



CONGO IDOLS.

## FETISHISM IN CONGO LAND.

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ILLUSTRATED AFTER SKETCHES FROM LIFE BY THE AUTHOR.



ONE OF MY CREW.

FETISHISM is the result of the efforts of the savage intelligence seeking after a theory which will account for the apparent hostility of nature to man. It is the first feeble striving of ignorance to ascertain the position of humanity in the universal scheme, and the endeavors by a hundred

tentative experiments to discover what power man may possess over his own life and destiny in the face of all this seeming antagonism. The African of the interior can find no note of sympathy in the world immediately surrounding him. Life is to him no free gift, but rather something to be dexterously snatched from the hand of adverse circumstances. Everything in earth or sky seems to threaten his existence. The hut of the inland village stands on the confines of an impenetrable forest, the haunt of savage beast and venomous reptile. The dweller on the river bank pursues his vocation in constant danger. Let him escape unscathed all the dangers incidental to his search for mere subsistence, let him lay up what is to him wealth, still he can never enjoy either good fortune or health in security, for one is at the mercy of his fellow-man,—the midnight raids of neighboring tribes,—and the other is imperiled by fevers, agues, and strange diseases which his skill is unable to cure or avert. The imagination of

the savage surrounds life with an atmosphere of awe and mystery. He walks continually in fear. Evil in countless undefined shapes is lurking everywhere. Influences obnoxious to him lie concealed in every object. Trees, stones, herbs, all contain imprisoned spirits which, if released by any heedless action on his part, may rend and destroy him. He must be ever watchful to propitiate or control the malevolent powers that menace him at every turn. Ill luck may be transmitted to him through object animate or inanimate when he is least aware. A native will never point at another with his finger, as the belief exists that an evil influence can be by this means conveyed to another. It behooves him to be very careful. He fears when health and fortune are favorable that some chance action of his may deprive him of both. He will therefore often turn in his path to retouch some object he has accidentally come in contact with, for fear the virtue that is in him may suddenly leave and some strange, hurtful influence may be conveyed to him instead. At night the chief will trace a slender line of ashes round his hut and firmly believe that he has placed a barrier which will protect him and his, while they sleep, against the attacks of the evil spirit. Upon stepping over this in the morning he takes the precaution to trace on the ground a small ring round him; in this he stands, and, uttering a devotional prayer, asks that the Moloki, or evil spirit, may not torment him during the day. When he is least conscious he

may be offending some spirit with power to work him ill. He must therefore be supplied with charms for every season and occasion: sleeping, eating, and drinking he must be protected from hostile influences by ceremonies and observances. The necessity for these safeguards has given rise to an elaborate system, and has created a sacerdotal class called by the different Congo tribes "Monganga," or "Nganga Nkisi" (the Doctor of Charms).

The fetish-man under any name is the authority on all matters connected with the relations of man to the unseen. He is the exorciser

and ceremonies are as diverse as the fancies of the fetish-men who prescribe them.

The traveler finds that superstitious customs which possess great force on the lower river gradually lose power over the natives as he penetrates farther and farther into the interior.

#### THE "NKIMBA."

AMONG the Ba-kongo people of the Lower Congo country, whose headquarters is at San Salvador, where resides their king known as the Ntotela (Emperor), or to Europeans as Dom Pedro V., a title bestowed upon him by the Portuguese, we find many curious examples of the fetish system. Prominent among these is the ceremony of the "Nkimba," or initiation of the boys and young men of the village into the mysteries and rites of their religion.

Each village in this region possesses its Nkimba inclosure, generally a walled tract of perhaps half an acre in extent, buried in a thick grove of trees in the vicinity of the village. Inside the inclosure are the huts of the Nganga, the fetish-man, who presides over its ceremonies, and his assistants, as well as of the boys undergoing the course of instruction. What this instruction is it is hard to say, for none save the initiated are permitted to penetrate the precincts of the Nkimba inclosure, but it includes the learning of a new language, so that those having passed through the Nkimba may be able to converse on religious matters in words not understood by the people.

When a boy reaches the age of puberty he is generally induced to join the Nkimba. This is effected in the following curious manner. On some market-day or public assemblage he falls down simulating sickness or a stupor, and is immediately surrounded by the Nganga and his assistants, who carry him off to the inclosure. It is given out that Luemba or Nsaki, or whatever the boy's name may be, is dead; that he has gone to the spirit world, whence by and by the Nganga will recall him to bring him up with the other lads in the sacred inclosure before restoring him to his friends under a new name. No woman is allowed to look upon the face of one of the Nkimba, who daily parade through the woods or through the surrounding country singing a strange, weird song to warn the uninitiated of their approach. The women fly from the sound, deserting their work in the manioc fields, and sometimes a man, a stranger in the district, on being encountered in one of these walks abroad will be severely beaten for his temerity in standing to watch the Nkimba go by.

