



Further Notes on the Kikuyu Tribe of British East Africa

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FURTHER NOTES ON THE KIKUYU TRIBE OF BRITISH EAST AFRICA.

BY H. R. TATE.

[WITH PLATES XVII—XVIII.]

Painting and Tattooing.

IN preparation for a dance the Akikuyu unmarried youths smear their bodies with a kind of salt gypsum called *Mungu wa Karian Dusu*, which is obtained principally from a locality between Lakes Naivasha and Elmenteita. They also employ a white clay found on the slopes of Kenya called *Kirera*. This is moistened with a little water and smeared over the face, body and limbs. Wavy lines are then drawn perpendicularly on the latter with the finger which erases the pigment, the face being traced in fantastic lines as shown in the accompanying photograph (Pl. XVII, Fig. 4). Red clay is also smeared around the eyes to give the wearer a fierce look. *Mrututu*, or blue-stone, which is bought from Indian traders, has lately been adopted to rub around the eyes as is the custom of the Akamba. The use of pigments among the Akikuyu seems to be adopted solely for the purpose of increasing the striking appearance of the dancer and has no hidden significance. As young unmarried youths are looking out for their future wives at this time, a good deal depends upon the effect of their toilet at these dances, which are called *Rua*. It is at these dances that the *ndomi* or shoulder shield is worn, as shown by the accompanying photograph (Pl. XVII, Fig. 5). Both young men and women cut marks on their bodies before marriage; the latter also incise three-quarter circles between the eye and ear which are called *miokia*. Horizontal raised scars named *ndemwa* are made upon the chest and abdomen of young girls. This is supposed to improve the appearance of the owner. Young men have three or four horizontal raised scars cut across the loins for the same purpose. The *miokia* are cut by a professional doctor with a kind of wooden skewer, but the *ndemwa* are incised by some woman skilled at this work, who uses a *ruenji*, or kind of scalpel, with which the skin is pierced and prized up to form a raised scar.

Habitations.

The huts of the Akikuyu tribe are simplicity itself, being built of grass and withes, with stout stick-pillars inside to hold up the roof and form corners to the bedsteads, bark rope being used to lash the materials together. Circular huts about 16 feet in diameter are invariable, and hardly any variation except in size takes place

in their structure. Grain houses (*ikumbi*) are always built on piles and temporary dwellings are occasionally constructed in trees in time of war and are called *nguki*.

Young unmarried men sleep together in *thingira*, in which huts the goats and sheep are also penned at night. Unmarried girls also sleep by themselves. Married women have each their own separate hut which their husband is supposed to visit in turn. A male traveller sleeps in the *thingira*.

On the death of the owner his house is either destroyed or left to decay, but never re-occupied or re-entered. The owner is never buried inside his house, but is either thrown out or left inside for the hyenas to drag away. The members of one family to the third generation generally live in the same village, which is usually surrounded by a stout fence pierced by a stockaded doorway (*kihingo*), although this mode of surrounding their villages is gradually being abandoned by the Akikuyu, since the *Pax Britannica* has given them absolute immunity from the attacks of the Masai.

Villages are generally built on a hill both for purposes of circumspection and because, as the natives state, the valleys are colder than more elevated positions. In moving their villages the natives reconstruct new huts from the old material. The bed, the *zigi* or ledge for holding household property, and a few stools are the only furniture of the hut. The bed is fenced in with a sort of screen of twigs. One fire only is made in the centre of the hut, the smoke escaping through the thatch. Refuse from the house is thrown out on to an ash heap outside. Caves in hill sides are often used as shelters in time of war and for hiding goats and sheep. When the site for a new village has been chosen, the owner comes with all his property, accompanied by his wives, and pours on the ground an offering (*kithambio*) of gruel of *mtama*; the head wife is also allowed to pour out a little. The man then prays to Ngai, asking that a prosperous village may rise up on this site and that property, wives, and fruitful fields may be his while he lives here. Building is then commenced, which when finished is followed by the slaughter of a sheep. All the members of the village join in the feast. Wine is next made and drunk by all the male portion of the community and by the married women and a little is spilt in each new hut. Prior to moving from old quarters the head elder of the village sends a goat to be herded by a neighbour until his new buildings are ready, when the animal is returned to its master's flock. This is done to bring good luck to the place. The head wife of the chief is also supposed to suck a few drops of blood from the neck of a live goat whose vein is tapped for this purpose. Her husband must sleep the first night in her hut or she will consider herself grievously slighted. These rites having been observed, the Akikuyu consider that every precaution has been taken to ensure a healthy and prosperous village.

