THE MEMOIRS

OF

PÈRE LABAT

1693–1705

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With an Introduction by

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SLAVES, AGENTS, AND INTERLOPERS

THERE is a very ancient law to the effect that if a man can reach countries subject to the King of France he is free. Owing to this law, King Louis XIII of glorious memory, had the greatest difficulty in the world bringing himself to permit the ownership of slaves. Finally he only yielded to the settlers' urgent requests after it was proved to him that this was the one infallible means to inspire the religion of God among the Africans, and retain them in the Christian Faith which they would then be compelled to embrace.

The negroes in the Islands came originally from two companies in Africa, which alone are authorized to traffic in slaves. But in times of war we often capture slaves in enemy ships who come from other parts of Africa and also from raids on plantations in enemy islands. In times of peace we also obtain slaves in the secret trade with the English, Dutch and Danes.

According to their charter the Guinea and Senegal companies have to bring, I believe, two thousand slaves every year to the Islands. The price of the slaves is regulated by the condition and sex of the negroes, and the requirements of the settlers.

Note.—In 1698 Labat bought 12 slaves from a ship from the Guinea coast for whom he paid sugar to the value of 5,700 francs at the rate of 7 francs 15 sols per quintal.

But for some reason that I do not know it is a long time since we have heard of any slaves from these two companies. All they do now is to try and prevent other merchants or private individuals trading on the African coast, without first buying permission to do so from themselves.

These companies have storehouses and forts at several places in Senegal and Guinea, from which four different classes of slaves are sold to merchants who go there expressly for this purpose.

The first of these are criminals condemned to death, whose sentences have been altered by their kings to perpetual banishment. In other words the kings sell them into slavery for their own profit.

The second class are men and women who have been made prisoners in tribal wars. These wars are continually waged between neighbouring kings, for no other purpose than to capture people in order to sell them as slaves. Wars of this kind are carried on by ambush and seldom in the open, and a decisive battle is very rare.

The third class are slaves owned by the kings or by private individuals. These are sold to the companies by their owners according as their fancy or need dictates.

Lastly the fourth and most numerous class are those

who are simply stolen. These people are stolen for the most part chiefly by the orders or with the consent of their king by thieves misnamed merchants. These merchants do nothing else but steal people for their own as much as for the king's profit. For it often happens that these small kings promise to supply a larger number of slaves than they possess. When they are pressed for the slaves they send these merchants into the villages of their neighbours, or quite possibly into their own villages. The merchants then seize all the men, women and children that they can lay hands on and sell them to the company. Sometimes it happens that the merchant is himself captured and sold. But this must be done without the knowledge of the king, for otherwise he would take all the money.

Apart from the slave trade there is a large business in ivory, wax, gold, skins, gums, etc., etc., grass mats, parrots and monkeys. With regard to monkeys an officer of a ship told me the following story about his father, who was the principal agent in one of the companies' *comptoirs*.

His father had asked permission to go to France on private business. His request had been granted, and at the same time he had received an order from one of the general directors to bring home four or five monkeys, but the number had been carelessly written 4 or 500 monkeys. The agent had never received a like commission and wondered for what

country the company could possibly desire such settlers. He had some difficulty in collecting so large a number, but eventually 330 monkeys were obtained. He shipped the monkeys in cages and boxes, and they were landed in good condition at la Rochelle, except a few that escaped and jumped overboard.

On his arrival the agent went to pay his respects to the director, and this gentleman asked him if he had been able to bring the monkeys. The poor agent trembled and replied that he had done his best, but had only been able to land 310. Picture the horror of the director, who was so enraged that he told the agent he would be charged freight for all the monkeys over the four or five ordered. Further he vowed that he would see that the agent paid dearly for the ridicule such a cargo would inevitably attract to the company. The agent, however, had carefully preserved the director's order, and went to a lawyer, who made a true copy of the document. He then showed it to the director, who was thus convinced that the mistake was due to his own fault, and was obliged to debit himself with the value of this fine merchandise. The director was then able to give magnificent presents to all his relations and friends.

