

their primitive work and so preserve their brilliant traditions.

We passed a country festival where a group of peasants were dancing. In the centre of the dance one of them was holding a big pole from which many-colored ribbons streamed in the air, and the crowd was whirling around at a dizzy pace to the cadence of a big sort of tom-tom. Their costumes were strange and archaic—a mixture of pre-Columbian America and the mannered elegance of ancient Spain. The embroidery, pompons, and lace were like a vision from the period of Philip II, when, escorted by royal frigates, the galleons of Cadiz unloaded their merchandise at Puerto Bello, whence

it was transported on the backs of mules across the Isthmus of Panama, and then put on another boat on the Pacific and carried to Lima, to mingle with the Chinese and Hindu embroidery that the Philippine flotilla bore over from Luzon. The train moved along, luckily at a slow rate, and the strange vision disappeared.

In some ways it looked like Brittany or Auvergne. The sky was misty and it rained. For eighteen days I had forgotten the rain. The Rio Vilcañota wound at the bottom of the valley. At seven o'clock in the evening we saw the tarnished tiles, the cupolas, and the church clocks of the town of Cuzco, capital of the Incas.

SEX WAR IN THE JUNGLE¹

BY DR. ROBERT BLEICHSTEINER

It is a common mistake to imagine that African women occupy an unusually oppressed and unhappy position. It is believed that women are simply slaves and beasts of burden for their husbands, who take their pleasure freely while their wives work in the rice fields, and that the men can have any number of wives, whom they force to do manual labor. In point of fact, the acceptance of Christianity by Negroes was due much more to their willingness to give up polygamy than to a desire to abandon any of their traditional pleasures. They believed that Christianity, and therefore monogamy, would raise the price of their labor.

¹From *Neues Wiener Tagblatt, Wochen-Ausgabe* (Vienna Liberal daily), October 23

There are many hard-working natives who lead a strenuous existence in the jungle provinces, and the distribution of labor between man and wife is an equal one. Here women not only are better cared for, but they also exert an important influence on the life of the community. It follows that matriarchy is widespread in the Negro world, and that there is established in many places a real system of feminine hegemony such as the ancients used to describe in olden times. It is true, however, that nowadays the practice is not so widespread as it once was. The predominance of the women in these matriarchal communities is based on their ownership of houses and land. They are the ones who are skilled in agriculture, on which all primitive

society is based. Domestic life is arranged with the woman as the keystone of the arch, and the inheritance passes from mother to daughter and not from father to son. The men, deprived of domestic influence, try to gain their prestige in warfare, where they seek to win the favor of their wives. Hence it follows that head-hunting is frequently found in matriarchal communities, and in order to appear worthy in his girl's eyes a young man must first bring her the head of an enemy as a trophy. The men form themselves into secret fighting societies, in which the older ones occupy important positions, and, as usually happens among primitive people, young men are initiated when they reach a marriageable age. They are then protected by the secret, horrible rites and gruesome masks which reduce the women to a state of terror. Often these secret societies extend over an entire province, and enjoy great political influence, since all the chieftains and elders must join them.

The women, for their part, in order to counterbalance the prestige of the men's societies, also organize secret associations to which members of the other sex have no access, and whose purpose is to initiate adolescent girls into their secret ceremonies, to instruct them in their rites, and to prepare them for the duties of marriage. In the Western part of Africa, men's and women's organizations are often to be found in the same tribe. The men's societies base their power on gruesome mysteries and hideous masks, while the women attend to the education of the children and secretly punish any of their members who fail to exercise full domestic authority. Early in the last century Mungo Park traveled in Western Africa and described these practices. Dancers clothed in costumes of dried grass, and wearing hid-

eous wooden masks, execute wild steps, waving spears and rushing through the town, to the terror of the women and children. Drums beat and the dancing begins. Suddenly one of the masked figures seizes a woman and binds her to a stake, and the leader, who is frequently her prospective husband, whips her furiously. The women's societies, on the other hand, base their prestige on the knowledge of sorcery and the medical skill of their old, experienced members. They arouse fear in the hearts of the men, and enjoy considerable influence.

The women of the Loango tribes on the West Coast have their own god, and enjoy a great reputation as healers. Whenever anyone in town is sick, they take the afflicted person to a secret part of the forest in order to practise certain strange rites. No man dares listen to what goes on, although after their return they could give plenty of information about what happened to the sick people. In the province of Pongwe, women have rival societies to those of the men, and practise carefully concealed ceremonies. Initiation to these groups entails great expense. Girls are taken into the society in their tenth or twelfth year, and the ceremonies last for a whole week. During this time the women decorate their bodies with bizarre ornaments painted red and white, and celebrate nocturnal rites in the forest to the beating of drums, while a holy fire is kept burning so that outsiders may not gain access to the ceremonies and discover what is taking place.

