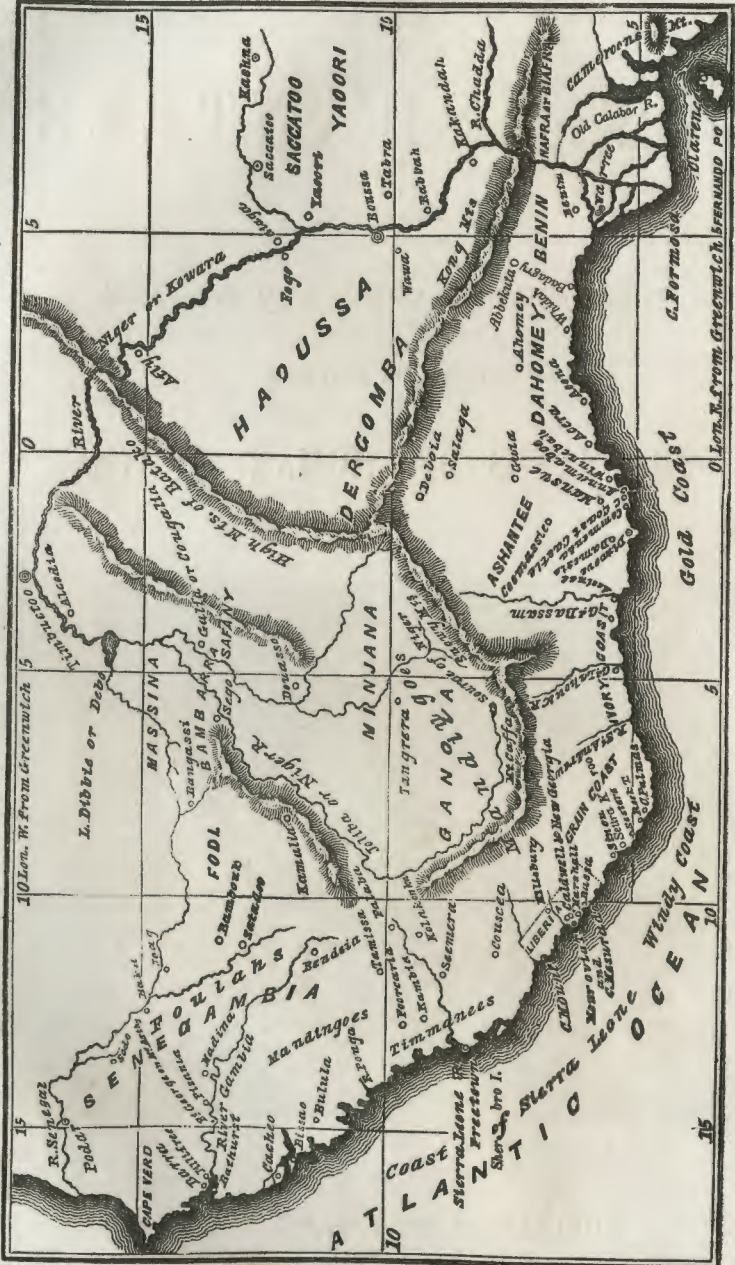


SUPERSTITIONS
OF
THE ASHANTEES,
ESPECIALLY
THOSE WHICH LEAD THEM TO SACRIFICE,
ON CERTAIN OCCASIONS,
THOUSANDS OF HUMAN VICTIMS.



PUBLISHED BY CALEB WRIGHT,
TROY, N. Y.
1848.



10 Lon. W. From Greenwich

10 Lon. E. From Greenwich

15

15

5

5

15

15

10

10

15

15

Cape Palmas.





Rock Town.

SUPERSTITIONS OF THE ASHANTEES.

THE objects of religious worship, in Ashantee, are fetishes. They are regarded as spiritual beings, though said to be of different sexes and to require food. They are supposed to reside in certain mountains, rivers, trees, brute animals, reptiles, and insects, and by ceremonies performed by the priests may be made to take up their residence in images of various kinds, or in bits of wood, glass, paper, &c. It is supposed that they not unfrequently render themselves visible to mortals. The great fetish of the rock, on which Cape Coast Castle stands, is said to come forth in the night in human form, but of superhuman size, and to proceed through the town, dressed in white, to chase away evil spirits. The Ashantees, and also the inhabitants of the adjacent countries, believe in the existence of the devil, and, in August, annually drive him out of their towns. At Cape Coast Town, preparation is made for the ceremony in the course of the day. As the hour of eight o'clock in the evening draws nigh, the people are seen collecting in groups in the streets, armed with sticks, muskets, and other weapons; at the instant the eight o'clock gun is fired from the castle, a tremendous shouting, accompanied with the firing of muskets, breaks forth from all parts of the town; and the people rush into their houses, and beat about with their sticks in every corner, shouting and hallooing with all their strength. When it is imagined that the devil is excluded from all the houses, a simultaneous rush is made out of the town, and the people in a body pursue the invisible enemy, with lighted flambeaux, shouts, and the firing of muskets, until it is concluded that he is completely routed and put to flight. After this achievement, they return; and, in some of the towns, the women proceed to wash and purify their wooden and earthen vessels, to prevent the devil from returning to their houses.

The priests and priestesses of the national superstition—the

fetish-men and fetish-women — constitute a numerous order. One class are attached to the public fetish-houses or temples. At the temple of the principal fetish of the Ahanta country, upwards of fifty superior priests are said to reside.

Another class of fetish-men itinerate through the country, remaining six or twelve months at a place, according as their services may be in demand by the inhabitants.

The revenue of the fetish-men is derived from the liberality of the people. A moiety of the offerings which are presented to the fetish belongs to the priests; and this is very considerable in amount. The king of Ashantee's offering is said to be generally ten ounces of gold, and that of his subjects in proportion to their respective ranks.

The influence of the fetish-men rests upon the universally-received principle, that evils can only be removed, and desired benefits conferred, by the fetishes; and that their friendly interposition must be sought through the medium of their servants or ministers. This doctrine, it will be perceived, puts the people entirely into the power of the priesthood, and wholly abandons them as victims to its rapacity.

To keep up the delusion, and maintain their influence, the fetish-men have recourse to a variety of means. They exert themselves to obtain all kinds of information. With this view, they employ agents in various parts of the country, who make them acquainted with all that is passing within the range of their observation. The fetish-men themselves, also, when on their travels, industriously collect the news; and, when one of them enters a town to practise his profession, his first business is, to shut himself up for a few days, until he ascertains by secret inquiries what subjects are engaging the public attention, who are sick, and what is the private history of the principal inhabitants. They thus acquire an amount of information which astonishes their dupes, and strengthens the popular belief in their supernatural powers.

The success of the fetish-men is further promoted by their acting in concert. They communicate to each other the information they respectively collect, and agree upon the line of operations which they shall pursue. A short time since, a person residing at a croom, or village, in the neighborhood of Salt Pond, was hunting in a very secluded part of the bush, when he came upon a company of about twenty fetish-men, who had retired thither to lay their plans for promoting the interests of their craft at the

public expense. He listened for some time to their conversation, unperceived, and might probably have kept their secret, had not his superstitious fears been partly dissipated by the influence of the gospel.