The bodies of the lads are chalked entirely



A BOY OF THE NKIMBA.

of spirits, the maker of charms, and the prescriber and regulator of all ceremonial rites. He can discover who "ate the heart" of the chief who died but yesterday, who it was who caused the canoe to upset and give three lives to the crocodile and the dark waters of the Congo, or even who blighted the palm trees of a village and dried up their sap, causing the supply of *malafu*, or palm wine, to cease, or drove away the rain from a district and withered its fields of *nguba* (ground nuts). All this is within the ken of the Nganga Nkisi, and he is appealed to on all these occasions to discover the culprit, by his insight into the spirit world, and hand him or her over to the just chastisement of an outraged community. This is the only substitute for religion that the African savage possesses: its tenets are vague and unformulated, for with every tribe and every district belief varies and rites

white, and a wide skirt of palm fronds or straight dry grass suspended from a circular strip of bamboo standing out from the body above the hips hangs down to below the knees, much resembling a short crinoline. Food is brought daily by the mothers or relatives of the pupils and laid outside the inclosure, whence it is conveyed inside by one of the Ngangas or the older lads. For although the women and the credulous outsiders really believe in the death and residence among the spirits of their male relatives who have "died in the bush" (*i. e.*, entered the Nkimba inclosure), they are religiously instructed by the Ngangas to attend to all the bodily wants of the supposed inhabitants of the spirit world.

dence in the inclosure,—and he affects to treat everything with surprise as of one come to a new life from another world; to recognize no one, not even his father or mother, while his relatives receive him as raised from the dead; and for several days the newcomer is permitted to take anything he fancies in the village, and is treated with every kindness until it is supposed that he has become accustomed to his surroundings, when he will be allowed to shake down into his place in life, and unless he determines to pursue the calling of a fetish-man will again become an ordinary member of society. The duration of the period of initiation varies from two years in some cases, and even longer, to only a few months, according, I suppose, as the pupil shows an apti-



A CONGO CHIEFTAIN'S GRAVE.

When a youth has successfully mastered the new language, and has acquitted himself satisfactorily in the eyes of the Nganga, expressing implicit belief in all the strange doctrines of fetishism it is thought necessary to impart to him, it is given out by the medicine-man that Luemba or Nsaki is now fit to return to the world and to his sorrowing relatives. Accordingly on a certain day he is conducted back to his village with much ceremony, reintroduced to his parents as no longer Luemba, but as "Kinkila Luemba" or "Nehama Nsaki,"—the new names being distinctly Nkimba names, adopted during the period of his resi-

tude for his studies or not. Any refractory youngster, or one who cannot bring himself to believe all the Ngangas declare to be true, is beaten until he recognizes the error of his ways and accepts as strictly true every story and miracle the medicine-man may relate. Sometimes a sturdy, unbelieving boy who cannot see that black is white, or *vice versa*, however much the Nganga may assert it and his older and wiser comrades share in the assertion, is beaten black and blue before he becomes convinced of the fact that his eyes have deceived him. The origin of this strange African order of freemasonry is quite unknown

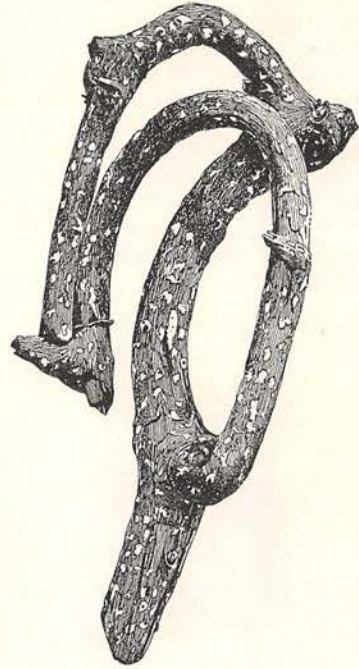
among the Ba-kongo. No missionary has yet been able to penetrate the mysteries of the language or of the rites and ceremonies connected with it, but from the following facts I feel inclined to believe it simply a perpetuation in the native mind, darkened by savagery and superstition, of the early Catholic teaching of the Portuguese fathers who followed Diogo Cam's discovery of the Congo and established themselves at San Salvador and in the surrounding country.

The Nkimba is unknown beyond Man-yanga and Lukunga,—two hundred miles from the coast,—which were probably the farthest limits reached in those early days by the priests in their missionary journeys; between these districts and San Salvador it increases in public estimation until when the true Congo country is reached—that within the scope of Dom Pedro's influence—we find the Nkimba inclosures at almost every village. The chalking of the body white and the wearing of a coarse dress of brown grass, in imitation of the white-robed priests and the rude vestments of the monks; the penalty inflicted on women who venture to approach or gaze upon the Nkimba (white priests never married, and no woman could enter a monastery); the chanting of strange songs in a new tongue and the learning of a new language, even as the rites of the Catholic Church are performed in a strange tongue (Latin) and a novice entering a monastery would have to learn that language; the giving of new names, as a monk often adopts a new cognomen and ceases to be Mr. So-and-so, but becomes Brother Ignatius or Father Hyacinthe; and finally the strange deception practised in pretending that the newly received boy has died and must be raised again from the dead and given back to life—all seem to point to one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Church which asserts that no man can be saved unless he be born again.

