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Age Group - LathwareLaws of marriage and inheritance and other
customs of Mabel's tribe.

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The Batswana of the olden times and their behaviour.

1. The proverb ran as follows: "Do not withhold milk from a girl, her cattle are under her heel". This means that wherever you see a girl, treat her with politeness and respect, with the knowledge that dowry (in cattle) will be paid for her, thus supplying her father and mother with cow dung.
2. Another one says: "When you see another man, suck whey in the mouth for him." Whey is milk from the cow. Whey comes out of a milk sack. This saying means that when you meet another man, treat him well and respectfully, that is, do good to all the people. In other words, you suck whey in the mouth for another man.
3. They also said: "The joint of an ox is one". It was said of men sharing the meat of an ox, one man saying to other, "Hold on the other side son of So-and-So; men praising each other at the kgotla (the meeting place of the chief and his council); on some other occasions, it is when they are drinking beer at the kgotla. On these occasions the Batswana held peaceful conversations. Mutual respect was an important thing among the Batswana.
4. When we were in our various sibs, according to law and mutual respect, if one man left his home to go on a journey, we used to say "One may go and the other must remain". This means that when a man set out on a journey, he used to leave another man in his home, one belonging to his sib, to enquire after the health of the children of the man who is away. That is to say he enjoyed the freedom of intercourse with the wife of the man who is away to continue the birth rate in that home. The child born as a result of this intercourse is not the son of the man who is left at home, he is the child of this house. It is born in this house. In other words the lands must continue to be ploughed.

it is said, "The lands must not lie fallow, the cattle must be brought home (at the usual time). Huts must be erected (if occasion demands), milk sack must be brought home, the goats and sheep must be cared for, things must run smoothly. The son of Nkele was born during the rain! It is the mothers' joyful shouts gifts of clothes are offered for the newborn child of So-and-So's father. They say "Modisa (a boy) has been born or Mosile (a girl) has been born". Firewood is brought home, water is drawn, grinders are busy, alles is rep en roer in die stad. You see the girls busy with the stamping block probably four or five to one stamping block. You hear the sound Kai-rei-rei-rei, kete-kete-kete-kete.

5 "stayer at home, the fire is dying out" (Keep the home fires burning). It is a message given to this man and this woman. It means that if a woman belonging to this sib setax out on a journey, the man who remains in the home must be helped by a woman from another 'lapa' of that sib; she will also continue to help the children of the woman who is away; she will do the cooking for the children of the woman who is away until her return. She will give the children water to drink as well as the man who has been left to look after the home. Hence the proverb "Keep the home fires burning". Of course he is the person who will be held responsible.

6 This was our custom and way of life; in the olden times mutual help was much valued. This was done particularly in the sibs as they regarded each other as the children of one father. That is why they were wont to say. "A stranger should not mix himself up in domestic troubles". That is to say, do not intervene if you find the children of one man fighting as you have no knowledge of the cause of their fight. Your intervention may or may not create peace between them and they may both severely bruise you. That was the real custom of the Batswana in those days.

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7 Again, to prove that love reciprocated amongst the Batswana, they used to say, "The saliva of a stranger is sour". That is to say the stranger will give you an interesting account, of news unknown to you and of the place from which he comes. He will be accommodated in the sib to which he has come; the mothers will dish out porridge and take it to the hut in which he is accommodated. It is they that the hosts at this 'lapa' will say, "The masters of the home profit by the presence of guests". Those then, who have welcomed the guest, if they have slaughtered a beast or a sheep, or a goat, will invite those friends who brought them porridge; the meat has now been cooked. On their arrival, they are seated, each person is given soft boneless meat, they pick it with their clean hands, one hand placing it on the other as they eat; if it is a lump, you will find a girl on her knees biting it off with the teeth.

8 To the man it will be said, "By the way you are in the midst of your relatives, do not bother us". He will then fancy one of his female relatives, it is to her that he will continually pay his attention, have sexual relations, and if anything happens to her cousin, there would be no trouble if she is a woman; food will be served as well as drinks and there would be shouts of joy. If you wanted to marry, you would be at liberty to do so amongst your cousins, In Tswana, the children of your father's sister are your wives over whom there can be no dispute.