The fetish-men apply themselves to the study of medicine; and the knowledge which they acquire of the properties of herbs and plants contributes to strengthen their influence with the people.

Application is made to the fetishes for counsel and aid in every domestic and public emergency. When persons find occasion to consult a private fetish-man, they take a present of rum and gold-dust, and proceed to his house. He receives the present, and either puts a little of the rum on the head of every image, or pours a small quantity upon the ground before the platform, as an offering to the whole pantheon; then taking a brass pan with water in it, he sits down with the pan between himself and the fetishes; and the inquirers also seat themselves to await the result. Having made these preparatory arrangements, looking earnestly into the water, he begins to snap his fingers, and, addressing the fetish, extols his power, telling him that people have arrived to consult him, and requesting him to come and give the desired answer. After a time he is wrought up, like Virgil's Sibyl, into a state of fury; he shakes violently, and foams at the mouth. This is to intimate that the fetish has come upon him, and that he himself is no longer the speaker, but the fetish, who uses his mouth and speaks by him. He now growls like a tiger, and asks the people if they have brought rum, requiring them, at the same time, to present it to him. He drinks, and then inquires why they have come, and for what purpose they have sent for him. If a relative is ill, they reply that such a member of their family is sick; that they have tried all the means they could devise to restore him, but without success; and that, knowing he is a great fetish, they have come to ask his aid, and beg him to teach them what they should do. He then speaks kindly to them, expresses a hope that he shall be able to help them, and says, "I go up to see." It is imagined that the fetish then quits the priest; and, after a silence of a few minutes, he is supposed to return, and give his response to the inquiry.

But what is this "going up to see"? The people believe that the fetish has four eyes, and conclude that therefore he can see better than mortals, who have only two; and some understand that the fetish goes up to the sky to look around for the cause of

the disease, and for the cure. But the fetish-men themselves, when arguing with William De Graft in defence of their system, have insisted that the fetish goes up to Yankumpon, the Supreme Being; and they have urged this as a reason for refusing to embrace Christianity. Their argument has been, "As the fetishes derive all their power and wisdom from God, why forsake them?" Latterly, however, as they perceive that the people, under the teaching of the missionaries, are disposed to reject this mode of reasoning, and go to God at once, the priests do not appear to admit so freely the dependence of their deities upon a higher power.

When a principal chief is ill, or when any public calamity has taken place, the inhabitants of the town repair to the public temple, or fetish-house, to propitiate the fetish, who is supposed to be angry because his offerings have not been duly presented; and who has therefore either himself appointed the afflictive visitation, or has allowed some evil spirit to inflict it upon them. The illness of the chief, however, is shrewdly traced up by the priests to his neglect of the prescribed customs for a departed relative, or some other similar offence.

On these occasions, the drums belonging to the temple are brought forth. These are made of large calabashes, one end being cut off, and covered with goat-skin. The persons who play them sit upon the ground under the shade of the grove, and beat them with their hands. All things being ready, the priest selects and commences a fetish-song, which the people sing, while they beat the drums, and the attendant fetish-men dance with all their might. While thus engaged, the priests are often excited into a state of frenzy, which is regarded as evidence that the fetish has entered into them; and at the end of the song the fetish is supposed to speak in the priest, and give intimations of his will to the people. Previous to his beginning to speak, the priest lays his hand upon the drums, and silence ensues. Having ended his communication, he commences another song, and the former scene is renewed. After a length of time, perhaps when fatigued, the priest dances very slowly, and delivers his oracles to the people as he passes softly by them. On some of these occasions he will rush out of the circle, and run into the house of a principal person, to tell him what to do in order to avert some evil which he foresees is coming upon the family; and for such intimations he does not fail to receive the usual present.

Some of the fetish-houses are built in a conical form, with long

sticks or poles placed in the ground, tied together at the top, and thatched. When a fetish dance takes place before one of these, a priest places himself at the entrance, to prevent the people from looking in. They are told that, when the fetish comes down to his temple, they will see it move. And verily they do. As the drumming, singing, and dancing proceed, the temple begins to rock backward and forward, which the people are led to believe is effected by the fetish, who has descended, and is dancing upon the temple. This deception is managed by a fetish-man, who, before the people come together, places himself on a cross-seat in the building, near the top, where he is able to shake with ease the whole fabric. The stationing of another fetish-man before the door is to prevent the people from discovering the true cause of the phenomenon which they witness.

Sometimes the town-fetish does not wait to be consulted, but summons the inhabitants to his temple. On such occasions, the priests profess that the fetish has come upon them. They run about the town like frantic persons, eating raw eggs, using the most extravagant gestures, and telling the people that the fetish has a communication to make to them. Then the inhabitants take the accustomed presents, and hasten to the fetish-house; and the usual scene of drumming, singing, and dancing is enacted.

In cases of great difficulty, the oracle at Abrah is the last resort of the Fantees. This has always been held in the highest estimation. Previous to the Ashantee (As-hánti) war, there was in the neighborhood a deep and almost impervious dell, inhabited by a number of aged fetish-men, whom the people believed to be immortal, and to have lived there beyond all memory, in intimate converse with the fetish, and with the departed spirits of the aged and the wise. Adoko, the chief of the Braffoes, frequently consulted them, either in his own person, or through his head fetish-man; and the Fantees afterwards attributed the success of the Ashantees, and their own defeats and misfortunes, to their disregard of the injunctions of the oracle. Abrah is now in ruins; but the fetish maintains his reputation; partly by the influence of the fetish-men in the country, who advise the people to go thither in cases of great emergency, and partly by means of the information conveyed to Abrah by the agents of the oracle. Frequently, when inquirers go from a distance, they are surprised to find that the fetish-men are already acquainted with many of their own private affairs; and it often happens that, on the strength of the secret information which they have obtained, the priests send

such messages to persons living in remote places as tend to cherish and confirm the popular impression, that they possess supernatural means of obtaining knowledge. The people throughout the country would be afraid, were they disposed, to speak disrespectfully of the Abrah fetish; for they believe that he would hear them, catch them up into the sky, and make them drawers of water, or would inflict upon them some other severe punishment.

This celebrated oracle is always consulted at night. During the day no person is allowed to enter the sacred thicket from which the response is given. Any of the natives rambling within the precincts of the enclosure would be severely fined; and, if a European were seen approaching, the fetish-men would endeavor to dissuade him from entering it. When the inquirers arrive, they find a large fire made upon the ground; and the presents which they have brought they place in the hands of the priests in attendance. But sometimes they are told that they shall have the honor of giving them to the fetish himself. They are then directed to elevate their presents above their heads, and to fix their eyes steadfastly upon the ground; for, should they look up, the fetish, it is said, would inflict blindness upon them for their sacrilegious gaze. Who or what it is, in the overhanging branches of the trees, that receives the presents, will be readily conjectured. The visitants are then instructed to sit down, and look into the fire, without turning their heads aside, or speaking to each other; and two or three priests go round the company, and receive their applications. After a time the oracle gives a response, in a small, shrill voice, intended to convey the idea that it proceeds from an unearthly source.

