



THE WEST AFRICAN EXPEDITION, NOVEMBER, 1936 - JUNE, 1937

THE Expedition was undertaken by the Museum with the aid of a grant from the American Philosophical Society, for the purpose of studying the culture of the Sherbro, or Southern Bolom, of the southeastern coastal region of Sierra Leone. Seven months were spent in the two Chiefdoms of Sherbro Island and in the mainland Chiefdom of Shengge (Kagboro), where the old Sherbro culture has been best preserved.

THE African population of these Chiefdoms is ruled by native Chiefs under the general supervision of a Provincial Commissioner, a District Commissioner, and his Assistant, who are all British. In each Chiefdom there is a Paramount Chief, to whom are subordinate a considerable number of Chiefs of Sections, known as Section Chiefs or Sub-Chiefs. Chiefs are chosen from the "ruling houses (*rams*)" by an assembly of Section Chiefs and elders. In the case of a Paramount Chief, he receives from the Provincial Commissioner a staff, which is at once the mark of his authority and of his responsibility to the British Administration. A Speaker, the deputy and spokesman of the Chief, is chosen at the same time, usually from a family in which his office is hereditary.

The "ruling house" is a *ram* which has acquired ascendancy over other *rams* in the Section or the Chiefdom. A *ram* is a kinship group in which descent and, hence, succession to important office should, if the old rule were always observed, follow the maternal line.

The *ram* is exogamous. It is believed that actual blood relationship is traceable among all members of a given *ram*, and the remotest degree of what we should call cousinship is a bar to marriage. Sexual relations between *pente* (male) and *wante* (female) are considered to be *simongama* (incest, incestuous). *Pente* and *wante* are the words for the relationship corresponding not only to the brother-sister relationship among us but also to any degree of cousinship.

Most men who can afford it have more than one wife. Proposals of marriage are usually made by a man's parents for him through a *kea*, matchmaker. It may happen that the prospective bride is not yet born, and the proposal is then made to a friend whose wife is pregnant or to

this woman herself that her child if it is born a girl should be given to their son when she is marriageable. Or a man may propose this on his own account. When the girl is nubile, the bride-price is paid to her mother's brother and the bride goes to her husband conducted by the *kea*. The recipient of the bride-price shares it with the girl's mother and her father and sometimes with other members of his family.

A man's heirs are his sister's children. If he has no sister, in our sense of the word, the children of another *wante* are his natural heirs.

Children are named according to the order in which they are born. The first born, if a boy is called Tsho, the next Tthong, then Saw, Baki, Reke, Kothong. Girls are, *seriatim*, Boe, Yema, Kona, Mahen, Tshoko, Yoki, Nebang. If more names are required, the name Daima is given to a child of either sex or a nickname is used. When a boy or a young man becomes a member of the Poro society, he receives a new name, of two elements, the second of which is the name of his mother or of some female ancestor. Thus, in the Poro name Kai Nesi, Nesi is the name of Kai's mother, etc. Similarly, when a girl becomes a member of the Bundu society, she exchanges her birth name for a Bundu name. The Poro name supersedes the birth name.



Poro (Sherbro, *Paw*) is the most important of the numerous secret societies of southern Sierra Leone. Outside of the Chiefdoms of Shengge and Timdel, where a third society of equal rank, Tthoma, has been introduced, membership in Poro for men and in Bundu (Bondo) for women is obligatory. A native Sherbro man who does not belong to Poro or Tthoma has no standing in the community; he is considered to be "not a man at all." Tthoma admits both men and women.

Left: Mask of a *min* (spirit) of the Bundu, the women's Secret Society which prepares girls for marriage and protects them from molestation by men.