Inheritance.

According to their custom, the Batswana regarded the following as inheritance:- the law, the beast, the father, greeting and the piece of wood of the kgotla. Inheritance according to the Batswana, lay in the beast, in the calves of the beast. When a beast was still alive, it was the property of its owner but when it had been slaughtered, it was distributed, each person knowing the portion of the meat that he was entitled to.

- 1 One's maternal uncle got the head to eat.
- 2 One's father's sister got the placenta to eat.
- 3 One's father got the kidneys to eat.
- 4 One's paternal uncle got the second stomach to eat.
- 5 One's sister got the placenta to eat.
- 6 One's mother ate meat on the junction of the backbone and tail as well as bowels.
- 7 One's grandmother ate the bowel.
- 8 One's elder brother ate the shoulder or front leg.
- 9 One's younger brother ate the hind leg.
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- 11.
- 12.
- 13 The hoofs and spleen and the are
herdboys' meat.
- 14 The liver and the chest are meat which the owner of the
beast is entitled to, the tongue and the lower bowel belong
to the old men. To divide these parts of the beast is to
show the children how the inheritance is divided and what
is done when it is distributed. One does not deprive
the other of one's share.

If a man dies and has two sons and two daughters, the inheritance of the son is the cattle of the father; it is the inheritance of the first born child of the family. He gives his younger brothers as he likes. The house is the inheritance of the younger brother; his clothes are his maternal uncle's, they are the boots. The inheritance of the daughters is the fields, the water pots, pots, baskets and adzes. All these are the inheritance of a daughter.

The inheritance which was created by magadi (dowry) is the inheritance of the girls' brothers in their succession. If the sister is only one, the magadi will be divided among the brothers. If a man has two or three wives, the live stock of the two huts are divided according to those huts, that is to say no children of one hut shall inherit the

estate of the other. Again in Tswana, the first born child cannot inherit the father's estate during his (father's) life time and no father will ever divide his estate among the children whilst he is alive. That is the natural law of the Batswana. Neither father nor mother divided his or her estate during his or her life time. According to Tswana custom one could assist one's paramour as one pleases. But one could not give her a portion of the inheritance, because those who are entitled to it, are the children of a married man and his wife.

6 If a woman dies and has a beast which she has bought or any other stock with kaffir corn or with a pig or with pot clay or with a mat, or a basket, that beast is the inheritance of the male child of that 'lapa', who is the last born amongst the others.

7 If the children have a dispute over the inheritance, their mediator is their uncle, their father's younger brother.

8 If the children lost their parents by death when they were still minors, their guardian, with whom they lived was their paternal uncle. They lived with him until they came of age. He was responsible for their getting married; that is our natural law and custom.

9 If these children withheld milk from their mother, she would go and complain to their paternal uncle; it was he who would remonstrate with them regarding the complaint of their widowed mother and it was their duty to obey him. If they refused to obey their paternal uncle he would go and lodge their mother's complaint with the head of the sib and if they refused to acknowledge his judgment, their uncle would then take their mother to the chief's council for the chief to give judgment personally.

10 By so doing then, you will have fulfilled our law which says: "If a man is unable to solve a problem he must go to others and say "I have lapsed, but not I

actually, the children of whom I am the guardian have lapsed. *rranapana-ampena-di-tšwang-di-tšwana-le-pele-ga-pela-e-kgaelwa-ke-maje-mogatie.

Setima-molelo means that fire is taken from the chief's kgotla, it is the people who go to fetch the fire from there.

7 In a native marriage, lobolo cattle are taken out in order to get a wife. The young girl will choose six girls for herself which belong to her age groups and these girls will be in her company at the marriage feast. The young man will also find four mates for himself. The marrying couple now arrive at the girl's home; they do not know each other. A woman comes forward with porridge and she places it in front of the young men. The woman who comes with it cuts it in the middle, and she goes to eat this half with other women, the porridge being held by her all the time in her hand. The young men eat the porridge from the wooden bowl and when they have had their meal, they will be shown their hut.

