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Among The Ibos Of Nigeria: An Account Of The Curious & Interesting Habits, Customs, & Beliefs Of A Little Known African People By One Who Has For Many Years Lived Amongst Them (1921)



Among the IBOS OF NIGERIA

GEORGE THOMAS BASDEN



Synopsis

George Thomas Basden (1873 – 1944) arrived Onitsha, British Nigeria in 1900 with a goal – “to convert pagans to Christianity” – on behalf of the Church Missionary Society. The time has passed when people say that no one reads a book by a missionary. This class has contributed largely to literature and to various sciences, among them to anthropology. Mr. Basden’s book is one of this latter class. He lived seventeen years among the Ibos, who live in Southern Nigeria, Africa, their territory beginning at the middle of the southern coast of the great bulge of the continent north of the equator. In Basden’s volume dealing with the Ibos of Southern Nigeria, the author has aimed at giving a fairly detailed, though popularly written, account of these interesting natives, and has succeeded in producing an instructive and attractive volume. He sounds a note of caution which may well be taken to heart by globe-trotters and stay-at-home amateurs who, with little or no experience, write books about native ideas and beliefs. He writes: "The longer one lives amongst West African natives, the more one is convinced that it is a practical impossibility for the European to comprehend fully the subtleties of the native character. Some white men claim to have done this, but my experience leads me to think that the claim can rarely, if ever, be substantiated with definite assurance." This is an honest admission on the part of one who has lived long enough among the natives to realise the difficulties involved in the diagnosis of their mentality, and to recognise the fundamental difference between their "philosophy" and ours. The Ibo people, who form nearly one-half the population of Southern Nigeria, occupy the country lying mainly between the Niger and Cross rivers, a huge tract extending from the coast to 7° N. lat. There is a westerly extension across the Niger. The Ibos are not homogeneous, important variations occurring in the extensive area occupied. The environment varies considerably, from the low-lying swamps of the Delta to the higher land around Onitsha. The book is a timely one, since the indigenous customs are very rapidly undergoing changes, though in 1900, when Mr. Basden arrived there, primitive conditions still largely persisted. The general life of the Ibos is well presented. A man’s greatest desire in life is to advance its social status, and many crimes are committed in order to promote this advancement. Theft (to obtain the necessary funds), murder, and head-taking (as a sign of prowess) are very usually the outcome of this craving for higher titles. Cannibalism has been rampant, human flesh being regarded as a valuable food product. Polygamy is favoured equally by both sexes, and will be suppressed only with great difficulty. The first wife takes precedence of all the others, and is regarded as the legal wife, anasi, who is priestess of the household gods. Belief in the survival of the soul prevails, and adequate burial of the dead is a matter of great concern. A first, necessarily hurried burial takes place soon after death, but a second more elaborate and very costly

"burial" by proxy is performed later, with the view of keeping the spirit of the deceased in contentment. Failing this propitiation, the spirit may become restless and malignant. Reincarnation is believed in. Originally published in 1921; reformatted for the Kindle; may contain an occasional imperfection; original spellings have been kept in place.

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Great book and a must have for West and Central Africans in need of more proof to their roots in ancient Israel.

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