

NIGERIA PAST AND PRESENT

SOME REMINISCENCES

THE early history of the native tribes at present inhabiting Nigeria is now, and probably always will be, enveloped in a cloud of mystery, for neither written records nor architectural monuments are much in evidence, and the results of any investigations which may be made upon this interesting subject must therefore depend to a great extent upon surmise, founded upon the folk-lore of the people.

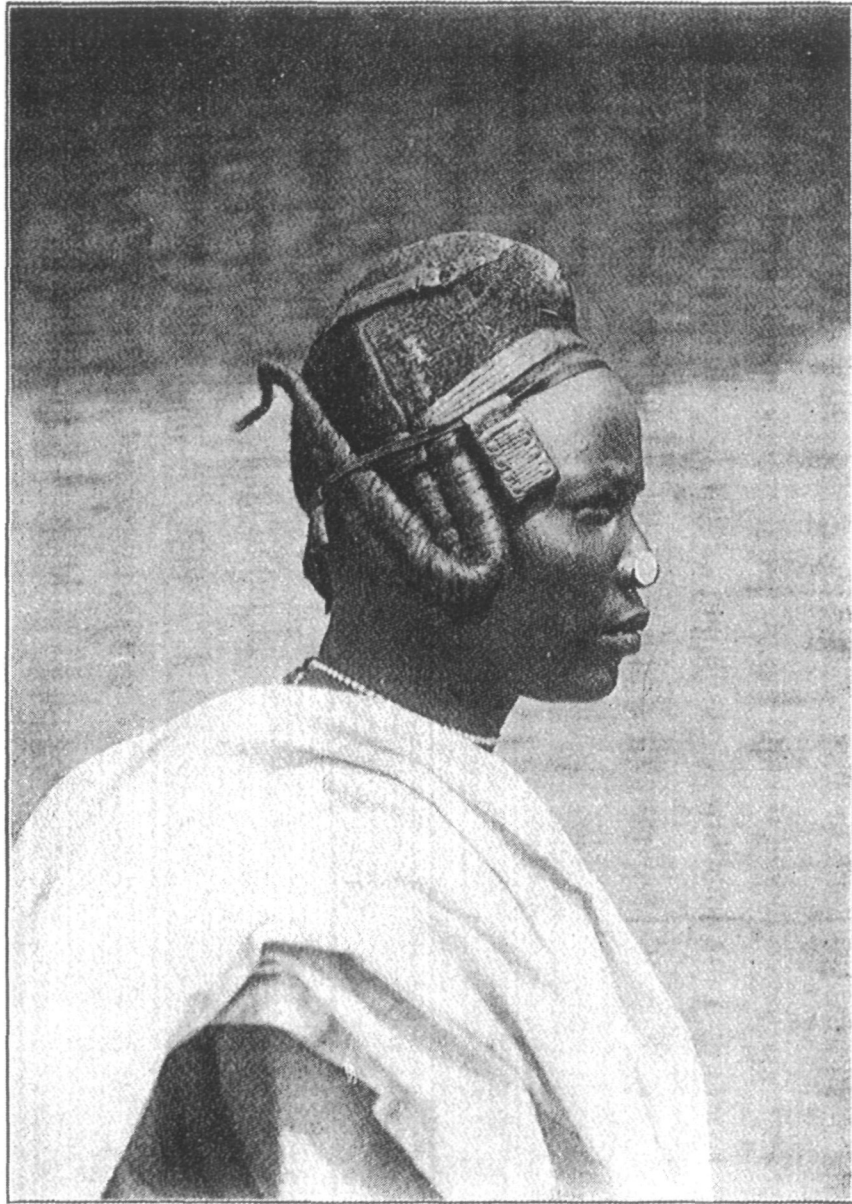
Broadly speaking, the people of Southern and Northern Nigeria may be divided into three classes, inhabiting (1) the coast belt; (2) the Hausa States of Northern Nigeria; and (3) the intermediate Yoruba country which forms a buffer belt between these two. Each of these is again subdivided into innumerable smaller groups, speaking different languages and dialects, and influenced religiously and politically by totally varying customs and lines of thought.

