

Natives Who Dress in Telegraph Wire

FRANK S. CARPENTER WRITES OF THE QUEER WAKIKUYU, NEAR BRITISH EAST AFRICA—A MAN'S WEALTH CONSISTS IN THE NUMBER OF HIS WIVES—GREAT RAILROAD THIEVES—STRANGE CUSTOMS OF THE NANDI.

Have you ever heard of the Wakikuyu?

There are more than a million of them in this part of Africa. They live on the highlands just east of here and about Mount Kenya, which is more to the north. I reached their country shortly after leaving Nairobi, the capital of British East Africa. That town is at the end of a series of highlands. It is on the western edge of a plateau and the land rises beyond it. We mounted over 2,000 feet in 24 miles and then found ourselves among the villages of these curious people. We could see their little farms everywhere. They take up patches of woodland and burn off the trees. After that they work the ground to death for a few years, and then go off to take up patches somewhere else. Some of their farms are no bigger than a bed quilt, others cover a quarter of an acre and some twice as much. The fields are not fenced, and now and then a rhino or hippo gets in and wallows while near the woodlands the monkeys pull up the crops. I saw the first of these Indian corn. I saw the women everywhere working the fields. Half nude, they bend low, pulling the weeds and digging the ground over with hoes. In most places the men squat around on the ground and keep them up to their work. The more wives a man has the richer he is; and the more he drives his wives the better his farm. Indeed the cheapest cattle here are human cattle.

GREASE, CLAY AND TELEGRAPH WIRE.

The chief dress of the Wakikuyu consists of grease, clay and telegraph wire. The grease makes their brown skins shine, the red clay gives it a copper hue, and the telegraph wire loads their arms, necks and ankles. The grease is usually mutton fat and the clay is the red soil found everywhere. The more rancid the fat the better they seem to like it. The average man or woman smells like heaven, and one can distinguish a native's existence before he gets to him. They soak their hair with this grease, and under the tropical sun you can almost hear the stuff sizzle. They stiffen their hair with clay, so that it can be put up in all sorts of shapes, making their headgear a pale brick-red color. I examined one man's head the other day. It was covered with something like 10,000 individual curls which stood out over his pate like the snakes of the Medusa. Each curl was an inch long, and it had been twisted by a professional hairdresser.

PIPE STEMS AS EAR PLUGS.

This man had three long pipe stems in each ear. Each was as big as a lead pencil and of about the same length. It was fastened through a hole made in the rim of the ear by a kind of brass button, and these three stems standing out on each side his head looked almost like horns, save that they projected from the ears. He had beads in the lobes and one of the men with him had the rim of his ear stretched that it held a plug as big as my fist. I bought the plug of him for 3 cents, and the man then took the two lobes of his ears and joined them together under his chin and tied them with a bit of string in order that they might not catch on a branch or something else as he went through the forest.

This second man had a brass collar about his neck and coils of brass wire about each wrist and over the biceps of each arm. His only clothing consisted of a strip of dirty white cotton which was fastened over one shoulder and fell to his thighs. He had pronounced negro features and where the red clay had worn off his skin was as black as my boots.

CATTLE SLEEP WITH THE PEOPLE.

These Wakikuyu live in small villages. Their towns look like collections of haystacks until you come close to them and when you get inside you find that they contain as many animals as men. The houses are thatched huts built about six feet apart in circles around an inclosure in which the cattle, sheep and goats are kept at night. The sheep and goats often get inside the huts. Each circle of huts usually belongs to one family, a chief and his relatives thus living together. The huts have wooden walls about four feet high with conical roofs. The wood is chopped out of the trees with the native axes, the boards being about 18 inches or 2 feet in width. They are made by the natives, a man and his wives requiring about ten days to build a hut. The wood used is soft, and the kind is regulated by the Government which charges the natives 65 cents for enough wood to build one hut.

In addition to the huts, each family has two or three granaries to keep its winter supply of Indian corn. These are made with wicker walls and wicker floors, and are raised a foot or eighteen inches off the ground. They are usually about as big around as a hoghead and six feet in height. They have thatched roofs.

WHAT THEY EAT.

The Wakikuyu are practically vegetarians. They live on corn, beans, sweet potatoes and a kind of millet. They have a few cattle and some sheep, but they consider them too valuable to be killed and they only eat them when the cattle are sick or become injured in some way and have to be killed. They have no chickens, and eat neither fowls nor eggs. The reason for this is that chickens crow, and in the past the locality of a village could be told by the cocks and thereby brought down its enemies and the slave traders upon it.

