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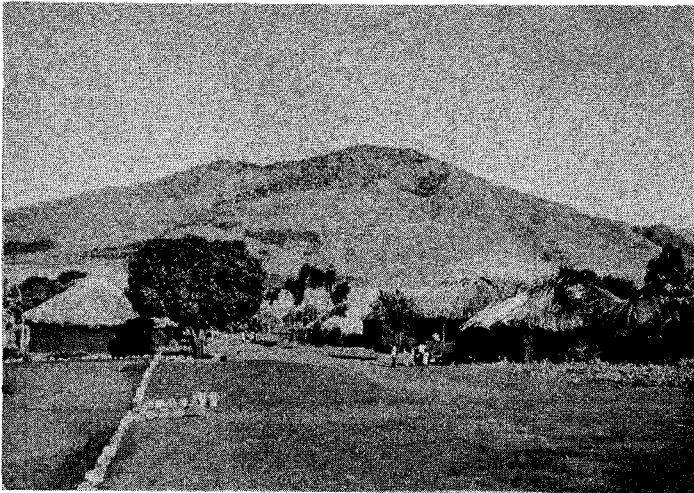
RFG - 13  
Gorowa Tribe  
III - Medicine and Magic

c/o Barclays Bank  
Arusha, Tanganyika  
September 2, 1955.

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

My first encounter with netlang--the curious creatures or spirits which are very important in the lives of the Gorowa--was on the top of Mt. Ufiome. I had just started my investigation of the Gorowa Tribe and was staying at Babati about 110 miles south of Arusha. Behind our camp the noble mass of Mount Ufiome, whose summit reaches 8,000 feet, dominated the country. When I was told of a magic lake on the top in which lives a giant snake that glows at night like fire, the temptation to climb the mountain became irresistible. So a mountain-climbing expedition was arranged, and at first dawn of a bright March day we started the ascent, my companions being Deputy Chief Zuberi Sige, Subchief Muna, an old man named Ailema Gitso who was our guide, and four other Africans.



Mt. Ufiome from Babati

After a four-hour climb, notable chiefly for the giant nettles, which stung our bare legs and arms cruelly, we reached the brink of the mountain's top and set off to find the lake. Mt. Ufiome is surmounted by a comparatively flat plain of about ten square miles and covered with grassy meadows alternating with patches of forest, so that visibility is poor. The guide, who had climbed the mountain many times, led us confidently to where he thought the lake should be. After walking briskly for half an hour he stopped, scratched his armpit thoughtfully, and led us off in a new direction. Coming suddenly into a glade, we found ourselves in the midst of a herd of elephants. I crouched behind a bush and prepared my camera for action, but by then everyone had disappeared, the elephants as well. Somewhat demoralized, the party reassembled, and for two hours we walked back and forth across the mountain searching in vain for the lake. As it was then getting late, we walked to the highest point on the brink--the true summit--took photographs, bolted sandwiches, and started for home.

On the way down we stopped half way for a long rest and to enjoy the magnificent view below us. The conversation of the Africans in the Gorowa language became more and more animated, and several times I heard our guide

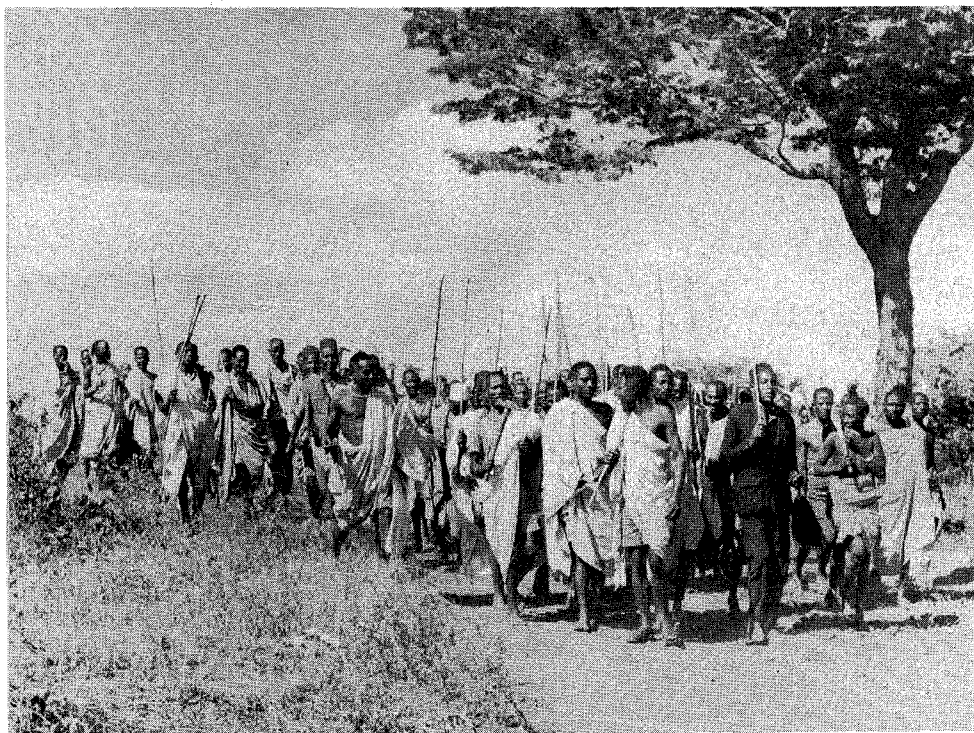
speak the word netlang vociferously. I inquired what the argument was about. Zuberi explained in Swahili that old Ailema, who had been brooding over his failure to find us the lake, had finally found an explanation. It had transpired that one of our party, a forestry guard named Tlaa Kunki who came along to cut a path through the jungle where the elephant tracks were overgrown, was living at his father's home where a relative had recently died. According to the old guide, Tlaa was in a state of ritual impurity and should not have been allowed to climb the mountain. Mt. Ufiome, as Ailema explained, was inhabited by netlang, the most powerful of which dwelt in the lake, thus giving it its magical character. These supernatural beings had been enraged that an impure person should invade their stronghold and had simply moved the lake everytime we came near it. We might have spent a week searching for the lake without finding it.

