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NOTE.—There are many subjects in Africa, such as Racial Characteristics, Labour, Disease, Currency, Banking, Education and so on, about which information is imperfect and opinion divided. In none of these complicated and difficult questions has Science said the last word. Under these circumstances it has been considered best to allow those competent to form an opinion to express freely in this Journal the conclusions to which they themselves have arrived. *It must be clearly understood that the object of the Journal is to gather information, and that each writer must be held responsible for his own views.*

THE CONDITIONS OF NEGRO LABOUR IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINES

As various persons have been writing in the "Journal of the African Society" on the subject of French and Portuguese regulations affecting Negro labour in Africa, I thought it would be interesting to give some particulars as to the way in which Negro labour is treated in South Africa by such important employers of labour as the leading mining firms at Kimberley and Johannesburg. The greater part of this information, together with the photographs illustrating it, have been kindly furnished to me through the agency of Messrs. Wernher, Beit, and Co., and Mr. Hennen Jennings has allowed me to use photographs of which he possesses the copyright.

Whatever solution may ultimately be found for the crying need of South Africa, which is cheap, unskilled labour, no

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FETISHISM

In the religions of savages, and in most early forms of faith, the object or place which enshrines a Spirit is not necessarily coincident with beauty, dignity or strength. For those objects do not *represent* the deities or Spirits in any way whatever. They are simply local residences. As such, a Spirit can live anywhere and in anything. And this is bald Fetishism. The thing itself, the material itself, is not worshipped. The Fetish worshipper makes a clear distinction between the reverence with which he regards a certain material object and the worship he renders to the Spirit for the time being inhabiting it. For this reason, nothing is too mean or too small or too ridiculous to be considered fit for a Spirit's *locum tenens*. For, when, for any reason, the Spirit is supposed to have gone out of that thing, and definitely abandoned it, the thing itself is no longer revered, and is thrown away as useless. The selection of the article in which the Spirit is to reside is made by the native "nganga" (doctor), who, to the Negro, stands in the office of a priest. The ground of selection is generally that of mere convenience. The ability to conjure a free wandering Spirit into the narrow limits of a small material object, and to compel and subordinate its power to the aid of some designated person or persons, and for a specific purpose, rests with that nganga.

Over the wide range of many articles used in which to confine Spirits, common and favourite things are the skins, and especially the tails, of bush-cats, horns of antelopes, nut-shells, snail-shells, bones of any animal, but especially human bones, and among these are very specially regarded human skulls, and teeth and claws of leopards. But, literally, anything can be chosen; any stick, any stone, any

rag of cloth. Apparently, there being no limit to the number of Spirits, there is literally no limit to the number and character of the articles in which they may be localised. It is not true, as is asserted by some in regard to these African tribes and their degraded form of religion, that they worship the actual material objects in which the Spirits are supposed to be confined. Low as is Fetishism, it nevertheless has its philosophy, a philosophy that is the same in kind as that of the higher forms of religion. A similar sense of need that sends the Christian to his knees before God to ask aid in time of trouble, and salvation, temporal and spiritual, sends the fetish-worshipper to offer his sacrifice and to ejaculate his prayer for help as he lays hold of his consecrated antelope-horn, or as he looks on it with abiding trust the while it is safely tied to his body. His human necessity drives him to seek assistance. The difference between his act and the act of the Christian lies (1) in the *kind* of salvation he seeks; (2) the *Being* to whom he appeals; and (3) the *reason* for his appealing. The reason for his appeal is simply Fear; no confession, no love, rarely thanksgiving. The Being to whom he appeals is not God. True, he does not deny that He is. If asked, he will acknowledge His existence. But that is all. Very rarely, and only in extreme emergencies, does he make an appeal to Him; for he thinks God so far off, so inaccessible, so indifferent to human woes and wants, that a petition to Him would be almost in vain. He therefore turns to someone of the mass of Spirits which he believes to be observant of human affairs, in which, as former human beings, some of them once had part.

