

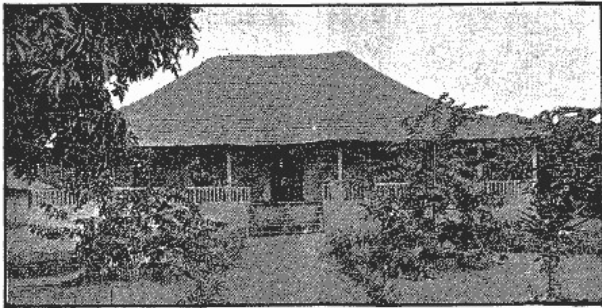
Gertrude Snyder: Article - Writes of Congo Describes Husbands Work

Brookland Daily Eagle MAY 20, 1901; Page 10

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**Writes of Congo Tribeswomen
to New Journal of
Missionaries.**

DESCRIBES HUSBAND'S WORK.



HOME OF THE SNYDERS AT LUERO, CONGO STATE.

Snyders home in congo



the amount of work to be done. Perhaps it is slight wonder if our sisters think theirs the better way, at least at first, for very few in this warm, enervating climate have any real love of work. Occasionally they sweep in their houses and towns, but dusting is quite unknown, and a dust cloth would be a decided waste of good material.

For recreation she smokes a most 'peculiar looking pipe made of a huge gourd, sometimes quite highly ornamented and studded with brass-headed nails, and here, as I fear in every part of the world, gossip is a never failing pastime. Quarrels are frequent, and for small causes they "put anger in their hearts."

They are easily excited and raise their voices to a shrill harsh tone, which can be heard a long distance and is most distracting, especially as they talk so fast it is almost impossible to understand a word. Our sister can keep up a sort of screaming cry for a whole day without shedding a tear. If angry with her husband she refuses to cook his food. If our sister belongs to the Ba-kete tribe she is not allowed to eat any meat—a saving arrangement for the husband—and I believe I never saw a woman from this tribe who was other than thin and apparently poorly nourished. The Ba-kete eat but one meal a day, the evening meal, and perhaps in this respect busy housewives at home puzzling and worrying over three meals a day may envy these simpler sisters.

Married Dr. Snyder Over a Year Ago and Went With Him to His Post.

The first issue of the Kassai Herald, a journal published in the heart of the Congo Free State, which has just reached Brooklyn through a private source, contains an interesting letter by a former Brooklynite, now the wife of a missionary stationed in that part of Africa, Mrs. D. W. C. Snyder. The paper, which is published at Luebo, is a journal devoted to the American Presbyterian Congo mission.

Mrs. Snyder, who was married only a little over a year ago, is with her husband and infant daughter now living in the town of Leopoldville, where they are settled for about four months. Dr. Snyder was sent down there to arrange and conduct a conference of Congo missionaries, which was to be held about May 1. At the same place the little steamer owned by the missionaries has been rebuilding. It is named the Samuel N. Lapsley. Mrs. Snyder, in a letter accompanying the copy of the Kassai Herald, says of her little daughter, whose name is Anna Gertrude, that she is remarkably healthy for a "Congo white baby."

The letter in the Congo paper is entitled "Our Sisters in Congo Land," of whom she says:

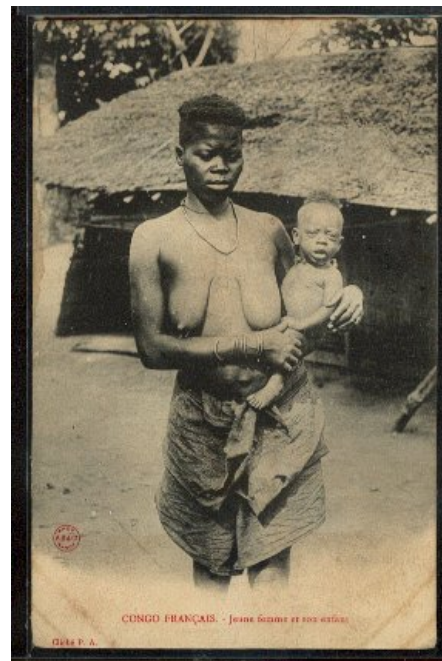
Certainly in appearance they are not attractive; truly they have no winning ways, and perhaps the most pitiful thing about them is the feeling which they inspire in one's mind, at first, as to whether they really are women and "sisters."

Let me picture to you, if I can, a wife and mother. Very likely she has been married at the age of 14 or 15. The marriage ceremony was complete when her would-be husband had paid a sufficient number of goats and yards of cloth to satisfy her relatives at least for a time. So she became his wife, —or, no, his woman, and really I am glad some times that we find no equivalent to the sacred name of wife in this African tongue, for certainly there is little, if any, appreciation of its significance. A man may have as many wives as he can pay for. Really they are all his slaves.

