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Western Africa.

The whole coast of Western Africa within the tropics, forming a wide sweep around the Gulf of Guinea, has long been occupied by a chain of European forts, erected with a view to the commerce in gold, iron, and palm-oil, but above all in slaves; and since this last object has been finally abandoned by Great Britain, these stations have become to her of very secondary importance. The territory is in the possession of a number of petty states, many of which compose aristocratic republics, turbulent, restless, licentious, and generally rendered more depraved by their frequent intercourse with Europeans. The interior country, extending parallel to the great central chain of mountains, of which the principal branch is here called Kong, presents nothing of that desert and arid character which is stamped on so great a proportion of the African continent. The soil, copiously watered, is liable rather to an excessive luxuriance; but where well managed, it is highly fruitful. There are found, too, in this tract, several very powerful kingdoms, better organized and more improved than any near the coast. They have not, however, the slightest tincture of European civilization; and their manners, in several important respects, are stained with habits and practices that belong to the very lowest stage of savage life.

Of these greater states, the first to which Europeans penetrated was Dahomey, which had distinguished itself early in the last century by the conquest it then achieved of the flourishing kingdom of Whidah, on the slave-coast. The Dahomians committed the most horrible ravages that were ever witnessed, reducing their country, the most fertile and beautiful then known in Western Africa, to almost utter desolation. As the king of Dahomey continued to hold sway over this province, Mr. Norris, in 1772, undertook a journey thither, to observe the character and position of this extraordinary potentate, and to make arrangements for the benefit of the English trade. He passed through a fine country, abounding in the usual tropical productions, and rising by a gentle ascent about 150 miles inland to Abomey, the capital. He arrived at an appalling season, that of the annual *eustoms*, when the great men were assembled from every quarter of the kingdom; and he was truly astonished to see those fierce and warlike chieftains, whose very names spread terror throughout Africa, prostrating themselves before the monarch flat on the ground, and piling dust on their heads in token of the most abject submission. This homage is yielded, not from fear, but from a blind and idolatrous veneration, which makes them regard their king in the light of a superior being. In his name they rush to battle, and encounter their foes with Spartan intrepidity. One of them said to Mr. Norris, 'I think of my king, and then I dare engage five of the enemy myself.' He added, 'my head belongs to the king, and not to myself; if he pleases to send for it, I am ready to resign it; or if it be shot through in a battle I am satisfied, since it is in his service.' The main object contemplated in this national anniversary, is, that the king may water the graves of his ancestors with the blood of human victims. These are numerous, consisting of prisoners taken in war, of condemned criminals, and of many seized by lawless violence. The captives are brought out in succession, with their arms pinioned; and a *fetisheer* laying his hand upon the devoted head, utters a few magic words, while another from behind, with a large scimitar, severs it from the body, when shouts of applause ascend from the surrounding multitude. At any time, when the king has a message to convey to one of his deceased relations, he delivers it to one of his subjects, then strikes off his head, that he may carry it to the other world; and if any thing further occurs to him after he has performed this ceremony, he delivers it to another messenger, whom he despatches in the same manner.

Another grand object of this periodical festival is the market for wives. All the unmarried females throughout the kingdom are esteemed the property of the sovereign, and are brought to the annual customs, to be placed at his disposal. He selects for himself such as appear most beautiful and engaging, and retains the others at enormous prices to his chiefs and nobles. No choice on this occasion is allowed to the purchaser; in return for his twenty thousand cowries a wife is handed out, and even she old and ugly, he must rest content; nay, some, it is said, have in mockery presented with their own mothers. The king usually keeps his wives up to the number of three thousand, who serve him in various capacities, being partly trained to act as a body-guard, regularly regimented, and equipped with drums, flags, bows and arrows, while a few carry muskets. They all reside in the palace, which consists merely of an immense assemblage of cane and mud tents, enclosed by a high wall. The skulls and jaw-bones of enemies slain in battle form the favourite ornaments of the palaces and temples. The king's apartment is paved, and the walls and roof stuck over with these horrid trophies; and if a farther supply appears desirable, he announces to his general that 'his house wants thatch,' when a war for that purpose is immediately undertaken.

