

# DAYRELL ELPHINSTONE

FOLK STORIES FROM  
SOUTHERN NIGERIA,  
WEST AFRICA

Elphinstone Dayrell

**Folk Stories from Southern  
Nigeria, West Africa**

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# Elphinstone Dayrell

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### INTRODUCTION

Many years ago a book on the Folk-Tales of the Eskimo was published, and the editor of *The Academy* (Dr. Appleton) told one of his minions to send it to me for revision. By mischance it was sent to an eminent expert in Political Economy, who, never suspecting any error, took the book for the text of an interesting essay on the economics of "the blameless Hyperboreans."

Mr. Dayrell's "Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria" appeal to the anthropologist within me, no less than to the lover of what children and older people call "Fairy Tales." The stories are full of mentions of strange institutions, as well as of rare adventures. I may be permitted to offer some running notes and comments on this mass of African curiosities from the crowded lumber-room of the native mind.

I. *The Tortoise with a Pretty Daughter.*— The story, like the tales of the dark native tribes of Australia, rises from that state of fancy by which man draws (at least for purposes of fiction) no line between himself and the lower animals. Why should not the fair heroine, Adet, daughter of the tortoise, be the daughter of human parents? The tale would be none the less interesting, and a good deal more credible to the mature intelligence. But the ancient fashion of animal parentage is presented. It may have originated, like the stories of the Australians, at a time when men were totemists, when every person had a bestial or vegetable "family-name," and when, to account for these hereditary names, stories of descent from a supernatural, bestial, primeval race were invented. In the fables of the world, speaking animals, human in all but outward aspect, are the characters. The fashion is universal among savages; it descends to the Buddha's *jataka*, or parables, to Æsop and La Fontaine. There could be no such fashion if fables had originated among civilised human beings.

The polity of the people who tell this story seems to be despotic. The king makes a law that any girl prettier than the prince's fifty wives shall be put to death, with her parents. Who is to be the Paris, and give the fatal apple to the most fair? Obviously the prince is the Paris. He falls in love with Miss Tortoise, guided to her as he is by the bird who is "entranced with her beauty." In this tribe, as in Homer's time, the lover offers a bride-price to the father of the girl. In Homer cattle are the current medium; in Nigeria pieces of cloth and brass rods are (or were) the currency. Observe the queen's interest in an affair of true love. Though she knows that her son's life is endangered by his honourable passion, she adds to the bride-price out of her privy purse. It is "a long courting"; four years pass, while pretty Adet is "ower young to marry yet." The king is very angry when the news of this breach of the royal marriage Act first comes to his ears. He summons the whole of his subjects, his throne, a stone, is set out in the market-place, and Adet is brought before him. He sees and is conquered.

"It is no wonder," said the king,  
"This tortoise-girl might be a queen."

Though a despot, his Majesty, before cancelling his law, has to consult the eight Egbos, or heads of secret societies, whose magical powers give the sacred sanction to legislation. The Egbo (see p. 4, note) is a mumbo-jumbo man. He answers to the bogey who presides over the rites of initiation in the Australian tribes.

When the Egbo is about, women must hide and keep out of the way. The king proclaims the cancelling of the law. The Egbos might resist, for they have all the knives and poisons of the secret societies behind them. But the king, a master of the human heart, acts like Sir Robert Walpole. He

buys the Egbo votes "with palm-wine and money," and gives a feast to the women at the marriage dances. But why does the king give half his kingdom to the tortoise? When an adventurer in fairy tales wins the hand of the king's heiress, he usually gets half the kingdom. The tortoise is said to have been "the wisest of all men and animals." Why? He merely did not kill his daughter. But there is no temptation to kill daughters in a country where they are valuable assets, and command high bride-prices. In the Australian tribes, the bride-price is simply another girl. A man swops his sister to another man for the other man's sister, or for any girl of whose hand the other man has the disposal.

II. The second story is a very ingenious commercial parable, "Never lend money, you only make a dangerous enemy." The story also explains why bush cats eat poultry.

III. *The Woman with Two Skins* is a peculiar version of the story of the courteous Sir Gawain with his bride, hideous by day, and a pearl of loveliness by night. The Ju Ju man answers to the witch in our fairy tales and to the mother-in-law of the prince, who, by a magical potion, makes him forget his own true love. She, however, is always victorious, and the prince and ousts the false bride, like Lord Bateman in the ballad, when Sophia came home. In this case of Lord Bateman, the scholiast (Thackeray, probably) suggests that his Lordship secured the consent of the Church as the king in the tortoise story won that of the Egbos. Our tale then wanders into the fairy tale of the king who is deceived into drowning his children, in European folk-lore, because he is informed that they are puppies. The Water Ju Ju, however, saves these black princes, and brings forward the rightful heir very dramatically at a wrestling match, where the lad overthrows more than he thought, like Orlando in *As You Like It*, and conquers the heart of the jealous queen as well as his athletic opponents.

"Prepares another marriage,  
Their hearts so full of love and glee,"

In the conclusion the jealous woman is handed over to the ecclesiastical arm of the Egbos; she is flogged, and, as in the case of Jeanne d'Arc, is burned alive, "and her ashes were thrown into the river." Human nature is much the same everywhere.

