

ETHNOLOGY OF SOUTHERN INDIA.<sup>1</sup>

THIS book is a reproduction, with some additions and quotations from published materials, of the useful bulletins which the author, as curator of the Madras Museum and director of the Provincial Ethnographical Survey, has issued during recent years. The arrangement of the book might be much improved; full references to the authorities should have been given, while a bibliography would assist the student in investigating a mass of unfamiliar literature. Even as it stands, the volume, with its useful collection of photographs, supplies much interesting material. The greater part of it is devoted to notes on marriage and death customs, and to a miscellaneous group of notes on omens, charms, magic, and the like. It is, as Mr. Thurston calls it, "a farrago," with which we can only deal by glean-

ing some of the interesting facts which abound in its pages.

Thus in the notes on marriage we find the rite of *confarreatio* adopted by the Kammalans of Malabar in the case of polyandrous unions, a fact which we believe to be new to Indian ethnologists. The bride and her prospective bridegrooms, who are all brothers, are seated in a row, the eldest on the right, the others in order of seniority, and last of all the bride. The tribal priest solemnises the union by pouring milk into the mouths of all the parties to the contract. Much evidence on the subject of fraternal polyandry is here collected, but for a scientific treatment of the subject we must await the forthcoming book on the Todas by Dr. Rivers. Numerous cases, again, are given of actual or feigned resistance offered by the friends of the bride to the bridegroom and his party. These are accepted *en bloc* as

evidence of marriage by capture, which seems unscientific in view of the evidence collected by Mr. J. G. Frazer to show that many of these mock combats are really intended to promote the fertility of the soil, and are thus by analogy appropriated in the marriage rites. The hill people of Vizagapatam practise a curious method of selecting the bride. Near their houses is a pit in which the children are placed at night to keep them warm in the cold season. In spring all the marriageable girls are shut up in one of these pits, and a young man who has already selected his bride with the consent of his parents comes to the brink and sings out her name. If she likes him she comes out, a fire

is lighted, and a dance solemnises the union. If she sings back that she will not have him he immediately tries the name of another girl, and goes on doing so until he is successful.

The chapter on death rites, though badly arranged, abounds in useful information. Madras supplies an admirable field for such investigations, because prehistoric interments are numerous, and it would be interesting to compare the usages of the earlier people with those of the present forest tribes. This Mr. Thurston has not attempted to do, but his collection of facts will help European students to undertake the inquiry.

A good illustration of the theory propounded by Mr. E. S. Hartland at the York meeting of the British Association—that both magic and religion, in their earliest forms, are based on the conception of a transmissible personality, the Mana of the Melanesian races—is found in the belief that from the eye of a man of low caste a subtle matter proceeds which contaminates food and other things upon which it falls. The most remarkable example of black magic



FIG. 1.—Sorcery Figure. From "Ethnographic Notes in Southern India," by E. Thurston.

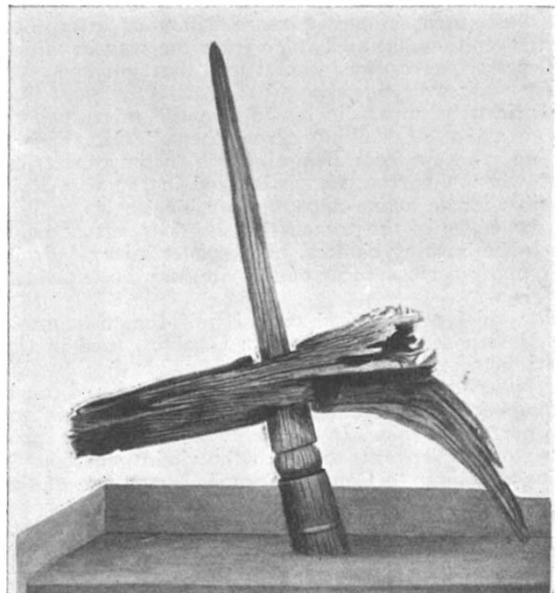


FIG. 2.—Meriah Sacrifice Post. From "Ethnographic Notes in Southern India," by E. Thurston.

is found in the nude figure of a woman, with her feet turned backwards, a large square hole cut above the navel, and the whole body covered with long iron nails and Arabic inscriptions, which was washed ashore at Calicut in 1903. This figure, of which the illustration is here reproduced (Fig. 1), Mr. Thurston supposes to be that of a woman of the Laccadive Islands who was possessed by an evil spirit, "which was nailed to it before it was cast into the sea." The fact that the feet are turned backwards certainly indicates its demoniacal character, and it seems more probable that it represents some notorious witch; that the nails were driven into it and the mutilation made in order to injure her, and the spells added to destroy her magical power; finally, that the image was cast into the sea as a means of getting rid of the sorceress.

