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BLACK AND WHITE



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JOURNEY IN THE DARK
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PLAYS

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LADY OF THE ROSE
SERVICE FOR TWO
THE CRIMINAL CODE
BROKEN DISHES
CROSS ROADS
SPINDRIFT
DANCING DAYS
AMACO
ACHILLES HAD A HEEL
TAPESTRY IN GRAY
AROUND THE CORNER
BLUE JEANS
SIX ONE ACT PLAYS



BLACK AND WHITE

FROM THE CAPE TO THE CONGO

By MARTIN FLAVIN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL WHITMAN



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS NEW YORK



BLACK AND WHITE

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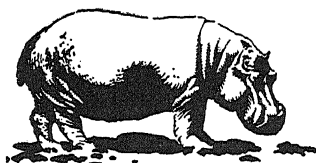
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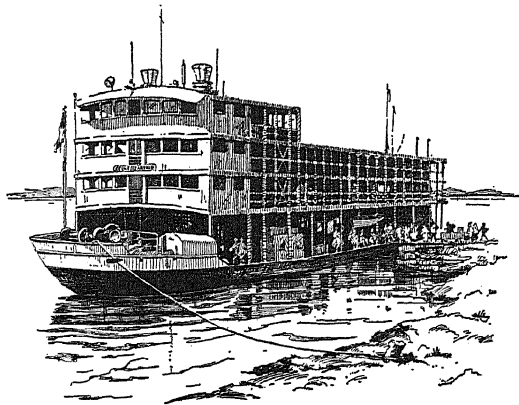


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I AM INDEBTED to Douglas Buchanan of Cape Town, for making possible my visit with Chief Tshekedi Khama in Bechuanaland; to Max Horn of Brussels, who inspired and guided my travels in the Congo; to Governor Maurice Simon of Usumbura, and Governor and Madame Ernest Bock of Stanleyville, whose kindness and generous hospitality far exceeded their official obligations; to the many officers of the Colonial Government, who were unfailingly courteous and helpful to me; to René J. Cornet, from whose recent books, *La Bataille du rail* and *Le Katanga*, I have quoted freely in my historical sketch of the Congo; to Louis de Lacger, whose exhaustive and absorbing works, *Le Ruanda ancien* and *Le Ruanda moderne*, have been the basis for my chapter on that region.

M. F.



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BLACK AND WHITE



SOUTH AFRICA

The Durban Deep

MR. BROOKS of Vacuum Oil called for me at 7:45 A.M., at my hotel in Johannesburg, to take me to a gold mine.

I had come up from Cape Town a day or two before on the "Blue Train," a miniature "Twentieth Century," of which the residents are justly proud. It runs twice a week and does the thousand miles in twenty-seven hours, ten hours faster than the ordinary trains, which isn't very fast, but fast for Africa. It's Continental in design, air-conditioned, and equipped with most of the gadgets to which we are accustomed in America. Unlike most African trains it has soap, towels, and toilet paper. Incidentally, it is almost impossible to get on it—like those exclusive schools for which you must be entered when you're born. But the Ministry of Transportation came to my rescue and got me a cute little coupe all to myself. It's a good train, and I was glad to get on it and very sorry to get off. The only place in South Africa where I was equally comfortable was a hospital in Johannesburg where I spent four wonderful days.

Johannesburg, or Joburg as they call it, is an urban island in the midst of nowhere, a pin point in the vast, sad wilderness of Africa: a city of nearly a million population, about half of which is black and lives on the wrong side of the tracks—really outside the town, in sordid Jim Crow areas to which it is restricted. The white people refer to themselves as Europeans, and call the Negroes Natives. Strictly speaking these designations are ethnologically unsound, but

they serve the purpose of the color line. The South Africans are very proud of Joburg. Some of the more enthusiastic and less well-informed say it is like New York. But they are mistaken about that. It's more like Detroit, with a dash of Butte, Montana, and a pinch of Houston, Texas—a kind of composite of the three. It's a mining town in fact, without any other excuse for its existence, built on a gold mine—or rather, on a lot of them, on a narrow seam of gold-bearing rock, known as the Reef, outcropping from a flat and broad plateau, six thousand feet above the sea.

The city is three years younger than I am, and on the whole, I think, is less well preserved. The core of it is an ugly, throbbing, congested business section, sprawling planlessly, and glutted with traffic, depressingly unequal to its present needs; fringed with residential sections in process of, or threatened with, absorption; thinning out into attractive suburbs—expensive homes with well-kept lawns and gardens, and winding tree-lined streets; country clubs, and bowling clubs for bowling on the green, tennis courts and swimming pools, cricket grounds and soccer fields; the whole ringed round for part of its circumference, at a respectful distance antipodal to the suburban area, with wretched Native slums—the most appalling slums I've ever seen. Finally, there are the mine dumps, rearing from the landscape—ocher-colored hills growing into modest mountains, pyramids of powdered stone geometrically designed, not devoid of beauty of a cold, forbidding sort, certainly impressive against the deep blue sky, which seems deeper and bluer in Africa than elsewhere: the monuments of Joburg, night soil of successful enterprise, excrement expelled in sixty years of eager, unremitting gluttony.

Gold, not diamonds, is the wealth of South Africa, in a ratio of 10 to 1 for gold. Even wool is far ahead of diamonds. But gold is at the top, far ahead of everything. The average annual production is 12,000,000 ounces, which at \$34.50 per fine ounce, has a value of \$414,000,000. There are 2,335,460 European (white) men, women, and children in the Union of South Africa—or were alleged to be the last time they were counted. If the gold were divided equally among them, each man, woman, and child would receive about \$200 yearly. But it's not divided among them; and there is no good reason why it should be, since they take little part in the production of it. There are 7,735,809 Native (black) men, women, and children

in the Union; and, in addition, 905,050 so-called Colored (mixed breeds), plus a handful of Asiatics. Or say, to summarize, almost 9,000,000 non-Europeans—four blacks for every white. If the gold were divided among the dark-skinned people, they would each get something less than \$50. But it's not divided among them either, though they are the ones who actually produce it, who perform all the hard, menial labor of the mines.



Some 300,000 Native workers are employed in the gold mines of South Africa: contract labor, with an average term of fourteen months employment, which of course can be repeated, and usually is. This labor is largely recruited from the Native Reserves, which comprise only 12 per cent of the Union's total area of 472,550 square miles. It is worthy of note that although there are four times as many blacks as whites, only one-eighth of the country has been allocated to them, wherein they may maintain some semblance of their natural tribal life and culture, and hold up their heads like men. To make the picture a little more graphic, let's put it this way: $5\frac{1}{2}$ Europeans to 1 square mile; 160 non-Europeans to 1 square mile. But the blacks are not confined to reservations; they are everywhere of course, and for one excellent reason: the Native Reserves will not support the Native population, not even on the bare subsistence level to which it is conditioned. They must get out or starve. No

good to say, as is so often said—if they were skilled, efficient cultivators of the soil (which they are not)—if they had the proper mechanized equipment (which they haven't)—if they didn't spend their money buying cattle to trade for working wives (which is their way of life)—if this, if that— The fact remains that, being what they are, they must get out or starve.

Hence cheap labor for the farms and for the mines, for every menial task. The labor unions and the law effectively debar them from skilled occupations and economic progress. Hence the dreadful, festering urban slums; hence disease and poverty and crime. Hence \$400,000,000 per annum worth of gold. But recruitment of labor for the mines is not confined within the borders of the Union, suggesting that the mining occupation is not as popular as sometimes represented. Labor is recruited from Portuguese East Africa, from Bechuanaland, even from as far away as the Rhodesias.

The South African lives in terror of two things. One is a decline in the price of gold, which he is helpless to prevent. For gold is not an ordinary commodity, like a cabbage or a motorcar, on which you can raise the price if your cost should be increased. The implementing sources of the price of gold are political rather than economic, and at all events remote from South African control. The other dread that haunts their sleepless nights is fear of an increase in the cost of labor—the labor which must produce the gold, if it is to be produced. I have said that the wealth of South Africa is gold, but the statement should be carried a step further: the real wealth of the country is cheap labor, deprived of which the Union would be bankrupt overnight. Without ruthless exploitation, and suppression, of a vast, subsistence-level labor pool, the economy of the country would be incapable of functioning. And in this day and age, that should be enough to keep a sober man awake.

The mines are at the apex of the general situation, and thereby serve as a focus of attention: what happens in the mines will happen elsewhere. Their position at the moment is said to be precarious. The mines are deep—the deepest gold mines in the world; only black men can, or will, work at these levels. And the deeper down you go the more difficult it gets, and the more expensive. And Native labor, as yet unorganized, unacquainted with and not yet equal to such complicated undertaking as collective bargaining, outlawed

by statute from most of the rights which we regard as inherent civil liberties—Native Labor is nonetheless awakening, slowly and painfully, to its wretched situation. Faint echoes from the outer world are coming to its ears in the galleries underground, and in the urban centers. The gold mines may indeed turn out to be volcanoes—almost any time.

The thoughtful citizen is not unaware of this, and is doing what he can, with what light he is endowed, to avert, or to postpone, a day of reckoning. With the Nationalist party in control of the government—a recent, unexpected political upset—repression and coercion should gain fresh impetus. But it would be a mistake to ascribe these policies to cruel and ruthless men. The European, like the Native, is the victim of a situation which he has inherited, which has grown slowly through a hundred years, for which no one can be said to be responsible. He is facing a problem which seems to him insoluble on any other terms than the present status quo; his purpose is to keep the problem where it is, not to let it worsen—which is of course impossible. He believes he is fighting for his life. And so indeed he may be—a losing fight, I think; but there is wide divergence of opinion about that. At all events he is neither a monster nor a brute, but an average, decent fellow—or as decent as any of us are. He wants to do the right thing, just as much as you and I. He may be stupid and shortsighted, and I rather think he is. But the problem isn't mine, and tolerance grows with distance. I don't know how I'd feel if I were in his place, and I'm equally doubtful about you.

It should be noted that the European population is by no means united, politically or socially. In the region of the Cape the atmosphere is British; but the interior of the country is largely dominated by the Afrikaners, as the Boers are called, descendants of those hardy Dutch and Huguenot pioneers who were original settlers of the land, with an Afrikaans language of their own, and highly separatist and reactionary tendencies. Politically, they are the Nationalists, isolationist by instinct and tradition: South Africa for the South Africans; and by South Africans, they mean themselves, the Boers. The unsuccessful war they fought with Britain for their independence has not been forgotten, nor have their objectives been relinquished. The wounds were deep and much bitterness remains. In personality, the

Afrikaners are not unlike our Texans: a shade less rough and noisy, but friendly and informal, rugged individualists accustomed to big country.



I HAD a limited time to spend in Joburg, and I wanted to see the inside of a gold mine. I had thought there would be no difficulty about this, but it turned out otherwise. Gold mines are open to visitors twice a week, a designated mine on a designated day. The mines rotate among themselves the responsibility of entertaining visitors. A certain number of applications are accepted for each occasion, and when the quota has been reached the list is closed. There was a day which fell within my scheduled time, but I was too late to be accepted. At this point Vacuum Oil comes into the picture. I had a letter of introduction to the managing director, and, as it turned out, they had made application for some visiting employees, one of whom was kind enough to retire in my stead, saying he could arrange to go another time. And so, for the day, I assumed his name and place.

Hence Mr. Brooks, at 7:45 A.M., in a baby Peugeot car, the back seat of which was already overloaded with two young visiting oil men from the Free State, who welcomed me with easy hospitality. I had brought with me, as I had been instructed, a bath towel and a change of underwear, and, with this bundle underneath my arm and an inconvenient camera hung around my neck, I climbed into the seat with Mr. Brooks. We crawled down the street, already thick with traffic, past the railway station with its stand of dilapidated rickshas—the only ones I saw in Johannesburg, and exclusively for Natives, I suppose, since I never saw a white man riding in one. There are Jim Crow busses for them, but at infrequent intervals and hopelessly inadequate; and they may ride on the trackless trolley cars, if they are accompanied by a white man—a generous regulation which enables the white man to keep his servant near him. And the black man may walk freely on the streets of Joburg, with his luggage on his head, until nine o'clock at night—and even after that, if he has a

pass signed by a white man. There are many aspects of the South African color line which are painfully reminiscent of those we have at home. But there is one important, fundamental difference: every step the black man is able to take forward in America has the support of law—of National law at least; in South Africa every step he takes is in violation and defiance of it. The cards are stacked against him.

We emerged out of the city onto a broad, paved highway, flanked with mine dumps; and, in the distance, with Native areas: Sophiatown, a squalid slum of 60,000; four-room houses with one family to a room, water from a faucet in the yard, bucket privies which are emptied at night into disposal wagons. Farther off, Orlando, a community of 90,000, in a treeless, sun-bleached, wind-swept plain; fairly decent housing, but the same overcrowded, intolerable conditions; no facilities for recreation or entertainment, scarcely any shops; schools to accommodate only a fraction of the children; medical dispensaries utterly inadequate to the population. A poor, sad place. But they do the best they can: there are yards with pretty flowers, and crowded rooms as clean and neat as can be, with curtains at the windows and pictures on the wall and teacups on a shelf. The workers of Orlando trudge back and forth to Joburg to their jobs, a round trip which may well consume five hours of the day. If they waited for busses it might take them longer. Still farther is Meroka, the plague spot of the country—of the world perhaps: a settlement of 60,000 squatters, in a kind of no man's land; shelters made of odds and ends of everything—tin cans and rags and sacks and scraps of wood, not even approaching the dignity of hovels. And it can be bitter cold on this high plateau of Africa, and sometimes it rains for days. There has been trouble in Meroka, and there will be again.

It was a fine midsummer day, near the end of February. Billowy, white cloud racks drifted slowly through the sky, very high above the earth, seeming somehow to emphasize the vastness of the landscape, to widen and expand the rim of the horizon till it melted into nothing at the very end of nowhere. Not even on the sea have I felt the world so big as it seems in Africa—nor so lonely and so sad. Mr. Brooks, himself an affable young man, remarked that we were lucky: the mine which was open for visitors on this day was the Durban Roodepoort Deep—one of the really deep ones, near nine

thousand feet, he thought, which was about the limit they could work and make a profit on it. He was well acquainted with the mines, he said, had worked in one himself when he was a boy. "Not a bad job for a youngster," he reflected, but engineering was his line and he preferred the oil business, which at least had the virtue of the open air. "And the Natives?" I inquired. "How do they like working underground?"—"Oh, they love it," he assured me. "They're better fed than they ever dreamed of being. They come in like scarecrows, and go out like fancy cattle. They work a few months and save their money, and then they can go home and buy themselves more women."—"And then?" I queried.—"Then?" He thought about it. "Well, they sit around, till they're hungry, I suppose; and then they leave their wives to till the ground, and come on back and have another go."—"It doesn't seem to get them anywhere," I said.—"No," he agreed, "I don't suppose it does. But then you see they haven't really anywhere to get."

He stopped the car and pointed out a low brick wall around a narrow patch of naked ground—formal gateposts, and an iron gate opening into nothing, as if someone had started to construct a house, beginning with the garden wall and not going any farther. "There!" he said. "That's supposed to be a monument, but they never finished it. There's a plate on the gatepost, and that's all." And there was a tarnished plate, undecipherable from where we sat, across the road from it. The boys in the back seat looked out languidly. "That's the very spot," Brooks said, "where the gold reef was discovered." He drove along, relating the circumstances of it—

The sixty-mile gold reef of the Witwatersrand ("Ridge of the White Waters" in the Dutch language) was discovered in 1886. Among the occasional gold seekers who wandered through the country, was a prospector named Fred Struben. The region of high veld was a desolate, barren one which had yielded little profit to the Dutch pioneers of half a century earlier, most of whom had perished fighting at their wagon wheels, slain by Matabele warriors who sought to bar their way. But in 1886 there was no great danger from hostile assagai, nor determined competition for possession of the bleak and inhospitable country, which the natives indeed had never greatly valued. Fred Struben could wander at his will, in peril

of no greater hazards than exposure to the weather and starvation, with both of which he acquired some acquaintance. He found gold here and there in negligible quantities; but he didn't find the reef, though it seems he was convinced that it was there, and kept on searching for it with dogged, dauntless courage—which in any other line of human undertaking would deserve a designation of psychotic.

A man named George Walker had been employed by Struben to supplement his efforts, at a spot some miles distant from what is now Johannesburg, and which was then a village of about 100 people. But Walker was a more fragile vessel than his employer, and presently grew weary of the gold-seeking life. So in due course he resigned from Struben's service and went to look for work of a more rewarding nature, at a settlement called Langlaagte, where he found employment with a farmer. His eyes were sharp enough to notice, unelatedly perhaps, that the doorway of the barn, which was built of conglomerate stone, contained indubitable specks of gold. And shortly afterwards, while idly strolling about, the toe of his boot struck and dislodged an outcrop of the gold-bearing rock. He went directly to the owner of the farm, saying simply and briefly these historic words, "I have found the main reef." And so in fact, as it turned out, he had. There is nothing more to chronicle of Walker, save that in the fine tradition of great discoverers, he died obscurely and in abject poverty.



AS MR. BROOKS concluded his account we turned off the highway, on a tree-lined road, at the end of which was a group of neat brick buildings, one storey high, containing the managerial offices of the Durban Roodepoort Deep. Behind the buildings, at some distance, was an ocher-colored dump of sizable proportions, and less far off the ugly structure of a hoist. Motorcars were parked around a patch of lawn, and from some of them the visitors of the day were

now alighting. There were, on later counting, twenty-four of us, about equally divided as to sex, of a wide variety of ages, and representing several nationalities. The only Americans besides myself were three determined women from Los Angeles. We stood around and waited, the usual procedure on excursions of this sort. It was hot in the sun and some of us went in and waited in the hall. The boys from the Free State were sizing up two unaccompanied girls and Brooks had strolled away in search of information.

A young Anglican cleric with a thin, ascetic, sensitive face and a cultured British accent, exchanged a word with me and introduced himself. He told me he had been in Africa five years, had come out direct from Oxford. He was now at the head of a mission in Sophiatown—of a school which began with kindergarten, and went on through grade and high school. But they could only take one child in three or four, in the district that they served; there were so many children; conditions were deplorable. He said it was at the age of adolescence that the Native boy or girl was in desperate need of help. Before that they seemed unaware of the color line—or at least of its more crippling implications. But with adolescence, frustration came to torture them—awareness that the white man's way of life, which had been forced upon them, had no place in it for them; that there was no future for them, no matter where they turned; no youthful ambition they could hope to gratify; no road they could follow without quickly coming to a sign which read, KEEP OUT.

He gave me this example: in a school, with which he had acquaintance, a young preceptor newly come from England, had introduced a modest business course—really nothing more than shorthand and typing, but which promised some vocational opportunity. The teen-age boys and girls had been elated, had gone at the undertaking with a will. At the end of the term some of them gave promise of being expert typists, or even secretaries. But then it turned out that there were not any jobs for Native typists, no positions they could fill. The young preceptor hadn't thought of that, or hadn't thought that far. One girl had killed herself, and the class had been abandoned. "Things like that," he said.

I asked a question: "In what way are the Natives different from the rest of us?"—"There is no real difference," he replied. "What appears to be a difference is actually a lag, due in the main to

deficient opportunity.”—“You mean they have the same potentialities—for technical skills, for intellectual speculation?”—“Exactly. With the same individual variations.”—“What about their moral character?”—“Morality,” he smiled, “is a question of geography.”—“Yes, I know,” I said. “But, to be specific, are they less honest than the white man?”—“No.” He shook his head. “They are by nature simple, gentle people—hospitable, kind.” He paused with a shy look in his eyes, as if he were afraid he might be shocking me. “I like the Natives. I would rather live among them than among the Europeans.”

Brooks came hurrying back with information. There was a treat in store for us, he said, something that visitors rarely had a chance to see, as it only happened at infrequent intervals, and very seldom on a visiting day: they were casting ingots in the smelter—ingots of pure gold; and that was the first thing we would have a look at. The excursion began to come to life. Someone instructed us to go into a room where a man behind a table checked our names against a list and took our signatures on a document of some kind, presumably a waiver of liability. But the name I signed was not my own, so it didn't seem to matter what I might be signing and I didn't stop to read it. We were now directed to get back into our cars, and to follow a lead car through the gate.

There was nothing much to see when we got inside: a considerable enclosure, with the mine dump and the hoist as its most conspicuous features; and some shedlike buildings here and there, neither numerous nor imposing. We stopped in front of one of them, and a pleasant-faced young fellow, of the engineering type, directed us to go inside where we would be equipped with coveralls and helmets like those that he was wearing. He glanced at my shoes and said I should have worn older ones. And I said I would have, but the ones I had on were the only ones I had. The hoist was clanging up and down, and ore was being dumped, rattling into something; but there were scarcely any workers to be seen, no suggestion of a great industrial undertaking. And I remarked about it.—“The business of a gold mine is underground,” he said, and added patiently that the Durban Deep employed 10,000 men, housed in two compounds of about 5,000 each, one of which we would be shown in due time. The mine operated on three shifts, eight hours each, six days in the week. But

the night shift was a small one, not a mining shift in fact, but a clean-up and repair crew. I asked him if the Natives were satisfactory workers.—“Oh, they’re all right,” he shrugged. “Of course they’re bloody stupid, and they’re lazy. But they’re all right, if you tell ’em what to do and stand by and watch ’em do it.”—“Do they like their jobs, working in the mine?”—“I wouldn’t know,” he said. “I never asked ’em.” And he added that I better hurry up and change my clothes or I might not find any coveralls to fit me.

There were two dressing rooms for visitors, one for men and one for women. The men’s was like a locker room in a modest country club, with hooks on the wall to hang your clothing and benches underneath, and two old-fashioned showers behind a wood partition. In a corner on the floor was a pile of blue denim coveralls; and though they’d been picked over by the early comers, I found one I could wear, albeit rather snug. I stripped to my undershirt, and afterwards regretted I hadn’t stripped that, too. Brooks had thoughtfully reserved a helmet for me, of shiny steel, with a hooded light bulb fastened on the front. It was heavy and uncomfortable, and steadily grew more so. My clerical acquaintance was hanging his clothing on the next hook to mine, and I remarked that a visit to a gold mine was probably no novelty to him. On the contrary, he told me, he had never paid a visit to a mine before, though he had long intended it; and he added rather sadly, “In Sophiatown we live in the shadow of the mines.”—“You mean that labor is recruited there?”—“No, not that,” he said. “The urbanized Native is too smart to take the bait, and most mine labor is recruited far away, in the country districts. The workers come alone; there is no provision in the compounds for their families. And so, when they go home, at the end of the period for which they have contracted, some of them leave souvenirs behind.”—“Souvenirs?” I questioned.—“Yes, souvenirs,” he smiled. “Babies they have fathered. And we have many of them in Sophiatown.”

Brooks interrupted, calling from the door. We went out and joined the ladies, who were similarly garbed in coveralls and helmets; and walked to the smelter which wasn’t far away—housed in a modest building, with the general appearance of a country blacksmith shop. As I stepped across the threshold, out of brilliant sunlight into semidarkness, some Native workmen, stripped to their

waists, wearing thick asbestos gloves and eyeshades, were in process of removing a brick of solid gold from one of several small furnaces which occupied the end of the room. The ingot was in a mold, suggestive of a bread tin, only somewhat larger. It was drawn from the furnace on a paddle, like a baker's. Except for the blinding orange glare in the oven's mouth, and the golden halo round the mold and avalanche of sparks, it might have been no more than a big-sized loaf of bread. It was the last loaf of the day, and was quickly cooled and dumped from the mold onto the earthen floor, where there were several more of them, already cold and black and unimportant looking.

"About \$400,000 worth of gold," a superintendent told us, as we gathered round in an awed, respectful circle. Somebody suggested that it looked a simple matter to get away with one. "Pick one up and try it," the superintendent said. So we had a go at that, picking up a gold brick weighing sixty pounds; it was too small for its weight or too heavy for its size; anyhow, there seemed no convenient way to hold it. The Native workers, of whom there might have been about a dozen in the place, went on about their business, exhibiting no interest in what was going on. They didn't laugh or smile, or seem aware of us. In a corner of the room there was a vat, or washtub, presided over by a European; and I walked over to see what he was doing. He was cleaning the gold bricks as they were carried to him, scraping off the crumbs and blackened scale. He said I needn't worry that any of the stuff would get away: every grain of it was caught in fine mesh screens in the bottom of the tub. The bricks began to look like gold when he got through with them.

He asked me where I came from and I told him from America. "From America?" he chuckled. "That's where we send the gold; you chaps buy it from us. We dig it up and ship it overseas; and you take it off to some place called—Kentucky, I believe, and bury it again."—"That's right," I said.—"It doesn't seem to make much sense," he grinned. "Might just as well leave it buried over here." He paused to scrape the surface of a brick with a wire brush. "It takes five thousand tons of rock to smelt out one of these; and that's a lot of digging, and a lot of sweating, too." I asked him what the Natives thought about it. And he answered, with a twinkle in

his eye, that he didn't think they'd heard about it yet. "When they do," he said, "I expect they'll laugh their heads off."

The tour was departing and I started for the door, but he called after me, "What sort of place is this—Kentucky?"—"It's a state," I told him. "Like what you call a province."—"Oh—" He nodded. "Is it near the place where they make the atom bombs?"—"Right next door to it," I said.—"Well, that's good," he chuckled. "Keep 'em close together. One won't be much good without the other."

We walked a short distance to the hoist, where, while we waited for the cage, we were equipped with batteries for our helmet lamps—flat, rather heavy boxes belted to our waists. The Native boys who brought and strapped them on, were quick and deft about it, but not talkative or friendly. They disappeared, and presently returned with armfuls of overcoats—thick, heavy ones, like army issue. "When you come up you'll need them," our conductor said. "It's hot down there and you're likely to get chilled coming up the shaft." We had several guides by now—six or eight of them, young fellows for the most part, competent and friendly, taking watchful care that none of us should come to any harm. The cage came clattering up: a narrow iron box roofed with heavy mesh, with double gates at either end, hinged to open inward. We crowded into it, about thirty men and women, including our conductors, and there was no room to spare; indeed, to close the gates, we had to push and wriggle. But at last they were banged shut, and down we went—five thousand feet of swift descent without a pause, a drop six times greater than from the top of the RCA Building to the ground. When the cage came to a stop someone remarked that there were hoists in the mines which traveled at a speed of thirty-five hundred feet per minute (forty miles an hour); and which, he added, was two and one-half times as fast as the fastest skyscraper elevator in New York. I don't know if ours was one of these, but it went down pretty fast. Opening the gates was a difficult affair, since we were packed against them like sardines. With a lot of squirming we opened them a crack, wide enough to enable some of us to dribble out, until finally there was room to push them back. I suppose they dare not have them open out, lest they should come open while the cage is moving. At all events I thought them ill-contrived, wasteful of space and time-consuming.



WE WERE in a spacious cavern, illuminated with electric lights, with a narrow-gauge track along one side of it, which disappeared at either end into galleries in the rock. At this point we were mercifully relieved of our overcoats, and informed they'd be waiting for us later on, at another shaft. There were several other shafts, they said, and we would not return by the one we had descended. There was not much activity in sight, and indeed there wasn't much anywhere they took us. Perhaps that was designed; perhaps they avoided the more active operations, for fear of interfering with the work, or of injury to us. It is possible, of course, there were things they didn't care to have us see, though that I doubt. In any case it was difficult to believe that 4,000 men (an average day shift, I suppose) were working in the mine. If they were they must have been where we were not, or spread very thin in the network of galleries.

There was a rumble of approaching cars in the dark depths of the tunnel, then the winking lights on the helmets of the men; and presently the train came into sight: little dump cars filled with rock and pushed by hand, two workers to a car, young fellows for the most part, stripped to their waists and their bodies sleek with sweat, the whites of their eyes as white as fish belly. They barely glanced at us as they trudged slowly by, not chattering or laughing or kidding one another, and not cursing or complaining, but silent and impassive—yes, and sad; like oxen pulling plows, without knowing what they're doing or any reason for it, and ill at ease about it, uncomfortable, embarrassed by an unnatural task; yet docile and resigned. That was the expression in their eyes, when I thought about it afterwards—the basic aspect of it, sometimes tinged with sullenness, with deep unvoiced resentment—in the eyes of most of them, in the mine and on the ground, wherever they are laboring in the service of the white man: in the eyes of houseboys passing cocktails at a party, and of stevedores working cargo on the docks at Cape Town, docile and resigned, alien and sad.

It was hot and humid, like a tropical conservatory: hot and close enough to make me feel a little faint, though there were blowers pumping in fresh air, and standing underneath one, it was fairly comfortable. But a few steps away the air was like a wet and sticky blanket wrapped around your head. We snapped on our helmet lights and set off into the tunnel where the cars had disappeared—a straggling procession, escorted by our guides. Brooks and the Oxford man and the two boys from the Free State walked along with me, and the engineering fellow who had criticized my shoes kept close beside us. He asked me if I felt all right and I said I did, which was trifling with the truth. I was thinking to myself: if I take it easy and am careful not to hurry, I may survive this trip. I'd been down in mines before, I don't know how deep, but this was the hottest and the wettest. My coveralls were soaked with sweat already, or maybe with water condensed out of the air. It was wet underfoot: puddles in the space between the tracks; and water dripping from the roof and trickling down the walls, which looked like granite and were not heavily timbered. Drip, drip, drip—you could hear it everywhere. I asked our guide how they got rid of it, for I saw no sign of pumps. "We drain it farther down," he said, "and pump it out from there." I ventured to inquire if we, ourselves, were going any lower. He said he didn't know, but probably we would—maybe as far down as seventy-five hundred, which was not far from the bottom. "I hope we will," chirped Brooks. I hoped we wouldn't, but I kept it to myself.

Presently we overtook the string of dump cars. They had stopped and were unloading—onto the floor of the tunnel, it appeared. But this was not the case; they were dumping the rock into a chute which went down somewhere. I had trouble understanding this until it was explained that the cars which would be hoisted to the surface were on a lower level, and the ore was being fed directly into them. "Sounds silly, I suppose," our guide remarked. "But gravity is what we use whenever we can do it. It's easier to drop things than it is to lift 'em up." I let it go at that, but I still don't understand it very well—nor how you'd ever start a mine that way, for in the beginning there would be nowhere to drop things. But I was too hot and uncomfortable to care.

We stood for a while to watch the dumping. There was a Euro-

pean foreman on the job, not performing any labor, but watching and directing, as indeed there always was when Natives were employed at anything. This one, for our benefit perhaps, was being brisk and sharp, shouting snappy orders in some Bantu language. It seemed a very simple operation and I asked why it required a white man to direct it. The answer was the usual one, that you couldn't trust a Native to do anything correctly by himself. To illustrate his thesis our conductor told a story which I'd already heard a dozen times, and which, with variations, goes like this: there was a fire somewhere and a Native bucket brigade went into action, for which its members had been scrupulously trained; the blacks ran back and forth in perfect order, some distance to a stream, with buckets full of water on their heads. One of them had no bucket, but he ran with the others, in his proper place, with a sardine tin of water balanced on his skull. Brooks and the Free State boys laughed heartily. I glanced inquiringly at the Oxford clergyman, but he smiled and shook his head, as if to say there was no use discussing it.

"How much are the Natives paid?" I asked.—"Two bob (fifty cents) a day," our guide replied. "And of course their food and housing. That's the basic pay."—"You mean that some earn more?"—"A little more," he said.—"And what's the basic pay for the white man in the mine?"—He named a figure which amounted to eleven times the Native wage.—"But the white man has to feed and lodge himself," amended Brooks. "The Native's better off a lot of ways, what with medical attention and everything he needs." He elaborated on it as we walked along: if the Native stuck it out for fourteen months, an average term of contract, say roughly around 350 working days; if he saved his money, which he could do if he wanted, he would wind up at the end with \$175. "And that's a lot of money for a Native," he concluded.—"But they don't save all their money," the Oxford man objected. Brooks tossed that off. "It's up to them," he said.

We tramped on through the tunnel, which was reasonably spacious, with ample head room save now and then for timbers arched across it. There was nothing to suggest that gold was being mined, nothing to be seen except the dripping walls, gleaming wetly in the light we flashed upon them. The tunnel

curved and angled here and there, aimlessly it seemed, though perhaps it had followed an erratic seam of gold which had been dug and finished. But that was pure conjecture on my part. At last it widened out into another cavern, like the one from which we'd started. And here we overtook the balance of the party,* grouped around a staging, climbing into something which startlingly suggested a small flat-bottomed boat, almost standing on its nose. "A kind of chute-the-chutes," our guide explained. And so indeed it was: a shaft sunk at an angle, with iron boats that slid, or rolled, upon a track—like little landing craft (it took three of them to hold the thirty of us)—like baking dishes really, with iron lids that clamped across the tops. The tourists were having fun about it. There were no seats in the boats; and, sitting on the floor, when the lids came down, there was no room for their heads. They had to flatten out, on top of one another. Then the lid would be banged shut, and down they'd go—like traveling in a coffin on a roller coaster.

I was in the very front of my boat, which was not the place to be, as all the other passengers slid down toward my end. Fortunately there was little room to slide; we were packed too tight for that. When the lid came down I ducked my head, but it jammed my helmet hard and almost tore my ears off. I was wedged between the two boys from the Free State, with the elbow of one of them digging in my throat and the knees of the other jabbed into my stomach. They asked solicitously if I was comfortable; and I told them I was fine, which was a lie. Somebody pressed a button, or did something, and down we went, with that old devil Gravity dancing on our backs and ramming us together till I thought I should be smothered. How fast? I have no notion; but in next to nothing we were there. The lid clanged up and we crawled out—like the fabled birds emerging from a pie. We were in another cavern, similar to the others, but a thousand feet closer to the center of the earth, and six thousand feet below the surface of the ground—just level with the sea. It was hotter and wetter, but otherwise unchanged.

I sat down in a puddle on the floor to catch my breath and straighten out my ears. Then off we trudged again, the five of us at the tail of the procession, into another tunnel, with neither tracks

nor dump cars, less spacious than the last one and with more timbering in it. The dripping water trickled along the sides of it; here and there, in dead-end caves, it stood in still, black pools, fenced off with wooden railings—abandoned pits of unknown depth, filled to overflowing. There was no sign of life; the tunnel seemed deserted, until at last we heard the muffled chatter of a pneumatic drill—a welcome sound in the silence of the place. And suddenly we came around a corner on the workers: two Natives, and a foreman who was standing idly by. They were in a narrow alcove in the tunnel wall; and the man with the drill was working in a hole in the ceiling of it, standing on a step cut in the rock, all of him out of sight except his legs. The other man was standing near, holding the heavy air hose. When we paused to look, the foreman cut the air off, and the deafening racket stopped. They were mining gold, I thought. But I was wrong. It turned out to be another gravitational matter: digging *up* a chute to connect another tunnel. I felt cheated and disgusted. “Why don’t you dig them down?” I asked him irritably. “If we dug them *down*,” he said, with admirable forbearance, “how would we get the rock out of the hole that we were digging?”—I hadn’t thought of that.—He went on to explain they were drilling for a blast; when the rock was loosened it would come tumbling down and could be hauled away.—“Okay, that’s clear,” I said. “But how did this thing get started, before it had a bottom, before there was a place from which you could dig *up*.”—“I wouldn’t know,” he grinned. “That was before my time.”

The man with the drill had climbed down out of the pocket in which he had been working. He was a Zulu. I could tell this by his tribal decoration: flat, white discs of bone inserted in his broad, distorted ear lobes. He was naked to the waist, with goggles on his eyes and a helmet on his head, and so thickly smeared with powdered stone and sweat that his coal-black skin was gray. He was young, in the flood tide of his strength—a Zulu boy, descendant of a proud and warlike nation which the white man had subdued with long and painful effort. He stood beside his helper, with the drill clasped in his arms, crouching with the weight of it, staring at us dully, half blinded by the light we focused on him. And then he raised his hand and pushed his goggles up; and his eyes were like the others—alien and sad.

His ragged jeans were ripped in a revealing place, and someone made a laughing reference to the fact, without, I'm sure, intent to give offense. The Oxford man turned away and walked on by himself. People in South Africa are prone to make remarks about the Natives in their presence, as if they were not there. At a dinner table, for example, I have heard them discuss the Native Question in its most alarming aspects, in the hearing of the servants, even to point of anecdotes which reflected on the boys engaged in serving them. Once or twice I had ventured to inquire how they dared to be so frank, though "frank" was not exactly what I meant. What I really had in mind was "so callous and unkind." In reply I had been told that the Natives never listened to what was being said, that they didn't understand and didn't care. But I had seen them listening, seen it in their eyes, and seen them care. And this Zulu boy had listened and had cared.



WE WENT on through the tunnel, and in a moment heard the drill begin again. Our guide was describing the technique of blasting—a white man's job, he said; no Native was allowed to use explosive, under any circumstances, anywhere.—"Why not?" I asked.—"Because they'd blow themselves to hell."—"What makes you think they would?"—"Because they're made that way; they haven't got the know-how. It simply isn't in them."—"Have you ever tried them at it?"—No, he never had, he said; and the day that they were tried he would quit the mining business. We overtook the Oxford man, and, walking at his side, I put the question to him: would he trust the handling of explosive to a Native?—"Of course," he said. "Why not?" And he added with a smile that in the recent war they had handled plenty of it with considerable effect. "It's like this," he said. "When a white man does a stupid thing he is said to be a fool, and it's let to go at that. But when a Native makes a

slip it's because his skin is black, and the whole race is condemned by implication."

We emerged abruptly into another cavern, in which there was a shaft and waiting cage. The rest of the party were already tucked inside it, and calling us to hurry. As I wedged myself through the crack between the gates, I thought with fine relief that this must be the end, that we were going up. But I was wrong about it. The iron gates clanged shut and down we went, another fifteen hundred—a mile and a half below the surface of the ground, or nearly that; more than a quarter mile below the level of the sea. And nothing at the end but another dripping cave, hotter and wetter than the last one. My iron hat encased my head like an instrument of torture, and the battery box dragged at me like a lump of solid lead; my knees sagged with the pressure. The atmosphere seemed thick enough to swim in, if one could make the effort. Perhaps we had arrived at the bottom of the mine, at the end of gravitational undertakings; I didn't think to ask. Anyway, they were pumping water out of it; there were big pipes in sight, and the sound of sucking pumps. And there was a blower, with something that resembled air gushing from its mouth. I sat down under it and lit a cigarette.

"Bit rugged down this deep," our guide remarked. "But gold is where you find it."—"You really mean there's gold down here?" I asked, ironically I hoped.—"Right there, around the corner, a hundred yards or so." He nodded toward a tunnel into which the visitors were already straggling. Half of them were women, and some of the men were older than myself. If they could take it, I could. "Okay," I said, "let's go." And I threw my cigarette away and climbed back on my feet. The members of our group applauded feebly, and off we went once more. "Let's get this straight," I said, when we'd walked along a way. "Do men really work down here, without compulsion, for fifty cents a day?"—"Natives," said the guide. "And there's no compulsion."—"Do their contracts say how deep they'll have to go?"—He didn't think so but he wasn't sure. "Anyway," he added, "they get along all right. Why they get fat on it."—"And eight hours isn't long," Brooks commented cheerfully. But a minute was too long, an hour was a nightmare, and eight of them beyond imagination.—"Ask him," the Oxford man whispered in my ear, "how many hours they spend waiting for the

cage to take them up." I asked but I didn't get an answer, beyond that they were lifted as rapidly as possible. "I am told," the Oxford man said, in my ear again, "that they often spend twelve hours underground." And I repeated this. But our guide was vague about it.

Still, I reflected to myself, all sorts of undertakings were subject to abuses. The mining occupation was not confined to black men; and a mine was a mine, whether deep or shallow; and while fifty cents plus keep seemed a very modest wage, in the modern world, for doing anything, still, the wage of the worker was a variable factor, differing widely with location and conditions. No, it was none of these things, nor all of them together, which made it seem so ugly: not the depth and discomfort of the mine, nor the pitiful reward for working in it. Nor was it this I saw, reflected in their eyes, not the hardships of their tasks. It was something else entirely: the vicious, devastating, and degrading color line.

We turned out of the dark and silent tunnel, through a narrow entrance, into a good-sized chamber, hewn in the rock. And here at last were signs of life: a score of Natives, armed with picks and shovels, desisted from whatever they were doing and grouped against the wall, out of the way, with their European bosses close beside them. The tourists were assembled in the chamber, perched on heaps of rubble with which the floor was littered, their headlights and attention focused on the wall—on something in the rock which the master guide was tracing with a pocket flash, which was hard to see at first, since it looked but little different from the rock through which it ran. But then I saw it was a different color, rather greenish: the seam which held the gold, scarcely wider than my hand, and in places not so wide. It seemed incredible that anyone could find it, or, having found it, could pursue it through the earth—like a microscopic vein in the carcass of an elephant.

"There it is," the guide kept saying. "That's the stuff we're after. And we have to move a lot of rock to get it." The visitors crowded close, with murmured exclamations in half a dozen languages, reaching up to touch the seam, picking crumbs with eager fingers. But the guides invited them to help themselves. The rubble on the floor was full of it, they said, and they crawled on hands and knees, finding samples for their guests. Our guide selected a good-sized chunk for me. He examined it with care and said it was a splendid specimen,

and would be a first-rate souvenir to keep; but it looked to me like any other rock. I thanked him warmly and stowed it in my pocket, where it jabbed me in a tender spot every time I took a step. The Native workers grouped against the wall, took no part in the proceedings and gave no indication of interest or amusement. As we straggled out I heard their foreman barking orders, and the scrape of picks and shovels—cleaning up the mess perhaps. On the way back through the tunnel I lost my souvenir. It weighed about two pounds, and when no one was looking, I sneaked it from my pocket and dropped it in the dark.

We were back on the surface in two jumps—straight up, no chute-the-chutes. But part way up we changed from one shaft to another; and at the final loading point our overcoats were waiting in a dump car, with Native boys at hand to help us on with them. We were warned to put them on, no matter how we felt, which was good advice, I guess; for the air in the shaft felt like a polar blast. But when we squirmed out of the cage the sun was shining brightly amid the drifting clouds, and the day was warm and fine, as we had parted from it. I glanced at my watch: we had been about three hours underground.

Our guides took leave of us. We would have time to change our clothes, they said, and then we'd be conducted to the compound, to see for ourselves how the Native workers lived. In the dressing room we hastily stripped and crowded in the showers; and in the midst of this boys rushed in with trays of tea—the inevitable complement of every undertaking in South Africa. You are waked with tea at dawn, on trains or boats or anywhere, nor is there any way I discovered to prevent it; all protests are ignored. Again, at eleven in the morning, tea is compulsory, with supplementary, unpalatable cake, more often stale than not—just in time to spoil your appetite for lunch, which is not a bad idea, for the food is unexciting, monotonous and dull; and then of course there is ritualistic tea at four o'clock. Three teas a day is the statutory minimum, and dodging any one of them is regarded with suspicion. I was not in a bank or business office where there was not a teacup on the desk of every clerk; they were either taking tea, or getting ready to, or had just finished with it. In the so-called skyscrapers of Johannesburg, which are not imposing structures, the elevator cages are

equipped with little shelves, designed to hold the operators' teacups. Anyway, they brought us tea, and littered the benches with cups and bowls and jugs. There was no room to sit down, and when I got my clothes on I escaped out of the place and went to work to clean my shoes which were caked with sticky mud. A new conductor was waiting at the door, and he called a passing Native boy to help me. The boy kneeled down obediently and scraped the mud away, polishing the leather with his hands. He said they were good shoes and he asked how much they cost.—“About five pounds,” I told him.—“Five pounds!” He shook his head and his eyes were big with wonder. I thought about it then: it would take him fifty days to earn that much—four hundred hours underground; and the shoes, however good, would be long worn out before he paid for them. I gave him a shilling, and he seemed surprised and pleased, glancing doubtfully at the guide from the corner of his eye, as if to make certain such things would be permitted.



THE tourists being reassembled, we were directed to get into our cars and follow a lead car to the compound. The Free State boys declined; they had had enough, they said, and someone else was leaving, who would drive them back to town. So Brooks and I crawled into the Peugeot and followed the procession—several hundred yards through deserted, littered grounds, beyond the lofty, ocher-colored dump. And there we came abruptly on the entrance to the compound: a gateway in a long, one storey building, through which we drove into a spacious yard, two or three acres in extent—a quadrangle in fact, bordered with rows of small brick houses, boxlike little structures with narrow space between them. The area enclosed was an open court of lawn and flower beds, nicely landscaped and well cared for. At the far side of it, opposite the entrance, were some even smaller houses, which afterwards turned out to be latrines and showers. And at one side was a building of good

size, of skeleton construction, with walls of glass or screen, widely open to the air. There was a patch of paving in the lawn, for playing some sort of ninepin game; and, as we drove in and parked our cars, there were several Natives playing—perfunctorily, the thought went through my head, as if they had been told to get out and show the visitors that they were having fun, though I have no shred of evidence to support such an idea. Perhaps it was the gateway that suggested it, or rendered me susceptible to such a train of thought. Though the gateway was in no sense formidable: there were no gates or bars, none that I was aware of; no guards and no formality. Yet the feeling was of an institutional entrance—of a place, when once you got inside, it might be hard to leave.—“Beautiful!” said Brooks, standing at my elbow, as we looked across the garden with its beds of brilliant flowers. And it was beautiful, in an institutional way—somehow reminiscent of a modern penitentiary. “I wouldn’t mind living here myself,” he added. I made no comment, but the bare suggestion of it sent a shiver down my spine.

We were taken to the commissary first, the building with the glass and screen, open to the air. I noticed, as we passed the ninepin alley, that the players had already disappeared, as if they’d done their stunt and could now go back to bed, or wherever else there was to go. There was little sign of life inside the compound; perhaps a day shift lived here, now at work beneath the ground; or a night shift, now asleep. Some workers passed us, going to and fro, clad in faded jeans, clumping on the pavement in their heavy shoes, going on about their business, barely glancing at us. There is nothing picturesque about the black man in South Africa—nothing savage or unique. They have lost all that, or buried it away with the costumes and customs of the past, to be resurrected now and then on state occasions—when the King of England comes to visit them, or when they stage a tribal dance for the benefit of tourists—perhaps more genuinely in their own reserves, when they are alone among themselves. But where they are in contact with the white man they look and seem like poor black people anywhere. Visibly at least there is little to distinguish the Native in South Africa from his brother in Harlem or New Orleans.

The commissary was a sanitary dream, efficiently designed and immaculately clean. At one side was a railed-off passageway, in

cafeteria style, where the customers could pass in single file, with pans into which the food was ladled by Native cooks in spotless aprons. There were half a dozen of them attending on the cauldrons, and even fewer diners; while we looked on only three or four passed by. I inquired about this, assuming that it couldn't be a normal eating hour, and was told they came for food when they were hungry, that it was provided for them twice a day. There was no place in the building where it could be eaten—no tables, chairs, or benches; the big room was a kitchen, nothing more. It was explained that they took the food away, to eat it at their leisure in their houses. As for the contents of the cauldrons: there was one big vat of mealies, a sort of corn meal mush, which is the basis of the Native diet; another filled with beans; and a third which at first defied analysis, but turned out to be a messy looking stew of hashed-up vegetables. Our guide said the Natives had no use for vegetables; and so they disguised them in this fashion, dicing them so small they could be with difficulty recognized, and not readily separated or rejected. The sort of subterfuge one employs in feeding children; and, indeed, I have done the same with dogs. There was no meat in sight. They had it twice a week, our guide explained. It was given to them raw, as they preferred to cook it for themselves, on stoves inside their houses. "They like it tough," he said.

I watched a man, as he paused to fill his pan, a big one like a wash basin—like the pan I use for a Norwegian elk hound; and it was ladled full of beans and mealies, with a scoop of vegetable stew to top it off, poured on like gravy: an unsavory looking mess, with a sickening, musty odor, though no doubt titillating to the Native nose; in any case more bulk than it seemed remotely possible a single human being could consume—at one sitting, anyway. "Forty-four hundred calories a day," our guide said proudly, somewhat as a breeder might have spoken of prize cattle. "We build 'em up," he added. But the man with the brimming pan was neither big nor fat. He was in fact a scrawny little fellow; and he did not look hungry, nor as if he were intrigued by his Gargantuan platter and trembling with impatience to be at it. Again I had the feeling—with no foundation for it, and which I'm sure wasn't true in any literal sense—that the man had been told to bring his pan and fill it to the brim, in order that the visitors might be witness to abundance.

He walked away unhurriedly, with the pan held out before him, and a sorrowful expression in his eyes. But perhaps the source of that was the vegetable gravy, which could never be unscrambled from the mealies and the beans.

We went up a flight of steps onto an open mezzanine where there were numerous vats and troughs of trickling liquid, all spotless, chromium steel; and some aproned Native boys attending on them. "It's the brewery," said the guide, "where they make their beer." Kaffir beer, it's called; and it has a decent alcoholic content, which, if it be reduced beyond a certain point—and I judge, from what was said, that had been tried—there is a storm of protest. About their beer, it seems, they are fussy and determined. "We give them what they want," our guide declared expansively. "We try to make them happy." He poured some beer in glasses and invited us to try it. It didn't taste like beer, nor much like anything; it was sour, flat, and tepid. We went down the stairs, into a good-sized room where the meat was stored: carcasses of beef hung up on hooks—and not just the carcasses, for most of their insides were hanging up beside them. "Those are titbits," said the guide. And so no doubt they were, to Native taste; but not a pleasing sight to Western eyes. There was no refrigeration, and the smell was pretty thick. The tourists did not linger in the meat house.

We went out of the building and followed a path beside the garden, past the row of neat, brick cubicles in which were housed the showers and latrines, to the open door of one of the small structures which lined three sides of the enclosure. The house was too small for all of us to enter at one time; and so, half a dozen in a group, we crowded in. It consisted of a single room, about sixteen feet square, with a narrow open space before the door, in the center of which was a little iron stove, to furnish heat in winter and to cook their meat. The rest of the room was taken up with bunks, tiered to the ceiling, and shrewdly staggered to economize the space. I counted twenty-four, but it was hard to see them and I may have made an error. The place was clean and in perfect order, suggestive of a barracks—blankets smoothly spread, in military fashion. And the lodgers were at home, some of them stretched out, or sitting, on their bunks; and others standing, a bit like raw recruits in the presence of an officer, uneasily at attention, not quite sure

what to do. I don't know why they were at home; or, since they were not working, why they were not asleep. I had the feeling—as by now I had it of almost everything—that their house had been selected for inspection, that they had been warned to have it ship-shape, and relieved from their jobs to set the stage. I should have liked to ask the guide about it, but I didn't think he'd tell me; and anyway he had said his say and gone before I got inside. I lingered in the room to take a picture, until all the other visitors had gone out. And when the black men saw me opening my camera they seemed to come to life, exchanging words about it; and several grouped themselves, with smiling faces, edging to the front to be sure to be in it. They struck self-conscious poses, and were motionless and silent. But when I'd snapped the shutter there was a lot of chatter, and one of them stepped forward—a stalwart, handsome boy—to ask in careful English, with timid eagerness, if I would send a picture they could pin up on the wall. I told him I'd be glad to if he'd write his name for me. But he couldn't write it, nor could any of the others.

Brooks and the Oxford man were waiting for me. The rest of the party was already far ahead, retracing its steps toward the entrance to the compound, to the building which contained the administrative offices. I asked Brooks if he still thought he would like to live here. And he laughed and said he'd changed his mind. "Though actually," he added, "it's not very different from the way I lived when I was in the army."—"That is probably true," the Oxford man agreed. "But when you were in the army you were fighting for your country, for the preservation of your way of life. The position of the Native is not analogous." And certainly it isn't.—As we walked along I kept telling myself that these black men were not prisoners, but were there because they chose to be, and free to go away if they so elected—though not entirely free, for they were signatories to a contract which was binding in the law; which, though they could not read it, they had signed, or made their marks. At all events the contract had been explained to them—if indeed it had been, and if they could understand it: a rigmarole of unfamiliar words recited to a black man in the bush, who had never been away from home before, from the simple tribal customs of his group; who lacked the education and experience to grasp its elementary implications. But some of them had been before, and had signed and gone again; and

those who had returned could describe what it was like; and the bush boy must have heard—or could have if he wanted. And they were not prisoners; they were under no restraint. They could walk out if they chose and not come back—though where were they to go?—where without a pass?—and how obtain a pass if one were in violation of his legal contract?

We overtook the balance of the visitors, already halfway through the administrative tour and going pretty fast; perhaps the visiting period was drawing to a close. We were told there was a playing field for football and cricket, on which Native teams contended; that sometimes on Sunday they would stage a tribal dance, to which members of the public were invited; that occasionally a motion picture would be shown, though the subjects must be chosen with great care, since most of the pictures were far beyond the reach of Native comprehension and likely to be strangely misinterpreted—as for example: European love scenes, as depicted on the screen, represented to the black man offensive and incredible behavior. Somewhere, we were told, there was a hospital, with two European doctors in attendance; but we were not taken to it. We walked through a first-aid room, which appeared to be all a first-aid room should be. We were taken to an office where the workers' cards were kept—many files of them; and good big cards they were, with fingerprints and history, and full record of demerits, if such had been incurred.

I held one in my hands, which was written nearly full with infractions of the rules, and was obviously the record of a rebellious rascal. He had been absent many times and frequently drunk; had engaged in numerous brawls and beaten up his fellows; had been accused of theft, though the charge had not been proved. He was lazy and incompetent, according to report, and repeated reprimand had not improved him. He had disappeared for days and then turned up, to continue his career of crime and disaffection, unchastened and unchanged. I asked a young official who seemed to be in charge, where this ruffian went when he was missing. But he only smiled and shrugged, as if to say my guess would be as good as his. "Probably Sophiatown," the Oxford man said dryly.—"And what do you do with such hoodlums?" I inquired. He said there were minor punishments they could inflict: offenders could be fined, or even locked up, for brief periods of time.—"There is no corporal

punishment?—no flogging?” I suggested.—“No, nothing of the sort,” he answered warmly. “When they are guilty of serious offenses, they are of course turned over to the police authorities.” He added that they tried in every way they could to reform the few bad characters who were bound to turn up in any good-sized group—to salvage them if possible. “We do the best we can for them,” he said. “And if it seems hopeless, in the end we send them home.” He took the card out of my hand and scanned it. “On such evidence as this,” he smiled, “we can scarcely be accused of being either ruthless or impatient.”

I had a final question in my mind, which I had been saving to ask someone who wasn't just a guide. “Tell me,” I said, “how do these men get on in the absence of their women—most of them young fellows in the prime of sexual life? What do they do about it? How do they get along?”—He frowned and hesitated, and then he told me carelessly that they got along all right—or anyway, most of them; they didn't seem to suffer from the absence of their wives, and were maybe glad to get away from them. “They get along all right,” he repeated firmly; and there was something in the way he said it that did not invite discussion.

The excursion appeared to be completed; the visitors were departing, and Brooks was waiting for me in the Peugeot. The Oxford man strolled with me to the car. “I would wager,” he remarked, “though I cannot prove it, that within walking distance of this place, it would be hard to find a Native girl, past the age of puberty, who has not got a baby or is not expecting one.”—I said it seemed to me like a reasonably safe bet.—“As for these compounds,” he went on, in his cultured, gentle voice, “the truth is they are reeking hives of sodomy, of every variety of sexual perversion; and the facts are known to many people. What else could they be, unless the laws of nature were suspended?” He paused and added wearily, “The conditions that exist are only tolerated because their skins are black.”—I nodded my agreement; we shook hands and said good-by. As I crawled into the Peugeot he leaned upon the door to say a final word. “But of course,” he smiled, “you're familiar with these matters; you have a color problem in the States.”—“Yes, we have,” I said. “Or anyway I thought so before I came to Africa.”



BECHUANA - LAND

African Chief in an Oldsmobile

THE "Rhodesia Express" crawled along all day, from Johannesburg whence it had set out the night before, bound for Bulawayo. I was on my way to pay a visit to an African Chief in Bechuanaland.

Under the date of February 29, my diary records:

This lousy little Continental train is packed, but I have, thank God, a coupe to myself. It is old-fashioned, shabby, and dirty. No soap and not a drinking glass, though there is a pseudoresplendent diner—comfortable to sit in when the travelers have been fed. Was waked at dawn, as usual, with a cup of tepid tea, which I was determined to refuse; but the waiter was even more determined and kept beating on the door and shouting at me, until finally I got up and let him in. Then at Mafeking there were emigration men, inquiring at the door—amiable young fellows in black shirts and white shorts. The dining car steward gave me a jug of hot water with which to shave, but I gathered my request was an unusual one. In Joburg I was warned this would be a "filthy" trip—hot and dusty. So far it is neither. This morning it is cool and rainy, almost chilly. We are crawling through a region of high veld, at about four thousand feet; "bush" they

call it, scrub vegetation, rather dense in places; and I have seen some desert stuff: cacti and species of acacia. It's not lush country, but it's certainly not arid in appearance—anyway, not at this season of the year, when the rains are not yet finished. Endless miles of it without a fence or house or any sign of life, except for widely separated clusters of mud-walled native huts with roofs of thatch. The few small European settlements are far apart; they look like tank towns in our Middle West—no, hardly that pretentious. When, at long intervals, we stop at one of them, there is a crowd of Natives on the platform: women with babies tied upon their backs, squatting in huddled groups; and men in ragged jeans and tattered shirts, crazy quilts of shreds and patches. They are not picturesque, just poor black people. Nearly naked children stand beneath the windows of the cars, begging for cigarettes or pennies, shivering in the rain.—Passed a train which was packed with black boys, loaded in like cattle—young faces crowded in the windows. I asked where they were going and was told “probably the mines” (recruited contract labor for the gold mines of Johannesburg).—Rolling, hilly country, climbing in the distance into mountains; green and beautiful, not quite like anything at home, though it isn't easy to say why. Perhaps the great white clouds that ride so high above the earth and seem somehow to stretch it into endless distance; and the desolation of it, a kind of melancholy in the landscape. Great country in which to ride a horse, but I have seen no riders and no horses. Occasional patches of scraggly, stunted corn. Nothing else. We are in Bechuanaland, and have been since we left Mafeking this morning.

Bechuanaland is a British Protectorate, what is known as a High Commission Territory, with a High Commissioner of the British Crown resident at Pretoria. It's about the size of Texas and in shape not unlike it: a solid chunk of country which has never been surveyed, including in its boundaries a substantial section of the uninhabited Kalahari desert; and, in its northern region, an area of swamp and jungle, with all the beasts and serpents of the tropics. It is bordered on the south, and partly on the east, by the Union of South Africa, which regards it covetously and would dearly love to have the mandate for it. Of the many smoldering frictions between the Afrikaners and the British Government, control of Bechuanaland is not the least important. The Native population is about a quarter

million, comprising eight different tribes, of which the Bamangwato tribe is by far most numerous—150,000 of them. The European population is less than 2,000, consisting chiefly of government officials, missionaries, traders, and labor agents.

Tshekedi (Chē-kāy-dee) Khama is the Chief of the Bamangwato, and by virtue of this fact the Native Boss of Bechuanaland. The other seven tribes which share the territory, including a remnant of the warlike Herero—whom the Germans, in their brief occupancy of South-West Africa, set out to, and almost did, exterminate—are guests or vassals of the Bamangwato. It was to Chief Tshekedi, in his native capital, Serowe, that I was now en route to pay a visit. Douglas Buchanan, attorney for the Chief and a representative in the Cape Town Assembly, had secured my invitation. In Johannesburg I received a telegram:

WILL MEET MARTIN FLAVIN AT PALAPYE STATION 29TH. WILL ACCOMMODATE AND ENTERTAIN HIM. GREETINGS. TSHEKEDI.

When I got this wire I was in a hospital—nursing home, they call it—the most comfortable place I had thus far found in Africa. I had an abscess in an inconvenient place, and for a day or two I wasn't sure I could make the trip: twenty-four hours on a train, and after that—God knew! But I didn't want to miss it or chance postponing it; and so, with a little surgery and a lot of penicillin, I finally got away.

A week or two before, in the lounge of the Mt. Nelson Hotel in Cape Town, I had been chatting with the High Commissioner for South-West Africa—that territory which had once been German and was now under mandate to the Union. He was a stalwart Afrikaner and an outspoken one. I had been questioning him about Native witchcraft practice, and what attitude the Government had toward it. In reply he told me that if, in South-West, he found a chief who tolerated witchcraft, he immediately deposed him, regardless of his claim to office, whether he was an appointed or hereditary chief. He said the Government meant to stamp it out. I had mentioned to him my projected visit to Tshekedi, and the fact that I expected to stay a day or two as a guest of the Chief in Serowe. He had shrugged his shoulders and smiled grimly. "You'll have a bellyful of that in an hour," he had said.

I was thinking rather gloomily of this prophetic warning, sitting in the dining car finishing my dinner, as the train crawled through the wilderness. The veld had flattened out, no hills or mountains now, and the bush had thickened to dense scrub vegetation. There seemed to be no towns, and even groups of Native huts were rare; and the huts themselves looked drearier and poorer. It kept raining off and on, as it had done all day—thoroughly depressing. It would be after eight o'clock, and dark, when we reached Palapye, which I'd been told was nothing much except a water tank. From Palapye to Serowe was a drive of forty miles. And what would it be like in the capital of Bechuanaland? Suppose by some mischance they failed to meet me? This was Sunday and there wouldn't be another train till Tuesday. And Tshekedi, himself, what would he be like? On more than one occasion he'd been front-page news in Africa. I went over in my mind what I'd heard and read about him—



TSHEKEDI KHAMA, born Serowe, 1906; son of Khama, distinguished Christian chief, and loyal friend and subject of the British Crown. The mother of Tshekedi was an inferior wife, and by reason of this fact he was not in direct line of succession to his father. When old Chief Khama died another son succeeded him, by whose death, in 1925, Tshekedi became regent for his brother's son, then an infant and now at Oxford studying law. Tshekedi, himself, was a student at Lovedale College near Cape Town when he was summoned home to assume the duties of a chief. At Serowe he found evidence of maladministration: poverty and apathy—most of his father's excellent work undone; Bamangwato authority diminished and defied, and tribesmen drifting back into unprogressive ways. The new Chief lost no time; he immediately dismissed the reactionary members of his council, and instituted numerous innovations and reforms. According to report he went about his job with great determination, sparing no one, least of all himself.

In August, 1933, when he was twenty-seven and had been in power for eight years, something happened—one of those things known in diplomatic circles as an *incident*—sufficiently sensational in its nature to hit the African front page with a resounding wallop. There are different versions of the facts, but in substance the story goes as follows:

A young man named Phineas McIntosh was resident in Serowe, not unwelcome since he was by trade a blacksmith and mechanic, and his services were in demand. He was the proud possessor of a rusty old jalopy, and also, it appears, of a lusty inclination untempered by discretion. At all events, in the Bechuana moonlight, he developed the habit to pick up Native maidens and take them for a ride, from which, it seems, not all of them walked back. His behavior went from bad to worse and at last became a nuisance, and then a public scandal. Whatever the virtue of virginity, in Africa it has an economic value. Native wealth consists of cattle, and cattle must be paid for wives; and deflowered maidens are on the bargain counter, not readily marketable. Families with girls to sell were properly enraged.

Complaint was lodged and Phineas was warned to mend his ways. But he didn't mend them. Finally he was summoned before the Chief, himself, in the Native Court, where justice is administered according to the edicts of Native Law and Custom—a proper proceeding in the circumstances, entirely defensible within the tenure of colonial policy. Indeed, it is difficult to see how Tshakedi could have acted otherwise, without serious sacrifice of prerogative and dignity. The arraignment of Phineas before the Native Court for the offense of which he stood accused, was not an arbitrary or extralegal procedure. But it was unusual.

The court was held in open air beneath a spreading tree; and, as always, there must have been a crowd of Native spectators, and no doubt some Europeans, traders and the like—a bigger crowd than usual, out of deference to the issue. Exactly what took place is controversial; but probably something of this sort: Phineas was pugnacious and defiant, standing in the dock before the Chief, who addressed him from a dais, surrounded by his councilors, all of them unarmed save for slender staffs, known as courtesy wands, and commonly carried as insignia of office. In substance Tshakedi told

the boy he must desist from this wholesale waste of virgins or take himself away out of Serowe. If he did not mend his ways or liquidate himself—and here Tshekedi made a blunder, which he afterwards admitted, though his legal position was completely sound—if he did not do the one thing or the other, the Chief would have him flogged. An ugly word, though in the future tense; and a dangerous threat, from a black man to a white one.

Phineas was neither frightened nor impressed. On the contrary, it seems, he was furiously angry. He shouted that no Native would ever lay a lash on the back of Phineas McIntosh, and followed up his words with a threatening gesture toward the person of the Chief, or one that could be easily so interpreted. And then there is confusion in the testimony. One story runs that the councilors intervened to hold him off, using their courtesy wands only to prevent an attack upon their master; though it seems both reasonable and likely that, in the heat of the affair, they may have beat him up a little bit. At any rate he suffered no great damage except his loss of face—a minor dent in White Supremacy. And here the matter should have ended, save for an unrelated circumstance—

The High Commissioner for Bechuanaland was on leave of absence. The Acting High Commissioner was Vice-Admiral E. R. Evans, a British naval officer of distinguished reputation, but of limited experience in colonial undertakings. He was in Pretoria at the time. Such report of the affair was brought to him, perhaps designedly, as led him to believe a rebellion was in progress in Bechuanaland. In a jiffy he was on the phone to Simon's Town, the British naval base a thousand miles away; and in next to no time a special train was speeding, some fifteen hundred miles, to the scene of action, with flatcars carrying field guns, and coaches full of jack-tars, armed to the teeth—an impressive expeditionary force, designed to put the fear of God into rebellious subjects. Strange concatenation of events, all stemming from the lusty Phineas and his appetite for virgins.

It is said that the European residents of Serowe stood aghast as the sailors and their guns marched into the town, that Phineas himself could hardly be persuaded to support the undertaking. But the case had now surpassed any rational control: the nationalistic press was seething with it; even London was concerned—and prob-

ably embarrassed. Action must be taken, regardless of the facts. And so a court was presently convened, with Tshekedi in the dock, accused of something—I'm not quite sure what. But whatever it was, and despite the defense of able counsel, he was convicted of it. There was nothing else to do; there were too many faces to be saved. Admiral Evans came next day to deliver a castigating lecture and pronounce the sentence of the court: deposition from office and exile, for two months—a modest punishment, but nonetheless a punishment.

There was a storm of unofficial protest, both in South Africa and England. Indeed, the case was verging on a *cause célèbre* when London came to life and intervened. The King, himself, restored the Chief to office, a gesture with its own implication of apology. It is worthy of note that Tshekedi did no crowing; he returned to Serowe and went quietly to work. Admiral Evans was relieved of the High Commissioner's mantle, and sailed away to less devious operations. The *incident* was closed.

In January, 1935, Tshekedi was in the news again. He appealed to the British Parliament to reject a proposal of the Union Government that the Bechuanaland Protectorate be transferred from Great Britain to the Union. His appeal set forth that his people regarded themselves as subjects of the British Crown and immune to interference by any other government. Needless to say, the Union's plea got nowhere in the British Parliament, and would have gotten nowhere with or without the protest of Tshekedi. But his stand in the matter made no friends for him in the Union of South Africa, where he didn't have too many to begin with.

In February, 1936, the Chief, then thirty years old, was married, with great pomp and ceremony, to Bagakanetse Sekgoma, daughter of his half brother. Their union was brief and unhappy, ending abruptly in another front-page story—

In March, 1937, Tshekedi was granted a divorce, on grounds that his wife had given birth to a child of which he was not father. The testimony, as reported in the press, was more or less sensational. The case seemed proved; and Tshekedi's attitude in the proceedings appeared to be dignified and just. A month later, in the Native Court, the divorced woman was found guilty on another charge: practicing witchcraft, with intent to do injury to the Chief's

mother. There was now a long period of comparative silence, during which Tshekedi took to himself another wife, and carried on with grim determination the business of his realm, until—

In October, 1947, he was back on the front page with a bang, accused by members of the Mswazi, long resident in Bechuanaland and subject to Bamangwato sovereignty, of a catalog of crimes: an indictment which described him as a Native Hitler, a totalitarian tyrant, who ignored the traditions of Native Law and Custom and the dictates of humanity. The source of the dispute was not too clear, and seemed to date a good way back in time. It had finally culminated in rebellion on the part of a portion of the Mswazi. Some twelve hundred of them had fled out of the country to Rhodesia, where they were far from welcome, squatting near the border in abject poverty. From this refuge they alleged specifically that the Bamangwato Chief had destroyed, or confiscated, their cattle, grain, and movables; that he'd sent armed force against them, and they'd been compelled to flee, in peril of their lives. Tshekedi, in reply, denied that armed force had been employed, and maintained that the Mswazi were delinquent in their taxes; the property impounded represented what they owed, plus the cattle and grain they'd abandoned in their flight. He was holding these chattels as a trustee, he said, pending the return of his rebellious subjects, which, he suggested rather ominously, had better not be long deferred. Such were, in substance, the respective allegations.

It is difficult to see how such abuse of power, as the Mswazi claimed, would be suffered by the British Government, whose High Commissioner was adjacent to the scene and must have been conversant with the facts. Still, on the other hand, British policy, like that of other countries, is not always crystal-clear; there may have been beneath the case political involvements not apparent on the surface. At all events the High Commissioner had not quenched the fire, nor prevented it from bursting into flame. Quite likely he was buried in an avalanche of contradictory briefs, passing back and forth between himself in Pretoria and the Privy Council, far away in London. And such paper work takes time—which can be, if desired, indefinitely extended.

However this may be, the refugees, or rebels—for their status was thus far undetermined—discouraged in their efforts to get their

wrongs redressed by the Colonial Government—had finally ventured to by-pass its authority. Chief John Mswazi, headman of the group, had directed an appeal to the United Nations, through the Rev. Michael Scott, a cruising, free-lance missionary and staunch defender of underprivileged blacks, who was then at Lake Success with other Native briefs and projects of his own to bring to the attention of the Council. It is not of record that he accomplished much in the Mswazi matter, or in any other case on his agenda.

I remembered one more story of Tshekedi, undocumented and possibly apocryphal, but more than likely with a core of truth; and which seemed to underline his character and sentiments. At the outbreak of the War, when the Union of South Africa had not made up its mind what it thought of Hitler—it never did entirely, and hasn't even yet—the Bamangwato chief sent a message to the King of England. He was prepared, he said, to raise an army in Bechuanaland and march upon the Germans; and, if necessary, to make war upon the Union of South Africa.

That about completed my dossier on Tshekedi: an African chief who had invited me to be his guest in his capital city of Serowe, where he would “accommodate and entertain” me.



IT WAS dark and drizzling at Palapye, which appeared to be not much except a water tank, though there were scattered lights in the bush behind the station, and some motorcars were parked against the platform. I dragged my luggage off the train, without assistance or elation—three handbags and my portable Corona. There wasn't any hurry as we never stopped for less than a quarter of an hour, but I was in a hurry all the same, with wriggling in my stomach and my morale very low. The young Afrikaner stationmaster wasn't interested or helpful. No one was looking for me, nor for anybody else, so far as he knew. He went on about his business. I shouted, “Chief Tshekedi!—Chief Tshekedi's car!” But no one answered,

and the cars were driving off, headlights weaving through the bush. The outlook was excessively dismal and depressing. I was afraid to move out of arm's length of the train lest it take a sudden notion to be off. The conductor came along. He spent his time in the luggage van at the rear end of the train, without apparent interest in, or attention to, the passengers, and was never to be seen except at stations. He said I could go on to Bulawayo if I wanted. At the moment I had never wanted anything so much.