IV. *The King's Magic Drum*.— The drum is the mystic cauldron of ancient Welsh romance, which "always provides plenty of good food and drink." But the drum has its drawback, the food "goes bad" if its owner steps over a stick in the road or a fallen tree, a tabu like the *geisas* of ancient Irish legends. The tortoise, in this tale, has the *geisas* power; he can make the king give him anything he chooses to ask. This very queer constraint occurs constantly in the Cuchullain cycle of Irish romances, and in *The Black Thief*. (You can buy it for a penny in Dublin, or read it in Thackeray's *Little Tour in Ireland*.) The King is constrained to part with the drum, but does not tell the tortoise about the tabu and the drawback. The tortoise, though disappointed, at least pays his score off in public, and then the tale wanders into the *Hop o' my Thumb* formula, and the trail of ashes. Finally the story, like most stories, explains the origin of an animal peculiarity, why tortoises live under prickly tie-tie palms. That explanation was clearly in the author's mind from the first, but to reach his point he adopted the formula of the mystic object, drum or cauldron, which provides endless supplies, and has a counteracting charm attached to it, a tabu.

V. *Ituen and the King's Wife*.— Some of these tales have this peculiarity, that the characters possess names, as Ituen, Offiong, and Attem. They are thus what people call *sagas*, not mere *Märchen*. All the pseudo-historic legends of the Greek states, of Thebes, Athens, Mycenæ, Pylos, and so on, are folk-tales converted into saga, and adapted and accepted as historical. Some of these Nigerian fairy-tales are in the same cast. The story of Athamas of Iolcos and the sacrifice of any of his descendants who went into the town hall, exactly corresponds to the fate of the family of Ituen (p. 32).<sup>1</sup> The whole Athamas story, in Greece, is a tissue of popular tales found in every part of the world. This Ituen

<sup>1</sup> See the Platonic dialogue, *Minos*, 315-6, and Athamas in Roscher's *Lexikon*.

story, as usual, explains the habits of animals, vultures, and dogs, and illustrates the awful cruelties of Egbo law.

VI. *The Pretty Stranger* is a native variant of *Judith and Holofernes*.

VII. A "Just So Story," a myth to explain the ways of animals. The cauldron of Medea, which destroyed the wrong old person, and did not rejuvenate him, is introduced. "All the stories have been told," all the world over.

VIII. *The Disobedient Daughter who Married a Skull*.— This is most original; though all our ballads and tales about the pretty girl who is carried to the land of the dead by her lover's ghost (Bürger's *Lenore*) have the same fundamental idea. Then comes in the common moral, the Reward of Courtesy, as in Perrault's *Les Fées*. But the machinery of the Nigerian romance leads up to the Return of Proserpine from the Dead in a truly fanciful way.

IX. *The King who Married the Cock's Daughter* is Æsop's man who married the woman that had been a cat. As Adia unen pecks at the corn, the other lady caught and ate a mouse.

X. *The Woman, the Ape, and the Child*.— This tale illustrates Egbo jurisdiction very powerfully, and is told to account for Nigerian marriage law.

XI. *The Fish and the Leopard's Wife*.— Another "Just So Story."

XII. *The Bat*.— Another explanation of the nocturnal habits of the bat. The tortoise appears as the wisest of things, like the hare in North America, Brer Rabbit, the Bushman Mantis insect, and so on.

XIII., XIV., XV. All of these are explanatory "Just So Stories."

XVI. *Why the Sun and Moon live in the Sky*.— Sun and Moon, in savage myth, lived on earth at first, but the Nigerian explanation of their retreat to the sky is, as far as I know, without parallel elsewhere.

XVII., XVIII. "Just So Stories."

XIX. Quite an original myth of Thunder and Lightning: much below the divine dignity of such myths elsewhere. Thunder is not the Voice of Zeus or of Baiame the Father (Australian), but of an old sheep! The gods have not made the Nigerians poetical.

XX. Another "Just So Story."

XXI. *The Cock who caused a Fight* illustrates private war and justice among the natives, and shows the Egbos refusing to admit the principle of a fine in atonement for an offence.

XXII. *The Affair of the Hippopotamus and of the Tortoise*.— A very curious variant of the *Whupptie Stoorie*, or Tom-Tit-Tot story, depending on the power conferred by learning the secret name of an opponent. These secret names are conferred at Australian ceremonies. Any amount of the learning about secret names is easily accessible.

XXIII. *Why Dead People are Buried*.— Here we meet the Creator so common in the religious beliefs of Africans as of most barbarous and savage peoples. "The Creator was a big chief." The Euahlayi Baiame is rendered "Big Man" by Mrs. Langloh Parker (see *The Euahlayi Tribe*). The myth is one of world-wide diffusion, explaining The Origin of Death, usually by the fable of a message, forgotten and misrendered, from the Creator.

XXIV. *The Fat Woman who Melted Away*.— The revival of this beautiful creature, from all that was left of her, the toe, is an incident very common in folk-tales, i.e. the Scottish *Rashin Coatie*. (The word "dowry" is used throughout where "bride-price" would better express the institution. The Homeric *ἔννα* is meant.)

XXV. *The Leopard, the Squirrel, and the Tortoise*.— A "Just So Story."

XXVI. *Why the Moon Waxes and Wanes*.— A lunar myth; not a poetical though a kindly explanation of the habits of the moon.

XXVII. *The Story of the Leopard, the Tortoise, and the Bush Rat*.— A "Just So Story."

XXVIII. *The King and the JuJu Tree*.— This is a fine example of Ju Ju beliefs, and of an extraordinary sacrifice to a Ju Ju power located in a tree. Goats, chickens, and white men are common

offerings, but "seven baskets of flies" might propitiate Beelzebub. The "spirit-man" who can succeed when sacrifice fails, chooses the king's daughter as his reward, as is usual in *Märchen*. Compare Melampus and Pero in Greece. The skull in spirit-land here plays a friendly part, in advising the princess, like Proserpine, not to eat among the dead. This caution is found everywhere – in the Greek version of Orpheus and Eurydice, in the *Kalewala*, and in Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale," in *Redgauntlet*. Like Orpheus, the girl is not to look back while leaving spirit-land. Her successful escape, by obeying the injunctions of the skull, is unusual.

