

Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande

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ABRIDGED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
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CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

CHAPTER I

Witchcraft is an Organic and Hereditary Phenomenon

I

AZANDE believe that some people are witches and can injure them in virtue of an inherent quality. A witch performs no rite, utters no spell, and possesses no medicines. An act of witchcraft is a psychic act. They believe also that sorcerers may do them ill by performing magic rites with bad medicines. Azande distinguish clearly between witches and sorcerers. Against both they employ diviners, oracles, and medicines. The relations between these beliefs and rites are the subject of this book.

I describe witchcraft first because it is an indispensable background to the other beliefs. When Azande consult oracles they consult them mainly about witches. When they employ diviners it is for the same purpose. Their leechcraft and closed associations are directed against the same foe.

I had no difficulty in discovering what Azande think about witchcraft, nor in observing what they do to combat it. These ideas and actions are on the surface of their life and are accessible to anyone who lives for a few weeks in their homesteads. Every Zande is an authority on witchcraft. There is no need to consult specialists. There is not even need to question Azande about it, for information flows freely from recurrent situations in their social life, and one has only to watch and listen. *Mangu*, witchcraft, was one of the first words I heard in Zandeland, and I heard it uttered day by day throughout the months.

Azande believe that witchcraft is a substance in the bodies of witches, a belief which is found among many peoples in Central and West Africa. Zandeland is the north-eastern limit of its distribution. It is difficult to say with what organ Azande associate witchcraft. I have never seen human witchcraft-substance, but it has been described to me as an oval blackish swelling or bag in which various small objects are sometimes found.

When Azande describe its shape they often point to the elbow of their bent arm, and when they describe its location they point to just beneath the xiphoid cartilage which is said to 'cover witchcraft-substance'. They say:

It is attached to the edge of the liver. When people cut open the belly they have only to pierce it and witchcraft-substance bursts through with a pop.

I have heard people say that it is of a reddish colour and contains seeds of pumpkins and sesame and other food-plants which have been devoured by a witch in the cultivations of his neighbours. Azande know the position of witchcraft-substance because in the past it was sometimes extracted by autopsy. I believe it to be the small intestine in certain digestive periods. This organ is suggested by Zande descriptions of autopsies and was that shown to me as containing witchcraft-substance in the belly of one of my goats.

A witch shows no certain external symptoms of his condition though people say: 'One knows a witch by his red eyes.'

II

Witchcraft is not only a physical trait but is also inherited. It is transmitted by unilinear descent from parent to child. The sons of a male witch are all witches but his daughters are not, while the daughters of a female witch are all witches but her sons are not. Biological transmission of witchcraft from one parent to all children of the same sex is complementary to Zande opinions about procreation and to their eschatological beliefs. Conception is thought to be due to a unison of psychical properties in man and woman. When the soul of the man is stronger a boy will be born; when the soul of the woman is stronger a girl will be born. Thus a child partakes of the psychical qualities of both parents, though a girl is thought to partake more of the soul of her mother and a boy of the soul of his father. Nevertheless in certain respects a child takes after one or other parent according to its sex, namely, in the inheritance of sexual characters, of a body-soul, and of witchcraft-substance. There is a vague belief, hardly precise enough to be described as a doctrine, that man possesses two souls, a body-soul and a spirit-soul. At death the body-soul becomes a totem animal of the

clan while its fellow soul becomes a ghost and leads a shadowy existence at the heads of streams. Many people say that the body-soul of a man becomes the totem animal of his father's clan while the body-soul of a woman becomes the totem animal of her mother's clan.

At first sight it seems strange to find a mode of matrilineal transmission in a society which is characterized by its strong patrilineal bias, but witchcraft like the body-soul is part of the body and might be expected to accompany inheritance of male or female characters from father or mother.

To our minds it appears evident that if a man is proven a witch the whole of his clan are *ipso facto* witches, since the Zande clan is a group of persons related biologically to one another through the male line. Azande see the sense of this argument but they do not accept its conclusions, and it would involve the whole notion of witchcraft in contradiction were they to do so. In practice they regard only close paternal kinsmen of a known witch as witches. It is only in theory that they extend the imputation to all a witch's clansmen. If in the eyes of the world payment for homicide by witchcraft stamps the kin of a guilty man as witches, a post-mortem in which no witchcraft-substance is discovered in a man clears his paternal kin of suspicion. Here again we might reason that if a man be found by post-mortem immune from witchcraft-substance all his clan must also be immune, but Azande do not act as though they were of this opinion.

Further elaborations of belief free Azande from having to admit what appear to us to be the logical consequences of belief in biological transmission of witchcraft. If a man is proven a witch beyond all doubt his kin, to establish their innocence, may use the very biological principle which would seem to involve them in disrepute. They admit that the man is a witch but deny that he is a member of their clan. They say he was a bastard, for among Azande a man is always of the clan of his *genitor* and not of his *pater*, and I was told that they may compel his mother if she is still alive to say who was her lover, beating her and asking her, 'What do you mean by going to the bush to get witchcraft in adultery?' More often they simply make the declaration that the witch must have been a bastard since they have no witchcraft in their bodies and that he could not

therefore be one of their kinsmen, and they may support this contention by quoting cases where members of their kin have been shown by autopsy to have been free from witchcraft. It is unlikely that other people will accept this plea, but they are not asked either to accept it or reject it.

Also Zande doctrine includes the notion that even if a man is the son of a witch and has witchcraft-substance in his body he may not use it. It may remain inoperative, 'cool' as the Azande say, throughout his lifetime, and a man can hardly be classed as a witch if his witchcraft never functions. In point of fact, therefore, Azande generally regard witchcraft as an individual trait and it is treated as such in spite of its association with kinship. At the same time certain clans had a reputation for witchcraft in the reign of King Gbudwe. No one thinks any worse of a man if he is a member of one of these clans.

Azande do not perceive the contradiction as we perceive it because they have no theoretical interest in the subject, and those situations in which they express their beliefs in witchcraft do not force the problem upon them. A man never asks the oracles, which alone are capable of disclosing the location of witchcraft-substance in the living, whether a certain man is a witch. He asks whether at the moment this man is bewitching him. One attempts to discover whether a man is bewitching someone in particular circumstances and not whether he is born a witch. If the oracles say that a certain man is injuring you at the moment you then know that he is a witch, whereas if they say that at the moment he is not injuring you you do not know whether he is a witch or not and have no interest to inquire into the matter. If he is a witch it is of no significance to you so long as you are not his victim. A Zande is interested in witchcraft only as an agent on definite occasions and in relation to his own interests, and not as a permanent condition of individuals. When he is sick he does not normally say: 'Now let us consider who are well-known witches of the neighbourhood and place their names before the poison oracle.' He does not consider the question in this light but asks himself who among his neighbours have grudges against him and then seeks to know from the poison oracle whether one of them is on this particular occasion bewitching him. Azande are interested solely in the dynamics of witchcraft in particular situations.