Thus satisfied that his honor as a guide was vindicated, the old man got to his feet and started us down the mountain again. I discussed the question further with other members of the party, and later with Chief Amri Dodo. All of these people were Gorowa, but as they lived in or near the village of Babati they were somewhat detribalized. Several were Mohamedans. They all seemed to believe in the existence of netlang and agreed that it had been rash for the forestry guard to climb the mountain while possessed by metimani—a state of ritual impurity. As to the cause of our failure to find the lake, they were not convinced that the netlang had anything to do with it. Other natural causes were suggested: that the guide had forgot the way or had avoided the right place through fear of elephants, or that the lake had simply dried up. It seemed to me that with the more sophisticated Gorowa of Babati these ideas represented vestigial beliefs which had little significance in their lives; and thereafter I investigated other matters during my stay at Babati.

Several weeks after the mountain climb we established a camp at Gidas in a remote part of the Gorowa tribal territory, where I continued my study of the native beliefs and customs with special regard to medicine. There I found out a good deal more about the concepts of netlang and metimani. According to these pagan Gorowa, the supernatural beings who had moved the lake on Mt. Ufiome are capable of bringing on various sorts of sickness and bad luck when someone is foolish or careless enough to neglect the rites and taboos prescribed for the state of ritual impurity.

Gidas being a comparatively healthy country except for seasonal malaria, the people fortunately do not have much need for the meager medical services offered by the dresser at the government dispensary. Several mornings spent at this dispensary gave me little insight into the Gorowa ideas of medicine. Therefore I started making inquiries about sick cases which were not brought to the dispensary but which were dealt with by native methods. After investigating a few of these case histories, I was in a position to discuss the subject more directly with the elders. Finally I tried to formulate in abstract terms some of the basic principles of Gorowa medicine.

One of the Gidas Court Elders whom I had met, Gadie Maros, was reputed to be a competent medicine man or qwatlarmono. With a view to discussing Gorowa medical problems, I paid him a formal visit one morning. At first I was not much enlightened by his talk which seemed to me to be rather unsystematic. His two small daughters (whose photograph appears in BFG - 12, p.11) then arrived



Subchief Feo Leading a Band of Gidas Men

from the village with their mother, the younger one looking rather peaked. Gadie explained that she had just recovered from a serious illness which from his description sounded as if it had been pneumonia. Gadie himself handled the case throughout its course. First he consulted his oracle in order to divine the nature and cause of the sickness. This is done by shaking some stones out of a gourd; the arrangement in which they fall is interpreted according to a secret code. It is the universal method of divining used by native Gorowa medicine men. The diagnosis, cause, and treatment of a disease are all dictated by the oracle. Gadie's oracle disclosed that his daughter was being annoyed by netlang who were angered because a ritually impure man--one in whose house a relative had recently died, as in the case of our mountain-climbing friend Tlaa--had been received with hospitality in the home. Gadie was seriously concerned at these findings, because his daughter had passed the age at which children are believed to be particularly vulnerable to the mere presence of an impure person. On being consulted again, the oracle directed that a certain kind of sheep be sacrificed. Gadie followed these directions, killing a sheep by smothering it and then scattering its blood and stomach contents around the cattle room and in front of the house. This was supposed to satisfy the netlang or drive them away. The child did not recover, however, and on the advice of the oracle a second sheep was sacrificed a few days later. This time some of the stomach contents were buried under the threshold to prevent the netlang from entering the house. But to no avail, as the child only got worse. It was then discovered that the whole house was thoroughly impure, and a third sheep was slaughtered for the purpose of "cooling" the house. This seemed to satisfy the netlang, and

the daughter recovered promptly. Gadie's case was the only one that I heard of in which three animals had to be sacrificed.

