

THE SOCIÉTÉ CONGO OF THE ILE Á GONAVE

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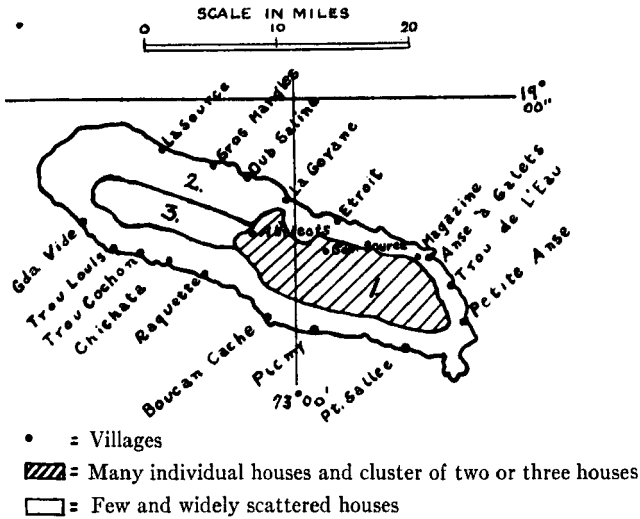
INTRODUCTION

IN ORDER to understand any aspect of Haitian life, it is necessary to remember the diversified origins of its culture. The chief elements concerned are African, French, and American Indian. The present population of the republic is composed of about 90% pure Negro and 10% mulatto, with French blood the most important white strain in the mixtures. This Negro stock was drawn from Gambia southward on the west coast of Africa and up the east coast to Mozambique and Zanzibar. There are represented, then, in Haiti, the cultural background and physical characteristics of many African peoples. The period of the French colony accounts for the French "paotis" of the people, a certain French tradition, a veneer of Roman Catholicism, and marked changes in the material culture. The amalgamation of the slaves into a homogeneous mass was carried on by arbitrary means under the French masters and has continued by optional selection since. The Indians left but little of their blood, due to the efficient methods of extermination employed by the Spaniards. They did, however, leave the chief crops and some of the agricultural practices of today.

The Ile á Gonave offers an excellent field of study to those interested in primitive society or in African inheritances among New World Negroes. Two natural features distinguish this island from the rest of the Republic of Haiti. The first is isolation and the second is the paucity of water. (See map 1.)

The extreme isolation of the island is in part due to location and in part to the inaccessible nature of its coasts. The Ile á Gonave lies well out in the great Gulf of Gonave midway between the two mountainous peninsulas of the mainland. The routes which connect the mainland with the world pass by Gonave but never touch it. The only connections with the outside are made

by the irregular trips of the small native fishing and trading boats. Throughout its history, the repelling nature of the coast lines has proved an isolating factor. At the immediate water edge, either sea-cliffs or rank growths of mangrove present themselves. Landing along those shores marked by cliffs is nearly impossible, and beyond them barren rocky slopes extend inland. By using



Map 1. Gonave Island. (1) Most densely populated and productive. High and rainy. Most springs and waterholes average planting per family from 5-10 carreaux. (2) Thorn forest and unproductive. Fishing villages comprise almost only settlement. Fresh water usually secured by boat from springs near coast. (3) Sparsely settled but extensively cultivated. Water brought overland for considerable distances. Average plantings from 30-40 carreaux. Yields low due to aridity.

boats of very shallow draught, an occasional hole in the mangrove barrier may be used to advantage. Behind the mangrove thicket stretches a sterile saline flat of considerable width, which swarms either with mosquitoes or sandflies, depending upon the season. Behind this, the thorn forest occupies the lower slopes and is exceedingly difficult to penetrate. Giant "jiggers" add to the general discomfort of the thorn forest.

