

ETHNOLOGY

# See the Funny White Man!

## How We Look to Savages, Summarized in Collection of 700 Pictures of Natives' Portrayals of Europeans

By EMILY C. DAVIS

**R**EMEMBER Bobby Burns' oft-quoted wish? The one that goes, "Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as ithers see us!"

Well, it's too late to do the Scottish poet any good, but that wish has come true for you and me.

We can now see just how queer civilized man looks—to a benighted savage.

What is more enlightening, we can see how white people impressed primitive folk at first glance. First impressions are important. When a white man was jungle "news," he was a sensation—and sometimes a scream.

A German anthropologist, Prof. Julius Lips, has given us this first good view of ourselves portrayed by curious observers.

In pre-Nazi Germany, Prof. Lips was director of a noted museum in Cologne, and editor of learned publications. Now he is in America, in Washington, D. C.

### Scholarly Prowlings

But just before the Nazi era, when Prof. Lips was studying mankind in his thorough German way, he spent three years in Africa and other out-of-the-way places. He says he went around like Harun al-Rashid in the Arabian Nights, who walked Bagdad streets disguised, to find out what people really thought of him.

Prof. Lips has found out. We are just as funny and curious to a savage as the savage is to us. And most islanders and jungle tribes haven't seen the new hats, either.

If you think a primitive artist can't see the humor in civilized life, take a look at one of his satiric portrait carvings. You'll be convinced.

One is an Englishman, done in the exact comedy-Englishman style to which we are accustomed. But a native did it, an artist of the Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. He got inspiration straight from life for his Briton with gaping mouth, big teeth, long nose, and blank stare. He completed the type with a pink coat, and a tropical helmet set squarely atop a long, large head. One

eye is glazed as if behind a monocle, but Prof. Lips suggests that the blank eye was originally fitted with a painted shell eyeball, like the other.

This primitive masterpiece is in the museum at Cologne, where Prof. Lips was the director. At least the statue was there, when he left. The Nazi government isn't amused at non-Aryan savages who make fun of Nordics.

The scarecrow Englishman was made to keep birds out of a field. Nicobar Islanders used to put native faces on their scarecrows. But white men are more effective.

### Protection by Images

Incidentally, a good many tribes make bogeyman images of white people, to scare off thieves and evil spirits. A white man glaring over a hut entrance is considered good protection, partly because of his strange countenance, but mainly because white men are powerful in other ways and therefore ought to be good at things like this, too. A bogeyman resembling a European ruler is considered tops.

So much for the scarecrow Englishman. Now take a statue of the English woman. White women are rare in native art, Prof. Lips says, because white men ventured alone to wild country, at first. Later, when wives tagged along, they still weren't important. They didn't carry guns. They didn't give orders, except around a house.

But when natives did take trouble to carve a white woman, the result is priceless. Prof. Lips knew of only ten or eleven white women thus portrayed before he came to America last year. Recently, he became acquainted with a new one, when the Field Museum put a prize-winner in the spotlight. (SNL, April 9, p. 234.)

This primitive art work, which the Field Museum calls "European Beauty," portrays the unpopular wife of an official in Madagascar. The Bara native who immortalized her in wood caught her prim, haughty look, her too dainty way of lifting her purple parasol, the sun helmet set high on her hair, and her teetering red shoes. Nothing could say



### OH! I SAY!

*Englishmen look like this, to Nicobar Islanders who live in the Bay of Bengal. If you said, "Looks like a scarecrow!" you were right, first guess. Natives made the figure to keep birds out of a field.*

more plainly than this, that the natives thought her ridiculous.

There are many other portraits of white people by natives, that are laughable to us. But Prof. Lips explains that we can't always tell whether the natives are trying to be funny. They may be merely expressing the unfathomable queerness of the white race.

Take the images of Queen Victoria, for example. She was popular with her African subjects, and they tried to copy official portraits that came their way on post cards and posters. Mostly these showed a billowy lady, with plump cheeks, a spiky crown on her head, and a veil trailing down her back. The post-card portraits ended mysteriously at the waist. And that, says Prof. Lips, is why you find African images of Queen Victoria that reproduce these same features, and are sawed off at the base, like chess pawns.

The African artists, you see, were not sure whether their Queen, who rode in a carriage, had feet. One, who thought

she did, carved two tiny feet like dangling clappers in a bell inside the skirt.

A West African carved a most ridiculous figure of the German Kaiser—to our way of thinking—though the native may have intended only sober realism. You see the Kaiser, as stiffest of humans, carved with bulging chest and uptilted chin, and perched commandingly on a mouse-faced horse—and the Kaiser's legs are on backward! The simple explanation is that the African subject hadn't observed riders closely enough to get leg angles correct. And he had found the torso of his Emperor far more striking than legs, anyway.

It would be interesting to see how African artists would portray Hitler or Mussolini!