XXIX. *How the Tortoise overcame the Elephant and the Hippopotamus.*— A "Just So Story," with the tortoise as cunning as Brer Rabbit.

XXX. *Of the Pretty Girl and the Seven Jealous Women.*— Here the good little bird plays the part of the popinjay who "up and spake" with good effect in the first ballads. The useful Ju Ju man divines by casting lots, a common method among the Zulus. The revenge of the pretty girl's father is certainly adequate.

XXXI. *How the Cannibals drove the People from Insofan Mountain to the Cross River (Ikom).*— This professes to be historical, and concerns human sacrifices, "to cool the new yams," and cannibalism.

XXXII. is unimportant.

In XXXIII. we find the ordeal poison, which destroys fifty witches.

XXXIV. *The Slave Girl who tried to Kill her Mistress* is a form of our common tale of the waiting-maid who usurps the place of her mistress, the Bride. The resurrection of the Bride from the water, at the cry of her little sister, occurs in a remote quarter, among the Samoyeds in Castren's *Samoyedische Märchen*, but there the opening is in the style of *Asterinos and Pulja (Phrixus and Helle)* in Van Hahn's *Griechische Märchen*. The False Bride story is, in an ancient French *chanson de geste*, part of the legend of the mother of Charlemagne. The story also occurs in Callaway's collection of Zulu fairy tales. In the Nigerian version the manners, customs, and cruelties are all thoroughly West African.

XXXV. *The King and the 'Nsiat Bird* accounts, as usual, for the habits of the bird; and also illustrates the widespread custom of killing twins.

XXXVI. reflects the well-known practices of poison and the ordeal by poison.

XXXVII. is another "Just So Story."

XXXVIII. *The Drummer and the Alligators.*— In this grim tale of one of the abominable secret societies the human alligators appear to be regarded as being capable of taking bestial form, like werewolves or the leopards of another African secret society.

XXXIX. and XL. are both picturesque "Just So Stories," so common in the folk-lore of all countries.

The most striking point in the tales is the combination of good humour and good feeling with horrible cruelties, and the reign of terror of the Egbos and lesser societies. European influences can scarcely do much harm, apart from whisky, in Nigeria. As to religion, we do not learn that the Creator receives any sacrifice: in savage and barbaric countries He usually gets none. Only Ju Jus, whether ghosts or fiends in general, are propitiated. The Other is "too high and too far."

I have briefly indicated the stories which have variants in ancient myth and European *Märchen* or fairy tales.

ANDREW LANG.

## I

### *The Tortoise with a Pretty Daughter*

There was once a king who was very powerful. He had great influence over the wild beasts and animals. Now the tortoise was looked upon as the wisest of all beasts and men. This king had a son named Ekpenyon, to whom he gave fifty young girls as wives, but the prince did not like any of them. The king was very angry at this, and made a law that if any man had a daughter who was finer than the prince's wives, and who found favour in his son's eyes, the girl herself and her father and mother should be killed.

Now about this time the tortoise and his wife had a daughter who was very beautiful. The mother thought it was not safe to keep such a fine child, as the prince might fall in love with her, so she told her husband that her daughter ought to be killed and thrown away into the bush. The tortoise, however, was unwilling, and hid her until she was three years old. One day, when both the tortoise and his wife were away on their farm, the king's son happened to be hunting near their house, and saw a bird perched on the top of the fence round the house. The bird was watching the little girl, and was so entranced with her beauty that he did not notice the prince coming. The prince shot the bird with his bow and arrow, and it dropped inside the fence, so the prince sent his servant to gather it. While the servant was looking for the bird he came across the little girl, and was so struck with her form, that he immediately returned to his master and told him what he had seen. The prince then broke down the fence and found the child, and fell in love with her at once. He stayed and talked with her for a long time, until at last she agreed to become his wife. He then went home, but concealed from his father the fact that he had fallen in love with the beautiful daughter of the tortoise.

But the next morning he sent for the treasurer, and got sixty pieces of cloth<sup>2</sup> and three hundred rods,<sup>3</sup> and sent them to the tortoise. Then in the early afternoon he went down to the tortoise's house, and told him that he wished to marry his daughter. The tortoise saw at once that what he had dreaded had come to pass, and that his life was in danger, so he told the prince that if the king knew, he would kill not only himself (the tortoise), but also his wife and daughter. The prince replied that he would be killed himself before he allowed the tortoise and his wife and daughter to be killed. Eventually, after much argument, the tortoise consented, and agreed to hand his daughter to the prince as his wife when she arrived at the proper age. Then the prince went home and told his mother what he had done. She was in great distress at the thought that she would lose her son, of whom she was very proud, as she knew that when the king heard of his son's disobedience he would kill him. However, the queen, although she knew how angry her husband would be, wanted her son to marry the girl he had fallen in love with, so she went to the tortoise and gave him some money, clothes, yams, and palm-oil as further dowry on her son's behalf in order that the tortoise should not give his daughter to another man. For the next five years the prince was constantly with the tortoise's daughter, whose name was Adet, and when she was about to be put in the fattening house,<sup>4</sup> the prince told his father that he was going to take Adet as his wife. On hearing this the king was very angry, and sent word all round his kingdom that all people should come on a certain day to the market-place to hear the palaver. When the appointed day arrived the market-place was quite full of people, and the stones belonging to the king and queen were placed in the middle of the market-place.

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<sup>2</sup> A piece of cloth is generally about 8 yards long by 1 yard broad, and is valued at 5s.

<sup>3</sup> A rod is made of brass, and is worth 3d. It is in the shape of a narrow croquet hoop, about 16 inches long and 6 inches across. A rod is native currency on the Cross River.

