

the & man HIS WAYS



The Man — and his ways



Rhodesians Worldwide

*An Introduction to the Customs and Beliefs of
Rhodesia's African People*

by

N. J. Brendon

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
An introduction to the man	1
The Man—and his spirits	6
The Man—and his chiefs	9
The Man—and his marriage	14
The Man—and his many fathers	18
The Man—and his children	20
The Man—his home and his labours	22
The Man—and his fears	27
The Man—and the veld	33
The Man—and his manners	38
The Man—his women	41

An introduction to—the Man



THIS little booklet has been prepared from a series of talks given by a senior official of the Ministry of Information, Immigration and Tourism, to various interested bodies in Rhodesia. It is published as your introduction to the man with whom you are in daily contact in your home and at work—the African—and sets out to tell you a little of the customs and beliefs of his people.

It is not intended that this should be a text book, for in his talks the author has generalized and has avoided the mass of detailed customs which vary in practice from district to district. It is hoped, however, that this booklet will at least stir some readers to delve more deeply into the subject. The many and varied practices relating to the marriage arrangements, the gifts and payments which accompany the lobolo contract and details of the many ceremonies relating to the propitiation of the spirits, make interesting reading but do not fall within the scope of this introduction.

What do we know about this man and his ways? Many of us tend to believe that simply because we do certain things in our everyday lives, other human beings do them too—even if they are people of a completely different race and culture. But this is not so. What to us might be a well mannered act might be the essence of rudeness from the other person's point of view, because our custom is not his. Because we believe in certain things it does not mean that the other chap shares our faith and he might, therefore, have a different outlook on life from ours. What moves us, leaves him stone cold! What we regard as important, he looks upon as trivial!

All this leads to a great deal of misunderstanding and, as we all

have to go on living together and are, in fact, dependent upon each other, we must get out of the habit of believing that everybody else thinks and behaves as we do. If we learn a little of the other's traditional customs we will begin to understand him better.

In Rhodesia there are two main African tribes, the AmaNdebele and the Mashona. Before the coming of the Mashona people several hundred years ago, the country was inhabited by the small statured Bushman who had not advanced beyond the Stone Age. There is evidence in the form of rock paintings and bits and pieces sifted from the floors of caves and shelters which shows that the Mashona people shared the land with them for a while before the Bushmen moved away to the Kalahari.

During the last century the AmaNdebele, an offshoot of the warrior Zulu nation of Natal, settled in the Western portion of the country and commenced ravaging and plundering the numerous Mashona tribal groups which lived in disunity in the remainder of the country.

All these people were of Negro Hamitic origin. Movement was essential to their way of life and, in their long journey down Africa, which probably lasted a thousand years or so, their progress southwards was dictated by the seasons, by tribal fighting and by need. Land was abundant and there was no urge to conserve its goodness. A tribe would settle in an area, build huts of pole and thatch and cultivate small patches of millet. This grain, together with meat obtained in the hunt, wild honey, fruit and roots, formed their diet.

Theirs was a subsistence economy. If a surplus accrued there was the difficulty of storage to be faced, so they tended to live for the day and let the future look after itself. In good years their "bellies were full" but in times of drought they died.

They were wholly dependent upon the fellow members of their tribe or family for they were surrounded by danger and had no means of protection, apart from their own community. There was no room for individuality and the wealth of a tribe was measured in people and in cattle, with the stronger preying upon the weaker.

No people can live together without some form of law or custom to regulate their association. These tribes formulated customs which the Chiefs applied. They have been handed down by word of mouth, for the tribes had no form of writing, and today the majority of these old customs are recognized by our Courts. There are others which are difficult for us to understand and which are forbidden because they are cruel or unjust when judged by our standards, but

we should try to look at them dispassionately and measure them against the conditions under which the race had to survive.

Because the tribal groups are so numerous no one can be dogmatic and say "This IS the custom". It may be so here—but not a few miles away. We can only generalize when we cast aside detail and look at the foundations and beliefs upon which African law and custom is built. Although there may be variations in the way in which a marriage is arranged, or where lobolo details are concerned, the fundamental beliefs upon which these are based are the same throughout the country.

What is your knowledge of your own law and customs? Do you regard everyone you meet as an expert lawyer? No, of course you don't. Therefore you must not fall into the trap of expecting every African you meet to be a walking encyclopaedia on African law and custom. The old man, the tribal elders and the Chiefs are the people to turn to—not the young man who still has much to learn.

There is one further point to remember and that is that for some time now, African law—and thinking—has been subjected to the influences of the European. Although basic beliefs have not changed, other things have. In most areas cash has taken the place of the hoe as a token and new ideas have been applied. For example not so long ago, a tribesman sued another for fifty-seven head of cattle, these being the progeny of a beast loaned by his great-grandfather to the defendant's great-grandfather during a famine which occurred some sixty years ago. As they argued, the fact emerged that the beast which had "sired" the fifty-seven head was a black ox!

"How can an ox have calves?" queried the District Commissioner who was hearing the case.

"It can", argued the plaintiff. "At the Post Office there is a written notice which tells me that if I pay £1 to the postmaster I will get back twenty-five shillings after some years. My great-grandfather's ox produced calves in the same way that the European's £1 produces shillings!"

Except in trivial matters the African, unlike the European, does not regard himself as an individual distinct from the rest of the group. He feels himself to be part of a unit, be it tribe or family, and to that unit he owes certain obligations in exchange for which he derives many benefits. His family, or tribal group, is extended to include the spirits of the departed and they have a great influence on his actions and his thinking.

The foundation of any tribal group is the ordinary family. The head of each family has certain responsibilities, the most important of which is to maintain family unity. He could not achieve this without consultation, so all matters affecting his small group are thoroughly discussed with the family, and his decision is a family affair based upon consensus of opinion. In important matters he consults the spirits of those members who have passed over, and seeks their guidance.

The family too, is not isolated in the sense that most European families are. It belongs to a *group* of related families which form a village. The heads of each family owe allegiance to the village head, while he in turn has responsibilities towards them and their families. These concern such matters as the allocation of land, the protection of his people against witchcraft and the administration of family law. He must maintain unity and this again means consultation with the villagers. Everyone is entitled to have his say and so the decisions of the village head are based upon public opinion.

The tribal structure extends even further with a group of villages forming a "district" under an acknowledged leader or headman, while one or more of such districts complete the tribal group under their Chief.

Let us now look at the man as an individual, and compare a few of his beliefs with our own. During generations of endurance he has acquired a passive fatalism. Misfortune, even today, is regarded as being due to witchcraft or is an expression of displeasure by the spirits. There was nothing the man could do to avoid it so he gave no thought for tomorrow. He conserved his energies and blamed everything bad on something else. How often today do we hear the excuse "I was failed by the examination" rather than "I failed!"

The African has a sense of justice and he deeply resents what he considers to be unfair treatment. He is inclined to brood over real or imaginary wrongs and on occasions when all efforts to obtain redress have failed he will threaten suicide. Because of the African's fear of the supernatural, a threat of suicide is taken seriously and every effort is made to pacify the wronged one.

The African loves laughter. His needs are few and simple and when he has satisfied them he is inclined to sit back. After all, time is given to all men for nothing. It has no value, so why do today what can be put off until tomorrow? Land and water have also been

put here for the free use of mankind so they, like time, can be wasted. Let tomorrow look after itself!

How then should we deal with this man? We should remember his background and treat him with patience and courtesy. Loss of temper when things go wrong helps no one. If we are to avoid misunderstanding we must remember that he might find our ways equally strange so we must never forget the need for careful explanation. This point can be illustrated by the following little story.