There are English companies similar to the French African companies which enjoy the sole right of trading in slaves. But this does not stop other Englishmen going to Africa for this purpose, provided that their ship is able to defend herself from the

companies' vessels, which have the right to capture her as if she belonged to an enemy nation. Such ships are called Interlopers and they are always well armed. When they have finished their trade on the African coast, they come to the Islands to sell their slaves. They have to be most careful, however, and take all precautions to avoid capture and confiscation. Several Englishmen have assured me that the slaves cannot be seized once they have been landed and have crossed the fifty paces reserved by the King round the coast of their islands, nor can the purchasers of slaves from interlopers be legally troubled. I do not say that this is true although I learnt it from the English themselves, and it certainly would be most convenient. The French do not enjoy any such rights and the interlopers are always very much on their guard. The interlopers suspect everyone, and therefore they allow no ship to approach unless she give the signal that has been prearranged with their shore agents and which is altered every voyage.

The interlopers sell their slaves at a cheaper rate than the companies, so people prefer to buy slaves from them, although there is a certain amount of risk to the purchaser. Since, however, there is a remedy for everything except death, and methods have been found to tame the fiercest animals, the English, who are a very clever people, have made the agents of their companies quite human. The French, who pride themselves in their ability to copy all that they see

done by other nations, have imitated them, and have taught their agents to be the most obliging and honest people in the world. It is only necessary to make an arrangement with the agents and then everyone is happy, except perhaps people who have shares in the company. It is true that these agents do make an occasional capture in order to keep their employment and enjoy the trust of the companies, but in this one remarks their prudence, for they never seize any but bad or rejected slaves, or discover what ships have brought them, or know the names of the buyers.

CARIB INDIANS

I HAD been six months in Martinique before I had an opportunity to satisfy my curiosity about the Caribs. They often visited les Mouillages but I was never there when they came. At last M. Michel, one of my neighbours at Macouba, told me that some Indians had come to his place and I went at once to see them. When I arrived I found that forty-seven Caribs, men, women and children, had landed in two boats.

The men were above the average height and were all well proportioned. They were not bad looking, except that their foreheads were flat and sloped back so much it appeared that they could look at the sky without raising their heads. This is not natural, but as soon as a child is born they tie a piece of board over its forehead to press it flat. The board remains tied in this position till the child's skull has set. Their eyes are small and black but look a more normal size on account of their foreheads. They all had beautifully white even teeth, and long straight black gloss hair. The colour of the hair is natural, but its glosss is due to castor oil, which they rub on their heads every morning. It is difficult to say what colour they are, as they paint themselves every day with a mixture

of *rocou* and castor oil which makes them look like boiled lobsters. Beside the pleasure the colour gives them, this painting serves two useful purposes. In the first place it prevents the sun blistering their skin, and in the second place gnats and mosquitoes dislike the smell of it. Without this paint, indeed, the Indians would be tormented by the bites of these insects. If they are going on a war expedition, or making any visit of importance, their wives paint black moustaches and lines on their faces and bodies which last for nine days or so before they fade. Some of these Indians were daubed in this manner. Nothing can be more ugly to my mind, or more handsome or in better taste to their way of thinking. Such is the diversity of opinion.

The men wear a cord round their loins in which they carry a knife, and from this cord hangs their only garment, viz., a strip of cloth some five inches wide reaching to the ground. The men also wear caracolis and feathers.

The caracoli is an ornament, and is also the name of the metal from which the ornament is made. It comes from the mainland, and is supposed to be a mixture of gold, silver and copper, but I myself believe it is a pure metal. It is granulous and brittle, and before it can be worked, gold must be added to make it malleable. The English and French goldsmiths in the Islands have made repeated experiments to imitate it, and the nearest approach they have made to it so

far, is an alloy that is said to contain six parts silver, three parts copper, and one part gold. With this they make bangles, buckles, knobs for walking sticks, and other very beautiful things, but in my opinion they are far inferior to the caracoli ornaments of the Indians. These look like silver lightly powdered with a glittering substance that makes them appear to be on fire.

