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PART I
THE BANYORO A PASTORAL PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

THE COUNTRY, THE PEOPLE, THE KING

Description of the country—its geographical position—its former area—pastoral and agricultural people—the boundaries of the country—native accounts of their kings and royal house—the mother of the second dynasty—disappearance of king Kagoro—the new dynasty—status of the king—sacred cows for the king's food supply—the king's evening meal of beef—the king's mode of spending the night—death of the king—war of the princes for the throne—crowning the new king—custom of killing or of banishing a prince—list of kings.

Geographical position of Bunyoro. To the north-west of Uganda, ranging from a little south of the equator to the Victoria Nile on the north and between 30 and 32 degrees east of Greenwich, lies the kingdom of Bunyoro. Like Uganda, it is one of the oldest kingdoms in Central Africa and has, for many generations, been able at once to resist the inroads of adjacent tribes and also to extend its own boundaries. It is one of the few kingdoms of the Bantu tribes that possess an established monarchy with subordinate chiefs and subchiefs governing large districts. These chiefs command numerous clans, many of whom are entirely pastoral, while others, though mainly agricultural, own large flocks of goats and sheep; but all alike, both pastoral and agricultural, acknowledge the king's supremacy.

Extent of Bunyoro. The kingdom originally comprised tracts of land which now belong to Uganda proper: certainly the Budu district and also parts of the district of Bulemezi, Kyagwe, Singo and Gomba once belonged to Bunyoro, while a large district of Busoga, lying to the south-east of Bunyoro

and tributary to it, was conquered by Uganda. For many years the Baganda have been slowly pushing back the Banyoro and occupying the lands thus acquired, and for some years Busoga and Budu have yielded to the superior arms of the Baganda. When British rule began in Uganda, a new kingdom was established on Mount Luinzori, and land which formed part of Bunyoro was given to the newly appointed king Kasagama, who is a nephew of Kabarega the exiled king of Bunyoro. This new king, Kasagama, was a rebel prince from Bunyoro, who was living in exile on the slopes of Mount Luinzori. Further deductions from the country were made when king Kabarega resisted the British and was finally captured and exiled to the Seychelles in 1899, soon after the British Protectorate was established in Uganda. A great part of south and east Bunyoro was given to Uganda in recognition of the services it rendered the British in suppressing king Kabarega. To-day Bunyoro is in extent about one-third of the original kingdom when at the height of its prosperity.

The pastoral clans. The Banyoro are a tribe of the great Bantu family, though they combine two distinct classes of people, the pastoral and the agricultural clans. Careful observation and enquiry lead to the opinion that the agricultural clans were the original inhabitants, and that they were conquered by the pastoral people who have reduced them to their present servile condition. The pastoral people are a tall, well-built race of men and women with finely cut features, many of them being over six feet in height. The men are athletic with little spare flesh, but the women are frequently very fat and corpulent: indeed their ideal of beauty is obesity, and their milk diet together with their careful avoidance of exercise tends to increase their size.

Agricultural clans. The agricultural clans, on the other hand, are short, ill-favoured looking men and women with broad noses of the negro type, lean, and unkempt. Both classes are dark, varying in shade from a light brown to deep black, with short woolly hair. The pastoral people refrain, as far as possible, from all manual labour and expect the agricultural clans to do their menial work for them, such as

building their houses, carrying firewood and water, and supplying them with grain and beer for their households.

Dress. The dress of the pastoral clans was, until quite recently, restricted almost entirely to cow-skins which were dressed until quite supple. The women are more particular about their clothing than the men and wear long robes extending from the shoulders to the feet, often tied with a girdle in a way that permits them to expose and use their arms, though more frequently the arms are covered by a second robe of cow-skin thrown over the head and hanging down to the waist. The men are less careful about their dress: they wear smaller skins hanging from the neck, covering the shoulders and upper part of the body only and leaving the lower part nude. The agricultural clans, both men and women, wear either sheep- or goat-skins round their loins or roughly made bark-cloths. In both sexes the dress of the agricultural clans is barely sufficient for decency.

Boundaries of Bunyoro. The Banyoro have proved themselves to be a strong barrier on the north against the incursions of the Nilotic tribes, and to them doubtless belongs the credit of diverting the migratory streams of those tribes from passing south and of causing them to take an easterly route, thus preserving the highlands of the great lakes region for the Bantu tribes. Bunyoro is bounded on the north by Bukedi, on the south-east by Busoga, on the west by the River Semliki and Lake Albert, and on the south and south-west by Uganda. The physical features of the country are much the same as those of Uganda: it is hilly, well watered and has some forest-land. To the south-west there are some rocky hills which are venerated by the people, and among them is the burial-place of the kings.

Origin of the royal house. There is no reliable account of the origin of the kings; this is probably due to the custom of never mentioning the name of a king after his death and of obliterating the word from the language. As in Uganda so also in Bunyoro, the people have mythical stories of the first king having come from God, originating their race and providing them with cattle and food. Four distinct dynasties of kings

are given by the old people for the first few generations of the royal house ; yet they are unable to trace the origin of these lines, nor can they account for the disappearances of certain of them. The story of the first two kings is as follows :

A man appeared among them who because of his ability and superior knowledge was acclaimed king. He was given the name Isaza and continued to live in the country and rule it for some years. He married a wife but had no children. After some years he disappeared suddenly, and the people, who were unable to trace him or to account for his disappearance, after a prolonged search and continued waiting in the hope that he would return, made the prime minister (Bukulu) king in his stead.

