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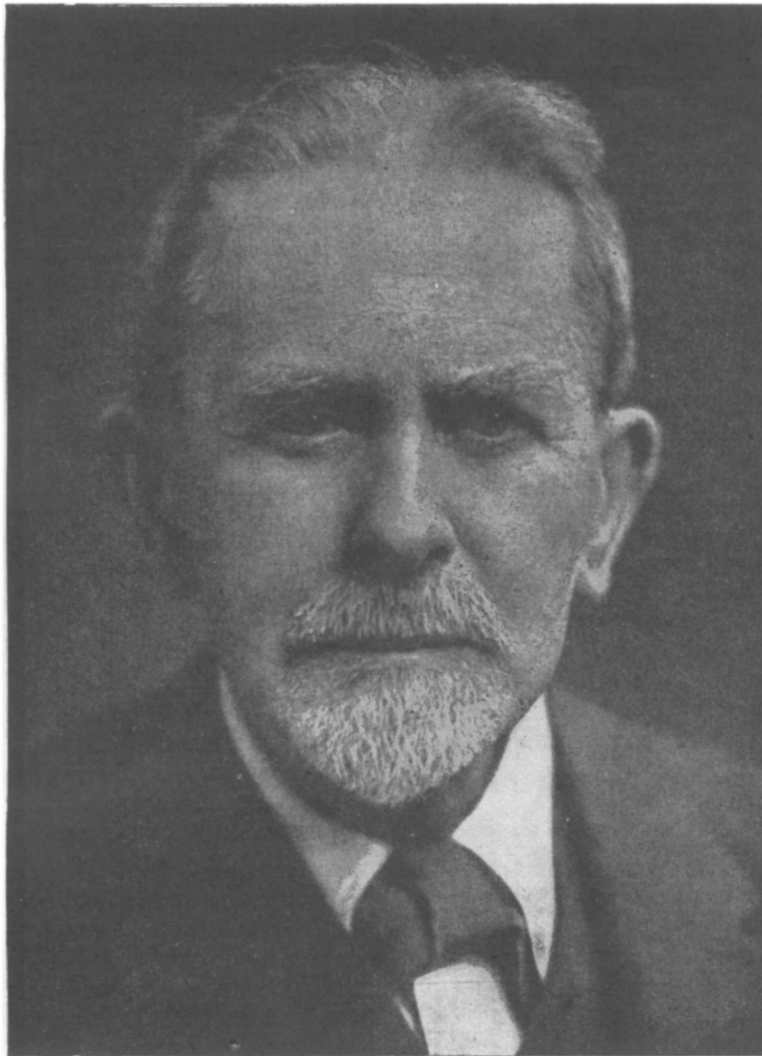
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JAMES GEORGE FRAZER*

by

PROFESSOR H. J. FLEURE, F.R.S.

I The centenary of Frazer's birth is a welcome occasion for a tribute to the assiduous collector who was one of the pioneers of the evolutionary study of the thoughts, beliefs and rituals of mankind. At the time of his birth preternatural origins for these aspects of human activity were still widely postulated. His work supplemented the efforts of Darwin and Huxley to show that natural law reigned in those regions as it did in the world of anatomy and physiology. His life work was in libraries gathering and classifying data from other men's work in the field,

**Sir James George Frazer, O.M., F.R.S., F.B.A., Membre de l'Institut de France, was born on 1 January, 1854, and died on 7 May, 1941. Further reference to the centenary of his birth is made in article 5 in this issue. Obituary notices by Professors Radcliffe-Brown and James appeared in MAN, 1942, 1 and 2.*

and he has been criticized for too frequent disregard of diversities of regional environment and tradition. But it is probable that he felt the importance of these differences, and sought to set forth a provisional generalized evolutionary sequence in ritual in order to press forward the main argument of evolution within the domain of natural law. Probably no one will ever feel impelled to attempt a similar collection of data in any anthropological field of study; *The Golden Bough* and what one may call its offspring stand as classics which established the idea of evolution in human thought and aspiration. The classical scholarship and splendid phrasing that are characteristic of Frazer enriched his work and made it attractive to many a reader without special anthropological knowledge. It is one of the greatest of his achievements that many men,

after Frazer, have added to and sometimes altered and superseded his conclusions. His category of Magic as a preliminary to religious development is now felt to be too crude, and the depth and antiquity of the tendency to awe and worship is allowed added significance. Frazer's studies of totems and so-called totemism are also more or less superseded, and opinion has veered towards functional interpretations. But, however people of different cultural traditions may have diverged in the course of ages, the study of that process of divergence must attract thought generation after generation as data accumulate and new details of the sequence of change come to light. And behind all studies of regional diversity lie facts of well-nigh

universal importance such as the facts of sex, birth, adolescence, marriage, eldership, death, blood relationship, ritual relationship, slavery, a social code, and so on.