The Ile á Gonave is an asymmetric anticline, rising above a slightly submerged limestone platform which is genetically related

to the alluvial plains of the main island just east of it.¹ All of the surface rock of the island is of a more or less porous limestone. The entire development of minor land forms and drainage features is that of a karst area. There are no through flowing streams and but a few surface exposures of intermittent streams. There are but two or three springs which carry water all the year. A half dozen small springs flow for part of the year. An equal number of large water-holes have some water in them throughout years of normal precipitation. At two points near the shore, fresh water bubbles up in the sea. These sources constitute the only supplies of water available for domestic use and stock watering. Rainfall is low and erratic. The northwest peninsula of the mainland cuts off the moisture-bearing trades, while the southwest peninsula stands as a barrier to the winds of the Caribbean storms. The hills of Gonave are too low to cause much cooling of the atmosphere in themselves. The average annual rainfall, along the coast, is probably about 25 inches. This may increase to 40 inches on the higher interior lands. However, individual years depart widely from the average. 1923 and 1924 are said to have been without rain. In late August of 1926 the author encountered about five inches in one week along the coast.

There have been no artifacts discovered on the island to tell of an Indian occupation. The ceramic remains and the sites so common on the main island seem to be entirely lacking. The clay figurines which make up an important part of the modern voodoo doctor's paraphernalia are imported from the mainland. Probably, the island of Gonave has been more diligently worked in this respect than any other part of the republic, due to the fact that Lieutenant F. E. Wirkus, Gendarmerie d'Haiti, has been governor of the island for over four years and has searched it from end to end. This man has located numerous Indian sites and acquired an interesting collection of artifacts during his years on the main island.

However, following the murder of the Indian Queen Anacoana

¹ W. P. Woodring, J. S. Brown, and W. S. Burbank, *The Geology of the Republic of Haiti* (Port au Prince, 1924). Pp. 418-422 contain the first and probably the only geological or otherwise scientific work done on Gonave to that date.

by the Spaniards in 1504, many of her followers are said to have fled to Gonave.² It is probable that the Indians took refuge in whatever isolated and otherwise undesirable spot the whites did not want. On the mainland they fled to the higher mountains and the small island in the Lake Enriquilo. Soon these were joined by other refugees. The runaway or "maroon" Negroes followed the practice of the Indians and occupied whatever land would most likely leave them unchanged by contact with Europeans. They often escaped the moment of landing or dived overboard as the ship sighted land.

The French paid no attention to the island and knew practically nothing of it. Even the well-informed geographer and historian of the colonial period, Moreau de St. Mery, merely mentions its existence.³

Since the establishment of the republic the island has proved a place of refuge or banishment for political offenders. In recent years there has been an immigration of landless peasants from adjacent sections of the mainland.

As a result of this individual history there has been little contact with Europeans and there is little if any white blood represented in the population of the island. The social and economic development has been more closely allied to African elements than on the main island.

THE SOCIÉTÉ CONGO

Probably the most interesting example of this sort is the Société Congo. This name is applied to the very interesting secret societies which dominate economic and social life on the Ile á Gonave. In the pages to follow, numerous extracts will be included, as notes, which appear to have a bearing upon the origins of these societies.

² B. Ardouin, *Geographie de L'Ile D'Haiti*, 26. Eds. 1832, 1856 and 1864. (Port au Prince.) Dantes Fortunat, *Nouvelle Geographie de L'Ile D'Haiti*, 408 (Port au Prince, 1888).

³ M. L. E. Moreau de St. Mery, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue*, 2: 527 f. (Philadelphia, 1797-1798).

These societies bear individual names and operate separately. In fact there is no central organization and the term *Société Congo* only designates the kind of society.⁴ The purpose of these organizations is fourfold. First, they are cooperative labor groups; second, the members are afforded protection; third, they are mutual benefit societies; and fourth, they provide social entertainment. Two other functions are performed by these groups—disciplinary and religious. Through disciplinary measures within the organization, the members are sometimes compelled to act in accordance with civil law. This aspect can not always be relied upon, but is at times used for the collection of debts and similar offices.⁵ The societies were not organized for religious purposes and ordinarily do not harbor religious ceremony. However, Voodooism, which is the deep seated religion of the mass, sometimes dominates the latter part of meetings which have been held for purely social purposes.

Each society has its own music, songs, dances, insignia, costumes, archives, and ceremonies.⁶ Each society is open to men and women on an equal basis. There are no age or sex limitations.⁷

⁴ J. H. Driberg, *The Lango: A Nilotic Tribe of Uganda*, 97, 1923: "These groups or associations for cultivation are more or less permanent and are called 'wangtich.' 'PurKongo' is the term used when there are fifteen or twenty assistants. Work begins at dawn and ceases at sunset. The laborers work individually without apportioning tasks, and the reward consists of liberal supplies of beer drunk at the owner's village at the end of the day." P. 405, "Pur" (means) cultivation. P. 388, "Kongo" (means) beer. It seems possible that the term Congo, as used in connection with the *Société Congo* and the *Dansé Congo* of the West Indies and its African counterpart, may have been derived from this source rather than being a geographical or cultural designation.