A native boy came up and tried to take my bags, but I clung fast to them, explaining my dilemma. At mention of the Chief he went running down the platform and presently returned with two companions. The Chief's car wasn't there, he said, in its accustomed place. Perhaps they'd been delayed because the roads were wet.—Could I telegraph Serowe?—No; it was Sunday and the telegraph was closed until tomorrow.—Could I rent a car to drive me there?—He was doubtful about that. He said the Chief would surely come, or send someone to fetch me, and suggested that I wait in the shelter of the station. But wild horses couldn't have detached me from the train, from easy reach of it. In simple truth I was secretly relieved, for I'd had some misgivings of the project, which the present situation seemed amply to confirm. I had gotten up from my hospital bed; I had fulfilled my contract. And this Native potentate had left me on a limb, or forgotten all about me. The hell with Tshekedi and Bechuanaland! And if it came to that, the hell with Africa! I'd go on to Bulawayo, and keep on going north till I was rid of all of it.

The whistle blew and the engine emitted a preliminary grunt. I grabbed my bags and flung them to the platform, and gripped the handrail of it. And just then there was the rattle of a car, and headlights coming toward us through the bush. The boys went tearing off into the darkness. The whistle blew again. I was standing on the step now, hoping in my heart that no good would come of it. The car came banging up beside the station, with squealing brakes, and bulking like a truck. And the boys were running back, shouting as they came, "It's from the Chief—the Chief!"—I pushed the bags off with my foot, carrying the Corona. There was nothing else to do. For better or for worse, I was stuck with it.

It was a truck—a Chevrolet, with three attendants. In the darkness I picked out one I thought might be Tshekedi; but he set me right

on that: he was driver for the Chief, who awaited my arrival in Serowe. He was sorry to be late, he said, but the road was wet and muddy, and he hadn't any chains. They put my luggage in the back and covered it with canvas, and the other two climbed in with it. I gave some money to the waiting boys, though I felt, at the moment, they'd been positively vicious in their efforts to assist me. If they'd only kept their mouths shut, I'd still be on the train, on the way to Bulawayo. I got into the seat beside the driver—like any truck seat, straight-backed and uncomfortable. And off we went, along a twisting, level road, ditched on either side and tightly hemmed with bush—slithering and skidding in the mud, dodging dangerous puddles, weaving back and forth from one side to the other to follow in the wheel tracks. In a little while we crossed a narrow bridge, without a handrail—a wet and slippery trestle—like driving on a tightrope. In the course of the journey we crossed a lot of them. When I saw one coming I simply closed my eyes.

We didn't do much talking. The driver's English was hard to understand, and I had no inclination to distract his attention from the road. He told me it was solid underneath and would dry out in a hurry when the rain stopped; that the rainy season was almost at an end, and then it would be very dry and dusty; that the Chevrolet was new and satisfactory, though its springs were not as sturdy as they should be—which surprised me because I had thought it didn't have any; that American cars were the only ones adapted to Bechuana roads, the others simply shook themselves to pieces; that he wouldn't mind the mud if he had chains. We went on through the blackness, sprinting when we could and crawling when we must; there were minor slopes where the tires lost their traction, spinning frantically in search of something solid while the racing gears squealed protest. Again and again I was sure we were stuck, but somehow we'd make it and slide down the other side. The man knew how to drive, there was no mistaking that. I began to relax, to regard the adventure with decreasing apprehension. Anyway, that's where I was: in a wilderness of bush, in the heart of Africa, on a dark and drizzly night. There might be hungry lions in the scrub along the road, or dozing crocodiles beneath those slippery trestles. I didn't ask. I kept my companion supplied with cigarettes. Most of the time we smoked in silence.

We had gone about halfway when we met a car—an Oldsmobile sedan, with a youthful Native driver; and we stopped and exchanged a lot of conversation. The sedan, it developed, was also from the stable of the Chief, and unequipped with chains. He had sent it off to fetch me, in proper time to meet the train; but then he'd had misgivings as to whether it would get there and had dispatched the truck, with its attendants, as an expedition of relief. The Oldsmobile had mired down not far from where we met it; and the truck had overtaken it and passed it, not having time to linger on the scene. Somehow the driver had rounded up assistance and pulled it out by hand; and now he was en route again, headed for Palapye, which made no sense at all. There was endless talk about it; but finally I was transferred from the truck to the sedan, an arrangement which I viewed with some alarm. The truck, however, was to follow at our heels, in case we should get into further trouble—which we promptly did: stuck in a mudhole to the hubs, the very same from which the car had so recently been rescued. The driver spun the wheels until the rubber smoked, but there was no getting out.

The relief expedition came up and disembarked, and there was more palaver. At length it was agreed that the truck should go ahead and tow us with a rope. But to pass us on the narrow road was not a simple matter, and one wheel of the truck slid off into the ditch. I thought this was the end, but they went to work with shovels and somehow got it back upon the road. And now the rope was tied, and with concerted effort of the racing engines, the Oldsmobile was dragged out of its grave. There was an anxious moment when we repassed the truck, but the worst of it was over; and though there were some doubtful moments left, there were no more disasters.

It was after midnight and I was half asleep when the driver announced that we were in Serowe. I looked out but could see nothing. We went on a way and stopped, with our headlights on a house—a rambling old white house, with several gables, like a New England farmhouse, but instead of shingles it was roofed with tin or iron, painted red. We were in a muddy, littered yard, at what seemed to be the back door of the house, beyond which was a modest building that turned out to be the kitchen, with a roofed-

over passageway between it and the house. There was a covered porch along the kitchen wall, and the ground beneath was paved with brick; on the porch against the wall was a long water trough, which served the purpose of a kitchen sink. There were no lights within the house nor any sign of life, not even barking dogs. The driver left me standing in the muddy yard while he went to rouse somebody, and presently returned with a sleepy-looking man who led the way into the house, through the covered passage between it and the kitchen, into a roomy hall, high-ceilinged and old-fashioned, where he had lit an oil lamp. The walls were thickly hung with ancient photographs and official-looking scrolls in heavy frames; and the floor was carpeted with lion skins, as indeed the whole house was—just the skins without the heads, sewed together to make rugs, as soft and sleek as velvet. The truck had come by now and my luggage was brought in.

And then, from a room beyond the hall, the Chief appeared, wrapped in a bulky bathrobe and carrying a candle—a chunky, solid black man, with the beginning of a paunch, accentuated by the robe he wore; of about, or even less than, average height, with a round, cropped head set close upon his shoulders and distinctly negroid features; not in any sense distinguished in appearance, or with any obvious sign of aristocratic birth. He came toward me with a smile, holding out his hand, greeting me politely but not easily or warmly. I apologized for having got him up at this hour of the night. And he replied with apology to me for the state of the roads and the chainless cars, repeating what I had already gathered in respect to his efforts to assure that I be met, as he led the way through what seemed to be, and was, the dining room, into a small and stiffly formal parlor, with more lion skins on the floor, and hugely ugly, uncomfortable chairs; with windows bordered by frames of colored glass, and lace curtains hanging at them, as crisp and bleak as shrouds—a room that might have been, and no doubt was, inspired by example of the early Boer pioneers, than which there could be nothing more substantial and depressing.

There was a table in the center of the room, with several candles on it, which the Chief lighted from the one he carried. I begged him not to go to any trouble, but he insisted I must have a cup of coffee before I went to bed. We sat down and faced each other, making

awkward conversation. I spoke about the house—its rambling roominess, which I could commend. He told me his father had built the house and lived in it; that he himself lived in another house, though at times in this one, when his wife was away, as she was just now—attending to their crops and cattle, a necessary matter at this season of the year. He explained that when the maize was growing, it was important for it to be guarded, from beasts and straying cattle; and commonly the women of a family, or some of them at least, taking turns about it, would go to stay and watch it, living in the bush, with only little shelters made of thatch—often at considerable distance from their homes, for the cultivated fields apportioned to a family or a clan were scattered far and wide, and changed, from time to time, from one section to another. His wife was now away on such an errand, and in her absence he was living in this house, which served him mainly as a guesthouse—a place where he could receive and entertain people with whom he had business to transact.

The sleepy-looking man who had introduced me to the house, and who was in fact the cook, came in now with a tray on which were cups of coffee. He served me first, kneeling on one knee, and doing the same when he served the Chief. I don't know if this was customary; or, if it wasn't, why it was done at all. But the gesture was not repeated in my presence by the cook, nor by anybody else. It afterwards occurred to me to wonder if the Chief had directed its omission, as being perhaps a little too suggestive of totalitarian methods. But I noticed nothing else at any time, suggestive of similar duplicity; and so quite likely the obeisance of the cook had no significance. He may have been too sleepy to think what he was doing, or just playing safe in the presence of a guest. The relations of the Chief with the members of his household, and with everybody else, as I observed them, were friendly and informal, but not the less authoritative. There was nothing to suggest that he was feared.

The coffee was lukewarm. When we had disposed of it the Chief picked up a candle and led me to my room, which opened on the hall and had a door with a stained glass panel in it. The room was small and filled to capacity with three pieces of furniture: a wardrobe in a corner, a stand with bowl and pitcher, and a big brass double bed, with inviting sheets and blankets, and a mosquito net looped over it. The Chief said the net was quite unnecessary as the

windows were well screened—but I could suit myself. We said good night and parted. I left the net hung up and took my paludrin, a malaria preventive, which I had been taking for some days, in preparation for this trip and my further excursion to the Congo; and I added a Nembatal to insure a good night's rest. I was almost asleep when I crawled into the bed, which was soft and comfortable.

My first impressions of Tshekedi, which subsequent acquaintance tended to confirm, may as well be stated now. He is not, as someone had warned me, a vulgarian; nor is he a man of polished manners. He is not a highly educated or widely cultured man, as indeed men of action seldom are. I had been told that he possessed the most extensive private library in South Africa. It turned out to consist of an indiscriminate collection of volumes on social subjects, and a vast amount of trash; in no sense extensive or selective. He has little sense of humor, and this is common to the one-track mind. I would doubt he is exceptionally endowed with administrative talents; but he has a great capacity for work—the stubbornness and physical endurance to carry on his job through thick and thin; and the vision of a practical idealist—a fanatic, if you like—to inspire almost superhuman effort. He is not a man to be discouraged or defeated, or to recognize defeat when he has met it. He is not, I believe, personally ambitious—not motivated by a lust for power. But power is his heritage and the tool beside his hand: the autocratic power of a chief, prescribed and endorsed by Native Law and Custom. He is lacking in emotional warmth. I cannot say I was drawn to him personally, that I either liked or disliked him. I felt that such interest as he had in me was purely to the end that I might serve his purpose. I was a writer and he had something to sell me. That's why I was there. He made no effort to cover up the fact; or, if he did, he was not deft about it. I suspect he might be a very lonely man, if he ever found the time to stop and think about it. These conclusions were not, of course, the product of a moment, but derived from observation of the man throughout my visit: what he did and said, plus the record of him I had read and heard.



IT WAS almost nine o'clock when I awoke. When they heard me stirring a boy came to my door, with coffee in a pitcher. I shaved and dressed and went out to look around. There was no one in sight and I went back to the kitchen. The cook was there, preparing breakfast on a primitive brick stove. The Chief had been gone since dawn, he said. He was always up at dawn and sometimes earlier. Court was held at sunrise, and he had to be there to listen to complaints and adjust disputes of one kind and another. He'd soon be



back for breakfast. The kitchen was a big room with almost nothing in it except the smell of onions; and I went out to the terrace. The rain had stopped and the sun was shining fitfully through the drifting cloud rack. There wasn't much to see: groups of round mud huts with conical roofs of overhanging thatch, enclosed behind stockades of rough, hand-hewn palings, six or eight feet high, designed to keep stray cattle from intruding. The view was interrupted by several craggy buttes of rock, rearing abruptly from the nearly level plain, their ragged flanks lush-green with grass and bush. In the endless distance was a rim of hazy mountains.

The Oldsmobile came slithering through the muddy yard, and the Chief got out of it. He was dressed in a brown suit, blue cotton shirt and necktie, and he looked less squat and paunchy than he had

the night before, but still quite undistinguished—like a reasonably prosperous Middle Western rancher. He apologized for being late. I said I wished he'd waked me, so I might have seen the functioning of his court; to which he replied that he knew I had been tired from my trip and was in need of sleep. But I had the feeling this was not the reason, that he simply had no interest in taking me along—not because there was something to conceal, but because there was nothing to serve his purpose from it. We went in to breakfast, which we ate from a white cloth-covered table in a conventional dining room, with numerous photographs in frames on the papered walls—one large one of Chief Khama in regalia of his office, and a collection of his favorite walking sticks, hung up like assagai. The boy who served us, dressed in khaki shirt and shorts, and of course barefooted, did it rather clumsily, never seeming sure where a dish should be set down, or just how to pick it up. There was nothing to suggest he'd been instructed by anyone who knew or cared about it. We had oatmeal and milk, and then a dish of mangled eggs and bacon cooked with onions—no doubt a robust dainty of the pioneer Boers; but I found it hard to take. We had good white bread, a pleasant change from the ersatz, sawdust kind adopted for the war, and still enforced by law, in the Union of South Africa. And the coffee was hot and palatable.

In the course of the meal the Chief volunteered some general information: the town of Serowe had a population of 30,000 people, of whom there were less than a hundred Europeans: some traders, labor agents, and the like, together with their families; and the members of the British Administrative Staff, whose work was carried on from a compound of their own. A District Commissioner was in charge, and there were other official groups, on a smaller scale, scattered through the country; with a Resident Commissioner at Mafeking, to whom they made report and from whom they got their orders; who was, himself, subordinate to the High Commissioner at Pretoria; beyond whom, in London at the apex of the hierarchy, were the Colonial Secretary and the Privy Council. He had no complaint to make of the British Government; or, if he had, he did not make it to me, either then or later. Though he mentioned rather sadly that of the taxes he collected from his people—about five dollars annually per man—the British took for their adminis-

tration, 65 per cent. It did not leave much, he said, for his educational projects, which were the first essential in his program for improving the condition of his people.

Despite this fact, he added, he was constructing now at a place called Moeng, some ninety miles away, beyond Palapye, the Bechuana Secondary School—the first such school in Bechuanaland, where there would be education in the higher branches, and vocational training in mechanical and agricultural fields; a school with a curriculum as high as, or higher than, a high school in my country. But this was only a beginning: teachers must be trained, and then there would be other secondary schools. He was silent for a moment, staring at his plate. “With equal opportunity,” he said, “the black and white may live in peace together.” He pushed his chair back and stood up. Tomorrow, if the rain held off and the roads were dry enough, he would take me to Moeng to see for myself what was under way. This morning he would show me through the town. But first he had some business to transact with the Commissioner, and I could go with him if I liked.

We drove through a network of winding, muddy roads—not streets, but country lanes, deep-rutted and with chuck holes that had to be negotiated carefully; bordered with stockades of wooden palings, with the conical thatched roofs sticking up above them—not symmetrically arranged, like houses in a town, but helter-skelter here and there, as if the builders of them had had no plan about it. There were pleasant shade trees but no gardens. Children were playing in the grass beside the road, and most of them looked undersized, spindle-legged and frail—some with bloated bellies, commonly the sign of a carbohydrate diet. On a footpath at the roadside men and women were going to and fro; but not many of them, nothing to suggest an urban settlement: the women carrying things upon their heads, baskets of provisions, jars of water. They stood still as we passed, smiling greeting toward the car; and the men, if they wore hats, took them off respectfully.

At the foot of a towering rocky butte we stopped outside a wire fence, beyond which was a flagpole with the union jack. Three old men were sitting on the ground outside the fence, and they stood up and bowed as we approached. One of them ventured to draw near and ask a question, to which the Chief replied with casual in-

formality. At the gate a Native sentry in colonial uniform, very spick and span, stood at smiling attention as we went into the compound, which contained several huts in the native style, some of mud and thatch, and some of shiny, corrugated metal, occupied as offices by the Commissioner and his staff. We entered one of them and I was introduced to Mr. Ellenberger—a gentle, patient, tired-looking British civil servant, who, from his manner and appearance, might have just arrived from London. But in fact he had been for many years a colonial administrator, and for not a few of them in Bechuanaland. I liked the man at once, and hoped and expected to have a chat with him, but I never got the chance. Following an exchange of the amenities, not wanting to intrude upon their business, I excused myself and walked outdoors.

In the yard I encountered Mrs. Ellenberger and introduced myself. I liked her, too, immediately. She was with her daughter, an attractive young lady, just home from school at Cape Town, and looking forward eagerly to her first trip to England. Parenthetically, I never cease to marvel at the way the British raise their children, no matter where they are; in wilderness or desert they are well-mannered English boys and girls. In reply to my questions Mrs. Ellenberger told me that the Chief was a grand man with a great vision; that he was a hard man when crossed—of which I had already a conviction; that he was not always good at selecting Europeans to assist him in carrying out his plans. By which I judged she meant that his estimates of European character and competence were frequently in error; and which tended to confirm an opinion I had formed, that he was not exceptionally endowed with administrative talents. She added that his own people were too primitive, ignorant and lethargic, to appreciate his efforts or properly support them, to say nothing of assuming competent participation in them. She mentioned, for example, how difficult it was for him to obtain the modest secretarial help he needed, since there were no schools where typing and stenography were taught; and even if there were, once the Chief had been supplied, there would be no jobs for Native typists. It was a vicious circle, as she sketched it: no trained personnel, and no personnel to train one—like building a house without carpenters or tools, by sheer power of one's will. The Chief was carrying on almost single-handed: a staggering undertaking, even for a man with an iron

constitution. As for the people of Bechuanaland, here in Serowe I would see the most advanced and could form my own opinion. The crops had been a failure for five years. There was scarcely one among them who remembered what it felt like to have his belly full.

The Chief returned and we set out again, wallowing through the mud. There appeared to be no center to the town, no focal point for business, nor business going on. We encountered several cars of European residents—traders, I imagine; and we passed a few shabby wooden buildings which seemed to be their shops. But mostly we were winding by stockades of native huts. I suggested I would like to visit one, and the Chief stopped at the gate of the next one we came to. Inside the paling the ground was packed as smooth and hard as a clay tennis court, and divided by low mud walls, so that each hut had a decent yard around it. The roofing thatch was thick, and so skillfully fabricated that, at a little distance, it looked as soft as velvet. It was not supported on the round mud wall, which it steeply overhung, but on poles which ringed the outside of the house, leaving a narrow space between the wall and roof, which provided ventilation and egress for smoke, when, because of weather, there was cooking in the house. The color scheme of yard and hut and roof was a blending of warm browns, pleasing to the eye in the greenery of the trees.

Two boys were cooking mealies in a kettle in the yard. They were so startled by the visit of the Chief that they let the pot boil over, and yellow mush poured out upon the ground while they stood respectfully, smiling welcome. We walked through the open door of the nearest hut, which I judged to be about twelve feet in diameter, with an earthen floor as smooth as tile and spotlessly clean. There was no one at home. Quite high up in the wall were two small windows which did not admit much light because of the steeply overhanging eaves. The furnishings consisted of two wooden chairs and table, and two narrow beds with cheap but pretty counterpanes. The pillowcase on one of them, immaculately clean and fresh, had clusters of flowers embroidered on its corners. A few poor garments hung on hooks upon the wall, and there were two or three religious pictures, which identified the owners as Christian communicants of some sort—as indeed nearly all the people of Serowe are. There was a shelf of modest crockery and some utensils stacked against the wall, but no sign of any stove. The Chief said if the weather

required them to cook indoors, they built a fire between mud bricks on the floor.

I do not know how typical this hut was, but it certainly was unselected. In any case, it seemed to me that it would be difficult to find, in a Western country, a cleaner, neater, better ordered household. But of course there was advantage in the fact that possessions were reduced to bare essentials. Architecturally the native hut seems admirably adapted to its functional use; and aesthetically it's pleasing to the eye, in form and color. And there is the added virtue of uniformity: no ugly, upstart house intrudes upon the scene. In a primitive society there is no such thing as individual architectural taste. If you want to build a house, there's only one to build.

As we were leaving I asked about the water, and the Chief said there were numerous wells scattered through the town, from which the residents were free to draw their needs. The women fetched it every day, or as often as they chose; the wells were gathering places where they liked to go to chat. I asked about the sewage, and he said there were no sewers nor sanitary works of any kind, not even privies for the average huts. There was the bush, he said, with sweep of his arm to indicate the breadth of Africa, and for the present they must make the most of it, as they had always done. There were other things that wanted doing first. The idea of a city of 30,000 people depending on the bush for its sanitary needs was a little staggering to me. But there were no sewage odors in the town, though there was a suggestive quantity of flies.



BACK in the car again the Chief volunteered some facts about his people, whom he described as constituting a communal, patriarchal society, composed of many clans. The head of a family was an authority within it, and families with close blood ties lived together. As for example, one stockade of huts contained the homes of sons, and grandsons, too—if there was space for them. And the ground they cultivated was communal, increased if need be by an in-

crease in their numbers, and, if changed from one section to another, changed for all of them. They did not own the land, which was assigned to them by tribal authority; ownership was vested in the Bamangwato tribe, in all the people. Nor did they, as members of a family, have individual claim on the produce of their labor. The crops and the cattle were the property of all. And the duty of the headman of the family, the oldest and wisest member of it—or there might be more than one—was to see that everybody got his proper share, and neither more nor less; and to settle such disputes as might arise between them. The family was a social unit, closely knit by economic and emotional ties.

As families grew in size and time, and blood ties were diluted, they gave birth to many families. And such a group of families was a clan, whose membership was governed by complicated rules of genealogy; and which, though less closely knit than the family unit, had its own loyalties and obligations, and a headman with the rank of chief. The chiefs of clans were commonly the councilors of the tribal chief, and were to be consulted on matters which affected the people as a whole. Disagreements in a family, which could not be adjusted by its elder, might be referred to the chief of clan, of which the family was a member; and if not determined there, or if the chief of clan felt doubt about the matter, the parties to the case could bring their cause before the tribal court, with their witnesses and arguments—a court of last appeal, where judgment would be rendered in accordance with the edicts of Native Law and Custom.

I was thinking of Tshekedi's wife, the one who had been tried for witchcraft and found guilty; and I asked a question: Did witchcraft often figure in the cases brought before him? He said sometimes, not often; and he added that such cases could not be tried in a British civil court, since a charge of witchcraft would be outlawed at the start, and no evidence admitted to support it. But native custom recognized it as a fact, and native law provided for its punishment, when it was used to do an injury. Belief in it was general; it was basic, elemental in the culture of the people—as a rule invoked benignly, for guidance in a project, as for example, where or when to plant a crop or build a house; or, more seriously, in the treatment of disease. But in fact it was in everything, all the doings of one's life: a deeply rooted fabric of taboos and superstitions,

which played a dominant role in native undertakings, from the cradle to the grave. I told him what that sturdy Afrikaner, the Union High Commissioner for South-West Africa had said to me in Cape Town: how, if in his territory he found a chief who tolerated witchcraft, he would instantly depose him. Tshekedi frowned and shrugged impatiently. Witchcraft, he observed, was not to be disposed of by such summary procedure; and to legislate against it would merely strengthen it, in the way that repressive measures usually resulted. It would yield in time to education, and to nothing else. He was silent for a moment. "The witch doctor," he said, "in the treatment of disease, serves a necessary purpose. He can only be replaced by scientific medicine. To destroy him in advance of its availability would be a criminal action."

We were passing by a vacant, sun-baked strip of ground, like a small public square, with a big tree in its center, and a narrow oval building at one side—really just a long thatched roof held up by poles, with a low mud wall around it. He pointed to it, saying it was where he held his court—in the open when the weather would permit, or otherwise under shelter of the roof. I was reminded of Phineas McIntosh, and I asked if this was the place where he'd been tried. He didn't answer that; he said, a little grimly, there were aspects of the case which had never been disclosed, but he didn't suggest disclosing them to me. Indeed, he changed the subject, nodding toward some unimposing structures on the far side of the square, which, he said, contained his administrative offices.

We went on a little farther and stopped at the foot of another rocky butte, up the side of which there was a road—or what had been a road, for it was now impassable, washed out and filled with rocks. It was not a steep ascent, but the Chief strode so briskly that two or three times I had to pause for breath. About halfway to the top, around a spur of rock, we came upon a low stonewall with a padlocked gate for which he had a key. Beyond it, carved in the sheer flank of the butte, was a narrow shelf of grassy turf: a family burial ground of half a dozen graves, with the monuments you'd see in an English churchyard. The dominating one was a slender granite shaft which marked the resting place of old Chief Khama. For some moments Tshekedi stood in silence, hat in hand; and then he motioned me to look across the parapet which edged

the burial ground upon its farther side. And there, it seemed, was all of Bechuanaland spread out before my eyes: a breath-catching panoramic view. The ragged town lay sprawling on the floor beneath us, half hidden by the butte on which we stood; and beyond it was an endless plain of bush, unbroken save for scattered crags of rock, splotched with barren patches of the reddish soil where the bush thinned out, rimmed at the end of vision with encircling soft blue mountains against a deep blue sky: beautiful and desolate, tinged with melancholy.

We sat side by side upon the parapet. Jutting out into the plain, almost out of sight behind the butte, was a lofty tableland—the top of it as flat, and the flanks as sheer, as if a knife had sliced them. This plateau, the Chief explained, was the beginning of the Kalahari desert, a vast, arid, uninhabitable region which stretched away a thousand miles into South-West Africa. But much of Bechuanaland was potentially rich, he said. This wilderness of bushland spread before our eyes would grow everything on earth under proper cultivation—with modern, scientific agricultural methods—with machinery and equipment to cultivate and harvest. He knew, for he had tried it out, under guidance of European experts. There was no doubt about it: not only a living in the soil for all the people of the country, but there would be a surplus to export, whose proceeds would provide the necessities of a more advanced society and even modest luxuries.

Nor was this all the story, for Bechuanaland was rich in mineral wealth. There were vast coal deposits not many miles away from where we sat, waiting almost at the surface to be mined. This, too, he knew, for he had employed European engineers to estimate their value and accessibility. And there were other minerals of great or unknown value. But development must wait until his people were able and ready to take it on themselves. Not now, but some day. Education must come first: schools to turn out farmers and mining engineers—trained men, and women too, for every sort of skill and vocational undertaking—and teachers who would multiply their numbers. The Bechuana Secondary School was just a start. “It may seem to you,” he said, “that not much has been done to improve the condition of the people. But a beginning has been made, and that is perhaps the hardest step of all.”

I asked what schools there were in Serowe now. There were five elementary schools, he told me, able to accommodate two thousand children, which was a third of the children in the town. The schools were of course inadequate, in quantity and quality, but there was great scarcity of teachers, and a limit to expense. From its share of the taxes the British Government contributed nothing to educational matters, and so the burden of them was a heavy one to bear. I asked another question: were many of his young men recruited for the gold mines of Johannesburg? Some were, he said, not many. From the way in which he spoke I had a feeling the subject was unwelcome. There were labor agents in the country, he admitted, and some young men and boys were tempted by their offers—prompted by a spirit of adventure, he explained. But those who did go seldom went again. When they came home they stayed. And men with wives and families rarely ever went. The Bechuana people loved their country and were not disposed to roam about the world. It seemed to me he was arguing with himself, evading, or ignoring, an admission that economic need was a factor in the matter. At all events he quickly changed the subject, calling my attention to the ragged town beneath us.

It had no plan, he said. It had just grown there, without direction or design. But unlike a Western city which must stay where it had started, Serowe could be moved. It had no permanency; the mud huts which composed it were of brief life anyway. When they had to be replaced they could as well be replaced somewhere else, and started with a plan: streets of proper size on geometric lines, and adequate provision for public services—a water supply and sanitation. It was in his mind to move the city, gradually, to a new location, actually adjacent to the one it occupied, but where it could be started with a blueprint. He wanted bit by bit to eliminate the native hut and the helter-skelter grouping of dwellings in stockades, to encourage modern housing in the Western style. He wanted in the end a new and modern town, with electric lights and sewers, and decent shops well stocked with merchandise. He would like to do away, he said, with European traders—concessionaires who paid well for the privilege of fattening on the public. The business of a country should be carried on by its own citizens, who, if they must enrich someone, had best enrich themselves. He had been reading

much about co-operatives, particularly those in the Scandinavian countries, and was greatly intrigued with the idea. When the time was ripe for it, he thought of introducing a co-operative system in the merchandising field, whereby the people could exchange their produce for manufactured goods and retain the profits for themselves. Such a system, he remarked, should be well-adapted to the Bechuana people, who were thoroughly conditioned to a communal life, and an easy, natural step for them to take. He glanced at his watch and said we must be going.

We went back to the car and drove a little distance, to the houses at the end of the square, which he had pointed out as containing his administrative offices. At the door of one several men were waiting, and they stood respectfully, hats in hand, as we passed by. The house consisted of three or four small rooms, meagerly furnished and equipped, with about a dozen clerks and typists busy at their tasks. The private office of the Chief had a modern touch, with a long narrow desk and metal filing cabinets, and a brisk young woman secretary who had numerous things to tell him and a batch of penciled memos to explain. They talked of course in the Bamangwato language, so I have no notion what it was all about. But presently, on his consent, she ushered in a woman who had probably been waiting for an interview—an elderly woman who, judging from her dress and almost tearful manner, might have recently suffered a bereavement. He motioned her to sit in the chair across from him, and listened to her story with attentive patience, twisting a paper knife in his big restless hands. It was a long story but he did not seek to hurry her, nor did he interrupt her, save now and then to ask a question. When at last she finished with it, he said his say about it, without warmth or emotion, but speaking like a friend—like a father to a daughter, though the woman was of an age to be his mother. Presumably he advised her what to do in the matter that was troubling her—a trouble close to tears; and she seemed relieved and grateful.

He took me then into another room, which he said was the office of the tax collector, in which there were three or four men working, one of whom he introduced as the head of the department—a sort of Secretary of the Treasury, I suppose, though in no sense distinguished in appearance, or distinguishable from the clerks who served

him as assistants. In short, he seemed an ordinary man of modest caliber, without earmark of executive ability or what we call efficiency. Indeed, I did not meet or see in the administrative offices, or elsewhere in Serowe or Bechuanaland, anyone who seemed to be the second-in-command—or third or fourth or fifth—any real vice-president or general manager, any individual who seemed to really supplement the Chief, or be capable of doing so, or within a long reach of it. It looked, from every angle that I saw it, like a one-man job, and much too big a job for any man alone.

A table in the room was stacked with paper money, most of it of small denomination; and in a corner was an open safe which seemed to be stuffed full of it. When we had exchanged the usual witticisms inspired by the tax-collecting business, we returned to the car and drove directly home, where we found lunch waiting for us: a substantial meal of soup and meat and vegetables, garnished thick with onions—neither good nor very bad. There was no beer or liquor served, with the meal or any time. The Chief does not drink or use tobacco. After lunch he said he had business to attend to and would leave me to myself. He took me to the parlor where my Corona was set out on a gimcrack desk in a dismal corner of it, and rather waved me to it, as if to say, "You'd better write it down while you still remember it." And he left me there, with the windows in their panels of stained glass behind the stiff lace curtains, and the lion skins on the floor.



I HAMMERED out some notes, and then I scrutinized all the pictures in the room; I went back to the hall and carefully read the scrolls and testimonials* framed upon the walls, most of which pertained to old Chief Khama. Time hung heavy on my hands. I went on to the kitchen and interviewed the cook. No, the Chief had not left word when he'd be back. The clouds had gathered and it looked like rain, but anyway I decided on a walk. I strolled, with no idea where I might be going, but taking care to remember how I came, lest I should be lost in the puzzle of stockades. Goats were tethered

here and there, and being moved about from one pasture to another. Men and women passed along the muddy path, nearly all the women carrying something on their heads—from a teacup to a hamper full of washing. Some were young and pretty, and most of them had slender, graceful figures which their Western sisters would have envied. When you carry a burden on your head, your back is straight and you have to keep your chin up. They smiled and nodded shyly to me; men in faded shirts and jeans stepped aside to yield the path, taking off their hats; children called out, “*Yambo*,” and seemed delighted when I called the greeting back.

It had commenced to drizzle when I came at length to a trader’s store, a dilapidated building with a crazy wooden porch on which a group of people had sought shelter from the rain: men and women, young and old, and spindle-legged children—poor people certainly, very poor indeed, but not unhappy. Their faces were not dull or listless, and there was a lot of laughing chatter going on. Inside the store two women were bargaining with a Native shop assistant for a length of cotton cloth, of which they make the simple garment that they wear. The gayer colors are the more expensive, but in Bechuanaland there are few gay colors used. The shop seemed almost bare of merchandise: bolts of cotton stuff, shirts and jeans for men—coffee, tea, and sugar, I suppose; some shelves of tinned and packaged foods, mostly from America—not on a par with the poorer sort of crossroads store at home.

Standing on the creaky porch, with the rain dripping through the broken roof, looking out across the road to the muddle of thatch cones sticking up behind the clumsy palings, I tried to think of Serowe being moved to a new location, to visualize conversion of it to a modern city: paved streets with trams and motorcars, electric lights and sewers; and rows of little bungalows with lawns and pretty gardens, equipped with all the gadgets of a civilized society. But it was hard to see, to imagine such a thing. The town I pictured to myself hadn’t just occurred, hadn’t suddenly developed out of nothing. It had hundreds of years of foundation underneath it. It was like an iceberg in the sea, with most of it concealed beneath the surface.

And I tried to think of the people on the porch as living in it, as making their homes in the little bungalows—a way of life which,



in itself, denied the deep convictions of their culture, which would disperse the family group and threaten all the loyalties tradition had imposed, which was antipodal to custom and destructive of the fabric of a tribal life. I tried to think of them as butchers, bakers, plumbers; as teachers, college presidents; as doctors, dentists, scientists, and lawyers; as governors and bureaucrats and bankers; as policemen and firemen and radio performers; as writers and editors and publishers of books; as owners and clients of co-operative enterprises—to think of them as playing all the specialized and complex roles demanded by a competitive society, and which were as remote from their experience as the stars. And this, to visualize within calculable time, was even harder—impossible in fact. There were so many things that wanted doing first, and not just things in the realm of education, that could be learned in schools. Only the children seemed in reach of it at all—but in reach of nothing more than being children, for children are the same throughout the earth; always and everywhere they are little primitives.

Later, in the Belgian Congo, I was to see the process of transition at its best, where the conduct of it is being carried on by a wise, farsighted colonial government, with a trained elite of expert administrators on the ground; with the working arm of the Catholic Church to direct a carefully formulated scheme of education—a scheme so sensitive and flexible that it can be, and is, constantly adjusted to the changing needs it seeks to serve; with the full, and enforced, co-operation of great concessionaires engaged in mining and agrarian enterprises, who must obey the program and contribute to fulfillment; with millions of money for buildings and equipment, for hospitals and dispensaries, for conservation measures to protect the soil, for experimental agricultural projects. Yet even in the Congo the process of transition is a slow and painful one.

Here in Bechuanaland it seemed a Herculean undertaking; and one I wished with all my heart might not be necessary. Too bad these simple people could not be spared the long and dubious agony of being civilized—a process which, no matter how humanely it be guided, is still a cruelly painful operation. But the world has grown so small there is no room left in it for adult children. And the process once commenced cannot be reversed, for there is no road back.

The rain had stopped and I retraced my steps. It was after dark when the Chief came home. He had a bulging brief case, and through dinner, which resembled lunch, he seemed preoccupied. When the meal was finished we adjourned to the parlor where, with concerted effort of the domestic staff, a gasoline lantern had been lighted. But it presently blazed up as if preparing to explode, and was taken away and replaced with several candles. The Chief said in the morning he would show me some other things of interest in the town, and after that would send me, under guidance of his cousin, to inspect the Bechuana Secondary School project—unless it should rain hard in the night and he didn't think it would. He was sorry he could not go with me himself, but matters had arisen to detain him in Serowe. From Moeng they would drive me to Palapye, in time to catch my train for Bulawayo—the same one I had come on.

He fetched a roll of blueprints and spread them on the table beneath the lighted candles. He wanted me to have, he said, some knowledge in advance of what I'd see at Moeng. There were to be twelve buildings, some quite large ones, seven of which were now completed at the expiration of nine months of work. In another six months he thought it should be finished, though the main school building had not yet been started; it was a big one and would alone require half a million brick. The brick was being made on the premises at Moeng. He pointed out the other buildings: dormitories for both sexes, with accommodations for 288 students; dining hall and kitchens; hostels for teachers and experimental farm managers; and a fine big residence for a European principal.

It looked, on paper anyway, like an undertaking of no mean proportions, and I asked him what the cost of it would be. He asked me what such an institution would cost to build in my country, and I said I thought at least a million dollars and probably much more. He told me then, with a complacent air, that the Bechuana Secondary School would cost a total of \$200,000. I said such a figure seemed incredible. And he agreed it would be except for the fact that all the labor, save for European foremen, and a handful of Colored artisans imported from the Cape—all the workers on the job, some three hundred of them, were Bechuana men who received no compensation—*voluntary* labor, as he called it. He spoke of such a group

as a *regiment*. I gathered that these labor battalions were recruited by the chiefs of clans, under his direction, as in the Western world men are mobilized for military service—or, more significantly, as in fascist states they are mobilized for every sort of purpose. A regiment worked four months, he said, and was then replaced by a fresh levy. They brought with them when they came, from far sections of the country, wagons and oxen for transport of material from the railway at Palapye. In answer to a question he assured me that their personal interests did not suffer by reason of their absence from their homes; other members of the family discharged their duties for them while they were away. Such procedure was in full accord with Native Law and Custom, and common tribal practice in public works construction from which all the members of the tribe would benefit.

Still, all the same, I said, \$200,000 was a lot of money to apportion from a slender budget for an educational project, and how had he managed that? He admitted that ordinary income would not provide for it; the work was being financed by a *voluntary* tax. I said I was familiar with many kinds of taxes but I had never heard of a voluntary one. He smiled amusedly, explaining that those who had subscribed would be in the nature of preferred shareholders in a corporate undertaking; they would be first to benefit from the improvement. The school would have a limited capacity, and the children of families of voluntary tax payers would be the first enrolled. I asked him humorously if the taxes of which the Mswazi clan stood in arrear, were of the voluntary sort; and he laughed good-naturedly. He said if I were interested in the Mswazi case, he'd be glad to furnish me the facts, and he took from the brief case on his knees an alarming file of papers about two inches thick, and put it in my hands. The story was all there, he said, in the letters and the briefs, and I might find it worth my while to read it. I think he was relieved to have provided me with something else to do than ask him questions, and he seized the opportunity to go to work himself on some other problem from the brief case.

I read about the Mswazi, in the flickering candlelight, until my eyes were blurred and my senses reeled. But I made no more of the affair than I have already briefly summarized. There were claims and counterclaims, diametrically opposed in fact and implication;

briefs and depositions; and endless letters to and from the High Commissioner's office, opaquely formal inquiries and answers—a maze of quasi-legal and official verbiage. Long before I'd finished wading through it, the Chief, after several premonitory yawns, excused himself and retired to his room. Finally, I began to skip, and then I gave it up. I took a candle from the lot and blew the others out, and crept away to bed.



THE morning was a repetition of the previous one. The Chief had long since gone when I got up, but he presently returned for breakfast—same mush, and mangled eggs with onions. It hadn't rained again and the day was clear and fine. After breakfast we set out, in the Oldsmobile, to a section of the town I hadn't seen, which was on higher ground and contained some modern houses, the residences of traders and government officials; and in their midst the hospital, which is administered by the Colonial Government. It consisted of three or four cottage-type brick buildings, closely grouped together—in appearance not unlike an average small town hospital at home.

At the door the Chief turned me over to the head nurse, or matron, a Native woman of middle age, who spoke reasonably good English. She told me there were two doctors on the staff, a European and a Native, neither of whom was at the moment on the premises. The European doctor had gone to an air strip at some distance from the town to meet a specialist who was flying from Johannesburg to operate upon a European child—a difficult abdominal operation which the resident doctor did not wish to undertake. The Native doctor was at home with a mild attack of flu.

She seemed pleased to show me through the place herself. There were some private rooms for European patients, only one of which was occupied, by the ailing child. The Natives were in wards, about a dozen to a room, segregated as to sex; but otherwise, except for

the maternity department, they seemed to be indiscriminately mingled—medical and surgical and whatnot. There was no isolation room, and cases of typhoid and diphtheria were separated from their neighbors only by a screen. Among the others that she pointed out, were cases of syphilis, leprosy, and tetanus; and a number of T.B.'s, most, but not all, of whom were on an open porch. I judged that altogether there were less than fifty patients, and that this was not far from the hospital's capacity. There were two or three Native nurses in attendance, looking decently efficient in clean, white uniforms. I encountered no technicians, and in answer to a question was told there were none, that the doctors did their own laboratory work. The technical and X-ray equipment that I saw was of a modest sort. As for the patients, they appeared to be like patients in any institution.

When we came back to the entrance the Chief was chatting with a young woman whom he introduced as a social worker, and who had been visiting the sick. She also worked with children, he explained, organizing groups for play and projects. She seemed a shy young person and uncommunicative, certainly not social in her attitude toward me. I mentioned I would like to meet the Native doctor, and the Chief said we'd stop by his house and pay a call. On the way to it we passed by the dispensary, an outpatient clinic to which the sick can come to be diagnosed and treated. It consisted of two round thatched huts with metal walls, connected by a narrow structure roofed with tile. About a score of people were waiting for the doctor: men and boys, and women with babies in their arms, standing or squatting in the shade of the tiled porch—waiting patiently, like people for whom time is unimportant.

The doctor's house was an attractive, modern cottage, on the edge of a muddy field which the Oldsmobile barely slithered through. The doctor's wife, a personable young woman with a pretty, toddling baby, received us at the door and welcomed us into the living room which was comfortably furnished and immaculately tidy. She said her husband had been sleeping but she knew he'd want to see us and she'd go and speak to him. She presently came back and took us to the sick room where the doctor was sitting up in bed—a young man with a beard and sadly thoughtful eyes. He said he wasn't really ill—just a touch of flu, but

he thought he'd take it easy for the day. I told him I had visited the hospital and was favorably impressed with what I'd seen.

He stared at me incredulously. The hospital was totally inadequate, he said, in capacity and in equipment. He enumerated several things of which it stood in need, and without which proper diagnosis and effective treatment were impossible. There were no interns on the staff, nor really any staff except himself and the European doctor, who must turn their hands to everything, from a major operation to a blood count. The medical schools were to blame for the condition: notwithstanding a Native population of 9,000,000, in the Union of South Africa alone, they admitted so few Natives to their classes that each year they graduated only six or seven Native doctors. He told me with a mournful smile that Native students in anatomy, in the universities, were not allowed to practice on European corpses; they must work on black ones of their own. Even in the grave there was a color line. For a Native to become a doctor was very difficult indeed. Only a handful were able to obtain the education prerequisite to studying medicine; and then there was the problem of finance, which fewer still could meet, for they had not equal opportunity with European boys to work their way through school—few jobs were open to them, and only menial ones; finally, there were the restrictions and humiliations of the academic color line, to which some of them succumbed, no matter how courageously they started. Yes, it was hard, he said.

I asked him to what diseases the Natives were most subject.—They had everything, he said, that anyone had anywhere.—Was there much V.D.?—Yes, lots of it. They got it in the mines and brought it home.—Was there much T.B.?—Yes, very much.—Malaria?—Of course. All Africa was riddled with it. But the worst thing with which they had to contend in Bechuanaland, was malnutrition, for it was at the root of many maladies. The average Native was so badly nourished that he was easy prey to anything that came along.—And what could be done for malnutrition?—“Ah that!” He shook his head and sank back upon his pillow. “You must ask the Chief,” he said. But the Chief had grown restless and was edging toward the door. And there was no need to ask him, for I knew what he would say: the answer was at Moeng, in

the Bechuana Secondary School. I shook the doctor's hand and said good-by.

We drove some distance to a good-sized building, one end of which combined a machine shop and garage, very modestly equipped and with nothing about it to suggest efficiency. There were trucks and cars, all apparently belonging to the Chief, inside and out of it, in various stages of repair, under direction of a young European who struck me as being a possible example of bad judgment in selection. He was voluble and full of explanations. There was talk about a station wagon which I gathered had been ordered for my trip to Moeng, but whatever it needed hadn't been accomplished, and I judged from what was said I was going in a truck. I asked the foreman if the Native boys made good mechanics; and he said they were all right if you stood by and watched them, which seemed to be what he was doing. The other end of the building was a woodworking shop, with power saws and lathes; and some Native carpenters who were making furniture—rather primitively, but they seemed to know what they were doing. The carpentry department was in much better order.

We went on, to a big, barnlike wooden building, standing bleakly by itself on barren ground, which was one of Serowe's five elementary schools, and probably the most prepossessing one. It contained several large, bare rooms, equipped with badly worn desks and benches, possibly castoff from European use and purchased secondhand; with shabby blackboards which had long since lost their luster; and with very little else. One of the rooms was of a size to contain two classes, each of fifty or more children. As we came into a room, in response to a warning from their teacher, they stood beside their desks and spoke a greeting to us. In age they ranged from five or six to their middle teens; in the lowest class there were some older ones—possibly backward pupils, or they had started late. They were all poorly clothed, with no greater uniformity than poverty imposes: the boys in shirts and shorts, and the girls in drab, unbecoming dresses with nothing underneath, and all of course barefooted. But there was no musty odor to suggest that either they or their garments were unwashed. Most of them looked undernourished, thin and frail. But they were alert and smiling, pleased and excited at a visit from the Chief; and those who were called

on to exhibit slates or copybooks were shyly delighted by a word of commendation—like children anywhere.

The curriculum seemed limited to elementary work: reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic, taught in their own language; and in addition they were learning to speak English. I thought the schooling did not go beyond what would be considered third- or fourth-grade work at home. The Native teachers seemed earnest and sincere, but of only moderate competency; and the principal, who was related to the Chief, impressed me as a gentle, ineffectual man. In brief, the school was not inspiring, not on a par in equipment or teaching staff with others I had seen in the Union of South Africa, which were under European guidance. In contrast with the great Mission schools of the Congo, which I had yet to see, this Serowe institution was a poor, depressing one. But still it was a school with four hundred children in it, learning how to read and write. And as the Chief would say: it was a beginning.



IT WAS nearly noon when we got home. A shiny pickup truck, with FARGO lettered on the tailboard, was waiting for me at the kitchen door; and the cousin of the Chief, who would act as my conductor on the trip to Moeng, was superintending the loading of my baggage. He was introduced as Molwa Sekgoma—the family name of the Chief's first wife, that unhappy woman who was accused of witchcraft. Sekgoma is about his cousin's age, less dark of skin and of slighter build, with a gentle, sensitive face, and a pleasing voice and manner. He was dressed in pseudomilitary costume, a relic I assumed of his service in the war: khaki-colored woolen shirt, and breeches which were bound at his ankles with short gaiters. Notwithstanding his attire there was nothing about him to suggest the man of action. I liked him at first glance, and in the course of the next eight hours came to like him more.

We had three passengers who were going with us in the body of

the truck, with my hand bags and Corona—one of them the cook, though I didn't at the time identify him. And there were three of us to occupy the seat: the driver—the same who had met me at Palapye with the Chevrolet, and Sekgoma in the middle, with my raincoat on his knees—he insisted on holding it for me. It was a little crowded. We got off with a flourish, waving good-by to the Chief, who, I felt sure, was relieved to see the end of me, and thankful that at last he could get back to his work.

The day was fine; the road already dusty, except for shrinking mudholes which could easily be avoided; the terrifying trestles turned out on close acquaintance to be decent wooden bridges over unalarming ditches; the sky was an inverted bowl, as blue as indigo and higher up than heaven; the air was fresh and sweet, and the bush was green and beautiful. Now and then we came to clearings, divided into little fields where knee-high corn was growing. Sekgoma pointed out two varieties: maize and mealies, he explained. But from the car I could not detect the difference. These were communal tracts, apportioned to families resident in Serowe; and here and there among them would be a tiny shelter made of thatch, where those who stayed to tend the crops could make their beds at night. They were scattered far and wide, Sekgoma said, to distances of several walking days. Although great areas of the Bechuana territory are what is known as Crown Lands, and as such are, theoretically at least, subject to the disposition of the British Crown, practically, the Natives are free to use most of the land in any way they please.

We came on cattle pasturing in the bush—scrubby-looking beasts of uncertain genealogy, and shelters for the herdsmen who were drowsing in the shade beside the road. They waved and called to us as we passed by. There were no fences and the pasturage was meager, so the cattle must be moved from day to day. Water was plentiful just now, at the ending of the rainy season, but later when the country would be brown and dry, it required skillful handling to keep the herds alive. They must be driven long distances sometimes—many days of tramping through the bush. And there were lions and leopards from which they must be guarded. A week before, near the spot we were then passing, Sekgoma had come upon a lion. It was at night and he was in a car, headed for Palapye. The car had broken down and they were getting out to see what could be

done, when suddenly a lion appeared in the middle of the road, not a hundred feet beyond them, standing still and facing toward them, blinded by the headlights. They had no weapon with them but a rifle of small caliber, of a size for shooting rabbits, and Sekgoma was uncertain if he ought to chance a shot, for if the lion were wounded he might charge upon the car, which was helpless to drive on. Such things had happened, or at least had been reported. But he took the chance and fired, and the lion was killed. It was a big and handsome one, he said.

I returned to the subject of the cattle: to whom did they belong?—To different people.—How many cattle did an average man possess?—It varied greatly. There were men of the Bamangwato tribe—though perhaps he spoke of families and not of individuals—who owned as many as five thousand head (which would be in value about \$20,000), and others who owned none.—Such disparity seemed difficult to reconcile with a communal economic system, and I raised the question. “You mean,” I asked, “that here in Bechuanaland, as elsewhere in the world, there are both rich and poor?”—“Yes, rich and poor,” he said. “But the rich are not rich by European standards, and the poor are not so poor, for no man will die of hunger while any in his family—or his clan or tribe—have food to eat.”—I pursued the matter further: such rich men as there were, why did they not, I questioned, avail themselves of Western methods to multiply their wealth?—why did they not invest in tractors and equipment to cultivate the soil?—“They are content,” he smiled. “They are not acquainted with competitive society, and their wants are few.”—But at least, I insisted, they could build modern homes, with frigidaires and radios and central heating plants.—“But they like their homes,” he said, “and they like their way of life.”—This seemed entirely reasonable to me and I dropped the subject.

It was long past lunch time now and I thought we must be coming near Palapye. I suggested that perhaps we ought to stop there and see if we could find a bite to eat. Sekgoma smiled; he said we had behind us in the truck the wherewithal to make a picnic, and also the cook who'd come with us to prepare it. We would lunch at Moeng—in the open air, if I didn't mind. Anyway, we would not pass through Palapye, as the road to Moeng would diverge before we got there. In England, he remarked, the picnic was a

national institution. He had been there recently, to represent the Chief at the Victory Celebration. It had been a great occasion; he had been well received and entertained in London. He had met the King and shaken hands with him. The experience had been one he would not soon forget.

As he had predicted, we presently diverged from the Palapye road. And soon we crossed the one-track line of railway which links South Africa with the Rhodesias—that fabled dream of Cecil Rhodes, with which he meant some day to slice the Continent, from the Cape to Cairo. But I doubt the dream will ever be fulfilled, for the airplane is at hand to solve the transport problem, and all Africa is crisscrossed by its flights. In the twinkling of an eye it skims the endless reach of bush and jungle, through which the railway train crawls like a tired turtle. Neither mountains nor rivers can retard it, and the journey of a week is reduced to a few hours. It cannot carry everything—not yet; but that will come perhaps. At all events the railway has an end, just within the border of the Belgian Congo, still south of the Equator—two thousand miles from Cape Town, and four thousand more to Cairo.

The road we followed now was a very narrow one, so tightly hemmed with bush there was scarcely passing room, and so twisting you could rarely see a hundred yards ahead; at times it seemed no more than a wheel track in the wilderness—not a road on which to meet another car at the speed that we were traveling. But we met no other cars, and the driver drove as though he did not expect to do so. Some miles beyond the railway we overtook a huge and clumsy wagon, loaded with dressed lumber, and drawn by eight span of plodding oxen, whose drivers walked beside them, urging them with sharpened sticks and a chorus of shrill cries. One of several transport crews in the service of the Chief, Sekgoma told me, bringing building materials from the railway at Palapye to the school—a trip of fifty miles which they commonly accomplished in two days. And then they would return to fetch another load.

There continued to be clearings here and there: strips of growing corn; but they were less frequent, and the soil appeared to be of poorer quality. They were not Serowe fields, Sekgoma said, but pertained to villages in the vicinity. Though nowhere on the way had I sight of any village, or even group of huts. At length we came upon a man walking by himself, carrying something on the

end of a forked stick, and stopped to speak with him. He was taking home an iguana he had killed, or something that resembled one—an ugly-looking lizard about a yard in length. Sekgoma said the meat of it wasn't fit to eat, but the skin was greatly valued for making shoes or sandals. They were not dangerous creatures if you kept your distance from them, but they used their tails in the manner of the crocodile, and could badly rip your leg if you got it within reach. They sometimes killed a dog that came too close.

Following this encounter the road began to climb a rim of hills or mountains, with taller ones beyond it. And from having been a fairly smooth dirt road, it suddenly developed into a sort of highway, two or three cars wide. It had been newly cut in very rocky ground, and the rocks dislodged left lying in it; it was literally paved with stones of every size, and many that approximated boulders. A grader could have cleared it in a day; but I doubt if there is, in all of Bechuanaland, a single piece of road-making machinery. What is done is done by hand, and this job was unfinished. We bounced and banged along a surface that resembled the droppings of a glacier, dodging rocks that could rip an axle out. I shuddered for the pickup, for its suffering springs and tires. The boys in the back were clinging to my bags and the picnic boxes; the cook sat braced with his feet against the tailboard, clasping my Corona in his arms. On the driver's seat the three of us were too tightly wedged to slide, but bounce we could, and my head hit the cab roof more than once. Sekgoma said, a little breathlessly, that when the road was finished it would be a smooth, broad avenue, and a suitable approach to the Bechuana Secondary School. In the meantime there was another road, somewhat longer but less painful, by which we would emerge.



AT LAST we gained the top and rattled down into a lovely valley, completely encircled by the mountains, the floor of it lush-green and dotted thick with clumps of fine big trees. For several miles we drove along a level road, fording trickling brooks where cattle

wallowed and must be herded from our path, until finally, at the far side of the valley, close against the flank of a tall, thick-timbered mountain, we came upon a group of thatched mud huts—perhaps a dozen of them. And around them, half hidden by the trees, scattered through a natural campus many acres in extent, were the white-walled buildings of the school, with their silvery metal roofs. We drove to one, across the hummocked grass, and stopped beneath a spreading tree.

And where, I asked, was Moeng?—Moeng was here—that little group of huts.—There was no more to it than that?—No more than that.—But why select a spot like this in which to build a school?—Well, for one thing, it was beautiful, Sekgoma ventured shyly—or did I find it so?—Yes, beautiful of course. But still, why here?—almost a hundred miles distant from Serowe, in the heart of the wilderness, in a place so inaccessible, at the very end of nowhere?—There were practical considerations, too, Sekgoma said. The Chief had selected the location, not for its aesthetic advantages alone, though they had played a part in his decision. He wanted the school to be removed from outside influences, in a place where the academic life could be uninterruptedly pursued, with almost monastic rigor. And Moeng served this purpose. Also, it was not too remote from the railway line, and this must be considered in the building of it. Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, there was an abundant source of water, from near-by springs—“fountains” as he called them—on the flank of the mountain. A good supply of water was essential to the school, particularly for its agricultural projects. And this had been no doubt the determining factor.

While the boys built a fire in the shade of the tree and set about preparing for the picnic, I strolled with Sekgoma from one building to another. The place was a beehive of activity: carpenters and masons busy at their jobs; trucks and wagons bumping back and forth with loads of brick and lumber. At a little distance the brick was being made. We presently encountered the European foreman, J. W. Warffemius—an amiable, big Dutchman from the Cape, who joined us and walked with us. He seemed to know his business thoroughly, and glad of a chance to talk about it. He had on the job, he said, only three other Europeans, and forty Native and Colored artisans whom he had imported. All the other labor was

furnished by the Chief, and on the whole was very satisfactory. He picked up a brick and put it in my hands. It was first-rate brick, he said, as good as you'd find anywhere. The Native labor wasn't his responsibility; they had their own headman. He told this fellow what he wanted, and it was up to him to get it done. So far it had worked out very well. There was, he explained, an additional authority, in the person of the captain of the labor regiment, who had charge of the workers' camp and provided for their rations, and settled such disputes as might arise among them. However, he had nothing to do with the construction.

Both these men subsequently joined us on our tour of inspection. Sekgoma introduced them, and, at my suggestion, they wrote their names for me, in carefully printed script: G. Motalaote and L. M. Serrtse. They were nice-appearing fellows, in their middle thirties, I should say; not authoritative in manner or in speech. They were manifestly proud of what they had accomplished—of the handsome buildings, so modern and complete, and delighted at the compliments I paid them. But I had the feeling—and to some extent I had it with Sekgoma—that their pride was in the physical achievement, that they had but little notion of the vision which had prompted it, that the purpose of the school was of secondary interest and scarcely apprehended.

Most of the workers were young men, boys in their teens or barely out of them. I asked Warffemius if they seemed unhappy by reason of exile from their homes and families. He said he didn't know if they were or not; and then he laughed and added confidentially that they didn't seem to lack for company. Sometimes on a moonlight night he'd go to take a stroll, and there were plenty of them, boys and girls, on the grass beneath the trees. You had to be careful not to step on them.—But the girls, where did they come from?—He waved his arm expansively. From the bush, for miles around. But it was no affair of his and he didn't interfere. It was a lonely place, and he'd been lonely, too—just three other Europeans like himself. They had a house to live in and were not uncomfortable; still, he'd be glad when the job was finished—in another six months if everything went well.—Had he any criticism of the plans or the location?—The plans were good, he said. As for the

location, he wasn't quite so sure; it was pretty low for proper drainage.

We were approaching the commissary building, which would house the dining hall and kitchen, and was practically complete—the biggest of the units, save for the main school one which had not yet been started, for which right now the brick was being made—half a million of them it would take. But it would serve no purpose to describe the several buildings in detail, beyond to say they would be no discredit to an educational institution anywhere. They were in no sense elaborate or pretentious, but designed on simple functional lines, not for luxurious but for rather Spartan living. Aesthetically, with their white-plastered walls one-storey high, and sloping, silvery roofs of stainless ribbed aluminum overhanging wide tiled porches, they were pleasing to the eye and appropriate to the landscape. But one thing I remarked: there was not in the program any provision for a chapel or a church.

I was suddenly reminded that in my conversations with the Chief, the subject of religion had been scarcely touched upon. He had mentioned that his people had embraced the Christian faith, and that morning, as we left the doctor's house, had pointed out a big brick church which his father had constructed, and which, he said, was well attended. But we had not stopped to visit it, nor had I made acquaintance, as might have been expected, of any of the clerical fraternity. I asked Sekgoma now what provision there would be in the school for Christian worship. He said the school would not be conducted under religious auspices. Services of some sort might be held. He didn't know.—But the Bamangwato people were Christians, were they not?—Yes, most of them, he thought.—Yet they did believe in witchcraft?—Some did, he agreed. And not very long ago, he added with a smile, many Western Christians had believed in witchcraft, too. All peoples had their superstitions, and some of the Native ones were not unadapted to interpretation in terms of Christian teachings. (The words are mine but the idea was his)—Did he, himself, believe in witchcraft?—The question was unfair and his answer was evasive. Witchcraft, he said, was a broad and complex structure, with a multitude of aspects. Inexplicable things undeniably occurred, not readily accounted for on grounds of pure coincidence. In the treatment of the sick, witch doctors

frequently effected what appeared to be extraordinary cures. For example, with snake bite they were, or seemed to be, remarkably effective; even venom from the fangs of the black mamba, the most lethal of all reptiles, often yielded to their treatment. Such matters were not easily shrugged away. As for other practice, even in my country many people consulted fortunetellers, did they not? And some no doubt were guided by what they were told?—I admitted that they did and that they were, and let it go at that.

When we got back to the dormitory building whence we'd started, the picnic preparations were complete, with a folding table and camp chair on the porch, and one place set for me. I protested the formality of this solitary state, insisting that Sekgoma come and join me, which finally he did. The other members of the party, Warffemius and the Natives, Motalaote and Serrtse, who said they had lunched and couldn't eat a bite, sat near us on the railing of the porch. The lunch was not a picnic but a full-fledged meal, beginning with soup and ending with dessert. It was nearly four o'clock and I was hungry. When we'd finished, it developed that our Native companions were not above a snack; and they sat down to eat, with seeming gusto, while we joined Warffemius on the railing.

I questioned the captain of the labor regiment: were his men content to be here, so far away from home?—Oh yes, they didn't mind.—They were not homesick?—didn't miss their wives and families?—Well yes, perhaps, as anybody would.—How did they occupy themselves in their leisure time?—There was little leisure time, he said, and nothing much to do.—Did they ever run away?—No, they never ran away.—Did they get into squabbles?—Yes, sometimes, but no more than they would at home.—Did they get drunk?—Some did, when they got a chance. But they didn't often get one.—Were they given any money?—No. He laughed. What good would money be in a place like this?—How long had they been here on the job?—Since the work began, nine months ago.—I thought perhaps he had misunderstood me, and explained that I meant this particular regiment of which he was in charge.—But no, he understood: they had been here for nine months. I told him I had gained the impression from the Chief that the regiments were changed at four-month intervals. He looked surprised and politely

incredulous.—Well, how much longer would his men be on the job?—He didn't know, he said. They would be here until the Chief permitted them to go.

It was time for us to leave, Sekgoma said, to provide a safety margin in case we should experience any trouble on the road. The kitchen equipment was already stowed away, and the table and dishes quickly followed. We shook hands all around, with cordial exchange of the amenities, and resumed our several places in the pickup. By my watch it was four-thirty when we left, and we had ample time, three hours and a half, to drive the fifty miles and be on hand for the Bulawayo train when it pulled into Palapye. But about ten minutes, and three miles, upon our way, just after we had waded through a rocky creek bed and dispersed a herd of cattle from their wallow, there was a cracking sound and the pickup bumped along with a list to starboard. We got out to look and found a spring was broken, which was not remarkable—remarkable in fact that all the springs hadn't broken long ago. The only tool that anyone produced, was a hand ax which the driver dragged from underneath the seat, and which didn't seem adapted to our needs, though indeed I don't know what tool would have been. There was prolonged palaver, at the end of which the cook started running back alone—like a sprinter to begin with; but the sun was hot, and within a hundred yards he had slowed down to a walk. Sekgoma said he'd sent him to get another truck. I called attention to the fact that at the rate of speed the messenger was going, or any speed he could possibly maintain, it would be at least an hour before relief could reach us, and then it would be questionable if we could make the train. Sekgoma admitted reason in my argument, and there was more palaver. It was finally decided to drive the pickup back; and this we did, banging along at a snail's pace, with which however we quickly overtook the sweating cook.



IT WAS after five o'clock when we limped across the campus and came to a halt in a group of Native workers who seemed neither homesick nor unhappy, but mildly elated and amused by our disaster. Motalaote and Serrtse made entrance on the scene, and there was more discussion, concluded with the requisition of another, bigger truck. But there would be slight delay because the truck was full of stuff which would have to be unloaded. Messengers went dashing off in search of it and there was no end of shouting. By this time we had gathered quite a crowd, including the residents of Moeng—about thirty men and women and a swarm of children. Two of the women, with infants on their backs, were appealing to Sekgoma. They wanted to go with us, he explained, to a clearing we would pass, where they had corn to guard. He told them they could go and they rushed away to gather their belongings. The truck arrived at last, a formidable one of reassuring size, with another driver at the wheel—a slender, keen-eyed fellow, lithesome and alert, and one of the best drivers I think I ever rode with. It was close to six o'clock when we were off again, with quite a load of passengers, including the two women and their offspring.

There was no time to spare and we didn't linger. The truck plowed along, like a car of Juggernaut, through creek beds and mud wallows, over rocks and ruts. When there were cattle in the way the driver routed them, yipping in a high, shrill voice, to which the passengers behind contributed a chorus; and the sluggish beasts made haste to scramble from our path. The road that climbed the mountain was not so rough as the one by which we came, but it was rough enough; and the voyagers in the body of the truck must cling tightly for their lives. But judging from their laughing chatter, they seemed to be enjoying it. We crossed the summit as the sun was setting, and, for a brief moment, I saw spread before me the endless reach of wilderness, softly crimsoned in the sunset colors, to the far blue rim of mountains, with the knife-edged tableland of

the Kalahari desert looming blackly from the plain—beautiful and desolate. And behind me was the valley of the Bechuana Secondary School, the valley of a vision, already in the twilight, buried out of sight in purple shadow—beautiful and lonely.

Down we went, and presently came into the narrow, twisting road we had followed through the bush. It was growing dusk and the headlights were turned on; and in the light of them we caught a silver fox—or so Sekgoma named it—as it slipped across the road and vanished in the bush. Two or three times, in the midst of nothing, we paused to discharge a passenger; and finally, at the edge of a tiny field of corn, the two women disembarked, their babies on their backs, carrying their belongings in their arms—blankets and a kettle and a bag of mealies: everything they'd need to make themselves at home, for days or maybe weeks. Perhaps there was a shelter into which they'd crawl to sleep; and if not no doubt they'd build one before they went to bed. They would know how to do it, gathering twigs and branches from the bush; they would not need any help. There might be lions abroad, or poisonous serpents hidden in the grass; and with such, too, they would know how to deal. And they would not be lonely or afraid. The errand they were on was part and parcel of their way of life, as unconsidered as, in the Western world, one would step across the street to buy a loaf of bread. They were laughing when we left them in the road, exchanging banter with the remaining passengers.

On the driver's seat we rode in silence, winding swiftly along the narrow way our headlights carved out of the wilderness. The stars were coming out. Again we crossed the railroad track—that segment of an uncompleted vision which a man long dead had dreamed. I was thinking of the Bechuana Secondary School, of the dream that inspired its creation, of the vision of the dreamer, in the distance far beyond it. I had seen the splendid buildings, had touched them with my hands, yet they seemed already like the fabric of a dream and incredibly remote—as if they stood alone upon a lofty tower which had no steps by which they would be reached, or just a few, far down close to the bottom, with a fearful gap between. A railroad from the Cape to Cairo seemed in contrast a comparatively modest undertaking; there were only to be overcome some virgin forests,

deserts, mountains, rivers; beasts and reptiles; plague-ridden tropics infested with malignant fevers; hostile savages, and European rivalries with spheres of influence—at their most deadly worst only forces of nature and political intrigue: nothing that money and a determined spirit couldn't conquer in a measurable period of time. But the Bechuana Secondary School had more formidable enemies to vanquish: lethargy, inertia; a kind of thinking and a way of life completely alien to its objectives, and which would be stubbornly defended, regardless of what lip service they gave, by the deepest strata of the primitive subconscious. There was, or so it seemed to me, riding in the darkness through the bush—there was too much that wanted doing first. As if you were to say to a child in kindergarten: tomorrow you must go to the university. It seemed impossible.

Sekgoma touched my arm. The lights of Palapye were in sight. At the edge of it we passed a camp of transport workers, and glimpsed in the light of their supper fires, long rows of oxen tethered by their yokes to heavy poles. They had come from Moeng, and in the morning the wagons would be loaded with lumber and cement and they would start back again. In another moment we drew up at the deserted platform, and the remnant of our passengers vanished in the night. The cook and the driver took my luggage in their charge. In the waiting room I found the stationmaster and an assistant one—young Afrikaners with cigarettes hanging on their lips, exchanging words in their guttural, bastard Dutch. They told me my train would be on time. They were not impolite, but they seemed crude and raw, and the whiteness of their skins had an unhealthy look.

I went back to the platform where my three companions waited, and gave some shillings to the driver and the cook, which they received in their cupped hands, with bowed heads and murmured thanks. On reconsideration I doubled the reward, to a total of what might have been their combined compensation for a month, assuring them of my appreciation of their respective services. They appeared quite overwhelmed, fairly wriggling with delight—more, it seemed to me, because of what I said than what I gave. But this may have been imagination.

I urged Sekgoma, in view of the fact they still had quite a journey before they would get home, that they go ahead and leave me; there was nothing to be done and no need for them to wait. But he wouldn't hear to such a thing. The Chief had placed me in his care, he said, and his responsibility would not be discharged until he saw me safely on the train. So we strolled together up and down the platform, with our two retainers at our heels. There was a bench against the station wall and I was on the point of suggesting we sit down, when I suddenly remembered there would be a sign above it: EUROPEANS. Somewhere in the dark, more exposed and humble and well removed from contact with the superior race, there would be another bench with NATIVES painted on it. It wouldn't do for me to sit on that one; it would be an admission of the matter, or else a condescension on my part: in any case embarrassing to everybody. Nor would it do for Sekgoma—a cousin of the ruling Chief of Bechuanaland, in which this wretched railway station stood, who had represented him not long ago in London at the Victory Celebration and had been well received and entertained, who had met the King of England and shaken hands with him; who was in fact an educated, cultured gentleman, whose boots the Afrikaner station agents were not, on any rational social basis, fit to shine—it wouldn't do for him to sit with me, or without me for that matter, on the "European" bench against the station wall. Quite likely if he did, the youthful stationmaster would tell him to get off.

And so we stood, or strolled, listening to the melancholy whistle at a crossing—perhaps the road to Moeng; watching the headlight spread thin against the sky, and then a steady beam driving at us down the track. The train came roaring, grinding to a stop: a modern monster in the silent wilderness, ablaze with light, and its tail of many cars stretching far beyond the platform. It was packed with voyagers: open windows in coupes and corridors crowded thick with European heads—white faces staring vacantly; and a host of chattering young ones, boys and girls of secondary-school age, wearing flannel blazers striped in gaudy colors—unpleasantly suggestive of organ grinders' monkeys. As I later learned there was to be next day, in Salisbury, Rhodesia, an important academic swimming meet; and these bands of teen-aged children in the colors

of their schools, from the Cape, from Joburg, Durban, were off on an excursion to the contest.

We looked for the conductor, but he was not in sight; and so we hurried back along the train, to the baggage van at the very end of it. And there we found him, lounging in the doorway. In answer to my question he said ungraciously there was space reserved for me, in a coupe for four which was already filled. Later on he'd see what could be done about it. In the meantime I could put my luggage in it, if I could get it in. He named the number of the car and space; and we stumbled back, the four of us, tripping in the dark on the projecting ties. The car was far ahead—a sweaty smelling labyrinth, cluttered deep with the belongings of the superior race, to which my own were added, delivered through a window in the corridor by the driver and the cook. I dumped the stuff into the cubbyhole where I must pass the night, on a board-hard narrow shelf against the ceiling. The occupants regarded my intrusion with cold, resentful eyes; and I fled back to the platform.

My companions were waiting in a group beside the train. I said to Sekgoma that now he must be off. But he smiled and shook his head: when the train went they would go. We stood in silence. At last the whistle blew a warning blast, and it was time to say good-by. I shook the hand of each—the driver's and the cook's, and then Sekgoma's—contrary to the protocol of white supremacy. I would have done it anyway, as a natural, friendly gesture; but at the moment it was something more than that: a childish, futile gesture of hurt and angry protest against the color line, against the race of which I was a member, against the world in which I lived. I was conscious of the faces watching from the windows of the train, hoping they saw me and would think the worse of me, not wanting to be welcomed or accepted by them. The train was moving and I jumped upon the step. "Good-by, my friends," I called, and called it loudly.

