

stead, it constitutes a "secondary" stage: a community of lower order than the original terrain supported.

Fighting malaria by timing mosquito-control activities with peaks in the malaria mosquito's breeding schedule was suggested by Dr. E. Harold Hinman of the Tennessee Valley Authority. These peaks, marking the time when broods or crops of mosquito larvae are produced, seem to come at about ten-day intervals in the region Dr. Hinman studied. Climate and other factors may change the schedule in other regions. If the larvae are produced at regular intervals, however, Dr. Hinman believes that larva-destroying measures should be timed to fit the peaks of larva production.

Buckwheat may be a serious enemy of pine trees, through harboring a fungus that causes a serious root rot, E. J. Eliason of the New York State Conservation Department stated. In a New York tree nursery, young trees sickened and died on land where buckwheat had been grown as a cover crop. Even four years after the last planting of buckwheat, the fungus was still in the soil, virulently ready to attack pine roots.

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#### PERILOUS TREASURE

*Getting these sorcerers' masks out of their ancient tribal home territory was rather risky: it is "verboten" for strangers to possess them.*

#### ETHNOLOGY

# Mystic Rites of West Africa Revealed to Harvard Scientist

## Men and Women Have Secret Societies for Teaching Youths and Girls During Long Seclusion in "Bush"

**M**YSTIC religious rites of West African savages, with their emphasis on spirit worship and human sacrifice, many of them kept secret for many centuries by a merciless death penalty for their revelation, have been pieced together by a Harvard scientist.

According to Dr. George W. Harley of Harvard's Peabody Museum, who has just returned from 12 years in the bush, more than 2,000,000 natives of Liberia, Sierra Leone and French Ivory Coast, virtually the entire population of the area, were members of the Poro, a secret religious society fostering these strange rites, at the height of its power only a generation ago.

Today, due to the government's vigorous efforts to modify it, the Poro is only half its one-time size and its more barbarous practices have been stamped out. While the Poro is best known in Liberia, it represents the culmination of many similar societies which once spread across the continent.

#### 300 Ceremonial Masks

Dr. Harley has brought back more than 300 wooden ceremonial masks used by the Poro, the most complete collection of its type ever assembled, as well as numerous other sacred relics.

How sacredly these are held by the natives is shown by the fact that a simple stone axe he has obtained was so revered that it could never be bought or sold. Instead, through the centuries of its existence, it was handed down from one high priest to another with the transference traditionally solemnized by the sacrifice of the recipient's eldest son.

"This is not all cruelty and savage blood-thirstiness," Dr. Harley explains. "It's just that the people take their religion so seriously they hold human life cheap rather than neglect its demands."

In addition to its religious significance, the Poro was very powerful politically, so powerful indeed that officials of the society have been known to stop bitter tribal wars merely by walking between the fighters. The Poro also served,

and still does, to a large extent, as a tribal educational institution.

Boy candidates for the society were taken into the bush by their elders for a rigorous educational program. First the boys went through a ceremony symbolizing their death; theoretically they were swallowed by an enormous sacred crocodile. Relatives and friends not members of the society, including all the women of the tribe, were told the boys were dead. This pretense was kept up for from three to seven years while they were isolated deep in the sacred forest, learning trades, tribal traditions, history and culture and the secret sign language of the society.

#### Living in Spirit World

During this period the boys were supposed to be living in an invisible spirit world and no one was allowed to see them on pain of death. Even those who might accidentally stumble on the Poro meeting place were killed and then eaten so that no human traces would be left in the supposedly spirit world. Even those members of the Poro who died accidentally in the bush were eaten in sacred ritual feasts.

Concerning these rituals the initiates swear to secrecy on the mask of the great "devil," the big man of the Poro. They hear his voice but do not see his face unmasked until the day of graduation, a grand occasion. At this graduation the boys are supposedly reborn from the belly of the great crocodile and they return to their village with great celebration.

They are entirely new beings now—men instead of boys—and they do not recognize any of their old friends or any past events. Indeed they must be introduced as strangers to their own mothers.

The masks, an integral part of the Poro, are worn in conjunction with flowing robes and "hula" skirts which completely cover the body. Lest his voice be recognized, the wearer speaks with a throaty, rolling falsetto. Thus mask and voice effectively conceal his identity, as well as serving as a badge of office. The