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W. C. H. T. McClu

NOTES
ON THE
INDIANS OF GUIANA.

No. 7.—PAIWARI-FEASTS.

The festivals, the dances, and the games originally peculiar to any people, are generally retained long after most of the other signs which distinguished that people from the rest of the world, have disappeared. Probably this is as true of the Indians of Guiana as of other races. But it is seldom easy for a stranger to see and note such festivities in their original and proper form. Indians are very shy; and in the presence of a white man, they are seldom willing to throw aside their reserve sufficiently to enter freely and unrestrainedly into the spirit of their games. It is, therefore, not possible to give a minute and detailed account of their amusements of this sort.

All the festivals among all the tribes being celebrated with much drinking of paiwari—the national beverage—they may all be called Paiwari-feasts. Sometimes these feasts are given on special occasions, as, for instance, to celebrate a marriage or a funeral, or to mark the establishment of a new settlement. But often they are held for no special reason, but simply because the headman, or captain, of some Indian settlement feels inclined to entertain his neighbours, and has sufficient cassava, ripe in his fields for the purpose.

When a paiwari-feast is to be held, invitations are sent to the people of all neighbouring settlements inhabited by Indians of the same tribe as the givers of the feast. The latter prepare a number of strings, each of which is knotted as many times as there are days before the feast day. One of these strings is kept by the headman of the settlement where the feast is to be held; the others are distributed, one to the headman of each of the settlements from which guests are expected. Every day one of the knots, on each of the strings, is untied; and when the last has been untied, guests and hosts know that the feast day has come.

In the meantime, while the knots were daily decreasing in number, all who are to be present at the feast have been busy. The guests have been making bread, and have been hunting game and fish, and smoking meat, in order to contribute their share to the general entertainment; for the hosts supply the paiwari, but cannot supply all the food for their visitors. And the hosts have been busy, the men in getting together as much provision as they can, the women in preparing the paiwari.

One or more wooden paiwari troughs stand in the middle of nearly every house. They are shaped something like canoes; indeed, canoes are often used for the purpose. Each trough holds from 150 to 200 gallons; so that, as all available troughs, as well as all spare bottles, gourds, and jars, are filled for the feast, no small quantity of paiwari has to be made. For this reason, and because paiwari does not acquire a proper degree of mellowness and fermentation for a day or two after it has been made, the women, whose duty it is to prepare it, begin the work some days before that on which their guests are expected to arrive.

The cassava-bread which is to be transformed into paiwari, is made as is that for other purposes; but it is thicker, and is baked, or rather burned, until it is quite black. It is then broken into small fragments, and mixed with water in a large jar or pot. The larger fragments are picked out and chewed by the women, who do this work while moving about and carrying on their usual household work; and the chewed masses are

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again replaced in the jar. The chewing is said to cause rapid and thorough fermentation. As soon as this jar is sufficiently filled, its contents, after being well stirred, are slightly boiled, and are then poured into the trough. More and more is added to the liquor in the trough—where fermentation goes on—until it is full. Sometimes a little juice of the sugar-cane is added to sweeten the liquor. The result is a brownish liquor—looking like coffee with a great deal of milk in it,—with a sub-acid, but not unpleasant taste. Some of the Caribisi, it is said, and some of the Brazilian tribes, manage to prepare paiwari, and to procure a proper degree of fermentation, by simple boiling, without resorting to the very disagreeable, but more orthodox chewing process; but paiwari produced in this way is said to be of very inferior flavour.

By the t[illegible] the guests begin to arrive a sufficient quantity of paiwari has been prepared. They came in family parties, men, women, and children, in their canoes, corials or woodskins; and they bring their hammocks and their provisions, for the entertainment lasts for some days, often for a week. Often they also bring such hammocks, balls of spun cotton, live stock, or other goods as they have for barter; for these gatherings seem to serve not only as feasts, but also as fairs. As the boats approach the settlement, the men give notice of their coming by loudly uttering the cry peculiar to their tribe—for each tribe has a distinct cry. The people of the settlement, with the exception of the headman, who goes to his hammock and there awaits the coming of his guests, flock down to the landing place to receive the new comers. The men of the newly arrived party make their way up to houses, leaving the women to unload the boats. The latter patiently carry up the goods, and, without a word, sling their husbands', brothers', and children's hammocks, and then their own, in some one of the houses.

