

Justice in a Hausa City

A TRUE STORY.

(From the 'Church Missionary Gleaner'.)

A certain man of K— acquired goods, a black cloak and a white one. He did not know that they were stolen. One day the men from whom they were stolen (they were three) saw their goods on the person of the man who bought them. They said to him, 'Where did you get these goods? They were stolen from us. Where did you get them— you?'

He said to them, 'I bought them.'

'From whom did you buy them?' they said.

'I bought them from some man,' he replied.

They said to him, 'We will give you three days from now to bring to us him from whom you bought the goods.'

He went, he wandered about three days, searching for him from whom he bought the garments. He did not see him. He came back and met those from whom the clothes had been stolen.

He said, 'I have not found him.'

They made reply, 'You are the man. You stole the clothes from us!'

They took him, they dragged him to the Judge, to the palace of King B—, King of K—.

He said, 'let them be taken to the Alkali* for him to give them judgment. The judgment he shall give it shall be done to him.'

The Alkali said, 'Judgment cuts off the hand of him who stole.'

The king said to the Dogari,† 'Go, cut off his hand, but give him thirty days, and it shall be said to him, "Go and seek him from whom you bought the goods."'

He went, he wandered about in the towns, he found him not. He came back to K—. The king said, 'The sentence cuts off his hand. Go, let his hand be cut off.'

He remained in the town mutilated; he continually sat in the market-place. One day he saw the man from whom he bought the things. He seized him with his left hand and brought him to the Sankurimi's** house. The Sankurimi took them both home. They passed the night there, and early in the morning he brought them both to the king, and said, 'See! he who had his hand cut off has found the thief who stole!'

The king said to him, 'Go and call those from whom the theft was made.'

They went and summoned him.

'Do you know the things which were stolen from you?' said the king.

'We do know them,' they said.

The king said, 'Tell me.'

They replied, 'A black garment and a white one, a turban, a box of ointment, a mirror, a hanging chain of steel, and a charm.'

The king of K— said, 'Such things are worn upon the body. Let him be searched. If any of those things is found on him, he made the theft. If one is not found, this man whose hand is cut off, he is the thief.'

The body of him who was last caught was searched, and the charm was discovered, and the box of ointment, and the chain; the

mirror he had sold. They said, 'Yes, he is the thief.'

The king said, 'He who was last caught, let him be taken to the Alkali.'

The Alkali said, 'Judgment cuts off his hand, because he stole; it also cuts off his foot, because he caused the hand of another to be cut off who had not stolen.' His hand and foot were cut off.

The king of K—asked him whose hand had been first cut off, 'How much did you give for the cloak?'

He said, '150,000 cowries.'‡

'And how much for the turban?'

'Two thousand cowries.'

'And how much for the black cloak?'

'Sixty thousand cowries.'

The king said, '210,000 and 2,000 cowries make 212,000 cowries. Let 212,000 cowries be given him.'

He then said, 'Where is the thing that I shall give thee that you may forgive me?'

He replied, '550,000 cowries. They are the price of a hand which has been cut off—the recompense for a hand.'

The king said, 'I will give you the cowries. Only forgive me.'

The man replied, 'You made my hand to be cut off, although I was not guilty. I will not forgive you. My hand with which I wrote, with which I tilled the ground, with which I fed my family; my hand you have made to be cut off, although I was not guilty. I will not forgive you.'

The King of K— wept, and said, 'I will give you a thousand thousand and a hundred thousand cowries—only forgive me!'

He replied, 'By the God of Heaven, O king, I will not forgive you. My hand, the hand which I had, I toiled with it—it was cut off. When men see me, they will say I am a thief, because my hand is cut off. Everybody in the town will think that I am a thief, I, even though I never committed theft.'

The king said, 'Go, and bring your family. Until you end your days on earth I will give you food to eat, your drink, your shelter—only forgive me!'

He said, 'O king, although you give me five million cowries, I shall take them, but I will not forgive you.'

He said, 'Oh, forgive me. Come, dwell here. Look at the house I give you.'

He brought his family, he dwelt with them in the house. The money with which he bought the stolen things (210,000 and 2,000 cowries) was first given him. The King of K— gave him money for food and drink for a year, and a house to dwell in; he brought them, he gave him them with his own hands. He said, 'Will you now forgive me?'

But the man received them in silence: he said not a word.

King B—, as long as he lived, gave him food. He never omitted to give it. Now there is a new King of K—. He gives a little food, but not much. But he decreed that the carrying out of a sentence should henceforth be deferred for one year.

This story was told us by a pilgrim on his way to Mecca. He left K— some six months ago. He himself knows the victim of the unmerited punishment. The unfortunate man still lives, although it is ten years since he lost his hand. It should be pointed out that Hausa men strongly condemn the man for his hard-heartedness in refusing to forgive B—.

I have translated the story almost literally in order to show the quaint way in

‡About 2,000 cowrie-shells are equal to one shilling.

which these people express themselves. In all Hausa towns minor theft is punished by cutting off the right hand.

The Hausa States are in the Western Sudan, bounded on the west by the River Niger, on the north by the Sahara Desert, on the east by Bornu and Lake Chad, and on the south by the River Benue.

These states contain fifteen millions of people who have never had a missionary living in their country. The Hausas are a very fine people, physically and intellectually. Theirs is almost the only African race which possesses a literature of its own; and their enterprise, commercially and as manufacturers and travellers, is remarkable. Since an invasion, a hundred years ago, by the Fulah tribes, the country as a whole has become Mohammedan, but it is uncertain to what extent this faith prevailed in Hausaland before that event. A large number of people, especially in the villages, are still heathen.

The country is now included in the British sphere of influence.

A Dog's Loyalty.

One of my brothers, when a young man, says a writer in the 'Contemporary Review,' owned a handsome Newfoundland, answering to the name of 'Skookum,' the same being Chinook Indian for 'good,' and amply deserved. When my brother married, Skookum was graciously pleased to approve of his choice and extended a courteous but distinctly condescending friendship to the new member of his family, evidently thinking that, perhaps, after all three might be company in spite of the proverb. But he drew the line at four; and, when the first baby came, his courtesy gave way.

He not only absolutely refused to come and look at the little tot and be introduced to the new member of the family, but, if it was brought into the room, would instantly either leave it or march off to the farthest corner and lie down with an air of offended dignity.

And yet the moment the baby was placed in his perambulator and started out through the garden gate for a constitutional down the street, Shookum would promptly range up alongside the carriage and escort it through the entire trip, keeping a most vigilant eye upon any stranger, canine or human, who ventured to approach his charge without a cordial greeting from the nurse-maid. The minute, however, that the gate was safely reached again, he considered his duty done and relapsed at once into his former attitude of jealous contempt. He evidently felt that, no matter how much he might disapprove of the baby personally and even feel free to express this feeling within the privacy of the family circle, yet the youngster was, nevertheless, a member of the family and entitled not merely to defence, but to respectful attention before the eyes of the outside world. As the baby grew older, he soon came to like him for his own sake; and they were the best of friends.

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*The Alkali is the chief judge, and even the king himself cannot reverse his decision.

†The Dogari is a man who acts as chief policeman and executioner.

**The Sankurimi is probably the Prime Minister. A poor man can only gain access to the king through his aid.