### Neither Childlike Nor Mad

Perhaps you realize by this time that Prof. Lips doesn't think primitive art is child-like. And it isn't like the fantastic art of the insane, either. He has compared a great many drawings and models made by primitive artists with the art work of mental patients. Only once did he find something by an insane person that reminded him of primitive art.

In its own way, native art is adult, and healthy, and often shrewd. The primitive world has produced some notable artists, honored by their own people. These artists do not sign their work, and so they remain unknown and unsung in the story of art. Primitive "old masters," however, in the form of carvings and pictures and metal work, are getting appreciation in collections.

There are thousands of these native art works that deal with the white man and his belongings. Prof. Lips himself has collected about 700 pictures of them. Many of the originals are in museums in Europe and America. They are valuable as historic records, even when weak in art value. For the primitive people of the earth have become accustomed to the white man now. They don't make so many pictures of him.

Prof. Lips enjoys the humor and surprise of seeing our civilized world through eyes of primitive man. But he regards this native art as far more than "entertainment," or historic data. It is important material for study of man, material which anthropologists had somehow overlooked. His recent book, "The Savage Hits Back," in which he presents and discusses several hundred pictures, is called by a fellow scientist, Bronislaw Malinowski, "a new approach

to the most vexed problem of culture change and diffusion."

Prof. Lips has traced the evolution of the white man in native art. First came the discoverers. They were exciting and frightening. They often came with masses of soldiers. They gave commands and enforced them with the magic of rifles. Naturally, soldiers figure largely in the earliest portraits of civilized man by savages.

The soldier carries his all-important gun. And you can usually tell at a glance what country the warrior hails from. Savages conquered by Frenchmen were impressed by upturned moustaches, small beards, uniforms. An observant native modeled a French officer with one hand stuck into his jacket in the famous Napoleonic gesture.

Later came missionaries and traders, and eventually tourists. An ordinary European could be shown sitting on a chair, says Prof. Lips, typifying "another of them." A top hat was another trademark of the white man. One Alaskan Indian recorded the incident of a high-hat gentleman riding in a native boat with two Indians, including the artist, as navigators.

### A Cartoonist's Eye

But for missionaries and traders, the natives pounced upon more subtle distinguishing traits, just as a cartoonist selects the traits that will instantly mean "Uncle Sam" or some leading political figure.

If the natives liked the missionary they showed pleasing qualities in his face and manner. If they didn't they were cruelly frank in making his picture.

In the British Museum, Prof. Lips found a little ivory figure that he thinks is a portrait of Livingstone, the African missionary. The figure is carved respectfully, showing a sober but kindly man. This is what would be expected, considering that Africans thought enough of Livingstone to carry his dead body 2,000 miles through all sorts of wilderness hazards to the coast, just because he asked it.

Traders, on the other hand, have been almost universally hated by natives, and any portrait of a trader is apt to be a mean one. The merchant followed the slaving era, and he introduced the harsh system of putting natives to years of labor, as a way of paying off their debts.

It is easier to pick out a merchant than any other European type in savage art, Prof. Lips discovered. The merchant is known by his harsh face. Sometimes he is shown lazily reclining in a ham-



### ON WRONG

*The German Kaiser portrayed by an African native, who didn't recall how a rider's legs should be attached.*

mock, while natives carry him. Sometimes he sits holding his precious account book. Always he is shown counting, counting, counting—greedily figuring ways to grasp more of the gold, ivory, spices, or other treasure from the land.

A tourist you can tell in native art by the huge golf cap and a vacant stare. That's a first-class tourist. A more earnest and simple individual is apt to be a third-class tourist.

The white man's belongings have fascinated the savage, as much as tom-toms and grass skirts intrigue us. But not all of our belongings are equally interesting to a native. They never tired of picturing guns, because of the tremendous magic power in a gun. And a ship was something to be observed and drawn with paddlewheels and smokestacks and anchors made very large and important.

Often the native left out the most essential features of the ship, or the trigger and lock on the gun. But when we look at a piece of (*Turn to Page 109*)

## From Page 103

primitive gear, do we always recognize the important features?

A proper dinner table was a wonder to Africa's natives, when they first saw cruet stands, sauce bottles, long-handled metal spoons, teakettles, and tablecloths. One Congo native was so impressed with a long-handled spoon that a white man had broken and repaired with a screw, that the native carved himself a wooden spoon just like it, patched handle and all.

On the other hand, a watch wasn't so interesting. Perhaps that shows a difference between the primitive mind and that of a child. Any baby is entranced with a shiny, ticking watch. But natives could not understand why a white man would look so fondly and so often at this pocket trinket, just to measure time.

"Why measure a thing of which there was always enough?"

That was what the natives would say in perplexity, when Prof. Lips talked to them about timepieces. He adds this comment:

"I have not found any imitations of the watch either in Australia or yet in Africa, or other regions peopled by tribes whose time does not mean money, and to whom the idea of measuring time must appear unintelligible and absurd."

