

## Ten, Ten The Bible Ten : Obeah in the Bahamas

Republished with permission  
Dr. Timothy McCartney  
Nassau: Timpaul Publishing (1976)

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indeed obligated to many people, directly and indirectly for helping me in the writing of this book. It is not possible for me to indicate every suggestion or assistance that interested people have given me.

Without the aid of Mrs. Gail Saunders, the Archivist, much of the material on the historical development of the Bahamas could not have been written. Antonnia Canzoneri, Bob Green, Rodney Smith, Sylvia Fernandez, Henry Podlewski, Edna Minaya, Sandra Dean and her mother, Miriam Dean, found books, articles, and obeah materials for me. Verona Ashman from the Institute of Jamaica, and Antonio Diaz Royo from the Caribbean Centre of Advanced Studies in Puerto Rico, were very helpful in sending the relevant material.

Community and

Public Health nurses from my class at the School of Nursing Education, and my students of Psychology from the Extramural Department of the University of the West Indies, collected most of the stories and superstitions related.

Horace Wright of the Ministry of Education and Culture and his staff at the Audio Visual Centre were always most helpful in obtaining and making tapes with information on aspects of Bahamian obeah. Mrs. Alexander Slorach kindly allowed me the use of her tape recorder.

Etienne Dupuch, Jr., and his staff, found issues of the Bahamas Handbook with articles on obeah. Mrs. Dupuch very kindly allowed me to utilize all their research facilities at their offices in Oakes Field. I am very thankful to them all.

Ann Duggan did most of the research in looking up old manuscripts and photocopying articles for me. Ann, unfortunately, abruptly gave up this research because an obeah practitioner warned her that she was highly susceptible to obeah and that she should discontinue!

My friends Brian Humblestone, Clement Bethel, Niki Kelly, David Bethel, P. Anthony White, Fred Fleischer, Elizabeth Nathaniels, Orde Coombs, Reggie Dumont, Compton Haynes, Chris Finlayson, Michael Beaubrun, William Thompson, Phyllis White, Telzena Coakley, Anthony Dean, Joan Lunn, Laura Ritchie, Mary Kelly, Michael Symonette, Sandra Knowles, Sylvia Cole-Tierney, Hal Leyland, Cleveland Eneas, Sr., Daphne Wallace-Whitfield, Jackie Mycklewhyte, Sheryl Taylor, Leotha Miller and Carolyn Davis have all been helpful in some way.

I am grateful to the Ministry of Tourism, and Mrs. Helena Lightbourne of "The Photographers" for the photographic illustrations in this book.

I have particular affection for Sam and Oris Grahme, Cyril and Pearl Joseph, Arthur and Sheila Hailey and Wilfred and Emma Lou Bowe for their constant support and encouragement.

I am indebted to Mrs. Gloria Frey for typing part of the manuscript and volunteering her help at a time when it was desperately needed.

To Mrs. Madeline Robertson goes the credit for typing most of the manuscript. Her 'eye for detail' and patience in 'deciphering ' my horrible penmanship, and putting up with all the many changes in the script, deserves the highest commendation. /

The dedication of this work goes to my children Lawrence, Angela, Lorraine and Sean, who suffered many deprivations—especially on weekends and holidays —while I was writing this book.

The inspiration of my life, though, and the person that helped me make my writing happen, is my beautiful wife Pauline. She typed some of the manuscript, proof read it, criticized it and was there to comfort me during my many frustrations. This small recognition of her help expresses inadequately my deep gratitude to her for her sacrifices, co-operation and constant support to my profession and my writings.

TIMOTHY McCARTNEY

NASSAU, BAHAMAS  
28 September, 1975

## **CHAPTER I**

### **SECTION I**

#### **HIGHLIGHTS OF BAHAMIAN HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

"I have come from a nation which was the gateway to the New World in the 15th Century. It has the potential to be a new Gateway to the New World in the 20th Century." <sup>1</sup> Thus spoke the Prime Minister of the newly independent Bahamas, in a recent speech which alluded to the Bahamas being projected onto the history of the World by Christopher Columbus' rediscovery of the Bahamas (and the New World) on October 12, 1492, when he landed at San Salvador (one of the Bahamian islands).

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas, is an archipelago, comprising of some 700 islands and 2,000 Cays, situated in the Atlantic Ocean, bounded on the North by Latitude 27.5°, on the South by Latitude 20.90, on the East by Longitude 73.2°, and on the West by Longitude 79.0°. The immediate geographical neighbours are the United States of America, Cuba and Haiti.

"Columbus did not discover the Bahamas. The first boat was not Spanish and the first human feet were bare, not booted. The original discovery belongs to the people Columbus found on his voyage of discovery. He called those people "Indians," believing himself near India. They called themselves "Lukku-cairi" (later transposed by Europeans to "Lucayans") or "island people." <sup>2</sup>

Columbus described these first Bahamian inhabitants in his journal:—"They go about naked as they were born, the women also . . . everyone appeared to be under thirty years of age, well proportioned and good looking. The hair of some was thick and long like the tail of a horse, in some it was short and brought forward over the eyebrows, some wearing it long and never cutting it. Some again, are painted, and the hue of their skin is similar in colour to the people of the Canaries—neither black nor white."

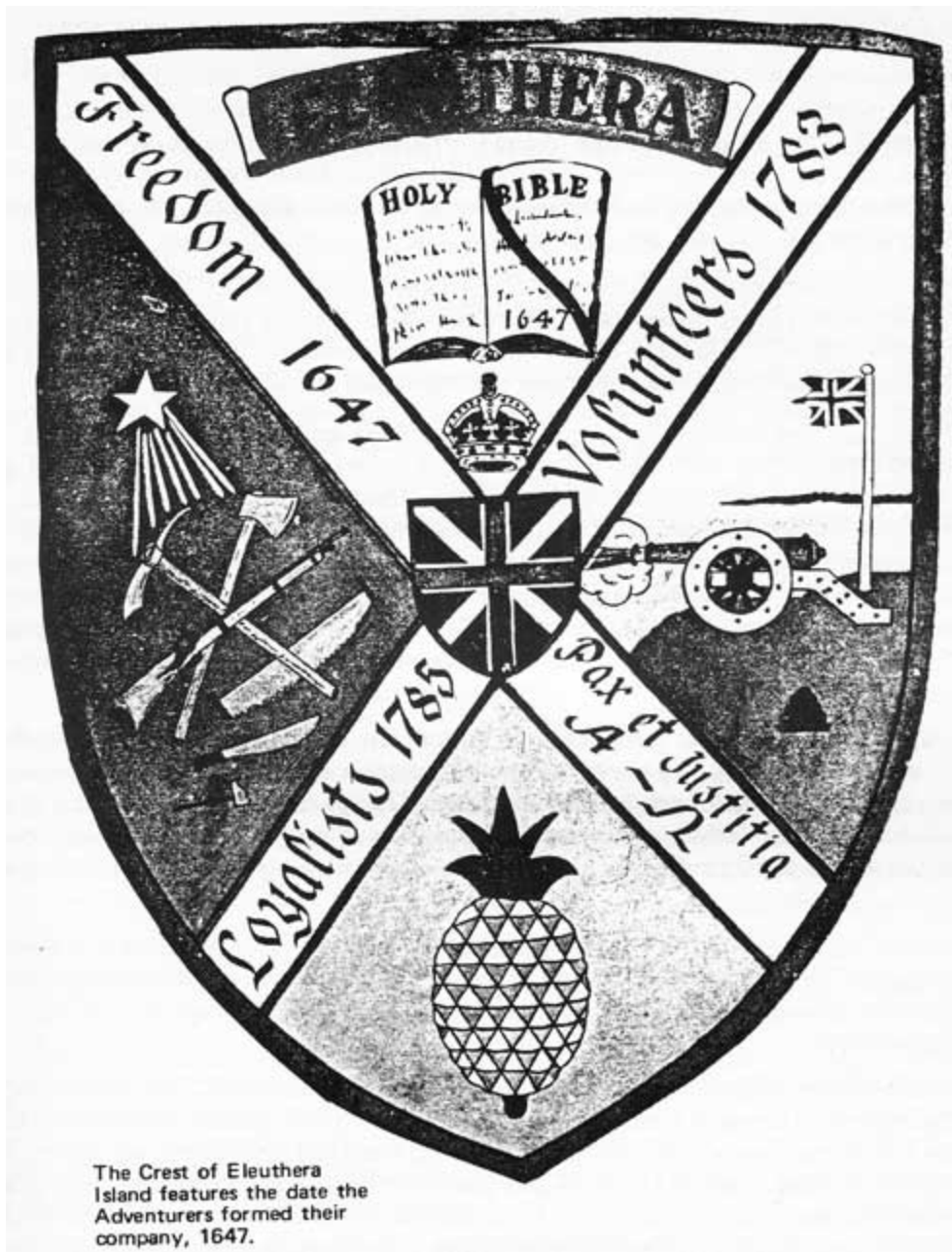
"However, these simple, gentle people who were Arawaks and "cousins of the Indians whom the Spaniards found in Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico and Jamaica," <sup>3</sup> in thirty short years were totally eliminated from the Bahamas. Although it has been estimated that there were approximately 20,000 to 40,000 Lucayans living in the Bahamas during the time Columbus visited, a slaving expedition in 1511, reported that it found no Lucayans, "having searched with the greatest diligence," and when Ponce de Leon sailed through the Bahamas looking for the "Fountain of Youth" in 1513, he only found a frail old Indian woman, living alone on one of the smaller islands north of Grand Bahama. These Lucayans were captured, against their will, and taken to Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Cuba to work in the mines and gather pearls. Most of them died because of the very hard work and cruel treatment by their masters; by disease, suicide and, finally , were eventually killed when they no longer served any useful purpose.

After Columbus, other explorers, mostly Spanish, passed by the islands, but since the land was barren, and with nothing in the form of mineral resources or precious stones the Bahama Islands were mostly ignored.

1 THE PEOPLE - "Pinding's Los Angeles Speech" in the Los Angeles World Affairs Council. Wednesday. 6th January, 1974. Thursday, 17th January, 1974. page 2

2. SYMONETTE, Michael A. "Discovery of a Nation" Management Communications Service Ltd., Nassau. Bahamas. 1973. p. 5.

3 CRATON. Michael "A History of the Bahamas" Collins: St James Place. London. 1962, p. 18



The early historical development of the Bahamas will be described under three headings: -

- (I) The early settlers, the Eleutheran Adventures (1640 - 1670) up to The Bermudian period, or the period of the Proprietors ( 1670 - 1684).
- (II) The Buccaneers and Pirates (1684 - 1717).
- (III) The Loyalist period ( 1783 - 1788) Slavery and its abolition (The Emancipation Act, August, 1834).

## I. THE EARLY SETTLERS - THE ELEUTHERAN ADVENTURERS (1640-1670)

The Spanish, up to 1640, dominated the whole Caribbean, even though there were some Dutch and Portuguese explorers who plied Bahamian waters. No doubt there was the odd English ship "but the first English voyage to the Caribbean of which we know any details was that of John Rut, in the 'Mary Guilford' in 1527. Rut sailed down the North American coast and probably through the Bahamas to Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, Hispaniola, where he traded between November 19 and 26, 1527.

The first English settlement of the Bahama Islands was in 1648, when William Sayle and his company of "Eleutheran Adventurers sailed from Bermuda for the Bahamas. This happened because on October 30, 1629, Charles I granted to his Attorney-General, Sir Robert Heath, proprietary rights over the area of the American mainland and the Bahamas.

"All subjects of Carolina (as this new province was called) and the Bahamas "were to enjoy the same rights as Englishman and all English subjects were to be allowed the right of fishing off the coasts, salting their catch and drying their nets without taxation." <sup>5</sup> William Sayle was a man of tremendous fortitude and, as Dr. Doris Johnson writes in her book. The Quiet Revolution" enticed by what must be the first tourist brochure on record - A Broadside Advertising Eleuthera and the Bahama Islands - the settlers had formed a company called "The Eleutheran Adventurers." <sup>6</sup> For \$100 each Adventurer was to receive 300 acres, plus 35 more for each family member. The first settlers numbered approximately 70 settlers and 28 slaves.

During this time, there was great upheaval in England. In 1649, Charles I was beheaded and Prince Charles was made King. As a result, more Puritans set out for the Bahamas, after refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the new King. This particular period in the Bahamas was one of hardship, and the failure of the small population to prosper was due to hurricanes, the inability of the soil to yield profitably and the lack of proper administration of the Colony's affairs.

In 1663, Charles II granted the Carolinas to eight Lords Proprietors. William Sayle wrote to Lord Ashley, begging the Proprietors of the Carolinas to include the Bahamas in their grant. "Shortly afterwards William Sayle died but on March 3, 1671, the Bahamas had been taken over by the Proprietors." <sup>7</sup>

During the Proprietors' administration, a Governor was appointed and "Freemen" elected an Assembly of the people. Although a semblance of security and fair administration was started, conditions were not all that good. The Spanish, who had been the "pioneers" of the Caribbean were, not too happy that the English had now laid positive claim to the Bahamas. In addition to this, many of the inhabitants of the American Colonies and the Bahamas, disappointed with the land and its' conditions, turned to profiteering. Many rich Spanish galleons bound for Spain from Central and South America were attacked by these Profiteers. Not only were ships attacked, but raids were made on small colonies and islands and, besides goods taken, many lives were lost. Even though Spain and England were at peace

(due to the Treaty of Madrid) in 1670, and were allowed to trade in the Colonies 'no English ship was safe closer to "The Havanas"

4. CRATON. Michael "Ibid", p. 47, 48.

5. "Ibid", p. 52.

6. JOHNSON. Doris, "The Quiet Revolution in the Bahamas" Family Islands Press, Ltd., Nassau. Bahamas. 1972, p. 4

7. CRATON. Michael "Ibid", p. 64.

10

+ + +

and few Spanish vessels ever risked the perilous passage through the Bahamas." This hostility was continued and many buccaneers got protection from various Governors, who became very rich from the sharing of the "spoils." Thus our next period was ushered in.

## **II. THE BUCCANEERS AND THE PIRATES (1684-1717)**

Probably no period in the history of the Caribbean, and the Bahamas in particular, has been romanticised and written about more than this one. The Buccaneers had more respectability, in that raids and profiteering were sanctioned by authority. However, the English, Spanish and French in their zeal, soon created a situation that degenerated into open piracy. Ships were constantly attacked and plundered, and tales of Blackbeard (Edward Teach), Ann Bonny, Mary Read and Stede Bonnet became legend. When the governments of the larger Caribbean islands exercised more control, the pirates moved North. "The Bahama Islands met all the 'cut-throats' requirements: lax government, many hiding places, access to shipping lanes and plunder." 9

In 1684, the Spanish raided New Providence, and for two years there were no permanent settlers in New Providence. The Bahamas really got a bad name in world history, to the extent that the Spanish labelled the Colony as a "receptacle for all rogues." It was not until 1718, when a former pirate—Woodes Rogers gained the support of King George I of England and became the Governor-in-Chief of the Bahama Islands that order was restored. He offered an amnesty for the pirates, solidified the existing local government, and gave a semblance of security to the inhabitants by arming the "Forts". 11

However, the Bahamas continued through a period of more turmoil - many pirates did not surrender; an epidemic reduced the population and there was the ever-constant threat of Spanish invasions. However, during Woodes Rogers' term of office, his "only memorials are the Bahamas' former national motto - *Expulsis Piratis. Restituta Commercia*; a statue in front of the Sheraton British Colonial Hotel, and a short street along the Nassau waterfront, known familiarly as the Market Range, but actually named Woodes Rogers Walk. To Rogers must also go the credit though for establishing, in 1728, the House of Assembly, and an elective form of government. 10

After this period, the population of the Bahamas increased, and the House of Assembly had more members representing the various island districts.

### III. THE LOYALIST PERIOD (1783 - 1788) - SLAVERY AND ITS ABOLITION (THE EMANCIPATION ACT, AUGUST, 1834)

After Woodes Rogers, the Bahamas was ruled by a series of Proprietary Governors, under the aegis of the British Crown, but more and more the Governors saw the need for more laws that were applicable to the Bahamian situation.

Coupled with the internal insecurities, the Bahamas was still subjected to attacks by Profiteers, and the external politics of Briton and their new Colonies in the vast rich land of America.

8. CRATON. Michael "Ibid", p. 74.

9. SYMONETTE. Michael. "Discovery of a Nation". Management Communications Services Ltd., 1973. Nassau, Bahamas, p 13

10. JOHNSON. Doris "The Quiet Revolution in the Bahamas" Family Islands Press Ltd. Nassau, Bahamas. 1972, p. 5.

11

+ + +





sea under the skull and crossbones.

It should be mentioned that in the “Memoirs” of Peter Henry Bruce—a Prussian of Scots ancestry, who accompanied Governor Tinker to the Bahamas—published in 1782, he listed the population of the Bahamas as: -

Heads of Families .....	310
Women and Children .....	689
Negro Male Slaves .....	426
Black Women and Children .....	538
Independent Company .....	100
	2,303

12

+ + +

None of the other Out Islands had any permanent settlers.

Just from a comparative point of view, the white population alone in Jamaica around this time (1774) was categorized by Edward Long 11 as follows:

Given number of settled and resident white inhabitants at medium.....	17,000
--	--------



Transients or unskilled whites.....	500
Soldiers and seamen resident, at an average about .....	3,000
Annuitants and proprietors non residents.....	2,000

22,500

In 1774, there were 79 slave ships that went to Jamaica with about 18,448 imported slaves. (Stephen Fullers' account). By 1789, the slave population in Jamaica was 217,584 (Roberts. The Population of Jamaica, Pg. 36). These figures are significant if we are going to understand the development of the Bahamian people with all their attendant customs and attitudes that vary somewhat to the other Caribbean "natives", although the majority of its peoples came from similar African "stocks".

As usual, the population of the Bahamas varied because of the external situations and internal problems. When there were wars or turmoil in Europe or the neighbouring Americas, Bahamians appeared to have profited in some way, even though the Bahamas was "insignificant in the grand panorama of the eighteenth Century." 12 (Sir Etienne Dupuch has labelled the Bahamas as being "the pimple on the posterior of the world"). In spite of this insignificance, though, the Bahamas did play an important role in international affairs.

The first international event was the Seven Years War of England and France, when privateering became the principle occupation, and Nassau harbour "buzzed" with activity. The French and the Spanish kept a careful "eye" on the Bahamas and, because of impending attacks the "Forts" in New Providence were restored and made ready. "Word reached Nassau from Havana, through a Mr. Bullock, that the Spaniards were preparing a small Armada to attack the Bahamas, consisting of 2 Warships of 80 guns each and 3 Galleys." 13 The expected attack never materialized; the Bahamas still continued privateering. For example, in 1746, "a Spanish prize was brought to Nassau for which the colossal ransom of 100,000 pieces of eight was received." 14 The Privateers benefitted from goods from captured Spanish and French ships. There was a profitable trade between the new American Colonies, the Caribbean and Europe and "doubtless many Bahamians were profiting from the illegal trade which inevitably passed through the islands." 15

11. LONG. Edward. "History of Jamaica" Vol. I. Bk. 2. LF.. 2.

12. CHATUN. Michael. "Ibid", pp. 137, 138.

13. CRATON. Michael "Ibid". Pg. 138.

14. "Ibid" p. 140

15. "Ibid" p. 145.

By this time, England was beginning to "rule the waves". French power in North America disappeared with the loss of Montreal in 1760, and Caribbean islands, like Dominica,

Grenada, St. Vincent and Tobago fell to the British. In spite of these gains, Britain was having problems with their thirteen American Colonies.

On the one hand, slavery in the Colonies was an integral part of a maturing, economic system. In Virginia, the Carolinas and the Eastern Seaboard States, Negroes came as much needed workers, and the rising population of Negroes, plus the questioning of the right by some religious groups of one man to hold another in bondage, caused internal pressures. Then too, the American Colonies were having problems with King George III, as a result of his resurrecting the Navigation Acts and the imposition of new regulations, like the Sugar Act of 1764.

Because of these two factors, the Colonists were becoming so vocal and defiant in their resistance to England, that British soldiers were sent to Massachusetts to restore law and order. The "Boston Tea Party" is well-known to readers, but little has been said of the importance of the Boston Massacre in 1770, when a runaway slave, Crispus Attucks, led an attack on these soldiers. The slaves were fired upon by several soldiers and Attucks was the first to fall. "Attucks" martyrdom is significant, not as the first life to be offered in the struggle against England. Indeed, there ensued almost five years of peace during which time it appeared as though Samuel Adams and his Group would not get their war after all. The significance of Attucks' death seems to lie in the dramatic connection which it pointed out between the struggle against England and the status of negroes in America. Here was a fugitive slave who, with his bare hands, was willing to resist England to the point of giving his life. It was a remarkable thing, the Colonists reasoned, to have their fight for freedom waged by one who was not as free as they." 16

By 1775, open hostility began in the Colonies against England and the War for Independence was a serious thing. The Bahamas, as a British Colony, appeared to be a threat to the American Colonies. In 1776, American warships were sighted off the coast of New Providence. In 1778, American ships "attacked" New Providence. Actually, the Americans after distributing leaflets promising security of life and property "invaded" Nassau and stayed for two weeks.

The significance of the American War of Independence to the Bahamas was the immigration of Loyalists by the thousands, with their slaves, to the Bahamas. These Loyalists, with their allegiance to the British Crown, were no longer prepared to stay in the newly Independent Colonies. Some came on their own, others were provided free transportation by the British and each Loyalist was given 40 acres of land for the family Head and 20 acres for every member, free of rents and charges.

The next five years saw a tremendous increase in the population of the Bahamas, especially the Negro population, as the Loyalists brought their slaves with them. By 1789, the total population was estimated to be 11,300, with 8,000 of these Negroes. It should be noted that slavery was still an economic factor of life and throughout the Caribbean, the plantation.

+ + +

system was the economic "life line" of Europe, and was vigorously maintained to enhance the prestige and increasing wealth of European countries.

Slavery and the Plantation System differed, however, in the Bahamas. These differences will be explained subsequently. It is useful to say, however, that by 1831, there were 12,259 Negroes in the Bahamas, outnumbering the white population by three to one. Out of this majority, 2,991 were free, indeed, there were some Negroes who also owned slaves.

On August 1, 1834, The Emancipation Act came into force, and the majority of the Bahamas population—the Negroes—were "free".

## **SECTION II ASPECTS OF SLAVERY**

Colonies of the New World were valued to the extent to which they contributed to the prosperity of the colonial power to which they were attached. Essentially, countries of the West Indies were held tenaciously because the European mother country needed products which they could not produce in their climate. Of course, this was not the only reason why, after Columbus' rediscovery of the New World, Europeans came to the West Indies. Some wanted to escape religious persecution, others sought to become wealthy as the promise of gold and silver offered the prospects of getting rich quickly (as an aside, it would appear to the author, that politics in the West Indies today hold this same promise); also criminals and prisoners of war were transported into the region where they were compelled into forced labour, while others came simply because of the love of adventure.

The West Indies became sugar producing and tobacco producing countries to replace mining, which was originally the principal source of wealth. The native Indian (Arawaks and Caribs) population was almost depleted as a result of working these mines therefore, labour was desperately needed to work the new plantations, and so Negro labour was sought.

As European tastes changed from tobacco smoking and snuff taking, coffee, tea (which they obtained mostly from the East Indies) cocoa, nutmeg, etc. had great demands. The West Indian islands were ideally suited for growing all these products - hence an added need for labour.

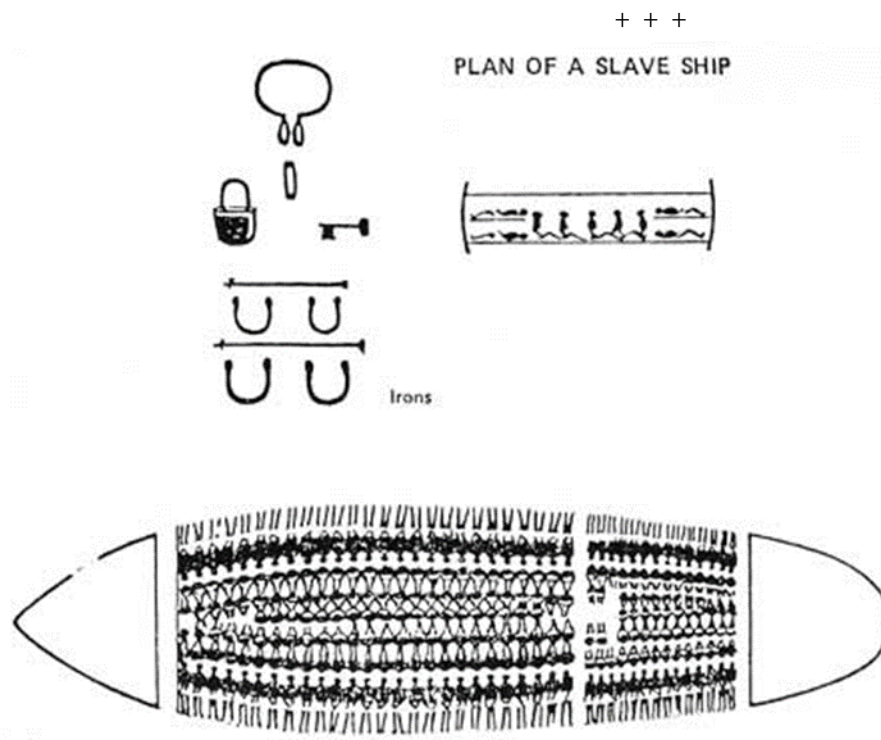
The Portuguese, as early as 1503, were importing labour from Africa and selling them in a slave market in Lisbon. Negro slaves were, initially, more a novelty for the European rich, but as the demand for labourers increased and as the Spanish Empire was now extended in the Americas, the Portuguese sold these slaves to the Spanish. Other countries, the Dutch, then the English and French, who also had now found the New World and had established

colonies, also became involved in the slave trade. The rivalry between England and France, which in the 18th century developed into wars in the West Indies, North America and India, led to an intense trade rivalry in Africa. Added to this fact, European slavers had to bargain with African slavers, who not only found capturing their own race to sell a lucrative act, but also as an excuse to wage war and extend their power.

It may be useful, at this juncture, to briefly look at the African slave trade and its' significance to the Bahamas, but, more particular, to the subject of Obeah as we develop it.

Historians cite six specific areas from the Western African continent, stretching from Senegal to Cape Negro. These areas were:

15



Conditions along the 'Middle Passage' between Africa and the West Indies, were appalling. Ships were overcrowded and in the holds slaves were packed closely. Under such conditions, contagious diseases such as smallpox, itch and dysentery were prevalent and killed large numbers. Slaves were fed and given exercise on deck. Doctors provided medical attention. Some captains were kind and some were harsh. In any case, the desire for profits dominated all other considerations. The journey lasted from five to eight weeks if the weather was favourable, and longer if it was bad.

## I. SENEGAMBIA

The Portuguese, and later the Dutch, actually started the slave trade in this area. They preferred the tribes in this region which were situated south of the Senegal and on either side

of the Gambia. The principal tribes were the Mandingos, the Gallofs (known as also Wallop and Walloff) the Fulas (or Fulani, Poula, Fulbie or Pholey) and the Jolas (or Feloops or Floops).

This area produced relatively small numbers of slaves compared to other areas of Africa. The British Governor of the Senegal, Barnes, stated that the number exported annually from the area during the 1780's was between 1,400 and 1,500.<sup>17</sup>

When the Europeans arrived in Africa, there were tribal wars, so better armed tribes and those who were more skilled in fighting captured opponents and they were usually made slaves. There were several types of slaves, viz:

17. Evidence of J.Barnes. Board of Trade Records to 1833. (B.T. 6:9- 1788).

16

+ + +

- (a) Those born into slavery and belonging to a household. The children of these slaves were also perpetuated into slavery, and became part of a family's tradition, to the point that their life style was a pattern that they were accustomed to, and their masters would not readily part with them.
- (b) Those captured in war or tribal raids, as previously mentioned.
- (c) Free-born children sold into slavery by parents during famine or extreme hard times to obtain food and sustenance.
- (d) Those individuals sold into slavery to redeem debts.
- (e) Freeman who were enslaved for committing certain crimes mainly, murder, treason, adultery and witchcraft.

## **II.. SIERRE LEONE AND THE WINDWARD COAST**

This area, commonly known as the Ivory Coast or Grain Coast, has been defined as stretching for two hundred leagues from the River Sherbro, round Cape Palmas to the River Ancober near Axim. <sup>18</sup>

The entire region is occupied by three main linguistic groups. To the southwest is a group of tribes speaking the Kru Branch of the Kwa sub-family of African languages. These include the Bakwe, Bassa, Bete, Dida, Grebo, Kru, Sapo, Wobe, etc. To the northwest of this group, in the region of what is now Liberia and Sierra Leone, are tribes speaking the Atlantic sub-family of African languages. <sup>19</sup> These include the Sherbro, Bullom, Temme, Goia, Kissi, etc., and there is the third group designated by Murdock, the 'peripheral Mande,' which includes the Dan, Gagu, Guru, Kono, Mende, Vai, Ngere and Gbande. Although their languages differ greatly, all these people have had considerable mutual contact with each other and there is a striking degree of cultural uniformity among them." <sup>20</sup>

There was relatively little slave trading in the areas of the Grain and Ivory Coasts during the late 17th and 18th centuries, the Europeans considering the Africans there particularly "barbarous and uncivilized", perhaps because the natives wisely prevented them from coming ashore, going instead to the anchored ships in their canoes to trade. <sup>21</sup> Slaves taken

from this area (and in the other areas also) were kidnapped by pillaging parties or captured in petty wars, a great many of the latter specifically waged for the purpose of obtaining slaves.

### III. THE GOLD COAST

At the beginning of the 18th century, there were twenty-four European forts on this Coast. Of these, twelve were Dutch, eight English, two belonged to the Brandesburgers, two to the Danes. 22

This gave an indication of slaving activity and the popularity of the location for bringing in slaves to this region.

18. SNELGRAVE. William. "A New and & Exact Account of Some Parts of Guinea (1734). Introduction.

19. MURDOCK. C.P.. "Africa: Its Peoples and their Culture History", pp. 222-29, 265-69.

McCulloch. M., "Peoples of the Sierre Leone Protectorate".

20. MURDOCK. McMULLOCH, op. cit.

21. PATTERSON. Orlando. "The Sociology of Slavery." GRENADA Publishing Co, LONDON, p. 118.

22. CLARIDGE. W. W.. "A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti" Vol. I pp. 181-208.

17

+ + +

Most of the peoples of the Gold Coast belong to the Twi speaking group of the Kwa subfamily of African languages. The largest linguistic sub-division in the area is the Akan. To the north of the Akan, in the hinterlands, are the less developed Guang peoples; and to their northeast are the speakers of the "Togo remnant languages". To their east are the Ewe speaking Ga and Adangme peoples. 23

At the beginning of the 18th century, the most powerful of all the Gold Coast Kingdoms, Ashanti, began to make its bid for power among the larger coastal states.

Another Akan tribe, the Fanti, were powerful at this time, also, and they earned themselves the reputation for being the most unscrupulous and efficient traders on the Coast. At times, they played off the Europeans against each other, as in the Dutch-Kommenda wars. 24 Miles, who knew the Fanti well and could speak their language, informs us that the Fanti slaves at least "one-fourth or nearly ... who beyond a doubt are for Debts and Crimes of different descriptions ... the chief of their crimes are Debts, Thefts, Adultery and Witchcraft." 25

### IV. THE SLAVE COAST

This area roughly approximates to what is now known as Dahomey.

The inhabitants of this region were Ewe speaking, but many of the slaves that came from this part of the Coast were derived from the Yoruba speaking peoples of the Oyo and Benin empires and were known both on the Coast and in the Americas as Nagos (or, as some writers report it, Nangos or Nangoes).

Snelgrave, 26 who knew the region very well, stated that "above 20,000 negroes were yearly exported from thence and the neighbouring places of the English, French, Dutch and

Portuguese." Most writers agree that more slaves were exported from this area than the rest in the 18th century.

**V. BENIN AND THE AREA OF THE NIGER AND CROSS DELTAS**

Benin had a long history of trade in slaves with Europeans, but internal strife and the slave trade depleted the population and ravaged the country.

In the regions of the Niger and Cross Deltas the main tribes were the Ibos and the majority of these slaves came from the inland region. It is significant that before the Slave Coast gained prominence by its huge slave exports, this region, between 1776 and 1784, exported about 14,000 annually from Bonny and New Calabar. 27

**VI. SOUTH WESTERN AFRICA**

The rest of the West Coast of Africa, down to Cape Negro, is included in this region. 28 The number of slaves from the Cameroon and Gaboon tribes found their way to Jamaica, and the rest of the West Indies were insignificant since the English at first seemed to neglect this area.

23. MANONKIAN, M. "Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast" pp. 1-10.  
24. CLARIDGE. W. W. op. cit. pp. 150-151.  
25. MILES. Richard (Evidence) Board of Trade Records B.T. 6:9 pp. 443-44.  
26. SNELGRAVE. William, op. cit. p. 4.  
27. PENNY "Evidence of. . . 1788 'G.T. 6:9f 270.  
28. PATTERSON, op. cit. p. 124.

18

+ + +

The French and the Portuguese did most for the slave exporting and it is estimated that between 1776 and 1784 between 13,000 and 14,000 slaves were being exported from the Congo and Angola each year. It appears that as the last quarter of the 18th century, the Dutch had emerged as a serious competitor to the French in this area. 29

We can clearly see then, that not only was the geographical area where the West Indian slaves came from a wide one, but the peoples were a great potpourri of races, tribes, cultures and languages.

For our purposes therefore, it would be useful to look (in chart form) at the principal areas of the Western African continent where Bahamian ancestors came from and also the main tribes found that were transported to the New World!

AREAS	TRIBES
I Senegal & Gambia (or Senegambia)	Fulani Wolof (or Gallofs) Mandingo

## II

Sierra Leone and the Windward Coast  
(Ivory Coast or Grain Coast)

Kono  
Mende  
Ashanti

## III

The Gold Coast (Ghana)

Akan (eg. Fanti)  
Ashanti  
Ewe  
Ga  
Twi peoples

## IV

The Slave Coast  
(Togo & Dahomey)

Ewe)  
Fon ) peoples  
Twi ) Congos  
Nagos (or Navgoes)

## V

Berlin and the Area of the Niger & Cross Deltas  
(Nigeria)

Yoruba  
Fulani  
Nupe  
Ibo  
Hausa

## VI

South Western Africa (Cameroons)  
Cromantees

29 Edwards, B. "History of the West Indies" Vol. 2 p. 61

19

+ + +

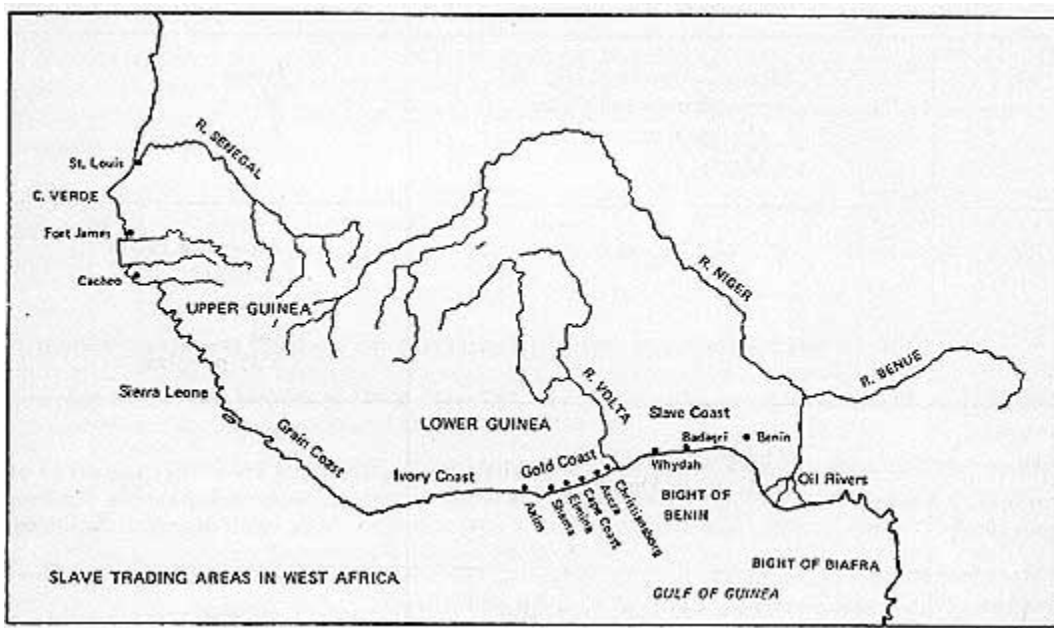
The colonial powers had their preferences in tribes and races.

The Spanish preferred the strong Yorubas of Western Nigeria. The English thought that the clean limbed intelligent Ashanti and Fanti from the Gold Coast were the best, although they also believed these people were "more prompted to revenge and murder the instruments of their slavery." The French favoured the Dahomeans (Whydahs) and partially peopled Saint Dominique with the powerful Congolese and the Ibos, although the last were said to be suicide prone. For house slaves, the French preferred the gentle Mandingos. They employed a greater number of house slaves than colonists on some islands.



The number of slaves shipped to the West Indies can only be estimated up to the abolition of the slave trade. It is estimated that 1,900,000 slaves arrived in the English island. The French imported about 1,650,000 slaves into the West Indies and their settlements in North America. The Dutch took 900,000 to the Guianas and their small West Indian islands. These are the figures for arrivals after the hazards of the trans-Atlantic crossing, but, of course, they do not include those who were killed during collection in Africa or who died on the long sea voyage.

It is thought that during the whole European slave trade, a quarter of which was concentrated on the West Indies, no less than 20,000,000 Africans were sold out of Africa. 30



The Bahamian educator, Dorothy Ford, argues that "the slaves who were brought to the Bahamas were either the most peaceful groups or else the environment of the Bahamas encouraged an easier adaptation to the Western Hemisphere, and from these groups emerged a people who are less violent, more humorous, and generally more friendly than those from the other Caribbean areas." 31

30. AUGIER, F.H., Gordon S.C. HALL, D.G. RECORD, M. "The making of the West Indies" Longman Caribbean Ltd., 1960 p. 67.

FORD, Dorothy. "New World groups: Bahamians" As seen through their myths, mirth and music. Printed by the Nassau Guardian (1844) Ltd., 1971 "Forward".

Whether one totally agrees with this statement is a matter for much discussion, but it is a fact that aspects of Bahamian slavery differ somewhat to the system of slavery as found in other parts of the Caribbean. Ford continues, 32 "The Bahamian is the product of a mixture of races (and tongues) not one of whom came to these shores for anything more barbarous than running away from oppression, seeking a lucrative living (legal or illegal), transplanting

plantations (in which the Bahamas soil often refused to co-operate), or simply adventuring for the sake of adventure. And it is into these general categories that the groupings of the islands fall. The adventures from England settled in the areas around Eleuthera; the plantation owners (mainly Loyalist Americans from the south) settled in the fertile Out-Islands (Exuma, Andros, Cat Island ); and the traders, pirates, buccaneers and profiteers generally settled for New Providence, where the action was."

The first recorded blacks to arrive in the Bahamas came in 1656 and they were all free men. A document found between Registry Book C, pages 166-78 in the Registrar General's Department is believed to be a copy from the 1671 Census, and this list gives the first mention of slaves and negroes in the Bahamas.

It is believed that the majority of Bahamian negroes came from the more northerly parts of West Africa, but no one has, for certain, been able to find any patterns of living or any strong African traits to point to a definite tribe, at least no one has recorded an actual tribal life style and beliefs. There were three types of negro immigration:

- Those negroes who were never in slavery (small minority).
- Those negroes who came with the Loyalists (the majority group) and slaves sold into slavery here.
- Those negroes transported into slavery after slavery was prohibited, when the British intercepted the ships and brought many of these slaves to the Bahamas as free men. These were so "lost" that they became "indentured" to white and free blacks to re-adjust to the new Bahamian life.

It is reasonable to believe that the minority negroes of Nos. 1. and 3. above, were the perpetuators of African culture, and whatever exists today of African culture came primarily from these groups. From these groups also, came the wise men, leaders, healers and Obeah men and women.

In New Providence, where eventually the majority negroes lived, we know that the areas of Gambier, Adelaide, Fox Hill and the Grants Town area as negro enclaves of strong African tradition.

Most Bahamian historians claim that African tribes who peopled the Bahamas were Ibos, Yorubas, Mandingos, Nangos, Congos, Fullahs and Hussas.

In Fox Hill (or Sandilands Village), this area was divided into four "towns" identifying two distinct African tribes: Nango Town, Joshua Town, Congo Town and Burnside Town. Major H. MacLachlan Bell 33 claims that the "Bahamas received Africans from many tribes who were Moslem and for centuries had been under Moorish rule; Congo negroes who had got swamp lands as their home; Ebos who are the least intelligent of the African tribesmen,

32 FORD *ibid.* Page 1.

33 BELL. Major H. MacLachlan. "Isles of June" U.S.A. 1934.

+ + +



+ + +

Mandingos, Nango Bars, Fullahs and Haussas. These last three were fighting men of magnificent physique and unquestioned courage. Behind these people lay generations of aboriginal life - sometimes in semi-slavery or, again, under the rule of the Arabs. Behind the Haussas and the Fullahs there is a battle history that cannot be ignored. They had men with the gift of leadership; heroes around whom folklore and legend had grown. The Bahamian negroes of today are an inter-mixture of all these strains, so their physical proportions are remarkably good. A deep copper tinge, aquiline noses, lithe and more athletic figures are their possessions.

There must have also been some Ashanti and Fanti, because the English preferred these tribes, and they are found in all English speaking Caribbean countries. From most of the material around, especially a few customs that have remained up to the present, the author is of the opinion that the Yoruba tribe must have been well represented in the Bahamas. For example, the Bahamian Asu or the Yoruba Esusu is essentially the same thing. Originally, it is a Yoruba society that deals with monetary matters only and it helps its members to save and raise money thus" 34

"Every member shall pay a certain fixed sum of money regularly at a fixed time (say every fifth or ninth day). And one of the subscribing members shall take the total amount thus subscribed for his or her own personal use. The next subscription shall be

taken by another member; this shall so continue rotationally until every member has taken. Should one of the members who has taken the Esusu fail to continue to pay the regular subscription, such a member must be held responsible for his or her subscription to the remaining members who have not yet taken their own Esusu. Payments shall be enforced as in case of debt. But if a member who has not taken Esusu fails to continue, another may take up his place, and where that one takes the Esusu, he shall refund to the first man (his predecessor) the amount subscribed by him (the first man)."

In 1974, the National Women's Movement, headed by Dr. Doris Johnson, instituted an Asu scheme that would enable its members to purchase low-cost houses. And just this year, their headquarters, "Asu House," was established in a modern building on the corner of Shirley Street and Kemp Road.

Bahamians, especially those who live in the Fox Hill area, still eat dishes, such as "akaro" and "moi moi," both made from black-eyed peas, and "agridi" which is made from corn.

Even though the author believes that Yorubas\* were very much in evidence, they must have been the more educated or sophisticated types that either rejected or did not place much importance on their religion, because there is no religious practise like "Shango" as is found in Trinidad, nor are there evidences in the Bahamas of the retention of any of the Yoruba gods or saints as is also found in Trinidad, Cuba, Grenada and other West Indies islands.

This evidence is also supported by my friend Antonia Canzonera who lived in Africa for over 15 years and is now resident of the Bahamas. Here are her comments to me: -

"Here are some of my conclusions based on my studies on Bahamian history:

34. AJISAE. A. K.. "The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People" Kash and Klare Bookshop. Lagos, Nigeria. 1946.

\* This view is shared. without exception, by most native Africans living in the Bahamas today.

23

+ + +

"I believe there are other reason, for the difference in voodoo worship here and in Jamaica and in Haiti and Trinidad other than different tribes. I think I was told that Shango worship is strong in Trinidad, though I may be wrong - I know it is in a certain section of Brazil. That is the extension of the worship of Shango which originated with the Yorubas, though it has spread to other tribes in Nigeria. There are many evidences of the presence of the Yoruba tribe.

"Anyway, I think the differences are due to the pattern of settlement and to the religions which the whites brought to the different countries. Catholicism, especially as practised in the days of slavery, was mostly ritualistic incantations in a language which had no meaning to the participants. There was no real attempts to affect a change of heart and mind. Protestantism, especially the Methodist and Baptist forms, aimed directly at a change of direction of the inner life.

"In the Bahamas the ratio of black to white was one to one or even less blacks until the influx of the loyalists from the States. Therefore, in general, the ways of the whites would have more influence on the blacks. Also, until the loyalists came, there were very few large plantations, therefore, fewer congregations of large numbers of blacks. Too, that would mean less buying of blacks directly from Africa.

"True, blacks were brought into the Bahamas directly from captured slave ships, but that did not begin until the slave trade was outlawed in 1807, and the really large numbers do not seem to have come until the 1830s. Therefore, I believe that most of the blacks that were here came with their masters from Bermuda or the States, and there was quite an attempt in the States, at least, to convert the blacks - much of it being conducted by blacks themselves, and resulting in some theology which would not be recognizable as being that of white groups of the same persuasion, but which would have exalted Christ and denounced idol worship.

"Since very large groups of slaves were brought in by the loyalists in 1783-85, the large numbers of Africans from slave ships would not have the same isolation pattern that they would have had otherwise. Also, numerous attempts to settle these Africans in villages of their own, both in New Providence and on other islands failed because of the difficulties anyone faces who tries to farm this poor soil. The only village which did not disintegrate was Headquarters, which became Grant's Town. This village was so close to the town of Nassau that the Africans there could work for the whites and thus mingle with the blacks already in the colony, and have a greater exposure to the activities of the whites. Since blacks were regarded as a very low class, they would naturally try to emulate those who were considered high class.

"I also want to tell you of an observation made by my mother, who was here during Christmas week. She is from Mississippi and I think I have told you that her relatives are the most racially prejudiced people I know. We were driving along one day and she said, "The people here are different." I asked, "How?" She said, "I don't know the word for it unless it is 'free'. Even the little children. They hold their heads up - even the little children." Then she added, "I like it." She has never been as prejudiced as her relatives, but when prejudice was the general climate, she was more so. It isn't now, and she is less, in fact, I don't see much prejudice in her at all now. However, I wondered if the life attitude of blacks in the States could be to "hold their heads up" - without defensiveness (how would that be possible!) - if they would not be more naturally accepted by the whites than they are now. Not all whites, I know."

There were definitely Congos in the Bahamas. In 1910<sup>35</sup> a letter written by Dr. A. R. Holly, who had a ministry in the Bahamas during the turn of the century, was published in which he

35. "Bahamas Handbook", Etienne Dupuch, Jr., Publications, 1970. pgs. 98,99.

said: "Among themselves, the negroes are charitable and even provident. They all belong to the mutual help societies which provide funds for burying the dead, for relief in sickness and act as savings banks. The affairs of these benefit associations are conducted with remarkable shrewdness and honesty. Noteworthy amongst them is the Congo United Society. It has an adult membership of more than 690 besides a juvenile branch. It was founded by Congo slaves toward the close of the slaving period. Although many of its members are illiterate, the affairs of the Society are administered honestly and fairly."

Years ago, there were many other societies reflecting the African tribal origins of many Bahamians.<sup>36</sup> The Ibo Society, that used to meet on Meadows Street, folded quite a while ago. The Fulani has broken up and formed other societies. The Yoruba Society is still supposed to meet on Meadow Street. "At least one African-inspired society - the Hausa - re-organized and changed its name around the turn of the century. It became the Knights of King George Society."

To summarize, then, from the preceding available literature on the Bahamas and scratches of information picked up from older Bahamians, the following profile will now be attempted with regard to the Negro population of the Bahamas, taking into consideration political and socio-economic conditions, under these headings: (1) Pre-Slavery, (2) Slavery and (3) Post Slavery.

### **(1) Pre-Slavery**

The population of the Bahamas was very small and, often, a transient one. The majority population during this period were white. The islands were populated by the Eleutheran Adventurers and their descendents, some Indian strains, free negro seamen who either "jumped ship" or decided to stay voluntarily, former negro and white indentures who escaped from the other Caribbean islands, domestics (white and black) who were a part of the more affluent black and white householders, white and black pirates, buccaneers and profiteers, and escaped criminals. The Bahamas was, before this time, a Spanish colony, but not much attention was 'paid to it. Other richer islands, Hispaniola, at first, then Cuba, became the focal point of trade.

"The Bahamas, technically a province subordinate to Cuba, lapsed into obscurity, known only for its rocks and shoals, so fatal to navigation; a place to be feared and shunned." <sup>37</sup>

The small total population were comparatively free from racial or social taboos. There were three basic classes of blacks, whites or others. There were those individuals who came with appreciable supplies and money. These constructed small homes but fairly comfortable; lived from fishing and farming. There were periods, though, when the poor yield from the land would cause them to revert to either piracy or profiteering.

The poorer classes just barely eked out a living. They existed from limited farming, fishing or odd jobs for the more affluent. These individuals lived in what could be termed "mud huts," many of these circular type African structures held together with limestone and with thatched roofs. In a particular compound, there was nearly always a cooking area with a "dutch oven," a hole in the ground for excretion and an area where animals like pigs or chickens were kept for their own consumption. Conditions for the poor throughout the world, where there was rigid

36. Ibid. Page 107.

37. CRATON. Michael, op. Cit.

\* It is believed that the Bahamian island of Cat Island (almost 100% Negro) was populated mostly by Ibos.

25

+ + +



SCENE IN GRANTS TOWN— The settlement of Grants Town, situated on the island of new Providence was inhabited mostly by ex-slaves and liberated Africans who were captured by the Royal Navy and freed on reaching Nassau. Grants Town used to be a very wooded place with many fruit trees. Each house had its own garden, filled with trees, vegetables and fruit.



This "thatched roof" house was typical of the type used in the Bahamas by the population. Many of these houses are still used by families today.

27

+ + +

class and social structures, were deplorable, so basic survival in the Bahamas, as elsewhere, was the primary goal. From a population point of view, the inhabitants on any one island could number anywhere from a single family, to thirty or to a thousand. This small number of people in the Bahamas, at this period, was a sad commentary on the systematic depletion of the Lucayan Indian population by the Spanish, which was estimated to be nearly 20,000 when Columbus first came.

The political situation, at this time, was unstable, with conflicts of ownership primarily between Spain and England. The First official English colony was formed in the Bahamas in 1648 with the coming of the Eleutheran Adventurers.

## **(2) Slavery**

The Portuguese, as early as 1503, were importing negro slaves from Africa, because of the demand for labourers, primarily by the Spanish, in the West Indies after the native population (the Caribs and Arawaks) had just about been exterminated. When the British made significant inroads in the West Indies, slavery had become a fact and way of life, and the Bahamas was caught up in this activity.

The population of the Bahamas increased appreciably when, during the War of American Independence, Loyalists, with their slaves, immigrated to the Bahamas. By 1789, the population was about 11,300 with about 8,000 Negroes, and about 8,000 New Loyalists. Most



of these Loyalists settled in the uninhabited Out Islands and set up plantations there. Nassau, also buzzed with activity. McKinnen gives an interesting account of the Bahamian slave trade.

#### The Bahamas 38

"appeared to be visited often whilst I remained there by African slave-ships, some of which disposed of their cargoes on the island, but the majority proceeded to the Havannah; I was witness to the sale of a pretty numerous cargo, which was conducted with more decorum, with respect to the slaves than I had expected. They were distributed mostly in lots from five to twenty in each; but some of the boys and girls were disposed of separately. On the neck of each slave was slung a label specifying the price which the owner demanded, and varying between two and three hundred dollars according to age, strength, sex, etc. This cargo was composed, as generally happens, of slaves, from different nations, and speaking languages unintelligible to each other. Some apprehensions prevailed notwithstanding all the expedients which had been used to convince them to the contrary, that they were brought over to be fatted and eaten. I had the opportunity of observing two or three the day after the sale in the hands of benevolent masters purchased for domestic servants, who seemed much delighted with their kind treatment as well as change of situation. Instead of being naked, they were clothed (in this climate as usual) in woollens; their food was much superior to what they had ever known before,\* they found themselves lodged in habitations abounding in comforts, some of them indeed superior to their comprehension; and in the streets, they beheld many of their own colour, whose appearance, friendship and hilarity had the most powerful influence in rendering them contented and happy in their new scene in life."

McKinnen must have been quite a naive fellow, or he was in the right place at the right time, to make such a sweeping statement, because many slaves were ill-treated and not placed in such benevolent circumstances. It does appear, however, from other written accounts of this period, that, on the whole, Bahamian slaves were treated fairly well.

38. MCKINNEN. Daniel. "A Tour Through the British West Indies" London, 1804. pp. 218-219.

\* How the hell did he know this? Had he ever lived in Africa or eaten African food?

28

+ + +

Sales of slaves were held mostly in "Vendue House" which is, at present, the site of the Bahamas Electricity Corporation. Cattle and imported goods were also auctioned here.

Another author, in observing the tribes of the Bahamas, writes "seven African races are known to have been introduced into the Bahamas: Nangos, Congos, Congars, or Nagobars, Ebos, Mandingos, Fullahs, and Hausas. Any racial distinctions which might once have been apparent have long since disappeared with the passing of time. Some of their practises, however, their folk tales, and their dances, reveal traces of African ancestry." 39

This author appears to be also a bit deluded because Sir Etienne Dupuch, the distinguished editor of the Tribune, recently stated, in an editorial written from the Bahamian island of Exuma: "I knew Exuma when anyone landing on the Island might have thought he was in darkest Africa at the time of Dr. Livingstone's exploration in the Dark Continent. At the Forest, the villagers were still living in the small thatched two-room huts occupied by their ancestors in the days of slavery. The compound was surrounded by a low rubble-stone wall with no gate. People in the compound jumped the wall like goats to enter and leave. There were no schools in the village. This was 67 years ago. I was with my mother at the Forest for a month."

