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THE CIVILIZATION OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

RAFAEL KARSTEN



CIVILIZATION OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

This book is an in depth look at the religious and superstitious beliefs, and practices based upon such beliefs, of the South American Indians. In this work, Rafael dispels many incorrect assumptions about various practices, such as "self-decoration". His writing provides valuable information for those who work with this subject, yet the general public can also pick up this book and find it fascinating.

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and of practices based upon such beliefs, and by doing so he has been in a position to discuss this particular subject with a thoroughness rarely met with in sociological monographs. Thus he has devoted some two hundred pages to customs relating to "self-decorations," such as the painting of the face and the body, the cutting or shaving of the hair, the piercing of the lips and the ears for the insertion of rings or other objects, the adorning and covering of the body with skins of animals or feathers of birds, or with necklaces, bracelets, or other "ornaments," the mutilation of the body, scarification, and tattooing. He has arrived at the conclusion that these and similar customs have not, in the first place, been practised from decorative or æsthetic motives, but have originated in religious or magical ideas still held by the natives.

In very many instances he has undoubtedly proved his case. I am glad to say that in these questions there is considerably more agreement between his opinions and my own than he himself seems to be aware of. In the fifth, rewritten edition of my *History of Human Marriage*, I have pointed out that those world-wide "self-decorative" practices may be traced to a variety of motives, including such of a superstitious nature. In one of the chapters on "Primitive Means of Attraction" I made the remark: "My research work in Morocco has convinced me that in very many cases the belief in magic forces is at the bottom of customs which have never before been traced to such a cause; and I have little doubt that in the genesis of practices which we have now discussed, superstition has played a larger part than is known at present." But I have also said that "I think it is an indisputable fact that savages, at present at least, practise ornamentation on a large scale as a sexual allurements"; that there is ample evidence that many savage mutilations, or practices connected with them, "are nowadays looked upon as ornamental, whatever may have been their original object"; that tattooing, when not restricted merely to one or a few marks with a specific meaning, "is generally considered to improve the appearance of the person subject to it," and that "we have reason to believe that in such cases it is practised with this object in view." It is quite possible that some of the statements on which these assertions are founded are merely conclusions of travellers who have possessed little insight into native psychology—unfortunately, we are only too often utterly unable to distinguish between a writer's own conjecture and the statement of a fact actually observed by him—but others are quotations from

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

By DR. EDWARD WESTERMARCK

HAVING read the proofs of Dr. Karsten's book, I am asked by the Editor to say a few words by way of introducing the work to English readers. This I have great pleasure in doing, although there is certainly no need for it. I think it will be generally admitted that Dr. Karsten's book is the most important contribution to the study of certain aspects of the South American native civilization which has yet appeared.

So far as the lower forms of civilization are concerned, there are, next to sociological field-work, no other investigations so urgently needed as monographs on definite classes of social phenomena among a certain group of related tribes. Social facts are largely influenced by local conditions, by the physical environment, by the circumstances in which the people in question live, by their habits and mental characteristics; and all these factors can, of course, much more easily be taken into account when the investigation is confined to a single people, or one ethnic unit, than when it embraces a class of phenomena as existing throughout the whole uncivilized world. Dr. Karsten's book combines the merits of the field-ethnologist with those of the monographer on a larger scale. His equipment for his task is exceptional. He is a trained sociologist, and an acute and thoughtful observer. He went to South America for the express purpose of studying its native tribes. He has spent five years in close contact with savages in different parts of the continent, and learned their language. And he has carefully searched all the available literature relating to the customs and beliefs of Indians in the various parts of the vast area with which he is dealing, and has thus been able to present, and comment upon, a large mass of facts falling outside the field for his own direct inquiries and personal observation.

In the present work Dr. Karsten has mainly restricted himself to a discussion of the religious and superstitious beliefs of the Indians

the writings of field-ethnologists belonging to a class whose exclusion from the rank of acceptable witnesses would almost mean the ruin of ethnology. I have protested against the indiscriminate dictum of Mr. Finck—quoted by Dr. Karsten with complete approval so far as the South American Indians are concerned—that the remarks of travellers regarding the addiction of savages to personal “ornamentation” are simply “the unwarranted assumptions of superficial observers, who, ignorant of the real reasons why the lower races paint, tattoo, and otherwise ‘adorn’ themselves, recklessly inferred that they did it to ‘make themselves beautiful.’” In Morocco, for example, although tattoo marks may be applied to make a man a good shot, or to cure a swollen knee, or to act as charms against the evil eye, more elaborate patterns, at least, are uniformly regarded as ornaments. A Berber from the interior, whom I always found to be a most reliable informant, told me (I may almost say, to my disappointment) that the large tattoo which he had on his right hand had been made when he was a boy in order to be pleasing to the women; and he added that many young men of his tribe have the right or left hand and the lower part of the forearm, as also one of their shoulders, tattooed for the same purpose, so as to find favour with the women without paying them anything. A beautifully tattooed girl is praised in their songs, and attracts many lovers who pay her well; and when given in marriage she fetches a high bride price. I refuse to admit that statements of this kind are merely “the unwarranted assumptions of superficial observers.”

I have so far only spoken of existing practices and the objects they serve at present, not of their origin, which is another matter. A thing may, of course, be invented for one purpose, and afterwards used for another purpose. But, as I have pointed out in my book, however important the influence of superstition may have been, “it should be remembered that the sexual impulse is even more primitive than the belief in mysterious or supernatural forces and agents. We have, therefore, no right to assume, without direct evidence, that what is now looked upon as a sexual stimulant originally was something else; and even if it is known to have been so, it may from the beginning have been a sexual stimulant as well.” Against this reasoning Dr. Karsten raises the objection that, as far as we can judge, superstition is as old as mankind, and that, at least among the Indians, “superstition is by far stronger than even the sexual impulse”; and this he considers to be “abundantly proved by the numerous cases

where the Indians abstain, for longer or shorter periods, from sexual intercourse for purely superstitious reasons." This argument, however, seems to me to be entirely beside the mark. The widespread custom of refraining from sexual intercourse in certain circumstances is due to the notion that such intercourse would be accompanied with supernatural danger; but is there a single fact to show that a similar notion is connected with the self-decorative practices of savages? On the contrary, we know that such practices are frequently looked upon as prophylactics against evil influences; and for this very reason they may be favourite means of embellishment, like the use of henna, antimony, and walnut root in Muhammadan countries.

Finally, I feel tempted to add a few words in reply to what Dr. Karsten says about my views as to the origin of pubic covering and circumcision. I do not maintain that the former is, or has been, merely a sexual lure, but I have expressly pointed out that, "although the desire to be sexually attractive is probably one cause of the origin of clothing, there may be various other causes as well"; and I have quoted several facts from different parts of the world indicating that the covering of the genitals, both in men and women, serves as a protection against natural or supernatural evils. Nor do I regard circumcision as essentially ornamental "in the civilized sense of the word." What I have said is this: "The most satisfactory explanation which has been suggested for this practice is, in my opinion, that it at once makes the boy a man and gives him the appearance of sexual maturity, or that it, by giving him such an appearance, is supposed to make him a man capable of procreation. Grown-up girls would then no longer have any objection to him, and circumcision, also, might thus be regarded as a means of sexual attraction, whether intended to be so or not." But I have also mentioned cases in which circumcision has evidently something to do with the superstitious fear of sexual "uncleanness." Australian natives and Fijians consider an uncircumcised boy "unclean"; and Muhammadans regard circumcision as "cleansing," as is indicated by the Arabic term for it—in other words, by circumcision "the boy becomes clean, and capable of performing religious exercises, of praying and entering the mosque." Here, again, the differences between Dr. Karsten's views and my own are not so great as he seems to think.

I hope that the author of this book will excuse me for making these remarks, and not consider me an intruder on a field which belongs

to him alone. My observations have sprung from no wish to criticize his views, and least of all his facts; but having been persuaded to write an introductory note in spite of the warning that my high appreciation of his book would have to be mixed with some controversy, I think it is pardonable if I have been anxious to prevent such misunderstanding with regard to my actual opinions as his references to me might cause. So also I may perhaps have been justified in saying some words in self-defence against the view expressed by the author, that "the whole means-of-attraction theory depends on a misunderstanding of the primitive customs relating to self-decoration."

Some marriage rites are incidentally dealt with. Regarding the mock capture of the bride and the sham fights at weddings which are known to exist among several South American tribes, as well as elsewhere, Dr. Karsten makes the interesting suggestion that they have a magical significance: the violence to which the young woman is subject during the forcible abduction will purify her and rid her of supernatural enemies, while the fast movement will further help her to escape. Although there seems to be no direct evidence for this explanation, it is plausible enough within certain limits. I have myself found reasons to believe that the sham fights at weddings in Morocco may partly have a purificatory significance, as is the case with similar fights on various other occasions (see my *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*); and the great speed at which bride and bridegroom are driven to and from church at German peasant weddings undoubtedly looks like a safeguard against supernatural dangers. But the suggestion in question can by no means be presumed to be—nor does it pretend to be—the complete explanation of those world-wide marriage rites. In some cases the mock capture of the bride so much resembles the genuine capture of her, which is also found in various parts of the world as a method of obtaining a wife, that we may suspect some connection between these customs. This does not imply that capture was ever the usual mode of contracting a marriage; but in a warlike tribe the capture of a woman for wife from an alien tribe may be admired as an act of bravery, and therefore playfully imitated by ordinary people at their weddings, just as in some countries the bridegroom and bride are regarded as king and queen. In most cases, however, I believe the sham fighting between the bridegroom or his party and the bride's family, or some other kind of resistance made by the latter, is a symbolic expression of

their unwillingness to give up the girl or of their feeling of sexual modesty, which is particularly felt with regard to the nearest relations; while the resistance of the bride is largely due to coyness, real or assumed, as was already pointed out by Herbert Spencer as one origin of the ceremony of capture.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that superstitious ideas essentially underlie another marriage rite mentioned by Dr. Karsten, —namely, the defloration of the bride, not by the bridegroom, but by some other man. This widespread custom has been found among various South American peoples (also including the Arawaks and the people of Cumana in the present Venezuela), among the Caribs of Cuba and the Tarahumare in modern Mexico, and, according to old Spanish writers, in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the province of Culiacan in the new kingdom of Galicia. Dr. Karsten traces it to the idea that the defloration of the young wife is regarded as particularly fraught with danger; and this substantially agrees with my own explanation of the rite. He observes that the delicate operation is very frequently entrusted to a medicine-man, because such an individual knows how to deal with the evil spirits, and therefore knows how to deflower the girl without her being supernaturally harmed and without her husband being harmed afterwards. But more positive benefits for the bride or for the married couple may also, I think, be expected to result from the act, since sexual intercourse with a holy person is frequently held to be highly beneficial.

In two very suggestive chapters Dr. Karsten has pointed out the influence which superstition has exercised on the ornamental art of the Indians. He has tried to show that most Indian ornaments have originally had a purely practical object, being magical charms against evil spirits; that, for instance, the frequent occurrence of animal figures as ornaments is due to the common belief that spirits assume the shape of animals; and that the so-called geometrical patterns generally represent either some vital parts of the human body or the bodies of certain animals. That I am in full sympathy with the idea that people have been led to apply “ornaments” to items of their property by a desire to protect them against supernatural danger, may be gathered from my article on “The Magic Origin of Moorish Designs” and my book *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, in which I have endeavoured to prove that the designs used in Moorish decorative art are very largely conventionalized representations, in some way or other, either of the five fingers of the hand or of an eye,

and that they or their prototypes were originally used as charms against the evil eye.

