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50. The Pleasing of the God Thangjing

Author(s): J. Shakespear

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

India : Manipur.

With Plate F.

Shakespear.

**The Pleasing of the God Thāngjing.** *By Lieut.-Col. J. Shakespear,* **50**  
*C.I.E., D.S.O.*

The inhabitants of Moirang are divided into fifteen families, each of which has its particular god or goddess, but over all is the god Thāngjing, therefore all the lesser divinities join in his Harauba, or "Pleasing." About four o'clock little processions emerge from the different Leikais or quarters inhabited by the different families. Each consists of a gaudy litter surmounted by a canopy in which are some of the sacred clothes of the god or goddess, for except in the case of Nongshāba<sup>1</sup>, the divinities do not come in person; with each litter is a drummer, one or two umbrella bearers, and a few followers. Nongshāba and his wife Sarunglaima come in person, two by no means beautiful figures. The reason of this is that they

are the parents of Thāngjing. Nongshāba is the greatest of the Umang lai or forest gods, but he made his only son, Thāngjing the chief god of Moirang. These processions all converge on the Lai-sang of Thāngjing and the gods and goddesses or their emblems are taken from the litters and carried inside the Lai-sang (god's house) and placed beside Thāngjing. Previous to the arrival of the gods the Moirang Ningthou (King of Moirang) and his wife the Moirang Leima have taken their seats in specially prepared sheds on the right and left of the Lai-sang<sup>2</sup>. As soon as the last of the gods has been installed some five or six men take up their position before the Lai-sang and commence a chorus of "O ho! O ho! Oha! He! He! Hi! Hi!" repeated over and over again, reminding one of the shouts of Nagas. Then a procession is formed.

Thāngjing's sacred Dahs carried by two men lead the way, followed by women bearing his vessels, men with his umbrellas, then a drummer and some Penna<sup>3</sup> players, followed by the litter of the Moirang Leima, behind which comes that of her spouse. The Ningthou and the Leima each wear a silken sling round the neck which reaches to the waist, and in which reposes a small earthen pot containing twenty sel, a betel nut, and a pan leaf. The top of each pot is covered with green leaves, which are tied round the neck, and from the centre of which projects some six or eight inches a bunch of leaves surmounted by a white flower. Beside this is a bobbin round which a cotton thread is wound. The procession halts beside a stream which passes through the village; the litters are placed side by side

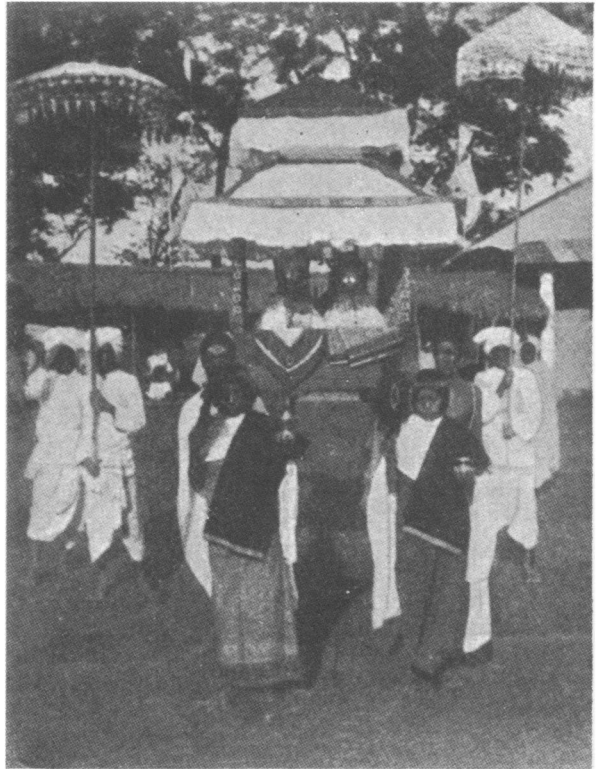


FIG. 1.

