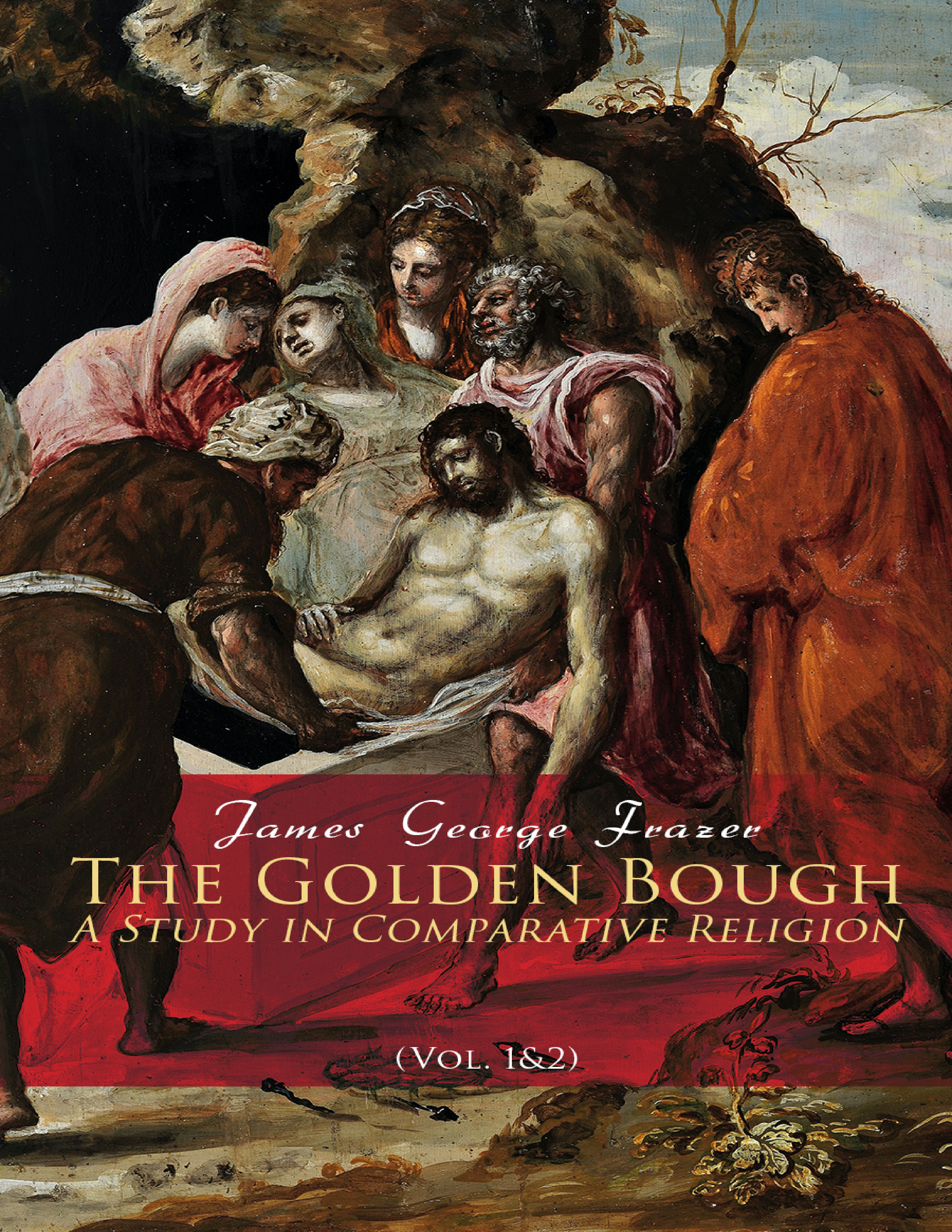

James George Frazer

The Golden Bough

A Study in Comparative Religion

(Vol. 1&2)

James George Frazer

The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion (Vol. 1&2)

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Chapter I. The King Of The Wood.

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“The still glassy lake that sleeps
Beneath Aricia's trees—
Those trees in whose dim shadow
The ghastly priest doth reign,
The priest who slew the slayer,
And shall himself be slain.”

MACAULAY.

§ 1.—The Arician Grove.

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Who does not know Turner's picture of the Golden Bough? The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi, “Diana's Mirror,” as it was called by the ancients. No one who has seen that calm water, lapped in a green hollow of the Alban hills, can ever forget it. The two characteristic Italian villages which slumber on its banks, and the equally Italian palazzo whose terraced gardens descend steeply to the lake, hardly break the stillness and even the solitariness of the scene. Dian herself might still linger by this lonely shore, still haunt these woodlands wild.

In antiquity this sylvan landscape was the scene of a strange and recurring tragedy. On the northern shore of the lake, right under the precipitous cliffs on which the modern village of Nemi is perched, stood the sacred grove and sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, or Diana of the Wood.[2] The lake and the grove were sometimes known as the lake and grove of Aricia.[3] But the town of Aricia (the modern La Riccia) was situated about three miles off, at the foot of the Alban Mount, and separated by a steep descent from the lake, which lies in a small crater-like hollow on the mountain side. In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day and probably far into the night a strange figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy.[4] He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him he held office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.

