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Cartoons and selected excerpts

7. *Aug. 13, 1881.*

A HORRIBLE STORY.

An account has reached us of things so horrible, and in themselves so incredible, that, were they not related by a gentleman of undoubted integrity who, in the spring of this present year, collected the evidence of them on the spot, we should hesitate to accept the account of them as anything else than a hideous nightmare. Our informant however is one who could not be suspected of inventing, and who could have no reason for exaggerating the things he has recorded. The only object he has or could possibly have is, in the interests of humanity, to call attention to the state of things which, however notorious in the place itself, is entirely unsuspected outside of it, and possibly thus to contribute his part towards putting an end to what must be admitted to be most foul crimes.

The Island of Hayti, Hispaniola, or St. Domingo, is of great extent and importance. It contains 800,000 inhabitants, the vast majority of whom are either full-blooded negroes or mulattoes. The Island is divided into two independent Republics—that of Hayti on the western and that of St. Domingo on the eastern side. These Republics enjoy all the modern improvements in the art of government. They have Constitutions ; they have Presidents, Senators, and Houses of Commons elected by universal suffrage ; they have standing armies (that of Hayti numbers over 6000 men) ; they have accredited diplomatic agents in London and all the other great capitals ; and they have so perfect and ready a way of bringing all questions within the range of practical politics that there is usually a successful insurrection every three years. Under these circumstances the perfectibility of human nature might be expected to show itself very distinctly. What is shown may be judged from the subjoined account.

We give this account in our correspondent’s own words, omitting only such names and details as it would be indiscreet to mention:—

VOUDON.

“The Religion of Hayti is ostensibly Roman Catholic. An Archbishop, four Bishops, and nearly one hundred priests are established in the country ; but they are really powerless in the face of a secret Religion called “Voudon” or Serpent-worship.

The Professors of "Voudon," who have the "Serpent-house" in each village-wood (as may also be seen on the West Coast of Africa), originally came from the Congo Coast, and were of the tribe called Mandingoes, celebrated for their skill as sorcerers and secret poisoners, and for being serpent-worshippers, child-slayers, and cannibals. They appear to have brought their arts with them from Africa, but while Hayti was under French rule they were obliged to practise them in secret.

It was however mainly owing to the power of "Voudon" that Hayti was lost to the French. Many of the Presidents have belonged to it ; the present President either cannot or will not suppress it, and it flourishes openly. It would be improper for me to give up my authorities. It is sufficient to say that they are of the highest, and that the facts are indisputable, being vouched for to me by eye-witnesses. Out of over 700,000 inhabitants of Hayti there are only 20,000 who do not *openly* belong to "Voudon."

The priests of this religion have got absolute power, owing to their knowledge of herb-poisoning and of the antidotes. Owing to this knowledge which nothing will induce them to divulge, they can poison either slowly or quickly, painfully or the reverse, and can procure a death-like sleep. They are consequently resorted to by people who wish to get rid of others wither for gain, from jealousy, or the like.

The secret poisoning is carried on to an enormous extent. It goes on, indeed, under the name of "Obi" wherever negroes are found. In Hayti, while the French had the island, it was sternly repressed—more so than either in Jamaica or Cuba—but since then it has increased to such an extent that a suppressed terror prevails among all classes in Hayti.

The great feasts of "Voudon" are at Christmas, at Whitsuntide, and at Easter. The drum is beaten at midnight and the people assemble. The ceremony commences by the most terrible oaths of secrecy. Then dancing begins, and the excitement is kept up by copious libations of rum till one or more of the performers fall down in a fit, when the spirit of "Voudon" is supposed to have entered them. These orgies last generally three nights and sometimes longer. On the first night a cock is offered up at the altar, and its blood is drunk warm. On the second a goat is treated in the same way. But on the third night children are brought in ; their throats are cut by the priest ; their blood is handed round and drunk warm, and their bodies are then cut up and eaten.

Before the sacrifice takes place the priest orders as many children as he requires. They must be of pure African descent, and not over ten years of age. These children are invariably forthcoming, either by being voluntarily given up, or obtained by being stolen by women who make a profession of it. They are expert at their trade. Entering a house at night, naked and oiled, they steal the child, and by administering a narcotic poison render it insensible. It is then conveyed to a secret place till required for the sacrifice, when an antidote brings it to ; then its throat is cut. Children are often voluntarily given up by their mothers for the sacrifice.

