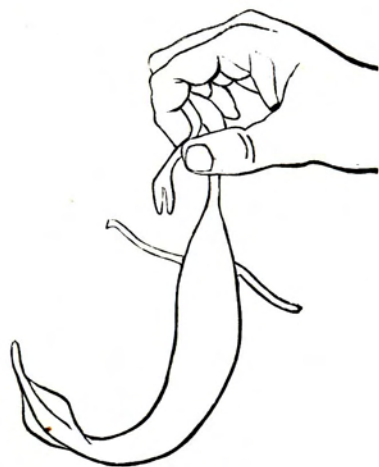
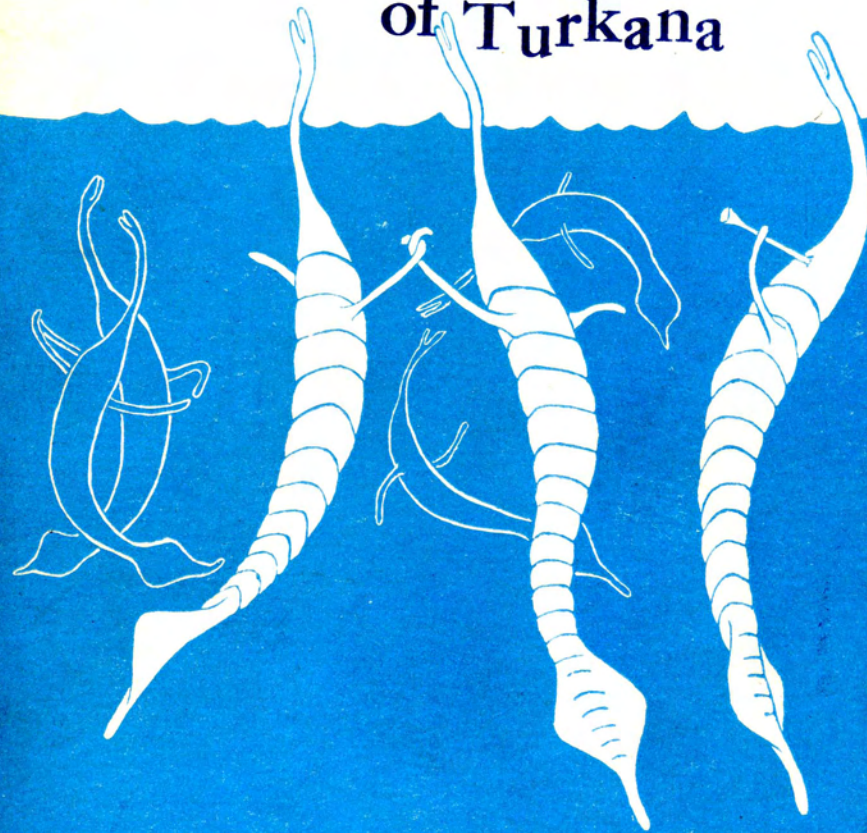




For years, this rare creature was known to those few
Who could travel to far Kangetet;
But now it's the favorite of every one who
Maintains an aquarium pet.

The Dancing Worm of Turkana : Rory : The Vanishing Press

The Dancing Worm of Turkana



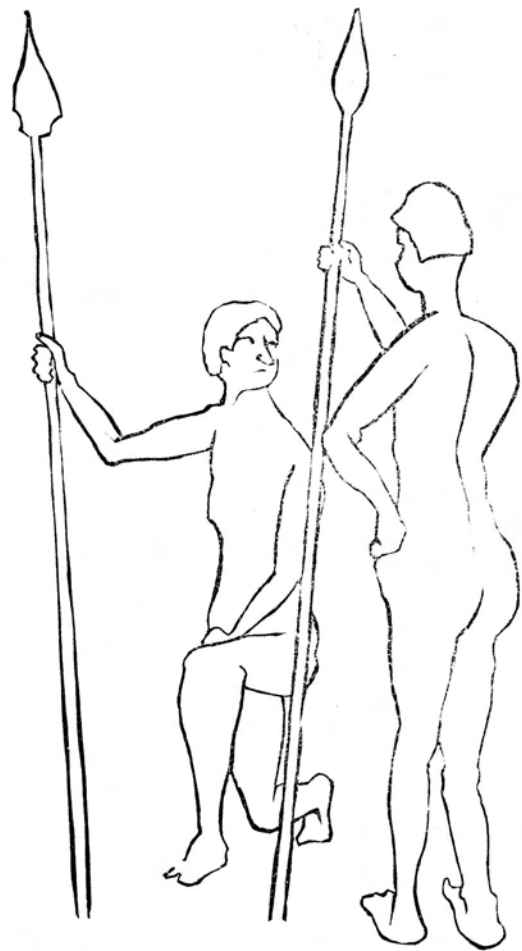
E. Scumms Rory

VANISHING PRESS
NATURAL HISTORY REFERENCES
NUMBER ONE



*The
Dancing Worm of
Turkana*

first edition: 300 copies



The Dancing Worm of Turkana

E. Scumas Rory

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
EUGENE S. RICHARDSON, JR.

AND WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
THE AUTHOR

1969

The Vanishing Press, Gurnee, Illinois

To

F. J. T.
who found the Tully Monster

B. P.
its dancing master

L. S. B. L.
whose complicity has not yet been assessed

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Foreword

THE Dancing Worm Letters came to me unsolicited, from four people of such diverse background that there can be no thought of their conspiring to deceive me. I replied to the letters, but the writers had vanished; the Kenya Post Office declared two of them* *unknown* at their alleged addresses. I'm sorry:- I would have enjoyed pursuing their acquaintance. But since the last (if not the only) earthly act of my vanishing correspondents was to send me these letters, I conclude that they were intended as a gift to The Vanishing Press. I publish them in the confidence that they will find a wide and happy welcome.

