

# FACING MT. KENYA

by **JOMO KENYATTA**

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY B. MALINOWSKI



A VINTAGE BOOK

FACING  
MOUNT KENYA

THE TRIBAL LIFE OF THE GIKUYU

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B. MALINOWSKI



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T O

Moigoi and Wamboi and all the dispossessed youth of Africa: for perpetuation of communion with ancestral spirits through the fight for African Freedom, and in the firm faith that the dead, the living, and the unborn will unite to rebuild the destroyed shrines.

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## INTRODUCTION

"ANTHROPOLOGY begins at home" has become the watchword of modern social science. Mass-observation and "Northtown" in England; "Middletown" in U.S.A.; the comprehensive studies of villages and of peasant life carried out in Eastern Europe—notably in Rumania and Poland; the new drive in French folklore undertaken by Rivière and Varagniac—all these are directing the technique, method, and aims of anthropology on to our own civilisation. Even Volkskunde, the study of the German people by German scholars, though partly mystical and largely misused, is none the less an expression of the sound view that we must start by knowing ourselves first, and only then proceed to the more exotic savageries.

In all this we do not even debate the point as to whether an educated and trained member of a community is entitled to observe it with profit and competence. We do not place taboos on Psycho-analysis, because the psycho-analyst himself may be of the same race and culture as his patient, and at times even in the same neurotic condition. We do not send our Behaviourist to Central Australia because, being white, he might be unable to study white children. The English economist is allowed to work on the commerce

and banking of the City of London, and the French jurists have given us excellent analyses of the Code Napoléon.

Yet when an African writes a book about his own tribe, it seems almost necessary to justify his claims. I shall not make any such attempt or gesture because, in my opinion, the book speaks for itself. Mr. Kenyatta also does not argue the point whether "Anthropology begins at home" is as true of Africa as of Europe. It obviously is. Mr. Kenyatta has acted upon the principle and produced an excellent monograph on African life and custom.

As every good ethnographer ought to do, the Author shows his credentials in his Preface. He has gone through the African course of training. He became, later on, practically acquainted with administrative and economic issues of East African policy. As to his training in Anthropology, I can add one or two points which he himself is not in a position to make. For several years past Mr. Kenyatta has been a member of my discussion class at the London School of Economics. He was thus associated in research and discussion, in original contribution and extempore critical activity with a number of brilliant, experienced and highly competent young scholars, many of whom had done their own term of field-work, and all of whom had had years of previous academic training. In this group he was able to play an active, indeed creative part, giving us illuminating sidelights, inspired by the inside knowledge of an African, but formulated with the full competence of a trained Western scholar. The present book bears full witness of his ability to construct, and his clarity of thought and expression.

There is one quality in the book to which I would like to draw special attention. Mr. Kenyatta is outspoken and honest to an extent rarely found in students of social science: he recognises the dangers of his own

bias. "In the present work I have tried my best to record facts as I know them, mainly through a lifetime of personal experience, and have kept under very considerable restraint the sense of political grievances which no progressive African can fail to experience" (Preface). In fairness to Mr. Kenyatta, and as a matter of wisdom in any co-operation between Europeans of goodwill and Africans who have suffered the injury of higher education, we have to recognise the fact that an African who looks at things from the tribal point of view and at the same time from that of Western civilisation, experiences the tragedy of the modern world in an especially acute manner.

For, to quote William James, "Progress is a terrible thing." It is terrible to those of us who half a century ago were born into a world of peace and order; who cherished legitimate hopes of stability and gradual development; and who now have to live through the dishonesty and immorality of the very historical happenings. I refer to the events of the last few years which seem to demonstrate once more that *Might is Right*; that bluff, impudence, and aggression succeed where a decent readiness to co-operate has failed. The first seeds of this new historical demoralisation, let us remember, were indeed planted, not by Fascism or Communism, but by the frauds, the imbecilities, and the impotence of democratic statesmanship, which led us into the World War; then into the ensuing injustices and betrayals of the Peace Treaties. German National Socialism and the other totalitarianisms have been largely manufactured and fomented through the ill-applied brutality, then the weakness, of the Allied policies.

"The African is not blind," Mr. Kenyatta reminds us. The educated, intellectual minority of Africans, usually dismissed as "agitators," are rapidly becoming a force. They are catalysing an African public opinion even among the raw tribesmen. A great deal will de-

pend upon whether this minority of "agitators" will be made to keep a balanced and moderate view of economic, social and political issues, or whether by ignoring them and treating them with contempt we drive them into the open arms of world-wide Bolshevism. For on this will depend the general drift of African opinion from one end of the Dark Continent to the other.

It is amazing how, for instance, the Abyssinian venture has organised public opinion in places and among natives whom one would never have suspected of having any complicated views on the League of Nations, on the Dual Mandate, on the Dignity of Labour, and on the Brotherhood of Man. But about Abyssinia most Bantu and Negroes have their views. They have been organised into a hatred of European encroachment and into a contempt for the debility of those powers and movements which ranged themselves on the side of Africa, and then, through weakness and incompetence, abandoned the cause of Africa and let it go by default. Again, the mismanagement of the "Chinese incident" is uniting the world of coloured peoples against Western influence and above all against Great Britain and the United States, for even to one who is black, brown, or yellow, *noblesse oblige*.

Mr. Kenyatta has wisely refrained from using any such language as appears in my last sentences. He presents the facts objectively, and to a large extent without any passion or feeling. That some of this is contained in his presentation of facts is a help and not a hindrance. For if the present book does nothing more than help us to understand how Africans see through our pretences, and how they assess the realities of the Dual Mandate, it will be rendering a great service. From this point of view the chapters on land tenure, on economic life, on the marriage system, and, last but not least, on religion and magic, deserve a careful

scrutiny. Any African bias contained in them is all to the good.

There is perhaps a little too much in some passages of European bias. I might have been tempted to advise the writer to be more careful in using such antitheses as "collective" v. "individual," in opposing the native outlook as "essentially social" to the European as "essentially personal." At many points unnecessary comparisons are introduced and European expressions such as Church, State, "legal system," "economics," etc., are used with somewhat superfluous implications. When we read of "a woman specialist . . . who has studied a form of surgery from childhood," and who performs an operation "with the dexterity of a Harley Street surgeon," the picture is amusing but not helpful. I am not aware that a Harley Street specialist had ever been placed side by side with the old Gikuyu practitioner to be compared with her. Principles of asepsis are certainly not prominent in the ritual surgery of any African tribe.

In another context Mr. Kenyatta himself warns us against the dangers of misusing European terminology. "The average European observer, not trained in comparative sociology . . . thinks of a tribe as if it must be analogous to the European sovereign state." Indeed, to use such expressions as "State," "Sovereignty," "Church," is only profitable if these terms be re-defined completely so as to make them applicable to the African culture. In the following statement, however, Mr. Kenyatta obviously runs counter to his own judicious advice and the rules of terminological caution. "To make use of European terminology, it might be said that religion in Gikuyu is 'State established,' but it would be even more true to say that Church and State are one." Since, however, as we have been rightly told, the word State cannot be well applied, nor yet the word Church, while an Established Religion carries with it

a multitude of unnecessary implications, it might have been better not to introduce a somewhat misleading and quite superfluous simile, and to describe the condition in terms of concrete detail. This is so abundantly given, however, that such criticisms are really due to a cavilling pedantry which I am using on this book to express my very high opinion of its quality.

The chapter on magic is especially important and valuable because of the abundance of texts, of the details given as to the ritual and the ingredients employed, and the inside information on the psychology of act and situation alike. Some anthropologists may question here the reinterpretation of the real processes which underlie magic. "It can be safely said that this (i.e. magic) is one way of transmitting thoughts telepathically from one mind to another," we are told by Mr. Kenyatta. "It seems that, through concentration, the magician or the possessor of love magic is able to penetrate into the mental mechanism of the person with whom he desires to establish communication. In this form the magician's suggestions are easily transmitted by means of vibration to the brain, and then to the mind."

I submit that Mr. Kenyatta would still have to supply some evidence as to how these "vibrations" are produced, how they act on the brain, and thence on the mind. But the author disarms all criticism when he tells us: "There is something in it which can be classified as occultism, and, as such, it cannot be dismissed as merely superstition." For, indeed, how can we criticise Mr. Kenyatta for believing in the reality of those magical vibrations and the possibility of penetrating the mental mechanisms of others, in occultism and telepathy or spiritism? How can we criticise him, and exonerate the great English physicist who believes in table-rapping and spooks; or accept as civilised the two or three of our present Cabinet Ministers who believe

in Christian Science, or the Oxford Group Movement, or spiritism? Do the religious convictions of those who accepted Hitler as God, who had faith in the omnipotence of Mussolini or in the omniscience of Stalin, belong to savagery or to civilisation, to superstition or to faith?

We are thus led to the reflection that Europe is as deeply immersed in occultism; that superstition, blind faith and complete disorientation are as dangerous a canker in the heart of our Western civilisation as in Africa. Indeed, since we know better, and have all the means to combat superstition among us, Mr. Kenyatta's somewhat ingenuous remarks should lead us to search our own hearts and not to indulge in another supercilious attack on the African's liability to superstition. There is more superstition among us; it is more dangerous as well as more despicable than anywhere among the most primitive tribe.

The present book will thus be useful, inspiring, as well as entertaining and instructive, in a variety of ways and for a multitude of readers. It is one of the first really competent and instructive contributions to African ethnography by a scholar of pure African parentage. Through his upbringing Mr. Kenyatta combines to an unusual extent the knowledge of Western ways and Western modes of thought with a training and outlook essentially African. As a first-hand account of a representative African culture, as an invaluable document in the principles underlying culture-contact and change; last, not least, as a personal statement of the new outlook of a progressive African, this book will rank as a pioneering achievement of outstanding merit.

B. MALINOWSKI

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## PREFACE

THE COUNTRY of the Gikuyu,<sup>1</sup> whose system of tribal organisation will be described in this book, is in the central part of Kenya. It is divided into five administrative districts: Kiambu, Fort Hall (Murang'a), Nyeri, Embu, and Meru. The population is approximately one million. Owing to the alienation of agricultural and pastoral land, about 110,000<sup>2</sup> Gikuyu live mostly as squatters on farms on European land in various districts of Kenya. The rest of the population inhabits the Gikuyu Reserve and the towns. The Gikuyu people are agriculturists; they herd large flocks of sheep and goats, and, to a less extent, cattle, since their social organisation requires a constant supply of stock for such varied purposes as "marriage insurance," pay-

<sup>1</sup>The usual European way of spelling this word is Kikuyu, which is incorrect; it should be Gikuyu, or in strict phonetic spelling Gekoyo. This form refers only to the country itself. A Gikuyu person is Mu-Gikuyu, plural, A-Gikuyu. But so as not to confuse our readers we have used the one form Gikuyu for all purposes.

<sup>2</sup>"We see no reason to doubt the general accuracy of the statement that the number of Kikuyu now resident outside the reserve is in the general neighbourhood of 110,000, and supporting calculations are given in the memorandum, which had been filed with the original record of the evidence." (*Report of the Kenya Land Commission*. September, 1933, § 499.)



ments, sacrifices, meat feasts, magical rites, purification ceremonies, and as means of supplying clothing to the community.

The cultural and historical traditions of the Gikuyu people have been verbally handed down from generation to generation. As a Gikuyu myself, I have carried them in my head for many years, since people who have no written records to rely on learn to make a retentive memory do the work of libraries. Without note-book or diary to jot down memoranda, the African learns to make an impression on his own mind which he can recall whenever it is wanted. Throughout his life he has much to commit to memory, and the vivid way in which stories are told to him and their incidents acted out before his eyes helps the child to form an indelible mental picture from his early teaching. In every stage of life there are various competitions arranged for the members of the several age-groups, to test their ability to recall and relate in song and dance the stories and events which have been told to them, and at such functions parents and the general public form an audience to judge and correct the competitors.

Like any other Gikuyu child, therefore, I acquired in my youth my country's equivalent of a liberal education, but while I lived among my kinsfolk there was no obvious necessity for writing it down. But during my anthropological studies and visits to various countries in Europe, I had the opportunity of meeting men and women who were keenly interested in hearing about African ways of life. I then realised the necessity to set down in black and white the knowledge which had hitherto remained in my head, for the benefit both of Europeans and of those Africans who have been detached from their tribal life. Before setting to work I realised the difficulty which faced me owing to my lack of training in comparative social anthropology,

and accordingly set about finding ways and means to acquire the necessary technical knowledge for recording the information scientifically. It was my friend and teacher, Professor Malinowski, who made this possible for me through the International Institute of African Languages and Culture, and I wish to place on record my appreciation of his unfailing help and encouragement, both in study and in the arrangement of my material.

I wish to express my gratitude to those many friends, both European and African, who have been good enough to read and discuss parts of my manuscript and to give their frank opinions of it. Their criticisms and suggestions have been helpful. I am indebted to Dr. Raymond Firth for his careful reading of the manuscript and his technical advice on anthropological points. And to my brother Moigai for taking photographs of initiation ceremonies and for checking information on ritual points; and to my father and other elders, who gave him their help.

I owe thanks also to my enemies, for the stimulating discouragement which has kept up my spirits to persist in the task. Long life and health to them to go on with the good work!

*Thaaaaai*—to the members of the Gikuyu Central Association, my comrades-in-arms of the past, present, and future. In this work as in all our other activities, their co-operation, courage, and sacrifice in the service of the Gikuyu people have been the inspiration and the sustaining power.