* * *

Sixteen months have slipped away since the events recorded in this chapter. And Chief Tshekedi Khama is in the news again, as per the following item in the New York Times, in this year of 1949.

MARRIAGE DISRUPTS TRIBE

Africans at Odds on Leader Who
Wed a London Typist

SEROWE, Bechuanaland, June 21 (Reuters)—Nine thousand tribesmen, squatting under the camelthorn trees in this African village, today continued their parley to decide whether they wanted 27-year-old Seretse Khama as their chief after his marriage to 24-year-old London typist, Ruth Williams.

The parley was adjourned tonight still undecided.

Today's attendance of tribesmen—the Bamangwatos—was 1,000 bigger than yesterday, when the parley began. Squatting on their stools and chairs round their leaders, they began proceedings with a prayer.

A disturbed, subdued murmur ran round the assembly when letters were read accusing the Regent, Chief Tshekedi of intrigue against Seretse, his nephew.

Earlier another uncle of Seretse, Peto Mohoeng, a noble figure and blind, had said that his nephew's marriage was against all the tribal laws.

"If Seretse wanted to marry and light the family fire, it must be done according to custom," he said. "But Seretse has broken the family water-pot."

Subsequent advice has been to the effect that the Party of the Chief was overruled—that his nephew, Seretse, despite his London typist wife, has been accepted by the Bamangwato, as Ruler of the Tribe.

If so, I wish him well. I hope he shares his uncle's splendid vision, and that he may pursue its ends as faithfully, if a shade less militantly.

The Chief is dead—or is he? I have still a doubt about it. And so— Long live the Chief!



THE CONGO

AT NDOLA, gateway to the copper country, the Rhodesian train was broken up. Only one of its coaches would go through to the Congo, to arrive in Elizabethville about twelve hours later—the coach in which I rode, in which I'd been assured I would not be disturbed and could sleep till any hour.

But it was as well that I got up, in response to determined banging on my door—a blowzy waitress with a jug of tepid tea, for fifteen minutes later, before the sun had risen, a surly car attendant

was gathering up my bedding and stuffing it away in a filthy canvas bag. He said the car was stripped of everything removable before it was turned over to the Belgians, who themselves would strip it before they brought it back.

When at last we pulled out of the station the train had completely changed its character, reduced from a long string of crowded cars to a single coach and half a dozen passengers, with a complement of freight vans and several loaded coal cars, the latter so disposed that the soot from them blew back through the windows of the coach, adding flavor to the trip. But the surprising feature was the fact that the engineer and firemen were Natives: a thing I had not seen before in Africa. Nor could I observe that the train behaved itself in different fashion to the ones I had been riding on for weeks; it did not run off the track or indulge in any quirks of an unusual nature, but rocked along at the customary speed of African express trains, which I'd estimate to be about thirty miles an hour. When it stopped and started I could detect no difference in the jolts and jerks, and the whistle sounded just the same as when a European pulled the cord. If I had not seen the engineer and fireman I would have had no reason to suspect their skins were black.)

An hour later we were at the frontier station of Sakania, in the southeast corner of the Congo, the door to the Katanga—that fabulously wealthy mineral region which the British Government and Cecil Rhodes missed grabbing by a hair; at whose entrance there should be, on the Rhodesian side, a monument of sackcloth with the simple epitaph: “Too little and too late.” And here at Sakania was another revelation; for, excepting two or three quasi-military Belgian officials, the Customs and Immigration Staff was composed of Native clerks and typists—a dispensation nonexistent in South Africa. So far as I could see they appeared to be carrying on their duties like such minor functionaries anywhere.

(Across the tracks was a poor little hotel, to which, when lengthy questionnaires had been filled out and passports scrutinized, two of us repaired for breakfast. The proprietor was leaning on the bar, behind which was a crowded shelf of bottles: whiskies, brandies, liqueurs, even Scotch—practically unobtainable in South Africa, and cartons of American cigarettes—suggesting an abundance of such

luxuries in the Congo, which I subsequently found was not always and everywhere a fact. Our host was amiable and friendly. He apologized because he had nothing to offer us but eggs, and only four of them; and to make amends for that, he opened a tin of *pâté de foie gras* and divided it between us. The chequered tablecloth was thick with gravy spots and the boys who waited on us were languidly incompetent, but the eggs and toast were hot, the coffee palatable, and the *pâté* straight from Brussels. This breakfast marked my advent into another world, next door to and remote from everything South African.)

In the early afternoon we dropped the coal cars and picked up a Congo diner, with a European steward but Native cooks and waiters—a pleasant change from the Afrikaner waiters of the Union, who are overworked and inclined to be ungracious; and the barmaid waitresses imported from England—God knows why—for the Rhodesian dining cars. The food was not particularly good, but it was different: the potatoes were French fried instead of boiled; the bread was white; the vegetables were seasoned. The meal had been prepared, if not with loving care, at least with a vestige of imagination.

And the country itself, through which the train was crawling, seemed to wear a different aspect: more mountainous, more tropical, with patches of dense forest here and there—still a wilderness of course, even wilder than it had been, more rugged and exotic, more primitive perhaps; but somehow not so sad, so deeply melancholy. No fences, houses, towns; at long intervals a station: a group of neat brick buildings with prettily landscaped grounds; clusters of Native huts beside the track, some with walls of thatch instead of mud, as poor as ever. But the people, like the country, seemed to have a different aspect, not easily analyzed and yet quite unmistakable.

(The natives could no longer be described as resembling “poor black people” anywhere. There was a subtle difference in their bearing and appearance, perhaps environmental in its origin, occasioned by the fact they were more recently, and not so closely, involved with Europeans, and in consequence less conscious of their underprivileged status—in short, more primitive. There was nothing

to suggest they were being pushed around or were expectant of it. The clothing of the men was as nondescript and ragged, but their heads were higher and their eyes more confident, as if they had not compromised their dignity and pride. And the women, too, seemed different: their cotton print dresses were colorful and gay, and pieces of the stuff were tied around their heads, like jaunty turbans. They had an air about them. The children were as naked, but they did not run beside the train, begging cigarettes and pennies.

It seemed, at this first glance, another world.)



WHEN you go from South Africa into the Belgian Congo, you come quite abruptly into another world. Physically, historically, politically, and spiritually I think—in some or all these aspects—the Congo differs widely from its neighbors. As a colonial undertaking it is probably unique at this moment on the earth.

A traveler may observe within its borders the thrilling spectacle of a nation being born. The labor is in process and promises to be a long and painful one; the delivery of a healthy, robust child is by no means assured. But the physicians in attendance are competent and hopeful. They are something more than that, for they are both wise and gentle. They are determined the child shall be delivered safely, uninjured by the forceps, sound of limb, of heart and mind. The infant nation will be black—if/as/when it shall come to actual birth. The issue is uncertain at this time, the prognosis favorable.

In this best and most mutable of worlds anything can happen. The child may be stillborn or suffer a deformity, be murdered in its cradle or perish of disease; or it may emerge from the darkness of the womb a baby Caliban, and grow into a monster. But neither I who write nor you who read will live to know the answer, for the labor will outlast our little span. We can do no more than pause in the delivery room and observe the preparations.)



BUT first, for the benefit of those who may know as little of the Congo as I did when I went there, let's have a look at it.

Question: Where is the Congo?

Answer: In the heart of Africa, straddling the Equator—comprising an area of 902,000 square miles, including the provinces of Ruanda-Urundi on its eastern border, which contain 20,500 square miles, and are not historically or geographically an integral part of the country. This region was briefly under German control, from about 1890 until, at the conclusion of the First World War, the League of Nations gave the mandate for it to the Belgians. It is administered by the Colonial Government as a part of the Congo, which for all practical purposes it now is. The total area is about one-third the size of the Continental United States exclusive of Alaska. Laid out upon a map of Europe its dimensions are even more impressive: with Elizabethville in Naples, Stanleyville would be in Berlin and Leopoldville in Brest.

Q: Has it access to the sea?

A: Its eastern border is five hundred miles, as the crow flies, from the Indian Ocean. On the west the mighty Congo River flows into the Atlantic, the mouth of it squeezed tightly between Portuguese Angola and its satellite Cabinda. The country is a landlocked funnel, save for the river's mouth and a scrap of coast line—actually a beachhead, less than thirty miles in length.

Q: What's the population?

A: 13,000,000 Natives, more or less, of whom some 4,000,000 reside in the relatively tiny Ruanda-Urundi section where the density of population is equivalent to that of France. There are many distinct tribes and more than a hundred different languages, chiefly of Bantu origin. But four are dominant and tend to general use. The European population is in the neighborhood of 40,000. Let's put it this way: in the Union of South Africa there are four

colored skins for every white one; in the Rhodesias the ratio is 20 to 1; in all of Africa 40 to 1; in the Congo 330 to 1. The Congo is a black man's country.

Q: You mean by reason of numerical superiority?

A: Not altogether. There is black numerical superiority in the Union and the Rhodesias, yet they are white man's countries—not merely in some comparative degree but in actual fact—administered by white men for the benefit of white men, who regard themselves as vested proprietors with clear titles to the land, grants endorsed by God. There is involved a point of view, a question of psychology.

Q: How is it different in the Congo?

A: In the Congo the ruling class regards itself as a Trustee. There are several factors that contribute to this altruistic attitude: among them, for example, the physical nature of the country and its climate.

Q: What's the country like?

A: A chain of high plateaux and mountains on the south and east, enclosing a vast basin of dense forest, with a network of rivers emptying one into another until they reach the Congo which itself flows to the sea. The Congo is the fifth longest river in the world—3,000 miles. The web of its affluents includes more than 7,500 miles of navigable ways; its basin extends far beyond the frontiers of the country, embracing an enormous area of 2,300,000 square miles. In the area it drains it is the second largest river system in the world.

Q: Then the river is the gateway to the country?

A: Yes and no. A gateway if you like, but with a padlocked gate. The Congo is a freak, unique in one respect among the rivers of the earth. A hundred miles above its broad deep mouth, in an infernal region of monstrous obstacles, hellish heat, torrential rains, serpents and beasts and deadly fevers, it suddenly elects to change its nature—to become a raging torrent compressed in narrow chasms, an interrupted series of cataracts and rapids, sixty-six in number, which continue for two hundred tortured miles, terminating as abruptly as they started, in a placid lake, the Stanley Pool, whence again the river flows, a wide and navigable stream, twelve hundred miles, from Leopoldville to Stanleyville, before it presents another obstacle—the Stanley Falls. In short, the river is a fine broad highway into the heart of Africa, once you've passed the padlocked gate on

which there is a sign: IMPASSABLE. NO THOROUGHFARE. DETOUR TWO HUNDRED MILES.

Q: Has a detour been achieved?

A: Yes, but only yesterday, within my lifetime. In 1948 they celebrated in the Congo the fiftieth anniversary of the completion of the railroad which by-passed two hundred miles of cataracts and rapids, linking the port of Matadi, a hundred miles within the river's mouth, to the Stanley Pool—a Herculean undertaking in its time, which consumed eight years of effort, cost many European lives and countless Native ones, and millions of money which wasn't easily found. The gate has been unlocked. But from the day Diego Cam, a Portuguese navigator, officially discovered the mouth of the river in 1482, it took four hundred years to find the key.

Q: What's the climate like?

A: In the highlands it is temperate and delightful. In the lowlands which comprise at least four-fifths of the total area, it is hot and humid. But, to be specific, no hotter at its hottest than a hot day in New York. And with rain or overcast it can be chilly. Europeans are less well-conditioned to this kind of heat than we are, and make more complaint about it. On the whole it's not as bad as you might imagine, but monotonous of course—like the rising and setting of the tropic sun: at six o'clock, month in month out. Such things get on one's nerves.

Q: Is the country unhealthy?

A: Yes, I'd say it is—and certainly for white men. Except for a few favored localities it is riddled with malaria, and in some sections with malignant types of it. In certain regions there is sleeping sickness which, though some progress has been made in the treatment of it, is still no laughing matter. There is amoebic dysentery too, and a number of persistent skin infections—tropical ulcers and the like. Most Europeans who reside in the Congo for considerable periods of time, bear the scars of the experience through the balance of their lives. The average man grows careless; and, if he's in the bush, is almost certain, soon or late, to be confronted with conditions where precaution is impossible. In addition to physical disorders, *la vie coloniale* is inherently possessed of psychological hazards: it's dull and narrow and monotonous—particularly hard

on women who have only a vicarious incentive to sustain them. So there are not uncommonly psychologic scars as well. But if it comes to that, where are there not?

Q: And the Natives?—are they not immune to the scourges you have mentioned?

A: To some perhaps. Not to malaria, not to sleeping sickness. And to compensate for those to which they may be, the European has presented them with others. For example, they are grievously afflicted with syphilis, which is not indigenous—though perhaps the Arab slavers introduced it before the Europeans. Tuberculosis is no stranger to them, nor elephantiasis, nor leprosy. Indeed, they seem to suffer nearly all the ills to which human flesh is heir. No, I wouldn't say it was a healthy country—not even for the Natives.

Q: Is it rich?

A: Yes, rich of course. Do you imagine for one moment the white man would be there if it weren't? Particularly rich in mineral wealth; its copper mines are among the most important in the world—in the southeast corner, the Katanga. And there are other minerals: coal and gold and diamonds; cobalt, zinc, and tin; cadmium, tungsten, and uranium. Rich, too, in the agricultural realm: coffee, quinine, and pyrethrum in the east; rubber, cotton, and coffee in the north; and in the vast virginal forest regions, copal and timber—enough of it to build a ladder to the moon; and palm oil. Lever Brothers, with whose soap you are probably acquainted, own a million acres of palm-oil plantations, and purchase the nuts from a million acres more of natural palmeries.

Q: Are there many of these great concessionaires?

A: No, not many. Less than one per cent of the Congo is owned by Europeans; and what they own has been bought and paid for. Acquisition of land, or mineral rights, from tribal tenure, must be with the consent and approval of the Native chiefs and the Colonial Government. The process of purchase is elaborately safeguarded; and, in the case of the big proprietors, involves many obligations on their part.

Q: How is the Government composed?

A: A colonial minister in Brussels; a governor general in Leopoldville; seven provincial governors domiciled in seven provincial capitals; and, scattered throughout the country, residents, administrators, assistant administrators, and a host of minor functionaries:

a complex bureaucracy, quasi-military in its form, composed of competent career men, trained and educated for their jobs, constituting an elite, a class of civil servants superior to most, and the equal of any with whom I've had acquaintance.

Q: How did the Belgians get possession of the country.

A: Well, that is quite a story—



THEY got it of course, as all such things are got, by seizure and political conniving. But actually the Belgians didn't get it at the start; they had it wished on them. It was their king who got it, and got it for himself: Leopold II; you may remember him: a shrewd-looking old man with a long white beard. And not until he died in 1909, only forty years ago, did Belgium come into possession of the Congo, inheriting the country, which from that date became her colony. The Belgian people didn't want it and made no end of fuss about accepting the bequest. Thirty years experience in financially underwriting the "civilizing" projects of their monarch had convinced them that the Congo was an expensive and unnecessary toy, and they didn't want to shoulder the liability. But they got it all the same; there seemed to be nothing else to do with it.

And here perhaps we should go back a bit. From the days of the early Portuguese navigators, during a period of four hundred years, some hardy adventurers, seeking gold or souls to save, did penetrate from the Atlantic into the interior of the hostile and unhealthy coastal country. But the padlocked river gate restrained invasion, and penetration was neither wide nor deep. There were too many places, with gold and souls to save, which were more accessible; and so this chunk of Equatorial Africa was largely let alone until the Belgian king took an interest in it, and events conspired—

As for Leopold II, to consult his own apologist:

As a young man, the King was deeply interested in geographical problems and, in his thoughts, he had lived intensely with Livingstone, Cameron, Burton, those pioneers who had made their way from the Eastern coasts of Africa in search of the sources of the Nile. . . . On the 12th September 1876, the King, judging the

time propitious, called a geographical meeting in order to coordinate the efforts of the explorers, with Brussels as the headquarters of the civilizing movement aimed at. This resulted in the foundation of the *Association Internationale Africaine*, which later on became the *Association Internationale du Congo*. Under the King's inspiration, its Belgian section was extremely busy and helpful, organizing several expeditions and carrying on its work in spite of the almost insuperable difficulties which had to be faced.

To interrupt this formal panegyric for a moment, and take note of an event unforeseen by king or counsellors, which was to shape the future of the Congo, I quote in free translation from *La Bataille du rail*—

August 5, 1877, one hour after sunset, four Zanzibar blacks, gaunt and exhausted, arrive at the settlement of Boma [a river port midway between the mouth of the Congo and its padlocked gate]. They seek someone who speaks English, for whom they bear a celebrated letter. It is addressed, "To any gentleman residing at Embomma and speaking English." It is dated from the village of Nsannda, the fourth of August, and commences with this phrase: "I arrive from Zanzibar with one hundred and fifteen persons. We are dying of hunger." It implores rapid assistance: "We are in great distress. . . . Help must reach us within two days or death will make cruel ravages among us." This letter is signed: "Henry Morton Stanley, commanding the Anglo-American expedition for the exploration of Africa" and terminates with this postscript: "As it is possible you may not know my name, I add that it was I who found Livingstone in 1871."

A rescue party was immediately organized and dispatched from Boma.

It approaches the encounter, pausing in a little village through which the expedition must pass. A table is set beneath a giant baobab. Nothing is lacking: linen, a tablecloth strewn with flowers. The flags of England, France, Portugal, Holland, and America are floating in the breeze. . . . Suddenly, a confused noise from afar; sounds of tom-toms and trumpets rend the air. Profound emotion overwhelms the waiting white men. . . . A man comes into the glade: a white man, alone, *coming from the East*. With tight lips and a strained expression in his face, with sparkling eyes he clasps the hands held out to him: without a word.

It is 999 days since Stanley quitted Zanzibar. He has explored the lakes of Victoria-Nyanza and Tanganyika, has gained the Lualaba, thrusting his way through the dense forest of Maniema, has passed the seven cataracts which will be named for him, the Stanley Falls. His pirogues have continued to descend the river, ever curving to the west. At every moment he must fight his way. Day after day, the pirogues pursue their dangerous course into the unknown. One thousand seven hundred kilometers have been thus accomplished, at a price of incredible effort, in the midst of incessant dangers. Stanley has lost his three white companions and the greater part of his company. He is at the limit of his strength and the end of his resources. . . .

But he has crossed Africa from east to west; he has explored the Congo river from Nyangwé, and attained the "Pool," which will also bear his name. He has united the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, has pierced from side to side a new road through the mysterious continent.

In short, he had discovered the highway to the Congo—the open road beyond the padlocked gate.

Representatives of the Belgian king were waiting for Stanley at Marseilles, prepared to present him with the keys to Brussels, to adopt him as their own. But Stanley was an Englishman and he went straight home to England and tried his level best for two long years to sell the Congo to the British Government, which, strangely enough, would not exert itself. At last, in despair, he gave it up.

To return now to Leopold II:

At the King's request, Stanley made once more for Africa in 1879. Five years later more than forty settlements had been established along the banks of the river Congo and its tributaries, by his assistants. . . . The *Association*, a private concern, being the only power ruling these vast territories, it became necessary to determine its political status, for which purpose an International Conference was convened in Berlin in November 1884. Lengthy and somewhat difficult negotiations ended in the recognition by all the European powers of the *Association Internationale* as an independent State, and in their last session, on the 26th of February 1885 all the Delegates were unanimous in paying a high tribute to King Leopold II, Sovereign of the new State. Sir Edward Mallet, on behalf of Great Britain, expressed the

general feeling of the Conference as follows: "Owing to the great interest shown by the Government of H. M. Queen Victoria in the recognition of the Flag of the Association as that of a friendly Government, I am hereby authorized to state that we regard with full satisfaction the constitution of this new State, due to the initiative of H. M. the King of the Belgians. During many years King Leopold II, whose prevailing idea was merely philanthropic, spared neither personal efforts nor financial sacrifices for the fulfillment of his purpose."

The new State set to work immediately, and the first task to be undertaken was to free the native populations from the yoke of the Arab traders, whose gangs, under the leadership of Tipu-Tip and Rumaliza, were taking slaves from Congo territory, plundering, and killing whoever stood in their way. After a long and strenuous campaign which ended in 1893, Belgian troops . . . finally annihilated the Arabs. Once peace having been restored, the authorities were able to devote themselves to the task of civilization and moral improvement of the natives, which, from the start, was the primary consideration in the King's mind. (?)

End of quotation, and the question mark is mine. Though who am I to fathom what kings have in their minds?

Q: Excuse me please for interrupting, but I have in my memory, dating back some forty years, to the first decade of the century, a picture of the Congo, which depicts it as a plague spot of the earth, as a shameful blot on the record of the Belgians and their king, who was represented to my youthful fancy as an avaricious monster, a cruel and ruthless tyrant, a figure designed to frighten children. I have still the vision of long lines of wretched blacks, linked by heavy chains to collars on their necks, staggering through the jungle with great burdens on their backs, while overseers drove them to their tasks with whips and staves. For the slightest disobedience their hands would be chopped off, their tongues torn out, their eyes burned blind, their ears sliced from their heads. Nothing you have said suggests such things went on, and so I am wondering if I was misinformed?

A: Your question is in order. And I will tell you frankly that such things *did* go on, though probably some calculated fraudulence contributed to the reporting of them. Stories of this sort have a way of growing; human credulity is a soil in which they flourish. But where there is smoke there is likely to be fire; and there was fire in

the Congo, of a most distressing nature, which, though thoroughly discounted for fraudulent expansion by envious commercial and political opponents, still, was wide and hot enough to do a lot of damage, and to leave behind it scars which have not yet been effaced.

The source of the abuse was largely economic: the Congo was too big a job for "King & Company"; and so, for a decade or more of years, until, upon the death of Leopold, the Belgian people inherited the country, administration of it was not free from opportunistic methods designed to raise the necessary cash. Concessionaires were invited and encouraged, and no references required. In consequence of this unfortunate policy an avalanche of brigands descended on the unhappy land: unscrupulous adventurers from every corner of the earth, bent on exploitation of the Native population and plunder of the country. They swarmed like locusts in the lower regions of the river, and the stains they left have not yet been washed away; there are old men still alive, with stumps of arms, and the murder and rapine of fifty years ago have not been forgotten. No brief should be presented for the predatory rascals who were guilty of these crimes, yet it's only fair to note: the atrocities they perpetrated were not introduced or originated by them, but were in the custom of the country, of a sort that the Natives inflicted on each other. More resented perhaps than the chopping off of hands was the unaccustomed labor they were forced to undertake. There is one more reservation to modify your picture: a comparatively small part of the country was subjected to this ugly business.



AT ELIZABETHVILLE a young man in the uniform of a tourist agency was waiting for me at the railway station. He told me with a cheerful cockney accent my hotel reservation had not been protected: a Sabena plane had been turned back, he said, and I would have to share a bathless room in the town's one good hotel with a stranger already in possession.

I said I wouldn't do it. I said, "Look here, I've had all this stuff

I can take. In Cape Town for ten days I was shuttled from one melancholy ark into another to make way for the British aristocracy who are swarming to Africa in search of a square meal. In the city of Johannesburg, whose inhabitants regard it as a great metropolis, I dwelt in a dark and airless den where a shoe box served the purpose of a waste basket. And though I was ill and unable to move out on the day I had contracted to depart, I was nonetheless compelled to pick up my bed and walk—or rather, I should say, to walk and leave my bed; and I found no place to go except a hospital.”

The young man murmured sympathetically, as we climbed into a decrepit, filthy taxi with a ragged Native at the wheel. He said apologetically that due to the war the Congo was badly underhoused. Its hotels, which at their best were not first-class, were filled with permanent guests, government officials and commercial employees who had no place else to live, and the traveler got what was left over, which was sometimes nothing. But I cut him short; I knew about all this, had heard it recited with a dozen variations in South Africa.

“Anyway,” I said, “I’ve had enough of it. I am an American writer and I’d like to see the Congo, but there are limits to my passion. Stanley and Livingstone are dead, and I belong to another generation. If I cannot be housed and fed in fairly decent fashion, I will get on the first plane on which I can find space—and to hell with Africa.” I threw around all the weight that I could muster, flourishing before his eyes some introductory letters, among which was one to the Provincial Governor.

The young man was impressed. He said he was thinking hard of something to be done. In the meantime we rattled aimlessly around the village of 6,000 Europeans, whose adjoining city of 80,000 Natives was not within our view.

(I stared out of the window with a lugubrious eye. And indeed Elizabethville—provincial capital of the rich Katanga; headquarters of the great *Union Minière*, with a copper smelter whose towering smokestack dominates the landscape—is the least attractive and intriguing of the Congo’s urban centers; and this despite the fact that it is situated in a mountainous region, at an altitude which assures a temperate climate.)

The town is laid out on a futuristic scale, with winding, unpaved

streets of boulevard dimensions—somewhat as if Los Angeles had been planned originally to be what it's become: a village in the framework of a metropolis, to which distinction it will no doubt attain. But at the moment it unhappily suggests a motion picture set in process of construction, or a real estate development which hasn't quite come off. The sprawling business section is an architectural jumble, with newer buildings in the modern style, which seems singularly unadapted to the African environment—facades which at a distance are imposing, but which on close acquaintance look jerry-built and shabby; uninviting shops, and sidewalk cafés with a Continental air, whose service and refreshment turned out to be depressingly colonial. As partial compensation for its dubious metropolitan appearance, the town has a pleasant residential section of unpretentious, comfortable homes, clubs and schools and every social edifice adapted to the upper income brackets of an industrial center of 80,000 people, whose proletariat is lodged across the tracks in a city of its own.

But at the moment it was growing dark, and we were rattling back toward the railway station from which we had set out. I wondered with a chill of apprehension if my companion were preparing to abandon me. But no, he'd thought of something. He stopped the taxi in front of a hotel—a dismal, barnlike structure, with an open air café roofed against the weather, in which family groups of colonial bourgeoisie were assembling for their dinner in melancholy silence—sad-eyed people, bored and homesick. The young man left me sitting in the taxi, and presently returned with what he called good news: he had talked the proprietress out of her own apartment. "You'll be comfortable and happy here," he said. But he was wrong about it.

My apartment consisted of a lurid suite of rooms, with a non-functioning bathtub in a kind of corridor which cut off all light and air. This depressing cavern was on the ground floor, not far distant from a noisy bar where the proprietress could usually be found—if found at all. There was no hot water unless a boy might bring it in answer to a bell which didn't ring. The furnishings and draperies had come out of the ark and retained the smell of it; the toilet which seemed rarely out of use, was in a dark and musty hall.

The food was bad. The boys who did the rooms and waited on the tables appeared confused, unhappy, and incompetent.

Such was my introduction to the Congo.



I ATE my dinner and went out to a movie, in another barnlike building—a vintage, French-made film so atrociously projected that half of it was barely audible or visible. But the audience seemed content and made no complaint about it.

When I came out of the cinema it was close to midnight and had begun to drizzle. My hotel was not more than a block or two away, but in the darkness and the confusion of the curving streets I managed to get lost. I passed the *good* hotel in which my reservation had not been protected; there were lights in the lobby and a few people still sitting at the tables on the sidewalk. But a little farther on I was at an intersection and in doubt if I should turn to right or left. And then I saw across the way beneath a street light two Natives in rubber hats and ponchos, whom I took to be policemen. And I crossed the street to ask them for direction. One replied to me in French, and, when I seemed uncertain, walked beside me to the entrance. I would in any case have passed the place because it was in total darkness.

Inside, I struck a match and found my key which was hanging on a hook in the open bureau. And I stumbled through the hall and found my room, and found to my dismay there was no drinking water in it—no bottle of boiled water, though one is never sure it's been boiled, never certain that the boy, in a negligent or irritable moment, hasn't filled it from the tap. But there was no bottle of any kind at all, and I was dreadfully thirsty.

I remembered that next door to the cinema there was a *café*, and decided to walk back and buy some mineral water. But when I reached the cinema the *café* was closed and dark. By this time my thirst was growing painful. Now what? There was the *good* hotel, which had been alight and open when I noticed it before. I could

buy some water there. But when I returned to it there was no one in sight except an aged Native who was polishing the floor. I spoke to him in French but he shook his head, he didn't understand me.

I went back into the street, helpless and defeated. I did not know how to get a drink of water which I felt I had to have. And then I saw again my two policemen standing in the rain beneath the street light. I stopped and looked at them, and then I hurried on, like a suspicious character, a lawbreaker in fact. It was too embarrassing to be found at large again when I had so recently been escorted to my door; and my French might not be equal to convincing explanation. No, better not to bother them again. But presently I was aware of footsteps at my heels and there they were in close pursuit.

"Pardon, monsieur," one said. "Have you lost your way again?"

"Oh no—" In my confusion I had passed the hotel entrance, but I tried to laugh it off. "It's only that I need some drinking water."

"Water?—to drink?" he said, a bit incredulously.

I explained the situation.

"Ah yes, I see," he smiled. "If you will wait I will bring some water." And he strode away and left me standing in the rain with his companion—a fine, good-looking fellow, tall and strong and young.

While we waited we conversed—

("What would you do," I asked, for the question was preponderant in my mind, "if you should apprehend a European lawbreaker?"

"I would arrest him."

"But if the European made resistance, would you venture to use force?"

Such things did not occur, he said.

"But if it did?"

He didn't seem quite certain. It would depend, he thought. In ordinary circumstances he would communicate with his superior officers who were Europeans.

"But suppose in the meanwhile the lawbreaker escapes?"

He would not escape.

"But if he were a stranger and unknown?"

"No." He shook his head. "In the Congo," he smiled, "everyone is known."



AND so indeed it may well be. For on entrance to the country the history of the traveler is exhaustively recorded, even to the name and date of birth of his divorced wife's mother. He is admitted for a limited period of time, and careful record kept of where he goes, when he arrives and leaves a given point. He is not annoyed or inconvenienced and is under no ostensible surveillance. But where he is and what he may be up to can be readily ascertained by the authorities on surprisingly short notice. If he suddenly decides on a criminal undertaking, he will find no place where he can hide with safety—not even in the bush, where his advent would be instantly and widely circulated.)

As for the resident European population—some 40,000 of them dispersed through an area a third the size of the United States—they are dwellers in a world in which everyone knows everybody else, but is decently reserved and self-contained about it, without Rotarian antics or shouting back and forth across the room. For example, in a restaurant on the cook's night out, the Governor may be there with his family, like anybody else, among bureaucrats and clerks, merchants and visiting planters. In the middle of a wilderness there is little opportunity to be selective, to assert superiority of rank or wealth; nor is there much privacy. Rattle of a skeleton in a family closet is pretty sure to be heard. A man involved with another fellow's wife, or with his secretary—and such things do go on, even in the Congo—would have quite a job to keep it dark. There is no secluded place he can take his lady love, not from one end of the country to the other, where he will not be seen and recognized. The embezzler would be equally embarrassed to find a place where he could spend his money without evoking comment. (If you mention to a friend in Leopoldville that you met a man named Smith in Stanleyville, or even in some isolated section of the bush, he will probably say, "Oh yes, I know him well, I can tell you

all about him." If he can't say that, he'll be definitely unhappy, and he will not rest until he runs the matter down.)



NEXT day I moved from my hotel to a suburban lodging—a kind of roadhouse of Hollywood design, which called itself *Le Lido*.

I can do no better than describe it in terms of its own brochure:

Luxueusement installé dans la fraîcheur et la verdure, Le Lido offre, dans un décor apaisant, un repos également réparateur pour le corps et l'esprit. . . . Le soir enfin, Le Lido, tel un luxueux paquebot, poursuit sa route dans le rêve étoilé de la nuit katangaise au rythme enchanteur entraînant les couples enlacés. . . .

It wasn't that good, but it wasn't bad. We dined on a spacious terrace overlooking a huge swimming pool, in which rarely anybody swam, and beyond which was a tumbling mountain brook from which the pool was fed. There were colored lights in the arches of the high French windows at our backs, designed, I was told, to discourage the mosquitoes—the anopheles variety which conveys malaria, and which like most assassins has a penchant for the dark. However that may be, the general effect was suggestive of a night club, without music, mirth, or revelry, and with plenty of fresh air and ample space in which to move around. In fact we were seldom more than half a dozen diners.

The boys who waited on us wore long white robes with crimson belts and caps—costumes which I felt they didn't like, which they regarded as infringing on their dignity. They did what they were told, not eagerly or cheerfully, and never under any circumstances anything they weren't. They stood or sat around in areas they judged to be remote from scenes of action. And if you shouted, "Boy!" there would be great debate as to which of them should come—sometimes so protracted you'd forget what you wanted or

get it for yourself. I had the feeling that if I were drowning in the swimming pool, they would stand and watch me, not maliciously at all but comfortably detached, until somebody told them to go and get a rope.

The proprietor was a pleasant, friendly man; but there were not many guests (the place was too remote), and I suspected he was losing money. There were little things that made me think he might be discouraged—like the mosquito net which hung above my bed and which was full of holes. Every night I spent an hour stuffing them with cotton, for the anopheles is cunning and determined, and one hole in a net is enough to turn the trick. The bed itself seemed scarcely to repay the effort, though it was no worse than the average run of beds in Africa. I rarely slept in one that had a spring; as a rule there is nothing underneath the shriveled mattress but a web of rope or hide, as unyielding as an Indian fakir's couch of spikes. And the pillows are stuffed with something which resembles sand—to the end of solid comfort. But one quickly adapts oneself to physical vexations, if one is a little patient at the start. I liked *Le Lido*, and I liked my genial host. He often took me with him in his motorcar back and forth to town, and waited for me while I did my errands, and he would accept no payment for such service. It was, he said, a pleasure. The most I was permitted was to treat him to a drink which he would draw himself behind his bar.



THE three urban centers of the Congo, which, in order of their metropolitan importance, lay claim to being cities, are Leopoldville, Elizabethville, and Stanleyville—a thousand miles or more apart, one from the other, with combined population of 15,000 Europeans and 300,000 Natives.

These European towns are the cerebral centers of the country, friendly and hospitable, with colonial-continental atmosphere, an intriguing mixture of the raw and mellow; but they are chiefly

interesting as the tails that wag the dogs—the controlling and directing instruments of the Native cities which adjoin them, and in which the civilizing process may be viewed at its best and at its worst.

The Native cities are not cities in themselves, any more than Harlem is a city in New York. They are integrated parts of the communities, the bone and sinew of the total population—proletariat and small white-collar class, which, regardless of the color of its skin, by reason of its economic status represents a group apart.

The cities differ in physical appearance. In Leopold and Stanley they seem, like Topsy, to have just grown up, without much plan or under much control. Housing is of all varieties, from huts of thatch to decent cottages. And these cities have the benefit of tropic vegetation which tends to make them seem rather comfortable and cozy, and to conceal their poverty. They are densely populated, particularly Leopold, where there is something in the nature of black market housing, where a Native landlord can pack a city lot with dwellings and overcrowd his property with tenants; though in actual fact the land is never his. He cannot buy or own it, but leases it from Government at a nominal rental. But the house he builds upon it is his personal property, to do with as he pleases.

Some housing, of the better class, is constructed by industrial and commercial enterprises, and use of it restricted to their employees; for example, a bank may build a dozen comfortable homes for its clerks and typists; or a factory may build a hundred less pretentious ones, as uniform as peas. Such a house will be of brick, of packing case design, of two or three small rooms, with an additional cubicle intended for a kitchen, but seldom used as such. The furnishings will be reduced to bare necessities; but, within my observation, there will be some attempt at decoration—the creation of a homelike atmosphere: curtains at the windows and pictures on the walls and teacups on a shelf; and the modest premises will be clean and tidy. And quite likely there will be a tiny garden with some pretty flowers in it.

(In Elizabeth, which lacks the benefit of tropic vegetation, the housing is more orderly and ugly. The Native city has a rather formal entrance—an arched wooden gateway at the end of a long, tree-bordered avenue, beyond which are endless rows of little houses, divided by unpaved, rutted roads. Sections differ from each

other in a progressive scale. Here, for example, is what they built in '38; and here, in '41, they made some improvements in construction and design; and now, in '48, they have advanced to this—more pleasing to the eye and more functional in its use. Progress by trial and error.

✓The Native cities have no sewage systems, nor is water piped into the houses; but latrines are dug to a safe depth, and water is supplied from street faucets located at convenient intervals.

They have their schools, most of them under the direction of the Catholic Church, well equipped and organized—numerous primary, and some secondary ones corresponding to our high schools; and a few for advanced vocational training in medicine, mechanics, pedagogics. There are no universities, nor are Natives encouraged to attend the Belgian ones. Such higher education, it is said, deprives them of contact with their people. They cannot return to Native life, to its habits or intellectual poverty. And they are suspect in it, nor is there place for them among the Europeans. They would be social outcasts, without function for their talents—lonely and unhappy. And so they are discouraged from such ventures—for the present.

They have their sports: stadiums, soccer fields, swimming pools, tennis courts; athletic teams and social organizations of all kinds. They have outdoor cinemas, where as many as ten thousand may assemble at a time, while an interpreter explains through a loud-speaker what is going on upon the screen. Such entertainment is not regular or frequent, and the subjects must of course be carefully selected, to be within the realm of their understanding.

They have excellent hospitals, well equipped and staffed, and clinics and dispensaries. They have their shops and markets—in Leopold a huge one in the open air, which, from sunrise until noon, is an exciting pageant of colorful humanity.

They have their bars, cafés, and night clubs—though not of a sort with which you are familiar: poor, bare places without a hint of glamour. And in some, on designated days, public dancing is permitted, to an orchestra of European instruments intermixed with Native ones, xylophones and tom-toms. They have European beer, in considerable abundance—in Leopold, half a million bottles every month, which figures to about a bottle a day per head for every

member of the adult population who can afford its purchase. In addition, they have their *vin de palme*, of greater alcoholic content than the beer; plus illicit beverages they distil or brew. In short, they consume, by one means or another, substantial quantities of alcohol. Whether more or less than they used to do, in their original state, is difficult to say. They have never been teetotalers. Still, I suspect that the civilizing process encourages the use of alcohol. There are so many things to forget and to escape.

They have their police and law enforcement agencies, but in no sense distinct from the European ones. All the police are Natives, under European officers. In Elizabeth, the Native city is closed to Europeans after seven in the evening—for their own protection, I assume. They have their courts, where disputes among themselves can be adjudicated in accordance with the edicts of Native Law and Custom.

They have reasonably good health, excluding from the picture endemic malaria, venereal disease, and infant mortality—a considerable per cent of which is traceable to venereal infection. Yet they seem singularly free from natal physical afflictions—perhaps because the handicapped succumb in infancy. However this may be, I do not recall having seen a blind man or a mute, and comparatively few with malformed bodies. Nor was I conscious of mental defectives—idiots and feeble-minded; again perhaps because children so afflicted are unlikely to survive. Presumably they have their neurotics and psychotics, and institutions where the latter are confined, though none came to my attention. From my own observation I should say their mental health was better than our own, though the civilizing process is putting strain upon it, under which it is probably deteriorating.

They have no transportation. And from home to job may be a walk of several miles—no great hardship in itself, since they have always walked. But they have not done their walking on a schedule, to be at a given place at an appointed time. They have only recently been made aware of Time, as registered by clocks. Soon after sunrise, on thoroughfares which lead out of the Native cities, you will see them on their way to work, walking briskly in the pleasant dawn: an endless procession at the sides of the road, out of the way of traffic—laboring men, mechanics, carpenters, and masons;

and, a little later, the white-collar workers—clerks and shop assistants, among whom, at rare intervals, will be a plutocrat upon a bicycle. Presently the stream thins out to tardy stragglers who, with tension in their faces, must run to be on time.

And there are women, going to the market—going somewhere, more leisurely about it, laughing and palavering, with infants on their backs and older children trotting at their sides, with something on their heads, a basket, box, or jug—trim figures with straight backs and chins held high. In the morning and evening there are swarms of people. But the roads are never empty of them. All day long, from dawn to dark, through the slugging heat of midday, they are trudging to and fro.

In Elizabeth, where the railway runs through a section of the Native city, they made a trial of running workers' trains, which would save many of them miles of walking and bring them home again at night. The charge to ride was nominal—if any charge be nominal on a subsistence level, but the trains were scantily patronized and finally discontinued. For one reason or another the workers chose to walk.

They have no labor unions and no sense of solidarity. They have not as yet developed an organizing talent nor the cohesive quality to render it effective. They could not be counted on to stand together, in pursuit of abstract principle or material advantage. They have not come far enough upon the road to be responsive to Marxian propaganda, or to remotely comprehend its dialectic. They simply do not think in terms into which such ideas could be translated. And if they could, such a social-economic theory must seem to them like a reversion, a return to their primitive condition—the communal way of life, from which they have so recently escaped, and whose many obligations cannot be harmonized with the future they are seeking to achieve. And certainly the Catholic Church, which to a large extent controls their education, will not encourage them to explore the heresy of Marxian doctrine. In short, they have no revolutionary tendencies. They have not advanced that far in the civilizing process.

Such is the urban picture at the moment. If it is not all that could be hoped, at least it is well to bear in mind that fifty years ago there had not been a beginning.)

II

THIS," said Mr. Sips, "is the incubator room."

At my first opportunity I had called on the Governor in his official residence, which appeared to be in process of being torn down—or possibly restored; and he had delegated Mr. V. E. Sips, *Chef du Service de la Population Noire*, to be my conductor in the Native city. Mr. Sips had presently arrived at my hotel in his motorcar, and had turned out to be an amiable gentleman with a pleasant sense of humor.

We had started with the hospital, a Catholic institution in nicely landscaped grounds, constructed on the unit plan, with covered passageways between the several buildings: operating rooms and laboratories, wards for men and women, both surgical and medical, not crowded like our hospitals at home; and even private rooms for those who wanted privacy and could afford to pay a modest fee of fifty cents a day.

We had walked on, from one building to another, passing groups of convalescents basking in the sun, some with pans of food—substantial-looking messes of meat and mealie mush—until we came at last to the maternity department: a long, airy building, with beds along the sides, about half of which were occupied. The Sister in charge accompanied us to the far end of the ward where there were delivery rooms, and at one side another, into which she led us—

"The incubator room," repeated Mr. Sips, pointing to a glass panel in the wall, behind which were the infant incubators, containing two or three diminutive black specimens of premature humanity.

I am not intrigued by infants in the raw, and these scraps of flesh, like embryonic chickens unexpectedly disclosed in breakfast eggs, seemed somehow unnecessary—not because their skins were

black, but because there were so many arriving every day and surviving by themselves the hazards of their birth—because half a dozen more or less seemed a negligible item, scarcely worth the effort to preserve. An infant incubator in the heart of Africa, was an anachronism, an impertinence, a dubious interference with the laws of Nature, which someone might sometime have occasion to regret; and in questionable taste—like gilding lilies or carrying coal to Newcastle—as if from an anthill one should gather a handful of particularly fragile baby ants and contrive to nourish them to adult anthood, or search the ground beneath an oak for its most unlikely acorns and undertake to sprout them from a pot. But Science is devoid of taste, ready to conserve anything that comes along—or, equivalently, destroy it. And, too, there was the Church which undoubtedly regarded these unfinished human morsels as potential candidates for Immortality. Out of deference to the Sister I reserved my comments until we were outside, and then I asked—

“What would happen to these premature and probably not greatly wanted infants, in the normal course of things?”

“In some sections of the bush,” said Mr. Sips, “weaklings and defectives are commonly exposed—abandoned in the forest where they quickly perish.”

“And here, in a more civilized environment?”

“They would die in any case without the incubators.”

“Well, why not? Of what importance are they when there are so many?”

“Ah yes,” smiled Mr. Sips. “But there are not enough. Many more are needed to develop the resources of the Congo. We cannot afford to lose a single one that can be saved.”

“Then the incubator room is not wholly altruistic?”

Mr. Sips shrugged slightly, as if to say, “Is anything?”



IN THE hospital there was a ward for children, one end of which had been partitioned off and divided into rooms; and outside on the porch, half a dozen toddling babies were amicably playing with some toys. Convalescents, I supposed. But the young and pretty Sister who had them in her charge, said they had not been ill.

"Then why are they in the hospital?"

"They were born here," she explained. The mothers had died or disappeared and the fathers didn't want them. She pointed out the room in which they slept, with six little cribs in a row against the wall; and in another room, a diminutive table with six chairs set around it. In a corner of the room was a tiny table with a single chair facing to the wall, and I asked the purpose of it.

"For punishment," the Sister said. "When one is naughty he must eat his meal alone."

"And are they often naughty?"

"Sometimes," she smiled. "Not often. They are happy children—happier, I think, than little Europeans."

"But why should they be?"

"Why?" She seemed to turn the matter in her mind. "I really do not know any other reason than that it is their nature to be happy. Nearly all the Native children are amiable and good."

"Later on, when they are older, what will you do with them?"

"When they are of school age they will be sent away. Until then we will care for them, though of course the hospital is not an orphanage."

"In that case why do you keep them here at all?"

"They were left with us," she said. "And we are fond of them."

We stood in the doorway to watch them at their play, with building blocks and dolls and trifling little things. They were not squabbling for possession of the favored toys, nor watching en-

viously; they seemed content to play with what they had. As we crossed the porch they looked up with smiling faces.

"*Yambo*," I said, in the Swahili greeting.

A pretty little girl giggled coyly in reply, "*Bon jour, monsieur.*"



MR. SIPS' office was just inside the gateway of the Native city—a bungalow of several rooms, in which the members of his staff were busily at work. He, himself, could be seen by anyone at almost any time, so he assured me. Anyone who had complaint to make or a question to discuss was welcome to an interview. And, indeed, he seemed to be readily approachable and his office unencumbered with formality or protocol. His relations with the *Population Noire* appeared to be on friendly, easy terms; he was addressed with deference but not of a fearful or obsequious sort—rather, as one might address an elder of the family.

Across the road from the official bungalow was the Native Court, and we went to have a look at it. After four o'clock, Mr. Sips explained, divorce cases were heard—divorces of marriages which had originated under tribal law. The Native Court has no jurisdiction over marriages contracted under European law, nor over those which the Church has solemnized. However, to judge by the litigants on hand, the tribal marriage rites must still be popular.

The court was a long, bare, narrow room, with an earthen floor as hard as brick. At one end of it was a dais, on which there was a table and three chairs for the judges who are appointed to office by the Governor. The judges who were sitting at the moment, were men of middle age, decently dressed in their ordinary clothes, without insignia or regalia. They looked intelligent and earnest—as if they meant to get to the bottom of the matter.

Facing the dais was a low wooden bench for the plaintiff and defendant, on which they could sit at a respectful distance from each other, with the bar of justice high above their heads. The man in the case was on his feet when we came in, presumably relating his side

of the affair, while the woman sat with sullen face and her eyes upon the floor. Neither of them was young or prepossessing. Behind them, standing awkwardly, were half a dozen people who were probably waiting to be called as witnesses.

The far end of the room contained a numerous company—men and women sitting on the floor, or squatting at the sides with their backs against the walls, prospective litigants with their witnesses and friends, and children, too, sitting by their mothers or trussed upon their backs, but not making any noise. And their elders sat in silence in their respective camps, waiting patiently until they should be summoned, apparently not listening or taking any heed to what was going on. Most of them were young, and nearly all looked poor in their drab and shabby clothing—at a distance black and gray. Poor black people in their domestic tangles, a little dull and oxlike in their stolid patience. The air was heavy with the musty smell of poverty.

Our entrance created a momentary stir and abruptly interrupted the proceedings of the court. The testifying litigant was checked in full career and retired to the bench, sitting down upon the very end of it, as far from his mate as he could get, staring glumly straight before him. The judges rose and stood respectfully waiting our approach. I noticed that Mr. Sips did not remove his hat—not then nor while we stood there; but I took mine off anyway. And I shook hands with the judges, who continued to stand until Mr. Sips suggested they resume consideration of the case.

We listened for some minutes: first to the man, and, when he had finished, to the woman. They told their stories stolidly—honestly, I thought, though of course I had no notion what they said. Now and then one or another of the judges would interrupt to ask a question, and the litigant seemed free to argue in reply, defending his position and elaborating on it, as fully as he chose. There appeared to be no hampering formalities between litigant and judge, and no court reporter making record of the evidence.

When there was a pause in the proceedings Mr. Sips related to me the substance of the case. It was not, he said, an interesting one. The husband had gone away from home to take a job in another locality. While absent he had learned, or had been told, that his wife was stepping out and had got herself another man. Not to be outdone, as the husband put it, he promptly got himself another woman. Both

parties expressed themselves as satisfied with their new arrangements, and neither had any wish to resume the old relationship.

I remarked that such a case should be easy of adjustment.

"On the contrary," said Mr. Sips, "for there is an economic issue to be settled." The court, he explained, was called upon to render a decision on disposition of the original marriage dowry—a matter of three hundred francs (about six dollars). Questions of this sort were full of knots, but the judges were experienced and adept at unraveling them. If the litigants came from different regions of the country, where different codes of Native Law prevailed, it might be necessary, before they finished with it, to call in expert witnesses.

I ventured to suggest that this six-dollar case seemed hardly worth the time it might consume.

"To the Native mentality," Mr. Sips replied, "time is not important. Justice is."



ONLY half of one per cent," the Major said, "have the cerebral conformation of the European."

He had said a lot of things before he got to that. My head was dizzy with the facts and figures he had showered on me; and on the desk between us was a frightening pile of pamphlets and brochures which I had the feeling I should never read. The Major, an ex-cavalry officer of the Belgian army and a very pleasant gentleman, represented the Public Relations Department of the *Union Minière*, the great mining company which operates in the Katanga; and the scene was the Major's office in a fine new building from which the many mining operations are directed.

The Major, on this, my first acquaintance with him, had been reeling off what struck me as a formulated patter—like a side show barker with an act to sell, describing what I'd see when I got inside the tent—a little too defensively, I thought, as if he expected his show to be attacked. Though he spoke in perfect English, he seemed

to fear I might not understand, and relentlessly repeated and hammered in his facts. It was stuffy in the office and I was tired and hungry; I had pretty well stopped listening when my attention was revived by the phrase in which I caught the words "cerebral conformation"—

"I beg your pardon, Major—"

"Their brains," the Major said, as if he were instructing a defective child. "They do not correspond to the European brain. Only half of one per cent of the Native brains have the conformation of the European brain." And he added that no doubt I was acquainted with this fact.

"No," I said. "I'm sorry."

"Ah!" The Major smiled complacently, and went on to explain that the Native brain was, biologically, an inferior instrument, equivalent in its structure to that of the medieval European peasant—a twelfth century brain, to be exact. In consequence the Native was incapable of thinking in modern European terms. In the normal course of evolution it would take the Native about seven hundred years to catch up with the European thinker.

"But in seven hundred years," I ventured to suggest, "the European brain will presumably have undergone further evolution, and the Native brain may still be seven hundred years behind."

"As to that—" The Major shrugged and prepared to change the subject.

"One moment please," I begged, for, upon this premise, the civilizing process seemed irrevocably doomed. "Am I to understand that this difference in cerebral conformation is a scientific fact?"

"But certainly," he said.

"Could you quote me the authority?"

"Unhappily—" The Major spread his hands. He regretted he could not do so at the moment; he did not keep such items at his finger tips. But he would consult a resident biologist who was a friend of his, and would have the information by tomorrow.



AFTER lunch the Major took me, by appointment, to call on Louis Wallef, *Directeur Général en Afrique de l'Union Minière du Haut Katanga*.

Mr. Wallef received me cordially in his spacious office. I judged him to be about forty-five years old, and he told me he had spent twenty-two years in the Congo—twenty-two out of the thirty-seven during which the *Union Minière* has had existence. He impressed me as being both honest and intelligent—in something more than a purely business sense.

In a corner of the room there was a cabinet of highly polished mineral specimens, some of them spectacularly beautiful. Mr. Wallef said they came from various properties of the company, and he pointed out and named most of the different minerals. But one he did not name—an uninspiring, ugly little piece, like a clinker from a furnace. He took it from the shelf and put it in my hand, and I nearly dropped it, for the unimportant fragment, scarcely bigger than my thumb, was much heavier than lead. "It's a radioactive ore," he told me with a smile, and in a moment took it back and replaced it on the shelf, remarking that it was not good to hold it very long. It may have been uranium; I didn't ask. Uranium is a subject that no one in the Congo seems to care to talk about.

In the course of our ensuing conversation Mr. Wallef said, among many other things, most of which the Major had informed me in the morning, that one of the many problems which confronted the civilizing program, was the danger that the Natives should outstrip the Europeans in their skills, and thereby upset the social-economic scheme before it was thoroughly established. If, for example, there should be permitted to arise in the population a considerable element of unskilled European labor—such a class as has developed in the Union of South Africa, and one with which we are familiar in our own "poor white trash" of the South—the program might be seriously threatened. Such a group would endeavor to protect its

membership by discriminatory and repressive measures, both on social and economic levels; and the results might be disastrous. At the moment, with a total European population of only 40,000, the question was an academic one, but it might become in time highly realistic.

In so far as its own operations were concerned, the *Union Minière* had this matter well in mind: the artisans, foremen, and the like, whom it brought out from Europe, were selected with great care; and, once employed, if they failed to measure up to certain standards and seemed likely to develop into drifters or incompetents, were promptly weeded out and sent back home. Still, no screening, he admitted, could completely eliminate the hazard, not even in a private enterprise where selective regulations could be rigorously enforced. Human judgment was unequal to the task: mistakes were made, and first-rate risks developed into derelicts. Government, he added, was by no means unaware of the potential danger to its program and was doing what it could to discourage immigration of undesirables. But—he spread his hands—the Congo was a democratic state, and, in consequence of the European situation, a good many applicants were seeking residence in it. The country itself was perhaps its best protection: its remoteness and inaccessibility, and, to some extent, its character and climate. It was not a land of milk and honey, of a sort to attract the ne'er-do-well.

It crossed my mind that the idea of a permanent White elite in a projected Black democracy was, philosophically at least, anomalistic; and perhaps, on top of that, biologically unsound. But I didn't say so. Instead, I asked a question—

“What do you foresee, assuming the civilizing program to develop as desired—what do you foresee as the ultimate position of the Native in the Congo?”

Mr. Wallef didn't answer that directly. He said that in twenty years, or fifty, he foresaw an enlightened Native population, literate, healthy, highly trained in Western methods, to large extent a self-governing society, busily engaged in developing the country, performing all the varied operations of the task—all the crafts and skills, industrial and agrarian—under the direction of a small European group of master technicians, executives and planners—key men, so to speak, who would be qualified to lead the way.

But I stuck to my question: “The *ultimate* position, Mr. Wallef?”

I had a feeling that the question was unwelcome. Anyway, he didn't answer it.

"Do you foresee a mixture of the races?"

"No." He shook his head—rather in admission that he couldn't see so far than in negation of the possibility. And he added with a smile that a mixture of the races, considering their present, or probable, numerical components, would not result in mixture but actual absorption of the White minority. There wouldn't be enough of them to dilute the Black.

"Do you foresee a condition of social equality?"

"Yes," he said sincerely, as if he had no doubt of it.

"When Black and White, here in the Congo, will meet together at their work and at their play, without being conscious of the color of their skins?"

"Yes."

"Within a measurable length of time?"

He nodded.

"How long would you say?"

But he wouldn't say.

"And when that time arrives, is not miscegenation implicit in the fact? Is there any other bar to a mixture of the races than the social one established by a color line?"

Mr. Wallef had been speaking fluent English; but now abruptly he replied to me in French, so rapidly and volubly that I did not understand a word he said. So in fact I have no notion what he thought about the question. And perhaps it doesn't matter. The business of "foreseeing" is, at its best, a questionable pursuit.)



THE Reader may be prompted to inquire: What about the color line, in the Congo, at this moment?

Well, there is a color line, and as rigid in its way as any other. But—and mark this carefully—it does not seem to be founded on a

conviction of biological superiority: that incredible fiction born of economic fear. It is a social, rather than a color line: a line between those who have enjoyed advantages and the underprivileged; or, better still, the line that distinguishes an adult from a child. It is subtly, but none the less immeasurably, different from the color line of South Africa, or the one subscribed to in wide sections of these United States. It does not degrade and humiliate the black man in an equivalent way or to the same degree. It is not an assertion of White supremacy, ordained by God and irrevocable.

Certainly the white man in the Congo believes himself superior to the black, as unquestionably he is in his Western way of life. But the difference lies in this: he does not believe himself to be so far ahead that he can't be overtaken. And he is engaged, with right good will, in encouraging and helping the laggard to catch up. Though he may not be aware of it, he is working like a beaver to destroy the color line, for that must be the outcome to the course he is pursuing if nothing arises to divert him from it. He is like a craftsman, training an apprentice to utilize his tools, and finally to replace him.

Such, I believe, is the intent of the makers of the civilizing program—Government and Church and great concessionaires. No doubt there are dissenters to the program, but as yet they are not numerous. The simple truth is this: the European in the Congo is not in economic competition with the Native, and hence is not afraid of him. He does not need a color line to create an illusion of security.)



NEXT day the Major called to take me for a visit to the copper smelter. Driving to it in his car, I inquired if he had obtained from his scientific friend, the authority with which to substantiate his statement regarding the Native cerebral conformation. The Major said he had not yet been able to interrogate his friend, who was out of town, but he'd have the facts for me in another day or two.

The smelter turned out to be a big affair, much like any other smelter, I imagine: ugly, grimy, noisy, and confusing. The only interesting feature was the fact that Native workers, in addition to performing all the physically hard labor, were also employed in responsible positions which called for the exercise of both skill and judgment.) There were Native operators in the lofty cages of the traveling cranes which were picking up great cauldrons of the molten ore, moving them about from one point to another, and meticulously pouring the contents into molds—not losing any of it or missing what they aimed at. And Natives on the ground were directing operations, making signals with their hands which the crane men understood. On the gallery which encircled the smelting furnaces, there were watchful Natives at the furnace doors, opening them from time to time and peeking at the broth through shields of colored glass. Indeed, there were few Europeans to be seen, at any rate until—

It seemed, from the excitement, that something had gone wrong in one of the retorts, the door of which had an opening on the gallery where we stood. Its peeking guardian suddenly drew back and called another, who took a hasty glance and shouted for a third. In no time there were a dozen of them grouped around the furnace door, peeking and palavering—like helpless cooks around a curdled sauce.

I asked the Major what was wrong, but he didn't know. And in another moment several Europeans came running to the scene and took charge of the affair, directing the Natives to keep the door propped open while they peeked into the furnace through dark glasses of their own, not getting any closer to the searing heat than they were compelled to do. And they, too, wore anxious faces, shouting comment to each other.

“You may see for yourself,” the Major said, “when anything goes wrong the Native is quite helpless.”

I said I saw. But in fact the Europeans seemed as helpless as the Natives, for, beyond their anxious peeking and discussion, they weren't doing anything. And perhaps there was nothing to be done; perhaps the curdled sauce was not to be uncurdled, by magic White or Black.

We left them to struggle with the problem by themselves and

strolled on along the gallery. At the end of it was a wide expanse of wall which the workmen, in their idle moments, had covered thick with drawings, done in paint or colored chalk—figures, for the most part, of workmen like themselves. The Major asked me if I saw anything unusual in these pictures.

I looked closely but saw nothing unusual or significant. They were crudely executed pictures, such as children might have drawn.

“But observe,” the Major said, “the faces of the figures. You will see that they are white.”

“White?” I scrutinized the faces. They were not exactly white, but still they were not black; and if black, would not have been decipherable on the grimy wall.

“When they paint pictures of themselves,” the Major was explaining, “they always give themselves white faces.”

“Why do they do that?”

“Why?” The Major laughed. “Because it is their dream of Paradise—that they should be white.”

“Do you think they all feel that way?”

“Yes, all,” he said. “There is not one of them who would not sell his soul to change the color of his skin.”

We went down to the floor beneath, where ingots, fresh from heating, were expelled out of their molds and came sliding down a chute, to be caught in metal barrows and wheeled away by hand. The smoking ingots came, one close behind the other, and the barrows must be ready at the bottom to receive them. They were heavy, clumsy loads, requiring careful balancing, lest they slide and spill; it wasn't easy work, wheeling them away. There was time to make the trip and back again, a not too hurried trip, but there was no time to waste. If one of the barrow gang should spill his load or dawdle on his way, the mechanics of the program would be thrown out of gear. But there was no interruption while we stood to watch them. They kept a steady pace, stolid-looking men in ragged work clothes.

“Healthy and well-fed,” the Major said.

I nodded. They did look healthy, and as if they were not suffering for want of nourishment.

“And happy, don't you think?” he added hopefully.

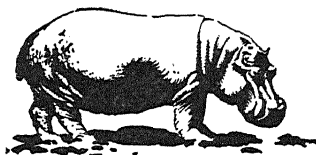
(But they did not look happy—not to me, though perhaps no less

so than workers wheeling barrows of ingots anywhere. I do not recall that I ever saw a Native, engaged in manual labor, or really any labor of a Western sort, who seemed to be enjoying it. Still, white men, at their labors, in this mass production age, give small evidence of joy. And yet there is a difference, which derives from this, I think: the average Native does not relate his job to a finished undertaking; in consequence his work is meaningless to him, it simply makes no sense.)

These fellows wheeling ingots in their barrows, had not arrived at the idea of *copper*. They had no conception of its use; they did not see it stretched into fine wires, over which men's voices could be carried round the world, across the floors of oceans. Indeed, in a geographic sense, the world and its oceans were beyond their apprehension. As an outcome to their labor, they did not even visualize a kettle, or the jacket of a bullet which might kill an elephant, or sleek, explosive shells which, dropped upon a village, would blast it from the earth. Copper had no meaning, beyond that it was something the white man held of value, for reasons of his own which were hidden from their view and about which they had little curiosity. For them the stuff they trundled made no sense. Nor did this in any way reflect on their intelligence, suggesting defective cerebral conformation. Their thinking was all right, but it was another sort of thinking, not yet oriented in the complicated labyrinth of causality. Like children, required to put away their toys, they did as they were bid, but they saw no reason for it; and, within the pattern of their lives, they were quite right: what they were doing made no sense.

I asked the Major what these barrow men were paid, and he named a monthly wage which figured out to about eight dollars. Much more, he said, than the Natives in the bush. And this was only part of their compensation: housing was provided and some items of their food and clothing, medical care and education for their children, and numerous social benefits. It was better, the Major pointed out, to furnish them with goods rather than with money which they could not be counted on to expend intelligently. They would likely spend it for useless, silly things, and have nothing left for rent and food.

And this seemed reasonable.



BUT I see that the Reader has his hand up, with a question.

Q: Is it not a fact that the Native labor of the Congo is ruthlessly exploited?

A: Let's leave out "ruthlessly," which implies intent of malice, for which there is no shred of evidence.

Q: All right, it's out. The Natives are exploited, are they not?

A: Yes and no. As a premise to the subject let me say that whether or not a primitive people will derive a benefit from being what we call civilized, is a question I do not care to discuss. It is in the realm of the philosophical, not realistic or pertinent to our inquiry. For better or worse the Natives of the Congo are being civilized—an excursion which, once embarked upon, can neither be halted nor reversed.

The civilizing process is an expensive business: hospitals, schools, housing, everything from the ground up. Government, with the best intentions in the world, cannot supply the cash, cannot find the money in a colonial budget, cannot tax its citizens for the necessary funds to make a job of it. So the civilizing costs must be largely paid for out of profits—the undelivered portion of the Natives' proper wages. This increment plowed back into the country, into roads and transportation, conservation measures, health and education—this increment is, in theory anyway and I believe in fact, the civilizing sinking fund. In short, the Native himself must, in one way or another, pay for being civilized. If this be exploitation, then he is exploited.

Q: But is the increment actually plowed back?

A: In the case of the big concessionaires—like the *Union Minière*, like Lever Brothers—yes, I think it is. They work hand in hand with Government and are closely supervised; and the policy prescribed serves their long-range interest.

Q: A project in Utopia?

A: That depends on where you sit. But the program I've described is by no means purely altruistic. The Congo has vast resources which can only be developed by the Natives, who must be developed to develop it themselves. Consider, if you please, a country one-third the size of the United States, with only 13,000,000 people in it. Well, of course, to begin with, the population must be multiplied: infant mortality must be reduced; babies must be carefully cared for, and people encouraged to have more of them. Then, to do a good day's work, a man must be well fed; and that's a knotty problem, for he's never been well fed or felt the need of being; he should have meat to eat, but he's not accustomed to it; of a balanced diet he's never heard or dreamed. And there is health: a man sick of a fever has neither strength nor will to climb a tree for palm nuts. So disease must be attacked; and this is none too easy, for the sick man distrusts the white man's magic and prefers the ministrations of his witch doctor.

Finally, the primitive man is deficient in his wants, shockingly destitute in fact; if he be housed and fed, and underfed at that, he is satisfied and happy, there is nothing else he needs. Why should he climb a tree, or labor like an ox, or burrow in a mine? They will pay him money for it, but the money is no use. He simply has no wants, of the kind that can be gratified by money. So his wants must be expanded; he must be made aware of a multitude of things and induced to covet them. And that takes education. He must be weaned away from his tribal loyalties and his communal life, from all the deepest habits of his past; he must be enrolled in a competitive society, in which the only purpose is to get ahead and stay there—entered in a race, to outwork or outsmart his fellow men. He must be made to want things, and a lot of them. Only then will the mines produce their proper quota and the oil nuts multiply.

And, oh yes! There's one thing more I am forgetting: he must have a new religion. The old one of his fathers'—a very good one, too, simple and direct—will no longer serve his purpose, or be allowed to do so. He must adopt the white man's God. And there is an added hurdle in this matter, for the white men are not agreed about their God; and so he is confronted with several different versions, each alleged by its adherents to be final and authentic. There is rivalry among the Christian creeds for the lost black souls;

they steal each other's thunder and persuade communicants out of one sect to another, by promises and threats of ultimate reward or eternal punishment—indeed, sometimes by more realistic methods such as bribery and coercion. Confusing to the primitive intelligence which is not adapted to deciding fine distinctions of theology. There are some disillusioned ones who are shrewd enough to take unfair advantage in this holy war, who pick the side that will pay the highest price, keeping an ear cocked for a better offer. Such misguided rascals may change their faith a dozen times and not exhaust the possibilities.

Q: Is there not an official religion of the country?

A: Not an arbitrary one. Belgium is a Catholic country. And the Catholic Church is the working arm of the Colonial Government. And let nothing I have said be interpreted as a reflection on the splendid work it's doing. But it would be too much to ask that the Catholic Church, or any church, should waive its claim to being sole possessor of the Truth, or omit a valiant effort to convince the unbeliever and preserve him from the torments of damnation. At all events, there are in the Congo, as elsewhere in the world, many different versions of the white man's God, of which the Catholic one is in preferred position. But there's no discrimination on the part of Government against the Protestants who have many institutions of their own, in most of which, I have no doubt, they are doing a fine, unselfish job. As in all human matters there are bound to be occasions of venality, and they are not confined to any creed.

However, we are wandering from your question which involved the suggestion that the civilizing process was a project in Utopia. Perhaps you have been answered; but to sum the matter up, whatever else it may be, the so-called civilizing of a primitive people is a hard and painful business, for the civilizing agent and the neophyte. It calls for wisdom and great patience; nor can it be unduly hurried. On the surface adaptation may appear to be complete, though the core of the psyche has undergone no change. The background of millenniums is not readily put aside; imitation and conversion are not to be confused.—A project in Utopia, if you like?



ONE day the Major took me to Kibushi, where there is a copper mine. It turned out to be an attractive little town, in wooded, rolling country. The European section, of 600 residents, was almost hidden among its trees and gardens; and the Native village, for the miners and their families—some 3,000 individuals—was roomily established in a level, shaded area, in the typical form of such a housing project: rows of small brick houses roofed with shiny metal, as uniform as peas, though different sections varied from each other, as improvements had been made, over periods of time, in construction and design.

We went through an excellent hospital where there were not many patients, and several European doctors to prescribe for them. The X-ray department seemed to be well equipped—a precautionary measure against silicosis, for which the miners are examined with frequent regularity, so the Major told me.

In front of the hospital was a long queue of women with their babies whom they brought every day for supplementary feeding. And Native nurses were on hand, in the open air, with big receptacles for milk and tapioca which they ladled out for consumption on the spot.

“It gets them off their mothers’ breasts,” the Major said. “They’d be nursing them for years if they were let alone.”

“Well, why not?” I asked.

“Because,” the Major smiled, “it conduces to polygamy.”

“Polygamy? How so?”

“The quicker a woman gets her baby weaned, the less inducement to her man to get another wife.”

“Then there is a moral aspect to the matter?”

“But certainly,” the Major said, and added carelessly that quick weaning was also conducive to fecundity.

The school, in charge of Native Sisters, was as impressive as the hospital, with well-ordered classrooms and competent-appearing

Native teachers, and healthy-looking children, bright-eyed and alert. When we came into a room they rose and spoke a greeting, and stood and spoke again when we went out. The work they were doing appeared to be equivalent to what children of like age would be doing in America. I thought their penmanship was better and their papers neater. In one room they were drawing, and samples were collected and brought for my inspection—still lifes and landscapes done with colored crayons, some of them suggestive of real creative talent. I thought they were the equal, perhaps above the average, of such work at home. And indeed the children seemed in general more serious about their schoolwork than children in America, as if they felt what they were doing had importance, in the nature of adventure rather than a penance—perhaps because education is so newly come to them, and there is not, in their unconscious racial past, the clanking echo of its melancholy chains.

The school included a domestic science course for teen-aged girls. One room was equipped as an experimental kitchen, and half a dozen pupils, in spotless apron uniforms, were engaged in culinary practice under the direction of a Sister who proudly displayed, as evidence of curricular activity, an object which resembled a European cake. In an adjacent room a group of twenty girls were seated at machines, learning how to sew. They were so intent upon the clicking needles that they barely glanced at us when we came in, and the rhythm of the treadles was scarcely interrupted.

I noticed that the classes thinned out as they advanced, shrinking in size from one classroom to another, and particularly in relation to the girls, so that whereas in the lower classes the children were approximately equally divided as to sex, in the upper classes they not only shrank in numbers but there were fewer girls. And I raised the question why this should be the case.

“Because, from year to year,” the Major said, “the work grows harder, and there are fewer of them with the wit or will to do it. As for the girls—” He shrugged. “If they are not definitely repulsive, they commonly get married in their early teens.” He shrugged again and added rather grimly that education for the girls was a major problem which remained to be resolved.

As we left the school we came upon a small boy standing rigidly alone in the center of the playground, with his back toward the porch on which the classrooms opened. He did not return my greet-

ing, though I saw that he observed me from the corner of his eye, and imagined that I caught a fleeting smile upon his face.

"Punishment," the Major said. "He is not allowed to speak."

"Could you find out of what crime he has been guilty?"

"I will try." There was now an extensive conversation with the culprit who appeared to be embarrassed rather than contrite. "Ha!" the Major ejaculated finally, with a ferocious scowl and a secret wink at me. "I think we have it: it appears that he has pulled the hair of the girl who sat in front of him."