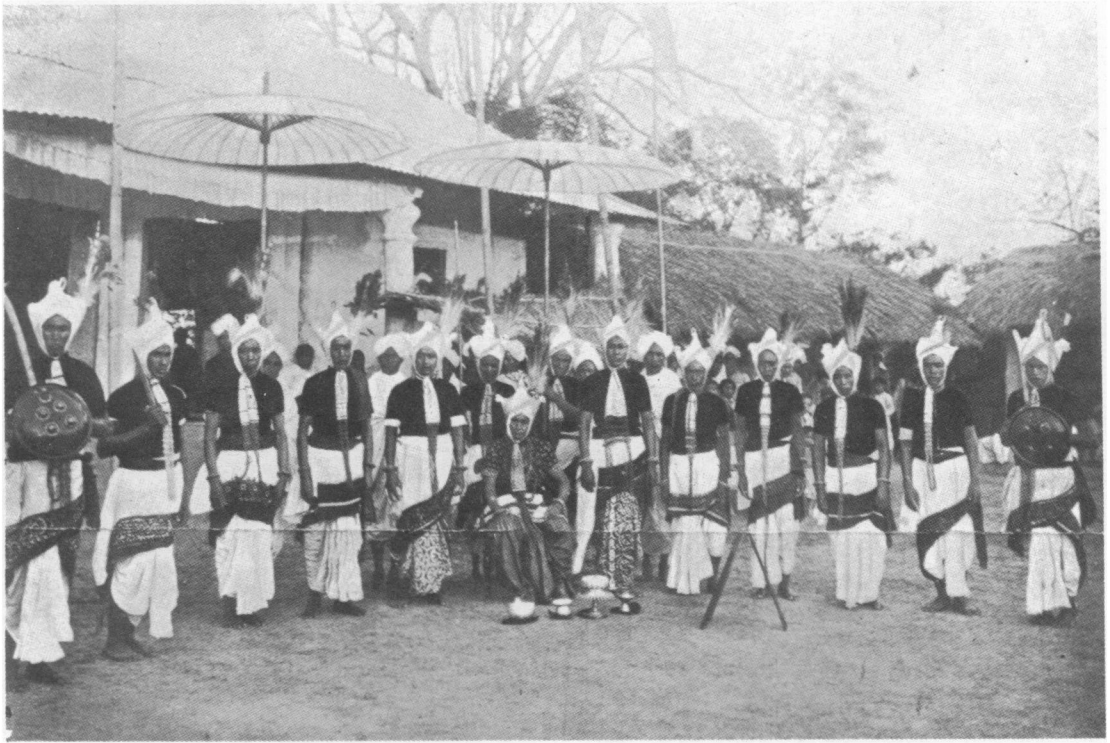


FIG. 1.

