



On African Symbolic Messages.

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the population tribes were created with separate languages. Such appeared to be the condition of the populations in the countries around the Mediterranean, and it was to be presumed in other regions.

The following paper was then read by the Assistant-Secretary :—

On AFRICAN SYMBOLIC MESSAGES.

By the Rev. C. A. GOLLMER.

AFRICAN symbolic language consists of messages which the natives in the Yoruba country, West Africa, in the absence of writing, and as a substitute for the same, send to one another in order to indicate and communicate their mind. This is effected by means of a variety of tangible objects, such as shells, feathers, pepper, corn, stone, coal, sticks, powder, shot, razor, &c., by which they convey their ideas, feelings, and wishes, good and bad, and that in an unmistakable, and if possible more forcible manner than can be done by writing, as the object transmitted is seen, the import of it known, and the message verbally delivered by the messenger sent, and repeated by one or more other persons accompanying the messenger for the purpose as the importance of the message is considered to require.

The shells made use of for this purpose are chiefly the cowries, with a few others. No cowries are found on the West Coast of Africa; they are all imported by European merchants. The white cowries come from the Molucca Islands and others in the Pacific Ocean, and the grey-looking ones from the Island of Zanzibar, and other parts of East Africa. Cowries have long been and still are in use in West Africa, as in parts of India, &c., as the current money of the country, and the people make also much use of them in their idolatrous worship. Cowries in the symbolic language are used to convey, by their number and the way in which they are strung, a great variety of ideas, as will be seen by the following, viz. :—

1. *One cowry* may indicate “defiance and failure”; thus: A cowry (having a small hole made at the back part, so as to be able to pass through it, and the front opening) strung on a short bit of grass fibre or cord, and sent to a person known as a rival, or one aiming at injuring the other, the message is: “As one finger cannot take up a cowry (more than one are required), so you one I defy; you will not be able to hurt me, your evil intentions will come to nothing.”

2. *Two cowries* may indicate "relationship and meeting"; thus: Two cowries strung together face to face, and sent to an absent brother or sister, the message is: "We are children of one mother, were nursed by the same breasts; we are one, what you hear from me is the truth: you look at me, and I look at you, but I want to see you yourself, and that face to face; come."

3. *Two cowries* may indicate "separation and enmity"; thus: Two cowries strung back to back, and sent to a person gone away, the message is: "You and I are now separated. Let us keep what we promised; if you do not our friendship is dissolved; you turn away from me, seeking your own; I must turn away from you, and do not want you to come back to me."

4. *Two cowries* and a *feather* may indicate "speedy meeting"; thus: Two cowries strung face to face, with a small feather (of a chicken or other bird) tied between the two cowries, and sent to a friend at a distance, the message is: "I want to see you; do not delay in coming, but as the bird (represented by the feather) flies straight and quickly, so come as quickly as you can, that I may see you face to face."

5. *Two cowries* with a little *soap* and *camwood* may indicate "help and faithfulness"; thus: Two cowries strung face to face, with a small piece of native soap and camwood (a red dye) tied between the two cowries, and sent to a member of the family from home, the message is: "We are alike; you and I have been washed, and made clean with this soap; you and I have had our bodies rubbed over with this camwood (powdered and mixed with oil); having thus alike been helped, and faithfully attended to for good, let us be true, help and do all we can for the good of one another—you absent, and I at home."

6. *Three cowries* strung together, with their faces towards the long end of the string, are made use of by the *Ogbonis* in sending messages to one another.

Ogbonis are members of a secret society, men and women, chiefly of the older and better class of the people, whose professed object is, "the good of the people and the country."

The *number* (three cowries) indicates that the message comes from a society or company, and the manner or way in which the three cowries are strung indicates that they all look to the same thing—*i.e.*, are of one mind. But the message communicated therewith (*i.e.*, delivered by the messenger) can only be heard and understood by those initiated into the secrets of the society. As the native proverb indicates, *viz.*: "*Ogboni meji li o m̀d̄ idi Èta*"—*i.e.*, "Two *Ogbonis* (members of the society) know the meaning and matter of the three."

7. *Three cowries* with some *pepper* may indicate "deceit";

thus: Three cowries strung with their faces all looking one way (as mentioned before), with an alligator pepper tied to the cowries, *Eru* being the name of the pepper in the native language, which in English means "deceit." The message may be either a "caution not to betray one another," or, and more frequently, "an accusation of having deceived and defrauded the company."