The Indians believe that the supreme danger in life lies in the activity of evil-minded spirits. A leading principle in their theory of the supernatural is that animate or inanimate objects of nature which are especially filled with supernatural power are the abodes of human spirits. Thus the veneration paid to certain animals and plants, and to mountains, rocks, and stones, is intimately connected with worship of human souls. Rapids, cataracts, and cascades are haunting-places of spirits who are likewise the souls of departed men. The same is the case with the spirits inhabiting the heavenly bodies, in accordance with the belief that the disembodied souls of the dead not only take up their abodes in different natural objects on earth, but rise upwards to the sky; and similar souls are also believed to act in striking meteorological phenomena, such as thunder and lightning, the rainbow, comets, and meteors. Even the supernatural properties ascribed to stone "fetishes" and amulets are in many cases considered to have an animistic origin—that is, to be derived from the spirits who are believed to dwell in mountains, rocks, or stones. But Dr. Karsten cautiously adds: "Whether the fetish itself is thought actually to be the habitation of a spiritual being or only to possess an impersonal magical potency, is a wholly superfluous question to which the savage Indian himself probably, in most cases, could not give an exact answer. To him there is evidently no clear distinction between the personal and the impersonal, between spirit and spiritual power." This is an important admission; and it is in complete agreement with the experience I have made within my own field of research. The primary fact underlying the belief in the supernatural is the feeling of uncanniness or mystery, and the ideas as to the nature of the phenomenon which gave rise to this feeling are frequently very confused and, in fact, of secondary importance. But it is interesting to find that the notion of impersonal supernatural energy seems to be much less conspicuous, and the tendency to personify the cause of wonder greater, among the South American Indians than among the much more civilized natives of Morocco. Facts of this kind may be worth considering in the discussions on animism and preanimism, and on the priority of magic or religion.

In the chapter on "Magical Sacrifice," Dr. Karsten deals with a class "of both bloody and unbloody sacrifices and offerings, which

cannot be explained as 'gifts' to a deity in the ordinary sense of the word, but are 'magical' in the sense that they are regarded as bearers of a mysterious power which is transferred to the object of the sacrificial act." To this class he refers many cases of human sacrifice, and maintains that such an explanation is radically opposed to my own theory that human sacrifice is mainly based on the idea of substitution—that when men offer the lives of their fellow-men to their gods, they do so as a rule in the hopes of thereby saving their own. But I think that our views, instead of being contradictory, really may be combined with each other. As instances of "magical sacrifice," Dr. Karsten particularly mentions "those human sacrifices which have for their object to put an end to, or to prevent, a devastating famine, and to secure an abundant crop"; and in support of this opinion he refers to such sacrifices having "the character of a magical manure, through which fertilizing power is directly imparted to the earth." It may be asked, however, Why was this particular gruesome kind of manure chosen for the purpose in question? My answer is, Presumably because human life was in danger. It should be noticed that peoples who have practised human sacrifice as an agricultural rite have also practised it with a view to averting other dangers besides starvation; this is the case, not only with the Indians of Guayaquil, according to Cieza de Leon, but with the Kandhs and the Pawnees. In the present connection I cannot help pointing out that my theory of human sacrifice does not, as Dr. Karsten maintains in his criticism of it, presuppose a belief in "angry and revengeful gods." On the contrary, I have said that "it is impossible to discover in every special case in what respect the worshippers believe the offering of a fellow-creature to be gratifying to the deity," and that "probably they have not always definite views on the subject themselves."

Dr. Karsten speaks of Indian beliefs relating to various other important subjects, such as totemism, generation and conception, the couvade, taboo, and *mana*. He thus deals with many topics which have of late been matter of much discussion among social anthropologists, and he has contributed to this discussion valuable ideas as well as facts. Even those who may not in every case accept his theories will always have something to learn from him. We hope that he will before long gratify our appetite for further results of his indefatigable and penetrating investigations among the South American Indians.

PREFACE

IN publishing this book I have first of all to thank Dr. Westermarck for his kindness to introduce me to English readers by his Introductory Note. I also take the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to him for many stimulating impulses received from his personal teaching and his works, and for the encouraging interest with which he has always followed my sociological studies. My method as a field-ethnologist, moreover, has essentially been that of Dr. Westermarck. If by this method I have attained some results in South America, this is, in part, my teacher's merit.

I also find it quite natural that in his note Dr. Westermarck has touched upon some of the questions where our views differ. That in a work of this kind, which is necessarily full of controversial matter, other anthropologists should find many points of difference in opinion and interpretation, is only what I have expected myself. As to the criticism I have passed upon some of Dr. Westermarck's theories, as far as they concern the customs of the South American Indians—as also upon the theories and interpretations of several other anthropologists—it is hardly necessary for me to emphasize that my only aim thereby has been scientific truth. I am strongly of opinion—and I know that this opinion is shared by Dr. Westermarck—that in sociological works such a criticism neither can nor should be avoided if on this new field of science progresses are to be made. *Amicus Plato, magis amica veritas.*

Speaking of the self-decorative practices treated of in my work, Dr. Westermarck states: "I am glad to say that in these questions there is considerably more agreement between his opinions and my own than he himself seems to be aware of." For my own part I should like to say that, although my general sociological view is certainly the same as that of Dr. Westermarck, it has not been possible to avoid that in many particular questions concerning South American customs and beliefs I should have arrived at different results. It may be proper to point out that it was Dr. Westermarck's chapter on "The Primitive Means of Attraction" in the earlier

editions of his work on the history of marriage which induced me to pay particular attention to the Indian ornaments. During my inquiries I found, however, that in regard to the self-decorative practices of the Indians erotic motives do not play that important part that the means-of-attraction theory would make us assume. My impression is that the said theory—even as modified in the last edition of the work—does not do full justice to the powerful influence that superstition has exerted upon Indian self-decoration and art.

Similarly, for instance, in regard to human sacrifice, I cannot see how my own theory of the Peruvian sacrifices as being in essence magical, could, as Dr. Westermarck suggests, be reconciled with his own substitution theory.

With this I have only wished to point out that, as far as I can see, there is really, in certain particular points, a more or less radical disagreement between Dr. Westermarck's views and my own. Whether I have myself been able to prove my theses, of course, is another question which I must leave to the impartial and unbiassed reader to decide.

Dr. Erland Nordenskiöld, Professor of Ethnology in the High School of Gothenburg, to whom I owe much valuable practical advice with regard to my travels in South America, has also been kind enough to put his ethnological library, containing many rare books on South America, at my disposal. My debt to him for his kind assistance is not easily measured.

To Mr. Sidney Silverman my best thanks are due for kindly revising the main part of the manuscript of this book and helping me to improve its style.

R. K.

HELSINGFORS,
April, 1926.

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INTRODUCTION

THE anthropological studies contained in the present work were begun during my stay among the Indians of the Argentine and Bolivian Gran Chaco in the years 1911 to 1913, and continued during a later residence among the savage or half-civilized tribes of eastern Ecuador in the years 1916 to 1919. In the course of the five years that I have thus spent in close contact with the natives in different parts of the South American continent, I have devoted attention to their material and spiritual culture in general, but especially to their religious beliefs and practices. The reader will find, throughout the work, that the conclusions at which I have arrived with regard to various customs of the Indians are to a great extent founded on my own direct inquiries and personal observation of Indian life. But, since my comparative studies cover the whole area of South America, the vast majority of ethnological facts presented in my work are naturally gathered from the writings of other travellers, the existing literature on South America being scrutinized by me as carefully as possible for information respecting native customs and beliefs.

The starting-point for my inquiries was provided by certain self-decorative practices of the Indians which, as I soon found, were closely connected with their religious or superstitious beliefs. In fact, my first intention was only to publish a monograph on Indian self-decoration and art. Questions of this kind are dealt with in the first part of the present work. My task will be to show that customs, such as the painting of the face and the body, the cutting or shaving of the hair, the piercing of the lips and the ears for the insertion of rings or other ornamental objects, the adorning and covering of the body with skins of animals, feathers of birds, or with necklaces, bracelets, and other ornaments, the wearing of masks, the mutilation of the body, as well as scarification and tattooing—that such and similar customs have not, in the first place, been practised from decorative or æsthetic motives, but form part and parcel of the practical religion of the natives.

Savage man's love of self-decoration has often been commented upon in general works on the anthropology of the lower races, but only comparatively seldom has it been recognized that certain ornaments—as, for instance, necklaces and bracelets made of coloured stones or of the teeth of wild animals—are also worn as charms and amulets. Generally the view has been taken that such things are, and have always been, merely pieces of self-decoration. Thus, for instance, Darwin, who, in his *Descent of Man*, largely deals with this question, speaks of the “passion for ornaments” displayed by savages all over the world, and seems to think that the only object of these ornaments is to make man “beautiful,” and especially attractive to the opposite sex. Even Darwin thus was of opinion that savage ornaments, being means of sexual stimulation, have their principal importance in connection with the contraction of marriages.¹ The same opinion has often been expressed, both by travellers among savage races and by theoretical anthropologists. A typical instance of the superficial way in which some ethnologists have looked upon these questions is the German traveller, W. Joest, who, in an extensive monograph, often quoted in works on primitive art, has treated of tattooing, body-painting, and kindred customs among uncivilized races. Whilst admitting that such customs also have partly arisen from certain practical motives, he strongly maintains that these motives had nothing to do with religion or magic. The principal motive for body-painting, tattooing, and other self-decorative practices, Joest finds in the sexual desire, in the desire of savage men and women to make themselves attractive to the opposite sex. The theory that the primitive ornaments are, in a large measure, used as “means of attraction,” or as sexual stimulants, has especially been set forth by Dr. Westermarck. In the earlier editions of his *History of Human Marriage*, he already tried to show that “men and women began to ornament, mutilate, paint, and tattoo themselves chiefly in order to make themselves attractive to the opposite sex—that they might court successfully or be courted.”² In the last edition of his work, Dr. Westermarck has in the main kept up his view, trying to adduce fresh evidence in support of his theory. Even such customs as scarification, extraction and mutilation of teeth, circumcision, and covering of the genital parts, according to Dr. Westermarck, have largely served the purpose of attracting the

¹ Darwin, *Descent of Man*, ii. 367.

² Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 1901, p. 172.

opposite sex through the "beauty" these operations impart to the persons subjected to them.¹

On the other hand, Professor Y. Hirn has tried to assign various origins to those rude manifestations of an artistic sense which meet us among savage peoples.² In expounding the ideas and feelings which have given rise to primitive art, he largely avails himself of ethnological sources. But not even in Professor Hirn's work is full justice done to the magical nature of primitive ornaments, and too much importance is ascribed to random theories, like those presented by Herbert Spencer, which have no real foundation in the facts of savage life. In general, the important rôle which magic has played with regard to the origin of most primitive customs has, up to recent times, been much underrated, naturally owing to our defective knowledge of the psychology of savage man.

But the subject-matter of my inquiries gradually became enlarged. The fact that magical ideas lie behind most primitive customs relating to self-decorations induced me to examine the nature of Indian magic in general, and since the supernatural power which is the essence of magic appeared to be intimately connected with animistic ideas, I was further led to inquire into Indian animism, as it refers to animals, plants, and inanimate objects of nature. Not only religious beliefs, but also certain forms of worship are involved in my investigations, since sacrifice among the Indians often has a purely magical significance. Moreover, since the belief in metempsychosis, deeply rooted in the Indian mind, appears to be closely connected with a certain primitive theory of generation and conception, I have tried to throw some light upon this theory also, notwithstanding the difficulties with which inquiries into these questions are beset. Again, the ideas which the Indians have about conception are apt to throw light upon the custom generally known under the name of "couvade," of which the classical land is South America. But, as we shall see, couvade is also connected with certain animistic ideas, which must be taken into account when we have to explain this peculiar primitive custom. Lastly, two fundamental notions in primitive religion are made the subjects of inquiry: the notion of taboo and the notion of *mana*. On the basis of the previous investigations, we may perhaps be able finally to decide whether the mysterious power behind taboo

¹ Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 1921, chapters xv. and xvi. *passim*.

