

THREE ELEMENTS OF AFRICAN CULTURE

(Continued from last issue)

There is still other light to be turned on the ethical status of the African tribes. Bent, more sympathetic towards the natives of Mashonaland, delivers himself thus: "Not only has Khama established his reputation for honesty, but he is supposed to have inoculated his people with the same virtue. I must say that I looked forward with great interest to seeing a man with a reputation for integrity and enlightenment as Khama in South Africa. Somehow one's spirit of skepticism is on the alert on such occasions and especially when a Negro is the case in point; and I candidly admit that I advanced towards Palapwe fully prepared to find Ba Mangwato a rascal and hypocrite and I left his capital after a week's stay there one of his fervent admirers." But Dent adds: "Doubtless on the traversed roads and large centres where they are brought into contact with traders and would-be civilizers of the race, these people become thieves and vagabonds, but in their primitive state the Makalangas are naturally honest, exceedingly courteous in manner."

It is plain to the impartial critic that judged by our ethical standards the peoples commended above would fall far short; but this is no less true with the earliest civilization of historic times. Standards not only vary from age to age but from people to people. In arguing to support the thesis that in Africa the lowliest tribes had some ethical standard, it is not necessary to prove that these standards compare favorably or unfavorably with those of modern times. Such is beside the question and with the testimony of the English and German archaeologists before us we are safe in saying that the African tribes had an ethical standard and thus the potentials of a civilization based upon morality. Neither can it be proved that the ethical standards of the tribes of Baganda, Mashonaland and Yoruba are without worth because they differ in so many particulars from our own. Later we shall attempt to show just why there is such disparity between their ethics and ours. Furthermore it is not necessary to prove that ethical contacts with Europeans affords no basis for the tribesmen but it is reasonable to suppose that the ethics of the African tribes had possibilities the same as the earliest nations of Europe and Asia; and if the Europeans be argued against the proposition that the Africans evolved an ethical standard, the same argument may be used to bedim the glory of our own civilization.

We, therefore, contend that whatever possibilities lie with the people who can evolve an ethical standard surely must lie with the African. It is true that the happy faculty of coordinating ethics with ideals has

made nations great and civilizations splendid, and that such faculty evidenced itself in the long-dark continent of Africa. The principle of evolution is just as operative in the world of ethics as in the world of physical science. Ethics must grow and outgrown ethics is ethics notwithstanding. The most rabid critic does not deny to Africa ethical origins, but such authorities as Tillinghast and Beauvais would deny their practical worth. These men criticise the standard rather than deny that there are ethical manifestations of culture. Ellwood in his *Sociology and Social Problems* contends that the regulation of sex relations has been the greatest achievement of man. Granting the truth of this statement, we have evidences that the African made desperate efforts to regulate sex relations both by a kind of public opinion and by punishment; for Roscoe says: "It was looked on as a great disgrace to a family if a girl was with child prior to marriage." We are certain that there was "marriage" and this itself is in an indication that an attempt had been made to regulate the all-important matter of sex. Roscoe further held that "the marriage vow was binding." Both those writers who commended the ethics of the Africans and those who belittled their standard, then, are essentially agreed to the fact of their ethics. Although there were wide variations in the standards of different tribes, we are abundantly justified in assuming that the ethics of the Africans was as susceptible to improvement as our own. The more advanced standards were prophetic of still more advanced ones.

II. Art.

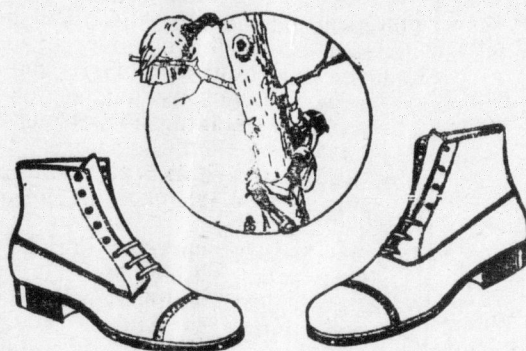
What a man admires is an infallible index to his innermost soul. Whether in the adornment of some temple or the crude markings upon primitive pottery, man is ever trying to express himself in his labors. Strange to say that though the passion for self-expression is dominant in human activities, the art of expression is still in its infancy. We may divide human artifacts into two classes, namely, those of utility and those of aestheticism. That the latter has a form of utility we should in no case deny but as to the utility of aesthetics we deem it beside the point here to discuss. When we use the term "art" in this treatise it will have the specific meaning of the attempt on the part of man to express his emotions; or his attempt to satisfy the aesthetic cravings of his soul. That there are such cravings is a fact which is universally conceded. That there are many evidences of such attempts among all civilized lands none will deny. That man's attempts at artistic expression is a criterion of his civilization is an historic fact. There can be no civilization without its concomitants of aesthetics. Man seeks beauty for beauty's sake, and he alone of the animals gives evidence of such propensity to a pronounced degree. In song, upon canvas, and in marble, humanity has poured forth its innermost soul of sentiments inexpressibly sublime. There is no passion, no object that has not at some time injured the soul and moved some mortal to the abode of the gods.

(To be Continued)

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