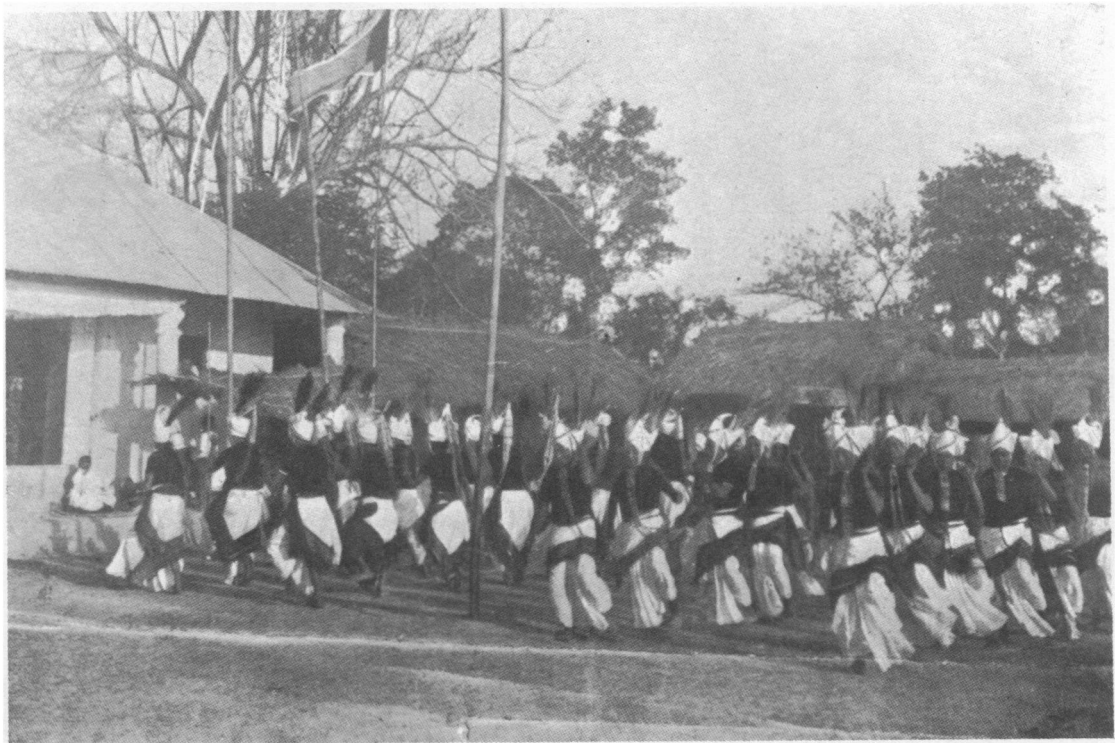


FIG. 2.

**THE PLEASING OF THE GOD THĀNGJING.**

a few feet from the water's edge. The Maibis, *i.e.*, priestesses, one of whom is a man dressed in a woman's clothes, sprinkle the water with flour and roasted dhan called "Puk yu, wai yu," out of which a mildly intoxicating drink is made. Seven short lengths of bamboo are stuck in the mud beside the water and these are sprinkled with the rice, &c., and with water. This is done to appease the seven evil spirits, Saroi and Naro<sup>4</sup>, who are ever on the look-out to injure mankind.

The female Maibi then comes forward and enters the water a short way, carrying a parcel made of leaves, which contains some rice, a duck's egg, a little gold and silver, and a lime. She first flips<sup>5</sup> the surface of the water three times, then immerses the parcel in the water, and after withdrawing it she throws it into the stream and again flips the surface. This operation is repeated with a second parcel and then with two parcels at the same time. The first two parcels are said to be an offering to the Lam-lai<sup>6</sup> (country god) of the water; the two which are thrown in together are for Thāngjing. The male Maibi now takes the earthen pots from the Ningthou and the Leima<sup>7</sup>, and dances a measure on the bank accompanied by the female Maibi, who holds a bunch of green leaves called Langterei in one hand while she tinkles a little bell with the other. The Pennas or fiddles play the while. Then the female Maibi takes the earthen pots, and entering the water, moves them gently about in the water, taking care that no water goes inside. She then sprinkles a little water on the upright leaves. The pots are then returned to the Ningthou and Leima, who stand beside the water with the pots in their slings. The bobbins are removed and the threads unwound; the female Maibi holds the bobbins in her hand, while the other ends of the threads are tied inside the pots. The female Maibi, holding the bunch of Langterei leaves and the bobbins in her right hand, and tinkling a small bell with her left, stoops down and moves the Langterei leaves about in the water. The male Maibi holds up the middle of the threads to keep them out of the water. The female Maibi intones a long incantation interspersed with extempore prayers to Thāngjing to manifest himself and bless the country. She gets more and more excited and sings quicker and quicker and then suddenly stops; Thāngjing has come. Rising up she passes her left hand up the threads, moistening them up to the earthen pots. The strings are then disentangled and the Ningthou and Leima resume their seats in their litters, holding the pots in their laps, while the Maibis hold the ends of the threads and walk on ahead, several women walking behind them supporting the threads.