⁵ Hutton Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies*, 116, 1908. This author speaks of the Egbo society as being an efficient means of debt collection, which was sometimes used by European traders. On Gonave the society is used to aid in the collection of taxes and other legitimate indebtedness. The medical officer of the Occupation Force has also employed the society to compel a badly diseased member to report for treatment.

⁶ Charles Partridge, *Cross River Natives*, 214, 1905. "Every society or club has its own costumes, insignia, music, dances and songs." P. Amaury Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London, 1912). In speaking of Egbo among the Ekoi people this author states: "Each grade (division) has its particular dances and tunes" (p. 44).

⁷ Hutton Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies*, 122. "True Egbo is for men only. But there is an affiliated society of free women—but it is subordinate. 'Idiong' or 'Idion,' an Old Calabar Society is open only to women and Egbo members.—'Lubuku' (society) of the tribes of the Lulua River allows general admission of women on the

The one prohibiting factor is inability to do a day's work. Each group is ruled by an elaborate array of officers.⁸ In fact, as the number of members in any one society is limited to approximately the number of working days in the month there is almost an office per person. However, only the senior officer receives anything but glory from his or her incumbency.

The Société Congo is not confined within the Republic of Haiti to the Island of Gonave alone. A more or less similar institution bearing the same title is found in the mountains of the south-western peninsula. There are likewise other organizations to be found upon the mainland which perform one or more of the functions of the Société Congo. Some of these organizations will be described in a later publication. However, in no part of the republic have the societies been so strongly developed or have they taken on so many individual characteristics as in the island of Gonave. This is doubtless a result of the fact that such an organization finds greater offices to perform under the peculiar natural and cultural conditions of Gonave.

We have already noted the low and erratic rainfall and the karst character of the country. The rainfall of the tropical wet and dry climates is everywhere exacting for the agriculturist. Add to this that the underlying rock material of the area absorbs the limited precipitation with extreme rapidity, and the problem becomes acute. Clearing, planting, harvesting, in fact, every detail of agriculture must be done on schedule.⁹ The poor soil and rainfall conditions of Gonave and the primitive semi-milpa methods employed do not encourage large yields. In consequence, considerable areas of land are necessary for the support of the

same status as men.—'Ndembo' of the upper Congo admits men, women and all ages freely."

⁸ P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 3: 763, 1926. "There is a kind of farmer's institution known as Owe, which, among Oyos, somewhat resembles a benefit club; it is a system by which a man can call upon others to come to help him in any big work, such as clearing a new piece of bush.—In Egba-land the Owe appears to be a properly organized guild *under a president and officers.*"

⁹ A. Werner, *British Central Africa*, 184, 1906. Referring to the peoples of the Shire districts, also with a tropical wet and dry climate "Hoing and weeding are sometimes got through more quickly, when time is pressing—as when the first rains have fallen—by means of a 'bee'."

family. Furthermore, land is to be had in plenty, for Gonave is still a frontier. The problem of clearing thirty or more acres of tropical vegetation is impossible for one man. By the time he is ready to plant, the first acres cleared will be brush-covered again. The planting, too, of such an area could scarcely be completed in the time necessitated by weather conditions. Furthermore, the average individual owns but one tool. In order to clear and plant, he will need at different times a machete, a hoe, an axe, or a crowbar. Within the society there are several of each of these tools. There is a marked tendency, often advised by the chief officers of the organization, toward the specialization of production by individuals. The peasant with a tract of coarse textured soil may produce only yams and "patats." One with compact soils specializes in legumes. Others will produce chiefly manioc, or malanga, or native cotton. Those, with land in the moist bottoms of sinkholes or solution valleys are likely to produce chiefly plantains. All differences can be ironed out later by barter within the society. Each crop has different dates of planting, cultivating, and harvesting, so that an admirable distribution of the labor results. The work of the society is largely planned for the year and directed throughout by the senior officer so that considerable unity of purpose is found. The efficiency of the societies is easily seen when the gardens of members are compared with those of individual farmers.

