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Central Africa : Ethnology.

Frazer.

The Mackie Ethnological Expedition to Central Africa.

By

*Sir J. G. Frazer.***90**

The Mackie Expedition, under the auspices of the Royal Society and the conduct of the Rev. John Roscoe, has spent about four months (from the end of February to the end of June, 1920) among the Banyoro, a large and important tribe or rather nation, which occupies the country to the east of Lake Albert in the Uganda Protectorate. The native king took a deep interest in the objects of the Expedition and did all in his power to forward them. Day after day for weeks together he granted Mr. Roscoe an interview of several hours and personally explained to him the secret customs of the tribe and the taboos observed by the kings. Thus the Expedition has been able to secure a large body of information authenticated by the highest authority.

The tribe comprises two distinct races, the Bahuma and the Bairu; the Bairu are a subject people of agricultural peasants, belonging to Bantu stock and descended from the original inhabitants of the country; while the Bahuma, a purely pastoral people akin to the Gallas, are a ruling aristocracy, whose ancestors invaded and conquered the country from the north. Though the two races have long lived side by side, they maintain their distinctive features and customs; intermarriage between them is comparatively rare, though not absolutely forbidden. The king belongs to the ruling aristocracy (the Bahuma). Yet, curiously enough, it was formerly the custom to appoint a temporary king every year from among the subject peasantry (the Bairu). This man represented the real king's dead father at the tomb of the deceased monarch. He enjoyed considerable honours: he used as his wives the widows of the late king who lived at the tomb: he sent his blessing to the reigning king and received presents from him: he blessed the country and sent presents of cattle to whom he would from the herds kept at the tomb; and he acted in general as he thought the late king would have acted if he had been alive. But after reigning thus for a week or eight days he was taken to the back of the tomb and strangled. In former times the real King of Bunyoro used to poison himself whenever he fell seriously ill or was wounded in battle, but this custom has long been obsolete. Nowadays in case of sickness the king calls in the aid of a medicine-man. If the medicine-man prescribes cupping for the royal patient, all the king's wives must be cupped at the same time and on the same part of the body; if the medicine-man prescribes blistering with a hot iron, all the king's wives must be blistered with a hot iron at the same time as the king and on the same part of the body; and they exhibit with pride their cuts or burns to their royal husband as so many indubitable proofs of their loyalty and affection.

The king is, or perhaps rather used to be, at the same time a high priest, daily interceding for his people and performing many ceremonies to increase the progeny of man and beast and the supply of food. He had his day marked out for him from morning to night, and he was guarded so that he went from one duty to another with the regularity of the sun. Certain officers were charged with the duty of reminding him of the time of day and of seeing that he performed his appointed tasks punctually. Hence, although he was in theory an absolute monarch, he enjoyed little real liberty, his life being spent in a monotonous round of ceremonial observances for the good of others rather than his own. Before he rose from his bed in the morning his great toes were anointed in a peculiar fashion on the under side by a young virgin, who always slept across the foot of his bed, because the king's toes might not touch the wood of the bed, nor yet be exposed during the night. The anointment was not a mere physical cleansing, it was a charm intended to ward off evil from the king. He might rise from his bed only