The caracolis worn by the Indians are crescent shaped. Two are worn fastened to little chains hooked into their ears. These measure about two and a half inches from horn to horn. Another caracoli is hooked in the same way to the nose and hangs over the mouth. A fourth caracoli, which is rather larger, is hooked to the lower lip and rests on the chin. They wear a fifth, which is tied to a cord round their neck and falls on the chests. This last caracoli is made of black wood which is shaped to form a crescent, and only the horns, which are about seven inches apart, are of metal.

When they are not wearing their caracolis the men sometimes fill the holes in their ears, nose, and mouth with bits of stick or green stones. When they have neither stones, sticks, nor caracolis they use parrot feathers, or strips of red, blue or yellow canvas. This gives them moustaches, whiskers and beards a foot long, to say nothing of their ears, and adorned in this fashion they look the most charming fellows in the world.

The weapons of these gentlemen are bows, arrows, clubs and knives. They are delighted if they can obtain a gun. But they soon make it useless, for however good it is they either put in too heavy a charge and burst it, or forget how to put it together if they take it to pieces. They will then just throw the gun away, for they are too apathetic and slovenly to bother about it any more. They will spend days together only getting in and out of their hammocks, and are surely the most careless and lazy creatures that have ever come from the hands of God.

The bow of the Caribs is about six feet long. The central portion of the bow is oval outside and flat inside, and is about an inch and a half thick. It diminishes evenly from the middle to the two ends, which are round and about half an inch in diameter, and are notched for the bow string. The bow is made of Bois Verd or Bois de Lettre—a brown wood streaked with red which is heavy, close-grained, and stiff. The Indians make these bows very well, especially now that they have European tools instead of stone implements and sharpened conch shells. The bow string is made of twisted *pitte* or sizal fibre, and is some three-sixteenth of an inch thick. The string is stretched fairly taut between the two notches but not tight enough to bend the bow.

The arrows are about three feet six inches long including the point. The shaft is made from the top shoot of the *Roseau* which grows every year when

the plant flowers. The point is the same diameter as the shaft at the splice which is bound with cotton thread. It is made of Bois Verd and diminishes evenly from the splice to the point. The whole point is carved into barbs so that it is impossible to pull it out of a wound without making the hole larger. Though Bois Verd is a very hard wood, the Indians make the points of their arrows still harder by scorching them with fire. These arrows are poisoned with the sap of the Manchineel tree, and it is almost impossible to get rid of this poison. They say that by burning the point and then scraping it you can remove the poison, but I should not like to test the truth of this on myself. When an Indian is shooting at a man he severs the binding of the splice just before he fires the arrow. The shaft then falls to the ground when the point enters the man, and this makes it still more difficult to pull it out of the wound, or push it through so as to pull it out from the opposite side.

Their hunting arrows are similar to their war arrows but are not barbed or poisoned. For shooting small birds a wad of cotton is tied over the point, which kills the bird but does not wound it.

Their arrows for shooting fish are made in one piece and have a long barb at the point. A fairly long thin piece of string is tied to the notched end of the arrow. The other end of this string is fastened to a bit of light wood. When the fish is shot it swims

away, but the piece of wood remains on the surface and marks its position. By diving and swimming along the string the Indian is able to catch the fish.

Occasionally they stick split feathers on their war and hunting arrows about six inches below the notch for the bow-string, but this practice is uncommon.

The club is made of a very heavy hard wood. It is some three feet six inches long, and the handle is round and about one and a half inches in diameter. The head is flat, and the sides carved into divisions which are painted with designs in various colours. The Indians use this weapon with great strength and skill. One blow from it is quite sufficient to break an arm or a leg, or split your head.

The men all look sullen and mournful. It is said that they are good in these days, but for all that one has to be very careful not to offend them, for they are exceedingly vindictive.

The women are smaller than the men and are plump and by no means bad looking. They have black hair and black eyes. Their mouths are small, and their teeth are white and even. They look more open and smiling than the men, but with all this they are very modest and reserved. All the women are painted red like the men, but without the black moustaches and lines.