In order to be initiated into "Voudon" it is necessary to have killed some human being ; a child is preferred.

Another horrible custom in Hayti is the devouring of corpses.

So strong is the taste for human flesh that midwives have been known to devour the children they have just brought into the world. The parts preferred are the knuckles and hands.

Lest it should be imagined that these are not facts, I will give one or two instances.

In May, 1879, two women were caught eating a female child. It was proved that the child had been first drugged and rendered insensible. The parents supposing it to be dead, buried it. These women immediately disinterred it, restored it to its senses by antidotes, and then inserted reeds through its side and sucked the blood from the heart. This happened at Port au Prince.

A Haytian of good position was also caught with his family eating a small boy. Another was found tied to a tree close by. The man was pointed out to me.

These offences were punished, in one case by a month's, in the other by six week's, imprisonment, the fear of Voudon not allowing a greater punishment.

In January, 1881, eight people were fined for disinterring and eating corpses.

In the same month the neck and shoulders of a man were exposed for sale in the market at Port au Prince, and were purchased and identified by an English medical man.

In February, 1881, at St. Mark's, a cask off so-called "pork" was sold to a ship. In it were discovered the fingers and finger-nails of a human being. This "pork" was all identified as human flesh.

A Haytian assured me that the kidneys of a child were first-rate eating. On my asking how he knew, he informed me that he had eaten them. He did not seem to think it strange or at all out of the way.

At Cape Haytien a coloured clergyman of the Church of England complained that "Voudon" neutralised all the good that he was doing, and declared that he had had human flesh offered him for sale, and that his wife nearly bought it, believing it was pork. In February, 1881, four people were fined for devouring corpses.

At Jacmel two corpses were recently disinterred and partly eaten. Two men were in prison for this, not being able to pay the fine. A man caught eating a child was arrested the day of my arrival. At Christmas time 9000 people assembled at the house of a noted "Voudon" priestess (pointed out to me) living in the country, and carried on Voudon rites in the woods close by during the week.

At Aux Cayes the child of an Englishman was stolen from its cradle on the 4th of March, 1879. The thieves being hunted they threw the child down a well—killing it—and escaped.

These facts speak for themselves."

STATESMEN—No. CCCLXVIII

"Covey" by Ape

The Earl of Coventry

The founder of the Coventry family was a Lord Mayor of London and a friend and executor of the famous Dick Whittington. He flourished five hundred years ago ; and from him descended the famous Chief Justice and the equally famous Sir John

Coventry who was waylaid on his way home from the House of Commons and had his nose slit by a gang of Charles II's courtiers. The family had already been ennobled in the person of Sir John's father, who was made Baron in 1628. After the "glorious" Revolution this Barony was improved into an Earldom. The Coventrys have married well, and have already had many children, so that their name is well and widely known. They have always been fond of horses and often too fond of racing.

The present and ninth Earl was born three-and-forty years ago. He succeeded to his title at the age of three, and has long been known to his friends as "covey." He has inherited in an eminent degree the family taste for horses, and he soon essayed his fortune in horse-racing. In 1864 he won the Cesarewitch with *Thalestris*, and he twice won the Liverpool Steeplechase. At twenty-seven he married a daughter of Lord Craven's, He has now however given up the Turf, and scarcely is to be seen at any races except those of the Derby and the Ascot Week ; but his knowledge of horses causes him to be in great request as a judge at all horse-shows. He is a Master of Fox-hounds—formerly known by his own name, but now called the Croome Hounds—and he is a fine rider, and so bold a one that he once jumped into a quarry thirty feet deep, together with her Ladyship, and both of them came out alive. He is a thorough Conservative, and under Lord Beaconsfield was Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms. He never speaks in the House of Lords and is not given to oration in other places. Yet he is a man of sound common-sense, of unimpeached discretion, and unblemished honour. He has withal much knowledge of the world, and much appreciation of its good stories. He is a gentleman.

JEHU JUNIOR



Vincent Brooks Day & Son Lith.

"Covey"