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WITCHCRAFT IN NYASA (*MANGANJA*) YAO (*ACHAWA*).

COMMUNICATED BY A NATIVE TO H. W. GARBUTT.

Note.—A witch or wizard can be a male or female; in these notes they are all treated as “male.”

WHEN anyone wishes to learn how to bewitch, he goes to a person who is suspected of being a wizard and asks him if he can make the applicant famous (*kuchuka*), as it is impossible to go and ask to be made a wizard. The wizard then asks him if he has any relative—or a sister or mother of a relative or an aunt—who is expecting a child. No one can be taught the profession unless he has a relative in this condition. If he has, the wizard tells him to go home and wait until the child is born. Should it be born dead, the applicant learns where it is going to be buried and reports to the wizard. After the burial the teacher and pupil go to the grave and dig out the body. The wizard cuts the body open and takes out the liver and heart, mixes them with some ground roots (*mitsitsi*), roasts them, and gives them to the pupil to eat.

The wizard also gets some roots out of the bush, mixes them with the nostrils, carpal bones, and hair of the forehead of a hyena, burns them and mixes the ashes with castor oil (*ntsatsi*). This mixture he puts into the tail of a hyena. He also makes a necklace of human teeth, thumbs, dried eyes, ears, nose, and privates, and gives it to the pupil.

All wizards are said to possess tame hyenas and owls which they keep in a cave and feed with human flesh every day. When the pupil has finished his course of instruction his teacher supplies him with a hyena and an owl. Wizards are also supposed to keep human blood hidden in a cave and to give some every day to their pupil.

Wizards are said to be able to get into huts at night without disturbing the sleeping inmates. This they do by means of the above-mentioned doctored hyena tail. When they come in front of the hut they tie the tail into a knot and push the door open, enter, and finding everyone fast asleep, make exhibits to the sleepers, stabbing each one with a poisoned needle in any part of the body. The hyena tail in Nyasaland is a very serious thing to the natives, and an important part of a thief's outfit. They use it to make people sleep, and then dig under the foundations of the hut, get inside and take away everything they can carry. They also play jokes on people by shaving their privates. These thieves are called *Chitaka*, and came from Mangulu in Portuguese territory into Blantyre after the famine in 1902. They are said to be able to kill a goat without letting it cry out,

or to steal from the hut of any wizard except the *Mabisalila*. Many of the Atonga (Baudawe) natives also know the magic theft.

There are four classes of witch doctors :—

1. *Waula*—the bone thrower.
2. *Mapondela*—the ordeal poison pounder.
3. *Mabisalila*—the witch hider.
4. *Mabvumbula*—the pointer.

When anyone is sick the relatives go first to the bone thrower (*waula kukavmbiza*) to find out who is bewitching the sick person. The bone thrower asks for the names of the people living at the kraal. This information having been supplied, he says to his bones, “*Tamvatu mvavanawe tandinza usaukwe weka*” (Just listen, my boy ; tell me and choose amongst these names by yourself). He continues “E! E! E!” and then mentions the name of the person who is suspected of bewitching the sick person. The relatives return home and send for the ordeal (*mvabvi*) poison pounder (*Mapondela*). He gets the ordeal poison, called by the natives *mvabvi*, and made from the bark of the tree of that name. When *Mapondela* is getting this bark he takes only the pieces which fall open \cup , not those which fall flat \cap . That which falls flat is called *mpelanjilu* (poison). *Mapondela* keeps the *mvabvi* ordeal poison in a bag made out of baboon skin. When he arrives at the kraal of the sick person, the relatives hide him. Early in the morning the headman of the kraal shouts with a loud voice, “*Musadie nsima musadie kanthu*” (Do not eat porridge or anything else); he then orders a young man to call together all the people in the kraal. The people come and go with the headman to the fields (*panthando*). There *Mapondela* appears in full dress, leaping and singing, “*Dzanza lamanzele lilipanyama.*” (The left hand is at the meat.) He pounds the *mvabvi* whilst singing and mixes it with the excrement of foxes, owls, hyenas and dogs’ urine, and calling the people one by one, makes them drink this mixture out of a filthy cup. He also tells his friends to watch the people, some of whom presently die, and some vomit; those who die are guilty, and those who vomit are innocent, but have to pay the doctor. The dead bodies are left lying at the ordeal drinking place (*nthando*) and are eaten by the birds and wild animals.