Not many years ago a District Commissioner received a call from a rural hospital to say that a mother had died leaving a small baby. The baby's grandmother had come to collect it but was unable to feed it as she had no milk. The District Commissioner asked for granny to be sent to his office. He issued a Government requisition on the local chemist shop for six tins of a well known baby food and when Granny arrived he instructed her, through his Head Messenger, on how to prepare the food.

A week later the Head Messenger entered the District Commissioner's office and said "Excuse me, Sir! The old grandmother has returned. She says she has eaten all the food which you gave her but she still hasn't produced any milk!"



The Man—and his spirits

THE African believes, as we do, in God, the Great Spirit who created and controls the heavens, the earth and the elements. He is called Mwari, or Umlimo, but he is little concerned with the affairs of particular tribes or men for He has never been a mortal. The tribal and family spirits who watch over the people were all once men—the progenitors of those whom they protect.

While Mwari is a great spirit, there are others, his sons, who are believed to be almost as powerful. Like Mwari they have never been man but they do “possess” the bodies of mediums through whom they communicate with man. Amongst these are Chaminuka, Nehanda and Nyamuswa all of whom have been attributed with the power of making rain. When its particular human host, or medium, dies, the spirit may not choose another immediately but will go off and “not be seen”. It will “come out” again, sometimes many years later, in another human who, when recognized as the new temporal home of the spirit, is revered by other men. The power of these selected mediums must never be underestimated.

The tribal spirits are all ancestral and are of a lower order. These are the spirits of the human progenitors, the first chiefs, who look after the interests of the tribes and punish their transgressions. Their relationship with the tribes is linked through the present day Chiefs but they are approached through the *swikiro* or medium. Hallowed though they are, it is the family spirits which are of paramount importance in the daily lives of the people.

As we have seen, a family does not merely consist of its living members. The spirits of the departed male ancestors are still a part

of the family and are concerned with the health and well being of those who are on earth.

They will watch over them and guard them—provided they themselves are not neglected or forgotten.

The living, therefore, worship the spirits of their ancestors and consult them in all important family matters. About three times a year each family conducts its ceremonies to give thanks and pay homage, the approach generally being made direct to the spirit of the grandfather or some other male ancestor who can still be remembered. In their consultations with the family spirits some families use the services of diviners, while others have their own medium—a member of the family—through whom the spirit speaks.

When this happens the medium goes into a trance and afterwards cannot remember what he said or did. When a beast is sacrificed to the spirits the medium will drink the blood, or eat the liver raw, to demonstrate the spirits' acceptance of him as medium.

There are of course other spirits, such as the *shave* (pronounced *SHA-VEE*) which is the graveless wandering shade of a person whose death was not followed by customary rites. The *shave* wanders restlessly until it finds a suitable human being to whom it attaches itself, occasionally taking possession of that person's body and demanding whatever it requires—ornaments, materials of certain colours, beer and dancing. The person selected by the spirit may feel strange and unwell and the cause of this may be diagnosed by the diviner as being the presence of the *shave* which is waiting to “come out”. These *shaves* are sometimes of great value to those whom they possess, giving to them special skills and abilities. “Ah—he has a *shave*”—might be the explanation why one man is a better hunter than the others.

Shave spirits are not always of the same tribe as those to whom they attach themselves. Many are alien and some in fact are animal, the most common of these being the spirits of baboons. A Shona possessed by a *shave* of another race will speak with that tongue when possessed, while he who is possessed of animal *shave*, behaves like one.

Shave gatherings are often held. Those who are affected by these spirits will assemble and become “possessed”. Frenzied dancing will follow—“a happening” to use a modern expression.

Another spirit is the *Ngozi*, the spirit of a man or woman who died with a grievance and who now seeks revenge. A person who was unjustly treated during life may return as an *Ngozi* to kill the

relatives of the person against whom the grudge is harboured. This explains why threats of suicide by Africans are viewed with great concern by their fellows.

The *Ngozi* spirit may be driven away by magic rites performed by the diviners; but it is perhaps safer to ascertain the cause of the spirit's grievance and to make amends to the living members of its family.

The spirit world with its host of spirits, some important and some not, is very real in the minds of the African people and this accounts for their adherence to, and reluctance to drop, many customs which stand in the way of progress. However, there are very many Africans today who have accepted the Christian faith and know that Mwari is deeply concerned with the lives of *individual* men and He is indeed approachable through the Churches.

Rhodesians W

The Man—and his chiefs

THE Chief to whom the African owes allegiance is the most important man in his tribal area. His power and influence is derived from the fact that *he* is the man whose election to the chieftainship had the full support of his followers and their tribal spirits. He is the traditional leader, the intermediary between the people and their ancestors. He is responsible for the unity and, in fact, the survival of his tribe. He sees to their welfare and maintains order.

His role is spiritual, judicial and administrative. He is the patriarch to whom all men go with their troubles. This we can understand—but how does it all come about? How does a Chief become a Chief? How is he selected?

Let us take a look at our own form of succession. Let us go back to Edward VII of England. When he died his eldest son George V became king. When he died the kingship (or chieftainship) went to his eldest son Edward who became Edward VIII. But Edward VIII abdicated. He had no children so, in accordance with our custom the Crown passed to the next eldest brother George VI. Up to this point our custom and the custom of the Matabele people is the same, succession being from father to the eldest son. But similarity ended when George VI died and his daughter became Queen Elizabeth II because she had no brother. This would be foreign to Matabele custom—and both systems are different from that of the Shona tribes but, as is so often the case, there are exceptions to the rule and women have been known to carry out the functions of headmen.

Perhaps the Shona system is best explained by a simple story, that of a man we will call Goredema. He lived with his tribal groups far away in the North about four hundred years ago. For some reason unknown to us, Goredema broke away from his tribal group and, with his family, moved southwards. As he travelled, others joined him and eventually they made their home in what today is Rhodesia.

They settled, and Goredema became the first Chief of the nucleus of a tribe. Let us assume that Goredema had had four sons by his first, or senior wife. We will call them Mutsvago, Marimba, Ningi and Tsuru. They married and set up their own homes, or houses, and so we get this picture:—



When Chief Goredema died the Chieftainship passed to Mutsvago who became Chief. When Mutsvago died the Chieftainship passed from the house of Mutsvago to the *oldest surviving male member* of the house of Marimba, then to Ningi, and finally to the oldest surviving male member of the house of Tsuru. When the houses of all four brothers had held the chieftainship it passed back to the house of Mutsvago and the whole process was repeated down the years.

This system, called the system of collateral succession, means that in most cases a Shona chief is an elderly man, while in the case of ourselves, or the Matabele who also practice primogeniture succession, a *young* king could lead the nation. Among warrior tribes, a young Chief who could demonstrate his bravery in battle made a good leader, but the Mashona people regard maturity as being of equal value and their system ensures that grey haired leaders rule them. But let us get back to the Goredema chieftainship.

Let us assume that the Chief has died. It is known that the leadership must now pass to the house of Marimba. Some fourteen very old men claim the chieftainship, each insisting that he was born before the others, and is therefore the oldest surviving member of Marimba house. There are no written records and no one who was around at the time they were born is here to help. One greybeard will say "I was born in the year of the rinderpest—in the months before the rains when it was hot". Another will say, "Ah—I was born in that year too—but during the winter before the hot weather came. So I am older than he". Another says, "That may be, but rumour has it that when you were conceived your mother was visiting her relatives. You are not of the blood of this house".