Another condition which has encouraged the rise of the societies has been the condition of government. The island of Gonave has been a football for Haitian politicians. Throughout the history of the republic, it has been held as a concession by one or a group of political favorites then in power. The only interest which the concessionaire has held in the island is to exploit it to the limit. Heavy taxes have been made heavier by the greed of the local tax collector. Peasants have been forcibly removed from the hut and garden which they have worked for several years to improve, only to have it given to some favorite of the local official. There has been no more, if as much, protection of life and property on Gonave than on the mainland. "Caco" bands have roamed and pillaged the countryside. Then, too, the "Hounga" man

(witch-doctor) is often a menace to individuals.¹⁰ The unity of the society is an efficient method of combating these evils and does so with great success.

Every member of the society is assured proper burial and burial ceremonies. This is an important function in the mind of all Haitians. Weddings or rather "placements" are duly celebrated by the same body. In case of sickness or inability, due to old age, the society assists where necessary in providing food. In some cases, the society forcibly intervenes to compel a member to do things for the welfare of the individual concerned. Under the harsh conditions of life encountered on Gonave, such assistance goes a long way toward the mitigating of suffering.

Almost the entire social life of the members is found within the society. During working hours singing, drinking, and general good fellowship prevails. It is certain that more labor per man is obtained with these stimuli than would ever be the case otherwise.¹¹ Meals and liquid refreshments are served by the host at the end of each day's work. Frequently a barbecue and dance are held that night by the member whose field has been worked. The celebration of Saints' days, funerals, "placements," and other events keep the program of social engagements full.

What has been said so far applies in general to all of the societies which bear the general title of Société Congo. We will now consider in detail the organization and activities of one particular society which the author had opportunity to study rather closely.

THE "MODEL DE PARIS"

The society, "Model de Paris," functions in the Section Grande Sources which lies in the interior upland of the southern

¹⁰ John H. Weeks, *Among the Primitive Bakongo* (London, 1914). "The 'raison d'être' for the Congo secret societies is lost in the dim and distant past. It may be that they were started to hold in check some tyrannical chiefs or to give mutual protection to members from the exactions of an upstart class of nobles or to afford protection against charges of witchcraft and the evil designs of witches—or they may have been organized to render aid to their members in their travels about the country for trade or other purposes.

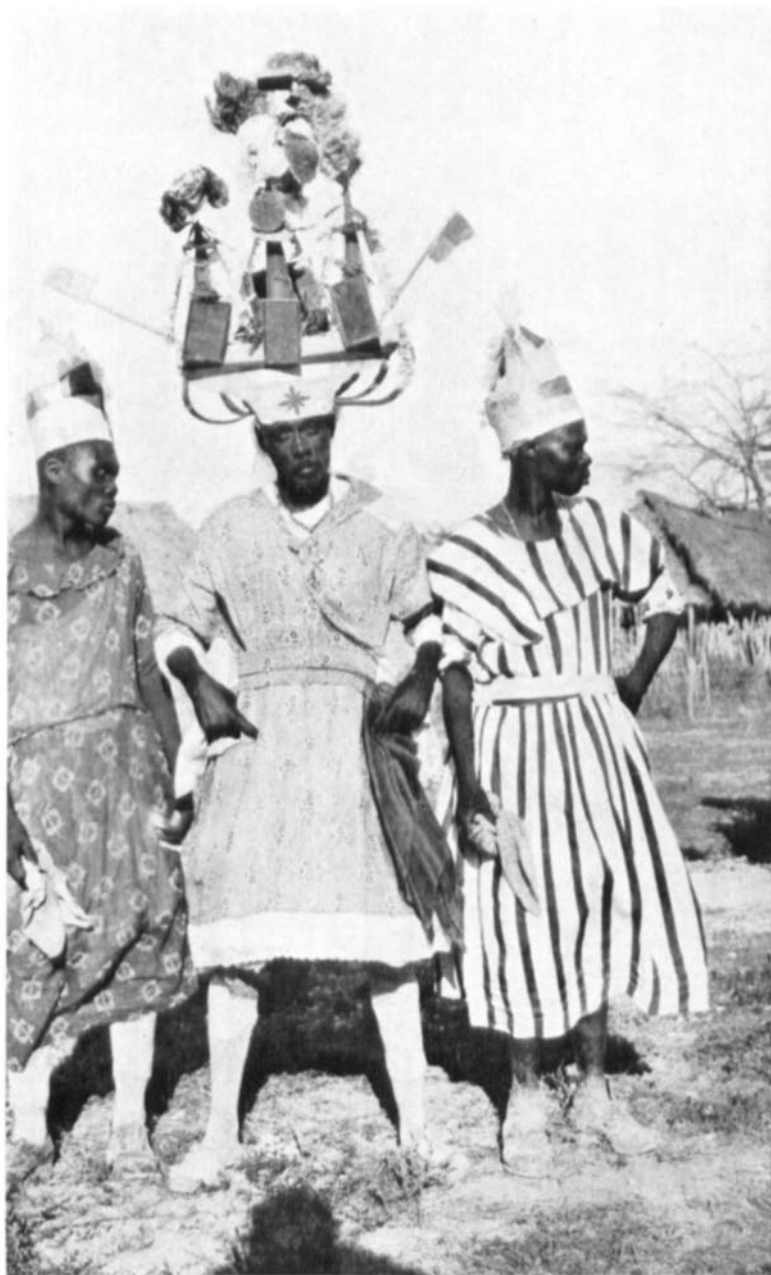
¹¹ J. H. Driberg, *The Lango: A Nilotic Tribe of Uganda*, 97. In speaking of the "wangtich" agricultural societies, the author states: "Hard work and long hours are expected—and ungrudgingly accorded, with the result that cultivation by this semi-communal method far exceeds the possibilities of individual work."



