



Totemism in Polynesia and Melanesia.

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larger groups. If these subdivisions once existed all over Ysabel and the other islands where exogamy is still practised and have disappeared, we have a ready explanation of some of the complexities of the present condition. Kia is at the end of Ysabel nearest to Choiseul, and it is possible that investigation of this latter island may help to throw light on the matter and may bring the totemism of Ysabel into relation with that of the islands at the other end of Choiseul, but at present all that can be done is to wait for further information which may elucidate the nature of the condition in the Eastern Solomons which, if it be not the real article, has simulated it so closely.

SOUTH MELANESIA.

The evidence for or against the existence of totemism in that part of Melanesia lying south of the Santa Cruz group is very slight. I did not visit New Caledonia nor the Loyalty Islands and have no information from that region. My stay in the Southern New Hebrides was too brief to obtain any new material myself, but the Rev. J. W. Mackenzie, D.D., of Fila Island, has very kindly given me a note on the social divisions of the Efatese.¹ On the island of Efate there are ten or more divisions called *naflak*, which are exogamous, each taking its name from a plant or animal, but Dr. Mackenzie does not say expressly that there is any prohibition of the use of these as food. The following are the objects from which ten of the *naflak* take their names: the *namakaur*, a tuber like the arrowroot; the taro; the yam; the coconut; the breadfruit; the *ber*, a kind of fungus; the *namal*, a kind of wild yam; the *nifa*, a plant with large leaves like those of the banana; the *kram*, a shell, and the *wiit* or octopus. Though we do not at present know whether there are any restrictions connected with the use of these objects, their association with exogamy, and their definite function in providing names for the exogamous divisions, makes it extremely probable that we have to do with genuine totemism. If so, we have a striking example of a community where plant-totems are more numerous than those derived from animals.

In the northern New Hebrides my own investigations were limited to the Island of Raga or Pentecost. Here there is the characteristic Melanesian dual organisation, but I could find no evidence that there were subdivisions of the moieties with objects which might be totems. The two moieties take their names from Tagaro and Suqe, and these have no connection with animals or plants. I am indebted to the Rev. H. N. Drummond for the information, however, that the Suqe natives call those of the Tagaro division sow (*matan dura*) and giant clam shell (*matan talai*), while the Tagaro natives call those of the Suqe division turtle (*matan avua*), *matan tagataqa*, a flower, and taro (*matan qeta*) with reference to their origin. These names are generally used only in sport or anger, and it is possible that we have in this derisive use a relic of totemism, a survival of a condition in which within each moiety there were a number of totemistic groups as in many Australian tribes.

¹ See also Macdonald, *Oceania*, Melbourne and London, 1889, pp. 159 and 181.

In the Banks' and Torres Islands I made very full inquiries into facts which might bear on totemism, and in neither group could I obtain any evidence of the institution. In the Torres Islands I obtained a long list of animals that were not eaten, but the abstention had in all cases a natural cause. In the island of Mota in the Banks' group, one of the two divisions of the community took its name from the *talai* or giant clam-shell, a fact of some interest in connection with what was found in Pentecost Island, but hardly enough to furnish a basis for the past existence of totemism. In none of the other islands of the group nor in the Torres group could I discover any connection between the names of the social divisions and those of animals or plants.

While there is thus no evidence of developed totemism, there is one institution of these islands which may possibly have had a totemic origin. Professor Hutton Webster¹ has shown that there is much to be said in favour of the development of secret societies from social divisions such as totemic clans, and it is possible that they may have had such an origin in the Banks' Islands. It is perhaps significant that in the region comprising the northern New Hebrides, the Banks' and the Torres groups where totemism is absent, the secret societies of Melanesia appear to have reached their highest development.

Though developed totemism thus appears to be absent, there was found in the Banks' Islands a group of beliefs which are of the greatest interest in connection with the possible origin of totemism. In these islands devoid of the developed institution there exist beliefs which would seem to furnish the most natural starting point for totemism, beliefs which Dr. Frazer has been led by the Australian evidence to regard as the origin of the institution.

In the island of Mota in the Banks' group there are many individuals who are not permitted by the custom of the island to eat the flesh of certain animals nor to eat certain fruits nor touch certain trees. The ground for the prohibition in most cases is that the person is believed to be the animal or fruit in question, his mother having received some influence from the animal or plant at conception or at some other period of pregnancy.

