

An Investigation of the Psychological Factors in Virginity and Ritual Defloration*

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Throughout history and in all stages of culture great emphasis has been laid on virginity. Sometimes a high positive value is set upon it as when the husband insists on his wife coming to him as a virgin, although, paradoxically, amongst certain people he must not have intercourse with the virgin bride, defloration and the first act of coitus being ritually performed by another. At other times virginity possesses what might be called a negative value; considerations of space will not allow this aspect to be dealt with here, but it is probably correct to say that the indifference to virginity where it is found, is more apparent than real.

Where a positive appreciation exists, at first glance the problem may seem simple; women are regarded in some sense property and so must enter marriage undamaged, consequently the forces of sexual selection cause a woman to prize her virginity. But such a solution is quite unsatisfactory, for it overlooks two important elements: in the first place it does not explain the insistence on ritual defloration, and secondly, it ignores the fact that woman has a strong feminine attitude to virginity which is not a mere reflection of man's views upon it.

It is my aim in this article to examine as far as possible the deeper motives that underlie the attitude to virginity of both men and women. The material for this study can be gathered from three sources: current everyday life; psycho-analysis; and the field of primitive cultures.

The information derived from this last source is particularly illuminating. Like the material gathered from psychotic patients it is more direct and obvious than that drawn from the first sources. But unfortunately, instead of having the direct opinion of the natives we have only reports and interpretations from white observers. These observations are not wholly reliable, for even where they are not biased to fit some pet theory, they are always affected by the European culture and point of view of the observer. I have tried as far as possible to sort out the facts from the theories of the anthropologist. Another source of error is that the facts are gathered from sources all the world over, and naturally in a paper of this kind it is impossible to study the setting of each custom, to give a complete picture of the culture from which each is drawn: it is, therefore, somewhat like the interpretation of a dream without any knowledge of the patient.

We see, therefore, that we are working under fairly serious disadvantages, and should bear these conditions in mind in the use of anthropological data.

Taking first the woman's attitude to virginity, the surface motives are quite clearly expressed in two conversations I had a short time ago with a girl of my acquaintance, and perhaps it will be possible to see even something below the surface. She is an attractive girl of twenty-four, and her sexual behaviour has been of a promiscuous nature for she has slept with many men. Slept here is not a euphemism, but it is to be understood literally, for she has never had intercourse; she enjoys all forms of forepleasure, but stops dead at any attempt at coitus. 'But why?' I asked her. 'With none of these men am I really in love. I am attracted to them, but

none of them is my ideal man. I am looking for my ideal man, and must keep myself for him'. One day she decided not to go on playing this 'silly game waiting for my God before I can give myself'. So she arranged with a man friend to deflorate her. He did not attract her, but he would be sure to do it 'cleanly', having a good deal of knowledge and experience. At the last moment she found herself saying the chief Jewish prayer, Shemah, which she had not uttered for many years. It is a prayer which every Jewish child is taught to say, especially as a plea for help when frightened. As she herself said, it was as if she has said 'Help me, God'. At the last moment she nearly fainted and the defloration was postponed.

This brings out the main motives which are at the root of woman's valuation of virginity: the wish to preserve it for the ideal man, for God, that is, for the Father, and the fear of losing something precious to herself. To take this second motive first, it is evident that women when they talk of defloration think a wound is left; that they are essentially different; 'never the same again' is a popular phrase. There is a lose of maidenhead which seems to be equivalent to a loss of the maiden's penis, penis and head of being, of course, frequently equated. 'I must not lose my purity or my body will be spoilt', said a patient of mine. On another occasion she saw a bottle of red ink on my table, and some interesting associations followed; first came the idea of a bloodstain on a white handkerchief, then that I had taken blood from her. A fairly detailed phantasy followed this: 'As if you have taken my flower from my garden. I am the gardener and have kept the paths so tidy and the grass in order and put notices all over the place, "Keep off the grass". You have a right to come into the garden because it belongs to you. You don't seem to care very much, but just go straight over the grass which has never been trodden on before and pick my most precious flower. Behind the bush on which the flower grows is a rubbish heap and now it will be seen and scattered all over the garden. If you pick my flower I will never care any more to keep the garden beautiful'.

