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THE CUSTOM OF COUVADE

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MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE MIAOTZU
THE COUVADE

From a Chinese manuscript album of the late eighteenth century, the property of Dr. S. W. Bushell, C.M.G., in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

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THE CUSTOM
OF
COUVADE

BY

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of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
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MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS

1929

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To
GRAFTON ELLIOT SMITH, F.R.S
IN FRIENDSHIP

PREFACE

THE custom of couvade, one of the most curious ever adopted by man, has for centuries impressed inquirers by its oddity and puzzled them as to its interpretation. Much has been written on the subject, and in the bibliography at the end of this volume are assembled many records of the observation of the custom of couvade—the earliest dating from the beginning of the Christian era—and many works that discuss its significance and attempt to explain it. In Chapters II. to VI. are grouped, roughly in geographical order, instances of the occurrence of the custom; in Chapter VII. its geographical distribution as a whole is considered; and in the final chapter is a summary of the views put forward by various writers as to the meaning of the custom, together with some comments thereon. By reserving the comments for the last chapter, it has not been necessary to encumber the text with numerous remarks, and consequently the material is merely arrayed without digression.

This little book is built up very largely of extracts from the works of actual observers of the custom, and from those of well-known authorities who have discussed it. It has been considered better to state the facts in the various authors' own words rather than to paraphrase or epitomize them, except in a few cases where the passages were too

long or too obscure to be presented in their original form. In every case references are given, so that my extracts or summaries can be verified. Amongst the most valuable contributions to the subject are those of the late Sir Edward Tylor, the late Mr. H. Ling Roth, and Sir James Frazer. I have freely made use of all the material brought together by these and other writers, and have supplemented this by references to a number of other publications that have appeared since the works of my predecessors were published, or were overlooked by them. I have been careful in all cases to verify the bibliographical references (and, incidentally, I found many in need of correction), and in all but a few cases have consulted the original works. The bibliography does not claim to be a complete one of its subject, but all the works therein enumerated bear directly upon the custom of *couvade* or closely related topics; all other works consulted or quoted are referred to in the footnotes.

I cannot claim to have solved the problem of *couvade*, but at the same time I hope I have succeeded in clearing away some of the valueless debris that has hitherto encumbered the discussion. My object has been to collect into a convenient compass the material for the reconsideration of a puzzling and interesting problem. These materials have been gathered from nearly two hundred different sources, many of them not easy of access. Some further material is considered in the Appendix.

W. R. D.

LONDON, *December* 1928.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
CHAP. I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE COUVADE IN EUROPE	9
III. THE COUVADE IN AFRICA	16
IV. THE COUVADE IN ASIA	19
V. THE COUVADE IN THE ISLANDS	28
VI. THE COUVADE IN AMERICA	43
VII. THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF COUVADE	56
VIII. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COUVADE	70
APPENDIX ¹	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY	103
INDEX	115

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

N.B.—*The numbers in Clarendon Type refer to the Bibliography at the end of this volume.*

THE word *couvade* was first used by Tylor as a technical term in anthropology to designate a series of related customs connected with childbirth (124).¹ These customs require that the father of a child, at or before its birth and for some time after the event, should take to his bed, submit himself to diet and behave generally as though he, and not his wife, were undergoing the rigours of the confinement. In its perfect form, the husband observing the *couvade* takes to his bed and pretends to be lying-in, sometimes even simulating by groans and contortions the pains of labour, and sometimes even dressing in his wife's clothes. Whilst in bed, he is pampered and fed on dainties, nurses the infant, and receives the felicitations of his relatives and friends.

¹ The word *couvade* is French, and means "brooding" or "hatching". For its etymology, see *The New English Dictionary* ["The Oxford English Dictionary"], vol. ii. p. 1099. Cf. also 1; 35; 124. It has also been suggested that *couvade* is derived from the Spanish *encovar*, *cueva*, etc., and refers to the covering, or withdrawing, of the husband (78, p. 198). This etymology is not generally accepted. Some German ethnologists have termed the custom *Männerkindbett*, whence the English name of "man childbed" is sometimes employed.

2 THE CUSTOM OF COUVADE

Frequently for some time before the birth, and in some instances from the very commencement of his wife's pregnancy, the husband is required to submit to a strict diet and to avoid hard work or the handling of weapons and tools, and to abstain from hunting, smoking and other amusements. In the following chapters will be found numerous instances of these curious procedures, as well as of many degenerate forms of couvade. In the latter, the part played by the husband often amounts to little more than the observance of certain food taboos and some restriction upon his usual occupations. Even in the most complete forms of couvade, the husband's lot is not always a happy one: he is not always the pampered object of his wife's attentions, but often has to submit to starvation for a long period and to ceremonies that involve him in severe physical pain. Many variations of the custom will be found amongst the actual recorded cases collected in the subsequent chapters, but, no matter what precise form the custom may assume, the underlying principle is always evident. ✓

Before passing on to the consideration of the actual cases of couvade in many lands, there are two cases that deserve special consideration, since these are in the nature of religious ceremonies, and as such stand quite apart from the customary form of couvade which is practised only by individual husbands upon the actual birth of a child. It will be convenient to deal with these two instances, from Cyprus and from Ireland respectively, before proceeding further.

Giraud-Teulon tells us that a form of couvade was practised in Cyprus, and says "*chez les Cypriens un homme se met au lit et imite les cris et les con-*

tortions d'une femme en couches" (39). He quotes Plutarch's *Theseus* (80) as his authority for this statement. On referring to Plutarch's text, however, we find that this case is altogether exceptional, for the rite referred to is clearly part of a religious ceremony. In this instance the couvade is a pure fiction, for it is not performed by a husband upon the birth of a child as is the case in all normal couvades throughout the world. ✓

Plutarch relates that Theseus, whose ship was driven upon the coast of Cyprus during a storm, there landed Ariadne, who was then on the eve of confinement. Returning to attend to the anchorage of his vessel, the tempest immediately carried the ship out to sea, and Theseus was thus involuntarily parted from Ariadne. Meanwhile Ariadne, who was received kindly by the Cyprian women, gave birth to her child, but died at its delivery. Theseus, returning soon after, was distracted with grief, and on leaving the island "he left a sum of money among the inhabitants, ordering them to make sacrifice to Ariadne, and caused two little images to be made; the one of silver, the other of bronze. Moreover, on the second day of the month Gorpiaeus [September], which is sacred to Ariadne, they have this ceremony among their sacrifices: to have a youth lie down and by his voice and gestures simulate the pains of a woman in travail" (80).¹

The idea of couvade, namely, a man simulating

¹ ἐπελθόντα δὲ τὸν Θησέα καὶ περίλυπον γενόμενον τοῖς μὲν ἐγχωρίοις ἀπολιπεῖν χρήματα, συντάξαντα θύειν τῇ Ἀριάδνῃ, δύο δὲ μικροὺς ἀνδριαντίσκους ἰδρύσασθαι, τὸν μὲν ἀργυροῦν, τὸν δὲ χαλκοῦν. ἐν δὲ τῇ θυσίᾳ τοῦ Γορπιαίου μηνὸς ἵσταμένου δευτέρᾳ κατακλινόμενόν τινα τῶν νεανίσκων φθέγγεσθαι καὶ ποιεῖν ἅπερ ὠδίνουσαι γυναῖκες.

the pains of childbirth, clearly underlies this curious ceremony instituted by Theseus in commemoration of the fatal labour of Ariadne.

The other exceptional case is a Celtic legend from Ireland, and this has come down to us in two manuscripts of the twelfth and fifteenth centuries respectively. A translation, with a philological commentary, was published many years ago, first by Windisch (137) and later by H. D'Arbois de Jubanville (51), from which the story may be summarized as follows:

There was a certain rich Ulster farmer named Crunniuc, whose wife died. After some time a mysterious woman entered the house, and immediately made herself fully at home, tending the children, ordering the household and acting generally as if she had ever belonged to the family. In course of time she conceived by Crunniuc, and the date of her expected delivery coincided with the great festival called Oenach. Owing to her condition, she was unable to attend the fête, but her husband set off, receiving from his wife a parting injunction to say nothing imprudent. In the course of the festival there was a horse-race, and it was won by the king's horses. "Could anything be swifter than these horses?" said the bystanders. "My wife can run faster," said Crunniuc. This imprudent utterance, made in entire disregard of his wife's warning, was overheard by the king, who took it as an insult, and gave orders for the arrest of Crunniuc. The king further ordered that the wife should be brought forthwith to run a race with his horses.

The king's messengers accordingly set out to fetch the wife of Crunniuc. His wife declared that

Crunniuc was wrong in his statement, but that in any case her condition prevented her compliance with the king's order, and she begged passionately for delay. The king's command, however, had to be obeyed, and the hapless woman was dragged off to the course. Arrived there, she made a further fervent appeal, for she already felt the pains of labour. The exasperated king ordered Crunniuc to be beheaded. Yet again the woman begged for delay until her delivery should be accomplished, but the relentless king still refused. The woman thereupon uttered a solemn declaration that for the wrong done to her the king should suffer a greater. "What is your name?" inquired the king. "I am called Macha," she replied, "the daughter of the Stranger [Sainred] Son of the Ocean [Imbath]; the place of this festival shall ever bear my name and that of that which is within my womb. Make ready the horses!"

The race began, and when the king's horses reached the winning-post, Macha had already arrived. There and then, beneath the very horses' heads, she gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl; and the place was thenceforth known as the "Twins of Macha" [Emain Macha], and was long the capital of Ulster. At the moment of her delivery, Macha uttered a loud cry. All the men who heard it were struck with a kind of enchantment. They were doomed to suffer once in their life the pains of childbirth for five days and four nights or for four days and five nights. This was called "*The Nine-night Week of the Ulates*".¹ During this period the men had no more strength than a woman in

¹ Concerning this week, cf. 85, pp. 360, 365.

travail, and this strange affliction passed from father to son for nine generations. From this curse only the hero Cuchulainn was exempted. When the epic queen Medb invaded the kingdom of the Ulates [Ulster], and began the war which is the subject of the principal Irish epics, all the warriors of Ulster were afflicted with their predicted curse, and, with the single exception of Cuchulainn, were unable to fight.

This remarkable story is evidently of mythological origin. The enforced couvade of the men was the vengeance of the outraged goddess for the wrongs done to her. It has a curious parallel in the story related by Herodotus of the vengeance of the injured deity upon the Scythians, who had pillaged her temple in the Syrian city of Askalon. "The goddess inflicted on the Scythians who robbed her temple at Askalon, and on all their posterity, a female disease; so that the Scythians confess that they are afflicted with it on that account, and those who visit Scythia may behold the state of those whom the Scythians call Enarees." ¹

We do not know the nature of the disease that the goddess inflicted upon those who had wronged her, but the Scythian and Irish stories are exact parallels in that an affliction peculiar to women was in both cases transferred to men. We shall have occasion to refer in a later chapter to these remarkable legends.

¹ Herodotus, i. 105 τοῖσι δὲ τῶν Σκυθέων συλήσασι τὸ ἱρὸν τὸ ἐν Ἀσκάλῳ καὶ τοῖσι τούτων αἰεὶ ἐκγόνοισι ἐνέσκηψε ὁ θεὸς θήλειαν νοῦσον. ὥστε ἅμα λέγουσιν τε οἱ Σκύθαι διὰ τοῦτό σφεας νοσέειν, καὶ ὁρᾶν παρ' ἐωντοῖσι τοὺς ἀπικνεομένους ἐς τὴν Σκυθικὴν χώραν ὡς διακᾶται, τοὺς καλέουσι ἐνάρεας οἱ Σκύθαι.

We may also note some further customs which may properly be considered in connection with *couvade*. Hesychius and other writers refer to an ancient Athenian custom called *Amphidromia*, in which a new-born child is carried round the domestic hearth. M. Salomon Reinach, in an interesting study of this custom (84), points out that the child was not carried round by the mother, nor by any other woman (as often erroneously stated), but was borne by a *man*, a naked man, who seized the child and ran round the hearth. He explains the significance both of the running and the nakedness of the runner, and brings evidence to show that the object of the rite was to make the child active and swift of foot, and quotes some striking modern survivals of the custom. The performance of this act by the father (rather than the mother) for the benefit of the child brings the rite, in the opinion of M. Reinach, into the same category as other acts of sympathetic magic performed by a father for the welfare of his child, of which he considers *couvade* to be a conspicuous example.

The rearing of infants by men, a custom which, according to Diodorus Siculus, was observed by the Amazons of Western Libya, may possibly be connected with *couvade*. There were two legendary races of Amazons: those of Pontus, near the borders of the Black Sea,¹ and those of Libya.² In both these tribes the women exclusively managed all the affairs of government, and the army was composed solely of female soldiers. To the men were relegated all menial duties and all household cares,

¹ Herodotus, iv. 110-117; Diodorus Siculus, ii. 44.

together with the rearing of children. In the words of Diodorus, "when the Amazons bear children, the male infants are immediately handed over to the men, who rear them on milk or upon cooked foods, according to the age of the children. As to the female infants, as soon as they are born, their breasts are burnt, so that they do not grow with the other parts of their bodies, and that the development of the breasts may not be an obstacle to military exercises." According to other accounts, the right breast only was amputated in order that it might not impede the use of the bow. This superiority of women and consequent subordination of men—the gynccocracy—is held by some writers to be related to couvade (*e.g.* 13); but whether there be any relationship or not, both are interesting examples of the inversion of the usual functions of the sexes, or of the simulating by the one the status of the other.

A Basque legend concerning the origin of couvade is related in the Appendix (see p. 91).

CHAPTER II

THE COUVADE IN EUROPE

IN the previous chapter we have called attention to a curious custom formerly practised in Cyprus, which, if not true couvade, is closely related to it. The next instance to be noticed is that of Corsica, where, according to Diodorus Siculus, the custom was practised in ancient times. Writing of the Corsicans in the first century A.D., Diodorus informs us that "one of the most curious features of their customs is that which they observe at the birth of their children. When a woman becomes a mother she pays no heed to the period of lying-in; but her husband, as though he were an invalid, takes to his bed and is waited upon during the period of accouchement with as much attention as if he were really suffering bodily pain" (30).¹

A couvade lasting eight days is, or lately was, observed in the Balearic Islands (78, p. 198; 6, p. 778).

3

As regards Spain, the earliest record of couvade in the Iberian Peninsula is that of Strabo, who

¹ παραδοξότατον δ' ἐστὶ τὸ παρ' αὐτοῖς γινόμενον κατὰ τὰς τῶν τέκνων γενέσεις· ὅταν γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ τέκνη, ταύτης μὲν οὐδεμία γίνεται περὶ τὴν λοχείαν ἐπιμέλεια, ὁ δ' ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς ἀναπεσὼν ὡς νοσῶν λοχεύεται τακτὰς ἡμέρας, ὡς τοῦ σώματος αὐτῷ κακοπαθοῦντος.

says: "These [pursuits] are common to both sides among the Celtic races in Thrace and Scythia—even manliness is common to men and women. The women till the land, and when they have given birth to children, they put their husbands to bed in their own stead and nurse them" (113).¹

This account appears to be quite unequivocal, but some modern writers believe that Strabo's statement is open to doubt as to whether couvade is actually referred to (*e.g.* Dr. Murray, 1, p. 459). In view of the abundant testimony—both ancient and modern—that exists as to the custom of couvade elsewhere, there seems to be no good reason for doubting it. Certain writers affirm that the custom has survived amongst the Basques in modern times: such was the opinion of Quatrefages (83) and of Michel (69). Laborde says "les femmes Cantabres portaient les fardeaux les plus lourds; elles cultivaient les champagnes, labouraient les champs et ne négligeaient aucune espèce de travaux; elles se levaient aussitôt après être accouchées et servaient leurs maris, qui se mettaient au lit à leur place, usage qui fut aussi commun aux habitants de la Navarre, et dont il est impossible de rendre raison" (58).

Zamacola, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, refers to Strabo's account of the ancient Cantabri and says that the modern Basques have the same manners and customs. After mentioning several points of resemblance, this author

¹ κοινὰ δὲ καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς τὰ Κελτικὰ ἔθνη καὶ τὰ Θράκια καὶ Σκυθικά, κοινὰ δὲ καὶ τὰ πρὸς ἀνδρείαν τήν τε τῶν ἀνδρῶν καὶ τήν τῶν γυναικῶν. γεωργοῦσι αὐται, τεκοῦσαι τε διακονοῦσι τοῖς ἀνδράσιν, ἐκείνους ἀνθ' ἑαυτῶν κατακλίνασαι.

writes: "And finally [Strabo says] that these women, as soon as they had borne a child, got up from the bed, while the husband lay down in it with the baby, just as was done a short time ago in many parts of Cantabria, because it was a natural duty and a custom amongst the Basques that the first sweat or shelter that the child received should be that of his father to identify him with the humours and spirit of his parents" (141, translated from the Spanish).

Ripley, whilst denying the statement that couvade is practised in Spain at the present day, admits that "there is no likelier spot for it to have survived in Europe than here in the Pyrenees; but it must be confessed that no direct proof of its existence can be found to-day, guide-books to the contrary notwithstanding" (86). A more recent writer has given good grounds for the opinion that couvade is not now, nor has lately been, practised by the Basques, but that the custom or tradition of it survives in other parts of northern Spain, as in the Balearic Islands (6). The general result of the investigation seems to point to the fact that couvade in Spain has not survived to the present day (130), but there seems to be no good reason for doubting either Strabo's statement or the continuance of couvade long after Strabo's time. The statements of such writers as Brissaud (19) are of a purely negative character. This writer, with apparent disregard of the literature of the subject, discusses the alleged statements of a mayor and of a schoolmaster who stated that they had known instances of the custom. He comes to the conclusion that such stories are deliberate attempts at "mysti-

fication", and that there never was couvade amongst either the Basques or Béarnais; and further, that the reports of such a custom are modern inventions, and that the Basques attribute couvade to the Béarnais and vice versa.

