



67. Some "Nsibidi" Signs

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Africa, West.

With Plate H.

Dayrell.

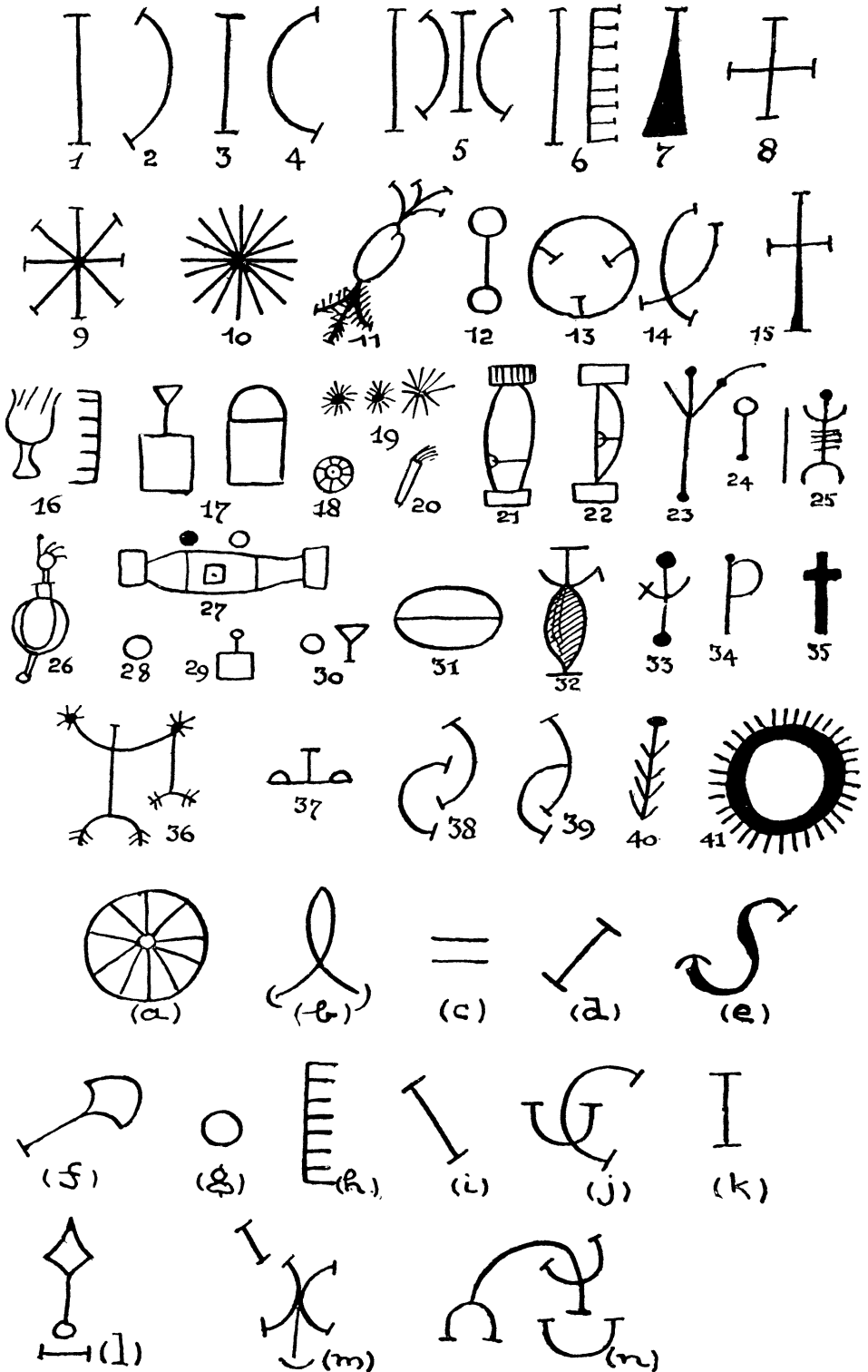
Some "Nsibidi" Signs. By E. Dayrell, District Commissioner, **67**
*Southern Nigeria.**

On Plate H are shown some *Nsibidi* signs (1-41), and a story (*a-n*) written in *Nsibidi*, collected by me recently in Southern Nigeria. The following is an explanation of the signs:—