The Njamba women are great experts at hocus-pocus. They discover thieves, and claim to be able to find out the secrets of their enemies. They know how to keep the men of the community in a state of real terror, and Wilson, in his book on West Africa,

says that the purpose of these women's societies is to shield their members from the brutality of the men by the brilliance and horror of their secret practices.

The Guinea Coast is the home of the most formidable secret societies. Here the members live in mushroomlike huts, and exercise such a great political influence that even the white men must reckon with them. Here too women's societies have been organized to counteract the men's organizations. But both sexes have certain ceremonies in common, of which the marriage ceremony is the most important. In 1671 an old Dutchman named Dapper, from Amsterdam, described in a book entitled *Africa* the initiation of adolescent girls into the women's societies at Quoga on the Guinea Coast. Girls of from ten to twelve years old are taken out into the jungle, where houses have been built for them, and there they are placed under the supervision of a priestess to remain for three months at a kind of school where they are chiefly taught the duties of marriage. 'Here they learn many complicated dances and songs. In these songs there is little enough to surprise them if they have already learned to be modest, pure, and honorable in their everyday speech. As long as they are all here together they go quite naked, for the priestess takes all their clothes when they arrive, and they are never given back again.' Older women too must give up their clothes on going into the forest.

When the initiation is at an end the girls dress themselves again, making clothes out of different kinds of dry vegetation, which they color red and yellow. Their friends bring them all kinds of ornamental bracelets of coral and shells with which to decorate themselves. 'When they enter a town full of people, though it is a day of

celebration, the priestess decides who is the most beautifully dressed of all that have appeared. Everyone sits down on the ground and one of them fiercely beats a round, hollow piece of wood with two sticks.' Then the girls dance in groups, and henceforth they are members in good standing of the women's society and 'are permitted to swear by No-soggo, which is the name of their society and a word that carries great weight among believers.'

In the English colony of Sierra Leone and in Liberia the secret societies known as Poro and Bundu have become particularly famous. The former is composed of men and the latter of women. The Bundu society is surrounded with the greatest secrecy, and is divided into three groups. The first is the Digma and the second is the Normay. The latter hide behind grotesque devil masks, and wear a garment of rough black cloth wound all about them. Their wooden mask is slung to their head, and they carry a long spear in their hands. The third group includes the leaders, or Soways, who are doctors with great skill in healing. When young girls join the society they must swear to guard its secrets fast. In token of this they take a certain drink out of an antelope's horn, swearing to guard the secrets, and announcing that they will drop dead if by any indiscretion they let them out. This drink is prepared by one of the high officials who is privy to the secrets of the society, and it is declared to be bewitched. Should any man intrude on the ceremonies in the secret part of the forest and hear what is going on, he is consigned to the Bundu devils and beaten with clubs, or turned over to the head of the village and sold into slavery.

The celebrations of the society reach their peak during the harvest. Girls

who have lately been initiated streak their bodies with white, to resemble the souls of their dead ancestors, whose cult the secret society celebrates. They pierce their flesh, tattoo themselves, and after they have become members assume new names. The period spent in the jungle is a kind of home economics course. They learn how to cook, spin, dye, and dance; they are instructed in the mysteries of healing herbs; and last but not least, the secrets of married life are revealed. Great importance is attached to the dances. These are a kind of step accompanied by a rattle. When their period of instruction is over, the girls dash through the town, while the rattles are sounded and the relatives of the new members give the masked women rich presents in return for the lessons. Last of all, they put on the so-called devil's cap and take the oath, smearing their heads with black mud, which they later wash off in the river. When this procedure is over they are ready for marriage. At the conclusion of the ceremony the girls must spend three nights in a little enclosure outside the town to recover from their fatigue. Within the Bundu society is a special group known as the Yassi order, composed only of women physicians, who heal all kinds of sickness by applying various herbs.

In Bulom is another Sierra Leone tribe of women known as the Attonga society, which is devoted to a cult of the dead. Near their village council hall stands a building in which grave-stones are cared for by the Attonga women. When a member of their society dies, all the surviving members spend three months in the house of the deceased, wearing black necklaces and headpieces made of shells or black seeds of grain. When a member of the society dies, her gravestone is put up in a special house of her own, and not in

the house mentioned above. If she leaves a husband, and he either accidentally or intentionally enters the house where her gravestone has been set up, he is forced to join the society, and after his death he too is granted a gravestone by this extraordinary sisterhood of death. The same thing applies to little boys whose mothers have to take them to the society's quarters.

In Northern Kamerun is another interesting women's society, known as the 'Water Sprites,' or Chengu. Only free women can belong to this; slaves are excluded. The members of the Chengu speak a language of their own. In the Volta district on the Gold Coast is a group of women who have a god known as Abbe. Whoever marries one of these women must recognize her god as lord and master. The worshipers of Abbe do honor to their god in a dance which they perform naked, with their faces painted red and white and their bodies streaked with mud.