<sup>4</sup> The fattening house is a room where a girl is kept for some weeks previous to her marriage. She is given plenty of food, and made as fat as possible, as fatness is looked upon as a great beauty by the Efik people.

When the king and queen arrived all the people stood up and greeted them, and they then sat down on their stones. The king then told his attendants to bring the girl Adet before him. When she arrived the king was quite astonished at her beauty. He then told the people that he had sent for them to tell them that he was angry with his son for disobeying him and taking Adet as his wife without his knowledge, but that now he had seen her himself he had to acknowledge that she was very beautiful, and that his son had made a good choice. He would therefore forgive his son.

When the people saw the girl they agreed that she was very fine and quite worthy of being the prince's wife, and begged the king to cancel the law he had made altogether, and the king agreed; and as the law had been made under the "Egbo" law, he sent for eight Egbos,<sup>5</sup> and told them that the order was cancelled throughout his kingdom, and that for the future no one would be killed who had a daughter more beautiful than the prince's wives, and gave the Egbos palm wine and money to remove the law, and sent them away. Then he declared that the tortoise's daughter, Adet, should marry his son, and he made them marry the same day. A great feast was then given which lasted for fifty days, and the king killed five cows and gave all the people plenty of foo-foo<sup>6</sup> and palm-oil chop, and placed a large number of pots of palm wine in the streets for the people to drink as they liked. The women brought a big play to the king's compound, and there was singing and dancing kept up day and night during the whole time. The prince and his companions also played in the market square. When the feast was over the king gave half of his kingdom to the tortoise to rule over, and three hundred slaves to work on his farm. The prince also gave his father-in-law two hundred women and one hundred girls to work for him, so the tortoise became one of the richest men in the kingdom. The prince and his wife lived together for a good many years until the king died, when the prince ruled in his place. And all this shows that the tortoise is the wisest of all men and animals.

Moral. – Always have pretty daughters, as no matter how poor they may be, there is always the chance that the king's son may fall in love with them, and they may thus become members of the royal house and obtain much wealth.

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<sup>5</sup> The Egbo Society has many branches, extending from Calabar up the Cross River as far as the German Cameroons. Formerly this society used to levy blackmail to a certain extent and collect debts for people. The head Ju Ju, or fetish man, of each society is disguised, and frequently wears a hideous mask. There is a bell tied round his waist, hanging behind and concealed by feathers; this bell makes a noise as he runs. When the Egbo is out no women are allowed outside their houses, and even at the present time the women pretend to be very frightened. The Egbo very often carries a whip in his hand, and hits out blindly at any one he comes across. He runs round the town, followed by young men of his society beating drums and firing off guns. There is generally much drinking going on when the Egbo is playing. There is an Egbo House in most towns, the end part of which is screened off for the Egbo to change in. Inside the house are hung human skulls and the skulls of buffalo, or bush cow, as they are called; also heads of the various antelopes, crocodiles, apes, and other animals which have been killed by the members. The skulls of cows and goats killed by the society are also hung up. A fire is always kept in the Egbo House; and in the morning and late afternoon, the members of the society frequently meet there to drink gin and palm wine.

<sup>6</sup> Foo-foo=yams boiled and mashed up.

## II

### *How a Hunter obtained Money from his Friends the Leopard, Goat, Bush Cat, and Cock, and how he got out of repaying them*

Many years ago there was a Calabar hunter called Effiong, who lived in the bush, killed plenty of animals, and made much money. Every one in the country knew him, and one of his best friends was a man called Okun, who lived near him. But Effiong was very extravagant, and spent much money in eating and drinking with every one, until at last he became quite poor, so he had to go out hunting again; but now his good luck seemed to have deserted him, for although he worked hard, and hunted day and night, he could not succeed in killing anything. One day, as he was very hungry, he went to his friend Okun and borrowed two hundred rods from him, and told him to come to his house on a certain day to get his money, and he told him to bring his gun, loaded, with him.

Now, some time before this Effiong had made friends with a leopard and a bush cat, whom he had met in the forest whilst on one of his hunting expeditions; and he had also made friends with a goat and a cock at a farm where he had stayed for the night. But though Effiong had borrowed the money from Okun, he could not think how he was to repay it on the day he had promised. At last, however, he thought of a plan, and on the next day he went to his friend the leopard, and asked him to lend him two hundred rods, promising to return the amount to him on the same day as he had promised to pay Okun; and he also told the leopard, that if he were absent when he came for his money, he could kill anything he saw in the house and eat it. The leopard was then to wait until the hunter arrived, when he would pay him the money; and to this the leopard agreed. The hunter then went to his friend the goat, and borrowed two hundred rods from him in the same way. Effiong also went to his friends the bush cat and the cock, and borrowed two hundred rods from each of them on the same conditions, and told each one of them that if he were absent when they arrived, they could kill and eat anything they found about the place.

When the appointed day arrived the hunter spread some corn on the ground, and then went away and left the house deserted. Very early in the morning, soon after he had begun to crow, the cock remembered what the hunter had told him, and walked over to the hunter's house, but found no one there. On looking round, however, he saw some corn on the ground, and, being hungry, he commenced to eat. About this time the bush cat also arrived, and not finding the hunter at home, he, too, looked about, and very soon he espied the cock, who was busy picking up the grains of corn. So the bush cat went up very softly behind and pounced on the cock and killed him at once, and began to eat him. By this time the goat had come for his money; but not finding his friend, he walked about until he came upon the bush cat, who was so intent upon his meal off the cock, that he did not notice the goat approaching; and the goat, being in rather a bad temper at not getting his money, at once charged at the bush cat and knocked him over, butting him with his horns. This the bush cat did not like at all, so, as he was not big enough to fight the goat, he picked up the remains of the cock and ran off with it to the bush, and so lost his money, as he did not await the arrival of the hunter. The goat was thus left master of the situation and started bleating, and this noise attracted the attention of the leopard, who was on his way to receive payment from the hunter. As he got nearer the smell of goat became very strong, and being hungry, for he had not eaten anything for some time, he approached the goat very carefully. Not seeing any one about he stalked the goat and got nearer and nearer, until he was within springing distance. The goat, in the meantime, was grazing quietly, quite unsuspecting of any danger, as he was in his friend the hunter's compound. Now and then he would say Ba!! But most of the time he was busy eating the young grass, and picking up the leaves which had fallen from a tree of which he was very fond. Suddenly the leopard sprang at the goat, and with one crunch at the neck brought him down. The goat was dead almost at once, and the leopard started on his meal.