Clearly there is here more than a simple defloration fantasy, but we cannot at this point enter into the anal-sadistic elements involved. They are of great importance in relation to virginity and I shall return to them at the end of this study.

Dr. Helen Deutsch, in her lectures on 'Women's Sexuality', brings out the connection between the first menstruation and defloration; she shows that both reanimate castration fears. As the first menstruation, so the defloration means to the woman a disappointment, not only in the sense of expected sexual pleasure, but also as a narcissistic injury. Hostile feelings and revenge tendencies are aroused against men. The first approach of menstruation stands as a punishment for the girl, a renewal of the feelings of the penis being taken away. Abraham says in this connection 'The primary idea of a "wound" is reanimated by the impression created by the first and each succeeding menstruation, and then once again by defloration; for both processes are connected with loss of blood and thus resemble an injury'.¹ One would expect to find a sadistic attitude in the form of a desire for revenge as a reaction to this feeling of injury aroused by defloration, but to this I shall return later.

It is not only in the unconscious that a connection is found between menstruation and defloration: among primitive peoples this idea is very clearly expressed in belief and ritual. Thus Frazer tells us that 'among the Baganda the first menstruation is often called marriage, and the girl is spoken of as a bride...the girl's first menstruation results from her defloration by one of a host of aerial spirits, and...the wound thus inflicted is repeated afterwards every month by the same ghostly agency'.² Among some peoples this ghostly agency takes the form of a serpent

which comes from within the girl at the first menstruation. Frazer says 'the Chiriguanos of South Eastern Bolivia hoisted the girl in her hammock to the roof, in which she stayed for a month; in the second month the hammock was left half-way down from the roof; in the third month old women, armed with sticks, entered the hut and ran about striking everything they met saying they were hunting the snake that had wounded the girl'.³ Crawley, in the *Mystic Rose*, brings out the idea of the serpent coming from within: 'A...plank carving represents a snake evidently intended to resemble the male sex organs, crawling out of the woman's vulva'.⁴ The association between menstruation and defloration finds further expression in a widespread belief that 'women, especially about the time of puberty, have communication with gods, a belief emphasized by the common practice of secluding them at that time'.⁵ 'In Cambodia it is a sacrilege to abuse a young girl who is not of an age to marry. Such girls are called the wives of Prah En (Indra). During the seclusion called the "shade", which is necessary at puberty, young girls are called the wives of Rea, and it is a sin to abuse them'.⁶ The belief that menstruation is caused by coitus with a fearful and dangerous agency, resulting in injury and bleeding, shows that there is present a sadistic conception of intercourse. This agency is dangerous not only to the girl herself but also to people with whom she comes into contact. The menstruating girl is thus taboo. Similarly the virgin who is still possessed by this hostile spirit is taboo and must therefore be ritually deflorated. Major Daly has recognised the close connection between menstruation and the taboo of virginity and explains the latter as a by-product of the 'the menstruation complex'. But as his theory of the menstruation taboo is based on two hypotheses, neither of which is biologically correct, it would be too great a digression to treat it more fully here.

Thus we see that associated with the first menstruation there is the idea that a girl is married to God and therefore must not be abused. But this belief that the virgin belongs to and is married to God is to be found associated not only with the first menstruation but with virginity in general. Havelock Ellis, quoting from *Judas Thomas' Acts*, tells us of a bride and bridegroom, who on their wedding night, had been persuaded to refrain from intercourse by a vision of Christ. In the morning they were found 'sitting one opposite the other, and the face of the bride was uncovered and the bridegroom was cheerful'. The bride's parents asked her why she was not ashamed of sitting without a veil, and the bride answered, 'Truly, my father, I am in great love, and am praying to my Lord that I may continue in this love which I have experienced this night. I am not veiled, because the veil of corruption is taken from me, and I am not ashamed, because the deed of shame has been removed far from me, and I am cheerful and gay, and despise this deed of corruption and the joys of this wedding feast, because I am invited to the true wedding feast. I have not had intercourse with a husband, the end whereof is bitter repentance, because I am betrothed to the true Husband'.⁷