"Well, such things happen," I said, as sadly as I could. The child was watching me with widely anxious eyes. I found in my pocket the fragment of a candy bar and slipped it in his hand, while the Major looked away, pretending not to see. The anxious eyes were smiling now, in a grin from ear to ear; and the candy bar was deftly tucked into a pocket.

We drove around the mine pit. But I didn't see the miners at their work, because I declined to descend into the shaft. A mine is a mine, and I knew what it was like. The Major said the men worked two eight-hour shifts, six days a week. They received supplementary rations on the job, before they went down and again when they came up: eight hundred additional calories beyond the standard of four thousand provided for the women and children, and which included—he checked the items off upon his fingers—meat, mealies, tapioca, sweet potatoes, beans, and salt; for fats they had peanuts, peanut oil and palm oil; some fruit and vegetables. The men got coffee on the job, with sugar in it; the women drew a sugar ration for the balance of the family. From a commissary, where a general line of merchandise was carried, the miners drew their rationed shoes and work clothes. There was no compulsion for anyone to buy in the commissary store, but it served to keep the traders' prices down.

"In Kibushi," the Major said, "there are no police, and no occasion for them." For diversion, once a month there was an outdoor cinema; and the miners had a band which gave periodic concerts—pretty good, the Major thought. The workers, he explained, were recruited for three years—a sufficient time in which to make adequate adjustment to the industrial life. At the end of the term they were encouraged to go home for a vacation which provided opportunity for contrast; and then to return, if they felt so inclined, as it seemed most

of them did, becoming permanent members of an urban industrial proletariat—by reasoned choice, without bribery or coercion. “The mine combines,” he said, “a vocation and a school—necessary factors in the civilizing process.”

“And when they are no longer fit to work, by reason of age or disability?”

“They are pensioned, and commonly return to the villages in which they had their origin.”

“What happens to a woman when the husband dies?”

“In such case,” the Major said, “there may be complications.” And he went on to explain that, by Native Law and Custom, the widow automatically became the wife of the deceased man’s brother. This bond could be dissolved, if the widow so elected, by repayment of the original marriage dowry. In one way or another adjustment could be made whereby the widow would receive her husband’s pension.

“Paternalistic?” I suggested.

The Major seemed to turn the matter in his mind and then he shook his head. The word, he said, was frequently misused and subject to unpleasant connotations. Trusteeship he considered a better designation of the corporate and governmental functions, since there was implicit in it a temporal limitation to authority, to a responsibility from which the Trustee must some day be discharged.

“Yes, but when?” I said.

“When?” The Major kept his eyes upon the road, piloting the car along the rutted streets of sun-baked mud, between the rows of small brick houses. “When the beneficiary has arrived at his majority, in the sense of being civilized; when he is in fact prepared and qualified to assume responsibility himself for the entire conduct of his own affairs.”

“How would you differentiate,” I asked, “between a Paternalistic system—or Trusteeship, as you prefer to call it—and a system of Industrial Peonage?”

The Major took this one squarely on the chin. “I would not,” he said, “undertake to do so, since the question involved is not one of fact but of intent.”

I thought his answer was both wise and honest, and I let it go at that. After all, it doesn’t help much, giving names to things.



WE STOPPED at the administrative office in the Native town, where the local *Chef du Service de la Population Noire*, a briskly competent young man, dropped whatever he was doing and joined us for a stroll through the nearly empty streets.

At the side of a house was a washtub full of water, in which a little naked boy was playing, while an even smaller one stood clinging to the rim. In the tiny kitchen through which the house had entrance, and in which there was no sign of culinary function, an old woman was sitting flatly on the floor, quite in the middle of it, facing the open door, so that to pass one must step across her legs which she did not draw back. Our conductor greeted her in cheery fashion, and she cackled a reply but without enthusiasm, regarding us impassively with lusterless old eyes, suggesting neither curiosity nor interest.

We stepped across her and went on into the house: three rooms, all very small, a table, chairs, two beds; clean, in decent order; rather dimly lighted, for they do not like big windows. They are unconcerned with views; when they go into the house they do not care to be reminded of the out of doors. And their wishes are respected in the houses built for them, in so far as may be practical.

"The old woman in the kitchen?" I inquired. "Why does she sit there on the floor?"

"We will see," our guide replied, and went back to interview her. There was now great palaver of question and reply, which at last boiled down to this—

She was the mother of the man whose house it was, a miner now at work. The little children in the yard were his. His wife was dead, had died quite recently; and she had been sent for, from her village in the bush, to supervise his household until such time as he found another woman to replace the one he'd lost. She had come two days ago.—Had she been here before?—No. She had never been away from home before, from the village in which she had been born.—

Did she like it here?—She was noncommittal on that point, but her eyes were sad and lonely.—Had she made acquaintance with her neighbors?—With some she had.—Were they not kind and friendly?—Yes, but they were strangers.—Was it not convenient to draw water from a faucet a few steps from the door?—Yes, that was good, she said without elation.—And the stores with things to buy?—She nodded sorrowfully.—And her little grandsons playing in the yard, was she not happy to have them in her care?—Yes, that was good, but there was no brightening in her eyes.

I interposed a question for translation: Why was she sitting in this barren cubbyhole?—It took a lot of talk to reach the bottom of it, which was, if interpreted correctly, that she was sitting here because she liked it, because she preferred it to the proper sitting room. It was more homelike to her than the others, more reminiscent of the home she'd left, with fewer reminders of the strange new life on which she was embarking. The constricted emptiness of the ugly little kitchen was soothing to nostalgia. To be sure, she said nothing of this sort, but I think that's what she meant.

Finally, why did she choose to sit upon the cold, damp floor when there were chairs at hand?—She did not like the chairs.—Why not?—She was not used to sitting on such things.—But she would be more comfortable.—No. She shook her head. Her son had told her that and she had tried the chairs, but she was not comfortable. They hurt her legs, she said, and made them ache.

The Major took the floor and addressed her at some length, the while she listened carefully, with her chin sunk on her breast and her eyes turned up to his, obediently attentive to authority but conceding no conviction, passively resistant—like a child confronted with parental logic and stubbornly determined on repudiation of it.—“What have you said to her?” I asked him at the end.—“I have told her in a month she'll be very happy here.” But he must have said much more to her than that. “Homesick,” he added cheerfully. “It is often so to start. But you've no idea how quickly and completely they get over it. In a few weeks time she'll be lively as a cricket, chattering in the market, full of new ideas, maybe into mischief. And you couldn't drive her back into the bush.”

We took our leave, stepping over the outstretched legs again. And the woman watched us go as she had watched us come, without a hint of interest in her eyes.)

Farther down the street we turned in at another house where there were signs of life: two women in the doorway, who responded to our greeting, albeit I thought I detected in their faces no great pleasure in our visit. But still they welcomed us and made room for us to pass.

Such is the custom. There is no question of the moment or convenience of the occupants, nor on the visitor's part an intention to intrude on privacy. If the door is open one walks in; if it be closed, one knocks and then walks in. And no one ever says, "Excuse me, I am busy. Please come back another time." What a Native may be up to, in his house or out of it, in the town or in the bush, is more or less the business of any European, official or civilian, who may be prompted to an interest in it, though it be no more than idle curiosity.

For example, I am walking on the street and a Native comes along with some intriguing object on his head or in his hands—an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable, or a decorated lance. I may feel free to stop him with a gesture or a word, as one would say, "What have you there, my friend?" And he will not take offense, as you or I would do if the matter were reversed. He will put his basket down and smilingly explain the contents of it, or entrust his precious lance into my hands, to be examined at my leisure. And he will wait my pleasure without show of irritation or impatience. Such is the custom. To such submission he has been conditioned.

There were several women in the house, young and middle-aged, and much chatter going on, which quickly died away upon our entrance, leaving an awkward feeling of constraint, as if a group of men had blundered unannounced into a ladies' tea party. At all events, the guests dispersed, slipping from the room and hurrying from the house. In a matter of moments there was no one left except the hostess, a buxom matron whose eyes, behind their smile, had an uneasy look.

While we glanced around the little sitting room, in which there was nothing unusual to be seen, she stood in the doorway of the bedroom and answered, a shade too eagerly, the questions I suggested to our guide. Her husband was at work in the mine, she said, and their three children were at school. They had been in Kibushi for two years, and had nothing to complain of. The house had two bedrooms which served their needs at present.

“But please—” The administrator motioned me toward the doorway where she stood. “Please see for yourself.”

The woman made way for me to pass—grudgingly, I thought, and followed me a step into the room, while my companions waited in the doorway. There was a double bed which almost filled the room, and not much else save some clothing hanging on the wall, and a small high window which admitted little light. I was already preparing to go out when my eye encountered something in a corner—an unusual piece of furniture perhaps; and I paused to scrutinize it, around the ample figure of the woman who had angled herself in position to conceal it. “What’s that?” I said and pointed, not dreaming it was anything to hide. But then I saw her face and knew my idle question was unfortunate. The object in the corner turned out to be a washtub piled high with bottled beer.

“Chut, chut!” exclaimed the Major.

The administrator took a bottle from the tub and held it to the light. And then he turned to face the culprit, addressing her not angrily but sadly, holding up his finger and wagging it before her, while she hung her head and shuffled her bare feet. I could imagine he was saying, “Come, come, this is really most annoying. You have been selling beer and you know it is forbidden. I am deeply grieved and disappointed. You have brought shame upon yourself and your husband and your children, and on me, your friend and guardian. You have disgraced us in the presence of a guest who has honored us by paying us a visit. I am very much displeased.”—She essayed a mumbled answer, but the young man cut her off with a decisive shrug and strode past her through the door.

“Chut, chut,” the Major said again, more in pity than in anger. And I followed at his heels, not looking at her, for I was more embarrassed than anybody else.

In the street I asked, “Will she be severely punished?”

“No, not severely.” The administrator laughed. “She will come to my office and we will have a chat. It is likely her husband knows nothing of this business.”

“Will you tell him?”

“That depends.”

“These women! These women!” The Major shook his head. “They are always into mischief.”



BUT the Reader has a question: Why was this woman selling beer, in defiance of rules and regulations?

A: Presumably to supplement her income, plus a social diversion to fill her idle time. But let's start at the beginning—

The urban Natives are poor people: 55 per cent of the workers in Leopoldville, oldest and largest of the Congo's cities, earn the minimum wage which amounts to about thirty-five cents a day. The remaining 45 per cent average about fifty dollars a month, scaling up to a maximum of slightly double that, but such compensation is exceptional. These are horrifying figures. But figures are misleading, out of context with the total economic picture. Let it suffice to say that half the population is on the edge of a subsistence level, in a society whose standard of living is of the simplest sort. Housing, food, and clothing, without frills of any kind, are all that minimum wages will provide. There is no margin left for luxuries, with which, it is true, they have never had acquaintance; but they are in close contact with them now—with the complex mechanics and overstuffed comforts of the European way of life.

In consequence of regulations governing urban residence, they have practically no unemployment problem. And they are engaged in every trade and occupation, from common labor to highly skilled mechanics, bank clerks, and river pilots. In theory—and to large extent in practice, for both legal and economic reasons—the jobless Native cannot stay in town, unless he's earned the right by past performance or has some valid reason to be there. Permission to reside must be obtained, in the course of which his antecedents will be closely scrutinized. He will be fingerprinted and card-indexed, and his life in the city will be an open book to the authorities.

This sounds, I am aware, like a police state, exercising repressive and coercive measures. But in practice it is not, for the purpose of control is essentially benign. If there were no restrictions and the

urban doors were flung wide to everyone, the country Natives would swarm in like locusts, for no better reason than to see what it was like. They are curious and they love to travel. There would be no jobs for them and they would starve to death, but not until they had thoroughly disrupted the resident societies, and occupied the housing and consumed the food supply of their relatives and friends who, by rules of tribal custom, must cheerfully submit to their own impoverishment.

As a matter of fact, one of the greatest trials the urban Native has to bear is that of visiting relatives, to whom he may not bar his door, who must be fed and welcomed, with whom he must share whatever meager resources he has—no great hardship in the bush, where nothing is involved but a handful of maize or a beast that has been killed; but quite a different matter in the city, where food is had for money and money must be earned. And, too, in defiance of mathematics, as one adds to one's possessions they have a way of becoming less divisible. At all events, violation of the law of communal hospitality is a serious affair. And though the head of the house may be sufficiently evolved to have reservations on the subject, even to the point of resisting the demands upon his slender budget, the women of the family are almost certain to oppose his resolution and defeat it if they can. Such matters are the source of much domestic discord—a battlefield of new and old ideas, of ancient cherished customs transplanted to a social-economic milieu in which they cannot operate.—“He would not let my brother come to live with us.”—“He is disrespectful to my parents.”—“He did not send a proper present to my father.”—No small number of divorces hinge upon such issues, which are rooted in convictions too basic to be compromised.

Nor are the husbands without sources of complaint. The woman of the bush, who has been accustomed to labor in the field and in the home, who has carried on her head the household water and the wood to feed the fire, is abruptly transported to a magic world where there is no field to hoe, where water flows out of a pipe a hundred steps away and fuel can be had from a merchant down the street. Time hangs heavy on her hands. She will quickly make acquaintance with her neighbors, among whom there will be some sophisticated ones who may show her how to turn an easy profit by, for example, the illicit sale of beer. She may carry on such

business without knowledge of her husband, if she is shrewd and careful, and have money in her pocket to expend as she sees fit.

If she is young and reasonably attractive, there are other pitfalls waiting an unwary step: she will be in due course introduced to bars—sordid little rooms without a hint of glamour—where she will encounter idlers of both sexes. There are more men than women in the cities—in Leopoldville, despite the program, almost twice as many—with the obvious implications of such a situation. Predatory males are numerous and aggressive, and prostitution is a flourishing affair. In a bar, or anywhere, the inexperienced novice may fall an easy prey to hunting wolves. She will not lack companions to guide and encourage her transgressions, and quite likely, among them, a plausible and friendly matron who makes a living as procuress.

The immorality—or one might better say, the inherent amorality of the Native woman, once she has parted with the structure and taboos of her traditional customs, is a disturbing feature of the civilizing process. For she does not readily assimilate, in place of what she loses, the European and Christian disciplines which might be expected to restrain her. On the contrary, she absorbs with disconcerting ease, the numerous vices of behavior patterns which are alien to her experience. Deprived of the code to which she is accustomed, she has no discrimination.

Finally, in an urban environment—though certainly the village of Kibushi could scarcely be so designated—she is likely to be a dubious mother, careless of the health and welfare of her children, at least in accord with Western standards. Thus, even though she be a faithful, devoted wife and mother, her reactionary tendencies tend to be obstructive. In consequence, the years of infancy and babyhood, in which the education of the adult man begins, are generally devoid of the kind of maternal influence which should contribute to a firm foundation. The child in school must unlearn what he has learned at home. This is not to say that there are not splendid types of character among the Native women, but only that they are, on the whole, less adaptable and more backward than the men—for which one need seek no more subtle explanation than the part they have thus far been called upon to play in the strange new world into which they've been so suddenly projected.

In substance, this is what the Major told me in answer to my ques-

tions, as we were driving home. And he added at the end that in Leopoldville there was a school for wives, in which progressive husbands could enroll their backward helpmates; and in a few months time, theoretically at least, recover companions with whom they could enjoy some measure of intellectual contact.

"It seems to me," I mused, "that the civilizing agents have thought of everything."

"Yes, everything." The Major nodded grimly. "Everything except a way to change the conformation of their brains."

As I stepped out of the car at my hotel, I ventured to inquire if he had yet obtained a quotable authority on the subject of cerebral conformation.

"When I do," the Major said a little testily, "I will let you know about it."

It may be recorded here and finished with, that he never did.



SPEAKING of conformations—

It was in the town of Bunia, in the far northeast corner of the country, that I first encountered the hideous deformity with which the women of the Babira tribe have been, but are now rarely, mutilated—the *femmes à plateaux*, as they are called.

I was driving down the street in the vintage Chevrolet in which I had been traveling with Marcel, my Belgian driver, at the wheel, when I saw at the roadside, walking in a group, an old woman, bent and shriveled, who appeared to be carrying something in her mouth, sticking straight out at right angles to her face—like a black dessert plate gripped between her teeth.

"Stop, Marcel," I cried, and jumped out in haste to see what this could be. And when I saw I felt a little sick, for the plate she was carrying in her mouth was her upper lip, or rather the periphery of it, for in place of flesh was a round thick plug of wood which served to hold her lip out like a shelf, in the absence of which it would hang below her chin—a flaccid rim of flesh with a wide hole in the middle,

like a soggy doughnut. With the wooden plug in place the woman bore resemblance to a duckbilled platypus.

Marcel had come to join me and we undertook to get some pictures of her, which took much urging on Marcel's part in Swahili, a language she could not, or would not, understand, and which had to be translated into her tribal tongue by other women of the group. There was endless palaver on the subject. And then she must be posed to favor her deformity, and she was not pleased about it or co-operative. When at the end I put some money in her hand, she was not satisfied with the amount; and was still scowling at us and mumbling imprecations when we drove away. I thought her mutilation must be sufficiently unique for her to have set a value on it, but in a village market not far distant from Bunia, I came upon a dozen more of the Babira women with equivalent upper lips, and these seemed not to be camera-shy or avaricious. But they had one thing in common: all of them were old, which suggested the practice had been discontinued, or was now forbidden by the Government, which later on I learned to be the case.

The lip is pierced in infancy or childhood, and a tiny plug inserted, to be presently replaced with a slightly larger one, so that the dreadful wound is gradually expanded through a period of years, until it may attain the size of a dessert plate. As to explanation for such brutal decoration, the legend is as follows:

In the long ago the Babira women were endowed by Nature with great beauty—or at least with something which the males of a neighboring warlike tribe found quite irresistible. And so the peaceful villages of the unwarlike Babira were subjected to frequent depredation. When the barbarians could think of nothing better with which to occupy their time, they would organize a raid, descend on the Babira and carry off their women, leaving death and smoking ruins in their wake. Beauty, it appeared, was attended with fatality—as indeed it has been often represented, both in fact and fiction—a curse upon the wearer of it and a heavy burden on the family.

The situation went from bad to worse, and the Babira were at their wit's end to defend their tottering homes, when some genius in their midst—no doubt a wily witch doctor—hit upon a scheme to defeat the lustful enemy. If beauty was at fault the remedy was simple: they need only make their women unattractive. And no

better place to start than with the upper lip, a necessary factor in osculatory art—though in fact I do not know if osculation is practiced by the Africans, and I rather think it isn't. But in any case, the lip, which is close beneath the eyes in the center of the face, could hardly be ignored by the most determined and abandoned of Don Juans.

Offhand, the remedy seems drastic—in the nature of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. But that may be a purely Western point of view. Anyway, according to the legend, it seemed to turn the trick, for the barbarians were thoroughly discouraged and henceforth confined their hunting to more rewarding fields; and the Babira men were happily content. Such is the power of suggestion; and such is the shaky scaffolding which supports such mooted notions as "beautiful" and "ugly." At all events, in scarcely any time a Babira swain would turn his back and run from anything resembling an old-fashioned lip. If the lady couldn't dangle hers below her chin or balance a teacup on its wooden plug, she was faced with spinsterhood. The barbarians, fortunately, never quite absorbed the idea; and so everyone lived happily ever after.

It was also in the town of Bunia that I first encountered an elongated head—on the shoulders of a personable young bank clerk whose skull resembled a well-proportioned melon, tapering at the back almost to a point: a deformity accomplished by skillful and persistent binding of the head in infancy, when the skull can be shaped like potter's clay, and its cerebral contents, like a pot of jelly, adapts itself to the changing envelope.

I found the effect not in the least revolting, quite the contrary in fact, for the elongated form is pleasing to the eye—a more aesthetic shape than the ordinary head, intriguingly exotic; and the wearer of the head, and of all such heads I saw, both men and women, conveyed a sense of breeding, an aristocratic quality, which may have been the wearer or may have been his head—impossible to say, but they seemed to go together and properly belong. However it may be, these people with the elongated heads had an air of great gentility; and they wore their heads, on which no hat would fit, with what seemed to be a nice sense of distinction—not boastingly or blatantly, but modestly aware of an enviable position in relation to the wearers of the commonplace variety.

I heard no legend to account for this deformity. But I did hear something else which might serve as foundation for legendary exercise, if one were tempted to elaborate upon it—

On day in Leopoldville, at lunch with two government officials who might be assumed to know whereof they spoke, the subject of the *femmes à plateaux* arose, and I expressed the horror I had felt when I had first encountered the mutilated women.

“Yes, of course,” my host agreed. “But,” he added cheerfully, “you have seen no young Babira so afflicted.” And when I admitted I had not, he went on to explain that Government had taken a stand upon the matter and the practice was forbidden. There had been much opposition at the start, but normal upper lips were now considered fashionable in the Babira country.

“And the people with the elongated heads?”

“Ah, those!” My host laughed awkwardly and applied himself to his unfinished lunch.

“Is the practice still permitted?”

“Yes—” he said uncomfortably. They had put a stop to it but had afterwards reversed themselves and permitted its resumption.

“Why have you done that?”

“Why?” He choked on a fishbone, and his young assistant took the floor—

“But you do not find the tapered head revolting in appearance?”

“On the contrary,” I said.

“It is not an affliction—like those monstrous lips?”

I conceded this was true. “But still,” I argued, “the binding of an infant’s head, like the binding of a Chinese baby’s feet, can hardly be regarded by European eyes as a wholesome practice, nor one con-
duc-
ing to the standards of conformity, physical and spiritual and mental, which seem to be the goal of the civilizing process—an end at which at least all heads shall look alike. And so why do you make exception in the case?”

“Because—” my host resumed with a melancholy smile, “—because it did not work.”

“Not work? What do you mean?”

“When their heads are left unbound—” He seemed terribly embarrassed. “—Well, they are not so bright.”)

III

IN ELIZABETHVILLE one evening I was invited to dine at the home of an acquaintance—a comfortable, well-appointed house; and the dinner was the best I had had in Africa, from the canapés which accompanied the apéritifs, to the ice cream with chocolate sauce with which it was concluded. It was served with an air of great deliberation by two boys with grim, determined faces, dressed in stiff white coats and trousers and wearing cotton gloves which necessitated keeping their fingers out of things. At the beginning of the meal a bonbon dish of giant-size yellow capsules was passed around the table—the daily dose of quinine, preventive of malaria.

Among the guests was a personable young man and his very pretty bride, in whose honor the dinner had been given. The boy had been born and raised in the Congo, and then had gone to Belgium to attend a university, where he had been trained for a career in the colonial service. He had met the girl in Brussels, and they had been married on the point of his return. The long sea trip to Africa had been their honeymoon. And now they were about to set out again, to a station in the bush, where the young man had appointment to a minor administrative post. A splendid opportunity, he said, for him to learn his job, since there would be in his district, of considerable extent, only one other resident European. “And it isn’t far away,” he added lightly. “Not an hour in the air, though it used to take two weeks by boat and motorcar.”

The eyes of the little bride were sparkling at the prospect. Her evening gown was obviously the product of a fashionable couturier in Brussels; her hair was prettily waved; her skin was smooth and white; her hands well-groomed, with lacquered fingernails. “I think it’s all just wonderful,” she said.

“You won’t be lonely?” someone asked.

“Lonely?” The little bride laughed at the idea. “How could I be lonely if I have my husband?”

“But in the bush—” The questioner was persistent.

My hostess frowned and shook her head, and changed the subject.

Coffee was served, liqueurs were passed. One might have been in Brussels; there was nothing to suggest the wilderness of Africa. The evening was delightful, gay and friendly.

A few days later, early in the morning, I left Elizabethville for Usumbura, in a small, two-motored plane with seats for eight, only four of which were occupied, and two of them by the young man and his bride. The day was overcast and rainy, and the ceiling kept us low. A lush, green wilderness of rolling hills and mountains slid by beneath our wings—an endless reach of bush, of scrubby, open forest. No towns, no railways, houses, fences; no cultivated clearings; no sign of life, of man or beast. Now and then, at broken intervals, a yellow thread of something that might be a road, or perhaps a river—it was difficult to say; and here and there a wide green open space—marsh or swamp no doubt. The little bride, in her jaunty traveling suit, looked eagerly from one side to the other, as her husband from his seat across the aisle, pointed out the landmarks to her. And when she turned her head, I could see her eyes still sparkled.

In an hour we came down and bumped a ragged landing in a clearing where there was nothing to be seen but a windsock on a pole. Some Natives were waiting our arrival; and a European, in shorts and a sun helmet, was sitting in a badly battered jeep.

This was the destination of the young man and his bride. I followed them out of the plane and watched them meet the other European of the district—a sickly-looking, unelated man of middle age, who greeted them with awkward stiffness, as if he had forgotten how such things were done. I watched their baggage disembarked—satchels and cases, smart and new; and watched the Natives pick them up and dump them in the jeep.

The young people walked back to say good-by to me. The young man shook my hand. “I hope that we shall meet again,” he said. The little bride was looking all around; her eyes were sparkling still but there was a hint of something else in them—as if it wasn’t quite what she had thought it would be, or as if she hadn’t really thought till

now. "If you should go to Belgium—" She seemed to hesitate, as if a lump had risen in her throat.

"To Belgium—yes?" I said.

"Please say hello to Brussels for me."

"Yes, my dear, I will." And I bent my head to kiss her.



THE co-pilot came back and sat down across the aisle from me. Twice a week they made the trip, he said, with scheduled stops at Manono where there was a tin mine, Albertville on the shore of Tanganyika, and Usumbura at the north end of the lake—about seven hundred miles.

Yes, he agreed, it was rough country which you'd be lucky to get out of if you got down on it alive. The weather would be better when we reached the lake, he thought, but it was still the rainy season. When I mentioned I had been a flyer, he invited me to come and meet the pilot, a cocky-looking youth with a waxed mustache, who took his earphones off and asked me to sit down and make myself at home. Then he put his earphones back and attended to the plane, which was narrowly suspended between the roller coaster of the ground and the leaky washboard of black and threatening sky.

We crossed a range of mountains at an altitude from which I thought, if the plane had paused a moment, I could have counted the leaves upon a tree. But aside from the trees there was nothing to be seen, not any sign of life. I looked in vain for a lion or buffalo, a rabbit or a squirrel; but there was nothing.

And this was the Katanga, the hostile wilderness from which Livingstone and other daring men had brought back intriguing tales of buried wealth. Somewhere to the west, not far away, had been Msiri's capital, the village of Bunkeya, where the Katanga's destiny had been finally determined. A history of the Congo would not be complete without inclusion of this episode. And the story, for itself, is worth the telling—



YOU will recall that on the twenty-sixth of February, 1885, the interested European Powers, assembled in solemn conclave at Berlin, recognized the political integrity of the Congo Free State—a private enterprise of the Belgian king.

But the southeastern border of the country was not well established, nor susceptible of being at the time, since the region was still largely unexplored. Leopold II was thoroughly aware of this weak spot in his armor, and four years later, in 1889, he appealed once again to the businessmen who, in earlier times, had lent him their support. These gentry came promptly to his aid, no doubt stimulated by the gold and copper rumors which were being circulated. And indeed there was no time to waste, for word of the Katanga's wealth had leaked, and the race was on for possession of it. The British who, with such a graceful speech, had presented the Congo to the Belgian monarch, were now alert to grab a slice of it—and the slice that promised to yield the biggest plums.

Yes, there was need for haste, and one expedition was launched upon another, in the hope that one at least would reach the target before it was too late. And so they struggled on, these bold young men—though not all of them were young—through the cruel and hostile forests, by river when they could and on foot when they could not—a trek that would have been a thousand miles by air line, and God knows how many more in the labyrinth of their journeyings. Many of them perished of fevers and starvation, but some of them survived to win the race.

For the final chapter in this epic I quote from an authority:

When the white men arrived in the Katanga, the principal chief of the region was, incontestably, Msiri, who resided at Bunkeya. Msiri was the son of a trafficking arab, who came frequently to the Katanga to purchase ivory and slaves. He accompanied his father on several of these trips, and then replaced him, one cannot say

just when. But he established himself in the country, married the daughter of the chief of the Katanga; and in a short time succeeded in making himself so popular that, on the death of his father-in-law, he was himself proclaimed Chief. . . . Within a few years, at the head of his Wasanga and Bayeke warriors, he brought under subjection a territory of more than 60,000 Kms. His relations with the treacherous Arabs of Tanganyika and his forays into neighboring regions were productive of a certain prosperity, and resulted in a concentration of the scattered population around his residence at Bunkeya.

From 1883 his power began to decline. His first subjects, the Wasangas, refused him tribute, and their revolt promptly spread to other districts, whose chiefs joined forces with them to unseat the tyrant. There was war, continual war, with the famine which invariably accompanies it in Africa. Many villages were abandoned, as the people could not maintain their village life; while Msiri, now too old to subdue rebellion, yielded himself to his sanguinary instincts. His destruction was earnestly desired, but no one had the courage to effect it.

While the *Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l'Industrie* and the *Compagnie du Katanga* were preparing to dispatch their three expeditions, commanded by Delcommune, by Stairs, and by Bia, Leopold II ordered Paul le Marinel to make his way to the residence of Msiri, and there to raise the flag of the Congo Free State. Le Marinel arrived at Bunkeya on April 16th 1891, and was authorized by Msiri to establish a post at Lofoi, close by Bunkeya. The old fox hoped that the white men would aid him to subdue the rebellious Wasangas, but he quickly perceived he could expect no help from this source. When the Stairs expedition arrived at Bunkeya, the relations between the Native capital and the Free State post were strained to the breaking point. In addition, the political situation was extremely grave; for an English explorer, named Sharpe, was prowling about in the vicinity, endeavoring, with the aid of three protestant missionaries, to persuade the old Chief to execute an act of submission to the British South Africa Company—an undertaking which the British Government had certainly inspired, in order to establish its title to the country.

Stairs arrived at Bunkeya on December 14th 1891, and visited Msiri the next day. He told the Chief that he would undertake to re-establish order in the country if Msiri would recognize the Free State flag. Two days later, Stairs sent his adjutant, Captain Bodson,

to receive the Chief's reply. The interview was stormy. In the midst of it Msiri stood up and seized his lance. Seeing himself in danger, Bodson drew his revolver and shot the tyrant dead, but himself fell victim to a weapon in the hands of one of Msiri's sons.

The death of Msiri led to the immediate submission of all the chiefs who had revolted against him; and, in a short time, of those who had continued to be his partisans. Stairs, himself, named Mokanda-Bantu, a son of the tyrant, to be Chief of the Bunkeya district; and this intelligent man established peace and order in the region, and remained ever faithful to the authority of the Belgians.

That's the end of the quotation, and the end of the story. The race for the Katanga had been won—at some cost in blood and tears, but probably no more than was to be expected. Fifty-three treaties were duly executed with the Native Chiefs. For your information I reproduce herewith a sample of the documentary evidence:

TREATY

M. acting in the name of *l'Etat Indépendant du Congo*, and sovereign chief of being met at this day of for the purpose of taking certain measures of common interest, have agreed, after mature deliberation, on the following dispositions which constitute the object of this present treaty:

ARTICLE I. declares, in his name, and the names of his vassals, his heirs and successors, that he hereby cedes full ownership to *l'Etat Indépendant du Congo*, of all territory that constitutes his state, as well as all sovereign rights which attach thereto. He solemnly declares that these territories belong to him alone and to his vassals, that he pays no tribute to any other chief, that he is not dependent on any chief and in consequence enjoys fullness of his sovereign rights in the territory of

ARTICLE II. The cession of territory and sovereign rights above set forth has been agreed upon for a stipulated payment, which declares he has received and hereby acknowledges in full.

ARTICLE III. *L'Etat Indépendant du Congo* guarantees to the King and all natives established in his territory, as described in Article I, the possession and free usage of such land as they may be cultivating at this moment.

There it is. I have no record of the "stipulated" price for which the Native chiefs sold their country to the white man. But possibly

some yards of cloth and strings of beads; perhaps a rifle and a bag of bullets for it. A Treaty no doubt similar in its contents to countless others which have been negotiated (?) with primitive peoples in all parts of the world, since the introduction of legalistic formulae for robbery and conquest—such a Treaty as our pious Pilgrim Fathers contracted with the Indians, in their day; or as Cortez may have offered Montezuma. But in any case a document which deserves to take its place, if on no other grounds than pure effrontery, in that cabinet reserved for preservation of shameful “scraps of paper.”

Possession of the Congo was completed. On the twelfth of May, 1894, the British Government accepted the frontiers which had been in debate. And nineteen years later, on the twenty-seventh of June, 1913, they confirmed the status quo in a diplomatic note which concluded with these words: “With the most cordial sentiments and wishes for the prosperity of the Belgian Colony, I have the honor to notify you of the formal recognition, by the Government of His Majesty, of the transfer of the sovereignty of the Congo to the Belgian State.” To which I am tempted to add, “*noblesse oblige.*” For the wealth of the Katanga, suspected at the time but unconfirmed, might today have saved the British economic neck.

Leopold II had accomplished his objectives, in spite of apathy and opposition; had unlocked the river gate with the fabulous railroad from Matadi to the Pool, which hardly anyone believed could be constructed, and, if it could be, would be worth what it would cost; had run and won the race for the Katanga, outstripping some first-rate colonial steeplechasers; had disposed of a number of predatory Arabs who had quite a foothold in some sections of the country; had subdued, or pacified, a great many Native tribes—with treaties, force, or bribery; had consolidated and confirmed the geographical and political position of the Congo Free State. Whatever may have been his motivations, he'd been shrewd and persevering and successful, in the face of mighty obstacles and a staggering burden of expense. He never saw the Congo—regrettably, I think; for certainly it would have been a source of satisfaction to feast his aging eyes upon the vast and wonderful domain which he, himself, almost single-handed, had carved out of the heart of Africa. But though he never saw it, he was very busy with it. Indeed, it is difficult to see how, in his reign, he could have had much leisure to devote to local matters.

But Europe was enjoying a rare period of peace, and perhaps his attention wasn't missed. At any rate, there is nothing to suggest that the Belgian people suffered from his preoccupation with the Congo—except with respect to the bills they had to pay.

Remark, if you please, that all these things happened only yesterday: the beginning and the end of them. From the day Henry Morton Stanley completed his amazing journey across Equatorial Africa, from east to west—on which day the history of the Congo really starts—to the day on which I write this line, only seventy-one years have elapsed. From the day Msiri met his death, and the Katanga ceased to be a rumor and began to be a fact, only fifty-seven years have run away. From the day the first railroad train crawled its tortured course from Matadi to the Pool, has been just half a century.



IT WAS in Usumbura that I first saw a "chain gang." In South Africa I had been told about them—wretched Natives manacled together by chains about their necks, being driven to their labors by brutal overseers; and I had been on the lookout.

In South Africa I'd been told a lot of things, suggesting the Belgians were ruthless exploiters, devoid of the milk of human kindness. I'd been told I was visiting the country at the wrong time of the year and would be lucky to escape from it alive, that I'd probably be bitten by a tsetse fly and succumb to sleeping sickness; that, in any case, the anopheles would get me and inoculate me with malaria, likely enough with a virulent variety, like blackwater fever which usually proved fatal. It is worth noting here that in four thousand miles of travel in the Congo I was, to my knowledge, bitten only once by an insect of any sort; and nothing came of that. Most of the people who told me of the Congo, readily admitted they had never been there, and added grimly they had no idea of going.

But to get back to the "chain gang"—

It was Sunday. In the morning I had visited the market, an excit-

ingly colorful affair with a suggestion of oriental character, perhaps a contribution of the Arabs who had once been numerous in the region; and with groups of Natives of a type I hadn't seen—primitive people from the bush, in abbreviated costumes made of skins, who had trudged for many miles with their produce on their heads, often nothing more than a huge bunch of bananas. They held themselves aloof, or perhaps they were avoided by the more enlightened town people. At all events, they did not mingle, clustered in their family groups on the outskirts of the market place, sitting patiently beneath the trees and waiting until someone came to buy. And then they made no effort to complete a sale, apparently indifferent to the outcome. They seemed like rural bumpkins in a city, not at home or at their ease. They did not chatter much and seldom smiled.

At noon I returned to my hotel, a big ramshackle structure run by Greeks, who are prominent in the Congo in the business of hotels, and who operate them much in the same fashion as they do their restaurants in America—noisily, greasily, and untidily. The man who owned this one in Usumbura, had on hand a visiting cousin from the Bronx, by whom I suspect he had been tutored. His hotel, in addition to its normal functions, served the purpose of a club for the European residents who, at the cocktail hour and on Sunday all day long, regularly gathered on its wide piazza to eat and drink, and be merry in the sad colonial way. One evening in the week the dining room would be converted into a cinema which everyone attended. The pictures were bad and the projection terrible. But I never heard anyone complain.

After lunch I sought my room and lay down to take a nap, from which I was roused by the sound of shouting voices. I stepped out on the balcony and saw there was a Native soccer game in progress, in the stadium which was close by the hotel. And then I saw, on the road which passed behind it, two boys in the striped gray shirts of prisoners, kicking an empty oil drum on before them. They were, and remained, quite close together; one would shove the oil drum with his foot and roll it on, and then the other. I caught a glint of something, dangling between them. Yes, it was a chain. And I grabbed my camera and ran out into the road.

It was a chain all right—not a clanking iron one such as I had pictured, not much thicker than a dog chain and perhaps six feet

in length. But still it was a chain, binding them together, to metal collars locked around their necks, not heavy cumbersome ones but rather like the collar of a *sommelier*, on which the keys to the wine cellar are strung, almost large enough to be slipped over the head though obviously not quite, and bound with leather so as not to chafe the skin. Still, they were collars, by which the wearers of them were manacled together; and the wearers were a "chain gang" of a modest sort.

I had not the heart to stare, to say nothing of focusing a picture. I was embarrassed lest the wretched prisoners think I had rushed into the road, which in the midday heat was empty of all traffic, to scrutinize their shameful degradation. And so I only glanced from the corner of my eye, pretending I was out to take a stroll; and I quickly passed them as they kicked the oil drum on—a leisurely and almost playful progress, since the drum had a tendency to roll out of its course, and then the needed kick to alter its direction required prompt attention. No "brutal overseer" was in sight. Still, he might be there, in the shadow of a tree, prepared to pounce upon them if they lingered. But I did not look back.

I walked on along the country road, and came at length to the Moslem town: a village of broad, right-angled streets, with white-washed, mud-walled houses of varying shapes and sizes—not with the uniformity of the Native huts or the modern housing projects. The yards were shaded by the foliage of fine trees and thick with vines and flowers, with bamboo pens for chickens and half-glimpsed rabbit warrens. There were many evil smells, but the village was intriguing—old and mellow, and appropriate to the landscape. Children playing in the street, paused to call an answer to my "Yambo," and their elders bowed and smiled a greeting to me. They were not pure Bantu types, but of Arab or of Indian mixture, dwelling, by reason of this fact or their religious faith, in their own community.

An hour had elapsed before I started home, expecting to meet the malefactors in their chains. But I saw no sign of them. Perhaps the oil drum had reached its destination somewhere on the road. I was coming to the stadium where the soccer game was still in progress, for I could hear the audience shouting in the bleachers.

But what was this?—I could scarce believe my eyes.—The "chain

gang," within a hundred yards of where I'd left it. They had rolled the drum into the ditch beside the road and tipped it on its end; and they were standing on it, with their arms around each other, taking in the soccer game, ecstatically absorbed, shouting approbation or howling disapproval—like fans at any ball game. They didn't even glance around as I passed by.

Later on I encountered other "chain gangs": prisoners convicted of crimes or misdemeanors, linked together two by two. The reason for the shackles is a simple one. In the Congo there are no penitentiaries, of the sort with which we are familiar. Prisoners are put to work, on roads and other projects. They are not closely guarded and, if so disposed, need not look long for a chance to run away. The ones who try it and get caught are the ones who wear the chains. They can still escape together, two by two, but it seems this rarely happens, perhaps because they can't agree on a direction.



I CANNOT say with certainty that convict labor is not sometimes contracted to private enterprise, though I was told officially that it wasn't. Once, in a river port, in the course of my voyage on the "*Reine Astrid*," I saw prisoners, under guard of Native soldiers, loading cargo for Otraco, the navigation company. And there was sharp criticism among the passengers, one of whom was thoroughly indignant. He declared such practice was contrary to law, and when he got to Leopoldville, he intended to run the matter down and find out who was responsible for such gross violation of the prisoners' rights.

"The Belgian people," he said firmly, "will not tolerate abuse or exploitation of the Native population."

Unfortunately, I don't know what he found or what he did.

The Congo has a Native military force, and prisoners are commonly under guard of soldiers, from whom, except for their striped shirts, they are not readily distinguishable. The army is composed

of volunteers—recruited for a term of seven years, I think. Many young fellows, as elsewhere in the world, respond to the idea of uniforms and guns, and the imagined perquisites of military life. But seven years is quite a stretch and, by and large, they get pretty sick of it. One sees them everywhere, employed at many tasks, or lounging in the grounds around their barracks—not smartly caparisoned like most colonial troops, not warlike or belligerent in bearing or appearance, but more like a militia or police force. In both World Wars they saw fighting of a sort, but mainly to protect their own frontiers.



USUMBURA is a sprawling, ragged, uninviting town, superbly situated on the shore of Tanganyika, with enticing foothills close behind it, rising into splendid mountains; provincial capital of the Ruanda-Urundi, in which the density of population equals that of France.

Here I saw the first and almost the only beggars I encountered in the Congo—a few whining lepers who paraded their deformities in vain, around the steps of the hotel piazza. And here I made acquaintance of a homesick Belgian youth with a defective stomach and an uneasy conscience—impediments to bliss, which are often found together. He had come out from Brussels not long since, as an employee of a small commercial company, and could find no place to live except in the hotel whose greasy food was rapidly completing his destruction. He occupied a room adjoining mine, and, when not at work, could generally be found upon the balcony, reclining in a chair, staring vacantly at nothing with eyes that were never very far from tears. He spoke the most appalling English I have ever heard, which he seemed convinced was better than my French. In substance, he told me at one time and another—

He was a Catholic and his conscience hurt. He could not harmonize the behavior of his fellow Europeans with his Christian prin-

ciples. He felt the effort here, in Usumbura, was not to help or civilize the Natives, but only to exploit them. One need only look, he said, at the petit bourgeoisie who thronged the big piazza and the bar, to be certain they were not engaged upon a moral errand, but were here for business reasons, to get what they could get. They were tired, disillusioned—you could read it in their faces; or they were tough and hard. They had not, like the British, a conviction of their own superiority nor standards of conduct to bolster their morale—no dinner coats, no polo, no reassuring protocol. They could not maintain themselves against the narrow, stifling life; it wore them down or hardened them. In official circles and among the great concessionaires, he was willing to admit morale was better. But the rank and file of *petits commerçants*—Greeks and Jews and whatnot, and Belgians too, he added bitterly—were subscribers to no program but their own cupidity. They had not the protection nor the solidarity of a special group or privileged class. They were shrewd and cunning, ignorant and uncultured. They did not practice a Christian way of life, but they were determined to have the Natives do so, to copy their small virtues and ignore their many vices; to be civilized in fact, and yet remain exactly as they were, docile and subservient, kind and generous—like expecting a child to grow into a man and still remain a child.—“Alas!” He shook his head (“Alas” was among his favorite words).

Such people were a menace to the future of the Congo, corrupting both the Natives and themselves. There were many men alone, without their families, particularly in the bush, who took up with Native women and fathered bastard, coffee-colored children who were neither white nor black but pathetically apart, without country, race, or home.—Alas, his heart was aching!—He wished he had never been persuaded to come to Africa. He would leave it if he could. He would not go back to Europe, which was definitely finished, but to America, if only it were possible. Did I know of any way he could accomplish that?

I didn't, and I was by no means sure he would like it when he got there—a land devoted to *petits commerçants*. I suspected his aching heart would ache as hard as ever. He got up from his chair and leaned across the railing of the balcony—

“Boy!” he shouted. “Boy!” (The short, harsh English word which

has made its way through the polyglot of Africa.) There was no answer nor sound of pattering feet, from the hidden corner of the porch beneath us, where as a rule boys could be found.

"Boy!" He fairly shrieked, trembling with irritation. "Come here immediately!—Boy! Boy!"—No answer and no footsteps, but I thought I caught the muffled sound of chuckles.—He sank back in his chair with his hand across his eyes. "You may see for yourself," he mumbled weakly—or made sounds which could with effort be translated into that. "But what can one expect? For, alas, they have been ruined by these *petits commerçants*." A tear rolled down his cheek and splashed upon his knee.



FINALLY, in Usumbura I chartered a vintage Chevrolet sedan, with the services of a stalwart Belgian youth who had been born and raised in Usumbura. He had been to Belgium once, to visit relatives, but he had not been impressed and had been very glad to get back home, he said. His name was Marcel, and he was to be my chauffeur, guide, and friend, for several weeks and thirteen hundred miles. He turned out to be a thoroughly nice boy, considerate and attentive to my health and safety; and though he spoke not more than twenty words of English, and rarely any two in grammatical connection, we managed on the whole to understand each other. The car was the property of Marcel's stepfather, with whom the charter terms had been arranged: six francs per kilometer, for as far as I might choose to go, plus an equivalent rate to send it home. I was headed north, through the Ruanda, and I had no idea of coming back. For the benefit of anyone who may be interested, my transportation cost about thirty cents a mile, including the return of the car to Usumbura; not cheap perhaps, but in the heart of Equatorial Africa, it didn't seem too much.

I had had offered to me, by the young man who owned it and who was an employee of an Usumbura bank, a brand new Studebaker,

with a Native boy to drive it, at a somewhat higher price and with a limit on the time that I might use it. The owner had called to see me in the evening, with a friend who acted as interpreter. They had not seemed to wish to come into the hotel, and the deal had been concluded in the dark and empty road. But next day the young man sent me word it would be impossible for him to carry out his contract; he did not say why. But afterwards I learned the reason.

There had been something surreptitious in the manner of the two—the evening call and the negotiations in the road—suggesting they did not wish to be observed. It developed that, in spite of their precautions, the bank manager had got wind of the affair and forbidden the transaction. The car had no connection with the bank; it was the personal property of the young man who wished to rent it. That was not the point. Employees of the bank were not permitted to make money on the side, not by renting motorcars or engaging in any extracurricular activities.

I was inconvenienced and annoyed. I viewed the regulation as a highhanded outrage, an infringement on the rights of private property and the freedom of the individual. But afterwards, when I came to think about it, I wondered if the rule had not a deeper purpose than its obvious implication—a capricious interference, designed to assure to greedy corporations the undivided interest of their employees. Perhaps there was another angle to the thing: for if the employee was not allowed to divert his attention from his job, he was equally prevented from engaging it in more devious undertakings. There is a price for everything, which someone has to pay. Protection of the Natives from abuse and exploitation must be a charge on someone.

Such questions are not easily disposed of, in convenient pigeon-holes. The right and wrong of them depends on where one sits, on a point of view in fact.



ONE fine morning we set out upon our journey—
Through rolling velvet foothills to the mountains, and up
a steeply graded, narrow, corkscrew road which twisted like a
serpent through the forest slopes, with thrilling backward glimpses
of the emerald lake and soft blue mountains on its other side.

Here, in the Urundi, was no sense of loneliness or desolation:
denuded mountains terraced to their peaks with conservation
ditches; villages and groups of Native huts; cultivated clearings,
with busy figures toiling in the earth—maize, beans, and tapioca;
slow, curling smoke from fires, where more clearings are in process;
thick groves of bananas—great vivid patches of them, much lighter
than the foliage of the trees.

And the road, between neat rows of eucalyptus, was filled with
life: men and women trudging at the sides of it, with every
imaginable thing upon their heads, from a cackling hen to a stag-
gering bale of thatch—going to market or coming home from it, or
perhaps just for a stroll; frequent gangs of laborers working on
the road, for there had been rain and slides—carrying earth on
wooden trays, rolling boulders with their hands, not hurriedly or
eagerly but with splendid disregard for efficiency and haste. They
scramble from our way in answer to the horn, or motion us to
wait while, with much palaver, they clear some final rocks out of
our path; and then they stand respectfully, smiling as we pass.
Pedestrians scurry to the road edge when they hear the car ap-
proaching, herding little children out of danger. “*Yambo*,” we call,
and “*Yambo*,” they call back with smiling faces. There is almost
no traffic. For an hour at a time we do not pass a car.

Toward the summit of the pass people and vegetation gradually
thin out. There are no more banana groves; it is almost chilly at
six thousand feet above the sea. Now we are at the top, and have
seen our last of Tanganyika; before us is a labyrinth of tumbling,
blue-green mountains, stretching away as far as we can see. It is

long past noon and we have brought no lunch. I had thought there would be some place where we could get a sandwich—or perhaps in the excitement of departure, I hadn't thought that far. At all events, I realized abruptly I was in need of food.

And just then, as if in answer to a prayer, we came upon a Catholic Mission—a group of fine brick buildings, with a spired church among them. “Stop, Marcel!” I cried; for here perhaps was succor—or at least an opportunity to explore the hospitality of the Catholic Church. We would ask the Fathers for a bite to eat: a morsel of bread and a banana, and perhaps a cup of coffee—not any more than that. I explained the project to Marcel, who looked a little gloomy at my suggested menu; and we drove into the yard and parked the car. And in another minute half a dozen bearded Fathers, young and old, dressed in long white robes, came running out to greet us, seeming genuinely pleased to have a visitor, and even more so when they learned I was from America. There was one who spoke good English, as indeed, of my experience, there is always one or more.

They led us in, to their refectory, a comfortable big room quite bare of luxuries, furnished with long tables made of heavy planks, and uncushioned wooden benches. They had already had their midday meal, they said, but would have some food prepared; and one of them rapped on a panel in the wall, which opened and disclosed a Native cook who did not look elated at the prospect.—“No, please,” I interposed. “As much as I would like to, I have not time to linger. Just a morsel of bread and a banana, and perhaps a cup of coffee.”—“But you are not serious?”—“Yes, serious,” I pleaded. “I entreat you, nothing more.” And I was really serious, for the refectory was pervaded by a reminiscent odor of unpalatable food; and as a guest I'd be compelled to eat it, no matter how unsavory it turned out to be.—“But your chauffeur?” they suggested. “Surely, he is hungry?”—I shook my head, glancing sternly at Marcel who was positively drooling with anticipation.—“Well, if you insist—” They sighed resignedly. While the coffee was preparing, it would be a pleasure for them to show me through the Mission—

From the road one would not guess at its extent. It opened like a fan: vegetable gardens, orchards, nurseries, many acres of them;

and substantial buildings, hidden one behind the other. Suddenly we came upon a crowd of children, boys and girls of an age from six to twelve, ragged little urchins, spindle-legged and potbellied, frightened of a stranger with a camera, huddling back and peeking out from around each other's shoulders, prepared to break and run. But they were herded closer by their Native teachers and supervising Nuns; and presently they lost their fear and were squirming in the van, to be seen and photographed, chattering with excitement, like a flock of magpies.

"Children from the bush," a Father told me. They lived too far away to be regular attendants at the day school which had seven hundred pupils. These little ones came twice a month, remaining for three days. Such schooling had not much educational value, but it did provide an introduction and an opportunity to fill their shriveled stomachs. They were underfed at home. The district was an overcrowded one, and the crops had not been good.

As we walked on he explained: the Mission had about four thousand converts, resident in the vicinity; it provided for them an elementary day school, a school for teachers, and a novitiate training college. We passed through a flower garden and a cloistered court, and came finally to a convent where a venerable Mother Superior gave me formal welcome and introduced me to a young and pretty Nun who could speak with me in English—fluently in fact, for she had lived in England.

She led me through another cloistered court, into a church—an unpretentious one, appropriate to the scene, with the music of an organ echoing softly from the loft—where a score or more young people of both sexes, dressed in shining white, with lighted candles in their hands, were kneeling at their prayers. We stood aside and watched them as they walked in slow procession, two by two, from the church and through the cloister—their young black faces reflecting solemn reverence, glowing with the light of spiritual awakening, with love and goodness. It was a moving sight and my eyes were moist with tears.

"What will they do," I asked, "these youthful novices, when they have been ordained?"

"They will go where they are sent to do God's work, to convert and teach."

"But will they not be sadly disillusioned when they come out into the Christian world?"

She looked up at me shyly. "Are you a Catholic?"

"No, I am nothing."

"Ah yes, I see—" She nodded. "Well then perhaps you wouldn't understand."

"No," I said, "perhaps I wouldn't."

The Fathers were waiting where we'd left them, and we presently returned to the refectory. The coffee had suffered by our absence, it was muddy and stone-cold, but the bread and bananas were all right. And with fine exchange of compliments, we took leave of our hospitable friends.

Another day we tried the trick again, at an even bigger Mission: two Chevrolet-sore pilgrims seeking a banana and a crust. But we were not so fortunate, for we arrived at mealtime, and I had no recourse save to submit myself to the food the Fathers ate, which I will not describe beyond to say that it was horrible. I could hardly choke it down, though Marcel regaled himself with no sign of distress. "It wasn't good," he admitted afterwards. But what would I expect in such a place?

"I have understood," I said, "from numerous sources, that these missionary priests did not neglect their stomachs. I have often heard complaint about them, that they live on the fat of the land, in idleness and luxury. They are frequently depicted with great bellies and greedy-looking jowels, clutching wine cups in their hands, with servants waiting on them, and even dancing girls to entertain them, and God knows what other voluptuous compensations for the missionary life. I expected to be feasted, to see a boar's head carried in upon a silver trencher, or at least a platter heaped with pheasants, and baskets of exotic fruits and sweetmeats. I am sadly disappointed and my stomach is upset.

"There appears to be no truth in what I have been told. These White Fathers are shockingly non-Sybaritic in their habits. On the contrary in fact, within my observation, they are serious, sincere, hard-working men, devoted to their faith and to their tasks, living simply and austere in the wilderness of Africa. I regret I can find nothing to condemn."

Marcel made no reply. Perhaps because he had not understood a word I said.

But at another time and place—

I was in conversation with a well-informed and cultivated woman, the wife of an important government official long resident in the Congo, and herself a Catholic. In substance I'd been saying what I have just said. She listened to me carefully and gave the matter thought before she made reply—

There were good and bad, she said, in all creeds, among the Protestants as well as Catholics. There was wisdom and stupidity, virtue and venality. With rare exceptions the chief concern of all of them was conversion of the Natives. As example of stupidity, few of them were making any effort to preserve the Native handicrafts—the exquisite carving they had done with wood and ivory, and their less distinguished ceramic undertakings. Such work was not encouraged, allegedly because much of its inspiration derived from pagan ritual and belief; actually, perhaps more practically, because there was small market for such wares. However this might be, Native girls were being taught to do embroidery, and to weave rugs from the fibers of banana leaves—such things as these, while their precious cultural heritage was discarded and forgotten. It was profoundly stupid and shortsighted.

On the question of integrity: “Not far from here,” she said, “there is a Catholic Mission with which I'm well acquainted, which is cruelly exploiting its communicants, and enriching itself at their expense. But—” She shook her head. “—it is not safe to generalize. There are good and bad, ignorant and enlightened, virtuous and venal. As for Sybaritic tastes—” She shrugged fastidiously. The rank and file of missionaries were not recruited from Sybaritic backgrounds. On the whole, the conditions under which they lived in Africa, would compare quite favorably with those from which they came.

So much for a dissident opinion. It is well to hear both sides of any question, for the truth is likely to be found somewhere in between.



ONE evening we came to a pleasant little town of no commercial consequence—an administrative center in the mountains, with immaculate brick buildings around a public square, where the official business of the district was transacted.

The small hotel was a modern structure, as neat and clean as one you'd find in Belgium. The wife of the proprietor came hurrying out to greet us. Her husband was away on a business trip, she said. In the dining room and lounge there were vases filled with flowers; and the bar had Scotch set out upon the shelf, not hidden underneath it as is frequently the custom. The boys were brisk and competent; they carried my luggage to a pleasant room, filled my bath with buckets of hot water, and took down the net above my bed and tucked it into place. There were no holes in it.

We were the only guests. At dinner, which was well cooked and served, the proprietress watched over us, making sure we were getting what we wanted; and the boys were quick to answer to her voice or eye. She was of middle age, matronly and placid; her hair was neatly done and her cotton dress becoming, but there was no makeup on her face and no lacquer on her nails. At my invitation she sat down to chat with us—

It was still the rainy season, she explained, and Congo people were not traveling for pleasure. The Kagera National Park—an extensive game preserve on the Uganda border, whither we were bound—was not open at this season of the year. In another month there would be many tourists passing through—or so her husband said. And he should know about it since he'd been here several years. She herself had come to join him just a few months ago. She had not been willing to break up the home in Belgium until the last of the children had been married.

How did she like the Congo?—Oh, very much. The country was so beautiful, and the climate was delightful—at least here in the

mountains. And she loved her garden where flowers grew like weeds.—Would she like to return to Belgium some day?—For a visit, yes. But not to stay. She expected to spend the balance of her life here.—She wasn't lonely, didn't miss her friends?—Well yes, sometimes. But there were friendly people, connected with the government—almost like a family.—And the Natives, how did she get along with them?—At first they had seemed very strange, she said. But she was beginning now to understand them, and to talk their language. They laughed at her mistakes but they tried to help her.

"They do not think as we do," she went on. "Some things we consider wrong, they think are all right. And it works the other way. But they are kind and gentle in their hearts—more so, I think, than we are."

"You are not afraid to stay alone with them?"

"Afraid?" She laughed. "I should be more afraid in Brussels."

Another day, after a long, hot, dusty journey, we arrived in the late afternoon, in another similarly pleasing town, and drew up before another small hotel.

The woman of the house, whom we found inside the bar, in which there were no vases filled with flowers nor any Scotch set out upon the shelf, was young and rather pretty, or might have been save for the discontented frown upon her face. Her hair was frowzy and her dress untidy, but there was lipstick on her lips and lacquer on her nails.

She dismissed my feeble French and addressed her conversation to Marcel, the gist of which, if I had not understood, I could have read in his crestfallen face.

We should have sent a telegram, she said. Some rooms were permanently occupied, and some had been reserved. The people might arrive or they might not, but the space must be held for them until six o'clock—which was two hours off. But we should have telegraphed, she repeated petulantly, with a shrug that suggested she was finished with the subject.

I was white with dust and aching with fatigue, and I ventured now to interpose. "But Madame, if you please, may I occupy a room in which to take a bath and rest myself, until you have determined the outcome of the matter?"

"Impossible," she said. The rooms had been prepared for the guests who would arrive, and if they were mussed up they could not be cleaned again. And then her husband joined us, an untidily casual man with an unshaven face and a bored expression in his pale blue eyes—not unfriendly in his manner or what he had to say, but careless and haphazard. He took charge of the affair, and the woman shrugged again and walked away. I could have a room and take a bath, he said, though he might have to change me to another later on. And he called for the boys to come and get the luggage. It took a lot of shouting to locate them, and when they did arrive, they looked sullen and unhappy. Still, I got a room and, with some effort, the water for a bath, though there wasn't much of it and it wasn't very hot. There were no screens in the windows and the net had holes in it.

I heard no more about the reservations—perhaps they were a fiction in a neurotic brain, determined to make mountains out of mole hills. Apparently no other guests arrived. For dinner, in addition to ourselves, there were three young couples, government officials and their wives, who sat, in moody silence, at tables by themselves.

The soup was tepid, and following it there was an interminable pause, with the sound of high voices in the kitchen, berating one another in Swahili. Marcel gave heed to them and whispered to me that he thought the cook was drunk. This turned out to be the case, for the proprietor presently emerged and announced the fact in no uncertain terms, on an even wider scale. "They are all drunk," he said, and went on into the bar, as if he had no further interest in the matter. The guests said nothing, suggesting by their silence that the situation was a not uncommon one.

In course of time the table boys brought in our meat and vegetables—tough pork, and soggy spinach and potatoes. From the bar we could hear an altercation going on, between the owner and his wife—the woman's shrill complaining voice, and the man replying with irritable weariness. Marcel gave heed to them. "She is telling him she's sick of it," he whispered. "She says the boys are lazy and do not tell the truth. She says they are *voleurs* and *scélérats*. She is very mad at them and at her husband too. She wants him to get rid of the hotel and go back where they came from."

"And where is that?"

"I am listening," Marcel said. "Ah yes, she tells him now. It is far away from here, where the river joins the sea. She says that there the Natives know their place and have fear of Europeans."

"And what does he say?"

"He says for her to shut her mouth."

"They are an amiable couple."

"Amiable, monsieur?" Marcel looked shocked.

In the midst of the affair, the electric lights went out—not an uncommon occurrence in the Congo. The woman came distraughtly from the bar, with a lighted candle, and began to open drawers in a sideboard in the room; but it seemed she could not find what she was seeking. And she called one of the boys to come, calling for him angrily by name, flinging things about the drawers and tapping with her foot while she waited his appearance. At last one of them came out of the kitchen, with calculated, surly indolence. In Swahili she demanded, Marcel translating for me, "Where are the candles?"—A mumbled answer.—"What have you done with them?"—"You are lying to me. There was a box of candles in this drawer. Go and get them instantly."—Unintelligible answer.—"You have stolen them and sold them." Her voice rose to a shriek. "You are a liar and a thief. You are all thieves and liars."—And now the boy replied at great and angry length, shouting at her savagely, with gestures that looked threatening in the flickering candlelight. Marcel continued with bated breath, in horrified amazement, "He is very angry now—maybe drunk or crazy. He is talking back to her, saying what he thinks about her, calling ugly names." The boy stormed on till his rage was worn out, and then he turned away and stalked out of the room, slamming the door behind him. And again there were high voices in the kitchen, mixed with contemptuous laughter.

A moment later the electric lights came on, as abruptly as they had gone out. The woman returned into the bar, resuming altercation with her husband where she'd left it. The boys came in with our dessert—succulent fresh pineapple. The guests went on with their interrupted meal. Among them there was no discussion of the incident, suggesting they must be accustomed to such scenes.

In the morning when I went to pay my bill, the proprietor was lounging in a chair behind the bar.

"Have you lived here long?" I asked.

"About six months," he said.

"Do you like it here?"

"No." He shook his head. "I'm going to sell the place and move away."

"But the country is attractive and the climate seems quite healthful."

He shrugged disparagingly. "These Natives have been spoiled," he said. "They've been coddled till they think they're as good as white men. They are lazy, good for nothing rascals. And they steal everything they can get their hands on."

There is a sequel to the story—

I missed a shirt—the only good one I had left. My other good one had vanished in the laundry of the Mt. Nelson Hotel in Cape Town. The manager had paid me for it, with a readiness that led me to believe such things were not unusual. But this hadn't helped much, because there are no decent shirts to be had in Africa. Now my other good one was among the missing. I remembered I had worn it the night the lights went out, and I had not seen it since. Either I had failed to replace it in my suitcase, or else the boy who did my room had stolen it. In neither case did there seem much hope of it.

Still, I did what could be done: I sent a telegram, naming a town a hundred miles away, where I'd be in several days, and requesting that the shirt, if by chance it should be found, might be dispatched to me by someone who was journeying that way.

And in that town I named, one morning when the dawn was breaking, I was roused from slumber by voices debating in Swahili outside my bungalow, one of which I thought sounded like my room boy's. I got up to investigate and found it was my room boy, engaged in heated argument with a ragged Native who had a package for me and a note. The source of the discussion was gradually made clear: the room boy had demanded that the package and note be left with him, insisting I could not be disturbed at such an hour. But the messenger had been equally determined: he had orders that both note and package must be delivered to my hands by him, and he had business of his own and no time to delay.

The package contained my missing shirt. The note was from my erstwhile host. It said the shirt had been found in my room after my departure, by the boy who waited on me and who had promptly delivered it to him. He was dispatching it by a resident Native who was going on a journey from which he would return in a few days. He suggested that I give the bearer something for his trouble, and, if I felt so disposed, something in addition for the boy who found the shirt. In any case, I must place my signature upon this note which would be returned to him, as evidence that I had received the shirt. And if I sent some money for the boy who found it, I must also name the sum upon the note, as otherwise the messenger would certainly maintain I had sent nothing. The note concluded with these words: "It is necessary to put everything in writing, *because the Natives are such dreadful thieves and liars.*"

The italics are my own.



RENÉ VERHULST, *Conservateur du Parc National de la Kagera*, is a man of mellow years, wise and gentle, frail of figure, with keen blue eyes and an engaging smile, soft-spoken and unhurried—a man whom, if I were a child, I should like for a father, if I were a Native I should like for an employer, and if I were an antelope or zebra I should be very happy to have for a protector.

We came one evening, following a long, dusty drive through tumbling mountains, rather barren ones in which there seemed but little population, with distant views before us in the clouded eastern sky of higher mountain ranges in the adjoining wilderness of Tanganyika and Uganda—we came at last to Gabiro which turned out to be nothing but the Director's modest residence, and a white-walled, thatched, mud guest hut of comfortable dimensions, in which I was installed. I never learned where Marcel spent the night. Perhaps he slept in our vintage Chevrolet. He was young and robust, and excited at the prospect of visiting the animals.

The Park was closed to visitors. But I carried a letter from the

Resident at Kigali, to whom I'd had a letter from the Governor, directing Mr. Verhulst in no uncertain terms that I was to be received and entertained. And so indeed I was—and would have been, I think, if I had come without an introduction.

At all events, we were made warmly welcome by the director and his hospitable wife, and enjoyed an excellent meal in their comfortable home, cooked and served by boys who had been with them for years and whose attitude suggested an affectionate interest in the family. And we spent an hour chatting, Mr. Verhulst and myself, for Madame spoke no English.

The Park, he told me, was sixty miles in length by twenty-five in width—not much like our National Parks, he thought, since it made no pretense of accommodating tourists whose access was limited to a few miles of road which would be gradually extended. He had a crew of eighty Natives working in the Park, who were paid about two dollars and a half a month, plus food and work clothes. They seemed content, he said. He followed a method of his own in dealing with them: he appointed so much work to be done each day, what he considered a reasonable requirement—for example, the construction of three hundred yards of road. They could do it as quickly or as slowly as they chose, but it must be done.

The Park was primarily designed for the preservation of wild life which in many regions was in danger of extinction at the hands of the white hunters. Here in the Kagera the animals were safe: zebra and many varieties of antelope—impala, topi, eland, reedbuck; some buffalo—most dangerous beasts of all, he said, for once thoroughly enraged, they were fearless and determined.—Were there lions?—Yes, lions and leopards. One might meet them on the road at any time, or not glimpse one for a year.—Giraffe?—No, none, for this was grazing country; nor elephants nor hippos. These I would encounter later in my travels, in the Albert Park.—Were there many snakes?—Yes, many, and some very poisonous ones.—Pythons?—Yes, pythons too. He had seen a dead one measuring thirty feet in length. And once he had come upon a huge one which had not long since dined upon an antelope, but without discretion, for the antlers could not be engorged and were projecting from the reptile's mouth.—What had he done about it?—Nothing. He had observed the matter and gone upon his way; it was no affair of his.—And what would happen?—Nothing, he imagined. The python

would postpone completion of its meal until the antlers rotted off, for several days perhaps.—And birds?—Yes, many birds: quantities of partridge, heron, bustard, duck, Uganda cranes and eagles. In the morning we will see, he said. And he lighted a lantern to show me to my house.

We were up at the first hint of dawn, and, fortified with steaming coffee, set forth in Mr. Verhulst's car, armed with no weapon but a pair of field glasses. The eastern sky was overcast with ominous black storm clouds, pierced by beams of sunlight which tinted them with sepia. The country was superb: a high plateau of rolling hills, clumped with scrubby, open forest, pastured deep in grass which in places grew waist high—not favorable for viewing grazing creatures, Mr. Verhulst said. Later on when it was dry, they could be better seen. But we'd have a look around—

He drove slowly, with his keen eyes searching out the landscape. For a while there was nothing to be seen except the partridges which scattered from the road, and herons winging over us, and a sleepy eagle on the dead branch of a tree.—Wait now!—He had stopped the car and was pointing through the window at a distant hillside. I looked but I saw nothing.—“Zebra,” he whispered, as if they might overhear him, and handed me the glasses. With their aid I finally did descry what might have been a zebra, two or three of them in fact—little striped horses. And then suddenly I saw that the slope was covered with them—hundreds of them grazing on the hill side. Marcel was in a frenzy of delight.

Farther on we came to antelope, small groups of different species, not mingling with each other: mothers with their fawns, and bucks alert and watchful on the outskirts—some within a stone's throw of the road, standing still with lifted heads to watch us. But the moment I stepped out of the car to take a picture, they would kick up their heels and lope away. They were accustomed to the cars, Mr. Verhulst said, seeming to regard them as harmless variations of the landscape. But with Man, himself, they were chary of acquaintance; their memories were too good.

We drove on, Marcel exclaiming wildly as he recognized a topi or an eland or a reedbuck. There were groups of buffalo in the shadow of the trees, in marshy spots, not lingering long to be observed. And once a leopard slid across the road, from morning

stalking of the baby fawns. But it went so quickly that I only saw it as a tawny streak. The sun was mounting higher and the creatures thinning out, taking cover from the heat. And presently we turned and started home, seeing scarcely any as we retraced our steps. The hillside, with the grazing herds of zebra, was deserted.

A hearty breakfast was awaiting us. It was then, while I was seated at the table with my host and hostess, I was certain I heard a baby cooing, on a porch outside the door. But I could not rationalize the presence of a baby. No baby had been mentioned. I knew the Verhulst children were long since grown up and far away in Belgium; and a Native baby, belonging to the servants, would not be domiciled within the house. Perhaps I was mistaken and it was not a baby, but some similarly sounding little animal, or possibly a bird. But no, it was a baby, in a beatific mood. I could not contain my curiosity, and so at last I asked.

"But come and see," my host replied and led me to the door. And there on the shaded porch, in a proper baby pen, was as cute a baby as I've ever seen—a chubby, happy little boy, in a spotless white dress, lying on his back and cooing blissfully, looking up to smile at me with friendly confidence. Yes, a baby in the flesh—as black as ink.

I was startled and confused, not quite certain what to think, aware my host was waiting my reaction, with a twinkle in his eye which I did not wish to misinterpret.

"You are wondering—" he prompted.

Madame Verhulst interrupted from the doorway. "Explain the matter to monsieur at once, René," she said a trifle testily.

"But yes, my dear," he smiled. "I am about to do so."

And here is what he told me—

A year ago, Madame Verhulst had gone one morning, as was her custom, to inspect her vegetable garden which was not far from the house, within sight of it in fact. And there she was surprised to see, trudging through the edge of it, an aged Native woman who was not unknown to her, one who was suspected of dabbling in witchcraft, and who, in any case, was known to practice the functions of a midwife in the neighborhood. The woman saw her coming and made haste to avoid her, hurrying on with something clutched and hidden in her arms, which Madame Verhulst thought

might be stolen vegetables. But anyway the woman had no business in the garden, was trespassing in fact—whether by intent was impossible to say. But certainly the business she was on, did not require her to cross the vegetable garden or approach the house; and so perhaps she hoped to be seen and intercepted. One is never certain what goes on inside their heads.

But Madame Verhulst was concerned about her vegetables, and called the woman by her name, commanding her to stop, which then she did and waited.—“What are you doing in my vegetable garden?”—She was only crossing through it to save herself some steps, the woman said. She had not stolen anything. And she unclasped her arms against her withered breast and displayed a tiny baby, a coal-black mite of wriggling flesh—the same now cooing in the pen, but then a newborn infant, not yet a full day old.

“Where are you going with that baby?”—To the bush.—“Where in the bush?—for what?”—The woman had explained: the baby had no mother; she had died when it was born. And the father did not want it. So there was nothing left but to take it to the bush and leave it there.