The reception of the men by the head-man of the settlement is tedious and formal in the extreme. The leader of the strangers first addresses, his host—who during the reception never stirs out of his hammock—and remarks that he has come; to which the captain grunts assent. The first speaker then, in a number of short abrupt sentences, tells any news he may have to give; and after each of these sentences, the captain from his hammock utters the same monosyllabic grunt of assent. At last when this first speaker is done, he is bidden to sit down. Then the next in authority tells his news in the same manner, and is answered with exactly the same grunts of assent; and he in his turn is bidden to sit down. And so, in long and tedious order, each one of the new-comers addresses the captain. In the meantime, the women of the house bring to each man, as he sits down, a large calabash filled with paiwarie. While he drinks, the woman keeps her hand on the calabash; and when he has emptied the vessel, at one draught, she re-fills it. Another woman brings the pepperpot and some bread, the latter on a fan, and sets these before the man. At last when all the new-comers have had their say and have eaten, they disperse, and retire to their hammocks; probably to make way for a new set, who are welcomed in exactly the same way.

The feast begins the next morning. By day-break men, women and children are busy painting and ornamenting themselves. As a rule, Indians, beyond the very small amount of clothing which they deem absolutely necessary, wear but very little ornament except perhaps a necklace or two, in the case of the men, and some strings of beads in the case of the women. But for a paiwari feast all make themselves as fine as possible. The men paint their faces with stripes of red, purple, dark blue, and sometimes yellow, and white*. They

* The red-paint is a paste made of the pulp from round the seeds of *Bixa orellana*, made soft with oil, and made fragrant with the gum of the Hyawa tree (*Icica heptaphylla*). The dark blue is produced by rubbing the body wtih the natural juice of the green apple-like fruits of the Lana (*Genipa americana*). The rich and ruddy purple dye is made from the *Bignonia chica*. The white paint is simply the soft felspathic clay which occurs in many places. And the yellow, which is very rare, and is used only by the more remote tribes, is said to be from the fruit of a tree.

stain their bodies with dark blue; and on this they draw lines, sometimes in elaborate patterns, sometimes as if to represent their ribs outside their skins, in a darker blue, or in red. They cover their feet below the ankles with a thick coating of bright red paste. Long single strings of beads, red, white or blue, are wound evenly round and round their ankles and their wrists. Their hair is smoothed and made shiny with palm oil, and is parted in the middle of the forehead. In the arch made by the parting, a thick mass of red paint is daubed; and on this is stuck some white down from under the feathers of the powis *(Crax alector)*. A long straw, sometimes ornamented with humming birds and other feathers, is passed through a hole in the lobe of each ear, in such a way that one end rests on the cheek, and reaches nearly to the mouth. A crescent-shaped or round piece of silver or copper, flat and highly polished on one side, is suspended from a small stick passed through the cartilage of the nose, so as to hang down over the mouth. A small bell-like ornament, made of white bone or shell, with a long streamer of white cotton in place of the clapper, is hung by a string passed through the middle of the under-lip. A beautifully made crown of feathers, the colours of which vary with the tribe to which each Indian belongs, is worn on the head. Several strings of cotton hang from the back of this down to the heels, where they are finished off with skins of toucans, fire-birds, cocks of the rock and other such bright coloured birds, or with tassels, made of iridescent beetles' wings, which tinkle like tiny bells at each movement of the wearer. Round his neck the Indian puts, not only the necklace of bush-hog's teeth which he always wears as a sign of his prowess, but also on these festal occasions, necklaces of the teeth of other animals and of seeds. Round each arm, a little below the shoulder, is a cord of cotton, finished off in front with a round disc of polished bone, or shell, or metal, from which hangs a streamer of cotton which reaches to the knees. Round his waist he often puts a skirt of young, yellowish green palm-leaves, neatly plaited. And round his body, he wraps, not ungracefully, as many yards of bright printed calico as he has been able to procure.