#### THE SELECTION OF THE NGANGA ON THE UPPER RIVER AND HIS START IN LIFE.

It is only on the Lower Congo, where the Nkimba is found, that any training in his profession is undergone by the fetish-man; in all other parts of the Congo region the office devolves upon its holder in quite an accidental manner: the distinction is thrust upon some native whose fortune has in some way distinguished him from his fellows. Every unusual action, every display of skill or superiority, is attributed to the intervention of some supernatural power, and thus the future wielder of charms or utterer of predictions usually begins his priestly career as Nganga by some lucky adventure.

A young man by showing prowess in the hunting-field, by being successful on the fishing-grounds or brave in war, at once becomes the object of a certain admiration in his village. His superiority commands respect; his steady



CHARM ROOT.

aim, his lucky hauls of fish, and his boldness in the fight are credited to the agency of some supernatural spirit or to some charm of which he may be possessed. Such a belief on the part of the villagers is never discredited by the fortunate object of it; on the other hand, he takes advantage of this credulity on the part of the ignorant, and in consideration of payment received will pretend to impart his power to others. This is almost invariably the way in which the fetish-man receives his calling to the office, and having once secured the estimation of his neighbors he will start a lucrative business for the supply of charms consisting of different herbs, stones, pieces of wood, antelope horns, skins and feathers, tied in artistic little bundles, the possession of which is supposed to yield to the purchaser the same power over spirits as the vender himself enjoys. Having once become known as the purveyor of charms he will continually add to the attractiveness of the stock in trade of his calling by the aid of a fertile imagination. Besides charms of his own manufacture he will obtain others from well-known fetish-men in distant villages, and thus after a time he acquires a large store of charms for all phases of life.

## THE FETISH-MAN AT HOME.

ESTABLISHED in reputation, the efforts of the fetish-man are next directed towards the acquirement of a demeanor calculated to impress his clients with a sense of awe; he aims at assuming an appearance at once grave and mysterious; he seldom speaks unless professionally, and then always in a gruff, husky tone. He cultivates a meditative look, and seems as if he were the victim of great mental anxiety. At home he keeps himself very select, and occupies his time principally among his charms. There is generally some sign of his calling just outside his hut, taking the form, as a rule, of an earthen vessel, out of the neck of which sprout long feathers—the pot being colored with red, white, and yellow chalks, and the orange-like tint derived from chewed betel-nut, the expectoration of which substance is supposed to have a very pacifying influence upon the spiritual evil-doer.

Sometimes the fetish-man's gesticulations will be directed to a carved image or some exaggerated form of charm. Suspended from the rafters in the interior of his hut are little parcels of mystic character, smoked grimy by the constant fires these people maintain in their dwellings. And outside, over the door, the same mysterious character of ornamentation proclaims to all the occupant's pretensions to sorcery.

## THE FETISH-MAN ABROAD.

WHEN abroad the fetish-man is always a conspicuous figure in a village. He wears a tall hat of animal skin; around his neck hang suspended by strings a few small specimens of his wares, and slung around his shoulders are little parcels of charms, into which are stuck birds' feathers. Metal rings, to which mysterious little packages are attached, clash and clang as he walks, serving, together with a liberal supply of iron bells fastened to his person, to announce the Nganga's presence; and, as if his body did not offer a sufficient surface to display all his magical outfit, he carries, slung over his left shoulder in a woven pocket, a load of wonder-working material. A peep into a fetish-man's sack discloses a curious assortment of preventives—eagles' claws and feathers, fishbones, antelope horns, leopard teeth, tails and heads of snakes, flint-stones, hairs of the elephant's tail, perforated stones, different colored chalks, eccentric shaped roots, various herbs, etc. There are sufficient reasons for his carrying these with him: if he left them in his village some one might steal them; and, again, provided as he is, he can administer at a moment's notice to suffering humanity some devil-proof mixture.

The flight of the poisonous arrow, the rush of the maddened buffalo, or the venomous bite of the adder can be averted by the purchase of these charms, and the troubled waters of the Congo can be crossed in safety by the fisherman's frail craft. The Moloki, or evil spirit, ever ready to pounce upon humanity, is checked by the power of the Nganga, and halts at his whistle through an antelope's horn, or the waving of a bunch of feathers.

## HIS CLIENTS.

THE fetish-man finds his best customers among those whom wealth and success have rendered objects for the envy and spite of their covetous neighbors. A chief whose fortunate trading ventures have enabled him to accumulate wealth of slaves and ivory becomes a devotee to charm usage; the fetish-man is continually by his side, and new charms are in constant requisition to ward off real and imaginary dangers which the uneasy possessor believes threaten his person and property.

## CEREMONY BEFORE DRINKING.

WHEN, in 1884, I was stationed at Lukolola, eight hundred miles in the interior, I was much struck with the elaborate and grotesque rites prescribed by the Nganga to some of the leading men of the district as a necessary preliminary to eating and drinking. I find the following notes in a rough diary I kept at that time.