It was now about eight o'clock in the morning, and Okun, the hunter's friend, having had his early morning meal, went out with his gun to receive payment of the two hundred rods he had lent to the hunter. When he got close to the house he heard a crunching sound, and, being a hunter himself, he approached very cautiously, and looking over the fence saw the leopard only a few yards off busily engaged eating the goat. He took careful aim at the leopard and fired, whereupon the leopard rolled over dead. The death of the leopard meant that four of the hunter's creditors were now disposed of, as the bush cat had killed the cock, the goat had driven the bush cat away (who thus forfeited his claim), and in his turn the goat had been killed by the leopard, who had just been slain by Okun. This meant a saving of eight hundred rods to Effiong; but he was not content with this, and directly he heard the report of the gun he ran out from where he had been hiding all the time, and found the leopard lying dead with Okun standing over it. Then in very strong language Effiong began to upbraid his friend, and asked him why he had killed his old friend the leopard, that nothing would satisfy him but that he should report the whole matter to the king, who would no doubt deal with him as he thought fit. When Effiong said this Okun was frightened, and begged him not to say anything more about the matter, as the king would be angry; but the hunter was obdurate, and refused to listen to him; and at last Okun said, "If you will allow the whole thing to drop and will say no more about it, I will make you a present of the two hundred rods you borrowed from me." This was just what Effiong wanted, but still he did not give in at once; eventually, however, he agreed, and told Okun he might go, and that he would bury the body of his friend the leopard.

Directly Okun had gone, instead of burying the body Effiong dragged it inside the house and skinned it very carefully. The skin he put out to dry in the sun, and covered it with wood ash, and the body he ate. When the skin was well cured the hunter took it to a distant market, where he sold it for much money. And now, whenever a bush cat sees a cock he always kills it, and does so by right, as he takes the cock in part payment of the two hundred rods which the hunter never paid him.

Moral. – Never lend money to people, because if they cannot pay they will try to kill you or get rid of you in some way, either by poison or by setting bad Ju Ju's for you.

### III

## *The Woman with Two Skins*

Eyamba I. of Calabar was a very powerful king. He fought and conquered all the surrounding countries, killing all the old men and women, but the able-bodied men and girls he caught and brought back as slaves, and they worked on the farms until they died.

This king had two hundred wives, but none of them had borne a son to him. His subjects, seeing that he was becoming an old man, begged him to marry one of the spider's daughters, as they always had plenty of children. But when the king saw the spider's daughter he did not like her, as she was ugly, and the people said it was because her mother had had so many children at the same time. However, in order to please his people he married the ugly girl, and placed her among his other wives, but they all complained because she was so ugly, and said she could not live with them. The king, therefore, built her a separate house for herself, where she was given food and drink the same as the other wives. Every one jeered at her on account of her ugliness; but she was not really ugly, but beautiful, as she was born with two skins, and at her birth her mother was made to promise that she should never remove the ugly skin until a certain time arrived save only during the night, and that she must put it on again before dawn. Now the king's head wife knew this, and was very fearful lest the king should find it out and fall in love with the spider's daughter; so she went to a Ju Ju man and offered him two hundred rods to make a potion that would make the king forget altogether that the spider's daughter was his wife. This the Ju Ju man finally consented to do, after much haggling over the price, for three hundred and fifty rods; and he made up some "medicine," which the head wife mixed with the king's food. For some months this had the effect of making the king forget the spider's daughter, and he used to pass quite close to her without recognising her in any way. When four months had elapsed and the king had not once sent for Adiaha (for that was the name of the spider's daughter), she began to get tired, and went back to her parents. Her father, the spider, then took her to another Ju Ju man, who, by making spells and casting lots, very soon discovered that it was the king's head wife who had made the Ju Ju and had enchanted the king so that he would not look at Adiaha. He therefore told the spider that Adiaha should give the king some medicine which he would prepare, which would make the king remember her. He prepared the medicine, for which the spider had to pay a large sum of money; and that very day Adiaha made a small dish of food, into which she had placed the medicine, and presented it to the king. Directly he had eaten the dish his eyes were opened and he recognised his wife, and told her to come to him that very evening. So in the afternoon, being very joyful, she went down to the river and washed, and when she returned she put on her best cloth and went to the king's palace.

Directly it was dark and all the lights were out she pulled off her ugly skin, and the king saw how beautiful she was, and was very pleased with her; but when the cock crowed Adiaha pulled on her ugly skin again, and went back to her own house.

This she did for four nights running, always taking the ugly skin off in the dark, and leaving before daylight in the morning. In course of time, to the great surprise of all the people, and particularly of the king's two hundred wives, she gave birth to a son; but what surprised them most of all was that only one son was born, whereas her mother had always had a great many children at a time, generally about fifty.

The king's head wife became more jealous than ever when Adiaha had a son; so she went again to the Ju Ju man, and by giving him a large present induced him to give her some medicine which would make the king sick and forget his son. And the medicine would then make the king go to the Ju Ju man, who would tell him that it was his son who had made him sick, as he wanted to reign

instead of his father. The Ju Ju man would also tell the king that if he wanted to recover he must throw his son away into the water.