He did find two watch dials pictured by natives, but they were in northern countries. One is the work of a Siberian native. The other is by an Aleutian Islander, one of our own Alaskan aborigines. The Aleutian people have taken over the clock as a motif, like the fleur-de-lis or swastika, and they use it in embroidery and other decorations.

Prof. Lips has had the novel experience of finding out what he himself personally, looks like to uncivilized humans. Among Algonquin Indians of Labrador the anthropologist soon gained the nickname, the Smoker, Oraquai. One old Indian delighted to make the pro-

fessor's picture, and showed him a new one almost every day, all drawn in simple, rapid style, but with half a dozen cigars sticking out of pockets, held in fingers, and in the mouth. A balloon of smoke was the crowning feature.

Prof. Lips has seen more excitement in getting his scientific research on these lines published, than he ever encountered among so-called wild men of the earth. He was just about to produce a volume on his investigations regarding white men in primitive art, when 1933 came, and Hitler's regime. Nazis objected to seeing themselves as others saw them. They forced Prof. Lips' resignation from his museum post, and cut off his expected pension.

A former student of his, dutiful to the government, arrived at the Lips home with State Secret Police, to demand his photograph collection. Prof. Lips refused, hid his pictures. Finally, he smuggled them out of Germany, and he and his wife escaped the country.

In Washington, the German anthropologist has started something new—a department of anthropology at Howard University, and the first department of anthropology for Negro students ever attempted.

*Science News Letter, August 13, 1938*

## ● Earth Trembles

Information collected by Science Service from seismological observatories and relayed to the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey resulted in the location of the following preliminary epicenter:

Friday, July 29, 8:06.2 a. m., E.S.T.

In the Indian Ocean off the coast of Sumatra. Latitude 1 degree north, longitude 96 degrees east.

Stations cooperating with Science Service in reporting earthquakes recorded on their seismographs are:

University of Alaska, College, Alaska; Apia Observatory, Apia, Western Samoa; University of California, Berkeley, Calif.; Des Moines Observatory, Des Moines, Iowa; Dominion Observatory, Ottawa; Dominion Meteorological Observatory, Victoria, B. C.; The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia; Harvard University Observatory, Harvard, Mass.; University of Hawaii, Honolulu; Hong Kong Observatory, Hong Kong, China; Magnetic Observatory of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, Huancayo, Peru; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, East Machias, Maine; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Montana School of Mines, Butte, Mont.; Montana State College, Bozeman, Mont.; Pennsylvania State College, State College, Pa.; Phu Lien Observatory, near Hanoi, French Indo-China; Seismological Observatory, Pasadena, Calif.; University of South Carolina, Columbia, S. C.; University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt.; U. S. Weather Bureau, University of Chicago; University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.; Zikawei Observatory, near Shanghai, China; observatories of the Jesuit Seismological Association at Canisius College, Buffalo, N. Y., Fordham University, New York City, Georgetown University, Washington, D. C.; St. Louis University, St. Louis; St. Xavier College, Cincinnati, and Weston College, Weston, Mass.; observatories of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey at San Juan, P. R., Sitka, Alaska, Tucson, Ariz., and Ukiah, Calif.

## TIME

is the important factor in all activities

## SAVE IT

by using the

## NEW ADVANCE ABSTRACT CARD SERVICE

of

## THE WISTAR INSTITUTE OF ANATOMY AND BIOLOGY

which brings to your table authors' abstracts of all papers about to appear in the

Journal of Morphology  
The Journal of Experimental Neurology  
The American Journal of Anatomy  
The Anatomical Record  
The Journal of Experimental Zoology  
American Journal of Physical  
Anthropology

Journal of Cellular and Comparative  
Physiology  
The Journal of Nutrition  
American Anatomical Memoirs  
Publications of the Biological Survey  
of the Mount Desert Region

The new Card Service has been planned to meet all the needs of librarians and investigators, and is offered in the three following styles:

	<i>Annual subscription</i>
Style No. 1. Advance Abstract Cards in sheets 4 abstracts per card—300 mm. by 125 mm.	\$2.00
Style No. 2. Advance Abstract Card Service sheets cut into cards—75 mm. by 125 mm.	2.50
Style No. 3. Advance Abstract Card Service—permanent library card punched—75 mm. by 125 mm. From July to December, 1938—one-half annual rate	\$3.00, or \$5.00 for 2 sets

## SUBSCRIBE NOW!

Send your subscription to

## THE WISTAR INSTITUTE OF ANATOMY AND BIOLOGY

Woodland Avenue and Thirty-sixth Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

## DUST

(Nature, Varieties, Effects, Etc.)

By S. C. BLACKTIN, Ph.D.

293 pages Illustrated

Published at \$6.50

SALE PRICE, \$4.00

An indispensable reference work for all who have to deal with the dust problem in disease, manufacturing, and science.

Send for circular describing this and other late books at marked reductions from the published prices.

THE SHERWOOD PRESS  
Box 552, Edgewater Branch  
Cleveland, Ohio