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AMONG the world's islands New Guinea is second in size only to Greenland. With 312,000 square miles, it is roughly equal to the combined areas of Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. In two features of its physical geography it is unique. No other of the larger islands has such a great proportion of mountainous country; and no area of like size anywhere else in the world has such high rainfalls. No one knows how many people inhabit New Guinea, but the Australian Commonwealth Office of Education estimates that in the eastern half alone there are at least 1,050,000 natives.†

The natives "are broken up into . . . communities, rarely con-

* The reader will keep in mind that the writer of this essay has been a missionary at Irelya for only one year and, furthermore, that his observation of the practices of the natives is restricted to his mission station. The study is not intended to present an over-all view of the religious beliefs of the natives everywhere in New Guinea. In gathering the material he was dependent largely upon the reports of native interpreters, and pidgin English is hardly the medium by which one is able to gain a full and comprehensive picture. The writer also calls attention to the fact that the natives may have deliberately withheld information from him. It is also likely that the natives frequently have no other reason for observing certain practices than tradition. The writer has inquired, for example: "Why do you hang a man's body on a pole for a day before you bury him?" or "Why do you spit on young shoots of taro before you plant them?" and received the answer: "We simply follow the example of our fathers and of their fathers before them." These customs may have had animistic origins, but the natives are unable to give an account of the reasons for their actions.

† *Current Affairs Bulletin,* Commonwealth Office of Education, Sydney, May 9, 1949, Vol. 4, No. 4. Names present a difficulty. Western NG, long held by the Netherlands, is known as Dutch New Guinea. The northeastern section of the island, claimed by Germany in 1884 and given as a mandate to Australia after World War I, is called the Territory of New Guinea; the southeastern section, claimed by the British Crown in 1884 and later turned over to the Australian administration, bears the name Papua. Hereafter in this paper, when we speak of NG, it will mean the entire eastern, Australian-controlled section.

taining more than a few hundred; and divided into a large number of linguistic groups, with nearly a hundred languages already counted and more to come. They vary widely in ethnic type; there are tall people and pygmies, light coppery skins and coal-black faces with a strong Negroid cast, and others that could belong to pigmented Europeans, frizzy hair and straight — and all degrees between these extremes and many different combinations of them. One thing they have in common is the primitive level of their material culture." *

Among many circumstances affecting the cultural status of the natives are the following: the isolation of New Guinea from the outside world until the middle of the last century; the isolation of tribal groups from other tribal groups on the island, caused by the severe mountainous terrain, by incessant intertribal hostility and warfare, and by the practice of sorcery and other barbarous customs; the absence of metals and common textile materials.

All of these factors have had their influence upon the natives of Irelya, a locality far in the Central Highlands of New Guinea, where the writer began Christian mission work in 1949. Irelya belongs to the large Enga, or Caga, language group. The Engas were first brought under partial government control during World War II. Mission work has begun among them only during the last two years. They have been thoroughly secluded from the outside world. Thousands of them are to this day quite unaware that a war with the Japanese ever raged on their island. The thought that an ocean exists and that they are living on an island, which is completely surrounded by water, appears to many of them novel and ridiculous. Sporadic intertribal fighting continues among them. They depend upon wood, stones, and bones for making tools and weapons. They are an agricultural people. They have no cooking vessels, roasting their food in the open fire or in covered pits. Bark, leaves, and rushes are fashioned into body coverings. As protection against chilling Highlands temperatures, houses are built low and snug out of roughly hewn planks and kunai grass. This, in brief, is the sort of environment from which the

* *Ibid.*

material for the following report on religious beliefs and practices is drawn.

The religious factors exerting most influence on the lives of the natives around Irelya are their beliefs concerning the spirits of the dead and their belief in sorcery — the fear of ghosts and the fear of black magic.

I. Ghosts

The natives among whom we work live in dread of the spirits of the dead. It is believed that when a man dies, his ghost (*timaungo*) remains in the vicinity of his former home and brings misfortune, illness, and death to his survivors. The blame for countless misfortunes is placed upon the spirits. A *timaungo* may inflict external physical deformities or internal complications. He may cause a man to fall and break a bone. He may cause a child to fall into the fire and be burned. He may enter a man's hand and stir up blood poisoning. He may bring about insanity. He may attack a native walking in the bush and kill him on the spot. If the pigs sicken and die, or if the house goes up in flames, it is the doings of a ghost. If a man is more prosperous than his fellows, it is said his family spirits are less vicious in their habits than those of other men. The spirits are said never to do good to the living — only harm.