“And so you see—” Mr. Verhulst spread his hands. “—there was nothing else to do.” He reached into the pen and touched the baby’s cheek, while his wife beamed upon him from the doorway.

“But what will you do with him?” I said.

“Do?” He sighed and shook his head. “When he is four or five we can send him to an orphanage.”

“But can you? Will you have the heart to do it? And would it be fair to him?”

“Yes, I have thought of that—” He sighed again, glancing doubtfully at his wife.

“I should say—” I hesitated.

“What would you say?”

“That it was now or never.”

He nodded thoughtfully. Madame Verhulst was attending carefully from the doorway.

“What does monsieur say?” she questioned.

“He says,” her husband translated into French, “we must give the baby up.”

“What?” Her eyes were flashing.

“But let me finish please,” he interposed, his blue eyes twinkling. “We must give the baby up, immediately—or never.”

“Ah!” Madame beamed again.

“And never, I imagine it will be,” he said in English, and bent again to touch the baby’s cheek. “Perhaps when he is grown up the world will be a better one to live in. Perhaps the color of his skin will not matter then. One can only wait and hope.”



AT ASTRIDA, a small, delightfully situated mountain town, there is a famous school—“A School for the Sons of Chiefs” it is sometimes called, though attendance is by no means limited to the aristocracy.

Its extensive, mellow-looking buildings are grouped around a sun-baked playing field, on which, when I arrived one afternoon, a hundred or more boys were playing games, soccer and other field sports—young fellows in their teens, in blue shirts and shorts, presenting an identical appearance, save for the color of their skins, to a group of young collegians anywhere, though perhaps a shade less raucous than they would be in America.

Frère Secundien, the director of the school—a fine, stalwart figure of a man, bearded and white robed, who twenty years ago inaugurated it—gave me a warm welcome and took upon himself to be my guide. As we walked along from his modest office, he gave me the following information—

The school is for boys, though there is a primary department for girls—non-boarders, resident in the vicinity. The curriculum includes both elementary and secondary education, plus opportunity for more advanced work in certain subjects. The elementary department is a day school, providing for seven hundred pupils who live within walking distance of it. The course is six years—similar in scope, Frère Secundien thought, to our grade schools in America. In the first years they are taught in their native language, which

in this region is Ruandian, and afterwards in French. Classes are conducted by Native teachers, under European supervision.

The secondary school contains three hundred boarders. The boys on the playing field were of this group, he said, and the shirts and shorts they wore were obligatory uniforms. Ninety-two new boys were accepted each year, selected from all the elementary schools in the Ruanda-Urundi province, on a basis of scholarship and regardless of their religious affiliations—whether they were Catholic, Protestant, or whatnot. About half of these ninety-two dropped out in the first year, failed to make the grade and gave it up, or were set back to try again. The truth of this was clearly illustrated by the first year classroom which had seats for about a hundred boys, whereas the next one had but half as many desks.

In this one a class in typing was in session: half a hundred boys sitting straight-backed at machines with covered keys, tapping out in measured rhythm, to the ticktock of a metronome, an exercise they were copying from their textbooks. Some of them glanced up as we came in, but without interruption to their fingers. I walked between the desks, looking over their shoulders at their work which was extremely neat, with very few erasures. The typists were intent and serious about it—tapping to the metronome in perfect unison.

Most of the boys I saw here in this room, Frère Secundien said, would go through to the end of the four-year course—an equivalent one, he thought, to our high school in America. They were taught by Europeans, and exclusively in French. In consideration of the fact that they were being taught in a language foreign to them, they could hardly be said to be behind, in academic aptitude, other similar age groups anywhere. Still, of course, he added, they were not average boys, but a selected group.

Beyond the secondary school, some few of them could, in certain subjects, continue with their studies for three or four years—or as long as seven, in the case of medicine. They could study to be veterinarians, agricultural experts, technicians of one sort or another, and administrators. In this latter branch of the curriculum were to be found the sons of chiefs, who were learning the functions of executives. There were, he told me, twenty-seven such young men in attendance at the moment. As he spoke he stopped a boy who was passing by, and introduced me to him—a tall, fine-featured

youth who bowed politely as he shook my hand and spoke to me in perfect French.

"A nephew of the King of the Ruanda," Frère Secundien said.

As we walked along I asked, "When he graduates, what then?"

"He will go to take his place in the village whence he came, to assist his father who is chief of an important clan, whom one day he will succeed."

"How will he be received?"

"Ah that!" Frère Secundien shook his head. It was not always easy for these young men, he admitted. Sometimes they were very much discouraged, cast back into the net of Native Law and Custom, helplessly enmeshed in a system they'd outgrown, feeling lost among their people, and often suspect too. But Government stood firmly at their backs and supported them in every way it could. For it was largely due to their pioneering efforts that Western administrative methods could be introduced and made acceptable to the tribal institutions. The process was a slow and painful one, and the life of a pioneer was not a bed of roses. It was a lonely business at its best, which took courage to endure, and great determination. "But," he added with a smile, "many of our students have been fortunately endowed with the necessary qualities."

We went into the dormitory—a big airy building, like an army barracks, with three hundred iron cots, gray blankets neatly spread; with three hundred modest lockers fastened to the walls. "They do not need much clothing," Frère Secundien said. "And they are not burdened with possessions—no radios and phonographs, no trinkets and no pictures of the girls they left behind them." There were suitable latrines and facilities for washing. There was no privacy. It was communal living, of a Spartan sort; no frills or furbelows. But the big bare room had a sense of timeless dignity.

We went on, to the mess hall, another big bare room: tables for eight or ten, and wooden benches; and an elevated rostrum at the end, from which the diners could be under observation. "A teacher presides at every meal," Frère Secundien explained. When the boys came to Astrida, many of them had limited acquaintance with the use of knives and forks, and what we call table manners. They were quick to learn, to imitate example of the more sophisticated. But a teacher was on hand, to correct the backward and the careless.

"And the food?" I asked.

"There is variety," he said. European dishes were mixed with Native ones. The purpose was a balanced diet, plus conditioning of their palates to a kind of cookery which had been unknown to them. It was difficult, he thought, to realize the adaptations which these boys were called upon to make, in a brief period of time—adaptations antipodal to the precepts and examples of their past, to all their tastes and habits—heroic dislocations in their thinking and emotions. "In a similar situation," he added with a smile, "I am by no means sure we should do as well." He was silent for a moment, and then he said, with impressive earnestness, "One is likely to forget the deeply hidden currents, buried far beneath the surface, which are not to be rechanneled in a moment. One is often tempted to want to go too fast. And that is dangerous."

We walked through a tree-lined alleyway, beyond which was a broad cultivated area, with little plots of many kinds of plants and orchard trees, immaculately tended. An experimental project, Frère Secundien said, for the agricultural students—where all sorts of things were tried, such as hybrids, pest controls, and fertilizers. We passed a surly leopard in a cage. "Our sole effort at a zoo," Frère Secundien smiled. And he added that the leopard was a luxury—the only useless creature on the premises, and not happy in enjoyment of its leisure. The leopard showed its teeth and snarled agreement.

We came to a building, at the side of which there was a yard with a high wall around it; and in the yard were several sickly looking beasts—cows and steers tied to wooden poles. One of them was lying down, with a group of boys around it, who, with a huge syringe, were pumping something into it, the while it bellowed mournfully and struggled to escape. A European stood near by, directing operations. "The veterinary class," Frère Secundien said, and added that the clinic had no lack of patients, as the farmers in the neighborhood kept it well supplied with ailing beasts.

We returned to the classrooms beside the playing field, and walked through several small ones, in none of which was more than half a dozen desks. There were anatomic charts upon the walls, and in one was an articulated skeleton; another was equipped to be a laboratory, with benches and retorts and microscopes. "Our medical department," Frère Secundien said. It was a very small one,

he admitted, but the work done was quite thorough, though the students had little chance for clinical experience. That they must get elsewhere—in the medical dispensaries which were scattered through the bush, or in the urban hospitals.

I asked a question: "When the students graduate, are they qualified as doctors?"

"As medical assistants," Frère Secundien said.

"What does that mean?"

"That they are not qualified to practice medicine save under the direction of European doctors."

"You mean they have the rank of interns?—doctors still in training?"

"Medical assistants," he insisted.

"You mean then that they have not completed the educational requirements to qualify as doctors?"

But that was not what he meant. Technically, they had completed studies which would qualify them, if they were Europeans.

"You mean they are disqualified because their skins are black?"

"You may put it that way if you like," he smiled, "though it would be a misinterpretation of the fact. They are not qualified because of something underneath their skins. They are too newly come into the rationale of Cartesian thinking. The ethics which govern the practice of medicine in the Western world, are not yet within their grasp. Of course there are exceptions, but—" he spread his hands "—it is not thought, by the authorities, that they may yet be trusted to make decisions affecting human life."

"And that young man to whom you introduced me, a nephew of the King?—if he were studying medicine?"

"He would be qualified," Frère Secundien answered firmly, "as a *medical assistant*."

He walked with me to the car. "Tomorrow," he said, "you will be in Nyanza, the heart of the Ruanda. And no doubt you will call upon the King who has his residence there. You must tell him that you met one of his nephews, here in Astrida." Frère Secundien smiled. "It doesn't matter which; he has so many of them. His name is Rudahiga Mutara, but he has another, his baptismal, Christian one—Charles Leon. If you are so fortunate as to find him at home, please convey my compliments."

He stood in the road to wave good-by—a fine, brave figure of a man, and a wise and gentle one.



BUT the Reader has a question—

Q: Yes, if you please. Since it would appear that we are now approaching the heart of the Ruanda, I should like to know something more about it, of a factual nature.

A: And so you shall. The Ruanda and its twin kingdom, the Urundi, speaking a common language and pursuing the orbit of a common destiny, in size slightly more than one-fiftieth (2 per cent) of the Congo's total area, and containing slightly less than a third of the total population, were not part of the original Free State, though now they are administered as such.

This region, on the extreme eastern border of the country, had escaped the exploitation of the Arabs, for reasons which will become apparent. And it was blissfully unaware of that International Conference in Berlin, in 1884-85—the same wherein the European Powers recognized the Congo Free State—in the course of which its political fate was to be determined.

Germany, with Bismarck at the helm, was on the march for African possessions. In six weeks time, Dr. Karl Peters, wandering through the East Coast littoral, acquired for the Reich a territory of 140,000 square kilometers, by a series of treaties with the Native chiefs who were happy to exchange their sovereignty for a handful of glass beads and miscellaneous trinkets.

The Ruanda and Urundi which, to simplify, I will henceforth designate as the Ruanda, lay between the expanding German program and the Congo Free State.

It was necessary to agree on a frontier. With this end in view, at the Conference in Berlin, Leopold II presented to the Powers a map of Equatorial Africa, on which, with a pencil, he himself, or someone, had drawn a line to indicate the eastern limit of his

possessions. Three such maps were prepared and submitted, as part of the proceedings: one for the Germans, one for the French, and one to be retained by Leopold. And, incredibly enough, the pencil lines were not identical on any two of them. On the German map the line was drawn to the west of Lake Kivu—that is to say, to the west of the historical and geographical Ruanda; on the French one it ran through the center of the lake; on the one the King retained, it passed to the east, bisecting the Ruanda.

These divergences, as might have been expected, resulted in confusion and dispute. Certainly they were not intentional. The truth is that the country was at the time a terra incognita, and slight deviations on a small scale, inaccurate map would not seem unreasonable, nor of special consequence. However, by reason of the errors in the penciled markings, the Ruanda escaped dismemberment, or even partial mutilation. The Germans held out toughly for the map they had received; and the Ruanda was annexed, with due diplomatic procedure, as a part of the German colony which, in 1890, took the official title: *Das Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Schutzgebiet*—or, “Protectorate of German East Africa.”

The Germans explored and subdued the Ruanda, not without considerable effort and opposition. Suffice to say that not until 1898, thirteen years after the Berlin Conference, did they really accomplish possession of the country which they were to occupy for the ensuing twenty years. They ruled the land in quasi-military fashion, applying a system of indirect control copied from the Romans. Under such a regime, the Native political institutions continued to function as before. Government was administered through the traditional authorities, in accordance with the formulæ of Native Law and Custom. This system was not unadapted to the Ruanda, which possessed a unified government, relatively advanced and generally respected.

It is not of record that, in the Ruanda, the Germans were effective or benevolent colonizers. Their major interest lay in the distant coastal lands of Tanganyika, which were potentially rich in agricultural possibilities. They made use of the Ruanda, with its teeming population, as a recruiting ground for agricultural labor, impressing countless thousands of the Natives, and marching them away from a temperate, healthy climate to the fever-ridden zone upon the

Indian Ocean, where they died like flies, of unaccustomed labor in the stifling heat, of homesickness and fevers, of broken hearts no doubt. The Ruanda of the Germans is not a pretty story—though, to be quite fair about it, no worse than many others in colonial history.

In 1916, as an operation of the First World War, the Belgians invaded the Ruanda, defeated the Germans and occupied the territory. The British who assisted where and when they could, were principally engaged in securing Tanganyika and Uganda, recovering for themselves, among many other keepsakes, the highest and most impressive mountain on the continent of Africa—Mount Kilimanjaro, 19,310 feet, which, in an exuberant moment, Queen Victoria had given to her nephew, Kaiser Wilhelm II, as a birthday gift. But the British got it back, undamaged and complete, its diadem of snow as white as ever. It was a time for getting presents back.

Following the War there was some friendly jockeying on the eastern border, between the Belgians and their British neighbors in Uganda. But the Belgian position was confirmed by the League of Nations: the historical boundaries of the Ruanda were restored intact. In 1924, eight years after the Germans had been ousted, the Belgian parliament formally accepted, from the League of Nations, a mandate for the country.

Such, in a nutshell, are the facts.

Q: Is the Ruanda a very fertile country?

A: Not particularly.

Q: Then how can it support so great a population?

A: It doesn't, very well.

Q: But why—

A: Why, indeed? I anticipate your question. But it cannot be answered in a moment, with a phrase, or a set of bare-boned facts. I would like to tell you more of the Ruanda: something to convey at least a hint of its fabulous past and enchanting beauty—and in which perhaps an answer to your question may be found.

And so, with your permission, let us devote a chapter to the subject—

IV

THERE is a well-known song, to this effect: "A little bit of Heaven fell from out the sky one day . . . and they called it Ireland." They could as well, I think, have called it the Ruanda.

A fifth the size of tiny Belgium, this microcosmic kingdom—for such it is, and has been through the centuries; nobody knows how many—is a rare and precious jewel, and would be so regarded anywhere on earth. Its western boundary, which divides it from the Congo, is Lake Kivu—the gem of that extraordinary necklace of lakes, which in order of location, commencing in the south, includes Nyasa, Tanganyika, Kivu, Edward, Albert, and, like a pendant to the chain, the great inland sea of Victoria Nyanza.

Lake Kivu is about fifty-five miles in length, from north to south; and, in width, at its widest, about thirty. It is forty-eight hundred feet above the level of the sea; and, as an indication of God's preference for it, it contains no crocodiles, though Tanganyika, to the south, is infested with them, and linked to Kivu by the Ruzizi River which completes the Ruanda's western border, and by which a crocodile, who felt so disposed, could readily negotiate the trip.

Standing one day on the shore of Tanganyika, with a resident of Usumbura acting as my guide, I suggested that the pretty, sandy beach where we had paused, would be a pleasant spot from which to take a swim. My companion regarded me with a horrified expression, pointing to an object in the water's edge, which resembled at first glance a log of driftwood. "You would not swim far," he said. And he picked up a pebble and flung it at the log which came suddenly to life, with a tremendous threshing, and disappeared from view. Not infrequently, he added, when crocodiles were slain, within them would be found disturbing souvenirs: native bracelets and the

like. The women came to do their laundry in the lake, and were not always watchful; and children sometimes waded, out of sight of parents' eyes. A lethal tail would lash out like a whip, and that would be the end. The jaws would snap and close upon the helpless victim, and drag him out of sight beneath the surface—not immediately to be devoured, but drowned and buried beneath a sunken rock or submerged roots of a tree, until he should be ripened to suit the saurian taste. It was not a pretty picture and I took no further thought of a swim in Tanganyika.

But at least, I ventured, on moonlight nights the beach would be a pleasant place to picnic. My companion shook his head. "Look where you are standing," he suggested. I looked and found I was standing in a footprint—a monstrous one that encircled both my feet, and there were dozens of them all around. "Hippos," he explained. "They come at night and tramp about." No, it was not a place to have a moonlight picnic, to do anything in fact except to watch your step.

But in Kivu are no crocodiles or hippos—nor mosquitoes, in the region of the lake: no stuffy net to drape around your bed; no danger to sit in the moonlight if you like, or stroll upon a beach, or swim if you are tempted. I swam in Kivu once, in broad daylight, by myself, but possessed of little faith. I could not rid myself of the idea that maybe one adventurous crocodile had dared to break the law, had found his way to the forbidden water; and so I had no heart to linger in it. It wasn't cold, but pleasantly refreshing, possibly not warm enough to suit the crocodile, for Kivu is much higher than neighboring Tanganyika—highest of them all.

The lake is ringed with mountains; and, at its northern end, on the Ruanda side, with great volcanic ones, whose tallest summits tower to fourteen thousand feet. And not all of them are permanently extinguished: Nyiragongo smokes and rumbles, and Nyamulagira paints the sky at night. In 1912 there was a violent outburst; and in this year of 1948, while I was on the ground, a new irruption in the lava plain, between the lake and mountains—like a huge, broken cauldron boiling over, pouring out a stream of molten rock, which cut through the forest like a flaming scythe—a swath three hundred yards in width—until it reached, and was swallowed by the lake, with the sound and steam of countless hissing tea kettles. Within

the radius of a mile the lake had changed its color to a poisonous, turbid green. In a fisherman's pirogue which stank horribly of fish, which was leaky and thoroughly unseaworthy, I suffered myself to be paddled to the scene—within a hundred yards of the performance, beyond which point the fisherman was disinclined to go, and I had no will to urge him. The water, at this distance, was too hot for comfort.

The ancient lava plain is pocked with cones and craters, as geometrically correct as if they'd been designed on a drafting table. But some of them are broken: inverted bowls and vases whose sides have cracked and shattered, leaving gaping holes; and in some of these, in the fertile humus to which time and elements have converted the surface of the lava, are villages and cultivated areas. Approaching in a car and circling by, one is startled to observe the broken wall, and, through a narrow aperture, a lovely bit of landscape—like a picture through a peephole—nestled in the crater of a dead volcano. Everywhere the ancient lava surface has been reduced to humus, supporting a dense semitropical forest. I have driven through it, for a mile at a stretch, beneath an emerald canopy of banana leaves, meeting overhead above the narrow road. This volcanic region is thickly populated, notwithstanding a scarcity of water. Not many streams flow through it from the mountains, and there is no water to be found beneath the humus, no more than you would find in a bed of solid concrete.

In Kisenyi I stayed for several days in a charmingly impractical hotel whose guest rooms were constructed in the style of Native huts, with cylindrical stone walls and conical thatched roofs; comfortably detached from one another and shaded by fine trees in a garden thick with bougainvillea and hibiscus—the creation of an artistic and imaginative woman, Mlle. de Galberg, who is its proprietress. It is true there were some minor disadvantages: my hut was dark, its windows screened by the overhanging thatch—so dark that I could not read or write in it, except at night when there was electric light—so dark that in the bathroom, which occupied half of the lunar interior, I had to shave with my razor in one hand and a candle in the other. And Native architecture is not designed for placement of European furniture: nothing seems to fit against round walls; if you get things straightened out at the periphery, there is

bound to be confusion at the center. Still, aesthetically at least, the place was charming. But to continue—

The domestic water for the Bugoyi Guest House in Kisenyi, was carried from the lake, a distance of about a hundred yards; for several hours every day, half a dozen house boys trudged back and forth, with ten gallon tins of water on their heads—a modest chore in Africa. But the drinking water for the guests was another story. The lake, I suppose, could have been boiled and rendered safe for use; but Mlle. de Galberg was a perfectionist, and the drinking water was toted for eight miles—a considerable journey for a drink.

Yet that is nothing. A village I visited in the lava plain, far from the lake, on the rising flank of Nyiragongo, had no water nearer than twelve miles—not a drop, unless in the season of the rains they caught it on the ground. The village was the residence of a local Chief, by whom I was received in a great stockaded court, swarming with men and women—the center of a populous community: 500 families and about 3,000 people. And every drop of water, for any sort of use, must be carried by the women, on their heads, for a distance of twelve miles, a round trip of twenty-four, accomplished in a day, without apparent effort or complaint: not a daily undertaking, but two or three times in a week, I was informed. I judged that not much water was diverted to purposes of laundry and the bath. But in other respects the community seemed normal, and unobsessed with any sense of hardship or privation.

As a matter of fact, I dare say, from many angles, one might as well be strolling, with a jug of water nicely balanced on one's head, along a pleasant, shaded forest trail, surrounded by companions with whom to laugh and gossip, with no need for hurry and no clock at hand to mark the flight of time, with the privilege to pause and rest one's self, in beds of fern beneath great spreading trees—one might as well be doing something of that sort as standing for eight hours beside an endless belt, putting nuts on motorcars; or sitting at a typewriter, hammering out a book. At all events, the Ruandians of the lava plain appear to be content to fetch their water, many miles, upon their heads. At least, there are comparatively few who move away.

But all the Ruanda is not a lava plain fenced off by volcanoes.

The country as a whole, in its topography, resembles Abyssinia: a high plateau, furrowed and contorted by a mighty plow, rising gradually from east to west and south to north—a magic labyrinth of softly rounded hills and peaks as sharp as needles, crisscrossed by narrow valleys, with foaming mountain streams; linked by hog-back ridges with densely timbered slopes—or smoothly barren ones, ringed now with lateral ditches to their very tops, with tall grass growing in them: geometrical designs against erosion. For the primitive Ruandian, like the civilized American, has been careless and wasteful of his country's natural resources. And so there are denuded mountains, but terraced to their peaks now, with these hand-wrought ditches—the laborious penalty of ignorance and misuse. They are not without a beauty of their own, but strangely incongruous in the landscape—like gigantic game boards of some unknown sort.

This homogeneous land mass, constituting the Ruanda, pursues a longitudinal course, bordering Lake Kivu and oriented like it, from southwest to northeast, rising to its crest at a varying distance from the lake of twelve to thirty miles. The mountains of this crest, whose summits are at an average height of ten to twelve thousand feet above the sea, represent the vertebrae of the country's spinal column, and compose the most important watershed in Equatorial Africa. Upon them the falling rains and melting snows are equally divided, to flow westward to Kivu, to the Congo, the Atlantic; and eastward to Victoria Nyanza and the Nile. These mountains which bisect and dominate the Ruanda, may be said to be at the very core of the heart of Africa. They were known to the ancients: both Aristotle and Ptolemy left written record of them, referring to them as "The Mountains of the Moon," which perhaps they had been already named, in an earlier day; for there is a word in the Native tongue—*Unwamwezi*—which signifies "Country of the Moon."

The Ruanda is like, and unlike, Switzerland: it is projected on a less heroic scale, is more intimate and friendly. In some respects it resembles Italy: the sharpness of its contours and a quality of picturesqueness; but it is untamed, more natural and less studied. Some aspects of it are reminiscent of Hawaii: the softly vivid coloring and the volcanic peaks, but it is never in the least monot-

onous, as the Pacific islands are. The Ruanda is perhaps a place apart, combining the most intriguing features of the world's great beauty spots. Billowing white clouds ride as high above it as they do elsewhere in Africa; but there is no sadness in the landscape—no hint of melancholy.

It is not, as you may judge from the description, a particularly fertile country, in the sense of being readily cultivated: much of it is too rugged, some of it too high, and the arable land has been sadly overburdened and abused. The aboriginal method to clear for cultivation, was, and is still, to burn; and in the wake of fire come erosion and sterility. Not the least of the many tasks of the Colonial Government are regeneration of the impoverished soil and reforestation of eroded areas. The Native is both orchardist and truck gardener. In the little plot of ground which surrounds his hut, there are sure to be bananas—his only fruit tree, which supplies him with a beverage that, when fermented, packs a kick like applejack; supplies him, too, with fibers for his clothing; and finally, with a pasture for his goats. In his vegetable garden, which furnishes the basis of his diet, are beans and peas, sorrel, and sweet potatoes (repulsive-looking tubers, unlike the sort we know); and, for cereals, sorghum, and maize, from which he makes his bread and brews a kind of beer. To conclude the list, there may be tobacco plants. His whole agricultural undertaking is calculated to fulfill the modest dietary needs of a vegetarian with an alcoholic leaning.

Notwithstanding this indicated adequacy, the Ruanda is not a land of milk and honey, not able to supply its population with abundance, nor at times with the bare necessities of life—not at the present moment, nor for far back in the past, though it may do so tomorrow, when it has been civilized and synthetically restored. But, as of today, the margin is a narrow one; famine is not unknown and can commonly be found—just around the corner.

Then why has the Ruanda, this microcosmic country, been selected to sustain so many human beings?—out of all proportion to any other section of Equatorial Africa?—It's beautiful of course; and perhaps that is a factor which persuaded its pioneers to linger in it, and their posterity to cling to it, even when the going was beginning to get tough. And the country is favored with a healthy climate, which, whether it was tempting to the original settlers,

yet must certainly contribute to expanding population: not so many children would die in infancy, and more adults would survive to procreate.—Yes, beautiful and healthy: a proper place for Man, be he primitive or civilized, to settle down and make a home. But there is another factor which cannot be ignored—

The Ruanda, in conjunction with its twin Urundi, is a natural fortress: a bristling redoubt, whose battlemented walls descend to moats—wherein are mountain torrents, cataracts and rapids, swamps and marshes, designed to entangle and discourage the invader. The country is an African Gibraltar. Its residents were able to defy their enemies: envious neighbors bent on conquest, migrant raiders seeking pillage, traffickers in slaves. There was no admittance to them. The gates were locked, the drawbridge up; and sentries were alert, prepared to sound a call to arms. The enemy was vanquished on the spot, or thought better of his venture and retired from the field. The Ruanda was not, and never has been, conquered by force of arms. On the contrary, its armies have sometimes sallied forth to conquer and annex the lands on its periphery, though in the end to yield them back again, content to live in splendid isolation, in its own impregnable security.

In another respect the Ruanda is unique: despite the plurality of races which compose its population, its people are imbued with a sense of national unity. The Natives of the country, regardless of their origin, feel themselves to be members of one nation—the Banyarwanda, from which the Ruanda takes its name. This nationalistic sentiment is rooted in attachment to the soil—not only to the hut and hearthstone, but to the community, the district, to the entire kingdom. Not until the Ruandian passes the frontier of his country, does he feel, with heavy heart, that he is leaving home. His patriotic emotion is centered in devotion to the reigning dynasty, whose representative is his sovereign lord, the king—*Mwami*, in the Banyarwanda tongue—beyond and above whom there is no one but God—*Imana*: a universal God, but highly nationalistic. For, though it is true that *Imana* is also recognized and honored in the Urundi, still, if he spends his day there, he always returns in the evening to his home in the Ruanda. Patriotic pride is exalted to the point of chauvinism. “The Banyarwanda,” according to Père Pagès, “were persuaded, before the penetration

of the European, that their country was the center of the world; that it was the greatest kingdom, the most powerful and civilized, of the earth. Thus, they found it natural that the horns of the crescent moon should be turned toward the Ruanda in a protective gesture."

And to paraphrase a comment of Louis de Lacger: The nationalistic sentiment was not founded exclusively on loyalty to the ruling dynasty. There were other elements which contributed to and underlay it: linguistic unity, practically absolute from one end of the country to the other, which facilitated relations between all the people; unity of institutions, of customs and usages, in both private and public life, subscribed to by people of different races, antecedents, and conditions; finally, unity of religious belief. This phenomenon is almost, if not quite, unique. More or less identical examples of it are to be found in the twin Urundi and the neighboring Uganda. But these are the only exceptions.

What are the ethnic elements that compose this strange and amazingly durable amalgam? There are three major ones: the *Batwa*, at the bottom of the list, both numerically and socially, dwellers in the forest, hunters and ceramists—makers of pots; the *Babutu*, who are cultivators of the soil and constitute an overwhelming majority of the population; the *Batutsi*, the ruling class, a social elite, possessing wealth, prestige, and power. This social edifice is not a primitive structure, but a highly organized, complex society representing three ethnologically distinct groups which have been incorporated or adjusted to it, at long intervals of time, in the course of ages.

At what period did the oldest of these groups, the *Batwa*, make their appearance on the scene? Probably they were not the first residents of the Ruanda, but themselves an amalgam of predecessor peoples. It is generally agreed, though the supporting evidence need not here concern us, that Central Africa was inhabited by Man at as early a period as Europe—that is to say, some tens of thousands of years ago. There is reason to believe that the aborigines, who, though simple hunters, were also fabricators of pottery and bricks, were followed by the *Batwa*, themselves nomadic hunters; and who, though they acquired the ceramic craft, utilizing the same forms and decorations which the earlier settlers had created, never learned

—or, if they did, subsequently lost—the art of making bricks. It is thought that the *Batwa* came into the country during the Iron Age, absorbing in time the original occupants, or being absorbed by them. In the Ruanda, as elsewhere in the world, purity of race does not exist. Nor does industrial progress consistently follow an ascending graph: new skills are gained and old ones lost.

The *Batwa* are short in stature, averaging about five feet two, not short enough for pygmies; though ethnologically they are classified with the Pygmy race. Possibly the aborigines with whom they mixed, were taller and added to their height. At all events, the term of dwarf or pygmy is not applicable to them. Their relation to the Pygmy family is similar to that of the Bushmen and Hottentots of southern Africa. In appearance the *Mutwa** is not prepossessing: skin black, nose pressed flat, wide mouth with thick, protruding lips, arms and legs not well proportioned to his body, a hairy chest and a potbelly. His clothing is a scrap of apron, on a cord around his waist. He is likely to have his weapon with him, a bow in his hand and some arrows in a quiver hanging from his shoulder. He is not responsive to the civilizing process or any interference with his primitive condition. He is content to live his forest life, hunting and fishing for his food, and gorging himself to repletion when he can. However, there are, among the *Batwa*, village dwellers—ceramists pursuing the metier of their fathers, makers of pots and vases, tobacco pipes and statuettes, often creations of real artistry, though their earthenware is poorly fired and consequently fragile. Still, they perform a necessary service: artisans in a craft of which they have a practical monopoly.

Whatever else they may be, or whatever their experience in the past, the *Batwa* represent, in the Ruanda of today, an aboriginal remnant—a numerically insignificant group of five or six thousand, in process of extinction. In the eyes of their fellow citizens, *Babutu* and *Batutsi*, they are veritable savages, socially beneath notice—though not pariahs, in the sense, for example of “Untouchables” in India. As might be expected, the *Babutu*, the great agrarian middle class, is most intolerant of the *Batwa*. The *Batutsi* are so thoroughly secure in their superiority that they can afford to be indulgent—a

* (Note: The singular of *Batwa* is *Mutwa*; of *Babutu*, *Mubutu*; of *Batutsi*, *Mututsi*.)

commonplace in all societies: intolerance is linked to fear, and fear to insecurity. As de Lacger puts it: "A *Mubutu* would not refuse a drink of water to a *Mutwa*, but would break the goblet which had served the low caste man." A *Mututsi*, I assume, would not break the glass—or, if he did, would break it with a smile, acceding to a gesture unprompted by conviction. Still, it would be an error to regard the *Mutwa* as a social outcast, even in historical perspective. He is not so considered, and there is no reason to suppose he ever has been: the Ruanda is his country, the *Mwami* is his sovereign, and *Imana* is his God—equally with anybody else. His rights as a citizen are respected and protected; and on his part he fulfills his duties to the State, paying customary rental for his tenure; serving the princes of the reigning house and following them to war when so required; attaching himself faithfully to his local Chief, by whom he is not infrequently employed, and above all to the *Mwami*.

His relations with the ruling class are by no means unhappy. From the ranks of the *Batwa*, the *Batutsi* have been accustomed to recruit their metalworkers and their basket weavers. The great Chiefs, and the King himself, selected from among them their litter bearers, huntsmen, beaters, dancers and musicians—and, in a more somber vein, their public executioners. The *Mutwa* was not constrained to accept these occupations; he regarded such employment as his prerogative, frankly preferring the *Mututsi* to *Mubutu*, the rich and powerful patron to the plebeian cultivator—another commonplace in human societies. In the households of the great, he was in a sense a privileged character—perhaps remotely like the wandering Gypsy in medieval Europe, part clown, part mountebank. Nor would he hesitate, if occasion seemed to warrant, and even though the offender be the King, to rebuke a stingy master or an imposition.

Such is, in brief—or was till only yesterday—the status of the *Mutwa*.

And now the *Babutu*, who constitute at least four-fifths of the total population—who and what are they? In physical type the *Mubutu* belongs to the largest and most widely dispersed of the Negroid groups, which, in a great variety of tribes and nations, is scattered throughout central and southern Africa, and commonly described as Bantu—probably originating, in common with the Pygmy family, in the tropic zone of Melanesia or Australasia. He

is taller than the *Mutwa*: on the average about five feet six, black-skinned, kinky-haired, broad-headed with projecting jaws, flat-nosed and thick-lipped—a description on the whole applicable to the *Mutwa*. But there is a difference: the *Muhutu* characteristics are less accentuated; the nose is not so flat nor lips so thick; the added stature represents improvement, and the limbs are well proportioned to the body. Finally, he has an air about him, carriage and demeanor, of more sophistication. In a word he is definitely less primitive, farther away from wherever Man began.

When and whence did he make entrance on the stage of the Ruanda? As to when, it is impossible to say with any accuracy, but probably in the Age of Iron, though long after the *Mutwa*, perhaps about four thousand years ago. As to whence, from somewhere else in Africa of course—presumably and reasonably from the littoral of the Indian Ocean, or some place in between. Through the ages, until quite recently, there has been great flux of movement in the Continent: a pushing from the East and North toward the West and South: nomadic peoples on the march, pausing here and there until a settled region seemed to be exhausted, then moving on to a new locality, displacing by conquest the original occupants or more recent comers, exterminating or absorbing them, or being absorbed by them—flux and melange, producing new eugenic variations, languages, and customs. Thus, in southern Africa, the Bushmen and Hottentots were succeeded by invading Bantu tribes, and are practically extinct; and again, one Bantu group would displace another, as, for example, the Ovambo drove the Bushmen from their home, themselves to be displaced by the more warlike Herero, who survived until the Germans arrived to decimate them. The movement of these migratory legions was devious and confused. Thus, the *Bahutu* may have taken, for their journey from the east to the Ruanda, several years or several centuries, depending on their haste and the opposition they encountered by the way.

Whence or when he came, the *Muhutu* found himself, on his arrival, in a promised land: altitudes of differing climates, adapted to a vast variety of vegetation, from tropical to alpine; and an equivalent variety of game: elephant and hippo, gorilla and chimpanzee, lion, leopard, buffalo, zebra, all sorts of antelope, wild boar, hyena, jackal, crocodile—almost all the beasts of Africa except the

rhinoceros and giraffe; and, in the feathered realm, geese and ducks and bustards; and, among the reptiles, gigantic pythons and many poisonous snakes. He must, too, have found the *Batwa*, in prior occupancy, dispersed and deeply hidden in the forest—nomadic groups of them, scarcely better organized to deal with an intruder than the beasts and reptiles. One can only guess at how he was received: whether he made entrance by invasion and armed force or fifth column infiltration, or unopposed and welcomed by the little people. Whatever the conditions that attended his approach, he arrived and came to stay.

The *Mubutu*, more prolific than the nomad hunter, was the actual colonizer of the country. He was, at least in contrast with the *Mutwa*, a craftsman of a sort: he knew how to grind his corn, to thatch his roof, to weave his clothing, to build a fence of sharpened stakes, to carve a pirogue from a tree trunk, to model household pots. And he knew the use of fire, to clear the ground for cultivation. He was in fact a farmer, his only implement a wooden hoe. But in the Ruanda he discovered iron and soon multiplied his tools. His antecedents are unknown; but his immediate ancestors were neither hunters nor shepherds, for he was not a meat eater. He did not eat the flesh of game or cattle, nor even drink the milk of the ewes and goats he raised. If, later on, he was persuaded to indulge in beef or cow's milk, it would be a gesture, contrary to his natural taste and instinct—a bit of snobbery, in imitation of a noble stranger, the *Mututsi*.

--This vegetarian colonist, by his obstinate labor, conquered and created the Ruanda, permanently impressing on the country his language, his customs, and his way of life. Through many centuries, with patient unremitting toil, he pushed back the wilderness, advancing step by step, pausing only to consolidate his gains, then reaching out for more. He humanized the forest, and gradually transformed his ancient tribal system which could not adapt itself to his expanding projects. For these little pioneer groups, always pushing farther on, detached from one another, bound together by their common language, customs, and religion, but devoid of a central authority or political unity, came in time onto dangerous ground. Group fell foul of group, jealous of its property or fearful of its power; and there was an open road to an invader. In the long

course of this individualistic resolution the country was divided into a mosaic of tiny principalities, each with its own political integrity, too nearly equal in their size and strength for any one of them to seize control and initiate authority.

The process of arriving at such social attenuation was in fact a simple one: the pioneer sought to attach himself, for protection and defense, to the nearest source of power—the strongest, richest family in his immediate neighborhood, presumably headed by a chief of some degree, whose residence then became the focal point of the community, for offensive or defensive operations, administration of justice, consultation and advice—in feudal terminology, the castle of a seigneur. In return for his security, which the lord of the manor contracted to defend, the peasant—or serf, if you prefer—accepted the obligations of a vassal: homage, fealty, service. Thus, inevitably, the country was divided into many little “spheres of influence,” fragments of a nation culturally united by its common language, customs, and religion, but politically disparate—as many perhaps as half a hundred units, though there are no history books to tell the story: domains through which the master might walk from end to end in a day’s stroll, the majority of which can still be recognized in modern Cantons and administrative districts. At the culmination of this social development some of the groups still adhered politically to their ancient tribal system, but most of them had acquired hereditary rulers, bearing the title of *Mwami* or *Muhinza*.

Such were the accomplishments to which the *Babutu* had attained, through many centuries of fumbling trial and error, when the *Batutsi* appeared upon the scene.

When the first Europeans penetrated the Ruanda, only fifty years ago, they found to their amazement, a unified, highly organized hierarchical society, amalgamating a dense homogeneous population: in short, a political entity quite comparable to those of so-called civilized nations. This situation, rare in Africa, is not of long achievement. It is the product of *Batutsi* domination, whose inception goes no further back than the fifteenth century of our era. The history of its growth, preserved in oral epics and traditional minstrelsy, recounts a long labor of conquest and assimilation, the details of which can find no place in this brief summary. It must

suffice to say: from the fragmentary materials they found ready to their hands, the *Batutsi* reared a unique, imposing, and durable political structure.

Who and what are the *Batutsi*, and from whence did they arrive in the Ruanda?

These gentlemen were, and are, herdsmen, cattle raisers. As to whence they came, and to quote de Lacger:

When one arrives in the Ruanda from the highlands of Egypt or Abyssinia, one recognizes them immediately. One has already seen them: these men who are veritable giants, averaging six feet in height and frequently attaining nearly seven; with slender, graceful limbs and bodies; with regular features and a noble bearing, grave and proud in their appearance. They are of the Caucasian race, related to the Semites of Asia Minor. But they are dark of skin, sometimes of copper or of olive color. They are brothers of the Nubians, the Galla, the Danakil. Their hair is woolly, frizzled; their women are steatopygic (big-buttocked), a physical characteristic borrowed from the Bantu, and testifying to long commerce with the simple blacks. The cattle of these herders we also recognize: the long horned beast of Hathor, whose image may be found on Pharaonic monuments; the Bull of Apis, worshipped as a Divinity on the banks of the Nile. The cattle are even less changed in appearance than their owners. But both are unmistakable.

Yes, we know where the *Batutsi* came from, and a glance at the map suggests their line of march; for, from the Abyssinian highlands to those of the Ruanda, there is a broad highway, twelve hundred miles in length by a hundred or more wide, which supports a vegetation suitable for ruminants, and sufficiently abundant to sustain the slow migration of the herds. How long they were about it—who can say?—or where and for what periods they tarried on the road? But about five hundred years ago, probably before Columbus sailed from Palos, they arrived in the country of “The Mountains of the Moon,” quite possibly producing, on their advent, a sensation of the sort that the sails of the Spanish caravels evoked among the Indians of the Caribbean Sea.

Surely they were gods, or on the fringe of being: these tall, superior strangers, imposing and disdainful, with copper-colored

skins and the finely chiseled features of high breeding. And they were rich—driving before them great herds of long-horned beasts, the like of which had not been seen before, as impressive an array as the elephants of Hannibal. To the simple-minded *Batwa* and *Bahutu*, they may well have appeared as natural rulers, provided by *Imana* to constitute a proper aristocracy for a functioning feudal system which had not within itself a group endowed by breeding with the necessary qualities to fill the upper brackets.

Some such popular reaction to the strangers seems to be indicated, by story and tradition and subsequent events. In any case, there is nothing to suggest that the *Batutsi* conquered the Ruanda by force of arms. They must have been insignificant in number; and the country, though politically divided, was naturally impregnable. Later on they did, by military might, consolidate some unreceptive fragments and add to their domain; but in the beginning, it would appear they conquered, by sheer virtue of their personality—possibly abetted by evidence of wealth, not the weapons but the hearts of the admiring residents. At all events, they were received and welcomed, and presented with the keys.

At first glance it would seem they had not much to offer in return, except personality and organizing genius—which, when one stops to think about it, represent a considerable endowment. They were members of a caste rather than a nation; proud, and perhaps even then, as they certainly are now, effete—inbred, verging on exhaustion. They could not have been passionately devoted to their language, customs, or religion; for, contrary to the universal practice of conquerors and civilizing agents, they readily parted with all three, exchanging what they had for what they found, or accepting compromise. This apparent resignation need not imply essential weakness, and can be as well explained on grounds of cynicism—the cultural point at which one can dismiss the superficial, as a child outgrows his toys. However this may be, the course they followed was the line of least resistance for a handful of herdsmen submerged in a mass of lowly tillers of the soil; and the one course, incidentally, calculated to achieve, by slow process of assimilation and adaptation, moral and national unity in what would otherwise have been an unintegrated society. They were even content to adopt the title, *Mwami*, for their kings.

“One fact is certain,” according to Père Pagès, “the *Batutsi* adapted themselves to the way of life—food, clothing, lodging—of the *Bahutu*. . . . Customs and superstitions became the common property of both victors and vanquished. The Hamitic kings introduced to their subjects their burial customs and the attendant ceremonies. But the desiccation of the royal corpse, and the ritualistic slaughter of several individuals to provide companions for the soul of the departed . . . are customs of *Bahutu* origin.” Thus there was give and take, though on the whole it would appear the *Batutsi* gave but little and took much.

Economically the different racial groups fitted admirably together, supplementing rather than constraining one another: country people all of them, without urban congregations or industrial enterprises, save for their household handicrafts. And their pastoral pursuits were distinct and nonconflicting. The *Batutsi*, who never represented more than a small minority of the total population, confined themselves to areas adapted to their cattle, without inducement to encroach on the cultivated lands of the *Bahutu* farmers, who on their part had no interest in the barren grazing lands. As for the *Batwa*, buried in the forest and numerically declining, their hunting and fishing interfered with no one.

In this peasant country there were no paupers and no unemployed. No man need be without a home, a roof above his head, and the wherewithal to satisfy his hunger. To each new-married couple, the resident Chief would assign a bit of ground on which to build a hut, and lend a hand at thatching it. There was land available for anyone who wanted it; and, if not land, a craft to ply; or service for another, a *Muhutu* cultivator or *Mututsi* cattle raiser or some higher dignitary—in accordance with the terms of feudal contract, which is a form of slavery, though in the Ruanda it was purely domestic and probably not onerous. There were no migrants wandering here and there in search of jobs, no homeless proletariat. Another factor disposed to social harmony: the master, though he might be hard to please, was always on the ground. The Chief and his clansmen, the master and his serfs, dwelt together in unpretentious promiscuity; the absentee landlord and the remote exploiter were alike unknown.

Finally, religion was a potent influence to maintain social peace.

For, if each clan had its loyalties and legends, its blood feuds and vendettas, which were not shared outside the family circle, still, above them all there was *Imana*, god of all the Banyarwanda, regardless of race, rank, or condition—*Imana*, who would not refuse himself to any of the faithful, however poor or humble. And there were no dissenters among these simple people, no skeptics and no cynics; no cults or creeds on which they were divided; no methodical theology, and in consequence no schisms—no ground on which to disagree and wage religious war. *Imana* was, and that was all of that. A fatalistic attitude supported resignation to *Imana's* will, and served to temper the injustice of a chief or master. There was blind faith in the providence of the *Mwami*, himself the lieutenant of *Imana*, and who must some day right the wrong committed. So injury was appeased and anger quenched, and the impulse to rebel restrained.

It must not be assumed from the above that the nation was forged of daisy chains, in a perpetual dance around a Maypole. The Ruanda was not spared its blood or tears. It has had its share of tyrants and of wars—both civil and external, of clan feuds and vendettas, of revolt and pillage, of banditry and famine. But this point should be noted: its civil conflicts, of which there have been many, have been in origin political, not social. The fabric of the social body has somehow held together, through all the ups and downs of wars and insurrections, suggesting it was fashioned to endure. The Banyarwanda nation refused to be dissolved.

Apologists for the colonial system and the civilizing process delight to point with horror to the past—in effect, to change the subject. “Ah yes, of course,” they say, in response to criticism. “But you should have seen the country yesterday.” And they go on to relate the common data: the ruthless cruelty of the Slave Trade, which, in its commercial aspects, was not indigenous but was introduced by strangers like themselves; the endless wars of conquest and aggression between the Native tribes; the inhuman rule of tyrants, which, to illustrate, they may choose as an example some figure like Msiri, the infamous Chief of the Katanga, a monster certainly, but himself half Arab and a usurper. And they will recount the punishments and tortures inflicted alike on rebellious subjects and vanquished enemies—or on anyone conveniently at

hand, to gratify sadistic appetites: how they buried men alive with their heads above the ground, to die of thirst or slow starvation; how they coated them with honey and tethered them on ant hills, to be devoured piecemeal; how they dined on human flesh, or certain favored ritualistic morsels; how they cut off hands and tongues and burned out eyes, and practiced other forms of mutilation; how desiccated heads were ranged on poles around the tyrant's residence. They will speak to you of rape and infanticide, of famine and disease. They will represent the past in terms of a nightmare of depravity and suffering. And so it may have been—but I am not sure of it.

No doubt such things occurred, and some in the Ruanda, though it never furnished slaves for export, if for no better reason than that traffickers in slaves never gained a foothold in the country; and it's doubtful if among its several tyrants, there were any of Msiri's caliber, who was himself phenomenal in the tyrant field. But of course there were abuses, as there are bound to be wherever there is Power. And there was rebellion here and there, quite likely sternly dealt with, in accordance with long established customs, which, however barbarous and inhuman they may seem, can hardly be more so than those with which the Western World has been presently acquainted. There were famines and disease—but where were there not? And there were wars, civil and external, but, as has been pointed out, political, not social. The truth is that the Banyarwanda were, and are, a simple, industrious, peaceful people, domiciled in a pleasant, fruitful country; and they had not much occasion to quarrel among themselves. I venture to suggest that the Ruanda—and perhaps all Africa—has been, through the last two thousand years of history, a happier, more peaceful scene than the European continent.

Some insight to the national character, the basis of which is deeply rooted in an ancient patriarchal system, may be inferred from the virtues and vices which the maxims of the country recommend or warn against. The following virtues are esteemed: humility, piety, courage, truthfulness, prudence, reverence, fear of God. The longer list of vices is not less explicit: pride, hatred, guile, gluttony, indolence, stubbornness, intolerance, fear, gossip, anger, envy, conceit,

calumny, coquetry, ingratitude, imprudence, despair, curiosity, inconstancy.

As to the application of these human qualities: for the common man monogamy is the rule, not the exception, and reproduction is generally prolific; the home is the center of the social life, and the atmosphere pervading it is demonstrably affectionate; children are greatly cherished, the young are continent and discreet, the aged are cared for and respected; men and women are equally industrious in their respective occupations; the social status of women is advanced, in dignity and responsibility; hospitality is mandatory, custom ordains that the stranger shall be received and welcomed and invited to partake of the family fare; authority is feared, and the laws which issue from it are respected and obeyed; crime is rare, criminals are vigorously pursued and rigorously punished; the public good is highly prized, and there is united effort to maintain it.—Such is the substance of de Lacger's social summary. And one wonders what remains to be achieved by the civilizing process?

The religion at the roots of the social structure, for which there is no word in the Banyarwanda language, is a monotheistic, nationalistic paganism, of *Bahutu* origin and of great antiquity, to which, in its recent evolution, the *Batutsi* have contributed additions and refinements. To briefly summarize its major attributes, I cannot do better than to quote de Lacger—

It is paganism of similar character to that of the classical civilizations. One recognizes in it the cult of ancestor worship, with the attendant ghosts and occult powers, and miracles arising from intervention of the dead; metamorphoses, metempsychoses, and anthropomorphisms; oblation and expiation, magic and divination; paeans and liturgies, teraphim and talismans; esoteric orders of high priests, initiates in mystery rituals, with their secret disciplines and orgies. But this Ruanda paganism is less evolved than those of classical antiquity; it is closer to its origins, less involved with symbolism and allegory. It has not developed into polytheism; there are no families of gods and goddesses, with cumbrous histories of feuds and altercations, with deaths and resurrections of divinities. The Ruanda recognizes and reveres only one God, not a nebulous abstraction but a living entity—almost flesh and blood.

Despite the simplicity suggested, the religion of the Banyarwanda is a highly complex subject, presenting at its apex a mystical monotheistic principle; and a secondary ancestor worship factor, which was probably primary in origin; and finally a systematized demonology, to account for phenomenal aspects of nature which would be otherwise unexplainable. No one of these factors would by itself rationalize the experience of human life; but the three of them together do a very good job of it—or so it seems to me. Space in this volume, and my own limitations, forbid me to do more than brush the surface, to convey the barest hint of the functioning of this faith.

Mana, or *Imana* ("I" is the article) is the lord of creation. He was before anything. He created two worlds: first, one high up above the clouds, with the sun and the stars; then the one on which we live, using the high one for a model, but omitting from it happiness and beauty. There are varying explanations to account for this omission, including one that suggests original sin. Anyway, there is a world of pain and anguish; and another one above it in the sky, with all its appurtenances—trees and birds and flowers—wherein is to be found great happiness and never-ending life. *Imana* is the only God inhabiting this heaven. Yet the Ruandian does not deny the possibility of other gods, with spheres of influence in other geographical locations. He admits they may exist, but he owes them no allegiance and has no interest in them.

Imana is good, benevolent and affectionate; He wishes well for all His children, but His responsibility is limited. They must do considerable looking out for themselves, must look before they leap and watch their step. He is not demanding nor highly critical of their behavior, save in matters which concern their attitude toward Him—and not toward Him alone, but toward His mandataries: the *Mwami*, His personal representative; the Chiefs to whom the *Mwami* delegates authority; and the father of the family. Thus, from the unit of the home to the all-inclusive state, there are sanctioned authorities to whom obedience and respect are due; and failure to discharge such obligations is an act of impiety, offending God himself. The cardinal sin for which *Imana* will take vengeance, or at least withdraw His interest and protection, is disobedience to, or rebellion against, constituted authority, mundane or divine.

With the sins of the Decalogue *Imana* is more lenient. And indeed there are other watchful eyes and vengeful forces to take cognizance of social misbehavior—the ordinary felonies: murder, robbery, and the like. But *Imana* is not much concerned with matters of this kind; He will not reward the virtuous nor punish the transgressor. He does not frown on suicide. If life's burdens are too heavy, one is free to put an end to them, and no penalty incurred. He regards euthanasia with an indulgent eye, not demanding that His children shall suffer needless pain. He is chiefly concerned with their attitude toward Him: their piety, obedience, adoration. Yet He has no church in which He must be worshiped, and requires scarcely any ritualistic ceremonial: there are no pictures of Him, no monuments or statues. Approach to Him is simple and direct. He is not a god of vengeance. If He is compelled to punish He will do so, but He inclines by nature to pardon and indulgence. He is omnipotent but not infallible. The diversities of life, unequal distribution of blessings and disasters, like the accidents of birth, a child with a deformity of body or of mind—these are not the will of God, but the failures of an artist. Of such misfortunes it is said, "*Imana* failed" or "*Imana* was too tired."

But not all the vicissitudes of life are to be so explained: by the endless blunders of a paternal Deity who wants only that his children should be happy. Then why must they suffer, as they obviously do: poverty and sickness, grief and pain, and finally Death? Here is the paradox with which all human creatures are confronted. The Ruandian has asked himself this formidable question, and has found an answer for it—as devoid of dialectic as such answers are, as illogical, irrational; the inevitable compromise between hope and observation, aspiration and experience, wish and fact. His solution is neither pessimistic nor dualistic nor deterministic; rather, it is optimistic, at least to the extent that it protects *Imana* from indictment for malfeasance or neglect, by a simple process of elimination. And to exonerate *Imana* the Ruandian has not found it necessary to condemn himself. He would gain nothing by so doing, for his sufferings on this earth are not to be rewarded in a world to come. He will have a future life beyond the grave, for there is a part of him, a shadow of himself, which will not die. But his life on earth is not a preparation for a future state, in

which his tribulations here are to be compensated. He is not to be punished or requited. This terrestrial life is the only one with which he is concerned. It must justify itself. And its cankering agonies are not to be explained by the blunders, or design, of a kindly and well-wishing God. So there must be other factors in the case. And such is in fact the answer. *Imana* wills no evil to befall His children, and hopes they will escape it, and will help them to do so when He can. He reserves to Himself jurisdiction in the realm of piety—in the widest meaning of the word, with all its implications of reverence and obedience. But beyond these boundaries there is an open field, in which He plays no part, or stays His hand, or rarely intervenes. And here are other Powers on the loose, malignant and benign.

There are the Dead, ghosts of the departed: the *Bazimtu*, who are very much alive, circulating freely from one world to the other. It is among the living that these beings find their sustenance and distraction: actual sustenance, provided by the shadow of mortal provender, which will suffice for shadows like themselves—though “shadow” is not the word exactly, but a microcosmic entity, invisible, impalpable, which was the essence of the living man, the soul from which the body was discarded like a garment. Thus, microcosmic sustenance will suffice the visiting ghost, but there must be something set aside for him, substantial enough to cast a shadow. As for his distraction, the *Muzimtu* returns for reunion with his family—a daily occurrence, if it suits his fancy—to render assistance to the living if they be deserving of his aid, if they have not offended by forgetfulness or negligence, and to exercise his vengeance if they have.

The good son seeks in every way to prove to his dead father, to all his ancestors, that he is faithful to the traditions of the family, and mindful of his duties to his *Bazimtu* relatives. If misfortune overtakes him, for no apparent reason, he is led to suspect he has failed in his devotion, or in some way given offense; and his first corrective step is to consult a necromancer—an expert in such matters, who is in communication with the world of the *Bazimtu*. When the case has been set forth in full detail, which commonly involves prolonged discussion, the intermediary will investigate the trouble, determine the offense and suggest a course of action to

appease the injured party. To this end he may persuade the intervention of other friendly ghosts. If further disaster is averted, one may reasonably assume a proper diagnosis and effectual remedy. If not—well, as with other practitioners, both physical and spiritual, there is nothing much to do but keep on trying.

So much for the *Bazimtu* who are members of the family, whose relations with it are of a personal nature, who are chiefly occupied with rewarding filial piety or avenging its transgression. Altercations with them can be painfully unpleasant, but as a rule, with reasonable effort, such quarrels can be adjusted. Unhappily there are other interested parties, not bound by family ties, and whose grievances are not so readily compensated: members of clans and families with which yours has been unfriendly, or possibly at war; the victims of vendettas, ghosts of murdered men, demanding to be paid for their interrupted lives. And here the necromancer must exercise his skill: appeasing if he can, directing perhaps a sacrifice of blood—a domestic animal which shall represent the murderer; or, if such offer be rejected, he must marshal a defense among the Dead. Such matters may require long negotiation, or never be resolved. Still, they have a rational origin: specific grievances, which, even though they cannot be compensated, can at least be clearly stated. These *Bazimtu* plaintiffs are not without their briefs.

But there are others in the spirit world, who are not activated by any motivations save the will to mischief: lemurs, harpies, vampires, a host of evil beings, jealous and implacable, a veritable nightmare for the credulous and simple. There is no way to account for their behavior, and nothing to be done to harmonize or pacify their villainies. Their conduct is inspired by pure malignancy, and their choice of a victim is fortuitous. When one has reason to suspect that these outrageous creatures have descended on him, he knows there is no chance of peace or composition. There is nothing to be done but fight them off, until they shall be weary or discouraged and go on to someone else. He fortifies his house against attack, by means of traps designed to snare the enemy, and obstacles possessed of occult properties, which the mischievous spirits cannot pass. He must arm himself with batteries of talismans and amulets recommended by the sorcerers and charged with incantations, which will avert, or modify, the destructive influences. And he will make

appeal to his own *Bazimu* relatives, advising them the nature of his plight and entreating them to come to his assistance, to set a guard upon his home and hearth, and flog the evil spirits from his door. In time, with patient effort and unremitting vigilance, they may be driven off, or routed in a night, or continue to persecute their victim until their febrile fancy is diverted to some more rewarding object.

Imana and *Bazimu*, God and the Dead, are nonconflicting factors in a religious theory devised to explain the experiences of Life. But there is still a third, for the Forces of Nature are not yet accounted for: the Powers which reside in the heavens and the earth—the sun and moon and stars, the rain that falls, the rivers and the mountains, the world of the inanimate—Powers which are commonly beneficent, but which at the whim of a presiding genie, can be viciously malevolent. As witness the hurricane or drought or flood, a pestilence afflicting men or cattle, a volcanic mountain bursting into flame and spreading destruction all around it. These are not *Imana's* doings, nor can they be ascribed to the *Bazimu*, for there is no personal element involved, no victim singled out for punishment. The evil flails the country or devastates a district; and the perpetrator of it is a genie of the heavens or the earth—a minor demon not of godlike rank, in an irritated mood. Such temperamental outbursts must be dealt with through the sorcerers, the *Bapfumu*, who are well-acquainted in the demonic sphere and know what steps to take to pacify the genie.

Imana, *Bazimu*, and the presiding Genii of the Natural Forces, whose names are legion and for whom there seems to be no general term of designation: within their several spheres of influence and office every circumstance of Life may be explained. From such a premise one might reasonably infer—and the fact is not infrequently alleged—that nothing occurs in the Ruanda, which is not regarded as of supernatural origin. But this is not the case. In the ordinary enjoyment of his everyday life, the attitude of the Ruandian toward the exterior world is quite similar to our own. He observes and appreciates the relationships of cause and effect, and instinctively adjusts himself to make the most of them: he knows that water will not flow uphill and that fire can run wild, and seeks no mystic sanctions to account for such phenomena, but

properly adapts himself to meet them. It is only in the presence of the unusual, the extraordinary or inexplicable, that he has recourse to supernatural explanations, to calm his anxiety or to assuage his anguish.

To this conclusion one might truthfully add that unusual phenomena of an unhappy nature are of almost daily occurrence in the normal life of Man, not only among those who have a public responsibility to discharge, but equally among the humble. The season is too wet or too dry, and a famine threatens; wild beasts tramp down the maize or kill the family cattle; a child, or calf, is born with a deformity; sickness sweeps a village; an adolescent girl does not develop and her marriage cannot be arranged; a wife is sterile; Death spares the aged and snatches at the young; fire destroys the family home; a stranger, with a new, irresistible weapon, invades the national soil. Of such things is Life made, for everybody; and the questions they pose have never been readily, or perhaps very satisfactorily, answered. At all events, it is only in the face of issues of this sort that the Ruandian turns to mystic causes to rationalize the facts; only then that he has recourse to the sorcerers and their magic formulae, to remedy disaster or to avert recurrence.

Such, in barest outline, was and is the religious faith of the Banyarwanda. Such the *Batutsi* found it, when, five hundred years ago, they strayed into the country, with no better introduction than their glamorous personalities. It is likely that their organizing, formalizing genius has contributed refinements, but the substance of the faith, like the language of the people and their social-economic system, must have been agreeable to the strangers' taste. Or else they were numerically so few that the line of least resistance was to fit themselves into a ready pattern, and be content with the direction of it, which suggests they may have been uncommonly astute.

When they arrived upon the scene, the *Babutu* had already unified the country, or major sections of it; and the monarchy was well established. It is impossible to say when this took place, or to describe the causes which induced the Chiefs of Clans to part with their prerogatives and yield themselves into the hands of a hereditary dynasty. This revolutionary step has left no trace in history, is the subject of no folk song and no legend. One can only assume that certain groups, wearied by incessant civil war, exhausted by periodic

decimations of fratricidal conflicts and vendettas, were inspired to create among themselves, for their own peace of mind and preservation, an instrument of arbitrary sovereignty, and by means of which they might unite defense against invading enemies.

Nor is it possible to say exactly when the *Batutsi* inherited the Crown, or describe the circumstances of their usurpation. Was it contrived with cunning politics, or the reward of wisdom or of valor, or no more than a fortuitous event? There is no answer. But achieve the throne they did, and with it the emblem of its power—the Royal Drums, traditional symbols of regal ceremonial, which had been beat before them for the *Babutu* kings. By fair means or by foul the *Batutsi* were invested with authority, which, in principle at least, they have not yielded, down to this present day.

As to the nature of the monarchy, under *Batutsi* dynasties, de Lagger describes it as an aristocratic oligarchy, employing in its service a host of functionaries, principally recruited from the ruling class, appointed to office at the discretion of the sovereign—in effect an army of dependents with claim upon the State for their support: chiefs of every grade, with civil and military functions; magistrates and tax collectors and minor dignitaries. In close contact with the ruler are the courtiers, among whom are the guardians of the Royal Drums: the favorites of the moment, greedy for wealth and power, seeking to monopolize the highest offices, contending with each other for the plums, risking lives and fortunes in schemes of Palace intrigue. Unscrupulous politicians, sons, brothers, uncles, nephews, cousins of the *Mwami*, in order of consanguinity or shrewdness, surround the despot when he governs by himself—or the Queen Mother, if she be regent for a minor—forming a camarilla which, if the prince or regent be timid or incompetent, may control the nation's destiny.

Paralleling the official class is the priesthood, the *Bapfumu*, divided in two groups: a low clergy, principally of the Muhutu race, distributed throughout the country; and a high clergy, calling itself *Mututsi*, which is closely connected with the Court. This priestly order, which might be described as the "intellectual" class, contains the surgeons and physicians, sorcerers and diviners. Professional activity, in the realm of the material or the spiritual, does not imply a special kind of life for the practitioners; the members of this class

are fathers of families, living like their neighbors, cultivating land or breeding cattle, undistinguishable on the surface from their less enlightened fellows. Yet they constitute, by reason of their functions, an elite—a distinct and separate class, entitled to respect and veneration.

At the apex of the social pyramid, above all classes and professions, theoretically exempt from restraint or criticism, is an absolute monarch, the *Mwami*, a lieutenant of *Imana*, ruler by Divine Right—the hereditary proprietor of his kingdom and all that it contains; whose subjects, big or little, are his feudal vassals or his serfs; holding in his hands their means of livelihood and title to existence; free to preserve them or destroy them at his pleasure.

One can hardly escape the observation that the paragraphs above almost equally describe the monarchy and court of the Bourbon kings of France, in a period comparatively recent—nor fail to be reminded that rule by “Divine Right” or something of the sort, with new and perhaps more specious sanctions, seems not to have been banished from the Occidental world, down to this present moment. At all events, in the Ruanda, the institution has not changed its character or name. It would appear the foundation must be sound, and the cement that binds the social structure of first-rate quality, for there are few faults or cracks apparent in the walls. Not even the stupendous shock of European entrance in the country, and occupancy of it, and taking over of administration have availed to destroy the edifice or much impair its aspect.

The Colonial Government functions at its side, employing in so far as may be practicable, the machinery of the ancient monarchy—advising and directing, being scrupulously careful not to go too fast. And king and courtiers, lords and priests and peasants carry on their lives much as they always have. There are checks upon the ruler and abuse of power, but only those in lofty seats have acquaintance with such matters; and there is a multitude of new and unfamiliar things descended on the world of the Ruanda, to which, bit by bit, adaptation must be made: education and scientific medicine, and the complicated doctrine of Christianity, and industrial and agrarian enterprise on an unimagined scale, and the overlordship of an alien race—a formidable program for the monarch or the serf. But the roots of the past have not been severed: the

ancient laws and customs are still the rule of life. Perhaps what remains is but a shadow, which will steadily grow fainter; but as yet it is a shadow complete in all its details, which the ordinary man may well mistake for the reality. Thus, the *Mutwa* in the forest at his hunting, the *Muhutu* in his field harvesting his maize, the *Mututsi* on the mountain with his grazing cattle may scarcely be aware of what is happening: the hearth and home remain unchanged; the family has not suffered dislocation; a chief is near at hand to hear complaint and rectify injustice; the *Mwami* rules the land from his palace in Nyanza; and *Imana* still presides on his throne above the clouds.

When you visit the Ruanda you will see them all, at the simple business of their lives. And you will not have much trouble in distinguishing between them. The blood of the *Batutsi* is not as pure by now as it was to start with, for in the course of centuries it has suffered some dilution. And there are other factors which have clouded the title to aristocratic eminence, for noble families do come croppers now and then, and may be reduced from charge of long-horned beasts to goats and wooden hoes. And the process is reversible, as when a shrewd and thrifty peasant shall graduate himself from goats and hoes to wealth and high position. So the laws of caste are not immutable.

Still, you will know them. Near the entrance to colonial offices—modern, new brick buildings with landscaped grounds around them, in orderly, neat towns—some *Batutsi* may be gathered, awaiting audience with the Administrator, standing proudly at their ease: perhaps a local Chief, with his gentlemen-in-waiting or attending bodyguard. You will know them by their stature, their slender graceful figures and finely chiseled features; by a sense of the effete, of long inbreeding; by their dignity of carriage, poise and manners; by the white robes draped around them, and the long staffs in their hands. They will be waiting as if they were not waiting—as if they, themselves, were expecting a petitioner. You will not feel surprise that the *Babutu* appointed or accepted them as rulers.

Or, on a mountain road—a road the Germans built, or commanded to be built; which the Belgians have lined with lovely shade trees which are not yet full grown—on such a winding, narrow road, in the midst of matchless scenery, you may encounter a *Mututsi* in a

litter, a kind of rigid hammock slung from poles, carried on the shoulders of *Bahutu* bearers—presumably a Chief of some importance, in an embroidered garment, with his hair roached like a cockscomb. If you are intrigued by his equipage and wish to photograph it, you have only to shout and wave your hand: the cortege will be halted to wait upon your European pleasure. And at your request the noble personage will be pleased to pose for you.—*O tempora! O mores!*—So are the mighty fallen, though still hoist upon their litters and the shoulders of their serfs, in the waning shadow of their greatness.

On this, or any road, in the regions of their choice, you will meet with the *Batutsi*—men and women, strolling leisurely, or hurrying on their business with easy striding steps. But they will not be bearing any burdens, not anything more weighty than a slender walking staff. They will pause as you pass by, to salute you with a graceful inclination of the head, in which there is no trace of servility or flattery. You may see them at a brook where cattle water, not herding the beasts but directing their retainers. And again, where repairs are being made upon the road, or a bridge is being built—where the sturdy *Bahutu* are grubbing in the ground, and trudging to and fro with trays of brick or earth upon their heads—a *Mututsi* will be present, in the role of superintendent, standing by or looking on, but not taking any part in the physical affair.

As for the *Bahutu*, the salt and backbone of the country, you will see them everywhere—trudging at the roadside, heavily laden with the produce of their toil and their simple implements; bearing home huge bunches of bananas on their heads, from which to distil an alleviating beverage, or cumbrous loads of thatch with which to mend a roof; cultivating fields and terracing the mountains; and in urban centers employed at every task; laboring for themselves, for their betters, for their *Mwami*, and for the new, strange rulers of the land. They wear no flowing robes or distinguishing regalia, but such garments as their economic status can afford, from shorts or jeans to rags. And they, too, will pause to greet you, if you give them half a chance, standing respectfully, hats in hand—if hats they have.

But the *Batwa*, rugged individualists of the Ruanda, you must seek, for there are not many left, and very few indeed to be met with on the roads. If you find them, it will probably be in, or

adjacent to, the forest. You will not mistake the *Mutwa* for anybody else: a nearly naked little man, with a loincloth fashioned from the skin of some wild creature, with a bow in his hands and arrows in a quiver hanging from his shoulder—no more lethal in appearance than toys designed for children; who, if he sees you coming, is quite likely to run off among the trees and vanish from your sight. But if you come upon him unaware, or are quick to block escape, he will stand and watch you shyly, giving heed to what you try to say with gestures of your hands, and answering if he can. He is not afraid, but shy. He will smile and string an arrow to his bow, to show you how it's done. But he will not discharge it at a mark, for the arrows are fragile and he does not care to risk them. He will wait submissively until you have finished with him, until you make it clear that he may go; and then he'll walk away, not looking back.

Such then is the Ruanda, its present and its past—a geographic fragment of the mighty Congo, in whose future it seems destined to play a leading role.



V

NYANZA, official residence of the Ruandian monarch, is a charming mountain town, devoted to administrative functions, carried on from neat brick buildings which front upon a broad parade ground, beyond which are the extensive buildings of a Mission. There are trees and flowers everywhere, planted to a plan and scrupulously cared for. In fact the town suggests a well-kept park.

The sun was hot, and we waited in the shade of a covered gallery outside the administrator's office, until he should be free to see us. There were others waiting, quite a number of them: a group of tall young men in long white garments, carrying slender staffs—obviously *Batutsi*; and others in nondescript apparel, waiting apart, not mingling with the tall ones, but with decent independence in their bearing, not like serfs or lackeys—obviously *Bahutu*. One of these was squatting in the sun beyond the porch, facing the administrator's door, in the manner of a suppliant—a demeaning posture which engaged my curiosity. His chin was sunk upon his breast, so that his face was hidden; and his hands were clasped about a staff which reached above his shoulders. We waited quite a while, but he did not raise his head or seem to move, squatting bareheaded in the full glare of the sun.

At length there was a stir, and a regal-looking personage emerged from the administrator's office—a man of middle age, well over six feet tall, slender and beautifully proportioned; his head held high, not disdainfully but with proper pride. His finely chiseled features were not negroid, his skin was almost olive, his hair roached high in a becoming coiffure. He was robed in white, but across one shoulder was a gaily-colored scarf which reached nearly to his ankles.

He crossed the porch with an air of graceful leisure, glancing neither to the right nor left, not arrogantly but as one who is

accustomed to choose his time and place. A young man came to greet him—tall and slender like himself, in white and with a staff—perhaps a visiting nephew. The face of the older man lighted with a smile, and he put his arms around the youth and held him for a moment to his breast, in an unembarrassed and affectionate gesture. And then they strolled away together, chatting. The waiting attendants followed at their heels, not obsequiously, but like contented courtiers in the service of a benevolent lord. It was all very decorous and charming—and one might add, highly civilized. The squatting suppliant had not looked up.

But it was not the King.

