

Vol. 3 | 1926

## KENYA MEDICAL JOURNAL.

## NOTES ON THE FOODSTUFFS OF THE LUO TRIBES.

BY J. C. J. CALLANAN, M.D., B.CH.

## COMMON FOODSTUFFS.

**MTAMA** (*bel*). This is ground and mixed with water, and boiled until a doughy substance is formed which is called *kuon* (Swahili, *ugali*). *Kuon* is eaten with meat, or native vegetables, buttermilk (*buyo*), blood, fish, chickens, or eggs.

**WIMBI** (*kal*). This is cooked and eaten in the same manner as *mtama*. It is chiefly used by the Luo who reside near the Kisii border.

**BEANS** (*oganda*). These are mixed with **MAIZE** (*oduma*). The mixture is termed *nyoyo*. Beans, without the admixture, are not popular.

**SWEET POTATOES** (*rabuon*). These are boiled and eaten with buttermilk. Alternatively, sweet potatoes are placed in a mixture of buttermilk and fresh milk and kept until it becomes sour before being ready for use.

**SMALL BEANS** (*ngor*). These are used alone, or mixed with *nyoyo* or with unground *mtama* (*oinjore*). **CHOROKO** (*olayo*). These are mixed with maize or unground *mtama*.

Two kinds of gruel are in common use. The first consists of *mtama* flour (*mogo*) and *wimbi* flour mixed with water or buttermilk to which cow's urine has been added. The second type of gruel (*nyuka*) is produced as follows: *Wimbi* is ground and placed in an earthenware vessel, and warm water added; the mixture is allowed to stand overnight, and when sour in the morning the gruel is drunk.

The staple food of the Luo is *kuon*. When *mtama* is scarce, sweet potatoes and beans are used at the principal meals, *mtama* being reserved for the making of gruel. *Mtama* is usually grown during the long rains, while beans and potatoes are cultivated during the short rains.

When maize is in season, the principal meal consists of the green maize boiled on the cob (*oduma manumu*). When the maize is old and hard it is mixed with beans.

There is practically no difference between the food used by males as distinct from that of females, with the exception that the latter are debarred from eating the meat of sheep, elephant, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus. The meat of goats is apparently permitted. In the case of elderly women prohibition as regards the forbidden types of meat is not so rigidly enforced. The reason given by the male section of the community, as to why women must not eat meat, is that meat eating by women

causes them  
reason; the b  
male.

BIRDS.

of the commu  
*ogungo* are n  
are not despi  
bird-lime (*oda*

Foodst  
is employed.  
following man  
slowly added,  
the mixture  
is added. Th  
minutes. It i  
is ready for us

Sweet  
are placed in  
same size is  
potatoes (or r  
cow dung or w

Vegetal  
blood.. Salt  
Indians is ca  
ground is nar

There a  
*akeyo* (or *dek*)  
*akeyo* with gh  
are three vege  
and *nderema*,  
salt, milk, or  
the nature of

Beans  
times roasted.

Beer is  
The former is  
Beer is used  
(*bur* or *liel*), be  
(*keudo*). Wh  
of beer is plac  
is placed on th  
(*nyuka funga*)

causes them to develop "itch." That is but the ostensible reason; the basis of the custom is selfishness on the part of the male.

Birds are eaten by all sections of the community. The guinea-fowl (*awendo*) and a crane called *ogungo* are much sought after. Small birds such as swallows are not despised. The smaller birds are caught by means of bird-lime (*odok*).

#### COOKING.

Foodstuffs are usually boiled, but occasionally roasting is employed. The preparation of mtama is carried out in the following manner. Water is boiled, and the mtama flour is slowly added, the water being stirred all the time. As soon as the mixture becomes of a doughy consistency some hot water is added. The pot is then covered and left on the fire for thirty minutes. It is then taken off the fire and stirred, and the *kuon* is ready for use.

Sweet potatoes and maize are cooked as follows: They are placed in a pot and water is added. A second pot of the same size is inverted and placed over that which contains the potatoes (or maize). The lips of the pots are then sealed with cow dung or with *kuon*. The pots are then placed on the fire.

Vegetables are often cooked with ghee (*mo*), or milk and salt is added, if procurable. The salt brought from the mountains is called *sero*, while that which they obtain from the ground is named *bala*.

There are three cultivated native vegetables, called *bo*, *akeyo* (or *dek*), and *mito*. *Bo* is cooked with salt, blood or milk: *akeyo* with ghee or blood: *mito* with salt, milk or ghee. There are three vegetables which grow wild, called *apoth*, *nyabo dhok*, and *nderema*, respectively. These wild vegetables are eaten with salt, milk, or ghee. Both cultivated and wild vegetables are of the nature of leaves of various kinds.

Beans are always boiled. Potatoes and maize are sometimes roasted.

#### BEER.

Beer is derived from two sources, wimbi and mtama. The former is called *kong'o mar kal*, the latter *kong'o mar bel*. Beer is used on all ceremonial occasions, such as the funeral (*bur* or *liel*), betrothal (*osiep*), coming of age (*wvoyi*), and marriage (*kendo*). When the Luo bury a corpse in the house a small pot of beer is placed on the grave. When children are buried no beer is placed on the grave, but gruel made from dried sprouting maize (*nyuka funga*) is substituted.

## KENYA MEDICAL JOURNAL.

PREPARATION OF WIMBI BEER. The wimbi is smashed with a grinding stone, but is not ground into flour. The wimbi is then placed in a large pot, and water is added. It is then allowed to stand for seven days. At the end of that time, a further amount of smashed wimbi is added. The mixture is stirred and allowed to stand for a period of three days. It is then roasted, placed in a basket for two days, then dried in the sun and kept until required.

When beer is required, wimbi is taken and placed in water for about four days until the seeds germinate (*thowe*). It is then dried in the sun. As soon as it is dry it is smashed with a grinding stone. A small quantity is then placed in a pot and the previously roasted wimbi is added, gradually, together with water until the brew assumes the proper consistency. It is then allowed to stand for one night. Then more *thowe* is added and the beer is ready for use.

The beer is used when of the thickness of gruel, but at times water is added. In the latter event, the beer is sucked through a hollow reed (*seke*).

PREPARATION OF MTAMA BEER.—Mtama grain is mixed with water and ashes in the morning. In the evening the water is removed. Next morning the grain is washed with water to remove the excess of ashes. The grain is now black (*rateng*).

The grain is placed in water and allowed to stand for two or three days until it germinates. It is then dried in the sun and smashed with a grinding stone. It is again placed in a pot with water and left for four or five days.

More smashed sprouting mtama is added, and it is left for four days. It is then dried in the sun. It is then cooked after the manner of *kuon* for two hours. It is afterwards placed on large mats in the house until cool. When cold it is placed in a large pot, and some smashed sprouting mtama (*thop'bel*) is added. Water is gradually introduced until the brew is as thick as gruel. It is allowed to stand for one night. Then it is sieved through a piece of matting, and drunk out of a half calabash (*agwata*), or water is added and the hollow reed is used.

There are no definite hours for meals. The time for meals is mainly regulated by the desire for food.

Children are given sour milk and *nyuka*. The milk is invariably mixed with cow's urine. Children use the milk of goats and sheep, both fresh and sour, unmixed with urine.