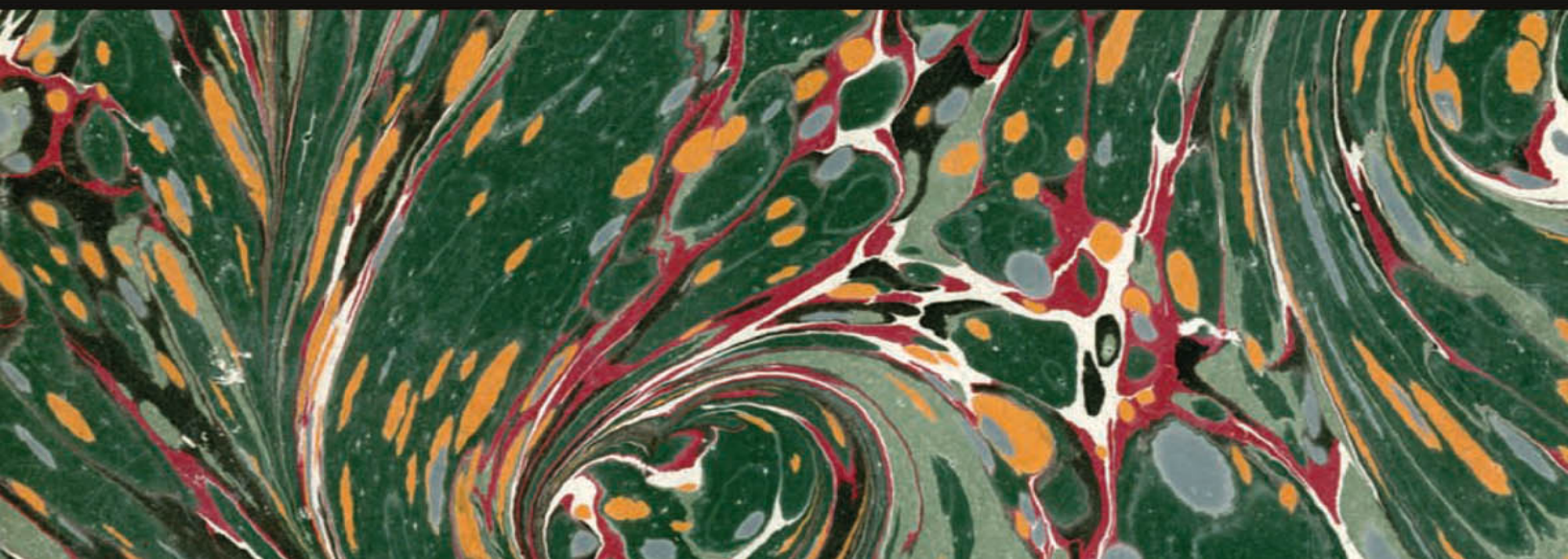




Myth in Primitive Psychology

Bronislaw Malinowski



MYTH
IN
PRIMITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

BY

BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI

Ph.D., D.Sc.

*Reader in Social Anthropology in the
University of London*

*Author of
“The Father in Primitive Psychology”*

1926

Copyright © 2011 Read Books Ltd.

This book is copyright and may not be reproduced or copied in any way without the express permission of the publisher in writing

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Bronislaw Malinowski

Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski was born in Kraków, Austria-Hungary (in present day Poland) in 1884. Both his parents were academics, and as a child he excelled academically. Malinowski received his Ph.D. in philosophy, physics, and mathematics in 1908 from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He graduated *sub auspicious Imperatoris*, the highest honour in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Malinowski spent the next two years at Leipzig University, where he was influenced by Wilhelm Wundt, and his theories of folk psychology. He had become acquainted with Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which stimulated his interest in primitive people and a desire to pursue anthropology. At the time, Frazer and other British authors were amongst the best-known anthropologists, and so in 1910 Malinowski travelled to England to study at the London School of Economics.

In 1914, Malinowski travelled to Papua (later Papua New Guinea) where he conducted fieldwork at Mailu and then, more famously, in the Trobriand Islands. He made several field trips to this area, some of which were extended to avoid the difficulties of emigrating from an Australian colony during the First World War. It was during this period that he conducted his fieldwork on Kula.

By 1922, Malinowski had earned a doctorate of science in anthropology and was teaching at the London School of Economics (LSE). In that year his most famous work, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), was published. Universally regarded as a masterpiece, the book saw Malinowski become one of the best known anthropologists in the world. For the next three decades Malinowski established the LSE as one of Britain's greatest centres of anthropology. He trained many students, including those from Britain's colonies who went on to become important figures in their home countries.

Malinowski taught intermittently in the United States, and was a lecturer at Cornell University in 1933 and for several years after that. When World War II broke out during one of these trips he remained in the country, taking up a position at Yale University, although he remained actively identified with the Polish partisan cause during the war.

His career at Yale was less spectacular than previously, but it gave him the chance to study peasant markets in Mexico in 1940 and 1941. Bronislaw Malinowski died in 1942, aged 58. Aside from his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), his best-remembered works are *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926), *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926), *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927) and *The Sexual life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (1929).

DEDICATION

TO SIR JAMES FRAZER

If I had the power of evoking the past, I should like to lead you back some twenty years to an old Slavonic university town—I mean the town of Cracow, the ancient capital of Poland and the seat of the oldest university in eastern Europe. I could then show you a student leaving the mediæval college buildings, obviously in some distress of mind, hugging, however, under his arm, as the only solace of his troubles, three green volumes with the well-known golden imprint, a beautiful conventionalized design of mistletoe—the symbol of ‘The Golden Bough’.

I had just then been ordered to abandon for a time my physical and chemical research because of ill-health, but I was allowed to follow up a favourite side-line of study, and I decided to make my first attempt to read an English masterpiece in the original. Perhaps my mental distress would have been lessened, had I been allowed to look into the future and to foresee the present occasion, on which I have the great privilege of delivering an address in honour of Sir James Frazer to a distinguished audience, in the language of ‘The Golden Bough’ itself.

For no sooner had I begun to read this great work, than I became immersed in it and enslaved by it. I realized then that anthropology, as presented by Sir James Frazer, is a great science, worthy of as much devotion as any of her elder and more exact sister-studies, and I became bound to the service of Frazerian anthropology.

We are gathered here to celebrate the annual totemic festival of ‘The Golden Bough’; to revive and strengthen the bonds of anthropological union; to commune with the source and symbol of our anthropological interest and affection. I am but your humble spokesman, in expressing our joint admiration to the great writer and his classical works; ‘The Golden

Bough, *‘Totemism and Exogamy’*, *‘Folklore in the Old Testament’*, *‘Psyche’s Task’*, and *‘The Belief in Immortality’*. As a true officiating magician in a savage tribe would have to do, I have to recite the whole list, so that the spirit of the works (their ‘mana’) may dwell among us.

In all this, my task is pleasant and in a way easy, for implicit in whatever I may say is a tribute to him, whom I have always regarded as the ‘Master’. On the other hand this very circumstance also makes my task difficult, for having received so much, I fear I may not have enough to show in return. I have therefore decided to keep my peace even while I am addressing you—to let another one speak through my mouth, another one who has been to Sir James Frazer an inspiration and a lifelong friend, as Sir James has been to us. This other one, I need hardly tell you, is the modern representative of primitive man, the contemporary savage, whose thoughts, whose feelings, whose very life-breath pervades all that Frazer has written.

In other words, I shall not try to serve up any theories of my own, but instead I shall lay before you some results of my anthropological field-work, carried out in northwest Melanesia. I shall restrict myself, moreover, to a subject upon which Sir James Frazer has not directly concentrated his attention, but in which, as I shall try to show you, his influence is as fruitful as in those many subjects that he has made his own.

[The above formed the opening passages of an address delivered in honour of Sir James Frazer at the University of Liverpool, in November, 1925.]

CONTENTS

- I THE ROLE OF MYTH IN LIFE
- II MYTHS OF ORIGIN
- III MYTHS OF DEATH AND THE RECURRENT CYCLE OF LIFE
- IV MYTHS OF MAGIC
- V CONCLUSION

I

THE ROLE OF MYTH IN LIFE

By the examination of a typical Melanesian culture and by a survey of the opinions, traditions, and behaviour of these natives, I propose to show how deeply the sacred tradition, the myth, enters into their pursuits, and how strongly it controls their moral and social behaviour. In other words, the thesis of the present work is that an intimate connection exists between the word, the mythos, the sacred tales of a tribe, on the one hand, and their ritual acts, their moral deeds, their social organization, and even their practical activities, on the other.

In order to gain a background for our description of the Melanesian facts, I shall briefly summarize the present state of the science of mythology. Even a superficial survey of the literature would reveal that there is no monotony to complain of as regards the variety of opinions or the acrimony of polemics. To take only the recent up-to-date theories advanced in explanation of the nature of myth, legend, and fairy-tale, we should have to head the list, at least as regards output and self-assertion, by the so-called school of Nature-mythology which flourishes mainly in Germany. The writers of this school maintain that primitive man is highly interested in natural phenomena, and that his interest is predominantly of a theoretical, contemplative, and poetical character. In trying to express and interpret the phases of the moon, or the regular and yet changing path of the sun across the skies, primitive man constructs symbolic personified rhapsodies. To writers of this school every myth possesses as its kernel or ultimate reality some natural phenomenon or other, elaborately woven into a tale to an extent which sometimes almost masks and obliterates it. There is not much agreement among these students as to what type of natural phenomenon lies at the bottom of most mythological productions. There are extreme lunar mythologists so completely moonstruck with their idea that they will not

admit that any other phenomenon could lend itself to a savage rhapsodic interpretation except that of earth's nocturnal satellite. The Society for the Comparative Study of Myth, founded in Berlin in 1906, and counting among its supporters such famous scholars as Ehrenreich, Siecke, Winckler, and many others, carried on their business under the sign of the moon. Others, like Frobenius for instance, regard the sun as the only subject around which primitive man has spun his symbolic tales. Then there is the school of meteorological interpreters who regard wind, weather, and colours of the skies as the essence of myth. To this belonged such well-known writers of the older generation as Max Müller and Kuhn. Some of these departmental mythologists fight fiercely for their heavenly body or principle; others have a more catholic taste, and prepare to agree that primeval man has made his mythological brew from all the heavenly bodies taken together.

I have tried to state fairly and plausibly this naturalistic interpretation of myths, but as a matter of fact this theory seems to me to be one of the most extravagant views ever advanced by an anthropologist or humanist—and that means a great deal. It has received an absolutely destructive criticism from the great psychologist Wundt, and appears absolutely untenable in the light of any of Sir James Frazer's writings. From my own study of living myths among savages, I should say that primitive man has to a very limited extent the purely artistic or scientific interest in nature; there is but little room for symbolism in his ideas and tales; and myth, in fact, is not an idle rhapsody, not an aimless outpouring of vain imaginings, but a hard-working, extremely important cultural force. Besides ignoring the cultural function of myth, this theory imputes to primitive man a number of imaginary interests, and it confuses several clearly distinguishable types of story, the fairy tale, the legend, the saga, and the sacred tale or myth.