The course of events is usually as follows: a woman sitting down in her garden or in the bush or on the shore finds an animal or fruit in her loincloth. She takes it up and carries it to the village, where she asks the meaning of the appearance. The people say that she will give birth to a child who will have the characters of this animal or even, it appeared, would be himself or herself the animal. The woman then takes the creature back to the place where she had found it and places it in its proper home; if it is a land animal on the land; if a water animal in the pool or stream from which it had probably come. She builds up a wall round it and goes to visit and feed it every day. After a time the animal will disappear, and it is believed that that is because the animal has at the time of its disappearance entered into the woman. It seemed quite clear that there was no belief in physical impregnation on the part of the animal, nor of the

¹ *Primitive Secret Societies*, New York, 1908, p. 135 *et seq.*

entry of a material object in the form of the animal into her womb, but so far as I could gather, an animal found in this way was regarded as more or less supernatural, a spirit animal and not one material, from the beginning.

It has happened in the memory of an old man now living on Mota that a woman who has found an animal in her loincloth has carried it carefully in her closed hands to the village, but that when she has opened her hands to show it to the people, the animal has gone, and in this case it was believed that the entry had taken place while the woman was on her way from the bush to the village.

I could not find out what interval usually elapses between the disappearance of the animal and the birth of the child, but this did not seem to be regarded as a matter of importance, for it was clear that this belief was not accompanied by any ignorance of the physical rôle of the human father, and that the father played the same part in conception as in cases of birth unaccompanied by an animal appearance. We¹ found it impossible to get definitely the belief as to the nature of the influence exerted by the animal on the woman, but it must be remembered that any belief of this kind can hardly have escaped the many years of European influence and Christian teaching which the people of this group have received. It is doubtful whether even a prolonged investigation of this point could now elicit the original belief of the people about the nature of the influence.

When the child is born it is regarded as being in some sense the animal or fruit which had been found and tended by the mother. The child may not eat the animal during the whole of its life, and if it does so, will suffer serious illness, if not death. If it is a fruit which has been found the child may not eat this fruit or touch the tree on which it grows, the latter restriction remaining in those cases in which the fruit is inedible. Thus a fruit used as a taboo mark would be useless for this purpose to one who owed to it his origin.

A case has occurred quite recently in which a girl unwittingly offended against the prohibition. She was an eel-child, and when quite young had gone to fish with some companions on the shore. They caught some fish including an eel, and all were cooked by them on the shore in the same pot, and were then eaten. A few hours afterwards the child began to rave and became quite mad. The people inquired into the doings of the child and found that she had not eaten any part of the eel, but only the fish cooked in the same pot, and this was held to be sufficient to have produced her condition.

I inquired into the idea at the bottom of the prohibition of the animal as food, and it appeared to be that the person would be eating himself. It seemed that the act would be regarded as a kind of cannibalism. It was evident that there is a belief in the most intimate relation between the person and all individuals of the species with which he is identified.

A further aspect of the belief in the animal nature of a child is that it partakes of the physical and mental characters of the animal with which it is

¹ This information was obtained with the aid of the Rev. C. E. Fox and the Rev. W. J. Durrad, to whose help I am very greatly indebted.

identified. Thus, if the animal found has been a sea-snake, and this is a frequent occurrence, the child would be weak, indolent and slow; if an eel, there will be a similar disposition; if a hermit crab, the child will be hot-tempered; if a flying fox it will also be hot-tempered and the body will be dark; if a brush turkey, the disposition will be good; if a lizard, the child will be soft and gentle; if a rat, thoughtless, hasty and intemperate.

If the object found has been a fruit, here also the child will partake of its nature. In the case of a wild Malay apple (*malmalagaviga*) the child will have a big belly, and a person with this condition will be asked, "Do you come from the *malmalagaviga*?" Again, if the fruit is one called *womarakaraqat* the child will have a good disposition.¹

In the island of Motlav not far from Mota they have the same belief that if a mother has found an animal in her dress, the child will be identified with that animal and will not be allowed to eat it. Here again the child is believed to have the characters of the animal, and two instances given were that a child identified with a yellow crab will have a good disposition and be of a light colour, while if a hermit crab has been found, the child will be angry and disagreeable. In this island a woman who desires her child to have certain characters will frequent a place where she will be likely to encounter the animal which causes the appearance of these characters. Thus, if she wants to have a light coloured child, she will go to a place where there are light coloured crabs.

