

# WOMEN IN THE HEART OF AFRICA

## QUEER CUSTOMS OF COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE AMONG THE SAVAGE TRIBES OF THE BLACK CONTINENT



A BOSUKUMA BRIDE ON HER WAY TO THE GROOM. THE GIRL IS UNDER THE COTTON ON THE WOMAN'S BACK.



KAFFIR MAIDEN SHOWING HAIR DRESSING



ZULU GIRL. A BRIDE WHO EARNS HER SALT.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

BEFORE I leave the heart of the Black Continent, to start going for the white man's Africa, that land of gold and diamonds below the Zambesi, I want to write a letter about the queer customs of our African sisters. They are an important part of this dark-complexioned world, and every nation and tribe has its own ways of treating them. I have already written of the Mohammedan maidens along the coast of the Mediterranean; they go about clad all in white or black, each having only a single eye-hole in her garments to find her way along the streets. I have written of the fair-skinned Jewesses of Tunis. They dress in jackets and trousers, and a pair of their embroidered breeches often costs as much as \$200. I have told you how they are fattened for marriage by special feeding and how a popular belle often weighs 300 pounds, or about as much as our own dear Secretary Taft. I have described the women of Tripoli and Egypt, where the girls cover their faces with long veils when they go out of doors, and also the dancing maidens of the Sahara, called the Ouled Nails, who have brazen, bare faces and paint their eyelids black with kohl, and stain their finger nails and toe nails red with henna.

Further down the continent I learned much about the women of the British possessions, where John Bull is not so respectful to the women as he is to the men. In the case of the British East Africa, the young unmarried girls are in the bachelor quarters, and until they are old enough to get married, a Masai man is not supposed to marry until he has a wife. In the case of the British East Africa, the young unmarried girls are in the bachelor quarters, and until they are old enough to get married, a Masai man is not supposed to marry until he has a wife. In the case of the British East Africa, the young unmarried girls are in the bachelor quarters, and until they are old enough to get married, a Masai man is not supposed to marry until he has a wife.

**A Tax on Wives.**

Down in Rhodesia the usual price for a strong, good-looking girl is four cows, and if she is the daughter of a chief she may bring as much as five or six. The government taxes every native \$5 a year for his hut and family, and this includes a tax for one wife. If he has more than one he is charged 10 shillings for each extra wife. Above the Nile the bride is engaged at 4 or 5 years of age. Such engagements are made by the parents and several cattle form part of the dowry. It is a custom among the Masai to allow a younger brother to marry until each of his older brothers has at least one wife, and the father often helps pay for the bride.

**Bridal Costumes.**

The question of dress is not a serious one in most parts of Central Africa. It is different north of the Sahara, where a pair of bridal trousers may, as I have stated, cost \$200 and upward, and where headdresses of cloth of gold are not uncommon. The lightest wedding costume I have seen in my travels is that which the women wear at the end of the Uganda railroad. The men go absolutely naked and the married women have on nothing but a sort of fly brush tail about 12 inches long which they fasten to a string around the waist.

In this same country the women wear no clothes whatever until married, when they adopt the tail. A little change is now beginning along the line of the railroad, but a few miles back nudity prevails. Notwithstanding this, the Kavirondo are said to be of a much higher grade of morality than their neighbors, who are more or less clad.

A little south of that region I came upon a tribe the ladies wear about the waist fiber fringes of the length of my hand or longer, and on the opposite side of Lake Victoria I saw hundreds of girls clad all in grass. I say "all," but this means only a skirt which reaches from the waist to the knees. The young girls wear nothing.

The Uganda women wear bark-cloth and cover the whole person. They have great blankets which they wrap around their waists. Indeed, they are so well covered that they could go through an American city without being arrested by the police. This would not be possible for a Kavirondo woman.

Down here near Broken Hill the women wear a cloth which reaches from the waist to the knees, and also a kind of cotton dickey over the breast and back. They are plump, lusty-looking matrons,

and can use the native hoe and mattock far better than the men. Indeed, the men do almost no work in the cornfields, that work being left to their wives. Our American belles adore dimples, and it is said that their dimples are sometimes artificially made. They adorn their faces with black patches of court-plaster, and also comb their hair in outlandish shapes. I have seen an American beauty with a diamond set in one of her front teeth, and we all know of women who paint powder and enamel.

The same effort to beautiful one's self goes on throughout Africa, save that the standards of beauty are different. Among the Banyoro, who live north of Uganda, the women knock out the six front teeth of the lower jaw and the young men do the same. The Zulus women have a similar custom. On the south side of Victoria Nyanza there are tribes where the women file their teeth sharp like a saw.

Most of the African women scar their bodies to beautify them. I have seen girls with Persian shawl patterns on their breasts and abdomens, and others with great welts on their foreheads and cheeks, marking the tribe to which they belong. In the Sudan there are scores of such tribal marks, and each tribe has its own way of scarring. Mutilation of the ears is common throughout Central Africa. The Swahilis enlarge the holes in the lobes until they become mere straps which will inclose a glass tumbler. These same girls have holes all around the rims of their ears, which they fill with rolls of paper.