² Hirn, *Origins of Art*, p. 217 *sqq.*

and *mana* is in any way connected with the animistic ideas of the Indians or not, and whether the "pre-animistic" theory, so much discussed in recent years, proves valid with regard to South American beliefs or must be rejected. Our inquiry into the ideas of taboo, as held by the more advanced Peruvian Indians, will at the same time throw an interesting light upon the powerful influence that religion and magic has, at a certain stage of development, exerted upon the moral views of uncivilized peoples.

Throughout my investigations I shall also find occasion to deal with such Indian customs which are not in themselves of a religious nature, as, for instance, with Indian dances, initiations of boys and girls at puberty, initiations of warriors and medicine-men, customs observed at marriage, at the birth of a child, after a death, and so forth. Taken as a whole, my work thus deals with the most important problems of the social anthropology of South America in general.

Some words may be added respecting the method followed by me in the present work. It is the comparative sociological method, adopted especially by British students of social anthropology, with the exception only that it is applied to a limited geographical area, South America. Seldom are my investigations extended to Central or North America, and rarely to other parts of the world. The South American Indians certainly form an important part of those races of mankind which, by a generally adopted term, are called "primitive" or uncivilized. There is also every reason to believe—nay, it is even certain—that many of the ideas which will be pointed out here with reference to the natives of South America could be found among many other primitive peoples as well. For my own part, I shall, however, abstain from generalizations which, in my opinion, should be postponed until similar detailed investigations have been undertaken among uncivilized races in other parts of the world. This will not prevent me from constantly keeping in view theories set forth in general monographs, such as those mentioned above, in which the same questions are dealt with as in the present work, the more so when these theories directly touch South American customs and beliefs.

The restriction of my comparative studies to a limited area of which I have personal knowledge thus is deliberate and forms part and parcel of my method. Only by proceeding in this way, I think, is it possible to avoid the mistakes to which the comparative method is liable when it is used on a large scale—that is, applied to a study

comprising savage peoples in different parts of the world, and representing different stages of culture. It has been argued, as it seems to me with much reason, that a comparative method of this kind, dealing with thousands of facts collected from most heterogeneous sources, does not make possible that careful scrutiny of authorities and of the material which is an indispensable demand of science. It is an objection of this kind to which Dr. W. Crooke, in a review of a recent anthropological work, gives expression in the following words: "As in the case of other treatises like this, dealing with comparative religion and custom, the uneasy suspicion arises that some of this material may not be worth preserving. How much of it will survive the practical test of reliability? Was a particular writer a person who had lived and worked among some tribe of the lower culture long enough to learn their language and earn their confidence? Was his position such as to give him access to the best informants? Did he understand the questions which deserve investigation; did he possess the tact necessary for such an inquiry? In short, was he a witness who, on other questions of fact, would satisfy the requirements of a court of law? The information now available is so voluminous that anthropologists will be forced to establish some organization competent to winnow the good grain from the chaff."¹

This remark unquestionably hits a weak point in the sociological method when used on a large scale. And this is the chief reason why many of the results arrived at in comparative anthropological works must be regarded as illusory.

Now, as far as the ethnological literature on South America is concerned, it must be admitted that there are very few works presenting a material which, *taken as a whole*, will "survive the practical test of reliability," to use the words of Dr. Crooke. Most of them are written by passing travellers and untrained observers. The works which are founded on investigations, according to strictly scientific methods, we can almost count on our fingers. Such works are, for instance, Sir Everard F. Im Thurn's and Dr. W. Roth's detailed accounts of the customs and beliefs of the Guiana Indians, Bandelier's work on the Aymará of the Lake Titica, and Guevara's careful monographs on the Araucanians, which stand in the first rank in the ethnology of South America. But the method, after all, is not the most essential thing in regard to a study of the customs of primitive peoples. It is more important that the writers really *know* anything

¹ W. Crooke, in *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxxiii., No. 3, 1922, p. 324.

about the peoples they are describing; and that their records, be they complete or not, are trustworthy. As a matter of fact, some of our best information respecting the Indians of South America we owe to missionaries, who had no scientific training whatever, but, instead of that, possessed the invaluable advantage of a thorough knowledge of native psychology, acquired during a stay of many years or even decades, which no method in the world can make up for. Christian missionaries, such as Acosta, Arriaga, Cobo, Gumilla, Dobrizhoffer, Lozano, and recently Barbroke Grubb, have done an immense service to science by their minute descriptions of primitive Indian customs and ceremonies which they have witnessed with their own eyes. The same may be said about early travellers like de Lery, Thevet, and Hans Staden, whose records on the Brazilian Tupi tribes are of inestimable value, all the more so as they visited these Indians at a time when they were still quite unaffected by European civilization. On the other hand, it is evident that the studies of many methodically trained modern ethnologists have proved in their results incomplete and inaccurate, owing to the too short time they have been able to stay among the natives. During a visit of a few days or weeks, or even months, it is not possible to acquire a knowledge, satisfactory from a scientific point of view, of the social life and psychology of a savage people.

Yet it is clear that even writings of passing travellers who have only acquired a superficial knowledge about a certain people may contain information of some value and be used in comparative monographs, if only the facts recorded are subjected to due criticism. There are, indeed, numerous ethnological writings of this kind quoted in the present work, and, without taking them into account, it would hardly be possible to treat of the social anthropology of South America as a whole. The sociologist who only extends his studies over a limited area, part of which he personally knows, is decidedly in a better position thereby than the sociologist dealing with savage peoples at large. The former has a much better chance than the latter to subject his sources to a careful scrutiny and thus to "winnow the good seed from the chaff." Although he has not himself studied the particular tribe concerned, he will be able to judge, by his general knowledge of the race or culture area to which the tribe belongs, which statements are likely to be true and which are probably erroneous. In South America, for instance, there is to be found a great general similarity between beliefs and practices of tribes living

in different parts of the continent, and there is also much probability that the ideas, underlying a certain custom found in one tribe, also underlie the same custom found in another tribe.

It must, moreover, be pointed out that, in a critical sociological treatise, it is necessary to make a distinction between a writer's statements of bare *facts*, and the *explanation* he gives of these facts. In many cases there may be no doubt as to the former, whereas the explanation perhaps only expresses the writer's personal opinion, and thus has little value from a scientific point of view. Many peculiar savage customs offer problems which cannot possibly be solved on the ground of the explanations which different travellers give of their meaning. With regard to such old customs as body-painting, tattooing, circumcision, etc., I think the problem can only be solved through a detailed study of the custom itself and the particular circumstances under which it is practised. Thus, for instance, when we are told about the Fuegians that they are "contented to be naked, but ambitious to be fine,"¹ I think this brief statement—taken from John Hawkesworth's *Account of Voyages*, a very doubtful source—is wholly without importance, since it only expresses the personal view of a superficial visitor, but does not refer to a fact. A more acute observer probably would have found that the Fuegians did not at all put on their simple ornaments out of an "ambition to be fine," but for altogether different reasons. Further, from the fact that the desire for self-decoration apparently is strongest in youth, that, for instance, tattooing of both men and women is especially performed at the age of puberty, and that dances and festivals are occasions when savages especially "adorn" themselves in various ways, the conclusion has been hastily drawn that the ornaments which the natives then take to wearing have for their object to attract the opposite sex. The conclusion is wrong because the premisses are wrong. Both the puberty ceremonies and the dances of savage peoples are judged too much from a civilized point of view, their religious character being overlooked. In regard to such subtle questions as those concerning the motives of self-decoration among savages, the mere statements of authorities, therefore, cannot as such be taken as sufficient evidence; a careful examination of the custom itself, with which a certain form of self-decoration is connected, is necessary, if we are to solve the problem.

For my own part, I have in the present work frequently offered

¹ Westermarck, *op. cit.*, i. 497.

explanations of Indian customs essentially differing from those given by the very ethnologists who have narrated these customs. I have ventured to do so in cases where my personal knowledge of native psychology and facts hitherto unknown or disregarded have convinced me that they must be explained in a different way. In general, it must be admitted that in South America even ethnologists—not to speak of common travellers—have devoted far too little attention to the spiritual aspect of Indian culture, and that many phases of it have been greatly misunderstood. Very seldom, for instance, have the religious beliefs and practices of the different tribes been made subject to a thorough investigation, and the enormous influence which magical ideas exert upon seemingly profane customs and social relationships have been overlooked. Many travellers among the Indians, indeed, if we may judge from their writings, seem to have started from the idea that the material culture of primitive peoples is the matter above everything worth studying, their spiritual culture being of secondary importance. This is an idea all the more regrettable, since not even the material culture can be properly understood without taking religious and magical beliefs into account. My own work, in which considerable attention is paid to the material side of Indian culture, may perhaps serve as a proof for this assertion.

There is another methodological question which may be touched upon here. My chief task in this work has been to explain the customs and beliefs with which I am dealing; but the possible wanderings of these culture-phenomena have not particularly been the objects of my investigations. Every student of Indian culture knows that in South America also there are culture-elements which are especially characteristic of certain great groups of peoples, and I, moreover, fully admit that in regard to customs, beliefs, myths, and arts, the different tribes have borrowed much from each other. In a few cases, where such cultural influences are quite evident, I have drawn attention to them in my work; but this question to me is only of secondary importance. I am far from accepting the obvious exaggerations of the so-called culture-history school of modern ethnology, represented by Dr. Graebner, Father Schmidt, Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, and some other anthropologists, which methodically avoids inquiries into the psychical causes of religious and social phenomena and regards the analysis of culture-relations as the only, or at least as the chief, task of the history of civilization. On this point I fully agree with Dr. Westermarck when he states that here we have two different kinds of investigation

which supplement each other, but cannot replace each other. Dr. Westermarck is also quite right when he observes that "even when the historical connection between customs found among different peoples has been well established, the real origin of the customs has not been explained thereby."¹ In the present work I have particularly studied the religious and social customs of the Indians from the psychological point of view, and I have done so with all the more reason as this aspect has generally been strangely neglected by students of Indian culture. Besides, it seems to me that the theories which certain advocates of the ethnological school have set forth as to general great "culture-centres" (*Kulturkreise*), of which the primitive South American cultures are supposed to form part, and about different stages or strata of culture (*Urkultur*, *Totemkultur*, *Zweiklassenkultur*, etc.), which in South America, as in other parts of the world, have regularly succeeded one another,² have the character of arbitrary constructions to such an extent that it would be a serious mistake to found any investigations concerning the social history of the Indians on them. What is the scientific value of a method which, for instance, wholly overlooks the enormous differentiating influence that purely natural conditions and racial and tribal qualities have exerted upon the customs and institutions of peoples? The fiction about different "culture-stages," with clearly marked characteristics, like those assigned by Father Schmidt, can, at least as far as South America is concerned, hardly be approved except by students who have approached ethnology and its problems from a purely theoretical point of view, but know little or nothing of real Indian life. It is also obviously impossible to make up a definite scale with regard to the different cultures which we meet in different parts of South America, and grave objections may be raised against the classification by Father Schmidt, according to which the *Urkultur*—the word taken in a general sense, to comprise the lowest peoples in the whole world—has its representatives on the Brazilian plateau, in the Chaco, and in the extreme south. Thus, an unprejudiced study yields to us the result that neither the Chaco tribes nor the Fuegians are in reality more "primitive" than the majority of the other Indians, the poorness of their material culture being only due to the natural conditions of the inhospitable countries

¹ Westermarck, *op. cit.*, i. 6.

