SCIENCE:

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THE KARIFS AND INSULAR CARIBS.

BY JOHN GIFFORD, SWARTHMORE COLLEGE.

THE word "Carib" is very elastic in meaning. It is applied in Spanish America to any wild and savage tribe. Originally it referred only to the natives of the Lesser Antilles and the South American mainland. The words "Carib" and "cannibal" are probably mispronunciations of their proper name *Karina*. The pure Caribs are represented to-day by several tribes in South America and a remnant in the Caribbee Islands. Throughout the American tropics there are Carib mixtures. In Spanish and British Honduras there are many black Caribs. The early Spaniards applied the term *grifos* to the crosses between Negro and Carib, probably because of the frizzled nature of their hair. This word has been frenchified into *griffe* and is now applied also to mulattoes in Louisiana.

In Froude's "English in the West Indies" there are many reckless statements, examples of which are that Pere Labat discovered from the language of the Caribs that they were North American Indians, that they called themselves *Banari*, which means "come from over sea," and that their dialect was almost identical with what he had heard in Florida. There seems to be little foundation for this statement. There are reasons for believing that the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles migrated from northern Venezuela and that they spoke a dialect of the language of the mainland Caribs.

According to the Spaniards the Caribs of old were exceedingly fierce and corrupt, but these statements, as well as others concerning their language, are controverted. Dr. Wilson calls them the "historic race" of the Antilles, and Peschel speaks of them as an "extraordinarily gifted race, both physically and intellectually, whom we must not condemn too severely for their complete nudity, their inclination to piracy, their craving after human flesh and the poisoning of their arrows." Some of the highest and some of the lowest specimens of South American Indians are Caribs.

The mainland and probably also the insular Caribs poisoned their arrows with curare, the juice of *Strychnos toxifera*, a climbing plant of Equatorial America. The arrows were light and were blown through a tube in a manner similar to the Dyaks of Borneo. This tube was made from the stems of *Arundinaria Schomburgkii*, a plant of the grass family resembling bamboo. This plant was named in honor of Schomburgk, a famous German traveller, sent in 1835 to explore Guiana by the Geographical Society of London. Among his many interesting finds was the *Victoria regia*. He had opportunity to witness the effect of their poisoned arrows and is charged with the statement that a deer at the top of its speed when hit with such a dart drops dead at the end of forty yards.

In what follows the writer only refers to the insular Caribs and the Karifs or black Caribs on the coast of the Bay of Honduras.

St. Vincent and Dominica were the principal rendezvous of the insular Caribs, although they occupied all the islands of that beautiful chain extending from Puerto Rico to the mouths of the Orinoco and raided at times Jamaica and San Domingo.

Many and bloody were the wars which the Caribs fought with the early colonists. In spite of their endurance they were unable to withstand the superior force and diseases of the Europeans, and all that is left in the Lesser Antilles is a little colony on the Island of St. Vincent.

In an old book on the "Caribby" Islands, the aborigines are described as good-looking, well-proportioned people of medium size, with mouths not overly large; teeth, close and white; complexion, orange; beards, scanty; hair long and black, and eyes black, piercing and somewhat Mongolian. This description fairly applies to the yellow Caribs still living on the Island of St. Vincent.

The original Carib looked very fierce because he wore no clothing, and dyed his body with arnotto (*Bixa Orellana*). It was called *roucou*, and in French Guiana there is a low tribe of Caribs called the *Roucouyennes*.

The Caribs of to-day are very able watermen. The boys even while very young are of an amphibious nature. They can catch a three-pence before it strikes the bottom of the bay, and think nothing of putting to sea on a fishing expedition on two logs nailed together. Even the women of the Black Caribs of Honduras bring bananas in small piroques to the ships in rough weather. They inherit this from their forefathers. The word "canoe," it is said, is of Carib origin. They were probably the first Indians to invent the sail. When the wind was fair they spread a cotton cloth; at other times it is said they rowed their canoes with oars, and even sang a song in time to the stroke, as sailors do to-day. Their piroques-of-war were often forty feet in length by six in width. Boats of almost this size, hewn from a single log, may be seen to-day in British Honduras. The trunks of the Giant Ceiba (*Bornbax Ceiba*) were used for this purpose. It is said that the word "ceiba" is a Spanish corruption of an Indian word for boat. The tree is of enormous size, but the wood is soft and not durable. It is also the Sacred God Tree of the Negroes.

Carib relics are often found. A collection was on exhibition at the Fair in Jamaica. They deftly fashioned implements and utensils from stone, bone and shell. There are two rocks in Grenada on which quaint hieroglyphics are cut. There too is the "hill of the leapers," where a hard-pressed, ill-fated band of Indians plunged into the sea. Many interesting remains were found on the Island of Amba, and these were of such superior workmanship that they reminded the discoverers of Greek patterns.

At the Jamaica Exhibition in 1891 there were six Caribs sent by the Government of St. Vincent. Three of these were types of "yellow" and three of "black" Caribs. They were engaged in basket making in the Industrial Village. At this work they are very skilful, the baskets they weave being water-tight.

The yellow Caribs form the purest remnant of the aborigines of the Lesser Antilles. The black Caribs