40

Certain peculiarities of Bahamian slavery and the Bahamian plantation system are significant:

(a) The Bahamas has never been an agricultural country. True, certain seasonal crops like pineapples and tomatoes thrive and were articles of export. During the period in question, the poor soil only allowed cotton to be grown and small farming. Europeans, limited slaves, free men (black and white) existed by taking sustenance from the rich waters surrounding the Bahamas, and the small farming previously described. During slavery, then, plantations were comparatively small, and the Plantation System, as was known in America, and other islands of the West Indies, where sugar cane, tobacco and other "exotic" products were grown for European consumption, did not exist in the Bahamas. The Plantation System, however, resembled, on a small scale, a share-cropper arrangement unlike the Southern United States, which "might have been hard on the tenants, the owners of big acreage in those days got little more than a bare living out of the operation." 41

Plantations were comparatively small.

The Hermitage Estate on Little Exuma consisted of 900 acres and had only 160 slaves (men, women and children). Bourbon cotton was the main crop; salt was also raked, and animals such as cattle, horses and mules were bred.

The most comprehensive and only (so far) existing account of a Bahamian plantation, has been described and preserved in "A Relic of Slavery", a diary written by Charles Farquharson for the years 1831-1832 and published in 1957 by the Deans Peggs Research Fund. This plantation, situated on San Salvador, included a dwelling house, a mistress house, the kitchen, a corn house, a cotton house, a lower barn and slave quarters. There were only a maximum of 52 slaves, and the main crop was guinea corn, although the commercial crop was cotton. A considerable amount of stock was raised on this estate and it was used for their own consumption, but periodically shipped to New Providence. Lord John Rolle (1750-1842) was probably the largest slave owner in the Bahamas. His official slave count at the Emancipation was 377.

39. "Folk Tales and Songs" - 1930.

40. DUPUCH. Sir Etienne. "Looking Back Over the Years" (editorial) The Tribune. Tuesday. October 1, 1974

41. DUPUCH. Etienne (Sir) Ibid.

The Heritage Estate on Little Exuma belonged originally to John Kelsall Member of the Governor's Council, Senior Assistant Justice of the General Court and Judge of the Court of Vice-Admiralty who died in 1803. It is now the property of Vincent Bowe.

The Estate once consisted of over 900 acres and raised Bourbon Cotton. Salt was also raked on the plantation.

In 1806 the Royal Gazette in advertising the Hermitage for sale stated that " With the Hermitage will be sold an uncommonly fine gang of seasoned Negroes, the whole number not less than 160 men, women and children."

Part of the present building dates back to the original twin-gabled barn-like edifice which had various smaller buildings around it.



RUINS ON THE FARQUHARSON'S PLANTATION, SAN SALVADOR

Farquarson's estate is named after Charles Farquarson who wrote a journal for the years 1821-1832 which has been published as "A Relic of Slavery". The Plantation, a large estate on the east side of San Salvador, is one of the largest on the island

Charles Farquarson, who was also a Justice of the Peace, owned fifty-two slaves in 1834 and according to the diary he appeared to have been a kind master to his slaves.

The Chief Crop of the Estate appears to have been guinea corn. The Chief Commercial crop, though a declining one, was cotton. A considerable amount of stock was raised on the estate and shipped periodically to Nassau.

The buildings on the estate included a dwelling house, a Mistress's house, the kitchen, a corn house, a cotton house, a lower barn and slave quarters.

The photograph shows the remains of two houses on the Farquarson estate. Perhaps the one in the foreground is the kitchen within its traditional fire-place and chimney. The buildings were constructed of native rock and limestone. Notice the corrosion that has taken place over the years.

31

+ + +

slaves. When slavery was abolished, Lord Rolle deeded all his extensive lands in Exuma to his slaves and their descendents in commonage.

Rolle owned extensive land holdings in Rolleville, Rolle Town, Mount Thompson and Ramsey. The Bahamian name "Rolle" is extensive and, no doubt, came from the original Lord Rolle, who was a benevolent slave owner. The white (or European Rolles) left the Bahamas and, to the author's knowledge, there are no Bahamian "white" Rolles - unless they have changed their names!

Many Bahamians are mixed, no doubt, from the intimate infusion of white or black and vice versa. The paternalism and benevolence of the slave owners plus the very good relationship of the master to his "house niggers" (of which there were many) contributed to the fact that there were no slave revolts or uprisings.

Around 1830, there were abolitionists throughout the Bahamas - liberal white men, members of the clergy and some free black men (lay and clergy). The infrequent incidents of cruelty pricked the conscience of the small Bahamian population, and although there was very strong resistance to the abolition of slavery, laws against cruelty were passed. These laws were especially enforced under the governorship of Sir James Michael Symth (1779-1838) who was a sincere sympathiser with the cause of the slaves and free coloured people and worked diligently for greater amelioration of slave conditions. There were members of the white ruling population who violently objected to the abolition of slavery. Reports in the local newspapers and letters to the colonial office in England, and from the Bahamas, attested to this fact.

(b) Because of a limited agricultural system, limited exports to foreign countries, and small estates, after emancipation, there was no need to continue working the plantations as there was no great demand for any Bahamian products. Throughout the Caribbean, after emancipation, the plantations still had to produce hence, Chinese, Indian and other labourers were indentured to plantation owners in the Caribbean.

This never happened in the Bahamas. Where there is found in most of the West Indian islands a diversity of ethnic types, the basic population continued to be majority black, minority white, and some in-betweens (who could go either way), as evidenced in descendents from Long Island, Eleuthera and Exuma.

The small number of Greeks, Chinese, Syrian and other minority groups, as found in present day Bahamas, came either during the "sponge industry boom" or the early part of the 20th century.

(c) Those Africans who were never placed in slavery, settled in areas of the Bahama Islands where, even though they were subjected to discrimination by a minority, but powerful, white population, established their own social and cultural life.

These Africans, generally, "looked down" on the majority Negroes who were Christianised and in former bondage. The former slaves regarded the free Africans as preserving much of the culture that they had lost, but still yearned for and looked up to the "Wise Men" - Healers, Herbalists and Obeah Men - for guidance. These were the aristocrats of the Black Bahamian Society, which perpetuated their own system of social class and discrimination, based on heritage and, primarily colour.

32

+ + +

### **3. Post Slavery**

This period should be headed colonialism, racism, social class and discrimination, because it seems as if, after emancipation, problems for the Negroes just began. The majority of people were black; but the Bahamas operated under a white power structure, not too unlike the United States of America, especially the Southern States.

There were no laws or regulations fixing the status of the black people, but they were subjugated to a position of inferiority that placed them solidly on the bottom of the social structure.

During this period, liberated Africans and ex-slaves lived in specific areas and were well known for their heritage (family). For example, Grant's Town was one of these areas where a large African population was found. Stark 43 describes living conditions: "The Houses are mostly of wood, some with limestone walls, roofs covered with shingles or thatching of palmetto leaves; it is rare to see glass windows, instead there are board shutters. They light fires out of doors, for cooking from dead wood gathered in the forest or thicket; the walls are

not sheathed or plastered; the furniture is of the most modest and simple kind; in day time they live out of doors. A little sugar cane, a few conchs or fish, a handful of fruits fills to overflowing their wants."

From an interest point of view, Powles 44 describes the house of an English clergyman, with his wife and two children:

"A house larger than, but about on a level with, an English labourer's cottage, containing two rooms and an apology for a study something like a store-closet. No ceiling, merely a partition between the sitting-room and bedroom, that anyone could look over by standing on a chair; only a solitary window glazed and scarcely one of the little comforts that would be found in the poorest home in England. And this, not in a savage land, but in a country which has been nominally civilized for one hundred and fifty years, and where, but fifty years ago, the planters lived as I have described.

Thus, life was of a fairly primitive, simple nature with the different social classes and British colonialism playing a very important role in Bahamian life, and the Bahamian value system. During slavery, and soon after the abolition of slavery, Bahamian blacks were aware of and perpetuated their African ties. However, the minority whites, who held the political and economic power, plus the very strong British colonial hold, questioned their rights and value system. Discriminatory attitudes and practises were everywhere - in schools, banks, clubs, hotels and residential areas. Very rarely, did black and white Bahamians have any meaningful social intercourse. Perhaps the only objective document available that depicts the lifestyle and politics during this period has been preserved in a book by an Irish Catholic Magistrate, L. D. Powles, who came to the Bahamas in the Autumn of 1886 from England as Circuit Justice in the islands. Powles' book, "The Land of the Pink Pearl", created such a furore among the white Bahamian population, (because of the truth of the situation and his sense of fair play) that Sir Ormond Drimmie Malcolm, Chief Justice in the Bahamas at that time, bought five hundred copies and burned them!

\* For an in depth analysis of the effects of racism, social class and colonialism, see the author's book "Neuroses in the Sun". Executive Ideas of the Bahamas. Nassau, Bahamas. 1972.

43. STARK. J. H., "History and Guide to the Bahamas". New York. 1891.

44. POWLES. L. B. "Land of the Pink Pearl: Life in the Bahamas" Sampson Low, Marston and Co. Ltd.. London. Pg. 236.



MARKET SCENE IN OLD NASSAU — The Bahamian market has always been a very colourful scene. This sketch was done around the early 1900s.



*Afro-Bahamians selling their products. Sketch taken from the Illustrated London News.*

35

+ + +

It is significant to this book, and indeed the history of the Bahamas, that I quote Powles extensively: -

*"The constitution of the colony is a sort of government by Queen, Lords and Commons, without a responsible Ministry. The Governor is assisted by an Executive Council, answering to the Privy Council, appointed by himself. He also appoints the members of the Legislative Council of 'Upper House,' whilst the Legislative Assembly or 'Lower House' purports to be elected by the people.*

*"This mockery of representation is the greatest farce in the world. The coloured people have the suffrage, subject to a small property qualification, but have no idea how to use it. The*



elections are by open voting, the bribery, corruption, and intimidation are carried on in the most unblushing manner, under the very noses of the officers presiding over the polling-booths. Nobody took any notice, and as the coloured people have not yet learned the art of political organization, they are powerless to defend themselves. The result is that the House of Assembly is little less than a family gathering of Nassau whites, nearly all of them are related to each other, either by blood or marriage. Laws are passed simply for the benefit of the family, whilst the coloured people are ground down and oppressed in a manner that is a disgrace to the British flag. . . .

"In every one of the principal out-islands there are one or more resident magistrates or justices. They are paid salaries varying from £301 to £2001 a year, for which they have also to perform the duties of revenue officers. Formerly, properly qualified magistrates, sent out from England, went regular circuits round these Islands for the administration of justice; but about thirty years ago the last of these disappeared, and the present system of resident justices was inaugurated.

"Against the decisions of these justices, the majority of whom are devoid of any special qualifications for their places, there was no appeal except to the Chief Justice sitting in Nassau. The people were all so poor not only was this appeal virtually a dead-letter, but the jurisdiction of the resident justices being very limited, there were many cases that, for want of means could never be brought into a Court of First Instance.

"Without giving credit either to one story which charges a magistrate with causing the death of a woman by ill-treatment, or to another which relates how a magistrate who did not wish to be bothered, adopted the plan of locking the parties and witnesses all up together till the case was abandoned, there is no doubt that acts of tyranny and oppression were daily committed...

" 'The bulk of them are just as much slaves as they were fifty years ago!'

"These words were said to me shortly after my arrival in the Bahamas, by a gentleman who had excellent opportunities of judging of the real condition of the coloured race, and was well acquainted with it.

"I asked him what he meant. He replied 'I mean that by means of the truck system the bulk of them are in a condition of bondage far more galling and far less profitable to the individual than the old slavery of fifty years ago.'

"This was a startling statement, and difficult to believe, for the first impression one gets on landing in the Bahamas is that the coloured people appear so remarkably contented that there cannot be much the matter with their condition. Wherever one meets them they seem cheerful

and happy. On all hands too I had heard complaints of their uppishness, laziness and general good-for-nothingness. One day I observed to a high official that the independent assembly was a simple absurdity, and that the little place ought to be made a Crown colony at once. Said he, As a Government official I should be very glad to see it made a Crown colony, but it would never do; the negroes would be as well off as they are in the rest of the West Indies. . .

"The 'truck system,' called by the Americans 'the store order system,' is, as every one knows, the substitution of payment in kind for payment in cash. It is undeniable that in some cases, this system may work well, and I have myself seen it acted upon with very good results in one of the smaller islands in the Bahamas, where are salt ponds. For many years the price of salt has been so low that it has been next to impossible to ship a cargo at a profit, and most of the salt islands are at present without trade. In this particular island, when a vessel comes in, the principal salt-owners take their net, go hauling, and divide the take among the men who carry the salt on board. In this way they shipped 38,000 bushels of salt at a profit in less than five months. All the island had benefited, for the weight of fish given the man far exceeds in value the amount they would have received had they been paid for their labour in cash. But this is a small island, containing only some three or four hundred inhabitants, where a patriarchal state of things exists.

"Very different is the working of the truck system between the Nassau merchant and the unhappy negro, whom, by means of it, he grinds down and oppresses for years and years. The principal industries of the colony are the sponge and turtle fisheries, and the cultivation of pineapples. Through the truck system the benefit derived from these sources by the working man is not only reduced to minimum, but he is virtually kept in bondage to his employer. The sponger and turtler are the greatest sufferers because they are kept under seaman's articles all the time.

"Let us follow the career of one of these unfortunates from its commencement. He applies to the owner of a craft engaged in the sponge or turtle fisheries, generally in the two combined, to go on a fishing voyage. He is not to be paid by wages, but to receive a share of the profits of the take, thus being theoretically in partnership with the owner. At once comes into play the infernal machine, which grinds him down and keeps him a slave for years and years—often for life. His employer invariably keeps, or is in private partnership with some one else who keeps, a store, which exists principally for the purpose of robbing the employee, and is stocked with offscourings of the American markets—rubbish, unsaleable anywhere else. As soon as a man engages he has to sign seaman's articles, which render him liable to be sent to board his vessel at any time by order of a magistrate. He is then invited, and practically forced, to take an advance upon his anticipated share of profits.

"Under the auspices of Governor Blake a Bill was passed in the House of Assembly, in the Session of 1885, limiting these advances to ten shillings; but any merit there was in the Bill was destroyed by an amendment, permitting them to be made 'in kind or in cash'. Besides, all through the time I was in the Bahamas this law virtually remained a dead-letter, as I do not

hesitate to affirm .—has been the case in the colony with every law passed for the benefit of the coloured race, that at all militates against the interests of the native whites.

"These advances, I need hardly say, are generally made in kind, consisting of flour, sugar, tobacco, articles of clothing, or some other portion of the rubbish that constitutes the employer's stock-in-trade. Probably the fisherman does not want the goods, or, at any rate, he wants money more to leave with his family; and in order to get it he sells the goods at about half

37

+ + +

the price at which they are charged to him. I was about to say half their value, but this would be grossly incorrect, for the goods are usually worth next to nothing, whereas they are charged to the fisherman at a price which would be dear for a first-rate-article. . . .

"Preliminaries settled, the fisherman starts on his sponging or turtling voyage, and remains away from six to twelve weeks, when he returns with his cargo of sponges. These he cannot by law take anywhere, except to Nassau, where they have to be sold in Sponge Exchange by a system of tender.

"Of ever anything analogous to the Jamaica emerite should cause Great Britain to send a Royal Commission out to inquire into the condition of this unhappy colony, the truth about these sales may come out. Personally, I hold the strongest opinion that they are fraudulent. The seller is a Nassau merchant, the buyer—usually the agent of a New York firm—is also a Nassau merchant; and that the two agree together and arrange a bogus sale, by means of which they rob the unhappy fisherman, I am convinced. . . .

"Just before my last circuit, Sam Gowan, one of my boys, had been away for five weeks in charge of a sponging schooner. They had brought back 900 strings of sponges called beads. These beads—taking large and small together—averaged, Gowan told me, nine sponges each, or 8,100 in all. He and his crew had not only taken his cargo of sponges, but had cleaned and dried them as well—a very troublesome process. The whole cargo fetched, in the Sponge Exchange, 11 pounds sterling, or less than a halfpenny a sponge all around. Yet many of these sponges would fetch five or six shillings in a shop in London, whilst the smallest would not be likely to fetch less than 6d. Here is a case in point.

"Besides, if these sales be not fraudulent, perhaps the Nassau merchant can explain how it happens that on the Florida Coast, under exactly the same conditions as to water and the quality of the sponge, the fisherman can earn twice and three times as much as those who fish in Bahamian waters.

"The sale over, the amount realized is declared, and owner and fisherman proceed to share. The fisherman is already liable to the owner for his original advance, and his share of the expense of provisioning the vessel. Nine times out of ten the farmer makes out that there has

been a loss and the fisherman is in debt to him, or, at any rate, that there is nothing to divide.

..

"The condition of the labourer in the pineapple fields, almost the only fruit of the soil that is at present exported to any extent, is only so far better than that of the fisherman in that, as his work has to be done on land not by sea, he cannot, like his fellow-sufferer, be kept continually under seaman's articles, but, except in one or two places where the people have been roused by a leading spirit, he is kept in a perpetual state of debt through the truck system.

"In some cases the pineapple cultivator is a peasant proprietor, in others he cultivates for the owner of the soil upon share. In both cases the Nassau merchant appears on the scene. 'Like flowers that bloom in the spring,' he appears with the pineapple season and disappears with it; save that instead of a flower he is a upas-tree, blasting and withering wherever he sets his accursed foot. Sometimes he appears in the character of owner of the soil, sometimes in that of agent. In the former case he contracts in his own behalf with the captains of the vessels that call for pineapples; in the latter on behalf of the cultivators. In both cases the coloured peasantry have to suffer, for they are in his hands. He receives cash for the pineapples from the captains and pays them with his worthless goods. Where he is an agent he often has a two fold opportunity for robbery, of which he generally—I do not say invariably—avails himself, by



THE SPONGE FLEET — NASSAU

The sponge fleet, i.e. the large vessels engaged in the sponging trade, usually consisted of six hundred (600) vessels - schooners and sloops built in local shipyards. These vessels had an average life of sixteen to twenty years, and carried up to five dinghies which were used for gathering the sponge. Each vessel had a small cabin for sleeping; cooking was done on deck. A typical crew consisted of ten men and a cook; voyages lasted five to eight weeks depending on the catch. The Great Bahama Bank, an enormous shoal on the west side of Andros nicknamed The Mud, and one of the great sponge beds of the world, was the most popular sponge fishing bed. Before a vessel went out on a sponge fishing voyage, the outfitter furnished the consumable goods and stores. This was done entirely on a credit basis and he was not reimbursed until the catch was marketed at the end of the voyage. The goods were booked at cost, plus a considerable margin of profit. These "personal advances" to members of the crew, often including food for their families, were recovered at high rates of interest, making it almost impossible for the fisherman to make any economic advance. Often he was left in debt. The outfitters, however, felt justified in their high rates, as they themselves took considerable risks. Their vessels were not insured and there were the risks of bad weather which affected the size of the catch, mismanagement and unscrupulous behaviour on the part of the crew, theft from the kraals, and damage to the catch during transit from Nassau.

39

+ + +

*accepting a douceur from the captain to persuade his clients to sell at a less price than the captain has come prepared to give.*

*"In one case that happened within my own knowledge, one of these light-fingered gentry accepted—or said he had accepted—bills for the amount due for pineapples from an American firm, which bills were never met, and several old people died of starvation in consequence. When I arrived at the settlement in question, the haggard looks of the poor folk told their piteous story far more eloquently than the flood of words in which they poured*

it out to me. This conduct was absolutely inexcusable, for plenty of vessels call every year for pineapples, and there is never the slightest necessity to ship a cargo without cash down, and I have little doubt the person in question was bribed to behave as he did.

"The cultivator thus gets a low price for his pines, and gets it in goods which, as in the case of the fisherman, are invoiced to him at the price of real good stuff, but are of so poor a quality that they will not go far. The result is that long before the next pineapple season, he is threatened with starvation, and mortgages his next year's crop to the Nassau merchant in return for an advance, and the relations of master and slave are established.

"I am bound in common fairness to add that the native white Bahamian is not alone guilty, for when a black man gets into the position of an employer of labour he is usually quite as bad, but when it is but natural that he should imitate what he has been brought up to look upon as the superior race.

"In fact there are very few among the working classes of the Bahamas who know what it is to handle cash at all, except domestic servants and skilled work-people; and we have already seen that in the Out-Islands even ship-builders do not always get paid in cash. Still as a general rule these two classes do get it.

"Whilst on the subject of slavery, it may be as well to mention a case that, as far as I know, has never been brought to the notice of the British public, but which certainly ought to be known.

"About eighteen years ago, one of the Nassau merchants acted as agent for the Dutch government, to hire labourers to go to Surinam on a contract of service analogous to that under which coolies are at present hired in many parts of the West Indies. A number of coloured Bahamians engaged themselves, and were shipped off. Only one has ever returned. He had the courage to put to sea in an open boat, and the luck to meet with a passing vessel which carried him to England, whence he was sent back to Nassau. The tale he tells is sad to the last degree. The men had no sooner landed in Surinam than they were told they were slaves, put in irons, and subjected to all sorts of hardships. Some pined away and died, one poor fellow—who had been a school master at home—cut his throat, unable to endure the shame and degradation of his position. Of the fate of a good many, the survivor can give no information, but I have heard my colleague express the opinion that some of them may be still alive. It is strange that I have forgotten the name of the poor fellow who survived, though I have often seen and talked to him, and he is as well known to everybody in Nassau as the streets of the city. John Stefney is now slightly deranged from the effects of his sufferings, but has had lucid intervals, during which he can give an intelligent account of what he knows. To the credit of the people of Nassau be it said, he is kindly treated by everybody, and is commonly spoken of as 'the poor man who was sold for a slave.' To the best of my knowledge and belief no communication has ever been received by the friends and relatives of any other individual who started on that ill-fated expedition.

"To the best of my belief also, no action has ever been taken by the Imperial Government in this matter. Yet every one of these men was a free-born British subject, as much entitled to the protection of our flag as the first nobleman in the land. Is it even now too late for something to be done for our fellow-subjects who may at this moment be languishing in slavery?

"Shortly after my first circuit I had many conversations with Governor Blake upon the condition of the coloured race in the colony, and I am convinced that no man was ever more sincerely anxious to benefit them than he was, at that time.

"In many other speeches, besides the one cited by the author of the articles in 'The Freeman,'"\* he pointed out to the people that as long as the Truck system existed, they were in slavery, as every man must be who is in debt.

"Considering whom he was addressing, 'slave' and 'slavery' were dangerous words to use. "To the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those who were emancipated in 1837, these words represent something tangible that they can understand and realize. The rest of the sentence, explaining the sense in which the words were used, would express nothing to their minds. And so it turned out, for if I have had it said to me once, I have had it said fifty times, 'De gubner say we slaves... ' "

"A case brought to my notice by Professor Brooks of Baltimore I hardly know whether to class under the head of the 'truck system' or to call by an uglier name. The professor being engaged during the winter of 1886-7 in a scientific examination of the sea-water, hired a coloured workman through the agency of a white Nassau merchant. The merchant was to pay the man, who was to receive —1 pound a week. Subsequently Professor Brooks discovered that the merchant was paying the man 6s. a week and pocketing 14s.! The professor immediately paid the man himself and the merchant threatened him with an action for damages.

"The merchant in question belongs to a powerful family, and is connected either by blood or marriage with whatever there is of influence or money in the town of Nassau. Incredible as it must appear, I have little doubt that had he brought an action against Professor Brooks in the Court of Common Pleas, he would have succeeded, as the judges would have been afraid to offend so influential a connection.

"And this story leads naturally on to the question whether justice is equally administered between black and white. Of course it will be alleged against me that I am unfairly prejudiced. Of that I am ready to take my chance, but I unhesitatingly assert that even handed justice between black and white is all but unknown in the Bahamas. Neither will it even become a general rule as long as a single judicial office remains in the hands of a native white. How can it be otherwise? All the native whites are connected with each other, and the higher officers are so badly paid that independence is all but an impossibility even where men are actuated by high motives. God forbid that I should deny that in Nassau, as

elsewhere, there are many men and women with good instincts, but is not human nature the same all the world over? A man has a miserable salary and no retiring pension; perhaps he has family to support? He lives in a small place where he is connected with every one of the dominant race, a narrow-minded, over-bearing clique, who imagine themselves to be a species of untitled aristocracy; a sort of thirty tyrants of Athens; an Oligarchy irresponsible save to itself. All his hopes of any active assistance outside

*\*A popular Bahamian newspaper that published from 1886 to 1889.*

41

+ + +



*House and place of sacrifice of an Obiaman (Priest), in Suriname*



his official salary, of any comfortable social intercourse, of an endurable existence in fact, depend upon his relations with the people! In heaven's name how can he do equal justice unless he be a man cast in an iron mould?

"The white natives are very fond of citing the case of the present Colonial Secretary, who thirty years ago suffered severely for doing equal justice between black and white. At that time he was police magistrate, and had to convict and fine his father-in-law for assaulting a black boatman. His father-in-law immediately turned him out of doors, and prosecuted him in every way for the rest of his life. Whilst sympathizing with him to the fullest extent, it must be evident that, after all, he had only kept the oath he took on taking office, a thing every British judge or magistrate is supposed to do so as a matter of course. The treatment he received at the hands of his father-in-law only shows what any member of the clique must expect, who dares to oppose the will of the rest, and how much moral courage a man requires to do his duty against such odds.

"The above is the only case the native whites ever cite on their side of the question. The cases on the other side are endless; I will instance a few that have happened quite of late years.

"Some little time ago a member of the clique was charged before the sitting magistrate with tying a black boy to a tree and beating him nearly to death. The doctor in charge of the asylum heard the child's shrieks, and had he not sent one of the asylum nurses over to interfere, it is extremely probably that the child would have been killed. For this offence the accused was fined 50s., which was thought a very severe punishment. Can any one doubt that if he had been a black man he would either have been sent to prison without the option of a fine or else committed for trial?

"Shortly after my arrival an instance occurred which showed me how impossible it was for one of these natives to do justice. My colleague was in charge of the Police Court, and I was standing by talking to him, when a girl name Rosa Poietier came in to apply for a summons against one of the principal men in Nassau and a member of the Executive Council, for assaulting her and turning her out of doors without paying her wages, her offence being that she insisted on wearing a piece of green ribbon, the badge at that time of those who supported Governor Blake. The girl's story may have been true or false, I cannot tell, but at any rate she was entitled to be heard. But my colleague sent her to the Civil Court to bring an action for wages, ignoring the charge of assault altogether! He did not dare do otherwise! Some time ago at Harbour Island, the second place in the Bahamas in importance, five coloured men, named Israel Lowe, John D. Lowe, David Tynes, William Alfred Johnson, and Joseph Whyllly, determined to test the right of the authorities of the Methodist Church to prevent a coloured man from entering the chapel by the same door as a white man. With this view they walked quietly in at the white man's door and up the aisle. The service was discontinued until they were turned out, and prosecuted the next day before the resident justice who convicted them of brawling, and fined them 20s. each, with

the alternative of imprisonment. And yet the men so treated had contributed both by money and manual labour to the construction of this chapel.

"Whilst I was sitting in the Police Court at Nassau in the early part of 1887, a case occurred showing the ideas prevailing in the colony on the subject of equal rights. Mr. George Bosfield, an educated coloured gentleman, was summoned before me for violating an Act of Parliament, compelling houses within the limits of the city, to be built in a certain way. Being possessed of a considerable amount of gumption, Mr. Bosfield filed informations against seventeen leading white men for violation of the Act, whom acting Police Inspector Crawford was compelled to

43

+ + +



SALE IN VENDUE HOUSE — This sketch is a typical sale in the Vendue House. During these sales, Bahamians

met socially, exchanged stories and of course, all manner of wares.

44

+ + +

summon. After repeated applications for adjournment, the summonses were withdrawn, and the House of Assembly repealed the Act! How different would the case have been had these seventeen been coloured instead of white!

"Not long ago a certain local Attorney was appointed acting magistrate. Some few years before there had been an application to strike this person off the rolls for gross professional misconduct; subsequently, when Acting Inspector of Schools, he had misappropriated

public funds, and would no doubt have been prosecuted had he been a coloured man. Being a white man, and related to some of the most influential members of the clique, he was allowed to repay the money in installments.

"In two cases in which white men prosecuted black for larceny, there being no evidence whatever to support a conviction, this person convicted and inflicted a nominal fine to prevent an action being brought against the prosecutor...

"About two years ago, a white man named Sands hit a black policeman. Sands was undoubtedly mad, and was acquitted on that ground. The way the whites talked of this habitually was, 'that the man was only a nigger, and it was a pity a few more were not shot.'

"I extract the following from a letter sent me by an intelligent coloured man:

" 'The family alliance is too great, its ramifications extend throughout every branch of the Government, Executive, Legislative, Judicial and Revenual. There is no hope for us except through the removal of the present holders of office.

" 'For many years the press of the colony has obstinately refused to publish our grievances, and the people are cowed down, afraid to make any public lawful demonstration or stand up for their rights, liberties, and privileges, as they are deterred by the oft-repeated threat of reading the Riot Act, and bayoneting the people by the soldiers. The dominant minority have the ear of the Government at home, and make use of their influence and prestige to crush and oppress us. We have no chance in the Halls of Justice, if our opponent be a member of the clique. In the public service we are superseded by the sons and younger brothers of powerful members of it, and our services, though long and faithful, are ignored.

" 'For us as a people, there is no hope, unless the present higher officials—who are either connected with the clique or else in debt to them—are removed, and their places filled by men from England. Unless we get help and aid from Great Britain, our condition will soon become unbearable!'

" A member of the New York Yacht Club, who knows the Bahamas thoroughly, once said to me, ' I was here the day Sands was arrested, and I never shall forget it as long as I live! No one who saw that crowd could doubt there was an undercurrent of race-hatred with which the white Conchs will have to reckon sooner or later.' There was an American lady staying at the hotel last winter, who made it her business to get at the bottom of the coloured people's thoughts and feelings. She went out sailing every day with the same boatman, and completely gained his confidence. One day he said to her, ' If it wasn't for the soldiers, we would cut the throats of every white Conch in Nassau.'

"I am told that shortly before I left, Jamaica men were going about telling the people the history of the Jamaica outbreak in Governor Eyre's time, and one of them even went the length of saying, 'If you burn down Bay Street, the whites haven't got a saviour among them. In Jamaica they had lots of saviours, but we burnt the town.' This, my informant explains to me,

+ + +

meant that whereas in Jamaica, white and coloured people held property side by side; Bay Street, which is the principal business street in Nassau, belongs entirely to the white merchants.

"Would that my pen might have power enough to impress upon the Colonial Office the necessity of being wise in time, and not lightly setting aside a petition for a Royal Commission if it should happen that one is sent in with that object. These people know enough of the history of Jamaica to know that the blacks were oppressed there; that they broke out under Governor Eyre, and that, though Gordon was hung, a Royal Commission was sent out, and the coloured people have been better off ever since.

"In fact I am told on all hands that not only in Jamaica, but throughout the West Indies, the coloured people are a great deal too well off, and it is common to say they are unbearable. Whether this be true or false, I have no means of knowing. I do know what their condition is in the Bahama Islands, I know that it is disgrace to the British flag, and above all I know that I have promised them to do my best to bring their wrongs before the British public.

"If the struggle for emancipation fifty years ago was really a struggle for a principle and not merely a struggle to get rid of an ugly-sounding name, if the soil that produced a Granville Sharp, a Wilberforce, and a Clarkson, still bears fruit of a like kind, they ought not to cry to England for assistance in vain. For never was there a time when the maxim that a black man has no rights which a white man is bound to respect, was more firmly believed in or more persistently acted on, than it was in the year of Jubilee in the Bahama Islands.

"For this state of things I believe there are two remedies. Let England persuade the United States to take over the country; or failing that, at once turn it into a Crown Colony. In the first case the independent assembly would disappear, and the country would become 'Bahama County.' 'Florida,' or 'South Carolina,' to which state it belonged before the separation from England. It would send one, or at the outside two, deputies to the State legislature, one good Yankee firm would eat up the little Nassau hucksters without stopping to take breath; the interests of the place as a winter sanatorium would be pushed, and the whole condition of things transformed in an incredibly short space of time.

"As an Englishman of course I dismiss the idea of annexation to America as not to be entertained, but I cannot shut my eyes to the advantages that would accrue to the country from it. and if a colony is worth keeping under the English flag, England should do her duty by it, and that she certainly does not do in the case of the Bahama Islands.

"The coloured people would not sever their connection with this country on any consideration. They associate England, and especially Queen Victoria, with emancipation, and are intensely loyal, because they are a grateful people, though their enemies are for ever proclaiming the contrary. Their faith in the Queen is unbounded, they call her 'The good

missus', and believe firmly that if she only knew their troubles, they would be redressed at once."It is of course not easy to change the constitution of a colony, but it would be very easy for England to promote of the present holders of office, who are men of ability and really good instincts, and who, in another colony away from the ties of family, would be good and useful servants to the State. Where they are it is next to impossible for them to do their duty.

"Bug in order to fill their places with really good men from England, it will be necessary to increase the salaries sufficiently to make worth the while of men who are worth having to take the places.

46

+ + +



*RAHAMIAN SOLDIERS — During slavery and after slavery many Africans formed part of the local army. This sketch was done probably near East Street by the Police*

*Barracks. Or more likely near a place where the present Sheraton British Colonial Hotel now stands.*

47

+ + +

"A very small modicum of the Subsidy of which the country was unfairly deprived in 1880 would be this; at present the salaries in this colony are a disgrace to the Imperial Government.

"But in any case. if I have not grossly exaggerated the state of the country, I have made out a case for a Royal Commission which ought to be sent out as soon as possible. In order to be effective it should sit with closed doors and be armed with large powers enabling it to protect all prisons giving evidence before it, and to punish severely anything like intimidation

*and Boycotting of witnesses. Neither should it confine its operations to Nassau, but should visit every one of the Out Islands and see the state of things for itself.*

*"If this were done, there might be some hope of wiping out this blot on the Imperial escutcheon..."*

*"The opening of the House of Assembly is a great day for Nassau, but the ceremony is rather trying to one's sense of humour. One tries to behave with decency and look impressed, but it is very difficult to help laughing.*

*"Even funnier is a meeting of the Lower House, or 'ouse' as some of its members call it. Every member is allowed to speak twice on the same matter, and he generally does. The speeches are often remarkable for an amount of unconscious humour that is truly delicious. At one meeting of this August body I heard a member make an ingenuous confession that I think can never have been surpassed outside the walls of the Palace of Truth. He was speaking to a Bill before the House to prohibit the employment of children under the age of twelve in the Sponge Fisheries. After dilating for some time upon the duty of perserving these young lambs from corruption, and saying over and over again that every worldly interest ought to be as nothing in comparison to it, he concluded thus: 'And besides, gentlemen, I do not think this Bill it'le injure the sponge trade. If I thought it was likely to prove bad for trade, of course I would vote against it,' The honourable member sat down amidst much laughter, to his very great amazement."*

Sir Etienne Dupuch writes: 45 "At the turn of the century we lived in a complex society; every man had a place and every man was expected to know his place. There were three main groups - the coloured people at the bottom, the Bahamian white, largely descendents of Loyalists who left the United States during the American War of Independence, and the British official class." Sir Etienne continues "The coloured people were split in groups determined entirely by degree of colour, starting with black at the bottom, through off-black, dark brown, brown, light brown, high yellow and near white." These divisions of colour, social class, nationality and race caused insecurities among all groups. "Naturally, following the yearning for upward mobility, those who aspired to social advancement, even within their own set limits, got their bearings from the beacon that shone at the top - thence, the deep-rooted British and white-orientated value system." 46 This value system not only applied to the blacks. Although the British Government official group accepted an element of the white wealthy Bahamian socially, they were all officially classed as colonials, which laced them always below the Englishmen. Thus, for Bahamians, black, white and in-between, becoming British was the single most important pre-requisite to attaining self-esteem and status. In this process, then, was an attempt by Bahamians to place less emphasis on their African heritage. Thus, during this post-slavery period and up to only recently, Bahamian blacks tried to be as British,

45. DUPUCH. Etienne, Sir. "The Tribune Story", Ernest Benn, London.

46. McCARTNEY, T. O. "Neuroses in the Sun". Executive Printers Ltd., Nassau. Bahamas. 1971.

(with as much "whiteness" as possible) culturally, politically, economically, educationally and legally.

The stifling of the majority black populations' basic African heritage, the economic stronghold on them by a white oligarchy and the psychological bad-image of the Bahamian black, created a powerless, passive and somewhat pathetic individual.

It is peculiar to the Bahamian people that this passive acceptance of deprivation and discrimination continued up to the early 50's. In other countries, deprivation, discrimination and injustices have the opposite effect—that of protest, organization, solidarity and agitation for basic human rights!

Probably the greatest single factor to \*the progress of liberation by the majority ethnic group were those 'mixed' Bahamians who totally denied their African heritage by finding more 'exotic strains' and by living in a style that they thought would project them as "white" or "cultured". The higher educated blacks and these displaced "mixed" were set to in fighting and confusion, with the white ruling class, dividing and threatening the majority blacks who were held in an 'economic bind'. This white-black condition, the lack of unity of purpose by the blacks, and the basic mistrust among them, perpetuated their condition as 'third class citizens in a country where they were not only in the majority, but the "sweat of their brows" were essential for the life line and well being of the very country where true freedom was denied.

The past twenty years in the Bahamas, as elsewhere in the world, though, have seen some important changes:

### **(1) Economic**

The traditional activities of fishing, sponge harvesting and farming now fall a long way behind international banking and tourism as the Bahamas' principal source of revenue and employment.

In 1972, some 11/2 million tourists visited the Bahamas, spending a total of over \$285,000,000. Efforts are now being placed on expanding the industries of agriculture and fisheries, and other industries are encouraged by a special Act of Parliament.

Grand Bahama island is the most industrialized island and has become one of the world's largest oil trans-shipment sites.

### **(2) Political \***

In 1956, a Resolution in the Bahamian House of Assembly prohibited racial discrimination in public places. Bahamian whites and blacks still maintained their rigid social system, although the influx of white expatriate professionals was beginning to bridge racial and social gaps.



The general strike in 1958 by taxi cab drivers against tour companies almost crippled the country. The two newly formed political parties, the Progressive Liberal Party (P.L.P.) and the United Bahamian Party (U.B.P.) (the then ruling party), plus the newly formed unions, were beginning to make their presence felt. The Secretary of State for the Colonies was sent urgently to the Bahamas. Reforms moved from male suffrage to universal suffrage by 1962. By far, the

Note: For a more comprehensive review of Bahamian political development see "The Quiet Revolution" by Doris Johnson, Family Island Press 1972., and the author's "The Relevance of Black Power in the Bahamas" in "Is Massa Day Dead - Ed. Orde Coombs. Doubleday & Sons, 1974.

49

+ + +

#### COMPARATIVE RETURNS OF SPONGE GRAPEFRUIT, ORANGES, COCONUTS AND SISAL EXPORTED 1906-1910

This record of comparative returns shows that sponge was the most valuable export for the islands during this period.

In 1906 the export value was:

Sponge - £115.527 (\$346,581); Grapefruit - £ 1,837 (\$5,511); Oranges - £783 (\$2349); Coconuts - £7 10 (\$2,130); Sisal - £ 40,140 (\$120.420).

By 1910, the export value had increased for:

Sponge to 110,740 (\$332,220); and Sisal to 42,057 (\$126,171). Whereas grapefruit, oranges and coconuts had shown a marked decrease.

50

+ + +

two most significant changes in the political structure of the Bahamas came in 1967 when the Progressive Liberal Party was elected to office—a black government over a black majority; and on July 10, 1973 when the Bahamas gained independence from Britain.

### **(3) Social**

The Bahamian today experiences no type of racial or social discrimination. It has been reported that there are some instances where there is black discrimination against white—be this as it may—there is no place in the world where one would find somebody hating or not liking somebody!

Mixed marriages, social and racial intercourse (lots of the other kind of intercourse too!) unlimited job opportunities, in all areas, are commonplace.

The proximity to the United States still plays, as in days of yore, a very important part on the everyday life of the Bahamian. The constant bombardment of the mass media, the high influx of tourists and tourism (the bedrock of the Bahamian economy), has its negative aspects and have brought pressure on the Bahamian family and on the Bahamian's value system. Viz:



( 1) Unstructured families and the single female family unit appears to be on the increase; so is illegitimacy.

Statistics\* for 1973 give the following:

Total number of births = 4,221

Illegitimate births = 1,646

Thus, 38.99 per cent of the total births for 1973 were illegitimate.

(ii) The poor economic world conditions have sent unstable economic waves to the Bahamas. For the first time, in the history of the Bahamas, there is high unemployment with the cost of living constantly raising.

(iii) The tourist industry utilises both parents in work situations. Long working hours and unusual shifts cause the lack of proper supervision for young children. It is significant that, at the time of writing, crime is on the increase and is cause for great concern. For example, out of 790 offenses \*\* in crime from the 5th January, 1974 to the 30th November, 1974, ranging from drugs to robbery, violence and murder,

21 offenders were over 20 years

1 offender over 19 years

2 offenders were 21 years

766 were between the ages of 11 years and 17 Years old.

(iv) The Bahamian male does not assume responsibility for the many children he fathers and spends much of his time from one mistress to the next or in the constant pursuit of the tourist female (called "Watergates" in the local vernacular). The Bahamian female, the mainstay of Bahamian society (which is matrifocal anyhow), is becoming more aggressive, educated and assuming more professional responsibility. Evidence of this can be found by the increasing top positions in the Government Civil Service held by Bahamian females, and the opportunities taken by many of them in furthering their education, as evidenced by their participation in

\* Department of Statistics. Bahamas Government Printing.

\*\* Unofficial statistics from the Commissioner of Police given to members of the Bahamas Christian Council at a meeting the 6th May, 1975.

many adult courses given. Bahamian females are now earning and saving more than their husbands, which the Bahamian male, with the already mother complex, is further "castrated". The Bahamian male must assert and perpetuate his masculinity by becoming a "stud", especially to the tourist female, mostly white.

(v) The educational orientation has changed. The Bahamas still follows the British system of education. Formerly, most Bahamians went to England or Europe to school (there are no universities in the Bahamas as yet). Today, more Bahamians attend schools in the U.S.A., and are caught up with the many anxieties of that country. Hence, many movements that attract black Americans are attracting black Bahamians. Black awareness, and the search for identity, change from Christian to Moslem and other Eastern religions and non-believers add to the confusion and confrontation of the majority Christian Bahamian society, and the more conservative older Bahamian.

Considering the Bahamians' development, then, from Columbus' time to the present, the quick transition from isolated "islands in the sun" to an independent nation, taking its place in a highly technological, fast moving world, has definitely set the atmosphere for the revival and practise of Obeah, which was originally utilised to discover, explore and find answers for the individual and collective Bahamian society anyway.

Since writing this book, the College of the Bahamas has been formed and offers a two year "Associate" degree.

## AN ACT

Auxiliary to an act of the Imperial Parliament, A. D. 1834.  
intituled, "An act for the Abolition of Slavery  
throughout the British Colonies; for promoting  
the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for  
compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the  
services of such Slaves."

[February 15th, 1834.]

WHEREAS in and by an act of the Imperial Parlia-  
ment of Great Britain and Ireland, of the third and fourth  
years of your Majesty's reign, intituled, "An act for the  
Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for  
promoting the industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for  
compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the services of  
such Slaves," it is among other things enacted, that all  
persons who, on the first day of August, in the year of our  
Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-four, shall have  
been registered as Slaves in the Colony, and shall appear by  
such Registration, to be, on that day, of the full age of six  
years and upwards, shall, on the said first day of August,  
in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty-four, by  
force and virtue of the said act, become apprenticed labour-  
ers to their last owners, for two certain terms of years;  
that is to say, all prædial apprentices until the first day of  
August, in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty;  
and non-prædial apprentices until the first day of August,  
in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight, and  
that, subject only to such apprenticeship as aforesaid, all  
persons who on the said first day of August, in the year  
one thousand eight hundred and thirty-four, shall have been  
lawfully registered as Slaves as aforesaid, shall, on that  
day and thenceforth be, to all intents and purposes free and  
discharged of and from all manner of slavery, and abso-  
lutely and forever manumitted; AND WHEREAS in and by

Preamble.

### EMANCIPATION ACT 15 FEBRUARY 1834

This "Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies: for promoting the Industry of the Manumitted slaves; and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the service of such slaves," came into effect in the Bahamas on 1 August, 1834.

The Act did not give the slaves complete freedom. There was to be a compulsory "apprenticeship", that is, a transition period between slavery and full freedom, when ex-slaves were to be dependent on their late masters for employment and the latter dependent on their slaves for labour and a small wage.

By the Act of 1834, the ex-slaves were divided into two categories "prædials" and non-prædials" and were to be freed after six years and four years respectively. All slaves were freed after four years.

Employers were still responsible for maintenance. Ex-slaves and ex-masters had contracts laying down the amount of hours that an ex-slave could work. Special Magistrates were appointed from England to see that the provisions of the apprenticeship were enforced.

Apprenticeship passed very quietly in the Bahamas. Poverty was perhaps the cause of such "tranquility". Many employers had to free their apprentices because of real poverty. Complete freedom came for the ex-slaves in 1838.

+ + +  
Chapter II  
SECTION I



THE MORNING BAZAR AT THE ROYAL VICTORIA HOTEL.

### WHAT IS OBEAH?

"It was a scorching day in September 1952. It seemed unusually hotter than every other day of the year in the small settlement on one of the remotest of the Bahamian chain. The rain that had fallen only minutes previously did nothing to cool the atmosphere.

There was no human life in sight except two middle-aged women who bitterly engaged in exchanging words. One was claiming that the other was "sweet-hearting" her husband. The other was not denying it but countered the remark by saying that if the first had what it took, her husband would have no need to keep sweethearts.

At that point, the more vocal of the two, a small plump woman of about 50, shot back: "Okay you are going to get what you asked for. Between this day and tomorrow, you ger sleep under the cotton tree."

The neighbours, who listened from behind tightly-closed doors and windows, heard the expression before and knew exactly what was in store for Miss May. They knew Miss Lile's reputation. In the small settlement she was known as the 'Obeah Woman,' nobody "fooled 'round' with her." Whether for good or well, she was respected.

If somebody was going to sleep under the cotton tree, somebody was going to sleep under the cotton tree.

Miss Lile turned and headed for her small house across the street from Miss May's. Once in the door she turned around to the startled face of her neighbour and shouted, angrily, "that's right, you just as well go inside your house and put your burying gown on."

The local constable and the commissioner had heard about the argument and were suspicious, so they watched Miss May's house during the night. They neither saw anybody enter or leave the small house which she occupied alone since her children had moved to Nassau.

That morning Miss May's fowls did not crow as usual and her potcake dog remained silent on the clap-board step. Inside the small dwelling Miss May was stretched out dead with eyes and mouth wide open.

A son in Nassau was advised of the occurrence and flew to the island, insisting on taking the body to Nassau for an autopsy, which, needless to say, proved that no foul play was suspected. The cause of death was not known, so Miss May's body was put on the mail boat and shipped back to the settlement for burial under the cotton tree.

Miss Lile had threatened Miss May the evening before, but she had not moved out of her house, no foul play was suspected. Miss Lile never said she was responsible for the deceased's passing. But neighbours were convinced that Miss Lile's ju-ju was working.

Very few people ever got the opportunity to visit Miss Lile's house, not even her close family, for even they feared her.

When she finally passed on to the other world and relatives were compelled to go inside the small dwelling, thousands of small bottles and packets were discovered containing various soils, seeds and herbs. She died a terrible death it was said. She was standing. She was so

55

+ + +

heavy that it took six men to place her in a lying position. It was said that even the casket refused to close." 1

This is one of the many incidents of Bahamian life that has been attributed to Obeah. Obeah relates to the' supernatural, but is not indigenous to the Bahamas. Throughout the Caribbean, especially the English speaking Caribbean, Obeah, and other practises that resemble Obeah, are found. To cite a few: Haiti has its "Voodoo", Trinidad and Cuba, "Shango", Cuba, "Santeria". In fact, wherever African slaves were transported and settled, African religious beliefs, healings and superstitions were taken and are still in evidence today. It is interesting, also, to note that black Americans and, even some American whites (especially in the Southern States), have similar beliefs that are found in the Caribbean.

Many "unexplained" mysteries, supernatural happenings and illnesses are ascribed to the influence of being "belted", "fixed", "hagged", "obeahed" or "placed under a spell".

Bahamian Obeah is the phenomenon of the supernatural. It renders evil or good; makes dreams come true; influences individuals either for their demise or holding them in one's power. It can cause one to become rich or it can make one poor. It can cause an illness, either physical or mental or can cure any physical or mental problems. It can cause death! It is a type of spiritualism, surrounded by many tales of unexplained phenomena, and surrounded with superstitions that evolve into a plethora of articles (fetishes), bush medicines, signs and specific directions as to what one may do.

Obeah, then, in the present context, appears to be the bastard child of primarily African religion and superstition, Judeo-Christian beliefs and European superstitions. There are also elements of black magic, white magic, satanism (with its demons), and witchcraft. From a comparative point of view, in Jamaica, "Obeah is the belief that spirits and other supernatural agents are used often to work harm to the living, or may be called off from such mischief. And it is used often to dispel evil spirits and to injure enemies."

One can also assume that Obeah probably originated from an African religion that had elaborate ceremony with "priests", "supernatural powers", "saints", etc., but Obeah, in its present day form, is not a cult or religion. There are no priests, collective rituals, gods or saints. It does not resemble the type of ceremony that is found in Voodoo (in Haiti), Shango (in Cuba and Trinidad), or other types of African religion that can still be found in parts of South America with large populations of peoples of African origin and descent.

The interaction with the Obeah man or woman and society is on a one-to-one basis. An Obeah practitioner may "chant" or "sing" or go into a trance to give an impression or for some effect, as an example, to obtain some "power", but there are no meetings, dancing, drum playing or singing. Although some ministers of religion may practise Obeah in the form of white magic, there are no "ministers" or "priests" of Obeah. "Theoretically, most revivalist leaders are religious leaders who are not involved in the practice of Obeah, and Obeah men and women are, supposedly, evil persons who practise magic without having church groups. Nevertheless, the temptation for revivalist leaders to try their hand at Obeah is strong because of the request made by followers, and, of course, there is a profit."

1. "The Obeah Woman". Bahamian Artifacts in the Nassau Guardian Weekend Magazine, Saturday. May 13, 1973. Page 6. (Written by P. Anthony White).

2. BOWEN. W. Errol. "Everything You Wanted to Know About Obeah but...Were Afraid to Ask." Skywritings-Creative Communication Inc., Ltd., 18 Melmac Ave., Kingston 5., Jamaica.

3. BOWEN. W. Errol. Ibid.

Then too, the actual term to describe people who practise Obeah may differ from country to country. Generally, they are known as Obeah Man or Obeah Woman. In Trinidad, for example, they are either Obeah Man or Wanga Man. In Jamaica, they are either the

Obeah Man or Myal Man\*- . In the Bahamas, they are either Obeah Man or Bush Man, or Bush Doctor. In Georgia (U.S.A.), they are called a Root Man or Root Healer\*\*, in Louisiana, they are the "Conjure Doctor" or "Voodoo Man", in Grenada, either "Obeah Man" or "The Scientist." Since there appears to be general confusion with "occult" terminology, it would be useful, at this stage, to briefly define and describe only those terms that are found in some aspects of Obeah practices:

## 1. Witchcraft

This term refers to the practice of witchcraft. Anyone who can summon invisible powers to help in casting spells or performing feats of magic are said to be practising witchcraft. The Biblical term (the Old Testament) "Kashaph" is often translated, sorcerer, sorcery and sorceries. The terms "witch" and "sorcerer" are often used with the same connotation. The term "necromancer" is used only for the individual who communicates with the dead and was not used in the Bible as a sorcerer. The spiritualist calls a necromancer "a medium", which actually means the same thing. Witchcraft has undergone changes throughout history. In Biblical times, witches were "benefactors" of society or could have been described as the worker of magic (enchanter); the incantation-using sorcerer (witch, proper); the snake-handling hypnotist (the charmer) or the physically gifted person who appeared to possess what we would commonly term extra sensory perception (E.S.P.), (the wizard).

However, in the Middle Ages, a witch (often female) was considered a person who sold her soul to the devil and had sexual relations with demons in exchange for magical powers. It has been estimated, by some authors, that more than nine million suspected witches (females) were put to death under the slightest provocation; and, more recently, in the early historical development of America, thousands of women were burned at the stake as witches.

Today, witches are neither looked upon with too much suspicion nor are they, generally, accepted by the general society. There appears to be many modern day attitudes, viz.:

- (a) Some are lovable and mischievous, for example, as portrayed in the television series of "Bewitched" and the genie-witch in "I Dream of Genie."
- (b) Some are leaders of a type of religious cult. For example, Anton de Szandor La Vey is the "pastor" of the First Satanic Church in San Francisco.
- c) Some are humanists. For example, Sybil Leek, who calls herself "the most famous witch in the world". She believes that people are "searching for a religion where they don't have to live a God-like life, a religion that acknowledges them as human beings." Miss Leek appears to be going more towards Eastern philosophy because, on a recent T.V. show (Merv Griffin), the 13th September, 1974, she expounded the theory of "reincarnation".

"Witchcraft, today, emulates that of the pre-Christian era in many respects. Its practitioners often engage into covens, a group of six male and six female witches, with a high priest or

NOTE: There is a distinct difference between the Obeah Man and the Myal Man, although they are often used interchangeably. These differences are more fully discussed later on. Herbalists, or Bush Doctors, were often confused with practitioners of the occult by ignorant European authors. Individuals who were "healers" and Obeah Men or Women were all placed under "witchcraft" and looked upon as being "evil".

