

XXVI.—*The Present State of Dahome.* By CAPTAIN RICHARD F. BURTON, F.R.G.S.

(Read November 22nd, 1864.)

IN the years 1863-4 I twice visited Dahome, a country whose savage and somewhat peculiar customs have made for it a name in Europe. My first flying trip lasted about one month, from May 18th to June 17th, 1863. It extended only to Kana, a ruined town, where the king was in *villagiatura*—country quarters. The second visit was prolonged to nearly three months (between December 8th, 1863, and February 26th, 1864), and its length enabled me to learn a modicum of the Ffon or national language. I am induced to offer the following remarks in the belief that my experience will rectify many popular fancies wide afloat. Few places in Africa have been more copiously bewritten than Dahome. And yet so well informed a journal as the *Saturday Review* (July 4th, 1863), gravely tells its readers that "the King of Dahome has lately been indulging in a sacrifice of two thousand human beings, simply in deference to a national prejudice (!), and to keep up the good old customs of the country (!)." It will presently appear how completely the reviewer misunderstood the matter.

And, first, of the word *Dahome*, which should not be pronounced *Dahóme*. The existence of this once great military empire was made known to Europe by a letter dated "Abomey, Nov. 27th, 1724," addressed by Mr. Bullfinch Lamb, or Lambe, agent for the English African Company, to Mr. Tinker, the commandant of the English fort Whydah. In it he describes, as an eye-witness, the dreadful slaughter of the people of Allada, an inland and independent city, by the conquering king, Agaja Dosu, of Dahome, when "there was no stirring for bodies without heads, and had it rained blood, it could not have lain thicker on the ground."

Yet the kings of the rival settlements were Scotch cousins after the following fashion:—

About 1620 an old and wealthy chief of Allada Proper died and left his dominions to his three sons. These agreed that the eldest should reign in his father's stead, which he did in peace and prosperity, with the name of Allada' Khosu, or King of Allada. "Dé," the youngest, or some say the second, rounded the Upper Nohwe or Denham waters of our charts, and founded "Hwebonu," which we have since known as Little Ardrah and Porto Novo. Hence the Dahoman king still calls him of Hwebonu "brother," although now under French protection. The cadet, "Dako," the "Tacoodonou" of our histories, settled at a place called "Uhwawe," between the two chief inland towns, Kana and Agbome, where the Adaniwe palace was afterwards built. Hence the *History of*

*Dahomy*, by Governor Dalzel (published in 1793), tells us that the original capital of Dahomy was "Dawhee," between the towns of Calmina (Kana) and Abomey, at about ninety miles from the sea-coast.

The little province of Uhwawe belonged to a chief named Awesu, who allowed the ambitious stranger to settle there. "Dako," by degrees becoming powerful, encroached upon a neighbouring kingdom, ruled by "Danh," meaning the Snake or the Rainbow. As his followers greatly increased, and he was ever asking more ground from Danh, the latter exclaimed in wrath, "Soon thou wilt build upon my stomach!" "Dako" bided his time, slew the king, and erected over his corpse the old palace of Dahome, meaning "on Danh's stomach." Hereupon, the Ffons changed their name to Dahomans; and thus about 1625 arose the once great military empire familiar to the ears of Europe. I prefer to write the word Dahome: properly it is Danh-ho-men, but the African nasals and the quasi-Arabic guttural *ho*, meaning *ilia*, would be unmanageable, both to reader and printer.

The extent and population of Danh-ho-men-to ("the land of Dahome") have been grossly exaggerated. Dr. M'Leod (1820), who never left Whydah, Commr. Forbes (1849-50), and M. Wallon of the French Navy, have assigned to this inconceivable province of the great Oyo or Yoruban region, the broad lands between the so-called Kong mountains on the north and the Bight of Benin on the south, a depth of two hundred miles. The rivers and lagoons of Lagos, others say the Niger, are near the eastern, while the Volta river and the Ashantis become the western frontier. This gives a breadth of 180, making a total of 36,000 square miles.

Such boundaries may have been, though I greatly doubt them: now we must reduce Dahome to one-tenth. The northern frontier bordering on the Makhi mountaineers, is a water called Tevi, eighteen hours of landmarch = forty miles from Agbome, the capital, giving a direct distance of about one hundred miles. On the north-east, beyond the tributary Agoni tribes, are the Iketu, and other Nagos or Yorubans, who have been plundered, but never subjected; to the north-west are the semi-independent races of Aja, of Attakpamwe, and others. The extreme extent may be fifty miles, narrow towards the south, giving the province a pyriform shape. The base between Godome or Jackin, the easternmost settlement, and the frontier between Whydah and the turbulent independent Popos, cannot exceed twenty-five to thirty miles. Assuming, therefore, forty miles as the medium breadth, we obtain a superficies of 4000 square miles. Moreover, this black Sparta is hedged in by hostile races. "Porto Novo" and Badagry to the east have fallen into European hands, whilst the Popo republics on the west

are safe in their marshes. Dahome will crumble to pieces under the first heavy shock.

