

### VIII.—RITUAL PROHIBITIONS.

Under the head of *masəm*—forbidden—are grouped a large number of beliefs and practices which have, for our ideas, no very clear bond of union. They are, however, very definitely distinguished from the simply “bad” in some cases, and must consequently be regarded as ritual in their nature with an underlying magico-religious idea. It is, however, somewhat singular that no idea of *masəm* is said to attach either to a corpse, provided it is that of an ordinary person, not a member of a secret society, or to a victim after sacrifice; the fundamental idea must therefore be widely different from those which are familiar to us in Semitic and other ancient religious systems.

Another anomalous feature is that though a *piacular* sacrifice is sometimes enjoined when a breach of *masəm* takes place, in other cases no purification is regarded as possible; in yet other cases no evil consequences of any sort are feared, and hence no *piaculum* is needed; and in others again the guilty party purges himself by a fine paid to the chief.

But more remarkable than either of these anomalies is the fact that under *masəm* are included acts which seem to be forbidden as contrary to ordinary prudence. Thus, it is *masəm* to treat parents-in-law disrespectfully, for they would take away the wife. Again, two brothers of the whole blood should not embark in one canoe; for if it upset, both would be drowned; a man should not take with him in one canoe both his wife and his mother; for if he saved his mother, his wife's parents would object, and if he saved his wife, his mother would curse him, thus introducing, it is true, a contingent magico-religious element. In another case theft was said to be *masəm*, because if a man stole, the wife's family