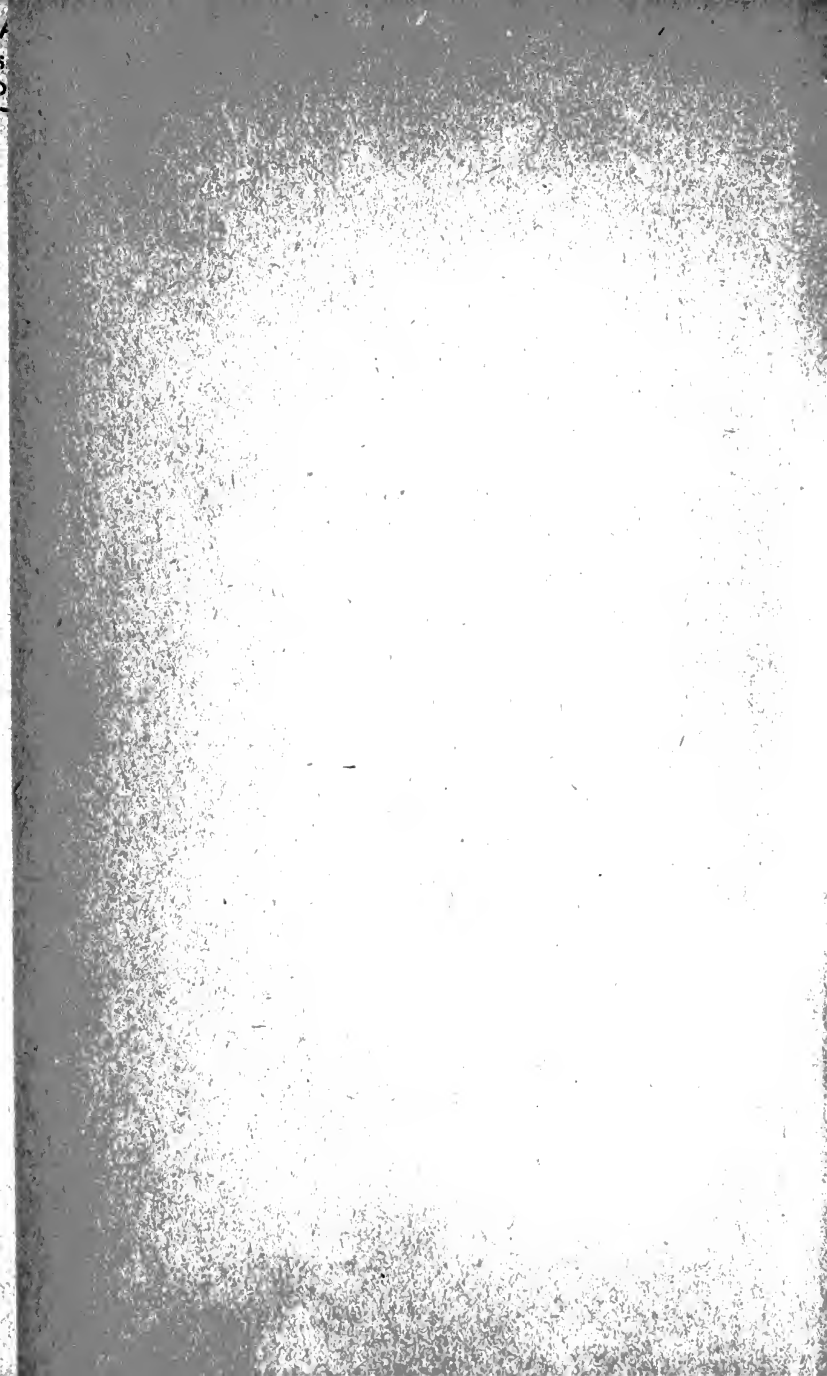




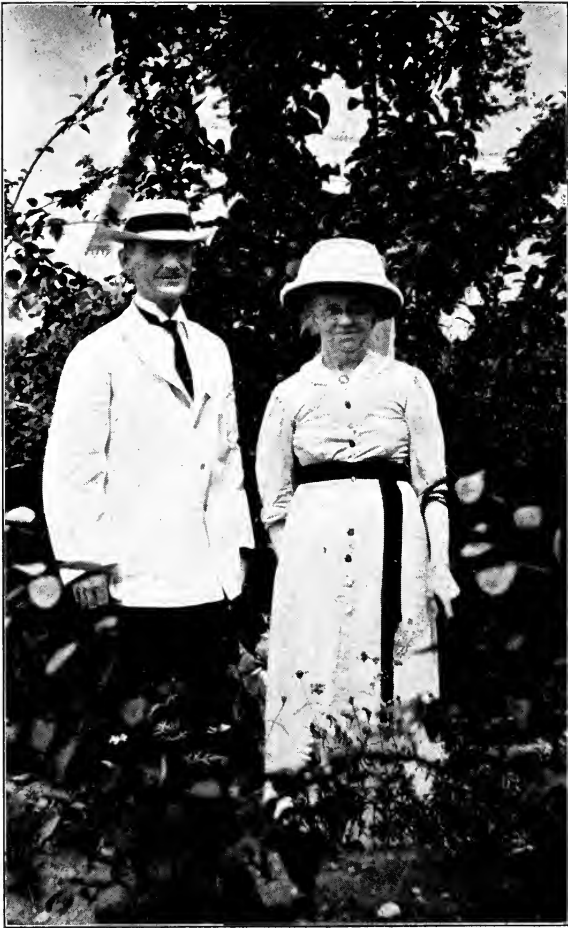
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REV. AND MRS. H. D. CAMPBELL

# A CONGO CHATTEL

The Story of an African Slave Girl

by

REV. HENRY D. CAMPBELL

Missionary of the Christian and Missionary Alliance to the  
Congo Belge for a quarter of a century. Brevetted by  
his Majesty ALBERT, King of the Belgians,  
as Chevalier de l'Ordre Royal du Lion.

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## INTRODUCTION.

A CONGO CHATTEL is not simply a story. It is a message and an appeal. It will cause a tug on the heart-strings of one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and make him wish he could plunge at once into the midst of Africa's darkness and seek to set some prisoners free. It will encourage some who may have begun to wonder whether foreign missions are, after all, worth the sacrifice involved. It will surely stir every honest Christian reader to earnest prayer that the day of Africa's bondage may speedily end.

Mr. Campbell does not expect a wholesale uplift of the degraded masses of Africa by any utilitarian schemes, so popular in our day, which leave out of account the fact that the individual lost soul is dead in trespasses and sins and can only be quickened by a living faith in the Christ who died but lives again. He has seen what commerce and education and industrial advancement have accomplished but turns from them all with the firm conviction that nothing but the Gospel of Jesus Christ will save Africa's millions, one by one.

The writer of this introductory note will never forget the day, at Freetown, W. Africa, now more than a quarter of a century ago, when he with two

fellow-laborers welcomed Mr. Campbell to African soil. With a large party, Mr. Campbell was bound for the Congo and the ship made its first stop in Africa at Freetown. When the brief visit was ended, and the vessel was headed for the ocean, the missionary party gathered on deck and sang:

“Launch out into the deep,  
Oh, let the shore-line go.  
Launch out, launch out in the ocean divine,  
Out where the full tides flow.”

Tears dimmed our eyes as the party sailed away and we said one to another: “Yes, they are launching out and little do they know what it may mean of hardship, of suffering, or of death.”

If we could tell the story of the intervening years it would show a record of fortitude and heroism of the highest order. Some of the missionaries have been promoted to the presence of the Master. Others have been compelled, by sickness and other causes, to return to the homeland. The broken ranks have again and again been filled up. Difficulties of climate and language have been met and largely overcome. The great wall of heathen superstition and demon oppression has been broken down. A native church of several thousand souls has been gathered in, the present membership being over sixteen hundred. More than seventy native teachers are giving the Gospel to their

people, while every church member takes some aggressive part in spreading the truth.

In all of these trials and triumphs Mr. Campbell has had an important part. It will be seen, therefore, that he does not speak as a globe-trotter or a novice, but as one who has seen and knows the problem of Congo. May the blessing of God make A CONGO CHATTEL a challenge to the Church of Christ in English-speaking lands, rousing them to greater faith and new endeavor for the spread of the Gospel in dark Africa.

J. E. JADERQUIST.

January, 1917.



## P R E F A C E .

EXCEPT for the happy ending, the story of Lelo is a common one. Similar stories vary only in details, but in the main are much alike in revealing the merciless exploitation of Congo's women. The substantial facts of Lelo's life were related to the writer by Rev. A. R. Williams who gave her asylum in time of direst need. The illustrations used are taken from photographs made by missionaries of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Lelo is not the real name of the subject of this African story, but she is a real woman of flesh and blood, covered with a black skin. She is also a type. Some of her actual experiences apply with equal truth to the sad lives of multitudes of oppressed African women. Reared in the gloom of superstition, their souls are dwarfed under an overshadowing dread of impending evil. They live out their animal days of toil and drudgery in the cruel hands of brutal and brutalizing taskmasters.

Congo's women need friends. They need Christ. May this imperfect narrative inspire to prayer and service for the uplift of these sorrow-stricken souls.

May Lelo be typical in another and better way of many soon to be brought from spiritual darkness and physical degradation into the heights and light of the knowledge of the love of God revealed in Jesus.

H. D. C.

Boma, Congo Belge, 1916.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A GIRL FOR A JUG.

**H**ELO and her mother halted abruptly in the forest path behind a living screen of vines and ferns that hid the village of Kinkoso. As they stood under the wet foliage, dripping with the early morning mists, they stooped under the burden of water jars in the baskets on their backs. A clamor of voices raised in altercation reached their ears.

"The palaver has begun," said the woman in a whisper.

"What is it all about, Mama?"

"Chief Bungu, who came last night with his caravan, left a jug with *Tata Koso* a long time ago. When Bungu sent for it, Koso told the messenger it had been stolen."

"Will Chief Koso have to pay?"

"I think he will," was the reply. And then with a troubled look at the child, she added, "Bungu may ask for a slave."

Entering the town, they deposited their burdens at the door of a small grass hut behind the largest house in the village, before which a noisy crowd of principals and spectators were gather-

ing. Had Lelo and her mother foreseen the outcome of that conference, they would not have found any entertainment in the gestures and eloquence of the actors. Maybe Lelo's mother had some premonitions of trouble in store. She drew the girl close to her as they huddled together with the other women at one side of the plaza, well out of the way of the men.

"No, I will not take another," angrily shouted Bungu, stamping the dust of the place from his bare feet, and waving away disdainfully with a brawny black hand the suggestion of such an alternative. "I want my own jug, and mine only!"

Koso endeavored to interject a conciliatory word. He crouched upon the empty gin box that served as his throne, the skirts of his long coat gathered about him, and winced under the storm of anger he had aroused.

Bungu was within his rights and knew it well. It seemed as if he did not propose wasting time parleying with the unreasonable culprit. Possibly the onlookers had not weighed his manner correctly, and maybe his attitude was put on for effect. To say nothing of getting the highest damages, such a born orator and actor would make the most of his opportunity of speaking on the only stage in the land—the palaver court. He stood, long carved walking-staff in hand, apparently ready for immediate departure if his demands were not met at once.

Bungu's appearance and dress harmonized with the wild, tropical background. He was a broad-shouldered, big-framed young man, with much of his chocolate skin plainly visible beneath his scanty costume. His short, tightly curled hair was partially hidden by a long-tasseled scarlet fez cap stuck on the back of his head. He had on a moth-eaten, heavily braided red short soldier coat, which had long since been discarded by some "civilized" warrior beyond the seas. This treasure, so valued by headmen in the Mayombe country twenty-five years ago, he had obtained after a long march and at a high price from a trader at Matadi on the Congo River. Although decorated with almost two rows of big brass buttons the coat was open, revealing Bungu's bare and muscular chest. Fastened around his neck was a string of wild boar's teeth, with a single leopard's claw pendant. Tied to a girdle about his waist were two monkey skins, the tails of which flapped against his calves when he lunged toward his own people, or whirled to fix Koso with a verbal dart. On one ankle he wore a brass ring as thick as a child's arm, the work of a village blacksmith.

Koso's hut was built at the head of the single narrow village street that was lined on both sides with irregular rows of grass-thatched houses made of split palm branches. The lane, trodden free from grass and swept of rubbish, was the only clear spot in the jungle. Massive, straight-trunked

trees grew close up behind the huts, and so tall were they that the village gathered but little shade from their dense, far-away branches. The kingly crowns of rich oil palms were visible above the rank foliage of ferns and vines. Broad-leaved plantains crowded against the papaw trees whose delicious fruit clung in great clusters of twenty or more about their tops.

Disconsolate Koso, although under his own veranda roof, in his own village, and surrounded by his own people, was peacefully inclined. In fear of what might befall him he did not intend to allow Bungu to go away dissatisfied and revengeful, so decided, if possible, to propitiate him. He tried to appear at ease leaning back against the post that supported the ridgepole of his hut. On the post just above Koso's head were rudely carved figures of men and women in all manner of grotesque postures. The front wall of the hut, about ten feet from the post, had a narrow, window-like door cut in it. On a shelf above the door were several doll-like wooden images decorated with charms made of bits of grass cloth, feathers, and bird claws. An eagle's head skewered to the wall and hung with medicinal plants was also added to this group of heathen fetiches.

The people of Kinkoso were very "religious"; they also had idols to aid them in their devotions. Propped against a stump at one side of the hut in full view of the company, was a rough figure carved



GATHERING NUTS AND  
PALM WINE. MAN IN  
FOREGROUND HAS  
CLIMBING BELT



A TRIBAL CHIEF IN FRONT  
OF HIS HUT. FETICHES  
CARVED ON POST





to represent a woman with a child in her arms. It was quite five feet high even after the white ants had devoured the legs. The town goats now scratched their backs against it, and where its proud feet had once been planted the pigs had dug a muck hole. However important in other days it was now neither in favor nor feared; its brief period of veneration and dread was past.

Bungu, answering the gestures and eager invitation of Koso, allowed himself to be persuaded to sit upon another gaudily-labeled and green-painted gin box facing the old man. Koso was not more than forty but then forty is "old" in the Mayombe. His ceremonial garb was a long-tailed black frock coat which had done good service overseas before it reached the *Missioni*, and notwithstanding its worn and faded appearance, was good value for the goat he had given for it at the Mission barter store.

What a story that coat could have unfolded if coats of that kind were in the habit of talking about their early experiences. Perhaps it could have told of its first appearance on a European boulevard, surrounded by a number of others of the same elegant cut. Then a story of vicissitudes that had brought it at last, thin and greasy, to the obscurity of a tropical jungle. Maybe that particular garment was specially made to adorn the "orator of the evening" at some missionary meeting. Its tails may have flapped sympathetically as

its wearer warmed to his theme under stress of feeling for the distant heathen. At any rate, even if the former owner had not been able to reach the heathen, here was his coat to warm the heart of Koso, and there was the goat to cheer the missionary larder. Whether it had been sent as a free-will offering in a barrel, or had come baled, by way of an old clothes-shop, smelling of barter, matters not, and, of course, cannot be known as long as the coat itself could not relate the story. Now, although rusty and snuff-spotted in front and gray in the seams, it not only comforted Koso, but was admired by his clan. And yet it was a great change from prestige abroad to a place in Koso's musty coffin strong box, to be aired only on occasional palaver days.

From a buttonhole where it was attached by a greasy cord dangled a small hollow gourd filled with home-made snuff. An accident had befallen one of the tails of the coat and it hung askew, revealing the grimy grass cloth protection for the old man's skinny legs. Koso's pineapple fiber cap was without visor and dyed black. He sucked nervously at a dark clay pipe inlaid with solder taken from refuse tin cans in some white man's backyard down at the Coast. One wrist was covered with brass bracelets which clinked feeble protests while keeping time with his mollifying gestures.

The men were dressed in nondescript costumes,

all much alike as to dirt. Some wore red blankets about their shoulders; and all carried knives in their belts. They were seated on mats very near their respective principals who were in the places of honor. The women and children were almost naked except for a bit of cotton cloth about the loins. They stood in groups by themselves out of the way, awaiting the result before taking up their baskets and hoes for the day's work in the fields.

The few women of Bungu's caravan were huddled near the feet of their bold leader. His men grasped their guns, and the women held on to their loaded baskets, all ready to move at the word of command. Being in the enemy's territory they were somewhat uneasy, and hoped their Chief would not go too far. Koso's people were with him to a man, but those experienced in palavers knew his case to be hopeless. Present law and the customs of the ancients were all in favor of the wronged stranger.

"As for me," resumed Koso as soon as Bungu sat down and composed himself to listen, "I would at once give up the jug if it were possible, but I tell you it was stolen."

Before Bungu could remonstrate against such an impossible excuse, a naked boy darted like a flash under the eaves of the low-hanging roof into the sheltered veranda space behind the two "Kings" and grabbed a dirty, skinny yellow dog. Taking advan-

tage of the excitement, the cur had sneaked in and was nosing into a pot of steaming beans and palm oil intended for the refreshment of the noble visitor. With a firm grip and angry curses the boy dragged the cur away, and threw it whining and snarling into the bushes, after cuffing it severely. A little girl snickered at the first howl from the wretched beast, which was the signal for a general outburst of merriment. It is always so amusing to see a habitually starved dog beaten for pilfering, and so mirth-provoking to hear the creature's yells! The tension on gun grips relaxed and the women chuckled with relief over the happy diversion.