The "Model de Paris" ready for the day's work.



The Queen of the "Model de Paris."



The President and two of the society's members
in ceremonial attire.

portion of Gonave. This organization is possibly the strongest on the island and is one of the oldest. It is said to have a recorded history of more than a half century. However, it differs but little in organization and function from other branches of the Société Congo in the same general vicinity. In fact, the woman who "rules" this particular organization also heads two other similar societies. It was largely through her friendliness that the more intimate details herein included were made available.

The membership of the "Model de Paris" is limited by its constitution to twenty-nine members. This number is generally maintained, as membership is highly desired by persons not belonging to such an organization. There is a long waiting list. When a vacancy in the society occurs, due to the death, departure, or expulsion of a member, the applicant with seniority on the list is first considered by the society. At a very dignified and formal meeting, vote is taken by ballot. If not more than one member vetoes the applicant that member must state, before the entire society, his reasons for disapproval. If these reasons are considered as serious by the other members, the applicant is not accepted. If two or more members object, the name is dropped. In either case, the applicant is formally notified that "no vacancies exist." He can not again enter his name until one year has elapsed.

The officers of the "Model de Paris" with their respective duties follow:

1. "*Reine*."—The chief officer of the "Model de Paris" is La Reine. In fact, in all of the societies the chief officer bears the rank of emperor or queen, depending upon the sex. In case the society is headed by a man there is also a queen, but she has no particular powers. If, as in many societies, the chief officer is a woman, no male member bears the title of emperor. The duties of the chief officer are complex. On that incumbent devolves the responsibility for all action and a considerable portion of the policy of the society. In the "Model de Paris" the queen personally keeps the archives, which consist of names of active members and a record of past members. It is her duty to see that each member does his or her work and in turn receives the benefits of the society. It is she, who, with the advice of the society, plans the year's campaign. She must then see that the plans are carried to fruition. This includes the allocation of crop production and the temporal distribution of labor. Through her each member is notified each evening where and when to appear the following day and what the nature of the work is to be. Through her all orders for disciplinary action and all