Mr. M'Leod, during his residence at Whidah, in 1803, found the country still groaning under the cruel effects of Dahoman tyranny. He particularly deploras the case of Sally Absou, daughter of the late English governor by a native female, who, trained in all European accomplishments, added to them the most engaging simplicity of manners. Suddenly she disappeared, and Mr. M'Leod's eager inquiries were met by a mysterious silence; all hung down their heads, confused and terrified. At length an old domestic whispered to him that a party of the king's half-heads (as his messengers are termed) had carried her off in the night, to be enrolled among the number of his wives, and warned him of the danger of uttering a word of complaint.

A more pleasing spectacle was presented to Messrs. Watt and Winterbottom, who, in 1794, ascended the Rio Nanez to Kakundy, and made an excursion to Foota Jallo, the principal state of the southern Foulahs. This people profess the Mahomedan religion, are orderly and well in-

structed, display skill in working mines of iron, and in carrying on the manufacture of cloth, leather, and other African fabrics. Caravans of 500 or 600 Foulahs were often met, carrying on their heads loads of 160 pounds weight. The article chiefly sought after is salt, which the children suck as ours do sugar; and it is common to describe a rich man by saying he eats salt. The two principal towns, Laby and Teembo, were found to contain respectively 5,000 and 7,000 inhabitants. The king could muster 16,000 troops, whom, unhappily, he employs in war, or at least hunts, against twenty-four pagan nations that surround his territory, chiefly with the view of procuring slaves for the market on the coast. When the travellers represented to him the iniquity of this course, he replied, 'the people with whom we go to war never pray to God; we never go to war with people who pray to God Almighty.' As they urged, that in a case of common humanity this ought to make no distinction, he quoted passages from the Koran, commanding the faithful to make war on unbelievers. They took the liberty to insinuate that these might be interpolations of the devil, but found it impossible to shake his reliance on their authenticity.

A more recent and memorable intercourse was that opened with the court of Ashantee. This people were first mentioned in the beginning of last century, under the name of Assente or Asienti, and as constituting a great kingdom in the interior,—the same that was described to Mr. Lucas, at Tripoli, as the ultimate destination of those caravans, which proceeding from that city measure the breadth of Africa. Being separated from the maritime districts, however, by Aquamboc, Dinkira, and other powerful states, they did not come into contact with any European settlement. It was not, indeed, until the commencement of this century that these states were obliged to give way before the growing strength of the Ashantee empire, which at length extended to the borders of the Fantees, the principal people on the Gold Coast. These last were ill-fitted to cope with such formidable neighbours. They are a turbulent, restless tribe, and extremely prompt in giving offence, but in battle they are equally cowardly and undisciplined. The king of Ashantee having not unwillingly perhaps, received from them high provocation, sent, in 1808, an army of 15,000 warriors, which entered their territory, and laid it waste with fire and sword. At length they came to Anamaboe, where the Fantees had assembled a force of 9,000 men; but these were routed at the first onset and put to death, except a few who sought the protection of the British fort. The victors then considering the British as allies of their enemy, turned their arms against the station, at that time defended by not more than twelve men; yet this gallant little band, supported by slender bulwarks, completely baffled the fierce and repeated assaults made by this barbarous host, who were repulsed with considerable slaughter. Seized with admiration and respect for British prowess, the Ashantees now made proposals for a negotiation, which were accepted, and mutual visits were paid and returned. The English officers were peculiarly struck with the splendid array, the dignified and courteous manners, and even the just moral feeling displayed by these warlike strangers. They, on their side, expressed an ardent desire to open a communication with the sea and with the British, complaining that the turbulent Fantees opposed the only obstacle to so desirable a purpose. A treaty was concluded, and a thoroughly good understanding seemed established between the two nations. The Ashantees, however, made several successful incursions in 1811 and 1816; and on the last occasion the Fantees were obliged to own their supremacy, and engage to pay an annual tribute. The British government judiciously kept aloof from these feuds; but in 1817 a mission was sent under Messrs. James, Bowdich, and Hutchinson, to visit the capital of that powerful kingdom, and to adjust some trifling dissensions which had unavoidably arisen.

