

BANTU BELIEFS AND MAGIC



C. W. HOBLEY
1922

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THE PROJECT GUTENBERG eBook OF BANTU BELIEFS AND MAGIC

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AND MAGIC ***

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KITUI
A KAMBA CHIEF.

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BANTU BELIEFS AND MAGIC

*WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE KIKUYU
AND KAMBA TRIBES OF KENYA COLONY; TO-
GETHER WITH SOME REFLECTIONS ON EAST
AFRICA AFTER THE WAR*

BY

C. W. HOBLEY, C.M.G.

M.R.ANTHROP.INST., C.M.Z.S., ASSOC.M.INST.C.E.
(Late Senior Provincial Commissioner, Kenya Colony)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
SIR JAMES G. FRAZER, F.R.S., &c.

LONDON
H. F. & G. WITHERBY
326 HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.

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PREFACE

It is often said that the longer one knows the native the less one knows, and the less one understands him. This expression is doubtless comforting to persons who have not the patience to systematically study him and his views on life, but it could with convenience be replaced by a saying to the effect that the more one knows of the native the more one realises how much remains to be learnt.

The spirit of this is in accordance with the true attitude to all other branches of knowledge, for the more one learns, the more the map unfolds, and one gradually realises the vastness of the country to be explored.

During long years of service in East Africa my work has brought me into close contact with the native tribes from Lake Victoria to the coast, and I early realised that their administration could not be intelligently conducted without close inquiry into their social organisation and religious beliefs, and in this connection I would here like to express my indebtedness to the kind advice and stimulating assistance which I have received from Sir W. Ridgeway, Sir J. G. Frazer, Professor Haddon and others. I particularly wish to thank Sir J. G. Frazer for his kindness in consenting to write an introduction to this work.

My first researches in this field were conducted among the tribes of Kavirondo, and when some years later I left the Nyanza province for Ukamba I became interested in the people with whom this work mainly deals. [4]

In 1910 I published a small work styled "The Ethnology of the A-Kamba and Other East African Tribes" which was mainly intended as an *aide memoire* for colleagues working among the people referred to; the study was continued and certain matters were dealt with in papers communicated to the Royal Anthropological Institute and the British Association.

Further research has, however, brought to light a great deal of additional material and has enabled me to piece together the work, and I venture to believe that the light which it attempts to throw upon the inner life of these important tribes may

stimulate further inquiry, and help both official and colonist in his relations with them.

It has long been the fashion to look upon such research as being of only academic value; this view, however, is year by year becoming dimmer, and I would ask all those who are interested in Africa to abandon it.

The late war has forcibly demonstrated the importance of understanding the psychology of our enemies, and if that is admitted I would claim that it is quite as important for workers in Africa to endeavour to understand the psychology of the Africans, whose friendship is of vital necessity to all progress in that country.

In presenting this work to the public, I would like to emphasise the belief that the field is by no means exhausted; all that I have been able to do has been done amidst the insistent rush of official duties, and I have often longed for the chance of being able to concentrate my attention for a year or two solely on researches of this nature.

The language difficulty is one of the greatest obstacles with which a European is faced; native languages are numerous and an administrative officer rarely has time to learn one before he is removed to another area and therefore another language. The elders rarely know much Swahili, the language which is the *lingua franca* of East Africa. Interpreters are often a snare, and an investigator has to work with one [5] for some time before being certain that he has fully realised the spirit of the research, especially when dealing with religious beliefs: indeed many interpreters never grasp the spirit of the inquiry. I had working with me for some years a remarkable interpreter—Juma bin Hamis—who became deeply interested in the subject under investigation, and was of the greatest assistance. When any point was obscure he would go off and unearth an elder who was known to have particular information on the point at issue. Unfortunately, however, I have to mourn his loss, for he died at Nairobi in 1911. Such a man is difficult to replace; his speciality was Kikuyu political organisation and customs, and, although a coast native, he was deeply esteemed by all the people of Southern Kikuyu.

I would here like to express my indebtedness to several of my colleagues and friends, particularly the Hon. C. Dundas, G. H. Osborne, and the late S. W. J. Scholefield, who, living for a long time in the native reserves of Kikuyu and

Ukamba in close contact with the people, have given me the greatest assistance upon special points. I am also grateful to Miss du Cros for her kind assistance in revising the MSS. of this work.

With the Hon. C. Dundas's permission, I have inserted an interesting memorandum by him on Kikuyu dances and certain magical phenomena. He collected the information while in charge of the Kikuyu district.

I also express my gratitude to the many elders who have so fully given me information about many customs and rites which they do not care to discuss with the man in the street. The Kikuyu in particular welcomed my interest in their beliefs. They even urged me to become a recognised elder of the tribe, so that they could impart full information without violation of the rules forbidding the divulging of the ceremonial of their grade to those not initiated to that grade. This election has been of great value, for [6]recognition as an elder in Kikuyu franks one, so to speak, among the Kamba, and the elders of that reticent tribe talked freely to me on their rites and beliefs.

Finally I must express my indebtedness to Professor Robertson Smith's illuminating work on the "Religion of the Semites," and to Campbell Thompson's book on "Semitic Magic." I have referred to these from time to time, as they throw light upon the principles underlying many of the African ceremonies which I describe.

Any description of the languages spoken by the tribes under review being outside the scope of this work, it has been considered inadvisable to complicate it by the adoption of the modern system of phonetic symbols in the native names. The use of the symbols, though based on sound principles, unfortunately renders unintelligible to the ordinary reader many native words.

As the war has occurred since the bulk of this work was written, I have considered that it might not be out of place to add a chapter of a general nature dealing with the position of native affairs after the great upheaval, for Africa has not escaped its effects any more than other parts of the world, and the future of the relations of black and white needs most thoughtful consideration.

C. W. H. [7]

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INTRODUCTION

The author of this book, Mr C. W. Hobley, has long been known to anthropologists as one of our best authorities on the native races of British East Africa, or Kenya Colony, as it is now called, where he resided as Provincial Commissioner for many years. The time he could spare from his official duties he wisely devoted to studying the customs and beliefs of the tribes whom he was appointed to govern, and through the knowledge and experience thus acquired he was able to make a valuable series of contributions to ethnography. In the present work he has resumed and largely supplemented his former studies of two important tribes, the Kikuyu and Kamba, enriching his previous accounts with many fresh details and fruitful observations.

The result is a monograph replete with information of great variety and of the highest interest for the student of savage thought and institutions. But the book has a practical as well as a scientific value. Placed in the hands of British officials engaged in the maintenance of order and the administration of justice among the natives, it must prove of real service to them in their task of affording them an insight into the habits and ideas of the people, and thus greatly facilitating the task of government. Indeed, without some such knowledge of the native's point of view it is impossible to govern him wisely and well. The savage way of thinking is very different to ours, and Mr Hobley is right in insisting that it is by no means simple, but, on the contrary, highly complex, and that, consequently, it cannot be understood without long and patient study. To legislate for savages on European principles of law [8]and morality, even when the legislator is inspired by none but the most benevolent intentions, is always dangerous, and not seldom disastrous; for it is too often forgotten that native customs have grown up through a long course of experience and adaptation to natural surroundings, that they correspond to notions and beliefs which, whether ill or well founded, are deeply rooted in the native mind, and that the attempt to discard them for others which have been developed under totally different conditions may injure instead of benefiting the people. Even when the new rules and habits, which government seeks to force upon the tribes, are in themselves, abstractly considered, better than the old, they

may not be so well adapted to the mental framework of the governed, and the consequence may be that the old moral restraints are abolished without the substitution of any equally effective in their room. To this danger Mr Hobley is fully alive, and he gives a timely warning on the subject to those well-meaning but ill-informed persons at home who would treat the native African in accordance with the latest political shibboleths of democratic Europe. Such treatment, which its ignorant advocates seem to regard as a panacea for all human ills, would almost inevitably produce an effect precisely the opposite of that intended: instead of accelerating the progress of the natives, it would probably precipitate their moral, social, and even physical decline. In practical life few things are so dangerous as abstract ideas, and the indiscriminate application of them to concrete realities is one of the most fatal weapons in the hands of the moral or political revolutionary.

Among the mass of interesting topics dealt with in Mr Hobley's book it is difficult to single out any for special mention in an introduction. The subjects to which, on the whole, he has paid closest attention are natural religion and magic. In respect of religion the author again and again notes the remarkable similarities which may be traced between East African and [9]Semitic beliefs and rites, and he raises the question how these similarities are to be explained. Are they due to parallel and independent development in the African and the Semitic races? Or are they the consequence of the invasion of Africa either by a Semitic people or at all events by a people imbued with the principles of Semitic religion. In my book "Folk-lore in the Old Testament" I had been similarly struck by some of these resemblances, and, while abstaining from speculation on their origin, had remarked that the hypothesis of derivation from a common source was not to be lightly rejected. On the other hand Mr Hobley thinks it safer, in the present state of our knowledge, to assume that the resemblances in question have arisen independently, through parallel development, in the African and Semitic areas. He dismisses as highly improbable the idea that the ancient Semitic beliefs should have originated in East Africa and spread from there to Arabia. Yet recent investigations in this part of Africa, particularly with regard to the native veins of iron and gold, tend in the opinion of some competent inquirers to show that East Central Africa, including the region of the great lakes, was an extremely ancient seat of a rudimentary civilisation, the seeds of which may have been carried, whether by migration or the contact of peoples, to remote parts of Europe and Asia. In regard to iron,

which has been wrought in Central Africa from time immemorial, Mr Hobley quotes Professor Gregory who thinks it probable that the art of forging the metal was invented in tropical Africa at a date before Europe had attained to the discovery and manufacture of bronze; he even suggests that the ingenious smith who first fused tin and copper into bronze may have borrowed the hint from the process of working iron which he had learned in Africa.

Among the many curious superstitions recorded by [10]Mr Hobley none is perhaps more interesting and suggestive than by the name of *thahu* or *thabu*, and which presents points of similarity to the Polynesian taboo. Mr Hobley thinks that the idea involved in it is best expressed by the English term "curse." But to this it may be objected that a curse implies a personal agent, human or divine, who has called down some evil on the sufferer; whereas in many, indeed in most, of the cases enumerated by Mr Hobley there is no suggestion of such an agent, and the evil which befalls the sufferer is the direct consequence of his own action or of a simple accident. Thus it would seem that "ceremonial uncleanness" answers better to the meaning of *thahu* than "curse." Be that as it may, deliberate cursing apparently plays a prominent part in the superstition of the Kikuyu and Kamba; but it is significant that they give it a different name (*kirume*, *kiume*) from that which they apply to ceremonial uncleanness. Great faith is put in the effectiveness of curses, especially the curses of dying persons; and as these latter curses often refer to the disposal of the dying man's property after his death and are intended to prevent the alienation of land from the family, Mr Hobley is led to make the ingenious suggestion that in some curses we may detect the origin of entail and of testamentary dispositions in general.

Not a few of the customs and beliefs described by Mr Hobley remind us of similar practices and ideas in the religion and mythology of classical antiquity. Thus the warriors who, armed with swords and clubs, dance or hop from foot to foot at the time when the *mawe* grain is reaped, are curiously reminiscent of the Roman *Salii*, the dancing or leaping priests of the war-god Mars, who, similarly accoutred with swords and staves, danced or leaped, while they invoked Saturn, the God of Sowing. Again, the strange sort of madness which from time to time seizes on Kamba women and under the influence of which, wrought up to a state of frenzy, they caper about with cow's tails suspended from their [11]arms, offers a parallel to the Greek legend of the daughters of Proetus and the other Argive women, who,

oddly enough, were said like their African sisters to have been healed of their infirmity by dances and the sacrifice of cattle.² The study of such hysterical and infectious manias among primitive peoples opens up an interesting field of inquiry to the psychologist.

Such are a few specimens culled from the rich collection of East African folk-lore and religion which the author has presented to his readers in this volume. The facts recorded by him provide much food for thought and suggest many lines of investigation for inquiries in the future. For, as he reminds us, with equal truth and modesty, the field of inquiry is far from being exhausted. Let us hope that it will yet yield an abundant harvest to others, who will follow in Mr Hobley's footsteps and imitate the example he has set them of patient and open-minded research.

J. G. FRAZER. [13]

Vol. II. pp. 4 *et seq.* ↑

¹ Apollodorus, *The Library*, II. 2, 2, with my notes. ↑

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(The young men parade the country with these some weeks before the ceremony) [17]

PART I

NATURAL RELIGION

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INTRODUCTORY

The main objects of this work are to place on record the results of investigations made among the native tribes in British East Africa, particularly among the Kikuyu and Kamba people, and to endeavour, from a study of their ceremonial with regard to sacrifice and taboo, to obtain a better insight into the principles which underlie the outward forms and ceremonies of their ritual.

It has long been customary, partly through narrow-minded prejudice and partly through ignorance, to class as Pagans all native tribes which have not yet embraced one of the great positive religions, such as Christianity or Mohammedanism. But the time has now come when such negative definitions, if seriously applied, will have to be abandoned. It must be admitted that all savages have a natural religion which is a survival of, and is analogous to, a stage of belief which existed among the ancestors of the civilised peoples of the present day. The admission is inevitable, however distasteful to those who are dogmatic in their religious beliefs and loath to admit that religious thought and the conception of a deity have passed through an evolutionary process and, furthermore, a process which has not ceased. For, after all, the development of mental and moral ideas is a part of the evolution of the living being as much as the development of limbs, cranial shape, or body markings. No positive system of religion descended from heaven as a completely new concept of the deity and with an absolutely novel code. Such a system could never have survived. Any new religious teacher could not fail to be, to a great extent, a [20]creature of his environment and of the age in which he was born. He must necessarily graft his scheme on to what went before. As Robertson Smith so truly says, “a new scheme of faith can only find a hearing by appealing to religious instincts and susceptibilities that already exist in the audience.”

In East Africa, various tribes remain in a stage of belief very similar to that which prevailed in Arabia and Assyria from about 1500 B.C. and onward, and which continued till a dogmatic uniformity was forced on the bulk of the people by the teachings of Mahomed about A.D. 650.

Asiatic beliefs were introduced to Abyssinia by the Sabæans or Himyaritic invaders a few centuries before the Christian era, but it is doubtful whether they spread to any extent. For ancient religious influences on Central Africa, we must look more to the channel afforded by the Nile valley which had become a route of exploration as far back as the time of the Pharaohs. Although, however, we know that Egyptian influence was spasmodically exercised for a long distance up the Nile valley, little evidence of any spiritual effect has as yet come to light. This is natural, for the ancient expeditions were at long intervals and were not missionary enterprises, but were in search of material gain.

The only case of permanent settlement which appears to be beyond doubt is the invasion into Uganda, Unyoro, and Ankole, of a light coloured race, now known as the Ba-Hima or Ba-Huma. Some consider that these people came from the Abyssinian highlands; Sir Harry Johnston, on the other hand, believes them to be descendants of ancient Egyptian settlers; according to Dr Seligman they are probably descendants of what he terms Proto-Egyptians—the latter description being a more concrete definition based upon careful researches in the Nile valley, the result of which was not available when Sir H. H. Johnston made his suggestion.

But whatever the origin of the Ba-Hima, there [21] appears to be no trace of this infusion of northern blood anywhere east of the Rift Valley, except, possibly, among the Masai who are believed to have migrated south-east from the valley of the Upper Nile. The Nandi, the Lako and Savei of Elgon, the Lumbwa and Elgeyo also came from the north-west, but did not cross the Rift.

The Kikuyu absorbed some Masai blood from time to time, and also intermixed to some extent with the aboriginal Oggiek, but they are mainly Bantu in blood and constitution. The Kamba people, whose ancestors flowed into their present habitat from the south and south-west, are believed to be pure Bantu.

We have, therefore, no evidence as to where the ancestors of the Kikuyu or Kamba lived about two thousand years ago, and, further, whether they were affected by Semitic culture in remote times.

It is, moreover, highly improbable that the ancient Semitic beliefs should have originated in East Africa. We must, therefore, decide whether such similarity as we find to-day is merely a case of parallel and unconnected development, or the result of an ancient invasion of a Semitic race or possibly of a race which had adopted Semitic beliefs. In the present state of knowledge it will be safer to assume that this similarity is due to parallel development, many examples of which may be found in other parts of the world.

It is, however, necessary to make it clear that if there should have been any Semitic influence it cannot have been derived from the Arab settlements on the East Coast of Africa, founded during the last few hundred years. Their political hold of the country never extended much beyond the tidal waters, and their only social influence was the slight one exercised at intermittent intervals by a slave raiding or ivory trading expedition. No ancient trace of Mohammedanism can be found among the people under consideration, and their present stage of culture is pre-Islamic in point of time. [22]

The religious beliefs of the tribes of Kikuyu and Ukamba generally consist of a rudimentary conception of a high god, corresponding more or less to the old Hebrew concept of Jahveh. To the bulk of the peasantry this idea is naturally very vague and practically subconscious. But the elders of what may be termed the "high place" are believed to have a clear conception of it, and their deity is apparently of the kind which can be influenced and

appeased by material attentions. The belief in ancestral spirits—*ngoma* or *aiimu*—is the predominating spiritual factor in the minds of the great majority of the people. These are ever present, and the relations between men and spirits are in accordance with the actual patriarchal state of society. The spirits must not be ignored, for are they not of the blood kin? If neglected, they will be angry and punish their children. But naturally no rancour is felt when such punishments are inflicted. There is a total absence of religious intolerance about this cult; failure to worship or failure to contribute to a sacrifice brings its own retribution, and the spirits are swift in detecting a delinquent.

These spirits are not necessarily evil, but there is little doubt that the character of the spirit is believed to reflect to some extent the character of the person from whom it came, and the power of the spirit is intimately connected with the position of the person in the tribe. This explains to some extent why an ordinary person is cast out at death, whereas an elder, qualified to take part in sacrificial ceremonies, receives burial. The burial is probably pleasing to the spirit, and the spirit of an elder possesses more power than that of an uninitiated common person. All spirits, however, appear to be relentless and malignant when neglected, and remain so until they are appeased. At times they are said to assist their clients, and, through a suitable medium, to warn the people of an impending raid.

In old Semitic records the evil spirits or *jinn* loom very large; they are usually referred to as devils in the [23]Old Testament. They have no continuous or fixed personal relations with mankind, but have their own particular haunts in desert places, caves, and so forth. They are, so to speak, outlaws; they appear to man either in human or animal form, and if one is killed, a solid carcass is believed to remain. Among the ancient Semites, the belief became very elaborate and survives to this day in out-of-the-way places. These unwholesome creatures were even classified more or less definitely as *jinni*, *ghouls*, *mared*, *lilith*, *sedim*, and so forth.

Among our African tribes this cult, however, has fortunately not developed to any great extent. It may, of course, have been forgotten, or it may have disappeared, but there are still a few traces of it left. A Kamba story, for instance, tells of two girls who took shelter in a cave during a storm. A centipede came in while they were there and the girls threw it outside. But the centipede was an evil spirit and revenged itself by closing up the entrance to the cave, so that the girls were starved to death. This story might have come straight from Central Arabia and be that of a *jinni*, the *sedim* of the Talmud, who were supposed to assume any form they wished. The deity or the ancestral spirit is appeased by means of sacrifice or libations, carried out either privately or communally according to the circumstances. A considerable amount of detailed information concerning these has been collected, which it may be interesting to compare with similar practices described in the Old Testament and other ancient literature.

The *aiimu ya Kitombo* referred to in "Ethnology of the A-Kamba" (p. 89), and the unnatural creature said to be seen at Manyani (p. 87, *op. cit.*), should also very probably be placed in this class.

The widespread prevalence of "taboo" among these tribes is very surprising, as it is a subject which is rarely mentioned and certainly never openly discussed. It has, nevertheless, reached a pitch of considerable [24]elaboration. The reason for many of the prohibitions is obvious, but that of others is extremely obscure.

The tribes under review have a very definite idea of prayer. Their appeals to the deity take place regularly at the sacred place, either on the occasion of sacrifice or when pouring out libations to the spirits. Examples of these are given later. This form of supplication is probably much more common than we are inclined to think. But it is no easy matter to induce people to give a definite enumeration of minor rites which they perform constantly and as a matter of course. The A-Kamba, for instance, when on a journey, and when leaving a spot where they have camped, throw a firebrand on their path and

pray that the party should reach its destination in safety and proceed together in amity. This is done by the head of the party, the next man throwing a few leaves on the firebrand and stepping on it. It is a pretty custom, although a European of the present day might consider it a somewhat strenuous method of expressing gratitude! But when people are constantly travelling through parts of a country infested with lions, and when their only protection from wild animals is a small camp fire, one can perhaps understand that they should think it advisable to keep on the right side of the deity.

At Kikuyu, a man was once seized with a sudden fit. When he recovered consciousness, he was given a little water. Before drinking it, he promptly poured a few drops in front of him, then on his right side, then on his left. This was meant as a kind of silent prayer of thanksgiving for recovery. He stated that it was his *muungu* who had attacked him thus.

Charms are also very common. Many of them are in the nature of sympathetic magic, whilst others are merely a form of perpetual prayer, or rather, of materialised prayers. A German missionary, named Brutzer, gives a good example, and describes the charms worn by a Kamba friend; one was worn round his neck to [25]protect him against witchcraft in general; on his wrist was a bracelet containing a charm which would warn him should there be poison in any beer which might be offered to him; if his hand shook on raising the gourd to his lips, it would be a sign of poison. From his elbow two pieces of wood were suspended to protect him from snake bites. And hanging from his waist was a chain to ensure riches.

There are also charms against infection; these are carried by a man when visiting a sick friend. There are charms worn when going to war, charms worn when love-making, to ensure the return of affection. The charms usually consist of powdered wood, roots and herbs. The advice of a medicine man is sought and he recommends a certain plant or tree. Grain is taken to the plant or tree indicated, and six times a single grain is thrown at

the tree, the remainder of the grain being thrown the seventh time only. This possibly signifies a sacrifice to the spirit of the tree. The plant is then dug up, or a piece of wood cut off the root of the tree and dried and powdered. Sometimes a firebrand and water are taken to the tree; in this case, the water is placed on the ground, and the supplicant, closing his eyes, walks six times round the tree, then stands under it, facing east, and prays, with eyes still closed: "Tree, I have a favour to ask—I have a sick child or wife or brother"—as the case may be—"and know not the origin of his sickness, as he has no trouble with anyone. I come to ask a favour. I come to you, O Tree, to treat him for it that he may be cured."

According to some of the missionaries, the natives believe that the fate of each individual from birth to death is decided beforehand; they believe, in fact, in predestination. I myself have discovered no trace of this. A native will sometimes say of a bad character, "Oh, he was born a bad lot," but this seems to me too vague a statement to serve as the basis of a theory. Conscience does not loom very large as a rule. The [26]Reverend Hoffman, who lived for many years in Kitui, however, quotes a saying which undoubtedly shows that the natives have some faint notion of the meaning of it: "*Aka nwa Engai*" or "God will find him." Thus do the Kamba refer to an evil-doer.

The Kamba account of creation is very vague. The first man is said to have been produced by the high god *Engai* out of an ant-hill by the sea, and from him all men are descended. He is referred to as *imuuma ndi* (he who came out of the earth).

According to the Reverend Hoffman, there is a saying that "the bird was created on the fifth day, and the *imundu mwei* on the sixth day." No further explanation of this curious saying is given. The ordinary meaning of *mundu mwei* is "man of power or wisdom," and it is used of the medicine man. But in the saying above quoted, it probably refers to mankind generically as opposed to other animals.

Generally speaking, the tribes under consideration attribute the existence of the world and of its inhabitants to creation by *Engai*. Very little abstract spirituality is to be found in their religion. Almost everything is concrete, and, according to their point of view, strictly logical. The same is probably true of all religions appertaining to human beings on a similar plane of culture.

This aspect of religion is a great snare to the European student. Being the product of a far more complex environment and having been brought up under the influence of religions of a higher type, he finds it extremely difficult to avoid either reading more into a ceremony than actually exists, or, on the other hand, he is apt to overlook some apparently trivial point which may be of deep significance to the worshipper. [27]

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CHAPTER I

SPIRIT BELIEFS

Ancestral Spirits.—The belief in the vitality of the ancestral spirits is very strong among both the Kikuyu and the Kamba peoples; the former call them *Ngoma* and the latter *Aiimu* (singular *Imu*). The A-Kamba declare that the life breath *ngo* becomes the *Imu*. Curiously enough, the disembodied spirit was called *Edimmu* by the ancient Assyrians (according to R. C. Thompson in “Semitic Magic”), and they also believed that the soul could return to earth and that ghosts were responsible for many body ills.

Under ordinary circumstances, when a person died and was duly buried his soul entered the underworld, “the house of darkness, the seat of the god *Irkalla*, the house from which none come forth again.” This would seem to correspond to the Sheol of the Hebrews.

The Assyrian word *Edimmu* (the root of which is *immu*) is practically identical with the Kamba word for the same conception, but there is no evidence to show that the identity is anything but accidental.

The belief in the ancestral spirit is merely a form of the belief in a soul, with the difference that the present-day religions of the civilised world would not admit that the spirits of the departed could interfere with the life of man. We still find traces of this belief in Europe in the Feast of All Souls, and in curious ceremonies which take place in some countries on St John’s Eve. [28]

The Yezidis of Mesopotamia believe that the spirits of the good inhabit the air, whilst the Kikuyu believe that the ancestral spirits live underground, and the Kamba that they inhabit certain sacred fig trees. This latter belief would seem to be particularly widespread. It is prevalent all over India, and examples of it are to be found at most places along the east coast of Africa.

The Kikuyu will tell you that there is only one *ngoma* or spirit for each person, and that women as well as men possess it. Cattle are said to have no *ngoma*, but sometimes they may become possessed with that of human beings, and an evil spirit will now and again enter their body in the hope of destroying the poor beast. An

animal so possessed is easily recognised by its peculiar behaviour; it goes about shaking its head, and tears stream from its eyes. This spirit may be of the same nature as the evil demons of Semitic mythology. The Kikuyu declare that it can be driven out by getting the possessed animal to sniff the smoke of a fire made of the dry fruit of the tree known as *Kigelia musa*. They believe that the high god *Engai* can control the actions of the *ngoma*, and they sometimes go to a sacred fig tree, *mugumu*, and beseech *Engai* to protect the people from evil spirits.

It is said that the *ngoma* of a murdered man flies straight back to his father's village and, as a rule, hovers around it; but, should the murderer run away and hide, the *ngoma* of his victim will often pursue and haunt him or else influence events in such a way that the guilty one will be discovered and handed over to the authorities, who will deal with him according to tribal law.

I endeavoured to find out from the elders whether the spirit or soul was supposed to be present in the body during life. But they declared that all they knew was that *ngere*, the life breath, was present during life, and between this and the soul they seemed to make no [29] difference. They believe, however, that it is dangerous to wake a man suddenly, as his *ngere* is away, and, in this semi-conscious condition, he is very apt to strike you if he should happen to have a weapon at hand.

They have quite a clear conception of the *ngoma* or spirit of the departed, the character of which is said to be similar to that of the person during his or her lifetime.

Unlike the people of Kavirondo, they have no fear of treading on a man's shadow.

There are no particular customs connected with suicide, although suicide is certainly not unknown among them. When people hang or stab or drown themselves they are supposed to have been possessed by a malevolent spirit.

The general attitude of the people towards the ancestral spirits has been described in the introductory chapter, and many concrete examples will be found in the accounts of the various ceremonies given later. The influence of these spirit beliefs among the Kamba people has been very clearly set forth by the Hon. C. Dundas in his paper on Kitui, *R.A.I.J.*, Vol. xliii, 1913, page 534 *et seq.*

A quotation from an Assyrian tablet some three thousand years old, which R. C. Thompson refers to in his "Semitic Magic," shows how slowly man changes:

"The Gods which seize (upon man)
Have come forth from the grave.
The evil wind gusts
Have come forth from the grave
To demand the payment of rites and pouring of libations.
They have come forth from the grave,
Have come like a whirlwind."

The author goes on to say: "Now if the attentions of its friends on earth should cease and the soul should find nothing to eat and drink, then it was driven by force of hunger to come back to earth to demand its due." This psalm-like utterance might equally well [30] have been made by a Kikuyu or a Kamba of the present day.

The intense desire of Africans for offspring is probably due to the fact that children are expected to sacrifice to the spirits of their dead parents, and the ghost of one who has left no posterity is therefore in a piteous plight. The spirits generally manifest themselves through certain women who, falling into a trance, give utterance to the message with which they are charged ("Ethnology of the A-Kamba," p. 86). This reminds one of Saul going to Endor to visit a woman with a familiar spirit (Sam. xxviii. 7).

Spirits are also said to manifest themselves and give messages to men in dreams.

The Kitui people say that sometimes when a snake, crawling outside a hut, is attacked, it will suddenly vanish, and they then know that it was the *imu* of a deceased person which had either assumed the form of a snake or entered the body of a snake. A few days afterwards, a woman will become possessed and fall into a state of semi-trance, and the *imu* will speak through her mouth and say: "I came into the village the other day, and So-and-so wanted to strike me." Whereupon the people think it just as well to sacrifice a goat to sooth the feelings of the injured spirit.

The Kamba people, unlike the Kikuyu, do not believe that spirits enter into *kimbu* or caterpillars.

When a hyæna comes and howls near a village, it is looked upon as an evil omen and as a token of death, and the beast is generally driven away and killed, if possible. They very probably believe that an evil demon has assumed the shape of a hyæna. In the Assyrian tablets mention is made of a spirit called *Alu* which slinks through the streets at night like a pariah dog and harms people.

There is a curious custom in Ukamba which throws some light on the spiritual beliefs of the people. If a young unmarried man is killed away from his village, his *imu* or spirit will return there and speak to the people [31] through the medium of an old woman in a dance (see p. 86, author's work on the A-Kamba), and say, "I am So-and-so speaking, and I want a wife." The youth's father will then make arrangements to buy a girl from another village and bring her to his, and she will be mentioned as the wife of the deceased, speaking of him by name. She will presently be married to a brother of the deceased, but she must continue to live in the village where the deceased had his home.

If at any time the corporeal husband beats or ill-treats her, and she in consequence runs away to her father, the *imu* of the deceased will come and pester the people of the village and they will have bad luck; it will probably ask, through the usual medium, why his wife has been ill-treated and driven away. The head of the family will then take steps to induce the girl to return for fear of the wrath of the spirit of his deceased son.

To those who wish to obtain full insight into the sociology of these people, it is of the utmost importance to have a clear understanding of the native's point of view, and to bear in mind that the ancestral spirits are a very real and vital thing to him and have a very deep influence upon his life.

The leaders of psychical research allege that the survival of human personality after death has been scientifically proved, and that, under favourable circumstances, communications from the dead have been received. If this be so, might it not be said that races on a lower plane of culture are possibly more sensitive to such influences and that their belief in the activity of the ancestral spirits is therefore not wholly unreasonable? The evidence for this, however, is at present quite insufficient to satisfy most, although we think that the question is one which deserves further consideration.

Tree Spirits.—When clearing a forest to make a cultivated field, the Kikuyu people generally leave a large and conspicuous tree in the clearing. Such a [32]tree is called *murema kiriti* and is believed to collect the spirits from all other trees which have been cut down in the vicinity. We have here an interesting example of animism, the spirits so collected being most emphatically declared to be tree, and not human spirits. Now if this tree shows signs of decay and is liable to be blown down, they decide to fell it. Before taking this step, however, they sacrifice a red ram at the foot of the tree, the ram being, as usual, killed by suffocation. The tree is then cut down, and when this is done, the elders take branches from two sacred bushes, *mukenya* and *muthakwa*, and plant them on each side of the stump of the fallen tree; two elders cut the *mukenya*, and two the *muthakwa*. The elders then say “*Nitukuria muti tutemeti*,” which means “We pray for this tree we have cut down,” and pour the melted tail-fat of the ram over the stump, smearing the *tatha* or stomach contents of the animal over the trunk of the fallen tree. The wood from such a tree can only be used by a senior elder, by a very old woman, or for the making of beehives. If young people were to use this particular fuel, they would become ill or die; old people are supposed to be ordinarily immune against the operation of most curses or *thahu*. It is believed that when a tree is cut down the spirits leave it and settle in another big tree, and, if the above ceremonial is observed, they are not angry and do not vent their spite upon the people, or, as they say, no *thahu* falls upon them. If such a tree blows down, the spirits are supposed to avenge themselves on the elders, who are held responsible for not having taken the necessary precautions, and they are very apt to die.

There is great similarity between this and the lore concerning the spirit of the oak, mentioned by Professor Frazer. And, from a different point of view, it may also be considered as an example of the slaying of the divine king, expressed in terms of trees: fear that harm may befall the spirit or spirits of the tree, and the consequent ceremonial killing of the tree and [33]arranging for the comfortable and formal migration of the spirits to another tree, or to a new dwelling place.

The A-Kamba of Kibwezi have a similar belief: before cutting down a big solitary tree in a clearing, an elder and a very old woman must pour beer and corn at its foot. The man pours out the beer, and the woman the corn. The tree is then felled, and, taking a branch from it, they place it against another tree some little distance away, and declare that the spirit of the fallen tree will then go quietly into its new abode.

In Ukamba of Ulu, Mr Osborne states that his people told him that to fell an *ithembo* tree would, of course, be considered absolute sacrilege, and according to tradition it was the felling of an *ithembo* tree on the Iveti Hills by an official of the I.B.E.A. Co. which gave rise to the attacks by the A-Kamba on the Government Station at Machakos in about 1892.

Large trees, however, which are not *ithembo* trees appear to have a certain sanctity, and when, for reasons of utility or safety, the felling of such trees becomes necessary the following ceremony is practised:

The trunk of the tree to be felled is plastered with the sap of the *waithu* shrub as a *ng̃nondu*.

A small branch of the tree is broken off and placed against some smaller tree in the vicinity.

Some earth at the foot of the tree is also taken and placed at the foot of the smaller tree.

The elders then assemble with some beer at the tree to be cut down, and a little of the beer is poured out at the foot of the doomed tree, accompanied by some such prayer as—“We give this beer as a gift to the *Engai*, if one lives here, and ask him to go to another tree.”

The rest of the beer is then drunk by the assembled elders.

The larger parts of the tree are taken by the elders of *ithembo* to manufacture into honey barrels, whilst [34]the rest is carried off as firewood by the women entitled to sacrifice at the *ithembo*.

Non-observance of this ceremony is supposed to bring death on the man who cuts the tree down, and on all who make use of the timber.

Miscellaneous Spirit Worship.—There are some traces of the belief in river spirits. For instance, at places where there are waterfalls like on the Chania and Thika, the elders, in passing, will spit into the river or throw a little grass into it.

There is a sacred rock near Thembigwa, close to a stream called Kichii—a tributary of the Ruaraka—where the natives pluck tufts of grass as they pass by and throw

them on the rock.

If a tree has blown down and fallen across the path, grass is again placed on the fallen trunk. Sometimes, too, stones are laid on a fallen tree. When people come upon the skull of a dead elephant in the bush, they also place grass on it.

The origin of all these customs appears to be lost.

Certain plants are believed to be maleficent, and are possibly thought to be connected with bad spirits. There is a creeper called *mwinyuria*, which is said to possess sap like blood; the story is told how one day, near Kirawa, three men named Nbota, Kigonde, and Kacheru, cut one of these plants which was growing near a sacred fig tree, and died the same day. When cut, the released end is alleged to spring out like the lash of a whip. This creeper is rare in Kikuyu, but is said to be common in the Kibwezi bush.

The Scapegoat.—The Kikuyu have a ceremony which appears to be an undoubted example of a belief which may be grouped with the Semitic doctrine of the scapegoat.

If a serious epidemic visits a village, the elders take a ram, a he-goat or a ewe lamb which has not yet borne, *mwati*, and slaughter it at the village. They cut pieces of meat from the carcass and impale them on wooden skewers, *ndara* or *njibe*. The men and [35] women of the village then each take a piece, walk away some distance from the village and throw it into the bush. They firmly believe that the disease will be carried away with the pieces of meat.

The remaining meat is roasted at a fire and eaten by the villagers; the bones are collected at the place where the meat was roasted and are broken up and the marrow extracted and eaten. Beer is prepared, and next morning at dawn, some is poured on the bones and the hyenas come and carry off the fragments.

When they pour the libation of beer on the place of the fire, they pray as follows: “*Twa oria ichua twa oria murimu utika choke muchi*”—which means, “We put out the fire at the place where we roasted the meat, we put out the sickness so that it cannot return again to our village.”

Everyone must be awakened before the beer is poured out. The beer is put into an ox-horn and into a piece of gourd, *ndayi*, the former being held in the right hand and the latter in the left. The beer in the right hand is poured out first to appease the male *ngoma*, that in the left to appease the female *ngoma*.

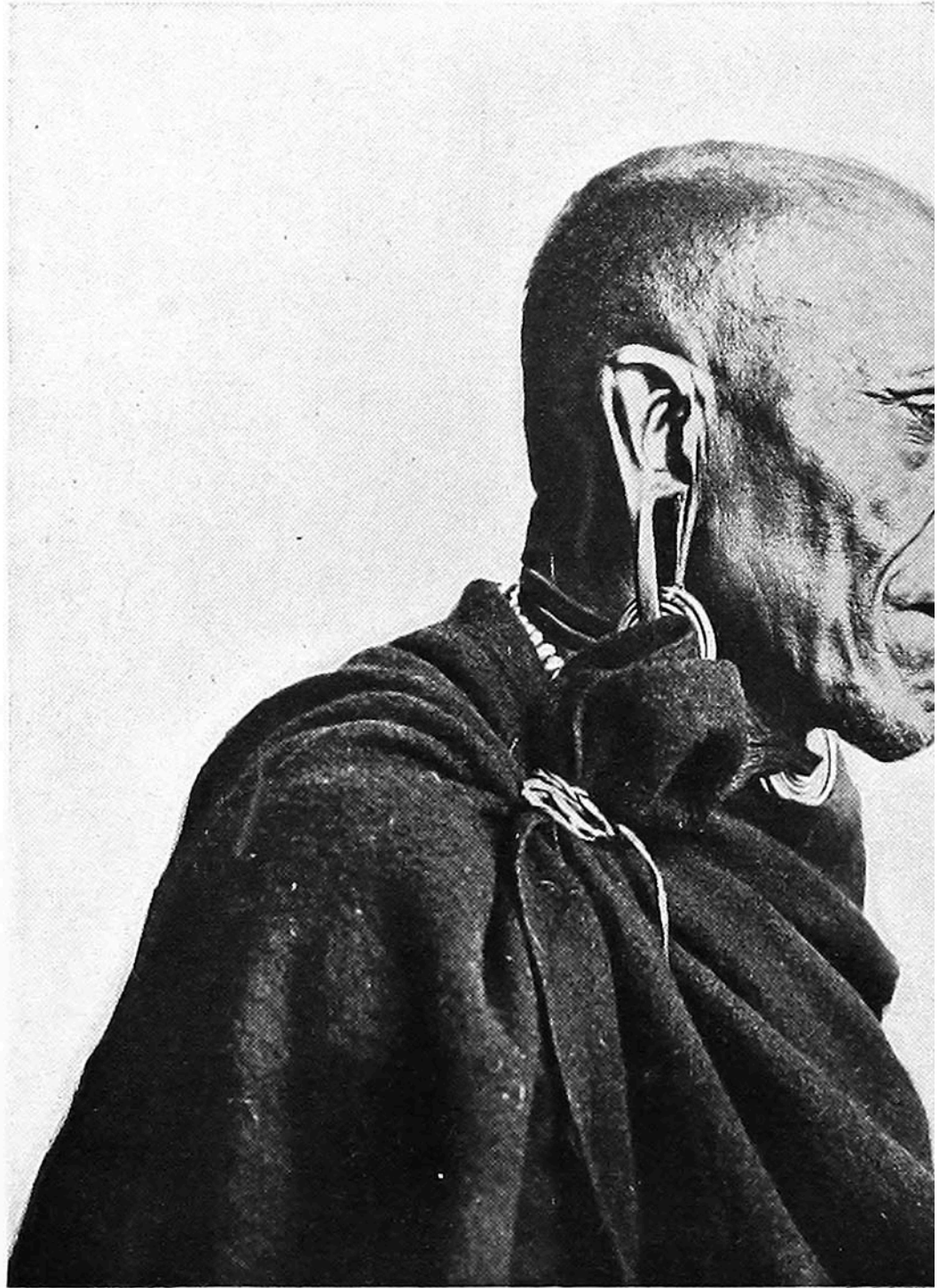
From the ceremony taking place at the village it is clear that the people believe that the ancestral spirits alone require to be propitiated.

The Scapegoat Idea in Kitui.—If a village is afflicted by a serious sickness, the headman will call in a medicine man who concocts some medicine by grinding up the roots of the following plants: *muthumba*, *kiongoa* (an aloe), *mulema*, *nthata*, *kivumbu*, and *mutaa*. A small boy and girl are then chosen from among the inhabitants, the villagers all congregate together, and the small boy leads a goat twice round the group, followed by the little girl and led by the medicine man; the party then passes through the centre of the group of people. The medicine man next makes an incision in the right ear of the goat, and the blood from this is allowed to drip into a half gourd containing the above-mentioned magical [36]concoction, mixed with water. The villagers then form up into a procession and, led by the medicine man, run for some distance into the bush towards the setting sun, no one being allowed to look backwards. The medicine man then stops and throws the mixture of medicine and blood in front of him, and the people return. This ceremony is performed in the early afternoon, after two p.m. That night, the village head must cohabit with his wife. This point is considered a matter of such importance that the elder has to take the *kithito* oath that it has been done.

A Kikuyu Oracle.—There lives in South Kikuyu-land an elder named Kichura or Thiga wa Wairumbi wa Kaumo of the Kachiko clan and the Njenga generation or *rika*, who is credited with the extraordinary power of being the recipient of messages from the Supreme Being, and in consequence possesses the gift of prophecy. He was interviewed and cross-examined by the writer, and stated that at intervals, about twice a year, during the night, he falls into a deeper sleep than usual, a trance in fact, and that while in this condition he is taken out of his bed and statements are made to him by a voice, but he cannot see who gives him the message. The trance always occurs at night, and he is generally taken outside his house while in this cataleptic condition, but says that he never remembers being able to distinguish the huts or any familiar objects in the village. The interior of the hut appears to him to be lighted up, and the message comes with a booming sound which he understands.

He stated that one day when visiting an elder named Kibutu, he was seized during the night and taken bodily through the thatch of the roof, and was found on the top of the hut next morning. On another occasion a young man of the warrior class, *mwanake*, belonging to his village, was sleeping alongside him in his hut when he was temporarily carried off, and the young man's hair all came off as if it had been shaved, and in the morning it was found lying in a heap on [37]the floor by the bed, the owner having no idea how this had occurred.





KIKUYU.

TYPICAL MUTHURI YA UKURU.

(Elder of the grade of priest)

He does not sleep in an ordinary hut with his wife, but in a *thengira* or bachelor hut with another elder. When he is seized with one of his trances the other elder will wake up and find he has gone, but does not see him go or return.

The day following one of his seizures he collects the elders and delivers his message. He states that after one of these seizures he is very exhausted, and for three days cannot rise from his bed. His father and paternal grandfather had this gift or power. His father told him that his paternal grandmother had three breasts, two on her bosom and one on her back, but he did not say whether he considered that this had any connection with the other phenomena.

He stated that he believed the gift came from God and not from the *ngoma* or ancestral spirits, and that if he did not deliver to the people the messages he received he would be stricken with sickness. He says that he was invested with this power when he was a stripling, soon after he had been circumcised. One morning he woke up with his two hands tightly clasped, and he passed blood instead of urine for nine days. A big medicine man named Wangnendu was then called in, a goat was killed, and the medicine man tied *rukwaru* bracelets of the skin on to the patient's wrists. The hæmaturia then stopped, and his hands relaxed, and he was able to open them, and it was found that he had fifteen *mbugu* in each hand. These are white stones such as are used in a medicine man's divination gourd. The medicine man then brought a small medicine gourd and placed the *mbugu* therein.

Kichura still has the gourd with the thirty *mbugu*, and relates how on one occasion his hut was burnt down and his gourd was destroyed in the fire, but that the *mbugu* were found quite uninjured in the ashes. He was asked whether he considered that his powers were intimately connected with these stones; he declared [38] that he did not believe he could lose them, but if by some mischance, however, they should be lost God would give him some more, and that even if they were lost he would receive oracles as before.

He gave examples of the kind of messages he received. On one occasion, some time before the advent of Europeans, he was told that the Masai would be severely stricken with small-pox, and that subsequently many would settle among the Kikuyu, and shortly afterwards it happened accordingly. On another occasion he was told that a white race would enter the country and that they and the Kikuyu would live side by side in this country, and now it has come to pass.

He was seized before the great famine of 1900 and foretold its arrival. Later, he was told to inform the Kikuyu to sacrifice a white sheep, a red sheep, and a black male goat at the *mugumu*, sacred fig trees, and that the chief Kinanjui was to sacrifice a *mori*, white heifer, at the head waters of the Mbagathi River. These orders were obeyed, and the famine and small-pox were lifted from the land.

Early in the present season he was told that the maize and other grains would be lost by drought, and that the food now being planted (April, 1911) would come to a good harvest. He was also told that during the present year the young people would suffer greatly from dysentery, and that they were to sacrifice sheep at the sacred fig trees, and that the women and children were to put bracelets from the skins of the sacrificed sheep on their wrists. Many have done so, and those who have obeyed will escape the visitation. After this he says that small-pox will come from the west of the country, and attack people from Karuri's (east slopes of Nandarua Mountain) to Limoru. The disease will gradually work its course eastward and decrease in intensity. When he delivers one of his oracular utterances the *athuri ya kiama*, elders of the council, bring him a sheep and a gourd of beer. He kills the former [39] and eats it, and the beer is returned to the elders to drink.

He says that sometimes when rain does not come he is accused of stopping it, but that such accusations are due to ignorance, as he is merely the unconscious and involuntary agent for utterances from a Supreme Power, and that all he can do in such cases is to take a sheep to a sacred fig tree, sacrifice it there, and pray for rain, just like any other elder who is qualified to do so.

In Ukamba, many years ago, a famous medicine man, Kathengi by name, is said to have prophesied the coming of the white men and their domination of the country.

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CHAPTER II

SACRIFICE

Although this rite has often been referred to and described in a somewhat desultory way by various writers, it seems to have received very little serious attention. The subject is, however, one which undoubtedly contains many features of great interest and is certainly deserving of special examination and study. There is little doubt that if we can only fully understand the relations of a people to their gods we have advanced a long way towards a realisation of their moral and intellectual development.

It is first proposed to examine the Kikuyu ceremonial.

Among this tribe sacrifice is of two kinds:

(1) The sacrifice at the sacred fig tree, or *mugumu*, which is always intended as an act of communion with a deity or high god called *Engai*.

This sacrifice may be either a communal rite, or it may be a personal matter for the head of a village.

(2) The other sacrifice is carried out in a village and is intended as an offering to the spirits of the ancestors who are supposed to live underground. This may be either a communal or an individual act.

Dotted about Kikuyu are numbers of great wild fig trees (*Ficus capensis*), many of which are used from generation to generation as sacred shrines or places of sacrifice, called *mugumu* or *muti wa Engai*.

Certain big medicine men like Njau wa Kabocha have special trees; it appears that the original choice [41] of a tree as a sacred place devolved on certain notable medicine men, and if a sacred tree happens to fall owing to age, the elders assemble there and sacrifice a ram and a male goat; they eat one half and leave the other half of each carcase at the tree and pour the fat over the stump of the fallen tree to appease the deity.

It is then the duty of the local magician and the elders of *ukuru* to choose another tree. They sacrifice at the new tree, and if their prayers are answered they know that it is acceptable to *Engai*, but, if after several trials no result is obtained, they dedicate another to the service of *Engai*.

The idea of sacrilege is very marked. If, for instance, an impious person cuts a portion of a sacred tree, dire results are believed to ensue, and the elders make the offender pay a ram and a male goat. These are sacrificed at the tree, and the elders apply a strip of the skin to the place where the incision was made in the tree and anoint it with fat and the *tatha* or stomach contents. The breast of the ram is cut off and hung in the tree, and the remainder of the carcass and the whole of the carcass of the goat, eaten by the elders.

No beast or bird can be killed or shot in a sacred tree. The sacred tree and its environs is often called *Kithangaona chainja*, which means the “sacred place of the ceremonies.” On the occasion of a sacrifice the elders of *ukuru* send word to the elders of *Athamaki* or *Athuri ya mburi nne* or elders of four goats and any senior to that grade, saying *tuthieni mutini*—“Let us go to the tree.” No elder whose father is alive can attend. No elder must go to the tree in a state of anger; no one must display anger with a wife, child, or even a stranger the day before he attends at the tree.

Elders of both of the circumcision guilds go together to the sacred tree and also elders of all clans.

If two elders, or their people, have a blood feud they are not allowed to attend or take part in a sacrifice [42] at the sacred tree until the feud is at an end; if they do, they are supposed to die.

A person who is alien to the tribe, but who has been formally admitted to it, may attend a sacrifice.

Oaths or ordeals are not administered at the sacred tree.

Strict celibacy must be observed the night before they go to sacrifice and the night after. The night before, they sleep in their usual huts, but the night after, they sleep in the *thengira* or goat hut. The morning following the sacrifice they go and bathe in a river and then resume their ordinary life.

A departure from this rule of celibacy by anyone present will entirely spoil the efficacy of the sacrifice, and, if an offender is discovered, he will have to pay a fine of two goats, and the elders will spit on him ceremonially and sacrifice afresh on the following day.

Arms must not be taken to the sacred tree. The elders wear their usual garments.

The following things are collected on the day before the sacrifice at the village of the elder who provides the sacrificial ram, and that night they stay at his village:

2 gourds of honey beer.

2 gourds of sugar cane beer.

1 cooking pot.

1 half gourd.

1 small knife for skinning the sacrifice and making the incision to bleed it.

The sacrifice is always a ram, and it is called *ngorima*. One year it will be black, but if that particular year the seasons are not propitious they consider that the deity is displeased and therefore change the colour, choosing either a red or a white one.

In former times a he-goat was said to be sacrificed before going to war. The ram must have the clan mark on its ears, and must also have had its tail cut. [43]

The provision of the sacrificial animals is settled by the elders, who pick the donors by rotation. At a specially important sacrificial ceremony, however, an important medicine man is called in and decides who shall provide the ram.

The proper time for a communal sacrifice is about two p.m., but private sacrifices take place at nine a.m.


It is said that the later time is usual for a communal sacrifice because it takes some time for elders who live far away to reach the place.

When the assembly arrives at the tree, one of the elders lifts up the ram into a standing position on its hind legs, facing the tree. This is called *Kurugamia ngorima mugumuini*—"To stand the ram before the tree." The idea is probably to show the sacrificial animal ceremonially to the deity.

Only senior elders are allowed to go to the actual foot of the tree, and the elders of the four goat grade collect the wood for the *ichua* fire.

A gourd of honey and one of sugar cane beer are then poured into the ground at the base of the tree and the elders call out: “*Twa kuthaitha Engai twa kuhoia mburi twa kuhoia indo chiothi*”—“We pray to God, we sacrifice a goat, we offer all things.”

It is curious that they use the word *mburi*, which really signifies a goat, whilst the Kikuyu use the word *mburi* in a collective sense, which, in this way, often refers to sheep as well as goats.

The sheep is then suffocated by clamping its muzzle. As soon as it is insensible, but before it is actually dead, its throat is pierced by the sacrificial knife and the blood is collected in the half gourd called *kinga*, mentioned above. The blood is then poured out at the foot of the sacred tree, cf. [Exodus xxix. 10](#) : “And thou shalt slay the ram and thou shalt take his blood and sprinkle it round about upon the altar.” The animal can be strangled by any elder present, and it does not appear to be the duty of any particular person to pierce the animal’s throat. It is said that [44]the animal is strangled so that its life breath should not escape. A sheep killed for food is also strangled, but an animal which has its throat cut can also be eaten.

Should an ox be killed, it is stabbed at the back of the neck, but an ox is said never to be offered as a sacrifice.

The right half of the carcass is then skinned, that portion being cut away and removed, and the left half wrapped in the skin and placed at the foot of the tree and left there. This is believed to be eaten by a hyæna or wild cat which is moved to do so by the deity.

A fire is then lit at a little distance from the tree and the pieces of meat from it are stuck on skewers, roasted and eaten by the elders. In olden times this fire was always supposed to be kindled from new fire made by friction, but nowadays a firebrand is often brought from a village, or better still from a fire in a garden.

The place at which this sacrificial fire is kindled is called *ichua*. The meat is laid on the branches of certain sacred trees, viz:

Muthakwa.


Nahoiŋa.

Muthigio.

Muguŋu.

Marabŋa.

which are collectively termed *mathinjiro*. The skewers used for roasting the meat are called *ndara*, and must be of *muthakwa* and *muthigio* wood. The branches and the skewers have to be burnt in the sacred fire on the same day as that on which the meat is cooked. The burning of these is said to be in the nature of a prayer to *Engai*, and it is specifically stated that this is not done for fear of anyone using these branches and skewers as fuel as everyone would dread touching them.

When the meat is cooked, it is eaten by the elders, who each drink a horn of beer. The fat of the ram is [45]boiled down in the cooking pot provided for the purpose, and one of the elders climbs into the sacred tree, and pours the liquid fat on to the main stem of the tree. The breast of the ram is often cut out and also hung up in the tree. Cf. [Exodus xxix. 26](#) : “And thou shalt take the breast of the ram and wave it for a wave offering before the Lord.” The bones of the portion of the sacrificial ram eaten by the elders are each broken into two parts and placed at the foot of the tree, the marrow not being extracted. Not a single piece of the meat may be taken back to the villages. The elders then retire some little distance away and chant as follows: “*Tathai Engai mwangi utue mbura*”—“We *Mwangi* elders pray God to give us rain.”

If, of course, the sacrifice is for another object the prayer is varied. After the prayer no man must look back at the tree. Each man returns to his village. Next morning the principal wife of each elder goes to the tree and deposits at its foot offerings of uncooked bananas and various kinds of grain.


If, however, they notice that the sacrificial meat is untouched they do not deposit their offerings, but retire to some distance and call out to their husbands, telling them that *Engai* has refused the sacrifice. The elders assemble and send the women back with their offerings. They then select another elder and direct him to provide a fresh ram, which is sacrificed as before. They pray to *Engai* and beg him not to refuse their sacrifice a second time, as they have brought a fatter sheep. Their exhortation is: “*Tiga Engai kutumbia*”—“Beg God not to refuse.”

The women come again on the following morning, and, if the meat is eaten, they leave their offerings and return to their villages, chanting a pæan of joy as they go. The chant is called *Ngemi*, and is a form of what is usually known as “*ululu*ing.”

They sacrifice at the sacred trees to invoke rain, and they also sacrifice to check the progress of an epidemic, when they say: “*Kurinda murimo utikaoki* [46]*muji*”—“To stop the sickness that it may not come to the village.”

They sacrifice and pray for relief from famine: “*Kuoya mugumuini ng̃naragu ithire*”—“To pray at the *mugumu* tree that the hunger may finish.”

Here again a ram is sacrificed, but before the animal is killed an important magician pours medicine into its mouth, and also squirts beer from his own mouth into that of the ram.

Unlike other tribes, they neither shave their heads nor deposit offerings of hair at the sacred tree. It is said that sometimes lights are seen at night in a sacred tree, and the following day they hasten to sacrifice there. Every season, when the maize is just coming up, the elders summon the important medicine men to go with them to the sacred tree to sacrifice. One of the magicians pours medicine into the mouth of the sacrificial ram before it is killed, and also pours it on the fire on which the meat is roasted. The bones of the animal are then burnt in the fire. These are supposed to be burnt so that the smoke may ascend into the sacred tree and be pleasing to the deity. “It is a burnt offering to the Lord: it is sweet savour an offering made by fire unto the Lord” ([Exodus xxix. 18](#) ).

The blood is caught in a half gourd, *njeli* or *kinga*, and then placed in an ox horn; one half is poured at the foot of the sacred tree, the other half being mixed with tiny pieces of intestinal fat and placed in the large intestine of the sacrificial ram. This is roasted over the fire and eaten by the senior elders of *ukuru*. The mixture is called *ndunduru*.

Near the time of the harvest, when the crops are ripe, but before they are cut, the elders take a ram to the sacred place and slaughter it. They pour the blood at the foot of the tree and pray: “*Engai twaoka kukui enyama tutikarware enda twa getha iriu wega*”—“O God we have to bring meat so that we may not get ill, for we have good crops and are glad.”