## IUKA'S DEVOTIONAL PRECAUTION.

JUNE, 1884.—Old Iuka, chief of Irebu, put into my beach to-day, on his way down river on a trading expedition. I gave him some *malafu* (palm wine), the drinking of which necessitated the most extensive fetishistic preparations that I have as yet noticed. The old chief placed a small leaf between his lips, then fastened others rather larger under his shoulder-blades and on his chest, keeping them in place by means of a string tied tightly around the body; a slave guarding the pot containing the beverage also had a leaf in his mouth, as did another who held the cup from which the



THE HAWK WHOSE TAIL FEATHERS BAFFLE THE EVIL SPIRIT.

chief was to drink ; two more slaves provided a musical accompaniment to the ceremony by clanking small bars of iron ; one of the wives of the chief clasped him round the chest from behind, while four slaves knelt down in front of him and beat their closed fists on their

Any trader who succeeds in massing together his little pile of cloth, beads, trinkets, etc. thereby excites the jealousy of his fellow-men, and if his fees are not liberal he may one day find himself suddenly bound hand and foot in the merciless clutches of the fetish-man, who



FETISH DEVOTIONS BEFORE DRINKING.

knees. When everything was ready, all shut their eyes, except the men in charge of the pot and cup, who required the use of these organs so as not to spill the precious liquor. The Nganga has also enjoined Iuka from taking the cup from his lips until he had drained the last drop. My guest was a spare-built little man, but the prodigious quantity of malafu which he imbibed on this occasion astonished me, and I concluded that rather than perform this ceremony frequently he was drinking enough to last him several days. It is noticeable that rites of the kind prescribed by the fetish-men to Iuka are only used preparatory to a draught of palm or other concocted beverages, and are omitted when drinking water at a stream or spring. The reason is that poison plays a prominent part in the drama of savage life. These observances imposed by the wielder of charms are most earnestly adhered to. A native, although he has a great weakness for palm wine or other strong drink, will deny himself the beverage if he is not prepared to carry out the ceremony ordered by the Nganga. As the fatal draughts are always prepared by the Nganga, and as he is also the only person able to furnish antidotes to his own poisons, he reaps much benefit from this branch of the business. It enables him to command a ready sale for any charms he may wish to force on the market, and is an excellent means of collecting back payments and securing further custom.

will trump up some charge against him of having exercised an evil influence, or of causing the death of some villager who has lately died.

#### "MBUNDU"—TRIAL BY POISON.

It is also by means of drugs that the Nganga pretends to discern the innocent from the guilty when natives accused of crimes are brought before him for sentence. When a native is accused of any breach against tribal laws he has to prove his innocence by undergoing the poison test. *Mbundu*, or *Nkasa*, is an herbal poison composed of the bark of a tree mixed with water. The effect of imbibing this concoction depends upon the strength of the preparation ; with but little water it is deadly, but it may be diluted until its effect is almost harmless. The accused is compelled to sit down, and then the Nganga administers the preparation to the accused, who, should he be able to vomit the nauseous mixture, proves his innocence of any crime of which he is accused. But too often the poison has an awful effect. The accused falls down, foaming at the mouth, the limbs become rigid, the eyes protrude, and if death ensues the guilt of the poor unfortunate is held as clearly proved, and the distorted body of the victim is pierced through and through with the spears of his accusers. The fetish-man whose duty it is to prepare the test regulates the strength of the poison ac-

ording to the wish of the majority. It may be that the accused is popular in his village; in that case the Nganga will take care that the mbundu is not too strong. The natives themselves place great faith in this mode of trial. A declaration of guilt renders the poison test unnecessary, payment being accepted instead.

Besides the power that he exercises over the life and death of his followers, the Nganga is also credited with a controlling influence over the elements. Winds and waters obey the waving of his charm or the whistle through his magic antelope horn. Tropical storms give notice of their beginning and cessation, so that the fetish-man is easily able to time his predictions of change without much fear of startling contradictions. If rain is desired by the villagers for their crops, he sets to work with his charms preparing for the object in view, but he will not be quite ready until a distant roll of thunder gives him notice that a storm is nigh; then, assuming all the gravity which he can muster, surrounded by his charms he boldly commands the rain to fall, and when the storm, seen in the distance, breaks, it is regarded as a triumphant indication of his supernatural authority. When I was at Lukolela the river remained in a swollen condition far beyond its usual duration. Upon my asking the natives the cause they accounted for it by telling me that an up-river Nganga, who had been in the habit of controlling the rise and fall of all the Congo, had recently died, and at present there was no one sufficiently skilled to take his place.

Superstitions of all kinds are so rife among these people that the Nganga has a fruitful field to work in. He has merely to direct current beliefs in the strange and wonderful so that they may in some way tend to increase his influence over the credulous. Every unaccountable effect is attributed to some superstitious cause, the workings of which are known only to him. Every familiar object of their daily life is touched with some curious fancy, and every trivial action is regulated by a reference to unseen spirits who are unceasingly watching an opportunity to hurt or annoy mankind.

“NGÖI MOLOKI”—EVIL SPIRITS AND ANIMALS.