Lesser misfortunes are soon forgotten and those who caused them are looked upon by the sufferer and his kin as having bewitched someone on this occasion rather than as confirmed witches, for only persons who are constantly exposed by the oracles as responsible for sickness or loss are regarded as confirmed witches, and in the old days it was only when a witch had killed someone that he became a marked man in the community.

III

Death is due to witchcraft and must be avenged. All other practices connected with witchcraft are epitomized in the action of vengeance. In our present context it will be sufficient to point out that in pre-European days vengeance was either executed directly, sometimes by the slaughter of a witch, and sometimes by acceptance of compensation, or by means of lethal magic. Witches were very seldom slain, for it was only when a man committed a second or third murder, or murdered an important person, that a prince permitted his execution. Under British rule the magical method alone is employed.

Vengeance seems to have been less a result of anger and hatred than the fulfilment of a pious duty and a source of profit. I have never heard that today the kin of a dead man, once they have exacted vengeance, show any rancour towards the family of the man whom their magic has struck down, nor that in the past there was any prolonged hostility between the kin of the dead and the kin of the witch who had paid compensation for his murder. Today if a man kills a person by witchcraft the crime is his sole responsibility and his kin are not associated with his guilt. In the past they assisted him to pay compensation, not in virtue of collective responsibility, but in virtue of social obligations to a kinsman. His relatives-in-law and his blood-brothers also contributed towards the payment. As soon as a witch is today slain by magic, or in the past had been speared to death or had paid compensation, the affair is closed. Moreover, it is an issue between the kin of the dead and the kin of the witch and other people are not concerned with it. They have the same social links with both parties.

It is extremely difficult today to obtain information about victims of vengeance-magic. Azande themselves do not know

about them unless they are members of a murdered man's closest kin. One notices that his kinsmen are no longer observing taboos of mourning and one knows by this that their magic has performed its task, but it is useless to inquire from them who was its victim because they will not tell you. It is their private affair and is a secret between them and their prince who must be informed of the action of their magic since it is necessary for his poison oracle to confirm their poison oracle before they are permitted to end their mourning. Besides, it is a verdict of the poison oracle and one must not disclose its revelations about such matters.

If other people were acquainted with the names of those who have fallen victims to avenging magic the whole procedure of vengeance would be exposed as futile. If it were known that the death of a man X had been avenged upon a witch Y then the whole procedure would be reduced to an absurdity because the death of Y is also avenged by his kinsmen upon a witch Z. Some Azande have indeed explained to me their doubts about the honesty of the princes who control the oracles, and a few have seen that the present-day system is fallacious. At any rate, its fallaciousness is veiled so long as everybody concerned keeps silence about the victims of their vengeance-magic. In the past things were different, for then a person accused by the prince's oracles of having killed another by witchcraft either paid immediate compensation or was killed. In either case the matter was closed because the man who had paid compensation had no means of proving that he was not a witch, and if he were killed at the prince's orders his death could not be avenged. Nor was an autopsy permitted on his corpse to discover whether it contained witchcraft-substance.

When I have challenged Azande to defend their system of vengeance they have generally said that a prince whose oracles declare that Y has died from the magic of X's kinsmen will not place the name of Z before his oracles to discover whether he died from the magic of Y's kinsmen. When Y's kinsmen ask their prince to place Z's name before his poison oracle he will decline to do so and will tell them that he knows Y to have died in expiation of a crime and that his death cannot therefore be avenged. A few Azande explained the present system by saying that perhaps vengeance-magic and witchcraft participate

in causing death. The part of the vengeance-magic explains the termination of mourning of one family and the part of witchcraft explains the initiation of vengeance by another family, i.e. they seek to explain a contradiction in their beliefs in the mystical idiom of the beliefs themselves. But I have only been offered this explanation as a general and theoretical possibility in reply to my objections. Since the names of victims of vengeance are kept secret the contradiction is not apparent, for it would only be evident if all deaths were taken into consideration and not any one particular death. So long therefore as they are able to conform to custom and maintain family honour Azande are not interested in the broader aspects of vengeance in general. They saw the objection when I raised it but they were not incommoded by it.

Princes must be aware of the contradiction because they know the outcome of every death in their provinces. When I asked Prince Gangura how he accepted the death of a man both as the action of vengeance-magic and of witchcraft he smiled and admitted that all was not well with the present-day system. Some princes said that they did not allow a man to be avenged if they knew he had died from vengeance-magic, but I think they were lying. One cannot know for certain, for even if a prince were to tell the kin of a dead man that he had died from vengeance-magic and might not be avenged he would tell them in secret and they would keep his words a secret. They would pretend to their neighbours that they were avenging their kinsmen and after some months would hang up the barkcloth of mourning as a sign that vengeance was accomplished, for they would not wish people to know that their kinsman was a witch.

Consequently if the kinsmen of A avenge his death by magic on B and then learn that B's kinsmen have ceased mourning in sign of having accomplished vengeance also, they believe that this second vengeance is a pretence. Contradiction is thereby avoided.

IV

Being part of the body, witchcraft-substance grows as the body grows. The older a witch the more potent his witchcraft and the more unscrupulous its use. This is one of the reasons why

Azande often express apprehension of old persons. The witchcraft-substance of a child is so small that it can do little injury to others. Therefore a child is never accused of murder, and even grown boys and girls are not suspected of serious witchcraft though they may cause minor misfortunes to persons of their own age. We shall see later how witchcraft operates when there is ill-feeling between witch and victim, and ill-feeling is unlikely to arise frequently between children and adults. Only adults can consult the poison oracle and they do not normally put the names of children before it when asking it about witchcraft. Children cannot express their enmities and minor misfortunes in terms of oracular revelations about witchcraft because they cannot consult the poison oracle.

Nevertheless, rare cases have been known in which, after asking the oracle in vain about all suspected adults, a child's name has been put before it and he has been declared a witch. But I was told that if this happens an old man will point out that there must be an error. He will say: 'A witch has taken the child and placed him in front of himself as a screen to protect himself.'

Children soon know about witchcraft, and I have found in talking to little boys and girls, even as young as six years of age, that they apprehend what is meant when their elders speak of it. I was told that in a quarrel one child may bring up the bad reputation of the father of another. However, people do not comprehend the nature of witchcraft till they are used to operating oracles, to acting in situations of misfortune in accordance with oracular revelations, and to making magic. The concept grows with the social experience of each individual.

Men and women are equally witches. Men may be bewitched by other men or by women, but women are generally bewitched only by members of their own sex. A sick man usually asks the oracles about his male neighbours, while if he is consulting them about a sick wife or kinswoman he normally asks about other women. This is because ill-feeling is more likely to arise between man and man and between woman and woman than between man and woman. A man comes in contact only with his wives and kinswomen and has therefore little opportunity to incur the hatred of other women. It would, in fact, be suspicious if he consulted the oracles about another man's wife on his own

behalf, and her husband might surmise adultery. He would wonder what contact his wife had had with her accuser that had led to disagreement between them. Nevertheless, a man frequently consults the oracles about his own wives, because he is sure to displease them from time to time, and often they hate him. I have never heard of cases in which a man has been accused of bewitching his wife. Azande say that no man would do such a thing as no one wishes to kill his wife or cause her sickness since he would himself be the chief loser. Kuagbiaru told me that he had never known a man to pay compensation for the death of his wife. Another reason why one does not hear of fowls' wings being presented to husbands in accusation of witchcraft¹ on account of the illnesses of their wives is that a woman cannot herself consult the poison oracle and usually entrusts this task to her husband. She may ask her brother to consult the oracle on her behalf, but he is not likely to place his brother-in-law's name before it because a husband does not desire the death of his wife.