Swimming.

Most Akikuyu know how to swim, though their use of the art is generally confined to crossing flooded rivers. They invariably use the side stroke, and attain considerable speed. Swimming is not taught among the youth, but seems to be

acquired by watching others in the water. Nevertheless very few of the Akamba know how to swim, unless their villages are situated on the bank of a river.

Basket Work.

Rugara, or small vegetable panniers, are made from fibre-string (*rurigi*) obtained from the *mondoi* and *mugyo* trees. The bark is first stripped in long pieces from the tree, then unpicked by hand into a tow-like form, chewed in the mouth, and then rolled out by hand on the thigh. It is finally twisted into string ready for use. The *rugara* has small loop handles on each side, which are oval in shape, and is constructed on a framework of twigs, above which is woven native fibre netted in a kind of chain stitch. All kinds of vegetables and gourds are carried in the *rugara*, which is, in fact, the receptacle for all commodities except grain. *Kiondo*, or native bags, are also made from the same fibre. They are of varying size, and used for carrying native grain.

String.

Besides *rurigi*, the process of making which has just been described, *ruga*, made from the sinews of a bullock's thigh, is used for bow strings. It is plaited in two strands while raw, wound round a spindle, and left ready for use. *Ruga*, made from a goat's leg, is used for sewing skins together, but a single strand only is used.

Leather Work.

The *mukwa*, or strap made from raw hide, is used largely by both the Akikuyu and Akamba in carrying loads on their shoulders. The process of preparing hides is as follows:—

After a bullock is killed the carcass is flayed with sharp knives, care being taken to separate the outer layer of fat from the skin, and strips of hide of required length are cut from it while the hide is raw. The strips are soaked in boiling water for about an hour, and then curried with a short stick which removes the hair. This process is repeated for about three days, when the strap is greased and is ready for use. The only other use to which ox-hide is put is for the upper covering of the bed. The hide, after being stretched on the ground for twenty-four hours until it is dry, is scraped with a potsherd (*rugeo*). The legs, head and outside parts are cut off, and the remainder spread over a layer of grass on the bedstead.

The method of preparing a goat skin is as follows:—

The skin is first pegged out on the ground, and all the extraneous fat scraped off with a knife. After twenty-four hours the hair is scraped with an axe. The skin is then treated by a vigorous rubbing between the hands, and sheep's fat or castor oil worked into it until it is thoroughly supple. It is then ready for use. If a goat's skin is required as a *kizii*, or man's cloak, the hair is not removed, but oil is rubbed into the skin with the hands.

Both men and women prepare leather. The men sew their *kizii* with *ruga*, punching a hole with an awl called a *mukuha*. The edge of the *kizii* is often bound with a strip of leather from which the hair has been removed. The women sew their own clothes, and often sew on the borders tiny white beads which form a chain all along the seams.

Two leather bags, both called *mondo*, are used by the Akikuyu, and are sewn with *ruga*. The smaller one, which is about eight inches square, is made of the skin of the bush-buck or impalah, and is used for carrying tobacco, needles, and knives. It is generally worn round the waist. The large one, which is about a foot square, is made from the same skins, and is used for carrying salt, honey, and occasionally, on a long journey, for water.

Fire.