Mr. Dryvers, the resident administrator, informed me that his visitor who had detained him from receiving us at once, was an important chief from a neighboring canton. There were many more in the Ruanda, he assured me, who were equally imposing and regal in appearance. Unfortunately, the King was out of town, on a tour of inspection. But the Queen was at home, so Mr. Dryvers thought, and he would be happy to take me to the Palace and arrange for my reception. He mentioned that the King was thirty-six years old, and though he'd been twice married, was still without an heir.

When we came out of the office the parade ground was deserted, save for the squatting suppliant who looked up at our approach and revealed a youthful face which was clouded with anxiety. But he made no effort to intrude himself upon us. I was moved by the poignant expression in his eyes, to intercede in his behalf, remarking he had been there a long time, and that perhaps his business was more urgent than my own.

"If you like, we will find out," the administrator said. And he turned back to the man who rose quickly to his feet and declared himself with passionate volubility, replying at great length with many gestures, to the questions asked. The matter, it appeared, was not one of life and death. The man was from a village, at some distance in the bush. He wished to leave the district where he had been born and had thus far lived his life, and to move to another where he hoped to better his condition, in substantiation of which prospect he presented a dirty scrap of paper, alleged to contain an offer of employment from a relative or friend. But his local chief had refused him per-

mission to depart, for reasons not apparent or related. He had come to make appeal to the administrator, to grant him leave to go.

“What will you do?” I asked.

Mr. Dryvers shrugged, observing that the matter would need to be explored: the man might be in debt, preparing to evade an obligation, or to shirk responsibility to his wife and family; or again, he might be victim of a personal whim or imposition. As a rule the chiefs were just in their decisions, deciding questions brought before them, in accordance with the edicts of Native Law and Custom, with which Government did not seek to interfere unless gross abuse of human rights was indicated. This present question, though simple on the surface, might require time and effort to reach the bottom of it.

“And now?” I said.

“Now?” Mr. Dryvers shrugged again. “When I return I will question him more fully.” Presumably, he said the same thing to the suppliant who squatted down again without remonstrance, his head bowed on his breast and his hands clutched round his staff.

“He will wait here in the sun, in this dejected pose, until you send for him?”

“The sun and the pose,” Mr. Dryvers smiled, “are his own affair. As for waiting, Time means nothing to him. He is not in a hurry. Today or tomorrow—or the next day—or the next.”

“What do you suppose is passing in his mind?”

“Ah that!” Mr. Dryvers shook his head. “I should hesitate to venture an opinion.”



WE EMBARKED in the administrator's car and drove a little way, along a pleasant, winding road which terminated in a sort of courtyard, edged with trees and shrubs, facing a modern European house, somewhat more pretentious than a bungalow but suggesting that style of architecture. It could have been anywhere in Europe or America. Still, it did not seem inappropriate to the landscape.

When the car came to a stop, half a dozen tall young men, robed in white and armed with staffs, appeared suddenly from nowhere. The Queen was not at home, the spokesman of them said—a Chief named Birassa whom Mr. Dryvers introduced. She had gone to the Mission for her French lesson, where perhaps we could find her at this moment. He would accompany us, if we desired. I said that would be fine, but, since we were here, could we have a look around, inside the Palace? There was considerable discussion of the matter, concluding with permission to see the public rooms: the living room and dining room and study. The six young men went with us.

The inside of the house was as modern as the outside, furnished in the European fashion and by no means in bad taste; altogether, rather comfortable and cozy. The study of the King contained a massive desk and proper filing cabinets. Excepting some *objets d'art*—wood carvings and the like, and masks and assagai that hung upon the walls—and the rugs upon the floor, of leopard, lion, and monkey skins, one might have been in a Western home whose owner had a taste for exotic decor, and the means to gratify it.

Among our attendants, all of whom were taller than the average European, was a veritable giant—a slender youth who must have been well over seven feet. Mr. Dryvers told me he was a famous jumper—a sport at which the *Batutsi* far excel their European brothers. This boy was a champion in the country. I asked if he would not be entered in the Olympic games?

No, he would not be entered, Mr. Dryvers said. And for this reason: the *Batutsi* jumpers could not jump in accordance with the rules which governed the Olympic contests. They were accustomed to a take-off, a slight elevation in the ground from which to leap, commonly an anthill, deprived of which their jumping was reduced to second-rate. They had tried to adapt themselves to the European method but thus far unsuccessfully.

“It would seem,” I said, “a simple thing to change.”

“Yes, like so many others—” Mr. Dryvers nodded thoughtfully, and added with a smile that they’d been using anthills a long time—probably for several thousand years.

We got back into the car, accompanied by Birassa, who I felt was going with us for the ride, and drove a short distance to the Mission where we were received by several genial Fathers who, when they

were acquainted with the purpose of our visit, sent off posthaste to find the Queen. If she were there, they said, she would be with the Nuns, in another building. In the meanwhile we waited in a small reception room which looked out upon a rose garden. I took occasion to inquire how I should address the Queen. Mr. Dryvers said there were no rigid rules: I could address her as "Madame" and offer to shake hands. He added that the Queen was shy and rather timid, and probably would not have much to say.—Could I ask permission to take a photograph?—Yes, certainly.

At this moment she appeared, strolling toward us through the garden, with two European Nuns. She was striking in appearance, tall and not too slender, not conspicuously aristocratic in her features or her bearing, not displaying symptoms of inbreeding and effeteness, unless perhaps a certain languorous indolence of manner. And her skin was darker than the pure *Batutsi*, suggesting the presence of *Babutu* blood in her genealogy. In age, she might have been in the early twenties. Her hair, done high upon her head, looked like a close-fitting cap of astrakhan. She wore a long, loose robe of soft white stuff, in which her arms were folded, beneath which and showing at her ankles, was an underskirt of colorful design. Her feet were bare. For adornment she had a necklace of small pearls and matching earrings. Her costume was becoming to her figure and her dignity. The expression in her eyes was serious and slightly apprehensive.

We went to meet her in the garden. Mr. Dryvers, hat in hand, presented me, introducing the Queen by her baptismal Christian name of Rosalie. I bowed and took her hand which was moist and limp.

"*Madame*—" I said, and spoke of this and that, the fineness of the day and the beauty of the country. In the presence of royalty and the assembled audience, I was painfully embarrassed by my dreadful, halting French. And the Queen, whose French appeared to be no better than my own, seemed equally unhappy. She murmured, "*Oui, monsieur*" and "*Non, monsieur*," or looked blank and said nothing. The conversation languished and then died.

"*Alors, une photographie?*" Mr. Dryvers helpfully suggested.

The Queen assented doubtfully, and suffered me to pose her against a shrub of brilliant blossoms, yielding to the urging of the

attendant Nuns, a faint, half-hearted smile which vanished before I could get a focus on her. Someone brought a chair and we tried another picture, with the Queen enthroned upon it—really beautiful and regal, but very shy and timid. That seemed to be the end.

"Merci bien, madame."

"Au revoir, monsieur," she said with unconcealed relief, and turned and strolled away to her incompleted French lesson.



About two hours later, as we were leaving town, I saw the Queen again, returning from the Mission toward the Palace, riding in a litter supported on the shoulders of four *Babutu* bearers, proceeding at a dogtrot with their royal burden. The palanquin was a semi-rigid hammock slung between two poles, in which the Queen, in a half reclining posture, was being badly joggled. It was not a situation in which to maintain a high degree of dignity, and I felt embarrassed for her. Still, I leaned from the window, prepared to raise my hat.

But as we approached, she turned her head and looked the other way.

"She is very shy," I said.

Marcel considered. "Or stupid," he suggested.

"Or stupid," I agreed. It was difficult to say.



ONE day, in a thinly peopled region, we came upon a sign beside the road—not a neat official one, but roughly scrawled on an unpainted board. It said, "*Village des Lépreux*," not indicating where, and there was no village within sight. But there were wheel tracks in the grass, leading back among the trees.

"Let us go and see," I said.

But Marcel, a cautious youth, was without enthusiasm. The sign, he thought, was not an invitation but a warning not to trespass. Visiting the lepers was probably unlawful, and also might be dangerous.

"All right," I said, "drive on." For I had some reservations of my own.

Presently, within a mile, we came to a dispensary—a small, brick building set back from the road, with landscaped grounds around it; one of many which are found at frequent intervals along the traveled roads of the Ruanda. "Let us stop here," I said, "and make inquiry about the leper village." Marcel obediently applied the brakes.

"Hallo!" he bellowed lustily, in accordance with his custom when he wanted to attract the attention of a Native. And before I could stop him, "Hallo!" he yelled again.

"Come, come," I said. "That is not a proper way to call upon a doctor." And I got out of the car and hurried up the path, meeting on my way the young medical assistant who was running to see what might be wanted. He had come in such haste that he still had in his

hand a syringe prepared for treatment of a patient. And I could see a queue of others waiting his attention.

I apologized profusely for interrupting him. But he begged me, in French much better than my own, to give no thought to it. As I walked beside him back to the dispensary, I inquired what I wished to know.—The leper village? Oh yes, he knew about it. It was in the district served by this dispensary.—No, it was not against the rules to visit it, and there was no danger in so doing.

We came to an open porch on which was a table with some medical equipment, instruments and bottles; and in front of which the patients were waiting in a line, about a dozen of them, men and women—several of them suffering from a malady which had turned their skins dead white in ugly looking patches. The patient whom the medical assistant had been treating, was a woman. She was standing by the table where he'd left her, her arm still offered for the needle.

I apologized again, overwhelmed by Marcel's gaucherie and my own intrusion.—Well, imagine if you can: one stands outside the door of an operating room, and shouts "Hallo!" And the surgeon drops his scalpel and comes running out to greet you.—I mumbled in confusion, not finding words in French that were equal to the matter. But the young man insisted it was of no consequence. He had been engaged in nothing of importance—just an inoculation. As for the leper village, he said with childlike eagerness that he would be happy to accompany us. The lepers, he added, were acquainted with him and would not resent our visit if he came along; and also he could answer any questions I might care to ask.

"But your patients?" I objected.

He dismissed the question lightly: there was nothing urgent, they could wait. And he spoke to the woman, still standing by the table, who nodded in reply with no sign of irritation. Nor did the others who had overheard, show any indication of impatience or resentment. He dropped his syringe into a sterilizer and led the way back to the car.

As we drove back along the road, Frère Secundien's words were echoing in my mind: "They are too newly come," he had explained, "into the rationale of Cartesian thinking. The ethics which govern the practice of medicine in the Western world, are not yet within

their grasp. It is not thought, by the authorities, that they may be trusted to make decisions affecting human life." He had said it patiently, a little wearily—as if it were something he had often said before and which he half expected would not be believed. And indeed, at the time, I had had doubts about it, suspecting there might be a catch in it somewhere—some other reason for discrimination.

I studied the young medical assistant from the corner of my eye: spotless shirt and shorts; clean, supple hands; a sensitive, fine-featured face, alert, intelligent. His eyes were sparkling with enjoyment of the ride. There was nothing in them to suggest that he might be inwardly debating a dereliction of his duty, that his thought might be concerned with the sick whom he had left. Quite likely he'd forgotten all about them. At length, I asked—

"Are you alone in charge of the dispensary?"

"Yes, alone," he said. At regular intervals a European doctor came to check up on his work, to diagnose cases of obscure diseases and prescribe the treatment for them, and to perform such surgery as might be undertaken on the premises.

"Could you not do these things yourself?"

He smiled and shrugged, as if to say of course. "But it is not permitted."

"Where have you studied medicine?"

"At Astrida."

"Then you know Frère Secundien?"

"Ah, yes," he said. And there was veneration and affection in his voice.

We turned off the road and bumped a little way among the trees, following the wheel tracks in the grass, until we came upon two rows of thatched, mud huts—some twenty habitations of the poorest sort. At sound of the car some of the inhabitants emerged out of their dwellings: men and women and potbellied children, clothed in rags; not looking, at first glance, to be afflicted with anything more grievous than their poverty.

The young man called for more of them to come. And more appeared out of their squalid shelters, and aged ones came hobbling from the shadow of the trees. Gradually I was aware of the dreadful ravages of the disease: faces welted and distorted with the hideous nodules; hands and feet of rotting flesh, hypertrophied and dying.

Though not all of them appeared to be afflicted, on the surface anyway. And the children, save for their potbellies, and two or three deformed by umbilical hernias which are not uncommon, exhibited no symptoms of disease.

But certainly they were not happy people, not chattering and laughing. They came at the summons of the medical assistant, gathering around us in a respectful circle, as if waiting a direction. But Marcel remained aloof, discreetly detached from danger of contamination. The young man showed them off, his eyes still bright with joy of the excursion, pointing out this one and that, on whose bodies the malady was conspicuously apparent. In answer to my questions he informed me: not all of them were ill—in some cases only one member of a family, but wives and children must share the isolation; there was ground for them to till, sufficient for their needs; they were under frequent observation and medical control, though there was not much that could be done for them. Yes, they were poor, he said. Very poor indeed, but they were not hungry. The wretched company stood in silence while he spoke, looking anxiously from his face to mine, as if their future might depend upon his words and my reception of them.

But when I opened up my camera and they understood I meant to take a picture, they came suddenly to life, forming a line before me, more of them than I could get in focus, edging close together at my bidding, studying my face to anticipate my wishes. And one old man who had hid himself from view behind a tree, came hobbling at a great rate, though every step he took on his misshapen feet must have been a racking hurt. And now some of them smiled and even laughed aloud.

When the picture had been taken I reached into my pocket for some money to distribute. They watched me curiously, without evidence of interest or expectation of my purpose. I held the money in my hand, not knowing what to do with it. And then I motioned one old man to come, saying to the medical assistant he should explain to them that the money—a few cents each it came to—was for their common use.

He repeated what I'd said, but still there was no hint of interest in their eyes. But the old man came obediently, holding out cupped hands to me, into which I put the money. And then he stared at it,

as if it were an unfamiliar substance. Some of the others came and looked over his shoulder, mumbling among themselves and prompting him to something. At last he spoke some halting words—speaking to the medical assistant, with plaintive hopefulness.

“What does he say?” I asked.

“He says—” The young man laughed, his eyes still sparkling. “He says he does not know what to do with what you gave him.”

“What would they like to have in place of it?”

And when that had been translated and discussed—“He says they would like to have some salt.”

“Salt?”

“Yes, salt.”

“Tell him, with that money they can purchase salt.”

“I have already told him that—” The young man shrugged and laughed again. “But they do not understand.”



PYGMIES!” cried Marcel, and jammed the brake so hard that we skidded in the dust. “Pygmies,” he repeated and scrambled from the car.

This was near Kisenyi. There was a volcano in eruption, not far distant from the town, in the lava plain that borders Kivu, beneath a chain of great volcanic peaks. Not long since, a belching cone had burst out of the floor and poured a molten stream through the forest to the lake. It had cut across the highway and occasioned some alarm. A few days later it had carved another channel farther on, leaving a wedge of no man’s land between. Some motorcars had been marooned in this danger zone and the passengers rescued by pirogues on the lake. Altogether there had been much excitement. A scientific expedition was flying from Brussels to investigate the matter. And we were on our way to see what could be seen from a safe distance, driving along the narrow highway, hemmed tightly

by the forest, to the intersection where the first lava stream had cut across it.

“Hallo!” Marcel was shouting, waving at two little naked figures whom we had met and passed, and who were edging now to the safety of the forest. “Hallo! Hallo!” he bellowed, motioning them to stop.

The figures hesitated, like small boys apprehended in an act of mischief, glancing back over their shoulders, seeming undecided if they should face the music or cut and run for it. But Marcel was close upon them, and so they stood their ground, facing round to meet him, side by side.

“Pygmies,” he explained when I had joined him. But I thought they were not pygmies. It was not a pygmy region and they did not quite fulfill the pygmy picture. They were not small enough, though the head of the taller one did not reach my shoulder. They were thin and scrawny but not ill-proportioned, and their features were of the Bantu type. Finally, they had a dignity of bearing which I did not associate with pygmies. They were *Batwa*, I felt sure—members of the aboriginal remnant, the first we had encountered.

They stood with solemn faces and shyly anxious eyes, naked save for scraps of apron tied around their loins, armed with bows and arrows—bows as tall as they were, and fragile-looking arrows in quivers made of skins. One was of middle age, with the hard privations of a nomad’s life written on his face; the other was a youth—father and son perhaps. They waited patiently while we discussed them, the father with an air of resignation, but the boy looked frightened, staring rigidly before him, his bow clutched tightly in his hand.

Marcel interrogated: Where did they live?—Where were they going?—What did they hunt?—The boy stood silent, with no change in his expression; the father shook his head and smiled half-heartedly. It appeared he did not understand Swahili, or did not choose to do so.

“They are stupid,” Marcel said.

But they did not seem particularly stupid—not more, I thought, than I would seem if someone asked me questions in an unknown

language. Stupid they might be, but there was not yet much evidence on which to base indictment.

Marcel took the bow out of the father's hands and tried it with his own, testing the spring of it. The boy was watching from the corner of his eye, trembling with anxiety. "It is flimsy," Marcel said. "Only good for birds and rabbits." He handed back the bow and reached to take some arrows from the quiver. The boy was winking now to keep his tears back.

Marcel held three arrows in his hand. They were not much good, he said, but he would purchase them for souvenirs, and he felt in his pocket for some coins. Presumably he asked, "How much for these?" At all events, his pantomime was unmistakable. The father smiled and shook his head, holding out his hand for the arrows, not the coins. Marcel increased his offer, adding paper francs. But the little man was not to be persuaded, and when Marcel persisted, he shook his head emphatically, not smiling now, and seized the arrows in his hand, not pulling them away, perhaps for fear he'd break them, but holding fast to them. The youth looked on, his face contorted with stifled apprehension—like a boy who sees his father subjected to indignity and is powerless to help him.

"Come, come!" I intervened. "If he doesn't want to sell them—"

"Bah!" Marcel released the arrows and put away his money. He had nearly lost his temper, though he was at heart both amiable and tolerant. "Be off with you," he ordered, waving them away. And they did not wait a second bidding, almost running down the road, close together, side by side, until there was a gap in the hedge-thick bush which bordered it, through which they slipped and vanished in the forest.

"Stupid!" fumed Marcel. "I offered him five times what those little sticks were worth. It was really stupid of him."

But it did not seem stupid, not to me, that the little black man should prefer his arrows which he had painfully fashioned to serve a useful purpose in his life—that he should prefer them to some worthless bits of metal and dirty scraps of paper.

"Stupid!" Marcel grumbled with somewhat less conviction, as we walked back to the car. And then he shrugged and laughed at his discomfiture. The arrows, he admitted, were of no consequence; he could pick up plenty of them, better ones in fact, and at a

cheaper price than he had offered. It was just their stupid stubbornness. "But one shouldn't be annoyed with them," he said. "After all they're only savages."

And savages no doubt they were, but they had seemed to me particularly gentle.



I WAS cautiously approaching a sulphurous smoking blowhole in the lava floor when I heard their voices.

We had come to the place where the molten stream had flowed across the highway, cutting through the forest a swath perhaps three hundred yards in width, carving a ruthless channel to the lake. It had taken down the forest as a blow-torch would take down blades of grass, consuming it in passing, and scorching to crisp and blackened death the trees that bordered on it, but not setting any fires outside its own grim path. A hundred feet away, the forest was as fresh and green as ever.

Judging from the tortured surface it had left, the flowing lava had not been a placid stream. It must have poured like water from a broken dam, with a mighty head of melted rock which piled up on obstructions, cooling and hardening, and then flowing on itself to cool again in strange, contorted forms. Where it cut across the road, the surface was at least ten feet above it, and there were cones and hillocks: clinkers as big as houses, and crevasses too, as formidable as a glacier and suggestive of one. And though there was no lava flowing in the channel now, and had not been for several days, it was still hot and smoking, with rumblings underneath; and through the cracks in it were glints of fire.

At the side of the road, within stone's throw of where it had been cut, were several undamaged Native huts, around which life was going on as usual. Some *Bahutu* boys were on hand when we arrived. In response to Marcel's inquiry, they pointed to a hill behind the huts, from which they said the cone of the volcano

could be seen—best seen, they added, when it was grown dark. If we cared to climb the hill they would guide us up the path. It seemed they had been piloting the visitors, of whom at the moment there were none except ourselves.

We said we'd have a look around and come back later, when the sun was setting, and we went on to explore the lava flow, though Marcel was cautious of it and lingered near the edge. He said it was so hot it burned his shoes, but this was overstatement. It was too hot for naked feet, and the sharp and gritty clinkers were hard on shoe leather, but it was safe enough. I went on for some distance, until I could see the full expanse of it; and presently, in a depression in the floor, I came upon a smooth black cone with a blowhole in its side, from which at intervals came puffs of sulphurous vapor.

It was then I heard the voices, calling back and forth—flat-sounding and unpleasant in the utter stillness, and somehow reminiscent. But I heard them for some time before I realized that they were speaking English; and then with a start I recognized the sound. They were voices of my fellow countrymen, unmistakably American. I climbed out of the pit and there they were, coming slowly toward me—two young fellows, one of them on crutches. And it crossed my mind that only an American would negotiate a lava flow on crutches, without real necessity to do so.

“Hello!” I called and went to meet them.—Yes, they were Americans, they said. Protestant missionaries from the States. One from Milwaukee, one from Chicago. The elder, crippled one had been in the Congo for two years, the other not so long. The Mission where they lived was at some distance. They had come to have a look at the volcano, traveling in a station wagon, camping along the way; and they'd brought along their guns to shoot some game.

The younger looked to be still in his twenties, the crippled one a little older, in the early thirties. It was the younger one who did most of the talking. They did not in the least look like missionaries—or as missionaries are supposed to look. They looked like quite ordinary men, undistinguished and uninspired, like young fellows who might be employed as minor clerks in a business office. They appeared to have no special qualifications for their jobs. In answer to my inquiry, one of them said he'd had a liberal arts education in a small Midwestern college whose name was unfamiliar to me. He

had not attended a divinity school or had any special training.—Why had he chosen to be a missionary?—Because he felt the call.—Was he happy in his work?—Yes, very happy.

As we walked back toward the road, I asked them what they thought of the Colonial Government.—Had they any criticism?

It seemed a new idea to them, or perhaps they were only being cautious. At length the younger said without conviction, as if he hadn't thought until this moment but felt obliged to answer, "Of course the Congo isn't a free country."

"How do you mean, not free?"

"Well—" He thought about it. "Suppose a man wants to go into the lumber business, he can't do it without the Government's consent. And—" he added lamely "—and he has to pay a tax."

"Do you mean a European or a Native?"

"Anybody."

"How do you feel about the way the Government treats the Natives?"

"Some of *our* Natives don't get a square deal."

"What do you mean by *your* Natives?"

"Members of our church."

"And how not a square deal?"

"We've got a case up now."

"You mean the Government discriminates against them?"

"No, not the Government exactly."

"Then who?"

"The Native chiefs."

"What chiefs?"

"The Catholic ones."

"Does the Catholic Church support this sort of thing?"

"Well, not openly of course."

"Doesn't the Catholic Church admit the graduates of your elementary schools into its secondary ones?"

"They've just begun to do it."

"Do you believe the Protestant Native is at a disadvantage in the Congo?"

"Well, it's a Catholic country."

We climbed down into the road where Marcel was waiting, sitting on the running board of our battered Chevrolet. The station wagon

was near by—a shiny new one; and the *Babutu* boys were waiting by the roadside to guide us up the hill. The sun was setting now and it would soon be dark. The missionaries were preparing to depart, but I held them for a moment with my questions—

“What are you doing in your Mission, in the way of education?”

“Oh, we have our school,” the younger man assured me.

“Do you have a secondary one?”

“No, just the elementary.”

“What do you do—you personally?”

“I teach,” he said.

“What do you teach?”

“Oh, hygiene, and other things. We follow the program the Government provides. We are compelled to do so,” he added with a shrug. “And it isn’t easy because they’re always changing it.”

“Why do they change it?”

He shook his head.

“Is it not to the end of improving the result—by trial and error?”

“Well, yes, perhaps,” he grudgingly admitted. “But it’s confusing to keep changing things around.”

The crippled one had not said much up to this point. But now he intervened, not belligerently at all, but as if he sought to terminate a profitless discussion—

“We didn’t come to Africa,” he said, “to educate the Natives, but to convert them—to put Jesus Christ into their hearts and save their souls from eternal damnation.”

“But—but don’t you think,” I stammered, “some educational foundation is essential to your purpose?”

“No.” He shook his head with complete conviction. “When Jesus Christ has entered into them they will be saved. And that is all that matters.”

There seemed nothing more to say, no more than there had been to the *Mutwa* with his arrows; and they climbed into their car and drove away.

Marcel stood up. To judge from the expression on his face, he must have understood the final words. Anyway, he pursed his lips and emitted a sound which resembled a Bronx cheer. “Missionaries!” he exclaimed disdainfully. “Very stupid ones!”

I nodded. They were fellow countrymen, but I could not think of anything to say in their defense.



THERE was quite a company assembled on the hilltop, strolling about and lounging on the grass: *Babutu* farmers, with their wives and children; and some Arabs and Indians in respective groups, aloof from one another and everybody else. But there were no *Batwa* or *Batutsi*—no little men nor tall ones, neither baseborn varlets nor aristocrats. Perhaps it was beneath *Batutsi* dignity to take notice of volcanos in eruption; as for the *Batwa*, no doubt they were too shy to intrude upon such matters. But the petit bourgeoisie were unrestrained by inhibitions; they had come to see the show and to enjoy themselves, comfortably at ease in family groups, laughing and palavering in soft melodious voices, while the children played about, not fussing or crying or getting out of hand.

The sun had set in a crimson, mackerel sky, and the tropic night came swiftly. We picked a vantage point between two family groups, and sat down upon the grass. The sunset colors faded, but in the eastern sky another crimson glow developed and expanded. And then the lava river which curved around our hill, began to come to life, crisscrossed with threadlike golden streaks, where the molten rock beneath showed through the cracks. At last we could make out the distant crater: a monstrous cone whose top had been sheared off to leave a shattered cauldron—the ragged rim of it seen fitfully through clouds of smoke and vapor, as its white-hot contents boiled and overran the edge, flinging molten gobbets and sheets of flaming spray high into the air. It was pouring down a flank we could not see, on the side away from us. But the river where it flowed, far beyond the one beneath us, was a speckled stream of fire. And there was a rumbled crackling, like a furnace. In the stillness of the night I thought I could detect the hissing of the lake, where the melted rock flowed into it.

There was not much laughter or palaver now. The children came to sit close by their elders, or in their mothers' laps. One young man strolled about, plucking the strings of a musical instrument

fashioned from an old cigar box—strange discordant sounds with an intriguing rhythm, not inappropriate to the spectacle. Marcel was deep in conversation with our neighbors.

At length he shrugged and laughed, but himself impressed, I thought. "They say it means another war," he said, and he repeated what he had been told by the old man of the family. In 1912 there had been an eruption, and there was another in 1938. The demons who lived in the volcano, knew what was to be and made report of it. They were generally reliable.

"And is there nothing to be done?"

Marcel inquired and reported, "Nothing."

"But are they not depressed and sad at such a prospect?"

"Pouf!" Marcel declined to investigate the subject. "They are never sad," he said.

The young man with the musical cigar box, came and sat down near us, intently plucking its melancholy notes. The children of the family on the other side, four or five of them, had been urging their mother to do something, pleading with her, but not whiningly or noisily. And now she was talking to them softly and they were still as mice, the smallest cuddled in her lap, and the others gathered at her knees, not to miss a word.

"What does she say?" I asked. And Marcel made inquiry.

"It is nothing," he informed me. "She is telling them a story."

"What kind of story?"

"What kind?" Marcel seemed doubtful but pursued the matter. And the story suffered interruption while there was prolonged discussion, from which not much was learned.

"Just a story," Marcel informed me wearily.

"A fairy story?" I suggested.

"Ah yes!" He exhibited relief. "Yes, that is it exactly."

"But what is it about?"

"About?" He shook his head. "But it is just a story—a story told to children."

"I understand that perfectly," I said a little testily. "But the subject of the story is what I want to know."

Marcel attacked the problem with a groan, and there was a barrage of question and reply, from which at last he made report: "She is telling them a story which concerns itself with God."

“The Christian God?”

“No, not the Christian one, but the God of the Ruanda.”

I dropped the subject, but I would have liked to know what she was saying.

The stars were twinkling in the sky, and some of the visitors were taking their departure. The little lad of ten or twelve, who had acted as our guide, was sitting watchfully near us, to be on hand when we should want him. And he was listening too, edging closer to the children. There was drama, I imagined, from the stifled exclamations which escaped the auditors; and there was humor too, whereat they giggled happily.

I would have given something to understand the story she was telling—



PERHAPS the story she told was one of these: folk tales of the Ruanda, for which I am indebted to Louis de Lacger's *Le Ruanda ancien*.

The Lost Paradise

In the beginning, humanity was domiciled in a celestial world—a Garden of Eden, created by *Imana* for his children. In this Paradise of Peace, Beauty, and Abundance there was Eternal Life, for Death had not gained entrance to it.

The Fall from Grace, which occasioned the banishment of Kigwa—the Adam of this legend—was the consequence of an indiscretion on the part of his mother, Nyirakigwa, who, under the influence of drink, revealed a secret favor granted to her by *Imana*. The unhappy circumstances are as follows—

Nyirakigwa would have been the happiest of women if she had not been sterile. At last she mustered courage to appeal to *Imana*, entreating him to accord her the blessing which Nature had denied. The Father of Mankind was moved by her petition and agreed to

satisfy it, but on a condition—that she would guard inviolate the secret process he employed to accomplish her desire. She readily gave her word. *Imana* then took in his hands a bit of potter's clay and fashioned from it the figure of a child, and moistened it with spittle from his tongue. And he gave it in her keeping, commanding that it be immersed in milk which must be always fresh. For nine months she must tend it; and at the end, if she had been faithful to her trust, the child would come to life.

Nyirakigwa obeyed instructions to the letter. And, as had been promised, the event transpired. Thus was Kigwa born, and at decent intervals a brother and a sister: the first of the *Batutsi*—or at least the first to fall from Grace and reach the nether world.

Unfortunately for everyone concerned, Nyirakigwa had a sister who was sterile like herself, and whose jealousy and envy threatened to consume her. She could not sleep or rest, or think of anything but Nyirakigwa's unaccountable fecundity. Incessantly she sought to learn the secret—pleading, wheedling, and reproaching. For a long time Nyirakigwa resisted all her efforts. But one day she prevailed on to take a drop too much, and her tongue was loosed. She told the secret. *Imana* was immediately informed and did not delay his vengeance.

Nyirakigwa's children, accompanied by their father, were returning from the chase, downcast and wondering, for they had not encountered any game in the forest on this day, and never before had such a thing occurred. Suddenly the floor of Paradise collapsed, the vault of the firmament gave way beneath their feet, and they were precipitated into space—falling from Heaven to the far-off earth beneath. Nyirakigwa was condemned to be a witness to this tragedy. With streaming eyes and broken heart she stood upon the brink to watch her loved ones vanish in the void.—The disaster was irreparable. The sin of a parent had been sternly visited upon a guiltless child. And the transgressor was a woman.

All this has a familiar ring, and is probably Hamitic in its origin.

Of Death

The victory of Death was also the fruit of disobedience. And again a woman was responsible—for loosing on humanity a mysterious and terrible affliction.

Death had existed always, but had never struck at any human being. Nevertheless, *Imana*, recognizing the monster as a dangerous and implacable enemy, determined to destroy him—to track him down at night and put an end to him. To assure that Death should find no refuge from pursuit, *Imana* gave orders to the people to go into their huts and seal the doors behind them—every aperture by which Death might gain entrance. At setting of the sun, when all had been prepared, *Imana* armed himself with bow and arrows and set out into the forest to seek and slay the vampire.

But alas! One old peasant woman was not content to stay within her hut. In the gray of dawn she got up from her bed and pushed aside the thatch which screened the door. And, when nothing happened, she ventured to go out; and she went into her orchard and began to cultivate it. She did not think that anyone would see her, concealed among the leaves. Of a sudden, the monster, fleeing for his life from the Celestial Archer, burst into the orchard, panting and exhausted, and threw himself before the frightened woman, entreating her to hide him from the Hunter. In return for her assistance Death promised to protect her from all harm—her and her descendants. The simple creature, unacquainted with duplicity, yielded to the monster's pleading. She hid Death at her breast, beneath her ragged garment.

Imana, disheartened and discouraged by mortal disobedience and stupidity, renounced his purpose and gave up the chase. And, since that day, every being conceived in the womb of woman, bears from birth the mark of Death.

Imana's Curse

Submission of *Babutu* serfs and *Batwa* slaves to their *Batutsi* masters has sanction of divine authority. The progenitors of the inferior races were guilty of acts of infidelity; the original *Mututsi* was faithful to his trust. The story goes—

Imana created three brothers: *Gatutsi*, *Gahutu*, and *Gatwa*. They were equal in his eyes, but he resolved to put them to a test, to determine which of the three was best qualified to be ruler of the others. With this end in view, one evening he entrusted to each a jug of milk, saying he would return next day to reclaim it. However, he was no sooner out of sight than the greedy *Gatwa* drained his jug,

almost at a gulp. As for Gahutu, he fell asleep with the jug between his knees and all the milk was spilled. But Gatutsi did not drink or fall asleep; and in the morning this faithful servitor was able to return his gage intact. Divine Justice was not far to seek: *Imana* pronounced a curse upon the glutton, and proclaimed Gatutsi the master of his brothers.

There need be little doubt of the origin of this tale.

Another version:

The Ruandian is under obligation to exercise his intuition, and to weigh in the scale of his conscience the most alluring and seductive propositions, even though the author of them be no less personage than *Imana*. Disobedience which results from virtuous decision, will not be punished, but, indeed, will be rewarded. An inhuman suggestion by the Lord of Hosts, or even a command, should not be taken seriously. Such a proposal is sure to be a trap, designed to detect the evil and unworthy. The virtuous man will be wise if he consults, and is guided by, the dictates of his conscience. As for example—

One at a time *Imana* summoned the three brothers to his presence, presenting to each a naked, newborn child. "Slay this infant," he commanded, "and I will reward you." Gatutsi disdainfully refused to lend himself to such an infamy. Gahutu bowed his head and turned away. But Gatwa the glutton, with the instincts of a hangman, drew his knife without a moment's hesitation and cut the infant's throat. "A curse upon you," cried *Imana*. "Execrable being, from this day forth you shall be no better than a dog in your brothers' eyes, destined to live forever on the crumbs brushed from their table."

Moral: Unprovoked cruelty to an innocent, defenseless being establishes the perpetrator in the category of the beasts, removing him beyond the pale of human society.

The Tomb of the Damned

The great pit which today contains Lake Kivu, was hollowed from the earth at *Imana's* command, to serve as a common grave for an entire population which had offended him. And again a secret was involved—

The region which contains the lake was originally a broad and

fertile plain, supporting a multitude of cattle. But these splendid herds consisted exclusively of cows, and so were threatened with extinction. The inhabitants were in despair. Among them was a noble of high rank, a vassal of the *Mwami*; and this man set out to seek *Imana*, to expose the situation which promised ruin to himself and all his neighbors, and implore celestial intervention. *Imana* received the noble affably and was disposed to be compliant. He would send a bull, he said, from his own pasture, but only to the herd of the petitioner, and on a condition—that this exceptional favor was not to be revealed.

The nobleman agreed. And that very night there came a bull from Heaven, into the *kraal* beside the hut, where the cows were waiting. And the cows conceived and were in proper time delivered of their calves.

The neighbors were distraught with envy. They could find no clue to the miraculous affair, for the bull came only in the night, and was never to be seen. Nor could they surprise the secret from the fortunate lord who was faithful to his promise and would breathe no word of it. But one unlucky day when he was absent from his home, attending on the *Mwami*, one of them contrived to insinuate himself into the favor of the mistress of the house, and to pass the night with her.

Suddenly there was a sound of trampling in the *kraal*. The vigilant intruder tore himself out of the arms of the unfaithful woman and ran out of the hut to see what might be seen, suspecting perhaps that a leopard had crept in among the cattle. There was no leopard. But in the moonlight he caught a fleeting glimpse of a majestic bull. It was enough: the secret was revealed.

With a dreadful crunching sound the solid earth caved in, shattered like an egg, revealing a terrifying chasm which engulfed the meadowlands for miles around. People, huts, and cattle—all were annihilated in the twinkling of an eye, and swallowed by the tomb. And the mountain torrents which had watered the green pastures, poured their streams into the grave and filled it to the brim.

When the noble lord returned from his visit to the Court, there was nothing to be seen except the placid surface of a lake, in the midst of which were some scattered verdant islands—mute reminders of *Imana's* vengeance. The bereaved man understood at once, and

bowed his head in humble resignation. Some days later the *Mwami* learned of the disaster and his heart was touched; he sent as a gift to his unlucky vassal, a splendid herd of cattle to replace what had been lost. Presumably the nobleman lived happily ever after.

Compassion of Imana

Imana inclines by nature to pardon and indulgence. He is by no means insensible to the supplications of the wretched, even though the sufferers have justly earned their punishment. When an ordeal has been patiently endured for a reasonable period of time, the sinner may be restored to Grace, recompensed and comforted. Following is account of such a dispensation—

When Kigwa, with his brother and sister, was banished from Heaven and cast down to the earth, in expiation for his mother's sin, it seemed that all three of them must perish, for they were destitute and helpless in an unfamiliar, hostile world. At the expiration of ten days of bitter suffering from sickness, cold, and hunger, believing themselves to be at the point of death, they addressed a petition to their Heavenly Father. "*Imana* of the Ruanda," they beseeched, "take pity on us. Forgive our sins." No sooner had this prayer been uttered than a streak of lightning darted from a cloud and struck the earth beside them, kindling fire in the grass. Thus Fire made its entrance in the world, to bring comfort to the shivering bodies of the damned, and to serve mankind in a multitude of ways. And Nyirakigwa's children were grateful for the fire and carefully tended it that it might not be extinguished.

But this was no more than a beginning, for a few days later the heavens opened and poured forth upon the earth a rain of seeds: maize, beans, peas, sorghum, bananas, and a great variety of fruits. And again, another day, the curtain parted, and there fell from on high the implements to cultivate the soil. "*Imana* has sent them," said the exiles, and they took the tools and bravely set to work.

There were already in the country at this time two families of *Bakutu*, and a third of *Batwa* in the forest. Their forbears had been guilty of misconduct and had been cast forth from Heaven at some remoter time. They had never asked for pardon, and *Imana* had left them to get on as best they could, which wasn't very well. They dwelt in utter poverty and wretchedness, and were barely able to

maintain existence. But the recentcomers who had been forgiven, were generous with their blessings; and the *Batwa* and *Babutu* families shared in their abundance.

Imana was apparently impressed by the industry and character of Nyirakigwa's children, and concerned about their future—fearful lest his favored colonists should not survive and multiply. At all events, his indulgence was extended to the point of dispatching an Angel—a *Mutabazi*—on the wings of thunder, to pay a visit to them. "Have no fear," the Angel told them. "I have come from *Imana* to be your mediator. Ask for what you will. If your wish is good, *Imana* will accord it." The young people took counsel among themselves and requested permission to communicate with their grieving mother in her home above the stars. And this was granted them. And they asked for a ram, a buck, and a bull, with accompanying females of the species. This, too, was granted; and the animals descended from the clouds. Finally, *Imana* sent a message by the Angel, announcing a special dispensation: the Law forbidding incestuous relationships was to be temporarily suspended. "Brother and sister, male and female, multiply yourselves," he ordered. And to be specific, "Kigwa and your sister, unite yourselves and multiply."

Thus, by the Grace of *Imana*, under leadership and guidance of Nyirakigwa's children, forbears of the *Batutsi* in the nether world, Mankind was at last restored to favor and might set about the business of peopling the earth.

The angelic *Mutabazi*, vicar of *Imana*, lingered on the scene to maintain celestial contact with suffering humanity. With evil men the Angel was not popular, and some of them waylaid him and nailed him to a tree with iron spikes. But *Imana* came swiftly to his rescue and drew the spikes away and healed the grievous wounds; and then he sent a tempest from the sky, on the wings of which the Angel was transported back to Heaven.

Later, when the wicked perpetrators of this outrage, or the descendants of them, had established a kingdom on the earth, the Angel came again—this time to make his residence in the body of one of the ruling *Mwami's* sons, who thereby became an Angel in his own right, and lieutenant of *Imana*. Whence, Royalty on earth is indissolubly related to Royalty in Heaven.

Imana Rewards Obedience

Imana, though he is quick to punish the transgressor, is equally alert to a virtuous act, particularly one of a heroic nature, as witness the following intriguing little tale, which is captioned in the Banyarwanda language, "*Abakobwa Bajya Kwihangisha Amenyoy*"—and might be freely translated, "Young Girl in Search of Teeth"—

There was once upon a time an unhappy little girl who had a wicked stepmother. Like Cinderella, she was always left at home to sit beside the hearth—presumably because she had very ugly teeth which no one cared to look at. At all events, her teeth were the subject of great sorrow to the lonely and neglected child. And one day, in despair, she appealed to *Imana* to provide her with a new set, like those he had accorded to other little girls of her acquaintance. *Imana* heard her amiably, and cheerfully consented to indulge her modest wish; but, as usual, he must have his pound of flesh—nothing for nothing, seemed to be the rule. The teeth would be supplied, a whole new outfit of them, faultlessly constructed and as white as newborn ivory; but in return there was a penance to observe: she must never smile again upon any provocation, never yield to the impulse to display the precious teeth. A harsh bargain on the face of it. But probably *Imana* had in mind to protect the child against the sin of Vanity; and then went on to other things and forgot the whole affair.

However this may be, the heroic little girl was faithful to her contract. She could not be induced to smile. In the games of her playmates she wore a doleful look and was soon left to herself. Her father's exhortations and her stepmother's abuse were equally without avail to make her break her promise. In time she grew to womanhood and married a good husband, but still she could not smile nor make any explanation; and her man was filled with grief, not knowing why his wife seemed always sad.

A child was born to her, and afterwards another—pretty infants whom she dearly loved, but they pined away and died because their mother never smiled at them. And then a third was born, on whom she lavished her affection. But soon she saw the sprightly, laughing baby grow weaker day by day, and knew it, too, must presently escape out of her arms, doomed to die for the same reason that had robbed her of the others.

At last, in despair, the unfortunate woman with the fatal teeth was constrained to implore her cruel, or careless, benefactor, in these poignant words, "Alas! *Imana*, I have never disobeyed you. Have pity on me now, that I may not lose this little one."—*Imana's* heart was touched. "Come here," he bade her. "Look, here are your children—the little ones that died. I give them back their lives and return them to your arms. Smile upon them now. Go and smile upon your husband. Smile at everyone. Your wicked stepmother shall be burned up in her hut, and all her worldly goods I give to you." In another instant all had been accomplished. Then *Imana* admonished his obedient daughter and her loyal husband, "Bring forth more children and multiply yourselves." And when he had spoken, he disappeared from sight.

Most of these stories are obviously of *Batutsi* origin, designed to rationalize and sanction the political superiority of the ruling class. And some, at least, are strangely reminiscent of religious myths with which we are familiar, a fact which tends to confirm their Hamitic sources.

Comparisons are odious, but not always easy to ignore. Thus, *Imana* seems to me an improvement on Jehovah. And though the *Batutsi* added myths out of their past, to bolster their supremacy, the character of God, the central figure in them, was *Babutu* in its origin, and throughly established long before the Hamites came into the Ruanda. Quite probably the nature of the country—its beauty, softness, and abundance—suggested the attributes its Deity should have. At all events, the God of the Ruanda, in contrast with Jehovah, seems a much more sympathetic figure. *Imana* is essentially human: He is lenient with the common human frailties, easily moved to wrath and as easily to compassion; He is both stern and gentle, forgetful and regretful, not always able to foresee the future nor even consequences of His own behavior; Himself not free from error, which, when called to His attention, He will readily admit and take steps to rectify.

At all events, it seems to me that one would be hard pressed to improve upon these folk tales—to provide a better guide to character and conduct.

VI

IN BUTEMBO I was ill—

But that was later. We had left the lovely land of the Ruanda, traveling north toward the Equator, making wide detour to pass by the volcano, following country lanes through a thickly peopled region whose residents seemed scarcely yet acquainted with such things as motorcars, for they stood to gape at us or ran with startled cries to herd the frightened children from our path—lanes which for long stretches were in twilight, like narrow, low-roofed tunnels, by reason of banana trees which lined them, whose leaves met in a canopy.

We had wound a devious course through the forest of the lava plain, amid the burned-out cones and empty craters. Though not all of them were empty, for on the rich earth floors of some, accessible through openings in the broken walls, were farms and Native huts, and even villages. At length we had come back into the highway, descending from the mountains into a rolling plain, not green and lush as it had been where we came from, but dry and rather barren, without much bush or timber—a country reminiscent of our central Middle West on a hot summer day.

Near the town of Rutshuru we overtook a Native with a leopard in his arms—a startling sight. But it turned out that the beast was dead, though quite recently deceased, for it was still limp and warm. The man who bore it, draped across his shoulder, was a soldier, in military shirt and shorts, with a long knife at his belt. He was hot and tired, and in no mood to stand upon the road and discuss the event with total strangers; the leopard was almost as big as he was, and toting it about was not a joking matter. He had caught it with a wired trap about its foot, he said, and bashed its head in with a club, and was taking it to town to collect a bounty on it. He stood

with scowling face while I took a picture; and then, as if he'd reached the limit of endurance, he cast his burden on the ground and wiped the dripping sweat out of his eyes.

"We will offer him a lift," I said.

"And the leopard?" gasped Marcel.

"And the leopard," I replied.

When this had been translated the soldier beamed with gratified surprise. And at my suggestion of further photographs, he cheerfully arranged the leopard on the ground, in lifelike attitude, posing on his knees beside it with his drawn knife, assuming a ferocious mien, suggesting mortal combat. And when the shutter snapped, he grinned appreciation of his act, chuckling with amusement.



For a change I had been riding in the back seat of the car, and they put the leopard in with me, stretched out upon the cushion, with its battered head upon my knees. It was a female, and its tawny fur was soft as silk. There was no blood upon it nor sign of any wound; it looked to be asleep. And it was beautiful.

Thus I rode into Rutshuru, like a triumphant hunter returning from safari. But I was glad the leopard did not owe its death to me.

In the afternoon we came upon an elephant. Marcel exclaimed and stopped the car, pointing through the window. And there, not a hundred yards away, in the shadow of a tree, was a majestic beast feeding on the grass which reached above its knees. I caught my

breath and crept out of the car with leveled camera, and snapped a dozen pictures in excited haste. The elephant went on about his leisured business and took no notice of me.

Farther on we saw another, and then a group of several. In fact we were approaching the Albert National Park, an extensive game preserve, two hundred miles in length by twenty-five in width, which extends below the southern end and along the western border of Lake Edward: an immense, quite level plain, tilting gently toward the lake—the floor of a valley, with lofty, timbered mountains rising steeply close at hand upon its western side; and remote ones in the east, almost at vision's end. It is not, like the Kagera Park, a rolling land of softly contoured hills; not pastoral but dramatic, a more suitable environment for elephants and hippos, though it too has antelope and other creatures, but not any zebra. And its director, Major Hubert, a mighty hunter in his day, who, if rumor can be credited, still takes desperate chances with infuriated animals—well, he was not in the least like René Verhulst.

In further contrast, the Albert Park is well prepared for visitors, at its *Camp de la Rwindi*, with a small commissary serving palatable meals, and with housing for its guests. On a rise of ground from which one has uninterrupted view upon the valley, were two rows of white-walled huts, with conical thatched roofs, half a dozen of them, cylindrical and spacious, decently equipped and immaculately clean. In smaller huts near by were showers and latrines.

In the commissary, which also served as the official bureau, were registered and paid a modest fee, including something extra for my camera. Major Hubert was absent for the day, we were informed, but would return at evening. In the meanwhile, if we wished to look about, a Native boy would come to guide us. It would be best toward sunset, our informant added, handing us a card of printed regulations.

I went back to my hut and sat in the doorway where there was a gentle breeze, watching Marcel struggle with a tire which was flat and worn to the fabric—the only spare we had, which was still usable. We had come down to about three thousand feet, and it was hot, but dry and not uncomfortable. There was nothing in the landscape to suggest we were close to the Equator, no semblance of the tropical. It might have been Montana—a vast expanse of grassy

prairie land, still freshly green, for the rains were not yet over, dotted with clumps of timber, sloping gently downward as far as one could see, till it melted in the soft, blue haze that hung above the lake.

The day was waning when our guide appeared, and we set out again for a drive of thirty miles on a road which was no more than a rutted wagon track, meandering here and there beneath the ragged flank of the towering western mountains—a timbered section where the grass grew thick and high. There were quantities of grazing antelope, numerous varieties of which I made no note. But Marcel was in a flutter of delight, exclaiming over this one and another, insisting they were rarely to be seen. They raised their heads to sniff as we passed by. And there were buffalo, more suspicious and aloof. As for elephants, the place was littered with them—ruminating singly in solitary grandeur, in pairs and family groups. There were hundreds of them, and their wives and children—fumbling little calves as big as oxen, obedient to the guidance of their elders, sometimes reprimanded with an affectionate slap of a parental trunk. And now and then there was a minor row, caused by the encroachment of a stranger or unwelcome relative. They would lift their trunks in threatening gestures and trumpet angrily. But they paid no attention to the car. I found it hard to think of them as dangerous. I could not divest myself of the idea that they were wise and friendly beings, with whom one could sit down and rationally discuss a point of view. I felt convinced it would be safe to go and walk among them, and tell them “gee” and “haw,” or whatever they are told in circuses, or even kick them in the shins, if such seemed indicated. But our guide assured me this was a mistake.

Anyway, I had no wish to try. I was hot and tired, at the end of an exhausting day. And I was bored with elephants. I leaned back in the car and closed my eyes, reflecting on some things I'd heard and read—

Pygmies hunt and slay the elephant—the smallest of men and the biggest of the beasts—not of course in the Albert National Park where hunting is forbidden, but where pygmies live, in the uncharted forest; and not with bows and arrows, which would mean no more than pin pricks to the quarry's hide. But they kill the elephant, these misshapen little savages; and here is how they do

it—or so I have been credibly informed: They separate the victim of their choice from the herd or family group, and by shrewd devices confuse and frighten him; and when he has been rendered sufficiently distracted, they circle him and charge, a score or fifty or a hundred of them—demonic Lilliputians in combat with a giant. With dreadful howling, they run in beneath his belly and deftly cut the tendons in his legs—hamstring him, so to speak—whereat he can no longer run away, but falls upon his knees and then upon his side. And now they swarm upon him, and quickly disembowel him, plunging their arms among the smoking entrails while the poor beast still lives, clutching for favored morsels, fighting among themselves for possession of the titbits. If two or three, or more of them, be trampled in the melee, there is no cause for grief or for regret; the game was worth the cost. And the survivors camp upon the spot, contesting their victory with the vultures; nor will they leave until their bloated bellies are skin-tight and the bones have been picked clean. Thus the most elementary species of the human race destroys the most majestic of the beasts: a dismal commentary on the process of survival.

When we returned to camp some other cars had come, including one we called the Caravan—a five-ton truck on which there was a house, a constricted living room with sleeping bunks, a kitchen, everything; and a trailer in addition, which served the purpose of a photographic darkroom; the unique possession of a rugged individualist named Bosch—an erstwhile big game hunter from the Kenya country, of the sort rich tourists hire to superintend safari, but reformed in middle age to pursue the vocation of itinerant photographer. I had met him in Kisenyi, and taken coffee with him in the Caravan—with him and his young attractive wife, and two small well-mannered children who seemed perfectly adapted to their mode of life. The woman wrote—books for children, she explained, to fit her husband's pictures, or it may have been vice versa. She showed me a volume she had published, which looked to be a first-rate piece of work. They'd been traveling in this fashion for two years, throughout the eastern coastal country, and they planned to go on indefinitely, until they had covered all of Africa. This was their first experience of the Congo, and I judged from what they said, they were not much pleased with it. They were British to the core,

and not to be corrupted by foreign institutions which they viewed with a dim eye.

"Too much red tape," Bosch said, as we sat on the terrace outside the commissary after supper. He did not want to be burdened with a guide, but to wander where he chose. "Wild animals—" He shrugged. "I have spent my life with them." He was determined to pursue them with his camera, with his wife and children, in the Caravan, alone and unrestricted. "Regulations! Nonsense!" He frowned and shook his head. "One doesn't come to Africa to be told what one must do."

A full moon climbed the sky, drenching the silent world in luminous pale mist, painting a silvery carpet upon the endless distance, till it was as smoothly empty as the sea—so still the human voice was a discord in the night, and the visitors spoke in whispers or were silent—a stillness broken by the hooting of an owl, or the cry of some wild creature far away. It was vast and beautiful and lonely—almost painfully so.

Major Hubert's car drove up, and he came to greet us—a small, dynamic man with a military manner, agile and alert, almost brusque at first. He made short shrift about the Caravan: there would be no exception to the rules; the Caravan would march with the other visiting cars or not at all. He regarded it with a grimly dubious eye, looming in the moonlight like a railway truck; and he seemed unimpressed with the account Bosch gave him of his reputation as a hunter. Thirty-six years, the Major answered drily, he had spent in Africa, and twelve of them right here, in the Albert Park. And that was that.

He greeted me more affably, inquiring for my comfort. "And what have you seen?" he asked.

"Elephants," I said.

"Ah, good!" He nodded cheerfully. "In the morning we will go in search of hippos.—At break of day," he added.

And at break of day we went—three cars of visitors, with the Major in our leading Chevrolet, and the lumbering Caravan at the tail of the procession, without its darkroom trailer, which was left behind. Bosch had not been ready at the moment of departure—the children hadn't finished their porridge, he explained. The Major had looked very black about it; and now en route he kept glancing

back to see if the Caravan were following. It was no place for a five-ton bungalow, bumping along a wheel track through a prairie, and even the animals seemed doubtful of its character. They watched it with suspicious eyes, or sniffed and ran away.

“Chut, chut!” the Major said, complaining to himself in French, something of an uncomplimentary nature about Kenya and the British.

We took a different road, descending toward the lake across a grassy plain with little timber on it. The beasts were feeding in the graying dawn—antelope and buffalo, and occasional elephants; but my interest in them was declining. I was stiff from the excursion of the previous day, and bored with animals.

At last, as the sun was rising above the distant mountains, we came to a river, hidden from sight by the tropic vegetation which grew along its bank. And here the Major called a halt, motioning the tourists to alight, explaining while we waited for the Caravan which had fallen far behind: We were to follow him and to remain together. Hippos, he cautioned, were not as docile or clumsy as they looked. For example: not long since, driving in his car, he had followed a pair of hippos on the road. They had loped along in front of him for quite a distance, without apparent effort, at a speed approximating thirty miles an hour. With wild animals one should not take things too much for granted, nor assume that these creatures dwelling peacefully in the Park had accepted a domesticated status. They were as wild as they had ever been. To be sure, they were no longer shy of motorcars, with which they had become familiar, regarding them as fragments of the landscape; but they were not less dangerous for that reason.

Bosch had now arrived upon the scene, and the Major fixed him with his eye. An elephant, when frightened or enraged, he said, had been known to attack a motorcar and reduce it to a pile of junk, and might conceivably—he stared at Bosch who stared straight back at him—might conceivably do likewise to a house upon a truck. As for hippos, he added, well, one should not take chances.

He led us for a dozen yards through a tangle of exotic trees and plants to the edge of a lovely crystal stream walled with red mud banks. And there among the boulders in the shallow water, were several small dark islands, which at first glance looked like sand bars

—the backs of wallowing hippos, with tick birds perched upon them: a score of them perhaps, when one really looked to see, in pairs and families—papa and mama hippos and their children, washed over by the pretty stream, raising their ugly heads to look around with little piglike eyes, gulping cavernously; or lying passively with their nostrils at the surface; or one would stir and flounder a few yards to a more favored spot, making grunting sounds between a sigh and groan, of anguish or content—impossible to know.

In obedience to the Major's gestures, we scrambled silently to better vantage points, snapping pictures as we went. Bosch was hung with cameras, like a Christmas tree; and he was determined on his own technique. But the Major frowned and shook his head—

"We will try another place," he said, "where perhaps we'll find more action."

And so we re-embarked and drove again, along the stream, until the Major found what he was seeking—another group of hippos reposing in the river, no more active than the ones we had already seen, and which was close to zero in the field of action.

"If—" Bosch said to me as we were climbing out "—if I were here alone, I'd stir these brutes about and get some pictures. There's too bloody much red tape—"

And just then it happened. The Major called a warning, holding up his hand, motioning us around a barren patch of sand. Two big hippos were ambling down the slope, directly toward it, not fifty feet away. They were headed for the river and had come over a rise that edged the clearing before they were aware of us; and now they paused uncertainly, taken by surprise—looking like a pair of startled pigs, neither furious nor dangerous. Still, remembering the Major's admonitions and the reported hippo speed of thirty miles an hour, I hurriedly retreated. But Bosch stood like a rock, amid his snapping shutters, and even ventured to advance upon the beasts. They stood quite still and waited, in swinish indecision; and then they backed a step, or two or three, till they suddenly decided to wheel and run away.

"You see!" Bosch grinned, winding up his camera. "Of course," he added, "if they had young with them, and you got them in a corner—well, then they might attack."

The scattered visitors reassembled.

“We will now go to the lake,” the Major said with dignity.

But Bosch expostulated. He had no interest in the lake. He was not a tourist who had come to see the sights. He insisted he be left beside the stream, to continue with the hippos. They talked apart, but at last the Major shrugged and walked away, with an air of suffocating resignation. And so we parted from the Caravan.

In the Chevrolet the Major summed it up: there was nothing to be done about the British who knew, or thought they knew, more than anybody else. He smiled and shrugged again, his good humor re-established.

Lake Edward cannot compare with Kivu. Still, it was a lovely sight in the early morning: pale blue and smooth as glass, bordered at its sides with soft blue mountains, swimming in the haze that rises with the dawn. There were hippos in the shallow edge of it, among the water reeds; and on the swampy shore were hundreds of big birds, with long stiff legs and sharply pointed beaks—composite caricatures of pelicans and storks. They would walk away from you with an ungainly step and a disdainful air, and clumsily take to wing when you had come too close.

At the end of the road there was a fishery: Native huts beneath the trees, and a big packing shed, beyond which on the lake shore were long rows of bamboo racks, on which the fish were spread to dry—thousands of them laid out in the sun. Boys strolled back and forth between the tables, to turn them over at the proper time, and carry them away when they were done—when they had shrunk to attenuated fragments of desiccated flesh. The stench was horrible.

We set out to return by another road which was more direct, but otherwise not different from the one by which we'd come: same scenery and terrain; more antelope and elephants. We passed one very large one, standing all alone near by the road, not doing anything, just standing there, looking somehow old and sad. As we approached he turned his head and seemed to scrutinize us. The Major leaned from the window of the car, to wave his hand and call a greeting.

“I know him well,” he said. “We are old friends.”

“Why does he stand alone?”

“Ah, that!” The Major pondered. “He is always by himself. I think he's very old. Perhaps he has no family any more.”

“Do you believe the fable that elephants do not forget?”

“Hum—” He turned the question in his mind. “I do not know,” he said. “But I would never trust one to whom I’d done an injury.”

Breakfast was waiting for us; it was not yet midmorning, though it felt like the next day. Afterwards the Major took me to his home, a comfortable house close to the camp, to show me photographs of animals he’d killed: lions and buffalo, and even elephants. And there was one of a gorilla, with a strangely wistful human face, propped against a wall, with its arms outspread—nine feet across from hand to hand, he told me.

“Today,” he said, “on your journey to Butembo, you will pass through the country where they live—on a mountain near Lubero.” And he added it was there my distinguished fellow countryman, Carl Ackley, had come to study the behavior of the creatures. There he had died, in pursuit of his adventure, and been buried in a grave upon the mountainside, in the land of the gorilla.

I said I’d like to see one.

“Would you?” The Major smiled. “You would have to climb high up, on foot, through forest jungle thick—a steep, wild country. And you might wander there for days or weeks or months, without sight of a gorilla, for there are not many left and they are hard to find.”

I shrugged politely, as if to say such ventures were quite common to my life. The breakfast coffee had revived me; and, too, the pains and hazards of the gorilla country might be exaggerated. If my countryman, Carl Ackley, could discover the gorilla, why not I? “Well,” I said, “I might be lucky and just stumble onto one.”

The Major laughed. It was plain to see he didn’t think so.

And he was right about it, for when some hours later we came near to Lubero, I would not have stepped out of the car to look at a gorilla.

We had climbed the western mountains by a narrow zigzag road which shuttled back and forth between its hairpin turns, whose steep ascent the groaning car could barely undertake—exposed to scenery unsurpassed in grandeur by any I have known: the valley of the Park, the lake and distant mountains, seen from jutting points where the mountain flank dropped sheer a thousand feet, or glimpsed

through vistas in the forest, the vastness of the panorama shrinking as we climbed, till the lake looked like a duckpond.

At last we crossed a spur that hid the view from sight. But still we climbed. The forest thinned and dwindled into scrub; and then there was no more of it: just rocks and boulders in the yellow grass. And it was cold up here, eight thousand feet above the level of the sea—I was shivering in my overcoat. The day was fine, with billowy white clouds drifting lazily high above us in the deep blue sky, but an icy wind whipped through the barren waste. Somewhere in this wilderness we passed a European, riding in a litter, a canvas hammock laced on poles, with half a dozen Native bearers—coming whence or going where? We didn't pause to ask. Once we stopped at a wind-beaten house which had cultivated ground around it, to fill the boiling Chevrolet with water. A European woman was alone upon the premises. She said it was not windier than usual, that one got used to it. There were scarcely any Native huts along the way, and such as there were looked ready to succumb.

My head began to ache, throbbing in the temples, jabbing knives into my eyes. I took some aspirin and fell into a troubled doze. Of the descent I have not much recollection. But again we had returned into the forest, and it was warm, then hot. At last, at the end of interminable time, of hideous jolt and jerk, the car came to a stop. Marcel was talking through the window to a Native, and then he turned to me, leaning wearily on the steering wheel, looking at me anxiously with badly bloodshot eyes, his face a mask of dust—

“It is here,” he said.

“Here? What?”

“Where the gorillas live.” He was pointing through the window.

I mustered strength to look—at a formidable mountain which towered from the road. “So what?” I muttered.

“We are near Lubero,” he explained. “It is there on that mountain the gorillas live. You wanted me to tell you.”

“Drive on,” I said.

“But the gorillas?”

“To hell with the gorillas!”

Marcel drove on without a word of protest, with an expression on his face that signified relief.

At Lubero—a village of no consequence—he wakened me again.

And we got out at the hotel for a bite to eat: sandwiches and beer, and some delicious strawberries which the proprietor highly recommended. They'd been grown in his garden, he assured me, under his personal observation, and were quite safe to eat. But afterwards I was not sure of it.

We continued toward Butembo, through pretty, rolling country, beneath the ragged flanks of the Mountains of the Moon, not unlike the Ruanda, though it was not volcanic, or not recently at least: thickly peopled and intensely cultivated, its graceful hillsides scored with geometric ditches to protect them from erosion; and the road again alive with trudging Natives.

But there were among them no *Batutsi* strollers, no aristocratic figures robed in white; and no *Bahutu* either, when one looked closely at them, for these people were of another breed. The women did not bear their burdens on their heads, but upon their backs, with slings around their foreheads; and the clothing of the men was often nothing more than a scrap of apron tied around the loins. They appeared more primitive than the *Bahutu*, without the mixture in their blood, or the fine example, of the Hamitic lords of the Ruanda.

I regarded them without enthusiasm. In addition to my aching head, I was suffering from nostalgia.



IN BUTEMBO, as I have already mentioned, I was ill. It was not much of a town: some tawdry shops of Greek and Jewish traders, spread haphazardly along a stretch of dusty road; the administrative buildings of a near-by mine, clustered on a hill behind them; a station of the Vici-Congo, a transportation company, with garage and workshop for its trucks and busses; plantations in the neighborhood, with modest villas of their European owners to be seen upon the hillsides, in one of which lived a boy named Philip Dumont, an acquaintance of Marcel's, who spoke English

readily, whose father was a planter, growing quinine—a likable young man.

The hotel, on a spur of hill that overlooked the town, was physically quite charming, and without apparent reason for existence. It had been designed, I learned, by Mlle. de Galberg—that temperamental artist who built, and was at present operating, the Bugoyi Guest House at Kisenyi. She had done this one at Butembo first, before her creative gift completely ran away with her. At Butembo the bungalows were neither round nor dark, but well-designed brick houses roofed with thatch, with two or more rooms each, comfortably furnished, with proper plumbing and electric light—two rows of them which fronted on a landscaped parkway, at the head of which, facing toward the mountains and comprehending an expansive view, was an attractive building which contained the lounge and dining room. At the side there was a tennis court; and, if I'm not mistaken, a swimming pool as well. Altogether, such a hostelry as one might come upon in the United States, and recognize as a first-rate "Motel."

Each bungalow was a sanitary unit, dependent for its functioning on quite a bit of boy-power. The hot water system was ingenious. It consisted of a two hundred-gallon oil drum, elevated on a brick foundation outside the bungalow, above an oven in which the house-boy built a fire in the morning and again at evening, providing water of varying temperature, from boiling hot to tepid. The reservoir which flushed the toilet, also required boy-power. It must be filled by hand each time the chain was pulled—a situation which occasioned me embarrassment, for I pulled it so often I could scarcely meet the eye of the boy who waited on me.

Why this hostelry existed in Butembo, I was never able to conjecture. There were few guests: occasional motorists who stopped to spend the night and hurried off at dawn; and one evening a chartered bus of Vici-Congo, packed with schoolboys from ten to sixteen years, in the charge of a young priest—off for their Easter holidays from their school at Costermansville, to be dropped en route within reach of waiting parents. They had come in a single day, by boat the length of Kivu, then in their jolting lorry, through Kisenyi and the Albert Park, across the mountains of the Ruwenzori, past the home of the gorilla; and they seemed none the worse for it.

They were playful, chattering youngsters, like schoolboys anywhere; and they ate their pork with relish, beneath the watchful eye of their attending guardian. At daybreak they were off again, with appropriate sound effects.

The owner of the inn was a young Belgian, with an unhappy eye—a lean and hungry look, suggesting Cassius. I felt he knew no more than I why it and he should be here in Butembo. On the evening I arrived, at a moment when I thought a drop of Scotch might save my life, and the boy behind the bar seemed not to understand me, I had ventured to go behind the counter to see what I could find to serve my need. The proprietor had come upon me looking through his stock, and had exhibited displeasure. He said ungraciously there was no Scotch, but only the brandy of the country—a raw, unpalatable beverage. Later on, he thawed a little, but he seemed to take no joy in his business or surroundings. Like many others of the colonial people, in isolated regions, engaged in individual undertakings, he appeared to have succumbed to a sort of apathy—to have given up the fight to make things work.

The food was bad, with pork at every meal—and nothing to be had that seemed remotely suited to my state of health. And anyway, I had no appetite. I was definitely ill—not seriously so, but most disagreeably. And in this Godforsaken place, at the end of everything, I had no notion what to do about it. There was a dispensary in the town, in connection with the mine; but the European doctor was absent in the bush. He might return tomorrow, or the next day, or the next—so Marcel ascertained. There was of course a medical assistant whom I could consult if things got any worse. But I postponed it.

In the daytime I dragged myself around, within quick reach of the conveniences. And in the evening, when Marcel had gone to bed, I would sit late upon the flagstoned terrace outside my bungalow, to watch the waning moon come creeping from the mountains and climb its way across the empty sky. The nights were soft as velvet—soft and vast and lonely.

One evening Philip Dumont came to dine with us—on pork as usual. Both he and Marcel were concerned about me, suggesting this and that, and seeking to divert me. But Philip was more successful at it, because we spoke in English.

He told me something of his life: he had been in the army, I believe, and had spent some time in England, but he preferred the Congo. His father's occupation as a planter required frequent trips to Stanleyville, the regional metropolis, several hundred miles away. He could make it in a loaded truck, driving day and night, in thirty to forty hours, dependent on the condition of the road, the weather, and his luck. Most of the trip was through dense forest and hot country. Still, it was nothing much, he said. He was a stalwart, handsome boy, with a happy-go-lucky disposition.

He had in mind an added business venture: the conduct of safari for visiting tourists—preferably Americans. Butembo was ideally situated, he explained, with a healthy, pleasant climate at its elevation of five thousand feet, and with easy access to rich hunting grounds. With proper exploitation there was no reason why it should not rival Kenya. He had some printed cards, in the nature of a prospectus, of which he gave me several to distribute to my friends when I should come home again. But I said I had no friends in the "hunting" category, or none at least in the exalted class addicted to safari.

In answer to my inquiries he told me: The Natives in this tribal section—about 200,000 of them—were a primitive and backward lot, though above the level of the pygmies who adjoined them on the north. Agricultural labor was paid three francs a day—roughly, seven cents. They were not bad workers if you watched them, under constant observation. But the moment you were out of sight they'd take advantage of it. There were some exceptions, but not many. And there were some with skills, who were much better paid: a good lorry driver, for example, might earn as much as twenty dollars a month.

He spoke of a Mission near Butembo—a Protestant Mission, American in fact. Recently there had been a tragedy: three of the missionaries, one of them a woman, had taken off in a small plane—a Piper Cub sent to them from the States, which they'd not long since received. They had crashed almost immediately, and all three of them were killed.

"How did it happen?"

Nobody knew. There was talk the plane had stood out in the rain, and water might have leaked into the petrol, through a plug left open or not tightly closed.

“Where were they going?”

Philip didn't know.

“Why did they need a plane in which to go about?”

“Ah, that!” He shrugged and spread his hands, with a twinkle in his eye. Perhaps it was a gift from a rich philanthropist—a foolish gift, he thought, since in any case a single-motored plane was not suited to the country, where for a hundred miles there might not be a clearing big enough to set it down.

But the tragedy was not what he had set out to tell me. The Mission maintained a school for mulatto girls—

“Mulatto girls?” I sat straighter in my chair.

Yes, mulatto girls, thirty or more in number. And there had been something in the nature of a scandal. Some of the fathers who had placed their daughters there and were paying for their keep and education, had made complaint of the conditions, alleging the girls were not cared for properly, nor being instructed as they should be. Complaint had been made to the Government, he thought.

“Where is this Mission?”

“On the road by which you came—behind a big brick church, not far outside the town.”

And I remembered now—the big brick church, close by the road, on the right-hand side; and across the way from it, on barren ground, a particularly wretched Native village, a big one of crowded dilapidated huts, alive with people, half naked in their rags. It stood above the road, on a bluff of hard-baked mud, a perfect symbol of poverty and ignorance; and, as we passed by, the bank was thick with naked children, spindle-legged and potbellied, undernourished and diseased.—Yes, I remembered it—perhaps because it struck me at the time as the most sordid village I had seen. And across the road from it, the big brick church, with the buildings of the Mission in a pretty grove of trees on the hillside at its back—where the children of the village went to school, if they went to school at all—behind the church, of which no doubt their elders were communicants, if communicants of anything.

“Good!” I said. “Tomorrow, if I'm able, we will go and pay a visit to this Mission.”

Philip and Marcel exchanged a glance—as if they'd planned between them to rouse me from my lethargy.