I have never known a case in which a man has been bewitched by a kinswoman or in which a woman has been bewitched by a kinsman. Moreover, I have heard of only one case in which a man was bewitched by a kinsman. A kinsman may do a man wrong in other ways but he would not bewitch him. It is evident that a sick man would not care to ask the oracles about his brothers and paternal cousins, because if the poison oracle declared them to have bewitched him, by the same declaration he would himself be a witch, since witchcraft is inherited in the male line.

Members of the princely class, the Avongara, are not accused of witchcraft, for if a man were to say that the oracles had declared the son of a prince to have bewitched him he would be asserting that the king and princes were also witches. However much a prince may detest members of his lineage he never allows them to be brought into disrepute by a commoner. Hence, although Azande will tell one privately that they believe some members of the noble class may be witches, they seldom consult

¹ It is customary, when witchcraft is suspected, to ask the local prince, or more often his deputy, to send a fowl's wing to the presumed witch, courteously requesting him to blow water upon it from his mouth in token of goodwill towards the injured person; cf. pp. 40-42. Sending a fowl's wing to someone is therefore tantamount to an accusation of witchcraft.

the oracles about them, so that they are not accused of witchcraft. In the past they never consulted the oracles about them. There is an established fiction that Avongara are not witches, and it is maintained by the overwhelming power and prestige of the ruling princes.

Governors of provinces, deputies of districts, men of the court, leaders of military companies, and other commoners of position and wealth are not likely to be accused of witchcraft unless by a prince himself on account of his own hunting or on account of the death of some equally influential commoner. Generally lesser people do not dare to consult the oracles about influential persons because their lives would be a misery if they insulted the most important men in their neighbourhood. So we may say that the incidence of witchcraft in a Zande community falls equally upon both sexes in the commoner class while nobles are entirely, and powerful commoners largely, immune from accusations. All children are normally free from suspicion.

The relations of ruling princes to witchcraft are peculiar. Though immune from accusations they believe in witches as firmly as other people, and they constantly consult the poison oracle to find out who is bewitching them. They especially consult it about their wives. A prince's oracle is also the final authority which decides on all witchcraft cases involving homicide, and in the past it was also used to protect his subjects from witchcraft during warfare. When a lesser noble dies his death is attributed to a witch and is avenged in the same way as deaths of commoners, but the death of a king or ruling prince is not so avenged and is generally attributed to sorcery or other evil agents of a mystical nature.

v

While witchcraft itself is part of the human organism its action is psychic. What Azande call *mbisimo mangu*, the soul of witchcraft, is a concept that bridges over the distance between the person of the witch and the person of his victim. Some such explanation is necessary to account for the fact that a witch was in his hut at the time when he is supposed to have injured someone. The soul of witchcraft may leave its corporeal home at any time during the day or night, but Azande generally

think of a witch sending his soul on errands by night when his victim is asleep. It sails through the air emitting a bright light. During the daytime this light can only be seen by witches, and by witch-doctors when they are primed with medicines, but anyone may have the rare misfortune to observe it at night. Azande say that the light of witchcraft is like the gleam of fire-fly beetles, only it is ever so much larger and brighter than they. They also say that a man may see witchcraft as it goes to rest on branches for 'Witchcraft is like fire, it lights a light'. If a man sees the light of witchcraft he picks up a piece of charcoal and throws it under his bed so that he may not suffer misfortune from the sight.

I have only once seen witchcraft on its path. I had been sitting late in my hut writing notes. About midnight, before retiring, I took a spear and went for my usual nocturnal stroll. I was walking in the garden at the back of my hut, amongst banana trees, when I noticed a bright light passing at the back of my servants' huts towards the homestead of a man called Tupoi. As this seemed worth investigation I followed its passage until a grass screen obscured the view. I ran quickly through my hut to the other side in order to see where the light was going to, but did not regain sight of it. I knew that only one man, a member of my household, had a lamp that might have given off so bright a light, but next morning he told me that he had neither been out late at night nor had he used his lamp. There did not lack ready informants to tell me that what I had seen was witchcraft. Shortly afterwards, on the same morning, an old relative of Tupoi and an inmate of his homestead died. This event fully explained the light I had seen. I never discovered its real origin, which was possibly a handful of grass lit by someone on his way to defecate, but the coincidence of the direction along which the light moved and the subsequent death accorded well with Zande ideas.

This light is not the witch in person stalking his prey but is an emanation from his body. On this point Zande opinion is quite decided. The witch is on his bed, but he has dispatched the soul of his witchcraft to remove the psychical part of his victim's organs, his *mbisimo pasio*, the soul of his flesh, which he and his fellow witches will devour. The whole act of vampirism is an incorporeal one: the soul of witchcraft removes the soul of the organ. I have not been able to obtain a precise

explanation of what is meant by the soul of witchcraft and the soul of an organ. Azande know that people are killed in this way, but only a witch himself could give an exact account of what happens in the process.

Azande use the same word in describing the psychical parts of witchcraft-substance and other organs as they use for what we call the soul of a man. Anything the action of which is not subject to the senses may likewise be explained by the existence of a soul. Medicines act by means of their soul, an explanation which covers the void between a magical rite and the achievement of its purpose. The poison oracle also has a soul, which accounts for its power to see what a man cannot see.

The action of witchcraft is therefore not subject to the ordinary conditions which limit most objects of daily use, but its activity is thought to be limited to some extent by conditions of space. Witchcraft does not strike a man at a great distance, but only injures people in the vicinity. If a man leaves the district in which he is living when attacked by witchcraft it will not follow him far. Witchcraft needs, moreover, conscious direction. The witch cannot send out his witchcraft and leave it to find its victim for itself, but he must define its objective and determine its route. Hence a sick man can often elude its further ravages by withdrawing to the shelter of a grass hut in the bush unknown to all but his wife and children. The witch will dispatch his witchcraft after his victim and it will search his homestead in vain and return to its owner.

Likewise, a man will leave a homestead before dawn in order to escape witchcraft, because then witches are asleep and will not observe his departure. When they become aware that he has left he will already be out of range of their witchcraft. If, on the other hand, they see him starting they may bewitch him and some misfortune will befall him on his journey or after his return home. It is because witchcraft is believed to act only at a short range that if a wife falls sick on a visit to her parents' home they search for the responsible witch there and not at her husband's home, and if she dies in her parents' home her husband may hold them responsible because they have not protected her by consulting the oracles about her welfare.