Fire is produced by means of the fire drill. The stick twisted between the hands (*kithagethi*) is cut from the *muchetha* tree. The block drilled is called *kika*, and is cut from the same tree. It is generally held down on the flat of a knife by one person, while the *kithagethi* is rapidly revolved between the hands of another. Dry grass is ready to receive the smouldering flame, and fire is soon produced. The Akikuyu always bring fire to a new house from the field, it being considered very unlucky to bring fire from another house. The owner would expect his goats to die and property to consume away if he broke this rule.

The Akikuyu believe in a fire god which is sometimes seen in a camp fire, but not in houses. They state that it often carries a man up into the air, when he is instructed as to what he should do to gain the favour of Ngai. After an hour or two he is deposited again by the fireside. My informant tells me that he only knows one man personally who has been carried aloft in this manner, but he has been told that several others have had a like experience. The hero of the occasion summons a council of the Elders next day, and they sacrifice a sheep and a she-goat to the fire god beneath the *mugomo* or sacred tree. The flesh is eaten by the Elders only, but the skin of the sheep is cut into strips and given to the women of the tribe, who wear it on their necklaces; it is supposed to bring them luck.

The she-goat (*mwati*), not yet having bred, is cut up into little bits, from which the elders take a bite or two and then lay the rest at the foot of the tree for Ngai to eat. The flesh of both sheep and goat is, however, first scorched over the fire which has been made under the tree. The next day a he-goat is killed for the young men, the strips of its skin being worn by them for a few days on the second finger of the right hand, and subsequently fixed on the spear.

Food

The Akikuyu live almost entirely on a cereal and vegetarian diet. Of the former the following is the chief list:--

	Swahili name.
<i>Mbemba</i> ... maize ... ..	... <i>mkindi</i> .
<i>Mohia</i> ... millet ... ..	... <i>mtama</i> .
<i>Mukombi</i> ... small grain... ..	... <i>mkonyori</i> .

						Swahili name.
<i>Muraiya</i>	...	}	...	...	...	...
<i>Mwere</i>	...		...	...	...	<i>mwebi.</i>
<i>Ugimbi</i>	...		...	...	...	<i>wimbi.</i>

These are either eaten whole or ground into flour. *Mweri* and *mkombi* are the only two used to make gruel (*uchuru*).

Among vegetables and legumens are:—

<i>Ngwachi</i>	...	sweet potato	...	...	...	<i>kiazi.</i>
<i>Kikwa</i>	...	yam	...	..	...	<i>kiazi kikuu.</i>
<i>Nduma</i>	...	native rhubarb	...	...	...	<i>maijugwa.</i>
<i>Mwanga</i>	...	cassava	...	...	...	<i>muhogo.</i>
<i>Kigoa</i>	...	sugar cane	...	...	...	<i>mua.</i>
<i>Njugu</i>	...	tree bean	...	...	...	<i>mbazi.</i>
<i>Thoroko</i>	...	a kind of haricot bean (red)	...	...	...	<i>kundi.</i>
<i>Thuu</i>	...	black bean	...	...	...
<i>Mboshu</i>	...	a kind of red bean	...	...	...
<i>Njahi</i>	...	a black bean	...	...	...	<i>fwu.</i>
<i>Marigu</i>	...	banana and plantain	...	...	...	<i>ndizi.</i>

Sugar cane is chewed as a thirst assuager, and is also pounded up for the manufacture of *njohi*, or native wine.

On very rare occasions beef is slaughtered, and more frequently sheep and goats. The meat of wild animals is scarcely ever eaten. Bread making is unknown. Milk, both of cows and goats, is much used. Only children drink it fresh (*mwithi*), and, if it is kept, the milk gourds into which it is poured are first rinsed out with cow's urine, then dried in the smoke, and finally wiped out with a cow's tail swish. The milk turns directly it is poured into the gourd, and becomes *iria rimata*. Butter is made by shaking the milk inside a gourd. The hard granules which subsequently separate themselves from the whey are called *ngorono*. Neither milk nor buttermilk (*uria*) is ever mixed with grain.