² Schmidt, "Kulturkreise und Kulturschichten in Südamerika," in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1913, pp. 1014-1124.

into which they have been drifted under the pressure of a superior race. The Jaghans, and especially the Onas, of Tierra del Fuego must decidedly be ranked among the more civilized of the South American tribes still living in a state of nature—if, indeed, these natives can any longer be said to live in such a state. On the other hand, Father Schmidt seems to know nothing of such backward tribes as the Sirionos in north-eastern Bolivia, the Avishiris in Ecuador, and the Maku in north-west Brazil, who intellectually and culturally stand far below the level of even the Botocudos.¹

Apart from these objections, I think we have no reason to lay too much stress on the method we follow in studying the culture of the lower peoples. Any method of investigation, after all, is good which conduces to our knowledge and helps us to *understand* the primitive customs and beliefs with which we are dealing. This is precisely the aim pursued by me in the present work.

¹ How preconceived opinions may induce an ethnologist grossly to exaggerate the “primitiveness” of an uncivilized people, is shown in a characteristic way in Father Koppers’ recent book on the Fuegians (*Unter Feuerland-Indianern*, 1924).

CHAPTER I

CEREMONIAL BODY-PAINTING

THE ethnologist who is studying an Indian tribe is no doubt confronted with one of his most difficult tasks when he tries to find out the original idea underlying such customs as body-painting and tattooing. First of all, the Indian probably outdoes most other lower peoples in his natural reluctance to reveal his religious and superstitious ideas, especially such as he suspects seem strange and ridiculous to the white man. Very seldom would it occur to him to tell his white inquirer straight, for instance, that he paints and tattoos himself to ward off or purify himself from evil spirits. Moreover, we must not start from the assumption that the original ideas of these ancient customs are known to all individuals of the present generation. The savages of our own days are not "primitive" in the exact sense of the word, but have passed through a long evolution, and certainly not without considerable changes. Although the customs themselves have perhaps remained unaltered, the motives and ideas underlying them may have changed—a psychological law very potent in the history of human culture. As a matter of fact, I shall show later on that in the self-decorative practices secondary motives have largely taken the place of, or become accessory to, the original ones.

An Indian, when asked, for example, why he paints himself for certain occasions or practises tattooing, will in most cases give an evasive answer, or the explanation which he thinks looks most natural to the white man. Thus he may say—and such answers I have received myself—that he does it in order to beautify himself, or simply because it is the custom of his tribe, and because his ancestors have always done the same. But we must be careful not to accept such vague answers to direct questions as real explanations. This is rashly done by Joest, for instance, when, in his book on tattooing, he declares that during his ten years of travels in different parts of the world he has put this question to many tattooed individuals of the lower races: "Why do you practise that? What is your idea in

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doing it?" and always received the answers: "We do it to embellish ourselves," or, "We do it because it is our custom," and so forth.¹ It is surprising that a man who has travelled for ten years among uncivilized races should attach any importance to such empty statements and draw generalizing conclusions from them to the effect that body-paintings, tattooings, mutilations, etc., are usages devoid of any deeper significance, only due to coquetry and vanity, and, in some cases, a mere play. More completely, I think, primitive customs cannot be misunderstood.

In examining the customs relating to personal decoration it is not sufficient to study the painted or tattooed marks and patterns or the ornaments themselves. We must first of all know for which particular occasions the Indian paints or adorns himself in a certain way, and the ideas connected with these—that is, we must regard all manifestations of the so-called æsthetic sense of the Indians in the light thrown upon them by their other social and religious customs. It is also important to know the reasons given by the Indians themselves, but it should be borne in mind that these are in most cases secondary and not primary.

The tattooing, which is a much more elaborate operation than the painting, I shall deal with later on in connection with other scarification and bleeding practices. In this chapter I am only concerned with painting as a means of decoration, first of all with the different forms of body-painting.

Professor von den Steinen, in his book on the Xingú tribes, which will be often referred to in this investigation, discusses, among other things, the Indian custom of painting the body. He distinguishes between the practice of simply coating the body with paint and the practice of making real patterns and ornaments, and is of opinion that only the latter owes its origin to æsthetic considerations. The former has arisen from purely practical motives. Thus the native coats himself with oil paint in order to preserve the skin against the influences of the heat or to protect himself against mosquitoes and flies. For instance, he does not leave for hunting without having smeared himself with oil, especially on the breast and on the back. Likewise, when he goes out canoeing, he is painted all over the body with oil, the result being that on his return his back is covered with dead flies which are washed away in the river.²

¹ Joest, *Tätowiren, Narbenzeichnen und Körperbemalen*, p. 55.

² v. d. Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Central-Brasiliens*, pp. 185, 186.

There is not the least reason to doubt that body-painting has occasionally served such practical purposes, and we may also agree with Professor von den Steinen when he says that in these and other respects the painting to some extent makes up to the Indian for the lack of clothes. Indeed, there are statements to the same effect from other parts of South America. Thus Dr. Krause received the same answer when he inquired about this practice among the Karayá Indians in east Brazil: the paint is the clothes of the Indians, and is of equal service to them against the mosquitoes as the clothes to the whites.¹ The same thing is said of some natives on the Orinoco,² in Peru,³ and in Chile.⁴ Again, Musters states of the Patagonians, that "both sexes smear their faces and occasionally their bodies with paint, the Indians alleging as the reason for using this cosmetic that it is a protection against the effects of the wind." And he adds that he himself found it equally effective against the sun.⁵ Much the same is said about the Onas of Tierra del Fuego.⁶

But although it is thus certain that the Indian may occasionally use red ochre, oil, or soot as a defence against changes of weather, flies, and mosquitoes, it is equally certain that this has not been the only, and not even the strongest, motive for this practice. These natural evils are nothing compared with the supernatural enemies, the malignant spirits, which play such a dominant rôle in the imagination of the savage Indian, and which he fancies he can ward off in the same simple way as he does the visible enemies. There are, in fact, as will appear from the subsequent investigation, numerous cases of body-painting which absolutely cannot be accounted for by any of the motives alleged for this custom by Joest and von den Steinen. Indeed, from Professor von den Steinen's own book, extremely rich as it is in information, I shall gather some facts which his theories fail to explain. In Chaco I never found any single instance of paint being applied to the body or face as a means of protecting these parts against the heat or against insects. The Chaco Indian is so accustomed to the heat and to all changes of the weather that he evidently has no need of such artificial means for counteracting its effects.

¹ Krause, *In den Wildnissen Brasiliens*, p. 213.

² Chaffanjon, *L'Orénoque et le Caura*, p. 10.

³ Grandidier, *Voyage dans l'Amérique du Sud*, p. 138.

⁴ Medina, *Aborígenes de Chile*, p. 169.

⁵ Musters, *At Home with the Patagonians*, p. 171.

⁶ Gallardo, *Los Onas*, p. 151.

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Yet body-painting is universally practised, from entirely different motives.

Examining the way in which the painted, as also the tattooed, designs are applied to the face and the body, we find that their object is evidently to protect certain natural openings of the body and uncovered parts which are particularly exposed to malign influences. The Indian, in fact, thinks that evil spirits may enter him through the mouth, the nostrils, the eyes, the ears, or attach themselves to the hair of his head. This principle will be brought out more clearly when, later on, I begin to speak of those, sometimes very grotesque, "ornaments" of rings, sticks, animals' teeth, etc., which the Indians are in the habit of inserting in the lips, the lobes of the ears, and the nose. But such critical parts are also commonly protected with paint. Rather peculiar is the Indian custom of smearing the *hair* with red ochre or some other paint for special occasions, a custom which is met with in different parts of South America from Tierra del Fuego to Guiana. Of the Fuegians Lieutenant Bove relates that they paint their hair as well as their face and body in one or many colours; but unfortunately he does not state why, or on which occasions, this is done.¹ The Abipones of Paraguay, says Dobrizhoffer, increased the frightful appearance which nature had given them by certain adscititious ornaments, one of these being to stain their hair with a purple juice or with the blood of oxen²—an efficacious means of giving this important part of the body's strength. In Guiana the Caribs and the Arawaks commonly practise much the same custom. The red seeds of the roucou plant (*Bixa orellana*) are mixed with oil so as to form a thick dye, with which individuals of both sexes smear their hair and head abundantly, starting from the upper part of the forehead and the ears.³ This is, among other occasions, done by the men before marching out to battle.⁴ Similarly among the Bororó of the Rio Xingú in Brazil, one of the precautions considered necessary after a death and for the proper celebration of the funeral feast is to

¹ Bove, *Patagonia, Terra del Fuoco*, p. 129. Dr. W. Koppers, who recently has described the customs and beliefs of the Fuegians (Jahgans), among other things gives information about their body-painting, from which it appears that it has a purely ceremonial character. Koppers, *Unter Feuerland-Indianern, passim*.

² Dobrizhoffer, *An Account of the Abipones*, i. 115.

³ Joest, *Ethnographisches und Verwandtes aus Guiana* (*Intern. Archiv. f. Ethnographie*, Bd. V. Supplement, Leyden, 1893), p. 80.

⁴ Schomburgk, *Reisen in British-Guiana*, ii. 322.

smear the hair carefully with red paint.¹ When such hair-painting is resorted to, for instance, after a death and before going out for war, there are sufficient reasons for assuming that it is meant to serve, not any ornamental, but purely practical and magical purposes: to protect the hair, which being the seat of the soul is one of the most critical parts of the body, against the ghost of the dead, or against other evil spirits which are then especially feared.

Great care is also taken of the eyes. The eye is the organ of the most important of the senses, but also it is the most delicate point of the body, and the one most exposed to disorders. As a matter of fact, inflammations of the eyes, and even cases of total blindness, are, according to the statements of many travellers, of rather frequent occurrence in some parts of South America, the cause of this being partly the heat and the strong sunlight in the tropical regions, partly the native custom of sitting at open fires or dwelling in smoky huts. The Indian, of course, ascribes diseases of the eyes, like other diseases, to the operation of supernatural intruders. Hence, for instance, the Chaco Indians, when they paint themselves, never forget the regions round the eyes. Sometimes the whole organ is circumscribed by a red line, sometimes red and black lines are drawn only along the upper part of it on the spot normally occupied by the eyebrows, which, being regarded as dangerous, are always carefully pulled off, sometimes, especially with the women, protecting tattoo-marks are applied instead of paint, etc. The Indian view is also brought out by the custom of the Campas on the Rio Ucayali in Peru, who, before marching out for a battle, rub their eyes previously with strong pimento, as they say, in order "to get a keener sight."² Knowing the importance of pepper as a "disinfectant" against evil spirits and the Indian way of expressing such things, we may assume that the practice is in fact religious in character. If the sight fails in the battle, this is ascribed by the Indian to supernatural causes, and these may be counteracted by an antidote of supernatural effects.

According to the same view, the ears, the nostrils, and the mouth may likewise serve as entrances for evil spirits. Thus it is natural that the Indian, who firmly believes that he might devour disease-bringing demons with the food he eats, should be careful with so critical a part of his body. When Sr. Boggiani states that the

¹ v. d. Steinen, *op. cit.*, pp. 476, 505.

² Grandidier, *Voyage dans l'Amérique du Sud*, p. 134.

