Records of Captain Clapperton's last expedition to Africa, Vol. 2 (of 2)

Richard Lander

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RECORDS

OF

CAPTAIN CLAPPERTON'S

LAST EXPEDITION

TO

=AFRICA:=

BY RICHARD LANDER,

HIS FAITHFUL ATTENDANT, AND THE ONLY SURVIVING

MEMBER OF THE EXPEDITION:

WITH THE SUBSEQUENT ADVENTURES OF THE AUTHOR.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,

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WANDERINGS

IN

AFRICA.

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CHAPTER X.

Character of the Africans in general — Their social qualities considered — Succinct remarks on the Natural History of the Interior — Yam Yams — Arabs — Falatahs — War of the latter people with Bornou and Fundah.

The character Plutarch gives of the Athenians is strictly applicable to the people of Africa in general, _in times of peace_:—“They are easily provoked to anger, and as easily induced to resume sentiments of benevolence and compassion.” This we found to be true in numberless instances; particularly amongst the gentler sex, whose apprehensions are quicker and more lively, and whose finer feelings more easily excited than those of their male companions. We not unfrequently observed persons quarrelling and fighting in one moment, with all the bitterness of angry and elevated passions, and in the next as gentle as lambs, and the most cordial friends in the universe; forgetting their previous noisy dispute in the performance of reciprocal acts of kindness and good nature.

The African, ceaselessly engaged in sleeping, warfare, drinking, &c. takes little, if any, delight in his own family circle. His is no _domestic_ life: his children never prattle round his knee; his eye never glistens with tenderness on receiving their innocent caresses; his numerous wives, who are valued as a distinct and inferior order of beings, weaken his affections and blunt his feelings; and he regards them with looks of indifference or contempt. With him,

“All claims that bind and sweeten life,”

are, indeed, unknown; and, provided his wants be supplied, unless aroused from his stupor by any particular event, he journeys calmly on, with the most listless indifference imaginable, scarcely deigning to bestow a solitary thought either on his country, or his wives and children. He holds the dead, however, in the greatest veneration, hardly venturing to let the name of a deceased relative escape his lips; and if, when engaged in contentious bickerings, his opponent alludes

to them in a disrespectful manner, he interrupts him with this energetic expression: “Curse _me_; slay _me_, if thou wilt; but do not rake up the ashes of the dead. Let them rest in peace, or thou thyself shalt follow them to the grave.”

The natives are passionately fond of storytelling, and listen for hours after the setting of the sun, with a gravity truly comic, to the recital of tales of the most wonderful and incredible description, in which they repose implicit belief. The following was told me with an air of great solemnity, and with a full conviction of its truth, by a native of Goober:—

“Doncasson, Prince of that province, ordered a number of men to build houses at the distance of three miles from Coonia, the capital, which they undertook to finish within a given number of days. The workmen, contrary to their expectation, could find no water in the neighbourhood of the spot, nor, indeed, at a shorter distance than Coonia; and having no vessels large enough to convey a sufficient quantity within the time specified, they were put to their wits’ end, in what manner to act, fearing that in the event of the non-fulfilment of their engagement a dreadful punishment would await them. In this dilemma they applied for advice to a female fortune-teller, residing in the city, who, having accompanied them to the scite of the intended hamlet, ordered an immense heap of earth, sufficient for the walls of the buildings, to be thrown up; when the old woman immediately supplied them with the water required, in the same manner as Gulliver extinguished the dreadful fire that threatened to destroy the capital of the kingdom of Lilliput, on his visit to that country; and thus the buildings of Doncasson were finished a week earlier than was expected.”

The persons of the Africans, of both sexes, are perfectly well-formed. I never saw an individual in the whole country with a hump on his back, or any other species of deformity whatever; and this will appear the more strange when it is considered that no people in the world pay less attention to their offspring in their tender years. We frequently saw individuals with only one hand, the other having been amputated as a punishment; but never met with a person that had lost a leg. The people used to deride us when we affirmed that some of our countrymen were furnished with _wooden_ legs in lieu of natural ones, believing that a person could never survive the loss of so important a member.

NATURAL HISTORY.

Of the natural history of the regions we traversed I can say but little, my very limited and imperfect acquaintance with that interesting study, in either of its branches, incapacitating me from giving any thing like a description of the various productions of the soil, or of the numerous animals that inhabit the woods or the rivers.

Magnificent forests of tall trees are scattered over the face of the country from Badagry to Soccatoo, and afford, in their gloomy solitudes, shelter to numerous species of reptiles and wild beasts. The palm, the cocoa, the tamarind, the banana, the fig, the date (a species of palm), the butter, and other trees, are indigenous; and several varieties of plum grow in woods of Yariba, as well as a tree bearing a fruit similar in size and appearance to our “love apple,” and in flavour, to the _cashew_ apple of the West Indies. Stunted orange, lemon, and lime trees, bearing fruit of inferior quality, may also be

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