During recent years, however, European civilisation has rapidly been bringing about a change—the construction of railways has afforded facilities for intercommunication, which have been thoroughly appreciated and taken advantage of amongst people who, until the advent of steam, had probably never even heard of each other's existence. Merchants from the Hausa States, instead of, as formerly, sending their goods across the Sahara Desert to Tripoli and Morocco by precarious and tardy camel caravans, now book through to Lagos or Baro, and conversely, the Lagos storekeeper is establishing his sub-depôts along the railway, right into Northern Nigeria. These he supplies with Manchester goods, cheap cigarettes, crockery, and the thousand and one articles of finery and utility which appeal to the native mind, with the result that

the inhabitants come in from miles around, and people who fifty years ago would have cut each other's throats on sight, now fraternise over their "shopping," and exchange ideas and views upon subjects of which their fathers had never dreamt.

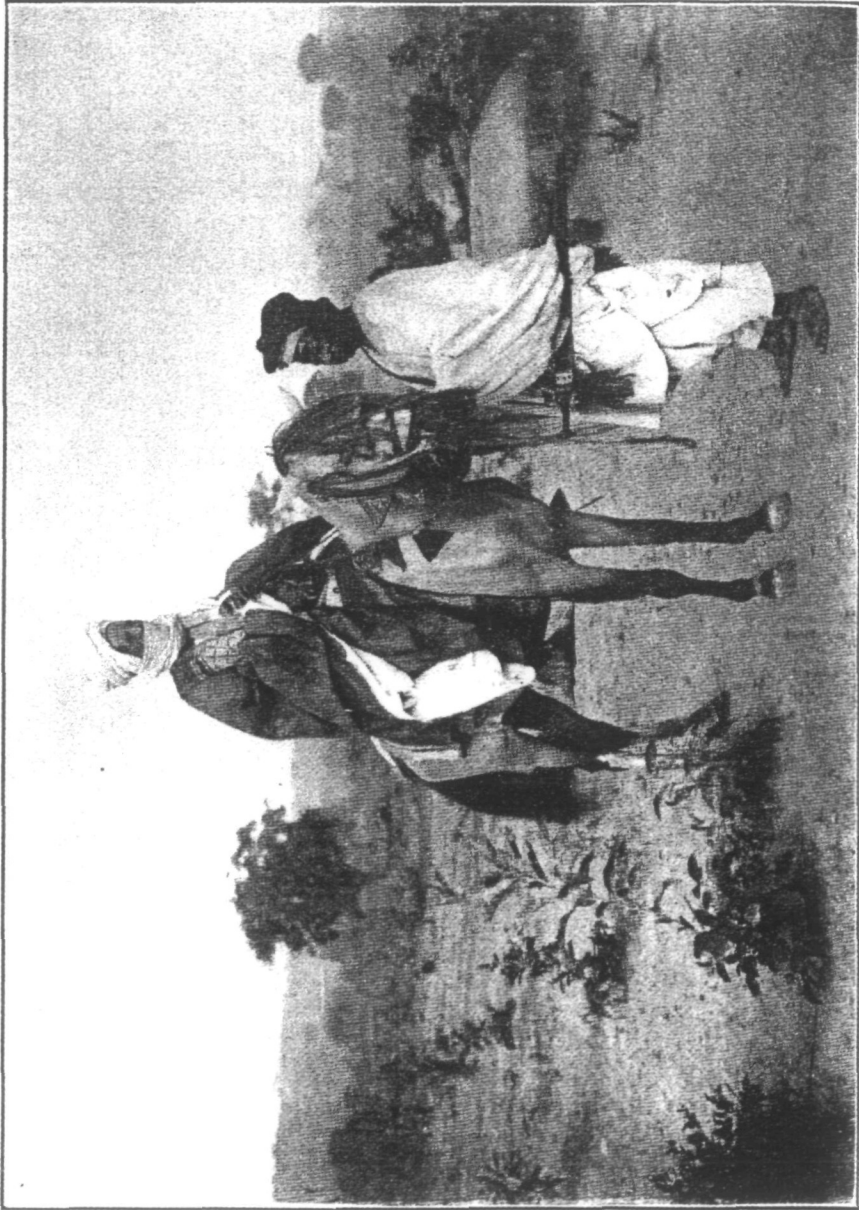
How did all these tribes, differing so widely in language, religion, and customs, enter Nigeria? At what period did they come—and from whence? These are questions which will probably never be satisfactorily solved; but it is probable that the Hausas and Fulanis, who are now by far the most important inhabitants of Northern Nigeria, were comparatively late arrivals; that they came from the north; and that the pagan tribes whom they conquered, and whose settlements at a later date they were constantly raiding for slaves, had been settled in the country for centuries prior to their advent. Whether at this early period they occupied the whole country, which we now know as Northern Nigeria, is problematical. Their present settlements, however, are almost entirely confined to the hilly districts, where they have established themselves, amongst the wildest and rockiest spots, the passes and defiles leading into which they have fortified by stone walls against their Hausa enemies. Some of these mountain fastnesses are well-nigh impregnable, and it is almost inconceivable that the attackers could ever have been successful in entering them, defended as they were by hordes of pagans, armed with spears, and their deadly bows and poisoned arrows, showers of which must have been poured from above upon the assailants. The writer has climbed some of these old walls of defence, with nothing worse than a hot African sun to contend with, and was heartily pleased when the last of the lines of walls, themselves built upon the roughest of rocky ground, had been negotiated.