BY WAY of preface to the mulatto problem—

In the Union of South Africa there are many of these people who are neither black nor white, and who constitute a definite social class, recognized as such by both the Europeans and the Natives. They are known as *Colored*. In the region of the Cape where they are particularly numerous, they have certain rights and privileges which Natives do not share: in certain districts, for example, they may own the land on which they live, though it is forbidden to the Native. And they have preferred position in an economic sense: house servants and artisans are recruited from their ranks. A few of them may even attain to modest wealth.

They have their own dispensaries and schools, to which no Natives are admitted; their churches, clubs, and residential areas—wheels within wheels of the complex racial structure. They do not intermarry or associate with Natives whom they regard as socially inferior. And the Natives, in their way, look down on them, as upstart bastards. Their position is not enviable. They may be thankful that they are not black, but they do not cease to grieve because they are not white. They cannot go forward nor retreat, but must remain an island in a divided sea, threatened by a tempest of contending forces which are alien to them, which they cannot join nor placate. Yet still, there are enough of them to constitute a social class, and to command attention. And there is solidarity among them: they are members of something in their own peculiar right.

In the Congo there is nothing comparable—

There are not enough mulattos in the country to constitute a group and attain to special status. I was told there are some 30,000 of them, which, if it be true, is a negligible fraction of the Native population—a ratio of 1 colored to about 500 black skins. Such a handful, scattered through the land, is scarcely to be seen or recog-

nized. Nor does the figure named testify to widespread miscegenation, considering the period of almost a hundred years during which there has been opportunity.

But we may dismiss the figure, which it seems to me can hardly be dependable. It will suffice to say that there is not in the Congo at this time a social group of Colored, distinguishable from the Natives—and obviously because there are not enough of them. So much for the mulatto as an adult.

In the case of the mulatto child there are two possibilities. The first and common one is that the father leaves it with the mother. He tires of the woman, or he moves away. He marries a woman of his race, and in time forgets the episode and fruit of it. The child left with the mother, is a member of her family and her tribe. If he be of lighter color than the other children, he is not, because of it, looked down upon nor up to. If the children of his village go to school, he will go to school with them; he will have no special handicaps nor privileges. In manhood he will woo and wed the maiden of his choice, without reference to the color of her skin; and may presently breed back to the blackness of his past—the white blood growing thinner with succeeding generations. I assume this must often be the case; and on the ground of it am disposed to question figures. Who is colored? Who is black?—In a narrow space of time, impossible to say.

But there is a second possibility which, though much less common, cannot be ignored. The father loves the child and feels responsibility. He may, or may not, continue his relations with the mother. He may grow tired of her, or move away, or marry. But his interest in the child is not extinguished. He has affection for it, or he is tormented by a sense of guilt, or both perhaps. In any case, he is not content to leave the child in the mother's custody, to grow up with her family, in her tribe and race. And so he takes the child away from her. It is said the mother rarely makes objection; one can only conjecture what she feels. Perhaps she is delighted and flattered at the prospect, that the little one she bore and suckled at her breast shall have a better chance than other children. I have not been a witness to such things, and so I do not know.

And what awaits the child?—Well, there are exceptional ones. In Brussels there are ladies—rich and beautiful, moving gracefully

in the highest circles of society: ladies who as girls were educated in the most exclusive schools of Europe—accomplished, cultured, charming. But there are not many of them, not more than two or three. And, of lesser magnitude, there must certainly be others, men and women: scientists, professors, painters, writers—perhaps a dozen scattered through the world.

But practically, the father, no great personage in himself, neither rich nor famous, nor likely to become so—a minor official who was lonely in the bush, or a trader, or a planter—the father is confronted with a problem: what to do with this little boy or girl whom he cannot bring himself to abandon utterly?

To begin with, he must find a school. And not a Native one, for it is from the Natives he would separate the child; and, too, he seeks a school with more advantages and a higher type of education. But the European schools will not accept the child, though the Government is now attempting to persuade them to open wide their doors to the mulatto children—the inception, I believe, of a farsighted program which has as its objective an end to segregation in the educational field. But nothing is decided, and the bare suggestion of mulatto children in the European schools has roused a storm of protest.

So then, this anxious father must find a school where mulattos will be welcome, in which they will constitute a group, not mixed with Native or European children. There are not many of them.

But such a school there was, behind the big brick church, on the highway to Butembo.



IT WAS Good Friday, in the late afternoon, when we paid our visit to the big brick church.

Gathered around it was a crowd of poor and shabby people, squatting on the grass beneath the trees, or milling their way to be nearer to loud-speakers which were bellowing a frantic-sounding

sermon mixed with static. Some were listening, with what seemed to me a strained and painful effort—like children trying hard to understand; some were frankly paying no attention, and were out to make the most of an occasion.

They greeted our approach with helpful interest, making way for us to pass, and pointing toward the entrance which was at the side. I wondered if they were communicants, and if so why they were not in the church; but when at last we pushed our way close to the open doors, the matter was explained. It was dark within the church, in contrast with the sunlight, and for a moment the scene was not revealed. And then I caught my breath. The great bare room, devoid of decoration, no more churchlike than a barn, was packed to its capacity: men, and women with infants on their laps or tied upon their backs or suckling at their breasts, and children of all ages—sitting flatly on the hard mud floor, jammed together like sardines in a tin, like maggots in a cheese, till it seemed there was not room where another could be squeezed. Inside and out there must have been four or five thousand of them.

The standees in the doorway had made room for us, meekly resigning their own preferred positions. And a thousand heads were turned at our intrusion: black faces staring at us with apathetic curiosity—black faces in a sea of sordid gray, the mass effect of unwashed rags. Confined between the high brick walls was a heavy, sickening odor—the musty smell of poverty.—It was not a pretty sight nor an inspiring one, not remotely suggestive of religious feeling or spiritual intent. It was meaningless and ugly.

Against the wall, not far from us, was a platform and a lectern, from which a Native preacher was discoursing, in accents of fanatic exhortation. But in the watching faces I detected no response. The auditors were listening with resigned and stolid patience, without hint of emotion; the children were subdued and quiet. When the speaker paused for breath, you could have heard a pin drop.

“There!” Philip nudged me, pointing.

“There? What?”

“The mulatto girls,” he whispered.

“Where?”

“On the platform—see?—Near the woman at the organ.”

And then I saw: a European woman, on a bench at a small organ;

and facing her across it, with their backs to us, about a dozen teen-aged girls, seated on chairs, one row behind the other—obviously the choir. They were too far away for me to see them clearly, but it was plain they were of lighter color, and some with hair that fell about their shoulders. And they seemed to be appropriately appareled for their status and their function, but I was some distance from them when I made this observation. When the preacher had concluded, at a signal from the organist they rose and sang a hymn—with untrained voices, neither well nor very badly.

At this point I stepped outside to get a breath of air, and found a European waiting for me—a tired, rather futile-looking man who appeared to be in charge of the proceedings, and who introduced himself as a fellow countryman—a Baptist missionary from the States.

He said apologetically it was a busy day, not the best on which to welcome visitors; and the mission was at present understaffed. As for the mulatto girls, the service in the church would soon be at an end, at which time I could talk with them—though, he warned me with a smile, they were quite shy with strangers. In the meanwhile, if I cared to climb the hill, I would find the younger girls at home, and a brother missionary who would be glad to show me anything I cared to see.

We climbed the hill, to a grove of trees in which there were several unimportant houses, with walls of mud or brick, shabby and run-down, with littered grounds around them, at the far end of which there were some children playing. One house—and by far the most pretentious—was in process of construction. A young man came to greet us, pleasantly enough, but if anything more futile in appearance than the other. He said the house in question was to have been the residence of the woman who was killed in the airplane accident. He did not know if it would be completed or what would be done about it. He led us to the house where the surviving missionaries lived—the two men and their wives, and one small child which was crawling on the floor in a very dirty garment. It had red blotches on its skin and looked unhealthy. The room was bare and ugly and disordered. The women who came presently to join us were plain of face and untidily dressed, not prepossessing. They were all good people, I feel sure, kindly and

well-intentioned, devoted to what seemed to them to be a noble undertaking, prepared and willing to sacrifice their lives to a hard, exacting task. But save willingness and fortitude, they seemed without endowments. We sat a while to chat, while the crawling child cried fitfully—

The Native school, they told me, went through third-grade work—which I judged might not be far from the limit of their pedagogic competency. The mulatto girls, they said, were separately instructed, but to what extent I could not learn. They were teaching them in English—which was obviously absurd in a French-speaking country.

“But why in English?” I inquired.

“Well, we do not speak French.”

“But what will they do with English?”

They shook their heads. The Government, they said, had made complaint of it; they didn’t know what the result would be.

We went out to look around, at the quarters of the mulatto girls, where they were housed and fed—and for which their fathers paid, not much perhaps, but something. A low-roofed, mud-walled building was their dormitory, divided into cubicles, with two cots in each, and which fairly filled them—dark and dingy little cells, the beds unmade, dirty and disordered—not a scrap of decoration, not a picture on the wall—no closets, chests, or drawers, not even hooks on which to hang their clothing, but cardboard boxes underneath the beds, in which to keep their few possessions.

Philip looked on in silence, with a disdainful eye; and Marcel whispered to me that even Native girls should not be asked to live in such a place. I didn’t answer him. I was embarrassed—ashamed of these good people who were my compatriots.

In such another building were the classrooms—two or three small rooms, with decrepit desks and benches, as dirty and disordered as the others. And here too was the room in which they ate their meals, bare and bleak and dismal, without a touch of cheer—like the workhouse where *Oliver Twist* had dared to ask for more.

One of the women volunteered a faint apology. They were understaffed, she said; and with Easter close at hand and so many services, and a number of new converts about to be baptized—well, things had got behind. But she said it carelessly, without, I thought,

any sense of the reality—of how very bad it was. I made no comment. I felt—perhaps unjustly—that the aspect of the place was not far from normal, and would not be much better at its best.

We went outside. By now the children were aware of us, and had ceased their play to come and peek around a corner of the building—little girls from four or five to ten or twelve years old, barefooted, in European dresses, the worse for wear and dirt—ungroomed, uncared-for-looking, with uncombed tangled hair. Their skins were of all shades; one small one almost white, with red blonde hair. They were having a good time, laughing and giggling, darting here and there from one viewpoint to another, but keeping at safe distance. When we approached they ran, helter-skelter across the littered grounds, to a tree in which there was a monkey—a tame one whom they'd made a pet. And they would not come back, though one of the women kept calling them by name.

"They are shy," she said.

But they seemed more wild than shy.—And why should they be shy—more shy than Native children who are curious and friendly? Still, I made no comment.

The other missionary joined us. And the older girls arrived from the service in the church; but they too remained aloof, peering at us warily. And then there was a minor accident: the monkey had come down out of the tree, and the little girl with golden hair, running to intercept him, tripped and fell, sprawling in the dirt and wailing lamentation. Two big girls ran to pick her up and comfort her; and so we came upon them. The little one was more mortified than hurt, her tear-stained, elfish face pouting with discomfiture. Dressed in a dainty frock, with her golden hair in curls, she might have been quite pretty. But in her present state it was difficult to say. Set back upon the ground, she quickly whisked away.

The big girls were plain of face and with unshapely figures. Their feet were bare; their legs and ankles thick. On closer scrutiny, their cheap, wash dresses were unbecoming and ill fitting. Their hair was in need of brush and comb; their coffee-colored skins were neither black nor white. In contrast with the average Native girl, they were awkward in their posture and ungraceful in their movements. There was no hint of lightness or humor in their eyes. And they were very timid; they hung their heads and mumbled—

One said at last, after long and painful questioning, she would like to be a nurse.

"In a hospital?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Why do you want to be a nurse?"

"Because—" She shook her head. I felt perhaps she meant she could hope for nothing more.

"You will have to study hard," I said, thinking with a pang of the utter hopelessness, in such a place as this.

"Yes, hard." She nodded, with a determined look.

I interviewed the other girl:

"What would you like to be?"

"A nurse," she mumbled.—It sounded like an echo.

There were some other questions I should have liked to ask, but I couldn't ask them with the missionaries there.

As we were taking leave, the elder missionary invited me to come again on Sunday, for the Easter services which would include a mass baptismal ceremony: a numerous group of converts who were to be immersed in a convenient pond. It would be quite a sight, he added. I made no comment, but I thought immersion in a pond wouldn't do them any harm.

We drove in silence. Marcel was deep in thought. At last he summed the matter up with diffident finality, choosing his words with care, not to hurt my feelings:

"I think—" he said "—I think it would be better to leave them with their mothers."



NEXT day my state of health had not improved, and when Philip came to call we held a consultation. The European doctor was still absent, and so it was decided I should pay a visit to the medical assistant. We drove to the dispensary, and Philip went in to make arrangements, from which he returned with a lugubrious

eye. The medical assistant would not prescribe for me, nor even consent to diagnose my case. He was strictly forbidden to treat European patients.

"I have tried to persuade him," Philip groaned. "But he says he dare not meddle in such things."

"But suppose that I were dying?"

"He says it wouldn't matter."

We adjourned to the hotel and debated what to do. In the midst of it Philip was seized with inspiration. "Dr. Becker!" he exclaimed. "You must visit Dr. Becker."

"Dr. Becker? Who is he?"

"A missionary doctor—a man from your own country."

"Oh!" I shuddered at the thought. "And where is he?"

"On the road you will travel when you leave Butembo."

"Yes, but where?"

"In the forest, north of Beni—about sixty miles from here."

My spirits sank.

"But yes," Marcel joined in. "That is the thing to do." He had heard of Dr. Becker in far-off Usumbura.

"Yes, certainly," urged Philip. He couldn't understand why he hadn't thought about it in the first place. Dr. Becker was a celebrated man, known throughout the region. His dispensary in the forest was thronged with Native patients, and many Europeans went to him to be treated. He would know in a moment what to do about me.

I was persuaded. We packed the Chevrolet, bade farewell to Philip, and set out once more upon the dusty road, winding downward through the foothills of the mountains. Midway to Beni, where the road wound round a steep and barren spur, we were suddenly confronted with a panoramic view which made me catch my breath—

"Stop!" I cried, staring in amazement. We were looking far down, on what at first glance appeared to be the sea—a sea of soft green treetops, woven like a carpet, without a crease or ripple, stretching away as far as one could see, till they melted in the sky.

"The forest," Marcel said. And we got out to look—standing at the cliff edge, with the calm and silent ocean at our feet. Here at last, I felt, was the veritable Congo—the flat immensity of tropic

wilderness, the mighty basin of a mighty river. And there, beneath the surface of the foliage, were the people of the Congo—the tribes of many nations, spread thinly in the labyrinth. It was not a white man's country.

We drove on, descending steadily. It was hot and muggy, like a hot day in New York. There were not many walkers on the road, and most of them were naked save for scraps of skin or cloth around their loins. Many of the women were as naked as the men, and, with their wooly heads, indistinguishable from them—except, at a distance, by the loads upon their backs; and, on closer view, by their flaccid breasts which hung down like empty sacks, halfway to their waists. They carried their children astraddle of their hips, which I had not seen elsewhere in the country.

We came at length to Beni, another sprawling, uninviting town, a thousand feet below Butembo, in the foothills of the mountains, beneath a snow-capped peak which was lost among the clouds. On a hilltop near the road was a small hotel where we meant to spend the night, and we paused to make arrangements and discharge our baggage. The comely proprietress said they would be crowded on this Saturday preceding Easter Sunday, but she would find room for us. We needn't be concerned about a place to sleep. I could go on to visit Dr. Becker whom she knew to be at home. He would soon correct my trouble. There was no better doctor in the country, she affirmed. We would come upon a sign beside the road—and then a little way within the forest, we would find the doctor's home and the dispensary.

The heat was stifling now, in the middle of the day. My linen trousers weighed on me like medieval armor, and my old felt hat seemed sadly out of place. I must have some shorts, I thought, like everybody else, and a proper topee to protect me from the sun. And so we stopped again, at the shop of a Greek trader—a cheerful young fellow who assured me, in French no better than my own, he was thankful to be out of Greece and happy in the Congo, where he hoped to spend his life.

The store was spacious, wide-open to the dusty road, its shelves and counters stacked with merchandise: groceries, hardware, agricultural tools; jeans and shirts and shorts; and the stuff for women's garments—lengths of gaily colored cotton cloth, hung for display

on poles that spanned the room. And there were women shopping—women of the town, not unsophisticated: some with dancing eyes in pretty faces—faces and figures you would turn your head to look at, in Paris or New York—flirting coyly with the Native shop assistants, bantering pleasantries, even with the owner, the while they did their shopping: debating a selection, discussing with a friend the quality and color, dragging one piece from the pole and then another, draping the stuff around them to regard it critically—perhaps to sigh and shake their heads, displeased with the effect or discouraged by the price—or, with contented smile, to approve and make a purchase. Like women shoppers anywhere—at Macy's or along Fifth Avenue. The Native shop assistants were patient and resigned—smiling hopefully while hope lingered in their breasts, and a trifle brusque when hope had fled.

The matter of my topee was settled in a jiffy—a tan one with a leather strap to go beneath my chin. But though I am of average size, there were no shorts to fit me—most of them much too small, designed for Native waists. The Greek ransacked the place in vain. At last he brought some bolts of stuff, for me to make selection. He would have them tailored for me, to my measure.—But perhaps I should be leaving in the morning.—No matter. They'd be finished at such hour as I named.—Yes, nine o'clock.—He brought a tape and measured me, rather casually, I thought. I ordered two: one khaki, for ordinary use; and another white, for dress occasions.

A little way from Beni we came into a forest, like no forest we'd been in, and which if it was not the veritable one, had close resemblance to it—the narrow road hedged closely with impenetrable walls of tropic vegetation: a tangled web of bush and vines and trees—mango and papaya, and many I could not classify, some with feathery leaves like the acacia; and giants with smooth white skins and massive trunks as straight as poles which did not break out their branches until they cleared the jungle and were high above the bedlam of their neighbors—wide-spreading, graceful branches, sharply silhouetted against the deep blue sky.

We were on the edge of pygmy country now. And there were pygmies to be glimpsed, coming and going from the mouths of tunnels they had burrowed in the forest—singly or in groups: men with bows and arrows, and their women, though it was even harder

now to distinguish which was which—homely little people, potbellied, and with arms and legs too long to fit their shriveled bodies—not differing greatly in appearance from the other residents, save in their size and the color of their skins, which were not so black—a phenomenon I've heard explained by reason of the fact that dwelling in the forest they are less exposed to sunlight. Marcel looked covetously at the arrows in their quivers, but we didn't stop to bargain.

Though presently we did stop, for another reason. There was a whistling sound and the Chevrolet bumped slowly to a halt. Another flat. They had come to be quite common: one or more per day was not unusual. Marcel got out his tools while I sat at the roadside in the shade. Some pygmies came along—two men with bows and arrows, and two withered, wrinkled women, with empty, flapping breasts. They gave wide berth to me and to the Chevrolet, crossing the road to pass in single file, as far away as they could get, with covert glances from the corners of their eyes.

"Hallo!" I called. But they neither paused nor answered, mending their pace a bit, until they disappeared around a curve.

Following an idle thread of thought, I said: "What would they do, Marcel, if we asked them to stop and help us change the tire?"

"The tire?" Marcel stared. "What could they do to help?"

"My question," I said, "was an academic one. Assuming that we asked them, in what way would they respond?"

"They wouldn't understand."

"But if they did?"

"Pouf!" Marcel dismissed the matter. "They would not do a thing."

"But suppose we had real need?"

"They wouldn't care."

"Suppose we had an accident in which the car was wrecked? Suppose we were injured—lying helpless in the road?"

"They would run away," he said, "as fast as they could go." Such a thing had happened to a friend of his—and not among the pygmies—and not a single Native of the many who had passed would come near to give him aid.

"Were they pleased that he was injured?"

"No, not that."

"Then why?"

"Because they were afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of making trouble for themselves."

"But trouble how?"

"How?" Marcel was on his stomach, struggling with the jack.
"Well, they are stupid."

I dropped the subject. But I wasn't sure *stupid* was the word. *Cautious* might be closer to the truth. To the primitive observer—or savage, if you like—a man at the wheel of a speeding motorcar must seem a little mad, and no less so if he chooses to overturn the thing and break his neck. The pattern of his life is an enigma, his behavior unpredictable, and his purposes mysterious. In such case, intervention is contra-indicated. It is better not to meddle in matters of this sort.

Still, I would have liked to try it: to roll the Chevrolet into the ditch, and lie down beneath the wheels and yell for help. But the project was not easy to translate into French, and I was not assured of Marcel's sense of humor. Anyway, my health wasn't equal to the effort.

We went on and came upon a narrow clearing, in which was a small village of decrepit huts—crooked tents of rotting thatch, and some sort of celebration going on: visiting pygmies, with their bows and arrows, mingling with the home folks—on familiar terms, it seemed. Tom-toms were being thumped, and there was high mirth and chatter—altogether, quite a racket. Some of the resident males had their faces chalked like clowns, and two or three wore head-dresses of leopard skin and feathers. There appeared to be no purpose in, or focus to, the function—no more than one would find at an average cocktail party. It was a social gathering and the guests were having fun.

"Let us look around," I said. And we got out of the car, though Marcel did not seem anxious to alight. Some of them came to meet us at the road side, not looking very pleased—about as hosts would look at uninvited strangers. In reply to Marcel's questions, one scowled and shouted at him; and he hurriedly desisted and got back into the car.

"They are drunk," he warned me anxiously. "The pygmies, too."

And drunk no doubt they were, but they did not look dangerous. Some of them turned their backs when I aimed my camera at them. Some grumbled and some laughed. One old pygmy woman stuck out her tongue at me, occasioning general merriment. There were some jeers and catcalls, but no threatening gestures.

Once more upon the road, I said: "Suppose, Marcel, you were driving by a village such as that, and there had been a fight, or accident of some sort, and someone had been hurt—what would you do?"

"I would not stop."

"But an injured man is lying on the ground, perhaps in need of medical attention. You could take him in your car to a dispensary."

"I would not stop," Marcel insisted doggedly.

"But why?"

"Because—" He hesitated.

"Because you'd be afraid?"

"No." He shook his head. "Even if I weren't."

"Then why?"

"It isn't good," he said.

"Not good? What do you mean?"

"Well, they might not like it—" He paused again to choose his words. "The ones like those—just ignorant savages—they like to go their own way and to be let alone. It's better not to interfere with them."

"Yes, I see," I said.

A little farther on we came upon the sign, beside the road.



THE dispensary was a stone's throw from the road, in a clearing hedged by forest.

Its most imposing structure was a long, narrow building roofed with thatch, open at the sides above a waist-high parapet of mud. As we drove by I could look into it—at rows of backless benches of

glistening whitewashed mud, and a platform at one end, with an organ and a lectern: unquestionably a church, though there was nothing churchly in the look of it—nor medical, for that matter.

Beyond it, scattered here and there beneath the trees, were the buildings of the clinic—modest, unpretentious ones, mostly mud and thatch. Dr. Becker's office was in one of these, scarcely bigger than a good-sized hut. There were people going to and fro on the path to it—young medical assistants in immaculate white shorts, and Native patients, among whom was a pygmy with a quiver full of arrows. Marcel accosted him, and there was great palaver in Swahili.

A young white woman in the costume of a nurse, came from the house to greet me. She said the doctor was engaged but would see me shortly. In answer to my question, she told me her home was in Los Angeles, and she had been trained in a San Francisco hospital. She liked the Congo and her work, she added. The climate here was a healthy one, she thought: the days were sometimes hot, but the nights were cool and pleasant.—She wasn't homesick?—She laughed and shook her head. She hadn't time for that.

I looked around. Behind the doctor's office were several shedlike houses, fronted by wide porches which were roughly roofed with thatch held up by poles—areas of ground before the houses, sheltered from the sun or rain. And beneath these rustic canopies were mud benches for the patients, and tables and stools for the medical assistants, where they interviewed the sick and made record of their histories, prescribing treatment for their simple ailments, or passing them along for more expert diagnosis. The benches were well-filled, and patients came and went with astonishing rapidity.

It was a busy scene—confusing, at first glance. And the aspect of the place—the unpretentious houses of simplest construction, haphazardly disposed, as if they had been added one by one where there happened to be room; and the absence of ritualistic trappings, to which one is accustomed in modern hospitals—the aspect was at first not reassuring. But presently one began to be impressed, to realize that something of value and importance was being carried on, that behind the flimsy makeshift was a functioning organism, in perfect running order.

A boy came looking for me. Marcel and the pygmy were still in earnest conference.

I liked Dr. Becker the moment that I saw him—a man in his early fifties, I should say, of medium height and slender, not robust looking, relaxed, unhurried, gentle, with a nice sense of humor, and thoroughly American. He listened to my story, and then he called a boy to prepare an enema.

He told me then, or later, in answer to my queries:

He had great admiration and respect for the Belgian Government and its Native policies. The administrators, on the whole, were intelligent and just, and co-operative. Only occasionally, when some rabid Catholic got into a government position, was there likely to be difficulty.

His medical mission served a considerable area, more than a hundred miles from end to end. There were five or six stations in the bush, which he regularly visited, staffed by medical assistants whom he himself had trained in a three-year course. These assistants were strictly limited in what they were permitted to prescribe or undertake. If the case could not be treated within such limitation, the patient must be sent on to headquarters, by foot if he could walk, or by transport if available, or he must await the doctor's monthly visit.

He repeated what I had so often heard: The medical assistants, regardless of their skills, were not competent to undertake full responsibility. They simply had not yet sufficient background.

I asked him if he could substantiate this fact by a specific incident. And he thought for a moment and then said—

At a religious service he had been near one of his young assistants who had seemed particularly promising—near enough to overhear some words the boy was saying in his prayer. It appeared he was asking God to implement the medicine which he was employing in a certain case—praying that the Power be put into the stuff.—Later, he had called the boy aside to question him.

Yes, the boy admitted, that was what he'd said. He added confidently, he knew there was no Power in the medicine itself—no more than in the stuff the witch doctors made use of, which was empty of purpose till the Power was invoked by proper incantation (*vide* prayer) to enter into it.

The doctor asked him: "Suppose you have typhoid and you take no medicine, what will happen to you?"

"It is likely I will die."

"And if you have a cold and take no medicine?"

"It is likely I will die."

Dr. Becker smiled and shrugged. In fact, the boy had not absorbed at all, though he'd spent three years about it, the theory of scientific medicine. In his mind was no relation between cause and effect. He admitted no real difference between typhoid and a cold.

I nodded. It occurred to me that converts to this dialectic would find many fellow travelers in the Western world—religious groups whose members practice therapies along quite similar lines, who are not debarred from doing so nor widely charged with irresponsibility—and others, even on the fringes of scientific medicine, where the psychosomatic and the mystical are in danger of confusion—and again, among the scientists themselves, where causality is seriously questioned—in addled heads of many sorts, where the Power and the Medicine, and the Cause and the Effect are about as badly mixed as things could be.

But I did not pursue the subject. Instead, I asked: In what way did this Mission and its outlying posts supplement the government dispensaries? Were they in competition, so to speak?

No, they were not in competition, nor on the whole involved in similar purpose. The Government was primarily concerned with combatting epidemic maladies. Its work was regimented; and the Natives, in this region anyway, preferred to trust themselves to the clinics of the Mission. They had little confidence in the medical assistants provided by the Government.

From what diseases did they chiefly suffer?

Everything, he said. Malaria, smallpox, yaws; T.B. and V.D.; a lot of leprosy—some of the nodule type, with which they had been getting good results. Well, just everything. Recently, he had seen for the first time, two cases of diabetes. There was nothing he could do for them: impossible to keep them on a diet, or train them in the use of insulin. One of them had died.

The equipment of the clinic was adequate, he said, though one might not suspect it from appearances. But it had a laboratory and X-ray, and the necessary instruments for surgery. There was no

physician but himself, ably supplemented by the nurse whom I had met. On certain days he operated. The Native boys were competent assistants—first-rate anesthetists, and a few were qualified to close and stitch a wound; but there were none he'd trust to do a major operation.

How many patients did they see per day?

"How many?" The doctor paused to think about it.—And I ask the Reader to reflect upon his answer.—Between five and six hundred on an average day, he said, of whom seventy or eighty he might see in person. The balance, he added, were sufficiently routine to be diagnosed and treated by the staff.

I had no heart to ask another question.

Dr. Becker would accept no fee from me, not even in the form of a present to the mission. If I was not better the next day, I must return to see him. But he thought I should have no further trouble.

Outside in the sunlight, Marcel was waiting for me, with three arrows in his hand and a broad grin on his face. It had taken quite a while, he said, but he and the pygmy had finally come to terms.—And how was I?

I said I was fine, and indeed I did feel better.

"You like the doctor?"

"Very much," I said. "A splendid man, Marcel. And—" I added with a smile "—a countryman of mine."



A GREAT black storm cloud rolled across the sky, and burst above our heads with streaks of jagged lightning and shattering claps of thunder. A fresh cool wind swept through the creaking forest and rain came down in torrents. The road was empty; the village where we'd paused appeared to be deserted. But in Beni it was hot and dry; it had not rained enough to lay the dust.

In the evening after dinner, I sat alone outside my bungalow, listening to the chatter of the tourists, gathered on the terrace of the

small hotel—family groups of them, on their Easter holiday, though why they'd chosen Beni was hard to understand. Still, no doubt it was a change from wherever they had come from; and in the heart of Africa there isn't much from which to make a choice. At least, they were escaping from the humdrum of their lives.

On a hillside, within view of where I sat, the bush was being cleared for cultivation. In the blackness of the night a little flame would glow, scarcely bigger than a match; then catch and spread with a tremendous crackling, and run like an express train for several hundred yards—a wave of golden fire, subsiding to a trickle, then suddenly extinguished. And again a light would glow, in another spot, and the show would be repeated. Sometimes two or three were going on at once, widely separated. There must have been a lot of people busy at the job, moving here and there, hidden in the dark. It was quite a sight to watch—like fireworks.

The waning moon came up, and the clouds upon the mountains made room for it to pass, disclosing for a moment a towering snow-clad peak—like a hound's tooth in the sky—the highest summit of the Ruwenzori.

Next morning I was definitely better, on the high road to recovery. The Chevrolet was loaded, and at nine o'clock precisely we called to get my shorts. They were not quite finished, the busy Greek apologized, pointing out two boys who were seated on boxes under shadow of the eaves, treading sewing machines on which my shorts were spread. I stood to watch them. They were quick and deft about the business. When the khaki ones were finished I put them on at once. They looked all right, though the pockets seemed a little out of place. I had to reach behind me to get into them. Still, that was no great matter. The Greek assured me they were an excellent fit, and they looked all right. They looked all right until, one day long afterwards, I chanced to glimpse myself in a full-length mirror; and then I took them off and gave them to my room boy—the white ones too. They did not look like the ones the young colonials wore—or perhaps it was myself. In brief, they looked like hell.

We set out for Irumu.

And almost in the spot where the day before a tire had gone flat, another went flat now. Marcel replaced it with our one remaining

spare which was worn to the fabric, but he had nothing left with which to mend the flat. He looked pretty grim about it. It was taking chances to go on without a spare—a hundred miles, on Easter Sunday, when we might not meet another car, where there were no towns nor any place we could hope to find assistance. Nor anyone but pygmies, he added very gloomily, and they quite likely drunk.

And thus it was we came again to call on Dr. Becker—

As we drove by the church, I could see through the open wall that it was packed with people—and a woman at the organ, and the doctor on the platform, delivering a sermon. We were intruding on the Easter service, and so we parked the car at a respectful distance, to await conclusion of it.

The young woman I had met came from the church to greet me. She explained that Dr. Becker was conducting the service in the absence of their spiritual adviser who had gone on a vacation; the service would soon be at an end; in the meanwhile perhaps I would like to come inside.

I said I would, and followed her. Some people in a back row of the narrow, whitewashed benches squeezed tighter to make room for me. Across the aisle, perched on the waist-high wall, with his feet far off the floor, was an aged pygmy, with grizzled, wrinkled face. He was paying rapt attention to Dr. Becker's discourse, which was delivered in a casual, friendly way, without hint of histrionics. I looked around at the congregation—in striking contrast to the sordid scene I had witnessed at Butembo: men in shorts and jeans; women in their Sunday best, with little furbelows—a ribbon or a flower; healthy-looking children, clean and tidy; no musty smell of poverty, though of course there was advantage of the out-of-doors. They did not turn their heads to stare at me; they seemed to be intent on what was being said. I scrutinized the faces I could see: serious and earnest—and, I am compelled to add, with few exceptions, dumb. I felt they were trying hard to understand the speaker, to follow the reasoning of his words; but that on the whole they were unequal to it. I felt the words he spoke, whatever they might be, did not mean to them what they meant to him—that the resulting concepts were very far apart.

Dr. Becker concluded. The organist played a familiar hymn, and

the congregation sang Swahili words to it. There was a final prayer, and then everybody rose and swarmed outdoors, exchanging smiles and greetings, and gathering in groups to stroll away together. The doctor came to find me and inquire for my health. And when I had explained the purpose of my visit—

“Why, yes, of course,” he said. He had on hand the things to mend a punctured tube, and one of his boys would be glad to undertake it. In the meanwhile, since it was now past noon, I must come home with him for dinner. A plate could be sent out to my driver, who would want to keep an eye on the mending of his tire. His wife came now to join us and supplement the invitation—an efficient, maternal-looking woman, cordially hospitable.

We crossed a pretty garden which I had not seen before, at the end of which, quite hidden, was the doctor's home—a modest, simple one, without a suggestion of Africa about it—such a house as one would find in a country town at home, with a sitting room, or parlor, as neatly commonplace, as comfortable and homelike, as friendly and informal. And the dining room adjoining was equally American; and the food a Sunday dinner straight from home: chicken fricassee and mashed potatoes, with thick rich gravy for them, and dainty little cupcakes—delightfully and incredibly fantastic in the forest of the Congo.

We were six at table, including three members of the staff—all the staff there was, I think—invited for dinner on this holiday occasion: three American women of competent appearance, well-educated and intelligent. We spoke of this and that—of the Becker children, a boy and girl of college age, in school at home, studying to be missionaries—of the loneliness and hardship of missionary life.

Mrs. Becker said they were happy in their work, for they were serving Him. She could not imagine how anyone could come to live in Africa on any other errand.

I spoke of the clinic, expressing admiration. But I thought Mrs. Becker rather brushed my words aside.—Yes, the clinic was doing a fine work, she said. But the great thing was conversion—redemption of the Natives from their unbelieving lives which were crusted deep with sin. It was wonderful to see these lost souls turn to Christ—to watch Him enter and flower in their hearts.

I changed the subject. I spoke of the Mission at Butembo and the mulatto girls, of the unfavorable impression I had formed.

Mrs. Becker took quick issue with me, firmly and politely. She assured me my conclusions were at fault. No doubt the airplane tragedy had handicapped their efforts, but the people at Butembo were splendid Christian workers. They had done, and were doing, a great and noble work—redeeming the lost souls and leading them to God.

I shifted the discussion to mulatto girls in general, and the conversation broadened.

It appeared there had been one in residence at the Mission—very talented, they said. She was now in America on some educational errand. They quoted her as writing in a disconsolate letter: she wished she were either black or white; for, as she was, she had no root or status anywhere; there was no place in the world where she belonged.—They had no idea how the problem would resolve. They did not seem to feel that mixing mulatto and white children in the schools offered hope of a solution.

At dinner Dr. Becker had been smilingly reserved. Afterwards, he brought some kodachromes to show me—pictures he had taken of patients he was treating for the nodular type of leprosy. We held them to the light, looking at them through a magnifying glass: pictures of several different cases, before and after treatment, in varying stages of it—the ugly nodules shrinking, until at last they disappeared completely.

“You may see for yourself—” the doctor said, pointing with his pencil to the evidence. “You may see we are getting good results.” He nodded to himself. “On the whole, quite satisfactory.” He gathered up the kodachromes and put them in their box. I thought he handled them almost affectionately.



WHEN we were again upon the road, I asked Marcel if he had enjoyed his dinner.

"Delicious," he declared. He had never had potatoes in that form before—so smooth and soft.

"In America," I said, "they are often cooked that way."

"And the sauce," Marcel went on. "It was really very tasty."

"Gravy," I explained, and spelled the word for him.

"Ah, gravy—" He said it several times. "And the little cakes were good."

"Cupcakes, we call them."

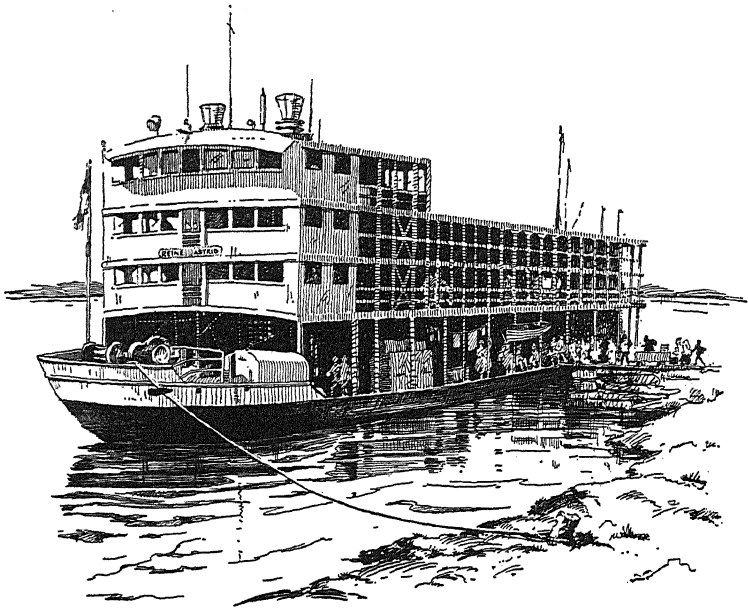
"Ah, cupcakes—" And he repeated that. "I should like to pay a visit to America some day."

"Yes," I said. "It's quite a country."

We drove a mile or two in silence, until there was a sudden, reminiscent sound—the whush of air escaping from a tire; and the Chevrolet limped painfully to a halt. Another flat!—Marcel got out to look and presently reported a patch had blown off an inner tube.

"Well, anyway," I said, as hopefully as I could, "it's not the one Dr. Becker's boy repaired."

But that's the one it was.



VII

MADAME BOCK suggested it—

She said: "The *Reine Astrid* arrived in port today, and soon it will be starting back for Leo. You should make the trip upon the river. I think you would find it interesting." She added that my visit had been fortunately timed, since the *Reine Astrid* was on a monthly schedule: a descending voyage which occupied nine days, and several more to return against the current—or several more, regardless of direction, if it happened to be grounded on a sand bar.

"But certainly," the Governor joined in. "I highly recommend it as an excellent way to see the country."

This was in Stanleyville, most pleasing of the Congo's urban centers, a village of 1,500 Europeans and a city of 100,000 Natives, delightfully situated on the north bank of the river, at the foot of the Stanley Falls where navigation ends: a picturesquely rambling town, comfortably mellow and thoroughly colonial.

We were sitting in the dusk, over whiskies and sodas, on the terrace of the residency—a modest mansion in a pretty park, enclosed within an iron fence, with Native sentries at the gates, who, so far as I observed, kept no one out. From where we sat we could look down an unpaved avenue lined with majestic palms, on which were to be found the leading shops, set back from the road and so screened with vegetation as to be almost hidden. Across a corner of the park, in a decrepit building, was a *pâtisserie*, with tables on the sidewalk beneath a wooden canopy, where one took tea or chocolate in the afternoon, with *petits fours* or brioche—not of Continental quality, but none the less nostalgic. The tablecloths were spotted and the service was confused, but still there was suggestion of another way of life.

But to go back a step—

We had gone on to Irumu, Marcel and I, without another flat or any misadventure. We had come out of the forest into hilly grazing country—an unexciting landscape, with widely scattered scrawny cattle. We had gone a little farther on, to Bunia—a town of many Greeks and not much else. In pursuit of a legend involving crocodiles, we had scaled a mountain range and descended by a painfully steep, abominable road to a desiccated valley wherein Lake Albert spread itself—a wide expanse of pallid blue, as lifeless as a mirror. Beyond it were the mountains of Uganda, swimming dizzily in the sky like a mirage. The valley was a desolate waste of stunted scrub, without sign of human life; and the heat was like a blast out of an oven.

We came at last, by way of wandering wheel tracks, to a dilapidated fishery, with some crumbling huts around it. A motorcar was standing at the door of a ramshackle house, and the man we sought to guide us was on the point of getting into it. The crocodiles were far away, he said, at the end of the lake, where there was a sandy beach on which they congregated. One approached them in a powerboat—he pointed to a paintless hulk, moored close to

the shore—and only by appointment. We should have let him know at least a day ahead. And he got into his car and drove away.

His manner had been abrupt and I was irritated. I said: "Here is the lake which, by popular repute, is full of crocodiles; and we will go and see them for ourselves."

We walked between racks of stinking fish, to the shore of the lake where some Native boys were bailing out a pirogue. "Demand of them," I ordered, "if they will take us to the crocodiles."—There was great palaver, but at last they said they would.—"When will we arrive?"—By sunset we should be there.—"Sunset!" I exclaimed. "But it is not yet noon."—It was far away, they said.—"But good God, there must be crocodiles in a more convenient place!"—No, only at this beach.

"What now?" Marcel inquired with an anxious eye.

"Be tranquil," I assured him. "If all the crocodiles on earth were gathered on that beach, and each of them was worth its weight in gold—even so, I would not trust myself in that leaky pirogue." And I added in my own vernacular, "Let us get the hell out of here while we still have strength to go."

In Irumu I was to take the plane for Stanleyville. The plane was late and we had time to kill. We sat for a while in the shop of a Greek, who opened beer for us. There was another loafer, sitting in the doorway—a paunchy Belgian, with an eye for women shoppers. If they were young and pretty, he would pat them on the fanny as they passed. And the girls would flirt and giggle, and bandy words with him. He was quite a fellow, full of conversation.

A boy came staggering down the road, with an elephant tusk clasped in his arms—almost as tall as he was, and a brutal load to carry. The Belgian joker stopped him with a shout, and interviewed him from his chair, while the boy stood patiently with his burden in his arms.—Where was he from?—From a village in the bush.—How far?—It was far; he'd been on the way since dawn.—Where was he going?—Here, to Irumu. The chief had sent him with the tusk, for delivery to a trader.—How much would he get for it?—He shook his head. Sweat was trickling on him, dripping on the ground.

The Belgian shrugged. There was no profit in ivory now, he said, nor any market for it. He made the boy come nearer, to examine

more closely the quality and color. Yes, it was good ivory, but of little value. Plastic had practically replaced the use of it. Disastrous for the Natives who had made good business of it. He sent the boy along, and turned in time to tweak a passing buttock. He was a gregarious fellow, and also curious—

He asked me my business, and I said I was a writer.—Would I write about the Congo?—I might, I didn't know.—Most things people wrote about it were not true, he said. They came for a few days or weeks and got everything all wrong. He, himself, had been in the Congo twenty years.—He drained his glass and filled it up again.—It took time to know a country.

I said, "I wish you'd tell me something."

"Yes? What?" He leaned back smugly.

"Anything you like. Things that have happened to you, to which you have been witness, or that you've heard about on credible authority."

"Oh—" He scratched his chin. "What sort of things?"

"Anything," I said. "Anecdote or incident, out of your own experience, which, in your estimation, would shed light upon the country and inform a stranger."

He hemmed and hawed and shook his big-jowled head. He couldn't think of anything—not anything particular.

"Yet you've lived here twenty years."

"Oh well—" He laughed uncomfortably. "If I were a writer—" He caught a passing fanny with a playful smack.

"You will be surprised," I smiled, "if you ever read an account of this in print."

"Account of what?"

"Of this."

"But I haven't told you anything."

"That's just the point," I said. But there was no time to amplify the matter, for the plane I was awaiting was circling for a landing.

Two hours later I was in Stanleyville, having flown about three hundred miles above a sloping carpet of unbroken forest. No doubt here were important things in progress on the ground—mines and agricultural projects and Native villages. But from the air, even lying close above it, there was nothing but the forest—an endless sea of treetops, cut with twisting, yellow threads of rushing rivers,

emptying one into another, until they came at last to the father of them all.

In Stanleyville there was no room for me, despite the telegram I had sent two weeks ago. The Greek hotel was full. The Guest House at the airport, to which I had returned—a pretentious hostelry, with verandah of imposing size and bungalows around a spacious garden—was equally discouraging—filled with permanent guests who had nowhere else to go. They listened to my story with sympathetic murmuring, but had nothing to suggest. The afternoon was waning and I was growing desperate. I wished I were back in the hospitable bush, with the battered Chevrolet and my faithful friend, Marcel.

“Very good,” I said at last, with an assurance I was far from feeling. “Let me use your telephone. I want to call the Governor.” I had an introductory letter.

It was Madame Bock who answered me, in English. And when I had explained my situation—

“Ah, yes, I see,” she said. “But you must come to us. We have a little guest house, unoccupied at present, and you will be most welcome to the use of it.”

The youthful manager was listening, as I had meant he should; and when I turned to leave, he intervened. He had discovered something—a guest whom he could move and thereby make room for me.

On close acquaintance, the Sabena Guest House was a disappointment: the food was poor and the service worse. The boys were lazy and sometimes impudent. You could shout for them till you were hoarse. The manager confided to me later that the airplane travelers spoiled them; they didn’t understand the Natives or know how to treat them. He was himself a very nervous fellow, in a state of constant irritation, rushing out to the verandah or back into the yard, yelling for or at the boys who sometimes came or sometimes just yelled back. He seemed thoroughly unhappy and discouraged.

However this may be, I had gone immediately, before I took possession of my quarters—I had gone in a taxi to the residency, to pay my respects and explain I would not need to trespass on the proffered hospitality. And it was then, that evening, sitting on the terrace, that Madame Bock suggested my voyage on the river.

“Why, yes—” I said, intrigued by the idea “—if the boat is not booked full at this late date?”

Madame Bock was reassuring. Most people went by plane to Leo. The river trip was something to do once, but tedious to repeat. Tomorrow, she added, she would go with me to see what could be done about accommodations.



AND next day we went—in the Governors' shiny motorcar, with Native driver in proper uniform, and little Belgian flags upon the fenders: a luxurious excursion in contrast with the ancient Chevrolet. European residents smiled and nodded as we passed, and Natives stood to raise their hats respectfully.

The *Reine Astrid* was at her dock: that is to say, she was tied up against the river bank, hedged off by wire fence whose gates were under military guard against intrusion by a crowd of idle spectators. The space enclosed was a scene of wild confusion, with cargo laden stevedores streaming down the numerous gangplanks, and others bearing loads of clumsy faggots, streaming up. They would come face to face upon the narrow gangplanks and vituperate each other until one of them gave ground. The cargo they unloaded was dropped where there was room to put it down—an inextricable tangle of bales and sacks and crates, in the midst of other cargo that was waiting to be loaded. Now and then a European would dash out of the office to shout orders which, in the general bedlam, appeared without effect.

We went into the office and were told: The boat would leave for Leo in two days.—But certainly there would be room for me.—The fare would be so much (it was very reasonable); a little more if one wished to go *de luxe*.—I took *de luxe*.—As for accommodations, I could go on board and look around. The maître d'hôtel (purser, we would say) would assign my space.—The boat would leave at dawn and I must come on board the night before.

The *Reine Astrid* was a big, stub-nose stern wheeler, reminiscent of a Mississippi showboat—no more streamlined than a tub and as shallow as a raft, comfortably old-fashioned, no modernistic nonsense. In design it bore resemblance to the Ark—or to a huge three-decker sandwich, topped with a narrow slice of pickle at one end, wherein were the wheelhouse and the captain's quarters, almost level with which was a single, squatty funnel. And, like a sandwich, it improved in quality with respective layers. The bottom deck, close against the water, was the tough and rugged part. Here were the boilers and piles of fuel faggots, the machinery and the cargo, and the Native passengers—wherever they could dispose themselves. The slice above was homely, simple fare: rows of narrow staterooms, opening on the deck or on inner passageways—not good nor very bad. But the upper layer had the mayonnaise and the lettuce. Its midship section was an open space from rail to rail, roofed against the weather, with tables and a bar, the general lounging place for all European passengers. Opening on it aft was the dining saloon, with sliding windows open to the air and big fans to circulate it. But this was not the apex, for on the other side, forward of the lounge, behind closed doors which blocked the deck, were the anchovy and relish—a plutocratic region entitled the *De Luxe*, whose precincts were forbidden to the ordinary passengers—a dozen spacious staterooms with connecting private baths, from which to make a choice.

The one I selected, with Madame Bock's approval, was at the forward end, beyond which was a roomy lounging place, enclosed with sliding windows. When the boat was moving there would be no lack of breeze, and one was assured of a panoramic view.

The maître d'hôtel, a dapper fellow in visored cap and mess jacket, made record of my choice. The stateroom would be mine, he said, and I could bring my luggage when I liked. As it turned out, he was, except the captain, the only European in the crew.

We took our leave—

“And now,” said Madame Bock, “I must show you the sights of Stanleyville.”

We stopped at a shop to buy a DDT bomb, since there might be mosquitoes on my voyage. The boat, she explained, did not proceed at night, but tied up against the bank, at a village or a wood camp

where faggots would be loaded as fuel for next day. It could not proceed at night, in any case, since it must be guided in its course by markers on the banks, without which it would not get very far. She showed me one across the river, visible a mile away—a big white target with a cabalistic sign. They were moved from time to time, she said, as the channel changed.

There was a town upon the other bank, and a small ferry plying back and forth, chugging frantically to hold its course against the muddy current—a town of no importance, save as a railroad terminus, one end of a short line that ran to Ponthierville, where again there was a navigable river, the Lualaba. Such is the transportation network of the Congo, a far-flung web of rail and water routes, supplementing one another: a system not unsuited to pioneer penetration in a land where labor may be had for next to nothing, where cargo may be shifted half a dozen times, from boat to train, without prohibitive expense.

We drove about the town: unpaved, dusty roads lined with trees and palms; comfortably cluttered shops, with wide-open fronts and dimly cool interiors; unpretentious homes in pretty gardens, wreathed in bougainvillea and hibiscus—a pleasing village, drowsily unhurried, with the wonderful, broad river flowing at its door. Stanleyville, as Madame Bock informed me, has neither mines nor factories. It is a transportation and administrative center—capital city of the Province Orientale, largest of the Congo's seven states: market place for a vast forest area which, though its development is still in infancy, transacts a thriving business.

The Natives were at work: clerks and shop assistants, truck and taxi drivers, artisans and laborers; and those who trudged the roads on business of their own, with their usual burdens. But they seemed less hurried and less harried than those of the Katanga. The industrial machine had not set its stamp upon them. They were closer to the bush, to the life from which they came, their feet not yet established on the treadmill—in a middle sector of the civilizing process. But still they were not like the people of the bush. They had come far enough to know the use of money, far enough to sense the struggle of competitive society. They had been urbanized and had lost something by it, which they would not regain.

We drove along the river, through the Native city, which has no

formal gates to mark its limits, nor housing projects of regimented structures, but huts and habitations to suit the owner's fancy, discreetly hidden from close scrutiny, almost buried out of sight among the vines and flowers. There was cheerful sound of laughter and palaver behind the sheltering screen, suggesting that not all the able-bodied males had hurried off to work at crack of dawn, nor that those who hadn't were currently engaged with serious affairs. It seemed a pleasant place to dwell, engagingly alfresco and unkempt, where poverty would have its compensations—things to eat in reach of hand, papayas and bananas in profusion, which, if they be not the basis of a diet, have at least a supplementary value; and bananas, when fermented, are euphoric in effect—and a climate where it was never cold, a thousand feet above the level of the sea, on the rim of the Equator.

Stanleyville is hot. And it was hot today, very hot and sultry. Still, later on, at luncheon, when everyone except myself was complaining of the heat which they said was unusually oppressive, and the Governor suggested we dispense with formality and divest ourselves of jackets, I had asked to see a Fahrenheit thermometer. And when one was produced, the mercury stood at 89—an unexciting summer temperature in most of the United States. But it was hot enough, with humidity not far from the saturation point.

A little way above the Native city we came upon the Stanley Falls—a road block in the river, which actually is not a falls at all, but a churning rapids where the river tumbles down a steeper slope—a turbulent affair, with great boulders nosing dangerously above the swirling water. There was a fishing village on the shore, and some idlers came to greet us—people of a river tribe, Madame Bock explained, who had uncanny knowledge of the river's habits and amazing skill to circumvent its tricks. Even the children, when they began to toddle, were at home upon the river; they learned to swim and use a pirogue paddle before they learned to walk.

The people of this village fished the rapids, not with lines or nets, but with woven baskets of cornucopia shape, suspended from elaborate bamboo scaffoldings, built far out into the stream from either bank—from another village on the farther shore. And the pirogues made their way from one fish trap to another—from shore to shore, indeed, though in fact it seemed impossible. But that is

what they did, and were doing at this moment, within plain view of us: three or four or half a dozen paddlers, standing in a frail canoe, flailing the water with their flimsy paddles in staccato rhythm, holding where they chose or going where they pleased—actually crawling up the stream against the rushing current, where it curled and broke in waves against the threatening rocks.

I said, scarcely crediting my eyes, more as tribute to the feat than with any real intent—I said, half to myself, “I should like to make a trip through those rapids in a pirogue.”

“Indeed?” smiled Madame Bock. “We will see what can be done. At luncheon I will speak with Monsieur Paradise.”

I hoped she would forget it, but she didn't. And Monsieur Paradise—a courteous gentleman and *Chef du Service de la Population Noire*—nodded affable assent. The matter would arrange itself, he said, and he would let me know.

I changed the subject. I have fear of certain things, and particularly water.

I made inquiry about the Native population—how 100,000 of them could be gainfully employed in a town where there were neither mines nor factories. Monsieur Paradise looked troubled. He said it was a problem. He admitted there was idleness and quite a bit of drunkenness. The situation was not serious as yet. If the urban population could be stabilized and prevented from expanding—He shrugged and added, smiling, “We do what we can to keep them occupied.”

Later in the day I thought I had a clue to what he meant—

Obedient to a ritual of the teatime hour we had dropped in at the golf club for a cooling drink, where some of the elite were gathered on the terrace outside the little clubhouse: businessmen and government officials, and matrons chatting of their domestic problems, among whom was Lucienne, the daughter of the Bocks, an attractive girl of twenty-two. I had talked with her at luncheon, and with the son, Pierre, a boy of seventeen who was still at school. But Lucienne was finished with her education—at least as much of it as the Congo could provide—and rather at a loss, I thought, to occupy herself.—How did she fill her time?—There was nothing to do, she said, but study, and she was through with that.—What then?—Well, there were books to read, and she was fond of reading.—

What about her friends?—There were only half a dozen, of her age and in her group—not enough to organize a social life.—What did they do?—They swam and they played tennis.—Was it dull in Stanleyville, for young people like herself?—She shrugged. Well, it was not exciting.—Her eyes were discontented, and I thought Madame Bock had a troubled look in hers.—Such are the limitations of colonial life, in a provincial capital of fifteen hundred people—and perhaps particularly in its highest brackets, where it is most limited.

But of my clue—

Monsieur Paradise dropped in and took a chair beside me. He was gratified to learn my opinion of the sporty, nine-hole course which had literally been hewed out of the forest. He said the club had only forty members. The dues were high, prohibitively so—about \$160 per annum, a sum which very few of the residents could afford.—I remarked that the course was beautifully maintained, the fairways as well kept as ordinary greens, and the greens as smooth as velvet.

Ah, yes? I found it so? Monsieur Paradise looked pleased. They did their best with what they had to spend. There were thirty-three Natives employed upon the course, to weed and trim and water.

I turned that in my mind: almost one employee for each member, almost four for every green. They could trim them with their teeth and still have time to spare. I said, with humorous intent, “If unemployment should become a problem, one could start another golf course.” But perhaps I did not say it well in French. Monsieur Paradise smiled vaguely, in the way that people smile when they are mystified, and presently excused himself—

“But please—” He hurried back. “It had nearly slipped my mind. About your pirogue trip across the Stanley Falls—”

“My—my pirogue trip,” I stammered. “I beg you not to give the thing another thought.”

“Another thought?” He laughed. “But it has been arranged.”

“Arranged—” I nodded weakly.

“Yes certainly, of course. My assistant, Monsieur Hoppe, will call for you at your hotel, at six tomorrow morning.”

“A thousand thanks,” I said, with what spirit I could muster.



MONSIEUR HOPPE was on time, in the shiny motorcar with the flags upon the fenders—a young administrator in official uniform, with an engaging manner but not a word of English.

The Native city was astir as we drove through, with smoke of cooking fires rising from the trees, and the road already thick with early walkers, off to work or to the market in this cool, delightful hour of the day. They hurried from our path, pausing at the roadside to smile or lift their hats.

Presently we stood upon the shore, where Madame Bock and I had stood the day before, close by the fisher huts and the bamboo scaffolding. Some idlers quickly gathered, but there was no one to welcome us nor sign of preparation, nor any pirogues in sight upon the river. Monsieur Hoppe looked annoyed and I felt hopeful.

Once in the long ago, when I was young, in the gorges of the Yangtze, I had crossed a rapid of unsavory reputation, in a leaky sampan with a single boatman. It had turned out to be a precarious excursion, and I still had memory of it. But the Yangtze had appeared less hazardous than this: it was only half as wide and there were no ugly rocks to break its surface. It had looked like a sheet of yellow glass, so smoothly swift that it gave no hint of speed until you were involved with it. And it was full of whirlpools which moved about in disconcerting fashion and might suddenly develop, without the slightest warning, in the very spot you were. We had narrowly escaped from such a vortex, and I still had in my mind the expression of terror on my boatman's face, as he struggled frantically to snatch us from the trap.

But the Stanley Falls was of more alarming aspect—as wide, it seemed to me, as the Mississippi in the neighborhood of Memphis, and as violent in behavior as an agitated washboard. To embark oneself upon it, in a clumsy hollow log, struck me at the moment as the height of folly.

"I have asked—" Monsieur Hoppe was saying to himself "—I have asked for thirty rowers." And he glanced at his watch and looked around.

"Ah, thirty!" I repeated.—It did not seem too many.—"But perhaps they are engaged, or something has gone wrong?"

"Not at all," said Monsieur Hoppe. "Some of them are here." He motioned toward the idlers who had grown to a crowd. "And the others are arriving.—Ah, yes, here comes the chief!" And he went to meet a man who wore a cap of leopard skin with some feathers sticking in it.

There was now a great palaver in which everybody joined, including the women who were out to see the show.

Still, I was hopeful of the issue, for there was no pirogue in my sight, except for some small ones drawn up upon the bank, and obviously unequal to carry thirty rowers. But our pirogue was at hand, and had been there all the time, concealed from view among the reeds that grew along the edge: the trunk of a tree, thirty feet in length, about thirty inches wide by twenty deep; burned out and then hand-hewed to shallow thickness; a long, straight shell, as tippy as an egg, and, one might imagine, as awkward to control—the biggest pirogue I had seen, or ever saw, of war canoe dimensions. A score of men and boys had dragged it out and were holding it against the bank.

Confusion was complete: a shouting, gesticulating mob. High words were passed, and even threatening gestures. Monsieur Hoppe waited patiently, quietly aloof. They were arguing, he said, as to who should make the trip. It appeared that everybody wished to go. A drum was brought, a hollow end of log with a skin stretched over it, and the sound of it was tried and listened to with critical attention, by the captain of the ship—not the chief in leopard cap, whose function appeared to be purely ornamental, but a rugged individual with a commanding voice who seemed to know his business and to brook no interference.

Two ordinary chairs were brought from somewhere and set face to face on the uncertain floor, near the tapered prow which, in design, was indistinguishable from the stern; and, with some ceremony, Monsieur Hoppe and myself were escorted to our places. My back was to the prow. The pirogue quickly filled with those

who could get in; late-comers were rejected with voluble exchange of angry imprecations; small boys, despite their pleading, were bodily tossed out. The crew arranged itself along the sides, standing easily, facing toward the bow, with slender paddles poised. The chief who had no paddle, stood facing me, behind Monsieur Hoppe's chair. The drummer and the drum were somewhere back of him; and the captain, like a coxswain, at the stern.

The crew was of all ages, from adolescent boys to gray-haired men. And once they were embarked they were deadly serious, intent upon the business, as if the undertaking had a ritualistic meaning or some religious quality. I thought there must be more than thirty of them. And so indeed there were. Excluding Monsieur Hoppe and myself, I counted sixty. There was hardly space where another could have stood.

"Ah," said Monsieur Hoppe, when I had named the figure. "I only asked for thirty, but you see that they enjoy it."

We pushed out into the river which was reasonably placid near the shore. The drum began to beat the stroke, in strange staccato rhythm, and the paddles swung to it in jerky unison, almost biting at the water. The people left behind kept up their shouting, in the rhythm of the drum, as if they had a part in what was going on.

"No doubt—" I said, as I hastily charged my camera with a fresh roll of film "—No doubt you have made this trip many times before?"

"Never." Monsieur Hoppe shook his head.

The current caught us and the rhythm quickened. But suddenly the pirogue swung around, as if to shoot the rapid. Monsieur Hoppe looked alarmed and shouted inquiry, to which a dozen voices shouted back.

"It is the drum," he said. "The captain does not like the sound of it, and so we must return and get another."

We were greeted by the crowd upon the shore with derisive yells and laughter, to which our crew made suitable reply, though with evidence of justified embarrassment. Both the drum and the drummer were discharged, and another drum and drummer selected and embarked. And once more we started out, with humorous admonitions from the spectators.

"Do you swim?" said Monsieur Hoppe.

“But yes,” I answered, as lightly as I could, covering my dismay with the camera at my eye. I could not swim well nor far, nor probably at all in anything like this. And there might be crocodiles. I didn’t ask.

In another moment I had no time to contemplate the matter. The excursion was abruptly transformed into a contest—a battle of wit and strength to defeat the yellow river, to prevent it from wrenching the clumsy hollow log out of control, from twisting it broadside to be tumbled upside down, or hurling it head on to be impaled and shattered on the rocks. The drum beat furiously and the paddles snapped like whips, the rowers chanting in a frenzied chorus. The pirogue inched its way, in short, sharp, jerky steps—or for moments at a time, did no more than hold its own.

There was a small island near the center of the river, at the foot of which the current gathered force. And it was here the battle reached its crisis. The drum outdid itself and the rowers kept the pace, but still for a long time we hung there in the balance, not gaining and not losing, until at last, with a final ounce of effort, the pirogue danced a little step ahead—and another and another. When the island had been safely cleared, the rowers tossed their paddles with a shout of triumph, in salute to victory; then buckled down again to keep the dancing pirogue on its course.

In fact it was a dance, the whole affair, strangely reminiscent, though at first I could not place it: the syncopated progress of the pirogue, the wriggling hips and torsos of the rowers, the broken rhythms of the drum; the expression on the face of the boy who stood beside me—exalted and ecstatic. I had seen that look before, on the faces of religious devotees, in the midst of fanatic ceremony. And I had seen it, too, on crowded dance floors, in the Harlem of New York. It was, unmistakably, the Conga, in primitive rendition, in the place where it had come from: a ceremonial dance upon the river, in a dancing boat.

There was no further peril.

On the shore which we approached, another crowd awaited. And as the pirogue danced toward them, they danced a welcome to us—men and women and the children, chanting with our rowers, wriggling hips and bodies to the rhythm of our drum. Men with poles or branches held aloft, danced into the river to their waists,

splashing the water with fanatic gestures, as if entreating us to land and directing our approach. In a quiet eddy near the shore, at a signal from the captain, every member of our crew tossed his paddle to arm's length, pointed at the sky. And there was a roar of welcome from the land.

I have not the slightest idea what any of it meant, but something, I feel sure, very old and very deep. Unfortunately, my camera held no record of the matter, since, in my excitement, I had failed to close it tightly, and the film was blank.



I AM the electrician." (*Je suis l'électricien.*)

He was standing on a chair in the middle of my room, tinkering with a fixture in the ceiling—a ragged, youthful rascal with a disarming twinkle in his eye. An equally ragged but more humble-looking boy stood attentively near by, fingering a screw driver.

"My helper," (*Mon aide,*) the one upon the chair carelessly explained; and he motioned for the screw driver, which the boy held up to him, accepting in return a pair of pliers. "We will take away this fixture and bring a better one."

"Good," I said. I didn't care. I had come to pack my bags, and I went on about it.

He tinkered for a while, with leisurely incompetence, while the helper stood patiently beside him, passing back and forth the only tools they had—the screw driver and pliers.

"You are English?" he inquired.

"No, American."

"Oh, American!" He got down from the chair and regarded me with interest. "I can speak English, too."—And he could, a little. He had picked it up in Leopold, he said, where he had gone to school and learned his trade. He was, he assured me, a first-class electrician (*de premier ordre*). His wage, he told me proudly, was a thousand francs a month.

"Very good," I said.

"How much would I be paid in America?"

"About that much a day."

"A thousand francs a day?"

I nodded.

"Oh—" His eyes were wide with wonder. "*Sans blague, monsieur?*"

"*Sans blague.*" I passed my pack of Luckies to the craftsman and his helper.

"*Merci bien, monsieur.*" He motioned to the boy. "A match," he ordered curtly. The helper fished one from his jeans and struck it on the surface of my table. "Ah, Lucky Strike! Good cigarette!" He leaned upon the chair, inhaling critically. "I should like to go to America some day."

"Would you?" I was busy with my bags.

"What is it like in America, *monsieur?*"

"Like?" I turned the question in my mind. "Well, like many things, but, for example: When I left, some months ago, in a town near where I live, a man was sitting on a pole."

"A pole?" He looked incredulous.

"Yes, a pole, *comme flèche ou poteau*, about fifteen meters high. There was a kind of basket at the top, in which the man could sit, or even lie, if he didn't stretch his legs. All day and night he sat there. He had been there for some time, and said he intended to remain at least a month. They sent up buckets to him on a rope, with food and water, and for his necessities. And, oh yes, he had a telephone, so he could talk to people on the ground; and they could call him up and talk to him. Every day the reporters interviewed him and printed in the papers what he said and what he thought."

"Ah yes, I see—" The youthful electrician nodded solemnly. "A religious man—like a witch doctor perhaps?"

"Not at all," I said.

"Then why would he sit upon a pole?"

"He was being paid for it."

"Ah, no!" He searched my eyes. "*Sans blague, monsieur?*"

"*Sans blague.* The pole," I explained, "was on a busy street, in a parking place next to a grocery store—a big one belonging to a company which owned many of them. And the company paid the man to sit upon the pole, because they thought the people who came

to watch the man, would come into the store to buy the groceries.”

“How much did they pay him?”

“I don’t know exactly. But I heard it said, if the man should sit there for a month, without ever coming down, he would be paid five thousand dollars.”

“How much is that in francs?”

“Hum—” I calculated roughly in my mind. “About two hundred thousand—or say, what you could earn at your present wage, in fifteen or twenty years.”

The helper’s jaw had dropped; he had understood enough to stupefy him. But the master craftsman smacked his lips—

“I would like to go to America,” he said.

“To go and sit upon a pole?”

“For two hundred thousand francs—” He laughed and rolled his eyes “—I would sit there all my life.”

“*Sans blague?*” I smiled.

“*Sans blague, monsieur.*”

I went on with my packing.

“Do you think, *monsieur*, I should do well in America?”

“Yes, very well,” I said. And I felt sure of it.

“Ah, good! Well, some day I shall go.” He surveyed his gaping helper with a disdainful eye, and took the pliers from him and climbed back upon the chair.

He was still tinkering with the fixture when I left.



NEAR sunset I took my luggage on board the *Reine Astrid* which seemed in shipshape order and ready to depart, confusion and stevedores vanished from the scene, her cargo loaded, and her faggot fuel stacked around the boilers to the ceiling of the deck. Actually, the boat carried little cargo, nor was there room for much in the shallow hull, nor space to stow it in the labyrinth of machinery, pipes, and cubicles with which the deck was crowded.

A young Native, in immaculate white uniform, came to meet me

at the gangplank—a boy with sensitive, wistful eyes and an engaging smile. He was, he told me with an air of modest pride, 'second captain' of the ship; subsequently he wrote his name for me: Builou Philemon. He went in search of the maître d'hôtel who led me to my stateroom and presented me the key. No other voyagers had yet arrived.

I took my leave, to stroll aimlessly about and kill the lonely hours of the evening. It was still hot, and presently I went to sit at a sidewalk table outside the *pâtisserie*, to sip a tepid drink and debate where I should dine. A truck came rattling by, and, to my amazement, there was Philip Dumont in the driver's seat, with a Native boy beside him—Philip from whom I had parted in Butembo, and had not dreamed to see again.

"Philip!" I shouted.

The truck pulled up abruptly in a cloud of dust and Philip came running back to meet me. He had arrived that morning from Butembo, he explained, with a load of produce for the market, having driven forty hours day and night, with the Native boy to relieve him at the wheel. It had been hot, he said, and they had met some trouble on the road, which had delayed them several hours. And, oh yes, they'd shot a leopard on the way.

"Where are you going now? Are you engaged?"

Nowhere he need hurry, and he was not engaged.

"Shall we dine together?"

"Willingly," he said.

"Where do you suggest?"

"Where? But it is Thursday, and we can have *muambe*."

"*Muambe*? What is that?"

"A Native dish. But it is hot," he warned me.

"No matter. Why on Thursday?"

He ordered an aperitif, explaining: At the Hotel Centrale, on Thursday night *muambe* could be had."

"Good," I said, "let's try it."

The restaurant was a big one and filled to its capacity with colonial family groups, whose members for the most part looked decorously bored—at least, they were not gay: the men in shirts and shorts and the women in wash dresses—provincial bourgeoisie. As for the *muambe*, it turned out to be a chicken dish with rice, and

a sauce so peppery that I thought it must raise blisters. Still, with the aid of good Portuguese white wine, I managed to dispose of it.

We took coffee and liqueurs upon a terrace open to the stars, and sat for a long time to chat, Philip discoursing with boyish eagerness about his plans—to make Butembo a rival of Nairobi, a big game rendezvous for rich Americans.

“You love the Congo, Philip?”

He nodded earnestly.

“Why?”

It was home to him, he said.

“Yes, but beyond that?”

Well, he liked the bigness and the freedom of it, and the endless unexplored, unexploited possibilities.

I said I understood that, and even felt a sense of it myself, though I was no longer young and just a passer-by. “But tell me why,” I asked, “in the face of such splendid opportunity to acquire fame and fortune—or virtue, if one choose, by taking thoughtful part, though it be quite humbly, in the projected enterprise which has for its fulfillment a no less intriguing end than the birth of a black nation—tell me why the people in this restaurant tonight should wear upon their faces—four out of five of them—expressions of jaded discontent. If the Congo is, as it seems to me to be, a great adventure, why should one not enjoy it?”

“Pouf!” Philip shrugged. “They are town people,” he said. “They would be no better off no matter where they were. They would be doing exactly the same things. But in the bush—” He laughed “—well, that is different.”

I nodded in assent. I suspected he was right.

We walked across the road, where the truck was parked beneath a mango tree. The Native boy was fast asleep, sprawled across the seat. He had not had *muambe*, nor any supper probably. It would not matter to him; he would satisfy his hunger when it was convenient.

The *Reine Astrid* was not far off, and we walked by starlight along the empty road. The boat was silent in the night, but there were lights to welcome me. We parted at the gangplank—

“Please remember,” Philip said, “if you should run into anyone who would like to shoot an elephant or lion—”

“I won’t forget.”

“*Bon voyage*. And come back.”