The farther removed a man's homestead from his neighbours the safer he is from witchcraft. When Azande of the Anglo-

Egyptian Sudan were compelled to live in roadside settlements they did so with profound misgivings, and many fled to the Belgian Congo rather than face close contact with their neighbours. Azande say that their dislike of living in close proximity to others is partly due to a desire to place a stretch of country between their wives and possible lovers and partly to their belief that a witch can injure the more severely the nearer he is to his victim.

The Zande verb 'to bewitch' is *no*, and in its only other uses we translate this word 'to shoot'. It is used for shooting with bow and arrow or with a gun. By a jerk of a leg witch-doctors will shoot (*no*) pieces of bone into one another at a distance. We may notice the analogy between these different shootings and their common factor, the act of causing injury at a distance.

VI

In speaking of witches and witchcraft it is necessary to explain that Azande normally think of witchcraft quite impersonally and apart from any particular witch or witches. When a man says he cannot live in a certain place because of witchcraft he means that he has been warned against this spot by the oracles. The oracles have told him that if he lives there he will be attacked by witches, and he thinks of this danger as a general danger from witchcraft. Hence he speaks always of *mangu*, witchcraft. This force does not exist outside individuals; it is, in fact, an organic part of them, but when particular individuals are not specified and no effort is made to identify them, then it must be thought of as a generalized force. Witchcraft means, therefore, some or any witches. When a Zande says about a mishap, 'It is witchcraft', he means that it is due to a witch but he does not know to which particular one. In the same way he will say in a magic spell, 'Let witchcraft die', meaning whoever may attempt to bewitch him. The concept of witchcraft is not that of an impersonal force that may become attached to persons but of a personal force that is generalized in speech, for if Azande do not particularize they are bound to generalize.

VII

A witch does not immediately destroy his victim. On the contrary, if a man becomes suddenly and acutely ill he may be

sure that he is a victim of sorcery and not of witchcraft. The effects of witchcraft lead to death by slow stages, for it is only when a witch has eaten all the soul of a vital organ that death ensues. This takes time, because he makes frequent visits over a long period and consumes only a little of the soul of the organ on each visit, or, if he removes a large portion, he hides it in the thatch of his hut or in a hole of a tree and eats it bit by bit. A slow wasting disease is the type of sickness caused by witchcraft. It may be asked whether Azande consider the consumption of the soul of an organ leads at the same time to its physical deterioration. They are certainly sometimes of this opinion. Witches also shoot objects, called *ahu mangu*, things of witchcraft, into the bodies of those whom they wish to injure. This leads to pain in the place where the missile is lodged, and a witch-doctor, in his role of leech, will be summoned to extract the offending objects, which may be material objects or worms and grubs.

Witches usually combine in their destructive activities and subsequent ghoulish feasts. They assist each other in their crimes and arrange their nefarious schemes in concert. They possess a special kind of ointment, which, rubbed into their skins, renders them invisible on nocturnal expeditions, a statement which suggests that witches are sometimes thought to move in the body to attack their enemies. They also possess small drums which are beaten to summon them to congress where their discussions are presided over by old and experienced members of the brotherhood, for there are status and leadership among witches. Experience must be obtained under tuition of elder witches before a man is qualified to kill his neighbours. Growth in experience goes hand in hand with growth of witchcraft-substance. It is also said that a witch may not kill a man entirely on his own initiative but must present his proposals to a meeting of his fellows presided over by a witch-leader. The question is thrashed out among them.

Sooner or later a witch falls a victim to vengeance or, if he is clever enough to avoid retribution, is killed by another witch or by a sorcerer. We may ask whether the distinction between witches, *aboro mangu*, and those who are not witches, *amokundu*, is maintained beyond the grave? I have never been given a spontaneous statement to this effect, but in answer to direct and

leading questions I have on one or two occasions been told that when witches die they become evil ghosts (*agirisa*). *Atoro*, the ordinary ghosts, are benevolent beings, at least as benevolent as a Zande father of a family, and their occasional participation in the world they have left behind them is on the whole orderly and conducive to the welfare of their children. The *agirisa*, on the other hand, show a venomous hatred of humanity. They bedevil travellers in the bush and cause passing states of dissociation.

VIII

The existence of witchcraft-substance in a living person is known by oracular verdicts. In the dead it is discovered by opening up the belly, and it is this second method of identification that interests us in our account of the physical basis of witchcraft. I have already suggested that the organ in which witchcraft-substance is found is the small intestine.

The conditions in which an autopsy took place in pre-European days are obscure. According to one informant, Gbaru, autopsies were an ancient Mbomu custom, and difficulties only began to arise in Gbudwe's time. Possibly the practice was an old one which disappeared as political control of the Avongara increased and reappeared with its old vigour after European conquest. King Gbudwe, as I have been told by all informants, discouraged the practice.

However, autopsies were sometimes made when a witch was executed without royal authority. Occasionally kinsmen of a dead man acted on the verdict of their own poison oracle and avenged themselves on a witch without waiting for confirmation from the king's poison oracle. In such a case their action was *ultra vires*, and if the relatives of the victim of vengeance could show that there was no witchcraft-substance in his belly they could claim compensation in the king's court from the kin who had taken the law into their own hands. On the other hand, autopsies to clear the good name of a lineage, a member of which had been accused of minor acts of witchcraft not involving payment of damages, may have been fairly frequent even before European conquest, and they were certainly common after it.

A man who had frequently been accused of witchcraft, even

though he were never accused of homicide, would feel that he had been insulted without cause and that the name of his kin had been brought into ill repute. He would therefore sometimes instruct his sons to open his abdomen before burial to ascertain whether these reflections on the honour of his lineage were justified, or he might have the operation performed on a son who had died prematurely. For the Zande mind is logical and inquiring within the framework of its culture and insists on the coherence of its own idiom. If witchcraft is an organic substance its presence can be ascertained by post-mortem search. If it is hereditary it can be discovered in the belly of a close male kinsman of a witch as surely as in the belly of the witch himself.

An autopsy is performed in public at the edge of the grave. Those who attend are relatives of the dead, his relatives-in-law, his friends, his blood-brothers, and old men of standing in the neighbourhood who commonly attend funerals and sit watching the grave-diggers at their labour and other preparations for burial. Many of these old men have been present on similar occasions in the past, and it is they who will decide upon the presence or absence of witchcraft-substance. They can tell its presence by the way the intestines come out of the belly.

Two lateral gashes are made in the belly and one end of the intestines is placed in a cleft branch and they are wound round it. After the other end has been severed from the body another man takes it and unwinds the intestines as he walks away from the man holding the cleft branch. The old men walk alongside the entrails as they are stretched in the air and examine them for witchcraft-substance. The intestines are usually replaced in the belly when the examination is finished and the corpse is buried. I have been told that if no witchcraft-substance were discovered in a man's belly his kinsmen might strike his accusers in the face with his intestines or might dry them in the sun and afterwards take them to court and there boast of their victory. I have also heard that if witchcraft-substance were discovered the accusers might take the entrails and hang them on a tree bordering one of the main paths leading to a prince's court.

