IDEAS OF MANHOOD IN WEST AFRICA

By W. D. Hambly

Assistant Curator of African Ethnology and leader of Frederick H. Rawson-Field Museum Ethnological Expedition to West Africa

In many primitive societies boys are not allowed to grow gradually into manhood. The adult stage is attained only by passing through ceremonies which invariably impose many restraints and much physical suffering.

When at Cangamba in the far east of Angola, with the Frederick H. Rawson-Field Museum Ethnological Expedition to West Africa, my attention was called to a large enclosure built of brushwood in such a way that the interior was entirely screened from passers-by. It was for the boys' initiation ceremonies, which are held only once in four years. With some difficulty I obtained admittance, chiefly because I was able to say that I was not a government official, and was thus enabled to witness parts of the ceremonies.

The first stage in the initiation proceeding is the approach of a group of young boys to the elders of the village asking that such initiation may take place. The ceremony is essential as a prelude to marriage; moreover, the uninitiated boy is regarded as a child who may never be a companion of the initiated.

On entering the enclosure I found five boys apparently varying in age from twelve to seventeen years. Each boy had to make for himself a mask of bark cloth which is painted black and white. The masks are newly made for each initiation ceremony, but the netting fiber costumes had evidently seen long service.

Usually the boys live for two months in this enclosure. During this period each boy has to spend fourteen days continuously lying on his back in a small cage built from branches of trees. The long seclusion is marked by semi-starvation and flogging; in fact there are deaths among the boys from time to time.

The message sent to the parents of a boy who has died under this treatment has a touch of pathos. The wooden food platter used by the deceased is sent to the parents after it has been perforated, so as to suggest that it will be of no further use.

About the time of my departure from Cangamba, all the newly-initiated boys were presented at a village feast. Four expert drummers played continuously for several hours, almost to the point of my exhaustion and their own. Everyone knows that these weird figures are the boys who disappeared for initiation some eight weeks ago, but everyone pretends that the village has been visited by the ochigangi, or spirits of the dead. The garbed figures dance wildly here and there, occasionally darting about to disperse a group of women and girls who run screaming to the bush.

Several complete costumes, including masks, were obtained, which will, in due course, be exhibited in Hall D, devoted to African ethnology.

AMAZON WOODS EXHIBITED

A collection of two dozen planks representing the principal species of woods of economic importance which are obtained from the Amazon valley has been placed on exhibition in the Hall of Foreign Woods (Hall 27). These specimens were obtained in the state of Pará, Brazil, by the Marshall Field Botanical Expedition to the Amazon.

According to Dr. B. E. Dahlgren, Acting Curator of Botany, who was leader of the Amazon Expedition, no region on earth has vaster forest areas or is more prolific in species of trees than the Amazon valley. More than a thousand kinds, almost twice as many as exist in all of North America above the Rio Grande, have been described from the state of Pará alone. In the presence of such a wealth of forest resources a notable development of lumbering could be expected. However, while a considerable export business both in logs and cut lumber does exist, it is with some surprise that one discovers that the local utilization of wood is confined to a few dozen kinds at most.

For the names of some of these woods the native Indian designations have been retained. Thus one encounters a variety of strange and sonorous terms like massaranduba, muirapiranga, araracanga, piquiárana, sapucaia, tatajuba, marupá—words, someone has said, made to order for the naming of Pullman cars.

The woods to which they are applied are as different as their appellations. Some are distinguished for their beautiful or unusual color, some for peculiar grain, characteristic striping or bizarre markings; others for lightness and excellent working qualities or for solidity and resistance to wear and exposure.

VOLCANIC BOMBS

By Henry W. Nichols
Associate Curator of Geology

Volcanic bombs do not explode, although they fall from such height that they can do much damage when they hit the earth. They have a curious origin. A volcano in violent eruption throws melted lava high in the air. Most of it is torn to fragments by the violence of the eruption and falls as volcanic ash and scoria. Occasionally a lump of lava in a semi-fluid state is thrown so high that it has time to cool enough, before falling to the earth, to retain the form impressed upon it during its aerial travel. Such a mass during its ascent and descent spins rapidly. The rapid revolution forces the plastic mass to assume the spindle form by which volcanic bombs are recognized. The outside of the mass chills rapidly so that it has a thin glassy glaze. The inside cools more slowly and may have the aspect of stony lava.