Wahay Boboya was a friendly talkative man who had agreed to supply us with milk. We often went to visit him at his house, about half an hour's walk from camp, where he lived with his wife, an intelligent woman speaking good Swahili, and several children. Wahay was the son of a qwatlarimo and had received some instruction in the art of divining from his father, but he had never fully mastered the art. He possessed a divining gourd full of the proper kind of stones which he would shake out in a most professional manner; but he had no confidence in his interpretations and did not attempt to practice publicly. Being something of a hypochondriac, he was deeply interested in medicine and liked to talk at length about his own troubles.

Passing by his house one morning, I stopped for a visit with Wahay but found him gone. His wife said that lately he had been worrying about his health more than usual. The evening before he had spent a long time on the veranda shaking the stones from his divining gourd. Then he had gone into the cattle room and mixed up some medicine, but was apparently unsatisfied with the results. He had left the house early that morning without saying where he was going. I continued on my way and returned by the house an hour or so later to find that Wahay had come back and was in good spirits. He told me that he had gone that morning to consult a prominent qwatlarimo named Awi Konki who had diagnosed his trouble and prescribed treatment. According to Awi, Wahay had drunk beer with a man who carried a contagious form of impurity known as khawii, and as a result the netlang had been getting at him. This had all happened some weeks before, which explained his chronic ill health. Fortunately for Wahay, the prescribed treatment was simple and inexpensive. First he had to prepare a medicine of which the principle ingredient was the pod of a weed called oroondi, which is not hard to find. This mixture, taken by mouth and applied on the skin, was supposed to purge him of the slight impurity which he had incurred. A second medicine, prepared from the plant tlamahandi, was sprinkled about the house for the purpose of "cooling" the netlang so that they would leave the premises. I suspect that Awi, knowing of Wahay's tendency to exaggerate slight symptoms, had let him off easy; because cases of sickness caused by netlang usually require the sacrifice of a sheep or goat or at least a chicken. For the time being Wahay seemed to be cured, but when I last saw him several weeks later he was again ailing with a number of minor complaints.

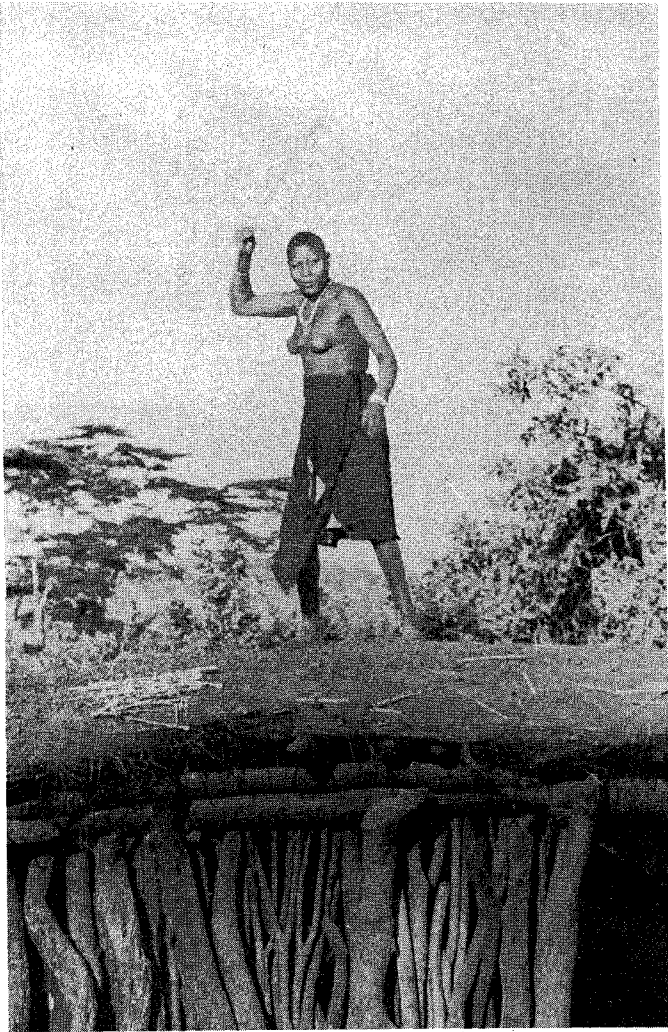
Wahay's young son had a serious sickness last year--apparently malaria--which was caused by a different agent and required more elaborate treatment. The qwatlarimo who was consulted informed the family that the sickness was caused by the gai (ghost) of Wahay's dead father. This gai was angered because his name had gone out of use and was not then attached to any living person. To bring his grievance to the attention of the family, he had caused the sickness of his grandson, who would certainly die unless he were given his grandfather's name with the appropriate ritual. Accordingly the relatives were gathered together and the boy was renamed Boboya--the name of Wahay's father. Then a fat bullock was killed and the rite of sprinkling its blood and stomach contents around the house was performed. The skin of the forehead of the sacrificed animal was made into bracelets to be worn by the boy as protective amulets. The meat of the bullock was eaten at a sacrificial feast. That evening some of the bones and meat were wrapped up in the fresh skin and placed