The cutting and the burial must be performed by a blood-brother, for this is one of the duties of blood-brotherhood. One informant told me that if a man who had not made blood-brotherhood with the kin of the dead person performed the

ceremony he would by so doing become their blood-brother. If witchcraft-substance is found the cutter will have to be paid heavily for his services. Whether there is witchcraft-substance or not he must be ritually cleansed after the operation. He is carried round on the shoulders of a relative of the dead and greeted with ceremonial cries and pelted with earth and red ground-fruits of the *nonga* plant (*Amomum korarima*) 'to take coldness from him'. He is carried to a stream and the relatives of the dead wash his hands and give him an infusion, made from various trees, to drink. Before he has been cleansed he may neither eat nor drink, for he is polluted like a woman whose husband has died. Finally, if there was no witchcraft-substance, a feast is prepared at which the cutter and a kinsman of the dead pull a gourd containing beer into halves and the kinsmen of the dead and the kinsmen of the cutter exchange gifts, a man from each party advancing in turn to the other party and throwing his gift on the ground before them.

CHAPTER II

The Notion of Witchcraft explains
Unfortunate Events

I

WITCHES, as the Azande conceive them, clearly cannot exist. None the less, the concept of witchcraft provides them with a natural philosophy by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained and a ready and stereotyped means of reacting to such events. Witchcraft beliefs also embrace a system of values which regulate human conduct.

Witchcraft is ubiquitous. It plays its part in every activity of Zande life; in agricultural, fishing, and hunting pursuits; in domestic life of homesteads as well as in communal life of district and court; it is an important theme of mental life in which it forms the background of a vast panorama of oracles and magic; its influence is plainly stamped on law and morals, etiquette and religion; it is prominent in technology and language; there is no niche or corner of Zande culture into which it does not twist itself. If blight seizes the ground-nut crop it is witchcraft; if the bush is vainly scoured for game it is witchcraft; if women laboriously bale water out of a pool and are rewarded by but a few small fish it is witchcraft; if termites do not rise when their swarming is due and a cold useless night is spent in waiting for their flight it is witchcraft; if a wife is sulky and unresponsive to her husband it is witchcraft; if a prince is cold and distant with his subject it is witchcraft; if a magical rite fails to achieve its purpose it is witchcraft; if, in fact, any failure or misfortune falls upon anyone at any time and in relation to any of the manifold activities of his life it may be due to witchcraft. The Zande attributes all these misfortunes to witchcraft unless there is strong evidence, and subsequent oracular confirmation, that sorcery or some other evil agent has been at work, or unless they are clearly to be attributed to incompetence, breach of a taboo, or failure to observe a moral rule.

To say that witchcraft has blighted the ground-nut crop, that witchcraft has scared away game, and that witchcraft has made so-and-so ill is equivalent to saying in terms of our own culture that the ground-nut crop has failed owing to blight, that game is scarce this season, and that so-and-so has caught influenza. Witchcraft participates in all misfortunes and is the idiom in which Azande speak about them and in which they explain them. To us witchcraft is something which haunted and disgusted our credulous forefathers. But the Zande expects to come across witchcraft at any time of the day or night. He would be just as surprised if he were not brought into daily contact with it as we would be if confronted by its appearance. To him there is nothing miraculous about it. It is expected that a man's hunting will be injured by witches, and he has at his disposal means of dealing with them. When misfortunes occur he does not become awestruck at the play of supernatural forces. He is not terrified at the presence of an occult enemy. He is, on the other hand, extremely annoyed. Someone, out of spite, has ruined his ground-nuts or spoilt his hunting or given his wife a chill, and surely this is cause for anger! He has done no one harm, so what right has anyone to interfere in his affairs? It is an impertinence, an insult, a dirty, offensive trick! It is the aggressiveness and not the eeriness of these actions which Azande emphasize when speaking of them, and it is anger and not awe which we observe in their response to them.

Witchcraft is not less anticipated than adultery. It is so intertwined with everyday happenings that it is part of a Zande's ordinary world. There is nothing remarkable about a witch—you may be one yourself, and certainly many of your closest neighbours are witches. Nor is there anything awe-inspiring about witchcraft. We do not become psychologically transformed when we hear that someone is ill—we expect people to be ill—and it is the same with Zande. They expect people to be ill, i.e. to be bewitched, and it is not a matter for surprise or wonderment.

I found it strange at first to live among Azande and listen to naïve explanations of misfortunes which, to our minds, have apparent causes, but after a while I learnt the idiom of their thought and applied notions of witchcraft as spontaneously as themselves in situations where the concept was relevant. A boy

knocked his foot against a small stump of wood in the centre of a bush path, a frequent happening in Africa, and suffered pain and inconvenience in consequence. Owing to its position on his toe it was impossible to keep the cut free from dirt and it began to fester. He declared that witchcraft had made him knock his foot against the stump. I always argued with Azande and criticized their statements, and I did so on this occasion. I told the boy that he had knocked his foot against the stump of wood because he had been careless, and that witchcraft had not placed it in the path, for it had grown there naturally. He agreed that witchcraft had nothing to do with the stump of wood being in his path but added that he had kept his eyes open for stumps, as indeed every Zande does most carefully, and that if he had not been bewitched he would have seen the stump. As a conclusive argument for his view he remarked that all cuts do not take days to heal but, on the contrary, close quickly, for that is the nature of cuts. Why, then, had his sore festered and remained open if there were no witchcraft behind it? This, as I discovered before long, was to be regarded as the Zande explanation of sickness.

Shortly after my arrival in Zandeland we were passing through a government settlement and noticed that a hut had been burnt to the ground on the previous night. Its owner was overcome with grief as it had contained the beer he was preparing for a mortuary feast. He told us that he had gone the previous night to examine his beer. He had lit a handful of straw and raised it above his head so that light would be cast on the pots, and in so doing he had ignited the thatch. He, and my companions also, were convinced that the disaster was caused by witchcraft.

One of my chief informants, Kisanga, was a skilled wood-carver, one of the finest carvers in the whole kingdom of Gbudwe. Occasionally the bowls and stools which he carved split during the work, as one may well imagine in such a climate. Though the hardest woods be selected they sometimes split in process of carving or on completion of the utensil even if the craftsman is careful and well acquainted with the technical rules of his craft. When this happened to the bowls and stools of this particular craftsman he attributed the misfortune to witchcraft and used to harangue me about the spite and jeal-

ousy of his neighbours. When I used to reply that I thought he was mistaken and that people were well disposed towards him he used to hold the split bowl or stool towards me as concrete evidence of his assertions. If people were not bewitching his work, how would I account for that? Likewise a potter will attribute the cracking of his pots during firing to witchcraft. An experienced potter need have no fear that his pots will crack as a result of error. He selects the proper clay, kneads it thoroughly till he has extracted all grit and pebbles, and builds it up slowly and carefully. On the night before digging out his clay he abstains from sexual intercourse. So he should have nothing to fear. Yet pots sometimes break, even when they are the handiwork of expert potters, and this can only be accounted for by witchcraft. 'It is broken—there is witchcraft,' says the potter simply. Many similar situations in which witchcraft is cited as an agent are instanced throughout this and following chapters.