57

+ + +

priestess. They meet monthly, at the time of the full moon, and on eight other festivals called Sabbats throughout the year" 4 The New York Times describes the Halloween Sabbat at the home of Raymond Buckland, an Englishman, with a Ph. D in anthropology:

"First, the witches remove their clothes and bathe in salt water to purify themselves. Then, still nude (sky-clad, as they call it) they descend to the basement and step inside a nine-foot circle that is drawn about them with a 400-year-old sword by Mrs. Buckland, the high priestess, who is known in the craft as Lady Rowen. A bewitching ambience is provided by music from a tape recorder and incense burned in a brass censor. Once inside the circle, the witches sing, chant, dance with broomsticks in commemoration of an ancient fertility rite, drink tea and wine, and listen to the high priestess read from the Book of Shadows.

The ceremony ends after Lady Rowen, dressed in only a silver crown, bracelet, necklace and green leather garter belt, takes a horned helmet and places it on the head of her husband, the high priest, who is known as Rosat. This signifies that power has been transformed from the high priestess, who reigns during the six months of summer, to the high priest, who rules during the six winter months." To my own knowledge, and at the time of writing, there is only one reported 'coven' in the Bahamas.

## II. Magic

From time immemorial, all societies have had individuals who performed magic. The Egyptians were adept at magic. The Bible reports them changing rods into serpents and turning water into blood. Other nations, of ancient antiquity revealed that many individuals, especially their "wise men" or "priests", accomplished many unusual feats.

Today, the word "magic" implies the individual who uses "sleight of hand" to make things appear or disappear, who can saw a person in half or produce animals out of a top hat. In spite of the natural explanation of some of these magical phenomena, there are many unusual things that happen that cannot be explained, by science or any method known to man, at this time.

Without going into the many amazing things that have happened and historically written about, only the type of magical phenomena attributed to Obeah will be eventually mentioned.



Professor Diepgen defines magic as being "every activity which aims at influencing either the super-sensible or the sensible world, which cannot be classed either as a cultic activity or as a technical operation".<sup>5</sup> Professor Diepgen gives three classes of magic:

(a) **White Magic** (or "religious magic" as it is sometimes called: )

The utilization of Bible texts and special forms of prayer, prayer objects (e.g. handkerchiefs, cloths, etc.) for healing or obtaining some desired effect, either to the individual or to someone else. White magic is utilised by many Obeah people for protection, defence, healing, fertility or to "fix" somebody. White magic uses, in its magic form, the names of the Trinity, whole psalms, Bible phrases and other religious symbols.

Merrill Unger, in his book, "Demons in the World Today", describes white magic: "In Biblical faith, trust is placed solely in the Lord Jesus. In white magic, it is deflected to someone else (the human agent) or to something else (one's own faith). In the Biblical prayer of faith, the

4. DeHAAN. Richard W. "Satan. Satanism and Witchcraft." Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972. Pgs. 97-98.

5. DIEPGEN. Paul. "Medizin und Kultur", Ferdinand Enke Verlag. Stuttgart. 1938 Pg. 150.

+ + +

praying person subjects himself to the "Will of God". In white magic, the help of God is demanded under the assumption that exercising such power is in accordance with God's will. In white magic, the Christian markings are mere decorations that camouflage the magical means for knowledge or power."<sup>6</sup>

b) **Black Magic**

This type of magic is usually applied to the type where the help of the devil, demons or spirits are utilised. Judeo-Christian believers attribute black magic to being "evil" and "selling the soul to Satan (or the Devil)". For many civilizations, demons were nothing more than the souls of criminals, new-born babies or women who died in childbirth, or even men who died in duels, that is to say, of anyone who died a death disapproved of by the prejudiced moral outlook of certain societies and periods. There is a barely visible transition from the man condemned by human laws to the damned man in the world after death, and from him to the demon while, in the end, all these are merged together. As a result, one theme recurs, with few variations, over every continent. "<sup>7</sup>

It should also be noted that "oriental" demons were not necessarily bad or responsible for evil deeds. Whether they were good or evil they were first and

foremost superhuman beings, in the same style as the spirits or "genies" of ancient Greece." 8

Black magic usually is used for persecution spells, vengeance spells, defence and some healing spells. The casting of spells (as popularly depicted, for example, in the "sticking of pins in dolls"), is extensively utilised by the Obeah individual. Being "fixed" means that a spell (usually evil) has been placed on the individual.

In the Bible, Jesus Christ, himself, cast out demons and there is a clear distinction between normal physical illnesses that were cured by the laying of hands or anointing with oil, and those cases of possession which were cured by the word of command, although these latter cases often showed the symptoms of ordinary diseases, such as dumbness or blindness (Matthew 9:32, 33; 12:22).

"The chief characteristic of demon possession appears to have been the control of the body of the possessed in an abnormal way against what was believed to be the will of the person." 9 Black magic, as a specific form of witchcraft, has its own literature. The 6th and 7th Books of Moses are the primary source and it alleges that Moses, himself, is the author. It makes this solemn assertion: "To whatever person possesses this Book at any given time, Lucifer makes promise to carry out his commands, but only as long as he possesses this Book." Demons have always been associated with black magic and many people link demons with "possession", even though the phenomenon of possession is found in both Christian, non-Christian, cultic and religious practices.

### **c) Neutral Magic**

These are phenomena that are "mysterious" and that cannot be explained by science, but which take place without reference to either religion, God or the Devil. The field of

6. UNGER, Merrill F. (Dr.). "Demons in the World Today", Tyndale House Publishers. 1971. Pg. 86.

7. BESSY, Maurice. "A Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural". Spring Books. London. 1964. Pg. 149.

8. Ibid. p. 148.

9. WRIGHT, J. Stafford, "Mind, Man and the Spirits". Zondervan Publishing House, 1971, pgs. 128,129.

NOTE: Other common books on magic used are: 'The Spiritual Shield, The Black Raven, The Spring Book, Saints Blessing, The Genuine Fiery Dragon, etc.

Parapsychology is the exploration of this phenomena and it is scientifically evident that many strange phenomena take place. A few examples are:

(i) levitation - things or objects that float in the air

(ii) telekinesis - the phenomenon that takes place when a psychically gifted person apparently moves objects by concentrating on them

(iii) apport - solid objects disappearing from one place and being found an instant later in a location hundreds of miles away

(iv) telepathy - the acquisition of knowledge without the use of the sources.

Tischner distinguishes telepathy by "thought sending, thought reading, mixed telepathy (in which telepathy is mixed with clairvoyance) triangular telepathy (in which sender, mediator and receiver work together, and psycho-metric telepathy, in which persons with mediumistic gifts can, by means of some object, make paranormal disclosures about its owner." <sup>10</sup>

Professor J. B. Rhine, originally of Duke University, has been a leader in para-psychological research. He indicates that some people are able to perceive facts through a so-called "sixth sense", and that others have the ability to transfer their thoughts without using the usual methods of communication.

Dr. Kurt E. Koch illustrates this fact with many accounts of his book. He writes for example, "an unusual and very pronounced form of telepathy was reported to me at an interview in Switzerland. The wife of a Christian worker lived in a suburb of a large town. A Christian friend of hers often used to do her shopping for her in town, without asking her beforehand what she needed. Every time, she was surprised how he brought all the food and other things which she had thought of while busy in her kitchen. This man and this woman both have mediumistic gifts. They gave other evidence of extra-sensory abilities." <sup>11</sup>

### **III. Clairvoyance**

This is the peculiar gift of some people to grasp with clear vision, in spontaneous experiences, things hidden in the past, the present and the future (secular or religious prophecy). <sup>12</sup>

Tischner defines clairvoyance as the extra-sensory perception of objective facts, of which no one has knowledge, without use of any of the known senses.

+NOTE: The June. 1974 issue of Cosmopolitan Magazine (Pg. 172). tells the story of Uri Gefler, the Israeli "Superpsychic". Uri is supposed to have correctly guessed the orientation of a die concealed in a metal box eight times in a row, beating odds of a million to one; deflected a laboratory balance placed under a bell jar by passing his hand over the jar and bent silverware with his mind.

10. TISCHNER. Rudolf. "Ergebnisse Okkultur Forschung", Deutsche Verlagsanstalt. Stuttgart, 1950.

11. KOCH. Kurt E. (Dr.), Christian Counselling and Occultism", Ev.Verlag 7501, Berghausen-Wesern German, 1972, Pg.57.

12. KOCH, Kurt E. ( Dr.) Ibid. Pg. 60.

The individual that is clairvoyant can see ghosts (sperrids, spirits, duppies), sometimes symbols and sometimes they can predict an event either 100 % accurate or, maybe, a large or small amount of error. There are many people who may "possess" clairvoyant ability without realising that it is clairvoyant phenomena; while others not only recognise it, but actually make it a profession. It is interesting to note that when a ghost of a living person is seen (in the Bahamas, many times before death or during sickness), the original of the ghost is commonly unaware of the actions of the people to whom the ghost appears. He is active in his own surroundings, and is not aware of travelling in any astral body. There may be cases, however, in which an individual, in a light trance, or in sleep, may become aware of travelling somewhere, seeing some person and has been seen by that person. Literature abounds with books and incidents of clairvoyance. A very famous incident is recorded in "Proceedings of the S.P.R. Vol. VII No. 41": A Mr. Wilmot, crossing the Atlantic, shared a cabin with a friend. One night, he dreamed that his wife came into the cabin in her night dress, hesitated on seeing that he was not alone, but then moved in and kissed him. On waking, he was rebuked by his friend who told him that, while lying awake, he had seen a lady come in and kiss him. When Mr. Wilmot arrived home from his trip, his wife asked him whether he had seen her "a week ago Tuesday". She told him that she was worried about him and thought about him so much that, during the night, she imagined that she travelled across the sea, came to a ship and went into a cabin. Then she saw a man staring at her with her husband also there, but asleep. She went over to her husband and kissed him. This lady also described, in accurate detail, the cabin, which was of an unusual design.

The most famous clairvoyants are also astrologers or "witches." Time Magazine's issue of March 21, 1969 is devoted to "Astrology and the New Cult of the Occult." Time reports that "Show business everywhere is dabbling in astrology and more or less related arts." Seeress Sybil Leeks' "Diary of a Witch" is already in its second printing, though her alleged witchcraft seems mainly a device to distinguish her from such colleagues in the prophecy business as the redoubtable Jeanne Dixon and British Seer Maurice Woodruff, who does his predicting on a syndicated T.V. show hosted by Robert Q. Lewis. To lend a little magic to public entertainments, Los Angeles enjoys the services of an official County Witch—a title conferred by the County Supervisor on Mrs. Louise Huebner, a thirtyish "third generation astrologer and sixth generation witch! "

With clairvoyance comes other phenomena that should be cited:

(a) Divination is "the art of soothsaying in it's widest sense, i.e. the unveiling of hidden things in the past, present and future."<sup>13</sup> Dr. Koch makes a clear distinction between divination and clairvoyance. "The retrospective and predictive visions of the clairvoyant are spontaneous experiences, which come over the seer without any preparation or mental volition on his part. The diviner, on the other hand, makes use of certain omens and means —arrows, (the Babylonians and Persians), livers, goblets (the Egyptians), extracts (the Greeks and Romans), runic letters (the Germans) rock crystals, snow crystals, marbles, mirror, cards and palm lines (the enlightened Europeans) hazel twigs, pendulums, etc.,— achieve his prophecy.

Divination is widely used by Bahamian Obeah individuals and the types of materials utilised will be described in a later chapter. The most popular idea of someone telling the future is the picture of a gypsy in a tent, gazing into a crystal ball or the gypsy reading the palm of the hand or cutting the cards.

13. KOCH. Kurt E. (Dr.) Ibid. Pg. 79.

61

+ + +

(b) Palmistry (or Chiromancy) is the reading of the palm of the hand to tell things past, present or future about the individual. The hand is divided into sections and these sections have lines that mean something. There is the Venus belt, the martian plain and areas for fortune, success, fame, intelligence, imagination and sensuousness. There are also four lines that dominate the surface of the palm: the head line, the heart line, the profession line and the life line.

(c) Fetishism - the Latin word "factitius" means magical or effective, but the Portuguese word "feitico," or charm, describes, more fully, what a fetish really is. A fetish is an inanimate object which is supposed to have special powers and is carried as a protection or revered.

Fetishism is not merely a manifestation of ancient or primitive religions, nor are those individuals who have a "fetish" or "charm" believers of pagan magic. Fetishism is a modern day phenomenon, as is exhibited by the rabbit foot, horseshoes, four-leaved clovers, for good luck or black cats, and the number thirteen for bad luck. Parts of the body or animal like hair, feathers, fingernail clippings or objects of clothing, underclothes, handkerchiefs, socks or stockings, are extensively used in Obeah. The most potent fetish, though, in Obeah, is cemetery (graveyard) dirt (earth) that can play any role the Obeah person wishes to utilise it for.

#### **IV. Spook Phenomena**

In Bahamian language, a spook is a "sperrid," "spirit" or "ghost," ("duppy" in Jamaica). The sperrid can be "called" by an Obeah person "calling the spirit"\* and can be used for (i) "revealing mysteries, (ii) doing good (as in protection, for example), (iii) doing evil (e.g. as haunting a house). This type of phenomena is still devoid of religious or para-psychological explanation. There are two types of spook phenomena, however, subjective spook and objective spook.

A subjective spook experience can usually be explained by psychological theories. For example, Professor Bender of the University of Freiburg reported, at a convention of the Evangelical Academy in Tutzing, in 1950, the following case: A student, for a long time, observed a man pursuing her. The observation could not be made by other people. The pursuer would, repeatedly, say to the girl, "Take your life!" This visual and auditory "phantom" ceased to appear after the girl had been counselled by a psychiatrist. This subjective spook

was the projection to the outside of a persecution complex, i.e., a subjective process which was experienced as an objective happening by way of the "outward curve." Most hallucinations can be explained this way.<sup>14</sup>

An objective spook can be either found in a particular location (e.g. haunted houses) can appear spontaneously or over long periods of time (e.g. apparitions at a certain spot like under the old cotton trees, or the noises, moaning sounds or heavy steps that come from various locations ).

Jung-Stilling reports on a haunted house which, for 300 years, was continually troubled by a nocturnal ghost. During the night, heavy steps were heard on the upper floor, as if someone was carrying a sack. A form also appeared several times, wearing a monk's cowl.<sup>15</sup>

Bahamian folklore is replete with ghost stories and this phenomenon will be explored in the "Tale of Sammy Swain" in the section on "Obeah and Folklore."

\* NOTE: This method utilised by those Obeah individuals with years of experience is the most difficult and the most frightening of experiences. It is also the most costly.

14. KOCH. Kurt. E. (Dr.) Ibid. p. 174.

15. JUNG STILLING. Heinrich. "Theorie der Geister Kunde", Zeibircherverlag. Nuremberg, 1921, Vol. 11, p. 85.

62

+ + +

A patient of mine told me that, when she was seven years old, she was often awakened around midnight by moaning sounds that came from the upper partition of her room. These sounds would persist until the whole household would get up to investigate them. To their horror, one night they found a coffin in the living room of their house. They thought that someone was playing a terrible joke (prank) but this happening persisted over a period of months. They consulted their pastor who prayed for them and the house and also they consulted an Obeah woman who told them that it was a sperrid that brought the coffin in the house. The Obeah woman promised them that she would ask the sperrid to leave them alone. This, she evidently did, because a few days later the coffin no longer appeared in the house and the noises stopped. Naturally, their pastor attributed the stopping of this phenomenon to his prayers and the power of God!

To state that Bahamians are superstitious is probably an understatement as is evidenced by a "tongue-in-cheek" article in the April 13, 1973 issue of the Guardian, "Beware! It's Black Friday" was the front page headline. The article goes on to say: "Today is the day. Yes, the day when superstitious Bahamians will stumble out of bed only to trip on the first concrete object nearby. It is the day when many will tremble at even the thought of driving their car out of the driveway. And what about work at school? The worst will happen, surely. Ladders, black cats and all suspicious-looking persons will be scrupulously avoided. Careful drivers and cautious pedestrians will pervade the day. And many will fall victims to what is sociologically termed the "self-fulfilling prophecy"—a modus operandi which states that if we believe something is going to happen, strong enough, it will, indeed, happen. And please,

no jokes on helpless, unsuspecting victims. They believe it was going to happen, anyway, whatever they believed was going to happen, Yes, today is for mad men only and the only thing you have to lose is your mind. It's Friday, April 13th –Black Friday!"

As recently as November 4, 1974, the leader headline appearing in The Tribune was "Two Groups Seek to Exorcise Sin Here"! The article reported: 16 'Moved by the Spirit two groups of women descended on Rawson Square today to exorcise sin from the nation. Leading the first group of thirteen, all dressed in white, was the black-garbed Dr. H. W. Brown, loudly preaching reproach on the Government. The second contingent, under the direction of "Mother" Lena Emily Tucker, threatened death to straw vendors who did not cease their Obeah practises."

There was also a picture of the crowd gathering around a straw vendor who had become hysterical, jumping around babbling unintelligible words, which believers refer to as "speaking in tongues."

Not only are these events happening, but the Obeah men and women are having an economic boom! Bush baths have, (at the time of writing) increased in price from \$100 to \$150-\$200, and consultation fees have increased from \$15-\$20 to \$35 up to \$80. Even though the peak years appeared to be in 1973-1974, and the heightened interest appears to be less evident, at the time of writing, Obeah has become stabilized and, in the author's opinion, especially since the wide press and radio coverage of a speech given by the author on this subject to the Bahamas Historical Society in January, 1975, an accepted Bahamian practise. There are many enquiries for speeches and lectures on Obeah and the author is, at present, being consulted with more "Obeah-type" problems.

16. The Tribune. November 4, 1974, Pg. 1.

63

+ + +

## **Chapter II**

### **SECTION II**

#### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF OBEAH IN THE BAHAMAS**

The origin of Obeah, and the word itself, has never been attempted by an author, writing about the Bahamas, although some physical "obeah-signs" and some of the superstitions have been found in the literature. Without exception, authors agree that Obeah was practised by Bahamians of African descent and some of these have been briefly described. Guidelines, therefore, must be taken from writers who have observed, more intimately, Obeah practise in the other Caribbean islands in order for us to better understand the development of Obeah in the Bahamas.

The etymology of Obeah is still undergoing controversy because the actual word "Obeah" is not found in present day Africa, although there are words sounding like it and describing

"witchcraft" or other types of occultic activity. The first attempt to understand the word was, by Reginald Scott 17 in 1584, who believed that "of the Hebrew word ob, what it signifieth, where it is found: of Pythonicus called Ventriloquae, who they be and what their practises are; experience and examples thereof shewed. This word, ob is translated Python or Pythonicus spiritus; sometimes though improperly magus...but ob signifieth most properly a bottle, and is used in this place because the Pythonists spoke hollow, as in the bottom of their bellies; whereby they are aptly in Latin called Ventrilique...There are such as take upon them to give oracles, etc...

It would appear that Scott believed that the word was Egyptian and that it was part of Egyptian Serpent worship. As a result, later researchers claimed that Obeah had this derivation.

A "Report of the Lords of the Committee of the Council appointed for the consideration of all matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations" in London, 1789, Part 111, Questions 22-26, tried to precise Obeah. This report stated: "The term Obeah, Obiah or Obia (for it is variously written), we conceive to be the adjective and the obe or obi the noun substantive; and that by the words Obiah men and women are meant those who practise Obi." The report continued: "A serpent, in the Egyptian language, was called 'Ob' or 'Aub.' Obion is still the Emtian name for seruent - Moses, in the name of God, forbids the Israelites even to enquire of the demon Ob, which is translated in our Bible 'charmer' or wizard, divinator and sortiligus. The woman at Endor is called Oub or Ob, translated pythorissa, and Oubsios was the name of the basilisk or royal serpent, emblem of the sun, and an ancient oracular diety of Africa. This derivation which applies to one particular sect, the remnant probably of a very celebrated religious order in remote ages, has now become, in Jamaica, the general term to denote those Africans who, in the island, practise witchcraft or sorcery."

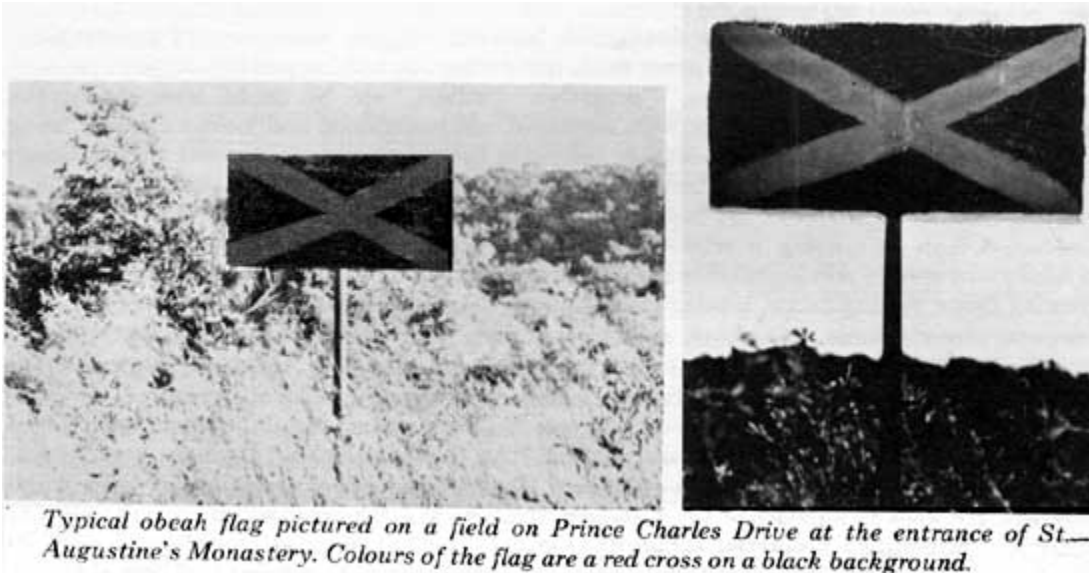
In 1932, Joseph Williams, a Jesuit priest, wrote a comprehensive book called "Voodooos and Obeahs" and he originally concurred with the preceding origin of the word. Later on, however, in 1935, in a paper called "Hebrewism of West Africa", he concluded that "the word 'ob' did not originate with the Egyptians but may be traced back to the Canaanites from whom the Egyptians, as well as the Hebrews, derive it and if there is any value at all in this suggested derivation, it would be at most the indication of an Hebraic influence on the parent stock of the Ashanti from whom West Indian Obeah is directly derived."

17. SCOTT. Reginald. "The Discoverie of Witchcraft", London. 1665, Book VII. Pg.71, Chapter 1.

Powles, 18 a circuit justice, writing about the Bahamas, reported that "the people here are very superstitious and what is called 'Obeahism' is very common among them. I have never been able to find out exactly what the 'Obeah-men' are supposed to do, further than that they are species of African magicians, who, for a trifling consideration, will bewitch your enemies and charm your fields, so that any one stealing from them will be punished by supernatural agency without the intervention of the policeman or the magistrate."



Shattuck <sup>19</sup> observed that "at some of the islands we found hanging to various fruit trees, fantastically draped bottles and sticks, which, we were informed, were charms to frighten away thieves and evil spirits. It is believed by the negroes that if anyone but the rightful owners, should eat the fruit from a tree on which this spell has been placed, he will swell up and burst."



Typical obeah flag pictured on a field on Prince Charles Drive at the entrance of St.-Augustine's Monastery. Colours of the flag are a red cross on a black background.

Major MacLachlan Bell, <sup>20</sup> trying to explain Bahamian Obeah, believed that the word "denotes sorcery, fetichism." Bell wrote "Obeah, the magic exercised by reputed witch doctors, is their inheritance from both jungle and moslem influence." He continued, "the forefathers of the present generation of black people were usually in terror of 'Ju-Ju', and the death sentences, which priests of the cult could pronounce among the isolated groups of people on the scattered islands of the Bahamian chain. This voodoo belief lingers still and finds practitioners." Bell, like so many other writers, got Obeah and Voodoo mixed up. Ellis, <sup>21</sup> as far back as 1891, tried to clarify this distinction: "That the term Vodou should survive in Haiti and Luisiana and not in the British West Indian Islands, will surprise no one who is acquainted with the history of the slave trade. The Tshi (original spelling Twi) speaking people (the Ashanti and kindred tribes),

18. POWLES, L.B.. "The Land of the Pink Pearl: Life in the Bahamas." Sampson Low - Marston & Co., Ltd., Fleet Street London, E.C. Pg. 238, 1888.

19. SHATTUCK, C. B., " The Bahama Islands", Geog. Soc. of Baltimore- MacMillan, N.Y. 1905, p. 415.

20. BELL, Major H. MacLachlan, "Isles of June", USA., 1934.

21. ELLIS, A. B., "On Vodou Worship", Popular Science Monthly Vol. XXXVIII, Pg. 651, 1891.

called Coromanties, in the slave dealers' jargon, and who were exported from the European fort on the Gold Coast, were not admitted into French and Spanish colonies on account of their dispositions to rebel and, consequently, they found their way into the British colonies, the only market open to them; while the French and Spanish colonies drew their chief supply from the Ewe speaking slaves, exported from Whydah and Badoggy."

The most plausible origin of the word "Obeah" is the theory put forward by Orlando Patterson.<sup>22</sup> "The closely related Twi word 'Obeye' (which, in pronunciation, is far closer to the Jamaican word), seems more convincing, especially in view of the fact that 'Obeye' has far greater currency among West Indian peoples. The medicine men, for example, use Obeye to describe the 'won'-like entity within witches. The fact that the word Obeah is derived from West African witchcraft and not sorcery should also be borne in mind."

People of all races and cultures distinguish between religion, medicine and superstition. The first Europeans to visit Africa never made this distinction and lumped any African practise as being "superstitious," "heathen," "primitive," "infidel," etc. No doubt, later, during the height of slavery, African practises were repressed, not understood and looked upon as being "inferior." Even today, one is constantly reminded by whites and blacks that the European "liberated" the African from his primitive existence. "In the face of incontrovertible evidence, a growing -number of scientists are beginning to conclude—however reluctantly—that while Caucasoid man was living a relatively primitive existence, his dark-skinned counterpart in Africa was already solving mathematical problems...building temples and homes of brick, growing crops, raising cattle, mining metals and fashioning them into useful objects such as weapons, utensils, tools, ornaments, and objects of art. Moreover, Africa's excavated ruins of palaces, fortresses and temples tell us that, during this early period, Africans organised social communities, their cities, states and finally empires with complex political structures, laws and religious institutions." <sup>23</sup> As a matter of interest, Robinson comments, in a recent editorial of The Message Magazine: <sup>24</sup> "More recently, when John H. Speke entered Uganda, East Africa, February 1862, he could hardly believe his eyes! He saw evidences of prevailing prosperity and progress. He went to a palace of the Kabakas where he saw the great reception hall, with its richly and elaborately decorated supporting beams. The Kabakas sat cross-legged upon an unbelievably beautiful leopard pelt. Speke saw the surrounding countryside had been skillfully cultivated. There were broad fields of maize, sugarcane and tobacco. The rivers had been spanned by log bridges, demonstrating a knowledge of engineering. There was an abundance of big game roaming the forests and plains. Vegetables were grown in the well-kept gardens. There were beans, potatoes and casava. Two rainy seasons and the warm climate afforded bumper crops. The court of Kabakas was governed by the strictest ceremonies. The subjects approached the king upon their knees, with they eyes turned toward the ground, in respect and humility. The king was a powerful personality both politically and socially. These people had a well-trained army and a powerful fleet of canoes which sailed the waters of Victoria Nyanza. H.M. Stanley reported that the army had 150,000 soldiers. The army, then, was well trained, well disciplined and well organised. The navy, too, had its 'admiral' and lesser officers. This amazing kingdom, in the heart of Africa, was a picture of utter astonishment to the Europeans, who, up to that time, believed that they

alone had the highest degree of social and political development. To their surprise, these Africans were not barbarous savages running

22. PATTERSON, O. "The Sociology of Slavery", Grenada Publishing, 3 Upper Jans. St., London, W.R. 4BP, 1973. pp. 185-6.

23. "Ebony Pictorial History of Black America," Vol. 1 Pg. 10.

24. ROBINSON, W. R., "Black History" (Editorial), The Message Magazine, September, 1974. Vol. 40 No. 6.

66

+ + +

naked in the center of Africa!" To better understand Obeah, therefore, it is important to distinguish between these three entities of religion, medicine and superstition. Patterson explains: 25 "The main features of West African religion are the beliefs in a supreme being too remote to be active in the affairs of man; the worship of a pantheon of gods which are usually non-human spirits associated with natural forces; ancestor worship and the belief in and use of charms and fetishes. Revolving around these various areas of beliefs are large numbers of cults. Medicine in West African means anything which possesses a 'power', or 'breath of life' and is the abode of a spiritual being or 'won.' 26 A won is normally neutral and can be employed for either evil or good 'as long as the proper ceremonies are performed.' 27 On this basis, the Ga, like other West African peoples, make a distinction between the good medicine-man (wontfe) who uses a combination of good medicine and ordinary herbs for good purposes only; and the bad medicine man (wontfulu) who is 'exclusively engaged in killing and harming and is employed by people who wish to hurt others'. 28 Herskovits 29 observed that among the Dahomans, the "one cardinal tenet in the theory of the Gbo is that good and bad magic are merely reflections of two aspects of the same principle."

"Witchcraft, on the other hand, has nothing to do with either bad medicine-men or the tangible embodiment of their medicines. Witchcraft is defined by Field as 'a bad medicine directed destructively against other people, but its distinctive feature is that there is no palpable apparatus connected with it, no rites, ceremonies, incantations or invocations that the witch has to perform.' 30 From the plethora of literature on witchcraft with regard to psychological and sociological studies, and the findings of anthropologists in Africa, there is a remarkable uniformity of witchcraft beliefs in the entire African continent, south of the Sahara. \*

In the Bahamas, the clearly defined categories of supernatural practises which one finds in Africa, are not found. It is also significant that many Obeah men and women possess all the attributes of religion, superstition and medicine. As previously theorized, it would appear that the majority of Bahamian negroes were Yorubas, even though there has never been any evidence of gods, saints or ceremonies of Yoruba beliefs which can be found in other Caribbean islands, with large Yoruba-descent populations.

With regard to witchcraft, (popularly defined as "Obeah"), however, and medicine, Bahamian practitioners appear to follow the traditions of Yoruba beliefs. The Yorubas

describe Ju-Ju (Obeah) and medicine under similar origins and experience. Ajisafe describes such customs: 31 "There are three ways of learning Ju Ju and medicine:

- (1) From an expert practitioner.
- (2) Through a vision or dreams

25. PATTERSON. O., Pg. 183-4 op. cit.

26. FIELD, M. J.. "Religion and Medicines of the Ga People". She tells us that most Ga medicine practises come from their neighbours, especially the Dahomeans. She also quotes Taylor's remark that 'every tribe believes its' barbaric neighbours to be more deeply steeped in darkly wonderful magic than itself'. Pg. 124-5.

21. Ibid (as quoted by Patterson op. cit. Pg. 183).

28. Ibid.

29. HERSKOVITES. M. J. "Dahomey ", Vol. 2. Pg. 285.

30. FIELD. M. J., op. cit. Pg. 128.

\* It should also be noted that there were many anti-witchcraft movements among African tribes, e.g. Audrey Richards "A Modern Movement of Witch-finders", Africa (1935). Pgs. 448-61 and H. Debrunner's "Witchcraft in Ghana. A Study on the Belief in Destructive Witches and its Effect on the Akan Tribe" (Accra: Presbyterian Book Dept. 2nd Ed. 1967, and M.G. Mamick "Another Modern Anti-Witchcraft Movement in East Central Africa" Africa 20 (1950) 100-12. Myalism in Jamaica was a form of anti-witchcraft and anti-sorcery.

31. AJISAFE, A.K., "The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People", Lagos, Kash and Klare, 1946, Pp. 42-43.

67

+ + +

- (3) From a whirlwind called aja.

When a man wishes to be instructed in the art of making ju ju or medicine he submits himself as apprentice learner to an expert practitioner and becomes his servant. But in 99 cases out of every 100 the master has not given free, honest and unselfish tuition to the apprentice. Hence, most of the native medicines nowadays are ineffective and spurious. Knowledge of the prescription of good medicine has disappeared with their master. Had the natives been more liberal-minded we should have found and seen that native remedies for curing disease show skill of no mean order. When a man has proved that a medical man is an adept or specialist in certain disease, he may secure and obtain the prescription from the specialist (should he feel inclined to give it to him) by paying whatever the specialist demands."

Ajisafe continues his description by stating that "When a man dreams of being told that such and such roots and leaves are a cure for such and such disease, he takes the prescription as a special gift and instruction from the genii. Such prescriptions are strictly kept as precious treasures and are seldom imparted. They are very efficacious. ".+

Ajisafe continues, "It is said that the whirlwind aja used to carry men away with it into the bush for one year or more. During this period the man thus carried away is fed and taught the art of making ju ju and prescriptions of various kinds by a supernatural being. When the man is discharged, he finds himself in his quarters without knowing where he has been and how he managed to get back to his quarters. Such a man is held in awe and respected, and is given a high title among the Olosanins (juju men), but such a case is very rare."

Let us now summarize the following essential factors and look at the development of Obeah in the Bahamas:

- (1) The word itself, is of African origin and, essentially, a type of bad medicine, in the African sense of the word, but also has certain elements of witchcraft.
- (2) Obeah practitioners were uniquely Africans, and, later, people of African descent. It is believed that in the Bahamas, those Africans, who were freed on arrival in the Bahamas, who were never in slavery, and were never exposed to the influence of Christianity, were the principal carriers and practitioners of these beliefs.
- (3) Obeah, which originated in Africa and may have had roots in some African religion or cult, developed into an individual practise. It was essentially a type of sorcery which largely involved harming others at the request of clients by the use of charms, shadow catching, and poisons. The Obeah professional performed Obeah practises and was paid by his clients.
- (4) Many European superstitions and practises (e.g. white magic), were incorporated into Obeah. Eventually, healing, and utilizing bush medicines, were practised.

Moslem beliefs and superstitions were also incorporated \* into Obeah beliefs.

So as to avoid confusion between Obeah and Voodoo, a brief description about Voodoo will be given.

Voodoo is an authentic religion of the people of Haiti, although remnants of Voodoo are found in Brazil, Cuba and the Southern U.S.A. Even though the state religion in Haiti is

+NOTE: One can see similarities in the training of Bahamian Obeah practitioners as described in chapter III.

\* NOTE: in 1802, Rev. D. L. Rose, an Anglican missionary, recorded that many of the Negroes of Exuma, presumably Mandingoes, were "followers of Mahomet".

68

+ + +

Roman Catholicism, the Haitian people (the peasant especially), though practising Catholicism has not renounced the Gods of his ancestors and still appeals to them for spiritual comfort and protection from evil. Voodoo is a Dahomian word meaning God or Spirit.

Alfred Metraux, the famous Swiss ethnologist who lived in Haiti and has studied and written scientific papers and a book on Haiti, defines Voodoo as "A set of beliefs and practises of African origin, intimately mingled with Catholic practices and constituting the religion of most of the peasantry of Haiti."

Voodoo has borrowed many of the elements of its liturgy from Christianity. Today, it offers a ritual derived from this syncretism, this fusion of African and Christian beliefs, which under distinct names associate God, the Virgin Mary and the Saints with the Gods of the Voodoo deities.

"The Voodoo doctrine manifests itself in rites, offerings and sacrifices, and in a sacerdotal hierarchy derived from the different tribes which were deported to San Domingo. Haitian Voodooism has its origins in religions practiced in Dahomey and Nigeria, and to a somewhat lesser extent in ritual practices in the Congo, Angola, Senegal and Guinea. We find the same organisation of the clergy, the same supernatural world, and the same ritual. The priest is a "houngan" or "mambo" and the servants of the divinity are "hounsins".

There are groups of spirits, appointed by God and some of them hierarchized, called Loas. These divinities are honoured in ceremonies of service, obligation or duty.

The dance is very important in the Voodoo religion and the drum has become the symbol of Voodooism. Its songs are hymns composed in honour of the divinities and are of many forms. These hymns are sung while the believers dance often to pulsating rhythms. The main symbols employed in Voodoo ceremonies are called "ve've" '. They are drawn by hand to the ground with ashes, flour or oatmeal. The Voodoo temple is called a Houmfort. It contains flags in the natural colours, drums, a few pictures of Catholic Saints and certain ve've' symbols.

+ + +

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **BAHAMIAN OBEAH PRACTITIONERS**

"Mr. Rolle, this is the gentleman that I told you about. Do what you can for him, he needs your help badly; this a good friend of mine."

This was my first contact with an Obeah man and I made it through a patient of mine who had consulted him because of a problem. She came to see me, in desperation, after all his advice and instruction failed. Mr. Rolle was of Haitian-Bahamian descent; he was short, very dark with a round face and a large flat nose. He spoke with a typical Haitian patois – broken English accent - and asked me to have a seat in a small, but overly furnished living room, where plastic flowers were everywhere. The house was typically Bahamian lower socio-economic class - a wooden house with one little porch leading to the living room, a small dining area, a very small cooking area with the usual kerosene stove, tins of corned beef, Crisco, Carnation cream and Spam on the shelves, a small refrigerator and a sink area. While sitting in the living room, I noticed a peculiar smell. As my nose became accustomed to the smell, I realised that it was incense burning - not the "churchy" type incense, but the popular type that young people use, especially when they are smoking grass, and which resembles the long-type "sparkler" "that children light up during Christmas time."

"What is your name?"

"Timothy Johnson," I replied, giving him a fictitious name.

"Why do you want to see me?"

"Well, as Miss Rosa told you, I have been feeling depressed, confused and just down."

"What ya wan me do den?"

"Miss Rosa told me that you helped her and that you could perhaps help me."

"How?"

"I don't know, you will have to find out the best way to help me."

"What you do?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know - what work you do?"

"Well, I work for the Ministry of Health."

"O.K.", replied Mr. Rolle, as he sat back and just stared at me. At that moment, I began to feel a little uncomfortable, but I managed to "keep my cool."

After what was about three minutes, but seemed like hours, he abruptly got up, came towards me and said "Come with me."

We entered the third room of this small house, which was in total darkness. Over the two windows, where little streams of light came through, was a black velvet cloth which extended from the curtain rods to the floor. On one side of the room was a small bed; facing the bed a bureau with the largest, oldest looking book that I have ever seen, open at the middle. Around this book were three large candles, white, black and red, and at the top of the book was a large cross. By the side of the bed there was a hot plate with a handless pot with clear water and

70

+ + +

adjacent to this hot plate was a large white cloth (about 12" x 12"), with three smaller candles of red, white and black in a triangle-like position, and in the middle of the cloth, a pack of cards, a rosary and two other books that, initially, I could not make out what the titles of them were. He motioned me to sit down on the side of the bed and then proceeded to light the candles, and plug in the hot plate. In a short time, the incense was burning, the water in the pot on the hot plate was boiling, and the candles were lit.

"If you need help, I can do three tings for you right now, I can cut the cards, I can read your hands or I can read your shadow."

"Is that all you can do?" I asked.

"Dere is one more ting, but is very dangerous and cost money."

"What is that?"

"Call the Spirit."

"Call the Spirit?"

"Yes, but we go to the grave yard at night, but very dangerous, but is best way to solve problem. ' '

"Mr. Rolle, I think that, for today, we better use one of the methods you have here. By the way, how much will it cost?"

"I don't talk 'bout money."

"Well, I have to know how much you are going to charge me."

"O.K. - for cut cards or read hands, 15 dollars; for read shadow, 20 dollar."

"Mr. Rolle, I have been having a lot of financial problems and I only have ten dollars to my name on me."

"O.K. - I read hands."

Mr. Rolle took up two of the books that were on the white cloth and placed them flat on the ground, opened at the middle, one in front of each foot, with the cover facing towards me. The writing was in French, and, unfortunately, Mr. Rolle didn't realise that I not only knew French, but had lived in France for many years. When I saw the title of these books, I experienced a sigh of relief because I began to suspect that Mr. Rolle was a fraud, even though I was hoping for an extraordinary experience. "How to Become a Millionaire" was the title of these little books and surely Mr. Rolle thought he was well on the way with my contribution of \$10, to have my palms read.

"O.K. - put your feet on top of book," said Mr. Rolle.

I complied to his request and when My 11 ½ " feet covered the books' title, he took my hand in his, knelt down in front of the white cloth and candles, and started to chant in a low voice.

"Hm. .... power. .... s'il tu plait, s'il tu plait, hm .... eieeee . . .... s'il tu plait, s'il tu plait . . . . . ." and he continued in an unintelligible gibberage while, occasionally, pressing my hand that he held in his. When this little "ceremony" was over, he got up, pulled out the plug of the hot plate, dramatically sat down and, with a quick, professional gesture, took my left hand in his, with the palm facing upwards.

"You are married" - true!

71

+ + +

"You are very depressed" - that's what I told him! !

"You were expecting to receive some money from something that you did - yes, you write something and you suppose to get money for it, but you disappointed 'cause money no come yet." My God, it's true! I was expecting royalties from my first book that I was supposed to receive two days previously and was depending on to help with my Christmas shopping, but never came thorough - maybe this fellow really knows what he is doing!

"You very disappointed 'cause money no come. I see here that you very sensitive man. You like people, people like you, but they take advantage o' you" - very true again—this guy was, so far, right on!



"You have girlfriend trouble too—plenty girlfriend." Now wait a minute! He can't continue to bullshit me! "You feel down because girlfriend call wife and cause trouble." I don't have a telephone at my house nohow! "And girlfriend may be have baby for you."

By this time I had had it! And I knew that this "Obeah Man" probably had something good going for him because he was clever and at least, initially, used what information he had received from me in his living room and was now pushing it back at me while reading my past, present and future, as seen in the palm of my hand.

"You gon be rich and live long.

"Thanks very much, Sir," as I jerked my hand away, "Here is your money, thank you for being so helpful," I lied...

That was not to end this way, however. He got up, led me to this old enormous book on the bureau, and asked me to place the \$10 on it. After so doing, he closed the book and with a "Tank you Sir, come again," I emerged into the bright Bahamian sunlight, with mixed emotions about how I was easily defrauded of my hard-earned \$10, but consoled myself, as I got into my old Triumph, and dreamed of the year when my book would be published about people like him, and, perhaps, receiving my \$10 back tenfold!

The practice of Obeah is forbidden by law in the Bahamas as is in the other Caribbean islands. The Bahamas Penal Code, Volume I, page 992, Chapter 48, Section 254 on the Practice of Obeah, states:

"Whoever practises Obeah, or by any occult means or by any assumption of supernatural power or knowledge intimidates or attempts to intimidate any person, or pretends to discover any lost or stolen thing or the person who stole the same, or to inflict any disease, loss, damage or personal injury upon any person, or to restore any person to health, shall be liable to imprisonment for three months.

Section 255 (1) If it is made to appear upon the oath of any credible witness that there is reasonable cause to suspect that any person is in possession of any article or thing used or intended to be used by him in the practise of Obeah or such other practise as is mentioned in section 254, it shall be lawful for any justice of the peace by warrant to cause any place, whatever belonging to or under the control of the person to be searched, either in the day or in the night, and if any such article or thing is found in any place so searched, to cause it to be seized and brought before him to be received for the purpose of being produced in evidence in any case it may be required."

The reasons for these Bahamian "Obeah Laws" being placed on the Statue Books have not been determined. One speculation could be that all British colonies in the Caribbean were to find

+ + +

some way of making African practices "illegal." The Bahamian Obeah Laws appear to be tame and only a "token," compared to the other Caribbean countries that had very large African populations, where the death penalty could be carried out if one was convicted of Obeah practices.

Two modern "Obeah" and "Voodoo" cases were reported in 1971. These two reports will give an idea of how the law deals with it. The first one is from a "Tribune" story of July 9, 1971, with headlines reading "Woman hacked man she thought was a dog."

"VOODOO —and a story of a dog transforming into a man—became an important factor in a grievous harm charge before Freeport magistrate John Cronin on Wednesday afternoon. "For an 'it was the Devil made me do it' explanation for the wild hacking of a man with a cutlass saved a Haitian woman from a possible prison sentence.

"Before the court was Oletha Carnael, of Eight Mile Rock, a 30-year-old housewife who was charged with causing grievous harm to Willie Cooper. She appeared in court having pleaded guilty at an earlier sitting and being remanded for sentence following a psychiatric report.

"Mrs. Carnael, who police had told the court had rushed from her home and chopped Mr. Cooper with the cutlass, gave an 'Alice in Horror land' explanation for her actions.

"She told the court that for three nights on the run she heard noises on the top of her house. On the third day, she went outside after hearing the noise and saw a pigeon, and then a dog and then a man with a cutlass. The dog, she told the court, had a flashlight. She hit the dog with the cutlass and on hitting it, it turned out to be a man.

"Her victim, Mr. Cooper, received a 4-inch metacarpal split through bone, a three-and-a-half inch cut on his head through his tendons.

"He was taken to the Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau.

Mr. Derek Higgs, for the defendant, said that she heard a noise and was afraid for her three children and went outside with her cutlass and struck the victim who turned from a man to a dog.

### **Voodoo Man**

"She believed that the man she attacked was a voodoo man, said Mr. Higgs."In other parts of the world something of this nature is taken seriously and there is no excuse for this type of behaviour —other than her mental condition," said Mr. Higgs.

"He did not think imprisonment would achieve anything.

"Mr. Higgs pointed out to the court that the victim of the attack did nothing to provoke it,—'it was just a mechanical action, not any threat of harm by the other party,' he said.

"Magistrate John Cronin advised the defendant to see her priest —'there is no such thing as obeah, never was, and never will be'—and fined the defendant \$20."

The second one is taken from the Nassau Guardian of December 14, 1971, with headlines reading: "U. S. Women net \$40 Fines for Practising Obeah, Theft." :—

"Two American women, one from North Carolina and the other from New York, pleaded guilty in the Magistrate's court on Monday to unlawfully practising obeah via supernatural

73

+ + +

powers and stealing \$100 cash from a Kemp Road resident. The two accused were represented by Attorney Rando1 Fawkes, M.P.

The two middle-aged accused, Nancy Mitchell and Judy Marks were arrested by Detective Superintendent A. Fields on Sunday after a report reached the C.I.D. that someone had been visited by two accused and a quantity of money stolen.

"The two defendants went to the home of Isadora Cooper on Kemp Road," Prosecutor, Inspector Silas Nixon told the court, 'and they told Mrs. Cooper that a curse had been placed on her house.'

"The Prosecutor added that the two women then requested Mrs. Cooper to do certain things. First, an egg was wrapped in a handkerchief along with a \$5 note. A Bible was also fetched by Mrs. Cooper, after which the two women then requested a picture of Martin Luther King—saying that the picture represented supernatural forces. The two accused women then knelt down and prayed, joined by Mrs. Cooper.

"After the praying session, one of the accused women cracked the egg that had been wrapped in the handkerchief previously, and told Mrs. Cooper that she saw inside the egg shell, a black head—saying that the black head was the curse and now it had been removed for good.

"Mrs. Cooper was then asked by the two women whether she had any more money inside her house and received an answer in the negative. However, the two women, not believing her, made her swear that she didn't have any more money in her house, which Mrs. Cooper did.

"Later though, when Mrs. Cooper found an amount of \$100 missing from her house, she quickly informed the police and gave a description of the two women.

"Prosecutor Nixon concluded his submission to the court stating that when the two women were picked up by Det. Supt. Fields, doll babies and papers pertaining to the practising of obeah and the occult, were found in their pocket books in addition to \$200 cash.

"Attorney Fawkes, in a mitigation plea for the two accused, submitted that they were not aware that it was unlawful to practise the occult here and that they both had lost a portion of their money since coming to Nassau a few days ago and were trying to recoup their losses. He added that both women were mothers with a number of children—one of the accused even having a child that was receiving medical treatment for an acute case of diabetes.

"The two were each fined \$40 or alternatives of 30 days imprisonment. Also, Chief Magistrate Kermit Ireland ordered that the two women depart Nassau immediately."

Not all individuals, however, once brought to Court are found guilty. An obeah practitioner\* was recently acquitted. In the "Tribune" dated September 26, 1975, the headlines read: **"Man cleared of Obeah Charge."** The article reported:-

"Several boxes containing lucky powders, incense, bits and pieces of paper with names written upon them and a couple of men's underwear were ordered returned to a 32-year-old Guyanese spiritualist today when a lower court judge found nothing unusual about him having them.

"What Philip Lazaique won't get back however is a fowl's egg with the names of several persons written upon it. That exhibit, seized by officers who arrested the curly-haired Guyanese in July on an obeah practising charge was listed as destroyed, the court heard.

\* I know many of this man's 'patients' and he is one of the most 'high-priced' practitioners in the Bahamas.

74

+ + +

"Lazaique, who was represented by attorney Henry Bostwick, was freed after Chief Magistrate Mr. Wilton Hercules found there was a lack of evidence to prove the charge against him.

"'I don't want you to feel that it is because obeah has been worked on me that you are being freed. It is only because of a lack of evidence' he said in dismissing the charge.

"Police detective Charles Moss told the court that he arrested Lazaique on July 28, after he executed a search warrant at the defendant's home.

"He found the defendant at home at the time with several women waiting in his living room and a woman with a baby with him in a bedroom that smelled of incense, Det. Moss said.

"Also found was a jacket with \$457.22 and a sign reading 'No credit,' and 'Pay Half Down' and the other items including the egg, he said.

"Det. Moss said that he went to Lazaique's home after a complaint was made by a woman who said she paid him \$3 to dress a candle but never received it.

"The woman had gone to Lazaique because she was having problems keeping her husband at home and away from other women, the court was told.

"Det. Moss, who said that he was satisfied that Lazaique was practising obeah for gain after speaking with him, had also produced a ledger which he said contained the names of the defendant's clients.

"The book included the names of several policemen, the Chief Magistrate himself, and also his other two colleagues on the bench, Magistrates George Hannays and Emmanuel Osadebay.

"Questioned by the magistrate after his evidence in chief, Det. Moss was asked whether he had ever visited a Roman Catholic church and seen their candles on the altar or the incense and holy water used in ritual.

"He had, he told the court, and also admitted further having common knowledge that people regularly go to the psychiatrists at the Mental Rehabilitation Centre because they have problems.

"In each case, it was never known why the priests or psychiatrists were never brought to court for practising obeah.

"He found that on the facts submitted in the case, he was not able to conclude that the defendant was practising obeah for gain. He said that Lazaique's statement to police also told the court that he was a spiritualist—'a person who helps people to solve their problems through prayers. '

"The mere possession of these items alone is not an offence, Mr. Hercules said, agreeing with an earlier submission made by Mr. Bostwick who said that there was no case made out against Lazaique. "

From a comparative point of view, in Jamaica, where the Plantation System was very valuable to Britain, and where there was a very high slave population, the white slave owners, outnumbered at least ten to one by their African slaves, used almost every possible method to prevent slave rebellions and to maintain their repressive system of subjugation.

In 1760, slave owning legislators in Jamaica passed this Act 32 "In order to prevent the many mischiefs that may hereafter arise from the wicked art of negroes, going under the appellation of Obeah men and women, pretending to have communication with the Devil and other evil spirits whereby the weak and superstitious are deluded in a belief of their having full power to exempt them, whilst under their protection, from any evils that might otherwise happen." \*

Accordingly, death or transportation was the penalty for any slave who "shall pretend to any supernatural power and be detected in making use of any Blood, Feathers, Parrots Beaks, Dogs' Teeth, Alligators' Teeth, Broken Bottles, Grave Dirt, Rum, Eggshells or any other materials relative to the practise of Obeah or witchcraft, in order to delude and impose on the minds of others." \*\* This statute did not define Obeah, but some years later a Committee of the Privy Council attempted a definition of Obeah:

"It is very common among these people, who have so small a portion of human endowments, for some to pretend to super-natural powers, and thereby to practise upon the imagination of those, who believe they can be protected by them from the harms of his life. This practise of witchcraft is commonly called Obeah, and is always made an offense punishable with death."

Thus, in Jamaica, from 1760 until the abolition of slavery, the provision against the practise of Obeah became a permanent feature of the slave laws.

"Legislators throughout the Caribbean, and the white population, generally believed that Obeah was a force to be reckoned with, and they saw in the 'Obeah man' the incarnation of all that was evil, including their own destruction." 33

An example of some of the convictions in Jamaica was described by Dr. Madden: 34 In the criminal record book of the Parish of St. Andrews, I find the following Obeah cases:

1773 - Sarah, tried 'for having in her possession cats' teeth, cats' claws, cats' jaws, hair, beads, knotted cords, and other materials relative to the practise of Obeah, to delude and impose on the minds of the negroes' - sentenced to be transported.

1776 - Solomon, 'for having materials in his possession for the practise of Obeah' – sentenced to be transported.

1777 - Tony, 'for practising Obeah, or witchcraft, on a slave named Fortune, by means of which said slave became dangerously ill' —not guilty.

1782 - Neptune, 'for making use of rum, hair, chalk, stones, and other materials relative to the practise of Obeah. or witchcraft' —to be transported.

In spite of the distances between the Caribbean islands, descriptions of the abode of Obeahmen and women are strikingly similar.

A paper delivered in 1789 by Mr. Rheder, in the Report of the Lords of the Committee, etc., as previously mentioned, describes the Obeah man and his home:

"Obeah men are the oldest and most artful negroes; a peculiarity marks them and every negro pays the greatest respect to them; they are perfectly well acquainted with medicinal

32. EDWARDS, Adolph C.. 'The Evolution of the Obeah Laws of Jamaica', Jamaica Law Journal, 11 Duke St.. Kingston, Ja.. April 1974. pg. 19.

\* 1 Geo. 2c. 22

\*\* Ibid

33. EDWARDS. A. C. Ibid.

34. MADDEN. R. R. "A Twelve Months' Residence in the West Indies During the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship". London. 1835. Vol. I. Pg. 93.

76

+ + +

herbs, and know poisonous ones, which they often use. To prepossess the stranger in favour of their skill, he is told that they can restore the dead to life; for this purpose he is shown a negro, apparently dead, who, by dint of their art, soon recovers; this is produced by administering the narcotic juice of vegetables. On searching one of the Obeah mens' houses, was found many bags filled with parts of animals, vegetables, and earth, which the negroes who attended, at the sight of, were struck with terror, and begged that they might be christened, which was done, and the impression was done away."