The numbers assigned to the kingdom vary greatly, and are all guess work. Commr. Forbes proposes 200,000; M. Wallon 900,000; Commodore Wilmot 180,000. I would reduce it to 150,000, of whom perhaps four-fifths are women and children. The population is thus not a third of what the land could support. The annual withdrawal of both sexes from industry to slave-hunting, and the customs of the capital, the waste of reproduction in Amazons, and the losses by disease and defeat, have made the country, in parts, a desert. So contemptible is the African power which is perhaps the best known throughout Europe! and so strong is eccentricity to attract notice!

Captain William Snelgrove, commanding the *Katherine Galley*, was the first Englishman who visited a Dahoman monarch. Since his day (1726) the custom has been regularly kept up. The stranger lands upon the "beach" of Whydah, congratulating himself if he escapes the sharks and the breakers. He is then escorted with great ceremony to the town of Whydah, about fifty miles from the shore. It is a large but decayed settlement; and before my last departure it was almost destroyed by fire. After receiving from the king an official permission to visit the capital, collect porters, and have hammockmen, he sets out, and in four days easily covers the fifty-two or fifty-three direct miles between the port and the capital. If the king be at Kana, a preparatory levée is held there; if at Agbome, the visitor advances without delay. Strangers are courteously received with reviews and processions: after a few days of repose, they are informed that the Customs will begin.

The word "Custom" is used to signify the cost or charges paid to the king at a certain season in the year. It is borrowed by us from the old French, who wrote *coutume*, and the Portuguese *costume*, manner, or habit.

The Grand Customs take place only after the death of a king. They excel the annual rites in splendour and in bloodshed, for which reason the successor defers them till he has become sufficiently wealthy. Our travellers of the olden time give terrible accounts of the slaughter and of the barbarities which accompanied the rites. Says Dalzel, "In the months of January, February, and March (1791), the ceremonies of the Grand Customs and of the king's coronation took place; the ceremonies of which lasted the whole three months, and were marked almost every day with human blood. Captain Fayrer, and particularly Mr. Hogg, Governor of Appolonia, were present; and both affirm that not less than five hundred men, women, and children fell 'victims to revenge and ostentation, under the show of piety.'

Many more were expected to fall, but a sudden demand for slaves having thrown the lure of avarice before the king, he, like his ancestors, showed he was not insensible to its temptation."

The last grand customs were performed in November 1860 by Gelele, the present sovereign, to honour the manes of his sire Gezo. The horrors of the rite were exaggerated with ridiculous adjuncts; for instance, the Europe-wide report that the king floated a canoe and paddled himself in a tank full of human blood. It arose from the custom of collecting the gore of the victims in pits about two feet deep and four in diameter. Yet, reports from the Wesleyan missionaries show that very little change has taken place, as regards the number of victims, during two-thirds of a century.

The Yearly Customs were first heard of by Europe in the days of Agaja, the conqueror (1708-1727). They form continuations of the Grand Customs, and they periodically supply the departed monarch with fresh attendants in the shadowy world. For, unhappily, these murderous scenes are an expression, lamentably mistaken but perfectly sincere, of the liveliest filial piety. It was said of the old Egyptians that they lived rather in Hades than upon the banks of the Nile. The Dahomans declare that this world is man's plantation, the next is his home—a home which, however, no one visits of his own accord. They of course own no future state of rewards and punishments: there the king will be a king, and the slave a slave for ever. Ku-to-men, or Dead-man's-land, the Dahoman's other but not better world, is a country of ghosts, of umbrae, who, like the spirits of the nineteenth century in Europe, lead a quiet life, except when by means of mediums they are drawn into the drawing-rooms of the living. As might be expected, many Fetishmen in Dahome have visited Dead-man's-land, and have travelled back from "the bourne from which no traveller returns", with exact details of what goes on there.

The annual customs are called by the people Khwe-ta-nun, or "The Yearly Head Thing," and Anung'bome—"Going to Agbome in the Dries." The number of victims has been greatly swollen by report. Mr. James, at the beginning of the present century, found the maximum of three several years to be sixty-five. Commr. Forbes owns that in the later years of the last king's reign, not more than thirty-six heads fell.