In strong contrast to this theory which makes myth naturalistic, symbolic, and imaginary, stands the theory which regards a sacred tale as a true historical record of the past. This view, recently supported by the so-called Historical School in Germany and America, and represented in England by Dr. Rivers, covers but part of the truth. There is no denying that history, as well as natural environment, must have left a profound imprint on all cultural achievements, hence also on myths. But to take all mythology as mere chronicle is as incorrect as to regard it as the primitive naturalist's musings. It also endows primitive man with a sort of scientific impulse and

desire for knowledge. Although the savage has something of the antiquarian as well as of the naturalist in his composition, he is, above all, actively engaged in a number of practical pursuits, and has to struggle with various difficulties; all his interests are tuned up to this general pragmatic outlook. Mythology, the sacred lore of the tribe, is, as we shall see, a powerful means of assisting primitive man, of allowing him to make the two ends of his cultural patrimony meet. We shall see, moreover, that the immense services to primitive culture performed by myth are done in connection with religious ritual, moral influence, and sociological principle. Now religion and morals draw only to a very limited extent upon an interest in science or in past history, and myth is thus based upon an entirely different mental attitude.

The close connection between religion and myth which has been overlooked by many students has been recognized by others. Psychologists like Wundt, sociologists like Durkheim, Hubert, and Mauss, anthropologists like Crawley, classical scholars like Miss Jane Harrison have all understood the intimate association between myth and ritual, between sacred tradition and the norms of social structure. All of these writers have been to a greater or lesser extent influenced by the work of Sir James Frazer. In spite of the fact that the great British anthropologist, as well as most of his followers, have a clear vision of the sociological and ritual importance of myth, the facts which I shall present will allow us to clarify and formulate more precisely the main principles of a sociological theory of myth.

I might present an even more extensive survey of the opinions, divisions, and controversies of learned mythologists. The science of mythology has been the meeting-point of various scholarships: the classical humanist must decide for himself whether Zeus is the moon, or the sun, or a strictly historical personality; and whether his ox-eyed spouse is the morning star, or a cow, or a personification of the wind—the loquacity of wives being proverbial. Then all these questions have to be re-discussed upon the stage of mythology by the various tribes of archæologists, Chaldean and Egyptian, Indian and Chinese, Peruvian and Mayan. The historian and the sociologist, the student of literature, the grammarian, the Germanist and the Romanist, the Celtic scholar and the Slavist discuss, each little crowd among themselves. Nor is mythology quite safe from logicians and psychologists, from the metaphysician and the epistemologist—to say nothing of such visitors as the theosophist, the modern astrologist, and the

Christian Scientist. Finally, we have the psychoanalyst who has come at last to teach us that the myth is a day-dream of the race, and that we can only explain it by turning our back upon nature, history, and culture, and diving deep into the dark pools of the sub-conscious, where at the bottom there lie the usual paraphernalia and symbols of psychoanalytic exegesis. So that when at last the poor anthropologist and student of folk-lore come to the feast, there are hardly any crumbs left for them!

If I have conveyed an impression of chaos and confusion, if I have inspired a sinking feeling towards the incredible mythological controversy with all the dust and din which it raises, I have achieved exactly what I wanted. For I shall invite my readers to step outside the closed study of the theorist into the open air of the anthropological field, and to follow me in my mental flight back to the years which I spent among a Melanesian tribe of New Guinea. There, paddling on the lagoon, watching the natives under the blazing sun at their garden-work, following them through the patches of jungle, and on the winding beaches and reefs, we shall learn about their life. And again, observing their ceremonies in the cool of the afternoon or in the shadows of the evening, sharing their meals round their fires, we shall be able to listen to their stories.

For the anthropologist—one and only among the many participants in the mythological contest—has the unique advantage of being able to step back behind the savage whenever he feels that his theories become involved and the flow of his argumentative eloquence runs dry. The anthropologist is not bound to the scanty remnants of culture, broken tablets, tarnished texts, or fragmentary inscriptions. He need not fill out immense gaps with voluminous, but conjectural, comments. The anthropologist has the myth-maker at his elbow. Not only can he take down as full a text as exists, with all its variations, and control it over and over; he has also a host of authentic commentators to draw upon; still more he has the fulness of life itself from which the myth has been born. And as we shall see, in this live context there is as much to be learned about the myth as in the narrative itself.

Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read to-day in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. This myth is to the savage what, to a fully believing Christian, is the Biblical story of Creation, of the Fall, of

the Redemption by Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross. As our sacred story lives in our ritual, in our morality, as it governs our faith and controls our conduct, even so does his myth for the savage.

The limitation of the study of myth to the mere examination of texts has been fatal to a proper understanding of its nature. The forms of myth which come to us from classical antiquity and from the ancient sacred books of the East and other similar sources have come down to us without the context of living faith, without the possibility of obtaining comments from true believers, without the concomitant knowledge of their social organization, their practised morals, and their popular customs—at least without the full information which the modern field-worker can easily obtain. Moreover, there is no doubt that in their present literary form these tales have suffered a very considerable transformation at the hands of scribes, commentators, learned priests, and theologians. It is necessary to go back to primitive mythology in order to learn the secret of its life in the study of a myth which is still alive—before, mummified in priestly wisdom, it has been enshrined in the indestructible but lifeless repository of dead religions.

Studied alive, myth, as we shall see, is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject-matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.

I shall try to prove all these contentions by the study of various myths; but to make our analysis conclusive it will first be necessary to give an account not merely of myth, but also of fairy tale, legend, and historical record.

Let us then float over in spirit to the shores of a Trobriand¹ lagoon, and penetrate into the life of the natives—see them at work, see them at play, and listen to their stories. Late in November the wet weather is setting in. There is little to do in the gardens, the fishing season is not in full swing as yet, overseas sailing looms ahead in the future, while the festive mood still

lingers after the harvest dancing and feasting. Sociability is in the air, time lies on their hands, while bad weather keeps them often at home. Let us step through the twilight of the approaching evening into one of their villages and sit at the fireside, where the flickering light draws more and more people as the evening falls and the conversation brightens. Sooner or later a man will be asked to tell a story, for this is the season of *fairy tales*. If he is a good reciter, he will soon provoke laughter, rejoinders, and interruptions, and his tale will develop into a regular performance.

At this time of the year folk-tales of a special type called *kukwanebu* are habitually recited in the villages. There is a vague belief, not very seriously taken, that their recital has a beneficial influence on the new crops recently planted in the gardens. In order to produce this effect, a short ditty in which an allusion is made to some very fertile wild plants, the *kasiyena*, must always be recited at the end.

Every story is ‘owned’ by a member of the community. Each story, though known by many, may be recited only by the ‘owner’; he may, however, present it to someone else by teaching that person and authorizing him to retell it. But not all the ‘owners’ know how to thrill and to raise a hearty laugh, which is one of the main ends of such stories. A good raconteur has to change his voice in the dialogue, chant the ditties with due temperament, gesticulate, and in general play to the gallery. Some of these tales are certainly ‘smoking-room’ stories, of others I will give one or two examples.

Thus there is the maiden in distress and the heroic rescue. Two women go out in search of birds’ eggs. One discovers a nest under a tree, the other warns her: “These are eggs of a snake, don’t touch them.” “Oh, no! They are eggs of a bird,” she replies and carries them away. The mother snake comes back, and finding the nest empty starts in search of the eggs. She enters the nearest village and sings a ditty:—

“I wend my way as I wriggle along,
The eggs of a bird it is licit to eat;
The eggs of a friend are forbidden to touch.”

This journey lasts long, for the snake is traced from one village to the other and everywhere has to sing her ditty. Finally, entering the village of the two women, she sees the culprit roasting the eggs, coils around her, and enters her body. The victim is laid down helpless and ailing. But the hero is nigh; a man from a neighbouring village dreams of the dramatic situation, arrives

on the spot, pulls out the snake, cuts it to pieces, and marries both women, thus carrying off a double prize for his prowess.

In another story we learn of a happy family, a father and two daughters, who sail from their home in the northern coral archipelagoes, and run to the southwest till they come to the wild steep slopes of the rock island Gumasila. The father lies down on a platform and falls asleep. An ogre comes out of the jungle, eats the father, captures and ravishes one of the daughters, while the other succeeds in escaping. The sister from the woods supplies the captive one with a piece of lawyer-cane, and when the ogre lies down and falls asleep they cut him in half and escape.

A woman lives in the village of Okopukopu at the head of a creek with her five children. A monstrously big stingaree paddles up the creek, flops across the village, enters the hut, and to the tune of a ditty cuts off the woman's finger. One son tries to kill the monster and fails. Every day the same performance is repeated till on the fifth day the youngest son succeeds in killing the giant fish.

A louse and a butterfly embark on a bit of aviation, the louse as a passenger, the butterfly as aeroplane and pilot. In the middle of the performance, while flying over-seas just between the beach of Wawela and the island of Kitava, the louse emits a loud shriek, the butterfly is shaken, and the louse falls off and is drowned.

A man whose mother-in-law is a cannibal is sufficiently careless to go away and leave her in charge of his three children. Naturally she tries to eat them; they escape in time, however, climb a palm, and keep her (through a somewhat lengthy story) at bay, until the father arrives and kills her. There is another story about a visit to the Sun, another about an ogre devastating gardens, another about a woman who was so greedy that she stole all food at funeral distributions, and many similar ones.

In this place, however, we are not so much concentrating our attention on the text of narratives, as on their sociological reference. The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it is told. The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the text; and the sociologist should take his cue from the natives. The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time-setting—the hour of the day, and the season, with

the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of the fairy tales. We must also bear in mind the sociological context of private ownership, the sociable function and the cultural rôle of amusing fiction. All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as the text. The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality.

I pass now to another class of stories. These have no special season, there is no stereotyped way of telling them, and the recital has not the character of a performance, nor has it any magical effect. And yet these tales are more important than the foregoing class; for they are believed to be true, and the information which they contain is both more valuable and more relevant than that of the *kukwanebu*. When a party goes on a distant visit or sails on an expedition, the younger members, keenly interested in the landscape, in new communities, in new people, and perhaps even new customs, will express their wonder and make enquiries. The older and more experienced will supply them with information and comment, and this always takes the form of a concrete narrative. An old man will perhaps tell his own experiences about fights and expeditions, about famous magic and extraordinary economic achievements. With this he may mix the reminiscences of his father, hearsay tales and legends, which have passed through many generations. Thus memories of great droughts and devastating famines are conserved for many years, together with the descriptions of the hardships, struggles, and crimes of the exasperated population.

A number of stories about sailors driven out of their course and landing among cannibals and hostile tribes are remembered, some of them set to song, others formed into historic legends. A famous subject for song and story is the charm, skill, and performance of famous dancers. There are tales about distant volcanic islands; about hot springs in which once a party of unwary bathers were boiled to death; about mysterious countries inhabited by entirely different men or women; about strange adventures which have happened to sailors in distant seas; monstrous fish and octopi, jumping rocks and disguised sorcerers. Stories again are told, some recent, some ancient, about seers and visitors to the land of the dead, enumerating their most famous and significant exploits. There are also stories associated

with natural phenomena; a petrified canoe, a man changed into a rock, and a red patch on the coral rock left by a party who ate too much betel nut.