And the king, when he had taken the medicine, went to the Ju Ju man, who told him everything as had been arranged with the head wife. But at first the king did not want to destroy his son. Then his chief subjects begged him to throw his son away, and said that perhaps in a year's time he might get another son. So the king at last agreed, and threw his son into the river, at which the mother grieved and cried bitterly.

Then the head wife went again to the Ju Ju man and got more medicine, which made the king forget Adiaha for three years, during which time she was in mourning for her son. She then returned to her father, and he got some more medicine from his Ju Ju man, which Adiaha gave to the king. And the king knew her and called her to him again, and she lived with him as before. Now the Ju Ju who had helped Adiaha's father, the spider, was a Water Ju Ju, and he was ready when the king threw his son into the water, and saved his life and took him home and kept him alive. And the boy grew up very strong.

After a time Adiaha gave birth to a daughter, and her the jealous wife also persuaded the king to throw away. It took a longer time to persuade him, but at last he agreed, and threw his daughter into the water too, and forgot Adiaha again. But the Water Ju Ju was ready again, and when he had saved the little girl, he thought the time had arrived to punish the action of the jealous wife; so he went about amongst the head young men and persuaded them to hold a wrestling match in the market-place every week. This was done, and the Water Ju Ju told the king's son, who had become very strong, and was very like to his father in appearance, that he should go and wrestle, and that no one would be able to stand up before him. It was then arranged that there should be a grand wrestling match, to which all the strongest men in the country were invited, and the king promised to attend with his head wife.

On the day of the match the Water Ju Ju told the king's son that he need not be in the least afraid, and that his Ju Ju was so powerful, that even the strongest and best wrestlers in the country would not be able to stand up against him for even a few minutes. All the people of the country came to see the great contest, to the winner of which the king had promised to present prizes of cloth and money, and all the strongest men came. When they saw the king's son, whom nobody knew, they laughed and said, "Who is this small boy? He can have no chance against us." But when they came to wrestle, they very soon found that they were no match for him. The boy was very strong indeed, beautifully made and good to look upon, and all the people were surprised to see how like he was to the king.

After wrestling for the greater part of the day the king's son was declared the winner, having thrown every one who had stood up against him; in fact, some of his opponents had been badly hurt, and had their arms or ribs broken owing to the tremendous strength of the boy. After the match was over the king presented him with cloth and money, and invited him to dine with him in the evening. The boy gladly accepted his father's invitation; and after he had had a good wash in the river, put on his cloth and went up to the palace, where he found the head chiefs of the country and some of the king's most favoured wives. They then sat down to their meal, and the king had his own son, whom he did not know, sitting next to him. On the other side of the boy sat the jealous wife, who had been the cause of all the trouble. All through the dinner this woman did her best to make friends with the boy, with whom she had fallen violently in love on account of his beautiful appearance, his strength, and his being the best wrestler in the country. The woman thought to herself, "I will have this boy as my husband, as my husband is now an old man and will surely soon die." The boy, however, who was as wise as he was strong, was quite aware of everything the jealous woman had done, and although he pretended to be very flattered at the advances of the king's head wife, he did not respond very readily, and went home as soon as he could.

When he returned to the Water Ju Ju's house he told him everything that had happened, and the Water Ju Ju said —

"As you are now in high favour with the king, you must go to him to-morrow and beg a favour from him. The favour you will ask is that all the country shall be called together, and that a certain case shall be tried, and that when the case is finished, the man or woman who is found to be in the wrong shall be killed by the Egbos before all the people."

So the following morning the boy went to the king, who readily granted his request, and at once sent all round the country appointing a day for all the people to come in and hear the case tried. Then the boy went back to the Water Ju Ju, who told him to go to his mother and tell her who he was, and that when the day of the trial arrived, she was to take off her ugly skin and appear in all her beauty, for the time had come when she need no longer wear it. This the son did.

When the day of trial arrived, Adiaha sat in a corner of the square, and nobody recognised the beautiful stranger as the spider's daughter. Her son then sat down next to her, and brought his sister with him. Immediately his mother saw her she said —

"This must be my daughter, whom I have long mourned as dead," and embraced her most affectionately.

The king and his head wife then arrived and sat on their stones in the middle of the square, all the people saluting them with the usual greetings. The king then addressed the people, and said that he had called them together to hear a strong palaver at the request of the young man who had been the victor of the wrestling, and who had promised that if the case went against him he would offer up his life to the Egbo. The king also said that if, on the other hand, the case was decided in the boy's favour, then the other party would be killed, even though it were himself or one of his wives; whoever it was would have to take his or her place on the killing-stone and have their heads cut off by the Egbos. To this all the people agreed, and said they would like to hear what the young man had to say. The young man then walked round the square, and bowed to the king and the people, and asked the question, "Am I not worthy to be the son of any chief in the country?" And all the people answered "Yes!"

The boy then brought his sister out into the middle, leading her by the hand. She was a beautiful girl and well made. When every one had looked at her he said, "Is not my sister worthy to be any chief's daughter?" And the people replied that she was worthy of being any one's daughter, even the king's. Then he called his mother Adiaha, and she came out, looking very beautiful with her best cloth and beads on, and all the people cheered, as they had never seen a finer woman. The boy then asked them, "Is this woman worthy of being the king's wife?" And a shout went up from every one present that she would be a proper wife for the king, and looked as if she would be the mother of plenty of fine healthy sons.

Then the boy pointed out the jealous woman who was sitting next to the king, and told the people his story, how that his mother, who had two skins, was the spider's daughter; how she had married the king, and how the head wife was jealous and had made a bad Ju Ju for the king, which made him forget his wife; how she had persuaded the king to throw himself and his sister into the river, which, as they all knew, had been done, but the Water Ju Ju had saved both of them, and had brought them up.

