

TWO IRANIAN INCANTATIONS FOR BURYING HAIR AND NAILS.*

Read on 29th September 1909.

President—MR. JAMES MACDONALD.

Mr. R. Campbell Thompson's recent book, entitled "Semitic Magic. Its Origin and Development," has suggested to me the subject of this paper. While speaking of exorcism, the author says :—

"In all magic, three things are necessary for the perfect exorcism. First, the Word of Power, by which the sorcerer invokes divine or supernatural aid to influence the object of his undertaking. Secondly, the knowledge of the name or description of the person or demon he is working his charm against, with something more tangible, be it nail-parings or hair, in the human case. Thirdly, some drug, to which was originally ascribed a power vouchsafed by the gods for the welfare of mankind, or some charm or amulet, or, in the broadest sense, something material, even a wax figure or 'atonement' sacrifice, to aid the physician in his final effort. Almost all incantations can be split up into three main divisions, each with its origin in these three desideratives.

"The Word of Power consists, in its simplest form, of the name of some divine being or thing, called in to help the magician with superhuman aid. In the New Testament, its use is obvious. 'Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name,' exactly expresses the beliefs of all time A Christian monk, Rabban Hormizd the Persian, banned 'the devils of the impure Ignatius' with the words 'By Jesus Christ I bind you, O ye trembling horde' ¹.

* Journal, Vol. VIII, No. 8, pp. 557-72.

¹ Semitic Magic, by R. C. Thompson. Introduction, pp. xlvi-xlvii.

“The second component of the perfect charm was that the magician should know something, even if only the name, of the person or demon whom he hoped to bring into subjection. The origin of this would appear to have arisen in the beliefs about hair, rags, or nail-parings, which are collected and wrought into the charm as the connecting links between it and the victim. If these are wanting, then the name alone will be enough, for want of anything better; in the case of a demon, it is obviously the only emanation that the sorcerer can obtain of him, and hence to learn the name came to be regarded as the equivalent of obtaining something more tangible. This is the reason for the long catalogues of devils that the Babylonian wizard repeats in the hope that he may hit on the correct diagnosis of the disease demon, who will straightway come forth when he perceives that his name is known”¹.

“The third and last part of the spell, is the ceremony with water, drugs, amulets, wax figures, etc. The simplest form that this can take is pure water with which the demoniac is washed, plainly with the principle of cleansing lying underneath it.”²

Then speaking of sympathetic magic, the author adds: “Much of the magician’s art consisted in his ability to transfer a spiritual power from its abode into some object under his control. In other words, he employed a form of that peculiar wizardry which is known as sympathetic magic. This force is a species of sorcery which shows itself in its crudest form in the use of small figures of wax or other plastic materials fashioned with incantations in the likeness of some enemy, and then pierced with nails and pins, or melted before the fire, that their human counterpart may by these means be made to suffer all kinds of torment. This is the more intelligible when, by the recognized rules of magic, it is considered more effective to obtain some portion of the

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 1-li.

² *Ibid.* p. li.

victim's nails or hair, or earth from his footsteps, or even his name, as an additional connection whereby the wax figure may be brought into still closer affinity with its prototype."¹

This belief, *viz.*, that a magician or an evil-doer tries his magic or his evil machinations through one's hair or nails, seems to be common among many other nations besides the Semitic nations, referred to by Mr. Thompson. This belief, among other reasons, seems to be the origin of the custom of burying hair and nail-paring observed by some people.

We find in the Vendidâd of the Parsees an injunction to bury the hair and the nails, and not to leave them exposed. The cause assigned there is different. But it appears, that even in Irân, latterly the hair and nail have been considered to be the instruments of the magic of a magician. This injunction has led to the formation of two separate *nirangs* or incantations in later times. We are not sure, whether the Vendidâd injunction began with the idea of saving the original owner of the hair and nails from the clutches of the magician. What we find there, is a belief that the hair and nails, if left unburied, bring harm and injury to mankind, and give additional power and strength to the Daêvas or demons to do harm to mankind.

I give below the two *nirangs*, as given in an old manuscript of Dârâb Hormuzdyâr's Revâyet in the Library of the Bombay University, correcting the incorrect orthography of the Avesta quotation here and there from the text of Westergaard.

