

# Myths of Ifè

## By John Wyndham

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This short book is a translation of some of the myths of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It is a history of the creation of the world, the gods, and humanity, and the early days of the sacred city of Ifè, the traditional center of Yoruba culture. The text was recited to the author/translator by the high priests of Ifè, and the book is still cited in some books on traditional Yoruba religion and thought today. It has undeservedly become quite rare, as it can be considered a minor classic in the field.

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## PERSONS

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>Arámfè</i>               | God of Thunder and Father of the Gods.                                |
| <i>Orísha</i>               | Creator of men. Son of Arámfè.  |
| <i>Odúwa or<br/>Odudúwa</i> | $\pm$<br>o King of men. Son of Arámfè.                                |
| <i>Ógun</i>                 | God of Iron. Son of Odúwa.  |
| <i>Oráyan</i>               | The warrior son of Ógun.  |
| <i>Ládi</i>                 | Smith of Ógun.  |
| <i>Obálufon</i>             | A worker in brass.  |
| <i>Mórimì</i>               | Wife of Obálufon.   |
| <i>Ífa</i>                  | The Messenger of the Gods, principally known by reason of divination. |
| <i>Olókun</i>               | Goddess of the Sea.   |
| <i>Olóssa</i>               | Goddess of the Lagoons.   |
| <i>Óshun</i>                | A Goddess who transformed and became the River Oshun.                 |
| <i>Édi</i>                  | The Perverter. A God of Evil who led men astray.                      |

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>Éshu</i>         | Now regarded as the Devil, but originally as the Undoer of the favours of the Gods.                    |
| <i>Peregún Gbo</i>  | A Forest God who caused the Forest to bring forth wild animals and watched over the birth of Orúnmila. |
| <i>Orúnmila</i>     | A God who watches over the birth of children.  |
| <i>Offun Kánran</i> | A messenger of Ífa.  |
| <i>Órní Odúm la</i> | The ancestor of the Órnís of Ífè.  |
| <i>Ojúmu</i>        | A priest.  |
| <i>Osányi</i>       | A priest and maker of charms.  |

The Sun, Moon, Night, Day, Dawn and Evening were also Gods and Goddesses sent by Arámfè, who is often spoken of as God. But a higher and very distant Being is mentioned by some of the Priests.

Oíbo means White Man.

Okpèllè is a charm used in the divination of Ífa.

The final N is as in bon, and French pronunciation is nearly correct in all the above names.

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A white man visits Ífè, the sacred city of the Yórubas, and asks to hear the history of the place. The Órní, the religious head of Yórubaland, begins, and directs the Babaláwo Arába, the chief-priest of Ífa to continue.

## I. THE BEGINNING.

*The Órní of Ífè speaks:*

Oíbo, you have asked to hear our lore,  
The legends of the World's young hours and where  
Could truth in greater surety have its home  
Than in the precincts of the shrines of Those  
Who made the World, and in the mouths of priests  
To whom their doings have been handed down  
From sire to son?

*Arámfè  
reigns in  
Heaven;*

Before this World was made  
There reigned Arámfè in the realm of Heaven  
Amidst his sons. Old were the hills around him;  
The Sun had shone upon his vines and cornfields  
Since time past reckoning. Old was Arámfè,  
The father of the Gods: his youth had been  
The youth of Heaven. . . Once when the King reclined  
Upon the dais, and his sons lay prostrate  
In veneration at his feet, he spoke

*tells his  
sons of the  
creation of  
Heaven;*

Of the great things he purposed:  
"My sons, you know  
But fair things which I made for you, before  
I called your spirits from the Dusk: for always  
[p. 14](#) Your eyes have watched the shadows and the wind  
On waving corn, and I have given you  
The dances and the chorus of the night  
An age of mirth and sunrise (the wine of Heaven)  
Is your existence. You have not even heard  
Of the grey hour when my young eyes first opened  
To gaze upon a herbless Mass, unshaped  
And unadorned. But I knew well the heart  
Of Him-Who-Speaks-Not, the far-felt Purpose that gave  
Me birth; I laboured and the grim years passed:  
Streams flowed along their sunny beds; I set  
The stars above me, and the hills about;  
I fostered budding trees, and taught the birds  
Their song the unshapely I had formed to beauty,  
And as the ages came I loved to make  
The beautiful more fair. . . All went not well:  
A noble animal my mind conceived  
Emerged in loathsome form to prey upon  
My gentle creatures; a river, born to bask  
In sunlit channels and mirror the steep hills,  
Tore down its banks and ravaged field and plain;  
While cataract and jagged precipice,  
Now grand with years, remind me of dread days  
[p. 15](#) When Heaven tottered, and wide rifts sundered my young  
Fair hills, and all seemed lost. Yet I prevailed.  
Think, now, if the accomplished whole be Heaven,  
How wonderful the anxious years of slow  
And hazardous achievement a destiny  
For Gods. But yours it has not been to lead  
Creation by the cliff's-edge way from Mass  
To Paradise." He paused on the remembrance,  
And Great Orísha cried: "Can we do naught?"

What use in godhead without deeds to do?  
Where yearns a helpless region for a hand  
To guide it?" And Old Arámfè answered him:

*sends them* "My son, your day approaches. Far-off, the haze  
*to make the* Rests always on the outer waste which skirts  
*World.* Our realm; beyond, a nerveless Mass lies cold  
'Neath floods which some malign unreason heaves.  
Odúwa, first-born of my sons, to you I give  
The five-clawed Bird, the sand of power. 1 Go now,  
Call a despairing land to smiling life  
Above the jealous sea, and found sure homesteads  
For a new race whose destiny is not  
The eternal life of Gods. You are their judge;  
[p. 16](#) Yours is the kingship, and to you all Gods  
And men are subject. Wisest of my sons,  
Orísha, yours is the grateful task to loose  
Vague spirits 1 waiting for the Dawn to make  
The race that shall be; and to you I give  
This bag of Wisdom's guarded lore and arts  
For Man's well-being and advancement. And you,  
My younger sons, the chorus and the dance,  
The voice of worship and the crafts are yours  
To teach that the new thankful race may know  
The mirth of Heaven and the joys of labour."  
Then Odúwa said: "Happy our life has been,  
And I would gladly roam these hills for ever,  
Your son and servant. But to your command  
I yield; and in my kingship pride o'ersteps  
Sorrow and heaviness. Yet, Lord Arámfè,  
I am your first-born: wherefore do you give  
The arts and wisdom to Orísha? I,  
The King, will be obeyed; the hearts of men  
Will turn in wonder to the God who spells  
Strange benefits." But Arámfè said "Enough;  
To each is fitting task is given. Farewell."

*The Gods* [p. 17](#) Here the Beginning was: from Arámfè's vales  
*leave* Through the desert regions the exiled Gods approached  
*Heaven.* The edge of Heaven, and into blackness plunged  
A sunless void o'er godless water lying 1  
To seize an empire from the Dark, and win  
Amidst ungoverned waves a sovereignty.

*Odúwa steals the bag and causes War on Earth.* But by the roadside while Orísha slept  
Odúwa came by stealth and bore away  
The bag Arámfè gave. Thus was the will  
Of God undone: for thus with the charmed sand  
Cast wide on the unmastered sea, his sons  
Called forth a World of envy and of war.

Of Man's Creation, and of the restraint  
Olókun<sup>2</sup> placed upon the chafing sea,  
Of the unconscious years which passed in darkness  
Till dazzling sunshine touched the unused eyes  
Of men, of War and magic my priest shall tell you,  
And all the Great Ones did before the day  
They vanished to return to the calm hills

*Life in Ifè is as it was in the time of the Gods* p. 18 Of Old Arámfè's realm . . . They went away;  
But still with us their altars and their priests  
Remain, and from their shrines the hidden Gods  
Peer forth with joy to watch the dance they taught,  
And hear each night their chorus with the drum:  
For changeless here the early World endures  
In this first stronghold of humanity,

And, constant as the buffets of the waves  
Of Queen Olókun on the shore, the song,  
The dance of those old Gods abide, the mirth,  
The life . . . I, too, am born of the Beginning:  
*Odúm la speaks for the Gods;* For, when from the sight of men the Great Gods passed,  
They left on Earth Órní Odúm la<sup>1</sup> charged  
To be a father to a mourning people,  
To tend the shrines and utter solemn words  
Inspired by Those invisible. And when  
Odúm la's time had come to yield the crown,  
To wait upon the River's brink,<sup>2</sup> and cross  
To Old Arámfè Ífa,<sup>3</sup> in his wisdom,

*and lives for ever in the person of the Órní.* p. 19 Proclaimed that son with whom Odúm la's soul  
Abode. Thus has it ever been; and now  
With me that Being is about, within  
And on our sacred days these lips pronounce  
The words of Odudúwa and Orísha.