Mantles made of the tail feathers of maccaws are fastened on to the shoulders in such a way that they stand out almost at right angles to the body. Other, very short mantles of woven cotton, from which hang long cotton cords ornamented at frequent intervals with tufts of white down, are occasionally worn; but the art of making these is said to have been lost.

It must not be supposed that all these ornaments are worn by the same man. Each puts on what he has got, and seems to think himself the more successful the more finery he has put on. The result is as varied and picturesque a crowd as could well be imagined.

The toilet of the women is more simple. They paint their bodies, much as do the men, except that the thick coating of red over the feet of the men, and the daub of the same on their foreheads, are never seen on the women. The latter, especially among the Ackowois, have a fancy for painting a broad rim of dark blue round the mouth; and for drawing a streak of the same colour from the corners of the mouth to the ears. But of other adornment the women wear far less than the men. They wear no feathers, and hardly ever any teeth. But they wear enormous quantities of beads round the neck, as girdles round the waist, and in bands round the ankles, the wrists and upper arms.

The children too are painted and dressed much as are their parents; and sometimes even the monkies of the settlement are got up in the same way.

Quaint and varied as is the dress of the feasters, a further element of picturesque variety is added when they take their weapons and instruments. Some whirl sticks to which are tied bunches of certain seeds (*Thevetia nereifolia*) which when struck against

the ground, clash and rattle; some beat time with hollow bamboos covered at one end with skin, like a drum, and ornamented with bunches of these same seeds. Some have small rattles ornamented with bright coloured feathers; some have drums; some have much ornamented flutes made of animals' bones; some have flutes made of hollow reeds; some have pan-pipes; and some have sticks topped with a rude wooden and painted image of some bird, fish, or animal.

At last all is ready for the carousal. All form a procession, and march slowly round the liquor trough, droning out a chant, keeping step, and waving their instruments in slow, measured time. Round and round the trough the strange procession winds, all feet stamping in time with the monotonous chant of Hia-hia-hia. Suddenly the chant gives place to loud discordant cries, and the procession breaks up. The women bring calabashes with paiwari for the men to drink. Then the women drink. And then the procession re-forms, and continues as before, till there is a new interruption, and a new drinking. The actual quantity of liquor consumed by each individual is tremendous. By long practice they have acquired the knack of bringing up the liquor almost as soon as it has been drunk. And so an enormous bulk of liquor fills and re-fills the stomach; but of this only the very small proportion of alcohol which it contains remains in the stomach to fire their spirits. In time this tells, and the drinkers get more and more excited. Then they leave the house and dance in the open space outside.

These dances seem to differ in each tribe; and, moreover, each tribe seems to have several dances more or less peculiar to it. In some the body is moved in a slow and stately manner, which contrasts oddly with the grotesque position in which the head and limbs are held. Certain of the dances are imitations of the movements of animals. One, of an usually lively kind mimics the capers of monkies; others, called tiger-dances, imitate the slow stealthy gliding of the jaguar. In these last, a man supposed to represent the jaguar creeps round and round the other dancers, and in and out among them, until he suddenly springs with a loud roar upon some one of them, and carries him of from out of the circle; then he returns and carries off another; and so continues, until he himself remains alone. The Ackawois have one dance in which each of the performers represents a different animal; and in this each carries a stick on which is a figure of that animal. This seems to be the origin of the dancing sticks mentioned above.