There is too much evidence, both direct and indirect, that such an "explanation" fails to account for (see below, p. 92).

We have already seen that Laborde states that at the commencement of the nineteenth century couvade was common amongst the inhabitants of Navarre (58, 59), and in this connection the medieval tradition preserved in the story of Aucassin and Nicolette is interesting. "Legrand d'Aussy mentions that in an old French fabliau the king of Torelore is 'au lit et en couche' when Aucassin arrives and takes a stick to him, and makes him promise to abolish the custom in his realm. And the same author goes on to say that the practice is still said to exist in some cantons of Bearn, where it is called *faire la couvade*" (124, pp. 295-296, quoting Legrand d'Aussy, *Fabliaux du XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, 3rd ed., Paris, 1829).

Mention has just been made of the province of Béarn, on the French side of the Pyrenees. In France the tradition of couvade has survived in the old saying, "Il se met au lit quand sa femme est en couche" (78, p. 197), and in the custom of placing the husband's garments upon the wife at the moment of delivery in order to transfer the pains of childbirth from the latter to the former. A seventeenth century writer refers thus to the custom: "Quand une femme est en mal d'enfant luy faire mettre le haut-de-chausse de son mari,

afin qu'elle accouche sans douleur" (117). Similar customs have been recorded from Germany (138).¹

M. Salomon Reinach records a curious ceremony that was observed about 1880 in a coastal village near Coutances (Manche), in the north of France. An infant a few months old had died, and, whilst waiting for the body to be placed in a little coffin immediately before its removal to the cemetery, the child's mother, *and father*, retired to bed and, reclining there, received the condolences of each of the mourners invited to the funeral, who came one by one to the bedside (84, p. 688, note 1).

Whilst making no attempt to explain this singular custom, it is worthy of being placed amongst the French survivals of the couvade.

In the British Isles the tradition of couvade survives in the beliefs still current that the pregnancy or confinement of a woman affects her husband, and that the former is relieved from pain in proportion as the latter suffers it (15; 33). Such beliefs have been recorded in recent years from Oxfordshire, Cheshire, Yorkshire and elsewhere (2; 15); and similar ideas have degenerated into "married man's toothache", of which many instances could be given. In the north-east of Scotland a belief still lingers that if the husband is the first to rise on the morning after his marriage, he will bear all the pains of childbirth when his wife's time arrives (91). We have, however, more definite evidence of couvade than these shadowy traditions. It was believed in Scotland, for instance, in the eighteenth century, and probably later, that the

¹ Other German customs which are akin to, or perhaps derived from, couvade are noted by Hartland (45, pp. 410-411).

nurse could voluntarily transfer the pains of child-birth from the mother to the father. This introduces a new element, namely, witchcraft, but the couvade tradition is clear. Thomas Pennant, writing of his visit to Langholm, Dumfriesshire, in 1772, relates that "the midwives had the power of transferring part of the primeval curse bestowed upon our first great mother from the good wife to her husband. I saw the reputed offspring of such a labour, who kindly came into the world without giving her mother the least uneasiness, while the poor husband was roaring with agony and in uncouth and unnatural pains" (76). A similar practice has been recorded from Ireland, where it was believed that the pains of maternity could be transferred from mother to father by the nurse, who made magical use of the man's garments taken from him and laid on the mother. "It is asserted by some that the husband's consent must first be obtained, but the general opinion is that he feels all the pain, and even cries out with agony, without being aware of the cause" (71; similar cases, 41).

There is an old Irish saying that preserves the couvade tradition: "You'll soon have to go to bed with the old woman and be nursed as they did years ago" (33; 78, p. 196). Mr. Donald A. Mackenzie informs me that there is an old Highland saying that is still occasionally heard: *Chuir i piantan air an duine*, "put she the pains on the man".

Finally, we may quote the following curious case that appeared in the press in 1884: "We heard lately, from a source that is above suspicion, of the survival in a certain district of Yorkshire of a

practice bearing no little resemblance to the *couvade*. When an illegitimate child is born, it is a point of honour with the girl not to reveal the father; but the mother of the girl forthwith goes out to look for him, and the first man she finds keeping his bed is he" (2; also quoted in the *Folk Lore Journal*, vol. ii., 1884, p. 121).

Some further traces of the *couvade* and of analogous customs in Europe are noted in the Appendix (see below, p. 93).

CHAPTER III

THE COUVADE IN AFRICA

DEFINITE instances of the couvade are extremely rare in Africa. There is no trace whatever of the custom in the records of ancient Egypt, and no tradition of it amongst the modern Egyptians. Elsewhere in Africa there are some instances of the idea underlying the custom, *i.e.* the participation by the husband in the risks of the pregnancy of his wife by the imposition on him of certain restrictions. Thus, amongst the Bagesu, a people inhabiting the district of Mount Elgon, north-east of Lake Victoria, a modified form of couvade exists. When a Bagesu woman is pregnant, "her husband has to refrain from climbing any trees or high rocks or on to house-tops, and when walking down a hill he had to go carefully, for, should he slip and fall, his wife might have a miscarriage"(92).

It appears, too, that couvade is practised in the region of the White Nile, Southern Soudan, and also amongst the Dinkas. A correspondent informed Roth that "in the Shuli district the women are held in high esteem. They are looked up to by the men, and counsel is taken of them in most of the affairs of life. In this district, to the best of my belief, couvade really exists, because for some days

before and after a child's birth, the father remains in or near the hut, refrains from certain kinds of meat (what, I do not know), and generally takes care of himself, that the infant may not be harmed. Again, amongst the Dinkas a somewhat similar custom obtains. For two or three days after the birth of a child the father remains in the hut, pays great attention to it, and nurses it" (94, p. 216).

The couvade motive seems to underlie the action of the natives at Goumbi (Nigeria), related by Du Chaillu and quoted by Roth (94, p. 236). When the famous traveller brought a female gorilla into camp, "while she was alive, no woman who was enceinte, *nor the husband of such woman*, dared approach her cage. They believe firmly that should the husband of a woman with child, or the woman herself, see a gorilla, even a dead one, she would give birth to a gorilla and not to a man child. This superstition I have noticed among other tribes too, and only in the case of the gorilla" (21, p. 262). On another occasion, when the body of a dead gorilla was brought into the village, three women who were pregnant hastened from the village *with their husbands*, and nothing could induce them to return until the skin of the beast had been dried and put away, as they were firmly convinced that if even their husbands saw the animal, the wives would bear gorillas instead of children (21, p. 305).

The missionary Zucchelli found a form of couvade in the eighteenth century amongst a Bantu people at Kasanje (Congo). Here the husband went to bed for several days and was tended by his wife (142; 143). Roth doubts the authenticity of this statement (94, p. 216). In the same region of Africa,

however, we have a well-attested modern instance of the occurrence of couvade. The following episode is related of the Bushongo, a tribe living among the Bantu races of the Congo Basin. They are believed to have migrated southwards from the edge of the Sahara, near Lake Tchad, and are related to the Azande:

“ From behind a wall a pretty girl looked maliciously at Miko-Mikope, a very handsome young man, who sat in front of his house smoking and tried hard to look unconcerned. It was no good, everyone knew, and the pretty girl knew, that he was as good as a prisoner; his wife was expecting a baby, and, in accordance with the custom of the country, had cut his belt; if he rose, his clothes would fall off, and—oh, horror! at any moment he might be called, not to the bed of his wife, but to go to bed himself and be nursed till the trouble was over” (122).

Possible survivals of the couvade amongst the Boloki of the Congo and in Madagascar are recorded in the Appendix (see below, p. 94).

The Nandi of East Africa have a custom that may possibly be akin to couvade, for a man whose wife is suckling a baby is not allowed to touch the threshold of his dwelling, nor anything within it, except his own bed.¹

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*, vol. iii. (London, 1919), p. 6.

CHAPTER IV

THE COUVADE IN ASIA

Two ancient writers, Apollonius Rhodius and Valerius Flaccus, have recorded the couvade custom amongst a people called the Tibareni of Pontus, which is situated to the north-east of Asia Minor, south of the Black Sea. Apollonius Rhodius relates that after leaving the mountains of the Genetaean Zeus, the voyagers reach the land of the Tibareni; “there, when the women bear children to their men, the latter take to their beds and groan with their heads tied up, while the women pamper them with tasty food and prepare for them the baths proper to childbirth” (5).¹ The same people are referred to by Valerius Flaccus, who says: “Thence they pass the mountain of the Genetaean Jupiter, and put behind them the green lakes of the Tibarenians, where [the woman] swaddles her child in the folds of her head-cloth, and after childbirth nurses her man” (128).²

¹ τοὺς δὲ μέτ' αὐτίκ' ἔπειτα Γενηταίου Διὸς ἄκρην
γνάμψαντες σῶοντο παρὲς Τιβαρηνίδα γαίαν.
ἔνθ' ἐπεὶ ἄρ κε τέκωνται ὑπ' ἀνδράσι τέκνα γυναῖκες,
αὐτοὶ μὲν στενάχουσιν ἐνὶ λεχέεσσι πεσόντες,
κράατα δησάμενοι· ταὶ δ' εὖ κομέουσιν ἔδωδῇ
ἀνέρας, ἣδὲ λοετρὰ λεχώια τοῖσι πίνονται.

² Inde Genetaei rupem Iovis, hinc Tibarenum
dant virides post terga lacus, ubi deside mitra
feta ligat, partuque virum fovet ipsa soluto.

Couvade has been recorded from many localities in India. The earliest reference to the custom is contained in the writings of Alberuni (c. 1300 A.D.), who, speaking of the Hindus, says: "When a child is born, people show particular attention to the man, not to the woman" (3). In Southern India there is a proverb, "'Tis like a Korovan eating asafoetida when his wife lies-in", and this refers to the couvade custom amongst the low-caste Madras race of Korovans. "Whereas native women generally eat asafoetida as a strengthening medicine after childbirth, it is the husband who eats it to fortify himself on the occasion. This, in fact, is a variety of the world-wide custom of 'couvade', where at childbirth the husband undergoes medical treatment, in many cases being put to bed for days. It appears that the Korovans are among the races practising this quaint custom, and that their more civilized Tamil neighbours, struck by its oddity, but unconscious of its now forgotten meaning, have taken it up as a proverb" (125).

At Gujarat a goddess is worshipped whose power is extended for the benefit of women after childbirth. "Among a very low-caste set of basket-makers (called Pomlā) it is the usual practice of a wife to go about her work immediately after delivery, as if nothing had happened. The presiding Mātā of the tribe is supposed to transfer her weakness to her husband, who takes to his bed and has to be supported with good nourishing food" (136).

Among the Ereculus or Yerukalas in Southern India, "directly the woman feels the birth-pangs she informs her husband, who immediately takes

some of her clothes, puts them on, places on his forehead the mark which the women usually place on theirs, retires into a dark room, where there is only a very dim lamp, and lies down on the bed, covering himself up with a long cloth. When the child is born, it is washed and placed on the cot beside the father, asafoetida, jaggery and other articles are then given, not to the mother, but to the father. During the days of ceremonial uncleanness, the man is treated as the Hindus treat their women on such occasions. He is not allowed to leave his bed, but has everything needful brought to him" (20).

The following extracts contain many interesting particulars:

"Among the Koravars or basket-makers of Malabar, as soon as the pains of delivery come upon a pregnant woman, she is taken to an outlying shed, and left alone to live or die as the event may turn out. No help is given to her for twenty-eight days. Even medicines are thrown to her from a distance; and the only assistance rendered is to place a jar of warm water close by her just before the child is born. Pollution from birth is held to be worse than that from death. At the end of the twenty-eight days the hut in which she was confined is burnt down. The father, too, is polluted for fourteen days, and at the end of that time he is purified, not like other castes by the barber, but by holy water obtained from the Brāhmans at temples or elsewhere.

"Among various other classes it is customary for the husband to remove the pollution caused by his wife's confinement by means of ceremonial ablution.

“To Mr. G. Krishna Rao, Superintendent of Police in the Shimoga district of Mysore, I am indebted for the following note on the couvade as practised among the Koramas:

“ ‘Mr. Rice, in the *Mysore Gazette*, says that among the Koravars it is said that, when a woman is confined, her husband takes medicine for her. At the instance of the British Resident, I made inquiries, and learned that the Kukke (basket-making) Koramas, lying at Gopola Village, near Shimoga, had this custom among them. The husband learns from his wife the probable time of her confinement, and keeps at home awaiting the delivery. As soon as she is confined, he goes to bed for three days, and takes medicine consisting of chicken and mutton broth spiced with ginger, pepper, onions, garlic, etc. He drinks arrack, and eats as good food as he can afford, while his wife is given boiled rice with a very small quantity of salt, for fear that a larger quantity may induce thirst. There is generally a Koramar midwife to help the wife, and the husband does nothing but eat, drink and sleep. The clothes of the husband, the wife and the midwife are given to a washerwoman to be washed on the fourth day, and the persons themselves have a wash. After this purification, the family gives a dinner to the caste-people, which finishes the ceremonial connected with child-birth. One of the men examined by me, who was more intelligent than the rest, explained that the man’s life was more valuable than that of the woman, and that the husband, being a more important factor in the birth of the child than the wife, deserves to be better looked after.’

“The following legend is current among the Koramas to explain the practice of couvade among them. One day a donkey belonging to a Korama camp pitched outside a village, wandered into a Brāhman’s field, and did considerable damage to the crop. The Brāhman was naturally angry, and ordered his coolies to pull down the hut of the owner of the donkey. The Korama, putting himself at the feet of the Brāhman, for want of a better excuse, said that he was not aware of what his animal was doing, for at the time he was taking medicine for his wife and could not look after it. It is suggested in the Mysore Census Report, 1901, that the practice of the couvade has either long ceased to exist, or is a mere myth based upon a proverb evolved out of a Brāhman’s gullibility in accepting the plea that a Korama was eating medicine because his wife was in childbed as a conclusive proof of an alibi on his behalf.

“It is noted by the Rev. S. Mateer (*Journ. Royal Asiatic Soc.* xvi.) that after the confinement of a Paraiyan woman in Travancore, the husband is starved for seven days, eating no cooked rice or other food, only roots and fruits; and drinking only arrack or toddy [171].

“Possibly, as suggested by Reclus, the following Toda custom . . . is a survival of the couvade: After the child is born, the mother is removed to a shed, which has been erected in some sequestered spot, in anticipation of the approaching event. There she remains until the next new moon, and for a month after her return home she appears to have the house to herself, her husband remaining indebted to friends for shelter meanwhile.

“The Nayādis of the Cochin State erect a special small hut to which the woman retires when taken in labour. She is attended to by various female relations, and her husband all the while goes on shampooing his own abdomen, and praying to the mountain gods for the safe delivery of his wife. As soon as the child is born, he offers thanks to them for ‘having got the child out’ ” (120).

The couvade custom does not appear to be confined to the lower castes in India. “[The couvade] is usual among natives of the higher castes about Madras, Seringapatam and on the Malabar coast. It is stated that a man, at the birth of his first son or daughter by the chief wife, or for any son afterwards, will retire to bed for a lunar month, living principally on a rice diet, abstaining from exciting food and from smoking; at the end of the month he bathes, puts on a fresh dress and gives his friends a feast” (124, 2nd ed. p. 301).

The custom of couvade has been recorded from various parts of Northern India. Thus amongst the Miri tribe of the Brahmaputra valley “the father is represented as a second mother, and goes through the fiction of a mock-birth, the so-called *couvade*. He lies in bed for forty days after the birth of his child; and during this period he is fed as an invalid” (131).

In Assam couvade is practised by various tribes (42). “Among the Tangkhuls the husband may not go out of the village or do any work after the birth of a child for six days if the child be a boy, or for five days when the child is a girl” (46).

The following birth customs of the Hindus in Northern India are akin to couvade, in that the

father plays the prominent rôle: "Among those castes which follow Brahminical rules, after the child is born, the first birth rite is performed. The father bathes, offers prayers to the god Ganesa, patron of good-luck and remover of obstacles, imploring him that the child may be good, strong and wise; that, if she has become specially impure by violating any of the prescribed rules of conduct or food, the mother's sin may be forgiven, and that its consequences may not be visited upon the baby. He then invokes the sainted ancestors of his family, of the nine planets which preside over domestic rites. With a golden skewer or the third finger of his right hand he smears the tongue of the child with a mixture of butter and honey, while a prayer is recited asking that the child may be endowed with all material blessings. The father then takes the child in his arms, and, touching each member of its body while reciting the suitable formula, prays that they (*sic*) may be endowed with strength. Finally, the father is purified by asperging him with holy water sprinkled from a brush made of sacred grass. The husband thus joins in the taboo which surrounds his wife, a belief which is probably at the root of the curious custom of the couvade" (26).

Similar purification ceremonies are performed by the father in Central India. "This habit of the husband taking a purifying dose after his wife has borne a child is very common among many of the forest tribes of Central India. The father is purified in a different way by the Deshasht Brāhmans of Bombay, who insist, when a birth occurs in the family, on the father jumping into a well with all

his clothes on; after which he is allowed to pour drops of honey and butter into the child's mouth, as a sign that it is admitted into the caste" (25).