# Footnotes

p. 15

1 [See Note I](#) on the Creation of the Earth.

p. 16

1 [See Note IV](#) on the Creation of Man.

p. 17

1 [See Note I](#) on the Creation.

2 The Goddess of the Sea.

p. 18

1 [See Note II](#) on Odúm la, the first Órní of Ílè.

2 The River which separates this World from the next.

3 The Messenger of the Gods. [See Note XII](#) on his divination.

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## II. THE DESCENT

*Arába speaks:*

I am the voice of Ífa, messenger  
Of all the Gods: to me the histories  
Are known, and I will tell you of the days  
Of the Descent. How Old Arámfè sent  
The Gods from Heaven, and Odudúwa stole  
The bag my king has told you. . . For many a day  
Across unwatered plains the Great Ones journeyed,  
And sandy deserts for such is the stern bar  
Set by Arámfè 'twixt his smiling vales

*The Gods arrive at the edge of Heaven.* And the stark cliff's edge which his sons approached Tremblingly, till from the sandy brink they peered Down the sheer precipice. Behind them lay The parched, forbidding leagues; but yet the Sun

Was there, and breezes soft, and yet the mountains A faded line beyond the shimmering waste Called back to mind their ancient home. Beneath Hung chaos dank blackness and the threatening roar Of untamed waters. Then Odudúwa spoke: "Orísha, what did we? And what fault was ours? Outcasts to-day; to-morrow we must seek Our destiny in dungeons, and beneath  
[p. 21](#) That yawning blackness we must found a city For unborn men. Better a homeless life In desert places: dare we turn and flee To some lost valley of the hills? Orísha, What think you?" Then spoke Orísha whom men call The Great: "Is this Odúwa that I hear My mother's son who stole Arámfè's gift, And thought to filch away the hearts of men With blessings which were mine to give? For me, The arts I know I long to use, and yearn To see the first of toiling, living men That I shall make. Forbidding is our task, You say but think, ere we return to peace And Heaven's calm, how boundless is the fate You flinch from! Besides, is Godhead blind?

You think

Arámfè would not know? Has Might no bodes With eyes and ears? . . Dumb spirits hungering

*Odúwa sends Ojúmu with the Bird,* For life await us: let us go." So spoke Orísha; and Odúwa hung a chain Over the cliff to the dark water's face, And sent Ojúmu, the wise priest, to pour The magic sand upon the sea and loose

[p. 22](#) The five-clawed Bird to scatter far and wide Triumphant land.<sup>1</sup> But, as Earth's ramparts grew, Ever in the darkness came the waves and sucked Away the crumbling shore, while foot by foot Lagoons crept up, and turned to reedy swamps The soil of hope. So Odudúwa called

*and* Olókun<sup>2</sup> and Olóssa<sup>3</sup> to the cliff  
*Olókun and* And thus he spoke: "Beneath, the waters wrestle  
*Olóssa.* With the new-rising World, and would destroy  
Our kingdom and undo Arámfè's will.  
Go to the fields of men to be, the homes  
That they shall make. Olókun! to the sea!  
For there your rule and your dominion shall be:  
To curb the hungry waves upon the coastlands  
For ever. And thus, in our first queen of cities  
And secret sanctuaries on lonely shores  
Through every æon as the season comes,  
Shall men bring gifts in homage to Olókun.  
And you, Olóssa, where your ripple laps  
The fruitful bank, shan see continually  
The offerings of thankful men."

p. 23 The months

*The Bird*  
*makes the*  
*Earth,*  
Of Heaven passed by, while in the moonless night  
Beneath the Bird toiled on until the bounds,  
The corners of the World were steadfast. And then  
Odúwa called Orísha and the Gods  
To the cliff's edge, and spoke these words of sorrow:  
"We go to our sad kingdom. Such is the will  
Of Old Arámfè: so let it be. But ere  
The hour the wilderness which gapes for us  
Engulf us utterly, ere the lingering sight  
Of those loved hills can gladden us no more  
May we not dream awhile of smiling days  
Gone by? . . Fair was drenched morning in the Sun  
When dark the hill-tops rose o'er misty hollows;  
Fair were the leafy trees of night beneath  
The silvering Moon, and beautiful the wind  
Upon the grasslands. Good-bye, ye plains we roamed.  
*The Gods*  
*descend.* Good-bye to sunlight and the shifting shadows  
Cast on the crags of Heaven's blue hills. Ah! wine  
Of Heaven, farewell" . . . So came the Gods to Ífè.  
Then of an age of passing months untold  
By wanings of the Moon our lore repeats

*A sunless  
World.*

p. 24 The dirge of wasting hopes and the lament  
Of a people in a strange World shuddering  
Beneath the thunder of the unseen waves  
On crumbling shores around. Always the marsh  
Pressed eagerly on Ífè; but ever the Bird  
Returned with the unconquerable sand  
Ojúmu poured from his enchanted shell,  
And the marsh yielded. Then young Ógun bade  
The Forest grow her whispering trees but she  
Budded the pallid shoots of hopeless night,  
And all was sorrow round the sodden town  
Where Odudúwa reigned. Yet for live men

*Orísha  
creates  
man.*

Orísha, the Creator, yearned, and called  
To him the longing shades from other glooms;  
He threw their images into the wombs  
Of Night, Olókun and Olóssa, and all  
The wives of the great Gods bore babes with eyes  
Of those born blind unknowing of their want  
And limbs to feel the heartless wind which blew  
From outer nowhere to the murk beyond. . .  
But as the unconscious years wore by, Orísha,  
The Creator, watched the unlit Dawn of Man  
Wistfully as one who follows the set flight  
p. 25 Of a lone sea-bird when the sunset fades  
Beyond a marshy wilderness and spoke  
To Odudúwa: "Our day is endless night,  
And deep, wan woods enclose our weeping children.  
The Ocean menaces, chill winds moan through  
Our mouldering homes. Our guardian Night, who spoke  
To us with her strange sounds in the still hours  
Of Heaven is here; yet she can but bewail  
Her restless task. And where is Evening? Oh! where  
Is Dawn?" He ceased, and Odudúwa sent  
Ífa, the Messenger, to his old sire  
To crave the Sun and the warm flame that lit  
The torch of Heaven's Evening and the dance. . .

*Arámfè sends fire, the Sun and the Moon.* A deep compassion moved thundrous Arámfè,  
The Father of the Gods, and he sent down  
The vulture with red fire upon his head  
For men; and, by the Gods' command, the bird  
Still wears no plumage where those embers burned him  
A mark of honour for remembrance. Again  
The Father spoke the word, and the pale Moon  
Sought out the precincts of calm Night's retreat  
[p. 26](#) To share her watch on Darkness; and Day took wings,  
And flew to the broad spaces of the sky  
To roam benignant from the floating mists  
Which cling to hillsides of the Dawn to Eve  
Who calls the happy toilers home.

And all

*The Age of Mirth.* Was changed: for when the terror of bright Day  
Had lifted from the unused eyes of men,  
Sparks flew from Ládi's anvil, while Ógun taught  
The use of iron, and wise Obálufon<sup>1</sup>  
Made brazen vessels and showed how wine streams out  
From the slim palms.<sup>2</sup> And in the night the Gods  
Set torches in their thronging courts to light  
The dance, and Heaven's music touched the drum  
Once more as in its ancient home. And mirth  
With Odudúwa reigned.

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## Footnotes

[p. 22](#)

[1 See Note I](#) on the Creation of the Earth.

[2](#) The Goddess of the Sea.

[3](#) The Goddess of the Lagoons.

[p. 24](#)

[1 See Note IV](#) on the Creation of Man.

[p. 26](#)

[1 See Note V](#) on Obálufon.

[2](#) Palm-wine, an efficacious native intoxicant.