This strange rule has no parallel in classical antiquity, and cannot be explained from it. To find an explanation we must go farther afield. No one will probably deny that such a custom savours of a barbarous age and, surviving into imperial times, stands out in striking isolation from the polished Italian society of the day, like a primeval rock rising from a smooth-shaven lawn. It is the very rudeness and barbarity of the custom which allow us a hope of explaining it. For recent researches into the early history of man have revealed the essential similarity with which, under many superficial differences, the human mind has elaborated its first crude philosophy of life. Accordingly if we can show that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood of Nemi, has existed elsewhere; if we can detect the motives which led to its institution; if we can prove that these motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike; if we can show, lastly, that these very motives, with some of their derivative institutions, were actually at work in classical antiquity; then we may fairly infer that at a remoter age the same motives gave birth to the priesthood of Nemi. Such an inference, in default of direct evidence as to how the priesthood did actually arise, can never amount to demonstration. But it will be more or less probable according to the degree of completeness with which it fulfils the conditions indicated above. The object of this book is, by meeting these conditions, to offer a fairly probable explanation of the priesthood of Nemi.

I begin by setting forth the few facts and legends which have come down to us on the subject. According to one story the worship of Diana at Nemi was instituted by Orestes, who, after killing Thoas, King of the Tauric Chersonese (the Crimea), fled with his sister to Italy, bringing with him the image of the Tauric Diana. The bloody ritual which legend ascribed to that goddess is familiar to classical readers; it is said that every stranger who landed on the shore was sacrificed on her altar. But transported to Italy, the rite assumed a milder form. Within the sanctuary at Nemi grew a certain tree of which no branch might be broken. Only a runaway slave was allowed to break off, if he could, one of its boughs. Success in the attempt entitled him to fight the priest in single combat, and if he slew him he reigned in his stead with the title of King of the Wood (*Rex Nemorensis*). Tradition averred that the fateful branch was that Golden Bough which, at the Sibyl's bidding, Aeneas plucked before he essayed the perilous journey to the world of the dead. The flight of the slave represented, it was said, the flight of Orestes; his combat with the priest was a reminiscence of the human sacrifices once offered to the Tauric Diana. This rule of succession by the sword was observed down to imperial times; for amongst his other freaks Caligula, thinking that the priest of Nemi had held office too long, hired a more stalwart ruffian to slay him.[5]

Of the worship of Diana at Nemi two leading features can still be made out. First, from the votive-offerings found in modern times on the site, it appears that she was especially worshipped by women desirous of children or of an easy delivery.[6] Second, fire seems to have played a foremost part in her ritual. For during her annual festival, celebrated at the hottest time of the year, her grove was lit up by a multitude of torches, whose ruddy glare was reflected by the waters of the lake; and throughout the length and breadth of Italy the day was kept with holy rites at every domestic hearth.[7]

Moreover, women whose prayers had been heard by the goddess brought lighted torches to the grove in fulfilment of their vows.[8] Lastly, the title of Vesta borne by the Arician Diana[9] points almost certainly to the maintenance of a perpetual holy fire in her sanctuary.

At her annual festival all young people went through a purificatory ceremony in her honour; dogs were crowned; and the feast consisted of a young kid, wine, and cakes, served up piping hot on platters of leaves.[10]

But Diana did not reign alone in her grove at Nemi. Two lesser divinities shared her forest sanctuary. One was Egeria, the nymph of the clear water which, bubbling from the basaltic rocks, used to fall in graceful cascades into the lake at the place called Le Mole.[11] According to one story the grove was first consecrated to Diana by a Manius Egerius, who was the ancestor of a long and distinguished line. Hence the proverb “There are many Manii at Ariciae.” Others explained the proverb very differently. They said it meant that there were a great many ugly and deformed people, and they referred to the word *Mania* which meant a bogey or bugbear to frighten children.[12]

The other of these minor deities was Virbius. Legend had it that Virbius was the youthful Greek hero Hippolytus, who had been killed by his horses on the sea-shore of the Saronic Gulf. Him, to please Diana, the leech Aesculapius brought to life again by his simples. But Jupiter, indignant that a mortal man should return from the gates of death, thrust down the meddling leech himself to Hades; and Diana, for the love she bore Hippolytus, carried him away to Italy and hid him from the angry god in the dells of Nemi, where he reigned a forest king under the name of Virbius. Horses were excluded from the grove and sanctuary, because horses had killed Hippolytus.[13] Some thought that

Virbius was the sun. It was unlawful to touch his image.[14] His worship was cared for by a special priest, the Flamen Virbialis.[15]

Such then are the facts and theories bequeathed to us by antiquity on the subject of the priesthood of Nemi. From materials so slight and scanty it is impossible to extract a solution of the problem. It remains to try whether the survey of a wider field may not yield us the clue we seek. The questions to be answered are two: first, why had the priest to slay his predecessor? and second, why, before he slew him, had he to pluck the Golden Bough? The rest of this book will be an attempt to answer these questions.

§ 2.—Primitive man and the supernatural.