Uchuru (hot gruel) is made from flour and water, and on the occasion of a big feast is generally drunk before roasted goat's flesh is eaten. Marrow (*muthimu*) is much appreciated, and sucked from the bone. Fresh blood is drunk, and also mixed with milk. Besides being taken for its saline properties, it is held to have a strengthening effect on the drinker. Men, women and children all drink blood. Cereals are stored in small huts (*ikumbi*) built on piles. They are the property of the owner of the field from which the crop has been harvested. Rock salt (*igata*) bought in bazaars is used as seasoning in the cooking of cereals. Honey is often mixed with *uchuru* to give it a sweet taste.

Mode of Cooking.

The Akikuyu, even when pressed for hunger, keep their meat for two or three days before eating, and prefer it slightly high. Meat is generally either roasted on spits or placed on a kind of platform of twigs (*ndara*) over the fire. Meat is also

boiled, and generally preferred that way by women. The cooking pots (*nyungu*) are made of clay, and are set on three stones over the fire. They are cleaned out with cold water. The gravy or soup in which meat has been cooked is called *thathi*, and is much relished. Each woman cooks her own meal in her own hut, and shares it with her husband when he passes the night in her hut. The food of men and women is cooked together. The Akikuyu like their meat well cooked.

When grain is to be converted into flour it is first put into mortars (*nderi*) and pounded by women with long poles until it has been fairly well pulverized. The meat is then placed on a flat rock and is rubbed by the women with a cylindrical stone called a *theo*.

Manufacture of Drinks.

Two sorts of native wine are made by the Akikuyu, *njohi* and *uki*. *Njohi* is made from sugar cane which is cut when it has attained its full height; the outer rind is then pared off and the inside cut into little bits. A barked tree trunk, from the top side of which has been scooped out a series of little holes about the size of a small hand basin, is generally to be found lying close to the village of the principal chiefs. It is called an *ndiri*. These holes are filled up with handfuls of chopped sugar cane, which is pounded with long sticks by the women until it is reduced to a pulp. This is put into an oxskin which is laid over a hole in the ground so that it forms a concave receptacle. Water is now added and the pulp is taken in handfuls by the young warriors and the juice wrung out. When nothing but the latter remains in the skin it is called *ngogoyo ya igwa*, and is transferred to big gourds. Slices of the fruit of the *muratina* tree are added and are allowed to remain in the gourds for twelve or fourteen hours. After these have been removed the *njohi* is ready, but only the elders are allowed to drink this nectar, which is said to be very intoxicating, though I believe that the heads of African natives are more easily turned than is the case with Europeans. *Njohi* must be drunk off quickly, as it is said to keep for only twelve hours after it has reached its proper state. *Uki* is made from honey and water. To two gourds of water add one gourd of unstrained honey. The liquid portion of this mass is squeezed by hand and the wax thrown away. The residue is then placed in a vessel and left for about eighteen hours, when it is ready. Elders only (except on certain festivals) are allowed to drink *uki*, which is said to be quite as intoxicating as *njohi*. Like the latter it will only keep for one day.

Meals.

The Akikuyu eat whenever they feel hungry, but a meal is generally taken at daybreak by all the members of the village before going to their respective employments. This food is cooked in the evening and laid aside ready for the next morning. The women return from the fields at sunset bringing firewood with them and prepare the meal as soon as they return to their huts. The women and children eat first, having previously dished up the food of the men, who eat together, both married and unmarried men. Periodically sheep and goats are