The procession returns to the Lai-sang. It passes round the end of the shed<sup>8</sup> on the left of the Lai-sang and advances up the centre of the court yard, passing over some rice placed on a leaf and some burning reeds<sup>9</sup>, and halts before the god's house. The earthen pots are taken into the house and placed before Thāngjing. The Ningthou and Leima get out of their litters, and having prostrated themselves before Thāngjing, they go to their proper seats. A Maiba now comes forward and stands facing the Lai-sang, holding up in front of his chest a small log of Hei-it<sup>10</sup> wood, and makes a lengthy address to Thāngjing invoking his aid. This concluded, several assistants come to his aid, and fire is made by drawing a piece of cane quickly backwards and forwards under the log, which is pressed down on to it with the foot, the hot dust being caught on some tinder. With the "clean" fire thus obtained some reeds are ignited and over this some fish<sup>11</sup> is cooked. While the fire is being made the Maibi dances before the god accompanied by two Penna players. The dance is slow, the feet being lifted high in turn and the hands waved about, much play being made with the fingers; at every third or fourth step the dancer turns round. After the Maibi has withdrawn, three Maibas advance and perform a dance three times before the Lai-sang. Their dance is like that of the Maibi, but a little more lively, and the hands are thrown over each shoulder in turn with a smart jerk. At the end of each dance the hands are clasped before the face and an obeisance made.

This dance is followed by one by three married women, who also dance three times, the steps being the same as those of the Maibi; they also dance to the music of the Pennas, whereas the Maibas had a drum and a cymbal as orchestra. In these two dances the performers must be three in number and they must dance three times, not more or less. By this time the fish is ready and pieces are distributed to everyone present. The eating of this fish is supposed to bring good luck. A white cloth is now spread on the steps of the Lai-sang and the women who are going to join in to-morrow's dance come forward and lay on it the clothes they intend to wear and then reverently sit down in two rows at right angles to the steps, while Maiba wrapped in a large white sheet stands between the rows facing the Lai-sang and invokes the blessing of Thāngjing on the clothes and all concerned in the festival. The invocation finished, all bow to the ground, and the women then remove their clothes from the steps and the ceremonies are over for the day.

*Second Day, 8th May.*—The Moirang Ningthou proceed to the Lai-sang mounted on an elephant, and preceded by the Moirang Leima, on another elephant, they are escorted by Penna players and the official Bard who sings of the doings of Thāngjing.

The Phamnai-bas, *i.e.*, title holders, are already dancing before the Lai-sang. As the Ningthou dismounts they all prostrate themselves. The Ningthou and Leima prostrate themselves before the Lai and then take their places.

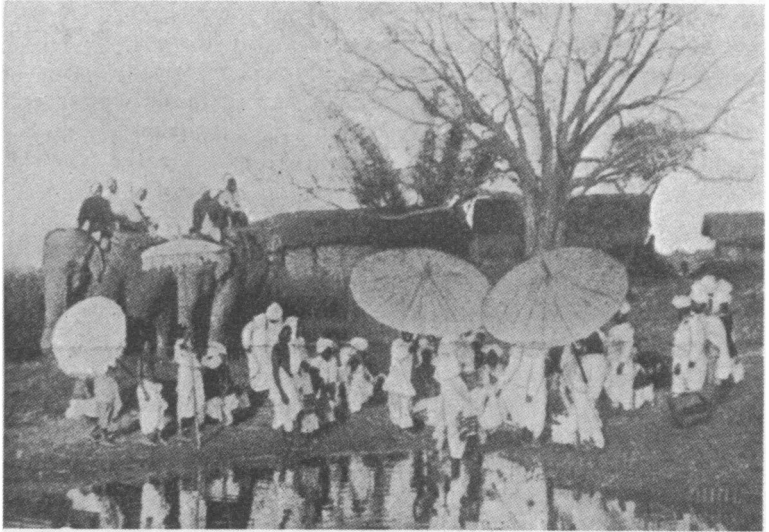


FIG. 2.