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The first point on which we fasten is the priest's title. Why was he called the King of the Wood? why was his office spoken of as a Kingdom?[16]

The union of a royal title with priestly duties was common in ancient Italy and Greece. At Rome and in other Italian cities there was a priest called the Sacrificial King or King of the Sacred Rites (*Rex Sacrificulus* or *Rex Sacrorum*), and his wife bore the title of Queen of the Sacred Rites.[17] In republican Athens the second magistrate of the state was called the King, and his wife the Queen; the functions of both were religious.[18] Many other Greek democracies had titular kings, whose duties, so far as they are known, seem to have been priestly.[19] At Rome the tradition was that the Sacrificial King had been appointed after the expulsion of the kings in order to offer the sacrifices which had been previously offered by the kings.[20] In Greece a similar view appears to have prevailed as to the origin of the priestly kings.[21] In itself the view is not improbable, and it is borne out by the example of Sparta, the only purely Greek state which retained the kingly form of government in historical times. For in Sparta all state sacrifices were offered by the kings as descendants of the god.[22] This combination of priestly functions with royal authority is familiar to every one. Asia Minor, for example, was the seat of various great religious capitals peopled by thousands of “sacred slaves,” and ruled by pontiffs who wielded at once temporal and spiritual authority, like the popes of mediaeval Rome. Such priest-ridden cities were Zela and Pessinus.[23] Teutonic kings, again, in the old heathen days seem to have stood in the position, and exercised the powers of high priests.[24] The Emperors of

China offer public sacrifices, the details of which are regulated by the ritual books.[25] It is needless, however, to multiply examples of what is the rule rather than the exception in the early history of the kingship.

But when we have said that the ancient kings were commonly priests also, we are far from having exhausted the religious aspect of their office. In those days the divinity that hedges a king was no empty form of speech but the expression of a sober belief. Kings were revered, in many cases not merely as priests, that is, as intercessors between man and god, but as themselves gods, able to bestow upon their subjects and worshippers those blessings which are commonly supposed to be beyond the reach of man, and are sought, if at all, only by prayer and sacrifice offered to superhuman and invisible beings. Thus kings are often expected to give rain and sunshine in due season, to make the crops grow, and so on. Strange as this expectation appears to us, it is quite of a piece with early modes of thought. A savage hardly conceives the distinction commonly drawn by more advanced peoples between the natural and the supernatural. To him the world is mostly worked by supernatural agents, that is, by personal beings acting on impulses and motives like his own, liable like him to be moved by appeals to their pity, their fears, and their hopes. In a world so conceived he sees no limit to his power of influencing the course of nature to his own advantage. Prayers, promises, or threats may secure him fine weather and an abundant crop from the gods; and if a god should happen, as he sometimes believes, to become incarnate in his own person, then he need appeal to no higher power; he, the savage, possesses in himself all the supernatural powers necessary to further his own well-being and that of his fellow men.

This is one way in which the idea of a man-god is reached. But there is another. Side by side with the view of the world as pervaded by spiritual forces, primitive man has another conception in which we may detect a germ of the modern notion of natural law or the view of nature as a series of events occurring in an invariable order without the intervention of personal agency. The germ of which I speak is involved in that sympathetic magic, as it may be called, which plays a large part in most systems of superstition. One of the principles of sympathetic magic is that any effect may be produced by imitating it. To take a few instances. If it is wished to kill a person an image of him is made and then destroyed; and it is believed that through a certain physical sympathy between the person and his image, the man feels the injuries done to the image as if they were done to his own body, and that when it is destroyed he must simultaneously perish. Again, in Morocco a fowl or a pigeon may sometimes be seen with a little red bundle tied to its foot. The bundle contains a charm, and it is believed that as the charm is kept in constant motion by the bird a corresponding restlessness is kept up in the mind of him or her against whom the charm is directed.[26] In Nias when a wild pig has fallen into the pit prepared for it, it is taken out and its back is rubbed with nine fallen leaves, in the belief that this will make nine more wild pigs fall into the pit just as the nine leaves fell from the tree.[27] When a Cambodian hunter has set his nets and taken nothing, he strips himself naked, goes some way off, then strolls up to the net as if he did not see it, lets himself be caught in it and cries, “Hillo! what's this? I'm afraid I'm caught.” After that the net is sure to catch game.[28] In Thüringen the man who sows flax carries the seed in a long bag which reaches from his shoulders to his knees, and he walks with long strides, so that the bag sways to and fro on his back. It is believed that this will cause the flax crop to wave in the wind.[29] In the interior of Sumatra the rice is sown by women who, in sowing, let their hair hang loose down their back, in order that the rice may grow luxuriantly and have long stalks.[30] Again, magic sympathy is supposed to exist between a man and any severed portion of his person, as his hair or nails; so that whoever gets possession of hair or nails may work his will, at any distance, upon the person from whom they were cut. This superstition is world-wide. Further, the sympathy in question exists between friends and relations, especially at critical times. Hence, for example, the elaborate code of rules which regulates the conduct of persons left at home while a party of their friends is out fishing or hunting or on the war-path. It is thought that if the persons left at home broke these rules their absent friends would suffer an injury, corresponding in its nature to the breach of the rule. Thus when a Dyak is out head-hunting, his wife or, if he is unmarried, his sister, must wear a sword day and night in order that he may always be thinking of his weapons; and she may not sleep during the day nor go to bed before two in the morning, lest her husband or brother should thereby be surprised in his sleep by an enemy.[31] In Laos when an elephant hunter is setting out for the chase he warns his wife not to cut her hair or oil her body in his absence; for if she cut her hair the elephant would burst the toils, if she oiled herself it would slip through them.[32]