But the number of spirits that can harm any one man is limited. A spirit must confine his evil work to living members of his own immediate family — his parents, children, brothers, or sisters. A native does not worry about the spirits of his cousins and more distant relatives. Moreover, as soon as a spirit has claimed a single victim in death, his potency is gone. As a menace to the living he is supplanted by the one he has killed. For this reason a native does not fear the spirits of his more remote ancestors. They have done their damage, and their sting is gone. To the question: "What becomes of the impotent spirits?" the natives reply simply: "We do not know."

The propensity of the ghosts for wreaking harm is not without cause, say the natives. They are hungry. The evil they do is extortion, intended to stimulate the living to give them pigs. Only for a price can the spirits be persuaded to desist from doing damage.

Hence the sacrificing of pigs to the ghosts is a frequently repeated rite.

If a native is taken seriously ill, his family assumes at once that a *timaungo* is responsible. But which one is it? When a spirit attacks a victim, it is said, all the other spirits in the neighborhood come to watch with glee as the evil deed is done. They are all present in the house. It is for the family of the sick man to determine which of them is the culprit and how he may be appeased. For this purpose they send for the "blow man" (*po pink*). For the blow man is supposed to know how to deal with the spirits.

The blow man's first task after his arrival is to clear the house of all those spirits who have no right to be there and have come only as curious onlookers — those belonging to other families. By a simple ritual he drives them away, leaving only a small group of family spirits, any one of which could possibly be the culprit. Then in the following manner the blow man purports to determine which of these it is who is causing the sickness.

Taking a certain leaf and placing it between his folded hands, he will begin to ask the ghosts many questions, all of them formulated in such a way that they can be answered either yes or no. "Are you the spirit of Pindi?" he will say. Then he will blow upon the leaf he holds between his hands. If he blows halfheartedly, the answer is no. He asks again: "Are you Raua?" He blows again. If his blowing is again weak, the answer is still no. He continues: "Are you Yaka?" He blows once more; and if he puffs vigorously at the leaf between his hands, the family knows the answer is yes. Yaka is the one causing the illness. But is this not a mere guess by the blow man, and a most transparent fraud? "No," say the natives. Yaka's ghost has come into the mouth of the blow man, causing him to puff strongly at the right time.

Then the family will begin to argue with Yaka's ghost. "Why do you want to kill this man?" they will say. "Let him live, and we will sacrifice a pig to you. If you kill him, you will only harm yourself; you will not get any more pigs. Which pig will you accept?" Then the blow man will go on to determine which pig will satisfy Yaka's ghost. He will ask: "Do you want the red sow with markings on the right shoulder?" "Do you want the young black sow?" "Would you be willing to accept the white boar?"

Each time he asks, he will blow; and he will keep on asking until the vigorous puffing comes. Then all will know that is the pig to kill.

With this question settled, the natives proceed with the sacrifice. The spirit, of course, can consume only spirit meat. He feasts upon the spirit and upon the smell of the sacrificed pig. The carcass belongs to the living. The pig's owner may use it to stage a feast, or perhaps to repay gifts of pork he has received in the past, or for home consumption.

But it is not only in cases of sickness that the natives sacrifice to the ghosts. Often, they admit, their own hunger for pork becomes the occasion of a sacrifice. When they kill a pig for their own use, they will think of a certain spirit and designate him to receive the spirit and the smell of the pig.

Sometimes it occurs that in a time of illness the family loses faith in the blow man and doubts the truth of his findings. In that case they may call in another man whose methods are considered more reliable. This man is known as the "whistle man" (*yakaiyop*). While the blowing method of questioning may be conducted in the daytime, not so the whistle man's ritual. This can be done only in the dead of night when the door has been fastened and the fire has died down. The whistle man is there, and the relatives of the patient. The whistle man questions the spirits just as the blow man did. But he uses no leaf. He asks a question, and if there is no sound in response, the answer is no. He voices another query. There is a sudden whistle. Everyone feels a quick fright; for by the whistle the ghost has spoken through the mouth of someone in the group.

The blow man receives no pay for his services, but it is customary to give the more highly regarded whistle man a small remuneration.

At Yaramanda the natives use another method to learn the deeds and intentions of the spirits. The equipment of the man in charge is a spear. Each time he asks the spirits a question, he thrusts the spear into the ground. If he is able to withdraw it easily, the answer to his question is no. He will go on with his interrogation until he thrusts in his spear and finds it held fast in the ground. This is the awaited sign of the affirmative.