During my second visit to Agbome, forty men were put to death. I presume that an equal number of women were sent to the next world; but if so, the executions took place within the palace. The men were all criminals and war captives: no innocent Dahoman is ever killed on these occasions, and the king judges in person those accused of capital offences. He is so par-

ticular about the lives of his subjects, that throughout the empire coroners' inquests must follow every death, and certify that it has not been violent. The time of execution is during the hours of darkness, and of these Zan Nyanyana, or Evil Nights, there were two: January 1st and January 5th, 1864. The public stays within doors under pain of death, and the king personally superintends the executions. Some are clubbed "*ammazzati*"; others are beheaded by the Mingan or Premier; the Meu or second minister also takes his part in the tragedy. After death, the bodies are exposed in the Uhunjro market place for a few days. The men, attired as during life in shirts and night-caps, are seated in pairs upon Gold Coast stools, supported by a double-storied scaffold, about forty feet high, of rough beams, two perpendiculars, and as many connecting horizontals. Between these patibula are gallows of thin posts, about thirty feet tall, with single or double victims hanging head downwards: cords passed in several coils round the ankles and above the knees, attach them to the cross-bar of the fatal tree. These tokens of the king's piety are allowed to remain exposed for several days, after which they are thrown into the city ditch.

It is not, however, at the Customs that the great loss of life takes place. As in the city of Great Benin and at Komasi, capital of Ashanti, almost every day witnesses some deed of blood. Whatever action, however trivial, is performed by the king, it must dutifully be reported to his sire in the shadowy realm. A victim, almost always a war-captive, is chosen; the message is delivered to him, an intoxicating draught of rum follows it, and he is dispatched to Hades in the best of humours. I heard of only one case where the victim objected to lose his life. Even those who were prepared for the customs which I witnessed sat looking at the various ceremonies, beating time to the music and eyeing all my movements: at my request, the king pardoned about half of them, but no man thanked me.

To conclude the subject of the annual customs, these ceremonies are of two kinds. The first, which happened, for instance, in 1862-63, is called Atto-ton-khwe or the Atto year, from the Atto or platform in the Ajyahi market whence the victims are precipitated. It is the form most familiar to readers. The second is the So-sin-khwe or Horse-tie-year which alternates with the former: as yet no traveller has described its peculiarities concerning which I am about to publish.

There are two ethnological remarkabilities in Dahome, which require notice: the corporeal duality of the king, and the precedence of women over men. The monarch is double, two kings in one. Gelele, for instance, rules the city, and Addo-kpon governs the bush, that is to say, the country and the farmer folk.

The latter has his palace about six miles from the capital, his high officers, male and female, his wives and eunuchs; moreover, criminals and victims are set apart for him at the Customs.

Our travellers are wholly silent upon the subject of this strange organisation. I presume that the duplicate was invented of late years to enable the king to trade. Commerce was held ignoble by his warrior ancestors. It cannot be now said of the Dahomans. They have a king who buys and sells, and yet Addo-kpon derives all the advantages of the industry of the palace, in which many things, as pottery, pipes, mats, and cloths, are manufactured and monopolised.

With regard to the position of women, it must be remembered that the king has two courts, masculine and feminine. The former never enters the inner palace, the latter never quits it except on public occasions. The high officers of both courts correspond in name and dignity: there are, for instance, the female Mingan and the man Mingan, the she Meu and the he Meu, and the woman officer is called the "No," or mother of the man. Strangers also find maternal parents: there is, for instance, an "English mother", who expects presents from her protégés. Some resident merchants have two "mothers," one given by the late, the other by the present, king. Royalty itself is not exempt: there are "mothers" for all the deceased rulers.

The origin of this exceptional organisation is, I believe, the masculine *physique* of the women enabling them to compete with the men in bodily strength, nerve, and endurance. It is the same with most of the races inhabiting the Delta of the Niger, where feminine harshness of feature and robustness of form rival the masculine. The custom is of old date in Yoruba, and our histories depict the Mino—"our mothers," vulgarly called Amazons,—before the birth of the late King Gezo, who used to boast that he had organised a female army. He doubtless regarded the force with a favouring eye, depending upon it to check the turbulence and treachery of his subjects and to cause rivalry in the field by breeding jealousy between the sexes. He ordered every Dahoman to present his daughters, of whom the most promising were chosen, and trained to arms. Gelele, the present ruler, causes every girl to be brought to him before marriage, and retains her at his pleasure in the palace. These being royal wives, cannot be touched without danger of death, they never leave their quarters unless preceded by a bell to drive men from the road, and all have slaves who act as spies. The sexes meet on the march and in the field; at parades they are separated by "bamboos" lying on the ground.