In all these cases (and similar instances might be multiplied indefinitely) an action is performed or avoided, because its performance is believed to entail good or bad consequences of a sort resembling the act itself. Sometimes the magic sympathy takes effect not so much through an act as through a supposed resemblance of qualities. Thus some Bechuanas wear a ferret as a charm because, being very tenacious of life, it will make them difficult to kill.[33] Others wear a certain insect, mutilated but living, for a similar purpose.[34] Other Bechuana warriors wear the hair of an ox among their own hair and the skin of a frog on their mantle, because a frog is slippery and the ox from which the hair has been taken has no horns and is therefore hard to catch; so the warrior who is provided with these charms believes that he will be as hard to hold as the ox and the frog.[35]

Thus we see that in sympathetic magic one event is supposed to be followed necessarily and invariably by another, without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. This is, in fact, the modern conception of physical causation; the conception, indeed, is misapplied, but it is there none the less. Here, then, we have another mode in which primitive man seeks to bend nature to his wishes. There is, perhaps, hardly a savage who does not fancy himself possessed of this power of influencing the course of nature by sympathetic magic; a man-god, on this view, is only an individual who is believed to enjoy this common power in an unusually high degree. Thus, whereas a man-god of the former or inspired type derives his divinity from a deity who has taken up his abode in a tabernacle of flesh, a man-god of the latter type draws his supernatural power from a certain physical sympathy with nature. He is not merely the receptacle of a divine spirit. His whole being, body and soul, is so delicately attuned to the harmony of the world that a touch of his hand or a turn of his head may send a thrill vibrating through the universal framework of things; and conversely his divine organism is acutely sensitive to such slight changes of environment as would leave ordinary mortals wholly unaffected. But the line between these two types of man-god, however sharply we may draw it in theory, is seldom to be traced with precision in practice, and in what follows I shall not insist on it.

To readers long familiarised with the conception of natural law, the belief of primitive man that he can rule the elements must be so foreign that it may be well to illustrate it by examples. When we have seen that in early society men who make no pretence at all of being gods do nevertheless commonly believe themselves to be invested with supernatural powers, we shall have the less difficulty in comprehending the extraordinary range of powers ascribed to individuals who are actually regarded as divine.

Of all natural phenomena there are perhaps none which civilised man feels himself more powerless to influence than the rain, the sun, and the wind. Yet all these are commonly supposed by savages to be in some degree under their control.

To begin with rain-making. In a village near Dorpat in Russia, when rain was much wanted, three men used to climb up the fir-trees of an old sacred grove. One of them drummed with a hammer on a kettle or small cask to imitate thunder; the second knocked two fire-brands together and made the sparks fly, to imitate lightning; and the third, who was called “the rain-maker,” had a bunch of twigs with which he sprinkled water from a vessel on all sides.[36] This is an example of sympathetic magic; the desired event is supposed to be produced by imitating it. Rain is often thus made by imitation. In Halmahera (Gilolo), a large island to the west of New Guinea, a wizard makes rain by dipping a branch of a particular kind of tree in water and sprinkling the ground with it.[37] In Ceram it is enough to dedicate the bark of a certain tree to the spirits and lay it in water.[38] In New Britain the rain-maker wraps some leaves of a red and green striped creeper in a banana-leaf, moistens the bundle with water and buries it in the ground; then he imitates with his mouth the plashing of rain.[39] Amongst the Omaha Indians of North America, when the corn is withering for want of rain, the members of the sacred Buffalo Society fill a large vessel with water and dance four times round it. One of them drinks some of the water and spirts it into the air, making a fine spray in imitation of a mist or drizzling rain.