E. Scumas Rory having written a narrative poem about a full-scale expedition to Kenya to collect Dancing Worms, I have invited him to provide illustrations and commentary for this definitive edition.

Eugene S. Richardson, Jr.

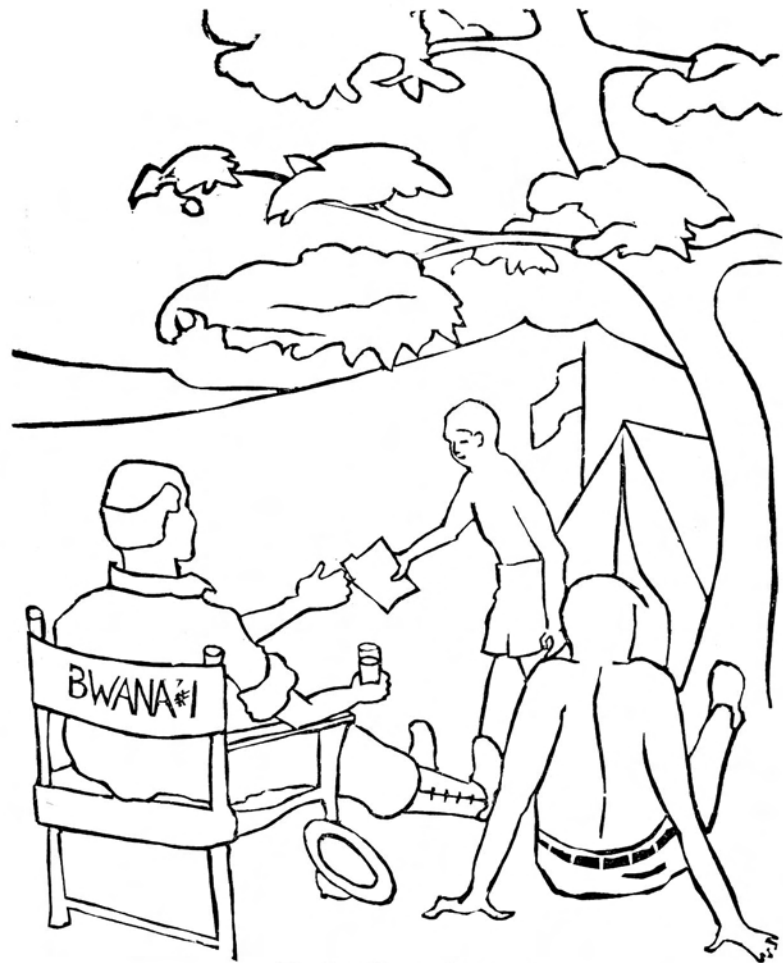
*For the others, see the Epilogue.

Interlogue

SOMEWHERE in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered tin dispatch box with my name, JOHN H. WATSON, M.D., LATE INDIAN ARMY, painted upon the lid. It is crammed with papers, nearly all of which are records of cases to illustrate the curious problems which Mr Sherlock Holmes had at various times to examine. . . . Among these . . . cases is . . . that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duelist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained



a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science.



Mail call on the Kerio

Note puttees, topee, canvas chair and highball. The 'artist' has officiously put breeches on the native lad.

Introduction

THE equatorial sun, having burned its way across Kenya, was rapidly and vertically moving on to Uganda and the Congos. A small group of paleontologists wearily gathered under a clump of acacias by the dry and sandy bed of the Kerio River. Turkana might be all very well for Pleistocene fossils, but it was lamentably short of water -- and even less prodigal of iced martinis.

The Agassiz Professor of Vertebrate Paleontology, far from the cool and well-watered Yard on the left bank of the Charles, clapped his hands imperiously and settled into a canvas chair. A native lad in tribal dress (see Frontispiece) came smartly to attention.

'Yes, Bwana?'

'Martinis, please.'

'Yes, Bwana.'

The Agassiz Professor, the Director of the Institute, and the retinue of paleontological apprentices loosened their puttees and cast aside their sodden topees while Akai, the native lad, scooped a hole into the somewhat cool and moist bed of the Kerio. Brushing sand from a well-corked



An Agassiz Professor, dressed for tropical field work. Note topee, bur-noose, double-breasted jerkin, Sam Browne belt, jodhpurs, puttees and shapeless bro-gans. Monocle and swagger stick, optional equipment, may be replaced by hand lens and Marsh pick.

bottle, he arrived at the acacias as Purshottam, the nephew of old Motibhai, appeared with the weekly packet of mail from Kampi-ya-Moto.

The first (and least warm) martini disappeared quickly. About half way down the second, the Director of the Institute passed two letters and a travel-worn *Bulletin* of the Field Museum to his senior colleague. By the end of the fourth martini, the Agassiz Professor had brought forth the punch line of his anecdote and lazily glanced at the *Bulletin*. On the cover frolicked as unlikely a bunch of worms as ...

'Migawd!' he exclaimed. 'What's this?'



Or so, perhaps, it may have been; I wasn't there. As the sun set in Turkana, I was enjoying the mid-morning of that same day, hunting Tully Monsters and other Pennsylvanian fossils in an Illinois strip mine.

In a sense, I am responsible for the Tully Monster and must accept the consequences. I drew the picture that disturbed the evening martinis in Turkana; I wrote the article accompanying it; and I have reaped the Dancing Worm.