All possible precautions are used to inspire the people with awe and fear, to deter them from visiting this oracle from motives of mere curiosity. It is inculcated that, should an unbeliever in the fetish enter the enclosure, he would be immediately discovered, and summarily punished. The fate of one irreverent visitant is dwelt upon with great solemnity. It is stated, that when he arrived, and sat down by the fire, a chain came down from the thicket, and dragged him up to the skies, where he is now employed in drawing up water from the sea, which the fetishes send back to the earth, in answer to the applications made to them for rain.

It has already been remarked that fetish-men and women acquire sufficient knowledge of the medicinal properties of herbs and

plants to enable them to cure many diseases. This knowledge is artfully employed to foster the public superstition. In administering the medicine, they invariably tell the patient that its healing properties were not discovered by themselves, and that they merely prepare it according to the prescription of the fetish. During the healing process many fetish rites are observed, to render the medicine more efficacious, and to counteract the influence of evil spirits. If the malady of the patient does not appear to yield to such applications, the fetish is again consulted; and, in some cases, as a further expedient, the priest takes a fowl or a cat, and ties it to a stick, and squeezes it to death. The stick is then placed in the path leading to the house, for the purpose of preventing evil spirits from approaching it. When the patient is known to be a rich man, a present of gold-dust is required, and sheep are directed to be offered. Mr. Bowdich states that, during the illness of his native guide at Coomassie, (Kumasi,) several sheep were sacrificed, and that he was fetiched until the last moment, and died amidst the howls of a number of old fetish-women, who continued to besmear with eggs, and other ingredients, the walls, door-posts, and every thing about him, until he had ceased to breathe. The sickness of persons of the highest order is frequently attended with more serious consequences than the slaughter of sheep and fowls. During the illness of Osai Tutu Quamina, it is stated that young virgins were regularly sacrificed to the fetish on certain days in the week, for the recovery of his health.

For the purpose of fortifying the applicant against any apprehended evil, some kind of fetish preparation is made, which he is directed to wear about his person; and, should it fail to accomplish the desired object, the blame is invariably thrown upon the wearer. It is alleged that he has neglected some necessary condition, or in some way or other offended the fetish; and the fetish-man escapes without censure. However greatly the predictions of the priests may be falsified by the event, or whatever may be the failure of the measures to which they resort, their own credit is maintained with the people. The case of the fetish-man at Gaboon will serve for the purpose of illustration. This individual, who declared himself to be invulnerable, was solicited by a credulous young man to endue him with the same miraculous quality. The request, enforced by a handsome present, was favorably entertained by the fetish-man; and the applicant having been duly fortified by the performance of the requisite

superstitious rites, confidently exposed himself to the fire of a musket. His arm was shattered by the ball ; but the fetish-man adroitly threw all the blame of the miscarriage upon the wounded dupe. He stated, that at the moment when the gun was discharged, it was revealed to him by the fetish that the young man had, on a former occasion, violated one of the fetish regulations. The sufferer was not prepared to maintain that he was faultless ; and the people continued to regard the fetish-man with undiminished veneration.

The measures prescribed to insure success in war afford a striking proof of the direful influence exerted by the national superstitions. When the king of Ashantee was about to engage in the Gaman war, he was employed in religious preparations during a period of several weeks. Not only in the capital, but at several other places, he presented fetish offerings in furtherance of the undertaking. According to the account of those transactions which Dupuis received from a native, it appears that the monarch, in the first instance, collected together his priests, and proceeded to consult the gods by a succession of human sacrifices. After fifty persons — thirty-two males and eighteen females — had perished, the royal council decided that the answers returned by the priests were unsatisfactory. The king was then directed to make a custom at the sepulchres of his ancestors ; and when the blood of many hundreds of human victims had been shed, the priests announced that the wrath of the adverse deities was appeased, and that they were at length disposed to favor the arms of the king. A certain composition was then prepared by the priests, which they delivered to the king, with a strict injunction to burn it daily in a consecrated fire-pot within the palace. On no account was the fire to become extinct in consequence of neglect ; for, so long as the sacred flame should continue to destroy the composition, the king, it was alleged, would not fail to triumph over his enemies.

Encouraged by the assurances which he received, the king prepared to join his army, and committed to his eldest sister, at that time the governess of the empire, or queen of the females, the task of watching over the sacred mystery ; informing her that both his crown and his life depended upon her vigilance. To assist her, he selected three of his favorite wives, who were to attend by turns, and prevent the fire from being extinguished. To this trust, however, the sister proved unfaithful. After the king had been some time absent, she formed a connection with a chief of

Bouromy, whose ambition led him to aspire to the throne of Ashantee. Seventeen of the king's wives, and their families, are said to have joined in the conspiracy; when the mysterious flame was extinguished, the fire-pot was broken to pieces, and the rebellious chief openly began to arm his followers in maintenance of his claims.

With this state of things, the king, it was believed, became acquainted by supernatural means. Surprised at the severe checks which he received in the early part of the war, he caused an incantation to be performed over a certain talisman, for the purpose of ascertaining why the results of the campaign proved so contrary to those which he had been encouraged to expect; when he is said to have obtained an insight into what was going on in his own capital. The fetish-men who were with him in the camp had doubtless received private information from Coomassie, which they communicated to the king as though it had been revealed by the oracle. The sequel may be briefly stated. The king immediately despatched Ossu Kujoh, with a body of troops, who speedily and effectually crushed the rebellion. When the king himself returned victorious at the end of the war, he summoned a council to deliberate upon the punishment to be inflicted upon the offenders; and it was finally decreed that the offending wives should suffer death by decapitation; but, to avoid the profanation of spilling royal blood, the sister of the king was ordered to be strangled, (her younger sister being elevated to her office of governess of the females,) and her paramour, and all his party, were doomed to undergo the most cruel deaths, at the grave of the king's mother. By the execution of these sentences, which were promptly carried into effect, it is said, seven hundred individuals perished.

In their preparations for war, the Ashantees have recourse to the Moors who visit or reside at the capital, as well as to their own fetish-men. Enormous prices are sometimes paid for the fetishes, or charms, manufactured by those followers of the prophet. The king, it is stated, gave for the fetish or war-coat of Apoko the value of thirty-seven slaves; and he paid according to the same scale for the war-dresses of several other chiefs, varied only with respect to the rank which they respectively sustained. For a small fetish, consisting of six lines of writing, enclosed in red cloth only, which the king presented to Mr. Bowdich's linguist, he gave six ackies of gold. Sometimes the fetish is cased in gold instead of cloth. A single sheet of writing-paper

is sufficient for a great number of charms, as a very small slip only will contain a mystical sentence.

To these cabalistic preparations the most extraordinary virtues are ascribed. The Ashantees firmly believe that they greatly contribute to make them invulnerable in war; that they paralyze the hand and shiver the weapons of the enemy, and divert the course of the balls. Several of the Ashantee captains seriously offered to allow Mr. Bowdich to fire at them; and such is the confidence which the warriors of that nation generally repose in these mystical defences, that they rush fearlessly into the midst of the greatest dangers. In the praises of one of the great captains, proclaimed on a public occasion by the bards, this was the climax of the song: "He is invulnerable; his fetish no man can look upon and live."

