



Pokomo Folklore.

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POKOMO FOLKLORE.

BY ALICE WERNER.

(Read at Meeting, May 21st, 1913.)

THE Wapokomo are a Bantu tribe inhabiting both banks of the Tana river, from Chara (a few miles from the sea) to within a short distance of the Equator. They are, (unless we count the few outlying Swahili to be found along the coast beyond Lamu), the furthest outpost of the Bantu race in this direction. Beyond them, on the north-east, are the Somali, and, on the north, various Galla tribes, or tribes allied to them, such as the Rendile. The Galla are also interspersed here and there among the Pokomo on the western bank of the Tana, and the Wasanye and Waboni (probably allied to, if not identical with the hunter tribes called Dorobo by the Masai) range over parts of the district. Pokomo, the name by which this tribe is usually known, represents the Swahili pronunciation: they call themselves Wa-fokomo (f representing the peculiar sound of "bilabial f").

The Wapokomo are divided into thirteen tribes, each of which occupies a fairly well-defined area, though parts of some have migrated and settled in the territory belonging to others. The names of the tribes and districts are identical, and I have not yet been able to ascertain satisfactorily to which the name was first applied. So far the balance of testimony seems to be in favour of the names belonging to the districts and being adopted by the tribes when they settled there; but one old man (at Kulesa) said

that the Buu and Ngatana tribes received their names from God (Muungu) before they migrated into the Tana valley from the north-east. (The Tana, by the bye, is called by them Tsana, which is the Pokomo word for a river of any size,—a smaller stream being *muho*, or, in Swahili, *mtu*.)

The names of the tribes are as follows, the first eight being known collectively as *Wantu wa dzuu* (people of above, *i.e.* of the Upper Tana) and the rest as *Wantu wa ninsi* (people of below). They are given in geographical order, going from north to south :—

Korokoro. ¹	Kinakomba.	Ngatana.
Malinkote.	Gwano.	Dzunza.
Malalulu.	Ndera.	Buu.
Zubaki.	Mwina.	Kalindi.
Ndura.		

The Ndera are the last of the up-river tribes, the boundary between them and the Mwina being a short distance south of the second southern parallel.

I can throw no light on the etymology of these names, save that I am told Buu is the name of a kind of fish, and Kalindi is derived from Dindi (a hole or pit), from the pits in which, according to an obscure tradition, the ancestors of the Pokomo at one time lived underground. This seems to imply that the name Kalindi, at any rate, was not taken from the place where the people settled, and falls in with a statement obtained independently at another place,—according to which the Mwina, Dzunza, and Kalindi were the three aboriginal tribes and “lived here on the Tana first of all.” Possibly, too, Korokoro may be connected with Chikorokoro (elbow), and refer to the bend of the Tana near which that tribe is located. A village some miles below Kulesa, on a bend of the river, is called Chunoni (at the hip).

Each of these tribes, (*vyeti*, plural of *kyeti*), consists of

¹ Individuals of these tribes are called Mu-Korokoro, Mu-Malinkote, etc. ; plural, Wa-Korokoro.

several exogamous clans, (*masindo*, plural of *sindo*). The pedigrees I have collected show that descent is counted through the father, and that both sons and daughters belong to his clan. They not infrequently marry into another tribe; but no marriages take place, (or, at any rate, none did till recently), between the Wantu wa dzuu and the Wantu na nsini, and the distinction, not to say antagonism, is still kept up in other ways.

One curious point is that the names of several Pokomo *masindo* are also the names of Galla clans, *e.g.* the Meta, Nta, Ilani, Karayu, and Garijela of the Zubaki tribe. The Garijela, according to one informant, is another name for the Kinakaliani clan, so possibly the Galla designations were aliases, or alternative names. This is rendered more likely by the fact that the Korokoro tribe have even discarded their own language for that of their oppressors; but I cannot learn that intermarriage has taken place to any appreciable extent, or that Pokomo customs have been modified by Galla influence. But it would be premature to express any opinion on these points. The physical type, at any rate, is perfectly distinct.

