

THE AKIKUYU OF EAST AFRICA.¹

IT may be said at once that this is a very valuable contribution to the ethnology of Africa. In its thoroughness it recalls work characteristic of the latest German school. A trifling defect is the trick which both authors have of separating their African words into syllables, no doubt to facilitate immediate pronunciation by the unlearned; but, although this plan might be recommended in certain important words at their first appearance, it becomes irritating to the eye when perpetuated throughout the book; and sometimes the separation of syllables cuts athwart the etymology of root-words. The same remarks apply to the introduction of the apostrophe after the initial "m" or "n." To anyone really versed in Bantu studies this apostrophe is anathema, as it is quite unnecessary. A writer fastidious about Bantu prefixes supplies a *hyphen* between the prefix and the root, and not an *apostrophe*.

Perhaps, without ungraciousness, another criticism might be added—that the book would have been even more valuable than it is if the authors had either been more widely read in regard to other African studies or had submitted their MS. to a specialist in comparative African ethnology in England or Germany, who could have explained many points which are acknowledged as obscure by the authors, and enabled them to have instituted the most interesting comparisons. The book is such a good one, so likely to take a permanent place as a standard work, that it is to be hoped in a further edition these suggestions may be taken note of.

The Akikuyu (*A-* is a corruption of the plural prefix, *Ba-*, *ki-* is probably the eighth prefix often applied to "languages," "sorts," or "kinds," and the root of the name is really *kuyu*) are a collection of clans of Bantu-speaking negroes which inhabit the elevated plateaus of equatorial East Africa on the eastern side of the great Rift Valley. In language, and perhaps partly in racial origin, they are akin to the Bantu tribes round the slopes of Mount Kenia and the river-side people of the Tana River; also, less markedly, to the A-kamba of the East African plains between these highlands and the sea coast. The Akikuyu specially are greatly interfused with Masai blood, so that many of them have a strong facial resemblance to the Masai, though not so tall in stature. It is very seldom that one meets amongst them the rather prognathous Pigmy type observable here and there amongst the nomad Ndorobo, who dwell on the fringe of their territory to the north. Obviously, they are a remnant of the Bantu invasion of East Africa, of a generalised negro type which at one time or another has intermixed very freely with the Masai, retaining, however, their own Bantu dialect. This, by some centuries of comparative isolation, has become distinctly peculiar in the form of its prefixes and some elements of its grammar. The dense forests of their plateau country have enabled them to resist complete extermination and absorption at the hands of the Masai, when some century ago that bold offshoot of the Nilotic peoples overran the countries between the Victoria Nyanza and the Indian Ocean.

According to the traditions collected by Mr. and Mrs. Routledge, the Akikuyu were preceded in their occupation of these forests by a diminutive race known as the Agumba, and also by the Ndorobo. The last-named is a nomadic people of very mixed elements—composed partly of Bushmanlike Pigmies

¹ "With a Prehistoric People. The Akikuyu of British East Africa." Being some Account of the Method of Life and Mode of Thought found existent amongst a Nation on its First Contact with European Civilisation. By W. Scoresby Routledge and Katherine Routledge (born Pease). Pp. xxxii + 392. (London: Edward Arnold, 1910.) Price 21s. net.

and degraded Hamites—which ranges in scattered hunting colonies all over equatorial East Africa. The Agumba may have been the Bushmanlike Pigmy race which seems to have inhabited East Africa in ancient times, and to have left many traces of its presence in existing tribes between Abyssinia on the north and Nyasa on the south. Or, again, the Agumba may have been a branch of the Congo Pigmies, the physical type of which can apparently be traced as far east at the present day as the western slopes of



FIG. 1.—Costume of a Neophyte as he dances prior to Initiation to Manhood. From "With a Prehistoric People."

Mount Elgon. According to the traditions collected by the authors, these Agumba finally went westwards to "a big forest."