at one particular part of it, and at night he had to get into it at the same part. When at rising he went to his bathroom, two yearling bulls were brought to him, one of them black with a white forehead, the other red and black. Taking first the black one by the horns, he placed his own forehead against the forehead of the beast and prayed, saying, "Take away from me, O God, all evil magic and enemies." Then he laid hold of the red and black bull in like manner and prayed, saying, "Pour thy blessing on my country and my people." After the king had bathed and been invested with his amulets by one of his wives, two sacred cows were brought to him and milked with much ceremony. The man who milked these cows held up his hands as in prayer before applying them to the cow's udders, and during his term of office, which lasted only two days, he might not so much as look at a woman on pain of death. The king then retired to the dairy and drank the milk. While he drank in private, his wives in the other room fell on their knees and hid their faces, and all the people kept as still as death; any person who chanced to cough or clear his throat while the king was drinking would be hurried away to instant execution. After hearing and trying cases in the throne room, the king was reminded by the official time-keeper that it was now the hour for him to go and herd the sacred cows. This he then did with much ceremony in order to ensure a blessing on the herds of the whole country. In the afternoon, about half-past four, he was similarly warned that it was time for the royal meal. He then partook of sacred beef, but before doing so he gave a tap to each of the nine drums in the throne room. When the rumble of the drum was heard, there was silence throughout the whole of the vast royal enclosure, all the people cowering and covering their faces, wherever they might be. The royal cook then came, purified, carrying a special fork, while his servant bore a pot of meat. The king sat on his throne, and the cook knelt before him and put four pieces of meat into the king's mouth, taking care not to let the fork touch the royal teeth, because to let it touch them was a crime punishable with instant death. After the king had partaken of the meat, the sacred cows were again brought, and the king drank milk as in the morning. During the early part of the night he wandered about his enclosure, and invariably went at a late hour to see whether the guard were being kept. If he found a sentinel asleep at his post, he might pin him to the earth with his spear. From the time of his accession the king seldom, if ever, went abroad; his duties in the royal enclosure kept him too busy to allow him to think of undertaking a journey, and from want of exercise he grew so indolent that he lost even the wish to travel.

The king generally indicated in his lifetime the son whom he wished to succeed him, but sometimes the claim of the heir apparent was disputed by one or more of his brothers. The dispute was always settled by the ordeal of battle, and the son who killed his brother, or brothers, succeeded peaceably to his father on the throne with the acquiescence of the other princes and people.

The new moon was greeted with great ceremony in the royal enclosure, the royal band playing incessantly day and night for seven days, with only very short intervals for rest and refreshment. As soon as the appearance of the moon was formally announced to the king, a man was caught and taken away secretly, and his throat having been cut his blood was used to smear on the royal fetishes. Human sacrifices were offered also in connection with the salt pans situated near Lake Albert. Every year the king used to send offerings to the spirits of the salt pans, not only for the increase of the salt, but for the general good of the country and the increase of man and beast. The offerings consisted of a slave woman, two cows, and a white sheep. The sheep was thrown into a pool near the salt pans, then taken out and ferried in a canoe a mile or more out on the lake, where it was drowned. The

slave woman was married to the local priest of the salt pans, or to one of his staff; and the first child she bore to her husband was sacrificed to the spirit of the pool, its throat being cut on the margin of the pool and the body thrown into the water. A black goat was also thrown into another rocky pool, higher up the stream, and after being allowed to swim about in the pool all night, it was taken out and killed, and its flesh furnished a sacrificial meal, the participants in which were supposed thereby to enter into communion with the Rock God. These offerings were believed to increase the supply of salt in the salt pans.

The ruling class of Bunyoro, as we have seen, are all pastoral people, and have large herds of cattle, which are their only care and for which they live. Theoretically all the cattle belong to the king, who is deemed something more than an ordinary man with power both on earth and in heaven. But apart from this general right over all the cattle of the country, the king has his special herds, which may number thirty or forty thousand cows; for even a private man who owns only a thousand head of cattle is not thought very wealthy. The kraal, with its cattle, is the centre of life to the ordinary man of the ruling race in Bunyoro; it contains everything he considers essential for existence. The cows furnish all he requires for food, and their surplus milk goes to furnish all he wishes to buy, such as salt and spears. The skins of the animals provide him with clothing. The whole land is open to him to settle where he pleases with his flocks and herds; only superstition sets bounds to his choice, for before he can settle in a place he must consult the oracle, or in other words the medicine-man, who determines whether the omens are favourable before he approves of the new home. When the new kraal is ready, the owner brings fire from the old one and lights the sacred fire in the centre of the new kraal; this fire is henceforward kept constantly burning. The huts of the owner and his dependents are built in a circle round the cattle kraal; but should evil omens occur during the first four days after the occupation of the new kraal, the place is deserted.

With regard to the skill of these people in breeding cattle, Mr. Roscoe writes as follows:—"During the past three months I have been engaged in investigating these cow customs, and find the people have the most wonderful knowledge of cows, and feel sure they would be able to turn this country to profitable use with encouragement and assistance from the British. Without any aid or science they have gained extraordinary insight into disease and the care of cattle, performing wonderful operations to save cows during cross birth when calving or in other circumstances of accident. With a little training they would become expert cowmen and supply European markets with meat, as well as sending butter and cheese."