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Chamacoco Indians of the Paraguayan Chaco ascribe pulmonic diseases, headache, and other ills to malignant spirits who enter their bodies while they sleep with the mouth open,¹ he reveals an idea which is familiar to all South American Indians. Probably it is for this reason that the women among some tribes, as the Chiriguano in Bolivia² and the Miranhas in Brazil,³ *blacken* their teeth as they sometimes paint their body: the black teeth act as amulets against supernatural intruders. In such cases, however, the black paint may also be regarded as a natural protection for the teeth. Thus the Colorados of western Ecuador, who blacken their teeth by chewing the leaves of a certain plant, specially cultivated for this purpose, allege that they do this in order to preserve their teeth against decay. But it may, of course, be doubted whether this is the original idea connected with the custom. The Botocudos, besides painting their whole body black with the juice of the *genipapo* fruit, draw a black stroke from one ear to the other, passing it under the nose across the upper lip, so that it resembles a moustache,⁴ as if to protect, by this magical line, all these exposed parts of the face.

Various other parts of the body are for similar reasons protected by painting. The ideas which have led to these practices will, in each case, gradually be brought out in the course of this inquiry. Now I shall proceed to examine some special occasions on which body-painting is practised by the Indians.

What is, for instance, the original motive of the almost universal custom of painting the body or the face black after a death? To say that the black colour is merely regarded as an outward sign of sorrow⁵ is, of course, to give no explanation at all. This indeed may be said of the black mourning dresses used in the higher culture, but the mourning and funeral customs of civilized peoples, as we know, are only survivals of primitive rites mostly based upon certain superstitious ideas.

Among the Chaco tribes, as far as I know, only the face is painted black after the death of a member of a family, and this is more

¹ Boggiani, *Notizie etnografiche sulla tribù del Chamacoco* (*Atti della Società Romana di antropologia*, vol. ii., fasc. i.), p. 73.

² Nordenskiöld, *Indianerleben*, p. 203.

³ v. Martius, *Beiträge zur Ethnographie Amerika's*, i. 536.

⁴ Wied-Neuwied, *Reise nach Brasilien*, ii. 11.

⁵ Joest, *Tälowiren*, etc., p. 22. This is what Joest calls "Symbolik der Farbe."

commonly practised by women than by men. Among the Tobas and the Matacos, for instance, a woman paints her face black when her father, husband, or brother dies. In a case which came under my notice a Toba woman blackened her face with soot at the same moment as her old father died. The spirit of the dead, which is always feared, is supposed to be most dangerous to the surviving relatives at the moment it leaves the body; it may enter into them and cause their death, and as women are always more exposed to such dangers than men, they have naturally to be more careful. But the spirit shuns the blackened face. Apparently the odd appearance which the soot gives the face acts as a deterrent, but probably some mysterious magical properties are also ascribed to the soot itself. Black is considered to be a more powerful means of inspiring evil demons with fear than other colours. Hence it is used in cases where there is a special danger, and most of all after a death, for the ghosts of the recently departed, or the demons who cause disease and death, are the most dreaded of all spirits. The Matacos are also wont to perform a special dance, called *nahútsak*, for some time after a death has taken place, and the men and women who take part in this dance are painted black in the way mentioned. The dance has for its object to exorcise the death-demon and to prevent it from carrying off other people, and the facial painting, which acts as a charm, naturally aids in the conjuration.

Many similar instances of facial painting at mourning periods could be adduced from different parts of South America, and it cannot be doubted that the idea is always the same. Thus, among the Karayá in east Brazil, the mourners paint the whole body black with *genipapo* or red with *urucú*, the men and boys being generally painted red, the women and children black.¹ This latter distinction probably is due to the consideration that women and children are more delicate than men, and therefore have to be painted with the stronger colour to resist the spirits. Among the Indian tribes of the Rio Negro in north-west Brazil Dr. Koch-Grünberg found the same mourning customs: the whole body was painted black with *genipapo*, or red with *urucú* or *carayurú*. Thus, in a village, the day after a funeral, all inhabitants were painted red with *carayurú*, sundry strokes being crudely applied to the body and especially to the feet. Only the medicine-men, says Dr. Koch-Grünberg, who, because of their supernatural power, were not equally exposed to the evil spirits,

¹ Krause, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

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did not wear this prophylactic painting.¹ The latter part of the statement probably refers to an exceptional case, for generally the medicine-men are the most painted of all, the painting helping them to conjure the spirits. The same writer, in fact, mentions another similar occasion when three sorcerers, who were performing a conjuration with their rattle gourds behind the house where the death had taken place, were hideously painted red in the face.² Among some other Brazilian tribes only the women paint the body black and shave off their hair. The same Indians are said to desert, out of fear, the huts where the dead have been buried.³ The Lenguas of the Paraguayan Chaco, who also greatly fear their dead and whose burial ceremonies throughout have the aim of making them harmless, in mourning paint the face black, generally with charcoal, streaks being made to represent tear courses.⁴ Among the Patagonians, Araucanians, and Puelches, according to d'Orbigny, the mourning is marked "par des vêtements sombres ou par des teintes noires, dont on barbouille le corps."⁵ Similarly among the Fuegians, where all inhabitants of the village take part in the family mourning, women as well as men paint their faces and hands black or red.⁶ The Guarayús in Bolivia, according to the Catholic missionary Cardús, have the following mourning customs: the relatives wash themselves with a decoction made of the bark of a tree called *ibiraa*, paint themselves black, fast one day, and make certain scarifications on the body. The idea of the face-painting as well as of the other operations is indicated by Cardús when he adds that "all this they do in order to rid themselves of the illness from which the deceased suffered, and to live healthily."⁷

How scrupulously the rules of custom with regard to body-painting after a death are observed also appears from the following statement of the Jesuit Father Gumilla, relating to the Indian tribes of Orinoco: As soon as the sick man has expired, he says, his wife and children, brothers and sisters, paint themselves black with *jagua*

¹ Koch-Grünberg, *Zwei Jahre unter den Indianern*, i. 167.

² Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, i. 161.

³ v. Spix and v. Martius, *Reise in Brasilien*, i. 383. Cp. also v. Martius, *Beiträge zur Ethnographie Amerika's*, i. 393 (on the Mundrucús).

⁴ Grubb, *An Unknown People in an Unknown Land*, p. 169.

⁵ d'Orbigny, *L'homme Américain*, p. 94.

⁶ On the Jahgans, see Bove, *Patagonia, Terra del Fuoco*, p. 138; on the Onas, see Gallardo, *Los Onas*, p. 150.

⁷ Cardús, *Las misiones franciscanas*, p. 75.

from head to foot. The persons of the second degree of relationship only paint the feet and the legs, the arms, the hands, and a part of the head. The still more distant relatives only paint the feet and the hands, and apply some spots to the face.¹ Evidently it was thought that the danger for the surviving relatives was lessened with the distance in relationship, the protecting paint being therefore applied in the degree that the persons were related to the dead man. It is a matter of fact that the spirits of the dead are always supposed to be most revengeful and dangerous to the nearest relatives. But such instances also make us realize that the body-painting as a mourning custom may easily, at a higher stage of culture, dwindle into a mere outward sign of sorrow, in the same degree as the ideas which originally gave rise to it loose their hold upon the mind.

Body-painting is, moreover, practised on various other occasions, the idea being much the same as at mourning periods. First of all it is necessary to pay some attention to the *puberty ceremonies*, especially those with which girls are initiated at the attainment of sexual maturity. The corresponding initiation ceremonies of the boys I shall deal with later on, because they are usually associated with bleedings and other similar rites which do not concern us at present. Even girls are often not only painted but also, and still more commonly, tattooed or scarified at puberty. Yet the principles upon which the initiation ceremonies of the girls are based are of such fundamental importance for my chain of evidence in this and the following chapters, that it is necessary to state at once the main ideas attached to this significant epoch in the life of the Indian woman.

The advocates of the theory of erotic excitation have laid great stress upon the fact that the desire for self-decoration seems to be strongest in savage men and women at the beginning of the age of puberty, and have adduced this as an important argument to the effect that the main object of the tattooings and of other "ornaments" then assumed is to stimulate the sexual desire of the opposite sex.² But these conclusions are precipitate, and not justified by the facts. Before we can draw any conclusions as to the meaning of

¹ Gumilla, *Historia natural de las naciones del Rio Orinoco*, i. 202.

² See Joest, *op. cit.*, p. 56. Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage* (1921), i. 524.

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these ornaments we must have an exact knowledge of what the puberty ceremonies themselves mean to the savage. It is in nowise sufficient to say that they signify the girl's initiation into her coming sexual life; their significance is much deeper. Among the South American Indians, at least, these ceremonies in the first place have a religious character.

A fact which we often notice in studying primitive customs is that many savage superstitions have an underlying stratum of reality. This holds true of the puberty ceremonies also. The physiological process which causes the menstruation of women, incomprehensible as it seems to the Indian, strikes him as something extremely mysterious and must needs give rise to certain superstitious beliefs. Thus it seems to be a common idea among the Chaco Indians that this strange phenomenon is caused, or at least influenced, by the new moon. Moreover, since the menstrual periods, and especially the first menses, are as a rule connected with certain nervous disorders or other alterations in the physical condition of the woman, it is naturally thought that she is seriously exposed to evil spirits during these critical days. At the same time, of course, owing to the awakening sexual desire, the relationship between this physiological process and the other procreative functions of woman is realized. The attainment of puberty, therefore, for the Indian girl certainly means the beginning of her sexual life, but first of all it means her entrance into a very critical epoch of development during which she is often—as at childbirth and during the following menses—particularly exposed to supernatural dangers. Hence the initiation ceremonies at puberty partly have for their object a direct protection against these dangers for the time being, partly a permanent purification from the evils associated with her sexual functions during the years to come, or—to express it more plainly—to *harden* her against evil spirits. From this point of view we have to explain even such practices as tattooing and scarification of girls at puberty, as will be shown later on. This is also the true reason why they are sometimes painted or otherwise decorated on this occasion.

The delicate condition into which the process of menstruation always puts a woman, and the source of danger which she is supposed to be even to other people during the critical periods, has among most Indian peoples suggested various precautions. Among some tribes she is really held taboo and supposed to carry a dangerous pollution to everything with which she comes in contact. This idea is plainly

expressed in the explanation which was given to Father Gumilla by an Indian chief on the Orinoco. For the custom of isolating the menstruous girl and making her fast, he gave the following reason: "Our ancestors had found that everything upon which a woman trod when she was in her ordinary period or lunacy dried away; and if a man put his feet upon the spot she had trodden on, they became swollen. Seeking a remedy for this evil, they ordained that a woman must fast forty days in order that her body may be rid from the poison. For in this way she dries well and is not harmful."¹ In Chaco the notion of taboo is not carried to the same extreme, as is shown, for instance, by the fact that among many tribes menstruation seems to be no hindrance to sexual intercourse. Yet similar superstitious ideas are commonly held about menstruous women. A Toba Indian gave a short and plain expression to the prevailing belief by the phrase: *Lolyak yavoh, aduottak peiyak*, "When a woman has her menstruation the evil spirits (*peiyak*) are angry with her."² Among all tribes the puberty of the girls is celebrated with certain religious ceremonies. The Chorotis, for example, practise a peculiar ceremonial dance, called *kau' simä*, at which the older women play the main part. The women form themselves into a ring, each holding a long staff or cane with a bunch of deer's hoofs tied at the top. These they strike on the ground, producing a hollow jangling sound and marking time to a chant. Some men, sitting inside the ring and holding rattle gourds filled with grains, or beating drums, join them in this chant. Nearly all of them have their face painted in different ways, either black with charcoal or red with *urucú*. The girl is inside the hut, reclining against the wall and silent. As long as the singing and dancing goes on she is uncovered, but as soon as the ceremonies are interrupted about midnight, her face is covered with a cloth. The dance begins at the first new moon after the appearance of menstruation, and is continued daily until the next new moon, sometimes for two successive months, and its object is to keep off and exorcise the evil spirits, the *mohsek*, who are attacking the girl and trying to enter into her. Among the Tobas the girl is initiated by much the same ceremonies as are performed for a childbed woman. The girl is secluded for four or five days, her face and the whole body must be carefully covered, especially in the evening, and she must keep

¹ Gumilla, *op. cit.*, i. 159. See also Gilij, *Saggio di storia Americana*, ii. 183.

