

the feather. The leaf, from its perishable nature, could not long stand the wear and tear of a hunting trip, and this led to a craving for something more durable. The great stroke of genius was the discovery that the attachment of a wing at the base of the arrow, be it leaf, leather, or feather, increased the precision of the projectile, and I confess that I am unable to guess how this was likely to have suggested itself to primitive man.

The most highly developed arrows in British East Africa are those of the A-Kamba, and the finish and balance of a good example is equal to anything that could be turned out in Europe.

Most of the hunting tribes mark the detachable heads of their poisoned arrows to enable a hunter to establish a claim to his quarry; the wooden portion generally contains the clan-mark, and the iron point the personal mark, of the owner.

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### THE 'MŪGUMO' TREE IN CONNECTION WITH KIKUYU CIRCUMCISION CEREMONIES

BY A. R. BARLOW

Many of the numerous 'Mūgumo' trees scattered throughout the Kikuyu country are found to be regarded by the natives as sacred and are places of sacrifice. This, however, is not the case with *all* trees of the species, which would appear to be a kind of parasitic rubber.

Especially in connection with the circumcision ceremonies does the 'Mūgumo' tree play an important part, a ceremony performed on the day preceding the circumcision morning being devoted particularly to it.

In the Mathira (Mazera), Trans-Tana, country this ceremony is known as 'Gūikia,' i.e. 'the throwing' ceremony, and the tree is one at which the ceremony has been held by successive generations from time immemorial: although should the original tree have fallen or have been cut down for any reason, a new tree will have been planted to take its place, the new

tree being a cutting from the original one. Should it be that the tree has fallen into disuse (as in the case of the 'Mūhingo' when no boys are circumcised for nine seasons), or should happen to be a new tree not used before for this purpose, a sacrifice must first be made at the foot to ensure success in its use. The tree is also trimmed, the smaller branches being cut away so as to leave a space in the middle, which gives it when viewed from the front the appearance of a large catapult-stick.

These preliminaries over, and a great crowd of spectators having gathered, the boys to be circumcised come running to the open space which has been cleared round the tree. There is a certain honour in being the first to arrive at the tree, the weaklings who may have been left behind being the subjects of real concern to their relations. As they approach the clearing the boys pass a fire at which bananas have been roasted for them, and each has handed to him a banana, which he bites and throws down, and also two or more 'ndorothe'-sticks, on receiving which he passes on into the clearing. The 'ndorothe' are light rods ornamented with hair of the colobus monkey; there are two kinds used in Mathira—a short one about four feet long, and another about six feet; the ones handed at first to the boys are of the short kind. Arriving in the clearing each boy throws one rod over the opening in the tree in spear-fashion. A dance of a special character is then performed by the boys and girls to be circumcised, the girls having also come to the clearing, but not running. After this dance each boy throws a second rod over the tree and then proceeds to strike the tree rapidly with a club or bludgeon; the club is then taken from him by a young man who gives him one of the long 'ndorothe'-sticks.

The girls are now conducted to the tree by the women and each girl takes off the hoop—consisting of a certain kind of stick bent round and tied—which has been placed round her neck, unties it, breaks it, and, placing the pieces against the stem of the tree, lets them fall to the ground at its foot. She then pokes the tree four times with the end of a light wand which she has in her hand.

Finally both the boys and the girls go to the foot of the tree and certain men ascend it and pluck twigs from it which

they let fall to the ground. Here a tussle for the twigs occurs amongst the women, who present them to the boys and girls—an odd number of twigs to a boy and an even number to a girl: it is usually five twigs for a boy and four for a girl.

The ceremony is now over, but each boy and girl takes his or her bunch of twigs home to the village at which they are to be circumcised. They are there given in charge of the mother of the village, who takes particular precautions that they do not get lost or changed until the next morning. At the circumcision next morning each boy or girl has his or her twigs placed for sitting upon during the operation; and, the operation being performed, takes them back to the mother at the village. She stores them very carefully in two calabashes, one for the boys and one for the girls, and puts them away in a particular position. These twigs make their appearance again on two subsequent occasions: a few days after, when they have added to them twigs (five for a boy, four for a girl) of a bush called 'mūkenia,' and again when the boys and girls have healed and the ceremonies of circumcision are ended, and this time they are strewed by the mother in the cupboard-space at the head of her bed, the stems all pointing to the head of the bed, and are left there to wither and be consumed by the white ants.

The ceremonies connected with the 'Mūgumo' vary in different parts of Kikuyu. In the district near Nairobi the tree is not an ancestral one but may be any 'Mūgumo' tree fixed upon by divination and not necessarily one which has been used for the purpose before. Neither is the tree trimmed, as, being always a small tree, the 'ndorothi'-sticks are thrown right over the top and not through a gap in the middle of the branches. No sacrifice either is considered necessary at the foot of the tree to guard against unfriendly influences. At the throwing ceremony a boy to be circumcised first throws a club over the tree and then a 'ndorothi'-stick of the long kind; after which the boys themselves climb the tree, armed with clubs or axe-handles, and knock the branches and leaves off the tree until it is almost bare, but they are not allowed to cut with a knife. Before descending each boy picks his bunch of five, or any odd number of twigs, which he retains until

he goes home to the circumcision village, where he hands them to the mother. The girls do not take part in the ceremony, but their twigs are plucked for them by the young men. They participate, however, in the subsequent dance. The mother places all the bunches of twigs on the roof of her hut outside for that night, and not inside as in the Mathira country. No doubt there are other variations in other parts.

In Mathira when an ancestral 'Mūgumo' tree becomes unsafe from age, or too large, it may be cut down to the accompaniment of a sacrifice. Four cuttings (branches) are planted near at hand and whichever becomes the most flourishing tree is adopted as the tree for the future performance of the ceremonies; the others may either be left standing or may be cut down on the occasion of the sacrifice at the initial 'throwing' ceremony of the chosen tree.

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## THE NESTING HABITS OF SOME EAST AFRICAN BIRDS

BY W. M. CONGREVE, M.B.O.U.

My excuse, if any is needed, for writing these notes for the N.H. Society's Journal, is that exceedingly little is known of the nesting seasons and habits of the birds of this country. There are also very few publications in the English language that are of any use as guides, and, in consequence, any amateur oologically inclined is very much at sea as to when and where to look for birds' nests. It is therefore hoped that the following rough descriptions of a few eggs and nests found by the writer may in a small measure help to swell the inadequate amount of information published up to date.

### THE EAST AFRICAN CROWNED CRANE (*Balearica gibbericeps*)

A pair of cranes of the above species reside on a seven-hundred-acre glade of the Mau forest not far from Njoro