Writing on the Sonjhara caste of the Central Provinces, Russell states: "In Bilāspur the Sonjharas observe the custom of the couvade, and for six days after the birth of a child, the husband lies prone in his house, while the wife gets up and goes to work, coming home to give suck to the child when necessary. The man takes no food for three days, and on the fourth is given ginger and raw sugar, thus undergoing the ordinary treatment of a woman after childbirth. This is supposed by them to be a sort of compensation for the labours sustained by the woman in bearing the child". The custom is now dying out (96).

The Venetian traveller Marco Polo describes the custom in Zardandau, in Chinese Turkestan: "And when one of their wives has been delivered of a child, the infant is washed and swathed, and the woman gets up and goes about her household duties, whilst the husband takes to bed with the child by his side, and so keeps his bed for forty days; and all the kith and kin come to visit him and keep up a great festivity. They do this because, they say, the woman has had a hard bout of it, and 'tis but fair that the man should have his share of the suffering" (140, p. 52).

The Langzi, the aborigines of the department of Weihsing, observe the couvade for forty days (as do also, as we have seen, the Miris of Assam). It was probably Marco Polo's story that gave rise to Butler's allusion in *Hudibras* (iii. Canto i, 70):

For though Chinese go to bed
And lie-in, in their ladies' stead.

It appears, however, that the real Chinese do not practise couvade, and the above-named instances gave a false impression (32).¹ The custom, however, was formerly observed by the Ainu of Japan. Batchelor records that "a curious custom used to exist amongst this people. As soon as the child was born, the father had to consider himself very ill, and had, therefore, to stay at home, wrapped by the fire. But the wife, poor creature! had to stir about as much and as quickly as possible. The idea seems to have been that life was passing from the father into his child" (11).

The most northerly locality in Asia in which any trace of the couvade can be found is Kamchatka, where the husband's operations are restricted before the birth of a child. He is not allowed to do heavy or dangerous work, such as bending sledge-staves across his knee, as such actions would harm his wife (124, p. 292). In his account of Kamchatka, Steller relates the following episode: "It happened in my time that a woman as a rare case had a child which was born with a breech-presentation, and she had to endure the pains of labour for three days. The Shamans said that the man was responsible for it, as, at the time the child was born, he was making a sledge, and necessarily bent the staves into their curved shape across his knee, from which one can see the absurd fancies of the inhabitants" (112, translated).

¹ On this point, see below, p. 95.

CHAPTER V

THE COUVADE IN THE ISLANDS¹

RETURNING now to the southern part of the Asiatic continent, we can trace the custom through the long series of islands in the Indian Ocean, and through Indonesia and Melanesia.

Beginning nearest to the Indian coast, we find couvade practised in the Nicobar group, concerning which we have, fortunately, very full information. The custom was briefly alluded to in a paper on the Nicobarese, published by E. H. Man in 1889, who said: "[Couvade] is practised by all the communities at the Nicobars, including the inland tribe of Great Nicobar; it is by them regarded as a custom of remote antiquity, and is called *otó* in the dialect of the Central Group" (66).

A much fuller statement by the same author was quoted by Roth a few years later, and as this narrative contains so much of interest, I make no apology for quoting it in full:

"Although never, I believe, mentioned or even known to previous writers, the singular custom called 'couvade' or paternal lying-in is among the institutions of the Nicobarese: it is called *falngendre*,

¹ A small part of the mainland, the southern extremity of the Malay Peninsula, is included in this chapter.

and is practised at Car Nicobar, as also in the southern islands of the group; the period extends over some two weeks for a first child, during which time the man may not work nor cook, but lies up like an invalid, while he and his wife are fed by their relatives. If a man marries a second wife after having had children by the former marriage, the couvade, upon his again becoming a father, is curtailed to a couple of days.

“Among the Nicobarese couvade is likened to the sitting of a hatching hen. At Nancoury the husband must remain as an invalid for about five days, during which he may not work, nor chew betel, nor bathe, and he has his food cooked for him and brought to him. He may feed his wife with what is thus cooked and brought to him. After this, and until his wife is able to resume her ordinary duties, he must still refrain from leaving the village or from joining in any entertainments, and he can only perform work of a light nature, but may eat what food he likes.

“A day or more before the confinement, in order to ensure an easy labour, the lashings of the husband’s and her own property, *e.g.* canoes, spears, waterpots, and even of the hut, etc., are cut, and they are renewed soon after the birth of the child.

“The food forbidden to a woman from the time of her confinement till she resumes her duties a month or so later are fish (including turtles and crabs), fowl and cocoanut. Her drink consists of hot water, and her food of vegetables, fruit, rice, pandanus and pork.

“At Car Nicobar it is much the same, only there the husband remains idle and has his food cooked

for him for about one month. He may bathe two days after the birth of his child.

"In some cases husbands consider it advisable to observe greater precautions by commencing to do little or no work a few months before their wife's expected confinement, more especially abstaining from any such work as felling trees and digging holes for hut posts.

"The belief is that if the father failed to observe the custom of couvade the child would be liable to fits; and were the infant to ail or die under such circumstances, it would certainly be attributed to the father's failure to observe the practice. *

"Similar observances are found throughout the group. The Nicobarese are not matriarchal. The mother looks after the child, assisted by her female friends. Some slight modifications occur in the case of a man's first child. The observance is less strict in the case of a man who has a child by a second wife, if he has had children by his late wife" (94, pp. 214-216).

To this most interesting account of couvade in the Nicobars, we can add another, that of Mr. George Whitehead, a recent writer (134):

"During the latter part at least, say two months, of the wife's pregnancy both parents must abstain from certain kinds of food and from certain actions, as also for some time after birth. The restrictions are binding on the father as much as on the mother, and though the couvade does not prevail in its fullness in Car Nicobar, there are traces of it in other matters than in restrictions about food. When the prospective mother goes down to *el-panam* (the beach where the birth and dead houses,

etc. are) her husband goes along with her; though the less sophisticated Car Nicobarese say that this is not due to the father's birth-pains, but in order that he may be ready, at all times, to wait on his wife. On one occasion I had an incorrigibly lazy dependent working for me; I said to him, 'R., the Nicobarese are the laziest race I have ever come across, and you are the laziest Nicobarese I have ever seen. What does your father-in-law say about you?' The answer came readily enough. 'He does not like me to work hard, for it would be bad for the baby.' Reasoning as the Nicobarese do on homœopathic principles, if it is bad for the sucking child when the mother works hard and gets into a state of profuse perspiration, surely it must after all be equally bad for the baby if the father should work hard.

"If the home of the parties is at some considerable distance from the birth-houses, a pregnant woman and her husband may go, some weeks before the child is expected, to live in or near *el-panam* in one of the 'good' (*i.e.* ceremoniously clean) houses on the beach or in the neighbourhood. In at least one of the villages, however, the birth-houses are not side by side with the dead-houses, much less identical with them, as is not infrequently the case, but away by themselves in the midst of the cocoa-palm grove—much like the ordinary *tu-hêt* (cluster of houses), only the birth-houses and neighbourhood were very much worse kept than any other group of Nicobarese houses that I have ever seen.

"When the labour pains begin, the woman goes to one of the birth-huts, for if she gave birth to a

child in a 'good' house, that would become ceremonially unclean and have to be pulled down and burnt; no one could live in it again. Some of the richer Nicobarese families have their own birth-hut side by side with the others, in order to have some small degree of privacy. There are always a number of women and their husbands living in *el-panam*, for they do not ordinarily leave for their own homes until perhaps three months after the birth of the child. . . . If there is any delay in delivery it is presumed to be due to the child being trapped or held or nipped by something homœopathically. So, though diligent search had been made long before to make sure that no clothes or other belongings of the parents were shut or boxed up, or contained any knots, a new search is made, and care is taken that the door of the hut and the lids of all boxes near be left open, so that there may be a clear passage. The man will also lift up an inch or two the big racing canoes of the village and then put them back in the same place; and if there were any logs or other heavy things lying about, they would lift them up or turn them over in order to lighten the load of the spirit and to set the infant free. Similarly, neither a pregnant woman nor her husband should ever make anything tight, as nailing a board or tying knots, for fear that the spirit of the unborn infant should get tied up in the knots, and that, in consequence, there would be a great difficulty, if not impossibility, of delivery when the time should come. My munshi and interpreter, to whom I am to a very large extent indebted for whatever work I have done among the Nicobarese and for whatever knowledge I may have of them and

their customs, had spent five years of his youth in Burma, and so was not always mindful of his duty according to the lore of the Nicobarese. Finding time hang heavily on his hands, he once began in his leisure hours to make a fishing net, when his parents-in-law reproved him strongly for his gross cruelty in thus foolishly and unthinkingly endangering the life of his wife and his unborn child. . . . The husband looks after his wife, remaining with her in *el-panam* and supplying all her needs.

“When the baby is still under a month old the father must not do any heavy work, nor walk in the sun, nor bathe in the sea, for they do not want the child to get sick (one said to me), thus illustrating the principle of the couvade” (134).

These two long and interesting accounts of the couvade and related ideas in the Nicobar Islands throw considerable light on the interpretation of the problem, and they will be discussed in a later section of this book. We must now proceed eastwards and note the occurrences of the customs in the islands of Indonesia. The best account of couvade in this area is to be found in an important paper by the Dutch anthropologist G. A. Wilken (135). Roth, without citing the title of this paper nor giving a bibliographical reference to it, has conveniently translated extracts from it into English (94, pp. 207-212).

Various forms of couvade occur in the Malay Peninsula. Speaking of the Orang Benu-wa of Malacca and of the Boeginese and Macassarese, Wilken says: “Of the first-named, more especially of the Jakuns, who inhabit the province Johor

along the river Madek, we read that they have the following superstition which, so long as children are unable to walk, prevents their parents from using as food certain fish and animals; as soon as the little ones have acquired the use of their legs this restriction is removed, and the parents are once more able to indulge in what has so long been *pantang* or forbidden. Should this superstition not be complied with, and any parent eat of any of the forbidden creatures during the period of restriction, the children are supposed to be liable to an illness called *busong*, arising, according to the Malays, from *pěrut-Kěmbung* or swollen stomach. Concerning the Boeginese and the Macassarese, these people believe that the man, during the pregnancy of his wife, and she also, often behaves whimsically, and has desires, appetites for food which are not otherwise eaten—a belief, as will presently appear, that may have had some connection originally with couvade" (135; 94, p. 211; and below, p. 95).

On the large island of Sumatra couvade does not appear to have been recorded, but it occurs on some of the smaller islands of the Sumatran coast. With regard to the island of Nias, the father and mother are both placed under numerous restrictions both before and after the birth of a child. If any of these restrictions should be contravened by the mother or by the father, the placenta might remain in the womb, the child might be still-born or might suffer some deformity (135; 94, p. 210). "The anxiety of the father for his unborn child is very peculiar. It is thought that there is the deepest sympathy between him and it, and on this account the father must take the greatest care in what he

does or in what befalls him, as it will affect the child" (102, translated).

In the neighbouring Mentawi Islands the husband is confined to the house for two months, and all work other than necessary fishing is prohibited. The couvade terminates in a feast, and work is then resumed (78, p. 201). In Borneo the Land Dyaks observe a five-day couvade according to some accounts (78, p. 200), or four or eight days according to others. "On these occasions [birth-celebrations] the unfortunate husband seems to be very ill-treated, particularly after the birth, being dieted on rice and salt, and forbidden during four days to bathe or show his face out of doors. The interdict, however, extends to the whole family, who can neither visit or be visited for the space of eight days" (99). "Among the Land Dyaks of Borneo the husband, before the birth of his child, may do no work with a sharp instrument except what is necessary for the farm; nor may he fire guns, nor strike animals, nor do any violent work, lest bad influences should affect the child; and after it is born the father is kept in seclusion indoors for several days, and dieted on rice and salt, to prevent not his own, but the child's stomach from swelling" (124, p. 292; *c.f.* 98, p. 160).

A kind of "rationalized" couvade, based also on sympathetic magic, is recorded of the Kayans of Borneo by Dr. Charles Hose: "Both the father and the mother observe certain restrictions during the early months and years of the child's life, with diminishing strictness as the child grows older. The general aim of all these restrictions seems to be to establish and maintain about the child a

certain atmosphere or, they say, a certain odour, in which alone it can thrive. . . . During the child's infancy neither father nor mother will eat or touch anything the properties of which are thought to be, harmful or undesirable for the child, such as the skin of the deer or tiger-cat, and the child himself is still more strictly preserved from such contact" (47).

Amongst the Dyaks, another writer has recorded that during pregnancy both the woman and her husband have to observe elaborate food-taboos, and both must abstain from lighting or going near a fire, drilling holes in wood, and immersing themselves. The neglect of these precautions is believed to have an adverse effect upon the embryo and might cause still-birth (77; and cf. 177).

As regards the Philippine Islands, the couvade custom was observed by some of the tribes of the interior of North Luzon, more especially in the province of Bontok (135; 94, p. 209). "When a woman has given birth to a child, she must go with it to the river, wash it and herself, and return to the settlement, hand the child over to the father, and go on with her work. She only has it back to give it the breast; the man nurses it, carries it wrapped in a covering on his back, and receives the visits of friends and acquaintances whilst the woman works in the fields" (100, translated).

With regard to the Tagals of Luzon, not only the mother, but also the father, have to observe certain rules in regard to their offspring. "He must forbear from the enjoyment of double fruits [*i.e.* fruits which have grown together], otherwise his wife will have twins, which Tagals by no means wish to happen" (16, translated).

We have some instances of couvade in the Moluccas and other islands lying between Celebes and New Guinea. "The Alfoeros of Boero must be named first. This is what Schouten, who touched on the island in the middle of the seventeenth century, says of the custom: 'The black woman in her confinement also does not remain in her bed, but henceforth goes with her new-born child to the river, and she, when she has well washed both the child and herself, returns to her usual occupation, and yet no harm follows. Still, besides, I am truly assured, that as the little darkie of the island of Boero begins to thrive a little, from that time forward the man, as husband of the confined woman, very absurdly pretends to be ill, and allows himself to be right handsomely pampered, so that the blockhead is waited upon more than usual. In the meanwhile the black woman must [return] to her work in order to prepare delicacies for her husband, in order to put the poor fellow on his legs again.' This account is confirmed by Captain Van der Hart (44). Those who in 1850 made a voyage round Celebes and to some of the Moluccas met again at Boero with that which W. Schouten had, in his time, come across there. . . . So also the couvade seems still, according to him [Van der Hart], to be practised in the island. 'As soon as a child is born', says he, at least, 'there is not so much trouble made as with us in Europe; the mother immediately after her delivery goes with her child to the river, both wash themselves, and therewith the affair is finished . . . Coming back from the river, the mother goes about her usual duties; the man, on the other hand, behaves sickly (as infirm) and absurdly, as though

he had been confined, enjoys with much gusto the delicacies which are prepared for him by his wife'” (135; 94, pp. 207-208).

Roth doubts the authenticity of Van der Hart's account, on the ground that it is almost exactly the same as Schouten's, and this similarity suggests that the one is copied from the other. Wilken, although he himself did not find any evidence of the custom, thinks it likely that it still existed in his time in the north of the island. In any case, we have no reason to doubt Schouten's veracity. Traces of couvade have been recorded from other islands of the Moluccas and neighbouring groups. With regard to the inhabitants of the islands of Leti and Kissner, it is said that when a woman is confined, superstition forbids her husband for some months to dig, plough or hoe (135; 94, p. 208).

Practices similar to those already mentioned are recorded by Wilken from the islands of Timor Laut, where the father at first has to carry and take care of the child, while the mother, after she has bathed, performs her usual housework.

“Amongst the natives of the Uliasers, natives of the Amboynas, we finally see how the man during the pregnancy of his wife is obliged to abstain from a number of things. He is forbidden, so we read [quoting von Schmid, 1843], ‘to manufacture objects such as tables, chairs, doors, windows and such like of same nature too, in similar obligation to bring together, to join, or, in order to drive in anywhere, a peg or a nail for fear lest the woman might have a difficulty in labour’.¹ So

¹ [I have not been able to obtain a sight of Von Schmid's work, so am unable to control this rather peculiar translation. W. R. D.]

may he, as is told us later on, not be allowed to split bamboos, in order, for example, to make a fish-hook, lest the child have a harelip. Nor is it with any eye to the child[’s welfare] lawful for him when in sight of the child to open cocoanuts, to cut hair, or to hold the rudder of a vessel” (135; 94, pp. 208-209).

There is no available evidence apparently of actual couvade on the mainland of New Guinea, although some related ideas are to be found. Chalmers states that at Suau the husband shuts himself up for some days after the birth of a child, and abstains from food (22), and amongst the natives of Mouat, according to another writer, the father before the birth of a child abstains from certain kinds of food which, it is believed, might have an effect on the child (12). Speaking of confinements in British New Guinea, Dr. Seligman writes: “While his wife is secluded in the house, the child’s father must abstain from chewing betel, and observe the same food-taboos as his wife under penalty of his child becoming seriously ill. He does not avoid his newly born child, nor stay away from the house; in fact he lives in the house and may see the child directly it is born. Cohabitation should not be resumed until the child can toddle about; if it is resumed before then the child will weaken, sicken and perhaps die” (103). Among the Kiwai Papuans (Fly River estuary), if a woman is pregnant, both she, and her husband, must refrain from going near anyone who is ill (62). These last instances, whilst not true couvade, have the same underlying idea.