And again the same motif appears in the story of the two lovers of Auvergne: 'When the wedding day came, and the young couple were placed in bed, the bride turned to the wall and wept bitterly. The bridegroom implored her to tell him what was the matter, and, turning towards him, she said that if she were to weep all her days she could never wash away all her grief for she had resolved to give her little body immaculate to Christ, untouched by men, and now instead of immortal roses she had only had on her brow faded roses, which deformed rather than adorned it, and instead of the dowry of Paradise which Christ had promised her she had become the consort of a merely mortal man'. He was overcome by her eloquence, and they lived for years chastely together. 'At length she died and was buried, her lover restoring

her immaculate to the hands of Christ'.⁸

The idea of virgins being married to a God is further exemplified in the accounts of Temple virgins. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* tells us that the 'Incas of Peru, who deemed themselves children of the Sun, procured a new fire from their great father at the Solstice in June, our Midsummer Day...The sacred fire...was deposited...in a great convent of virgins. These virgins were regarded as the wives of the Sun, she was burned alive, like a Roman vestal, and her paramour was strangled'.⁹

The idea of the virgin belonging to God is brought out even more explicitly in the following account given by Howard in his *Sex Worship*: 'From time immemorial virginity has been definitely sacred, and has universally been looked upon as belonging exclusively to the Gods. This belief was so strongly implanted in the minds of ancient Romans, that their law could not permit a virgin to be executed in the ordinary manner. No matter what the enormity of the guilt, the woman, if a virgin, could not be subjected to the penalty of death by violent hands. By reason of her virginity she was the property of the gods; she contained within her the spiritual presence of the Deity; and hence, before inflicting the last penalty, it was the duty of the executioner to remove the God from her, and for this purpose he was obliged, as a part of his office, to deflower her; after which she was strangled or burnt'.¹⁰

This motive for the presentation of virginity comes to equally full expression in those cases where a virgin is initiated into the service of the temple by a ceremony of marriage with the God, being artificially deflorated by a large phallus, which is often considered to be the god himself, as in the case of Priapus. Or again, when the priest, as representative or incarnation of the deity, performs the defloration ceremony. It is a natural extension of this that the maidens should continue to have intercourse with the priest in the service of the Gods.

Such full expression of the motives underlying the valuation of virginity can only be achieved in the case of women specially dedicated to temple service. For the majority of women the demands of reality, the necessity for children and so forth, make adherence to such strict practices impossible, and a compromise of some sort is essential. The form that the compromise took in many places was that the first intercourse only had a sacred character. Howard bears out this when he says, 'Among the ancients, however, life-long continence was not regarded as a necessary means for the sacrifice of virginity. The religious duty of women to bear children would not in those days have permitted such a custom. To them it was sufficient that the first sexual act of a woman should be given to her deity, that the act by which she gave up her divine virginity should be dedicated to the god or goddess of her religion'.¹¹ According to Frazer, 'In Cyprus it appears that before marriage all women were formerly obliged by custom to prostitute themselves to strangers at the sanctuary of the goddess'.¹² Also among the Amorites it was the law 'that when she was about to marry she should sit in fornication seven days by the gate'.

We have thus arrived at what appears to be a very important, if not the most important, motive for the valuation of virginity - at least from the woman's side - namely, that she wishes to preserve her virginity for God. And I think that we will have no great difficulty in seeing that God here is largely a father substitute. Freud, in his essay on 'The Taboos on Virginity', has already suggested this when he writes, 'It is a question of sexual wishes active in childhood and never relinquished - in women generally a fixation of the libido upon the father, or upon a brother taking

his place – wishes that often enough were directed to things other than coitus, or that included it among others only as a vaguely concealed aim. The husband is, so to speak, never anything but a proxy, never the right man; the first claim upon the feelings of love in a woman belongs to someone else, in typical cases to her father; a husband is, at best, second. Now whether the husband is rejected as unsatisfying depends upon the strength of this fixation and the tenacity with which it is upheld...Primitive customs appear to accord some recognition to the existence of the early sexual wish by assigning the duty of defloration to an elder, a priest or a holy man, that is, to a father substitute'.¹³

So far only the woman's attitude and the way it finds expression in custom and ritual have been considered. We have seen how the desire for this preservation of virginity for God is expressed in the virgin's dedication to God; how the underlying infantile incestuous wish is fulfilled by the temple maiden's intercourse with father substitutes, the priests; we have also seen how where such complete expression is impossible it comes to expression in the dedication of the first intercourse to the God or his temple. Perhaps a further consideration of this compromise will enlarge our view. Can we consider the explanation of this custom so far put forward completely satisfactory or is there something more expressed in it? Can we believe that fulfilment of the wish on one occasion satisfies it once and for all, or if the husband is also a father substitute, why is there this special need to have another substitute on this one occasion?