We have here a variety of tales which might be subdivided into *historical accounts* directly witnessed by the narrator, or at least vouched for by someone within living memory; *legends*, in which the continuity of testimony is broken, but which fall within the range of things ordinarily experienced by the tribesmen; and *hearsay tales* about distant countries and ancient happenings of a time which falls outside the range of present-day culture. To the natives, however, all these classes imperceptibly shade into each other; they are designated by the same name, *libwogwo*; they are all regarded as true; they are not recited as a performance, nor told for amusement at a special season. Their subject-matter also shows a substantial unity. They all refer to subjects intensely stimulating to the natives; they all are connected with activities such as economic pursuits, warfare, adventure, success in dancing and in ceremonial exchange. Moreover, since they record singularly great achievements in all such pursuits, they redound to the credit of some individual and his descendants or of a whole community; and hence they are kept alive by the ambition of those whose ancestry they glorify. The stories told in explanation of peculiarities of features of the landscape frequently have a sociological context, that is, they enumerate whose clan or family performed the deed. When this is not the case, they are isolated fragmentary comments upon some natural feature, clinging to it as an obvious survival.

In all this it is once more clear that we can neither fully grasp the meaning of the text, nor the sociological nature of the story, nor the natives' attitude towards it and interest in it, if we study the narrative on paper. These tales live in the memory of man, in the way in which they are told, and even more in the complex interest which keeps them alive, which makes the narrator recite with pride or regret, which makes the listener follow eagerly, wistfully, with hopes and ambitions roused. Thus the essence of a *legend*, even more than that of a *fairy tale*, is not to be found in a mere perusal of the story, but in the combined study of the narrative and its context in the social and cultural life of the natives.

But it is only when we pass to the third and most important class of tales, the *sacred tales* or *myths*, and contrast them with the legends, that the nature of all three classes comes into relief. This third class is called by the natives *liliu*, and I want to emphasize that I am reproducing prima facie the

natives' own classification and nomenclature, and limiting myself to a few comments on its accuracy. The third class of stories stands very much apart from the other two. If the first are told for amusement, the second to make a serious statement and satisfy social ambition, the third are regarded, not merely as true, but as venerable and sacred, and they play a highly important cultural part. The *folk-tale*, as we know, is a seasonal performance and an act of sociability. The *legend*, provoked by contact with unusual reality, opens up past historical vistas. The *myth* comes into play when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity.

In the subsequent chapters of this book we will examine a number of myths in detail, but for the moment let us glance at the subjects of some typical myths. Take, for instance, the annual feast of the return of the dead. Elaborate arrangements are made for it, especially an enormous display of food. When this feast approaches, tales are told of how death began to chastise man, and how the power of eternal rejuvenation was lost. It is told why the spirits have to leave the village and do not remain at the fireside, finally why they return once in a year. Again, at certain seasons in preparation for an overseas expedition, canoes are overhauled and new ones built to the accompaniment of a special magic. In this there are mythological allusions in the spells, and even the sacred acts contain elements which are only comprehensible when the story of the flying canoe, its ritual, and its magic are told. In connection with ceremonial trading, the rules, the magic, even the geographical routes are associated with corresponding mythology. There is no important magic, no ceremony, no ritual without belief; and the belief is spun out into accounts of concrete precedent. The union is very intimate, for myth is not only looked upon as a commentary of additional information, but it is a warrant, a charter, and often even a practical guide to the activities with which it is connected. On the other hand the rituals, ceremonies, customs, and social organization contain at times direct references to myth, and they are regarded as the results of mythical event. The cultural fact is a monument in which the myth is embodied; while the myth is believed to be the real cause which has brought about the moral rule, the social grouping, the rite, or the custom. Thus these stories form an integral part of culture. Their existence and influence not merely transcend the act of telling the narrative, not only do they draw their substance from life and its interests—they govern and

control many cultural features, they form the dogmatic backbone of primitive civilization.

This is perhaps the most important point of the thesis which I am urging: I maintain that there exists a special class of stories, regarded as sacred, embodied in ritual, morals, and social organization, and which form an integral and active part of primitive culture. These stories live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narratives; but are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them.

In order to make the point at issue quite clear, let us once more compare our conclusions with the current views of modern anthropology, not in order idly to criticize other opinions, but so that we may link our results to the present state of knowledge, give due acknowledgment for what we have received, and state where we have to differ clearly and precisely.

It will be best to quote a condensed and authoritative statement, and I shall choose for this purpose the definition and analysis given in *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, by the late Miss C. S. Burne and Professor J. L. Myres. Under the heading "Stories, Sayings, and Songs", we are informed that "this section includes many *intellectual* efforts of peoples. . . ." which "represent the earliest attempts to exercise reason, imagination, and memory." With some apprehension we ask where is left the emotion, the interest, and ambition, the social rôle of all the stories, and the deep connection with cultural values of the more serious ones? After a brief classification of stories in the usual manner we read about the sacred tales: "*Myths* are stories which, however marvellous and improbable to us, are nevertheless related in all good faith, because they are intended, or believed by the teller, to explain by means of something concrete and intelligible an abstract idea or such vague and difficult conceptions as Creation, Death, distinctions of race or animal species, the different occupations of men and women; the origins of rites and customs, or striking natural objects or prehistoric monuments; the meaning of the names of persons or places. Such stories are sometimes described as *aetiological*, because their purpose is to explain why something exists or happens."¹

Here we have in a nutshell all that modern science at its best has to say upon the subject. Would our Melanesians agree, however, with this

opinion? Certainly not. They do not want to 'explain', to make 'intelligible' anything which happens in their myths—above all not an abstract idea. Of that there can be found to my knowledge no instance either in Melanesia or in any other savage community. The few abstract ideas which the natives possess carry their concrete commentary in the very word which expresses them. When being is described by verbs to lie, to sit, to stand, when cause and effect are expressed by words signifying foundation and the past standing upon it, when various concrete nouns tend towards the meaning of space, the word and the relation to concrete reality make the abstract idea sufficiently 'intelligible'. Nor would a Trobriander or any other native agree with the view that "Creation, Death, distinctions of race or animal species, the different occupations of men and women" are "vague and difficult conceptions". Nothing is more familiar to the native than the different occupations of the male and female sex; there is nothing to be *explained* about it. But though familiar, such differences are at times irksome, unpleasant, or at least limiting, and there is the need to justify them, to vouch for their antiquity and reality, in short to buttress their validity. Death, alas, is not vague, or abstract, or difficult to grasp for any human being. It is only too hauntingly real, too concrete, too easy to comprehend for anyone who has had an experience affecting his near relatives or a personal foreboding. If it were vague or unreal, man would have no desire so much as to mention it; but the idea of death is fraught with horror, with a desire to remove its threat, with the vague hope that it may be, not explained, but rather explained away, made unreal, and actually denied. Myth, warranting the belief in immortality, in eternal youth, in a life beyond the grave, is not an intellectual reaction upon a puzzle, but an explicit act of faith born from the innermost instinctive and emotional reaction to the most formidable and haunting idea. Nor are the stories about "the origins of rites and customs" told in mere explanation of them. They never explain in any sense of the word; they always state a precedent which constitutes an ideal and a warrant for its continuance, and sometimes practical directions for the procedure.

We have, therefore, to disagree on every point with this excellent though concise statement of present-day mythological opinion. This definition would create an imaginary, nonexistent class of narrative, the ætiological myth, corresponding to a nonexistent desire to explain, leading a futile existence as an 'intellectual effort', and remaining outside native culture

and social organization with their pragmatic interests. The whole treatment appears to us faulty, because myths are treated as mere stories, because they are regarded as a primitive intellectual arm-chair occupation, because they are torn out of their life-context, and studied from what they look like on paper, and not from what they do in life. Such a definition would make it impossible either to see clearly the nature of myth or to reach a satisfactory classification of folk-tales. In fact we would also have to disagree with the definition of legend and of fairy tale given subsequently by the writers in *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*.

But above all, this point of view would be fatal to efficient field-work, for it would make the observer satisfied with the mere writing down of narratives. The intellectual nature of a story is exhausted with its text, but the functional, cultural, and pragmatic aspect of any native tale is manifested as much in its enactment, embodiment, and contextual relations as in the text. It is easier to write down the story than to observe the diffuse, complex ways in which it enters into life, or to study its function by the observation of the vast social and cultural realities into which it enters. And this is the reason why we have so many texts and why we know so little about the very nature of myth.

We may, therefore, learn an important lesson from the Trobrianders, and to them let us now return. We will survey some of their myths in detail, so that we can confirm our conclusions inductively, yet precisely.

¹ The Trobriand Islands are a coral archipelago lying to the northeast of New Guinea. The natives belong to the Papuo-Melanesian race, and in their physical appearance, mental equipment, and social organization they show a combination of the Oceanic characteristics mixed with some features of the more backward Papuan culture from the mainland of New Guinea.

For a full account of the Northern Massim, of which the Trobrianders form a section, see the classical treatise of Professor C. G. Seligman, *Melanesians of British New Guinea* (Cambridge, 1910). This book shows also the relation of the Trobrianders to the other races and cultures on and around New Guinea. A short account will also be found in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, by the present author (London, 1922).

¹ Quoted from *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, pp. 210 and 211.

II

MYTHS OF ORIGIN

We may best start with the beginning of things, and examine some of the myths of origin. The world, say the natives, was originally peopled from underground. Humanity had there led an existence similar in all respects to the present life on earth. Underground, men were organized in villages, clans, districts; they had distinctions of rank, they knew privileges and had claims, they owned property, and were versed in magic lore. Endowed with all this, they emerged, establishing by this very act certain rights in land and citizenship, in economic prerogative and magical pursuit. They brought with them all their culture to continue it upon this earth.

There are a number of special spots—grottoes, clumps of trees, stone heaps, coral outcrops, springs, heads of creeks—called ‘holes’ or ‘houses’ by the natives. From such ‘holes’ the first couples (a sister as the head of the family and the brother as her guardian) came and took possession of the lands, and gave the totemic, industrial, magical, and sociological character to the communities thus begun.

The problem of rank which plays a great rôle in their sociology was settled by the emergence from one special hole, called Obukula, near the village of Laba’i. This event was notable in that, contrary to the usual course (which is: one original ‘hole’, one lineage), from this hole of Laba’i there emerged representatives of the four main clans one after the other. Their arrival, moreover, was followed by an apparently trivial but, in mythical reality, a most important event. First there came the *Kaylavasi* (iguana), the animal of the Lukulabuta clan, which scratched its way through the earth as iguanas do, then climbed a tree, and remained there as a mere onlooker, following subsequent events. Soon there came out the Dog, totem of the Lukuba clan, who originally had the highest rank. As a third came the Pig, representative of the Malasi clan, which now holds the

highest rank. Last came the Lukwasisiga totem, represented in some versions by the Crocodile, in others by the Snake, in others by the Opossum, and sometimes completely ignored. The Dog and Pig ran round, and the Dog, seeing the fruit of the *noku* plant, nosed it, and then ate it. Said the Pig: "Thou eatest *noku*, thou eatest dirt; thou art a low-bred, a commoner; the chief, the *guya'u*, shall be I." And ever since, the highest sub-clan of the Malasi clan, the Tabalu, have been the real chiefs.