Of Frazer's studies of Pausanias, illuminated by his travels in Greece, his not very successful attempt to review the folklore of the Hebrew scriptures, and his attractive essays and comments on eighteenth-century literature, there is here no space to write. They are all further illustrations of the mind of a patient scholar who involuntarily gained in his lifetime almost every honour thinkable for such a case, and yet withal remained the same retiring researcher untouched by the pomps and vanities of the world.

CIRCUMCISION AMONG THE TIV*

by

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2 In the literature on the Tiv of the Benue Valley of Central Nigeria references to circumcision are numerous, but include some apparent contradictions and rather glaring misinterpretations. I offer this description and analysis both to place my own material and photographs on record,¹ and to indicate that most of the contradictions in the literature, particularly those dealing with fetishes (*akombo*) are more apparent than real.

The age at which Tiv are circumcised varies widely from one part of the country to another. In the large lineage of Iharev, in the north and north-west areas of Tivland, the average age at circumcision is about seven or eight years. In Masev, another large lineage bounding Iharev to the south, the age is about 13 or 14—Masev refuse to circumcise any youth before the appearance of pubic hair. Iharev men, when they see an uncircumcised boy of that age, will ask his lineage—if it is not Masev, they will chide him for being uncircumcised. If, however, he says that his lineage is Masev, they will merely note that Masev have queer customs. In Kparev, the central and largest Tiv lineage of this level, circumcision ages vary much more widely. I have known babes-in-arms to be circumcised at less than a year old, and I know one man who was circumcised at the age of 20 or 22. In the latter case, however, the operation had been postponed many times because the boy was epileptic, and the approach of the operation brought on attacks. Abraham notes (p. 124) that the variation in age depends on health and physical development. However, like other aspects of Tiv life which vary widely from one part of the country to the next, variations in circumcision ages by area have not in the past been reported.

In Tiv myth, half the tribe is descended from a son of 'Tiv,' the original ancestor of them all; the son is said to have been begotten before his father learned about circumcision. After 'Tiv' had learned of circumcision from

the 'foreigners' (*Uke*) and had himself been circumcised, he begot the ancestor of the other half of the Tiv tribe.

Today, however, Tiv say that it is impossible for a man to have sexual relations before he has been circumcised. If one points out that this was apparently not the case if the myth of Tiv ancestor is to be believed, and that it is certainly not true among several of the surrounding tribes, Tiv say that you are quite right, but that in Tivland no woman will consent to sexual relations with any man who is uncircumcised, therefore their initial statement was correct. Tiv women say that the idea of sexual relations with an uncircumcised man is repugnant, and insist quite adamantly that no woman whatever would sleep with such a man. Some give reasons of cleanliness; most, however, phrase their distaste in terms of fastidiousness. We could find no other reason than this given by Tiv for the fact that they circumcise all normal males. Extensive questioning reveals no trace of religious motivation, though Tiv have, in order to make this point clear, contrasted their own customs with those of Mohammedans, among whom a religious reason is said (by Tiv) to be present. We could find no Tiv who would give a ritual reason of any sort for circumcision.

Circumcision is, however, associated in a symbolic way with adult male status. This became apparent to me when Tiv discussed the few neurotic males (I know only one and have heard of two or three others) who were not circumcised. Such a man did or had none of the things which are prized attributes of normal adult men: having a compound of one's own, prosperous farms, wives and children, performing ceremonies for control of fetishes (*akombo*) and seeking prestige. Tiv added, as a sort of summary to such a recital, 'He has none of these things; he is not circumcised.'

Although it has been stated in the literature that circumcision is connected with initiation into an age set, we could

* *With Plate A*