How is it all sorted out? There is one person who knows who is the rightful claimant—and that is our old friend Goredema who died many many years ago. You will recall that the African family or tribe consists of the living and the dead—and Goredema, the spirit, has been there all the time watching over his people. It is to Goredema that they turn now and he will tell them through the spirit mediums which of our fourteen is the rightful successor to the Chieftainship.

The tribal spirit is wholly concerned with the welfare of the tribe. It is to this spirit that they pray for prosperity and health. Their requests may be granted—but if they neglect the spirit or ignore their customs, the spirit may be expected to send hunger or sickness to show its disapproval.

Not very far away from Salisbury there is a small rocky hill in which there is an underground cave. It is customary for the local tribal group to bury its chiefs in this cave. The body is sewn up in a black ox hide and reverently placed beside the remains of past Chiefs. Now one Chief of this particular area was converted by a missionary who established many schools in the tribal area. In due course the Chief died and the missionary gave him a Christian burial and laid him to rest in a coffin.

A year or more went by—and then the time came for the new Chief to be selected. The District Commissioner was talking to the elders and he asked them, "Has your tribal spirit accepted a departure from the traditional method of burying Chiefs?"

"No" they replied.

"But he must have done so" said the District Commissioner, "for it is your custom to sew the body of your Chief into a hide and place it in a cave. You put the last one in a coffin and buried him

in the ground. The spirits have not shown their disapproval. There has been no sickness, no famine—nothing. Surely then the spirits are happy and have condoned the change?"

The old men looked uneasy, then one of them said, "The spirits are not angry. Our Chief was buried in the cave in traditional manner."

"But what about the funeral—and—what about the coffin?" asked the District Commissioner.

"Well—we had a couple of goats in the coffin" they replied. "You see the priest has been very kind. He has worked hard and has given us many schools. We would not like to offend him—but then we cannot offend the spirits either!"

Although the Chief is not the medium through whom the spirits speak, he is the link between the living members of the tribe and the past. Because of this spiritual association it is the people, working through their tribal elders and the recognized mediums, who elect the Mashona Chiefs. These chiefs are not chosen by the Government, for Government merely gives its recognition to the Chief elect when it is satisfied that the great majority of the tribe have accepted him as the true heir.

Consider now his judicial role. The Chief, assisted by his elders, holds court to determine the many and varied issues brought by his followers. Old family quarrels dating back many years, sometimes before the litigants were born; claims for damages arising from adultery, seduction, slander or loss; arguments relating to the maintenance or custody of children; inheritance claims—all are heard and adjudicated upon in accordance with customary law. The court, unhampered by strict rules of evidence and procedure, dispenses justice in the eyes of the people. If you, the European, are alarmed by the lack of stringent procedural rules in these Courts remember that justice, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, and that the tribesmen consider it grossly unjust that, under our system, a confessed murderer can be found not guilty of his crime because of some legal technicality.

The cases which come before the Courts of the Chiefs are likely to have been heard first by their headmen or the village heads, who have been unable to settle the differences between the parties. Unlike our Courts, those of the tribal leaders go out of their way to bring about a reconciliation between the parties. Remember that the wealth of the tribe was measured in people, and any hiving off

of disgruntled members would result in the group being that much poorer.

The administrative responsibilities of the Chiefs in relation to their tribal areas has increased over the years and today they are called upon to deal with a multitude of subjects which were unknown in bygone years. Local government, community projects, the establishment of business centres and rural hospitals, etc., are but a few of the matters in which they are required to act on behalf of their followers.

The Man — and his marriage



As we have seen, the tribesman does not regard himself as an individual as the European does, but rather as part of a greater whole, such as his family group or tribe. He believes that everlasting life can be achieved through the procreation of children, for on his death his oldest son replaces him, taking his name and sometimes his wives, except his own mother, and even having children by them.

The son, who succeeds as head of the family on his father's death, is responsible for the debts which his father left, for the care of his family, and for the propitiation of his ancestral spirits. Life is continued from father to son, and so he and his family travel down through time. A man *must* have children, for without them there can be no continuation of the life stream. And because children can only be obtained through the reproductive powers of a woman of another family, his society, like ours, has established its forms of marriage.

When a couple marry, there springs up a very close relationship between their two families, much closer indeed than is generally the case in European marriages. In fact great friendship between unrelated families often results in their acquiring relationship through marriage. The marriage contract is between the families, not between the man and wife as individuals, but it is obvious that when a couple marry individuality must play an important part in

their union. If they quarrel, their families may go to great lengths to prevent the marriage from breaking up.

There are several forms of customary marriage, but two of these are no longer permitted for obvious reasons. The first is where a woman was taken to wife by her captor during a tribal war; and the second was the pledging of a baby, or young girl, for the repayment of a debt. Pledging cases do still occur today however. The most common forms of customary marriage which our law recognizes today involve the payment of lobolo, generally in cattle, by the groom's family to the father of the bride.

"Lobolo!" you say—"That pernicious system whereby black women and girls are bartered! Slavery!" So it may appear to European eyes—but let us take a closer look.

We know that a man must have children. And so it is that when a father accepts lobolo in respect of his daughter he undertakes to furnish the bridegroom's family with the children who are so necessary for a continued existence. In fact, in some tribes it is the custom that no lobolo is paid until the wife has proved herself by producing an infant.

Where lobolo has been paid and the wife is found to be barren, the husband has the right to claim either a refund of what has been paid, or another woman of his wife's family—often her younger sister—who would be willing to bear the children for him. Where the husband is proved to be sterile his brother may by arrangement raise seed for him. A glance at history will show you that this has been done before!

What happens to the lobolo which a father receives from his daughter's marriage? Well, it is equally important that he too has descendants, and so he ensures against the possibility of having no grandchildren by using this lobolo to obtain a wife for his son. In fact it is common practice for a father to pair off his sons and daughters so that each son knows from which sister his own lobolo will come.

Lobolo can therefore be regarded by the husband's family as an insurance policy. It insures that children will be born to them to carry the family into the future. It guarantees other things besides children, all of which go to make a successful marriage. It assures good conduct on the part of the husband, for if he ill-treats his wife she may leave him and he may find that through his cruelty he has forfeited his right to a refund of lobolo either wholly or in part.

On the other hand, while a father holds lobolo he is responsible for the good behaviour of his daughter. If she is lazy, or a bad cook, she may be sent home to her family for correction. If she nags or scolds she might likewise be sent back to her father to learn how to behave. If she does not mend her ways there is a strong possibility that she will be returned with a request for a refund of the dowry. The lobolo system certainly has a great deal to commend it!

Although polygamy is still practised, many Africans of today enter into civil marriages solemnized in accordance with Christian rites. Even in these marriages however, lobolo generally passes between the families. As far back as 1912 the High Court of Rhodesia ruled that such payment is permissible in a Christian marriage.

So, you see, there is no question of women being bartered in marriage for lobolo. The lobolo system was designed to ensure that man has life everlasting through the procreation of children—but wait! What about the fellow who comes from a poor family and has no means of providing lobolo for a wife? Is he to be denied the pleasures of family life? Of course in modern day Rhodesia with its buoyant economy there is nothing to prevent this young man from going forth, like Dick Whittington, and earning his lobolo, but in the old days under a subsistence economy this could have been difficult. Tribal custom, however, was tailored to meet this young man's case and it enabled him to serve another man for a number of years, cultivating and tending the stock, until eventually his master rewarded him with the hand of a daughter in marriage. The story of Jacob and Rachel in Chapter 29 of Genesis is but another example of how the ancient laws are still practised in Africa!