In order to understand this myth, it is not enough to follow the dialogue between the Dog and the Pig which might appear pointless or even trivial. Once you know the native sociology, the extreme importance of rank, the fact that food and its limitations (the taboos of rank and clan) are the main index of man's social nature, and finally the psychology of totemic identification—you begin to understand how this incident, happening as it did when humanity was *in statu nascendi*, settled once for all the relation between the two rival clans. To understand this myth you must have a good knowledge of their sociology, religion, customs, and outlook. Then, and only then, can you appreciate what this story means to the natives and how it can live in their life. If you stayed among them and learned the language you would constantly find it active in discussion and squabbles in reference to the relative superiority of the various clans, and in the discussions about the various food taboos which frequently raise fine questions of casuistry. Above all, if you were brought into contact with communities where the historical process of the spread of influence of the Malasi clan is still in evolution, you would be brought face to face with this myth as an active force.

Remarkably enough the first and last animals to come out, the iguana and the Lukwasisiga totem, have been from the beginning left in the cold: thus the numerical principle and the logic of events is not very strictly observed in the reasoning of the myth.

If the main myth of Laba'i about the relative superiority of the four clans is very often alluded to throughout the tribe, the minor local myths are not less alive and active, each in its own community. When a party arrives at some distant village they will be told not only the legendary historical tales, but above all the mythological charter of that community, its magical proficiencies, its occupational character, its rank and place in totemic organization. Should there arise land-quarrels. encroachment in magical

matters, fishing rights, or other privileges the testimony of myth would be referred to.

Let me show concretely the way in which a typical myth of local origins would be retailed in the normal run of native life. Let us watch a party of visitors arriving in one or the other of the Trobriand villages. They would seat themselves in front of the headman's house, in the central place of the locality. As likely as not the spot of origins is near by, marked by a coral outcrop or a heap of stones. This spot would be pointed out, the names of the brother and sister ancestors mentioned, and perhaps it would be said that the man built his house on the spot of the present headman's dwelling. The native listeners would know, of course, that the sister lived in a different house near by, for she could never reside within the same walls as her brother.

As additional information, the visitors might be told that the ancestors had brought with them the substances and paraphernalia and methods of local industry. In the village of Yalaka, for instance, it would be the processes for burning lime from shells. In Okobobo, Obweria, and Obowada the ancestors brought the knowledge and the implements for polishing hard stone. In Bwoytalu the carver's tool, the hafted shark tooth, and the knowledge of the art came out from underground with the original ancestors. In most places the economic monopolies are thus traced to the autochthonous emergence. In villages of higher rank the insignia of hereditary dignity were brought; in others some animal associated with the local subclan came out. Some communities started on their political career of standing hostility to one another from the very beginning. The most important gift to this world carried from the one below is always magic; but this will have to be treated later on and more fully.

If a European bystander were there and heard nothing but the information given from one native to the other, it would mean very little to him. In fact, it might lead him into serious misunderstandings. Thus the simultaneous emergence of brother and sister might make him suspicious either of a mythological allusion to incest, or else would make him look for the original matrimonial pair and enquire about the sister's husband. The first suspicion would be entirely erroneous, and would shed a false light over the specific relation between brother and sister, in which the former is the indispensable guardian, and the second, equally indispensable, is responsible for the transmission of the line. Only a full knowledge of

matrilineal ideas and institutions gives body and meaning to the bare mention of the two ancestral names, so significant to a native listener. If the European were to inquire who was the sister's husband and how she came to have children, he would soon find himself once more confronted by an entirely foreign set of ideas—the sociological irrelevance of the father, the absence of any ideas about physiological procreation, and the strange and complicated system of marriage, matrilineal and patrilocal at the same time.¹

The sociological relevance of these accounts of origins would become clear only to a European inquirer who had grasped the native legal ideas about local citizenship and the hereditary rights to territory, fishing grounds, and local pursuits. For according to the legal principles of the tribe all such rights are the monopolies of the local community, and only people descendent in the female line from the original ancestress are entitled to them. If the European were told further that, besides the first place of emergence, there are several other 'holes' in the same village, he would become still more baffled until, by a careful study of concrete details and the principles of native sociology, he became acquainted with the idea of compound village communities, i.e. communities in which several sub-clans have merged.

It is clear, then, that the myth conveys much more to the native than is contained in the mere story; that the story gives only the really relevant concrete local differences; that the real meaning, in fact the full account, is contained in the traditional foundations of social organization; and that this the native learns, not by listening to the fragmentary mythical stories, but by living within the social texture of his tribe. In other words, it is the context of social life, it is the gradual realization by the native of how everything which he is told to do has its precedent and pattern in bygone times, which brings home to him the full account and the full meaning of his myths of origin.

For an observer, therefore, it is necessary to become fully acquainted with the social organization of the natives if he wants really to grasp its traditional aspect. The short accounts, such as those which are given about local origins, will then become perfectly plain to him. He will also clearly see that each of them is only a part, and a rather insignificant one, of a much bigger story, which cannot be read except from native life. What really matters about such a story is its social function. It conveys, expresses,

and strengthens the fundamental fact of the local unity and of the kinship unity of the group of people descendent from a common ancestress. Combined with the conviction that only common descent and emergence from the soil give full rights to it, the story of origin literally contains the legal charter of the community. Thus, even when the people of a vanquished community were driven from their grounds by a hostile neighbour their territory always remained intact for them; and they were always, after a lapse of time and when their peace ceremony had been concluded, allowed to return to the original site, rebuild their village, and cultivate their gardens once more.¹ The traditional feeling of a real and intimate connection with the land; the concrete reality of seeing the actual spot of emergence in the middle of the scenes of daily life; the historical continuity of privileges, occupations, and distinctive characters running back into the mythological first beginnings—all this obviously makes for cohesion, for local patriotism, for a feeling of union and kinship in the community. But although the narrative of original emergence integrates and welds together the historical tradition, the legal principles, and the various customs, it must also be clearly kept in mind that the original myth is but a small part of the whole complex of traditional ideas. Thus on the one hand the reality of myth lies in its social function; on the other hand, once we begin to study the social function of myth, and so to reconstruct its full meaning, we are gradually led to build up the full theory of native social organization.

One of the most interesting phenomena connected with traditional precedent and charter is the adjustment of myth and mythological principle to cases in which the very foundation of such mythology is flagrantly violated. This violation always takes place when the local claims of an autochthonous clan, i.e. a clan which has emerged on the spot, are overridden by an immigrant clan. Then a conflict of principles is created, for obviously the principle that land and authority belong to those who are literally born out of it does not leave room for any newcomers. On the other hand, members of a sub-clan of high rank who choose to settle down in a new locality cannot very well be resisted by the autochthons—using this word again in the literal native mythological sense. The result is that there come into existence a special class of mythological stories which justify and account for the anomalous state of affairs. The strength of the various mythological and legal principles is manifested in that the myths of

justification still contain the antagonistic and logically irreconcilable facts and points of view, and only try to cover them by facile reconciliatory incident, obviously manufactured *ad hoc*. The study of such stories is extremely interesting, both because it gives us a deep insight into the native psychology of tradition, and because it tempts us to reconstruct the past history of the tribe, though we must yield to the temptation with due caution and scepticism.

In the Trobriands we find that the higher the rank of a totemic sub-clan, the greater its power of expansion. Let us first state the facts and then proceed to their interpretation. The sub-clan of the highest rank, the Tabalu sub-clan of the Malasi clan, are found now ruling over a number of villages: Omarakana, their main capital; Kasanayi, the twin village of the capital; and Olivilevi, a village founded some three 'reigns' ago after a defeat of the capital. Two villages, Omlamwaluwa, now extinct, and Dayagila, no longer ruled by the Tabalu, also once belonged to them. The same sub-clan, bearing the same name and claiming the same descent, but not keeping all the taboos of distinction and not entitled to all the insignia, is found ruling in the villages of Oyweyowa, Gumilababa, Kavataria, and Kadawaga, all in the western part of the archipelago, the last mentioned on the small island Kayleula. The village of Tukwa'ukwa was but recently taken over by the Tabalu some five 'reigns' ago. Finally, a sub-clan of the same name and claiming affinity rules over the two big and powerful communities of the South, Sinaketa and Vakuta.

The second fact of importance referring to these villages and their rulers is that the ruling clan does not pretend to have emerged locally in any of those communities in which its members own territory, carry on local magic, and wield power. They all claim to have emerged, accompanied by the original pig, from the historical hole of Obukula on the northwestern shore of the island near the village of Laba'i. From there they have, according to their traditions, spread all over the district.¹

In the traditions of this clan there are certain definitely historical facts which must be clearly disentangled and registered: the foundation of the village of Olivilevi three 'reigns' ago, the settlement of the Tabalu in Tukwa'ukwa five 'reigns' ago, the taking over of Vakuta some seven or eight 'reigns' ago. By 'reign' I mean the life-rule of one individual chief. Since in the Trobriands, as no doubt in most matrilineal tribes, a man is succeeded by his younger brother, the average 'reign' is obviously much

shorter than the span of a generation and also much less reliable as a measure of time, since in many cases it need not be shorter. These particular historical tales, giving a full account of how, when, by whom, and in what manner the settlement was effected, are sober matter-of-fact statements. Thus it is possible to obtain from independent informants the detailed account of how, in the time of their fathers or grandfathers respectively, the chief Bugwabwaga of Omarakana, after an unsuccessful war, had to flee with all his community far south, to the usual spot where a temporary village was erected. After a couple of years he returned to perform the peace-making ceremony and to rebuild Omarakana. His younger brother, however, did not return with him, but erected a permanent village, Olivilevi, and remained there. The account, which can be confirmed in the minutest detail from any intelligent adult native in the district, is obviously as reliable an historical statement as one can obtain in any savage community. The data about Tukwa'ukwa, Vakuta, and so on are of similar nature.

What lifts the trustworthiness of such accounts above any suspicion is their sociological foundation. The flight after defeat is a general rule of tribal usage; and the manner in which the other villages become the seat of the highest rank people, i.e. intermarriage between Tabalu women and head men of other villages, is also characteristic of their social life. The technique of this proceeding is of considerable importance and must be described in detail. Marriage is patrilocal in the Trobriands, so that the woman always moves to her husband's community. Economically, marriage entails the standing exchange of food given by the wife's family for valuables supplied by the husband. Food is especially plentiful in the central plains of Kiriwina, ruled over by the chiefs of highest rank from Omarakana. The valuable shell ornaments, coveted by the chiefs, are produced in the coastal districts to the west and south. Economically, therefore, the tendency always has been, and still is, for women of high rank to marry influential headmen in such villages as Gumilababa, Kavataria, Tukwa'ukwa, Sinaketa, and Vakuta.

So far everything happens according to the strict letter of tribal law. But once a Tabalu woman has settled in her husband's village, she overshadows him by rank and very often by influence. If she has a son or sons these are, until puberty, legal members of their father's community. They are the most important males in it. The father, as things are in the Trobriands, always wishes to keep them even after puberty for reasons of personal affection;

the community feels that their whole status is being raised thereby. The majority desire it; and the minority, the rightful heirs to the headmen, his brothers and his sisters' sons, do not dare to oppose. If, therefore, the sons of high rank have no special reasons for returning to their rightful village, that of their mother, they remain in the father's community and rule it. If they have sisters these may also remain, marry within the village, and thus start a new dynasty. Gradually, though perhaps not at once, they succeed to all the privileges, dignities, and functions vested till then in the local headman. They are styled 'masters' of the village and of its lands, they preside over the formal councils, they decide upon all communal matters where a decision is needed, and above all they take over the control of local monopolies and local magic.

