

Death-Dealing Traditions

DO YOU AVOID walking under a ladder? Avoid crossing a black cat's path? Do you cross your fingers? Cross your heart and spit through your teeth?

Do you carry a rabbit's foot or a four-leaf clover for luck? Or any other talisman?

No? You claim to be sophisticated and erudite. Really?

Chances are that in some way and sometime you have evinced some superstitious tendency.

Hawaiians have always had a belief in the supernatural.

Who can disprove or disclaim this belief or who would care to try?

For good or for bad, kahunaism has existed as far back as the earliest Hawaiian oral traditions, but comparatively little has been recorded in literature.

EVEN SO, Hawaiian scholar J. S. Emerson, who worked in the mid-

A kahuna had 11 ways to kill or maim in one mele.

1800s, recorded 11 different death or injury-causing methods in just one chant.

Eleven ways to kill or maim in one mele, 11 evil forces sent on missions.

Pleas for deliverance from such evil forces were addressed to Nu'u, a Hawaiian god who had numerous homes high on inaccessible mountains or ledges.

Prayers to Nu'u asked in essence, "Go thou thither to . . ."

1—Deliver us from Ke 'Ana'ana, a general prayer for any death by sorcery.

2—Deliver us from Ka Pule Kuni, a death caused by burning certain articles in a fire.

3—Deliver us from Ho'o-pi'opi'o, a form of black magic practiced only on a sandy beach by a seashore; body parts were injured.

4—Deliver us from Ka Lawe Maunu. Death was produced by burning clothing used by the victim over a period of three days.

Tales of Old Hawai'i

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5—Deliver us from Ho'ounauna, which sent a death message into the body.

6—Deliver us from 'Apo leo. The kahuna caught and destroyed a person's voice.

7—Deliver us from Po'i 'Uthane, in which the kahuna caught the soul and the body died.

8—Deliver us from Ke Kauoha — general injury or robbery of possessions.

9—Deliver us from Ke 'Oni. The kahuna writhes like an eel; this

causes the victim to likewise writhe, but in real pain.

10—Deliver us from Na Kaha Pe'a, a injury caused by stepping on or over a mark. The victim often trips and injures himself.

11—Deliver us from Ka Ho'opu'upu — an insidious form of death-dealing by rumor mongering.

IN SENDING or in setting up each of these methods, the kahuna paid attention to the minutest detail.

A kahuna's prayers were said in a certain way, with a certain inflection, and said from a certain postural position.

Materials used in casting the spell were gathered only in specified places and handled only in certain ways. Methods of preparation were prescribed, including recitation of the proper chants.

Like so many Hawaiian beliefs these death-dealing traditions have disappeared in antiquity.

Or have they?

If you walk a lonely beach path at dusk and see an elderly patriarch or matriarch motioning and swaying to an ancient chant, how can you be sure he or she is not a kahuna sending forth an evil force?

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