

THE KIKUYU MARKET AND KIKUYU DIET.

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To the Kikuyu the market is not only the place at which products are sold and bartered, but it is also the chief social centre and plays a large part in the life of the people, especially of the women, who often go many miles to market, carrying heavy loads each way. To the European a large market is an interesting sight, and throws numerous sidelights on native customs and ways of life. In these days of discussions and controversy on the subject of native diet a market is full of interesting information.

The market which I have in mind is held on a bare narrow ridge, very like a hundred other ridges in the Kikuyu country. It is situated on both sides of an ancient foot-track, which runs along the ridge, and the vendors of produce establish their booths anywhere along a distance of about one hundred and fifty yards, on either side of the track.

At one end of the market is a large group of women selling mtungis, or earthenware cooking pots. These are beautifully made and of varying sizes; they used to be the only cooking utensils in use, but times are changing and the metal sufuria of civilization is coming more and more into use. A little further along native grains and beans are on sale. The commonest grain is mwele, a small grey grain, which is grown in large quantities during the short rains, and its black, bulrush-like ear is a universal sight. Muhia, or mtama, is also on sale in fair quantities: its grain has the appearance of barley, and its long stalk and feathery head are a common feature of the higher parts of the country. Two other grains not so much used are mugimbi (wimbi), a small blackish grain rather like mustard seed, and mkombi, a yellow grain somewhat similar to mwele.

Maize was exposed for sale in surprisingly small quantities. This may be due to several reasons: comparatively small quantities of maize are sown at the time of the short, or mwele, rains; most of the maize which is not used for food is sold for export at the Indian trading centres; and, in spite of the common fallacy that two pounds of maize meal is a sufficient ration for a native, maize is by no means the principal food of the Kikuyu.

Not far from the grain market there is considerable noise and activity; this proves to be the place where various sorts of

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gruel, or uchuru, are being sold. A large number of women are collected there, armed with large kibuyus containing their gruel; they dispense their brew into a small half gourd, and do a brisk trade among their thirsty neighbours at a cent a time.

The gruel can be made from the flour of any grain; it is made by adding three cupfuls of flour to about two gallons of water, with a little salt. This is brought to a boil and well stirred. Sometimes fat is added, but the women will not drink it then. Uchuru is nearly always taken when cold; it is looked upon as a beverage and not as a food, and a person who has consumed a couple of pints of uchuru does not consider that he has had a meal, any more than the average Briton considers that he has fed after two pints of four-ale. The gruels in chief use are made from mwele flour, or maize flour, or the two mixed. Mugimbi or mkombi are not very generally used: muhia or mtama, gruel is chiefly used by sick or convalescent people, as it is supposed to be particularly nourishing.

Mtama is the only grain except maize which is eaten unground: it is boiled with salt, and eaten only by women and children. Maize is largely used as gruel, but practically never in the form of ugali, or thick porridge, which is the staple diet of the employed native. Maize is commonly eaten on the cob, either boiled or roasted.

Just next door to the uchuru section are a few more old women similarly armed with large kibuyus. They are selling curdled milk, known as iria, and their customers are noted to be men and children only. The women do not take milk either raw or sour, and milk does not hold a large place in the Kikuyu dietary, in spite of the large number of cattle in the country. Goats' milk is never used. Fresh raw milk is known as mwitha, but is rarely used in that state, being almost always drunk sour.

Legumes of various sorts are prominently shown at nearly every stall. By far the commonest sort is the mboco, or maharagwe, bean. These are red, red and white, or white in colour, and are kidney shaped. The red variety seems to be identical in appearance with the seed of the French runner bean. Another common legume is njugu, a yellow or green pea; this is sown at the time of the mwele rain, and grows up as a long and slender shoot by the time of the long rain. By about the end of the long rains it will have grown into a straggling bush about 5 ft. high, with a yellow flower. After the maize is ripe the bush is covered with an abundance of pods, which become

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ripe about August or September, and the crop is gathered some time after the maize has been garnered. The thoroko, or chiroko, bean is also used in fair quantities, and yet another bean seen at the market is njahi, a small blackish-brown bean, which is especially popular as a food for pregnant women. Another legume used by the Kikuyu is the thuu, a small green pea.

