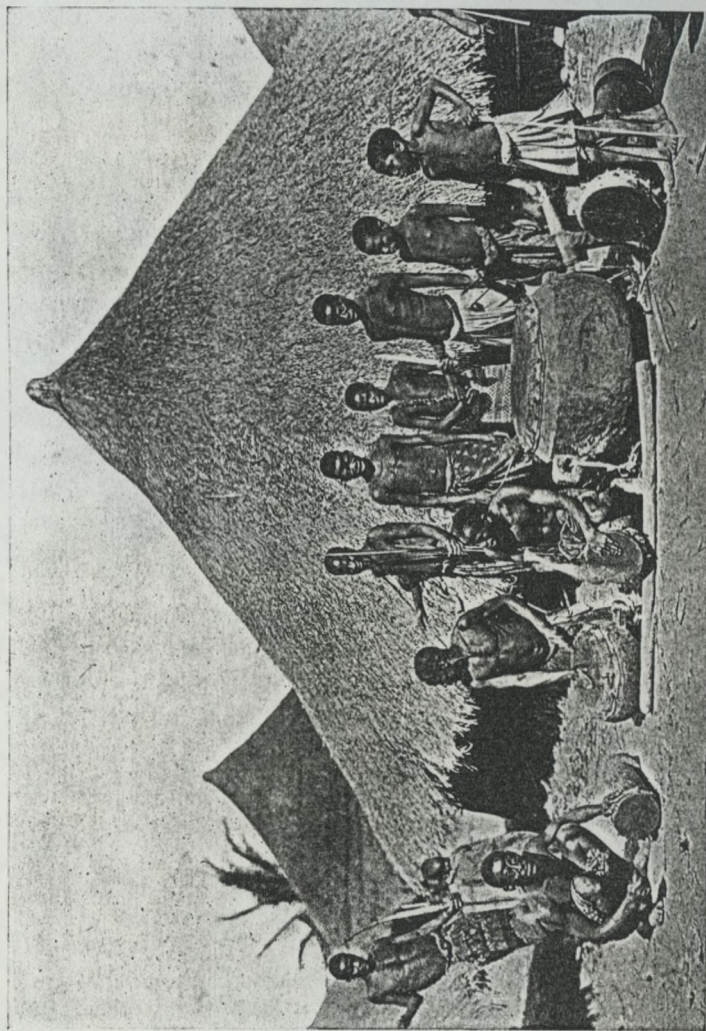


Dancing and singing are the principal forms of native amusement, and are indulged in all over the country about the time of full moon. The music of the drums is the most general form of accompaniment, and many of the people become astonishingly expert in beating them. The number of drums used at one time is as a rule three, and this number is never allowed to exceed five or six, although on one occasion when I was in Maravi's main town, close to Mozambique, I witnessed a dance in which over 2,000 persons took part, to music furnished by over thirty drums. On this occasion three immense rings were formed and the drums were stationed a little way off. This was the most imposing festivity of the kind at which I have been present.

The dances in this district are not only regarded as a relaxation, but, as stated in the portion of this chapter dealing with the death rites, they enter into almost every incident of life as solemn observances proper to, and inseparable from, the occasion. This is the result of that superstition which hedges the life of the native in at every point, making him far more the slave of accepted custom and convention than any European—a fact which has often been remarked upon by observers, and upon which there can be no doubt.

Placing aside the ceremonial character of their dances and other observances, which, it must be admitted, are not perhaps very musical in character, it would be wholly incorrect to say that the native has no appreciation for, or power of producing, music of considerable charm. It is true his instruments



NATIVE DRUMS.

Langham, Reginald Charles Fulke  
Portuguese East Africa.  
London: John Murray, 1906.





are limited in number, but each is capable of producing sounds not only harmonious in themselves, but harmonising perfectly with the character of their surroundings. I do not suppose the music of the Blue Hungarian Band would be either in place or very acceptable in the midst of an African village, any more than in the civilised atmosphere of a London drawing-room the music of the "malimba" or of the "nyakatangali" would do more than raise an amused, indulgent smile; but I can recall many occasions when I have found the utmost delight in the faint, sweet music of these instruments when they have formed a fitting accompaniment to a picture containing a middle distance of trim native huts backing on to a heavy moonlit forest, with heaps of glowing ashes in the foreground from which thin spirals of blue smoke steal lazily upward.

Beginning with the drums, there are three or four of different sizes, of which the "ngoma hulu" is the larger, the "ntumba wa pakati" the medium, and the "ntumba wa kumpili" the smallest. These, as I have said, are beaten with great dexterity either by the hand or by the hand aided by a short stick; the dancing time is kept with marvellous fidelity, and at a short distance the music of the drums is by no means unpleasant.

Of musical instruments I am aware of five, of which the "malimba" skilfully played is by far the sweetest. Known among Europeans as the "native piano," this clever contrivance consists of a light, oblong frame bent and secured by two long pieces of twisted hide on to a strong foundation,

upon which is fastened on one side a number of graduated hollow gourds, and on the other from twelve to fifteen short, graduated pieces of hard wood, which are the keys. These are smartly tapped with a short stick terminating in a ball of rubber, the sound produced being resonant and melodious as that of a harp, which it closely resembles. Next in order of importance comes the "mbila," a flat foundation of wood upon which narrow strips of iron are fastened projecting over a bridge. These are rapidly bent down by the fingers and released. I have heard this instrument played with great dexterity, and a very pleasing effect. The difference between the "nyakatangali" and the "ntundwa," which are both one-stringed instruments, is that in the one the variations of tone are produced by half a hollow gourd pressed lightly or heavily against the chest, whilst in the other they are obtained by the position of the finger on the string as in the case of the violin or banjo.

Agriculture is simple among these tribes, and industries are primitive and few. In October the native prepares his grain gardens by burning the grass and timber which encumber them, the ashes being left to enrich the soil. Should the land selected prove unproductive, the following season another area is chosen, prepared, and planted. All weeds and tares are removed from the growing crops, and the gardens kept clean by the women and children. One serious result attending these constant changes of plantation site is the gradual but steady deforestation of the country, which, although the native reckons not of it, is assuredly affecting the



annual rainfalls. In the neighbourhood of the older established villages one finds planted, in addition to the food-producing cereals, ground nuts (*Arachis hypogea*), the castor-oil plant (*Ricinus communis*), melons, pumpkins, cucumbers, gourds, of which serviceable household and other utensils are fashioned, sweet potatoes, manioc (cassava), tobacco, tomatoes, red pepper, and kidney beans ("feijão"). In addition to the foregoing, pineapples, pawpaws, bananas of various kinds, and, more rarely, lemons, limes, and sugar-cane. Numerous other wild fruits are gathered and eaten in their season, but their native names would convey but little to the reader at home.

No village is ever complete without its pigeons. These attractive birds, which bear a striking resemblance to the occupants of an ordinary English dovecot, are extremely tame, and often very numerous. The leggy, domestic fowl of Africa struts and clucks and gathers its chickens beneath its wings, leading, it must be confessed, a precarious existence from its chickenhood upward, threatened on the one hand by the prowling leopard or the domestic cat, and dwelling, moreover, on the other hand, within the constant shadow of the murderous axe. Muscovy ducks are very generally kept, as are goats and fat-tailed sheep, but oxen are entirely absent, and pigs far from numerous. The goats are a great source of thankfulness to the weary traveller when, as in occasional cases, a little fresh milk can be squeezed from them; but the native of these regions does not drink the milk of domestic animals, and is not quite sure whether he approves