8. *Five cowries* may indicate "sickness and pain"; thus: *Arun* in the Yoruba language means "five" (cowries or coins implied); it means also "sickness," from the verb *run*, to be sick, in pain, &c. Five cowries, strung with their faces all looking the same way, and sent to some one, the message is: "We are in the same way, viz., sick or suffering," or "We are alike pained and grieved by what we hear about you."

9. *Six cowries* may indicate "attachment and affection"; thus: *Efa* in the native language means "six" (cowries implied); it also means "drawn," from the verb *fa*, to draw. *Mora* is always implied as connected with *Efa*: this means "stick to you," from the verb *mo*, to stick to, and the noun *ara*, body—*i.e.*, you. Six cowries strung (as before mentioned) and sent to a person or persons, the message is: "I am drawn (*i.e.*, attached) to you, I love you," which may be the message a young man sends to a young woman with a desire to form an engagement.

10. *Seven cowries* may indicate "ending or stopping"; thus: *Eje* in the native language means "seven" (cowries, and here days implied). By custom the worship, &c., of the executive god *Oro* may last seven days, and then it must end. Seven cowries, strung as before stated, sent to any one acquainted with, the message is: "There must be an end to our intercourse and friendship, &c., and all messages, &c., must be stopped now."

11. *Eight cowries* may indicate "likeness and agreement"; thus: *Ejo* in the Yoruba language means "eight," also "alike," "conform," "agree," from the verb *jo*, to be alike, to agree, &c. Eight cowries strung (as before mentioned—*i.e.*, all faces looking one way) and sent to some one, the message is: "We are like you, and agree with you respecting the matter," which is applicable of course to a variety of things, and may be so to one thing in particular, viz., as a message of a young woman in answer to the message received from the young man, as per the six cowries communication.

12. *Nine cowries* may indicate "benefit or revenge"; thus: *Esan* in the native language means "nine" (cowries implied); it means also "to be better," and "to retaliate," from the verb *san*, to benefit, to reward. Nine cowries strung as usual, and sent to a friend or foe, the message to the former will be: "We hope you are in better health;" and to the latter: "We shall pay you with the same coin," *i.e.*, retaliate.

13. *Forty cowries* may indicate “disturbance, trouble, and loss”; thus: *Ogoji* in Yoruba means “forty”—literally twice twenty—from *Ogun*, twenty; and *Eji*, two. But it means also a “fray,” *i.e.*, “double fight,” from *ogun*, war, and *Eji*, two. Forty cowries (having a small hole made at the back—not the middle part of the cowry as usual, but near the pointed part) strung, so to say, upside down, and fastened to grass fibres, the end of which bending down through the weight of the cowry, and thus sent to a friend at a distance, the message is: “We have great excitement here; the place is, as it were, turned upside down, we are in great trouble; all people hang their heads down through rumours and fears of war.”

The following fourfold message (14 to 17) was sent to me about thirty years ago by the King of the *Ijesa* (Ijesha) country, five days' journey from Lagos interiorwards, and in a north-easterly direction.

14. *Ten cowries* may indicate “invitation.” Ten cowries strung on a short and narrow strip of leather, the faces of the cowries all looking one way. *Ewa* in Yoruba means “ten” (cowries implied); *Ewa* means also “you come,” from *e* the prefix being (the contracted form of) the plural of the second personal pronoun—*i.e.*, “you” (in which form or language the higher classes of the people address, or speak to, one another as servants also speak to their masters to show respect, while the masters speak to their servants, &c., in the second person singular form—*i.e.*, “thou,” and not “you,” to indicate inferiority), and from *wa*, the verb, or, better, verbal noun, “come.” The message was in the polite language, “You come,” which was delivered by the messengers thus: “Our king has heard of the *Alapako*, and he wishes you to come and see him, and bring white men with you to live with him.”

The name *Alapako* was given me by the natives; it means “owner of the board or timber house,” from the fact that in 1845 I brought timber and boards for two houses from Sierra Leone to Badagry, where I had them erected. One of them I subsequently took down, removed, and re-erected at Lagos—*i.e.*, the present Church Missionary House at Oko Faji, Lagos, near the Government House.