While dancing, they chant songs; and the end of each dance is marked by a loud and discordant uproar, which is a signal for renewed drinking. As the fun grows fast and furious, men and women reel and stagger. At last some dispute arises. As a rule Indians rarely quarrel, and never fight among themselves. However much one Indian has been offended by another, he satisfies himself by ceasing to speak to his foe or, perhaps, speaks of him in his absence as a "bad man." But when inflamed by paiwarie, the quarrel is more violently followed up. Abuse is passed freely from one to the other. Sometimes even blows are exchanged; but that this is an acquired habit, and not one natural to the Indians is shown by the fact that, in such cases, they do not double their fists, but, in imitation of the negro, swing forward the extended arm, so as to slap the opponent with the palm of the hand. But before Indians resort even to this mild form of fighting, they are generally so overcome by paiwarie that the one who is struck falls at the blow, and he who strikes loses his balance and falls too. There they generally lie; but if one or other of the fallen ones shows signs of giving further trouble, the least intoxicated members of the party take him or her—for it is as often a woman as a man—and sew him up in a hammock, in which position, though quite helpless and

harmless, he adds by his shouts to the din of the revel, which is still continued.

But at last, when all are either too drunk or too tired to keep up the dance and the shouts, they retire to their hammocks for the night. The next morning, however, the revel of the previous day is renewed; and so it is for many days, until all the available stock of paiwarie has been exhausted.

Paiwari is largely used at other times; and so long as there is any cassava to be had, a stock of this liquor is always kept ready. Whenever the men return from hunting, and whenever a stranger comes into the house, it is drunk. And the women and children—even the youngest babies—drink it. Probably to this habit is due the great rapidity with which Indians loose flesh. Paiwari seems to have a great tendency to puff out the flesh and make the whole body look fat and round; but if an Indian has to go without paiwari for many days the false appearance of fat disappears, the skin hangs in folds, and every bone in the body becomes prominent.

In some parts of the country, instead of paiwari, both for festivals and for ordinary occasions, a much pleasanter drink is used. This is casiri, which is made of sweet-potatoes and sugar cane. Generally, though not always, it is prepared by simple boiling and not by chewing. It has a pretty pink colour, due to the sweet-potatoes; and when well made it tastes not unlike thin claret.

Among the Macusis on the savannahs, paiwarie feasts are generally accompanied by foot races. The racers, who wear collars made of long white heron's feathers, or of black powis feathers, start, not abreast, but one behind the other, as in the ordinary "bumping" boat races of English universities. Games of ball are also played on these occasions, with a ball made either of part of an ear of Indian corn or of native India rubber.