All the facts I have just reviewed are strictly empirical observations; let us now look at the legends adduced to cover them. According to one story two sisters, Botabalu and Bonumakala, came out of the original hole near Laba'i. They went at once to the central district of Kiriwina, and both settled in Omarakana. Here they were welcomed by the local lady in charge of magic and all the rights, and thus the mythological sanction of their claims to the capital was established. (To this point we shall have to return again.) After a time they had a quarrel about some banana leaves pertaining to the beautiful fibre petticoats used for dress. The elder sister then ordered the younger to go, which among the natives is a great insult. She said: "I shall remain here and keep all the strict taboos. You go and eat bush-pig, *katakayluva* fish." This is the reason why the chiefs in the coastal districts, though in reality they have the same rank, do not keep the same taboos. The same story is told by natives of the coastal villages with the difference, however, that it is the younger sister who orders her senior to remain in Omarakana and keep all the taboos, while she herself goes to the west.

According to a Sinaketan version, there were three original women of the Tabalu sub-clan, the eldest remained in Kiriwina, the second settled in Kuboma, the youngest came to Sinaketa and brought with her the *Kaloma* shell discs, which started the local industry.

All these observations refer only to one sub-clan of the Malasi clan. The other sub-clans of this clan, of which I have some dozen on record, are all of low rank; are all local, that is have not immigrated into their present territory; and some of them, those of Bwoytalu, belong to what might be called the pariah or specially despised category of people. Although they all

bear the same generic name, have the same common totem, and on ceremonial occasions would range themselves side by side with the people of the highest rank, they are regarded by the natives as belonging to an entirely different class.

Before I pass to the re-interpretation or historical reconstruction of these facts, I shall present the facts referring to the other clans. The Lukuba clan is perhaps the next in importance. They count among their sub-clans two or three which immediately follow in rank the Tabalu of Omarakana. The ancestors of these sub-clans are called Mwauri, Mulobwaima, and Tudava; and they all three came out from the same main hole near Laba'i, out of which the four totemic animals emerged. They moved afterwards to certain important centres in Kiriwina and in the neighbouring islands of Kitava and Vakuta. As we have seen, according to the main myth of emergence, the Lukuba clan had the highest rank at first, before the dog and pig incident reversed the order. Moreover, most mythological personalities or animals belong to the Lukuba clan. The great mythological culture hero Tudava, reckoned also as ancestor by the sub-clan of that name, is a Lukuba. The majority of the mythical heroes in connection with the inter-tribal relations and the ceremonial forms of trading belong also to the same clan.¹ Most of the economic magic of the tribe also belongs to people of this clan. In Vakuta, where they have been recently overshadowed, if not displaced, by the Tabalu, they are still able to assert themselves; they have still retained the monopoly in magic; and, taking their stand upon mythological tradition, the Lukuba still affirm their real superiority to the usurpers. There are far fewer sub-clans of low rank among them than among the Malasi.

About the third large totemic division, the Lukwasisiga, there is much less to be said as regards mythology and cultural or historic rôle. In the main emergence myth they are either completely left out, or else their ancestral animal or person is made to play an entirely insignificant part. They do not own any specially important forms of magic and are conspicuously absent from any mythological reference. The only important part which they play is in the great Tudava cycle in which the ogre Dokonikan is made to belong to the Lukwasisiga totem. To this clan belongs the headman of the village Kabwaku, who is also the chief of the district of Tilataula. This district was always in a relation of potential hostility to the district of Kiriwina proper, and the chiefs of Tilataula were the political rivals of the Tabalu, the people of the highest rank. From time

to time the two would wage war. No matter which side was defeated and had to fly, peace was always restored by a ceremonial reconciliation, and the same relative status once more obtained between the two provinces. The chiefs of Omarakana always retained superiority of rank and a sort of general control over the hostile district, even after this had been victorious. The chiefs of Kabwaku were to a certain extent bound to execute their orders; and more especially if a direct capital punishment had to be meted out in olden days the chief of Omarakana would delegate his potential foe to carry it out. The real superiority of the chiefs of Omarakana was due to their rank. But to a great extent their power and the fear with which they inspired all the other natives was derived from the important sun and rain magic which they wielded. Thus members of a sub-clan of the Lukwasisiga were the potential foes and the executive vassals, but in war the equals, of the highest chiefs. For, as in peace times the supremacy of the Tabalu would remain unchallenged, so in war the Toliwaga of Kabwaku were considered generally the more efficient and redoubtable. The Lukwasisiga clan were also on the whole regarded as land-lubbers (*kulita'odila*). One or two other sub-clans of this clan were of rather high rank and intermarried rather frequently with the Tabalu of Omarakana.

The fourth clan, the Lukulabuta, includes only sub-clans of low rank among its numbers. They are the least numerous clan, and the only magic with which they are associated is sorcery.

When we come to the historical interpretation of these myths a fundamental question meets us at the outset: must we regard the sub-clans which figure in legend and myth as representing merely the local branches of a homogeneous culture, or can we ascribe to them a more ambitious significance and regard them as standing for representatives of various cultures, that is as units of different migration waves? If the first alternative is accepted then all the myths, historical data, and sociological facts refer simply to small internal movements and changes, and there is nothing to be added to them except what we have said.

In support of the more ambitious hypothesis, however, it might be urged that the main legend of emergence places the origins of the four clans in a very suggestive spot. Laba'i lies on the northwestern beach, the only place open to sailors who would have come from the direction of the prevailing monsoon winds. Moreover, in all the myths the drift of a migration, the trend of cultural influence, the travels of culture heroes, take place from

north to south and generally, though less uniformly, from west to east. This is the direction which obtains in the great cycle of Tudava stories; this is the direction which we have found in the migration myths; this is the direction which obtains in the majority of the Kula legends. Thus the assumption is plausible that a cultural influence has been spreading from the northwestern shores of the archipelago, an influence which can be traced as far east as Woodlark Island, and as far south as the D'Entrecasteaux Archipelago. This hypothesis is suggested by the conflict element in some of the myths, such as that between the dog and the pig, between Tudava and Dokonikan, and between the cannibal and non-cannibal brother. If we then accept this hypothesis for what it is worth, the following scheme emerges. The oldest layer would be represented by the Lukwasisiga and Lukulabuta clans. The latter is the first to emerge mythologically; while both are relatively autochthonous in that they are not sailors, their communities usually lie inland, and their occupation is mainly agriculture. The generally hostile attitude of the main Lukwasisiga sub-clan, the Toliwaga, to what would be obviously the latest immigrants, the Tabalu, might also be made to fit into this hypothesis. It is again plausible that the cannibal monster who is fought by the innovator and cultural hero, Tudava, belongs to the Lukwasisiga clan.

I have expressly stated that the sub-clans and not the clans must be regarded as migration units. For it is an incontrovertible fact that the big clan, which comprises a number of sub-clans, is but a loose social unit, split by important cultural rifts. The Malasi clan, for instance, includes the highest sub-clan, the Tabalu, as well as the most despised sub-clans, Wabu'a and Gumsosopa of Bwoytalu. The historical hypothesis of migratory units would still have to explain the relation between sub-clans and clan. It seems to me that the minor sub-clans must also have been of a previous arrival, and that their totemic assimilation is a by-product of a general process of sociological reorganization which took place after the strong and influential immigrants of the Tudava and Tabalu type had arrived.

The historical reconstruction requires, therefore, a number of auxiliary hypotheses, each of which must be regarded as plausible, but must remain arbitrary; while each assumption adds a considerable element of uncertainty. The whole reconstruction is a mental game, attractive and absorbing, often spontaneously obtruding itself upon a field-worker, but

always remaining outside the field of observation and sound conclusion—that is, if the field-worker keeps his powers of observation and his sense of reality under control. The scheme which I have here developed is the one into which the facts of Trobriand sociology, myth, and custom naturally arrange themselves. Nevertheless, I do not attach any serious importance to it, and I do not believe that even a very exhaustive knowledge of a district entitles the ethnographer to anything but tentative and cautious reconstructions. Perhaps a much wider collation of such schemes might show their value, or else prove their utter futility. It is only perhaps as working hypotheses, stimulating to more careful and minute collection of legend, of all tradition, and of sociological difference, that such schemes possess any importance whatever.

As far as the sociological theory of these legends goes the historical reconstruction is irrelevant. Whatever the hidden reality of their unrecorded past may be, myths serve to cover certain inconsistencies created by historical events, rather than to record these events exactly. The myths associated with the spread of the powerful sub-clans show on certain points a fidelity to life in that they record facts inconsistent with one another. The incidents by which this inconsistency is obliterated, if not hidden, are most likely fictitious; we have seen certain myths vary according to the locality in which they are told. In other cases the incidents bolster up non-existent claims and rights.

The historical consideration of myth is interesting, therefore, in that it shows that myth, taken as a whole, cannot be sober dispassionate history, since it is always made *ad hoc* to fulfil a certain sociological function, to glorify a certain group, or to justify an anomalous status. These considerations show us also that to the native mind immediate history, semi-historic legend, and unmixed myth flow into one another, form a continuous sequence, and fulfil really the same sociological function.

And this brings us once more to our original contention that the really important thing about the myth is its character of a retrospective, ever-present, live actuality. It is to a native neither a fictitious story, nor an account of a dead past; it is a statement of a bigger reality still partially alive. It is alive in that its precedent, its law, its moral, still rule the social life of the natives. It is clear that myth functions especially where there is a sociological strain, such as in matters of great difference in rank and power, matters of precedence and subordination, and unquestionably where

profound historical changes have taken place. So much can be asserted as a fact, though it must always remain doubtful how far we can carry out historical reconstruction from the myth.

We can certainly discard all explanatory as well as all symbolic interpretations of these myths of origin. The personages and beings which we find in them are what they appear to be on the surface, and not symbols of hidden realities. As to any explanatory function of these myths, there is no problem which they cover, no curiosity which they satisfy, no theory which they contain.

¹ For a full statement of the psychology and sociology of kinship and descent see articles on “The Psychology of Sex and the Foundations of Kinship in Primitive Societies”, “Psycho-analysis and Anthropology”, “Complex and Myth in Mother Right”, all three in the psychological journal, *Psyche*, Oct. 1923, April, 1924, and Jan. 1925. The first article is included in *The Father in Primitive Psychology* (Psyche Miniature, 1926).

¹ Cf. the account given of these facts in the article on “War and Weapons among the Trobriand Islanders”, *Man*, Jan. 1918; and in Professor Seligman’s *Melanesians*, pp. 663-668.

¹ The reader who wants to grasp these historical and geographical details should consult the map facing p. 51 of the writer’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

¹ Cf. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 321.

III

MYTHS OF DEATH AND OF THE RECURRENT CYCLE OF LIFE

In certain versions of origin myths the existence of humanity underground is compared to the existence of human spirits after death in the present-day spirit-world. Thus a mythological rapprochement is made between the primeval past and the immediate destiny of each man, another of those links with life which we find so important in the understanding of the psychology and the cultural value of myth.