Then he upsets the vessel, spilling the water on the ground; whereupon the dancers fall down and drink up the water, getting mud all over their faces. Lastly they spirt the water into the air, making a fine mist. This saves the corn.[40] Amongst the Australian Wotjobaluk the rain-maker dipped a bunch of his own hair in water, sucked out the water and squirted it westward, or he twirled the ball round his head making a spray like rain.[41] Squirting water from the mouth is also a West African way of making rain.[42] Another mode is to dip a particular stone in water or sprinkle water on it. In a Samoan village a certain stone was carefully housed as the representative of the rain-making god; and in time of drought his priests carried the stone in procession, and dipped it in a stream.[43] In the Ta-ta-thi tribe of New South Wales the rain-maker breaks off a piece of quartz crystal and spits it towards the sky; the rest of the crystal he wraps in emu feathers, soaks both crystal and feathers in water, and carefully hides them.[44] In the Keramin tribe of New South Wales the wizard retires to the bed of a creek, drops water on a round flat stone, then covers up and conceals it.[45] The Fountain of Baranton, of romantic fame, in the forest of Brécilien, used to be resorted to by peasants when they needed rain; they caught some of the water in a tankard and threw it on a slab near the spring.[46] When some of the Apache Indians wish for rain, they take water from a certain spring and throw it on a particular point high up on a rock; the clouds then soon gather and rain begins to fall.[47] There is a lonely tarn on Snowdon called Dulyn or the Black Lake, lying “in a dismal dingle surrounded by high and dangerous rocks.” A row of stepping stones runs out into the lake; and if any one steps on the stones and throws water so as to wet the farthest stone, which is called the Red Altar, “it is but a chance that you do not get rain before night, even when it is hot weather.”[48] In these cases it is probable that, as in Samoa, the stone is regarded as in some sort divine. This appears from the custom sometimes observed of dipping the cross in the Fountain of Baranton, to procure rain; for this is plainly a substitute for the older way of throwing the water on the stone.[49] In Mingrelia, to get rain they dip a holy image in water daily till it rains.[50] In Navarre the image of St. Peter was taken to a river, where some prayed to him for rain, but others called out to duck him in the water.[51] Here the dipping in the water is used as a threat; but originally it was probably a sympathetic charm, as in the following instance. In New Caledonia the rain-makers blackened themselves all over, dug up a dead body, took the bones to a cave, jointed them, and hung the skeleton over some taro leaves. Water was poured over the skeleton to run down on the leaves. “They supposed that the soul of the departed took up the water, made rain of it, and showered it down again.”[52] The same motive comes clearly out in a mode of making rain which is practised by various peoples of South Eastern Europe. In time of drought the Servians strip a girl, clothe her from head to foot in grass, herbs, and flowers, even her face being hidden with them. Thus disguised she is called the Dodola, and goes through the village with a troop of girls. They stop before every house; the Dodola dances, while the other girls form a ring round her singing one of the Dodola songs, and the housewife pours a pail of water over her.

One of the songs they sing runs thus—

“We go through the village;
The clouds go in the sky;
We go faster,
Faster go the clouds;
They have overtaken us,
And wetted the corn and the vine.”

A similar custom is observed by the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Roumanians.[53] In such customs the leaf-dressed girl represents the spirit of vegetation, and drenching her with water is an imitation of rain. In Russia, in the Government of Kursk, when rain is much wanted, the women seize a passing stranger and throw him into the river, or souse him from head to foot.[54] Later on we shall see that a passing stranger is often, as here, taken for a god or spirit. Amongst the Minahassa of North Celebes the priest bathes as a rain-charm.[55] In the Caucasian Province of Georgia, when a drought has lasted long, marriageable girls are yoked in couples with an ox-yoke on their shoulders, a priest holds the reins, and thus harnessed they wade through rivers, puddles, and marshes, praying, screaming, weeping, and laughing.[56] In a district of Transylvania, when the ground is parched with drought, some girls strip themselves naked, and, led by an older woman, who is also naked, they steal a harrow and carry it across the field to a brook, where they set it afloat. Next they sit on the harrow and keep a tiny flame burning on each corner of it for an hour. Then they leave the harrow in the water and go home.[57] A similar rain-charm is resorted to in India; naked women drag a plough across the field by night.[58] It is not said that they plunge the plough into a stream or sprinkle it with water. But the charm would hardly be complete without it.

Sometimes the charm works through an animal. To procure rain the Peruvians used to set a black sheep in a field, poured *chica* over it, and gave it nothing to eat till rain fell.[59] In a district of Sumatra all the women of the village, scantily clad, go to the river, wade into it, and splash each other with the water. A black cat is thrown into the water and made to swim about for a while, then allowed to escape to the bank, pursued by the splashing of the women.[60] In these cases the colour of the animal is part of the charm; being black it will darken the sky with rain-clouds. So the

Bechuanas burn the stomach of an ox at evening, because they say, “the black smoke will gather the clouds, and cause the rain to come.”[61] The Timorese sacrifice a black pig for rain, a white or red one for sunshine.[62] The Garos offer a black goat on the top of a very high mountain in time of drought.[63]

Sometimes people try to coerce the rain-god into giving rain. In China a huge dragon made of paper or wood, representing the rain-god, is carried about in procession; but if no rain follows, it is cursed and torn in pieces.[64] In the like circumstances the Feloupes of Senegambia throw down their fetishes and drag them about the fields, cursing them till rain falls.[65] Some Indians of the Orinoco worshipped toads and kept them in vessels in order to obtain from them rain or sunshine as might be required; when their prayers were not answered they beat the toads.[66] Killing a frog is a European rain-charm.[67] When the spirits withhold rain or sunshine, the Comanches whip a slave; if the gods prove obstinate, the victim is almost flayed alive.[68] Here the human being may represent the god, like the leaf-clad Dodola. When the rice-crop is endangered by long drought, the governor of Battambang, a province of Siam, goes in great state to a certain pagoda and prays to Buddha for rain. Then accompanied by his suite and followed by an enormous crowd he adjourns to a plain behind the pagoda. Here a dummy figure has been made up, dressed in bright colours, and placed in the middle of the plain. A wild music begins to play; maddened by the din of drums and cymbals and crackers, and goaded on by their drivers, the elephants charge down on the dummy and trample it to pieces. After this, Buddha will soon give rain.[69]