A journey from Zaria, some 75 miles eastwards, to the Kurama hills, jogging along behind a line of carriers at the rate of 15 miles or so per diem, before the days of railways, gave much food for thought and the making of history. Under present altered conditions there is but scant opportunity for such reflections, for the little narrow gauge railway, which has recently been completed, covers the distance in a few



HAUSA WOMAN.

To face p. 250



hours, which quickly pass in the sorting of luggage, in conversation with chance fellow passengers, and in the many other distractions incidental to a railway journey through a newly opened-up country.

Zaria itself is a large Hausa town, the old defending mud walls of which are crumbling away, for there is no further use for them. Pax Britannica and the subsequent whistle of the passing locomotive have altered all that. Its fortifications are typically Hausa, consisting of heavy mud walls, pierced at intervals by gates, and enclosing a roughly rectangular space, large enough not only for the town proper, but also for a considerable area of cultivated land upon which crops might be grown in sufficient quantities to supply the defenders with food against a protracted siege.

For miles around, with the exception of a few gaunt trees which have been left standing, the country is perfectly bare and destitute of vegetation. This denudation is obviously due, either to centuries of consumption of firewood, or for the military purpose of preventing an attacking army from taking cover—probably the latter, as a similar feature is observable around most of the fortified Hausa towns and villages elsewhere, and they are all fortified, large and small, with the same rectangular space, enclosed by mud walls, and a surrounding ditch or moat.

The path from Zaria traverses an undulating and sparsely wooded country, and after passing through several Hausa towns leads along the foot of the Kurama hills. Up to now all has been Hausa and Fulani—Hausa towns, Hausa gowns, Hausa fortifications, Fulani cattle, and Mohammedan religion. The fighting men are horsemen, and their arms are spears.