invitations for social events are issued. These invitations have the full weight of an order and any disobedience of them is subject to drastic punishment. The responsibility of seeing that every deceased member is given a decent burial devolves upon the queen. In such cases, the society is called together and each member is assessed by her. The order of ceremony is her responsibility, the actual operation is directed by the Division de Société. The ceremony involves a great deal of mourning, singing, dancing, and drinking. The society goes about the immediate countryside in single file with each member wearing the formal insignia or costume of his office.¹² The cross and the Saints are much in evidence, as are the paraphernalia of the Papa and Mama Loi. In fact there is no differentiation between the two creeds. There is but one religion—an indefinable compromise. When a member becomes ill, each member of the society is ordered in turn to furnish food and take care of the disabled person's livestock and other immediate demands.¹³ When any member becomes involved in difficulties with the local officials the queen intervenes on the application of the unfortunate and arranges a settlement. In return for these arduous duties, La Reine is well repaid. She is exempt from all manual labor and receives two full days' work on her property. She is the only officer who receives any material gain. As the particular queen in question also "rules" the "Fleur de St. Rose" and the "Fleur de St. Andrew" she receives six days of labor and so maintains the largest and best cared for garden on the island. She is also accorded many honors. On her approach, the tomtoms give four ruffles, the flag is lowered, all members stand at attention, and the machetes are brought to the position of "Present sabres." This rule applies whether the society be at work, at the dance, or at court. Various other formal courtesies are given, such as the persistent use of her title in conversation, standing at attention when speaking to her, and passing her the first cup of rum or the first helping of food.

Her influence in the community is great. She is respected and loved by all. The gardens of the members of her societies are the best tended of any on the island. Her advice is sought on many personal matters and frequently followed. She is referred to affectionately as "Te (petite) Menin" (little ruler) in spite of the fact that she weighs 250 pounds or more.

2. "*President*."—The presidency of the society usually devolves upon some elderly member, whose wisdom and wealth are well recognized. He stands as first adviser to the chief officer and takes her place when she is absent. He is accorded much respect and the formality of his title.

3. "*President de Confidence*."—He is the vice-president of the society. He, too, is an adviser and takes the president's office when that dignitary is absent.

¹² Partridge, op. cit., 215. "When a member dies, the other members sing and dance at his funeral obsequies. . . . The 'mourners' paint and adorn their bodies, and drink as much gin and palm-wine as they can get, and spend hour after hour—sometimes the whole night—in 'dancing' about town in single file."

¹³ Partridge, op. cit., 111. "When an old member is too old or too sick to find food for himself, the club (Egbo) does it for him."

4. "*Chef de Société.*"—This officer is chosen as the ablest agriculturist. He directs the operations of the society in the field.

5. "*Division de Société.*"—This officer is in reality the drill master. He is responsible for the instruction of the society in all its formalities. When the queen or an important civil official approaches, he gives the order of attention, sound drums, and present arms.

6. "*Reine de le drapeau.*"—This officer is the color bearer. She is responsible for the society's flag. When the society is at work or in session, the flag must be exposed for all outsiders to see. She carries the flag to all meetings of the society and observes the formalities pertaining to it.

7. "*Sergent d'armes.*"—This officer advises offenders to appear for trial and stands to the right of the accused during the trial. He also does the "sword work" (with a machete) at all ceremonies.¹⁴

8. "*Conseils.*"—Two "conseils" are among the officers of the society. Any member brought up for trial may choose one of these as attorney for the defense. The other then becomes the attorney of the prosecution.¹⁵

9. *Miscellaneous officers.*—The "Model de Paris" had three drummers at the time of investigation. Two of these men were exempt from manual labor in the field but their presence was always required. They follow the workers and beat their "tomtoms" continuously. The third drummer functions only at purely social events. These officers have no semblance of permanency and accrue to those members with the greatest talent.

One person is designated to properly kill the animal paid as a fine by an offending member. Another is the master of the barbecue. Almost any office will from time to time have an assistant. All offices bear some dignity and every member holds some office from time to time.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERSHIP

As the Société Congo is primarily a cooperative agricultural organization the responsibility of membership is largely related to agricultural matters. In fact, many members leave the immediate community and even the island to engage in other activities during the dry season. During this or any other absence, all property is left under the protection of the society. The dark red flag is placed above the peak of the absentee's roof and signifies that any trespasser will be answerable to the society.¹⁶ The society only operates in full force during the crop season, which extends

¹⁴ The titles of certain officers, the commands of the "sergent d'armes" and drill movements of the society are closely related to the French military.

¹⁵ The title "conseil," the duties of that officer, and the court proceeding are doubtlessly due to French rather than African influences.