Bungu talked mostly to his own retinue when he rose to speak, turning occasionally to note the effect of his arguments upon the opposing faction. His own people had heard it all before, but it was a righteous complaint and worthy of many tellings. Several times he had detailed the affair to the caravan with minute exactness to beguile the tedium of the journey. The gross offense of Koso was without logical excuse, and he must be made to pay dearly for it. Bungu would now condescend to rehearse his wrongs for the last time. It was enough; the culprit must settle without further delay or take the consequences.

"I myself bought it down at the River," Bungu repeated circumstantially; "it was full of *malavu* (rum) and I gave the *Mundele* (white man, or

man-in-cloth) a manload of palm kernels for it. Is it not so?"

"It is so indeed," chorused his loyal party.

Thus encouraged Bungu continued: "It was a beautiful jug, colored and striped, with a handle of clay. So strong was it that it would have made a mark for my grave which neither sun nor rain could ever destroy. In all this land show me one woman who can make such a jug. Bah! the jugs of this land are but as egg-shells beside it. Mine was no fragile, unpainted earthen jar, burned in a fire of sticks in the open street. Mine was a jug from *kumputu* (the foreign land)!"

"From *kumputu* indeed," chimed in Bungu's crowd affirmatively, in answer to their leader's look and expectant pause for their amens.

The wronged Chieftain stopped for breath, while allowing time for the facts of the jug, its value, durability, and general desirability to sink into the minds of all unprejudiced persons. Then taking up the strain and glaring at Koso, he demanded, "I left my jug in your hands, is it not so, on this very spot?"

All eyes turning mechanically upon Koso had the effect of upsetting him. He knew the danger of admitting the truth, but what else could he do? The facts were too well known to stand denial. Sober-faced and speechless, he established the fact of guilt with a nod of assent that would cost him dear. Not that Koso himself would pay much, but

Lelo and her mother might find it hard to foot the bill for the jug from which they had never drunk.

Bungu's eyes reflected a glow of triumph and satisfaction. No need of more proofs now since Koso had acknowledged his guilt. All that remained to be done was to settle the terms of indemnity. The vanquished one made the proposition tentatively—"I will send to the River, and get you another jug. One of your own men may go with my caravan to select the very size and pattern." He offered his gourd to Bungu, but the snuff was waved out of the way, almost as an impertinence.

The victor scowled at the presumptuous debtor, and growled, "Would that be *my* jug, the one you took from my own hands?"

Slobbering into his cold pipe, Koso cringed on the gin box, while Bungu, secure in the great advantage he had gained, scorned the displeasing offer, saying, "Me, I tell you I will not take another jug, nor two nor ten others; give me back my own!"

Again the dull reiteration in an evasive undertone of the futile plea, "How can I; it was stolen."

"I must have my own jug or a slave," tersely claimed Bungu.

His demand met with a derisive denial from Koso's people; they indignantly agreed that it was exorbitant. While order was clamored for by the cooler heads of the village, Bungu's quiet crowd watched for the next move of their shrewd Chief.

"A slave?" inquired Koso in well-simulated amazement, as soon as he could hear his own voice.

"A slave," slowly repeated the wronged Chief with an accent of finality.

"For one small jug? No, I will not!" The refusal was made as if he meant to stick by it, but noting the deepening cloud of wrath on his adversary's face, he modified it by offering, "I will put a goat 'on top' of a new jug, and drop the matter."

"No," said the owner of the precious missing jug, spurning the promised goat, and conscious of the justice of his cause, "I will not take a goat, nor a pig, nor both 'on top.' Give me my jug or a slave, and be quick about it, lest I take my case higher!"

Bungu spoke with the confidence of one who offered a good bargain, and affected absolute indifference as to whether it were taken up or not. Before his adversary had finished speaking Koso had made another rapid mental inventory of his live stock. He had but few slaves, and no full-grown ones that he could spare. By all means he must stop the matter on the spot. He could not afford to bribe any higher "King" and feed a crowd of hangers-on through another hearing of the case. He would probably lose and not get off with so light a fine. His choice fell upon Lelo. It would never do to accept the terms too soon, so he temporized with Bungu's ultimatum.

"Me, I have no slave to spare; a King must

drink palm wine and eat fresh meat. Who will climb my trees or hunt for me if I let *all* my slaves go? Take one pig, one goat, and a new jug of palm wine, and settle it so at my expense." But Koso well knew that his insinuating offer would not meet with a favorable reception.

"I have spoken," snapped Bungu. With a curt shrug of his military shoulders, he arose and adjusted his monkey skins, grabbed his staff from a henchman, and added, "Refuse my terms in the presence of these witnesses, and let me go!"

"Since you are so obdurate," whined the older Chief, contesting every inch of the ground according to the rules of the game, "and as I long for peace, let us then consider my slaves. I have no man, but I have a boy. He is whole, growing fast, and will soon be able to work."

"Indeed not," returned the victor, "I want no baby. However, I might take a girl child to oblige you, if she is strong and not too young."

Koso, with seeming great reluctance said, "I have a fine girl, but I couldn't part with her, unless I got something valuable to even up matters."

"Let me see her," was Bungu's non-committal reply.

Koso, throwing off his cringing manner, turned to Lelo's mother and shouted to her to bring her child. The girl stood clinging to her mother, but was soon hustled forward for inspection. Trembling in the presence of her lord and the big stranger, tears





MISSIONARY CARAVAN ON THE ROAD



INTERIOR OF IIUT, SHOWING COFFIN USED AS  
STRONG BOX



moistened the long lashes hiding her large eyes, and with her arms folded over her breast she stood before them, a sweet-faced, well-formed child about ten years old. A scanty cotton cloth that could have been drawn through the brass bracelet on her tiny wrist was her only covering. Her ornaments were an anklet of brass and a necklace of blue glass beads. Sick at heart she listened to the big men who stood commenting on her little form. She longed for her mother's touch, but mother was now in the background with the other women behind the crowd who were reckoning the market value of the shivering, chocolate-skinned "chattel."

Bungu looked her over, searching for defects while taking note of all good points. If not so valuable at present she would later on bring a fat bundle of cloth, guns, and rum in the matrimonial market. Taking increase of value into consideration, and the children that would come, she might safely be estimated as a good investment in exchange for a bit of painted crockery. Without any apparent desire for Lelo, talking as if bored with the long-drawn-out affair, Bungu announced that he had been expecting a full-grown slave, and failed to see how he could relinquish his just claim to take a half-grown girl. He allowed he might be persuaded to take a woman. He said it would be a long time before Lelo could do hard work and bear offspring, even if she lived. Sickness and accidents had to be reckoned with, and even death. It was

a risk, but he was anxious to get back to his own country, so he would take the chances with the girl, giving full release for the jug he had been deprived of in such a suspicious way.

Koso offered but a feeble remonstrance, saying he ought to have something to equalize the bargain and salve his feelings, even if he were only given a goat. It was hard, he said, to part with his precious child. Lelo was valuable in any open market and that he wanted Bungu to understand. Bungu waxed indignant at the suggestion of dallying over terms of surrender, and declared he would go and leave the palaver hanging fire unless his ultimatum were accepted at once. Dreading the discharge of a weapon so well directed against his peace and property, Koso with a final groan said, "Take her."

In that short sentence, so agreeable to Bungu, Lelo listened to her condemnation to a lifelong servitude. But, what of it! she was only a child and a girl at that. What mattered it where she lived and slaved? Who cared? Nobody—except Lelo and her mother.

## CHAPTER II.

### A FORCED MARCH.

**R**OSO called loudly for palm wine. A boisterous manner was assumed to cover his relief that the affair was over. "Bring us a drink to bind the bargain, and a parting cup for my good friend Bungu."

A slave hastening to obey brought the required refreshment from the royal hut. He bore two large gourds filled with the thirst-quenching, slightly intoxicating drink. He produced a huge mug decorated with bright stripes, and a deep, thick soup plate. Lifting the cleanest end of his loin cloth, he deftly dusted the mug and removed some of the grime from the plate by way of concession to the honorable guest.

Bungu saw through the open door a great assortment of crockery on the damp earth floor. Pottery was a good investment, an evidence of wealth, and widely used in barter. The supply included wash bowls, pitchers, and one or two common articles, the use of which was unknown to the owner. A passing glance sufficed for the display inside; Bungu was more interested in the movements of the slave before him.

After setting the mug on the soup plate between

the two "Kings," the man filled it to overflowing with the thin, milky sap. Koso politely took a hearty swig, thus ingenuously proving that no evil substance had been dropped into the gourd. The kneeling slave hastened to fill the mug to the top and over, then shrank back humbly on his haunches, while the noble visitor regaled himself. In turn, according to their weight in the social scale, the male strangers and headmen of Kinkoso partook from the oft-filled vessel, until every drop had been drained from the gourds. The attendant at last sucked down the dregs of overflow from the full saucer, and generously passed it on to an envious youngster to lick dry. The "Kings" wiped their mouths with the backs of their hands. Koso looked furtively around from time to time to see whether any of the women were breaking the law, but fortunately for them they were found kneeling with covered eyes during the ceremony of imbibing.

Before Lelo's affair was quite settled, a loud sound, strange to the ears of Bungu, disturbed the silence of the forest. Koso hastened to explain to his wondering guest that it was only the bell at the *Missioni*, and informed him that it was then ringing to prayers, or to work, or to something. Said he, "They ring early and late. But me, I don't like it. We never had such an uncanny noise in all these parts before, and I am afraid it will bring some calamity." Bungu observed that he could understand the cloth, knives, and things of that kind,

but felt that only mischief was to be expected from the other new-fangled affairs. He expressed mistrust of the *ba Missioni* generally, and the bell in particular.

Lelo did not understand much about their plans concerning her, but she knew quite enough to make her feel miserable. Standing before them, not daring to move, and shrinking with vague forebodings of evil in her mind, hot tears filled her eyes. She tried to stifle a sob, but in vain. The tears trickled down into her twitching mouth. Here was visible evidence that Lelo, although a mere chattel, had feelings; that, although a slave herself, she owned a heart. Ignorant, naked, and black, she loved her mother and dreaded the coming separation.

Koso had not a large assortment of chattels, but the few that he owned were all greatly prized. Chattels are movable property, and under that definition his chattels consisted principally of women, weapons, animals, crockery, and cotton cloth. Women were rightly at the head of the list because of their relative value compared with the other articles named. Among other living chattels pigs were also of first importance, because of the high prices they commanded, and the steady demand for that kind of stock. Not only were they delicious to eat, but these Mâyombe scavengers never balked so badly but what they could be hustled along the road. In this respect they were much better as an investment than women, for women did balk at times, and

could not be budged when inclined to be stubborn. Sometimes in a temper women even went to the length of killing themselves, but within the memory of the oldest owner, no Mayombe-bred pig had ever done anything so rash. On the whole there were advantages in favor of pigs, since women might, without due consideration for proprietary rights and in reckless disregard of the feelings of their liege lords, wantonly destroy valuable property by taking their own lives.

Koso lived in a palaver-saturated atmosphere. Most of his lawsuits were about women, but pigs too demanded a fair share of his valuable time. He handed Lelo over to her new master with as much feeling as though she were a pig. The feelings of a pig or of the girl were alike to him. He commiserated with himself on his loss but had no feeling to spare for others.

Obeying a peremptory signal and a muttered command from Koso, Lelo's mother drew her away from the royal presence. Pushing the child through the crowd they entered the semi-darkness of her windowless hut, and shut the door. Such as it was, it was the only home they knew, and a place of thrice-welcome privacy.

Seizing her mother by her arm, Lelo whispered, "What are they going to do with me, Mama?"

It was hard to tell the truth, but the mother knew there was no time to waste in carrying out the royal order to get the girl ready for the road. Women



did not travel much in the Mayombe country at that time, and the journey would doubtless separate them forever. It was too cruel to be true. The baby had been all her own a few minutes before, and now without warning she was to lose her altogether. It was all she could do, but for the child's sake she managed to answer quietly, "You must go with Bungu, he is your master now."

"But I don't want to go with him, I want to stay with you, Mama."

"Hurry, Koso will not wait."

Lelo heard the order in dismay, but with a suspicion of hope in her faltering voice, she inquired, "Will Bungu take you too, Mama?"

"No, I cannot go," the mother answered. A vision of her own lonely future was before her. Lelo, her last baby, was to be taken away. She was to be deprived of her chief joy, her little comrade and close friend. Her work in the fields would be henceforth drudgery indeed; no light in the dark little hut, and life would become a weary burden. Happiness was ended. Oh! how quickly the little chapter of love had closed.

The child's anxiety increased, and she cried, "Oh! let me stay with you, won't you, Mama?"

Mother could hardly see through her tears the few simple treasures she was gathering for the child and stowing hurriedly into a small basket. Lelo stretched forth her arms and snapped her tiny fingers in the characteristic Congo fashion when

trouble comes. Such calamity and grief were enough to affect one much less sensitive. Convulsive sobs shook her, and down her grimy little twisting body tears washed crooked channels. Mother hated the task and yet she was glad that her own hands were permitted to do this last service for the child. With deft fingers she put a small clay cooking pot and a tiny water bottle into the basket, and laid between them a few bananas and some peanuts tied in a leaf wrapper. From a large basket high up in a forked stick that the ants would not climb, she took her daughter's holiday dress—a fringed bit of cotton check a hand's breadth in width, and as long as the arm which held it for a moment before packing it away.

“Don't send me away,” begged the child, clasping the mother's hand.

The plea was a blow. She would have parted with everything else to keep her only treasure. She loosed the girl's hands and said, “You must go. Now!” She thrust the little one from the hut to save her from needless punishment, hastily wiping from the baby face the marks of grief. She then placed the “V” shaped basket on the little child's back and fastened the woven carrying band around the burden and about the tender forehead.

Led by her mother, after the Elders had finished their wine, Lelo joined the caravan, and took her place with the women who were preparing to depart. The burden of separation was not all bearing



MISSIONARY RESIDENCE AT VUNGU. BUILT 1892  
OF SUN-DRIED BRICKS



BURDEN-BEARERS OF CONGO



upon Lelo; her future of weal or woe was all unknown; but deprived of her only joy, the mother's barren and unhappy lot was all too plain. Rebellious thoughts rose up within her, and she asked in her heart why she should be robbed of all that made life worth living.

All of Lelo's worldly goods were in the basket and on her person. Dangling from her bead necklace hung a curiously carved nut, a sacred treasure. She had worn it since she was a baby, and hitherto it had seemingly served her well; but now when most in need of its good offices it failed to help. The business of the nut was to protect her from sickness and all evil. A fetichman had received several things for it before it passed into her mother's hands. He got a good knife, a fathom of blue cloth, and a full-grown fowl. Her mother had been cheated if its present work was a criterion of its worth. Apparently it was out of commission and in need of reviving. What worse evil could have befallen Lelo than slavery and being torn from her home and from her mother, and what disease worse than heartsickness?

The two principals in the palaver parted at last. Koso was glad to have escaped so cheaply and Bungu delighted to be the owner of such a healthy bit of live stock in place of his clay jug. No traces of their true feelings were allowed to appear on their solemn visages, but each one tried to look as if disappointed with the outcome. No time was

wasted between them in long farewells. The caravan soon took up its march in single file along the narrow, worn trail that was almost hidden under the rank tropical growth on either side.

Lelo started as from under a blow when Bungu abruptly bade her move on quickly. He was not angry—far from it; it was but his way of speaking to females. It came naturally to him through long years of dealing with human chattels and, as his brutal mind chose to regard them, other shirking, deceiving slaves. His eyes greedily took stock of this promising chattel as she moved off. Certainly he did not intend to injure the little body that bade fair in the long run to bring in a rich return for his modest outlay. Lelo would be safe from a blow as long as he was sober. Drunk or enraged he might foolishly disregard his own interest and do her violence.

Lelo did not know *ba* from *da* (the syllables with which the Congo primer begins), and was unaware of the fact that she lived five degrees south of the equator, but she did know that her heart had been wounded in the loss of mother and home. However, with the philosophical unquestioning mind of the native who recognizes her helpless position, she quietly submitted to the inevitable, and even tried to draw some comfort from thoughts of the new life before her. Bowing under the burden of the basket until her head almost touched the back of the woman ahead of her in the path, she began her

forced march. The noises of the village, the crying of the children, the dismal howling of the dogs were soon left behind. A few minutes' march and the uncanny silence of the forest covered them with its pall. The caravan heard only the monotonous yet rhythmical slapping of their own plodding, naked feet in the narrow, clayey rut, the pattering that sent the animals of the jungle slinking into their quiet hiding places.

Not far along the way, something came gliding through the dense underbrush on their flank with the swiftness of an antelope; somebody convulsively seized Lelo in a grip that hurt, a roasted plantain was thrust into the child's hand, and somebody tried to say good-bye before being roughly pushed aside. Lelo forced along by the crowd behind caught a glimpse of her mother sprawling among the bushes. She never saw her mother's face again.

Lelo is typical of the great host of African burden-bearers who keep the trails free from grass by the tread of their aching, weary feet. She had joined the great multitude of female chattels that drag out a tragic existence in the dark places of the earth. The caravan spent two days on the road to Kibungu, camping in the forest at night. The monotonous drudgery of Lelo's life began at once; she entered Bungu's family as servant to one of his concubines.

Like all girls who live within the tropics she grew rapidly to womanhood. Bungu looked upon her

one morning and saw it was high time for her to marry, and he turned her over to the chosen man—that is to say, the man of his choice. So it was not many years after leaving Kinkoso that she became a mother herself.

