The Tar Baby Story

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and blue from the blows the tailor's wife had given it in the churn. The lid was taken off, and there was nothing within but watery stuff, but in the tub were three large lumps of beautiful butter.

I will conclude with a warning against lightly meddling with matters so serious as these. A man named C. was going to mass early on Sunday morning to Kiloanan. As he crossed the strand, he found a woman and her daughter actively engaged in framing witchcrafts by means of pieces of thread of various colours. He tore up the whole apparatus and rebuked them for malice and for breach of the Sunday. They entreated him not to reveal what he had seen, and promised their protection in return for his silence. Nevertheless after mass he told the story. Shortly after, when he was about to sail for the mainland, a black crow settled on the mast of his boat and a storm arose in which he perished. The story is not only true, but of recent occurrence.

THE TAR-BABY STORY.

BY MISS A. WERNER.

I SUPPOSE the question of the African origin of the "Uncle Remus" stories has been settled long ago, but it is interesting to see how every fresh contribution to the stock of African (and more especially "Bantu") folklore supplies us with fuller and more detailed evidence on this point. Since it was discussed in the introduction to Mr. Chandler Harris's original edition (how long ago was that?) at least three distinct African versions of the Tar-Baby episode in Brer Rabbit's career have come to light. And the same thing is probably true of the other stories.

The latest of these versions is one obtained by Père Capus, of the White Fathers, among the Basumbwa, one of

the numerous tribes inhabiting the district of Unyamwezi, in German East Africa. Lest this should not be sufficiently definite, we may add that their habitat is about midway between the south-western corner of the Victoria Nyanza and the upper end of Tanganika.

The text of this story, with a literal French translation, is published in the Berlin *Zeitschrift für afrikanische und ozeanische Sprachen* (vol. iii., fasc. 4), under the title "Muna mugunda ne Kanakami—Le Maître du Champ et le Lapin." Anyone with a little knowledge of any one "Bantu"¹ language cannot fail, on glancing over this Shisumbwa text, to recognise a fair proportion of words. Thus *mwini*, *mwenyi*, *mwene*, an owner, or chief, are found in various forms in Yao, Swahili, and Mang'anja; and *mugunda*, a garden, is the Yao *mgunda*, Mang'anja *munda*. But we must not let ourselves be tempted into a linguistic digression, further than to remark that the Rabbit's name affords a curious instance of divergence, where so many names of animals can be traced through ten or twelve tongues as being originally the same word. Here he is *nakami*, in Yao *sungula*, in Mang'anja *kalulu*, in Ronga (Delagoa Bay) *mpfundla*, in Zulu *unogwaja*! Whether all these names are applied to the same animal I should not venture to decide. M. Henri A. Junod (*Chants et Contes des Ba-Ronga*, p. 86) says that, in Basutoland, there are two hares (he calls Brer Rabbit "lièvre" throughout) bearing distinct names, and totally opposite characters. The Ba-Ronga, it would seem, have only one hare, whom they call *mpfundla*, and when they adopted (on the hypothesis that they did adopt) the Basuto tales, they attributed two sets of stories to the same animal, and so introduced glaring inconsistencies into his character. He is some-

¹ This name, Bantu, is sometimes objected to, but after all it has gained a certain currency, and on Darwin's principle (*Life and Letters*, vol. iii., p. 46) will serve as well as any other—or better, for no one has yet proposed a practicable substitute.

times (and most frequently) a "malin personnage," who is surnamed "le rusé compère" (Nwa-Chisisana), sometimes "un nigaud," who is taken in by the Swallow, and even by the Hen. M. Junod suggests that his contention is borne out by the circumstance that the two tales in his collection which most strongly exhibit the Rabbit in this light are really Makua stories, imported from Mozambique.

I do not feel competent to give an opinion on this matter, but would like to mention one or two points which may or may not be relevant. Among the Mang'anja tales I collected at Blantyre and in the West Shire district are two variants (one very imperfect) of the tale called by M. Junod "Le Lièvre et l'Hirondelle." In one it is the Cock (*tambala*) who is overreached (with tragic results) by the Swallow; in the other the Rabbit's place is taken by the Cat, and it is a small bird (the *ntengu*) who is too sharp for him. Again, many of the *Kalulu* stories (and he figures in the great majority) consist of two parts; in the first, Brer Rabbit is fooled by some one, by preference the Dzimwe;¹ in the second he goes one better and turns the tables on his adversary. In one, the Crocodile kills the Rabbit's wife, but the latter employs the Wood-pigeon to entice the Crocodile ashore, and then kills him. So universally is the *Kalulu*'s superiority insisted on, that I am inclined to think that the tales showing him as the defeated party (I can only recall one at this moment) are incomplete, and, like Cambuscan's, left half-told.