### III. THE WAR OF THE GODS.

*Arába continues:*

Oíbo, I will tell and chronicle

A second chapter from the histories

*The fable of Earth, Water and Forest* Bequeathed from other times. . . A tale is told  
 How God in the Beginning sent three sons  
 Into the World Earth, Water and the Forest  
 With one and twenty gifts for Earth and men  
 That are the sons of Earth; and all save one  
 The Forest and the Rivers stole; and how  
 God promised to his first-born, Earth, that men  
 Should win the twenty gifts again by virtue  
 Of that last one, Good Humour. And this is true:  
 For in those years when Ógun and the Gods  
 Made known their handicrafts men learned to seek  
 Thatch, food and wine in Forest and in River  
 Patiently. So Man prevailed; but in those days  
*Strife between Odúwa and Orísha* Came strife and turmoil to the Gods for still  
 For jealousy and pride Odúwa held  
 The bag Arámfè gave to Great Orísha.  
 Often Orísha made entreaty; oft  
 A suppliant came before his brother in vain;  
 Till once when Odudúwa sat with Ógun  
[p. 28](#) In that same palace where the Órní reigns,  
 The sound of drums was heard and Great Orísha  
 Approached with skilled Obálufon, and said:  
 "The time has come to teach Arámfè's arts  
 "To men. Give back the bag (for it is mine!)  
 That I may do our Father's bidding. Else,  
 Have a care, is it not told how caution slept  
 In the still woods when the proud leopard fell,  
 Lured on by silence, 'neath the monster's foot?"[1](#)  
 Then was Odúwa angered exceedingly:  
 "Am I not king? Did not Arámfè make  
 Me lord of Gods and men? Begone! Who speaks  
 Unseemly words before the king has packed  
 His load."[2](#)

Orísha and Odúwa called

*brings war to Ifè.* To arms their followings of Gods and men,  
And on that day the first of wars began  
In Ifè and the Forest. Such was the fall  
Of the Gods from paths divine, and such for men  
The woe that Odudúwa's theft prepared;  
But little the Gods recked of their deep guilt  
[p. 29](#) Till darkness fell and all was quiet for then  
Returned the memory of Calm, their heritage,  
Of Heaven born and destined for the World;  
Gloom, too, with the still night came down: a sense  
Of impious wrong, ungodly sin, weighed down  
Warriors aweary, and all was changed. Around,  
Dead, dead the Forest seemed, its boughs unstirred;  
Dead too, amidst its strangling, knotted growth  
The stifled air while on that hush, the storm's  
*Arámfè tries to stop it;* Mute herald, came the distant thundrous voice  
Of Old Arámfè as he mused: "In vain  
Into the Waste beneath I sent my sons  
The children of my happy vales to make  
A World of mirth: for desolation holds  
The homes of Ifè, and women with their babes  
Are outcast in the naked woods." But when  
The whirling clouds were wheeling in the sky  
And the great trees were smitten by the wind,  
Thundrous Arámfè in his ire rebuked  
His erring sons: "At my command you came  
To darkness, where the Evil of the Void  
Insentient Violence had made its home,  
To shape in the Abyss a World of joy  
[p. 30](#) And lead Creation in the ways of Heaven.  
How, then, this brawling? Did the Void's black soul  
Outmatch you, or possess your hearts to come  
Again into its own? For Man's misfortune  
I grieve; but you have borne them on the tide  
Of your wrong-doing, and your punishment  
Is theirs to share. For now my thunderbolts  
I hurl, with deluges upon the land  
To fill the marshes and lagoons, and stay  
For aye your impious war."

*but fails.*

Dawn came; the storm

Was gone, and Old Arámfè in his grief  
 Departed on black clouds. But still the wrath,  
 But still the anger of his sons endured,  
 And in the dripping forests and the marshes  
 The rebel Gods fought on while in the clouds  
 Afar Arámfè reasoned with himself:  
 "I spoke in thunders, and my deluge filled  
 The marshes that Ojúmu dried; but still  
 They fight. Punish, I may but what can I  
 Achieve? In Heaven omnipotent: but here ?  
 What means it? I cannot tell. . . In the Unknown,  
 Beyond the sky where I have set the Sun,  
 p. 31 Is He-Who-Speaks-Not: He knows all. Can this  
 Be Truth: Amidst the unnatural strife of brothers  
 The World was weaned: by strife must it endure ?"  
 Oíbo, how the first of wars began,  
 And Old Arámfè sought to stay the flow  
 Of blood your pen has written; but of the days,  
 The weary days of all that war, what tongue  
 Can tell? 'Tis said the anger of the Gods  
 Endured two hundred years: we know the priest  
 Osányi made strange amulets for all  
 The mortal soldiers of the Gods one charm  
 Could turn a spear aside, a second robbed  
 The wounding sword of all its sting, another  
 Made one so terrible that a full score  
 Must flee but not one word of the great deeds,  
 Of hopes and fears, of imminent defeat  
 Or victory snatched away is handed down:  
 No legend has defied, no voice called through  
 The dimness and the baffling years.

But when

An end was come to the ill days foreknown  
 To Him-Who-Speaks-Not, remembrance of the calm  
 Of Heaven stole upon the sleepless Gods  
 p. 32 For while the Moon lay soft with all her spell  
 On Ífè of the many battles; while  
 With sorrowful reproach the wise trees stood  
 And gazed upon the Gods who made the soil  
 The voices of the Forest crooned their dreams  
 Of peace: "Sleep, sleep" all weary Nature craved,  
 And "Sleep" the slumbrous reed-folk urged, and 'twixt  
 The shadow and the silver'd leaf, for sleep

*Ógun asks* The drowsing breezes yearned. . . . And with the dawn  
*Odúwa to* Ógun, the warrior, with his comrades stood  
*give back* Before the king, and thus he spoke: "Odúwa,  
*the bag to* We weary of the battle, and its agony  
*Orísha.* Weighs heavy on our people. Have you forgot

The careless hours of Old Arámfè's realm?  
What means this war, this empty war between  
One mother's sons? Orísha willed it so,  
You say. . . 'Twas said of old 'Who has no house  
Will buy no broom',<sup>1</sup> Why then did Great Orísha  
Bring plagues on those he made in love? In Heaven  
Afar Arámfè gave to you the empire,

p. 33 And to Orísha knowledge of the ways  
Of mysteries and hidden things. The bag  
You seized; but not its clue the skill, the wisdom  
Of Great Orísha which alone could wake  
The sleeping lore. . . The nations of the World  
Are yours: give back the bag, and Great Orísha  
Will trouble us no more." But neither Ógun  
Nor the soft voices of the night could loose  
Odúwa from the thrall of envy: the rule  
Of men and empire were of no account  
When the hot thought of Old Arámfè's lore  
Roused his black ire anew. The bag he held;  
But all the faithless years had not revealed  
Its promised treasures. Bitterly he answered:

*Odúwa* "These many years my brother has made war  
*refuses;* Upon his king; while for the crown, its power  
And greatness, I have wrought unceasing. To-day  
My son hope of my cause, my cause itself  
Wearies of war, and joins my enemies.

Weak son, the sceptre you were born to hold  
And hand down strengthened to a line of kings  
Could not uphold your will and be your spur  
Until the end. Is it not said, "Shall one  
Priest bury, and anon his mate dig up

p. 34 The corpse?"<sup>1</sup> No day's brief work have you undone,  
But all my heart has longed for through a life  
Of labour. So let it be: God of Soft Iron!  
Upon your royal brow descends this day  
The crown of a diminished chieftaincy,  
With the sweet honours of a king in name  
For I go back to Old Arámfè's hills

*and trans-* And the calm realm you prate of." Then Odudúwa  
*forms to* Transformed to stone and sank beneath the soil,  
*stone,* Bearing away the fateful bag.  
*taking the* And thus,  
*bag with* Beneath, through all the ages of the World  
*him.* A voiceless lore and arts which found no teacher  
Have lain in bondage.

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## Footnotes

p. 28

1 cp. Yoruba threat "The Elephant has power to crush the Leopard, though he be silent." (Communicated by drum-beats, I think.)