I inquired very carefully whether a case had ever been known in which the prohibition of an animal as food due to this belief had been passed on to a child or other descendant, but it was clear that such an idea was quite foreign to the beliefs and customs of the people. The taboo is purely an individual matter. In every respect but this, there is the closest resemblance with totemism. In the food prohibition and the belief in descent from or identity with the animal or plant, we have two of the constant and characteristic features of totemism, while the belief in the physical and mental resemblance of man and animal is found in typical totemism as in that of the Western people of Torres Straits.² We have only to have the taboo and belief in descent and resemblance transmitted to a group of descendants to have typical totemism. We have here a perfectly natural and intelligible explanation of the origin or of one origin of totemism, and yet it occurs in a people whose social system has no totemic features at the present time, whatever it may have had in the past.

In 1905 Dr. J. G. Frazer³ advanced a hypothesis to account for the origin of totemism which was based on the belief of certain central Australian tribes which

¹ The disposition of a child may have other causes. A child born in a place where the grass sways from side to side will be like it, undecided, turning from one purpose to another, while one boy now on Mota is fond of playing because an old man dreamed shortly before his birth of children playing round a pool.

² *Report Cambridge Expedition to Torres Straits*, vol. v, p. 164 *et seq.*

³ *Fortnightly Review*, 1905, vol. 78, p. 455.

assign to a child the totem belonging to the place where the mother first becomes aware of the new life within her. In his "conceptional" theory Dr. Frazer assumed that the belief that a child had an animal or plant nature, or one derived from any other object, was due to something which had impressed itself on the mind of the woman at the time of quickening. He suggested that something the woman had recently eaten would probably most often furnish such an object, and as other causes he suggested that if at the time of quickening she had been "watching a kangaroo, or collecting grass-seed for food, or bathing in water, or sitting under a gum-tree, she might imagine that the spirit of a kangaroo, of grass-seed, of water, or of a gum-tree had passed into her, and accordingly, that when her child was born, it was really a kangaroo, a grass-seed, water, or a gum-tree, though to the bodily eye it presented the outward form of a human being." In this passage Dr. Frazer has assumed a series of situations very closely resembling that which I have actually found to exist in the Banks' Islands, and there is definitely established the existence of the belief which forms the basis of his conceptional theory. It is true that in the Banks' Islands the belief and attendant customs have not become the starting point of totemism, but there are many ways of accounting for this, whether it be that totemism never existed in these islands or whether the institution was once present and was lost during the development of the secret societies.

The most important feature of the Banks' belief is that the supposed animal or plant nature of the child is accompanied by a taboo on the flesh of the animal as food or on the use of the plant. Perhaps the most universal feature of totemism is the existence of a restriction of this kind and the conceptional theory of totemism furnishes a ready explanation of this universality. Further, it enables us to understand not only belief in descent from the totem, but also the ambiguity which so often accompanies this belief. Thus in the Eastern Solomons we have seen that while acknowledging their descent from the totem-animal, the people regard this animal rather as the representative of a human ancestor than as the ancestor itself. This belief becomes perfectly natural if the ancestor has two natures, one human and the other animal; if he is, as in the Banks' Islands, an animal in human form. The characteristic features of totemism become perfectly natural if the institution has grown out of such a belief as that of the Banks' islanders, or the similar beliefs suggested by Dr. Frazer.

It is improbable that totemism has had everywhere the same origin, or rather, one of exactly the same kind, and in some parts at least of North America the absence of belief in descent from the totem and the nature of the myths make it probable that there the institution has had its origin in the guardian animal. It is interesting that a belief in a guardian animal should also exist in the Banks' Islands, and it is significant that in this case again the mysterious connection between man and animal is accompanied by a taboo on the flesh of the latter.

A Banks' islander often stands in a definite relation towards an animal which is called his *tamanivu*. This seems to be at the same time the familiar of the person and also a kind of life-token. A person who wishes to have a *tamanivu* goes to one

who has *mana* for this purpose, or probably who is the hereditary possessor of a stone which has such *mana*. This man carries out a rite in which he drinks the juice of certain leaves and then deposits the leaves in some cleft of the rocks; it must be in some place where they cannot be touched by salt water. The people wait till the leaves stink and then watch the cleft to see some animal come out, and when this appears it is the *tamaniu* of the person on whose behalf the rite has been performed. The animal is taken up and put in a suitable place and visited from time to time.