² See Karsten, *The Toba Indians of the Bolivian Gran Chaco* (*Acta Academiæ Aboënsis*. Humaniora, iv., 1923), p. 28.

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to a diet. Every evening rattle gourds are shaken outside the house to keep off the evil demons, the *peiyak*, who are attacking the girl in the form of snakes. Among the Matacos, again, the evil spirits are conjured by a religious dance, performed on five successive evenings. The girl sits motionless in the middle of the ring with the head covered.¹ The Chiriguanos, as soon as the first signs of puberty show themselves, put the girl into a hammock which is pulled up near the roof of the hut. When four or five days have elapsed she is taken down, her hair is cut, and she is shut up in a part of the house where she has to pass the time till the next menses, fasting and keeping silence.² In this case also it is feared that the evil spirits may enter her, especially through the genitals.

From the northern parts of South America we have many reports of similar ceremonies, although as a rule they are still more elaborate. Of great interest, for instance, are the puberty ceremonies related from among the Piaroas on the Orinoco, but they cannot be described at length here. During the first days the girl is kept secluded; no woman, we are told, is allowed to see her, for in that case the evil spirit will punish her with madness or death at the next new moon. The ceremonies which follow consist in whipping the girl with cords of fish skins, in dancing and chanting, by which "the demon who wanted to enter the girl" is conjured and driven out.³ Similar customs have prevailed among the Caribs and Arawaks of Guiana. Of the Macusis, an Arawak tribe, Schomburgk states that even during the following menses a woman always was considered impure, and had to take certain precautions. She was not allowed to bathe, nor to go in the woods, in order not to expose herself to "the amorous attacks of snakes."⁴ Among the Caribs the last thing done with the girls before they were allowed to associate freely with other people was to shave their hair and to *paint them black with genipapo*.⁵ This latter custom, to paint the girls black at puberty, Dr. Koch-Grünberg also found prevailing among the Indian tribes of north-west Brazil. Thus at Rio Aiary, at the first menstruation, the girl's hair was cut short by her mother, and her back coated black with *genipapo*.⁶

¹ See Karsten, *Indian Dances in the Gran Chaco* (Öfversigt af Finska Vetenskaps-Societetens Förhandlingar, Bd. LVII., 1914-1915. Afd. B., No. 6), p. 25 sqq.

² Domenico del Campana, *Notizie intorno ai Ciriguani* (Archivio per l'antropologia e la etnologia, 1902), p. 85. ³ Chaffanjon, *L'Orénoque et le Caïra*, p. 214.

⁴ Schomburgk, *Reisen in British-Guiana*, ii. 316.

⁵ Lafitau, *Mœurs des sauvages Américains*, i. 292.

⁶ Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, i. 181.

The same custom was practised among the Uanána on the Rio Caiary.¹ Likewise among some tribes in Venezuela, when a girl is to be initiated she is taken outside the hut and seated upon a footstool, naked down to the waist, whereupon her body is painted with *onoto*. The ceremony is completed by lashing the girl with whips.² It is hardly necessary to observe that in such cases the painting cannot possibly be any "ornament" in the proper sense of the word, nor a direct means of sexual stimulation. The *genipapo*, applied crudely to the back, is certainly not regarded as beautiful by the Indians themselves. It is a simple means of "disinfecting" the impure girl by the strong liquid. The black colour, which remains for many days, at the same time serves as a charm or a prophylactic against the invisible enemies. This principle will presently be brought out more clearly with regard to some other cases of body-painting.

With more reason the face-paintings of the Toba girls could be interpreted as a means of sexually stimulating the men. These paintings, as far as I know, are not practised at the first menstruation because of the custom of secluding the girl and covering her head and body with clothes. However, at various times the Toba women, who in our days do not tattoo themselves, appeared richly painted in the face with the red *urucú*. When I inquired as to the reason for this, I sometimes simply received the answer that it was considered beautiful, sometimes that it was done to attract the men. The girls paint themselves, I was told, when they are desirous of a man. Yet it was perfectly clear that this cannot have been the only motive, for the facial painting was not practised only by unmarried girls, but also by young married women, who ought not to have had any reason to put on such an outward sign for the men. As a matter of fact, the truth appeared to be that the Toba women generally paint themselves *at the time of their menses*—no doubt as a prophylactic against the evil spirits whose feared attacks also make them diet during the four or five critical days. But since sexual desire with the Indian woman is greatest during the days of her menstrual period, we can understand how this desire has, in the case of unmarried girls, come to act as a secondary motive for face-painting.³ Thus the facial painting of the Toba women gives one instance of the

¹ Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, ii. 64. Cp. v. Martius, *Beiträge zur Ethnographie Amerika's*, i. 589.

² Arvelo, *Vida indiana*, p. 173.

³ Among most Chaco tribes, a girl, after she has had her first menstruation, is allowed to have free sexual intercourse with any unmarried man until she chooses a husband for life.

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numerous ways in which secondary motives may arise in the evolution of customs, and at the same time shows us how necessary it is to examine carefully the facts before we draw our conclusions.

A young Toba woman at the same critical epoch appeared with two arrow-heads painted on each cheek; and another had, likewise on the cheeks, ornaments which evidently signified the teeth of some wild animal. When we know the part arrows and teeth of animals play as charms among the Indians, we cannot have much doubt as to the magical significance of these ornaments.

The ideas pointed out are of special interest because they help us to understand, not only many so-called decorative customs among the Indian women, but also some peculiar facts relating to their social position. It is a fact often noticed and commented upon by travellers in South America that the women as a rule play a very subordinate rôle in all religious feasts and ceremonies.¹ Thus the Indian dances in general seem to be meant more for the men than for the women, and in certain dances, which professedly have the character of magical conjurations, the latter are not allowed to take part at all. The mask-dances, for instance, are generally considered to be so dangerous for women—as also for children—that by merely looking at the masks they might die on the spot. Likewise, they are strictly forbidden to see some other religious instruments, such as the flutes and bull-roarers used by many Brazilian tribes. They may never enter the “men-houses” or “flute-houses” where the religious instruments are kept and the secret ceremonies are performed; any infringement of these rules would prove fatal to them. Such facts have greatly puzzled some writers, but they have never been satisfactorily explained. Yet, I think, the reason for these restrictions is quite simple. The “men-houses” or “flute-houses” are sanctuaries where important religious ceremonies and conjurations take place. The persons who take part in these must be specially initiated, or—to use the expression which seems to me to be more to the point

¹ It must, however, be observed that there are exceptions to this rule. Thus, as we have just seen, the older women play the main part at the ceremonies which are performed with girls at puberty among some Chaco tribes. Similarly, among such tribes that are scalp- or head-hunters, the women take an active part in the dances and other conjurations, with which these trophies are initiated. See Karsten, *Blood Revenge, War, and Victory Feasts among the Jibaro Indians of Eastern Ecuador, passim*; Friederici, *Skalpieren und ähnliche Kriegsgebräuche in Amerika*, p. 113. This is evidently due to the fact that the ends for which such ceremonies are performed practically concern the women. See Karsten, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

—hardened against the evil spirits with whom the conjurers have to enter into intimate contact. This initiation or hardening is carried out through special ceremonies performed by the sorcerers. On the other hand, the uninitiated—namely, children who always are delicate, and women who, owing to the natural processes they are subject to, are considered to have little power of resistance against the evil demons—are excluded from these mysteries. According to principles which will be put forward in detail later on, the religious instruments, —masks, flutes, bull-roarers, etc.—are believed to contain the spirits who, by the conjuration, have been compelled to enter them. These spirits will invade any woman who merely—even were it only by accident—looks upon them, and the consequences will prove fatal not only to her, but perhaps to other women as well.

It is true that among many tribes in South America there exist female sorcerers also, who are able to conjure demons like their male colleagues. But these women are, I think, invariably of an advanced age, and have already passed the critical periods in a woman's life. Old women are among the Indians much like men, and are almost regarded as men. Yet it seems that the female sorcerers have to undergo a harder trial in order to be initiated into their profession than male sorcerers.

In Chaco the "men-houses" or "club-houses" are not real houses, but open places, usually under a shadowy algaroba tree. Although they are not considered so dangerous as the "flute-houses" among the Brazilian Indians, yet women never enter these places and never take part in the drinking-feasts held there. The reason for this, it seems to me, is that the drinking of algaroba-beer and other intoxicating liquors originally has been, as it still often is, a purely religious ceremony, a sort of conjuration, in which women must not take part.¹

Many of the points which I have here merely touched upon in passing I shall find occasion to discuss at some length in the course of the inquiries which follow.

My thesis that women are considered to be more delicate and more exposed to evil spirits than men, and the other thesis that most

¹ Old women, however, form an exception to this rule for the reasons already given. They not only occasionally drink algaroba-beer and other intoxicants, but also smoke tobacco, a practice which also is, or has been, intimately connected with the magical conjurations. The old women are no more real women, and may, therefore, take part in such mysteries or indulge in habits which are considered unwomanly.

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ornaments have originally been nothing but prophylactics against these supernatural powers, seem not to be quite consistent with the supposed fact that among the Indians the men generally decorate themselves much more than the women. This has indeed often been pointed out as being the rule among savage peoples at large. Thus even Darwin, discussing savage man's love of self-decoration, emphasizes that "in most, but not in all, parts of the world the men are more ornamented than the women and often in a different manner," and he also tries to account for this fact. "As the women," he says, "are made by savages to perform the greatest share of the work, and as they are not allowed to eat the best kinds of food, so it accords with the characteristic selfishness of man that they should not be allowed to obtain or use the finest ornaments."¹ I think Darwin here somewhat exaggerates both the "selfishness" of savage man in relation to the weaker sex, and the subordinate position of woman in primitive societies. Likewise, the assertion that at the lower stages of culture the men as a rule ornament themselves more than the women involves some exaggeration. In South America certain modes of self-decoration, as body-painting and tattooing, are decidedly more common among women than among men. At least this is so in Chaco. Thus, among the Tobas, the men comparatively seldom paint themselves in the face, or almost only for religious dances and conjurations; on the other hand, the younger women not only paint themselves for dances, but also for some special occasions, for instance, at their menstrual periods, as already pointed out. The same seems to hold good of the Chiriguano in Bolivia, and of the Caingua, another Guaraní tribe on the upper Paraná in Misiones. Of the latter Dr. Ambrosetti says that they are in the habit of painting their face in various colours; but this, he adds, is done mostly by the women; men seldom paint their faces.² Exactly the same may be said of tattooing, which among nearly all Chaco tribes is confined to the women. The Ashluslays on the lower Rio Pilcomayo tattoo the girls at puberty, but never the boys. The Argentine Tobas, on the right bank of the same river, also practise tattooing, but it is likewise confined to the women. Only in some rare cases it may happen that a young man, who is considered in some way abnormal or feminine in his manners, is tattooed by his comrades.³ Similarly among the

¹ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, ii. 372.

² Ambrosetti, *Los Indios Caingua del alto Paraná*, p. 49.