Tully Monsters swarmed in the shallow muddy sea off the coast of northern Illinois in the Pennsylvanian period, some 280 million years ago. This picture of *Tullimonstrum gregarium*, from the Field Museum *Bulletin*, reminded Colonel Cloudesley of the Dancing Worm of Turkana and led to the letters in this book.

Ten years ago - as the Agassiz Professor read in the *Bulletin* - hardly any one had a Tully Monster. But by 1966 this was no longer the case; more and more fossil collectors were discovering the one particular strip mine where this curious fossil abounded. As Curator of Fossil Invertebrates at the Field Museum, I sooner or later get to see most of the fossils that the local collectors bring back from the strip mine. But I was out in the field on that day back in 1958 when the first Tully Monster came to call. On that day, Mr Francis J. Tully came up from Lockport, Illinois, to consult George Langford about some of his fossil plants. Before leaving, he reached in his bag and pulled forth a . . .

Monster (mŏnstə), *sb.* ME. [a. OF. *monstre*, ad. L. *monstrum*; orig. a divine portent or warning, f. *monere* to warn.] **A.** *sb.* f1. A prodigy, a marvel - 1710 [Shorter O.E.D., page 1277]

. . . as I called it a few days later, when George showed me the three specimens that Mr Tully had kindly left for the Museum. The name stuck; ever since, the animal has been known as the Tully Monster, and when I came to write its formal description, I simply latinized the existing name, as *Tullimonstrum gregarium*.

Tullimonstrum, I admit, is a highly improbable animal. It stands uneasily alone in having a fierce claw in the midline, at the end of a rather long proboscis; a transverse bar across the forward part of the body, with a round organ of some

sort on each end, is also unique. The little round organs may be eyes. The segmented body resembles that of an annelid; the tail seems molluscan; the size and shape may remind one of certain bathypelagic nemerteans.¹ But it is none of these.

I don't defend the Tully Monster; I simply report it. I am unhappy and uncomfortable about not being able to assign it to one of the major animal groups. Much as I admire and enjoy Mr Tully's little namesake, I'm well aware of this imperfection in its character. What we need to round things out is another animal, closely similar to the Tully Monster and clearly allied to one of the recognized divisions of the animal kingdom. To those who understood the need the *Bulletin* carried the message. Far and wide it went. For worldwide coverage few journals can do so well. What other house organ reaches the Zurich banker and the Venezuelan roustabout, the Eskimo sealer and the Fuegian clam digger, the (&c, &c), the Agassiz Professor? Eventually it found its mark and Colonel Cloudesley's



A Tully Monster (front end only). Note the vicious claw and the pronounced transverse bar. This is an impression preserved in a concretion from a northern Illinois strip mine.

¹ I am in debt to Prof. Ralph Johnson for thinking of the bathypelagic nemerteans.

letter (see page 9) was the happy result. I replied to Colonel Cloudesley with heartfelt thanks: it was, after all, barely possible 'that a relation of my extinct monster might still survive in one of the remotest parts of East Africa.'

The British military man, in the tradition of Xenophon, Cæsar and Alfred, is observant, curious and literate. I was not greatly surprised by the Colonel's zoological insight and Kiplingesque style, though I marveled that pukka sahibs were still living in Nairobi at this point in history.

I showed the letter to many colleagues; we combed it for discrepancies and assayed its credibility. In a large atlas we found Turkana and Lodwar and even, in that dry country, a swamp (albeit the wrong one). We didn't find A. M. Champion -- but our list of District Commissioners went back only to 1928. In general, things checked.

At least twenty people pointed out that there should be an expedition, and that they should be included.

Within a week came the second of the letters, this one from 'my hopeful servant', Purshottam S. Patel, posted in Nakuru, a hundred miles upcountry from Nairobi. Few who read it could forbear: in spite of 'naked men with spears,' another thirty intrepids joined the expedition.

I charged out a dozen volumes of African travels from the Museum library; scant indeed was the knowledge of Turkana. The staple diet, it appears, is camel milk, tinted with camel blood and curdled with camel urine.

Dr. Solem, the Curator of Lower Invertebrates, had never heard of the Dancing worm of Turkana; he helpfully wrote

to zoological acquaintances with distant and unlikely addresses. They too knew nothing of such a worm, but all agreed that there must still be undiscovered animals in the little-known depths of Kenya.

All that was lacking to justify -- indeed, to demand -- an expedition was a bit more information about The Dancing Worm: one cannot, of course, send a field party almost to the antipodes in search of a rumored vermiform wraith, however elegant the rumors, until the wraith can come forth clothed in a fair simulacrum of verisimilitude¹.

But instead of further information, even that which we had grew faint and wavered: one upon the heels of the other, my letters to Cloudesley and Patel returned to me, stamped *unknown* by the postal authorities of Nairobi and Nakuru. The expedition quietly collapsed.

Meanwhile, however, a ship was carrying another letter about The Dancing Worm, and by the time the whole matter had faded to a pleasant anecdote I found another envelope from Kenya on my desk. This, datelined 'Lokori / P.O. Kampi ya Moto / *via* Nakuru,' came from the interior of Turkana itself. My informant was Akai, a Turkana boy. Like the others, he offered priceless help. The name of the Worm, he told me, was *Ekurut loedonkakini*; it lived in Ayangyangi Swamp; it danced in the rain. These and other ethological details at last defined our objective. The expedition, larger than ever, reassembled. I sent my thanks to Akai and his teacher, allow-

¹ Xenophon has undoubtedly stated this principle, but one need go no farther back than Roman times: . . . *nec exercitum in antipodes spectrum vermiformem appetere dimittere decorum est nisi spectrum eo loco praesto sit et verisimilitudinem spectri probatam sit.*

ing the customary two months for my letter to be stamped *unknown* and to return to me. I would expect it by February.