In the Persian Revâyets,² we find two *nirangs* (incantations) with directions as to how a Zoroastrian was to dispose of his superfluous hair and nails. They are given under the heading *نیرنگ ناخون پریدختن* and *نیرنگ موی پریدختن* *i.e.*, incantations for taking care of, or for being cautious about

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

² *Vide* the Manuscript of Dârâb Hormuzdyâr's Revâyet at the Bombay University Library, Vol. I, folio 157.

ॐ. 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓𑀲𑀢𑀺𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓
 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓

The direction for the first *nirang*, viz., that for the hair runs as follows in the Gujarati Avesta books.

ચેઆર આંગળ પ્રમાણે ખાડો ઉંડો ખણીએ ખાડા પાહોલો ખણી
 રેખ (૩) અહુનવર (૩) પદતાં કાહાડીને તે ડોકાણે વચે ખાલ
 મુકાને સરૌરાખાન અષેહ મુઘી પઢીઆ પછી એ નીરગ પઢવી
i.e., a hole (in the ground) must be dug four fingers deep. The
 rest must be (proportionately) broad. Three lines must be
 drawn round it reciting three Ahunavars. The hair may then
 be put in the middle of the hole. Then the Sarosh-bâj must
 be recited up to the word Ashahê. Then the following words
 which form the *nirang* must be recited:

“At akhyâi ashâ Mazdâo urvarâo vakhshat.”¹ Then the direction says, that the recital of the Sarosh-bâj may be finished.

Similar directions are given for the nails but the *nirang* or incantation in this case is different.

These *nirangs* are based upon the 17th chapter of the Vendidâd, which speaks of the disposal of hair and nail-parings. It directs that the superfluous hair, which a man removes from his body, and the nails, which he pares off, must not be thrown haphazard, but must be carefully buried. If one does not attend to this injunction, he invokes “the death caused by the Daêva (demon) through virulent plague.”

𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓 𑀧𑀲𑀭𑀸𑀓

A disregard for this injunction causes the spread of the power of the demons, inasmuch as it leads to the spread, in this world,

¹ Vide *infra* for translation.

² Vendidad XVII, 1.

of noxious creatures (*Khrashtas*) of the type of the lice
(*دندو*)¹.

To avoid this calamity, it is enjoined that the hair and the nails must be buried in the ground, a little away from the habitations of men,—ten steps away from pious men, twenty steps from fire, thirty steps from water, and fifty from the Barsam used in liturgical services.

In the case of hair, if the ground is hard, one must dig a hole half a span of the hand (*chishti*) deep, but if it is soft, one span. In the case of nails, one must dig a hole of the depth of the top-joint of a finger. Having dug these holes, one must put the hair or the nails in three respective holes or pits. While doing so, in the case of the hair, one must recite the words “At akhyâi ashâ Mazdâo urvarâo vakhshat”² *i.e.*, “Mazda made the vegetation grow through Asha for it (*i.e.*, the cattle).” In the case of nails, one must recite the words: “Ashâ Vohû mananghâ yâ sruyê parê magaônô”³ *i.e.*, “With Asha and Vohu-manô, who are to be praised before the greatest.”⁴

Having thus buried the nails, one has to recite again a short formula, “Paiti tê marêga”⁵ which is rendered, thus:—

“To thee, O Bird Asho-zusta,⁶ I show these nails:

“These nails I devote to thee.

“May these nails, O Bird Asho-zusta, be thy lances, swords, bows, thine arrows the swift flying, thy sling-stones which are to be employed against the Mazanian Daêvas.”⁷

¹ This ancient idea of the connection of virulent plague with the spread of noxious creatures of the type of the lice; reminds us of the modern notion of the connection of plague with fleas. Have hair and nail-parings, as filth, any connection with plague?

² This is a quotation from Yaçna XLVIII, 6.

³ *I bid* XXXIII, 7.

⁴ Spiegel's Avesta, translated by Bleek, Vol. II, p 92.

⁵ Vendidad XVII 9.

⁶ The word Asho-zushtî literally means “The friend of purity,” “loving purity.”

⁷ Spiegel's Avesta, translated by Bleek I, p. 125.

It is further said, that if the nails are not thus disposed of and dedicated to the Bird Asho-zusta, instead of serving men as means or instruments to be used against the Mâzanian Daêvas (*i.e.*, the Daêvas of the country of Mazendrân), they would be used by the Daêvas against men. It is further enjoined that after thus burying the hair and the nails, one has to draw round the hole, three or six or nine kashas,¹ (lines of demarcation or limit) reciting three or six or nine Ahunavar formulæ.

