A TRAVELLER'S EXPERIENCE IN LAND OF THE "JUJU"

P. Amaury Talbot Tells of His Journeys Through Land Inhabited by People Untouched by White Man's Influence

Quaint Customs and Weird Fetich Worship Practised by Primitive Ekoi Race in Wilds of Nigeria, Africa

The rapidly changing customs of a primitive race induced Mr. P. Amaury Talbot of the Nigerian political service to record a great deal of the Ekoi folklore and many of their customs during the last five years while he was among them. His work has just been issued by the George H. Doran Company under the title of "In the Shadow of the Bush." It was written in the intervals of official duties during marches that averaged 1,700 miles a year.

By P. AMAURY TALBOT.

THE Ekoi people are divided into two unequal parts by the boundary which separates the Cameroons from Southern Nigeria. Their land is most easily reached by way of the River Kwa, which empties itself into the Cross River, a few miles from the latter's mouth. For some distance before its junction the Kwa is too broad to permit of a good photograph, and it is not till nearing the beach from which runs the main Calabar-Oban road that one can be obtained.

The banks are fringed first with mangrove and screw pine, then further on by palm trees. When that part is reached which the Ekoi proudly term "our own water" the river narrows and becomes more beautiful. At its edge grow giant arums, green on the outer sheath, but cream splashed with purple within. Behind these spring trees of every variety of shape and tint from mimosas with their delicate mauve or cream balls and feathery foliage to the huge trumpet shaped flowers of the Gardenia physophylla, the heavily scented, purple splashed blooms of the Kalbreyeri, or the great Berlinia, the white flowers of which shine with a pearl like lustre from amid its dim, dark leaves.

Here and there at a bend one comes across beaches of clear white sand glistening with mica, where crocodiles lie sunning. On the single occasion when I went down the river after having expended all my ammunition during a long "bush tour," the fate which presides over such matters arranged an interesting tableau. On the branch of a great tree which hung directly over the water lay a creature such as I have never seen before or since. In shape it was like a medium sized crocodile, but with a flat snout like that of a pig and with six to eight black rings round its tail. As if aware of its perfect security it lay quite still until we were almost level and then slid out of sight.

Sometimes a monitor slips from a fallen tree trunk as one draws near or a great snake ruffles the surface as it swims across with a bird, just caught, in its mouth. Huge butterflies of gorgeous coloring flutter hither and thither and now and then a flash of turquoise hangs for a moment over the water as a kingfisher swoops down, to rise again with a tiny fish.

As one passes up the river further and further from Calabar and all it represents one leaves behind not only one's own race, but one's own century as well and glides backward through the ages up the stream of time to the childhood of the world—to a land of mystery and terror, of magic plants, of rivers of good and ill fortune, of trees and rocks, ever lowering to engulf unwary wayfarers; where the terror of witchcraft stalks abroad and where against this dread the most devoted love or faithful service counts as naught.

After awhile the banks grow steeper and one enters a deep gorge which the water has worn for itself in the course of centuries. Down this rolls the thunder of the falls, and seems to shut out all sounds from the world one has left, just as the bush, creeping down around one, curtains off familiar sights. This gorge forms the boundary between the sedimentary deposits below and the crystalline rocks of the hilly country, of which the greater part of the Oban district is formed. The line of demarcation lies along this parallel of latitude to the Calabar River on the one side and the Akwa Yafe on the other.

Beyond Obutong beach navigation is impossible, for the great curve of the first falls reaches from side to side in one white horseshoe. Above this again comes a stretch of foaming water, and then in rapid succession the higher falls, which are very beautiful for their size.

Possibly the cult of snake and crocodile has come down from very ancient times. It is well known that both were honored in Egypt as tutelar gods, and if the Ekoi have trekked, as seems likely, from the east of Africa, it is probable that the original reason for deifying snake and cat, i.e., that these creatures were the principal scourges of the plague carrying rat, lies at the back of the powerful snake cult, while traces of cat worship are still to be found. Rats are a great pest all over the land, and every possible means is taken to keep them down, though with little result.

In Egypt the snake was not only the guardian of house and tomb, but a snake goddess presided over the harvest festival, held in the month of Pharmuthi or April. Doubtless among other attributes she was regarded as the protectress of the garnered grain, and her cult grew from the practice of introducing non-poisonous snakes into granaries in order to protect their contents from predatory rodents. Nimm also is looked upon as the guardian of farms and crops, and her great festival falls at the time of the gathering of the new yams.