The *tamaniu* has two functions. If its owner wishes to injure anyone he will speak to the man who has procured the *tamaniu* for him, saying that he wishes the *tamaniu* to injure his enemy, and as a result the *tamaniu* would do so in the way peculiar to itself; if an eel it would bite him; if a shark it would swallow him. If a man who has a *tamaniu* falls ill he will go to visit it, or if he cannot go himself will send another to inspect it. In either case the animal is turned over carefully to see what is the matter with it; it may be found that some object may be sticking in its skin, in which case the object is removed and the man recovers. It may be that the animal is found to be dying and in this case when the animal dies, the man will die also.

I was given a striking account of a recent occurrence in connection with a *tamaniu*, which had in this case been brought to Mota from another place. The owner, a blind man, went to the small island of Merig and asked a man there to carry out the appropriate ceremony. A large lizard of the kind called *puasa* appeared, which was brought to Mota and put near the village in the roots of a big banyan tree, where it grew very large. Long after the blind man fell ill and told a friend to go and see the animal, using the words "Look at me," referring to the lizard as himself. The man went alone to the tree, but when he got there, was too frightened to call upon the animal. He was sent again, but this time took some companions to keep up his courage. When they got to the tree the man called the name of the animal, *Rosasangwout*, and the *tamaniu* came out. It was a very large lizard, much larger than any other the men had seen in Mota. When it came out it seemed sluggish and walked as a sick man would walk. The son of the blind man, who was one of the companions, then asked the *tamaniu* if it was ill, and the creature nodded its head and then returned into the roots of the banyan tree. They went back and told the blind man that he was ill, and not long after he died. At the same time the banyan tree fell and is still lying on the ground across the pathway, and this was taken as a sign that the *tamaniu* was also dead.

Mr. Durrad was told by a Motlav man in the Torres Islands that there was a similar belief in Motlav, but we failed to obtain any account of it, though the manner of our informant left no doubt in our minds that the failure was due only to his reticence. The person who has an animal as *tamaniu* will not eat any animal of that kind. So far as totemism is concerned, the points of interest in the *tamaniu* are this taboo on the flesh of the animal and the clear identification of

the man with the animal. It was quite certain that the connection of man and animal with the attendant taboo was a purely individual matter and was never transmitted to another generation.

There are other cases again of taboo on the flesh of animals in these islands, thus, in the island of Motlav, a man who had certain medical powers might abstain from the flesh of some animal believing that if he did not do so, his medicine would lose its efficacy. Again, it was habitual, in mourning, to abstain from certain foods, but there was no evidence that these taboos were ever transmitted as a similar taboo, described by Codrington, has been transmitted in the island of Ulawa in the Solomons.

We have thus in the Banks' Islands, at least, two beliefs, which, with their attendant customs, have probably formed the origin of totemism elsewhere, and yet they exist in a people who are at the present time singularly devoid, not only of the developed institution, but even of the definite survivals which exist in so many places. Whether we have in the secret societies the evidence of a remote condition of totemism or whether this institution has never had its seat in these islands, it is clear that at the present time the beliefs in question exist in total independence of totemism. If these beliefs, or one of them, have at some time formed the starting point of totemism, it is clear that the institution has lived and died or else has disappeared in an institution in which its presence is only with difficulty to be recognised, and yet the beliefs have continued apparently in a pristine form. The existence of such beliefs in the absence of totemism shows how unjustified it is to assume the previous existence of totemism in a people on the ground of stories of men turning into animals or of animal familiars.

ASSOCIATED TOTEMS.

It will have been noticed that in most of the Polynesian and Melanesian examples brought forward in this article, a clan or other social division has had more than one totem. In many cases obvious reasons why this should be so can be given. Thus in the case of the multiplication of totems in the mountain tribes of Fiji, recorded by myself, it is clear that while one is the totem of the tribe, others belong to smaller divisions of the tribe. A man has two totems, one as a member of the tribe and the other as member of a *matanggali* or *tokatoka*. If my supposition is correct that the totem of the tribe has been derived from that of some chief,¹ this becomes perfectly natural, for a man will acquire this new totem from the chief in addition to that which he had previously had as member of his division of the tribe. Again, in such a place as the Reef Islands where there is definite mixture of two races, the multiplicity of totems may have been a direct result of the fusion. Another origin may be the fusion of divisions of one people or the absorption of the surviving members of a nearly extinct division, and I have suggested that this may account for the condition which is now to be found in the

¹ *Man*, 1908, p. 134.