In 1893, a fairly comprehensive book was written about Obeah in the island of Grenada, by Bell 35 who described the Obeah man: "Obeah was rampant in all the West Indian colonies, and laws and ordinances had to be framed to put it down and combat its baneful influence. There were few of the large estates having African slaves, which had not one or two Obeah men in the number. They were usually the oldest and most crafty of the blacks, those whose hoary heads and somewhat harsh and forbidding aspect, together with some skill in plants of the medicinal and poisonous species, qualify them for successful imposition on the weak and the credulous. In these days, and Obeah man would be hard to distinguish from other blacks and might only be known by wearing his hair long, or some other peculiarity, or else by possessing a good substantial house, built out of the money obtained from his credulous countrymen, in exchange for rubbishing simples or worthless lovespells." Bell goes on to describe an Obeah man's house and the contents that he found: "The dirty little room was littered with the Obeah man's stock in trade. A number of vials containing some sort of unholy liquor were lying ready to be handed over to some foolish negro in exchange for their weight in silver. In every corner were found the implements of his trade, rags, feathers, bones of cats, parrots' beaks, dogs' teeth, broken bottles, grave dirt, rum and egg shells. Examining further, we found under the bed a large conarie or earthen jar containing an immense number of round balls of earth or clay of various dimensions, large and small, whitened on the outside and fearfully and wonderfully compounded. Some seemed to contain rags and were strongly bound round with twine; others were made with skulls of cats, stuck round with human or dogs' teeth and glass beads. There were also a lot of egg shells and numbers of little bags filled with a farrago of rubbish. In a little tin canister I found the most valuable of the sorcerer's stock, namely, seven bones belonging to a

rattlesnake's tail - these I have known sell for five dollars each, so highly valued are they as amulets or charms - in the same box was about a yard of rope, no doubt intended to be sold for hangman's cord, which is highly prized by the negroes, the owner of a piece being supposed to be able to defy bad luck."

The original Obeah men and women of the Bahamas, appear to have conformed to their fellow practitioners in the other Caribbean islands. MacLachlan Bell 36 describes them: "Severe penalties have curbed the possessors of the 'powers of darkness' but occasional incidents reveal that the seemingly placid and contented servants in one's home may also be denizens of a kingdom of demons and demoniac powers into which it is well-nigh impossible for a white man to intrude. The Obeah man uses queer nostrums and relies on weird concoctions and effects to gain a livelihood. Old medicine bottles often are filled with simple drugs bought for a penny or two, then are sold, of course, for shillings: Dogs' teeth, sharks' teeth, egg shells, snake bones, skulls of cats and other animals, earth from old graves, miniature coffins and chicken feathers are used to cure almost any disease or avert any possible disaster. Our magician deals in love by supplying philtres, in revenge by putting curses upon enemies and in care by being paid on the barrelhead, so to speak, before he goes to work. Sometimes a female of the species develops quite a business before landing in police hands."

35. BELL, Hesketh J., "Obeah Witchcraft in the West Indies". Sampson Low, Marston & Co., London,. 1893, Pg. 9.

36. BELL, Machachlan H., "Isles of June", New York, 1934.

77

+ + +



*Imported products for Obeah use right to left, Holy Spirit Bath, Lucky Dream and Remembring Oil.*



Obeah beliefs and practitioners are found on every island in the Bahamas, but there are some islands, originally having almost a hundred per cent negro population, where it is more prevalent.

The islands of Cat Island and Andros appear to have strong historical Obeah roots and the most powerful and renowned of the Obeah practitioners were situated on these two islands. Obeah beliefs are also strong in the Exuma Cays, Acklins, Mayaguana, South Eleuthera and Crooked Island. Even these islands have its' Obeah centres. In Cat Island, it is the Bight, on San Salvador, it's Breezy Hill, on Andros it's North Andros and in New Providence, it's Fox Hill.

In order to gain first hand knowledge, I have visited, talked with and researched eighteen Obeah practitioners. Most of the older Bahamian practitioners are Bahamian-born, but there is an increasing number of Haitians, Haitian-Bahamians, Jamaicans and a few other nationalities who have quite a lucrative practice.

There appears to be a remarkable belief in Obeah among all West Indian negroes: The magical practises of a neighbouring or distant island are always more powerful than one's own. Hence, Bahamians believe that Haitian voodoo is more powerful than Bahamian Obeah. The very high influx of Haitian immigrants to the Bahamas, with their different language and reputation for the supernatural, have added to the dimensions and superstitions of the Bahamian. A common Bahamian rumour is that a few prominent Bahamians who have died, can be seen roaming the mountains of Haiti as zombies! Anytime there is an election, it is rumoured that many politicians pay a visit to Haiti to ensure success at the polls.

Peoples of the Windward and Leeward Islands believe the French islands of Martinique or Guadeloupe have greater powers than they have. Then too, politicians from these islands are known believers. The belief of West Indian leaders in Obeah and certain rituals before elections is no secret.

78

+ + +

One Rosicrucian + leader engages an Obeah man from Guyana and they repair to the mountains for this politician to get his blood bath. A friend of mine, who personally witnessed such a ceremony, described it to me: "The Obeah man was dressed in a long white robe with his hair tied in a turban. A bath was prepared with the blood of a fresh cock, (never the female fowl) just killed and drained. With incantations and prayers, the leader was immersed into the blood and 'refreshed.' He won the election hands down!"

Another former Prime Minister of St. Vincent always utilised a bush bath for his success. His Obeah man was an East Indian from Trinidad.

Many Bahamian Obeah men and women were apprenticed to older wise men or women, and some learned their art from their parents, or they were "born" with their special gifts and these "gifts" were recognised at an early age.

Some received their "power" during adulthood with a "vision" or, while "in a trance," were instructed into their art.

The more professional of these Obeah practitioners have studied in Haiti, Jamaica and in Harlem, New York, U.S.A. The following are my own personal experiences of interviews with eighteen practitioners:

- 7 in New Providence (one of these of Haitian-Bahamian descent)
- 2 from Cat Island
- 3 from Andros
- 2 from Haiti
- 1 from Jamaica
- 1 in Freeport, Grand Bahama
- 1 from Eleuthera
- 1 from Long Island

The claims of Obeah practitioners are legend, and people that have profited from these ministrations often attest to the 'powers' of these people. Two Obeah men appear to have had a great reputation; unfortunately, they are both deceased, and I never got the pleasure of meeting them.

Zaccharias Adderley had the reputation of being a very powerful Obeah man. He was affectionately known as "Pa Beah", \* and was the "king" of Obeah in New Providence. He lived in Fox Hill, was a farmer and started practising Obeah in his spare time as a hobby—a hobby which was much more lucrative than farming the land!

He once told someone "If people are stupid to gimme money I ain't too stupid not to take it."

According to legend, Pa Beah could fix his field so that if anyone went to steal his cassava, then they wouldn't be able to find their way out of the field until he arrived to catch them. One day, someone foolishly stole his groceries and a friend said to him: "My Lord, how yer ginna manage this week fer food?"

"Don't worry yer head 'bout me, yer betta worry 'bout the fella who take ma food. He'll soon bring ma food back or else!"

Pa Beah then took a doll, measured it against a candle and cut the candle to the length of the doll and stuck pins into the doll and candle, the same distance apart in each. All the time he was

\* 'Beah", naturally being a derivative of Obeah.

+ Member of an occult order said to have been founded in 1484 by Christian Rosenkreuz

+ + +

doing this, he was calling the name of known pilferers in the area. He then, dramatically, lit the candle and said: "When the candle burns down to the first pin, the thief will have a bad, bad, pain." That evening, Pa Beah's groceries were left on his doorstep!

"Uncle Boy" was the reputed "King" of Obeah from Cat Island. The nephew of "Uncle Boy" lives in Nassau and told me two stories that I have authenticated from talking to Cat Islanders, who knew Uncle Boy and, also, a religious leader who confirmed these stories.

Uncle Boy had a coconut farm which was the pride of Cat Island. He worked very hard, was a shy retiring man, and lived in the middle of his farm. He had few visitors and was a man who kept very few friends. He was well-read, and had quite a library—some of these books (many on the occult) are, at present, the possession of Uncle Boy's nephew. It appears that some one was constantly stealing Uncle Boy's prime coconuts. Fed up, he posted the following notice:

"To whom it may be concerned: Whoever been in my white land and poached my coconuts for the purpose of shipping, come to see me immediately. You could be carried down and would be carried down if you don't come and see me. In the future, be more careful!"

No one turned up or replied to Uncle Boy's notice. A short time afterwards, a man in the village started to swell up. No amount of medication or treatment could help him. He soon died, as a result of this "strange" illness. It was found out afterwards that it was this man who stole Uncle Boy's coconuts.

Uncle Boy also raised chickens and one of his employees used to give eggs, without asking Uncle Boy, to a friend of his and then, afterwards, they would share them. The employee soon became ill, and his friend, one night, stole some of Uncle Boy's chickens. He killed one of them and gave it to his friend for nourishment.

The following day, the sick friend ran out from his home, hysterical, and crowing like a chicken. He climbed a tree and lived in this tree, stooped up like a chicken, and in spite of the many efforts to take him down and carry him back to his home, he ran back to the tree, climbed it and stayed there. During sunshine, rain or high winds, this man never came down from the tree. Every morning he would crow like a chicken and never spoke again, except for cackling like a chicken. He had to be fed in his tree home, and his eating movements were 'chicken-like'. He eventually died in his tree home!

Out of the eighteen Obeah practitioners interviewed, two of these greatly impressed me and appear to have extra sensory perception. One practitioner had some kind of "power" and practiced mostly "Black Magic" and relied heavily on the 6th and 7th Books of Moses and the Black Heart Book. This gentleman truly frightened me and I went through a fit of depression after trying to probe him. Not being a depressive, and beginning to delve very deeply into my subject, I thought it best to discontinue my investigations of this man.

With the exception of these two practitioners, the rest were, to my mind, frauds, very clever "con" men and women and doing a helluva business.

I have become very friendly with one Obeah practitioner, and use her as my "consultant" in occult psychology, when I deal with Obeah problems. I have found her to be honest, nonmercenary, and utilising, primarily, bush medicine and white magic.

She is now 65 years old and was born in Long Island. Her father was born in Cat Island and a well-known herbalist. She was taught by him, at an early age, to distinguish different "bushes

80

+ + +

and barks" and the effects of these on the human body and mind. Her mother was born on Long Island, but left her and her father in Cat Island as she returned to her home. She continued to tell her story:

"I, initially, learned everything from my father, who used to bring different bushes and boil it and make up medicines for people. I stayed with my father, and learned about bushes and helped him to find them and to prepare them. At an early age, I used to have visions, but I thought that they were bad dreams. Small men used to come to me and give me instructions. When I told my father about it he used to tell me not to worry about it. My father was a very nice man, he never drank or got into fights, but he used to like women. One night, when I was nine years old, I had a 'vision' and saw my father in a big fight. I didn't do much about this because my father was a peaceful man and never fought. In my vision, a little man came to me and asked me to tell my father to stay home and not venture out the next day. In the morning, when I got up, I told my father that he must not go out because the little man in my vision said that he shouldn't. My father just smiled and said it was just another dream. At two o'clock that afternoon, shortly after I returned home from school, I heard a commotion outside my house. When I looked out, I saw some men carrying my father. When they got to the house, they told me that my father was in a big fight and got slightly injured. From that time onward, my father helped me to develop and understand my 'powers'. He used to call me a 'witch'."

She came to Nassau at fifteen and became a nurses' aide. One day, she met a Jamaican lady who exclaimed: "Praise God, I've found you!" This lady explained that she was looking for someone like her for a long time who had "power". She soon moved in with this lady and watched her and practised with her. She then left Nassau with the Jamaican lady and went to Jamaica for three months, where she learned how to "call the dead". She studied with this lady and then with "Lord Kitchner" of Jamaica. She then visited Haiti for three weeks, then returned to the Bahamas where she has been practising Obeah for 38 years. She has also been to New York (Harlem) where she perfected her "power".

This lady lives in an unpretentious house in the heart of the "over-the-hill" district in New Providence. There is a little shop in front of her house that actually adjoins her home, and this

is stocked with groceries, primarily the basic Bahamian needs of rice, grits, flour, assorted canned goods, jars of Mortimer brand candies, bubble gum, chicklets and the proverbial kerosene oil dispenser. There is also a small refrigerator with cold sodas and malt tonic and other bottles of her own "tonics" and "medicine". Behind her counter she showed me about three rows of "sets", i.e., photographs, articles of clothing and other memorabilia belonging to her clients or her clients' relations, enemies, etc. of whom the fix- is to be directed. She also took me into the back room of this shop. In this room were all kinds of local bushes, barks and bottles filled with liquid and barks and bushes of all colours and sizes.

"Taste this," as she got a spoon and poured a reddish-looking liquid into it.

"O.K.", I quickly replied, with mixed emotions. Somehow I trusted this lady and knew that she wouldn't do anything to hurt me.

"Ahm - what's this? It tastes a bit like a tonic that I used to drink some time ago called 'Becol'."

"It's my own mixture of crushed barks and boiled bushes, made especially for sexual potency."

\* Being fixed is explained more fully in another section of this book.

81

+ + +

"It tastes good, but I don't think that I need this just yet—in fact, my wife may come to you to find out whether you have anything to 'cut my courage'.' '\*"

"Ha, Ha," my friend replied, "You got Eleutheran blood in you and I know, from experience, 'bout Eleutheran men! "

"What's that thing in that small bottle over there?" I asked. There were about ten brown short-stemmed bottles in a corner with a label on them of "poison".

"Oh! That's not to drink--it's for a room or a house when it's hagged. What ya do is sprinkle lil bit o' this in the four corners of the room."

"And what's this thing here?" I continued to enquire.

"Oh--dat's candle wax—dat's what I does do my sets wid."

"What do you mean? Could you demonstrate for me?"

The lady then took me to her room in the house where there were literally hundreds of photographs, graveyard earth, locks, keys, articles of clothing (handkerchiefs, panties, men's shorts, stockings, socks, undershirts) and, on a small table, neatly labeled pieces of hair.

"My Lord!" I explained. "You sure have quite a practice. Are all these things here your current clients? "

"Oh yes! I am well known and I's get results—dat's what counts, results!"

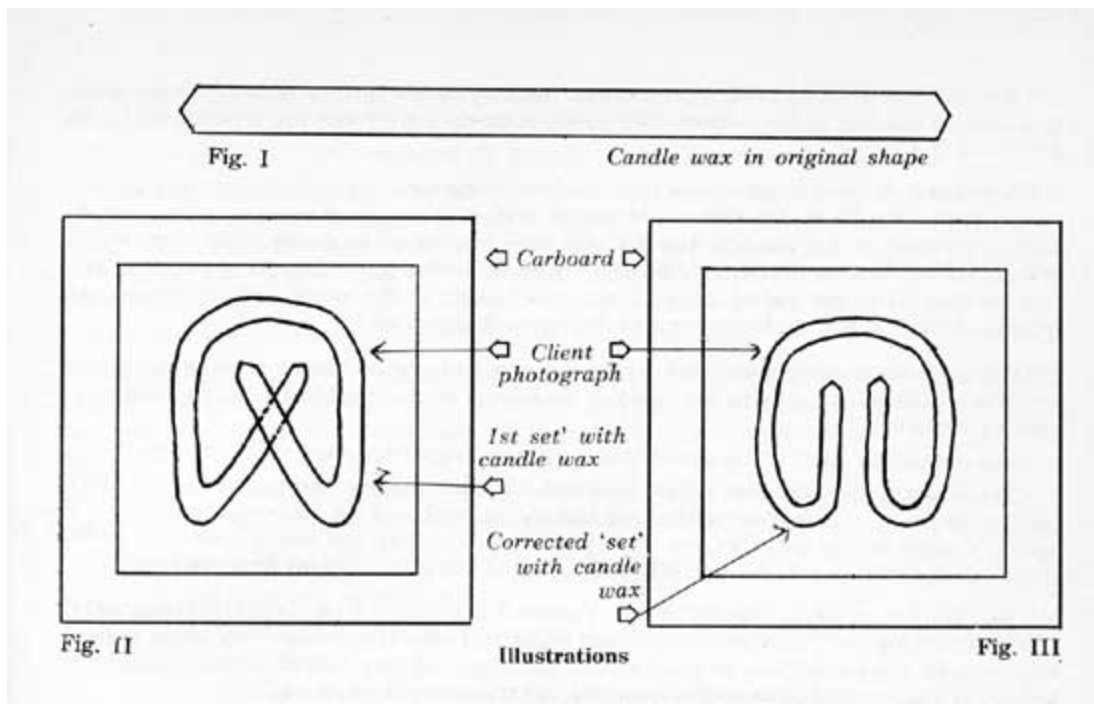
"O.K—show me how to 'set a fix'."

"All right. You see this wax here—it's a very important part of 'setting a fix'. Lemme show ya something!" She took a small square package that was covered with aluminum foil with an elastic band around it. She carefully opened it and there was a small piece of card board in the shape of a square. On this card board was the picture of a man; and on top of the picture was a strip of thin white candle wax, in a peculiar shape (see illustration).

"This man used to run around a lot with sweethearts and used to be very cruel to his wife. In desperation, she went to a Haitian Obeah man who 'set a fix' for her (see Fig.II). The lady was instructed to put this 'set' under his pillow for three nights, as he slept (if he stayed home that often!), and this was supposed to stop him from 'running around'. Unfortunately, the marriage deteriorated and the man continued to beat his wife and stay out with his sweethearts. She finally came to see me and I asked her to bring me the set that the Haitian had fixed. Well, when I saw this, I told her no wonder he stay away. You see, he set it to cross her and he had to continue going out. (She demonstrated how the 'set' was originally fixed as in Fig. II). I told her to leave it with me and then I reset it like this. (See Fig. III). Shortly afterwards, the woman came to see me, very excited. 'Ma husband home!' From that time up to the present, this man has completely changed his Life and he is now a devoted husband."

My Obeah friend explained that the original "set" that the Haitian did was "crossing-up" the wife, as demonstrated by his "set". Her "set" had them "together", as demonstrated by her

\* A local Bahamian term meaning to slow down or keep under check sexual activity— like using "salt peter" for example.



"set". She also stated that she had to read certain psalms from the Bible and pray over the "set" 'for it to be completely effective. \*

The second time that I met with my "consultant" in occultic psychology, she explained, more fully, her art. She attributed her powers to God and utilised, exclusively, white magic. She also, emphatically, stated that she never utilised her "gift" (power) to harm anybody. She would remove the harm from a client if he or she had an "evil-fix," but although she knew how to harm (or "carry-down", in Obeah terminology) someone, she never did it.

"How do you really carry out these amazing feats - I mean, how do you explain all this?" I continued to prod.

"Well, you see, I have control of the spirits. There are good spirits and evil spirits, just like there is a God and the Devil, and a Heaven and a Hell. Many people have, in fact I believe that all of us have, some kind of gift, but I have been especially blessed by God, who gives me the strength to control evil and use his good spirits for good. With the control, of the spirits, I also use bush medicine for healing the sick. You see, Dr. McCartney, you're a good doctor and you help my daughter, but you aint got head for dis kind o' ting, ha, ha. Right now, there are good and bad spirits right here. You'se scare easily?" She asked me.

NO - why?"

She got up, fetched a plain mirror, and then a little container that resembled a Mennen spray (squeezelike) type plastic deodorant bottle.

\*I, subsequently, got the name of this lady, interviewed her and many people that knew the family. and my Obeah friend's story was authenticated. Many of their friends noticed a 'sudden change' in the man, but they didn't know that the wife had consulted my friend, the Obeah woman!

+ + +

"Now, don't be afraid, notting gon harm you. See here (as she sprayed some liquid out of the container on the face of the mirror), look carefully at the mirror and you'll see de spirit dat protecting you!"

I looked and all I saw. initially, was this liquid on the mirror—by God! There was a definite human form, forming on the face of the mirror and, in a matter of seconds, there was absolutely no doubt in my mind (unless my eyes were playing tricks on me!) that there was a definite human form on the mirror! She held my hand, looked up to the ceiling and said, in a soft whisper, "You can vanish now!" I was still looking at the mirror and as soon as she completed those words, the human form on the mirror disappeared!!

I examined the mirror, in disbelief. I turned it over and over and found nothing unusual. I took the container, and sprayed the liquid on the mirror, as my friend had done, and waited—nothing happened.

"How did you do this!? Is this a trick—do you know magic? Are you trying to fool me?"

"Doctor McCartney, youse an honest man and if I didn't like you and trust you I wouldn't give you the time of day. You tell me you looking for truth and you investigating Obeah. I open my house to you and I let you see, examine, do anything you want! Honest to Jesus, that was a Spirit. If you think I trying to fool you, den I ain' gon' waste my time wid you."

"No, I don't want you to take it this way! You see, I'm writing a book about this thing, and if I write something like this, a psychologist and scientist, I have to examine every angle. Believe me, I've seen stage magicians do many wonderful things, but they were all tricks—sleight of hand - at least most of them, so I'm enquiring, not trying to put you down."

"O.K. —come closer to me. Now look into my eyes. Yes, you see anything different 'bout ma eyes."

"No, not really, your eyes look all right to me—wait! There is a little greyish spot at the bottom of each eye, why is this? You have trouble with your eyes?"

"Doctor McCartney, I'm going to put myself into a trance and I completely block out myself and as I do this, I go blind for a little while."

My friend held on to my hands, threw her head back and whispered, "Oh, Jesus". She trembled slightly, but soon settled down. In the meantime, after glancing around for a split second, I looked into her even again. and the two small spots began to grow and grow and grow until her whole two eyeballs were completely covered by this grey matter. No more pupils could be seen and I have never seen such a hideous sight in my life. Lord, what have I



gotten myself into today, I thought, am I really seeing what I'm seeing or is this just some dream or, perhaps, she got me fixed to see these things!

Her body convulsed once or twice, then relaxed and then she slowly released my hands and slumped back into her chair. She stayed immobile for about ten minutes. There was an uncanny silence in that little room and, as I looked around at all the objects of her trade, I had feelings of cynicism, belief, a shaking of my senses, my faith! –Was I really experiencing this—was it real—had she hypnotised me? I have been hypnotised before, but it was not like this. No, this was real - my mind wasn't playing any tricks on me, I actually saw...

"Doctor, I'm very tired—you have to leave now—come here." As she motioned to me, she took up a small bottle (about four ounces) with a clear liquid in it and, at the bottom, mercury

84

+ + +

(quick silver). She unscrewed the cork, tipped the bottle to her finger and, very suddenly, placed the finger with the liquid at the edge of my two nose holes.

"I've anointed you—go—no harm will come to you. God bless you, Doctor."

Since these two encounters, I have seen my friend infrequently, but talk to her often over the telephone, to discuss problems, profit from mutual advice and to discuss Obeah. Although she is known as an Obeah woman, she claims that it is not really Obeah, but the power that God gives her but she doesn't object to being called an Obeah woman. She relies, very heavily, on the Bible, and claims that the 109, 110 and 111 Psalms are the most powerful in the Bible.

She also warned me not to "fool around" with "calling the Spirit!"

"Even though I can do it," she explained, "Dats very dangerous, and it must be done with someone that is clean and who knows what they're doing, 'cause it can ruin you for life. Don' mess wid dat at all—dat's de devil and evil forces—de debil is powerful too—don' mess wid dat!"

I have taken her advice! Although this ritual\* has been described to me, in detail, by another practitioner, I did not utilise this as part of my research, and have no intention to do so!

To summarise, then, Bahamian practitioners have been:

- (a) Born with special powers.
- (b) Received, at an early age, certain powers, usually revealed to them by a vision or dream.
- (c) Power recognised in an individual by a seasoned practitioner, who encourages, or teaches, the individual the "art" of Obeah.

(d) Heritage: that is, Obeah powers peculiar to a family and passed from one to another.

(e) Conversion, (as in white magic) where powers suddenly are bestowed by changing one's life style.

( f ) Whereas only Africans, or those people of African descent, practised Obeah, other ethnic groups in the Bahamas (Indian, whites) now practise Obeah.

\* This ritual is described in Chapter IV.

85

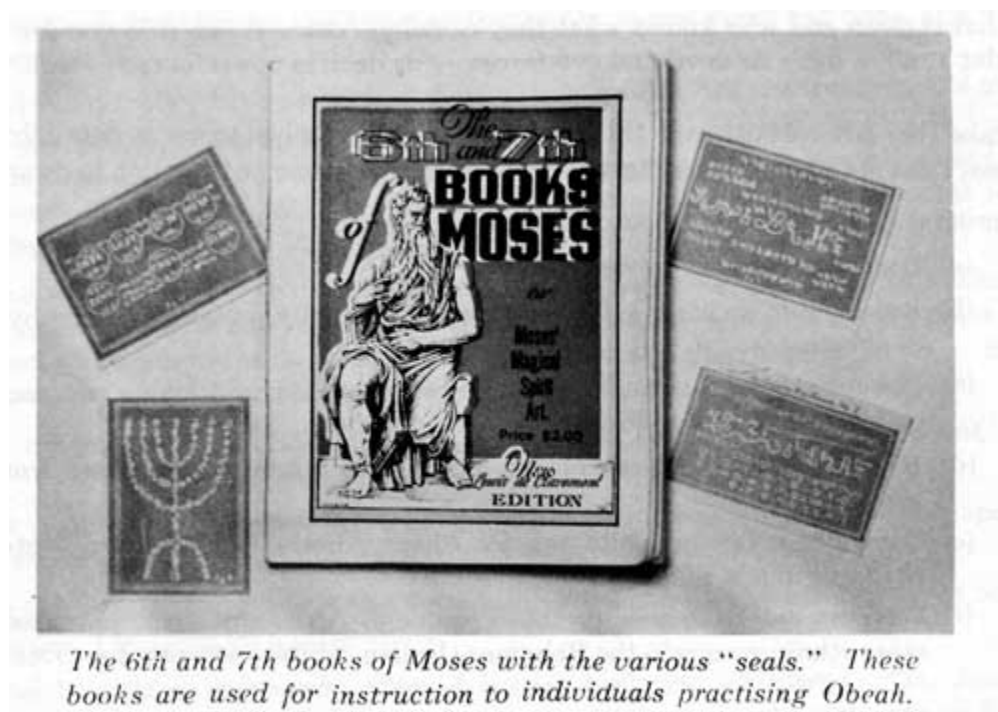
+ + +

### CHAPTER III

#### SECTION II

#### THE PRACTICE OF OBEAH

Obeah is practised on an individual (or one-to-one) basis and, as previously explained, differs from remnants of African religious or cultic practises that are still evident in the Caribbean today (e.g. Shango, Santeria, Voodoo). However, basic methods of Obeah practise and the utilization of various components of "supernatural" powers, have much in common with the superstitious aspect of some of those African religions. (Comparisons will be given).



With the great influx of Haitian immigrants to the Bahamas, there has been a syncretisation of Obeah practises and voodoo beliefs, notwithstanding European superstitions. This chapter will describe actual Obeah practises, and give some examples of the methods utilised by the Bahamian practitioners of Obeah.

### (I Fixing) \*

This entails casting a spell, placing a set or **hagging**, (whether it is an **individual, house, property or object**). Fixing a person is the most common method of Obeah practise in the Bahamas. Being fixed must be distinguished from a curse that has been placed on an individual, property or object and directed through use of the Bible. Also, "**putting mouth on yaw**" is a type of curse, but does not necessarily have to originate from any Biblical implication. The subtle differences of a fix and curse are the following:

\* Fixing will be more fully explored in the section on Obeah & Medicine. Chapter V.

86

+ + +

- (a) When one is fixed he can be "cleared" or "cured" by an Obeah practitioner or even a medical doctor or other type of professional.
- (b) When one is cursed, only the individual who gives the curse can "clear" or "remove" the curse. Unfortunately, if the one who gives the curse dies, then no one can clear you - you've actually "had it"! One can be fixed either by:

**(a) Black Magic**—Using the powers of the Devil or, commonly termed, "witchcraft". An Individual can gain power himself without any help from external sources, except reading special books and literally "selling one's soul to the Devil"!

The following books are mostly used in Bahamian Black Magic practice: Seven Steps to Power; Black Guard; Seven Keys to Power and Master Key.

Here is an example of Bahamian Black Magic for someone trespassing on a person's property:

- (a) Take up the tracks or footprints of earth.
- (b) Get grave dirt from the cemetery.
- (c) Place the dirt footprints and the cemetery dirt in a cloth bag and then tie the bag.
- (d) Hang this mixture over a fire.
- (e) As the heat takes it, the earth will become dry; the more it dries, the person who has trespassed on the property will begin to feel pains in his limbs.
- (f) The person will eventually become a total cripple, unless he is "cleared."

From a comparative point of view, the following is a voodoo practice to protect a field from evil influences:

- (a) On the day you are planting in your garden, get up without saying a word to anybody.
- (b) Go to a cemetery and take dirt and a cross from a man's grave.
- (c) Turn your back and go to the garden, and plant underground, in the middle of the field. the said cross.

- (d) The dirt will be used as a perfume and thrown toward all parts of the garden, at the same time asking the dead man to become the said garden's faithful watchman.
- (e) The individual is recommended to light a candle before making the appeal. No one could either trespass or steal from this property except for personal harm coming to them.

In Haiti, cock fighting is legal and a great tourist attraction. There is a Black Magic prayer to aid fighting cocks.<sup>37</sup>

NOTE: The most external sign of Bahamian property protection is the bottle hanging in the trees. Many years ago, this was a common sight throughout the Bahamas, but now is seen infrequently. One magnificent example can be found by the parking lot of the City Market Maderia and Rosetta Streets. The Obeah flag (black background with a red cross in the form of the Roman numeral "X") is also placed for protection. See such a flag on a field on Prince Charles Drive next to St. Augustine's entrance.

37. SEABROOK, W. B., "The Magic Island", George G. Harrop & Co. Ltd., London 1929, pg. 314.

87

+ + +

"Great Saint, King Gaspard, in the company of all other chiefs of ghosts, allow that by means of the great Belzebuth's weapon, my adversary be defeated. Amen!" Before going to the fight, it is necessary to light a candle in the name of Agrippa.

In Black Magic, not only is the Devil used, but all the "demons" or "imps" can be called upon or those personalities from the Bible who were against God or died as a result of defying God.

(b) **White Magic** —Using the name of Jesus, the Bible and/or verses from the Bible, forms of prayer, prayer objects (e.g. handkerchiefs, scarves, underclothing) and religious symbols. The psalms are particularly valuable. "I gon read the Psalms for you " or "God don't like ugly" are common Bahamian threats!

White Magic is, evidently, more powerful than Black Magic. For example, a combination of a fix and curse, by utilising Black Magic, can be clemd (cured) by White Magic.

If the individual who is cursed by White Magic goes to the curser and asks forgiveness, and the White Magic practitioner does not accept his apologies, then the curse will revert to the curser.

There are definite rules to follow before one can practise White Magic.\*

- (1) One has to carefully examine one's conscience and, preferably, be converted to Christ (i.e. become a devout Christian).
- (2) One has to have tremendous control over the passions. "Go to the job and help people in peace" appears to be the dictum.
- (3) If one is not "clean" while practising White Magic, one can develop problems, primarily mental problems.

- (4) To prepare oneself it is desirable to read the Book of Job, but particularly the 91st and 109th Psalms.
- (5) White Magic must be used primarily for good, but there are times when people must be taught a lesson and an evil fix can be placed on them, but never to cause death.
- (6) Be sure that when a man is placing an evil fix, the Bible is turned face downward from you because the fix will be turned on you.
- (7) When an individual is fixed by the Bible, the Black Magic man can't help you.
- (8) Engage in prayer and fastings to be constantly "clean"
- (9) Memorize, if possible, the most utilized Biblical passages, especially if suddenly called upon to cast out an evil spirit or a demon.

The following is an example of how White Magic can be used to cure alcoholism, viz:

- (a) Pay the Obeah person a prescribed sum of money.
- (b) The Obeah person will read Psalms 109 and 110 and place the money on the Psalms in the Bible then close the Bible on the money (No coins are used for this particular fix!).

\* These rules were obtained from a Cat Island Obeah practitioner.

88

+ + +

- (c) The Obeah person will pray that the spirit of drunkenness be taken away.
- (d) The patient will be "cleared" (cured) of their problem.\*

In Haiti, a voodoo practise that resembles Obeah White Magic, for protection from guns, is cited: 38

"God of Heaven and of the Earth, immortal and invisible King, everything trembles at your name. May I, by myself, be not vanquished, but victor. Amen." Every Friday, as a charity, give the poor four cents.

An important observation about magic was made by John W. Vandercook 39 in 1927, after a visit to Surinam; he wrote:

"Magic is the great reality of the jungle. We northern races, when we think of magic, see a vaudeville performer with a pack of marked cards. Magic is trickery, sleight of hand, legerdemain. It is serio-comic foolery. Magic to us is the thinnest stuff in the world - the semblance of empty illusion. We must forget all that in the tropic forests. There, magic is the vital craft of survival. In a land where a locomotive turns to dust, where all the science of Europe is empty and will avail nothing, against the powers of the jungle, magic developed through a thousand, thousand years has taught the negro how to live, how to meet the terrors of the manifold deaths that lurk always amid the immutable silence of the trees. It is the most serious, most important thing in the black man's world...

Jungle magic is never for effect. It is purposeful, studied. When famines, pestilences and evils come upon the forest people, it is magic that wards them off. It deals with things – with medicines, potions and ideas—which, in the forest, are more real than steel and far more dangerous. Magic saves. Then it is White. Magic kills. Then it is Black. It is the science of the jungle.

The way of an enemy is never direct. The mysterious ways of jungle death are the only ways down which death comes. Sometimes a bush negro, out of jealousy, anger, or fear, wishes another dead. So he sets his fetishes against his enemy, invokes the "Winti" of the bush to set upon and destroy him. It is dangerous business, for the murderer knows that in time he will, himself, be almost inevitably destroyed. But there are stronger passions even than fear. The spirits of evil are set in action. The one against whom they are working learns of his mortal danger. He attempts propitiation, seeks to make his protective fetishes stronger than the destructive fetishes of his enemy. But almost surely, sooner or later, he dies, and his family knows that he has been murdered. That is the forest way."

The majority of Obeah practitioners in the Bahamas utilise the method of White Magic for "fixing."

#### (11) Cutting the Cards

Telling things about the past, present or future with a deck of cards, by shuffling the cards and asking the client to "cut" them.

\* NOTE: What a pity that this has not been found to be effective. because we would be able to get rid of the alcoholic unit at Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre (the local mental hospital)

38. SEABROOK, W. B., *ibid.* Pg. 310.

39 W. VANDERCOOK, John W3D. "White Magic and Black: The Jungle Science of Dutch Guiana", Harper's Monthly Magazine, U.S.A., 1927.

89

+ + +

There is a distinction between ordinary "playing cards" that are mostly used by the general population and another type of cards, "tarot cards," that are used by the more sophisticated Bahamian Obeah practitioner. The ordinary "playing cards" number fifty-two, the "tarot cards" number twenty-one, and are used solely for purposes of divination. There is another card in the tarot card deck, the "fool", which becomes a very powerful and dominant card when one is foretelling the future, as the indication supported by the "fool" is certain to be active, and therefore, must influence, or even suppress, all other indications.

"Associated with a good card, the Fool is strong enough to carry you through much evil; times may prove troublous, but you will pull clear before long. On the other hand, if the Fool is attached to a bad card, any sign of good fortune, thrown by the other cards, will not be strong enough to save you from the threatened trouble, though they may modify it to some extent. 40

Spades denote loss, privation of any sort, things in their ultimate issues. The suit is capable of many inflexions, however, and, like the Diamonds, shines only by the reflected light of the accompanying cards. Hence, a run of Spades has no light in it at all, and is sinister and ominous in the extreme. The position of the cards, The Four Aces,, the seven answers, dealing the cards by sevens or fifteens, the great figure of fate, etc., are some of the methods used in cartomancy. The use of playing cards, or tarot cards in Obeah practise is the infiltration of European superstitious practise, as it is the popular belief that cards were invented in order to amuse King Charles VI of France, at a time when he was mentally unstable. It is a fact, however, that cards were used in the Eastern world in very ancient days. Cards may have been a game originally, but as known by the gypsies and Eastern occultists, they were only used for the purposes of divination or fortune telling.

The essential feature in cutting the cards, or Cartomancy, is that the person whose future is to be read must, in some way, influence matters when he "cuts" the cards. This gives the Obeah person, who shuffles them, the ability to read and foretell by this personal contact. In the normal playing cards, the value of the four suits is, briefly, as follows: 41

Diamonds denote life in general, and, for this reason, are largely dominated by the accompanying cards.

Clubs denote power, whether arising from affluence, fame, position or inherent capacity. Hearts denote love, and its inflexions, such as friendship, sympathy, attachment, together with peace, tranquility and the concomitants of love.

### **( III) Clairvoyance**

The use of this particular gift is to prophesy and advise and predict future events or to understand the past. Clairvoyance can be utilised by,

- (a) Being in the presence of a client.
- (b) looking for signs or images in a pail of clear water (or cup or any container with water).
- (c) Utilizing a mirror \*

40. SEPHARIAL, "The Art of Card Fortune Telling". W. Foulsham & Co. Ltd.. London 1958. Pg. 11.

41. SEPHARIAL, *ibid.* Pg. 24.

+ The crystal ball utilised by gypsies or other clairvoyants was not found in any of the Bahamian Obeah practitioners. Interestingly, many modern clairvoyants use methods of astrology as their principal guide. Many feed information into computers and make their readings!

- (d) Using the information about month, date and time of birth.
- (e) Utilising (to a minor degree) methods of astrology.
- (f) Interpretation of their own feelings after coming into contact with their client. The client's "vibrations" can reveal things about their past, present and future to the Obeah practitioner.

A common Bahamian practise of clairvoyance is used, as an example, to detect a thief: If you suspect someone of stealing, although there is no positive proof, then the following method can be used:

- (a) Obtain a wedding band and a piece of black thread.
- (b) Tie the black thread to the ring.
- (c) Get a glass and fill it with clear water.
- (d) Hang the ring on the thread over the glass of water, making sure that it is in the centre of the glass.
- (e) Call several names (especially the suspect's) one by one and very slowly.
- (f) When the ring starts to move by the side of the glass and hits the glass with a tinkle at a specific name, that's your thief.

The following story was told to me by a pastor of a local religious faith who spent his adolescent years with his grandmother in a small village in Haiti. He (the pastor) came from a large family of merchants and there were three brothers who owned a grocery shop. Two of the brothers were ambitious, but the third brother, although capable, tended to be lazy.

One day, one of the brothers missed a very valuable watch from his home and, after exhaustive searching, could not find his watch. It was concluded that it must have been stolen and a formal police investigation had no results. The man who had his watch stolen became distraught and depressed as the other two brothers revealed to their mother (the pastor's grandmother) suspicion of each other. The loss of the watch and the accusations of the brothers, plus the depression of the older brother, was cause for concern to their mother, and although advised by relatives and friends to visit the local voodoo priest, resisted their suggestions because she was a Christian woman and didn't believe in that kind of thing.

The family situation deteriorated and, in desperation, she decided to give the voodoo priest a try.

My friend, the pastor, accompanied his grandmother to the voodoo priest, whom he described as being "crafty looking" and living in a small dilapidated house with rooms filled with bottles of various liquids, bones of some types and bits and pieces of "all kinds of junk"! He and his mother were ushered into a very small room and they sat on the floor and the grandmother related what had happened. The voodoo priest then got a large saucepan, took down a bottle with same clear liquid, and poured it into the saucepan. He then stood up, went to a corner of the room and started mumbling and chanting in a language that my friend could not understand. He soon, dramatically, returned to where he and his grandmother were sitting, and asked them to look into the saucepan. To my friend's and his grandmother's horror, they saw the face of the second brother. The face-image was reflected in the water for at least three minutes.



Needless to say, a thorough search of this man's home found the watch and he was t prosecuted for stealing.

My pastor friend, who is a man of great intelligence, with the highest integrity, insists that this story not only is true, but since that time, it was the common practise of this voodoo priest to assist the police with their investigations!

#### **(IV) Calling the Spirit or Necromancy**

The Obeah practitioner may be mediumistic, in that they are the mediators between the real and the spirit world. "Calling the Spirit" is a ritualistic form of Obeah practise to either obtain knowledge that can be utilised for good or evil. The Obeah practitioner that has the power to manipulate a spirit, can send a spirit to possess a person (e.g. possession) or haunt (hag) a house or property.



*'Obeah Bottles' hanging in tree. Anyone eating fruit without owner's permission would 'swell up' and die, it is alleged. Note the skeleton and the shrunken human skull at right of picture.*

From time immemorial, man has tried to find means of communicating with the dead and the spirit world. Necromancy, the art of "calling the dead," is universal and goes back to earliest antiquity.

Obeah practitioners often support their claim by relating the Biblical story of Saul, who, through the intermediary of a pythoness (medium-witch), conjured up the spirit of Samuel, who foretold that King Saul would soon die.

Belief in the spirit world and ancestor worship are strong components of African belief, and although there is no evidence in Bahamian literature which suggests that Bahamian slaves ever practised any ancestral cultic worship, the belief in ghosts or spirits was, and still is, widespread among the population.

MacLachlan Bell <sup>42</sup> made these observations: "Some of the black inhabitants along the coast of Andros are very fearsome about venturing inland in the stretch of black country behind Coakley Town. They believe that 'spirits' of harmful intent abide in that feared territory. Therefore, outside of their huts, you will find, tied to trees, a variety of bottles and pans containing charms to ward off evil beings."

The common word in the Bahamas for any form of ghost (or spirit) is "sperrid." Sperrids can be found anywhere, but in Bahamian tradition, they like to reside in the very large silk cotton trees that abound in the Bahamas. This belief, no doubt, came directly from Africa, and appears to be the survival of some form of animism, as many African tribes venerate the cotton tree. Although there is no evidence of Bahamian negroes ever worshipping the silk cotton tree, it was and still is feared as the habitation of sperrids.

Bahamian sperrids get up to all kinds of mischief—they haunt houses, hag people, influence human habits (good or evil) or scare the hell out of you!

Bahamian sperrids appear to wander around "willy nilly," but only the Obeah practitioner can "call," "control" and utilise the sperrids to effectuate good deeds or evil deeds.

This is a direct remnant of the Bahamian's African Heritage and the maintenance of African belief. African peoples are aware of a Mystical Power in the universe. This power is ultimately from God, but in practice it is inherent in, or comes from or through physical objects and spiritual beings. That means that the universe is not 'static' or 'dead', it is a dynamic, "living" and powerful universe.

Access to this Mystical Power is hierarchical in the sense that God has the most and absolute control over it; the spirits and the living dead have portions of it; and some human beings know how to tap, manipulate and use some of it. Each community experiences this force or power as useful and therefore acceptable, neutral or harmful and therefore evil. On the credit side, Mystical Power is employed for curative, protective, productive and preventive purposes; for this reason, Africans wear, carry or keep charms, amulets and a variety of other objects, on their bodies, in their possession, homesteads and fields. Medicine men and diviners are the main dealers in the use, manufacture and distributor of these articles of 'medicine' or power. On the negative side, it is used to 'eat' away the health and souls of victims, to attack people, to

42. BELL, Major H. MacLachlan. "Isles of June. U.S.A.. 1934. Pg. 147.

\* The largest Bahamian island, still not fully explored. To give an indication of its' size. Andros is slightly larger than the island of Trinidad.

93

+ + +

cause misfortunes and make life uncomfortable. The witches, wizards, sorcerers, evil magicians and people with an evil eye, are those who employ this power for anti-social and harmful activities.

Mbiti, an African Anglican Priest continues "a good number of people spend large amounts of wealth to obtain access to this power. Expert users spend years to acquire their knowledge and skill some of which is obviously secret and unknown to outsiders, such experts have their own 'science' in dealing with this mystery of the universe. There are reports of fantastic experiences and phenomena attributed to this Mystical Power; and some of them defy both repetition and explanation by means of modern science. The subject of Mystical Power, magic, sorcery or witchcraft, with all the beliefs that accompany it, has other dimensions besides the religious. There are social, psychological and economic aspects which add to the complexity of discussing and, understanding this subject."

"Calling the Spirit" has ritual aspects and is the most expensive practise of the Obeah person and can be very dangerous, especially in causing mental illness. This practise has been described to me by a Cat Island Obeah man. The following is a summary of this:

(1) Limitation to this ritual is only three persons.

(2) Articles needed are:

Blood - (fresh blood from a young lamb, chicken, ox, or snake).

Seals

Tape

Master Key

(3) Individuals must arrive at the cemetery at eleven o'clock so the ceremony can begin precisely at twelve midnight.

(4) Make a circle with the blood and stand in the middle of this circle. Under no circumstances must you venture outside this blood circle, especially when the sperrid is called. The blood is for protection. .

(5) Place tape over seals and rest seals and master key in the centre of the circle.

(6) At precisely midnight, the Obeah practitioner will chant specific words to gain direct contact with the Devil. The Hebrew words that the witch used to call Samuel must be used. The "power of words" subdues Satan, but allows the spirit of a dead person to come.

(7) The sperrid, when called, usually makes its presence known by first a moaning sound, and, then, floating towards the circle, and just at the outside of the circle, it stops, and awaits the questioning of the Obeah practitioner. The sperrid now can respond to questions

or ask questions. There are times when the sperrid can be seen, and times when only a voice is heard.

(8) The whole ceremony and questioning must be terminated before three a.m. because, at that time, the sperrid must be sent back to his grave or else he will continue to roam forever endlessly.

(9) It is always useful to call the spirit of a loved one, or someone who was close to you and knows about you. This spirit can reveal many important things of the past, present or future.

In Haiti, there is a "culte des morts," a cult of the dead, that practises neither human sacrifice nor murder, but molests only the dead. Some of the followers of this cult believe that

94

+ + +

certain dwell in the bodies of the dead, when either eaten, or parts of the dead body rubbed on living bodies or objects, special qualities like courage, immunity (as in eating the heart) or protection from bullets (as in rubbing the brains on a rifle), will be imparted. Many methods are used to "call the spirit" in Haiti, but a formula was found on the body of a Haitian general, Benoit Batrville, on May 9, 1920 that gave the following instructions <sup>43</sup> for calling up spirits: "Having at a crossroads at midnight on a Friday, get a candle made of honey wax, or tallow, and swallow's liver, which you will light on that comer in the name of Belzebuth, saying 'Belzebuth, I am calling you to me in order that you may acquaint me with (such and such a thing) this very moment!' You will then fire one shot, the gun to be loaded with incense and dirt, putting the dirt on top of the counter load. Fire to the east saying: 'Upon the thunder's rumbling, may all kings of the earth kneel down. May Puer, Agrippa, Berke, Astaroth, spare me. Amen!'

To call up the actual dead person: 'Go to a cemetery on a Friday night at midnight. Go to a man's grave, taking along with you a white candle, one leaf of wild acacia, and a fully loaded gun. On arrival you will make this appeal: 'Exurgent mortui et acmo vennient. I require of you dead that you come to me.' After saying these words you will hear a stormy noise; do not take fright, and then fire one shot. The dead will appear to you. You must not run away, but walk backwards three steps, saying three times these words: "I besprinkle you with incense and myrrh such as perfumed Astaroth's tomb.'

To send the dead back after it has been called, pick up a handful of cemetery dirt which should be thrown to the four comers of the grave, saying, 'Go back from where you came, from dirt you were created, to dirt you may return. Amen!' "

Bahamians are afraid, generally, of sperrids and, especially cemeteries and especially at nights. A rather amusing, but tragic, tale comes from the island of Exuma:

Two men were at a bar bragging about bravery. One said to the other, "Bet you \$5 you won't go in the graveyard after midnight."

The other said, "You mussy fool man - I'll go, I ain' scared."

"Now, how I gon' know you went to the graveyard?"

"Well, you take a hammer, some wood and some nails, and when you get there, nail the wood to a certain stone in the graveyard, then I'll know."

After midnight, the man went to the graveyard and started nailing down the piece of wood. The other man was curious, so he quietly sneaked under a tamarind tree to watch his friend and see what was happening. In the meantime, the man in the graveyard, heard a noise and noticed something under the tamarind tree, at the same time not really noticing how he was nailing the wood to the stone. The man was finished his nailing, and still keeping his eye on the shadow under the tamarind tree, he got up to leave, and not realising that he had nailed his shirt to the grave, he was immediately jerked back.

"Oh, Lord, sperrid got me—oh, Lord, sperrid got me!"

With that, he got such a fright that he suffered a massive heart attack and died on the spot.

The Bahamian believes that to protect oneself from a sperrid, all one has to say is "Ten, Ten the Bible Ten;" and if one wants to actually see a sperrid, one has only to remove some 'bibby' \*

43. SEABROOK, W. B. op. cit. Pgs. 308-309.

\* A Local name for Mucus (or "matter" as the Jamaicans call it).

95

+ + +

from a dog's eye and put it into their eyes and they will have the gift of seeing sperrid. Horses also see sperrids, so their 'bibby' will help you also.

## **(V) Palmistry or Chiromancy**

This method is by reading the palm of the hand to tell the future.

Having been practised by the nations of classical antiquity, chiromancy was quickly developed by the gypsies into a tribal specialty for themselves. "Interpretations .were often corroborated by the predictions of astrology. By the 17th century, the 'general scheme' of the hand was duly established. Since the character is expressed through movement, it was natural that the hand, the most supple organ, came to be considered as capable of expressing the character of the individual. "44

The Bahamian Obeah practitioner evidently copied this from his European counterpart, as this practise is not indigenous to Africa, although it is now also practised there.

The fact that chiromancy is quick, and without any embellishments, is the least expensive service that the Obeah practitioner has to offer, and seemingly, less threatening to the individual.

## (VI) Working Witch

This term is based on the tradition that an individual can buy or hire a witch to do its bidding.

Working Witch is an older term for "working obeah" and was used mostly in the Island of Cat Island.

Anyone could buy or hire a witch, but it was very expensive.

Some Cat Islanders would go to South America to work and save their money. They would return home, then go to Haiti (presumably the only island where one could obtain a witch) to get their witch.

Some of these witches were shaped round like a ball, with numerous legs—and looked like a sea egg (sea urchin). Many 'eyes' were alleged to be placed on each leg, with a wide mouth in the centre. These eyes could see anything and look through anything.

These witches only live on and eat eggs, but they have to be dark eggs.

The most popular witches, however, were animals like the snake, rat and rabbit.

A snake witch was extremely expensive, so much so that the owner of a snake witch would "will" or "sell" it to another person. The 'snake-witch' was a short, thick snake and was always distinguishable with a ribbon around the neck. This snake could swim for long distances, get on a ship or plane to "fix" people in distant lands if need be. It also had the power to go "inside" people—eating their insides so that eventually the 'fixed individual' would have a high fever, start to have convulsions (fits) then waste away and die.

Many pregnant women who became fixed with a snake would lose their babies, or the snake would go inside them, eat the foetus and then nine months after would be born in place of the baby.

44. BESSY, Maurice, "A Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural." Spring Book. London 1964. Pg. 55.

+ This material was obtained from a tape of Mrs. Gail Saunders, Archivist, interviewing Mr. Arthur Bain from Cat Island. 3rd July, 1973.

There are very many obeah stories that attest to women being pregnant and then giving birth to snakes. Many reputable people, and Bahamian midwives would 'swear-on-the-Bible' that they have seen snakes come out of women.

Rat witches were also notorious for the havoc that they waged on agricultural fields and barns.

Rabbit witches usually were 'hired' for good deeds or to obtain wealth.

Today in the Bahamas, the old timers still threaten to 'work witch on ya.'

### **(VII) Bush Medicine.**

The widespread use of bushes, herbs and barks extends back into the pre-history of the entire world. Many medicines and remedies that are now used in medicine and pharmacy had their counterparts thousands of years ago. However, today, most drugs are synthetic and are made in the laboratory. Medicine from the earth, or bush medicine, is still a very important part of Bahamian life and is utilised by all ethnic types. Most Bahamian herbalists have nothing to do with Obeah and use local bushes and barks strictly for preventative and healing purposes, sexual potency and longevity. Poultices and salves are used, also other food products such as lard, olive oil, kerosene, salt pork, onion, garlic, etc. and they provide an exciting supplement to local remedies.



*Photo taken at Obeah practitioner's home with various mixtures. (Below) some of the local 'bushes' used in mixtures and in bush medicine.*

With this present research, the majority of Obeah individuals use bush medicine as part of their practice; in fact, the more effective practitioners rely very heavily on their knowledge of this art.

Many writers of the Bahamian scene, have taken great pains to describe some of these herbalists. \* Northcroft 45 observed that "Many wild plants have medicinal properties, some

valuable for export and others known only to the bush doctor or Obeah man." He went on to describe the "Manchineel" as the "chief of the poisonous trees that grow in these parts. Eating crabs who have fed on its leaves generally have fatal results. It takes the skin off animals who rub against it, or when heated, lie under it. Its milky juice, dropped on the skin, burns like the poisoned shirt of 'Nessus'. It is said to furnish the poison used in the mysterious bottles of the Obeah man."

All herbs have qualities which link them with certain values. The Obeah person believes that plants absorb the cosmic properties of the sun, moon and planets and whether they are taken internally, used as a poultice or worn as a fetish or amulet, they convey to you the desired results. The occult magic of bush medicine is almost unlimited and is supposed to give the individual excellent physical, mental and emotional health which can be acquired in no other way. The rose, for example, is the international flower of love. The petals of the rose may be steeped and tea made, sachets made, or it may be pressed in a book dealing with love.

The most comprehensive book on bush medicine in the Bahamas has been written by the well-known Bahamian "Roving Gardener," Mrs. Leslie Higgs. The foreword to this book was written by a respected Bahamian physician, Dr. Paul Poad. Bush medicine and native healers are accepted methods and practise also in the other West Indian islands. Bell 46 describes bush medicine and Obeah in the West Indies:

"The darker and more dangerous side of Obeah is that portion under cover of which poison is used to a fearful extent; and the dangerous and often fatal effects of many a magic draughts are simply set down by the superstitious black, to the working of the spells of Obeah, and never to the more simple effects of the scores of poisonous herbs growing in every pasture and which may have formed the ingredients of the Obeah mixture. Owing to the defective state of the laws relating to declaration of deaths and inquests, it is to be feared that very many deaths occur from poisoning, which are set down to a cold or other simple malady."