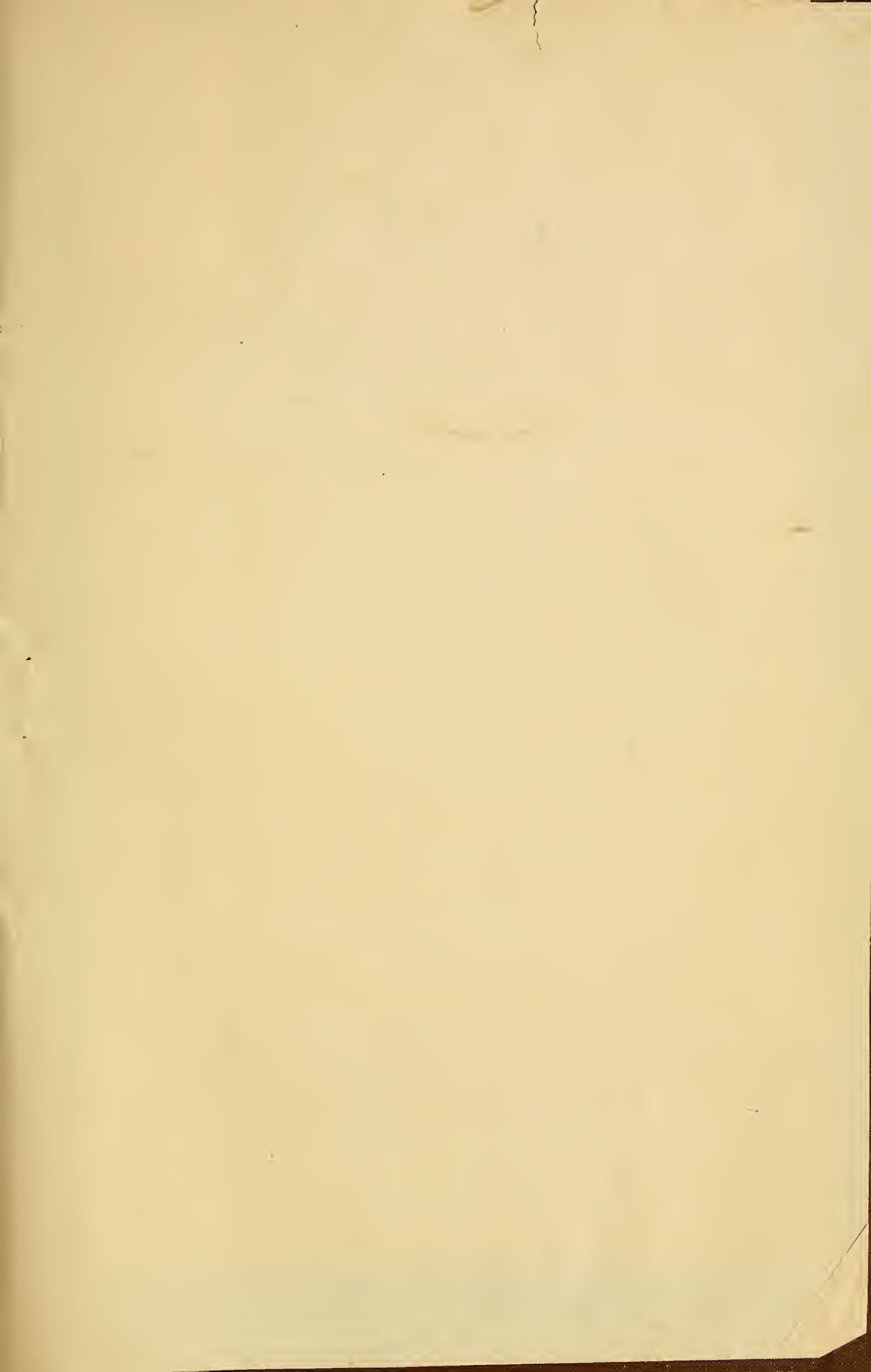
The paiwari feasts of the Arawaaks' were peculiar for a strange and painful dance, which is now, probably, nearly, though not quite extinct. The dancers—who are all men—stand in two rows opposite to each other. Each man has in his hand a whip, with a hard strong lash, made of fibre.* As they dance, the whips are waved. Every now and then a couple retires from the line, and use their whips. One stands steadily, one leg in front of the other; the other swings back his whip, and, with all the force he can command, and with a spring forward, lashes the calf of the first man's leg; then in his turn, the second man stands still, to receive a lash from the other. They lash each other in this way until their calves are striped with weals, and blood flows freely. The punishment is born and inflicted with perfect good temper, and was probably originally devised as a means of testing endurance. Finally the dancers retire and drink together.