It would seem that the girl not only has the wish to have intercourse with the father and therefore primitive society recognizes this by allowing the father to have the first intercourse with her; but further that she feels she belongs to the father and only an initiation into intercourse by him can allow her to belong to another. Unless she is initiated in this way some harm will befall her, for intercourse is always associated with incest and the guilt feelings attached thereto, and so requires to be formally sanctioned in some way before it may be indulged in. This is well illustrated by a statement made by a patient: 'I wish marriage could be just between me and Billy with God there instead of the priest, then I would know that God thought marriage was right'. In intercourse with another, there seems also to be some feeling of depriving the father and consequently a fear of incurring his revenge unless his permission is first obtained.

Much of this argument has been based on customs and rites, which, it must be remembered, are not decreed by women, but grow out of the life of the people. They therefore form an expression of the attitudes of both women and men. This being so, before the thesis here put forward can be accepted or, in fact, further developed, we must examine the matter from the man's side. Freud, in the essay already quoted, says, when considering the source's of the man's attitude: 'One may sum up and say that it is the immature sexuality of the woman which discharges itself upon the man who first introduces her to sexual intercourse; with this the taboo of virginity becomes intelligible enough, and we understand a regulation which enjoins avoidance of these dangers on the very man who is entering upon life in the company with this woman'.¹⁴ And he takes this attitude on the part of woman as the basis of the man's fear of performing the act of defloration. With regard to this he says that the act of defloration 'liberates an archaic reaction of enmity towards the man, which may assume pathological forms, and often enough expresses itself by inhibitions in the erotic life of the pair, and to which one may ascribe the fact that second marriages so often turn out so much better than the first. The strange taboo of virginity, the fear which among primitive people induces the husband to avoid the

performance of defloration finds its full justification in this hostile turn of feeling.¹⁵

Among primitive peoples, however, the taboo in question is not a taboo merely on defloration, but on defloration and the first intercourse. This is a point Freud has recognized in his essay, but he does not introduce it in the explanation just quoted. What then does the husband gain from this double taboo? Two facts become apparent; firstly, that he avoids associating the shedding of blood and the difficulties of the first intercourse with his relations to his wife, and secondly, that he avoids the necessity of ever having intercourse with a virgin.

This raises what is perhaps the most important question: Why is intercourse with a virgin considered dangerous? We must seek for the answer to this in the man's internal realities rather than look for actual external dangers, though naturally we must not overlook these. Psycho-analysis has taught us in dealing with the psycho-neuroses to look for the cause not in the actual trauma but in the feelings of trauma: we do not seek for an avenging mother in the home, we recognize the stern super-ego of the child and ask for what the punishment is demanded and why the feelings of guilt.

And it is clearly this same point of view that we must adopt in studying the psychological causes of customs and taboos. Let us examine the matter in this light, and ask why the husband wishes to avoid the act of defloration.

An obsessional patient of mine said, 'I only want intercourse with some one who is not a virgin; defloration associated with blood would make me feel guilty'. Primitive peoples likewise have a superstitious dread of shedding blood; and by the language used there would seem to be the same association of this dread with a fear of castration among them as we find in the neurotic.

One of the main sources of the repulsion felt by homosexual men towards sexual relations with women is that their castration anxiety is revived by the absence of a penis in women. Actual defloration will tend to evoke these feelings to a much greater extent and so it is readily intelligible that it will be avoided even by heterosexual men. As in women so in men the fear of defloration is associated with the fear of a narcissistic injury, with the difference that in women there is always an actual injury as a basis. Therefore defloration faces a man with the perpetration of a sadistic injury on the woman, equivalent to castration, arousing his own guilt feelings and therefore his own castration anxiety.

How then is man going to escape these guilt feelings and this fear of castration? That initiation rites offer one means seems to be apparent in much of the information we have about them. Frazer puts forward the idea that totemic initiation ceremonies, coming as they do at puberty, are for the purpose of depositing the soul in the safe-keeping of an animal. According to him the dangers feared are those entailed in the sexual relation.¹⁶ The exact nature of the danger apprehended is still obscure, he says; psycho-analysts, however, can with some confidence supply the answer that castration is the basic danger feared.