8 Two young men will now accompany the bridegroom to the hut. They will find the young girl already in bed in the hut. They will then say "Young man, here is your wife." It will take the young man about four days before he knows or understands his wife very well, because he gets up very early in the morning to avoid being known by his young wife. On the fifth day the young man will go during the day with that party of his of the four young men, who are still at the girl's home. They will find food already prepared for them those six young girls (the bride's company are also present. Now the bride will be asked to give her husband food. When she takes the food, she will glance at the young men over there,

Age group = Letladi.

A woman was engaged or betrothed before she was born. The parents of a boy paid a beast by which they picked out a woman, before the child was born. May be the woman is

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pregnant, or she may not be so, but they will say if she happens to give birth to a female child, that child will be married by our child, so-and-son.

3 But if this woman does not bring forth a female child, what will be done is that a married girl of this family will be taken back from her husband, and will be given to the young man who expected the would-be-born child to be a girl. If the betrothed girl happens to die before she has had a child, one girl in the family will be provided (seantlo) to take the place of the one who died. If it is the young man who happens to die, his younger brother will take the wife who was betrothed by his elder brother. The children of course will belong to the first husband who had betrothed the wife.

5 The betrothal of a chief's child like this, firstly, three head of cattle are taken out, and delivered to the elder brothers of the child, they engage the wife who is still to be born. When it is thought that the chief's son can now marry, he can do so, he can marry a woman or women, because according to Tswana custom he can marry four women according to the consent the parents and the tribe. The position will remain as such until the time of the maturity of the betrothed woman.

6 In Tswana this girl is called 'Setimamelelo' (Fire extinguisher), that is to say, one who will bring forth the chief and the child she bears is the child of her father's sister. She is of course not sure which of the young men is her husband. She will now give the food to the one she thinks is the right one. If she is lucky, she'll fall upon the right one being face to face with him. If she happens to go wrong through ignorance, they will all burst in laughter. Later, it will be said, "Young woman there is your husband since you have all the time been holding a snake by the chin. That is to say

you had a husband whom you did not see, who crept in by night and disappeared at dawn. Now, husband and wife are left alone.

9 On the engagement of a girl, a beast is slaughtered by the girl's paternal uncle as a sign of appreciation of the lobolo received. The betrothed girl will be shown its skull which will be exhibited on her neck. There is great joy on this occasion, the young man's parents and the young girl's parents hold a big feast wherein the people eat meat, food, and beer drinking takes place also. People sing jubilantly. On the second day the girl is taken to the young man's home. The same feasting takes place, food in abundance and jubilant songs are sung.

10 If a girl refuses to be married by a young man, according to law, two men are sought who go with some old women into a hut to condemn the girl for her action and their judgment is that she is cornered and given a thorough walloping. If on the other hand the young man refuses to marry the judgment upon him is the same as that of the girl. He is handed over to his age group in order to dig the truth out of him. If he rejects the girl, his people pay a beast for their lies. That is the only judgment.

The Tswana saying is: "If you open the door when one is in bed, see that when you leave, the door must be shut. That is to say, if you had spoken about marriage with some one, and you later decide not to marry her, be frank to tell her that you have changed your mind.

11 A water calabash. If you have given away your daughter for marriage, you will leave this message with her people-in-law: "There is the water calabash. I give it to you in good condition, and if you get tired of it, bring it back in good condition and without a crack". That is to say if the girl disobeys you, bring her back in a healthy condition, do not beat her about.

Proverb: "Ya re na a'kga longetse le tsona di akge diditse, di boela gae haka jake le ene a boela gae".

This means that if a man has no control over his wife, he is a reed butterfly which finds a river inundated and which keeps back and says "Where shall we cross over, the river is full. In other words a man finds his wife pregnant, another man being responsible for her pregnancy. He will not cohabit with his wife when she has been impregnated by another man.

12 When this man is tried, his cattle kraal will be opened at the back; that is to say the head of the sib will impose a heavy penalty upon him.