The story of Nyinamweru. King Bukulu had one child, a daughter. While she was still a girl, a medicine-man came to the king and warned him against allowing his daughter to marry, saying that, should she marry and have a son, the king would die. King Bukulu accordingly guarded his daughter and, when she was old enough to marry, he built a house for her and surrounded it with a strong, high fence, with no gate or outlet, setting a man with his wife to guard the road leading to the house and thus prevent the girl from holding intercourse with the world. Inside the enclosure king Bukulu placed his daughter, whose name was Nyinamweru, with her maid Mugezi, and warned them against holding any communications with men. Food, that is to say milk, was brought daily to the guardian Lumbumbi, who climbed the fence and handed it down to the maid inside. For several years all went well, until one day a man belonging to the priestly clan called *Bacwezi* arrived. The man was a stranger in the place and wandered to the enclosure seeking some one to tell him the way. He had his dog with him and, as he could find no entrance to the enclosure, he walked round calling to the two women inside and enquiring for the entrance. They explained to him their situation and told him how they were secluded to avoid men. This, however, only increased the man's curiosity, and being struck by the beauty of the princess, he made love to her. Gathering some wild flowers he presented them to her,

and finally gained the women's permission to climb into the enclosure. Simbu was the name of this man: he became the husband of the princess Nyinamweru and remained with her several months in concealment. He then left the place secretly. In due time the princess gave birth to a son and named him Ndaula. Nyinamweru nursed her child for two years without the infant being discovered. At the end of that time her nurse became afraid that the child would be seen playing in the enclosure and that its presence would endanger their lives, should king Bukulu learn of its existence. She therefore persuaded Nyinamweru to give the child to the guard Lumbumbi, who was bidden to take and cast it into a stream and drown it. The mother most reluctantly yielded to this advice, and little Ndaula was taken by the guard and cast into the river. Fortunately the child's umbilical cord was tied to his wrist and, when Lumbumbi cast him into the river, the string by which the cord was tied to the wrist caught on the branch of a tree and saved the child from drowning. Later in the day Lumbumbi passed the place and heard the child crying, and went to see how it could still be alive. When he saw what had happened, he regarded the child's preservation as an intervention of the gods, took it home to his wife and told her to nurse it. When Nyinamweru was told how her son had been preserved from death, she was delighted and gave Lumbumbi a milch cow to supply milk for the child. The boy Ndaula grew up to be a man and was commonly known as Lumbumbi's son. He herded the cattle and was a dauntless youth, full of mischief, delighting above all things to tease the king's herdsmen, who were haughty and expected everybody to give way to them and their cattle at the watering-places. It chanced one day that the king had ordered his cow-men to give his cattle salt to eat at a certain place, saying that he would be present to examine the cattle. At the appointed time Ndaula also appeared with his cows and drove them to the spot to eat salt. The king's herdsmen tried to keep the cows away, and a struggle ensued between them and Ndaula, in which the king was fatally speared. At the trial which followed Ndaula explained who he was. He then sent

for his mother Nyinamweru who confirmed his story, and the people not only pardoned his offence but also crowned him king. From the time of king Ndaula it has been the custom for a mother to make her child an amulet and put it on his neck in remembrance of the string which saved Ndaula's life. King Ndaula reigned a short time and then sent for his father and brought him and his relatives into Bunyoro. Ndaula married and had a son whom he named Wamala. When Wamala grew up, his father abdicated the throne in favour of his son, in order that he might be free from the responsibilities of government and able to make war upon the surrounding tribes. Ndaula was constantly victorious in the wars he undertook, enlarged the boundaries of his country, and enriched the people. In his old age he is said to have disappeared, because it was not customary for kings to die.

King Wamala continued to reign until he became an old man when, like his predecessor, he disappeared, and his son Kyomya succeeded him on the throne. Kyomya also increased the size of the kingdom by conquering many of the surrounding tribes. Wamala appointed three men named Mugarara, Ibona and Mugenyi to be priests, and two women, Nakalanda and Nabibungo, to be priestesses to the chief gods. These men were the first of the class of people afterwards known as the Bacwezi, who are the priests of the country.

Nothing else is known of Kyomya except that, in his old age, he too disappeared as his forefathers had done, and that his son Kagoro succeeded him on the throne.

Kagoro warned by ghosts to leave his country. When Kagoro had reigned some years, he was warned by the ghosts of his ancestors that they were displeased with his people, because they robbed each other and lied to one another. The king called the people and told them that, unless they ceased from these bad habits, he must leave them. They, however, took no heed of the warning, and accordingly king Kagoro called together his near relations and departed with them secretly, carrying with him two baskets containing truth and love, and leaving behind him two baskets containing lying and hatred. One young woman who refused to go with the party

was left in a house with certain sacred drums named *Kajwimbe*, *Nyalabe* and *Kyamukumbwiri*, which are still retained as royal drums. For some years the people hoped to find one of the princes whom they could induce to become king, but after a prolonged search it became evident that they must find some other person to rule over them. Accordingly the prime minister Nakolo was sent to the Bukedi country to seek a prince who would come to reign in Bunyoro. Nakolo found a prince named Nakoko and returned with him to Bunyoro, where he became king.