II

In speaking to Azande about witchcraft and in observing their reactions to situations of misfortune it was obvious that they did not attempt to account for the existence of phenomena, or even the action of phenomena, by mystical causation alone. What they explained by witchcraft were the particular conditions in a chain of causation which related an individual to natural happenings in such a way that he sustained injury. The boy who knocked his foot against a stump of wood did not account for the stump by reference to witchcraft, nor did he suggest that whenever anybody knocks his foot against a stump it is necessarily due to witchcraft, nor yet again did he account for the cut by saying that it was caused by witchcraft, for he knew quite well that it was caused by the stump of wood. What he attributed to witchcraft was that on this particular occasion, when exercising his usual care, he struck his foot against a stump of wood, whereas on a hundred other occasions he did not do so, and that on this particular occasion the cut, which he expected to result from the knock, festered whereas he had had dozens of cuts which had not festered. Surely these peculiar conditions demand an explanation. Again, every year hundreds of Azande go and inspect their beer by night and they always

take with them a handful of straw in order to illuminate the hut in which it is fermenting. Why then should this particular man on this single occasion have ignited the thatch of his hut? Again, my friend the wood-carver had made scores of bowls and stools without mishap and he knew all there was to know about the selection of wood, use of tools, and conditions of carving. His bowls and stools did not split like the products of craftsmen who were unskilled in their work, so why on rare occasions should his bowls and stools split when they did not split usually and when he had exercised all his usual knowledge and care? He knew the answer well enough and so, in his opinion, did his envious, back-biting neighbours. In the same way, a potter wants to know why his pots should break on an occasion when he uses the same material and technique as on other occasions; or rather he already knows, for the reason is known in advance, as it were. If the pots break it is due to witchcraft.

We shall give a false account of Zande philosophy if we say that they believe witchcraft to be the sole cause of phenomena. This proposition is not contained in Zande patterns of thought, which only assert that witchcraft brings a man into relation with events in such a way that he sustains injury.

In Zandeland sometimes an old granary collapses. There is nothing remarkable in this. Every Zande knows that termites eat the supports in course of time and that even the hardest woods decay after years of service. Now a granary is the summerhouse of a Zande homestead and people sit beneath it in the heat of the day and chat or play the African hole-game or work at some craft. Consequently it may happen that there are people sitting beneath the granary when it collapses and they are injured, for it is a heavy structure made of beams and clay and may be stored with eleusine as well. Now why should these particular people have been sitting under this particular granary at the particular moment when it collapsed? That it should collapse is easily intelligible, but why should it have collapsed at the particular moment when these particular people were sitting beneath it? Through years it might have collapsed, so why should it fall just when certain people sought its kindly shelter? We say that the granary collapsed because its supports were eaten away by termites; that is the cause that explains

the collapse of the granary. We also say that people were sitting under it at the time because it was in the heat of the day and they thought that it would be a comfortable place to talk and work. This is the cause of people being under the granary at the time it collapsed. To our minds the only relationship between these two independently caused facts is their coincidence in time and space. We have no explanation of why the two chains of causation intersected at a certain time and in a certain place, for there is no interdependence between them.

Zande philosophy can supply the missing link. The Zande knows that the supports were undermined by termites and that people were sitting beneath the granary in order to escape the heat and glare of the sun. But he knows besides why these two events occurred at a precisely similar moment in time and space. It was due to the action of witchcraft. If there had been no witchcraft people would have been sitting under the granary and it would not have fallen on them, or it would have collapsed but the people would not have been sheltering under it at the time. Witchcraft explains the coincidence of these two happenings.

III

I hope I am not expected to point out that the Zande cannot analyse his doctrines as I have done for him. It is no use saying to a Zande 'Now tell me what you Azande think about witchcraft' because the subject is too general and indeterminate, both too vague and too immense, to be described concisely. But it is possible to extract the principles of their thought from dozens of situations in which witchcraft is called upon to explain happenings and from dozens of other situations in which failure is attributed to some other cause. Their philosophy is explicit, but is not formally stated as a doctrine. A Zande would not say 'I believe in natural causation but I do not think that that fully explains coincidences, and it seems to me that the theory of witchcraft offers a satisfactory explanation of them', but he expresses his thought in terms of actual and particular situations. He says 'a buffalo charges', 'a tree falls', 'termites are not making their seasonal flight when they are expected to do so', and so on. Herein he is stating empirically ascertained facts. But he also says 'a buffalo charged and wounded so-and-so',

'a tree fell on so-and-so and killed him', 'my termites refuse to make their flight in numbers worth collecting but other people are collecting theirs all right', and so on. He tells you that these things are due to witchcraft, saying in each instance, 'So-and-so has been bewitched.' The facts do not explain themselves or only partly explain themselves. They can only be explained fully if one takes witchcraft into consideration.

One can only obtain the full range of a Zande's ideas about causation by allowing him to fill in the gaps himself, otherwise one will be led astray by linguistic conventions. He tells you 'So-and-so was bewitched and killed himself' or even simply that 'So-and-so was killed by witchcraft'. But he is telling you the ultimate cause of his death and not the secondary causes. You can ask him 'How did he kill himself?' and he will tell you that he committed suicide by hanging himself from the branch of a tree. You can also ask 'Why did he kill himself?' and he will tell you that it was because he was angry with his brothers. The cause of his death was hanging from a tree, and the cause of his hanging from a tree was his anger with his brothers. If you then ask a Zande why he should say that the man was bewitched if he committed suicide on account of his anger with his brothers, he will tell you that only crazy people commit suicide, and that if everyone who was angry with his brothers committed suicide there would soon be no people left in the world, and that if this man had not been bewitched he would not have done what he did do. If you persevere and ask why witchcraft caused the man to kill himself the Zande will reply that he supposes someone hated him, and if you ask him why someone hated him your informant will tell you that such is the nature of men.

For if Azande cannot enunciate a theory of causation in terms acceptable to us they describe happenings in an idiom that is explanatory. They are aware that it is particular circumstances of events in their relation to man, their harmfulness to a particular person, that constitutes evidence of witchcraft. Witchcraft explains *why* events are harmful to man and not *how* they happen. A Zande perceives how they happen just as we do. He does not see a witch charge a man, but an elephant. He does not see a witch push over a granary, but termites gnawing away its supports. He does not see a psychical flame igniting

thatch, but an ordinary lighted bundle of straw. His perception of how events occur is as clear as our own.

IV

Zande belief in witchcraft in no way contradicts empirical knowledge of cause and effect. The world known to the senses is just as real to them as it is to us. We must not be deceived by their way of expressing causation and imagine that because they say a man was killed by witchcraft they entirely neglect the secondary causes that, as we judge them, were the true causes of his death. They are foreshortening the chain of events, and in a particular social situation are selecting the cause that is socially relevant and neglecting the rest. If a man is killed by a spear in war, or by a wild beast in hunting, or by the bite of a snake, or from sickness, witchcraft is the socially relevant cause, since it is the only one which allows intervention and determines social behaviour.