The women have only one garment which is

called the *camisa*. This is a small apron eight inches long and four inches wide, embroidered with beads with a fringe of beads at the bottom about two inches deep. Beside the *camisa* they wear necklaces, bracelets, and armlets made of beads and ear-rings of beads or small green stones.

These women never wear caracolis or feathers, and their characteristic ornaments are anklets. These are worn when a girl is about twelve years old, and she must never take them off unless they are completely worn out. The anklets are made of stout material, and are four or five inches long. They have a rim half an inch wide at the bottom and an inch wide at the top which stick out rather like the edge of a plate. The anklets are sewn on round the legs before they have fully developed, and consequently get so tight that the calf becomes far larger and harder than it would grow naturally.

As soon as a girl puts on the *camisa* and anklets she may no longer run about free, but has to stay with her mother. It is seldom, however, that girls reach this age without becoming engaged to marry some man. Her male relations can marry a girl without her having the power to refuse, and very often she is engaged to be married when she is four or five years old. It is not their custom for a brother to marry his sister, or a son his mother, but in all other degrees of relationship they are free to wed and have as many wives as they please. It frequently happens that a

man will marry three or four sisters at the same time, and they claim that an arrangement of this kind makes for more peace in the man's household, since the women have been brought up together, and may therefore be expected to get on better with each other. This is an advantage to the men, who regard their wives simply as servants, and, no matter what affection they may have for them, the husbands never forgo the attention that their wives have to give them, or the respect which they insist must accompany their service.

When the Indians go to war they only take one or two women in each canoe with them to cook their food and paint them. When, however, they travel on business or pleasure, they bring their women and children, their hammocks and all their household utensils. These utensils are graters, presses and platines for cooking cassava, earthenware pots, calabashes, coyenboucs, matatous, baskets and catolis. Their cassava press is a rather short wide pipe made of basket-work. After the manioc has been grated, the wet cassava meal is put into this pipe, which is then hung to a branch of a tree with a heavy stone tied to the bottom. This weight gradually pulls out the pipe till it is long and narrow and thus squeezes the water out of the meal.

The coyenbouc is made out of two calabashes cut in half. The half of the larger calabash fits tightly over the half of the smaller calabash and forms the

lid of a receptacle used for anything they wish to keep dry.

The matatou is the table from which they eat their meals. It is a basket with a flat bottom and no cover. Four sticks in the corners project some four or five inches and are the legs of the table when the basket is turned upside down. The basket is so closely woven it will hold water. As a rule two matatous are used. One for cassava. The other for fish, meat or crabs, and a *coüi* full of hot sauce made of boiled manoic-juice, crushed pimento, and lime-juice.

Beside the furniture in their canoes, the Caribs also bring parrots, iguanas, chickens, pigs, pineapples, bananas and crabs to trade with us.

The Indians catch parrots by first finding a tree on which a number of parrots roost at night. When it is dark they go to this tree and light a charcoal fire under it. Next they put gum and green pimento on the fire. This gives off a thick smoke and stupefies the parrots that fall to the ground and behave just as if they were drunk. The Indians then pick them up and tie their wings and legs. To bring them to their senses they pour a little water on the parrots' heads. To tame the birds the Indians do not give them any food till they are really hungry, and then feed them by hand. If the parrot bites and is savage they blow tobacco smoke on its beak, and this suffocates the bird and makes it quickly forget its bad temper. Parrots

are thus tamed and in a very short time learn to talk.

One observes but three things in which the Caribs are not indifferent. In the first place, they are so jealous of their women that they kill them on the slightest suspicion. Secondly, they are so vindictive there are no people more ready to take vengeance on anyone who has offended them. The third thing is an extreme passion for rum or any strong liquor, and they will give all they possess to get hold of it. Apart from these three things there is no power on earth capable of moving them.