The elders then eat the meat. After the feast, [47]they take the *tatha* or stomach contents of the sacrificial ram and sprinkle it over the ripe crops, and also sprinkle some over the *mukumbi* or big wicker bottles in the grain huts and over the big gourds in which grain is stored. It is believed that if the elders failed to do this, the people would suffer greatly from diarrhoea. The last two rites are evidently rudimentary forms of the ancient Semitic ritual of the offering of the firstfruits, or cereal oblation. The sprinkling of the crops and of the grain receptacles with *tatha* indicate either a conservation of the crop for human consumption, or a purification of it from all influences which might be harmful to the consumers. The latter is probably more in accordance with their line of thought.

On the particular day when sacrifices for rain are offered, no one may touch the earth with iron; not even a spear or sword may be rested on the ground, as the sacrifice would then be useless.

The Kamba have a somewhat similar belief, and think that to till the soil with iron drives away the rain.

Among the Kikuyu, however, the ground on such days must not be struck by anything, and an elder may not even strike his *mithege* staff into the ground in the usual way.

Sacrifices for good crops are also made at the *mugumu* trees by medicine men. On the same day, a *mwanake* (a young man of warrior age) patrols the whole district (ridge) with a torch, which he finally throws on the ground. No one may then come from another ridge or leave the ridge to go to another.

Sanctuary.—The ancient idea of a sanctuary at a holy place is known to the Kikuyu. If a murderer, or a person who has committed a serious crime, runs to a sacred place and touches the tree, he is safe from vengeance. The criminal cannot, of course, stay indefinitely at the tree or he would starve, but the elders come and take him away, and his life is safe. He cannot, however, re-enter a village, and his clans-men [48]have to go to the tree and sacrifice a ram, which they are supposed to offer in exchange for him. He is smeared with the *tatha*, and a line of white earth, *ira*, is drawn from his forehead to the tip of his nose by a senior elder, of *ukuru*. After which he is *tahikia*, or ceremonially purified, and can return to his family. All the meat of the sacrifice is eaten by the elders, and none is left at the tree. Some of

the *tatha*, however, is sprinkled at the foot with the object of purifying the spot where the criminal stood. In a case of this sort the criminal does not pay blood money himself, but his blood relatives have to pay for him. If in war an enemy were pursued and took sanctuary at a sacred place, he could not be attacked whilst he was there, but would probably be seized and killed at some distance from the sacred place.

If, again, a man should kill a tribesman, he can run to the house of his victim's father and, by confessing his crime, obtain sanctuary there. The father will then kill a ram and place a strip of skin on the right wrist of the homicide, who must have his hand shaved and be ceremonially purified by a medicine man—*tahikia*, as it is termed. He will henceforth become as the son of the deceased's father.

Private Sacrifice to the Deity.—The head of a village usually has a private sacred tree at which he sacrifices to the deity for good fortune or for assistance in times of trouble.

The ceremony described by Routledge—"A Prehistoric People," pages 232–734—is a private sacrifice to the deity.

As we have said before, women are not allowed to attend a sacrifice to the deity at one of the regular sacred trees. But at a private sacrifice for good fortune, carried out at a sacred tree belonging to a particular village, the village elders attend with their wives and children, their cattle, sheep and goats.

The sacrificial ram is killed, and the whole family, as well as flocks and herds, are smeared with fat. [49]The party then returns home, uttering the usual African cry of joy, sometimes called "*ululu*ing" which the Kikuyu term *ngemi*.

The women and children are not actually allowed to come near the tree, but must remain some little distance away. The people belonging to the Masai circumcision guild use *muzigio*, *mutumaiyu* (*Olea chrysophylla*), or *mugumu* trees for their private sacrifices. They would probably begin with a *mutumaiyu* or *muzigio* tree, and if the luck was not good they would change to a *mugumu*. Those belonging to the Kikuyu guild use either *mugumu* or *muthakwa* trees.

In a private sacrifice, the skin of the sacrificial ram is taken back to the village and presented to the head wife of the elder, but this is never done at a public communal

sacrifice.

The night before the sacrifice, the elders of the village sleep in their own huts, but must observe celibacy. The night after, they sleep in the goat hut or *thengira*.

For two days before and after a sacrifice, no stranger is allowed to sleep in a village; nothing is sent out of the village to sell, and nothing is allowed to be carried away. If a stranger comes, he can be fed, but he must eat the food there and not take it away. At both a public and private sacrifice the eyes of a ram must be very carefully removed from the carcass, for it is considered an extremely bad omen if an eye should burst during extraction, and a fresh sacrificial ram then has to be provided.

Two days after a private sacrifice, ceremonial beer drinking takes place at the village, the men drinking together in the goat hut, or *thengira*, and the women in the hut of the principal wife; this is called a *kithangaona ya muchi*. During the ceremony they pray to the deity: “*Twa thuitha Engai utue endo chiothi chiana na mburi na ngombe*”—“We pray thee, O God, that you will give us all things, children, goats, and cattle.” [50]

On the morning of the day following a private sacrifice the wives go to the sacred tree and deposit offerings of grain, bananas, and other things.

Sacrifice to Ancestral Spirits.—In addition to the sacrifice at the sacred trees to the deity *Engai*, the Kikuyu sacrifice to the *ngoma*, or ancestral spirits. These rites, however, never take place at the sacred trees, but in a village, close to the village shrine.

The animal sacrificed is a ram. It is killed in the same way as those sacrificed to the deity, the carcass being laid upon branches from certain sacred trees, viz:

Mukuyu—*Ficus* sp:

Mutumaiyu—*Olea chrysophylla*.

Muthakwa—*Vernonia* sp:

Mutare.

Mugumu—*Ficus capensis*.

The branches are called *mathinjiro*.

Four skewers, *ndara*, are cut from each of the above species, and the pieces of meat which are eaten are impaled upon the skewers and roasted at a fire specially kindled for the purpose, called *ichua* and *muzigia*. *Mutumaiyu* or *makuri* wood must be used.

The branches on which the meat has rested, as well as the skewers, must be burnt the same day in the fire on which the meat was cooked. Early next morning, before sunrise, beer is poured on the spot.

The *ichua* fire was formerly kindled on the spot from new fire made by friction, but nowadays it is supposed to be brought from a village.

These sacrifices generally take place at about nine a.m.

An elder usually sacrifices a ram every three months or so at the grave of his father. He pours blood, fat, and beer upon it and leaves the skin there.

If the father died away from home, on a journey, the son proceeds some distance along the road by which the father left and sacrifices a ram by the roadside. [51]The son and his wives eat the meat of the sacrifice, but a wife married after the father's death, as well as the man's children, are not allowed to touch it.

The sacrifice must take place before sunrise. This would seem to be a very common feature in many ancient sacrifices, and some authorities consider that it may be in some way connected with the worship of Venus, the morning star. It is, of course, a difficult question to settle, but I would venture to suggest that it is more likely to have some connection with the idea that ancestral spirits are more active at night, and therefore more appreciative of attention, and that they lapse into inaction with the sunrise.

There appears to be no particular day in the month for the celebration of these sacrifices.

If, on the occasion of a sacrifice at the sacred tree, the elders chance to see a snake, they say that it is a *ngoma*, or ancestral spirit, which has taken the form of a snake, and endeavour to pour a little of the blood from the sacrificial ram on its head, back, and tail.

If the owner of the village should meet a large caterpillar, called *thatu*, near the gate, he pours a little fat and milk in its path; if it turns back, all is well. If, on the other hand, it should walk round the spot where the fat, and so forth, was poured, and still come on towards the village, the people know that it is a spirit which has assumed the form of a caterpillar, and a ram is sacrificed in the village. If one of these caterpillars is found in a food hut, a ram is again sacrificed for the same reason.

Should anyone set fire to the grass or scrub on the spot where the dead are thrown out, spirits of the departed are supposed to be heard calling out. When this happens, the person who lit the fire gives a ram, which must be killed on the spot, and the elders of *ukuru* sprinkle the *tatha* all round to appease the *ngoma*.

Sometimes a spirit will come and call in a peculiar [52] way outside a village at night. The people believe that it is hungry, and next day sacrifice a ram.

The elders, when they eat, always throw a little food to the spirits before commencing their meal, and at a beer-drinking always pour a little beer on the ground to propitiate the spirits so that they may not harm them. Women, too, when they are cooking porridge or gruel, invariably throw some on the ground for the spirits.

Description of a Sacrifice at a Sacred Fig Tree in Kikuyu. (Witnessed by the Author.)—The elders first took some sugar cane and poured a little on each side and in front of the tree, praying at the same time. The sacrificial ram was then strangled, held up before the tree, and its throat pierced. The blood was collected in a cow's horn and a little poured out on each side of the tree and allowed to trickle down the trunk. At this stage of the proceedings another prayer was uttered.

A strip of skin and fat running from the throat of the carcase down to its belly, and including the genitals, was then cut off and hung up on a small branch projecting from the tree. The elders now prayed again. After this the ram was dismembered and the feast took place.

If the head of a village notices the appearance of disease among his flocks and herds, or among his people, he sacrifices at his own sacred tree. But he first of all

consults a *mundu mugo*, or medicine man, to find out whether the affliction comes from the high god or is due to the offended *ngoma*, or ancestral spirits. The medicine man throws his stones, and if, after sorting them into little heaps, the balance left is eight, he knows the trouble comes from the high god; if, on the other hand, the balance is seven, the trouble is attributed to the *ngoma* or ancestral spirits.

For a man, the heap consists of five stones, and for a woman three. [53]

The sacrificial ram is obtained from a neighbour.

If a bad storm comes and damages the crops, or if there is too much rain or a drought, a large assembly of elders is convened. They meet and sacrifice at the communal place of sacrifice, called the big *mugumu*.

Sacrifice among A-Kamba.—We will now examine the ceremonial connected with sacrifice among the A-Kamba, and principally among those of Kitui. These people have two kinds of sacred places, or *mathembo* (singular, *ithembo*).

(1) Sacred places for the whole country, or rather for each big division of the country, at which they pray and sacrifice to *Engai* or *Mulungu* for rain, and in the event of a pestilence among human beings and cattle.

(2) Sacred places for a group of two or three villages, where they pray to the *aiimu*, or ancestral spirits, on the occasion of sickness among people or cattle.

The holy places are almost always at a tree. For the first-mentioned a fig tree of the species known as *mumo* is chosen. For the village shrine, on the other hand, the tree may be either a *mumo*, fig tree, another variety of wild fig called *mumbo*, or a *mutundu* tree.

The mode of procedure of a sacrifice for rain at an *ithembo* of the first kind may be taken as an example, and the following description was given by a couple of leading elders:

On the day settled for the ceremony, the elders of *ithembo* assemble early in the morning, and at about nine a.m. proceed slowly to the sacred place, taking with them an *nthengi*, or male goat, usually black in colour, as well as milk, snuff, and a small quantity of every kind of produce which is grown.

The following were specified: *mbaazi* (cajanus), *mawele* (millet), *mtama* (sorghum), bananas, wimbi (penicillaria), sugar cane, beans, sweet potatoes, cassava, and pumpkins; also some sugar cane beer (honey beer is not allowed), red trade beads and [54]cowries, the leaves of a sweet smelling plant called *mutaa*, butter and gruel.


The men lead the goat and carry the milk, gruel, snuff, and beer, each one putting a little butter in the milk, whilst the other items are carried to the tree by the old women.

The women are not allowed to approach the tree, but dance together some distance away; as mentioned above, the ceremony commences at about nine a.m., and goes on till about two p.m., when the actual sacrifice takes place. The proceedings are not hurried, as some of the elders have to travel long distances before reaching the spot.

Six senior elders and six old women are selected, and all proceed to the tree; they can wear their loin cloths, but their blankets are taken off and left some distance away. The men go first and taste a little of the milk, gruel, and beer, which they spit out at the foot of the tree, and then give way to the old women who go through the same ceremony. The men again return to the tree and pour the balance of the milk and so forth at its foot. Each elder now puts some of the snuff in the palm of his hands, takes a little, and deposits the remainder. The women again come up and pour the foodstuffs at the foot of the sacred tree, the butter being smeared on it.

When the offerings are deposited, the officiating elders—one can almost call them priests—pray as follows: “*Mulungu chao ya nekeu twenda nbua na aka machisi na ngombe kisia na mbui kisia engai tupiengea muimu andu ma kakwe*”—“Mulungu, this is food. We desire rain and wives and cattle and goats to bear, and we pray God that our people may not die of sickness.”

The sacrifice of the goat comes next, but before this is done, they take the roots of two trees called *mriti* and *muthumba*, grind them together, mix them with water, and make the animal drink the mixture with a view to sanctifying it. This done, they lead the goat [55]up to the tree, stand it on its hind legs before the tree, or, as they say, “show” it; its throat is then pierced and the blood allowed to flow over the offerings previously enumerated. The carcass is skinned and an incision made from

the throat to the stomach. The upper portion of the skull with the horns is cut off and buried at the foot of the tree. The leg bones, however, must not be broken, but carefully disarticulated at the knee-joints and elbows. Small pieces of meat are cut from every part of the carcass and from every internal organ and deposited at the foot of the tree. The meat is then divided, the left shoulder and part of the back is given to the officiating old women, whilst the elders take the rest. (Cf. [Exodus xii. 46](#) : “The bones of the meat of the passover feast must not be broken.”)

Each party, male and female, lights a separate fire and eats, the selected officiating elders eating with their fellows. The fire must be made of the wood of a *mumo* tree, not that of the sacred tree, but of another of the same species. The six men and six women each impale a fragment of the meat on a skewer of *mumo* wood, roast and eat it. This is a ceremonial meal, and when it is over the remainder of the meat is divided up, and any kind of firewood can be used for cooking it.

The actual sacrifice of the goat is called *kutonya ng̃nondu*, to pierce the sacrifice. The mere word sacrifice, however, hardly expresses it, for the word *ng̃nondu* really implies purification, or perhaps expiation, the underlying idea being that the goat is an expiatory gift offered with the object of relieving the country from the effects of the deity's displeasure and of the consequent drought.

No work is done on the day following the sacrifice, and no cultivation is undertaken, neither any house building. A man may stroll over and see a friend close by, but he is not allowed to go on a real journey.

The night before the sacrifice the elders must ^[56]observe celibacy, as well as on the six following days, the day on which the sacred meat was eaten counting as the first.

No elder can participate in this ceremony if he has the stain of death on him; that is to say, if his wife or child has died, and the purification ceremonies connected with the event have not been completed; or again if he, or one of his men, has killed someone and the ceremonies for removing the bloodstain are not over. Any fighting or quarrelling or fighting among the people would also be likely to destroy the efficacy of the ceremony.

If a man breaks a stick from the sacred tree the elders at once fine him, and a bull or goat is sacrificed. The wound in the tree is anointed with butter, and milk is poured at its foot. Lights are sometimes seen at night in *mathembo*, but people very rarely go out to them while it is dark; those who have tried it declare that stones were thrown at them from the tree, and that these stones strike fire when they hit the ground. If a person be thus attacked, it is a sure sign that he is fitted for a medicine man.

Another account of the procedure was obtained from elders in a different part of the Ukamba country, and as this varies a little and contains a few additional details, it is considered advisable to describe it.

The day before the sacrifice, the women of the neighbourhood gather together and go to the sugar cane plantations, every woman bringing back two or three sticks of cane and taking them to the *thomi*, or village meeting place, of one of the elders, where they are crushed to make beer. In the evening, the elders of *ithembo* take the beer and place it near the sacred tree. They light a fire there with a firebrand from the village, and the gourds of beer are put near it; a little beer is also poured at the foot of the tree and they pray to the *imu* of the person to whom the tree is dedicated, and then return home. It is believed that the object of this ritual is to attract the attention of [57]the guardian spirit of the shrine, and to propitiate it and to ensure, as it were, its attendance on the morrow as the intermediary between the people and *Engai*.

In the morning, the elders of *ithembo* and certain very old women proceed to the *ithembo*. The elders bring the sacrificial beast and first suffocate it; they then quickly skin its throat, and the oldest of the elders stabs it in the neck with a knife, collecting the blood in a half gourd (*nzeli*). The skinning is then completed, and small pieces of meat are cut from the tongue, ribs, and the left flank. One kidney, one testicle, and a piece of the liver, heart, and every internal organ are also taken, all these fragments being placed in a half gourd. They then take a half gourd of beer, and the gourds containing the meat and the blood, and empty them at the foot of the tree. The old women now approach and deposit samples of every kind of field produce—beans, maize, and so forth—and milk. Some of the food is cooked and some is raw.

When the men deposit their offerings they pray as follows: “*Engai twaevoya mbua kuamba eyima sionthi Engai*”—“We pray to God that rain may bless all our country.”

The women merely say “*Twaevoya mbua*”—“We pray for rain.”

The sacrificial meat is then cooked and eaten. The first to partake of it are the four senior elders.

The fire for cooking the meat is lit a little away from the tree, and the fuel must consist of dry sticks picked up in the sacred grove. The fire having been lit, a small staging is built over it, and the pieces of meat are placed thereon to roast. The place of the fire is called *ivuvio*; the wood used for the framework is *muthakwa*; the sticks composing it are *mbatwa*, and the whole framework when completed is called *ndala*.

When removing the marrow the bones of the sacrificial animal must not be broken.

After the feast the bones are collected and placed [58] on the fire and covered with the stomach contents (*tatha* or *muyo*), and the smoke which rises to heaven is said to be pleasing to *Engai*.

A private sacrifice is called *kithangaona* by the Kamba people, its object being to purify a village from sickness. The ceremony is also termed *kuvindukia muimu*—“to cleanse the place from the spirit” (*ku-indukia*—to cleanse) and may possibly have an implied meaning to the effect that the spirit must be appeased.

Sometimes a woman who goes into a cataleptic condition, which is known as being seized by *aiimu*, will say that to obtain rain a beast of a particular colour must be sacrificed. A black goat is said to be preferable as a supplication for rain, the colour probably being symbolical of the rain clouds.

Sheep and goats, both male and female, are sacrificed, and also bulls and bullocks, but never a cow.

A black bullock is thought to be the most acceptable and a white sheep comes next, whilst many of the Kamba people consider a red animal bad for the purpose of sacrifice.

Sacred Places (Mathembo) in Ukamba.—Dotted about the country, near most of the older villages, there are sacred trees, representing private shrines, called *mathembo*. The sacrifice which takes place here is similar to that described above, but the proceedings do not take so long, as the assembly is smaller. There is no particular day of the month for such a ceremony, but it should not be performed in the months called *Nyanya* and *Kenda* (the month *Nyanya* in 1912 commenced on June 14th). *Ikumi* is suitable for a sacrificial ceremony, as it is then considered possible to prepare the fields for planting, in expectation of the rain which will fall as a result of the ceremony.

Four pieces of the stalk of the castor oil bush are planted at the foot of the sacred tree. If on a certain day a man brews beer, he visits the tree in the evening and pours a little of the beer into each of the castor [59]oil stems, and prays to the *aiimu*, saying, "I have made some beer, and this is your share; do not come into the village and bother us." The castor oil stalks are meant to imitate gourds of beer. It is customary to deposit at the tree a piece of the fruit of *Kigelia pinnata*, or *K. Musa* (called *miatini* and used in producing fermentation in beer), and the leaf of a *mumo* tree. They then say, "This is your *nzeli* to drink the beer from," the *nzeli* being a half gourd used as a drinking cup, and the *mumo* leaf in this case representing a *nzeli*. As these things decay, they are periodically renewed.

The people of a village utter a prayer when they see the new moon, begging that they may go safely through the month. This bears a close resemblance to the European habit of turning one's money and bowing nine times to the new moon. At the village *ithembo* beer is poured out, generally on the advice of a medicine man, when someone is ill in the village.



The sacrifice at the village *ithembo* usually takes place about ten a.m., the people returning at noon. On their arrival at the village, a mixture of *tatha* and water is sprinkled upon the cattle, and upon the water pots of the village. This is called *kikaela muyo* and is done for the benefit of those villagers who are not qualified to go to the sacred place.

The women qualified to attend a ceremony at an *ithembo* are those who are past the age of child-bearing and have a husband who is a *mutumia ya ithembo* (an elder of the *ithembo*). A childless old woman may also be allowed to go.


It often happens that during a ceremony at an *ithembo* a woman is seized, or possessed, and passes into a condition of semi-trance in which she will prophecy either that the rains are coming or that they will fail, or, in former days, that a Masai raid was imminent. An explanation of this was carefully sought, and, upon investigation, I was told that the message came from the *imu* or spirit of the person of [60]olden times to whom the *ithembo* was dedicated and to whom it was supposed to belong, but quite clearly, that this spirit was only an intermediary, the message really coming from the high god *Engai* or *Mulungu*.

A little house is always built at the foot of the sacred tree on the east side, with the door facing the rising sun, and two days before the time settled upon for commencing planting a pot of water and one of food, as well as butter and milk, are placed in it. On the day following the deposit of this offering, no work is done. These offerings are said to be for *Engai*; the pot of water is a reminder that rain is required, and the food represents the crops.

Sacrifices for Rain.—*Kikuyu*—If the elders go to the sacred fig tree for rain they sacrifice the usual ram, preferably a black one. If, on the other hand, they pray for rain to cease, the sacrificial ram is preferably a white one, although a red one may be used. After the sacrifice, the intestines are taken and tied round the stem high up in the tree. The melted tail fat is then poured at the foot of the tree and a strip of the meat and fat are hung on a branch.

Ukamba.—Among the Kamba a black goat should be sacrificed for rain; a red one, however, is occasionally used. But whatever the colour of the animal sacrificed, it is very important that it should be entirely of one colour, and not spotted or parti-coloured. A parti-coloured animal would probably be considered as having some blemish. (Cf. [Deut. xviii. 1](#) : “Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord thy God any bullock or sheep wherein is blemish or evil-favouredness”; also [Numbers xix. 2](#) : “Speak unto the children of Israel that they bring thee a red heifer without spot.”)

The Kitui A-Kamba also have another curious ceremony which they perform when their crops are in danger of being spoilt for lack of rain. They snare a couple of hyrax (*Procavia sp.*) and carry them round the fields containing the standing crops; one is then [61]released, the other is killed. The heart, contents of the stomach, and intestines of the victim are then taken and placed on a fire which is lit among the crops. The smoke of the sacrifice is said to be pleasing to the deity (*Engai*). Cf.

[Exodus xxix](#) : “And burn them ... for a sweet savour before the Lord.” The carcase is not eaten.

The use of a hyrax for sacrificial purposes is rather curious, and may well be a relic of an old Semitic belief in which the hyrax was thought to have possessed originally the human shape. It was said that he who eats of its flesh will never see father and mother again.

The A-Kamba, however, appear to have lost sight of any connection of this sort, and it is therefore impossible to say whether it really existed; the choice of this curious animal may be merely a coincidence.

General Remarks on Sacred Places and Sacrifices.—The way in which a particular tree is chosen as a sacred place was explained to me unhesitatingly in the following manner: In a particular locality, long ago, there would be a woman, noted as a prophetess or seer, whose prophecies always came true, and at her death she would be buried in her village. After a time, a woman of that village became possessed by the *imu*, or spirit, of the deceased, and, in a state of exaltation, would speak in the name of the prophetess, saying: “I cannot stay here, I am called by *Engai*, and I go to live at a certain tree” (which would be specified). The tree thus designated then acquired sanctity. Four elders and four old women would then be selected; taking some earth from her grave, and one (a blood relation of the deceased) taking a goat, they would all proceed to the tree. The earth was deposited at its foot, the goat led thrice round the tree and then sacrificed. The delegates then prayed: “We have brought you to the tree you desire,” and a small hut was built on the spot. This hut is renewed from time to time, usually before a great ceremony takes place at the tree. [62]

The elders who build the hut must have their heads shaved next morning, but must shave one another, as no one else is allowed to do it. They then hide their hair. (NOTE.—Hiding away of hair after it is cut or shaved is a common custom among Africans; the idea is supposed to be that an evil-disposed person might use the hair as a medium for bewitching the owner.)

An interesting and thoughtful paper on the A-Kamba of Kitui, by Hon. C. Dundas, appeared in the *Journal R.A.I.*, 1913, and on page 534 *et seq.* the writer discusses the religious beliefs of these people. He has come to the conclusion that they have

no conception of a high god, and that the terms *Engai* and *Mulungu* are merely collective words denoting the plurality of the spiritual world. The present writer, however, is unable to accept this opinion, for while it is recognised that great confusion of thought may exist on the subject among the bulk of the people, there is little doubt that the elders of *ithembo*, or tribal shrines, are quite clear on the matter. Great care was taken to record only such information on the question as was furnished by this grade of Kamba society. And as the elders of *ithembo* correspond, in a measure, to the priestly castes of more highly developed communities, their opinion has a certain value, and we therefore feel justified in saying that the Kamba religion contains the concept of a high god. We would also contend that the information herein recorded contains internal evidence of this, and every effort has been made not to read more into the information than it actually contains. The fact that the writer was known to have been duly recognised as an elder among the neighbouring tribes, the Kikuyu, undoubtedly induced the elders to discuss these questions with considerable freedom in his presence. The words used to designate what may be conveniently termed the high god are *Engai*, *Mulungu*, and sometimes *Chua* (or the sun). [63]

It is sometimes said that *Engai* lives in the high mountains, Kenya for instance, and this would appear to differentiate the great spirit from one which has its origin in an ordinary human form. They insist also that there is only one *Engai*. They say that if the *aiimu*, or ancestral spirits, want to kill someone, *Engai* or *Mulungu* can stop them, their explanation being that although the *aiimu* can afflict a living person, they cannot kill him unless *Mulungu* concurs.

There is a saying when anyone dies, "*Nundu wa chua*," which means "the order of the sun," the obvious inference of which is that death comes from the high god.

They are emphatic in stating that *Engai*, and not the *aiimu*, brings the rain. It is said that a woman will sometimes bear a child having a mark on its body similar in position to that of a wound which caused the death of a brother-in-law or some near relative in the village. The deceased is supposed to have been seen by *Engai*, and it is he who puts a similar mark on the new-born child. I am not sure, however, that the term *Engai* is not somewhat loosely used in this case, as the *imu* of the deceased might well be held responsible for such an occurrence.

Other confirmatory evidence of the presence of the concept of a high god will be found in the account of various ceremonies.

There is no doubt about the definition of the concept of the *imu*, and it can be translated as the spirit of the deceased person.

The Kitui elders stated that the sacrificial fire for cooking the meat at the *ithembo* must always be made by friction, so as to avoid any such impurity or uncleanness being brought from a house as might occur were burning embers from a household kitchen taken to the tree.

No one who is under a *thabu* or *tabu* can take part in a ceremony at an *ithembo*, nor must the *muma* or *kithito* oath be taken on such an occasion. Inquiries [64] were made as to whether, in olden times, any of the spoils of war were sacrificed at an *ithembo*, but this was said not to have been the case.

When, as sometimes happens, a shooting star appears to fall in an *ithembo*, it is supposed to be a sign that *Engai* has descended to the *ithembo* and demands food. Various kinds of food are then taken there as offerings. It is, however, not usual to sacrifice an animal. The shooting star falling on an *ithembo* may be compared with the story of Jehovah appearing to Moses in a burning bush, which seemed to burn and yet not be consumed. It is here to be noted that it is *Engai* who demands food, not the *aiimu*.

Sacrifice apparently is only performed when the people desire to invoke help.

One elder only from each clan, *mbai*, can participate in a ceremony at the *ithembo* on any particular occasion, and, further, no elder whose father is alive can go to the tree.

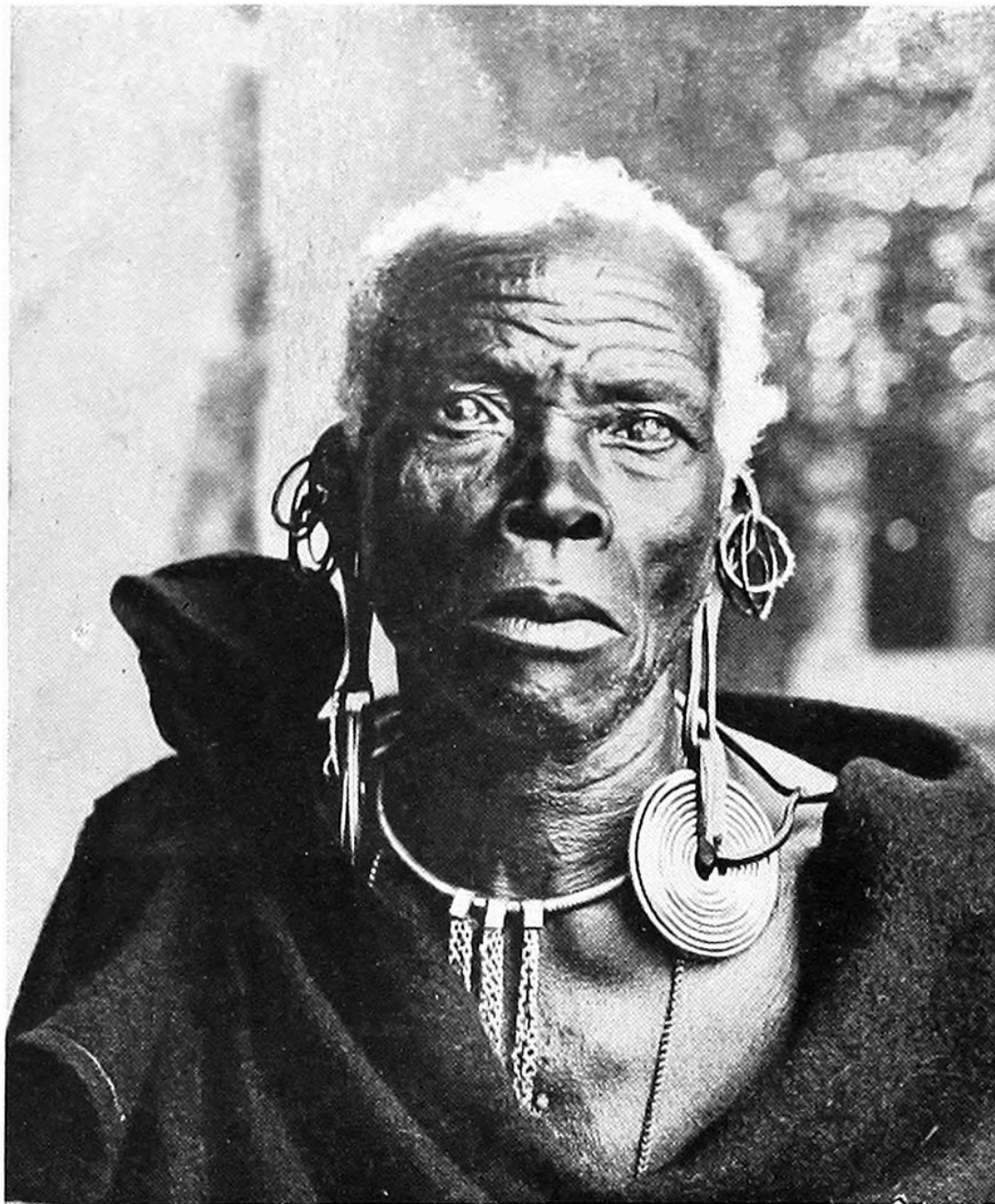
If in war an enemy took sanctuary at an *ithembo* he was allowed to stay there unmolested, and was safe; at night he escaped. If, again, he caught hold of an elder of *ithembo*, he was equally safe; the elder would take him to his village and send one of his sons to convey him safely out of the country. It is considered that this fact emphasises the priestly position of the elders of *ithembo*, who must, at all cost, avoid the stain of death.

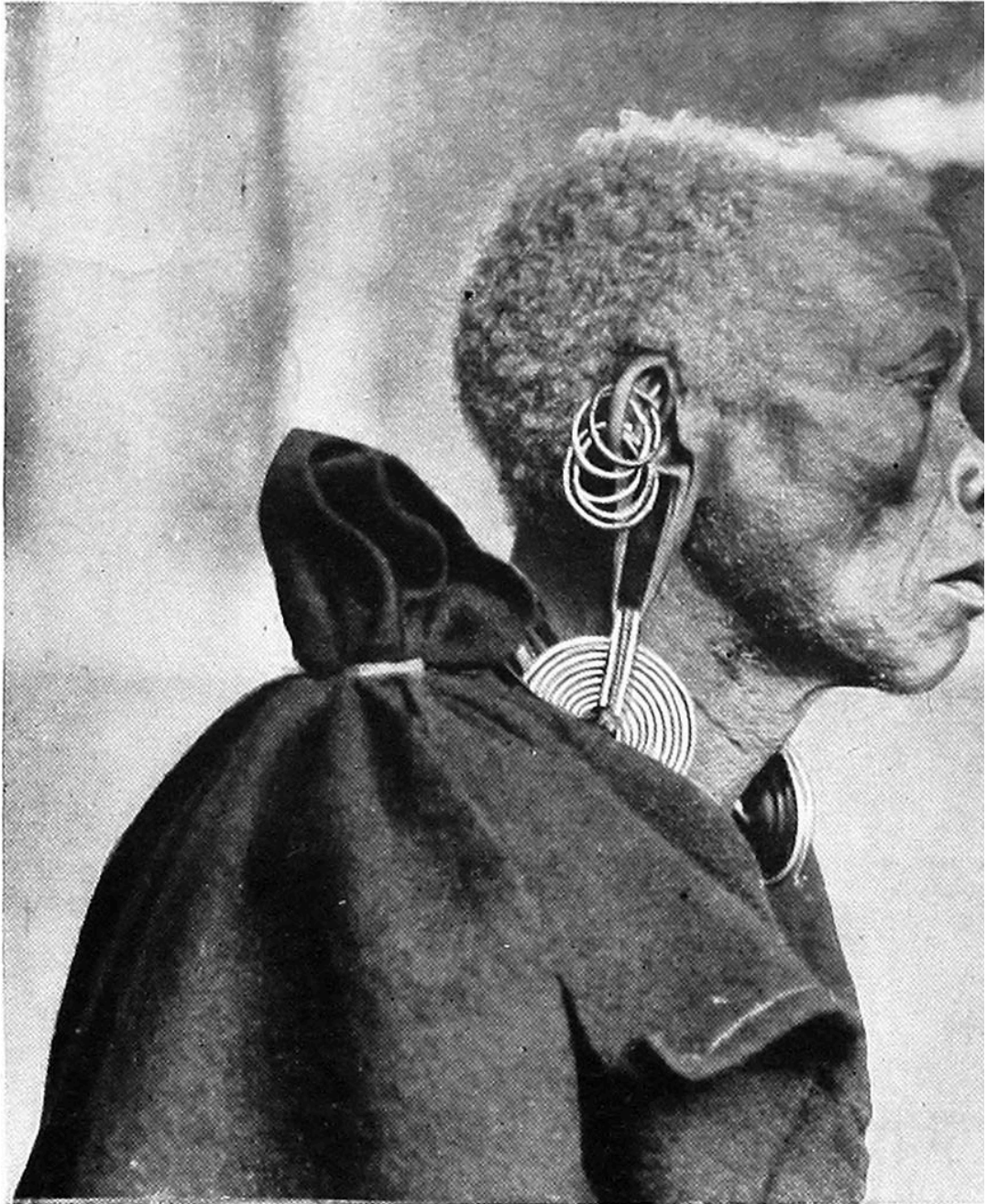
If a snake is seen at a sacred place it is customary to pour milk, butter, and gruel over it; it is supposed to be *njoka ya aiimu* (snake of the *aiimu*).

Arms must not be taken to an *ithembo*, small knives to skin the sacrificial animals only being allowed.

No bird or beast can be killed at a sacred tree in the grove which generally surrounds it.

Should a sacred tree, of the old communal *mathembo* kind, fall down, the people will still worship on the site.





KIKUYU MUTHURI OR ELDER.

(Prognathous type)

If a village which possesses one of the small [65] *mathembo* is moved, the assistance of a medicine woman is sought for the selection of another one near the new site for the village. The elders take her to the old tree and leave her there all night in solitary vigil; in the morning she is fetched and taken to the new tree.

When the elders return from sacrificing at a sacred tree, each takes a small piece of the skin of the sacrificial animal and ties it on the thorn fence near his hut. It is believed, however, that this would not be allowed in the case of a great communal gathering to pray for rain, such as previously described.

The sacrificial animal is provided by the elders of *ithembo* in rotation.

It is said that before going to war a black goat was sacrificed at the *ithembo*, and success was prayed for.

Upon returning from a successful raiding expedition, they went to the organiser of the party, the *muthiani*, killed the biggest ox, and prayed to *Engai* as a thanksgiving ceremony. This did not take place at the *ithembo*, as, in all probability, they dared not go to the *ithembo* with any suspicion of bloodstain upon them.

The Kamba belief that the spirits like to haunt certain sacred fig trees is very widespread, and there is one factor connected with it which is common to the whole area in which the belief is found, and that is that sacrilegious trespassers in a sacred grove are assailed by showers of missiles. Such incidents are often alleged to occur in India, and, apart from native superstition, the writer has even heard of two examples in East Africa, where European colonists, who had no knowledge of these beliefs but had built in the vicinity of sacred fig trees, asserted that they were periodically disturbed at night by stones thrown on the roofs of their houses. In Phil Robinson's well-known book, "In my Indian Garden" (page 208), it is stated that in Burmah to this day the Government pays a fee, called [66]*murung*, to the headmen of certain tracts for appeasing the *manes* of their ancestors lodged in old *sal* trees.

Robertson Smith also quotes an old authority to the effect that fig, carob, and sycamore trees are haunted by devils.

The belief in ghosts is widespread in Kitui, and people who allege that they occasionally see the ghosts of human beings are not uncommon. They do not appear to be terrified about it, but state that they call out to the apparition to verify its immaterial character, and if no reply is received they know that it belongs to the *aiimu*. If, however, a ghost is seen, it is necessary for the observer to kill a ram and smear his face with some of the purifying *tatha*, together with some of the ram's fat.

We thus see that when a shrine is established, tradition and the continual use of it for worship sanctifies it and maintains its position in the popular mind. As the authority previously quoted points out: "Holy places are older than temples, and older than the beginnings of settled life."

It is also interesting to note how the old Canaanite high places were associated with a tree or grove of trees. This is considered by some authorities as an indication of an ancient cult of tree worship. There is little evidence of the survival of such a cult among the people under consideration, but an account has been given of a ceremony which has to be performed when a large solitary tree in a clearing is cut down, and certain rites have to be performed to transfer either the spirit of the tree to a new abode or perhaps human spirits resident in the tree.

There is, however, little doubt that the ancient altars erected under trees were a later development of worship which originally took place at the tree without any altar. It is said that our English maypole is a degraded survival of the worship under trees. Generally speaking, in ancient Arabia the gifts of the worshippers were presented to the deity by being laid [67] on sacred ground, often at the foot of a sacred tree, or they were hung on it, and when libations of sacrificial blood or other things were offered, they were poured either there or over a sacred stone. All this might have been written of our African peoples of to-day, and one cannot, therefore, be accused of special pleading in inviting attention to the similarity of practice.

It is supposed that the ceremonial dedication of the foundation of a sacred building is a direct survival of the rites which took place in ancient times when a new "holy place" was formerly recognised and adopted.

The ancient flavour will be detected in the following extract from the account of the proceedings which took place a few years ago upon the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of a Jewish synagogue, in British East Africa, the sacrificial nature of the rites being very noticeable:

"Corn, wine, and oil were presented to His Excellency by three prominent Freemasons. His Excellency strewed the corn on the stone, and the bearer of the corn said:

"'There shall be a handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains, the fruit thereof shall make Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.'

"His Excellency poured the wine on the stone, and the bearer of the wine said:

““And for a drink offering thou shalt offer him a third part of a bin of wine, for a sweet savour unto the Lord.’

“His Excellency poured oil on the stone, the bearer of the oil said:

““And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of apothecary, it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith and the Ark of the testimony.’

“Benediction—‘May the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, shower down his choicest blessings upon this Synagogue about to be erected for His Honour, and may He grant a full supply of the Corn of Nourishment, the Wine of Refreshment, and the Oil of Joy.’”

Making of Fire (Kamba of Kibwezi).—The fire [68]required for sacrificial purposes was formerly always made anew by friction, as fire so produced could carry no evil with it, whereas if firebrands were brought from a hut some *thabu* or curse which rested on the family owning the hut might inadvertently be brought with it, and the wood might in fact be infected.

Nowadays, however, it is curious to note that a sacrificial fire is lighted with matches; for they consider that these, being of foreign origin, can bring no infection derived from Kamba spirit influence. This gives some insight into the ratiocination of the native mind.

Fire was formerly made, and is still made, on occasion, by hunters and others who rapidly rotate a piece of hard stick, held vertically between the hands, in a cup-shaped cavity cut in a piece of soft wood which is held between the toes, the friction generating enough heat to produce sparks which light some tinder. The vertical stick is called the male, and the other piece the female, the reasons for which nomenclature are obvious.

It is curious to note that a woman is not allowed to make fire by friction, the reason given for this being that a man has to squat to make fire, and that if a woman does the same, it is unseemly, as she thereby exposes her nakedness. It is believed, however, that there is more in it than this, and that only a male is really supposed to manipulate the masculine portion of the fire-making apparatus. [69]

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CHAPTER III

SACRED STONES OR VILLAGE SHRINES IN KIKUYU

When the Kikuyu people found a new village, the elder of the family collects three stones, two being brought from the bed of a river to the north of the village, the direction from which the tribe migrated, and one from a river to the south of the village. The river in the north is generally the Thika, and the river in the south is generally the Mbagathi. The stones must not be collected from a river from which the villagers take water for their domestic use, and it must also be a river with a perennial flow.

These stones usually weigh from thirty to forty pounds, and are used as a village shrine. Having obtained the stones, the people take a black ram, sew up its left eye, and bury it in the middle of the village. This is done with the idea that if anyone comes to bring bad magic to the people of the village, he will, like the ram, lose the sight of one eye. The three stones are then planted round the spot where the ram is buried. Four people carry out this ceremony: the head of the village, another elder of the same clan, and the two senior wives of the village head. They break branches from the *mutumaiyu*, *mukenya*, and *muthakwa* trees and plant them round the spot. If they take root, it is considered a very good omen; if the branches die, however, they are replaced periodically by fresh ones.

Whenever a sacrifice is made in the village, in connection with any ceremony, the ram is killed near this spot and blood and fat are poured into the ground [70] between the stones. Meat for the spirits is always put out in two heaps, one for the male and one for the female spirits. It is believed that if the stones are obtained from strong flowing rivers, they will help to protect the village from nocturnal thieves. Moreover, the stones from the rivers to the north of the village will stop the entrance of bad *ngoma* or

spirits coming from that direction, and similarly, the stones from the south will form a protection against the evil spirits from that direction.

The stones are not supposed to possess a spirit, but if a stone is stolen it is looked upon as a terrible crime. The thief is said to have, by its possession, the power to inflict a serious curse upon the village, whenever it was stolen. When the stone is missed, the head of the village collects the *kiama*, or council of elders, and presents them with a fee of a ram and a bullock, which are killed. They tell the owner to wait three days, and if by then the stone is not returned, they bring him the *kithathi* on which to curse the thief. In all probability, the stone is secretly returned by night; if not, the owner curses the thief on the *kithathi*, and some time afterwards it will be found that two or three people have died mysteriously in a certain village and the stone is brought back. The owner of the stone will then kill a sheep, and place strips of the skin, *rukwaru*, upon the right wrist of all the men, and upon the left ankle of all the women in the thief's village. After this, they all go to a river and are purified on the bank of it by a *mundu mugo*, or medicine man. They then bathe in the river and are marked on their foreheads by a vertical mark made with *ira*, or white earth, and return home. The owner of the stones now presents a ram or male goat to the elders of *kiama*, to show that the trouble is over. It is said that no theft of this kind has occurred in recent years.

The sacred stones are called *Kithangona ya muchi*, which may be interpreted as "village shrine" or altar. The Swahili equivalent is *Mathbah ya Kafara ya [71]miji*; *mathbah* is evidently the same as the Arabic *masseba*. It is believed to be associated particularly with the *ngoma*, or ancestral spirits, and has no connection with the deity. They may perhaps believe that the stones form a resting-place for the beneficent *ngoma* of their ancestors, or that they indicate a spot where the villagers can render service to the spirits. The former interpretation is the more likely; why, otherwise, should there be such trouble when one is stolen? These stones must never be used as seats.

The same idea occurs in Bantu Kavirondo, where these stones are to be found in each village. Mumia pointed out such a shrine, decked round with white feathers, where a fowl was periodically killed and the blood poured between the stones. The stones were said to have come from the north of the Nzoia River, from a place whence the Wanga clan were supposed to have migrated.

Some years ago, one of these stones was stolen by a complainant who alleged that he could not get a hearing in a case regarding the debt of a cow. The whole country-side was upset at the loss; the suit was immediately heard and disposed of, and eventually the stone was returned. The incident clearly showed what importance was attached to these apparently insignificant objects.

If a Kikuyu village is moved, the stones are moved to the new village, a fresh ram being buried in the new spot. Before the stones are removed, the head of the village and his senior wife pour out honey-beer and sugar-cane beer on the space between the stones, which can then be removed with impunity. When a brew of honey-beer is made a little of the honey is poured out between the stones, and when the beer is fermented, a libation is also poured there.


The writer recently witnessed the celebration of the morning prayer at a village shrine. The principal wife brought sugar-cane beer and poured some into a [72]cow horn and some into a small U shaped gourd. The elder, who was head of the village, then poured the beer, first from the horn on to the trees growing between the stones, and then from the gourd. He now uttered a prayer with great solemnity, and called upon the spirits to grant good fortune to the village and also to the visitor. He prayed for wealth in live stock, abundance of children, safety in journeying, and so forth. As the prayer proceeded another elder responded solemnly. The beer from the horn was a libation to the male spirits; that from the gourd to the female spirits.


The horn had a knob carved on the end, the origin of which might be phallic. [73]

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CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE HARVEST, ALSO PLANTING CEREMONIAL

It is interesting to compare all this with the Mosaic ritual laid down in [Exodus xxiii. 19](#) : “The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God.” This is the Levitical *minha* or tribute.

Robertson Smith’s “Religion of the Semites,” p. 241, states: “Among the Hebrews, as among other agricultural peoples, the offering of firstfruits was connected with the idea that it is not lawful or safe to eat of the new fruit until the god has received his due. The offering makes the whole crop lawful food, but it does not render it holy food; nothing is consecrated except the small portion offered at the altar, and of the remaining store clean persons and unclean can eat alike during the year. This, therefore, is quite a different thing from the consecration of animal sacrifices, for in the latter case the whole flesh is holy, and only those who are clean can eat of it” (*Cf. Lev. xxiii. 10–21* .

Professor Robertson Smith also points out that in Hosea’s time the firstfruits of corn were offered at the shrines of the Baalim, who had become recognised as the giver of rain and the author of all fertility. This principle, it will be seen, agrees as closely as possible with the ideas of the tribes under review.

In Kikuyu, the people do not appear to take the firstfruits to the sacred tree formally before reaping the crop, but on the occasion of each harvest the women will take offerings of the various cereal foods—maize, [74]millet, and so forth (also beans, sugar cane, etc.)—to the sacred place. They are not allowed to go right up to the tree, but pour their gifts on the ground near by. All such food must be uncooked. This being done, they return, and the

elders kill either a young ewe which has not yet borne a lamb, or a ram, at a little distance from the tree, and a *rukwaru*, or strip of skin, is placed on the left wrist of each of the women. The elders then eat the meat; none is actually taken to the tree or left there. It is a kind of harvest thanksgiving ceremony.

Firstfruits in Ukamba.—It is customary to eat a certain quantity of the maize cobs or the bean crop before they ripen. But before this can be done a little of each kind is reaped and laid at the *ithembo* by an elder and an old woman, and a goat is sacrificed. The *tatha*, or stomach contents of the goat, are mixed with the green food in a cooking pot and boiled. A portion of this is then distributed to each village, after which the green crops can be safely eaten.

Next comes the proper harvest, but before reaping can commence the owners again consult the medicine man whose advice was previously sought at sowing time. They take him a present of every kind of grain, and so forth, reaped at the previous harvest, and he gives his advice as to a propitious day for the ceremony. The elders then gather the firstfruits of the harvest and assemble at the village meeting-place (*thomi*) of one of the senior elders and sacrifice a goat. Then, as above, they cook samples of the various products in a big pot together with the *tatha* of the goat. When the food is ready, the women from the villages round come and receive some of it, which is placed on leaves.

It is said that were this ceremony to be omitted, the people would be afflicted with diarrhœa, and would presumably become the victims of *thabu*. But when it is concluded, they may reap and eat of the crop without fear or hindrance. [75]

Curiously enough, this ceremony is not considered necessary for the *mbaazi* crop (*Cajanus indicus* or pigeon pea). The people give no explanation of this, but it may be that the pigeon pea was introduced from Kikuyu or elsewhere, after the belief had developed, and was therefore excluded.

A housewife having gathered into her granary (*ikumba*) all her crops, must not cohabit with her husband the night on which she has completed her harvest.

A present of a little of the new grain has to be made to the medicine man who advised the people where to plant.

If a woman has had assistance from her neighbours in the harvest-field she makes a feast of all kinds of food; no men are present, as they have nothing to do with it. There is no dancing on such an occasion.

The next thing is the threshing of the grain, and before the *mawe* grain, and according to some the *mbaazi* pea, can be threshed, permission must be sought from a medicine man who specialises in agricultural magic. In Kibwezi district no one has any leave to thresh *mawe* until the elders have sacrificed at the *ithembo*. It is said that if anyone breaks this prohibition the particular area will miss the *mvua ya ua*, or the second portion, of the next big rains. These are the showers which bring the grain into head and fill out the seed, and thus they will miss their crops. The first half of the rains grow the stem and leaves, and the second half bring the plant to fruition.

Again, if a woman has the assistance of her neighbours she will make a feast for them at the completion of the threshing.

Planting of Crops and Harvest.—In Ukamba, before the sowing of the grain is commenced a medicine man is usually consulted with regard to the proper season and the prospect of good rains.

When these preliminaries are settled, the elders of *ithembo* and the old women are summoned to the [76]*ithembo*. The men bring a goat and the women bring milk and offerings of grain contributed by the villages of the neighbourhood.

The goat is sacrificed at the sacred tree; some of the blood and the beer are poured out as libations, an offering of the cereals is made, prayers for good crops are offered, and the meat and food is then eaten and the beer is drunk by the worshippers.

They then go away and commence to plant with a light heart. After planting, however, a woman must not cohabit with her husband until the grain has sprouted and appeared above ground. Should, however, ceremonial cohabitation become necessary in connection with some other religious observance, the woman must first go and dig up a seed of each species of food product which has been planted and bring it back to the village.

If any man plants before the proper sacrifice has taken place, the elders will fine him a goat, which has to be sacrificed at the *ithembo* as an atonement. Further, the grain which has been sown has, as far as it is possible, to be dug up, collected and returned to the village. If it is left in the ground, it is supposed not to mature, and also *Engai* might be angry with the community at large.

The people of Ulu (Ukamba) again, often perform another fertility ceremony to ensure good crops. They take the dung of the hyrax, which is called *kinyoi ngilla* in Kikamba, and mix it with the powdered root of the *mulinditi* tree and a weed called *waithu*. This medicine is then mixed with some of the seed which they propose to plant and burnt together with some of the dry weeds collected from the field. The fire is made in such a position that the smoke drifts across the field. The ashes of this fire are then mixed with the seed about to be sown. In Kitui, however, it is said that a live hyrax is carried round the field by a procession of villagers, the animal being then killed and its blood and entrails scattered over the field. [77]

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CHAPTER V

CIRCUMCISION CEREMONIAL

One of the most important factors in the life history of all natives is the formal initiation to the tribe, of which the outward sign is usually the ceremony of circumcision. In Kikuyu these rites have attained some elaboration, and it is important to describe them in detail.

It will later be seen in [Chapter VII](#) how deeply the division of the Kikuyu tribe into the two guilds, *Kikuyu* and *Masai*,¹ affects their customs, and in the following description the rites of the two guilds are described separately.

Before a child reaches the age of circumcision, however, a ceremony called *Ku-chiaruo ringi* has to be gone through, which means “to be born again.” It must be undergone by young children before they are eligible for the next stage of initiation, viz., circumcision.

The occurrence of these two ceremonies, connected as they are, cannot fail to strike one as being, in a lower stage of civilisation, the genesis of the idea of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. It is said in fact [78] that some of the missionaries do not hesitate to explain the two Christian doctrines mentioned by reference to the two pagan ones, and state that with the help of this key the natives at once grasp the idea of their doctrines.

But to return to the ceremony itself—the form varies with the guild of the parents. According to the fashion of the Masai guild, about eight days after the birth of the child, be it male or female, the father of the infant kills a male sheep and takes the meat to the house of the mother, who eats it with her neighbours if they belong to the Masai guild. At the conclusion of the feast, the mother is adorned with the skin from the left foreleg and shoulder of the sheep, the piece of skin being fastened from her left wrist to left shoulder; this she wears for four days, when it is taken off and thrown on to her bed, where it remains till it disappears. The mother and child have their heads shaved on the day this ceremony takes place; it has no connection with the naming of the child, which is done on the day of its birth.

The ceremony of *Ku-chiaruo ringi*, according to the fashion of the Kikuyu guild, is as follows in S. Kikuyu. The day after the birth a male sheep is killed and some of its fat is cooked in a pot and given to the mother and infant to drink. It was not specifically stated whether this had a direct connection with the rite referred to, but the description commenced with a mention of this. When the child reaches the age of from three to six years the father kills a male sheep, and three days later the novice is adorned with part of the skin and the skin of the big stomach. These skins are fastened on the right shoulder of a boy or on the left shoulder of a girl. The skin used for a boy has, however, the left shoulder and leg cut out of it, and that for a girl has the right shoulder and leg cut away. The child wears these for three days, and on the fourth day the father cohabits with the mother of the child. [79]

There is, however, one important point, and that is that before the child is decorated with the sheep skin it must go and lie alongside its mother on her bed and cry out like a newly born infant. Only after this ceremony has been performed is the child eligible for circumcision.

A few days after circumcision the child returns to sleep on a bed in its mother's hut, but the father has to kill a sheep before he can return, and the child must drink some of the blood, the father also having to cohabit with the mother upon the occasion.

Owing to similarity of name it is possible that the ceremony of *Ku-chiaruo ringi* might be confused with *Ku-chiaruo kungi*, which is of widely different significance. This latter is an adoption ceremony, and is said to be similar to a Swahili rite called *ndugu Kuchanjiana*. If a person has no brothers or parents he will probably try to obtain the protection of some wealthy man and his family. If such a man agrees to adopt him he takes a male sheep and slaughters it, and the suppliant takes another one. The elders are assembled and slaughter these sheep, strips of the skin (*rukwaru*) being taken from the right foot and from the chest of each sheep and tied round each person's hand, while each is decorated with strips of skin from the sheep of the other party. The poor man is then considered as the son of the wealthy one, and when the occasion arises the latter pays out live stock to buy a wife for his adopted son.

The Kamba people, at any rate the Kitui section, have nothing corresponding to the *Ku-chiaruo ringi* rite of the Kikuyu, but when the child is about six months old it is moved from its mother's bed and thenceforward sleeps on a little bed by itself. If the husband cohabits with his wife during this period the child has to be placed on the mother's back.