The original Obeah practitioner was such an expert herbalist, that this aspect was part of the rationale for laws against Obeah practise. Bell 47 continues:

"Fifty or sixty years ago, the practise of Obeah, being the cause of so much loss of slave property by poisoning, it was found necessary to enact the most stringent laws for its repression, and an important ordinance was passed in all the West Indian colonies imposing heavy penalties on any person found guilty of dealing in Obeah. Unfortunately, through the knowledge possessed by some of the old negroes of numerous poisonous bushes and plants,

More detail with regard to bush medicine will be given when the psycho-social aspect of Obeah with reference to medicine is discussed in Chapter V.



+ This book is a legitimate work on local healing, and has absolutely no connection with Obeah. I have talked with Mrs. Higgs on many occasions and she disassociates the practise of bush medicine completely from Obeah. Mrs. Higgs has a weekly column in a local daily newspaper, the Nassau Guardian, called "The Roving Gardener". She received one of the Distinguished Citizen's Awards for 1975" from the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce for her contribution to the Bahamas in the field of horticulture.

46. BELL; Hesketh J. "Obeah, Witchcraft in the West Indies", Sampson Low, Marston & Co., London 1893. Pgs. 10-12.

47. BELL. H., *ibid*.

98

+ + +

unknown to medicine, but found in every tropical wood, it is to be feared that numerous deaths might still be traced to the agency of these Obeah men. The secret and insidious manner in which this crime is generally perpetrated makes detection exceedingly difficult."

From a comparative point of view, voodoo superstition and bush medicine is used in Haiti, for example, Do relieve a woman from child birth pains: 48

"Make a tea of the following mixture: dirt from the four corners of the house and the following leaves: Pains cutter, called Verbena, Abra Homa, called Elm Wood. Write the woman's baptismal name and her usual name on a parchment, or ordinary paper, the ashes of which must be nixed with the tea. This being done, before giving her the tea, go to the rear of the house and, facing the east, call her three time; there will be no reply to the first and second calls, but there must be a reply to the third. Soon afterward, give her the mixture. She will certainly be relieved. If the child is a boy, name him Emmanuel, if a girl, name her Anna."

One of the most famous Bahamian concoctions that males rely on, is the following bush tonic for virility.

(1) Gather the following from the bush:

- (a) Love Vine
- (b) Stiff Cock
- (c) Five Fingers
- (d) Gamalame
- (e) Pine Bark
- ( f ) Sweet Margaret

(2) If any one of these bushes cannot be readily obtained, one can substitute either "old man" or "old woman."

(3) Boil in a minimum amount of water these bushes and strain.

(4) Add a Little sugar, boil again for five minutes.

(5) Add rum or brandy, boil for two minutes.

(6) Carnation cream (a little bit) can be added, but this is optional.

(7) Pour in a bottle (preferably a dark coloured bottle) and allow to steep" for about three weeks before drinking.

Many of my friends swear that after drinking this tonic they had more "lead in their pencil" than at any time in their life. If this, in fact, "works" (and who am I to dispute an individual's virility,) then the Bahamas could cultivate a whole new "export" item!

48. SEABROOK. N.B., op. cit.

\* This formula was given to me by an Andros Obeah person whose specialty is in restoring sexual potency!

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PSYCHO-SOCIAL ASPECTS OF OBEAH**

Man's subjective and object world are in constant inter-play and "nothing that he knows about the universe can be dissociated from the facts of his own life; and no product of his culture is so detached from the larger groundwork of existence that he can impute to his individual powers what alone has been made possible by countless generations of men and by the underlying cooperation of the entire system of nature."<sup>1</sup>

The Bahamian's beliefs and every aspect of his life-style and values are bound up or come under the influence of religious beliefs, superstitions and healing. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that Obeah finds its ramifications in every aspect of man's psycho-social development.

The Bahamas is a black country and the ethnic flavour of the Bahamas in terms of communication, communion and interaction, project (notwithstanding the contribution made by the minority groups) those images found in all countries in the Western Hemisphere where a majority or significant group of African descendents inhabit. African beliefs, rhythms, healing, although outlawed in many countries, rigorously repressed during slavery and discouraged by most of the colonial powers, still were kept underground and grew, in spite of the hindrances to expressions of religious ritual, folklore and local medical practises.

The historical development of the Bahamas indicates a strong suppression of African life styles. The majority Africans who came to the Bahamas with the Loyalists, were converted to Christianity and they, being mostly "house slaves," emulated their Euro-American masters. The minority Africans, either free or indentured, had more liberty in exercising their African practises, and these were the holders and retainers of the African life-styles. There were also some slave masters (who bought slaves at the auction at Vendue House) that were not too keen to expose their slaves to doctrines of "equality," and, so to avoid dissension and unrest, allowed their slaves to engage in their local practices. After emancipation, however, the established Church (Anglican) and the British colonial power discouraged "native" practises, and social restrictions were such that the Black Bahamian came to despise what he really had and, especially, if he wanted to reach economic and social prominence he had to be "cultured" or at least "act white." In spite of this racial-social-economic distance, only very mild legislation on the practise of Obeah was passed (see Chapter III) and there were no African religious or folklore practices that the ruling masters thought "dangerous" or "threatening" to them as, for example, Cumfa \* that was banned in Surinam.

Until recently, the majority of Bahamians tried to forget or deny any roots with Africa, as part of the upward racial-social mobility. Many authors of Bahamian books confirm that hardly any link with African practises are retained. Craton wrote in 1962: 2 "Today in the Bahamas there are no names and few customs that can be traced back to Africa with any certainty." And Dr. Paul Albury recently wrote: 3 "In the Bahamas today, consciousness of racial distinction has almost totally disappeared among the blacks and because of inter-marriage, it would take a

1. MUMFORD, Louis, "The Condition of Man". Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., London 1944, Pg. 11.

\* CUMFA: A dance ceremony in which the person becomes possessed and which blood, in some ceremonies, is used. Cumfa is found mostly in the Guianas and has its counterpart in "Kumina," as found in Jamaica. The only comparable ceremony of this type in the Bahamas is "getting the spirit" as evidenced in the many Pentecostal church services.

2. CRATON, Michael, "A History of the Bahamas", op. cit. Pg. 188.

3. ALBURY, Paul. "The Story of the Bahamas". MacMillan Caribbean (London) 1975

100

+ + +

well-trained anthropologist to link any great number of them to their ancestral tribes. During slavery, however, the distinctions were obvious. Apart from physical differences, many spoke their native languages, followed their own tribal customs and took pride in their particular race. "

These ideas are, in part, in keeping with the ideas expressed by the brilliant West Indian author, Braithwaite, 4 who contends that "African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed, survived and creatively adapted itself to its new environment. Caribbean culture was, therefore not pure African, but an adaptation carried out mainly in terms of African tradition."

It is, perhaps, this ability of the African to adapt, to utilise their patterned life-styles and integrate it with imposed Euro/American religious practise that Obeah could flourish without the practitioners feeling too guilty about it. White magic beliefs fit in very comfortably with basic African beliefs about the supernatural world.

This chapter, therefore, attempts to view the development of religion, healing practises and folklore in the Bahamian context and give particular reference to Obeah and the reactivation of African practices or indigenous culture that is believed to be necessary if the Bahamas is going to retain any type of "identity." This is crucial, especially at this time to "new independence." There is an absence of a rich literary heritage, of very few meaningful architectural monuments and not enough older people around to instruct younger Bahamians in the cultural traditions of our ancestors.

The Bahamas and the rest of the Caribbean, being "hybrid" societies and class-differentiated entities are culturally tributary to their former colonial countries and geopolitically tributary to the strong presence of "big brother," the U.S.A. Cuba and Guyana appear to be the only

countries in the Caribbean so far that have broken away from the U.S.A.'s political philosophy, and appear to have developed their own thing with the help of the neo/colonialist nation of Russia.

Bahamians (at least those who think) are becoming more and more concerned with the influx of the American mass media and its effect on our life-style as evidenced by the "Kentucky Fried Chicken-like mentality", the American accented 'hip' announcers of Z.N.S. that bombard the populace with one type of music and the negative influence of the self-defeating ghetto-like life-style of displaced-people'd Black Americans, as evidenced by the very poor taste black films. Bahamians—are terribly concerned about the pseud-sophisticated, "honky tonk "Burger-Kingian", "bastard", cultural image that they are now projecting. Yes, the search for cultural roots is more important now, than ever before.

## SECTION I OBEAH AND RELIGION

Visitors to the Bahamas, and natives alike, are unanimous about one fact - there are nearly as many churches in the Bahamas as there are houses and there are nearly as many preachers, priests, evangelists, pastors, brothers and reverends , as there are people - for such is the

4 BRAITHWAITE, Edward Kamau, "The African Presence in Caribbean literature". DAEDALUS. Spring 1974 (USA) Pg. 73.

\* The "now" thing is for many local preachers to come up with the title "Reverend Doctor" although some of them supposedly obtained "doctorate" degrees from American Universities!

101

+ + +

Kingdom of the Bahamas, a highly religious place! But, unlike the more racially cosmopolitan societies of Jamaica. Cuba and Trinidad, only orthodox (Roman Catholic and Greek) and Protestant religions co-exist.

There is little doubt that the world's oldest profession is not prostitution, as we would like to believe, but the religious specialist. This is the individual in any society who interprets or is the possessor of supernatural powers, derived, either directly from the original supernatural source, or ordained, appointed, apprenticed or studied into that state where revelation and interpretation are imparted to him. Religion then, is rooted in the mind of man and caters directly to man's psycho-social needs. Man is also a culture-bearing animal who never is and never can be alone and still remain human. "A peculiar organism, a man is the precipitated experience of many minds, reified knowledge, the word made flesh. The individual man, therefore, potentially lives as many millennia as his knowledge of the past can span. But it must be conscious and articulate knowledge, for otherwise a living man is partly the passive present-day residue of the pathology of past history, since tradition is, in part, as neurotic as any patient." 5



*"The Bahamian Church in all its glory."*

Religion, therefore, is the beliefs, behaviours and feelings of people. From time immemorial, man has been trying to understand himself and his God (or Gods) and even though ceremony, ritual, fetishes, symbols, saints, etc. differ according to the culture, there is striking religious similarity as found in "homo sapiens."

5. LA BARRE, Weston. "The Ghost Dance -Origins of Religion", Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York. 1970. Pg.XV "Preface".

102

+ + +

It is generally accepted that the focus of African culture in the Caribbean was religious. Religion to the African was a total thing, and included his whole life-style, expressed in the African's art, beliefs, societal laws and references about the supernatural.

"The African religious complex, despite its homogeneity, has certain interrelated divisions or specialization ( 1) 'worship' - an essentially Euro-Christian word that doesn't really describe the African situation, in which the congregation is not a passive one entering into a monolithic relationship with a superior god, but an active community which celebrates in song and dance the carnation of powers/spirits (orisha/loa) into one or several of themselves. This is, therefore, a social (interpersonal and communal), artistic ( formal-improvisatory choreography of movement/sound) and eschatological (possession) experience, which erodes the conventional definition/description of 'worship'; (2) rites de passage (3) divination (4) healing and (5) protection. Obeah...is an aspect of the last two of these subdivisions, though it has come to be regarded in the new world and in colonial Africa as sorcery and 'black magic'. One probable tributary to this view was the notion that a great deal of 'prescientific' African medicine was (and is) at best psychological, at norm mumbo-jumbo-magical in nature. It was not recognised, in other words, that this 'magic' was (is) based on

scientific knowledge and use of herbs, drugs, foods and symbolic/associational procedures (pejoratively termed fetishistic), as well as on a homeopathic understanding of the material and divine nature of man (nam) and the ways in which this could be affected. The principle of Obeah is, therefore, like medical principles everywhere, the process of healing/protection through seeking out the source of explanation of the cause (obi/evil) of the disease or fear. This was debased by slave master-missionary-prospero into an assumption, inherited by most of us, that Obeah deals in evil. In this way, not only has African science been discredited, but Afro-Caribbean religion has been negatively fragmented and almost (with exceptions in Haiti and Brazil) publicly destroyed. To properly understand Obeah, therefore, we shall have to restore it to its proper place in the Afro-American communion complex: Kumina—custom—myal—Obeah—fetish." 6

The Bahamian Plantation System has already been described in a previous chapter especially as to how it differed from the system in the other areas of the West Indies. The small population of slaves, most of whom were "house slaves" did not find it difficult to interiorize European Christian beliefs. The zeal with which Bahamian slave owners "converted" and treated their slaves, indicated to them (the slaves) that they were indeed lucky to partake of such benevolence. Then too, the Christian religion, which originally was High Church of England, appealed to them, even though they maintained many of their own beliefs.

Pascoe \*. writes: "The greater number of the islands are peopled entirely by negroes, who, though normally Christians are to a great extent practically heathen. There are great difficulties in the work of evangelization, arising ( 1) from the population being scattered over so wide an area, the distance by sea from one end of the diocese to the other being about 650 miles. The people live in small settlements separated by great distances, some in huts hidden away in the bush, only to be got at by a weary tramp over sharp, honey-comb rock; others in settlements inaccessible except by boat, and then only in certain winds; others are secluded in the recesses of creeks to which the approach is almost blocked by clumps of mangroves. (2) The bulk of the male population is employed on the sea, sponge gathering during nearly the whole year. (3) Government provides schools (undenominational) in the most populous centres. The

6. BRAITHWAITE. Edward Kamau.op. cit. notation on page 74.

\* PASCOE. c.f. Two hundred years of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. 1701-1900. London, The Society's Office. 1901. pp. 216-21.

Church, with the aid of grants from Bray's Associates and the Christian Faith Society does what it can to provide teaching of a very simple and elementary character for the children in the more remote places, but numbers are still out of reach of any school. The people generally are in a state of extreme ignorance, a large proportion being unable to read; witchcraft and other heathen superstitions abound, and immorality is everywhere very prevalent (4) The missionary clergy have to spend their time travelling from one station to

another, and their field of work is so large that it is impossible for them, except at their headquarters, to spend more than a few days at a time at one place."

The appurtenances of the Anglican Church with its saints, altars, highly robed priests were not unlike African priests or the original Obeah man. Slowly, the slaves began to become totally familiar with the Jewish God and soon, especially after emancipation, he began to only retain what would be considered as "vestiges" of his original culture, on those official holidays that were in keeping with the Christian calendar.

The Bahamas, belonging to England, took on the aura of genteel English living. The minority whites ruled anyhow, and the British colonial officials with education, administrative know-how and zealous religious fervor, propagandised the Anglo-Saxon way of life - to the point that the displaced African and his descendants in order to survive and gain status had to become white, especially in his socio-religious behaviour. Except for sectarian revivals that came during the latter part of the 19th century, there has been no great religious movement or revival as experienced, for example, in Jamaica during 1860-61. This is not difficult to imagine as explained in our developmental history; however, it was strange that the African who depended on active participation and emotionalism, especially with drumbeating and emotive religious dance expression, adapted so readily to the more orthodox English church. Seaga 7 probably had an explanation when he wrote: "The Christian church in its orthodox and accepted form, frowns upon the more emotional manifestations of the spirit, and even if the fundamental division of exclusiveness and inclusiveness were somehow to disappear, a cultist would get little satisfaction in a service where his participation is restricted to hymn singing and responses from a prayer book. Herein lies the second significant point of division: whether there is acceptance of the doctrine of spirit possession. From this dividing line, Christian groups are classified as 'temporal' or 'spiritual'. It is true to say that sects or cult groups which accept the doctrine of personal possession by spirit forces, classify themselves as 'spiritual' and correspondingly categorize those which do not as 'temporal'; the orthodox denominations all falling within the latter group, while spiritual groups include many Church of God and native Baptist sects such as Pentecostal, Four Square and others in addition to Revivalism."

There are no "cults" as such in the Bahamas, although the off-shoots of organised Christian Pentecostal religions are not much different in the Bahamas to Pukkumina or Zion as found in Jamaica. These fundamental religious groups in the Bahamas exhibit loud singing, "getting the spirit" (possession), speaking in tongues, the use of musical instruments (including percussion) in the Church (as opposed to just the organ or piano) and faith healing.

Even though the Church of England was the official religion, the Baptists have the earliest infiltration into the core of the Bahamian black population which brought appeal and acceptance to the blacks who needed this type of religion to cater to their basic African beliefs—a highly emotive type of worship.

+ + +

Prince William was a freed slave from South Carolina who came to the Bahamas with other freed slaves in 1790 and was successful in attracting many blacks, at least more successful than the Rev. William Guy, who was sent to the Bahamas by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1731.

The Baptists, although divided into many "Conventions", are thoroughly indigenous in clergy and laity and have never endured racial division, because they are almost 100 per cent negro Bahamian.

"The first Methodist in the Bahamas was a negro, Joseph Paul, who came to Abaco from the Carolinas in the United States. He moved to Nassau in the 1780's and gathered a class of five, whom he taught in a parish schoolroom. In 1786, Joseph Paul founded a Wesleyan Church in the western district of Nassau. In 1794, the Methodist Episcopal Conference in the West Indies sent a man named Johnson to help Paul's society and a small wooden chapel was built." 8

The newly converted Methodists often suffered open hostility and persecution from the majority Anglicans, who thought that the new doctrines would have a disruptive effect on the negroes, especially when the question of "equality" came up.

Although the first Wesleyan missionaries preached with considerable success to the negroes, their doctrines were even more attractive to the native whites, especially of the poorer kind. As time went on, there came a noticeable social or racial division in the Methodist Church.

Bishop Bernard Markham, Anglican Bishop of Nassau and the Bahamas (1963-72) comments on the Church in the Bahamas, 9 "I think we are going to lose the young people of the Bahamas unless we can deal with this situation. It's 'churchianity' rather than 'Christianity.'" He continues 'the Church covered every part of life. Life on some of the Out Islands can be rather British. There is also a strange ambivalence, an ambiguity about the lives of people who are very proud of being a part of a church. They will come up to you, but they will live with a woman who is not their wife and get drunk every week. In some extraordinary way, I'm not we that the people in the Bahamas are associating the church with love, real love. Being a member of the Church is sort of a symbol of having arrived, rather than being Christian in their lives. There are certain strata of society. It would be difficult for those who are climbing socially to commit themselves in many of our churches. Being an Anglican is connected with colonialism here, you know. There are three hills in Nassau. One is Government Hill, one is Bishop's Hill (people don't talk about Anglican Hill, it's always Bishop's Hill) and there is Crazy Hill where, the mental hospital was. The three hills you see, not the seven hills At one time, the Anglican bishop had prerogative of mercy in death sentences, and it was always assumed that the Anglican Church went along with the government, because it was English. It was, for many years, socially respectable to be an Anglican. Then there came this extraordinary thing about 1860 and 1870, when a lot of Anglicans left the Church as they said it was developing in a very Catholic way. They found the Methodist Church as they said it was



around the corner, and went across to Trinity Methodist. But I'm told that the real thing was that the Anglican Church was getting so many black people. Trinity Methodist has always been a refuge for white Bahamians. It still is, I think. On the whole, the two churches that have really integrated in regard to colour and race have been the Roman Catholic Church and our own

8. BARRY. Colman J. (O.S.B.), "Upon 'These Rocks", Catholics in the Bahamas, St. John's Abbey Press. Minnesota, 1973. Pg. 215.

NOTE: Not only is this book a highly researched one with regard to the Roman Catholic Church in the Bahamas, but it has many "human insights" into the Bahamian people that no other Bahamian history book so far, has. I highly recommend this book for all Bahamians.

9. BARRY. C.J.. op. cit. Pg. 548.

105

+ + +

Anglican Church. The Baptists are almost entirely black. The Scot's Kirk,... well, we needn't take them too seriously, because I remember talking to a previous minister who said, 'Our Church has no mission at all. It has been here all these years. We never make any converts. We've never extended.'" Bishop Markham also commented on church building in the Bahamas. 10

"Church building, by the way, is a Bahamian trait. Bahamians like building churches. The largest Christian edifice is not St. Frances Xavier's, \*\* not Christ Church Cathedral \*\*\*, it is the Church of God Cathedral. We have Baptist Cathedrals here also. It's much easier to get people to come to build a church than to come to worship. Getting them to church is a problem, but getting them to build a church is wonderful!"

The Roman Catholic Church, that was firmly established in the large Spanish and French Caribbean colonies of Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Haiti and which syncretised with Haitian African voodoo religion, was late in becoming established in the Bahamas. Fr. Chrysostom Schriener, O.S.B., a Benedictine from St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, was the pioneer of the Catholic Church in the Bahamas, and only attracted 77 converts in 1892. However 11 , "selecting certain depressed islands, such as Cat Island+ and Long Island,++ and ignoring others, the Roman Catholics built beautiful churches, and the priests and sisters laboured heroically to provide educational, medical and social services so badly needed by the people. Their success was phenomenal and their new converts were attracted from all other denominations. The following table illustrates the proportional increase or decrease of the four major religious denominations in the Bahamas, from 1943 to 1953, taking into consideration a population at that time of 180,000:

Denomination	1943	1953	Increase	Decrease
Anglican	27.04	27.85	0.18	
Baptist	33.85	32.61		1.24
Methodist	11.42	9.87		1.55
Roman Catholic	10.34	15.38	5.04	

It is useful, at this time, to consider the religious groupings in present-day Bahamas:

(I) Orthodox Groups

Roman Catholics

Greek Orthodox

Jewish faith (Judaism)

(II) Protestants

Anglican ( Church of England, Episcopalians)

African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.)

Baptists (many different "conventions", e.g. Southern, Central, Native, etc.)

\* The Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church, which was predominantly white, but now attracts many "middle" and "higher class" blacks. It has been said that this is the newest "in-church status symbol" at present.  
10. *ibid.* Pg. 549650.

\*\* Catholic \*\*\* Anglican \*\*\*\*Pentecostal.

11. CRATON. Michael, *op. cit.* Pg. 245.

+ Almost 100% Negro population.

+ + An Ethnically mixed island of majority "fair-skinned" Negroes, with small "Indian" admixture.

106

+ + +

Brethren (sometimes called " Holyrites" )

Plymouth

Exclusive

Free

Christian Scientists

Jehovah's Witnesses

Lutheran

Methodist

Presbyterian

Pentecostal Sects\*

Church of God of Prophecy\*\*

Assemblies of God

Church of God in Christ

Church of God of the Apostolic Faith

The Church of the Living God

Church of the Nazarene

etc.

Salvation Army

Seventh Day Adventists

### (III) Eastern Religions

Black Muslims  
Islam ( Moslems proper)

### (IV) Others

Mormons  
Baha'is  
Slutan-al-Azkar (or Divine Science of the Soul.  
This is not a religion as such, but more a pathway that anyone can follow to get back to God.).

International Meditation Society (organization which utilizes the method of transcendental Meditation and not a religion.)

Divine Light Society (Yoga)

Superet Brotherhood (obtaining the secret of Aura Science)

In addition to the many Christian denominations, the Bahamian is an inveterate joiner of organizations—"societies", "order", and "lodges". The reason for this being the Bahamian's basic African need to feel a part of and to discover means of solidarity and communication in social situations that he had been basically denied during slavery.

Although the socio-economic configuration of these organisational members have changed over the past twenty years, they attracted, originally, the black, lower socio-economic strata of Bahamian society. I stress lower - socio-economic strata because even the intellectual black Bahamian and those who had status in terms of family heritage, because of the socio-racial

\* Many of the adherents of these sects are called 'Jumpers' or "Holy Rollers" because when they get the "spirit" they jump about and often fall to the ground and roll about. The majority of Protestant sects are associated with a parent American association.

\*\* This is the largest group of the Pentecostal sects.

system, hardly ever became affluent in relation to his Bahamian white counterpart. These black leaders were the leaders of the "secret societies" and the rituals were Euro-African orientated. Many of them were (are) prescribed in European manuals but the actual practises have taken on an African flavour. These "societies", "orders" and "lodges", although theologically in conflict with the dogma of orthodox and some protestant religious denominations, provide no basic conflict in the mind of the Christian Bahamian. With this in mind, the Christian-African spirit world and the utilisation of "spirits" for good or evil by the Obeah practitioner, presents no conflict to the Christian who believes in the efficacy of Obeah.

Let us briefly examine the African world of spirits.

The spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living dead (called "Zombies in Voodoo terminology".)

These can be divided into

- Divinities
- associates of God
- ordinary spirits
- living dead

### **(a) Divinities and God Associates**

These have been created by God in the ontological category of the spirits. These are in intimate contact with God and do His wishes

Some of these are national heroes who have been elevated and deified, but this is rare and when it does happen the heroes become associated with some function or form of nature, e.g. (a) the Ashanti's have a pantheon of divinities known as "abosom." (b) the Yoruba have one thousand and seven hundred divinities called "Orisa" associated with natural phenomena and objects as well as human activities and experiences. An example is "Ogun" the hunter, the owner of all iron and steel and the "chief" among the "divinities" and "Orunmila" the divinity who shows itself among men through the oracle of divination.

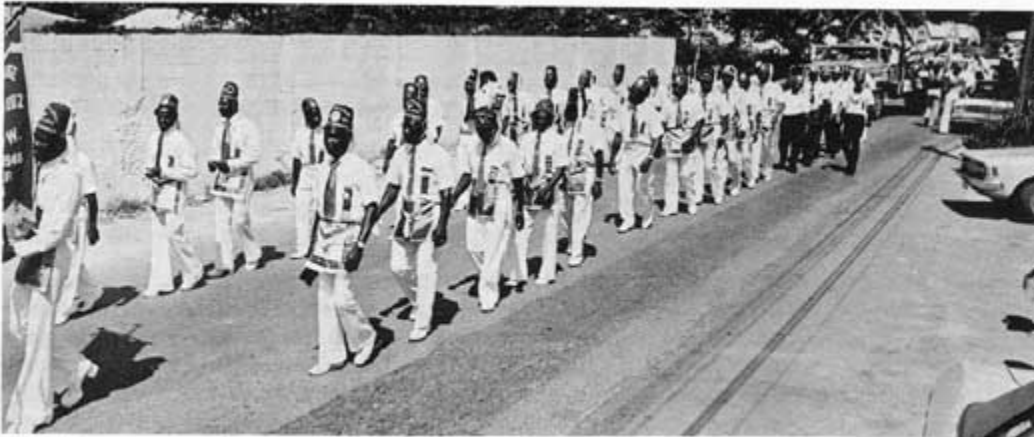
### **(b) Spirits**

These are the common spiritual beings beneath the status of divinities and above the status of men. These are the 'common populace' of spiritual beings.

Spirits are invisible but may make themselves visible to human beings. They have no family or human ties with human beings, nor are they evil or good. Mbiti \* states that with the spirits "death is a loss and the spirit mode of existence means the withering of the individual, so that his personality evaporates, his name disappears and he becomes less and not more of a person: a thing, a spirit and not a man anymore. Spirits as a group have more power than men, just as in a physical sense the lions do, yet, in some ways men are better off, and the right human specialist can manipulate or control the spirit as they wish. Men paradoxically may fear, or dread' the spirits and yet they can drive the same spirits away or use them to human advantage."

The majority of peoples believe that spirits dwell in the woods, bush forest, river, mountains or just around the villages. In the Bahamas the main abode is either the cemetery or the silk cotton tree.

\* John S. Mbiti "African Religion and Philosophy" Heinemann 1969 London page 79.



*The Bahamas Association of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World on parade.*

In Africa, spirits are very real to society, especially to those who have recently died. Various ceremonies are performed to maintain this contact, such as, placing food and other articles on the bier or by the gravesite, or offerings placed in spirit shrines. Such shrines belong to the community who share a common belief and are cared for by priests or the holymen.

### **(c) The Living Dead**

These are the closest links that men have with the spirit world. The living-dead speak the language of men, and also the 'spirits' of God. They are people who have not yet become 'spirits' or things when they appear to men or families, they know, have interest in what is going on in the family or community and may give advice or warn about tragedy in a family.

Thus the living dead appear to be partly 'human' and partly 'spirit.' They can either take direct directions from God or the human that they are in close contact with.

"\*The Ashanti have spirits that imitate trees, rivers, animals, charms and the like and below these are family spirits thought to be ever present, and to act as guardians. Bambuti spirits are thought to serve God as 'game keepers,' and are described as small, dark skinned, bright eyed, white haired, bearded living in tree hollows and stinking. Those of the Ewe tribe are believed to have been created by God to act as intermediaries between Him and human beings. Although they are visible, people say they have human form, protect men, live in natural objects and phenomena and are capable of self propagation." The Fajulu believe that every person has two spirits ; one is good and the other evil".

No area of African-Euro Christian syncretisation is more evident in past and present day Bahamas as in the Bahamian way of death.

To the African, death and burial were a very important phase of man's life cycle.

"On the funeral depended not only the prestige of those kin of the deceased surviving him, but the safe journey and status of the deceased in his new abode in the spirit world." 12

\* Ibid pg.87.

12. PATTERSON, O., "Sociology of Slavery", op. cit. Pg. 195-196.

109

+ + +

"Man, we put him down good" is commonly used to express a good funeral. It is not surprising, then, that funeral rites of African slaves and their descendents in the Bahamas have survived more than most other cultural elements.

In Africa, burial is the commonest method of dealing with the corpse and different customs are followed. \*

"Some societies bury the body inside the house where the person was living at the time of death, others bury it in the compound where the homestead is situated, others bury the body behind the compound, and some do so at the place where the person was born.

"The graves differ in shapes and in sizes, some are rectangular, others are circular, some have a cave-like shape at the bottom where the body is laid, and in some societies the corpse is buried in a big pot. In many areas it is the custom to bury food, weapons, stools, tobacco, clothing and formerly one's wife or wives so that they may 'accompany' the departed into the next world. Yet in other societies the dead body might be thrown into a river or bush where it is eaten by wild animals and birds of prey. In others, a special burial "hut" is used, in which the body is kept either indefinitely or for several months or years after which the remains are taken out and buried. In a number of societies the skull or the jaw or other part of the dead person is cut off and preserved by the family concerned, with the belief that the departed is 'present' in the skull or jaw; and in any case, this portion of the dead is a concrete reminder to the family that the person lives on in the hereafter. These methods of disposal apply mainly to those who are adults, or die 'normal' deaths. Children, unmarried people, those who die through suicide or through animal attack, and victims of diseases like leprosy, small pox or epilepsy, may not be given the same or full burial rites, but modern change tends to make burial procedures more even or similar for everybody.

"Again it is clear that people view death paradoxically: it is a separation but not annihilation, the dead person is suddenly cut off from the human society and yet the corporate group clings to him. This is shown through the elaborate funeral rites, as well as other methods of keeping in contact with the departed." Mbiti continues to summarise about the African way of death by stating that "death becomes then, a gradual process which is not completed until some years after the actual physical death. At the moment of physical death the person becomes a living-dead: he is neither alive physically, nor dead relative to the corporate group. His own sasa: \*\* period is over he enters fully into Zarnani + period, but as far as the living who know him are concerned, he is kept 'back' in the sasa period, from

which he can disappear only gradually. Those who have nobody to keep them in the sasa period in reality 'die' immediately, which is a great tragedy that must be avoided at all costs."

The Bahamas Handbook gives a colourful description of Bahamian funerals: "Except for the band, which headed the procession, rendering 'Onward Christian Soldiers' with a particularly loud (but mournful) thump on the base drum, there wasn't a sound from the five hundred odd men, women and children in the funeral procession.

\* Mbiti, John S. "African Religions and Philosophy ". Heinemann London 1969, page 158.

\*\* Ibid page 150-152 .

+These are " time " periods as many African tribes conceptualizes them. The 'Sasa' covers the now period and has the sense of immediacy near-ness and now-ness. It is 'about to become', the process of realization or recently expressed. Zamani is the period beyond which nothing can go. It is the grave yard of time, the period of termination, the determination in which everything finds its halting point.

13. Bahamas Handbook, "The Bahamian Way of Death", Etienne Dupuch, Jr., Publications, 1970, Nassau, Bahamas.

110

+ + +

"Walking solemnly in pairs; little girls in white with huge butterfly bows anchored to their pigtailed and little boys in spanking clean shirts carried immense wreaths of plastic flowers. Following the women, in their white uniform dresses, marched a man carrying a lodge banner of one of the fraternal orders in the same bright colours as the men's sashes.

"Proudly, the banner-carrier, stepped out leading the lodge members who were making the last walk with their brother. A tightly-knit group of men in black, friends of the deceased and high in the ranks of the lodge, pushed the coffin on a bier toward its final destination. The family—the widow and her small children—followed behind in isolation that nothing could touch.

"At the same time, coming up the hill on Cumberland Street, was another procession, also led by a band. But this band was jauntily playing 'When the Saints Go Marching In'. The people were dressed the same, but their lines weren't as orderly. In fact, there was a real strut to their step. And there was no bier. They had left that in the cemetery with the deceased, the anguish, the wailing and the family. The two processions passed on the hill of Cumberland Street just above the Sheraton British Colonial Hotel, one enveloped in a mood of heavy sorrow, the other on its way to a party.

"This familiar scene in Nassau is a ritualistic remnant of the original function of fraternal orders and burial societies in the Bahamas—the Elks, the Good Samaritans, the Masons, the Congo Society, the Volunteers,—the remnants of brotherly action in time of trouble forty or fifty years ago and earlier.

"In the days before there were morticians in the islands, the lodges and societies took charge of the funerals of members as a fraternal duty. In their poverty, the people banded together

to help one another, not only in time of death, but also to lend a helping hand in time of sickness.

"When a member was mortally ill, the president appointed a couple of members to sit by the bedside with the family through the night, to give comfort and solace to the dying. After death (or "the passing"), two men, handy with hammer, nails and saw, were despatched to the lodge hall to build a coffin. A supply of lumber was always on hand.

"In the meantime, three men would be getting the grave ready, which on New Providence and on some of the other Bahamian islands is hard work, even today. A thin layer of topsoil covering limestone makes grave-digging a back-breaking labour of love and sorrow.

"Two or three women would be at the home of the deceased preparing the body for burial, which, due to the climate and lack of embalming methods, had to take place within twenty-four hours. Often, in those twenty-four hours, a wake was held, for with the small population of the islands, a lodge member would go to only four or five funerals a year. A funeral was—and, of course, still is—a meeting ground for old friends and a highlight in the social life. Everyone came to the funeral because it was a closely-knit inter-dependent community of people who shared the family's loss of a father, wife or child. There was no indifference at the time of bereavement. Even the children participated, as they do today, carrying, with solemn and innocent dignity, the wreaths of flowers to be laid on the grave side. No effort was made to soften the hard facts they were to face as they grew older.

"After motor vehicles came to Nassau, hearses were usually used—except in military funerals. But, today, there is a return to the old ways of rolling the bier.

111

+ + +

"At Bahamian funerals, cars or not, people still walk in the funeral procession out of respect for the dead. Of course, another factor is that most churches are within walking distance of a cemetery if the interment isn't in the church yard."

Many of these lodges and societies began as African tribal self-help and self-identity institutions. Initially, there were the Congo Society, the Ibo Society, the Fulani Society and the Yoruba Society. Only the Congo and the Yoruba, at present, have adherents. but these are old people and, unless they are reactivated, they will die a natural death.

At the turn of the century, when British colonialism was making its presence known, there was almost an anti-African/native attitude that was subtly encouraged by the colonial administrators, Bahamian whites and the Afro-Saxon Bahamian. The prevailing attitudes and status symbols were white-orientated and local-native cultural symbols were regarded as "quaint", but "primitive", and something that no respectable-educated Bahamian would want to indulge in. British names, manners, music and customs were the aspiring goals, and so many of the "burial societies" or "tribal societies" went into American-orientated or Euro-orientated organisations that were most acceptable. For example, the Hauser Society



reorganised and changed its name to the "Knights of King George Society." Another society, "The Bahamas Friendly Society" received its charter from William IV (who ruled the British Empire between 1830 and 1837). It also owned, for many years, a mace, a gift of William IV, which was an exact duplicate of the one used in the Bahamian House of Assembly.

Then came the Free Masons, a Euro-American institution that had "white" members who recognised their black Bahamian counterpart in handshakes and often gave help to their brothers, but would not allow their black brothers to join their particular group or meetings.

The General Grand Accepted Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity was founded in the United States in 1874, when a group of people gathered in Washington, D.C., and decided to form an organisation to take care of the sick and infirm, bury the dead, and help distressed members. This was before emancipation came to the United States.

In 1897, the Mother Lodge of Love and Charity in the Bahamas called "Pride of India" was organised.

Then, there is the "Scottish Rites of the Masonic Order" and, perhaps one of the largest organisations, "The Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World". This organisation was founded in the United States in 1898 and caught on rapidly in the Bahamas.

"The regalia denoting the office of Elkdom consists of a gold chain worn around the neck with a golden medallion of an elk resting on his breast, and a special fez worked in gold thread." <sup>14</sup>

There are many lesser organisations—Eureka Lodge, the Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Good Samaritans; the Daughters of Samaria in the Bahamas, the Daughters of Ruth, ad infinitum.

The initiation ceremonies of most of these organisations are "top secret" and the various "signs"—the hand clasp, the placing of the feet, etc.,—may denote "friendship", "trouble", "asking for help", "identification", etc.

14. Bahamas Handbook. *ibid.*

The official uniform (or perhaps we should use the word "costume") consists of men with top hats, black suits, sashes or apron-like waistbands, bowties and, for the higher ranking "brothers" (or bills) or "daughters" (or sisters), emblems around the neck. No wonder that many members (especially men) fortify themselves with alcoholic drinks (mostly rum) to withstand the intense heat generated by their black bodies and black clothing.

The ceremonies around the grave, after the normal "Christian" or "official ceremony", are colourful by their singing, various "signals" with their hands and arms, e.g., in unison they would outstretch their arms, clasp them to their breasts three to four times, then in unison, they would respond to some readings, either from the Bible or their manual book; then they would grasp the green leaf or foliage that had been pinned to their lapels (or pinned to their hats) and, in one last gesture, throw it in the grave of the deceased.

These organisations, with their dress, marching and ceremony, add to the colour and tradition of Bahamian blacks. They take their "lodges" very seriously, and keep up the payments of dues so that when they die, they can be "put away in style"!

Thus, Bahamians of African descent, with the elaborate funeral imbedded in their psyche, have made colourful adaptation of Christian burial where no psychological conflicts exist, as they combine solemnity with "festival".

Many Obeah practitioners are lodge members, and belong to organised religion. Their healing powers are in keeping with the legitimate church where "faith" healing and prayers for the sick cause no conflicts.

The "speaking in tongues" based on what happened in ancient times on the "Day of Pentecost" is legitimized in the incantation or the gibberish-type language that the Obeah practitioner may utilise.

Casting out demons of those possessed, cause no Obeah-theological conflicts. After all, the Christian church recognises the spirit world of good and evil—so does the Obeah practitioner.

The Bible relates the story of Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick. The Obeah practitioner is in command of the spirit world, and healing the sick is his forte.

To the Bahamian Pentecostals, the supernatural world resembles the natural one. There are rivers, lakes, mountains—"Jordan river is chilly and cold" is the theme of a favourite spiritual, and "crossing the River Jordan" is passing through to a place of rest "on the other side."

Thus, Obeah and religion are integral forms and are unified in magico - religious behaviour, and have deep psycho-social and psycho-physiological implications.

The phenomenon of "getting the spirit" is the religious term for being imbued with the power of God.

The phenomenon of being "possessed" has the connotation of being under the influence of the Devil or evil forces. The individual who is possessed can either be an evil person who has "sold his soul to the Devil" or an individual who has been fixed by Obeah. Only the Obeah practitioner, or a religious man (priest, pastor, etc.) utilising the power of God through "Exorcism" can release the individual from these powers.

+ + +

On the other hand, "getting the spirit" is a condition that every Pentecostal Christian strives towards. This is a sign of having the "Grace of God" within you, letting the Holy Ghost (Spirit) rule (temporarily) your mind and body. Being saved, baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit ("Sanctified") is the prime goal of Protestant Christians.

A more descriptive account on "possession", "exorcism" and "having the spirit" will be given in the following section on Obeah and Medicine.

One of the most popular manuals used by the Obeah practitioner is "King Solomon's Guide to Success and Power". On its cover is found the following quotation from the Bible (Mark 11,22-24):

"And Jesus answered, 'Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and thou cast in the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith.' "

We can see, then, faith (the song popularised by the late, great Nat King Cole, "Faith Can Move Mountains") as a legitimate belief, finds its credence in the Bible, by which the religious specialist and the Obeah specialist both get their "directions" and "power" by which they interpret, advise, edify and heal.

+ + +

## OBEAH AND MEDICINE

Throughout the world, more and more scientists are becoming aware and more sensitive to the belief that a para normal world does exist.

Modern science, and especially psychology, have made some gains in exploring and explaining much of what used to be looked upon as "magic", "supernatural" or "primitive" superstitions. The "surface" of the psychic world with regard to research has just barely been scratched, but there is more interest, serious study and questioning of the many "unexplained" phenomena.

Time Magazine 1 recently highlighted the increased psychic activity:

"In the U.S., 'The Secret Life of Plants' becomes a best seller by offering an astonishing and heretical thesis: greenery can feel the thoughts of humans.

"At Maimonides Medical Centre in New York City, the image of a painting is transmitted by E.S.P. and seems to enter the dreams of a laboratory subject sleeping in another room.

"In England, a poll of its readers of "New Scientist" indicates that nearly 70% of the respondents (mainly scientists and technicians) believe in the possibility of extra sensory , perception.

"At the University of California, Psychologist Charles Tart reports that his subjects showed a marked increase in E.S.P. scores after working with his new testing machine !

1. TIME. "Boom Times on the Psychic Frontier " March 4, 1974.



*Three types of medicinal potions, made by an obeah practitioner and photographed at her house. (1) Bottle on right — used for venereal diseases and gives sexual strength. (2) Middle bottle — all purpose drink — for strength, colds, sexual potency etc. Some of the ingredients are pepper, garlic, six different bushes etc. (3) — a tonic made with eggs for anemia, and general debility.*

115

+ + +

"In Los Angeles, a leaf is cut in half, then photographed by a special process. The picture miraculously shows the "aura" or outline of the whole leaf.

"In Washington, the Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency assigns a team to investigate seemingly authentic psychic phenomena at the Sanford Research Institute.

"On both sides of the Atlantic, Uri Geller, a young Israeli psychic, astounds laymen and scientists alike by bending spoons and keys, apparently with the force of his thoughts.

"In the Philippines, tennis star, Tony Roche, is relieved of painful "tennis elbow" when an incision is made and three blood clots are apparently removed by the touch of a psychic healer, who knows nothing of surgery or of modern sanitation.

"In the U.S., the number of colleges offering courses in parapsychology increases to more than 100.

"In the U.S.S.R., researchers file reports on blindfolded women who can "see" colours with their hands.

"In California, ex-Astronaut, Edgar Mitchell, who while on the Apollo 14 moon mission conducted telepathy experiments with friends on earth founds the Institute of Noetic Sciences. His new mission: investigate occurrences that will not yield to rational explanation.

"In London, Arthur Koestler examines psychic research with the zeal of the believer. Koestler, one of the foremost explicators of establishment science (The Sleepwalkers, The Act of Creation) speaks of "synchronized" events that lie outside the expectations of probability. In anecdotes of foresight and extra sensory perception, in the repetition of events and the strange behaviour of random samplings, Koestler spots what he calls the root of coincidence. In his unforgettable metaphor, modern scientists are "Peeping Toms at the keyhole of eternity."

Thus, with all the above activity in psychic phenomena going on in respectable circles, Bahamian Obeah practitioners are being looked upon more seriously and there is honest enquiry into the "hows", "whys" and "wherefores" of Obeah practice.

Healing, or problems of physical and mental health, are the most important aspects in the practice and art of Obeah. The manifestations of a fix are usually some medical symptom (physical or mental) by which normal or trained medical professionals may find difficult to diagnose or treat. It is not unusual that many Bahamians will either use their own local cure or consult a "bush doctor" or Obeah practitioner before seeing a "qualified" medical practitioner.

Bahamians have always relied-on local cures, and today, in many of the remote islands of the Bahamas, the only medicines to be found are the natural ones from barks, bush and earth. It should be noted from the start, however, that many local healers are Not Obeah practitioners or even associated with Obeah; but it must be admitted that the majority of Obeah practitioners, and usually the most effective of them, are expert herbalists or bush doctors.

This section does not deal with actual parapsychological research findings, nor were there attempts made to allow for the case histories that will be cited, to undergo any rigid

research procedures with controls. As far as possible, medical histories were obtained, individuals seen by the author \* and stories verified by questioning and the evaluating of material. Genuine medical cases that have been attributed to the power of Obeah will be related.

\* Many people refused to talk about their problem or gave permission to be seen.

116

+ + +

Symptoms associated with Obeah and stories of people afflicted with strange "physical" happenings abound in the Bahamas. The real power or efficacy of the Obeah practitioner lends itself to the manifestations of being fixed.

Being fixed ascribes the causation of a disease or disability, or mental condition, to the magical influence of Obeah. It is like a hex or a spell placed on the individual by another person. Naturally, medical science is often incapable of dealing with the problem of fixing and only the Obeah practitioner who diagnoses and can interpret the reasons for the fix, is capable of unfixing or clearing the individual.

Virtually, any symptom, physical or emotional, may be ascribed to "being fixed".



*Mixtures used for FIXING. From left to right:— (1) Quick silver mixture for protection of body, house and property. (2) A 'control' with straw from a broom bent in mixture, especially for houses that are suspected to be 'hagged' (haunted). (3) Special mixture for protection against enemies. (4) Snake oil mixture for rubbing and external purposes.*

Often, a patient will explain his illness, initially, in a rather guarded manner. Unless he is very disturbed, only intensive questioning would reveal his beliefs, and after that, he describes his illness usually by naming his tormentor, although sometimes the source of the "fix" remains unknown.

The commonest belief is that you are "fixed" or can be fixed by the proper use of the many prescribed negative fetishes. These are often common household items or clothes, such as salt, sand, socks, handkerchiefs, such blood or the excreta of common animals - as the chicken, goat, pig or snake. Other items having magical significance are human hair, fingernail clippings, urine, blood and feces. The common use of blood, excreta, nails and hair in witchcraft

117

+ + +

practices of the 17th century Caribbean voodoo, and even Egyptian healing rites indicate the venerable origin of some of the Obeah signs. The most powerful item used in Obeah, however, is cemetery (grave) dirt and next to this is probably sea water.

All the previous material may be used to "fix" an enemy by using them in conjunction with proper times and conditions. Sunrise, the dark of the moon, midnight, are particularly favoured times to "fix" people.

For example, a common method for "fixing" one's enemy is to collect grave dirt at midnight, get the Obeah man or woman to place a set +, add the grave dirt and bury all this in front of the victim's house. When the victim steps over the "set", he gets fixed, and either a physical or mental symptom (or both) will occur.

The more common physical symptoms occurring as the result of being "fixed" are the loss of hair; unexplained swelling of the limbs or stomach; constant headaches or "ringing in the ears"; unexplained outbreak of boils or festering sores that do not respond to medication; the loss of use of the limbs (not being able to walk, etc.) or deformity of the limbs, loss of sight. Many of the remedies employed for the above symptoms are extremely varied - bush baths, poultices, salves, the drinking of many liquid concoctions, etc. Many of these type of therapies are effective, but the early observers of Bahamian life, probably ignorant to the effectiveness of natural herbs and barks, usually "poked fun" at the local cures and projected their own brand of racial prejudices with their writings, even though some of them experienced a "cure" from the local bush doctor.

Amelia Defries 2 describes such an occurrence: "I was the only white person on the island—the commissioner being away on leave just then—and, when I developed fever, Aunt Celia\* was sent for. I recognized her at once, for I had last seen her coming from delivering a baby into the world, and she was dressed then as now in remarkably grubby rags, fastened with an American safety-pin. On her head a soiled yellow bandana handkerchief, silhouetted against the orange and sapphire of the sunset, and the attitude of her angular hands, the way she moved and her general "atmosphere" recalled the Haweis paintings of Bahamian

negroes. I recoiled at first - for the unclean, long nails of the "Wise Woman" looked anything but hygienic. Nevertheless, she "worked on" me (as she put it) and cured me in an incredibly short time. During the treatment we had many a talk, and I found out how the original doctors effected their cures. Aunt Celia has very little work, for most of these 'ignorant,' people on this desert island know how to cure themselves on the rare occasions when they fall ill. But in serious cases, she is consulted. All her medicines grow in the 'bush' and are fresh-picked and fresh-boiled for every patient. Rubbing with lard or melted tallow candle is one of her chief cures and to some of her medicines she adds a 'large, big rusty nail', Cows' gall is a remedy for certain complaints when you can get it. This and mustard, however, are rarities."

Rosita Forbes, 3 observing 'being fixed' in Cat Island, and interviewing the local commissioner, wrote: "These islanders are the most suspicious I know,' said one of the young men. 'They wouldn't sleep or eat with a neighbour, no ma'am, they'd be too frightened of being 'fixed'. He told how a youth brought back a cake from Nassau and gave a slice of it to one of his

+ Ways of setting a fix, e.g., taking an article of clothing, or hair or photograph, etc. See previous chapter diagram.

2. DEFRIES. Amelia, "The Fortunate Islands", London, 1929, Pgs. 34-36.

\* She was at Eight Mile Rock on the island of Grand Bahama.

\*\* The local medicine woman.

3. FORBES, Rosita. "A Unicorn in the Bahamas", Chapter on Cat Island, Pg. 169, New York. 1940.

118

+ + +

neighbours, with whom there had been some dispute. Apparently, the man could not resist 'shop' cake. He ate it and within a few hours was dead. 'All the villagers thought it was Obeah, good, hot and strong. But it may have been poison,' concluded the narrator. Nobody could possibly tell. In the long, sandy lane we met an intelligent looking negress who was considered a good doctor. Most of her medicine grew in the bush. She picked and brewed them fresh for each patient. But sometimes she uses cow's gall, rare as a needle, or a shilling on Cat Island, lard or melted tallow candle, a big rusty nail stewed in the juice of certain herbs, seaweed, a poultice of earth and red peppers, or a conch taken from the shell, laid on an open wound. The one thing she did not believe in was fresh air. Nobody ever died of her treatment, she insisted. They died from old age, or 'sperrits,' from poison and drowning—and fresh air and sharks or sharp-teethed Barracuda—she even acknowledges that her fellow villagers occasionally died from consumption 'if dey plum obstinate about it, but dey nebber die from what I do to dem, no Ma'am.

"Such a 'wise woman' has to work very hard. She cannot feel a pulse, prescribe and go away. She must go out into the bush or along the shore and find the numerous complicated ingredients for her medicines. She must then 'bile' them or stew them and take them to the patients, whom she will bathe, rub, knead, plaster and soon 'packing them' with pepper, grass or other herb plants, 'filling them' with purges of oil or herbal infusions. Her methods are drastic. The patients are generally thinner when she has finished with them but I was told nine



out of ten times she effects a cure - when she fails it is because 'de Lawd sure wanted dat man very bad!"

As virtually any symptom or misfortune, including death, may be explained as the result of being fixed, the ones most common in psychiatric practice are those syndromes which form the biggest part of any psychiatric referrals—alcoholism, depressions, anxiety states, confusion& and delusional states.

"Crazy people" have always been feared and looked upon with awe and suspicion by Bahamians".\* Mental illness is generally characterized by various distinct syndromes which vary in terms of its description, cause treatment and cure.

"Plaggin' wid nerve trouble," "sick in de head", "bad head", "madness" and "going crazy" are the most common terms used to describe the individual that has a mental problem.

The causes of mental illness are many, but the following represents some of the main common local beliefs :

- (a) Fundamental religionists ascribe mental illness as "sinful" or to the work of the Devil. Many also ascribe the work of the Devil as being an aspect of Obeah or being fixed.
- (b) Violent and disturbing behaviour, e.g., shouting, tearing of clothes, constant use of filthy language, all can be caused by being fixed (or obeah). A bad or evil spirit could be controlling the individuals' behaviour and can only be cleared by religious healing or Obeah or a combination of both. This will include bush baths, sprinkling, special drinks, and probably sleeping with an open Bible or the wearing of clothing either on the wrong side or of a special colour to effectuate a cure.
- (c) "Nerve trouble" or "plaggin wid nerve trouble" or "nerves breaking down" are usually due to warring, problems with neighbours, wife or husband finding

\* The author's "Neuroses In the Sun" goes into the problems of mental illness in the Bahamas.

spouse with another person ("roach on the bread"), unrequited love, excessive work, financial problems or job problems. Symptoms are manifested by "talking out of the head", irritability, insomnia, and hyperactivity.

(d) Physical marks on the skin at birth, mental illness or mental deficiency in children are primarily attributed to the pre-confinement experiences of the mother and, infrequently, to them being "cursed". For example, while my daughter was pregnant, she often had a strong urge for chocolates. She was very conscious of her weight, and often became frustrated by denying herself chocolates. Our maid warned her that she should be careful when she 'craved' something while pregnant, because if parts of the body are touched, the children will be born with that physical manifestation.

My daughter, very cynically and in jest, said, "O.K. - I crave chocolate", and did so by rubbing down the length of her left leg while saying it. When my grand-daughter was born, she had (still has) a dark brown pigmentation on her left leg that extends from the top of her hip to her ankle! Doctors examining her claim that it is an unusual pigmentation and that it may disappear as she grows. Of course, our maid constantly says, "I told you so!"

My paternal grandmother claimed that the reason my father's eyes came out so greyish-blue was that while she was pregnant with him, she used to chew on 'chalk'!

Mental illness in the Bahamas is still stigmatized and patients are often discriminated against when job or house hunting; also, they are shunned or teased by the general populace.