Everything done up to the present to educate and convert the Caribs has failed. For more than thirty years our Order has maintained missionaries who have studied their language and lived among them. The missionaries have taught them the catechism and prayers, and have neglected nothing to win them to Christianity, but all their work has been fruitless. Fathers Raymond, a Breton priest, and Phillipe de Beaumont, both priests of our Order in Provence de St. Louis, lived in Dominica for five-and-twenty years without doing more than baptize a few children as they were dying, and a few adults morally certain to die within a few moments.

This was not because these priests could not have baptized a larger number, but to do so would have only exposed this sacrament to profanation. The priests knew only too well the native wickedness of

the Indians, their inconstancy and their indifference which even now still makes them regard the most solemn ceremonies merely as games. Thus when Caribs ask to be baptized it is only to get the presents which their godfathers give them. They invariably return to their vomit so as to get baptized again, and this sacrament can be repeated as often as you care to offer them a glass of rum.

A gentleman of good position, called M. Chateau Dubois, came to Gaudeloupe for the sole purpose of teaching and converting the Indians, and more especially the Caribs of Dominica. He kept a number of them in his house and taught them with all possible care and kindness. He died, however, in this pious exercise without the consolation of having made one Carib a good Christian, although he had had many of those living with him baptized. These Indians had been perfectly instructed, and one would have thought could have been trusted to retain their religion. But they remembered their baptism and their Christianity only so long as they remained with M. Dubois, and returned to their own religion or libertinism the moment they set foot on their own island.

A very good churchman, M. Varinghen, lived for many years with the Caribs in Dominica, but obtained no better results than his predecessors in that island. In the end he was obliged to return to Martinique, and in 1705 when I left the Islands, he was almoner for Madame la Marquise d'Angennes.

The Jesuit mission alone keep priests in St. Vincent. These missionaries are maintained through the piety of the King, and it is to be hoped that their care and labours will be rewarded in the future, for up to the present time they have had no better success than any of the other missionaries. When I was leaving the Islands I heard that the Jesuits were abandoning the mission at St. Vincent, because it was feared that the Indians would massacre the priests.

The Caribs use three types of boats all of which are hollowed out of the trunk of a single tree. The smallest of these is the canoe and has a flat stern. The Indians I saw at M. Michel's place had come in a *bacassa* and a *pirogue*. The latter is made like a canoe but both ends are pointed. This *pirogue* was about twenty-nine feet long and had a beam of four and a half feet. The bow and stern were raised fifteen to twenty inches above the level of the centre of the boat, and the gunwales were pierced with holes for lashing the Indians' furniture and belongings to the side of the boat. This *pirogue* had nine thwarts made of boards which had been split and not sawn. Behind each thwart and about eight inches above it were back-rests or struts of wood about the thickness of your arm. These back-rests also stayed the sides of the *pirogue* and kept them rigid.

The *bacassa* measured forty-two feet long and seven feet beam. Boards, fifteen inches wide, had been bent round the top of the dug-out, thus con-

siderably increasing the size of this boat. Both these boats were neatly and evenly made. The Indians never use oars but only paddles, the paddle they steer with being at least a third longer than the others. The bows of the *bacassa* were raised in the same way as the *pirogue* and it had similar thwarts, etc. The stern was built to form a poop.

On this poop they had carved the head of a monkey in bas-relief, and had carved it very badly, and near this carving they had fastened a human arm.

The Indians offered to make me a present of this relic of humanity which they said had belonged to one of six Englishmen that they had killed in Barbuda in a raid. They added that they had made prisoners a woman and two children whom they had taken back with them to Dominica.

I thanked them for their offer, and told them I would give them much rum and other things if they brought the woman and children to me. They said that they would do so and promptly forgot all about it. I ascertained, however, a little later, that a French ship passing Dominica had ransomed the woman and children for four casks of rum and a gun, and had brought them to Martinique whence they had been sent back safely to Barbuda.

The real object of this visit to us, I found out, was to take revenge on one of their countrymen, and kill him for murdering one of their relations in Dominica. The Caribs had first gone to Les Mouil-

lages, where they had learnt, how I do not know, that this man was in our neighbourhood and had therefore come round in the hope of finding him. We did not have to tell this man to hide, once he knew that his compatriots were on our beach.