1. Some twenty married women dance before the Lai-

sang, in four lines; the step is the same as that of the dance which took place yesterday. The dress is the ordinary dancing dress of married women. In addition to her own hair each wears a long tress, which reaches below her waist, of false hair. These tresses are generally imported from Burma. The orchestra consists of three Penna players and a fluter.

2. The next dance is performed by men most of whom are title holders. The step is the same as yesterday, the party dances in lines, and in addition to the drum and the cymbal a band of men and boys stand near and clap hands.

3. A dance of women most of whom are wives of the title holders, but as some are too old to dance, recruits from the commons are welcome.

4. The men dance again. The hand clappers are more numerous and emit discordant shrieks, which I am told are the song that was sung when Mahadev took Parvati to Brindaban. This introduction of Hinduism into a purely animistic festival is interesting.

5. The married women dance again in greater numbers; after a short time they group themselves to the left of the Lai-sang, and the Moirang Leima, accompanied by

the wife of the Khadarakpa, take up their position opposite to them, and after bowing proceed to dance before the god. In this dance the Moirang Ningthou should really join, but he is too old for such things. The Moirang Leima wears over her ordinary skirt a highly ornamented over-skirt, looking glasses about two inches square alternate with squares of embroidery of the same size. The Penna players are assisted by the drummer who plays in honour of the absent Ningthou.

6. The men dance again.

7. The three Maibis dance (one of them being a man in woman's clothes<sup>12</sup>). The Maibis gradually get excited and end their dance by skipping about most friskily. They thereby invite Thāngjing to take possession of them, but to-day he did not respond.

8. A procession is now formed; first come two men carrying Thāngjing's sacred Dahs; next two maidens in dancing costume carrying fans and vessels; then two married women with similar utensils; these are followed by ten<sup>13</sup> married women in single rank, each wearing round her head a red sash which has been laid before one of the goddesses. Two umbrella bearers walk one on each side of the first woman. After the cloth bearers come a number of women followers, behind whom comes an umbrella bearer followed by nine men, each wearing on his head a red cloth which has been placed before one of the nine gods; these are followed by male followers in dancing costume. The procession is formed up with its head opposite the Lai-sang. A few feet away on the inner side a Maiba, in dancing costume, with a Penna-player on each side of him and drummer behind, takes his place. The Maiba reads a long invocation from an ancient writing, and then the procession moves off round the courtyard, going the opposite way to the hands of a clock. The Maiba continues reading while a master of the ceremonies instructs the performers as to their actions from an ancient writing which he carries. It is most important that no mistake should be made, hence the reference to the manuscripts. The actions refer to the story read by the Maiba, which tells of how Thāngjing created mankind, commencing from the feet. Having gone round several times in single rank, double rank is formed, the pairs holding hands; after two or three rounds in this formation the lines separate and form up opposite each other, one facing, and one with its back to the Lai-sang; they then advance and pass through each others ranks, turn round, return, passing through again; this is repeated several times, and then the double rank formation is resumed and several more circumambulations are completed, and again the two ranks separate, this time forming up on opposite sides of the ground and advancing across the front of the Lai-sang, passing through each others ranks backwards and forwards several times; finally they form up four abreast and march round once or twice and then down the centre and halt before the Lai-sang, and the day's performance is over. During the latter part of the marching the Maibis got somewhat frisky, pirouetting and exchanging banter, but the ribald jocularly which was conspicuous at Kakching was absent. It is noticeable that the maidens and young men take but little part in Thāngjing's Lai-harauba. The marching hither and thither was said to demonstrate the search for Thāngjing, who having finished the work of creation, hid himself. The gathering in front of the Lai-sang signified that the god had been found.

*Third Day, 9th May.*—This day's performance was practically the same as yesterday's, except that several low comedy interludes were inserted, but I was assured that they had nothing to do with the "Pleasing of the God," but were simply put in to make people laugh. I therefore omit them.