As to the character of the Salvation sought, it is not spiritual. It is a purely physical salvation. A sense of moral and spiritual need is lost sight of, although not eliminated. This is an index of the distance the Negro has travelled away from our ideas before he finally reached the position of placing his trust in a Fetish. By just so much as he seems to himself living in a world crowded with unseen but powerful Spiritual Beings (with whom what a Christian calls "Sin" has no reprehensible moral quality),

by that much he seems to have lost sight of the moral necessities of his Soul. The Future is so vague that, in the thought of most tribes, it contains neither Heaven nor Hell; there is no certain reward for Goodness, nor positive punishment for Badness. The Future Life is to each native largely a reproduction, on shadowy and intangible lines, of the works and interests and passions of this earthly life. In his present existence, with its savagery and oppression and dominance of selfish greed and right of might, goodness has no reward. It is badness which, in his personal experience, generally makes the largest gains. From this point of view, while some acts are indeed called "good" and some "bad" (Conscience proving its simple existence by the use of these words in the record of Language), yet Conscience is not much troubled by its possessor's badness. There is little sense of the sinfulness of Sin. There is only fear of possible physical injury by human or subsidised Spiritual enemies. *This* is all the Salvation that is sought. It is sought by (1) Prayer; (2) by Sacrifice and certain other Ceremonies rendered to the Spirit of the Fetish, or to other non-localised Spirits; (3) and by the use of Charms or Amulets. These Charms may be (1) Vocal, (2) Ritual, or (3) Material.

(1) The *Vocal* are the utterance of cabalistic words, deprecatory of evil, or supplicating of favour, which are supposed, in a vague way, to have power over the local Spirits. These words or phrases, though sometimes coined by a person for himself or herself (and therefore, like our slang, having a known meaning), are often archaisms, handed down from ancestors, and believed to possess efficiency, but whose meaning is forgotten. In this list would be included long incantations by the Magic-Doctors, and the *Ibâtâ* blown-blessing. (2) Certain *Rites* or ceremonies are performed for almost every child at some time during his or her infancy or youth, or subsequently as occasion may call for, in which *prohibition* is laid upon the child in regard to the eating of some particular article of food, or the doing of some special act. It is difficult to get at the exact object of this "orunda." Certainly, the prohibited article or act is not in itself evil, for all others but the inhibited individual may

eat or do with it as they please. Most natives blindly follow "custom" of their ancestors without being able to give me the *raison d'être* of the rite itself. But I gather from the testimony of those best able to give a reason that the prohibited article or act is literally a sacrifice, ordained for the child by its parents and the Magic-Doctor, as a gift to the governing Spirit of its Life. The thing prohibited thus becomes removed from the child's common use, and is made *sacred* to the Spirit. It is therefore a Sacrament. Any use of it by the child will thenceforth be a sacrilege, which would draw down the Spirit's wrath in the form of sickness or other evil, and which can be atoned for only through expressive ceremonies and by gifts to the Magician interceding for the offender.

Anything may be selected for an orunda. I do not know the ground for a selection. Why one child—perhaps a babe too young yet to have eaten of the to-be-prohibited thing—should be debarred for ever the eating of a chicken, or liver, or any other particular part—or any portion at all—of a goat or of an ox, or of any other one of all known animals, I do not know. But that orunda is thenceforth faithfully complied with, even under pangs of hunger. It is like a Nazarite's vow.

I have strong suspicion that where the orunda laid on a woman is a matter of meat, Superstition has played into the hands of masculine selfishness, and denies to women the choice meat in order that men may have the greater share. My suspicion rests on almost positive evidence in the case of some prohibitions to the women of the Bulu and other Fang tribes of the Interior. On a boat journey in the Ogowe River I camped on the edge of a forest for the noon meal. My crew of four, members of the Galwa and Nkâmi tribes, had no meat. They needed it, for they had rowed hard and well. For myself, I had only a small chicken. I was satisfied with a portion of it, and gave the rest to the crew. It would make at least a tasty morsel for each with their manioc-bread. Three of them thanked me; the fourth did not touch his share. I felt slightly vexed, thinking my favour was not appreciated, and I asked the cause of his

apparent sullenness. He said he did not dare to eat of the fowl, as it was "orunda" to him. On another journey a young man whom I had picked up as extra hand in my boat's crew, when at noon eating-time we stopped under the shade of a spreading tree by the river's bank, instead of respectfully leaving me alone with my lunch in the boat and going ashore where the others were eating, wanted to insist on remaining in the boat, his "orunda" being that, when on a journey by water, his food should be eaten only over water.