¹⁶ Hutton Webster, op. cit., 116. "Calabar people who find it necessary to be absent on a journey, place their property under the protection of 'Egbo,' by fastening the badge of the society to their homes."

from the middle of February to the first week in September. Each member receives one day's work by the entire society on his property and a definite system of rotation is practiced.¹⁷ Each member then knows when to prepare for the group on his property and where he is supposed to report for work on the following day. In spite of this system the queen issues invitations to each member every evening, stating not only the place but also the time and the type of work. A number of things may happen to change the rotation temporarily. Any member is privileged to sell his day of work to the one who follows him. The established price is 50 centimes de gourde (10¢) per worker. The seller saves the price of entertaining the group and the purchaser receives two consecutive days of work. Illness, inclement weather, etc., may temporarily halt the proceedings, but the rotation is never broken.

A member may purchase the right to membership without working and still receive his days of work from the society as well as all the other benefits. This is done by paying each member 50 centimes de gourde a month. Members of this sort are rare and usually old men with some money, who are considered solid citizens of the community. Non-members may arrange with the queen for the employment of all or part of the society during the off-season. The rate again is 50 centimes per worker per day.

A DAY IN THE FIELD

The society meets at early morning in order to accomplish as much work as possible before the intense tropical heat becomes too pronounced. The "Reine de la drapeaux" posts the society's flag of plain dark red, at some conspicuous point on the nearby trail. The "Chef de Société" divides the workers into two lines, sees that tools are properly distributed, and gives instructions for the day's work. The drummers sound the signal to begin and keep up a rhythmic beat as the tools of the workers glisten in the early morning sun. Before many moments, a voice joins tune with

¹⁷ Duncan R. Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, 118 f., 1925. "Working parties are often formed for the hoeing, *the group spending one day in each garden*, and being fed by the owner in each case. When a headsman's garden is being done, beer is provided, and the chief usually kills an ox when he has a party hoeing for him."

the drums. When the solo is finished the entire society joins in the chorus. It is usually an old song and well known to all. The drums beat incessantly and the tools rise and fall in unison with it. Every now and then, someone sings out and the group joins in the chorus. Many of the songs are extremely lewd. New verses are often created but the tunes do not change. Always it is the solo followed by the chorus.¹⁸ The music of the drums and the tunes and words of the songs are usually enough to inform anyone acquainted with the island as to just what society is at work.¹⁹ The drums especially can be heard at great distance.

The owner of the property has been arranging for days for this event. Now he moves down the line passing out drinks of "taffia." Before long everyone is feeling the effects of the raw liquor and songs become lustier and lewder. Shouts of laughter follow the creation of an unusual verse. The workers call in a high voice to peasants along the trails. The whole event is hugely enjoyed.²⁰

About eleven o'clock, the drummers sound the order for rest and the society gathers in the shade of the host's hut. A meal of yams and millet cakes or congo beans and cassava bread is served. The "taffia" container is always in evidence and the neighborhood resounds with laughter and shrill voices.

At about two o'clock work begins again and the performance of the morning is repeated. By four-thirty or five the "Chef de Société" usually signals the drummers to sound quitting time, if this has not been done by the host.

The evening meal is then served. This is much more elaborate

¹⁸ J. H. Driberg, *op. cit.*, 129. ". . . Every now and then one will get up and sing, sometimes an old song, sometimes an improvisation, but always whether old or new, the rest join readily in the chorus.—They (the songs) always consist of a solo or recitative and a chorus.—Songs of an indelicate nature are not unusual."

¹⁹ P. Amaury Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 413, 1912 (referring to the Ekoï people): "All clubs have different tunes and peculiar ways of beating the drums, so that even at a distance it is easy to tell which of the many societies is holding a celebration."