2 Yoruba saying. The speaker is probably prepared to travel.

p. 32

1 Yoruba saying.

p. 34

1 Yoruba saying.

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p. 35

## IV. THE SACRIFICE OF MÓRIMI.1

*Arába continues:*

Oíbo I have told you of the days  
When Odudúwa and Orísha fought;  
But of the times of peace our annals hold  
Strange legends also. . . Now in the age when mirth  
And Odudúwa reigned, grief ever-growing  
Befell Great Mórими, the wife of skilled

*Mórimí  
has no  
sons,*

Obálufon for while his lesser wives  
Proudly bore many sons unto their lord,  
A daughter only, young Adétoún,  
Was granted to his queen. And as the years  
Lagged by, a strangeness which he always seemed  
To keep in hiding chequered the fair day  
With doubtings, and waylaid her in the paths  
Of her fond nightly dreams. Once with the Spring,  
She saw the clustered tree-tops breaking into leaf  
Copper and red and every green, and she  
Remembered how beneath the new year's buds  
It was ordained by Peregún Gbo, lord  
Of uninhabitable woods that Life  
[p. 36](#) Should spring from Forest, and Life from Life, till all  
The Woods were gladdened with the voice of beasts  
And birds and thus she reasoned: "Is it not told  
How Peregún Gbo<sub>1</sub> spoke, and from the womb  
Of Forest leaped the sloth that laughs by night?  
How 'mid the boughs the sloth brought forth the ape  
That bore the leopard? And did not Peregún  
Watch o'er the birth of young Orúnmíla,  
And ever, when the morrow's sorrowing dawn  
Must yield up to the leaguings fiends the child's  
Fair life, did not the watchful God send down  
His messenger to stay the grasping hand  
Of Death? Thus do the Gods; and surely one  
Will give me sons. Ah! whom must I appease?"

*She  
consults  
Ífa:*

Quick with new hope Great Mórimí sought out  
A priest of Ífa<sub>2</sub> in his court yard dim,  
Where from each beam and smoke-grimed pillar hung  
The charms the wise man set to guard his home,  
His wives and children from the ills contrived  
[p. 37](#) By the bad spirits. To her gift she whispered,  
And laid it on Okpéllè; and the priest  
Seizing the charm of Ífa said: "Okpéllè,  
To you the woe of Mórimí is known;  
You only can reveal its secret cause,  
Its unknown cure!" Then he laid down the charm  
And Óffun Kánran stood before them. The face  
Of Ífa's priest was troubled, and he said:

*Who tells her to sacrifice her daughter.* "Mórimi, this is the message of my lord Ífa: a son, nay many sons, you long for. You have a daughter, and your husband's love Was yours. The Gods would give you many sons, But in your path stands Éshu, the Undoer, Whose shrine calls out for blood, for sacrifice: Adétoún." Without hope Mórimi Went forth, and loathing of the ways of the Gods Possessed her while indignation fed her love Of her one child. . . .

The months passed by: Moons came,  
And in the smiles of happier wives she read  
A mockery; Moons faded from the sky,  
And grief and her Adétoún remained  
Companions of her hours. At last she cried:  
"But sons I asked for; I will go again  
[p. 38](#) And pray for sons and my Adétoún.  
The last word is not yet. Olókun's tide  
Has ebbed: will it not flow again?"

Yet hope

*She consults Ífa again.* Went not with Mórimi to the dark court  
Of Ífa's priest; and when a torch disclosed  
The self-same bode of sorrow in the dusk  
To her drear home Great Mórimi fled back  
In terror of the deed which love commanded,  
And love condemned. . . . Silently in the night

*Édi advises her to act on Ífa's message.* Came Édi, the Perverter, the smooth of tongue,  
Who with his guileful reasoning compels  
To conscious sin: "The forms of messengers  
Reveal the thoughts of Ífa, and the ears  
Of Ífa, the God-Messenger, have heard  
The far-off, thundrous voice. Would you hold back?  
Is not the birth of Nations the first law  
Arámfè gave? Can any wife withstand  
His will, or maid stern Ógun's call? [1](#) To-day  
Is yours, oh, mother of great kings that shall be:  
The green shoots greet the Spring-rain and forget  
The barren months, and Mórimi shall know  
Her grief and her reproach no more." Then doubt  
[p. 39](#) Seized Mórimi but still she answered; "Will Gods  
Not give? Is the grim World a morning market  
Where they drive bargains with the folk they made?  
Are babes as bangles which Obálufon  
Fashions to barter?" But Édi answered her:  
"But once Arámfè spoke to Odudúwa,

And with what heavy hearts the Gods went forth  
From Heaven's valleys to the blackness! Now thrice,<sup>1</sup>  
Thrice to the woman Mórими the word  
Has come with promise of the World's desire:  
Not every wife is chosen for the mother  
Of a house of kings. And think! Obálufon!"  
Then Édi, the Perverter, hid his form  
In darkness; and with the dawn a young girl lay

*The death of Adétoún.* On the Undoer Éshu's altar while  
The lazy blue of early morning smoke  
Crept up the pass between the hills.

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## Footnotes

p. 35

<sup>1</sup> [See Note VI](#) on Mórими's sacrifice.

p. 36

<sup>1</sup> [See Note XI](#) on Peregún Gbo.

<sup>2</sup> [See Note XII](#) on the divination of Ífa.

p. 38

<sup>1</sup> Ógun kills unmarried girls of marriageable age.

p. 39

<sup>1</sup> According to the legend, Mórими consulted Ífa three times before acting on his advice.

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p. 40

## V. THE ÚBO WARS.<sup>1</sup>

*Arába continues:*

*After the War of the Gods, Ifè returns to the arts of peace.* Oíbo, graven on my memory  
 Is the sad legend which my father told me  
 Of the Great Gods' departure. . . The years slid by  
 Unnoted while King Ógun<sup>2</sup> reigned. The World  
 Was young: upon the craggy slopes the trees  
 Shot forth red buds, and ancient Ifè, gaunt  
 With suffering, dreamed again her early dreams.  
 Taught by the Gods, the folk began to learn  
 The arts of Heaven's peace anew; the drum  
 Returned to measures of the dance, and Great  
 Orísha saw the joy of life once more  
 In his creatures' eyes. Thus lived mankind among  
 The Gods, and multiplied until the youth  
 Of Ifè sought new homes and wider lands  
 In the vast Forest; and thus was born the first  
 Fair daughter of Odúwa's city. Men called  
 Her Úbo, and the leader took the name  
 Olúbo of Úbo with his chieftaincy.

*The foundation of Úbo is attended by strife from the first.* But to these colonists the Gods, their Fathers,  
 Gave no good gifts: 'midst battles with the Wild,  
 'Mid struggles with the Forest the town grew-  
 While dull remembrance of unnatural wrongs  
 p. 41 Bred Man's first rebel thought against the Gods;  
 And when the time of festival was near,  
 Word came to Ifè that the folk of Úbo  
 Would bring no gifts, nor worship at the feet  
 Of Ógun. But the King scorned them, laughing: "Who lights  
 His lamp between the leopard's paws?"<sup>3</sup>

*The Chief of Úbo seeks advice,* Years passed  
 In grieving while Olúbo sought the homes  
 Of spirits of the Forest springs, laid gifts  
 At crossway shrines where childless women go,  
 Or wandered to drear coasts to share his wrongs  
 With Ocean chafing at his old restraint.  
 But rivers answered not, not brooks, nor Gods  
 Of crossway altars at the light of dawn;  
 And through the unceasing hissing of the foam  
 No voice of counsel came. . . With Autumn's fall  
 Olúbo came with gifts before the shrine  
 Of the grim Forest-God who hedged his land,  
 And prayed him to accept the corn he brought  
 And the fat beasts, nor seize his lands again.  
 And the God saw the oil, and smelled the blood  
 Of birds and cattle; and the longed-for voice

*which the  
Forest-God  
gives him*

p. 42 Came to Olúbo: "See with the rain I come  
Each year upon your fields with springing trees,  
Rank-growing grass and vegetation wild:  
Your work of yester-year is all undone  
By my swift desolation. Be this your symbol:  
Go thus against the Scornful Ones arrayed  
As I."

In Ifè was great joy: the last  
Black thundercloud has passed; the maids were wed,  
And all men feasted on the sacred days  
Of Ógun and the Lord of Day when sudden,  
From the still Forest o'er the walls there broke  
Portents of moving trees and hurrying grass  
On Ifè's stone-still revellers. (Hope perishes  
In the dark hour a mother sees the dance  
Of white-robed goblins<sub>1</sub> of the midnight streets  
A glimpse, no more; and her sick child is lost).