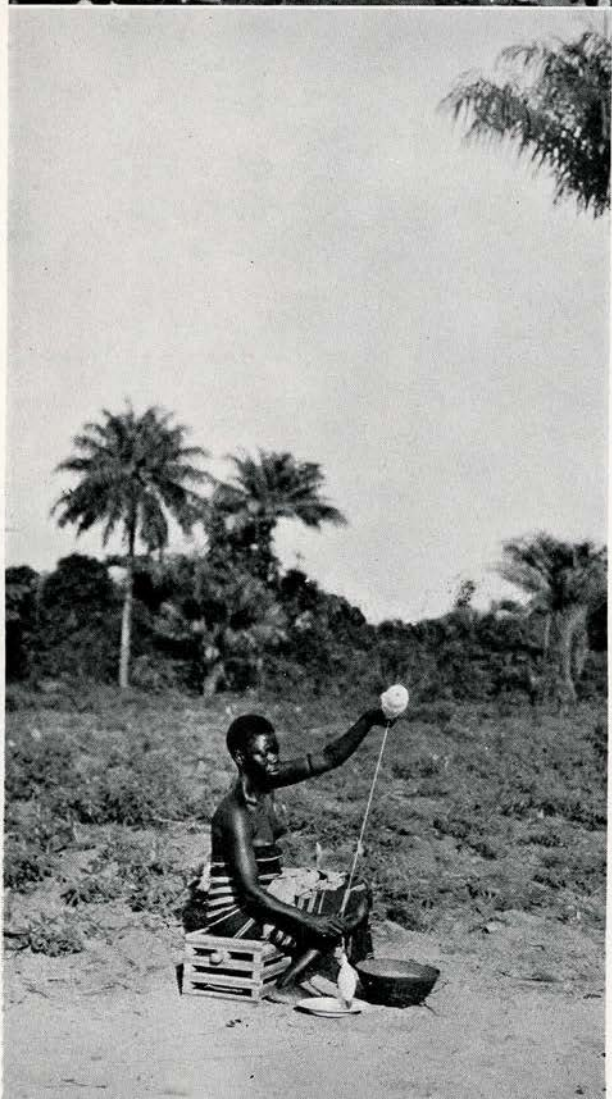


Below: Two Bundu *min* in ceremonial costume and other officials of the Society. The costume and mask may be worn by anyone of the proper rank in the Society.





"King Jimmy's" Wharf, market for
fish and vegetables in Freetown.



Spinning cotton fibre

Bundu is, so far as its universality among the Sherbro is concerned, the feminine counterpart of Poro. But while Poro admits candidates of all ages between infancy and manhood, girls go to Bundu usually about the time of puberty or not much later. Circumcision is obligatory for Sherbro boys, but is not a part of Poro initiation; the corresponding operation on females is the essential feature of Bundu initiation. Poro initiants have a certain design cut into the skin of the back and sometimes around the breasts. The usually more elaborate designs borne by women are only decorative. No man may enter the Bundu "Bush"; but while the same regulation with regard to Poro is binding on women, the seclusion of the girls who are undergoing initiation in their Bush is not as rigorous as that of Poro candidates. The girls, under certain restrictions, may leave the Bush to work on the farms or to visit their parents, and there is no ban against their being seen by men while doing so. Poro initiants may leave the Bush by day to work on the farms, but the women must avoid the places where they are working. They leave the Bush at night to plunder the farms, or, heralded by the voice of the "devil," to receive food from their relatives or friends; but on these occasions this voice—notes blown on a wooden trumpet—warns the women and other non-members to keep off the paths or to hide themselves in the houses. Poro has no distinctive "medicine"; Bundu has, and offenders against Bundu regulations are "affected" by it and may die unless treated with certain herbs by the Bundu head woman in the presence of the "medicine". Offenders against Poro also stand in danger of death, but the mystical—or other—means by which this is brought about or averted are not evident to the uninitiated.

The other secret societies all possess "medicines" of magical potency. Yasi, which is closely allied to Poro, owns one, which like most such instruments of magic is potent both to harm and to heal.

Yasi admits both men and women; and its alliance with Poro provides a loophole through which, in spite of the drastic regulations excluding women in general from the latter society, some women have gained admittance. The head of Yasi is a woman and is, *ex officio*, a *soko* or principal person of Poro. As such, she becomes, technically, a man, a "change of sex," which aside from her activities as a Poro member, is evidenced mainly by the fact that, if married, her husband cannot claim damages from any man to whom she grants her favours. A similar, theoretical, reversal of sex occurs in the case of certain other women

called *deboi* who are members of Poro.

Poro has charge of all burials and its experts perform the autopsy through which, by the examination of the intestines, it is determined whether the deceased was a witch or a cannibal. The libation and food-offering to the ancestors which open the sessions of the Society are performed by the chief official of Poro.

This cult of the dead is the central element of Sherbro religion. Sacrifices and prayers to the dead are offered also by the heads of the *rams*, for the *ram*, and of the individual families, for the family. There is a belief in a high god and his wife, the earth goddess, but these do not play an important part in ritual observances. The souls of the dead frequent their graves and certain groves or forests. They can be brought into the dwelling to receive sacrifices, which are also offered at their graves, and they can be summoned to take part in the dances which accompany the offering of public sacrifices. They can be induced by prayer and sacrifice to bring about an abundant yield of the farms and the fishing grounds and to promote the welfare of individuals and of the people in general, which, in material things, depends largely upon the produce of the soil and the water.

H. U. H.

CHIEF GABRIEL PAUL'S TREASURE

BY the generous gift of Dr. Samuel W. Fernberger, the University Museum has received a collection of interesting objects, formerly the prized possession of the late Penobscot Chief Gabriel Paul of Old Town, Maine. Here are represented not only old and rare capes of ceremony but the tools of common Indian crafts.

The Penobscot Indians, one of the five tribes of Northeastern Algonkians, have come to be known as the Wabanaki—"East-Land or Dawn People"—have occupied from very early times the forest, lake and river region of Maine from the St. Lawrence to the sea. Into it they came venturing from the north in the dispersion of the wide-flung Algonkian peoples. The character of their homeland kept them a hunting and fishing people, with little agriculture. They still maintain an independent tribal government of two alternating parties with elected Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Representative to the State Legislature, together with various minor officials. Old Town has long been their leading settlement, its importance dating from 1669. Chief Gabriel Paul, who