Usually, prior to being seen by a physician, individuals who feel that they have been 'fixed' consult an Obeah man or woman. On the other hand, many consult the faith healer. These healers may be strictly religious healers, or they may be a combination of both (Obeah-religious) as already described in "white magic". The Devil, playing an important role in the illness, must be cast out or the individual may be possessed by a demon and must be exorcised. There is a distinction between "evil" demon possession or being "possessed" by the Holy Spirit, a much sought-after condition, indicating "purity" of the soul or the actual manifestation of God in one's body. One does not have to be ill to receive the "Holy Ghost", as normal individuals may receive it especially during a church service. The loud music and singing, hand clapping, the "Amens" and "Hallelujahs" and the sudden "getting the spirit" of the individual is manifested by epileptic-like convulsions, a trance-like condition and even glossolalia (speaking in tongues). Evil or demon possession never takes place in church or at a church service and has different manifestations. The individual suddenly "changes" his personality. They have new ideas, knowledge of places or situations that they could not have possibly seen or experienced. Their facial expressions change and are no longer their own. Their language becomes garbled, a different tone of voice is emitted and often they utter the most obnoxious profanities.

The medical profession generally attributes this phenomena to schizophrenia, as medical experts do not generally acknowledge the existence of separate entities apart from what they can see, touch, feel or measure; so possession by a demon is entirely inconceivable. The doctor will look rather for personality defects rather than the presence of an external force. Many will attribute the illness to secondary or tertiary personalities as part of the original personality. Stories like "The Three Faces of Eve" or "Sybil" attest to this approach.

To the religious specialist, possession is a real entity and is the 'taking over' of the soul by an outside evil force more likely to be the Devil or his demons. Those religions or cults that have no devil, either interpret these outside forces as being 'good' or 'bad', depending on what the individual projects while possessed. Fear and superstition also accompany possession with its attendant taboos and a popular conception is to have destroyed all objects that

have come into contact with the possessed one. The 'evil eye' concept is still popular in some countries, i.e., a possessed person casting a glance at a healthy person can cause the healthy person to become ill. "Belief in the evil eye is common throughout Latin America where it is known as "malojo", and in the Caribbean Islands, where it is called 'rnaljo'. In Trinidad, maljo is thought to be responsible for general wasting and debility, abdominal pains and loss of appetite. 4

There are also specific places where an individual may go to become dispossessed or cleared or healed. For Bahamians, Haiti, Cat Island or Andros Island are specific places for Obeah healing. For more orthodox Christians, the popular and varied places in the world where healing waters flow, grottos and places like Lourdes, can effectuate miraculous cures.

Personalities, in addition to local healers, who are popular in the Bahamas (thanks to American T.V.) are Oral Roberts and Katherine Kullman, Bahamians who can afford it, and after local 'cures' have not worked, travel to Haiti or America, to look for a person or place that would perhaps be effective. A terminal cancer patient friend of mine, one month before he passed away, went to consult with Katherine Kullman.

The "non-medical" healers, therefore, whether they be priests, evangelists, Obeah practitioners, shamans, witchdoctors, or whatever they may be called, play an important role in the medico-cultural spectrum of human existence and to this author's mind, are as valid and effective as the "trained" healer (or doctor) the western world produces.

In the case of physical illness, the herbs, barks and natural medications have their physical validity, coupled with the patients' belief in the healer.

In the case of mental illness, it would appear that the local healer is extremely effective, when it is considered that cultural tenets influence not only the definition of a mental illness, but also the nature and type of its treatment. The healing process is a form of psychotherapy.

Jerome Frank 5 looks at psychotherapy from three basic concepts:

- (1) A trained, socially sanctioned healer, whose healing powers are accepted by the sufferer and by his social group or an important segment of it.
- (2) A sufferer who seeks relief from the healer.
- (3) A circumscribed, more or less structured series of contacts between the healer and the sufferer, through which the healer, often with the aid of a group, tries to produce certain changes in the sufferer's emotional state, attitudes and behaviour. All concerned believe these changes will help him. Although physical and chemical adjuncts may be used, the healing influence is primarily exercised by words, acts, and rituals in which sufferer, healer and, if there is one, group, participate jointly."

The valid Obeah practitioner is a psychologist 'par excellence' - in training, methodology and healing techniques. Relief of suffering, attitudinal changes, follow-up, are all valid marks

4. BEAUBRUN, Michael. "Mental Health and the Interaction of Cultures in the Caribbean". Keynote address at the 10th Biennial Conference of the Caribbean Federation for Mental Health, Caracas, 27th July, 1975.
5. FRANK, Jerome D., "Persuasion and Healing", Schocken Books, New York, 1983, Pgs. 2-3.

121

+ + +

of the trade but, most of all, the personal charisma of the healer and the strong faith and beliefs in his purported method, are of prime importance.

Faith and cultural security on the part of the ill person is as important to his relief as is the bedside manner of the 'society' doctor to his patient.

'Interpretation' of events, happenings and the phenomena accompanying an 'unexplained illness' must be given if it is to be proven effective, and according to the beliefs of the sick person. Non-belief, non-acceptance or doubt are barriers in all aspects of healing, e.g. possession against the will of an individual with that individual fully aware of all of his faculties and powers and resisting possession is completely impossible.



*"Imported" obeah products. Fast Success Powder and Lucky Dream Incense.*

Thus, it can be seen, that in the practice of Obeah, there is a profound influence on an individual's emotions or on physical health. It is suggested 6 "that anxiety and despair can be lethal, confidence and hope, life-giving." In order to better understand the Obeah-medical 'connection', the following are some medical case histories attributed to Obeah. The patients cited are all Bahamians (white and black).

### **Case History No. 1**

Ruth, a 25-year-old, very attractive girl, was referred to me by her physician because of depression, but also severe headaches and lethargy of 2 1/2 weeks duration. She had not responded to traditional medication and it was suspected by her ,doctor that she was still suffering from shock because her boyfriend of 5 years, who lived with her and who was the father of two of her three children, suddenly, one morning, just got up and left her.

+ + +

On examination, the patient was depressed, somewhat confused and expressed suicidal ideas. She was given medication by a psychiatrist colleague of mine, given two weeks sick leave, and seen by me on a twice-weekly basis for supportive psychotherapy.

She responded fairly well and was soon fit to return to work. However, she was still very much in love with her boyfriend and would occasionally continue to brood, withdraw and sometimes have tearful sessions.

One afternoon, about three weeks after she had returned to work, she telephoned me and, with urgency, announced that she had to see me immediately.

I saw her the same day, and she appeared to be excited, a little apprehensive, but soon, after some hesitation, began to talk.

"You see, Doc, I have a Haitian friend who sells me 'numbers' and I told him about my situation. He has a friend whom he believes can help me and he wants me to see him. You mind?"

"Not really - any help you can receive is appreciated. What kind of man is he?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know; but some o' dese Haitians have powers you know".

"Do you believe in Obeah?" I prodded.

"Well, I don't; believe that people can fix ya as such, but Doc, they can poison ya. Right now, I'm so desperate to have my boyfriend back, I'll try anything."

"O.K., you go and see this man. As you know, I'm very interested in Obeah. I would like you to tell me exactly what he does to you and asks you to do. We'll see if his Obeah works!"

The following day, she came to see me. She had a quizzical and somewhat skeptical look on her face, and couldn't explain herself.

"Come man.\* - tell me what happened?" I asked.

"Well, I went to see this man. He looks funny."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he just stares and stares at you. He can hardly speak English and he looked as if he was kinda drunk or 'high' on something. Anyhow, I told him what happened to me and also told him that I really needed help. After he listened to my story..."

"Wait," I asked, "Did you tell him that you were being treated by me?"

"No—I told him that I was taking medicine from a doctor but I didn't mention any name or tell him that you were seeing me. Anyhow, he then asked me what I wanted him to do for me. Well, I tell him I didn't want anything done to me, but that I still loved my boyfriend very much and wanted him back 'home'. This Obeah man just sat very quietly listening to me, and after I was finished, he said, 'O.K., I help you. You got money? - It'll cost you \$150.' I asked him if he'd take a cheque and he said that that was money. Anyhow, Doc, the man told me

that all I had to do was one thing - ha, ha! Lord, Doc, I can't tell you what the man tell me to do."

"Come on, now, you've never been shy with me. You can tell me anything—you know that."

\* Bahamians use the term "man" (pronounced mon) (male or female) often.

123

+ + +

"Man, Doc, this sound so stupid!!"

"Tell me what the man wants you to do."

"Well, O.K. Well, he say that I must go home, take a tea bag, cut it open very carefully then—Lord, Doc, you really want me to tell you what this man want me to do?"

"Yes—go on, don't be shy. Tell me!"

"O.K.—Well, he tell me to pluck two hairs from my pussy \*, one from either side and then put these plucked hairs in the tea bag, then sew it back up very carefully—Lord, Doc, I shame! "

"Go on—what else he tell you to do?"

"Well, he say I mus' offer my boyfriend some tea the next time he comes to the house to bring money for the children."

"Then what?" I asked, excitedly.

"Nothing else—the Obeah man tell me that that's all I have to do—he'll do the rest. He tell me if I carry out his instructions, my boyfriend will come back to me."

"O.K.—now listen carefully to me. You carry out the instructions and we'll see if this man's Obeah can work. "

The following Wednesday my patient telephoned me and said that her boyfriend didn't come around that Saturday, but came around the Tuesday night. She asked him if she could get something for him to drink. He said he wanted a beer. Well, she told him that she had no beers, but he said that he would take some coffee—anyhow, they agreed that she would fix him a nice cup of tea because that's all she had. She drew the tea with her 'prepared' tea bag, and her boyfriend drank it all down.

"Well, we'll now wait and see what happens. Be sure that as soon as something happens, even if you have to come to my home, you come and tell me.

On Sunday morning, very early, my doorbell rang. On opening it, there was my patient—very excited.

"He home, Doc—true to God, Doc—I went out to do some shopping on Saturday afternoon and when I got back home, at about 7:30 p.m., there was my boyfriend, lying in my bed. With tears in his eyes he said that he was foolish to leave me and that he'd never do it again and that he still love me. Lord, Doc, what you think—this Obeah man really powerful."

I was rather shocked at this news, and told her to "play it cool" and we'll see what happens.

This incident happened in 1974. This patient recently saw me in a supermarket and she told me that her boyfriend is still with her—in fact, he is so attentive to her that he is with her everywhere she goes—actually, she said: "Doc, he fix too good 'cause I kinda tired of him always following me around."

She also related to me that in talks with her boyfriend, she asked him what made him decide to come back to her. He told her that he suddenly started thinking about their past life together, and a funny urge came over him and he couldn't help himself from returning. This

\* Vagina (or "crabby" as used colloquially)

124

+ + +

story, however, does not end here. I wanted to visit this Obeah man myself and obtained his name and telephone number from my patient. The conversation went as follows:

"Hello! "

"Hello! "

"May I speak to Mr.—"

"Speaking. What you want?"

"Well, I have a problem and a friend of mine that you helped gave me your name and telephone number and told me that you can help me. She told me that you solved a problem for her recently."

"What's her name?"

"Miss Ruth—"

"Oh, yes, I know her" —long pause.

"Hello—Hello!"

"I here. I go nowhere. What your name?"

"My name is William James", I lied.

"Mr. James—I don't know what you want but you got no problem. You wan' see me for something else. I tink you lying to me."

"Why you getting on like that, man. You think I'd call you and tell you that I have a problem if I didn't have a problem?"

"I sorry, Sir, if you no got problem, I can't help you. You no got no problem. If you wan' see me for something, you must need something from me."

'O.K. - can I see you anyhow?"

"What's your real name?" (Man! This guy is sharp!)

"O.K. I'll come clean; I'm Dr. McCartney and I was treating Miss Ruth - I would like to talk to you about Obeah."

"Ah—I know something funny. I have no time to see you. When I ready for you I call you. Bye!"

With that he hung up the telephone. He hasn't called me yet!

## Case History No. 2

Leila was a hard-working lady, who initially started selling food to civil servants in government offices and also on Bay Street. Through her hard work and determination, she built up a food catering service and also did farming. She was intelligent, thrifty, a hard worker and was liked by everybody. She married a man who was also a hard worker, but used to drink too much sometimes and although Leila was disturbed by her husband's drinking, her business and family life was not too seriously affected.

Leila had money in the bank, but like many Bahamians, kept large sums of money in her house \* for emergency purposes.

\* Inside mattresses, in tin pans, buried in the ground, nailed between partitions of houses - are all famous money hiding places in the Bahamas.

125

+ + +

Leila was thinking about expanding her business and formulated a plan that she would take to the bank hoping that she could borrow money. She got up very early one morning, went to her hiding place to get her money and, to her horror, the money was gone! She and her family searched everywhere and couldn't find the money. She finally called in the police and after a few weeks of investigation, could not find the money, nor did they have any theory as to how it was either stolen or lost. Leila was extremely upset and decided that she had to find out, by any means available, how her money had disappeared.

Leila believed in Obeah and was advised by a friend to go to Haiti and see a man that he knew.

She journeyed to Haiti, and saw a man who told her that, unfortunately, he couldn't tell her the name of the person who stole the money, but that the culprit would be struck blind!

Leila paid the man, and returned to the Bahamas to see whether the Obeah man was successful in finding the person who stole her hard-earned money.

To her horror, at the exact moment that she was informed by the man in Haiti that the culprit would go blind. Leila's husband became suddenly blind. He confessed that he had stolen the money and Leila, although angry and disappointed, didn't want her husband to remain blind. She went back to Haiti, saw the Obeah man \*, but he told her that, unfortunately, he could not reverse the blindness.

The husband consulted an eye specialist, but, at the time of writing, he is still blind.

I discussed this case with Dr. Ken Knowles, a Consultant Ophthalmologist, who did not initially see him, but knew about this story and obtained the medical history of Leila's husband, who



was seen in 1957 at the Eye Wing of the Princess Margaret Hospital. He was 36 years old, and been given medical tests (e-g. V.D.R.L. etc.) all of which were negative.

He had a history of drinking, but not that much to appreciably affect his eye sight. He was diagnosed as having "Optic Atrophy".

Dr. Knowles explained that "Optic Atrophy" is very common in the West Indies, but it is a gradual illness, with progressive loss of sight. Dr. Knowles thought it unusual that this man would suddenly go blind without any previous history, and at such an early age. Subsequent doctors' notes on his medical file indicate that his right eye was blind, with no reaction to light and his left eye went from 6-60 to 3-60 and finally to 2-60 vision when he was last seen in 1958.

I asked Dr. Knowles whether he thought that this Obeah man in Haiti really "fixed" this man to go blind.

With his usual twinkle in his eyes and his oftentimes sarcastic humour, Dr. Knowles replied that it was an unusual case, under unusual circumstances, and who was he to finally become an eye expert in Obeah!

My investigations have proved that the facts, as related in my story, are correct—the medical reports attest to the sudden blindness of Leila's husband, but whether it was a coincidence or whether it was the power of that Obeah man in Haiti, is left for the reader to decide!

\* Actually a voodoo priest.

126

+ + +

### **Case History No. 3**

It was a typical Friday afternoon in 1941—school had been let out at noon, and by two o'clock, all shops, banks and business places had closed for the traditional half-day.

My father, a custom's officer, used to arrive home at about two o'clock—the family would have lunch and after my father's visit to the toilet (to do what comes naturally and read the daily papers) and a little 'nap', we would all go for a drive, visit friends or go to either of two little farms that we had on Blue Hill Road or Wulff Road: My father was late in coming home—he hadn't telephoned, and my mother (a natural worrier) was becoming concerned. Her fears were soon relieved when at about 2:45 p.m. the car horn blew (as it was my father's custom as he turned our corner) and my father arrived. When he entered the house, we could see that he was visibly shaken and there were looks of anxiety, puzzlement and concern in his face.

"What's the matter, dear?" My mother asked.

"Dear, I've just seen the most frightening thing in my life. There is P----- from Tarpum Bay who has been brought here for medical treatment. She and her parents are living in our house in Hay Street. I went to see them and, Dear, I just saw P-----, and she is passing glass from her mouth and nose. I just can't believe it—it's not possible, but I just saw it with my own eyes. I don't understand it. They tell me that she has been Obeahed, but you know I don't believe in that stuff. But I do know something, I just saw glass coming from P-----!"

My mother listened to my father in disbelief, but she, unlike my father, was somewhat superstitious—she was a great believer in dreams and things that could happen, e.g. if she laughed too much (usually at my father's jokes and antics) she would suddenly become serious and say "I'm going to cry soon" or "we'll soon be hearing some bad news". She also believed in blackbirds, being a bad omen. Anytime she saw birds around her house, she would say "Someone's going to die soon". In fact, my father told me that the afternoon before my mother had a stroke and died suddenly, after three days of illness, she saw some blackbirds in an almond tree in our back yard. She looked at my father and said "They are here for me - I'm going to die soon." My father, just shrugged his shoulders and thought that my mother was up to her usual superstitious 'predictions' again. - Anyhow, my father decided to take my mother to see what he just saw, and I persuaded them to take me. When we got to our rented house in Hay Street, my mother felt that the experience could be too traumatic for me (I was only eight years old then) and they left me in the car.

About a half hour later, my parents returned to the car and they were both 'visibly shaken'. My mother told me that she had just seen the lady and glass was still coming from her mouth and nostrils. My father had a small piece of white glass in his hands and he gave it to me to feel.

"Throw it away, because if it is the result of Obeah, I don't want it in my house—don't want anything like that for my children to be exposed to."

For me, this experience was fascinating, and it didn't sound too extraordinary. We were being fed at that time all kinds of nursery rhymes and the "cow jumping over the moon" or Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck 'takling' and acting like humans, were all part of our fantasy world that programmed us to accept things like glass coming from the mouth or nostrils as

\* These areas, at that time, were very sparsely inhabited and consisted mainly of very thick bush. We used to plant corn, okras, pumpkins, watermelons, tomatoes and various types of peas and beans. There were also coconut trees and delicious jelly coconuts were always available.

127

+ + +

'normal'. Even though my parents, aunts, uncles and other relatives constantly talked about it, the incident soon passed from my mind.

In 1953, just before I left the Bahamas to enter St. John's University in Minnesota, my father asked me to go to Eleuthera and visit my grandmother, who was very ill. He thought that it

might be the last time that I saw her alive. Walking along the hard streets at Tarpum Bay, one day, a cousin of mine pointed to a lady sweeping out the church (gospel hall) and said that it was P-----, the lady that passes glass. My memory was jolted back to that Friday afternoon in 1941, and I was sufficiently curious to go and speak with her.



*Obeah practitioners' special 'instrument' for predictions. This bottle and mixture was obtained from "her school" and cost her \$500. In late August when I visited her, she looked at this bottle and said that a storm was travelling towards the Bahamas but that it would not affect the Bahamas. Three weeks after she told me this, a storm was in fact travelling towards the Bahamas and we were placed on a storm alert. As she predicted, it didn't effect the Bahamas.*

+ + +

"Hi, I'm 'Lil Tim' \* , May Dorn's grandson. How are you?"

"All right, thank God." She replied.

"I hope I'm not offending you or bringing up something that I'm sure you would like to forget, but I've heard about your terrible experience with glass coming out of your body." "Yes, Sir, it comes out of my mouth, ears and sometimes when I comb my hair, small pieces of glass come out."

"Does it hurt you?"

"At first it did, but now I use to it."

"When last did it happen to you?"

"Oh! 'bout three years ago."

What is causing this to happen?! - I asked, "Do you eat glass?"

"Oh, no Sir, I don't eat glass."

"Well, how do you explain what is happening to you?"

"I don't know, Sir - they say I fix!"

She then told me how one time a piece of glass protruded from the side of her left ear and wouldn't come out for several days. When it finally fell out, it left a scar. She showed me the scar and I ran my fingers over it. She then bade me 'bye' and with a "Say hello to Timmie", abruptly turned away to continue her cleaning.

Naturally, while obtaining information for this book, I got back on the case of the 'glass passer'. Members of her family that I've met, without exception, confirm the story. I have tried, without success, to obtain pieces of the glass, but no one seems to have kept them.

This lady is still alive and lives in Nassau, but the family that she lives with refuses to let me see her.

To authenticate this story, I wrote to Dr. Michael M. Gerassimos who had seen this phenomenon. Dr. Gerassimos practiced medicine on the island of Eleuthera for many years and is now stationed at the island of Inagua. I received the following letter from him the 14th July, 1975 :

"Dear Doctor McCartney.

"Thank you for your letter dated 2nd July, 1975. Regarding your request, the following are the facts, as I recall:

"After going to Eleuthera in 1960 to reside and work. I became friendly with Mr. - at Tarpum Bay and sometime after, i.e. one or two years after that, he told me about a girl who, from time to time, 'passed glass' from her mouth, ears, nostrils and/or skin. I am not sure about her name but I think it was ----- + and she lived not far from—Club. I was so intrigued by this phenomenon that I asked Mr. - to let me know at any time, night or day, when it was happening, in order for me to witness it and, sure enough, he called me and I went to Tarpum Bay.

\* I am named after my father and everybody, especially from Eleuthera, used to call me 'Lil Tim' (Little Tim), distinguishing me from my father "Big Tim" - my 6' 4 1/2" notwithstanding!

+ The name that he gave IS in fact the lady that this case history is about.

129

+ + +

"The girl was lying down at home with several curious people (including myself!) present. Appearing from one nostril (possibly both?) was a piece of glass that seemed to be coming out and, upon waiting, it did in fact move down. Its passage was assisted by some coaxing from me with a forcep, and in this process she received a minimal laceration of the nostril. Apart from this, which I had caused, there was in fact no injury or bleeding and this agreed with the story I had been told, i.e. the glass was passed without any bleeding! The size of the piece was 1" - 1 1/2" long with diameter the same size as the opening of the nostril, i.e. it filled the nostril and it was rough and elongated. Unfortunately, I did not retain the specimen produced. I certainly saw it happen. My appraisal of the event is that the girl was a fairly simple person and a bit backward, perhaps lacking in affection and attention. I considered a possible explanation was that on a previous occasion she may have accidentally pushed a piece of glass into one of the orifices, or done so by chance, while in a somewhat hysterical or emotional state, and that following this she became the centre of attention and had a lot of visitors. Subsequently, this action was repeated occasionally as a subconscious action which brought her attention and satisfaction. I do not believe it was a conscious deception on her part. I suggested my explanation to several people in Tarpum Bay, including Mr.— and none accepted it. But I cannot think of another explanation that I can accept. What is your opinion?"

My investigations have not proved Dr. Gerassimos' hypothesis and all those people close to her attest that she has been under constant surveillance and there is no evidence of her pushing glass into any of her bodily orifices. Also, when she has been ill and had her hair combed, some days on occasion, long slivers of fine glass would be combed out of her hair, coming from her scalp and other days, there were none: and all the time she was kept indoors because she was ill and had absolutely no access to glass, especially of the type and variety that 'passed' from her.

This lady is not the only one with a history of 'passing glass' in the Bahamas. The Tribune of June 8th, 1938 had the following headline:

"Strange Tale from Eleuthera. Commissioner \* sees Glass Issue From Woman's Body."

The article reports:

"A strange tale is released by Commissioner Ronald Malone of Eleuthera of a curious case at Palmetto Point in which fifteen year old Dorothy Gordon has been turned into a natural glass factory. Attention was first drawn to the case when small glass crystals started coming from the nostrils of the girl. Dr. Fields was called, the story says, and medical science had an explanation for the unusual disorder, but when the neck of a beer bottle came out of the woman's chest and the bottom and side of a gin bottle literally oozed out of her breast, it presented a major phenomenon that no science could explain.

"The woman came to Nassau last week, soon after this attack and the Commissioner has brought a collection of the glass to the city on this trip. This strange incident was also witnessed by Mr. W. B. Johnson + Government Tomato Inspector, who has just returned from Eleuthera.

"When I saw her,' Mr. Malone told a Tribune representative, 'She was passing a piece of glass from each nostril, one ear and her breast. The piece that came from her ear was one inch wide and this was two days coming. She suffered great pain, but there was no tearing of the

\* A commissioner is the official government representative on the Family Islands. He is usually the combination of judge, justice of the peace, marriage officer, sometimes local 'doctor' and the administrator.

+ Mr. W. B. Johnson has since died, but I have heard him and my father talk about the 'passing glass' phenomenon.

130

+ + +

flesh and no blood, except when she coughed up two pieces from her throat. Then she spat a little blood. She seems to know when a piece of glass is coming. She goes to bed and after it has passed, she is quite happy and goes back to her work. The strange thing about the case is that where there is a natural opening, I could see glass coming from the top of her nose, but in cases where there is no natural opening in the skin, I could not see where the glass came from. It just oozed out of her skin. Dr. Fields and I spent three days at the settlement trying to discover an explanation. We even spied on her through a hole in the partition, but all she did was groan and worry around in the bed while the glass was coming out. This lasted for a week,' the Commissioner said. 'An explanation? I can't explain it. I left the room in horror when I first saw the case but I soon went back and both the doctor and I tried to discover the cause, without success. Dr. Fields said that the glass from her head was a chemical substance which crystallized after exposure to air, but he could not explain the manufactured glass that came from her body. She tells me that she passed half of a lamp chimney from the centre of her head at Tarpum Bay two years ago. Her mother says that she has passed as high as fifty pieces of glass in one spell. I don't know about this. After seeing this case, however, I shouldn't be surprised if she passed a demijohn. The woman claims that she got a dose of Obeah that was set for her mother."

"It is said that the disorder has ceased but up to the time of going to press this afternoon, the Tribune was unable to locate the victim for a personal interview. Mr. Malone showed the Tribune representative a box of specimens he had with him. The glass from the ears and nostrils were white; but the two bottlenecks were green in colour and perfectly shaped."

Seven days after the Tribune had published this story, a Tribune reporter actually saw the incident of 'passing glass' happen. The story was reported in the Tribune, June 15th, 1938:

"Yesterday morning, a Tribune representative found Dorothy Gordon, a buxom Eleuthera girl who has come to Nassau to live. Miss Gordon has been the centre of wide interest lately in consequence of periodical attacks in which, according to an interview with Commissioner

Ronald Malone published in the Tribune last week. She passes glass from various parts of her body, including bottlenecks from her thighs and breasts.

"Yesterday, we published a short interview with the afflicted girl and the people with whom she is living promised to give the Tribune a call when another attack came on. Late yesterday afternoon—after the paper had already gone to press—we received the promised telephone call— a spell was coming on. Tribune representatives scurried over to the little cottage in Grant's Town, elbowed through a roomful of awestruck spectators and found the girl writhing and groaning on a bed. There were two pieces of green glass protruding from the nostrils. As we bent over to obtain a closer view, she coughed up three pieces of glass in assorted shapes amid hushed exclamations, and whispered softly in the presence of the strange phenomenon.

"Those two pieces in the nose should be pulled out,' a Tribune representative ventured.

"You can't do that, it'll drive her crazy,' a member of the family said, with some alarm.

"I wouldn't pull it out regardless,' a spectator observed laconically, 'that plague'll catch me flying.'

"And so—we leave the case open. The glass which protruded from her nose and that which came out of her mouth need not have originated in the body—and yet they might have. It is

131

+ + +

said that they often come through the skin - we cannot say that we have seen this phase of the singular manifestation.

"Today, crowds thronged the little lane to see the wonder girl who was reportedly still generating glass."

Miss Gordon, the 'glass passer', has since died, but Commissioner Malone is still alive, although retired as Commissioner.

In a speech to the Rotary Club of East Nassau in 1973, Commissioner Malone, in vivid detail recalled the incident that has just been reported. Unfortunately, in his many travels, he has mislaid the samples of the glass that he kept.

My investigations have found many people that confirm these stories. They also tell of a lady that used to live through McCullough Corner West, who on occasion would have small insects (e.g. roaches) fall from her legs. I tried to find this lady, but up to press time for this book, have not been successful. Needless to say, all these incidents have been blamed on Obeah.

## Case History No. 4

Peter was a 16 year old student at one of the high schools in the Bahamas and referred to me because of 'odd behaviour'. He complained of 'hearing voices' and oftentimes, in class at school, a 'funny feeling' would come over him and the voices would tell him to curse bad words.

Peter's teacher stated that he was a good student and that she had known him for about two years. She couldn't understand his recent behaviour. She would be teaching a class, then all of a sudden Peter would start making grunting noises. When she would observe him, his eyes would 'roll over', he would begin to tremble, as if in a fit, and then the profanities would come.

My initial examination found a physically appropriate youth. He was well orientated, spoke coherently, and formed a good rapport. He was of average normal intelligence (as scored on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale) and his Bender Gestalt drawings indicated good visual motor-perception and co-ordination without any manifestations of brain dysfunction. Responses of projective tests (e.g. T.A.T.) indicated some depressive traits but no psychopathology; yet, he heard voices and said that he was beginning to now 'see things.'

"Things like what?" I asked.

"Well, the other day, when I left school, I saw two men - one white and the other black. The black man was trying to push me in the middle of the road and the white man was trying to pull me back and protect me."

"How often does this happen?"

"Oh - 'eny now and den."

"Like once a week?—or twice a week? How often?"

"'Bout once a week, Doctor."

In spite of the results of Peter's psychological tests, I thought that he was either freaking out on drugs or that he was an early schizophrenic. However, there was no evidence to support the drug theory and so I referred Peter to Dr. John Spencer \* for another opinion. Peter was placed on medication and I was asked to follow him up psychotherapeutically.

\* Dr. Spencer has since left Sandilands and, at present, is a Consultant Psychiatrist in Perth, Australia.

I saw Peter on a once-weekly basis, and even though his bizarre behaviour in the classroom had been modified, he continued to hallucinate, but I never saw him during one of these 'spells' as his relatives used to describe these episodes.



One Saturday morning, the doorbell to my home rang, and Peter's mother, very excitedly, stated that Peter was going through a 'spell'. He was lying in the back seat of their car and was mumbling incoherently with the occasional 'cuss' word. I told them to take him to Sandilands and I would meet them at my office there. When I got to Sandilands and saw Peter again, he was definitely psychotic and I decided to admit him for treatment, my tentative diagnosis was then confirmed in my own mind and I labeled him a schizophrenic. Just before the nurse came to take him to the ward, Peter let out a blood curdling cry and fell on my couch mumbling, "Leave me alone - oh, Lord, save me - leave me alone."

"Who are you talking to, Peter?" I asked.

Peter paid me no mind \*, but kept talking, "It's in my gran'ma's yard—it's in my gran'ma's yard."

"Whose yard?" I asked his mother, who had, herself, now gotten into a very emotional state and was repeating, "Jesus Saviour, pilot me through life's tempestuous sea—oh Jesus, —my son gon' die—oh, Jesus, don't let ma son die!"

"What is he talking about?" I asked, again, in a very stern and official voice.

"I don' know, Doctor -I don' know;"

"Peter, what's happening to you?"

"I gon' die if dey don't take it from gran'ma yard," Peter exclaimed.

"Take what?" I continued to ask.

"Take the cross from the yard—it under the dilly tree—oh, Lord, dey done fix me."

By this time, I had become more than interested in what Peter was saying and really scolded myself for not exploring the Obeah theory before.

"Where is this cross?"

"In Gran'ma's yard, under the dilly tree on the eastern side. The black man I been seeing put it there to kill me—Lord, I gon' dead—take up the cross—take up the cross—take up the cross -" he began to repeat over and over again.

By this time, the nurse had arrived, so had Dr. Spencer. They then took Peter to the ward and tranquilized him. After he had left; I talked with his mother and asked her whether she knew what Peter was talking about.

"Where is Peter's grandmother?"

"Doc, he only have one grandmother alive and dat's my ma, but she lives on Cat Island."

"Peter ever been to Cat Island?"

"NO, Doctor."

"You ever talk about Obeah around him?"

"Yes—there are some neighbours who done been fix and Peter know 'bout dem—sure he know 'bout Obeah but we never say anything wrong with our family."

\* Colloquially, "no attention"

+ + +

"Is there a Sapodilla tree in your ma's yard?"

"I think so, Doctor, but I ain' been home for 'bout five years now - yeah - there's a dilly tree in the yard—yes—dat's right, there's a big dilly tree in the yard, but it so near to the next man property dat my mudder and dis man does row 'bout who tree it is."

"Listen here," I continued. "Can you go to Cat Island and look fbr the tree and even dig around the tree and see if you see any cross around? I'm interested in this and I just want to follow this case up, Maybe we can help Peter better if we find this cross."

Peter's mother went to Cat Island and, in digging around the Sapodilla tree, found buried in a black piece of cloth, a cross made from the middle stem of the 'pondtop' \* tree. The mother told me that her mother and her mother's neighbour had a long-standing feud over property and it is believed that this man set a 'fix' for the grandmother. How her son Peter got this fix, and he had never once visited Cat Island, was a mystery to all.

From a medical point of view, Peter was shortly discharged from hospital and, up to the time of writing, he has never since hallucinated, or acted in his bizarre fashion, or been psychotic. He was taken off medication and, at present, he has a responsible job in a local hotel.

Three basic questions must be asked:

- (1) How did Peter predict that there was a cross buried in his grandmother's yard with such precision, when he had never visited Cat Island and his mother never talked about a Sapodilla tree. (In fact, when I asked her about this Sapodilla tree she wasn't sure that there was one in the yard). Also the grandmother was unaware that there was anything under her Sapodilla tree.
- (2) There was a sudden onset of Peter's bizarre behaviour and a sudden rehabilitation. If he was schizophrenic, not only would he have to be maintained on medication but surely in five years there should be some manifestation of his illness.
- (3) What accounts for this behaviour? Was he 'fixed'; did he experience an hysterical episode; was the medication sufficient to 'cure' him so suddenly or was this whole episode just a coincidence? What do you think?"

\* I'm afraid I don't know the botanical name for this 'palm-type' tree that grows almost wild in the Bahamas. Bahamians use the leaves for plaiting and making straw crafts. Fishermen also use it to string fish and conchs.

+ + +

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL ASPECTS OF OBEAH SECTION II

### Obeah and Folklore

Three years ago, a Bahamian musician, resident in New York, suddenly burst on the international and Bahamian scene with songs that all Bahamians could readily identify with. He was Tony MacKay, a Cat Island-born Bahamian who called himself "Exuma, the Obeah Man". Kifaru Magazine 1 described him—"Everything is a bit mysterious about Exuma, from his outfits to his music, his paintings, his poems, his life. 'Exuma is one.' he has written. 'Exuma is three. One, two, three, they all can see.' Also, 'his time is short, his time is long. Exuma ain't right and Exuma ain't wrong.' Also, 'Exuma took his wooden hand and scorched his mark across the land.' Mysterious."

1, KIFARU, "Tony MacKay is Exuma the Obeah Man", VOL. 3, NO. 1, 1974, BOX 2942, Freeport, Grand Bahama.

134

+ + +

It is significant also, that three years ago, Obeah had reached its 'height' on the comeback road in the Bahamas and Exuma's rhythms and songs not only highlighted a practice that was embedded into every Bahamian's psyche, it provided a meaningful departure point for the search for cultural expression and a projection of African beliefs that had relevance to a newly independent Bahamas.

The practice of Obeah, the supernatural and cultic activity occur in the writings of West Indian authors from all ethnic groups.

Ramchand 2 writes: "The degree of prominence given to them varies from novel to novel; and the authors' attitude to their raw material differ widely. J. B. Emtage introduces negro terror of the fetish in a mocking and comic spirit ('Brown Sugar', 1966) but another white West Indian, Geoffrey Drayton, uses Obeah differently in the novel of childhood ('Christopher', 1959). The boy's increasing involvement with the negro world around him, and his growing up process, are subtly correlated with his development, away from the exotic view, to an understanding in psychological terms of how Obeah operates. Sociological truth and a comic intention are both served in V.S. Naipaul's version of Obeah in 'The Suffrage of Elvira' (1958)."

Ismith Khan, in his novel 'The Obeah Man' (1964), describes Zampi as follows: "An Obeah Man had to practice at distancing himself from all things. He had to know joy and pleasure as he knew sorrow and pain, but he must also know how to withdraw himself from its torrent, he must be in total possession of himself, and at the height of infinite joy he must know with all of his senses all that lives and breathes about him. He must never sleep the sleep of other men, he must have a clockwork in his head. He must, at a moment's notice, be able to shake the rhythm from his ear, to hold his feet from tapping. He must know the pleasure in his groin and he must know how to prevent it from swallowing him up."

There has not been any attempt by foreign or Bahamian authors to deal with Obeah in the Bahamian setting. The practice is cursively mentioned in novels and history books, but there is nothing to approximate the work of Naipaul, Khan, Sylvia Wynter, Orlando Patterson or Edward Seaga's exploration of Obeah, religion or cults in the Caribbean.

The superstitions and beliefs of the Bahamian people have been perpetuated by 'word of mouth' and 'old stories' that have been passed on from generation to generation by parents, grandparents and relatives.

These stories, superstitions and myths are mixtures of African and Euro-American beliefs. Ford 3 states that "Myths, in the sense of bases for religion, are not extensive in the Bahamas, although ritual myths exist; superstitions, as deterrents, are a different matter. In fact, they act almost as strongly upon our folkways as social sanctions do in any small society. It is possible to trace the degree to which superstitions control the actions of people, if one reasons along the theory that 'education' or enlightenment usually dispel the fears that are naturally a part of ignorance. Needless to say, superstition was also the seed-bed for the birth of Obeah, witchcraft or feeack, as our earliest West Indian immigrants referred to it." Ford continues: "Obeah men and women thrived well in the early part of the century. People went to them (some secretly at night) to have certain events and conditions 'fall' at set times, on selected

2 RAMCHAND, Kenneth, "Obeah and the Supernatural in West Indian Literature", Jamaica Journal Vol. 3, No. 2, June 1969. Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica.

3. FORD, Dorothy, "New World Groups: Bahamians", Printed by the Nassau Guardian (1844) Ltd., 1971, Page 16.

135

+ + +

people. The fact that a great number of these events did 'fall' on the parties, envied or cursed, only added to the mischief."

Curry wrote in 1930 that Bahamians' "folk tales and their dances reveal traces of African ancestry. Occasionally, you may hear of a form of 'black magic' being attempted, but this is rare. The people are religiously inclined, in a childlike way; although, on the other hand, they can be incredibly superstitious. Their group dances consist usually of shuffling movements with accompanying chanting and a beating of time with the hands; in the dances where circles are formed, the chief performers are in the centre. There is a tom-tom rhythm to the dances." 4

'Old stories', 'music', 'rhythms' and 'Obeah stories' have always been integral parts of the Bahamian way of life. Religious beliefs, ideas of references to heaven, hell, sperrids, angels and the Devil, abound in the stories and songs of Bahamians. "Morals and morale-building were so greatly interwoven that one aspect cannot be separated from the other: the myths contributed greatly to the music, the music belonged to the people and lyrics were improvised for the purpose of morale-building. Adlibbing or 'rigging', as the old Bahamians termed it, went on for hours at a time and supplied fun for all concerned. Morals controlled the songs of necessity: the children could not be despatched anywhere (all members of the family were within shouting distance and facilities were close at hand) so they were in on every move the adults made. As children were not aware of anything implied in the songs, the composers were as adept as Doane in disguising the real meaning of words, so when we sung in imitation of them, 'Mama look up in daddy's face all night long,' it never entered our

guileless minds that mama and daddy were doing anything else but sitting down facing each other, talking all night. The image of adults sitting up, talking all night, was a familiar one; the other action was not." 5

In trying to understand the relevance of Obeah and folklore, one must go back to the source and examine the Bahamians' ancestors (Africans) who were uprooted from their societies and cultural settings and placed in a new cultural environment. Added to this transposition was the other Euro-American influences that moulded the African through religious missionary zeal, and both clerical and secular education to conform to that colonial ideal. There were gradual displacements of African names, beliefs, superstitions, foods, festivals and holidays. "Since the object of the plantocracy was to retain its wall of social and political authority in the Caribbean, it supported these two 'missionary' drives with social legislation designed to prevent the former slaves from achieving very much in the community. Their voting rights were restricted, their socio-economic mobility curtailed, and their way of life brought under subtle but savage attack. Shango, Cumfa, Kaiso, Tea-meeting, Susu, Jamette—carnival—all had to go." 6

Surely, the suppression of the Bahamian-African's cultural expression was discouraged. To begin with, the majority 'house slaves', christianized and emulating their masters, looked upon African cultural expression as being 'pagan'. The minority 'field slaves' were not sufficiently tribally strong to find common grounds for expressions. Except for the islands of Cat Island, Exuma and Andros, where the retention of African practices were strongest, the majority of Afro-Bahamians followed strongly Euro-American cultural traditions.

It is significant though, that through research, Bahamians are realizing the importance of the "remoteness" of the Family Islands. Slaves and free Africans who were concentrated in

4. CURRY, Robert A., "Bahamian Lore-Folk Tales and Songs," Paris, 1930.

5. FORD, Dorothy, op. cit. Pg. 16.

6. BRAITHWAITE, Edward Kamu, "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature", op. cit. pg. 75 and 76.

isolated "pockets" in these islands, maintained their culture - the expression of which, today, are represented in an almost unchanged art form.

These islands free from Euro-American cultural infusions that invaded New Providence and Eleuthera, for example, never projected expressions that were found on Southern U.S.A. Slave plantations. Comparatively, in other West Indian Islands where slaves escaped to the "interior", almost "unchanged" cultural expressions can be found.

Bahamian rhythms have been compared very much to Brazilian rhythms, although in Brazil, Portuguese influence and traces of indigenous Indian models make interesting rhythm expressions.

There were generally four annual holidays during slavery: Christmas, Boxing Day, New Year's Day and Easter. Both master and slaves participated in these 'festivals'. After slavery was abolished, Fox Hill Day when only those of African descent celebrated, and August Monday (Emancipation Day) were added to the people's festivals, although Fox Hill Day was not a public holiday.

There was no retention of any African festival as such in the Bahamas. No yam festival or river (or water) festivals were commemorated. The Bahamas never enjoyed such outstanding harvests of yams as to occasion the celebrating of them. Harvests of sponges, pineapples, tomatoes and conchs have been sung about, and Bahamians improvised words and music as they suited the current events.

Harvest time was celebrated as a religious festival of thanksgiving by the white population (mostly American) and was not a public holiday. It was also incorporated into the church services of the majority Black Christian denominations on a seasonal basis. This was not unusual since the major denominations for blacks in the Bahamas were started by free American Blacks who had been converted to Christianity.

In "A Relic of Slavery" (Life on a Bahamian plantation) the great festivity of Christmas and the lesser celebration at harvest, gain mention but the day, Sunday, itself, is totally omitted except that some Sundays the slaves still had work to do. It is interesting to note, however, that there were family prayers every morning on this plantation, which were attended by the 'domestic' servants.

Emancipation Day was a great holiday for the Bahamian. "Everyone ditched work and headed for Fox Hill by whatever means of transportation he could muster. For the majority, this meant walking; therefore, the trip from Grant's Town, Bain Town and Conta Butta \* started early in the morning along the winding foot-path of what is now Wulff Road and Bernard Road. The weeks of preparation undergone by the various tribes resulted in a day of highstrung festivities: dances, quadrilles, concerts and jumping-dance. The entire community moved round as a whole, going from one church to lodge hall to the next, thus allowing for everybody to see everyone' else's performance prepared for the day."

By far, the greatest pre and post-slavery, celebration was Christmas when Bahamians had an almost 'free rein' to do their 'thing'. This fact persists even today!

The preparation of food and the preparation of the Junkanoo festival with the making of costumes, became a joint family neighbour venture. Unlike carnival in other West Indian

\*All African settlement on the island of New Providence.



*Gbaiero. the hanger of witches*



countries and countries with a strong Lenten tradition, when the celebrations precede Lent, carnival (or Junkanoo) is celebrated during the Christmas season with official Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

The original Junkanoo, reputed to be the corruption of John Canoe (reputedly an African or 'Gensinconnu' - meaning individuals with masks, is the strongest remnant of African tradition.

As previously postulated, the majority of Bahamians appear to have come from the Yoruba tribe, and early Junkanoo practices resemble costumes worn by individuals of the Egungun

139

+ + +

cult. The Yorubas, like most African tribes, worship their ancestors. This worship is based on the belief that the spirit of a human being never dies.

Egungun is a secret society of masqueraders headed by a hereditary chief called 'Alagba'. An Egun mask usually represents the spirit of a particular person and it is always the priest of



the Ifa oracle who will decide which spirit must receive special attention. The masks are of different types. Many consist of coloured cloth and leather, covering the whole body of the dancer, who looks out through a closely-knitted net. Some have actually got masks in front of the face, while others again wear a carving on top of the head.

Junkanoo is found in Jamaica and other of the smaller English-speaking Caribbean islands, although it would appear that the Bahamas has retained Junkanoo and projects this in a more elaborate fashion, and developed Junkanoo that is distinctly Bahamian.

Patterson 7 suggests that "John Canoe was originally derived either from one of the dances of West African secret societies or from the main dance of the band of hired entertainers, or, more likely, from both these sources." He continues that "Cassidy's \* etymology for John Canoe - the Ewe word meaning sorcerer - man or witch doctor - strengthens our case, when it is noted that witch doctors were often the heads of secret societies and, themselves, performed the main ritual dance performed."

Bahamian original Junkanoo dancers wore costumes of cloth or frilled paper.+Many of the 'masks' were just paintings on the facial skin itself, and the projection of the Obeah man was usually the one dressed in white with a white mask or paint on the face jester-like. There were also 'stilt' dancers, street dancers, clowns and acrobatic dancers. The Bahamian flavour was added by costumes made of sponges. These Junkanoo dancers were accompanied by the goombay\*\* drums (goat-skin stretched over a wooden frame and heated to obtain the maximum sound), whistles and another Bahamian adaptation, the cowbell.

From a comparative point of view, in Belize, British Honduras, the stilt-dancer, who appears in a parade at Christmas time, is called 'John Canoe' and in Barbados, the central figure of the Christmas masquerade parade used to be a stilt-dancer who controlled the dance with a tin rattle.

In discussing the interaction of cultures in the Caribbean, Beaubrun 8 states that "Whenever two cultures interact, some change is inevitable in both of them, and the change may be for good or bad. Dr. Stephen Proskauer, at one of our W.F.M.H. meetings, attempted to categorize such interactions using the terms acculturation, abculturation, synculturation, dysculturation.

'If my memory serves me right,' Beaubrun continues, 'acculturation refers to the beneficial growth of a culture by this contact. Abculturation would be where a culture loses by such contact. Synculturation is where both cultures grow and are improved by contact with each, other, and dysculturation where both are harmed by the interaction."

To fully understand Bahamian Obeah and folklore, the process of acculturation, which consists of acquiring another culture, losing most of a previous culture and the creation or adaptation of new cultural expressions, must be explained.

\* CASSIDY, F.G., "Jamaica Talk: Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica", London, 1961.

\* \* Gumbay in Jamaica; gombey in Bermuda.

+Another local adaptation was the use of sponges on a type of cloth netting worn over the body.

8. BEAUBURN. Michael, "Mental Health and the Interaction of Cultures in the Caribbean", Keynote address at the Biennial Conference of the C.F.M.H., Caracas, Venezuela, 27-7-75.

140

+ + +



*Some Egungun masks are made of cloth and leather*

141

+ + +



*Junkanoo Costumes*

## Junkanoo Costumes

142

+ + +

The acculturative process in Bahamian Obeah may be thought of in terms of:

### **(1) Total or nearly total African retentions**

e.g. retention of fetishes, drums, whistles and rattles, cowbells emphasis on rhythm and polyrhythms, use of animal blood in 'calling the spirit'.

### **(2) Afro-European syncretisms**

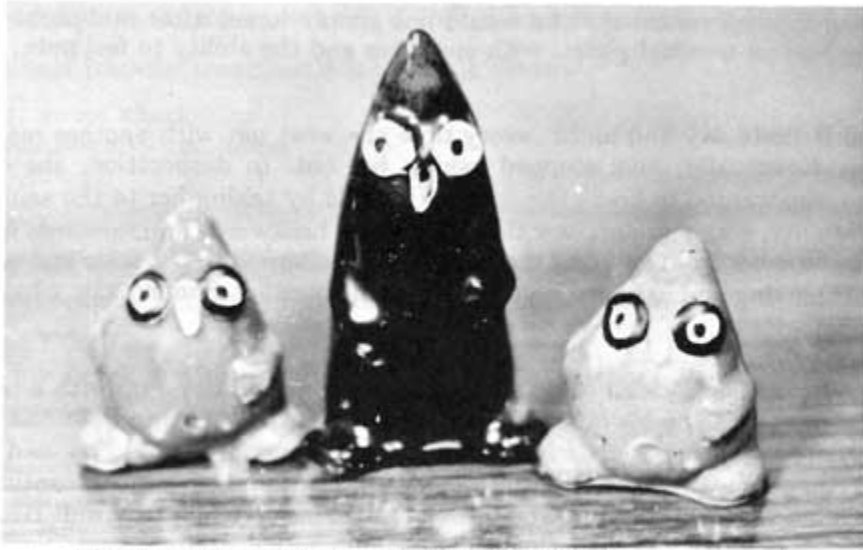
e.g. funerals, wakes, beliefs concerning sperrids, possession by spirits, the use of dreams in divining, folk tales.

### **(3) Euro-American borrowed traits and the reinterpretation of Euro-American cultural elements.**

e.g. the Bible, spirituals, hymns, revival, candles, the cross and crucifixes, incense, divination by gazing into a mirror, a glass of water or reading tea leaves, cutting the cards, reading the palms of the hands, religious prayers.

Curry, 9 in 1930, wrote about Bahamian folk tales and songs: "Their stories fall into two classes: those which are the fruit of their own imaginings and traditions, and those borrowed from such sources as the fairy tales in the English language and Aesop's Fables. Many of the

Bahamian stories will be found to have a marked similarity with those of the negroes of the southern states of America. It is indeed not always easy to distinguish the story of Bahamian origin from one which has been imported."



*Models of the legendary Bahamian Chiccharnies. Found primarily on the Island of Andros.*

Evidence of these stories are the Brer Bookie and Brer Rabbie stories that are of the animal—trickster—hero folk type. The 'chiccharnies' of Andros Island, are favourite mysterious-like, three-legged 'animals,' that resemble the 'leprechauns' of Ireland. They supposedly live in the

9. CLIRRY, Robert A. op. cite.

143

+ + +

silk cotton trees and get up to all sorts of mischief. The chiccharnie has become a favourite 'tourist' ornament, as replicas are made up in clay, glass and other memorabilia, with the varied stories surrounding them.

The most important Obeah folk tale, however (other than the millions of sperrid or ghost tales), is the Legend of Sammy Swain. This legend has been popularized by the brilliant Bahamian pianist composer, Clement Bethel, who has put this to music and dance.

"Sammy Swain was an ugly, old cripple who lived on Cat Island. He was unliked by the people of the settlement because of the hideousness of his person. He fell in love with a beautiful young girl called Belinda, who was a real 'village belle'. She was much sought after and consequently became very conceited. Sammy Swain fell desperately in love with the beautiful Belinda and summoned the courage to ask her to marry him. However, beautiful as Belinda may be, there was nothing kindly about her in her treatment of Sammy and she laughed in his face and told him, arrogantly, what an ugly, old fool he was. She also told him just how much she had to offer and how sought after she was as well. Sammy was furious at

the hard-hearted way in which she rebuked him and his offer of marriage, and threatened to sell his soul to the devil and come back and haunt her and stop her becoming the woman of another man.

The following day, Sammy's body was found with his head lying to the east and his face, therefore, facing west, which meant that he had done what he threatened to do. In one hand he had a hog's snout and in the other he had a ball which was half white and half black. These omens meant that whenever Sammy came to haunt, the snorting of a pig would precede his appearance and the ball meant that he would not simply haunt after mid-night but day and night. Sammy was an unusual ghost, with appetites and the ability to feel pain; he was also invisible.

He haunted Belinda day and night: every time she went out with another man something would happen. Eventually, men stopped asking her out. In desperation, she consulted an Obeah woman who wanted to break the spell on Belinda by taking her to the sanctuary of the church. But Sammy, very vigilant, saw this and moved backwards and forwards in front of the church door to stop her from entering the church. She collapsed to the floor and while she was lying there, old looking and haggard from the stress of haunting, Sammy saw what he had done to her and apologized.

Eventually, her father decided to do something about it and came up with a plan. The idea was to trap Sammy by using his favourite food as a lure and then to ship Belinda away from the island to Nassau as soon as possible. His favourite food was boiled fish heads, and so the father gathered the villagers together with cutlasses and these men laid in wait. Meantime, the pot of boiled fish heads was put on to cook and lure Sammy. And lure him they did! He came up and asked for a dish from them and the father told him, 'No, get away from here.' Sammy said that he would fix him if he didn't give him some and so he gave a plateful of this to Sammy. The idea was to strike at the direction of the fish as it travelled to invisible Sammy's mouth and kill him again. He did this but Sammy was only mildly wounded but the father called the villagers and they came running and striking out with their cutlasses and pursued the yelling Sammy back to the grave-yard. As he ran, he screamed out as every cutlass stroke hit home and he fell back into his grave and died a second death.

Meantime, Belinda was being put aboard the boat for Nassau.

She came to Nassau suffering from severe shock and probably a mild seizure of the heart and was admitted to hospital. By now, she had been through so much mental strain that her memory had gone. After months of rest and careful treatment, she, one day, discharged herself from hospital and disappeared. For three days her relatives searched the island of New Providence for her and eventually found her dead, lying by a hedge. On the other side of the hedge was a sow and her piglets and what had happened was that Belinda, seeing

the hog, suddenly regained her memory, and the horrible events on Cat Island came sweeping back to her and she died of a massive heart attack."

This is reputedly a 80-100 year old legend, but Mr. Clement Bethel, after giving a talk on the legend, was told afterwards by a member of the audience that 'Belinda' was, in fact, a great aunt of hers. So, like most legends, it is partially rooted in fact, more than likely.

Belinda was, also, more bound to Sammy Swain than she thought and, although repelled by him, probably became reliant on his ghost in a bizarre sort of way. Perhaps the freeing of herself from the spirit on his second death, caused the physical trauma more than the haunting and brought about Belinda's physical breakdown.