Despair held rule: the new-wed wives were lone;  
Their men were slaves of Úbo lords. The drum  
Was silent, and laughter mute. About dull tasks  
A listless people wandered; but not so

*Mórimí  
consults  
Ífa,*

p. 43 Mórimí for she, assured of triumph, strode  
To the dim court of Ífa, and laid bare  
Her gift. A vision flickered and was gone,  
And the priest prophesied: "The bode is good.  
As when a sick man lies beset by fiends<sub>1</sub>  
I call not to the Gods for aid, but take  
The pepper on my tongue and thus invoke  
Those very fiends in their dread mother's name,  
And then command the Prince of leaguings Woes  
(Though hastening to the River's lip) to turn  
Again such now is Ífa's counsel, borne  
Swift in the form of Messengers to me

*who advises  
her to go  
to Úbo.*

His priest, his voice: 'Evil has come down on Ifè:  
By Evil only can desire prevail.  
Take six he-goats to Éshu, the Undoer;  
Thus crave his aid and go, Great Mórimí,  
A harlot to the land of Úbo'" . . So sped  
Mórimí to the rebel town; and when

*She finds  
out the  
secret.*

A lord of Úbo sought her midst the shades  
Of night, the Undoer's will possessed his lips,  
And he betrayed the way of Úbo's downfall.

While Éshu's shrine yet ran with blood, the Gods,

*Meanwhile,  
the gods  
transform  
to stones,  
rivers,  
etc.,*

p. 44 Unknowing, sat alone in their abasement,  
And Ógun said: "We scorned our upstart son;  
Scorned him and let him be nor bore in mind  
The wisdom of the Past, 'A little snake  
Is yet a snake.'<sup>1</sup> See now the end has come:  
Swift from the sight of mocking men we must  
Depart. The sage Osányi will lay wide  
The door of our deliverance: come then  
For naked of dominion what are we Gods?"  
And one by one Osányi gave his charms  
To the lorn Gods. . Orísha could but moan  
"Children I made you who but I?" and sank  
Beneath the soil he loved. And Óshun<sup>2</sup> threw  
Her body down but never ceased: a stream  
Gushed up, the sacred stream that flows for ever.  
Olókun<sup>3</sup> fell; 'neath the wide Earth she flowed  
To the broad spaces of her troubled realm. . .  
So went the Gods; but last, as Osányi gave  
The charm to Ógun, last of all the Gods  
Back from the rebel town Great Mórими  
Rushed back, and cried: "The fire the vulture brought  
p. 45 Shall slay the hosts of Úbo!". . . The months crept by  
Fate-laden, white King Ógun's warrior son,  
Orányan,<sup>1</sup> schooled the sireless lads to War;  
But when the festive season came, he hid  
Them with red fire prepared within the city,  
And, as the invading hosts of Úbo scaled  
The walls, a rush of flaming boughs destroyed  
Grass garments and rebellious men. Thus fell  
Úbo before Orányan, and her folk  
Saw slavery in Ífè. . .

*except  
Ógun.*

*Orányan  
destroys  
the Úbo  
army.*

Time spared these deeds

*The Édi  
Festival*

But gave to the impenetrable wilds  
The place where Úbo stood, her rebel Gods,  
Her rites. And here in Ífè, by command  
Of Mórими, the children of the captives  
Worship Olúbo, but must flee before  
Orányan's fire. And on those days of feasting  
No man may blame his wife for her misdeeds  
All-mindful of the guile of Mórими.

# Footnotes

p. 40

1 [See Note VII](#) on Úbo and the Édi Festival.

2 [See Note X](#) on Ógun.

p. 41

3 Yoruba saying.

p. 42

1 [See Note XIII](#). These goblins are called Eléré.

p. 43

1 [See Note XIII](#) for the incantation.

p. 44

1 Yoruba saying.

2 [See Note VIII](#) on Óshun.

3 [See Note IX](#) on Olókun.

p. 45

1 [See Note X](#) on Ógun and Orányan.

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p. 46

## VI. THE PASSING OF ÓGUN.

*Arába continues:*

*After the* An age passed by, and Ífè knew no more  
*Úbo Wars,* Of battles; for Ógun, grey and bent, chose out  
*Ógun reigns* The way of peace beloved of Old Arámfè.  
*in peace.*

Forgotten lives were lived, and shadowy priests  
Kept warm the altars of the departed Gods:  
Old men went softly to the River's lip<sup>1</sup>  
Unsung: 'twixt hope and fear mute colonists  
Went forth to the strange forests of the World;  
And unremembered wives sought out the shrines  
Of the givers of new life. Their names are lost. . .

Yet now, Oíbo, let a final tale  
Be told; for, at the last, that silent age  
Yields up the legend of its fall. In those  
Last tranquil years the mothers blessed King Ógun  
For peaceful days and night's security;  
And old men used to tell of their brave deeds  
In battles where Orányan led, applaud  
The torch-lit dance and pass their last calm days  
Happily. . . But then came traders from the wilds  
<sup>p. 47</sup> By thorn and tangle of scarce-trodden ways  
Through the dim woods with wondrous tales they heard  
At crossway markets<sup>1</sup> in far lands of deeds  
Orányan did on battlefields beyond  
The region of the forests. These tales, oft-told  
In house and market, filled the air with rumours  
And dreams of war which troubled the repose  
Of ancient Ífè for, while the fathers feared  
The coming of the day when the grey God,  
Aweary of Earth's Kingship, would go back  
To his first far-off home, the young men's dreams  
Were always of Orányan, and their pale days

*Orányan  
returns  
from  
distant  
Wars to  
demand the  
crown.*

Lagged by. . . Such were the various thoughts of men  
In Ífè, when on a clay, unheralded,  
Orányan<sup>2</sup> with a host appeared before  
Her peaceful gates. None could deny his entrance:  
The hero strode again the streets he saved  
From the Olúbo's grass-clad men, and came  
Before his father to demand the crown  
Of Odudúwa. King Ógun spoke: "My son,  
<sup>p. 48</sup> 'Tis long since you were here, and you are welcome.  
But why with these armed men do you recall  
Times well-forgotten and the ancient wars?  
This is a land of peace: beneath the shade  
Of Ífè's trees the mirth of Heaven's vales  
Has found a home, the chorus and the dance  
Their measure. Lay by your arms, and may no hurt  
Attend your coming or your restful hours!"

Harshly Orányan answered his old father:  
 "You speak of peace, Great Ógun, and the calm  
 Arámfè destined for a World to be.  
 Arámfè spoke and Odudúwa's dream  
 Of wisdom linked to supreme power begat  
 A theft!<sup>1</sup> And that same night on Heaven's rim  
 Devised another destiny for men.  
 What Heaven-sent art has Ógun to undo  
 That deed, and bid the still-born live? Besides,  
 Who taught the peaceful peoples of the World  
 Their longing for red War? Who forged their weapons  
 With steel Arámfè gave for harvesting?  
 Who slew young maids who would not wed to bear  
 p. 49 More sons for ancient wars? Who, pray, but Ógun,  
 The God of War? . . . What then? 'Tis said: 'The field  
 The father sowed his son shall reap!'"<sup>1</sup> And Ógun  
 Made answer: "The story of my life has been  
 As the succeeding seasons in the course  
 Where Óshun pours her stream. First, long ago,  
 The sunny months of heaven when I roamed  
 A careless boy upon the mountains; then,  
 As a whole season when the boisterous storms  
 Fill full the crag-strewn bed with racing waters,  
 And the warm Sun is hidden by the clouds,  
 Doom brought me journeys, toils in darkness, wars  
 And yet more wars. Again the barren months  
 Are here: the wagtail lights upon the rock  
 The river hid; a lazy trickle moves  
 And in my age Arámfè's promised peace  
 Gives back her stolen happiness to Ífè. . . .  
 And now, the sage Osányi<sup>2</sup> is no more,  
 His charms forgotten: I cannot turn to stone  
 And vanish like Odúwa; I cannot cast  
 p. 50 My worn old body down to rise instead  
 A river of the land, as Óshun did.  
 No, Earth must hold me, glad or desolate,  
 A King or outcast in the vague forest,  
 Till Heaven call me when the locked pools bask,  
 And Óshun sleeps. . . Till then I ask to be  
 In peace; and, with my tale of days accomplished,  
 My last arts taught, Arámfè's bidding done  
 I, the lone God on Earth who knows fair Heaven,  
 And the calm life the Father bade us give  
 To men, I, Ógun, will make way, and go  
 Upon the road I came." But Orányan said:

"Let the first Mistress of the World decide.  
These years the kingly power has passed away  
From the old sleeping town Odúwa built  
To me, Orányan, battling in far lands  
Where no voice spoke of Ífè. Let Ífè choose  
Her way: obscurity or wide renown!"