The Moirang Ningthou showed me to-day an ancient cloth which he asserts was made by Thoibi for the wife of Thāngjing. In the troublous times of the Burmese invasions this cloth was lost, but last year it was brought to him by the people of

Marring Khunbi, who said that since the Lai-harauba of Thāngjing had been resumed and celebrated with their former pomp the god had troubled them much with sickness and therefore they now gave up this cloth. This is interesting as supporting the theory that these ceremonies are necessary for the renewal of the vitality of the Lai. The cloth, to my incredulous gaze, looked suspiciously modern. It was plain khaki colour save for a border some eight inches wide on which were worked in black a row of strange birds.

I was unable to stay to witness the end of the Harauba, but I am informed that on the fourth day Thāngjing and all the other Lais are carried in their litters to a place about two miles distant near the foot of the hills, and there "clean" fire is made as on the first day, fish cooked, and the usual dances follow, the party returning before dark. The fifth and sixth days are similar to the second and third. On the last day the contents of the earthen pots which figured so prominently on the first day are divided among the Maibas and Maibis.

Divination is practised thus: the enquirer takes a very small piece of gold and silver and gives them to the Maiba, who saying the appropriate charm places them in the palm of his hand and then inverts it over a circular piece of plantain leaf. If the two pieces rest between the two middle ribs of the leaf the decision is favourable to the enquirer, and if the silver is behind the gold it is extremely favourable. Should the pieces rest elsewhere on the leaf misfortune may be expected.

The Maibis may be consulted as to who has committed a crime, but they will not commit themselves further than a general description of the criminal, such as that he is a dark man who comes from Wangu, or a thin woman who deals in fish.

#### NOTES.

<sup>1</sup> *Nongshāba*.—The head Maiba of Moirang informed me that when the universe was in the making and all was dark this powerful "Lai" produced light. Nongshāba may mean maker of the sun.

<sup>2</sup> *Lai-sang*.—This is a prosaic looking building with a corrugated iron roof. It consists of an open room in front and an inner holy of holies, with a passage round it. On the exterior of the walls of this inner chamber are frescoes illustrating the story of Khamba and Thoibi, which can be seen through the windows in the outer wall.

<sup>3</sup> The *Penna* is a fiddle, the head of which is a cocoanut covered with thin leather, and the strings are horse hair stretched over a little wooden bridge resting on the leather. The bow has a wooden handle and a curved iron head ornamented with little bells; the string is horse hair.

<sup>4</sup> *Saroi and Naroi*.—These spirits are said to have no special names, and I have so far been unable to find out much about them, but they are said to be very mischievous. Sa = wild animals; nga = fish; roi = loi = along with, accompanying. I have not found out much about these spirits. They are much dreaded. On the two Saturdays preceeding the Holi festival they are appeased by offerings of every sort of food and some cotton collected from every house in each village. Old women place these offerings across every road where it crosses the village boundary. A portion containing a little of each article and some Puk-yu Wai-yu is placed for each of the seven spirits. The old women then call on the spirit of the last person who has died in the village to keep the Saroi Ngaroi from entering the village, as these offerings have been placed for them. On the Saturday next but one before the Holi all sorts of food are offered to Senamahi, the household god, and then cooked and eaten by the household and friends. The householder places a little of each article at every entrance to his homestead.

<sup>5</sup> This flipping of the water with the finger is said to disperse evil influences which may lurk beneath it.

<sup>6</sup> The gods of all the waters of Manipur are I'ke Ningthou and I-rai Leima. When the Maibi throws them her offering she whispers, "We give you this to eat. We know you as Muba and "Mubi (black ones)." Every Manipuri has a nickname or a pet name, and the Maibi calls the gods by these nicknames as a sign of affection.

<sup>7</sup> This is the important part of the ceremony. It was explained to me that all the Umang Lai came from the water, and the ceremony is intended to renew the vitality of the Lai and to bring him into action. The threads are roads by which he can proceed to the pots. The Langterei leaves are placed in the Ningthou's pot and are kept in the Lai-sang till the next Lai-harauba. I

was told that if the Harauba were not celebrated sickness and scarcity would prevail, partly on account of the god's anger and partly because of his failing strength.