I may add that, to the best of my belief, there is only one *Kalulu* in the Shire Highlands, and he is quite as much of a hare as he is of a rabbit; more so indeed, for he does not live in warrens, but makes himself a form in the bush, even as our hare at home. In size, if I recollect rightly the fleeting glimpses which were all he ever vouchsafed me, he is something between the two.

¹ Some call this animal an ant-eater, some an elephant, some a bogy. I incline to think he belongs to the last-named genus.

The tale of the Nakami begins in true native fashion : "There was a man; he had a field of *bukonzo* (dhurra); it ripened. The Rabbit came to eat it. He (*i.e.* the owner) came; he went to (see) it; he found in it the foot-marks of the Rabbit. And he said, The Rabbit, it is he who eats my *bukonzo*." It will be seen that this style of narrative is conducive to *longueurs*, especially as the speeches of the various characters are reported with Homeric minuteness, and repeated in full every time there is occasion to refer to them. Thus, *e.g.*, if a native has to relate that A gave B a message to convey to C, and C afterwards told the purport of the message to D, the exact words used will recur *in extenso* at least three times in the narrative.

To return to the Shisumbwa story; it runs, in a slightly condensed paraphrase, something like this: The owner of the field consulted with his neighbours, and they suggested that he should cut a log of wood into the shape of a girl. He did so, and having adorned the figure with cloth and beads, smeared her with gum (*bwirembo*; elsewhere they say *malilolilo*), and set it up in his field. When the Rabbit came in the early morning, he saluted her with "*Mpola!*" little girl!" She made no answer. He said again: "*Mpola*, little girl!" No answer. So he said: "Do you hate your neighbours then? They salute you, and you say nothing. I will come nearer." He came nearer and spoke to her again, but still received no answer. Then he took hold of her, and his hand stuck fast. He said: "Let me go," but could not get away. "Let me go, little girl, there are people coming." He seized her with the other hand, and that, too, stuck fast. "Do let me go, they are coming nearer. I will put my foot on you." He did so; his foot stuck fast, then the other foot. Then he threatened to bite her, and as this produced no effect he tried to do so, and was caught by the mouth. Then he sat on her (it is not easy to see how

¹ Shisumbwa for "moyo," "sakubona," "moni," or "howdy."

he could have done it under the circumstances), and could not get up again. The people now came up and found him a prisoner. They went to fetch the Muna Mugunda, who loosed him from the gum and carried him off to the village. The culprit, however, had thought of a way of escape. "You man! (*obe mugosha*) don't kill me, but boil me alive in the pot; I shall boil quickly. If you kill me first, I shall not boil quickly, I shall be hard like a stone." The man listened to his words, and put him into the pot. (As it was still early, we may presume that the water had only just been put on, and was therefore cold.) Then the people all went away to hoe their gardens. At this village, there was a child ill with *manoro* (a skin disease), and they left him to watch the pot. As soon as they were gone, the Rabbit came out of the pot, seized the boy set to watch, put him in, and then assumed his shape, *manoro* and all. When the people came back, he said: "Your meat is ready; cook me a mess of bran-porridge (*shihere*; in Yao, *chipere*). I do not want any of your meat, it smells bad." The boy's mother made him some *shihere*, and he went outside to eat it *muhumbo*—under the eaves by the door. They called him to come and sit beside them, but he refused. When he saw them picking the bones, he muttered: "You are gnawing the bones of your own child." They said: "What do you say, child?" He said: "I only said the flies are biting my sores." When they had finished eating, he ran away, calling out to them as he went: "You have eaten your own child! I am going away!—I, the Rabbit of Ngaraganza." (This might be the same as "Ukalaganza," which seems to be another name for Unyamwezi.) The women cried (*lira* means both to weep and to cry out; in particular, to raise the "keening" for the dead), but the men pursued him. They had all but caught him, when he ran into a hole. One man put in his hand and seized him by the tail, but he began "fer ter holler," the equivalent to the "Tu'n loose dat stump root an ketch holt er me," uttered by Brer Tarrypin in like case. Like Brer