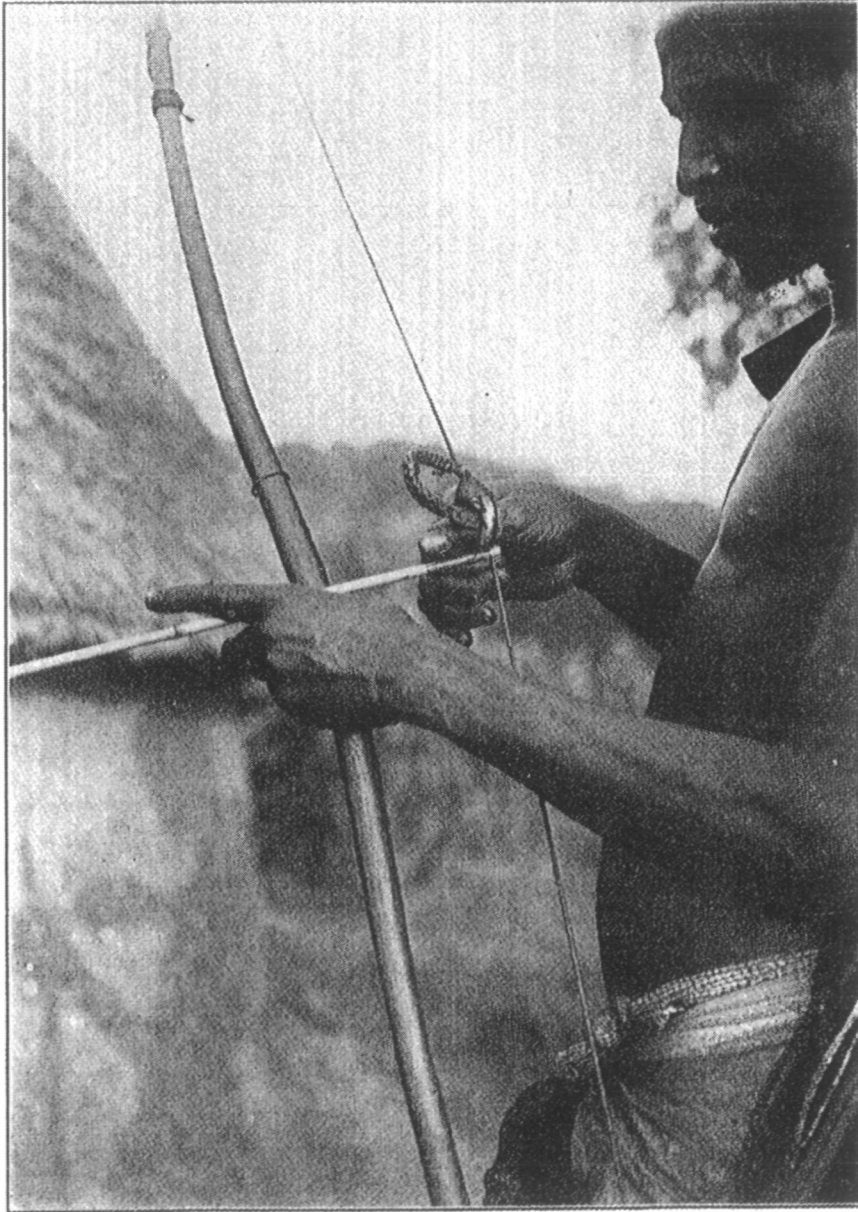
At the Kurama hills all changes. A side path turns off the main track up a gorge between beetling granite heads, and across this path a first line of defence is encountered—not a mud wall, but one well built of large hand-picked stones, where many a bloody stand must have been made in times gone by. After passing another line of defence and crossing a rocky bedded stream, the path passes steeply up between more rugged granite hills, and eventually debouches upon a plateau some two to three square miles in extent, entirely

surrounded by high granite hills, the entrances to which are all similarly guarded, and upon this plateau are scattered the Kurama pagan villages.

We are now amongst some of the wildest tribes of West Africa, who may possibly be the aboriginal inhabitants. Here each man carries a bow and a quiver of poisoned arrows, and the women go practically naked, excepting for a bunch of green leaves tied on by a girdle and worn behind. Mohammedanism has disappeared, and "Ju-ju" reigns supreme. Yet the people are nice—very nice. The gift of a few cigarettes—the use of which, by the way, had to be explained—and a little attention to the small black babies, soon established confidence, and when the more practical subject of supplies of chickens and eggs was introduced no difficulties were encountered.

These people merely exist. They carry on but little trade, and only cultivate land to provide crops sufficient for their food. They grow a certain amount of cotton, from which they weave a rough cloth, and there is generally a blacksmith to be found who is capable of making arrow-heads, hoes, and other small forgings in iron. His anvil is a smooth stone, and considering the roughness of his implements he turns out surprisingly good work.