But in December Professor Bryan Patterson dropped in. Over a mug of Museum coffee he wove a tale of his summer's work collecting fossils in Kenya.

"Oh, Pat," I broke in, "speaking of Kenya - have a look at these letters."

The Professor read them, with mounting interest. Yes, there were still some retired British officers in Nairobi. Aha! old Motibhai (a rascal) and his sons (a couple of cowboys; wouldn't trust them with a lorry). Ayangyangi's fauna quite unstudied. Non-delivery of letters typical of Kenya Post Office.

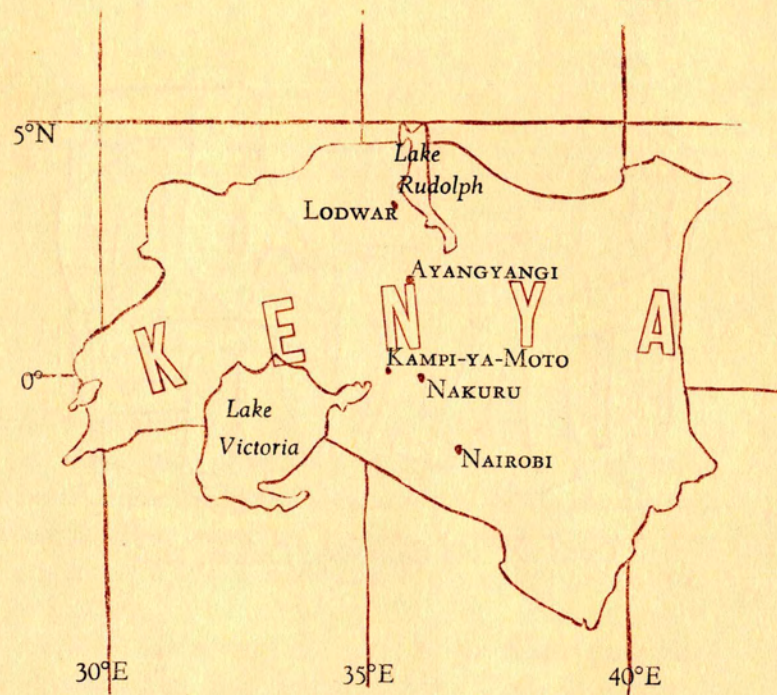
Confirmatory evidence! Subcommittees of the late Expedition met in odd corners and chewed it over. But somehow, the plane was not chartered and the carboys of formalin remained unrequisioned.

The whole concept of the Dancing Worm was attractive, but was it perhaps just a little too Pat?

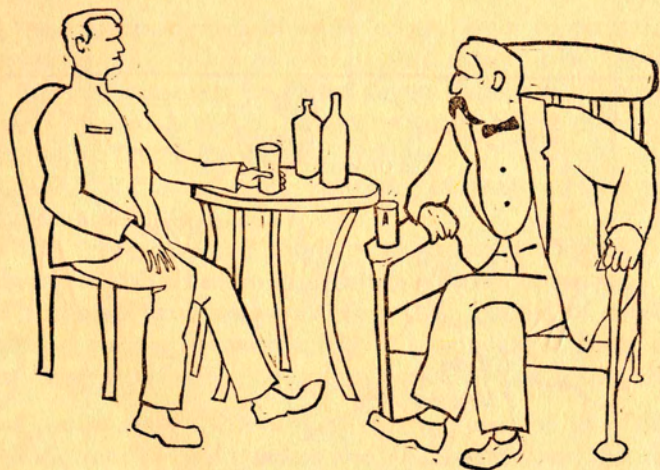


The letters that follow (pages 9 through 13) constitute the necessary and sufficient Canon of the Dancing Worm, and are the basis for Rory's narrative poem (pages 17 through 25). The associated body of Apocrypha and Commentary may also some day be set forth by The Vanishing Press.

Plate 1



The Land of the Dancing Worm



Cloudesley and Champion: Lodwar, 1926

The Letters

Such footnotes as the editor feels are necessary for the fullest understanding of these letters are signalled by superscript numbers and may be found on page 14.

LETTER FROM COLONEL CLOUDESLEY

1/9/66
P.O. Box 30009
Nairobi

Dear Dr. Richards:

A recent issue of the *East African Standard* contains an illustrated article describing a curious prehistoric creature you discovered. This jogged my memory, carrying me back some forty years, of a tale I once heard that may be of some interest to you.

In 1926, having been seconded¹ to the King's (now Kenya) African Rifles from the Indian Army, I was in northwestern Kenya dealing with some border incidents. Passing through the administrative centre of Lodwar upon my return journey, I took the opportunity of calling upon Mr. A. M. Champion, then D.C.² Turkana District. In addition to being a keen shikar,³ Champion was a naturalist of the first rank, and during the two evenings I passed in his company regaled me with many a fas-

cinating yarn about the fauna of the area. Among these was one about a remarkable worm reputed to live in the swamp country to the southeast. The local tribesmen told fantastic stories about its dancing and giving milk, if I remember correctly. Such nonsense aside, Champion did give me a description of the creature which he had obtained from various natives (he never succeeded in getting a specimen), and this curiously enough has remained in my memory when much else has been forgotten. His account agreed remarkably well with the illustrations of your "Gully Monster," even to the "paddles" and the long snout. Your mention of sharp teeth, incidentally, does agree with a Turkana tale that the creature bites. On this account they are deathly afraid of it, believing that it is poisonous. But then nearly all natives believe everything of the creeping or crawling kind to be venomous.