sacrificed as an offering to Ngai. This is done, apparently, about every quarter, to propitiate the deity so that success may follow the owners of the village, and flocks and herds may prosper. The women eat a sheep and the men a he-goat. The ceremony, which is exclusively confined to the village, is as follows:—At sunset all the inhabitants are gathered together including women and children. A huge fire is built in the centre of the village. The elders kill both goat and sheep, the young men holding them. After both men and women have eaten to their heart's content of roast meat, the oldest woman in the village takes a piece of fat from the entrails, everyone else standing around her, and holding it aloft petitions Ngai to send prosperity to the village, to the men, women, and children; husbands to the women and health to the flocks and herds. She promises good conduct on the part of the members of the village and finally places the fat on the embers. (This ceremony is only one of the many adopted by the Akikuyu in their worship and petitions to Ngai.) The next morning all the village elders, young men and women drink *uki*, and the day is observed as a general holiday. The elders generally get drunk, but no one else is allowed to drink more than enough to produce a certain amount of exhilaration. No intercourse is allowed between men and women for eight days after this feast. The Akikuyu believe that if any infraction of this rule takes place a mortality among the flocks will ensue.

Invited guests or strangers have food brought to them if they have arrived from a journey and the other members of the family are not eating. In eating meat one man cuts up the carcase and apportions a share to everyone. The only implements used at meals are *kiuga*, a half gourd, and *kahiyu*, a knife. The Akikuyu allay the pangs of hunger on a long journey by drinking water whenever it is procurable.

Religion, Fetishes, etc.

The Akikuyu do not believe in the soul of a man as distinct from his visible body. To dream of dead people in their estimation is highly undesirable. The dreamer takes live charcoal in his hands next day and rubs it between his palms saying, "I shall not dream of that dead man again." Wraiths are not believed in neither are animals credited with superhuman intelligence.

A sheep is generally killed by the nearest relative after a death in a village, but the idea is not a sacrificial one. The owner disembowels the goat, throwing the dung from its entrails into the water of the nearest stream, with which he washes himself all over and is supposed to purify himself thereby. Until he has done this he cannot eat with others.

Only the elders of a village are buried in the ground, young men and women being thrown into the jungle.

Obsession and Possession.

All diseases are regarded by the Akikuyu as having been caused by *Ngai Mwuru* or the bad deity. Nightmares, however, are looked on as merely bad dreams and not ascribed to his malevolent influence. The same view is taken of

erotic dreams, but in the case of a married man when travelling away from home it is looked on as portending evil, and he sacrifices a goat as soon as he returns to his village.

The Akikuyu apparently do not believe that a demon enters into a man during illness, but they say if Ngai foreordains that he will live, he will do so, and *vice versa*. A medicine man, however, is generally called in if the illness does not leave the sick man for several days. A goat is slaughtered and the blood caught in a half gourd. Into this the medicine man pours the medicine from his *mbutho* or phial, the ingredients of which are said to be the extracts of many herbs and the bark of trees. To this is added a little honey and, the whole being stirred up, the patient drinks it off, the medicine man having first made a few passes round his head with the *mbutho*. Many days may elapse before a gradual recovery sets in.

Hysterical and epileptic fits are called *ngoma*, and are supposed, together with all other illnesses, to have been sent by *Ngai Mwuru* on account of the previous wrong-doing of the sufferer.

Spiritualism.

The medicine man (*murogi*) holds conversation only with the dead man whose life he has been unable to save. According to his own statement he goes out at dead of night and visits the corpse where it has been thrown out into the bush. Placing a little dust made from herbs and bark on the palms of his hands, he lays them on the dead man and says, "Get up." The dead man gets up and says, "Who has brought you here?" The wizard answers, "I know not. But do as I tell you and revile your father, mother and your brothers." The dead man is supposed to obey and after the medicine man has thrown a little more medicine on him the conversation is ended and the latter goes his way. Those reviled by the corpse are supposed to generally fall ill soon afterwards and occasionally even to die. It is only with the recently dead that the wizard claims power to converse. This kind of *murogi* is stated by the Akikuyu to be a malevolent person who has no friends and who spares no one in the exercise of his craft. There are other medicine men who do cure sick people.

Idolatry.