The Kuramas are a cheery, merry, laughter-loving people, who spend much of their time in dancing, to the accompaniment of their more or less rude musical instruments, which consist chiefly of drums, banjo-like stringed instruments, and horns or flutes. One striking form of dance is worthy of description. A line of young girls is formed, in front of whom, some five or six feet away, a corresponding number of girls take up their position, with their backs to the first line. Facing these again stand an equal number of young bloods. At the first sound of the music, the latter leap forwards, whereupon the middle line of girls, keeping their bodies perfectly straight and rigid, throw up their hands and fall backwards into the arms of the first line of young ladies, who catch them deftly by the shoulders, and heave them back again into an upright position, when the youths leap back again into their original places. This is repeated over and



A KURAMA HUNTER.
Showing position of hands and method of using ring.

To face p. 252.

over again, and the see-sawing, backwards and forwards, which affords much merriment, is kept up for hours. This sounds monotonous, but the wild gesticulations of the men, the weirdness of the music, and the applause of the admiring crowd, all go to make up a most interesting and exciting performance, which is not only thoroughly enjoyed by the participants in the dance, but also by a very appreciative audience, from amongst which there are constant fresh volunteers.

The first night the writer was encamped upon the plateau a most extraordinary and weird noise was heard amongst the hills. The night was calm, and about 10 p.m. an intense booming sound was heard, which rose and fell almost rhythmically, and the position of which was very difficult to locate. It was obviously caused by some musical instrument, of a trumpet type, and seemed to come from all sides. The next day the head man of the adjacent village was asked to explain its cause and reason, but he entered into a long rigmarole about the mystery of it, and explained that the sounds emanated from the rocks, were quite supernatural, and were often heard. This, of course, was bunkum; but though upon several subsequent occasions similar sounds have been heard, no explanation of them has been forthcoming, and it would be interesting if any of the readers of the *African Society's Journal* could throw any light upon the matter. Ju-ju was, of course, at the bottom of it, but in the course of a long and varied experience amongst the wilder tribes of West Africa the writer has not come across an instrument capable of producing the extremely sonorous and far-reaching sounds which were heard upon this particular occasion.

The particular spot which has been described affords a striking illustration of the rapidity with which civilisation is advancing in Nigeria. Barely two years have elapsed since the writer marched from Zaria to the Kurama hills. The path then was a mere track. Swamps had to be waded, and at least one river to be swum; and the plateau was in its primitive state, many of the inhabitants never having seen a white man.

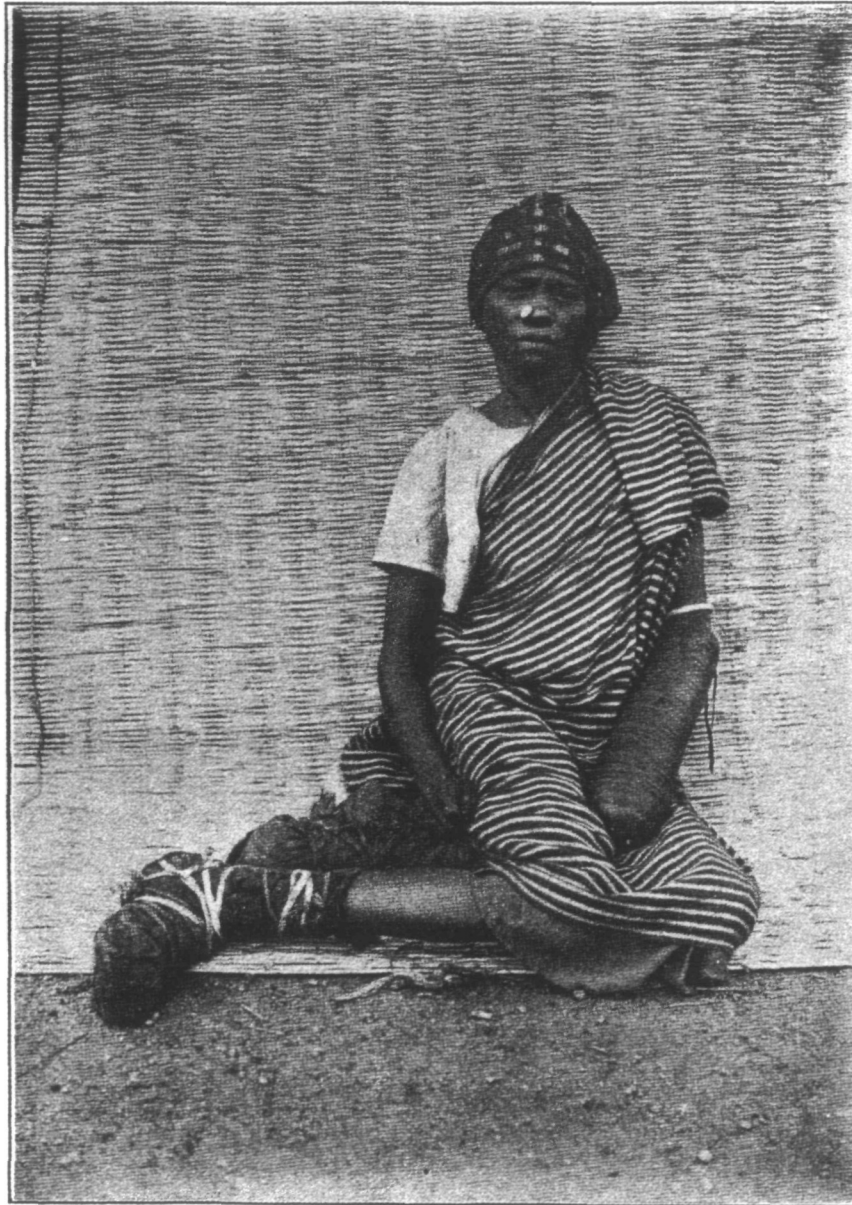
Since then the Bauchi Light Railway has been constructed