13 Adultery. In the Tswana custom, if an unmarried girl is found to be pregnant, a little entrance will be made for her in the back yard which is used by herself alone; no one greets her when she is in this condition because of the adultery committed in her father's and mother's home. She is not allowed to eat food in the same bowl as the others. It is an aversion. Her food was dished out into broken pieces of clay pots as she was look upon with contempt. The hair of her head was not cut off. Her parents did not like to do so because by her action she took away from them the honour of her dowry; she also took away the power of her father and maternal uncles. The man responsible for her pregnancy was made to pay a beast as punishment.

14 The Marriage of a widow. If a woman lost her husband by death, she could not be married by any man who wished to do so before she was left for good by the men belonging to the particular sib which married her. They were given priority in the matter. It was for these men to see which one of them would be her husband. In that case, she was taken to wife by a man who was the 'seantlo' (who took the place of the deceased), who would bring forth children in that hut, who would call them his elder brother's or younger brother's children in accordance with the Tswana custom. He would call them by the surname of the deceased husband.

15 If a man has lost his wife by death, he goes to the sib from which her took the wife to seek one who would take the place of his deceased wife. If he finds her, he will then pay two head of cattle and take the woman into his hut.

16 A man who has lost his wife by death takes a married woman to wife to replace her dead wife. This woman will be made to divorce her husband.

17 If a widow refuses to be married by the younger or elder brother of her deceased husband the punishment upon her is to be driven away from that sib, to be dispossessed of every thing, the children corn and cattle and these will remain in the sib and they belong to the children of the deceased man. If the men of the sib do not wish to take her to wife, she goes with the children and all the belongings of the deceased man to the home of her people.

18 Girls were examined by old women in order to find out if they had reached womanhood, in order to find out whether they were pregnant, as it was the custom of the Batswana to allow girls and boys to play outside in the road without harm being done to the girls. That was the reason why it was necessary to examine them.

19 If a girl was found to be pregnant, food was prepared which was eaten by old women as it was their responsibility to see the condition of women. They would with a feeling of joy say, "She is pregnant, she has reached womanhood, she is one that men might marry". She has reached the status of women.

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23 The uncircumcised lads are herd boys. They understand nothing but cattle and the stick, beating each other and singing and to take the moretlwa (stick) to the chief. That is when they go to the chief to ask him to send them to the circumcision school.

When they are referred to as 'masupodi', it means that they go about sucking milk from peoples' goats, breaking sugar cane, eating water melons and the fowls of the people. For all this they are not brought to trial since they are not considered as men yet, they are only thrashed with switches, there is no case against them; they thrash them so that they may come to sing for them. Their songs are composed of swear words only.

24 The chief is not afraid of them, they just come to sing for him and for the chief's wife. After they have brought the 'moretlwa' to the chief, the chief summons the sub-chiefs, the chief's uncles to discuss the staging of an initiation ceremony with them. When they have agreed upon it, the chief calls the tribe together to tell them that he desires to send a group of young men to a circumcision school. The women are also informed. He tells them that the children have grown up to the stage that makes it necessary for them to be circumcised. The chief says, "I will now give them what they want". The tribe agrees with the chief and then the chief says "Let them be brought together to come and get the last walloping from the chief.

25 There is a doctor who treats them with medicine all of them in their order.

26 They then go to the veld for the initiation ceremony for a period of three months. On their return, they will find little kraals having been built for them with branches of trees in which they stay on their arrival. That is where they will sing their praises for their mothers. That is where their uncles will give them goats and fowls and that is where they pierce the shield, since they have been given an age group. At this stage they are now called 'makokwanyane' (those who have just returned from the circumcision school); they are smeared with red ochre and black ochre having done away with their hair. This is then the end. They will now be allowed to marry.

27 Cattle according to Tswana custom are kept at the cattle posts. According to our custom, women may not pass through them, they die if women do so, especially if it a woman who has miscarried; her husband also may not pass through the cattle. A woman may not enter the cattle kraal unless she has first washed herself with 'mogaga' (species of bush) medicine. It is only a girl who has not had menstruation who may go into the cattle kraal, goat or sheep kraal. They are looked after with great care. That is to say that the cattle kraal is protected medicinally by men. A woman may not jump over a leg tie for a cow. The bull of the cattle is also treated with medicine so that it may not cover cattle outside those of its own kraal.