a little distance from the house, and during the night a hyena took it all away. This was considered to be an entirely satisfactory ending to the ceremony, because in these cases hyenas are sent by ancestor spirits to bring them their share of the sacrifice. The old gai promptly withdrew his malignant influence from the boy, and young Boboya soon recovered his health.

At my request, Wahay took me to visit the qwatlarimo Avi Konki one day during office hours. Like many doctors, Avi was rather uncommunicative, and after greeting us briefly he set to work on the three patients who were waiting for him. We sat apart at one end of the verandah, Wahay quietly explaining to me in Swahili what was being said. The first man had come on behalf of a sick wife. The qwatlarimo shook the divining stones and found that the sick woman had accepted a cigarette from another woman with khawii, and had been tainted with impurity herself, thus setting the netlang on her. The husband was directed to prepare and use the two medicines, oroondi and tlamahandi in the same way that Wahay had recently done. The second client had two sick children. According to the oracle, a guest had been entertained at their house who had recently cut himself with a knife and had not performed the necessary purification rite for drawing blood. He exuded an evil influence which had affected the children, making them susceptible to netlang. The prescribed treatment was first to administer oroondi medicine to the children, then to sacrifice a chicken to the netlang. The third patient complained of a simple headache which was diagnosed as being due to natural causes without consulting the oracle. The doctor took a piece of charcoal from the ashes, chewed it up, and smeared the mixture of saliva and charcoal on the patient's forehead. Then he went into the house for some special medicine which he mixed with his own spit and gave to the patient to chew. That ended his medical work for the morning.

Most of the case histories that I examined involved one or more of these three elements: netlang, metimani, and gai. Therefore I began to inquire about the nature of these basic concepts. What sort of creatures are netlang? Are they demons from hell, or avenging angels? Is metimani to be regarded as a contagious condition which may be transmitted from person to person like an infectious disease? Or is it more like a condition of mortal sin which must somehow be atoned for or expiated? What is the exact relation between metimani and netlang? How is the concept of gai to be interpreted? Is it at all comparable to the traditional Christian idea of the surviving soul? As might be expected, I did not get direct answers to these questions. Primitive (and even civilized) people can hold deep-rooted beliefs of fundamental importance in their lives without being able to express them abstractly. But they are implied in the concrete acts of the people, and in the desires and fears and supernatural beliefs which prevail in a society. By observing these matters and discussing them with the elders, the Gorowa philosophy of man and his relation to the universe could be roughly formulated.

The Gorowa believe in a supreme God who created man and the universe. God is remote and incomprehensible and takes little interest in human affairs. He is called Lalca or Loa, both words referring to the sun. But the sun itself is not God, and they have another word, tseima, for the sun as an object. The brightness and heat and power of the sun are felt to symbolize God, but there is no trace of sun-worship in their beliefs. In fact there is no formal



Gorowa Woman with a Sling  
Frightening Birds From her Field

worship of God at all, though in time of crisis a person may pray to God for help personally and informally. Oaths are sometimes taken in the name of God. The oath-taker throws a handful of grass to the wind and says: "If it is not true, may Loa blow me away like this grass." After a stroke of unusually good luck a person may express his thanks to God by spitting on a handful of grass and placing it on his head. Grass, as with some other cattle-keeping tribes, is sometimes regarded as sacred, and spit is held to have magical properties. In short, God stands aloof from the world but is not altogether indifferent to the welfare of his creatures.