We thus find from the above description of the Vendidad, that hair and nails were directed to be buried with the recital of particular *nirangs*, with a view to avoid some mischief in the future. When they were carelessly thrown round about, it was believed that, that would lead to the growth and increase of noxious creatures like the lice which destroyed corn and clothes. If properly disposed of, as directed, they served as weapons or instruments in the hands of men for the destruction of the demons or evil powers. If not, they served as instruments or weapons in the hands of the evil powers to work destruction among mankind. Due attention to the directions for the disposal of the hair and the nails led to good for mankind in general, and carelessness in the matter led to harm. The good or harm was general and not individual.

The injunctions, though more honoured in the breach than in their observance by the modern Parsees, are still followed by some of the priests, especially those who observe the Barashnum, and perform, what are called, the inner liturgical ceremonies, *i.e.*, the liturgical ceremonies within the temples. Their strict observance now, in a city like Bombay, is not possible, because, if one were to dig the ground in front of his house or temple, he would be subject to municipal fines, etc. But, in case of fire-temples, which have a compound of their

¹ *Vide* my paper on "The Kashas of the Iranian Barashnum and the boundary lines of the Roman Lustrum," in the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. VIII, No. 7, pp. 520-530. *Vide supra*, pp. 330-3.

own, or which have some similar convenience, the practice is still followed. It is followed to a greater extent by the priests of a place like Naosari, which is the head quarters of the priesthood. In the case of nails, it is more generally followed than in the case of hair. The knife,¹ with which they pare the nails, serves as an instrument to draw the *kashas* or the demarcating lines round the hole in which the nails are buried.

The Pahlavi Shâyast lâ Shâyast also refers to the above injunction of the Vendidâd. It says, "They should not leave nail-paring unprayed for (*anâfsudak*), for, if it be not prayed over (*afsârd*), it turns into the arms and equipments of the Mazaniân demons."²

Now what is the abovementioned bird 'Ashô-zusta'? Literally, it means "the friend of purity or piety" or "loving purity." According to the Sad-dar (chap. xiv), it is the owl which is believed to eat away the nails.

Then, the question arises, why is this bird called Ashô-zusta? Prof. Darmesteter thinks, that it is called the bird Ashô-zusta in the Vendidâd, and the bird of Bahman (Vohumana) in the Sad-dar, because the words Asha and Vohumana begin the formula of exorcism that is recited while burying the nails according to the direction of the Vendidâd. I think it is perhaps so called, because the bird is believed to eat off the nails which were considered as impure and as a source of filth and infection.

Again, one may ask, if the following tradition about the owl may not entitle this much-abused and hated bird to be honoured with the epithet of "friend of piety or purity." It is given in the Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. III, No. 3, of 1907, pp. 173-174,

¹ This knife is called *نَاخُن چَين* *nâkhunchin*, i.e., "the parer of nails," in the above incantation. *Vide supra* p. 344, l. 17.

² Chap. XII, 6, S. B. E. Vol. V, p. 342. The word *anâfsudak*, translated as "unprayed for," by Dr. West, would be better translated by "on which no incantations are recited."

under the title of "THE BIRDS' COMPLAINT BEFORE SOLOMON, being an extract with a translation from the *Kitab u'l-Jamharah filmel'l-Bazyarah,*" by Lieut-Colonel D. C. Phillott and Mr. R. F. Azoo.

"It is said that once, by the inspiration of the Almighty, the birds went to the Prophet of God, to Solomon the son of David (peace and blessings on both of them), and saluted him with all reverence and said: 'Oh Prophet of God! we have come before thee, and stand here in thy presence that thou mayest regard us as thou regardest the rest of thy subjects, and mete out full justice to us, commending us to each other's care, and directing that no bird, either in the heavens or on the earth should oppress another; for we are now complaining to thee about four species of birds, well-known to us all. The first is the Hawk, who has succeeded in gaining the affection of man, and has risen in station to the highest degree, having no other foot-stool for his feet than the hand of kings, so that he now speaks not to us from pride, nor answers us out of hauteur and grandeur. We entreat thee to ask him what the cause of this silence is: to what is it due? The second bird is that hated bird known to men by the name of Owl. He dwells secluded in ruins and avoids habitations, nor does he repair to branched trees; and when we ask him the reason for this he says no more to us than '*Yâ hû yâ hû.*' We entreat thee to ask him what is the meaning of this expression, and to whom he alludes in these words.'