She cherished the memory of her own mother and never forgot the spot where she was born. She clung to the hope of returning to her “home,” and waited patiently for an opportunity of fleeing from the land of bondage.



## CHAPTER III.

### TASTING FREEDOM.

**L**ELO had left her old home at Kinkoso under a burden of trouble, and now, fifteen years later, she was again occupying the center of the stage at the same place, the disputed chattel of another palaver. Mbenza was now wearing the old "King's" shoes, or, to be exact, his long-tailed official coat. He in turn wielded the fly brush with a pattern of elephant-tail hairs woven into the handle, and, with Lelo standing behind him, he viciously swished at the attacking insects, while listening to the complaint of deceased Bungu's heir.

Except for the fact that the village had been rebuilt on a new site nearby there was no apparent change in the people or their surroundings. Hardly a memory of her own mother survived among the new generation. The dead were as quickly forgotten here as elsewhere and an exuberant mass of vegetable life hid even the spot where they lay. The people were as strange to Lelo as to the tiny eight-months-old baby astraddle her hip and four-year-old Wumba who clung to her bare leg. The name of the village was now Kimbenza, taking the name of the reigning headman and prefixing to it "ki."

Koso had died and was buried—two distinct events, with an interval of six months between. After long smoking upon a bier with slow fires beneath and kept burning by his bereaved concubines, and much winding of cloth around the wizened body, it at last resembled a huge dirty bale of goods. This bundle had been confined in a great, rough painted chest, and dragged on a rude wooden funeral car over a wide road cut through the forest and grubbed clean for the purpose. At the end of the road, a quarter of a mile from the village, the gruesome bundle was buried. It had taken weeks to make the journey, stopping to drink, dance, and fire off gunpowder by the way. The precious load had at last been lowered into a shallow trench and lightly covered with earth. This had all taken place so long before, that the ornamental cloth and mats on top of the grave had rotted away in the rain and blazing sun from frequent drenchings and scorchings. The crockery and idols too had fallen and were buried under a profuse covering of weeds.

Lelo was now about twenty-five years old. She had deep lines about her mouth and between her eyes, stamped there by the drudgery of life at Kibungu. The small of her back upon which had rested her basket was as hardened as the palms of her hands that had toiled for so many years in wielding the short-handled hoe. Whether it was something in the soil or an innate love for her own kin that drew her, she had so longed for "home"

that she must see it even though life itself paid the penalty. The desire increased when the father of her two children died, and with her little ones she had taken flight during the night and escaped from bondage. The heir who had been deciding on a new husband for his "property" before the body of the old one had become quite cold knew where to seek when the news came of Lelo's flight. He followed hard and reached Kimbenza soon after her.

Lelo is again the bone of contention. The snarling heir demands his rights and Mbenza has taken up the cudgels on Lelo's behalf. She remembers vividly how years before she stood, a trembling tot, while they haggled over her body and bartered her away for a worthless jug. Now again was a man clamoring for her body as if she were but an animal or a roll of cloth "currency" to be passed from hand to hand. Why could they not leave her in peace with the children? she thought. She asked no more than to be left alone. She could support her little ones with her own strong and willing hands. Why did they hound her? What crime had she committed? She felt that the social order was all wrong and in her heart she rebelled at the cruelty and injustice of it.

"No," asserted Mbenza, calmly regarding his adversary, "I will not give her up. If she wants to go back, that is her affair; if she prefers to stay here, I will not drive her away." This mild pronouncement indicated a challenge over and above

the spoken words as much as to say—"And I would like to see you try to take her by force."

This was a tonic to Lelo. Invigorated she looked around hopefully. She even ventured to smile at her little girl and reply in a monosyllable to a childish question. She swung the baby round from her side and hugged him to her breast. Friendly services had been all too few in her dark and sad experience and she regarded Mbenza with grateful eyes.

"But, you know she belongs to me?"

Mbenza, with uplifted brows and an inimitable shrug of his chocolate-hued shoulders, thus declined to commit himself, and make public the extent of his knowledge of the matter.

"She was forfeited to my father here on this very spot," angrily declared the wronged heir. Some of the Kimbenza people smiled broadly at seeing him wax indignant, but the friends who had come with him growled corroborative evidence. Their glances at Lelo suggested a bad quarter of an hour for her after they had again obtained possession of her and were on their way back toward Kibungu.

"Times have changed since then, my boy," remarked Mbenza sarcastically. "Who would be fool enough now to give you a girl for a jug of rum? If you don't like it, take your case to the *Zuzi* (Judge) at Boma."

Times had indeed changed. The *Mundele* (man-in-cloth), who, like the camel in the poem,

had but his nose in the tent fifteen years before, now enjoyed almost undisputed possession of the Mayombe. Lelo's life began under the old heathen régime; now she was to experience a new order of things. She lived at the parting of the ways. The people were confronted with a new political system and control and were awakening to the fact that the government of their country had passed into the hands of the stranger. Along with taxes had come judges and these began to settle native palavers.

Mbenza's reply was received in blank silence. After a pause he added in a tone that would have been appropriate to a member of an antislavery society, "I may say I don't think he will agree with your side of the matter; slavery is against the law now." Absorbed in this new and noble sentiment, Mbenza became oblivious to several incidents of a somewhat similar nature in which he himself was at the same time entangled. The wronged heir seeing how the affair was going modified his own course. If he could not get what he first claimed he would take what he could.

With a brave attempt at good grace and an appearance of willingness to do Lelo a favor he said as mildly as possible, "Well, since she is so anxious to stay here I will not make any further objection. Of course I expect to be paid for her. I must have the price paid for her if I cannot get Lelo herself."

Mbenza with a scornful laugh returned the question, "Her price? Do you mean what Bungu gave

for her? You may get a jug of rum from somebody else, I have none to spare. Why not ask the *Zuzi* at Boma to pay you?"

"Good," said the heir, stung into taking up the challenge; "to Boma we go then, but Lelo must go with us."

Lelo stood listening intently and noting every turn of the palaver that was to decide her fate. She had taken a long step toward liberty, and as far as she had gotten she liked the experience and was ready to advance farther. She determined she would not go back without first making a strong fight to save herself from the drudgery of the past years. "Me, I will go to Boma to see the white *Zuzi*," she said, "but you will have to bind and drag me back to Kibungu."

Determination was in her low-spoken words. It was not necessary for her to lift her voice or look up from the nursing baby to make the heir understand that she meant all she said. The villagers felt too that Lelo was capable of some desperate act; that she had reached the limit of endurance. Boma was not so dreadful to her as a return to the old life even if she shrank from the journey to that strange place. Queer tales of the city that had as many as two hundred white men in it, and the uncommon happenings there, had been talked about for years among the women folks. None of these stories tended to inspire confidence among the people of the hinterland. The heir was not anxious

for the journey; his expressed willingness to face the white *Zuzi* was mostly in word. He could expect little from such a trip. How could any *Munde* with his foreign way of looking at matters settle a palaver to the satisfaction of Mayombe litigants?

An unexpected but welcome interruption occurred at this juncture. A solution of the problem was found in the arrival on the scene of Mavambu, the deaf headman of a nearby village. Mavambu although born a slave was mounting the social ladder. He was soon to be appointed to the coveted position of Medal Chief to represent the government in his district. The advent of a man of such prestige and influence naturally caused a stir. He pressed up as close as he could get to the speakers, staring from one to the other and thrusting his head forward, with strained expression to better hear their answers to his rapid questions. Getting in touch with the situation and looking Lelo over, he made a sudden resolve.

Talking loudly, as if the listeners were deaf, he volunteered, "Me, I will pay to settle this palaver," adding hastily, in order to clear away any misconception in the minds of Lelo and the heir regarding his offer, "I'll take her for my wife if the price is reasonable; but I won't be imposed upon."

The heir said at once he could not see any reason why the ba-Kongo people should take any of their own palavers to a white stranger, ignorant of their

customs and knowing only a few words of the ki-Kongo language. Lelo said nothing, which was regarded as the correct attitude by the crowd. What was there for her to say? The people thought the offer a good solution to a hard question, and it was suggested that not only was Mavambu a public official, but he was showing a fine public spirit in the present emergency. How much better to arrange their own affairs and thus keep clear of the uncertain decisions of the *Zuzi*, and the troublesome complications his findings so often made.

Lelo was not enraptured with the prospect, but the unexpected intervention of Mavambu was obviously the right answer. She must have a male protector like all other women; she could not be allowed to own herself and run loose in the community. Then why not Mavambu? He was a man and had power to keep her from becoming public prey, and he, moreover, lived on the dear patch of green earth that had nourished her in her early years. True, Lelo would not be his first love; at least ten predecessors had occupied a place in his heart. Maybe it was his stomach that had been principally affected. Most of his happy recollections of the departed ones and present incumbents had to do with something good to eat, or the way they prepared his food. At the moment there were several living rivals that Lelo would have to reckon with in getting a solid footing within Mavambu's compound.

Mavambu was no longer young, and had never



been noted for his good looks. But that made little difference to Lelo, and one in her place could not afford to be too fastidious about her means of deliverance. After all, Lelo herself was not so young as might be desirable in order to be much in demand. Her life of constant toil had left marks, yet she still had traces of personal charm and beauty. If not young she was strong and well knew how to plant a field, cultivate it, prepare tasty messes from its produce for the family platter, and that of course was the principal thing. Indeed after spending years over the cook-pots, she was in this respect more valuable than a younger woman. She could doubtless gladden the heart of Mavambu with richly oiled and peppered vegetables should he be able to conclude the bargain.

Lelo's voice was not heard during the time the principals were closing the business. She quietly yielded to the lot they offered her. The sum was agreed upon and settled with fewer phrases than usual. The heir was glad in these changing times to get even a moderate return for his father's investment. He felt that after all the family had made a pretty good thing out of Lelo. Bungu got her for a jug of rum, and Lelo's deceased husband had paid a good-sized bundle of cloth, and other valuable things including rum and a sheep, before he had been given a life interest in the chattel. And now the heir was to get more booty so he reckoned that close bargaining would be in bad taste,

particularly since the white *Zuzi* had been mentioned.

Mavambu soon brought back from his town the first payment of rum and cloth. The generous heir agreed to relinquish all claim on Lelo as soon as the full sum was received. The little ones were to stay with Lelo, and Mavambu became her happy owner. Thus Lelo got a legal hut for herself and babies, a male champion, and the right to live unhunted. She had no cause to fear hunger as long as she would be able to work, nor bodily harm as long as Mavambu kept in good spirits—and kept away from trade spirits. What more could a reasonable woman ask? Things had indeed come her way since boldly taking matters into her own hands, cutting the cords of bondage and leaving Kibungu behind her.

Mavambu led the way to his village looking back once in a while to say an encouraging word or leer good-naturedly at his new piece of property and wave his free and empty hand at the baby, while Lelo, bent double under the child and the well-filled basket on her back, followed him patiently. Sweet little Wumba trotted at her heels away to their new stall in Mavambu's compound which was located within gunshot of Yenge Chapel.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AN ORDEAL OF FIRE.

**T**HE first year passed almost uneventfully. Lelo's life in Mavambu's compound was without remarkable incident, until a new little boy came. Her simple life was, however, but little disturbed by this event as he made very little more work in the "home." She had neither washing nor cooking to do for him. When he was hungry she nursed him at the breast, or gave him a bit of roast sweet potato to chew upon. When he was dirty she had only to wash his chubby little body for he wore not the tiniest scrap of cloth to soil.

She bathed the little tot at irregular intervals by placing a great pot of water out in the open street. Then seizing the tiny mite by one arm, she swung him screaming and kicking aloft, while with the other hand she dashed and splashed him with cold water; resting him for a moment in her lap, she loosened the dirt with brisk rubbing; then grasping him by the other arm and holding him up as before, she repeated the dose of water to his sputtering accompaniment. Rolling about in the sun or lying on a bit of mat by the fire, he soon dried off without further bother. So there was nothing complex

about her home life and duties to be interfered with by the arrival of a new baby.

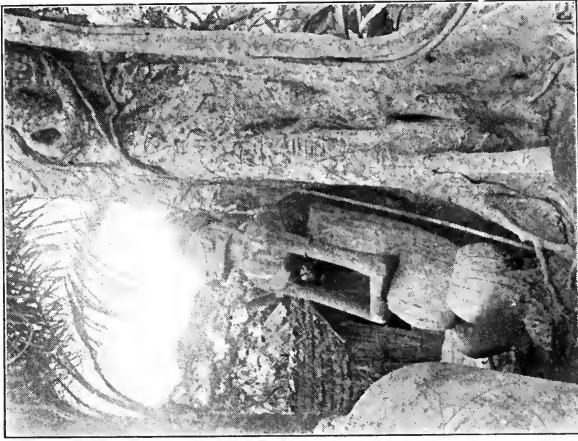
She hadn't the heart to treat her baby as some of the other women did who threw their squirming, tender little ones on to the low sloping roofs, catching them in their arms, as they rolled over and down and off to harden them. Somehow Lelo couldn't bear to hear her baby scream with fright at such rough treatment, so she omitted that kind of gymnastics in raising her little ones.

A trying incident in her life at this time was connected with the fate that befell her mother. She was told the sad tale soon after her baby was born. Lelo had never forgotten her mother, and with love and longing often meditated upon the one good and true friend she had ever known. The image of her dear mother, clothed in a rich drapery of sacred memories, was enshrined within her heart. She had looked forward with such joy to seeing Mama again. As soon as she was free from Kibungu and headed toward home her thoughts were all of the hoped-for happy meeting.

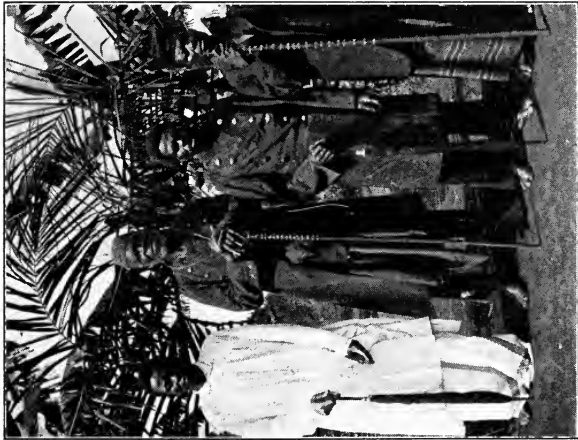
Resting before Mbenza's hut, when she first reached his village, she had told the gist of her own tale in a few hasty, broken sentences, and then asked,

"Where is Mama?"

She did not use one of several other words in common use for mother, but said simply "Mama," which is the same word how ever spelled in many



A WOODEN IDOL



CONGO CHIEFTAINS



different tongues. Her mother would always remain "Mama" to her.

The question, although the first and most natural one to be expected, produced a strange effect on Mbenza. "She is dead," he replied in an embarrassed way that was unnoticed by Lelo.

She was only concerned with the sad news, not with him. After a pause she faintly asked, in the manner the Congolese refer to the dead,

"Was 'she that was my mother' sick long?"

"No—yes—that is, I think so—I wasn't here at the time," he stammered.

"When did she die?"

"Oh, don't let us talk any more about it," he objected; "me, I never like to talk about the dead. It's unlucky."

He returned only evasive answers to several other anxious and reasonable questions in regard to the circumstances of her mother's death, and the place where "she that was her mother" was buried. At last he curtly refused to say any more on the subject, and she was forced to remain in ignorance of the details of the sad event. She at last noticed his hesitation and confusion, but attributed it only to his religious convictions. She hid the matter deep in her own heart, and it was a long time before she could even speak about it again to anyone.

In the compound living in a hut next to her own was a woman named Mayala, who was the property of Mavambu. She had been the favorite wife of

the last important Chief of the district, and not only had she seen better days, but she was more than ordinarily intelligent. She had enjoyed some distinction in the neighborhood because of her position as head woman of such a Chief. At that time the place was a well-populated center; it had not been depopulated by sleeping sickness, rum, and other evils. Mayala had been taken to wife by Chief Noki a few years after Lelo, the child, had been carried off to Kibungu. When Noki died Mayala was not freed from matrimonial bondage, but she became the "wife" of Mavambu, as his portion of the estate.

Mayala was kind to Lelo and the babies, and they soon became fast friends, notwithstanding the difference in their ages and disparity of rank in Mavambu's household. Nothing of any consequence in those parts had happened for many years but what Mayala remembered it. She knew the history of the people also, and could tell what had become of different ones, of those who had died, or had gone to other parts, and where they were if alive.

She was just the one to tell Lelo about her mother. When the latter asked Mayala about the matter one day, she was startled to find that she had broached a subject that was very distasteful to the older woman. This fact aroused her suspicions, and made her anxious to know more. Lelo found a good opportunity soon after when one afternoon Mayala crossed her field on her way



home from work, and rested for a moment on the huge tree that had been cut down to make room for a bean patch, and against which Lelo was laying brushwood for the beans to climb upon.

Lelo stopped working and squatted close to the tree, where under its shelter the baby was quietly sleeping. Little Wumba temporarily relieved of the strain of taking care of the baby was amusing herself by pretending to be gathering food and wood and water, and to be carrying off the spoils to her imaginary hut to cook for an imaginary man. Rather serious work to pass for play, but it was a common game for the children of Africa who for generations had been thrust into a playless, miserable, and grown-up world of hard, barren realities.