15. A *fan* may indicate “high station and authority”; thus: The king's messengers carried and handed to me, whilst delivering their messages, a good-sized fan, cut out of a dried cowhide, of a round shape, and about 16 inches in diameter, with a handle attached, and ornamented with a number of figures, imitations of animals, and others worked on it in narrow strips of coloured leather, and the message was: “A great man, the owner of the fan, and sender of the message, inviting a great man to come to him.”

16. A *bean* may indicate "friendship and play"; thus: The king's messengers handed me also two light grey-looking African beans, of the common marble size and form, and the message was: "When the great man Alapako visits the great man the King of Ijeṣa, they will sit down as friends and play together:" somewhat as friends at home sit down and play at chess or draughts, &c., with this difference, that the Africans have a thick piece of board about 2 feet long and 6 to 9 inches broad, with two rows of about half-a-dozen holes or cavities scooped out. The players sit opposite to each other with the board between them, one after the other playing, *i.e.*, moving a number of the beans from one cavity to the other along his side.

17. A *sheep* may indicate "provision"; thus: The king's messengers also brought and delivered to me two sheep. And the message was: "When the great man Alapako goes to visit the great man the King of Ijeṣa, he must take the two sheep and have soup made for him by the way."

The following fivefold painful symbolic message was sent by D., whilst in captivity at Dahomey, to his dear wife M., who happened to be staying with us at Badagry at the time. The symbols were a stone, a coal, a pepper, corn, and a rag. In great distress of mind M. came and showed us the articles, and told us the message received. During the attack of the King of Dahomey, with his great army of Amazons and other soldiers, upon Abeokuta in March, 1852, D., one of the native Christians and defenders of his town, home, and family, was taken captive and carried to Dahomey, where he suffered much for a long time. M., anxious to do all she could to get her husband released, came down to Badagry, and earnestly begged me to help her in her efforts. And whilst waiting for weeks to know the result, she received the symbolic letter which conveyed the following message:—

18. The *stone* indicated "health" (the stone was a small common one from the street); thus the message was: "As the stone is hard, so my body is hardy, strong—*i.e.*, well."

19. The *coal* indicated "gloom" (the coal was a small piece of charcoal); thus the message was: "As the coal is black, so are my prospects dark and gloomy."

20. The *pepper* indicate "heat" (the pepper was of the hot cayenne sort); thus the message was: "As the pepper is hot, so is my mind heated, burning on account of the gloomy prospect—*i.e.*, not knowing what day I may be sold or killed."

21. The *corn* indicated "leanness" (the corn was a few parched grains of maize or Indian corn); thus the message was: "As the corn is dried up by parching, so my body is dried up or become lean through the heat of my affliction and suffering."

22. The *rag* indicated “worn out”; thus (the rag was a small piece of worn and torn native cloth, in which the articles were wrapped) the message was: “As the rag is, so is my cloth cover—*i.e.*, native dress—worn and torn to a rag.”

Natives having frequently more names than one, and at Dahomey D. being only known by his other name, O., the efforts to redeem and release him failed. After much suffering D. was sold and shipped as a slave, but through the kind efforts of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society, and the powerful influence of the British Government, D. was found at Havana, set free, and restored to his country and family.

The following is a twentyfold symbolic representation and communication:—

During my visit to Ketu, a large fortified town near the Dahomian frontier, and about three days' journey west from Abeokuta, in August 1859, it happened one day, when paying the king another friendly private visit, that I observed the king's previously smiling and cheerful countenance changed for the worse, and that, instead of asking me to sit by him at his usual place of reception, he led me through several rooms and courtyards to a small secret out-of-the-way place, where he asked me to sit down, and without greeting me as before with the usual salutations, and making the various customary inquiries; but, looking at me in a somewhat unfriendly manner, and after a pause, he (the king) produced and placed on the ground before me twenty little sticks of different wood, each about 8 inches long, and of the thickness of a finger, and asked me to take one of these twenty sticks.

The change in my reception by the king, which before was most friendly and now quite the contrary, with the strange place of audience, made me feel somewhat uncomfortable, and the placing of the twenty sticks before me not a little embarrassed and troubled my mind, this affair being beyond my eighteen years' African experience. I was puzzled, paused and thought what it could all mean. The more I reflected the more reluctant I felt to do as I was asked, *viz.*, to take one of the twenty sticks.