So far I have been unable to discover anything which could fairly be described as totemism. The few *miiko* (prohibitions) of which I have heard do not necessarily bear that interpretation,—but as yet my information is too vague to suggest any conclusion. The Mbaji clan of the Mwina tribe does not eat the fish called *mukungu* or *fyoka*, which is elsewhere considered very palatable, but I have not learnt any reason for this abstinence. The Pokomo are among the few peoples (I have not heard of any others) who eat crocodile from choice; they have been known to protest against the destruction of crocodiles' eggs, lest the supply of their meat should run short. But some clans abstain from the dainty,—again I know not why. Rats (*mpanya*) are forbidden food to all Pokomo “from the Wakalindi to the Wakorokoro”; so are the leopard, wild

dog, baboon, and small monkey called *ngoto*; but half the nation eats the monkey called *chima*, and half also eat lion,—which half not specified. The hippopotamus is eaten by some and avoided by others of the same tribe, *e.g.* the Wabuu.

The names of the clans, with rare exceptions, suggest nothing in this respect. Many of them are compounded with *kina*. This, I am told, is a word of the Upper Tana dialect. I could get no explanation of it, but suppose it to have the same meaning as it has in Swahili, viz. "relations, family, kin." Sometimes the second half of the compound has a recognizable meaning in present-day Pokomo,—and I hope by further enquiry to increase the number of these examples; sometimes one can get no other explanation than "*sindo tu*" ("it is only a clan name"). *Mbare*, in *Kinambare*, is the up-river equivalent to *nzare*, the name by which the Kulesa and Ngao people designate two kinds of wading birds, (the smaller, I think, is a white ibis). But no one seems to be aware of anything which might lead us to suppose that it was the totem of the Kinambare. My informants denied that they abstain from eating it, and I could not elicit the smallest hint that they have any special ideas about it at all. Kinangombe, Kinamongo, and Kinahafa are compounded with words meaning, respectively, "cattle," "back" (or, more probably, "the further side" of the Tana), and "here." There is another clan (of the Wakilindi) called Mamboo, which seems to mean "people of the hither bank" (*mboo*). Gomeni is the name of a place; *Uta*, I thought, was "people of the bow," but bow is *uha*, not *uta*, in Pokomo, and I now find that *Uta* is also a Galla clan. A little light is thrown on this matter by the statement that many clans have alternative names, one of which is Galla. The Galla were for many years the tyrants of the Wapokomo, continually raiding and harassing, when not actually enslaving them, and,—as is the case with some tribes exposed to the incursions of the

Masai,—dread of the conquering race was not unmingled with admiration, resulting in the sincerest form of flattery. It thus seems probable that the names of Galla clans were adopted by Pokomo *masindo*, at first in addition to their own, and afterwards in place of them.

I do not yet know enough of Galla customs and institutions to say whether the Pokomo have been appreciably influenced by them; but it does not appear that their tribal organization differs appreciably from that of the Wanyika tribes, who are evidently sprung from the same stock. For instance, I have been unable to trace anything like the twofold division of the Galla clans into Irdida and Barietuma, the members of the first only marrying into the second, and *vice versa*. A Pokomo, so far as I can make out, is free to marry into any clan he likes, provided he avoids his own. He must not, however, marry relations who belong to other clans, such as the daughter of his father's sister, or of any of his mother's brothers or sisters. All these are called *waimbu* (sisters). Like the Giryama, and unlike the Duruna and Digo, the Pokomo, whatever they may have done in the remote past, now reckon descent in the male line, the children, both sons and daughters, belonging to the father's *sindo*.

There is a twofold division of *each Pokomo tribe*, however, of the existence of which I have just become aware, and which necessitates further enquiry. These sections are called *Mperuya* and *Magomba*, and the chiefs of the tribes are chosen from them alternately. "Just now," says my informant, "the children of the Mperuya are ruling. Afterwards the children of the Magomba will rule." Chiefs (*haju*, which seems to be a Galla title), are not succeeded by their sons, but chosen by the tribe. Their power and standing seem to be much the same as with the Giryama, the real authority being in the hands of the old men, or, properly speaking, the highest grade of elders, who form a close corporation. The various grades have each their own

ngadzi or friction-drum, which is never allowed to be seen except by the initiated, and never, under any circumstances, by women.

Concerning these grades I must await further information. As they begin in early childhood, (a man's father purchasing for him admission into the Makombe, Nchere, and Kundyia in succession, before arranging his marriage), they would seem to correspond to age-classes. The fees for initiation into each successive grade are heavy, and,—as is said to be the case in Freemasonry,—the higher you go the more expensive the process becomes. The highest order, the Wakicho, have the right to levy contributions on the rest of the tribe, in cattle, goats, rice, honey-beer, etc., and the German missionaries are very severe on their aldermanic banquets, which one missionary designated by the graphic but untranslatable term *fresserei*. Herr Krafft's informant drew the distinction between the Wakicho and the Wagan-gana or sorcerers, that the former distribute their superfluous property among the people of the village, which the latter never do. How this corporation of the sorcerers stands with regard to the Wakicho is one of the things I have not yet been able to enquire into.