In the present work I have tried my best to record facts as I know them, mainly through a lifetime of personal experience, and have kept under very considerable restraint the sense of political grievances which no progressive African can fail to experience. My chief object is not to enter into controversial discussion with those who have attempted, or are attempt-

ing, to describe the same things from outside observation, but to let the truth speak for itself. I know that there are many scientists and general readers who will be disinterestedly glad of the opportunity of hearing the Africans' point of view, and to all such I am glad to be of service. At the same time, I am well aware that I could not do justice to the subject without offending those "professional friends of the African" who are prepared to maintain their friendship for eternity as a sacred duty, provided only that the African will continue to play the part of an ignorant savage so that they can monopolise the office of interpreting his mind and speaking for him. To such people, an African who writes a study of this kind is encroaching on their preserves. He is a rabbit turned poacher.

But the African is not blind. He can recognize these pretenders to philanthropy, and in various parts of the continent he is waking up to the realisation that a running river cannot be dammed for ever without breaking its bounds. His power of expression has been hampered, but it is breaking through, and will very soon sweep away the patronage and repression which surround him.

The reader will undoubtedly wish to know my credentials for writing the book. Merely to have been born and bred in the Gikuyu country may seem to him a vague qualification, so I will give a more explicit account of the sources of my knowledge.

I have said that as a boy I received the usual education of Gikuyu boys, and the legends in the chapters on Kinship and Government, and elsewhere in the book, are some of those which I absorbed from my elders during early training in custom and tradition, and later used to relate to my juniors as an evening amusement. The terms of kinship are those which I have heard and used for years among my own kinsmen. As my grandfather and father were polygamous,

I was born into a wide kinship group with several degrees of relationship

Following the tribal custom, I had to pass through the several stages of initiation along with my age-group, *kehiomwere*, and can therefore speak from personal experience of the rites and ceremonies. Although men do not witness the physical operation on the girls, they are not ignorant of its details, as the young initiates of both sexes talk freely to each other about it afterwards. Moreover, one of the operators was my aunt, Waco, and in visiting her homestead as a child, I naturally picked up the details of the process by hearing conversations between her and other women.

I participated in the activities of my age-group, and was chosen as its leader. Afterwards, through my knowledge of the outside world, I came to take a leading part in the progressive movements among the Gikuyu generally, and still hold that position. As the General Secretary of the Gikuyu Central Association, I started and edited the first Gikuyu journal, *Muig-withania*, in 1928-1930. This gave me the opportunity to tour all over the Gikuyu country and to meet many people, old and young, with whom I have discussed various aspects of cultural problems, political, social, religious, educational, and others. In due course I have passed three stages of eldership (*Kiama kia mbori ithato*), and this has enabled me to participate in Councils of Elders and to learn their procedures in various parts of the Gikuyu country. As a member of the warrior class, I not only have a practical knowledge of the Gikuyu methods of warfare, but have lived in the Masai country at a place near Ngare Narok, where I came in close contact with Masai military methods and learnt much about them, and have also visited many other tribes.

As for magic, I have witnessed the performance of magic rites many times in my own home and elsewhere.

My grandfather was a seer and a magician, and in travelling about with him and carrying his bag of equipment I served a kind of apprenticeship in the principles of the art. Besides this, I have lived in a place called Gaturi in Central Gikuyu, a district well known for its magical practices, and there came into contact with many magicians, or witch-doctors, and learnt a great deal about their ways. I have also had opportunities of meeting and discussing the subject with other magicians, both from coastal and up-country tribes.

Information about the new religious cult came my way in 1930-31, on my return from a first visit to Europe. A deputation from its members visited me at that time, and I learnt much from them about their activities and ideas.

I can therefore speak as a representative of my people, with personal experience of many different aspects of their life. Finally, on the vitally important question of land tenure, I can claim to speak with more than ordinary knowledge, as I have explained in a note at the beginning of Chapter 2. The Gikuyu have chosen me as their spokesman before more than one Royal Commission on land matters. One was the Hilton Young Commission of 1928-29, and a second was the Joint Committee on the Closer Union of East Africa, in 1931-32. Before this Committee I was delegated to present a memorandum on behalf of the Gikuyu Central Association. In 1932 I gave evidence in London before the Morris Carter Kenya Land Commission, which presented its Report in 1934. I have studied and taken part in various discussions of this Report, and disputes arising out of it, among others the one about the removal of the Gikuyu people from their ancestral home in Tigoni; a matter which has been widely discussed in the Press and the House of Commons.

I make special mention of these points, because to anyone who wants to understand Gikuyu problems, nothing is more important than a correct grasp of the question of land tenure. For it is the key to the people's life; it secures for them that peaceful tillage of the soil which supplies their material needs and enables them to perform their magic and traditional ceremonies in undisturbed serenity, facing Mount Kenya.

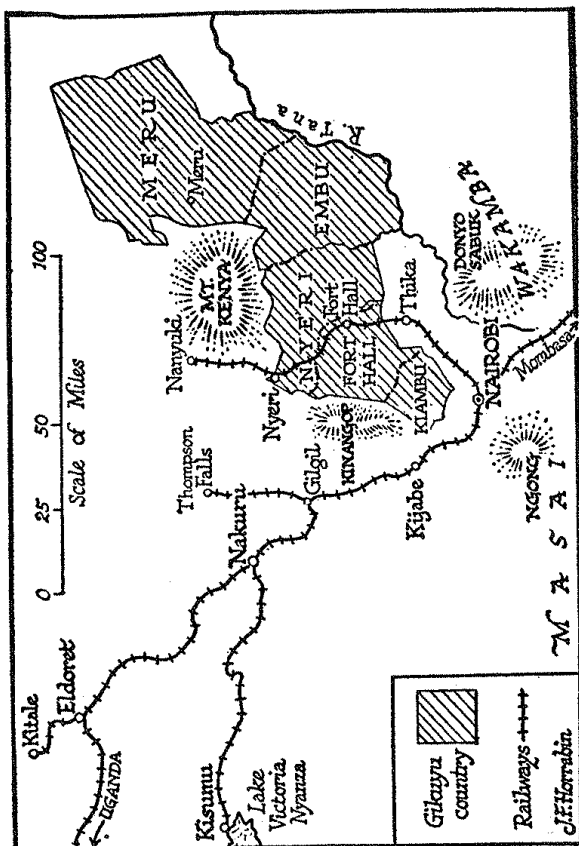
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*London*

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FACING  
MOUNT KENYA



## TRIBAL ORIGIN AND KINSHIP SYSTEM

THE GIKUYU tribal organisation is based on three most important factors, without which there can be no harmony in the tribal activities. For the behaviour and the status of every individual in the Gikuyu society is determined by the three governing principles which we will categorically enumerate here. The first is the family group (*mbari* or *nyomba*), which brings together all those who are related by blood; namely a man, his wife or wives and children and also their grand- and great-grandchildren. The second is clan (*moherega*), which joins in one group several *mbari* units who have the same clan name and are believed to have been descended from one family group in the remote past. It is obvious that, owing to the polygamous system of marriage, a family or *mbari* unit increases rapidly, and in one generation it is possible for a *mbari* to have a hundred members or more. Thus in a few generations the number increases to several thousands, which renders it impossible for a *mbari* to live together in a group where they could refer to one another as father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, grandfather, grandmother, etc.

When these identities of blood relations disappear, the only bond left between a group which once was united by close blood relation is the *moherega* identity. This knits together distant relatives and facilitates the feeling of rendering mutual support in all important matters in the interest and the welfare of the *moherega*. In perpetuation of this feeling, representatives of a *moherega* generally meet on occasions of big events, such as marriage ceremonies and initiation or circumcision ceremonies. In such gatherings, the elders bring with them a young member each from their respective *mbaris*. The younger members of the *moherega* are introduced to one another, and they are told how their lineage links their particular *mbari* to the *moherega*. This information is given to the youths so that when they grow up and take the responsibility in the leadership of their own *mbaris*, they will be in a position to conduct wisely the affairs of their family group, and at the same time to follow the correct line of their ancestors in promoting the unity of the whole of the *moherega*.

The third principle factor in unifying the Gikuyu society is the system of age-grading (*riika*). As we have seen, the *mbari* and the *moherega* system help to form several groups of kinsfolk within the tribe, acting independently; but the system of the age-grading unites and solidifies the whole tribe in all its activities.

Almost every year, thousands of Gikuyu boys and girls go through the initiation or circumcision ceremony, and automatically become members of one age-grade (*riika rimwe*), irrespective of *mbari*, *moherega*, or district to which individuals belong. They act as one body in all tribal matters and have a very strong bond of brotherhood and sisterhood among themselves. Thus, in every generation the Gikuyu tribal organisation is stabilised by the activities of the various age-grades, of old and young people who act harmoniously, in the

political, social, religious and economic life of the Gikuyu.

With these few opening remarks, we will proceed at once to describe the "behaviour patterns" which are the key to understanding the relationship existing between various individuals within a kinship group. To do this effectively, it is necessary to take as our starting-point the tribal legend which will throw light on the origin of the Gikuyu system of kinship.

According to the tribal legend, we are told that in the beginning of things, when mankind started to populate the earth, the man Gikuyu, the founder of the tribe, was called by the Mogai (the Divider of the Universe), and was given as his share the land with ravines, the rivers, the forests, the game and all the gifts that the Lord of Nature (Mogai) bestowed on mankind. At the same time Mogai made a big mountain which he called Kere-Nyaga (Mount Kenya), as his resting-place when on inspection tour, and as a sign of his wonders. He then took the man Gikuyu to the top of the mountain of mystery, and showed him the beauty of the country that Mogai had given him. While still on the top of the mountain, the Mogai pointed out to the Gikuyu a spot full of fig trees (*mikoyo*), right in the centre of the country. After the Mogai had shown the Gikuyu the panorama of the wonderful land he had been given, he commanded him to descend and establish his homestead on the selected place which he named Mokorwe wa Gathanga. Before they parted, Mogai told Gikuyu that, whenever he was in need, he should make a sacrifice and raise his hands towards Kere-Nyaga (the mountain of mystery), and the Lord of Nature will come to his assistance.

Gikuyu did as was commanded by the Mogai, and when he reached the spot, he found that the Mogai had provided him with a beautiful wife whom Gikuyu

named Moombi (creator or moulder). Both lived happily, and had nine daughters and no sons.

Gikuyu was very disturbed at not having a male heir. In his despair he called upon the Mogai to advise him on the situation. He responded quickly and told Gikuyu not to be perturbed, but to have patience and everything would be done according to his wish. He then commanded him, saying: "Go and take one lamb and one kid from your flock. Kill them under the big fig tree (*mokoyo*) near your homestead. Pour the blood and the fat of the two animals on the trunk of the tree. Then you and your family make a big fire under the tree and burn the meat as a sacrifice to me, your benefactor. When you have done this, take home your wife and daughters. After that go back to the sacred tree, and there you will find nine handsome young men who are willing to marry your daughters under any condition that will please you and your family."

Gikuyu did as he was directed by the Mogai or Ngai, and so it happened that when Gikuyu returned to the sacred tree, there he found the promised nine young men who greeted him warmly. For a few moments he could not utter a word, for he was overwhelmed with joy. When he had recovered from his emotional excitement, he took the nine youths to his homestead and introduced them to his family.

The strangers were entertained and hospitably treated according to the social custom. A ram was killed and a millet gruel prepared for their food. While this was being made ready, the youths were taken to a stream nearby to wash their tired limbs. After this, they had their meal, and conversed merrily with the family and then went to bed.

Early the next morning Gikuyu rose and woke the young men to have their morning meal with him. When they finished eating, the question of marriage was discussed. Gikuyu told the young men that if they wished

to marry his daughters he could give his consent only if they agreed to live in his homestead under a matriarchal system.

The young men agreed to this condition, for they could not resist the beauty of the Gikuyu daughters, nor the kindness which the family had showed them. This pleased the parents, for they knew that their lack of sons was now going to be recompensed. The daughters, too, were pleased to have male companions, and after a short time all of them were married, and soon established their own family sets. These were joined together under the name of Mbari ya Moombi, i.e. Moombi's family group, in honour of their mother Moombi.

The nine small families continued to live together, with their parents (Gikuyu and Moombi) acting as the heads of the Mbari ya Moombi. As time went on, each family increased rapidly, and Gikuyu and Moombi had many grand- and great-grandchildren. When Gikuyu and Moombi died, their daughters inherited their movable and immovable property which they shared equally among them.

During the time of mourning for the death of their parents they continued to live as one family group as before. But as the number of members of each individual family group multiplied, it was found impossible to live together and to follow the system of classificatory nomenclature without forming more family sets and clans.

It was then decided that each of the nine daughters should call together all her descendants and form one clan under her own name. Thus the nine principal Gikuyu *meherega* clans were founded. The names of the main clans are: (1) Acheera; (2) Agachiko; (3) Airimo; (4) Amboi; (5) Angare; (6) Anjiro; (7) Angoi; (8) Ethaga; (9) Aitherando. Besides these there are others which are more or less variations of the original ones.



After the system of kinship was extended from Mbari ya Moombi to several *mbaris* and *meherega*, it was then thought necessary to bring all these groups under one strong bond of kinship, in which they could act in solidarity and regard one another as members of one big family.

This large group was then formed and given the ancestral collective name of Rorere rwa Mbari ya Moombi, namely, children or people of Moombi or Moombi's tribe. In this, women continued to be the heads of their family groups and clans for some generations. But somehow the system changed from matriarchal to patriarchal.