These people have many dishes like ours. They eat roasting ears off the cob, and they boil beans and corn together, making a kind of succotash. They have also a gruel made of millet and milk, and if one of the family becomes sick they sometimes give him mutton broth. In their cooking they use clay pots, which they rest upon stones and build fires under them. They use gourd for carrying milk and water, and make bags of woven bark ranging in size from a pint to four bush-

els. Such bags are used for all sorts of purposes, and the larger ones serve for the transportation of their grain to the markets.

The Wakikuyu looks upon the females of his family as so much available capital. If a man has fifteen or twenty wives, he is supposed to be wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice. I am told that many of the chiefs have a dozen or more, and that since the British have begun to exploit the forests, the more industrious of the native men have been rapidly increasing their families. A good girl, large and healthy, will bring as much as fifty sheep, and a man may pay down ten sheep and agree to bring in the balance from month to month as himself and his wives earn them. He goes into the woods and cuts down trees, being paid so much per stick. If a man works hard he may make \$1.25 or \$1.50 a month, and if, in addition, he has several women to help him, his income may be doubled or trebled.

In such work the men cut the wood and the women carry it on their backs to the market. They are loaded up by their husbands, a piece of goatskin separating the rough sticks from the women's bare skin, the burden being tied on by a rope of wild vine which rests on the forehead. In addition to this goatskin on her back, the woman usually has an apron or skirt of skin, which is tied about the waist and reaches to the knees and sometimes below them. A good lusty girl can carry as much as 200 pounds of wood in this way, and her husband does not scruple to load her with all she will take. I made some inquiries as to the prices of such women, and am told that a girl is supposed to be worth for sale at five years and that \$20 in cattle or sheep is an average price. For this sum the woman should be large, well formed and fairly good looking. Ugly girls and lean girls go cheap and some such are often unmarried, in which case they have to work for their parents.

GREAT RAILROAD THIEVES.

I saw a half dozen Nandi, including two women, at one of the stations between here and the Escarpment. The men were almost naked, save that they wore cloths of monkey skins with the fur on and strips of cowskin about the waist. The women had on waist cloths and blankets of cowhide tanned with the hair on. These blankets were fastened over one shoulder, leaving the arms and half of the breasts bare. These Nandi were walking along the railroad track, and were closely watched by the station agents. I am told they are great thieves, and that the British have had trouble with them because they steal bolts and rivets which hold the rails to the ties, and even climb the telegraph poles and steal the wire. The women I saw had coils of brass wire around their necks and long coils of similar wire tied to strings in their ears. In their own country telegraph wire brings a big price as jewelry, and they look upon the strands of iron stretched from pole to pole along the railroad just as our women look upon gold and silver jewelry. If the wires along our tracks were made of gold and silver, so that one could snip off a section far out in the woods and make a gold necklace for his girl out of it, you would have about the conditions that prevail here as to the telegraph. The native men are crazy for iron. They can use the bolts and rivets for slungshots to brain their enemies, and all the iron they have had in the past has come from digging up the ore and smelting it. The Nandi live northwest of here on a plateau which contains iron deposits, and they make a business of mining and smelting. Since the railroad has come from time to time and raided the considerable work in iron and leather. They have cattle, sheep and goats, and a few do some farming. Like the Masai, they bleed their cattle, and the drink the blood hot, sometimes mixing it with their porridge. After bleeding they close the wounds, so that the cattle grow well again. They are good hunters, and have large dogs with which they run the game so close that it can be killed with spears. They also trap game by digging wedge-shaped pits, and covering them over with grass. They have donkeys, which they use to carry the iron ore from the mines to their furnaces, where they turn it into pig metal.

QUEER NANDI CUSTOMS.

These Nandi are among the bravest of the African natives. They are like the Masai, delighting in a fight, and ready to fight at the least provocation. They are more civilized than the Wakikuyu, and do considerable work in iron and leather. They have cattle, sheep and goats, and a few do some farming. Like the Masai, they bleed their cattle, and the drink the blood hot, sometimes mixing it with their porridge. After bleeding they close the wounds, so that the cattle grow well again. They are good hunters, and have large dogs with which they run the game so close that it can be killed with spears. They also trap game by digging wedge-shaped pits, and covering them over with grass. They have donkeys, which they use to carry the iron ore from the mines to their furnaces, where they turn it into pig metal.

