



by Rowland V. Bingham

Editor's note: This article was originally printed in The Evangelical Christian, May 1916, in Toronto, Canada. It is a reminder of the first call to reach the nomads of the world a century ago. Reprinted by permission.

If one would like to get a picture of 1800 B.C. when Jacob and his sons were the wandering herdmen of Palestine, all one needs to do is visit the Fulani tribe of Northern Nigeria today [in 1916].

With their ever increasing herds of cattle they scour the country for the pasture which they need, in the rains inhabiting the upland regions, but in the dry seasons they are driven to follow the river courses to the valleys.

Indignantly refusing to be classed with the negro races, but having so mingled the blood of his ancestors with the captive women slaves which he was ever adding to his household from the native races through whose country he wandered, at first sight there is often little in the color of his skin to distinguish him, and little to warrant his claim to relationship with the white man.

But there is no doubt that the Fulani is different. The long, straight hair of the women, the absence of the flat nose, the frequent reversion of the lighter skin and the general demeanor separate them from the ordinary native of Central Africa.

Then they are the real nomads. While they do have a few towns and villages, the Fulani is "at home" when he is wandering through the country. He flourishes in the pilgrim life, he degenerates when he settles down. He has no love for any other occupation than herding his cattle, and he prefers ever to add to his milk and meat diet by raiding or trading. He despises the comforts of the settled life and builds his only abode of the cornstalk. We have called them "the people of the cornstalk," because they are adept in its use for all purposes. Even when they degenerate to town life they still build the walls of their higher house of cornstalks, make

the rafters of its roof by binding the cornstalks together, and then use the same material for their first thatch. When in these civilized (?) surroundings it is necessary to delimitate his landed possessions by fencing in his compound, the cornstalk serves him still, and I have known him to finish up by making his gate of cornstalks.

The simple life is the life of the Fulani, and he regards it as the superior life. He looks down on every other race but the white, with whom he claims equality. Since by conquest they brought under their sway the large cities of the northern central Sudan, they have furnished quite generally the rulers of the cities, but not the subjects.

The little bands of Fulani with their great herds of cattle are generally hated by the tribes into whose domain they travel, but they have generally been able to look after their own interests in much about the same way and with sometimes about the same principles as Jacob and his sons. The pagan generally complains that he has been taken in by the Fulani, who has the name of offering his own price in the exchange of commodities, and failing a satisfactory bargain simply helps himself to the thing he wants.

In trade, the women who generally conduct it, know how to get value for their goods. They are shrewd and clever. We stopped a woman one day some miles from town who had a calabash half full of buttermilk on her head. We were very thirsty, but we put restraint upon our desire, as we enquired whether she had watered it, as they so often put in water from their filthy pools in order to increase the quantity. She looked at us as though we were lacking in intelligence as she said,

White man, don't you know how far it is from town? Do you think I would water it here when there is a stream right near the place at which to water my milk?

The Fulani loves his cattle. Before he was won over to the Moslem faith he worshipped his kine, and in some regions some few still follow the custom. They handle their immense herds with consummate skill. We have seen them lead them across rushing rivers from which the cows would certainly have turned back but for the voice of the herdman.

They are worse off than their cattle—the cattle have a guiding voice, and protecting care, but the Fulani has no herdman to guard or guide.

Why are we writing of these people? Because they are worse off than their cattle. The cattle have a guiding voice, and protecting care, but the Fulani has no herdman to guard or guide. No missionary has mastered the language of this wandering race and no word of the Gospel has been translated into the tongue of this people, spoken, we think, by at least a half a million.

The missionary to this tribe has no easy task before him, but a tremendous opportunity. He will need to be another Gilmour, who lived in his tent and followed the nomad Mongolians in all their wanderings. He could learn their language and make his headquarters in one of their few towns, and then he would have to spend half of his time in the saddle following his flock, who are as wandering sheep having no shepherd, or to use the Fulani figure, as a scattered herd with no herdman's voice to call them together.

The Christ who died for this people has bidden us to pray that missionaries be sent to them.

The bright-eyed little children that we met, of whom there are thousands, ought to have some further prospect than a cornstalk shack as the beginning and end of existence. The women and girls ought to know something more than the milking of cows and the making of butter, and to be able to possess other wealth than the trifling ornaments with which they lavishly adorn themselves. These men who for long time have furnished the rulers for the strongest kingdoms of the Sudan surely ought to know of a coming kingdom and the King of Kings.

Pray for God's man, God's men for this tribe, for the ambassadors of God who shall make known to them the way of life, tell of the saviour of sinners, and invite them from cornstalk huts to become heirs of a mansion. **IJFM**

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