The parallel between primeval and spiritual existence can be drawn even further. The ghosts of the deceased move after death to the island of Tuma. There they enter the earth through a special hole—a sort of reversed proceeding to the original emergence. Even more important is the fact that after a span of spiritual existence in Tuma, the nether world, an individual grows old, grey, and wrinkled; and that then he has to rejuvenate by sloughing his skin. Even so did human beings in the old primeval times, when they lived underground. When they first came out on the surface they had not yet lost this ability; men and women could live eternally young.

They lost the faculty, however, by an apparently trivial, yet important and fateful event. Once upon a time there lived in the village of Bwadela an old woman who dwelt with her daughter and grand-daughter; three generations of genuine matrilineal descent. The grandmother and grand-daughter went out one day to bathe in the tidal creek. The girl remained on the shore, while the old woman went away some distance out of sight. She took off her skin, which, carried by the tidal current, floated along the creek until it stuck on a bush. Transformed into a young girl, she came back to her grand-daughter. The latter did not recognize her; she was afraid of her, and bade her begone. The old woman, mortified and angry, went back to her bathing place, searched for her old skin, put it on again, and returned to her grand-

daughter. This time she was recognized and thus greeted: "A young girl came here; I was afraid; I chased her away." Said the grandmother: "No, you didn't want to recognize me. Well, you will become old—I shall die." They went home to where the daughter was preparing the meal. The old woman spoke to her daughter: "I went to bathe; the tide carried my skin away; your daughter did not recognise me; she chased me away. I shall not slough my skin. We shall all become old. We shall all die."

After that men lost the power of changing their skin and of remaining youthful. The only animals who have retained the power of changing the skin are the 'animals of the below'—snakes, crabs, iguanas, and lizards: this is because men also once lived under the ground. These animals come out of the ground and they still can change their skin. Had men lived above, the 'animals of the above'—birds, flying-foxes, and insects—would also be able to change their skins and renew their youth.

Here ends the myth as it is usually told. Sometimes the natives will add other comments drawing parallels between spirits and primitive humanity; sometimes they will emphasize the regeneration motive of the reptiles; sometimes tell only the bare incident of the lost skin. The story is, in itself, trivial and unimportant; and it would appear so to anyone who did not study it against the background of the various ideas, customs, and rites associated with death and future life. The myth is obviously but a developed and dramatized belief in the previous human power of rejuvenation and in its subsequent loss.

Thus, through the conflict between grand-daughter and grandmother, human beings, one and all, had to submit to the process of decay and debility brought on by old age. This, however, did not yet involve the full incidence of the inexorable fate which is the present lot of man; for old age, bodily decay, and debility do not spell death to the natives. In order to understand the full cycle of their beliefs it is necessary to study the factors of illness, decay, and death. The native of the Trobriands is definitely an optimist in his attitude to health and illness. Strength, vigour, and bodily perfection are to him the natural status which can only be affected or upset by an accident or by a supernatural cause. Small accidents such as excessive fatigue, sunstroke, over-eating, or exposure may cause minor and temporary ailments. By a spear in battle, by poison, by a fall from a rock or a tree a man may be maimed or killed. Whether these accidents and others, such as drowning and the attack of a crocodile or a shark, are entirely free from

sorcery is ever a debatable question to a native. But there is no doubt whatever to him that all serious and especially all fatal illnesses are due to various forms and agencies of witchcraft. The most prevalent of these is the ordinary sorcery practised by wizards, who can produce by their spells and rites a number of ailments covering well nigh the whole domain of ordinary pathology, with the exception of very rapid fulminating diseases and epidemics.

The source of witchcraft is always sought in some influence coming from the south. There are two points in the Trobriand Archipelago at which sorcery is said to have originated, or rather to have been brought over from the D'Entrecasteaux Archipelago. One of these is the grove of Lawaywo between the villages of Ba'u and Bwoytalu, and the other is the southern island of Vakuta. Both these districts are still considered the most redoubtable centres of witchcraft.

The district of Bwoytalu occupies a specially low social position in the island, inhabited as it is by the best wood-carvers, the most expert fibreplaiters, and the eaters of such abominations as stingaree and bush-pig. These natives have been endogamous for a long time, and they probably represent the oldest layer of indigenous culture in the island. To them sorcery was brought from the southern archipelago by a crab. This animal is either depicted as emerging out of a hole in the Lawaywo grove, or else as travelling by the air and dropping from above at the same place. About the time of its arrival a man and a dog went out. The crab was red, for it had the sorcery within it. The dog saw it and tried to bite it. Then the crab killed the dog, and having done this, proceeded to kill the man. But looking at him the crab became sorry, 'its belly was moved', and it brought him back to life. The man then offered his murderer and saviour a large payment, a *pokala*, and asked the crustacean to give him the magic. This was done. The man immediately made use of his sorcery to kill his benefactor, the crab. He then proceeded to kill, according to a rule observed or believed to be observed until now, a near maternal relative. After that he was in full possession of witchcraft. The crabs at present are black, for sorcery has left them; they are, however, slow to die for once they were the masters of life and of death.

A similar type of myth is told in the southern island of Vakuta. They tell how a malicious being of human shape, but not of human nature, went into a piece of bamboo somewhere on the northern shore of Normanby Island.

The piece of bamboo drifted northwards till it was washed ashore near the promontory of Yayvau or Vakuta. A man from the neighbouring village of Kwadagila heard a voice in the bamboo and he opened it. The demon came out and taught him sorcery. This, according to the informants in the south, is the real starting point of black magic. It went to the district of Ba'u in Bwoyталu from Vakuta and not directly from the southern archipelagoes. Another version of the Vakuta tradition maintains that the *tauva'u* came to Vakuta not in a bamboo but by a grander arrangement. At Sewatupa on the northern shore of Normanby Island there stood a big tree in which many of the malignant beings used to reside. It was felled, and it tumbled right across the sea, so that while its base remained on Normanby Island the trunk and the branches came across the sea and the top touched Vakuta. Hence sorcery is most rampant in the southern archipelago; the intervening sea is full of fish who live in the branches and boughs of the tree; and the place whence sorcery came to the Trobriands is the southern beach of Vakuta. For in the top of the tree there were three malignant beings, two males and a female, and they gave some magic to the inhabitants of the island.

In these mythical stories we have but one link in the chain of beliefs which surround the final destiny of human beings. The mythical incidents can be understood and their importance realized only in connection with the full beliefs in the power and nature of witchcraft, and with the feelings and apprehensions regarding it. The explicit stories about the advent of sorcery do not quite exhaust or account for all the supernatural dangers. Rapid and sudden disease and death are, in native belief, brought about, not by the male sorcerers, but by flying witches who act differently and possess altogether a more supernatural character. I was unable to find any initial myth about the origin of this type of witchcraft. On the other hand, the nature and the whole proceedings of these witches are surrounded by a cycle of beliefs which form what might be called a standing or current myth. I shall not repeat them with detail, for I have given a full account in my book, the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.¹ But it is important to realize that the halo of supernatural powers surrounding individuals who are believed to be witches gives rise to a continuous flow of stories. Such stories can be regarded as minor myths generated by the strong belief in the supernatural powers. Similar stories are also told about the male sorcerers, the *bwaga'u*.

Epidemics, finally, are ascribed to the direct action of the malignant spirits, the *tauva'u*, who, as we saw, are mythologically often regarded as the source of all witchcraft. These malignant beings have a permanent abode in the south. Occasionally they will move to the Trobriand Archipelago, and, invisible to ordinary human beings, they walk at night through the villages rattling their lime-gourds and clanking their wooden sword clubs. Wherever this is heard fear falls upon the inhabitants, for those whom the *tauva'u* strike with their wooden weapons die, and such an invasion is always associated with death in masses. *Leria*, epidemic disease, obtains then in the villages. The malignant spirits can sometimes change into reptiles and then become visible to human eyes. It is not easy to distinguish such a reptile from an ordinary one, but it is very important to do so, for a *tauva'u*, injured or ill-treated, revenges himself by death.

Here, again, around this standing myth, around this domestic tale of a happening which is not placed in the past but still occurs, there cluster innumerable concrete stories. Some of them even occurred while I was in the Trobriands; there was a severe dysentery once, and the first outbreak of what probably was Spanish influenza in 1918. Many natives reported having heard the *tauva'u*. A giant lizard was seen in Wawela; the man who killed it died soon after, and the epidemic broke out in the village. While I was in Oburaku, and sickness was rife in the village, a real *tauva'u* was seen by the crew of the boat in which I was being paddled; a large multi-coloured snake appeared on a mangrove, but vanished mysteriously as we came near. It was only through my short-sightedness, and perhaps also my ignorance of how to look for a *tauva'u*, that I failed to observe this miracle myself. Such and similar stories can be obtained by the score from natives in all localities. A reptile of this type should be put on a high platform and valuables placed in front of it; and I have been assured by natives who have actually witnessed it that this is not infrequently done, though I never have seen this myself. Again, a number of women witches are said to have had intercourse with *tauva'u*, and of one living at present this is positively affirmed.

In the case of this belief we see how minor myths are constantly generated by the big schematic story. Thus with regard to all the agencies of disease and death the belief, and the explicit narratives which cover part of it, the small concrete supernatural events constantly registered by the natives, form one organic whole. These beliefs are obviously not a theory or

explanation. On the one hand, they are the whole complex of cultural practices, for sorcery is not only believed to be practised, but actually is practised, at least in its male form. On the other hand, the complex under discussion covers the whole pragmatic reaction of man towards disease and death; it expresses his emotions, his forebodings; it influences his behaviour. The nature of myth again appears to us as something very far removed from a mere intellectual explanation.

We are now in full possession of the native ideas about the factors which in the past cut short man's power of rejuvenation, and which at present cut short his very existence. The connection, by the way, between the two losses is only indirect. The natives believe that although any form of sorcery can reach the child, the youth, or the man in the prime of life, as well as the aged, yet old people are more easily stricken. Thus the loss of rejuvenation at least prepared the ground for sorcery.

But although there was a time when people grew old and died, and thus became spirits, they yet remained in the villages with the survivors—even as now they stay around the dwellings when they return to their village during the annual feast of the *milamala*. But one day an old woman-spirit who was living with her people in the house crouched on the floor under one of the bedstead platforms. Her daughter, who was distributing food to the members of the family, spilled some broth out of the coconut cup and burnt the spirit, who expostulated and reprimanded her daughter. The latter replied: "I thought you had gone away; I thought you were only coming back at one time in the year during the *milamala*." The spirit's feelings were hurt. She replied: "I shall go to Tuma and live underneath." She then took up a coconut, cut it in half, kept the half with the three eyes, and gave her daughter the other. "I am giving you the half which is blind, and therefore you will not see me. I am taking the half with the eyes, and I shall see you when I come back with other spirits." This is the reason why the spirits are invisible, though they themselves can see human beings.