Bar, the man let go his hold of the tail and seized the root; but the episode was not yet at an end, for he pulled as hard as he could, and up came the root. Then they left one man to watch the hole, while the rest went for picks, to dig out Brer Rabbit. As soon as they were gone, he said to the man on guard: "Open your eyes wide, so that you may see the Rabbit when he comes out, and catch him." ("Ecarquille les yeux au terrier," says Père Capus: the meaning seems to be that the man was to put his face close to the entrance of the burrow and look in.) He did so, and the Rabbit threw dust in his eyes and ran past him. He felt something, and quickly clapped his hands over the hole, still blinded (so the narrative seems to imply), and not knowing whether the prisoner had escaped or not. When the others came back they said: "Is he there?" He answered: "He threw sand in my eyes; perhaps he is there." "Perhaps"—*Kamba, kanga, kapena*—is one of the most subtly characteristic African locutions. No one conversant with native ways can fail to recognise the cautious non-committal answer; the speaker declining to draw any inference, however obvious, from his first statement, or to assume any responsibility for a supposition even to the extent of an "I think." "Has A gone to X?" "Perhaps he has gone." "Are the floods out on the Matope road?" "*Kapena* they are!" It is only less exasperating, on occasion, than the famous *Kaya*¹ of the Mang'anja (Yao, *Kwalini*), which can only be rendered by the Spanish *Quien sabe?* and is more comprehensive even than that.

They began to dig. The Rabbit made a circuit (it is to be supposed that he stripped off his skin—as he does in many native tales, or otherwise disguised himself—though this is

¹ Not to be confounded with the Zulu *ekaya*, at home (which seems also to be used in Shisumbwa). Perhaps it is to be counted for righteousness to the Zulus that they don't possess a "*kaya*." "*Ang'azi*" is simply a straightforward "I do not know"—like "*sindi dziwa*" in Mang'anja—a statement of fact quite distinct from *kaya*.

not stated, as it is on a similar occasion, later on), came upon them, as if from a distance, asked what they were doing, and offered to help. He took up a pick and set to work; but before long the iron came out of the handle. So he called to the Giraffe, and asked for the loan of his leg to serve as a handle. The Giraffe lent his leg, and in a very short time it was broken, and the Rabbit ran away, declaring himself as he ran. He now took refuge in a white-ant heap, and the episode was repeated with two differences, viz. that, instead of getting past his enemy by a stratagem, he found an opening into another burrow, and so escaped; and that, when the pick came out of the handle, he this time proposed to fix it into the head of the Elephant. After this second failure the pursuers were (naturally) disheartened, and said: "We are tired" (*twakatara*, which is the Zulu *sakatala*), "and those who helped us, they have been killed. Let us stop." So they went home.

The Rabbit and the "Muna" both, in this story, exhibit an engaging artlessness, the former asking directly for what he wishes, the latter unsuspectingly granting it. Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox are cuter. (Is this owing to the stimulating air of the New World?) "'I don't keer w'at you do wid me, Brer Fox,' sezee, 'so you don't fling me in dat brier-patch. Roas' me, Brer Fox,' sezee, 'but don't fling me in dat brier-patch' sezee Co'se Brer Fox wanter hurt Brer Rabbit bad as he kin, so he cotch 'im by de behime legs en slung 'im right in de middle er de brier-patch . . .'"

M. Junod, who belongs to the (Swiss) Mission Romande, and resided for some years at Lourenço Marques, has, in his large collection of Ronga tales, two fairly complete sequences of adventures, which he entitles "*Le Roman du Lièvre*." The Tar-Baby episode comes into the first of these as follows. The "*Lièvre*" having, by means of a false alarm of war, repeatedly robbed the ground-nut patches of a certain village, the inhabitants become suspicious, and lay a trap for him. The first step is to

gather "de la glu noire." There are several kinds of trees which yield large quantities of gum, especially (in the Shire Highlands, at least) that called *myombo* (*Brachystegia longifolia*), which also supplies bark-cloth. They made a Tar-Baby, in this instance, "un mannequin de femme." (It is to be noticed that "Tar-Baby *she* ain't sayin' nuthin'" is in strict accordance with the original tradition, though Brer Rabbit's injunction to "take off dat hat en tell me howdy," seems to imply that the feminine pronoun is a mere *façon de parler*—as in the case of ships and engines. For Uncle Remus certainly knew what good manners demand in the case of gentlemen and ladies respectively.) The image having been set up in the gardens, the Ronga Brer Rabbit once more gives the alarm: "*Nte! nte! nte!*" (he is supposed to be sounding his horn—the nefarious acquisition whereof forms an earlier episode in the story)—"the enemy is coming!"¹ The women all ran away; but, seeing the Tar-Baby still there, the Rabbit called out "*Va-t-en, femme!*" The sequel is exactly as in the version already given (except that Brer Rabbit did not sit down on the "mannequin"), so that "*il resta suspendu, se balançant de-ci, de-là.*" The people then came up, extricated him from the Tar-Baby's embraces, and informed him that they were going to kill him. "Very well," said he, "but don't kill me on the ground, kill me on the chief's back!" They returned to the village and spread a mat on the ground, on which the chief obligingly lay down, and the Rabbit squatted on his back. A strong warrior then prepared to spear the Rabbit and, as might be expected, killed the chief. Brer Rabbit having leaped into the air at the critical moment, made his

