

Extending from the slow and sluggish Oliphants river, North of Geluks Location, to the swift flowing and treacherous Steelpoort river in the South-East, over a distance of about forty-five miles is a range of mountains known as the Lulus. They are not so majestic, perhaps, as the Drakensberg range, which for some distance runs parallel to the Lulus, but in a quiet and unobtrusive way they are very attractive. To see their kloofs, fountains ~~and~~, kranzes and water falls; to see their slopes in Spring and Summer all covered with green verdure and the beautiful white and gold arum lilies is to see one of Nature's most rare and beautiful attractions in South-Africa. Do not the graceful Rheibuck, the Klipspringer (the chamois of S.A.), the Rockrabbits, the Baboons and Blue-Apes find the sanctuary there that is denied elsewhere to so many of the fauna of the Transvaal? And since Leopards, the deadly Mamba's, Pythons and other wild and dangerous animals shelter there, it is the more interesting and exciting.

The range is about eight miles broad and at some places the soil is very deep and fertile and there natives of the Bapedi tribe have made their abode and lead a quiet and healthy life. One portion is occupied by a few Swazies and these are experts at making clay pots which they barter with the Bapedies and White people, receiving in exchange grain. These pots are well made and burnt and are ornamental as well as useful. These mountains, too, are historical --- the 1879, Sekukuni war was fought there. They also serve as the school, play and hunting grounds of the Bapedi tribe, and travelling along them on foot, (to ride would be cruel to any animal!) and seeing something of interest at every turn is a real pleasure. After a good day in these mountains, no appetisers or sleeping draughts are necessary.

One morning I travelled over part of the Lulus and came upon a large heap of stones, all of small size, near the footpath. These stones would weigh from four to six tons and from all appearances had not ~~been~~ come there naturally. Actually they are brought there by natives and are collectively known as a ^hScrotto. I learnt later that the custom is, that when a native visits a strange kraal he picks up and throws a stone on this heap as he goes along the footpath for, by so doing, he leaves any disease or evil which he may be possessed behind him. Thus he does not infect-----

infect the kraal which he is visiting. On his return he again picks up a stone and in similar manner throws it upon the "Serotto" so that any contracted disease or evil will be left behind.

I went further and was fortunate enough to come upon some altars or stone cairns which are called "Mpato" by the natives and which had been built to commemorate a native "Koma" or Initiation School. This has been a custom practised from time immemorial ---- the oldest native does not know the origin of the custom which has been the cause of the hundreds of cairns met with in the Lulus. If an argument arises, so they say, as to whether a native has been to the "Koma" or not the test is whether this native can point out his "Koma's" altar or "Mpato".

I was sitting under a large wild-fig tree with green pigeons whistling over-head when Ngoanakgomo (child of the cow) came by and stopped to rest a while. I engaged this eighty-year-old or even older native in a conversation relating to these stone altars or cairns and other native customs and gleaned the following information from him; -----

"Well, Ngoanakgomo, I suppose you are one of the oldest natives living here; are you not?"

"Yes Morena; I am old and finished."

"Were you a cannibal, Ngoanakgomo?"

"No Morena! I am not and never was a 'Makgema' (cannibal);"

This was an answer to be expected, for although it seems evident that some of the older individuals must have belonged to the school of cannibalism, they are not easily persuaded to acknowledge this fact so that I was not satisfied although it seemed sincere. I continued:-

"Which is nicer to eat, Ngoanakgomo ---- Black man's meat or White man's meat?"

"There is no difference in the taste of Black man's meat or White man's meat ---- the blood is all red."

"Is it nicer than beef or mutton, Ngoanakgomo?"

"Yes Morena; it is much better than ox meat," and as I could not suppress a smile of enjoyment at this confession made so unwittingly by the old man he quickly continued in rather a confused way -----

way ; ---

"I have never eaten of it, Morena-----others have told me ---- we were very very hungry in those days. Why do you laugh, Morena?"

I left this last question unanswered and changed the topic of discussion by asking:

"Ngoanagomo, tell me all about the "Koma" and how these altars come to be built."

He took a pinch of snuff ~~and~~ from the cartridge-case he used as a snuff-box and put down his long forked walking-stick whilst he sat down on a stump of a tree some short distance away from me.

"You see, Morena, when boys attain the age of twelve to sixteen years they have to go into the "Koma". On the first day of the "Koma" they are circumcised (bolocile) very early in the morning by the foreman or teacher of the school. He uses a very blunt knife, notched like a saw so that these school boys can feel it --- it is very sore and is made so to serve as a form of punishment. As soon as each boy is done he has to jump into a large pool of water and remain there until all are finished. Yes; Morena sometimes the water is very cold for it is always in the middle of Winter. They are treated like convicts --- all boys must obey. When all the boys are finished --- there may be one-or two-hundred--- they are allowed to come out of the water. The first few have the worst punishment! Then for two months (kgoedi) or more they have to go about totally naked --- yes, Morena, they wear no clothes at all; that is one reason why no one must see them. Any White man or Black man who persists after he has been warned that a "Koma" is ahead, will be killed."