King Mpugu. When prince Nakoko was crowned he was named Mpugu by the people, because one side of his body was dark and the other light. He came with three brothers who with himself formed the Babito dynasty. It is said that, when the Babito family first arrived in Bunyoro, they did not understand cow-keeping. They had to learn the art from the Banyoro and also how to live on a milk diet.

Royalty and their state. The king is held in great veneration by all classes who bow low when coming before him, and no person dares take a weapon into his presence. Weapons are laid on the ground at a distance, and the owner approaches and prostrates himself to greet the king. When the king is on a journey and wishes to rest, one of his subjects immediately kneels down on one knee and offers the other as a seat for the king to sit upon.

The king lived in an enclosure very much like a cattle kraal. It was surrounded by a fence, in most instances, composed of thorny bushes intended to keep the cattle together by night and also to prevent wild animals from attacking the cows. The king's houses were divided from those of his wives and servants by roughly built fences of elephant-grass, which were merely screens to hide him from view rather than to afford protection against an armed force. By night the cows belonging to the king were taken into different court-yards and guarded by special cow-men. At each gateway to the royal enclosure there was a hut in which a guard lived, and one man was expected to be always awake and guarding the gate by day and by night. From the body of police who

supplied the guards for the gates the king's personal guard was chosen, some of whom had to be on duty during the night to guard his house against any danger.

The sacred herd of cows. The king's diet was strictly regulated by ancient custom. He subsisted on milk and beef, but chiefly on milk. Vegetables and mutton he might not touch, and for his use a special herd of cows was kept. These were sacred animals which had to be guarded against coming into contact with other cows, and no one was permitted to drink the milk from them save the king and his servant appointed for the duty. The sacred herd of cows had special men to herd them and to attend to them constantly in order to prevent them from mixing with other cattle. They were kept in a part of the country where they could be kept from contact with the large ordinary herds of the king and from mingling with the cattle of chiefs. From this herd nine cows were taken to the capital to provide milk for the king's use, the animals chosen being young cows with their first calves. When a cow was ready to travel after giving birth, she was taken to the royal residence to join the select number, and one of the nine was then removed to the general body of the sacred herd in the country. This most sacred herd of nine was called *Nkorogi* and had to be jealously guarded against contact with a bull. The period for which each cow was kept in the *Nkorogi* herd was about two months, during which time both cow and calf had to be maintained in perfect condition. At the end of two months her place was taken by another cow and she was removed as already stated to the country and there kept for her milk to make butter for the king's use and for breeding purposes: she never returned to supply the king with milk.

Men belonging to the sacred herd. The *Nkorogi* cows had three special men to care for them, in addition to a boy who brought them from the pastures daily. These men had assistants who took charge of the cows during the day when they were out at pasture. The boy chosen for the office of driving the cows to and from the pasture and of drinking the surplus milk from the king's supply was known as the "Caller," so named

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CH. I] THE COUNTRY, THE PEOPLE, THE KING II

because he had to call out to warn people to leave the path, as he passed along with the cows. He thus announced their presence and gave people time to escape out of the way of the herd. He was taken from the Abaitira clan, had to be a strong healthy boy seven or eight years old, and retained the office of "Caller" until he was old enough to marry, that is to say about seventeen years old, when the king ordered the Abaitira clan to bring another young boy. The former boy who was now deposed was given a wife by the king and settled to ordinary pastoral life. Should the boy fall sick during his term of office and the medicine-man consider the illness to be of a serious nature, he would be strangled; or, again, should he have sexual relations with any woman, he would be put to death. He had to guard against scratching his flesh or doing anything that might draw blood. On this account he was not allowed to go into tall grass, nor might he leave the path when going to bring the cows from the pasture lest he should prick or scratch himself. To strike this boy was an offence punishable with death, because the boy's life was bound up with that of the king and anything that happened to him was liable to affect the king. Each afternoon before sunset the boy went for the *Nkorogi* cows, which were brought from the pastures to some place about a mile distant from the royal residence, when they were delivered to the boy who then began to drive them thither, raising, as he did so, his cry to warn people from the path. Men and women now hurriedly hid in the grass and covered their heads until the herd had passed. The cry was repeated from time to time until the boy reached the kraal at the royal residence, where one of the three cow-men awaited him. Another important duty of the boy "Caller" was to drink up the milk left by the king from his daily milk supply. No other person but this boy was permitted to drink any of the milk from the sacred cows, nor was the boy allowed any other food. The three milk-men in charge of the cows had special titles, *Mukologi*, *Munyuwanga* and *Muigimbirwa*. Each day before going to milk the cows they purified themselves by smearing their heads, arms and chests with white clay, and during their term of office, which lasted a year, they observed the