The mission having set out on the 22d April, 1817, passed over a country covered, in a great measure, with immense and overgrown woods, through which a footpath had with difficulty been cut, though in some parts it presented the most beautiful scenery. Being delayed by Mr. James' illness, they did not arrive at Coomassie, the capital, till the 19th of May, when they were surprised at its unexpected splendor. It was four miles in circumference, built not indeed with European elegance, but in a style considerably superior to any of the maritime towns. The houses, though low and constructed only of wood, were profusely covered with ornament and sculpture. The array of the caboceers, or great war-chiefs, was at once brilliant, dazzling, and wild. They were loaded with fine cloths, in which variously-coloured threads of the richest foreign silks were curiously interwoven, and both themselves and their horses were covered with decorations of gold beads, Moorish charms, or amulets, purchased at a high price, and the whole intermingled with strings of human teeth and bones; leopards skins, red shells, elephants' tails, eagle and ostrich feathers, and brass bells, were among the favourite ornaments. On being introduced to the king, the English found all these embellishments crowded and concentrated on his own person and that of his attendants, who were literally oppressed with large masses of solid gold. Even the most common utensils were composed of that metal. At the same time the executioner, with his hatchet on his breast, and the execution-stool clotted with blood, gave a thoroughly savage character to all this pomp. The manners of the king, however, were marked by a dignified courtesy; he received the strangers cordially, and desired them to come and speak their palaver in the market-place. On the presents being carried to the palace, he expressed high satisfaction, as well as great admiration of the English workmanship. After several other interviews, he entered on the subjects under discussion, which related to some annual payments formerly made to the Fantees for permission to erect forts, as well as for the ground on which they stood; and the king now demanded, as conqueror of the country, that these payments should be transferred to himself. The claim was small, and seems according to African ideas, to have been reasonable; but Mr. James thought himself bound to remain intrenched in the rules of European diplomacy, and simply replied,

that he would state the demand to the governor of Cape Coast. The king then told them that he expected they had come to settle all palavers, and to stay and be friends with him; but now he found that their object was to make a fool of him. Considering himself insulted, he broke through the ceremonious politeness which he had before studiously maintained, he called out, 'the white men joined with the Fantees to cheat me, to put shame upon my face.' Mr. James having remained firm, the king became more incensed and exclaimed, 'the English come to cheat me; they come to spy the country; they want war; they want trade.' Mr. James merely replied, 'No, we want trade.' But the monarch's wrath increased to such a degree, that he started from his seat and bit his beard, calling out, 'Shantee foo! Shantee foo!' and added, 'If a black man had brought me this message, I would have had his head cut off before me.' A singular manœuvre now took place in the diplomatic party. Mr. Bowdich with two junior members, conceiving that Mr. James's too rigid adherence to rule was endangering the preservation of peace with this powerful sovereign, resolved to supersede him, and undertake the charge of the negotiation. They conducted it entirely to the satisfaction of his Ashantee majesty, who concluded a treaty with the English, and even made a proposal of sending two of his sons to be educated at Cape Coast Castle.

During their stay at Coomassie, the commissioners witnessed dreadful scenes, which seem to sink the Ashantee character even below the ordinary level of savage life. The *customs*, or human sacrifices, are practised on a scale still more tremendous than at Dahomey. The king had lately sacrificed on the grave of his mother 3,000 victims, 2,000 of whom were Fantee prisoners; and at the death of the late sovereign the sacrifice was continued weekly for three months, consisting each time of 200 slaves. The absurd belief here entertained that the rank of the deceased in the future world is decided by the train which he carries along with him, makes filial piety interested in promoting by this means the exaltation of a departed parent. On these occasions the caboceers and princes, in order to court royal favour, often rush out, seize the first person they meet, and drag him in for sacrifice. While the *customs* last, therefore, it is with trembling steps that any one crosses his threshold; and when compelled to do so, he rushes along with the utmost speed, dreading every instant the murderous grasp which would consign him to death.