The Yeffay society, with headquarters in Dahomey, is another order, to which men are admitted. It occupies a big walled settlement of tents and huts, in one of which the holy stone is guarded. Here stands an altar made of earth, splattered with blood and decorated with white chicken feathers. Only members can enter. In the cloister lives the prior, known as Hunuvo, and a number of male and female 'dogs,' as the members call themselves. They are grouped into two classes — one of novices, and the other of those who are privy to all the secrets of the order. The members are either destined to the order from birth or enter later of their own free will, and many of the latter are tricked and robbed. The cloister is a safe asylum for everybody. No one can press a suit against a member even if he is clearly guilty. Thus people inside the cloister

can live a care-free life and need fear no annoyance, for none can bring charges against them. Heavily indebted people liable to the penalty of being buried alive take refuge in such a cloister and become believers. When they arrive, the members of the order execute a horrible dance. People in trouble may well be glad to pay a large sum to the highest official for the privilege of entering this safe retreat.

If a woman or a girl wants to join the order, she throws herself before the head priest, who then takes her in as a novice. For the next six months her friends must bring her food. If she is married, her husband cannot come to her unless he brings her gifts and joins the society himself, but if the wife does not want to see her husband any more she simply tells Hunuvo not to let him in. The Yeffay order exercises a demoralizing influence on the population, because it destroys family life. Even if a wife who belongs to it goes back to her husband, only storm and strife follow, because she serves the ends of the order and neglects her housekeeping. If her husband shows signs of anger, she simply runs away from him, and her friends usually succeed in forcing the man to give all kinds of presents to conciliate his wife. A further injustice that these orders often commit is to keep putting new members off and postponing their election, though they want very much to join.

In Weidah, on the Guinea Coast, where snakes are worshiped, the priestesses choose a certain number of girls each year to enter into the service of their god. They march out of their temple during the evening, armed with clubs, and scour the streets in little groups, seizing on any girl they please, for no one dares resist them. The members live apart in special dwellings, and learn sacred songs and dances, decorating their bodies with designs of flowers and animals, and sometimes lacerating their flesh, so that when the painful wounds heal up they look like fine, blossoming, black atlases. On a dark night the girls are brought back again to the houses of their parents and left on the threshold, where they are cheerfully greeted by their families, who are proud that the holy serpent has deemed them worthy of this honor. This honor, however, often costs a great deal of money, since a large fee must be paid to the priestess for her training.

If the girls are of marriageable age, they are led, richly ornamented, to the temple, and there they dance before the serpent god and are initiated as wives of the serpent. Once a girl has been made a consort of the Great Serpent she takes a higher social position among the other women of Weidah, and if a man seeks her hand he must prepare to enter a higher sphere of life and do honor to her on his knees.

A JOURNEY IN ABYSSINIA. VIII¹

BY JEAN D'ESME

For eight days we skirted the banks of Lake Tsana, the enormous body of water from which the flow of the River Nile can be regulated. It is bordered with trees, rocks, and vast fields of papyrus, on which the sun glistens in many colors.

In the plain that surrounded our encampment we found traces of the activities of the English mission that had been there eighteen months before, studying the water supply and preparing to control it. We spent all this time close to the waters of the lake, either on the rocks or on the banks, where dams that will change the formation of this body of water will be erected. All along our pathway were black crosses and symbols engraved with a cold chisel to mark the spot where a mine will be laid. On the little plateau outside the village of Bar-Dhar stood an abandoned mission station.

Two kinds of people inhabit this little settlement. On the shores of the lake are the Abyssinians in their native huts, clustered about the church, and farther out in the plain, where there is no shade, are the Weitos, skinny and nervous, living in a confused group of hovels so low that you had to enter them on your hands and knees and were unable to stand up when you got inside. The Weitos are not liked by the savage, proud Abyssinians, but they reminded me of my beloved Somalis in the Dankali desert.

¹ From *L'Écho de Paris* (Clerical daily), October 12, November 10

Half-naked, carrying lances in their hands, they wander the whole length of the Abbai in little groups, hunting for hippopotamuses and killing them with their lances or with dilapidated guns, forty or fifty years old, that even have no sights on them. When they succeed in bagging a hippopotamus they join in a Pantagruelian feast on the very spot where they have killed their prey.

'Yes,' as the Abyssinians say with a disgust heightened by religious prejudice, 'they are hippopotamus-eaters.'

And what eaters! To appreciate them fully we must witness one of these banquets. To understand also all they have told us about the hippopotamus we must ourselves be heroes in one of the most bizarre hunting parties in which we have ever participated.

For six days we tried to get near a hippopotamus. Hidden in blinds on the banks of the Blue Nile, we saw these animals in troops of five or six bathing in the river, but always out of range. In spite of our tricks, we never could get nearer than two hundred and fifty or three hundred yards to these groaning, snorting, plunging animals, who now and then stuck their large snouts above the water for a few seconds, and wiggled their ears.

Tired of this inactivity, we had decided to depart the next day and leave these defiant beasts to themselves. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and I was surrounded by cases and bales that my servants were