

BOYS' INITIATION.

In times past age was not reckoned in terms of years, and yet the period of one's birth was never forgotten.

Two months after a boys' initiation school had been held, a girls' initiation took place. The boys' initiation generally took place in the month of April and lasted three months, so that it broke up in June. The girls' initiation began in August and lasted for two months. The boys and girls of these two initiation schools were equals; they formed one regiment (mophato -- age-group). A year elapsed after the holding of one initiation school before the next one was held.

Boys and girls who are undergoing initiation do not eat corn which has been purchased (from the trading store); they eat corn which comes straight from the fields or from the grain-store (sehale). When there is a drought, no initiation ~~take~~ takes place.

Each initiated group of boys is given its own name and the same name is given to the girls initiated immediately afterwards. They constitute one regiment or age-group. The age-group has a male and a female leader. Both the initiated boys and the initiated girls are arranged in order of seniority according to the makgotla from which they are drawn.

The initiation lodge is built in the veldt. Maradu are set apart for them -- maradu being milk cows. Some distance from the site of the lodge -- say about four miles -- another site is occupied by women who do the cooking for the initiates. All the makgotla represented in the number of initiates set aside a woman or women to go and cook for their son or sons who are undergoing initiation. That is the time when those parents who take a pride in their children may be seen from the way in which they care for their welfare. Cattle and small stock are slaughtered; porridge and other types of food are cooked. When it is ready, the food is taken in a dish to the initiation lodge by an elder brother or a paternal uncle or even the father of the boy undergoing initiation -- in a word, any male member of the boy's kgotla

N.B.

I came across one man who was found in this way by an initiation group out on a hunting expedition, and the story goes that but for the intervention of Chief Montshiwa, who happened to be out with the initiates, he would have been put to death. Montshiwa saved his life and he afterwards became one of his most trustworthy servants. At present he is a headman in one of the outlying districts.

who has already undergone initiation.

Women are not allowed to approach the initiation lodge (motse bogwera) and throughout the duration of the initiation the initiates are not permitted to see women. Nor are uninitiated men allowed to approach the lodge. If one of them by chance finds himself in the lodge, he is not allowed to return home uninitiated. He is immediately included among the initiates and is circumcised in the ordinary way. Even when the initiates are out on a hunting expedition (lecholo), if they come across an uninitiated person such a person if a soman, in the olden days, was put to death; if a man he was put to death or included in the number of initiates, as pointed out above. During their stay at the initiation lodge, the boys are taught the laws and customs of their people. That was the education of the olden days and a person who had not been to the initiation school was looked upon as uneducated person, just as we to-day look upon people who have never been to school. The initiates were taught the order of seniority of the different makgotla of the town (motse), so that when he returned from initiation, he knew his juniors, his seniors and his equals in the village. They were taught the whole body of Tswana Law and Custom, e.g. court procedure (mock trials were held in which the initiates participated), the manner of seeking a wife, marriage customs and the manner in which to care for a wife during marriage; they learnt the songs of the tribe, the praises of the chiefs of the tribe and of the heroes of the wars in which the tribe had been involved in the course of its history. They were taught something of the history and origin and migrations of the tribe. When out on hunting expeditions, they were taught the rules of hunting - how to follow the track of an animal and the habits and the life-history of the animals of the area in which they were hunting; they were taught also how to keep a secret. They were taught all these matters by men who had already undergone initiation. They asked them questions - they gave them practical training - in all the subjects mentioned above.

All things done in the initiation lodge were regarded as secrets which had not to be divulged, especially to the uninitiated, whatever their age might be, and whether they were men. Nothing that happened in the initiation lodge was revealed to those at home. Even if an accident occurred to one of the initiates, e.g. if he died, even if his father should be aware of this, he says nothing about it at home, although he may during this period be sleeping at home, as he was allowed to do. The boy's mothers and sisters continue to cook for him and to send his food until the initiation is over and the boys return to their homes. It is only then that they will discover that their child died (during initiation). The news is brought to them by someone who comes to them carrying the dish which was used by their child. When he gets into the courtyard (lolwapa) of their home, he drops the dish and it breaks. It is then that they burst into tears, weeping for their deceased child. This means that the boy is buried out there and they will never be able to locate his grave. The men of the village have been aware of this death all the time, but told no-body about it.

Life in the Lodge.

The food that is brought to them the initiates eat together, they share all the food. What is left over is given is given to the cattle and the horses in the lodge, cattle and horses being the only animals allowed in the lodge. A dog is not allowed to eat food left over by initiates, nor are dogs allowed to live in the lodge.

The language used in the lodge is a different language not known by people in the village. This language, when spoken by the people who belong to the same initiation group if together with other persons, may be used in speaking about the latter without those persons being aware of the subject of the conversation.

Closing of School.

When the initiation school closes, the lodge is burnt together with everything which was used during the initiation. Nothing is left over. The clothes with which the initiates entered the lodge are destroyed by fire and new clothes are

presented to them by their parents.

Return Home

When the time for their return draws near, the parents of the boys and more particularly his maternal relatives -i.e. his maternal uncles (bo-malomagwe) prepare fine blankets for them; their sisters make various ornaments for them - ear-rings, bangles, etc. etc., and these things are sent to him so that he may decorate himself with them. It is on this occasion that people vie with one another in doing their best for their children.