I can find no record at all of couvade in

Australia, but it reappears once more in the islands of Melanesia. At San Cristoval, Solomon Islands, "for two or three weeks after the birth of a child the father guards himself carefully from the sun and from the cold wind which comes up nightly from the river valleys, and from the rain. He is careful to do no heavy work, and especially not to carry anything heavy" (37).

Codrington, who also mentions the practice at San Cristoval, supplies information regarding other islands in the Melanesian group.

"A proper couvade has perhaps been observed in San Cristoval alone, when the young father was found lying-in after the birth of his child; and it should be observed that this was where the child follows the father's kindred. There is much, however, which approaches this. At Saa [Malanta, Solomons] it is not only the expectant mother who is careful what she eats, the father also both before and after the child's birth refrains from some kinds of food which would hurt the child. He will not eat pig's flesh, and he abstains from the movements which are believed to do harm, upon the principle that the father's movements affect those of the child. A man will not do hard work, lift heavy weights, or go out to sea; he keeps quiet lest the child should start, should overstrain itself, or should throw itself about as he paddles. In the Banks Islands also, both parents are careful what they eat when the child is born, they take only what if taken by the infant would not make it ill; before the birth of her first child the mother must not eat fish caught by the hook, net, or trap. After the birth of the first child, the father does no heavy

work for a month; after the birth of any of his children he takes care not to go into those sacred places, *tano rongō*, into which the child could not go without risk. It is the same in the New Hebrides; the expectant Araga father keeps away from the sacred places, *ute sapuga*, before the child's birth, and does not enter his house; after the birth, he does work in looking after his wife and child, but he must not eat shell-fish and other produce of the beach, for the infant would suffer from ulcers if he did. In Leper's Island the father is very careful for ten days; he does no work, will not climb a tree, or go far into the sea to bathe, for if he exerts himself the child will suffer. If during this time he goes to any distance, as to the beach, he brings back with him a little stone representing the infant's soul, which may have followed him; arrived at his home, he cries, 'Come hither,' and puts down the stone in the house; then he waits till the child sneezes, and he cries, 'Here it is,' knowing then that the soul has not been lost' (23).

With reference to the Banks Islands, Rivers gives some further particulars: "The parents must remain in the house for some time after the child is born. The father must not do any work for five days (till the cord has separated) and he must not do any hard work for a hundred days. He must not eat food which comes from a place where the people have been doing an *oloolo* rite [a magical ceremony described on p. 156], nor must he go to such a place himself. If by any chance this happened, he would have to submit to a ceremony to remove the source of danger to the child" (88).

42 THE CUSTOM OF COUVADE

In New Ireland, when a woman is confined, her husband, in order to rid her of the pains of delivery, goes to the men's club-house, where he lies down and feigns suffering, writhing in imaginary pain. This is continued until the child is born (75).

CHAPTER VI

THE COUVADE IN AMERICA

QUITE isolated geographically is the record of a form of couvade in Greenland. Here it is stated that on the birth of a child the husbands "must forbear working for some weeks, neither must they drive any trade during that time" (34).

In North America couvade seems to be confined to California; I have been unable to find any record of the custom elsewhere in the Northern Continent.¹ In California, after the birth of a child, the women "went about their duties as usual, and in other particulars observe no manner of caution, going to the forest for wood and food, and performing every other service the husband wanted; while he in the meantime lay in his cave, or stretched at full length under a tree, affecting to be extremely weak and ill; and this farce continued for three or four days" (129).

Writing of the Central Californians, Bancroft says: "When childbirth overtakes the wife, the husband puts himself to bed, and there, grunting and groaning, affects to suffer all the agonies of a woman in labour. Lying there, he is nursed and

¹ It seems probable, however, that a trace of the custom has survived in Ontario. See 93.

tended for some days as carefully as though he were the actual sufferer" (8, p. 391).

In Southern California the husband did not lie-in, but was placed under certain restrictions. He was not allowed to leave the house, nor to eat fish or meat (8, p. 412). Similarly, amongst the Lagunero and Ahomana (New Mexico), the husbands ate neither fish nor meat, and went to bed for six or seven days (8, p. 585). /

Central and South America provide many instances of couvade, and the literature of the subject has recently been enriched by a good discussion of the custom in that continent by Dr. Karsten (52). This writer gives good reason for thinking that the custom is not, or was not, so restricted as many writers would have us believe (*e.g.* 52). It seems very probable that originally, at least, the custom was distributed over almost the entire continent. From the statement of Bridges (18) it seems probable that couvade was originally practised in the extreme south by the Fuegians. He states that among the Jahgans "the mother and father of a newly born child . . . are both careful as regards their food, thinking some kinds are hurtful to the child. They generally also keep quiet for a week or two after the child's birth." This certainly appears to be a custom derived from couvade, and other writers state that a fully developed couvade exists amongst the Fuegians (55), but, unfortunately, no details are available.

The custom was evidently prominent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as many writers, mostly missionaries, have left us accounts of it; and although there is a tendency for the

couvade to disappear, it is still maintained in many districts.

Rochefort (89) and Du Tertré (115) have given a full account of couvade as practised by the Caribs of the West Indies. This has been conveniently summarized by Tylor, whose account is here quoted. "When a child is born, the mother goes presently to her work, but the father begins to complain, and takes to his hammock, and there he is visited as though he were sick, and undergoes a course of dieting which would cure of the gout 'the most replete of Frenchmen. How they can fast so much and not die of it', continues the narrator, 'is amazing to me, for they sometimes pass the five first days without eating or drinking anything; then up to the tenth they drink *oüycou*, which has about as much nourishment in it as beer. These ten days passed, they begin to eat cassava only, drinking *oüycou*, and abstaining from everything else for the space of a whole month. During this time, however, they only eat the inside of the cassava, so that what is left is like the rim of a hat when the block has been taken out, and all these cassava rims they keep for the feast at the end of forty days, hanging them up in the house with a cord. When the forty days are up they invite their relations and best friends, who being arrived, before they set to eating, hack the skin of this poor wretch with agouti-teeth, and draw blood from all parts of his body, in such sort that from being sick by pure imagination they often make a real patient of him. This is, however, so to speak, only the fish, for now comes the sauce they prepare for him; they take sixty or eighty large grains of pimento or Indian pepper, the strongest

they can get, and after well mashing it in water, they wash with this peppery infusion the wounds and scars of the poor fellow, who, I believe, suffers no less than if he were burnt alive; however, he must not utter a single word if he will not pass for a coward and a wretch. This ceremony finished, they bring him back to his bed, where he remains some days more, and the rest go and make good cheer in the house at his expense. Nor is this all, for through the space of six whole months he eats neither birds nor fish, firmly believing that this would injure the child's stomach, and that it would participate in the natural faults of the animals on which its father had fed; for example, if the father ate turtle, the child would be deaf and have no brains like this animal, if he ate manati the child would have little round eyes like this creature, and so on with the rest'" (124, pp. 288-289).

The couvade custom is practised in the Pearl Islands, in the Gulf of Panama (78, p. 204).

Richard Schomburgk states (of the Macusis of Guiana) that after the birth of the child, the father suspends his hammock by the side of that of his wife, and is confined with her, until the navel-string of the child falls off. During this time neither the father nor mother must do any kind of work, nor handle weapons, nor bathe. Their only food is cassava and their sole drink warm water. The father is not allowed to scratch himself with his nails, and for this purpose he is provided with a slip of wood taken from the midrib of a palm. The violation of this injunction would bring sickness upon the child (101, pp. 313-314).

A more recent account of the couvade among the

Guiana Indians is given by Sir Everard im Thurn. "This custom, which is common to the uncivilized people of many parts of the world, is probably amongst the strangest ever invented by the human brain. Even before the child is born, the father abstains for a time from certain kinds of animal food. The woman works as usual up to a few hours before the birth of the child. At last she retires alone, or accompanied only by some other women, to the forest, where she ties up her hammock; and then the child is born. Then in a few hours—often less than a day—the woman, who like all women living in a very unartificial condition, suffers but little, gets up and resumes her ordinary work. . . . In all cases where the matter came under my notice, the mother left her hammock almost at once. In any case, no sooner is the child born than the father takes to his hammock, and, abstaining from every sort of work, from meat and all other food, except a weak gruel of cassava meal, from smoking, from washing himself, and, above all, from touching weapons of any sort, is nursed and cared for by all the women of the place. One other regulation, mentioned by Schomburgk, is certainly quaint; the interesting father may not scratch himself with his finger-nails, but he may use for this purpose a splinter, specially provided, from the midrib of a cockerite palm.¹

¹ [The prohibition of scratching with the finger-nails occurs elsewhere in other ceremonies. Thus in Queensland during the ceremonies of rain-making, the men "scratch the tops of their heads and the inside of their shins from time to time with twigs; if they were to scratch themselves with their fingers alone, they believe that the whole effect of the ceremony would be spoiled" (Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. vol. i. p. 254). Scratching

“Couvade is such a widespread institution, that I had often read and wondered at it; but it was not until I saw it practised around me, and found that I was often deprived of the services of my best hunters or boat-hands by the necessity which they felt, and which nothing could persuade them to disregard, that I realized its full strangeness” (119).

The custom of couvade as practised by the Arawaks of Dutch Guiana has been described by several writers, notably Quandt (82) and Firmin (36). After the birth of a child, the father must fire no gun, hunt no large game and fell no tree. He may stay near home and hunt little birds with bow and arrow and angle for small fish. Quandt takes the view that the man, being deprived of his usual occupations, and finding the time weigh heavily on his hands, takes to his hammock from sheer *ennui*!

When describing the Carib couvade of the West Indies (above, p. 45), reference was made to the avoidance by the father of certain animals because of their supposed effect upon the child. In this connection, the following account is of special interest:

“Some of the *men* of the Acawois and Caribi nations, when they have reason to expect an increase in their families, consider themselves bound to abstain from certain kinds of meat, lest the expected child should in some mysterious way

with the fingers is prohibited to a girl at her first menstruation in the Torres Straits Islands and amongst numerous tribes of Indians both of North and of South America (*ibid.* vol. x. pp. 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 47, 50, 53, 92). In such cases a special piece of wood or some other implement is provided for the purpose. See also *ibid.* vol. iii. p. 146.]

be injured by *their* partaking of it. The *Acouri* (or *Agouti*) is thus tabooed, lest, like that little animal, the child should be meagre; the *Haimara* also, lest it should be blind, the outer coating of the eye of that fish suggesting film or cataract; the *Labba*, lest the infant's mouth should protrude like the labba's, or lest it be spotted like the labba, which spots would ultimately become ulcers; the *Marudi* is also forbidden, lest the infant be still-born, the screeching of that bird being considered ominous of death. Both the above tribes and the Waraus consider it their duty to abstain from venison *after* their wives are confined, lest the child on arriving at manhood be found wanting in speed, exemplified by the slow pace which the female deer when she has a young fawn at her feet is obliged to observe. Such are some of the dietetic rules laid down for the *men* by their system of superstition. They are probably observed by very few in their full vigour, for the forbidden animals form a large proportion of the Indian's bill of fare as found in the forests, and a Carib or other polygamist with three or four wives might be debarred from tasting them during the whole, or the best period, of his manhood" (17, p. 355; 94, p. 220).

The same writer, speaking of actual couvade amongst the same tribes, gives the following instance: "An instance of this custom came under my own observation; when the man in robust health, without a single bodily ailment, was lying in his hammock in the most provoking manner, and carefully and respectfully attended by the women; while the mother of the new-born infant was cooking—none apparently regarding her" (17, p. 101).

Amongst the Wapiana, when a woman has given birth to a child, she sits with her infant on the ground, while her husband builds a hut over her. He divides off a portion of the hut, and there observes the couvade (78, p. 203).

The Bakaïri of the Xingu River district have a couvade that lasts a month, and the father of a child among the Ipurinas of Bolivia abstains from eating the flesh of the tapir till his child is a year old (78, p. 204).

Writing of the Petivares of Brazil in the seventeenth century (1633), Laët says: "Quand les femmes Petivares sont accouchées, les maris se couchent au lit et sont salués courtoisement de tous leur voisins et sont traités des femmes soigneusement et largement" (60).

Southey makes the following reference to the couvade in Brazil: "Immediately upon a woman's delivery the father takes to his hammock, covers himself up, and is nursed there till the navel-string of the infant has dried away; the union between him and his progeny is regarded as so intimate that the utmost care must be taken of him lest the child should suffer" (107).

Spix and Martius make several allusions to couvade and related customs. They relate that bleeding is practised amongst the Indians of Rio Yapurá, especially during pregnancy. Not only the wives but also the husbands are bled, and the same practice is followed among the Botocudos (109, p. 1821). The country on the lower part of the River Içá (which has its source in the N.W. in the Cordillera, where it is called Putumayo) is inhabited chiefly by tribes of the Passé and the Jurí.

Among the Passé, after the birth of a child, both father and mother remain in the dark for a month and eat nothing but mandiocca. During this time the father blackens himself and stays in his hammock. Among the Jurí, as so often elsewhere, the father lies in his hammock and the mother waits upon him (109, p. 1186). This couvade is kept up until the child's navel-string falls off, about eight days (68, vol. i. p. 511). The Mundzucú are a polygamous tribe. Like the Caribs and the Tupé, when a child is born the father lies in his hammock for several weeks. He is waited on by the mother and visited by the neighbours. The reason is that the child is attributed to the father alone, the mother being regarded as the soil which receives the seed (109, p. 339).

In Peru, von Tschudi states vaguely, the husband, after the birth of a child, goes to bed for a few weeks (123).

With regard to the Coroados of Brazil, Spix and Martius report that "as soon as the woman is evidently pregnant, or has been delivered, the man withdraws. A strict regimen is observed before the birth; the man and the woman refrain from the flesh of certain animals, and live chiefly on fish and fruits" (110).

Amongst some tribes, the husbands do not lie-in, but fast with their wives for various periods (109, p. 381; 68, pp. 427, 441, 482). In the case of the Coimbas of Peru, the husband does not go to bed, but sits motionless at his door during his wife's confinement, and remains until the child has been washed and its sex announced to him (97).

Another seventeenth-century writer, Biet, de-

scribing the couvade says that as soon as a woman is pregnant, her husband at once abstains from eating the larger fishes and turtles, and avoids those who catch them for fear that his wife's soul, his own, and those of his children should enter the fishes. After delivery of the wife, the husband takes to his bed for six weeks, and, instead of tending his wife, the latter waits upon him. He avoids the gaze of his neighbours and meets them with downcast eyes. He eats so little, that when at length his six weeks' penance is finished, he is as thin as a skeleton (14).¹

The Jivaro Indians of Ecuador and the Piojés of the Putumayo both practise the couvade custom. "The couvade is rife among the Jivaros; and at the birth of a child, the mother has to undergo all her parturient troubles outside the house, exposed to the elements, whilst the husband quietly reclines in the house, coddling and dieting himself for some days until he has recovered from the shock produced upon his system by the increased weight of his responsibilities as a father. This custom is still in some measure extant in many of the civilized villages on the Solomons, where, amongst the Tapuyos and even degrees more approached to the whites, the father, on the birth of a son or daughter, lays himself in the hammock, from which he will not move on any consideration to do any kind of work, nor especially to touch any cutting instrument, fearing thereby to exercise evil influences upon the healthy development of the child" (105).

"Another very curious custom is that of both

¹ I have not been able to see this work, and do not know, therefore, what part of South America it relates to. The above is an epitome of the French text printed by Roth (94, p. 219).

father and mother fasting for days after the birth of a child. Sometimes this is kept up so long that it is a wonder that at least the mother does not sink under the debilitating ordeal. If the father is away from his wife he also fasts three days on hearing the news that she has borne him a child, as some of the Piojés assured me" (104).

The Austrian Jesuit missionary, Martin Dobrizhoffer (1717–1791), who worked for eighteen years among the Guaranis and Abipones, has given an interesting account of the couvade custom as practised by the latter. The Abipones are an equestrian tribe in central South America, between Santa Fé and St. Iago, Paraguay. Dobrizhoffer's narrative is in Latin,¹ and I accordingly quote Tylor's translation: "No sooner do you hear that the wife has borne a child, than you will see the Abipone husband lying in bed, huddled up with mats and skins lest some ruder breath of air should touch him, fasting, kept in private, and for a number of days abstaining religiously from certain viands; you would swear it was he who had had the child. . . . I had read about this in old times, and laughed at it, never thinking I could believe such madness, and I used to suspect that this barbarian custom was related more in jest than in earnest; but at last I saw it with my own eyes in use among the Abipones. And in truth they observe this ancestral

¹ The full title of Dobrizhoffer's book is too long to insert in the Bibliography. It reads: *Historia de Abiponibus, Equestri Bellicosaque Paraguariae Natione, locupletata Copiosis Barbararum Gentium, Urbium, Fluminum, Ferarum, Amphibiorum, Insectorum, Serpentium praecipuorum, Piscium, Avium, Arborum, Plantarum aliarumque ejusdem Provinciae Proprietatum Observationibus.*

custom, troublesome as it is, the more willingly and diligently from their being altogether persuaded that the sobriety and quiet is effectual for the well-being of the new-born offspring, and is even necessary. Hear, I pray, a confirmation of this matter. Francisco Barreda, Deputy of the Royal Governor of Tucuman, came to visit the new colony of Conceiçam, in the territory of Santiago. To him, as he was walking with me in the courtyard, the Cacique Malakin came up to pay his respects, having just left his bed, to which he had been confined in consequence of his wife's recent delivery. As I stood by, Barreda offered the Cacique a pinch of Spanish snuff, but seeing the savage refuse it contrary to custom, he thought he must be out of his mind, for he knew him at other times to be greedy of this nasal delicacy; so he asked me aside to inquire the cause of his abstinence. I asked him in the Abiponian tongue (for this Barreda was ignorant of, as the Cacique was of Spanish) why he refused his snuff to-day. 'Don't you know', he answered, 'that my wife has just been confined? Must not I, therefore, abstain from stimulating my nostrils? What a danger my sneezing would bring upon my child!' No more, but he went back to his hut to lie down again diligently, lest the tender little infant should take some harm if he stayed any longer with us in the open air. For they believe that the father's carelessness influences the new-born offspring from a natural bond of sympathy of both. Hence, if the child comes to a premature end, its death is attributed by the women to the father's intemperance, this or that cause being assigned; he did not abstain from mead; he

had loaded his stomach with water-hog; he had swum across the river when the air was chilly; he had neglected to shave off his long eyebrows; he had devoured underground honey, stamping on the bees with his feet; he had ridden till he was tired and sweated. With raving like this the crowd of women accuse the father with impunity of causing the child's death, and are accustomed to pour curses on the unoffending husband'' (31 *apud* 124, pp. 290-291.)