The king was silent, and so was I; but he watched me all the while, and after another long pause, during which the king's countenance changed a little for the better, he broke the silence by saying, “I see you are perplexed, and do not take one of the sticks. Well, to explain the matter (the king continued)—

23. “These *twenty sticks* represent the twenty of my young wives, who visited you this morning at your lodgings. On their return home I was informed that you eyed one of them very much, and who was supposed to have done some mischief which

you by means of your supernatural power as a priest or god could discern in her, and therefore looked at her so much, but you would not say anything on account of the many people present; so the twenty women have each brought their representative stick for you to prove and make known the guilty and clear the innocent."

I listened anxiously to this statement, and felt not a little uneasy when the king seriously spoke of my having "eyed" one of his wives, fearing "an enemy has done this," and remembering that such charges frequently result in great trouble. And yet after hearing the king out, and looking at him, I involuntarily smiled, which broke the spell of the king's gloomy countenance, and provoked a smile from him in return.

I now frankly and fearlessly stated what took place in the morning, when his twenty wives paid me a visit of honour on behalf of the king their lord, viz. : that nothing was said, either by his wives or by me, beyond the usual ceremonial salutations and inquiries, that as a minister of God it was my duty and practice to read a portion of God's Word to my visitors, and that accordingly I read these words to them (reading the 128th Psalm), and told them these are the words of the true God. I then assured him that it was not true that I "eyed" one woman more than the other, and that neither I nor any other mortal man had such supernatural powers; that God alone knows the heart of man, and the evil thereof. This statement the king accepted as true, gathered the twenty sticks and smilingly said, "My wives will be glad to hear what you stated."

I thanked God for helping me out of my dilemma, for it was clear if I had been wanting in reflection, and hasty in taking up one of the twenty sticks, the poor innocent woman represented thereby would have been seized and punished severely, and I should have been guilty of causing much injury and suffering to an innocent person.

To elucidate one of the above statements, I should mention that I was informed the Mohammedan priests assume, and make their credulous heathen neighbours believe, that they have supernatural power by means of which they can tell what bad deeds are done; and the people, taking for granted that I as a white man, and priest of God, must have this supernatural power in a higher degree than the Mohammedans, thus came to the conclusion as above stated.

24. A *tooth-brush* may indicate "remembrance"; thus: It is a well-known fact that the Africans in general can boast of a finer and whiter set of teeth than most other nations. And those Europeans who lived long among them know from constant observation how much attention they pay to their

teeth, not only every morning, but often during the day. The tooth-brush made use of is simply a short piece of wood (a medicinal root, &c.), and about 6 to 9 inches long, and of the thickness of a finger. One end of the stick, wetted with the saliva, is rubbed to and fro against the teeth, a longer or shorter period as time and work may allow, which end after awhile becomes soft. This sort of tooth-brush forms an article of trade or commerce, is also frequently given to friends as an acceptable present, and now and then it is made use of as a symbolic letter, and in such a case the message is: "As I remember my teeth the first thing in the morning, and often during the day, so I remember and think of you as soon as I get up, and often afterwards."

25. A *kola* (or *gora*) nut may indicate "health and old age"; thus: *Orogbo* is the name for the bitter kola or gora nut, from *koro*, to be bitter; and *gbo*, to ripen, and this kola or gora nut contains tonic properties of the nature of quinine, and is eaten to promote health. When such a nut is sent to a friend, the message may be twofold, viz.: if sent to some one who is or has been ill, it conveys an inquiry after the health and a wish of good health; if sent to one in health it conveys the good wishes to come to maturity—*i.e.*, long life, grow old—which is one of the best wishes in the Yoruba country, because of the great honour old people are held in by the people generally.

Kola nuts (divided in quarters) and water are generally offered to respectable visitors, natives and Europeans, whereby the person visited wishes welcome, peace, and health.

26. *Honey* may indicate "welcome"; thus: On one occasion, when wishing to visit a distant town and people, as a matter of precaution, not to get into any trouble in a new and unknown country on the one hand, and on the other to ascertain whether a visit was practicable, and that I might hope to be well received, I despatched messengers to the local authorities—*i.e.*, the king and principal chiefs—to inform them of my desire, and to be informed of their wishes. My men on their return were accompanied by messengers from the king, who brought not only the usual "message-stick," *i.e.*, object to identify the sender and verify the message (which may be a sceptre, sword, knife, staff, &c., according to the rank of the sender), but also two bottles of honey, which they handed to me with the message (answer): "That the king and chiefs will be glad to see me," or "As the honey was sweet, so will be my visit to them."