The agricultural people, known as Bairu, are treated by the pastoral people (the Bahuma) as their slaves. They seem to belong to a very inferior race and to have been only slowly raised to a higher level of culture through the influence of the pastoral people living among them. For long the Bahuma avoided intermarriage with them, but in course of time such of the subject race as gained wealth by their superior intelligence, were raised by the king to the rank of freemen and allowed to marry Bahuma women; they might even become chiefs. When they clear land for cultivation, the men cut down the trees and burn the grass and reeds, but put aside the fallen timber to be used as firewood. The ground thus prepared is dug by the women, who then plant sweet potatoes or sow maize or beans. At sowing a woman has to observe many superstitious rules. She must refrain from sowing if the omens are bad; she must keep the fire burning all the preceding night, for a dying fire would portend dying seed. "When the seed is sown she returns home and cooks the evening meal, and that night the husband has sexual

"connection with her to make the crop grow." When the crop is ready, the wife prepares a little of the food for her husband first, and "after eating the first fruit" he must have sexual relations again with his wife to ripen the fruit." The main crop raised by these people is a small grain which they call *bulo*. The husband assists his wife at sowing it, but the reaping is chiefly done by the women. When the grain has been threshed by the women, most of it is stored in underground granaries, which are pits from six to eight feet deep and covered over so that only the owner knows where they are situated; some natural feature, such as an ant hillock or a tree, serves as a landmark to guide him to the spot when he wishes to draw on his store. Only a little of the grain is kept in the house, lest it should be lost through fire or in war. Peas and beans are grown in quantities and eaten; plantains and millet are cultivated for making beer. Agricultural people eat honey, but pastoral people eat it only in secret, because they think that they might injure their herds by eating what the bees have gathered from various kinds of plants and dead animals.

Sheep and goats are kept both by the agricultural and pastoral people, but not so much for the sake of their flesh as for ceremonial purposes. For example, goats are often used by medicine-men to exorcize ghosts, especially from women with child or from women whose children have died prematurely. Again, fowls are kept both by the peasants and the pastoral people, but not for the sake of their eggs or their flesh, neither of which is eaten by the agricultural people; on the other hand, fowls are constantly wanted by medicine-men for the consultation of the oracle.

In regard to marriage the king was expected, or rather required, on his accession to marry one of his half-sisters, a daughter of his father by a different mother. The half-sister thus married became the queen. The king might not raise to the rank of queen one of the wives whom he had married before his accession. The queen lived in a separate enclosure of her own near to that of the king. The princesses, with the exception of the one who became queen, were never allowed to remarry, but were spoken of as men and treated as princes. Yet they enjoyed great liberties and are known to have had their favourite half-brothers, and few of them were pure. Even the queen is apparently forbidden to bear a child, for should she find herself pregnant she takes a drug which causes abortion. But the king has other wives beside the queen, and it is they who give birth to princes and princesses. Yet so many risks and dangers attached to the position of a king's wife that few parents coveted the honour for their daughters, and most of them did all they could to evade it.

Among the ordinary Bahuma or pastoral people children are usually betrothed in infancy. They may be neighbours and play together without any knowledge of their future relation to each other until they are old enough to marry. At marriage a number of cows, usually from ten to twenty, are presented by the parents of the bridegroom to the parents of the bride. The bride, who has been fattened up for the ceremony by copious draughts of milk, is carried veiled in a litter to the bridegroom's house. She is accompanied by a paternal aunt, who stays with the newly-married couple any time from two days to a month and shares their bed; nay, if the bride is young and timid, it is her aunt's duty to supply her place in the arms of the bridegroom. Among the agricultural people, on the other hand, by a curious variation of custom, it is the maternal aunt who accompanies the bride to the house of the bridegroom; she stays only one night, occupying a separate bed, and when she departs next day she leaves a younger sister of the bride to keep her company for a month or more. In either case, on the morning after marriage the aunt washes down bride and bridegroom four times from head to foot with a bunch of purificatory herbs. This is said to wash away any youthful ills and to

permit the young couple to begin married life without any stain. Among the pastoral people an important part of the marriage ceremony is the drinking of milk by bride and bridegroom from a special wooden pot, which is handed to them by the bridegroom's mother. The milk must be drawn from a cow whose calf is alive; for if it were drawn from a cow which had lost its calf, they believe that the couple would have no children.