The Akikuyu make small images of clay which represent men and women. They are not idols but seem more in the nature of dolls. The children play with them, and in a dance between the unmarried men and girls the former carry the dolls, both male and female, in the palms of their hands. These images seem to be part of a kind of game concerning which the Akikuyu are unwilling to say much. It is also stated that they are used in certain ceremonies, such as the praying for rain and the celebration of the gathering in of the crops.

Spirits and Demons.

The Akikuyu state that they sometimes see spirits at night. The man to whom the apparition appears gets a piece of fat with which he rubs his eyelids.

The appearance of the spirit is said to be like that of the colobus monkey. The next morning a sheep is generally killed as a sacrifice to Ngai. Both disease and death are held to be caused by the latter. Demons appear only in dreams which are precursors of misfortune.

Nature-Spirits.

The *mugomo* tree, on account of its size and fine appearance, is regarded as the sacred tree, and it is not ruthlessly cut down as is the case with all other trees which impede clearing operations during the making of fields. Ngai is supposed to live up in its branches, but he descends in order to eat the meat of the sacrifice, which is offered below. Groves are favourite places of worship for the Akikuyu, and animals found therein are regarded as sacred, especially the colobus monkey, which is held to be under the special protection of Ngai in these localities. Elsewhere it is ruthlessly slaughtered for its pelt, which contributes towards the full dress of a warrior. Sheep and goats are sacrificed beneath the *mugomo* tree either to intercede for rain or for a sick child, or to thank the deity for prosperity and to pray him to avert future harm. The whole of the meat is left underneath the tree, the fat being placed in a cleft of the trunk or in the branches, as special titbits for Ngai. Those who worship merely cross their lips with a morsel of meat before sacrificing.

Polytheism.

The Akikuyu recognise three gods:—two good and one bad. The first sends riches, such as cattle, and goats, and also rain, thunder and lightning; the second is responsible for good wives and healthy children, and to the third or bad deity are attributed all illnesses, and the loss by death or war of livestock. All three gods are called Ngai. To the god who sends riches, supplication and sacrifice are made before war. He is considered the supreme deity and credited with divine power. If a man is good this Ngai can give him much property. If he does wrong the same power can strike him down with disease and cause his livestock to dwindle away. The Akikuyu regard their deities as common to other tribes, such as the Akamba and Masai. Generally speaking it seems to be their belief that constant sacrifices are necessary to propitiate even the good deities. The sudden death of a man, for instance by lightning, is ascribed to some evil act of his life being punished by Ngai.

Worship.

The office of priest (*mundu mugu*) is hereditary. The father educates his son, or two sons if he has them. The same person is sometimes chief and priest. When a priest is exercising his spells over a sick person he has no connection with his wives, as it is supposed that by so doing he will spoil the cure.

The following are the names of the dance-festivals:—

- (1) *Ngakare*, the dance held after war, to celebrate the death of those of the enemy who have fallen.

- (2) *Ruhuyu wa Ngombe*, the festival to celebrate the capture of cattle during war.
- (3) *Irua*, the festival before the circumcision of boys.
- (4) *Uregu*, ditto before the circumcision of girls (*Kichukia*, *Nguchu* and *Mugoyo*). The dances of the unmarried men and girls are not festivals but love dances. *Muthunguehi*, the dance of the Elders and married women, is also of an erotic nature.
- (5) *Nguru*, the festival of the warriors before going to war.

Prayer is only offered by the Akikuyu at the time of sacrifice when it is a public ceremony. In times of illness or epidemic among the herds prayers are offered to Ngai, but they are always accompanied by sacrifice. Only temporal benefits are asked for. One may say that prayer, as we understand the word, is unknown to the Akikuyu.

Sacrifices are offered to all three deities. The ceremony is always a public act. Priests must be present and intercede with Ngai. Sheep and goats are the invariable sacrifice offered, and Ngai is supposed to be appeased by eating the meat which is left for him. As the celebrants always retire and leave the meat behind them they are unable to explain how Ngai possesses himself of it. They say that, if a man returned and ate or stole it, he would die.

