

# Queer Customs of Courtships and Marrings of Black Continent Tribes

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**B**ROKEN HILL, Northwestern Rhodesia.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee)—Before I leave the heart of the black continent, to start south for the white man's Africa, that land of gold and diamonds below the Zambezi, I want to write a letter about the queer customs of our African sisters. They are an important half of this dark-complexioned world and every nation and tribe has its own ways of treating them. I have already written of the Mohammedan maidens along the coast of the Mediterranean; they go about clad all in white or black, each having only a single ekehole in her garments to find her way along the streets. I have written of the fair-skinned Jews of Tunis. They dress in jackets and trousers, and a pair of their embroidered breeches often costs as much as \$30. I have told you how they are fattened for marriage by special feeding and how popular bells often weigh 300 pounds. I have described the women of Tripoli and Egypt, where the girls cover their faces with long veils when they go out of doors, and also the dancing maidens of the Sahara, called the Ouled Ualis, who have brazen, bare faces and paint their eyelids black with kohl and stain their finger nails and toe nails red with henna. Farther down the continent I learned much about the woman of the British possessions, where John Bull is now regulating the marriages, fixing the price of brides, old and young, lean and fat, good looking and the reverse, at \$3 each, and still farther south about the women now ruled by the Germans, who are allowed to marry as they please, according to custom. I have also notes before me gathered during my travels in Portuguese East Africa, Mashonaland, Matabeleland and here on the edge of the Congo Estate. Indeed, the material is such that I hardly know where to begin, and I shall dig into my notes, jumping from one place to another, as the subject demands.

### Adventure with Usukuma Bride.

Let me start with the description of a wedding procession which I saw in German East Africa, on the lower edge of Victoria Nyansa. The people there are known as Basukuma. There are half a million of them and they are considered a strong race. They are Bantu negroes, who dress in cowskins and cottons and who have cattle, sheep and goats. When a young man there wants a wife he pays her father fifty sheep for her or agrees to work for the old man a number of years. All marriage arrangements are made by go-betweens and the matchmaker brings the bride to the groom. In the meanwhile the chief brideprice has arranged the groom's hut for the occasion and a new bed is made, consisting of a framework of wood with a mattress of oxskins. The brideprice is paid a sheep for this work. After this she goes with the matchmaker, who might be called another brideprice, to the house of the bride and brings her home in great style.

It was such a procession that I stopped one morning on its way to the groom. It consisted of a score or more of women dressed in cowskins and cottons, yelling and singing as they danced along to a queer-looking figure which laboriously moved in the center. At first I could not make out what it was. It looked like a woman with a gigantic hump, wrapped in bright figured Indian cotton. As the party came closer this figure turned sidewise. The hump then took the shape of a human form and I could see that the woman was evidently carrying a sister or brother under her armpits. I handed my camera to my son Jack, who was with me, and accompanied the lady. She laughed, and I attempted to make out what kind of a creature she carried. I could see two little black "foolish woodstoes" sticking out at the front, and by the cutaway of the skirt cotton could see that it covered a lusty girl who was holding on by her arms to the woman who carried her. Her hands were clasped together over the brideprice's breast and the brideprice was also supporting her by holding her ankles, which stuck out on each side of the body. I put my hand on the woman's back and the bride squeaked, but when I attempted to touch her bare feet the brideprice objected. All this took but a few moments and as I stepped back the procession went



A ZULU BRIDE EARNS HER SALT.

The second brideprice stood behind the bride-carrier and held an umbrella over her. As the party neared the hut of the groom a score of other women, the relatives of the groom, rushed out and scattered rice over the bride and the escorting party. I peeped into the hut just before they arrived, and thus got a look at the bride's chamber. It was a dark closet shut in by bark-cloth, and the bed was of cowskin. I was told that the groom was not yet present and that he would come in and take possession after the brideprice had arranged everything and fitted the hut for the pair. He had already given sixty sheep to his father-in-law and one sheep to the bride's sister.