²⁰ A. Werner, *op. cit.*, 184. "The owner invites all his neighbors, men and women, and prepares large quantities of beer, with which they regale themselves after a hard morning's work. Sometimes, the pots are carried out to the garden and the party consumes refreshments there. Each person has a certain piece of ground allotted to him or her—'a roe to hoe' and the work is got through with singing and mirth."

than the noon meal and contains a number of dishes. Some meat or fish is usually included and wheat flour biscuits are occasionally served as dessert. The "taffia" is served in greater quantities. Sometimes the host issues an invitation to the group to remain for a dance that night. Before the group breaks up the "Division de Société" lines the workers up and the "Chef" asks them if they are satisfied with the treatment they have received. They all answer together either to the affirmative or negative. The "Chef" then asks the host if he is satisfied with the amount and quality of work done.²¹ He answers and gives his reasons for the answer. In case of a negative answer in either case, the queen is called and both arguments are heard. If the host has been lax in affording food and drink he is fined and pays in more food and drink. If the society is found to be in the wrong they return for a while on the following Saturday and complete the work. Between two and three carreaux (one carreau is equal to 3.10 acres) is considered a good day's clearing or planting. When both sides are satisfied the meeting ends by a dipping of the flag to the host.

The majority of cases referred to the court are for not heeding the "invitation" to work. Should a member fail to appear, a red flag is placed on the roof of his house. This usually takes place early the following Saturday morning and means that the member is under arrest. He is not permitted to leave his hut or talk to anyone until the court assembles in his yard that afternoon.²² The Queen, President, and "Chef" act as judges and the attorneys for the defense and prosecution present their angles of the case to the whole society. The judges present their decision to the society for approval, which is almost always given.

²¹ J. H. Driberg, *op. cit.*, 97. "Only in case of extreme poverty or when famine has consumed all supplies does a man cultivate unaided. Assistance is normally procured from his friends and neighbors in return for food and drink after the day's work, and the extent of assistance thus procurable is conditioned by the size of the reward, regularized by custom, and designated by standard terminology."

²² C. F. Schlenker, *A Collection of Temme Traditions, Fables, and Proverbs*, xiii, 1861. "The Temmes who have the 'Purrah' institution use the same method to give notice of the excommunication of an individual who has fallen under the displeasure of the society. A stick to which are fastened some leaves of grass, placed in the offender's yard, is a warning that he is not to leave his farm or have anything to do with anyone until the ban is removed." Quoted from note 6, Webster, *op. cit.*, 116.

If the accused cannot prove sickness or some other complete alibi he is sure to be convicted. When brought to trial he is said to be "burned."²³ If found guilty a red handkerchief is tied about his arm above the elbow. Then the queen selects the largest and fattest hog or goat which the member owns and it is killed "against"²⁴ him. A barbecue and a dance follow. The victim is compelled to furnish the drinks immediately upon conviction and thereafter until the party terminates. This it usually does not do until well into Sunday. The entire society, however, turns up at the man's hut at some later date and works free for him for a part of a day to help offset the cost of the food and drink which they have consumed at his expense.

For more serious offenses, expulsion from the society is the common penalty. It is said by non-members that bodily torture and even death are meted out to those who betray the society or commit serious offenses against it. This the author believes to be mere gossip. However, in the long protracted dances and drinking festivities, voodooism probably enters and crimes may be committed in the name of religion. Again, however, the author believes such incidents to be exceedingly rare.

CONCLUSION

The Société Congo is primarily a cooperative agricultural society. It has, in addition, social, protective, and benevolent functions. In its organization and operation, influences of American Indian, French, and African cultures can be seen. Adjustments to local conditions can also be noted.

The crops produced—notably the yam, cotton, cassava, and maize—are inherited from the Indian, as is the semi-milpa system of agriculture. The French contribution is chiefly in language,

²³ G. Cyril Claridge, *Wild Bush Tribes of Tropical Africa*, 201, 1922. "The poor fellow was what the natives call '*burnt*.' To court he had to go, where he listened to an eloquent indictment against himself before paying the penalty (the price of a pig)."

²⁴ Charles Partridge, *op. cit.*, 111. In describing the Egbo societies of the Obubura Hill district, the author quotes a member as saying: "In the old time, if we wanted any young man to join, and he refused, our chief went into town and killed a goat 'against' him and he had to pay its value to the owner. A cow was shot 'against' a member for disobedience."

religion, and tradition, all of which temper the whole. The celebration of Saints' days and the names and even the functions of some of the officers are examples of this influence. The temporal distribution of activities, methods of agriculture, and the relation of the organization to society at large result in part only from the natural and cultural environment of Gonave.

The organization and origins of the Société Congo appear to be primarily African. Not that any one African secret society can be found which will present an exact duplicate but rather the society, like the people of Haiti, is a composite drawn from many parts of the African continent.

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