28 Cattle disease, that is if they are suffering from anthrax or hindquarter evil or lung sickness. These diseases in cattle were cured by the men, they lived at the cattle posts herding their cattle and filling milk sacks with milk. In the afternoon.

They sent the milk sacks home on trained pack oxen. Even if they caused the loads to fall, the pack ox would stop for you to help it. When the people finished weeding their lands, the women went to the cattle posts. They were a long distance away and the women stayed there, their only work being to eat sour milk and to make baskets and mats, receptacle for rubbish and hand made seats.

29 The work which the men did was the making of wooden spoons and wooden bowls, water pots and pillows, sticks and handles of adzes and pronged sticks for stirring food. They also hunted animals, jackals, civetcat. The leopard is also included. They set traps to catch small animals, guinea-fowls, partridges and pheasants.

30 They brayed skins and made blankets with them and they also made sandals with the skin of the ox's forehead. Sandals were the footwear in those times. The women made beads for wearing

round the waist, head and hands. They crushed kaffir corn to make 'sompufane' (porridge made with whey and sweet milk.

31 How tribute was paid to the chief. There was a custom by which it was paid. Wild animals were hunted and half of an animal cut off from the backbone and skins were taken to the chief.

The men always set out on hunting expeditions because a lot of meat was consumed at the chief's place. The meat was cut into pieces and eaten or it was made into biltong.

32 The chief was in the habit of giving meat to the old men, as it was the custom of the Tswana people for a chief to give part of the food to the people, to make them to enjoy themselves, to make them to be at home with him and to know him, so that they might always know what took place the previous night. The chief was greeted with humility. The chief would kill a wizard if one was found out. He was killed outright. Chiefs wore hats of skins of animals and the wives of chiefs had woman servants who cooked for them and who work in their houses.

Praise Song.

Our staple food is kaffir corn. Kaffir corn is used as food in the following manner: The grain is stamped in a hole. The meal is then boiled in water. Before it is boiled, after it is stamped in the hole or a hollowed out wooden block, it is shaken up so as to separate the husks and to remove residue. The corn from which the husks have been removed is then pounded again to produce meal which is then boiled in water and the mixed with sprouted corn that had been boiled the day before. When the meal has thus been fermented, it is called 'ting' (fermented porridge). After cooking, it is called porridge. It is fermented in a pot known as 'tsagana'. There is what is called 'mošoko' unfermented porridge which is cooked without having been mixed with leaven, it is stirred with a pronged stick in order to crush the lumps. The bran which has been removed from the kaffir-corn is cooked and eaten after salt had been added to it. The corn is boiled (lefatana) it is mixed with beans. Kaffir corn is eaten also as 'mosutlhwane' that is corn from which husks have been removed and which has been winnowed but not stamped. Mošutlhwane is also kaffir corn which has been rubbed off the ears whilst still green and cooked being grain. It is then stirred and pressed by means of a spoon and dished out to the people in that condition. It is also called 'mošutlhwane'.

Again when the men go to war, it is the same corn which is roasted and ground and it has salt added to it, and is turned into 'lebabe' (roasted kaffir corn) which is their provision in the army. It can also be cooked to make pufa. Pufa is porridge boiled with sour milk.

It is also kaffir corn which our women eat when they are lying in. Soft porridge is cooked for them, it is the same porridge that is given to infants and they are taught to eat by it. It makes very nice ~~xxxx~~ porridge which does not give one stomach trouble and indigestion. It settles

very well in one's stomach. It is the same kaffir corn which makes beer. We begin by putting kaffir corn in water if we want to make kaffir beer. It is first caused to rot whilst soaked in water, and it germinates in a small beer vessel and when taken out, it is pitch black, it is then sprouted corn. It is taken out of the beer vessels, it is spread out to dry, and thereafter it is ground on a milling stone. Kaffir corn that has not been soaked in water is ground and cooked in large cooking pots. After cooking the meal of sprouted corn is added and it is that which turns this porridge into 'mogetle' (been in the process of making). Again sprouted corn is ground which is used to torn the improperly brewed beer in the pots and it then becomes beer. When it ferments, a strainer is then used to strain it and to separate bran from it; the residue is cooked and eaten but the bran is food for the pigs.

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