It is said that while holding superior position in the community, the women became domineering and ruthless fighters. They also practised polyandry. And, through sexual jealousy, many men were put to death for committing adultery or other minor offences. Besides the capital punishment, the men were subjected to all kinds of humiliation and injustice.

Men were indignant at the way in which the women treated them, and in their indignation they planned to revolt against the ruthless women's administration of justice. But as the women were physically stronger than the men of that time, and also better fighters, it was decided that the best time for a successful revolt would be during the time when the majority of women, especially their leaders, were in pregnancy.

The decision was hailed by the men who were very anxious to overthrow the rule of the opposite sex. At once the men held a secret meeting in which they arranged a suitable date to execute their plan. On the day appointed to carry out the initial stage of the revolt, the men started to act enthusiastically. They embarked on a campaign to induce the women leaders and a majority of their brave followers to have sexual intercourse with them. The women were unfortunately deceived by the

flattery of the men, and blindly agreed to their inducements without knowing the wicked plan the men had made to overthrow the women's rule.

The men, after completing the first act, quietly waited for the result. After six moons had elapsed the men then saw clearly that their plan had materialised. At once they organised into groups and finally carried out the revolt without much resistance. For the brave women were almost paralysed by the condition in which they were. The men triumphed, took over the leadership in the community and became the heads of their families instead of the women. Immediately steps were taken to abolish the system of polyandry and to establish the system of polygamy.

The men also decided to change the original name of the tribe as well as the names of clans which were given under the matriarchal system, to new ones under the patriarchal system. They succeeded in changing the name of the tribe from Rorere rwa Mbari ya Moombi to Rorere rwa Gikuyu (i.e. Gikuyu nation or the Children of Gikuyu). But when it came to the changing of the clan names, the women were very infuriated and strongly decided against the change which they looked upon as a sign of ingratitude on the part of the men. The women frankly told the men that if they dared to eliminate the names which stood as a recognition that women were the original founders of the clan system, the women would refuse to bear any more children. And to start with, they would kill all the male children who were born as a result of the treacherous plan of the revolt.

The men were very much afraid of the women's strong decision, and in order to avoid the conflict, they allowed the original names of the clans to remain unchanged. And the nine main clans in the Gikuyu tribe are still known under the names of the nine Gikuyu daughters who were the founders of the Gikuyu clan

system. The proper names of these daughters from which the clan names as given on page 7 were derived are: (1) Wacheera; (2) Wanjiko; (3) Wairimo; (4) Wamboi; (5) Wangare; (6) Wanjiro; (7) Wangoi; (8) Mwethaga or Warigia; (9) Waithera. And these are the common women's names in the Gikuyu society nowadays.

Up to this point we have been following the description of how the Gikuyu kinship system was founded. With that as our background, we will proceed to analyse the behaviour patterns which govern the relations between the members of one kinship group.

In the Gikuyu family group, as in other forms of tribal organisation, there are certain rules of behaviour which must be strictly observed in order to keep the group in harmonious relationship. These "behaviour patterns" (*metugo ya nganyiiti*, as they are called by the Gikuyu), are very important, and though fundamentally similar in the family groups to be found almost in every part of the world, they no doubt differ considerably under the influence of such factors as patrilineal and matrilineal descent, the division of labour and responsibility between men and women in every society.

The Gikuyu society is organised and functions under the patrilineal system. The father, who is the head of the family, is called *baba* (my or our father), *ithe* (father, his or her), *thogwo* (father, your). The father is the supreme ruler of the homestead. He is the owner of practically everything, or in other words, he is the custodian of the family property. He is respected and obeyed by all the members of his family group. His position in the community depends largely on the type of homestead he keeps, and how he manages it, because the capability of good management of one's homestead is taken as a testimonial that one is able to manage public affairs.

It is etiquette for a son or daughter to talk to the father in a gentle and polite tone, and the parent, except when reprimanding or correcting his children, is required by custom to reciprocate the compliment in the same way as his children extend it to him.

The members of his children's age-grade address him in the same manner as his children do. It is considered impolite to address the father by his own name or names; his children speak of him as "my or our father," other children address him as "father of So-and-so." Unless he is a rascal, they dare not mention his name in private or in public, except when mentioning it in a collective sense, that is, in referring to the family group, such as *Mbari ya Moigai* (Moigai's family), or *Ng'undo ya Moigai* (Moigai's land), etc.

The mother is called *maito* (my or our mother), *nyina* (his, her or their mother), *nyokwa* (your mother). The term "mother" is considered as an honourable form of address, and one which is desired by every woman in Gikuyu society. When a woman reaches the stage of motherhood she is highly respected, not only by her children, but by all members of the community. Her name becomes sacred and she is addressed by her neighbours and their children as "mother of So-and-so." To maintain her prestige, she must be hospitable to visitors and render assistance to her neighbours when they are in difficulty or in need.

The worst thing that a man can do to infuriate another is to dare to mention his mother's name in an indecent way. This would result in a fight to defend the sacred name of the mother. The great attachment and respect shown to the mother by her children is due to the fact that she is their nurse, and has daily closer contact with them than the father. She feeds and looks after the clothing and ornaments of the children. When they are in trouble, they first go to their mother, to appeal or confess to her. If the matter needs the atten-

tion of the father, it is the mother who takes it before him and tactfully explains the children's needs to her husband. In many cases the mother manages to get conciliation between the father and the children and avoid a conflict.

In a Gikuyu family, especially when there is more than one wife, the mother is the immediate head of her family set, namely, her hut, her children, her personal ornaments and household utensils, as well as her cultivated fields with the crops thereon and granaries. In these respects she is her own mistress as far as other wives are concerned.

The relations between wives are those of partnership based on the collective possession of the husband, and not on the ownership of the property within the precincts of a wife's hut or granary. The wives address one another as *moiru wakwa* (my partner or co-wife). Each wife is materially almost independent of the other. The head wife has no superior authority over the rest. But she is only respected for her seniority in age, provided that she lives up to it. Her main official duty in the homestead is to take a leading part in the religious and other ceremonies performed in the interest of the family group. With regard to work, she does her own work in the same way as the rest, according to the recognised rules in the homestead.

The co-operation in cultivating the land, planting the seeds or harvesting, depends entirely on mutual agreement between the wives and their husband. Each wife addresses her husband as *mothuri wakwa* (elder mine or my husband). The husband addresses his wife as *mutumia wakwa* (lady mine). Collectively he addresses them as *atumia akwa* (ladies mine). They address him collectively as *mothuri wito* (elder ours). This form of address is extended symbolically to each member of the husband's age-grade. And he, too, ad-

dresses the wives of the members of his age-grade in the same manner as "lady or ladies mine."

The brother of the husband is given a nickname as a sign of endearment. He, too, reciprocates in the same way, and sometimes a present is necessary as a sign of naming. The sister of the wife is addressed by the husband as *maramu*, which is something like "my sister-in-law." All the wife's other relatives, including her parents, are addressed individually as *mothoni wakwa*, and collectively, *athoni akwa*, i.e. my relative-in-law and relatives-in-law respectively.

The wife addresses the husband's parents as *maito* or *baba*, i.e. my mother or father, as the case may be. They address her by her father's name as daughter of So-and-so. This is a sign of endearment and respect to the parents.

We have examined the relation between wife or wives and husband, and also between relatives on both sides. It is necessary then to turn our attention to the social behavior existing between the children in a family group, and again the relation between them and other members of both paternal and maternal family groups.

The bond of kinship between the children of the same mother is strengthened by the mother. Male children address one another as *moro wa maito*, i.e. son of our mother. Female children address one another as *mware wa maito* (daughter of my or our mother). A brother refers to his sister as *mware wa maito*, and the sister to his brother as *moro wa maito*.

As regard to seniority in age, the elder child is addressed by the younger one as *mokoro wakwa* (my senior), the parents refer to such a child as *irigithathi* (first child). The first-born is regarded as a centre of affections and a precious possession of the parents, especially that of the first wife. The younger child is addressed by the elder one as *moruna wakwa* (my

follower or one who followed me). The last child is known as *kehinganda* (one who closed the womb), such a child is held dear, particularly by the mother. The relation between the children of one father and different mothers is strengthened by the father. They address one another as *moro wa baba* (son of our father), *mware wa baba* (daughter of our father).

The bond of kinship between the children of the same mother and father is stronger than that of the children of one father and different mothers. The feeling between the former is that of inseparables, and it is said that, having slept in the same womb (*maraire nda emwe*), and having suckled the same breast (*mongire nyondo emwe*), they are one another's flesh and blood, and as such they ought to live for one another.

On the other hand the children of the same father and different mothers behave to one another in a different way. The feelings between them is that of separate family sets linked up and kept together by the father. And as long as the father is alive, the connection-link is very strong. But when the father dies, they are free to break up the common homestead and establish separate homesteads together with their respective mothers. After this the family group which once was kept and functioned together under the father's direction and co-operation, becomes two or three distinct family units acting almost independently.

This is how sub-clans are started. In the first place the sons of the same father and different mothers continue to perform collectively their religious and other sacrificial ceremonies. They do this generally during their lifetime. But after they are dead the relation between their sons begins to drift apart slowly until the divergence reaches a point where collective action or participation in religious or other private functions of a family is no longer considered necessary. At this juncture the only bond left between such a group of people

is that of a common distant ancestor with whom all commune according to the needs of their particular family group.

In many cases, especially in a small family group of one or two wives, close relation between the members is maintained for many generations, and the authority of the father is always passed to the next generation through the elder son in each generation. In perpetuation of the kinship system girls count very little on their parents' side; their function becomes more important later on in their husband's homesteads.

If a man dies without a male child his family group comes to an end. This is one thing that the Gikuyu people fear dreadfully, and it can be said to be one of the factors behind the polygamous system of marriage. There is no doubt that perpetuation of family or kinship group is the main principal of every Gikuyu marriage. For the extinction of a kinship groups means cutting off the ancestral spirits from visiting the earth, because there is no one left to communicate with them. And so when a man has more than one wife and many children, his soul rests in peace with the feeling that, after death, it will not be wandering in the wilderness or lose contact with the earth, for there will always be someone to hold communion with.

#### RELATION BETWEEN CHILDREN AND THEIR FATHER'S RELATIVES

In the Gikuyu society behaviour towards the father's relatives is entirely different from that accorded to the mother's relatives. All his brothers are addressed by his children by the name of "father ours," according to their age in comparison to that of the real father. If it be an elder brother he is addressed as *baba mokoro* (elder father, my or our), the younger brother is called *baba monyinyi* (small or younger father, my or ours).

They in turn address the children in the same way as their own. Sometimes these relations depend on the position of the fathers, if they are rich and entertain the children nicely they hear more of "our elder father, our younger father," but if they are not in a position to give the children treats, they hear less of the beloved form of address. Hence a Gikuyu saying that "*Motheni ndetagwo baba mokoro kana monyinyi*," that is, a poor man does not command the respect of being called "elder or younger father."

The form of address used between the children of brothers is that of *moro* or *mware wa baba mokoro* or *monyinyi* (son or daughter of my or our elder or younger father, as the case may be). A sister of the father is called *tata* (aunt). The relation between her and her brother's children depends on whom she marries and the distance between her husband's homestead and that of the brother. If there is mutual agreement between the two families and frequent visits are exchanged from both sides, the children become well acquainted with their aunt and respect her as one of the close relatives and one who entertains them. But unlike her brothers, who are looked on as fathers and have supreme authority over the children, she has very little influence in affairs concerning the children or the homestead of her brothers, except in social functions.

Her children and those of her brothers address one another as *moihwa* (cousin), there is a strong bond of kinship between them, and whenever they pay a visit to one another, the host provides a special meal for the guest. Even when they are just passing by, it is considered as a bad omen not to visit the homestead of your cousin or to leave it without eating something, no matter how little it may be. This is illustrated by a Gikuyu saying that "*moihwa ndaimagwo ronyeni*," which means, a cousin cannot be denied a meal.

#### GRANDPARENTS ON BOTH SIDES

Grandparents are called *guuka* (grandfather) and *coco* (grandmother). The affection between them and the children is very great. Symbolically the children belong to the same age-group as their grandparents. The name given to the first male child is that of his paternal grandfather, and at the time of birth it is announced that it is "he" who has come. Similarly the second male child will represent his maternal grandfather. In religious ceremonies the children are treated in the same manner as their grandparents. The same thing applies to a female child. Owing to the supreme authority which grandparents have in the family group the children, while with them, are given the feeling that they are with their equals. Sometimes the children spend more time with their grandparents, especially the grandmother, than with their own parents. A boy is called by his grandmother "my husband," and a girl is called "my co-wife." The grandfather calls the boy *wakine*, "my equal," and the girl *mohiki wakwa*, "my bride." This form of address is, of course, used figuratively and as a sign of endearment.

When the grandparents are not living near the homesteads of their daughters or sons, the children pay frequent visits to their grandparents and stay with them for some time. Sometimes it becomes difficult to get the children to return to their parents' homesteads, for they feel more free in playing and joking with their grandparents than they would with their own parents.

#### MOTHER'S RELATIVES

As we have seen that the behaviour pattern towards the father is extended to his brothers and sisters, in the same way that towards the mother is extended to her

relatives. The important members of her family group, who enter into functions of the kinship system, are the father, mother, brother, and sister. Her mother and father, as stated above, treat their daughter's children with great respect and love.