"Then Solomon was surprised at their language and pondered on their intelligence and their way of putting things, and replied, 'I will see that you obtain your wishes in this, and I will put your questions to those against whom you have lodged objection.'

"He then summoned the first, namely, the Hawk. Then Solomon summoned the second, namely, the Owl, and said to him, 'Oh odious bird! why dost thou seclude thyself in ruins, avoiding

habitations; and why hast thou forsaken the companionship of birds on branching trees?’

“The Owl said, ‘Oh Prophet of God! He that regards the world is seduced, and he that knows that he will be called to account for his actions is sorrowful; so I busied myself with the thought of the One I fear and the One I dread; and I love no other friend but Him, and there is none in my heart except Him (*Hú*). So praise be to Him of whom it is said there is none but Him (*Hú*).’ Then he added:—

“‘Repeating the name of the only God is food for the souls of those that are lost in His love.

“‘Their bodies are emaciated through their fear of God, and through the sallowness of their cheeks they have risen to high eminence.’”

Prof. Darmesteter, while speaking of the 17th chapter of the *Vendidâd* on which I have based my paper, says that the ideas about hair and nails referred to in the *Vendidâd* “are connected among certain people at certain times with resurrection. So, in Ireland, it is directed that the hair may be buried, not burned. The Christian martyrs were, owing to this idea, afraid of the punishment of being burnt. The miracles of St. Eulalie were affected with this idea.” The Roman flamines also buried their hair and nails under a fruit tree. Prof. Darmesteter thinks that among the Parsees, the idea of hygiene is the principal idea. Whatever is separated from the body is dead and is therefore subject to corruption and infection. Hence its isolation. He says:

“Le culte des cheveux et des ongles qui fait l’objet de ce Fargard, s’est, chez certains peuples et à une certain époque, combiné avec les idées relatives à la rèsurrection. En Irlande, il est défendu de bruler les cheveux, it faut les enterer, le possesseur les retrouvera à la rèsurrection. C’est la même idée qui fasait tant redouter aux martyrs le supplice du feu et ramena tant de fois le miracle de sainte Eulalie. Les flamines devaient enterrer sous un arbre fruitier leurs ongles

et leurs cheveux ; dans ce cas-là au moins la résurrection est hors de cause. Le point de départ de ces précautions est probablement dans cette impression, si sensible dans le Parsisme, que tout, ce qui est séparé du corps est mort et par suite est un siège de corruption et d'infection. Des idées d'hygiène n'y étaient donc pas étrangères."¹

Though not the nails, the hair were connected with the idea of resurrection among the ancient Irânians also. That appears from the Bundesh (XXX 6) where we read :

“Pavan zak hangâm min minô-i-jamik ast va min maya khun, min ûrvar mui, min âtash khaya chigunshân pavan bundesh padiraft khâhad ” (Justi's text, p. 72).

I. e., at that time (of resurrection) will be demanded bones from the spirit of the earth, blood from water, hair from the plants, and life from fire, as they were accepted by them in the creation."²

Now, though we do not see directly in the Vendidâd the belief that hair and nails are the instruments of a magician's magic, we find that, latterly, that belief was prevalent in Irân, and it was this very chapter of the Vendidâd that was referred to by later writers as the authority for their statements. The 14th chapter of the Sad-dar, a much later writing, refers to this injunction and custom of burying the hair and the nails. It gives out in detail the directions referred to in the Vendidâd, adding something of its own to what is contained in the Vendidâd which it follows in the main. For example, it adds the following further injunctions and observations. 1. An Ahunavar should be recited while paring each of the nails 2. The observation of all the directions in the matter makes the observer happy in both the worlds. 3. If one is away from his country, and if he does not know by heart the incantation of the section (in the Vendidâd) known as that of “*paetitê-mêrêga*,” he must at least recite the Ahunavars.

¹ Le Zend Avesta par Darmesteter, II p. 236.

² Vide my paper on Astodân (Journal of the Anthropological Society, Vol. I, No. 7, p. 446). Vide *supra* p. 21.