27. *Sugar* may indicate "peace and love"; thus: During the long and destructive war between the chiefs and people of the two large towns A. and I., in the interior, there were among the inhabitants of the two towns a number of people—native

Christians—who, instead of hating and fighting one another, were at peace with and loved each other. And in the midst of the strife this good disposition was made known to one another by the following symbol:—A loaf of white sugar was sent by messengers from the native Church at A. to the native Church at I., and the message was: “As the sugar is white, so there is no blackness (*i.e.*, enmity) in our hearts towards you; our hearts are white (*i.e.*, pure and free from it). And as the sugar is sweet, so there is no bitterness among us against you; we are sweet (*i.e.*, at peace with you), and love you.”

28. A *fagot* may indicate “fire and destruction”; thus, one mode of revenge in some parts of Africa is to set fire to an offender’s house. Robbers may also avail themselves of this means to facilitate their nightly depredations and plunder, and sometimes the innocent are punished and made to suffer in this way by evil-disposed people. During the time of sad commotion, war and rumours of war, at Badagry (connected with the slave trade), a most trying time for me and my family, as for weeks—yea, months—we had cause to apprehend an attack would be made upon us, as was intimated one night by the following symbolic object, *viz.*: A *fagot*, *i.e.*, a small bundle of bamboo poles, burnt on one end, was found fastened to the bamboo fence enclosing our compound, or premises, and which conveyed the message: “Your house will be burnt down”—*i.e.*, destroyed.

29. *Powder and shot* may indicate “murder” or “war”; thus: Disputes and quarrels are, alas! by far too common among the Africans, especially among the higher and ruling classes, and frequently jealousy and obstinacy lead to threatening messages being sent intimating that revenge will be taken when this assumes a family, tribal, or national character. Powder and shot are often made use of and sent as a symbolic letter; the message is to either an individual or a people, *viz.*: “As we cannot settle the quarrel, we must fight it out” (*i.e.*, “We shall shoot you, or make war upon you”).

30. A *razor* may indicate “murder”; thus: In Africa, alas! many people die an unnatural death. The Yorubas have only too good a knowledge of the poisons (vegetable, animal, &c.) that abound in their country, and only too often they make use of one sort or other to shorten the life of one another, and this takes place mostly among chiefs, the ruling powers and higher classes of the people. Other means also are employed to take revenge, and put an enemy out of the way (*i.e.*, kill him), and that in as secret a manner as possible. A person suspected and accused of having by some means or other been the cause of death of a member of a family, the representative of that family will demand satisfaction by sending the symbolic object, *viz.*,

a razor or knife, which is laid outside the door of the house of the accused offender and guilty party, and the message is well understood to be: "You have killed or caused the death of N.; you must kill yourself to avenge his death."

31. A certain *sound* or *noise* may indicate "the presence, voice, and speech of a god;" thus: *Oro* is the name of the executive god of the Yorubas. And as *Ifa*, the consultive god, is not represented as other gods, by an image in human form, but by sixteen sacred three- and four-eyed palm-nut stones, so is *Oro* the consultive god represented otherwise than by an image, viz., by certain implements, consisting of sticks and poles from 6 to 12 feet long, with a piece of good strong cord from 4 to 6 feet long, fastened to the thin end of the sticks and poles, and with a thin piece of board from 2 to 4 inches broad and 2 to 4 feet long fastened to the other end of the cord. The larger of these implements are put together and used by men, and the smaller by boys; and the poles and sticks are so moved about as to cause the piece of board to swing in the air, by which, according to size, either a deep sonorous or sharp shrill sound is produced, somewhat like *wu-wu-wu*, longer or shorter according to the slow or quick moving of the implements. These sounds are heard generally after dark and for hours, seldom the whole night; and at times, when a number of these different implements are in use at a given spot, the sound is most melancholy and dismal, intimidating not only native but even European females. These sounds are sometimes heard in the daytime, but only at a distance from a sacred grove or a neighbouring forest, so that the women cannot see the implements nor know how the sound is produced, lest the secret of the men in this matter should be divulged and spoiled. For the men impose upon the female sex, making them believe that these sounds are the voice of *Oro*, the executive god—*i.e.*, "the voice of the departed spirits of their ancestors" (the deep or low sound being the voice of the old, and the shrill that of the young ones), "and that they are come for the purpose of holding a council and to judge matters." The nature and doings of this god are understood to be a secret known to the male sex only; but no doubt a number of women know a good deal about it, though they dare not and do not talk about it, from fear of *Oro* punishing them.

