

## Chapter 12

The Balanta. The fertility of their lands and the disposition of the natives. The way of life of these heathen and their superstitious rites.

A creek of modest width separates these heathen from the island of Bissau. To as great an extent as the land has abundance in its variety of staple foodstuffs, such as fundes and milhos, and in the flowing waters of its stream and springs, it is correspondingly lacking in trees of all kinds, for instance, in the palm-trees which are so necessary for these heathen. It does not lack vegetables such as beans, macarras, pumpkins, yams, and it has all the staple crops in great quantities, except for rice, of which it has little. Cows, goats and hens are raised in large numbers. Among its wild animals are civet-cats, etc. The land is meadow throughout, lacking any sort of wood for burning, in place of which they use milho canes and cow-dung. The people have an evil disposition and their appearance is surly and not very attractive. However they are excellent workers. Both men and women have lines on their forehead, most of which have been incised deliberately. They file their teeth. /f.41/ They are all great thieves and they tunnel their way into pounds to steal the cattle. They excel in making assaults, and from their villages they direct these against other villages of their own people, in order to plunder them by taking everything they can find and capturing as many persons as possible. In their behaviour they choose to resemble the Bijagos.

They have no princip~~le~~ king. Whoever has more power (than his neighbours) is king, and every quarter of a league there are many kings of this kind. Sons are the legitimate heirs to their fathers, and are their successors. Nephews and other (? male) relatives succeed women. Their greeting when they meet is to sniff at the right hand of the other, taking and raising it to the nose three times. Their marriages are the <sup>common</sup> ~~normal~~ kind, the son-in-law giving cows to the father-in-law in exchange for his daughter. These savages have great trade and commerce with the Biafares, who bring them cloths and oil, which are as lacking in their lands as there is abundance of butter and milk. From their fairs merchants obtain goats, cows and staple foodstuffs. It is only with the Portuguese that the Balantas have as yet no such contacts, and so we consider them barely or not at all friendly to us, hence even as our enemies. They build their houses without using the quantity of wood the other heathen use. Thin sticks are employed throughout, and on these they place the normal sort of thatch, made up into mats, so that the rain penetrates less easily to the apartments below. Where there are canes available, they use these for the framework. /f. 41./