I walked with cautious steps. The passengers had come aboard, some of them at least, for the cramped and littered deck was alive with sleeping figures—men and women, in canvas chairs or stretched upon the deck with coils of rope for pillows, and little naked children curled up on chests of gear. And all the things they’d brought: big green banana bunches hanging from the ceiling, pineapples and papaya; baskets and luggage, and pots and bowls of food; and the rancid odor of cassava.

I threaded through the sleepers to the slippery iron stairs which none of them would dare to mount, up to the second deck where there were lights in staterooms and faint sound of muffled voices; up still another flight of broad, commodious ones, to the open lounge, dimly lighted and deserted; through the door to the *De Luxe*, where was neither sound nor light, save the bulb they had left burning in my room.

It was a little lonely in *De Luxe*. The higher up you go, the lonelier it gets. But one can’t have everything.

The night was filled with stars, and as warm and soft as velvet.



THE first day—

We are off soon after dawn. The river resembles a sheet of yellow glass, as smooth and solid, as muddy as the Mississippi, but broad and beautiful, winding sleekly through the forest which stretches away as far as eye can see; an endless plain of treetops, its rippled surface broken by the forest giants whose thick, straight trunks rear high above their fellows before they spread their branches to the sky. There are islands in the river—floating fragments of the forest, like emeralds set in topaz.

We are three in the *De Luxe*, including a woman who speaks neither French nor English, and a Dutchman, Mr. Gehts—an agree-

able bachelor who sells Chrysler motorcars in Stanleyville and appears well satisfied with his job and with himself. We had coffee on the deck at 6 A.M., in our dressing gowns—pitchers full of coffee which is never hot enough. Breakfast is at eight: mush, and cheese, and confiture (I manage to get toast), and cold meat this morning. Meals are not included in the passage money, but they're reasonable enough and not too bad—or anyway they weren't in the beginning.

There are only seventeen European passengers—a handful in the big dining saloon—most of them homeward bound for long deferred vacations. From Leo they will go by railroad to Matadi, and thence by ship to Europe: commercial employees and a group of bearded Fathers, and a young administrator named Victor Plumerel—a thoughtful, earnest fellow whose opinions I respected. He told me that the general rule, in government employ and commercial enterprise, was a six-months vacation each three years, of which about two months would be engaged in travel. By plane the trip could be covered in a day or two, but it was more expensive—much more if one's living was taken into count. All day he sat with his chess-board spread, prepared to take on any comers. He was good at chess—and probably, I thought, at other things as well.

The *Reine Astrid* slides back and forth, from shore to shore, with seeming aimlessness, unless one notes the targets on the banks whose painted arrows guide her course. The depth of water must be frequently determined, and two boys with poles are stationed at the bow. All day they sit on capstans, one on either side, prepared to dip their poles on order from the bridge. Even so, we graze the bottom now and then.

At midday we approach our first stopping place, Yangambi, where the Government maintains an experimental agricultural station. But there is nothing to be seen save a narrow clearing in the forest with a few scattered buildings half hidden in the oil palms. The *Reine Astrid* swings widely in the stream and comes back against the current, her big wheel threshing cautiously as she edges toward the landing. From bow and stern two boys dive overboard, with lines around their shoulders; they swim like fish and scramble up the bank, where there are ready hands to haul the heavy hawsers to which the lines are fast. And thus the clumsy ark is warped against the bank.

The gangplank is run out, though *run* is not the word, for the gangplank is a cumbersome affair of heavy planks, whose length must be adapted to the circumstances, sometimes a gap 'twixt ship and bank of twenty feet or more. There is great shouting and confusion. The captain remains upon the bridge, aloof and unconcerned; the 'second captain,' Philemon, rushes frantically about, commanding and exhorting, almost tearfully at times. But at last it is accomplished, and the Native passengers stream eagerly ashore, to purchase food or whatnot from waiting Native vendors whose wares are on display upon the grassy bank. But the voyagers have no need to disembark, for pirogues are three deep around the ship, loaded to their gunwales with pineapples and bananas, and woven chairs and baskets of the region—ramming one another, amid ardent imprecations, struggling valiantly to come within arm's reach. There is great bargaining and palavering.

Some cargo is unloaded and some more is brought on board. Visiting Europeans gather in the lounge and the boy behind the bar is kept busy serving beer. The arrival of the *Reine Astrid* is a rare event, an occasion for rejoicing and festivity—colorful and gay.

In an hour we are off. The boys who swam ashore, remain to loose the cables, and then must swim again to overtake the ship which does not linger for them. They must be quick, for the trees or posts to which the ship is tethered, may be at some distance from the shore; they must hit the water not far behind the hawser loops, and catch the truck tires which serve the ship for bumpers—like doughnuts hung along the water line, and clamber up the shallow freeboard. There is no time to waste. One of them almost missed; he caught the very last of the truck tires, and the churning paddle was perilously near him.

Philemon was standing beside me at the rail, looking down to see how the matter would turn out—

"Why don't they wait," I asked, "till the boys are on the ship?"

They could not, he explained, for reason of the current.

"Why not have the people on the shore cast off the lines?"

"Oh, no—" He looked alarmed. "It is not permitted."

"But suppose the boy is left?"

"Ah, yes—" He smiled. "It would not matter, for there are many others."

“But what about the boy?”

He shrugged and spread his hands.

At nightfall we tied up at Basoko, where there were corded faggots to be loaded, whereat the Native woodmen would be busy until dawn, tramping back and forth across the treacherous gang-plank, with the heavy burdens on their shoulders.

I went for a stroll with Mr. Gehts, by the light of a fading pocket flash he carried. My DDT bomb had sputtered and expired, and I had the hope to find another.

Basoko was not anything: a few poor houses spread along a road, at the end of which there was said to be a Mission. House doors were open to the muggy night, and through one, in a deeply recessed chamber, I glimpsed the household things of India: a shaded hanging lamp above a little shrine and fabrics on the wall. And there was an Indian maiden in the costume of her homeland, crosslegged on the floor, with a book upon her lap. I wondered what she read, and what she thought.

In the middle of the road were some embers of a fire. A watchman's fire, Mr. Gehts remarked, beside which he could sit in safety from mosquitoes. But no watchman was in sight. And what was there to watch?

The shops were closed. But a man who sat beside one in the dark, volunteered to fetch somebody. And presently a lamp was lit and a boy came to the door and let us in—a gentle Portuguese, with softly wistful eyes. He had some DDT bombs, but they were old, he said, and maybe worthless now. He got them out and piled them on the littered counter, and watched us shyly while we tried them one by one, until at last we found one which gave some sign of life. The shop was a strange conglomeration, with many things as old and useless as the empty bombs. Beside the door there was a rack of guns, at which I stared in real amazement. For there were fine expensive ones, repeating rifles of heavy caliber, which a London gunsmith would take pleasure to display; and there were ancient pieces, muzzle-loaders of a hundred years ago, of a sort to be enshrined in a museum.

“For Native customers,” Mr. Gehts explained, “when they can afford them. But the repeating rifles they may not have at any

price. Such dangerous weapons are for Europeans only. It is against the law for a Native to possess one."



THE second day—

Overcast and cool, almost chilly in the morning. No change of scene: dense forest to the water's edge, and the endless carpet of it almost level with my eye from the deck of the *De Luxe*: oil palms and countless trees for which I have no names, dripping with lianas, a veritable jungle, motionless and silent. The *Reine Astrid* slides back and forth across the greasy river, weaving in and out among the islands, from one target to the next, coming at times so close against the bank one could almost lean and touch the overhanging foliage. A flock of parrots chattering in a tree; occasional startled birds that wing across our bow; no other signs of life.

When I think of Livingstone and Stanley, and so many others, finding their way through this deadly wilderness, the adventure of Columbus seems a holiday excursion. Stanley, when he crossed the heart of Africa, from Zanzibar to the Atlantic, tracing the Congo to the Pool, was almost three years upon his way. Amazing exhibition of fortitude and strength, of endurance and determination.

There are pirogues near the shore. When the boat approaches, they make haste to avoid the backwash of our wake, edging close against the bank. Here and there are groups of huts: fisher folk, with their cornucopia fish traps, and picket fences of bamboo built across the outlets of lagoons and creeks whose mouths are like dark tunnels in the foliage.

At long intervals we come to tiny clearings where perhaps are traders' shacks or administrative stations, for which we carry mail or parcels. Four blasts upon our whistle, and a waiting pirogue, manned with several rowers, will come sliding out to meet us, almost skating on the glassy surface. The *Reine Astrid* will halt her churning paddle, riding swiftly with the current. The pirogue's course is

nicely aimed and timed to intercept her, angling deftly alongside. The rowers reach and clutch a fleeting bumper, and the pirogue rides against the ship. In the time it takes to exchange a pouch of mail or some minor bits of freight, amid a passing bedlam of greetings and palaver, the clearing in the forest is far away behind us. The *Reine Astrid* does not delay one moment; immediately her big wheel rolls again. Let the pirogue get away as best it can. It sheers off sharply, bobbing like a cork in our foaming backwash, the rowers on their feet and paddling with good will to keep it from capsizing. If it did turn upside down, I feel sure the *Reine Astrid* would ignore the whole affair.

Or sometimes there are boys who make a game of it, coming out to meet us, diving from their pirogues at the proper moment—not an easy one to gauge between the varying speeds of ship and current—swimming hard to catch a slippery passing bumper, often missing but not always; with a shout of triumph if successful, clinging for a while, rocked and buffeted against the ship, exchanging badinage with laughing passengers, letting go at last, to swim away and wait the drifting pirogue which has been left behind. A strenuous sort of game, but the players seem to thoroughly enjoy it.

There are wood camps on the banks: clustered huts and rows of neatly corded faggots, with which the river traffic is sustained. But there seems not much traffic. Two or three times in a day we may pass another boat—little paddle wheelers towing barges at their sides, or strung out upon a towline.

In the afternoon we stop at Bumba, and disembark a Britisher—a boy fresh come from London to take a job with Lever Brothers. I thought he looked a little blank at the prospect that awaited him, but he managed a smile and a cheerful "Cheerio." A little farther on we pass Alberta where Lever has an oil plantation.

At dusk we tie up at a wood camp.

This evening, in the lounge—like a country club piazza—there was talk of many things, including the housing situation. It appears that government employees, and many commercial ones as well, must surrender their housing when they go on their vacations, and, on their return, must do the best they can from the bottom of the list, without preference or priority. In short, a family may have lived for years in undisturbed possession of a comfortable home,

paying rental to government or private enterprise; and, at the end of a six months vacation, return to an inferior one, or none at all—compelled to live in lodgings, in crowded, second-rate hotels, for an indefinite period. The condition was a transient one, a product of the war, but it was productive of much dissatisfaction and some domestic discord. Not infrequently the wives postponed return, until they had assurance of proper place to live—

“Or they don’t come back at all,” said Mr. Gehts, the bachelor. He added grimly that any excuse to remain in Brussels would not be unwelcome to a good many of them.

“In the bush—” said Victor Plumerel, setting out his chessmen on the board “—in the bush there is no problem. There is only one of us. When I leave my post and house, another man takes both. When I return, he is moved away.”

There was talk of the Natives—increasing drunkenness in urban centers, and marijuana smoking, which is rigidly forbidden but they grow it anyway. Crime was on a rising scale; and crimes of passion in the Native cities were by no means uncommon.

“In the bush,” said Victor, “crime is rare.” He paused reflectively, adding with a smile, “I like the Natives. They are kindly, honest people. I like to live among them.”

“Why?” somebody asked.

“Why?” He turned the question in his mind. “Because they are happy. Because, left to themselves, they do the things that give them joy. If they want to sing, they sing; if they want to dance, they dance. Well, for example—”

And he told this story—

One night, in his solitary house deep in the bush, he was wakened by the beating of a drum—not far away, he thought. It went on and on, rising and falling in its cadence; and finally he was wide awake and his curiosity aroused. It was a brilliant moonlit night, and at length he got up and went to see. He walked a little way among the trees, guided by the sound, to a clearing where there was a hut. In front of it was a small boy, sitting on the ground with the drum between his knees, beating the tangled rhythms with his fists. And in a narrow space of hard, baked earth before the door, a woman danced—an aged woman, gray and wrinkled, dancing in the moonlight to the music of a little lad who might have been her grandson.

There was no one else, no spectator. He had stood for a long time to watch, hidden in the foliage; then cautiously retraced his steps. They had not seen or heard him. The drum was still beating when at last he fell asleep.



THE third day—

Still overcast and cool, and still unbroken forest. By any standards with which I am familiar, this voyage down the Congo is a fascinating and delightful trip.

Two of the bearded Fathers came to sit with us for early coffee—Hollanders, homeward bound on their vacations, from their Mission station in the forest. One of them was curious about the purpose of my visit. I said I was a writer.—Ah, a journalist.—No, not a journalist.—Then what?—I'd written plays and novels.—Had they been translated into French or Dutch?—Some of them had.—Indeed? Perhaps he was familiar with my work?—I named some, but he wasn't.—Was I seeking material in the Congo?—I was always on the lookout for material, everywhere.—Had I found something whereof to write?—Many things, I thought.—For a novel or a play?—Probably not.—For a travel book perhaps?—Maybe, something of the sort.—What had I found of greatest interest in the Congo?—The Natives.—Ah, yes, the Natives. He raised his eyebrows with a dubious air. It would take several years, he said, to make acquaintance with the Native mind, to begin to understand the way it worked.

I did not debate it with him. From his angle he was right. But in the course of any long relationship, one risks the loss of objectivity: emotional reactions no longer play a part, and phenomena are drained of their phenomenal qualities; observation ceases to be a living thing, and becomes an affair of facts and figures—or even nothing. There is something to be said for the fleeting glance.

Anyway, it seemed to me I was as close, or closer, to an understanding of the Native mind than I would ever be to the missionary

one—to the mind of that good Father, in his long white robe, stroking his ragged beard, regarding my presumption with gentle disapproval. The thinking of the primitive is less difficult to follow—for me at any rate. The simple man explains his mysteries simply—erroneously of course, but rationally, upon a given premise—constructing an elaborate scaffolding whose pieces fit logically together, the which, in its totality, sustains and corroborates a satisfying philosophy of life. If the premise is attacked the whole thing falls to pieces, as is the case with all religious systems. But the primitive man, unlike his more enlightened brothers, does not attack his premise; he lives in comfort with it. And on the basis of it everything makes sense. In just what way, or variety of ways, he adapts the Christian dogma and its involved theology to his elementary mind, I have greatly wondered. And I wondered if the Father could have told me. But I didn't think he could, and I didn't ask.

I said, unfortunately I had little time to spare for an intensive study of the Native mind. I was a traveler, actually a tourist. Indeed, I was not qualified to do more than record the vagrant impressions I gathered by the way—some of which, I realized, I might readily misinterpret. I would report, as carefully as I could, the facts as I observed them. Sometimes they were good, and sometimes bad. I was glad when they were good, and also a little sorry, for panegyric was not much fun to write and even less to read.

The good Father looked confused and changed the subject.

Near noon we reach Lisala. It is Sunday, and every European within reach—about fifty, I imagine—is on the dock to greet us: men, women, children, dressed in their Sunday best—a solid phalanx of them, in preferred position in the center of the landing place; with a crowd of Natives, equivalently arrayed, at a respectful distance in the background. There is freight to be discharged and to be loaded, and a gang of ragged stevedores prepared to do the job. The Europeans flock aboard the ship and take possession of our quiet lounge. Children romp about the deck, and the bar is very busy.

There is an Arab family on the boat. The man is tall and gaunt, and wears a long white gown. His face is like a bird's, with a Semitic nose and rather piercing eyes; he wears a smile of unctuous deprecation, as if he were apologizing. He is always in the forefront of the disembarking Natives, elbowing his way to be first across the gang-

plank. He will rush about in his flapping gown, with swinging stride, from one vendor to another, till he finds what he is seeking; then squat upon his haunches and endlessly debate the purchase of a vegetable, never raising his voice or making gestures, but clinging to his purpose with oily perseverance. Today, there were some tourist wares displayed: skins of crocodile and python, crudely fashioned into bags and slippers. The Arab lingered long upon the scene, with his family in attendance—two comely women with babies in their arms—but he could not reach decision. At last the patience of the vendor was exhausted, and he bundled up his wares and carried them away.

Among our passengers are two Portuguese mulattoes—a handsome boy of twelve or fourteen years, with thick black hair and big brown eyes; and a girl a little older, whom I take to be his sister—slender, graceful, as pretty as a picture. The boy is neatly dressed in khaki shirt and shorts, and the girl in Native costume, with a turban of the stuff around her head and a flower in her hair. The feet of both are bare. Their skins are dark enough to restrict them to the lower deck, but no darker than many of our own sun-bathing youth. They are always together, seeming not to mingle with the Natives, affectionately disposed toward one another—the girl with a maternal air far beyond her years, and the boy with smiling confidence. He will not cross the gangplank unless she is beside him; he will wait to take her hand. And they will walk together on the shore. When I pass them and look closely, they both avert their faces. It may be they are shy. Or perhaps they are self-conscious of the status which they have not fully earned. Or maybe it is I who am self-conscious, and they read it in my eyes.

There was a large and heavy crate to be loaded on the boat. A score of stevedores lifted it and brought it to the dock edge. But here the matter halted, for the crate was wider than the gangplank, and those who had lifted at the sides had no footing to go on. And the others who found room to catch hold upon the ends—about a dozen of them—could not stir it from the ground. They tugged and tugged in vain, while Philemon exhorted and almost wept about it.

At last they gave it up, standing in their places where they had left off trying. They waited for a bit to wipe their sweating faces, and then began to sing a broken-rhythmed chant, beating time with

their knuckles on the crate which resounded like a drum. They sang for quite a while, in perfect unison, the tempo steadily mounting till it was very fast, and their hips and shoulders swaying to the cadence. Then of a sudden, on no signal I discerned, as a single man they stooped and lifted up the crate as if it were a feather, level with their waists, without apparent effort; and singing as they went, they bore it across the creaking gangplank to the ship.



THE fourth day—

Clear and hot, but not uncomfortable. In our *De Luxe* lounge, with the big windows open and the ship in motion, there is a pleasant breeze. The forest is unchanged.

No stop all day. In the afternoon a dilapidated launch comes out to intercept us, and we stop our paddle briefly to pick up Mr. Gans, Inspector of Navigation for Otraco—a burly gentleman, of rough-and-ready manner, with a seafaring air about him. He quickly disappears upon the bridge, for conference with the captain whom as yet I have not met, or even seen—except at a distance, from the shore, standing on his bridge, looking out across the rail. It is said to be his first trip on the *Reine Astrid*, so perhaps he is obsessed with responsibility. But Mr. Gans is with him, or somewhere on the boat, for his paintless launch is riding at our side.

At dusk we tie up for the night at a faggot village. The huts are square in shape and numbered, with decent space between them, on geometric streets. They are beautifully constructed: poles laced with bamboo to form a screenlike grid on which the mud is plastered, both inside and out. To appreciate the workmanship one must see one in construction. Otraco pays for building them and rents them to its woodcutters. In time, I suppose, when the wood has been cut back to a distance it doesn't pay to haul, the village is abandoned and another one set up in a new place.

Things are growing in the clearing, wild and cultivated things

jumbled altogether—like an old-fashioned garden: tobacco, bananas, papayas, oil palms, peppers, and vegetables of one sort or another. And there is the sour odor of cassava. Cooking fires smolder in the open, outside the doors of huts; and strange things are being cooked under watchful guardianship—simmering in pots or calabashes, or being smoked, suspended by a string: fragments of an antelope, a monkey, God knows what.

It is still hot and close. And there are mosquitoes in the air, or gnats or something, though they do not seem to bite. In the fading twilight, the residents swarm the bank beside the boat; some with things to sell: fish and eels, and turtles tethered on their backs with woven grass; a dismembered monkey (I'm told the meat is good); a chunk of crocodile cut in convenient morsels (good too, but soft and fat). A small boy dragging an unhappy baby monkey on a string; some little girls hopping through divisions of a figure traced upon the ground—a game akin to hopscotch. Endless chatter and good humor. One drunk man, pretty drunk, staggering about, declaiming to the listeners in a savage voice, with ferocious scowling—airing his grievances perhaps. But the listeners do not seem to take it seriously. Natives are forbidden to make alcoholic beverages, but they do it anyway, out of almost anything. A Native moonshiner can get six months for it; a European selling liquor to a Native can get two years.

When I returned aboard the *Reine Astrid*, I discovered Mr. Gans, in pyjamas and bare feet, stretched in a wicker chair in the *De Luxe*. He hailed me in English and invited me to join him in a drink.

In the course of an hour he informed me, substantially, as follows—

The method of transport was not suited to the river. They should have followed the Mississippi system of pushing or towing, and not the one of barges lashed against the sides, which was a waste of power.

He spoke of the *Reine Astrid* with humorous contempt. They were building a new boat which would use oil for fuel. It was hard to get the wood cut. During the war they *made* the Natives cut it; but now they were back on the "democratic plan," and it didn't go so well. The Natives didn't want to work; they'd rather fish and loaf—and there was enough to live on in the forest. He believed in democracy when, and if, it got results. When it didn't, a kick in the

ass was the next best thing, and often the only thing they understood. Some of them were capable and willing, but you had to keep reminding them.

He sent a boy for Philemon who presently appeared and stood respectfully, cap in hand, to be interrogated—

How old was he?

Twenty-four.

What schooling had he had?

Eight years in Leo.

How long had he been upon the river?

Since he was fifteen.

There was a jest between them, which Mr. Gans exploited—for my benefit perhaps: *viz.*, if the “niggers” didn’t watch their step, the United States would send two million of its own to take their jobs. He winked at me, demanding if that were not correct, while Philemon essayed a feeble smile.

It was all a joke, but a pretty rough one.

For no apparent reason beyond my entertainment, Philemon was sent to fetch our engineer and the headman of the woodcutters. The engineer was a sober-looking fellow, in his middle years. The woodman was a chief’s son, a handsome boy of twenty with the figure of an athlete, straightforward in his bearing but not obsequious. They stood to answer questions which Mr. Gans propounded from his chair in semihumorous fashion, as one might talk with children. The engineer replied with heavy effort, but the chief’s son answered briskly, eye to eye. They seemed to like their rough interrogator, who perhaps was not so tough as his salty speech and manner would suggest. And I felt that Mr. Gans was convinced of their good will, which would not be terminated by a sound kick in the ass—if such were indicated.

He said he would see me in the morning. But in the morning, the launch in which he came had vanished from our side; both he and it were gone. He had left a book for me—a compendious volume of river information, which contained Otraco’s rules of navigation, and many pictures of the river targets, explaining the meaning of their cabalistic signs.



THE fifth day—
Unchanged.

We have a prisoner on the *Reine Astrid*. This morning, standing at the rail of the *De Luxe*, Victor called attention to him. There is a narrow space on the bottom deck, aft of the stubby fore-castle where the boys sit with their poles—a constricted area where passengers can stand, with heads and shoulders to the breeze that sweeps across the blunt-nosed bow. From the upper deck we can look down upon them.

“There—” said Victor, pointing. “Standing, with an open book held in both his hands upon the edge.”

And then I saw him—just the top of his head, and the open book held upon the ledge, almost level with his eyes—as I had seen him standing many times: the book in both his hands, because there was a chain that bound them close together, which before I had not noticed. He wore a sort of blouse of gaily colored print, the long loose sleeves of which came down below his wrists and concealed his manacles. But now I saw the chain that stretched between them, and another that bound them to a collar at his neck, covered by his blouse, so that his hands could not be lowered much beneath his breast.

“And there—” said Victor, pointing to a soldier who was lounging not far off “—is one of the two guards who are taking him to Leo.”

“Why to Leo?”

“To be extradited to French Equatorial.”

“What has he done?”

He had stolen two million francs—or so it was alleged. French francs they were, and the sum not as imposing as it sounded. He had twice escaped from custody, and had finally been captured in the Congo, in the north country, not far from Victor’s station. He was said to be a dangerous man, and the soldiers were instructed to

keep close watch of him. They must release his shackles when he ate, and went to the latrine, but otherwise he wore them day and night. If a mosquito chanced to light upon him, he would need help to slap it.

I went to make acquaintance of the criminal, threading my way along the teeming deck whose occupants accepted my intrusion with smiling amiability—past tiny rooms of crowded bunks, for the use of which no doubt there is an extra tariff; past the mouths of open hatches which led to noisome caverns in the shallow hull: airless dormitories where men and women sleep promiscuously together, unless they choose to lie upon the open deck; past a woman ironing on a crate, with a hollow iron filled with embers; past others cooking over charcoal braziers—messes in metal pans, fragments of dried fish, and repellent odors; past green clusters of bananas, and pineapples set to ripen in angles of the steam pipes, and long lengths of sugar cane, on chunks of which the children gnaw; past the boilers of the ship, which are near the bow, with faggots racked around them at the rails, to the deck above; past the blistering pit in which the sweating stokers feed the fires; past two little iron sheds which serve for the latrines, and which signify their purpose at some distance; past all of this and out upon a little space of deck, open to the sky, confined between the superstructure and the breast-high parapet of the restricting forecastle, washed by a clean, sweet breeze that swept across the bow—that narrow space on which I had looked down from the rail of the *De Luxe*.

There were several people out to take the air. From the corner of my eye, I saw the pretty Portuguese mulatto and her handsome little brother; and saw that they saw me and quickly glanced away. The soldier was still lounging at the side; and the prisoner still stood with the book in both his hands, spread open on the ledge. I touched his arm and he turned to face me, his hands and book against his breast—a personable man of thirty-odd, with shrewdly sophisticated eyes, with quite an air about him, of a bravado sort—not embarrassed by his chains, not in the least: a devil of a fellow with the women, one might guess. He could speak a little English and was glad to show it off.

“What do you read?” I asked.

He held the paper volume for me to see the title. The book was *Manon Lescaut*.

"Ah, yes! You like it?"

It served to pass the time, he said.

"You have been unfortunate?" I suggested, glancing at his hands.

He shrugged and laughed. It was all a great mistake, he told me. He had been accused of something of which he was quite innocent.

"But to be confined upon the boat—"

It was not too bad, he said.

"Under guard of soldiers—"

They didn't bother him. He laughed again. When he had an itch in a place he couldn't reach, they would come and scratch it.

"Still, you will be glad when the voyage ends?"

Yes, that he would. For he was anxious to return to the scene of his disaster, to face his accusers and clear himself in full.

"Why then did you take the trouble to escape?"

He looked sharply at me, with unsmiling eyes.—He was guilty as hell; there was no doubt about it.—It had been a foolish thing to do, he said. The impulse of a moment.

"And the second time?"

Ah that!—He turned the question shiftily in his mind, and then he laughed good-humoredly and brushed it all aside. He would be glad to be at home again, in the French Colony, where he had some influential friends who would do their best to help him—Americans like me.

"And who are these Americans?"

They were missionaries.

"What sort of missionaries?"

Protestants, he said. Of the church of which he was a convert.

"What church is that?"

What church? He frowned, as if trying to remember. At the moment he could not recall its name. But they were his friends and they would help him.

Suddenly his eyes had gone beyond me. And he was smiling now at something else, very debonairly. I turned my head. The Portuguese mulatto girl had a cigarette in hand and was looking for a light—

"*Mademoiselle, permettez moi—*" He was reaching in the pocket

of his blouse to find a match, kneeling with his shackled hands to strike it on the deck, cupping the flame for her, close against his breast—the epitome of gallant gesture.

“*Merci bien, monsieur*—” She smiled and drew away, ignoring me entirely.

“*Pas de quoi, mademoiselle*—”

The interview was ended; I went back to the *De Luxe*.

In the afternoon we come to Coquilhatville, superbly situated at the junction of the Congo and the Ruki—a provincial capital, beautifully laid out, with fine broad avenues lined with stately palms. On the bank against the Ruki is a fine *jardin des plantes* and experimental farm where rubber and cocoa and many other things are being cultivated. Victor and I explored it in a decrepit taxi, with a ragged Native driver who acted as our guide. In a grove of trees we came upon a tethered elephant—a small and scrawny one, with a dejected eye. The taxi driver said the elephant, too, was experimental. They had tried to make him work, like the Indian ones, but it didn't seem to be successful.

We drove about the town—the most important one in twelve hundred miles of river, between Stanleyville and Leo: a charming, tiny European village, and extensive Native city with broad palm-shaded roads, pleasing to the eye—with hospital and schools, and two big Missions close at hand, one Catholic and one Protestant. Coquilhatville—Coq for short—stands on the Equator.

Black clouds piled in the sky and a thunderstorm broke over us, with fine pyrotechnical display. The rain poured down in torrents and it was delightfully cool, and fragrant with the smell of rich, wet earth. In half an hour the storm had rolled away and there was a gorgeous sunset—bands of gold and crimson in a mackerel sky.

We stayed the night in Coq. Some passengers had disembarked, and others came to join us.

Among them was Père Boelaert—



VIII

THE sixth, seventh, and eighth days—
Cool and rainy when we depart from Coq; the forest dense as
ever, but there are wide areas of marshland along the widening
river.

Père Boelaert sits next to me at table in the dining saloon—a man
of sixty, I should think, with long gray beard and thin ascetic face,
in which are keen and restless eyes: a figure suggestive of *Don
Quichotte*—a revolutionist perhaps, or at any rate a man of strong
conviction, inflexible and militant; and, beyond that, a cultivated
gentleman. He wears the long white soutane of the "Missionaries of

the Sacred Heart," in Africa for half a century, and himself for eighteen years of it.

Across the table from him is a traveling companion, Frère De Poorter, of the order of the "Christian Brothers"—a young man with red beard and hair, to whom at times Père Boelaert appeals for confirmation, and who supports his statements like an echo. They come from Flandria, on the Ruki, not far from Coquilhatville; and they are en route to Europe on vacation, after long years of delay.

By way of introduction, on first acquaintance at the breakfast table, Père Boelaert asked abruptly if I believed in a moral law, divinely sanctioned.

I caught my breath and said I didn't, adding that the moral commandments appeared to me to be of social origin, designed by Man for his own security—as for example, "Thou shalt not kill" was, by implication, a simple affirmation that one did not wish to die. It did not seem to me that a supernatural agent was needed to explain it, nor any of the other so-called moral laws.—I was pleased to have conveyed so much in French, albeit pretty lamely.

"Hum—" Père Boelaert nodded. He did believe in a moral law, he said, ordained by God. But he did not say it with a superior air, nor regard me pityingly, nor seek to change my mind. He was respectful of my point of view. His question and my answer are of no importance to this narrative; I repeat them only to emphasize his tolerance and directness. Since I propose to quote him at some length, on controversial issues, the Reader is entitled to a picture of the man.

So then—

Père Boelaert speaking, at one time and another—in French, in Dutch or Flemish which had to be translated, in very meager English—at early morning coffee, at the dining table, at night upon the deck—to those who cared to listen:

The region with which he is familiar, contains about 2,000,000 Natives—a seventh of the Congo's total population; a fifth of it, if the Ruanda-Urundi be omitted—the Nkundo-Mongo Nation, composed of many tribes, loosely related but with a sense of national unity. He traced an outline of the region on my map, describing a rough ellipse, about four hundred miles from north to south by six hundred from east to west—hot, forest country, all of it, within

the arc of the encircling river, but not quite reaching it, for the river dwellers are of another breed—extending almost to Stanleyville, to Lusambo in the south, to the Kasai River in the west, within two hundred miles of Leo: a big chunk of the country, perhaps a fifth of the total area, in the very heart of the great river basin.

In addition to the Mongo population, there is a small minority of pygmies—100,000, more or less. They do not mix. Even in the schools they must be kept apart. Still, they occupy the land on peaceful terms, contributing to one another. The Mongo are indifferent cultivators, but they do some modest farming, exchanging produce for meat supplied them by their hunting pygmy neighbors.

They are gentle, kindly, hospitable people, living a model pattern of communal life, in no proper sense uncivilized. Their language is melodious and richly expressive—more so, Père Boelaert said, than any other with which he was familiar. They have behind them a long history—unwritten, but carefully carried on in song and story to each succeeding generation. They have no graphic arts, but they are skilled musicians and extraordinary dancers. Their religion is monotheistic, venerable with age, rich in lore and moral in its precepts. I ventured to inquire why, with such religious heritage, one should seek to substitute another faith.

Père Boelaert said he had no wish to change their faith, but only to direct it. He did not elaborate, and I do not know exactly what he meant.

At any rate, such was his description of the Mongo people—or rather, the endowments of which they'd been possessed until fifty years ago, since which time their gifts and blessings have been steadily declining.

The first attack upon the Mongo Eden came from the exploiting buccaneers who preceded the completion of the railway from Matadi to the Pool, in the concluding years of the last century. These ruthless pirates penetrated deep into the country, leaving grief and desolation in their wake. They were guilty of all the crimes of which they've been accused; and there are still alive many creditable eyewitnesses to substantiate the facts. They came in search of gold and remained to plunder, impressing Native labor in pursuit of rubber or any other project which engaged their avarice. They were followed by the soldiery, both blacks and whites, enlisted to make

war upon the Arabs, and who introduced some scourges of their own. It is since the beginning of the century, in the region of the Maniema River, that sleeping sickness has made such frightful inroads. Tuberculosis is rampant everywhere. And as for syphilis—

To be specific: In Coquilhatville, Bordet-Wassermann reactions, widely taken, indicate infection in a third of the Native population. In the interior, the situation appears to be much worse: an indicated incidence of almost 60 per cent.

Such widespread prevalence of venereal disease would in itself account for a decline in birth rate, but not for such decline as is in effect, which has arrived at an alarming stage suggesting national suicide—not undertaken consciously nor with the aid of contraceptives, but by decline and atrophy of the sexual instinct: a phenomenon yet to be explained, but which seems to have its source in the civilizing process.

According to Père Boelaert, there is supplementary evidence of expanding decadence in the primitive society. Communal tribal life, deprived of its traditional sanctions, is in process of destruction. At the root of the social edifice, the family is deteriorating. Western marriage standards are not strengthening the ties between the sexes, but are weakening them. There is increasing drunkenness and crime. Western education—of little application in the forest where makeshift schools are few and far apart—is serving no good purpose; it is not adapted to the primitive intelligence, which is not yet prepared to properly interpret or assimilate it. Money is a corrupting factor. The labor undertaken for it is distasteful and degrading, antipodal to their deepest instincts. Civilization is being forced upon them. They are made to walk before they learn to crawl, performing like trained animals or robots.

In the forest they are most lost and helpless—in the empty wilderness where the better aspects of the civilizing process are least in evidence and its dubious benefits can rarely be obtained, where their chief acquaintance with it is the labor it demands: to climb the trees for oil nuts, and bear the heavy sacks for miles upon their heads to the plantation owners, receiving in return a bare subsistence wage—a way of life which simply makes no sense, yet from which, once embarked upon, they can find no escape. They feel themselves abandoned to their fate. It is not the diseases of the flesh that over-

whelm them, though they are bad enough, but a more deadly thing which is destroying them: collective spleen, long cankering melancholy—a deep despondency, never far beneath the surface of the fickle Bantu nature. They are dying of a malady of soul—of broken hearts.

In short, they can no longer sustain the will to live and reproduce themselves: unhappy victims of a psychic trauma induced by shock and strain, the multiple disasters of half a century of European blunders and abuse. The man has lost his sense of racial pride, and with it his virility. The woman no longer feels the need to be a mother. The sexual instinct dies of malnutrition. Together they have nothing to pass on to the child—no security or hope.

Nor is their situation a unique one. There are others who have suffered grievously from the dreadful dislocations of the civilizing process. Perhaps the Mongo people have been more afflicted, or were, by their peculiar nature, more susceptible to injury. However this may be, the menace is abroad throughout the land. In many areas population is declining at an alarming rate, and there is grave concern about it in high quarters.

So, in substance, said Père Boelaert.

We come to the mouth of the Ubangi, and again the river widens. The shore is deep with *marais*—great swamps of water reeds, and the forest has begun to thin a little. The western bank is no longer in the Congo, and we will not touch at it again. From the mouth of the Ubangi, the river is the boundary, dividing the Congo from French Equatorial Africa.

Père Boelaert speaks again:

Colonial policy is sadly misdirected. Exigencies of war served to accelerate the civilizing process beyond the point of safety. Economic expediency has taken precedence over all considerations of humane and moral nature—a myopic policy which threatens to destroy the bird that lays the golden eggs. Without a healthy, happy, expanding population, the Congo cannot flourish and produce. Nor is the Government completely honest. It says one thing aloud, for the benefit of world opinion, to which it is particularly sensitive, by reason of the fact that its claim on the Ruanda depends upon a mandate from the United Nations, and public criticism is a thing

to be avoided. But it whispers contradictory instructions in the ears of its administrative officers.

Victor Plumerel, the young administrator who had been listening in attentive silence, took firm issue in the Government's defense. Specifically, he asked, what did the speaker mean?—What evidence could be present of such double-dealing?

Père Boelaert smiled, as if to say, "You know as well as I." But Victor did not yield. He was unaware, he said, of deceit of any kind, in little things or big ones. No secret instructions had ever come to him. He believed the Government to be attentive to, and sincerely concerned with, the welfare of the Natives.

"Hum—" Père Boelaert nodded thoughtfully, as if carefully weighing the objection. He added that in the Mongo region, the Government was taking land from Native ownership, without the consent of the proprietors, and disposing of it to European planters and concessionaires.

Victor challenged the correctness of this statement. The Natives, he affirmed, had never had individual titles to the land, but only a communal interest in it.

"You are quibbling," said Père Boelaert.

"Not at all," said Victor.

Père Boelaert smiled and carried on: The Government, in leasing or granting land concessions, makes arrangements through the Native chiefs, without consulting the individual owners. In effect, a family which has occupied a piece of ground for many generations, may be abruptly dispossessed of it, without recourse or warning.

Victor interposed: Within the framework of Native Law and Custom, the Chiefs alone were vested with authority. If the Government did not deal with them, with whom then could it deal?

Père Boelaert did not answer this directly. He said the Chiefs were creatures of the Government: they did as they were bid or risked to lose their jobs. And some of them were venal: a thousand francs in hand might decide the future of thousands of their subjects.

Victor denied the Chiefs were creatures of the Government, or risked to lose their jobs in honorable defense of the interests of their people. In witness whereof, he mentioned several cases which had come to his personal observation, in which the Chiefs had held out stoutly against the Government, and had finally been rewarded with

success. Venality he admitted to exist, as it did in all societies. But the Government was not a party to bribery or corruption, and could be depended on to punish such offenses rigorously.

"Hum—" Boelaert nodded and went on: In the Mongo country, big concessionaires—Lever Brothers, for example—had acquired large areas for oil-palm plantations: land expropriated from Native ownership, by due process of law, on the face of it, but actually without any moral sanction. Deprived of the land on which they've lived, the Natives are compelled by economic need, to work on the plantations—for a wage of about twelve cents a day, which is perilously close to a bare subsistence level. Housing is furnished and they may bring their families if they like, though most of them do not: a condition, in effect, of agrarian peonage. In addition, the Native residents in the natural palmeries of the forest, within a radius of many miles of a plantation, are required to harvest the oil nuts and transport them to the concessionaire, who establishes the price. There is no other market.

Victor shrugged and spread his hands. Of the Mongo country he was not prepared to speak, since he had no acquaintance with it. But in the north, in the section with which he was familiar, quite other things were going on. In the region of his station, for example, the government was giving title to the land, in pieces of a size of twenty acres, to individual Natives who seemed qualified to farm it—trying by this method to create a sense of private ownership and consequent responsibility. These selected farmers were under European supervision, being educated in Western agricultural methods—fertilization of the soil, crop rotation, and the like; and they were supplied with everything essential to their task. The project was still in an experimental stage, but it seemed to offer promise of success. The basic problem was psychological: to induce the Native to assume responsibility, to cherish the land and protect the produce of it in his individual interest, and take pride in his achievement.

In this region the staple crop was cotton, and roads were being built to facilitate its transport. But at the present time most of it must be carried to the market on their heads—sometimes a distance of twenty miles or more. And cotton must be carefully cultivated, and picked at proper time. Not infrequently, when this moment

was at hand, the owner would be missing from his farm, having wandered off on some irrelevant excursion of his own, or merely to avoid the harvest labor, leaving the produce of his toil to rot—without a care or thought about the outcome of it. If he could be found, he'd be sent back, but sometimes he couldn't and the crop was lost. It was an uphill job, but Government was doing everything that could be done to make it a success.

Père Boelaert smiled with gentle skepticism.

We come to the town of Bolobo.

On the grassy bank above the landing, under shelter of big trees, is a long stone table, like a counter in a shop. And behind it, waiting for us, standing so close together that their elbows almost touch, are half a hundred shop assistants, boys and men, each with his wares set out in the narrow space before him—for the most part things of ivory, for Bolobo is an ivory-carving center: paper knives and articles of toiletry; cameo brooches, necklaces, and bracelets; desk sets and statuettes—little figurines, in some of which is evidence of skilful craftsmanship. And there are bags and slippers of crocodile and python, pocketbooks and cigarette cases. But not anywhere, and never to be found, is an object of Native inspiration—no religious symbol or adornment or utensil, never an example of the exquisite handicrafts which were their heritage.

The voyagers, of all degrees, flock about the counter, and there is great bargaining and palaver. Almost everyone buys something, and flaunts his purchase to his neighbors, or suspects, upon their flaunting, they have made better bargains, and is properly chagrined. The Fathers, in their long white robes, are intent on paper knives; and Mr. Gehts emerges with near a dozen of them, which he will dispose of to relatives and friends in far-off Europe, who, I feel assured, would be happier without them. I came away with several things myself, most of which are still reposing in a drawer of the desk on which I write. Among them was a lady's handbag, made of crocodile, of the consistency of iron; and which, to this date, no lady with whom I have acquaintance, has been willing to accept. In Bolobo it seemed desirable.

It begins to rain—a gentle shower, dripping through the branches of the trees; and the vendors hastily gather up their wares. In a jiffy, the counter is laid bare and the shop assistants vanished. The

travelers flock back upon the ship, to compare their cherished trifles and pack them away in already bulging luggage, amidst the accumulated rubbish of their own confused and complicated lives.

The evening comes, and discussion is resumed at the point where it left off.

Père Boelaert speaking:

Colonial policy must be reshaped—and quickly, or the Congo will be lost. The forest villages are emptying; vacant huts, once the homes of happy families, are crumbling into ruin. In these hamlets reigns a mournful sadness. The life force is exhausted and the source is drying up; for the Bantu, as has been well established, will only procreate in joy. By sorrow and despair he is rendered impotent.

He had, he said, specific reference to the Mongo, of whom he had intimate acquaintance, for a period of nearly twenty years, whose diminishing morale he had watched with his own eyes. But what he had to say was, in more or less degree, applicable to the country as a whole. In general, for example: the economic inequality between the relatively easy and comfortable life of the urban centers and the conditions in the impoverished bush, were provocative of anarchy and crime. In 1945, in the District of Tshuapa, the police arrested 20,000 Natives, for crimes and misdemeanors—1 in 36 of the total population. Such performance did not inspire confidence in the security of the ruling class. Disregard for law was the first step to rebellion.

But the trouble went much deeper than economic handicap. The wasting illness of the Mongo people was not to be relieved by more of the same medicine, of the sort colonial policy prescribed for every ailment: more food and education; more hospitals and clinics; more factories, mines, and agricultural projects; a higher living standard, in the Western sense. Therein was not the remedy. This was not to say that the medicine was bad—far from it; but that the invalid, in his present state of health, was allergic to it. A doctor who administered a drug to a patient too feeble to support it, was guilty of malpractice. The intentions of a tutor might be of the best, but if he imposed upon his pupil an education which destroyed him, he was in fact no better than a murderer.

Not more haste but less, was the present indication—until the sick man's strength had been restored; until he could better orient

himself in a new and frightening world; until hope and pride revived, and he could feel once more the joyous thrill of life.

Victor leaned upon the table, with his elbows on the chessboard and his chin cupped in his hands. Specifically, he asked, how was this to be accomplished? What precisely had the speaker to suggest?

"Hum—" Père Boelaert said, and seemed, like *Don Quichotte*, to couch his lance. What must be accomplished for the Mongo people, and the country as a whole, was the re-creation of a social climate favorable to reproduction: the moral law and order of a social life in which the family would again discover the disciplines which it had lost, and the will to live and multiply.

"But how?" insisted Victor.

Père Boelaert reared his head, with flashing eyes. One step was imperative, he said. For years the Government had pursued a devious course with reference to polygamy—a cancerous institution, sanctioned by pagan faith and custom, which could not be harmonized with Christian doctrine or the civilizing process. Colonial policy had compromised itself repeatedly upon the issue, forbidding and permitting, causing endless confusion and distress; its record was a labyrinth of rules and revocations. The time had come to take a positive stand. For amelioration of the demographic picture postulated the establishment and universal practice of monogamy. Without such firm and final action, all other remedies were only palliative. If civilization was not moral, it was an idle word.

Victor made thoughtful answer, choosing his words with care, regarding Père Boelaert with sober, honest eyes. To the question of polygamy, he said, he had given no intensive study. It appeared to him to be a single aspect of a multisided problem, from which it could not be entirely segregated and examined by itself. In practice it was waning, and if not repressed too harshly, should die in course of time a natural death.

The Government, he added, was not infallible; it made mistakes of course, like other human agencies. Its progress was one of trial and error. But colonial policy was not a rigid structure; it was flexible enough to profit by its blunders. The civilizing process was a hard and painful business, for everyone concerned; of that there was no doubt. But he had confidence in the parties to it—both Gov-

ernment and Natives—that together, in the end, they'd work things out.

“Hum—” Père Boelaert nodded polite acknowledgement, with unalterable conviction in his eyes.



THE ninth day—

We were due this morning to arrive at Leo. But at breakfast yesterday there was a gentle jar, and scraping sound beneath the hull; and the *Reine Astrid* was grounded on a mudbank, near the Congo shore; nor would all the threshing of her paddle in reverse, serve to back her off. It went on interminably, without the least effect, while our captain remained in seclusion on the bridge, invisible and uncommunicative. But Philemon was busy as a bird dog, dashing up and down the stairs from the boilers to the bridge, exhorting and commanding.

At length, a boat was lowered and lines got to the shore, made fast to sturdy trees. But the winches snapped them, and the *Reine Astrid* remained as immovable as ever. In the afternoon a towboat came along, crawling up the river with barges at its sides. With long maneuvering, and much shouting back and forth, it moored its barges near the shore and came to help us, making fast a hawser at our stern. For an hour or two it struggled manfully, slacking off and charging out at different angles, while the paddle of the *Reine Astrid* churned with might and main. In the end, the towboat gave it up, collected its barges and went on upon its way.

The *Reine Astrid* continued to struggle by herself, in desultory fashion—as if the captain could think of nothing else, except to keep on trying the same thing, though he was convinced it was completely futile. But near evening, someone was inspired with a new idea; and the crew began to shift the faggots—such of them as remained after stoking all day long—from the bow back toward the stern. Almost immediately the ship responded, and readily floated

loose—a conclusion, I assume, which could as well have been accomplished some ten hours earlier. But I am a tyro in such matters.

We went on a mile or two, and tied up for the night.

Today we have proceeded at full speed, in an effort to reach Leo before dark. Philemon is hopeful but reserved. The maître d'hôtel is noncommittal. He has a worried look, suggesting that our larder may be nearly bare—a condition which our last few meals have led me to suspect. The European passengers are restless and impatient; they have had enough of it and are anxious to get off. They pace the deck, and talk of nothing but the hour of arrival. The voyagers below seem more relaxed. The Portuguese mulatto and her little brother are sitting side by side on canvas stools, with their backs against the bulwark of the bow. The girl looks up and sees me watching her, and quickly looks away. The prisoner stands as usual, with his book spread open, in both his shackled hands—the tale of *Manon Lescaut*, which serves to pass the time. The boys sit on the capstans with their sounding poles.

The overcast has cleared and it is a pleasant day, comfortably cool in the breeze that we create. We have pretty well emerged out of the forest, and the French bank of the river has an almost barren look, though there are wide strips of *marais* at the water's edge. On both sides of the river are gently rolling hills which, in the afternoon, begin to assume the consequence of mountains, at the rim of the horizon.

Toward evening the river narrows sharply, and as suddenly emerges into the Stanley Pool—a spacious basin, as placid as a mill-pond, like an estuary fed by a yellow tide.

Philemon comes along the deck. He is, if anything, more hopeful. Leo is not far away, at the far side of the Pool, though we cannot see the shore across the lake. He thinks we will make it, but it is not certain yet. The maître d'hôtel is reassuring, and he wears a smile again. He says we shall be in Leo for our dinner; there will be no more meals upon the ship. Mr. Gehts is fully packed, his paper knives and other *objets d'art* meticulously tucked into his luggage. Victor's chessmen are reposing in their little bag; and Père Boelaert sits in silence with nothing more to say, in the brief time that remains.

The sun goes down—a great magenta ball in a crimson sky which

deepens into purple. We are following a channel marked by buoys, around the southern border of the Pool: a circuitous approach to our objective. The tropic twilight comes and will quickly yield to night. But it cannot matter now, for there are lights upon the channel markers. And stop a minute, wait! Yes, there is Leo: the twinkling lights of it, not far off across the lake. The passengers call out to one another, and come running to look across the rail.

But stop again! What now? The *Reine Astrid* is nosing toward the bank, with her paddle idling, then coming to a stop; and the boys are fixing lines about their shoulders—

“Good God!” storms Mr. Gehts. “What utter nonsense! I could swim from here to Leo.”

Philemon approaches, crestfallen, almost tearful. There are bad rocks, he says, and the captain will not risk it. Boats have been sunk at night. It is better to be safe. The *maître d’hôtel* comes by with scowling face, announcing wearily that dinner will be served. A makeshift meal, he adds with a sadistic air.

And he was right about it: some revolting odds and ends; and for dessert an orange of the African variety—green when it is ripe, sour as a lemon, with a skin as tough as whale hide.

We are moored against a swamp, in a hot and breathless night. Through the open windows come swarms of bugs and gnats—and certainly among them some mosquitoes. They fly about the light globes and fall into the food and crawl upon our necks. There is no safety from them on the deck; nor anywhere to go except to bed, in a stifling little room, beneath a smothering net.



LEOPOLDVILLE: where the river flows out of the Pool, at the head of that fearsome *chute* of cataracts and rapids whose padlocked gate so long defied intrusion; metropolis and capital, largest (7,600 Europeans and 120,000 Natives) and most sophisticated of the Congo's cities, and the oldest of them; a thriving industrial and com-

mercial center, situated in rolling, pastoral country between the river and the Pool, with fine broad avenues lined with graceful palms and splendid mango trees—not unpleasing in its aspect.

Across the river is the town of Brazzaville, capital of French Equatorial, of which the Belgians speak with an indifferent shrug or undisguised contempt. I did not visit it.

Of Leo I find not much to say that I've not already said of Elizabeth and Stanley—

It has a railway station which in its design suggests a monument, as it might justly do. It boasts a skyscraper of six or seven stories, which seems particularly out of place. At a *pâtisserie* which calls itself *Chez Papa*, one may sample delicacies of Continental quality. And at the big café across the street, you may sit beneath an awning and savor an aperitif while Arab vendors eye you from the sidewalk, displaying ivory carvings and the usual bags and slippers, seeking invitation to invade your privacy.

There are some nice old houses of white painted wood, commodiously colonial in their atmosphere, dating back in their construction to a less fretful age. There is the Greek hotel—or Greek by implication: pretentiously uncomfortable and noisy; and a big barnlike cinema, with antiquated films and bad projection. And there are the same dilapidated taxis, with the same harassed and ragged drivers. There are some rickshas, too, but not many of them nor much patronized.

In the midst of things, where, presumably, it happened to get started fifty years ago, is the Native city—nondescript in its appearance and frightfully overcrowded, but not unpicturesque behind its screen of tropic verdure, with lofty palms that shade its narrow roads and decorative fountains where housewives come to fill their water pails and linger to palaver; with huts and houses packed in fine disorder amid the vines and flowers, behind casual bamboo fences: a city with an atmosphere of age, fortuitously mellow.

I was lodged not far from it, on the outskirts of the European town, on a thoroughfare frequented by the workers. Soon after dawn they would be passing by. I would be wakened by the hum of voices and the shuffling of their feet. From my window I could look down and see them: men and boys walking briskly in the early

morning coolness—a long procession of them. For an hour they'd be passing; and again at evening, going home. Sometimes their voices would be raised, bantering back and forth; and sometimes they'd be singing. A very few had bicycles; these were later comers—clerks and shop assistants. They were anxious in the morning, hurried and intent. In the evening they were free to take their time, and that was when they sang.

My hotel was operated by Sabena, for the overflow of voyagers who could not be accommodated at the airport. Occasionally at night a busload of them came and were off again at dawn. But also we had some permanent guests: young Belgians, in commercial or Government employ, and their young and pretty wives—most of them newly married, and newly come to the colonial life, installed in the hotel for no one knew how long, until the housing program provided quarters for them. They were attractive youngsters, like boys and girls at home, though somewhat more reserved and better mannered.

The hotel was rather like a prison: quite new and modernistic, built around a narrow open court, with balconies on which the guest rooms opened. The court had a stone floor, in the center of which was an idle fountain in an empty concrete basin. It was a bleak and dreary place in which I never saw a human being pause. But tethered to the basin was a wretched little monkey who sometimes whimpered sadly to himself.

There were no public rooms in the hotel, nor anywhere to sit except within your own, from whose window there was nothing to be seen but a patch of dusty street. The furnishings were of the massive sort—as functional as a prison and as uninviting. No meals were served but breakfast, in a small, bare room, presided over by a surly Native steward who frequently had words with the proprietress, from which he seemed to emerge with flying colors. For lunch and dinner, the Sabena bus would come and take us to the airport where the food was monotonous and bad.

At seven in the morning breakfast could be had, and the Belgian boys came promptly, half a dozen of them—spick and span in shirts and shorts—for their eggs and coffee, with sometimes a sardine or slice of sausage, and always bread and cheese. They sat at tables by

themselves, or two together, not having much to say—quiet and reserved, and most polite. They bowed to one another and to me, before they sat themselves, and again when they were leaving. They were serious, preoccupied young fellows, with eyes upon their wrist watches. When they had breakfasted they did not linger, but briskly pushed their chairs back and hurried off to work.

A little later came the wives—one with an infant in a perambulator, and two or three not far off from such event: pretty girls in summer frocks, from trousseaux planned in Europe for honeymoons in Africa.—And how had it turned out with hopes and dreams? And how *would* it turn out?—But their eyes were bright and filled with warm expectancy. When they came into the room, they smiled and nodded to me, murmuring a good morning. They sat two or three together, chatting of—I know not what: perhaps of the new, hot day that was beginning, and what they'd do with it; of happy school days and the life from which they'd parted; of the homes they hoped to have; of the baby who was there and the others who were coming; of their husbands and their weddings. They lingered long at breakfast, until the surly steward began to rattle things, for they had nowhere to go and nothing much to do.

Of Leo, I remember these things best: the workers trudging back and forth upon the dusty road, the hum of voices and the shuffling feet; and the boys and girls with whom I sat at breakfast in the dreary little room. So far apart they were, and yet so close together, embarked—however little they might be aware of it—embarked together upon a great adventure.

One morning at nine o'clock, I took the plane for Brussels.



IN THE small hours of the night, we came down at Tripoli—When we came out of the messy airport restaurant, the waiting room, which had been deserted when we left it, contained a strange assembly of travelers who had arrived while we were being fed.

There were no men among them: only women and children, and no child who looked to be less than ten years old; women without men, except adolescent boys; grandmothers and mothers and young girls in their teens. This was strange enough, but stranger still was their appearance, for they looked as out of place as masqueraders—like members of the chorus in a peasant opera. The younger boys wore knickers and black stockings, and tight-fitting jackets of another day—patched and darned and threadbare. The girls and women were in peasant dresses, and odds and ends of things, long out of date—ugly, shapeless garments. And there were some with shawls about their heads; and others, boys and women, who wore clumsy leather boots reaching almost to their knees. The girls and women had no make-up on their faces, nor polish on the broken nails of their hard-bitten hands; their hair had no acquaintance with a permanent wave, nor any other coiffure save to hang upon their shoulders or be drawn sleekly back and braided in a knot. They were poor people, with stolid, peasant faces; they had no adornments except the wedding rings which the older women wore.

There was no mirth or gaiety among them, or scarcely any talk. They were travel stained and weary, to be sure: set down here from the sky in the middle of the night, in a desolate airport on the rim of Africa. But in their eyes was something more than travel stain and weariness. They were sad people; I think the saddest people I have ever seen. Even the children had sad, adult faces, as if they had been burdened with cares beyond their years, as if they had been born with all their childhood missed.

They sat in family groups: women, girls, and boys—from ten years old to feeble age. There was a woman who was ill, reclining in a chair, gasping painfully for breath, while a young girl kneeled beside her on the floor, fanning with a piece of folded paper, watching anxiously her mother's faded eyes—if indeed it was her mother. I went to ask if I could be of service, but they didn't understand me.

Who were these people? Whence had they come and whither were they bound?—I made inquiry of an affable young Britisher to whom I was directed as having them in charge.

They were Polish refugees, he said, escaped out of their country in the first days of the War, when escape had still been possible. The

husbands and fathers had joined forces with the British and fought with them to the end. Those who had survived were still in England, dispersed in camps, their future undecided. The women and children had been evacuated into British colonies in Equatorial Africa. And there they had remained through all the War years; there they had lived and died, in a world incredibly remote from the homeland they had fled; there had grown up the children who had never seen their fathers. But now at last the families were being reunited. Every day or two a planeload left Africa for London. They'd be taking off again in a few minutes now, as soon as they'd refueled. And in the morning they'd be safe and sound in England.

And where would they be then?—What new humiliations were in store for homeless and dependent people? What solace for the women in their helpless men?

I walked through the waiting room again, looking at the stolid, apathetic faces, with their hauntingly sad eyes; the joyless children with the adult faces; the woman still reclining in her chair, gasping for her breath, while the young girl fanned and watched: "Unhappy victims of a psychic trauma"—as Père Boelaert had described the Mongo people—with nothing to pass on, "no security or hope."

My plane was ready; they were calling me to come—



BRUSSELS: among the loveliest of cities, and one of the most civilized (in Greater Brussels 1,299,929 Europeans; Natives, none). It was startling to see so many white-skinned people, and a bit depressing. Their pallid faces had an unhealthy look—until again one grew accustomed to them.

Soon after my arrival, some gentlemen with interests in the Congo, invited me to luncheon at a famous restaurant. My hosts included an international banker, an industrialist, a publisher, an oil-palm planter, and the grandson of a distinguished scientist-explorer, now deceased: a group of cultivated men, sincerely interested in the civilizing pro-

gram, both from economic and—if I might judge on short acquaintance—humanitarian standpoints.

For lunch we had: first, an assortment of hors d'oeuvres, accompanied by a dry, delicious sherry; then, filet of sole with a titillating sauce, with which was served a suitable white wine; following this was filet mignon, crisply done outside and correctly pink within, with a garnish of mushrooms in sweet butter, and a tossed green salad for whose dressing I could not have suggested an additional dash of anything. To liquidate these items were cobwebbed bottles of vintage burgundy, poured by the *sommelier* with solemn reverence, from their basket cradles. For dessert, one was free to choose from a variety of pastries and ices, or a simple fruit: hothouse peaches, displayed in partitioned cardboard boxes, each in a cotton nest; or fresh sliced pineapple, dipped in curacao or brandy; or heroic strawberries—almost as big as hen's eggs.

I refused the strawberries, though the *maître d'hôtel* highly recommended them. I had already priced them in a less expensive restaurant, where they came to about sixty cents a piece. Instead, I took pineapple, which I felt to be a modest and patriotic gesture. I do not know the cost of the slice I had, but I have no doubt that in the Congo—whence my slice had come—I could buy a hundred whole ones for an equal sum. Finally, we had coffee and liqueurs, and cigars were passed.

As I lighted my Havana, I calculated roughly that an average Native worker in the Congo, providing he was steadily employed, might, in three to five years time, earn sufficient money to pay our luncheon check—which proves exactly nothing.

The conversation, in mingled French and English, hinged upon a question that I raised: was the civilizing program proceeding satisfactorily?—and if not, why?

My hosts responded amiably and with apparent frankness. In general, they appeared to be agreed upon the issue:

They feel that, with proper food and medical attention, the Natives will be equal to their task—to what is hoped for from them: an expanding interest and technical ability, directed toward development of the Congo's vast resources. They think the problem is fundamentally a material one—or, at least, that the material aspect

has first place on the agenda. They attribute the breakdown of morale, where it has occurred—and the gravity of which they did not deny or minimize—they attribute such breakdown to material handicaps. They maintain that these handicaps are by no means new, and are not the product of the civilizing process, but have always existed among the Bantu peoples: in short, that the Natives have never been well-fed and have always been riddled with disease. In a primitive status, they have been able to survive, despite their handicaps; but called upon to make the effort, both physical and adaptative, demanded by the civilizing process, they have not the necessary stamina and strength.

In substantiation of this brief, they point to certain sections of the country, where the civilizing agencies have had time and opportunity to alter materially the physical conditions—in the main, by proper feeding and preventive medicine—and in which morale is on a mounting scale, with notable improvement in the demographic picture.

They felt assured, they told me, that so rapidly as methods might be found to control the diet and physical disorders of the Native population, improvement in morale and spiritual well-being would quickly and inevitably follow.

Specifically, they said, the Natives needed meat, of which they had but little in their natural state; and of which not near enough to satisfy their needs was presently available. But there were big projects under way for breeding cattle, in localities adapted to the purpose; and from which, at a not far distant time, an adequate supply might be expected. The value of meat had been determined, though there had been some trouble in introducing it—. The speaker, Mr. Beaumont of Lever Brothers, paused with an embarrassed air.

“Trouble? What?”

“A minor difficulty.”

“You mean, they didn’t like it?”

“Oh, they like it well enough.”

“Then what?”

“Just a misunderstanding—”

“About what?”

"Well, you see—" It appeared that Lever Brothers, in a certain district where they had plantations, had introduced tinned horse meat. But the Natives wouldn't eat it.

"Why not?"

"Because of a misapprehension." A trifling matter, Mr. Beaumont added, which, when the source had been determined, was readily resolved by inviting the tribal chiefs, or their delegates, to visit the processing plant and witness for themselves the tinning of the meat.

"But the source? What was it?"

"It seems they had been doubtful of the nature of the meat."

"Doubtful? In what way?"

"They were not convinced that it was horse meat."

"What did they think it was?"

"Well—" Mr. Beaumont smiled—"it sounds ridiculous, and we are not completely sure of the fact, but we have reason to believe they suspected the meat might be human flesh."

There was a hearty laugh.

I walked alone to my hotel, along the Rue Royale, past the Colonial Office and the palace of the King, beside a pretty park in which the grass was freshly green, the trees in blossom and the lilac coming out—where children played discreetly, in view of aproned nurses. It was a fine spring day and the sidewalks were thronged with well-dressed people. Sleek motorcars with uniformed chauffeurs discharged fashionable ladies at the doors of luxury shops: flowers, bonbons, millinery; windows filled with books, old pictures and old silver—the residuary heritage and cumulative result of many hundred years of being civilized.

It was very far from Africa, from the river and the forest—almost too far to remember, or to be sure one remembered rightly. And the gentlemen with whom I had been lunching, men of good will who knew whereof they spoke, albeit *in absentia* or brief, detached encounter, by means of graphs and charts and volumes of statistics, whose counsel would be heard in the Colonial Office, and the echoes of it reach the farthest corners of the forest—it was very far from them to Frère Secundien in the great school at Astrida; to Dr. Becker's clinic on the Beni road; to Père Boelaert on the Ruki, among the Mongo people; to Victor Plumerel in his lonely post up north—

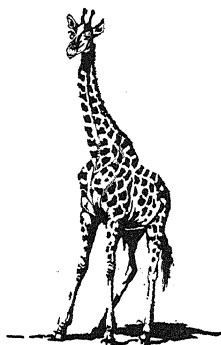
and farther still to the aged woman he had told about, dancing in the moonlight, all alone, while the little lad sat drumming in the doorway of the hut.

But the civilizing process would go on, for better or for worse. There was no other end to it.

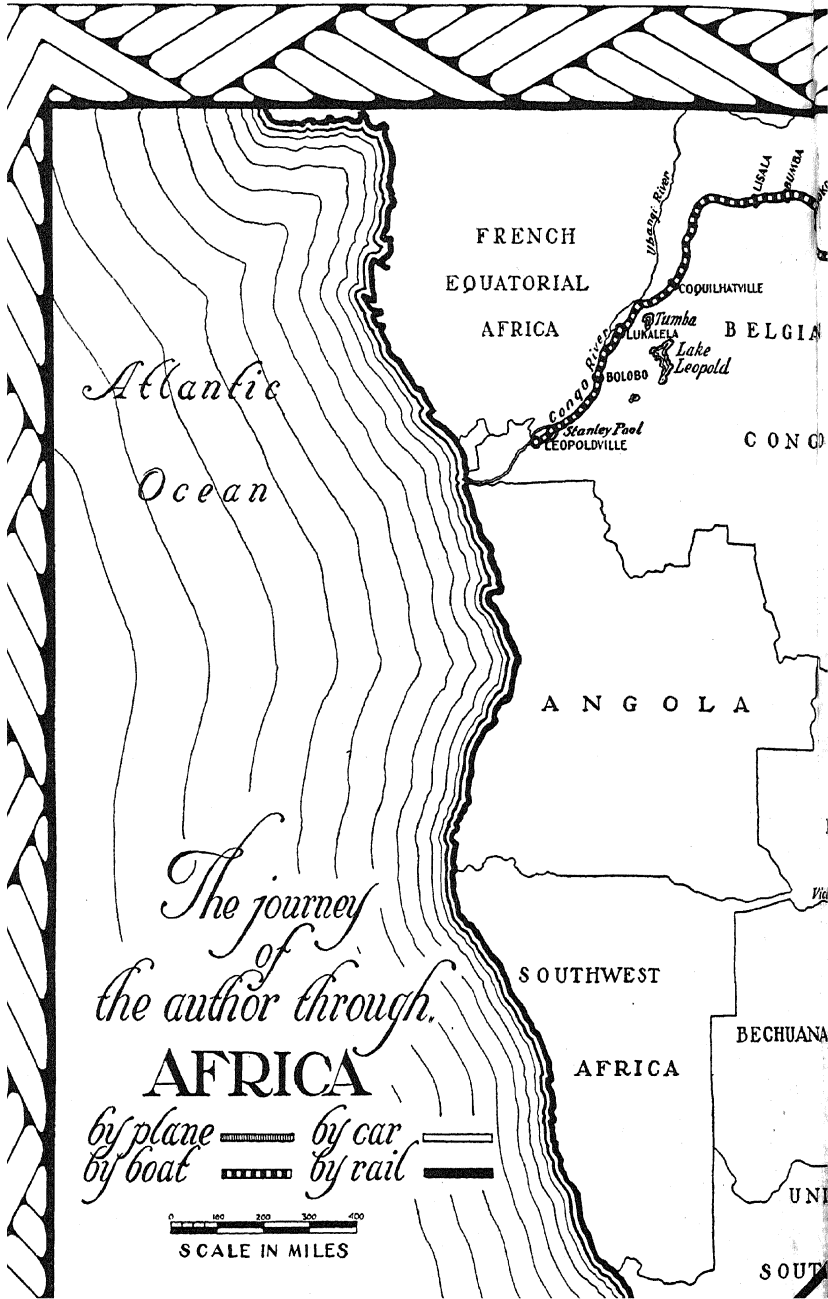
"Passage East"

June, 1948 to September, 1949





Set in Linotype Janson
Format by A. W. Rushmore
Manufactured by The Haddon Craftsmen
Published by HARPER & BROTHERS, New York



*Atlantic
Ocean*

FRENCH
EQUATORIAL
AFRICA

BELGIA
CONGO

ANGOLA

*The journey
of
the author through.*

AFRICA

by plane ———— *by car* ————
by boat *by rail* ————

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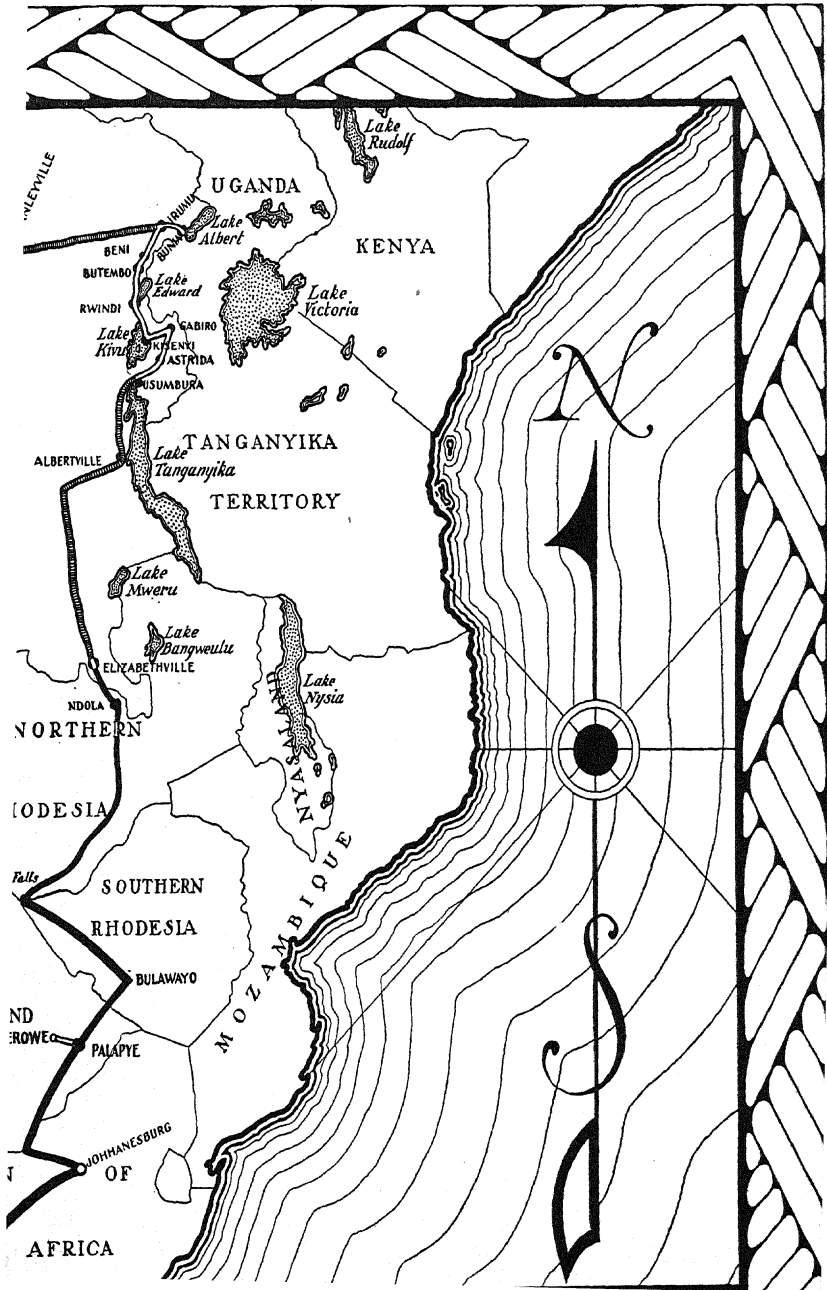
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