### What Wives Cost.

Sixty sheep seemed to me a big price for a wife, and I asked the Germans whether many girls were not sold at reduced rates. The reply was in the affirmative, but it was added that a good, lusty woman was worth something as a worker and that the women were the slaves of the family. They take care of the stock, cultivate the crops and also keep house. The men do little but loaf. Besides it costs almost nothing to keep an extra wife there, as the women are not allowed to eat chickens or eggs, even the necks and gizzards being forbidden to them. In the Kafirland country at the northeast of the lake, I was informed that the usual price for a wife is forty iron hoes, twenty goats and a cow, and that these articles can be paid on installments. In Uganda the government price is \$3 per girl, but more is usually given for the daughter of a chief.

Among the Nandi tribes the richest men have from ten to forty wives, and the price for a good maiden of 14 is six cows. Girls are often betrothed as early as 7, and they are married at 11. The cows are often paid on installments, and if no child is born within a year after the marriage the husband may stop payment. It is among these Nandi, as with the Masali, who are found around the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro and also on the highlands of British East Africa, that the unmarried girls dwell with the young unmarried men in the bachelor quarters and until they are old enough to get married. A Masali man is not supposed to marry until he is 30. Among the Buvumas the price of a wife is two cows and five goats. Of these the father of the bride keeps one of the cows and a goat, the other four goats being given to the relatives.

### Tax on Wives.

Down in Rhodesia the usual price for a strong, good-looking girl is four cows, and if she is the daughter of a chief she may bring as much as five or six. The government taxes every native \$5 a year for his hut and family, and this includes a tax for one wife. If he has more than one he is charged 10 shillings for each extra wife. The Kaffir girls are married at as early as 12, and a girl is often engaged at 4 or 5 years of age. Such engagements are made by the parents, and several cattle form a part of the dowry. It is a custom among the Kaffirs not to allow a younger brother to marry until such of his older brothers has at least one wife, and the father often helps pay for the bride.

About Lake Shiré girls are often betrothed in their infancy and they are sometimes actually engaged before they are born. In such cases the prospective groom or his parents are expected to clothe the girl until she is old enough to be married, but as the only clothing in her early life is a waist cloth, and often not more than a string, the expense is not heavy. The people there have from one to twenty wives, according to their wealth, and in times past the chiefs had harems of as many as 100 women each. As a rule the number of wives is decreasing all over South Africa, and with the demand for foreign



KAFIR MAIDEN'S COIFFURE.

goods, which is gradually growing, making the support of women more expensive, there is likely to be still further decrease.

### Bride's Costumes.

The question of dress is not a serious one in most parts of central Africa. It is different north of the Sahara, where a pair of bridal trousers may, as I have stated, cost \$30 and upward, and where breeches of cloth of gold are not uncommon. The lightest wedding costume I have seen in my travels is that which the women wear at the end of the Uganda railroad. The men go absolutely naked and the married women have on nothing but a sort of fly brush tail about twelve inches long, which they fasten to a string around the waist. The tail thus hangs down behind on a line with the vertebrae and flaps up and down as one walks. It is indecent for any man to touch this scandal badge of matrimony, and even the husband is warned to let it alone.

In this same country the women wear no clothes whatever until married, when they adopt the tail. A little change is now beginning along the line of the railroad, but a few months back nudity prevailed. Notwithstanding this the Kafir women are said to be of a much higher grade of morality than their neighbors, who are more or less clad.

A little south of that region I came upon a tribe where the ladies wear about the waist fiber fringes of the length of my hand or longer, and on the opposite side of Lake Victoria I saw hundreds of girls clad all in grass. I say "all," but this means only a skirt which reaches from the waist to the knees. The young girls wear nothing. The Uganda women wear bark-cloth and cover the whole person. They have great blankets which they wrap around them, blinding them in at the breast and waist. Indeed, they are so well covered that they could go through an American

city without being arrested by the police. This would not be possible for a Kafir woman.