When the (new) regiment returns to the village, you will notice that they behave like strangers in the village. They do not engage in much conversation with the people at home. For the most part theirs is to remain silent. A week may pass before they are quite free in their conduct. This is because they are waiting for the final act of the initiation, namely, the race (lobelo) which they are expected to run against the regiment initiated immediately before theirs. On the day of the race, all those who care to do so, who feel themselves equal to it go forth together with the initiates for a distance of about four miles from the village and thence they race back to the village. Those belonging to different regiments (mephato) arrange themselves in groups and they battle for the seditse, possession of which is the sign of victory in the race. Anyone who is leading in the race takes the seditse and whoever overtakes him takes the seditse from him and makes his way to the kgotla where the Chief awaits the winner. The regiment of the runner who comes in first with the seditse is regarded as the winner and everyone does his best to fight for his regiment. What the initiates in particular hated to see was to be outrun by an uninitiated person. It hurt their pride to see this and they did their best to seize the seditse from such a person.

There is great joy among those who gain the victory. The Chief slaughters a best or two at the kgotla which is cooked and partaken of right there. Songs are sung with actions in emulation of cattle (dipina tsa dinakana), women make ~~particular~~ peculiar

peculiar noises called go letsa megolokwane, dancing goes on, beer is drunk and generally a great festival is held. That is the end of the initiation. After this the initiates resume their customary duties at home.

Status

The initiated are now looked upon as adults. They are no longer boys. The conduct of men is expected from them. If they have younger brothers, the initiated may now leave to them the herding of the cattle. They are now permitted to marry, to participate in discussions at kgotla and in trials held at the Chief's court. They have left childhood behind and the way is now open for them to enter upon all the activities of adult men.

GIRLS' INITIATION.

- Where held. Girls' initiation is held in the village, in the segotlo of one of the houses making up the kgotla (household) from which the girls about to be initiated are drawn. All the girls in the village undergoing initiation are not collected in one place (as are the boys). While female initiation is going on in a particular segotlo, men are not permitted to enter it.
- When The initiation of girls begin in August after the termination of the boys' initiation.
- How long The initiation of girls lasts for about two months.
- In charge The girls are placed under the charge of elderly women who have themselves undergone initiation. A private door is made in the segotlo (enclosure at the back of the front hut) to enable those in attendance upon the girls to enter the segotlo without passing through the lolwapa (front enclosure).
- Instruction The female initiates are taught the customs pertaining to women - the rearing of children during marriage, female domestic duties, songs and all that is connected with the life of a woman.
- Name The men and women who undergo initiation in the same year constitute one age-group. They are given the same name, so that when that age-group is given any task to perform, whatever is men's work in that task is done by the men, and women's work by the women of that regiment. Each age-group has a male leader (who is in charge of the men) and a female leader (in charge of the women). They are first informed when when their regiment is required for any duty by the Chief. It is their responsibility to see that such a task is performed properly, to see to what extent they have failed in their appointed task, to report absentees and to indicate what action has been taken by the regiment against defaulters. The leaders are drawn from the royal ranks, i.e. from among the relatives of the Chief - from the senior kgotla represented in the regiment and in his or her absence the next in order of seniority acts in accordance with the rules of seniority which
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the initiates were taught during their initiation.

Stages

Female initiates are taken out into the veldt three times:- Firstly they go to what is called go iwa kgweding (going to the month). They get up early in the morning and they all meet in the veldt. During their stay no man must approach them. Dikgwedi (months) is the first duty of the initiates. The girls who are about to undergo initiation are asked questions to find out if they are grown up (past puberty), they are warned about the seriousness of the work ahead of them. When they return to the village they enter upon their course of initiation. They must indicate whether the feast of the eldest child has been held at their homes (go jelwa dithari).

The second time they go out to the veldt they are said go za khurwane (to go to the red). Again they set out very early in the morning. It is at this stage that they are made into women. Blood will be spilt and will flow, because the fruit of a certain tree called kg^elegettwa is taken and with this they are pierced, *according to one informant.*

[Apparently with the fruit of this tree the girls are deflowered and naturally this causes a flow of blood - hence the name go la khurwane, to go to the red. Khurwane is the feminine form of khunou which means red and is said to refer to the blood which flows when the girls are deflowered.]

When they go to the veldt the third time they are said "go za matebeleng" - to go to the Matebele. This is the end of the initiation - they are women. Their wounds have healed and the breaking up of the initiation school is at hand.

On the last day of the initiation they stay up all night (go leta thojane). Dancing goes on, songs are sung throughout the night and when the sun rises the initiation is at an end.

N.B. The initiation of girls being held within the village is ~~more~~ a much more public affair than the initiation of boys. Many of the activities of girls are under public observation - the dances which they hold from time to time, the songs which they sing, the mock trials which they hold and in which they learn something of the law of the tribe and court procedure, although in the ordinary course of events they are not allowed to attend kgotla except as witnesses, complainants or defendants in a trial - all these matters are not carried out in secret as in the case of the boys. The result is that the initiation of girls is much more popular and much more instructive to the general public.