The chapter on fire walking supplies many facts, but does not help us much to understand the methods and significance of the rite. The question has been discussed by Mr. J. G. Frazer in his recent book on "Adonis, Attis, and Osiris," with the result that it

<sup>1</sup> "Ethnographic Notes in Southern India." By E. Thurston. Pp. viii+580; 40 plates. (Madras: Government Press, 1906.)

seems to be a survival of a rite of actual fire sacrifice. In some cases the juice of the *Aloe indica* is said to be used as a protective, but Mr. Thurston seems to believe that the indurated skin on the soles of men who habitually walk barefoot over the roughest ground accounts for many cases of immunity. A recent description by Mr. D'Penha of the rite as it is performed at Travancore indicates that the length of time which is allowed to expire between the lighting of the fire and the actual walking makes it an operation of little danger. Mr. Partridge, who witnessed the ceremony at Ganjam, describes the priest as going to the fire-pits, "which were a mass of red-hot ashes; he sprinkled not more than a handful of incense on to them; dipped his feet in a mixture of rice-water and milk; and walked across one pit, leading another man. He then dipped his feet again in the fluid mixture, and returned by the other pit. The time he took in walking across one pit was not more than four seconds, and he took about four steps on the ashes. At least fifty persons in the crowd walked over the pits afterwards, but they went a little faster than the priest, and some of them only took two steps on the ashes. Their feet were not hurt, and they did not wash them in any mixture before or after they went over the ashes. I infer from the way in which the performance was conducted that anyone can easily walk over the ashes, but that, if he goes like the priest, he must dip his feet in the mixture both before and after walking across them." Mr. Risley, on the evidence from Bengal, came to the conclusion that when a narrow trench is used in the rite, it is possible for an active man to place his feet so rapidly on the edges of the trench that he does not actually touch the burning cinders, and escapes injury. Probably many performances of the rite may be explained in this way.

The chief ethnological curiosity of the museum is the Meriah sacrificial post from Ganjam, used in the blood sacrifices of the Khonds, of which the illustration is here reproduced (Fig. 2). It has suffered much damage from white ants, and its original form is not easily recognisable. It seems to represent the proboscis of an elephant to which the victim was bound. This, according to General Campbell, was one of the most common forms.

Mr. Thurston's book is arranged without any method, but it contains a mass of curious information which will make it welcome to European ethnologists.

#### MEDICAL SCIENCE AND ARMY EFFICIENCY.

IN spite of the natural interest which the nation takes in the Army, few people realise completely what is the work that the Royal Army Medical Corps has to do, how vast are the responsibilities committed to it, and how dependent army efficiency is upon medical science. It is difficult to explain this want of interest and knowledge, but it arises probably from the fact that much of the work which the medical service does in the Army, both in peace and war, is of an unostentatious nature, and lacks the pomp and glamour which appeal so strongly to a public when associating itself with the military organisation of the country. Apart from this, the medical service suffered for many years under grave official disabilities, being systematically snubbed, and its professional and military pride injured. Such an attitude on the part of highly-placed persons in the military bureaucracy could not fail to dishearten its *personnel* and lessen any general enthusiasm or interest in its work by the general public. To a large extent these mistakes of

the past have been rectified, and the army medical service desires now, as it ever has done, to do its duty and to deserve well of the country; but it recognises that to do this it must advance and utilise fully the progress of science and the increasing knowledge of the profession of medicine which it represents in the military machine. Before attempting to explain these aspirations, it may not be uninteresting to readers of NATURE to sketch briefly the evolution of the army medical service from less enlightened times to the present day.

The need of medical attendance with an army in the field seems to have been always more or less recognised. In the days of the early Edwards, physicians and surgeons are recorded as having formed part of the levies which were taken into the field; but until the sixteenth century the proportion of such men to the whole force was very small, and even in the time of James I. we find no allowance or provision in the estimates for medicines or hospital appliances; these details were supposed to be found by the surgeons themselves, for the cost of which a weekly stoppage of 2*d.* was made from the pay of the private soldier. It is not until the time of Marlborough that we find any sign of prominence being given to the medical service of the Army, but it was nearly fifty years later that the first reforms in military medicine and sanitation were introduced by Sir John Pringle, when physician-general to the forces in Flanders. The long series of wars in which England was engaged at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries produced many able men who left their mark on the organisation of the Army; not the least remarkable among them was Sir James M'Grigor, who, beginning his career as a military surgeon in 1793, became principal medical officer in Portugal and the Peninsula under Wellington, and finished his official career as medical director-general after the time of the great war. To him it was due that, in the service of which he was head, order was evolved out of chaos, and that the army medical service became an organised body, uniting in itself the best traditions of two professions.

In the long peace that followed Waterloo, our military machinery rusted from disuse or decay, notably the supplementary services which are necessary to form an army. The arrangements which had been made and the materials which had been collected in the old war-time for the care of the sick and wounded disappeared with nothing to replace them, and, when the Crimean War came, the best endeavours of the best men were powerless to grapple with the problems which were to be faced. The lessons of old experience had been forgotten, and the army medical service found itself helpless, without means to carry out even an antiquated system of professional duty. At that time the army medical service consisted only of officers, divided into two classes, staff surgeons and regimental surgeons, though the whole were borne on one list, and, up to a certain rank, were interchangeable. After a regimental surgeon had attained a certain seniority he was promoted to be a staff surgeon of the first class, and was employed thenceforth in superintendence and administration rather than in regimental or personal professional practice. Practically all the officers of the medical staff had at one time or another been regimental surgeons, and presented in varying degree the merits or demerits of that training. The system of gazetting medical officers to individual corps had many advantages, both socially and professionally, but it had undoubted drawbacks. The first and most important of these was that there was a constant difficulty in utilising them elsewhere than with their own corps, hence, if the public service