This Carib refugee used to catch fish for me from time to time. I would have given him more employment and even kept him with me so that he might live in a more decent manner, but this is an almost impossible thing to do, for these people are so lazy and conceited that infinite tact is required to manage them at all. They will obey no order, and if they do anything wrong you must be most careful how you reprove them, or even appear annoyed, for their vanity is inconceivable. Hence the proverb, "Frown at an Indian and you fight him. Fight an Indian and you must kill him or be killed." They do what they please and only when they please. If you want them to do anything it is usually just the time when they want to do nothing. If you want to go hunting, they say they are going fishing, and the best thing to do is to have nothing to do with them, or at any rate never depend on them for anything.

Another reason for not employing them is the antipathy which exists between the Carib and the African. The Caribs imagine they are far superior to the Blacks, while the latter, who are not a whit behind the former in conceit, despise the Indians and

call them savages. This word invariably makes them so furious that they will go to any extreme to take vengeance, and their vengeance can only be avoided by being very careful.

A CARIB CARBET

AT the beginning of December 1694 our Superior sent me to Cul-de-Sac François to decide which was the most convenient site for a church. This fine quarter of Martinique was then beginning to be settled, and it appeared would soon become full of people if it possessed a resident curé.

M. de la Vigne-Granval, captain of the militia in this quarter, was very anxious to have a church in the district, but had not offered to provide the grounds necessary for such a building. Another officer called M. de Bois Jourdain, a very rich man who owned a sugar plantation in this quarter, and had started to make a second, was continually pressing the Intendant and our Superior to appoint a curé. A third settler, M. Suffren, who had come out from Provence, was also anxious that they should have a church and curé. All these gentlemen, however, wanted the church near their own properties. In the end M. Joyeux, who was a captain in the cavalry and owned a fine property near these three gentlemen, offered to give the lands necessary for a church and presbytery. In exchange for this gift he was to be given the first pew, and would not be expected to subscribe towards the building of the church, etc.

M. de Mareuil, Lieutenant de Roi, was to accompany me. My instructions were to see that the site chosen was in a healthy and convenient place, with sufficient land for the presbytery garden and a *savanne* for the curé.

I left my parish in charge of my neighbour, Père Breton, and started on the 12th of December after I had said Mass. I dined at "Grande Ance", and arrived in good time at La Trinité where I met M. Mareuil, who accompanied me to M. Joyeux' house, where I stayed the night.

We started the following morning in a canoe. As M. Joyeux did not live at Cul-de-Sac, but only kept a driver and some slaves on his property there, he had put as much food as we were likely to require in the canoe, so that we would not have to go to any of his neighbours till the site for the church had been definitely decided. A wise provision as we soon had to admit, for when we were three-quarters of the way to Cul-de-Sac Robert we were caught in a squall, and had we not reached la Pointe à la Rose I do not know what would have happened to our canoe and its cargo.

There is a Carib living at this place, which is the eastern arm of the bay, who has called himself La Rose. The Carib has named himself after the Point, or the Point has been named after the Carib, I don't know which, but while the negroes were hauling the canoe up the beach we walked to his carbet.

This Carib, his wife, and some ten or a dozen children have been baptized and they received us very civilly. He was wearing a pair of short trousers and a brand-new suit of red clothes, and from this we concluded that he had just been painted. His wife was wearing a *pagne*, and two of her daughters aged fifteen and sixteen were dressed in the national costumes, but when we arrived they also put on pagnes. The *pagne* is a piece of cloth which is wound twice round the body with the two ends tucked into the folds to keep it in place. La Rose had four grown-up sons simply dressed in a cord and a strip of cloth, while the rest of his children, who were small, wore the same clothes as when they first entered this world.

We found a large concourse of Caribs at the carbet, who had arrived for a purpose I will relate later on.