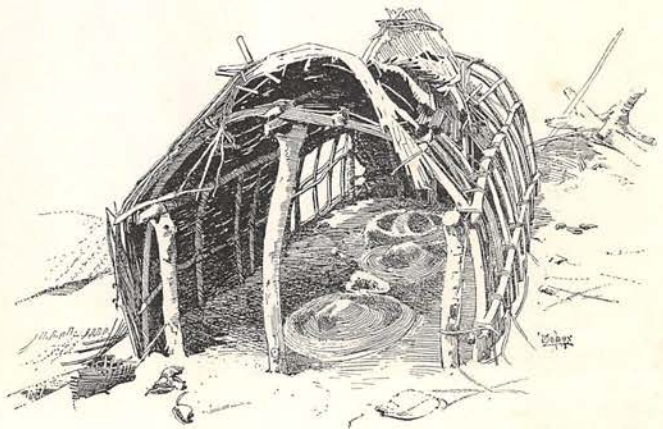
As all natives are either hunters or fishermen, a number of quaint beliefs have naturally

attached themselves to birds, beasts, and fishes. Some birds are of ill, others of good, omen. Some beasts are friendly to man, and others seek only to do him harm.

The mournful hooting of the owl heard at midnight by the villager is a message that death is stealing silently through the huts waiting to select a victim, and all who hear the call will hasten to the neighboring wood and drive the messenger of ill tidings away with sticks and stones.

There is a belief common to all natives of the Upper Congo regions which ascribes to certain possessors of evil spirits ability to assume at will the guise of an animal, reassuming the human form whenever they wish to do so. The incident that follows will serve as an illustration of the strength of this conviction.

As I had lost several goats from the frequent nocturnal raids made on the station by a leopard, I determined to try to rid the district of this wily robber. For several nights I watched, tying up as bait a young goat, which announced the presence of its own savory body by ill-advised bleatings from sunset to dawn. But the leopard did not return to reward my vigilance. It happened, however, that as soon as I omitted my watch the tracks around the sta-



LOWER CONGO GRAVE.

tion showed that the beast had renewed his visits. The natives then explained to me that this was no ordinary leopard, but was an evil spirit which had assumed the shape of that animal, Ngöi Moloki (“evil-spirited leopard”), and that it was useless to watch for him, as the evil spirit which possessed the beast at night was perhaps visiting my station in human form each day, learning my intentions and timing his raids accordingly. They said, “When you next intend waiting up for the leopard be careful to keep the matter a secret; tell no one, and then perhaps, being unwarned, the animal may venture out.”

This transmigration of spirits is supposed to be not altogether without its advantages to some of the powerful head men, who are believed to have in their service crocodiles, hippopotamuses, and other dangerous animals that once were men and to whom death has brought strange changes.

I was living at one time in a clearing of thick

ling me out of my sleep in a most unceremonious manner. He would tell me that there was an old monkey in some of the neighboring trees, or that he could hear the call of a guinea-fowl; this information delivered, he would hurry off to prepare gun and ammunition. The sharp eyes of this boy first saw the hippopotamus, and he imparted to me the news while waking



"TU-KU-LINGA MVULA" ("WE WANT RAIN").

forest with an extensive view of the mighty river before me. A thousand yards from my house was a small island covered with thick tropical vegetation. At the upper end of this an old hippopotamus had taken up his quarters, and at midday would lie in the shallow waters round it basking in the sun.

My little black servant, who was a most enthusiastic sportsman, was delighted when he could bring me the welcome news that he had seen some animal or bird that I might shoot, and he would disturb me at most untimely hours with such information. Sometimes, when I had been hunting all the morning, I would lie down in the heat of the day for a couple of hours, and often was rudely awakened by this youngster tugging away at me and start-

me out of my sleep. It is not usual in hunting even big game to fire at such a distance as a thousand yards, but I fired just a few shots to startle the unwieldy brute with the splash of the bullets falling close by him.

#### AN UNWIELDY COMPANION.

IN the evening of the same day one of the head men of a neighboring village, named Mpuké, paid me a visit, and in a very grave and ceremonious little speech informed me that that particular hippopotamus was a friend of his. He said: "That hippopotamus was originally a man who died, and he assumed the shape of this animal. It is useless for you to try to shoot him, because he has supernatural



power and is bullet-proof. That hippopotamus accompanies me on all my trading expeditions, and is generally of very great use to me. When I go away in my canoes the animal follows me, swimming behind at a short distance, protecting me against all enemies, whether they are men or other hippopotamuses, and he will upset the canoes of natives who are unfriendly to me."

"Do you really think that I am unable to kill the beast, Mpuké?" I asked.

The old chief replied with the emphasis of solemn conviction, "I do."

"Well," said I, "have you any objection to my trying?"

"No," he had no objection, he answered in tones which suggested regret that good powder and shot should be wasted in trying to prove that which every man, woman, and child in the district knew to be a fact.

I decided to try the experiment. I sent around into the neighboring villages that evening and informed them of the conversation I had had with Mpuké concerning his strange friend, and announced my intention of proceeding the next morning to put the matter to the test. The natives were naturally very curious as to what would be the result, and at the very earliest streaks of dawn large canoes full of people made their appearance on my beach. About eight o'clock in the morning I manned my canoe and paddled across to the island, followed at a respectful distance by the canoes of the neighborhood propelled with muffled oars, all the crews maintaining perfect silence.