Finally, in the case of the Chiriguano Indians, of the Pilcomayo River district (Paraguay), not only the father but the children also lie-in and fast at the birth of each successive child (118).¹

¹ See the further remarks on couvade in America, below, p. 96.

CHAPTER VII

THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF COUVADE

IN discussing the geographical distribution of couvade, it must be kept in mind that we are dealing with a custom that leaves no visible or tangible trace of its existence. We can trace the diffusion of megalithic monuments, for instance, because the megaliths themselves remain as permanent witnesses of the peoples or of the civilizations that erected them. Mummification again, whilst affording a less complete chain of evidence, has, nevertheless, provided the material for distributional study in the form of actual mummies from many widely separated localities, the technique of which can be examined, and the same may be said of the custom of artificially deforming the skull. Even tattooing and ear-piercing are customs that leave evidence of their ancient practice in statues and pictures. For all these customs we have, besides such tangible proofs, written history and oral tradition, but for couvade we have to rely entirely on the latter. Our material, therefore, must be to some extent incomplete, for couvade may have been practised in certain localities for which we have no written records, and since it is a custom that tends to disappear before the influence of the white man,

it may be vanishing, or has already vanished, from many places that do not happen to have come under the trained observation of anthropological science.

From the records of history, tradition or observation that have been enumerated in the foregoing chapters, we can perceive that the distribution of couvade constitutes a more or less definite chain, although from many parts of it links are missing. It will be observed that the recorded localities in which couvade is, or has been, practised correspond to a remarkable degree with those associated with megalithic monuments and with customs usually connected with what has conveniently been called the heliolithic culture-complex, a complex comprising many curious customs and beliefs, amongst which may be specially mentioned sun-worship, mummification, ear-piercing, tattooing and cranial deformation.¹

I do not propose on this occasion to enter into any discussion of the general question of the diffusion of culture, but the inherent strangeness of the custom of couvade (no less than of the other customs referred to) makes it impossible to believe that it originated independently in the various

¹ The distribution of mummification has been discussed by Prof. G. Elliot Smith in his *Migrations of Early Culture* (Manchester, 1915); that of tattooing by Miss A. W. Buckland, *Journ. of the Anthropological Inst.* vol. xvii. (1888), pp. 318-328, with Pl. vi. (map), and more recently by W. D. Hambly, *The History of Tattooing and its Significance*, London, 1925; of ear-piercing by J. Park Harrison, *Journ. of the Anthropological Inst.* vol. ii. (1872), pp. 190-198. A sketch-map giving the general outline of the distribution of these and other customs will be found in Prof. Elliot Smith's memoir, p. 14, and in that of Hambly, facing p. 25.

places in which it has been recorded. In many of these places there is the clearest proof of contact derived from a variety of evidence, and the existence of so curious a custom in widely separated localities throws the onus of proof, it seems to me, *a priori* on those who allege that it originated spontaneously in each of such places. The association of couvade with many other practices that follow the same routes seems to point to its origin, with them, in the ancient civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean area.

Speaking of the geographical distribution of the many curious customs that make up the heliolithic complex, Professor Elliot Smith has written: "It will be found that in most respects the areas in which this extraordinary assortment of bizarre customs and beliefs is found coincide one with the other. In some of the series gaps occur, which probably are more often due to lack of information on our part than to real absence of the practice; in other places one or other of the elements of this complex culture-mixture has overflowed the common channel and broken into new territory. But considered in conjunction, these data enable us definitely and precisely to map out the route taken by this peculiarly distinctive group of eccentricities of the human mind. If each of them is considered alone there are many breaks in the chain and many uncertainties as to the precise course; but when taken together, all of these gaps are bridged" (108, p. 3).¹

¹ The whole of the introductory part of this memoir, which deals with the distribution of the practice of mummification in particular, should be carefully read, as it throws much light on the

The distribution of other customs usually found in association with *couvade*, but which have no genetic connection with it, will help us to trace the diffusion of the custom in places for which our records are deficient or wanting.

There is quite definite evidence that mummification originated in Egypt in early times (probably under the First Dynasty); tattooing may have been practised in Egypt before the First Dynasty, but it was certainly in vogue in the Eleventh Dynasty, as actual mummies of that period, on whose skins patterns are tattooed, have been found. Piercing of the ear-lobe was practised in Egypt certainly as early as the Seventeenth Dynasty, and we have evidence of cranial deformation in the Eighteenth. In view of these facts, one naturally looks for the origin of *couvade* in the same country, but there is absolutely no evidence of its occurrence there. What we know of the manners and customs of the ancient Egyptians is derived from a study of their wall-paintings, from such hints as the popular literature conveys, and from the accounts of Greek travellers, chiefly Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus. The Egyptians themselves have left us no written account of their daily practices as such. We have no native account of so cardinal a custom as mummification, for instance; what we know is derived from the accounts of the Greek historians and from the observation of actual mummies. One would therefore hardly expect to find any Egyptian account of

question of the diffusion of customs in general. Since it was published (in 1915) much additional and confirmatory evidence has been forthcoming.

the couvade (if it had been a usual custom in the country), but one would expect, if it had been practised, to find some mention of it by Herodotus or by Diodorus Siculus. Whilst, therefore, there is no evidence whatever that the Egyptians observed the couvade custom, there is at the same time no positive evidence against the possibility that it may have been observed. Even if many of the customs in the heliolithic complex are of Egyptian origin, it does not follow that they all are. Closely associated with the heliolithic track is the widespread tradition of the destruction of mankind by a deluge, but this tradition originated not in Egypt, but in Mesopotamia.¹

In the entire absence of evidence, therefore, I make no suggestion that couvade originated in Egypt, and its origin must be sought in one of the neighbouring lands of the ancient world. That couvade is an ancient custom we know from the fact that it is mentioned by classical writers—Strabo, Diodorus, Plutarch, Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus, and it is probably more ancient than the time of the earliest of these writers. A form of couvade was practised in Cyprus (admitting for the moment that the custom mentioned by Plutarch may be classed as couvade, a point that will be discussed in the next chapter), and it is quite probable that Cyprus may have been its place of

¹ The flood stories of the world have been conveniently collected by Sir James Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* (London, 1918), vol. i. pp. 104-361.

The Egyptians had a legend of the destruction of mankind, but the god punished his rebellious subjects by slaughter and not by flood. This point is further discussed in the Appendix; see below, p. 97.

origin. Assuming this to be the case merely for the sake of argument, we will trace its movement from that centre.

Passing westwards, the first large island encountered is Crete, and it is probable that the Cyprian custom was followed here, for the cult of Theseus and Ariadne is closely associated with Crete. We have as yet no evidence, however, that *couvade* was known in that island. We can assert with some certainty that it was unknown on the mainland of Greece, because three Greek writers record *couvade* as a strange custom in foreign lands. Had the *couvade* been familiar to these writers, they would scarcely have noted it as an oddity when they came across it elsewhere. The same may be said of Italy and Sicily, but *couvade* reappears once more in Corsica (30). I can find no evidence of it in Sardinia,¹ but it survived until recent times in the Balearic Islands (6). Reaching Northern Spain, we have Strabo's record of the custom (1st century A.D.) and the testimony of other writers of its survival in later times (see above, p. 10). Thence the custom spread through France, probably under Celtic influence, into Germany on the west, and to the British Isles on the north.

Returning now to Cyprus, we have to trace the distribution of the custom southwards to Africa. Here our material is defective. We know that there was intercourse between Cyprus and Egypt certainly as early as the New Empire, and if *couvade* originated in Cyprus, the custom must have been carried up the Nile. It has left no trace of its

¹ Roth, on the authority of Tylor, states definitely that *couvade* does *not* occur in Sardinia (94, p. 207). See, however, below, p. 93.

existence in Egypt or in Nubia, but we find—not a complete couvade, but its underlying motive—in the region of the White Nile and in the district of Mount Elgon. From the Southern Soudan we can trace (by the presence of associated customs) a cultural track south of the Sahara to west coast, and in the Congo basin we have a fully developed couvade custom amongst the Bushongo, a tribe that is believed to have migrated southwards from the edge of the Sahara, near Lake Tchad. The relative rarity of couvade from Africa must probably be ascribed rather to our lack of information than to the real absence of the custom, because we have well-marked cultural routes in Africa over which mummification, ear-piercing, tattooing and other customs follow in close association. The principal stream which followed the Nile Valley branches in several directions in the Southern Soudan, whilst a maritime route can be traced along the Red Sea littoral, through the Bab el-Mandeb and across the Persian Gulf to the Malabar coast of India.

And now as regards Asia. We have only one record of couvade in Western Asia, and that is among the Tibareni of Pontus, south of the Black Sea. From the distribution of other customs we may infer that couvade probably spread here by a route round the coast of Asia Minor. Whether it spread overland to Northern India and Assam from this point, we have no means of knowing. We find couvade, however, in many places on the Malabar coast of India, and it is probable that it thus came by sea across the Persian Gulf. From the western coast the custom spread into Central India, and

by two other streams northward and southward. We have records of the custom from Assam and from Chinese Turkestan. From this point, northwards, there is a break in the chain until Japan is reached; probably (from the evidence of distribution afforded by other customs) couvade followed a route round the China coast. From Japan to Kamchatka couvade probably travelled by a route mapped out by other customs, a route that passed through the Aleutian Islands to Alaska. In these latter places, however, we have no evidence of the couvade custom.

Returning to India, we find evidence of a culture stream around the Bay of Bengal through Assam and Burma to the Malay Peninsula and probably also a sea-route to the Nicobar Islands, and thence to Indonesia. For the Nicobars we, fortunately, have full information, but there seems to be no record of true couvade in the Andamans, although it has been observed that the husband of a pregnant woman abstains from eating iguana and *Paradoxurus* (a small carnivorous mammal), believing that the unborn child would suffer if he ate them.¹ Couvade reappears in the island of Nias and in the Mentawi group off the south-western Sumatran coast, and in the Malay Peninsula on the north, although I can find no record of the custom on the mainland of Sumatra itself. In Borneo, in the Celebes and the Philippine Islands couvade occurs, also in some of the smaller islands that lie between

¹ E. H. Man, "The Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands", *Journ. of the Anthropological Inst.* vol. xii. (1883), p. 354. Elsewhere (*ibid.* p. 87) Man states that couvade is quite unknown to the Andamanese.

Celebes and New Guinea. In various parts of New Guinea itself the couvade motive is to be found, although there is apparently no record of any fully developed instance of the custom. In Melanesia couvade is found in some of the smaller islands, as well as in the New Ireland, Solomon and Banks groups, but we are entirely without records of its occurrence in any of the Oceanic islands between Melanesia and the American coast.¹ From Australia also the couvade seems to be entirely absent; the nearest approach to it that I have come across is the custom practised by the Kaitish tribe of Central Australia. Here, it is stated, "the father of a new-born child goes out into the scrub for three days, away from his camp, leaving his girdle and arm-bands behind him, so that he has nothing tied tightly round any part of his body. This freedom from constriction is supposed to benefit his wife."²

As we have already seen, couvade has an extensive range in America, and in every case but two (those of Greenland and of Tierra del Fuego) its recorded localities are directly in, or within the

¹ A reminiscence of the couvade may possibly have survived in the remarkable play acted by the natives of Ulieta (Society Islands) for the entertainment of Captain Cook and his officers in 1774. This drama was called *Mididij Harramy* ("The Child is Coming"), and "it concluded with the representation of a woman in labour, acted by a set of great brawny fellows, one of whom at last brought forth a strapping boy, about six feet high, who ran about the stage, dragging after him a large wisp of straw, which hung by a string from his middle".—*Captain Cook's Voyages of Discovery* (Everyman ed.), p. 175.

² J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. vol. iii. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 295.

influence of, the heliolithic track. What connection culturally there may have been between Greenland and the mainland is but little known, but that such a connection at some time existed is suggested by the fact that the custom of tattooing is also found there and likewise the legend of a Great Flood, whilst tattooing occurs on the opposite side of Davis Straits, which probably marks the northern extent of a culture-stream passing upwards from Lake Superior. The possible survival of tradition in Ontario (93) would support this hypothesis.

In North America the recorded range of couvade is not extensive, being confined mainly to California,¹ but in the southern continent the custom has a wide range. It is found in some of the islands of the West Indies, and in Colombia, Venezuela, Guiana, Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay. Dr. Kunike, speaking of the distribution of couvade in South America, believes the northern part of South America, especially Brazil and Guiana, to be its principal centres, from whence he believes the custom spread to some few peoples in the northern continent, and that its occurrence elsewhere in America is confined to a few isolated peoples, such as the Abipones of Paraguay. On the other hand, Dr. Karsten considers this account to have but little value, "as it rather shows us where the couvade has been observed by travellers in South America than where it really exists. That it is most common in the Amazonian territories probably is due only to the fact that there are more Indian tribes in the northern parts of the continent than in the south, and also to the

¹ See, however, 93; and 52, p. 438, note 4.

fact that the peoples in the deep and inaccessible virgin forests naturally have remained less affected by the levelling influence of civilization than the rest. As to Chaco, the couvade has certainly not been an exceptional phenomenon amongst the Abipones and sundry other tribes. Thus, it has no doubt been practised by the whole great Guaycurú group to which the Abipones belonged. Among the Tobas in Bolivia I have myself found, if not the actual custom of male-childbed, at any rate ideas intimately associated with it. The same holds good of the Mataco-Noctenes, who also know a sort of couvade; and among the Chorotis it exists nearly in its most typical and original form (52, p. 437).

It has generally been asserted that couvade was not practised in the far south, and that the Jahgans and the Onas know nothing of the custom. There seems to be good reason to believe, however, that couvade actually does, or did, exist amongst the Fuegians (18; 52). Similarly, the absence to-day of couvade in the Andean regions of Peru and Bolivia may be due, as Karsten points out, merely to the influence of European civilization, and there is reason for thinking that the practice formerly prevailed (52, p. 438). As, indeed, couvade is elsewhere associated with megalithic culture, mummification, tattooing and cranial deformation, we should expect to find it in the Andean regions of Peru and Bolivia, where all these customs have left definite traces of their former existence.

This brief sketch of the geographical distribution of couvade shows that it comes within the limits of the heliolithic sphere of influence as

usually laid down.¹ Greenland and the extreme south of South America are both outside the generally defined limit of the ultimate spread of culture from its original "home". If the very probable opinion be accepted that couvade was known to the Fuegians, the limit must be extended southwards so as to take in the whole of South America. Greenland, however, presents greater difficulties, as the limit of influence (except on the Pacific coast) is not considered to extend further northward than Lake Superior. Whilst the distribution of the custom of tattooing, and presumably also of other cultural elements, can be followed in a northerly direction from Lake Superior towards Davis Straits between Hudson Bay and the Great Slave Lake, the chain is incomplete so far as our present knowledge goes. It would therefore be rash to push conclusions too far in support either of diffusion or its converse on the strength of a single record of couvade in Greenland. Until fuller information is at our disposal, it is wiser to offer no opinion on the matter.²

To the writer it seems inherently improbable that so distinctive and curious a custom as couvade should have originated independently in various parts of the world. In spite of the incomplete state of the evidence, the probabilities of the diffusion of the custom seem to outweigh greatly those of its independent origin, apart altogether from the facts suggested by the distribution of other customs with

¹ See the map in *Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (London, 1925), facing p. 312.

² See the map facing p. 25 of Hambley, *History of Tattooing and its Significance* (London, 1925).

which couvade is so often found in association. The independent origin theory, however, has been dogmatically asserted by many writers.¹ The custom of couvade by itself is inadequate to prove the hypothesis of diffusion; it must be considered merely as one unit in the extensive complex of which it forms a part, and due allowance must be made for the local factors which preserve or destroy (as the case may be) the evidence or tradition of the former existence of customs and beliefs.

In this connection, it will be useful to quote a few paragraphs from an essay, published in 1922, by the late Dr. Rivers:

“It was assumed as an essential part of the general framework of the science [of anthropology] that, after the original dispersal of mankind, or possibly owing to the independent evolution of different main varieties of Man, large portions of the earth had been cut off from intercourse with others, so that the process of evolution had taken place independently. When similarities, even in minute points of detail, were found in these regions, supposed to have been wholly isolated from one another, it was held that they were due to the uniformity in the constitution of the human mind which, working on similar lines, had brought forth similar products, whether in social organisation, religion, or material culture.