To cultivate the good understanding now established, the British government very judiciously sent out M. Dupuis, who, during his residence as consul at Mogadore, had acquired a great knowledge of Africa and its people. But before his arrival, the ardor of their mutual affection had been cooled by the intervention of some clouds, which he had set out in the hope of dispelling. This mission, which arrived at Coomassie early in 1820, was well conducted, and succeeded in its object. The king renewed, in the most ample measure, his professions of desire to cultivate a friendly intercourse with the British nation; withdrew such of his demands as were shown to be inadmissible; and while he claimed full dominion over the coast, agreed that the English should exercise jurisdiction within, and even in the immediate vicinity of their own forts.

M. Dupuis found this monarch deeply impressed with respect for white men, and also with a desire to imitate and rival the pomp of European kings. He was erecting a palace, the outside of which consisted only of large logs of timber, but the interior was to be adorned with brass, ivory, and gold. He said, 'now white men know me, I must live in a great house as white kings do; then I shall not be ashamed when white people come.' And on another occasion, 'I must have every thing suitable, and live like a white king.' He had procured architects from Elmina to give instructions to his own subjects, who, however, performed the task in so awkward a manner, that he himself laughed at them, exclaiming, 'Ashantee fools at work.' But the want of skill was compensated by their numbers; and while engaged at work, they suggested to M. Dupuis the singular image of a legion of devils attempting to construct a tower of Babel.

The envoy had the unhappiness of being resident during the 'Little Adai custom,' as it was called, and understood that in one day upwards of seventy victims had been sacrificed in the palace alone. He was not present, but waiting on the king immediately after, saw his clothes stained with blood, the royal death-stool yet reeking, various amulets steeped in gore, while a spot on the brow of his majesty and his principal chiefs, indicated the work in which they had been engaged.

The government of Cape Coast Castle unfortunately, did not ratify the treaty concluded by M. Dupuis, but undertook to support the Fantees in an attempt to throw off the Ashantee yoke. They were thus involved in hostilities with the latter people, whose sovereign, in January, 1824, entered Fantee with a force of 15,000 men. Sir Charles M'Carthy, newly appointed governor, being ill-informed as to the strength of the enemy, marched out to meet him with a force scarcely a thousand British, supported by a crowd of cowardly and undisciplined auxiliaries. The two armies met near the boundary stream of the Bosompra, where the English, soon deserted by their native allies, in whose cause they had taken the field, maintained the contest for some time with characteristic valour, till it was discovered that, through the negligence of the ordnance-keeper, the supply of powder was entirely exhausted. Thus deprived of the use of fire-arms, they were surrounded by the immensely superior numbers of a warlike and desperate enemy, and after a fearful contest, the particulars of which never fully transpired, the whole army either perished on the field or underwent the more cruel fate of captivity, in the hands of this merciless foe. Only three officers, all of whom were wounded, brought the dreadful tale to Cape Coast Castle. The Ashantees then over-ran the whole open country, laid siege to the castle, and pressed it closely for some months. Being repeatedly checked, however, and suffering under sickness and want of provisions, they retreated into their own country; nor has the king, distracted by the rebellion of some neighbouring states, ever since attempted to march down upon the coast.

Captain Adams, in the course of a trading voyage along the African shore, visited Benin, the capital of which is situated on a river coming from the north-east. The city is large, apparently containing about 15,000 inhabitants, and surrounded by a country extremely fertile, but not highly cultivated. The king of Benin is Fetiche, worshipped by his subjects as a god, and must not on any account be supposed either to eat or sleep. Heresy against this creed is punished in the most prompt and summary manner, by instantly striking off the head of the unbeliever. With all his divine and royal attributes, however, the king does not disdain the occupation of a merchant, and drives a hard bargain while exchanging slaves and ivory for tobacco, which is a favourite luxury in this part of Africa. He is very accessible to strangers, provided they spread before him as a present a handsome piece of red silk damask. Human sacrifices are not practised to the same dreadful extent as in some other parts of Africa; yet a considerable number are offered on the graves of their great men, and four annually at the mouth of the river, as an amulet to attract vessels; but such is the pestilential character of the climate, that this bloody charm brings now comparatively few slave-merchants to Benin.