The sun had dropped so low in the West that its power for that day was no longer to be feared. Disappearing behind a barricade of trees, it was shooting narrow, slanting beams of heated light through the open places between, but much of Lelo's patch was now protected by welcome shadows. Overhead the sky was delightfully soft and refreshing to her worn and tired eyes, and the dreamy, cool restfulness of the brief tropical evening after a long, burning, stifling day was creeping languidly on.

Mayala suggested waiting until Lelo had gathered her tools and picked up her babies, and then they would go home together. Lelo agreed, but instead of moving to pick up her implements began to

question her friend upon the matter that was so much on her heart.

"Mayala," said she without warning, looking up pleadingly into her friend's face, "I wish you would tell me more about Mama."

"*Nana*," she replied, with quick and positive emphasis on the words of refusal, "I will not."

"But, Mayala, if you were in my place, you too would be anxious to know about your mother. Why not tell me about mine?"

"I don't want to talk about it! Although I never did believe she was guilty of witchcraft."

So this was why Mbenza and Mayala had refused to talk about Lelo's mother. It was because she had been accused of witchcraft, and perhaps—murdered! It was a blow, but not altogether unexpected.

After she had begun to talk, it was not very difficult to persuade Mayala to continue. She first pledged Lelo to secrecy "by her mother," an oath that would not be lightly broken. She revealed then a story that was the most cruel to which Lelo had ever listened. She hardly lifted her eyes after Mayala began to speak, but crouched nearer to the ground and drew the baby closer to her as the brutal narrative was unfolded.

"I was with Noki at the fire before his hut when Koso came along one evening and sat down. We could plainly see that he was upset about something, and it was not long before he blurted out

his trouble. He said that he was sure your mother was a witch.

"I felt then he was mistaken, and became fully convinced of it later. Why, when they *did* poison her, she would have lived through a day and have proven her innocence, or have recovered completely, if they had not crowded around her and seized her when she began to stagger.

"Noki, he didn't say much one way or the other, but Koso was sure he was right, and went on to tell of several suspicious circumstances he had noticed. He was anxious to find out what Noki thought, and whether he approved of a witch hunt at that time.

"Koso said there had been some sickness in his town lately and that this had first aroused his suspicions; then that very evening one of his slaves had fallen from a palm tree, which he was tapping for wine, into the thorny brush below, and was lying with an arm and a leg broken, and the flesh scratched and torn away from one side of his body.

"He said that it was becoming too much to put up with, and if Malanda died he would be revenged upon the witches whoever they were, whether your mother or others.

"Chief Noki replied that if he felt that way about it the best thing for him to do would be to call in Nsakala the priest who lived in Kimbundu. He said that there was no better man in the whole district, and that if there was a witch in Kinkoso

he would 'smell it out.' And besides, Nsakala's charges were always moderate, which, said Noki, was no light consideration.

"I had almost forgotten Koso's visit, when a few days later I heard Malanda had died, and that on the next day there was to be a witch hunt in his village.

"For me, I never could see why the women are always so anxious to attend a witch hunt. I went reluctantly, and only because it was the customary thing to do. Of course you know that they might have said that I myself was a witch if I had stayed away.

"It was nearly noon next day before we heard the drum beating the call, and announcing the arrival of Nsakala. It's strange how that sound makes one shiver. There's something very dreadful about the noise that comes from a witch-doctor's drum. Nsakala was a busy man. He had been working on a case in a town some miles away during the early morning, and that was what made him so late in getting started at Kinkoso.

"There was a big crowd gathered in the four towns on this side of the valley, and they were not long in getting together in Kinkoso after the signal drum. The street was filled with people when I reached there, and they kept coming in from all directions.

"It wasn't long until I saw the *nganga* come out of Koso's hut followed by the Chief. Nsakala's

bleared eyes rolled wildly as he looked over us and all around him to note who was there and see how the preparations were going. It seemed to me that he was more than half drunk.

"He had his witch fetich in his hand, and almost the first thing that he said when he shouted at us, and held it up to view, was that every hanging strip of dirty rag dangling from the *nkisi* had been torn from the loin cloth of some witch discovered by him. 'Before their vile bodies were thrown into the flames,' boasted he, 'I took my trophy.'

"He was frightful to look upon, with his painted face, as he stood shaking his rattle to emphasize his shouted threats concerning what he would do to the witch when he caught it. I couldn't help thinking how I should feel if he made a mistake, being drunk, and happened to 'point me out.' I would have been glad then to sneak behind the crowd, or to leave the town, but I was afraid of what they would say.

"He went into the hut which they had prepared for him, to consult his idol, and shut the door. We remained where we were, talking and speculating as to who would be 'pointed out' by him. When he did appear, we were all drawn up on both sides of the street in two rows, intently and anxiously watching Nsakala. We knew that we were innocent and were hoping that his information would agree with our own conviction of the fact.

"The door was slammed back, and with a roar,

*nkisi* in hand, he jumped into the open. He ran wildly up on one side peering into the faces of the crowd and down on the other as if seeking the one that he knew was guilty. Yelling at the top of his voice, jumping into the air, or stopping dead and silent in his tracks to glare at someone, he soon had our nerves on edge. We were all pretty shaky, and glad to see him stop at last in front of Koso's big house.

"He said that he was glad to announce that he had not been called in vain, that there was indeed a witch in Kinkoso, even in the very town; a reprobate who had, without interference or suspicion, been 'eating' the people for a long time. In a solemn voice he said that he had discovered it to be the same witch who had wickedly caused the accident which had cost Malanda his life.

"A howl of rage went up from the assembled crowd, in which I joined, of course. Such a howl was enough to put terror into the heart of anyone dabbling with evil spirits, and turn him from such wicked ways. He said that he was glad there were not many concerned in the devilish plot. In fact there was but one, and that he had succeeded by superhuman efforts in finding out who it was, and that furthermore he now intended to announce the cursed name.

"We listened, breathlessly straining to hear every word, while he went on to say that the guilty wretch was a woman! That took the pressure from the

men, but his announcement bore down more heavily upon us women who were left, and increased our anxiety.

"I knew, or felt I knew, from what had been said to Noki by Koso, that I could myself tell who was to be named. Yet I wasn't certain, as I couldn't be sure of what revelations the spirits had made to Nsakala while in the hut. It was not much longer before he relieved us from all suspense by saying that the witch was your mother. He roared her name at the top of his mighty voice."

Mayala paused and looked at Lelo, waiting for some comment, but as Lelo did not move, nor lift her head, she continued her story:

"Your mother said that it was all a lie, but Nsakala answered that whether true or false the facts would be known the next day. 'Unless my *nkisi* has deceived me,' said he, 'you are *ndoki*'; but your mother scornfully denied the accusation and cried out that she was innocent.

"They arranged to go away into that old clearing just off the path leading over the bluff, down into the little valley behind Kimbenza. It was necessary to be careful then in giving the *nkasa* cup, on account of the *baNganga Nzambi* (Doctors of God, i. e., the name given by natives to Protestant missionaries) over at the *Vula* Station. The missionaries had begun to make trouble even then, and for some time they had been sticking their noses into matters of that kind as soon as they heard of them.

"Next day we were all on hand again at Kinkoso. There was a general holiday in the neighborhood. We left the village early for the place where the poison tea was to be given, and when we got there I saw your mother sitting on the ground waiting. Nsakala was watching closely two of the women who had been appointed to grind the bark and help him mix the test cup.

"When the time came, your mother stood up at the command of the priest, and took the cup from the hand of one of the women who had stirred it. She held it in both hands while he again charged her with being a witch, and called upon his *nkisi* to prove her guilt in the sight of all her outraged neighbors, if she was indeed *ndoki*.

"There was hardly a movement then, we were all so quiet that we could hear the dripping of the heavy morning mist falling from leaf to leaf and pattering to the ground at the foot of the trees along the edge of the clearing. It was a dismal morning with that dark sullen gray sky bearing down and penetrating our hearts with its chilling gloom. We shivered and wished the trial would end, so that we could run and walk, and get back to our work or huts with their comfortable fires.

"With the big wooden cup in her hands, that meant so much to her for good or evil, for life or death, your mother stood silently and waited until Nsakala's charge was finished when he ordered her to drink.



"She was so different from that awful old witch that was killed last month, 'who called herself while living' Lengo. I never saw anyone act so crazy; she cried and howled about her children all the time. She should have thought about her children before she entered into such an awful compact. Her children are much better off now than they ever could have been with her, learning all kinds of forbidden things. You were there when she died, weren't you?"

Lelo hardly seemed to hear what Mayala said about the other woman. She made no reply to the question, so Mayala continued.

"Your mother said never a word to Nsakala, nor looked around at any of us. She lifted the mug, held it to her lips with both hands, and though it almost choked her, drained it of the nasty mixture."

"Go on," said Lelo hoarsely, moistening her dry lips with her tongue when Mayala paused.

"Well, she died. But I think she would have lived if some of Koso's men and Malanda's relatives had not crowded in around her and seized her as soon as she staggered. After that it was not really possible to tell whether she had fallen from the effects of the poison, or because of a blow dealt her in the scuffle. For me, I always did believe that she would have lived through it, if only for a day, long enough to prove anyway that she was innocent of the charge made against her. There isn't much

more to tell," Mayala concluded hesitatingly, "and it's getting late."

"Finish it now; tell me all, Mayala, and I will never trouble you again. How did she die?"

"Well, when she was on the ground at last, Koso and Nsakala and others began to shout that the witch had been caught, and soon the whole crowd took up their triumphant cry. The noise was heard by everybody for a long distance in every direction. If any others felt like me, they also wisely kept it to themselves, for that was not the time for argument. What could anyone do? They were like wild beasts of the forest with their prey in their clutches.

"She screamed loudly at first with the pain, from the *nkasa* and the blows, and then she lay moaning and crying feebly, saying that she was innocent and that she was indeed an honest woman. Nobody listened much to her; only the two or three that stood guard over her body paid any attention to what she said.

"The crowd scattered and ran to the edge of the clearing, soon returning, each one with a big stick or an armful of wood. Koso pointed to a big tree which has since fallen and long ago been eaten by ants; and there they threw their burdens down at its foot. There were two high, narrow, big roots growing from the trunk outside the ground, and they formed a kind of fireplace. Several burning brands had thoughtfully been brought along from

Kinkoso, for use if needed; they would serve to light pipes, if not a pyre. With these a fire was soon started and began to blaze up along the great tree trunk.

“They lifted your mother, her arms and legs bound with strong vines, and carried her, crying and pleading her innocence, and threw her on top of the burning faggots.”

Mayala stopped, and wondered whether she ought to conclude the horrible story. Lelo took up the baby, and pressed him convulsively to her breast. Mayala was silent for a moment, thinking of that culmination of horror she had witnessed, and then suddenly as if speaking for her own relief, almost forgetting to whom she was telling the tale, she concluded:

“After they had thrown her bound body upon the blazing pile, something strange happened, something that made an impression upon even the most hardened among the yelling crowd. When death had mercifully closed her terror-haunted eyes, and her features had relaxed into the peace that follows release from pain, we saw through her gaping side what your mother had been hoping to look upon with joy in a few more weeks. The unborn child and mother were both quickly consumed, all except a few large bones which had fallen over to one side.

“These dried and whitened and crumbled slowly away, and were buried at last, along with the fallen tree itself, under a dense mass of grasses and ferns,

which grew into the mound around which the new path now curves.

"Come, Lelo, it is time to go. What is past we cannot help now."

Lelo mutely shook her bowed head, and motioned her friend to leave her. She wanted to be alone. Mayala turned and walked slowly away in the swiftly falling darkness toward the village. Little Wumba, noting the departure of Mayala and feeling the chill of advancing night, came to rouse her mother.

Clasping her mother about the neck and trying to lift her head, she said, "Mama, I want to go to the village."

Lelo raised her face and the little one buried her head upon her mother's breast in sympathy. She knew that something was wrong and that Mama needed help. Lelo arose slowly and taking the child by the hand turned toward their home. The little arms had given more help than they knew, they had released the awful weight on mother's heart.

A tear, unnoticed in the deepening shadows save by the all-seeing eye of Him Who knows that such as Lelo have hearts, and Who understands their needs, rolled slowly down her ashy, drawn face, and fell upon the head of the helpless mite clasped to her breast.

A bitter tribute exacted by the enemy. Another tear toward the filling of the cup of the heathen

woman's woe. A tear wrung from a wounded heart by a barbarous, heathen religion, and inexcusable Christian neglect.

## CHAPTER V.

### A DIGRESSION ON A HORSE.

THE purpose of this digression is to get away from the atmosphere of the revolting tale of the death of Lelo's mother, and to leave for the time being the scenes of her own miserable life, and so find relief by taking a journey to far-distant places. Lelo's country had never produced a horse. No horse can be found in Mayombe, and as a horse is absolutely essential to the success of the journey, it becomes necessary to leave tropical Congo and visit North America in the freezing month of February.

The horse of this excursus is brought into the narrative by a lady who came to attend a missionary meeting that was being addressed by a Congo missionary on leave. Seeking to interest people at home in his work among the heathen and to secure their co-operation, to what better place could he go than to a church? Mr. Missionary was glad to avail himself of the invitation to address the congregation on the subject of his field and work, and felt that he was among friends when he reached the platform.

It was a magnificent church building, much better than the sunburned brick, grass-roofed places of



WITCH-DOCTOR PERFORMING



DECORATIONS ON GRAVE. IDOLS, GUNPOWDER  
KEGS, CROCKERY, AND PERIODICALS PICKED UP  
ON THE COAST OF WEST AFRICA—PINNED  
TO STRIPED BLANKET





worship in the Congo. The decorations and fittings alone had cost a great many thousands of dollars and were most elaborate and luxurious. The pew cushions were delightfully soft and sleep-inducing, and Mr. Missionary could not help but think how nice it would be to have such a place to crawl into after a long, hard day tramping through the tropical jungle. Not that he would have taken advantage of such a fine opportunity with his grimy, travel-stained garments!

The congregation was made up of well-dressed, well-fed and well-educated people, evidently in comfortable circumstances. They appeared to be much interested in the story from the Congo, and gave earnest attention to the message and to the plea made for the miserable people whom the missionary represented.

There was deep feeling in Mr. Missionary's voice and a mist before his eyes as he surveyed that fashionable congregation. He compared them with his own people, and thought of the difficulty of finding the right matters to touch upon, in order to make them understand the depths of destitution and need he intended to portray.

Seeing them so well-groomed and happy-looking, it was hard to keep back the tears. He was not inclined to cry because of their comfort and prosperity, but his tears were rather for his African flock in all their misery and need, sunk as they were in the depths of sin.

Missionaries generally keep their tears for the homeland; they don't cry much when about their heart-breaking work.

It is necessary for the missionary sometimes to get away from his field of labor and the hardening everyday scenes of spiritual and physical degradation that he encounters in his heathen parish. The contrasts in the homeland are so marked that the dire needs of his own suffering people assume a greater urgency.

On that particular night, Mr. Missionary, with aching heart, was himself so deeply stirred with the need of Lelo's oppressed kind, that it appeared as if the congregation simply could not but see eye to eye with him, and that there must be a generous response to the appeal on behalf of the oppressed Congo natives also, in missionaries, volunteers, and in the necessary financial assistance.

In the course of his message he dwelt at some length on the physical destitution and the inhuman treatment by which so many were being brutalized and destroyed, soul and body. It becomes necessary sometimes to speak of matters of which many people would rather remain in ignorance.

Mr. Missionary told the congregation of meeting a woman who lived in a village close to the Mission. She had been accused of witchcraft, and had fled to the Station for protection. She was not more than twenty-five years of age, soft of speech,

and attractive. Her four sturdy boys ranged from two to ten years of age.

He related that when he and Mrs. Missionary heard of the accusation, they were sympathetic and indignant. They endeavored to persuade her to resist the poison test, if only for the children's sake.

"*Mfummu*," sobbed she, holding the youngest in her arms, while the others cuddled at her feet on a mat spread on the veranda floor, "they call me *ndoki!*"

"What? Call you a witch!"

"Yes. I was pointed out this morning, and they say that I must drink *nkasa* tomorrow!"

"But you know that you are not a witch?"

"Truly, I know that."

"And do you want to die?"

She shivered, although there was no chill in the hot noontide; and cried softly as she looked from one to the other of her little family.

"If I were you," Mr. Missionary said he had advised her, "I wouldn't take that vile dose of poison for them. What will become of your babies?"

"What can I do? They will beat me to death if I refuse!"

"Refuse by staying here; they can't kill you if you don't go back to them!"

"Would you let us live here?"

"Yes. And they will not try to molest you while you are with us."

He said that she seemed, as no doubt she was,

deeply grateful. A little hut was allotted to them, and for a few days the refugees were safe. No force was used to take her from the *Vula*, nor did anyone even enter the place to threaten her. The women nevertheless employed effective means to draw her away and at last they succeeded.

Passing along the public path that skirted the premises, they sometimes stopped opposite the hut where the unfortunate mother was living. Or else maybe they saw her moving about somewhere within earshot. Then they began to cry:

"Look at the witch! Oh, the vile wretch! Of course she is a witch, else she would not have run away. She is afraid because she is guilty. If she were honest, she would be glad to drink *nkasa*. She fled to the *mindele* because they are witches too. Let her stay, she can never come back to us. Yes, let her work out her deviltry at the *Vula*. Behold the shameless renegade!"

After much more jibing in a similar strain, they filed away along the path, howling derisively. They came back again and again, and repeated the insults. They always moved off, said Mr. Missionary, when either Mrs. Missionary or he went out to protest against their conduct.