Down here near Broken Hill the women wear a cloth which reaches from the waist to the knees, and also a kind of cotton dickey over the breast and back. They are plump, lusty-looking maidens, and can use the native hoe and mattock far better than the men. Indeed the men do almost no work in the cornfields, that work being left to their wives.

### Old Beauty Spots.

Our American belles adore dimples, and it is said that their dimples are sometimes artificially made. They adorn their white faces with black patches of court-plaster, and also comb their hair in outlandish shapes. I have seen an American beauty with a diamond set in one of her front teeth, and we all know of women who paint, powder and enamel. The same effort to beautify one's self goes on throughout Africa, save that the standards of beauty are different. Among the Banyoro, who live north of Uganda, the women knock out the six front teeth of the lower jaw and the young men do the same. The Jalu women have a similar custom. On the south side of Victoria Nyansa there are tribes where the women file their teeth sharp like a saw, and the Buvumas knock out two of the incisors, the price for each such operation being four cows shells or a fraction of a cent.

Most of the African women wear their bodies to beautify them. I have seen girls with Persian shawl patterns on their breasts and abdomens, and others with great welts on their forearms and cheeks, marking the tribe to which they belong. In the Sudan there are scores of such tribal marks, and each tribe has its own way of scarring. Mutilation of the ears is common throughout Central Africa. The Swahili enlarge the holes in the lobes until they become mere straps which will inclose



A BASUKUMA BRIDE ON HER WAY TO THE GROOM.

a glass tumbler. These same girls have holes all around the rims of their ears, which they fill with rolls of paper.

The Masali women load down their ears with jewelry, fastening great weights to the holes in the lobes so that they are gradually pulled down until they flop against the shoulders.

In German East Africa there are people who wear great rings and plugs in their lower lip and in the upper lip as well. Such ornaments elongate the upper lip so that it extends several inches over the mouth.

### Queer Ways of Hair Dressing.

Until I came to Africa I thought the American girl could put up her hair in more outlandish ways than any other maiden on earth. She has many competitors and some superiors among the ebony belles of the Black continent. It is true that these African maidens in most cases have to conquer the kink or corkscrew curl which covers their pates, but nevertheless they have many creations which surpass the wonders of the marcel wave, of our mighty pompadour and the other oddities formed with the aid of the rat, the curling iron or curl paper. The Sudanese braid their hair in long, even curls, so that it hangs out like the snakes of the Medusa. The Zulus put it up in mighty towers, which often extend a full foot above the crown of the head, and down in Natal a bridegroom goes out to court his sweetheart with a pair of real cowhorns tied upright upon his head, so that they look as if they grew there.

Along the eastern coast of Africa there are many natives who braid the hair in little windrows over the scalp, and farther back there are many tribes in which the women shave the head close. This is so with the Baganda and the Masali. Many of the native women of Omdorman, in the Sudan, shave not only the head, but every part of the body, and it is a common cus-

tom among tribes for both men and women to have themselves shaved from head to foot before marriage. Among some people the hair is pulled out. This is also the custom among the Moros of the Philippines and certain tribes of the Amazon.

The Batoro, a tribe which inhabits the country between Lakes Albert and Edward, shave and oil their brides before the wedding. The girl's head is scraped off by the village barber, and her own sister uses the razor over the rest of the body. After this she is smeared from crown to toenail with butter and castor oil, the stuff being well rubbed into the skin.

The Sesse Islanders pull out their eyelashes, and babies have their heads shaved shortly after birth. The old Zulu men and women pull out the gray hairs as they begin to appear, thinking that gray hairs make old age. The younger women there rub red clay and oil in their hair, and they often plait it into string-like strands. When they trim their hair in Pondoland the hair dresser puts a strap around the forehead, and cuts the hair level with this by means of a knife, stopping at the strap, which protects the skin. After they are married they often train their hair into a cone-shaped mass, stiffening it with red clay and oil for the purpose.