Mr. and Mrs. Routledge think that the root-word *kuyu* refers to the great fig-trees which are abundant in the forests of the Akikuyu country, fig-trees, probably, that produce bark cloth. But it may also be a word meaning "up above," the lofty region, from the Bantu root *kulu*, *gulu*, or *zulu*, the letter *l* being

much disliked in many of these East African Bantu dialects, and either dropped or changed into a *y* sound. Certainly, according to the traditions of the Akikuyu, their upland country was until a hundred years ago (more or less) a region of unbroken forest (we may add, West African in its flora and fauna) which was nourished by an exceedingly heavy rainfall. This great equatorial forest of Africa obviously extended at one period right across the continent to the shores of the Indian Ocean. It has left traces of its peculiar flora and even fauna in the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba, and on the north coast of Lake Nyasa. This must have been a forest which contained not only the West African antelopes and pigs, birds, spiders, and butterflies, still found in Kikuyuland, but the gorilla and chimpanzee, and other types which once ranged uninterruptedly between West Africa and Further India. Consequently, Kikuyu-

very well known for his own ethnographical and linguistic studies of East African peoples.

Specially noteworthy are the illustrations and description of the Kikuyu "bull-roarer" used in various ceremonies, the modelling of fetishes (human figures), blacksmith's work, and initiation ceremonies, with their appropriate dances and costumes. In the interesting article on the medicine-man, the etymology of his name—Mundu Mugū—is not quite rightly hit off (in the quotation from Mr. McGregor). Mugū is really a contraction of the prefix and root of the widespread Bantu word Mu-logu, or Mu-logo, meaning magician, either good or bad. This root *-logo* ranges mainly over western Bantu Africa, and assumes sometimes very altered forms, such as *-doki*, *-Jozi*, *-roho*. It is a parallel to the equally widespread root *nganga*; but *-logo* has to do rather with the evil side of magic or of spiritual influence, while *nganga* may well have been in its origin applied to some new wisdom from the north, something to do with iron-working or superior knowledge of a practical, material kind. (For instance, *Bu-nganga* in some Bantu languages means "gunpowder.")

There is an appendix to the book which gives an interesting note by the late Colonel J. A. Grant on iron-smelting in East Africa.

In their bibliography dealing with the Kikuyu and their language, the authors omit any reference to the present writer's vocabulary of Kikuyu in his work on the Uganda Protectorate. For various reasons, this vocabulary, though short, is

of interest, as it represents the dialect of the westernmost part of the Kikuyu range, and is therefore interesting for comparison with the nearest (but very dissimilar) Bantu dialects of the regions immediately to the east of the Victoria Nyanza.

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TEMPERATURES IN THE FREE ATMOSPHERE.¹

DR. WAGNER has given us a comprehensive discussion of the temperature results obtained with registering balloons in Europe during the period July, 1902–June, 1907, and has incidentally furnished an excellent practical tribute to the collective publication

¹ "Die Temperatur Verhältnisse in der freien Atmosphäre [Ergebnisse der internationalen unbemannter Ballonaufstiege]." By Dr. Arthur Wagner. Beiträge zur Physik der freien Atmosphäre. Bd. iii. Heft 2-3. (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Nömmich.)



FIG. 2.—A Medicine Man. From "With a Prehistoric People."

land, from the point of view of palæontology, would, if there were any Tertiary or alluvial deposits (dried-up lakes, &c.), probably yield as interesting results in its exploration from that point of view as in ethnology and botany.

The book under review, besides giving these interesting details as to the traditions and chronology of the Akikuyu, describes the people and their pursuits, their food and cookery, agriculture, domestic animals, arts and crafts, warfare and weapons, blood-drinking, betrothal and marriage, and general position of women, dances, initiation ceremonies, religion, conceptions of God, notions as to life after death, medicine, folk-lore; and also the position of this interesting people under the new British Administration. The authors have received much assistance from Mr. C. W. Hopley, one of the principal officials of East Africa, who is so