The strain of ostracism proved too much for the afflicted mother. The false accusations, together with the jeers and contemptuous treatment, so unsettled her mind that she became desperate. She made her decision secretly, and determined to show

her little world that she was as good as any of them. Somehow her fears had been all for her children, and it was to save them that she had left her village. She would take the test then, and so make them ashamed of the cruel way they had treated her and the babies, when they saw the result. She must resume her place in society. It was necessary for the children's sake; they had been outcasts long enough. Her decision was made and her plans carried out quietly. She passed the word out to the headmen of the village. She said that she would be ready at a certain time and place to undergo the ordeal. All was duly prepared for her by willing hands, and they awaited her arrival with impatience.

Mr. Missionary told how she had quietly left the hut at daybreak, without disturbing the babies. She would not run the risk of awakening them by touching them as they lay, and have to answer embarrassing questions. She would be back soon, she hoped. Then how happy they all would be, as they returned together proudly and victoriously to their own town and people. She hesitated in closing the door, and looked upon them. It was for the last time. She never returned. The *nkasa* cup had been too well mixed that morning.

The babies were heartbroken when they heard about their mother's sad end. An unfeeling woman hastened to give them the—to her cheering—news, as soon as the affair was over. The

oldest boy was beside himself in an agony of grief and helpless rage.

"Mama is dead. Mama is dead!" he cried. And the other little ones wailed in a heartbroken way. They followed the elder boy, all making their way toward the house to inform Mrs. Missionary of the tragedy.

The jeering women walked another path that day; their work at the *Vula* was done.

That instance, briefly told, was only one of several used by Mr. Missionary in illustrating his text,—“The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.” Such stories of the heathen world were not pleasant for the congregation to listen to, seated so snugly in their comfortable church that night, but then, the victims mentioned in these incidents found the actual experiences considerably harder to bear.

At the close of the service, several people came forward, took Mr. Missionary by the hand, and wished him Godspeed and success in his work. Among the first to reach the platform, elbowing her way, was a well-dressed lady of refined appearance, who seemed to be in a hurry to speak. Mr. Missionary, if the matter occurred to him at all, may have thought that her heart was so deeply moved by the needs brought to her attention that she was hastening to offer herself and her purse for the alleviation of heathen misery, and to bring them to a knowledge of the world's great Healer.

"I was greatly interested," she remarked in a polite and quiet way, "in the account you gave of the wretched conditions in your field."

Mr. Missionary bowed in acknowledgment, not having any better reply on hand. He was tired after the evening's effort and felt worn and weary, having thrown his whole force into the address and missionary appeal.

"But, is it really possible to help such degraded people?" the lady continued.

She hardly expected an answer to her question, which was evidently put in a spirit of skepticism. The rising inflection and slight pause were possibly a concession to Mr. Missionary's extreme views.

"God is no respecter of persons. The Gospel is sent to the base and despised," replied Mr. Missionary, becoming interested and aroused by the "but" in the lady's question.

"Yes, yes, I dare say. But fancy such cold-blooded murderers. It really upset me to listen to the story of that wretched woman with the children." She made a gesture to indicate her repugnance of such vile people and their inhuman deeds.

"It has upset others before you, madam, the murdered woman's children to begin with. God has done great things among those poor people. In some of them the Spirit of Christ now truly lives and works."

"Really?" she replied almost with indifference as

if she had a far more pressing matter at heart than the salvation of those in heathen darkness.

"Among the Congolese," Mr. Missionary went on to explain, "are too principal classes, such as are to be found among nearly all peoples. Not all black-skinned are black-souled. Some in the Mayombe have souls as white and noble as any that God has ever fashioned to adorn His earthly kingdom. Just as among the civilized people here, there are souls yonder whose blackness matches the blackness of hell."

The good lady suddenly veers, the wind is taking her into deep waters and is heading her away from her desired haven. Besides, "murder" and "hell" are vulgar words and distasteful to her refined sense. She is not accustomed to the use of such terms.

"There is one thing I noticed in your address. You endeavored, it seemed to me, to impress upon us strongly that we all shared equal responsibility in efforts to uplift and help those poor Africans." She spoke as if begging politely to be allowed to differ with Mr. Missionary in his views of heathen needs.

He could only reply in effect that the good lady had correctly interpreted his intentions. He had again grown weary following this conversation and there were others waiting to say a word. The good lady seemed forgetful of the fact that she was taking the few brief moments that remained to Mr.



Missionary before the congregation dispersed to their homes and the impatient sexton extinguished the lights.

She paused for a moment, possibly to prepare Mr. Missionary for her indictment, and to add weight to the forceful truth of the lesson which she had hastened to bring, and then said with some asperity, "But you forget, sir, that we have our own work to do!"

No, she was in error. He had not forgotten, however his words may have sounded, that there was work to do at home. Good work and great work, some of which made his own work abroad possible. He had not asked in his address to have the home work overlooked or set aside, but had simply endeavored to emphasize the truth that every Christian ought to be concerned in the work in the regions beyond. And that such concern should be in addition to ordinary church work and any philanthropic interests.

Mr. Missionary had contended that everyone who professed to love the unseen Christ should love also the unknown peoples for whom He had died, as well as those who passed daily before them in the homeland. He said that much of the time and money devoted to work of comparatively trifling importance ought to be used for the uplift of those unhappy souls who in the dark places of the earth were so greatly oppressed.

All along he had well remembered the absolutely

important phases of Christian effort to which so many were giving their lives at home. His purpose had not been either to belittle the noble workers or to reflect invidiously upon the good work in which they were so unselfishly engaged. He knew that there were many worthy causes not so denominated, or that were directly Christian, that required the time and attention of a number of good, philanthropic people. He had not meant that everybody should get up and leave everything else to take part in foreign work exclusively.

"Perhaps, madam, I did speak strongly," he wearily observed, "and possibly I may, in my haste, have stupidly failed to make myself clear. I honor all who are laboring in every part of the great world field, and realize that much of the work of others is as indispensable as mine." And then as the lady lingered, he absently inquired, more in courtesy than for any other reason, as he was dead tired, and would much rather have gone to his rest than continue the conversation, "May I ask, madam, in what kind of Christian work *you* are engaged?"

Over and over in his tired mind, a number of questions were turning with nervous rapidity. Even while he had been addressing the congregation, with treadmill monotony these queries were insistently repeated, why? why? why?

"Why should a tender, loving, black-skinned child like Lelo, thousands of miles away, be torn

from her mother's arms, and sold off into vile bondage, while white children 'at home' were exempt from such treatment?"

"Why should mothers 'at home' be allowed to rear and care for their own, while across the sea Lelo's mother, and the multitudes like her, have their children snatched away and disposed of like mere inanimate chattels?"

"Why should slavery be allowed to go on under the African sun, in the blaze of today's knowledge 'at home'?"

"Why should any woman 'at home' have all of life's privileges and blessings, while nearly all women on the Dark Continent are denied all that makes life worth living, and are forced to exist in squalid misery?"

"Why was there such a lack of interest and so much inaction, with people saying everywhere that 'slavery is finished' and that 'there's enough to do at home,' and practically denying that God hath made all of one blood, and redeemed all by the blood of His Son?"

"Why should he, and other missionaries like him, faint under the burden of a woeful, helpless people abroad, while professors of Christianity and professed philanthropists at home be exempt from any real responsibility, freeing themselves inconsistently by paying some trifling tax on income?"

"Why was it that God's people could not see that 'laymen,' 'missionaries' and 'ministers' were

only man-made words; that all Christians are members of His body, and upon all devolves burden-bearing responsibilities as well as equal privileges, at home and abroad?"

"Why was it that so many Christians, not to mention the humanitarians and professing Christians, have so little heart for Lelo and her kind, and are so careless concerning the indescribably sad lot of those dwellers in darkness, failing to see their needs and concerned only about a hundred and one matters of trifling consequence 'at home'?"

"Why was it so hard to make people 'at home' understand, to inspire them to activity; why could he not tell the story of Africa better, and make vivid to them what was so real to his own heart?"

Mr. Missionary was tired, mentally as well as physically, and ought to have had somebody to encourage and stir *him* to greater effort and more consistent living, instead of trying to enthuse and inspire others. He needed rest after a strength-consuming missionary service. Involuntarily he shivered as he thought of the long trolley journey, through a freezing, sleety night, that lay between himself and his warm quarters. His question was offered politely, but perfunctorily.

"In what kind of Christian work are *you* engaged?"

His attention was immediately drawn to the lady again because of the very evident embarrassment that was produced by the simple inquiry. She

probably had not anticipated answering any questions about herself, and had not come prepared, being preoccupied with the error into which Mr. Missionary had allowed himself to fall during the course of his address.

She nervously adjusted the umbrella which she held, looked up from it to speak, but hesitated. Seemingly she was obliged to search diligently in her mental vocabulary for more suitable expressions. Stammering at last as if not altogether certain as to what she wanted to say, she ventured,

"Well, at present I am interested in a Society—" then followed a slight pause.

Mr. Missionary's attention was attracted by the hopeful word "Society," and he waited for more.

"A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty—" she slowly went on to explain, before there was another lingering pause.

Mr. Missionary manifests increasing concern. Through his mind like a flash went the cheering thought: She is a member of some Society for the protection of aboriginal races or something of the kind, and is rather diffident about speaking of herself and her own work.

With somewhat of an effort and with heightened color, the good lady ejaculated in conclusion: "Cruelty to Horses."

Horses? "A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Horses." Was this the work she had to do that was so important, so exacting? Was

this the work that demanded so much of her life "at home," that she could only spare a little indignation for the work of others that had been obtruded upon her attention?

When Mr. Missionary had sufficiently recovered from the shock, and was on his way to his quarters, he thought of many more things. He had been pouring out his heart over the crying needs of human beings with souls. He had been talking that night about people who were more cruelly abused by religious and social customs than any horse was treated in civilized lands. Why was it that some were more concerned about animals than human beings? Was it because the horses were near at hand and tangible, and could be reached and helped with little expense and effort; while the Lelos were far away, and much money and many lives were needed to give them the help they required?

Horses were not treated at home as Lelo's mother had been used in Africa. Certainly horses are deserving of consideration and ought to be protected from violence and neglect. Not but that horses should be "unchecked" on hills, and well fed, and spoken to kindly, and that whips should be laid aside. Not but that the brutes that ill-treated horses should fail to be haled to court and punished. But should Lelo and her kind be left uncared for in their sad and deplorable condition, a prey to ravening brutes?

Horses do feel it when they are abused, but not quite in the way that Lelo felt when she was roughly pulled from her mother's arms and thrust into the hands of a slaver; and not as Lelo's mother felt when she was cruelly dragged away to her funeral pyre; nor in the sense that Lelo felt when she listened to the horrible recital of that deed.

Lelo and her kind are different from other animals in that they possess souls to suffer, or to be happy, eternally; and that do suffer now keenly from other causes than lack of food and harsh treatment.

Lelo had never seen a horse, and knew nothing of their hard lot "at home," but Mr. Missionary saw horses and several other kinds of animals that night. He suffered from a nightmare trying to solve his perplexing problems and answer his own questions.

Among other remarkable things he saw in his dreams a handsomely gowned woman leading a well-groomed horse into a lush summer pasture and using several yards of pink neck ribbon for a guiding rope. His hurried vision descried almost at the same instant an almost naked black girl being dragged along to a lustful brute's hut at the end of a twisted rope, and lashed with another bit of the same tough vine. The sight of the tiny trickling red stream down her back, and her pitiful heart-rending cries sounding in his ears, awoke Mr. Missionary in a lather of cold sweat.

But alas, the fate of the girl is no dream or flight of disordered fancy, but a plain matter of everyday fact in Congoland.

Lelo had never looked upon a horse and knew nothing of its trials; she had troubles of her own. This tale as it has to do mostly with her must be finished without digressing so far afield again as to the land of oppressed horses!





A CORNER OF KINKONZI STATION



FIREPLACE AT BASE OF TREE. IN LOWER LEFT-HAND  
CORNER ARE CHARRED BONES OF VICTIM POI-  
SONED FOR WITCHCRAFT.



## CHAPTER VI.

### TRIED AND ACQUITTED.

**N**OT long after she had related to Lelo the sad story of her mother's end Mayala was taken suddenly ill, and died a few days later. Lelo deeply regretted the loss of her friend and was perhaps the most sincere mourner at her grave. Friends like Mayala were very scarce in her circle.

The uneventful round of Lelo's existence was resumed. Month after month rolled by with nothing to vary the monotony, and more than a year had passed before the routine was disturbed. She uttered a thoughtless, harmless remark to Mavambu that instantly caused a commotion. Her unwise speech nearly cost her her life; she paid dearly for what was no more than a slip of the tongue before the matter was finally closed.

Mayala's grave, in plain view from the path that ran through the forest behind the village, caved in. A mat and a few frail sticks had been laid over the corpse, and these soon decaying the dirt dropped down farther into the hole. The broken pots, a basket, and an idol that embellished the top had fallen over and were almost hidden by the quickly growing weeds.

Lelo mentioned the matter to Mavambu one day, and spoke about the bad condition of Mayala's grave. He turned upon her immediately, and glaring as if she were indeed an evil spirit that had just come from the dark realms beyond, hinted suspiciously:

"*Zindoki* are interested in the dead."

She was alarmed at the intimation, but managed to stammer out a timid acknowledgment to his sage remark about witches. She wished at the same time she could control her limbs, which suddenly began to tremble, and to make her face appear natural and unconcerned. Mavambu, in the light of his sudden feeling of distrust, viewing the matter perplexedly and unheeding her halting interruption, continued:

"Why should any honest woman talk about graves?"

"Me, I didn't mean any harm!"

He made no reply to that, but continued to regard her sternly. He was busy with his new thoughts, mentally weighing her doubtful words and altered looks.

"I saw that the mound had dropped and the *nkisi* fallen over, and thought that you might like to know it."

"I could have seen for myself. Who looks at graves?"

"I just happened to notice it," she faltered with growing agitation; thinking about the dread word

*ndoki* he had used. Her dismay was not unnoticed by her lord.

"Me, I have other things to look at than graves caved in by devilry. What have you got to do with such things?" Without giving her opportunity for a frightened reply in an attempt to clear up the misunderstanding, and interrupting her defense, he charged: "Maybe you yourself are *ndoki!*"

Denials were becoming worse than wasted effort. Each new form of explanation made to Mavambu and all the protestations of innocence given out in the village only served to draw and concentrate attention upon the accusation that had been made. The more she denied and endeavored to explain the matter the more she became entangled.

That she was frightened was plain to be seen, and so her denials were soon reckoned as the lying ravings of a detected witch trying to further blind their eyes to her true character. If she were not guilty, said they, what was the use of her talk? What had she to fear? Only the guilty were fearful. Their words did not alter the facts; Lelo was innocent, and afraid too.

Mavambu, as became an honest man ready to sacrifice personal interest to public welfare, went to his brethren and accused the woman. His trusty brethren should not suffer through her even though she was his own wife. If she should be found guilty and put out of the way of doing

further harm, he would suffer considerable pecuniary loss. But what of that? His duty to the community was clear, and recognizing the fact, he would not fail in discharging it.

He had now, because of her alarm, good reason to believe that she was *ndoki*. He did not propose to allow her to work out her devilish schemes, using him as a screen, and abusing the shelter of his honorable roof. Mavambu was still possessed of a good measure of public spirit in a degenerate age when all men sought their own, and not another's good.

Several women vindicated Mavambu's admirable stand at once, and sought to corroborate his praiseworthy accusation against Lelo by relating various untoward circumstances. There were several questionable actions of the accused now to be accounted for. There were sundry mysterious looks and mutterings which they had wondered at, and which now must be satisfactorily explained, all of which came back to them with added force, since their memories had been revived through the recent stir over a dead woman's grave.

Since the matter had been mentioned one good lady was then at liberty to state positively that she had been certain for a long time that Lelo was *ndoki*. In fact as soon as she had set eyes upon her she had noticed, so it seemed, a certain peculiar expression. This strange look she found accentuated on one occasion when Lelo thought no-

body was observing her. This witness was confident that the said odd look was the hall-mark of the Evil One, *nkadi ampemba* himself. She had not felt free before to voice her knowledge, as none besides herself seemed to be aware of Lelo's true character. Being also naturally fearful of making any mistake, and of accusing anybody hastily or wrongfully, she had considered it prudent to await developments.

Another outspoken soul, greatly stirred with indignation at the bare thought of the shameful duplicity of the hypocritical, smiling Lelo, slapped her thighs vigorously, stamped her feet wrathfully, waved her arms wildly, and said loudly, standing on the plaza in the midst of a sympathetic group, that Lelo's coming back to Kimbenza was all a put-up job. She charged the Kibungu people with being well aware of Lelo's devilish proclivities. But they, lacking the public spirit and courage to put her out of the way in the lawful manner, had concocted the plan of having her pretend to be homesick and run away. Their imposture being thus laid bare, it could be seen at a glance that the Kibungu people had gotten rid of her and her machinations and had at the same time been reimbursed for any original expenditure which they might otherwise have lost. Lelo too had gained; she got a further lease of life to work out her vile plots against the welfare of the country. What the last speaker said must surely have been revealed

to her; she was a seer, seemingly; she understood the awful plot so well.

