

IN THE NIGER DELTA.

Horrible Superstitions Prevailing in that Part of Africa.

Lizard and Snake Worship—A Mother Rejoicing to See Her Child Devoured by a Python—Good Work Done by Christian Missionaries.

In the last issue of the "Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society," London, there is an unusually interesting article on "the Niger Delta" in Africa, of which the following synopsis has been made for the New York Ledger:

The Niger represents to-day the ruling people of the extreme lower Niger, of Brass, of New Calabar, Bonny and Opobo. In times past they were fanatic adherents of a savage type of animistic religion. Like the majority of the Africans, they did not know or conceive of the existence of one supreme God, but embodied a number of natural principles in the forms of certain animals, or in a concrete representation of "fetiches" or idols.

Each little community had its "totem," or sacred animal, in whose species the ancestral spirit—the soul of the tribe, so to speak—was supposed to dwell. Thus in Brass they worshipped the python snake; in Bonny the monitor lizard. Only nine or ten years ago this animal worship was so real that the British authorities in the Oil Rivers were compelled to afford it a certain amount of recognition. Europeans were forbidden to kill the sacred lizard of Bonny, or the still more sacred serpent of Brass, and were heavily fined by their Consul if they infringed this prohibition.

On one occasion, in Brass, some ten or twelve years ago, an agent of Messrs. Hatton & Cookson's firm found a large python in his house and killed it. When the misdeed became known the Brass people made a descent on the factory, dragged the agent out of the house, on to the beach, tied him up by his thumbs, spat in his mouth, and inflicted other indignities on him. Then they broke open the store, and took out £20 worth of goods, which they confiscated. The British consul, hearing of the disturbance, arrived in Brass, considered the case, and was unable to afford the agent any redress, because he was supposed to have brought the punishment upon himself.

A Bonny monitor lizard became a sickening nuisance. They devoured the Europeans' fowls, turkeys, ducks and geese with impunity; they might lie across the road or doorways of houses with their six feet of length, and savagely lash the skins of people who attempted to pass them with their whip-like serrated tails, and if you wounded or killed one of them, there was no end of a to-do. You were assaulted or robbed by the natives, harangued by the Consul on board of a man of war, and possibly fined into the bargain.

In other parts of the delta it might be the shark, or the crocodile, or some water-bird that was worshipped, but nowhere was this zoölatry carried to greater lengths than at Bonny and Brass. For its effectual abolishment, which has been of the greatest benefit to the well-being of Europeans and natives alike, we owe our thanks not to the intervention of naval or consular officials, nor to the bluff remonstrances of traders, but to the quiet, unceasing labors of the agents of the Church Missionary Society, who, by winning the natives from these absurd practices, have brought about such a change of ideas that now the python is promptly killed at Brass, before it makes its appearance, and the monitor lizard is relegated to the woods and swamps. Indeed, as regards the latter animal, there was rather a curious revolution of feeling.

About four years ago, when Bonny Town was infested with numbers of these great, sluggish lizards, the missionaries screwed the courage of the Bonny converts (who then meant almost the entire population of the place) to the sticking point. A grand slaughter of lizards was arranged to take place on Easter Sunday. As soon as the morning bells of the mission church rang out a large number of Bonny men and boys armed themselves with machetes and sticks and commenced the slaughter of the lizards. By the end of the day there was not one left alive in the town, and so great were the numbers slaughtered that the town almost brought about a sickness, and for four or five days the town was unapproachable.

But in slaughtering the lizards much else of the old superstition seemed to go, and that event marked the real revolution, and a turning toward better things on the part of the Bonny people. A change almost similarly abrupt put an end to the python worship at Brass. Before that time, if a python seized a child in the street in its coils and slavered it with its vicious saliva, the mother—so far from interfering to save it—must stand by and call out her thanks, and summon her friends and relatives to rejoice with her that the god-python had so honored her family as to devour her child.

OOZY-HEADED PEOPLE.

Beware of Persons Between Whose Ears and Mouth There is No Partition. You would not pour precious wine into a sieve, yet that was the case as to make a confidant of one of those "leaky vessels" of society that, like corporation water-carts, seem to have been made for the express purpose of letting out what they take in. There is this difference, however, says the New York Ledger, between the perforated monehoun and the leaky brain—the former lets the dust and the latter is pretty sure to lose a dust.

Beware of oozy-headed people, between whose ears and mouth there is no partition. Before you make a bosom friend of any man be sure that he is secret-tight. The mischief that the non-retentives do is infinite. In their they often mar the best-laid schemes and render futile the most profound strategy. In social life they sometimes set whole communities by the ears, frequently break up families and are the cause of innumerable misfortunes, miseries and crimes. In business they spoil many a promising speculation and involve hundreds in bankruptcy and ruin. Therefore, be very careful to whom you intrust information of vital importance to your own interests or to the interests of those you hold dear.

Every man has a natural inclination to communicate what he knows, and if he does not do so it is because his reason and judgment are strong enough to control this inherent propensity. When you find a friend who can exercise absolute power over the communicative instinct—if we may so term it—wear him in your heart, "yea, in your heart of heart." If you have no such friend, seek your own counsel.

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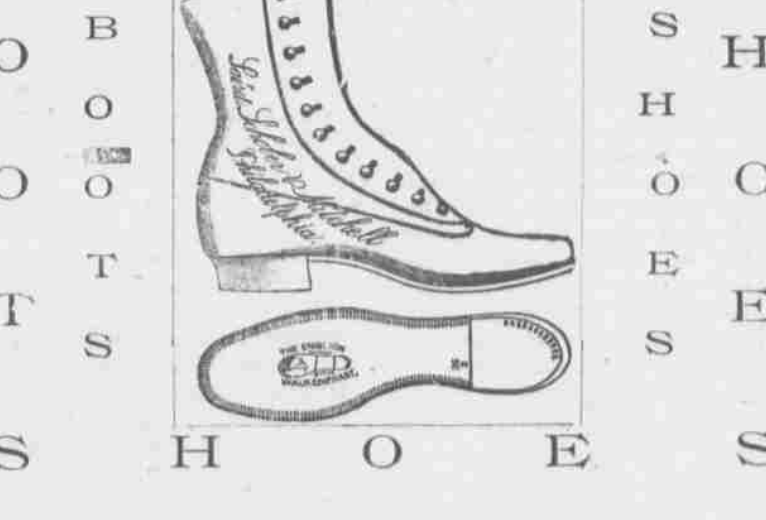
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