³ Lehmann-Nitsche, *Les Indiens Takshik*, p. 16. Campos, *De Tarija a la Asuncion*, p. 255.

ancient Guaranis of Paraguay, only the girls used to tattoo themselves in the face at puberty.¹ Among the Chorotis of the Bolivian Chaco tattooing is the rule for women, although men also sometimes practise this custom. In most other parts of South America both sexes seem to practise tattooing, but on the whole it is more common among women than among men.

When it has been asserted that among the Indians men are more addicted to self-decoration than women, especially one important class of ornament has been thought of, namely, the feather ornaments which, as a matter of fact, are everywhere in South America more used by the masculine sex. But this is due to special reasons which I shall mention in a following chapter, and which do not contradict my general thesis that women are considered to be more delicate and more in danger of evil spirits than men, and therefore are, on the whole, in greater need of prophylactic "ornaments" against them.

It is unfortunate that some writers on Indian customs, who have taken too narrow a view of the subject, have confined themselves merely to describing the way in which men and women decorate themselves, but have not deemed necessary to inquire *why* this was done, nor on what occasions the ornaments were used. Yet it is highly probable that, for instance, many peculiar practices relating to body-painting among Indian women have their origin in the ideas and considerations pointed out in these pages. Thus, when we hear that among the Sinsis of Peru the women paint on their body two lines which are drawn from the shoulders over each breast down to the ventral parts, and that among the Tirras in the same land the women paint a sort of girdle round the waist in black colour, and three similar black bindlets on each thigh which are never removed,² we cannot have much doubt as to the idea of this peculiar "decoration." The breasts and the venter of the women are critical parts which must be protected by such magical means where the natural covering with clothes is not practised.

Other important occasions on which the Indians adorn themselves in various ways are the *feasts* and *dances*. That in these facial painting is used as one of the commonest kinds of ornaments is so well known that it is hardly necessary to illustrate the fact with examples. Yet some general words may be said as to the meaning of the Indian dances. On this point it must be borne in mind that

¹ Azara, *Descripción e Historia del Paraguay*, i. 184.

² v. Tschudi, *Peru. Reiseskizzen*, ii. 228.

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dances among savages on the whole have a very different character from what they have among civilized peoples. They are generally no amusement, but a serious ceremonial performance. Although some South American tribes are supposed to know purely profane dances also, there are strong reasons for assuming that all Indian dances have been purely religious or magical in their origin, the primary ideas having in some cases been forgotten. This assertion is difficult to prove, because hitherto very little attention has been paid to the dances of the South American Indians by students of their customs. The data given on this point, however, are apt to confirm the view I have taken as to their true nature. Among the Ecuadorian Indians, whom I visited during my last journey in South America, profane dances are entirely unknown; all dances among these tribes have a purely magical character, being a sort of conjuration, and there is little doubt that this holds true of the Indian dances in the whole Amazonian territory. Accordingly, it is easy to find that all ornaments which are put on for these occasions have likewise a magical significance. In the Gran Chaco, where I had an opportunity of studying dances among several tribes, I made the same observation. Thus the Tobas have three dances, all of which appear to be of religious origin. The Indians firmly believe that by certain movements of the body, as well as through the chants which accompany these movements, they can conjure evil spirits. It is true that the religious or magical idea is not conspicuous in all dances, and the commonest of the Toba dances, the *nahotti*, is sometimes apparently practised as a mere amusement. Yet the very name of this dance (*nahotti*, from *nahot*, "evil spirit") clearly reveals its origin as a magical conjuration. As such it especially appears when it is performed to cure sick people by driving out the disease-demons who have taken possession of them. The dancers then form a ring round the patient, and start to jump up and down with both feet at once, chanting loudly and marking time with rattles and bells which are held in the hands. Most of them are painted red in the face with *urucú*.

The Chorotis in the Bolivian Chaco have been mentioned as an instance of Indians who have purely profane dances. Their feasts and dances are said to be mere amusements and to have especial reference to sexual life.¹ On these occasions the men paint themselves richly in the face and put on grand ostrich plumes, as well as

¹ Nordenskiöld, *De sydamerikanska Indianernas kulturhistoria*, p. 145.

other ornaments which are supposed to please and attract the girls. Yet, it seems to me, the religious origin of these dances is still conspicuous. It must be considered that the sexual life, and especially courtship and marriage, is among the Indians often closely connected with religious ideas. Thus the marriage-dance, *avusje*, although to a superficial onlooker it seems like a mere play, has in fact a magical significance. The girls, who have to make choice of a husband, stand in the middle of the ring, the young men dancing around them, chanting loudly. This is called *nissammaha aséhne*, "to hurry on the girls." When we know what the Chorotis mean by this expression, which is often used in similar cases, we understand that the meaning of the ceremony cannot be but to avert supernatural dangers from the girls on this important occasion when they are making a choice for life.¹ Two other of the Choroti dances, the *ahlénta* and the *jóhloki*, at which the men are in like manner painted and decorated, are performed especially during the season when the algaroba and most other fruits reach maturity and the Chaco Indians are living a happy and joyous life. During these dances all fruits are collected into the house of an old man, and it is believed that *the dances will make them abundant*—not only the fruits collected there, but all fruits in the forest. It would be out of place here to discuss at length the particular ideas on which this belief seems to be founded, and which probably are no longer known to the Indians themselves. It is sufficient to point out that, in many other parts of South America also, dances and feasts are held at harvest-time which clearly have a religious or magical character. In Brazil and the northern parts of South America they are professedly performed to propitiate the spirits which are believed to animate certain plants and bring the fruits to maturity.² With the Choroti dances just mentioned we

¹ From the same point of view, I think, we have to explain the facial painting of young Indians at courtship, even independently of dances. The Mataco man, for instance, paints himself with red, blue, and black colours when he is courting a girl (Baldrich, *Las comarcas virgenes*, p. 232); and the Ona man, on the same occasion, paints himself with small white spots in the face (Gallardo, *Los Onas*, p. 151). Courtship is a critical occasion for the young man, which makes it necessary for him to protect himself against evil influences, and thus secure good luck. But it is easy psychologically to understand that such an ornament makes a good impression upon the girls, and that thus it may secondarily act as a means of attraction. That, however, it is essentially no real ornament, is indicated also by the fact that after marriage the Ona man changes the white spots in the face for black ones (Gallardo, *loc. cit.*).

² Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, i. 189.

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may compare the *kyaiya* of the Paraguayan Lenguas, described by Mr. Grubb. This feast was, likewise, held to celebrate the gathering-in of the main crops,¹ and its religious origin is plainly brought out by the particular ceremonies with which it was connected, but the real meaning of which was no longer remembered.²

The hypothesis seems more than probable that, on such occasions, body-painting has originally been used as a charm against the demons with whom the dancers came in contact during the conjuration; since, however, in course of time the original idea has been forgotten whereas the custom itself has been preserved, secondary motives have been developed which have transformed the charm into a mere ornament or a means of attracting the opposite sex. But such cases are probably comparatively rare. For the most part, no doubt, the Indians are still quite aware of the true ideas underlying their dances, and these are, as a matter of fact, particularly performed on occasions which have professedly a religious character, such as at childbirth and name-giving, at betrothal and marriage, at the puberty of boys and girls, and after a death. The death-dances and the ornamental painting assumed for them are especially significant. From Chaco I have already mentioned such an instance relating to the Matacos. In like manner, among the Indians of the Rio Negro in Brazil, after a death had taken place and the dead had been buried, a big feast with much dancing and *kaschiri*-drinking was arranged, which lasted for about five days. When the guests arrived to this feast the women and the girls of the house painted beautiful patterns upon their bodies with the black juice of the *genipapo*. Some other guests at first rubbed the red of the *carayurú* well into the skin and afterwards coated the whole body, with the exception of the face, crudely with *genipapo*. Every dancer painted red patterns on his own face with the aid of a small mirror.³ Just as in this case the dancing and the excessive beer-drinking were no amusements but first of all had a practical aim, so the thorough and painstaking body-painting certainly was no decoration proper. We are here simply dealing with different precautional measures taken to protect the survivors against the revengeful spirits of the dead.

¹ Grubb, *An Unknown People in an Unknown Land*, p. 178.

² As to the religious and magical dances in the Gran Chaco, see more fully Karsten, *Indian Dances in the Gran Chaco* (*op. cit.*), *passim*.

³ Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, i. 174, 178.

I mentioned that the Tobas in Chaco among other things practise facial painting at the dance which is performed to cure sick people by conjuring the disease-demon. This, as a matter of fact, is the rule in all South America. It is, indeed, one of the strongest evidences in support of the theory here set forth with regard to the origin of self-decoration that exorcisms and conjurations—be they connected with dancing or not—are occasions on which the Indians most of all paint and adorn themselves, and that the sorcerers often are the most adorned of all. In so far as their ornaments consist of feathers and plumes, as is frequently the case, I shall come back to this question in the third chapter. For the moment we are only concerned with the custom of painting the body.

The Chaco tribes, on the whole, practise body-painting much less than the Indians in the northern parts of South America. Yet, for instance, among the Tobas the usual thing was that a medicine-man, before he went to exercise his profession, applied some black or red spots with soot or *urucú* to his cheeks. Among the Chamacoco in Paraguay, the sorcerers, according to Sr. Boggiani, used to decorate themselves more than other people, one of their ornaments being red ochre richly applied to the face.¹ Likewise, the Patagonian sorcerer who was called for to perform the ceremonies by which a girl was initiated at puberty had to prepare himself by, amongst other things, adorning himself with white paint; and at the dance held in the evening in honour of the girl, four sorcerers appeared adorned with white paint daubed all over their bodies.² Still more strange was the ornamental outfit of the Jahgan medicine-man when he proceeded to carry out the exorcism: his head was covered with ashes and mud, his face and his body painted in various colours, and he was, moreover, adorned with plumes of sea-birds.³ In fact, it will probably be agreed by everybody that in such cases any decoration theory falls short. Evidently there is the idea that the odd painting partly will serve as a charm to protect the medicine-man himself during the dangerous contact with the demon to be conjured, and partly will actively aid in this conjuration by inspiring the evil demon with terror.

From the tropical parts of South America many similar instances could be given. Thus, among the tribes of the Rio Negro, Dr. Koch-

¹ Boggiani, *Compendio de etnografia Paraguaya*, p. 110. Cp. also, on the Payaguas, Azara, *Voyages dans l'Amérique méridionale*, ii. 139.

² Musters, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

³ Bove, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

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Grünberg sometimes found the sorcerers hideously painted red in the face when they were engaged in their profession, whether they had to cure sick people or to perform the conjurations considered necessary after a death.¹ At Rio Xingú Professor von den Steinen witnessed a nightly ceremony performed to conjure a meteor, the sudden appearance of which had terrified the Indians. Two *baris* (medicine-men), smeared all over the body with bright-red *urucú*, tried to drive away the demon by vehement gesticulations and by throwing spittle up into the air.² Professor von den Steinen does not account for the painting in this case, but probably will agree that it can have been neither an ordinary decoration nor a protection against mosquitoes or flies.

Equally obvious is the magical character of body-painting which is applied as a direct means of protection against diseases, a custom which is known to be practised among savage peoples in many different parts of the world.³ Dr. Koch-Grünberg mentions some significant instances of this nature from among the tribes of the Rio Negro. Thus, when in a Siusi village one of the men had fallen ill with a pulmonary inflammation and another with a catarrh, all inhabitants of the village coated their bodies with the red *carayurú*, believing that the paint would protect them against the epidemic. The chief himself was found carefully painting himself as well as his father and brother "in order to keep off the disease." Small children, who are especially liable to fall ill and die, as well as the people that lived in the same house as the pulmonary patient, and therefore were more endangered than the rest, kept this prophylactic painting for a long time and had it renewed every day.⁴ Similarly among the Kobéua the women used to paint their babes on every occasion, "partly with the red of the *urucú* as an ornament, partly with the purple red of the *carayurú* as a prophylactic against the evil catarrh and other diseases."⁵ What this distinction in the use of the *urucú* and the *carayurú* was due to, Dr. Koch-Grünberg does not explain, and the suspicion is difficult to resist that the *urucú*-painting also was simply a prophylactic against disease. Small breast-feeding children hardly need any real ornaments, but charms against evil supernatural

¹ Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, i. 161, 334.