Austerities.—Spiritual communications are said by the priests to be received only during dreams. The only austerities they are called on to practise during the exercise of their spells are interdiction *a mensa et toro* as far as their wives are concerned.

Purification.—After bloodshed or contact with the dead (*mukuu*) the Akikuyu purify themselves. All the elders are called together and a sheep is slaughtered. One of the elders cuts a strip of hair from above both ears of those who have shed blood. The hair is thrown away, but after this ceremony the warriors rub themselves with the dung from inside the sheep mixed with water. The body is finally cleansed with water only. (The remainder of the hair on the head of the purified person is subsequently shaved off by his wife.) The elders then eat the meat, but those purified may not do so.

Contact with women is forbidden for one month after the shedding of blood. A similar purification is carried out after the contact with the dead, a goat being slaughtered and its dung rubbed on the hands and body of those defiled.

Miscellaneous Ceremonies.—Children are named on the day of their birth by the midwife (*mwitchiarithia*), who has been instructed previously by the mother. A goat is generally killed on the day of the birth of a child by all Akikuyu of ordinary affluency.

Marriage Ceremonies.—When a woman has been bought by her husband and goes to his village, he finds a new house for her. She lives in this hut together with her most intimate girl friends for five days, during which time they bewail day and night her approaching loss of maidenhood and freedom of life. On the sixth day the husband is allowed to have access to her, and her former companions return



FIG. 1.—KIKUYU FINGER RINGS.

Photographs by R. Meineitzhagen, Esq.

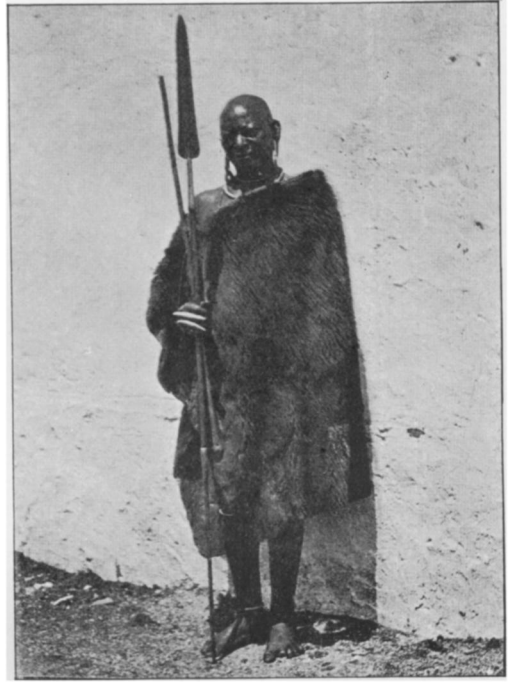


FIG. 2.—A KIKUYU ELDER.



FIG. 3.—YOUTH PAINTED FOR THE "IRUA."

Photographs by W. Scoresby Routledge, Esq.



FIG. 4.—BODY ORNAMENTED WITH WHITE CLAY.



FIG. 5.—"NDOMI" OR DANCING SHIELD.

FURTHER NOTES ON THE KIKUYU TRIBE, BRITISH EAST AFRICA.



FIG. 1.