The mother's sister is called *tata*, the same as the father's sister, but the relation between her and the children of her sister is entirely different. She is looked upon by the children in the same way as their real mother. The affection and indulgence that she gives to the children and the sympathetic attitude towards them is even greater than that the children can expect from their own mother. Children like to visit or to be visited by their aunt, and whenever such a visit is made it is always an occasion of rejoicing and feasting. The children of both sisters address one another as *moro* or *mware wa tata* (son or daughter of my or our aunt), the behaviour pattern between them is almost like that of brothers and sisters.

The mother's brother, who is called *mama* (my or our uncle), is the only one in the family group who enjoys that title. For there is no uncle on the father's side, because those who might be called uncle, according to European system of kinship, are called "fathers" in the Gikuyu society. The uncle's relation with his sister's children is that of fatherly love and affection. He has a certain influence over the children. For instance, before children can be allowed to pierce their ears as a sign of approaching the circumcision ceremony, his permission must be obtained. A gift of five sheep or goats is made by the father to the uncle at a time when the permission is required.

Visits are made to the uncle's homestead, but not so frequent as those made to the mother's sister. The reason being that in his homestead, unlike that of his sister who is ruler of her house, the entertainment of the children is in his wife's hands. And unless he has

a very good and hospitable wife, the children would feel rather nervous at visiting him, except at the time of a ceremonial feast when children are accompanied by their mothers.

#### RELATIVES BY MARRIAGE

We have discussed the behaviour patterns and terms used among the husband's and wife's immediate relatives. But as a marriage brings together all members of two distant clans, it is necessary to describe the relation existing between the two groups.

After a marriage contract is signed between two families all clan members of both sides become united. They regard one another as *mothoni* (relative by marriage). The behaviour towards one's relative-in-law is bound up with the word *mothoni*, which means one who is bashful or polite. Therefore it follows that every *mothoni* must treat another with politeness. In the case of a woman the politeness tends to be bashful, especially in the presence of her relatives-in-law. She must not eat in their presence or utter unpleasant words. She must cover her body properly when sitting or passing near them. She must speak in a sweet and polite tone when talking to them, etc.

The same thing applies to a man. He must show politeness to his mother-in-law or any other member of her age-group. He must give up his seat to her, get out of the way while she is passing. He must cover his body properly in her presence and not use any vulgar language while speaking to her or in her hearing. The father-in-law may not enter the house of his daughter-in-law before she becomes a mother, and as a sign of politeness he must give a sheep or goat on entering her house.

With regard to economics, both sides give each other a great deal of mutual help. In agriculture, relatives by

marriage generally help one another. Cultivation rights are, moreover, given to a relative by marriage who has not sufficient land of his own to maintain himself and his family. There are numerous gifts exchanged among them, especially in times of ceremonies connected with initiation, marriage, or religion. For example, if a man is having his son or daughter circumcised, and has not sufficient grain to entertain visitors and friends who attend the initiation ceremonies, he will send to his relatives-in-law to supply the necessary food and drink, knowing that they would ask for the same help if they were similarly placed. This exchange of gifts is governed by the principle of "give and take."



## THE GIKUYU SYSTEM OF LAND TENURE

THE RULES governing land tenure, like many other social customs, were taught to me by my father, who is a landowner. As I was his first son he was careful to give me all necessary information about land tenure, to equip me to discharge my duties as *moramati* in future years. In this way I acquired the knowledge which is a normal part of every Gikuyu's education, especially if he is a first-born. But in addition to this I have been a witness to many land transactions and disputes, both public and private, in various parts of Gikuyu; for instance, I acted as private interpreter to Chief Kioi in his big land case which, after several hearings before the *Kiama*, was brought to the Supreme Court in Nairobi in 1921. I was elected as a spokesman of the Gikuyu Central Association when we presented our case before the Hilton Young Commission in 1928; afterwards, when the report came up for discussion in Parliament, I was delegated to present the Gikuyu point of view with regard to land and other matters to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1929, and have continued to do so when the occasion has arisen.

Because of these experiences, my knowledge of Gikuyu land tenure is not merely due to the fact that I am a Gikuyu, but is the result of great interest and specialised study, both of recorded precedents and of those tribal evidences which are handed down from generation to generation.

In studying the Gikuyu tribal organisation it is necessary to take into consideration land tenure as the most important factor in the social, political, religious, and economic life of the tribe. As agriculturalists, the Gikuyu people depend entirely on the land. It supplies them with the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved. Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried. The Gikuyu consider the earth as the "mother" of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity. Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gikuyu the soil is especially honoured, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth (*koirugo*).

Owing to the importance attached to the land the system of land tenure was carefully and ceremonially laid down, so as to ensure to an individual or a family group a peaceful settlement on the land they possessed. According to the Gikuyu customary law of land tenure every family unit had a land right of one form or another. While the whole tribe defended collectively the boundary of their territory, every inch of land within it had its owner.

The following terminology is used to denote the landholders' position:

1. *Mwene ng'ondo* or *githaka*, the individual owner of land who has acquired it either by purchase or through inheritance or by acquiring first hunting rights.

2. *Moramati*, a trustee, who acts as the guardian to the younger members of his family group.

3. *Mohoi*, one who acquires cultivation rights on the *ng'ondo* or lands of another man or family unit, on a friendly basis without any payment for the use of the land.

4. *Mociarwa*, a man who is adopted into the family of a clan other than his own by means of a special religious ceremony.

5. *Githaka kia ngwataniro*, land held by two individual families as joint property (this practice was rare).

6. *Mothoni*, a relation-in-law of the first degree, who acquires cultivation or building rights, or both.

7. *Mothami*, a man who acquires cultivation and building rights on the *githaka* of another man or clan.

8. *Borori wa Gikuyu*, territory of the Gikuyu, this term denotes the political unit of all lands within the tribal boundary. The term emphasises that the land belongs exclusively to the Gikuyu. Undoubtedly this is what the Europeans have misinterpreted to mean "Tribal ownership or communal land."

Having given these outlines, we will at once proceed to describe how the land was originally acquired and the traditional sanctions under which the Gikuyu system of land tenure was maintained prior to the coming of the Europeans into the country. To do this effectively it is best to start from a tribal legend connected with the old man Gikuyu, the founder of the tribe, from whose name that of the country and of the people is derived.

According to the tribal legend, which as a boy I heard from my grandfather's talk with other elders, and which many of our people are familiar with, we



are told that from the beginning of things, Ngai or Mogai (God or Divider or Benefactor), when he was dividing the world into territories and giving them to the various races and nations that populate the globe, gave the man Gikuyu a territory full of the good things of nature. The Mogai commanded Gikuyu to establish a home for himself and his descendants. Gikuyu and his wife, Moombi, built their first homestead at a place called Mokorwe wa Gathianga, and had many children. As time went on, the people increased rapidly owing to the multiplicity of wives and good nourishment from the soil. Soon the land, which was held as the family land, became densely populated. For this reason some of the people decided to move southward and try to acquire more lands from the forest dwellers.

In the forests there lived a race of people called Gumba (pigmy), who were engaged in hunting. They were very short and strong. Their homes were built underground, they were shy and did not like to mix freely with the strangers. To avoid meeting other people they dug tunnels (*miungu*) connecting different sections of their underground villages. As soon as they saw a stranger they ran into the tunnels, which were cunningly concealed; then they would run quickly underground and reappear at the other end. The Gikuyu were very much astonished, for they thought that these people had magic for opening the earth and disappearing therein at will.

As far as the story of these people goes, there is no clear indication of any land transactions between them and the Gikuyu people, but it is said that they disappeared underground and no one knows what became of them. Their disappearance is attributed to the failure of their magic, which they used to perform while entering into their underground homes. And it is supposed that when the earth swallowed them, they were

not able to perform their magic to permit them to return to the surface.

Our theory on this question is that it is not likely that this race of early hunters was swallowed by the earth, as we are led to believe by the tribal legend, but that there are two ways in which the disappearance of the Gumba could definitely be explained. Firstly, that they moved farther west towards the Congo forests where similar types of people are to be found. But when we consider the distance between the Congo forest and the Gikuyu country, and the hardship which the Gumba would have encountered on their journey to Congo, we are inclined to think that the movement did not take place.

If that is so, then the only possible way to account for the disappearance of the Gumba is that they intermarried with the early Gikuyu pioneers who ventured into the forests, and perhaps lost their contact with the other main sections of the Gikuyu, and, therefore, settled in the forests in the same way as Gumba.

There is strong reason to support the latter theory, for soon after the Gumba had disappeared as a race, there came into being another race of hunters known as Ndorobo or Aathi, who seemed to have grown like mushrooms in the forests. Unlike their predecessors, they were not short in stature, but something between the Gumba and the Gikuyu. Also they did not live underground, but built their homes on the surface, almost on similar lines to those of the Gikuyu homesteads. Their language, too, was similar to the Gikuyu. To a certain extent the two tribes could understand one another with little difficulty.

With these evidences it would not be assuming too much to say that the interbreeding between the Gumba and the Gikuyu was responsible for the disappearance of the Gumba as a distinct race, and the producing of

the Ndorobo or Aathi, who became the new owners and the masters of the forests, as we shall see later.

The Ndorobo established friendly relations with the Gikuyu, and, as the people continued to move southwards, land transactions started between the two tribes who lived side by side. The Ndorobo were not interested in cultivating the land, their main occupation was hunting and collecting wild honey in the forests. Apart from land transactions they traded with the Gikuyu. By barter they sold their honey and skins of animals to the Gikuyu, who in turn gave the Ndorobo grains, yams, sugar-canes, bananas, and other fruits of the soil.

As the time went on the Gikuyu, who had not enough land to cultivate in the congested areas, started to buy lands from the Ndorobo. All the lands which were bought in this way were held under private ownership or as a family joint property. In fact, there was not in any part of the Gikuyu, as far as memory goes, any land that belonged to everybody, or what is called "no man's land." The term "communal or tribal ownership of land" has been misused in describing the land, as though the whole of it was owned collectively by every member of the community.

The Gikuyu defended their country collectively, and when talking to a stranger they would refer to the country, land, and everything else as "ours," *borori wiito* or *borori wa Gikuyu*, to show the unity among the people. But the fact remained that every inch of the Gikuyu territory had its owner, with the boundary properly fixed and everyone respecting his neighbour's. In the Report on the Gikuyu Land Tenure, paragraph 22, it is recorded that: "—there are several places in the Nyeri and Fort Hall districts where one may stand and see more than a thousand acres at a stretch with scarcely an acre uncultivated, and the disputes which occur, though complicated and troublesome, are surprisingly few." In former days no man could dare

go and cultivate another man's land without first obtaining the necessary permission from the rightful owner or owners. The sense of private property vested in the family was highly developed among the Gikuyu, but the form of private ownership in the Gikuyu community did not necessarily mean the exclusive use of the land by the owner, or the extorting of rents from those who wanted to have cultivation or building rights. In other words, it was a man's pride to own a property and his enjoyment to allow collective use of such property. This sense of hospitality which facilitated the communal use of almost everything, has been mistaken by the Europeans who misinterpreted it by saying that the land was under the communal or tribal ownership, and as such the land must be *mali ya serikali*, which means Government property. Having coined this new terminology of land tenure, the British Government began to drive away the original owners of land.

In the following pages we will describe the system of land tenure, showing how the land was first acquired, and how it passed from individual ownership to family or clan ownership. In doing so we will base our analysis on the eight different types of land holding or land rights.

In dealing with the private ownership of land we will begin our description from the time when the Gikuyu people started to move southward and established contact with the Ndorobo, from whom the land, especially in South Gikuyu, was bought. Before this time, although some form of private ownership of land existed, the system was not so obvious, as there was no property exchanged in acquiring the possession of the land. In the first place the land was given to the Gikuyu by the Mogai, the Lord of Nature. Secondly, by the fact that the Gikuyu was the first to establish his homestead on the land. Thirdly, that when the people started to multiply and to form their own individual family groups,

each family group pegged out a portion of the forest and reserved the first rights of cultivation and hunting therein. In those days the claim of having cleared the original forest was the basic principle of absolute ownership of land. In other words, a man acquired the right to own the land through the labour he spent in developing it. For this reason it was necessary for the whole family to join forces in order to clear sufficient land for their present and future needs. Fourthly, when the land which the Mogai had given to the Gikuyu was thickly populated and no more forests left to be pegged out, people moved towards the forests in the south. Here, the forests having been owned by the Ndorobo, there was no possibility of a man just going into the forest and establishing his claim by merely clearing the original forest. This being the case, the Gikuyu who were anxious to own the land, on seeing that the Ndorobo were willing to sell, at once started to purchase it. Thus a new form came into being, of owning the land by purchase, instead of owning by acquiring the first rights of hunting or clearing the original forests.

In order to clarify the two systems last mentioned, under which the lands were acquired, let us take the words from the Report on the Gikuyu Land Tenure issued in 1929. In paragraph 24 the following statement is made: "It is most interesting to consider why it is that the tribal theory is in most respects intact in Nyeri and Fort Hall, while in Kiambu it has been modified greatly in favour of the individual owner-cultivator and the sectional head."

The reason for this difference is that in Nyeri and Fort Hall there hardly existed any land transaction between the Gikuyu and Ndorobo, and even if any purchase of land from the Ndorobo had taken place in these districts it would have happened so far in the remote past that the incident has faded from the memory of the present generation. Most probably there

were no Ndorobo in either Fort Hall or Nyeri, for the Mokorwe wa Gathanga, the place where the Gikuyu are believed to have originated, is somewhere in these districts. If that is so, there could not have been any land transactions between the Gikuyu in the two districts and the Ndorobo, unless there is evidence to prove that both the Gikuyu and the Ndorobo originated at the same place. But as far as we are aware, there is no such evidence in the tribal historical legends.