1, Fighting stick. 2, Woman. 3, Pillow. 4, Man. 5, Man and woman, pillow in middle; the man has had a quarrel with his wife because she has fallen in love with another man. 6, The young men's club, to which the lover belongs, sitting on the *ekfrat* stick. 7, The sword which the man will take to fight the boy, or man, with whom his wife fell in love. 8, Poor man's money, always four rods, given to the wife going to market. 9, Young rich man's money, always eight rods. 10, Rich chief's money, always sixteen rods. 11, The peacock, "Egbo palaver"; when a man is wronged he sends this sign, which means that he is going to take action in the Egbo society. 12, *Mbudualkpe*, sent to notify people that the "Egbo"† is out. 13, *Ekara 'Nkanda*; a man always runs before the "Egbo" with this in his hand; it is made of cane. 14, *Akpahata*—constant fighters; one will not let the other go. This sign is sent by a strong fighter to another man whom he wishes to fight, and means that he will fight to a finish and not run away. 15, The "Egbo" fighting club. When the "Egbo" is out, if a man is caught who does not belong to the society, he is tied up to this cross, which is fixed in the ground, and then flogged by the "Egbos" with whips made of manatee hide. 16, A comb; or give me a comb. 17, Looking glass. 18, A native umbrella, made of grass, *nkanya iboto*. 19, Big and small stars, the sign of night. 20, Firebrand or torch. 21, Woman, on left, sleeping with man, on right; pillows at head and foot. 22, Woman, on left, sleeping with man, on right; she is a walking woman, *akpara*; pillows at head and foot. 23, A man with a whip in his hand. When a boy does wrong this sign is sent to his father to show that he has been caught and will be flogged, so that the father can pay compensation to the man wronged. 24, A slave messenger, who always watches his master's wife. 25, A stick and a man, who was caught by the watcher and was tied to the post and flogged by the husband. When the signs 23, 24, and 25 are sent to a man it means that the husband's "watcher" has caught the son doing wrong, that the boy is tied up and is going to be flogged. If the wrong done is stealing yams, the sign of a farm and yams is included; if the boy was caught with the husband's wife, the sign of a man and wife is inserted. 26, A man dressed ready for a wrestling bout. This sign was sent by one young men's company to another, when they wished to challenge them to wrestle. 27, Pots (native), washing pots. The round black pot holds ashes to take away the oil from the hands, &c. 28, Cap (native) made of grass. 29, *Asan Inan*, four-square bottle, the sign for rum or request for rum. 30, Glass-stand and glass (native). 31, Palaver house—*Efe Ekpe*. 32, A dead body tied up in a mat; sign for the death of a relative of father, mother, sister, &c. 33, Sign for the death of a friend or of a member of the house. 34, Gun (cross-bow). 35, Matchet or sword. 36, A man and a murderer who murdered someone with the above weapons (34, 35) and escaped and was ordered to be caught. The murderer stands on the right, and the man who caught him on the left. 37, *Ebuka*—old-time fetters. 38, *Esit Ima Obutong*—Obutong's love. It means that the husband will be inconstant and will go about

* For *Nsibidi*, see MacGregor, *Some Notes on Nsibidi*, *Journ. Roy. Anthr. Inst.*, XXXIX, n. 209.

† For Egbo, see Parkinson, *A Note on the Efik and Ehoi Tribes*, *Journ. Roy. Anthr. Inst.*, XXXVII, pp. 262 ff.



SOME "NSIBIDI" SIGNS.

getting different wives in many towns. 39, *Eti Esit Ima*—good steady heart of love. This means a constant lover. 40, *Etak Ntaña Nsibidi*—Nsibidi's bunch of plantains. When the head of the house wants plantains he sends this sign to the head boy on the farm. 41, *Effe Nsibidi*—the Hall of Nsibidi; the round house where the young boys meet to learn the Nsibidi writing.

(a) The young boys were sitting in the *Nsibidi* house. (b) There were two young women who sold their favours for money. (c) They had two boys whom they used to send out to get the men to come to them or to get money from them. (d) One of the two boys took (e) a chewing stick, (f) a bottle of *tombo*, and (g) a native glass (h) to the young men sitting on the *ekfrat* stick. (i) These young men sent their boy to bring (j) a bag containing rods. (k) The boy got the bag of rods and took it to the two boys, who took the rods to the women. (l) The young men sent their boy with the sign of the comet to meet them that night. (m) One of the young men met one of the women in an open place, *et cum inclinata coïvit*. (n) The next day the young man found the woman with a different man and knew she was unfaithful.

E. DAYRELL.

Africa: Congo State.

Ishmael.

The Babinza. By George C. Ishmael, F.R.G.S.

68

The Babinza, or Babinja, is a large tribe which inhabits that part of the Belgian Congo which stretches from the station of Likati on the Likati river to the State post of Mandungu on the Itimbiri (or Rubi) river. The tribe is made up of some twenty clans, of which the principal are Amokoki, Bachimba, Libombo, Bayeyi, Alibonje, Bomenge, Bongongo, Bukata, Yalikombe, &c., similar to each other in all but unimportant details. With few exceptions the Babinza are neither tall nor well-proportioned, and do not appear to be very strong; in this they differ from the majority of the Congo tribes, such as the Azande, who inhabit more open country to the north. Their women, especially, are small of stature and ill-shaped, but men and women alike are ugly in features and dirty in habits. Their voices are thick and raucous, and the most friendly conversation in the privacy of their huts has the semblance of a noisy quarrel.

Their villages are built sometimes close to the water's edge, and sometimes in small clearings in the heart of the forest. A village consists of rows of huts thatched with what would seem to a casual observer to be one roof. On close inspection, however, one finds that each hut is thatched separately. A Mubinza would no doubt make the same mistake on first seeing some of our suburban streets. No care whatever is taken in selecting the site of a village, and when a village is formed no care is taken to keep the huts or surroundings in a sanitary condition. To about a foot from the ground the huts are covered with moss, and days after a heavy shower of rain the oozy and evil-smelling passages between the rows of huts (one can hardly call them "streets") are full of pools of stagnant water. The interior of the hut is usually in as unhealthy a state as the exterior, being as a rule musty and covered with mildew. Within these happy hunting grounds for microbes the Babinza prepare their meals, and these, combined with the state of squalor I have described, account beyond doubt for the spread of some of the diseases which are to be described later on. The first meal, consisting of pounded plantains and some added delicacy like boiled snails, takes place between nine and ten in the morning. The snails are boiled in their shells, and served up on a wooden platter. They are pulled out of their shells with the finger nails or any piece of wood that happens to be handy. The morning and afternoon dish of pounded plantains is sometimes also diversified with caterpillars or slugs. After their meals the Babinza, unlike most Africans, do not wash their hands, but wipe them on their bodies or scant clothing of rags and leaves. No wonder, then, that nearly every man, woman, and child among them suffers from some form of skin