Upon arriving at the island I ran my canoe ashore just below the shallows, and walked through the forest until I arrived at the edge. I selected a position whence I had a good view of old Mpuké's devil-possessed friend the hippopotamus. In shooting this game it is necessary to be a good shot, because, although the animal is easy to hit, unless you strike fair on some vulnerable spot you are simply cruelly and unnecessarily wounding it. The proper place to aim at is in the forehead, three inches above a line drawn between the two eyes; or in the ear, in the eye, or between these two organs. I had crept so carefully to my position that the hippopotamus was unconscious of my presence. I realized that my reputation was most seriously at stake, and I waited patiently until the animal presented a good mark. Then I raised my Martini rifle and fired, hitting him squarely in the forehead. After three or four spasmodic kicks in the air he sank to the bottom, and the waters became still. That evening the waters around the sandbank were undisturbed, and the smell of boiling and roasting hippopotamus meat pervaded the whole district. The enemies of Mpuké were now able

to cross the river in their canoes in safety. I earned the reputation of being a good shot, and a useful member of society in being able to replenish the larder. Moreover, I scored a point against this particular kind of superstition.

There are, on some reaches of the river, fetish crocodiles which are credited with the power to change their scales to the black skin and curly wool of the African. It is firmly held by the villagers that many members of the community who have disappeared suddenly from their homes and families have been lured to the river by a stranger who beguiled them with fair promises of beads and cloth, and who, when the water's edge was gained, changed instantly to a crocodile and disappeared in the oozy mud, dragging his deluded victim with him. Crocodiles are also, for what reason I know not, considered as generous and social in their natures. Natives have frequently assured me that when a crocodile is fortunate enough to secure a human being it will invite all the crocodiles along the banks to share in the meal, and my men have pointed out places where such banquets have been held.

#### THE "SOKO."

A CURIOUS account is given by the natives of the origin of the Soko. The Soko is a large monkey of the gorilla type, brown-haired, large-eared, with round face, smooth except the eyebrows, and a scanty beard. The Soko, if we are to believe the Congo negro, is a man who in ages past, having unfortunately drifted into debt and difficulty in his village, has fled to the woods to escape his creditors, and while waiting for his troubles to blow over, his limbs have altered in shape and his body become covered with long hairs. The women are much frightened at the sight of the Soko and clutch their babes fearfully to their bosoms, as they are persuaded that the only property the transformed debtor now attempts to lay hands on are very small children; these, they say, he will catch and carry to the topmost bough of some tall tree. To recover possession of the infant the Soko must be humored. If approached with threatening gestures by the natives he will hurl it in rage to the ground, but if it is left to him to decide, the child will be returned unhurt by its captor. The habits of these strange creatures certainly afford some foundation for the exaggerated statements which the superstitious African makes about them. I myself have seen a family of them at early morn clustered for warmth round a camp-fire which has been left smoldering by some fishermen.

Animals furnish the Nganga with some of his most potent charms. Portions of the skin, hair, or horns of the wild beasts of the forest or river bank command a ready sale; for such

when worn as charms and proclaimed fetish will transfer to the wearer the courage or cunning of the original owner. Elephant tail hairs are in great demand, and a buffalo's horn loaded with small magic trinkets is considered as possessing peculiar virtues.

The babe in the earliest days of its existence is protected from the efforts of the evil-doer, for to the furry belt in which the little one is slung to its mother's breast is attached some charm.

#### EVIL SPIRIT IN A RIFLE-BARREL.

ANY hitch or hindrance occurring in everyday affairs is at once placed to the credit of evil influences. The Moloki, or evil spirit, will be guilty of petty annoyances in the smallest matters of domestic life. I was once somewhat astonished to hear this mysterious being accused of tampering with firearms. Continual practice among African big game gave me a steady hand and rendered my aim with the rifle fairly sure. As a rule after a day's hunting among the buffaloes or hippopotamuses I returned home with at least one of these animals. But during one season it happened that for two consecutive days I failed to kill anything although I saw plenty. I had used every effort, too, as my larder stood much in need of fresh supplies. The men who accompanied me were thoroughly disheartened at my want of success, and were convinced of the interference of some spirit who had bewitched my gun, and they earnestly asked my permission to expel the objectionable evil-doer. "Let us have your rifle and we will remove the Moloki," said they; and upon my inquiring the mode of ejection they proposed trying, "Simply put the barrel into the fire," they answered. As the cure suggested seemed to me worse than the evil it was intended to remedy, I decided that the Moloki could retain his present quarters rather than that my rifle should suffer such treatment.

#### WAR CHARMS.

A DECLARATION of war between two villages is the signal for great activity among the fetish-men. They must find out by their insight into the future how the coming fight will terminate. Charms to protect the warriors against gunshot, spear, and arrow must be prepared. These consist of small packages the size of a tennis ball which contain stones, beads, pieces of iron, fish-hooks, and shells, and are worn round the necks or shoulders of the warriors. Besides the actual charm, devotional duties are imposed upon the wearer by the Nganga. A warrior supplied with a talisman to protect him in time of war against the enemy's weapons has, in order to render the charm effectual, to observe carefully certain injunctions dictated

by the fetish-man to be carried out before eating or drinking. Sometimes it is necessary to smear the face and body with various colored chalks, but the extent of such ceremonies increases with the importance of the client. Manjimba, the village blacksmith at Lukolela, having by his handicraft been enabled to obtain a great number of slaves, considered himself liable to the zealous efforts of the Moloki evil spirit, and as supplement to his charm against the enemy's spear received instructions from his Nganga to carry out the following preliminary before partaking of malafu. First he tied himself around the waist with a thin string of fiber and covered it with a cloth, then with a nut in his mouth, and his knife in his left hand, he carried his cup into a dark corner of his hut where no one could see him.