In all African countries the native men are almost as particular as the women as to the dressing of their hair. In Zululand the married men wear rings around their heads, twining the hair over them and then smearing it with charcoal and oil so it can be polished. It is a great insult to attempt to pull off a man's ring. In many places the men shave their heads, and up here in Rhodesia there is one tribe which puts the hair up so that a great spear shoots out right above the crown. This spear of hair is sometimes as long as the man cannot stand upright in his hut without disarranging it.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

# Omaha Man's Invention Designed to Prevent Street Railway Mishaps

**A** DARK, stormy night in June, after a sudden rain had spoiled the pleasure of a picnic at a well known Omaha park, a party of the picknickers was returning home on a Cuming street car. The car was disagreeably crowded, and the people who had to

conductor, not noticing her indecision, had pulled the rope and the car was starting. The woman left her little girl, and while ten feet away from the car she stepped off, she murmured resignedly that she had got off at Twentieth street, and stepped into the dark. It was a most ill-considered thing to do. She was thrown flat on her

of about 1,000 in the United States every month and devote about 7 per cent of their earnings to paying damage suits in court. A street car is a very dangerous and a very everyday affair and the combination of everyday association with danger is sure to make people lose sight alto-

This device is called the "Meyer Safety Guard" and it has been patented in the United States and foreign countries. A company known as the Meyer Safety Guard company has been organized and they will be manufactured in Omaha.

The man who jumps from the car from force of habit will be out of danger from some hand stronger than himself, which him firmly in its grasp and holds him on the car. This is just what the Meyer invention will do. A strong rail is suspended from metal standards so that it hangs at about the level of the passenger's elbow and holds him close to the car if he stands on the footboard. It is impossible to stand on the footboard outside of this guard and it is impossible to get off when it is down.

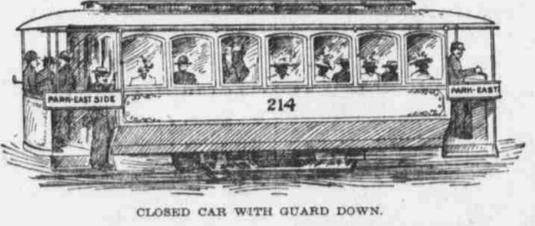
The conductor is the arbiter of the proper time for leaving the car and when he is ready to let the passenger get off the footboard or from the step in a winter car, he moves the proper lever at little effort and the guard is raised. It is so slightly built that it requires no great expenditure of muscle for the conductor or the motor-man, who also has control of it, to raise and lower the guard at every street corner on a trip.

In the summer the guards will be used as an excellent advertising medium. Cards such as are displayed on the walls of cars at present can be placed along the outer and inner surface of the board and when raised or lowered these will be before the eyes of the people on the streets and in the cars.

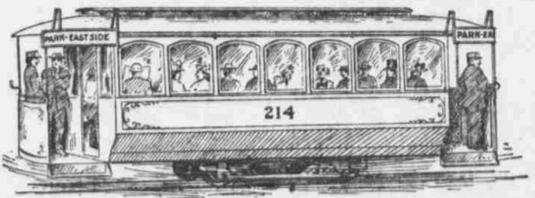
If it were not the custom for a man to leap from a car at the first opportunity as if his feet ached for the touch of solid pavement and if fewer people slipped up and had their heads aching from the touch of solid pavement, both the long suffering public and the street railway corporations would be much better off.

In the city of New York it has been the usual average for the street cars to kill about two persons a day. Many of these are the innocent victims of collisions and such accidents, but on the other hand much of the trouble could have been avoided by greater carelessness on the part of the victims and would certainly not have occurred if the cars had been equipped with a safety device.