In addition to natural creatures, the world contains supernatural beings called netlang, who are no more intimately related to God than are people. Netlang are usually thought of as invisible spirits who can only be known through their acts, usually malevolent. Nevertheless there is a body of lore which attributes netlang with certain physical features; and in several well-attested instances netlang were actually seen by men. One of these episodes happened in the reign of Chief Khatlatla. A group of men were crossing the

northern end of Lake Babati where the water was only knee-deep. One of the party, a man named Homa Sanka, was wearing a richly-decorated skin cloak. While they were in the middle of the lake Homa suddenly disappeared into the water but wasn't missed by his companions till they reached the shore. After a long time, Homa emerged from the lake stark naked but still carrying his spear and walking stick. He explained that an old netlang had pulled him below the surface of the lake and robbed him of his beautiful cloak, saying that he wanted it for his favorite son, and promising never to harm him again.

Another story from the dim past concerns a man called Sakatay, and perhaps represents a myth explaining the origin of one kind of metimani. Sakatay was harvesting his shamba in the Doay area one day when he accidentally cut himself with his knife. He went to the nearby Awak River to wash the wound and then went home. That night his son became fearfully ill. Suddenly a



netlang appeared and reproached Sakatay for contaminating the river with blood. "My son is now in grave danger," he said, "and if he dies so will your son die. You must find an unblemished red sheep and sacrifice it to purify the blood which you shed." The man did as he was ordered and his son recovered.

These stories illustrate several characteristics of netlang, the most important being that they dwell where there is water--streams, ponds, springs, and wells. They also control these water sources and can dry them up if they chose--an important matter in a country like Gidas where watering points for cattle are few and far between in the dry season. They can also punish people with sickness, though just how they cause sickness is not known. The important thing is to stay in the good graces of netlang, not to inquire into their methods. Supposedly on the evidence of eye-witnesses, netlang are believed to have human shape, only they are smaller. They have long nails and teeth are covered all over with hair. Like people, they have children and also keep cattle in their watery homes. But so few people have seen them that they are commonly treated as if they were disembodied but potent spirits. In America the average Christian's conception of angels is probably equally vague and contradictory. Certain human conditions are dangerous to netlang, who strike back by injuring people unless the condition is corrected. They may harm the person with the impure condition, the community in general, or an innocent third party who is most often a child. This dangerous or impure condition is called metimani. Seven different situations of metimani, which I have been able to distinguish, are listed immediately following.

DEATH. The general term for the ritual taboos and injunctions following a death is dirang. When a husband or wife dies, the surviving spouse is required to discard his clothes, bathe, and put on new garments. He then enters a period of segregation called tsuma during which he must remain in the house for forty days. Food and water are brought to him by friends or relatives, but no one enters the house or touches him. At the end of tsuma, the Kahusmo--the leading elder of the ward--calls for him and leads him to a neighborhood beer party. On the way the elder breaks off an ear of sorghum which is divided and eaten by the two people. This symbolizes the end of his strict isolation. Arriving at the beer party, the elder fills the gourd cup of the impure person, but without touching it. With the drinking of the beer he passes into the next phase of his metimani which is called Khavii, and which lasts for two months. During this time he may leave his house and carry on most of his work, but he is potentially dangerous to other people, especially children, if he enters their houses or touches them or their belongings. He must also stay away from water sources during the period of Khavii so as not to annoy the netlang. According to the elders, the recent tendency is to lengthen these periods of isolation due to the influence of the neighboring Iraqw Tribe where the period of metimani is said to last for as much as two years.

DEATH BY VIOLENCE. In the old days death in battle was an important cause of this condition, which is known as tsihlit, but nowadays it is usually the result of being killed by a wild animal while hunting. After the accident the companions of the dead man return to his ward and explain to the elders what has happened, but they must not touch or talk to anyone else. The elders then seize a sheep or goat, slaughter it and place the stomach contents in a straight line, which must be trodden by each of the companions of the dead hunter. The meat of the goat is cooked and eaten on the spot by the elders. This is supposed to end the condition of metimani.

**DRAWING BLOOD.** If a person is injured while fighting, or if he accidentally cuts himself, he acquires a form of metimani known as tsere. The injured person is expected to sacrifice a rooster as soon as possible and then stay in his house for one day. A serious injury may require a larger sacrifice. In theory, even the smallest drop of blood, such as might be caused by a thorn prick, brings on tsere. Such a wound might go unnoticed, which is why young infants, who are highly susceptible to metimani, are kept in strict isolation. Netlang are believed to be very sensitive to tsere, and if a person with this condition should visit a stream or spring the whole neighborhood might suffer from the vengeance of netlang. In that case more elaborate sacrifices are necessary to pacify them.

**PREGNANCY.** When a woman knows she is pregnant she tells the elders of her own family, who then inform her husband. The whole family then acquire a form of metimani called barafotsi which lasts for forty days. They are confined to their house during this period as in the case of a death.