Two Ogowe chiefs, near whose villages was anchored the small river-steamer *Pioneer*, on which I was passenger, came aboard, and being given by the captain a glass of liquor, one of them held up a piece of white cloth before his mouth in order that strangers' eyes might not see him swallow. That probably was his orunda. (Perhaps also the hiding of his drinking may have had reference to the common fear of another's "evil eye.")

The other, having taken a mouthful, wetted his finger in his mouth, drew the wet finger across his throat, and then blew on to a small fetish which he wore as a ring on a finger of the other hand. I do not know the significance of his motion across his throat. The blowing was the Ibâlâ-blessing, an ejaculatory prayer for a blessing on his plans, probably of Trade. This word "orunda," meaning thus originally *prohibited from human use* (like the South-sea "taboo"), grew under missionary hands into its related meaning of *sacred to Spiritual use*. It is the word by which the Mpongwe Scriptures translate our word "holy." I think it an unfortunate choice, for the missionary has to stop and explain that "orunda," as used for God, does not mean the orunda used for mankind. In the translation of the Benga Scriptures the word "holy" was transferred bodily, and we explain that it means something *better than good*. To such straits are translators sometimes reduced in the use of heathen languages!

(3) The Charms that are most common are Material; are Amulets. So common, indeed, that by the universality of their use, and the prominence given to them everywhere—

in houses and on the person—they almost monopolise the religious thought of the Bantu Negro, subordinating other acknowledged points of his Theology, dominating his almost entire religious interest, and giving the departmental word "Fetish" such overwhelming regard, that it has furnished the name distinctive of the native African Religious System, viz., *Fetishism*.

Fetish is an English word of Portuguese origin. It is derived from *feitiço*="made"="artificial" (compare the old English *fetys*, used by Chaucer), and this term, used of the charms and amulets worn in the Roman Catholic religion of the period, was applied by the Portuguese sailors of the sixteenth century to the deities they saw worshipped by the negroes of the West Coast of Africa.

De Brosse, a French savant of the last century, brought the word fetishism into use as a term for the type of religion of the lowest races. The word has given rise to some confusion, having been applied by Comte and other writers to the worship of the heavenly bodies and of the great features of Nature. It is best to limit it to the worship of such natural objects as are revered not for their own power or excellence, but because they are supposed to be occupied each by a spirit (Menziés, *History of Religion*).

The native word on the Liberian Coast is "gri-gri"; in the Niger Delta, "ju-ju"; in the Gaboon country, "monda"; among the cannibal Fang, "biañ"; and in other tribes the same respective dialectic by which we translate "medicine." To a sick native's thought, the adjuvant medicinal herb used by the "doctor," and its associated efficiency-giving Spirit invoked by that same doctor, are inseparable. In the heathen Negro's soul the Fetish takes the place, and has the regard which an idol has with the Hindu and the Chinese. "A fetish, strictly speaking, is little else than a Charm or Amulet, worn about the person, and set up at some convenient place, for the purpose of guarding against some apprehended evil or securing some coveted good. In the Anglo-African parlance of the Coast, they are called by various names, but all signifying the same thing. Fetishes may be made of anything of vegetable, animal or metallic

origin; and need only to pass through the consecrating hands of a native priest to receive all the supernatural powers which they are supposed to possess. It is not always certain that they possess extraordinary powers. They must be tried and give proof of their efficiency before they can be implicitly trusted" (Wilson, *Western Africa*).