The death of the husband does not necessarily put an end to the marriage for his widow. She generally remains with his family and is later inherited by his brother or his son. Once again we have an example of ancient custom which is illustrated in Deuteronomy Chapter 25 verse 5!

Divorce *does* terminate a marriage, but, as we have seen, the families of the group will often go out of their way to prevent a break-up. The woman has no right to ask for a divorce—except for prolonged cruelty, or where her husband has falsely accused her of practising witchcraft—but the *man* has the right to divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever. Unless he can produce some good reason however, he may have difficulty in recovering his lobolo, but the fact remains that he *can* cast her off at will. All he has to do is to give her a token of divorce and send her back to her father!

When a marriage is dissolved by divorce, or where the husband has died and his widow, instead of being inherited, decides to return to her own family, the question of a refund of the lobolo arises. Generally where a woman has borne her husband six or seven children and has lived with him for many years, no claim for a refund is made. If, however, she is a younger woman it is usual for the families to agree to a return of the lobolo paid, less deductions for each child born and for the time which she spent at her husband's home. It follows that where a wife's barrenness has led to a divorce the husband is entitled to a refund of a major portion of the lobolo. There is no hard and fast rule laying down the amount which the wife's father may retain, for this is generally a matter of discussion and agreement. But a man who grossly ill-treats his wife may forfeit his rights to any refund whatsoever, although he may be entitled to any lobolo accruing to her father should she re-marry, for there is a maxim that "No man may hold two kraals of cattle for one daughter".



The Man — and his many fathers

WHEN we discussed the man and his marriage we found that if a husband is incapable of begetting children custom allows his brother to raise issue for him. Let's have a look at this and see if there are any hidden facts which you might regard as "complications"!

For the moment I am a tribesman and I have four sons named Wiri, Biri, Hari and Kari. Wiri is the eldest. He is married and has no children. An arrangement is made under tribal custom and Wiri's wife is made pregnant by Biri. A son is born whom we will call Cuthbert. Who has parental rights over him? Wiri—although Biri sired him. Who is Cuthbert's father? Wiri, Biri, Hari and Kari!

In order to explain this I will cease to be a tribesman for a few moments and will become a European again. As a European I believe in the dilution of blood. Let me put it this way. Through my veins flows the blood of many families. It is not the pure unadulterated blood of my male forefathers for it has been diluted by the blood of all those hundreds of families which furnished my mother, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and so on.

However, as an unsophisticated tribesman, I believe that the blood which flows through my veins is the pure blood of my father's lineage, and that it has not been affected at all by all those other families which helped to produce me. Therefore I cannot marry anyone who has the same surname—or totem—as I, for our blood

will be the same and our union would be incestuous in the eyes of our fellow tribesmen.

Because we shared a common father, my sisters have the same blood as I, but their children will not. Their children will have the blood of their fathers only. My sons Wiri, Biri, Hari and Kari have my blood—and so does Cuthbert. Because of this and his relatively junior position, Cuthbert regards Wiri, Biri, Hari and Kari as his fathers and any children which they might have as his brothers and sisters.

Now Cuthbert is a nice lad who would not tell a lie unless he had to. He grows up and enters your employment. When you are extremely busy and need all the help available Wiri falls under a bus. Cuthbert comes to you and says "My father is dead. He fell under a bus. Please may I have leave to go and mourn him?" Reluctantly you agree.

A few months later when you require Cuthbert for a most important task Biri drowns while trying to cross a swollen river. Cuthbert comes to you and pleads for leave because his father has drowned. And in due course when Hari, being somewhat short-sighted mistakes an elephant for a lorry and tries to thumb a lift, you greet the news of his untimely death with scorn but tell your friends "First he told me that his father had been killed by a bus—then he was drowned—and now he says his father has been killed by an elephant! What sort of fool does he take me for? Of course, I fired him."

Poor Cuthbert!

The Man — and his children



*T*HE African man and woman want children more than anything else, and we can barely appreciate the despair felt by those women who know that they can never become mothers. Let us, however, take a look at the couple who have married and whose first child is on the way.

During this first pregnancy the wife usually returns to the home of her parents where she can be looked after and instructed by her mother. It is at her father's home that the child is born. After the birth the husband will be sent for but it will be a day or so before he is allowed to see the child over whom he will have full parental control. He has both the rights of custody and guardianship over the children of his marriage.

There is a saying that "Cattle, not men, beget children". This means that it does not really matter by whom the woman bears the children as long as she has been lobola'd, in which case the children belong to the man who paid the lobolo cattle. Therefore a child conceived by a married woman in an act of adultery "belongs" to her husband and his rights over that child are the same as those which he exercises over his own. The husband may, however, after

he has been paid damages by the lover, accept a customary payment and by so doing he acknowledges the lover's rights to the child. When the child is old enough to leave its mother the natural father makes a further payment for the rearing of his child and then acquires full rights of custody and guardianship. Unless the husband was separated from his wife at the time she conceived he is most unlikely to acknowledge the lover's parentage of the child!

He exercises his parental rights over his sons until they marry and set up their own homes and he is responsible for the actions of any of his minor children. His daughters remain under his tutelage until, in due course, he hands them over as brides to the care of their husbands. Before they are married he has the right to sue any seducers of his daughters for damages whether or not they were virgins at the time, or whether or not pregnancy results.

A child born as a result of his daughter's seduction "belongs" to him and he has absolute discretion as to whether or not he will retain or relinquish the custody to its natural father. The seducer may only ask for his child if he has paid damages for the seduction, and the girl's father has agreed to accept lobolo for the child. When you stop to think about it, these customs again demonstrate very clearly the relationship between lobolo and children. It is through lobolo that a man acquires rights in respect of his children and it is very rarely indeed that he is deprived of those rights by law once lobolo has been paid. In Manicaland a man is liable to lose the custody of his children if he repudiates his wife without good reason, but generally speaking custom demands something more than that. For example, a man who kills his child might forfeit all rights to his other children by the same wife.

Despite the stringency of customary law in regard to parental rights, our Courts have repeatedly laid down that where the custody of a child is concerned, the welfare of the child is of primary importance and the practice today is to award the custody of the child to the mother's family if it is in the interests of the child to do so. This invariably happens in the case of babes and toddlers who need a mother's care, but when they reach the age of about seven years the father may resume custody unless it is against the interests of the child.

And finally, a word of warning. If you are out in the veld and a hare gets up and runs—keep it running! If it stops and looks back at you over its shoulder you may become impotent. As a European you could ignore this superstition—but keep your fingers crossed!



The Man —his home and his labours

MANY African men are today earning their living in domestic service, cheerfully performing tasks which they would not dream of doing in their own homes. Housekeeping, and all that it embodies, is regarded by the African as women's work. We have similar ideas in our society, and the office manager might well squirm at the thought of his staff spying him in that frilly, floral apron helping his wife with the washing up on Sunday evening!

In their villages in the rural areas, custom dictates that there should be a well defined division of labour between the African men and their women, and the man does only that work which he considers worthy of his superior position in relation to his wife. The woman would not expect her man to do otherwise.