This building is the last Carib carbet remaining in Martinique. It was about sixty feet long by twenty-five feet wide and built something like a barn. The smallest posts were about nine feet high out of the ground. The rafters reached the ground on each side, and were covered by a thatch of palmiste leaves supported by lathes of roseaux. One end of the carbet was entirely closed by a wall of roseaux and palmiste, except for an opening leading to the kitchen, the other end was open. The kitchen was ten paces away, and was in a shed, built in the same way, but half the size of

the main building. This shed was divided in two by a palisade wall of roseaux, the other room being the bedroom of the women and children. The furniture in both sheds consisted only of hammocks and baskets, but La Rose had a box, a gun, a sword, and a pistol beside his hammock. His four elder sons were similarly armed, and they all did their duty very well when the English attacked the island.

Some of the men were making baskets, and it was the first time that I had seen this operation. I also observed two women making a hammock. There were a large number of bows, arrows, and clubs all neatly tied to the rafters. The floor was of beaten earth, and was clean and level except under the doorways where a little mud had collected. Eight or nine Indians were squatting on their heels round a fire in the carbet, and were smoking tobacco while waiting for some fish to cook. The fish, I noticed, were lying in the fire between the wood and the ash, and I was told that they cook birds in the same way. The ash forms a jacket over the skin, keeps in all the juices, and when the fish or bird is sufficiently cooked this jacket is easily scraped off. It is an excellent method of cooking. When we went into the kitchen we saw seven or eight women busy making cassava. In this matter the Caribs are wiser than the French, for they cook their cassava every day and eat it hot, when it is much better than as we eat it, cold and stale.

All these gentlemen greeted us in their usual manner

but without changing their position, saying—"Bon jour compère. Toi tenir Taffia[1]?"

In the meantime it was getting near the dinner-hour and the sea air had made us hungry. So I told the negroes to spread our tablecloth in a corner of the carbet where I had noticed a clean piece of matting spread over some boards. This was done, and our slaves brought in some bread and salt and a dish of cold meat. M. Mareuil, M. Joyeux and myself hastened to sit down on the mat, and had just started to eat our meal when we saw that the Caribs were frowning at us, while an altercation had started between them and La Rose.

We asked him what was the matter, and he replied that there was a Carib buried under the mat and our sitting on it annoyed the dead man's relations.

We got up at once and had all our things removed. La Rose had another mat spread for us in a different place in the carbet, and we sat down again and finished our meal in peace. La Rose and his friends were given a drink to repair the affront we had given them, and this made them our friends once more.

While we were having our meal La Rose explained that these Caribs had all come for the burial of their relation, who had died in his carbet and was buried under the mat. It appeared that they were only waiting for the arrival of more relations from St. Vincent to complete the ceremony. He also told us that it was

[1] Taffia = Rum.

necessary for every relative of the dead man to inspect his body, for even if it were only one who failed to see it, all the other relations put together would not be able to convince him that the man had died a natural death. On the contrary he would then be quite sure that they had contributed towards the man's death, and honour would compel him to murder one of them to avenge him.

This custom seemed to us a very inconvenient one, and I think our host would have willingly forgone the honour the Carib had done him by dying in his carbet, for the large company of relatives were eating up his store of cassava which very likely was only sufficient for his family.

When we had finished our dinner I asked if I might examine the body. La Rose told me it would give pleasure to all the company if I did so, and especially if I were to give them some rum to drink to the health of the dead man.

The boards and mat were removed disclosing a round grave four feet in diameter and six feet deep. The body was propped up in the same squatting position as the Caribs round the fire, the elbows resting on the knees, and the palms supporting the cheeks. He was painted red with black moustaches and lines. His hair was tied behind his head, and his bow, arrows, club and knife were laid beside him. I touched his hands, face and back which were quite dry, nor did the body smell, although they assured me that they had done nothing

more than paint him the moment he was dead. They had then buried him in the sand in the position I have described. The first relations to come had removed the sand to examine the body, and as there was no decomposition they had left him unburied, so as to avoid digging the sand away and putting it back each time a new relation arrived. The man, they said, had been dead five months, and when all the relations had seen him they would fill in the grave.

We did not disappoint the mourners, for we gave them rum to drink to the dead man, and after that they replaced the boards and mat.