Usually, however, the molten lava is saturated with dissolved gases and steam, in which case the inside of the bomb is porous and resembles pumice or the inside of a loaf of bread. The resemblance to bread is more marked in the breadcrust variety of volcanic bomb which has a surface reticulated by shallow cracks such as appear on bread crust. This is due to contraction from cooling.

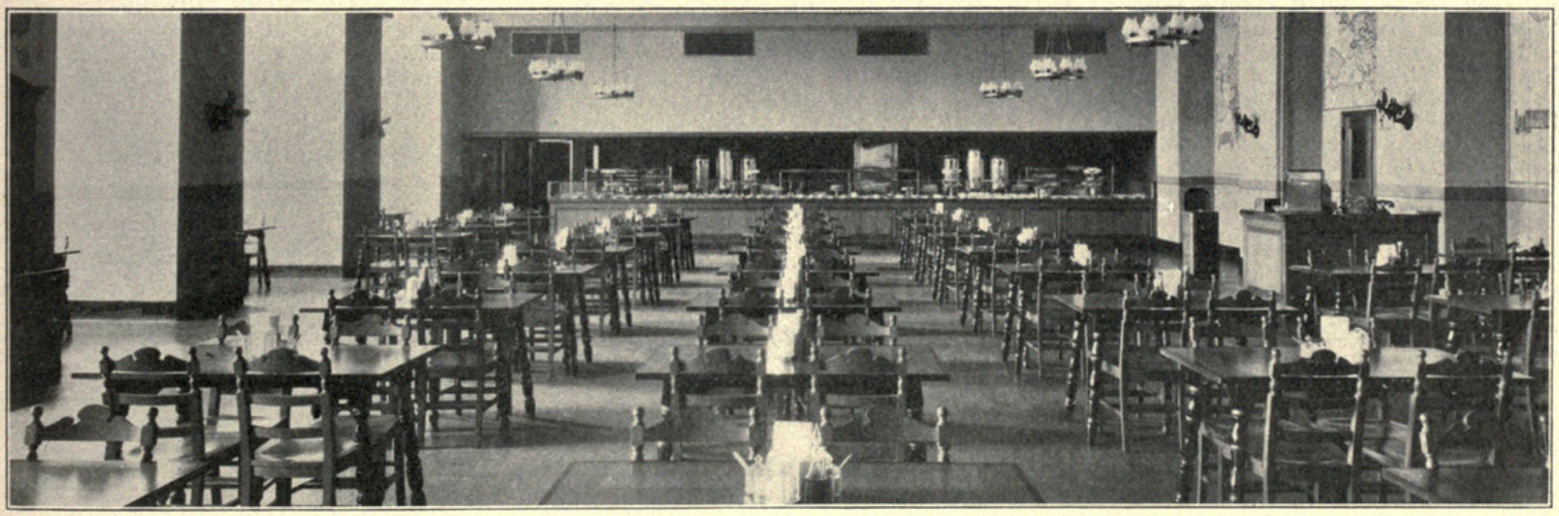
The recent Marshall Field Expedition to Mount Taylor added a number of specimens to the volcanic bomb collection in Clarence Buckingham Hall (Hall 35).

Museum's Printing Chief Dies

U. A. Dohmen, for more than thirty-five years Chief of the Division of Printing of Field Museum, died on May 21. Mr. Dohmen was born December 24, 1874, and began his work for the Museum in 1895. Starting with hand-set type, foot-operated printing press, and himself as the only printer, Mr. Dohmen developed the plant in his charge into a large one with modern typesetting, printing, binding and cutting machinery, and a staff of numerous workers. His devotion to his duties and the great success he made of the printing plant, were greatly appreciated by the administrative officers of the Museum, and his death represents a serious loss.

Dewey S. Dill, for several years an assistant of Mr. Dohmen's, has been placed in charge of the Division of Printing.

GOOD FOOD AMID PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS PROVIDED FOR MUSEUM VISITORS



Field Museum's New Cafeteria

View of part of new lunchroom looking toward the serving counter. Improved facilities make possible quicker and more efficient service for large numbers of people. See editorial on page 2.