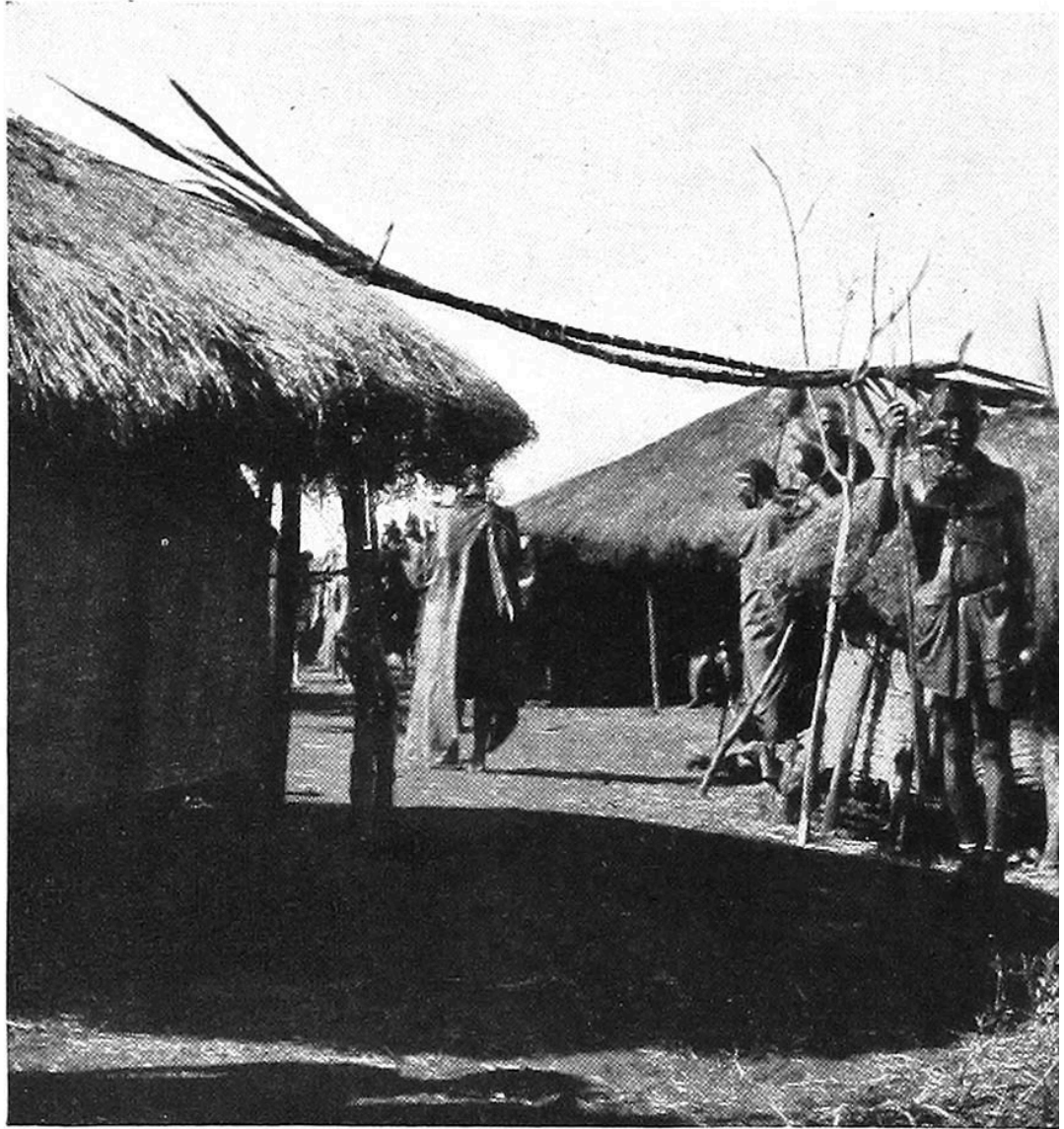
Circumcision.—As previously mentioned, the A-Kikuyu are circumcised according to two systems, some according to one and some according to the other. [80]

Ku-r(1)hia ukabi, i.e., Masai fashion.

Ku-r(2)hia u Kikuyu or *Gikuyu*, i.e., Kikuyu fashion.

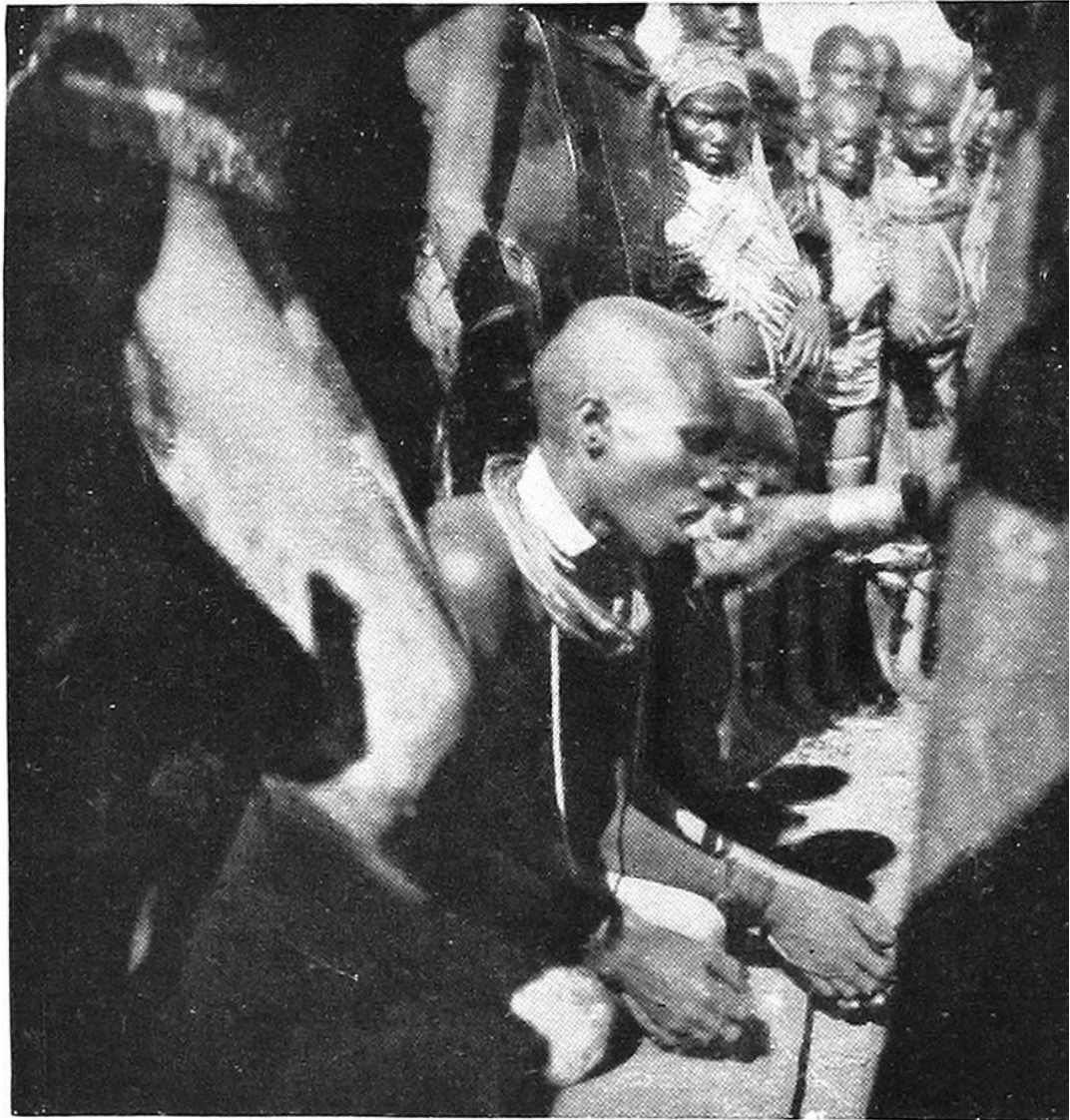
The actual surgical operation is the same, but according to the Masai system the boys stay and sleep in the hut for four days after the operation, and then go out, shoot birds, and wear the skins of the birds on the head and neck. When the new moon appears their heads are shaved, and each one then goes to his home. The head of the village cannot sleep in the hut where the circumcised youths are staying until they are well.

According to the Kikuyu system the youths remain in the hut for eight days; on the day of the operation a sheep is killed, and on the ninth day the father of the children takes them away to their homes. The head of the village sleeps in the hut where the youths stay after the operation has taken place.



KIKUYU CIRCUMCISION FEAST.

SUGAR CANES OVER VILLAGE GATE.



EATING CEREMONIAL FOOD.

Those circumcised according to Kikuyu fashion hold the feast called *Mambura* the day before the operation; the writer recently witnessed one of these gatherings, and so is able to describe it with some accuracy. It was held at a village between the Mathari and Thigiri streams, and was on the twelfth day of the moon, so there does not appear to be any particular significance as to date. Several thousand people of both sexes had collected to dance and take part in the festivities; the warriors were dressed in their war paint and had their bodies smeared with red or grey paint, and in some cases were picked out with star-like patterns. The women were all in their best, and freely smeared with red ochre and oil; a large collection of elders was there, and the chief was present, as he explained, in order to keep order and prevent the young

warriors from quarrelling. Over the gate of the village two long pieces of sugar cane were fastened, and all who entered the village were supposed to pass underneath. The entrance of the village was also guarded by a bag of medicines belonging to a *mundu mugo*; these were supposed to prevent [81] anyone coming into the village to bewitch the candidates. In the morning the elders of *kiama* slaughtered a big male goat, *nthengi*, by strangulation, and each male candidate for circumcision had a strip of the skin fastened round his right wrist, the same strip being also carried over the back of his hand and his second finger passed through a slit in it. The male candidates were nude with the exception of a string of beads or so, and a necklace made of a creeper called *ngurwa*; the girls were nude as far as clothes went, but were enveloped in strings of beads from their necks to below their waists. Much dancing took place till a little after two p.m., when there was a ceremonial meal. The candidates came into the village in Indian file, the girls leading the way. They were received in front of the hut, where they were to reside temporarily after the operation, by a few elders who had for some time been preparing a number of strips of a vegetable creeper, and smearing them with a black oily mixture. Each girl first came up and had a piece of the creeper fastened round her left ankle. The creeper is called *ruruera*, and each piece is smeared with medicine made from the *umu* and *wangnondu* plants mixed with castor oil. One of the elders then took a handful of porridge made of *wimbi* and *mtama* meal (eleusine grain and sorghum), and placed some on a bundle of twigs of the *mararia* bush and offered it to each candidate; the candidate bit a little piece and then spat it out on the ground, the balance was then placed in her hand and she ate it. The porridge was placed on a flat stone used for grinding corn. The boys then came along one by one, and the ceremony was repeated in the same manner, but the strip of creeper was fastened on the right ankle of each boy. It was stated that the object of this portion of the ceremony was to lessen the pain suffered by the candidates during the actual operation.

In another part of the village a man was completing five stools of white wood, roughly hewn out of the solid, which were intended as special seats for the [82] elders and old women who had to perform the ceremony.

Immediately after the ceremonial meal was finished a great rush occurred, and the candidates, followed by the crowd, galloped off to a *mugumu*, fig tree, about three hundred yards away; as they approached it, the boys threw clubs and sticks up into the tree, and then commenced to climb into the branches, hacking savagely the whole time at the leaves and twigs; each youth had a light club with the head sharpened to a

blunt cutting edge, and by dint of vigorous hacking gradually broke off small branches which fell down among the crowd below, and were immediately seized by the people, some of whom at once began to strip off the bark.

The bark was supposed to be used to bind round the heads of the candidates. The people then danced round the tree, and this ended the proceedings. The leaves of the fig tree are collected and strewn in the hut where the candidates sleep after the operation. They are said to be for the purpose of catching the blood, and possibly to prevent the hut being defiled by the blood soaking into the earthen floor. They would never throw sticks into, or gather leaves from, a sacred *mugumu* tree.

The actual operation was not seen, as it took place at dawn the following morning; it is performed in the open near the village. The bulk of the prepuce is not cut off at all, but forms an excrescence below the glans, a small piece of skin only being cut off; it is thrown away, and not buried.

At the similar operation in Ukamba the prepuce is left on the leaves on which the youth is seated during the operation and thrown away with them.

The neophyte is placed on a bed of leaves for the operation, as it is very bad for the blood to fall on the earth. If anyone touches the blood it is considered unlucky and he must cohabit with his wife, and the mother of the child with her husband, and no harm will ensue. [83]

Mambura Festivities Preceding Circumcision According to Masai Fashion.—The festival which precedes circumcision according to the Masai fashion was also witnessed. It was originally to have been held at full moon, but bad weather caused its postponement till the twenty-fifth day of the moon, which seemed to be equally propitious.

In the morning a sheep was killed and eaten by the elders, and at about noon the candidates had assembled. The people of the village and the candidates passed their time in dancing until the preparations were completed. The male candidates were smeared from head to foot with ashes, and were nude with the exception of a belt of iron chain (*munyoro*), a bead necklet (*kinyata*), an iron dancing bell (*kigamba*) on the right leg near the knee; some wore a ring of the *ngurwa* vine round their necks. The girls were decorated from neck to waist with a load of beads as in the Kikuyu form of the ceremony.

The first proceeding was the decoration of each of the male candidates with a bracelet made of climbing euphorbiaceous plant called *mwimba iguru*.

The elders of *kiama* and the wives of the owner of the village, who was one of the elders, sat round in a circle in the middle of the village with a quantity of tendrils of the plant on a wicker tray, *kitaruru*, in the centre; a small gourd of white diatomaceous earth, *ira*, was produced, and each person licked a little and then smeared a small portion of the white earth on his throat and navel; this was to purify himself for the ceremony. A horn cup of honey-beer was then produced, each one taking a sip, and then all simultaneously blowing it out of their mouths in spray on to the plant; it was said that the object of this was to purify or dedicate the plant to the use to which it was to be applied. The male candidates then came up one by one and a bracelet of the creeper was fastened on the right wrist of each.

After a little more dancing the male candidates were seated in a row on ox-hides spread out on the ground; [84] a woman, the sister of the owner of the village, came along and poured first a little milk and then a little honey-beer on the head of the one on the left of the line; she smeared it over the scalp and shaved a place on the right side of his head and passed on to the next. The shaving was merely ceremonial, as the candidates had all been shaved on the head before coming to the ceremony—the native razor, *rueñji*, being used. The milk was in a gourd and the beer in a cow horn. The male candidates then got up, and the same performance was gone through with the girls.

Shortly after this two great branches from the *mutamaiyu* tree were brought to the gate of the village and held upright, one on each side of the entrance; the elders said that in the ceremonies according to Masai fashion the *mutamaiyu* had the same significance as the *mugumu* tree had in the Kikuyu ceremonial. The candidates came through the village dancing and singing all the time up to near the *mutamaiyu* branches, and stopped a few yards away from them, still dancing and singing. The song did not appear to have any great significance, being to the effect that from time immemorial they always had the *mutamaiyu* at these festivals, and now it had come they could proceed to circumcise the candidates according to old custom.

They then all returned to the village, and the candidates were arranged in the order in which they could be circumcised on the morrow. The owner of the village divested himself of his blanket and donned an oily kaross made of goatskin from which all the hair had been scraped; his hands were carefully wiped and some *ira* (the white earth

previously mentioned) was poured into the palm of his hand from a small gourd. He then commenced at the left of the line and anointed each candidate on different parts of the body with smears of the white earth; he was assisted by his principal wife and two sisters and another elder.

The boys were first touched on the tongue, and a line was then drawn down the forehead to the point of [85]the nose; a spot was placed on the throat, the navel, the palm of each hand, and finally between the big toe and first toe.

The procedure with the girls was slightly different, the tongue being smeared first, and a horizontal line then drawn across the forehead. The palms of the hands and the navel were next smeared, and finally a band was drawn round each ankle.

After the candidates had thus been anointed, the elders took mouthfuls of honey-beer out of a horn and blew it in spray over each candidate's head and shoulders. This part of the proceedings was a ceremony intended to purify the candidates from any *thahu* which might be on them, and to protect them from any *thahu* which they might possibly get from an onlooker. The spectators "*ululued*" loudly during this operation.

It was then about two p.m., and nothing further of importance took place; the crowd, which had been gradually growing, however, danced on till sundown.

At nightfall each candidate was said to receive a dose of the crushed seeds of a plant called *ngaita*, which acted as an aperient, and in the morning before the operation each one had to bathe in water in which an axe head had been placed to make it cold; it was, however, stated that if there were a large number, some would not bother about this, but would bathe in the nearest stream.

The operation took place at dawn on the following morning, and was not witnessed. No firewood but that from the *mutamaiyu* tree is allowed to be used in the hut where the candidates live after the operation.

This custom of circumcision according to the two different systems applies to both sexes. Both classes dance with the oval wooden shields called *ndomi* before circumcision, and travel through the district painted in zig-zag stripes with white clay.

A man circumcised according to Masai fashion can marry a girl circumcised according to Kikuyu fashion [86] and *vice versa*; but a medicine man and the elders have to perform a ceremony to change the girl from Kikuyu to Masai before the marriage can take place. The ceremony is said to be as follows: a male sheep is killed, and the small intestines are extracted. The medicine man and the girl take hold of them, and the elders then cut the intestines with three pieces of wood sharpened to a knife edge and made of *mathakwa*, *mukeo*, and *mukenya* bushes. A piece of intestine is cut with each knife. The girl is then anointed with the fat of the sheep by another woman and smeared over with *tatha* (the stomach contents) mixed with water.

In the case of a marriage between a couple belonging to different guilds the man never changes; it is always the woman who relinquishes the system in which she was brought up. A man can, however, at his own wish and for reasons of his own, change his guild; that is to say a man brought up Masai fashion can change over to the Kikuyu side. It is a much simpler matter for him than for a woman; a male sheep is killed by the elders, and a medicine man then comes and puts him through the ordinary purification ceremony.

A man usually belongs to the guild of his father; that is to say, he is circumcised according to the system of his father and grandfather before him. The mark of a person circumcised Masai fashion is as follows: a copper ring is placed in the lower lobe of each ear, and a piece of stick with an ostrich feather on it is bound on each side of the head; a band of sansevieria fibre, *ndivai*,² is bound round the forehead, and on this band bird skins are fastened.

These ornaments are worn for eight days only; bows and arrows are also carried and sandals are worn. After eight days they put off the ornaments and give up the bows and arrows, leaving them in the village where they were circumcised. They then have their heads shaved at the village and return home.



CLIMBING THE "MUGUMO" FIG TREE TO GATHER LEAVES.

Those circumcised Kikuyu fashion go through [87]none of this, but for two days wear a strip of banana fibre, *maigoia*, in the lobe of each ear. During five days after recovery they also wear in their ears a round plug of *mununga* wood whitened on the top with *ira* and a necklace of the leaves of the *mutathi* plant. This is probably a protective magic to preserve them from evil influence during their convalescence.

The marks just enumerated only apply to the male sex. With regard to girls, further inquiry has elicited the following facts: a girl whose father belongs to the Masai guild wears rings of copper called *ndogonyi* on each ankle. A girl whose father belongs to the Kikuyu guild wears an anklet of iron with little rattles, called *nyara runga*, attached to it.

If a girl who is Masai marries a man who is Kikuyu the *ndogonyi* are taken off at marriage. If a girl who is Kikuyu marries a man who is Masai she does not, however, discard the *nyara runga*.

The elaborate ceremonial of old days in connection with circumcision is now rapidly dying out in Southern Kikuyu.

Inquiries were made as to whether the bull-roarer, which is well known in Kikuyu as *kiburuti*, was used in these ceremonies, but curiously enough it appears to survive only as a child's toy, whereas in many of the neighbouring tribes it and its first cousin, the friction drum, are regularly used in initiation ceremonial.

Among the Kikuyu, two men circumcised at the same ceremony cannot go into each other's huts or even touch one another and neither may their children by their first wives. The prohibition may be removed by an exchange of goats, or beer, which both families consume together in a hut. This prohibition does not extend to children of younger wives or to grandchildren. It does not appear to be connected in any way with *thabu*, but a penalty of a goat or two is paid for breach of the custom.

Generations of the A-Kikuyu.—The description of [88]the circumcision may be concluded by an enumeration of the circumcision ages of the Kikuyu as far back as they can be traced.

In the December number of *Man*, 1908, the late Hon. K. Dundas gives a list of the *Rika* or circumcision ages of the A-Kikuyu which probably goes back about one

hundred years or so, but this enumeration did not go sufficiently into detail, and certain important points were missed, so it has now been revised.

Four well-known elders, named Katonyo wa Munene, Karanja wa Hiti, Ithonga wa Kaithuma, and Mukuria wa Mucheru, were consulted, and the following lists are probably as reliable as can be expected, dependent as they unavoidably are on the memory of old men. The first list was given me by the first two, the second list by the second two. There are slight variations, but these are almost inevitable under the circumstances.

Morika, or *Muhurika*, singular—*Rika*, plural, is the circumcision age or generation, and corresponds more or less to the *poror* among the Masai. The *Rika* called *Manjiri*, *Mamba*, *Manduti*, and *Chuma* were not recognised by either of the elders, who both commenced their count with *Chiira*, which is obviously the same as *Shiera* of Dundas's paper, and possibly the farther north one goes among the Kikuyu tribe the farther back do their legends go.

The following is the list beginning at the most remote point:

VERSION I

1. *Chiira*.
2. *Mathathi*.
3. *Endemi*.
4. *Iregi*
5. *Kiarie*
6. *Kamao*^[89]

} These three, it is said, are often grouped as *Iregi*.

- 7. *Kinuthia*
 - 8. *Karanja*
 - 9. *Njuguna*
 - 10. *Kinyanjui*
 - 11. *Kathuru*
 - 12. *Ngnanga*
- } The fathers of the oldest men alive in the country belonged to these ages, and are called Maina.

- 13. *Njerogi*, means the orphans, Chief Katonyo is of this *morika*.
- 14. *Wainaina*, means those who shivered during the circumcision ceremony.
- 15. *Mungai*, means swelled faces.
- 16. *Kitao*, refers to their eating colocasia roots after they were circumcised.
- 17. *Ngua ya nina*, those who wore their mothers' clothes.
- 18. *Mbugwa* or *Kuchu*, because the circumcision wounds did not heal.
- 19. *Mwiruri*, name of a song they sang at the ceremony that year.
- 20. *Mwitungu*, means small-pox.
- 21. *Kiambuthi*, called *Mwangi*, those of the dancing place.
- 22. *Kirira* or *Ngugi*, because fire was on Kenya at the time of the circumcision ceremony.
- 23. *Mangorio*, named after a sweet-smelling tree used to decorate the youths after circumcision.
- 24. *Rohangha*, named after a girl who had decorated her ears before marriage.
- 25. *Wanyoiki*, because they came one by one to the place of circumcision.
- 26. *Boro*, the big stomach of a sheep.
- 27. *Imburu*, the poor people (there was a famine at the time).
- 28. *Ngoraya*.
- 29. *Kiniti*, from a song.[90]
- 30. *Ingigi*, season of the locusts (Katonyo's son, Thuku, belongs to this generation).

- 31. *Mutongu*
 - 32. *Kenjeko*
- } Called *Mwangi*.
- { Time of the small-pox, probably about 1895. When circumcised they went to dig potatoes in the fields.

- 33. *Kamande*
- 34. *Wanyaregi*
- 35. *Kanyuto*
- 36. *Thegeni*
- 37. *Kariangara*
- 38. *Njege*
- 39. *Makio*

Called *Mwiringhu*. This is a name given by the youths themselves to this age. They will probably be renamed later by the elders when the generation is complete.

- Time of the caterpillar plague.
- The wanderers.
- The man-eating leopards; there were several about in that year.
- The year of the cutting of the iron wire.
- They ate gruel made of immature maize (Thuku's son belongs to this year).
- The porcupines.
- Named after a liquid magic medicine which was sold in Kikuyu during the year. Those circumcised in 1910 belong to this *morika*, it will finish early in 1911.

VERSION II

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Chiira.</i> | 15. <i>Ngnanga.</i> | 29. <i>Mwitongu.</i> |
| 2. <i>Mathathi.</i> | 16. <i>Njerogi.</i> | 30. <i>Mwiruri.</i> |
| 3. <i>Endemi.</i> | 17. <i>Ubu.</i> | 31. <i>Uchu.</i> |
| 4. <i>Iregi.</i> | 18. <i>Wainaina</i> | 32. <i>Kiambuthi.</i> |
| 5. <i>Mukuria.</i> | 19. <i>Kangnethi</i> | 33. <i>Ngugi</i> or
<i>Kirira.</i> |
| 6. <i>Kicharu.</i> | 20. <i>Kitao</i> | 34. <i>Mangorio.</i> |
| 7. <i>Kamao.</i> | 21. <i>Mungai</i> | 35. <i>Rohangha.</i> |
| 8. <i>Kiarie.</i> ^[91] | 22. <i>Injehia</i> | 36. <i>Wanyoike.</i> |
| 9. <i>Kimemia.</i> | 23. <i>Mairanga</i> | 37. <i>Kinyiti.</i> |
| 10. <i>Kimani.</i> | 24. <i>Marire.</i> | 38. <i>Imboru.</i> |
| 11. <i>Karanja.</i> | 25. <i>Wangigi.</i> | 39. <i>Ingigi.</i> |
| 12. <i>Kinuthia.</i> | 26. <i>Ngua ya nina.</i> | 40. <i>Mutungu.</i> |
| 13. <i>Njuguna.</i> | 27. <i>Wakirutu.</i> | 41. <i>Kenjeko.</i> |

14. *Kinyanjui* or
Kathuru.

28. *Mougwa* or *Kitindiko*.

42. *Kamande*.

This brings us up to the last few years, and the elders said they had no interest in them.

The name given to the *morika* generally has some topical allusion to an event which occurred during the year and about the time of the circumcision ceremonies; these allusions are naturally forgotten in course of time, and the derivations in many cases now appear senseless.

One *morika* extends over two years, or four Kikuyu seasons, called *Kimera*.

The terms *Maina* and *Mwangi* as names for the *rika* of the last fifty years seem to be fixed as far as one can gather, e.g.:—

The Chief Katonyo's father was *Maina*.

Katonyo himself is *Mwangi*.

Katonyo's children are *Maina*. [92]

Katonyo's grandchildren when circumcised become *Mwangi*.

His great-grandchildren when circumcised become *Maina*.

So apparently every person when circumcised takes the name of the *morika* of his grandfather.

The word *morika* is used indifferently as applying to the larger group as well as to the group of a particular year. Any young men, however, who have been circumcised of recent years, and are still under the class *Mwiringhu*, would not be called *Mwangi* until the group of years was complete.

The time of the completion of a group of years is decided by the elders, but what determined the commencement of a new group was not ascertained.

These *rika* names only apply to males.

A leading Kikuyu elder named Lorigi was independently questioned on these matters by Mr C. Dundas, and his view was as follows: The *Azamaki* of to-day are practically all *Mwangi*, and Lorigi himself, who is among the most senior *Azamaki*, belongs to *Mwangi*. Kamiri, and a few others, are *Maina*, like the *Mwangi* he attends

the councils. The sons of *Maina* are *Mwangi* and the sons of *Mwangi* are *Maina*, so that a man always belongs to the same division as his grandfather: thus Lorigi's father was a *Maina* and his son also belongs to *Maina*, but Lorigi himself belongs to *Mwangi* as his grandson does. It thus comes about that there are two generations of *Mwangi* and *Maina* living at the same time, and the younger generation of either is distinguished by the temporary name of *Mwirungu* (plural *Irungu*). When these become elders they will be called *Mwangi* or *Maina*, as the case may be, without the addition of *Irungu*.

The Itwika Ceremony.—As explained in the last section, the Kikuyu have *rika* or circumcision ages, and a long list was given; these *rika* fall into groups and so many form a greater *rika*, named either *Mwangi* or [93]*Maina*, which follow one another alternately. It was not clear at the time what determined a group of *rika* being lumped together as *Maina* or *Mwangi*; it now appears, however, that this is connected with a periodic ceremony called the *itwika*, which takes place every fifteen years or so. These correspond to a great extent to the *eunoto* of the Masai, and are of tremendous importance to the Kikuyu; the elders, in fact, state that they originated in Kikuyu, and were copied by the Masai during the period when the Kapotei and Dogilani Masai were very friendly with the S. Kikuyu and the Purko Masai with the N. Kikuyu; in the present state of our knowledge it is, however, impossible to say whether there is any foundation for this.³ Probably the best test would be to inquire if the Bari people who live in or near the country from which the Masai are believed to be derived, possess this kind of social organisation. The *itwika* has been described by Mr. Routledge as a secret society connected with snake worship, but as far as can be discovered in S. Kikuyu there is no foundation for this idea, elders, however, do not care to discuss its ceremonial unless one is very well known to them; they are not supposed to discuss it with any person of younger grade than themselves, and the ceremonies may be considered, in fact, as a final initiation at which only fully qualified elders are allowed to attend.

The last great *itwika* ceremony was at the end of the big famine of 1898–9, and was held about the time that the Government founded Fort Hall.⁴ The gatherings were formerly held on the area between the Thika and Chania rivers, just above the junction of these two rivers, and the name Thika is derived from its connection with the *itwika*. The last *itwika* was held [94]near Kalaki's, in the district known as Tingnanga in Mimi wa Ruchu's country; it is said that on account of the decimation of the people by famine and small-pox it was decided not to hold it at the old place.

The next *itwika* will take place when the grandchildren of people of the same *rika* as the chief Kinanjui have all been circumcised, and the decision of the date rests with the *athuri ya ukuu* of the *Maina* generation, this being the senior generation to-day. This apparently corresponds to the *ngaje* of the Masai (*vide* Hollis's "Masai").

An account of the last ceremony was obtained from one who was present, and the first step is said to be the building of a huge long hut to accommodate those who participate in the festival. This is divided into two main divisions, one for elders of the *Maina* generation and one for those of the *Mwangi* generation, and in addition, a small room for the *athuri ya ukuu*, who may be considered as the officiating priests of the festival. These *thuri ya ukuu* are always eight in number, and at the last *itwika* their names were, Muthaka, Ngombwa Tutua, Kimwaki, Kathungu, Kithenji wa Njuki, Rimui wa Kanjuku, Ngegenya and Mbura wa Katuku, and the whole programme rested in their hands.

The principal elder of each village is supposed to attend, and often the next in importance as well; the gathering, therefore, consists of several thousand souls, and the proceedings continue for three months or more. Each elder brings sheep and goats, bullocks, gourds of honey-beer, and gourds of sugar-cane beer, and relays of food are brought to the camp during the ceremonies by women, but no women are allowed within the confines of the camp. A number of men are also selected to collect firewood, but do not come inside the camp. The only persons allowed inside the camp, except the elders, are eight spearmen, who are told off to attend on the eight *athuri ya ukuu*.

It does not appear possible to obtain a detailed account of the proceedings, but it is said that every [95]day the eight *athuri ya ukuu* instruct their juniors in the customs of the tribe and so forth, the elders also hold "*ngomas*" or dances.

One man is chosen as an official trumpeter to the proceedings, and he collects the elders for the various rites by blowing a horn of the rare bongo antelope (*ndongoro*). The horn is called *choro*, and no one else is allowed to blow it; this is considered a very honourable office, and the trumpeter is paid nine rams and nine female kids for his services.

In former days towards the end of the festival the elders in charge of an *itwika* sent two envoys to a certain place on a stream called Kikira, in Kenya province, which was said to be the habitat of a mysterious reptile called the *ndamathia*. It was

described as being more like a crocodile than like a snake. This beast was given beer to drink, and when it was drunk hairs were plucked from its tail. A hairy tail is not characteristic of reptiles, but all are agreed that the hairs were obtained. The envoys then returned, and the hair was plaited together with some strands of fibre of the wild date palm (*Phoenix reclinata*), and then placed on the top of the *itwika* hut. At the conclusion of the festival the people went in procession to a sacred fig tree (*mugumu*) in the vicinity, and stuffed the hair into a crevice in the tree and left it there. They then took the milk of a cow which had only borne one calf, the milk of a ewe which had only borne one lamb, and the milk of a goat which had only borne one kid, and poured them as a libation at the foot of the fig tree; a dance round the fig tree then ensued. This was the concluding ceremony of the *itwika*. Each person attending was finally adorned on the wrist with a *rukwaru* or strip of skin from a male goat, and the *itwika* house was broken up and they returned home.

At the last *itwika* held in South Kikuyu the elders did not send for the hair of the *ndamathia*, but the concluding ceremony was carried out with a big black ox, which was tied by its fore and hind legs and laid [96] between two poles; all the people then came along, one after the other, and stamped on the ox, which eventually died. The ox was not eaten but was left lying there, and they then poured libations of milk and fat at the foot of the sacred *mugumu* tree and danced round it, praying to God (*Engai*). After this they shaved their heads, were adorned with the *rukwaru* from a male goat, and returned home. Upon reaching their villages each elder killed a ram and placed a *rukwaru* cut from its skin on every person in his village; these were worn for one day only, the villagers then ceremonially bathed and threw them away.

These ceremonies are said to be very pleasing to God (*Engai*). No one is ever allowed to cultivate on the area which has been used for an *itwika* ceremony, and no one must ever cut the *mugumu* (fig tree) with an axe or knife. [97]

Members of the Kikuyu tribe from birth to old age pass through various grades of initiation, but the ceremonial observed is of two classes, one of which is referred to by the natives as the Kikuyu system, and the other the Masai system. The Kikuyu system is probably the older, whilst the so-called Masai system is probably contact metamorphism due to the proximity of the Masai and the partial intermingling which has occurred from time to time. Curiously enough, the Masai system bears very little resemblance to the Masai customs of the present day, so presumably it has been modified to fit in with the psychology of the Kikuyu who adopted it. ↑

² *Ol-divai* is the Masai word for the wild Sansevieria. ↑

³ *Vide* article on Masai and their traditions, by A. C. Hollis—*London Quarterly Review*, July, 1907, p. 104

—“Now the Masai themselves say they learnt this peculiar ceremony (*viz.*: their method of circumcision) from the Kikuyu.” ↑

4 Mr Routledge mentions a later one which took place near Karuri's about 1904, but according to the S. Kikuyu natives it was only a local ceremony. ↑

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CHAPTER VI

DEATH AND BURIAL CEREMONIAL

Kikuyu.—Among most peoples, irrespective of their stage of culture, definite ceremonials have to be observed upon the occasion of a death, and before the heirs can succeed to the property. In Kikuyu land these are somewhat complex, and like many other observances in that country, their form greatly depends on the circumcision guild to which the person belongs. This is the excuse for introducing the subject, as it is submitted that this factor has apparently escaped the notice of previous investigators, and to understand fully the life-history of a Kikuyu native it must be clearly realised how, from his early years to his death, he is bound down by the ritual of the guild to which he belongs. The nearest analogy one can find to illustrate this is the case of one child who is baptised a Protestant and another a Roman Catholic; the main principles of these religions are the same, and among the Kikuyu the guild to which a man belongs does not affect his beliefs as to the *ngoma*, or spirits, and their influence upon mortals, but the ritual of his religion varies throughout his life according to the guild to which he belongs.

The ceremonial observed upon a death is called *ku-hukura*—the Swahili synonym, *sadaka*, has practically the same meaning.

The death and funeral ceremonies of an elder circumcised Kikuyu fashion will be first described. On the day of the death the children or heirs take two rams and present them to the elders to pay for the [98]digging of the grave; every elder who has circumcised children is buried, married women who have borne five or six children are also buried. The grass is dug with a *mubiru* or *mukuruwi* stick, the sons of the deceased doing the actual digging, but the elders decide the site and supervise the work; if a son refuses to assist in digging his father's grave it disqualifies him from receiving a share of the estate. The grave-diggers receive a big male goat

(*nthenge*), or, if the family is rich, a bullock, the bullock being slaughtered and the corpse buried in the hide. The corpse of a male is buried on its right side with its knees doubled up and with the right hand under the head. The site of the grave is near the gate of the village, and the face of the corpse is placed looking towards its hut. A woman is always buried lying on her left side.

On the third day after the interment, the elders assemble at the village to kill a ram to cleanse the village from the stain of death, and the sons eat the breast of this animal and next day shave their heads. The same day the elders bring with them one of their number who is very poor, and of the same clan as the deceased, and he has to sleep in the hut of the senior widow of the deceased and have connection with her; he generally lives on in the village and is looked upon as a stepfather to the children.

There is then a pause of six days, and on the seventh day the elders return, a supply of beer is made ready for them, and a big male goat is killed and eaten by all present. This is called *nthenge ya noro*, which means the “goat of the whetstone,” referring to the whetstone used in sharpening the razors with which the heads are ceremonially shaved at the conclusion of the ceremonies. During the first four days after the death, the married men in the village must have connection with their wives; during the succeeding four days, however, they must observe strict continence.

After the *nthenge ya noro* has been killed the property is divided. [99]

If the deceased belongs to the Masai circumcision guild the ceremonies are as follows:

When a death occurs the elders decide whether the person is to be buried or not. Only elders above what is known as the “three goat” grade are buried; these are called *athuri ya mburi tatu*, which means that they have reached the grade, the entrance fee to which is three goats; the next grade is *athuri ya mburi nne* or the “four goat” grade. No elder is a fully qualified member

of council till he reaches that rank. Generally speaking, it works out that only those elders who have grown-up children are buried. In the case of a person not entitled to burial, it is the duty of the elders to decide the place in the bush where the corpse shall be deposited.

Assuming that the deceased is entitled to burial, the local *athuri ya ukuu* (highest grade of elders) are summoned, and the corpse is taken out of the hut by the sons and laid on the hide on which the person slept during life. A ram (*ndorume*) is then slaughtered, the fat being cooked in an earthenware pot and some poured on the corpse, the children of the deceased also being smeared with the fat. The ornaments of the deceased are then removed under the supervision of the elders and divided up among the immediate family; the eldest son has the first choice, then the senior wife, and each child gets something. An ox of a uniform colour, preferably all white or all black, is now slaughtered and the hide is set aside. The elder sons dig the grave, the site having first been chosen by the elders; it is usually situated inside the village near the goat hut or bachelor quarters, *thengira*. The corpse is then interred lying on the sleeping hide used during life; if a male, it is laid on its right side, knees doubled up and right hand under the head; if a female, it is laid on its left side in the same position. The corpse is then covered with the raw ox hide with the hair side upwards and the grave is filled in. Nothing is buried with the body, but after the grave is filled in, the elders [100]pour honey and cooked fat on the grave, and say, "We give you this to drink."

A little later in the day a male goat, *nthenge*, is slaughtered, the meat being roasted on a fire near the gate of the village, and a little of the fat is placed on every fire in the village; the smell of this is believed to be very pleasing to the *ngoma*, or spirits, and any *thahu* or curse that may be impending is drawn away. This act is also said to lustrate the sons who have performed the burial.

A month, or perhaps more, is allowed to elapse, and the division of the estate takes place. The children or heirs then take four rams, and the women of the village shed all their ornaments and sleep together in the same hut, which is also shared by the four sheep. In the morning the elders arrive and the sheep are killed, the fat is cooked and then put away to cool, while the meat is eaten by the assembled people, providing they belong to the Masai guild. The head must be cooked and eaten away from the village; the skin is taken by someone else, and the viscera by yet another person.

On the following day the heads of all the inhabitants of the village are shaved and they are anointed with the fat of the sheep. During the ceremony the people present wear their skin garments inside out, and these are anointed with the cooked latex of the *mugumu* fig tree; after their bodies have been anointed with the fat they can once more turn their skin robes right side outwards, and the women resume their ornaments.

The property of the deceased is then divided up by the elders; the principle followed is that each son takes the property which had its dwelling-place in his mother's hut, the goats and sheep, for instance, and which lodge, so many in the hut of each wife. With regard to which cattle, each son gets those which have been milked by his mother. Strict continency must be observed by all in the village until these proceedings are finished, and at their close the inhabitants and all [101]the property of the deceased are ceremonially purified by a medicine man.

Among the Kikuyu a woman's skin cloak is laid outside on the ground when she dies and no one will touch it; a Dorobo husband, however, wears his wife's cloak after her death; hence one may at times see a man wearing a woman's cloak. The fear of corpses is intense with the Kikuyu, but it appears to be much less so with the Dorobo. They will, for instance, live in the house of the deceased, and do not seem to mind handling the corpse, a man's sons, in fact, anointing his corpse after death.

Burial (Ukamba of Kitui).—Among these people the head of a village is buried if his wife, wives, or any sons are alive. If they are all dead the body is thrown out.

A man of importance and of high social grade is nearly always buried and is interred at the side of his cattle kraal.

The head wife of an elder is buried.

Beer and blood are periodically poured out by the side of a grave of a deceased medicine man, but not by that of other elders. It is essential that this libation should be made just before sunrise, and as this is in accordance with the practice in several other places, the custom is probably a very old one.

In the case of deceased elders, a libation of beer and blood is poured out inside the hut of the deceased when liquor is brewed or when a goat is killed.

If a childless wife, who is the first wife, dies, she is buried inside the village. In the case of a second or third wife, the body is thrown out, but curiously enough it must not be taken through the gate; a special opening is made in the village fence for the purpose, the opening being afterwards closed up again. Presumably this is to prevent her spirit from finding its way back into the village.

There is a curious custom among the Kamba of Ulu, in the event of a member of the family being away [102] when a death occurs in a village. An elder measures the corpse, cuts a stick of the same length and places it alongside the house of the deceased; this procedure is believed to protect the absent one from evil. Upon his return, a goat is killed and he is smeared with the contents of the stomach, *muyo* in Ki-Kamba, the *tatha* of Kikuyu, and some is deposited at the door of the hut, and he must tread in it before entering the hut; this ceremonially purifies him. The stick is then taken up

by a *mutumia ya makwa*, one of the elders who understands the ritual connected with the removal of *thabu* or *makwa*, and is thrown out into the bush where the corpse of the deceased was deposited.

In Kitui if a man is on a journey and a death occurs in the village during his absence, his wives may not cut their hair till he returns and has performed the ceremonies necessary upon the occasion of a death. [103]

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CHAPTER VII

THE CURSE AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

[Contents]

(a) *Thahu and its Connection with Circumcision Rites, etc.*

Thahu, sometimes called *nzahu*, is the word used for a condition into which a person is believed to fall if he or she accidentally becomes the victim of certain circumstances or intentionally performs certain acts which carry with them a kind of ill luck or curse. A person who is *thahu* becomes emaciated and ill or breaks out into eruptions or boils, and if the *thahu* is not removed, will probably die. In many cases this undoubtedly happens by auto-suggestion, as it never occurs to the Kikuyu mind to be sceptical on a matter of this kind.

It is said that the *thahu* condition is caused by the *ngoma*, or spirits of departed ancestors, but the process does not seem to have been analysed any further.

We are now in a position to realise the attitude of the Kikuyu mind towards *thahu*, and it is considered that the term curse, in its mediaeval sense, expresses it. Everyone will remember in the *Ingoldsby Legends* the pitiable condition of the Jackdaw of Rheims after he had been cursed by the Cardinal for stealing his ring; now this would appeal to a Kikuyu, and he would at once say the jackdaw was *thahu*. In one of the cases of *thahu*, quoted hereafter, it is possible for a person to lay a curse maliciously on a whole village by breaking a cooking pot, and in another instance, a father can lay a curse on his son for disobedience. We thus have parallel instances from both higher and lower civilisation; in the first, the Cardinal curses the jackdaw with the help of the supernatural powers with which he [104] is invested by virtue of his sacred position, and in the lower culture it is apparently held

that any person can inflict a curse by invoking the supernatural powers of the *ngoma*, or spirits, of the dead ancestors.¹

The position has, indeed, changed but little. It would appear probable that as the priests gained power, they arrogated to themselves the monopoly of laying a curse upon their flock; but the freedom with which people use the conventional formula of curses to this day is evidence, however, that the power to inflict a curse was formerly at the disposal of all. It is nevertheless important to realise that when curses were believed to be effective, and in the case of malicious ones, punishable by native law, people were more careful about the custom than Europeans are to-day, when all belief in the power of a curse has died away.

Some people use the term ceremonial uncleanness to express the meaning of *thahu*, but, as far as my inquiries go, the phrase inadequately explains the Kikuyu ideas on this question. Acts which cause a person to become *thahu* are also often found to be enumerated under the heading of “prohibitions” and “*tabus*.”

The similarity between *thahu* and *tabu* is somewhat striking and worth considering. *Tabu* appears usually to be applied to some act or object by a man who often acts in the dual capacity of ruler and magician. There is, as far as can be discovered, no record of a Kikuyu *thahu* having been imposed by any known personage, but these beliefs must have originated somewhere, and it may be that they were originally imposed one by one by great medicine men in former times, and have thus become incorporated in what may be termed the tribal religion.

The removal of the curse is effected by a process of lustration which, in the more serious cases, has to be done by the *mundu mugo*, or medicine man, and in [105]others by the members of the native council, or *kiama*; the latter is an interesting case of the overlapping of judicial functions and those of a sacerdotal character.

The lustration ceremony is almost always accompanied by the slaughter of a sheep and anointment with the contents of the stomach, the white diatomaceous earth called *ira* being used in some cases. The purification is called *tahika*.

In a few cases smoke is used as a purifying agent and seems to be considered effective in some more trivial ones.

The reality of this aspect of Kikuyu life and thought may easily be underestimated, but it is important that all who wish to gain a deep insight into native affairs should understand it and give the phenomenon its true value. To give the question a practical application, it may safely be said that no Kikuyu native who becomes *thahu* during the course of his employment by a white master, will rest until he has been freed of his curse or ill luck, and he will probably desert with wages due to him in order to get rid of it; he cannot afford to wait, the risk is too great.

There is another curious side to the question; a Kikuyu, when he is circumcised, undergoes this rite either according to the old Kikuyu custom or according to Masai custom; the physical operation and result are the same, but the ceremonial varies, and for some unfathomed reason, a man who is circumcised Masai fashion can do certain things or encounter certain circumstances with impunity which would, if he had been circumcised Kikuyu fashion, render him *thahu*. This is a very curious fact, and the Kikuyu themselves do not seem to be able to give any reason for it. The matter should, however, be made the subject of further research, as my information is derived from the southern branch of the tribe, and many customs which are dropping into disuse in that area, and thus losing their inner meaning, are found to be very much better known in Kenya Province or Mwaitumi, as they call it. [106]

List of Thahu.—I will now proceed to give a list of *thahu* which I have collected with the assistance of the Kikuyu chief Kinanjui and his *kiama*, or

council, of *athuri*, or elders; the question of the two classes of circumcision will be discussed later.

(1) If a small child dies and the mother carries the body away into the bush, the woman is *thahu*, and if the husband cohabits with her before she is purified, he becomes *thahu* and the woman is cleansed. The man carries the *thahu* away with him, and, what is worse, may transmit it to his other wives. If the man becomes *thahu* in this way it is much more serious for him than the woman, and a *mundu mugo*, or medicine man, has to be called in: the woman has to be purified by three elders, *athuri ya kiama*, and an elder woman, *mwirui*. For instance, if a man has two wives and the younger had become *thahu*, the senior wife would shave the head of the woman who was to be purified; a sheep is killed, and she is smeared with *tatha*, or the contents of the stomach.

This *thahu* only falls on those who have been circumcised according to Kikuyu fashion: if the man has been circumcised according to Masai custom he does not become *thahu*.

(2) If a woman who has assisted at a birth cohabits with a man before the end of the umbilical cord of the newly born child has shrivelled up and come away, and before she has bathed herself ceremonially, the infant, although not her own, will become *thahu*. To remove the curse from the child the principal elder of the village kills a sheep and smears the woman with *tatha*, the contents of the animal's stomach, and thus cleanses her.

This applies to those circumcised either according to Kikuyu or Masai fashion.

(3) If a man touches or carries a corpse, he becomes *thahu* until he is cleansed. The lustration is performed by members of the local council of elders, *athuri ya kiama*, and the final purification by a *mundu mugo*, or [107] medicine man. If he cohabits with a woman before he is cleansed she also becomes *thahu*.

(4) Stepping over a corpse inflicts a *thahu* of a very serious nature, and the person contracts a sickness called *mangu* (possibly leprosy). He is said to break out into an eruption, and the fingers come off and the nose rots away. To remove this *thahu*, both the elders, *athuri ya kiama*, and the *mundu mugo* are called in; the latter procures the bone of an elephant, and this is placed on the ground, the *athuri* forming a circle round it, and the patient then steps over the bone; the *mundu mugo* afterwards purifies the man in the usual way.²

This *thahu* applies to both sections of the tribe, viz., those circumcised Kikuyu fashion and those circumcised Masai fashion.

(5) During a marriage ceremony five goats have to be presented to the *athuri ya kiama* and are killed for a feast. After they are slaughtered the eyes of the carcasses have to be removed, and if, during this process, an eye becomes cut or broken, the bride becomes *thahu*, and unless something is done will not bear children; the father of the girl has to present a sheep to the *athuri*, and the girl is purified by them—this not being a matter which necessitates a medicine man. This applies to both sections of the tribe.

(6) On the occasion of a birth, the young men of the village kill a sheep for a feast called *mambura*; if the man who slaughters it cuts his finger and his blood drips on to the meat, he is *thahu* until he is purified by the *athuri ya kiama*.

This again applies to both sections of the tribe.

(7) If a man, the head of the village, attends the circumcision of a child at the hut of one of his wives, he is *thahu* until the children who were circumcised in the hut are cured; a *mundu mugo* then comes and [108]purifies him and the woman in whose hut the children were circumcised.

This applies only to the men circumcised Kikuyu fashion, for in that section it is the custom for the village head to sleep in the hut where the circumcision has taken place, and he becomes *thahu*, whereas it is the

custom for a village head who was circumcised Masai fashion to sleep in another hut until the ceremonies are quite over, thus escaping the *thahu*.

(8) If one man kills another, and comes to sleep at a village and eats with the family in a certain hut, the people with whom he has eaten become *thahu*, and the skin on which he has slept is *thahu* and may infect anyone sleeping on it. This is a case for a *mundu mugo*, who is called in to purify the hut and its occupants.

If, however, the owner of the hut and his family have been circumcised Masai fashion they do not become *thahu*.

(9) If an important elder dies he is buried by his sons and they are *thahu* until purified by the *athuri ya kiama*. They are smeared with oil and their heads are shaved during the ceremony; this is not considered a very serious *thahu*. If they have been circumcised Masai fashion they can be purified forthwith, but if they belong to the other section it is necessary for them to isolate themselves until the new moon appears.

(10) When a child is born the father kills a sheep, of which a large part is given to the woman who has assisted at the confinement, and if, before he has pegged out the skin and divided the meat, he is summoned away from the village on urgent business (my informant gave an example, and said: "Suppose he was arrested and taken away as a prisoner"), the infant is *thahu* and the principal elder of the village has to kill a sheep, take a strip of skin from the forefoot of this animal, and fasten it as a bracelet on the wrist of the infant to remove the ill luck.

This applies to both sections of the tribe. [109]

(11) If children are being circumcised at a village, and the owner of the hut where the ceremony has taken place goes away to sleep at another village before he is cleansed, and, say, on the way, meets a crowd of people, the children who were circumcised will all be *thahu*. This is a case for a *mundu mugo*.

This only applies to those circumcised Masai fashion as, by Kikuyu fashion, the man does not sleep at another village.

(12) If two men who were circumcised at the same ceremony fight and blood is spilt, they are both *thahu* until a *mundu mugo* comes and removes it. He kills the usual sheep and the *athuri* or elders put a strip of the skin of the sheep on the wrist of each of the two men. Persons who are circumcised at the same feast are called *wakini*. This holds good for both sections of the tribe.

(13) If one man circumcises his children according to Masai fashion and another according to Kikuyu fashion, and the former should eat meat killed by the latter, the former will be *thahu* and *vice versa*.

(14) If a person belonging to the *Mweithaga* clan sleeps in the hut of a person belonging to another *rika* or clan, the people of that hut become *thahu*; this is a case for both medicine men and elders, and applies to both sections of the tribe.

(15) If a man throws some earth at his wife, both become *thahu*; this is a case for a medicine man, and both have to be purified. This only applies to those circumcised Kikuyu fashion.

(16) If food is eaten from a cracked pot the persons eating it become *thahu* and a *mundu mugo* has to be called in. This affects both sections of the tribe.

(17) The wives of smiths are usually decorated with armlets made of twisted strips of iron called *mithiori*. If a man enters the hut of a smith, and cohabits with a woman so decorated, he becomes *thahu*. A sheep has to be killed and a supply of honey beer provided; a strip of skin from the sheep is placed on the wrist of the [110]man, the woman, and any children she may have; this bracelet is placed on the left wrist of females, and the right wrist of a male. The purification ceremony is performed by another smith.

This *thahu* affects both sections of the tribe.

(18) Persons eating food in a smithy become *thahu*; the smith himself can purify one from this curse.

It affects both sections.

(19) If a bead worn on a warrior's neck or waist falls into food, the persons who partake of the food become *thahu*; if such a bead falls into the grain store and becomes inadvertently cooked with the food the result is the same. This only affects persons circumcised Kikuyu fashion.

(20) If a Kikuyu has had his crops protected by magical processes performed by a medicine man (to protect in this way is called *ku-roga*), and someone takes food from a garden so protected, he becomes *thahu*, and this form of *thahu* can only be removed by the medicine man who has *roga*-ed the plantation.

This applies to both sections of the tribe.

(21) If a man has connection with a woman from behind, they are both *thahu*. This is a very serious *thahu* and both the *athuri ya kiama* and a *mundu mugo* are necessary to remove it, neither the man nor the woman being allowed to eat any of the sacrificial sheep.

This applies to both sections.

(22) If a man beats his wife and draws blood, the woman is *thahu*, and the man cannot sleep in her hut until she is freed from it; the elders are called in and kill a sheep. The two persons concerned are not allowed to eat any of the meat, and the skin is reserved as a fee for a *mundu mugo* who is called in to perform the formal lustration.

This affects both sections of the tribe.

(23) If a woman is carrying a baby on her back, and it slips out of the leather garment and falls to the ground, it is *thahu*; the child must not be lifted from

[111]the place where it fell until a sheep has been killed on that spot, and this is a case for both the elders of *kiama* and a medicine man. Both sections of the tribe are affected by this.

(24) If an elder or a woman when coming out of the hut slips and falls down on the ground, he or she is *thahu*, and lies there until a few elders of *kiama* come and slaughter a sheep near by, and some blood and *tatha* (contents of the stomach of the sheep) are rubbed on the spot where the person fell. The elders then say, “So-and-so is dead, let us bury him,” and they plant a sprig of the bushes called *mukuria* and *muthakwa* on the site of the mishap. This applies to both sections.

(25) If a man marries a woman and she steals anything from a member of her father’s clan, she is *thahu*, and milk will flow from her breasts without any natural cause, and any child she bears before the *thahu* is removed will be *thahu*. This is a matter for the *athuri*, or elders of *kiama*; a sheep is placed on the woman’s shoulders, and its throat is pinched until it micturates on the woman’s body, the sheep then being killed, and the contents of the gall bladder, mixed with urine from its bladder, poured over the leather garment of the woman, and her navel touched with a little of the mixture. The milk that was unnaturally flowing from her breasts will then dry up, and by this sign they will know that the *thahu* is removed.

This applies to both sections of the tribe.

(26) If a man’s son commits adultery with one of his father’s wives, and the father is still alive, the father becomes *thahu* and not the culprit, the reason given being that the father takes the *thahu* because he begot the son. The erring woman does not return to her husband, she is not *thahu*, and can still bring food to her husband, but he does not cohabit with her, and her hut is broken down. The son who has transgressed in this way has to make peace with his father by a formal present of a big male goat, *nthengi*. This *thahu* can [112]be removed by the *athuri ya kiama*; it is a very serious matter, and if the *thahu* is not quickly removed from the father, he will die.

It applies equally to both sections of the tribe.

(27) If a person touches menstrual blood, he or she is *thahu*; or if a man cohabits with a woman in this condition he is *thahu*. The person who is contaminated will first take some cow dung and then red ochreous earth (*thiriga*) and plaster it on the part of the body touched by the blood; ochre is said to be used because it is the same colour as the blood; the woman from whom the contamination came is also *thahu*. The *mundu mugo* has to be called in to purify the persons.

This applies to both sections.

(28) If one woman is circumcised Masai fashion and another Kikuyu fashion, and the child of the latter is suckled by the other woman, the child becomes *thahu*: this is a case for a *mundu mugo*.

This applies to those circumcised Kikuyu fashion.

(29) If a hyæna comes into a hut at night, kills a goat and the owner kills the hyæna in the hut, the hut will be abandoned, and the whole village has to be purified by the *kiama*.