How could Lelo help but look guilty and change countenance under the openly accusing looks and loudly voiced charges of Mavambu and the neighbors? For a time nothing was said openly about poison, but she wished that they would speak about it publicly. It would be such a relief to be tried and acquitted. She knew that she would be cleared when she got a chance to prove her innocence. How could the *nkasa* bark injure her since she was as guiltless of witchcraft as the babe in her arms? Was it not an age-long established fact that *nkasa* was only deadly to those who were in league with the Evil One? She wished that they would soon do something more than ogle and snarl at her, she was getting enough of that; she chafed under the suspense, and longed for the privilege of proving herself guiltless.

When some of the Ancients came to think of it, it was not to be wondered at that Lelo was *ndoki*. They recalled then that after Lelo had been sold off to Kibungu, her own mother had developed unmistakable symptoms of witchcraft. They remembered, too, how that when Koso boldly had her tried, the mother had died in agony on the spot from the *nkasa*, as any witch would, and her body had been dragged off in triumph and burned. From such a mother what else could they have expected? Lelo had it in the blood by birth, and devilry had been imbibed with her mother's milk. They might



well be thankful that she had been found out before she had gotten any further along on her evil course.

Strange to say, none of them had thought about her mother before, possibly they had lost sight of her case among a multitude of other affairs of a similar nature; but now all was as plain as day. Seeing the matter so clearly it was necessary to go to the root of the evil and cut out the dangerous growth before it progressed farther.

Much evil might come through longer delay; even then some of them might be under the first potent touch of the enemy working through Lelo. Several suspicious pains and aches had not been accounted for lately by natural causes. Having resisted all lawful remedies probably they came through occult power, and it was no doubt high time that strong preventive measures be taken.

True the *Missioni* was close by, and *Bula Matadi* (the Government) sometimes made trouble over the killing of a witch close to a *Vula*; so the affair must be arranged to keep it from the ears of the Government and the *baNganga zaNzambi*. Even though the missionaries were close at hand and as usual nosing about, in a matter of such tremendous importance, when so much was at stake certain risks must be taken.

Mavambu consulted with the Elders and they agreed to pass the word among the adults to drop all talk on the subject. It would never do for some foolish child to mention the story over at the

*Vula* school. They could wait for a little until the excitement had subsided, and then have the poison trial for Lelo in secret, in the presence of only a few trustworthy witnesses.

In due time Lelo was poisoned. The usual procedure was not followed in her case. Mavambu reached the door of her hut one morning at the first glimmer of gray in the east. While the villagers restlessly turned on their mats in the early chill, or sleepily revived their fires by poking the living ends of the partly consumed sticks together, he came according to agreement to arouse her.

Lelo sprang to answer the knock, leaving the children cuddled together on the simple bed, and demanded cautiously in the terse native style before removing the bar, "Who?"

"We go now, we!" The voice was Mavambu's replying in the same characteristic Congo way.

She knew it was needless to ask, but said nevertheless, "Where?"

"To forest!" was Mavambu's word in reply, without mentioning the purpose of their journey.

"Good, I come!" Lelo could afford to be short. She knew perfectly well why they were to set out for the forest, and she was anxious to go with him.

Stepping lightly over the high sill, and closing the door noiselessly behind her, she ran quickly to the hut of a girl friend, and begged her to go and look after the babies. Without returning or



CONGO TEACHER-EVANGELIST AND WIFE



IDOLS AND BROKEN CROCKERY ON A GRAVE



looking back toward her treasure chamber, she followed her husband at a brisk gait.

Wasting no words they left the noises of the awakening village and soon reached an unfrequented spot, over seldom-trodden paths. Lelo was now as cool inwardly as her body was chill, covered as it was with the heavy dews brushed from the bushes lining the path on either side and that were fighting for even the narrow hard ribbon of earth over which the ill-mated couple walked.

It was Mavambu who was nervous now. Possibly the strain of preparing for the ordeal was telling upon him. Lelo was quite composed.

Ordinarily it was the business of a witch-doctor to discover, point out, and name the witch, or witches, troubling a community by dangerous activities. After such simple remedies, in case of sickness, as painting the body of the afflicted one with cabalistic chalk markings, or the incantations and dancing of a wise woman, had failed, the witch-doctor was called for an expert diagnosis. Accidents and disasters of various kinds also required satisfactory explanations.

Witch-doctors (*Zinganga*) have a very well-defined way of exposing the real source of illness or public calamities, and of finding the culpable ones when the cause is found to be witchcraft. Announcement is generally made in advance, and time and place fixed for the search.

The villagers and their friends from other places

assemble at a fixed time to "hunt the witch," as people in other lands gather for their particular kind of hunting. This sport—it is sport as well as a religious duty—is more interesting to Mayombe people than a buffalo hunt since the game is more valuable. It is more exciting than a palaver as so much more is at stake. It is a good way to dispose of enemies because it presents fewer risks than a knife-thrust or a gun-shot on an unfrequented path.

Even if no special antipathy had already existed toward the guilty wretch, there are still the fields and household effects of the departed *ndoki* to be considered. This confiscation and division are always the excuse for an exciting diversion, especially when the rascally witch happens to be a well-to-do person and of some standing among them.

According to the locality in which he practices, the fetich priest has several different ways of finding out a witch. Sometimes the name of the culprit is whispered in his ear while he lies in a trance, sacredly shut away in a hut from the vulgar crowd. Sometimes the face of the unspeakable villain is revealed to him when alone, after a weird performance in public, when his body is fantastically painted, and robed in skins and green leaves. In the "sacred" privacy of his hut he beholds the face of the traitor in the broken bit of mirror, set into the wooden belly of his human-shaped idol.

Accusation is one thing, but proof of guilt is quite another. The accused is rightly held to be not

guilty until indisputably proven to be a criminal. Of course the one "pointed out," as might be expected, always vigorously denies any participation in occult rites, or any knowledge of evil spirits. It is the *nkasa* cup alone that can determine the truth or error of the revelations made to the doctor.

That the doctor's information is not always reliable is seen when an accused person successfully undergoes the trial. This is hard to account for, but is generally met by the fact that his knowledge is often shown to be correct, as seen in the number of witches killed by the cup, after being "pointed out" by him. The suspected one must be proven guilty, and the fair-minded are always willing to await the result of the test, lest they wrong an innocent person by hasty judgment.

The accused person is generally given until day-break the following morning. A strict fast is observed, but it is not difficult to abstain from food as most persons have little appetite under such a serious charge. Then in the presence of a large crowd of tense spectators, who have been drawn together by the booming of the signal drum, the draught is gulped down from a huge mug. The deadly poisonous bark of the *nkasa* tree has been finely pounded by several women appointed for the purpose, before being mixed with water enough to make the dose.

The nauseous mixture often takes immediate deadly effect, and the patriotic crowd of villagers

unite gladly in destroying the vile body that has been so prostituted as to become an anchorage for a destroying spirit of evil from the unknown seas of space behind the veil of honest man's ken. With howls of rage, mingled with shouts of triumph, they complete their voluntary task, leaving not a semblance of humanity beyond shreds of torn flesh and partly consumed bones, near the dying embers of a fire, after which they take their departure.

Sometimes the outraged stomach of the victim is so upset by the noxious draught that vomiting follows at once. This fact is generally heralded with shouts of joy, and the triumphant beating of drums. The friends of the poor dupe are delighted at the outcome, and many pleasant incidents and ceremonies follow the pains and retching. Proof of innocence thus established, the accuser disgorges into the hands of the accused the fee that had been collected in advance, and makes other amends. A present of cloth is sometimes added, or other articles bestowed to salve the wounded feelings of the victim of the mistake.

As soon as strength returns the conqueror is feted, and in some cases receives a new name in commemoration of the victory. This is equivalent to a title or a decoration, and acts upon the pride in much the same way as medals and other marks of favor affected by civilized men in other lands. It is not strange that some are glad to have this easy



way to distinction thrust upon them, or even sometimes to seek it.

Lelo's affair was carried out in secret, there were only a few of Mavambu's cronies present to witness the poisoning. She was alone without one sympathizing heart to stand with her. Fortunately for her, and for her little ones, the dose was overstrong, or her stomach was in the right condition to reject the deadly stuff, or God directly intervened. She vomited freely at once and so got rid of the noxious potion.

Doubtless God did intervene and interfere directly in Lelo's case. She was spared to care for her children, and thus given opportunity later on of accepting Christ, and of entering into Eternal Life through believing in Him.

Her indignation over the slander against her was swamped under the inrush of gladness which followed when she realized that it was all over, and that she was free—free to go back to her waiting babies, and to face the whole countryside proudly, as one incontestably shown to be honest, and free from the hidden and detestable practices of witchcraft.

Mavambu sheepishly fell in with the new order of things brought about by the unshakable sign of Lelo's innocence, and presented her with several articles of value. His gifts included a new loin cloth of checked cotton, in which to receive her friends and neighbors when they brought their con-

gratulations together with gifts of food to the happy victor.

Lelo's life once more resumed its normal course. Her glory was but fleeting; her presents quickly consumed. The *nkasa* test was forgotten, and her life was claimed by the many duties of her humble lot.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SERVING A NEW MASTER.

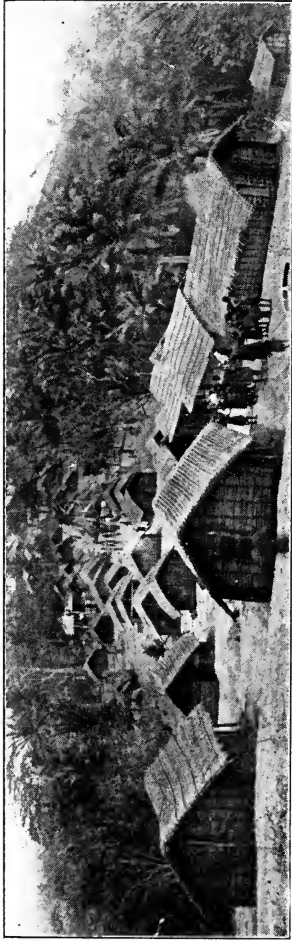
**R**OSO'S village had not changed since Lelo first went away to Kibungu. Moving the town to new sites in the neighborhood had not changed it; it was the same outwardly as it had been for years. The same kind of grass huts, always being repaired, or sadly in need of it; the same kind of pots, and axes, and hoes. The same kind of nearly naked people living in ignorance and suffering under the burden of their hoary, evil customs. People and names were always changing, but to the eye everything was almost the same now as it had been for many years.

However, a great change had indeed come to the neighborhood, even if it had been felt only by two or three of the people of Kinkoso town. The change had come through the advent of the strange white men from across the sea. At the time Lelo was marched away into slavery, a naked slip of a girl, the white man had just penetrated into the jungles of Kinkoso. She had never seen a "man-in-cloth," but had heard many strangely distorted tales concerning them; about their appearance, their food, their dress, their jabbering harsh language, and evil customs; but that was all.

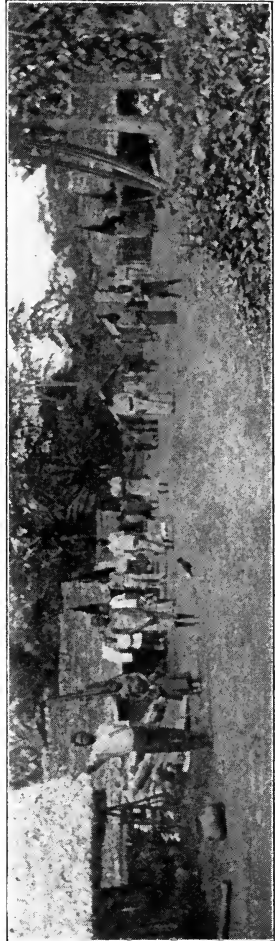
She had never seen a white face, and had never listened to such a story as the strangers living near Kinkoso endeavored, from the first day of their coming to make plain in their barbarous, broken kiKongo. Shortly before she had been carried off in Bungu's train, the first *mindele miaNzambi* (white men of God) had reached Yenge. Lelo had listened to the strange sound of the church bell that first awakened the sleeping echoes of the primeval forest on Kimfutila plateau. The bell was rung before the chapel was built, hanging high in a convenient tree, but Lelo was a woman full grown before she answered the signal call and took her place within the precincts of God's little house among His people.

The curiously dressed white strangers had come along, guided by a friendly boy from a *Missioni* called Ngangila near the Congo River, which place had been opened several years before, and the missionaries had gotten a start on the language there. When they reached Yenge (peace) they bargained with the important men and one or two lesser lights for the right to settle in the country.

Each one of the favorably inclined "Kings" received as a token of their friendly reception a second-hand frock coat, a red fez cap, a blanket, also red, a dagger-pointed bone-handled knife in a gorgeously painted pasteboard scabbard, and several other highly desirable articles, all equally valuable.



A VILLAGE ON LOFTY RIDGE



NATIVE CHRISTIAN VILLAGE



After the piece of land had been selected which the white men wanted for a station site, the same performance was gone over with the women, who owned the yam and manioc patches and the growing banana trees. The articles given out were changed to suit female tastes, and the women received strips of red twill cloth, bandana handkerchiefs, small round mirrors, beads, spoons, and other coveted treasures, brought from the white man's El Dorado home "under the seas," and made in the factories of his *Nzambi*.

The first building put up by the newcomers was a "cloth house," a very curious affair in those parts. Near the tent was built a grass hut. Bought and paid for, torn down from its village plot, carried over piecemeal and erected on the station all within one day—almost an incredible feat for people who would have left it on the way, while they went off to rest for days, or applied themselves to some other business in a leisurely manner. This store hut was soon filled with the valuable traps of the strangers brought in packages on the heads of their caravan porters. A strong lock was snapped on the door, while the owners were at work clearing up the place.

Before any permanent building had been erected and while still engaged in gathering materials, making bricks and drying them in the sun, a school was started, and daily services were held for the boys and men employed on the place, and for the others

engaged in gathering materials, chopping down trees, digging stumps and roots, and cutting away the persistent heavy grass that would push up in every unoccupied spot.

None of the people hired had been accustomed to any regular work, but the treasures of the white men were a great incentive to toil. There was no scarcity of hands, more or less willing, when a holiday costume consisting of a fathom of blue cloth, a cap and a knife could be procured for a month's labor, to say nothing of regular rations of food every day.

During the first sessions, there were more on the outside than seated within the school hut! There were more to watch the teacher and comment on his appearance and costume than there were to enroll as pupils. There was no lack of seating capacity inside, but then the outside afforded more security from *kindoki*. The audience listened intently and watched carefully the contortions of those who were struggling to grasp the elusive letters.

The audible comments from those outside sometimes evoked defiant looks and stinging replies from the indignant scholars. There was much talk outside about witchcraft and about foolish persons who were in a fair way to lose their sight poring over forbidden hieroglyphics; nevertheless the *skulu* went on increasing in popularity. The extraordinary buzzing from the temple of learning always attracted the attention of visiting natives, who fre-



quently came in droves to behold for themselves the wonderful sights of which they had been told in their own far country.

Lelo ought to have been among the first company of young people at Yenge, many of whom are now doubtless safe at home with the Lord. But the little girl was far away, serving in bitter bondage. She had gone before the revolutionary period had begun, and so missed the first manœuvres of the invaders, who had come from *kumputu* to turn the Mayombe world upside down.

The gospel story was so strange that it was regarded as only a well-concocted pretense. It was of course but a cover to hide the real purpose of all that tremendous outlay of valuables. They were not such fools as to believe that the *mindele mia-Nzambi* were giving away blankets and coats and other articles, without expecting any tangible return. What else could it be called but "giving away" when the return was valueless; for who would think of parting with good cloth for a piece of land that was of no value in itself, but only worth what was dug from it by hard labor?

All other white men known by sight or by reputation to the hardy Congolese travelers were after money; and it would soon be seen, said the more suspicious ones, that the *baNganga Nzambi* were self-seekers also. That they had come, without ulterior motives, simply to tell of the love of God for them, was of course not to be believed by

men of the world. That talk about *Nzambi*, whom they had never seen, would serve for credulous fools, for the women and the children. Some of their own traders had known the wily ways of the "people in cloth" for a long time, meeting them frequently on their journeys to the Coast, but not much that was creditable to the strangers had they ever observed.

The "good news" (*Nsamu wambote*) was an old tale by the time Lelo got back to Kimbenza, close by Yenge Station. To many it had proven wearisome, and it was decidedly less interesting than many of their own well-known fables. Lelo fell in with the generally accepted views on the subject, and found at first that the story did not appeal to her.

The first time it impressed her as having any sense in it whatever was after she had been "home" for several years, and Mrs. Missionary had nursed her through a very serious illness. Then somehow it began to grip and it seized her heart with its simple truths. It sounded different to her, lying there on her mat, listening to what Mrs. Missionary was saying in a natural and unaffected way than when she had heard it preached in her village.

Coughing her throat free from the smoke which percolated through the butt ends of some dead sticks, the points of which were glowing on a hot bed of coals near Lelo's couch, Mrs. Missionary ventured experimentally, after politely hearing that her patient was better,

"You were very close to the land of the dead."

"Yes, Mama, I have seen much trouble, indeed."

"Suppose you hadn't come back, but had gone on your journey, then what?"

"Who knows?" Lelo queried faintly.

"Me, I know. Listen! 'He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.'"

Lelo shrugged her shoulders, dismissing the unwelcome subject, and Mrs. Missionary wisely said no more at the time. But Lelo soon found that she could not put away the new thoughts that crowded into her mind, after Mrs. Missionary had ceased speaking, however much she wanted to forget and to relegate the whole matter to oblivion.