This myth contains a reference to the seasonal feast of *milamala*, the period at which the spirits return to their villages while festive celebrations take place. A more explicit myth gives an account of how the *milamala* was instituted. A woman of Kitava died leaving a pregnant daughter behind her. A son was born, but his mother had not enough milk to feed him. As a man of a neighbouring island was dying, she asked him to take a message to her own mother in the land of spirits, to the effect that the departed one should

bring food to her grandson. The spirit-woman filled her basket with spirit-food and came back wailing as follows: "Whose food am I carrying? That of my grandson to whom I am going to give it; I am going to give him his food." She arrived on Bomagemma beach in the island of Kitava and put down the food. She spoke to her daughter: "I bring the food; the man told me I should bring it. But I am weak; I fear that people may take me for a witch." She then roasted one of the yams and gave it to her grandson. She went into the bush and made a garden for her daughter. When she came back, however, her daughter received a fright for the spirit looked like a sorceress. She ordered her to go away saying: "Return to Tuma, to the spirit-land; people will say that you are a witch." The spirit-mother complained: "Why do you chase me away? I thought I would stay with you and make gardens for my grandchild." The daughter only replied: "Go away, return to Tuma!" The old woman then took up a coconut, split it in half, gave the blind half to her daughter, and kept the half with eyes. She told her that once a year, she and other spirits would come back during the *milamala* and look at the people in the villages, but remain invisible to them. And this is how the annual feast came to be what it is.

In order to understand these mythological stories, it is indispensable to collate them with native beliefs about the spirit-world, with the practices during the *milamala* season, and with the relations between the world of the living and the world of the dead, such as exist in native forms of spiritism.¹ After death every spirit goes to the nether world in Tuma. He has to pass at the entrance Topileta, the guardian of the spirit world. The new-comer offers some valuable gift, the spiritual part of the valuables with which he had been bedecked at the time of dying. When he arrives among the spirits he is received by his friends and relatives who have previously died, and he brings the news from the upper world. He then settles down to spirit-life, which is similar to earthly existence, though sometimes its description is coloured by hopes and desires and made into a sort of real Paradise. But even those natives who describe it thus never show any eagerness to reach it.

Communication between spirits and the living is carried out in several ways. Many people have seen spirits of their deceased relatives or friends, especially in or near the island of Tuma. Again, there are now, and seem to have been from time immemorial, men and women who in trances, or sometimes in sleep, go on long expeditions to the nether world. They take

part in the life of the spirits, and carry back and forth news, items of information, and important messages. Above all they are always ready to convey gifts of food and valuables from the living to the spirits. These people bring home to other men and women the reality of the spirit world. They also give a great deal of comfort to the survivors who are ever eager to receive news from their dear departed.

During the annual feast of the *milamala*, the spirits return from Tuma to their villages. A special high platform is erected for them to sit upon, from which they can look down upon the doings and amusements of their brethren. Food is displayed in big quantities to gladden their hearts, as well as those of the living citizens of the community. During the day valuables are placed on mats in front of the headman's hut and the huts of important and wealthy people. A number of taboos are observed in the village to safeguard the invisible spirits from injury. Hot fluids must not be spilled, as the spirits might be burned like the old woman in the myth. No native may sit, cut wood within the village, play about with spears or sticks, or throw missiles, for fear of injuring a *Baloma*, a spirit. The spirits, moreover, manifest their presence by pleasant and unpleasant signs, and express their satisfaction or the reverse. Slight annoyance is sometimes shown by unpleasant smells, more serious ill-humour is displayed in bad weather, accidents, and damage to property. On such occasions—as well as when an important medium goes into a trance, or someone is near to death—the spirit-world seems very near and real to the natives. It is clear that myth fits into these beliefs as an integral part of them. There is a close and direct parallel between, on the one hand, the relations of man to spirit, as expressed in present-day religious beliefs and experiences, and, on the other hand, the various incidents of the myth. Here again the myth can be regarded as constituting the furthest background of a continuous perspective which ranges from an individual's personal concerns, fears, and sorrows at the one end, through the customary setting of belief, through the many concrete cases told from personal experience and memory of past generations, right back into the epoch where a similar fact is imagined to have occurred for the first time.

I have presented the facts and told the myths in a manner which implies the existence of an extensive and coherent scheme of beliefs. This scheme does not exist, of course, in any explicit form in the native folk-lore. But it does correspond to a definite cultural reality, for all the concrete

manifestations of the natives' beliefs, feelings, and forebodings with reference to death and after-life hang together and form a great organic unit. The various stories and ideas just summarized shade into one another, and the natives spontaneously point out the parallels and bring out the connections between them. Myths, religious beliefs, and experiences in connection with spirits and the supernatural are really all parts of the same subject; the corresponding pragmatic attitude is expressed in conduct by the attempts to commune with the nether world. The myths are but a part of the organic whole; they are an explicit development into narrative of certain crucial points in native belief. When we examine the subjects which are thus spun into stories we find that they all refer to what might be called the specially unpleasant or negative truths: the loss of rejuvenation, the onset of disease, the loss of life by sorcery, the withdrawal of the spirits from permanent contact with men, and finally the partial communication re-established with them. We see also that the myths of this cycle are more dramatic, they also form a more consecutive, yet complex, account than was the case with the myths of origins. Without labouring the point, I think that this is due to a deeper metaphysical reference, in other words, to a stronger emotional appeal in stories which deal with human destiny, as compared with sociological statements or charters.

In any case we see that the point where myth enters in these subjects is not to be explained by any greater amount of curiosity or any more problematic character, but rather by emotional colouring and pragmatic importance. We have found that the ideas elaborated by myth and spun out into narrative are especially painful. In one of the stories, that of the institution of the *milamala* and the periodical return of the spirits, it is the ceremonial behaviour of man, and the taboos observed with regard to the spirits, which are in question. The subjects developed in these myths are clear enough in themselves; there is no need to 'explain' them, and the myth does not even partially perform this function. What it actually does is to transform an emotionally overwhelming foreboding, behind which, even for a native, there lurks the idea of an inevitable and ruthless fatality. Myth presents, first of all, a clear realization of this idea. In the second place, it brings down a vague but great apprehension to the compass of a trivial, domestic reality. The longed-for power of eternal youth and the faculty of rejuvenation which gives immunity from decay and age, have been lost by a small accident which it would have been in the power of a child and a

woman to prevent. The separation from the beloved ones after death is conceived as due to the careless handling of a coconut cup and to a small altercation. Disease, again, is conceived as something which came out of a small animal, and originated through an accidental meeting of a man, a dog, and a crab. Elements of human error, of guilt, and of mischance assume great proportions. Elements of fate, of destiny, and of the inevitable are, on the other hand, brought down to the dimension of human mistakes.

In order to understand this, it is perhaps well to realize that in his actual emotional attitude towards death, whether his own or that of his loved ones, the native is not completely guided by his belief and his mythological ideas. His intense fear of death, his strong desire to postpone it, and his deep sorrow at the departure of beloved relatives belie the optimistic creed and the easy reach of the beyond which is inherent in native customs, ideas, and ritual. After death has occurred, or at a time when death is threatening, there is no mistaking the dim division of shaking faith. In long conversations with several seriously ill natives, and especially with my consumptive friend Bagido'u, I felt, half-expressed and roughly formulated, but still unmistakable in them all, the same melancholy sorrow at the transience of life and all its good things, the same dread of the inevitable end, and the same questioning as to whether it could be staved off indefinitely or at least postponed for some little time. But again, the same people would clutch at the hope given to them by their beliefs. They would screen, with the vivid texture of their myths, stories, and beliefs about the spirit world, the vast emotional void gaping beyond them.

¹ Chap. X, *passim*: especially pp. 236-248, also pp. 320, 321, 393.

¹ An account of these facts has been already given in an article on "Baloma; Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands" in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1916.

IV

MYTHS OF MAGIC

Let me discuss in more detail another class of mythical stories, those connected with magic. Magic, from many points of view, is the most important and the most mysterious aspect of primitive man's pragmatic attitude towards reality. It is one of the problems which are engaging at present the most vivid and most controversial interests of anthropologists. The foundations of this study have been laid by Sir James Frazer who has also erected a magnificent edifice thereon in his famous theory of magic.

Magic plays such a great part in northwest Melanesia that even a superficial observer must soon realize its enormous sway. Its incidence, however, is not very clear at first sight. Although it seems to crop up everywhere, there are certain highly important and vital activities from which magic is conspicuously absent.

No native would ever make a yam or taro garden without magic. Yet certain important types of planting, such as the raising of the coco-nut, the cultivation of the banana, of the mango, and of the bread-fruit, are devoid of magic. Fishing, the economic activity only second in importance to agriculture, has in some of its forms a highly developed magic. Thus the dangerous fishing of the shark, the pursuit of the uncertain *kalala* or of the *to ulam* are smothered in magic. The equally vital, but easy and reliable method of fishing by poison has no magic whatever. In the construction of the canoe—an enterprise surrounded with technical difficulties, requiring organized labour, and leading to an ever-dangerous pursuit—the ritual is complex, deeply associated with the work, and regarded as absolutely indispensable. In the construction of houses, technically quite as difficult a pursuit, but involving neither danger, nor chance, nor yet such complex forms of co-operation as the canoe, there is no magic whatever associated with the work. Wood-carving, an industrial activity of the greatest

importance, is carried on in certain communities as a universal trade, learnt in childhood, and practised by everyone. In these communities there is no magic of carving at all. A different type of artistic sculpture in ebony and hardwood, practised only by people of special technical and artistic ability all over the district, has, on the other hand, its magic, which is considered as the main source of skill and inspiration. In trade, a ceremonial form of exchange known as the *Kula* is surrounded by important magical ritual; while on the other hand, certain minor forms of barter of a purely commercial nature are without any magic at all. Pursuits such as war and love, as well as certain forces of destiny and nature such as disease, wind, and weather are in native belief almost completely governed by magical forces.

Even this rapid survey leads us to an important generalization which will serve as a convenient starting-point. We find magic wherever the elements of chance and accident, and the emotional play between hope and fear have a wide and extensive range. We do not find magic wherever the pursuit is certain, reliable, and well under the control of rational methods and technological processes. Further, we find magic where the element of danger is conspicuous. We do not find it wherever absolute safety eliminates any elements of foreboding. This is the psychological factor. But magic also fulfils another and highly important sociological function. As I have tried to show elsewhere, magic is an active element in the organization of labour and in its systematic arrangement. It also provides the main controlling power in the pursuit of game. The integral cultural function of magic, therefore, consists in the bridging-over of gaps and inadequacies in highly important activities not yet completely mastered by man. In order to achieve this end, magic supplies primitive man with a firm belief in his power of succeeding; it provides him also with a definite mental and pragmatic technique wherever his ordinary means fail him. It thus enables man to carry out with confidence his most vital tasks, and to maintain his poise and his mental integrity under circumstances which, without the help of magic, would demoralize him by despair and anxiety, by fear and hatred, by unrequited love and impotent hate.

Magic is thus akin to science in that it always has a definite aim intimately associated with human instincts, needs, and pursuits. The magic art is directed towards the attainment of practical ends; like any other art or craft it is also governed by theory, and by a system of principles which

dictate the manner in which the act has to be performed in order to be effective. Thus magic and science show a number of similarities, and, with Sir James Frazer, we can appropriately call magic a pseudo-science.