Another way of constraining the rain-god is to disturb him in his haunts. This seems the reason why rain is supposed to be the consequence of troubling a sacred spring. The Dards believe that if a cowskin or anything impure is placed in certain springs, storms will follow.[70] Gervasius mentions a spring into which if a stone or a stick were thrown, rain would at once issue from it and drench the thrower.[71] There was a fountain in Munster such that if it were touched or even looked at by a human being, it would at once flood the whole province with rain.[72] Sometimes an appeal is made to the pity of the gods. When their corn is being burnt up by the sun, the Zulus look out for a “heaven-bird,” kill it, and throw it into a pool. Then the heaven melts with tenderness for the death of the bird; “it wails for it by raining, wailing a funeral wail.”[73] In times of drought the Guanches of Teneriffe led their sheep to sacred ground, and there they separated the lambs from their dams, that their plaintive bleating might touch the heart of the god.[74] A peculiar mode of making rain was adopted by the heathen Arabs. They tied two sorts of bushes to the tails and hind-legs of their cattle, and setting fire to the bushes drove the cattle to the top of a mountain, praying for rain.[75] This may be, as Wellhausen suggests,[76] an imitation of lightning on the horizon. But it may also be a way of threatening the sky; as some West African rain-makers put a pot of inflammable materials on the fire and blow up the flames, threatening that if heaven does not soon give rain they will send up a flame which will set the sky on fire.[77] The Dieyerie of South Australia have a way of their own of making rain. A hole is dug about twelve feet long and eight or ten broad, and over this hole a hut of logs and branches is made. Two men, supposed to have received a special inspiration from Mooramoora (the Good Spirit), are bled by an old and influential man with a sharp flint inside the arm; the blood is made to flow on the other men of the tribe who sit huddled together. At the same time the two bleeding men throw handfuls of down, some of which adheres to the blood, while the rest floats in the air. The blood is thought to represent the rain, and the down the clouds. During the ceremony two large stones are placed in the middle of the hut; they stand for gathering clouds and presage rain. Then the men who were bled carry away the stones for about fifteen miles and place them as high as they can in the tallest tree. Meanwhile, the other men gather gypsum, pound it fine, and throw it into a water-hole. This the Mooramoora is supposed to see, and at once he causes the clouds to appear in the sky. Lastly, the men surround the hut, butt at it with their heads, force their way in, and reappear on the other side, repeating this till the hut is wrecked. In doing this they are forbidden to use their hands or arms; but when the heavy logs alone remain, they are allowed to pull them out with their hands. “The piercing of the hut with their heads symbolises the piercing of the clouds; the fall of the hut, the fall of rain.”[78] Another Australian mode of rain-making is to burn human hair.[79]

Like other peoples the Greeks and Romans sought to procure rain by magic, when prayers and processions[80] had proved ineffectual. For example, in Arcadia, when the corn and trees were parched with drought, the priest of Zeus dipped an oak branch into a certain spring on Mount Lycaeus. Thus troubled, the water sent up a misty cloud, from which rain soon fell upon the land.[81] A similar mode of making rain is still practised, as we have seen, in Halmahera near New Guinea. The people of Crannon in Thessaly had a bronze chariot which they kept in a temple. When they desired a shower they shook the chariot and the shower fell.[82] Probably the rattling of the chariot was meant to imitate thunder; we have already seen that in Russia mock thunder and lightning form part of a rain-charm. The mythical Salmoneus of Thessaly made mock thunder by dragging bronze kettles behind his chariot or by driving over a bronze bridge, while he hurled blazing torches in imitation of lightning. It was his impious wish to mimic the thundering car of Zeus as it rolled across the vault of heaven.[83] Near a temple of Mars, outside the walls of Rome, there was kept a certain stone known as the *lapis manalis*. In time of drought the stone was dragged into Rome and this was supposed to bring down rain immediately.[84] There were Etruscan wizards who made rain or discovered springs of water, it is not certain which. They were thought to bring the rain or the water out of their bellies.[85] The legendary Telchines in Rhodes are described as magicians who could change their shape and bring clouds, rain, and snow.[86]