I hardly dare to suggest that a relation of your extinct "monster" still survives in one of the remotest parts of East Africa, but it might just be worthwhile to pursue the matter.

Yours faithfully,
R. G. L. Cloudesley
(Lt.-Col., ret.)

LETTER FROM PURSHOTAM S. PATEL

P. O. Box 568

Nakuru

13 September, 1966

Honoured Sir:

I have now seen in an old copy of the Standard the account of a wonderful monster you have found in your country. Sir, I believe that it also lives here in Kenya! My cousins Aowind and Manu have often told me of the dancing worm of Turkana, and what they say is very like your article. What triumph it would be to catch one.

Turkana is far from here and full⁵ of naked men with spears, but my Uncle Motibhai has a duka⁶ business there, and his sons, my cousins, adventure with lorries⁷ into that savage land. With their help I, even I, might catch one for you. The price would be very cheap. But, honoured Sir, tell me how I catch it as it lives in a great swamp. This is a new thing for me. Do I keep it, do I kill it? I await eagerly your orders and instructions.

Believe me honoured Sir,
your hopeful servant:
Purshotam S. Patel

LETTER FROM JOSEPH N. NGOMO

Lokori
P.O. Kampi ya Moto
via Nakuru
9 September 1966

Dear Sir:

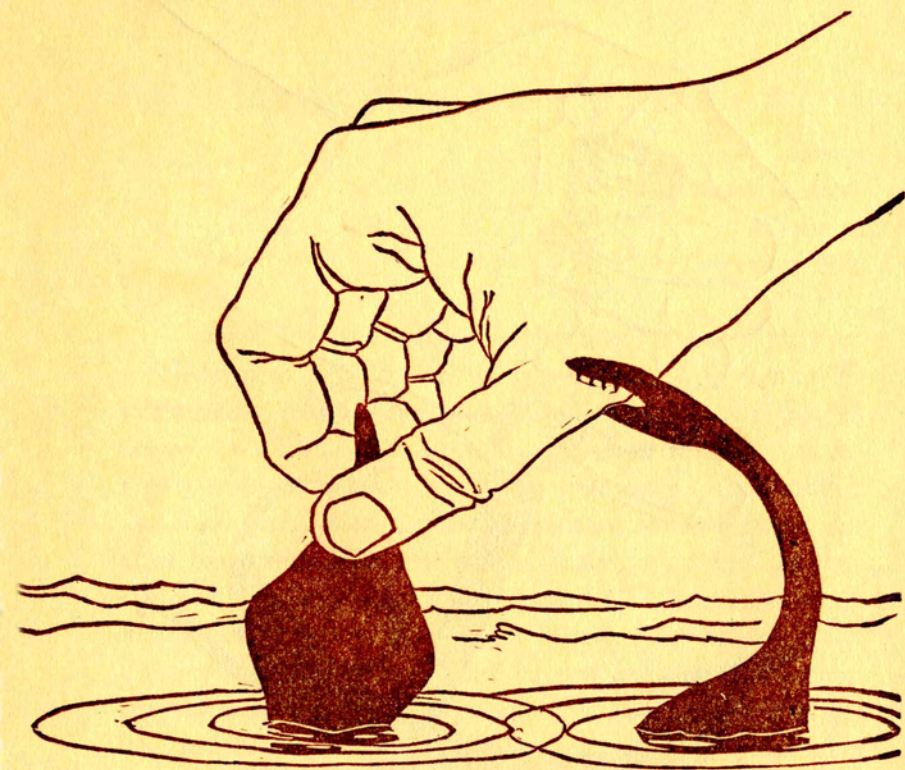
I must ask your pardon for writing to you, a stranger, which happens in this way. I am a temporary teacher at the intermediate school here where I teach elementary English among other things. Whenever I can I show the pupils newspapers which is not often as this is a far away spot. The other day I was lucky to get a Sunday Standard which is bigger and often has repeats from English and American papers. The class was soon in a buzz and I heard repeated a Turkana word which means dancing worm roughly. On looking I see an article and drawing about an animal found by you and the children say they hear of it from their fathers. One pupil, Akai, a bright boy, was so moved that he later brought me a letter for sending to you. He was so proud I had not heart to refuse and so enclose.

As regards the subject of the letter I can say nothing. Most Turkana are very primitive people and have many tales in which sometimes is a grain of truth.

Yours faithfully,
Joseph N. Ngomo



Do I keep it? Do I kill it?



Bite man die

LETTER FROM AKAI

tODaY TE^chER show Us pAPER ANd
 ThERE is AN_MAL MY pEPeLS KNows_t,
 I NOt KnOW NA_mE TULY M_oSTER
 BUT CALL EkUR_{ut} LO_eDoNkAKiNI_t,
 It LI_vE AYANGyANGI^s_t IN RAINS
 AT MOON FILL ALL DANCE WAVE
 HANDS GL_vE m/Lk_t EkURUT
 LoEDONkaKINI^I VERY DANGERY
 Anmal_t BiTE_t mAN DiE_t

AKAI s/o⁹ EkECHALon

NOTES
on the Dancing Worm Letters

Colonel Cloudesley's Letter. Standard Air Letter form of Kenya Post Office, handwritten, addressed "Dr. E. S. Richards, Fields Museum, Chicago, U.S.A." Postmarked Nairobi, 4 PM, 2 Sept., 1966

1. Assigned temporarily (accent on second syllable).
2. District Commissioner. Champion very probably was D.C. at that time. In 1935 he published two articles on the geographic position of Teleki's Volcano, based on field observations made while he was stationed in Turkana.
3. Hunter (Urdu)
4. Lactation is not a typical invertebrate activity; perhaps they're discharging sex products.