<sup>8</sup>In front of the Lai-sang is a wide open space, down each side of which runs a long shed; in that on the right sit the notabilities of Moirang, the Ningthou nearest the Lai-sang, the others in due gradation. Opposite them sit their spouses also in proper order.

<sup>10</sup>The wood is selected because it is soft and ignites easily. This method of making fire is still used by Nagas in out-of-the-way parts of the hills.

<sup>11</sup>The fish takes the place of the bull which was sacrificed in pre-Hindu days. (*Vide The Meitheis*, by T. C. Hodson, p. 144.)

<sup>12</sup>I am told that the Laïs prefer women to dance before them, and therefore when a man becomes "possessed" he assumes women's clothes. It is noticeable that the Maiba, priests of these Umang Lai, do not take part in the dances at the Lai-harauba, though everything is regulated by them. The men who work themselves up into a frenzy and say they are possessed don women's clothes and dance, but are not enrolled among the Maibas. The real Maibis are people of importance. It is usual for a Manipuri husband to sleep on the right, but if his wife is a Maibi he yields her the place of honour.

<sup>13</sup>I enquired why there were ten representatives of the goddesses, as there are only seven goddesses of the families. I was told that the other three were the wives of Thāngjing and Nongshāba, but on the next day only nine representatives of the goddesses appeared, and I was told that by mistake one in excess had been decorated the first day. Seeing how much importance is said to attach to the verbal accuracy of the chant, it seems curious that such a mistake was not considered likely to have any bad effects.

J. SHAKESPEAR.

#### DESCRIPTION OF PLATE F.

Fig. 1. THE TITLE HOLDERS OF MOIRANG.—The Ningthou is seated. In front of him, each on a piece of plantain leaf, are his betel-nut box and other brass utensils, a little to one side is his looking-glass. On all ceremonial occasions these utensils and looking-glass are carried with every person of importance. There are twenty-nine title holders, but only fourteen appear in the group. The title holders receive no pay and have no specific duties. There is a strict order of precedence among the title holders, and persons will pay considerable sums for a title.

Fig. 2. THE SECOND DANCE OF THE SECOND DAY.—The performers are male titleholders of the village.

#### DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT.

Fig. 1. NONGSHĀBA AND HIS WIFE SARUNGLAIMA BEING CARRIED TO THE LAI-SANG.—The two girls are carrying the god's fans and utensils in their hands, and each has a red blanket for the god's use over her left shoulder.

Fig. 2. THE ENTICING OF THĀNGJING.—The Moirang Ningthou is sitting in the centre under the two umbrellas. The Leima, his wife, is hidden by one of the Maibis, who is supporting the thread leading to the langtere leaves in the hand of the chief Maibi, who is moving them about in the water. On the right, at the water's edge, are seen the seven bamboo tubes for the Saroi Naroï. These tubes are identical with the three *theibial* used in a similar manner in the Tui-leh-rām sacrifice performed by the Luthais and other cognate classes to appease the spirits of the land and water.

Africa, East.

Beech.

**A Ceremony at a Mugumu or Sacred Fig-tree of the A-Kikuyu of East Africa.** By M. W. H. Beech, M.A.

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At Nyakumu, in the Kikuyu Native Reserve, there is being built a large dam. This is to catch rain-water for the flocks of the A-Kikuyu to drink in the dry season.

The dam is 500 yards in circumference and is nearly completed. Towards the end of February there was a heavy thunder shower, and a large quantity of water found its way into the enclosure. What should be noticed is that this is a new water supply; no domestic animals had as yet drunk from it.

Now, however, they will do so, for Ngai (God), through the medium of a sacred mugumu (or fig-tree) such as was described by me in MAN, 1913, 3, has received his due, and has exercised or appeased the spirits of the rain, for it is rain-water in the dam. The ceremony, which took some time, I myself witnessed, and it is worth describing in detail.

The Government "chief" Kinyanjui wa Gotherimu—an officer of our own