In the course of a war, the Ashantees use additional means to fortify themselves against evil, and to obtain fresh inspirations of vigor and courage. Several of the hearts of the slain enemy are taken out by the fetish-men who attend the army; and, having been cut to pieces, are mixed with blood and various consecrated herbs, while the accustomed ceremonies and incantations are performed. All who have never before killed an enemy eat of the preparation; it being believed that, if they did not, their energy would be secretly wasted by the haunting spirits of their deceased foes. The smaller joints, bones, and teeth of the most distinguished among the slain, are worn by the victors about their persons. Such was the end of the unfortunate Sir Charles M'Carthy. His heart was eaten, and his bones were worn as fetishes, or charms, by his savage conquerors.

The national divinities are supposed to be as willing to assist an individual in injuring his neighbors as in averting evils from himself and his family. If a revengeful or malicious design is formed, recourse is had to the fetish, for the purpose of carrying it into effect. During Mr. Hutchinson's stay at Coomassie, a person was executed for an attempt upon the life of his brother, who was a caboceer, or nobleman. The criminal was presumptive heir to the property, and his object was to obtain possession of it by the removal of his brother. To effect this, however, he did not use any personal violence, but only employed the fetish incantations which are resorted to for such purposes.

The great religious customs, which are to be classed among the darkest features of the national superstitions, yet remain for consideration. The immolation of prisoners taken in war is one

of those revolting practices; for it is presented to our notice, not as the effect of the ungovernable passions of the conquerors, breaking loose from the restraints and obligations of religion, but as an expression of pious zeal and devotion. It results from the principle recognized by the king of Ashantee in these words: "The fetish makes war for strong men, because they can then pay plenty of gold, and proper sacrifice." To obtain a supply of victims for their altars, is thus a principal end for which the national deities are supposed to promote war; and the sacrifice of their prisoners, consequently, becomes a religious obligation on the part of the people. Dreadful are the scenes of barbarity which are exhibited after a victorious campaign. After the Gaman war, full two thousand prisoners were destroyed, by the most refined tortures, over the royal death-stool in Coomassie, in honor of the fetish, and of the shades of departed kings and heroes; and at the commencement of the war which brought the Ashantees into hostile collision with the British, when the Asins were overthrown near the Prah, the horrid work of sacrificing the prisoners went on at the little temple on the banks of the river, by night as well as by day, until thousands had perished. In the national songs which celebrated the latter victory, the principle which requires the sacrifice of prisoners was distinctly recognized; and the bards exultingly sang that "a river of perjured blood flowed from Miasa to the Prah, and *propitiated the wrath of the river-god.*"

In Fantee, (F'anti,) the preparations for a funeral commence by washing the corpse, arraying him in his best garments, and adorning him with his trinkets and beads. He is then laid on a sofa, in a room the walls of which are covered, either wholly or in part, with red cloth. A silk umbrella is fastened to the wall over the head of the corpse, and a table is placed near it, covered with viands and wine for the use of the departed spirit. The family then commence a loud wailing, which attracts the neighbors to the house.

Every party of relatives or friends, coming from a distance to join in the custom, bring a suitable present, and are accompanied with drums and muskets. On their arrival, they give their presents to the individual having the charge or direction of the funeral, who is usually one of the principal persons of the family of the deceased. They then fire their muskets, and begin to beat their drums. The director of the funeral custom takes a regular account of the presents received, that a similar compliment may

be returned when the head of the family of the donors may be removed by death.

After a few days, the dead person is buried in his own house, or, if he be a young man, in the house of his father; and on the principle that individuals assume in another world the state which they maintained in this, the head of a family is interred in his best clothes and ornaments; gold-dust is also put into his grave; and sheep and cattle, at least, are slain on the occasion. Drumming, firing, dancing, wailings, shoutings, and other extravagant proceedings, take place when the soil is thrown upon the corpse; and food and drink are placed upon the grave.

If the deceased was rich, the custom is continued, perhaps for a month, until the family are nearly reduced to want; as they are obliged to support all the parties who attend the funeral from a distance, so long as they remain. A funeral is usually absolute ruin to a poor family. Whether they can afford it or not, the custom must be observed; and the survivors are obliged to find money to meet the expenses. The practice of persons borrowing money of others, and engaging to remunerate the lender by their future services, (a practice which cannot be regarded without suspicion, as liable to great abuse,) is very much promoted by funeral customs. Many poor persons, on the death of the head of their family, have been obliged to become "pawns" to others, to obtain sufficient money to meet the unavoidable expense.

The funeral custom is renewed at the end of twelve months, when sheep and cattle are killed in honor of the deceased. Every year, after this, a little rum and food is placed upon the grave by the relatives; and even if the house has gone to decay, or has been pulled down, they will not fail to repair to the spot with the accustomed annual offering.

The natives believe that their deceased relatives eat and drink, live in the same state, and engage in the same pursuits as when they were in this world. This belief exerts a powerful influence upon the mind, and leads to the most tragic results. If their relatives are to resume in another world the state they maintained in this, then it is deemed necessary to send after them their wives and attendants; and thus the death of an individual becomes the signal for the murder of his household.

Until recently, human sacrifices were publicly offered at funeral customs in the immediate neighborhood of the coast. Bosman mentions one at which he witnessed the sacrifice of eleven persons, among whom was an individual who, having endured

exquisite torture, was delivered up to a child of six years of age, by whom his head was, after much difficulty, finally sawed from his body. Meredith states, that, in the year 1800, when a king of Apollonia died, one or two human beings were sacrificed every Saturday, until the great custom took place, which did not happen until six months after his decease; when upwards of fifty persons were sacrificed, and two of his youngest wives were put alive with his corpse into the grave, wherein was deposited a considerable quantity of gold, and several rich cloths. The lid of the coffin was covered with human blood, on which gold-dust was sprinkled. And Dupuis says that he has known many victims sacrificed, in the last few years, within gun-shot of the castles. He mentions the case of two men and two women, who were butchered under the very walls of the fort at Accra; and adds, that at Tantum, Apollonia, Dix Cove, Succondee, and Chamah, the same class of murders was perpetrated with impunity. In a recent letter, the Rev. Mr. Brooking mentions that a person had just perished under the sacrificial knife at Dutch Accra. Since the Ashantee invasions, the power of the Fantees has been so greatly broken, and their numbers are so much reduced, that the British government, to which they are obliged to look for protection, has been enabled to put down these inhuman practices within the sphere of its immediate influence.

In the independent states in the interior, the funeral customs of the rich and great exhibit spectacles of the most horrifying barbarity. In some cases many of the wives, and in others a great number of slaves, are, on these occasions, sent after the deceased, to enable him to maintain his proper rank in another world. When a king of Dahomy dies, a dreadful scene takes place in the palace. The wives of the deceased monarch begin to break and destroy his ornaments, and every thing valuable belonging to themselves, and then to kill each other. When Adahunzun died, two hundred and eighty of his wives thus perished, before his successor could arrive at the palace and put a stop to the carnage; and, at the funeral of the deceased king, all these victims were buried in the same grave, with six of the remaining living wives.