Among other preposterous teachings, as near as Lelo could determine, was one stating that they were all slaves, and that they might all be free. The Doctors of God held that the whole country was enslaved, not alone the actual slaves of the rulers, and the women and children in bondage, but the Chiefs and Headmen themselves were serfs in the clutches of a hard master. So the strange teaching declared.

The *baNganga Nzambi* said that sickness and brutal oppressions and all the vile deeds that cursed the land were caused through the people being in fetters to *nkadi ampemba*, or *Satana* as they called him; and that all the people of the land were but enslaved captives, and doing his will daily.

They explained in their teaching that the will of the Enemy was to inspire them to all manner of cruel and debasing actions, and that he reveled in the consequent result of misery and woe. They said that whosoever committed sin was in heart the slave of sin; and that freedom of the body was of but little value, compared with freedom of the soul. They called deeds sinful to do which Lelo had always considered right. She had known that it was a grave error to be caught with another person's property, but to get away with the goods successfully was not only profitable but a decidedly clever, laudable and laughable act.

Incredible as it was, they claimed that soul-freedom could be had by anybody for the asking; and that it was for all who would believe on *Klisto*, and go into His service. For everybody—even women! No wonder that Lelo found it a hard saying to accept, when even slaves and women were included in the offer.

Mrs. Missionary came across Lelo one day out in her field. Whose field? Lelo's field. But then it also belonged to Mrs. Missionary. It was in Lelo's little plot of ground that they met, while the owner was hard at her hoeing; but it was also Mrs. Missionary's territory in another sense. Lelo devoted her time to yams and manioc and other things that required good soil and diligent cultivation; but Mrs. Missionary was sowing seeds of another kind

—of that kind which could only germinate in human hearts that were open to receive them.

Mrs. Missionary was out walking, going through the gardens inviting the girls and women and babies to the women's meeting over at the *Vula*.

"*Mbote* Lelo," said she, leaning hard on a friendly stump, and slowly mopping beads of perspiration from face and neck with a generous-sized handkerchief.

"Eh, Mama *mbote*," said Lelo returning the salutation, "where are you going?"

Lelo arose from her stooping posture, laid aside the short-handled hoe, and prepared for a friendly chat. Removing her loin cloth which covered the baby and taking him up from his bed of leaves, she improved the time by feeding him while having a *moka* with her friend.

Mrs. Missionary was unable to reply "Nowhere," or "I'm taking a walk," as neither one of those expressions would have conveyed any meaning to Lelo's practical mind. For her there was no such locality as nowhere, and that any reasonable being would wander aimlessly about on a hot day, for the sake of walking, was not only incredible, but a decidedly unsuitable exercise for one so wise as a missionary.

"I have been to the village, and am now here to ask you why you don't come to the *Vula* to *sambila*?"

"Pray!" repeated Lelo shrilly, and then asked as

if "no" could be the only possible answer: "Women, is it that *they* ever have time to pray?"

"Women find time to dance and to play, don't they?"

Lelo grudgingly admitted that they did manage to get a little time for recreation, now and then.

"Women should take time to pray now," urged Mrs. Missionary pleasantly, "if they don't wish to regret their neglect hereafter. Why not come to the women's meeting this afternoon and bring the baby?"

Lelo hesitated, and Mrs. Missionary went on to say in sober tones: "You may be sure your garden will keep on growing while you are away from it."

Lelo laughed. The droll conceit amused her. She promised that she would attend the service that day.

She not only went that afternoon, but she returned again and again. The more she frequented the Chapel, the higher rose her interest in the strange teachings that she heard. She had a hunger to understand, to grasp what was given out. She sat on a hard bench made of packing-case boards, and cudgeled her brain with the new words and fresh ideas given from the platform. A vista opened before her; she soon began to see beyond her hut and the little garden patch. Her heart worked better than her head; she was slow in apprehending with her brain, but the truth found an opening into her heart. It entered there and com-

pletely changed the whole course of Lelo's life.

Seated in Yenge Chapel one day, she heard a message that seemed to have come direct from heaven and intended particularly for her. It touched her heart and seemed to meet her own special need as no other word had ever yet done.

"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood," read Mrs. Missionary slowly and devoutly. She then commented briefly in explanation of those precious words of Scripture.

Lelo heard darkly, and understood but little of the exposition. She indistinctly saw Mrs. Missionary standing in her accustomed place upon the raised brick platform. She felt the movements of the crowd of women and children seated about her and heard with a start the loud, resounding slap with which a woman killed a much-dreaded poisonous fly that had settled on the bare leg of a little child seated on her lap.

She was dimly conscious of the beautiful picture seen through the open window, of the many-hued plants, and the tree branches and leaves bathed in the mellow sunlight and stirring in the afternoon breezes. She felt the tugging of her own restless child and whispered a soothing promise to take her home soon.

Somehow all that she heard and saw was as if in a dream. In her heart beat the message, slowly and distinctly, "redeemed by blood," and over and over again her brain repeated the words "brought

back to God." The story of Christ and of His shed blood was not new to her, but she had never heard it as it came to her then. It caught and gripped and held and her whole being was shaken by the mighty truth.

"He was slain to redeem me back from slavery to my Father, and home," she murmured, so low that no human ear could have caught what she said.

Lelo never knew just how that tempest under her skull and the turmoil in her breast began, but she understood well that it was the beginning of something new and different in her life. When the strong emotion had partially subsided, and she had mechanically risen to go out with the rest of the hearers, she felt so different and realized that a change had taken place. Gratitude welled up from her heart toward the One who had bought her and made her free. She brushed away furtively from her eyes the tears that were too sacred for other eyes to look upon. She vaguely realized that she loved Christ, and that she now experienced the joy of His lifelong love for her. She rightly knew and felt she had entered the company of the redeemed.

After that Lelo attended the meetings frequently. She enjoyed the services in the little Chapel and found that the time spent there cheered and lightened an otherwise dreary and monotonous life. She was glad to get away for a little from the cook-pot



and the hoe, and to be away from the sordid scenes of everyday life, and the vile words and obscenities of those who seemed by their actions to be but little removed from the brute creation that surrounded them.

There in the little grass-roofed house of worship she was exalted and lifted above her gloomy everyday present, in devout thought of Christ and the promised radiant future of purity and eternal bliss that awaited her. Even assuming that the life of eternal freedom and happiness thus held out to her was after all only a dream, still Lelo's life was lifted and ennobled materially by what she learned of good in the meetings.

When the other women told her, with a knowing laugh, that the *nsamu wambote* was "lies-and-lies only," it did not in the least shake her confidence in the Gospel or cause her to doubt her own experiences. She knew the truth, and how she knew it was the truth she was soon able to explain to her worldly-wise and doubting critics.

The wonderful Book was to Mrs. Missionary as plain as anything could be, so why should Lelo also not be able to learn to read it? She secured a Primer by telling Mrs. Missionary of her hunger for a further knowledge of her Saviour, and began the dreary task of learning those strange and wearisome signs that she must go over so many times before the bigger book would open to her mind and she could understand its precious words. It

was hard, but she patiently stuck to it, although for a long time progress was very slow.

She became so enraptured with her new experiences, that she was constrained to tell the other women all about them, in order to arouse their interest. There were plenty of suitable opportunities, for their conversation and daily life were barren enough of interest and new happenings. The *Vula* and the teachings of the missionaries were to their darkened minds frequently the subject of jest and speculation.

Lelo became after a while a real live missionary. She did good work, keeping at it persistently in season and out of season, in her village and away in the fields. Some of the women began to jeer at her, after the novelty had worn off, and to state seriously that she was crazy. They dubbed her *nlongi*-teacher, and regarded it as a huge joke that one of their own number acted just as if she were a missionary—just like the white woman over at the *Vula*.

Early one morning, leaving the babies to enjoy themselves contentedly in the calm, matter-of-fact way typical of Congo children by playing at getting the meal ready, Lelo went off as usual to replenish the water jars. She first filled a great basket, placing several smaller bottles around a big clay vessel in the bottom that alone would hold several gallons, and lifting the basket onto her back, started off. She reached the stream in the valley after a few

minutes' brisk walk along a winding forest path.

She was greeted boisterously by a crowd of splashing, gossipy women that had already assembled there. Some were gathering huge green leaves from the overhanging bushes to make soft beds in their baskets for the fragile bottles, or twisting leaves into stoppers for the great mouths of the jars. Several women higher up the stream were filling their vessels, and others, with their bottles full and safely stowed away in their baskets on the bank, were taking their customary morning bath.

Although a main path crossed the brook at that spot, they were quite safe from intrusion; it was their private bath for the time being. It would have been a bold fellow indeed, or someone extremely foolish who would brave the severe punishment sure to follow, if he approached the stream without giving warning to the women. A wise man would herald his approach by first shouting "Water?" before the water itself was sighted. Cautiously he would await a reply and the necessary permission to pass, from any ladies who might be about their ablutions. By several unmistakable signs, familiar to the Congolese, even strangers might detect their approach to a stream used for bathing, and from which water to supply the village was drawn.

Most men were wise in the ways of scheming women who unscrupulously endeavored to get rich

quickly. It had cost some of the men a lot of cloth to obtain this knowledge, but others had learned through the experiences of those who had already fallen victim. It was a practice for women to often secrete themselves, pretending not to hear the warning shout of the solitary male traveler; and then, unclothed, to stand up in indignation and well-feigned alarm in full view of the unwary pilgrim when he reached the stream. Their angry and raucous cries soon brought their male relatives to the succor of outraged modesty, when a settlement would be demanded.

Many slaves, guns, and bundles of cloth had been handed over to the husbands and Chiefs of such crafty conspirators in payment for "crimes" of that nature. The women were then usually safe from intrusion, and a wise man would not only cry "water," but generally used at the same time both ears and eyes as well as lungs to keep him from falling into the traps laid along the water courses. Travelers, after giving warning, were generally allowed to pass over the ford after the women had first modestly donned their few scant loin-cloth coverings and had stepped dripping out of the way.

Lelo was met upon arrival with scoffing remarks, and Kumbi, a girl from her own village, began mockingly, with a serious and long-drawn countenance,

"Good! ("morning" understood) Teacher of God!"

"Lelo, she is missionary?" asked Baku a friend of the farce-maker, with well-simulated wonder at the title used.

Lelo went about her business quietly, first carefully putting down the basket, and removing the bottle with her gentle and accustomed hand.

The chatter upstream ceased when Kumbi and Baku began to talk. A little girl giggled in approval, and one woman, having her sense of humor well developed, was so shaken with mirth in anticipation of the coming dialog between the two clever actors that she was obliged to sit down on the bank and hold her sides.

"Truly! But don't you know that Mrs. Missionary pays Lelo for preaching to us?" Kumbi's voice was shrilly surprised in imparting the informing question.

"No! Is it true?" stammered Baku, lifting with one hand her lower jaw, which had dropped in amazement. With wondering eyes she turned to Lelo and inquired: "Do you think that I could get work too? I would like to get pay for preaching to these sinful women."

That was too much for the crowd. The interested auditors did not wait for Lelo's reply; they had restrained themselves with considerable effort while waiting for the gibing remarks to end. Baku's exertion was repaid with loud bursts of laughter which sent all the four-legged creatures in the vicinity away into hiding, and caused the

birds in their alarm to fly away, or silently blot themselves from sight behind the friendly branches of the highest trees.

Encouraged by their success, Baku nasally drawled, in exaggerated mimicry of Mrs. Missionary's kiKongo pronunciation, and imitating at the same time her walk and gestures,

"You women, why to pray come you not?"

Another happy shout rewarded this ape-like display, and by mutual agreement the women resolved they were having a splendid time; and that the stragglers who were late in coming from the village were missing a great comedy.

Kumbi then addressed Lelo, and asked inquisitively: "Do they pay you well?"

"Pay me? The missionaries pay me nothing."

"What! No pay from them. Do you mean to say that you work for nothing?" Deep solicitude was apparent in Kumbi's question; she was seemingly concerned about Lelo's welfare.

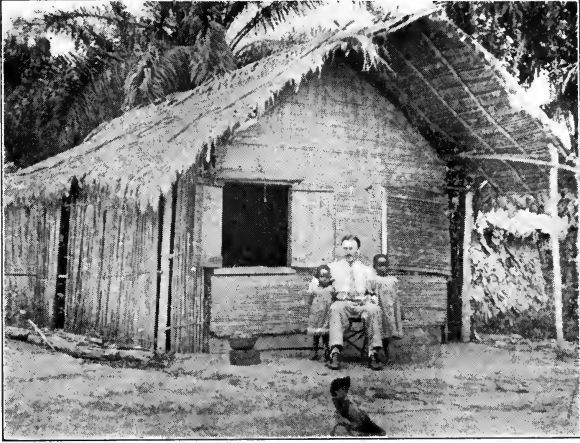
"No, indeed not," simply answered Lelo, "I do not work for nothing. I am well paid; my Father pays me."

"How does He pay, with franc pieces, in rum, or cloth?"

"With neither, but He gives me peace and joy in serving Him because He has changed my heart."

"Listen, you sinful women," jeered Kumbi, "Lelo says that she has got a new heart."

That was received and bandied about with an-



BEGINNINGS AT MBOKA



CONGO VILLAGE





other uproar of ridicule, and when the hilarious cries had somewhat abated, Kumbi derisively continued: "Can you see your new heart? What does it look like?"

Lelo attended quietly to her work, undisturbed by the hubbub; she had filled her jars, and arranged them carefully in the basket, and had taken her bath. She took up the basket to return home to her babies. She left under a fire of jeers and insults, the parting shots from a merry company following her until she was beyond reach.

"We are as good as you," said one.

Another shouted, "You are crazy!"

Similar cries followed her as she toiled up the hill, bent almost double under the heavy load of water. The last contemptuous shout of "Behold the Teacher!" reached her just as she left the valley and disappeared from their view, entering the forest on the level ground.

Lelo did not like it very much, but she made no reply to the insults. She knew that her chance would come later; she would then have better success when she got them alone, one by one, and quietly talked to them about God and His love for them. They were not so bold when separated, and she could wait.

Lelo had left them in their heathenism, so she must bear their revengeful attacks. It was easier in some ways to stay with the crowd, but she had no desire to be with them, or to go back in spirit

to the darkness she had left behind. She prayed and God heard and sustained her in the petty persecutions as well as in the greater tribulations that followed in the course of her checkered life.

The crowd punctuated their sneers with mocking laughter, but Lelo continued to pray silently. Lelo had taken the best course as it so proved in the long run.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A NEW WIFE FOR AN OLD.

**D**AVAMBU was the first in the village to discover a difference in Lelo's life; it was not long before he observed the change in her. He by no means relished the new order: she had been far more agreeable to him in her former manner of life. He resented any rebuke from her, for his evil words and actions sometimes provoked a strong protest. Her talk about what "the Lord said," and what she had learned from the missionaries, was to him irritating chatter of the most meaningless kind. He answered her with outbursts of rage, and so the breach widened.

Undoubtedly, she did make it disagreeable for him, however little she desired to do so. It was because of the lack of harmony and fellowship between them and her aversion to his evil life. He increased her burdens by his attitude toward her and they thus grew farther and farther apart. Even the children were no bond of union, so widely separated were the hopes and plans of the parents. Indeed it was their youngest one who at last was the means of tearing their lives hopelessly apart.

Her baby boy was taken ill and it was then they had their most serious misunderstanding. The

little sufferer grew rapidly worse and nothing that she could do gave him more than temporary relief. She knew so little of means whereby to help the child, and it is possible that he might have been better off if she had not attempted to assist him with her loving but mistaken care.

Mavambu loved—if that word could express his feeling—the baby. He informed Lelo that the boy was his child, and that his heart was as tender toward the baby as was her own; that in fact he was more concerned about getting the baby cured than she was. He, for his part, was determined to send for a fetich priest. The *nganga* would be expensive, but what of that? The child's life was also worth something.

They had to consider not only the baby's sufferings and their own feelings in consequence, but also the fact of the boy's ultimate worth if he lived to manhood. They must think of what it would mean in a few years' time to have the income derived from his labor, as well as the consequent prestige of having a larger number in the family.

Lelo was unyielding, and with dogged determination showing in her face and ringing in the firm tones of her voice, she declared: "The boy is mine. I alone will nurse him!"

"If he dies, then you will be the cause of his death. It is you who will kill him," charged Mavambu threateningly.

"I won't let any witch-doctor touch him!"

"Why not, if he can heal the child?"

"Better for him to die than to have the devil make him well," answered she with unusual boldness and refusing to be moved.

Mavambu by that time had the undisguised sympathy of the crowd which, at the first sound of loud words, had quickly collected at Lelo's hut. She was openly and recklessly defiant of their clamorous opinions and was not to be frightened from her position.

The mother crouched on the ground over the fire of glowing wood coals just outside her door, crooning to the restless child tightly clasped to her breast. The heat was grateful to the little one who was in pain. Lelo feared, and not without reason, that someone would endeavor to tear her treasure from her arms. She looked about timidly, like a hunted animal preparing for attack.

One of her neighbors growled out her feeling of disgust for such an unnatural mother who would wilfully and obstinately allow her child to die, rather than accept the help she might have for the asking. This neighbor seemed to voice the sentiment of the other women. They received her speech with approving grunts and nods.

The long-suffering Mavambu was heartened by the kindly expressed sympathy and encouragement of those good souls who understood his case so well and who could commiserate with him in this new conjugal difficulty.