These elaborate observances attendant upon the possession of charms are simply the result of the fetish-man's fruitful imagination. They fail to give a reason for the precaution of tying a toe, placing a bean between the toes, etc. The ignorant native performs these duties because the fetish-man commands it. To all my inquiries as to the reason for such preparations "fetish" was the only answer.

Sometimes before a fight the fetish-men will be busily engaged for a month or so finding out the best course to pursue in the coming struggle, the warriors the while being engaged in renovating their weapons and in dancing and drinking. It is needless to say that the plan mapped out by the Nganga is not vigorously followed in the war by the warriors, as their actions must necessarily depend much on the reception they meet with when face to face with the enemy. Then, if defeat is the result, the fetish-man will say: "Aha! if you had done exactly as I told you all would have ended differently. You would not have lost a man; you would have captured many slaves, and have returned loaded with ivory and cloth. But, of course, if you do not attend to what I say you cannot expect to succeed." And the contrite warriors will answer: "It is quite true, that is what we ought to have done; why did we not do it?" Then all hotly discuss who should bear the blame for disobeying instructions, finally coming to the conclusion that the next time they go to war they will follow the guidance of the fetish-man. But they never do so. It is easy to understand that they cannot. If they find their enemies too strong, and that they are likely to get the worst of it, they beat a hasty retreat. If in overwhelming force, a precipitate rush is made to the enemy's stronghold, as every man is anxious to steal as much as he can. I have often been amused by watching the return of my neighbors' canoes from some warlike expedition. It is not difficult to

tell at a glance what the result has been. If they have been victorious, and have secured much plunder in the shape of ivory, slaves, goats, etc., they are welcomed back with beating of drums, tinkling of bells, blowing of trumpets, hootings and yellings, a tumult of indescribable sounds. On the other hand, if they have been thrashed, they sneak back to their villages, and the whole affair is hushed up as quickly as possible.

#### NATIVE SURGERY.

To his religious functions the Nganga unites those of the surgeon and the physician, and however his pretensions in the one calling may be, his skill in the other is more than considerable. In skirmishes of intertribal warfare natives are often badly wounded: powder is a scarce commodity in this part of the world, so the owner of a musket will not fire at his enemy unless he is near enough to be certain of his aim. The slugs used are rough pieces of copper, brass wire, and stones of all shapes. These fired at a distance of twelve or fifteen yards inflict ugly wounds, and are found deeply embedded in the flesh. In the extraction of these rude bullets the fetish-man displays great surgical skill, although of course he always attributes this to the agency of his wonder-working charms. During a little fight I was forced into by the hostile attitude of a neighboring chief several of my men received wounds from the enemy's overcharged flintlocks. I called in a native charm doctor who was renowned for surgical skill. When he arrived I told him that if he succeeded in extracting the slugs from my men I would give him a handsome present. One of my men was badly hit; the charge had entered the shoulder just below the neck and worked its way down towards the armpit. The Nganga, covered with magic paraphernalia, assumed the impressive demeanor characteristic of his clan. He first compelled all present to seat themselves on the ground before him, allowing no one to stand behind him while he was performing the operation. My man was then brought and firmly held, while the Nganga examined the wounds, carefully probing with the hair of an elephant's tail to ascertain the position of the slugs. Having satisfied himself on this point he addressed himself to his charms, bewildering the simple onlookers with muttered incantations of fearful-sounding words; he would often consult a basin filled with water placed near the head of the patient, into which he had dropped a few shells; then he smeared his body with different colored powders, and to increase the keenness of his insight into the hidden things of the spirit world he anointed his eyelids with

a bluish paste. All influences being propitious he proceeded to work again, gently squeezing and pinching the flesh to coax the bullets from the wounds. When his fingers assured him that he had succeeded in his endeavor to bring the bullet near the surface, he produced a number of leaves from a bag carried on his person, pressed them to pulp between his palms, and placed a portion of them over each wound. This done he continued his manipulations with one hand while gesticulating to a mysterious bundle he had in the other. Finally he removed the leaves, and taking the extracted bullets from the aperture of each wound dropped them one by one with a triumphant gesture into the basin. The skill of the Nganga compelled my admiration, and yet all the natives who witnessed the extraction, the patient included, departed more impressed by the irrelevant and absurd rites that accompanied the operation than by the knowledge and dexterity of the operator.

There is much sickness among the tribes of the interior. Fevers and agues haunt the swamps, and ulcers and other sores are very general. Herbal medicines of valuable properties are known to these people. But the fetish-man, in order to maintain his reputation, invests all actual medical treatment with such elaborate magical surroundings as to convince the ignorant savage that the cure is due to the charm, and the application of the herbal mixture subservient to fetish agencies.