In Ashantee, when a person of distinction dies, the slaves immediately rush out of the house, to hide themselves in the bush; as a slave or two are instantly sacrificed, to attend upon the spirit of the deceased until the custom shall take place. It has been stated that the king of Ashantee, in his last battle with the British, at Dodowah, whenever it was announced to him that any of his

captains had been killed, immediately caused slaves to be immolated to accompany them into the other world.

When Mr. Bowdich was at Coomassie, he had the opportunity of witnessing a funeral custom for the mother of one of the principal caboceers, (noblemen or chiefs;) and he states that, as soon as she had breathed her last, the king, her son, and another of the nobles, each sacrificed a young girl, that the deceased might not be altogether without attendants, until the custom should take place. The relatives and adherents of the family then presented contributions of gold, powder, rum, and cloth, to be expended at the funeral; but the king, as the heir of all his subjects, sent a larger present than any other, except the nearest relative, who succeeded to the stool and the slaves. He also sent a sum of gold, and some valuable cloths, to be buried with the deceased.

On the day of the funeral, an extraordinary scene presented itself. Walking out about noon, Mr. Bowdich and his friends saw the vultures hovering over two headless trunks, scarcely cold; and were passed by several troops of women, from fifty to a hundred each, who danced along in a movement resembling skating, lauding and bewailing the deceased in the most dismal strains. Other women carried on their heads rich cloths and silks, and other valuables which had belonged to her. All these women were profusely daubed with red earth, in barbarous imitation of those who had succeeded in besmearing themselves with the blood of the victims. The rush of the crowd was most tumultuous; and horns, drums, and muskets, yells, groans, and screechings, were heard in every direction. Now and then a victim was hurried along at full speed, by persons, the savage delight of whose countenances gave them a fiendlike appearance; and the chiefs and captains arrived in rapid succession, their approach being announced by the peculiar flourishes of their horns, and the firing of muskets. Soon the king's arrival in the marketplace was made known; and the crowd rolled impetuously towards it; but the sabres of the soldiers, which were freely used, hewed a way for the procession. The son of the deceased led the van, dancing from side to side like a bacchanal, and appearing as though he was intoxicated with the adulatory praises which were bellowed forth by his attendants. He looked upon the victims, who had large knives passed through their cheeks, with a savage joy, bordering on frenzy; while they regarded him with indifference or apathy. The other chiefs and captains, adorned in all the splendor of their fetish dresses, followed in the train.

On arriving at the market-place, Mr. Bowdich saw the king seated with his usual attendants and state-display. Thirteen victims, surrounded by their executioners, in black shaggy caps and vests, were pressed together by the crowd at his left hand. The troops of women already described, paraded on the outside of the circle, vociferated the dirge; and the utmost powers of the horns and drums were called forth. A discharge of musketry then took place near the king, which spread round the circle, and was continued without intermission for an hour. The soldiers kept their stations; but the chiefs, after firing their muskets, bounded once round the area with the gesture and extravagant behavior of maniacs, followed by their sycophants, who waved flags over their heads and roared forth their "strong names." The head fetish-woman of the family was at the same time observed rushing through the ranks as the muskets were fired, and screaming as though in the greatest agonies. The firing having somewhat subsided, rum and palm-wine were copiously drunk; and the principal females of the family, many of whom were described as being very handsome, came forward to dance.

Presents of sheep and rum having been exchanged between the king and the son of the deceased, the drums announced the sacrifice of the victims, who were visited successively by all the chiefs. The executioners struggled with each other for the bloody office, and the victims looked on with apparent indifference. At length, an executioner, snatching a sword, lopped off the right hand of one of the victims, who was then thrown down, and his head was sawed, rather than cut, from the body. The remaining twelve were, in like manner, mangled and butchered upon the spot; and others, principally females, were provided, to be sacrificed in the bush where the body was interred. Slaves, however, are not the only victims on such occasions; for it is usual to "wet the grave" with the blood of at least one respectable freeman. The heads of all the slaves who have perished having been placed in the grave, several of the retainers of the family are called in a hurry to assist in lowering the coffin; when, just as it touches the heads which pave the bottom of the grave, one of the freemen is stunned by a violent blow, a deep gash is cut in the back part of his neck, he is rolled in upon the body, and the grave is instantly filled.

After this, the firing, drinking, singing, and dancing were kept up during several days; and it was understood that, had not the approaching war with Gaman enforced the necessity of economiz-

ing powder, there would have been eight great customs for the deceased, instead of this one; at the last of which the king himself would have fired. On the last day of the custom, all the females connected with the family paraded round the town, singing a grateful acknowledgment of the services of those who had assisted at the custom.

The funeral customs for kings and members of the royal family are conducted on a scale corresponding with the rank of the deceased. The okras, — who are slaves peculiarly devoted to the king, and distinguished by a large circle of gold suspended from the neck, — amounting in number to more than a hundred, and also many women, are sacrificed on the tomb of the king. When Osai Quamina died, the funeral custom was repeated every week for three months, two hundred slaves being sacrificed, and twenty-five barrels of powder being fired on each occasion; but when the king's brother died, during the invasion of Fantee, the king devoted three thousand victims, two thousand of whom were Fantee prisoners, and nearly one thousand more were furnished by various towns; making, in the whole, about four thousand human beings who perished at the grave of this royal personage.

When the king dies, Ashantee is, in fact, one vast Acelanda; for all the customs which have been made for deceased subjects during his reign, must be repeated by their families, simultaneously with the custom which is celebrated for the departed monarch. During the first two or three days after the death of the king, scarcely any one is safe; for the relatives of the king, rushing forth with their muskets, carry havoc and death around; and few persons, even of the highest rank, dare to leave their homes. The funeral customs of the kings of Ashantee are frequently repeated; and Bantama, the royal sepulchre, is, from time to time, made to reek with the blood of newly-slain victims.

The annual yam custom furnishes another exhibition of the true character of the national superstitions. It is celebrated when the yam is ready for use; and is intended as a public acknowledgment, on the part of the people, of the kindness of the fetishes in preserving them through another year.

In Fantee, all the inhabitants of the towns assemble under the shade of the grove adjoining the fetish house or temple, when a heep or some fowls are killed, part of the flesh of which is mixed with boiled yams and palm-oil, and a portion of this mixture being placed upon the heads of the images, the remainder is thrown about before the temple, as a heave-offering to the deities

When the heave-offering has been presented, the fetish-men receive from the people the offerings of rum which they have brought ; and, after placing a little upon the heads of the images, and pouring out a small quantity upon the ground before the temple, they invite all the fetishes to come and partake of it, saying, "When people eat, they need to drink also." The remainder of the sheep and fowls are made into a soup, of which no persons but the priests and priestesses are allowed to eat ; but the people partake of the residue of the rum. When the priests have finished their repast, the people begin to beat the drums, and sing fetish songs, to which the priests dance ; and the festivity is often prolonged throughout the night.