Roots are well represented. The Kikuyu, or sweet, potato is the commonest, and there seem to be as many varieties of these as there are of the European potato. The latter are now much grown and in frequent use among the Kikuyu. Both these potatoes are used either boiled or roasted. The next commonest root is the ikwa, an elongated, wrinkled tuber which is grown in large quantities in the higher parts of the district; it grows as a vine on a living tree called mukungugu, which is very slow growing and acts as a natural ant-proof prop; the roots of the ikwa can be removed as required. It is a very favourite article of Kikuyu diet.

Nduma is another root very commonly grown. It contains a bitter poison and has to be boiled a long time to be fit to eat; since it is a poison it is contrary to custom to bring it to market uncooked. It is the root of the wild arum, and has leaves like those of the arum lily. They are a very common feature, particularly in the valleys along stream beds. Although so universally grown, it does not appear to be used very frequently. Apparently it matures very slowly, and is therefore an expensive form of food, and it also seems to be regarded as a reserve food against times of famine and shortage. It is a large squat tuber, and is eaten without condiments, after boiling for from 3 to 5 hours according to size; to the European palate it is peculiarly tasteless. It is said to be the first food called for by the convalescent. The only other root in use is the cassava, or manioc, known as mianga, or by the Swahili name of muhogo. This is not much used.

Fruits begin and end with bananas, but of these there are many varieties. They may be roughly divided into the sweet sort, which may be eaten raw, and the cooking sort. Of the sweet varieties there are muchuru, a small yellow banana, mbuu, a long fairly thick yellow sort, and murari, a medium sized green fruit. Of the cooking sorts, mutuhatu, a medium sized thick green banana, is by far the most commonly used. Mbiri and mutika are also used for cooking. Bananas may be boiled or roasted, or may be boiled, mashed and fried in fat with onions. They are however most commonly used as one of the chief

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ingredients of irio, which will be described later. The only other fruit used by the Kikuyu is the nduyu, or fruit of the wild fig tree, and this is chiefly eaten by children.

The market displayed no section for the sale of green vegetables; in fact the only vegetables seen were a few bundles of a form of onion like a shallot, and an occasional pumpkin. Green leaves are used in the form of irio eaten by women, but these greens are gathered wild or from the shambas and apparently have no market value. There are four forms of wild spinach, hatha, gikunygui, terere and togotia. These are used in the months of October and March, when the leaves of cultivated vegetables are not available. At other times of the year the leaves of the thoroko, mboco, and njahe beans are used, and also the leaves of the pumpkin, which are called marengi. The women are fond of green vegetables, but they are little used by the men.

In one corner of the market are men selling balls of black clay. This is salt earth dug from various swamps, and it used to be the only salt in general use by the Kikuyu. It is now sold to be given to the goats and cattle. The people of the country can now afford to purchase imported salt. A number of booths are engaged in selling rough kitchen salt and magadi soda, another peculiar delicacy. The quantities sold are small, but the purchasers many. The general price seemed to be a small teaspoonful for a red cent. Salt is a favourite delicacy among the children, and many fortunates could be seen walking about with a small quantity in the palm of one hand, taking occasional dabs with the moistened finger of the other. Some of the salt vendors added curry powder to their stock in trade, and this condiment seems to have achieved a considerable vogue.

Even medicines figure among the articles for sale. One man is selling pieces of root, the ashes of which have a good reputation in the treatment of stomach complaints. Powdered copper sulphate is sold for application to the sores of yaws and to chronic ulcers. Epsom salts are now well known, and one enterprising merchant is even found dispensing iodoform powder. Castor oil beans are also sold, but more for mixing with the red earth, which is the gala attire, than for any medicinal use.