¹ In a Yao tale, the Sungula (Rev. Duff Macdonald, to satisfy his own sense of the fitness of things, translates *fox*) went along the road with his drum, and met women digging beans (*njama*, very like the ground-nut, *Aractus hypogaea*), and beat his drum, saying "Ti, ti, war!" The women fled; the Sungula picked up their baskets and went home.

escape without any difficulty, and the indignant villagers massacred the warrior. "This is the end," says Kwizu, the narrator of the story.

These villagers, like the Basumbwa, seem singularly deficient in perspicacity. Perhaps the Makua, through long contact with Portuguese and Arabs, are somewhat sharper, and Nakami or Mpfundla lost his too easily-acquired reputation when he ventured among them.

It will not have escaped the reader's notice that Uncle Remus attributes to Brer Fox (and in one case to Brer B'ar) the part played by "the people" in these two African stories. In fact, except for Miss Meadows and the girls, so delightfully accounted for by the statement that "dey wuz in de tale," and one solitary appearance of "Mr.'Man" (from whose superior power only Brer Rabbit can deliver Brer Fox), the actors in the great majority of his tales are animals only. In the aboriginal African stories, however, the distinction is not very clearly marked. I had myself frequently noticed this characteristic in Shire Highlands folklore, when I came upon the following passage in *Chants et Contes des Baronga* (p. 89):

"Le Lièvre, la Rainette, et toutes les bêtes qui passent et repassent dans ces curieux récits, représentent des êtres humains, cela va sans dire." . . . (Or would it not be more exact to say that the narrator, by a familiar myth-making process, invests them with his own personality?) "Leurs caractères physiques particuliers sont présents devant l'imagination du conteur pour autant qu'ils donnent du pittoresque au récit. Mais on les oublie tout aussi aisément dès qu'ils ne sont plus essentiels à la narration. . . . L'Hirondelle est un oiseau, mais sa femme est une véritable femme qui demeure dans une hutte, qui cuit dans une marmite des légumes. . . . Dans l'histoire de la Femme paresseuse, l'Antilope déclare au Lièvre avoir vu les traces de ses pas dans un champ qui a été pillé par un voleur. Or, c'étaient les empreintes d'une femme! Le conteur à oublié la différ-

ence physique du lièvre et de l'homme à ce moment-là. A chaque ligne on rencontre de ces inadvertances. . . ."

One of these inadvertences, to name no more, is found in the Shisumbwa story, where the Rabbit seizes the Tar-Baby with his *hands*. So, too, a Mang'anja tale in my MS. collection gives the Swallow a hut with all orthodox arrangements—the hearth in the middle of the floor, and the stage (*nsanja*) above it, on which meat and other things are dried—and a wife who cooks gourds in an earthen pot. In another, the Rabbit's wife goes down to the river with her water-pot like any native woman, and is caught by the Crocodile when stooping to fill it.¹ Numberless touches of the same sort could be quoted from Uncle Remus, but he has a much more sophisticated consciousness of the difference between "folks en de beasteses" than the native African.

M. Junod remarks that this "personification" of animals is emphasised in the Ronga tales by the honorific prefix *Nwa*, which can be rendered, according to circumstances, by Mr., Mrs., or Miss, and is equivalent to the Yao *Che*. Thus we have Nwa-Mpfundla, Nwa-Ndlopfu (Mr. Elephant), and in Yao Che-Sungula, &c. No doubt Brer Rabbit, Miss Cow, &c., are echoes of the same usage. There is an opening here for a grammatical dissertation on the "*m* or living-person" class, and the transference into it of animal names properly belonging to another, when the animals are considered with reference to their personality. But we must not forget that we set out with the Tar-Baby.