This castration anxiety is aroused not merely by defloration, that is, by the shedding of blood; there is also another very powerful incentive. As we have seen it is not only defloration which has to be avoided but also the the first intercourse with a virgin, that is with a woman who belongs to a god or spirit or the father-substitute. The anxiety is thus further enhanced by this situation which revives the old situation of

the child to its parents: the wish to take the mother away from the father, and the fear of the father's revenge. Freud, in discussing modern instances of the taboo of virginity, adds a footnote: 'A masterly short story of Arthur Schnitzler's (*Das Schicksal des Freiherrn von Leisenbogh*) deserves to be mentioned in this connection, in spite of a departure in it from the situation under discussion. The lover of an actress who had had a great experience in love is dying as the result of an accident; and he creates a new virginity for her, as it were, by uttering a curse of death upon the next man to possess her after him. For a time the woman who is thus placed under a taboo does not venture to have intercourse with anyone. Then she falls in love with a singer, and resorts to the plan first granting a night with her to Freiherr von Leisenbogh, who has for years tried in vain to win her. And the curse fulfills itself upon him; he dies of a stroke on hearing the reason of his unexpected good fortune.¹⁷ Here this second source of anxiety is clearly apparent but Freud, though illustrating it, has not worked out this side of the question more fully.

The appreciation of the effect of this repetitive aspect of the situation gives us greater insight into the mode of escaping the guilt feelings which we have already mentioned, namely initiation. The essence of initiation is that it is a permission by the father to do the forbidden thing. In his *Psychoanalytic Study of the Family*, Professor Flugel, speaking of the significance of initiation, says 'A boy may dream of initiation at the hands of his father, because this signifies to him a removal of the prohibition imposed by his father on all sexual activity on the part of the boy – a prohibition imposed in virtue of the boy's original direction of his love towards his mother: without such sign of approval and change of attitude on the father's part, the boy may feel that the original prohibition is still too powerful to overcome and that his sexual life will remain for ever under the ban of the strong inhibition aroused by a sense of parental disapproval'. Professor Flugel illustrates this by a dream of a patient of his: 'I was trying to catch a train, but a gate leading to the platform was closed and I could not succeed in opening it. Then my father suddenly appeared, shook the gate violently, opened it and hurried me across the platform. He opened the door of a compartment and pushed me in. I found a lady sitting there'.¹⁸ The lady here was associated with the mother and the opening of the gate and door symbolized the sexual act.

Among primitive peoples this initiation into sexual life is achieved in reality: the father-substitute initiates the man and gives him permission to perform an act tinged with the infantile incestuous motive by first himself having intercourse with the virgin bride. Thus we see that fear of castration which tends to be evoked by the association or resemblance of defloration to castration is fully reanimated in the situation which, by arousing the incestuous trends, gives full justification for the man to fear punitive castration by the father. It is this which would seem to give real force to the castration fear and which accounts for the guilt feelings. It is also this fact which explains why the taboo against intercourse with a virgin, that is the first intercourse, are necessarily linked.

That this conclusion is not unfounded nor far-fetched may be seen by a consideration of savage marriage customs. We will see that danger is apprehended in marriage; in the nature of the danger feared and in the means taken to guard against it, we can see this unconscious motivation at work in a more or less thinly disguised state. Peculiar native marriage customs have always attracted the traveller's attention; we might take our first instance from Sir John Mandeville who describes the practice of certain peoples of the East Indies of having their young girls deflorated before marriage by a professional person. He states that they explain

this custom by the fact that in former times 'men hadden bene dede for defloration of maidens, that hadden serpents in hire bodyes, that strongen men upon hire zerdes that thei dey den anon'. That is, the maiden was believed to have a serpent in her body, which stung the man upon his penis so that he died deflowering her. This shows ideas very similar to Mrs. Klein's findings that the fear of intercourse with the mother is derived from the belief that the father's penis is already in the vagina and acts as a punishing and revenging instrument, for actually in the place desired is the revenging instrument. Thus the mother attains fearful proportions in virtue of being a combined parental figure.