Above the general level of the market is a long row of more pretentious booths; these are either eating shops or small dukas which cater for the vanities of the local beau or belle. Here are ear ornaments of multiple loops of beads, wooden ear distenders, and bead necklaces, for the women: metal dancing

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bells of local manufacture for the men; lumps of red earth, and various coloured pigments, for the adornment of both sexes.

Among the eating shops are teashops, where the exhausted male may recover from the arduous toil of watching the women do the work, and may discuss the news of the day. In one shop there is a cauldron of cooked ikwa. The ikwa is sliced and boiled slowly with salt, fat and a little curry powder; onions may be added if liked. It is a distinctly palatable dish, and is retailed at 2 cents per large spoonful. In the next booth njenga is being sold at the same price. It has rather the appearance of rice pudding and is most palatable, having a flavour similar to unsweetened semolina served with butter, or the American dish "hominy." Njenga is made from maize, which is placed in a hollow log with a very little water and pounded and split, after which it is sun-dried and the husks removed by winnowing. It then appears rather like rice, and is used by boiling for from 3 to 4 hours with water, fat and salt being added to taste. Meat and European potatoes or ikwa may be added if available.

In another part of the market irio is on sale. The word irio is the Kikuyu for food, and it is by far the most frequently and generally used food of the country. It is nourishing and fairly palatable, and has nothing against it except its unsightly appearance. It is prepared as follows:—Take some cooking bananas, preferably mutuhatu or mutika, boil and mash them. Put some unground maize with any kind of pea or bean in equal quantities into another pot and boil up to 3 hours, add salt or magadi soda, and when nearly ready, green leaves (nyeni) may be added. Then mix in the bananas and some fat if available, boil and stir well for 5 to 10 minutes. The mixture should then have the consistency of a firm dough, and can be eaten hot or cold. Women always prefer green leaves in their irio, while the men prefer it without. Other dishes eaten exclusively by women and children are muthura, mtama eaten unground and boiled, and kiroiga, mtama meal cooked with magadi soda.

The butcher's shop is conspicuous by its absence, and it is a significant fact that among all that mass of foodstuff not one scrap of meat is to be seen. Meat forms a very small part of the Kikuyu diet. Meat eating is chiefly confined to the Elders and a few old women, and occurs usually in connexion with some sacrificial ceremony. The men on the whole get a fair amount of meat on occasions, but the women are supposed not to like meat and very rarely eat it. The customs vary slightly in different localities, but as a rule it may be said that the young women hardly ever get

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meat, the old women and women who have borne a child get it sometimes; they are then only supposed to eat of the legs of a bullock. The meat eaten by the women is usually nearly decomposed, as it usually takes a day or two to decide that the men are incapable of consuming it all. The small amount of meat eaten by the Kikuyu is not because they do not like it, but because they are loth to sacrifice their stock, which is a form of property and a reserve against famine. A Kikuyu woman, on being asked whether she like meat, will invariably reply "No", as to express a desire for meat would not be considered good manners. A desire for meat, however, is a very real thing among the Kikuyu, and they even have a word "kuthuti," meaning "to have a longing for meat".

One other shop which is not obvious at the market is the tembo shop, and it will not be easy to find, since the sale of tembo is not encouraged by the authorities. Tembo, however, bulks very largely in the Kikuyu dietary, especially among the old men and old women. There are three sorts of tembo: marua, made from maize or millet, njohi, made from sugar cane, and uki, made from honey. The two latter were the original intoxicants used in the country; marua is said to have been introduced since the war, but it is doubtful if this statement is true.