“The adherents of the recent movement to which I have referred [*i.e.* the Diffusionist School] regard the whole of this construction with its main supports of mental uniformity and orderly sequence as built upon the sand. It is claimed that there has

¹ *E.g.* 54; 64; 132, etc.

been no such isolation of one part of the earth from another as has been assumed by the advocates of independent evolution, but that the means of navigation have been capable, for far longer periods than has been supposed, of carrying Man to any part of the earth. The widespread similarities of culture are, it is held, due in the main, if not wholly, to the spread of customs and institutions from some centre in which local conditions specially favoured their development.”¹

¹ W. H. R. Rivers, *History and Ethnology* (London, 1922), pp. 4-5.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COUVADE

WE now come to grips with the most difficult aspect of the curious custom, the distribution and variations of which have been outlined in the foregoing chapters—What is the significance of Couvade? Many attempts have been made to explain the meaning of the custom, and these attempts are of very unequal value. Some of them are entitled to the fullest consideration, others are fantastic and absurd. The latter we will deal with first, merely for their historical interest, for they have no other claim that entitles them to be drawn out once more into the light of day from their well-deserved oblivion (see also below, p. 98).

When Tylor first published his *Early History of Mankind* (124) in 1865, Professor F. Max Müller contributed to a contemporary journal an essay on manners and customs that was reprinted two years later in the second volume of his *Chips from a German Workshop* (72). In this essay long extracts from Tylor's evidence on couvade were quoted verbatim (without references or even inverted commas); and in singular defiance of the recorded facts, Max Müller proposed feminine tyranny, or "henpecking", as the explanation of

the custom. This fantastic theory was supported by such statements as these: "Now, without exaggerating the treatment which a husband receives among ourselves at the time of his wife's confinement, not only from mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and other female relatives, but from nurses, from every consequential maidservant in the house, it cannot be denied that whilst his wife is suffering, his impunity from pain is generally remarked upon, and if anything goes wrong for which it is possible to blame him, he is sure to hear of it. . . . And would it not be best for him to take to his bed at once and not get up till all is well over?" (72, p. 277). After some further quotations from Tylor, Max Müller proceeds: "The statements, such as they are, given by unprejudiced observers, seem to support very strongly the natural explanation which we proposed of the couvade. It is clear that the poor husband was at first tyrannized over by his female relations, and afterwards frightened into superstition. He began to make a martyr of himself till he made himself really ill, or took to his bed in self-defence. Strange and absurd as the couvade appears at first sight, there is something in it with which, we believe, most mothers-in-law can sympathize; and if we consider that it has been proved to exist in Spain, Corsica, Pontus, Africa, the Eastern Archipelago, the West Indies, North and South America, we shall be inclined to admit that it arose from some secret spring in human nature, the effects of which may be modified by civilization, but are, perhaps, never entirely obliterated" (72, p. 281).

No comment is needed on this preposterous

"explanation", which ignores many of the recorded facts and grotesquely misinterprets the rest.

The proposed solution of the missionary Joseph Lafiteau (61) is no less fantastic, for he believed that the custom of couvade conserves a dim recollection of the doctrine of Original Sin. He adds some observations on the diffusion of the custom: "Ne pouvait-on pas présumer, d'une coùtume qui paraît si singulière, que de ces premiers peuples elle a passé à ces derniers [*i.e.* from the Old World to the New]; d'autant mieux que Strabon et la plupart des auteurs nous tracent le chemin que les Ibériens qui étaient venus d'Asie en Espagne anciennement nommée Ibérie, ont tenu pour retourner d'Espagne en Asie, où ce même nom d'Ibérie est resté au pays qu'ils occupèrent. N'ont-ils pas pu se transporter de là en Amérique?" (61, p. 49).

In 1889 couvade was connected with androgyny in a communication published by Tomlinson (121). Other correspondents added notes purporting to uphold this view, but in reality they have no bearing on couvade, and are merely cases of functional male mammary glands. It was apparently Tomlinson's suggestion that Keane had in mind, and which he seems to have taken seriously when he wrote: "A more recent view, based on the existence of the usually imperfect but sometimes functional mammary organs in the male, is that the progenitors of the mammalia were androgynous, and that the custom is a survival from the period when both sexes yielded milk and thus nourished their young" (53). Keane seems to have abandoned this view later, and vigorously maintains that the custom

was independently evolved by all the peoples who practise it (54, p. 219). ✓

The psychological explanations of the custom almost always fail to take into account all the data afforded by the diverse variations of the custom of couvade that have been noted earlier in this book. A generalization based on an ideal case that is a sort of mean between the extremes of form that the custom assumes cannot be applied as the explanation of the couvade in any particular locality. This facile method of disposing of a complex problem in a single paragraph is well illustrated by the following extract:

“Striking evidence of the effect of an association of ideas that is perfectly analogous to the one underlying the taboo of the mother-in-law is offered by a custom which is doubtless generally only local in scope and yet is found in the most diverse parts of the earth, thus showing plainly that it is autochthonous in character. I refer to the custom of so-called father-confinement, or ‘couvade’. This custom prevails in various places, occurring even in Europe, where it is practised by the Basques of the Pyrenees, a remarkable fragment of a pre-Indo-Germanic population of Europe. Due, probably, to the heavier tasks which these people impose upon women, it here occasionally occurs in an exaggerated form. Even after the mother has already begun to attend to her household duties, the father, lying in the bed to which he has voluntarily retired, receives the congratulations of the relatives. Custom also demands that he subject himself to certain ascetic restrictions, namely, that he avoid the eating of certain kinds of food. The

custom of couvade is clearly the result of an ideal association between husband and wife—one that is absolutely analogous to that between the two mothers of the married couple. The child owes its existence to both father and mother. Both, therefore, must obey the regulations which surround birth, and thus they are also subject to the same taboo. Just as there is very commonly a taboo on the mother and her new-born child, so also, in regions where couvade exists, is this transferred to the husband" (139).

The explanation put forward in the latter part of this paragraph is an arbitrary generalization unsupported by evidence, and the statements made, moreover, are at variance with many of the recorded details of couvade.

Various other explanations have been put forward, usually based upon the form assumed by the couvade custom in particular localities. Quandt, for instance, imagined that the couvade arose out of the desire of the women to have their men-folk at hand at times of childbirth in order to help them and to prevent them from going afield to hunt large game, as the bringing in of the latter imposed much hard work upon the women. The men, thus debarred from their usual pastimes and food, found it better to take to their hammocks (82). Firmin saw no more in the custom than the vanity of men and the submissiveness of women (36)—the exact contrary of Max Müller's view!—whilst Marco Polo was told that it was only fair that the husband should take a share in the pains and inconveniences of childbirth (140, p. 52), and the same explanation or justification is made in modern

times by the Sonjharas of the Central Provinces of India (96). These explanations involve the belief that the husband, by his lying-in, relieved his wife of pain, and made himself, it is not stated how, her scapegoat. Elsewhere magical means or witchcraft were directly applied by the nurse to transfer the pains of the mother to the father by means of the garments of the latter (71; 76). This transference of pain, or at least some relief to the mother, survived in a more innocent form, where the male garments effected their beneficent purpose without subjecting their owner to malignant witchcraft at the hands of a nurse (38, p. 251). The same idea is preserved in a belief in the north-east of Scotland "that the one who rose first on the morning after marriage carried all the pains and sorrows of child-bearing" (91).

Writing in 1896, Dr. Tautain rejected all the current explanations of the couvade, and put forward the opinion that the custom is really an adoption ceremony, whereby the father of the child claims his paternity (114). As we shall see, this view is not original, for long before Bachofen had hinted at it, and he used it to support his hypothesis, in which he was afterwards supported by Tylor, that the custom of couvade belongs to the turning-point of society when the matriarchal system was passing into the patriarchal, the father claiming his right by the fiction of making himself a second mother. In discussing the opinions of Bachofen and Tylor, we shall see that this "turning-point of society" is entirely theoretical, and fails to account for all the facts of the case. The simulation of birth as a form of adoption is certainly a most interesting

custom, but it is difficult to see in it any genetic connection with couvade. Sir James Frazer has collected a number of instances of adoption rites.¹

The theory, to which reference has been made to account for couvade was put forward by Bachofen in 1861 and was generally accepted for many years, especially when Tylor, who had in the meantime proposed another which he then abandoned, gave it the weight of his support in a communication made to the British Association in 1888 (126; 127). Bachofen's theory may conveniently be summarized in Tylor's own words: "Looking at this position, I must now argue that the original interpretation of the couvade given by Bachofen in his great treatise in 1861, and supported by Giraud-Teulon, fits substantially with the facts, and is justified by them. He takes it to belong to the turning-point of society, when the tie of parentage, till then recognized in maternity, was extended to take in paternity, this being done by the fiction of representing the father as a second mother. He compares the couvade with the symbolic pretences of birth, which in the classical world were performed as rites of adoption. To his significant examples may be added the fact that among certain tribes the couvade is the legal form by which the father recognizes a child as his. Thus, this apparently absurd custom, which for twenty centuries has been the laughing-stock of mankind, proves to be not merely incidentally an indicator of the tendency of society from maternal to paternal, but the very sign and record of that vast change" (127, pp. 255-256).

¹ *Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 74 sq.

It may be explained that Tylor's return to Bachofen's view was the result of an elaborate method he devised of compiling schedules of the systems of marriage and descent among some 350 peoples of the world. On this basis he applies to his schedules a number of customs (of which couvade is one), and, on the evidence of these statistical results, he came to the conclusion that the matriarchal system was older than the patriarchal, and that the custom of couvade marks, as we have just seen, the transition of the one to the other. Although this statistical method of inquiry was received with acclamation at the time of its first enunciation, it is not generally regarded as sound at the present day. Other explanations that are more in accordance with the evidence have since been offered, but some later writers still adhere to the Bachofen-Tylor theory (29; 35; 43).

Against this explanation, weighty considerations were brought forward by Roth (94, p. 227), for cases of couvade are actually found amongst the Arawaks and Melanesians, both of whom have matrilineal descent, but another objection is well expressed by Crawley in the following paragraph: "Further, the custom would be too much of a legal fiction if it meant all this originally; and early man has not, as may easily be shown, any such lawyer-like love of formality in matters of descent and inheritance; like the animals, he attaches himself to those with whom he happens to be born, and as to inheritance, there is nothing to inherit. Doubtless, in certain cases, as amongst the Mundurucus, the couvade may have come to be used as a method whereby the father recognizes the child as his; but

this, besides being secondary, is not the same thing as a legal fiction asserting the father's rights as against the maternal system. It is rather a case of paternal pride. It would be expected that a people should themselves be aware of the fact, if assertion of paternal rights as against maternal were the object of the custom, the maternal system and counter-assertion being so obvious, but no tribe actually holds this meaning of the couvade" (24, pp. 181-182).

The explanation of Bachofen and Tylor was repeated in similar terms by Bastian, but he proposed a second alternative, namely, that the practice of couvade was an endeavour to cheat the demon of puerperal illness, and to protect the child against evil influences generally (9; 10; and cf. 185).

Another explanation was put forward by Tylor in 1865; and although he abandoned it in favour of Bachofen's theory in 1888, it has been found generally more acceptable, and has been followed by many writers of importance, notably by Sir James Frazer (38, vol. iv.), by the late Dr. E. S. Hartland (45), and by the late Mr. H. Ling Roth (94). Tylor suggested that the couvade custom expresses a physical bond between the father and his child, whereby, on the principle of sympathetic magic, any action of the father would react upon his offspring. This explanation certainly accounts for more features of the couvade than does the Bachofen theory, but it leaves untouched the many cases in which the father observes no restrictions before the birth of his child, and is merely pampered after the event. On the other hand, the terrible ordeal endured by the Caribs of the West Indies—

described by Rochefort (89), Du Tertré (115) and Tylor (124; and see above, p. 45)—and the lesser sufferings of the father elsewhere (*e.g.* the Land Dyaks of Borneo, 99) cannot be explained on this basis, for on the principle of sympathetic magic the father's agonies would be endured by his child; and it would be pushing the principle of sympathetic magic too far, and would make it altogether too theoretical, to assume that, by the uncomplaining endurance on the part of the father of scanty and unsavoury diet, together with the physical pain of scarification with its subsequent irritating dressing, the child would thereby acquire the power of accomplishing such feats of endurance with fortitude!

Sir James Frazer holds that the term *couvade* is applied to two entirely distinct series of customs, although both are connected with childbirth. One is the regimen observed by the father for the benefit of the child to which he is closely related, and the other is the simulation of childbirth by the father in order to relieve the mother of the pains of labour. He holds that both these customs are founded on the principle of sympathetic magic; post-natal *couvade* is contagious magic and pre-natal is homoeopathic or imitative. He rightly repeats that neither custom has any bearing at all upon mother-right or father-right (38, vol. iv. pp. 254-255.) Whilst recognizing the dual nature of the *couvade* custom, it seems to me that the two elements so often combine, that for the purposes of examination they must actually be taken as one. There certainly seems to be much evidence in favour of Sir James Frazer's explanation in interpreting the species of

couvade that merely takes the form of regimen and diet on the father's part, but can the same be said of the post-natal kind? Ploss has collected various instances of couvade, and classified them under two headings—those that are pleasant for the father, and those that are unpleasant (78, p. 207 ff.)—but this classification is quite artificial, and brings us no nearer to a real explanation. It is true that in the modified forms of couvade that survived till lately in France, Germany and Britain, the pains of the mother were believed to be transferred to the father by means of witchcraft or otherwise, but such an interpretation will hardly hold elsewhere. In the first place, the pains of childbirth amongst primitive peoples are not necessarily serious; the birth of a child to such a mother is not normally the prostrating and anxious crisis that befalls her civilized sisters. Innumerable instances could be quoted to prove that (provided the course of nature is normal and no pathological complications arise) the women of primitive peoples bear their children with a minimum of inconvenience and suffering, and, indeed, in many cases of recorded couvade it is expressly stated that the mother goes about her work as usual immediately after her delivery. In such circumstances, is there any need for the husband to lie-in for a considerable period, and to receive attentions that his wife neither requires nor expects, for the purpose of relieving her from sufferings that are not of a severe kind? Moreover, is there evidence of such a kindly sympathy between a man and his wife amongst primitive peoples? We find the couvade practised by the men of tribes who submit their kith and kin to ceremonies involving

almost incredible physical pain, but there is no attempt to relieve the victims of their sufferings by sympathetic magic or otherwise. Why, then, should such tenderness be shown on an occasion that is, by comparison, almost painless? It is significant that the cases in which the transference of the pains of labour from the mother to the father is effected all occur in western European countries of advanced civilization, where childbirth is a far more serious affair than it is amongst primitive and uncivilized peoples.

Many of the observances performed by the husband of a pregnant woman seem rather destined to ensure the unimpeded delivery of the child than to relieve the mother of suffering. The untying of knots during a woman's pregnancy evidently is done in order to untie the child from hindrances to its proper entry into the world. In the Toumbuluh tribe of North Celebes, the husband, from the fifth month of his wife's pregnancy, is forbidden to tie fast knots or to sit with his legs crossed;¹ this is evidently a piece of sympathetic magic for the benefit of the quickening embryo. None of the many similar cases seems to refer to the wife, but rather to the child. If this is so, we cannot, it seems to me, maintain a sharp dividing line between customs based upon a sympathetic connection between father and child on the one hand, and those that are destined to relieve the mother of the dangers of childbirth on the other, that Sir James Frazer proposes.

¹ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. vol. iii. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 295. See the similar instances there collected, and below, p. 83, footnote 1.

We must now return to the other aspect of the explanation of the couvade custom, namely, the relationship of father to child. That there is a widespread belief in an intimate connection between father and child, both before and after the birth of the latter, is attested by many well-authenticated instances. In appraising the value of our evidence, however, we must be careful to distinguish between cases where the natives themselves have given this relationship between father and child as the reason for couvade, and these in which the explanation has merely been surmised, or even confidently stated, by modern writers. There is a tendency to regard all races as equals psychologically, and to explain all their actions, customs and beliefs by a single formula. The explanation put forward by Wundt (139; see above, p. 73) is an instance of this codification, and assumes that a widespread custom such as couvade can be interpreted in the same terms wherever it is found. Speaking of the couvade custom amongst the South American Indians, Dr. Karsten truly says: "An intricate sociological problem like the couvade cannot be solved with any single catch-word, be it this or that, and general summarizing explanations are of little use" (52, p. 465). It must be remembered that some of the explanations put forward are based upon the reasons assigned by the natives of various areas in which the custom is found. These must be used with the greatest caution. To quote Dr. Karsten again: "An Indian, when asked, for example, why he paints himself for certain occasions or practises tattooing, will in most cases give an evasive answer, or the explanation which he thinks looks most

natural to the white man. . . . But we must be careful not to accept such vague answers to direct questions as real explanations" (52, p. 1).

This quotation refers to the South American Indians, but it applies with equal force to other parts of the world. A good instance of such an evasive explanation is that given by Marco Polo (140; above, p. 26). Here it was alleged that because the woman had gone through a period of hardship, it was only fair that the husband should do the same: actually, however, the man endured no suffering, but was pampered and congratulated.