The Masai women load down their ears with jewelry, fastening great weights to the holes in the lobes so that they are gradually pulled down until they flop against the shoulders.

In German East Africa there are people who wear great rings and plugs in their lower lip and in the upper lip as well. Such ornaments elongate the upper lip so that it extends several inches out over the mouth.

**Queer Ways of Hair Dressing.**

Until I came to Africa I thought the American girl could put up her hair in more outlandish ways than any other maiden on earth. She has many competitors and some superiors among the ebony belles of the Black Continent.

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regular university courses of reading for promising appearing young chaps introduced to him who couldn't afford to go to college and who did their studying in accordance with his directions after working hours. Scores of men who were put through the mill in this way under Spofford's guidance have made good in many fields.

Perhaps he will be remembered longer for his amazing memory than for any other reason. He could not as well be called Macaulay, remember the happenings on the day when he was born, nor did he perform such Macaulay feats as committing the whole of Milton or Homer or the Bible to memory. Nevertheless it was said of Spofford by scholars both of this country and of Europe that probably he possessed the most phenomenal memory of any man that ever lived.

He not only knew books, but he knew their contents. It was worth while to see the tall, loose-jointed old man with the swarthy skin of an Indian engaged in "reading" a book. What the average man gets out of a book by careful reading Spofford absorbed by skimming.

When the Library of Congress was still in the Capitol you would come upon the librarian standing in some dim, out-of-the-way book-heaped aisle, with four or five ponderous books under his arms and another around his neck. He would be quite unconscious of what was happening around him while occupied with the job of extracting the meat from the book before his eyes.

He would turn the pages over rapidly,

and farther back there are many tribes in which the women shave the head close. This is so with the Baganda and the Masai. Many of the native women of Omdurman, in the Sudan, shave not only the head, but every part of the body, and it is a common custom among many tribes for both men and women to have themselves shaved from head to foot before marriage. Among some people the hair is pulled out. This is also the custom among our Moros of the Philippines and certain tribes of the Amazon.

The Baloro, a tribe which inhabits the country between Lakes Albert and Albert Edward, shave and oil their heads before the wedding. The girl's hair is scraped off by the village barber, and her own sister uses the razor over the rest of the body. After this she is smeared from crown to toenail with butter and castor oil, the stuff being well rubbed into the skin. The Sesee Islanders pull out their eyelashes, and babies have their heads shaved shortly after birth. The old Zulu men and women pull out the hair as they begin to appear, thinking that gray hair makes old age. The

younger women there rub red clay and oil in their hair, and they often plait it into string-like strands. When they trim their hair in Pondoland the hair-dresser puts a strap around the forehead, and cuts the hair level with this by means of a knife, stopping at the strap, which protects the skin. After they are married they often train their hair into a cone-shaped mass, stiffening it with red clay and oil for the purpose.

In all African countries the native men are almost as particular as the women as to the dressing of their hair. In Zululand the married men wear rings around their heads, twining the hair over them and then smearing it with charcoal and oil so that it can be polished. It is a great insult to attempt to pull off a man's ring. In many places the men shave their heads, even see him, much less hear him. He went right along brushing over the pages of the volumes about Fox.

Reed, who was then Speaker, smiled his Chinese smile and wandered back to the House of Representatives. He knew there was no use in trying to get anything out of Spofford while the librarian was "reading" a book.

Reed made a careful note of the work he had seen Spofford absorbing on that occasion, and he got the book and read it himself with considerable care. Two years later he walked in upon Spofford, accompanied by some friends from Maine, one day and said to him:

"Spofford, I'm interested in this Fox fellow, the English Premier, you know. Tremendous gambler, wasn't he? When I got some facts about his gambling? Was his gambling exaggerated? and a number of questions of similar import."

Spofford named, offhand, the biography of Fox that Reed had himself seen. The librarian skimming two years before, in which the matter of Fox's gambling habits was dwelt upon exhaustively. Then he summarized, in about 60 or 50 words, the gist of what the biography had set forth as to Fox's gambling habits, giving the amounts of great sums that he was said in that work to have won or lost at certain occasions.

Reed and his friends listened attentively and then when they returned to the Speaker's room he turned to the part of it which dealt with Fox's gambling methods and showed his visitors that every fact and figure that had been quoted by the librarian in his short summary was exact to a dot.

Once the late Senator George Vest, of Missouri, got into a discussion with a Southern friend as to the production of cotton in the South immediately before and immediately after the Civil War, the discussion took place in the Senator's rooms and he had no books of reference from which to ascertain the desired facts. "I'll call up Spofford and ask him; he'll know," said the Senator, and he went to the telephone and got the librarian on the wire.

"See here, Spofford," said Senator Vest through the phone, "there's a crazy man down here at my place who pretends to know something about cotton, but he doesn't know any more about cotton figures than I do about the wool production of the Balkans. I want to know what you think of this: How much cotton did this country produce in the year 1859 and in the year 1867?"

Spofford named the two amounts in bales with the figures. Not only that, but he named the numbers of bales exported each year and the number of bales kept at home for domestic consumption.