Patel's Letter. Standard Air Letter form of Kenya Post Office, handwritten, addressed "Dr. E. S. Richards, Fields Museum, Chicago, U.S.A." Postmarked Nakuru, 10 AM, 14 Sept., 1966

5. Turkana is actually quite sparsely populated; much of it is so poor it won't even raise dust.
6. A country store (Swahili)
7. British trucks

Akai's Letter. Scrap of white paper, enclosed in a plain white envelope with Mr Ngomo's letter (on plain white paper), handscrawled, addressed "Dr E. S. Richards, Fields Museum, Chicago, U.S.A." Postmarked Kampi ya Moto, date illegible

8. A swamp at 1°55' N, 36°05' E, formerly part of the western shore of Lake Sugota.
9. Son of

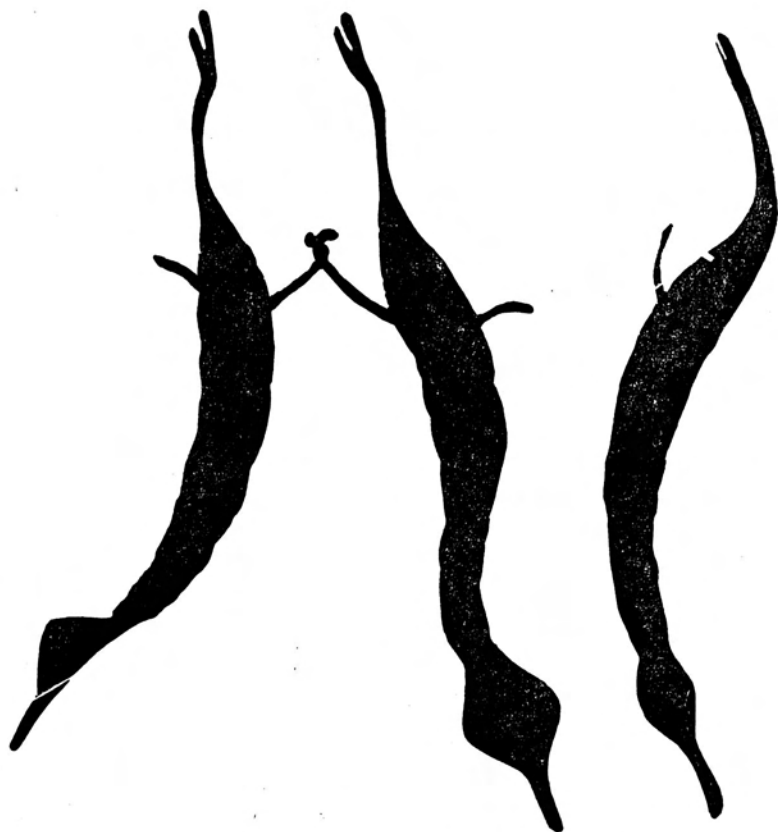
Interlogue



"Just the place for a Snark!" the Bellman cried,
As he landed his crew with care;
Supporting each man on the top of the tide
By a finger entwined in his hair.

"Just the place for a Snark! I have said it twice:
That alone should encourage the crew.
Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice:
What I tell you three times is true."

THE HUNTING OF THE SNARK, Fit the First



A pleasingly metrical account, in some respects trustworthy,
 by E. SCUMAS RORY,
 purporting to relate the Inception of a Museum Expedition,
 its Organizing and Staffing, its Triumph over all Obstacles,
 and its ultimate success in finding the Habitat of

THE DANCING WORM OF TURKANA



Like monsters of heraldry, this one occurs
 Remote from zoologists' haunts.
 Now R. G. L. Cloudesley, a colonel, avers
 It lactates and bites -- and can daunce.

A champion story, my dear Colonel C.!
 However, one telling won't do.
 The requisite number of tellings is three:
 If you say it three times it is true.

A heraldic monster, from
 some remote haunt.



A word from Purshottam: Aowind and Manu
 With Motibhai's help will confirm
 The Colonel's vague rumor. A rupee or two
 Is all they will charge for a worm.

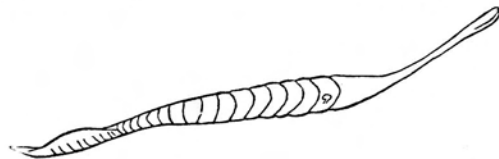
This second report of the vermiform wraith
 Adds much that is useful and new;
 Its verisimilitude builds up one's faith,
 Two tellings! It's practically true!



Turkana folk call it Ekurut; it kill
 With bite that can make a man die.
 It live Ayangyangi and dance at moon fill,
 As we learn in the note from Akai.

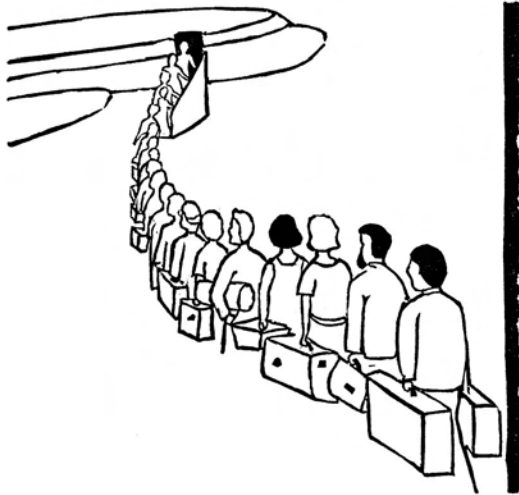
Though cautious and skeptical scientists we,
 We're off to that far-distant slough
 Where, dancing, the Worm of Turkana must be.
 We've read it three times, so it's true!