The Buu tribe trace their descent from a man named Vere, a Melchizedek-like being without father or mother, who made his appearance in the district now occupied by the tribe at a period which I have as yet been unable to ascertain even approximately. But, as Mpongwa, the Government elder of Ngao, tells me that people were living on the coast when Vere came here, the mystery probably reduces itself to the not very recondite fact that he arrived here by himself and no one has ever heard anything about his belongings. He was unacquainted with the use of fire, till shown how to make it with two sticks by one Mitso-tsozini, whose status and *provenance* are not yet clear to me; he comes abruptly into the story (like "Miss Meadows") as "his (Vere's) companion."

Vere had a son named Sango² and three daughters. The eldest of these, called Mkabuu (wife of Buu), married Buu, the eponymous ancestor, one supposes, of the Buu tribe. Her two sisters, Habune and Habuya, lived at their brother's village, and did not marry, but formed irregular connections with strangers from a distance; their children were *wana wa haramu* (illegitimate). Mpongwa, who is of the Karya clan, says he is descended from Habune, so, unless the descent was on the mother's side, it looks as if Buu were not responsible for the whole of the tribe called after him. Again, it would seem that the Katsoo, Kale, and Deno clans came in later,—but here the ground becomes so very uncertain that it seems better to say no more till I have sifted my information.

Passing from the question of origins, I may remark that the Pokomo have been estimated at about 15,000, though the German missionaries at Ngao are disposed to think that this is too high, and also that their numbers are diminishing. Infant mortality is terribly high, chiefly owing to malarial fever, from which all natives in the Tana valley suffer more or less, though the disease is not so acute as among Europeans. Elephantiasis also is not uncommon, and a disease called *buba*, which appears to be that known to science as *frambæsia*, while the small community of Ngao possesses two lepers. The present year (1912) has been one of great scarcity,—first, through an unusually high flood of the Tana, which swept away the crops, and then through the drought which has affected all the coast districts.³

The Pokomo live by agriculture and fishing. Their principal crop in former times was rice, which,—since the

² Böcking and Kraft, in *Zeitschrift für afrikanische und ozeanische Sprachen* (Berlin, 1896), iii. i. p. 33, and *Pokomo-Grammatik* (Neukirchen, 1908), p. 133, seem erroneously to have made the two into one, and call the parentless ancestor Sangovere.

³ Since writing the above I find that last year's land-tax returns give their numbers as about 18,000. I am inclined to think that the view of the missionaries is unnecessarily pessimistic.

Tana has had a wider outlet to the sea and its two annual inundations cover less ground than formerly,⁴—is more and more giving place to maize. They are expert canoemen, manipulating their dug-outs (*waho*, plural *maho*) with great skill, by means of short, leaf-shaped paddles and forked punting-poles, and pass a great deal of their time on the river. Sometimes one sees a *waho* with the husband punting at the bow and the wife paddling at the stern, or *vice versa*, and a baby and a pile of baskets amidships. Both men and women are good swimmers, using the hand-over-hand stroke like, I believe, all Africans. The Tana is infested by crocodiles, though the numbers are kept down by the popularity of the reptile as an article of food. The natives seem singularly fearless as regards crocodiles. "Why, we eat each other!" they sometimes say,—à la *guerre comme à la guerre*. A Pokomo once said to me that the Swahili are sometimes caught by crocodiles "because they are afraid of them. But we,—we simply don't pay any attention to them. We know they are there in the water, like the fish, but we never trouble our heads about them." Accidents, however, sometimes happen. A woman is occasionally seized and dragged in when incautiously filling her water jar at the river's edge, instead of dipping it from the higher bank with the long-handled gourd in general use.

Fishing is done either with rod and line or with *miono* (plural of *mono*), baskets like magnified lobster-pots, about five feet long by two wide. During flood-time, *i.e.* generally in November or December, and again in April or May, fishing is carried on in the Tana itself, but, when the water

⁴ The Tana formerly reached the sea through a channel still traceable near Chara and containing water in places, known to the Swahili as *Mto Tana*. The Tana and the Ozi, (a small river with a large estuary somewhat to the north-east), were long ago connected by the so-called "Belezoni Canal," probably the work of the Arabs, but scarcely more than a ditch. Mr. Anderssen, Commissioner of Tanaland in 1902, had the Belezoni cleared out and widened, and since then the volume of water entering the sea by way of the Ozi is so great as to lower the level of the river at flood-time.