II. Black Magic

Our natives at Irelya fear and practice many forms of sorcery. Natives use sorcery for revenge. If someone steals food from a garden; if he refuses to repay a gift; if he puts another man to shame, he may find himself the victim of sorcery. Now that the government has come and warfare has been banned, many natives consider sorcery the only feasible means of avenging themselves on members of hostile tribes.

Fear of the sorcery of other tribes has long been a block to inter-tribal travel and communication. It has kept tribes in isolated seclusion and has preserved hostility. At times it has made it difficult for us to hire natives to carry supplies to our other mission station at Yaramanda. Many local natives refused for the same reason to accompany us as carriers on an exploratory trip into the valley of the Sau River last year.

The following accounts of various types of sorcery and their effects have been given by my interpreters. They do not in all cases represent what has been actually seen and experienced. They are presented only as a record of common belief and rumor about sorcery and its power.

The sorcery practiced most in the vicinity of Irelya is known as *kongi.* A *kongi* specialist may be sitting beside the road or squatting in front of his house. Seeing an enemy approach, he will bow his head and mumble certain inarticulate things. Suddenly he will raise his head, gaze steadily at his approaching enemy and spit. Within one or two months, it is said, the enemy will die. Blood-letting is the accepted remedy for saving someone affected by *kongi.* Many men know how to perform this kind of sorcery. One who knows will charge a good price before he will let another into the secret.

Another type of sorcery in these parts is called *chira.* One who wishes to avenge himself by *chira* first obtains a certain shoulder bone of a pig. Over the bone he invokes a curse upon the name of his enemy. Then with a stone he smashes the bone to bits. With that the enemy dies. It is said that no special knowledge is required to perform *chira.* Anyone, young or old, may use this method effectively.

Another form similar to *chira* is *konda.* The method in *konda*

is to take a piece of new bark of the kind the natives use for tying. Over the piece of bark call out the enemy's name and wish death upon him. Then cut the bark in two. As it dries and withers, the enemy will perish.

The form of sorcery widely used around Yaramanda is known as *tromogai.* For this a certain type of powdery substance is required. It is said that the natives purchase this material from the Hagen people east of Yaramanda, and that its composition is herbs, powdered bones, and fluids from a decomposed human body. Its price is high—a large pig for a small capsule. The natives believe that any contact with the substance, internal or external, will be fatal. The usual method, they say, is to approach an enemy in stealth while he is sleeping. If possible, sprinkle some of the substance in his mouth or on his skin and garments. Or hang a capsule of it on a tree near his house. Within two or three months he will be dead. I am told that one of the symptoms of infection by this kind of sorcery is a fearfully distended mouth. An incident written by Missionary Hintze and published in the *Lutheran Witness* of August 23, 1949, deals with *tromogai.*

Another variety of sorcery known as *malagori* similarly requires the use of a secret substance. What this substance is, none of my informants were able to say. *Malagori,* they say, is used widely in the region of the Sau River and along the Lai River below Yaramanda. A man who wishes to put *malagori* to use stands up along the road. Possibly he will climb a tree for a better lookout. When he sees his enemy coming along the road, he takes the secret substance in his hand and gestures with it at the victim. If he gestures lightly, the victim dies after he gets home. If he gestures vigorously, the victim falls down at once; his beard, hair, and skin become brittle, crack, and break; and he dies in torment on the spot.

The natives with whom I have talked assert that magic and the spirits of the dead work together for evil. But the manner of their co-operation is not clear. Some conceive of the magic spell as inciting the victim's family spirits to kill him.

In considering sorcery, we cannot disallow the possibility of the use of actual pharmaceutical poisons. Whether such are used here we are unable as yet to say. It would be strange if there were no poisonous plants here, and also strange if the people had not dis-

covered their properties. But it will be noted that among such a people as ours, who take for granted the power of sorcery, there is usually no clear distinction between a pharmaceutical poison and any other substance which is believed in the sorcerer's hands to be capable of causing death. If a native eats spoiled pork and subsequently begins to vomit, he can ordinarily trace the cause of his distress. But whether the sorcerer in his deed would use a true poison or merely the bone of a pig would be immaterial in the minds of the natives, so long as the victim died. Both would be considered equally fatal. Whether the victim died of poison or of fright, the result in either case would be the same; and there are no chemists to make post-mortem examinations.