Among the agricultural people the practice of betrothal in infancy appears not to be in vogue. When a young man is old enough to marry, he chooses his wife or leaves the choice to his parents. An essential part of a proposal of marriage is an offering of beer to the bride's parents; if they accept it and drink the beer, the contract is regarded as sealed, but the bridegroom has to pay a bride-price to his wife's parents; it is usually a cow or a cow with two or more goats. On being conducted to the house of the bridegroom the bride is veiled with barkcloth and is generally carried. The marriage is not consummated on the first night, though bride and bridegroom are together and sometimes share the same bed. The bride's younger sister, as we have seen, remains with her for a month after marriage and often sleeps on the same bed. After the younger sister leaves the house and returns home, the husband of her married sister becomes taboo to her; she may not meet him or have any conversation with him. Among these agricultural people, whom the pastoral Bahuma regard as their slaves, a man may never meet his mother-in-law or speak to her face to face; if he must hold communication with her, he does so at a distance or outside the house in which she sits. If he meets her in the path, he retires into the grass and looks the other way until she has passed. Among both the pastoral and the agricultural people it is perfectly legitimate for any man of the husband's clan to have sexual relations with his wife; such intercourse is not looked upon as adultery. The husband may dissuade his wife if he happens to dislike the particular man, but he cannot accuse her of infidelity.

Among the pastoral people (the Bahuma), when a child has been born, the afterbirth is buried at the doorway of the hut, on the right side if the child is a boy, on the left side if it is a girl. The husband brings one of the principal logs which forms the gate and places it on the fire, and this has to be kept burning brightly during the first four days. It is considered essential that the fire should not die out during this period lest the child's life should also pass away with it; nor may anything be taken from the house, especially fire may not be taken, nor may any pipe or grass be lighted at this fire during the first four days. Formerly the legitimacy of a child was tested by laying the infant on the ground at the gateway when the gate was opened in the morning to let the cows out; if the cows trod the child to death, it was illegitimate, and if they did not, it was legitimate. This custom is now obsolete.

Among the agricultural people a pregnant woman has to observe a number of superstitious rules or taboos. For example, if a tethered animal crosses her path, leaving its rope over the road, she must step on the rope and not over it, for otherwise her labour will be hard. If she commits adultery by having intercourse with any man who does not belong to her husband's clan, the birth will be retarded and she or the child will die. Should a child be born feet first, it is deemed a very bad omen; but the disastrous consequences which would naturally follow from such a mode of birth may be averted by knocking a hole in a basket and passing the child through the hole head first, thus inverting the unlucky order and so annulling the evil omen.

The birth of twins is regarded as a special favour of God and is the occasion of various ceremonies. The front door is closed, and a new door cut at the back of the house, if there was not one there before. The drums are beaten and dancing

is kept up till late at night. The parents are particularly glad if the twins are of different sexes, for then they think that father and mother have been equally favoured by God. The happy father is allowed to announce his felicity to his own father but not to his father-in-law, the maternal grandfather of the twins. To convey the intelligence to his father-in-law he makes emblems of the twins, ties them up in a parcel, and gives the parcel to a friend to convey to his father-in-law. The friend must be an active man and a good runner, for, curiously enough, he is liable to be ill-treated and even mauled; nay, he was formerly liable to be killed by the exasperated grandfather if he succeeded in catching the unlucky messenger. So the messenger proceeds cautiously. He enters the house with a nonchalant air and engages in general conversation as if nothing particular had happened. While thus diverting the attention of his hearers from the real object of his visit, he slips the precious parcel unobserved into a corner; then, retreating from the house to a safe distance, he breaks the glad tidings by shouting, "Your daughter has twins!" With that he bolts at the top of his speed, hotly pursued by the irate grandfather, and it entirely depends on his fleetness of foot whether he escaped with a whole skin from the discharge of his delicate duty.