The next point in connection with the slight difference between the system of land tenure in the Kiambu district and that which exists in the Nyeri and Fort Hall districts, is that in the former case the land was actually bought from the Ndorobo. In the Kiambu district the land transaction between the Gikuyu and the Ndorobo is a recent occurrence, and there are people still living who took part in purchasing the land from the Ndorobo.

At the same time there are single families who bought the land, and as they have not yet increased to form a clan unit the land is still in the hands of the first purchaser, and as such he has the rights of private ownership. For example, if a man whom we will call A bought land before he was married, that land was his own private property during his bachelorhood. When he married B, the land became the joint property of husband and wife. In this case we will assume that A had no relatives or he was independent of such relatives. He cleared a part of his land for his wife to cultivate; that part cultivated by his wife became her own or she had full cultivation rights, while the soil still remained the property of the husband. Let us say that a man had sixty acres of land. The first wife might have cultivated two acres; she would refer to this part as "my garden" (*mogonda wakwa*), and the rest as "our land" (*githaka giito*). Next A married a second wife C, and cleared another part of his land for her in

the same way as for B. The land which remained uncultivated belonged to all three. The wives could call it "our land," while their husband called it "my land" (*githaka giakwa*). Now each wife had her garden or gardens according to her capacity in cultivation. No one, except perhaps her husband, would encroach upon her cultivated pieces of land. If any of the wives wanted a new garden, her husband would clear another piece from the uncultivated land.

After some time the family began to increase. Let us imagine that each wife had three sons and perhaps some daughters. But as female children do not take part in the ownership of land, we will leave them out, because, having no system of spinsterhood in the Gikuyu society, women do not inherit land on their father's side; they play their part in the family or clan in which they marry.

To return to our analysis, Mr. A with his two wives B and C had six sons. The sons following their father's example married two wives each. In this way the land which used to be the private property of Mr. A, and of which he had absolute ownership, was now shared by several persons who had full cultivation rights, namely, the father, his two wives, the six sons with their twelve wives, making a total of twenty persons who called the land "ours," and the father who retained the title of "my land" (*ng'ondo yakwa*).

For our analysis let us suppose that the twelve wives followed the example of their mothers-in-law and had an average of three sons each. This would bring the number of the land claimants to fifty-six persons, all having full cultivation rights, and each regarding the piece under cultivation as "my garden." The other uncultivated land or fallow land would be regarded by all collectively as "our land," while Mr. A still called the whole of the land "my land." If we take daughters into consideration, as they also had to use land before

marriage, we will find that while Mr. A was still living he might have had about seventy or more people of his own as nucleus of his *mbari* or clan unit.

As time went on this group of people became a big community and the land which all regarded as "our land" could no more support them. When a family group reached this point, the more prosperous members of it went and bought lands somewhere else and started the same proceeding as we have already described; but those who were not in a position to buy land became *ahoi* or *athami*, i.e. they acquired cultivation or building rights on the lands belonging to another family group or clan unit.

The above description gives a clear picture contradicting what is called communal ownership of land, a term which presupposes that the land belonged to every Dick and Harry in the community. This could not be the case for, as we have shown, the land did not belong to the community as such, but to some individual founders of various families who had the full rights of ownership and the control of the land.

Unlike the European, the African kinship tie is so strong that all a man's children and grandchildren, including great-grandchildren, are considered as forming the family group, and as such they must stick together.

To clarify the above statement let us take the case of a man who bought or acquired the first hunting rights of land while a bachelor, and was afterwards forced by circumstances to become monogamous instead of polygamous. In this case we will suggest that fate so decided that the man had only one son and many daughters, which means that there were only two persons who could call the land "ours" and the father who called it "mine," and who had full or outright ownership of that particular land. On his death he transferred his rights to his son according to the

customary law of inheritance. So it is clear that unless there were many sons in a family group, the land remained the private property of the man who bought it or of his son who inherited it.

#### BUYING AND SELLING LAND

After land was bought from the Ndorobo, any man who held such land, through purchase or inheritance, had full rights to sell it outright or give it to any one as he liked without consulting any one, except the elders who acted as the ceremonial witnesses in all land transactions. By inheritance we mean a single son inheriting the land from his father who had no other relatives.

When a man has many sons he is no more alone, his interests are interwoven with those of his children, and since they are flesh of his flesh, bone of his bones, he shares his land and all his property with them. He could not sell his land without consulting them unless he was a very bad man, who did not care for the future of his family. Cases of this nature are very rare in the Gikuyu community but even when it occurred the elders of the village or district would intervene and plead with the father for the welfare of his children.

#### LAND INHERITANCE

After the death of the father the land passed on to his sons, the eldest son took his father's place. At this juncture the system of land tenure changed a little, there was no one who could regard the land as "mine," all would call it "our land." The eldest son who had assumed the title of *moramati* (titular or trustee) had no more rights than his brothers, except the title; he could not sell the land without the agreement of his brothers who had the same full cultivation rights on the pieces of land which they cultivated as well as

those which were cultivated by their respective mothers.

At this stage the land had now become family or *mbari* land, under the name of the original owner (*Mogori Githaka* or *Mwene Githaka*). For instance, if the original owner was Kamau, his *mbari* would be known as *mbari ya Kamau* (the Kamau's family group), and the land as *ng'ondo* or *githaka kia mbari ya Kamau*, i.e. the land of Kamau's family group. Through this process the land passed from one man to his sons and then it was actually vested in the clan's name.

The above statement shows clearly that the Gikuyu system of land tenure was never tribal tenure, nor was there any customary law which gave any particular chief or a group of chiefs any power over lands other than the lands of their own family groups. A chief could only give cultivation or building rights to a *mohoi* or *mothami* on his own land or that of his *mbari*, but in this case he could do so only if he was a *moramati*. Otherwise he had no power to give or sell land outside the boundary of his own personal property.

The policy of making a chief a trustee or investing him with the power of allotting "tribal or communal lands," is entirely new and foreign to the Gikuyu democratic principles. The power to decide land disputes was invested in the councils of elders (*kiama*), who conducted all land transactions. Any chief who participated in these councils did so in his capacity of an elder (*mothuri wa kiama*), and not as a chief.

Up to this point we have been following the Gikuyu system of land tenure, from the founder of the tribe to the Gumba and Ndorobo, the master of the forests; and then to the first purchaser and his family. We have now reached the juncture where the administration of the land has passed to the *moramati*. Having done so, it is necessary to add a short description of the *moramati* and his duty to his brothers on whose behalf he acts as a trustee.

A *moramati* owes his position to his seniority in age, and to being the first son of the first wife. And in a case where the first wife had no sons, the first son of the second wife became the heir. The duty of the *moramati* was to see that the land was properly used, and to carry out the wishes of his dead father. *Moramati* had no more cultivation or building rights than his brothers. Agriculturally he was only the ceremonial figurehead and master of his own pieces of cultivated fields in the same way as his father's wives, brothers and sisters. If any of them wanted to clear a piece of virgin land, he or she was at liberty to do so, provided that there was no taboo or custom prohibiting cultivation of that particular piece of land.

If an outsider wanted to acquire cultivation or building rights, as a *mohoi* or *mothami*, such rights could only be given by the *moramati* with the consent of other members of the family group. In the first place the *moramati*, before giving such rights, would see to it that there was enough land for the needs of his group. Secondly, he would not grant cultivation rights on the fallow land that had previously been cultivated by any of his juniors, unless they had abandoned the cultivation of such land altogether.

Before a man was given cultivation or building rights his character and past history were carefully scrutinised to make sure that he was not a trouble-maker. A *mohoi* or *mothami* was given permission to settle on the land only on the understanding that he would respect the rights of the members of the landowning family and keep peace with them. As a sign of his adherence to this agreement he had to give a calabash or gourd of beer to the *moramati* or his representative, whenever he had an occasion of brewing beer. This obligation was strictly applied to a man who had been given cultivation and building rights (*mothami*), but if he had only cultivation rights (*mohoi*), his obligation to

give beer was only when he had brewed sugar-cane beer from the land given to him.

A *mothami* was further obliged to help in case of any work of emergency such as building houses or cattle-pens. If a *mothami* behaved decently his family and that of the landowner sometimes joined in teamwork for mutual benefits. On the other hand, a breach of the contract on the part of a *mothami* meant withdrawal of his rights and removal from the land. The authority to carry this out was invested in the hands of the *moramati*. If a *mothami* or *mohoi* refused to quit the land, he was taken before the *kiama* (council of elders), who naturally gave judgment in favour of the *moramati*. But in any case a *mohoi* or *mothami* was given sufficient notice to find another land and also to harvest his crops. Apart from the beer which was given as a token of friendship and respect, there was no payment of rent of any kind for the use of the land. The cultivation or building rights were given purely as a matter of friendship and not on a business basis.

There was another situation necessitating a change in the position of the *moramati*; for instance, if he mismanaged the land and a quarrel arose between him and his juniors, the village council (*kiama gia itora*) was summoned to divide up the land equally among the male representatives of the family group. But this was only done when all effort to seek conciliation had failed. When the land was divided up, the *moramati* was left to himself and his own immediate family, i.e. his wife or wives and their children. The rest, if they wanted to continue the management of their land under one head, appointed one of themselves as the new *moramati* and carried on with their affairs as before.

When the land was thus divided up, the old *moramati* could sell his own portion to anybody else, and perhaps move away and buy land in another district. Accord-

ing to the customary law of land tenure, if one of the brothers wanted to sell out his share, the relatives had the first option so as to avoid a stranger coming in their midst. The one whose right was bought out, and his descendants, lost all claims to the original ancestral land, and were treated as mere strangers.

Before the sanction for the sale of such land was given, the matter was carefully scrutinised by the *kiama* in order to preserve kinship unity in connection with the ancestral land. For the selling out of his rights in the family land was the last thing that a man could do to sever the relation with his kinsfolk. In perpetuation of the kinship unity it was considered right and proper for a man to reserve his rights in the ancestral land, so that if misfortune should befall him in his ventures, he could always return to his ancestral home and be received with joy by his kinsfolk.

#### PASTURE LAND AND PUBLIC PLACES

It is important to mention that in every district there were pasture lands where livestock grazed in common. There were also salt-licks (*moonyo*) and mineral springs (*irori*), the access to which was free to all those in the district. In addition to these there were public places (*ihaaro*) reserved for meetings and dances. And also public roads and paths (*njera cia agendi*), as well as sacred groves where national sacrifices were offered to Ngai.

Public opinion entered strongly in the management of the above-mentioned lands, for although in reality these lands were owned by different individual families, in actual uses they were treated as common lands. Whenever a salt-lick or a mineral spring was found on any land, whether cultivated or uncultivated, the owner could not prevent other people in the district from

sending their livestock to such places. But in the case of a poor man who had no other land, he was given another piece of land by the elders of the district. But for pasture lands there were permanent grass or bush lands reserved for that purpose. Generally these lands were situated some distance from the homesteads, some of them were considered not good for cultivation except along the rivers where sugar-cane, bananas, and *ndoma* (arum lily) were cultivated.

Near homesteads there were also pasture lands, owing to the system of cultivating the lands in rotation, and besides this there was also woodland, reserved for building materials and firewood. The use of such land for grazing was restricted to the family group possessing it. They could give or withhold the permission to outsiders.

If we consider for a moment the pasture lands, salt-licks, public meeting and dance places, the woodlands, including big forests along the frontier of the Gikuyu and the neighbouring tribes, we will at once see that there were big tracts of lands used for other purposes than cultivation and which were equally important to the community.

It is of these lands that the early European travellers reported that they had seen huge lands "undeveloped" and "unoccupied." To them it may have seemed so, but to the Gikuyu every inch of their territory was useful in some way or another. To a Gikuyu these lands were no more unoccupied than moorlands in England, for if a Gikuyu were asked to make a report on such moorlands, he would naturally report that these lands are undeveloped and unoccupied. The mere absence of large herds of sheep and goats on the lands, and the lack of bananas, yams and sugar-cane cultivation would be sufficient evidence to convince him that those lands were not put to "proper uses." Just in the same way

the Europeans did not justify the usefulness of bush land in Africa where they expected to find cultivated grass-land for pasture.

#### CEREMONY OF MARKING THE BOUNDARY

In analysing the Gikuyu system of land tenure the most important aspect and deciding factor as to the ownership of land is the ceremony of marking the boundary. This was performed only when absolute land sale took place. In the case of a *mohoi* or *mothami*, *mociarwa* or *mothoni*, no such ceremony could be performed between them and the landlord, for they had only been given cultivation or building rights.

It was only when the purchaser had paid or agreed to pay the number of sheep and goats required as the price of the land, that the two parties concluded an agreement in the form of a ceremony. This was done in the presence of the principal elders of the district who acted as witnesses. Before buying and selling of land took place, there was a preliminary ceremonial discussion between the seller and the buyer. According to the etiquette of the people, no man could go directly to another and tell him that he wanted to buy his land. The same applied to the seller, he could not advertise the sale of his land publicly; the reason being that the land was regarded as the mother of the people, and as such the selling or buying of it must be treated matrimonially.