The celebration of the yam custom at Winnebah is attended with one peculiarity. The principal fetish at that place, it is believed, will not be satisfied with sheep, but he must have a deer brought alive to his temple, and there sacrificed. Accordingly, on the day the custom is to be celebrated, almost the whole of the inhabitants, except the aged and infirm, go out into the adjoining country, which, studded with clumps of trees and bushes, has a park-like appearance ; and, while the women and children look on, the men strike the thicket with sticks, beat drums, and halloo with all their might. While thus engaged, sometimes a leopard or panther starts forth ; but it is usually so frightened with the noise and confusion, that it scampers off in one direction as fast as the people run from it in another. When a deer rushes out, the chase begins, and the people attempt to run it down. At length, it is tumbled upon the ground by the sticks which are thrown at its legs, when the people seize it, and exultingly carry it to the town, with shouting and drumming. On entering, they are met by the aged persons with staves ; and, having gone in procession round the town, they proceed to the fetish house, where the animal is sacrificed, and partly offered to the fetish, and partly eaten by the priests. The catching of the deer is described as an animated scene ; and European gentlemen not unfrequently go from Annamaboe to witness it. In 1839, the people succeeded in catching two deer, which were both offered to the fetish.

The yam custom is continued during several days ; and is followed or closed by what the English have termed the *Black-Christmas*, when the people put on their best clothes, and visit each other. On entering the house, they shake hands with all the inmates, congratulating them, and wishing they may live to

see another year. On this occasion, the chiefs bring out their large umbrellas, and all make the best display which their circumstances will afford. In about three weeks after this, the ceremony of turning the devil out of the towns takes place, and the people conclude that they have then made a promising commencement of the year.

At the time of the yam custom in Ashantee, there is a great national assembly in the capital. All the caboceers, and the tributary sovereigns, or their representatives, are required to be present, except those who have been sent to a distance on urgent public business; and it is at this annual festival that suspected chiefs are usually placed upon their trial. During the whole of the festival, the greatest licentiousness and immorality prevail, and both sexes abandon themselves to their passions without restraint.

At one of these festivals witnessed by Mr. Bowdich, every caboceer, as he arrived, sacrificed a slave at the city gate; and, in the procession of the first day, all the heads of the kings and caboceers who had been conquered, from the reign of Osai Tutu down to that time, with those who had been executed for rebellion, were carried by two parties of executioners, each consisting of upwards of a hundred individuals. In the skulls were inserted sprigs of thyme, to prevent the spirits of the deceased from troubling the king; and, as the bearers of those horrid trophies passed along in an impassioned dance, they clashed their knives upon the skulls either with the most frightful gestures, or with an expression of indescribable irony and ridicule. The festivity was kept up during the greater part of the night; and on the following morning, which happened to be the Christian Sabbath, the king ordered a large quantity of rum to be poured into brass pans, for the use of the people, in various parts of the town. A most beastly scene resulted; for, in less than an hour, excepting the principal men, not a sober individual was to be seen.* Towards the evening, another splendid procession took place. The third day was chiefly occupied with state-palavers; and, on the day after, the assembly broke up, and the caboceers took their leave.

In the course of these proceedings, about one hundred persons were killed at various places in the capital. Several slaves were

* The Ashantees procure their rum of *Christians* in exchange for *slaves*. The rum which made so many of these heathens drunk on the *Christian Sabbath* was doubtless brought to them by a *nominal Christian*.

also sacrificed at the royal sepulchre of Bantama, over the enormous brass pan which is used there for sacrificial purposes; and the streaming blood of the victims was mingled with various vegetable and animal matter, partly fresh and partly putrefied, for the purpose of making the most powerful fetish preparation. All the chiefs, likewise, killed several slaves, and caused their blood to flow into the holes from which the new yams were taken; and those who could not afford to kill slaves, took the head of one already sacrificed, and placed it upon the hole.

In the interior, time is divided into periods of three weeks, and the first of the three is regarded as the good week, and is called *Adai*. The Ashantees honor its return by a religious festival, termed *the Adai custom*; and this is distinguished again as *great* or *little*, for reasons which have not been fully ascertained. The great and the little customs, however, appear to alternate with regularity, so that one of each is celebrated every three weeks. At the setting of the sun on the evening previous to the custom, the great death-drum, which stands at the gate of the palace, is struck with much force; the royal household shout, and their exclamations are echoed by the people throughout the capital. Music and firing are continued through the night; and on the next morning, the king proceeds to the fetish house, opposite the palace, and offers in sacrifice several sheep, whose blood is poured on the golden stool, which is regarded as the palladium of the kingdom. There is then a numerous assemblage of all ranks in the palace-yard. A great display takes place; and it has been calculated, that the king, on every such occasion, makes presents to the superior captains and others, amounting in value to the sum of four hundred pounds sterling.

This custom, also, is frequently accompanied by scenes most revolting to humanity. Mr. Hutchinson remarks, that the greatest sacrifice of human life which took place while he resided at Coomassie, occurred on the eve of the little Adai custom. He had a friendly caution given him respecting it, from a quarter which he did not feel himself at liberty to name. "Christian," said his kind monitor, "take care and watch over your family: the angel of death has drawn his sword, and will strike on the neck of many Ashantees. When the drum is struck on Adai eve, it will be the death-signal of many. Shun the king, if you can; but fear not." As the time approached to beat the drum, and Mr. Hutchinson sat meditating on the horrors of the ensuing night, he

suddenly received a message to attend the king. This was a somewhat startling summons, as obnoxious caboceers are frequently thus sent for on such occasions, ostensibly to talk a palaver, but, on entering the palace, they are seized and led to execution. Mr. Hutchinson, however, waited upon the king; and, while he remained with him, the officers appointed to attend the sacrifices came in with their knives, and other weapons of destruction.

The design of this sacrifice was, to propitiate the fetish, and secure its assistance in the approaching war with Buntuku. The bones of the king's mother and sisters were, in the first place, taken out of their coffins, and bathed in rum and water; and, after having been wiped with silks, they were rolled in gold-dust, and wrapped in strings of rock-gold, aggrry-beads, and other most costly materials. Those persons against whom the king had any cause of complaint were then sent for in succession, and immolated as they entered, that "their blood might water the graves" of the royal personages, whose bones had been exhumed. During the whole of the night, the king's executioners traversed the city, and all whom they met were dragged away for execution; but the intended massacre having by some means become known, the king was disappointed in securing so few of the distinguished individuals who had been marked out as victims. Next morning, desolation seemed to reign over the capital, and no persons appeared in the market-place but the king and his attendants. When the day closed, the human sacrifices were again renewed; and during the night, the bones of the royal deceased were removed to the sacred tomb at Bantama, accompanied by a splendid procession. The chiefs and their attendants were all habited in their military costume; the stools, and all the ornaments used on great occasions, were borne by the proper officers; the human victims, in chains, with their hands tied behind them, preceded the bones; while at intervals, the chanting of the war-song indicated the eagerness which prevailed to march against the enemy. When the procession returned, on the following day, the king proceeded to the market-place. His horns sounded the well-known "wow, wow, wow," interpreted, "death, death, death;" and the work of sacrifice was at once resumed. The king sat with a goblet of palm-wine in his hand, and, every time the executioners cut off a head, he imitated a dancing motion in his chair. The terrors of the day ended when the king returned to his palace; and the chiefs, issuing from their places of

concealment, paraded the streets, rejoicing that they had, for that time, escaped death.