Four or five months after the birth of twins a great festival is held in their honour. The day chosen for the ceremony must be one when the moon is waxing. The relatives, both of the father and of the mother, assemble, each family bringing its medicine-man. During the night there is much noisy dancing and much making of magic. The aim of each family is to avert any evil that may attach to the twins and to transfer it to the other family. If the twins are boys, the mother's family makes strenuous efforts to ward off the evil and disgrace which such a birth reflects on themselves; and if the twins are girls, it is for the father's family to vindicate themselves from the suspicion of being under the ban of the higher powers. This rivalry leads to open hostility between the two families; sometimes it ends in a free fight and broken limbs. With the dawn of day, however, hostilities cease, and both families dance in harmony round the twins and their placentas, which are laid together on the ground. After a time the placentas, and afterwards the cut hair and nails of the twins, are carried in procession into the forest and deposited there in a place where they will not be disturbed. The parents of the twins must complete the festivities by having sexual intercourse with each other; for otherwise it is believed that the expected blessing would be lost.

When one of the king's wives bears twins, the ceremonies are similar, but still more elaborate. When the time comes to exhibit the royal twins in public two sacred trees are planted, and the twins and their afterbirths are set on the ground between them. Then the two parties—the party of the king and the party of the mother of the twins—dance round the sacred trees and the twins. Afterwards the mother carries the two afterbirths in procession to the forest and deposits them there; then the whole party dances round them. And every month, when the new moon appears, the nurse takes the twins and dances with them round the sacred trees which were planted soon after their birth.

The birth of triplets is regarded with horror as portending fearful calamities. The king sends his troops, who seize the mother with the infants and her parents, carry them away to a desert place, and spear them all to death, leaving their bodies to be devoured by wild beasts. The father of the triplets has his eyes gouged out to prevent him from harming people by his gaze.

Amongst the pastoral people (the Bahuma), when a man falls sick and the sickness does not yield to ordinary treatment, a medicine-man is called in. He may pronounce that the patient is possessed by a ghost. In that case the doctor has to decide whether the ghost in question is a malevolent ghost intending the destruction

of the patient, or whether it is the ghost of a member of the same clan as the sufferer. The treatment naturally differs according to the diagnosis ; for if the ghost is that of an enemy, he must be captured and destroyed, whereas if he is the ghost of a fellow clansman he must be treated with more consideration and induced to transfer his attentions to some other person or animal. The transference is commonly effected as follows. A goat is brought, a male goat for a male patient, and a female goat for a patient. The animal is tethered by the foot to a peg near the patient's bed : a cord is stretched from the goat to the sick man or woman ; and the ghost is requested to pass from the body of the patient into that of the animal, which is presented to him as a freewill offering. The ghost is given the night to think it over ; next morning he usually closes with the offer and passes into the goat, which henceforth is sacred to him and lives near the bed.

When the sickness is caused by a hostile ghost, the medicine-man prepares a pot of savoury meat and sets it near the patient's bed ; then shaking his rattle he chants an invitation to the ghost to come out of the man and eat the meat. Tempted by the savoury smell, the ghost incautiously accepts the invitation and enters the pot. No sooner has he done so than the medicine-man claps a skin on the pot, smears clay over the skin by way of sealing it up, and then carries the captured ghost to waste land and burns him to death. Or he may drown the ghost by throwing the pot into running water ; but this mode of treatment labours under the serious disadvantage that the pot may break and allow the ghost to escape and return to the patient.

Should the medicine man declare that the sickness is caused not by a ghost but by magic, he may resort to a variety of means for counteracting the evil influence. For example, a tree of a certain sort or, failing that, a stout reed, is planted in front of the house where the sick man is lying. Then the medicine-man kills a goat, catches its blood in a bowl, and smears some of the blood on the sick man, who has been brought out of the house for the ceremony. Some of the blood is also put on the tree and sprinkled on the assembled family. Next the trunk of the tree is split from top to bottom ; the slit thus made is held open, and the patient passes through it and returns to the house without looking behind him. Sometimes a second goat is secured between the tree and the house, and as the sick man passes it, he lays his hands on the animal's head. Then the goat is driven through the split tree in the reverse direction to that followed by the patient. Afterwards the animal is taken away by the medicine-man and kept alive ; it is supposed to retain whatever is left of the sickness which was caused by the magic, but which has been thus transferred to the goat.