is low, chiefly in the lakes to be found at either side of it,—Shaka Babo, Sumiti, Gweiti, etc. These lakes receive the water of the Tana when it is high, and the fish then enter them, remaining behind when the river falls and communication is cut off. Fish are also speared with the *yutsoma*, a pole some twelve or fifteen feet long, with a sharp, awl-shaped spike, perhaps ten inches in length, fixed into its end. The fish most usually speared are the *mamba* and *nswi*, both having broad heads and cat-like whiskers and no scales, (or some apology for them which I am not ichthyologist enough to describe). The *mamba*, which is sometimes over three feet long and proportionately thick, makes itself a hole in the mud when the dry season comes on and lies there, torpid and sealed up like the legendary toad, till the rains come, or till his repose is rudely broken by the thrust of a *yutsoma*, (for the Pokomo often spear them at this season). There is a very large number of edible species of fish, though at this season of the year, that of low water, they do not seem to be caught in great abundance.

The large white water-lily, which grows freely on all pools and backwaters of the river, as well as on the lakes mentioned above, is also a stand-by in time of scarcity; the seed-vessels containing the unripe seeds, and the tuberous roots, are both boiled and eaten, and the ripe seeds are pounded and made into sauce, eaten with fish. Probably the roots are very indigestible, as people complain of pains and intestinal disturbances when reduced to feeding largely on them. Another alimentary stop-gap is the fruit of the *mkoma* or dum-palm (*Hyphæne*), which has been aptly compared to a mixture of sugar and sawdust; children are fond of it at all times, and it is hawked about in the streets of Lamu at two for a cent.

The Pokomo grass hut is more accurately described by the term beehive-shaped than many to which that term has been applied. It is round, with no separation of roof and wall,—but not hemispherical like the Zulu,—and slightly

pointed at the top. The breadth at the bottom is about equal to the height in the centre. The thatch is cut off, near the top, in three or more concentric ridges, which gives a peculiar cachet to the general effect. The doorway is a narrow opening just wide and high enough to admit one person in a stooping position. There is no door, but one or more dried fronds of the wild date-palm are used to close the entrance, and lean against the house beside it when not in use. The principal interior features are the central fireplace and two bedsteads, made of palm-leaf ribs lashed together over a rough wooden framework. The husband's bedstead is high,—three feet six or so,—but the wife's only one foot or under, in case of the babies rolling off, for the smallest children share it with their mother. As boys and girls grow older, they are drafted off to the youth's house and the maids' house respectively. Polygamists have a hut for each wife and her children.

The genealogies I have collected seem to show that polygamy is, comparatively speaking, not very frequent. Most men have one wife, occasionally one has two, but three are rare. Probably, as the old jest has it, matrimony is a matter of money, *i.e.* of inability to raise the bride-price a second time. Girls are often bespoken in infancy, or even (conditionally) before birth, and one sometimes hears it said,—“So-and-so has a wife, but she is not grown up yet.” The arrangement is not always rigidly carried out. It would be surprising if it were among so good-natured a people as the Pokomo, who certainly do not err in the direction of severity towards their children. If, on reaching years of discretion, the girl finds that she does not like the destined suitor or prefers another, the matter can always be arranged by returning to the former the payments he has already made on account. If there is another young man, he, of course, has to do the paying.

The dress of the non-mission Wapokomo consists chiefly of one or more pieces of cotton cloth, beads, and a mixture of

sazi (red oxide of iron) and sesamum oil, with which they anoint all the exposed parts of their person,—hair and all,—acquiring a ruddy tinge which is not displeasing. The bead ornaments are many, and often involve a great deal of work; they include a girdle (*silipi*) usually an inch and a half broad, a fillet worn round the head, a straight necklet (*kit-side*) about half an inch wide, a more elaborate necklace (*tsambaa*) with oblong pendant in front, fringed with beads and small cowries and sometimes having a further fringe of small iron chains reaching to the waist, etc., etc. The girdle is supposed to be worn by married women only. Sometimes they wear a belt of palm-leaf or leather, or, if within reach of civilization, a strap and buckle. My own leather belt was remarked on at Kulesa, in connection with the usual enquiries as to my status,—“Oh no! she can't be unmarried, she has a belt on,—*that* would never do,” etc.