Marua is made as follows. A quantity of millet or maize is divided into two halves. The first half is placed in water for two or three days until it sprouts; it is then dried in the sun and ground. The second half is made into gruel, or uchuru, as described above, placed in pots, and left for one two days. The first half is then again divided; one half is boiled and added to the uchuru, stirred and again boiled: the remaining portion is then added as a fermenting agent, and the pots are left covered for a day. The mixture is then ready for consumption, and is mildly intoxicating. If it is left for a further period, it ferments violently and becomes a strong intoxicant.

Njohi is prepared from sugar cane. The peeled cane is pounded in a trough by the women, and the pulp is mixed with water, and put into a pot together with the fruit of a tree called miratina. It is ready for consumption in twenty-four hours, and is very intoxicating.

Uki is a beer prepared from honey. The honey is strained and cleaned of dead bees, mixed with water in about equal parts, and put into a pot with the fruit of miratina. It is ready to drink in about twelve to twenty-four hours.

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The miratina is a fairly large tree; the fruits hang down on a long stem, and look rather like German sausages. The fruit is dried and then pounded before it is added to sugar or honey; it acts both as a fermenting and flavouring agent.

Before leaving our market, one item must not be forgotten. This is tobacco, in the form of native snuff, which is being sold in all directions. The vendor of snuff has her vessels by her side, and measures it out by means of a small piece of split stick with a shilling cent tied into the slit. As much as will cover this cent is sold for one cent, and the successful vendor is he or she who can contrive to make the least amount of snuff cover the cent.

After seeing such a market as has been described, and after studying Kikuyu food customs, certain points offer themselves for consideration. To the medical man the first question which suggests itself is: Is the diet of the average Kikuyu a full and sufficient one, or is there something lacking which will explain the poor average physique, and the average low resistance to disease? It is at once obvious that animal proteins in the form of meat, and fresh fruit and vegetables, are taken in very small amounts. Also the Kikuyu country is totally lacking in salt deposits, except for the salt earth deposits which occur in the low country, now alienated for European settlement, and at some distance from the thickly populated areas. The Kikuyu seem to have accustomed themselves to a diet in which salt plays a very small part. This salt deficiency is evidenced by the fact that the people have a great liking for salt, and that quite a number of cases of goitre occur in the district.

There is therefore reason to suppose that the Kikuyu diet is lacking in meat, fresh fruit, vegetables, and in mineral salts. With the spread of civilized ideas, these deficiencies are gradually becoming less marked. Salt is now widely sold; meat is eaten more than it used to be, by the more educated natives; and many natives now grow a few European vegetables. This however is only a beginning, and it is important that everything should be done to remedy these deficiencies.

Another point which strikes the eye is that the young women and girls are noticeably plumper and more healthy looking than the males of a similar age. There are several possible explanations for this. It may be that the female is naturally fatter than the male: the women do much more physical labour than the men, and this may keep them in better health: the young Kikuyu woman is a valuable asset to her parents, and since the Kikuyu man prefers a plump wife, it may be that the

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young woman of marriageable age is well fed in order to enhance her market value. It is said that Kikuyu women are accustomed to consume a greater bulk of food than the men, and it is probable that the superior condition of the women is due to the greater quantity of food consumed, rather than to any fundamental difference in the quality and kind of food.

It is obvious from what has been said that the Kikuyu native diet, in spite of its deficiencies, is a varied and rich one, and that the diet offered to the Kikuyu in European employ must be dull and uninteresting. Two pounds of posho and salt, which is the ordinary daily ration on farms, is to the Kikuyu what a daily ration of plain boiled rice would be to the European, and it is little to be wondered at that after a short time in European employ the Kikuyu begins to hanker after the flesh-pots of his own country. There would seem to be little hope of the Kikuyu ever becoming a regular and steady worker until there are radical alterations in the way in which he is fed when out at work.

The foregoing account of Kikuyu food customs does not pretend to cover the subject fully, as it is the result of a comparatively short investigation. In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the assistance I have received from the Rev. H. D. Hooper, Dr. K. W. Allen, and the Rev. C. T. Butcher, in the collection of information.

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