**MISCARRIAGE.** When this happens both the wife and husband are in the impure condition of gurkvahleri which lasts until a new pregnancy occurs. For this time they are dangerous to other people and must not visit watering places.

**ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH.** The Gorowa regard illegitimate pregnancy as an extremely serious delinquency, both socially and ritually. For this reason girls are very strictly supervised by their mothers to prevent the unhappy condition from arising. When an unmarried girl becomes pregnant she enters a state of metimani known as tsatay. A small hut is built for her where she lives alone for the duration of the pregnancy. Then after the proper purification rites she is offered in marriage to an elderly man who already has one or more wives. The bride price for such a girl is a single bullock which is derisively called awu daara, and which provides a feast for the older women of the disgraced family. In case no husband can be found for her among the Gorowa men, she may be married outside of the tribe.

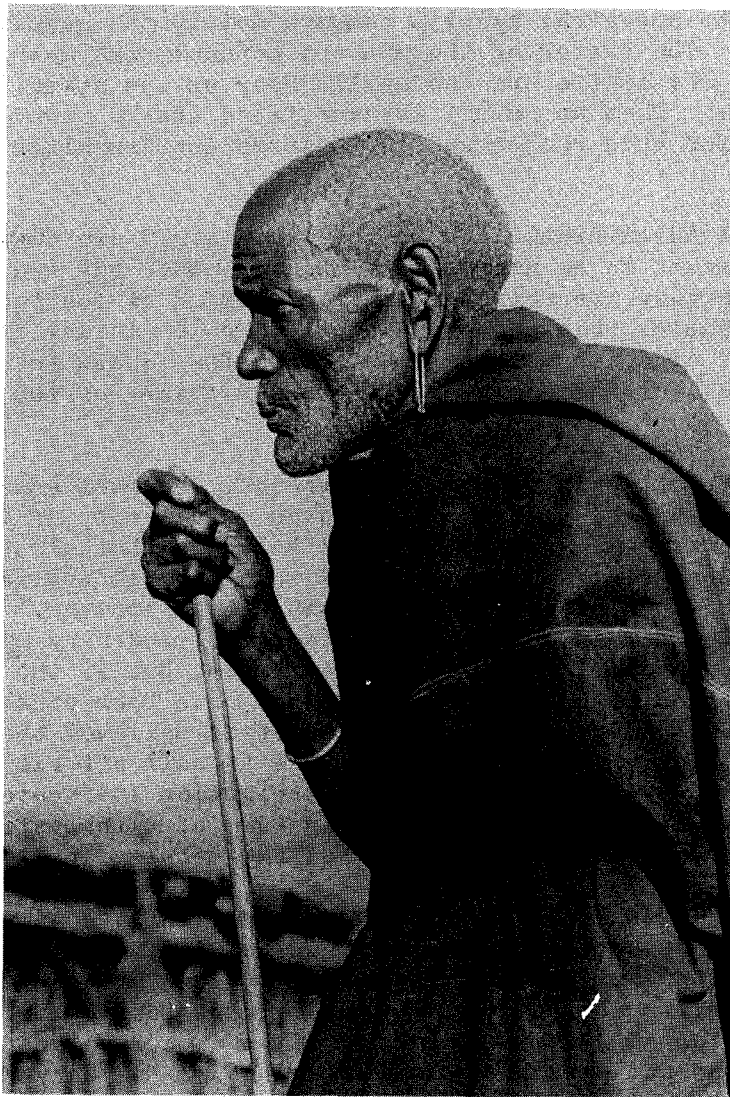
**ABNORMAL BIRTH.** To be born by breech or foot presentation is an ill omen, and the infant was traditionally placed in the doorway to be trampled by the cattle as they entered the house. If the infant survived this ordeal it carried a stigma of impurity known as soroh which absolutely precluded marriage with a normal member of the tribe. The cattle ordeal is now outlawed, but the marriage prohibition is still enforced. A person with soroh can only marry someone of the opposite sex with the same condition or a foreigner. This form of metimani is a potential threat to the individual or community which becomes active only if there is marriage or sexual intercourse with a normal person.

It is not easy to see the common element in these various conditions of metimani, but there is a great deal more lore about the subject as evidenced by the fact that the elders spend much of their time discussing it. In fact to understand metimani seems to be the proper accomplishment for a mature man. In some respects metimani resembles a contagious condition which can be passed from person to person and may infect houses or cattle of even a whole community. Another feature of the condition is that it displeases the netlang. The actual danger of metimani comes from the malevolent acts of netlang which are usually directed against an innocent person who has inadvertently come into



contact with an impure person. If the concept is closely analysed it is not really a contagious condition at all but rather a form of punishment for breaking rules which have been laid down by supernatural beings. The concept of netlang is simpler and more unified than that of metimani and no doubt represents a more ancient system of beliefs. Some of the conditions which are now included under metimani bear the resemblance of being beliefs which were borrowed from other tribes and then assimilated to an older concept of metimani, which may originally have been concerned only with the propitiation of water spirits. My limited investigation was not sufficient for deeper analysis of this question.