On the whole I must say that the Pokomo make a pleasant impression. Physically, they are fairly well-grown and well-made, though not, as a rule, very tall. They are dark-brown in colour and have often, to an eye accustomed to the African type, very pleasing faces, which they do not, like some other tribes, disfigure by pulling out their eyebrows and eyelashes. They have the usual splendid teeth of the African natives, though unable, it seems, to leave them to their own unaided effect. They usually extract the two middle incisors of the lower jaw, though this is by no means universal; some have a small gap between the two middle upper teeth, which looks as if it were made rather by inserting some instrument between them, and gradually working them apart, than by chipping off any part,—but in this I may be mistaken. Some have a similar gap in the lower jaw.

In the following desultory notes, of which the sole merit is that of being compiled *in situ*, it has chiefly been my aim to set down such scraps of belief and tradition as I

have heard from the natives themselves. Some of these notes were made at Kulesa, and some at Ngao.

Various fabulous beings appear to be firmly believed in. The following account was given in all seriousness by a very intelligent Christian at Kulesa, who pointed out the spot where the incident occurred. His father, when a young man, was walking by night from Chunoni to Kulesa,—about three miles by land, cutting across a bend of the river,—when, just after passing the old bed of the Tana, he saw before him, as he thought, a huge leafless tree, quite white, high up on which were two bright lights,—“like these,” he said, pointing to the brilliant yellow flowers of a small hibiscus, which I had just gathered and was carrying in my hand. When Jonathan’s father approached the tree, he found that it was no tree, but a huge snake, the lights being, *not* its eyes, but, curiously enough, its ears. It lifted up its voice and made such a noise that the percipient was deaf for two weeks after. He was terrified and fled, but “the snake remained where it was.” It appears to be called *ngoloko*, so, though no one else saw it on that occasion, it must have been previously known, at any rate by hearsay.

On the same occasion, Jonathan pointed out a small bird on the wing, which, he said, was much dreaded by mothers of children, present or prospective. He called it *mpungu*. I could not see it distinctly, but it seemed to be about the size of a thrush. If a pregnant woman sees this bird, it is supposed that her child, when born, will be seized and devoured by some animal, unless she works the counter-charm by plucking a piece of green grass,—any kind of grass will do,—tying a knot in it, and sticking it into her hair. My informant picked and knotted a blade in illustration. “*Mani mawitsi ni kintu cha kuvothy*” (Green grass is a sacred thing), he added, “and will prevent the creature from doing any harm.” This belief, it is well known, is held by the Masai and also by the Galla. I am

not aware of its existence among any Bantu tribe, unless it is the Kikuyu, who would have borrowed it from the Masai. A song sung by children to this bird runs as follows:—

“*Nzooni mnyowe, huyu ndiye mpungu*
Mpungu mulenji kwa baba, nzooni mnyowe.
Huyu ndiye mpungu, bibi, nzooni mnyowe,
Huyu ndiye mpungu, mpungu mulenji huyu.”

i.e. “Come and see, this is the *mpungu*, the *mpungu* who flies on high at my father’s, come and see. This is the *mpungu*, grandfather, come and see. This is the *mpungu*, the *mpungu* who flies on high.”

Another very unlucky bird is the *hoyembe*, seemingly a kind of ibis or heron, which is not eaten by any tribe of Pokomo, apparently because it lives on fish. If men see it in front of them, when going to fish, they at once turn back.

I should add that I have hitherto failed to identify the *mpungu*. All enquiries at Ngao, which is about a day’s journey below Kulesa, have elicited only the fact that the people know the *mpungu*, but, by their description, it must be an entirely different bird from the above, being like the *chalikoko* (fish-eagle, *Haliaetus vocifer*), but larger and also different in colouring. Nor do they seem to be aware of any sinister reputation attaching to a bird of the name.

I find that the *mpungu* song of which I have a phonograph record is not the same as the one given above, which was dictated to me by the singer at my request, after taking the record. Many natives seem to find a difficulty in remembering the words of a song unless they are actually singing it, (when it requires a good deal of practice to be able to catch and take them down). In the same way, I found that some Kikuyu young men could not, so they said, sing the song of which I wanted a record, without going through the motions of the dance which it usually accompanied, and they were unable to do this in the absence of the other performers. Whether this was

Jonathan's reason or not, I did not succeed in taking down the words when repeating the record, and cannot now try it again until a permanent duplicate is made.