The control of this god *Oro*, or the sayings and doings in his name, is chiefly in the hands of the *Ogbonis*—*i.e.*, the elder members of the secret society mentioned under paragraph 6, for they appoint the time when, and determine for how many days (one, two, or up to seven), *Oro* is to make his appearance in public. And they order the town criers to give public notice

previously of the day fixed, so that the women may have time to provide and store up in the house the needful food, water, firewood, &c., for so many days, so that the objects of *Oro*, or rather the designing men, may not be interfered with, which are: to deprive the women of their privilege of attending the public meetings proposed to be held by the men; to compel all women, old and young, high and low, to remain indoors, and on pain of death not to appear in the streets; and also that the men may be able quietly to hold their meetings, discuss plans, and decide upon important matters, which may be the execution of criminals, planning a war expedition, or offering a human sacrifice, &c., unknown to the women, who might otherwise frustrate their purpose.

32. *Fire* may indicate "punishment"; thus: *Sango* (Shango) is the name of the god of thunder and lightning of the Yorubas. Thunder and lightning in Yoruba are most awfully grand, the peals of thunder being often terrificly loud and powerful, shaking the very ground under one; and the flashes of lightning are not only exceedingly vivid, but great masses of fire, and often destructive, people being killed and houses set on fire by it, and from fear thousands of poor ignorant heathen people worship this terrible and destructive god, that he may not punish them. When there is a storm thousands of the worshippers perambulate the streets, shout mightily with every peal of thunder and flash of lightning. And when a thatch roof of a house or compound is set on fire, many assemble there and sing and dance around the burning place, making no attempt, nor permitting any one to attempt to put the fire out, shouting, "It is holy fire, the fire of Sango." They say: "Sango punishes the owner for some offence, by burning down his house." "Sango is punishing him also by giving all his property to his worshippers." Accordingly they plunder the premises, and rob the poor man and his family of all they possess. And as a further punishment the head of the family has to pay a fine in money, *i.e.*, cowries, to the worshippers before he is allow to rebuild his house.

33. A *leopard* may indicate a "human enemy"; thus: In the early part of my residence at Lagos, just thirty years ago, a leopard swam across from the mainland to the island of Lagos, and the Church Missionary House being at that time the first or last house of the town, *i.e.*, in coming from or going to the sea, we had the first visit from the leopard, the forest monster. Unannounced he leaped over our compound wall, but not finding what he was in search of—*i.e.*, a lamb, sheep, or bullock—he as unceremoniously left, leaped over the wall again, and proceeded into the town, where, in an open place, he met two men, who

kept watch because of human enemies being feared to come and attack the town. The leopard sprang upon one of the men, dug the claws of one of his fore feet into the man's shoulder, and the other on his forehead, the man embracing the body of the leopard tightly; whilst in this position the other man shot and killed the leopard. The following morning the men brought the dead leopard, a fine large animal, to me for inspection, &c., the head of the leopard being covered up that the women might not see it, because it was said and believed the leopard was one of their great human enemies metamorphosed.

34. A *necklace* may indicate "slavery"; thus: Some slaves have to wear a certain necklace—*i.e.*, a string with a few beads fastened round their neck, which indicates that they are in bondage—*i.e.*, slaves. When such a person by any means is redeemed, the best and only proof of being no longer a slave, but a free person, is the taking off of the said necklace.

35. A *book* may indicate a "bookman"—a missionary; thus: Native kings, chiefs, warriors, &c., hand their messengers an object which may be a sort of sceptre, sword, staff, &c., to show that they are sent with authority to deliver a message. European officers, merchants, and others, in imitation of this native custom, generally give the messengers they send to native authorities a fine large silver-headed staff, and for the same purpose, as without it chiefs would hardly credit the message sent. We missionaries, not being provided with such a staff, gave our messengers a book instead, by which they were known to come from the bookman—*i.e.*, the missionary, and the messenger had also liberty and the advantage, after delivering his message, to read a portion from his Yoruba book.

