

GEOGRAPHICAL.

THE GAMBIA, WESTERN AFRICA.

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BUT to speak more particularly of the Mandingoes. Those bordering upon the Gambia and to the eastward, are of a slender and handsome form; many of them are tall, and dignified in their appearance. They have not the thick lip and flat nose of the negro family, though their colour is dark. There is, however, a variety amongst them, proceeding from intermarriage and conquest; for the mixed descendants of themselves and their slaves are doubtlessly called Mandingoes, because they belong to this people and speak their language. The Mandingoes are active and warlike, and are the most enterprising traders of the country next to the Moors. They are, however, full of duplicity and over-reaching; qualities not peculiar to a black skin, and which they have perhaps learned from those who ought to have known better. They are full of extortion and tyranny towards their vassals and dependants. There are many different Mandingo kingdoms scattered through Africa, some of them differing in dialect and nomenclature, though evidently of the same family. The language of the Gambia is mellow and harmonious, approaching to the pronunciation of the Italian, and is the *Lingua Franca* of these parts. Its structure is simple, and of eastern origin. In some of its forms it resembles the Hebrew and Syriac; its most peculiar sound is of the Malay family; its manner of interrogation resembles the Chinese; and its composition of verbs the Persian. The Mandingo is neither a copious nor precise language; yet it follows certain general rules of grammatical construction. It has borrowed a few religious terms from the Arabic, and the European names of some articles of commerce; but in other respects it appears to be unadulterated.

The Gospels have been translated into this language; and that according to St. Matthew is now printed. A grammar and elementary books are also published. In religion, some of the Mandingoes are Mahometans, others are Pagans. The former generally know little of the precepts of the Koran, but mix up a few Mahometan tenets with their "country fashions," or native superstitions. The priests are a knavish class of men, who gain much from the credulous people by writing *greegrees* or amulets. These consist of some words of the Koran written on a scrap of paper, and sewed up in strong leathern coverings, like large pincushions, which are fastened with thongs round the neck, arm, leg, &c. These are supposed to be a charm against all dangers, though they seem to be only half trusted. *Greegrees* are also occasionally made of other articles, as of the head and feet of birds, &c. Europeans are supposed to possess some superior *greegrees*, to which their greater knowledge and wealth are attributed. The inhabitants of the Gambia do not seem to be so much given to sorcery and witchcraft as their southern neighbours; which may be accounted for from the influence of Mahometanism. There are only a few relics of devil-worship in the Gambia; though these abound toward the parts of Sierra-Leone. The greater portion of the inhabitants are domestic slaves. These are seldom sold, unless for the commission of some crime, or for circumstances of exigency; but as they generally form the foot-soldiers in warfare, they are very liable to change masters; in which case they are sold by right as prisoners of war. A slave is always a slave; and though his condition often differs little from that of a labouring peasant in some countries, or a vassal of the feudal Barons, he never rises above his state: for should he regain his liberty, he is always liable to be seized by any person as a slave, according to the tenets of the Mahometan Moors and negroes, they can lawfully spoil or kill any heathen tribes. And on the other hand, the pagan chiefs of note call themselves Soninkees, the

meaning attached to which is "drunken bandits," men "who fear not God neither regard man," with whom the country is infested. So that there is seldom a long continuance of peace in any place; for war and plunder are the order of the day. In the Gambia, one of the most noted of these desperadoes is King Kemington, who ascended the throne of a small kingdom, by a double fratricide. This Chief has lately obtained great notoriety by plundering a British merchant vessel, and afterwards repulsing a small force of British native troops sent to seize his capital. This expedition was ridiculous in the highest degree, and has greatly sunk the terror of the British name. It appears that a handful of native troops were led by a gallant Captain through a forest where neither food nor water was to be obtained. On the third day they came in sight of Kemington's town, on which they fired with a few pieces of brass cannon and rockets. After expending a quantity of powder and lead on the mud walls of the town, they sounded a retreat, as the men were fainting from hunger and thirst, and the place was stronger than they anticipated. Some native allies who had promised to enter the breach, wished the British to set the example; and so kept hovering round, doing nothing, but afterwards covering the retreat. The artillery was left behind, which Kemington has mounted on his fort, and dares the world to attack him in his nest.

Another of these freebooters is Habudaremeina, a Foola Chieftain, who subsists on plunder, and is the Robin Hood of the adjoining country. There are some other noted warriors, who easily find excuses for pillage and bloodshed. Some of the negro tribes are very hospitable to strangers. By the custom of the country, a stranger is at liberty to partake of any food that he sees being eaten, even if not invited to the repast. When they go to trade in any place they subsist at the expense of the principal persons in the town. The Mandingoes build in a very irregular manner, the streets being so many narrow passages like the mazes of a labyrinth. The houses are built of strong mud walls, usually of a circular form. The best contain two separate walls of this kind, one enclosing the sleeping apartment, which is almost dark; and the other, built round the former, includes a narrow ring of space, which forms a piazza or sitting apartment. Windows are deemed an unnecessary appendage, light being admitted and smoke emitted by the doors. The cooking, however, is generally performed outside, or in a shed erected for the purpose. The roof is a rough thatch of long grass, which hangs over the walls so as to throw off the heavy rains.

The Mahometans restrict themselves to four wives, but the Soninkees take as many as they please; and these have their separate huts in the premises of the husband. Their favourite dish is *koos-koos*, being a preparation of flour and the juice of meat, which is so manufactured as to become like small round seeds, and is thus served for use. They also eat rice, which grows very luxuriantly in the marshy banks of the rivers. The usual grain is a Guinea corn, growing very high, with stalks resembling cane, and large bunches of heads and ears. It is reduced to flour by being pounded in wooden mortars by the women.

In treating of the Foolas, we will endeavour to avoid those usual mistakes concerning them, which have arisen from their being spoken of as one people.

There are properly three tribes of the Foolas. These use the same language, (though we conjecture in different dialects,) but are essentially distinct in feature and habits. They are called by the natives Teucolars, Foolas, and Loubies. The Teucolars resemble the Mandingoes in form, character, and prowess. They have established themselves in several powerful kingdoms, the chief of which are, Footar-Toro, on the south of the Senegal; Foota-Jallou, adjacent to Sierra-Leone; Foola-Doo, (or