In her home, the African woman is responsible for all the chores connected with rearing her children and keeping her husband contented. She has her own hut, like every other wife of her husband, and this means a great deal to her. So much so that when she dies no other woman will ever live in it, and it will be left to disintegrate. She has shared in the building of her hut, for while her husband has carried the heavy poles from the veld and has set them up in a circle, she has done the plastering of the walls and has prepared the floor. She has also carried the long thatching grass for her man to tie to the framework of the conical roof, and she has watched him fashion the door and fit it so that it can be secured from within.

In laying her floor the housewife leaves a small dish-like hollow in the centre, and it is in this that she makes her fire. Around the

fireplace she sets her three hearth stones, and near them she fashions a small immovable seat upon which no one but her husband may sit. Around the inside wall she builds a low narrow platform which she plasters, and this serves as a seat for others who may enter her hut. This seat usually extends from either side of the door, around the walls, to the large daub shelf which she makes at the back of the hut opposite the doorway. On the shelf she places her pots and, with the sleeping mat her husband has provided for her, her furnishing is then complete.

There are various pots on her shelf, ranging from the big cooking pots to the small ones which she uses for relish. Even today in the rural areas these pots are made of clay, each has its own place and use and name, and each one is her own private property, for she probably made them herself.

The women know no potter's wheel yet they fashion and shape the clay with their hands with a skill that is not usually appreciated by those who have only a casual knowledge of the African. When the clay pots have dried they are packed in an open hole in the veld and are burnt. No small children are allowed to be present at this stage for it is believed that should a child scratch itself during the baking, all the pots will crack. Later the pots are neatly ornamented with various designs. Unfortunately paint is generally used for this purpose today, but it does not give the pots the beautiful finish of graphite and iron oxide which the women once used.

The African housewife in the faraway village has a busy day. She stamps the grain in her wooden pestle and she grinds the meal between two flat stones. She collects the firewood, and the leaves of certain wild plants, or caterpillars for relish. She feeds her children and tends them, and fetches water from the stream or well for her domestic use. She brews the beer, and she cultivates her vegetable garden. Her husband usually has two meals a day and it is her duty to prepare them and to take them to him, but she may not join him as he eats. If a man has more than one wife, each will prepare food for him, and he is careful to partake of each dish, for should he leave one the wife who prepared it will know that she is no longer loved or trusted. In addition to all these tasks, the woman helps her husband with the cultivation of the land and, as we have seen, with building.

She also has the responsibility of keeping the family larder, and a good wife sees to it that her grain storage bins are not emptied through waste.



It must not be thought that while the woman is doing all these tasks, the man is sitting around sunning himself. He too has his work to do, for it is he who provides for the family. He is primarily an agriculturist. He clears the bush and breaks up his land. Today this task is made lighter by the plough, but with the plough came problems related to the conservation of

the soil, and so the husband has the added burden of building and maintaining contour ridges and storm drains to protect his land. This can be heavy work under a blazing sun.

The man cultivates his fields assisted by his family, and he is responsible for the majority of heavy tasks that have to be done. As we will see, he often lightens this load by means of the *nhimbe*—a labour saving device unknown in our society. He makes the wooden handles for the tools they use, he fashions the pestle and mortar for his wife and he carves the plates and porridge sticks. In earlier days he smelted the iron from which he made his assegais, hoes and axes. The task of basket making, and the preparation of skins belongs to him.

Man is the hunter, and it is he who brings in the products of the chase. He may hunt with his dogs, driving the hunted animals into nets which he has made from the fibrous bark of certain trees, or he may capture his quarry in snares or pits. In bygone days the men of certain tribes would creep up to an unsuspecting elephant and hamstring it with blows from their heavy long-bladed axes which were made and sharpened especially for that purpose. It is an old belief that if a wife is unfaithful her husband may be killed in the hunting field.

While the man has nothing to do with the purely domestic tasks, the woman takes no part in the affairs of the state or tribe. The man, with his greater knowledge of life, understands many things that are supposed to be incomprehensible to women. And so it is he who attends meetings of the clan when they are held by the chief or headman, and voices his opinion. The greying his beard, the weightier his arguments, for the opinions of young men are not much respected.

As we observed, we have many similar ideas in our society.

"See you at the Club at seven, old boy. Then we can have a

couple of spots, and work out the details of the contract." How often are these words repeated day after day in our society? Very often—and business and pleasure go hand in hand. We are not alone in mixing the two, and a visit to an African Tribal Area during the seasons when crops are grown or reaped will furnish ample evidence of this.

Sometimes you will see a group of people seated in the shade of a large tree in the middle of a land where maize, or munga or rapoko is growing. The men, many of them with greying hair and beards, will be squatting on their haunches, talking of this and that as the foaming beer pot is passed around. One man will politely wipe his lips, raise the pot, or calabash, and drink, before passing it across to his neighbour. The women, legs outstretched or tucked beneath them, are seated a little distance away from the men. They are suckling their babies, laughing and gossiping together and, like their menfolk, refreshing themselves. Other people may be seen in groups working happily amongst the crops, tilling the soil with short handled hoes, singing and chattering as they do so. And the social gathering which you have just seen is called a *nhimbi*.

There, in the tribal area, the man and his family support themselves on the land. There is a limit to what one or two adults in a family can do, for weeds grow fast and if six, seven, or eight acres have to be cleaned by hoeing, the task is gigantic. On the other hand it may be necessary for the man to erect a new hut and here again he is confronted with an arduous task—chopping and hauling poles, setting them up, and thatching the roof, while his wife does the plastering of the walls and the laying and smearing of the floor. Whatever the task, it is lightened if the assistance of others can be obtained.

And so it is that the *nhimbi* has found its place in the social life of the rural African, and has become one of the most pleasurable of all his activities. For the *nhimbi* is actually nothing more than a party where the host supplies the beer, and the guests do his work. Today helpers will come in from villages scattered far and wide to help old Tichafa hoe his lands. Tichafa will reward them with his hospitality, and tomorrow he and his family will probably attend a similar work-party at his neighbour's kraal, and give their labour in return for a drink, a yarn and even a dance in the evening if the beer lasts out.

The host at the *nhimbi* always sees that he has sufficient beer for the needs of the working guests, but it is not always there to be

seen. The beer pots are generally hidden away out of sight and the womenfolk, who brewed the beer, fetch more as it is required. If the work is not going fast enough, supplies may be held up—but not for long.

It is the threshing parties which give the greatest pleasure. The grain has been reaped and the crop is bountiful. There is no need to worry about a shortage of food for a few more months. Men and women gather at the threshing floor. They stand in a circle armed with long sticks, and to the sound of their own singing they rhythmically beat the grain from the husks. The dust rises, the tempo increases, and for once custom allows ribald jests to pass between the sexes. All day long the beating and pounding goes on, but it is thirsty work, and so there are frequent intervals between songs.

Economically these parties do not pay, but nobody worries about that, for they are enjoyable and those who give them are not economists. The fact that the more inebriated members of the *nhimbi* party weaved from side to side as they worked will show in the crooked lines of maize or nuts, but who cares? The crops have been planted in lines instead of being scattered, and that alone should please the authorities whose job it is to teach better agricultural methods.

Although business men in our society may discuss a deal, glean little items of profitable information or do each other down very pleasantly over their raised glasses, it would be dangerous for us to extend the *nhimbi* in its true form to our own way of living. Imagine the chaos which would result if you had your home redecorated by a party of enthusiastic, but not so sober guests, or your roses pruned by those amiable fellows who dropped in the other evening!

Although it would not fit into our society, and is not economical in theirs, the *nhimbi* custom has played an important part in the lives of the rural Africans for generations, and its real value lies in the enjoyment it gives to so many. It is a custom which, if it ever dies, will die slowly and will be greatly mourned.