Then the boy said: "I leave the king and all of you people to judge my case. If I have done wrong, let me be killed on the stone by the Egbos; if, on the other hand, the woman has done evil, then let the Egbos deal with her as you may decide."

When the king knew that the wrestler was his son he was very glad, and told the Egbos to take the jealous woman away, and punish her in accordance with their laws. The Egbos decided that the woman was a witch; so they took her into the forest and tied her up to a stake, and gave her two hundred lashes with a whip made from hippopotamus hide, and then burnt her alive, so that she should not make any more trouble, and her ashes were thrown into the river. The king then embraced his wife and daughter, and told all the people that she, Adiaha, was his proper wife, and would be the queen for the future.

When the palaver was over, Adiaha was dressed in fine clothes and beads, and carried back in state to the palace by the king's servants.

That night the king gave a big feast to all his subjects, and told them how glad he was to get back his beautiful wife whom he had never known properly before, also his son who was stronger than all men, and his fine daughter. The feast continued for a hundred and sixty-six days; and the king made a law that if any woman was found out getting medicine against her husband, she should be killed at once. Then the king built three new compounds, and placed many slaves in them, both men and women. One compound he gave to his wife, another to his son, and the third he gave to his daughter. They all lived together quite happily for some years until the king died, when his son came to the throne and ruled in his stead.

## IV

### *The King's Magic Drum*

Efiam Duke was an ancient king of Calabar. He was a peaceful man, and did not like war. He had a wonderful drum, the property of which, when it was beaten, was always to provide plenty of good food and drink. So whenever any country declared war against him, he used to call all his enemies together and beat his drum; then to the surprise of every one, instead of fighting the people found tables spread with all sorts of dishes, fish, foo-foo, palm-oil chop, soup, cooked yams and ocos, and plenty of palm wine for everybody. In this way he kept all the country quiet, and sent his enemies away with full stomachs, and in a happy and contented frame of mind. There was only one drawback to possessing the drum, and that was, if the owner of the drum walked over any stick on the road or stepped over a fallen tree, all the food would immediately go bad, and three hundred Egbo men would appear with sticks and whips and beat the owner of the drum and all the invited guests very severely.

Efiam Duke was a rich man. He had many farms and hundreds of slaves, a large store of kernels on the beach, and many puncheons of palm-oil. He also had fifty wives and many children. The wives were all fine women and healthy; they were also good mothers, and all of them had plenty of children, which was good for the king's house.

Every few months the king used to issue invitations to all his subjects to come to a big feast, even the wild animals were invited; the elephants, hippopotami, leopards, bush cows, and antelopes used to come, for in those days there was no trouble, as they were friendly with man, and when they were at the feast they did not kill one another. All the people and the animals as well were envious of the king's drum and wanted to possess it, but the king would not part with it.

One morning Ikwor Edem, one of the king's wives, took her little daughter down to the spring to wash her, as she was covered with yaws, which are bad sores all over the body. The tortoise happened to be up a palm tree, just over the spring, cutting nuts for his midday meal; and while he was cutting, one of the nuts fell to the ground, just in front of the child. The little girl, seeing the good food, cried for it, and the mother, not knowing any better, picked up the palm nut and gave it to her daughter. Directly the tortoise saw this he climbed down the tree, and asked the woman where his palm nut was. She replied that she had given it to her child to eat. Then the tortoise, who very much wanted the king's drum, thought he would make plenty palaver over this and force the king to give him the drum, so he said to the mother of the child —

"I am a poor man, and I climbed the tree to get food for myself and my family. Then you took my palm nut and gave it to your child. I shall tell the whole matter to the king, and see what he has to say when he hears that one of his wives has stolen my food," for this, as every one knows, is a very serious crime according to native custom.

Ikwor Edem then said to the tortoise —

"I saw your palm nut lying on the ground, and thinking it had fallen from the tree, I gave it to my little girl to eat, but I did not steal it. My husband the king is a rich man, and if you have any complaint to make against me or my child, I will take you before him."

So when she had finished washing her daughter at the spring she took the tortoise to her husband, and told him what had taken place. The king then asked the tortoise what he would accept as compensation for the loss of his palm nut, and offered him money, cloth, kernels or palm-oil, all of which things the tortoise refused one after the other.

The king then said to the tortoise, "What will you take? You may have anything you like."

And the tortoise immediately pointed to the king's drum, and said that it was the only thing he wanted.

In order to get rid of the tortoise the king said, "Very well, take the drum," but he never told the tortoise about the bad things that would happen to him if he stepped over a fallen tree, or walked over a stick on the road.

The tortoise was very glad at this, and carried the drum home in triumph to his wife, and said, "I am now a rich man, and shall do no more work. Whenever I want food, all I have to do is to beat this drum, and food will immediately be brought to me, and plenty to drink."

His wife and children were very pleased when they heard this, and asked the tortoise to get food at once, as they were all hungry. This the tortoise was only too pleased to do, as he wished to show off his newly acquired wealth, and was also rather hungry himself, so he beat the drum in the same way as he had seen the king do when he wanted something to eat, and immediately plenty of food appeared, so they all sat down and made a great feast. The tortoise did this for three days, and everything went well; all his children got fat, and had as much as they could possibly eat. He was therefore very proud of his drum, and in order to display his riches he sent invitations to the king and all the people and animals to come to a feast. When the people received their invitations they laughed, as they knew the tortoise was very poor, so very few attended the feast; but the king, knowing about the drum, came, and when the tortoise beat the drum, the food was brought as usual in great profusion, and all the people sat down and enjoyed their meal very much. They were much astonished that the poor tortoise should be able to entertain so many people, and told all their friends what fine dishes had been placed before them, and that they had never had a better dinner. The people who had not gone were very sorry when they heard this, as a good feast, at somebody else's expense, is not provided every day. After the feast all the people looked upon the tortoise as one of the richest men in the kingdom, and he was very much respected in consequence. No one, except the king, could understand how the poor tortoise could suddenly entertain so lavishly, but they all made up their minds that if the tortoise ever gave another feast, they would not refuse again.

