

XI. THE YAKUT.

‘Send me some melted butter, some vodka and some meat, if you have it, for I am dying, and would once more enjoy the good things of the earth’; such was the message sent to Sieroszewski¹ by a poor Yakut, Tarsatyng, who lived near him. The behaviour of several people at whose death this writer was present corresponded to that implied in the above message. The only thing which a Yakut really cares for before death is to be certain that an animal will be slain directly after he dies, in order that, accompanied by this animal, his soul may make the journey to the abode of the departed. On the death of a man a bullock or a horse is killed, on the death of a woman, a cow or a calf; if the deceased was rich the animal is fat and able to be ridden, otherwise the soul must either drive it in front of him or drag it by the horns. The flesh of the dead animal is eaten by the gravediggers and all the funeral company. The custom is called *khailyga* or *khailige*. In the north, where these customs are more strictly practised, even the poorest man will kill his last cow to fulfil the conditions. When a Cossack asked some Yakut to place a monument on the grave of his brother who had died at Kenurakh Station while on a journey, they said, ‘If you wish to hire us you must first slay an animal, for there was no blood shed on the grave of your brother and we fear to work there.’²

When a man dies, the body is clothed in a rich garment and placed in a corner of the dwelling, where it lies for three days; on the third day it is placed in a wooden coffin, which is drawn to the grave by a horse or bullock. No one but the gravediggers accompany it, and even they hasten to complete their work and return home; on their way back they do not stop or look behind, and when they enter the gate of the village they and the animal must pass through a fire made from the straw on which the dead man lay and the wood left from the making of the coffin. Other things which have been in contact with the dead, such as the shovel, are also broken and burnt. On the death of a child, its cradle is left on the grave and its toys hanging on the nearest tree.

Pripuzoff says that, while in former times at the burial of an important man his riding-horse with all its trappings, rich furs, and provisions for a journey, as well as a servant, were buried

¹ Sieroszewski, 12 *Lat w Kraju Yakutów*, 1900, p. 616.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 617.

alive with him, this is now restricted to the killing of the best horse.¹ The Yakut have great fear of a corpse before it is burned : it is supposed to be able to disturb the forces of nature, producing great storms, and the influence of the corpse of a shaman is even more powerful. A great wind is held to be favourable, as it will smooth out the tracks on the way to the place of the funeral, otherwise many of the living will follow the dead. Sieroszewski says that in olden times the Yakut exposed the dead on a tree or on a platform placed on two poles called *arangka*.² He saw such platforms on which skeletons still remained, but he thinks that this custom has been borrowed from the Gilyak or Yukaghir. There is, however, still another form of burial among the Yakut, which consists in leaving the dead in the house with all the utensils belonging to him.

There existed formerly the custom that an old or very weak person requested his relatives to bury him. All the villagers were invited to a three days' feast, during which the old man, attired in his finest garments, occupied the chief position. On the third day his relatives took him to the forest, where a grave had been prepared, and one of them would suddenly strike him down. With him in the grave were placed food and his weapons. Sometimes husband and wife were buried together, or a living animal was buried with the person or was tied to the nearest tree (*surge*). Sieroszewski tells how a Cossack brought an old woman from a grave in the forest who lived for some years afterwards. Until the corpse is buried the soul remains near the house and endeavours to remind the relatives of its existence. Some souls never leave the earth and are never quiet ; such souls are called *yor*. The souls of those who have died young or suffered death by violence, or who were buried without ceremonies, as well as of the shamans and great people, become *yor*.³

XII. THE ALTAIANS.

Among the Altaians the corpse is treated in different ways. It is sometimes exposed on a raised platform or buried in a mountain with the best horse of the deceased person ; sometimes it is burned or exposed on a tree.⁴ Potanin says that in former times the body

¹ Fripuzoff, *Materials for the Study of Shamanism among the Yakut*, p. 65.

² Sieroszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 616-17.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Wierbicki, *The Natives of the Altai*, p. 68.

was laid on the ground and covered with boughs of trees.¹ The corpse is elaborately dressed, a cap placed on the head, and in a pouch different kinds of food.² It receives a cup and a spoon, says Potanin, but there is no feasting after the death.³ Yadrintzeff mentions that among the Altaians during the seven days following the death the relatives pray to *Tiu Shaitan*. The father and mother of a dead child may not enter any one's *yurta* till after the expiration of forty days.⁴ Among the Uriankhai the corpse of a shaman is exposed on a raised platform and his drum and coat are hung above its head. The corpse of an ordinary person is placed in a hollow tree-trunk. Near its head is placed a pole, the top of which is carved in the form of a cup. A rich man's corpse wears a fine new coat, but a piece of an old coat is attached to the new one. A fire is made near the place, and portions of flesh, meal, and oil are burned. The relatives for the next seven days must not carry anything out of the *yurta* either to sell or to give away, but they may dispense hospitality within; this custom is called *shirlikh*, and we find the same restriction as to carrying things out of the house during a certain period among the Mongols, who term the custom *kerektey udur sertey*, but it is not associated with burial.^{5,6}

If the death occurred by lightning, then the Uriankhai prepare a *ser*, i. e., a raised platform, for the corpse. The flesh of an animal struck by lightning is never eaten.

XIII. SAMOYEDIC AND FINNIC TRIBES.

Among the Samoyed, according to Castren, there is no belief in a future life for the ordinary man. The dead, with whom many of his belongings are buried, is supposed to exist still for a short while, and during that time food is brought to the grave and the

¹ Potanin, op. cit., 1882, vol. ii, p. 36.

² Wierbicki, op. cit., p. 86.

³ Potanin, vol. iv, 1883, p. 36.

⁴ Yadrintzeff, *The Siberian Aborigines*, 1891, pp. 110-20.

⁵ Potanin, vol. iv, 1883, p. 36.

⁶ Among the Buryat of Alarsk this custom is observed after the sacrifice to the fire and is called *khurir* or *serotey*; among the Darkhat and the Diurbiut, during the period reserved for cattle-breeding. Among the Diurbiut this prohibition holds good on the day of death and on any day the number of which contains the number of the day of death; e. g., if the death occurs on the 3rd, the prohibition holds on the 13th, 23rd, &c.

Similar numerical arrangements in connexion with the custom of not carrying things out of the house are found to hold good on other occasions, such as sacrificing a horse to a god. (Potanin, vol. iv, ed. 1883, p. 37.)

sacrifice of the reindeer is repeated several times, but when the body has once turned to dust there is nothing beyond. Only the *tadibey* (shaman) attains to the privilege of a future life.¹

Death is usually ascribed to the power of a bad female spirit, *Namsya Barussi*, who steals the soul, but a good shaman can sometimes recover the soul and return it to its owner.² In former times the Samoyed used a special incantation to prevent the return of the dead, and when the body was taken away from the *chum* (dwelling-house) the women of the *chum* jumped over the body.³

Krohn, who is a great authority on the subject, believes that among the Finnic tribes the cult of the dead and ancestor-worship is common to them all, and is their oldest form of religion. 'Their places of sacrifice frequently stand in close proximity to their places of burial; their images are chiefly representations of the dead, their offerings are to be explained by the needs (food, clothes, &c.) of the dead; and their whole system of magic seems to aim at a union with the spirits of the dead.'⁴

Among the Vogul, at the moment of death the relatives place in the mouth of the dying a small stick to prevent the closing of the teeth, and immediately afterwards the head of the corpse is covered. The body is then attired in its best clothes and is laid again in the sleeping-place. All this is performed in silence. Then the women loosen their hair and begin to bewail the dead and extol his virtues, his great power as a hunter, his goodness in the family; sometimes the men assist them, but they are usually busily engaged in making the coffin and preparing the grave. The body is placed in the coffin by members of its own sex. Sometimes they draw with charcoal on the lid of the coffin the form of a bird or a fish. Then the eldest woman of the family slightly raises the coffin. If it is heavy, she promises to sacrifice to the spirits. Then each member of the family, first the women and then the men, in each case beginning with the youngest member, slightly raises the coffin. After this the coffin is carried or driven to the grave.⁵ Usually the body is buried on the day of death, and it is carried out through a window of the house, or if it is a *chum*, through a specially-made hole. The graveyard, among

¹ Castren, *Reiseerinnerungen aus den Jahren 1838-77*, p. 267.

² Tretyakoff, *The Country of Turukhansk*, p. 204.

³ Lepekhin, *Diary of a Journey*, part iv, p. 117.

⁴ Krohn, 'Cult of the Dead,' *E. R. E.*, vol. i, p. 467.

⁵ N. L. Gondatti, *Traces of Paganism among the Aborigines of N.W. Siberia*, 1888, p. 44.