These people have about the same customs of marriage as the Masai. The young girls live with a marriageable age, and marriage is always a matter of bargain and sale. The price of a good-looking girl is three goats, a cow and a good fat hen, and the bride of the tribe may bring twice as much. Among the Nandi, the woman who bears the most children is considered the most valuable. She who has twins is a mascot, and is given a cow, the milk of which goes exclusively to her. The younger women of this tribe wear small aprons of leather, ornamented with beads, and the young men go practically naked. The married men dress much like those I saw on the track.

I understand that the Nandi live about the same as other natives about here. They have circular huts of boards roofed with thatch. Each hut has a fireplace in the center, and on each side of this a little bed consisting of a platform of mud, built along the wall of the hut. The people sleep on the mud, and use round blocks of wood for pillows. The

children sleep with their parents until they are six years of age, when they are shoved off into a smaller hut outside, built especially for them. They believe in witches and medicine men, and they have a sky god to whom they pray every morning and to whom they sacrifice when times are hard.

PEOPLE WHO DRESS IN BEADS.

Nearly all these Africans believe in witch doctors. The Wakamba, whose country I passed through on my way to Nairobi, not infrequently kill the women of their tribe when they are charged with witchcraft, and there is a record of something like forty having been murdered this way within the past two or three years. I saw these Wakamba on the Athi plains and in and about Nairobi. They are tall and fine looking, having woolly hair, rather thick lips and almost straight noses. They wear but little clothing. Some of the women I saw were clad in nothing but beads. They had bead leggings reaching from their ankles almost to their knees, and bead waistbands embracing their bodies from the breast to the thighs, with short bead aprons hanging down at the front. They wore wristlets, consisting of about twenty coils of brass wire as thick as a lead pencil, and they had bead collars, necklaces and bead waistbands embracing their bodies from the breast to the thighs, with short bead aprons hanging down at the front. They wore wristlets, consisting of about twenty coils of brass wire as thick as a lead pencil, and they had bead collars, necklaces and bead waistbands embracing their bodies from the breast to the thighs, with short bead aprons hanging down at the front. They wore wristlets, consisting of about twenty coils of brass wire as thick as a lead pencil, and they had bead collars, necklaces and bead waistbands embracing their bodies from the breast to the thighs, with short bead aprons hanging down at the front.

SAVING THE AFRICAN FORESTS.

In coming from the plains over the mountains into the Great Rift Valley, I rode for miles through the woods and had a chance to see what the British Government is doing to save the forests. Contrary to the general opinion, this country has but little woods except in the hills, and lumber is high. A great deal of that used at Mombasa and Nairobi is brought in from Norway, and some comes from the United States. Leaving the Ki-kuyu hills there are woods all the way to the ridge known as the Escarpment and the forest extends a distance down the sides of the Rift Valley. Here in the valley itself the country is mostly pasture and there is no timber of any account. In the forest region, above referred to, the woods are thin, and in many places the virgin timber has been cleared by the Wakikuyu, who burn the ground over in order that they may use the virgin soil for garden patches. The Government is now prohibiting this, and is doing all that it can to save the trees remaining and to build up new wood lands. I saw a Nandi, a Nandi, an Australian who is one of the heads of the forestry department. He tells me that the Government has established nurseries at Mombasa, Nairobi, Escarpment and Lamdalla. Near Mombasa they are sowing teak trees, and at Nairobi they have planted a large number of acacia and eucalypti, which they have imported from Australia. The eucalyptus grows well at Nairobi. I saw trees there which were 75 feet high, and that although they were only five years of age.

MONKEYS AND THE WOOD LANDS.

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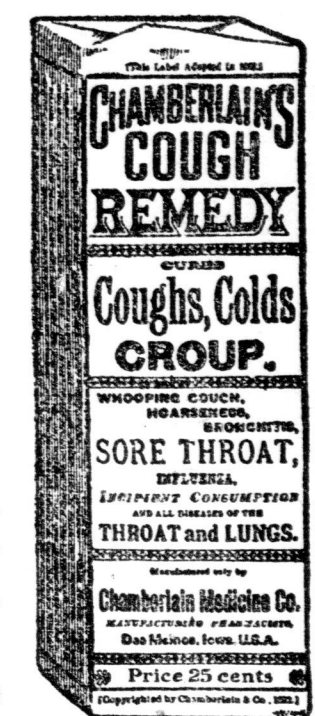
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