Other more or less fabulous beings are the *kodoile*, the *ngojama*,⁵ and the *kitunusi*. The first-named, one informant told me, was "a bear,"—an animal, I believe, quite unknown in Africa; but it appears that the translators of the Pokomo New Testament have used *kodoile* as an equivalent for "bear" in Rev., cap. xiii., v. 2. ("Dragon" in the preceding chapter is rendered by *ngojama*.) The accounts of it are somewhat vague. The old men at Ngao tell me that it is like a leopard, but its colour is that of "a kind of cat"; it is much dreaded, but its attributes seem at present somewhat obscure. The *ngojama* and *kitunusi* are both human or quasi-human in aspect, but the former has a long steel claw in the palm of his hand, which he strikes into people, should they be so unfortunate as to come within his reach, and then drinks their blood. He speaks, and his language is Galla. He is mostly solitary, but sometimes has a wife and children; they live in the bush, but neither make shelters nor climb into trees. Possibly some solitary outcast Galla, rendered misanthropical by his experiences and armed with a spiked bracelet, or possibly with a weapon similar to the "tiger's claw" of India, originated the myth.

The following story about the *ngojama*, which was told me at Kulesa by Yonatan Kopo of the Ngatana tribe, was hardly intelligible at the time, but I have since obtained explanations and the continuation from Isaya, a Pokomo of the Denu clan (Buu tribe) from Ngao. The legendary hero of the story, Bombe, is said to have been a real man belonging to the Katsoo clan of the Buu tribe.

"Long ago a man [Bombe] was on the plains (*yuanda*, the open steppe which skirts the Tana forest), and the

⁵ So far as I can trust my ear, the Pokomo say *ngojama* and the Galla *godyama*.

ngojama lived in the bush at Mifuneni (on the north-east bank of the Tana); and the man and his wife, once upon a time, went to the bush, and they separated, taking different paths, and the wife called out "Bombe, *imbaa*? Bombe, *imbaa*?" (Bombe, which way are you coming out (of the bushes)?,—*imbaa* being a Galla word). The *ngojama* repeated her words, saying "Bombe, *imbaa*?"

Here Yonatan broke off, adding, somewhat inconsequently, "His weapon is [a steel spike] in [the palm of] his right hand, and people fear him." Isaya continues the story as follows:—

"Then the man in his turn called his wife, saying "Nanguri! Nanguri!" [He was not quite sure of the name, but thought this was it.] "The woman was silent when she heard the shout, thinking it was not her husband's voice, and she called him again,—"Bombe! Bombe! who is it that is calling?" Then the man came to his wife, and they came out on to the open plain. Suddenly the *ngojama* too came out, and called "Bombe, where are you coming out?" Bombe answered "God will bring me out." The *ngojama* asked "Is your God the black cloud?" [The words are partly Galla.] He answered "Yes." Then Bombe and his wife ran away, and the *ngojama* pursued them as far as the Tana."

Another story told by Isaya is as follows:—"Long ago Bombe arose and took his *saka* [a gourd supported by a string netting], and went to climb a [tree containing a] beehive. While he was climbing, the *ngojama* came, and stood at the foot of the tree calling "Bombe! Bombe!", and Bombe answered, "*Woi*!" [the usual hail of the Galla]. "Is it you?" "It is I!" "Can you escape?" "I can." "Where can you get out?" "God will take me out." "Where is this God of yours? Show him to me that I may see him who is going to deliver you to-day." Bombe answered "He lives up there?" "Is this God of yours that black cloud?" "Yes!"

[*Dumansa*, the word used, is the Pokomo pronunciation of the Galla *dumens* (a cloud), but my Pokomo informant insisted that it means "that black thing." *Gurách* is the Galla word for "black," and *Wak* for "God"; the usual expression for the sky is *Waka gurach*. But Gallas, by the way in which they speak of *Wak*, seem often, if not always, to identify him with the sky.]

"Thereupon the *ngojama* said "*Uu himbou lakis*." [These words purport to be Galla, and to mean "You will never get away at all."] Bombe climbed up (to get) his honey, and, when he had finished, said, "Go aside a little while I come down." The *ngojama* went apart, and Bombe came down, took out some of the best honeycombs and put them on leaves for him, and then hastened on. The *ngojama* came and stopped to eat the honey. Bombe was running away all this time. The *ngojama* raised his head and saw him, and said,—"*A! A!* Run as fast as you like,—I shall catch you even now." Bombe ran very fast, and had nearly reached the Tana when the *ngojama* started after him. He pursued him on foot until Bombe reached the Tana, and put his gourd into a canoe, and cut the rope quickly, and pushed the canoe out into the river. The *ngojama* stood on the bank and, seeing that he had failed to catch him a second time, he cried,—"*Wai! wai!* If I had known, I would not have eaten the honey! Well, Bombe, go! It is you who are the (better) man." Bombe said,—"*Did I not tell you that my God would deliver me?*" He answered,—"*Go, you are a man! But another day we shall meet!*"