For what though the mailmen in Kenya sent back
 The letters we wrote to these chaps?
 We're soothed by what Patterson says, so let's pack,
 For the Worm is authentic (perhaps).



How many are going? A hundred or so.
A first-rate adventure, this expedition
to hunt down the Worm. Let's all go
And stick out our corporate necks.

Zoologists, yes, to the count of a score,
And twelve anthropologists too,
Familiar with customs and languages, for
They'll guide this most studious crew.



The botanists going along on this romp
(And paleontologists yet!)
Expect to find specimens filling the swamp,
Which seems to be near Kangetet.



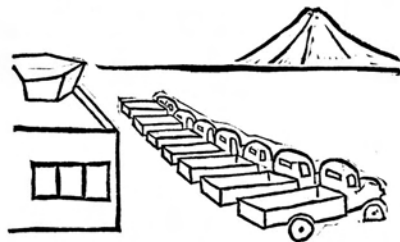
Besides all these fellows, our budget provides
Preparators, janitors, cooks,
Stenographers, editors, artists and guides,
Photographers, printers, librarians, books.



Away we all fly, for our greatest concern
Is to get to Turkana next week.
Just read **The East African Standard** to learn
Our success with the worm that we seek.

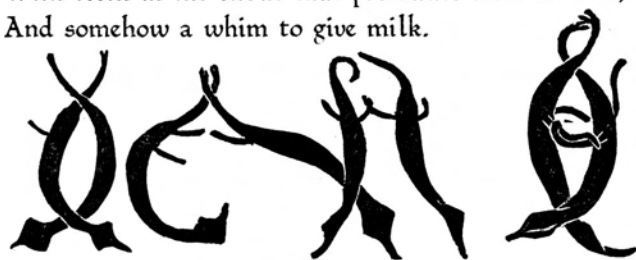


A planeload of hunters is taking the air,
 Nairobi our first port of call.
 We've cabled to Cloudesley, who's meeting us there,
 To have enough lorries for all.



Purshottam's in charge; the safari will leave
 Nakuru by speediest route
 To reach Ayangyangi, which, so we believe,
 Is the home of the worm Ekurut.

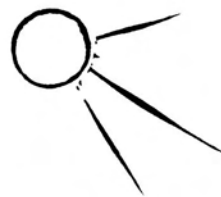
We know what we'll find when we get to that place:
 A worm of ridiculous ilk,
 With teeth in the snout that protrudes from its face,
 And somehow a whim to give milk.



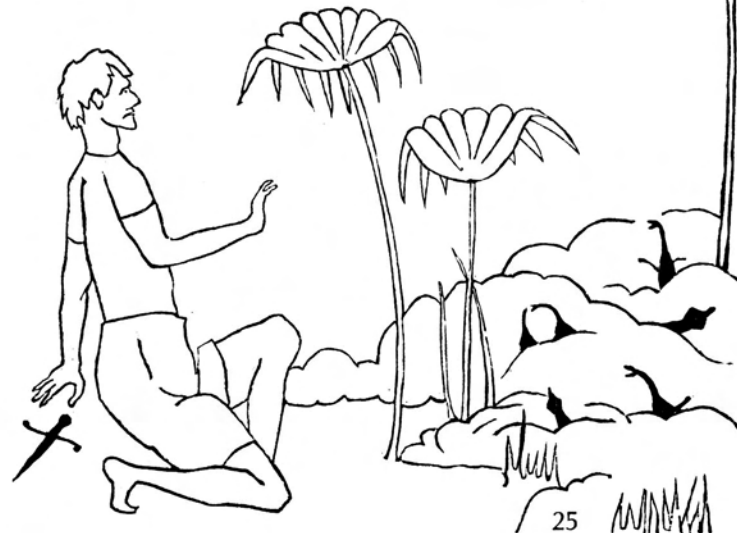
What kind of a dance does Ekurut perform?
 Is it slow, like a stately pavanne,
 Or something more kin to the African norm,
 With rhythms to challenge a man?

The rains are beginning, the moon almost full;
 Conditions are good as can be.
 Manu and his brother are ready to pull
 The Worms from the swamp -- for a fee.

Akai is on hand with his teacher to show
 The best way to handle the Worm:
 You grab it as fast as you can, just below
 The jaw, and then squeeze -- and be firm!



Now here with a rush come the creatures at last!
 Their milk, in the moon's brilliant beam,
 Is whiter than whitecaps. - The dance is so fast
 They've smothered the swamp in whipped cream!



Acknowledgments

WE never found the Dancing Worm, but seeking is greater than finding. Many people in many ways, besides the 'hundred or so' who wanted to go along, helped in the search, most notably the following:

Peter Derrick. London
Marianne Harper, Mettawa, Illinois
F.W. Holiday, Glogue, Pembrokeshire
James H. Isherwood, Christiansted, V.I.
Oscar T. Owre, Coral Gables, Fla.
Bryan Patterson, Cambridge, Mass.
Ivan T. Sanderson, New York
Leon Siroto. Chicago
Norman Skeoch, Christiansted, V.I.
Alan Solem, Chicago
Bernar Verdcourt, Kew
Arthur Welton, Chicago
P.E.P. White, Silver Spring, Md.
John J. Williams, Nairobi

Epilogue

THE Kenya postal service was unable to deliver my letters to Cloudesley and Patel. ('Typical,' muttered Patterson; 'write again'.) My friend F.W. Holiday also wrote fruitlessly to Cloudesley, from his home in Wales. Some one, though, was on hand to accept my letters to Ngomo and Akai, for the good teacher replied after a long interval, from Gilgil, far from the Dancing Worm country. Patel wrote again, from Rongai, still hoping. Then there was a fine letter from one Michael Eccles, also *unknown*, enclosing a snapshot of an ekurut actually dancing. The literary vaults of Cox & Co. being impracticably distant, I keep these later Letters, plus a considerable mass of commentary, in my own filing cabinet.