Therefore, the correct approach was that when a man wanted to buy another man's land, he would brew a small beer and take it to the landowner in the same way as if he were proposing marriage to his daughter. After sipping the beer ceremonially, the two men would then join in a conversation, talking in parable something like this: "Well, son of So-and-so, I brought you

this small beer to tell you that within your homestead I have seen a beautiful lass. I hope you will excuse me when I say that I am madly in love with her. My great desire which urged me to come here to-day is to ask you if you will accept me as your son-in-law. I am sure that you, being a man of great experience, will not fail to see the admiration I have in my heart for your beautiful lass. And I know that you will not fail to give your consent to my humble request."

Through such a conversation the landowner would know at once what his guest really wanted. Then, in the same parable language, they would agree or disagree. If they agreed about the price of the land they would fix a date and invite the elders of the district to be present as ceremonial witnesses.

On the day appointed, the elders gathered on the land in question, where the two parties wishing to enter into symbolical matrimony awaited them. The seller of the land was asked to testify by an oath that the land he was selling was his own property, that he or his ancestors were the original and rightful owners. And that he was satisfied with the number of sheep and goats he had asked as the price of his land, and that later he would not ask the purchaser to give him more than what had been already agreed to. Then the elders turned to the purchaser and asked him to take oath and declare that he had willingly agreed to buy the land and to give the number of sheep and goats asked for it; that the animals he was giving were his own or family property, and that there was no dispute as to the ownership of such property in his family group or outside it.

When the above declaration was concluded, the purchaser provided a ram, which was slaughtered on the spot where the declaration was made. The contents of the stomach were taken out, then the elders formed a procession with the seller and the purchaser at the head



of it. They moved slowly chanting a ceremonial melody connected with the fertility of the soil. The landowner pointed out the boundary of his land which he was selling, at the same time the ceremonial elder sprinkled the contents of the stomach along the line, while the rest planted trees and lilies (*matooka*) as a permanent boundary mark.

The elders, in their ritual tones, uttered curses against anyone who should cunningly or maliciously remove the boundary mark of his neighbour. When the marking of the boundary was completed, all sat down at the centre of the land, two small pieces were cut from the skin of the ram, the purchaser put one on his right wrist and so did the seller. This act of uniting the two men in the land transaction, who now regarded one another as relatives-in-law, concluded the ceremony of marking the boundary.

After the elders had finished their official duty they joined in a meat feast and sometimes in beer drinking. The elder who sprinkled the contents of the stomach along the boundary line was given a ewe as the reward for his laborious duty. The official name of the ritual gift is known as "*mwate wa kuhura njegeni*," i.e. a ewe for dusting off aching caused by a stinging creeper called *njegeni*.

According to the Gikuyu system of land tenure no man could claim absolute ownership of any land unless he or his ancestors had gone through the ceremony of marking the boundary, which was the Gikuyu form of title-deed. The boundary trees and lilies so ceremonially planted were highly respected by the people. They were well looked after and preserved. The history connected with such lands was passed from one generation to another. No man dared to remove his neighbour's boundary mark, for fear of his neighbour's curses and out of respect for him.

If one of the boundary trees or lilies dried out, fell

down, or was rooted up by the wild animals, the two neighbours would visit the spot and perhaps replace it, but if they could not agree as to the actual place where the mark stood, they called one or two elders who, with a little ceremony, replanted the tree or lilies. But in a case of a big dispute, especially where a fire had destroyed boundary marks, a full council of elders was called to replant the tree and lilies.

#### LAND TENURE AND THE COMING OF THE EUROPEANS

In the foregoing analysis we have traced how the land was formerly acquired and how the rules governing the system of land tenure were laid down. Further, we have shown the relations between the landowner and his immediate family, and the relations between that group and those who acquired cultivation or building rights. Later on we will show how this generosity of giving temporary cultivation or building rights to strangers was extended to the Europeans when they arrived in the Gikuyu land. Before entering into this discussion it is necessary first to give a short account of the prophecy of a great Gikuyu medicine man, Mogo wa Kebiro, who predicted the coming of the Europeans and the result thereof.

#### MOGO WA KEBIRO AND HIS PREDICTION

Once upon a time there lived in Gikuyuland a great medicine man known as Mogo or Moro wa Kebiro. His national duty was to foretell future events and to advise the nation how to prepare for what was in store. We are told that one early morning the prophet woke up trembling and unable to speak; his body covered with bruises. His wives on seeing him were very frightened and in a state of hysteria, not knowing what

had happened to their husband, who went to bed in perfect health the previous evening. Horror-stricken, the family summoned the ceremonial elders to his side with a view to offer a sacrifice to Ngai (God) and to inquire what the great man had foreseen that had so frightened him.

When the ceremonial elders arrived, a male goat (*thenge*) was immediately slaughtered and Mogo wa Kebiro was seated on the raw skin. The senior elder among the gathering took the blood of the animal, mixed it with oil, and then this mixture was poured on the head of the great seer as an anointment. At the same time the ceremonial elders, saturated with religious beliefs, recited ritual songs as supplication to Ngai. Soon Mogo wa Kebiro regained his power of speech. With his usual prophetic voice he began to narrate what he had experienced during the previous night. He told the elders that during his sleep Ngai (God) had taken him away to an unknown land. There the Ngai had revealed to him what would happen to the Gikuyu people in the near future. On hearing this he was horrified, and in his endeavour to persuade Ngai to avert the evil events coming to the Gikuyu, he was badly bruised and exhausted and could not do anything but obey the Ngai's command to come back and tell the people what would happen.

After a little pause, Mogo wa Kebiro continued his prophetic narrative. In a low and sad voice he said that strangers would come to Gikuyuland from out of the big water, the colour of their body would resemble that of a small light-coloured frog (*kiengere*) which lives in water, their dress would resemble the wings of butterflies; that these strangers would carry magical sticks which would produce fire. That these sticks would be very much worse in killing than the poisoned arrows. The strangers, he said, would later bring an iron snake with as many legs as *monyongoro* (centipede), that this

iron snake would spit fires and would stretch from the big water in the east to another big water in the west of the Gikuyu country. Further, he said that a big famine would come and this would be the sign to show that the strangers with their iron snake were near at hand. He went on to say that when this came to pass the Gikuyu, as well as their neighbours, would suffer greatly. That the nations would mingle with a merciless attitude towards each other, and the result would seem as though they were eating one another. He also said that sons and daughters would abuse their parents in a way unknown hitherto by the Gikuyu.

Mogo wa Kebiro urged the people not to take arms against the coming strangers, that the result of such actions would be annihilation of the tribe, because the strangers would be able to kill the people from a far distance with their magical sticks which spit deadly fires. The warriors were very angry when they heard this statement and said that they would take up arms and kill the iron snake and the strangers. But the great seer calmed them and told the warriors that the best thing would be to establish friendly relations with the coming strangers, because the spears and arrows would not be able to penetrate the iron snake, and therefore the warriors' attempt to fight the strangers and their snake would be futile.

The great medicine man advised the people that when these strangers arrived it would be the best policy to treat them with courtesy mingled with suspicion, and above all to be careful not to bring them too close to their homesteads, for these strangers are full of evil deeds and would not hesitate to covet the Gikuyu homeland and in the end would want to take everything from the Gikuyu.

When the people heard what Mogo wa Kebiro had predicted they were very disturbed and did not know what to do except wait and face the coming danger.

Many moons afterwards, about 1890 or thereabout, the predicted danger began to appear, for sure enough, the strangers dressed in clothes resembling the wings of butterflies started to arrive in small groups; this was expected, for prior to their arrival a terrible disease, called *ndigana* or *nyongo*, had broken out and destroyed a great number of Gikuyu cattle as well as those of the neighbouring tribes, the Masai and Wakamba. The incident was followed by a great famine, which also devastated thousands of the tribesmen.

The first few Europeans who passed near the Gikuyu country were more or less harmless, for they passed through along the borderline of the country between the Gikuyu and Masai or between Wakamba and the Gikuyu. They were thus directed according to the prediction of the great medicine man. The Europeans with their caravans kept coming and going the same way from the coast to Lake Victoria and Uganda. In their upwards and downwards journeys they traded with the Gikuyu with little or no conflict. At last, misled by European cant, the Gikuyu thought that the Europeans with their caravans did not mean any harm and befriended them. Forgetting the words of Mogo wa Kebero to treat the Europeans with courtesy mingled with suspicion and not to bring them near their homesteads, the Gikuyu began to welcome the Europeans in close proximity to their homesteads.

At this stage it is interesting to give a short narrative of how the Gikuyu came to lose their best lands. When the Europeans first came into the Gikuyuland the Gikuyu looked upon them as wanderers (*orori* or *athongo*) who had deserted from their homes and were lonely and in need of friends. The Gikuyu, in their natural generosity and hospitality, welcomed the wanderers and felt pity for them. As such the Europeans were allowed to pitch their tents and to have a temporary right of occupation on the land in the same

category as those Gikuyu *mohoi* or *mothami* who were given only cultivation or building rights. The Europeans were treated in this way in the belief that one day they would get tired of wandering and finally return to their own country.

These early Empire builders, knowing what they were after, played on the ignorance and sincere hospitable nature of the people. They agreed to the terms of a *mohoi* or *mothami*, and soon started to build small forts or camps, saying that "the object of a station is to form a centre for the purchase of food for caravans proceeding to Uganda," etc. For "Kikuyu was reported a country where food was extraordinarily abundant and cheap."<sup>1</sup>

The Gikuyu gave the Europeans building rights in places like Dagoretti, Fort Smith and others, with no idea of the motives which were behind the caravans, for they thought that it was only a matter of trading and nothing else. Unfortunately, they did not realise that these places were used for the preliminary preparations for taking away their land from them. They established friendly relations with the Europeans and supplied them with food for their caravans, taking it for granted that naturally the white wanderers must undoubtedly have their own country, and therefore could not settle for good in a foreign land, that they would feel home-sick and, after selling their goods, would go back to live in their homesteads with parents and relatives.

The belief that the Europeans were not going to live permanently in Africa, was strengthened by the fact that none of them seemed to stay very long in one place. Therefore, reasoning from this, the Gikuyu naturally came to the conclusion that one day all the Europeans in Africa would pack up bag and baggage and return to their own country in the same way as they came. It

<sup>1</sup> *The Rise of our E. African Empire*, by Lord Lugard, p. 323, vol. 1.

was a common saying among the Gikuyu until a few years ago that "*Gotire ondo wa ndereri, nagowo Coomba no okainoka*," which means that there is no mortal thing or act that lives for eternity; the Europeans will, no doubt, eventually go back to their own country. This saying was taken up as a lamenting slogan, and was sung in various songs, especially when the wanderers started to show their real motive for wandering.

The early travellers reported that "Kikuyu promised to be the most progressive station between the coast and the lake. The natives were very friendly, and even enlisted as porters to go to the coast, but these good relations received a disastrous check. Owing largely to the want of discipline in the passing caravans, whose men robbed the crops and otherwise made themselves troublesome, the people became estranged, and presently murdered several porters."<sup>1</sup> This was the beginning of the suffering and the use of the sticks which produced killing fire, as Mogo wa Kebiro had predicted in his prophecy of the coming of the white men. For soon after the above incident, we are told that the Gikuyu were "taught a lesson," they were compelled to make "the payment of fifty goats daily, and the free work of three hundred men to build the fort they had destroyed."<sup>2</sup>

After this event the Gikuyu, with bitterness in their hearts, realised that the strangers they had given hospitality to had planned to plunder and subjugate them by brute force. The chief, Waiyaki,<sup>3</sup> who had entered into a treaty of friendship with the strangers, was afterwards deported and died on his way to the coast. People were indignant for these acts of ingratitude on the part

<sup>1</sup> *The Rise of our E. African Empire*, by Lugard, p. 535, vol. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 536, vol. 2.

<sup>3</sup> "I made treaties with Eiyaki (Waiyaki) and several other chiefs, who came from considerable distances to perform the ceremony of blood-brotherhood." (*Rise of our E. African Empire*, by Lugard, p. 329, vol. 1.)

of the Europeans, and declined to trade with them, thinking that the Europeans and their caravans would get hungry and move away from the Gikuyu country; but soon the Gikuyu were made to know that "might is right," for it is reported that "from this country of teeming abundance, where in a few days I obtained many thousand pounds of food, the officer finds it impossible to purchase a single bag of grain," and parties were sent out regularly to take it by force!—and "large armed parties were necessary to procure firewood and water."<sup>1</sup>

The prediction of Mogo wa Kebiro was slowly being fulfilled, for soon afterwards the Kenya-Uganda railway (the iron snake) was completed. And the Europeans, having their feet firm on the soil, began to claim the absolute right to rule the country and to have the ownership of the lands under the title of "Crown Lands," where the Gikuyu, who are the original owners, now live as "tenants at will of the Crown." The Gikuyu lost most of their lands through their magnanimity, for the Gikuyu country was never wholly conquered by force of arms, but the people were put under the ruthless domination of European imperialism through the insidious trickery of hypocritical treaties.

The relation between the Gikuyu and the Europeans can well be illustrated by a Gikuyu story which says: That once upon a time an elephant made a friendship with a man. One day a heavy thunderstorm broke out, the elephant went to his friend, who had a little hut at the edge of the forest, and said to him: "My dear good man, will you please let me put my trunk inside your hut to keep it out of this torrential rain?" The man, seeing what situation his friend was in, replied: "My dear good elephant, my hut is very small, but there is room for your trunk and myself. Please put your trunk in gently." The elephant thanked his friend, saying:

<sup>1</sup> *Blue-Book Africa*, No. 8, 1893, p. 2.