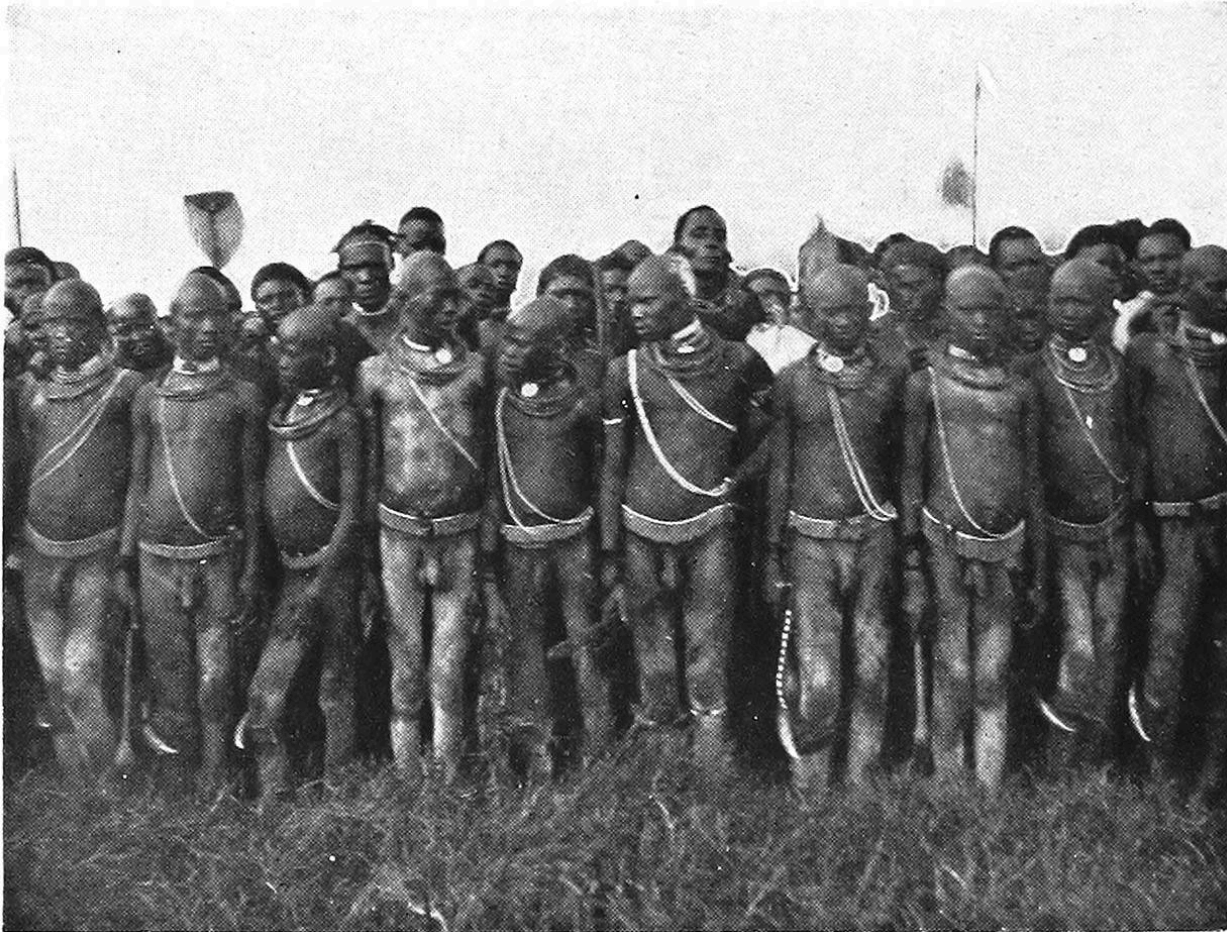
This applies to both sections of the tribe.

(30) If a hyæna defæcates inside a village, the village and its inhabitants are *thahu*, and this is a case for the *kiama* to arrange; the usual sheep is killed and must be eaten by the people of the village. If a person belonging to another village eats any of the meat, a hyæna will come and defile the village where he lives.

This applies to both sections.

(31) If a woman is carrying a gourd on her back and it falls and breaks, she is *thahu*. This is a matter for the elders of *kiama* to arrange.

(32) If a goat should come up to where people are sitting, and try to suckle a woman's breast, the woman is *thahu*, and the goat has to be taken away and slaughtered at the village of the woman's father, [113]the elders of *kiama* being called in to purify the woman.



KIKUYU CIRCUMCISION FEAST.

MALE CANDIDATES.



FEMALE CANDIDATES.

This applies to both sections.

(33) If a woman is milking a cow and the calf climbs up on her shoulders while she is so occupied, the calf is not allowed to suckle the cow again and is forthwith slaughtered; this is a case for the elders. The people of the village must not eat any of the meat, half being taken by the woman to her father and the other half eaten by the elders.

This applies to both sections.

(34) When a woman has recently been confined and the discharges are still unfinished, it has sometimes happened that a cow has come along and licked the stool upon which she has been sitting. In such a case she must

immediately tell her husband; if not, he will become *thahu* and die, and all the other people in the village will become *thahu* in a lesser degree and get ill. The cow has to be killed without delay by the elders and eaten by them; no person of the village must eat of the meat unless he has been circumcised Masai fashion. Three elders in Kikuyu are said to have died from this *thahu* within recent years.

It only applies to those who have been circumcised Kikuyu fashion.

(35) If a cow is out grazing and its tail becomes twisted round a tree, it is *thahu*, and must be slaughtered there and then; it is killed by the owner, and the elders receive the saddle and the young warriors the neck.

This only applies to cattle owned by persons circumcised Kikuyu fashion.

(36) There is a white bird called *nyangi* (the bird *nyangi* is in Swahili called *furakombe*); if one is seen to settle on a cow, and the cow is not killed, the owner of the cow will be *thahu* and die. The cow must be killed there and then and the meat divided up, the elders receiving the saddle, and the neighbouring warriors the neck, whilst no person belonging to the [114]village must eat of the meat. The herd of cattle also need to be purified, and the owner of the village, assisted by the elders, must take a female sheep which has not borne a lamb, and a male goat; these are slaughtered, and the intestines and bones of the animals (termed *ichua*) are placed on a fire, which is lit to the windward of the cattle kraal, and the smoke passing through the kraal and among the cattle will purify the herd. Should the bird be killed among the cattle, the whole herd would die.

This applies to both sections.

(37) If a cow's horn comes off in a person's hand the animal is *thahu* and is slaughtered, and the meat is eaten by all. This applies to both sections.

(38) If a bull or bullock leaves the herd when out grazing and comes home alone, and stands outside the village digging at the refuse heap (*kiaraini*)

with its horns, it is known to be *thahu*, and is forthwith killed by the owner. This applies to both sections.

(39) If a goat is giving birth to a kid, and the head appears first and the body is not born quickly, it is said to be *thahu*, and is slaughtered by the owner. No woman must touch the meat of such an animal or she would become *thahu*; men only can eat it. Moreover, if a goat which is in kid should die, no woman must touch it or eat the meat, the idea probably being that her fertility might become contaminated. This applies to both sections.

(40) If a woman bears twins the first time she has children, the twins are *thahu*, and an old woman of the village, generally the midwife, stuffs grass in their mouths until they are suffocated and throws them out into the bush. If, however, a woman first bears a single child and then has twins they are not thrown out.

If a cow or a goat bears twins the first time, the same practice is observed, and a necklace of cowries is placed round the neck of the mother. This practice is observed by both sections. Some kill both mother and young, and a medicine man is called, who leads a [115]sheep round the village and then sacrifices it to remove the curse.

(41) If the side pole of a bedstead breaks, the person lying on it is *thahu*, and a sheep must be sacrificed; this is a matter for the *kiama* to arrange, and a bracelet called *rukwaru*, cut from the skin of the sheep, must be placed on the wrist of the person, or he or she is liable to die. This applies to both sections.

(42) A malicious person will sometimes, out of spite or in a fit of rage, take up a cooking pot, dash it down to the ground and break it, saying the words *urokwo uwe*, "Die like this." This is a very serious matter and renders all the people of the village *thahu*; it is necessary for the people of the village to pay as much as seven sheep to remove the *thahu*. This is naturally considered a

crime according to native law, and the offender is punished by the elders of *kiama*, who inflict a fine of seven goats. This applies to both sections.

(43) If a son seriously disobeys his father, he can be rendered *thahu* by his father rubbing ashes on his buttocks, and cursing him, saying, “May you be eaten by my anus.” The son will have to take a sheep and then a male goat and a jar of honey and crave his father’s forgiveness. The father slaughters the animal, and rubs his navel and his buttocks with the meat, and the curse is removed. This applies to both sections.

(44) If the head of a village has a quarrel with another man, wounds him with a *simé* or sword, and blood is spilt in the village, the village becomes *thahu*, unless the offender takes his adversary and leads him round the outskirts of the village, letting the blood drip on the ground as they go; the elders will then have to be called in, a sheep is killed, and they purify the village. This applies to both sections.

(45) If an idiot or maliciously-minded person picks up a skull, walks round a village with it and leaves it on the “*thomi*,” or “place of conference,” the village is *thahu*, and is in very serious danger. The elders are first called in, and they take a sheep and drag it round [116]the confines of the village by the same route as that taken by the person with the skull; the animal is killed and pieces of the intestines are dragged round the village. The meat of the sheep is only eaten by very old men. Six other sheep then have to be killed by the elders, and finally the medicine man has to purify each person in the village.

(46) If a wild animal is killed among a flock or herd of animals out grazing the beasts are *thahu*; they can be purified by the owner and the *kiama*; a sheep is killed and the bones and intestines are placed on a fire lit to windward of the infected flock or herd, and the smoke cleanses them and removes the curse. *Vide* Tylor’s “Primitive Culture,” Vol. ii, pp. 430–434, “Fire serves for purification in cases too trifling to require sacrifice.” This applies to both sections.

(47) If domestic animals are attacked and stung by bees they are *thahu*; a sheep is killed and the bones and intestines are placed on a fire lit to windward of the herd and the smoke removes the curse. This applies to both sections.

(48) If a son curses his father seriously he becomes *thahu*; he has to bring a sheep, which is eaten by his father and mother, the fat is melted and all three are smeared with it; the son then has to peg out the skin of the sheep in front of his mother's hut. This applies to both sections.

(49) If a person strikes anyone who is herding cattle, etc., and draws blood, the flock or herd is *thahu*; the offender must pay a sheep, which is killed by the elders, and a strip of skin (*rukwaru*) is placed on the wrist of the offender; no young person is allowed near during the ceremony. This applies to both sections.

(50) If the droppings of a kite or crow fall on a person he is *thahu*; he must shave his head and bathe at a river, and the elders kill a sheep and fasten a strip of the skin on his wrist. The skin of the sheep must not be pegged out to dry in the village where the person lives. This applies to both sections. [117]

(51) If a woman sleeps with her leather garment inside out it is unlucky, but she is not *thahu*, the procedure being for her to spit on the garment and turn it the right way. This applies to both sections, but is considered much more unlucky for a woman circumcised Masai fashion.

(52) When a man dies, the eldest son gives one bull or a big male goat (according to his means) to the *athuri ya kiama* for a feast, and the elders then teach him his duties (*kirira*). The next step is to give the elders a male sheep (*ku-hukuria*), which must not be eaten by the children, the object of this being to cleanse the village of the deceased. Now if a son has not made these gifts nor gone through the necessary ceremonies marking his succession, he cannot participate in the sacrificial feast which has to take place at the sacred fig tree after the death of an elder (called *ku-hoya Engai*).

The principal wife of the deceased can attend the sacrifice, but not the other wives and their children. And should they do so they will become *thahu* and it is a case for a medicine man to arrange. The women and children from the neighbouring villages can go.

If a sacrifice is made at a sacred fig tree to invoke rain only, *athuri ya kiama* can attend and eat it. No woman must go near. These rules apply to both sections.

(53) If children are being circumcised at a village according to Kikuyu fashion and the head of the village goes on a journey before eight days have elapsed or, according to Masai fashion, before four days have passed, he and those of his children who have been operated on become *thahu*; this is a case for the medicine man to arrange.

(54) If a child has been circumcised and, on the first occasion after the ceremony on which he leaves his village, the goats and sheep come back from grazing and enter the village before he returns, he is *thahu*. He cannot return to his village until it is removed and [118] must sleep at a neighbouring village where some of the other boys, who went through the ceremony with him, reside. To remove the *thahu*, his father has to kill a sheep and place a strip of skin (*rukwaru*) from the animal on his wrist.

(55) If a father picks up one of his children and places it on his back or shoulders, the father becomes *thahu* and the child will die, the result being the same whatever the sex of the child; if he carries the child in front of him there is no evil result. This is a case for a medicine man to arrange, and it applies to both sections of the tribe.

(56) If a person should be bitten by a hyæna or a dog he or she is *thahu* and a medicine man has to be called in; he kills a sheep and places a bracelet, or *rukwaru*, of the skin on the wrist of the patient. This applies to both sections.

(57) If a dog dies in a village it is a very serious matter; the head of the village and his people are *thahu*, and the elders are called in. The village

head provides a sheep which is slaughtered, and the stomach contents (*tatha*) are sprinkled round the village, which is then ceremonially swept by the elders; the medicine man is then called in to purify all the people of what is called the *mugiro* of the dog. (*Note.*—The *mugiro* means the pollution produced by the blood of the dog having fallen on the ground of the village or the death of the dog in the village.) This only applies to the Kikuyu section of the tribe.

(58) The children and grandchildren of brothers and sisters cannot intermarry. Breach of this rule is considered to be a very grave sin, and all children born of such marriages surely die; the *thahu* on them cannot be purged by any ceremonial. The parents are not affected. It sometimes happens, however, that a young man unwittingly marries a cousin; for instance, if a part of the family moves away to another locality a man might become acquainted with a girl and marry her before he discovered the relationship. In such a case [119]the *thahu* is removable; the elders take a sheep and place it on the woman's shoulders; it is then killed, the intestines are taken out, and the elders solemnly sever them with a sharp splinter of wood from the mukeo bush, and announce that they are cutting the clan "*kutinyarurira*," which means that they are severing the bond of blood relationship existing between the pair. A medicine man then comes and purifies the couple. This only applies to the Kikuyu section of the tribe.

(59) If a parent goes on a journey and, during his absence, one of his or her sons cohabits with one of his father's wives, the parents are *thahu*, and upon his return will be seized with illness. This is a case for the medicine man, who has to be called in to perform a lustration ceremony to purify them; the offending son is not affected. Sprigs of the *mahoroa*, *muchatha*, and *mitei* bushes are bound up together and dipped in water, and the water is sprinkled over the couple, a little being also sprinkled at the gate of the village. This only applies to those circumcised Kikuyu fashion. It is curious to note that practically the same custom is observed by the A-Kamba.

(60) If a Kikuyu native kills a man belonging to another tribe he is not *thahu*; if he kills a man of his own tribe, but of a different *rika*, or clan, to his own, he is not *thahu*; if, however, he kills a man belonging to his own *rika*, or clan, he is *thahu*, and it is a very serious matter. It can be arranged by the elders in the following manner:

Two trunks of the plantain or banana tree (called *miramba* in Kikuyu) are placed on the ground parallel to each other, and an elder sits on each; one of them is then lifted up by another elder, and the offender has to seat himself on the tree trunk exactly in the same place; the other elder is then removed and the elder brother of the deceased or brother next in age to him is put in his place.

The mothers of the offender and deceased then bring [120]to the place food made of every kind of field produce grown by the tribe, as well as meat; the usual sheep is killed by the elders and a little of the *tatha*, or stomach contents, is sprinkled over the food which was provided by the mothers of the two parties.

The two elders who first sat on the plantain trunks then solemnly eat a little of this food, and also administer some to the offender and the brother of the deceased. Two gourds containing gruel made of meal are then taken, and the elders put a little of the *tatha* in each, and one gourd is sent to the village of the offender and one to that of the deceased. The remaining food is divided among the assembly.

The following day the elders proceed to the local sacred fig tree (*mugumu*), and kill a sheep. They deposit some of the fat, the chest bone, the intestines and the more important bones at the foot of the tree, and eat the rest of the carcase. They say that the *ngoma*, or spirit of the deceased, will visit the tree that night in the shape of a wild cat and eat the meat, and that this offering will prevent the *ngoma* of the deceased from coming back to his village and troubling the occupants.

A medicine man then has to come and purify the murderer and the brother of the deceased.

This ceremony is not considered legal, and cannot be performed till the blood money has been paid.

The above case is a good example of the two stages of the removal of a more serious *thahu*; in the first place, the spirits of the deceased ancestors, including that of the murdered man, have to be appeased, and the personal defilement due to the spilling of blood, which falls on both the murderer and the family of the murdered man, has then to be removed by a separate ceremony performed by the medicine man. It is interesting to note that only the medicine man can remove this latter.

The above *thahu* applies to both sections of the tribe. In giving these details, my informants explained [121] that according to Kikuyu native law, the blood money for a man was a hundred sheep and goats, and nine sheep and goats in addition for the elders. If, however, a man could not raise a hundred goats it was the custom for him to give three daughters in payment, plus the nine goats for the elders.

The Kikuyu were formerly only allowed to eat the following wild animals and birds before being circumcised: partridges (*ngware*), pigeon (*ndutwa*), and hyrax (*mi-kami*). Many will not eat wild game throughout their lives, and people follow the custom they have been brought up to observe; those that eat it probably had Asi or Dorobo ancestors. A person who eats wild game does not become *thahu*. This same view is held by both sections. The repugnance to eating this kind of food probably had its origin in totemism, but all traces of this belief seem to be lost in S. Kikuyu.

(61) If a tree falls on a hut it is considered extremely unlucky; the hut, however, will not be abandoned, but it is necessary for the head of the village to kill a ram which is led round the village before being killed. If this were not done, the owner of the village, or at any rate the woman who lived

in the hut, would become the victim of a *thahu* or curse. The owner of the village, however, may not enter the hut until the sacrifice has been made to appease the *ngoma* or ancestral spirits who inflict the *thahu*. This applies to both sections of the tribe, viz., those circumcised Kikuyu fashion and those Masai fashion.

(62) If a jackal (*mbwei*) comes into a village and calls at night when the inhabitants are asleep, the people say that a spirit is calling for meat, and it is considered very unlucky. Next morning the owner of the village will take a male goat (*nthenge*), lead it round the village, and kill it at about the spot where the jackal called out. Pieces are cut from the loin, lungs, heart, and each of the limbs, and piled up into two little heaps as offerings to the *ngoma*, who are believed to have [122] called out through the medium of the jackal. The sex of the *ngoma* is not known, and therefore to be on the safe side two little heaps are laid out, one for any male spirits and one for any female spirits. No bone must be broken in any meat offered to the spirits.

Next morning the elders go to the place where the two offerings of meat were deposited and pour out a libation of beer on each. They then address the *ngoma* as follows: "O ye spirits, take this meat and beer and give us goats and cattle and children, and do not bring *thahu* to this village." The people of both circumcision guilds follow this procedure.

(63) If a certain snake, called *nyamuyathi* by the Kikuyu, enters a hut, it is necessary to pour some milk or fat on the floor for the reptile to drink; it may drink and leave, or it may not. If it does, well and good; if not, the owner of the village has to kill a sheep, cook some of its fat, and pour it out in the hut, saying at the same time: "We offer you some fat to drink, we beg of you to leave us." It is believed that a *ngoma*, or spirit, has come in the guise of a snake, and on no account must such a snake be killed. After the sacrifice of the sheep has been made the snake will always go, but it disappears mysteriously and no one sees it leave. If the snake remained in the hut, the wife who owned the hut, and her children, would be *thahu*.

(64) If a stranger comes to a village and dies in a hut there, the hut is completely abandoned if the owner belongs to the Kikuyu guild; a large hole is made in the side of the hut by taking out several of the wall slabs or planks (*mihirigo*); the corpse is left inside and the hyænas come and carry it off. The hut is then left to fall into ruin, and no articles, such as cooking pots, beer, jars, etc., are removed from it. The men who break the hole in the wall are even considered unclean, as much as if they had handled the corpse, and after performing the duty they go straight off into the bush and stay there until they have bathed and been anointed with *tatha* (the stomach contents of a sheep); [123] finally a very old woman comes and shaves their heads; they are then ceremonially clean and can return to their families. A medicine man (*mundu mugo*) has, however, to come and purify the whole village in the usual way.

If the owner of the village belongs to the Masai guild the consequences are not so serious. The family leave the hut temporarily until the corpse has been carried off by the hyænas; they then kill a goat or sheep near the door of the hut, take a little of the fat from the stomach of the animal, and place a small portion on the cooking fire of each hut. This removes the *thahu* due to the death of the stranger and all is well.

(65) If a new hut is built in the village and the wife enters it and finds herself menstruating on the day she lights the first fire in it, the hut has to be broken down and demolished the very next day. The woman must on no account sleep a second night in it; a *thahu* is on both the woman and the hut. A medicine man has to be called in to purify ceremonially the woman and her children, a new hut is built and the medicine man ceremonially sweeps it out with a broom made of the twigs of the *mukenya*, *mahoroa*, and *michatha* bushes; he then collects the sweepings and throws them outside the village. This custom applies to both sections of the tribe.

This custom also has another phase which is as follows: If on the day a hut is built, the wife, who is the owner of the hut, is away from the village and finds herself menstruating, she cannot even return to the village, but has to

seek shelter with neighbours for three days. On the fourth day she returns, bringing with her a gourd of water. When she reaches the *thomi*, or meeting-place outside the village, she pours some of the water into a half gourd and washes herself. She can then enter both village and hut without further ceremony. This applies to both sections of the tribe.

(66) When a new hut is built, the first fire to be lit [124] in it must be brought from a fire out in a *shamba*, or field, not from another hut. If fire cannot be obtained from a *shamba* it is first obtained from another village; with this a fire is lit in a *shamba* and burning sticks are taken from that fire. The Kikuyu state that they are afraid to get fire direct from another village in case they bring some unknown *thahu* along with it or with the firewood; they consider it a great risk, particularly for the children, who might get thin and ill in consequence.

Two or three days after the first fire has been lit a male sheep has to be slaughtered by the owner of the village. The meat is cooked in the hut, and the blood is poured out on the village *thomi*, then beer is brewed and a libation of it is poured out inside the hut near the door and on the *thomi* or village green. The above applies to those circumcised Kikuyu fashion. Those circumcised Masai fashion make the first fire in a new hut by friction with a firestick, and the wood for the first fire must come from two of the trees sacred to this branch, viz., *mutamaiyu* and *mutarakwa* (juniper).

(67) Anyone can impose a *thahu* upon the owner of a hut by plucking out a handful of thatch from over the door and throwing it on the ground. The *thahu* apparently affects the wife who lives in the hut, and she is apt to be attacked by a wasting disease. To remove the evil effects, a number of elders and a *mundu mugo*, or medicine man, are called in; they kill a ram or young ewe, which has not yet borne, near the door of the hut, and sprinkle the *tatha* inside the hut and at the door. They then take a rough brush made of twigs of the *marario* and *mahoroa* bushes and sweep up the *tatha*. This proceeding purifies the hut. They also sprinkle some of the *tatha* on the thatch over the

door and put some *muthakwa* and *mukenia* sprigs in the place where the piece of thatch was taken.

Only the elders and the medicine man eat the meat of the sacrifice; none of the inhabitants of the village must touch it, and even the brothers of the owner of [125]the hut may not eat any. If the hut is not thus purified, it must be forthwith destroyed.

Should the thatch be pulled out unintentionally by a drunken man, he will only have to pay a goat for the purification ceremony. If, on the other hand, it is done with evil intent, the *kiama*, or council of elders, will fine the offender five goats. The writer is indebted to Mr Beech for bringing this example to his notice.

If a man goes to sleep at a strange village, and if the owner belongs to the same *rika* as himself, he is told to sleep in the hut of one of the wives of the owner. If this woman has lost a child and has not performed the usual purification ceremonies after a death, the man will return home with a *thahu* and will pass it on to the wife in whose hut he sleeps on his return home.

It is necessary for the hut to be purified as in the previous case, and then the man and his wife have also to be purified.

Again, if a wife goes and sleeps abroad and cohabits with a man who has assisted in the burial of a corpse or touched a corpse and not yet been purified, she will, on returning home, bring a *thahu* to her husband, and the same ceremony of lustration has to be undergone.

(68) The last of the Kikuyu *thahu* which will be quoted is one of some importance, as it may be, in primitive culture, the germ of one of the beliefs which affects the life of civilised peoples: this is the ill luck which is attached to the seventh day.

A herdsman will not herd his flocks for more than six days, and on the seventh must be relieved by another man.

If a man has been on a journey and absent for six days he must not return home on the seventh day, and must observe continence on the seventh day; rather than return to his village on that day he will go and sleep at the house of a neighbour a short distance away. If this law is broken, serious illness is certain to supervene and a medicine man (*mundu mugo*) has to be called in to remove the curse. Both sections of the [126]tribe are subject to it, and both male and female are affected. Moreover, the live stock of the offender will become sick.

This belief makes it easy for the missionaries to explain to the Kikuyu the meaning of the Christian observance of the Sabbath.

An important point in connection with *thahu* in Kikuyu which previously escaped notice is that an owner of a village, if he belongs to the Kikuyu circumcision guild, cannot enter or sleep in a hut which has been ceremonially purified until two days have elapsed, or for two months if he belongs to the Masai guild. This prohibition has a very practical effect, for in cases where the whole village has to be purified to rid it of some serious *thahu* the owner of the village would naturally be homeless for either two days or two months, as the case may be. To obviate this difficulty the purification ceremony is carried out in two instalments: one half of the village is done first, and a little later the medicine man returns and performs the lustration ceremony on the other half; the people are not thus greatly inconvenienced.

A variant of the word *thahu* in Kikuyu, which is often used by the old men, is *nzahu*.

It appears upon inquiry that not every elder in Kikuyu has the power of removing *thahu*, but only such as have lost a wife who is a mother.

If a wife dies and leaves children, the husband calls in two *athuri ya ukuu* (these are the very senior elders), a *muthuri ya kiama* (elder of council), and an old woman past the age of child bearing.

They kill a lamb, *mwati*, or a ram, and the elders then take the *tatha* (stomach contents), pour them into a half gourd, *njeli*, dip a bundle of leaves in the *tatha* and sprinkle the hut. This ceremony is believed to remove from the father and his children the *thahu* left by the death. The half gourd is then placed at the bed head of the father. A medicine man finally comes and purifies the whole family. If his generation or age is [127]junior to that of the elders who come to perform the above ceremony he cannot participate in it, but has to sit apart.

After this the father is considered to be eligible to take part in ceremonial connected with the removal of *thahu*, but only if he is a qualified *muthuri ya kiama ya imburi nne* or *mburi ithano*; that is to say, if he has reached the grade to which the entrance fee is four goats or five goats.

Partial Immunity of Elders from Thahu.—The elders of the highest grade, *ukuru*, are as a rule proof against the incidence of *thahu*. They probably acquire a certain sanctity from their communion with the deity when they take part in the performance of sacrifices at the sacred trees and can thus be considered as a primitive priesthood. If, however, they assist in the burial of a corpse and cohabit with their wives within two months, they will be stricken with illness. If they participate in the native oath *ringa thengi*, they must be celibate for four months, and if they assist at the *kithathi* or *githathi* oath ceremony, they must remain so for five months, or nothing can save them. In all the above cases they must, like ordinary people, be purified by a medicine man before they can resume their marital relations.

Thabu in Ukamba.—In Ukamba *thahu* is called *thabu* or *makwa*, and the popular attitude towards it is very similar to that existing in Kikuyu, but it does not appear to be such an important factor in the lives of the people, and for some reason or other does not seem to have reached such a high development. It is looked upon with awe, and people generally dislike to discuss it. The bulk of the elders can therefore only give one or two examples of it. They declare that the only people who can give much information are the *atumia ya makwa* (elders of *makwa*) and *atumia ya ukuu*

(elders of *ukuu*), and these important people undoubtedly endeavour to envelop the beliefs in mystery. [128]

The incidence of *makwa* or *thabu* does not appear to be nearly so frequent in Ukamba as it is in Kikuyu. The Kamba, in fact, sneer at the Kikuyu, and say they are full of *makwa*. Moreover, owing to the reticence of the Kamba on the subject, it is not easy to collect examples. Mr C. Dundas, who has assisted in this inquiry, had to pay a fee of a bullock for himself and a goat for his interpreter before he could get any information on the subject. These fees admitted him to the grade of *mutumia ya ukuu*. All inquiries, however, had to be conducted in a low tone, and no one was allowed to listen. The following are all that have been discovered up to date, but there is little doubt that others exist:

(1) On the death of a man the village is unclean and must be purified by the elders, and during the period of purification strict continence must be observed by all those resident in the village. If a man fails to observe this rule he will become afflicted with *makwa*; also the woman, providing she belongs to the village where the death has taken place. Moreover, if a daughter of the deceased who is living away from the village visits there within eleven days of the death of her father, she will become afflicted.

The curse is removed in the same way in either of the above cases. A brother of the deceased must first cohabit with his wife. He then brings a goat and the afflicted person brings some beer. One of the elders then collects twigs of the *movu*, *mulale*, and *muteme* bushes; these are pounded up with water, and the mixture is called *ng̃nondu*. Some of the *ng̃nondu* is poured down the goat's throat, the idea probably being to purify the animal ceremonially. The patient then walks three times round the goat, and the animal is lifted up by the elders. Its throat is cut and the blood spurts over the patient's head and body. A piece of stick is then placed under his left arm and another between the toes of his right foot; two elders take hold of each of these sticks and pull them away saying, "We [129]purify you." The belief is possibly that by some magical process the defilement is passed into the sticks. Subsequently the

brother of the deceased again cohabits with the same wife, and the patient is then cured.

(2) A man may not lie on his mother's bed, or even take any articles from it, without becoming *makwa*. Upon the death of his father he inherits, and is then entitled to use, his father's bed, which was, of course, also occupied by his mother, and it is therefore necessary that he should be protected from any evil which may come from this. So the elders make a mixture called *ng̃nondu*, and smear the soles of his feet with it; they also sprinkle the framework of the bed. They say that if this were not done the son would become *makwa* if he even put his foot on the bed. If a son becomes *makwa* through transgressing this law before his father's death, he has to be purified as in the previous case. It is suspected that this prohibition was devised as a safeguard against incest, but if the theory is correct the natives seem to have forgotten the reason. A man, moreover, may not sit on his brother-in-law's bed without incurring *thabu*.

Reference is invited to the author's work on the "Ethnology of the A-Kamba" (Camb. Press), p. 65, discussing the danger to a girl if a stranger touches her menstrual blood; this is a clear case of *makwa*, which falls on the girl in consequence.

Some of the prohibitions mentioned on p. 102 op. cit. are also cases of *makwa*, and on p. 97 op. cit. there is an account of a man who was suffering from *thabu* or *makwa*. At the time, unfortunately, the importance of the phenomena had not been fully recognised.

(3) If a man dies and leaves young wives, the sons usually take them over; but, of course, a son must not marry his mother. A son cannot, however, succeed to one of his father's wives until the elders have performed certain ceremonies. If he cohabits with her before these are carried out he will become *makwa*. [130]

To remove the curse in this case the ceremonial is as follows: a paternal uncle of the offender collects the elders and provides beer for them; the woman concerned brings a goat. The elders make some of the *ng̃nondu* mixture, which is handed to the patient, who pretends to pay it to the elders. The elders then bring a branch of a tree called *muuti* and tell him to pay it to his uncle. He does so by throwing it at his uncle, saying, "I pay you before the elders." This looks as if the spirit of the deceased father were offended, and ceremonial payment had to be made to the brother of the deceased, who for the time being represents him.

A piece of wood about fifteen inches long, cut from a *mukingezia* tree, is then brought. This is first inserted into the vaginal passage of the woman, and the man's penis is then touched with it twice or thrice. One of the elders afterwards carries the stick away and throws it across a river saying, "I throw this evil away." In the evening the uncle cohabits with the woman. The *makwa* is thus believed to be removed, but the man can never have anything to do with that woman again. He can, however, marry another of his father's wives after the elders have performed the necessary rites.

(4) After the death of a father none of the sons may take honey from the father's hives until the paternal uncle has first done so. Any who break this law will become *makwa*. It can, however, be removed by the uncle, who brings a sheep, and he, the elders, and the mother of the patient lead the sheep three times round the patient; at the conclusion of the third turn the sheep is lifted up and its throat is cut, and the blood is allowed to spurt over the patient. The animal's throat is cut by one of the elders, whose forearm is held by the uncle and the mother. After this ceremony the patient is believed to be cured, and he can take honey. It may be that this was devised to prevent a son rushing off into the woods after his [131]father's death and annexing any honey he found, irrespective of whether such and such a hive would fall to his share when the elders decided as to the division of the estate.

(5) If a woman loses a young child by death it is necessary for her to have her breasts ceremonially purified by a qualified elder, or it is believed that

any future children she may bear will die of *makwa*.

(6) If a man cohabits with a married woman in the woods while the cattle are out grazing, it brings *makwa* upon the cattle and they will die. The woman, however, is generally afraid of evil falling on the precious cattle, and confesses. The cattle are then taken out of their kraal, medicine is placed on the ground at the gate, and they are then driven back over the medicine, and this lifts the curse. The woman has also to be ceremonially purified by an elder.

(7) If a woman who has borne children is forced by a man a curse is said to fall on the children and they will die. The evil can, however, be averted if she is purified by an elder; the man has to pay a goat and the expenses of the purification ceremony.

(8) If a hyæna defæcates in a village during the night a *makwa* falls on the village, and the elders have to kill a goat and purify (*tapisha*) the village.

(9) Some medicine men have the power to place a *makwa* upon one of their wives who is a particular favourite. This is done by medicine, but the details are kept secret. If a man seduces the woman in question it is said that death will ensue unless he can by payment induce the medicine man to lift the curse.

(10) If a person goes to his mother's native village and eats food there, and if by any chance a death has occurred in that village and the funeral ceremonies are not completed, he will be stricken with *makwa*. Even if a wife goes to pay a visit to her father's village under the above circumstances the result is the same. This form of *makwa* can only be removed by a medicine man. [132]

The little known Thaka or Tharaka people in the Tana Valley south-east of Kenia also believe in *makwa*, and use the same word for it. A few examples have been collected by Mr C. Dundas, and are given below:

(1) If a village is ceremonially unclean for some reason or other, and a man cohabits therein with a person of the opposite sex before it is purified, they are both stricken with *makwa*.

(2) If a man belonging to a village has been absent on the occasion of a death and at the necessary subsequent purification of the village, he may not enter until a sheep has been killed and the contents smeared on the threshold of his mother's hut. If this lustration ceremony is omitted he is stricken with *makwa*.

(3) After the death of the head of a family the sons may take the younger widows to wife, but not until the brother of the deceased has ceremonially cohabited with the principal wife of the deceased. If this rite is not observed before a son marries one of his father's widows, he will become *makwa*.

Little is yet known of the procedure which has to be adopted to remove the *makwa*, but it is said that only medicine men can do so. An elder, seen recently, who was covered with small sores, and some of whose toes had dropped off, was stated to be suffering from *makwa*, due to infringement of the rule mentioned in example (1) above.

A new road was recently opened in Kikuyu country, and where it crossed the Ruiru River a bridge was built. At one end of the bridge an arch, made of bent sticks, was erected, and on this a small wicker-work arrangement was suspended. Over the bent sticks a strip of the skin of a sheep was entwined. This was called "*rigi*," and was a miniature of the wicker door of a hut. The Ruiru River at this place is the boundary between two sections of the country, and the object of the model door was to prevent evil influences, or *thahu*, entering the neighbouring area by the bridge. The strip of [133]skin was taken from a sheep which had been sacrificed there.

There is a curious belief in Kikuyu with regard to the burning of a hut. If a hut is burned down, the owner must not lodge the goats from that hut in the house of a friend, the idea being that the hut caught fire as the result of some

kind of *thahu*, and that the goats are probably infected with the *thahu* and may thus bring sickness to other people's animals. There was, for instance, a case where a hut was destroyed by fire, along with several goats, but the people dare not eat the carcasses, although the meat was apparently quite wholesome.

When a burnt hut is rebuilt, a goat is slaughtered to prevent the new hut from being destroyed by fire. The meat of the goat is eaten by the elders, and the skin is given to an elder who has had a hut burnt. But although he may use the skin he must not sell it.

Extinction of Fire in a Hut.—Though not definitely connected with the *thahu* beliefs, the ill luck which is associated with the extinction of fire in a hut is rather interesting to note.

If a man has several huts it is considered extremely unlucky if the fire goes out in all of them in a single night. He must at once summon the elders, who kill a male sheep and sprinkle some of the stomach contents or *tatha* on each fireplace. If his nearest neighbours live some little way off, he relights the fire by means of a fire stick, *mwaki ku-thegetha*, but if they live near by he begs some fire from them. When the sheep is killed they also fry the fat in a cooking pot and sprinkle some of it in the village and pray to *Engai* (God) —“We give thee fat to drink, and beg thee not to extinguish the fire again.”

When fire goes out in the hut of a medicine man it is not necessary for him to kill a sheep like ordinary people, but he feels the ill luck all the same. He dare not travel next day, and if anyone comes to him for [134]medicine or to be purified, he will not perform the ceremony until a whole day has elapsed.

The elders who were interrogated about this were quite clear that it was God who put out the fire and not the *ngoma*, or spirits.

Effects of Breaking a Tabu.—A curious case of the results of an infringement of *tabu* recently came to the notice of an officer in Western Ukamba. He was inspecting the hospital, and found there a Kamba porter stricken with illness;

his face was much swollen and covered by a kind of congested rash, and his testicles were also swollen. On inquiry, he stated that his affection came on suddenly after eating some hartebeest meat, and that he belonged to the *Aitangwa* clan, in which this was a forbidden meat. The officer immediately sought out an intelligent Mu-Kamba, who knew nothing about the incident, and asked about the *Aitangwa* and their *tabu*, or *makwa*, and without hesitation he was told that hartebeest meat was forbidden, and described exactly the symptoms from which the porter was suffering as being the result of breaking the prohibition. It was said that the man would have to sacrifice a goat and go through a purification ceremony to get rid of the affliction. The final result was not heard.

These phenomena are very curious, and psychologists would no doubt attribute them to self-hypnotic suggestion. It must, however, be remembered that a man who breaks the clan *tabu* is probably, before breaking it, very sceptical as to the evil effects, and, being sceptical, would presumably be proof against the hypnotic auto-suggestion.

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(b) Purification and Blessing

Ku-tahikia in Kikuyu.—Reference has been made to purification by the medicine man, which generally concludes the ceremonies connected with the removal of *thahu*. This ceremony is the same in all cases in [135] which it is considered necessary; it may vary a little according to the practice of a particular medicine man, but that is all.

The writer was recently present at one of these ceremonies, and the procedure was as follows: The medicine man first received a sheep; he then made a small incision between the hoofs of the right foreleg and rubbed a

little medicine into the wound. The medicine consisted of a powder made from the *mararia* bush and *mahunyuru*, which is the epidermis and hair of a sheep. Probably the idea underlying this was a consecration of the animal for the purpose of the ceremony. The medicine man then brought a number of sprigs of various plants:

Mahoroa,
Murumbai,
Uruti-Emilia?
Mukandu,
Muchatha-Emilia, sp.,
Matei or *Mitei*,
Ihurura, a creeping, vine-like plant.

He separated these into two bundles, and bound each at the base with the creeper *ihurura*; they resembled two hand brushes of green leaves.

The mother of the patient or person who was to be purified then fetched about a pint of water from the stream, carrying it in a couple of banana leaves laid over each other. A small depression was scooped in the ground, and the water, still in the banana leaves, was deposited therein. The medicine man and the patient squatted opposite each other. The former then put a variety of powders in the water. These were enumerated as follows:

Powder (1) made from the stomach contents of the tree hyrax.

Ruthu (2) made from the *muhokora* root.

Umu (3) reddish powder made from the root of a thorny plant.

[136]

A powder (4) made from the *irura* (papyrus) and the *mahoroa* plant.

He then produced the dried right black forefoot of a sheep, dipped it in the water, stirred up the contents, and placed the wetted foot in the mouth of the patient, who licked it vigorously and then expectorated the liquid on the ground. This was repeated some twenty or thirty times, the medicine man

incessantly recounting all kinds of dangers and evils in a chanting voice with a general refrain, "May you be delivered from all these." He then took one of the bundles of plants and dipped the lower end in the water. The patient licked it and expectorated, as above described, the medicine man chanting the whole time.

The same procedure was adopted with the second bundle of leaves.

The patient then stood up; the medicine man took one of the brushes, dipped it in the water, and sprinkled the patient's head and wiped the front of his body with the wetted bundle of leaves. The patient now turned round and the back of his body was similarly treated.

The patient then knelt down and washed his face with the water and washed each foot and leg. This done, he wiped his face, feet, and legs, first with one bundle and then with the other. The patient then put his finger into the water and pierced the banana leaf basin, and the water soaked away into the earth. Thereupon the medicine man gathered up the banana leaves and his bundle of leaves and deposited them on the village manure heap, *kiaraini*.


There was still a final stage of the proceeding, viz., the anointing with white clay, *ira*. The patient still stood in front of the medicine man, who took from a small gourd some of the white earth, and smeared it down the line of the nose, on the upper lip, under the chin, on the right and left big toe, and on the palms of both hands. A little of the medicines called *irura* and [137]*muhokora* were then taken and a little placed in the palm of each hand of the patient, who crossed his hands and, holding them in this position, alternately licked each palm. The medicine man then licked a little of the above medicine, and the ceremony was finished.

The purification ceremony cannot be performed without payment; it is otherwise of no avail.

Ceremonial Blessing by a Medicine Man (Kikuyu).—This is believed to be efficacious, upon certain occasions, against evil and as a purification. The

medicine man gives the supplicant a powder made from an aromatic root called *muhokora*. It is of a greyish brown colour; a little is poured into his hand and he eats it. The medicine man also eats some, with the object, perhaps, of showing the patient that nothing bad has been mixed with it.

The medicine man then takes a long narrow gourd with tiny holes on one side of it and shakes out, as from a pepper castor, a powder made of the roots of the *muhokora* and *mchanja muka* plants, and at the same time uttering a prayer. The patient receives the powder on his hands and rubs it on his head and down the middle of his forehead. The medicine man now takes a draught of beer and ceremonially spits a little on to each of his breasts, first, however, spitting a little on the ground as a libation to the *ngoma*, or ancestral spirits.

The general idea of the purification ceremony is of a dual character; its first object is to cast out the contamination of an evil influence and, this being done, to re-establish normal relations between the worshipper and his deity. It is believed that among African natives the idea of the evil influence is not very concrete, but among other peoples the evil influence assumes the shape of a demon, the nature of which may be identified by a magician and expelled by him by the use of appropriate formulæ. The one is a higher development of the other. In Math. xvii. 14, and [Mark ix. 14](#) , for instance, we find the founder of the Christian [138]religion playing the part of the magician and casting out an evil spirit. The only parallel to this class of procedure among the African natives under investigation is the curious *Engai* possession of the Kamba and the ritual undertaken to cure persons possessed: the odd point about those ceremonies, however, is that although the afflicted person for whom the dances are convened may be cured, others will be seized during the proceedings, the affliction apparently becoming infectious.

Kithangaona cha muchi—*The Purification Sacrifice for a Village (Kamba of Kitui)*.—If sickness becomes prevalent in a village, the headman will consult a medicine man, who may declare that the spirit (*imu*) of a person who died

long ago is bothering the people and needs appeasing, and he will therefore order a fowl to be taken round the village ceremonially and killed. This is supposed to be very efficacious in restoring the good luck of the village, and is done as follows: the village head will walk round outside the village with some ashes in his right hand and a fowl in the left; on reaching a point opposite the gate of the village the fowl will be released and allowed to fly inside. It is then caught again and its throat is cut and the knife is afterwards buried in the cattle kraal. The children of the village eat the fowl. The village head then prays to the deity (*Engai*) to remove the sickness and keep it from the village, and afterwards prays to the *imu*, or spirit, of the deceased person who is supposed to have brought the sickness. It is stated that they first pray to *Engai* because the *imu* is believed to have gone to *Engai*.

The *aiimu* which afflict villages are said to be usually those of deceased medicine men who, when alive, were supposed to communicate with *Engai* in their dreams. They declare that they have seen someone glowing like a fire, giving such and such a message.

There is another *kithangaona cha muchu*, which [139]also deals with sickness in a village, but differs from the previous example in which a fowl is used. As with European physicians, the practice of medicine men varies for individual patients.

The magician, having decided that the sickness is due to the *imu* of a deceased person, will order the women of the village to grind some *mawe* or *wimbi* flour and cook it and make porridge.

The porridge is brought to the hut of the afflicted person and some butter is added; the people present dip their wooden spoons in the porridge and each one eats a little and then throws some on to the floor as an offering to the *imu*; the senior wife of the village head commences and the others follow suit.

The village head then brews some beer, drinks a little, and pours some out to the troublesome *imu*. Having done this he kills a he-goat, cuts a strip of meat from the breast, cooks it, and deposits it at the door of the hut. It is probably eaten by the village dogs or fowls, but this does not matter.

The people then pray to the spirit and say, "We have given you food, beer, and meat, we beseech you to allow the sick one to recover."

Kithangaona cha mburi—*The Purification Sacrifice of the Goat*.—On some occasions the medicine man will advise that the ceremony of *kithangaona cha mburi* be performed. This is done as follows: The evening before the ceremony, the head of the village puts a stone in the hut fire and leaves it there all night; next morning he calls a small boy and girl, and the former, accompanied by the headman, leads a male goat round the outside of the village, followed by the girl. The goat must be all one colour and not spotted. When the party reaches the gate of the village the headman takes a half gourd of water and places it on the goat's head between the horns. The red hot stone is brought out from the glowing embers in the hut, dropped into the bowl of water, causing the water to boil and give off steam. A hole is now dug at the door [140] of the hut of the village head, who holds the stone over the hole and prays as follows: "*Engai muimu mivo nathika dikoni wao mivo nathika hivia nathika wao pamwe nabia hii*," which, freely translated, means: "Oh God, I do not wish to see the sickness enter my village, so now I bury this stone and bury the sickness with it." The goat is not killed, but is allowed to go free. This is an unusual proceeding. It is a curious example of a combination of magic and primitive religion.


Kithangaona cha munda—*Prayers for Crops (Kitui)*.—When a villager sees that his crops are suffering from drought, the ravages of insect pests, and so forth, he will go to a river bed and cut the branch of a tree called *kindio* which grows there. He will then take the egg of a fowl, dig a hole in the ground, among the crops, and place the egg in it, planting the branch of the *kindio* tree in the hole. He prays to the deity (*Engai*) beseeching him to make his crops grow like the *kindio*, a tree which never withers. The egg is said to

be used because of its nourishing properties, and it is also believed that no bad influence can penetrate its shell. This is a very pretty example of homœopathic magic.


The Dedication of the Bull—Kithangaona cha nzau—Kitui A-Kamba.—It sometimes happens that when a man consults a magician about a contemplated marriage, or some other matter, the magician informs him that in his village a cow is in calf and that this cow will bear a bull calf which will be of a certain colour, red or black or spotted. He tells the owner that the calf must not be killed or sold in the ordinary way, as it will be the property of the ancestral spirits (*nzau ya aiimu*), or will be dedicated to them. If, however, it is necessary at any time to kill this beast, some beer must be brewed, and the meat must be divided among the owner's wives. No portion with a bone in it must be given to a stranger, but all the bones should be collected and buried in the cattle kraal. The meat of [141]the beast must be cooked and offered to the *aiimu*, and some of the beer poured out to them. The bones of the carcass may be broken, if so desired.

A beast thus dedicated to the *aiimu* will never die of disease. If, for any special reason, the owner wishes to sell or kill such a bull, a substitute must be found for it, and an important ceremony has to be observed. The original animal and the substitute are tied and thrown on their sides; the two animals are then placed touching each other. Some hair is cut from the forehead, the chest, and the tail of the original beast and placed on the substitute, the animals being then released. The *aiimu* are addressed, and it is explained to them that owing to pressing reasons the original beast has to be killed or sold, as the case may be, but that a suitable substitute has been provided. Some beer is brewed, and a libation of it is poured out in the hut of the village head.


Old Testament Parallels.—It is considered that the principle of *thahu* or *thabu* existed among the Israelites, and the following references to Mosaic law may be reasonably quoted:


[Leviticus xix. 8](#) : “Therefore everyone that eateth it shall bear his iniquity because he hath profaned the hallowed thing of the Lord and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.”


This refers to the eating of a sacrifice of peace offerings on the third day; it may be eaten the day of the sacrifice and the following day, but if eaten at all on the third day, inflicts a *thabu* on the culprit.

[Leviticus xix. 22](#) : “And the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of his trespass offering ... and the sin which he hath done shall be forgiven him.”

This can be taken as a case of a man who has committed a crime against tribal law, and takes a ram to the priest or one of the elders of the tribe, who [142]performs the ceremony of *tahikia* to cleanse him from his sin.

The elaborate ceremonial laid down in [Leviticus xiv](#) . dealing with the case of purification from the plague of leprosy might be the procedure adopted by a Kikuyu medicine man to-day: the use of special plants, the sacrifice of a ewe lamb of the first year. The latter is identical with the *mwati* of Kikuyu practice.

It is laid down in [verse 19](#)  that: “The priest shall offer the sin offering and make atonement for him that is to be cleansed.” This certainly looks as if the plague were the result of evil-doing on the part of the patient, and of the nature of a *thahu*, and is quite in accordance with present-day beliefs in Kikuyu and Ukamba.

The comminatory chapters xxviii. in Deuteronomy are of considerable interest as a parallel to the cases quoted as existing to-day in Africa, e.g., [xxviii. 45](#) : “And all these curses shall come upon thee and shall pursue thee and overtake thee till thou be destroyed.”

General Remarks on Thahu and Thabu.—It will be well to review the results of this inquiry. It should be noted that in a number of cases, about one-third

of those enumerated, the *thahu* is brought upon the offender or brought upon a third party, by the intentional act of the offender; in other cases the person, and sometimes the live stock, are the victims of circumstances over which there is no control.

The investigations throw a vivid light upon the complicated nature of the life history of a Mu-Kikuyu or Mu-Kamba, and it is evident that a native of one of these tribes cannot go through life without becoming *thahu* or *thabu* some time or other.

Mr C. Dundas, writing on this subject, says with regard to the Kikuyu people: "The fear of *thahu* is always present, a man may be subject to it without knowing the cause. When anyone goes on a journey [143] he cannot tell whether he may not have contracted *thahu* in strange houses and villages, and therefore when he returns he will kill a goat for purification before he enters his village. This was done on one occasion by a number of elders who had been on a journey with me, but as they were representatives of the western part of the district, the goat was killed on crossing the Kamiti River, which river they regarded as the boundary of their country."

Unmarried men and girls are not subject to *thahu*. On one occasion a woman in hospital was said to be suffering from *thahu* caused by having touched the genitals of a strange man; the symptoms of *thahu* were in reality only a bed sore, but a medicine man was called in to cure her. A case, in which a man was sued for a goat for the purification of a woman whom he had raped, and who, in consequence, could not suckle her child until she was purified, was tried before a *kiama*. The idea seemed to be that the child would become *thahu*.

The *thahu* is, however, in nearly all cases removable by the elders and medicine men for payment, and it may therefore be urged that the belief has not much value as a moral restraint. This view cannot, however, be seriously maintained for the following reasons: Take the case of a person who commits an act which he knows will bring *thahu*; it must be clearly

understood that he never questions the validity of the principle; he goes about with the burden of the misdeed on his conscience, and this worries him so much that he gradually gets thin and ill, and puts it down to the *thahu*. It therefore ends by his confessing to the elders and begging them to free him from the curse. It is in essence nothing more or less than the confession and absolution of the Christian Church. Then again we have to consider the publicity of *kraal* life, where very little goes on which is not known to the neighbours; polygamy also increases this, a man confides in one wife, she tells another wife and so it goes through [144]the village; if one person commits an act which inflicts *thahu* on himself or a neighbour, it will gradually leak out by some means or other, and public opinion will insist on measures being taken to remove it. No living person would ever dream of evading the wrath of the *ngoma*, or ancestral spirits. Occasions may, of course, arise when the commission of a prohibited act may involve a third party, and the person who committed it may preserve silence on the point, but the elders will in most cases be in possession of complete information as to the movements of every person in the neighbourhood, and, moreover, the demeanour of the conscience-stricken culprit will invite suspicion, so in practice it is but rarely that the offender is not detected.

In some of the examples of *thahu* which are cited above, cases will be noted in which the hut is affected and has to be forthwith demolished if the curse is not removed; this feature appears to be worthy of note, and it may in some measure account for the low type of domestic architecture among these tribes. Obviously there is but little incentive to build large permanent structures if, owing to the incidence of a *thahu*, the owner may have to demolish them at any moment. The author's attention was first called to this point by a learned French missionary who has studied the Kikuyu for many years.

It must not be assumed that every native is conversant with all the acts of omission or commission by which *thahu* or *thabu* may be incurred and there are doubtless variations in different areas, i.e., the *thahu* of Western Kenya are not identical in number and character with those of Kyambu district. All

the tribesmen, however, know a certain number, and if anything untoward occurs to a man he will consider it advisable to consult an elder; the elder will cross-examine him and ask if he has done so-and-so, or omitted to do certain things. Eventually the applicant will admit having done something which results in a [145]*thahu*; the way is then clear, and appropriate treatment must be sought in the proper quarter. Ridiculous as most of these taboos appear, they probably have a general value in regulating conduct in communities where legal restraint is in an undeveloped state.

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(c) *The Dying Curse*

This is a very interesting belief, which occurs in both Kikuyu and Ukamba. In Kikuyu it is called *kirume*, and in Ukamba *kiume*. The belief is also said to be found, under the name of *ukuongo*, among the Ja-Luo Kavirondo.

It is really a *thahu*, *thabu*, or *makwa* which can be suspended by a dying man over his descendants. The same idea, somewhat inverted, exists among the Swahili, who call it *rathi*, or the dying blessing. If a man does not receive his father's blessing, he is believed to go through life attended by much misfortune.

The general idea is that a dying person can put a curse upon property belonging to him, or can lay a curse upon another person, but only upon a person belonging to his own family; thus, for example, the head of a village, when dying, can lay a curse on a certain plot of land owned by him and will that it shall not pass out of the family, and if a descendant sells it, his speedy death is said to follow. A case recently came to the author's knowledge where an elder was offered a very tempting sum for a particular piece of land, and equivalent land elsewhere, but refused it because the property had

come down to him with a *kirume* on it. This is a very interesting revelation, because when one comes to consider it, in all probability it is the genesis of a last will or testament. Furthermore, it is the rude beginning of our principle of “entail.” It shows, moreover, that these people have almost reached the stage of individual tenure in land, or at any rate, of tenure by the family, the head of the village being the trustee for the family, and it is his duty to see [146]that the *gethaka* rights are preserved intact. The *gethaka* is the portion of a ridge owned by a particular family, title being obtained by an ancestor by purchase from the original occupiers, the Dorobo hunting tribes.

If the head of the family feels that he is nearing his end he assembles his sons, and to the eldest he will probably say, “The goats belonging to such a hut shall be yours”; he will then call another son and say, “The goats of such and such a hut shall be yours, and if any of you break these wishes he shall surely die.” He will then mention a certain *shamba* (cultivated field) and say, “Such and such a *shamba*, shall not be sold, and if this wish is broken the one who sells it shall die.” This operates as an entail on the property which will be passed on from generation to generation; such is the strength of the belief. Upon inquiry, examples may be found all over the country.

Another case quoted was that of a man who had a ne’er-do-well son who was in the habit of pilfering the neighbouring villages; the custom is for those who have suffered to collect and seize the equivalent of their losses from his father. If this continues, the father, in the end, becomes so annoyed with his son’s misdeeds that he will put a *kirume* on him when on his death-bed. There is quite a mediaeval flavour about this action.

Sometimes, too, a man, when he is very old, entrusts a son with charge of his live stock, and the son may abuse the trust and let the flocks and herds melt away. Cases have been known where an old patriarch on his death-bed has put a *kirume* on his son to the effect that he shall neither grow rich nor have wives, but to the end of his life shall be condemned to perpetual poverty.

Again, a daughter may be a trouble to her father; she is, say, married to a husband who has paid the required dowry to her father; she runs away, repeatedly misbehaves herself, and so forth, and the father will then be subject to continual worry, owing to [147]the husband's demands for the return of the dowry. The father may eventually become so weary of all this worry that he will put a *kirume* on her and condemn her to perpetual barrenness.

Another case quoted was that of two brothers, one rich and one poor; the poor man may be envious of his brother and hate him in consequence. One day they go to drink beer, and, excited by the liquor, the poorer one brutally attacks his brother and grievously injures him. When the injured man recovers consciousness he will call his brother and say, "You have always been jealous of my wealth, and now I shall probably die from treatment received at your hands, but when I am dead if you attempt to seize any of my property you shall only be able to look at it, for if you touch a single head of stock you will die, and if your son comes to take any of my beasts he will also die."

If a dying man calls out to a man of his own clan, *muhirika*, or *morika*, and makes a request such as, "Give me water," and the person refuses, the dying man can impose a *kirume* upon the one who refuses.

A man is, generally speaking, only able to lay a *kirume* upon a person belonging to his own *muhirika*, or clan, which really means that a *kirume* will only affect one with a common blood tie.