The term "Njomm," which can only be translated by "Juju," is so elusive as to defy definition, but as far as may be gathered from the vague conception of the Ekoi, it includes all uncomprehended, mysterious forces of Nature. These vary in importance from elementals, so powerful as to hold almost the position of demi-gods, to the "Nana"—to use a Melanesian term—of herb, stone, or metal. In another sense the word also includes the means by which such forces may be controlled or influenced; secrets wrung from the deepest recesses of Nature by men wise above their fellows, or mercifully imparted to some favored mortal by one or other of the Deities.

Jujus vary in importance in different towns according to local opinion, but everywhere a dominant one is to be found, and whatever other attributes may be claimed for this, that of protection against witchcraft always ranks first. Each of the lesser Jujus presides over its particular department, though in many cases attributes overlap.

The Juju is said to lose its efficacy if certain rites are not observed. Since its arrival palm kernels must be picked from the bunch before being brought into the town. Should this not be done a leopard will come before dawn and exact the penalty of cow or sheep. The same punishment is inflicted should any violent quarrel take place in the town, as also if a fire is lighted outside a compound's walls. It is possible that the strong smelling pitch used to "renew the power" of the Juju may offend the nostrils of the keen scented beasts of prey and cause them to avoid the town.

The "images" of all these Jujus wear robes of dark blue native cloth bordered with a fringe of palm fibre and decked with the silvery shells of a bivalve. From a certain resemblance in shape these are supposed to represent the human ear and symbolize the all hearing power of the spirit like those pottery and enamel representations of the organ found in Egyptian temples. In each case the "image" bears a roughly carved crocodile's head upon its own, thus seeming to link itself with the cult of the great nature goddess "Nimm."

When a man wishes to sacrifice he must first call on Eyo (the sun) to carry his petition before Obassi. Should the ceremony take place in the morning the title Eyo Ofu (sun of the morning) must be used, but if after noon that of Eyo Egu (sun of the evening).

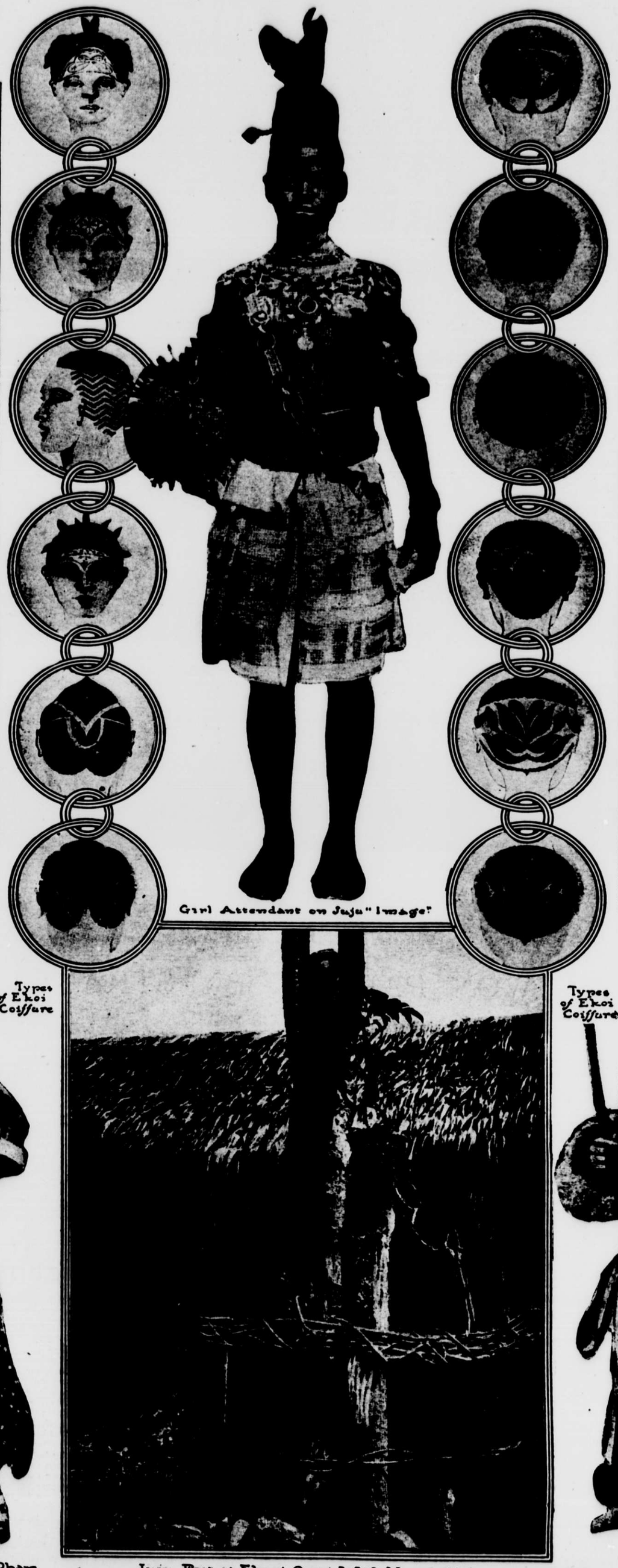
The ceremonies proper to the various Jujus are long, complicated and contain many fragments of old ritual of which the meaning has long since been forgotten. An account of some of these may be not without interest.