A silence fell: the black clouds of the storm  
Were overhanging human destiny;  
The breathless pause before the loud wind's blast  
Held all men speechless though they seemed to heave

*The old  
men desire  
Ógun to  
remain;*

p. 51 For utterance. At length, Eléffon, the friend  
Of Ógun, voiced the fond hopes of the old chiefs  
Who feared Orányan and his coming day:  
"Ours is the city of the shrines which guard  
The spirits of the Gods, and all our ways  
Are ordered by the Presences which haunt  
The sacred precincts. The noise of war and tumult  
Is far from those who dream beneath the trees  
Of Ífè. There is another way of life:  
The way of colonists. By God's command,  
From this first breast the infant nations stray  
To the utter marches of humanity.  
Let them press onward, and let Orányan lead them  
Till the far corners of the World be filled;  
Let the unruly fall before their sword  
Until the Law prevail. But let not Ífè  
Swerve from the cool road of her destiny  
For dreams of conquest; and let not Ógun leave  
The roof, the evening firelight and the ways  
Of men to go forth to the naked woods."  
And the old chiefs echoed: "Live with us yet, Oh, Ógun!  
Reign on your stable throne." But murmurs rose

*but the  
young men  
acclaim  
Orányan.*

p. 52 From the young men suppressed at first, then louder  
Until their leader, gaining courage, cried:  
"Empty our life has been while from far plains,  
Vibrant with the romance, the living lustre,  
Orányan's name bestows, great rumours came  
To mock our laggard seasons; and each year  
Mórimi's festival recalls alike  
The hero's name and Ífè's greatness. Must  
All Ífè slumber that the old may drowse?  
No; we will have Orányan, and no other,  
To be our King." And a loud cry went up  
From his followers: "Orányan is our King!"  
And in that cry King Ógun heard the doom

A chieftain of our day sees clear in eggs<sup>1</sup>  
Of fateful parrots in his inmost chamber:  
The walls of his proud city (his old defence)  
Can never more uphold a rule of iron  
For victor treachery within. And wearily  
He spoke his last sad words: "My boyhood scarce  
Had ended on Arámfè's happy hills

p. 53 When I came here with Odudúwa; with him,  
Lovingly I watched this ancient city growing,  
And planted the grand forests for a robe  
For queenly Ífè. I have grown old with Ífè:  
Sometimes I feel that Ógun did become  
Ífè, and Ífè Ógun, with the still lapse

*Ógun goes away.* Of years. Yet she rejects me. Ah! my trees  
Would be more kind, and to my trees I go."

Dawn came; and Ógun stood upon a hill  
To Westward, and turned to take a last farewell  
Of his old queen of cities but white and dense.  
O'er harbouring woods and unremembering Ífè  
A mist was laid and blotted all. . Beyond,  
As islands from a morning sea, arose  
Two lone grey hills; and Ógun dreamed he saw  
Again those early days, an age gone by,  
When he and Great Odúwa watched the Bird  
Found those grand hills with magic sand, bare slopes,  
Yet born to smile. . . That vision paled: red-gold  
Above grey clouds the Sun of yesterday  
Climbed up to shine on a new order. . So passed  
Old Ógun from the land.

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## Footnotes

p. 46

1 The River which separates this World from the next.

p. 47

1 Markets are often found at crossroads in the forest.

2 [See Note X.](#) on Ógun and Orányan.

p. 48

1 The theft of Orísha's bag.

p. 49

1 Yoruba saying.

2 Osányi made the charms which enabled the Gods to transform.

p. 52

1 A gift of parrot's eggs to a Yoruba chief is an intimation that he has reigned long enough and that, should he die by his own hand, trouble would be saved.

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p. 54

## NOTES

### I. THE CREATION.

The relationships of the various gods are differently stated by different chiefs and priests of Ífè, and also by the same men at different times.

It appears, however, that Arámfè ruled in Heaven, and sent his sons, Odúwa and Orísha, to a dark and watery region below to create the world and to people it. According to the legends told in Ífè, the gods were not sent away as a punishment; but there is some story of wrong-doing mentioned at Ówu in the Jébu country. Arámfè gave a bag full of arts and wisdom to Orísha, and the kingship to Odúwa.

On the way from Heaven Odúwa made Orísha drunk, and stole the bag. On reaching the edge of Heaven, Odúwa hung a chain over the cliff and sent down a priest, called Ojúmu, with a snail-shell full of magic sand and a "five-fingered" fowl. Ojúmu threw the sand on the water and the fowl kicked it about. Wherever the fowl kicked the sand, dry land appeared. Thus the whole world was made, with Ífè as its centre.

When the land was firm, Odúwa and Orísha let themselves down the chain, and were followed by several other gods. Orísha began making human beings; but all was dark and cold, because Arámfè had not sent the sun with Odúwa. So Odúwa sent up, and Arámfè sent the sun, moon and fire. (Fire was sent p. 55 on a vulture's head, and that is why the vulture has no feathers on its head.) Then the gods began to teach their arts and crafts to men.

After many years Orísha made war upon Odúwa to get back his bag. The various gods took sides, but some looked on. The medicine-men provided amulets for the men on both sides. Arámfè was angry with his sons for fighting and threw his thunderbolts impartially for he was the god of thunder in those days. The war is said to have lasted 201 years, and came to an end only because the gods on Odúwa's side asked him to give back the bag. Odúwa, in a huff, transformed to stone and sank beneath the earth, taking the bag with him. His son, Ógun, the god of iron, then became king.

## II. ODÚM LA, THE FIRST ÓRNÍ OF ÍFÈ

According to tradition, when the gods transformed, they ordered Odúm la to speak for them, to be a father to the whole world and to remain on Earth for ever. In the words of an old chief: "It is our ancient law that the spirit of Odúm la passes from body to body, and will remain for ever on the earth. The spirits of the gods are in their shrines, and Odúm la speaks for them "

I think the Órní claims to be Odúm la himself. This is a matter of dogma, and I express no opinion.

p. 56

## III. ODÚWA.

There is little to add to the story of Odúwa told in Parts I, II & III.

Arába told me another version of the end of the War of the Gods: Orísha and Odúwa agreed to stop the fighting on condition that each should have a man for sacrifice every seven months. Fourteen months was then regarded as a year.

Another story Arába told me was: "The Moon is a round crystal stone, which is with Odúwa. They take it in front when they go to sacrifice to Odúwa otherwise the god would injure the man who offers the sacrifice." Odúwa is said to have taken the stone from a Moslem, and to have been in the habit of looking at it.

When I went to Odúwa's shrine, there was a great knocking of doors to warn the god of my arrival. I did not see the stone.

## IV. ORÍSHA AND THE CREATION OF MAN.

The legend of Orísha's creation of Man is mysterious. He is said to have thrown images into wombs. I was once told he put signs into women's hands. I can only account for this story by the suggestion that it may date from a period when men had not discovered the connection between sexual intercourse and the birth of children.

p. 57

As to spirit life before birth, the priest of Arámfè said "A child may have been with the spirits, but when he is born he forgets all about it."

The sacrifice offered to Orísha consists of eight goats, eight fishes, eight rats and eight kola-nuts.

Orísha was a god of great knowledge (apart from the contents of the bag which was stolen from him), and taught his son, Oluorógbo who, according to tradition, is the ancestor of the white races.

The Órní attributes ascendancy of Europeans to the up-bringing of Oluorógbo.

Our ancestor has need of eggs, fowls, sheep, kola and snails.

## V. OBALUFON.

Little is told of Obálufon, the husband of Mórimi.

He was a man sent from Heaven by Arámfè, and was a weaver and a worker in brass. He also showed the people how to tap the palms for palm-wine.

Apart from that, "he took care of everybody as a mother of a child, and used to go round the town to drive out sickness and evil spirits."

His image represents him as a king.

## VI. MÓRIMI.

Mórimi is the great heroine of the Ífè legends. The story of her sacrifice which I have adopted is Arába's version.