The Galla seem to hold a somewhat different view of the *ngojama*. According to Abarea of Kurawa he is nothing more nor less than a man-eating lion,—a lion "who has become accustomed to human flesh and will no longer eat animals." This view is emphatically repudiated by my Pokomo informant. The Galla-speaking Wasanye (Wat) of Malindi district, again, recognize the name of *ngojama*,

but give yet another account of him. Unfortunately I was not able to take it down verbatim, and could not always follow the narrator, nor get him to repeat what was not clear, but the gist of it is that the *ngojama*, though quasi-human in shape, is an animal and has a tail. He used to roam through the bush, eating raw flesh, till he met with a Wat named Abalefe, who showed him how to make fire and cook, and tamed him to some extent. But one day the savage nature broke out; he turned on Abalefe and ate him, and then went back to the bush.

The theological discussion between Bombe and the *ngojama* has a curious parallel in a bit of Galla tradition which I owe to the kindness of the Rev. W. B. Griffiths of the United Methodist Mission. A Galla,—(one of “our Galla,” presumably the Barareta or Kofira),—when sending out his son to herd the cattle said,—“Go and herd together with the son of God” (Gurba Wakatin). The spies of the Bworana Galla followed the boy, and asked him what his father had said. On being told, they asked,—“Where is this God your father speaks of.” The boy answered and said,—“God is he who is above.” They answered,—“We are now going to kill you,—let the God whom your father and mother speak of save you!” When they had finished saying this, those Bworana surrounded that youth on this side and on that, and flung their spears at him. But they could not hit him. They missed him (every time), and (finally) they fought and killed each other.

Of the *kitunusi* there are two kinds; one walks upright, like a child of Adam (*binadamu*); the other moves about,—most uncomfortably, one would think,—in a sitting position, and in this way only attains a height of about two and a half feet. He has legs, though he does not use them and, apparently, does not need them. He wears a cloth (*kitambaa*) of *kaniki* (black, or dark-blue, cotton stuff). As to the clothing (or non-clothing) of the *ngojama* I have no information at present. It is very dangerous to meet him; some

who do so are seized with illness (*wanapata ujwazi*), and some (if I have rightly apprehended the explanation of the verb *ku disama-disama*), become paralysed and lose the use of their limbs. But some have boldly grappled with him, and if, in wrestling, a man can tear off a bit of the *kitunusi's* cloth, his fortune is made. "He puts it away in his *kidzamanda* and becomes rich." *Kidzamanda* is explained at Ngao as being a covered basket made of *miyaa* (leaves of the *Hyphæne* palm); no one makes them now, but "our grandfathers used to keep their cloth and things in them." This seems to show that no one in this generation has successfully wrestled with the *kitunusi*. One wonders if he is akin to the *chiruwi* of Nyasaland, with whom the lonely traveller must wrestle, if he would pass him in safety; but the advantage gained by overcoming the *chiruwi* is that he shows you all sorts of medicinal herbs and teaches you their uses.

The Wapokomo appear to have a large stock of the usual Bantu folk-tales, in which, as elsewhere, the hare (*kitunguwè*) plays the principal part. They have not as yet been collected, the only texts hitherto published being the traditions of tribal origins already referred to and the legends of Liongo Fumo, printed by Böcking in the *Zeitschrift für afrikanische und ozeanische Sprachen*, II. i. pp. 33-9, and by Krafft in his *Pokomo-Grammatik*. The old man of whom I first enquired said that there were such stories, but, since the people had taken to reading, they had forgotten them; and the missionaries whom I asked said at once that they had never troubled to enquire into such things. However, with a little coaxing, the old man just referred to (Abadula) dictated the chameleon story of which the translation is given below, and one of the teachers, (Andrea or Bwashehe, from whom I have obtained a good deal of useful information), followed it up with a hare story, which seems to be a variant of the Yao "Roasted Seeds."⁶ I think that there are

⁶ Duff Macdonald, *Africana*, vol. ii., pp. 340-1.

a good many other variants, but am unable to give them from memory. The chameleon story resembles the one current among the Wasanye, and published by Capt. Barrett in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.⁷ The Pokomo version is as follows:—