If all remedies prove unavailing and the man dies, his body is commonly buried. If he was the owner of the kraal, the grave is dug in the deepest part of the dunghill so as to reach down to the earth, but not to penetrate it. The body, with the legs bent up under the chin and the hands placed together under the right side of the head, is laid at sunset in the grave on its right side, so as to look into the kraal. All who take part in the funeral wash themselves by the grave and have their heads shaved and their nails cut. The cut hair and nails are laid on the grave, and the water with which the mourners washed themselves is also poured on the grave. Afterwards all the pots and vessels in the house are brought out and set before the door ; such as have any flaws are put aside and cast upon the grave, the rest are kept to be purified. Then the sister of the heir comes and is given a pot of pure water mixed with white clay. She takes two bunches of purificatory herbs, dips them in the water, and sprinkles the whole family, and such of the pots as are to be preserved. After that ceremony the heir receives the congratulations of his friends on succeeding to the property. In former times the heir might marry

any of his father's widows except his own mother, unless the widow preferred to return to her family, in which case her family had to refund the value of the property originally paid for her by her deceased husband. If the dead man had no kraal of his own, he is buried by his relatives anywhere in the open; if he has no relatives to perform the last offices for him, his body is simply cast out into the grass and left there to be devoured by wild beasts. The agricultural people bury their dead in their gardens and plant trees round the grave to prevent children from walking on it.

From Masindi the Expedition, quitting Bunyoro, passed eastward to Soroti, a Government station near the north-eastern arm of Lake Kioga; thence it proceeded through the Teso country to Mbale on the lofty Mount Elgon, which lies on the border of the territory known till lately as British East Africa. On Mount Elgon the Expedition was able to make some further inquiries among the cannibal Bagesu, whom Mr. Roscoe had visited before and described in his book *The Northern Bantu*. In particular Mr. Roscoe was fortunate enough on the present occasion to witness a remarkable tribal ceremony of circumcision, which he will describe fully in his final report. From Mbale the Expedition proceeded northward some forty miles to Sebei, from which the latest report, dated August 8th, 1920, was sent to the Royal Society. Among the Basebei totemism appears to be in a state of decay; the clan system is now used by them chiefly to regulate marriage. From Mount Elgon it was Mr. Roscoe's intention to pass northward into Karamojo in order to investigate the Turkana, a tribe about which comparatively little is known. Unfortunately this scheme has been frustrated by the military operations now being carried on in that region, which, in addition to the other inconveniences they create, by exasperating and harrying the natives, render all scientific inquiries among the people futile. Under these circumstances Mr. Roscoe proposes to move from Mount Elgon into Busoga in order to complete the inquiries which he made among the Basoga a good many years ago. From Busoga the Expedition will return to Bunyoro, where it is expected that the native king will furnish some fresh information, which at the recent departure of the Expedition he was prevented by ill-health from supplying. From Bunyoro the Expedition will then start on the homeward journey down the Nile.

J. G. FRAZER.

Obituary.

A. L. Lewis. *By Sir E. Brabrook.*

Brabrook.

Mr. Alfred Lionel Lewis was the son of a well-known instructor in the art of handwriting, and was himself a chartered accountant of distinction. He joined the Anthropological Society of London in 1866, and specialised in the study of stone monuments. He interested himself also in many subjects submitted to the Society and frequently joined in its discussions. He was one of an independent Committee appointed in 1868 to report on the condition of the Society. He attended several of the international congresses of prehistoric archæology, from that of Norwich in 1868 where he read a paper on the Sarsden Stones of Berkshire, in which he took up the position that stone circles were primarily places of worship and that their use as places of sepulture was subsidiary. He visited Locmariaker and Gavr' Inis, and reported his observations to the Society. In 1869 he contributed to the British Association, at its Exeter meeting, a paper on the builders and the purposes of megalithic monuments, which he revised and published in the *Journal of Anthropology*.

He was elected a member of the Council of the Society in 1869, and appointed a delegate to the Liverpool meeting of the British Association, before which he read a paper on the builders of megalithic monuments in Britain. He became a member of