There are, however, two exceptions to this:

If a man of one clan marries a woman of another clan (as is the rule) he can, if necessity arises, place a *kirume* upon the family of his wife if they live in the village of his father-in-law, because they have, as the expression runs, "Eaten of his property," referring to the live stock he has paid over to his father-in-law for his wife.

The converse can also happen, for if a man has married a woman and has not paid his father-in-law the full amount agreed upon, the father-in-law when he dies can impose a *kirume* upon his son-in-law, and such *kirume* may also extend to his daughter, the idea [148] probably being that the daughter has not sufficiently worried her husband to pay the balance due.

The power to impose a *kirume* is apparently not altogether confined to elders, for it is said that if an incorrigible child is driven away from home, becomes starved and dies in consequence, it can, before it dies, curse its parents and say, "You have treated me like this, and therefore you shall not have any more children."

It is said that if a person hears that someone of his own clan is threatening to impose a *kirume* on him, he can take steps to prevent its infliction. The procedure was described as follows: If a person hears that, say, a brother intended to place a *kirume* on him, he at once takes a male goat or sheep to his village and kills it there; he offers some of the fat, some milk and beer to the dying man, who cannot refuse to forgive the suppliant, and who ceremonially spits into his hands and rubs a little saliva on his forehead, navel, and feet. The threatened person then departs in peace, free from any danger of a *kirume* from that person. This applies to both guilds.

One curious case of *kirume* which was described deserves notice. It is probably very rare, but it possibly carries evidence of the ancient origin of the belief and dates back to matriarchal times.

Suppose a dying *mwanake*, or member of the warrior age, lays a *kirume* upon his maternal grandfather, what course would he pursue to rid himself of the dangerous infliction? If he was unable to get the one who imposed it to spit on him as above described, he would have to seek a grandson by another daughter, take or send to him a male goat, some beer, the milk of a cow and seed of the various kinds of grain grown in the country, and beg him to come to his village. The grandson would then come accompanied by the elders; he would taste the meat, beer, milk, etc., and ceremonially spit them out on the

grandfather, and this would relieve the old man of all danger from the [149]*kirume* imposed by his other grandson. There is a word *kigao*, which is intimately connected with *kirume*, and is often confused with it, but inquiry seems to show that *kigao* means the neglect of a dying father's wish with regard to the disposal of property, and the result of *kigao*, is, therefore, *kirume*, cause and effect being often very closely allied in the mind of a native.

The fear of *kirume* seems to be much greater in the section of the tribe circumcised Kikuyu fashion, for a prominent elder of the Masai guild stated that when those circumcised Masai fashion succeed to their father's property they are invested with the brass bracelet worn by elders on their right wrist, and upon their mother's death they wear the iron bracelet worn by her. These are called *kigao*, and once an elder has been invested with them he is quite safe from the effect of any *kirume* from his parents. The younger sons receive pieces of the ear ornaments, *ichui*, which are made into finger rings and fulfil the same purposes as the bracelets. This probably accounts for the greater popularity of the Masai guild among the Kikuyu people. At the same time the elder admitted that it would be bad to squander the flocks and herds left by his father, and that if they became depleted he would probably sell a portion of the landed property to make the flocks and herds up to their original strength.

If a man hears that a near relative is very ill he makes a point of going to see him, and takes the precaution of getting him to spit ceremonially on his hand and rub his visitor on the navel.

If a man goes to see his sick father or mother he takes a piece of mutton fat, and the sick parent ceremonially spits on it and the visitor rubs the piece of fat covered with saliva on his navel.

A married woman can impose a *kirume*, but not on an unmarried woman. The following is an example of a case in which a married woman may invoke this curse: [150]

If a married woman has for a long time been systematically ill-treated by a brutal husband she can, when dying, put a *kirume* on her father for having forced her to marry such a bad man, and also upon her husband for his brutality.

The *kirume* is looked upon as the severest form of *thahu* or *nzahu* known; in most cases of *thahu* the subject rarely dies, because it is slow in its action and the patient has an opportunity of making reparation and seeking relief from the prescribed medicine man or elders, but in the case of a *kirume* the curse is very swift in its action, the patient rapidly sickens, breaks out into ulcers and often dies before he can arrange to take measures to arrest its onslaught; his live stock will also die mysteriously.

It is believed that the effective power of the *kirume* is derived from the spirit (*ngoma*) of the deceased person by whom it is imposed, assisted by the *ngoma* of the ancestors of the family.

It is said that there is no poison without its antidote, and the same applies to the *kirume*, but the antidote must be applied in good time and the only persons who can effect a cure are certain persons called *athuri ya ukuu*. The *athuri ya ukuu* compose a grade of elders above that of *athuri ya mburi nne* (elders of four goats—referring to the fee they pay for initiation to the grade). They are always old men and rich, and have to pay to their fellow elders of the grade a bullock and a male sheep or goat as initiation fees.

While the *athuri ya mburi nne* form the ordinary *kiama*, or council of elders, the *athuri ya ukuu* constitute a native court of appeal, but they do not admit appeals except in very important cases, when it is within their competence to revise a judgment and, if they consider fit, reduce the amount of compensation. It is also the duty of the *athuri ya ukuu* to instruct the heir in the customs of the tribe when he succeeds to the property after his father's death.

The *athuri ya ukuu* do not treat ordinary [151]cases of *thahu* but have to be called in for cases of *kirume*.

The ceremonial connected with the removal of a *kirume* is as follows; it is called *ku-tahikia kirume* in Kikuyu, which means “to purify from the *kirume*.”

The *athuri ya ukuu* are summoned to the patient’s village, and the day before the ceremony the elders catch a mole-like rodent called *huku* (*Tachyoryctes sp.*), put it alive in a cooking pot with some sweet potatoes, and cork up the mouth of the pot. The *huku* must be caught near the patient’s village. Next morning the *athuri ya ukuu* arrive with a medicine man belonging to another clan and a male sheep is killed; the elders then take the *huku* out of the pot and make passes all over the patient’s body with the live animal and now take the *huku* and samples of various kinds of native food, beads, etc., and proceed to the place where the corpse of the person who imposed the *kirume* has been buried or thrown out. Another sheep is taken with this party and also a small cooking pot; upon reaching the spot referred to the second sheep is killed and some of its fat is cooked in the pot. They then dig a hole and pour the fat in it, also milk, honey, beer, etc.; they smear the *huku* with the *tatha*, or stomach contents of the sheep, and the medicine man ties a tiny piece of meat to the right and left foreleg of the animal with a string made of *mugeri* (hibiscus) fibre, then fastening it up in a rough net made of the roots of the *ruriera* plant, and cuts the face off the sacrificial sheep, leaving the eyes intact, and places them all in the hole saying, “Go back to your burrow and take with you the spirit of the person who left this curse.” The hole is then filled in. The medicine man eats the remainder of the meat and afterwards returns to the village and purifies it.

The *huku* is said to personify the person who imposed the *kirume*, and the eyes of the sheep are to watch the *huku* and see that it does not return to the village. The *huku* is chosen because it lives below [152]ground, and the *ngoma* of deceased persons are believed to live below ground.

After this ceremony the affected one is believed to recover; some say, however, that it only alleviates the effect of a *kirume*, but does not remove it completely. The elders stated that this would not affect a *kirume* placed on a piece of land forbidding its sale, and what may be called the *kirume* of entail could not be lifted.

The lustration from a *kirume* by the *huku* ceremony only applies to the Kikuyu guild.

Altogether this is a very pretty example of what Sir J. G. Frazer terms “homœopathic magic.”

If a young woman has been abused or vilified by the young men (*anake*) of her particular *rika* or generation, it is a serious matter for her, but nothing is done about it until the girl is about to be married. The father, however, then takes a ram and makes a feast for the *anake* of the same *rika* or circumcision generation as his daughter, and they assemble and ceremonially spit on the girl. She can then be safely married and bear children. In fact, as a precaution, this is generally done even if there is no record of a quarrel between the girl and the young men of her *rika*. A medicine man is called in, a ewe is slaughtered, and he ceremonially purifies the girl before her marriage.

Ukamba.—As was mentioned before, the doctrine of *kirume* or the dying curse is found among the Kamba people and is there called *kiume*.

Elders, *atumia*, and young married men, *anthele*, can impose a *kiume* among the A-Kamba but not among the warrior class, *anake*.

A man is able to place a *kiume* upon the people of a village to the effect that they shall not refuse food or good treatment to a particular person, the friend of the dying man; this friend may even belong to another tribe.

A person cannot impose a *kiume* on anyone outside his immediate family. A married woman can place a *kiume* on her father’s village if she has reason to

do so. [153]

An eldest son can place a *kiume* on a particular thing in the village from which his mother came, a common case of this being when a man places a *kiume* on the people of his maternal grandfather's village, contingent on the disposal of a beast which was paid by his father to his mother's people as part of her marriage price. The reason of this is that an eldest son has a claim to a heifer, the progeny of the marriage price paid by his father to his maternal grandfather for his mother, and he can, when dying, will this beast to any particular person, and if anyone prevents this bequest being carried out he will die; the *kiume* generally falls on the head of the village. The formula used is: "If you do not carry out this wish you will not be able to eat meat, to drink water, to drink milk to eat maize, to eat millet, and so on—and you will surely die."

As in Kikuyu, a dying elder in Ukamba can place a *kiume* on a cultivated field, forbidding its sale out of the family.

If a Mu-Kamba breaks a dying wish and incurs a *kiume*, he can generally be freed from the consequences if he goes to an elder of his father's village or to a near relative of his father and takes a bullock; the beast is killed and the elders spit water and milk on his face—this saves him from the worse effects of the *kiume*, viz., death. The ceremony is called *kuathimwa*.

There is little doubt that much more remains to be learnt about the ritual of *kiume* in Ukamba, but these things are more difficult to work out in that district and the details have to be dragged out bit by bit. [154]

¹ Of course the analogy is not complete, for it does not apply to one who accidentally becomes the victim of certain circumstances. ↑

² The act of stepping over a corpse is probably considered a serious insult to the *ngoma*. ↑

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CHAPTER VIII

SUPERSTITIONS REGARDING CHILDREN AND WOMEN

Regarding the Birth of Children, etc. (Kikuyu).—In former times, if a child was born feet first it was suffocated and thrown out.

If a child touches the ground at the time of its birth it is considered very unlucky. A ram, a *mwati* (young ewe) or an *arika* (young female goat) is killed, and a bracelet made of the skin is placed on the mother's wrist. This is done for the sake of the child. The skin of the animal sacrificed is used for carrying the child on its mother's back.

It is again very unlucky when an infant cuts its upper teeth first, but the child is not killed, and is merely sent to its maternal grandmother. This only refers to those belonging to the Kikuyu circumcision guild. The child is termed *kingu*. To avert the ill luck, a friend is asked to cohabit with the mother for a month, after which the husband returns to his wife.

The birth of twins is a great misfortune either in human beings or domestic animals, but only when it occurs the first time a woman or animal bears.

It is believed that the father will die if he cohabits again with the mother; a case was cited of a man who did so and was killed by a train a few days later.

Formerly twin infants were always suffocated, and in such cases were thrown into the bush by the old woman who assisted at the birth. This probably still occurs in the remoter parts of Kikuyu, but the elders stated that in the more civilised parts they are no longer killed but are given to a member of the clan of the father to rear. [155]

In order to free the mother from the curse, the husband hands her over to another man called a *mundu rohiu*, and when she has borne to him, her husband takes her back. A ram has to be killed and the woman adorned with a *rukwaru* before she is taken back.

This only refers to those belonging to the Kikuyu circumcision guild.

If a person, who is a twin, crosses a river, he or she must stoop down and fill the mouth with water and, facing downstream, spit it out into the river, saying, according to their sex: "May I not beget (or bear) twins as my father (or mother) did."

Anyone seeing this ceremony might well mistake it for a propitiatory offering to a river spirit, and the error indeed has occurred. The root idea, however, is that the flowing water may carry away the kind of *thahu* which results in such an unlucky tendency as that of bearing twins. They can give no explanation as to why twins should be of such ill omen if they happen to be the first children of a married couple or of a domestic animal. They do not appear to believe, as in some countries, that twins have any influence over the weather. If a woman bears twins a second time, one of the children will be given to another man to bring up.

The Hon. C. Dundas made some inquiries on this point in Kyambu district, and he states that in S. Kikuyu the birth of twins is considered unlucky excepting in the case of a woman who has borne other children; the younger the woman the more unlucky the occurrence, and if the first birth is of twins, no medicine man can remove the evil, and the only course is to throw the twins into the bush or to give them to another man of a different tribe or clan. In Kenya Province it is said that twins are sold to other tribes, but in Kyambu district the elders held this to be a bad custom. The foster-father becomes sole owner of the twins and if they are girls receives dowry for them. In such case if the twins were the first birth of a woman, the father can accept no part of the dowry, but if they were second [156] or subsequent

births, he receives the whole dowry from the foster-father and returns ten goats to him.

At Ngenda Mission, a twin was handed over to the missionary, and the father agreed to give them the customary ten goats out of the dowry when the child should be married. No reason for this belief is known, but the custom is rigorously followed to this day. No one can sleep in the hut in which twins were born until they are disposed of, and the mother must cohabit with a stranger who is then called *mwendia wa rohio* or *mundu rohiu* (man of the sword).¹

A short time ago a case of triplets occurred. The mother had first borne one child, then twins, and finally triplets. In this case only one of the triplets was given away to a man of another clan, for, as the woman had borne several times before, the triplets were not considered unlucky, and the giving away of the one was said to be due solely to the mother's inability to suckle all three.

On the birth of a child a sheep is killed and a strip of the skin is worn on the mother's wrist, *rukwaru*, and her head is shaved; the fat of the sheep is prepared and given to the infant to eat, being put into its mouth with the finger. This must be done before the child is suckled, and the same ceremony, in respect to the mother, is performed by the foster-mother in cases where a twin or other child is handed over to a family of another clan.

In every case where a child is handed over to foster-parents it will belong to the clan of its foster-parents and not to that of its real parents, but if the child is a girl she can marry a man of the foster-father's clan provided he does not live close to the foster-father, while marriage with a man of her real father's clan is prohibited to her. [157]

There is an undoubted widespread belief that the only satisfactory way of dealing with twins is to suffocate them, as they are unlucky. It is believed that the practice of giving them away is a later adaptation to the custom

followed when a woman dies in child-birth, the child, whether twin or not, being always, in this case, given away to a man of another clan.

Among the Kamba of Ulu, the same general idea as to the unluckiness of twins, if they are the first-born, prevails. The twins, however, are not killed or put away, but within a day or two of their birth the mother is returned by her husband to her father and the marriage price of the woman is paid back to him. If the husband cohabits with the mother of the twins after their birth it is believed that he or the children will die. It is therefore quite clear that the curse or ill luck is only immanent in the woman. Upon the birth of an ordinary child a string made of the bark of the *ithaa* tree is ceremonially tied round its neck, but this is not permitted in the case of twins. After the mother of twins has been returned to her father, she may be married to another husband without the latter incurring the same risks as the first husband, but the second husband must be of the grade of an elder of council. It is an interesting point, as a man, on reaching this grade, is not so subject to the incidence of a curse as a young man. It would therefore appear that the woman is still to some extent dangerous. The second husband becomes the adopted father of the twins and carries out the *ithaa* ceremony mentioned above; one of the twins must be named Mbatha, the name of the other one being of no significance. At the feast of the *ithaa*, he kills two rams or two male goats, one for each twin. It is said that twins are not killed at birth, as among the Kikuyu, because the woman's second husband would, under native law, sue the father for the value of the children.

As the twins grow up, each child must be treated exactly alike; if one has a present, the other must [158] receive the same. A wife must be found for each at the same time, and the same marriage dowry must be paid for each. In the case of boys, when sufficient live stock has been paid over to the prospective father-in-law to induce them to part with their daughters, both brides must be brought to their husbands on the same day. If one of the twins is a boy and the other a girl, and the latter is being sought in marriage

by a young man, it is the custom for the brother to take his sister to her lover's village for a visit. They stay there two days and return home on the third day, the girl being given a goat by the young man.

The Kamba of Ulu do not believe that twins have any influence on the rain or the weather generally. In Kitui, as in Kikuyu, it is most unlucky for twins to be born if they are the first children of the marriage. In former times one was buried alive, but this cruel custom has apparently died out. It is, however, still believed that if they are girls and both live, the mother will die, and if the twins are boys and they survive, the father will die. It is supposed that the evil effect can be mitigated to some extent if, three days after their birth, the father cohabits with the mother; the parents also kill a goat and are smeared with the *tatha*, or stomach contents.

If a cow bears twin calves at first calving they are invariably both killed.

As in Kikuyu, it is lucky for a child to be born head first; it is unlucky to be born feet first, but the infant is not killed. There is, however, a curious belief that such a person must never step over anyone lying on the ground, and if he forgets this prohibition, he must at once step back over the recumbent person. The stepping back is called *njokela*, "to go back," and is supposed to reverse the ill luck which would be transmitted.

In Kitui, if a cow bears a dead calf the children can eat it but not a woman, as it is believed that the next time she is pregnant she will have a still-born child. [159] Women are also not allowed to eat the meat of a beast which dies.

If a cow bears a deformed calf it is buried, for if it is allowed to live lung trouble is said to appear among the cattle.

There is no particular taboo on crippled children, but the people say that the infant is the reincarnation of a deceased person similarly afflicted whom they remember, and give it his or her name.

The Kamba of Kitui believe that the *aiimu*, or spirits of the deceased, sometimes pray to the deity (*Engai*) to give them another body, and if the request is granted, a spirit will enter a new-born child and commence another corporeal existence on earth. Their reason for believing this is that a pregnant woman will sometimes dream of a deceased person night after night; if she dreams of a certain man who is dead, and then bears a son, they know it is that particular man who has come back to earth, and the child will be given his name. This is part of the same belief as that of the spiritual husband, described in the author's work on the A-Kamba, page 39.

As in the Ulu district and Kikuyu it is considered very unlucky for a child to be born feet first, and such a child will have ill luck through life. If it is a male child his wife, if he marries in late life, is sure to die, and if it is a girl, her husband will die. In the latter case, however, the evil can be averted if the prospective husband, before he commences to pay for his bride, sends her mother a present of an axe. If the woman bears a child which is born feet first, it is essential that the husband cohabit with her on the seventh day after the birth.

Should a child in Kitui cut its upper incisor teeth first it is considered a very bad sign. Such a child must not partake of the firstfruits of the fields, and it is said that, should it admire a growing crop, that crop will never reach maturity. This evil influence, however, can to a great extent be mitigated if, when the first of [160]the child's milk teeth drops out, the father cohabits with the mother.

A child is taught that when one of his milk teeth comes out he is to throw it between his legs and say, "May *Engai* give me a new tooth to replace the one I have lost."

The feeling against twin birth varies according to the locality. In the more remote parts it is very strong, but in parts of Ulu, the prejudice is dying out. The father, however, will usually sacrifice to prevent evil effects.

Taboos on Women.—When a pregnant woman is near delivery, all arms are taken out of the hut, and also any iron hoes. They are not brought back again until the mother's head has been shaved at the purification ceremony after a birth. If these articles are left in a hut on such an occasion and someone, for instance, takes a hoe away and uses it, the child will, it is believed, be afflicted with a *thabu*. The food in the house at the time of birth can only be eaten by the mother and three old women who assist at the birth; any infringement of this rule is a great danger to the newly born. Even the father cannot eat in the hut for three or four months, but if a man is poor and has only one wife, he will sleep in the *thengira*, or goat hut, and if he has no *thengira*, he will sleep in the hut on a separate bed.

A pregnant woman must not sew with a needle, as it is said to be very dangerous for the new-born infant.

If at child-birth any blood falls on the floor of the hut, the old women who assist at the birth dig up the earth floor at that place and bury the soil in the bush at some little distance from the village, for if a goat licked that particular spot it would die.

If a man goes into his hut at a birth or after it has taken place, and accidentally treads in blood which may have dripped on the floor, the newly born child will become sick, but the evil can be averted by the cohabitation of the parents.

This fear of certain kinds of blood is very curious [161]and goes right back to ancient times. Among these people a woman during her menstrual period may not grind corn, but is allowed to cook sweet potatoes or whole maize. She may not, however, milk the cattle, nor may she cut potato tops as green fodder for the goats.

A woman must also not step over her husband when in this state or he will become ill, and to remove the *thahu* a ewe lamb must be killed and both husband and wife invested with bracelets made of the skin (*rukwaru*). A

woman will tell her husband when she becomes ill, and bathe when she is no longer so. Her husband can then return to her.

A woman must not shave her hair while her husband is on a journey; if she does so she will be accused of bewitching him. She can, however, clip her hair a little in front. This prohibition is said to be connected with the customs by which a wife shaves her head on the death of her husband, and were she to do so while he is travelling, it might possibly bring him ill luck.

If a man goes away to hunt or to fight, and on his way back, when he nears his village, is taken ill and suffers from diarrhoea, he knows thereby that his wife has been unfaithful to him during his absence. He will thereupon call an elder and tell him to bring a ram and the roots of certain medicinal plants: *kindio*, *ibalu*, and *mathengi*. The throat of the ram is pierced and the blood collected in a half gourd (*nzeli*) and mixed with the crushed roots and the *tatha*, or stomach contents, of the ram. The suspected woman is called out and told to take hold of the right arm of the elder who is holding the *nzeli* containing the mixture. She then takes a handful of the decoction and throws it on the ground, and the husband rubs his foot in it. The remainder of the mixture is sprinkled all the way from there to the door of the hut, as well as on the bed. She is probably beaten by her husband, and her paramour is summoned before the council of elders and fined a bull or a ram. [163]

¹ The frequent occurrence of sexual rites may appear repugnant to Europeans, but students of the ancient world will readily admit that there is an intimate connection between these rites and the religious beliefs of people in a certain stage of culture. Many examples could be quoted. ↑

PART II

MAGIC

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INTRODUCTORY

In a study of the beliefs and practices of primitive people it is difficult to draw the line between religion and magic. The general view is that magic is anti-social; that is to say, that it grew up to satisfy the desire of man to manipulate supernatural powers for his own private benefit.

Robertson Smith expresses the position as follows: “The gods watched over a man’s civic life, etc., but they were not sure helpers in any private need, and, above all, would not help him in matters that were against the interests of the community as a whole. There was therefore a whole region of possible needs and desires for which religion could and would do nothing, and if supernatural help was sought in such things it had to be sought through magical ceremonies designed to purchase or constrain the favour of demoniac powers with which the public religion had nothing to do.”¹

This line of argument is probably unassailable, but in the people with whom we are dealing the belief in demoniacal powers, as apart from the ancestral spirits, has not reached a high pitch of development, and is not at all concrete. They practise magic extensively and have a firm belief in it, but it is difficult to say with certainty exactly what powers they believe are being influenced by the magical ceremonial.

The guild of smiths, both in Kikuyu and Ukamba, possess hereditary magic powers; one clan of the Kikuyu, called the *Eithaga*, is believed also to possess similar powers. A leading elder in Kikuyu, for [166]example, who is also the priest in charge of a sacred tree, is said to have the power of destroying plagues of caterpillars. Such a person, however, could scarcely be considered anti-social, as the destruction of the pest must benefit the crops of the whole community. There is also the case of another elder who is apparently a past master in the art of detecting criminals, and more especially thieves; this power would, of course, only be exercised at the request of the owner of the property, and incidentally to the advantage of the magician.

The power of the “evil eye” probably belongs to magic, although the power is regarded as an infliction which a person unfortunately possesses at birth. It is a very ancient belief, and has existed from the time of the ancient Assyrians to the present day. It still flourishes among the Semitic races, and also in Morocco; all round the Mediterranean basin, in fact, as well as in Arabia and Palestine, people wear armlets or charms to protect them from this evil influence. [167]

1 “Religion of Semites,” p. 264. ↑

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CHAPTER I

THE GUILD OF SMITHS IN KIKUYU AND UKAMBA

The information relating to Kikuyu smiths was mainly collected from Kimani wa Nyaga, of the *Gachiko* clan, who is one of the senior smiths in Southern Kikuyu.

A smith in Kikuyu is called *muturi*, plural *aturi*.

The smiths of the Kikuyu tribe are said to have all come originally from a common centre of distribution at Ithanga, on the south-western side of Mount Kenya.

This scattering of the smiths throughout the tribe is stated to have occurred many generations ago, and the name Ithanga to be that of their common ancestor, but now the term Ithanga has become a synonym for a sub-clan of the *A-Gachiko*, and not all the members of this sub-clan are smiths.

It may be that the ancestor Ithanga was a migrant from another tribe and the first person to bring into the tribe the knowledge of working in iron. There appears to be, however, no legend as to who invented the act of smelting or working in iron; it therefore looks as if the craft were imported. It was certainly not learnt from the Dorobo or Asi aboriginals, for the Kikuyu declare that when their forefathers came into the country, the Asi had no smiths, and to this day they have none. It is believed that the ancestors of the Dorobo were the people who made the stone implements now being so widely found.

The Masai, however, appear to have had amongst them for a long period a clan of serfs called El-Konono, who are their smiths.

In former times, the ancestors of the Kikuyu dug [168] out nodules of ironstone at Ithanga, and also collected iron sand washed down by the rain from the hill. This is probably the place described by Routledge, p. 80 *et seq.*, of his book. The ironstone was smelted with charcoal made from the *mutumaiyu* tree (*Olea chrysophylla*) and forged with charcoal from the *mutarakwa* tree (*Juniperus procera*).

The tools and apparatus used by smiths are as follows:

Stone Anvil—*Ihiga ya uturi* (even to this day these are brought from Ithanga, where hard metamorphic rocks occur).

Hammer—*Kiriha*.

Pincers—*Muhato*.

Bellows—*Miura*.

Wooden nozzles of bellows—*Ngeruru* (made of *murumbu* wood).

Clay tuyère—*Ngerrua*.

Charcoal—*Makara*.

Smith's fire—*Mwaki wa kiganda*.

Smith's hut (smithy)—*Kiganda*.

Pot used to contain water for quenching—*Rugio ya uturi*.

In former times one section smelted the iron and another forged it; imported iron wire is now so cheap that most of the forgings are made from it.

If a man wishes to enter the guild, he has to be initiated with some ceremony. He must bring a ram (*ndorume*) which is slaughtered just outside the smithy; the novice is then walked round the anvil. The heart and lungs of the slaughtered animal are held in the smith's tongs and roasted in his fire, which is fanned by the bellows; the novice eats them and the smith sits on the anvil and anoints the forehead of the novice with a spot of white earth (*ira*). The carcass of the sacrifice is then split from neck to tail, the right half being eaten by the smiths and the left half by the villagers present. [169]

The smiths and the villagers then go to the village of the novice to drink beer, and next morning the smith comes and forges an iron bracelet, which he places on the right wrist of the would-be smith, and, if the smith is married, one on the left wrist of his principal wife. If he has more than one wife, one of his first tasks is to forge bracelets for the others. The head of a smith's village wears a twisted iron bracelet on his right wrist, the other smiths a plain iron band.

Birth does not confer membership of the guild; the son of a smith has to go through the same initiation ceremonies before becoming a smith.

All smiths are believed to possess magical powers which are alleged to come from the iron they use and are carried on through the spirits of their ancestors (*ngoma*). These powers are used in many ways; a smith can inflict curses which are of the nature of *thahu*, and they can bless the weapons they forge.

When a smith has forged a spear or sword he rubs it with a piece of *kilanduri* wood (Swahili *msuaki*, Bot. *Salvadora persica*) and addresses the weapon thus: "If the owner of this meets with an enemy, may you go straight and kill your adversary; but if you are launched at one who has no evil in his heart, may you miss him and pass on either side without entering into his body." This incantation is believed to be a great charm.

After this ceremony the smith's assistant polishes the weapon with a quartzose stone called *ngomongo*; the assistant is paid for his work but is not usually a smith. He is often merely

the bellows boy, who is called a *muruguti*.

Some customers bring their own iron and charcoal and bargain for the manufacture of a sword or spear; others buy a weapon which has been made at odd moments and laid by for sale.

A smith will not make the sheath of a sword; he makes the wooden hilt, but the owner himself covers it with raw hide and also makes the sheath.

One of the important functions of the smiths is to [170]make certain articles used in connection with the circumcision rites of the tribe. These are as follows:

Ruenji—A razor which is especially made for the circumcision rite.

Mukuha—A needle for piercing the ears of small boys. When a boy is circumcised the elders ceremonially pass this through the hole in the novice's ear.

Ngunju—A small iron ornament placed in the ears of boys and girls at the circumcision ceremony.

Kahiu kaithinja—A knife especially forged to kill the sacrificial ram at the circumcision ceremony.

The head of the village where the rites are to take place orders these articles from a leading smith before the ceremony. When the smith delivers them he is given some honey beer, and he ceremonially spits a little of it on each of the things to free them from any suspicion of containing bad magic.

When a smith marries, another smith is called in to forge an iron bracelet, which is placed on the bride's left wrist. The husband then kills a ram, and the fat and the *tatha* (stomach contents) of the animal are boiled together in a pot, and the bracelet is dropped into the mixture. This is supposed to free the bride from any bad magic which some evilly disposed ancestral spirit might bring upon her by means of the bracelet.

The Kikuyu smiths state that they have no special language or dialect peculiar to their guild. When they die, they are buried or thrown out in the bush, according to their grade, in the same way as other members of the tribe, and no symbol of their trade is buried with them.

Some smiths belong to the Masai circumcision guild, others to the Kikuyu guild.

With regard to the magic powers of smiths referred to above:

A smith can place a spell on a patch of forest to [171]prevent anyone from destroying it. He takes an iron necklet or bracelet which belonged to a deceased person, cuts it into small pieces, and walks round the piece of forest which is to be protected. He then deposits the pieces at the foot of a tree within the area, and woe betide anyone who infringes the prohibition! If at any time the spell is to be lifted, the smith proceeds to the area, sacrifices a ewe, removes the pieces of bracelet, and smears the spot with *tatha*, or stomach contents, of the sacrificial animal.

If sugar cane is stolen from a garden, or goats are stolen out of a village by night, the owner often goes to a smith and seeks his aid, taking with him the iron necklet or bracelet of a deceased person. If the smith agrees to intervene, he will heat this in his smithy fire and then sever it with a chisel, saying, "May the thief be cut as I cut this iron." Or he may take a sword or an axe-head which he is making, heat it in his fire and then quench it in water, saying, "May the body of the thief cool as this iron does," i.e., "May he die."

Both of these curses are said to be equally effective, and it is believed that the thief will gradually become thin and fade away with a terrible cough. When he becomes ill, however, he will usually confess his crime and be brought to the smith or come to him to beg that the curse may be lifted. He must bring a ram (*ndorume*) with him, and the smith will then order him to sit down outside the smithy and will march round him with the ram. The ram is killed, and the heart and lungs are extracted; these parts are then roasted in the smith's fire and the patient eats them, and the curse is lifted. The complete recovery, however, is said to take about six weeks. A medicine man has no power over a smith's magic.

In former times smiths were sometimes supposed to bewitch people against whom they had a grievance. A smith would secretly take the necklet or bracelet of a deceased person, cut it into pieces, and bury a piece at the gate of the village he wished to bewitch; the people [172]passing in and out all day would step on the spot where the piece of iron was buried and thus incur the evil influence. Another piece would probably be buried at the watering place. By these means the whole village became afflicted, and unless the magic was removed the people would die. The infliction of the magic, in fact, would probably not be realised until several people had died. The evil magic has to be removed by a smith and a medicine man; a ram and a young ewe, which has not yet borne, *mwati*, are provided, the ram is killed, and the usual purification ceremony gone through, the ewe being set aside and taken by the *mundu mugo*. After the evil magic has been removed, the head of the afflicted village receives from the smith a twisted iron bracelet (*muthiori*).

Smiths place their old clay *tuyéres* on sticks in cultivated fields to protect the crops from thieves; there is no ceremony connected with this, but if at any time these must be

removed, the smith removes them, carefully placing a little *tatha* from the stomach of a sacrificial sheep in the hole in which the stick was erected. This removes the curse and also the possibility of the magic damaging, at some future time, a person for whom it was not intended.

When a smith forges a new hammer for use in his forge, the medicine men of the district come and collect the iron scale from the forging to mix with their medicines, more particularly the medicines they make to protect a village from thieves or wild beasts. The medicine man (*mundu mugo*) marches round the village with the medicine and then buries it at the gate. It is called *kihoho* by the Kikuyu.

If anything is stolen from a smith's forge he calls together all the smiths of the countryside. This assembly is called *njama ya aturi*. Each one in turn is asked if he stole the article, and whether the culprit confesses or not, they generally fix on one whom they strongly suspect and insist on his taking the oath of the goat (*ku-ringa thenge*). If the culprit confesses he is [173]forgiven and warned, but if he refuses, he is cursed by the bracelet of a dead person. Should he be guilty, the spirit of that person will bewitch him to the peril of his life. He cannot get the curse lifted until the *njama ya aturi* reassembles and lifts it.

The ordinary Kikuyu native is far too afraid of the magic of the smiths to steal anything from one of them, so that when a smith is the victim of a theft it is easy to guess that the crime has been committed by another smith.

In the old days, the Anjiru clan, before starting on a foray against the Masai, went to a smith and got from him a small piece of iron called *kiheto*, for which the representatives of the clan would pay a pot of honey beer and one of sugar cane beer. The smith took a little of the beer and spat it out on the *kiheto*. The Anjiru then took away the *kiheto*, made medicine with it, and buried it on the path at the entrance to the enemy's country. This was believed to stop the Masai cattle from being driven off a long way.

Smiths were formerly called upon to settle cases. If, for instance, a man was owed a debt, he would induce some smiths to go to the village of the debtor and order him to pay. And as the smiths were held in fear because of this magic the order was generally complied with.

The *Eithaga* clan has never counted any smiths amongst its members. The magic of the smiths was always feared by them. When this clan made spells to withhold the rain it is said that they were careful not to let the fields of a smith suffer.

If a medicine man visits the village of a smith he does not sleep in one of his huts, but lodges in the goat hut, *thengira*; a smith does the same if he visits the village of a medicine man. If a Mweithaga passes a smithy when it is raining he cannot enter to take shelter.

A woman cannot enter a smithy unless she is a smith's wife, and she can then come to bring her husband's food. [174]

Smiths Among the Kamba of Kitui.—The original smiths all belonged to one clan, viz., the Atui, which is a section of the Anzunzu clan, but members of other branches have now learnt the art and been admitted to the brotherhood. In Machakos district some of the smiths belong to the Eombi clan.

If a man wishes to become a smith he brews some beer and takes it along with a goat to a local smith. They drink the beer together; the smith takes a sip and then ceremonially squirts it over the hand of the novice, saying, "May your hands become skilful at the work which I can do." They then kill the goat and mix some of its blood with some of the beer, and the smith pours it over the anvil and addresses it as follows: "This man is now the same as I am, and I shall give him a new anvil, and may this new anvil be his friend."

The anvil is of stone, and when it is worn out the smith searches for another suitable piece of some tough rock, generally granite or gneiss, and instals it in the forge. Before using it, however, he brews some beer and pours it over the anvil, saying, "You are now an anvil, and you must be as good a one as your predecessor."

The cult of the smith does not appear to be as highly developed in Ukamba as in Kikuyu, for his powers are more limited; he wears no mark of his trade, and he does not dedicate the weapons he forges, as is done by the Kikuyu smiths.

If, however, a man steals a smith's stone anvil or any tool from his smithy, the smith can curse him by saying: "So-and-so has stolen my anvil, and I curse him, and if he eats this season's food he will die," and it is firmly believed that the thief will die before the harvest is reaped.

When a man goes to a smith to have an iron rod forged for branding cattle, the smith will place it in the purchaser's hand when it is finished and say: "May the cattle branded with this iron be lucky, may they escape disease, and may they be fruitful." This tends to show [175]that the branding of cattle is believed to have a magical value and is not solely intended as an identification mark for the beasts belonging to each clan.

Iron has always played a great part in ancient magic, and continues to do so in many parts of the world. This is probably due to the fact that the art of extracting the metal appeared

so marvellous to early man that it was attributed originally to magic. This idea was very likely kept alive by the early iron smelters and smiths. In early times, as at the present day, in certain parts of Africa the same persons smelted and forged, and these men probably invested the process of manufacture with an atmosphere of mystery and combined into a guild pledged to keep the art a secret from the uninitiated.

In connection with this subject, it is interesting to note that some scientists lean to the opinion that the manufacture of iron originated in Africa. Professor Gregory comments on this problem in "Geology of To-day," pp. 321–322. Referring to the easier smelting of iron than of bronze he says: "Grains of iron oxide are very widely distributed, and in arid areas attract attention by their heaviness and metallic aspect.... The preparation of iron by the negroes in Africa is a far simpler process than the manufacture of bronze. Bronze tools, however, are found in Europe earlier than those of iron, but their earlier presence may be explained by the readiness with which iron tools would perish by rust.... This explanation is, however, not satisfactory, for if iron had been present and removed, the rust would have remained as a stain or as a cement. Moreover, it is clear that in Western Europe the bronze age immediately succeeded the stone age, for the early bronze implements are copies of stone tools. The conflict of metallurgical and archæological argument probably admits of a geographical explanation.

"Grains of iron ore in sands and gravels are conspicuous in hot, arid climates such as tropical Africa, and it is probable that iron working was invented there [176] before the bronze age in Europe. The inhabitants of the moister climates of the Mediterranean and Europe had no such easily found supply of iron.

"Some conspicuous ores yielded tin and copper, and an ingenious smith who had learnt iron working in tropical Africa may have combined them, and obtained bronze."

This is one view. Professor Sir W. Ridgeway, on the other hand, is, I believe, firmly convinced that the secret of the working of iron in the Western world originated in Central Europe, probably in the Hallstadt region, and there we must leave this problem. [177]

CHAPTER II

THE EVIL EYE

This belief, so widespread in Europe, Morocco, and many other parts of the world has never received much attention from observers in this part of Africa, and it was only recently realised that it received much recognition in Kikuyu. It is called *kita* or *kithamengo*.

The word *kita* means saliva as well as evil eye. The Swahili synonym is *kijicho*.

A few people here and there throughout the country are believed to possess this gift, women as well as men, irrespective of the guild to which they belong. The possessor is born with it.

It gradually dawns upon the people that So-and-so possesses the power, owing to the fact that if that person audibly admires a beast belonging to a neighbour the animal shortly after that becomes sick. If this occurs several times the various owners compare notes and it becomes generally known that So-and-so is *kithamengo*.

It would therefore seem that the idea is not based on an evil glance but upon an envious thought.

After that, if a cattle owner hears that a man who has this power (or one ought, perhaps, to term it "this infliction") has been admiring one of his cows, he will send for him and insist on his removing the evil; this is done by the man wetting his finger with saliva, and touching the beast on the mouth and on various parts of the body with his wetted finger; this is believed to neutralise the enchantment.

Members of the Chera and Anjiru clans are notably [178]possessed of this power with considerable frequency; the Ambui and Aithiageni again very rarely possess it. Even a medicine man cannot remove a curse imposed by a person with the evil eye; only the individual who imposed it can remove it, and he can do it only in the morning before he touches food.

Human beings and also inanimate objects are equally affected by the power, for it is said that if a person who possesses the evil eye admires a woman who is *enceinte* she will abort, and if she is not, her breasts will become highly inflamed, and he has to come and ceremonially rub a little saliva on them to remove the danger.


If an individual object is admired, say a spear, it will soon afterwards be broken, or if, for instance, the leather-covered sheath of a sword is admired it will probably be gnawed by rats and spoilt.

No one who is not born with the power can acquire it, and it appears to be looked upon as an unavoidable misfortune. It is said to be the gift of God (*Engai*), and if a death or loss occurs the person to whom it is attributable cannot be sued for compensation before the *kiama*, or council of elders.

In time the people get to know who possesses the power, and if such a person enters a village he is asked in a friendly way to spit ceremonially on all the children to prevent anything untoward occurring to them owing to his visit. If a father possesses this power he can render his children proof against its action either from himself or any other person by shutting his eyes and then ceremonially spitting into each of their mouths.

The power is said to be hereditary, but all the children are not born with the gift. This belief exists among the Masai, and is called '*Ng-onyek oo'-l-tunganak*, and will probably be found to account for the ceremonial spitting which was so common among them when they wished to show their friendliness. Refer to Hollis's "Masai," page 315, the spitting on children is [179]undoubtedly done to show the parents that the stranger is anxious to do the right thing and not afflict the child by the power of the evil eye. Also *vide* Hollis's "Nandi," page 90, spitting is again believed to remove the spell of the evil eye (*sakutik*).

In Ukamba, Mr Dundas states that it is called *kyeni*; there is said to be a whole clan in Kitui called Mwanziu which possess the power, and it often happens that when a person has received a slight injury he will go to a member of this clan and ask him to spit on the injured spot, which forthwith becomes whole. Possibly he attributes his hurt to someone with the power of the "evil eye." It is also said that possessors of this gift have such power that if they admire a stone it will split into fragments.

The evil eye is a belief of great antiquity, for it was even recognised as far back as Mosaic times, *cf.* [Deut. xxviii. 54](#) : "His eye shall be evil towards his brother and towards the wife of his bosom," etc.

The Magic of the Eithaga.—It has occasionally been incorrectly alleged that the power of the "evil eye" in Kikuyu is the monopoly of one clan called the Eithaga or Aithaga, but such does not appear to be the case. The members of the Eithaga clan are credited with supernatural powers, but they are of quite a different character, as will be seen below. The name of the clan is *Eithaga* or *Kiuru*, a single member is called Mweithaga. The name *Kiuru* is an opprobrious nickname, which means "those who bewitch people."

The stronghold of the Eithaga is Karuri's country on the east slopes of the Nandarua Mountain, but it is said that they originally came from Karira's to the north of the Saba Saba River. The present head of the clan is one Kiriri near Karuri's, and in South Kikuyu the most prominent Mweithaga is Mkone wa Ndawa, and it is said that the chief Kiriri has hair growing on the point of his tongue. The clan is nearly entirely endogamous, that is to say, a Mweithaga generally marries a Mweithaga, and no man of another clan will marry a [180]Mweithaga woman, but a Mweithaga man may occasionally find a mate from another clan. The members of the Eithaga clan practically all belong to the Kikuyu circumcision guild. They are, however, divided into two divisions, *A-Mbura* and *A-Kiuru*, the first meaning the "rain-makers" and the second the "wizards."

The former profess to be able to make rain, but their powers in this connection are not considered very extensive, and the majority will only admit that if rain is about, a *Mu-Mbura* may cause it to fall if it is the proper season for rain. If rain comes on in a camp where one has any Eithaga porters they will turn out, wave branches and blow vigorously in the direction from which the rain is coming, and, what is more, firmly believe that they are having some effect on the elements.

In connection with these rain-making powers, it is curious to note that no Mweithaga may drink or cook with rain-water that has been collected in a cooking pot; if he does so he will surely die. Further, no Mweithaga may carry embers of fire in a fragment of crock from a cooking pot. He must either carry the fire in some green leaves in his hand or get a firebrand.

We now come to the wizard branch of the clan. Only the males have magical powers. It is said that a Mweithaga will take an ox or Kudu horn and blow it, and so doing will bewitch an enemy, saying, "I blow this horn and your heart will become like the wind I blow through this horn," meaning, it will disappear and be lost. The person will then be bewitched, will cough up phlegm, and eventually die unless he takes offerings to the Mweithaga and beseeches him to remove the spell. The proper thing is to take a ram and some sugar cane, and if this is done the wizard is unable to refuse, and will keep the sheep, cook some of the fat and put it in his mouth with some of the juice from the sugar cane. He will then squirt a little into the mouth of the bewitched person, and will also put some into a [181]gourd for the patient to take back to his village and give to his children. After this ceremony the patient recovers, and, what is better, it is said that no Mweithaga can again bewitch him in this way.

A Mweithaga, if he wishes to bewitch a village, will go into the bush and find francolin eggs, and will put these, together with the leaves of the *mkurwe* (*Albizzia*) bush, on a fire and will say, "As these eggs burst and as these leaves shrivel up so shall this village be

destroyed,” and it is believed that evil will forthwith fall on the people of that village, but only upon the people, for the Eithaga do not harm live stock. Some will put the francolin eggs with water in a cooking pot on a fire and then break the pot and the eggs with one of the hearth stones. The Eithaga rarely use herbs or material substances in their magic, their spells being done by invocation. No medicine man can remove a spell imposed by a Mweithaga; it can only be removed by the one who imposed it or by another Mweithaga. If, however, a mysterious sickness falls on a village a *mundu mugo*, or medicine man, is called in, and he can diagnose it and tell whether it is due to the magic of Eithaga. A Mweithaga cannot bewitch another Mweithaga, nor can he bewitch a person belonging to another tribe such as Masai or Kamba.

Sometimes, however, they are of use, for they are believed to have the power of bewitching unknown thieves, and so it occasionally happens that a person who has had, say, some goats or some sugar cane stolen, will call in a Mweithaga and ask him to throw a spell on the thief. He will come to the village and take a piece of mud containing the spoor of one of the stolen animals or one of the stems from which the sugar cane has been cut, as the case may be, and he will say “*A rokwa nguo*,” “I bewitch the thief.” The thief, who is probably not far away, will hear people talking of this, and being convinced of the effects of the magic will hasten to return the stolen property to its owner.

The Mweithaga is then called again, and the owner [182]of the goats takes one and kills it, the Mweithaga cuts out the stomach with part of the œsophagus, wets his finger with saliva and touches the end of the œsophagus with his wetted finger, and then inflates the stomach by blowing and makes passes with it over the body of the thief, thus removing the spell. He finally fastens a *rukwaru*, or strip of the goat skin, on the thief’s wrist and the thief has to pay a sheep to the Mweithaga as a fee. If the theft is that of such a thing as sugar cane the thief has to find the sacrificial goat and then be purified as above described.

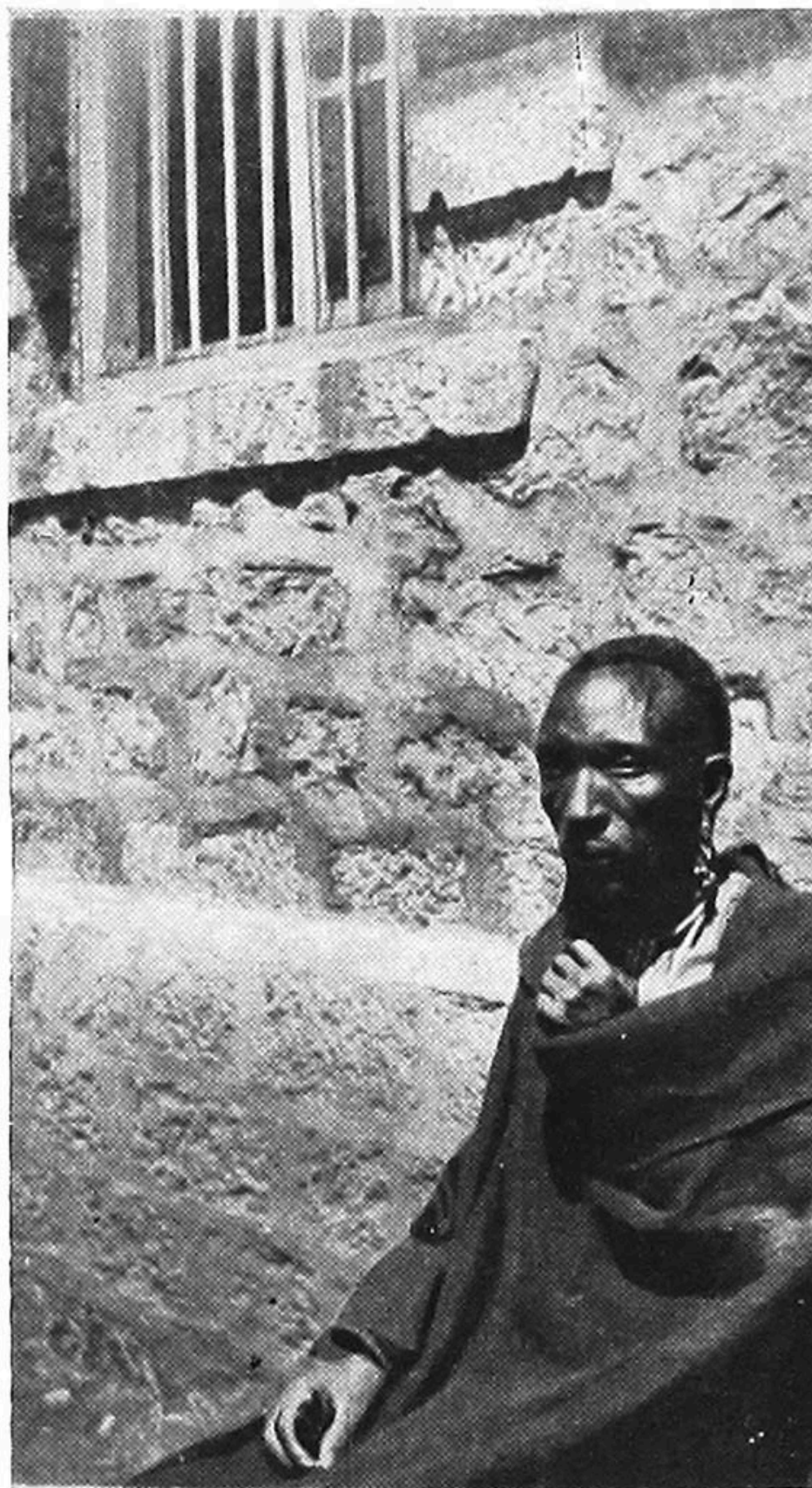
No Mweithaga may eat wild game, and in no case can he even wear the skin of a wild beast; the only exceptions to this law are that they can eat locusts and can make honey bags out of the skin of the *ngunu*, a small reddish antelope, probably a duiker.

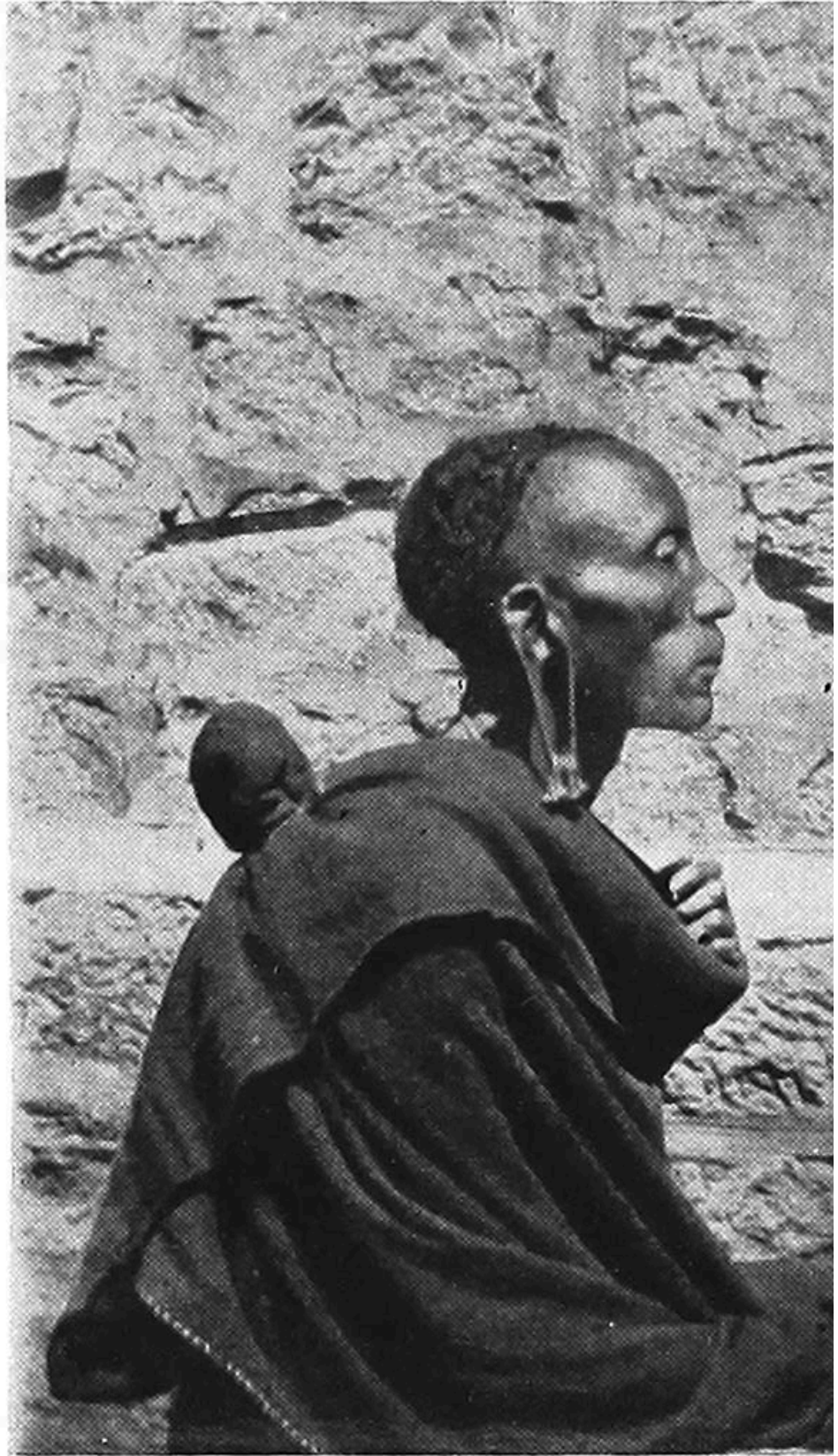
For all their magical powers the Eithaga, like other people, are subject to the incidence of *thahu*, and are also subject to the power of the evil eye.

There is a kind of constitutional antipathy between the Eithaga and the smiths of the tribe, and it is said that there are no Eithaga smiths. A Mweithaga may not sleep in a smith’s house or *vice versa*; if this did occur it is believed that illness or even death would supervene. The evil spell can, however, be removed by the owner of the house; that is to

say, if a smith sleeps in the house of a Mweithaga, the Mweithaga could remove the evil, and *vice versa*.

The Kikuyu are very afraid of the Eithaga, and in former days after someone had been killed by their black art the elders would induce one of them to come and remove the spell from all the people of the village where the man had died. They would then collect as many of the members of the clan as they could find and insist on their taking the oath known as *ku-ringa thenge*, by which they would swear not to bewitch any more of their neighbours. Sometimes, however, they would turn out *en masse* and slaughter all the Eithaga they could lay their hands on. It is said that [183]a Kikuyu would never enter the village of a Mweithaga uninvited.





KIKUYU ESCARPMENT.

If a Mweithaga goes to a village and becomes embroiled in a quarrel with a member of another tribe, goats must be exchanged to make the peace, and the Mweithaga must spit on the other party to obviate any evil effects. The Mweithaga then invites the other man to his village to drink beer with him, and will take a sip from a horn of beer and eject it back into the horn, the man then drinking the beer, after which he is immune from the effects of any Eithaga magic.

The Eithaga are believed to have the power of protecting forest, and their powers are sometimes invoked for this purpose. If a man wishes to protect a patch of forest on his property, he sends for a Mweithaga to put a spell on it; the magician proceeds to the spot with the local elders and brings with him a cooking pot taken from the deserted hut of a deceased person. He fills this with water drawn from each spring and stream in the piece of forest, and boils it on a fire made on a path in the said forest; the pot is supported on three stones. After this a little of the water is poured back into each of the springs or streams, and the pot is then shattered by dropping one of the hearth stones on it. The magician then blows his horn and announces that if anyone cuts the trees in the forest his heart will burst forth like the blasts of the horn. [184]

[Contents]

CHAPTER III

KIKUYU MAGIC AND MAGICIANS

Njau wa Kabocha.—There is, in S. Kikuyu, a curious old medicine man named Njau wa Kabocha, belonging to the Anjiru clan, who is held in great esteem on account of his magical powers and his priestly functions. He possesses a sacred tree, at which sacrifices are believed to be very effectual. He is said not to deal in bad magic, and one of his specialities is the removal of a plague of caterpillars, *ngunga*, or wireworms, *vigunyu*, from the crops. He was good enough to give a description of the procedure used to effect this useful object.

The owner of the afflicted crops brings a ram, *ndorume*, and some beer; the ram is strangled and the lower intestine, *mutura*, is extracted; a number of the caterpillars are also collected. The magician drinks a draught of the beer and then bites the caterpillars in half, one after another, and lays the pieces on the leaves of the *mutundu* (*Croton macrostachys*) and *mukuyu* (*Dombeya sp.*). He then places fragments of the caterpillars in the intestine of the ram, goes away into the bush and buries the parcel in the hole of white ants' nest (*Muthongonina*).¹ He next takes some wood of the *morika* and *muirangani* trees and lights a fire near the place where the caterpillars are buried, and in this fire he burns the above-mentioned leaves and the remaining caterpillars. [185]

The magician does not eat any of the meat of the ram; this is consumed by the owners of the fields and the elders who have accompanied him.