The Man—and his fears

ONE of the greatest stumbling blocks to the advancement of the African has been his terrible fear of witchcraft. Today he has schools and hospitals and is free of the fear of tribal warfare and political intimidation. He knows that whether there be drought or flood he will not be allowed to starve. Many of his anxieties have been forgotten but it will be many years before his fears of the supernatural are dispelled.

Witches and wizards are the enemies of men. They cast spells, ride on the backs of hyenas and devour corpses. They are anti-social and wicked and must therefore be hunted out. But do not confuse witches and wizards with witchdoctors. The word "witchdoctor" is a misnomer. These people fulfil a very important part in tribal society for they are believed to have the power of exposing the evil ones.

Besides riding the countryside at night on the backs of hyenas, witches are believed to send birds or animals to bring harm. Because of this belief, no one would have anything to do with the domestication of wild animals as this might easily have led to an allegation of sorcery. Even today it is not common to see a tribesman with a pet. They have their cattle, their donkeys, their hunting dogs and the useful goat or pig, but very rarely an animal which gives companionship in the sense that we know it.

Now many years have passed since the last trial by ordeal was held in England. In Rhodesia, there may have been one yesterday evening.

Strictly forbidden by law, a trial by ordeal is still regarded by the unsophisticated as the highest tribunal before which a person

may seek to prove his, or her, innocence when an accusation of witchcraft is made. Anyone who makes such an accusation is liable to severe punishment, and this well known fact deters to some extent the witch-hunter.

The African believes that sickness, death or disaster will not visit a home without some reason. A person may fall ill or die because he has neglected to propitiate a spirit, which uses this means to draw attention to itself. A visit to a diviner will probably reveal this, for it will "come out" when the bones are thrown. On the other hand, the bones may show that the calamity has been caused by an evil one, intentionally, through the supernatural power of witchcraft. There will be whisperings.

Then, with customary rites, the witch is sought out and named. At the very least this means banishment from society and a life of loneliness and misery for him or her. The person named may then demand that a trial by ordeal be conducted in order to prove that he is not a wizard. Sometimes it is the so-called witchdoctor who conducts the ordeal for the actual "smelling out" of witches, and it is only a few years ago that this resulted in the deaths of four innocent people in a tribal area not far from Salisbury. Nor is the trial always related to an accusation of witchcraft for, as will be seen later, an innocent person accused of some misdeed may turn to it in desperation in order to "disprove" the allegation.

The trial may take one of two forms, the *Mteu* or the *Nyikisa*, both of which are cruel and inconclusive. In the former a concoction is prepared from the bark and roots of certain trees or plants, and this is drunk by the accused. The potion is poisonous, and upon the amount of poison contained depends the fate of the accused, for it is not generally realized that too much, or too little, depending on the poison used, will cause him to vomit. If he vomits and survives, he is innocent; if he does not, he is guilty—and dead.

When the *nyikisa* test is applied, a pot of water is placed upon the fire, and when it is boiling furiously a small stone is dropped into it. The accused is then called upon to plunge his arm into the bubbling water and to remove the stone for all to see—without scalding himself. If he is successful, he is innocent. If he fails, his scars will bear witness to his guilt. A similar ordeal, called *rupadza*, where the person on trial licks a red-hot hoe, is sometimes carried out.

The *nyikisa* trial is not always supervised by the witchdoctor. In fact he may not even enter into the matter, for the people themselves, sincerely believing that the innocent man will not be scalded,

sometimes carry out the test in their own homes. Rare though these instances are, however, such cases do occur.

One case involved an elderly African couple who were married in accordance with Christian rites. Their children had grown up and had families of their own. The husband ran a small business some miles from his kraal and usually slept in the shop in order to guard his goods. One Sunday night, after spending the day at his kraal, he decided to remain there for the night.

According to the wife, she and her husband soon dozed off on their sleeping mat, but during the night they were awakened when the door of their hut swung open, and then closed again. The woman pointed out that the door had not been latched, and that a wind had sprung up. This, she maintained, obviously accounted for the opening of the door.

"I can understand the wind blowing the door open," her husband countered, "but I have never heard of a wind closing a door behind it when it goes out. You have a lover and it was he who, unexpectedly finding me here, shut the door as he fled."

The woman denied the allegation. In vain she argued with him, until eventually he suggested that she should undergo the *nyikisa* ordeal. One wonders whether he would have suggested the *mteu* instead, had he known of the Trial of Jealousy which is set down in the fifth chapter of the Book of Numbers.

With full knowledge that she had no lover, the wife readily agreed, and together they prepared the pot. It was a clay pot, which she used for cooking. It was about seven inches in diameter, some six inches deep, and held just over a quart of water. They sat and watched it, the firelight flickering on their intense faces. Soon it was ready. The husband took a small round stone, no bigger than a



pigeon's egg, and dropped it into the seething water. He looked at her, and nodded.

The woman, without fear, plunged her hand into the pot. She fumbled for the stone but could not grasp it as it bounced about with the movement of the water. She could bear it no longer, and withdrew her hand. She hesitated, then forced it back into the boiling water. This time she found the stone and held it, then taking it out she showed it to her husband.

Her hand and wrist were not scalded.

He was convinced, however, that his wife was guilty, and could not understand why she had not been scalded. He pondered over the matter the whole of the following day and eventually came to the conclusion that his method of applying the ordeal had been wrong, otherwise it would have revealed her guilt. That night he again remained at his kraal, and after their evening meal he told his wife that she would have to go through it all again.

"This time we will use a very big pot," he explained, "a pot that will hold much more boiling water".

His wife refused. "I have already undergone the supreme test," she said, "and have proved my innocence. I will not do it again for there is no need for me to do so."

They were still quarrelling when their son, a grown man, passed their hut and overheard their words. He took his mother away, and the next day she complained about her husband to the District Commissioner. Apart from a slight puffiness around her knuckles there was no sign of injury.

Needless to say, the husband went to prison, and upon his release his wife was granted a divorce on the grounds of his cruelty. In accordance with Native law he also forfeited his right to the return of any lobolo.

The fact that she was not scalded may call for comment. One can only say that it was so, and repeat the words of a District Commissioner who, in 1900, wrote:

"I have personally seen a trial of this kind take place in which a Native put his hand and arm into boiling water and took out a brass ring, and he suffered no harm whatsoever. I myself examined his arm, and can vouch for the fact that he was not harmed in any way."

Another case concerned a man who had two wives and there was ill-feeling between the two women. One day he mislaid half-a-crown and later, during his absence, his senior wife accused the

other of having stolen it. The younger woman retaliated by denouncing her accuser as having been the thief herself, and a violent quarrel ensued. It became so intense that the two wives, each acutely aware of her own innocence, rushed to their cooking pots and simultaneously plunged their hands into the boiling water. Both were badly scalded.

The most important point in these two stories is that in each case the woman freely and voluntarily underwent the trial, confident that she would be spiritually protected and her innocence revealed.

Besides fulfilling his task of exposing the evil-doer and advising on the causes of trouble, the witchdoctor has his store of medicines and charms, and is able to treat the sick and satisfy the superstitious. Sometimes portions of the human body are used in the preparation of a talisman in order to give it greater power. It is the extremities, such as the finger tips, ear-lobes, toes and genitals that are generally used but sometimes the internal organs are taken.