At Oban on February 2, 1908, a sacrifice was offered by a woman named Ogai Etab for recovery of health. When the townsfolk had assembled the suppliant advanced holding a calabash of food covered with a white cloth.

The priest received the offering, then took the cloth and held it up before the Juju, saying, "Here is cloth brought by Ogai Etab. By the charm you told her that the sickness had fallen upon her because she had not offered sacrifice for a very long time."

Next, dried meat was taken from the calabash, and offered with the same words, together with an earthen jar containing palm wine. After this the priest called for water and filled his mouth; then laid two Juju leaves on the back of his left hand. He blew the water out upon them and called aloud, "Behold, here is food come from Ogai Etab. Answer whether or not you will eat of it, Obassi-o-o! Obassi-o-o!"

The names of all dead members of the cult were called, for ghosts have great power over the Juju which they served in life. This is particularly the case with the "Founder," i. e., the priest who first started the cult in a new town and is supposed to remain its guardian after death. Before any further step is taken the Diviner (Mboni) assures the people that the ghost of the Founder is present.



Girl Attendant on Juju "Image"

Types of Ekoi Coiffure

Chief Agbashan of Oban (A Were-Elephant).

Juju Post at Ekuri Owai With Mummified Head in Fork.

Types of Ekoi Coiffure

Image of Nkanda Grade of Egbo With Emblem "Ekabe Nkanda"

When the long list of dead was ended the priest struck his right hand against the back of his left, on which the two leaves were lying. These fluttered down; one fell face upward and the other downward. This showed that the sacrifice was accepted.

Several times it has come to my knowledge that Jujus have been used against me in court in the hopes of securing a favorable decision, or of causing temporary dumbness and even sudden death should an adverse judgment be contemplated. Probably something of the kind goes on every time a court is held throughout the country, but knowledge of the fact seldom reaches the Judge's ears.

On one occasion a man named Nsa Obassi brought a complaint against some members of the Egbo Club who had beaten him for being found outside his house during an Egbo performance. In the course of his evidence, he stated: "It was Inyan Ita and Oberi Oye who beat me most cruelly." The latter said, "You cannot bring an action for this, as almost all the town is concerned in the matter. Besides, even should you try to bring trouble upon us on account of it, you cannot succeed, for I have a strong Juju, which I should take into court against you. When I stamp with my foot on the ground the Judge will become dumb, and so will be unable to pronounce judgment for you."

The headdresses representing bird or beast, worn by the "images" of the Egbo and other clubs, seem originally to have been connected with the common belief in metamorphosis. It is quite usual to hear one of the Ekoi say of another, "he (or she) possesses" such and such an animal, meaning that the person alluded to has the power to assume the shape of that particular creature. To primitive people like the Ekoi, such cases seem on the same plane as those recorded from other continents, where the souls of mystics or sick people are supposed temporarily to quit their bodies. It is an article of belief that by means of constant practice and hereditary secrets, a man can leave his human form and take on that of some wild creature. They say that every man has two souls, one which always animates the human shape, and a bush soul, which at times is capable of being sent forth to enter the form of the animal "possessed." When a man wishes to send out his bush soul, he drinks a magic potion, the secret of which has been handed down in his family from time immemorial and some of which is always kept ready for use in an ancient earthen pot set apart for the purpose.