A Fetish, then, is any material object consecrated by the "oganga" or magic-doctor, with a variety of ceremonies and processes, by virtue of which some Spirit becomes *localised* in that object, and subject to the will of the possessor. An immense number of things may thus be consecrated, literally anything. Articles most frequently used are snail-shells, nut-shells, and small horns of gazelles or goats. These are used probably because of their convenient cavities. For they are to be filled by the oganga with a variety of substances, depending, in their selection, on the special work to be accomplished by the fetish. Its value depends, however, not in itself, nor solely in the character of these substances, but on the skill of the oganga in dealing with Spirits.

But there is a relation between these selected substances and the end to be obtained by the fetish which is to be prepared of them. For example, to give the possessor bravery or strength, some part of a leopard or of an elephant; to give cunning, some part of a gazelle; to give wisdom, some part of a human brain; to give courage, some part of a heart; to give influence, some part of an eye; and so on for a multitude of qualities. These articles are supposed to lure some Spirit (being in some way pleasing to it), which thenceforward is satisfied to reside therein, and to aid the possessor in the accomplishment of some one specific wish. In preparing the fetish the oganga takes the ashes of certain medicinal plants, pieces of calcined bones, gums, spices, resins, and even filth, and other substances chosen for their special qualities as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, such as portions of organs of the bodies of animals, and especially of human beings (*e.g.*, eyes, brains, the heart, and the gall-bladder), particularly of ancestors or men strong or renowned in any way, and very especially of enemies and of white men. These are compounded in secret, with the accompaniment of drums,

dancing, invocations, looking into mirrors or limpid water to see faces (human or Spiritual as may be desired), and are stuffed into the hollow of the shell or bone, or smeared over the stick or stone, or whatever the receptacle may be.

If it be desired to obtain power over some one else, the oganga must be given by the applicant, to be mixed in the sacred compound, either crumbs from the food, or clippings of finger-nails or of hair, or (most powerful!) even a drop of blood of the person over whom influence is sought. These represent the Life or Body of that person. So fearful are natives of power being thus obtained over them, that they have their hair cut only by a friend, and even then they carefully burn it or cast it into a river. If one accidentally cuts himself, he stamps out what blood has dropped on the ground, or cuts out from wood the chip containing the blood that has saturated it.

Sitting one day long ago by a village boat-landing while my crew prepared for our journey, I was idly plucking at my beard, and carelessly flung away a few hairs. Presently I observed that some children gathered them up. Asking my Christian assistant what that meant, he told me:—“They will have a fetish made with those hairs; when next you visit this village they will ask you some favour, and you will grant it by the power they will thus have obtained over you.”

The water with which a lover's body (male or female) is washed is used in making a philtre mingled (secretly) in the drink of the loved one. Human eye-balls (particularly of a white person) are a great prize. New-made graves have been rifled for them. While, as I have already stated, it is true that anything may be used not only as the receptacle in which the Spirit is to be located, but also as the substances or “medicines” to be inserted in it, I wish to insist that in the Philosophy of Fetish there is generally a reason in the selection of all these articles (reason which it is often difficult for a foreigner to discover), an apparent fitness for the end in view.

Arnot (*Garenganze*, page 237) refers to this:—“Africans believe largely in preventive measures, and their fetish-

charms are chiefly of that order. In passing through a country where leopards and lions abound, they carefully provide themselves with the claws, teeth, lips and whiskers of these animals, and hang them around their necks, to secure themselves against being attacked. For the same purpose, the point of an elephant trunk is generally worn by elephant hunters. The bones from the legs of tortoises are much valued as anklets, in order to give the wearer endurance; reminding one of the fable of the tortoise. The lower jaw-bone of the tortoise is worn by certain tribes as a preventive against tooth-ache. The spine bones of serpents are strung together with a girdle as a cure for back-ache."