A murderer will cut away these portions and devour them, for he believes that by so doing he and his slain enemy become as one, and the spirit of the murdered man cannot therefore harm him. If he does not eat a small portion of the body for this purpose he may lick the fresh blood from his assegai, or whatever weapon he used for the killing. This was done by the warriors in battle for the same reasons.

From this flows the belief that if one eats a portion of a body one acquires some of the qualities of the deceased. It was, therefore, fairly common to give an aged and senile chief medicines made from the organs of children or young people, in order to restore his youth and vitality. When it was considered necessary to do this professional murderers were employed. They would set off for a neighbouring tribal area where they would seize a child and choke it by forcing matted grass seed down its tiny throat. They would then return with the required parts and the necessary potion would be made.

Similarly, if a drum was being made for the propitiation of the greater tribal spirits, some tribes would send off their professional murderers to obtain the hearts and lungs of a boy and a girl. These would be placed inside the drum before the parchment was tightened over it. For this reason it is considered very unlucky indeed to look inside a drum. The presence of these human organs gave the drum greater power and enabled the drummer to follow spiritual dances which might be unknown to him.

Many of the old chiefs washed their war drums with the blood of their captives who had their throats slit over the drum as it throbbed out its message of victory. At the coronation of a chief, or at his death, some tribes would anoint their drums with the blood of young children who were kidnapped in the usual manner.

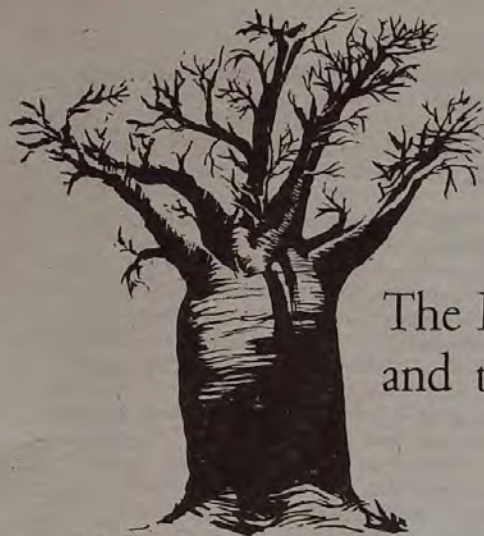
Parts of the bodies of young children have another use however. It is customary to mix medicines with the seed before planting crops—this is believed to increase the size of the harvest and many of the more powerful concoctions contained the fingers or arms of young children, which would give vigorous growth to the plants. Not only have cases of this nature come before our Courts, but men have been charged and convicted of raping their infant daughters in order to bring fertility to the soil.

When these killings occur today it is more than likely that the motive behind them is to acquire a charm for gambling or for business purposes. The witchdoctor does not take any part in the actual murder. He merely tells his client what parts of the human body he requires and leaves it to him to obtain them. Only a few years ago a small African boy was found with his throat slashed, and his genitals cut away. This brutality was committed, not so very far from the modern capital city of Salisbury, in order to acquire those parts for the making of a lucky mascot.

Having received his charm the gambler believes that if he carries it on him while playing cards he cannot lose. The right cards are bound to fall to him. At night he will sleep with it under his pillow, and it will cause him to dream of numbers, numbers which are sure to come up if he bets on them. At the races he will be able to spot the winner long before the horses leave the paddock, for the dirty little bit of something which he carries wrapped in a grubby piece of paper, or woven into an amulet, will not fail him.

Some African business men make use of charms. It is believed that if one such charm is tucked away amongst the goods which line the storekeeper's shelves customers will ignore his rivals and will flock to his shop from far and wide. Other charms ensure that one is lucky in love, or in the hunting field. Carry another, and no one will be able to catch you out in a lie.

Oh!—by the way, have you a hare's foot in your pocket?



The Man— and the veld

BEFORE the coming of the European with his shops and supermarkets, the African depended upon the veld for all his requirements as well as the small crops which he raised with his primitive methods of cultivation. He hunted, taking the smaller animals and birds in nets and snares. The larger species he killed with spears or bows and arrows. Game pits were used as well, while some of the more adventurous hunters would creep up behind a dozing elephant and hamstring him with a mighty blow from a specially made axe.

Besides meat, the veld produced roots and berries and other wild fruits. Clay was obtainable for the making of the household pots, while the many different species of timber produced such items as assegai shafts, roofing poles and a hundred and one other items. Of all the trees the one from which the tribesman derived the most benefit was, perhaps, the baobab, the cream of tartar tree or, if you prefer it, the *Adansonia digitata* L. Rising to a height of seventy feet, or more, this grotesque tree appears to be stunted, for its bulk is out of all proportion to its height. The majestic old baobab towers above the other trees, its great girth and misshapen body giving to the veld around it something that is purely African.

The Africans who live in the lowveld areas where the baobabs grow are, generally speaking, living nearer to their own natural way

of life than their kinsfolk in the higher regions. In the cooler climate of the highveld there has been greater European settlement and, therefore, greater advancement. The lowveld Africans turn to the baobab for many purposes, and the generous tree has a great deal to offer them in the way of materials, food, shelter, and a final resting place.

From Nature's "Manchester department" come blankets, mats, and a variety of other things which are woven from the fibrous bark. This is stripped off in sheets about five feet square and is pounded, prepared and turned to good use by the people who live in baobab country. When one is merely existing on a subsistence economy, a tree which provides material of this nature is a useful one to have in the back-yard, especially as it grows another piece of bark to take the place of that which was stripped.

The African housewife goes to the baobab for several of her culinary needs. During the short period that the tree is in leaf, a tasty relish may be made from the young, tender foliage. The fruit, which consists of hard, oval pods, contains large seeds, each coated with a white chalky substance which has a very high vitamin "C" content. This is the cream-of-tartar which gives rise to one of the names by which the tree is known. These pods are broken open, and the contents are either sucked as sweets, or pounded and cooked into a porridge. And if the lady of the house requires cooking salt to add to her relish, the ash of the baobab's burned wood will supply it.

Wild bees store their honey in the hollow branches of the baobab; and the chattering cries of the little Honeyguide, a small bird of the *Indicatoridae* family, often lead the sweet-toothed African to the hive. No matter how great his craving for honey, the robber will always leave a portion for the Honeyguide, for he believes that if he does not reward it the bird will later take its revenge by leading him to the lair of a dangerous animal.

It is not only the branches that are sometimes hollow. The whole interior of the baobab is occasionally burnt out by veld fires, or it may be naturally hollow. Unlike other trees, the baobabs continue to thrive even when this happens. Some of them retain rain water in their great cavities and these trees are well-known to thirsty travellers.

Others provide shelter, like the one which is known as "Sororo's Tree". This giant stands alone by the side of a path in the Mtoko district of Rhodesia, and the people of that area would spend the

night in its roomy interior when they were travelling. It is big enough to accommodate twenty, or more if need be, and the tree has a natural doorway, and several holes in its enormous trunk which serve as ventilators.

One evening a man named Sororo was travelling through the country with his wife and three children. They reached the tree about sundown, and as it was too late to travel on to the safety of the next kraal, they decided to spend the night in this recognized resting place.

They made a small fire and the woman roasted some monkey-nuts, then having finished their meagre meal, the family lay down to sleep.

They were tired after their long journey and did not stir when their fire grew cold. It was then that the lion arrived. He was old, and was worried by the quills which he had received in his foreleg a month or so before, when he had tried to kill a porcupine. He had attempted to bite these quills from his leg but had only succeeded in making matters worse, for now he was painfully lame. Often during the past year he had gone hungry, and now his recent injury had prevented him from killing for several days.