3. *Mabisalila*.—When a person dies, the brother or son goes to *Mabisalila* and asks him to go to the mourning kraal. *Mabisalila*, two boys, and the relative of the deceased travel together and reach there secretly, at night, so that the people may not see them. *Mabisalila* asks when the funeral takes place. They will probably say, “To-morrow.” *Mabisalila* and the relative go out early to the burial place and measure a place where the body has to be buried. *Mabisalila* and his two boys are then left hidden in the bush and the relative returns to the kraal to join the others in carrying the body to the grave. The messenger does not tell anyone that *Mabisalila* is hidden near the grave. They dig a pit in the place appointed by the messenger (the place *Mabisalila* measured). When the pit is about 8 feet deep they make a room in the side of the pit and into this room they place the body,

they stick sticks in the ground and cut a piece of mat so as to separate the body from the mud, then they close the pit and return to the kraal. Before reaching the kraal they go to a river or brook and wash; the women wash down the stream and the men up the stream. When they reach the kraal they find a goat killed and cooked, but before eating it they burn the hut of the deceased. As soon as possible the relative slips away from the crowd and returns to the *Mabisalila*. *Mabisalila* has provided himself with poisoned skewers and a koodoo horn.

Wizards are supposed to visit the graves before dark, because they are afraid of snakes. They come in a whirlwind, *Mabisalila* blows his horn, the wizards then become blind and fall down, and *Mabisalila* stabs them with his poisoned skewers and breaks them off. When he has finished doing this he orders his two boys to race home; he remains with his victims; stooping, he again blows his horn to wake them up. The wizards scatter away, but return to the grave for revenge, but they see no one, as *Mabisalila* ran away with them, but they did not recognize him, and, instead of returning to the grave with them, he ran home. The next morning all these victims cannot sit up straight owing to the broken-in points of the poisoned skewers, and in a few days some of them die and the skewer ends are found in their flesh.

4. *Mabvumbula*.—When natives are always sick in their kraal the headman agrees to find, or call in, the witch pointer. He sends one of his men to the *Mabvumbula's* kraal with two fowls. On arriving the messengers clap their hands in front of *Mabvumbula*, saying, "We have been sent by our headman to disturb you and to ask you to come and dance in front of your slaves to-morrow morning." In reply *Mabvumbula* simply nods his head. The messengers return home and tell the headman that the doctor has accepted the fowls.

Early the next morning the witch pointer comes, bringing with him a koodoo horn, small buck's horn, zebra's tail, and a pot of castor oil. He is dressed in full dress of wild animal skins and brings boys with him. On his arrival he finds the headman and all the people of the kraal waiting for him. The *Mabvumbula's* boys beat the drums; he dances, holding the zebra tail in his right hand and the koodoo horn in his left, and the castor oil (*ntsatsi*) pot on the ground near him. The small buck's horn hangs from his neck, attached to a piece of hyena skin. The people are formed in a circle round him. He sings, "*Mousesmu ndatseuda ndaona lelo sindinaziwovia*" (I have been travelling through country to-day which I never saw before). He dips the zebra tail in the oil pot and swings it round on to the people whilst he whistles with the small buck's horn. He tells all the people to look earnestly at him and he points the koodoo horn at each one. Then soon he springs and hits with the tail the one suspected of being a wizard. At once his boys tie up the suspected person or persons and take them off to be burnt or stoned. A good headman does not allow this unless he has previously sent for an ordeal poison pounder to make an examination by the ordeal.

Namlondola (Theft Doctor or Pointer).—Whenever goods or sheep are stolen by the magic thieves (Chitaka), the owner of the property gets permission from

the headman of the kraal to call in *Namlondola*. He then goes to the theft doctor's kraal and presents the doctor with two yards of calico and says, "Master, I am your servant who has lost all his goods and has nothing left; please accept this piece of calico and follow me to-morrow." The doctor replies, "Yes, my son." When the owner of the stolen goods returns home he does not tell the people at his kraal that he has been away engaging the services of the theft doctor. Early in the morning *Namlondola* arrives, bringing with him the horn of a koodoo or eland. Marking his face with a red paint, he goes to the headman of the kraal and tells him that he has been called to this kraal by one of the inhabitants in it. The headman calls the man who has lost his property and tells him to find four strong men. When these men are found they go with the doctor to the place where the goods used to be, and *Namlondola* tells two of the men to lift up the horn and the other two to press it down. The horn moves forward and follows the thieves' spoor to the place where the goods are hidden; here it slips from the four men's grasp and falls down. The four men dig and the goods are found. If they are found in a hut the owner of it is considered to be the thief and is tied up. If he is well known he is fined a slave and a number of goats and sheep, but if he is a "nobody" he is burnt. When the goods are found in the bush *Namlondola* says to his horn, "Now, friend, show me where the thieves are." The four men then grasp the horn as before and it seems to pull all four men until it arrives at the thieves' kraal and takes them to the hut of the head thief. The four men tie up the owner of the hut until he discloses the names of his accomplices. If they were common people they were burnt, and *Namlondola* was allowed to take away from their huts all he could carry and was also paid a fee of two goats by the owner of the stolen property.

Mischievous Youths.—When a boy of ten to fourteen years of age steals chickens, eggs, etc., the parents may decide to punish him. To do this the mother takes hold of his left hand and shoves it into some hot ashes and pours cold water on to them. Though the youth cries out the mother does not stop until the vice is scalded out. This is to teach a boy that when he grows to manhood, if he steals, his whole body will be burnt.