"I don't know what we're going to do up at the Capitol when that old boy dies," said Senator Vest, hanging up the receiver. "All the same, I'm going to check him up on this," and he made a note of the figures Spofford had given him.

On the following day, when he went to the Capitol, Senator Vest looked into a book of reference and found that the cotton figures Spofford had given him in that offhand fashion over the phone were correct to a bale.

Amazing Memory of A. R. Spofford

Dead Librarian of Congress Had a Vast Store of Information at Everyone's Service.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

AMAN who will be missed is Ainsworth R. Spofford, Librarian of Congress between the years 1864 and 1897, and from 1897 until his death in New Hampshire the other day Chief Assistant Librarian of Congress. All told, he had been attached to the National Library in one capacity or another, but for the greater part of the time as its head, for 46 years, having been appointed to a place in the library by President Lincoln in 1861.

He will be missed by a good many different classes of people here, but chiefly by the Legislators. More than a generation of Representatives in Congress were in the habit of leaning upon brusque-mannered, book-absorbed Spofford. Yet during all the period, nearly half a century, which the librarian spent in Washington nobody ever succeeded in finding out what his politics were.

It is doubtful if he leaned toward any party. He was a student and a keen critic of the game, but he never dipped into it to the extent of revealing even a symptom of partisanship.

The difficulties underlying such neutrality may better be understood when it is stated that Republicans and Democrats alike in Congress lent ear to his wisdom when they found themselves in tight pinches. He never gave unsolicited advice, but when he was approached by a man desirous of profit-

ing, he would turn the pages over rapidly, picking out the facts as the crab man picks out the meat and often muttering to himself as he fluttered the pages. He'd go through the book to the last page, including addenda and errata, and then he'd fling it into one of the heaps of books to the aisle and "eat up," as the library employees used to term it, one of the other books under his arm.

Spofford could get out of him even if the man waiting to address him were a haughty United States Senator, until he'd quite finished skimming the books he held in his arms. "For fear they'd get away from him," as was said by the men under him. Then, the last book gobbled up, in a way of speaking, he'd emerge from a sort of daze and step back to the world of affairs again.

Everything that he mind absorbed by this skimming process stuck there. This was proved a number of times by marvelous friends of the librarian, who could not see how anybody could get the heart out of a book by riffling over the pages in that manner.

By one time they tested him, as they often did, and often on wagers with friends, too, they found that he knew the contents of a thoroughly as he'd spent a laborious week in reading it. Not only that, he'd even remember the number of the page on which a certain fact, word or figure occurred for the purpose of trying him out.

It made no difference whether the volume were a book of philosophy or a book of statistics. Spofford got the "inards" out of it by his skimming method as thoroughly as the reader who pondered the book for days. Even more astonishing, he could find out the exact location of a word or a name in foreign languages, from books that he glanced over in this way.

The late Archbishop Chappelle and Spofford poles in the matter of religion. One day a number of years ago the Archbishop found the librarian skimming through a new work by Ernest Renan.

Archbishop Chappelle, a courtly and affable Frenchman, waited until Spofford had finished reading the Renan volume. The Archbishop himself had read the Renan book with great care as soon as it issued from the press and was thoroughly familiar with it.

"Spofford," he said challengingly to the nervous, jerky old librarian, "why do you waste your own and the Government's valuable time in such an unsatisfactory, impossible pursuit?"

"Explain that, sir, explain it," said the old gentleman, wheeling in his quick, marionette-like way upon the archbishop.

"I'll call up Spofford and ask him; he'll know," said the Archbishop, "picking up a book that I took Renan about 20 years to write and professing, yes, sir, professing, that in the space of 10 minutes while standing first on one leg and then the other and flicking over its pages."

"Tush, tush, sir, I know every line of that book," said the archbishop, "and the librarian. 'One does not have to be a mole, sir, and bury himself in the ground to read a book, like you religiousists, who insist upon the archbishop's picking up the discarded Renan volume, opened it at random, and asked Spofford what the Frenchman had to say with reference to a certain doctrinal subject.'"

To the archbishop's everlasting astonishment Spofford repeated in French, and almost word for word, Renan's views as to the matter about which Chappelle had inquired. Carrying the test further, the archbishop, in the manner of an examiner, took the librarian smack through the difficult volume, only to find at the end of the test that the librarian, who had only picked up the book a little while before in wandering through the aisles, had every part of the book as pat as if he'd been poring over it in a study for days and weeks.

Tom Reed, a man who always had to be shown, used to take keen delight in

exhibiting Spofford's phenomenal powers of memory to incredulous friends. Upon an occasion Reed strolled into the old library in the Capitol to see Spofford about something or other. He had to prow all over the place before he came upon the librarian, who, standing near a window, was skimming over the pages of a three-volume "Life and Letters" of Charles James Fox, the British statesman, that had just been issued from the press.

Reed tackled Spofford about the thing he had in mind, but the librarian didn't say anything or other. He had to prow all over the place before he came upon the librarian, who, standing near a window, was skimming over the pages of a three-volume "Life and Letters" of Charles James Fox, the British statesman, that had just been issued from the press.

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PUZZLE—WHAT IS THE MAN, JUST BACK FROM HIS VACATION, TELLING ABOUT?