Let us look more closely at the nature of the magic art. Magic, in all its forms, is composed of three essential ingredients. In its performance there always enter certain words, spoken or chanted; certain ceremonial actions are always carried out; and there is always an officiating minister of the ceremony. In analysing, therefore, the nature of magic, we have to distinguish the formula, the rite, and the condition of the performer. It may be said at once that in the part of Melanesia with which we are concerned, the spell is by far the most important constituent of magic. To the natives, knowledge of magic means the knowledge of the spell; and in any act of witchcraft the ritual centres round the utterance of the spell. The rite and the competence of the performer are merely conditioning factors which serve for the proper preservation and launching of the spell. This is very important from the point of view of our present discussion, for the magical spell stands in close relation to traditional lore and more especially to mythology.¹

In the case of almost all types of magic we find some story accounting for its existence. Such a story tells when and where that particular magical formula entered the possession of man, how it became the property of a local group, how it passed from one to another. But such a story is not the story of magical origins. Magic never 'originated'; it never was created or invented. All magic simply *was* from the beginning, as an essential adjunct to all those things and processes which vitally interest man and yet elude his normal rational efforts. The spell, the rite, and the object which they govern are coeval.

Thus the essence of all magic is its traditional integrity. Magic can only be efficient if it has been transmitted without loss and without flaw from one generation to the other, till it has come down from primeval times to the present performer. Magic, therefore, requires a pedigree, a sort of traditional passport in its travel across time. This is supplied by the myth of magic. The manner in which myth endows the performance of magic with worth and validity, in which myth blends with the belief in magical efficiency, will be best illustrated by a concrete example.

As we know, love and the attractions of the other sex play an important rôle in the life of these Melanesians. Like many races of the South Seas

they are very free and easy in their conduct, especially before marriage. Adultery, however, is a punishable offence, and relations within the same totemic clan are strictly forbidden. But the greatest crime in the eyes of the natives is any form of incest. Even the bare idea of such a trespass between brother and sister fills them with violent horror. Brother and sister, united by the nearest bond of kinship in this matriarchal society, may not even converse freely, must never joke or smile at one another, and any allusion to one of them in the presence of the other is considered extremely bad taste. Outside the clan, however, freedom is great, and the pursuit of love assumes a variety of interesting and even attractive forms.

All sexual attraction and all power of seduction are believed to reside in the magic of love. This magic the natives regard as founded in a dramatic occurrence of the past, told in a strange, tragic myth of brother and sister incest, to which I can only refer briefly here.¹ The two young people lived in a village with their mother, and by an accident the girl inhaled a strong love decoction, prepared by her brother for someone else. Mad with passion, she chased him and seduced him on a lonely beach. Overcome by shame and remorse, they forsook food and drink, and died together in a grotto. An aromatic herb grew through their inlaced skeletons, and this herb forms the most powerful ingredient in the substances compounded together and used in love magic.

It can be said that the myth of magic, even more than the other types of savage myth, justifies the sociological claims of the wielder, shapes the ritual, and vouches for the truth of the belief in supplying the pattern of the subsequent miraculous confirmation.

Our discovery of this cultural function of magical myth fully endorses the brilliant theory of the origins of power and kingship developed by Sir James Frazer in the early parts of his *Golden Bough*. According to Sir James, the beginnings of social supremacy are due primarily to magic. By showing how the efficacy of magic is associated with local claims, sociological affiliation, and direct descent, we have been able to forge another link in the chain of causes which connect tradition, magic, and social power.

¹ See *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* pp. 329, 401, et seq., and pp. 69-78 of "Magic, Science and Religion" in *Science, Religion and Reality*, Essays by Various Authors (1925).

¹ For the complete account of this myth see the author's *Sex and Repression in Primitive Society* (1926), where its full sociological bearings are discussed.

V

CONCLUSION

Throughout this book I have attempted to prove that myth is above all a cultural force; but it is not only that. It is obviously also a narrative, and thus it has its literary aspect—an aspect which has been unduly emphasized by most scholars, but which, nevertheless, should not be completely neglected. Myth contains germs of the future epic, romance, and tragedy; and it has been used in them by the creative genius of peoples and by the conscious art of civilization. We have seen that some myths are but dry and succinct statements with scarcely any nexus and no dramatic incident; others, like the myth of love or the myth of canoe magic and of overseas sailing, are eminently dramatic stories. Did space permit, I could repeat a long and elaborate saga of the culture hero Tudava, who slays an ogre, avenges his mother, and carries out a number of cultural tasks.¹ Comparing such stories, it might be possible to show why myth lends itself in certain of its forms to subsequent literary elaboration, and why certain other of its forms remain artistically sterile. Mere sociological precedence, legal title, and vindication of lineage and local claims do not lead far into the realm of human emotions, and therefore lack the elements of literary value. Belief, on the other hand, whether in magic or in religion, is closely associated with the deepest desires of man, with his fears and hopes, with his passions and sentiments. Myths of love and of death, stories of the loss of immortality, of the passing of the Golden Age, and of the banishment from Paradise, myths of incest and of sorcery play with the very elements which enter into the artistic forms of tragedy, of lyric, and of romantic narrative. Our theory, the theory of the cultural function of myth, accounting as it does for its intimate relation to belief and showing the close connection between ritual and tradition, could help us to deepen our understanding of the literary

possibilities of savage story. But this subject, however fascinating, cannot be further elaborated here.

In our opening remarks two current theories of myth were discredited and discarded: the view that myth is a rhapsodic rendering of natural phenomena, and Andrew Lang's doctrine that myth is essentially an explanation, a sort of primitive science. Our treatment has shown that neither of these mental attitudes is dominant in primitive culture; that neither can explain the form of primitive sacred stories, their sociological context, or their cultural function. But once we have realized that myth serves principally to establish a sociological charter, or a retrospective moral pattern of behaviour, or the primeval supreme miracle of magic—it becomes clear that elements both of explanation and of interest in nature must be found in sacred legends. For a precedent accounts for subsequent cases, though it does so through an order of ideas entirely different from the scientific relation of cause and effect, of motive and consequence. The interest in nature, again, is obvious if we realize how important is the mythology of magic, and how definitely magic clings to the economic concerns of man. In this, however, mythology is very far from a disinterested and contemplative rhapsody about natural phenomena. Between myth and nature two links must be interpolated: man's pragmatic interest in certain aspects of the outer world, and his need of supplementing rational and empirical control of certain phenomena by magic.

Let me state once more that I have dealt in this book with savage myth, and not with the myth of culture. I believe that the study of mythology as it functions and works in primitive societies should anticipate the conclusions drawn from the material of higher civilizations. Some of this material has come down to us only in isolated literary texts, without its setting in actual life, without its social context. Such is the mythology of the ancient classical peoples and of the dead civilizations of the Orient. In the study of myth the classical scholar must learn from the anthropologist.

The science of myth in living higher cultures, such as the present civilizations of India, Japan, China, and last but not least, our own, might well be inspired by the comparative study of primitive folk-lore; and in its turn civilized culture could furnish important additions and explanations to savage mythology. This subject is very much beyond the scope of the present study. I do, however, want to emphasize the fact that anthropology should be not only the study of savage custom in the light of our mentality

and our culture, but also the study of our own mentality in the distant perspective borrowed from Stone Age man. By dwelling mentally for some time among people of a much simpler culture than our own, we may be able to see ourselves from a distance, we may be able to gain a new sense of proportion with regard to our own institutions, beliefs, and customs. If anthropology could thus inspire us with some sense of proportion, and supply us with a finer sense of humour, it might justly claim to be a very great science.

I have now completed the survey of facts and the range of conclusions; it only remains to summarize them briefly. I have tried to show that folk-lore, the stories handed on in a native community, live in the cultural context of tribal life and not merely in narrative. By this I mean that the ideas, emotions, and desires associated with a given story are experienced not only when the story is told, but also when in certain customs, moral rules, or ritual proceedings, the counterpart of the story is enacted. And here a considerable difference is discovered between the several types of story. While in the mere fireside *tale* the sociological context is narrow, the *legend* enters much more deeply into the tribal life of the community, and the *myth* plays a most important function. Myth, as a statement of primeval reality which still lives in present-day life and as a justification by precedent, supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief. It is, therefore, neither a mere narrative, nor a form of science, nor a branch of art or history, nor an explanatory tale. It fulfils a function *sui generis* closely connected with the nature of tradition, with the continuity of culture, with the relation between age and youth, and with the human attitude towards the past. The function of myth, briefly, is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events.

Myth is, therefore, an indispensable ingredient of all culture. It is, as we have seen, constantly regenerated; every historical change creates its mythology, which is, however, but indirectly related to historical fact. Myth is a constant by-product of living faith, which is in need of miracles; of sociological status, which demands precedent; of moral rule, which requires sanction.

We have made, perhaps, a too ambitious attempt to give a new definition of myth. Our conclusions imply a new method of treating the science of folk-lore, for we have shown that it cannot be independent of ritual, of

sociology, or even of material culture. Folk-tales, legends, and myths must be lifted from their flat existence on paper, and placed in the three-dimensional reality of full life. As regards anthropological field-work, we are obviously demanding a new method of collecting evidence. The anthropologist must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the verandah of the missionary compound, Government station, or planter's bungalow, where, armed with pencil and notebook and at times with a whisky and soda, he has been accustomed to collect statements from informants, write down stories, and fill out sheets of paper with savage texts. He must go out into the villages, and see the natives at work in gardens, on the beach, in the jungle; he must sail with them to distant sandbanks and to foreign tribes, and observe them in fishing, trading, and ceremonial overseas expeditions. Information must come to him full-flavoured from his own observations of native life, and not be squeezed out of reluctant informants as a trickle of talk. Field-work can be done first-or second-hand even among savages, in the middle of pile-dwellings, not far from actual cannibalism and head-hunting. Open-air anthropology, as opposed to hearsay note-taking, is hard work, but it is also great fun. Only such anthropology can give us the all-round vision of primitive man and of primitive culture. Such anthropology shows us, as regards myth, that far from being an idle mental pursuit, it is a vital ingredient of practical relation to the environment.

The claims and the merits, however, are not mine, but are due once more to Sir James Frazer. *The Golden Bough* contains the theory of the ritual and sociological function of myth, to which I have been able to make but a small contribution, in that I could test, prove, and document it in my field-work. This theory is implied in Frazer's treatment of magic; in his masterly exposition of the great importance of agricultural rites; in the central place which the cults of vegetation and fertility occupy in the volumes of *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*, and in those on the *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*. In these works, as in so many of his other writings, Sir James Frazer has established the intimate relation between the word and the deed in primitive faith; he has shown that the words of the story and of the spell, and the acts of ritual and of ceremony are the two aspects of primitive belief. The deep philosophic query propounded by Faust, as to the primacy of the word or of the deed, appears to us fallacious. The beginning of man is the beginning of articulate thought and of thought put into action. Without words, whether

framed in sober rational conversation, or launched in magical spells, or used to entreat superior divinities, man would not have been able to embark upon his great Odyssey of cultural adventure and achievement.

FINIS

¹ For one of the main episodes of the myth of Tudava, see pp. 209-210 of the author's "Complex and Myth in Mother-right" in *Psyche*, Vol. V., Jan. 1925.



Myth in Primitive Psychology

Bronislaw Malinowski