After drinking the potion the bush soul is supposed to leave its human form and float invisibly through the town till it reaches the forest, where it begins to swell, and, safe in the shadows of the trees, takes on the shape of its were-body. The commonest animals "possessed" in this manner are elephant, leopard, buffalo, wild boar and crocodile.

Different potions are naturally necessary for the assumption of each shape.

Early in 1911 a deputation from Netim, one of the largest towns in the district, brought a chief and his son to the Commissioner at Oban. These were accused of having, in crocodile form, killed two women while the latter were crossing the Calabar River. Some men stated that they had watched the women enter the water, and, about midstream, saw them dragged under by crocodiles. The chief and his son, who had long been suspected of such crimes, were at once seized and a meeting was held in the town. The dominant Juju was brought out and the accused were asked to clear themselves by swearing their innocence upon it. This they refused to do, and were therefore brought up before the D. C. who was administering the district at the time. He very naturally said that it was not in his power to do anything in such a case, as more proof was necessary. The people returned to the town and held another meeting at which the accused were asked to swear their innocence on the "broom Juju." This is held in considerable veneration, because it enters into every little corner in cleaning out the compound, so no part of the house is supposed to be safe from it. The son confessed that both he and his father were guilty, that they had killed and eaten seven other men and women, but that in this case, as in all others, it was his father who had taken the lead. He asserted, however, that one of the women was not dead, but that after reviving her by magic arts, they had drawn her up out of the water, and then in their human forms taken her to Uyanga, where she had been sold as a slave. The body of the other had been placed in the fork of a tree just beneath the surface, where it was kept to devour at leisure.

The people swore that they went to the place indicated and found the body exactly as had been said. They then sent to Uyanga and found the other woman. She at once pointed to the chief and his son, and said that it was they who, as crocodiles, had dragged her down to a house which they had beneath the water. There she lost consciousness, and only recovered when they restored her and forced her to follow them into slavery.

Those who have elephant affinities know at once should any beast which happens to be killed be "possessed" by a man's soul. In the latter case they would not eat of it. Were-elephants are said to be seldom seen in the daytime, but there is a curious superstition with regard to were-leopards. At noon of day or night such creatures are supposed to rise on their hind legs and walk upright. Occasionally when the people of a bush farm have left the compound and gone to work one of these uncanny beings will creep up to the deserted dwelling and reconnoitre. If all seems safe he will enter, with the object of carrying off one of the domestic animals. In such a case it is thought that he walks upright, holding his tail with the left hand and hiding his face behind a bunch of green boughs held in the right. Sick folk, left behind while the rest of the family went to work, have repeatedly testified to having watched through door or wall chink while their terrible visitor approached lamb or kid, in the manner described, then suddenly pounced upon its prey and bore it off to devour in the bush.

An old woman of Oban, Awaw Ita by name, was suspected of a still more sinister familiar. Her husband, by whom she is standing in the photograph, had a sore on his ankle. Somehow or other the idea got about that this could not heal because a snake came out of her mouth every night to lick the wound while they slept. Curiously enough, as in similar cases in our own country during the Middle Ages, she herself firmly believed in the truth of the story and owned to it when she thought that such a confession might cost her her life.

By native custom a man who wishes to marry an Ekoi maiden must serve her people for some considerable time, usually from two to three years. His work mostly consists in helping to clear bush for the next season's farms, but other services may be required of him.

During this time he is expected to make presents to the relations of his future wife, the value of which varies according to his means. A very usual list of gifts offered to father and mother or guardians is the following: One demijohn of palm oil, one head of plantains, one piece of dried meat, two bottles of rum, two or more heads of tobacco.

Maidenhood in a bride is not considered of the first importance, though parents usually watch over their daughters with great care, and in some cases girls are not allowed to go out alone.

Even should young girls be allowed considerable freedom before marriage they may be regarded as fairly faithful once the ceremony has been performed. This is partly due to fear of the Jujus invoked by the husband and partly because considerable damages may be claimed from the corespondent and also from the woman should the husband consider the affair serious enough to demand a divorce.