Again, primitive man fancies he can make the sun to shine, and can hasten or stay its going down. At an eclipse the Ojebways used to think that the sun was being extinguished. So they shot fire-tipped arrows in the air, hoping thus to rekindle his expiring light.[87] Conversely during an eclipse of the moon some Indian tribes of the Orinoco used to bury lighted brands in the ground; because, said they, if the moon were to be extinguished, all fire on earth would be extinguished with her, except such as was hidden from her sight.[88] In New Caledonia when a wizard desires to make sunshine, he takes some plants and corals to the burial-ground, and makes them into a bundle, adding two locks of hair cut from a living child (his own child if possible), also two teeth or an entire jawbone from the skeleton of an ancestor. He then climbs a high mountain whose top catches the first rays of the morning sun. Here he deposits three sorts of plants on a flat stone, places a branch of dry coral beside them, and hangs the bundle of charms over the stone. Next morning he returns to this rude altar, and at the moment when the sun rises from the sea he kindles a fire on the altar. As the smoke rises, he rubs the stone with the dry coral, invokes his ancestors and says: “Sun! I do this that you may be burning hot, and eat up all the clouds in the sky.” The same ceremony is repeated at sunset.[89] When the sun rises behind clouds—a rare event in the bright sky of Southern Africa—the Sun clan of the Bechuanas say that he is grieving their heart. All work stands still, and all the food of the previous day is given to matrons or old women. They may eat it and may share it with the children they are nursing, but no one else may taste it. The people go down to the river and wash themselves all over. Each man throws into the river a stone taken from his domestic hearth, and replaces it with one picked up in the bed of the river. On their return to the village the chief kindles a fire in his hut, and all his subjects come and get a light from it. A general dance follows.[90] In these cases it seems that the lighting of the flame on earth is supposed to rekindle the solar fire. Such a belief comes naturally to people who, like the Sun clan of the Bechuanas, deem themselves the veritable kinsmen of the sun. The Melanesians make sunshine by means of a mock sun. A round stone is wound about with red braid and stuck with owl's feathers to represent rays; it is then hung on a high tree. Or the stone is laid on the ground with white rods radiating from it to imitate sunbeams.[91] Sometimes the mode of making sunshine is the converse of that of making rain. Thus we have seen that a white or red pig is sacrificed for sunshine, as a black one is sacrificed for rain.[92] Some of the New Caledonians drench a skeleton to make rain, but burn it to make sunshine.[93]

In a pass of the Peruvian Andes stand two ruined towers on opposite hills. Iron hooks are clamped into their walls for the purpose of stretching a net from one tower to the other. The net is intended to catch the sun.[94]

On the top of a small hill in Fiji grew a patch of reeds, and travellers who feared to be belated used to tie the tops of a handful of reeds together to detain the sun from going down.[95] The intention perhaps was to entangle the sun in the reeds, just as the Peruvians try to catch him in the net. Stories of men who have caught the sun in a noose are widely spread.[96] Jerome of Prague, travelling among the heathen Lithuanians early in the fifteenth century, found a tribe who worshipped the sun and venerated a large iron hammer. The priests told him that once the sun had been invisible for several months, because a powerful king had shut it up in a strong tower; but the signs of the zodiac had broken open the tower with this very hammer and released the sun. Therefore they adored the hammer.[97] When an Australian blackfellow wishes to stay the sun from going down till he gets home, he places a sod in the fork of a tree, exactly facing the setting sun.[98] For the same purpose an Indian of Yucatan, journeying westward, places a stone in a tree or pulls out some of his eyelashes and blows them towards the sun.[99] South African natives, in travelling, will put a stone in a branch of a tree or place some grass on the path with a stone over it, believing that this will cause their friends to keep the meal waiting till their arrival.[100] In these, as in previous examples, the purpose apparently is to retard the sun. But why should the act of putting a stone or a sod in a tree be supposed to effect this? A partial explanation is suggested by another Australian custom. In their journeys the natives are accustomed to place stones in trees at different heights from the ground in order to indicate the height of the sun in the sky at the moment when they passed the particular tree. Those who follow are thus made aware of the time of day when their friends in advance passed the spot.[101] Possibly the natives, thus accustomed to mark the sun's progress, may have slipped into the confusion of imagining that to mark the sun's progress was to arrest it at the point marked. On the other hand, to make it go down faster, the Australians throw sand into the air and blow with their mouths towards the sun.[102]