Mr. Meyer invites the investigation and trial of his scheme and is beginning to consider himself a benefactor of humanity and if the street car companies are able through his invention to lessen the number of street car tragedies he will be just that—a benefactor to humanity. Women will cease to climb from the cars with their eyes toward the smokers' benches and men will not wait till the car stops in the millennium—but not before. In the



CLOSED CAR WITH GUARD DOWN.



CLOSED CAR WITH GUARD RAISED.

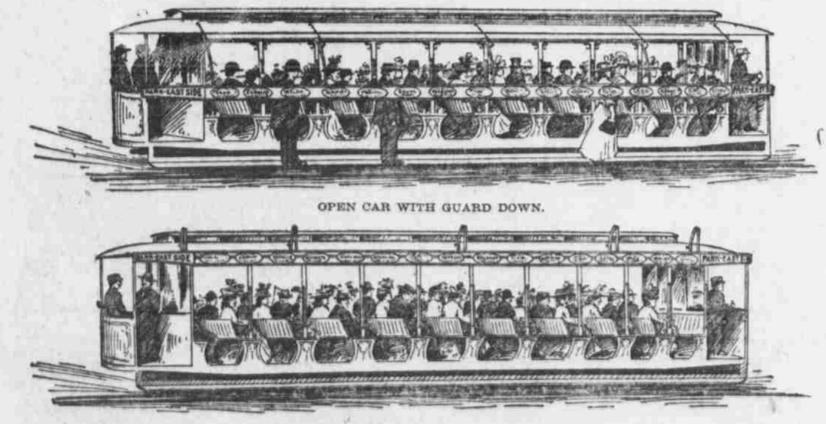
meantime something is necessary to save their lives against their wills and Mr. Meyer's invention seems likely to do it. The safety guard will work equally well on summer and winter cars. On the closed cars it will extend across both front and

conductor may manage his safety guard from anywhere he may happen to be.

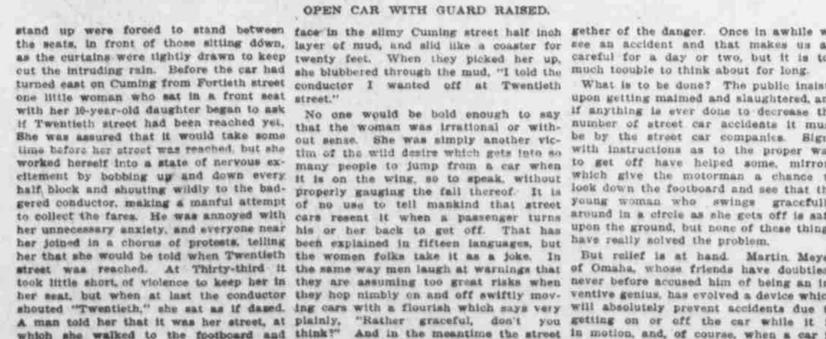
Mr. Meyer is certain that the device can be handled so quickly and conveniently that traffic will not be in the least interfered with nor will schedules be retarded. The adjustment is so light that the weight of the rail is scarcely felt when it is raised or lowered and the lever controls it quickly so that the passengers may be permitted to get on and off almost as quickly as now and the only additional delay will be caused by keeping everyone on the car until it stops, which is a concession of time for the sake of safety.

Mr. Meyer is convinced that his device will not only save the people what street car accidents cost them in suffering, but will also pour still greater streams of shekels into the coffers of the corporations. Dividends will be increased because damage suits, one of the greatest drains on the companies' revenues, will be almost entirely eliminated. The expense of adding the safety guard to the equipment of the car will not be great and it will be more than compensated for by the revenue from additional and desirable advertising space.

When the new invention is placed on the cars the street railways will cease to spill careless people into the street and "fall off a street car" items will be no longer seen in the newspapers. Mr. Meyer has shown his contrivance to Omaha men interested in the street car company and to others of judgment and they are unanimous in the opinion that such a protection will eliminate accidents and the Meyer Safety Guard company expects to have the cars of this and other cities soon equipped with Martin Meyer's invention.



