



**A White King in East Africa: The Remarkable  
Adventures of John Boyes, Trader and Soldier of  
Fortune, Who Became King of the Savage Wa-  
Kikuyu (1912)**

*John Boyes*

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John Boyes (1875-1951) was a British born ivory trader and soldier of fortune in Africa.

If true, and it is declared to be authentic, this is certainly one of the most remarkable stories of adventure told in many a year. The author describes how he, a young Englishman, entered East Africa as a trader, gained such ascendancy over the wild tribe of the Kikuyu that they made him their king, continuing thus until the English captured him and let him barely escape with his life. The descriptions are vivid, and bring to light the Kikuyu country.

From inside the book:

"THE following pages describe a life of adventure in the more remote parts of Africa— adventures such as the explorer and sportsmen do not generally encounter. The man to whom the episodes narrated in this book refer has been personally known to me for ten years. We have hunted big game and explored together many a time in the African jungle ; and as it is principally at my instigation that he has put the following account of his experiences into writing, I think it is due to him and to the public that I should make known my responsibility in the matter.

It seemed to me that the adventures John Boyes underwent were something quite out of the common ; in these matter-of-fact days they may be said to be almost unique. In the of exploration and discovery, when Captain Cook and such heroes lived and thrived, they were perhaps common enough; but every year the opportunities of such adventure get more and more remote, and as the uttermost parts, of the earth are brought under the influence of civilization will become ever more impossible. For this reason alone a story such as told here seems to be worth recording.

"There is no attempt at literary style. The man tells his tale in a simple, matter-of-fact way, and, as his Editor, I have thought it better from every point of view to leave his words as he has written them.

"The reader will judge for himself as to the interest of the adventures here related, but I think any one will admit that no ordinary force of character was necessary to carry them through to a successful issue. The whole life of the author during the time he was a wanderer in the Kikuyu country, and later while he was practically supreme ruler of the tribe—a tribe numbering half a million of people— was one of imminent daily risk.

"Each hour he went about with his life in his hands, and if he came out scatheless from the melee, he has only to thank his courage, nerve, and 'resource. AH these qualities he obviously possessed in a high degree.

"He appears to have been harshly treated by the British East Africa authorities. Doubtless much that he did was grossly misrepresented to them by more or less interested parties. He certainly did yeoman's service to the colony in its early days by opening up an unknown and hostile country which lay right on the border land of the Uganda Railway, at that time in course of construction. His energetic action enabled the coolies on the line to work safe from many hostile attacks. He supplied them with the food without which they would have

starved— all for a very small reward, and at great personal risk to himself. But the love of adventure was in him, and such people do not work for profit alone. The life itself brings its own reward. An impartial observer will perhaps be able to understand the point of view of the British Administration, and will appreciate their difficulty, indeed their ability, to allow an independent white power to rule beside their own; but the public will judge for themselves whether they set about to do what they did with regard to John Boyes in the most tactful way, or whether they treated a brave fellow-country man in the manner he deserved."

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