

Negro Life in South Central Africa.¹

By SIR H. H. JOHNSTON, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.

THERE have been very few books like the two volumes before us published about any people of arrested development, even in Germany, where, before the war, a certain standard of perfection was reached in ethnological treatises. It is difficult to find any fault with the work, in regard to either what has been put in or what left out. The authors are the Rev. Edwin W. Smith, an honorary chaplain to the Forces and a Church of England missionary to the Ba-ila, and Capt. Andrew Murray Dale, a magistrate in the British South Africa Company's administration. Capt. Dale died (unhappily) last year of black-water fever, worn out with much war service. The Rev. E. W. Smith, if I mistake not, saw considerable war service in Italy and elsewhere, and his work with the Forces kept this remarkable book back from publication for some little time. Incidentally, I might mention him as well known to students of Bantu. He was the author of a handbook of the Ila language, and an important contributor to the information on South-west African languages in my "Comparative Study of the Bantu."

The Ila people inhabit the central part of Northern Rhodesia, especially the region through which flows the great river Kafue. (This name seems to be a corrupted and abbreviated form of Kavuvu or Kafubwe, which means "Hippopotamus.") They have evidently been a conquering race of invaders from the north-east which has imposed its language and customs on less courageous tribes of inferior physique. The true Mu-ila is—for a pure Bantu negro—rather a handsome type, at any rate in beautifully formed and proportioned body and limbs; but other tribes speaking the Chila language to-day are of different stocks; some may even go back for their ancestry to Bushmen or to Congo pygmies, and in remembrance of this they are called "Batwa" (dwarfs) to this day. Others, again, belong to the Luba group, the men of which have almost an Arab cast of features and a full beard.

This most noteworthy work deals with the history, the physical characteristics, clothing (often lacking in the males), building operations,

food, domestic animals (their cattle are straight-backed, and seem to have come to them from the west and south, the old Damara-Ngami breed and Portuguese), hunting, warfare, medicine, iron-work, pottery, social organisation, terms of

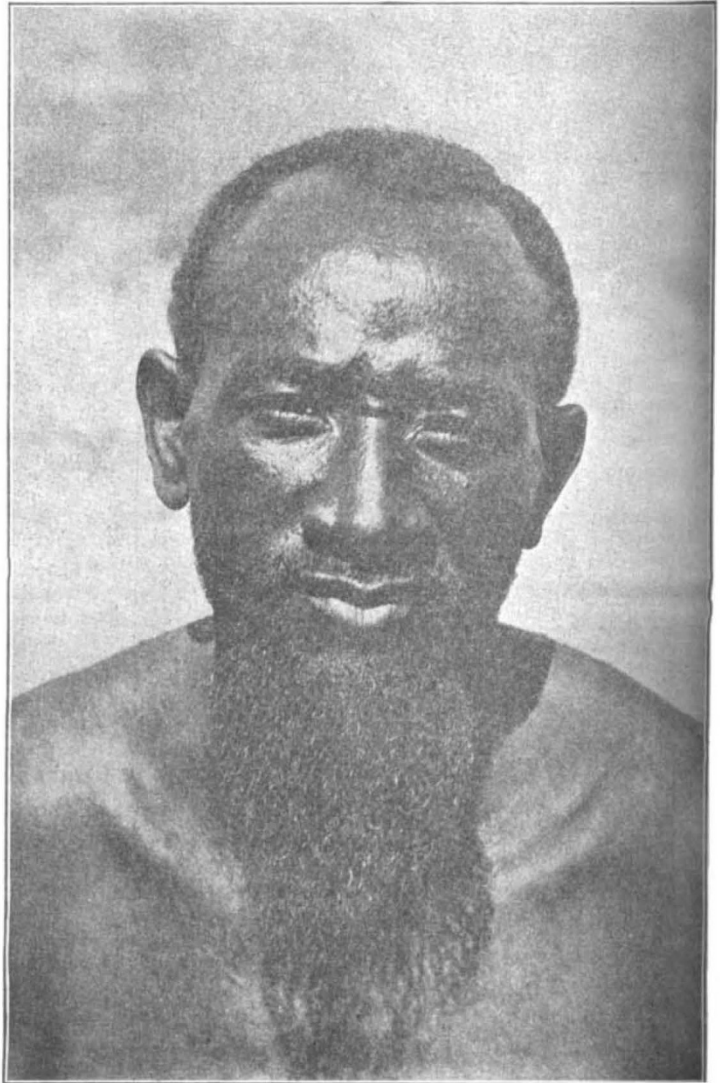


FIG. 1.—A Baluba type. From "The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia."

relationship, religious beliefs, relations of the sexes, folk-lore—and what perhaps is most interesting and novel, their ideas about psychology, astronomy, biology, the undefined external forces of Nature, thaumaturgy, and therapeutics. The chapter on etiquette brings home to one how minutely these seemingly savage men and women may order their lives by prescribed custom, and what slaves they can be to convention. No newly enriched person in our own land, wishing to move