The other important beings in the supernatural beliefs of the Gorowa are gai or the ghosts of dead ancestors. When children die nothing of them survives. They simply disappear from the world. But in the case of circumcised youths who have reached the age where their personalities have



Gorowa Medicine Man

developed a degree of force, the souls or ghosts are believed to survive as gai after death. These gai have some of the traits of the living persons before their death. The gai of persons who were wealthy and powerful and had large families are more important than those of poor people or young people. Gai are particularly interested in having their names carried by living descendants, and if this is overlooked, as in the case of young Boboya, they may cause sickness to remind a family of the oversight.

Even when their names are being carried by living descendants, gai like to be remembered from time to time by the sacrifice of a goat or sheep. If this obligation is overlooked for too long, the neglected gai is apt to bring a series of misfortunes on the family for the purpose of jogging their memory. Ancestor spirits also get thirsty and expect regular libations of beer. Beer is prepared on a day designated by a diviner, and the relatives are invited to attend. Some beer is first spilled on the grave of the thirsty ghost, then the people settle down for an evening of drinking and discussing family affairs. These sacrifices to ancestral spirits concern mainly the patrilineal descendants of the ancestor. The sister of the man who conducts the sacrifice plays an important role. She is the one who spills beer on the grave and drinks the first cup of beer. When an animal is sacrificed she is always given a shoulder of the meat, and for this reason she is known as the "shoulder woman" (hataa kwahlo).

The Gorowa ideas about life in the other world are vague and contradictory. There seems to be uncertainty about whether gai are purely immaterial beings, or whether they are represented by some kind of substance and inhabit a world which resembles this one, with cattle, grain fields, and the like. In fact the vagueness of these beliefs about life after death is comparable to that found in the beliefs of Christians about the conditions of the souls of the departed.

Witchcraft, as it is commonly understood, does not enter strongly into the beliefs of the Gorowa. It is regarded as an activity of foreign tribes which rarely affects them. However, it is believed that certain people called daaluse (commonly translated by the Swahili word for witches wachawi) have the power to enlist the help of netlang in harming their enemies. Deaths are often attributed to daaluse. If a sickness is caused by ordinary metimani it should be cured after the appropriate rites or sacrifices, but if the patient goes on to die the Gorowa reason that the sickness must have been caused by netlang acting as agents for daaluse. In this case it is believed that the only recourse is to persuade the daalusmo who is responsible to call off his netlang--a difficult thing to achieve. During my investigation I discovered no recent case of sickness or death attributed to this form of witchcraft, and it seems to be relatively unimportant in the lives of the people.

Rainmaking is included in the supernatural beliefs of the Gorowa, but it does not seem to be anything like as important as in the Iraqw Tribe. At present there are three rainmakers (haryambi) who are practising in the country. These men all belong to the Mande clan, which is of foreign origin. In fact the whole institution of rainmaking is looked on as a foreign art, and the Gorowa themselves do not pretend to understand it. The haryambi who serves the Gidas region is a man called Muna Sola whose home is on the Bubu river about eight miles from our camp. He is said to be a heavy beer drinker and has

little competence in anything else than rainmaking. Whenever the crops and pastures need rain the Gidas elders discuss the matter and send a delegation off to Muna requesting him to produce rain. In return for this service he receives tribute in the form of goats, sheep, and grain. Just how he goes about his business is a mystery to the Gorowa and to myself. According to the Gidas elders there was a serious drought in 1951. When the early rains failed to come the elders seized Muna and the haryambi for the Bonga region, Tluway Alawa, and imprisoned both men. The two rainmakers were then brought before Chief Dodo at Babati and asked to explain why they had failed to bring rain that year. They are said to have told Dodo that rain is ultimately in the hands of God and that their art is only a help. If God decides to hold up the rain it must be for causes which are beyond their power to alter. Satisfied with this answer old Dodo released them.

The Gorowa attribute sickness among their cattle to two causes. In some cases such sickness is merely caused by eating bad grass, and the answer is to change pastures. But in most cases, as with human beings, cattle sickness is thought to be caused by netlang. In any case it is looked on as a community rather than an individual misfortune and discussed by the elders of the affected ward. Diviners are never consulted in the case of cattle sickness. If the elders decide that netlang are harming their cattle they order the appropriate rites to be carried out in the region.