Of Gelele's so-called Amazons about two-thirds are said to be maidens,—a peculiar body in Africa. The remaining third has

been married. That an element of desperation might not be wanting, women liable to death are "dashed" to the king and are duly enlisted. Besides these criminals, the Xantippes who make men's hours bitter, are very properly put into the army, and Africa is well stocked with the noble army of martyrs, that begins not with Socrates and that ends not with Mr. Thomas Sayers. The fighting women are not *de facto* married to the king; but it may take place at his discretion. The first person that made the present ruler a father was one of his colonels.

The Amazons affect male attire especially when in uniform. There is nothing savage or terrible in their appearance. When young, they are compelled to dance, and to engage in violent exercises, which renders them somewhat lean; but as they advance in years they grow in weight, and many of them call loudly for the treatment of Mr. Banting.

The soldieresses are not divided into regiments; there are, however, three distinct bodies, as in the male army. The Fanti company takes the centre, and represents the body-guard. The king generally pays "distinguished strangers" the compliment of placing them in command. I had this honour, but was not thereby entitled even to inspect my corps. The Fanti women bind round the hair, which requires but scanty confinement, narrow white fillets, with rude crocodiles of blue cloth sewn on the band. The other two divisions are the wings, right and left. The three corps consist of five arms under their several officers, viz.—

1. The Agbweya, or blunderbuss women, who may be considered the grenadiers. They are the biggest and strongest of the force, and each is accompanied by an attendant carrying ammunition. With them rank the carbineers, the bayonetteers, and a company armed with heavy weapons and called Gan'u'nlan, or "Sure to kill."

2. The elephant hunters—who are held to be the bravest of these women; twenty have been known to bring down at one volley, with their rude appliances, seven animals out of a herd.

3. The Nyekplo-hen-to, or women armed with huge razors, of which an illustration lately appeared in the English papers. This "maiden," or portable guillotine, is apparently useful *in terrorem*.

4. The infantry, or sling women, forming the staple of the force; from them, as in France, the *élite* is drawn. They are armed with Tower muskets, and are well supplied with ammunition, but they manoeuvre with precisely the precision of a flock of sheep, and they are too light to stand a charge of the poorest European troops. Personally, they are clean-made, without much muscle. They are hard dancers, indefatigable singers, and though affecting a military and swaggering gait, they are rather mild and unassuming in general appearance.

5. The Go-ken-to, or archeresses, who, in the late king's time, were young girls, the fairest corps, the pick of the army, and the pink of dancers. Armed with a peculiar bow, a quiver full of light cane shafts, and a small knife lashed with a lanyard to the wrist, they were distinguished by scanty attire, by a kilt, extending to the knee, and by an ivory bracelet on the left arm. Their weapon has fallen in public esteem; under Gezo's son they are never seen on parade, and when in the field they are used as scouts and porters. They also carry the wounded to the rear.

In 1863 I saw all these women troops marching on service out of Kana, and a careful computation gave me the following results. Before ten a.m. were counted 1,439, mostly weaponed; they then marched in knots in all 246—making, when we retired to breakfast, a total of 1,685. The movement was interrupted till our return, when the king set out with a body-guard of 353. Thus, the grand total was 2,038, and, at most, amply allowing for omissions, 2,500. But of these one-third were unarmed, or half-armed, leaving the fighting women at a figure of 1,700. Gelele, the present king, has never been able to bring more than 10,000 troops into the field. His "most illustrious viragos," are now a mere handful. King Gezo lost the flower of his force in March, 1851, outside the walls of Abeokuta, and the loss was never made good. Gelele has lately followed the example of his sire.

On Tuesday, March 15, 1864, the present king carried out his favourite project, his daily thought and nightly dream, an attack upon Abeokuta, where his father had left fame and name. The attempt was contemptible in the extreme; twelve marches, and nearly a fortnight of starvation reduced the wretched troops to their lowest strength, and though all knew that the town is provided with moat and wall, there were neither fascines nor ladders. Of all the host only four women scaled the defences, and were of course slain. The attack lasted about an hour, and was followed by a retreat, and which speedily became a *sauve qui peut*. The consequence was to Dahome a loss of 1,000 slain and about 2,000 captured.