“The chameleon (*rumvwi*) and the dog had a dispute. God (Muungu) had invited them to a feast, and, when they got ready for the journey, the dog said to the chameleon,—“How will you be able to go? I shall go first, and by the time you get there I shall be sitting on the chair (of honour).” The chameleon replied,—“Yes! if it please God, I shall arrive.” They slept. In the morning they started. But, when the dog sprang (forward), the chameleon climbed up his tail. Well! the dog ran quickly, in order to get ahead of the chameleon; and, when he arrived, he saw that, at the (places of the) feast, there were bones on the ground. As he was looking on the ground, (his attention absorbed by the bones), his tail came close to the chair, and the chameleon climbed on to it and said,—“Here I am, sir!” (*Ndimi huyu, Bwana*, lit. “It is I, this one”). And the dog began to pant till his tongue hung out, and the chameleon was a great (person) and sat on the chair. And so the dog went on eating bones on the ground to this day.”

Having asked Andrea to write out some more stories for me, and supplied him with an exercise book for the purpose, I was considerably disappointed when he brought me two tales in Swahili and certainly not indigenous,—indeed one was no other than the Merchant of Venice! As he had spent some time at the training-school carried on by the Neukirchen Mission at Lamu (now given up), and can read a little English, I thought it possible that he might have become acquainted with the story of Shakespeare’s play through the medium of some elementary reading-book; but he tells me that he heard it from a Banyan at Kipini, and that it is certainly “a story of theirs” (*i.e.* the Hindus).

⁷ Vol. xli. (1911), p. 39.

If really quite independent of European contact, this variant should not be without interest.

I was more successful with old Mpongwa, the non-mission elder of Ngao, where there are two villages side by side,—the Christian, which is being built with rectangular thatched houses of sun-dried bricks on either side of a broad street running away from the river,—and the ‘*Heidendorf*,’ a cluster of beehive huts a little lower down on the river-bank. The Christians have their own elder, Nicodemus, but the *moro* or “palaver-house,” which is also the equivalent of the American “corner grocery,” or the churchyard wall at Thrums, seems to be common to both. Mpongwa told me the tale of Mwakatsoo (*alias* Kitunguwe) and Muzee Nsimba, or “Old Man Lion.” This is, I think, found in almost every collection of Bantu folk-tales that has yet been made, but I am writing at a distance from books and cannot give references from memory. The best-known is probably that to be found in Jacottet’s *Contes Populaires des Bassoutos*. I believe that Mr. Walter Jekyll’s “Annancy in Crab Country” is a far-off echo of the same original.⁸ I give the story as nearly as possible in the old man’s own words:—

“Old Lion built a stone house, and his kinsman was Mwakatsoo. Lion was hungry, and searched for all the beasts of the bush [*bara*, open bush country] and the forest. Mwakatsoo called all the animals together, elephant, hippopotamus, antelopes, giraffe, and the pig too, and the big palm-rat too. “Come, there is a *nyambura* dance at uncle’s. There is a big dance. Let us play.”

All the animals came and stayed outside. Mwakatsoo said to them,—“Come, dance, there is nothing [*i.e.* no danger].” And [as for] the Lion, Mwakatsoo had buried him in the sand, leaving only one tooth sticking out.

They came in. The house had a big *baraza*, as long as from here [Ngao] to Meli [Chara]. All the animals went in. So the

⁸ *Jamaican Song and Story*, p. 70.

rhino said to Mwakatsoo,—“Come! strike up the song of the dance!” He struck up the song, and said:—

“All you elephants, all you hippos, when you dance, you will dance in the inner house.

All you buffalos, etc., etc.

All you crocodiles, etc., etc.

This is the tooth, the tooth, the tooth, the tooth of a camel!

As for me and the civet-cat, we will dance in the outer house.

Come, all you elephants, etc. (*da capo*).”

All the animals believed him, and went on singing, “This is the tooth, the tooth of a camel,” etc.”

The singing was continued for some time, the above words being repeated indefinitely. Then the old man showed in pantomime how the Lion burst from the ground with a ‘R-R-R-R!’ Then a young man sitting by took up the tale, and he, Mpongwa, and the rest somehow finished it between them.

“While they were singing this, the Lion came out from the sand and sprang on the animals, seized them, and killed them. Mwakatsoo had shut the door, and he and the civet-cat ran away. Afterwards, when the Lion had finished eating the animals, Mwakatsoo came and opened the door for him, and he came out.”

This story was also told me in Swahili by Muhamadi bin Abubakari at Lamu, but with the hyæna in place of the lion. One hears curiously little about the hyæna among the Pokomo,—but this is a subject which would require a paper to itself!

A. WERNER.