The elders (barise) of each ward, under the chairmanship of their ward leader or kahusmo, hold lengthy meetings about once a week to discuss such matters concerning the welfare of the ward as the health of the people and cattle, the condition of the crops, and the need for rain. If an epidemic or a drought should involve several wards there is a combined meeting of all the elders. Occasionally the kahuse of the whole country meet at Babati to talk over important matters. These meetings are largely concerned with ritual matters, usually having to do with metimani or netlang. During our stay in Gidas there was a large meeting of several wards to discuss an epidemic of human sickness which was expected to result from the large number of foreigners who had been passing through the country recently. As a preventive measure the country was ritually purified and sacrifice made to the local netlang. The elders agreed that a black sheep was needed for the sacrifice, and a delegation was appointed to obtain it. These elders seized the first animal of this kind which they came upon. No compensation is given to the owner in these cases. The sheep was killed by smothering. It was then skinned and part of its skin cut into small pieces. The stomach contents were removed and a portion of it placed on each piece of skin. A number of small boys were then sent round the boundaries of the country, each carrying on a piece of skin some of the stomach contents, which were strewn through the country. The meat of the sacrificial animal was eaten by the elders. Similar sacrifices are performed for other communal misfortunes thought to be caused by netlang.

The medicine men among the Gorowa seem to be acquainted with a large number of plants which are used in their practice. These are rarely taken in the form of oral medication, though, and hence cannot usually affect the sickness through pharmacology action. In most cases these herbs are ground up and mixed according to the directions of the medicine man, and then applied to the house, buried under the door, or placed in some part of the premises.

Their object is usually either to "cool" a place contaminated by metimani or to pacify irritated netlang. A few of the common herbs are taken by mouth and may possibly have some sedative or febrifuge effect. Plants with cathartic action are also known but do not seem to be used in the treatment of sickness. A favorite remedy to hasten convalescence from any sickness is unsalted beef broth, which is drunk in large quantities. When a kwatlarmo administers medicine to a patient on the spot, it is always mixed with his spit, which is believed to have curative properties in itself. Headache and some other minor ailment are treated by the kwatlarmo in this way. In view of the beliefs concerning the cause of serious sickness, it is only to be expected that herbal remedies play a minor role in Gorowa medical practice.

One may well wonder whether Gorowa medical practices have any curative value at all. Certainly if held up to the diagnostic and therapeutic standards of modern medicine they can only be judged worthless. We must examine the psychological and social functions which it serves in order to see any value in Gorowa medicine. The medical beliefs form a fairly consistent body of knowledge or lore which provides explanations for most kinds of sickness and indicates the necessary action to be taken. When a case of sickness arises, the people do not stand about wringing their hands in despair: they promptly consult a diviner, and then busy themselves with performing the required rites and sacrifices. If the patient recovers, the whole system of beliefs is once more vindicated in their minds. If he dies, it is because of a mistake in interpreting the oracle or carrying out its directions. The system is infallible, but human mortals are prone to error. Occasionally the evil power causing a sickness is too strong to be countered by available means, as in the case of a netlang acting in the service of an evil daalusmo. Then there is genuine cause for despair; but the hopelessness of such cases is not usually realized till after the death.

Venereal diseases, and some others, are frankly regarded as foreign diseases which fall outside the scope of native medicine. The treatment of these must also be foreign. There is tremendous confidence in the efficacy of injections (sindano) in the treatment of these conditions. Epidemics with which traditional medical methods are not able to cope are believed to be of foreign origin. Sometimes epidemics are caused by alien diseases about which nothing is known and for which nothing can be done. At other times it is felt that foreigners entering the country introduce strange forms of impurity which provoke the netlang to make mass attacks on the health of the inhabitants. In the latter case community sacrifices should prevent the epidemic, or bring it to an end if already started.

I think that the greatest value of Gorowa medicine lies in the sense of security which is present in individuals and the whole society from believing that the cause and effective treatment of most kinds of sickness are contained in their medical system. In terms of modern medicine, this is the psychosomatic aspect. If a patient is confident that his condition is understood, and optimistic in regard to its effective treatment, the disease will undoubtedly run a milder course than if he were riddled with doubts and anxieties.

On the other hand the Gorowa virtually ignore the purely biological aspect of medicine, which has been the sheet anchor of modern medicine and the main reason for its rapid progress during the last century. They are not interested in physiology and pathology. Their medical speculation jumps directly to first causes, which they find ready at hand in their lore about nature spirits, ancestral ghosts, and ritual impurity. When modern Western ideas penetrate the Gorowa to the point where traditional supernatural beliefs lose their grip on the people, the native medical system will undoubtedly break up. When that time comes, it is to be hoped that the government medical services will be prepared to fill the breach.

Sincerely,

*Robert F. Gray*  
Robert F. Gray.

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