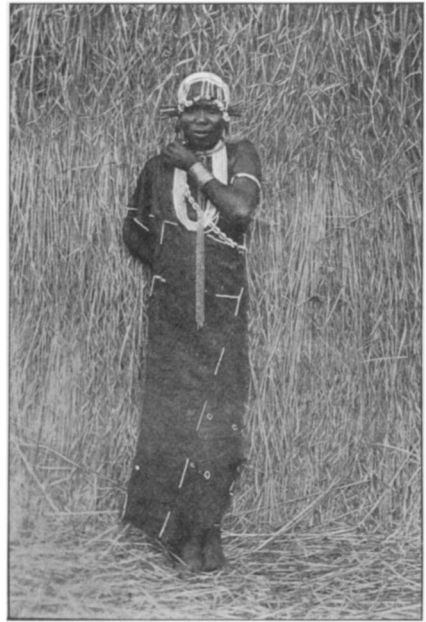
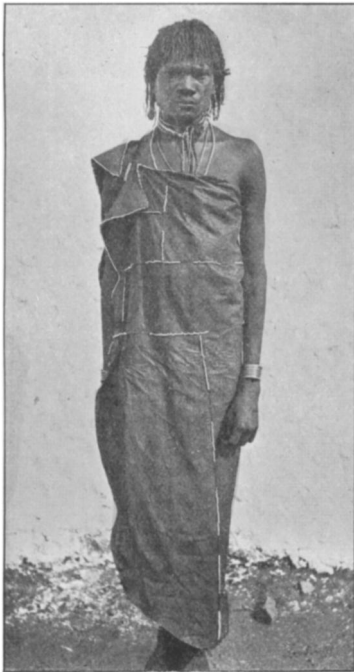


FIG. 2.

DRESS WORN BY GIRLS AFTER CIRCUMCISION.

Photograph by R. Meineitshagen, Esq.

Photograph by W. Scoresby Routledge, Esq.



**FIG. 3.—DRESS WORN BY BOYS
AFTER CIRCUMCISION.**

Photograph by R. Meineitshagen, Esq.



FIG. 4.—NATIVE HURDLE USED AS A DOOR.

Photograph by W. Scoresby Routledge, Esq.

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to their homes with a present of fat. After a month of married life a sheep is slaughtered, the eating of which constitutes a kind of marriage feast. The election of a chief does not partake of the nature of a religious ceremony. In the case of one tribe making a treaty with another, the warriors of one side first come and receive from their future allies two sheep and much food. This is eaten on the spot. The warriors then return to their own country and a visit from their late hosts follows with a similar feast. Many palavers follow and friendship is finally sealed between the two tribes.

Circumcision.

The practice of circumcision prevails everywhere among the Akikuyu. It is practised upon both sexes as soon as they reach puberty. Before the latter period a girl is known as a *karegu*; after circumcision a *mwai retu*. A boy is known as a *kakee* until he becomes a *mwanake* or young man. The custom is said by the Akikuyu to have the same origin in regard to both males and females, viz., it has been handed down from former generations. Skilled old men, of whom there are always a few in every district, perform the operation on boys, and old women on girls. The position of circumcisor (*murwithia*) is an honourable one and is hereditary. Males are cut with a special knife with a blade about 4 inches long and an inch broad; the foreskin (*ngwati*) is cut off, but a portion of it which is left is drawn down below the glans, where it forms, after healing, a large excrescence of skin. This is very marked in some cases. The clitoris (*mugura*) of the female is excised with a scalpel, and, in the case of both sexes, the parts cut off are thrown away. For about a month after the ceremony both girls and boys are known as *kichairi*. The latter wear a long skin robe (*nguo ya maribi*) until their wounds are healed. (Plate XVIII, Fig. 3.) Girls wear an upper garment of skin over their breasts which is known by the same name, and coils of wire around their heads, from which depend small white discs (*ngenyi*), made either from ostrich eggs or goats' bones. (Plate XVIII, Figs. 1 and 2.) Castor oil is used by both sexes to heal their wounds, and for two months circumcised persons are exempt from labour, one month during healing and one month afterwards.

Circumcision is regarded as neither a religious duty nor a law among the Akikuyu, but only as a custom. Nevertheless it is counted a disgrace for a married woman to have connection with an uncircumcised boy, and, so far from the operation ever being dispensed with on account of the pain it causes and for fear of it deterring proselytes, boys and girls who are afraid are caught and made to be cut against their will. The recognised name for circumcision among the Akikuyu is *mambura*. It is not considered to render marriage prolific, and, although the Akikuyu cannot tell you what advantage they derive from the practice, it is in full force to-day and not in the slightest degree likely to die out.