Both my Introduction and Rory's poem are intentionally, and satirically, overdrawn to reflect the layman's concept of museum field work. Even museum people may now and then - well, muse.

Eugene S. Richardson, Jr.

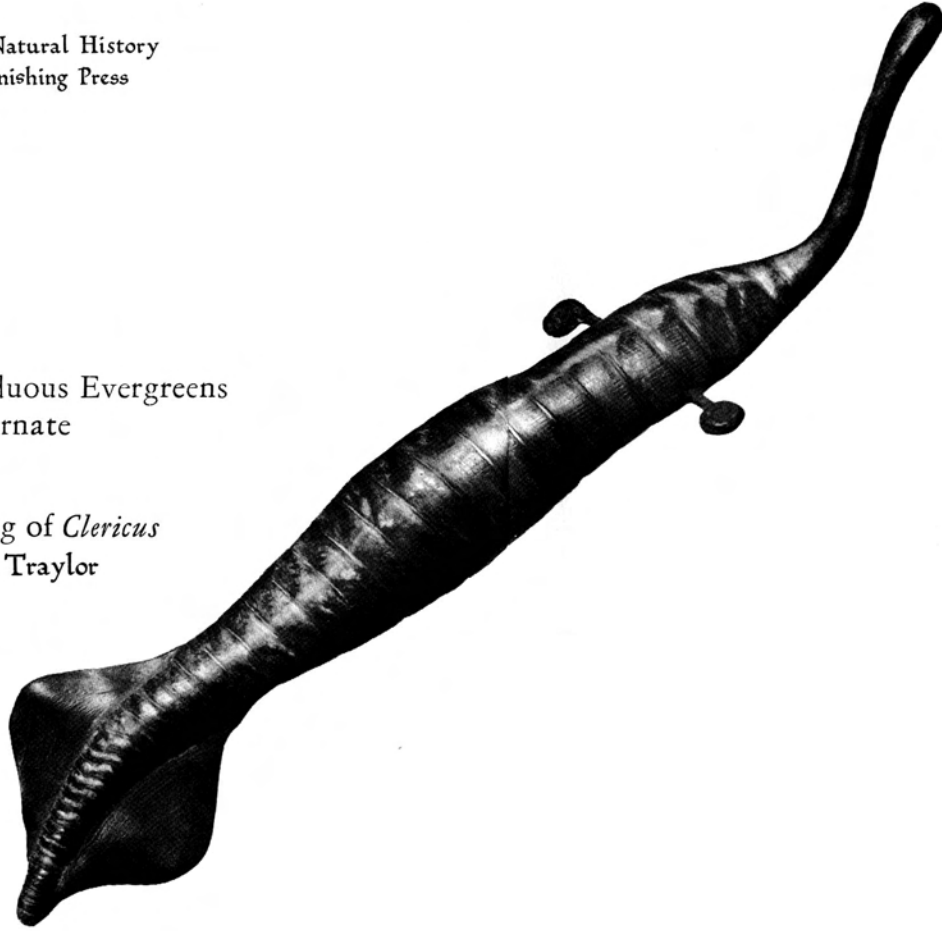
This book has been set and printed by hand at :

The Vanishing Press

Other works on Natural History
from The Vanishing Press

Northern Ornamental Deciduous Evergreens
with Leaves Opposite, Alternate
by Angus Pinwillie Dibble, III

The Nomenclatural Standing of *Clericus*
polydemoninata by Melvin A. Traylor
(in press)



ERRATA

INCREDIBLY, some errors have crept into this book. The proprietor of the Vanishing Press, adept in detecting faux pas in the work of others, clearly needs an editorial assistant at home. In the hope of exorcising these bloopes, I list them:

Sometimes I arranged the roman-numeral pages with the even numbers on the right.

p. ii. *Natural History References, Number One*. Number Two actually came out first (1967), at which time certain pages of *The Dancing Wren* were already printed and the others seemed sure to follow soon.

for *first edition*, read 'first edition'
for 300, read 229

p. iv (title page). *Illustrations* is the Turkana word for 'linoleum cuts'; let us discuss the matter no further.

p. vii. As for that commentary solicited from Mr. Rory, I supplied it myself.

p. viii. This is the first time I've published a 30-pt misprint. For *Interlogue*, read 'Prologue'.

p. 2, line 13. In many copies, the *e* in *Bullfinch* failed to print; this is an annoying characteristic of this particular font of Garamont italic.

p. 4, line 5. For *invertebrates*, read 'Invertebrates.'

p. 9, line 2 of letter. For *prehistoric*, read 'prehistoric.'

p. 10, line 4. For *milk*, read 'milk⁴.'

p. 18, line 7. For *Tramma*, read . [period].

p. 26. Delete two points of leading between the first two lines.

lines 5 and 12. For . [period], read , [comma].

line 15. For *Bernar*, read 'Bernard'

p. 28. Mel Traylor's book is not 'in press.' It was successfully published in 1967 (and was duly reviewed in a South African ornithological journal). Page 28 was one of those already printed by then.

this page, line 4. For *bloopes*, read 'bloopers.'

THE DANCING WORM OF TURKANA
E. SCUMAS RORY



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