A second ram is then provided, and the magician, together with the village elders, goes and sacrifices this at the nearest sacred fig tree; the breast of the ram is cut out and hung in the tree, and the remainder of the sacrifice is eaten by the magician and the elders. After this, the magician takes the *ngorima* (colon?) from the second ram, some beer, *njohi*, some unfermented beer, *ngogoyo*, honey, beeswax, medicine, of which he would not disclose the nature, and the horns of the ram; these he burns in a fire, *ichua*, in the afflicted field. The bones are all broken intentionally, but the marrow is not extracted, as it is said that when the fat and bones are burnt in the fire they make a smell which is very acceptable to the deity *Engai*. The fire is called *ichua*, the particular name for a fire lit at a sacrifice—a sacred fire in fact.

This is the end of the ceremony, and the magician then receives two or three *miati*, ewes which have not yet borne a kid. It was stated that after the ceremony above described the caterpillars would disappear in a day or two; they would either be killed by heavy rain, eaten by soldier ants, *siafu*, or the sun would dry them up.

On the day after the ceremony no person is allowed to cultivate the fields, the men may not eat beef that day or the next, and that night every man must observe celibacy. He must not sleep in one of his ordinary huts, but in the *thengira*, or goat hut, among the unmarried men.

Njau wa Kabocha declares that he can, if he wishes it, bring a plague of caterpillars upon any section of people who treat him badly, and that he can do this by pouring out some beer in his village and praying to *Engai*. Within fourteen days, he alleges, the caterpillars will begin to appear, but he admitted that he could only do this about the normal season when caterpillars are apt to come in swarms. [186]

In the old days, when the Kikuyu used to fight the Masai, Njau's father, who was a great magician, was a specialist at making medicine to enable his people to check the Masai invasions, and when they came, to ensure victory for the Kikuyu. The knowledge of this art is said to have come down from his ancestors.

This magic is called *mwita*, and its most important instrument is a *kiheto*, or small piece of iron obtained from a smith. A small clay pot is made in which the *kiheto* is placed and some medicine called *njeku*, and this is brought to the path by which the Masai usually came to attack. If this failed, Njau's father would go to an old woman of the Asi or Dorobo tribe, buy from her an earthenware pot; this he would take, along with a ram, and proceed secretly through the forest near Ngong Mt., to a spot close to the Masai raiding track. He would then kill the ram as if for a sacrifice, cook the tail fat in the pot, then melt down some of the body fat, taking care to pick out any pieces of flesh which had accidentally been put into the pot. He would also add some *tatha* from the stomach of the ram and some sugar cane beer to the melted fat in the pot. He would next seek out a straight and lofty tree and bury the pot and its contents at the foot of it, being careful that the mouth of the pot just showed above ground. This is what the Swahilis call *kafara*, and it is believed to stop a raiding party from passing that way. If, however, they did succeed in passing, their raid would be abortive and many would be killed. The power of this magic is said to be derived from the deity *Engai* and not from the spirits.

The medicine above referred to and called *njeku* is stated to have been made from a piece of cloth or an old discarded sandal secretly obtained from an abandoned Masai kraal; this is charred, ground up, and then mixed with certain magic herbs.

Kamiri wa Itherero.—The Hon. C. Dundas has furnished some interesting information with regard to the magic powers of one Kamiri, who is the same [187] medicine man referred to in the curious incident described in "Ethnology of A-Kamba," p. 143 *et seq.*

Close to Kyambu there lives a medicine man of the name of Kamiri wa Itherero who is said to be one of the most renowned of all Kikuyu. Like most medicine men, Kamiri is possessed of more character than most of his countrymen, and this is shown by his manner and appearance to a far greater extent than is usually the case among other natives. He is one of the few members of the senior generation of *Maina*, which in itself is a claim to veneration; this means that he has practically withdrawn from the council of elders, and that he must be a man of considerable age. Yet Kamiri looks younger and better preserved than many an elder of the *Mwangi* generation. This may possibly be due to his temperate habits, for it is said that he has never in his life touched intoxicating liquors. In height Kamiri is much below the average of his tribe, but his remarkably clear features and the penetrating look of his eyes give him a dignified appearance.

For the European, Kamiri, on the whole, has no liking, and he does not trouble to conceal this; in his own mind he is clear on the point that we do very little good and cause vast damage by upsetting all good customs; in particular the injurious effect of our administration on the manners of women troubles him. And this is not surprising, for Kamiri has suffered much by our intrusion. In former times the success of raids depended to a great extent on his advice and aid, and this, coupled with his deep knowledge of the art of medicine in general, had won him great respect, and one can even say that he was held in awe. Kamiri, in fact, was probably the principal man of the tribe and the nearest approach to a chief that his countrymen of that day could imagine. To-day he is a small headman, but nevertheless enjoys no small standing, as we shall show.

Missionaries designate Kamiri as the “official poisoner”; yet one missionary, who knows him better [188] than any other European, tells me that if Kamiri is hired to poison a man he will first call that man and tell him so and then he will inquire into the case and endeavour to settle the quarrel, in which respect he is usually successful. If Kamiri is a poisoner he is essentially the “official” poisoner; he uses his art with discretion and in legitimate causes. There is a great difference between the medicine man of Kamiri’s type and the average witch doctor of to-day; the medicine man of the old school knows what he does, and dooms a man perhaps as conscientiously as a judge when he hangs a murderer.

Nothing which we or our influence could do has broken his position as a medicine man; even the paramount chief has a great respect for him, and he has been seen to get up and give his place to Kamiri. It is believed that no Kikuyu, however strongly supported by the Government, would really dare to go against Kamiri. A few years ago he demonstrated this power by hanging up a bag of rupees in a tree by the pathway and left it there for several months: no one dared to tamper with it. Natives attribute marvellous powers to him, and it is pretty certain that once he has detected a criminal no Kikuyu has any doubt as to his guilt, neither would they think that any man poisoned by him had been unjustly dealt with.


It is not very surprising that this cunning medicine man, with his uncomfortable supernatural powers and his science of detection, should not enjoy great popularity, and that there should be rather a feeling of distrust between him and his people.

On one occasion Kamiri volunteered to detect a case of theft of some cattle in which two men, A, a herder, and B, a man remotely suspected, were in custody on suspicion. As far as is known Kamiri knew nothing about the case or the persons suspected. Having set some boys to catch lizards, Kamiri placed the two men before him and dabbed some white powder on their noses and on the palms of their hands. The [189]same substance was streaked on one of the lizard's heads and he then waved the gourd containing this medicine round the lizard and likewise round the suspected man. He then asked B if he had committed the theft, to which the man replied in the negative. Kamiri then held the lizard to the man's nose for some minutes, but it made no signs. Next he repeated the performance with A, and immediately on his denying the charge the lizard caught hold of his nostrils with its mouth. This it did several times. Kamiri was then asked if the man was guilty. He replied that he was not, because if he had been so, the lizard would have held on and not let go, but he was also not innocent, otherwise the lizard would have acted as with B, and therefore he concluded that the man knew about the theft and had probably abetted it. The charge was never proved against this man, but it was almost certain that he must have had some knowledge of the theft. The natives had not the smallest doubt about it after Kamiri's decision, and were highly surprised that B was not at once liberated.

A famous trick of Kamiri's is to make a small sheep grow large. The writer has not seen this, but was told by a European that he had witnessed it and that he made the sheep swell to an enormous size. One of Kamiri's feats is related with great satisfaction by the natives. Kamiri once gave some medicine to a European in order that he should win a race, and the story goes that the medicine worked satisfactorily. So now there is a profound belief that Kamiri's medicine, unlike most others, does not lose its potency with Europeans.

Kamiri's pupil is his son Kithege, who is said to be almost as practised in the arts as his father, and he is now generally sent in his father's place when there is any distance to go. Kithege was seen to perform the same trick with the lizard in another case of theft. This time the lizard hung on to the man's nose and remained so even when not held. The man was at [190]once pronounced to be the offender, and even admitted himself that he had never heard of Kamiri making a mistake before, although he denied having committed the theft. On this occasion endeavours were made to discover how the trick was done. It was certainly not due to any pressure of the hand; a trial was also made with various colours, but with no effect. Seeing that the writer was sceptical, Kithege, at his own suggestion, picked out at random two men from the crowd and tried it with them, but the lizard would not bite either of them.

Finally the conclusion was come to that there must be some connection between the breathing of the man and the lizard's action; possibly so long as the man breathed freely, the lizard would not bite, but when he held his breath or breathed strongly, after holding it for a time, the lizard, for some reason, hung to his nose.

The idea that a reptile will fasten on to a criminal has its parallel in the New Testament, *vide* [Acts xxviii. 3–6](#) : “And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on to his hand they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” Possibly there is an idea that the reptile is really a spirit which has temporarily assumed this form.

It is considered impossible that a medicine man should maintain a real standing and the absolute faith of the people by mere trickery. Still less is it likely that a charlatan would have so much self-confidence as Kamiri, and therefore one is driven to the conclusion that a man such as Kamiri must repeatedly have proved himself to be right in his detection. The most successful practices in this respect will always be such as work automatically, and the more one sees of noted medicine men the more one inclines to the idea that many of their powers are neither trickery nor mystery, but are simply due to the nervousness or to the mental effect upon the victim or patient.

Kithege was asked if he had any other ways of ^[191]proving the man's innocence or guilt, and he immediately expressed his readiness to try another test. Asked what he would do, he announced his intention of taking the man's eye out, and on being stopped he volunteered to put a venomous snake round the man's neck. Unfortunately both of these experiments entailed more risk than the confidence of the observer would permit, although the suspected man seemed to have no apprehensions as to the danger he was running. ^[192]

¹ A Syrian superstition quoted in “Religion of the Semites,” p. 443, deals with a ceremony to rid gardens of caterpillars, and in that, one of the insects is bewailed and buried and the caterpillars then disappear. ↑

CHAPTER IV

MISCELLANEOUS MAGICAL PRACTICES

Rain Magic (Ukamba).—The Kamba have no medicine men who specialise in rain-making, and in times of drought they pray and sacrifice at the *ithembo*, or local shrine, in the manner already described. Some people, however, pretend that by means of a certain medicine they can make rain pass by and not fall at a particular place. The ingredients of this are kept very secret and are only known to a few people. It is a black powder and is placed in the palm of the hand and blown in the direction of the rain storm. Some is also placed in the horn of an antelope and stuck in a tree. It is addressed as follows: “You are now a man and are placed here to keep the rain away; if you fail you stay out here in the rain and I will not take you back into the house, but throw you away into the bush.”

Presumably the concept is that by these means a human, or perhaps anthropomorphic spirit, having the power of averting rain, is bottled up in the horn by the potent medicine, or it may be that the spirit is supposed to be in the medicine itself. It is a pity we do not know what the medicine is composed of, as the reasoning might be the easier to follow.

Burglar's Magic.—In the author's “Ethnology of A-Kamba” an example of this in connection with the Machakos district was given—p. 95. The same kind of thing is evidently practised in Kitui, where it is said that a thief will sometimes obtain medicine from a magician and rub it on a stone. He then goes to a village at night and throws it on to the thatch of a hut. [193]It is stated that he then probably waits till he hears the people say: “Let us sleep.” He presently enters the hut and goes to the owner and says: “I have come for a cow which I am going to take away.” The owner is apparently hypnotised and unable to refuse, for he answers: “Take such and such a one,” and the people go on sleeping till late the next morning. A neighbour calls at the village early next day, and is surprised to find the door of the hut and of the cattle kraal open, one or two cattle missing, and the people still asleep.

Women often fashion little clay images of men and hang them up in their gardens to frighten youngsters who go there to pilfer the crops; the children believe that if they take anything they will be stricken with a *thabu*. The elders, however, declare that such charms are only a sham, as the women do not really wish to harm the children, but only to scare them.

Hunter's Magic.—If a Kamba hunter shoots a very fat beast he must not take snuff while he is skinning it or he will be seized with diarrhoea.

Elephant hunters often carry a medicine called *ngatho*, of which a little is placed on each arrow before it is shot at an elephant; it is carried in a hollow reed in the hunter's quiver. The hunter must not eat or touch mutton before he returns from hunting or this medicine will prove ineffective. The medicine man who concocts the medicine places it in the quiver of the hunter with his own hands, and the quiver must not be opened till the hunter is in the presence of the elephants. Hunters often carry another medicine called "*nzebi*," which, if blown in the direction of game, prevents it from seeing the hunter.

In Kitui, if a man has made his preparations to go on a hunting expedition, he must not cohabit with his wife the night before he starts.

If there is a new-comer in a hunting party and an elephant is killed, the leader of the party will cut off the trunk and breasts of the beast before the new-comer comes up, and hide them in the bush. It is said that if ^[194]this is not done the new-comer might joke about the peculiar appearance of these parts and in so doing turn their luck so that no other elephant would be killed. The elephant spirit would evidently be annoyed.

An officer, some time ago, shot an elephant in Kitui, and two of the natives who accompanied him came up and asked if they might perform their ceremony, the object of which was to bring him much luck and good sport. He agreed, and a goat was killed and some of the blood collected; one of the men tasted a little of the blood, and then each of them took a little in his mouth and ejected a few drops on the tusks of the dead elephant, the remainder being poured out as a libation.

The leader or leaders of the hunting party who are termed *A-thiani* in Ukamba and *Tha-mati* in Kikuyu can alone eat the trunk of an elephant.

When the hunting party returns it is the duty of the leader to sacrifice an ox and brew some beer; the blood of the ox and the beer are mixed and poured out in the village as a libation of thanksgiving.

The same ceremony is observed after the sale of the ivory.

A man who organises successful hunts, or proves himself a good leader of caravans to the coast, obtains great honour among his people.

Charms.—The Kikuyu people sometimes place a human skull in a tree in a garden to prevent people from stealing; it is not quite certain whether this is believed to have any magic power. They also place the clay *tuyéres* from a smith's furnace in trees to protect gardens; in this case they are probably trading on the dreaded magic powers of the smiths.

The horns of the first ox presented to a man by the father or his son-in-law are not thrown away, but placed on the roof of the hut of his principal wife. The significance of this is not very clear; it may be done merely to commemorate the event, but in these matters it is never safe to jump to conclusions. [195]

The following observation in Kikuyu may be classed among magical procedure. A man was sued for return of some cattle which he was obliged to return. On doing so, he pulled out a few hairs from the animals' tails. It appears that when certain medicine is made in the village the owner has only to pull out a few tail hairs from a beast and it will always return to his village.

Occasionally in a Kikuyu village the vertebra of an ox may be seen transfixed on the stick which surmounts a grain hut. This is a charm to keep butterflies away from the village, as it is believed that these insects carry sickness to the goats and sheep.

Fear of old Women.—Old women in Kikuyu are much feared, particularly those who are blind, toothless, and decrepit; they are often believed to possess magic power. When meeting them, it is safer to pass by or to speak to them pleasantly. If they are annoyed they may bring all sorts of ill luck. Being bothered one day by a number of very old women, Chief Marraro and his elders were asked to send them away, but were afraid to tell them to go, and even many of the police dared not talk to them.

Knots, etc.—When a Kikuyu warrior goes to war he ties knots in the grass on the way, so that he may find his enemy sleepy. Or again, if he is going to visit anyone he does the same in order that he may find his friend at home.

If a man is at war, it is bad for the wife to make string for a food bag (*chondo*); it is probably believed that the twisting of string would have the same deleterious effect as the tying of a knot is supposed to have on certain occasions. Further, the wife must not sweep out the hut while her husband is away with a war party.

A zebra was shot by the writer some time ago in Kitui, and when the meat was brought to camp a Kamba was observed to tie a knot in the hair of the tail; the reason given for this was that zebras being rather subject to diarrhœa, it was a good thing to tie a [196]knot in the tail, as the persons who eat the meat would then not be likely to suffer from this complaint.

In Kitui, also, if two men are starting on a cattle trading expedition and one gets ahead of the other the one who is delayed plants a stick in the ground and ties grass to it, this being supposed to delay the first man, and, the other passing him, will then be able to sell his cattle first and therefore at a better price.

War Medicine (Kikuyu).—Before a young warrior departs on an expedition, the father goes to a medicine man and obtains some medicine called *njeku* and smears it on his son's shield, the object of this being to protect him from the weapons of his enemies. It is said that sometimes the medicine man, out of spite, supplies bad medicine and the warrior will then be killed. This alternative is no doubt the explanation of casualties, and it would be interesting to know how the medicine man defends himself from the accusation of having supplied the wrong medicine.

If a man collects the saliva of an enemy and takes it away to a medicine man (*murogi*) who makes suitable medicine of it, the owner becomes afflicted with a bad throat.

A wife must not sleep away from her village while her husband is on a journey, nor bring a male friend to the village; she may shave her head in his absence, although this is barred among some tribes.

Magical Remedies for Sterility.—Among the A-Kamba of Ulu there are various remedies for barrenness in women. The husband consults a medicine man, who casts lots, "*piga mbau*" to find out which of the various remedies must be adopted. When the proper kind of remedy has been discovered, the husband takes his wife to the discoverer of the remedy (*ngnondu*), who administers it.

Various remedies are in vogue, viz:

A piece (1) of the trunk of the *mumo* tree is cut out and bound in the woman's bead loin band. [197]

One (2) of the yellow fruits of a common wild weed is bound in the loin band. It is called *baringo*, and is probably a *Solanum*.

A goat (3) is led round the woman seven times, and the *aiimu* are promised a goat if she proves fertile.

A goat (4) or fowl is killed. Its blood is poured on the woman's head till it trickles down her back and breast. She is thus supposed to derive new blood.

The (5) tails of her loin cloth are knotted.

Medicine is also made from the following:

Two (1) twigs of the *mukengesia* tree.

One (2) twig of the *musumsuyia* tree.

A branch of *mulali* tree sufficiently long to go round the woman's waist is then cut.

The woman's loin skin apron is cut into two pieces, and a knot is tied in one of them.

The *mulali* branch is then passed round her waist and tied into a knot.

The twigs 1 and 2 are then placed to the woman's lips, and she bites some of them and spits out the pieces three times. Part of this is taken and thrown on a main road for passers-by to tread on. The rest is taken by the husband, who walks in front of the woman, dropping it for her to tread on as far as the village. Water in a *nzele*, or half gourd, is then drawn by the husband, and all the men and women of the village rinse their hands in it. A goat, given by the husband, is made to drink the water in the *nzele*; it is then killed, and the chest is taken and eaten by husband and wife. The husband does not cohabit with his wife till the second night after the ceremony.

Among the Kikuyu if a married woman does not prove fertile a medicine man takes her to a *mukeo*, *mukenyia*, or *muthakwa* tree, and there suffocates a *mwati* (a young ewe which has not yet borne a kid); the elders of the husband's clan take the small intestine of the *mwati* and twine it around the woman [198] and the tree, the intestine being then cut through with a sharp splinter of wood. The ceremony concludes with the anointing of the woman on the forehead with castor oil, and some fat from the carcass of the *mwati* is melted and poured out at the foot of the tree.

It was impossible to discover the exact significance of this ceremony; it may be a form of so-called tree marriage, a ceremony by which presumably the fertility of the tree can be given to the woman.

Inoculation Against Snake Bites.—Although these observations are classified under the heading of magic, it is not at all clear whether the procedure adopted is based on the knowledge of prophylactic or antiseptic drugs. The subject is worthy of professional investigation by a trained pathologist.

The author is indebted to Mr G. H. Osborne for the description of the process of inoculation for snake bites which took place in his presence at Machakos in Ukamba.

The practitioner was a young man of some twenty-five years of age, Waita wa Mathendu by name; the patient a boy of about sixteen, called Kaboyi wa Kimoino—both natives of the Iveti Hills. At the writer's request the native doctor brought specimens of the medicinal plants. They consisted of:

(1) A branch of a shrub called *musobi* (Kikamba). This has a leaf measuring about two inches in length, bright green on the top and a lighter shade below; the edges are serrated but not sharp, and the whole leaf has a velvety feel to the touch. It bears a fruit which is red when ripe and which is eaten by the A-Kamba. It is also used as medicine for colds in the head.

(2) Two branches of a shrub called *mthingii*. The leaves appear to grow on a single stem, and are composed of some six petals on either side of the leaf stem. The leaf, full grown, measures about one and a half inches by three quarters. In the case of the first, a piece of the stem as it stands in the ground is lightly [199]scraped three times with a knife. In the case of the second, grains of *mtama* grain are thrown three times to strike the bush.

Both are then completely dug up by the roots, and the two roots, the stems and leaves, are put on the fire without water and dried completely. These are the vegetable ingredients of the medicine.

The animal ingredients are:

(1) The heads of various kinds of snakes. When a medicine man captures a snake he takes it by the neck in his right hand and passes its tail three times around and behind his waist with the left hand, like a belt, the third time passing its head to his left hand, which is grasping the tail, and then clasping neck and tail in the left hand and holding it out from his body. He makes three gashes with a knife on the back of the snake's head, just above the neck, at the same time making a gash in the back of his left hand, which is holding the snake's head and tail. He then takes some of the blood from the gash on the back of his hand and smears it with his knife point in each of the gashes in the snake's neck. The snake dies after the man's blood has been smeared on the gashes, and its head is then severed below the gashes and put into the *nzele* with the vegetable ingredients. These are then pounded up till the mixture becomes a pitch-like substance. It is put back on the fire until thoroughly dried, when it is ground up into a powder varying from dark grey to black in colour.

The medicine is now ready for use and is placed in its several receptacles. The vegetable ingredients are always the same, but as each kind of snake is treated, each vessel holds a different kind of medicine. On this occasion the doctor had only three snakes fastened up in a gourd with air holes bored into it. Before explaining the initial process he took them out and put the first round his neck and the second on his lap, [200]where it lay diversifying its position by coiling round his arm.

The snakes brought for inspection were:

(1) *Ndau* (female).—About eighteen inches long, dark green on the back and light green underneath. It both spits and bites, and lives mostly in trees. Its darts are very rapid.

(2) *Syomelule* (female).—A dark grey colour on the back and light grey to light yellow below; the pattern appeared to be almost in squares. It was about two feet long and had not

digested a mouse which had got half-way down. It is said to be a tree snake; it both spits and strikes, and after striking sticks on to the bitten part.

(3) *Kiko* (male).—Marked like a puff adder, black, with a broad flat head. Unfortunately this one had had a slight difference with the second snake, which had struck and killed it on the way to the station. It was in the bottom of the gourd and was not visible. It is said to lie on the road, shamming death, and rearing suddenly, to strike at the thigh. The larger ones also spit, and are especially dangerous to people drawing water.

There were in all seven small gourds of powder, each containing a mixture of the vegetable ingredient and a different kind of snake. In addition to the three snakes above mentioned the gourds contained the powder made from four other kinds of snakes:

(4) *Nguluku*.—Said to be a small, reddish, whip-like snake of which larger specimens have also been found living near streams; their bite is very deadly.

(5) *Kimbuba* (Swahili Bafu).—Puff adder.

(6) *Kisilu*.—A very black snake seldom leaving its hole in the daytime.

(7) *Yaitha*.—A tree snake which is very fond of taking up its residence in large birds' nests. It darts down on the passer-by from a tree, strikes the head, and then retires again to the tree. In 1907, one of them lived in a tree on the road to Mumoni, not far [201] from Gai, and killed two people in a short time. The District Commissioner was asked to kill it, but two Kamba went out together and one of them killed it as it tried to strike the other. This is probably a *Dendraspis*. The doctor takes the skin of the patient's upper palm, just below the knuckle of the finger and thumb, and cuts three small gashes in the skin. He does this just above the upper wrist bone and upper elbow joint on the outside. The tongue is also slightly gashed in places till blood is drawn.

The writer only saw these particular places cut, as there was not sufficient time, but anyone undergoing the full treatment would be cut on the top of the foot, just above the toes, on the upper thigh, the buttock, and the shoulder, the process being repeated on the other side of the body.

The practitioner then pours into the palm of his left hand a little of each powder—seven kinds in this case. With the first finger of the right hand he puts the mixed powder on to each of the three gashes, then spits on the places and rubs the powder into the gashes with the second finger of his right hand. The remaining portion in the palm of the left hand is licked three times off the palm by the patient's gashed tongue. The doctor then carefully

wipes his hands, and, the operation being over, the powder is allowed to dry into the gashes.

To show the writer the efficacy of his medicine he took out the *Syomelule* snake and put it on to the finger of the patient, the mouth being closed over the first finger just below the nail, where it hung for several seconds. Then he took it off and returned it to its receptacle. One fang—the upper one—had drawn blood in the finger. He then took a knife and scraped the place of the bite on the upper and lower side of the finger. He said this was to scrape off the fangs of the snake. No blood was drawn on the under side of the finger. The patient said that the snake, when hanging [202]to his finger, did not hurt him, but that he merely felt as if his finger was being tightly pinched. Both the doctors and the writer's boy who were present declared that instant death was the usual result of a bite by such a snake.

The result of the treatment is that a person can seize hold of any snake and, by making a circle round its head three times with the first finger of the right hand, render it innocuous. If a person sees a snake enter a clump of grass, he walks three times round the clump, and at the place where the snake has entered puts his hand in till he catches it by the tail. He pulls it out, and the snake strikes back. He allows it to strike his hand three times, and then seizes it by the head or neck and lets go the tail. He then makes three circular passes round its head with the first finger of the right hand and the snake can no longer hurt anyone unless a person forcibly puts his fingers into its mouth. It can be carried about or worn with impunity.

If a person who is immune spits and strikes a snake with the spittle, the snake becomes sick and dies at once. The patient was at the writer's house for quite an hour after the operation. He still had the other side of the body to be operated upon. He showed no signs of swelling or illness.

The usual price for divulging the identity of the plants and the method of concoction to a fellow tribesman is a cow and a bull. For this reason the doctor brought the twigs tied up in a piece of cloth, so that their nature was not apparent to a passer-by.

This inoculation may be a system of immunisation or it may be that the snakes produced for the operation had had their poisonous fangs extracted. Its efficacy is, however, implicitly believed in by the Kamba people of these parts, and no one who has been inoculated is known to have died from the bite.

It must be noted that a certain amount of formality is observed, there being a favourite number for the magic "passes" and for the gashes made for inoculation. [203]

Another observer writing from Kikuyu states that while standing at a particular place with some elders a snake was seen in the long grass. One man commenced to feel about in the grass for the snake, and when another man struck at it, he picked it up alive. He seemed to have absolutely no fear of snakes, and explained that he had medicine for their bites—not to prevent bites, but to neutralise the poison. Later, he was further cross-examined and denied that he had this medicine.

The author also saw in Kitui a man who professed to have no fear of snake bites. This man one day walked into Kitui Station carrying a big puff adder (*Bitis arietans*) in his hand; he was not holding it by the neck, but was gripping it about eighteen inches below its head. He had heard that snakes were wanted for a collection, and had come to sell it. After the puff adder had been safely disposed of, he pointed out two deep scratches, not punctures, bleeding freely, at the base of his thumb and produced a black powder, some of which he rubbed on the wounds and some of which he placed on his tongue and swallowed. The wounds were inflicted by the adder. This man accompanied the writer for a ten days' journey, and during that time caught various live snakes. His general procedure was to lie down and put his arm into the recesses of a white ant nest which is a very favourite shelter for snakes during the heat of the day; he would feel about and sometimes extract a snake. The idea of feeling about in a dark hole in a district where cobras, puff adders, and other poisonous snakes are common, made one shudder. But nothing untoward happened, and he suffered no ill effects from his scratches by the puff adder's fangs. He was asked what the black powder was made of, and produced about six plants, the roots of which, when dried, charred and ground up, were said to constitute the antidote. It was, however, not possible at the time to identify the plants. [205]

PART III

MISCELLANEOUS

[207]

[Contents]

INTRODUCTORY

In this section a variety of matters, many of which have a bearing on the beliefs of the people, but which cannot be legitimately placed under either Religion or Magic, are dealt with.

The section dealing with the constitution of the people shows how the council of elders grades into the primitive priesthood.

A chapter on Kikuyu dances is included, and for this the author has to thank the Hon. C. Dundas. Many of these dances take place either at planting time or near the harvest, and also at marriages, and undoubtedly come under the class of fertility ceremonies. They may thus be considered to come under the heading of either Religion or Magic, although it is not always possible to say to which they belong.

A chapter has been added on the position of women in tribal organisation, and this subject is particularly recommended to future investigators. [209]

[Contents]

CHAPTER I

THE CONSTITUTION AND WORKING OF COUNCILS AMONG THE KIKUYU

According to the natural organisation of the Kikuyu tribe every youth, as he grows up, gradually passes through the various grades of tribal life. He commences as a *kihe*, an uncircumcised boy, and after circumcision becomes a *mwanake*, and finally a *muthuri*. He has to be initiated, step by step, into each grade according to the ritual of the tribe, and payment has to be made for entry into each stage. The procedure and rites with regard to circumcision have been dealt with elsewhere, and we now have to consider entry into the higher grades.

When a father considers that his son is old enough, he agrees to his marriage, and after marriage, when he is the father of a child, he becomes eligible for eldership. When the father thinks the time has come, he provides the son with a goat to present to the council of elders for his initiation into the grade.

The elders cannot refuse to admit him to the lowest grade, and at their next meeting the initiation takes place. The goat is first strangled, and a knife is then driven into its chest and the blood collected in a pot. The senior elders take a sip of the blood, and the candidate also drinks a little.

The following portions of the carcase are then set apart, viz., the ribs, a piece of the meat of a leg called *ruhongi*, a piece of the small intestine, one of the small stomach, *ngorima*, and one of liver.

Two *athamaki*, or full elders of council, take these [210]portions and roast them before a fire; they are then brought to the hut of the candidate and handed over to his wife, or, if he has more than one, to the senior wife, who places them on a kind of shelf, called *thegi*, near the bed, and they are afterwards eaten by the man. The wife then gives the elders a half gourd, *njeli*, of gruel and a portion of cooked pigeon pea, *njahe*. The elders eat a little of this and the remainder is given to the candidate.

This ceremonial meal appears to be in the nature of an oath. The man is then called a *muthuri ya mburi imwe*, viz., an elder of one goat.

A little later on he presents another goat to the elders and becomes an elder of two goats, *muthuri ya mburi igiri*; and then again, he presents a third goat and becomes an elder of

three goats, *muthuri ya imburi itatu*. No particular ceremony attends the presenting of the second or third goats.

After a due time has elapsed the man can apply to the senior council to be admitted to that body. As a rule his entry is not refused, but it is said that he cannot demand admittance to this grade without the approval of its elders. He pays a fourth goat as entrance fee, and the same ceremony as for the lower grade elder of one goat is gone through. He then has to pay a fine *thenge*, or male goat, which counts as two ordinary goats, whereupon the elders reveal to him the secret matters of their grade and instruct him in the procedure of the council. They also invest him with his staff of office, the *mithegi*, and hand him the bunch of sacred leaves, *mutathia* (*Clausena anisata* and also *Clausena inaequalis*), and he is then a fully fledged elder of council and is called *muthuri ya imburi nne* or *ithano*, elder of four or five goats, as the case may be, and is entitled to be called *muthamaki*, which may be translated as magistrate or judge, or one who is entitled to try cases.

Ordinary elders are allowed to carry a bunch of leaves of *mutathia* (*Clausena inaequalis*, also *C. [211]anisata*), but until they become *ukuru*, they cannot carry the leaves of *muturanguru* (*Vernonia sp.*).

It is now necessary to consider the functions of the various grades. There are two councils, or *kiamas*: *kiama cha kamatimo* and *kiama cha athamaki*. The council whose legal powers are recognised by Government is the *kiama cha athamaki*.

The following table shows how these councils are composed:

Name of Councils	Composed of
Kiama cha kamatimo	Athuri cha imburi imwe igiri " " " itatu " " "
Kiama cha athamaki	nne " " " ithano " "
	Athuri ya ukuru.

The members of the *kiama cha kamatimo* have no judicial power; they attend at a meeting of the council but do not sit with the *athamaki*; they are grouped at some little distance, the

word, in fact, meaning those who sit away. This body generally correspond to the *kisuka* of the A-Kamba.

The *kiama cha athamaki* actually means those who adjudicate or settle cases. The term *athuri ya kiama*, elders of council, is generally understood to refer only to the elders of the *kiama cha athamaki*. The *athuri ya ukuru* still remain members of the *kiama cha athamaki*, but when they reach this grade, as years go by, they generally take a less active part in judicial matters, although they are always called upon to settle knotty points of tribal law and custom.

When a man becomes a *muthuri ya ukuru* he assumes more definite priestly functions, and becomes responsible for the proper conduct of the periodical sacrifices at the sacred trees. When such a sacrifice is made the *athuri ya ukuru* are alone privileged to eat half of the head and the kidneys of the sacrificed ram.

In the same way when a sheep is brought to the *kiama* as a judicial fee, it is eaten by the elders present, and the *ukuru*, if they happen to be there, claim the [212]head and the kidneys, which, according to custom, they pass on to the small boys of the village.

When an elder enters the grade of *ukuru* he can wear in his ears the flat discs of brass-wire known as *ichui*.

In former times, one of the duties of the *ukuru* was to summon the *kiama* for the discussion of questions of national importance.

The elders of *ukuru* also decide the date of the circumcision feasts, and other similar questions.

It is also the function of the *ukuru* of the tribe to settle when the time has arrived for the holding of the great *itwika* feast, in which the generation changes from *Mwangi* to *Maina*, or *vice versa*.

As a general rule the *athamaki* are men advanced in years, but there is no fixed rule as to this; many are middle-aged or younger. Occasionally one may see quite a young man, practically a youth, among the elders. The elders explained this as follows: the election to the *muthamaki* grade lies entirely with the *athamaki*; if they see a young man whose prudence and knowledge has impressed them favourably, they may elect him into their grade; further, the family of a *muthamaki* should always be represented in this grade, and therefore if one dies and leaves no near relation other than a young man, they will elect his son or brother in his place even if he is quite a youth. Such elections are, of course, rare and are only mentioned in case these exceptions should be noticed. They are more

frequently found among the A-Kamba, as the *ithembo*, or sacred places, are inherited from father to son, and the owner of an *ithembo* must always have his place among the elders of *ithembo*, who correspond to the *athuri ya ukuru* among the A-Kikuyu.

If an elder behaves improperly while occupying the position of elder, or commits a serious breach of tribal custom, his fellows threaten to curse him with their staves and sacred plants, and he stands in such awe of this that he will appear before the elders and beg forgiveness, [213]bringing with him a ram or male goat as a sign of his good intent. He will then be ceremonially purified, *tahikia*.

Initiation into the Ukuru Grade of Elders (Kikuyu).—When a *muthuri*, or elder, becomes old he generally aspires to a higher grade called the *ukuru*, but cannot enter it until all his children have been circumcised. Some, however, never become members of the *ukuru* grade; the consent of the other members of the grade is necessary and they do not approve of a candidate who is not well endowed with worldly goods, or, again, prospective candidates may be considered unlucky.

When an elder wishes to become a *muthuri ya ukuru* he prepares a supply of beer and invites all the elders of that grade from the surrounding neighbourhood; if they agree to his admission they assemble and ceremonially spit on him. A day is then fixed for the formal initiation, and a larger gathering of elders of various grades assembles.

The candidate has to present formally to the elders of the grade what is called *njahe*, and at the ceremony at which the writer was present this consisted of:

- 4 gourds of honey-beer.
- 4 gourds of sugar-cane beer.
- 4 gourds of gruel made from *kimanga* and *mawe* meal all mixed together.
- 4 bowls of cooked *njahe* or pigeon pea.
- Numerous bowls of cooked sweet potatoes.

A bullock and ram were also provided for the guest.

The first thing to be settled was to which elders the various parts of the beasts should be given; this goes by seniority. The head of the bullock went to the senior, two forelegs and chest to the next, the left hind leg to the next, the hide to the next, and the right hind leg to the candidate.

This being decided, the candidate presented each [214]of the most senior elders with a gourd of the different beers and each kind of food. The candidate then presented the principal wife of the senior elder with a gourd of beer and food. The senior elder brought

forth a horn of beer, took a sip and spilt a tiny drop into his left breast and then offered it to the candidate who took a sip and ceremonially spat into his left breast. The senior elder's wife did the same, offering the beer to the candidate's wife. The food was then divided among the other elders, who gathered round and drank beer. After this, various elders made speeches welcoming the candidate into the grade and prayed to *Engai* to look favourably on him, his wives being also mentioned with the hope that they might be fruitful.

The animals are then slaughtered, the following portions being selected:

The heart of the ram—*ngora*.
Lungs, a portion of—*mahuri*.
Intestines, a portion of—*wei*.
Spleen, a portion of—*weriungu*.
Loins, a piece from—*ruduithi*.
Rump, a piece from—*ruhongi*.
Ribs, portion of—*kengeto*.
Colon—*ngorima*.
Kidneys of bullock—*hiyo*.

The *ngorima* is cut out and the end tied up; it is then filled with blood from the ram and bits of meat.

The *mromo waiyu*, or big stomach of the ram, is filled with bits of meat and fat and tied up.

All these are cooked, and when ready are taken inside the hut of the senior elder and only a chosen few of the *ukuru* are allowed inside; on this particular occasion only eight were admitted.

The senior elder bites a small piece out of the ram's heart and spits out a bit to the right and left as an offering to the *ngoma*, or ancestral spirits, and the [215]candidate does the same. The next senior elder eats the *kengeto*. The *mahuri* and *ngorima* are given to the senior wife of the host by the senior wife of the candidate.

A little honey beer was then brought into the hut, and the candidate was presented with one of the black staves which only elders are allowed to carry, and also the bunch of sacred leaves known as *muturanguru* (*Vernonia sp.*). The leaves are tied together with the fibre from the *mukeo* bush.

The candidate took hold of the staff and the leaves, and the senior elder drank a little sip of the beer and ceremonially spat on the leaves saying “*Aroendwo na kiama*”—“May you be well liked by the council of elders.” This was a kind of blessing which may be likened to the blessing which accompanies the “laying on of hands.”

The ceremony inside the hut was then over, and all the elders outside indicated its conclusion by taking a sip of beer and spitting a little on to their right breasts. The meat was then divided and cooked, and the company settled down to the feast of meat and beer.

Procedure in Pre-administration Times.—The procedure in former times seems not to have differed greatly from that followed nowadays in regard to the form of trial. It is said that the elders of *mburi imwe*, *igiri* and *itatu* used to sit separately, according to their rank, instead of together as they seem to do now, but it is doubtful if this custom was religiously observed.

The whole procedure was, of course, less organised than at present. There appear to have been no fixed councils or meeting places, which is easily explained by the fact that there were no defined locations. If two men had a case, they each called a few elders, who met to judge the case; others came and joined in, partly out of interest in the affair and partly because the elders, on the whole, delight in litigation. Certain cases became of general interest or may have affected [216]the whole country, and then the council would probably comprise most of the elders from far and wide.

It is certain that the elders could exercise considerable authority when they chose, as already described, but the object of the council was primarily to arbitrate in disputes and to point out the recognised custom to be followed. Where an offence affected the whole community, or when an accused was regarded as an habitual and dangerous offender, public indignation might be so strong that the affair would appear as a public concern, and the elders would then use their full authority. Ordinarily differences between two men, however, were considered to be their own affair, and if a man would not give what was due by custom, the claimant was expected to use force, although in such cases he was held liable for any damage done in using such means. The elders were, however, always able to enforce a judgment by cursing an accused found guilty if he refused to obey the judgment against him, but probably this was only done in very serious cases where public feeling ran high. Hence, probably, the many ancient feuds and the intense desire to increase the strength of the family. Had public authority been very strong and efficient this would not have been considered of such importance.

The presumption that the elders were regarded more in the light of arbitrators than judges is strongly supported by the fact that even to-day some elders appear to be adverse to

deciding questions of fact. The mere appearance of a defendant before the council would seem to have implied his liability; even now it is difficult at times to induce a native to appear before either the council or a court if he maintains that the charge is entirely groundless or false.

Present-Day Procedure.—In each locality there is a gazetted council, or *kiama*, which meets at the council house situated near the headman's village; a special flag is hoisted to tell the people that there is a meeting. Until now the *kiama* has met whenever [217]there has been a case to try, but this has proved a great evil, as a few elders are hastily collected and the large majority object to going to the councils too frequently. The councils have therefore mostly been composed of elders living in the vicinity of the chief's village. It is now arranged that the meetings shall, if possible, be on fixed days, and not more than three or four times a month, and the improvement in consequence has been most marked.

The *athamaki* for each locality are now registered, and it has been agreed that at each meeting at least half, or in large localities, one quarter, of their number must be present. Hitherto it has been customary for the headman to summon the defendants through his *askaris*, or retainers, but now that each elder has been entrusted with the charge of a certain number of huts, it has been agreed that the parties shall in the first instance be summoned by their respective *athamaki*. (In S. Kikuyu each *muthamaki* will have, on an average, twenty-five huts under his charge.)

As a general rule the elders prefer to sit outside the council house; this is a good rule, as it ensures publicity to the proceedings, and publicity is also the object of native law. The *athamaki* sit in front and the other elders, the *kamatimo*, behind; only women and *anake*, or young unmarried men, are barred from sitting on the general council.

The fee paid to the elders varies greatly according to the means of the parties and the matter in dispute. It would be advisable to see a fixed fee instituted, but the elders should make this change of their own accord. When the parties appear, they come before the elders of *athamaki* in turn and state their cases; the plaintiff as a rule begins. Witnesses are sometimes called, but the parties repeatedly appear before the *athamaki* to contradict or correct the opponents' statements. The elders generally keep count of the articles in dispute by breaking twigs; if, as is usual, part of the claim is [218]admitted, the twigs representing what is admitted are put aside.

Having heard all that the parties have to say the elders of *athamaki* then retire alone to discuss the question and settle it (this conference is called *ndundu*). They do not, however, all go, and any elders who are relatives of the parties are excluded; this is, of course, very equitable. The gazetted headmen never appear to go with these elders, but are sometimes

called and consulted by them. The discussion between the elders is conducted so that it is not heard by anyone else; they are hardly ever known to break up without coming to an agreement. Having decided what it is to be, they break twigs representing the amount to be paid or any imprisonment imposed. One of them repeats what each twig represents, while the rest give their assent in chorus. Two of the senior members then stand up and invoke poverty, sickness, and calamity upon those who disobey their orders, and to this the rest again assent in chorus. After this, all beat their sticks on the ground, repeating much the same phrases, and finally they bring their staves together on the ground, so that the points meet, while they give a peculiar sort of whoop indicating that they have agreed. They then return to the general council, and one of the most senior among them, carrying the twigs, asks in varying terms if they have agreed, to which they assent in chorus. The elders then state what each twig represents, and finally throws his staff or club on the earth.

One case was recently witnessed in which the elders came to a decision without adjourning at all. As a general rule they are loth to decide facts, and if such are in dispute, or either party appears to be lying, the decision will simply be that both parties must take the oath of *muma*. The investigation is generally most searching; if the subject is some hurt done they will not be satisfied until they have examined and probed the wounds. No questions are asked as to dates and time, these being considered of minor importance. [219]

The elders will not recognise that a claim has been paid unless it was made good before a *kiama*, and this is the only proof that it was paid. Natives will therefore not pay debts out of court, as it were, and this principle is often erroneously taken to mean that they will not pay debts at all unless forced to. If the council imposes a fine, it is paid to the Government. In almost all cases, however, a goat or two must be paid to the elders, who are allowed to keep them on the understanding that such fines must be consumed by them.

As was previously mentioned, in former times many of the judgments were not executed until force was used by the plaintiff and his kin.

The fear of revenge must, indeed, have been the chief preventative of crime, as it has been at all times before the State became the public avenger. Mere compensation could certainly not have acted as a deterrent to crime any more than it could to-day. We have therefore, in reinstating the settlement of crimes by payment of compensation only, not made adequate provision for the prevention of crime, nor have we been able to revive fully the old native organisation by leaving out the fear of private revenge.

The councils are, it is believed, gradually realising that crime will not be effectually checked by awards of compensation only; the right of private revenge has been abolished. It would therefore seem that the infliction of imprisonment by councils is at times a

necessity if peace and good order is to prevail, but stringent supervision by Government will, of course, be necessary for a long time to come.

Constitution and Working of Councils among the A-Kamba of Kitui.—The male Mu-Kamba from birth to death passes through most of the following grades:

Kana.—(a) *Kahengi*, an unweaned child; (b) *Kabisi*, a weaned child able to walk. The generic name is, however, *kana*. These distinctions would [220]really only amount to our describing children as being in long clothes or short.

Kivizi or *Kivisi.*—A boy old enough to herd goats, but who has not been circumcised.

Kamwana.—A circumcised boy who is old enough to dance at *ngomas*, but not reached the age of puberty.

Mwanake (plural—*Anake*).—A young man who has reached the age of puberty, dances at *ngomas*, and has joined the warrior class. He may be married and have children.


Nthele (plural—*Anthele*).—A married man with children who has ceased to dance at *ngomas*. He pays a fee of one to three goats to the *anthele* on being promoted from the *anake* grade, part of the meat going to the *anthele* and part to the *anake*. It is said that an oath, *kithito*, has to be taken with the blood. A *mwanake* may be of any age and must remain in that group until he has been admitted among the *anthele*.

Ngila.—This does not appear to be a regular grade, but is merely a war title. No initiation seems to be necessary. An *ngila* is one of the advanced guard in war, and his portion of meat is the lower part of the leg. It does not seem necessary that he should be even an *nthele*.

Mwamba in Kitui, and *Kiauu* in Machakos, is also a war title. The bearer forms part of the rear-guard, whose duty it is to keep off the enemy while the *ngila* escape with the booty. His portion is the rump and upper part of the leg.

An *nthele* next enters the grade of *atumia ya kisuka*, elders of *kisuka*, and has to pay ten goats. As a matter of fact they generally pay one bullock, which is the recognised equivalent, but the fee is always quoted in goats, the A-Kamba probably having nothing but goats when the procedure was evolved. The fee is divided among the members of the *kisuka* and the elders of *nzama*, which is the next higher grade.

Although a man enters this grade, it must not be inferred that the *kisuka* is a council which still exists. [221]The duty of the elders of *kisuka* is to deal with a *kingnoli* palaver; that is to

say, the communal execution of a person who has been proved to their satisfaction to have killed a number of people by witchcraft, poison and so forth. The practice corresponds in a measure to the stoning of Stephen by the people described in [Acts vii. 57–60](#) . The people undoubtedly looked upon this man as a strange and harmful magician, and their point of view is quite comprehensible.

They also assembled on the occasion of a Masai raid to draw up a plan of campaign, another of their functions being to arrange a peace palaver in case of serious internal fighting. The grade takes its name from the meat they ate on the occasion of such meetings.

The next grade is *mutumia ya nzama* (plural, *atumia ya nzama*), elders of the *nzama*, and for the privilege of entering this grade a man has to pay one bullock and ten goats. Its members are the arbiters of private disputes, the assessors of damages, and the witnesses of the payment of bridal price and ordinary debts, and are thus the archives of the tribe and the registrars of transactions. A man enters this grade by invitation of the members of the council, and must have proved himself a man of sound judgment. His age does not matter, but he must be married and a father to be eligible either as a member of the council of the *anthele* or of the *nzama*. At a feast the portion of meat allotted to him is the head, the back, and, if a bullock is killed, the rump.

The next, or final grade, is that of *atumia ya ithembo*, elders of *ithembo*, often just referred to as *ithembo*, to which there is no specific entrance fee, as the selection is made by the other elders of the grade. The candidate, however, invariably makes a present to the other elders after his election, as a compliment for the honour done him, the usual payment, according to the statement of one elder, being four goats. [222]

The bullock which an elder has to pay to enter the grade of *nzama* is also said not to be a fee but a thank-offering to the elders for his election. The *atumia ya ithembo* claim the tail as their portion of a feast. Their duties are mainly sacerdotal; they arrange and carry out the sacrifices at the *ithembo*, or sacred place, in times of drought, pestilence, planting of crops, and they are responsible for the proper carrying out of burial customs and village offerings to the spirits. In times of national crisis their advice is sought, but they do not ordinarily sit and hear cases dealing with private disputes.

The rise of a Kamba native from one social grade to another depends:

On ~~his~~ (1) supposed fitness for the position, this being decided by the members of the grade he can enter, and an invitation to join is necessary.

On ~~the~~ (2) ability of the candidate to pay the fees.

When a case is brought before the council of elders, *nzama*, any of the male population can be present, but can only listen to the evidence and cannot interfere in the proceedings.

The evidence is generally taken by one man on behalf of the council; he conducts the examination and cross-examines, and if other members of the court wish to put questions, it is generally done through the presiding elder.

The Government Chief, or Gazetted Headman, who is really foreign to the organisation, does not generally sit with the *nzama*; he sits apart.

The *nzama* is really a court for the settlement of questions of law or custom.

Should the evidence on matters of fact differ materially, the only way, with the exception of very obvious cases, is for the litigants to take the native oath (*kula kithito*), which is supposed to bring most dire consequences on the perjurer. A litigant who [223]refuses to take the oath is out of court, and judgment goes against him. The results of the oath are supposed to take effect within six months or a year, and should the litigant who has taken the oath survive the period, the case is given in his favour. Only one party and his witnesses are allowed to take the oath.

As cattle are generally involved in the case, the cattle in dispute are generally placed with some respected headman or elder until the effects of the oath are known.

The elders of the *nzama* retire to consider their verdict, and no members of the tribe below that rank are admitted to the consultation.

The council generally sits in a circle.

The Government Chief has in recent years assumed the duty of Executive Officer to carry out the judgment of the *nzama*, and in many cases in Ukamba has, at times, arrogated to himself a certain amount of revisionary power.

Disputes between members of the same family rarely come before the council, but are settled by the head of the family.

Enforcement of Orders of the Council.—Formerly obedience would be enforced by any sentence, up to that of a death penalty. At the present day obedience has in some cases to be enforced by Government.

The successful litigant could enforce the payment awarded by court by seizing the defendant or members of his family.

In connection with this inquiry it is of some interest to analyse the functions of two special grades of elders among the Kamba, i.e., *atumia ya makwa* (elders of *makwa*) and *atumia ya ukuu* (elders of *ukuu*).

It must first of all be clearly understood that these titles have no connection with the ranks of *atumia ya nzama* (elders of council) in whose hands the judicial functions are vested. The members of the highest [224]grade of this rank are termed the *atumia ya ithembo* (elders of the shrine), both of these ranks being part of the natural career of the head of a family of any standing in the tribe. The elders of *makwa* and *ukuu* are, however, more comparable to positions which are attained by successful medical specialists. A man may become one or the other, or he may be both. Of the two branches the elders of *ukuu* are considered the more important; on the other hand, it is said to be more difficult to become a successful elder of *makwa*.

These branches of practice must not be confused with the profession of medicine man, which is quite distinct. A man can only become a medicine man if he is in direct communication with the *aiimu*, or ancestral spirits.

The function of a *mutumia ma makwa* (elder of *makwa*) is to avert the evil consequences of the incidence of a *thabu* or *makwa*; the functions of a *mutumia ma ukuu* is to ward off death itself.

The former uses ceremonial and lustrates by means of various herbs, from which he concocts the *ng̃nondu* or purifying reagents.

The latter (*ukuu*) uses spells which have a magical value only, and gives directions.

The qualification which enables a man to become a *mutumia ma makwa* (elder of *makwa*) is that one of his wives shall have died under circumstances which may leave a curse or *thabu*. He must then at once consult an elder of *makwa*, who performs certain purification ceremonies. If these are not performed the children of the deceased will become afflicted with *thabu* or *makwa*. If the ceremonies are successful the husband is considered to be initiated as an elder of *makwa*; if, however, he wishes to practise the art, he must set to work to obtain experience, as the ceremonial necessary to cure the many forms of *makwa* is very varied, and a wide knowledge of the various herbs employed is necessary.

In the case of a *mutumia ma ukuu* (elder of [225]*ukuu*) the necessary qualification is a series of deaths in the family within a short period. He can then go to another elder of *ukuu*, pay fees and be initiated in the secrets of the art—the fee is usually one or two bullocks; his duties are to remove the curse due to murders, accidental deaths, and remove the curse of death from a family which has been afflicted by an unusual number of deaths. He does not

perform purification ceremonial, but lays down certain procedure which has to be followed by the applicant. He may be compared to the consulting physician who gives certain advice, such as a particular diet, and leaves the patient to follow it or not as he likes. The prescription sometimes, for instance, takes the form of a direction to have conjugal intercourse at a particular season.

The final degree which he reaches in old age is called *mutumia ma ithembo* (elder of the shrine), and his duty then is to offer the sacrifices at the sacred grove or *ithembo*. Among the Kamba tribe the members of this grade take but little part in the affairs of the tribe, but in Kikuyu the *athuri ya ukuu* form a tribal court of appeal (the word *ukuu* in Kikuyu has a different significance from *ukuu* in Ukamba and merely means “great or senior”).

If an elder of *ithembo* becomes so old as to fall into his dotage, and has a son who is qualified to take his place, the son is often elected in his stead.

If, however, a *mutumia ma nzama* (elder of council) is married to a wife who is a magician, and who can instruct him in certain matters connected with the ritual of the shrine, he can approach much nearer to the sacred grove than the ordinary elder of *nzama*, but cannot actually go up to the place of sacrifice—the elders of *ithembo* only being privileged to do so.

Elders of *ithembo* are very few in number; there are rarely more than two for each grove. The above practice is prevalent among the Kamba of Ulu. The Kitui customs may possibly vary somewhat.

The author is greatly indebted to the late Hon. K. [226]Dundas for assistance in making these matters clear.

Curse for Disobedience to a Judgment by the Court of Elders.—In connection with the history of the operation of the *thahu* in Kikuyu one point is worthy of notice. If a person has been one of the parties in a suit before the *kiama*, or council of elders, and refuses to pay the necessary compensation, the elders can lay a curse or *thahu* on him. The procedure is as follows: they assemble at one of their recognised meeting places and then mass together, beating their long staves on the ground in unison, calling out, “We curse you on the *mithegi*; the person who disobeys the order of the *kiama* shall be cursed.” *Mithegi* is the name of the staves carried by old men, the name coming from the wood they are made of. No elder goes to a council without his staff. The offender need not be present, but it is believed that the curse forthwith begins to take effect.

To remove the curse the offender then goes to the elders and begs to be allowed to pay the amount of the judgment. This is done, and in addition he brings a sheep; the elders then

say, "Go back home, bring some beer, and the day after to-morrow we will come and spit on you." They assemble at his village on the appointed day and the offender gives another sheep, which is killed outside the gate of the village; the purpose of this is to purify the village, *ku-thirura muchi*, and the meat is carried round the confines of the huts. The elders then each take a little of the sheep's fat and rub it on their staves, saying, "We are glad that the man who defied our orders has now obeyed it; we cursed him through our *mithegi*, but we now smear our *mithegi* with fat, as a sign that we and our *mithegi* are glad, and there is now nothing to be feared, for we have come to cleanse you and your village from evil." The elders then assemble in a circle with the man and his family in the middle, and one of the elders anoints the tongue of each individual of the family with [227]a spot of *ira*, or white earth, and the elders then ceremonially spit on the offender and each of his family, and depart.

The same belief occurs in Ukamba, and the *nzama*, or council of elders, can inflict a curse upon a man for disregard of its orders; if he is still recalcitrant it is said to be potent enough to kill him and all the people of his village in a short time. The elders impose this curse, called *kutuu*, by all clapping their hands together. The effect of the curse can be averted if the man obeys and the elders forgive him; as in Kikuyu, however, he has to pay a fee of a goat, and the elders assemble and ceremonially spit on the culprit to neutralise the curse. The removal of this curse is called *ka-athimwa* or *ka-musia* by the A-Kamba.

Sometimes, however, in Kikuyu a defiant tribesman was beaten with staves, or his village was burnt, and in extreme cases he was ordered to be killed and his property was confiscated. If he was executed by judicial order, he had to be killed by his blood kin, so that no claim for blood money should lie. The procedure consists either in strangling the culprit with a rope, choking him by clasping his throat *kuita*, or killing him by blows delivered with the handle of an axe.

It was also considered right to drive a man out of his tribe if he proved himself an undesirable; this may be done even now, in which case he is allowed to take his property with him.