4. The nails must be interred in barren or hilly ground which is least frequented by man and which is free from moisture. 5. The bird 'Asha-zusta,' referred to as said above in the Vendidâd, is here spoken of as one living upon the nails of man. It is also known as 'Koof' or 'Bahman morg.' The owl is the bird referred to. 6. Again, it is said that if the nails are carelessly thrown away, and if one of them falls in some eatables, it brings on sickness and disease (بیماری باریک) 7. It refers specially to the belief that the nails and the hair serve as instruments in the hands of wizards. It says: "It is altogether necessary that they do not leave them unbroken, for they would come into use as weapons (Silâ'h) of wizards. And they have also said that, 'if that fall in the midst of food, there is danger of pulmonary consumption.'"¹

According to the Persian Zarthusht-nâme, the enemies of Zoroaster accused him of sorcery by secretly placing hair, nails, blood and such other impurities in his room,² and got him imprisoned for sorcery. They did not like his new reformed religion. So, when he was preaching to king Vishtâsp the tenets of his religion, they bribed his door-keeper, got the key of his room from him, and secretly concealed in his bed hair, nails and such other impure things. They then accused him of practising magic through these impurities. The king sent his men to look for them in Zoroaster's room, and finding them in his room, found him guilty of practising magic and imprisoned him.

I may here refer to one or two other Parsee customs in connection with hair as observed among the Parsees.

The Parsee priests are enjoined by custom to keep beards. They are asked not to get their hair cut by barbers. They

¹ S. B. E. Vol. XXIV., p. 276.

² همان ناخن و موی و هم استخوان .: که افتاده از تن مردگان
(Livre de Zoroastre publié et traduit par F. Rosenberg. Persian text, chap. 43, p. 47, l. 916.)

must cut their hair themselves or get that done by their co-religionists. The priests of the Kadmi sect of the Parsees are indifferent in observing this custom. I remember having read in a book that the late Dastur Moola Firoze, the learned and famous head priest of the Kadmi Parsees, got his head shaved by a barber openly in the compound of his Fire-temple, and that while he was engaged in this operation, his devotees, who visited the Temple at the time, placed his *ashodâd* (money gifts) before him at a distance. The idea of not getting the hair cut by an ordinary barber seems to have arisen from the fact, that these barbers, at times, carried skin-diseases from one person to another through their unwashed razors, etc.

The custom that a priest should keep his beard, and cut the hair of his head but not shave it, has given rise to several special phrases in Gujarati which are common to the Parsees only and especially to the priests. For example, if one were to say, “કુલાનાં મ્મિ માયું બોડાવી નાવું,” *i.e.*, “such and such a person has got his head shaved,” meant, that he gave up the profession of priesthood. At one time in Naosari, the headquarters of the Parsee priesthood, barbers were not generally admitted in Parsee houses or even in the streets. So people had to go to adjoining villages to get their hair cut or shaved. Two of these villages are Manockpore and Takori. They are situated on the other side of the river Purna, on the left of the road leading to Surat from Naosari. So, if one were to say, “So and so had been to Manockpore Takori”, it meant that “he has got his head shaved.”

Hair being considered impure from the point of view of the Vendidad, a Parsee custom, not generally observed now, enjoined that one must bathe after shaving, and not only that, but he must get all the clothes, which may be on the body at the time, washed separately before being mixed with the ordinary clothes to be sent to the washermen.

Up to a few years ago, the hair-cutting of an infant or child was something like a special event in a family. In some cases, a mother, who often lost her children in their infancy, took a vow, that she would not cut the hair of her children until at a certain age. I remember having heard that such and such a family went to Udwarâ, the seat of their ancient sacred Fire in India, to get the hair of their child cut there. That was in consequence of a sacred vow. They got the hair cut, and the first thing done after that was that the child was taken to the Fire-temple to offer thanks to God for keeping it alive so long. This custom seems to have been taken up from the hair-cutting ceremony of the Hindus.

We will note here a few more beliefs and customs in connection with hair and nails referred to by Mr. Thompson.¹

The Syrian Arabs believed that one can get at another's soul through his hair. "The story of Samson guarding his strength in his hair seems to have something in keeping with this belief." I think it is the same belief of guarding one's self which leads the clergy of almost all oriental nations to preserve their beards and to keep their hair.

The Arabs had a special ceremony known as the *'akikah* or the hair-cutting ceremony for a child, on which occasion they sacrificed a sheep.

"To this day in Syria, women vow to give a son to God, who is regarded as a sort of Nazarite, and his hair is not cut until he comes of age."

¹ *Semitic Magic* by R. C. Thompson.