Belief in death from natural causes and belief in death from witchcraft are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they supplement one another, the one accounting for what the other does not account for. Besides, death is not only a natural fact but also a social fact. It is not simply that the heart ceases to beat and the lungs to pump air in an organism, but it is also the destruction of a member of a family and kin, of a community and tribe. Death leads to consultation of oracles, magic rites, and revenge. Among the causes of death witchcraft is the only one that has any significance for social behaviour. The attribution of misfortune to witchcraft does not exclude what we call its real causes but is superimposed on them and gives to social events their moral value.

Zande thought expresses the notion of natural and mystical causation quite clearly by using a hunting metaphor to define their relations. Azande always say of witchcraft that it is the *umbaga* or second spear. When Azande kill game there is a division of meat between the man who first speared the animal and the man who plunged a second spear into it. These two are considered to have killed the beast and the owner of the second spear is called the *umbaga*. Hence if a man is killed by an elephant Azande say that the elephant is the first spear and that witchcraft is the second spear and that together they killed

the man. If a man spears another in war the slayer is the first spear and witchcraft is the second spear and together they killed him.

Since Azande recognize plurality of causes, and it is the social situation that indicates the relevant one, we can understand why the doctrine of witchcraft is not used to explain every failure and misfortune. It sometimes happens that the social situation demands a common-sense, and not a mystical, judgement of cause. Thus, if you tell a lie, or commit adultery, or steal, or deceive your prince, and are found out, you cannot elude punishment by saying that you were bewitched. Zande doctrine declares emphatically 'Witchcraft does not make a person tell lies'; 'Witchcraft does not make a person commit adultery'; 'Witchcraft does not put adultery into a man. "Witchcraft" is in yourself (you alone are responsible), that is, your penis becomes erect. It sees the hair of a man's wife and it rises and becomes erect because the only "witchcraft" is, itself' ("witchcraft" is here used metaphorically); 'Witchcraft does not make a person steal'; 'Witchcraft does not make a person disloyal.' Only on one occasion have I heard a Zande plead that he was bewitched when he had committed an offence and this was when he lied to me, and even on this occasion everybody present laughed at him and told him that witchcraft does not make people tell lies.

If a man murders another tribesman with knife or spear he is put to death. It is not necessary in such a case to seek a witch, for an objective towards which vengeance may be directed is already present. If, on the other hand, it is a member of another tribe who has speared a man his relatives, or his prince, will take steps to discover the witch responsible for the event.

It would be treason to say that a man put to death on the orders of his king for an offence against authority was killed by witchcraft. If a man were to consult the oracles to discover the witch responsible for the death of a relative who had been put to death at the orders of his king he would run the risk of being put to death himself. For here the social situation excludes the notion of witchcraft as on other occasions it pays no attention to natural agents and emphasizes only witchcraft. Also, if a man were killed in vengeance because the oracles said that he was a witch and had murdered another man with his

witchcraft then his relatives could not say that he had been killed by witchcraft. Zande doctrine lays it down that he died at the hand of avengers because he was a homicide. If a man were to have expressed the view that his kinsman had been killed by witchcraft and to have acted upon his opinion by consulting the poison oracle, he might have been punished for ridiculing the king's poison oracle, for it was the poison oracle of the king that had given official confirmation of the man's guilt, and it was the king himself who had permitted vengeance to take its course.

In these situations witchcraft is irrelevant and, if not totally excluded, is not indicated as the principal factor in causation. As in our own society a scientific theory of causation, if not excluded, is deemed irrelevant in questions of moral and legal responsibility, so in Zande society the doctrine of witchcraft, if not excluded, is deemed irrelevant in the same situations. We accept scientific explanations of the causes of disease, and even of the causes of insanity, but we deny them in crime and sin because here they militate against law and morals which are axiomatic. The Zande accepts a mystical explanation of the causes of misfortune, sickness, and death, but he does not allow this explanation if it conflicts with social exigencies expressed in law and morals.

For witchcraft is not indicated as a cause for failure when a taboo has been broken. If a child becomes sick, and it is known that its father and mother have had sexual relations before it was weaned, the cause of death is already indicated by breach of a ritual prohibition and the question of witchcraft does not arise. If a man develops leprosy and there is a history of incest in his case then incest is the cause of leprosy and not witchcraft. In these cases, however, a curious situation arises because when the child or the leper dies it is necessary to avenge their deaths and the Zande sees no difficulty in explaining what appears to us to be most illogical behaviour. He does so on the same principles as when a man has been killed by a wild beast, and he invokes the same metaphor of 'second spear'. In the cases mentioned above there are really three causes of a person's death. There is the illness from which he dies, leprosy in the case of the man, perhaps some fever in the case of the child. These sicknesses are not in themselves products of witchcraft,

for they exist in their own right just as a buffalo or a granary exist in their own right. Then there is the breach of a taboo, in the one case of weaning, in the other case of incest. The child, and the man, developed fever, and leprosy, because a taboo was broken. The breach of a taboo was the cause of their sickness, but the sickness would not have killed them if witchcraft had not also been operative. If witchcraft had not been present as 'second spear' they would have developed fever and leprosy just the same, but they would not have died from them. In these instances there are two socially significant causes, breach of taboo and witchcraft, both of which are relative to different social processes, and each is emphasized by different people.

But where there has been a breach of taboo and death is not involved witchcraft will not be evoked as a cause of failure. If a man eats a forbidden food after he has made powerful punitive magic he may die, and in this case the cause of his death is known beforehand, since it is contained in the conditions of the situation in which he died even if witchcraft was also operative. But it does not follow that he will die. What does inevitably follow is that the medicine he has made will cease to operate against the person for whom it is intended and will have to be destroyed lest it turn against the magician who sent it forth. The failure of the medicine to achieve its purpose is due to breach of a taboo and not to witchcraft. If a man has had sexual relations with his wife and on the next day approaches the poison oracle it will not reveal the truth and its oracular efficacy will be permanently undermined. If he had not broken a taboo it would have been said that witchcraft had caused the oracle to lie, but the condition of the person who had attended the seance provides a reason for its failure to speak the truth without having to bring in the notion of witchcraft as an agent. No one will admit that he has broken a taboo before consulting the poison oracle, but when an oracle lies everyone is prepared to admit that a taboo may have been broken by someone.

Similarly, when a potter's creations break in firing witchcraft is not the only possible cause of the calamity. Inexperience and bad workmanship may also be reasons for failure, or the potter may himself have had sexual relations on the preceding night. The potter himself will attribute his failure to witchcraft, but others may not be of the same opinion.