A similar description is given of the little Adai custom, by Dupuis. The city, he remarks, exhibited the most deplorable solitude; and the few human beings who were courageous enough to show themselves in the streets fled at the approach of a captain, and barricaded their doors, to avoid being shot or dragged to sacrifice. The doleful cries of the women vibrated from various parts of the city; and the death-horns and drums seemed to stupefy the obnoxious prisoners and foreign slaves with terror, as clearly indicating the dangers to which they were exposed. The second day of the custom exhibited a similar train of horrors; and human blood again flowed in torrents, at the dictate of this sanguinary superstition.

It would be an easy task to enlarge this horrifying picture. The religious customs of the neighboring country of Dahomy, — whose barbarous monarch paves the approaches to his residence, and ornaments the battlements of his palace, with the skulls of his victims, — and the gigantic fetish-tree at Badagry, — the wide-spreading branches of which are laden with human carcasses and limbs, — would alone furnish abundant matter for amplification. But further research is unnecessary. The reader will now be able to form a tolerably correct estimate of the nature and tendency of the popular superstition. The range of its influence is almost without limit. It holds its votaries in a state of perpetual thralldom. They cannot eat or drink without recognizing its authority. They cannot cultivate their ground, undertake a journey, enter into any negotiation, or engage in any business, but in obedience to its requirements. The practice of medicine, and the administration of justice, being under its control, it regulates the proceedings in all questions affecting property, and life and health.

The baneful effect which such a system must have upon public morals especially demands attention. What, indeed, must be the morals of a people where unchastity in unmarried women is no disgrace; where prostitution is even regarded as a virtue; where the priesthood is employed in promoting and concealing the intrigues of faithless wives; and where religion sanctions instead of discountenancing crime, and even lends the aid of its influence to him who cherishes injurious intentions against the property and life of another!

A careful examination of the national religion unfolds the true source of the barbarous practices which so extensively prevail.

Were nothing known of the superstitions of the people, it might remain a matter of doubt whether, in the wholesale butchery of their enemies, they were not merely indulging their own savage instincts, like the wild beasts of the forest. In the absence of information on that subject, the interpretation of the following passages from Dupuis would be attended with difficulty.

“The wars of the king,” says the writer, “were shortly after introduced as a subject of general discussion. That of Gaman was the favorite subject; and the king occasionally took up the thread of the narrative, or elucidated such events as were perhaps not generally known. As he caused the linguists to interpret to me the particular feats of himself, the king of Banna, and Apoko, his eyes sparkled with fiery animation; and, at one period, he threw himself into a sort of theatrical attitude, which appeared to be unpremeditated and unaffected. He then seemed to be wrapped up within himself in delightful cogitations; and, at this crisis, some of the auditors, like the bards of olden time, rose to the hum of the war-song, and recited their parts in a pleasing, mellifluous strain. The king enjoyed the scene in ecstasy, and frequently motioned with his body and feet, in cadence with the metre of the verse. This reverie and the recitation occupied many minutes, and were ultimately succeeded by irony and satire cast upon the memory of his fallen enemy. ‘His skull was broken,’ said the king; ‘but I would not lose the trophy, and now I have made a similar skull of gold. This is for my great customs, that all the people may know I am the king.’

“A slave was deputed to one of the apartments of the palace; and, as he returned, he deposited a chair, which his majesty said was the regal seat of Dinkara. This piece of workmanship was studded all over with gold and silver ornaments, and silver coin of different European states. The slave again disappeared, and returned, bringing under his escort a son of that unfortunate monarch, one of the few male survivors of the race of Dinkara. A pallid hue, if so it may be termed, overspread the jetty features of the youth, as he bowed trembling before the king. The angry glance which marked his reception excited the most painful apprehensions; and the countenance of the young man spoke woful agony, as he endeavored to scan the purport of the summons.

“‘Your father,’ said the king, addressing himself to the prince, ‘was a rebel. He was full of pride, and wanted to be a great

king. He forgot when he was my slave. Is not this true? Then he wanted Sarem to help him, and sent gold to make friends. Is not that true, too? He forgot I was his master. He killed my sword-bearers, and sent me an insulting message. Now I have his skull, and the jaw-bones of his captains. His wives, and you, and all the people, are my slaves; and, when I tell you to die, you shall die as your brother did; but now you shall serve me.'

"The king then desired him to strip off his robe, and show me the wounds he had received in battle. The unhappy youth did as he was instructed, pointing to five or six honorable scars upon his breast, arms, and thighs, which had the appearance of gunshot wounds. 'Now,' said the king to him, with a stern, sarcastic apathy, 'you know your father was a fool, and that I am the king; you did not know that before; and so now go home until I send for you again.'"

It is added that this unfortunate youth had been compelled, in the presence of the king, to join a chorus in the cruel *epicedium*, or "death-song," which preceded his brother's sacrifice — an execution which was performed in his presence, with torture, and amidst the mockery and derision of the whole court.

The inquiry naturally arises, on what principle could such a character as that described in the preceding quotations be formed? What had produced the feeling which, from its settledness and malignity, indicated the demon rather than the man, and made the monarch appear as the very personification of infernal revenge? Was he remarkable for his natural ferocity and savageness of disposition? The reverse was the case. He was polite and affable in his general manners; and especially characterized by his tender and affectionate treatment of his children. To his *religion* this fearful trait in his character must be traced. That taught him to regard his captive as an implacable foe, who would carry his enmity beyond the grave, and of whom, as an evil spirit, after death he would have to beware. His religion taught him that the torture and sacrifice of an enemy are peculiarly acceptable to the deities whom he worshipped. "A negro," says Dupuis, "can hardly be persuaded that an enemy might be converted into a friend; and, as he naturally thirsts after his gold, if he is so far successful, nothing can satiate him short of his opponent's blood, which is esteemed the portion of the spoil due to the tutelar gods, (and acceptable to the shades of his ancestors,) whose service it is incumbent on him not to neglect, lest their wrath should overwhelm him on a future day." This solves the

difficulty, and shows on what principle the most diabolical revenge is sometimes combined in the same individual with great natural affection. When once it is ascertained that a people are thoroughly imbued with the persuasion that the deities, whom they regard as the arbiters of their own fate, require human sacrifices as the most acceptable offerings which their votaries can possibly present, — that those deities, in fact, employ themselves in promoting and fomenting war, that their altars may continually reek with blood, — the horrid scenes enacted in Ashantee cease to create surprise.

Polygamy is another of the distinguishing features of society in Africa. The kings and principal persons have usually a great number of wives. It is stated that the law allows the king of Ashantee to possess three thousand three hundred and thirty-three; but in what consists the charm of this mystic number, which is carefully kept up, does not appear. The king has seldom a greater number than six with him in the palace at the same time; the rest live at the country residence of the king, and in the capital, where two streets are devoted to their use. No persons are permitted to approach them but their own female relatives, or the king's messengers; and these only communicate with them at the entrances, which are closed at each end with bamboo doors, where a guard is placed. When they go abroad, which is not often the case, they are attended by a great number of little boys with whips of elephant's hide, with which they lash severely all who do not immediately turn aside into another path, or throw themselves into the bush with their hands before their eyes. Their appearance in the more public parts of the city occasions great confusion. Caboceers and captains, as well as slaves and children, are seen tumbling one over another, to avoid their approach.