"But, Ngoanagomo, I myself, was stopped one day and asked to wait to give the boys time to hide themselves --- do you always stop, people?"

"Yes, Morena, but if they will not stop that is their own 'molato' (fault)."

"If no one must see them, Ngoanagomo, where do they get their food?"

"Every night, when it is not yet very dark the women at the kraal bring to a certain place two or sometimes three large 'mohopo's' (wooden dishes) full of porridge and the foreman goes and takes these from them.

He then takes these dishes into the hills and all the boys come and eat. Each boy must kneel all the time he is eating. He forms his own basin or plate by putting his hands together and in the hollow so formed the foreman puts the

porridge. ----

porridge. They are not allowed to touch it with their fingers but must eat it like a dog ---- with their mouths. They must not cough, scratch or talk when they are eating and all must remain kneeling until all the boys of the 'Koma' have had enough to eat. If one of the boys coughs, talks or scratches himself every bit of the food is destroyed and they must go hungry. Then they all go straight out into the hills to hunt and sing again."

"They must be very angry with the boy who has made them all go hungry, Ngoanakgomo?"

"Yes Morena; he is taken by his school fellows and small sticks, about six inches long ---- as long as a man's hand ---- are placed between the middle fingers of each hand; the fingers are locked together and then one of the largest boys takes hold of the sticks and twists them in all directions. Oh, Morena, that is very, very sore!"

"What do they sing Ngoanakgomo?"

"Oh, Morena; they do not sing anything but are just taught to sing. Night and day one can hear them just singing 'HO--o--o--o--~~KORR~~
--HO--o--o--o--HO--o--o--o-----! ' The white man does not like this ---- he says they make a big noise but we think it is very pretty. Some of the boys have beautiful voices. Whilst they are in the 'Koma' they wear no clothes nor do they sleep in blankets. If it rains they sit under the rocks but ---- they are not afraid of the water! During the day they gather wood and at night they make a large fire (this fire must not go out even during the day time; and sit round it. If the fire goes out whilst the boys are in the 'Koma' they are disgraced. When it is very cold they pull the ashes out of the fire, strew them on the ground and sleep in the warm ashes. In the day time they also hunt game and their bag, with the porridge the women bring them each night, is the only food they get. When they leave the 'Koma' they are covered with red ochre and they are fine, strong, athletic young men. A few days before the end of the term all the boys are taken to a large flat rock and they make huge fires on the rock and when it is very hot, they pour water over it. The rock then cracks into many flat pieces of all sizes. They then take these flat pieces of rock and deposit them at a spot previously agreed upon. When they come back

next day they find that from the stones two altars or cearns (mphato) have been built by the older men of the kraals. The boys had to fast the previous day and this porridge of theirs and ashes are mixed to form the mortar for building the cairns. Then each 'Koma' boy passes the altar, bends down and receives two severe lashes with the cane from the foreman. When they leave school they throw away all their bangles, loin cloths, towels and other much prized ornaments --- they are then men; even if they are only twelve or thirteen years old. Unless a boy has been through the 'Koma' he cannot take a wife of his tribe. The girls also go to a 'Koma' but I know nothing about them. In the olden days we were very strict but now, Morena, it is not so anymore. Some of them even marry 'majakans' (Christians) but that is no good, awa(no), Morena. Yes, the boys learn much in the 'Koma' but if their heart is bad one cannot take it out --- some are good and some are bad."

"But, Ngoanakgomo, what happens if a boy dies in the 'Koma'?"

"Oh, Morena, that very seldom happens but if one should die his 'Mahopo' is taken to his kraal and is broken to pieces in front of his home; this is to notify his parents that he is dead. They never ask when or where he died --- they just know he is dead by this act of breaking ^{his} /'mahopo' which is never done until the 'Koma' is finished.

"Then, Morena, there is a second school but this is not so severe as the first. All the boys who have been to the 'Koma' the first year go to the second school the next year. Their food is brought by the girls and placed in a row in small 'mahopo's' --- one for each boy. At dusk the boys leap and sing as they rush down the hill, dance and sing round the 'mahopo's', each takes his 'mahopo' and then they all return to the hill --- yes, Morena, they must run all the way."

He had taken another pinch of snuff some time before and this he still held between the fingers of his right hand and his open "tooga" (snuff-box) still lay in the palm of his other wrinkled and shaking hand. He sniffed it into his nose, already quite discoloured with excessive use of snuff, wished me god-speed and tottered off down the kloof.

I sat awhile and pondered over all these things and wondered who really was the happier and more blessed --- we with our advanced education and general civilization or these ignorant and unsophisticated people with their "Komos" and altars, strange beliefs and superstitions.

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