That marriage is dangerous to both bride and bridegroom appears over and over again in accounts of marriage ceremonies. Sometimes guns are fired or arrows are shot to protect the bridal pair from spirits; the bride and bridegroom wear protective weapons; or sometimes other people dress up as bride and bridegroom to divert the danger from the true pair and the bride and bridegroom disguise themselves. At other times there is a mock marriage between trees or animals and effigies, so that the evil spirits may vent their wrath on these. The bride frequently has to be veiled, she may not touch the ground and is often carried in a cage; and similar rules are observed by the bridegroom. These measures serve both as a protection to the bridal pair and as a protection to other people who might be harmed by contact with the tabooed and therefore dangerous pair. A relic of this custom is found in the red carpet and awning at our weddings. 'The function of the bridesmaids, bridesmen and groomsmen', says Westermarck in his *History of Human Marriage*, 'have been not only to attend upon the bride and bridegroom but to protect them from evil influences'.¹⁹ And further because of the danger there is sometimes a form of initiation on lines parallel to ritual defloration. Thus Westermarck tells us that 'among the Lyca Indians of Colombia the man who accompanied the pair to the hut in which marriage is to be consummated says to the bridegroom, "Take the woman"; and then enforces his command by beating him with a small whip'.²⁰ Among yet other people it is the father himself who initiates: the whip often figures in these ceremonies.

In many places custom enforces upon the father behaviour which can be considered as being mainly a conventionalized expression of jealousy. In illustration of this we can quote from d'Arvieux *Travels in Arabia the Desert*: 'All the relations assist at the wedding except the bride's father who leaves the house that evening out of an odd piece of niceness that will not suffer him to be at home whilst they are putting his daughter to bed with a man'.²¹ Again Westermarck tells us that, 'when a Singhalese gave his daughter in marriage he first slept with her himself on the plea of having a right to the first fruit of the tree he had planted'. Yet Westermarck rejects any idea of incest saying 'it is difficult, however, to believe that the custom in question really represents a right claimed by the father. His intercourse with the daughter more probably serves the object of making her acceptable to her husband'.²² How it does so I have tried to show. And even with us the clergyman frequently kisses the bride first after the wedding ceremony.

Where there is no initiation or ritual defloration continence is often observed for some nights after the wedding. Throughout primitive cultures there is an idea that hostile powers can be disarmed by chastity. According to Westermarck, 'among the Indians of Canelos the young couple do not spend the first night after the nuptial feast together because they believe that if they did the husband would die. The Supai, a most dangerous demon, claims the right to spend that night with the bride; and the right is voluntarily ceded to him by the husband'.²³

It is seldom that we can apply in sociology or psychology those tests which are possible and customary in the physical sciences, for it is but rarely that we can create or find the conditions postulated in our hypothesis and then see if the predicted result follows. It is then particularly gratifying to be able to do something of this nature in the case. I have suggested that underlying the taboo on virginity and the custom of a ritual or initiatory defloration and intercourse by one other than the husband is the idea that the virgin belongs to someone else, in some cases avowedly to God, but in all, in the unconscious to the father, and that he will revenge himself unless precautions are taken. Our test then will be the woman who does actually belong to someone else, that is the widow. We have already seen in the individual case I quoted above from Freud how a second virginity can be created for a widow by means of a threat of punishment on the man who transgresses. Let us now see what happens among savages on the remarriage of widows. We find that there is the same fear of the first intercourse with the widow as has been seen to exist in regard to the virgin; in fact many of the rites and ceremonies are identical. Westermarck says that 'among the Kamchadal nobody would marry a widow before an outsider had had sexual intercourse with her, which was called 'removing the sin from her', since otherwise it was thought that the new husband would also die. As Dr. Jochelson remarks she was thereby freed from the old union, and her new husband could take her to his own family hearth without incurring vengeance on the part of her husband's spirit...So also among the Akamba, east of the Victoria Nyanza, 'in the event of a widow not going to her husband-in-law, but to a stranger, she must first go through a ritual coitus with another elderly man, otherwise her prospective husband's earlier wives will become barren, or her children will die'.²⁴ The husband sometimes takes steps to avoid the danger which menaces him also; Roscoe reports that among the Baganda 'when a man wished to marry a widow, he first paid the deceased husband a barkcloth and a fowl, which he put into the little shrine at the grave in this way he imagined could pacify the ghost'.²⁵ And from Westermarck we learn that 'among the Gonds in some parts of Bastar a widow whose husband has been killed by a tiger is formally married not to her new husband, but either to a dog or to a lance, axe, sword, because they believe that the ghost of the deceased has entered into the tiger and in that form will seek to devour the man who marries his widow, but now will carry off the dog or perish by the weapon'.²⁶