Not even all deaths are invariably and unanimously attributed to witchcraft or to the breach of some taboo. The deaths of babies from certain diseases are attributed vaguely to the Supreme Being. Also, if a man falls suddenly and violently sick and dies, his relatives may be sure that a sorcerer has made magic against him and that it is not a witch who has killed him. A breach of the obligations of blood-brotherhood may sweep away whole groups of kin, and when one after another of brothers and cousins die it is the blood and not witchcraft to which their deaths are attributed by outsiders, though the relatives of the dead will seek to avenge them on witches. When a very old man dies unrelated people say that he has died of old age, but they do not say this in the presence of kinsmen, who declare that witchcraft is responsible for his death.

It is also thought that adultery may cause misfortune, though it is only one participating factor, and witchcraft is also believed to be present. Thus it is said that a man may be killed in warfare or in a hunting accident as a result of his wife's infidelities. Therefore, before going to war or on a large-scale hunting expedition a man might ask his wife to divulge the names of her lovers.

Even where breaches of law and morals do not occur witchcraft is not the only reason given for failure. Incompetence, laziness, and ignorance may be selected as causes. When a girl smashes her water-pot or a boy forgets to close the door of the hen-house at night they will be admonished severely by their parents for stupidity. The mistakes of children are due to carelessness or ignorance and they are taught to avoid them while they are still young. People do not say that they are effects of witchcraft, or if they are prepared to concede the possibility of witchcraft they consider stupidity the main cause. Moreover, the Zande is not so naïve that he holds witchcraft responsible for the cracking of a pot during firing if subsequent examination shows that a pebble was left in the clay, or for an animal escaping his net if someone frightened it away by a move or a sound. People do not blame witchcraft if a woman burns her porridge nor if she presents it undercooked to her husband. And when an inexperienced craftsman makes a stool which lacks polish or which splits, this is put down to his inexperience.

In all these cases the man who suffers the misfortune is likely to say that it is due to witchcraft, but others will not say so.

We must bear in mind nevertheless that a serious misfortune, especially if it results in death, is normally attributed by everyone to the action of witchcraft, especially by the sufferer and his kin, however much it may have been due to a man's incompetence or absence of self-control. If a man falls into a fire and is seriously burnt, or falls into a game-pit and breaks his neck or his leg, it would undoubtedly be attributed to witchcraft. Thus when six or seven of the sons of Prince Rikita were entrapped in a ring of fire and burnt to death when hunting cane-rats their death was undoubtedly due to witchcraft.

Hence we see that witchcraft has its own logic, its own rules of thought, and that these do not exclude natural causation. Belief in witchcraft is quite consistent with human responsibility and a rational appreciation of nature. First of all a man must carry out an activity according to traditional rules of technique, which consist of knowledge checked by trial and error in each generation. It is only if he fails in spite of adherence to these rules that people will impute his lack of success to witchcraft.

v

It is often asked whether primitive peoples distinguish between the natural and the supernatural, and the query may be here answered in a preliminary manner in respect to the Azande. The question as it stands may mean, do primitive peoples distinguish between the natural and the supernatural in the abstract? We have a notion of an ordered world conforming to what we call natural laws, but some people in our society believe that mysterious things can happen which cannot be accounted for by reference to natural laws and which therefore are held to transcend them, and we call these happenings supernatural. To us supernatural means very much the same as abnormal or extraordinary. Azande certainly have no such notions of reality. They have no conceptions of 'natural' as we understand it, and therefore neither of the 'supernatural' as we understand it. Witchcraft is to Azande an ordinary and not an extraordinary, even though it may in some circumstances be an infrequent, event. It is a normal, and not an abnormal, happening. But if they do not give to the natural and supernatural the meanings which educated Europeans give to them they nevertheless distinguish between them. For our question

may be formulated, and should be formulated, in a different manner. We ought rather to ask whether primitive peoples perceive any difference between the happenings which we, the observers of their culture, class as natural and the happenings which we class as mystical. Azande undoubtedly perceive a difference between what we consider the workings of nature on the one hand and the workings of magic and ghosts and witchcraft on the other hand, though in the absence of a formulated doctrine of natural law they do not, and cannot, express the difference as we express it.

The Zande notion of witchcraft is incompatible with our ways of thought. But even to the Azande there is something peculiar about the action of witchcraft. Normally it can be perceived only in dreams. It is not an evident notion but transcends sensory experience. They do not profess to understand witchcraft entirely. They know that it exists and works evil, but they have to guess at the manner in which it works. Indeed, I have frequently been struck when discussing witchcraft with Azande by the doubt they express about the subject, not only in what they say, but even more in their manner of saying it, both of which contrast with their ready knowledge, fluently imparted, about social events and economic techniques. They feel out of their depth in trying to describe the way in which witchcraft accomplishes its ends. That it kills people is obvious, but how it kills them cannot be known precisely. They tell you that perhaps if you were to ask an older man or a witch-doctor he might give you more information. But the older men and the witch-doctors can tell you little more than youth and laymen. They only know what the others know: that the soul of witchcraft goes by night and devours the soul of its victim. Only witches themselves understand these matters fully. In truth Azande experience feelings about witchcraft rather than ideas, for their intellectual concepts of it are weak and they know better what to do when attacked by it than how to explain it. Their response is action and not analysis.

There is no elaborate and consistent representation of witchcraft that will account in detail for its workings, nor of nature which expounds its conformity to sequences and functional interrelations. The Zande actualizes these beliefs rather than intellectualizes them, and their tenets are expressed in socially

controlled behaviour rather than in doctrines. Hence the difficulty of discussing the subject of witchcraft with Azande, for their ideas are imprisoned in action and cannot be cited to explain and justify action.

CHAPTER III

Sufferers from Misfortune seek
for Witches among their Enemies

I

WE must now view witchcraft in a more objective manner, for it is a mode of behaviour as well as a mode of thought. The reader will rightly ask what a Zande does when he is bewitched, how he discovers who is bewitching him, how he expresses his resentment and ensures his protection, and what system of control inhibits violent retaliation.

Only when the misfortune is death can vengeance or compensation be exacted for injury from witchcraft. In a lesser loss all that can be done is to expose the witch responsible and to persuade him to withdraw his baneful influence. When a man suffers an irreparable loss it is therefore useless for him to pursue the matter further, since no compensation can be obtained for the loss, and a witch cannot undo what he has already done. In such circumstances a Zande laments his misfortune and blames witchcraft in general, but is unlikely to take steps to identify any particular witch since the man will either deny his responsibility or will say that he is not conscious of having caused anyone an injury, and that if he has done so unwittingly he is sorry, and in either case the sufferer will be no better off.

But if a misfortune is incipient there is sound reason for immediate identification of the witch responsible since he can be persuaded to withdraw his witchcraft before matters take a serious turn. If game is scarce at the end of the hunting season it is useless to seek out the witches who have scared it away, but at the height of the season discovery of the witches may result in a good bag. If a man is bitten by a poisonous snake he either gets well soon or he dies. Should he recover, no good can come of asking the oracles for the name of the witch responsible for the bite. But if a man falls sick and his sickness is likely to be serious and of some duration, then his relatives approach