Once more, the savage thinks he can make the wind to blow or to be still. When the day is hot and a Yakut has a long way to go, he takes a stone which he has chanced to find in an animal or fish, winds a horse-hair several times round it, and ties it to a stick. He then waves the stick about, uttering a spell. Soon a cool breeze begins to blow.[103] The Wind clan of the Omahas flap their blankets to start a breeze which will drive away the mosquitoes.[104] When a Haida Indian wishes to obtain a fair wind, he fasts, shoots a raven, singes it in the fire, and then going to the edge of the sea sweeps it over the surface of the water four times in the direction in which he wishes the wind to blow. He then throws the raven behind him, but afterwards picks it up and sets it in a sitting posture at the foot of a spruce-tree, facing towards the required wind. Propping its beak open with a stick, he requests a fair wind for a certain number of days; then going away he lies covered up in his mantle till another Indian asks him for how many days he has desired the wind, which question he answers.[105] When a sorcerer in New Britain wishes to make a wind blow in a certain direction, he throws burnt lime in the air, chanting a song all the time. Then he waves sprigs of ginger and other plants about, throws them up and catches them. Next he makes a small fire with these sprigs on the spot where the lime has fallen thickest, and walks round the fire chanting. Lastly, he takes the ashes and throws them on the water.[106] On the altar of Fladda's chapel, in the island of Fladdahuan (one of the Hebrides), lay a round bluish stone which was always moist. Windbound fishermen walked sunwise round the chapel and then poured water on the stone, whereupon a favourable breeze was sure to spring up.[107] In Finnland wizards used to sell wind to storm-staid mariners. The wind was enclosed in three knots; if they undid the first knot, a moderate wind sprang up; if the second, it blew half a gale; if the third, a hurricane.[108] The same thing is said to have been done by wizards and witches in Lappland, in the island of Lewis, and in the Isle of Man.[109] A Norwegian witch has boasted of sinking a ship by opening a bag in which she had shut up a wind.[110] Ulysses received the winds in a leather bag from Aeolus, King of the Winds.[111] So Perdoytus, the Lithuanian wind-god, keeps the winds enclosed in a leather bag; when they escape from it he pursues them, beats them, and shuts them up again.[112] The Motumotu in New Guinea think that storms are sent by an Oiabu sorcerer; for each wind he has a bamboo which he opens at pleasure.[113] But here we have passed from custom (with which alone we are at present concerned) into mythology. Shetland seamen still buy winds from old women who claim to rule the storms. There are now in Lerwick old women who live by selling wind.[114] When the Hottentots wish to make the wind drop, they take one of their fattest skins and hang it on the end of a pole, believing that by blowing the skin down the wind will lose all its force and must itself fall.[115] In some parts of Austria, during a heavy storm, it is customary to open the window and throw out a handful of meal, chaff, or feathers, saying to the wind, “There, that's for you, stop!”[116] Once when north-westerly winds had kept the ice long on the coast, and food was getting scarce, the Eskimos of Alaska performed a ceremony to make a calm. A fire was kindled on the shore and the men gathered round it and chanted. An old man then stepped up to the fire and in a coaxing voice invited the demon of the wind to come under the fire and warm himself. When he was supposed to have arrived, a vessel of water, to which each man present had contributed, was thrown on the fire by an old man, and immediately a flight of arrows sped towards the spot where the fire had been. They thought that the demon would not stay where he had been so badly treated. To complete the effect, guns were discharged in various directions, and the captain of a European vessel was asked to fire on the wind with cannon.[117] When the wind blows down their huts, the Payaguas in South America snatch up firebrands and run against the wind menacing it with the blazing brands, while others beat the air with their fists to frighten the storm.[118] When the Guaycurus are threatened by a severe storm the men go out armed, and the women and children scream their loudest to intimidate the demon.[119] During a tempest the inhabitants of a Batta village in Sumatra have been seen to rush from their houses armed with sword and lance. The Raja placed himself at their head, and with shouts and yells they hewed and hacked at the invisible foe. An old woman was observed to be especially active in defending her house, slashing the air right and left with a long sabre.[120]

In the light of these examples a story told by Herodotus, which his modern critics have treated as a fable, is perfectly credible. He says, without however vouching for the truth of the tale, that once in the land of the Psylli, the modern Tripoli, the wind blowing from the Sahara had dried up all the water-tanks. So the people took counsel and marched in a body to make war on the south wind. But when they entered the desert, the simoom swept down on them and buried them to a man.[121] The story may well have been told by one who watched them disappearing, in battle array, with drums and cymbals beating, into the red cloud of whirling sand. It is still said of the Bedouins of Eastern Africa that "no whirlwind ever sweeps across the path without being pursued by a dozen savages with drawn creeses, who stab into the centre of the dusty column in order to drive away the evil spirit that is believed to be riding on the blast."[122] So in Australia the huge columns of red sand that move rapidly across a desert tract are thought by the blackfellows to be spirits passing along. Once an athletic young black ran after one of these moving columns to kill it with boomerangs. He was away two or three hours and came back very weary, saying he had killed Koochee (the demon), but that Koochee had growled at him and he must die.[123] Even where these dust columns are not attacked they are still regarded with awe. In some parts of India they are supposed to be *bhuts* going to bathe in the Ganges.[124] Californian Indians think that they are happy souls ascending to the heavenly land.[125]

When a gust lifts the hay in the meadow, the Breton peasant throws a knife or a fork at it to prevent the devil from carrying off the hay.[126] German peasants throw a knife or a hat at a whirlwind because there is a witch or a wizard in it.[127]

§ 3.—Incarnate gods.

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These examples, drawn from the beliefs and practices of rude peoples all over the world, may suffice to prove that the savage, whether European or otherwise, fails to recognise those limitations to his power over nature which seem so obvious to us. In a society where every man is supposed to be endowed more or less with powers which we should call supernatural, it is plain that the distinction between gods and men is somewhat blurred, or rather has scarcely emerged. The conception of gods as supernatural beings entirely distinct from and superior to man, and wielding powers to which he possesses nothing comparable in degree and hardly even in kind, has been slowly evolved in the course of history. At first the supernatural agents are not regarded as greatly, if at all, superior to man; for they may be frightened and coerced by him into doing his will. At this stage of thought the world is viewed as a great democracy; all beings in it, whether natural or supernatural, are supposed to stand on a footing of tolerable equality. But with the growth of his knowledge man learns to realise more clearly the vastness of nature and his own littleness and feebleness in presence of it. The recognition of his own helplessness does not, however, carry with it a corresponding belief in the impotence of those supernatural beings with which his imagination peoples the universe. On the contrary it enhances his conception of their power. For the idea of the world as a system of impersonal forces acting in accordance with fixed and invariable laws has not yet fully dawned or darkened upon him. The germ of the idea he certainly has, and he acts upon it, not only in magic art, but in much of the business of daily life. But the idea remains undeveloped, and so far as he attempts consciously