[p. 58](#)

I went also to Mórimi's priest, who showed me her image of painted wood and no artistic merit representing a naked negress. His story was much the same as Arába's; but, in his version, Mórimi sacrificed her only son, Yésu, for the whole world and not to any god. It would appear that some early Christian missionary had recognised the Virgin Mary in Mórimi; but it may be doubted whether the missionary had heard of Mórimi's visit to Úbo (See Note VII).

## VII. ÚBO AND THE ÉDI FESTIVAL.

The story of the Úbo Wars is that some colonists went from Ífè to found a new town which they called Úbo; but as the gods had given them nothing, they invaded Ífè. On the first occasion they were driven back; but the next year they came dressed in grass, terrified the people of Ífè and took the men as slaves. (And in those parts of Africa dead kings and gods in need of sacrifice are believed to prefer slaves to free men).

Then Mórimi consulted Ífa, and was told to sacrifice six goats and six bags of cowries to Éshu, and go as a harlot to Úbo. Her mission was successful, and she returned with the necessary information only to find the gods had transformed to rivers, stones, etc. (It seems that Ógun did not transform, as he was afterwards displaced by his son, Orányan).

Acting on Mórimi's advice, Orányan set fire to the Úbo soldiers on their next inroad.

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The end of Úbo is commemorated by Édi (the festival of Mórimi, which began on the 21st November

in 1913). Men dressed in hay parade the town, but have to run for their lives when others pursue them with fire. Fire is also taken out to the Bush.

On the first day of Édi, the Órní appears, but must remain in the Afin (Palace) for the remaining seven. During this period the women do honour to Mórimi's share in the victory by emulating her deed, and their husbands are not allowed to interfere.

The meaning of the legend is doubtful. There may have been such a town as Úbo, but it seems likely that the Festival is connected with agriculture.

Úbo (or Ígbo) means the Bush, and Mórimi may have advised the customary burning of the Bush to prepare the land for crops. The date of the Festival (early in the dry season), the fire and the men dressed in hay, all suggest this interpretation. On the other hand, the same arguments, combined with the seclusion of the Órní and the license of the women, would favour the view that Édi was the more general Festival of the Saturnalia. Possibly it was so originally; and the demons to be driven out appeared so material in the form of tropical vegetation that Úbo (the Bush to be burned) has obscured the former meaning of the Festival. If this be so, Mórimi's mission to Úbo may be a later fable to account for the license of the women before farming operations begin.

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## VIII. OSHUN.

Óshun was a woman (or goddess) in high favour with both Odúwa and Orísha. "It were well were Óshun with us," said Odúwa, and Orísha agreed. Accordingly she took her place on Odúwa's left, Orísha being on his right; that is to say Óshun was considered the third personage in Ífè.

The second chief in Ífè, the Obalúfe, claims descent from Óshun for himself and half the people of his quarter of the town. He has a well in his compound, called Óshun, which is said to be the actual water into which Óshun transformed herself. He says his first forefather took a calabash of the water with him when he went to war, and this gallon became the source of the River. The source is forty miles from Ífè, and perhaps the Obalúfe is right. The well is never dry; and it is needless to add that the water has many curative properties. One would be surprised if a descendant of Óshun died, except from other causes.

"At the time of the Óshun Festival," says Obalúfe, "all her tribe collect sheep, goats, yams, agidi, palm-wine, kola, rats, fish and pigeons, and bring them to me for the feast. Óshun gets the blood of goats, sheep and pigeons, the head of a rat but not of a fish. We eat the fish although they are the children of Óshun and consequently our brothers." Óshun is more strait-laced than her descendants.

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## IX. OLÓKUN

There is a pond in Ífè called Ókun (the Ocean), where Olókun transformed to water. Thence she flowed underground, and came out in the sea.

Her priest showed me a bronze head of Olókun, which has considerable merit. He told me that, in return for sacrifice, Olókun gives beads. In Benin, Olókun is considered to be the Goddess of Wealth as well as of the Sea; and a King of Benin, who must have been alive about 1400 A.D., is said to have found the treasures of Olókun laid out on the shore and to have looted her coral.

## X. OGUN AND ORANYAN

Ógun was the son of Odúwa, and is usually regarded as the God of Iron and of War.

According to his chief-priest (the Oshógun), he went away to war and captured a woman called Deshóju, whom he made his wife. When Ógun returned to Ífè, Odúwa took Deshóju from his son. There is therefore some doubt as to whether Ógun was the father of Orányan who was born with a leg, an arm and half his body black, the remainder being white (according to the Oshógun).

Ógun may have had other attributes. He may have been a Phallic Deity, because there are hewn stones in Ífè, called the staves of Ógun, which appear p. 62 to be of Phallic origin. It is also noteworthy that, at the time of his Festival, Ógun is said to kill any marriageable girl he may find in her mother's house. (This happened once to Arába; the prospective son-in-law could not produce £5, and Arába, who gives no credit, lost a potential five pound note in the shape of his daughter). Further, when a child is circumcised the severed skin is put in a calabash of Ógun "to worship him (together with a snail in order that the wound may heal)."

Ógun may also have been the Sun-God (or a worshipper of the Sun-God). His festival is commonly called Olójjor (Lord of Day). Oshogun says Ógun was Olójjor; Arába says Olójjor was someone else, the confusion being due to the circumstance that the two festivals take place at the same time. In this connection, the half-and-half colouring of Orányan is suggestive.

The dog is the principal animal used for sacrifice to Ógun. Orányan prefers a ram, a rat, kola and much palm-wine.

Eventually, Orányan displaced his father, who planted his staves in Ífè and went away. I have presumed the death of Osányi, as I cannot otherwise explain the fact that Ógun "went away" instead of transforming as the other gods had done. In his turn, Orányan "went away: he had too much medicine to die."

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## XI. THE CULT OF PEREGÚN GBO.

Peregún Gbo (or Peregún Ígbo) seems to have been a god who caused the forest to bring forth birds and beasts. He was a son of God, and came to earth with Ebbor (worship) and Édi, a god who causes men to do what they know to be wrong.

It is evident from the incantation below that Peregún Gbo was originally approached by people in need of children, but nowadays the same formula is recited by the priest whatever a man may be asking for.

The priest tells the man to bring a sheep, kola, palm-oil, a pigeon, a cock, and a hen; also a live goat for the priest.

The priest kills the sheep, pigeon, cock and hen. The three birds and a part of the sheep are placed in separate broken pots with palm-oil. The man is then told to produce nine pennyworth of kowries, which are also put in the pots. The priest takes the balance of the mutton in addition to the live goat. The priest then faces the pots, puts pepper (*átarè*) into his mouth, and recites the incantation:

1. *Ígbo lóbi íror*  
The forest bore the sloth.
2. *Íror lóbi ógubor*  
The sloth bore the monkey.
3. *Ógubor lóbi áhan-námajá*  
The monkey bore the leopard.

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4. *Ahan-námajá lóbi érelu-agáma*  
The leopard bore the guinea-fowl.
5. *Érelu-agáma lóbi ekusá*  
The guinea-fowl bore the hawk.
6. *Ékusá lóbi óju-gbona*  
The hawk bore the evil spirit who guards Heaven's gate.
7. *Óju-gbona lóbi áfi ikere-tíkere éhin éku.*  
The evil spirit bore the generative organs of men and women.
8. *Peregún Gbo ni abobá Imálè.*  
Untranslated. Imale is Peregún Gbo's messenger and is sent to do what the man asks.
9. *Oriyámi la-popo*  
Good luck is human.
10. *Ése ámi lápè okúte ába*  
The father of a lucky child is lucky.
11. *Atorladórla Igbadá lordífa fun Orúnmila nigbatí nwon fi ojor íku re dóla.*  
Atorladorla Igbadá approached Ífa on behalf of Orúnmila when they had fixed his death for the morrow. (Atorladórla Igbadá is a good spirit who keeps on postponing an evil deed contemplated by someone.)

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12. *Orúnmila ni kátikun tíkun kátikerè tikerè.*  
Orúnmila says menstruation will cease, and pregnancy will begin.
13. *Orúnmila ni on ko yúnle orun.*  
Orúnmila says that he (the child) will not go to Heaven (*i.e.* will be born alive).

When the priest has finished the recitation, the man takes the pots to the shrine of Éshu (the Devil). The first ten sentences are in praise of Peregún Gbo, who ordered Atorladórla Igbadá to go to Ífa, and is now asked to send Imále to Orúnmila with the applicant's request. (The incantation is apparently in some form of archaic Yoruba, and the Babaláwo had to explain much of it to the interpreter. Some of the translations are probably very loose).