Summary.—The preceding review of the organisation of the councils of elders, and the functions exercised by them, show how, in the first place, the elders are merely administrators of tribal law or arbiters as to what is right and proper according to the tribal code; secondly, how they eventually acquire a sacerdotal position. The memories of the elders are also the archives of the tribe as well as the unwritten records of tribal law and tribal observances. If a debt of any importance is paid, it is generally done in the presence [228]of one or more elders, and the matter is then settled without the necessity of any receipt or quittance.

It is sometimes assumed by reformers that the elders are nothing more than useless encumbrances, and every district officer wishes they were more progressive. They certainly have their faults, and in some tribes the faults almost overshadow the more useful qualities. On the other hand, we may be rather over anxious to push things along, and we are apt to expect a tribe to jump into a higher cultural plane in too short a time. We forget too easily that reform must come from within, and that the inner consciousness of a tribe changes slowly. A veneer applied on the surface is always thin, and is unlikely to wear.

To illustrate this organisation it may be interesting to refer to the account of the Druids of Britain, about 55 B.C., left to us by Cæsar; these functionaries apparently performed very much the same duties as those of the present-day elders of the *ithembo* in Kikuyu and Ukamba; in the case of these tribes, however, the line between ordinary people and the priestly caste does not seem to be as sharply marked as it was in Britain. Cæsar in Bell. Gall. vi. 13–14 writes as follows:

“Among the Celts there are only two classes held in consideration and honour, the Knights (*equites*) and the Druids. The latter are concerned with all things divine, manage the public and private sacrifices, interpret sacred omens and religious scruples. (N.B.—This is identical with the duties of the *athuri ya ukuru* as regards *thahu*, etc.). For they make decisions on almost all disputes, both private and public, and if a crime is committed, e.g., a murder, or if a lawsuit arises concerning heritages or disputed boundaries, it is they who give judgment. They name the compensation and assess the penalty, and if any private person will not accept their award they interdict him from taking part in the sacrifice. This is the heaviest punishment they can impose. Persons thus placed under interdict are held impious and accursed; men quit their company [229] and avoid meeting them or speaking to them lest they may come to harm from the contagion of the wicked.”

All this has a peculiarly African flavour, and with slight amendment might refer to the constitution of a modern African tribe on the same level of civilisation as the Kikuyu or Kamba people. [230]

CHAPTER II

LAWS OF COMPENSATION FOR MURDER

It is a matter of great importance, from an administrative point of view, that these should be properly understood, as a murder is otherwise likely to create a hereditary feud between the two families, which will eventually lead to fresh crimes.

Kikuyu.—In Kikuyu, for instance, until the ceremonial has all been properly carried out, no member of the family of the murdered man can eat food out of the same dish or drink beer with any member of the family of the murderer. In Ukamba it is believed that unless the matter is properly adjusted according to the law (their law) the members of the family of the murderer will continually be involved in quarrels which are likely to end by one of them killing his neighbour, and conversely the members of the family of the murdered man become involved in quarrels and are liable to be killed in the same way as their relation. If one tries to look at the matter from their point of view it appears to be this: there is a bad spirit or *muimu* about, belonging to an ancestor; it enters into a man and the result is that the next time he quarrels with a neighbour he kills him. This spirit may continue to possess that person, or it may go on to another member of that family with the same result. In the same way the *muimu* of the deceased, the murdered man, influences the *aiimu* in the bodies of all the members of his family and makes them afraid. [231] They know that this death-dealing spirit is abroad, and the members of the family are more liable to be killed if they become entangled in a broil. Thus both families are anxious that this state of affairs should cease and that the troublesome spirit be appeased and laid to rest.

The explanation just given may or may not be the final interpretation, but the fact remains that it is considered a vital necessity that the ceremonies necessary to close the trouble caused in a tribe by a murder should be carried out according to the law of the tribe, and only by the observance of the proper ritual can the avenging spirit be appeased.

In South Kikuyu there are only two persons qualified to perform these ceremonies: Gachii wa Kihara and Juguna wa Kihara, both sons of a great elder and chief named Kihara, of the Anjiru clan, upon whom those duties devolved. The office is apparently hereditary.

The ceremonies are called *Kugira uhio wa kuria mundu*, which means “To carry the man who was killed,” and the word *mugiro*, derived from *ku-gira*, is also used in this connection. Of course, the payment of compensation has now been abrogated by Government, and the death penalty imposed in its place according to our law, so that the functions of the elders mentioned have of late years been confined to the supervision of the ceremonies which have magical or religious significance. The description of the affair,

however, which was obtained from Gachii himself, takes no cognisance of the amendment caused by the substitution of the “lex talionis” for the old principle of “wergild” or compensation. The procedure runs as follows: soon after the murder had occurred the father of the murderer summoned Gachii or Juguna to his village, and whichever of these elders attended took with him eight *athuri ya ukuu* (elders of appeal), and the first object of their mission was to stop any fighting between the young men of the two parties. [232]

They remained at the village, and the father of the murderer then collected seventy goats and sent them to the father of the murdered man, and a bullock and a male sheep to the mother of the deceased. This bullock is important; it is called *ndegwa muhiriga* or *njiga migwe*, that is the “ox for the clan” or the “ox of the arrows,” which represents a peace offering to the clan, and prevents the clan of the deceased taking out their arrows to avenge their brother. Two days later thirty goats were collected and sent to the father of the deceased. The compensation of a hundred sheep or goats can be paid either in goats or sheep or cattle, but, whatever is paid, the count is always kept in sheep or goats. For instance, a *thenge*, or big male goat, may count as two or three goats, according to size, and in the same way an ox has its stated rate of exchange and is counted as so many goats; in pre-European days the ox counted as three goats, and a heifer or cow counted as ten in paying compensation or in marriage fees for a wife.

The next payment is nine male sheep to the *athuri ya ukuu*, nine more sheep being given to the father of the deceased, and nine ewes, *nyarume*, to the maternal uncle of the deceased, or *mamawe*, as he is called. The father of the murderer and the father of the deceased then each bring a male sheep, and the trunk of a banana plant is procured, placed on the ground, and the murderer and his relations seat themselves on one side of it, and the relatives of the other party on the opposite side; four of the *athuri ya ukuu* also sit on each side. The two sheep are then killed, and the two parties exchange pieces of cooked meat and eat them; they then exchange pieces of sugar cane and sweet potatoes smeared with *tatha* (the contents of the stomach of the sheep), which are given to the women and children of the two families. Some gruel is also exchanged; this is for the children of the two families, and is eaten inside the villages of the two parties. [233]

The presiding elder, Gachii or Juguna, does not sit with either party, but a little way off, his function being to see that the proper ritual is observed.

The elders then take the spear or sword with which the murder was committed, and beat it until it is quite blunt. The spear head or sword is taken away and thrown into a deep pool in the nearest river. They say that if this were not done the weapon would continue to be the cause of murder.

The final act is what is called *ku-kukuriwa ithe na nyina* (to purify father and mother). The elders adorn themselves with necklets of a grass called *ngoka*, which they wear for eight days, but if at the expiration of this period no moon is visible they cannot take them off till the moon reappears. When the day comes for dispensing with them they cross a river and bury them on the far side, and return home without looking back. In North Kikuyu, Mwaitume, it is said that they throw the rings away in an old *shamba*, garden, dig up a sweet potato, eat it, and then return home.

These ceremonies are the same for both grades of the Kikuyu, viz.: those circumcised Kikuyu fashion, and those circumcised Masai fashion. If they are properly carried out they wipe out all questions of blood feud, and the members of both families can eat together.

If the *mugiro* ceremonies are not properly carried out, the spirit of the murdered man will go back to his village, cry out in the night like a child, and enter into one of the villagers, who will become as one possessed. The people will call out to him, "Who are you?" and he will reply, "I am So-and-so" (mentioning the deceased). "I have come because I have been abandoned." A near blood relative of the deceased must then take a male goat or sheep, if the deceased was a man, or a young ewe, *mwati*, if the victim was a woman, into the bush, where it is killed by strangulation, and immediately it is dead its throat is pierced and the blood allowed to run out on the ground. They then carve a [234]piece of meat from each limb and part of the animal, and place them in a heap, the bones also being placed in another heap, and left there. Any meat that remains is eaten by the elders; the person who was possessed of the *ngoma*, or spirit, of the deceased then recovers.

The customs vary according to different cases, the compensation for the murder of a woman being only thirty sheep or goats and three rams.

If a man murders his cousin on his mother's side of the family, the father of the murderer collects fifty sheep or goats, and pays them to the head of the family of the deceased, and the recipients usually kill an ox which is eaten by both parties; the elaborate ritual described above is not observed because of the blood relationship which exists.

If a man kills his brother or sister by the same mother there is no compensation—the case very rarely arises; the father would, however, kill a sheep and make his children eat it together.

If a pregnant woman is struck and injured by a man, and miscarries in consequence, the elders are called in to settle the matter. The culprit has to bring two male sheep; first one is killed and eaten by the villagers and the elders, but not by the woman. The second is eaten by the woman and visitors, but not by the elders.

Some of the fat and meat of this second animal is cooked in a pot with some bitter herbs, and the woman drinks the decoction, this being evidently in the nature of a purification; it is called *theria nda*, to purify the belly. The people present who are nearly related, either to the offender or the woman, are then invested with *rukwaru*, or wristlets, made of the skin of the sheep first mentioned.

This is not a matter for the *athuri ya ukuu*, but the ordinary councillors, *athuri ya kiama*.

Ukamba.—In Ukamba there is a general similarity of ideas, but a considerable difference in ceremonial.

The general compensation for the murder of a man [235] is thirteen cows, two bulls, and fifty goats; and for a woman six cows, two bulls, and one goat.

In each case the actual blood money is twelve cows and five cows respectively, the balance being for the ceremonies necessary to wipe out the blood stains, and which bear the name of *etumo*.

The cow, the two bulls, and the goat are taken to the village of the murdered man; the elders, *athuri ya ukuu*, assemble there, and the goat is first killed at about five p.m. The murderer must not be present; if he or any member of his clan appeared at the *etumo* ceremonies they would probably be killed. Fourteen pieces of meat are cut from its throat, an elder impales seven pieces on a wooden skewer, and puts them into the mouth of the wife of the deceased, who eats them, and the other seven are similarly given to the brother of the deceased. When darkness comes on, the elders retire to a short distance from the village, and the widow and her brother-in-law retire to a hut and have connection; they then return and call the elders.

Upon their return the bull is killed and they receive half of its meat and half of that of the goat, the remainder being consumed by the family of the deceased. All the meat must be eaten during the night, and none of the bones must be broken, and before morning the latter must be carried out and deposited in the bush by the elders. The hides of the two animals must not be allowed to remain in the village, but are carried off by any elders who do not belong to the same *mbai*, or clan, as the deceased. The cow remains in the village, and becomes the personal property of the widow, who is not allowed to sell it.

The collection of the number of cattle payable as blood money generally takes some time, and the members of a man's clan often assist him to pay. When they are all collected, an assembly of people and elders takes place at the village of the deceased, comprising members of the family and clan as well as [236]strangers, and a bull is slaughtered from the compensation cattle; there is a general feast, and each person takes a strip of the hide away

for tying up loads. The cattle are then divided; the senior member of the deceased's family receives one cow and pays back one bull, the maternal grandfather of the deceased receives a cow and pays back a bullock, and if there is a half-brother of the deceased he receives a cow and pays back a bull, provided that he does not live in the village of the deceased. If there is a village of the same clan near by, the head of it receives a cow and pays back a bull. None of these cows may be sold or given in exchange for a wife; if this rule is broken the recipient has to pay back a cow to the family. The bulls given in exchange provide feasts for the elders, members of the family of the deceased, and members of the clan. The remainder of the cattle are the property of the eldest brother of the deceased, who divides them between the mother and wife or wives of the deceased, who have the use of the milk. He cannot dispose of one of the beasts without the permission of these women.

The payment of the cow, bull, and goat first mentioned is of ritual importance, and is called *etumo*; they are necessary to protect both the family of the murderer and the murdered one from the powers of the unappeased death-dealing spirit which is abroad. Even if the killing was accidental (*mbanga*) the *etumo* payments and ritual must be observed, because it shows that there is a bad influence about or the accident would never have occurred.

In former times, if a man of one clan killed another in some inter-tribal fight, the custom was for a brother to waylay and kill a man of the clan who had killed his brother. The two deaths cancelled each other, and there was no further question of compensation, but it was considered essential that the *etumo* fees should be paid and the proper ceremonial observed.

One other point in connection with the weapon used in the murder should be mentioned: in Kikuyu the [237]spear is thrown away, but in Ukamba the weapon is nearly always an arrow, which is carried away some distance and placed on a path, the idea apparently being that it contains a harmful essence which it is impossible to remove, and the evil is believed to pass on to whoever picks it up. If this is not done the evil is said to remain with the family of the deceased.

The Kingnoli Custom.—In the author's "Ethnology of A-Kamba," p. 95, an account is given of the old form of judicial execution called *kingnoli* which used to be customary throughout Ukamba. It is also referred to by C. Dundas in the "History of Kitui," p. 514.

It is not proposed to describe over again the details of the procedure, but while considering the question of sacrifice, it may be interesting to point out the similarity of this practice

with the judicial slaying which took place among the ancient Semites, e.g., among the Hebrews the criminal was stoned.

Professor R. Smith ably shows how the idea of an execution of this kind is not penal in one sense of the word: it is not done to punish the offender, but to rid the community of an impious member—generally a man who has shed the tribal blood.

It would appear that the repeated spilling of tribal blood is an act which annoys the *aiimu* of the tribe to such an extent that an ordinary sacrifice is insufficient to appease them, and a human sacrifice becomes necessary either as an expiation or to re-establish good relations: by not offering compensation for the crimes he has committed, the brothers of the criminal formally surrender him to the community and this acquits the community of any bloodstain.

The *kingnoli* custom is also known among the Kikuyu, who call it *mwinge*. The Hon. C. Dundas states that the procedure in Kikuyu is practically the same as that in Ukamba except that the near relative of the accused, whose consent to the execution is [238]essential, had to carry it out by strangling the convicted person.

Another important point is that any person giving evidence against a tribesman being tried under this law had to make his charges on the *kithito* or *kithathi* which is one of the most potent oaths. [239]

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CHAPTER III

CEREMONIAL OATHS

The Kithito of Ukamba.—This is the most powerful oath recognised by the tribe, and is common to all sections of the Kamba; it corresponds to the *kithathi* of the Kikuyu. The apparatus for the oath is made by medicine men. Secret medicines are placed in the horn of a buffalo or hartebeest, a hippo tusk, or on the bottom end of a small ivory tusk. There is usually one in each district, and it is always in the possession of a particular elder; in many cases, they have been bought from the makers, who reside in either Mumoni or Tharaka country. All over the world the idea that better medicine can be obtained from a distance than at home seems to exist; even in England, people in the provinces have unbounded faith in the London specialist.

Some of these *kithito* are undoubtedly of great age, and are handed down through many generations. The *kithito* must always be kept away from the village, as it might harm the inmates; it is generally hidden away in a cavity in the rocks. It is carried about in a small pot or a basket, being very dangerous to handle; the original owner or his son, if he has been taught, can handle it by observing certain precautions, but no one else. An unmarried man cannot possess a *kithito*.

The writer once witnessed the administration of a *kithito* oath near Machakos at Mathendú's. The gathering was a very large one, and elders from all [240]parts of the district were present, all the various clans being represented. It was an occasion of some importance, the object of the gathering being for representative elders from each council to swear upon the *kithito* to conduct their councils and the internal government of the district upon proper lines and to afford the local councils due support.

The congregation of elders, which probably numbered some five hundred, sat round in a large circle on the hill-side; in the centre were a few of the senior chiefs and elders from each clan and the elders chosen to officiate. The first proceeding was for an elder to march round the outside of the whole circle with the *kithito*, which was suspended by a string; after this, all the persons included in the circle were subject to the effects of the oath. The *kithito* was then brought into the centre of the circle and deposited on a branch of the acacia tree, *kisumi*.

As far as could be seen the contents of the *kithito* were as follows:

A shell (containing secret medicine).

A human leg bone.

The tooth of a ruminant.
Twigs from various trees.

The whole of these were wrapped in a portion of a plaited Kamba fibre bag (*chondo*). Stones were arranged on the ground around the package. The end of the *kithito* parcel faced towards the afternoon sun, i.e., the west.

The officiating elder then stood on the two stones to the west of the *kithito* and, with a thin stick, touched the *kithito* and recited the terms of the oath. The object of these stones was to insulate him from the ground while he was engaged in the ceremony.

At each item of the oath the elder took a thin stick and dipped it in some blackish sticky medicine in the shell and recited the particular points, saying: "If [241]any man breaks this, may he be thrown away," and then jerked the stick over his right shoulder in the direction of the sun.



KAMBA ELDER WITH KITHITO.

After the ceremony, the *kithito* was carried away and a sheep was killed near by and the *tatha*, or stomach contents, were sprinkled on the ground at the spot where the *kithito* had

been. This was said to be done to cure the ground from the evil effects of the *kithito*.

The Oath of the Sacred Bead (Chuma cha mchugu) in Kikuyu.—This oath or ordeal belongs to the same class as those described in the writer's work, "Ethnology of A-Kamba" (Camb. Press), pp. 139–143, viz., the *kithathi* and *ku-ringa thengi* ceremonies.

If one man is in debt to another and repudiates his debt, the creditor goes to the elders and demands that they may both be given the ordeal of the *chuma cha mchugu* (*chuma* is the Kikuyu word for bead).

Now the bead used for this purpose must be one of a particular kind, which has been handed down from past ages and is evidently believed to be of magical value. Several of the clans in Kikuyu are alleged to possess specimens of this bead, each one being in charge of a particular elder; they are said to be reddish in colour and rather long in shape. Endeavours have been made to get a specimen for examination, but it has not been possible to locate one; the elders state that they have not seen one used for some years. A *chuma cha mchugu* must not be kept in a house, but is hidden away in the bush—in this particular it is like the *kithathi*.

To return, however, to the ceremonial connected with its use: on the appointed day the creditor and debtor meet the elders; the latter sit in a circle and the former sit on the ground in the middle and facing each other. Each takes a piece of fine grass and places [242]it inside the aperture in the bead and swears, as the case may be, that he lent a cow, or that he borrowed a cow, and that if he testifies falsely may he be eaten by the bead (i.e., destroyed). Sometimes the bead is held in the hand, and sometimes it is placed on the ground between the two parties.

Perjury is believed to result in the death of the perjurer, and furthermore serious harm, even death, to his near relatives.

If a man who has perjured himself by this oath dies, his brothers by the same parents will promptly pay the debt, and then call in the elders to remove the curse, or *thahu*, which the perjury has inflicted. To effect this lustration, the sacred bead has to be brought to the village, a sheep is killed and some of the stomach contents are smeared on the bead. Another sheep is next marched round the afflicted village, is killed, and the people eat the meat. The bones of the sheep are afterwards collected and calcined in the fire on which the meat was cooked, next morning a libation of beer being poured over the ashes of the bones by the elders of the village. A medicine man is then summoned, and he purifies (*tahikia*) the villages, and these are finally safe from all danger from this *thahu*.

There is another piece of ritual in which beads play a part. If an elder or old woman dies in one village, and later on a similar death occurs in a neighbouring village, the head of each village goes to assist at the *hukura* or death ceremonies (described in [Chapter VI](#)) at the village where the death has occurred. At the conclusion of these ceremonies each will have two blue trade ring beads, of the pattern known as *mtinorok*, fastened on his wrist, and the senior wife of the principal elder of the village where the death occurred will have two beads tied to her wrist; they wear these for eight days, and then bathe and cast the beads into a river; finally they wash their clothes there and return home.

The custom is practised only by the people belonging ^[243]to the Kikuyu circumcision guild. The blue beads used on this occasion are ordinary trade beads and are called *chuma cha mchugu*, but are not the sacred beads referred to in the earlier portion of this chapter. Probably, as the real *chuma cha mchugu* are very rare, they pretend that these are the real articles, or think they delude the spirits into believing that the beads are the genuine thing.

The sacred bead is also said to be used for the detection of thieves; the elders declare that the bead is first doctored by a medicine man and then thrown away in the direction of the suspected person, and the elders simultaneously cry out, "Go and find the thief." The belief is that after it is thus thrown the bead will enter the stomach of the offender and trouble him to such an extent that he will be forced to confess, and he can then be ceremonially purified and healed.

The Muma Oath and Adultery.—A case of adultery occurred in Kikuyu in which a man, having seduced a woman, afterwards induced her to take the oath of *muma* that she would not tell her husband. After a time she disclosed this to her husband and, shortly after, she died. The husband then sued for blood money, but the elders refused his demand on the ground that if the woman had held her tongue the *muma* would not have killed her. The husband then demanded that the man should jump over the corpse seven times; this he refused to do and the elders would not insist as they held that the woman had, in fact, committed suicide. ^[244]

¹ These are probably ancient carnelian beads; they are occasionally found among the divination apparatus of medicine men; they almost certainly were derived from Egypt or the Nile valley. ↑

CHAPTER IV

WAR AND PEACE

War.—In former times raids were conducted by the *anake* or warrior class only, but if the country was invaded, the younger elders also fought, while the old men went to hide with the women and stock; elders were armed with bows and arrows, but the *anake* of Kikuyu carried spears and swords only.

The Kikuyu apparently made a good stand against the Masai invaders, for it is said that the Masai killed most of the Dorobo, so presumably this tribe was unable to stand against the invaders while the Kikuyu held their own. It is probable that the scourge of the Masai was generally much overrated, and that they were as often as not badly beaten by other tribes.

During a Masai invasion it was customary to bury knives at the foot of *mugumu* trees; this was supposed to give the invaders sore and swollen feet.

Expeditions and raids were led by three *anake* called *asigani*. These had first to consult with a medicine man, who would say whether they could be *asigani* or not; Kamiri was particularly noted as such a medicine man. If approved by the medicine man they had to go alone into Masai country as a test of courage and spy out where the cattle were. Only such men could be leaders of raids, and they remained as *asigani* until they had passed the warrior age.

On return from a raid the booty was brought together and the elders assembled. The *asigani* had first choice of the spoil, and got about one quarter more [245] than the rest. The elders merely looked on, and each warrior took his share of the booty home; the father took possession of the cattle so long as his son remained in the village, but if he left the village and settled elsewhere he would take with him the stock he had obtained in war.

The only elder who was actually given any part was the medicine man who had been previously consulted as to the success of the raid. When a raid was arranged, the warriors were collected from everywhere, but no one was forced to join. Special distinction was attained by those who had killed a Masai. Such a man was called *mundu wa rohiu*, man of the sword; the shield and spear of the Masai he would give to his uncle, from whom, in turn, he received a goat or two; he would also go round to all his relations, who would give him small presents, but to prove his deed he had to bring back the sword of the slain Masai, otherwise he was not believed.

The Kikuyu apparently often raided Masai country, but raids on the Kamba were considered much more dangerous, and were only undertaken by large bodies and with greater precautions. The whole force was divided up into various bodies to guard against total annihilation; attacks were made only at night, and as soon as the stock was captured it was sent, under escort, to Kikuyu so that if they were attacked and killed the stock was saved.

Women and children were also taken and handed over to the warrior's father, but a Kamba was generally permitted to redeem his wife for nine head of cattle; this is said to have been the practice owing to the former friendship existing between the Kamba and the Kikuyu. This practice was broken later, because the Kamba always stole the wives of the Kikuyu. The Kamba is to this day an incorrigible wife stealer; the same cause led to his breaking friendship with the Masai and Galla, so the legend goes.

It is said that fights with the Kamba were more [246]frequent than with the Masai, and that they were much more feared because of the Kamba arrows, but nevertheless the Kikuyu declare that they penetrated as far as Mumoni, and that they also fought the Emberre. Gachii wa Kichara remembers that on one occasion the Kamba and Kikuyu joined to fight the Masai, but that the Kamba ran away, not because they were afraid of the Masai, but because they foresaw that they would have to fight the more numerous Kikuyu if they were to get any of the booty.

On the whole it would appear that the Kikuyu were no mean fighting tribe; they certainly inflicted very severe lessons on the Masai, and they gave us no little trouble in the early days. One can, however, scarcely imagine them to have been warlike judging from their present character, but the generation of warriors before our time have passed into elders, and the present warrior class has never known war; this class is also rapidly disappearing, and the young native now marries long before the time when wars and raids allowed them to do so in the past.

It is believed to be very lucky to meet a mole on the way to war; a warrior kills it with his spear and carries the skin on the point of it; this is supposed to bring him good fortune in the fight.

Before the Kikuyu went to war they used to sacrifice at the sacred trees in the usual way; the elders attended, but not the warriors; their weapons were not smeared with the sacrificial blood. If any of the warriors killed an enemy during the fighting, the elders who had conducted the sacrifice above mentioned shaved the heads of the warriors upon their return, took away the hair and hid it in the woods. They also smeared their faces with a line of *ira*, or white earth, and the spear which had done the killing was also smeared with

ira. This white earth is generally used as a protecting agent against evil influences, in this case doubtless the spirits of the slaughtered foes.

If cattle were captured the captain of the warriors, as [247]soon as possible after the fight, would choose a fine bullock from the spoil and slaughter it as near as possible to the scene of the fighting. This was done as a thank-offering to the deity, *Engai*. The bullock should be a whole coloured beast, either black, white, or red, and not spotted or parti-coloured.

The elders who go to sacrifice and pray at the sacred tree before the fighting, and the captain of the warriors, eat the meat; the bulk of the fighting men do not participate. The hide of the bullock is left on the spot after the feast.

Peace Ceremonial (Kikuyu).—Seven elders from the clans or tribes at enmity each meet with a number of the warrior class, the different sides providing a ram or he-goat, which is slaughtered. An elder of one side then takes the intestines and cuts them with a razor and says: “Who breaks this peace may he be cut as this is cut.” An elder from the other side now takes the intestines from the animal provided by his side and goes through the same ceremonial. Both sides then eat the meat together.

In the days of the early travellers, some fifteen to twenty-five years ago, the Kikuyu were noted for their treachery; one day they would make peace with a caravan and the next day attack it. The elders were asked the reason of this, and whether they believed that peace deliberately broken would bring evil on the breakers of it; they said it was quite true that many had been guilty in this respect, but that the great famine of 1899, and the smallpox which followed it, had killed off all the guilty ones.

In former war-like times when a member of another tribe came to the village of an elder and wished to enter into brotherhood and settle among the tribe, the elder would summon his colleagues and kill a bullock. The stranger would be formally adorned with a bracelet made of the ox hide, and he would then be safe from harm. The meat was eaten by the assembled elders and the villagers. The elder then chose a daughter [248]for him to marry. If, for instance, the head of the village belonged to the *Anjiru* clan, the stranger became a *Munjiru*; and he also adopted the circumcision guild of his host. If, after this, anyone belonging to the tribe were to kill him, the murderer would have to pay a hundred goats and nine rams to his adopted father, nine rams for the elders and nine rams for his mother.

Peace Ceremonial, Ukamba (Kitui).—The elders of the vanquished side bring an ox, and the elders of the winning side bring a *kithito*. The elders of each side assemble in two groups in the centre, and the warriors are collected in two masses, one on either side of the

area chosen for the ceremony. The *kithito* oath is then administered to the leaders of the two groups of fighting men.

They kill the ox, skin it, and cut the meat off the throat and also cut out a few of the vertebræ of the neck (*ngata*) and place them on the *kithito*. An iron arrow head is then produced and tied on to a shaft; it must be tied with the fibre from the *lilambia* bush, and a few thorns of the *mulaa* tree are also fastened to the arrow. A small bag is made from a piece of the small intestine of the ox and is filled with blood. The officiating elder then picks up the arrow and slits open this bag and allows the blood to drip on the neck-vertebræ and meat, which are placed on the *kithito*, and calls out to the assembly: "If anyone breaks this peace may he be slit as the *mwethi wa kitutu*." The neck bones and meat are then left to be devoured by hyænas.

Before this, however, an oath is administered to each of the captains of the fighting; those who take the oath are naked; the right arm and right leg are smeared with ashes, and a bunch of leaves is fastened over the pubes. Each man takes a bundle of arrows in his right hand and swears by the *kithito* that he will never again fight the opposite party and that if any should come to his village they shall be received as friends; [249]the company of warriors assent to this and say, "If you break this oath may the *kithito* slay you."

Blood Brotherhood (Ukamba of Kitui).—The two parties meet and a goat is killed; two pieces of the liver are taken and slightly fried on a fire. A small incision is then made in the right forearm, the chest, and the navel of each party, and a spot of the blood therefrom is smeared on the liver. The two pieces are then exchanged and eaten jointly.

This is a very sacred and lasting oath of friendship. If ever it is broken, the people are very shocked and *Engai* is believed to injure the village of the one who breaks it and probably both blood kin and stock will die.

It is often difficult to state with precision whether the high god or the ancestral spirits are meant when the term *Engai* is here used. In this case, however, the high god is probably referred to. And if the opinion be correct, it is a striking example of the belief in the concept of a personal God, who takes a continual and minute interest in the doings of His creatures. [250]

CHAPTER V

MISCELLANEOUS CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS

Adoption into a New Clan (Kikuyu).—This is a proceeding which sometimes takes place in Kikuyu, but which rarely comes to the notice of European observers. It is called *njama ya ruoro kucharua*, which means “the assembly or council of the knife to change,” and, expanded, means “the ceremonial gathering of the knife at which a man changes his clan.” The word *ruoro* means the knife used for branding cattle.

The candidate first makes an arrangement about the matter with the senior elder of the clan he wishes to enter; a day is fixed for the ceremony and the elder summons the other elders of his clan and the candidate brings his brothers. A number of elders belonging to other clans are also invited as witnesses.

The candidate presents a razor (*rwenji*), some castor oil, butter (*ngoromo*), and a ewe lamb (*mwati*) to the elders of the clan he wishes to join, and the elders of that clan provide a bullock. The bullock is slaughtered and the skin is dried, this being for the parties to sit on during the ceremony. The candidate and the senior elder of the clan he wishes to enter then sit on the bullock’s hide, and the elder’s senior wife comes and shaves both their heads. When this is completed, they anoint each other’s head with the castor oil and the butter. Each man collects and takes away the hair cut off and carefully hides it so that no evilly [251]disposed person shall pick it up and make medicine with it.

Henceforward the man is considered as adopted in the new clan, and his children belong to that clan. If he is a young man and wants a wife, the senior elder of his new clan will buy him one, and if he is killed in a tribal fight the elder claims the blood money.

If, after this ceremony, the elder was to commit adultery with the wife of the adopted man he would surely die.

If a daughter of the adopted man is married, the elder gets five goats from the bridal price received for the girl; these goats are called *ugendi* and possibly have reference to cases in which the elder has paid the bridal price for the wife of the adopted man.

A Kikuyu native does not, however, change his circumcision guild by entering a new clan.

Njama ya Kikende.—The ceremony of adoption is closely connected to a ceremony performed between great friends; this is a form of ceremonial brotherhood, but the man who makes the alliance does not change his clan, and if he is killed the blood money

would go to his own clan. In this case the elder kills a ram or he-goat (*thengi*), which is skinned, and a piece of the skin of the chest is cut off, whilst another elder cuts out a bracelet of the skin and places it on the elder's right wrist and on the wrist of the man who wishes to join in brotherhood with him.

The man who desires the brotherhood then presents a gourd of beer to the elder; the beer must be of two kinds, viz., sugar-cane and honey-beer mixed. The elder who cuts the bracelet also receives a gourd of beer from the man.

On Bee-Keeping.—The A-Kamba are great bee-keepers. When Europeans first visited the country they found the industry fully established; as at the present day, logs of wood were hollowed out and hung in trees for bees to hive in. They periodically collected the honey, brewed mead, and then threw [252]away the comb. The Government Officers have since taught them to boil down the wax into cakes which can be sold, and a large quantity is annually exported.

In Kitui when a man makes his first beehive he does not hang it in a tree himself, but gets his uncle to do so; he believes that if he omitted to do this the bees would not settle in it.

The owner of the beehive cannot cohabit with his wife until he sees that a swarm of bees has settled in the hive and is building there. Two nights after he is satisfied that this is the case, he may resume his marital relations.

If on his first visit of inspection he finds the hive occupied, he brews beer and pours some on the ground as a libation to the *aiimu*, or ancestral spirits.

In a season when there is a dearth of honey the owners of the hives go to the woods in which they have put their hives and sacrifice a goat; the meat is eaten, and the blood, mixed with beer, is poured on the ground as a propitiatory libation to the *aiimu* to secure a good honey crop. Among the Ulu A-Kamba the ceremonial varies and is apparently more elaborate.

When a man has hollowed out the log of wood which forms the beehive he takes a shaving or chip of the wood which is called *ikavu*, and gives it to his mother, who then cooks beans, pigeon peas and maize in a pot and places the chip, *ikavu*, in the fire under the pot to assist in cooking the food. If he has lost his mother the *ikavu* is given to his wife, who cooks the ceremonial meal.

When the food is boiled the villagers are summoned to eat it. The beehive is then hung in a tree, and when it is full the owner collects the honey and brings it to his village. Before the

honey can be mixed with water to make beer or mead the owner of the hive must present his mother with some of the raw honey.

When the first brew of the mead is ready the father of the owner of the hive buys it for a goat, which may not be killed. On the second night after the purchase, [253]the parents of the owner of the hive must cohabit; this in speaking to each other they refer to as *kuzya mbui*, and if talking to another person, the term *kulunga mbui* is used.

They believe that the consumption of the beer and the succeeding ceremony ensures that the hive will always yield a good supply of honey, and that there will always be plenty of people to buy succeeding brews of mead made from the honey. The whole proceeding may therefore be considered as a magical fertility ceremony.

If a man has lost his own parents, he sells the first brew of mead to his uncle, presumably as head of the family.

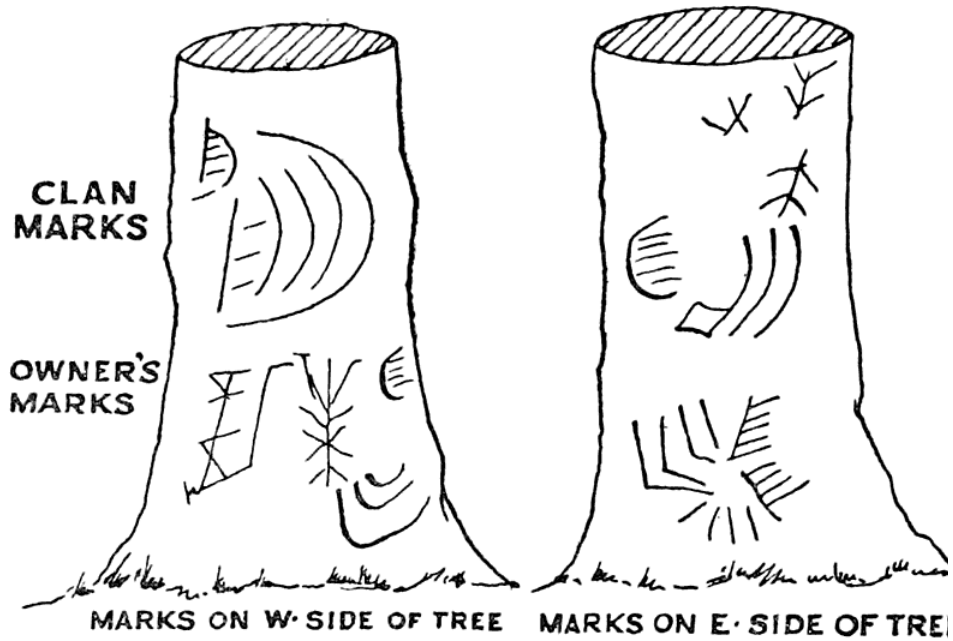
Among the Dorobo hunting tribe of the Kikuyu escarpment when a man makes a new beehive, beer is made and the old men and women drink it before it is hung in a tree. They then ceremonially spit on the hive and next morning place it in a tree; the inside of a hive is also smeared with beeswax to attract the bees.

The first crop of honey out of a new hive is only eaten by the children of the village, or perhaps by very old women. The reason of this is said to be that if a young woman were to eat any and then misconduct herself with a man, the honey crop would be spoilt and the bees would not enter any of the hives hung up on that day.

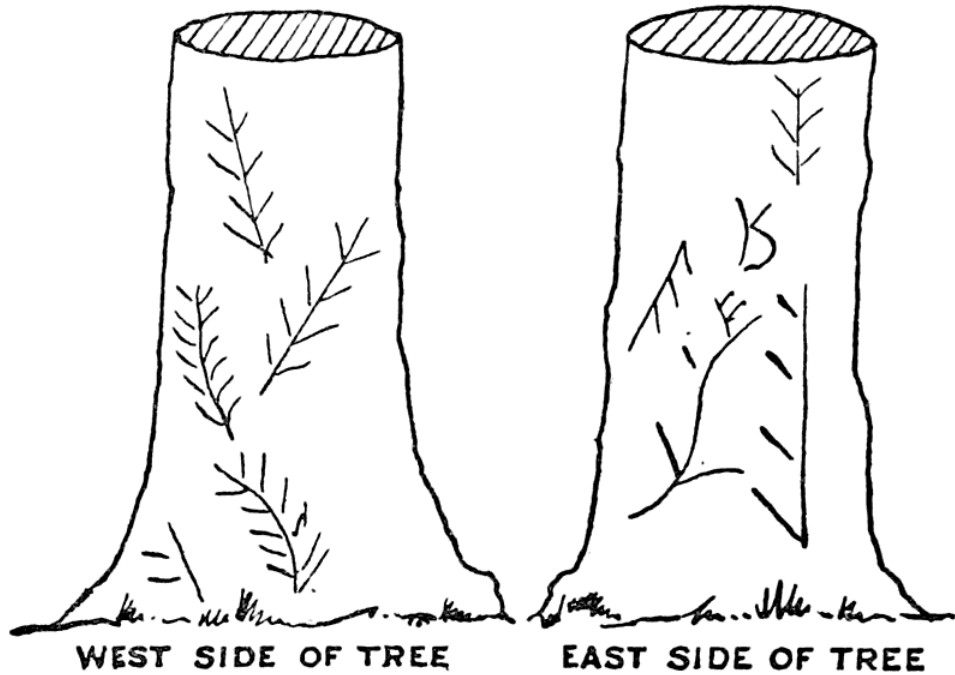
It is a well-known fact the natives always mark their beehives before suspending them from the trees, and the marks are generally of two kinds, one being that of the clan and the other that of the owner. Mr A. C. Hollis states that on the Southern Aberdare Range in the bamboo forest between Karanja's and Enjabini he saw two *musaiti* trees (camphor wood, *Ocotea usambarensis*) from which the Kikuyu make their honey barrels or beehives. Although still standing, they were both marked with the same designs one sees on beehives.

The trees, it would appear, are earmarked by certain [254]persons for the manufacture of beehives while still standing. Sketches of these marks are given below. At first sight it seems curious to put the clan mark on beehives, but the object is to warn a would-be thief that if he robs a hive he will have to reckon with the whole of the clan to which the owner belongs. Further, if a would-be thief found a hive belonging to his own clan he would be very unlikely to rob it, as he could always obtain honey or honey-beer from his blood kin.

KIKUYU BEEHIVE MARKS ON TREES



ANJIRU CLAN MARKS



AIZIAGENI CLAN MARKS

Infectious Mania among the Kamba People.—In “Ethnology of A-Kamba,” p. 10, reference was made to a peculiar kind of infectious possession or mania which appears periodically in Ukamba country, and in 1906 many young people in Machakos district were seized with it at the sight of a European hat. In a few months, however, it passed away, but in 1911 a similar epidemic recurred. This took a different form, and was called *Engai ya mweretu*, or the spirit of the girl. The spirit of a girl who was said to have died mysteriously was supposed to enter into people in various parts of the district—generally old women—and speak. The whole district rapidly became disturbed; the spirit, through its oracles, demanded that bullocks should be slaughtered; the order was implicitly obeyed, for anyone who refused was supposed to be doomed. As a result, several thousand bullocks were slaughtered and consumed in a week or two. Great dances, at which the meat was eaten, were held. Very soon the oracles became seditious, and plans were being made for the abolition of European government and attack on the Government station. The whole thing was kept secret at first, but eventually it all came out and a company of troops had to be sent to the district to calm the excited people; the elders, who felt sore at the loss of so many cattle, rallied to the support of law and order and the country gradually regained a normal state.

The phenomenon is also known in Kitui, but is said to have been introduced from the Machakos district. Mr C. Dundas has investigated it in the former district and states that when people wish to misrepresent the nature of any dances held in this connection they refer to them as *kilumi*. Now *kilumi* is an old Kamba dance which is periodically performed at *ithembo* all over the country with the object of warding off epidemics, but the *Engai* dances are carried on at villages to cure an individual possessed by the form of mania known as *Engai*. Fez caps and [256]other unusual ornaments and clothing worn at *Engai* dances are not worn at *kilumi* dances. The word *Engai* appears to be loosely used in this connection, but this is possibly due to the fact that the individual organising the dance is supposed to be a person possessing occult powers, a person, in short, who knows the inner mysteries or who would not otherwise possess the “medicine” which is supposed to come from *Engai*.

As far as is known, this *Engai* possession appears to be almost entirely confined to women. A woman becomes mysteriously possessed; the medicine man cannot account for it. A woman who understands the affection is therefore called in and orders the appropriate dance to be performed. The performers become worked up and wildly excited, and many of them become affected and the disease spreads, although the afflicted person for whom the dance was convened may be cured. When the people are worked up to a pitch of

frenzy, the leader of the dance then demands a bullock, beer, and a goat from the head elder, and these are consumed by the performers.

Women who organise these dances have been seen and interviewed by the writer and they generally appear to be stupid and half-witted, and one would not suspect that they were capable of influencing the people as they undoubtedly do. When they have worked themselves up into a kind of hypnotic state they may possibly be different. One great idea at these dances is that everyone must shake hands with the woman, and for this privilege she is given sixpence or more. The people believe that if this be omitted, they will be permanently afflicted with a spirit; they do not apparently mind temporary possession, but fear its becoming a permanency. The payments appear to be peculiar to Kitui.

The elders do not approve of these dances, but are generally too frightened to intervene. The reason of their disapproval is not far to seek; every woman who becomes possessed is told to demand something from [257]her husband or the mania will not leave her. The women generally ask for fez caps and clothes which are worn at subsequent dances; one elder told Mr Dundas that his wife had demanded the tails of ten white cows. They dress in white and red clothes, consisting of deep bands worn round the waists, and have fez caps on their heads and cows' tails suspended from their arms. The women who conduct the ceremony are termed Siekitundumu; the meaning of *kitundumu* is thunder. One of the chants sung on such an occasion was translated as: "We have come from a comet and one day we will return there to stay with Siekitundumu." When a woman shakes hands with the leader she is seized with a kind of convulsion and says, "I am Siekitundumu." The speeches of the women appear to be devoid of meaning; they will attempt to use English words in particular, calling out "*Yesu*," and So-and-so is said to be the children of "*Yesu*," or one will be asked who she is and she will mention the name of some European or other. "*Yesu*"—Mr Dundas thinks—may be either a corruption of the English "Yes" or it may be a contraction of "Jesus" as pronounced by the German missionaries, or it may be a corrupt pronunciation of the Swahili word "*kisu*," which means a knife, and which the A-Kamba are inclined to pronounce "*kyesu*."

It is also said that those who participate in the dance must keep their eyes fixed on the ground; they are otherwise supposed to be liable to fly up to the heavens.

The woman called the Siekitundumu has a *chondo* (string bag) full of medicines carried in small gourds. No one may look at these magical properties without paying. The medicines are said to be made by a kind of ghoulish being who has only one hand and one leg and who lives above. These mysteries work the credulous and susceptible women into a state of frenzy, when they cease to be responsible for their actions. One chief, [258]with some pathos,

stated that women who have been to one of these dances often go back home and beat their husbands.

The principal Siekitundumu in Kitui is said to be one Monge wa Muli. She and her husband assembled all the people at the village of the chief Muli and told them to collect food and other gifts. The elders had to pay a bull and a black goat. On a certain day the bull was killed and its blood poured into a large hole in the ground and mixed with meal, milk, and grain. Monge then announced that she would transfer the *Engai* to a particular village. She selected certain able-bodied women, who ran into the bush with a fowl, shouting that they were sending “*Engai*” to Muli’s village, the fowl being left in the bush. A few days later a woman in Muli’s village was, of course, seized with the *Engai* mania and the dance had to be performed there. Thus the affection is spread throughout the district. After a time, either the Government or the combined elders take steps to stop it by drastic measures and it dies down for a while, possibly for a year or two, but at any time it is liable to recur and it is then necessary for the administration to keep a sharp look out for its appearance.

The whole phenomenon rather reminds one of the ancient accounts of demoniacal possession. According to Goodrich Freer a peculiar kind of possession, called *bonda*, is said to attack women in Abyssinia. Here again all their demands for dress, food, and trifles of any sort must be strictly attended to. They sometimes mimic a hyæna.

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Sundry Beliefs

Slaughter of Pregnant Animals.—The A-Kamba may not wilfully kill an animal heavy with young when hunting, and certainly would not slaughter a domestic animal in this condition. Should, however, such an [259] animal happen to be killed by mistake, the uterus is opened to discover the sex of the foetus. In cutting up the uterus the hunter will hold a few blades of grass in his hand, together with the knife, at the same time grasping the wrist of the hand holding the knife with the other hand. If there are two men, the second man will grasp the wrist of the other while he cuts open the uterus.

If the foetus is male it is unlucky, and if female it is lucky. The killing of the mother in this condition must, however, have been done unwittingly.

This curious custom appears to be common to all the Kamba people.

Eclipses.—These are said to be the work of *Engai* (or the high god) and to be an omen of a sickness in the land. The head of each village has to take two children and a goat, which is lead round the outside of the village, and when it reaches the gate, an elder cuts a piece out of one ear and lets the animal return to the village. They then smear it with *ia* (Kamba) *ira* (Kikuyu), or white earth—on its face, along its stomach, and along its back to the tail.

Lunar Changes.—The Kikuyu people have no theories as to the nature of the sun or moon, but believe that the sun and moon are constantly at war with each other and that the moon is always beaten and driven away. After a time she regains her strength and returns to the fight.

Food (Kitui).—The Kamba of Kitui state that they cannot eat the meat of hyæna, jackal, serval cat, hunting dog, crocodile, snakes, kites, vultures, marabou stork, ducks, geese, crows, rats, or even eggs. A few will sometimes eat a little of the flesh of lions and leopards, probably on the grounds of sympathetic magic, i.e., with the idea of assimilating the strength and agility of these beasts. Baboon, monkey, and donkey meat are also eaten by some.

Food Ceremonial (Kikuyu).—If an ox is killed for a feast and a member of the same clan, who happens to [260]live at a distance, puts in an appearance, he must be given a piece of meat, although he cannot claim to share in the feast.

If an ox is killed on the occasion of a wedding, the members of the clan living in the neighbourhood are always invited to participate.

Women eat separately inside the huts and out of sight of the men, but can drink water or beer in the presence of men.

Small children naturally feed with their mothers, but once the boys are circumcised they no longer eat with women.

A curious custom was recently noticed during a journey among the Kikuyu. The desiccated carcase of a cow or ox was noticed in the branches of a tree by the roadside, a little distance from a village, and it appears that if cattle are lodged at the village of a friend and one should die, the owner is informed, and is asked to come over and see it and remove the meat. If for some reason or other he does not come the carcase is hoisted into a tree so that all may see it. The object of this is that people may know that the beast was not surreptitiously killed and eaten by the people of the village, and no claim can then be lodged against them by the owner.

Names Among the Kikuyu.—Every Kikuyu child receives two proper names. If a male, his first name is that of the paternal grandfather, *thiga*, and if a female that of the maternal grandmother, *chuchu*. In the case of a male the second name is that of the father.

In addition he generally receives another name at the time of circumcision; this is considered as a nickname, and generally refers to some peculiarity of character, habits, or physique.

For instance, a boy will be called *kichuru* because he was said to drink a large amount of gruel as a child. If the lobe of a man's ear is broken he is called *kachuru*; if he happens to break a finger he is called *kara*. [261]

The names are derived from animals such as *nugu*—a baboon, *njovu*—an elephant, *hiti*—hyæna, *ngui*—a dog.

From names of natural objects, such as *kamiti*—trees, *kegio*—a wild hibiscus used by the Kikuyu for making fibre, *higa*—stone, *meriwa*—a thorn, *wa-rui*—a stream, *kirima*—a hill.

From names of weapons such as *kitimu*—a spear (used of a tall thin man), *kahiu*—a sword, *njuguma*—a club. [262]

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CHAPTER VI

LEGENDS

Legend of Kilui Lake (Kamba of Kibwezi).—A few miles below Kibwezi Station there is a small lake called Kilui which is believed to be haunted by numerous spirits. The author recently had occasion to visit the place and, seeing a crocodile, shot it; the crocodile was badly hit, but, as usual, managed to struggle back into the water. The Kamba porters were afterwards heard to say that it was a good thing that it was not killed as the master would have been taken sick and probably died. The local elders, however, were questioned on the subject later on, but denied that any evil effects were likely to supervene. They stated that the place was undoubtedly full of spirits, as a long time ago there was a large village on the site of the lake, and, one day, a terrible rain storm occurred during which a frog entered one of the huts; the housewife on seeing it told one of her children to throw it out, and this having been done, the frog then went to another hut where the same thing occurred, and so on at the third, but at the fourth hut the wife, however, said, “Oh, it is doing no harm, let it stay.” Thereupon the frog said to her, “You have given me shelter and so listen to my words—take your children and flee from this village without delay for it will disappear.” She had the sense to obey this wonderful warning and had only gone a short distance when the whole village sank below the water.

The place was also supposed to possess a large [263]sacred snake, and it is said that the manager of a neighbouring rubber plantation shot this reptile and cut down a sacred tree near by. This man having died of dysentery a few months later, the natives were convinced that his death was directly due to the ancestral spirits avenging such sacrilegious actions.

The Kibwezi River flows along an old valley carved through the metamorphic rocks, but in recent geological times a sheet of lava came down the valley from the Chyulu Mountains and choked its flow. It appears from under a lava-bed near the railway station and runs for about three-quarters of a mile, and then disappears entirely and reappears in three sources, joining up at Kilui Lake. The eruptions which caused this are of so recent a date that quite possibly the legend above narrated may be founded on fact and may contain some vestige of the record of an actual occurrence during the last phases of volcanic activity in this region.

In the author's book on the A-Kamba, p. 167, mention was made of a haunted hill in the Kibwezi region; it is of volcanic origin, and is regarded with great awe by the people. It is called Chumbi and is situated near the south end of the Chyulu Range on the eastern side. There are two small hills, one being bush-covered, and the other so recent that no bush has

yet taken root on it. It is said by some that the latter was only formed some fifty years ago. The people will only discuss it with those whom they know very intimately, but it is said that a rhythmic beat, attributed to the female spirits crushing corn in mortars and keeping time with each other, can be heard, as one approaches the place. If, however, a native could be persuaded to guide one there, it would be probably found that this rhythmic beat is due to the sound of a pulsating steam vent. It is also said that when an intruder approaches the hill a rushing wind comes and sweeps him up into the hill and he is never seen again. The first native [264] who told a European about this awesome place is said to have sickened and died shortly afterwards.

Legend Regarding Origin of Fire.—The Kikuyu have a curious folk tale concerning the origin of fire. This has now become merely a fairy-tale told to children.

A long time ago a man borrowed a spear, *katimu*, from a neighbour to kill a porcupine which was destroying his crops. He lay in wait in the field and eventually speared one, but it was only wounded and ran off with the spear in its body and disappeared down a burrow. He went to the owner and told him that the spear was lost, but the owner insisted on having it back. Whereupon, the man bought a new spear and offered it to the owner in place of the lost weapon, but the owner refused it and again insisted on the return of the original spear. The man then proceeded to crawl down the porcupine burrow, and having crawled a long way found himself eventually, to his surprise, in a place where many people were sitting about cooking food by a fire. They asked him what he wanted and he told them of his errand. They then invited him to stay and eat with them; he was afraid and said he could not stay as he must go back with the spear which he saw lying there. They made no effort to keep him, but told him to climb up the roots of a *mugumu* tree, which penetrated down into the cavern, and said that he would soon come out into the upper world. They gave him some fire to take back with him. So he took the spear and the fire and climbed out as he was told.

This is said to be the way fire came to man; before that people ate their food raw.

When the man reached his friends he returned the spear and said to the owner, “You have caused me a great deal of trouble to recover your spear, and if you want some of this fire which you see going away into smoke, you will have to climb up the smoke and get it back for me.” The owner of the spear tried and tried to climb the smoke but could not do it, and the elders [265] then came and intervened and said, “We will make the following arrangement: fire shall be for the use of all, and because you have brought it you shall be our chief.”

The underworld referred to in this tale is called *Miri ya mikeongoi*. [266]

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CHAPTER VII

DANCES

Kikuyu.—There are, according to trustworthy authorities, a large number of Kikuyu dances. It is difficult to give an exhaustive list of these, as it has been impossible to trace them all. The word *ngoma* (a dance, Swahili) has such a very wide meaning that it is difficult to say where dances begin or end.

A girl must not refuse to dance when called upon to do so by the *anake* (warrior class); if she does so she may be beaten by them and her parents cannot interfere. Generally, in such cases, a *mwanake* will deprive her of her ornaments and she cannot then dance until she gets them back. The *mwanake* who takes the ornaments cannot keep them, but must divide them with the other *anake*. If he breaks them he has to make *uji* (gruel) for the other *anake*; if he hurts the girl when taking her ornaments he has to pay a goat to the elders, but her parents get nothing.

The principal dances of the *anake* are connected with harvest and crops; the most important of these is the *Kivata* dance. In this only certain *rikas*, or age grades, may take part; at present only the *rikas* named Kincheku, Kamandu, Kanyeta, and Mutungu dance the *Kivata*, while the *rikas* of Sengenge, Matiha, Njarege, Kangei, and Makiomei are not allowed to join in. Formerly the junior *rikas* were not even permitted to look on, but now they do so and frequently try to take part in the same; which leads to fierce fights and not a [267]few deaths. The elders are therefore much against this dance, and have often forbidden it. Formerly if the elders wished to prohibit a dance they would go to a place where it was to be held, and lay a cooking pot on the ground; a branch of the *mugere* tree was stuck beside it, and the *anake* could not dance there unless they were returning from a raid on enemy's country.



KIKUYU.

KIVATA DANCE AT KYAMBU.

This custom is still practised, for in Kyambu district a few years ago the elders for some reason wished to prevent a *Kivata* dance, and they resorted to the old rite.

Kivata is danced when the *mawele* grain is reaped. The dancers wear no clothes whatsoever; they are ornamented with a large inverted crown of ostrich feathers which is slung from the forehead to the back of the head. Strings of beads and bells are hung about the body, and plumes of colobus monkey fur are tied below the knees. In many cases the face is covered completely with yellow colouring, the loins being likewise adorned; others affect various colours in stripes and dots. The legs and arms are also coloured. The weapons carried are mostly swords and clubs; very few have spears, but the younger *rikas*, who look on, generally have spears. Their faces are often decorated with a broad red stripe drawn across the face and outlined with white dots.

The dancers march round in rows of from six to eight, the dancing consisting mainly in a continued jumping from one foot to the other. The women bring gourds of *uji*, or gruel,

which they give to the dancers and thereby signify their affections. The dance is said to be a general occasion for choosing brides by old men as well as by *anake*.

Many of the onlookers (not the younger *rikas*) run madly round the whole circle, brandishing swords and leaping into the air. The name of the dance is said to be derived from this.

Even the old men who are spectators become [268]infected with the spirit of the dance, cast off their blankets and trot round the outside of the circle. In fact it appears to be essential to discard clothing, for if one omits to do so he is censured by his fellows. The women also follow the men with shrill cries, but otherwise they take no part.

At one of these dances several girls were noticed amusing themselves by a game exactly similar to one played by children in Europe, and which consists in clapping hands. This is called *Amukiana*.