#### "MOLOKI."

THE native when old, too, is frequently stricken with paralysis, a visitation that is utilized by the Nganga for obtaining by terrifying predictions as many fees as he can frighten the sufferer into giving. "It is an evil spirit that I have discovered in you," he will tell the stricken one. When all the remedies of the fetish-man have failed, and in spite of charms and incantations one of his patients dies, he often decides to hold a post-mortem examination, and if it is then determined that the dead native had an evil spirit the body is thrown into the water; if, on the other hand, the absence of the Moloki is proved, due burial rites are observed. In some districts on the Lower Congo for several weeks after interment palm wine is periodically poured down to the deceased through a small hole leading from the surface of the grave to the body. This custom is not general. In other localities the natives mark the final resting-places of their friends by ornamenting their graves with crockery, empty bottles, old cooking-pots, etc., all of which articles are rendered useless by being cracked or perforated with holes. Were this precaution not taken the grotesque decorations would be stolen.

They believe in an existence carried on underground as on earth, a life in which the departed ones require the services of slaves and wives to attend to their several wants. They believe also in spirits or ghosts, which they call Barimu, and affirm that occasionally the Barimu visit the village at night to frighten and annoy mortals.

The fetish-man is in some instances a dupe to his own art. Surrounded by his own people, who place implicit confidence in him, he may in time grow to believe that his actions have really some of that mystical virtue which is everywhere attributed to them; but more often he is a conscious knave. I had among my crew when exploring some of the little-known tributaries a bright, intelligent young fellow who had gained in his village the reputation of being a rising Nganga. One day I asked him to tell me something about the fetish profession. Making sure that no other native was within hearing to betray his words to the villagers, and eliciting from me a promise that I would not divulge anything he told me, he confessed that so far as he was concerned it was an imposture, and that he invented charms simply to meet the demand of the credulous. He had in his hand a large antelope's horn, over the aperture of which was a woven covering. "This," said he, "is a piece of fetish. By this I can discover in case of sickness whether the sufferer will recover or die. When I am called to a sick person this horn will at once foretell his fate. If he is to die, the charm will remain silent; but if recovery is certain, a low whistle will be heard. See, I will hold the charm at arm's length and it shall whistle when you wish." I tendered the necessary invitation, and was surprised to hear a wheezy whistle, which sounded as if it came from the horn. I asked the man to explain it to me, but he was not inclined to part with so valuable a property without some consideration. Finally he agreed that I should become the possessor of the charm and its working for an empty bottle, which I gave him. Going to the door to make sure that no listeners were there, he drew from his nostril a perforated bean. It was with this that he had made the sound supposed to come from the horn. He explained to me that it was by such means that the fetish-man amassed his wealth.

Natives fear the fetish-man, as they are unable to determine the extent or limit of his authority over evil influences. But the belief in his power has no deeper root than this uncertainty, and it is greatly lessened in natives who come in contact with white men, who, they are quick to perceive, perform greater wonders

than the Nganga, and without his supernatural pretension.

I have had under my command natives who in their own villages would observe most religiously all the imposition which their fetish-man thought fit to decree. Before eating and drinking they would adopt the usual measures of precaution, and would wear on their persons the requisite package of guardian charms; but after a few months' contact with the skepticism of the white man these same natives felt as safe and secure in eating fish and drinking malafu without fetish precaution as I myself in sipping a cup of coffee. When I had killed an elephant, a buffalo, or a hippopotamus, I often asked them: "Can your Nganga kill these big beasts? Has he even the courage to face them and to risk his life to obtain them for you? I do it and succeed. But I have no fetish charm." Such reasoning on my part was not without effect; my men invariably ignored the power of the Nganga, but on returning to their villages they relapsed into the same feeble submission to senseless custom, not because they still had any faith in it, but because they knew that any declaration of disbelief in the power of the fetish-man would bring trouble upon them, and in all probability the Nganga would soon find an opportunity to accuse them of witchcraft. The poison test would be administered, and the draught so mixed as by certain death to establish guilt.

There is an element of hopefulness in the little permanence attaching to the customs of superstition of the African savage. Their beliefs never attain the dignity of traditions. They are a people absolutely without legends or history. Each generation lives its life and passes from the face of the earth, leaving no sign, no memorial, of its existence. There are no records of great men in the tribes, nothing to mark either the progress or the decay of a race, and all the unreasoned fetish system has not the sanction that superstition gains in other countries from ancient laws and sacred literature.

The African knows of no past, and he is bound by no great memories. He lives entirely in the present, and his beliefs are made to fit the needs of the moment. It is easier to correct the vagaries of childlike ignorance than to combat creeds which have outlived centuries of progress. It should therefore be only a question of time when the increasing light derived from the spread of Christianity, due to the self-sacrificing efforts of devoted missionaries and the accumulating incentives to industrious labor which commerce extends to all, shall have penetrated the dark spots of central Africa and illuminated the still darker intelligences of her savage children.

*E. J. Glave.*