I am far from denying that the belief in an intimate relationship between father and child may in many cases be the true explanation, or, at least, the most logical explanation, of the couvade; such instances as those related of the Abipones by Dobrizhoffer (31) and of the Nicobarese by Whitehead (134) leave no doubt on the matter.¹ But in other cases where modern writers have put forward this explanation, were they always really stating the local native belief, or were they merely generalizing from the accounts of others? It seems that many writers are too dogmatic in their assertions; they state as positive facts what may be, at best, no more than a probability. It is preferable to follow

¹ In this latter case, the principle of sympathetic magic is well expressed in the untying of knots, opening of boxes, etc. (see above, p. 81). This and similar practices are frequent amongst many peoples, the majority of whom are not known to practise the full couvade custom; in some cases they are performed by the husband, in others by both parents or by relatives. An interesting collection of instances has been made by Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed., *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* (London, 1911), pp. 293 *et seq.*, and see below, p. 94.

the guidance of such writers as Sir Everard im Thurn, who has given us an excellent account of the couvade custom amongst the Guiana Indians (119). In presenting an explanation of the practice he cautiously states this as his own belief, and does not say definitely that the interpretation he offers is really that of the natives themselves. His account is a model of what such a statement should be, and to the extract printed above (p. 47) I now add the concluding portion:

“No satisfactory explanation of its origin seems attainable. It appears based on a belief in the existence of a mysterious connection between the child and its father—far closer than that which exists between the child and its mother—and of such a nature that if the father infringes any of the rules of couvade for a time after the birth of a child, the latter suffers. For instance, if he eats the flesh of a water-haas (*Capybara*), a large rodent with very protruding teeth, the teeth of the child will grow like those of the animal; or if he eats the flesh of the spotted skinned labba, the child's skin will become spotted. Apparently there is also some idea that for the father to eat strong food, to wash, to smoke, or to handle weapons, would have the same result as if the new-born baby ate such food, washed, smoked, or played with edged tools ” (119).

In this passage the author has summarized the observations of other writers, and tentatively offers them as a probable explanation. He does not dogmatize and state that these beliefs are actually held by the natives. In contrast with this passage, I will quote another, dealing with the same race, which, although mentioned with approval by Keane (54,

p. 368) seems to me to be a good instance of the confusion by modern writers between possibilities and certainties. A Guiana Indian, on the birth of a child, "calmly prepares for what he considers his duty. He must not hunt, shoot or fell trees for some time, because there is an invisible connection between himself and the babe, whose spirit accompanies him in all his wanderings, and might be shot, chopped, or otherwise injured unwittingly. He therefore retires to his hammock, sometimes holding the little one, and receives the congratulations of his friends, as well as the advice of the elder members of the community. If he has occasion to travel, he must not go very far, for the child spirit might get tired, and in passing a creek must first lay across it a little bridge or bend a leaf in the shape of a canoe for his companion. His wife looks after the cassava bread and pepper-pot, and assists others in reminding her husband of his duties. No matter that they have to go without meat for a few days, the child's spirit must be preserved from harm" (90).

On carefully examining all the instances of couvade assembled in the foregoing chapters, it will be evident that some of the proposed explanations are those of authors who had no direct native information, and merely generalized from previous writers' statements, or they are the result of direct questions put to the natives in which the answer practically was suggested by the query. It is quite clear that we cannot state that there is a uniform psychological belief innate in all primitive races in the existence of a mysterious relationship subsisting between father and child merely because we have

evidence that in some cases this is, or may be, the case. Dr. Westermarck considers that the custom of couvade implies this intimate relationship between father and child, and indicates plainly that those who practise it must be well aware of the principle that pregnancy is caused by sexual intercourse (133).¹ On the other hand, this does not explain why the husband's share in this union is magnified and that of his wife minimized, often to vanishing point. Some of the instances of modified pre-natal couvade that have been quoted seem to imply a close connection between husband and wife, rather than between father and child.

I take the view that the more elaborate forms of couvade in which the father simulates childbirth are not the development of the simpler forms that merely consist in restrictions in diet and occupation, but that the latter are degenerate survivals of the former.² In the oldest records of the custom that have survived, those of Strabo and of Diodorus, we have the couvade in its complete form, a form that in some localities has survived to the present day, whilst in others it has degenerated into mere segregation or food-restriction.

Crawley holds that the existing explanations of couvade err in not taking into account the woman's side of the question. He believes that couvade is merely one of the many expressions of the prin-

¹ It is worth noting that couvade does not appear to have been recorded amongst the various peoples who do not understand the function of the male element in procreation, as, for instance, various Australian tribes and some of the Melanesians, such as the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands.

² Cf. W. H. R. Rivers, *History and Ethnology* (London, 1922), p. 5.

ciples of contact that underlie human relationships (24, pp. 182, 183). I cannot see, however, that his views bring us any nearer to an interpretation, and they seem to be merely another of those theoretical considerations that are held to be uniformly applicable to the human mind.¹

We may, indeed, ask whether any of the attempted explanations hold good at the present day, and whether, in fact, the custom of couvade is susceptible of any explanation at all. There is a frequent tendency in man to rationalize his beliefs; he is ever attempting to explain away the often irrational actions that he habitually performs, and to convince himself and others that they have a rationalistic foundation. It seems to me that ethnologists make the false assumption that human beings are basically rational and logical, whereas the facts of everyday experience repeatedly belie such an idea. This point has been admirably summarized by Prof. Elliot Smith, whose words I will quote:

“It is a common fallacy to suppose that men’s actions are inspired mainly by reason. The most elementary investigation of the psychology of everyday life is sufficient to reveal the truth that man is not, as a rule, the pre-eminently rational creature he is commonly supposed to be. He is impelled to most of his acts by his instincts, the circumstances of his personal experience, and the conventions of the society in which he has grown up. But once he has acted or decided upon a course of procedure he is ready with excuses in explanation and attempted justification of his motives. In most cases these

¹ As to Crawley’s theories in general, see Mrs. B. Z. Seligman’s remarks in *Man*, May 1928, No. 60 (pp. 87-88).

are not the real reasons, for few human beings attempt to analyse their motives or, in fact, are competent without help to understand their own feelings and the real significance of their actions. There is implanted in man the instinct to interpret for his own satisfaction his feelings and sensations, *i.e.* the meaning of his experience. But of necessity this is mostly of the nature of rationalizing, *i.e.* providing satisfying interpretations of thoughts and decisions, the real meaning of which is hidden.”¹

Human beings continue to enact irrational and obsolete customs and to perpetuate archaisms that are entirely bereft of their original significance. In England to-day numerous examples of such procedures could be quoted. We gravely enact strange and now meaningless rites on all sorts of ceremonial occasions: at the coronation of kings, at civic functions, at births, marriages and deaths, at the launching of ships, at the laying of foundation-stones and on scores of other occasions. Few people who perform and witness such ceremonies at the present day have the slightest knowledge even of their original, but now obsolete, significance. Assuming, therefore, that so strange a custom as couvade has been borrowed from one people by another in bygone ages, it is quite natural that its original meaning has been forgotten, and probable even that in many cases it has never been understood by those who adopted it. As Dr. Rivers truly says: “When customs are carried from their original home to other parts of the world, few of them sur-

¹ *The Evolution of the Dragon* (Manchester, 1919), p. 4. See also especially pp. 5-8.

vive unchanged, but suffer profound modification, some in the direction of progress, some in the direction of degeneration, and some in a direction that can hardly be described in terms either of progress or decay. . . . Many customs which were once supposed to be the products of a simple process of evolution among an isolated people have, in fact, behind them a long and tortuous history.”¹

The custom in the island of Cyprus mentioned by Plutarch affords a hint as to the possible ultimate origin of the couvade. In this case a man lies down, and by voice and gesture imitates a woman in travail, and it was clearly part of a religious ceremony.² In its transmission from place to place it was misunderstood and reinterpreted, whilst its original meaning was distorted or forgotten.³ Parallel instances drawn from the transmission of other customs might be quoted;⁴ and whilst I

¹ *History and Ethnology* (London, 1922), p. 5.

² In the Appendix to the second volume of *Adonis, Attis and Osiris* (*The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. vol. vi. pp. 253-264), Sir James Frazer has collected a large and interesting series of examples of priests dressing and acting as women. There is no other case, however, of the curious procedure described by Plutarch. See also 24, vol. i. pp. 250-252, 318-321.

³ The same might apply with equal force to the Irish legend related in Chapter I.

⁴ In mummification, for instance, many of the arbitrary technical details of the Egyptian method of embalming, details that in Egypt had a definite function, were slavishly followed in other countries where the modifications in method made these details serve no useful purpose whatever. I have called attention to such details in mummies from the Canary Islands (*Proc. Royal Soc. of Medicine*, vol. xx., 1927, pp. 851-854); from the Torres Straits Islands (*Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, vol. xi., 1924, pp. 92-94); and from Australia and America (*Journ. Royal Anthropol. Inst.*, vol. lviii., 1928, pp. 115-138).

merely throw out the suggestion that couvade *may* originally have been part of a religious ceremonial which was afterwards invested with new and varied significance and made a mere family concern, I am conscious that this hint is very far short of an adequate explanation. In the meantime, until fresh facts come to enlighten us, we must, with Ploss (78, p. 211), humbly admit that the state of our knowledge regarding the original motive of the couvade custom is expressed by a single word—IGNORAMUS.¹

¹ For some further remarks on the significance of couvade, see below, pp. 97-102.

APPENDIX

SINCE the foregoing chapters have been set up in type, some further material relating to the custom of couvade has become available to me. The new matter supplements, but does not modify, the data presented in the text, and for the sake of completeness it will be convenient to deal with it as a series of addenda to the respective chapters.

CHAPTER I.—To the legends outlined in this chapter must be added another that is directly associated with the custom of couvade. The ancient tradition of the custom in the Iberian Peninsula does not rely solely upon the testimony of Strabo. There is an ancient legend attributed to the bard Lara (or Larus), who lived at the time of the Punic Wars when the Cantabri were the allies of Carthage. During the celebrations that followed the conclusion of peace between Rome and Carthage in 241, the bard is said to have sung the epic of Aitor, the traditional founder of the Basque race. The particular episode of the story that now concerns us may be summarized briefly as follows:

Aitor and his wife lived at the time when the great deluge overwhelmed the earth, and they took refuge from the rising waters on the summit of a high mountain, where they dwelt in impene-

trable darkness amidst the clash of the elements. Here, in the cave that served as their home, a son was born, and as the tempest roared without, the infant's cries echoed through the cavern. Aitor's wife, fearing that prowling beasts, famished and daring, might enter the cave and snatch the child from her arms, would not suffer her husband to leave the cavern. Aitor accordingly took the infant, and, lying down with it upon his bed of skins, kept it warm on his ample breast. His wife, meantime, insisted on going herself in quest of food, feeling assured that the child would be safe in the arms of its strong protector. Thus said Aitor, "the sons of my race, out of respect for the hardships that befell their ancestor, have perpetuated as a commemorative custom that which foreign nations regard as so singular a usage, for they know not its origin. And thus, when a young mother leaves her bed of confinement, her husband at once takes her place with the new-born child, so that, by its inhaling the manly and paternal breath, the strength of the small and puny being is endowed with sympathetic influence." Such is the legendary origin of the Basque custom of couvade (147; cf. 179, pp. 667-668).

CHAPTER II.—Reference has been made (above, pp. 10 ff.) to the divergence of opinion upon the survival of couvade amongst the modern Basques. Many modern writers have denied the practice of couvade in the region of the Pyrenees, and to those who hold this opinion may be added Wentworth Webster, who dismisses the whole matter as a fable based upon the statement to Strabo (183). On the other hand, J. Augustin Chaho and Eugène

Cordier, two writers who were intimately acquainted with the customs of this region, have definitely affirmed that the couvade was still practised in their time (146; 150).

Guest considered the practice of couvade in antiquity by the Basques and by the Pontine Tibareni as another point to be quoted in corroboration of other evidence showing some connection between the two races (157).

With regard to Sardinia, although there is apparently no trace of couvade in a developed form, there is, however, a custom that appears to be a debased derivative of it. Von Maltzan has recorded that when a Sardinian woman is confined, her husband eats his food from the same plate as his wife. The woman being in bed, in order to share the same dish, her husband must perforce go to bed also (169).

Some further traces of the survival of the custom in Europe have been recorded by Letourneau. "It is probable that more than one trace of this 'lying-in' still exists in Europe, in superstitious and popular practices. Quite recently a Russian has informed me that it is still in use in the Baltic provinces, but naturally in a form of survival in which the meaning is lost. It is, however, complete enough; the husband goes to bed, utters groans and cries, and his neighbours hasten to his side. And lastly, M. Léon Donnat told me lately that he had discovered the couvade still practised in the little island of Marken, in the Zuydersee" (163, p. 318).

The avoidance by the husband of a pregnant woman of handling edged tools and the untying of

knots are, as we have seen, practices closely related to, or associated with, couvade. It would therefore appear from the following extract from the narrative of an early eighteenth-century traveller that a dim recollection of the couvade existed at that time in Lapland: "To put a handle to an axe in the house of a lying-in woman was impious. The Laplanders cautiously provided against anything twisted or knotty in the garments of a person under such a situation, led by a vain imagination that such knots would render the birth of the woman more difficult" (162).

CHAPTER III.—The Rev. J. H. Weeks has recorded what he believes to be a survival of couvade amongst the Boloki of the Congo. After the birth of a child, the husband observes certain food prohibitions, and he is then said to be in a state of *liboi*, a noun derived from the verb *bwa*, "to be confined" (184).

A curious ceremony was witnessed in Madagascar by the seventeenth-century French traveller, François Cauche. An elaborate festival was held at a central spot, during which all the male children were brought from neighbouring districts to be circumcised. After the rite had been performed, the *fathers* of the infants returned in procession to their various villages, each carrying his child. The baby was tied by a cloth round the father's waist, and put its arms around the parent's neck. This method of carrying is that customary by the women. This is an instance of the father performing for his child what would normally be regarded as the mother's function, and it may possibly be a survival of the couvade tradition (145).

CHAPTER IV.—Reference was made to the practice of *couvade* by the aborigines of China, the Maiotzu (above, p. 26, and 32; 63). In this connection a Chinese drawing of the eighteenth century, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, is of particular interest. It was published originally by Dr. S. W. Bushell (144), and by the kind permission of the director I reproduce it here (see Frontispiece). In the centre of the picture is a house, through the window of which may be seen a man lying on the bed nursing an infant, whilst his wife brings him refreshment on a tray. This picture is one of a series depicting the manners and customs of the Maiotzu.

A tradition of *couvade* amongst the Chinese proper has survived, but there is apparently no proof of its reality, confusion having arisen between the real Chinese and the Maiotzu. It is mentioned by Navarra (174), and more fully by Captain Neale, who refers to the “curious anecdote told of the Chinese, for the truth of which, however, no one has yet been able to vouch. They say when a Chinese lady is blessed with an increase in her family, from the moment of her accouchement the unhappy husband is put to bed also, and there detained for forty days, and during this delightful penance he is subjected to all the rigorous treatment of his better half. Should medicine be administered to her, he must partake of it also, and he is strictly confined to the same diet she is obliged to undergo” (73).

CHAPTER V.—Some interesting examples of present-day *couvade* amongst the Sea Dyaks of Borneo are given by the Rev. J. Perham (177), and

amongst the Tuaran Dusans and the Endu Jakuns of the Malay Peninsula by Ivor Evans (155).

CHAPTER VI.—Some information regarding couvade amongst the Caribs of the West Indies, together with curious speculations as to the meaning of the custom, are given by the eighteenth-century traveller, T. de Chanvalon. He states, however, that he did not himself witness any instance of its observance (149). Some interesting modern testimony as to the couvade amongst the Caribs has been brought forward by Farabee (156). To the mention of couvade amongst the Jivaros of Ecuador may be added the following account by Orton: "An odd custom prevails among these wild Indians when an addition is made to the family circle. The woman goes into the woods alone, and on her return washes herself and the new-born babe in the river; then the husband immediately takes to his bed for eight days, during which time the wife serves him on the choicest dainties she can procure" (176).

Two actual cases of couvade, witnessed respectively by M. Mazé, Commissioner-General of French Guiana, in 1842 (on the River Oyapok), and by M. Voisin, Justice of the Peace, in 1852 (River Mana). In the latter case it is related that M. Voisin received hospitality for a night in the hut of a Galibi Indian. During the night, behind the partition of boughs that separated his hammock from the household of his host, a child was born. The mother uttered no sound, and at day-break M. Voisin watched her go to the riverside with her infant. Here she first washed herself, then threw the child several times into the water,

catching it as it rose to the surface and rubbing it with her hands. The husband meantime remained in his hammock, acting the invalid, and on his wife's return to the hut he received with the greatest seriousness all the attentions she lavished upon him (172, pp. 545-547).¹

CHAPTER VII.—Reference was made on p. 60 to the story of a great flood: here it was stated that this legend originated in Mesopotamia. If the essential element in the story is held to be the destruction of mankind by a *deluge*, this statement is correct, because the Chaldean story is the oldest extant of this form of the legend.² If, on the other hand, the essential element in the legend is the destruction of rebellious men by an outraged deity (which may be accomplished in various ways: by slaughter, flood, fire, frost, etc.), then it is probable that the Egyptian story is the oldest in existence; and although the text that contains it dates only from the Nineteenth Dynasty, there is much reason for believing that it embodies an extremely ancient tradition.³

This point has no direct bearing upon couvade, but it is well to make it clear in view of the significance of the distribution of customs to which attention is called in this chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.—The views of many writers upon the significance of couvade have been dis-

¹ For some further instances of couvade in South America, see 148; 154; 160; 161; 175; 180.

² For the sources of the story, see the preface to Dr. R. Campbell Thompson's *Epic of Gilgamesh* (London, 1928).