Exact knowledge about the sorcery in which they believe and which they practice and fear is lacking among the natives. Sorcery thrives in ignorance. Monstrous rumors are taken for absolute truth. The natives are convinced of the power of sorcery. Their dread of it is strong and satanic. And the dread is often enough to cause death. The injunction in the explanation of the Second Commandment against the use of witchcraft seemed somewhat archaic to us until we witnessed ourselves how sorcery, believed in, sanctioned, and practiced among a people, completely enslaves them.

III. Other Elements

There is a belief in the existence of certain demons which the natives call *puruduri.* These are distinct from the spirits of the dead. No one seems to know anything of their origin. It is said they dwell in the bush on the mountainsides. In some cases they inhabit particular stones. Travelers in the bush may be attacked and disemboweled by a *puruduri.* In a discussion regarding these beings I found a quaint skepticism. Some of the natives said: "We are inclined to doubt that there are such beings as *puruduri,* even though our forefathers have had much to say about them. In all likelihood it is not *puruduri,* but ordinary ghosts, who kill those who walk alone in the bush."

The natives also speak of the *yailyagari.* These are good beings who dwell in the sky. Though nothing is known of their origin, the natives believe it is the *yailyagari* who give the rain. There is a great lake in the sky. The *yailyagari* sit on the shore of this lake

and smite it with great sticks so that the water splashes down to the ground in the form of rain. If there is ample rain and the crops flourish, the people say the *yailyagari* are being good to them.

Some time ago one of the head men of the local tribe at Irelya said to me: "You have told us much about God and His angels that we have never heard before. All we ever knew about God and His angels was what our forefathers told us about the *yailyagari.*" In the *yailyagari* he had found a point of connection between our teaching and that of the forefathers; and though the similarity is remote, who knows whether it may not have a historical reality? Dr. Theodore Graebner, in *Evolution,* writes: "The founders of the comparative study (or Science) of Religion and the greatest authorities in its various departments are practically unanimous in their opinion that all pagan systems of mythology and religion contain remnants of a more exalted form of belief, of a higher, clearer knowledge of the Divinity, which gradually became dimmed and corrupted" (4th Ed., 1929, p. 105).

Nearly every tribe around Irelya has an area of forbidden ground fenced off and overgrown with bushes and trees. Within this place is the tribe's *yainanda.* The *yainanda* is a stone of a peculiar shape—possibly one that has been hollowed out at one time in some river bed. To this stone is attributed the power to grant a good harvest. The *yainanda* is a fertility god.

At intervals of about a year, just before beginning to plant new gardens, the members of a tribe will fix a time for renewing the good will of the *yainanda.* They will send the young men of the tribe out into the bush to hunt opossums (one of the few species of wild game found here). When they have bagged a goodly number, they return home; and the tribe will stage an opossum feast in honor of the stone. The men of the tribe, together with others of neighboring tribes, will retire into the fenced area of bush where the *yainanda* is situated. No women are permitted, and the occasion of the opossum feast is the only time when men may enter the area with impunity. At a certain traditional spot within the fence the men will roast the opossums. The *yainanda* will enjoy a feast of opossum spirit and opossum smell. The men, with even greater relish, will consume the fleshy portion. On this occasion the men will pour a libation of the grease of pigs or the oil of a

certain tree over the stone. They will place upon it leaves of the taro and karuka and pit-pit and other plants whose growth they expect it to bless. Then they will bury the stone in the ground, where it will remain until the next feast.

In a few tribes the claim is made that their forbidden area is inhabited not by a stone, but by a monstrous snake, known as *moroboi,* which will devour all trespassers except on the day of the sacrificial opossum feast. In these tribes the same honor is given to the snake as is bestowed in other places upon the *yainanda.*

The Engas are supernaturalists. Though the invisible things of God are clearly seen among them, being understood by the things that are made, they do not glorify God as God. The glory of the incorruptible God they have changed into an image made like to corruptible man. God and His angels have become colorless creatures idly splashing on the edge of a lake in the sky, while the attributes and rights of God have been handed over to His creatures. His power to guide and rule the lives of men and to be Lord of life and death they have given to the ghost and the sorcerer. The praise due to His name for granting seedtime and harvest and causing the earth to bring forth bountifully is given instead to stones and creeping things. They worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever; and in abject fear they bring the offerings of their hands not to God, but to the ghosts of those whom He has made. Against all these things, says St. Paul, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. On this account, "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness."

The natives at Irelya are laid on the hearts and consciences of our Christians, who must bring the Gospel to these benighted heathen. The Gospel is the power of God to free them from the bondage of Satan and to translate them into the glorious liberty of their Savior Jesus Christ.

Irelya, New Guinea