A recent visitor in the Gaboon makes, in the *Journal of the African Society*, the following remark as to the *raison d'user* of fetishes:—"When a white man or woman wears some trinket strung about them, they call it an amulet or charm. They ascribe to it some virtue, and regard it as a sacred thing; but when an African native wears one, white men call it 'fetish,' and the wearer a savage or heathen." This defence of the negro is gratifying, but the criticism against the white man is not quite just, for this radical difference:—To the African, the "fetish" is his all, his entire hope for physical salvation; he does not reckon on God at all. The civilised man or woman with a "mascot" is very foolish in his or her belief in Luck, but they do not put their mascot exclusively in God's place. I met, a few years ago, this same criticism from the mouth of a partly educated Sierra Leone negro, who, though a professing Christian, evidently was wearing Christianity as a cloak of hypocrisy. His well-educated Mpongwe wife was a member of my church. It was discovered that she had a certain fetish suspended in her bedroom. It was necessary to summon her before the church Session. She explained that it was not hers but her husband's, and disclaimed belief in it. She was rebuked for allowing it in her room. The husband, hearing of the rebuke, wrote me an angry letter, justifying his fetish. He said, in substance, "You white people do not know anything about black man's 'fashions.' You say you trust in God for everything, but in your own country you put up an iron

rod over your houses to protect yourselves from death by lightning: and you trust in it the while that you still believe in God; and you call it 'electricity' and 'civilisation.' And you say it's all right. I call this thing of mine, this charm, 'medicine'; and I hung it over my wife's bed to keep away death by the arts of those who hate her; and I trust in it while still believing in God. And you think me a heathen!"

It was explained to him that the use of the lightning-rod was a means that reverently recognised God in His own Natural Forces, but that his fetish dishonoured God, ignored Him, and was a distinct recognition of a Supposed Power that was claimed to act independently of God; that I trusted to the lightning-rod *under* God, while he trusted to his fetish *outside* of God. For every human passion or desire of every part of our nature—for our thousand necessities or wishes—a fetish can be made, its operation being directed to the attainment of one specified wish, and limited in power only by the possible existence of some more powerful antagonising Spirit. These, hung on the plantation fence or from the branches of plants in the garden, are to either prevent theft or to sicken the thief; hung over the door-way of the house, are to bar the entrance of evil; hung from the bow of the canoe, are to ensure a successful voyage; worn on the arm in hunting, are to assure an accurate aim; worn on any part of one's person, are to give success in loving, hating, planting, fishing, buying, and so forth all through the whole range of daily works and interests. Some kinds, worn on a bracelet or necklace, are to ward off sickness. The new-born infant has a health-knot tied about its neck, wrist, or loins. Down to the day of oldest age everyone keeps on multiplying or renewing or altering these life-talismans.

If of the charge at Balaclava it was said, "This is magnificent, but it's not war," I may say of these heathen, Such faith is magnificent, though it be folly. The hunter, going out certain of success, returns empty-handed; the warrior, bearing on his breast a fetish-panoply, which he is confident will turn aside a bullet, comes back wounded; everyone is some day foiled in his cherished plan. Do

they lose their faith? No; not in the System, their Fetishism. But in the special material object of their faith—their fetish—they do. Going to the oganga whom they had paid for concocting that now disappointing amulet, they tell him of its failure. He readily replies:—“Yes; I know. You have an enemy who possesses a fetish containing a Spirit more powerful than yours; which made your bullet miss its mark; which caused your opponent’s spear to wound you. Yours is no longer of use; it’s ‘dead.’ Come, pay me; and I will make you a Charm containing a Spirit still more powerful.” The old fetish hitherto jealously guarded, and which would not have been sold for any consideration, is now thrown away or sold to the white curiosity-hunter.

A native heathen Akele chief, Kasa, my friend and host in the Ogowe, once showed me a string of shells, bones, horns, wild-cat tails, and so forth, each with its magic compound, which, he said, could turn aside bullets. In a friendly way he dared me to fire at him with my sixteen repeating Winchester rifle. I did not believe he meant it. But, on his taking his stand a few paces distant, he did not quail under my steady aim, nor even at the click of the cocked trigger. I, of course, desisted, apparently worsted. Two years later that same man, while hunting, was charged by an elephant he had wounded, and was pierced by its tusks. His attendants drove off the beast; the fearfully lacerated man survived long enough to accuse twelve of his women and other slaves of having bewitched his gun, and thus causing it only to wound instead of killing the elephant. On that charge four of the accused were put to death.

Both men and women may become “oganga” on voluntary choice, and after a course of instruction by an oganga.