Folk songs of the Bahamas initially were more religious, linked to slavery and freedom, as evidenced by the many spirituals.

These spirituals were primarily brought to the Bahamas by the slaves coming with their masters from U.S.A. plantations. The Bahamian spiritual, however, has added features that Clement Bethel describes as the "rhyming spirituals." He believes that it is a Bahamian adaptation, with traditional lyrics, but the rhyming, exchange of voices and "call and answer" techniques are unique to the Bahamas and a definite adulterative component.

Many spirituals (mostly traditional) told about death:

"Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming forth to carry me home."

or,  
"In the sweet bye and bye,  
We will meet on that beautiful shore."

or, they were expressions of the feeling of God in their bodies:

"Every time I feel the spirit,  
Moving in my heart, I will pray."

Most secular songs, however, were linked to working songs, due to the type of economy of the islands, e.g. fishing, farming, sponging, etc.:

"Hoist up the John B Sail,  
See how the mainsails set.  
Send for the Captain ashore,  
Le'we go home. "

or for farming, e.g.:  
"Watermelon is spoiling on the vine."

There were also songs that were very much like the calypso songs, composed extemporaneously to cite some local event of scandal, politics, superstition, love, sex and marriage. e.g. :

"There's a brown girl in the ring,  
and she looks like a sugar in the plum.

or,  
"Love, love alone, cause King Edward to leave the throne."

or,  
"The Big Bamboo pleases one and all,"

or,  
"Obeah don' work on me."

Tony MacKay sings a lot about Obeah:

"I came down on a lightening bolt, nine months in my mama's belly.  
When I was born the midwife screamed and shout,  
I had fire and brimstone coming out of my mouth,  
I'm Exuma. I'm the Obeah Man."

Another song describing himself as the Obeah Man is:

"When I've got my big hat on my head,  
You know what I can raise the dead,  
When I got my stick in my hand,  
You know that I am the Obeah Man.  
If you got a woman and she ain't happy,  
Come and see me for gamalame,  
Take that gamalame and you make her some tea,  
And she will love you all the time, and  
When she got you running like a train on a track,  
Take some flour and you make some pap,  
That will give you strength in your back.  
I've sailed with Charon, day and night,  
I've walked with Hongamon,  
Hector Hippolite,  
Obeah, Obeah, Obeah, Obeah's in me,  
I drank the water from the firey sea."

Folk songs and music are linked very closely to the dance, and like Junkanoo, there are definite African dances that exist but also many Euro-American dance music and rhythms.



Many aficionados of the dance like to categorize the various types into ten parts, viz.: amorous, ritual, rustic, carnival, street, topical, pursuit, square, finger snapping and handkerchief.

Katherine Dunham has three simple divisions that I will adhere to: sacred (religious), secular (folk) and social (popular modern).

"In the West Indies, the African drum beat, always in 2-2 or 4-4 time, predominates in any classification of the dance, whether it be a sacred voodoo ritual, simple folk dance in the country, a lascivious 'son' in a Havana Rhumba palace, or the grotesque phantasmagoria of African revelry during Mardi Gras." <sup>10</sup>

10. LEAF, Earl, "Isles of Rhythm", A. S. Barnes & Co. New York. 1948, pg. 5.

146

+ + +

In the Bahamas, the predominant African dances are Jump-In (or Fire Dance) and Junkanoo.

The following table attempts to categorize the folk dance and music of the Bahamas under the headings of (1) Religious, (2) Secular and t 3) Social:

## **(A) RELIGIOUS**

### **(1) More purely African survivals**

- (a) Goombay
- (b) Voodoo-Obeah (from the influx of Haitians)

### **(2) More Afro-Christian survivals**

- (a) Revival/Pentecostal
- (b) Spirituals
- (c) Funeral marching

### **(3) Euro/American traditional hymns**

## **(B) SECULAR**

### **(1) Work orientated**

- (a) Digging
- (b) Fishing/boating
- (c) Packing (e.g. tomatoes)
- (d) Sponging
- (e) Launching Songs

### **(2) More Euro-African**

- (a) Quadrille
- (b) Heel and Toe Polka
- (c) Rake and Scrape



### **(3) More Afro-Bahamian/Caribbean**

- (a) Junkanoo ("Rushing")
- (b) Jump-In (Fire dance)
- (c) Conch style
- (d) Limbo
- (e) Goombay

## **(C) SOCIAL**

### **(1) More Euro-Bahamian survivals**

- (a) Ring Play
- (b) Plaiting the Maypole
- (c) Broom Dance
- (d) Military/marching

### **(2) More American/Caribbean survivals**

- (a) Calypso
- (b) Afro-Cuban (rhumba, bolero, cha! cha! mambo)

"Prior to the introduction of services for blessing ships and sailors by the Bishop in 1839, there was hardly a sailor in the Bahamas who went to sea without putting on an obeah-string for his protection against malignant evil spirits."

PASCOE, C. F. "Two Hundred years of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel". 1701. London: The Society's Office. 1901, p. 225.

147

+ + +

- (c) Meringue ("Skulling")
- (d) Jazz
- (e) Bossa Nova

### **(3) Present Day Popular Modern**

- (a) Rhythm and blues (soul, bump, getting down, funky, hustle etc.)
- (b) Reggae
- (c) Goomrock
- (d) Electric Junkanoo
- (e) Country and Western
- (f) Rock

148

+ + +

## **CHAPTER V**

### **A COMPILATION OF BAHAMIAN BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS**

Stories, superstitions and beliefs abound in the Bahamas and like all countries where there is human habitation, the traditions and stories, either by word of mouth, passed on from generation to generation or written, make up the colourful expression of people everywhere. This chapter compiles some of the popular lore of the Bahamas and by no means covers the

totality of the Bahamian experience. Many of these stories are found in other parts of the world although there may be many variations on the themes. This is not unusual because the 'lore' of Africa counted with the Euro-American influence portrays the acculturation of the many ethnic groups found in the islands.

Because of the change of life style of Bahamians, unless these stories are written down, they will soon be lost forever. In the 'old days', most families did not have television or radio, and they were self entertaining.

"As night set in there would be gradual change of positions with more adults joining in as the chillen fell into the background and slowly edged towards a step or fallen branch on which they sit while they defied sleep." <sup>1</sup>

Many tales were told to me by my Paternal Grandmother either when we visited Eleuthera or when she would visit Nassau. My Mother also told many tales of the islands to me as she used to rock me to sleep—of course when the seven other children came I couldn't enjoy my private 'rocking' any more and had to content myself to lie on the bed, 'scared like hell' at the ghost stories that she vividly related.

"The ghost tales told to us as children would comprise the world's largest collection as these were told in conjunction with the etiological tales, all children. believed that ghosts, spirits, and chiccharneys existed, they were evil, and they got you if you were naughty. Nobody took chances by daring their parents or the ghosts. It never entered one's head to prove whether they existed or not because there was no hope of returning from wherever you were taken as a result of naughtiness. Life was simple but good to children of that era and no one wanted to go to any place of no return." <sup>2</sup>

The boggaman \* was often used to get us to do what our parents wanted us to do or "he'll catch you." Also 'Jack-mi-Lantern', with glowing eyes and teeth caused many a fright!

Various aspects of life therefore, will be explored, with the many tales, superstitions and beliefs surrounding them.

## DREAMS

The Bahamian people believe in dreams, and are not hesitant to place an interpretation on their dream content. The most popular interpretations of Bahamian dreams are death,

1. Ford, Dorothy "New World Groups: Bahamians" 1971. Nassau Guardian, page 17.

2 Ford, Dorothy Ibid page 17.

\* Boogey man, that mythical individual, used to frighten children into doing chores, behaving or being put to bed. From a psychological point of view, it installs fear and apprehension in children at an early age.

marriage, forebodings of evil things or to win money especially in playing numbers or during the race track season when interpretation of numbers are important for winning. Dream manuals can be brought anywhere and people take their dreams very seriously.

Since one cannot dream without sleeping, there are also many superstitions about sleeping. For example, if a man finds himself suddenly and constantly sleeping during the day, and there is no sickness, his relatives and friends conclude that his wife and/or sweetheart is pregnant.

Dreams have influenced the history of the world. The Bible is rich with the influence of dreams. Joseph was called "The Dreamer". Jacob dreamed about a ladder going into Heaven. Joel II verse 28 claims that "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions."

Then, too, many dreams are found in literature. "A Mid Summer Night's Dream" by Shakespeare is well known in the Bahamas, and John Bunyan's dream that perpetuated "The Pilgrims' Progress" has been recognized as one of the world's great masterpieces.

Finally, dreams became part of the rehabilitative process in the exciting field of Psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud formulated the theory of dreams being the manifestation of the unconscious desires beliefs, etc., and play an important role in the technique of psychoanalysis where dreams symbolism aids in the interpretation and diagnosis of the individual's problem.

The following dream material are commonly used in the Bahamas:

## **ANGELS**

To dream that you are an angel or that you see angels is a very good sign. To dream that you see angels flying over you or your house, means that you will receive good news and have joy.

## **COLOURS**

**White** - If you dream of a white man or someone wearing white clothes or robes is a good sign. To dream of someone dressed in white and getting married, signifies that someone will soon die. To see white meat is good luck but also your teeth could fall out.

**Blue** - Peaceful and harmonious family relationships.

**Black** - To wear: a black dress or dream of a black man may mean marriage, bad luck or evil to one's children.

**Brown** - Accusations of dishonesty.

**Purple** - To dream of something painted purple or a purple dress means sickness or a long illness.

**Orange** - You will own your own home.

**Green** - A green dress, house or green grass means that someone is envious of you.

**Red** - To dream of anything red signifies hostility, fights, or a long life.

**Blood or Bleeding** - If you dream of blind or bleeding it signifies death, especially if when a tooth is extracted it bleeds a lot. For people that are naturally happy, bleeding means joy and health. For people that are constantly depressed, it signifies the loss of property and money.

## **CARDS**

To dream about cards or one playing cards or gambling signifies that he is in danger of losing his property. If he can recognize who he is playing cards with then he is his enemy.

## **CONCH**

If one dreams about conch it means that he will soon make love to a stranger. If a man dreams about eating conch, he will soon not be able to maintain an "erection" (to raise). If a woman dreams about eating conch she will be barren.

150

+ + +

## **CAT**

Dreams of cats, signify a thief. If a cat has scratched him, then he will have sickness. For women to dream of cats signifies a person of loose morals.

## **CHICKENS**

Chickens signify loss of property or damage to property.

## **CORN**

To dream of ears of corn means to have plenty children or the individual will grow rich and gain as much money as the number of corn on the cob.

## **DEVIL**

Dreams of the devil signify a guilty conscience and is usually a bad sign.

## **DRINKS**

Means that the individual will be prosecuted by law. To drink clear water is bad. To drink muddy water is very bad. To drink white wine or milk is a good sign. To drink vinegar is a sign of discomfort.

## **EATING**

To eat human flesh is a very bad sign even death. To eat meat also is a bad sign. To eat salt means somebody is talking or spreading rumours about you. To eat cheese signifies making money. To eat apples means anger. To eat fish means virility and or someone will get pregnant. To eat crab means that you will go crazy. To eat crab and rice means stomach troubles. To eat avocado pear means stomach troubles (actually pear is fart food anyhow). To eat beans is also stomach problems (fart food also!). To eat eggs means gain and profit. To eat fried eggs means illness.

## **GOD**

To dream of God means a guilty conscience or goodness. Manifestations of God mean good health and happiness.

## **GOLD**

Gold and silver signifies loss of money and deceit.

## **GRAVE**

If you dream that you are put in a grave, you will 'die bad.'

**HELL**

God is talking to you because of your sins, better 'repent and be saved.'

**HAIR**

Means sexual potency. Hair falling out means death.

**JOCKEY**

To dream that you're riding a horse means that you will catch V.D. (gonorrhea, (the claps) or syphilis).

**KILL**

To dream that you killed a man signifies success in business.

**LIZARDS**

Signifies pregnancy or bad luck.

**MOUSTACHE**

If a woman dreams of feeling a moustache while kissing, she should be careful because she can be easily seduced.

**MANURE**

Is a very lucky dream and one will become rich.

**MATCHES**

Will receive money. If you strike a match, you will win money either in a raffle or by gambling.

**MONEY**

To give, lend or pay bills is a good omen that you will receive a large sum in a surprising manner. If you dream of handling other people's money and don't steal it, you will inherit something valuable from somebody.

**NUNS (SISTERS)**

If a woman dreams of a religious sister, she is liable to be separated from her husband or sweetheart.

**ORANGES**

The loss of her sweetheart is predicted for a young lady who dreams of eating oranges or drinking orange juice.

**ORGAN**

A woman who dreams that she is playing an organ must beware of being too exacting in her demands upon her lover. It also shows that she is a jealous woman.

151

+ + +

**PAPER**

This means a quarrel especially with husband or wife.

**PENCILS**

If a woman dreams of pencils or a pencil she is very sexy or has lesbian ('sissy') tendencies.

**PEPPER**

You will soon find a sexual partner; indicates sexual potency.

**PIGS**

Dreaming of pigs indicates jealousy primarily, but it also indicates greed and being 'begrudgeful' \*

**PUMP**

Means a broken love affair. Pumping water means future success in love and business.

**RIBBON**

If a young girl dreams of putting ribbons on her dress, underwear or in her hair, she will have an offer of marriage from a nice young man. If, however, she is putting ribbons in someone else's hair, beware of that person because they want to take your boyfriend or husband from you.

**RAPE**

That the individual is under extreme pressure—sexual, financial, etc.

**ROCKING CHAIR**

Happiness and health.

**ROPES**

Poor love life.

**ROSES**

Point to an early marriage and a wide circle of friends.

**RINGS**

Happiness. If the ring is taken off the finger or broken, love life will be unhappy with lots of quarrels and fighting.

**SNAKE**

The snake is very significant in dreams. Psychoanalytically it is the typical phallic symbol, but it could mean success if it lives in your house. If you kill a snake it means that you can successfully fight temptation. It can also mean that you are sneaky, and cannot be trusted. If you are bitten by a snake it is a prediction of misfortune.

**SPIDER**

If you dream of a spider in the house, you will be having a guest in the house or a visitor. To kill a spider, there will be constant lover's quarrels. To destroy a spider's web is a sign that someone will spread rumours about you.

**SUITCASE**

or a purse, bag, box, often symbolize female sexuality. If you travel and open your suitcase and there are no clothes in it, then you're worried about your sexual performance.

**TELEPHONE**

If the individual dreams about receiving a telephone call or talking over the telephone, then they are having strong competition with a good friend for the love of their loved one. If the telephone keeps ringing, you pick it up and no one answers, this is a sign of isolation and can be also a sign of an inferiority complex.

**TEA**

+ If one dreams about drinking tea, then it is a sign of sickness. Love difficulties are foretold by a dream of seeing dregs at the bottom of the tea cup.

**TOBACCO**

To dream of women smoking cigarettes is a good sign of happiness in the home. To dream of women smoking pipes indicates quarrels and disappointments. To dream of men smoking (cigarettes, pipes, or cigars) predicts the solution to problems pertaining to someone you love.

## **TOOTHBRUSH**

If you dream of brushing your teeth, it is a good sign of coming to grips with one's problems. If the bristles of the toothbrush come off in your mouth, it is a good sign. To an unmarried woman, it predicts success in a love affairs, followed by a happy marriage and a large family. For a married woman it predicts serious mental problems.

\* Bahamian for being envious.

+ There are some younger obeah practitioners that are now reading 'tea leaves'. This is a recent practice, no doubt learned from European or American persons (or books).

152

+ + +

## **TWINS (OR MORE THAN TWO CHILDREN)**

To dream of having twins or more than two children is a sign to a woman that she will be pleasantly surprised by good news. Often it is from a former boyfriend that she used to love very much. For a single woman to dream of twins indicates sexual anxieties and probable sickness.

## **UMBRELLA**

\* Walking in the rain with a leaky umbrella and you are getting wet indicates a lot of quarrels between you, your spouse or sweetheart.

## **UNDERWEAR**

\*\* Dreams about dirty underwear indicates fears and guilt feelings. Dreams about going without underwear show anxiety about the individual's ability to make friends or project warmth.

## **UGLINESS**

Dreaming of ugly or grotesque features (according to the individual's ugly-value indication) indicates problems for lovers. For a married person, quarrels.

## **VEGETABLES**

For the Bahamian to be preparing pumpkins or cutting up tomatoes or okras, means that they are proud, 'biggety' and have a 'stand-offish' attitude toward people. It is a self-protection type dream to really protect from fears of being inadequate or inferior.

## **VERANDA (PORCH)**

To dream that one is sitting on a porch with a lover is to be able to look forward to happiness through an early marriage. If one is already married, it is an indication of happiness.

## **VOYAGE**

To sail on a ship from one island to another is an indication of bad news—if someone visits you and you go to the ship or plane to pick them up, bad luck in business or a love affair.

## **WAR**

To dream of war indicates that the person is experiencing mental problems—if a spouse dreams of the other spouse going off to war, then it is bad news.

## **WEDDING**

Unmarried girls with no immediate plans for marriage dream about weddings because they want one. A young woman who dreams of having a secret or very quiet wedding

will experience very bad luck in a love affair. Dreaming of a church marriage is a good indication of a happy married life. If the dreamer is already married, then to dream of getting married means news about the death of a loved one. To dream of a boy or girl friend getting married to another person is an indication of an early marriage. To dream of a wedding guest dressed in black is an indication of unhappiness in marriage. If a man dreams of a wedding ring, then his wife has a sweetheart ("putting roach on his bread" + or "horning" him). If a woman dreams that her wedding ring is bright and untarnished, it is a sign of happiness in marriage.

### **WEEPING (CRYING)**

If a young woman dreams of crying, she will have a quarrel with her lover. If the individual is crying at a funeral or at some unhappiness, then good luck is predicted.

### **WETNESS**

If a woman dreams that she is wet from rain or is soaking wet with perspiration, then she is likely to be implicated in a big scandal.

### **WINDOW**

Shuttered or closed windows mean that the individual is narrow minded. Dreams of many open windows indicate optimism and an outgoing personality. Dreams of broken or cracked windows indicate unhappiness and is bad luck

\* Opening an umbrella inside a house is a sign of bad luck. Oftimes someone who lives in the house can die because of this.

\*\* Many Bahamians wear underwear on the wrong side in order to protect them from being fixed, especially if they have been threatened by someone.

+The Jamaicans say, "give him a jacket" if a wife has a child that does not belong to her husband.

153

+ + +

### **WINGS**

Dreaming about wings or flying means that the person wants to escape from responsibilities.

There are also good luck dreams, and bad luck dreams (many of these have already been mentioned) and many love dreams. Some Good Luck Dreams are dreams about abdomen (stomach), adultery, advice, adding machines, accordion (or concertina), anchor, angels, apples, the month of April, asparagus, babies, bananas, bathing, beating, bees, books, butter, butterflies, cars, candy, carrots, castle, cattle, celery, cemetery, cheques, children, Christmas, chocolate, clock, clouds, coins, concert, copper, cotton, coughing, crowd, crying, &, dancing, deafness, dew ('draft'), dirt, disappointment, dishes, diving, doctor, donkey, dress, driving, drugstore (pharmacy), drums, drawer, earrings, eating, eggs, election, elephant, elevator, emerald, entertainment, escape, eyes, face, failure, family, fan, farm, fat, feathers, fence, fight, fire, flags, friends, frogs, fruit, gale (storm), games, garlic, gloves, goats, golf, grapes, grass, guitar, guineps, herds, harvest, hat, home, hominy (grits), hymns, ice cream, incense, itch, jewels, jockey, jumping, kettle, kick, kissing, kite, knife, knitting, lace, ladder, lamps, love, lard, leaves, legs, license, light, linen, lobster, manure, matches, milk, mangoes, moon, mosquitoes, mustard, napkins, next, newspapers, nuts, oars, onions, oranges, orchestra, organ, pain, parents, paint, plums (hog plums or scarlet plums), pearls



(especially conch pearls), peas, pencil, pepper (especially goat pepper), perfume, piano, picnic, pigeon, pills, pipe, play, postage stamp, purse, quarrel, rainbow, rake, rat, ring, rosary, roses, sadness, sailing, sausage, saw, scald, school, sea, sheep, shirt, shy, soup, spear, spider, stamps, starch, sugar, sunrise and sunset, soursop, sugar apple, swimming, table, tangerine, tears, tent, thimble, thread, tobacco, tomatoes, tamarind, toys, trees, trunk, uniforms, vase, village, virgin, voyage, wages, waist, warts, weeping, well, wreath, wine, yacht, yolk (of an egg.)

Some Bad Luck Dreams are dreams about abandonment, accounts, acid, aches, airplane, altar, ankle, ants, apes, arch, archbishops, arm, arrest, aunt, axe, baby, back, bag, baldness, ball, baptism, barroom, baseball, bathing, bats, beans, bread, bed, beer, beggar, belly, bench, betting, birth, biscuits, bishops, bite, bleeding, blotting, bones, boom, brandy, breasts, breath, bridge, broom, burglar, buying, cabbage, camera, candy, cards, cars, castor oil, cemetery, chair, chalk, chase, christening, church, cigar, coffin, corkscrew, cradle, cripple, crossroads, curtains, cut, cymbals, dagger, debt, dentist, desk, dessert, detective, dictionary, digging, disease, disguise, dominoes, drums, drunkenness, dummy, dwarf, dying, eating, echo, eclipse, election, elevator, execution, fainting, falling, father, feet, fever, fingernails, fire engine, fish net, fits, golf, groceries, guns, hammer, handcuffs, hat, hatchet, hate, hearse, horns, hospital, hurricane, hypocrisy, idol, incest, indigestion, infant, injury, ink, insects, intestines, invalid, iron, itch, jam, jelly, jewellery, judge, June, joy, keyhole, kitchen, knitting, knocking, lamp, lard, laundry, lawsuit, lawyer, leather, lettuce, lice, limes, liquor (or liqueur), lumber, luxury, lying, macaroni, magician, magistrate, map, market, mat, measles, medicine, mice, minister, morgue, mother-in-law, mud, murder, museum, nagging, neighbour, newspaper, noise, nose, nutmegs, olives, omelet, organ, owl, pail, paint, parsley, peas, peppermint, pigpen, pills, pot, powder, procession, pudding, pulpit, pushing, puzzle, quilt, raccoon, raisins, rape, razor, ribbons, ringworm, rubber, running, rust, sand, shaving, sieve, sapodilla, skull, smallpox, sneezing, soap, sodawater, soda, biscuits, sponge, spots, stammering, seaweed, shark (Jaws!), steak, switch, syringe, tailor, tapeworm, taxicab, thatched roof, thumb, toast, trousers, turtle, twine, uncle, undressed, varnish, vomit, wedding, writing, wasp, yawning.

154

+ + +

It is useful to note that an individual dreams every night, whether it is remembered or not. There has been a lot of research done with regard to dreaming and dream researchers can now accurately map dream trips, tell when we dream, how often, why some dreams are remembered and why many are forgotten.

To the Bahamian, dreams take on an almost religious aura, and even the most sophisticated Bahamian still feels uneasy if he dreams something that is supposed to be a bad omen.

Other aspects of Bahamian beliefs and interpretations are found under the following:

## **BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD**

### **(a) Pregnancy and Birth**

Before the more sophisticated prenatal care and clinics, Bahamian women had their babies at home assisted by a midwife who was either formally trained or had experience and knowledge passed down or by being apprenticed to an older midwife. There are many beliefs to prevent pregnancy—if a woman eats a whole sweet pepper before intercourse, then she shouldn't conceive—if a man puts a lima bean under his tongue before intercourse, then he can't make the person pregnant—don't make love when the moon is young if you don't want the girl to get pregnant.

When a woman is pregnant many things indicate this:

If the woman has a child and the child bends forward and looks between his legs, then a baby is on the way—the pregnant woman suddenly "craves" unusual things, e.g. somethings like tamarinds, guineps or gooseberries; gritty things like sand, chalk, limestone, charcoal, etc—if a lizard jumps on a woman and doesn't run off, she is pregnant—when a woman's mouth begins to have an unusual amount of saliva and she begins to spit often are good signs. When a woman is pregnant, and she knows that there are certain people that don't like her, she should be careful that they don't cross the baby on her stomach. If she feels that someone has crossed her or is working obeah on her during pregnancy, she must get some bird pepper and cask rum, mix the two together and drink it. She should also use this mixture and rub it on her stomach after each bath.

While pregnant, a woman must be careful not to look at ugly things (e.g. warts, hunchbacks, etc.) or else the child will come out like what she has seen. She should by all means touch beautiful things, especially "good" (long, straight) hair (implications of negative values!)

If a young girl gets pregnant for a married man and his wife threatens to "cross" the baby and so either stop its birth or cause the baby to become deformed:.

- go to the graveyard
- obtain a handful of dirt from an old grave after digging six inches down
- go to a crossroad and get a handful of soil from there
- boil these two dirt in a little rum and give it to the pregnant girl to drink.

The effects of this mixture are twofold:

(i) the deleterious effects on the baby will be removed and

155

+ + +

(ii) if the mother is experiencing a difficult pregnancy or in a long labour, it will help the pregnancy and speed the delivery.

To tell the sex of the baby is to look at the pregnant woman's stomach. A nice rounded stomach, fairly high up toward the chest is a sure indication of a boy. If the stomach is pointed (sharp) and is way down towards the cervix, then it is supposed to be a girl. No matter how her stomach is shaped, if she walks over a vine (pumpkin or watermelon) the baby will be healthy. "If you want to know if your first child will be a boy or girl, you can try

one of the practices of Mangrove Cay, Andros. It has worked for many people living there so try it! First you write down your name and your wife's name, e.g.

Dick Rolle  
May Rolle

if your Christian name ends with an s or your surname, you add an s. e.g.

James Dames  
Jamess Damess

you now pair the letters of your names with the first people in the Bible, Adam and Eve

A = Adam, E = Eve

for example:

Aeae	Aeaea
Dick	Rolle
Aea	Aeaea
May	Rolle

this ends in 'A', therefore it is a boy. If the pairing or matching ends in A the child is a boy, E the child is a girl" 3

There is also taboo with children conceived by brother and sister or first cousin marriages. Children born of these unions are bound to go crazy (mentally ill) or go blind. After a child is born, it is customary to bury the navel string in the parents' yard so that the children will always have a strong home base. Bahamian women who have babies in hospital request that they be given the 'naval string' so that they can bury it in their yard when they leave the hospital. When the baby has been weaned, for a woman to suppress lactation, she should squeeze milk from the breast with a container, and bum it on a fire. The milk will dry from the breast and the breast will shrink. When the woman wants to ensure that she is healthy and to test for sugar in the urine, she should urinate outside in the yard and leave it overnight. If ants are around her urine the next day, then she has sugar in the urine.

When a woman is pregnant and suspects that she will have a dangerous confinement or a premature delivery, she may consult an obeah practitioner for advice. One common obeah practice as told to me by one of my obeah consultants is the following:

- Turn to Psalm No. 1 and the pregnant woman should write the 3 full verses of this psalm on a piece of goatskin. She should also write together with the hidden holy name (which is Eel Chad) the appropriate power.
- Place this skin with the writing in a bag that has never been used before and that has been specially prepared for the goatskin.

- Suspend this bag with a string around the neck so that it will rest against her naked body.

The prayer that the obeah practitioner will say is as follows:

"May it please thee, O Eel Chad, to grant unto this woman (name) daughter of ----- that she may not at this time or at any other time have a premature confinement; much more grant unto her a truly fortunate delivery and keep her and the fruit of her body in good health. Amen. Salah"

To determine the number and the sex of children, a woman may have, —take a threaded needle and rub it up and down on the clenched outer palm of hand, then open hand and hold needle in centre of palm. If the needle moves in a circle, it is a girl, if it moves in a crosswise position or up and down, it's a boy. Do this until the needle stops, then you'll know the number and the sex of children. \*

Probably the most common way to determine how many children a woman is capable of having is to look at the left hand clenched and look at the number of lines running down the side from the little finger.

The number of moles on a woman's face will indicate her potential for children.

To deal with problems of childhood, the Bahamian follows many practices. For example, when a baby is born with a thin membrane\* \* over its face, the child will be haunted and see spirrid. This membrane should be removed and burnt if the spell is to be broken and the child is to lead a normal life.

A restless child or a "crybaby" child can be calmed if an open Bible turned to Psalm XXVIII is placed on the bed under a pillow. If a black string were tied around a baby's waist, it would protect them from sperrids. If a child is 'plagued with worms,' pick some shepherds' needle, boil and steep it, then them give about 1/4 of a glass of this mixture to drink. This will get rid of the worms.

I can remember a cure that my Grandmother used for pains in the stomach. She used to lay me flat on my back, then smoke a pipe and take some spittle and put around the navel and blow the pipe's smoke around the navel while rubbing the stomach slowly. I swear, this used to work for me every time. When I had a high fever one time, she bathed me in stale pee, then warmed some lard in rum, then rubbed me down with this mixture. It broke the fever even though I was smelling like a urinal!

When a baby (or young child) has the hiccups, spit on a wet brown piece of paper, then place it on the forehead of the child.

If a child is having problems teething, get a piece of a cock's (rooster's) comb, rub it around the child's gums, then give it back to the cock to eat, the pain will soon disappear.

When a child has sores or gets chicken pox, the leaves of the white elder or the sage bush is boiled. The child when bathed in this mixture will soon have the sores dried up.

It is not good to tickle a child too much because it would grow up with a stammer.

If a child's hair is cut too soon his speech will never be clear and he will suffer from this impediment all his

\* We have played this game many times and one Sunday with three women, the results were consistent and accurate.

\*\* Called a "caul" in the Bahamas or "veil" in Jamaica.

157

+ + +

life. And if the child is experiencing difficulty in walking, the Mother can carry the baby to the seashore, dig two holes in the sand, place the baby's feet into the two holes and start to walk away. The baby will follow and have no more problems walking.

## **(b) Childhood**

Bahamian children's superstitions are many and revolve mainly around punishment, sperrids and death, e.g.

- Walking backwards resulted in the death of one's parents.
- If the left eye began 'jumping' (twitching) for most of the day, the child would cry before the day was done.
- To avoid punishment, pull out an 'eye winker' (eye lash), throw it over your shoulders after spinning around three times.
- Before 'going to the line',\* rub some garlic on the palm of the hands and you won't feel the cuts of the cane when applied by the headmaster.
- If you can kiss your elbow, you can change your sex (e.g. from a male to a female).
- When children are seen walking with their hands on their heads, it is a sign that they are "mourning their parents away."
- If your big toe is shorter than your second toe your Father will die before your Mother.
- If you point a finger at the dead or at a graveyard, your finger will rot off very shortly.
- If you want children to sleep soundly, tie a black string on their big toe while they are sleeping and they will stay asleep until you loosen the string.
- When a girl just begins to menstruate, she must not climb a fruit tree or else all the fruits would spoil.
- Children must never pick or eat fruit from a tree where a bottle is hanging. If the fruit is eaten, the individual will eventually swell up and die.

- When a child has to sleep in a haunted room, to keep the sperrids away, open the Bible at the 27th Psalm and place it under the child's pillow.
- Anytime an individual has walked through a cemetery, when returning to their own home, wipe and brush very carefully the dust off your shoes; if this is not done, sperrids from the graves will enter your house and haunt you.
- Children should never sleep across two doors as this offends sperrids, and they will give you nightmares.

## **MALE, FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS**

The roles of Bahamian males and females are still clearly defined, although because of education, more exposure and the need for Bahamian manpower, roles, (especially the females) are slowly becoming neutralized. Beliefs and superstitions with regard to male-female relationships naturally resolve around sexuality, love and marriage.

\* Children in school are usually sent to the headmaster for punishment and this is called 'going to the line.'

158

+ + +

Most obeah practitioners claim that the majority of referred problems are the type of male-female relationships especially in keeping one's partner, placing evil on a rival, sexual potency and protecting one's interests.

The following sections will explain some of the more common superstitions:

### **(a) Love, Sex and Marriage**

The love vine that is found in abundance in the Bahamas can indicate whether the love that you have for a person is genuine. Take the roots and a piece of this vine, plant it and place it on another tree. It will continue to grow healthy as a parasite on this tree if your love is strong. If it dies or is "stunted" in growth, your love is false.

Bahamian mothers warn their sons from eating and drinking from everybody especially from the home of a woman that has available daughters. Bahamian mothers may brew a special drink for their sons to give them life long protection. They can also wear their underclothes on the wrong side; put herbs in their hatbands or if salt is put in your shoes, no one can put anything down for you, so if you walk on it, you'll be protected.

For a girl to 'catch' a young man, she can take a bath during her period, then take the dirty water and make a pot of peas and rice. If the boyfriend eats this, he is 'caught' for life.

An extremely obnoxious superstition is for a girl to take her sanitary pads, 'soak them in some warm water, then take the water for use in preparing food for her boyfriend. If he eats this, then he is 'caught' for life.

There is a story of the grandmother of a family of beautiful girls. Any time she saw a young man that she thought 'just right' for one of her grand daughters, she would invite the young man to her home and invite him to sit down in a special chair. Once he did this, he couldn't help but marry the girl.\*

One way of finding out about the character of a young woman is to watch certain things that may happen to her, e.g.

- if she perspires on her nose, she can't be trusted.
- if she has 'open teeth', then she is a liar (this holds for the male also.)
- if she has a mole on her mouth, she will be a grouchy (fussy) woman.
- if the gap between her big toe and her second toe is wider than his (the male's) then she is the bossy type.
- if a woman resembles her mother she will be lucky. If she resembles her father, then she will be unlucky.
- if a girl, loses her engagement ring, she will have bad luck.

There are also certain things that individuals must not do if they want to get married, e.g.

- they must never eat food directly from a pot.
- girls should never wear their mother's wedding rings.

Virility and potency are extremely important to Bahamian males and females. Our food (e.g. conch) and drink (e.g. buckfast tonic wine and carnation cream) enhance this virility.

\*Two of the husbands of these girls "swear" that this happened to them. A cousin d mine, however, was invited to do so, but the he never sat down and was the only one that 'got away'!

159

+ + +

Bahamians are also very sensitive about being "roached" and there are many ways to keep one's spouse happy and prevent "roaching".

To keep a man, (a) after intercourse, take some of his sperm, put it on a piece of meat (preferably salt pork), and give this to a lady dog (bitch) in heat to eat. The man will always be true to the woman. (b) Measure a man's waist with a string; take this same string and measure the man's penis; tie a knot at the length of the man's penis. The woman must keep this string in her possession and the man will never go with another woman.

- To 'fix' a husband if it is found out that he is having a sweetheart:
  - get an onion
  - place a razor blade inside the onion
  - place (tie) a silver piece on the onion and razor.
  - bury this at the man's sweetheart's door.
  - if the man has sex that night with her, his penis will be cut by the woman's vaginal hair ('haicut') and it will never get well.
- An obeah practitioner can cure the man by:

- getting an onion, placing razor blade in onion
- taping a silver coin around onion and razor blade
- burying it for three days.
- dig up onion, take razor blade out and let it dry.
- as the razor blade dries, the man's cut will heal.

As long as the razorblade is "moist", the cut will never heal.

To hold on to a wife so that she will never have sex with another man:

- buy a lock and key.
- take this to an obeah person so that a 'set' can be placed on the lock. \*
- take lock and key home and place under wife's pillow.
- while making love, place lock and key in the hand and as soon as the wife is having her orgasm ("coming"). close the lock and lock it with the key.

The woman is fixed and no matter how much she may want to go with another man, her vagina would never accept another man. It is "locked" to everybody except her husband who has "fixed" her.

If a man leaves his girlfriend, she can have someone fix him by getting a ball of thread and 'set' it and bury it. This will make the man sick until she digs it up. If it remains in the earth for a long time, the man may die.

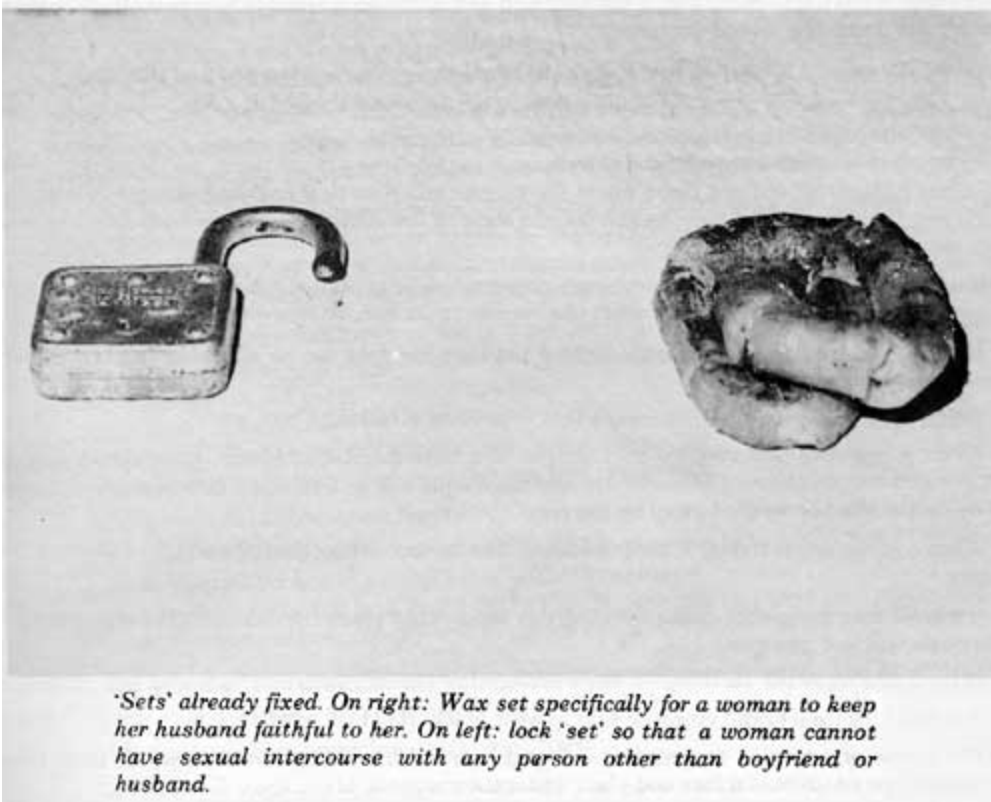
For Bahamian males to ensure that a woman's love will grow for him, he should:

- take a strand of hair from his woman's head
- thread this hair through a needle
- stick this needle with the hair into a growing tree
- as the tree grows, the woman's love will grow for the man.

A practice that young Bahamians utilize to tell whether someone loves you is to scratch a match and hold it up straight. Call your love's name. If the match burns down to your hand your love and lover's love, is strong and true.

\* This is done with 12 needles and other methods that unfortunately was not revealed to me.





161

+ + +

To get your spouse (husband or wife) from their sweetheart:

- get your old foot of a shoe
- obtain one handful of crabgrass
- one tablespoonful of sulphur powder
- one teaspoonful of incense
- place all of this in a crocus snack and burn this slowly either under the floor of your home, or near the window of your bedroom.

The spouse is bound to come back, never to stray again.

If a wife is having problems with her husband and a foreign woman (e.g. watergate) + she can banish her from the island for good.

When the woman is visiting just before she is returning (one will have to find this out)

- write her name on a piece of paper to form a double "X"
- fold the paper in one direction, then mark X's around the name.
- stitch nine (9) new sewing pins to form an X in the paper
- place this (hidden) in a place where the woman will pass or if possible, place it in a bag or container that the woman has. As she travels back to her country either by boat or plane, she will never return to the Bahamas!

If a man wants to keep out of a woman's power when he gives her a picture of him, he should always clip off one end. No matter what she may do to fix him, he is protected.

If a married woman is constantly itching between her toes for no apparent reason, a new sweetheart will enter her life.

When your ears are ringing, it means that your lover is talking about you.

To fix a house so that couples may quarrel and have marital problems, throw some guinea pepper and salt on the roof of the house and the couple will quarrel until this mixture is blown away by the wind or washed away by the rain.

When couples are married, if their wedding day is very rainy, then the couple will never be happy.

If a bride sees the groom on the wedding day before they reach the church, it is a sign that the marriage will not prosper.

If the bride tears her stocking on her wedding day she will have bad luck with her marriage.

It is bad luck for a bride (virgin or not) to wear black. Bad luck will follow her.

For a man or a woman to maintain a happy married life, and prevent either of them from straying, cross a knife and fork and place under the mattress. He or she will not stray.

### **(b) Illness and Death**

Bush medicine cures are the 'rule of the day' to cure 'normal' illness, and are also used in conjunction with "clearing" a fix when manifestations are of an 'abnormal' or obeah nature.

As previously mentioned, being fixed is indicated by many physical and mental ailments.

The most common physical sign of obeah fixing is the swelling of parts of the body, usually the stomach or the limbs, especially the legs. There are many ways to fix a person to swell.

\* Local term for American women

162

+ + +

Here are a few told to me by a Cat Island obeah person.

- get the stem of a tree that grows in the person's yard.
- find a gamaleme tree, bore a hole in this tree, then stuff the stem (that has come from the person's yard) into this hole.
- get a lock and key.
- close the lock and lock it with the key
- the person to be fixed will become "stall" (constipated and without any appetite) and the belly will swell.

Now two things can happen:

- (i) if he is not cleared by easing out the key and stem slowly so that his body can return to normal functioning, the person will die.
- (ii) if you want the person to die quickly, after three days of swelling, go to the tree and pull key and stem out of the hole quickly. The person will die very quickly, shitting himself to death (i.e. "non stoppable diarrhea").

A very common superstition about hurting a man sexually is for the woman to suck a copper during sexual intercourse. Eventually the man's penis will begin to rotten away.

A woman can also take the measurement of a man's sexual organ while he is asleep and have it fixed and buried. The man will never be able to "raise" (achieve an erection) again if he has sex with someone else. Equally, a woman can take the measurement of a man's waist and carry it with her everywhere she goes, and the man will never stop following her.

Perhaps the most dangerous way of fixing a person is to do it through his yard (property).

- get a live conch in the shell
- get some graveyard earth
- get a silver threepence
- put conch and shell in the sun so the conch can let out its 'lip'.
- drop a silver threepence in shell so conch can feed (suck) on it.

'Now if you want to kill the whole family.

- find a small barrel and bore a very small hole in it so there could be a slow leak.
- place the prepared conch in a small bit of water in the barrel.
- every nine days there will be a death in the family. Also the fact that the liquid leaks on the ground of the victims, nobody will live there again.

It should be noted that everything the family will eat will turn to sand, and an autopsy of these "fixed" victims will reveal their whole system full of sand.

There are many ways of protection from being fixed.

If you feel that someone has "fixed" you and you have an unusual ache or swelling and don't know who fixed you.

- obtain a wedding band
- get 3 copper nails
- cut a small piece of oak or pine
- Now, place ring in the centre of the board, drive nails inside ring making sure that it's tight and then bend nails outward over the ring.
- Place ring under your pillow for three nights.

Another simple form of getting "cleared" is to wear 3 links of chain around your neck or waist. This can protect or put out any obeah man's candle.

If a part of the body is affected by fixing and it really hurts and doesn't respond to traditional medication, wash the affected part in sea water when the tide is ebbing for three days. That should effectuate a cure. One has to be very careful with this "cure", because if the affected part is washed in a flood tide, you will get the same ailment again "what goes up (or rise) must come down".

If you suspect that your house has been fixed. You can know this by a strange odour in the house or noises especially at night:

Obtain:

- some rock salt
- turpentine
- dried okra seeds
- a sixpence (or a silver 10 cents piece will do)

Mix all these things together and scatter over the roof of the house and in the four comers of the house. Take out the sixpence from the mixture and place or bury it in your walkway. No more house problems!

Much lore surrounds death—the signs of death, if someone has had a "good" or "bad" death and protection from sperrids.

Some common signs of death are:

- Crows. Whenever crows (or blackbirds) are continually around your home or if one alights on a Church this is a sign that a member of the family will die.
- If a Banana Bird or a Tobacco Dove flies through a house it is regarded as a sign of death and a family member will die shortly.
- Whenever there is a screeching cricket in the comer of a house, this is a sign of death.
- Whenever a Black Bee buzzes around you and won't go away, there will be a death of a distant relative by obeah.
- It is a custom for a Church bell to be rung as soon as possible after the person dies. If a death bell makes a double toll by itself while someone is ringing it, a death will soon follow the one for whom the bell is tolling.

There is great activity, custom and ceremony surrounding death and funerals in the Bahamas. Some of these traditions have already been described. Some common beliefs with regard to the dead body itself are:

When a person just dies, relatives can talk to the dead body and ask for favours. Some of these requests are - giving them numbers (for gambling purposes) to play; removing sickness,

asking for a sign of good luck; rubbing the hands over certain parts of the body to protect one's self from sickness to that particular part, etc.

There is a strong belief that some people have the gifts of catching the spirit of a dying person and utilizing this spirit to work for them. The person remains alone with the dying person and has a special bottle of quicksilver. When the dying person exhales, the bottle is held near the nostrils

164

+ + +

and when moisture is seen inside the bottle, it is quickly corked (or the cap is screwed on). The person who keeps the bottle is said to own the dying person's spirit.

Other beliefs are:

- If you see the ghost of a dead person before they are buried, you must follow the funeral procession behind the coffin. Turn around and look at the coffin between your legs and you will see the sperrid riding astride the coffin. As soon as this is seen, close the eyes, repeat "Ten, Ten, the Bible Ten," and the sperrid will never bother you again. One very important rule is to never answer when you hear a sperrid call you three times or else you will die shortly to join them in the sperrid world.

There are literally thousands of ghost (or sperrid) stories, and only a few will be cited here.

The Bahamian sperrid physically conforms to the images of those found in other parts of the world. They look like white sheets draped over a body, and either float, fly, or walk. They make noise and may or may not be seen. They like to live in attics, the upper floor of houses or in haunted (or hagged) houses. The favourite Bahamian abode is the silk cotton tree. Some sperrids go into different forms and have a predilection for animals, especially pigs, snakes, or goats. Sperrids do not necessarily appear in white; they can appear in black and infrequently in grotesque physical shapes, e.g., dressed in black with fire coming out of the eyes, or dressed in white with nothing else than a big mouth with long teeth and no eyes, ears or nose. Sperrids tend to be sometimes ignorant. They can't count to ten, i.e., they count up to nine, but always skip ten.

They can move very quickly (travel faster than the concorde jet!) go through locked doors, solid partitions and walk on the water. To protect one's self from sperrids: —

- sleep with an open Bible at the 27th Psalm under your pillow.
- wear your underclothes on the wrong side.
- sprinkle benny around the house, and also place twelve benny seeds on the headboard of the bed. When a sperrid sees benny seeds, it has an uncontrollable urge to count. Since sperrids can only count to nine, they became confused with twelve seeds and if they persist on counting they, will keep going to nine then

counting over again until the next morning when they have to get back to their resting place.

- cross a pair of black shoes at the entrance of your bedroom door. No sperrid will dare enter.
- cross windows or doors with an "X" on all entrances to the house. No sperrid can pass.
- to keep a wicked person's spirit from roaming, during the funeral service, when the Minister commends the body to the earth, especially when the words "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes" are said, a white sheet should be spread over the coffin and the spirit cannot escape.
- keep a basin of water in a haunted room at all times and no sperrid will dare enter.

Whenever a hen crows twice, it is an indication that a sperrid is around; the preceding precautions should be taken.

To make doubly sure, that you are fully protected, always remember to stick a match in your hair, keep in your memory the 23rd Psalm and of course speak "Ten, Ten the Bible Ten".

165

+ + +

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **I: PERSONAL COMMENTS**

This book has taken me three years to research and write and has been not only an exercise in perseverance and discipline (having to research and write in my spare time) but also a learning experience.

Lots of material has been collected, but this book only contains what I consider to be relevant to the subject of obeah. There is so much more that can be done on this subject, especially with regard to para psychological experimentation. The two obeah practitioners that I believe have extra sensory perception should (with their permission, of course) be submitted to strict laboratory conditions and controls.

More information is also needed on the actual life style, historical and anthropological artifacts of Bahamia.

The Bahamas is in desperate need of 'native' authors from every field and these authors' goals should be towards excellence.

I am becoming more and more concerned with the numerous "pamphlets" that are being described as "researched books" and that are being sold to the unsuspecting consumer with erroneous information. Every book written or research paper contain some mistakes, but there are basics that must be adhered to. As I write I am looking at a recent local publication of very commendable obeah stories, but the implication that obeah is voodoo and the text of the short introduction to the book is totally misleading.

To create an obeah bandwagon is not my intention, but I sincerely hope that this basic study will stimulate more research and more knowledge of the subject.

There was the temptation to 'rush' things—to get something published—but not only did my varied life style prevent this, but deep down, I wanted to do something that would act as a departure reference point and something that, I hope, will someday become a 'classic' of Bahamian writings.

A few months after I actually commenced researching this book, I found myself becoming depressed. I examined myself and could not find any obvious (or conscious) reasons. This 'depression' was not the type of positive depression that I experience, for example, when I have many bills to pay and it is difficult to meet them. It was more like a 'fear' a type of unexplained 'heaviness' - a form of negativism and lethargy, which demotivated me, especially from "looking for obeah material" and from writing.

I mentioned my condition to a very good author-friend of mine who was visiting the Bahamas, and he advised me to 'cool out' for awhile and reaffirm whatever philosophical or religious beliefs that I had, because most writers who investigate occultic activity or those that try to 'probe the unknown', experience many difficulties, primarily deep depressive bouts.

This information appears to have been the explanation for my depression because at that time I had recently experienced a meeting with an obeah man that frightened me. I had this feeling that this man had some strange 'powers', and the 'vibrations' indicated danger for me. He wanted to give me the experience of "calling the spirit" and that would have meant going to the cemetery at midnight and participating in the Black Magic ritual prescribed for communicating with the dead. I was thinking very seriously about doing this, purely from an ex-

166

+ + +

perimental point of view and believing that it was all 'hocus pocus' anyhow, but thank God, my good friend Antonnia Canzoneri gave me Dr. Kurt Koch's book on "Christian Counseling and Occultism" to read, and I decided not to get too deeply involved with this particular aspect of obeah practice.

The total approach to this fascinating subject has actually given me three roles that I have tried to fulfill:

**(1) As a Psychologist in researching and analyzing material.**

I think one has to appreciate the particular dilemma of the black professional in the modern world. The whole world is going through a transitional stage where technological advances are breaking down not only old taboos, but tenaciously held truths that used to be, are now "ain't what it is was anymore". Then, too, ideas of Western Orientated racial superiority from the ethnic and cultural viewpoint, are also being revealed as projected myths that any

group must develop to maintain its culture and it's hold on other disadvantaged peoples. Surely in the past three hundred years, the top has been Euro-Western white, with the browns, yellows, and blacks bringing up the middle and the rear. This has been true in every aspect of human living.

In the past decade, however, more writings, research, and practices of those people placed in this 'inferiority niche' have come to the fore. Many analysis of the confusion faced by underprivileged peoples existing in the white-orientated world, have been admirably done.

From my own development, how does an Afro-Bahamian, British-Colonial-orientated, Euro-American trained, middle class individual, approach the problem of obeah, especially since this African practice is imbedded in the very core of my ancestral psyche? From the point of view of black professionals in the behavioural sciences, luminaries like Frantz Fanon and his "Black Skin White Masks" or Grier and Cobbs in their "Black Rage" and the Jamaican genius Rex Nettleford with "Mirror, Mirror", to name just a few, adequately examine this type of dilemma.

I think that at this particular point, I should make some clarification of the term 'black: as I describe myself and other peoples of African descent throughout the world. This term 'black' that offends so many people, especially in the Bahamas, has been coined to take in the ethnic, cultural and total expression of people with African ancestry throughout the world. It is, like nearly everything else over the past twenty years, been projected by the mass media and by black America. Africans are having problems with this term because they are described as Africans, the Caribbean and Latin America, where there are large populations of 'blacks' are experiencing difficulties in terminology, and the American 'blacks' themselves have also now developed terminological differences as to whether black is a good term or perhaps Afrikan spelled with a "K" etc. To my mind, it is more easier for one to place a definite 'name' for the racial identification when any particular place or peoples represent homogeneity; however, it becomes very difficult in highly racially mixed societies, as the Caribbean for example. If we were to ascribe to the 'white', 'cracker', scientifically erroneous theory that 'one drop of nigger blood makes you a nigger', then aren't we, as black people falling into the trap of perhaps not being as objective as the white man and following the same false theories?

In Jamaica, for example, what shall we call an individual (and there are many of them like this) with Chinese, Negro, and Syrian ancestry? Black America would immediately label them as black –so would white American. South Africa would be a bit more lenient—they would be placed in the "Coloured" identification! And where would we place an individual of say, Japanese, Indian and European ancestry?

It appears to me that the whole classification of race in this modern world has many flaws and those individuals where racial nomenclature is a real problem are those that are still minority groups, socio-economically deprived and, where strict racial discrimination is still



rigidly enforced. I believe that racially mixed persons will live their life style and adhere to the customs of their dominant parental identification, although many being caught in the 'middle' so to speak, will experience identification problems. "Black" which is a beautiful term, is still not really accepted by many white s and blacks, primarily because of the white orientated value system that has 'patternized' the black man's thinking, and the inability for many black individuals to 'work out' their own racial feelings of inferiority. I have no intention of continuing with this subject in this book, but cultural heritage does play an important role in a book of this type, especially for the individual who is doing the researching and writing.

With this book, then, both my racial ancestry and my scientific training was invaluable in obtaining information (especially interviewing) and in analyzing the results. It should be obvious to the readers, that I have not tried to prove or disprove the phenomena reported. Nor have I tried to find 'psychological answers' for the unusual manifestations. I have tried to find that medium where the general public and professionals alike can read, enjoy and critically appreciate the material.

From the information that I have, I will be doing research of a more 'scientific' nature based on scientifically orientated methods and hopefully, laboratory conditions. These results will be more psychologically scrutinized, analyzed, and published.

## **(2) As a Private Citizen and Christian**

Many professionals in this modern world, carefully guard their personal philosophical and theological beliefs. It would appear to me that in Bahamian society (and I think that this could apply world-wide) many men of learning have total disregard for things 'spiritual.' and only rely on their own knowledge of what they can see, read, experiment with or feel.