¹ "The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia." By the Rev. Edwin W. Smith and Capt. Andrew Murray Dale. In two vols. Vol. i., pp. xxvii+423; Vol. ii., pp. xiv+433. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1920.) Price 5s. net two vols.

without attrition in the highest circles, need undergo such a tax on the memory as the stranger who would desire neither to offend nor to shock a Mu-ila man or woman. The language is full of pitfalls, because it is as rich in double meanings as any European tongue. You may be grossly

act of immorality, while another will be mulcted severely for merely alluding to an indecent proposition. Many of the dances and a number of the songs—especially those sung at funeral ceremonies—are termed by the authors "phallic," and here very sensibly they quote the actual words and deeds, lest imagination should exaggerate. The authors conclude that this condition of immorality, especially among quite young people—children not fully mature—is leading to a seriously diminishing birth-rate.

In some writings on Africa missionary work is still sneered at; but one result—especially in South and East Africa—has been to raise the birth-rate amongst the negroes by discouraging polygamy, and, above all, by strenuously urging the abolition of the depraving initiation ceremonies and all immodest behaviour amongst young girls and boys. The worst feature in Ila-land is the abuse of quite young girl-children by adult men.

But the study of these primitive people as a whole leaves one with a very pleasant mental impression, alike of them and of their two interpreters, Mr. Smith and Capt. Dale. The absolute truth is told about them, but it is told so tersely, with so much humour, sympathy, and insight, that the discriminating reader, the ethnologist above all, rises from the reading of "The Ila-speaking Peoples" with a sense of gratitude to the authors and with a wonderfully vivid impression of negro life in that particular region very little influenced as yet by the white man. One hopes sincerely that the Ila people may turn the corner under wise administration and missionary teaching, and become in time a flourishing race, playing a considerable part in the development of Northern Zambezia.

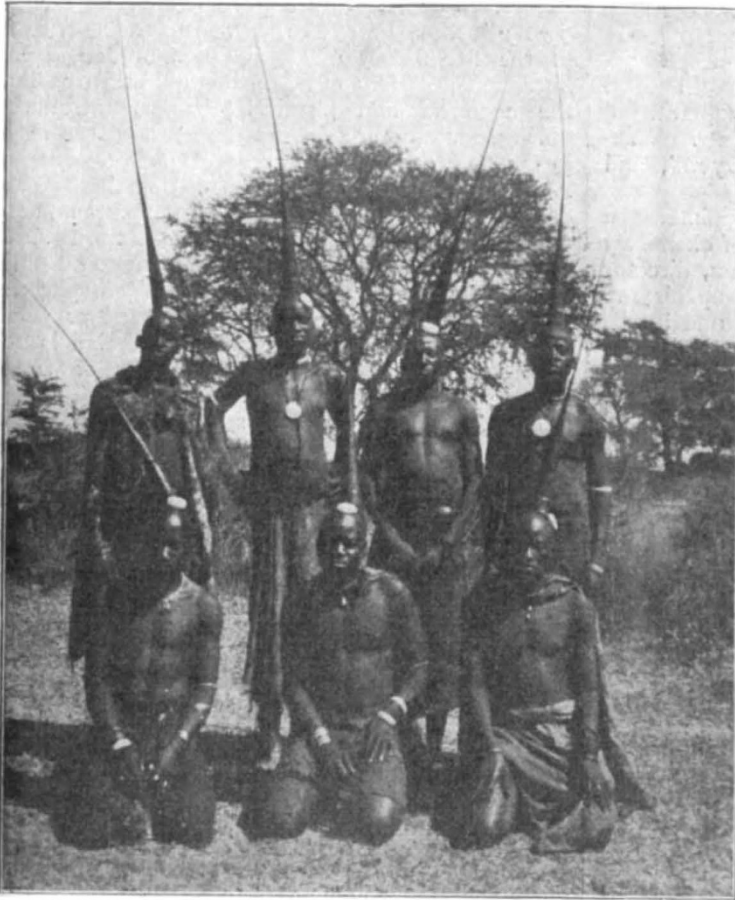


FIG. 2.—Young Ba-ila fresh from the hairdresser. From "The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia."

indecent in alluding to common objects of the house or garden implements.

The Ba-ila are so sensual that the relations between the sexes are nearly promiscuous. Yet here again everything must be governed by custom. One man may be fined lightly for a gross

Industrial Research Associations.

III.—THE BRITISH COTTON INDUSTRY RESEARCH ASSOCIATION.

By DR. A. W. CROSSLEY, C.M.G., F.R.S.

THIS association was incorporated in June, 1919, but much valuable work had been done previously by a Provisional Committee appointed by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research towards the end of 1916. The Committee was presided over by Mr. J. W. McConnel, to whose efforts it is largely due that

more than 90 per cent. of all the spinners, doublers, manufacturers, bleachers, dyers, calico printers, and finishers engaged in the cotton industry have given their support to the association, which now numbers 1461 members, including representatives of the lacemaking and hosiery trade. The first chairman of the association was