M. Junod, in a note to the tale we have just quoted from him, refers to a story in M. Heli Chatelain's "Folk-tales of Angola," where the Rabbit and the Monkey (whom we have not hitherto found in his company) are lamentably caught by "de belles filles-mannequins," whom they are

¹ The text of this tale is given in "*Zeitschrift für afrikanische und ozeanische Sprachen*, 1897, Heft iii.

tempted to embrace. I have not seen Chatelain's book, but the story is probably very much on the same lines as those already given.¹ The Ambundu of Angola seem to possess a rich store of tales, and a language sufficiently like that of their more eastern kin to be learnt without difficulty. Herr Seidel (in a handy little collection entitled, "Geschichten und Lieder der Afrikaner," Berlin, 1896) gives two or three specimens, among them a turtle story which is the exact parallel to the adventure of Brer Tarrypin and Brer Bar. The German translator, who has evidently made his version from the English and not from the Kimbundu text, has, by a curious slip, entitled it "Die Turteltaube;" but it is quite evident from the story itself that the water and not the winged turtle is the one meant. A man from Lubi la Suku found a turtle in the bush, and it was proposed to kill it with axes, but the turtle sang:

"Turtle of Koka, and axe of Koka!
No axe can kill me!"

Stones, fire, and knives are all suggested in turn with a

¹ The story given by Chatelain (p. 183) is of great interest. In outline it is this:—Monkey and Hare (*Kabulu*) rob Leopard. He consults "the old one" for a charm to catch them. The interviews with the witch are no doubt a transcript from life. At last, by her advice, Leopard makes wooden "images of girls," and smears them with gum of the wild fig-tree. Monkey and Hare, endeavouring to flirt with them, are caught. Leopard puts Monkey and Hare "in his side-bag" and takes them home, intending to cook them on the morrow. But the next day his father-in-law's death is announced, and he has to attend the funeral. In his absence, Monkey and Hare persuade his wife to let them out of the bag and give them the keys of the trunk, that they may dress and follow to the funeral. They dress, one as Captain and the other as Ensign, and go to the funeral. At the funeral they pretend to be sent by "the Lord Governor" to catch Leopard. He is bound and carried home. There they torture him, pillage his house, steal his clothes, and decamp. Hence the monkey always sleeps on a tree and the hare in the bush, so as to be secure from surprise by the leopard. The leopard's spots were caused by the torture. The honorific prefix *Ngana* is given to Leopard, and sometimes to Monkey and Hare. ED.

like result, and at last some one says: "We will throw him into the deep water!" Then the turtle cried out lamentably: "Alas! I must die! What shall I do?" And they took him to the river and threw him in. He swam away merrily, singing in triumph:

"In the water is my home!
In the water is my home!"

"Ole man Tarrypin wuz at home, I tell you, honey!"

I was about to add that there is also a Yao version of the Tar-Baby. There probably is, but I am not acquainted with it. It is true that the little book in which the Domasi school-children learn to read contains, along with some (I believe) genuine native tales, one called "Ndano ja Juampache Malilolilo," whereof one word at least will be recognised by listeners devoted enough to have followed this paper attentively. But it is only—so, if my memory serves, I was informed by the compiler of the book—a version of Uncle Remus's Wonderful Tar-Baby, as indeed the words, "If you refuse to take off your hat," sufficiently indicate. But it reads naturally enough, and after all, we may suppose, has only been restored, a little touched up perhaps, to its original home.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15th, 1899.

THE PRESIDENT (Mr. E. S. Hartland) in the Chair.

The minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

The election of Mr. Hoey Dignem and Miss K. Schlesinger was announced.

The resignation of Mr. T. K. Hurlburt was also announced.

The President then read a paper by Mr. W. G. Aston, entitled "Japanese Myth," which was followed by a discussion, in which Mr. Crooke and the President took part.

Dr. Gaster then read a paper entitled "Two Thousand Years of the Charm against the Child-Stealing Witch."

Votes of thanks for these papers were passed.

JAPANESE MYTH.

BY W. G. ASTON, C.M.G.

I.

THE SACRED BOOKS OF JAPAN.

IN Japan, as elsewhere, the respective domains of myth, legend, and history merge into one another in such a way that it is often hard to say where one ends and another begins. The ancient annals give us continuous narratives in which all three are treated alike. It is generally agreed, however, that the mythical period comes to an end with the accession to the throne of Jimmu Tennō, the first Mikado, an event to which the date of B.C. 660 is usually assigned. Modern Japanese historians make history to begin from this point; but in reality legend predominates for many hundreds