Thus, Dahome yearly loses *prestige*. She is weakened by traditional policy, by a continual shedding of blood, and by the arbitrary measures of her king, who has resolved to grind the faces of his subjects for ten years, of which six have elapsed. She is demoralised by an export slave trade, by frequent failures in war, and by close connection with Europeans. As was remarked a dozen years ago by Commr. Forbes, Dahome now contains no Dahomans. The gallant old race of which our histories speak, has been killed out; its place has been taken by a mongrel breed of slaves and captives. Except the royal blood, which may number 2,000 souls, all are of impure origin, and are *bond fide*

slaves to the king. Under these circumstances, it is pleasing to remark the gradual but sure advance of El Islam, the Perfect Cure for the disorders which rule the land. Amongst my eight hammock-bearers I found two Moslems.

XXVII.—*On the Principles of Ethnology.* By T. S. PRIDEAUX, Esq.

(Read November 22, 1864.)

ETHNOLOGY to become a science must be based on induction. A great quantity of facts relating to the physical and mental differences presented by mankind have, of late years, been collected by the praiseworthy industry of observers. Notwithstanding, however, the store of building materials accumulated and lying ready to the hand of the workman, we have no hesitation in expressing the opinion that the foundation stone of a durable and scientific edifice, embodying the laws of Ethnology, has yet to be laid.

The want of precision in language, the discordance in opinion, the absence of order and method, or any recognised starting point, so different from the regular and progressive growth of a system of ideas that has once attained a firm basis of truth to rest upon, all proclaim that in ethnology the reign of chaos is not yet ended.

Where so many industrious and intelligent workers have laboured so long and effected so little of a durable character, surely it ought to excite a misgiving that their efforts have not been made in the right direction, and that the system on which inquiries have been prosecuted, must have been an erroneous one. That such has been the case has long been my deliberate conviction, and the object of this paper is to endeavour to point out the errors in method which have so paralysed the progress of ethnology as a science, and to suggest a remedy.

No science is possible without precision of language. Proper names used as the representatives of certain classes of objects being purely arbitrary sounds, propositions in which they occur are, and can be, intelligible only in proportion to the precision of the ideas associated with them. However clear may be the perceptions of the individual who enunciates a fact—however grammatical his language, the statement is, to the hearer, absolutely meaningless, more or less vague, or clear and definite in exact ratio to the coincidence in the ideas attached to the same terms

by each. If these differ, discussion may be endless, but agreement must be unattainable.

The science of mathematics, especially geometry, offers to our view an admirable illustration of the advantages of accuracy of language to the advancement of science. Here we find universal agreement and steady progress from the days of the Greeks to our own, because the terms used convey exact ideas to all, so that misapprehension is impossible. Did one geometer understand by the term right angle, an angle of 85°, whilst another used it to describe an angle of 95°, what would become of the boasted certainty and exactitude of mathematics? Yet this difference of 10° in the meaning attached to the same appellation does but faintly shadow forth the vagueness, or, more properly, the confusion, which prevails amongst ethnologists on the signification of one and the same term. Does anyone doubt this, let him read the different and differing definitions of Celt and Saxon to be found in ethnological literature.

Does a geologist speak to me of nummulites, ammonites, or trilobites, he shows me the creature and I clearly apprehend his statements. Does he talk of oolite, he points to a specimen in his cabinet, and tells me the formation occurs below the "green sand," and above the "lias." Let me visit half a dozen in succession, and I find their statements all agree. Here, then, I find certainty, a science with established laws, and a firm basis ready to receive additions to the superstructure; but where are the established laws of ethnology, is there any one doctrine held in common by ethnologists, any two facts admitted to be correlated? Surely a method must be at fault which leads to such unsatisfactory results.

If we desire a different fate to attend our own labours, we must banish preconceived opinions, which are the bane of progress, and shake hands with the past. Instead of commencing with assumptions, and bending and twisting facts to fit into our prejudices, we must lay aside the old-fashioned spectacles which have so long blinded our vision, and look at facts as nature presents them. Let us once emancipate ourselves from our coloured glasses, and assuredly we shall feel surprised as we contemplate the diversified hues of nature, that we should so long have seen nothing but red, yellow, and blue.

On what foundations rest the orthodox ethnological doctrines of the day regarding the populations of Western Europe? Are they inductions from observation? Certainly not; their warmest supporters could not venture to allege any such claim in their behalf. What, then, is their origin? An attempt to interpret the phenomena these populations exhibit by the narratives and traditions of the historical period. Or, in other words, many having