

Notes and News

*Initiation of Fulani boys in Adamawa.*¹

The circumcision rites practised on Fulani boys take place once a year, in the dry season usually soon after the Guinea-corn harvest, if there are boys in the village of the right age (in most districts between 7 and 10). A shelter is erected for the purpose, and the floor covered with sand. The boys are then called in one by one, starting with the youngest. After the operation they remain for four or five days in the shelter, and are then taken at dawn two or three miles away from the village to a chosen spot where there is a large tree. In the shade of this tree they spend the day in charge of trusted guardians, known as *wainabe* (herdsmen), returning only at dusk to sleep in the village. This they do every day until all have completely recovered from the effects of the operation. Food is sent out to them from the village: at dawn *mbusiri kilbu* (gruel mixed with potash), and *nyiri* (the ordinary thick porridge) later.

During the time that they remain in the bush they may be visited by their male relatives, but must have nothing whatever to do with women. At night they sleep together in a separate hut or shelter. During the day they play games, most of which are peculiar to this period. Each boy provides himself with a whip with which to drive away any women or small children that may come near them. They also make themselves masks of cornstalks to warn these to keep their distance. They go down to the stream, and fashion from the clay of the bed an instrument of the ocarina type, on which they play a rhythm, which any one who hears can interpret as follows:

Fe-turu-fe-tu,
 Fie, Mother, for shame!
 What porridge is this?
 Made out of toppings.
 What is the sauce?
 Of Baobab leaves.
 I'm not going to eat it!
*Fe-turu-fe-tu.*²

From this it will be seen, as also from certain verses in 'Gono Yaya', that the boys at this time are given an unusual amount of licence and considera-

¹ The information given here is with the Author's consent reproduced from the interesting report given by Mr. R. M. East in the *Nigerian Teacher*, i. 5.

² The Fulani text of this and the following songs is published in the *Nigerian Teacher*.

tion, and are encouraged to treat the women in a manner befitting those who are about to attain to the first stage of manhood.

There are other tunes and songs played and sung by the boys during this period, but as these are all somewhat crude and their meaning has in some parts been lost, they are not included.

While they are in the bush their life is closely bound up with the tree under which they live. It is called *Mamahi* or *Dadahi*, Grand-mother Tree. Each day a portion of the food sent out to them is smeared on its trunk, and when the period of their convalescence is ended the loin-cloths which have formed their only articles of clothing are hung on its branches. It appears, however, that the offering of food is not made to the tree itself, but to a spirit called *Mbulu*, which comes at night and collects the meal which has been prepared for it. The boys believe that *Mbulu* lifts them up to the sky while they sleep, and is liable to drop them if not previously appeased with an offering. In this case they can only be saved by the *Mama-bade* (a kind of lizard), which has the power of catching them, swallowing, and spitting them out again.

When the last boy's wounds have healed they make ready to return to the village. First they are washed, their heads shaved, and their nails cut. Each boy is provided with a new gown, trousers, cap, and shoes, and if he is a son of wealthy parents, with a horse on which to ride into the village. Otherwise, his father will hire a man to carry him in on his shoulders. The whole village comes out to meet them, and they are escorted in with drumming and singing. Each boy's father slaughters a bull from his herd, or more if he is a man of substance. The relatives all give presents (*sukila*) according to their wealth, for example, strips of woven cloth (*somso*) and in former times slaves. The boys, followed by the crowd, visit each of their fathers' houses in turn, and the festivities continue for three or four days. It is during this period that the women sing the '*Gono Yaya*',¹ of which one version is given here:

O *Gono Yaya!* O *Gono* that never grows older,
Gono Yaya! Ever green as the young cotton plant.
 Who'll sing with me? *Gono* returns like a spoon that is borrowed.
 Sing² steadily on, till Orion comes round to the West.

Though childless I be, have the kin of my kindred no children?
 Although I be barren, may God grant that others bear sons.
Aiye wolowolo! Is the fruit ripe here on the fig-trees?
 Is the fruit ripe here on the banks of the River Balwa?³

¹ In the original, each line of the song ends in '*Gono Yaya*'.

² i.e. Sing '*Gono Yaya*' with those whose sons are amongst the initiates and some day they will help you to sing it when it is the turn of your own sons.

³ The noise of the crowd is like the chattering of the birds, when the figs are ripe on the trees.

My *Jingi*¹ is back and the bush-lands are shining with glory;
Aiye, let us be happy! To-day has my *Jingi* come home.
 Kola-nuts brought from the market are not for my *Jingi*,
 He says that the nuts on the stalls have a *bosi*-cake taint.²

Shoes that are brought from the market are not for my *Jingi*,
 He says that the shoes on the stalls have a *bosi*-cake taint.
 The flesh of the he-goat is not good enough for my *Jingi*.
 The goat, with its little short life, and its little short legs.

Way, there! Make way! Let her enter, the mother who bore him.
 O Mother of Children, your womb has enthroned you a queen!
 O Mother, your womb has become a Male Snake of good omen,³
 Lie down and sleep, while your head is attired, and encircled with beads.⁴

The following verses contain allusions to the particular circumstances in which the present version was sung, and are naturally varied to suit the occasion. Each of the relatives is mentioned, and praised or disparaged according to his or her contribution to the feast:

O Father of Children, would one bull have emptied your steadings?
 O Father of Children, to-day you are shamed unto death.
 O sister of his father, to whom is the share of the dowry.
 O *inna*, his aunt, to-day you are shamed unto death;
 Busied with cooking and serving,
 Busied with: 'Bring me my mat,'
 And 'Yea Lord, I hear and obey.'⁵

The Moral Aspect of Native Education.

AN interesting discussion recently took place in the Committee on Applied Anthropology of the Royal Anthropological Institute, when Major Hanns Vischer, Joint Secretary of the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on

¹ *Jingi* is a nickname given to a boy who has undergone the circumcision rites.

² He must have his kola-nuts bought straight from the merchant, and not from the market where they might smell of *bosi* (a preparation of fish, &c.).

³ If the *ngorori* snake bite you, and you die, you are counted a martyr; if you do not die, you will live to be rich. So also in childbirth; whether you live or die, you are lucky.

⁴ *Bafdi* is the name of the special style of hair-dressing which a mother wears when she has borne a child, for four months in the case of a son, and three months in the case of a daughter. She does not really do this again at the *nastordu*; the words are sung to her by the women in remembrance of the time when her child was born.

⁵ One of the aunts was so engrossed in her domestic affairs that she forgot to prepare a present for her nephew.