

THE DEATH VINE— AYAHUASCA

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A primitive art of curing and healing was developed to an astonishing degree by the Incas, even before the advent of the Spaniards. These natives of America knew the medicinal value of certain herbs, shrubs, and the roots, barks, resins and leaves of trees, and how to administer them to effect cures. They were acquainted also with the use of certain narcotics. This knowledge, modified by the passing of time, has been transmitted from generation to generation, and is the basis of practices carried on today by a few Indian tribes in certain regions in the eastern ranges of the Andes and the adjacent equatorial forests. Many ancient customs and traditions have survived unaltered among these people because of the simple environment in which they live. It is therefore not surprising to find among them certain individuals regarded as wizards or medicine-men.

Among the botanical specimens brought back by the Marshall Field Expedition to Peru, one of the most interesting is the *ayahuasca*, used by these medicine-men. This name derives from the Quecha dialect words *aya*, meaning death, and *huasca*, meaning vine. The "death vine" belongs to the tropical family Malpighiaceae.

Among these Indians the leaves of this vine are boiled in water for several hours, and the resulting infusion is drunk copiously at ceremonial feasts to eliminate fear and to stimulate reckless bravery in warfare. The narcotic element in the drink has a rapid and violent effect on the nervous system. It is strongly habit forming.

During a tribal gathering the medicine-man acts as cup-bearer. He serves the *ayahuasca* drink in a small calabash containing about a cupful. In about two minutes its effect begins to be apparent. The drinker turns pale, trembles in every limb, and is swept by dizziness. When this

stage has passed he announces that he sees charming landscapes, trees laden with fruits, birds of gorgeous plumage and other beautiful things. Then, suddenly, the vision changes. Unable longer to support himself, he has hallucinations of persons appearing to ridicule him, of tigers, serpents and supernatural creatures preparing to attack him, and other fearsome things. He howls and groans mournfully, screams incoherent unintelligible words. All of this, the medicine-man explains later, is due to some particular individual—usually an enemy of the family—for whom a poisonous concoction should be prepared.

When the Indian awakes from his trance he must be held down by force to prevent him from seizing his weapons and attacking the first person he encounters. This stage is followed by lethargy, lapsing into unconsciousness. Finally, upon recovering, there is a feeling of heavy drowsiness and headache which lasts for several days.

The *ayahuasca* concoction is drunk also by the medicine-man himself, to produce a trance supposed to enable him to do such things as settle a dispute or quarrel, discover robbers, tell if strangers are approaching, give proper answer to an envoy from another tribe, discover the plans of an enemy, discover if wives are unfaithful, or, in the case of a sick man, to tell who bewitched him.

The powerful *ayahuasca* narcotic, which is similar in its effects to both opium and henbane (although botanically it is very different from either), does not seem to have been studied by toxicologists.

MISSIONARIES AND MUSEUMS

By KARL P. SCHMIDT
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So many rare or otherwise interesting specimens of plants, animals, and ethnological objects come to museums from missionaries stationed in foreign lands that these workers may well take pride in the mark their collecting has made in scientific history. From the nature of their primary interests,

it is natural that the chief scientific contributions of missions and missionaries have been made in anthropology and linguistics. Many individuals, however, have turned to the strange animal and plant life of their surroundings for recreation and diversion, and the sum of their collecting has produced notable advances in our knowledge of the plant and animal life of the world. Some have even become trained collectors, quite on a par with museum professionals.

Aside from their collecting, mission stations in remote parts of the world have proved extremely hospitable to scientists or scientific expeditions passing through their territory. The debt of science to missions is perhaps even greater in this respect than for more direct contributions.

A few instances from Field Museum's recent contacts with missionaries will illustrate both these relations. The Museum not long ago received, through Miss Emily A. Clark, of the Sudan Interior Mission (Interdenominational), in Central Nigeria, a specimen of one of the rarest of African lizards, the curious primitive gecko *Hemitheconyx caudicinctus*. Last year it obtained specimens of the largest of all frogs, the West African Goliath frog, and of the even more remarkable "haired" frog of the same region, from Mrs. Edwin Cozzens of the Presbyterian Mission in the Cameroons. These were the latest of a long and notable series of collections received by various American museums from this group of missions. On the recent Cornelius Crane Pacific Expedition of Field Museum the eminent immunologist, Dr. W. L. Moss, who accompanied the expedition as physician, was enabled to make a unique series of blood tests of native Fijians through the cordial cooperation of the Wesleyan Mission in the Fiji Islands. When the expedition planned to visit the upper Sepik River in northern New Guinea, an ideal guide and leader was available in Father Franz Kirschbaum, whose knowledge of New Guinean ethnology and linguistics has grown to be pre-eminent during his eighteen years of service with the Catholic Mission of the Society of the Holy Word.

MODEL OF MENANGKABAU NATIVE VILLAGE IN SUMATRA IS NOW COMPLETED IN HALL G

A miniature model of a village of the Menangkabau, powerful Malayan tribe which inhabits the Padang Highlands of Sumatra, and is especially interesting for its matriarchal form of social organization, has been completed and is now on exhibition in Hall G of the Museum.

The model shows several typical dwellings, among them one under construction on which the men are seen busily engaged in thatching the roof and putting up carved wall panels. In the background is seen Mount Merapi at a distance, with terraced rice fields extending far up its slopes, and scattered settlements buried beneath coconut palms and other tropical foliage. In the foreground is the village pool which serves for fishing, bathing, and providing the water supply. Here two men are seen washing clothes, while a young girl bathes a baby. Scattered about are groups and individuals engaged in various other typical activities.

Among these people, inheritance and descent are reckoned in the female line, and this leads to unusual situations which are

a head woman, her sisters, daughters, nieces and their families. A large common room is provided where sons and brothers have equal rights as to sleeping and eating; but after marriage the men become visitors in the homes of their wives and spend much of their time there. However, they continue as members of the house in which they were born, and have equal vote there with the women, whereas they have no authority in the homes of their wives.

Several villages make up a clan, and a number of these form a phratry. Each phratry has a council house (one of which is represented in the Museum's exhibit), where representatives of the clans meet.

The data for the exhibit were collected several years ago by Dr. Fay-Cooper Cole while conducting an expedition for the Museum in Sumatra, Java and Borneo. The modeling was done by John G. Prasuhn of the Museum staff.



Menangkabau Village

Miniature model showing varied activities of strange tribe

reflected in the village life, according to Dr. Berthold Laufer, Curator of Anthropology. A settlement, such as is shown in the Museum's model, consists usually of only three or four houses, each of which is occupied by



Williams, Llewelyn. 1931. "The Death Vine - Ayahuasca." *Field Museum news* 2(8), 3-3.

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