Dear me, how much labor is saved where there are no beds to make, stoves to polish, furniture to dust, clothes to wash, tables to set, silver to polish, nor sewing to do! But there is another side also, is there not? There are no books, no pictures, no concerts, no churches, no pretty, cozy homes, no flowers, no luxuries, no blessed knowledge of the Gospel, nor Christian kindness and fellowship.

Perhaps as we go some afternoon to visit or hold a little outdoor service we will see a strange addition to the hut of our sister.

A sort of bower has been built of huge palm fronds in front of the house, making really another room, and we know at once that a little stranger has come to this household. Stooping nearly double to enter this bower, and again to enter the low door of the house, we peep about in the darkness and discover the mother sitting flat on the dirt floor and near by a slave holding on her uncovered knees the little new born infant, quite destitute of clothing and covered with palm oil, mixed with soot, from head to foot. If the baby lives two rather startling performances take place every day. Morning and evening it is bathed in the following fashion: Placing a pot of cold water beside her, the mother sits on a low stool, with baby on her knees and sometimes scooping up the water in her hands, sometimes pouring it from the gourd, she succeeds in wetting baby most thoroughly, using her hand for a wash-cloth, while he yells with all his little might and kicks a vigorous protest. The sun and the wind are his towels and the whole process takes place out of doors, no matter how chilly the weather.



Our Congo sister, now married, leaves her home to enter one quite similar in appearance, a hut perhaps six feet by eight, in which one can barely stand upright, built altogether of palm, or thatched with leaves or grass according to the tribe to which she belongs. She begins her modest housekeeping with a few black clay pots, a mortar and pestle, in and with which to prepare her chumby, two large flat stones for grinding her meal, and a basket or two for carrying provisions to and from market and field. She labors in the field, planting and caring for chumby peanuts, sweet potatoes and corn; she prepares and cooks her husband's food, grinding the meal, pounding the cassava root, bringing the water from a considerable distance, cutting and carrying the firewood and even catching the grasshopper and other small insects, which give an extra tastiness to the evening meal.

All burdens are carried upon the heads of the women, and I am sure you would feel a thrill of admiration could you see them coming up a hill almost perpendicular in its steepness, with a huge clay pot of water resting on a little twisted pad of banana leaves, balanced so skillfully on their heads that they do not need to raise a hand to steady it. I have seen a woman raise a large open basket filled with vegetables to her head, then stoop and left to his favorite resting place—her hip—a child at least 2 years old, and walk off quite unconcerned about the weight of her load.

Yet they are not large, nor apparently very muscular nor strong. They are mostly short and rather slender.

Baby is nursed at the breast whenever he desires it, but before he is many moons old this is supplemented by a portion of the mother's own food—her bread. The loaf of chumby bread is not unattractive looking in its round whiteness, but when broken open it resembles—what shall I say? A mass of soggy white potatoes, very starchy, of course, and sour. This the mother tries to make baby eat. She plasters a huge piece over his mouth and with the aid of her finger forces it little by little down the tiny throat, baby struggling and choking and screaming in vain. Yet, poor little creatures, they live and grow to be fairly strong, healthy children.

The mother is not much troubled about her child's wardrobe nor his education. A few strings of beads around waist, neck, ankles or wrists are quite sufficient until he is nearly 10 years old, and he learns what he wishes and does as he pleases.

Motherhood, in all your sweetness, tenderness and wise teaching, have you never come to the Kassai Valley and dwelt among these people? Wanted, needed, in this great field some women with mother hearts, to bring out what surely lies dormant in the hearts of our heathen women. Not that they do not care for their children. With animal instinct, but little more, indeed, they do, only because they have never learned to love. That they can be taught to love is well proven by those who have been trained on the station.

I should like to tell you of our station girls, but space will not permit. I have told you only of the untaught native woman. In a later paper there may be opportunity to show you the contrast—a Christian wife and mother.

For our ignorant, degraded sisters, I ask your prayers.



Perhaps our young wife has come to live in a new village, and if so she will probably begin at once to dress her hair in the prevailing style. Perhaps that will mean shaving most of it off, leaving a round patch at the back of the head, or it may mean smearing palm oil and red dye into her thick mass of little curls and by manipulation elongating them until they hang about her head and low on her forehead in a greasy, reddish fringe.

There are several styles of hair dressing among Congo women, as well as several fashions in dress, although when you see the size of the piece or pieces of cloth which constitute their one and only garment, you are apt to wonder how it can be worn as a dress at all, much less be draped according to a prevailing fashion.

They do not mean to be immodest, these Congo women. They dress for comfort and as simple nature bids them; and consider the amount of clothing the American woman wears as most unreasonable and impractical. They put on a piece of cloth, or in most cases, two pieces each about a half yard square, folded over a string tied around the waist, and they wear that very piece or pieces day and night, day and night, until with age and dirt it will no longer support its own weight, and necessity compels a new garment. No Monday wash days in this sister's household. But, lo, here comes the missionary, with her dozens of pieces of cloth and straightway she must have them washed as soon as a spot of dirt appears to mar their whiteness.

Truly, the larger the wardrobe the greater

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