When the *njahe* or *cajanus* bean is planted the *Mugoyo* is danced. This dance is held at night when there is no moon, and is one of the most picturesque dances of the country. A circle of fires is made and maintained by men appointed for the purpose, and round the outside of this circle stand the dancers. Richly smeared with red earth and fat as they are, the fire heightening the blaze of red, the whole scene is intensely bright in the darkness. The men stand with their backs to the fire, each holding his partner, who stands with her feet on his. Their faces and legs are slightly coloured, but the girls use no colouring beyond the red mixed with fat. Forming a diameter across the circle stands another row of dancers. The leader of the *maribeta* (song or verse) goes about and the rest join in the chorus. Excepting for a slight movement of the shoulders among the dancers the whole dance has an air of quietness which is presumably intentional. There are masters of ceremony who go about and check noisy persons, preserving general quiet and the regular formation of the circle. Their methods are simple and effective: two firebrands are struck together over offending couples, and a shower of sparks thus quickly calls them to order. All the men are naked but elaborately ornamented; unfortunately the vulgarity of civilisation too often mars the beauty of this picturesque scene. One smart youth has dangling on his back an advertisement for sardines, another a gaudy scriptural text, and others, similar cheap articles of [269]European origin. Occasionally the figure of the dance varies—the men turn facing the fire and bump up and down on their heels; another time they kneel joining hands on spears held horizontally which they sway to the rhythm of the song. The song is not startlingly comprehensible: “We went to Juja and saw a white ostrich, so we put its feathers on our heads,” and such like. The girls also join in the chorus, while the men now and again make a curious gulping sound produced from the

throat. Finally at midnight, or later, the dance breaks up: each *mwanake* takes a firebrand, and the country is soon dotted in every direction with small spots of fire.

At such a dance a man was seen carrying a clay figure of the kind described by Mr Routledge. It was not, however, part of the ceremony, and the man who was carrying it in his hand was not dancing. This image is a common feature in dances, but its significance is not known even to the people themselves. Judging from Mr Routledge's description, therefore, the figure must either have lost its meaning among the Kikuyu west of the Chania, or it must have acquired a new and increased significance in the Kenya area.

Another dance connected with the crops is *Kichukia*, which is held when the *mawe* is six to eight inches high. It is danced both at night when there is a moon, and in the daytime. The author has not seen this dance. It must not be confounded with *Njukia*, which is called thus because the girls do *not* choose the song. Both are danced by girls and *anake* together; the latter dance is held about the month of July, and in the morning only.

Muzogo.—This is also danced by *anake* and girls on dark nights by firelight, and is very similar to the *Mugoyo* both in name and character, but is danced when the maize is nearly ripe.

One of the most important dances for young men is *Nguru*. In 1912 it was held all over the district in the [270]month of September; it does not seem to be in any way connected with crops, but denotes rather a time of rest and leisure while there is no work in the field. It is danced by young men and boys only, but the latter are said to join merely for instruction; anyone may look on. The dance commences with a sort of "follow my leader" march, after which there is continued jumping up and down with great vigour, although the heels are not lifted off the ground. A continuous song is maintained by one man; there is no chorus. The dance somewhat resembles *Kivata*, but the body painting is much less profuse. No spears are carried, but among the people east of the Ruiru River it is customary to dance with shields, which, during the march, are held aloft over the head. Sticks with wisps of fur are carried. A curious feature is the wearing of skin apron flaps such as are worn by women; when the season for this dance is over these coverings are given to small girls to wear.

The main feature of this dance is the eating of meat by the dancers and elders. Everyone who dances must contribute to the cost of buying bulls to supply the meat which is eaten in common by the dancers at a hut built near a river. The dancing which takes place at different villages goes on day by day until the meat is finished; the bladders of the slaughtered beasts are very common articles of decoration in the dance. The elders, if they contribute, are given a share of the meat, which they eat apart from the young men. In the

eastern part of Kikuyu meat-eating is not a part of the *Nguru* dance, but at the same time of the year several men, both old and young, club together and buy meat which is eaten at a common meal; this custom is called *kiruga*.

At this time people are supposed to lose strength, and therefore require good nourishing; this is said to be the reason for the custom. It appears, therefore, to be a general time for feasting all over Kikuyu. [271]

This dance is said by Mr Routledge to be one held by warriors before going to war, but this can hardly be so seeing that it is performed at a fixed season in the year. If it were so it must be a relic of a very old custom, when possibly the tribe had a favourite time for raiding.

There is thus a continual round of dances for the *anake*, and they continue for a fixed period. One should therefore be able to reckon the seasons by the dances, but as a matter of fact they may be very irregularly held. For instance in 1912 most of the dances, *Kivata* in particular, were quite out of season, and this was only owing to the previous heavy rains in which the people could not dance. The *anake* will, however, have their dances, and if the season is unsuitable they will dance it at another time. It is probable that the significance of the dance as connected with the crops is beginning to be lost. In this connection it is interesting to note that although there is a great difference in the seasons prevailing in the highlands and the lowlands, the dances are mostly held at the same period all along one ridge. It thus happens that the highlanders are often completely out of season in their dances. The fact is that the Fort Hall Kikuyu give the lead, and the dances spread westward so that the lowlanders even in Kyambu may not be dancing quite at the proper season. Fort Hall is, on the whole, the authority for the Kikuyu customs, whether because it is the birthplace of the tribe or not, one cannot say, but the lead given by Fort Hall is analogous to that given by Machakos to the Kamba of Kitui. These facts give a curious instance of how a custom may lose its meaning; we have here an example of a custom superseding its own origin.

The uncircumcised boys and girls are called *irego*. Their principal dance is *Ngoisia*. There is no particular season for this, and it is danced both in the daytime and at night; in the former case anyone may [272] watch it, but at night only the inmates of the village in which it is held may be present.

Before the circumcision feasts a dance called *Kibuiya* is danced by circumcised and uncircumcised boys. It is so called because of the buffalo horns worn by the boys, but this dance is now said to be practically extinct, mainly because they cannot get buffalo horns.

For women there are two dances which are:

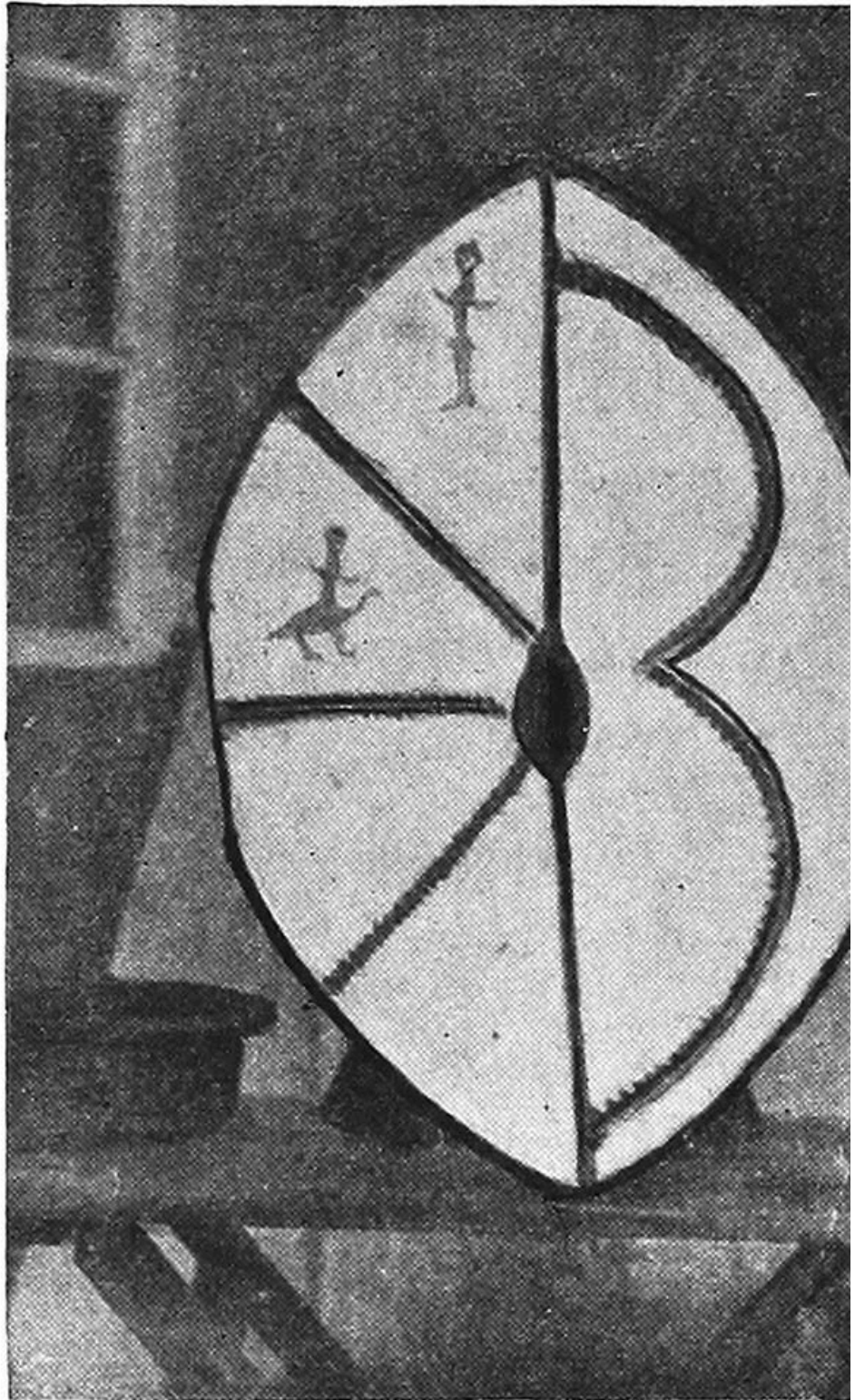
Getiro—This is a marriage dance and is held first at the bride's village and in the evening at the bridegroom's village.

Ndumo—This is danced by women at the close of the Kikuyu year. It takes place in a village, but anyone may be present.

In Kikuyu the elders have only one dance, called *Muthungwei*, which they dance together with the women; its name is said to be derived from the nodding of the head in the dance. Only elders can dance it, and a woman cannot join unless her husband is entitled to dance. It is held in an open space outside a village.

Mr Routledge mentions three other dances, but he was probably misled by the words used. Two of these, *Keoana* and *Kuinenera*, are verbs meaning to dance or sing. The third, *Ndorothi*, is the name given to a stick carried by youths at circumcision feasts. It is topped with a tuft of colobus monkey fur and is carried until the evening before the ceremony. On that evening, all those about to be circumcised race to a *mugumu* tree and throw the *Ndorothi* sticks at the foot of the tree.

At the time of circumcision there is, again, the *Mambura* dance. The boys travel about the country, their bodies painted white, and wearing curious wooden shields on their arms above the elbow.



KIKUYU.

CIRCUMCISION SHIELD WITH ANTHROPOMORPHIC
FIGURES.



KIKUYU.

METHOD OF CARRYING THE CIRCUMCISION SHIELD.

Natives, of course, often sing either in chorus or singly, and at any time; such songs are also called *ngoma*. On one occasion the author met a man who [273] was a sort of primitive travelling minstrel. It was his vocation in life to go about the country singing songs, for which people gave him a few cents. The natives said that he was the only man known to do this, and he was therefore perhaps rather a freak. [274]

CHAPTER VIII

WOMEN AS A FACTOR IN TRIBAL ORGANISATION

Although far from negligible, the part played by women in the life of a savage tribe is very apt to be overlooked by a man. The reasons are obvious; the African woman is not obtrusive; she is perpetually busy, and one rarely comes into contact with her. Her inner thoughts and beliefs are a sealed book to the investigator, and one is at first inclined to believe that her influence is not worth consideration. The longer the experience, the more clearly one realises that this lack of information about the woman is one of the weak points of any inquiry.

Among the Kikuyu there is a council, or *kiama*, of old women in every district; they collect goats periodically and present them to the elders of *ukuru*, or priestly class. They occasionally fine troublesome women, and the fine, usually a goat, has to be obtained by the culprit either by extra work or by begging one from her father. The men fear the women's *kiama*, as it is believed that the members of it have the power to bewitch people.

It is to be regretted that so little is known about the methods of initiation and the scope of their activities in this direction, but complete information could only be obtained by a female investigator who has exceptional opportunity and great sympathy.

The official recognition of the wife of a candidate for admission into the grade of *ukuru* among the Kikuyu has been described at another place. This is unusual in African ritual, but can readily be understood [275] when one learns that old women, past the child-bearing age, can participate in sacrificial ceremonies at the sacred trees. This is due to the fact that the growth of cereal and other vegetable food falls to the woman, and they alone are responsible for the food of the family.

This leads to great difficulty, as the women are intensely conservative, and when an energetic district officer wishes to improve the economic products of his district and distribute better seeds he is invariably up against the opposition of the women, which is very difficult to overcome. The woman knows by long experience that, given a certain area, a certain seed, and a certain rainfall she can feed the family, and one can understand that she should be loth to waste labour on experiments, the result of which is doubtful. This feeling is very deep-rooted, and consequently most difficult to overcome: the same obstacles are met with in connection with the introduction of big European hoes for agriculture. The African woman has for generations done her planting with either a digging stick or the small African hoe; the tiresome European comes along and worries the men to buy the big heavy hoe, and one can hear the annoyed woman inquiring of her husband why

she is being bothered to give up the implement she has been brought up to use with one hand, for a strange thing which is more expensive and requires two hands. For all that, however, the European hoe is making good progress, and will eventually win. It is hoped that this, and the introduction of ox-drawn ploughs, will result in the male section of the population taking a more active part in agriculture, and alleviating the lot of the women. It is believed that if instructors could be detailed to travel about and demonstrate the benefits of utilising oxen to plough, women would soon champion the cause of progress.

The male African in his home life is not noted for persistent steady work; the women, on the other hand, [276]are never idle, and are withal cheerful and uncomplaining about their lot, and not nearly so down-trodden as some people believe. In most tribes they are well-treated; their lot among the Masai is probably harder than among agricultural tribes; the old women have to go on watch at night in the cattle kraal and often get beaten if they fall asleep. In Kavirondo, on the other hand, the mother of the head of the village is often the most important person in the village, and her opinion is generally sought even on political matters which lie outside the ordinary sphere of a woman's influence; the affection of the Kavirondo for their mothers is, however, a very marked trait in their character. Among the A-Kamba the fact that manifestations from the spirit would nearly always come through the mouths of women undoubtedly proves that the sex plays an important part in the life of the people. The fact that in both Ukamba and Giriama old women have in recent years turned out to be at the bottom of serious political agitation also demonstrates this point. The influence of a woman over her children is the same all the world over, but owing to the long period of lactation prevalent in African society, and possibly among any polygamous community, the African mother might be expected to be more tied by her children than a European mother; such, however, is not the case, and the baby is taken everywhere with the mother—to market, to the field, out into the bush when firewood has to be gathered, and to the river or water-hole. The first separation is when the small boy first goes out to herd the goats; the small girl stays on with her mother and trots by her side and assists her in her various duties. This continues until the boy is promoted to herd cattle and then goes out into the wider world and comes into contact with civilising influences and European progress which cannot fail to enlarge his horizon and increase his knowledge of men and affairs. The girl, however, stays on with her mother in the narrow life of an African village. The difference of environment at [277]the formative stage of life is thus ever producing a great disparity between the mental development of the two sexes, and must, as time goes on, prove more and more a disturbing factor in tribal life.

Owing to the marriage value of girls their parents are loth to allow them to go far from home; the missionaries complain of this as one of their greatest difficulties. Boys can be attracted to the missions for instruction, but it is very difficult to induce parents to allow their daughters to go to school. The old women say that if they go to school their heads

will be turned, that they will want to be fine ladies, as the saying goes, and will not take kindly to agriculture, the collection of firewood, and other household duties. There is probably a large amount of truth in the accusation, for education would undoubtedly open their eyes to the life of drudgery they lead; they would, as far as physical labour goes, have an easier time while at a mission, and would feel the return to a harder life. The whole question is a problem which time alone can solve, and a proper adjustment of the sphere of activity of the two sexes will take many years.

It may be of some interest to review the class of work which is the special duty of the women. Their primary duty may be said to be the raising of food, be it in the form of grain, beans, bananas, sweet potatoes, etc. They sow, they tend the fields during the growth of the crop, and then reap the grain, thresh it, store it, crush it in wooden mortars, and grind it into meal. In most tribes the clearing of the bush and the heavy work of breaking up new ground devolves on the men, and in Kavirondo the men assist to a great extent in actual agriculture. Where natives irrigate, this branch of agriculture is always in the hands of the men.

As the producers of food, it naturally becomes the duty of the women to make the supply of beer for the family. In Kikuyu young girls crush the sugar cane in mortars made out of a log of wood with round holes in [278]it, and they then squeeze out the sweet sap and brew the beer. They understand the art of malting grain and the manufacture of beer from cereals.

Having grown the food, the cooking of it naturally falls to them; they know the wild green herbs which are used as green food, particularly in times of scarcity, and the wild edible roots which are sought for at such periods.

The collection of firewood to cook the food and the transport of the water used also falls to the women.

The manufacture of the cooking pots and other household utensils is generally women's work. In Uganda, however, it is as a rule done by men. Smith's work is never done by women, this industry being a monopoly of man; there would be a prejudice against any arms or weapons made by women, and by analogy it is therefore believed that the persons who made the stone implements which we are beginning to find in Africa were men.

The collection of honey and the manipulation of bees is also never done by women.

The basket work used in the villages is almost always made by women, and also sleeping mats. The rule is, however, not invariable, for an old influential elder in Giriama was recently seen plaiting a mat, possibly because he was too infirm to do more active work.

The string bags, singular, *chondo*, plural, *vyondo*, used by the A-Kamba are always made by the women.

Wood cutting or rude carpentry is the work of the men; if bedsteads are used they are made by the men, also the ornamental staves and stools so extensively used.

If skin garments are worn, the woman will bray the goat skins she wears and that in which she carries her child. When the men have not reached the blanket stage they usually go naked or wear an ox hide, and this they generally prepare themselves. [279]

Leather work for weapons is always done by the men.

In Uganda the bark cloth is made by men.

The bead work affected by some tribes is nearly always done by the women, but in Kikuyu a young dandy will often be seen sewing beads on to a bit of hide.

Metal work used as ornament is always done by the men; the beautiful iron chain work of Ukamba is man's monopoly; any working in ivory, such as armlets, must be done by men.

Each wife in an African family usually has dedicated to her particular use a certain number of cattle; they are not her property, but she has the sole disposal of their milk for the use of her children. The adult A-Kamba and others also drink a considerable amount of curdled milk, and each wife keeps a supply for her husband and his friends.

To what extent women have assisted in the domestication of animals is now a matter of some conjecture, but there is little doubt that the men caught the animals, probably young ones, when out on hunting expeditions, and handed them over to the women to rear. It is noticeable that among African tribes a woman never owns live stock, and probably never did, even in matriarchal times.

The women are largely responsible for the handing on of the folk lore of a tribe and undoubtedly teach it to their children, as is done in Europe to-day. The men, however, often unconsciously help in this, for at a friendly beer-drinking gathering elders will recount folk tales, out of the stores of their experience, to the assembled company, and one tale will remind someone of another and he will try to cap the previous story by one more wonderful.

Women have done a good deal, however, for the development and blending of folk lore. In times past when inter-tribal conflict was common, women were frequently carried off and

thus became incorporated [280]with another tribe; they carried their folk tales with them, and unconsciously the stories, as well as the blood of a tribe, became modified.

The influence of women in fixing a language must not be overlooked; the mother teaches it to her children, not actively perhaps, but the young child is in closest association with the mother and assimilates her speech, and, of course, captured women will, if in any number, bring foreign words with them, and may be instrumental in their general adoption.

European women may consider that none of her sisters, even in Africa, could willingly acquiesce in a polygamous life; such, however, is not the case. The burden of life falls heavily on the African woman, and she is, as a rule, only too pleased to welcome a new wife to share her burden of work.

Several cases have been observed of women worrying their husbands to take a second wife, and a senior wife will often lodge a new wife in her hut until she becomes settled down in the village and her own hut is ready. There are doubtless quarrels, but, on the whole, the family lives in amity and it is believed that jealousy in the European sense does not loom very large; fierce feeling is, however, sometimes aroused if a husband unfairly favours one wife in the allotment of cattle. [281]

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CHAPTER IX

SOME GENERAL REMARKS

The writer's main object has been to demonstrate the fact that the tribes under review possess a system of natural religion more elaborate than was hitherto suspected, and he must frankly admit that, although living for some years in close touch with these natives, he had no idea of the extent and variety of the ceremonial connected with the *tabu* beliefs, sacrifice, and other cognate branches of their beliefs. The light which the inquiry has thrown upon the complex nature of a native's life is somewhat of a revelation. It should serve as a warning to rash reformers who consider that so-called pagan heathendom can be abolished by a stroke of the pen. This attitude should most certainly be avoided in Africa as much as in India. The beliefs of an African are as real to him as those of a Buddhist, although they may belong to different and more primitive plane of thought.

The influence of the spirits, or the belief in their influence which in fact comes to the same thing, is, as it were, the real key to a close understanding of the native mind.

The native mind is so permeated with these beliefs, and they consequently have such a profound effect on his actions that, until this point has been thoroughly grasped, we are bound to be perpetually brought face to face with absolute enigmas.

Progressive Europeans are at times apt to sneer at native beliefs and to feel very impatient with them; [282]there is no doubt that, generally speaking, these beliefs tend to check progress and development, as we understand them. Although this cannot be denied, we must not lose sight of the fact that, on the whole, they undoubtedly act as moral restraints and perform in very much the same way the functions which a dogmatic religion fulfils among people of a higher culture.

Even if Government formally abolished the ceremonial by legislation, the belief would not be affected one iota; each people has to reckon with its own gods, and before the indigenous religion is officially discountenanced, the ruling power must be sure that it has something better and equally suited to the native mind to put in the place of a faith it tries to displace. Otherwise materialism will result, and the effect of this negation of faith, and freedom from all moral restraint upon a savage would be most disastrous.

There is practical evidence of this in the criminal tendencies evinced by numbers of natives who have drifted into the up-country towns in British East Africa and cut themselves adrift from their tribal life. To what extent the progress of Christianity will supply discipline and fit the spiritual needs of a people at this stage of culture is not yet

quite clear. While not opposing missionary effort, it would therefore appear to be imperative to study carefully their present beliefs and not give the impression of trying to crush them; at the same time, with the influence based on the knowledge acquired, the people could be gradually induced to give up any repugnant features and retain the better elements of their ritual.

It is not suggested that this is a policy of finality, but it is important at this juncture to avoid the spread of an impression that the Europeans have set out to crush the deep-seated and cherished natural religion which the natives now possess. The spread of an idea of this character will do as much as anything to alienate the sympathies of the blacks and may prove a cause of [283]serious antagonism. The need for higher philosophy will gradually spread, but let the craving come from within.

It is of great interest to note how readily the more intelligent elders respond to inquiry into their beliefs once they are convinced that it is undertaken in the proper spirit, and nothing convinces them so much of the *bona fides* of our administrative intentions as a sympathetic study of their customs and a demonstration of one's knowledge of them.

It is therefore maintained that the study of these questions is not merely academic but one of the greatest practical value to the administrator, the missionary, and the colonist, as well as the student.

It is interesting to show how these questions may frequently affect the colonist. It is well known that the Kikuyu people form the bulk of the labour supply of the upland colonists in British East Africa, and complaints are often received from employers of its capricious nature. Upon investigation it was found that, apart from the natural ebb and flow of this supply, the charge of caprice was well founded, i.e., there were many cases of desertion, often without any suspicion of ill-treatment; further, in some cases it was discovered that this desertion was traceable to a belief on the part of the individual that it was necessary to go away to get *dawa*, which is the general local synonym for medicine, whether of the nature of drugs or magical in character. The question then arose as to why such frequent calls occurred, and it was a long time before a definite clue could be obtained, but the principles gradually unfolded and became clear and were found to rest on the necessity of obtaining ceremonial purification to free the individual from either a *thahu* or the impurity left by a death in the family, as has been described in this work. It is in fact difficult at first to believe how complex a native's social life may be. It may not be immediately obvious how a knowledge of these beliefs can ameliorate the difficulty, but the [284]point is that if a man deserts without leave he breaks his contract of service and dare not venture back for a long time in case he should be identified and punished, whereas if he knows that his master understands his beliefs he will probably go and tell him and ask if he can go away

for a day or so and carry out the necessary ceremonies, and will then usually come back. It may be a little tiresome to the master, but the better feeling and mutual confidence which is induced pays in every way. This is not mere theory, for the men who do get into close touch with their employees lose very few, and can generally get more men than they require. This is merely quoted as an example of the practical value of ethnological inquiry in daily life, which after all is not a bad working test.

The method employed in collecting the material has been to discuss the questions with as many responsible elders as possible, and compare and correct the statements so obtained. It has been a work of great interest, though often very tedious, but probably more tedious to the informer than to the recorder.

There is one warning which it is desired to impress upon persons living in the country and who have opportunities of research, and that is that the last word has not been said upon these questions, and it is hoped that these observations will only encourage further research and the keenest criticism. It must be remembered that very few of the ceremonials described in this book have been witnessed by Europeans, and if they have, they have not been observed and described by eyes trained to note the important features, and it may well happen that with the best intentions the elders may have from time to time omitted some point which, when accurately described, may throw a flood of light upon an apparently obscure point in the ritual. This is where the district officer and the missionary can, if they choose, play such an important part; we have many missionaries who possess a thorough knowledge of the [285]vernaculars of the tribes, and district officers who, if not such good linguists, are in intimate touch with these people; these men have many chances if they would only train themselves for the task. Up to the time of the war signs of a renaissance were not wanting, however, and administrative officers and others were yearly taking more and more scientific interest in their people, and one of the missionary societies, it is said, formed a committee for the study of native customs. It is to be feared that the war has indirectly checked this branch of scientific study, and the activities of many observers, who before its occurrence promised to develop a *flair* for this kind of research, have temporarily ceased. A very marked need at present is greater sympathetic appreciation from high quarters. Further, local assistance with regard to the publication of observations is essential. Few signs of such support are, however, visible at present in many of our colonies. Missionary endeavour in this field is particularly welcome, but if a word of advice will not be resented, these observers must realise the necessity of caution in collecting observations of pagan customs from persons who have been for some time in close contact with their teaching, which often has the effect of causing their pupils to ridicule time-honoured ceremonial. Moreover, missionaries are, as a rule, only in close touch with the rising generation who are not initiated in the procedure, and have little to do with the elders of the tribe. [286]

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CHAPTER X

EAST AFRICA AFTER THE WAR

Although it may appear somewhat beyond the scope of the foregoing inquiry, which was mainly conducted before the war occurred to interrupt it, I consider that it may be of interest to examine the effect of the great world conflict on the native races, and to assess the present position with regard to black and white in that region.

The outbreak of war came as an unexpected shock to the natives as a whole. The up-country tribes had very little conception of the distinctions between the various white races, and were somewhat puzzled by the conflict. The coast people, who were in daily touch with Germans and Austrians, were a little clearer, but, of course, had no conception of the *casus belli*, and although they knew that the daily lives of the two sections were apart, yet they saw them mix at the clubs and never dreamt that Europeans among themselves ever resorted to arms. The internment of the enemy subjects in Mombasa was the first material sign, and it was hailed with acclamation by the Swahilis of Mombasa, who treasured up resentment at the arrogant behaviour of the Germans prior to the war. The conflict was therefore a great blow to the solidarity of the white race, but this effect was not immediately apparent.

On the whole the tribes behaved in an exemplary manner, but enemy agents produced some active unrest among a coast tribe which for some years past had been unfavourably disposed towards Government. [287]

Like most of our countrymen, the natives naturally had no conception of the magnitude of the struggle or its possible duration. They thought that it would be over in a few months, and responded with alacrity to calls for porters, and for recruits for the K.A.R. They also made no demur to the numerous restrictions which a war imposes on the people involved.

The war, however, dragged on year after year, the calls for labour became more and more insistent, the poor carriers suffered hardships and died in tens of thousands, from the diseases inseparable from a campaign in an unhealthy tropical region, dysentery and pneumonia being the two main causes of death.

In a campaign of this character, where troops of mixed races are employed, the close contact between black and white is an undesirable and unavoidable feature.

The black troops soon came to realise the physical disabilities of the Europeans and their vulnerability. They saw Europeans shot down and even bayoneted by enemy black

soldiers, they realised that very few Europeans were crack shots, they noted the inferior marching capacity of the white man, his inability to find his way about in the bush unaccompanied by a native guide, and in some cases they even saw that the courage of the white was not greater than that of the black. After all this can it be wondered that the prestige of the white race has suffered in the war! Is it surprising that the attitude of many of the blacks to the white man has altered?

The black has always been quick to realise who is in authority and who is not, and will still accede outward respect to a representative of the Government, but that is not the test, and the real criterion is his attitude towards the ordinary farmer or settler; this has been considerably modified during the war, and it is doubtful if the old traditional wide respect of white by black can ever be entirely restored.

The might of the Government has been demonstrated [288] during the war to an unheard of extent, and to some extent Government has unconsciously traded on this impression, for it has boldly imposed restrictions on the black, and a degree of taxation which it would have hesitated to do before the war.

There are two schools of thought in existence regarding the governance of the black races in East Africa.

(1) This school claims to be progressive, and favours the abolition of tribal control by its indigenous constitution; it is opposed to chiefs, tribal law and customs, and is in favour of direct government by European magistrates and by police.

(2) The conservative school aims at retaining and strengthening the internal forces which control a tribe, at the same time promoting an evolution of the character of that control by inducing the native leaders to slough the more repugnant customs and beliefs.

The former scheme receives considerable support from the settler community on the grounds that it will result in the native, conjointly with themselves, playing a more active part in the development of Africa. It is also supported to some extent by the missionaries, who feel that the disintegration of the old order would afford them greater chances for their propaganda. At the same time the probable effect of the dissolution of tribal control is rarely realised. The nearest example of such emancipation can be observed in the larger towns, and here we have thousands of natives attracted to these places by the desire to earn money. They have no natural authorities in control, and although there are, of course, respectable members in these assemblages, taking it all round they are the biggest collection of native ruffians in the country, and are saturated with every vice. Consequently in spite of a concentration of magisterial and police control far in excess of

anything in a native reserve, crime of every kind is rife, and they have become an increasing menace to the European residents. [289]

These town colonies of natives, it must be remembered, are products of our own creation, and do not argue well for native emancipation from their natural leaders.

The native system of government is admittedly faulty, not so much in design as in execution; this is partly due to the fact that the blood kin of a criminal will go to great lengths to shield him, and partly because chiefs and elders are often venial or amenable to threats or to fear of witchcraft.

Native custom has in recent years been purged of many of its repugnant features, and any that exist will steadily tend to disappear if intelligently approached by native commissioners who take the trouble to understand these customs and the motives behind them. Blind action in these matters is rarely effective.

If the present-day political shibboleth of “self-determination” is to be encouraged in Africa, the policy of disintegration of all native authority should be pursued. It is a sure prescription for the birth of a native party which will speedily demand equal electoral privileges with the Europeans; it will abolish tribal isolation and inter-tribal prejudice which has for long years been a safeguard against the combination of the black millions against the few white intruders from overseas. It will produce a receptive soil for educated blacks from other countries to propagate the doctrine of “Africa for the Africans.” In the event of a struggle, the European, having sole control of munitions, will not eventually be worsted, but he will not re-establish domination until much blood, both black and white, has been spilled, and both sides will emerge from the struggle with bitterness and distrust. The choice of a policy is therefore a vital matter to all, and the problem should be dispassionately considered.

After the Armistice large numbers of natives who had served in the King’s African Rifles were disbanded, and some people maintain that these men in future may [290] prove a menace owing to their knowledge of arms and their close acquaintance with European troops in the field. In Kenya there is, as far as I know, no signs of it, for they have no arms; they are moreover weary of war, and the majority have gone back to their reserves to spend their savings or invest them in wives. In Tanganyika a good many arms were secreted by deserters and picked up after engagements, and these may be used to some extent in attempts to settle inter-tribal feuds; there is, however, little fear of the concentration of any force in opposition to Government. In fact our rule is so mild compared with the German régime that when the internal prosperity of that country revives there is no reason to anticipate anything but peace for a long time to come. When one

realises that over eight thousand official floggings per annum took place in German East Africa before the war, and in addition many thousands of unofficial floggings, no record of which was kept, the relief must be apparent to all. The Germans themselves must have realised that the flogging propensity had to be checked, for in 1912–1913 no fewer than one hundred and seven employers were convicted of assaulting their labourers. Needless to say, under British rule, flogging is only inflicted for a few extremely serious crimes.

It is, however, fruitless at this stage to dilate upon the differences between German and British rule; it is far more important to consider the factors on both sides that count in the present situation and to outline any obvious future dangers.

The question of religion is intimately connected with behaviour, and an attempt has been made in this work to show how closely interwoven with their life are the primitive beliefs of the people. In recent years, however, a new set of influences have arisen, viz., those of the Christian churches and also Mohammedanism.

The Christian missions are very varied; there are the Roman Catholic, and Church of England faiths, [291]Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists, also a loosely knit group of nonconformist type known as the Inland African Mission and others.

To obviate undue competition in any particular area, Government has in Kenya Colony agreed to spheres of influence being arranged between the various mission groups, and withholds approval of the establishment of a new mission too near an already established rival. The only argument in favour of this practice is expediency, for on ethical grounds the State has no right to decide that the people of any particular area shall only have ready access to the doctrines of any particular church.

The Roman Catholic missions, as is often the case, have acquired more land than any other religious body, and there is a marked tendency on their part to attempt to set up *imperia in imperio* on their estates on the plea of internal discipline, thus usurping to some extent the rights of government. It will be remembered that in the early days in Uganda this led to armed struggles between Catholics and Protestants: such, however, are unlikely to recur under modern conditions.

The Catholics have perhaps more than any other mission suffered from shortness of funds since the expulsion of the religious orders from France, and up country in Africa they generally endeavour to grow coffee or some other crop to help to support the mission; such efforts are praiseworthy and useful in the educational sense. They are a great contrast, for instance, to the neglected estate of the C.M.S. at Freretown.

The missionaries, taking it all round, have in spite of unrivalled facilities contributed but little to our knowledge of the country; but they have, it is true, recorded the construction of various native languages. With one notable exception in Uganda, who, in spite of discouragement from his fellows, persisted in his researches, no missionary in East Africa has thrown much light on the ethnology of the natives; it is said that they have been inclined to consider researches of [292]this nature as somewhat irreligious, but this view has, it is believed, died away.

Upon the plea of combating the spread of Mohammedanism, the missions have, except at the coast, declined to teach the Swahili language, which is the *lingua franca* of East Central Africa, and have perpetuated and are still endeavouring to perpetuate a host of tribal languages, which, although interesting as linguistic curiosities, prove a barrier to civilisation and progress. It may be, of course, that English will on this account come into general use quicker, but that result, if it comes, will not be due to the missions.

The main qualification for a missionary in Africa appears to be what they term “earnestness,” but it is to be feared that the possession of this admirable trait is an inadequate equipment for the task of regenerating the black. It is to be regretted that there are not a greater percentage of scholarly men with liberal ideas among their numbers. It is not to be inferred that such men are absent; it would, however, be invidious to mention names; there is a leaven of men of wide vision, and the missionaries as a whole afford examples of purity of life which cannot fail to have a good moral effect.

This short review of the missionary position may seem beside the point, but the character of the influences which affect the native are of no little importance.

The missions all claim to play a great part in the education of the natives, and the local government has, through paucity of funds, found it convenient to acquiesce in this claim, and to a great extent leaves native education to mission effort. The results leave much to be desired, and naturally the primary mission ideal of education is to impart to the native a sufficient knowledge of reading and writing to enable him to read such portion of the scriptures as have been translated into the vernacular of the tribe.

Very few missionaries understand the philosophy of education; very few even have much knowledge of [293]educational method. As a brilliant educationalist has written, “the function of education is to foster growth”—the aim of the teacher should be “the development of the latent powers of his pupil, the unfolding of the latent life.”

Are the blacks in Kenya Colony receiving an education of this nature? The answer is, it is feared, generally in the negative. Now the character of the education of the black is going

to have a profound effect on his future and also on the relations of black and white. This is a truism, and as Dudley Kidd has so forcibly put it, “The problem is the progress of a backward race, and we allow inefficient teachers, whose only qualification for the difficult work is their own kind hearts, to form the character of the rising generation and to complicate our difficulties—has any State the right to allow unqualified people to intensify national problems in this gratuitous fashion?”

It is not to be inferred that missionary educational effort is mischievous. Far from it; but it is narrow in its outlook, it is not based on any sound foundation, and it does very little to develop latent powers.

The colonists do not, as a rule, favour literary education, but clamour mainly for industrial education. There is a germ of truth in this opinion, but a sense of proportion must be exercised or the industrial market may be flooded with artisans of mediocre efficiency far in excess of the demand. The great rôle of the African in the future must be, as it has been in the past, the cultivation of the soil. Improve his agricultural methods and teach him to extract more food per acre to feed the future increase of the native population and still have something to sell.

Mohammedanism needs a reference, for it is a factor of no mean importance in Africa. Some students of extreme views picture the growth of a pan-Islamic spirit which will bind all the blacks against the Europeans; and missionary publications often refer to this as an imminent danger possibly with the object [294]of eliciting financial support for Christian propaganda. The writer has no such fears. Mohammedanism is spreading to a limited extent in East Africa, but there is little religious fervour behind it, and it is difficult to see how it can ever become more than a veneer with the up-country tribes, for it is certain that they will never learn Arabic in order to be able to enjoy the Koran.

Among the up-country people who come into intimate contact with Mohammedan life, such as those who come to coast towns to work, it is readily embraced, for it becomes the religion of the cooking pot. The Swahilis and such like are hospitable folk, but may not eat with unbelievers, and it is therefore very expedient for an up-country stranger to become nominally a Mohammedan, for he may then dip his finger in the food bowl with his hosts.

Apart from this, however, there is no doubt that the easy doctrines of Islam appeal to the African; they are suited to his temperament, and more important still, Islamism is not looked upon as an alien religion, for although the Arabs are few, the Swahilis, who form the greater number of the followers of Islam in the country, are only Africans who are a little more civilised and better clothed than their cousins from up-country, while

Christianity is always associated with the coming of the Europeans and with their domination of the country.

Although for many reasons Mohammedanism appears more suited to the black than Christianity—it is a ceremonial religion and it moreover countenances polygamy—nevertheless, it is inadvisable that the State should in any way foster its progress in our African colonies, for it contains many dangerous elements. The Mohammedanism of East Africa is a mild variety, but there is much inflammable material lying about in the Mohammedan world, and it might at any time be blown over to that area. Mohammedanism, too, has a reactionary influence; it stunts cultural development and it appears to be insusceptible to internal evolution. [295]

On these grounds it would appear expedient that the bias of the State should be in favour of the eventual spread of Christianity, for it is a religion of a higher ethical type. It is the religion of the Western world, and although its spiritual progress has been hampered by an extraordinary mass of mediaeval accretions in the shape of dogma, ritual and such like, there are signs that it is endeavouring to eliminate non-essentials and adjust itself to the plane of modern thought. The progress is slow but it has to such a great extent lost its authority and its influence over the people as a mass, that if it wishes to survive it must adjust itself to the age it serves and endeavour to carry mankind a step further in the way of spiritual evolution. As for faith, faith is common to and alike in all religions—faith is the vital spark without which no religion can live or can ever become a vital force—be it a highly developed creed of the West or a lowly primitive type such as we have been considering. Faith evades all logic, and even the higher criticism of advanced clerics leaves it untouched.

During recent years the rapid internal development of East Africa has produced an acute situation with regard to native labour, and although, owing to the present economic depression, this is relieved for the moment, it is bound to recur as trade improves and production increases. The supply of labour has vastly increased during the last ten years, but up to the outbreak of war the amount but rarely kept pace with the demand, and the loss of native life during the German East campaign was so heavy that if the pre-war demand had been maintained there would have been a general shortage; a few years of restricted demand will therefore give a little breathing space, and a number of youths who were not old enough for military service will become old enough to go out and seek work.

Among a certain section of people in England whose knowledge of the colonies is somewhat vague, and whose outlook is tinged with sentimental philanthropy, [296]the employment of blacks as agricultural labourers or industrial workers by British colonists is looked upon with suspicion and as being little removed from slavery. It is apparently based

on the belief that such labour is forcibly seized, badly treated and paid only a nominal wage. Ill-informed criticism is generally faulty, and in the present instance it is particularly so. Twenty years ago the up-country natives were, generally speaking, reluctant to work for private Europeans or for Government, except occasionally to carry loads; as settlement, however, proceeded the demand for farm labour arose, the needs of the native gradually increased, and a few rupees had annually to be earned to pay the hut tax; as these stimuli became felt, so native labour gradually became available. Every year up to the war the supply increased, and more and more natives became accustomed to the idea of working for wages several months in the year. Is this desirable, and if so, why? In the old days, before European occupation of the country, the able-bodied male population had to be always ready to repel raids or participate in raids, and in times of peace its main duty was the herding and guarding of the tribal cattle. The danger of attack ceased with the advent of settled government, and if the younger men of the tribe do not go out to work, they spend the bulk of their time loafing from village to village attending beer feasts and philandering with the young girls; for tribal custom insists that the bulk of the agricultural work shall as formerly be done by the woman.

The elders do not approve of the present habits of the youths, but unfortunately under our rule the bonds of tribal discipline have been relaxed. If this is fully realised it will readily be seen that the absence of a considerable portion of these young men for a part of each year is beneficial to the good order of a native reserve; they are under discipline when working, they learn something, and come back to their villages with money which enriches the tribe. [297]

On the majority of plantations and farms the natives are well treated, and it is the duty of Government to see that they are well housed, well fed, and that any grievances are speedily redressed; inspectors periodically visit employees for this purpose. Ill treatment has occurred from time to time, and isolated cases of brutality on the part of employers have unfortunately happened and have been punished by the courts. Such cases should, however, not be allowed to cloud our vision or distort our sense of proportion any more than the occurrence of a few cases of cruelty to children in England.

As regards wages, the rates are such that have naturally grown up in the country with due regard to the cost of food, the usual village diet of the labourer, and the cost of his simple clothing. It must also be borne in mind that the output of an African is very minute compared with a European, and the supervision required is vastly greater.

A recent petition to the home government headed by prelates, labour representatives, and various well-meaning people took rather an extreme view, and urged the adoption of a

policy entirely native in its outlook, and one which would result in crushing European endeavour in this part of Africa.

One important plank in the policy was the foundation of native industries in the reserves, and so forth. Every well-wisher of the native wishes to see progress in the reserves, but intimate knowledge of the cultural plane of the aboriginal population causes one to realise clearly how easy it is to formulate dicta in London, and how difficult it is to carry them out in Africa.

The individual planting of agricultural products in reserves by the medium of the African hoe, and the labour of the African woman, is an uneconomical form of production, and once the food supply of the tribe is assured, the surplus enriches the Indian middle man more than the native. Long established custom rules that the agricultural work in a tribe shall be carried out [298] by the women, and no ordinance will force the young men to relieve the women of this duty if they do not desire to do so.

Native progress proceeds slowly, and the stimulus for acceleration must come from within if it is to be permanent.

Then again with regard to native industries—conditions of life can be gradually improved, and the people can be taught to build better houses, and to use furniture. The majority, however, cannot afford such luxuries, and are contented with their own mode of life; their idea of saving money being to provide the means to buy live stock, the possession of which is essential for wife purchase.

The renaissance again must come from within. It will come gradually, but not nearly so soon as our benevolent friends hope and desire.

To sum up this brief survey of a complex question, it is desired to impress upon all that the future of the African native and the nature of his relations with the white race will not be decided by the academic recommendations of any body in England. The utmost that philanthropically minded opinion can demand is a high ethical standard in native administration, and the safeguarding by government of native land rights. Further, the well-meaning people at home must trust their own people in Africa, trust to the growth of a tolerant and humane local view of the relationship of black and white. There is no reason to believe that this spirit will not reach as high a level in East Africa as it has done in other parts of our Empire.

Further, as Lord Buxton recently remarked in an address on native problems, and referring to the government of the Union of South Africa and Rhodesia: “Especially do they resent criticism when those who criticise put on a self-righteous air and assume that they and

their associates alone have the welfare of the native at heart, and imply that those [299]who differ are actuated by obstinate or unworthy motives.”

The main points in native policy which long experience of Africa suggest may be stated as follows:

(1) The old tribal discipline and organisation is in danger of dissolution; it rarely rested on very firm foundations, for the authorities were weak; it should receive most careful review by experienced men of knowledge and sympathy, tribe by tribe. The situation is at present drifting, and neither black nor white can see whither.

There is one thing, however, which is obvious, and that is that the new generation of native leaders should be educated by Government to fit them for their duties. Such a step would be widely appreciated and might do a great deal to avert future danger. Their education should, above all, concern itself with the formation of character and the development of responsibility; education seems to so rarely provide the African with these essentials, in fact their vital importance seems to be often overlooked.

(2) The taxation collected from natives by the State for general purposes should be low, and any addition to the standard tax which may be collectable as the wealth of the natives increases should be devoted to specific objects, such as native education, the development of the reserves and such like. The natives should clearly understand this, and it would do a great deal to improve the relations of the Government with the native, for there is at present a well-founded belief in the native mind that they are periodically called upon to pay more and at the same time get but little return for their money; confidence in Government has perceptibly lessened in the last few years.

(3) The excessive infantile mortality in native reserves should receive specific attention, and also the checking of disease generally. On economic grounds [300]alone, epidemics among the native population are far more important than those among cattle; it is feared, however, that up to now they have not received as much attention, and the reason is not far to seek.

Effective measures will entail the training of a considerable staff of native subordinate medical staff who should be distributed throughout the reserves, each group being under a European medical officer.

(4) As has been previously stated, the more dangerous elements of the native population are in the towns; for it is there that the restraining influence of the chiefs and elders is absent, it is there that crime is more prevalent, it is there that undesirable political movements are bred and where more educated material can be found; a fertile soil for the

sedition seed of the Asiatic agitation. Common sense therefore suggests that special efforts be made to reach these mixed assemblages of native life by the provision of suitable educational facilities and by the provision of healthy amusement and entertainment, by evening lectures in subjects both interesting and instructive, by an amusing and healthy native press.

Needless to say, better housing in town locations is an important matter if these people are to be taught to live decent, respectable lives; baths and places for washing clothes are also essential for health and well-being.

(5) Abrupt interference with native customs and tribal laws is to be deprecated; much of the old codes is good, and undesirable features can, with the consent of the people, gradually be eliminated, if the guiding hand applies his reforming touch with judgment; and this brings us to the necessity for the careful selection of administrative officers and the importance of these being trained in ethnological method, for no man can reform and develop a system of which he is not qualified to judge. [301]

Greater knowledge of native psychology will help to maintain the paternal relations which should exist between the natives of a district and their commissioner, and to which the most successful native administrators in the past owe their success.

(6) Education. This is essential, but, as has been explained, matters are not satisfactory at present, nor will they improve much until Government takes it over into its own hands, and it should begin by the formation of a well-equipped normal school wherein a large staff of native teachers should be trained by a picked European staff.

A boarding school should also be founded in each province where an effective industrial training can be given to a number of picked youths, and in conjunction with a sound rudimentary education.

The African is a receptive person, but has little persistence, and is apt to become weary before he is efficient. There are altogether too many young men about with a mere smattering of education which is nothing more than a surface veneer, and is often used as an excuse for escaping manual labour; this spirit needs to be vigorously combated. Very few natives leave the mission schools with anything more than this surface veneer of education, the outward sign of which is a passion for khaki coats, boots, collars and ties, and in this way they ape the European. This may appear ridiculous at present, but there is one thing certain and that is that a renaissance has now begun, and we must in the future be prepared for curious manifestations of the aspiration for self-realisation on the part of the African. The true art of government, therefore, will be to utilise with wisdom any real

signs of their desire to rise to a higher cultural and social plane. The way will not be easy, but much can be attained by wide sympathy and by knowledge of the psychology of the subject.

It must never be forgotten that in a colony of the East African type the European colonist and the [302]native are interdependent. Due consideration and justice for the backward partner must be the keynote of the native policy, for a contented, friendly black population will connote a healthy and prosperous white community. [303]

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L'ENVOI

The student of anthropology is urged to be precise and accurate in his record of facts, and the haunting fear of giving rein to the imaginative side, especially when dealing with beliefs which have almost ceased to evoke response from Western races, often tends to make one's narrative seem dull and lifeless.

The poet is bound by no such paltry conventions, but it is rare to find one who strikes the true note—intimate knowledge coupled with acute insight.

The late Captain Cullen Gouldsbury of Rhodesian repute possessed this rare gift, and the writer takes the liberty of reproducing the following poem as a remarkable and unique attempt to express the native point of view:

THE POINT OF VIEW

*From Songs out of Exile by Cullen Gouldsbury
(Fisher Unwin, 1912)*

White man, cease from your tales—your God may be good for you,
But think you that aught avails to fashion our creed anew?
We, who are born and bred in the fear of 'Mlimo's wrath,
Heirs to eternal dread shall we cast our Witchmen forth
To take as a load instead the creed of ye from the North?

Lo! we are born in the fear of wild and unspeakable things;
Born in the Bush land here, where the souls of the dead have wings.
Hovering high in the air where the shades of even fall,
Shrinking in dim despair at the gate of each lonely kraal—
Scoff not, white man! beware, when the ghosts of the dead men call.

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There are Spirits that walk by night with their heads behind their backs—
There are Spirits that fade from sight in the gloom of the forest tracks;
There are ghosts of the babes that died in the kraal long moons ago,
Ghosts of cripples that glide with shambling pace and slow,
Ghosts of the new-made bride and of many a girl we know.

Yestereen, when the sun sank low in the western sky,
And silently, one by one, the hovering bats flew by,
Ziwa, pride of my heart, my youngest and best-loved wife,
Drew me a pace apart, saying: “Husband, ’tis done with life,
Nay friend, shrink not, nor start! lend me your hunting knife!”

Ay! and she lies there dead—and the youths and maidens mourn,
They bury her, so one said, in the cool of to-morrow’s dawn—
For the evil moor-hens keep a watch on this kraal, I know,
And perch when the world’s asleep, on the hut-tops then below.
See! I will kill a sheep to ward off a further blow!

White man, laugh if you will! such tales are for babes, you say?
Have *you* no God of Ill? Do *you* not cringe and pray?
Offering sacrifice in a temple built of stone?
Do you not seek advice from a priest man of your own?
Do you not pay a price? Are *we* the heathen *alone*?

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GLOSSARY

This includes the native names most used in the text.

DOROBO: Masai word (spelt Torobo by Hollis) often corrupted by travellers to Wandorobo or Andorobo. Dorobo in Masai means tsetse fly. The name for an aboriginal race of hunters who inhabit the great forests of the highlands in East Africa. They call themselves Asi and the Kikuyu call them Adzi. The name of the Athi River is believed to be a corruption of Adzi.

ENGAI (Kikuyu): The deity.

EITHAGA: The name of a Kikuyu clan, members of which are said to possess magical powers; sometimes spelt Aithaga. A member of this clan is called a Mweithaga.

GETHAKA (Kikuyu): The portion of a ridge in Kikuyu owned by a particular family, the title to possession of this being obtained from the Dorobo, the original occupants of the forest. Some regard it as a freehold right, others maintain that the Kikuyu only acquired the right to cut the forest in order to make *shambas*, or gardens. The *gethaka* rights are, however, very real possessions in the eyes of the Kikuyu.

HUKU (Kikuyu): A mole-like rodent—*Tachyorctes sp.*

ICHUA (Kikuyu): A sacrificial fire.

IMU, singular; AIIMU, plural (Kamba): Ancestral spirits.

ITHEMBO, singular; MATHEMBO, plural (Kamba): Sacred place where sacrifices are carried out.

IRA (Kikuyu): White diatomaceous earth which is also used in ceremonial as a purifying agent.

ITWIKI (Kikuyu): A periodic ceremony which marks the termination of a generation or age in the tribe—it corresponds in some ways to the Masai *Eunoto* ceremony. [306]

KIKUYU: The missionaries now often spell it Gikuyu. A member of the Kikuyu tribe is called Mu-Kikuyu—plural, A-Kikuyu. In common parlance, however, if one drops the prefixes and refers to a man of this tribe as a Kikuyu (native)—the latter word being widely understood, it is simpler than attaching the appropriate prefix. An upland tribe in Kenya Colony extending from near Nairobi to Mount Kenya.

KAMBA: Mu-Kamba is the singular; A-Kamba is plural and collective. In the same way as above, it has become more usual to simply refer to them as Kamba (native). Their country is termed Ukamba, and their language Ki-Kamba. A tribe in Kenya Colony, east of Nairobi. There are detached portions of the tribe near Mombasa, near Taveta, and in Tanganyika territory.

KITHANGAONA (Kikuyu): Sacred place.

KU-ROGA (Kikuyu) verb: To place upon or to bewitch.

KIHE (Kikuyu): An uncircumcised boy.

KAMWANA (Kamba): An uncircumcised boy.

KIN̄GNOLI (Kamba): Collective killing or execution by the people of a person convicted of certain serious offences.

KAFARA (Swahili): A charm placed at cross-roads to avert misfortune. If anyone carries it away it is believed that the misfortune or disease will be carried with it.

KIRUME (Kikuyu): The dying curse which can be suspended over his descendants by a dying man.

KIUME (Kamba): The dying curse which can be suspended over his descendants by a dying man.

KONONO (Masai): A clan of serfs believed to be of alien race who live among the Masai and who are the smiths to the tribe. They correspond to the Tumul of the Somalis.

KITA (Kikuyu): The power of the evil eye.

KIAMA (Kikuyu): Council of elders.

MWANAKE, singular; ANAKE, plural (Kikuyu): Warrior class.

MUTUMIA, singular; ATUMIA, plural (Kamba): Tribal elders.

MUTHURI, singular; ATHURI, plural (Kikuyu): *Athuri ya Ukuru*—the senior elders.

MUMO (Kamba): Sacred fig tree. [307]

MUGUMU (Kikuyu): Sacred fig tree, often called *muti wa Engai*.

MAKWA (Kamba): Afflicted by a curse. See *thabu*.

MWATI, singular; MIATI, plural (Kikuyu): A young ewe which has not borne a lamb.

MIATINI (Kamba): The fruit of *Kigelia musa* or *Kigelia pinnata*—used for fermenting beer.

MULUNGU (Kamba): The deity.

MATHAMAKI, singular; AZAMAKI or ATHAMAKI, plural (Kikuyu): An elder of council; his official title, not his grade rank.

MUTURI, singular; ATURI, plural (Kikuyu): A smith.

MUNDU MUGO (Kikuyu): Medicine man.

MUROGI (Kikuyu): Medicine man who deals in black magic.

MUBURI (Kikuyu): Goat.

NGOMA (Kikuyu): Ancestral spirit.

NGOMA (Swahili): A dance. This word is also widely used by up-country natives.

NJELE (Swahili): A half gourd used as a domestic utensil for drinking water, gruel or milk.

NZELI or NZELE (Kamba): A half gourd used as a domestic utensil for drinking water, gruel or milk.

NTHELE, singular; ANTHELE, plural (Kamba): Young married man.

NDORUME (Kikuyu): A ram, a favourite form of sacrifice.

NGÑONDU (Kikuyu): A ewe, which is also used as a sacrifice on certain occasions.

NGUNGA (Kikuyu): Caterpillars.

NJOHI (Kikuyu): Native beer, usually made from sugar cane.

NZAMA (Kamba): Council of elders.

NJAMA (Kikuyu): A consultation by the elders; the proceedings are generally secret.

RIKA (Kikuyu): Generation—age grade.

RATHI (Swahili): Happiness, blessing—generally used of a formal blessing. *Kuwarathi*—to be satisfied or content with. [308]

RUKWARU (Kikuyu): A strip of goat skin bound on the waist of a person to signify that he has duly performed a certain ceremony.

RUENJI (Kikuyu): A razor.

RUORO (Kikuyu): Knife used for branding cattle.

SHAMBA, singular; MA-SHAMBA, plural (Swahili): Cultivated field or garden, widely used by up-country Africans.

KU-TAHIKIA (Kikuyu), verb: To purify. *Ku* is the infinitive prefix common to all verbs.

THABU (Kamba): A curse or afflicted by a curse—a condition which is the result of certain acts, analogous to some forms of *tabu*.

THAHU (Kikuyu): A curse or afflicted by a curse—a condition which is the result of certain acts, analogous to some forms of *tabu*.

THENGIRA (Kikuyu): Literally the goat hut. It is synonymous with the hut in which the unmarried men sleep.

THOMI (Kamba): Open meeting place outside every village.

TATHA (Kikuyu): The semi-digested vegetable matter which forms the contents of a sheep or goat. When an animal is sacrificed this is used as a purifying agent to remove evil. In Kamba language called *muyo*.

UJI (Swahili): Gruel—also widely used by East Africa Bantu tribes. *Uji* is usually made of maize or millet meal.

UKI (Kamba): Beer, especially mead, made from honey, but the word is used for all beer. [309]

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