As he passed the baobab a slight scent of humans was wafted towards him. Hunger drove out any natural fear that he might have had. He prowled slowly round the tree, then saw the opening, and went inside.

It was some days before the fate of the travelling family was discovered, and then the engorged animal was tracked down and shot. Since then the tree has been shunned as a place of refuge. Charms and an ornamental axe were found in the tree some months later, and this gave rise to the rumour that a witch had taken up residence in the dark interior.

Another gruesome baobab grows not many miles from Sororo's and this one is used as a tomb for the burial of the dead. Standing in thick bush this tremendous tree has a round opening about five or six feet above ground level. When a funeral is held two men climb through the hole into the hollow trunk and then receive the corpse from helpers outside. The body is laid amongst the skeletons of those who have already entered the Spirit World and a piece of thornbush is placed in the entrance when the undertakers leave, to keep away marauding animals.

Throughout the country there are other trees about which stories can be told. Not only trees, but hills and caves, rivers, and



pools have their associations with the past for in the veld legend is all around us. Let us take a look at Mtemwa, the granite mass which is close to the little town of Mtoko.

One thousand feet above Mtoko, on top of Mtemwa, is a geodetic beacon, proof that man has been able to reach the summit with the materials required to mark this point accurately on the surveyor's map. But to get there you must climb, and reach, and stretch, groping for holds, without a guide. It is easy to take the wrong way, and to find yourself clinging to the bare rock face an inch from death, where a stolen glance behind shows how far you have come from the valley, and how far you are above the hawks that glide and hover away below.

The tribe which lives around Mtemwa settled there several hundred years ago. When their ancestors arrived from the north they discovered some ruins which, although very much smaller than those at Zimbabwe, resemble them in detail with their dry-bonded walls and herring-bone patterns. Some of the walls were destroyed when archaeological research was carried out many years ago, but there is still much of interest, and no African would hesitate to take you to them.

Similarly, on a neighbouring hill there is a shallow cave which can be reached after a short climb. When the present tribe arrived in the country, their forefathers wondered at the many rockpaintings which adorn the walls. Today you may still see this ancient picture gallery, for the local Africans will always guide you to it.

But very few Africans will offer to guide you up Mtemwa. One of the more sophisticated may set off with you, but as you approach the steep base of the mountain he will probably inform you that his leg has become sore, and he can limp no further. He will have remembered that ill-luck is said to attach itself to those who have climbed Mtemwa, and he will have recalled to mind those who have died. There was Mbewe who contracted leprosy, Gororo

who went mad, and Kaitano who was killed by a lion, all within a year of having made the ascent.

The old people in the villages believe that Mtemwa is inhabited by spirits, and what they term *mayuwe*, or mirages, are to be seen on the mountain. Those who climb it, they say, will see many things which do not really exist. As proof of its occupation by the shades of men long since dead, many will tell how they have seen a form moving across the granite face and setting fire to the vegetation which exists in the crevices. The form is that of a man, clad in a black waist-cloth, who is accompanied by a dog, and one may see fires springing up at different points as his vague figure flits across the mountain.

He is nameless, but the people know that he is a hunter intent upon chasing out the rock-rabbits for his hound to kill. His fires are only visible in the hot months of the year, and are seen in the evening. He has not been seen often, perhaps five or six times during the life-time of the oldest tribesmen, but his appearance is always followed by excellent rains and abundant crops.

Neither the hunter nor the magical visions will be seen by Europeans, say the Africans, and no evil will befall those white men who climb the mountain. In fact the person who does make the ascent is recompensed for his labours by magnificent views of rugged hills, open plains and the majesty of the Inyanga mountains. Mtemwa is generous in this respect. Look around you—you will see Rhodesia.

The Man — and his manners

*M*ANNERS makyth Man, we are told—but do all men share a code of good or bad manners? Manners differ. What is considered polite in one society may be regarded as the height of rudeness in another. This is particularly so in Rhodesia where we have a multi-racial society—yet we always tend to judge the manners of the others by our own.

Whenever a European man is addressed by a superior, or when someone to whom he owes respect enters the room where he is sitting, he will leap to his feet and remain standing. When entering another's office he does not barge in and sit down. Yet the African considers it a mark of esteem and respect to squat down on his haunches as soon as he is addressed by a senior. He is being polite, in accordance with his code, when he walks in and *sits* down without waiting for an invitation to do so.

The African, like the Arabs and others who have existed in countries where there is barely sufficient water for survival, let alone washing, regards his right hand as his "clean" hand. He uses the right hand for conveying food to his mouth. Because he uses his left hand for various unclean tasks, he would be a most unwelcome guest if he used it for taking food from the communal cooking pot. To give with the left hand is a slight upon the receiver. Politeness demands that you use the "clean" hand only when handing anything to another person.

An African is not being rude or greedy when he holds out both hands to receive a gift. No matter how small the present may be,



he is trying to indicate to you that it is so big, so heavy, and so generous, that it takes two hands to hold it. To receive a gift with one hand as we do, belittles the gift somewhat and does not express gratitude.

We shake hands when we meet, a custom which dates back to the days of swords and daggers. We extend our sword hand, empty, to show that we do not intend any mischief. If two people are talking we would consider it ill-mannered to walk between them, yet the African will do this in order to show that he does not intend harm.

Returning to our sword hand for the moment. It is customary for the bride to walk down the aisle after the marriage, at her husband's left side. This leaves his right or sword hand free so that he can protect his bride. Yet we are apt to raise our eyebrows when we see a heavily laden African woman accompanied by a man who carries nothing but a spear, axe or stick. When you come to think of it, he would not be able to protect the woman in an emergency if he were cluttered up with the luggage. Remember this the next time you are made to go shopping!

How many of us, living as we do in a busy whirl, adopt an abrupt "Yes? What do you want? Speak up!" attitude? To the

If the woman has sexual intercourse outside the bonds of marriage her lover may be sued for damages by her guardian—and this applies even in her widowhood. In fact, before a dead man's estate was distributed, the widows to be inherited (his wives) were required to jump across their deceased husband's bow, for it was believed that the bow string would snap if they had been unfaithful since his death.

Because of her status a woman has no say in tribal politics or any matters of importance. However, events in Africa have shown that the women exhort their menfolk to action. Can this be frequently said of us?

There are many practices and taboos relating to women but here again some have been modified or discarded under the influences of Christianity and civilisation. Because of the woman's mysterious power of creating new life it is understandable perhaps that many primitive beliefs are associated with her bodily functions. At certain times, for example, she may not visit the cattle kraal or handle the family herd lest harm should befall it. When pregnant she must not walk through gardens where monkeynuts are growing or the pods will burst and ruin the crop.

It was stated at the outset that it is not intended that this little booklet should be a text book on African customary law—nor is it intended that this chapter should be a legal treatise on the present day status of African women. There have been modifications to customary law and today some women have moved towards complete emancipation. But old customs die hard—especially when so many want them kept alive.



look back—to the last paragraph
on page 21



RHODESIA

Published by Ministry of Information, Immigration and
Tourism, P.O. Box 8232, Causeway, Salisbury, Rhodesia.

Printed by the Government Printer, Salisbury.

In the United States, this material is filed with the Department of Justice, where the required registration statement, in terms of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, of the Rhodesian Information Office, 2852 McGill Terrace, Washington, D.C., as an agency of the Rhodesian Ministry of Information, is available for inspection. Registration does not indicate approval by the United States Government.