Before their wedding all free born Ekoi girls of well to do parents spend a time in the "fatting house." During this period they may not wash their faces and are not supposed to go out or do any work. If the parents are too poor to keep their daughter in idleness and provide her with sufficient food to fatten her during this period she is looked down upon by her companions before marriage and also by the members of her husband's family when she joins them.

Should an Ekoi mother not approve of the man of her daughter's choice she can sometimes induce her to give him up by the threat of not providing her with a good "fatting house," i. e., not letting her have as much or as rich food during the time of her seclusion as if she had chosen a suitor whom the mother favored.

Unless my memory misleads me, some such custom also obtains among the Bavili of the French Congo, where a girl is secluded for a time in the "paint house" so called because after being carefully fed and tended there in enforced seclusion she is painted red before being led to the dwelling of her future husband.

At a wedding, besides the gifts presented to the bride and her people, offerings must also be sent to the chiefs of the town. A feast is made for the "Nkan," or "age classes," of bride and bridegroom. By this expression these townspeople born within two or three years of one another are meant. The men of about the same age form a sort of club to themselves and the girls and women likewise.

Immediately after marriage, if the husband be wise, he will try to induce his wife to swear with him before the Juju Njomm Ekatt (the foot Juju), which is supposed to keep wives faithful to their husbands.

The method of procedure is as follows: The newly wedded pair take mud from the river bed. This in itself is supposed to possess magic properties. Hen's eggs and a quantity of mfo leaves are collected and the latter placed in a vessel of fresh water. The woman then holds an egg in each hand while the man pours water over them. Next she lays the eggs on the ground and places two leaves beside them. The husband advances his left foot, and while standing in this position crushes up the leaves in the vessel of water. Into this the woman carefully stirs the mud brought for the purpose, and after a while, when it is well mixed, dips in her hand and makes a mark with the liquid on her husband's forehead. He in turn does the same for her.

The object of this ceremony is to prevent women from having lovers after marriage. Should they do so after the rite above described it is thought that Njomm Ekatt will "catch" them and give them a sickness from which they can only recover after confessing to their husbands and inducing these to revoke the Juju.

Another way of insuring fidelity in a wife is to swear with her before Njomm Alyung (the blood Juju).

Each of the contracting parties sucks a little blood from the wrist of the other as in the ancient marriage rite. Certain death is thought to follow any infraction of this oath. The blood of the husband which has entered the woman's body is said to rebel at the first sign of unfaithfulness and course so furiously through her veins as to bring about speedy death.

On marriage the wife becomes a member of her husband's family and goes to live in his compound. A man's first wife is always the head of the house. The younger wives obey her and consider her in everything. Therefore a wife likes her husband to marry plenty of other women. The chief complaint of cruelty brought by the wife of Njabong of Oban before the Native Court was that her husband refused to marry any one but herself.

Should a wife's father die after marriage it is usual for the husband to support his mother-in-law, but this is not obligatory. Each wife is given one side of the central "atrium," and two fireplaces are made for her, one for her own use and one for that of her children.

Up to 1907 Mfamosing had been the scene of a veritable reign of terror under Chief Nenkul. The latter was a giant of a man, with a huge bull neck and the arms of a prizefighter—a good chief according to his lights, but so obsessed by the terror of witchcraft that every single person in the town was forced by him at some time or other to undergo trial by ordeal in order to clear themselves from the suspicion of black magic. Many died from tests imposed, others suffered horribly. He had killed two of his wives in this way and forced his own children to take esere. This is the most ordinary form of ordeal among the Ekoi. The bean itself is to be found in a wild state all over the district. The ordeal is practised by giving it ground up and mixed with water to the accused person, who must then drink the potion.

The superstition is that wizard or witch will die on drinking, but that ill effects will be produced on innocent persons. As a matter of fact should the bean have been boiled before the ordeal is tried it will result only in intense pain, followed by vomiting. This, however, is a jealously guarded secret. Some natives assert that the danger varies in proportion to the quantity administered. Should either an under or over dose be given it will only result in vomiting. The exact amount is known only to initiates.

The ordeal by boiling palm oil is far less dreaded, not only because its results were practically never fatal but because the physical anguish is acknowledged to be less intense than that produced by esere.

The bush, with its soft green twilight,

Continued on Fifteenth Page.