"You have done me a good deed and one day I shall return your kindness." But what followed? As soon as the elephant put his trunk inside the hut, slowly he pushed his head inside, and finally flung the man out in the rain, and then lay down comfortably inside his friend's hut, saying: "My dear good friend, your skin is harder than mine, and as there is not enough room for both of us, you can afford to remain in the rain while I am protecting my delicate skin from the hail-storm."

The man, seeing what his friend had done to him, started to grumble, the animals in the nearby forest heard the noise and came to see what was the matter. All stood around listening to the heated argument between the man and his friend the elephant. In this turmoil the lion came along roaring, and said in a loud voice: "Don't you all know that I am the King of the Jungle! How dare anyone disturb the peace of my kingdom?" On hearing this the elephant, who was one of the high ministers in the jungle kingdom, replied in a soothing voice, and said: "My Lord, there is no disturbance of the peace in your kingdom. I have only been having a little discussion with my friend here as to the possession of this little hut which your lordship sees me occupying." The lion, who wanted to have "peace and tranquillity" in his kingdom, replied in a noble voice, saying: "I command my ministers to appoint a Commission of Enquiry to go thoroughly into this matter and report accordingly." He then turned to the man and said: "You have done well by establishing friendship with my people, especially with the elephant who is one of my honourable ministers of state. Do not grumble any more, your hut is not lost to you. Wait until the sitting of my Imperial Commission, and there you will be given plenty of opportunity to state your case. I am sure that you will be pleased with the findings of the Commission." The man was very pleased by

these sweet words from the King of the Jungle, and innocently waited for his opportunity, in the belief that, naturally, the hut would be returned to him.

The elephant, obeying the command of his master, got busy with other ministers to appoint the Commission of Enquiry. The following elders of the jungle were appointed to sit in the Commission: (1) Mr. Rhinoceros; (2) Mr. Buffalo; (3) Mr. Alligator; (4) The Rt. Hon. Mr. Fox to act as chairman; and (5) Mr. Leopard to act as Secretary to the Commission. On seeing the personnel, the man protested and asked if it was not necessary to include in this Commission a member from his side. But he was told that it was impossible, since no one from his side was well enough educated to understand the intricacy of jungle law. Further, that there was nothing to fear, for the members of the Commission were all men of repute for their impartiality in justice, and as they were gentlemen chosen by God to look after the interests of races less adequately endowed with teeth and claws, he might rest assured that they would investigate the matter with the greatest care and report impartially.

The Commission sat to take the evidence. The Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant was first called. He came along with a superior air, brushing his tusks with a sapling which Mrs. Elephant had provided, and in an authoritative voice said: "Gentlemen of the Jungle, there is no need for me to waste your valuable time in relating a story which I am sure you all know. I have always regarded it as my duty to protect the interests of my friends, and this appears to have caused the misunderstanding between myself and my friend here. He invited me to save his hut from being blown away by a hurricane. As the hurricane had gained access owing to the unoccupied space in the hut, I considered it necessary, in my friend's own interests, to turn the undeveloped space to a more economic use by sitting in

it myself; a duty which any of you would undoubtedly have performed with equal readiness in similar circumstances."

After hearing the Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant's conclusive evidence, the Commission called Mr. Hyena and other elders of the jungle, who all supported what Mr. Elephant had said. They then called the man, who began to give his own account of the dispute. But the Commission cut him short, saying: "My good man, please confine yourself to relevant issues. We have already heard the circumstances from various unbiased sources; all we wish you to tell us is whether the undeveloped space in your hut was occupied by anyone else before Mr. Elephant assumed his position?" The man began to say: "No, but——" But at this point the Commission declared that they had heard sufficient evidence from both sides and retired to consider their decision. After enjoying a delicious meal at the expense of the Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant, they reached their verdict, called the man, and declared as follows: "In our opinion this dispute has arisen through a regrettable misunderstanding due to the backwardness of your ideas. We consider that Mr. Elephant has fulfilled his sacred duty of protecting your interests. As it is clearly for your good that the space should be put to its most economic use, and as you yourself have not yet reached the stage of expansion which would enable you to fill it, we consider it necessary to arrange a compromise to suit both parties. Mr. Elephant shall continue his occupation of your hut, but we give you permission to look for a site where you can build another hut more suited to your needs, and we will see that you are well protected."

The man, having no alternative, and fearing that his refusal might expose him to the teeth and claws of members of the Commission, did as they suggested. But no sooner had he built another hut than Mr. Rhinoceros charged in with his horn lowered and ordered

the man to quit. A Royal Commission was again appointed to look into the matter, and the same finding was given. This procedure was repeated until Mr. Buffalo, Mr. Leopard, Mr. Hyena and the rest were all accommodated with new huts. Then the man decided that he must adopt an effective method of protection, since Commissions of Enquiry did not seem to be of any use to him. He sat down and said: "*Ng'enda thi ndeagaga motegi*," which literally means "there is nothing that treads on the earth that cannot be trapped," or in other words, you can fool people for a time, but not for ever.

Early one morning, when the huts already occupied by the jungle lords were all beginning to decay and fall to pieces, he went out and built a bigger and better hut a little distance away. No sooner had Mr. Rhinoceros seen it than he came rushing in, only to find that Mr. Elephant was already inside, sound asleep. Mr. Leopard next came in at the window, Mr. Lion, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Buffalo entered the doors, while Mr. Hyena howled for a place in the shade and Mr. Alligator basked on the roof. Presently they all began disputing about their rights of penetration, and from disputing they came to fighting, and while they were all embroiled together the man set the hut on fire and burnt it to the ground, jungle lords and all. Then he went home, saying: "Peace is costly, but it's worth the expense," and lived happily ever after.



## ECONOMIC LIFE

### DIVISION OF LABOUR

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER we have been discussing the land tenure, which is the most important factor, as we shall see presently, in our analysis of the economic life of the Gikuyu, for the supply of material needs depends entirely on the land.

The chief occupations among the Gikuyu are agriculture and the rearing of livestock, such as cattle, sheep and goats. Each family, i.e. a man, his wife or wives and their children, constitute an economic unit. This is controlled and strengthened by the system of division of labour according to sex. From the homestead to the fields and to the tending of the domestic animals, every sphere of activity is clearly and systematically defined. Each member of the family unit knows perfectly well what task he or she is required to perform, in their economic productivity and distribution of the family resources, so as to ensure the material prosperity of the group.

The best point for starting our analysis of the division of labour is from the homestead and then moving gradually to the fields. In house-building the heavy work of cutting timbers and putting up the framework falls on

men. Carrying and cutting of the grass for thatching and plastering the wall with clay or cow-dung is the work of women. Men build fences around the homestead or gardens and also cattle-pens. They are the night watchmen to protect the crops against the wild animals.

The entire housework naturally falls within the sphere of women's activities. They cook, bring water from the rivers, wash utensils and fetch firewood from the forests or bush. They also perform the task of carrying the loads on their backs. According to the tribal customs which govern the division of labour, no man would dare to indulge in any of these activities except in a case of emergency, or otherwise he would scandalise the women and it would be difficult for such a man to get any girl to marry him. He would be given a nickname, *kihongoyo* or *moburabureki*, something like "Nosy Parker." Women are afraid of a man of this character, for they say that if he could perform women's work, what is the use of getting married, for how can a wife and husband be doing the same thing at the same time?

In cultivating the fields men clear the bush and cut big trees, and also break the virgin soil with digging-sticks or hoes. Women come behind them and prepare the ground for sowing seeds. Planting is shared by both sexes. Men plant bananas, yams, sweet potato vines, sugar-canes, tobacco, and also provide poles for propping up bananas and yams. Women plant maize, various kinds of beans, millet and sweet potato vines.

Weeding is done collectively. Cutting drains or water-furrows and pruning of banana plants, as well as making roads and bridges, is the work of men. Harvesting is done chiefly by the women. Tending of cattle, sheep and goats, and also slaughtering and distributing the meat and preparing the skins, is entirely the men's duty. Dress-making, pottery and weaving of baskets is exclusively women's profession. Wood-carving, smith's work, bee-keeping and hunting are men's occupations.

Women take responsibility for grinding corn and millet, for making gruel, and pounding grains in wooden mortars. They also pound sugar-canes for making beer.

The brewing of beer is done jointly by both men and women. Men cut the canes from the field and peel them, and the women carry the canes home. While the women are pounding, the men are busy mixing the substance of the sugar-canes with the water and squeezing or wringing the juice out of it, and also straining the juice into fermenting gourds. Trading is done by both sexes. Carrying and selling grains at the markets is chiefly done by women, while taking sheep and goats or cattle to the markets and selling them is the job of men.

#### AGRICULTURE

The land being the foundation rock on which the Gikuyu tribal economy stands, and the only effective mode of production that the people have, the result is that there is a great desire in the heart of every Gikuyu man to own a piece of land on which he can build his home, and from which he and his family can get the means of livelihood. A man or a woman who cannot say to his friends, come and eat, drink and enjoy the fruit of my labour, is not considered as a worthy member of the tribe.

A family group with land to cultivate is considered as a self-supporting economic unit. The group work harmoniously with a view to satisfying their immediate needs, and with the desire to accumulate wealth in the form of cattle, sheep and goats. These are acquired through effective tillage of the land, except in a very few cases nowadays where some people are able to get money in some other ways than selling their products.

#### CHILDREN IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Children begin their activities in production when they are young as a part of their training in agriculture and herding. When children are very young they are left at home minding small babies, or are taken by their parents to the field where they are allowed to play in a corner of the cultivated field. Soon the children get interested in the work and are ambitious to participate in gardening. As soon as they are able to handle a digging-stick they are given small allotments to practice on.

The children are very proud of their small gardens and take great interest in learning how to become good agriculturalists. Parents help them to plant seeds and teach them how to distinguish the crops from the wild plants or weeds. For sometimes children keep on rooting out growing crops together with weeds, until gradually their eyes get to recognise what are weeds and what are crops. The children are very enthusiastic in their work, and frequently like to take their playmates and proudly show them round the small gardens, saying: "Look how our crops are growing nicely, surely we are going to have a good harvest, and then we can have a big feast as a result of our labour."

As a child grows, its sphere of activities in gardening increases. Instead of small fields, a large one is provided according to the capability of the child. Of course, the work is done collectively. The crops thus cultivated are in the care of the mother, who is the managing director of food supply in the homestead.

The children co-operate with their parents in production and distribution of the family's resources and wealth until the time of marriage. When a girl marries, if her husband's homestead is near, she continues to cultivate her childhood gardens and takes the crops home for the use of herself and her husband. On the



other hand, if she goes far away to live, she leaves the gardens to her mother. In the case of a boy, he takes full control of his gardens when he marries. For although he still co-operates with his parents in the general economy of the family group, he and his wife are now responsible for supplying and satisfying their own immediate material needs.

#### SEASONAL CALENDAR

In the Gikuyu country there are four seasons and two harvests in one year. These are divided as follows: (1) The season of big rain (*mbura ya njaha*) from March to July; (2) the season of big harvest (*magetha ma njaha*), between July and early October; (3) short rain season (*mbura ya mwere*), from October to January; (4) the season of harvesting millet (*magetha ma mwere*), from January to March. There are various names attached to these seasons, according to the activities pursued during each season, such as clearing virgin land (*matuguta*), protecting millet from the birds (*marira ma mwere*), etc., but the names mentioned above are the main divisions of the seasonal calendar.

#### PREPARING FIELDS FOR PLANTING

Where land is available the system of cultivating it in rotation is the most favoured, for it gives a farmer or peasant an opportunity of getting a new field every four or five seasons, and at the same time letting the old one rest fallow. In this way a peasant is able to get good crops without using manure, because most of the Gikuyu land is very fertile. In cases where land is not available, especially nowadays owing to the alienation of the Gikuyu lands, people depend entirely on turning their land over and over again to renew it.

During the hot season a family group gets together

and prepares their fields ready for planting. Every member of the group has his or her own fields for various seasonal crops, such as maize, a variety of beans, sweet potatoes and European potatoes and other vegetables. All these are planted at once when the rain starts. They are the mainstay of the Gikuyu diet.

Permanent crops such as yams, sugar-canes, bananas, can only flourish in particular soils in various localities. The planting of these is a matter for individuals and for the custom of different districts. These are not crops that everyone in the community can afford to grow on account of the suitable soil and water they require. In some districts, especially Fort Hall and Nyeri, these articles of food are plentiful, but in other districts they are looked on as somewhat of a luxury.

It would be tedious to describe here planting ceremonies or magic connected with the economic activities in the fields, as the magic which enters into the economic life of the people is dealt with in Chapter 10 on religion and ancestor worship.

To avoid repetition of magical aspects we will proceed to analyse the work and crops in the fields. Apart from the crops mentioned above, there are three kinds of crops which are planted in rotation, namely, millet (*mwere*), tree peas (*njogo*), and *njaha*, a very nourishing kind of beans used mostly to feed women after child-birth. *Njogo* and *njaha* are planted during the big rain season, and *mwere* during the short rain season. The reason being that if *njaha* and *njogo* are planted during the short rain season, the result will be failure, because they are very slow-growing crops and need plenty of water. The same with *mwere*; if it is planted during the big rain, it will grow taller and taller, and bear very little or no grain at all. From a scientific and economic point of view, obtained from years of trial and error, the planting of crops and weeding of the gardens are done according to the seasonal calendar.