The sacrifice of virgins has always been thought to be an especially efficacious means of propitiating good or evil spirits. On similar lines among many peoples widows are killed so that their husbands may enjoy them in heaven. In fact, a widow who did not allow herself to be killed was regarded as an adulteress, and in Pentecost the women were by no means pleased at the alleviation of the custom due to European influence, for they feared that they might be haunted by the offended spirits of their husbands. Even the prizing of virginity is paralleled by the widow; we are told that 'among the Nsakara north of the Mubangi, where the marriage tie is very loose and married women are most unchaste, chastity is expected of the widow – and even of the daughters and sisters – of dead chiefs of importance; and they have to spend their lives maintaining a perpetual fire on the dwelling-tomb of the deceased potentate'.²⁷ Continence is also enjoined for a varying period after marriage with a widow.

Thus not only does the result that might be expected actually follow, but also in this case the accepted explanation is that the previous possessor's – the former's husband's – vengeance is to be feared and therefore he must be placated or his anger deflected.

There is one other matter in regard to virginity which it may be interesting to notice and which would seem to corroborate the thesis here put forward: it is the attitude to rape. The rape of virgins, that is to say intercourse by violence, seems an especially dreadful thing to the mind of the primitive and in fact to the mind of the people to this very day; among primitive peoples both the perpetrator and the girl were often punished by death. This attitude seems to have very little to do with any theoretical idea of woman's freedom of choice, for rape is severely punished by the very tribe's who practice infant marriage, that is to say where the woman has no freedom of choice. The difference between rape and infant marriage would seem to be that in the latter the father's consent has been obtained whereas in the former it is disregarded. Rape would thus appear to be an example par excellence of robbery of the father; hence the extreme condemnation of it. Doubtless the factor of the girl's consent also plays a part in determining the attitude to rape, in fact woman's reaction to rape is intense and great feelings of revenge are aroused by it.

The same revenge feelings, though to a less intense degree, are aroused also by the taking of virginity. The woman feels she has been violated; and this objection to violation undoubtedly plays its part in woman's valuation of virginity. As Havelock Ellis says in speaking of virginity, 'Its charm is represented as lying in its own joy and freedom and the security it involves from all troubles – it is in a large measure a revolt against men and marriage'. The girl, quoted at the beginning of this paper, once said when talking of a man from whom she had withheld herself, 'keeping men off and keeping myself a virgin makes them feel unmanly, emasculates them'. And a patient of mine, speaking about keeping her virginity and not letting herself be touched by her fiance, expressed herself in a similar manner: 'I felt as if I was gradually killing him by withholding from him something his body wants'. (This is, of course, obviously connected with oral withholding.) This attitude in an exaggerated form appears in homosexuality – an entire refusal of the male.

This raises a problem in the motivation of the taboo of virginity and the custom of ritual defloration, and introduces some psychological questions which deserve very careful consideration. Freud in his essay would seem to consider the avoidance of the woman's revenge feelings as the main source of these customs, and undoubtedly it is a motive which cannot be excluded. There are, however, certain facts which seem to raise a doubt as to its being the weightiest motive. Freud bases his opinion on the idea that ritual defloration deflects the woman's revenge feelings onto someone other than the husband, who is thus free from them. But if this is so we should hardly expect to find as we did the same fear of and practices in regard to intercourse with a widow, whose revenge is surely no longer to be feared. A more important question is whether this process is borne out by psychological findings. If the feeling of revenge is so strong in connection with the first intercourse, which signifies castration, would the unconscious be so reasonable as to dissociate the first from all the succeeding intercourse, and so leave subsequent intercourse with the husband free from feelings of castration? Do not the laws of association of ideas and continuity in the unconscious suggest rather that in so far as the first intercourse is a trauma, the feeling of trauma and with it revenge will be carried onto the next intercourse with whomever it be? And if the act of defloration 'liberates an archaic reaction of enmity towards the man', can we assume that this reaction exhausts itself at once? Does not analysis lead us to believe that it works on in the individual, expressing itself constantly throughout life?