When the tortoise had been in possession of the drum for a few weeks he became lazy and did no work, but went about the country boasting of his riches, and took to drinking too much. One day after he had been drinking a lot of palm wine at a distant farm, he started home carrying his drum; but having had too much to drink, he did not notice a stick in the path. He walked over the stick, and of course the Ju Ju was broken at once. But he did not know this, as nothing happened at the time, and eventually he arrived at his house very tired, and still not very well from having drunk too much. He threw the drum into a corner and went to sleep. When he woke up in the morning the tortoise began to feel hungry, and as his wife and children were calling out for food, he beat the drum; but instead of food being brought, the house was filled with Egbo men, who beat the tortoise, his wife and children, badly. At this the tortoise was very angry, and said to himself —

"I asked every one to a feast, but only a few came, and they had plenty to eat and drink. Now, when I want food for myself and my family, the Egbos come and beat me. Well, I will let the other people share the same fate, as I do not see why I and my family should be beaten when I have given a feast to all people."

He therefore at once sent out invitations to all the men and animals to come to a big dinner the next day at three o'clock in the afternoon.

When the time arrived many people came, as they did not wish to lose the chance of a free meal a second time. Even the sick men, the lame, and the blind got their friends to lead them to the feast. When they had all arrived, with the exception of the king and his wives, who sent excuses, the tortoise beat his drum as usual, and then quickly hid himself under a bench, where he could not be seen. His wife and children he had sent away before the feast, as he knew what would surely happen. Directly he had beaten the drum three hundred Egbo men appeared with whips, and started flogging all the guests, who could not escape, as the doors had been fastened. The beating went on for two hours, and the people were so badly punished, that many of them had to be carried home on the backs of their friends. The leopard was the only one who escaped, as directly he saw the Egbo men

arrive he knew that things were likely to be unpleasant, so he gave a big spring and jumped right out of the compound.

When the tortoise was satisfied with the beating the people had received he crept to the door and opened it. The people then ran away, and when the tortoise gave a certain tap on the drum all the Egbo men vanished. The people who had been beaten were so angry, and made so much palaver with the tortoise, that he made up his mind to return the drum to the king the next day. So in the morning the tortoise went to the king and brought the drum with him. He told the king that he was not satisfied with the drum, and wished to exchange it for something else; he did not mind so much what the king gave him so long as he got full value for the drum, and he was quite willing to accept a certain number of slaves, or a few farms, or their equivalent in cloth or rods.

The king, however, refused to do this; but as he was rather sorry for the tortoise, he said he would present him with a magic foo-foo tree, which would provide the tortoise and his family with food, provided he kept a certain condition. This the tortoise gladly consented to do. Now this foo-foo tree only bore fruit once a year, but every day it dropped foo-foo and soup on the ground. And the condition was, that the owner should gather sufficient food for the day, once, and not return again for more. The tortoise, when he had thanked the king for his generosity, went home to his wife and told her to bring her calabashes to the tree. She did so, and they gathered plenty of foo-foo and soup quite sufficient for the whole family for that day, and went back to their house very happy.

That night they all feasted and enjoyed themselves. But one of the sons, who was very greedy, thought to himself —

"I wonder where my father gets all this good food from? I must ask him."

So in the morning he said to his father —

"Tell me where do you get all this foo-foo and soup from?"

But his father refused to tell him, as his wife, who was a cunning woman, said —

"If we let our children know the secret of the foo-foo tree, some day when they are hungry, after we have got our daily supply, one of them may go to the tree and gather more, which will break the Ju Ju."

But the envious son, being determined to get plenty of food for himself, decided to track his father to the place where he obtained the food. This was rather difficult to do, as the tortoise always went out alone, and took the greatest care to prevent any one following him. The boy, however, soon thought of a plan, and got a calabash with a long neck and a hole in the end. He filled the calabash with wood ashes, which he obtained from the fire, and then got a bag which his father always carried on his back when he went out to get food. In the bottom of the bag the boy then made a small hole, and inserted the calabash with the neck downwards, so that when his father walked to the foo-foo tree he would leave a small trail of wood ashes behind him. Then when his father, having slung his bag over his back as usual, set out to get the daily supply of food, his greedy son followed the trail of the wood ashes, taking great care to hide himself and not to let his father perceive that he was being followed. At last the tortoise arrived at the tree, and placed his calabashes on the ground and collected the food for the day, the boy watching him from a distance. When his father had finished and went home the boy also returned, and having had a good meal, said nothing to his parents, but went to bed. The next morning he got some of his brothers, and after his father had finished getting the daily supply, they went to the tree and collected much foo-foo and soup, and so broke the Ju Ju.

At daylight the tortoise went to the tree as usual, but he could not find it, as during the night the whole bush had grown up, and the foo-foo tree was hidden from sight. There was nothing to be seen but a dense mass of prickly tie-tie palm. Then the tortoise at once knew that some one had broken the Ju Ju, and had gathered foo-foo from the tree twice in the same day; so he returned very sadly to his house, and told his wife. He then called all his family together and told them what had happened, and asked them who had done this evil thing. They all denied having had anything to do with the

tree, so the tortoise in despair brought all his family to the place where the foo-foo tree had been, but which was now all prickly tie-tie palm, and said —

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