from Zaria to Rahama, a distance of 89 miles, which passes the foot of the Kurama hills, at the 65th mile, near which a station has been built; and on the plateau itself a market has been established where European articles are bought and sold, and where Lagos merchants, Hausa men and women, and Kurama pagans freely mix, and discuss topics of mutual interest. The Hausa and pagan no longer give thought to the upkeep of defences, but rather to cultivation of the soil. The pagan still carries his bow and arrows, but they are for purposes of the chase rather than for war; and a brand-new native article has been manufactured, viz., the railway petty contractor, capable of carrying out, expeditiously and satisfactorily, any ordinary works connected with the construction of a line of railway.

Such rapid strides are, of course, only occurring in the vicinity of the lines of communication recently opened up by railways, and also in the districts of Bauchi and Naraguta, where the tin-mining industry has not only changed the face of the country, but has already proved a source of considerable revenue to the Government.

Other parts of the country, though going ahead, are doing so at a much slower rate of progress, for there are still tracts, especially amongst the more benighted pagan tribes, which are unsettled and dangerous, and where in some few instances cannibalism is still practised.

At the time the existing railways were only projects under discussion, doubts were expressed in many quarters as to whether they would pay. They have, however, already more than justified their existence, and should prove strong incentives to the rapid construction of further extensions, various schemes for which are under discussion. A line which would appear to be eminently desirable would be one having as its southern terminus Calabar, the original capital and seat of government, and running north to effect a junction with the Bauchi railway. This would involve the construction of a bridge of considerable magnitude over the Benue River, but would be of immense value to the country, especially in view of the recently discovered coalfields near Udi, which would be served by a branch line, and also in opening up the still



NATIVE VANITY.

(Dyeing finger nails red and feet black.)

Hands are kept for a considerable time in a casing made from a calabash, the feet are wrapped up in dye and bandaged for several days.

To face p. 254.

unsettled Munshi country lying to the south and north of the Benue River.

As separate Colonies and Protectorates, Northern and Southern Nigeria have made immense progress during the past ten years. Amalgamated, even greater results will surely be achieved.

It is not, however, within the province of this little article to discuss the routes which such extensions should follow. Suffice it to say that in the light of what has already been achieved, and in view of the amalgamation of the two Protectorates, the time is not far distant when the darker regions of the Nigerias will be opened up, and when inter-tribal warfare, cannibalism, and the benighted practices of "ju-ju," will give place to the peaceful cultivation of the soil, an appreciation of the advantages to be derived from trade, and the consequent general increase of the prosperity of the country.

The excellent photographs which accompany this article have kindly been supplied by Mr. C. H. Firmin, who was closely associated with the writer during his sojourn in West Africa.

S. G. BROUNGER.