When the king of Ashantee signed Bowdich's treaty, three hundred of his wives, however, were present as witnesses of the transaction; and, at a public entertainment given by the king of Dahomy, Mr. Norris saw seven hundred and thirty of the wives of that monarch, who marched in file, bearing liquors and provisions upon their heads; and these were followed by many hundreds more, classed in troops of seventy each, who walked in greater state. In Yarriba, even a caboceer has been known to possess two thousand wives; while the king of that country told Clapperton that he did not know how many wives and children

he had ; but he was sure that his wives alone, hand to hand, would reach from Katunga, the capital, to Jannah — a distance, as appears from the maps, of considerably more than one hundred miles ! On one occasion, he actually visited the traveller in company with five hundred wives.

This latter sovereign makes the services of his wives subservient to his pecuniary interests ; for Clapperton remarks that, in their journey from Badagry to Katunga, they found in every place some of his wives trading for him, and, like other women of the common class, carrying large loads upon their heads from town to town. The wives of the king of Ashantee, it appears, are not thus degraded, but live in a state more in accordance with their dignity. Bowdich says that the three hundred whom he saw at the signing of the treaty were arrayed in all the magnificence which a profusion of gold and silk could furnish. According to Dupuis, however, their influence is not great. Their mediation is considered unavailing in state affairs, and they are not permitted, nor do they expect, to receive presents from foreign ambassadors ; whereas in Barbary, as in the East, it is of the first importance to secure female mediation ; for the determination of the sultan is generally formed under the influence of the harem or seraglio.

The number of wives which caboceers and other persons possess depends partly on their rank, and partly on their ability to purchase them ; for the practice which prevailed in the remote ages of patriarchal antiquity is perpetuated among the descendants of Ham. With them, also, it is the rule that the parent receives a sum for his daughter, instead of giving a fortune with her, as is the practice in European countries ; and it consequently follows, that a large family of daughters is a source of wealth to an African father. Nor has the husband cause to complain, that he is required to pay for every wife ; for in Fantee, and the countries near the coast, if a man can only obtain six or ten wives, the fruits of their labor are sufficient to enable him to lead a life of indolence.

In the affair of courtship the wishes of the female are but little consulted, the business being chiefly settled between the suitor and her parents. No Ashantean, however, compels his daughter to become the wife of one whom she dislikes ; but, if she refuse to receive as her husband one of whom her father approves, he instantly withdraws from her his support and protection, and prohibits her mother also from affording her any aid or countenance

whatever. It is not unfrequently the case that infants are married to each other, to promote the connection of families; and infants are also frequently wedded to adults, and even to elderly men. In such cases, the husband sends a present to the mother, who brings up the child for him, until she is old enough to be removed to his own house. The caboceers speak of this as a good plan for a man who wishes to get gold; for the most innocent freedom, when the girl becomes ten or eleven years old, proves the occasion of a serious palaver with the husband; and as these marriages are not generally known, it happens that such palavers frequently occur, and a person has to make compensation for taking liberty with a wife when he supposed that he was only playing with a child. It is, moreover, a custom in Ashantee to contract for a child before it is born. When a man takes a fancy to the wife of a caboceer in a state of pregnancy, he *consaws* the infant in the womb, by the payment of a sum, varying from two to ten ounces of gold; and, should the child prove to be a girl, she is brought up for him as his wife.

The domestic arrangements, in places where polygamy prevails, are formed on a different principle from that which regulates an English domicile. In Ashantee, Fantee, and the neighboring countries, the husband lives separate from his wives, who dwell in houses or sheds built contiguous to each other in the form of a square; and in some cases they continue with their mothers. They cook and carry food to their husband, but are not allowed to partake of a meal in his presence. Sometimes his children eat with him, but more frequently he eats alone. On one occasion, when Mr. Hutchinson paid a visit to the croom of Apóko, one of the greatest men in Ashantee, he had the opportunity of witnessing a domestic scene. About the middle of the day, a large pot of yams, and another of boiled fish, were placed in a side room, whither Apóko repaired and dined; after which he divided the remaining yams and fish into a given number of portions, when the door opened, and about twenty of his sons and daughters received their respective shares in calabashes, with which they came furnished. In the after-part of the day, four of his wives arrived from Coomassie, a distance of about three miles, with some prepared food; but, as he was disposed to sleep, he sent them word that they were not to enter the room, but leave the meat, and go back again to town.

The children are left chiefly to the care of their mothers, and grow up without correction, until at length, when the perverse-

ness of a boy can no longer be endured, the Ashantean father punishes him by cutting off an ear. Some of the Ashantees, however, appeared to admit the force of Mr. Freeman's arguments in favor of early and moderate correction.

Unfaithfulness on the part of the wife is treated with severity. Death is sometimes the penalty which both the guilty parties have to pay ; but more frequently the injured husband is satisfied with a fine from the parents of his offending wife, and another from her paramour. Sometimes he cuts off her nose, if her family are too powerful to be provoked by putting her to death. It is not uncommon, however, that the wives and daughters of even men in power are employed by their husbands and fathers to allure the other sex into crime, in order to involve their victims in a palaver, which has ended in their being sold into slavery, when they have not been rich enough to pay the required fine.

In Ashantee, a peculiar provision is made with reference to the female sex. One of the king's sisters is constituted the governess of the empire, or queen over the females. When this personage, on a certain occasion, honored Dupuis with a call, she was accompanied by about one hundred and fifty women and girls, many of whom were described as the wives and daughters of men of high rank. All the females in the empire are said to be placed under her direction and control. But, whatever may be the nature and object of the training to which she subjects them, it is certain that it is not intended to make the wife the rational companion and confidential friend of her husband ; for, if an Ashantean wife is detected in listening to a private conversation of her husband, her curiosity is sure to cost her an ear ; and, if she betrays a secret with which she has by any means become acquainted, her incensed husband punishes her by cutting off her upper lip. The sight of women who have suffered such inflictions is as common at this day in Coomassie as it was in the time of Bowdich.

In countries where polygamy prevails, it might be presumed, that either there is a great disparity between the sexes or that all do not marry. In Ashantee, the majority of the males live without wives. Sometimes a caboceer will give his daughter to a confidential slave ; but celibacy is the condition of far the greater proportion of the slave population. From this unequal state of things, the grossest irregularities naturally follow. In despite of the penalties with which incontinence is visited, the violation of the marriage contract is notoriously common, and prostitution is

openly countenanced. In some instances, females are provided by the state, and are set apart to their office by public formalities and religious ceremonies. As many as two hundred and fifty females of this description have been seen together on state occasions at the court of Dahomy. But scarcely any single circumstance tends to show so clearly the demoralization of negro society, as the fact that wealthy females, on their death-bed, regard it as one of the most meritorious acts which they can perform, to bequeath to the public a few female slaves. What must be the moral condition of a people, where the state lends its authority to legalize crime, and the sanctions of religion are employed to invest vice with the attributes of virtue !

Sp. Coll.
RARE
DT
507
W73
1849