² v. d. Steinen, *Unter den Indianern Central-Brasiliens*, p. 514.

³ See Bartels, *Medizin der Naturvölker*, p. 196 sqq.

⁴ Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, i. 158.

⁵ Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, ii. 150. Cp. ii. 85.

influences they need all the more. The custom of painting newborn children is reported from some other Brazilian tribes too. Thus, among the ancient Tupis, as soon as the child was born, the father painted it in black and red colours.¹ Von Spix and von Martius, speaking of the Coroado Indians of R. Xipoto, say that "even sucklings were painted with red and black-blue lines and spots, especially in the face."² In the same way among the Karayá, the newborn child is smeared over with the red *urucú*.³

Again, the Lenguas of Paraguay have a habit of rubbing the knees and ankles of their children with the grease of the ant-bear and the ring-tailed bear. "This they do," Mr. Grubb says, "in order to make their legs strong." The same missionary states that "at various periods they make paint marks upon their bodies unconnected with mere ornamentation," and that "these marks have reference to physical conditions."⁴ The latter laconic explanation seems to imply that the paint marks were charms against diseases—that is, against evil spirits. As to children, we frequently notice the anxious care with which Indian parents try to protect, in various ways, their newborn offspring, who, owing to their delicate condition, are supposed to be in great danger of supernatural enemies.

The Indians of Orinoco, according to the Father Gumilla, used to smear their whole body from the top of their head to the feet with a certain oil, and the mothers, at the same time as they anointed themselves, also anointed their children, even their sucking babies, at least twice a day. This anointment was regarded as an equivalent to clothes, and was especially resorted to for feasts, for visits, for fishing expeditions, and for other important undertakings. Upon the anointment they, on certain occasions, painted various designs in different colours, and arranged their plumes and other ornaments.⁵ The Father adds that the oil gave the natives some protection against the mosquitoes and against the hot sun, but this cannot have been their only motive for using it. The fact that even babies at the breast were anointed with it, as well as other circumstances, makes it almost certain that some magical virtues were ascribed to it, and that it was believed to act as a prophylactic charm against evil supernatural influences.

¹ Lery, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, etc., p. 297. Southey, *History of Brazil*, i. 238.

² v. Spix and v. Martius, *op. cit.*, i. 368.

³ Ehrenreich, *Beiträge zur Völkerkunde Brasiliens*, p. 29.

⁴ Grubb, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁵ Gumilla, *op. cit.*, i. 123.

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Passing on to the western parts of South America, we hear that the Indians in ancient Peru were in the habit of smearing their bodies over with maize and some other things, using this also as a means of curing people from illnesses. "With the *llimpi*, which is the metal of mercury, they used to smear themselves, as well as with coloured earth at the time of their feasts or for other purposes, in connection with some ceremonies and superstitions."¹ The supernatural purifying effects ascribed to the mercury evidently depended upon the poisonous qualities of this metal. Of special interest is the sacred paste, prepared of mashed maize, which played such an important part at certain feasts of the ancient Peruvians. With this paste, which was called *sancu yelba*, the Peruvians not only used to paint themselves in the face; even the idols representing their highest gods and the embalmed corpses of their dead ancestors were coated with it on solemn occasions. At an annual purification feast, called *citua*, when sacrifices of sheep were made, the mashed maize was mixed up with the blood of the victims and used as an ointment. Extraordinary magical virtues seem to have been ascribed to this paste, which especially was believed to keep off diseases.²

Among the Chiriguano in Bolivia the *urucú*-painting is frequently practised by convalescents who are recovering from grave diseases. The missionary Del Campana, who records this, says that it is done in order to conceal the traces which diseases like smallpox and dry scall have left on the body, and especially on the face.³ But this explanation is probably not correct. The Indians do not find the scars and pits left by such diseases disfiguring in the same way as civilized peoples, and it hardly would occur to them to try to conceal them for this reason. With more probability there is the idea that, since the face has been especially attacked by the disease-demon, this

¹ Cobo, *Historia del nuevo mundo*, iv. 150.

² Cobo, *op. cit.*, iv. 140, 141, 144, 145. The *teopalli* of the ancient Mexicans also affords an interesting instance of a magical ointment, and may therefore be mentioned in this connection. It was made of the ashes of certain venomous creatures, such as spiders, scorpions, palmers, salamanders, and vipers, which were burnt upon the hearth of the temple, and thereafter powdered in mortars. The ashes were mingled with tobacco and *betum* (a herb). The priests anointed themselves from foot to head with this sacred ointment when they went to the mountains to make sacrifices, and it was supposed to "take away fear, and to give them courage." Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (Hakluyt Society), ii. 365.

³ Del Campana, *Notizie intorno ai Ciriguani* (*Archivio per l'antropologia e la etnologia*, Firenze, 1902), p. 62.

part must be particularly protected by prophylactic painting. That this is so may be inferred from some other cases of body-painting in sickness or on recovery from it. Among these same Chiriguanos a child-bed woman, after she has been delivered, has her body smeared over with the red of *urucú*.¹ Considering the other precautional measures she is subject to at the same time (fasting, etc.), we may safely say that the painting has for its object to purify her from the pollution of childbirth, and to protect her against evil spirits. For a similar reason, no doubt, among the Passé Indians of Brazil the father of a newborn child paints himself black for the days he is observing the rules of the *couvade*.² Among the Guarayús the father who lay in *couvade* used to paint his feet, hands, and joints black and fast for three days.³ According to the principles of *couvade*, the condition of the father is, during the first days, intimately bound up with that of his child. The black painting, therefore, not only protects the father against malign influences, but first of all his delicate son.

Several other facts relating to the social customs of the South American Indians may be adduced, where the magical significance of the body-painting is equally clear.

Thus, we are told that the Cauchahues of Chile used to paint their face black with charcoal before they entered the frozen lagoons, and that, according to the belief of these natives, any person who would not take this precaution would die.⁴ Apparently it was considered that lacking the painting, he lacked the necessary protection against the dangerous spirits that held the frozen lakes.

The missionary Del Campana relates that the Chiriguano women paint themselves hideously in the face on the occasion when they are preparing the *chicha* (maize-beer).⁵ This practice cannot be understood unless we know that just as the maize-beer itself is a sacred drink, so its preparation is a more or less ceremonial business. It may be that the facial painting is believed to give the women influence over and resistance against the maize spirit, with whom they are dealing at the brewing of the beer. Or, since the Indians often have recourse to body-painting for important works and undertakings in the belief that they will thereby acquire strength, it is possible that the Chiriguano women paint themselves on the said

¹ Del Campana, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³ Cardús, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁵ Del Campana, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

² v. Martius, *op. cit.*, i. 511.

⁴ Medina, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

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occasion only to make themselves, in general, strong and vigorous for the most important home industry incumbent on the Indian woman.

Dr. Koch-Grünberg tells that among the Kobéua in north-west Brazil, when a woman is delivered, she is assisted by all married women in the village, and that on this occasion they are painted red in the face as for a feast.¹ We know that childbirth is one of the occasions when evil spirits are especially supposed to be in action. Moreover, there is danger not only for the childbed woman herself but also for other persons present. They have to protect themselves against the invisible foes much in the same way as those taking part in an ordinary exorcism or conjuration, and this, among other things, is effected through a prophylactic body-painting.

Among some Indian tribes the rules of etiquette require that, at the arrival of guests in a village, both they and the hosts should be painted or otherwise adorned. This is the custom, for instance, among the Karayá in east Brazil. When the guests arrive, all inhabitants of the village paint themselves in the face with red and black patterns, and the guests likewise ornament themselves with painting before they enter the village.² Among some tribes on the Orinoco it is customary to paint the whole body red with *urucú* for a visit, and when the guests arrive, hospitality requires that their body-paintings, which possibly have been fouled by the dust on the way, should be renewed by the hosts.³ Similarly, the Jibaros of Ecuador prepare themselves with great care and in different ways when they are about to pay a visit to a strange village, one of their decorations being to paint the face as well as the breast in red or other colours. The hosts, in receiving their guests, paint themselves in the same fashion.⁴ Among the ancient Guaycurús the guests used to put on all their ornaments, as well as their swords, lances, arrows, clothes, and beads, for "they ran a risk." They stopped about one league outside the village which they wanted to visit, and in the following morning drew near, all decoratively painted red. The first salutation was a formal combat with fists.⁵

¹ Koch-Grünberg, *op. cit.*, ii. 146.

² Krause, *op. cit.*, p. 218. Cp. also, on the tribes of the Kuliséhu, Schmidt, *Indianerstudien in Zentralbrasilien*, pp. 64, 109.

³ Depons, *Voyage à la partie orientale de la terre-firme*, i. 307.

⁴ Vacas Galindo, *Nankijukima*, p. 78.

⁵ Sanchez Labrador, *El Paraguay catolico*, ii. 18.

To explain such facts by saying that the Indians paint themselves for a visit simply to be fine and neat, just as civilized peoples dress and decorate themselves on similar occasions, would certainly be entirely to misinterpret a primitive custom from a civilized point of view. In this case also body-painting is obviously due to certain superstitious ideas, widely spread not only among the Indians, but among many other savage races as well. The often ceremonial character, which the reception of a guest assumes in the lower culture, is founded on the consideration that the visiting stranger, even though he be of the same race, is always a more or less mysterious and dangerous being. He may be a potential source of evil; he may be a powerful wizard who is bringing disease or ill-luck upon the people he is visiting;¹ or, he may be the ghost of a dead man who is calling on his surviving relatives in the guise of a stranger. This is the idea Dr. Ehrenreich found among the Karayá. The stranger was always received with a certain distrust; in fact, he came armed, and was received with arms as if he had been an enemy. "Even if he came as a friend there was still the possibility that the people were dealing with a hostile *kamiri* (ghost), especially the ghost of a murdered man, who had taken the disguise of the expected guest in order to revenge himself on his murderers." As ghosts usually come noiselessly the visitors always announce their arrival by gesticulations and loud shouts to show that they are beings of flesh and blood.² The belief here pointed out is certainly not confined to the tribes Dr. Ehrenreich is describing. In Chaco, when I visited the Chorotis in the interior of their land, it struck me that, on my arrival at a village, I was received by a loud wailing of the women and children. I soon learnt that a great chief had died some time ago; but the fact that the wailing was raised to receive me remained unexplained. Yet it is the rule among the Chorotis that, when strangers arrive at a village where a death has recently taken place, they must be received with wailing. The most probable explanation seems to be that it is feared lest the dead should revisit his people in a strange disguise.³ The

¹ Cp. Westermarck, *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, i. 584.

² Ehrenreich, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

³ Among the ancient Jupis in Brazil also it was customary to receive a guest or a relative, who had been away for a long time, by weeping and wailing (Lery, *op. cit.*, p. 414), a custom which probably was due to the same belief. Of the Chamacoco Indians in Paraguay we are told that on an occasion when they were just celebrating a death-feast to drive away the evil demons who had taken away a great chief of theirs, their camp was suddenly attacked by a band of the savage Moro Indians. They concluded that