## XII. THE DIVINATION OF ÍFA (A FRAGMENT)

Ífa was the Messenger of the Gods, and is consulted by the Yoruba on all subjects.

His priests (called Babaláwo) profit considerably by divination, which they perform with sand on a circular board, or with a charm called Okpéllè.

Okpéllè consists of eight pieces of bark on a string. These eight are arranged in fours.

Each of the pieces of bark may fall either with the outside or the inside showing. Consequently [p. 64](#) each set of four may fall in sixteen different ways having different names and meanings.

The sixteen names are:

1. Ógbè all face down inside showing.
2. Oyéku all face up outside showing.
3. Iwóri.
4. Édi.
5. Obára.
6. Okánran.
7. Róshun.
8. Owórin.
9. Égutan.
10. Ossa.
11. Eréttè.
12. Etúrah.
13. Ológbon.
14. Ékka.
15. Oshé.
16. Offun or Orángun.

When Okpéllè is thrown on the ground and the two fours are identical the resultant is called:

|                                    |               |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| Ogbe Meji ( <i>i.e.</i> Two Ogbes) | Egutan Meji   |
| Oyeku Meji                         | Ossa Meji     |
| Iwori Meji                         | Erétte Meji   |
| Édi Meji                           | Eturah Meji   |
| Obára Meji                         | Ologbon Meji  |
| Okánran Meji                       | Ekka Meji     |
| Roshun Meji                        | Oshe Meji, or |

These are called the Sixteen Messengers of Ífa.

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The chance, however, of the four on the Babaláwo's left agreeing with that on his right is only one in sixteen. The other fifteen combinations which may appear with Ogbe on the right are called: Ogbe Yeku, Ogbe Wori, Ogbe Di, &c., similarly with the other Messengers of Ífa. These combinations are called the children of the Messenger who appears on the right. Thus, Ogbe Yeku is a child of Ogbe; Oyeku Logbe is a child of Oyeku.

From this it will be seen that Okpéllè can show 256 combinations.

*Procedure.* A man comes to a Babaláwo to consult Ífa. He places a gift of cowries (to which he has whispered his needs) before the Babaláwo. The latter takes Okpéllè and places it on the cowries. He then says: "You, Okpéllè, know what this man said to the cowries. Now tell me." Then he lifts Okpéllè and lays it out on the floor. From the messenger or child which appears the Babaláwo is supposed to deduce that his client wants a son, has stolen a goat, or has a toothache, as the case may be. He then tells him what he must bring as a sacrifice to achieve his ends. In all cases the sacrifice (or a large part of it) is offered to Éshu (the devil) for fear that he might undo the good work. For instance, the client is poor and needs money: Édi Méji appears, and the Babaláwo tells his client to bring a dog, a fowl, and some cowries and palm-oil. The man splits the dog and the fowl; puts palm-oil and p. 68 cowries inside them, and takes them to Éshu. The Babaláwo presumably takes the bulk of the cowries for himself.

The appearance of Ógbe Méji promises long life, but a goat must be brought.

If a man has no children and Oyéku Méji appears, he must bring a ram and a goat.

Iwóri Méji demands eggs, a pigeon, and cowries from a sick man.

Édi Méji. As above.

Obára Méji. A sacrifice of 2 cocks, 2 hens, and 250 cowries is needed to purify after menstruation.

Okánran Méji. A goat and 500 cowries bring on menstruation.

Róshun Méjí. A she-goat and 2 hens to cure a headache.

Awórin Méji. 4 cocks and 800 cowries to bring about the death of one's enemy.

Égutan Méji. A ram (large) and 1,200 cowries to cure a bad bellyache.

Ossa Méji. Butcher's meat and 4 pigeons to drive away witchcraft.

Erétte Méji.-2 pigeons, 2 cocks, and 600 cowries to get children.

Etúrah Méji. One large gown, a, sheep, and 300 cowries to cure eye disease.

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Ológbon Méji. Sacrifice 4 snails and 4 pigeons if you suspect someone wishes to poison you.

Ekka Méji. 4 hens, oil, and 700 cowries for earache.

Offun Méji. If children keep on dying, sacrifice 16 snails, 16 rats, 16 fishes, and 1,600 cowries, and the following children will live.

Osse Méji. 8 snails, 8 pigeons, and 800 cowries for children.

Ogbe Yeku. (a) If a man has no money, he must bring 4 pigeons, 2 shillings, and soap. The Babaláwo mixes leaves (*ewe-ire*) with the soap as a charm, and the man must use it for a bath.

(b) If a man is very ill, he must offer 3 he-goats and 5s. 6d. He will then be better.

Ogbe Wori. (a) If a man is sick, he must offer 8s. and a sheep. Otherwise he will die.

(b) If a man needs money, he must bring thread and 6 pigeons and buy soap. The Babaláwo gets *ewe aji* and puts them on the soap with the pigeon's blood. The thread is put inside the soap. The man then washes.

(c) If a man has committed a crime, he must bring 7 cocks and 35s. The Babaláwo kills the cocks, and takes the 35s. for himself. He takes the sand of Ogbe Wori from the *Ífa* board and puts some on each cock's breast, with 260 cowries. Five of the cocks are then p. 70 given to *Éshu* and the other 2 are taken to a place where three roads meet. Then either a necessary witness will not appear in court or the accused will be found not guilty.

(d) If two men want the same woman, and Ogbe Wori appears (when one of them consults *Ífa*), the Babaláwo asks for 4 hens and a he-goat. The woman then becomes the client's wife. *Éshu* gets the hens and the goat's blood; the Babaláwo, the goat.

### **XIII. A CURE FOR SUDDEN AND SERIOUS ILLNESSES.**

The priest puts pepper (*atáre*) into his mouth and recites:

*Akélejá! Akélejá!*

A spirit who grips a man by the throat and makes breathing quick and uneasy.

*Akélewóssa!*

A spirit who causes eye-disease.

*Akútobárun!*

Spirits which trouble sick persons.

*Amúrorfáshorgérrè!*

Spirits now called *Anjánu*, who cause delirium.

*Amulepásheyé!*

One who causes bad bellyache.

*Ojobolóro!*

Spirits who cause severe headaches.

*Abiyéte-ashórmunyányan!*

One "who has a very sharp edge to his cloth," and causes backache.

*Asá-ntétè-mofárapá!*

Imps seen at night in white cloths. Now called Eléré. They afflict children.

*Olómo-áro, niyéye éshukú!*

"Olómo-áro, who art the mother of evils." She does no harm but is invoked because her children, already named, will listen when prayed in their mother's name.

*Arónposhé Íreké!*

The husband of Olómo-áro and the father of the evil spirits. If he is not invoked the sick man dies. He is also called upon to stop his sons' mischief.

*Íshuku den lényimi!*

"Evil, leave my back!" When this has been spoken, the spirits leave the sick man.

*Bi Ébura Nla ba de éti ómi, apéyinda.*

"If the Great Evil comes to the river's bank, he will turn back."

Ébura Nla is the master of all the evils. If called by the other spirits, he comes to the further bank of the river Arénkenken, which is described as the "water of Heaven". If he crosses to the near side, the sick man dies.

After finishing the incantation, the priest takes some of the pepper from his tongue and puts in on the patient's head. The patient recovers, and is able to take nourishment at once.

(The Yoruba of this is probably archaic. The interpreter did not understand it, and the Babaláwo had to explain).

## XIV. AJÍJA (THE DUST-DEVIL).

"Ajíja was a doctor who lived with Arámfè, and came to earth with another doctor. They made various medicines one to kill a man when asked to do so. He pronounced certain words, and the man died. He could also kill with his walking-stick. He lives on Óke Arámfè (Óke Óra), and can only be approached through Arámfè (the father of the gods), because he is a bad man. He is worshipped near Arámfè's shrine.

"When he wishes to make trouble, he comes through the town. He sometimes sets fire to a house by picking the fire up and putting it on the thatch.

"When a man meets Ajíja, he should protect himself by putting pepper in his mouth and saying: "Ahanríyen, Fágada Shaomi" (names of Ajíja), "ki íru re bómi" (put your tail in water). The man should then spit the pepper at Ajíja.

"Sometimes Ajíja turns into a big lizard."

According to another story, Ajíja is a devil with one leg who throws men down and breaks their ankles.