Captain Adams ascended also to Waree, an insular territory, enclosed by two branches of another stream flowing through this alluvial district. It is beautiful as well as fertile, is about five miles in circuit, and appears as if it had dropped down from the clouds; for all the surrounding shores consist of an impenetrable forest rising out of a swamp. Even in the dry season the water stands on the ground a foot in depth, producing exhalations which prove excessively destructive to the European constitution, as well as to all the more delicate plants and animals that happen to be removed from the drier soils of the interior. In other respects, this intelligent navigator did not make any material addition to the knowledge of Western Africa previously derived from other sources.

## African Magnanimity.

Abdulkader, the king of Foota Torra, a Mahomedan, and a zealous bigot in his passion for making proselytes, had sent an embassy to Damel, king of the Jaloofs, to convert him to the faith of the Prophet. The ambassador was accompanied by two Bushreens, each of whom carried a large knife, which they laid before Damel, while the ambassador explained the meaning of these suspicious emblems. 'With this knife,' he said, 'Abdulkader will condescend to shave the head of Damel, if Damel will embrace the Mahomedan faith; and with this other knife Abdulkader will cut the throat of Damel, if Damel refuses to embrace it,—take your choice.' The king of the Jaloofs replied, with much *sang froid*, that 'he had no choice to make; he neither chose to have his head shaved, nor his throat cut;' and with this answer the Foota Torra's envoy was civilly dismissed. Abdulkader immediately marched his army into Damel's country; but on the first news of his approach the inhabitants had filled up their wells, destroyed their provisions, removed their effects, and abandoned their dwellings; so that the invaders, after advancing three days' journey into the Jaloof territory without meeting any opposition, began to suffer greatly from want of provisions, and especially from thirst. This induced them to direct their march towards the woods, where they discovered a watering place; and the men being overcome with fatigue, after quenching their thirst, lay down carelessly to sleep among the bushes. In this situation they were surprised by Damel, who attacked them during the night, and completely routed them. Many were trampled to death by the Jaloof cavalry, others were killed in their flight, and a still greater number were made prisoners. Among these last was the unlucky Abdulkader himself, who was now led a wretched captive into the presence of the prince, whom he had so lately insulted by his arrogant message. The behaviour of Damel, on this occasion, is never mentioned by the singing men but in terms of the highest approbation; and it was indeed so extraordinary in an African prince, that the reader may find it difficult to give credit to the recital. When his royal prisoner was brought before him in irons, and thrown upon the ground, the magnanimous Damel, instead of setting his foot upon his neck, and stabbing him with his spear, according to custom in such cases, addressed him as follows:—'Abdulkader, answer me this question: if the chance of war had placed me in your situation, and you in mine, how would you have treated me?' 'I would have thrust my spear into your heart,' returned Abdulkader, with great firmness; 'and I know that a similar fate awaits me.' 'Not so,' said Damel, 'my spear is indeed red with the blood of your subjects killed in battle, and I could now give it a deeper stain, by dipping it in your own; but this would not build up my towns, nor bring to life the thousands who fell in the woods. I will not, therefore, kill you in cold blood, but I will retain you as my slave, until I perceive that your presence in your own kingdom will be no longer dangerous to your neighbours; and then I will consider of the proper way of disposing of you.' Abdulkader was accordingly retained, and worked as a slave for three months; at the end of which period, Damel listened to the solicitations of the inhabitants of Foota Torra, and restored to them their king. Strange as this story may appear, I have no doubt of the truth of it. It was told me at Malacotta by the Africans; it was afterwards related to me by the Europeans on the Gambia; by some of the French at Goree; and confirmed by nine slaves, who were taken prisoners along with Abdulkader, by the watering-place in the woods, and carried in the same ship with me to the West Indies.

[Life of Mungo Park.]

SHORT WORK.—By our marine list it will be seen, that the slavers will continue to visit Monrovia. The Euphrates, under American colours, came in to land one Green, a passenger, a citizen of this town. The crew landed, intending to enjoy a visit on shore. As soon as Gov. Buchanan heard of it, the sheriff was ordered to arrest the fellows and put them in prison, unless they were off immediately. This is the only way. Nothing else will cure the evil.—Africa's Luminary.