36. A *shirt* may indicate an *Oyibo*—*i.e.*, a "white man," or "belonging to the white man." Shirts are of course worn by all Europeans or white men, also by most natives employed by them. White men are much respected in West Africa, and the natives connected with them come in for a share of the respect. Natives entirely unknown to, and unconnected with whitemen, when travelling up and down in the interior, and unsafe places specially, frequently resort to the stratagem of providing and wearing an English (European) shirt, which they find to be the best possible passport and protection, by means of which they are allowed to pass unmolested, because the shirt indicates the wearer to belong, or to be connected with, or employed by the white man; and robbers, waylaying travellers, regard such a one as an unlawful subject of plunder, and do not trouble him, as they believe he belongs to the white man.

37. Symbolic salutations are constantly received from—

(1) Blacksmiths, who will salute passing chiefs, friends, and

others whom they respect, by striking their anvil with a piece of iron in a peculiar but well-understood manner.

(2) Weavers (who generally sit and weave out of doors) salute the same class of people as mentioned before, by moving their shuttle to and fro, and thus produce a peculiar rattling noise, which is also understood as a complimentary salutation.

(3) The drummer going about the streets will salute authorities and such as they desire to honour, by beating their drums and producing certain well-understood speaking sounds.

(4) The musician will do the same—*i.e.*, blowing his horn or fife, and make them speak instead of the mouth.

I am aware there are other objects by which symbolic messages are conveyed among the Yorubas, but I can add no more to the present communication.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. HYDE CLARKE said this paper had been communicated by Mr. R. N. Cust in the hope that it might induce other missionaries in Africa to supplement the information. Symbolic language was practised in many parts of the world, and notably in Southern and Eastern countries, and depended on a full knowledge by the people of the symbols. In Italy and other countries it worked in combination with the systematic dream-books, which, by the bye, had not received notice, though they were connected with widespread superstitions. A familiar illustration of symbolic language was the Turkish love letter recorded by Lady M. Wortley Montague. The symbolic language of the Yoruba people, called also *A-ku*, was of considerable interest, and the language had been much studied by French scholars from its apparent relationship to languages of the ancient world. It would be observed that the number of cowries used were also applied by their sounds expressing other meanings. This was an illustration of ancient symbolism; ideographs and characters, for framing the names of the numerals, were not exclusively numeral, but were also the names of other objects: such relations of numerals lay at the base of astrology. Another feature of the paper was its indication of separate symbols used by the secret societies, as to which they wanted more information. This fragment offered the suggestion, in combination with other facts, that the secret societies of Africa were of the same origin and same organisation as the mysteries—what we commonly understand as masonic societies. Throughout the world they were commonly found to be framed on a similar model, in the ancient mysteries of Africa, in India, among dervishes, among the Greeks, and among Freemasons and their imitators, though in reality there is not the connection between them which is commonly supposed. If the author be right, women among the Yorubas are admitted to some of the mysteries, as was the case

among the ancient Greeks; but the general rule is their exclusion and a restriction to men. A matter cursorily referred to, and on which more information was required, was the drum language, on which he (Mr. Clarke) had made a communication to the British Association. Another deserving of inquiry was the salute given by craftsmen.

JUNE 24TH, 1884.

Professor W. H. FLOWER, LL.D., F.R.S., *President, in the Chair.*

The Minutes of the last meeting were read and signed.

The following presents were announced, and thanks voted to the respective donors:—

FOR THE LIBRARY.

- From Professor FLOWER.—Catalogue and Handbook of the Archæological Collections, Indian Museum. 2 vols. By John Anderson, M.D.
- From the ASSOCIATION.—Proceedings of the Geologists' Association. Vol. VIII, No. 6, April 1884.
- From the SOCIETY.—Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. February, 1884. No. 2.
- Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Vol. LIII, Part I, No. 1, 1884.
- Proceeding of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Vol. IX, No. 3.
- From the EDITOR.—“Nature.” No. 763.
- Revue Politique et Littéraire. Tom. XXXIII, No. 24.
- Revue Scientifique. Tom. XXXIII, No. 24.
- “Science.” Nos. 69, 70.

The election of A. W. HOWITT Esq., F.G.S., and the Rev. LORIMER FISON, M.A., as corresponding members, was announced.

MR. J. E. GREENHILL exhibited a large and interesting collection of palæolithic flint implements recently found by him in the north-east of London; and gave a verbal description of the collection.

The DIRECTOR read a paper “On Phœnician Intercourse with Polynesia,” by Dr. S. M. CURL, upon which Mr. J. PARK HARRISON made some observations.

The PRESIDENT read the following paper:—