Putting aside man's physical life—i.e. basic living, man also has a spiritual life—or perhaps I should say, that each one of us live by some code of beliefs or behaviour. Many are moralists—"doing unto other the way they should do" and living a life of "common, logical decency". Others believe that "God" is man's imagination and creation anyhow, and that man does not have to rely on his own creation, but only needs himself—his own intelligence. There is rejection of a spiritual world or an after life, and "when ya dead, ya done". Others just "don't know" and are in a constant search for meaning."

Let's face it folks, we all worship and are motivated by something - whether it's money, sex, status, budha, intellectualism, Allah, or 'watchamacall it'. Many of my friends are somewhat shocked when I tell them that I am a Christian - that I believe in God, and that I have accepted Jesus Christ (What! a Jew?) as my personal Saviour and Master.

"How can an intelligent man like you believe all those myths?" many of them question.

"How can a scientist, with your training accept a doctrine like the "Resurrection" or the "Virgin Birth" for example?

What I find surprising is the tremendous guilt and embarrassment that people exhibit when Christianity is mentioned among "intellectual gatherings". What is even more surprising is when I mention that "I'm doing yoga" or "I'm doing transcendental meditation" - ears,

\* Except in Africa where tribal or religious differences cause more problems. South African is the great exception!

168

+ + +

eyes and noses 'perk' up because you see, it's something 'exotic', different', and, of course, 'Eastern' philosophy and practices are now the "IN" thing. If I ever mention "SIN", or "Heaven" or "Hell", man, the subject is changed very quickly or they wonder whether my patients 'craziness' is 'rubbing off' on me.

I must confess that I have gone through religious and philosophical changes. I think that most university students, with the sudden infusion of knowledge go through periods of doubting their own religious and philosophical background. I suppose one needs this exposure and questioning while 'growing' to eventually formulate a philosophy.

My beliefs in Jesus, and being a Christian are very practical, logical, and not based on negativism or fear of hell where "the worm dieth not and the fire is never quenched" as was constantly 'pushed' into my head by many Bretheren preachers. Whatever I am today, and my life style based on integrity and honesty (not only Christian attributes) stems from being guided by the Holy Spirit. Many people try to apologize for their beliefs—happily I don't—being a Christian for me is a beautiful security and the greatest positive and motivating force in my life. Check it out!

How, then, does a Christian go into the question of obeah—with its components of witchcraft, black magic, white magic and other seemingly anti-Christian components?

Many theologians warn Christians about becoming involved with the occult.

Richard De Haan <sup>1</sup> warns Christians not to become "ensnared in the traps of Satan and his followers. Just as the devil enticed Eve with the prospect of gaining desirable knowledge and enviable pleasure by eating the forbidden fruit, so he tempts God's children today to break through the limits the Lord has established. He makes the attractions of the world, even those which violate God's holy law, appear to be desirable and pleasurable. When the believer discovers the emptiness of this world's enchantments, Satan tries to deceive him into accepting false religious teaching or seeking spiritual help through some form of occultism. " Mr. De Haan continues that "an assured and obedient believer will avoid all occultic practices which promise information about the future or 'miraculous' help for pressing problems."

Another view, and this is by a theologian with many years experience, with occultism, Dr. Koch <sup>2</sup> writes "rationalists are therefore unable to differentiate between mental illness and

possession for they lack the spiritual antennae needed for this task. Indeed, one must turn to the charismatically gifted Christian counsellor, but let it be said, a psychiatric training is nevertheless of immense value to such a counsellor."

As a Christian then, I was not violating any basic beliefs in investigating obeah. Nor do I subscribe to many so-called Christian attitudes and ideas that African religious beliefs are 'primitive' "heathen" or "displeasing to God". It would be an unjust God, to my mind, to give 'revealed truth' just to Europeans and condemn the majority of the world's population who worship him in different languages and modes.

It was very interesting to discover that the Europeanized syncretisations of obeah—black magic, cutting the cards, reading the palms, etc. were more indicative of "heathen practices" than those indigenous obeah African traditions.

I. De Haan, Richard "Satan, Satanism and Witchcraft" Zondervan Publishing House 1972. U.S.A. p. 118.

2. Koch, Kurt E. "Christian Counselling and Occultism" Ev. Verlag. Western Germany 1972. p. 6.

169

+ + +

The question of Christianity and obeah was a very important one to me and I have had long discussions with my schoolmate and friend, the intellectual and highly respected Rector of one of our largest Anglican Churches in the Bahamas, Cannon William Thompson. \* I asked his opinion on obeah and he wrote the following that not only conforms to my view, but admirably places this whole question in perspective:

"Any up-to-date, objective assessment of the religious situation in the Bahamas of today must take far more seriously than ever before the African side of the religious heritage of the Bahamian people. This approach is in keeping with the contemporary Church's emphasis that "the Good News about Jesus Christ" is addressed to the total man—his past, his present and his future. Obeah represents, in a somewhat distorted and negative way, some of the remnants of the African religious heritage as found in the Bahamas today. It should be pointed out right here that Obeah is in essence a part of a valid religious phenomenon, and should be regarded in this light before any "value judgments" are made about it. Obeah, in origin, belongs to a very sophisticated and successful African attempt to give meaning, purpose and coherence to the African experience of reality. All religious practices, however, are subject to abuse and exploitation, and African religions have been no exception—the Christian and Jewish religions 'have had to "reform" and "renew" themselves from time to time. It is also true that the chances of abuse and exploitation taking place are greater in societies where the particular religion has been outlawed and driven underground, as has been the case of African religions in their New World settings. Hence the above reference to "distortion" and "negation" as regards Obeah in the Bahamas.

This, of course, does not mean that Obeah cleansed of its distorted and negative accretions is equivalent to the "supernatural-affirming" elements in Christianity. It, however, does mean that elements in Obeah are just as important as similar "supernatural-affirming" elements in

other religions that have been "Christened": by the Church over the years. People seem to forget that incense, votive lights, sacred meals, facing East to pray, etc., were a part of the "Obeah" of many of the pre-Christian European religions. Genuine Christianity, nevertheless, is not afraid of using the positive elements in any culture's attempt at coming to terms with God, Man and the World, for it knows that "the Spirit of the Lord" continues to fill the whole world, whether it be Africa, America, Asia, or Europe. Bogus politicized one-culture-centered Christianity, on the other hand, will always be afraid of this approach, and will always endeavour to 'quench" the spirit as best it can."

### **(3) As A Writer**

It is routine for an individual trained in the Behavioural Sciences, to carry out research. It is another thing, however, to write it in precise readable form. It is indeed another problem to write a book for scientific value but also for a general reading public.

I have never looked at myself as a writer, hence I do not take myself seriously from that point of view, although I consider myself an excellent speaker! (How's that for confidence!). My first book "Neuroses In The Sun" and other articles that I have recently written have been accepted and enjoyed to a point beyond my "wildest dreams". When I'm introduced to people by my good friend, well known author Arthur Hailey and he tells them what an excellent writer I am (and I know Arthur doesn't bull) I am beginning to take my writing more seriously. Not

\* St. Agnes Church is situated in the Grants Town area, historically the abode of former slaves and where their descendants still follow obeah practices. Canon Thompson and myself grew Up on the border line of this region, upper "Farm Road."

170

+ + +

from the point of view of changing my style or going into novels—at least not yet—but from the point of view of projecting some ideas that I think have merit.

This book is the first time in my experience that I've related stories in dialogue form, and I not only find it enjoyable to do, but also I find that I am more accurate in reliving the experience with an individual as I write in dialogue. It would become more difficult for me if I had to create characters and fit them into different roles, (as the methods that novelist use) but perhaps, as I continue writing, I may attempt to create in this manner and see what happens!

Writing is one of my hobbies and although I have lots of things that I have written (even poetry, yet!) I still seem to write books with a specific psychological orientated nature. I'm enjoying myself, anyhow, so what the hell!

I have talked about Obeah with many people from a cross section of Bahamian life, and their views and attitudes could take up a whole book—something like "Contemporary Bahamian Attitudes on Obeah" or another chapter in this book. I will briefly mention some of

the individuals that I've discussed this subject with and also a few letters that I have received from friends commenting on various aspects of this book.

Sir Roland Symonette, the first Premier of the Bahamas, is a colourful person, highly respected and to my mind a Bahamian National Hero. He is an excellent story teller and has an inexhaustible supply of jokes. I spoke with Sir Roland one morning, very early, at his beautiful home: -

"Do you believe in Obeah?" I asked.

"No".

"Have you ever had what may be termed a supernatural experience?"

"No" he replied "but it appears that I have an almost sixth sense for events and many of my judgments are based on these unexplained feelings that I have " he said.

"Do you believe in the Devil?"

"Not as an actual person, but I believe in the hereafter—a place for rest and rewards and a place for punishment".

Sir Roland believes that unusual things happen in the world, and he is not a superstitious person, but for unexplained things that happens, he ascribes some natural phenomenon to it. He also claims that in The Current, Eleuthera, where he was born and grew up, there were no Obeah practitioners.

Mr. David Bethel, a Bahamian attorney definitely believes in Obeah, but not in terms of the views commonly held by many Bahamians. Mr. Bethel believes and accepts that strange things happen and that obeah is part of a "wider belief of the supernatural and a part of mind science." He has experienced himself, some unexplained happenings, but he told me the story of one of his clients from a Family Island. This young lady was arrested and charged with receiving goods that were stolen by her boyfriend and two other friends in a robbery. The evidence was very clear and showed that she took police to the place where part of the "loot" was buried. Mr. Bethel advised this client that in no way could she be cleared from the charge because the evidence was too conclusive. She assured him that she knew what to do, and that she would

171

+ + +

consult her obeah \* lady to help her. She consulted her lady and received the following instructions and supplies from her.

- (1) She supplied the defendant with a doll that represented the Magistrate.
- (2) She supplied the defendant with a cup turned upside down on a saucer. This was to remain fixed in this manner until after the court trial.
- (3) The defendant was given something to drink.
- (4) The obeah lady instructed the defendant to place the doll in her purse and during the actual case, anytime she believed that the Magistrate was being swayed against her, she should apply pressure to the doll.

Because of a disagreement over fees, Mr. Bethel did not appear in Court on behalf of his client, but she made a submission of "no case to answer" as directed by him. The case was tried and all the other defendants were sent to trial in the Supreme Court, and eventually found guilty, except for the lady defendant who consulted the obeah woman, and as Mr. Bethel claimed "didn't have a hope in hell to get free."

A prominent black lawyer friend of mine, who asked me not to mention his name, was also interviewed and related a story that happened to him.

When he divorced his first wife, she threatened that his life would never be the same again because she would 'fix' him.

He soon met another lady, married her and moved into a new home. The first night that they moved in, throughout the whole night, they heard noises on the roof as if small stones were being thrown on the roof. They investigated and found nothing.

The following day, a statue on the front lawn was mysteriously broken and the grass around it was destroyed as if by a fire.

The next night, which was a very calm night, doors were banging, windows were moving as if there was a high wind, and there were sounds of shuffling in the ceiling. At that time, also, they had two visitors from Miami who were also disturbed by all these happenings.

The next morning, the whole lawn was totally destroyed as if by fire. Their guests, politely decided that they had to suddenly return home, and left!

My lawyer friend decided that something strange was happening and took samples of the soil to be analysed. It was found that some chemical had been placed in the soil to destroy the grass. In desperation, the lawyer's new wife went to consult an obeah man. He told her that the ex-wife of her husband had consulted a very powerful obeah person and in some areas, was stronger than he. He advised her to:

1. Make a thorough search of the house and destroy whatever she might find
2. He gave her something to bum in the house and in the yard.
3. He gave her something to drink for protection.

When she returned home, she told her husband what had happened and to placate her he searched the house. To his amazement, there was a woman's stocking very carefully embedded in the wood of their front door, and around every window there were unexplained holes +

\* The client herself had practiced obeah on occasion.

+ It is said that obeah practitioners can fix a house by putting holes around windows. The inhabitants will always be arguing because of this typed of fix.

+ + +

circling them. The stocking was removed and the holes plugged. Shortly afterwards all the bees in the house stopped—there was no more harm to the yard or house and up to this time, no more problems of this sort.

My lawyer friend regards what happened to them as unusual and although his second wife claims that his first wife really carried out her threat, he dismisses all of this as "damn foolishness. "

Sir Etienne Dupuch is a distinguished, 'colourful' Bahamian, who was a former publisher and editor of "The Tribune". He certainly is a controversial figure with wide experience in "things" Bahamian having been a member of the former House of Assembly (now House of Parliament) for many years.

Sir Etienne is a prolific writer and is the author of "Tribune story." He is internationally known, has travelled widely and has been honoured by many countries and organizations. He is at present not living for any long periods of time in The Bahamas, and it is because of this fact, that during the writing of this book, I did not get a chance to interview him.

Sir Etienne's writings, however, give interesting insights into his beliefs and varied experiences. His sense of history and his ability to conceptualize and predict situations, oftentimes before they happen (due I'm sure to his exposure and experience) have made people wonder whether he has E.S.P., or is an "Obeah-man" without realizing it!

Here then, are two Tribune editorials written by Sir Etienne Dupuch, Wednesday, the 18th, September 1976 on "Life after death," and Friday, September 20th, 1976 on "The Living and the Dead. ":

### **Life After Death**

"From the beginning of time man has been exploring the question of life after death. We are told in the Bible that there is a great gulf that separates life here from life in the hereafter.

"No one has returned to tell us the story of life after death, if it really exists, as I firmly believe it does.

'Is this belief in a life after death built on human vanity, the conceit that man may feel that such a wonderful creation as himself must not end in a handful of dust in the silence of the grave?

"In its issue of June 12th Newsweek magazine published an article by Kenneth L. Woodward in which he produced evidence to suggest that there is consciousness of an after life at the moment of death.

"In this article he reports on experiences of people who have been on the brink of death ... and have miraculously returned to life. These people were on the line between the here and

the hereafter...and in a moment of physical unconsciousness got a brief glimpse of a new life in which there was supreme peace.

"In all these cases the person was, to all appearances, dead. Hundreds of people have had "out-of-body consciousness—that is, the apparent ability to people who exhibit no respiration, heart beat or brain-wave activity to describe events taking place around them."

While in this state of apparent death these people have contact with another world.

The article quotes from a book by Dr. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., Ph.D., MD. In *Life After Death*, Dr. Moody asserts that "the picture of the events of dying which emerges from these

173

+ + +

accounts corresponds in a striking way with that painted in very ancient and esoteric writings totally unfamiliar to my subjects."

Mr. Woodward reports that "in particular, Moody finds that the experiences of floating out of body, meeting spiritual companions and encountering a being of light are remarkably analogous to images found in the Tibetan Book of the Dead."

"In one repeated account," the article reports, "the patient feels himself rushing through a long, dark tunnel while noise rings in his ears. Suddenly he finds himself outside his own body, looking down with curious detachment at a medical team's efforts to resuscitate him. He hears what is said, notes what is happening but cannot communicate with anyone. Soon his attention is drawn to other presences in the room—spirits of dead relatives or friends—who communicate with him nonverbally. Gradually he is drawn to a vague 'being of light.' This being invites him to evaluate his life and shows him high-lights of his past in panoramic vision. The patient longs to stay with the being of light but is reluctantly drawn back into the physical body and recovers."

~ ~ ~

"One researcher, Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, an internationally respected expert on the psychiatric dimensions of dying, now claims that she has proof that 'there is life after death on the basis of hundreds of such stories.'

"As a result of such experiences, she says, 'many of them resented our desperate attempts to bring them back to life. Death is the feeling of peace and hope. Not one of them has been afraid to die again'."

The story is illustrated with the reproduction of a fifteenth-century woodcut of the soul of a woman leaving her body. The picture shows the woman lying in bed with a Priest and Sister at her side. In the upper corner of the room she is shown as a small spirit in the arms of an angel.



~ ~ ~

"This story...and particularly the picture...interested me because I have had this experience in one of my serious illness.

A remarkable fact is that I have been considered dying five times and yet today at 77 I am in such good health that I have set my target for a century.

I didn't experience the feeling of rushing through a long dark tunnel with noise ringing in my ears. Nor did I find myself in the arms of an angel of light. All I experienced was a sense of being a tiny spirit in the room looking down on myself lying in a bed. I was fully aware of what was happening and I was completely indifferent to the body lying in bed. I wanted to get away from it. It was, as described in the article, a moment of supreme peace. And then my spirit was drawn back into my body and I lived again. The woodcut that illustrated the story could have been an illustration of my experience.

I have never been afraid of death...not even as a child...but since that experience I know that it is a transition to be welcomed...because it brings a peace that "passeth all understanding."

~ ~ ~

"You know...I shouldn't be here. It is said that if you add up the years of your parents and grand parents lives and divide the total by six you have your life expectancy.

I know nothing about my grandparents on my mother's side. They must have died very young. My mother died when I was ten and there is no record of her parents anywhere. My

174

+ + +

grandfather on my father's side died at 36, my grandmother at 60, my mother at 36 and my father at 44. Divide the total by four and my life expectancy is 44. So I'm long overdue.

My first serious illness was on the Sahara desert in Egypt at the age of 18 in the first world war. Many doctors examined me in a hospital in Alexandria. They couldn't figure out what was wrong. I have since decided that I was suffering from desert fatigue. I had given up until one day an English Sister sat on the side of my bed, took one of my hands in hers, and asked me if there were any last messages I wanted to send home.

I took the hint...I pulled myself together and got better. I was never ill again in my three years of service overseas.

My second illness was a strep throat. It worked fast. Wendell Willkie, author of the book One World, the man who ran for the U.S. Presidency on an Independent ticket against F. D. Roosevelt and made a great showing, was stricken in New York at the same time. In a few days he died. The crisis in my case passed quickly and I got better. I said the infection

worked fast. In a few days it reduced me to an ashen-coloured skeleton. I was so emaciated that the day I returned to The Tribune the girls in the office were so shocked they cried.

In my other three illness I received Extreme Unction, the final Sacrament of the Catholic Church reserved for the dying.

And so it wasn't a joke. In the last four cases I was saved by a new drug that, in each case, had just come on the market. That is the miracle of modern medicine.

Oh yes, there are things wrong with me now but my doctors keep them under control with new drugs.

Because of these experiences I feel no fear of death. I say that my target is 100. It's fun challenging death. But any time the Old Boy wants to come...I'll gladly go with him.

~ ~ ~

"I have seen many people die. A Christian's death is an inspiration to witness. If ever there was a Christian my sister Naomi was one.

She was unconscious for a long time before she died. During this period her face was often wreathed in a beatific smile.

There is no doubt about it. She was having visions of the glory land ...a reward for which she had worked all her life.

~ ~ ~

"I will tell you a still more remarkable story to indicate that it is possible for a healthy person to communicate with the dead while in a trance.

My mother's older sister, Aunt Mary, periodically fell off into a deep sleep that lasted for 48 hours or more.

During that period she carried on a running conversation with the spirits of dead members of the family who seemed to be moving in and out of the room.

She spoke aloud. It was like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. When she finally woke up she knew nothing of what had taken place, not even as a dream.

After my mother died Aunt Mary's family revealed that they knew the date of her death six months earlier. During one of her trances the spirits in the room told Aunt Mary that on that date my mother would join them in the spirit world.

And so I am convinced that there is a spirit world ...and I believe that it's a wonderful place to be.

~~~

"You must remember the experience of Abraham Lincoln. One night he dreamt that he walked through the White House. Everything was draped in black and a feeling of gloom pervaded the place.

Finally he reached the great reception room where a coffin was draped in the Stars and Stripes.

"Who is dead?" he asked someone near the coffin.

"The President is dead," was the reply.

Then he woke up. The dream was so realistic that he felt depressed but he threw off the feeling of gloom during the day.

That night he was assassinated in a theatre in Washington."

~~~

### **The Living and the Dead**

"One of the most important questions in psychic phenomena is the relationship that may exist between the living and the dead. I can also write on this subject because I have had some vivid experiences in this field. I am convinced from my experiences that the dead can help the living and the living can help the dead.

My mother died when I was 10. The night she died seemed like the end of the world to me. We didn't have a great deal of this world's goods but we had a happy home. We all had to work hard to keep The Tribune alive. I started work at five but, despite this fact, while my mother was alive my life seemed as free as a little bird flitting from tree to tree and raising a song of praise to the glory of his Maker.

When this happened my paternal grandmother came to live with us. From that day I had trouble. I have had much happiness in my later life but nothing just like when my mother was alive. My childhood experience was one of complete freedom. My later happy life has been associated with trials and many tribulations.

While my father was alive my mother passed completely out of our lives. He died when I was 15 and my older brother Gilbert headed the family until I was 20. After serving three years in the B.W.I. Regiment overseas in the first world war, I came home to give the family leadership.

It was after my father's death that both my father and mother seemed to realize that we needed their help. They started to visit Gilbert in his dreams.

One night they came to him together. They said they wanted to take a look at the office. They made a tour of the office together. At the end of the tour they seemed satisfied that everything was all right but, just as they were leaving, my father said to Gilbert: "Don't forget, you have something to do at the Registry tomorrow."

That was the last day Gilbert had to turn in a report on my father's affairs to the Registry. He had completely forgotten about it.

176

+ + +

Several times after that they came to Gilbert in a dream and pointed a direction for him to follow.

~ ~ ~

"My first experience was with my mother. This was on the Sahara desert in 1916 after I had just turned eighteen.

In the story I wrote two days ago about life after death I told you about a serious illness I had on the desert when the doctors seemed to think I was going to die. My principal doctor was named Dr. Stewart. When I recovered quickly after an English Sister intimated to me how gravely ill I was, he told me that my recovery was a miracle.

~ ~ ~

"It all started one night while I was on Ordnance Guard. Every night a detachment from our regiment was taken from the desert to the outskirts of Alexandria to guard the ordnance in that city. The ordnance was all the Allied equipment stored in the area.

The guard covered a wide area. It was so wide that, when the guard was changed every two hours, it took two full hours to make the change. For this reason a Sergeant and a Corporal took turns at doing the route.

To do this guard we were transported to the edge of the desert where we met a train that took us into the city. This meant that it was impossible to get a relief in case of sickness and it was equally impossible to leave any post unguarded. Nor could anyone do a double shift.

I was taken sick after reaching the guard post. The Sergeant took me to see a doctor. The doctor said I should be in hospital but he pointed out that there was no one to take my place. He asked me if I felt strong enough to stick the night out. I told him I would try.

The Ordnance Guard was a terrible spot. Some of the places were so dark that you couldn't see more than a few feet ahead of you. I have told this story before but it can stand repeating in this particular context today.

One night one of our chaps saw two eyes approaching him through the darkness. No sound. Two eyes. Nothing more. He challenged the approaching object. It continued to come on. He challenged it twice more. It didn't stop. Then he fired and the eyes disappeared. The next morning they found a dead hog lying in the path with a bullet wound between its eyes.

~~~

"I was very ill that night. Soon after I reached my post I found I couldn't stand up. And so I decided to lie down on the side of the road and fold my rifle in my great-coat. I must have fallen asleep immediately.

The next thing I knew the whole heavens were ablaze with a brilliant light. And I saw my mother, dressed in a great flowing silk robe and smiling radiantly, descending to me. She was as big as the whole heavens. She came . . . took me by my hand and lifted me to my feet . . . she then placed my rifle in my hand in the defence position . . . brushed my coat . . . and disappeared.

At that moment I awoke and all was darkness. I then became aware of tramping feet and saw the glint of bayonets flashing in the dark. It was the relief guard. The guard always marched with fixed bayonets.

177

+ + +

I was so confused that I was unable to challenge them properly. The Corporal halted the guard when I seemed to be mumbling incoherently and approached alone. He dressed me down severely for failing to challenge the guard properly and informed me that I would be placed under arrest as soon as we got back on the desert. The next day I went to hospital, a very sick man.

Had I been caught asleep at my post I would have been Court Martialed and shot,

Soon after returning to the desert I was drafted out to France where I had so many narrow escapes that I felt that someone must be watching over me. I came through without a scratch. And was never ill again in the cold northern climate.

~~~

"When I came back to Nassau and started getting into trouble with **The Tribune** I had several visits from my father and mother in my dreams that always gave me new heart.

And then I got involved with a girl of whom I knew they would not approve. She had a great fascination for me but she was the type that wouldn't have fitted into their lives.

I decided I was going to marry this girl. On a visit to New York I bought a small diamond engagement ring. One day I fell asleep in my cabin in the **S. S. Munargo**. I had the ring on the end of my finger and fell asleep admiring it and thinking about this girl.

And then I dreamt. My father and mother came into the cabin. They lifted my hand, looked at the ring and then stared at me coldly for a moment with a look of complete disgust on their faces. They then dropped my hand back on the bed and left the cabin without saying a word.

Needless to say, that marriage never came off. Later events showed that they were right I was wrong.

~ ~ ~

"Many times I was helped in this way through my dreams. When I stopped to think about it I felt it was unfair that my parents should be earth-bound to look after me. And so I prayed about it: Although I had never dreamed about Father Chrysostom, he had done so much for me I included him in my prayers.

I prayed that if there were anything in the lives of my parents and Fr. Chrysostom that tied them to earth I asked that it be transferred to me so that I might redeem the burden in my lifetime. During my prayer I felt a gentle brush on my lips. It was a kiss. My prayer must have been answered because they never came again. I felt glad for them but sorry for myself because there have been times when I have felt the need of their comforting presence.

Despite this fact I continued to feel that there was an invisible influence guarding me throughout my life. On more than one occasion, when my friends felt that I was caught in a hopeless situation, some invisible hand has piloted me back to safe harbour. This has happened so often that my wife and daughter, Mrs. Carron, who have been very near to me in these situations, now feel that nothing can go wrong with us.

When I say nothing can go wrong I don't mean to suggest that we won't have setbacks and troubles. But I feel nothing can go wrong because I can now look back on 77 years of life and I can truthfully say that, in retrospect, my worst experiences have turned out to be the best thing that could have happened at the time it took place.

178

+ + +

And so I am convinced that if a man lives in a state of faith, the spirit of the dead can be an instrument through which he is protected from harm and, through the medium of prayer, he can also help release the spirits of the dead from earth-bound concerns."

## Haunted House

Reverend Fred Fleischer is a former Roman Catholic priest, but now an Anglican priest. He is American, white, and married to a Bahamian. He is also an analyst having obtained his training at the Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland. Father Fred is also an accomplished pianist, and teaches music at St. John's College, among the many other interesting activities that he is involved with. He told me of some interesting experiences that happened to him

while living in an old Bahamian mansion that is alleged to be haunted. This house is situated at the end of Bilney Lane—a large two storied mansion - and is at present abandoned. The neighbours attest that strange things happen "in dat house." "Dat house haunted" and "don go dere Doc—you'll get hagged" greeted me as I paid a visit there one afternoon to "case the joint".

When Father Fred moved into the house, he found all the possessions of the deceased sisters, the last inhabitants of the house. He found a jewellery box with a stuffed bird, many rare old books, exquisitely hand made furniture and other memorabilia that should have been preserved for a proper Bahamian Museum.



*Alleged HAUNTED HOUSE situated at the end of Bilney Lane  
off Mackey Street, Nassau, Bahamas.*

The description of the house conforms to how Hal Hennesy described it in one of his articles in 1971 -

3. Hennessey, Hal "Builders of the Bahamas". The Nassau Guardian Saturday, July 24, 1971. Page 2.

179

+ + +

"The old house stood at the head of Bilney Lane in a large overgrown clearing. In the late afternoon it was etched darkly against the sky, bleak and forbidding. "Is there anyone here?" I called, but no answer came so I entered the open doorway. Inside was a scene of chaotic disorder -old, once valuable books and albums were strewn about indiscriminate1y, clothes dating back beyond the 1920's littered the floor, and scraps of yellowed papers and documents were everywhere. It was like opening a well bound history—book to a page unexpectedly tarnished by noisome stains. One bizarre touch: an old style telephone lay buried in a file of debris in one corner. I lifted the receiver. From it came a variety of noises,

buzzings and clicks, and an unintelligible ghostly voice. I had the eerie sensation that if I were to pull the cord from the wall, the sounds would not stop. But no, the house was still connected to the world of reality, a bridge between yesterday and now.

"Good bye", I said, and hung up, feeling foolish."

Further on in the article Hal in interviewing one of the descendants of the owner of the house asked:

"Why didn't one of the...rescue some of the more valuable or historical heirlooms?" "You saw that stuff, it's junk", the interviewee replied. Hal retorted. "It happens that one of the things I found in there was the body of a parakeet preserved carefully in a small jewel box. Some one must have loved that little bird a lot to have kept it that way. Someone sentimental?"

However, getting back to Father Fred's story—he rented the house, moved in and did some renovations to make it more comfortable for him. He soon had to go back to complete his studies at the Jung Institute, and a friend, Cecil Dorsett, a member of the Lucayan Chorale, of which Fred is a musical director, moved in to stay in the house while Fred was away and also to set up residence there as it was sufficiently large enough to ensure comfortable and private living.

Father Fred left the Bahamas for Switzerland, and Cecil moved in. The very first night, shortly after Cecil retired to bed, and fell asleep he was awakened by violent shaking of his bed. When he got up, there was this old white man, with a long beard, trying to wake him.

"What are you doing here?" the man asked Cecil. "No black man has ever lived in this house. You can only stay if they agree to it."

"What do you mean? What are you talking about? I've just moved in and this house is rented by my friend Father Fred Fleischer. What do you mean? Who are 'they'?" Cecil asked, very frightened. "Come with me" the man replied. Cecil was then led by the old man downstairs to what used to be the Library, but which Fred had converted into a kitchen. He was placed in a chair near to one of the windows, and waited. The old man told him that he could participate in the discussion, but could not vote. While Cecil was waiting he looked out of the window and saw all these old, white, people coming up from the ground \* and entering the room through the walls of his room! Cecil thought that he was having a bad dream, and hoped that he would soon wake up!

When all these people had entered the room, a violent discussion began. There were two old ladies that hurled abuse at him, calling him a "nigger" and that he had no "right in this house". Cecil was so frightened that he became speechless and only hoped that the nightmare

\* This area of Bilney Lane used to be a cemetery. The site of the house is situated on the grounds of part of this cemetery.



+ + +

would end. The old man soon called for the arguments to cease and told them that it was time for the vote and led Cecil back up the stairs to his bed. He went back downstairs and a few minutes later, returned to Cecil and informed him that the votes went against his staying in the house. The old man said, however, that his vote was for him and he could stay in the house. With that statement the old man disappeared as quickly as he had appeared.

By this time Cecil was dripping wet with perspiration and "shaking like a leaf." He got up, quickly dressed, and rushed back home to his parents' house where he stayed until Father Fred returned to the Bahamas, and he moved back to the house with him.

Father Fred had a Haitian gardener, Joseph, who lived in the house and who had similar experiences as Cecil. One night Joseph cried out and when Father Fred and Cecil went to his room, Joseph was struggling with somebody who was trying to choke him. Another night, Joseph invited a friend to stay with him while Fred and Cecil were off the island. While sleeping, they were awakened by blows from a belt. They were being beaten by two old white ladies and a man who told them to "get out of the house."

This is exactly what they did and very quickly. Joseph's friend has never visited him again! One night Father Fred came home around 10:30 p.m. to find that he had no electricity in the house. On checking the neighbourhood, all the other neighbours' houses had lights, and on looking at his fuses, everything was in order. He had an old candelabra and tried several times unsuccessfully to light it. Everytime it caught, it was as if a breeze would come and blow it out, although it was a very 'still' night. Since he couldn't get light, he decided to take a ride in his car. When he was going down Fowler Street, he met a friend and invited him to his house for a drink. Father Fred turned back and headed for the house. As the car reached the gate, his friend let out a terrifying scream and asked him to stop the car. "I'm not going up there—something is wrong with that house!" "Why?" asked Father Fred. "I don't know, but I get a funny feeling. Something is wrong up there. I'm not going there."

Father Fred took his friend back and shortly returned to his home. He found another candle and every time he tried to light it, the candle would be extinguished by some wind. Another thing that was bizarre was the action of his cat who almost went 'berserk'—running around and meowing wildly. The lights suddenly came on. He looked at his watch and it was midnight. Next day Father Fred heard that one of the relatives of the owners of the house had died that night. He was hovering between life and death from about 10: 15 p.m., when the lights were off and died at midnight, when the lights suddenly came on again!

Mrs. Phyllis White is an American friend who used to live in the Bahamas and also lived in the Philippines for two years. She has a Master's degree in education and used to work as a special education teacher at the Boys Industrial School. My wife and I spent five glorious

days with Phyllis, her husband Joe and their daughter in Terhan, Iran in 1973 and while there I told her about this book.

In 1974 I received the following letter from Phyllis (with photographs) telling me about psychic healing in the Philippines. While this may not have any direct connection with Obeah, it demonstrates an aspect of psychic power for healing methods in a similar manner of gaining some unexplained "power" resource that the Obeah person can also 'tap':

181

+ + +

July 18, 1974

"Dear Tim & Pauline,

I can waste no time in niceties at the beginning of this letter, after I tell you the most mind blowing experience I had yesterday. Timmie, you must come here ! Its essential in your research.

"Have you ever heard of "spirit healers." Unlike faith healers who rely on your faith to heal you, these people claim close attunement with "God"; but the Asian concept of God! This God, gives them the power. No! they are the instruments through whom "God" uses his "power?" "forces?" to heal people. Now the mind buster! Yesterday I went with four friends to a "spirit healer." Jesus what I saw exploded my mind. There is no way you will believe what I have to write but here goes. One of my girl friends here—a very black girl from N.Y. (who incidentally heard about these healers the day I did) submitted herself for an OPERATION—She laid on the table—The Rev. Father Marcos Orbito wearing a white jacket—walked up to the table, unzipped her slacks and pushed them down (the pubic hairs were not exposed). He rubbed her abdomen with an oil of some kind, took some plain white cotton, wet it in water from a basin on the table and proceeded to "knead his fingers" on her abdomen below the navel ever so gently but firmly. Before my very eyes, I was standing next to the table just as a woman would position herself at the sink to wash dishes—yes, that close, with, I might add, my camera and flash unit in "Go" position. Before my very eyes, his hands, first tips then knuckles, then more of his 10 fingers were "INSIDE HER BODY!" He began to pull out clots of blood (I thought—"Jesus Christ" it looks like menstrual clots"). He continued kneading into the cavity he had "created with his hands," and then he started pulling out a seven inch tube of tissue (just what a thin umbilical cord would look like) I, during all of this time was standing over her taking pictures as fast as I could. The "surgeon" even told me as he held open the cavity "here, take a picture of this." Now! My friend was lying there, very frightened, nothing to kill any pain was administered, nothing! I saw inside her abdomen, and she felt only a tingling vibration, not heat, not cold, not warmth. The most discomfort she felt was maybe that he was pulling out the pubic hairs on her abdomen.

"I must confess. It was at this point I began to feel very upset—like a part of my brain had flown away from my head. I shoved my camera at Michael who took us there, and I went outside stumbled in a daze—utterly shocked therefore I cannot say what it (her abdomen)

looked like when he was in the actual process of taking his hands "out of her stomach." One of the others described it as "he started to remove his hands still kneading as when he went in, and by the time he had his hands completely out, her stomach (abdomen) was just as it was when he started. He wiped the remainder of the clots, oil and water from the cotton off her stomach, I came back as she was sitting up—I saw her sitting up and turning around to look at the basin the "healer" was pointing out. She was in a state of shock at what she saw in the basin, she had a look (mouth open, eyes not comprehending, words trying to find her tongue). She was in no discomfort or pain at all. She said she was a little weak as she stepped down from the table. She is sure she was weak (only from shock) at what she saw in the basin. She is a registered nurse with a Masters and points toward a Ph.D.

"You know how a woman puts her hands in yeast dough. They just disappear in the dough. The dough "accepts" the probing fingers. When the fingers pull out of the dough, it closes in on the space invaded by the fingers. It was the very same. Her abdomen "accepted" his hands.



(i) Start of "Operation."



(ii) "Surgeon" begins to knead into body. Assistant supposedly holds cotton to keep blood from running onto table or patient's clothes. Notice no long sleeves to hide things in.



(iii) (you tell me?) Middle of operation.



(iv) The tissue and clots he pulled out during picture number 3. His index finger is supposedly down inside her abdomen. He "cuts" tissue by "magnetic energy."



**(v) No scars. Patient was in a little state of shock when she saw and examined the tissue and clots in the basin. NOT COTTON! The cotton when wet does not turn red.**

But unlike the yeast dough which shows clear lines or punctured marks, her skin was unmarked.

"The healer I saw, has been investigated by Physicians, Institutions (Swiss, German etc.) including the American CIA and is said to be genuine.

"I am going again tomorrow. This time more prepared for that I'll see. More ready to photograph. My hand is too tired to go into detail about how he has been investigated. He (the Rev. Orbito) claims to be guided by the "energy force" to that part of the body which is ill and through "magnetic healing" he automatically corrects what is sick." He says he can not heal a body sick through bacteria or infections (colds, flu, etc.) but cancer, leukemia, arthritis, rheumatism, clots, nerves, growths, "he" can reach in and heal." He asked my friend how long she had been having trouble with her periods; because the cloths came out of her uterus and the tissue he took out was from "out of her tube." Don't ask me any questions. I

only saw it. I didn't understand it. In about two or three weeks I'm going to photograph operations in a small province about four hours from Manila. There is a woman who is supposed to be fantastic at this stuff.

184

+ + +

Another man is said to hold his hand above the area to be operated on, and moves his finger in a line in the air. The skin directly under it opens, as if an incision were made via scalpels. Bare handed surgery is what I saw. I will send you pictures and literature. I think you can't afford to ignore this aspect of the "unexplained" in your next book.

Got to dash. We love you both. Most affectionately. Phyllis."

Another comment on this type of "healing" was made in an article in Time Magazine, March 4, 1974.

"The most irresponsible and odious niche in the world of the paranormal is occupied by the psychic healers, who cannot operate legally in the US. but lure unfortunate Americans overseas with claims of spectacular cures. Diagnosing illness and locating diseased organs by purely psychic means, they perform operations by plunging their hands through what appear to be deep incisions to grasp and remove sickly tissue. In the Philippines, currently the center for psychic surgery, a number of conjurers use sleight of hand and buckets of blood and animal parts to work their wonders. Surrounded by adherents who have been "cured," the ill-educated and often filthy surgeons perform "operations" - slashes of the epidermis, knives in the eye cavity, fingers in the abdomen - sometimes painlessly and always with great flourish.

"As one witness to such "surgery" describes it: "The healer pulled some tissue from the area of the 'operation'...I literally grabbed the 'cancerous tissue' from Tony's hand...I wanted to have valid medical tests performed on it. The tests, conducted in Seattle, showed that the tissue was 'consistent with origin from a small animal...there is no evidence in any of this tissue to suggest that this represents metastatic carcinoma from the breast of the patient.' "

Tom Valentine, author of a book on perhaps the best known of the psychic surgeons, Tony Agpaoa, documents the experience of a Mrs. Raymond Steinberg of Two Rivers, Wis. Tony "made a major production" of removing a piece of metal and several screws that had been surgically placed in her hip after an automobile accident. X rays later showed that Agpaoa had removed nothing. "

Dr. Brian Humblestone is a Consultant Psychiatrist. He is an Englishman, has lived in the Bahamas for about twelve years and is married to a Bahamian. We work together at the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre and have had long discussions on the subject of obeah. Dr. Humblestone has had many patients who have been "fixed" and has appreciated the many cultural implications involved. He had, two years ago, a very strange experience in Haiti involving a Voodoo ceremony that he attended, but of which I am not permitted to relate.

We have scientific meetings at Sandilands and after one of these meetings when I presented a paper on "Obeah In the Bahamas," he commented that he believed that a paranormal world does exist and that with more experimentation and honest research, may one day be able to explain scientifically many of the unexplained phenomena existing today.

"After all", Dr. Humblestone continued, "it was difficult to conceive of the idea that a small transistor radio could receive messages from all parts of the world. Man, with his brains, has created that transistor, so it is not unusual for man to receive messages from other men or sources and from far away places. Thus, telepathy is not an unusual thing."

Mrs. Angela Barney, my daughter, is a graduate of the College of St. Benedict and the University of Miami, and a Guidance Counsellor with the Bahamas Ministry of Education. "Do you believe in obeah Angela?" I asked as I was actually completing this book.

185

+ + +

"Yes".

"Why?" I prodded.

"Well, I've had certain experiences one right after the other, that I thought strange – it wasn't until recently that I found out that someone had gone to an obeah woman to have me fixed. "

"But you're a young, educated woman - do you really believe in obeah or do you have any explanation for obeah?"

"Not really, but I suppose that if one believes in something strong enough, perhaps it will happen." She refused to discuss it further!

## **II SUMMING UP**

The overall findings with regard to this obeah question appear to be the following:

1. Obeah is widespread in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.
2. The majority of obeah practitioners are Bahamians although many Haitians, Guyanese and Jamaicans are infiltrating the profession.
3. The majority of obeah practitioners are frauds - 'con' men and women—and utilize many occult products obtained from America. There were, however, two persons, whom I believe have extra sensory perception and that are honest in their dealings with clients, and another one who is deeply into "Black Magic."
4. There are many people who practice bush medicine and healing, and even though people look at them as obeah practitioners, they are not. These people are sincere

and have a genuine pride in their knowledge. They also have an extraordinary facility of dealing with human problems - physically, and emotionally.

These native healers perform as valid a service as the trained professional. In effect, many of these "healers" are more effective than professionals, because not only do they share their clients' culture, communicate in language that they understand, but they live up to their clients' expectations.

Torrey<sup>3</sup> an American Psychiatrist very intelligently comments: "one has no right to impose its concepts of causation or system of classification upon another. The only exception is when there are relevant data that are scientifically proven (as opposed to being just empirically validated) and could be helpful to the other culture. An example of this would be the scientifically proven relationship between the metabolic abnormality of the disease phenyl ketonuria and subsequent mental retardation in the child. It is known that a certain kind of diet, if begun early enough in the child's life will minimize or obviate the mental retardation. Western cultures have an obligation to share this kind of data with other cultures and encourage them to use it. It does not by contrast, have the obligation to impose the concept that sexual deviancy is caused by a traumatic childhood experience. Such a concept may be true, may be false, or may be culture-bound, but in any case rests upon data which is on exactly the same scientific plane as the idea that sexual deviancy is caused by a lost soul or a broken taboo."

3. Torrey, E. Fuller "The Mind Game. Witchdoctors and Psychiatrists." Bantam Books Publications. 1973. New York. P. 164.

186

+ + +

5. Obeah clients were originally Afro-Bahamians and from the lower socio-economic level. Today, clients come from all ethnic groups and from all socio-economic levels.
6. The majority view is, that people can fix you by poisoning or placing something in food or drink. One can be fixed by the other means (e.g. cemetery dirt, etc.) if you believe in it. That is, if you believe in it strongly enough, it will happen!
7. Obeah is looked upon as a valid Bahamian cultural tradition, even though it is still illegal.

187

+ + +

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Additional references and notes are given in the footnotes of this book.

AJISAEE, A.K., "**The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People.**" Kash & Klare Bookshop, Lagos, Nigeria, 1946.

ALBURY, Paul; "**The Story of the Bahamas**". MacMillan-Caribbean, London, 1975.

ANONYMOUS - "**Folk Tales and Songs.**" 1930.

AUGIER, F.R.; et al "**The Making of the West Indies**". Longman-Caribbean, 1960.



BARRY, Colman J. (O.S.B.); **"Upon These Rocks—Catholics in the Bahamas."** The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., U.S.A., & The Order of St. Benedict Inc., 1973.

BELL, Hesketh J.; **"Obeah - Witchcraft in the West Indies"**. Sampson Low-Marston & Co., London, 1893.

BELL, MacLachlan H. (Major) **"Isles of June"**, London, 1936.

BESSY, Maurice; **"A Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural"**. Spring Books, London, 1964.

CASSIDY, F.G., **"Jamaican Talk: Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica"**. London, 1961.

CLARIDGE, W.W.. **"A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti"**. Vol. I, London.

COOMBS, Orde (editor), **"Is Massa Day Dead"**, Doubleday & Sons, New York, 1974.

CRATON, Michael, **"A History of the Bahamas"**. Collins, London, 1962.

CURRY, Robert, **"Bahamian Lore—Folk Tales and Songs."** Paris, 1930.

DEFRIES, Amelia, **"The Fortunate Islands"**. London, 1929.

DE HAAN, Richard, **"Satan, Satanism and Witchcraft"**. Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, (U.S.A.), 1972.

DIEPGEN, Paul, **"Medizin und Kultur"**. Verlag Stuttgart, West Germany, 1938.

DUPUCH, Etienne, **"Tribune Story"**, Ernest Burn, London, 1967.

EDWARDS, B., **"History of the West Indies"**. Volume 2, London.

FIELD, M.J., **"Religion and Medicines of the Ga People"**. Oxford. 1937.

FORBES, Rosita, **"A Unicorn in the Bahamas"**. New York, 1940.

FORD, Dorothy, **"New World Groups—Bahamians"**. Nassau Guardian (1844) Ltd., Nassau, Bahamas, 1971.

FRANK, Jerome D., **"Persuasion and Healing"**, The John Hopkins University Press, U.S.A., 1963.

FRANKLIN, John Hope, **"From Slavery to Freedom - A History of American Negroes"**. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1966.

HEIZER, Robert F., **"Mixtum Compositum: The Use of Narcotic Mushrooms by Primitive Peoples"**. Ciba Symposia 5: 1713 - 1716, 1944.

HERSKOVITES, M.J., **"Dahomey"**, Vol. 2.

HIGGS, Leslie (Mrs.), **"Bush Medicine in the Bahamas"**. Nassau Guardian (1844) Ltd., Nassau, Bahamas, 1969.

JOHNSON, Doris, **"The Quiet Revolution in the Bahamas"**. Family Islands Press Ltd., Nassau, Bahamas, 1972.

JUNG-STILLING, Heiniich, **"Theorie de Geister Kunde"**. Zeibircherverlag; Nuremberg, 1921.

KOCH, Kurt E. (Dr.), **"Christian Counselling and Occultism"**. Ev. Verlag 7501, Berghausen, West Germany, 1972.

IAVEY, Anton Szandar, **"The Satanic Rituals"** Avon Books, New York, 1972.

LEAF, Earl, **"Isles of Rhythm"**. A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc., New York, 1948.

LINDSEY, Hal, **"Satan is alive and well on Planet Earth"**. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, (U.S.A.), 1972.

LONG, Edward, **"History of Jamaica"**, Vol. I, Bk. 2, Ch. 2.

MADDEN, R.R., **"A Twelve Months Residence in the West Indies"**. Vol. I, 1835, London.

MANONKIAN, M., **"Akan and Ga—Ardangme Peoples of the Gold Coast"**, London, 1950.

MBITI, John S., **"African Religions and Philosophy"**. Heinemann, London, 1969.

MCCARTNEY, Timothy, **"Neuroses in the Sun"**, Executive Printers, TimPaul Publishing Co., Nassau, 1971.

MCCULLOCH, M., **"Peoples of the Sierra Leone Protectorate"**. London, 1952.

McKINNEN, Daniel, **"A Tour through the British West Indies"**. London, 1804.

MUMFORD, Louis, **"The Condition of Man"**. Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., London, 1944.

MURDOCK, G.P., **"Africa: Its Peoples and their Culture History"**. New York & London, 1959.

PASCOE, C.F., **"Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G. 1701- 1900"**. London, 1901.

PATTERSON, Orlando, **"The Sociology of Slavery"**, Granada Publishing Co., London, 1967.

POWLES, L.B., **"Land of the Pink Pearl: Life in the Bahamas"**. Sampson Low- Marston & Co., Ltd., London, 1888.

SCOTT, Reginald, **"The Discoverie of Witchcraft"**, Book VII, London, 1665.

SEABROOK, W.B., **"The Magic Island"**, G.H. Harrop Co., Ltd., London, 1929.

SEPHARIAL, **"The Art of Card Fortune Telling"**. W. Foulsham & Co., Ltd., London, 1958.

SHATTUCK, G.B., **"The Bahama Islands"**, Geog. Soc. of Baltimore., Macmillan, N.Y., 1905.

SNELGRAVE, William, **"A new and exact account of some parts of Guinea"**, (1734).

STARK, J.H., **"History and Guide to the Bahamas"**. New York, 1891.

SYMONETTE, Michael A., **"Discovery of a Nation"**, Management Communications Services Ltd., Nassau, Bahamas, 1973.

TISCHNER, Rudolf, **"Ergebnisse Okkultur Forschung"**, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart, 1950.

TORREY, E. Fuller, **"The Mind Game—Witchdoctors and Psychiatrists."** Bantam Book Publications, New York, 1973.

UNGER, Merrill, **"Demons in the World Today"**. Tyndale House Publishers, (U.S.A.), 1971.

WHYLLY, H.C., **"Superstitions of the Bahamas."** San Salvador Teachers College, July, 1972. Ministry of Education and Culture, Nassau, Bahamas.

WILLIAMS, J., **"Voodoos and Obeahs."** Dial Press, New York, 1932.

WRIGHT, Stafford J., **"Mind, Man and The Spirits"**. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A., 1971.

189

## OFFICIAL COMMITNICATIONS

1. Many important documents dealing with varied aspects of Bahamian history can be found in the Registry, the House of Assembly Library and the Nassau Public Library. The most comprehensive documentation however, can be found in the Bahamas Archives Department.
2. Other informative material can be obtained from the Institute of Jamaica, the Public Records Office in London, The Carnegie Institute in Washington, and Manuscripts in the British Museum.
3. **BOARD OF TRADE RECORDS TO 1837 (B.T.6:)**

B.T.6: Vols. 9-11: Slave Trade Enquiry—Copies of certain of the evidence submitted to the Committee of Council for Trade and Plantations in the course of their enquiry into the state of the African Slave Trade.

R.T.6:g: - 1788; B.T.6: 10 - 1788; B.T.6: 1788-89.

#### **4. BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS (BPP)**

HPP: Vol. XVII 1818: Papers relating to the Treatment of Slaves in the Colonies.

BPP: Vol. XX 1831-1832: Report from the select committee on the Extinction of Slavery throughout the British Dominions; with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, p.1.

### **NEWSPAPERS**

**Nassau Guardian**

**The Tribune**

**The People** (Wednesday, 6th January, 1974 Thursday, 17th January, 1974)

**Santa Monica Evening Outlook** 24th June, 1971

### **MAGAZINES AND JOURNALS**

**Bahamian Review**—Vol. 15 No. 1-2, 1973.

**Cosmopolitan**—June, 1974 issue.

**Ebony**—

**Jamaican Law Journal** - April, 1974.

**Jamaican Journal** - Vol. 3 No. 2 June, 1969

(Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica)

(a) "Revival Cults in Jamaica. Notes towards a Sociology of Religion" by Edward Seaga.

(b) "Obeah and the Supernatural in West Indian Literature" by Kenneth Ramchand

TIME—"Boom Times on the Psychic Frontier".

DAEDALUS - **Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences**, Boston, Mass.,—Spring, 1974.

**Slavery, Colonialism and Racism**. "The African presence in Caribbean literature", by Edward Kamau Brathwaite. (Reprinted by permission).

190

**KIFARIT** - Vol. 3 No. 1, Freeport, Grand Bahama, 1974. "Tony Makay is Exuma the Obeah Man".

**LIFE MAGAZINE**—9th January, 1970.

**SKYWRITINGS**—Creative Communications Inc., Kingston, Jamaica.

"Everything you wanted to know about Obeah and were afraid to ask" – by Errol W. Bowen.

**POPULAR SCIENCE MONTHLY** Vol. XXXVIII - 1891.

**THE MESSAGE**—Vol. 40 No. 6, September, 1974.

**HARPERS' Magazine**, U.S.A., 1926.

"White Magic & Black..." by John W. Vandercook.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR - 2(9) 8-14, 1972.

"Witchcraft and Sex" by Robert D. Anderson.

BAHAMAS HANDBOOK - Etienne Dupuch Jr. Publications. 1970 Edition. "Bahamian Way of Death".

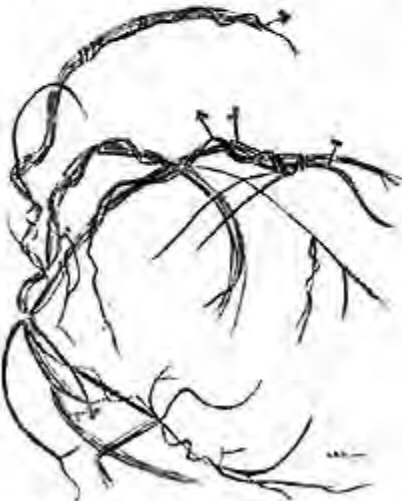
191



**BAY GERANIUM, SOAP RUSH (ANERODIA HISPIDA)**  
This plant grows as a vine or shrub on the beaches of the Bahamas. It is made into a soap; relieves itching skin, and is highly recommended for indigestion. Used by those "going into a decline" and for "clearing the lungs". It is widely used for the common cold. It has antihistaminic properties and is a powerful diaphoretic. A strong tea is made and served hot with lime and rum or gin.



**CERASEE, ART PUMPKIN (MOMORDICA CHARANTIA)**  
A quick growing vine, bearing bright yellow flowers and oddly formed orange coloured seed pods. The scarlet, pulpy coating of the seed pods is edible. The seeds are emetic and the plant is used extensively as a "tea" in colds and fever.



**LOVE-VINE, DODDER (CUSCUTA AMERICANA)** "A creeper without beginning or end". It is a parasitic twiner that eventually kills the plant it clings to. It is used for an itch of the skin, as a cooling bath for prickly heat, "against sex weakness" and if tied around the waist gives great "ease" for backache. (Cuscuta Americana is orange — Cuscuta Pentagona is yellow).

192



**56. OBEAH BUSH (PETIVERIA ALLIACEA)** A slender bush with the odour of garlic. Used as a bath to cure "pain in the bones".

192

+++