## CLEARING WEEDS

When crops are about four or five inches high the weeding of the ground is started. During this time people join in a collective weeding. Four or five persons or more form a group for team-work, they cultivate one man's field one day then next day another man's field, and so on until they clear weeds from all their fields. Another way of cultivating the fields is by inviting a group of friends, ten or more, and providing them with a feast of beer or gruel and other edibles. This is not looked upon as a reward for the work done, but as hospitality to one's guests.

After a man has informed his friends about the work he wants them to help in, a day is fixed, generally three days ahead. On the day appointed, the friends meet in the garden or field early in the morning and start to work enthusiastically, singing cultivation songs. Sometimes they will challenge cultivators in the next field and compete with them in work and songs. About midday, when the sun becomes hot, they have finished clearing a big field. At this juncture they retire and start feasting joyously for having completed the work of helping their friend.

If a stranger happens to pass by at this time of enjoyment after labour he will have no idea that these people who are now singing, dancing and laughing merrily, have completed their day's work. For after they have cleaned off the dust which they got from the fields, they look, in all respects, as though they have been enjoying themselves the whole day. This is why most of the Europeans have erred by making general remarks that "the African is a lazy being and likes to bask in the sun, while his wife or wives work for him," not realising that the African in his own environment does not count hours or work by the movement of the clock, but works with good spirit and enthusiasm to

complete the task before him. In this way an African is able to work better and quicker in his own field, where he is his own master, than when employed by the Europeans where he has to be bossed about.

To turn to our analysis of the work in the fields, the correct method of ensuring a good crop is, that while the crops are growing the fields are weeded over and over again until there are no more weeds growing there. Then comes a time of relaxation waiting for the harvest. This is a period of numerous dances and songs and performing various ceremonies, especially if a good harvest is expected. About this time one of the quick-growing kinds of bean (*mboco*) is ripe, and is taken as a supplement to food prepared from the grains stored during the previous harvest.

## MARKETING

At this time people have finished the heavy work of weeding and there is little to do in the fields except that the crops are in need of protection against the birds. This work is generally done in rotation, one member of the family group taking charge of the field one day and another the next day. This gives all the members of the group an opportunity of participating in dances and visiting the markets to sell or buy.

Marketing begins when crops are ripe and have not yet dried to be harvested. Various things are taken to markets, principally bananas, yams, a variety of beans, tree peas, maize, millet, potatoes and sugar-canes. In these markets one finds all kinds of ornaments, articles of clothing, from skins of animals to the Lancashire cotton, different types of agricultural implements, running from digging-sticks to hoes made in Birmingham or in Japan. There are also sheep and goats, milk and butter-fat, etc.

There are two ways of exchanging goods, one by

barter and the other by money. The former is predominant, for the majority of the people still adhere to the old form of exchanging one article for another. For instance, if one man has beans and he wants yams, he goes to the man who has yams and is in need of beans and tells him: "I have my beans and I want your yams." Then they argue as to how many yams to a basket of beans. If they agree they exchange there and then; if not, each goes his own way, looking for someone else who will agree with him, for the exchange depends entirely on individual buyer and seller.

There are also fixed prices for certain goods dictated by the seasonal law of supply and demand. For instance, if a man wants a cultivating-knife he goes to a smith who has fixed a general price for each of his articles according to their sizes. For example, a small knife is exchanged for a small basket of millet or two small baskets of beans. Again, if a woman wants an ornament she goes to a man or a woman who has them and there exchanges two heaps of sweet potatoes or one heap of yams for a bracelet or an ear-ring.

In the markets things are bought and sold in small and big quantities by people who have too much of one thing and too little of the other. Take the case of a man who is about to stage a big ceremonial feast, and perhaps has not cultivated sufficient grain to enable him to display his generosity to his friends. He takes one of his sheep or goats to the market and exchanges it for three or four big baskets of millet or for any other commodity that he lacks. If a man has too many cows and fewer sheep and goats, he takes one of his cows, especially one that has no religious implications within the family group, and exchanges it for ten or more sheep and goats. Sometimes there are people who have been working for wages and have saved a few shillings after paying their poll or hut taxes. When one such returns to his home and wants to own a few

of these valued animals, which are the recognised standard of wealth among the Gikuyu, he goes to the market and makes a good bargain with the people who have brought their sheep and goats to raise sufficient money for the Government taxes. In these markets one can buy almost any conceivable thing that is available in the tribe. It is considered a sign of industry to be selling grain in the markets, for it proves that one has not only cultivated sufficient for the family, but also a surplus for accumulation of wealth.

#### HARVESTING

In many cases the harvesting-time is the busiest period for the majority of women, for the simple reason that they are the managing directors of the food supply in their respective family groups. Therefore it is considered right and proper for the women to handle the grain and store it according to the immediate and future needs of the family. The work of harvesting is almost divided equally between men and women. For while the women do the actual harvesting and carrying the harvest home, the men cut or root out maize or millet stalks, burn them and spread the ashes in the field as a part of the manuring and to kill certain insects. Men also make new granaries or repair the old ones.

When the harvesting is completed, a woman's first thought is to store sufficient grain to last her family until the next harvest. After she has done so, and there is surplus grain left, she consults with her husband. Then, if there is something that the family needs, the surplus grain is sold immediately in the markets to satisfy the needs. If there are no immediate needs, the surplus grain is kept back and sold later when there is a scarcity of that particular grain in the markets.

The stored grain is dished out carefully by the wife, with the view neither to be wasteful nor starve the

family. She prepares family menus with a variety of daily changes to balance the diets. For example, if she had prepared sweet potatoes and gruel for to-day's meal, to-morrow she will cook a mixture of beans, maize, greens and perhaps bananas. Although food is changed almost daily, the wife takes great care not to exhaust the supply of one article of food. So when there is plenty of beans and maize, and less bananas and sweet potatoes, she cooks more of what is abundant and less of what is scarce.

A wife who manages efficiently the economic affairs as well as other duties in her family group, is highly respected not only by her group but by the entire community.

#### ECONOMIC VALUE OF SHEEP AND GOATS AND CATTLE

We have seen that in the Gikuyu society almost every man has a garden or gardens from which his immediate needs are supplied. We have also dealt with the economic aspects of the crops raised in these fields, and how they are bartered in the markets or sold for money. Little has been mentioned about the marketing of domestic animals, but up to this point we have not yet discussed the economic value of these animals. It is therefore necessary to give a short description of how the Gikuyu look upon their cattle, sheep and goats.

To a Gikuyu the cattle in the first place are merely a display of wealth, for a man to be called rich he must own a number of cattle. Because, while every family has a number of sheep and goats, say, from one to hundreds, only a small minority own cattle, and therefore to own a cow or two is the first sign of being a wealthy man.

Apart from being the display of wealth, cattle play a part in the economic life of the people. To start with,

cow's milk is used for babies by those who can afford it. The milk is very little used in the Gikuyu diet except by those who own a number of cows. Hides are used for various purposes, for bedding, making sandals and straps for tying and carrying firewood and other loads. As a source of meat or butter supply, cattle play a very small part. Cows are never killed for food, except at a time of famine, but bulls and oxen are now and again slaughtered for occasional meat feasts (*kerugo*), and this is regarded as luxurious and only practised by well-to-do persons.

Cows give the owner a prestige in the community, but are never killed for any particular sacrificial or religious ceremonies, except in very rare cases or when a bull or ox is substituted for a male goat or a ram. As economic assets cattle play a part in the marriage ceremony, where a cow or more is given as marriage insurance (*roracio*), but there, too, cattle are given as a substitute for sheep or goats, each cow being valued at ten sheep or goats and a bull or an ox at five sheep or goats.

In former days cattle had very little economic value to the owners, apart from the fact that such owners were looked on as dignified, respected rich men. The milk was not sold, but used by the herdsmen and by visitors, especially warriors, who were the protectors of the villages against Masai or other raiders. The rich men, who naturally had more property to be protected, were responsible for feeding the warriors in the way of milk and providing oxen for meat feasts (*irugo*) to keep the warriors in good healthy condition.

Sometimes the owner of cattle hardly had the pleasure of drinking his cows' milk, especially if they were far away from his homestead. In spite of this the owner of a large number of cattle was sentimentally satisfied by praise names conferred upon him by the community in their songs and dances. Nowadays some people, especially those who are near European towns, do sell

their milk and derive a good income from it. This income could be improved by introducing a better breed instead of keeping a number of cows which give very little milk. From the economic point of view the present breed of cattle reared by the Gikuyu is very poor, and it would be a great advancement if the Government could help the people to secure a few good bulls for breeding, and gradually replace the inferior types of cattle with better ones. This method would automatically improve the problem of congestion in grazing areas which faces the country at present, for people would learn the value of keeping a few cows which would be useful economically, instead of keeping a large number of cattle for sentimental satisfaction.

#### SHEEP AND GOATS AS STANDARD CURRENCY

In the Gikuyu country, before the introduction of the European monetary system, sheep and goats were regarded as the standard currency of the Gikuyu people. The price of almost everything was determined in terms of sheep and goats (*mbori*). This system still operates among the majority of the Gikuyu people who have not yet grasped the idea of a monetary system and its value.

These domestic animals play an important role in the economic, religious, and social life of the Gikuyu. A man with a number of sheep and goats feels no less than a man with a large bank balance. The people look upon these animals as a good investment which gives them a yearly income, for if a man has two or three good sheep or female goats within a year they increase to six or more, and people consider this a good profit. They would argue saying that money is not a good investment, for one shilling does not bear another shilling, whereas a sheep or goat does. This, of

course, is due to the ignorance of money speculation, and so they say it is better to buy a sheep or a goat instead of keeping shillings which, if buried in the ground (the only form of saving money the majority of the people know), would rot and lose their value.

Sheep and goats, unlike cattle, are used for various religious sacrifices and purifications. They are the chief means of supplying the people with meat, while the skins are used as articles of clothing. Finally, without them a man cannot get a wife, for it is sheep and goats that are given as *roracio* (marriage insurance). If a man has cash money and he wants to get married he must, in the first place, buy cattle or sheep and goats, because the parents of the wife-to-be will not accept cash money as *roracio*. To them coins have very little meaning and have no religious or sentimental associations within the people's custom.

The real value of money is only realised when a man takes it and buys a cow or sheep and goats, or pays the Government taxes, otherwise money as such has little function inside the Gikuyu country. With all the disadvantages connected with the rearing of sheep and goats, they are still regarded generally as the only means of expression of wealth. By disadvantages we mean that in some cases young men have been ruined by spending years earning money to buy these highly valued animals and sometimes sickness invades a homestead and kills every one of them in a few days. This means a loss of ten or thirty pounds, which if it had been put in a savings bank, would have remained there and helped the young man to improve his standard of living. This is a question which is very difficult to settle, for some people would argue that the animals give better profit yearly, whereas shillings do not multiply quickly and do not give the same sentimental satisfaction. But let us hope that gradually people will be able to decide which one of the two systems is suitable for their advancement.

#### TRADING WITH THE NEIGHBOURING TRIBES

We have given a description of how the Gikuyu exchange goods amongst themselves in the markets, and the types of articles sold and bought. Having done so, we will now enter into discussion of how the Gikuyu trade with their neighbours, i.e. the Masai and Wakamba. The articles of special value in trading with the Masai are spears, swords, tobacco, gourds and red ochre. The Masai, who are not agriculturalists, and who regard the cultivation of soil as a crime against their gods, depend almost entirely on the Gikuyu for the supply of the three last-mentioned articles. Although the Masai have their own blacksmiths, the spears made by the Gikuyu were and still are regarded as the best.

There are inter-tribal markets where these goods are exchanged, but, apart from these markets, sometimes a group of men organise into a trading guild and take their goods into the heart of the Masai country. In former days this kind of trade was conducted in the homestead of a friend who acted as the guide and protector of his friends and their goods.

The Gikuyu, after collecting their trading goods, would send for their friend or friends in Masailand, asking them to meet the traders at the frontier and conduct them into the country. Thus goods were taken to villages, and, after exchanging them for sheep, the Gikuyu would return escorted by their friends to the frontier to avoid any molestation by the hostile warriors who would only be too glad to have someone on whom to blood their spears. The same thing happened when the Masai wanted to enter into Gikuyuland for the purpose of trade.

Nowadays the trade between the two tribes is mostly restricted to trading centres. Only those who can afford

to pay heavy licence fees to the British Government can open a trading store in these centres.

As regards trade with the Wakamba, there are no special articles as in the case of the Masai. In fact the Wakamba being agriculturists grow almost the same crops as the Gikuyu. The two tribes are racially and linguistically identical. It can be said that in the beginning of things the Gikuyu and Wakamba were brothers, but how and why they came to part is a matter requiring some investigation.

In former days there was very little hostility between the two tribes, and their trade depended on seasonal harvests. If there was a shortage of food in Gikuyuland and abundance in the Wakamba country, the Gikuyu went and bought grain from the Wakamba, the exchange being sheep and goats or cows and sometimes ivory. The same thing happened in the case of the Wakamba. Apart from these contacts, there were frequent and friendly visits from both sides for trading or other purposes.

We may mention here that soft chains, snuff-boxes or carriers, bows and arrows, witchcraft and herbal medicines were among things exchanged in trading, or given as presents to friends, in reciprocity, which is the basic principle of friendship. The friendly relations between the Gikuyu and the Wakamba is still the same, except that free visiting is now prohibited, and only those who have a special pass from the British Government can visit either Gikuyu or Wakamba country or other tribes.