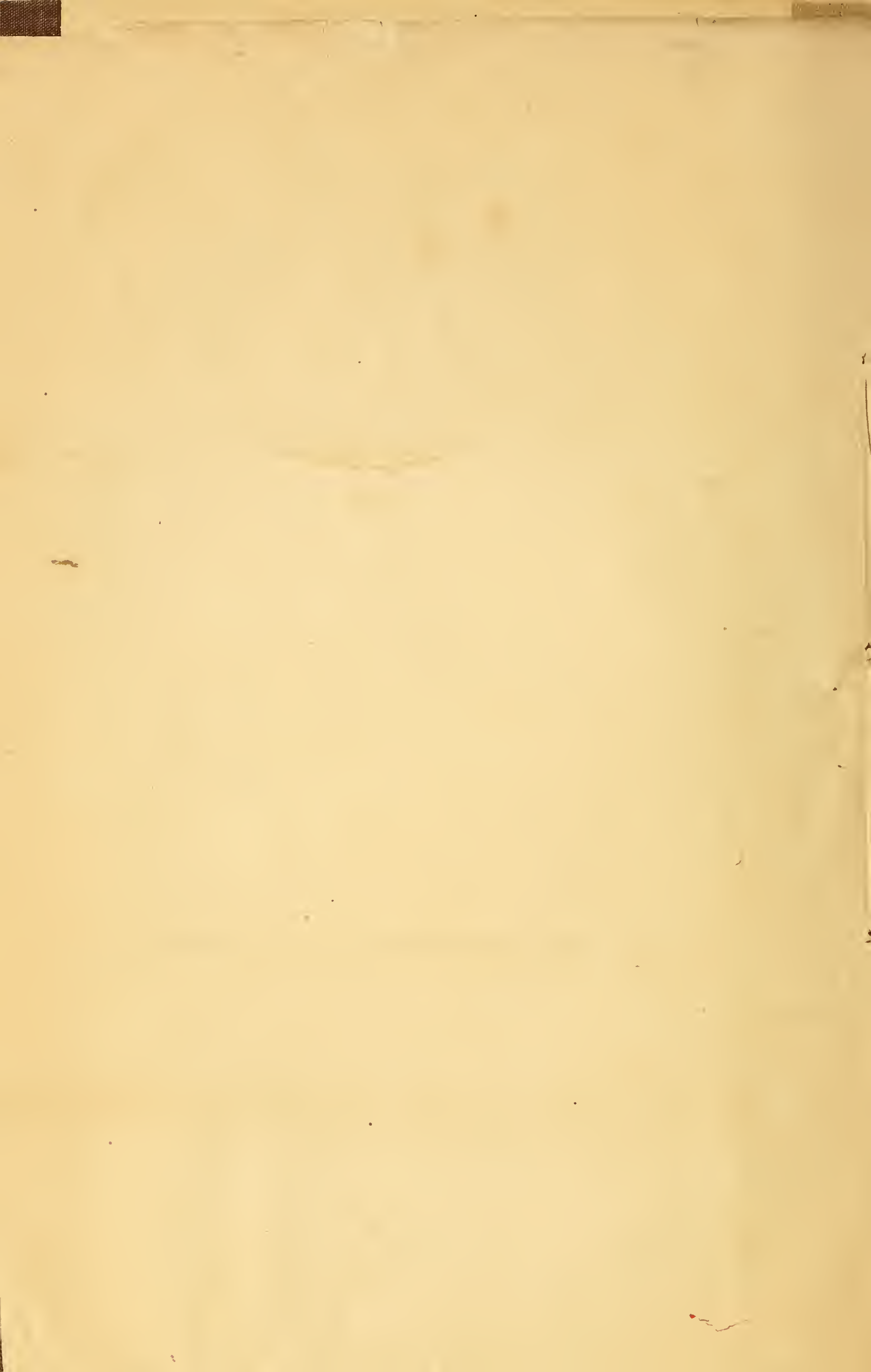
The Warraus, again, are peculiar, for a kind of wrestling which they practise at their paiwari feasts. A challenge is given and accepted. Each of the opponents is provided with a large square shield, about four feet high by three wide, made of parallel strips of the pith of the Aeta palm lashed on to a strong but light wooden frame work. The two wrestlers, each behind his shield, which he grasps with his hands by its two sides, stand opposite to each other, making feints and watching for a favourable opportunity. Suddenly one, seeing his opportunity, springs toward the other, and the shields meet and clash. Each now strives to push back the other. Each plants one foot firmly on the ground behind him and bends the other knee against the shield. Whoever succeeds in pushing back the other from his position is considered to have won the victory.

EVERARD F. IM THURN.

British Guiana Museum,
August 11th, 1879.

* These whips, called macquari, give name to this dance.





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