An attempt has here been made to explain those ideas of virginity which come to expression in the custom of ritual defloration, but this subject can hardly be left

without some reference to the ideas of virginity current in our own civilization. The main feature of these is the insistence on the bride's being a virgin and the husband himself performing the act of defloration and the first intercourse. As this study has been almost entirely concerned with the other aspect of the question, there is space only for a few suggestions in regard to this phase. It would seem, perhaps, that the husband in insisting on virginity in his bride is seeking reassurance of his wish that she should not have belonged to his father; that he is trying, in fact, to possess her himself in the past as in the future. There remain, however, the apparently irreconcilable facts that although he may be reassured that she has belonged to no other by the physical fact of her virginity, yet to perform the first intercourse with a virgin, that is, with one who, emotionally considered, belongs to another, he must be able to bear the anxiety involved in this act. But if the modern European can sustain this anxiety without the aid of external measures, we may assume, with some confidence, that either, he is more capable of bearing anxiety than the primitive or that in some way the intensity of the anxiety has been reduced or, of course, that a combination of the two processes is at work. Perhaps the most acceptable explanation of the difference between the primitive and the modern lies in this combination, with as the main element the ability to tolerate anxiety.

Because his ego is less developed or for some other reasons, primitive man is less able to tolerate instinct tension, and it seems that sadism is correspondingly increased as a reaction to the feeling of deprivation, as Dr. Jones has so clearly shown in his paper on 'Anxiety, Guilt, and Hate'.²⁸ There would thus be a tendency for intercourse to be conceived only in terms of anal-sadism and so it would seem doubly dangerous, for the death wishes against the father being increased, the fear of his vengeance is so much the greater, and there is also the fear of the bride's revenge, since intercourse is considered to inflict injury. In this connection I may refer to the example, given above, of the patient who said, 'I only want intercourse with someone who is not a virgin; defloration associated with blood would make me feel guilty'. In this case intercourse could be had in phantasy only with a special type of woman, one so robust as to be able to bear with impunity his assault of her. His conception of intercourse necessarily involved the injuring of the love object and was correlated with a fear of the consequences of the act. Defloration, resulting actually in injury and loss of blood, stimulates the latent sadism and with it the dread of castration and death, even more powerfully than intercourse associated only with phantastic injury. Hence among primitive peoples and neurotics, where we find the virgin tabooed, we may fairly conclude that there is considerable development of anal-sadism. In present-day European culture there seems a somewhat greater ability to conceive of inter-course in genital terms; anxiety is so far reduced as to allow the infantile wish for the sole possession of the mother to come to expression in the demand for a virgin bride, and is so much better tolerated as to permit the husband to carry out the act of defloration and first intercourse, with no more external support than is given by the marriage service.

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ENDNOTES:

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- ¹ K. Abraham, *Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 344.
 - ² *The Golden Bough*, Vol. X, p. 24.
 - ³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.
 - ⁴ Vol. I, p. 231.
 - ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 235.
 - ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.
 - ⁷ *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol. VI, pp. 156-157.
 - ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.
 - ⁹ Vol. II, pp. 243-244.
 - ¹⁰ P. 86.
 - ¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 87.
 - ¹² *The Golden Bough*, Vol. V, p. 36.
 - ¹³ Freud, *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, p. 229.
 - ¹⁴ Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.
 - ¹⁶ *The Golden Bough*, Vol. XI, pp. 220 et seq.
 - ¹⁷ Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
 - ¹⁸ J.C. Flugel, *Psychoanalytic Study of the Family*, p. 80.
 - ¹⁹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, Vol. II, p. 526.
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 517.
 - ²¹ P. 325.
 - ²² *Op. cit.*, Vol I, p. 188.
 - ²³ *Op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 563.
 - ²⁴ *Op. cit.*, Vol I, pp. 327-328.
 - ²⁵ *The Baganda*, p. 97.
 - ²⁶ *Op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 525.
 - ²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol I., p. 320.
 - ²⁸ *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Vol. X, pt. IV.