“There is generally a special person in a tribe who knows these things, and is able to work them. He has more power over spirits than other men have, and is able to make them do what he likes. He can heal sicknesses, he can foretell the future, he can change a thing into something else, or a man into a lower animal or a tree, or anything; he can also

assume such transformations himself at will. He uses means to bring about such results; he knows about herbs, he also has recourse to rubbing, to making images of affected parts of the body; and to various other arts. Very frequently he is regarded as inspired. It is the spirit dwelling in him which brings about the wonderful results; without the spirit, he could not do anything" (Menziés, *History of Religion*).

Though these magicians possess power, its joy has its limitations. For, becoming possessed by a Familiar Spirit, through whose aid they make their invocations and incantations, and under whose influence they fall into cataleptic trances, or are thrilled with Delphic rages, if they should happen to offend that "Familiar," it may destroy them by, as their phrase is, "eating" out their life.

On Corisco Island, about 1863, a certain man had acquired prominence as a Magic-Doctor. He finally died of consumption. His friends began a Witchcraft investigation to find out who had "killed" him. A *post-mortem* being made, cavities were found in the lungs. Ignorant of disease, they therefore dropped the investigation, saying that his own "witch" had eaten him.

Captain Guy Burrows, a British officer formerly in the Service of the Congo Free State, thus jocularly describes what he saw of Fetish at the town of Matadi, on the Congo, where there is an English Baptist Mission:—"Outside the small area under the direct influence of the Mission, there is but one deity—the Fetish. The heathen in his blindness, in bowing down to wood and stone, bows, as Kipling says, 'to wood for choice.' He carves a more or less grotesque face; and the rest is a matter of taste. I came across one figure whose principal ornaments consisted of a profusion of ten-penny nails and a large cowrie shell." [Those nails were not mere "ornaments." They were the records of the number of persons who had been transfixed by death or disease under the power of that fetish-idol. A similar custom is known in the West Indies and in the southern United States. For every pin stuck into a wax figure intended to represent the person to be injured, some sickness or other evil will fall

on him. Wilkie Collins also utilised this superstition in his novel, *I Say No.*—R.H.N.] “But anything will do; an old tin tea-pot is another favourite fetish decoration. I have generally found that the uglier they are, the more they seem to be feared and revered. The Fetish is sometimes inclined to be a nuisance. On one occasion, I wanted to build an out-house at the far end of a plantation, where tools and other implements might be stored. I was told by the Chief, however, that this was fetish-ground, and that terrible misfortunes would follow any attempt to build on it. I tried to get some closer idea of the fetish; but could get no more material information than a recital of vague terrors of the kind that frighten children at night. So, I began building my out-house; during the course of which operation some monkeys came and sat on the trees, highly interested in the proceedings. In some indefinite way, I gathered that the fetish-power was regarded as being invested in these monkeys, or that they were the embodiment of the fetish-idea, or anything else you please. But I could not have my work interfered with by the ghosts of a lot of chattering apes, and the fears of those big children the natives; so I witch-doctored the monkeys after an improved recipe of my own—I shot the lot. Thereafter, the spell was supposed to be lifted, and no farther objections were raised; but the empty cartridge-cases were seized upon by the men as charms against any farther manifestations in the same place. I am glad to say none occurred; the spell I had used was too potent!” Captain Burrows was probably an efficient administrator. But, like many foreigners, he evidently chose to ride rough-shod over natives’ prejudices, regarding them as idle superstitions, and unable or unwilling to investigate their philosophy. I see, however, from his story that he had got hold of a part of the truth. That ground on which he desired to build was probably an old grave-yard. The native Chief very naturally did not wish it to be disturbed. Monkeys that gather on the trees in the vicinity of a grave-yard are supposed to be possessed by the spirits of those buried there. An ordinary individual would have been forcibly prevented had he attempted what

Captain B. did. He had a foreign Government at his back, and the natives submitted. Their dead and their *pro tempore* sacred monkeys had succumbed to the superior power of the white man's cartridges. Their only satisfaction was to retain the empty shells as souvenirs.

ROBERT HAMILL NASSAU.