³ See the chapter "The Story of the Flood", by Prof. G. Elliot Smith, in his *Tutankhamen* (London, 1923), pp. 92-99, for a summary of this aspect of the legend.

cussed in this chapter, and for the sake of completeness the following additions may be made.

To the more fanciful interpretations of the custom detailed on pp. 70 ff. may be added that of Dr. Corre: "Cette bizarre comédie a sans doute pour but de faire oublier ses douleurs à la femme, de lui donner comme une innocente revanche de la reproduction" (151).

The view that was put forward long ago by Adolf Bastian (above, p. 78) that the practice of couvade was an endeavour to deceive malign spirits seems to have met with little support. In the numerous explanations of the custom that I have consulted, only one writer, Zmigrodzki, seems to have adopted it (185).

The great majority of writers, as we have seen, take a view similar to that of Bachofen and Tylor (above, p. 76) that couvade is in reality no more than an assertion of paternity, although they do not all go so far as to regard the custom as marking the transition from the matriarchal to the patriarchal régime. Maurel, for instance, after considering various theories, came to the conclusion that the true explanation of couvade must be the assertion of paternity (172). Ward, however, goes the whole length of the Bachofen-Tylor theory, and maintains that the custom marks the transition from mother- to father-right (182). Baron von Hellwald advanced the view that the mother and baby being connected by an obvious tie, the father made himself a second mother in order to assert his connection with the child, *i.e.* his paternity (158, p. 37). In a later work the same author explains couvade as having originally been a re-

ligious ceremony, a thanksgiving for delivery; but in course of time its original significance was forgotten, and it became merely a precaution taken by the parents for the welfare of the child (159, p. 362; and cf. the views of Lippert, 166; 167).

Dr. Kunike, whose paper on *couvade* has already been referred to (above, p. 65), makes the subject a peg on which to hang a long and discursive discussion, dealing more particularly with the custom as it is found in South America, but he makes no suggestion as to its origin or distribution in the Old World. He divides *couvade* into two types: the first, which he calls *imitatio naturae*, comprises the cases in which the husband goes to bed and feigns confinement; the second, involving only food-restrictions and other discipline, he regards as sympathetic magic for the benefit of the child (56, p. 556). In the long discussion that follows, *couvade* is mentioned in connection with the matriarchal and patriarchal systems, and with totemism, magic, etc., but the whole seems to me quite inconclusive. The term *imitatio naturae* seems an unfortunate one, for the husband's conduct in lying-up in his hammock is not an imitation of what actually occurs. Amongst many peoples of primitive culture the wife does not lie-in even for a short period: numerous instances have been quoted in this book in which the mother is delivered without trouble and without nursing or attention, often alone in the forest, and that after parturition she at once goes about her ordinary duties, bathes in the river, or otherwise actively occupies herself from the very moment of delivery. The *couvade* could only be called an *imitatio naturae* in the case of

peoples of higher culture, where childbirth is a far more serious affair and involves the treatment of the mother, at least for several days, as an invalid (see above, p. 80).

Dr. Nathan Miller seems to me to have fallen into the same error when he says: "The variations of the actual conduct of the man are first of all an imitation of the mother's action. It is clear to the primitive man that to have a child it is necessary to be temporarily ill" (173, p. 25). On the custom generally, he practically reverts to the Bachofen-Tylor view that "the couvade is merely one of the manifestations of that movement from the loosely organized matrilineal system that culminated finally in the patriarchal organization of the family and social life. It is a step in the evolution of the idea of 'paternity', later exfoliating into the extreme father-family of the nomadic culture-groups of antiquity. Yet it is objectionable to maintain that this is the 'very sign and record' [Tylor] of this momentous change in the history of culture. The couvade reflects a stage of development in which the paternal tie appears to have become an extremely intimate one. Von den Steinen, with Brazilian natives in mind, offers linguistic evidence to show that the 'child' means the 'little father', and this term is applied to the daughter as well. The child is thus a miniature, or part of the father" (173, pp. 24-25).

Chamberlain adopts the opinion of Von den Steinen that the child actually *is* the father, and concludes with a quotation from that author (148, p. 125). "The whole question of the 'couvade' and like practices finds its solution in these words of

the author: 'The behaviour of the mother, according as she is regarded as more or less suffering, may differ much with the various tribes, while the conduct of the father is practically the same with all. She goes about her business, if she feels strong enough, suckles her child, etc. Between the father and child there is no mysterious correlation; the child is a multiplication of him; the father is duplicated, and in order that no harm may come to the helpless, irrational creature, a miniature of himself, he must demean himself as a child' " (111, p. 338).

This interpretation, founded on the linguistic indications of certain Brazilian tribes, even if it could be shown to explain the custom in that locality, will obviously not hold elsewhere. The point that most other writers have stressed is that so far from there being "no mysterious correlation" between father and child, there is indeed a close bond in which they see the basis of the custom and by which they explain it. Moreover, there are many instances of the *couvade* that prove that the man by lying-in simulates not his child, but his wife. It is not necessary now to call attention to the other points in which this explanation fails to cover the facts, nor to the objections to the paternity theory in general: these points have already been discussed (above, pp. 77 ff.). Nor is it necessary to comment upon the theory of Lc-tourneau, who also accepts the affirmation of paternity as the explanation of *couvade*, and draws the curious inference that the custom "is, in short, a revolt of individualism against primitive communism" (163, p. 319); an inference that is all the

stranger when his views on communism generally are taken into account.

Finally, I will quote the conclusions of a recent writer, Prof. B. Malinowski. So far as I am able to understand it, this paragraph seems to me to embody one of those highly theoretical hypotheses that soars far above the many and puzzling details of the custom itself and of its peculiar distribution. "Even the apparently absurd idea of *couvade* presents to us a deep meaning and a necessary function. It is of high biological value for the human family to consist of both father and mother; if the traditional customs and rules are there to establish a social situation of close moral proximity between father and child, if all such customs aim at drawing a man's attention to his offspring, then the *couvade* which makes man simulate the birth-pangs and illness of maternity is of great value and provides the necessary stimulus and expression for paternal tendencies. The *couvade* and all the customs of its type serve to accentuate the principle of legitimacy, the child's need of a father" (168).

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104 THE CUSTOM OF COUVADE

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INDEX

Note.—Throughout this Index the word *couvade* is expressed by the abbreviation "c."

- Abipones, c., 53
- Acawois Indians, c., 48
- Adoption rites, 75, 76
- Africa, c. rare in, 16; cases of c. and analogous customs in, 16-18, 94; distribution of c. in, 61, 62
- Ainu of Japan, c., 27
- Aitor, Basque legend of, 91
- Alberuni on Hindoo c., 20
- Alfoeros of Boero, c., 37
- Amazons, 7
- Amboynas Is., c., 38
- America, cases of c. in, 43-55, 96-97; distribution of c. in, 64-67
- Amphidromia, 7
- Androgyny, 72
- Apollonius Rhodius, on c. of the Tibareni, 19
- Aranzadi, T. de, on c. in Balearic Is. and Spain, 11
- Arawaks, c., 48
- Ariadne, legend of, 3
- Asia, cases of c. in, 19-27; distribution of c. in, 62-64
- Assam, c. in, 24
- Aucassin et Nicolette, 12
- Australia, c. absent, 40; analogous custom found in, 64
- Bachofen, J. J., theory of c., 75-78, 98-100
- Bagesu (Africa), c., 16
- Bakairi Indians, c., 50
- Balearic Is., c., 11
- Bancroft, H. H., on c. in California and New Mexico, 43, 44
- Banks Is., c., 40, 41
- Basques, c., 10-12, 91-93
- Bastian, Dr. Adolf, theory of c., 78, 98
- Batchelor, Rev. J., on Ainu c., 27
- Béarn, c. in., 12
- Boloki (Congo), c., 94
- Borneo, c. in, 35, 36, 95
- Bushongo (Congo), c., 18
- California, c. in, 44
- Caribs, c., 45, 78, 96
- Cauche, F., on a Madagascar custom, 94
- Celtic legend analogous to c., 4-6
- Chaho, A. J., on legend of Aitor, 91; on modern Basque c., 92
- Chamberlain, A. F., on significance of c., 100
- Chanvalon, T. de, on Carib c., 96
- Chinese, tradition of c., 26, 95. *See* Maiotzu.
- Chiriguano Indians, c., 55
- Codrington, Bishop R. H., on c. in Melanesia, 40-42
- Coimba Indians, c., 51
- Congo tribes, c. or similar customs, 17, 94
- Cordier, E., on Basque c., 93
- Coroado Indians, c., 51
- Corsica, c. in, 9
- Couvade, definition of, 1; etymology of the word, 1; adopted as tech-

- nical term by Tylor, 1; bibliography of, 103-113; occurrences of c., and analogous customs: in Europe, 9-15, 92-94; in Africa, 16-18, 94; in Asia, 19-27, 95; in the eastern islands, 28-42, 95; in America, 43-55, 96-97; distribution of, 60-69; often associated with other customs, 56-60; theories of its significance, 70-90, 97-101; possibly derived from a religious ceremony, 89
- Crawley, A. E., theories on significance of c., 77, 86
- Crooke, W., on c. in India, 25, 26
- Customs: certain customs often associated with c., 57-60; customs and legends that may be related to c., 2-8, 14, 16-18, 23, 25, 64, 91, 93, 94
- Cyprus, form of c. in, 3; possible place of origin, 60
- Dinkas, c., 16
- Diodorus Siculus, on the Amazons, 7; on c. in Corsica, 9
- Dobrizhoffer, M., on c. of the Abipones, 53
- Dutch Guiana, c. in, 48
- Dyaks of Borneo, c., 35, 36, 95
- Ecuador, c. in, 52
- Egypt, c. unknown in, 16, 59
- Erekulas (India), c., 20
- Europe, occurrences of c., and analogous customs in, 9-15, 92-94
- Firmin, P., theory of c., 74
- Flood story, 60, 91, 97
- France, c. in, 12, 13
- Frazer, Sir J. G., on adoption rites, 76, *n.* 1; on an Australian custom, 64, *n.* 2; on flood stories, 60, *n.* 1; on a Nandi custom, 18; on prohibition of scratching, 47, *n.* 1; on the significance of c., 78-81; on men dressed as women, 89, *n.* 2
- French Guiana, c., 96
- Friendly Is., custom analogous to c., 64, *n.* 1
- Fuegians, c., 44, 64, 66
- Geographical distribution of c., 56-69
- Germany, traces of c. in, 13
- Giraud-Teulon, A., on c. in Cyprus, 2
- Greenland, c., 43, 64, 67
- Guiana Indians, 46-48, 96
- Gujarat (India), c., 20
- Gynecocracy, 8
- Hartland, Dr. E. S., on German customs analogous to c., 13, *n.* 1; on significance of c., 78
- Heliolithic culture, 57 ff.
- Hellwald, Baron, on significance of c., 98
- Herodotus, on the Amazons, 7; on the curse of the Scythians, 6
- Hodson, T. C., on c. in Assam, 24
- Hose, Dr. Charles, on Kayans of Borneo, 35
- Holland, c. in, 93
- Iberians, c., 9-11, 91-92
- India, c., 20-26
- Indonesia, c. in, 33-39
- Ireland, Celtic legend, 4; c. in, 14
- Jahgans, c., 44
- Jivaro Indians, c., 52, 96
- Juri Indians, c., 51
- Kamchatka, c., 27
- Karsten, Dr. R., on c. in America, 44; on lack of records, 65; on native explanations, 82
- Kayans of Borneo, c., 35
- Keane, Prof. A. H., on androgyny, 72; on the significance of c., 85; on separate local origins, 72
- Kissner Is., c., 38
- Kiwai Papuans, custom analogous to c., 39
- Knots, untying of, 81, 83, 93

- Koramas (India), c., 22, 23
 Koravans (India), c., 20-22
 Kunike, Dr. H., on distribution of c., 65; on significance of c., 99
- Laborde, A. J. L. de, on Basque c., 10
 Lafiteau, Joseph, theory of c., 72
 Langzi, c., 26
 Lapland, customs analogous to c., 94
 Leti Is., c., 38
 Letourneau, C., on c. in Europe, 93; on significance of c., 101
- Macassarese, c., 34
 Macha, Celtic legend of, 5
 Macusi Indians, c., 46
 Maiotzu, c., 26, 95
 Malabar, c., 21
 Malacca, c., 33
 Malanta (Solomon Is.), c., 40
 Malay Peninsula, c., 33, 96
 Malinowski, Prof. B., theory of c., 102
 Maltzan, F. von, on Sardinian custom, 93
 Man, E. H., on the Andamanese, 63; on the Nicobarese, 27-30
 Marco Polo, c. in Chinese Turkestan, 26, 83
 Mateer, Rev. S., on c. in Travancore, 23
 Matriarchate and c., 75-79, 98-100
 Melanesia, c. in, 40-42
 Mentawi Is., c., 35
 Michel, F., on Basque c., 10
 Miller, Dr. N., on significance of c., 100
 Miris, c., 24
 Mouat (New Guinea), custom analogous to c., 39
 Müller, Prof. F. Max, theory of c., 70-72, 74
- Nandi (E. Africa), custom analogous to c., 18
 Navarre, c. in, 12
 Nayādis (India), c., 24
- New Guinea, no record of true c. in, 39; analogous customs in, 39
 New Hebrides, c., 41
 New Ireland, c., 42
 New Mexico, c., 44
 Nias Is., c., 34
 Nicobar Is., c., 28-33
 Nigeria, customs analogous to c., 17
 Nine-night week, 5
- Oceania, absence of c. in, 64
 Ontario, trace of c. in, 65
- Paraguay, c. in, 53, 55
 Passé Indians, c., 51
 Pearl Is., c., 46
 Pennant, Thos., on c. in Scotland, 14
 Perelaer, M. T. H., on c. of the Dyaks, 36
 Perham, Rev. J., on c. of Dyaks, 95
 Peru, c., 51
 Petivares of Brazil, c., 50
 Philippine Is., c., 35
 Piojé Indians, c., 52
 Ploss, Dr. H., classification of c., 80; verdict of, 90
 Plutarch, 3
 Psychological theories of c., 73 ff., 102
- Quandt, C., theory of c., 74
 Quatrefages, A. de, on Basque c., 10
- Reinach, Dr. Salomon, on Amphidromia, 7; on a curious French custom, 13
 Rio Yupura Indians, c., 50
 Ripley, Prof. A. Z., on Spanish c., 11
 Rivers, Dr. W. H. R., on c. in Banks Is., 41; on degeneration of customs, 88; on diffusion of customs, 68
 Rodway, J., theory of c., 85
 Rochefort, C. de, on Carib c., 45
 Roscoe, Rev. J., on the Bagesu, 16
 Roth, H. Ling, on cases of c., 16, 17
et passim; on significance of c., 78

118 THE CUSTOM OF COUVADE

- Russell, R. V., on c. by the Sonjharas, 26
 Russia, c. in, 93
- St. John, Spencer, on c. in Borneo, 35
- Sardinia, absence of true c. in, 61; custom analogous to c. in, 93
- Schadenberg, A., on c. in Philippine Is., 36
- Scotland, c. in, 13, 14, 75
- Scratching prohibited, 47, with *n.* 1
- Sceythians, 6
- Seligman, Dr. C. G., on New Guinea customs, 39
- Seringapatam, c., 24
- Shamans, c., 27
- Shuli District (Africa), c., 16
- Smith, Prof. G. Elliot, on distribution of customs, 58; on Flood story, 97; on irrational actions, 87
- Solomon Is., c., 40
- Sonjharas (India), c., 26
- Spain, c. in, 8-11, 91-92
- Steinen, K. von den, on significance of c., 100, 101
- Steller, G. W., on c. in Kamchatka, 27
- Strabo, on Iberian c., 9-10, 91
- Sumatra, absence of c. in, 34
- Survival of customs, 88
- Sympathetic magic and c., 75 ff., 99
- Tangkhuls (India), c., 24
- Tautain, Dr., theory of c., 75
- Tertré, J. B. du, on Carib c., 45
- Theseus, 3
- Thurn, Sir Everard im, on c. in Guiana, 47; on the significance of c., 84
- Thurston, E., on c. in India, 21-24
- Tibareni of Pontus, 18, 93
- Timor Laut Is., c., 38
- Todas, c., 23
- Torday, E., on c. by the Bushongo, 18
- Tupé Indians, c., 51
- Tylor, Sir Edward B., adopts the term *couvade*, 1; on c. by the Abipones, 53; on c. by the Caribs, 45; on c. in India, 20, 24; theories of c., 75 ff., 98 ff.
- Uliasers (Amboynas Is.), c., 38
- Ulster, legend of c., 4
- Valerius Flaccus, on c. of the Tibareni, 19
- Venegas, M., on c. in California, 43
- Waddell, L. A., on c. by the Miris, 24
- Wapiana Indians, c., 50
- Waraus, c., 49
- Weeks, Rev. J. H., on survival of c. on the Congo, 94
- Westermarck, Dr. E., on significance of c., 86
- West Indies, c. in, 45
- Whitehead, G., on c. in the Nicobar Is., 31-33
- White Nile, c., 16
- Wilken, Dr. G. A., on c. in Indonesia, 33 ff.
- Williams, Sir M. Monier, on c. in India, 20
- Witchcraft and c., 14, 75
- Wundt, W., theory of c., 73, 82
- Xingu River Indians, c., 50
- Yerukalas (India), c., 20
- Zamacola, D. J. A. de, on Basque c., 10
- Zardandan, c. in, 26
- Zmigrodzki, M. von, on significance of c., 98
- Zucchelli, A., on c. in Kassanje, 17