OPEN CAR WITH GUARD DOWN.



OPEN CAR WITH GUARD RAISED.

stand up were forced to stand between the seats, in front of those sitting down, as the curtains were tightly drawn to keep out the intruding rain. Before the car had turned east on Cuming from Fortieth street one little woman who sat in a front seat with her 10-year-old daughter began to ask if Twentieth street had been reached yet. She was assured that it would be some time before her street was reached, but she worked herself into a state of nervous excitement by bobbing up and down every half block and shouting wildly to the badgered conductor, making a manifold attempt to collect the fares. He was annoyed with her unnecessary anxiety, and everyone near her joined in a chorus of protests, telling her that she would be told when Twentieth street was reached. At thirty-third it took little short of violence to keep her in her seat, but when at last the conductor shouted, "Twentieth," she sat as if dead. A man told her that it was her street, at which she walked to the footboard and peered into the rain. By that time the con-

ductor in the slimy Cuming street half inch layer of mud, and slid like a coaster for all twenty feet. When they picked her up, she babbered through the mud, "I told the conductor I wanted off at Twentieth street." No one would be bold enough to say that the woman was irrational or without sense. She was simply another victim of the wild desire which gets into so many people to jump from a car when it is on the wing, so to speak, without properly gauging the fall thereof. It is a case of no use to tell mankind that street cars resent it when a passenger turns his or her back to get off. That has been explained in fifteen languages, but the women folk take it as a joke. In the same way men laugh at warnings that they are assuming too great risks when they hop nimbly on and off swiftly moving cars with a flourish which says very plainly, "Rather graceful, don't you think?" And in the meantime the street cars continue to kill people at the rate

### When the Woods Burn

(Continued from Page One.)

body else did likewise. I felt as though I was burning up. My mouth got dry and I could feel my tongue swelling. My eyeballs seemed starting out of my head, and for a moment, as I felt the flames above and seemingly all around me, I think I lost consciousness. I don't know how long I had myself completely submerged under water. I suppose it was only a few seconds, but it seemed an age. When I raised my head the flames were roaring on at the south shore of the lake, having swept completely across the shallow body of water to the other side. All around the lake the woods were on fire, and a wall of flame, seemingly fifteen or twenty feet high, completely hemmed us in. It was an awful, awe-inspiring sight, which I hope

to never witness again. While I was watching the work of the flames all around a red glare shot higher and brighter than the surrounding flame, and dimly through the smoke and flying sparks I could see that the train was all ablaze. The heat from the burning cars became so intense that once more we were compelled to seek relief under the water, raising our heads at brief intervals to get a breath of air, so impregnated with smoke and fire that it was like poison to breathe it and afforded us but little relief.

"How the women and children stood it I am at a loss to state, but there were enough men to care for them, and as some poor creature became overcome and swooned she was supported and saved for until the awful period of heat had passed. Still it was too hot for us to leave the camp, and for four hours we waited in the swamp, with water to our waists, for the shore of the lake to cool sufficiently to give us a footing.

"When that time arrived the male portion of the party compared notes. We found that Mr. Holt of Duluth, Mr. Anderson of Minneapolis and myself were the strongest of the party, and we arranged to get out for relief. In my grip were a couple of dress shirts and a night robe, besides some articles of wearing apparel. We tore the shirts into strips and wound cloth about our feet until they were pretty well protected from the heat under foot and the burning cinders, etc. Then we wrapped our coats about our heads, after saturating the garments thoroughly in the water, and with a godspeed from the ones left behind we plunged into the smoke on the way to Hinckley. It was an awful journey, but we were protected from the heat under foot and the burning cinders, etc. Then we wrapped our coats about our heads, after saturating the garments thoroughly in the water, and with a godspeed from the ones left behind we plunged into the smoke on the way to Hinckley. 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