Looking around at them appreciatively with a bleary expression of gratitude, and in an effort to win their whole-hearted approval of the very sensible and moderate means he was employing with his refractory chattel, he demonstrated his reasonable attitude by demanding of Lelo:

"What do you mean by 'make him well by the devil'? I only said that I wanted to send for Mpeso Luamba to cure the baby. Do you call Mpeso the devil?"

"The devil has people to do his work! Devil or no devil Luamba shall not touch my baby!"

She hugged the child closer, so tightly indeed that the feverish little one cried out, and pushed at the restraining arms. It was from no lack of love that Lelo refused the assistance of the *Nganga*.

Mavambu, dropping his head to one side, and straining with his right ear scooped in his hand to catch the words, was deeply moved at such a reply. The rebellious attitude of his own lawfully acquired property stirred him to righteous indignation. What a base return for all the kindness that had been lavished upon her and for redeeming her from slavery in the hands of Kungu's heir! She actually talked now as if she owned herself and as if she possessed sole rights over the child. What a pernicious doctrine to publish, especially before the other women. Who could tell where such teachings would lead them? Rank disobedi-

ence was bad enough indeed, but how much worse to excuse it with such destructive beliefs.

Things had certainly reached a sad state of confusion in his village when a woman dared to talk to her owner in such a way. Lelo's unwarranted and cool disposal of his own child, his own flesh and blood, his own property, loudly demanded sudden and dire punishment. His wrath, under the circumstances, was very excusable.

Mavambu felt, though, that it would not be wise for him to press the matter too suddenly. Notwithstanding that he was well within his rights it would be better to allow her to have her own headstrong way for a time, rather than by hasty action to drive her to desperation. Mavambu was far from being sure about this latest addition to his number of wives, and sometimes he wondered after all whether his kindness and his affection had not been sadly misplaced.

"The child is mine," said he, "and you too belong to me. It is for me to do what I please with my own; for you to obey and obey only."

With an eloquent gesture, and not even raising her eyes, she shrugged her naked shoulders, and banished the "man's rights" argument. Concerned only with her fretting baby, she remarked simply: "The Word of God forbids us having any dealings with the devil."

Screams of angry protest greeted her words, and a loud-voiced woman immediately volunteered the

right prescription for Lelo's case. However it might be with the baby, there was absolutely no question as to the kind of medicine Lelo's trouble demanded. She instructed Mavambu in hoarse, angry tones, and suggested a good, or a bad, whipping for the addle-pated wretch he had been be-guiled into taking to his bosom.

Determined Congo women sometimes do have their own way, but in this instance Lelo was so palpably in the wrong that she alienated the sympathy of even her best friends. She was at last overpowered by public opinion and brute force.

The witch-doctor was summoned. Lelo was roughly handled and thrust into the background to sob out her distress after the boy had been torn from her arms. Mpeso went through with the ordinary performance, and it resulted finally in another child victim being sacrificed upon the altar of a religion of lies. Another weight was thus added to the already overlaiden shoulders of the mother. Lelo grieved for her boy.

When Mavambu's latest trial with his irrational chattel was noised abroad among the villages of the neighborhood, other husbands began to take notice, and to inquire into teachings that influenced so unfavorably their domestic welfare. After much discussion it was seriously agreed upon by the property owners that the *Vula* was a dangerous place for women. They did not so much mind the hymn singing, and the spelling sheets, but such a prac-



tical demonstration of the teachings instilled into silly heads at the Chapel showed them plainly that danger was ahead.

The women were all charged by their lords to keep away from the *Vula*, especially from the women's meetings. They were threatened with summary punishment should they fail to obey. On the whole it was decided that prevention was far better than cure in dealing with such an ailment. The heresy to which Lelo had succumbed was akin to *kindoki*. The *Vula* was placed under a ban and boycotted. They did not mean to go through in their own individual cases any such experiences as those with which Mavambu had been troubled, if they could possibly avoid it.

Then it was that the *Vula* became unspeakably bad, and all connected with it, both black and white, were hypocritical schemers. There was nothing of good remembered, and nothing too mean to rake up and exaggerate in condemnation of the offending Mission. All material benefits received by them since the place was opened and innumerable kindnesses and help in trouble and sickness were too readily forgotten. All benefits and kind deeds were swept away on a wave of suspicion and anger, and many would have been glad to see the *Vula*, buildings and members alike, ousted from their country for all time.

These hard feelings affected the attendance at the school, the children quickly absorbing the hos-

tile sentiments of the elders. The services were mostly attended by those living at the station, since going to church was so unpopular with the villagers. Under the storm of abuse the missionaries could only quietly plod along and pray for better days and brighter skies. In it all they thought that it was much better to have disapproval and even persecution than to suffer from indifference and neglect.

Mavambu was a black Lothario, although by no means could he be described as gay. On the contrary, he was the owner of a forbidding, funereal countenance, and gave utterance to his momentous thoughts in a most dismal manner. He was never satisfied with the number of women in his possession and was always on the lookout for one more.

His women were always dissatisfied with his improvidence and neglect and were ever trying to get away from him into better hands. He failed to furnish cloth for his own human belongings, but always had plenty to waste upon strangers. The women even lacked tools to do the work demanded by him in their gardens, and he even neglected to repair their huts as any dutiful Mayombe proprietor was morally bound to do. So although he was always in search of new women, he was not popular with his old ones.

Lelo sometimes mustered up courage enough to rebuke him for his evil actions and neglect, and this never failed to call forth threats of vengeance.

After being particularly abusive one day he announced his determination to seek another wife for his comfort—one who would understand him better, and care for him more. It was unbearable, so he informed Lelo, to be met always with the biting words of an old woman whenever he came to her hut. He had in mind, so he continued, a dear little thing, very gentle and attractive, who would be delighted and honored in being permitted to become his wife and have the privilege of cheering him with loving speeches along his arduous way.

Thus it was that Mavambu made Lelo's rebuke an excuse for setting out on his quest for Simba. Indeed the girl was no sudden fancy, but a child upon whom his appraising eyes had long and longingly rested. She was diminutive and slender and aged about fifteen years, the only daughter of deceased Mayala, her father being old Chief Noki. Since her mother's death she had been living at Kimbusu with some of her maternal relatives, to whom she had reverted when left an orphan.

Mayala had been the faithful wife of Chief Noki, the father of Simba. When Noki passed away Mayala fell into Mavambu's hands and so became his property. Mayala was a wise woman in her day and proved a valuable addition to Mavambu's fortune. He was full of joy over his acquisition, but alas, his happiness was destined to be short-lived. Mayala remained only a few years in his possession, and then died suddenly before

he had ceased to congratulate himself upon his good fortune.

The death of Mayala pressed heavily upon Mavambu. Not only was it a natural burden of sorrow at her departure and the consequent funeral expenses, but he was further weighted down by the feeling that he had been rankly imposed upon. Looking about him he saw men, not so worthy as himself, having wives who had kept well, and had lived many working years to add to the prestige and power of the clan; but here was Mayala, the best of his lot, dying while still in her prime.

The fact that Mayala's male relatives at Kimbusu were far from strong numerically or rich in this world's goods, had a lot to do with Mavambu's toleration of this additional burden of grief. He would have let it go at that, when he had laid her broken pots on the grave and had tied her best red handkerchief on a pole above it, if there had been no hope of getting some intrinsically valuable consolation from her people. He would have summarily dismissed his added grief, and never have mentioned it, had it not happily occurred to him that he might be able to turn his sorrow to good account.

"On the whole," said he, in making confidences to his cronies, "it was decidedly unfair for Mayala to die upon my hands before I had realized much from her." He waxed indignant at the rude shattering of the happy fabric of his dreams about

her, and the ruthless robbery of his family hearth by the hidden hand of witchcraft. True, Mayala had served Noki faithfully for years, but Mavambu of course could not reasonably be expected to reckon that to her credit in his accounts. He concluded on the whole that he had been greatly ill-used.

So all in good time, after turning over the whole affair for inspection by his friends, and after settling the matter in his own mind, Mavambu decided he ought to demand another woman from Mayala's relatives to replace his own untimely loss. He simply must, he felt, have some compensation for the expenses incurred in burying her, and as balm to his broken heart. And then, as has been said, *Mfumu* Busu was not a powerful chief, nor one who could afford to turn unceremoniously from the recital of Mavambu's sorrow.

With the high, hot sun shining full upon his badge of office—the great pewter medal dangling at the end of a nickel chain fastened about his neck, and resting upon the bosom of his long-tailed black coat, Mavambu entered Kimbusu. He was followed by a few intimate friends, shining in the reflected glory of the Medal Chief, for Mavambu had reached the dignity of local representative of the government. Mavambu had come for the purpose of appealing to Mayala's people concerning the matter of compensation.

Hastily seeking the shelter of *Mfumu* Busu's

hospitable veranda they seated themselves in its refreshing shade. All eyes were fixed upon a demijohn, apparently heavy, that one of their number put away in a safe place where it could not be upset by the goats or pigs. The noises of the people at their customary occupations ceased, and an apprehensive and curious silence fell upon the town.

Busu had been sounded by an envoy of Mavambu's, sent some time before, but neither then nor now was the Chief favorably inclined toward Mavambu's claim. He was not disposed to pay out cloth, or to give up a slave upon any such pretext, unless absolutely compelled to do so.

When Chief Busu made his appearance, after the customary greetings, he told Mavambu that as far as he was concerned he considered the whole affair had been settled when Noki died and that Noki had received full value for his original outlay; that in fact Noki had been a heavy gainer, as Mayala had turned out to be an especially good bargain.

"Truly," he protested, "she was a good wife, and Noki more than got back the dowry goods."

Mavambu was crafty enough to admit a part of this contention, and to agree that she had been a good wife to the late Noki.

"But," replied he, "we are no longer dealing with Noki. What about me? She was my property too. I fell heir to her. Surely you will

not contend that I got much good from her? Why she died on my hands at once—almost!”

“Women die every day. What did you expect—that she would work forever?”

Mavambu was complacently disposed to acknowledge that women died frequently, and often when disappointingly young, but pressing his argument kindly, he said,

“I expected several more good years and ought to have had at least one child to lighten my old age.”

Sighing deeply in memory of the departed, and the attendant troubles, and fixing Busu with an accusing eye, he continued,

“About all that I got from Mayala was the heavy funeral expense account I was obliged to pay.”

“Men always bury their own women!”

“Certainly. And when they have first had some advantage, they can bury them with a good heart. But in the case in question, you of course are the one who ought to be made responsible for the debt.”

“She had a funeral almost as good as if she had been a man,” interjected Paka reproachfully.

And to this agreed friend Makwala who even mentioned in detail the various kinds of cloth used for Mayala’s shroud, and enumerated a few of the valuable articles that had been broken and laid upon her grave.

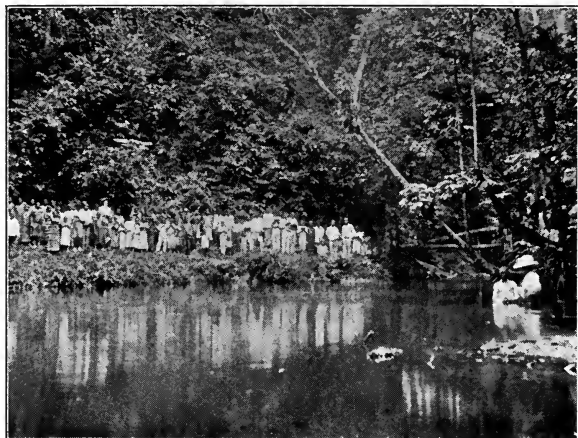
Mavambu wagged his head mournfully, but whether in memory of his departed wife, or of the wasted valuables, or both, he failed to make clear to the observers by any enlightening comment upon Makwala's speech.

Busu stoutly contended that all such talk was foreign to the matter in hand; that it was contrary to all established custom to hold any man responsible for furnishing a substitute, after a woman had lived with her husband as long as Mayala had done. He claimed that she had fulfilled all reasonable expectations, and urged that she had a perfect right to die when she did, being under no obligation to anybody to live longer.

The old Chief indignantly contended that he himself had gotten no more than he had been entitled to, and that the dowry had been a very moderate one to begin with. He said finally that to ask him to replace the woman now was an imposition, and one to which he would not tamely submit!

Mavambu dolefully observed that he thought that Busu knew very well, and that it would have been superfluous to remind him that some customs had changed since the advent of the White Man. To him it seemed childish to harp on the way things used to be. He ventured to cite several instances of how the White Man—his White Man—by whom he was employed, had gotten full justice for other medal chiefs like himself, when unscrupulous natives had been inclined to impose upon the said





BAPTISMAL SERVICE, KINKONZI



A MISSIONARY HOME AT YEMA



medal chiefs. He disliked greatly bringing his own affairs to the busy attention of his White Man, but hinted that however much against his will, he might be obliged to do so in the present instance, if he were not fairly treated.

Busu was of course visibly impressed by the weight of the argument and by the moderate way in which Mavambu advanced it. Busu soon after manifested a more tractable spirit, and could not resist the righteous claims of his adversary—that is to say, he found them irresistible when presented in such a manner, coupled with the name of his White Man.

When Mavambu and his loyal friends left Kimbusu, they left behind them the red-striped, wicker-covered bottle. It was generously left half filled with the fiery stuff in which they had pledged the prosperity of Mavambu and his "bride." When they returned to Yenge their caravan included the girl Simba, en route to her new "home."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A GENEROUS HUSBAND.

**N**ATURALLY, Mavambu was at first very kind to his new child wife, as he wished to impress her with his generosity and worth as a husband. Wishing to show her a kindness, at no cost to himself, he happily hit upon the following plan. He resolved to divide Lelo's rich garden and to give a half-share to Simba, who did not own a single fruit-bearing tree, or possess even a tiny patch of cultivated ground.

It occurred to far-seeing Mavambu that he might thus, so to say, kill two birds with one stone; not only would he serve Simba and win her lively gratitude, but he could at the same time punish Lelo, the refractory and foolish owner of the fields, and so make her understand in a practical way that he was a lord not to be trifled with.

Lelo was a hard-working woman; she had acquired the spirit of industry when young, and it had become a fixed habit. By the diligent use of her hoe and the tiny bladed axe, she had made a clearing in the jungle, and had vegetable and fruit gardens under cultivation. The garden was her whole source of income; from it she derived sustenance for herself and her little ones; and got in

addition the savory, red-peppered vegetable stews with which she regularly supplied her lord as his portion of the returns for her labor.

Simba's fields were still in prospect, they were yet to be cut and dug out of an unyielding soil and a dense tangle of trees, vines, and roots that encumbered the coveted spot. There was, of course, plenty of community land she might have had for the choosing, but much hard work was required, and a long, hungry intervening time must ensue before a yam or a banana or a bit of manioc root could be harvested. She had all to battle for with the mass of hindering jungle. Simba recalled with a sigh that at Kimbusu she had made good headway; but Kimbusu was left behind her. She was now a stranger, living on charity, having nothing but her basket, a pot or two, a hoe, and part share of a husband to feed.

The husband Mavambu, generous soul, prepared a bit of a surprise for the dear girl. He called her to him one morning, soon after her arrival, and with an air of mystery informed her that she was to go with him on a short journey. She of course accompanied him without question, and after a leisurely walk they soon reached Lelo's clearing and saw the rich field spread out attractively before them.

Mavambu, with that spirit of liberality that some people possess when dealing with the property of others, royally apportioned to Simba an ample slice

of the garden. With a magnificent wave of his bountiful hand, he said, pointing to a fire-smitten, leafless skeleton of a tree, whose dreary branches were clearly silhouetted against a background of gray sky:

"There is your boundary mark; from that tree to here where we stand is all yours."

Simba looked and gasped. She could only murmur unintelligible thanks, overcome as she was with wonder at her sudden great good fortune. She gazed upon Mavambu with admiring awe.

He playfully pinched her arm, and smilingly confirmed the gift, saying cheerfully,

"Yes, it is true. It is all thine; the ground, and all that you see growing thereon."

He expatiated upon the peculiar value of his gift, and the appropriateness of it at that time of the year and at that particular season of Simba's fortunes. Incidentally he made mention of the free-handed way in which he was accustomed to deal with those who put their trust in him and who might be under his generous protecting care.

Simba, overwhelmed, was still trying to convey to him her deep appreciation of his goodness, when Lelo appeared. They saw her coming from the path that crossed at the other end of the field. She made her way carefully over the obstructions, left there for vines to climb upon, into the midst of her garden plot.

When Lelo saw them, she slackened her pace,

somewhat surprised to see the two standing together in her garden, trying to account in her own mind for their being there. Unfortunately for their peace of mind she was not long in finding out the matter under consideration. Her own eyes and the few words of explanation vouchsafed by her lord enlightened her as to the nature of the proceedings. At once she most emphatically vetoed Mavambu's generous action.

A tiny scratch, drawing but one drop of red blood, calls for bitter retaliation, or an emollient in the shape of valuables to atone for the offense, and it is almost as bad to wound the Congolese in property rights by taking any part of their belongings. Lelo was being injured in a tender place.

She sternly remonstrated,

"With my own hands I made them. These gardens belong to me!"

"No matter," replied Mavambu, gently evading the objection, in rare good humor with himself and trying to conciliate her; "there's land enough, and food enough too, for you both."

"There is not enough in this patch for Simba!"

"She is a stranger. Is she to have no garden?"

"That is 'not affair mine.' Me, I did not bring her to this country."

"Don't try to make trouble. There is enough for us all, and for little Simba too," argued Mavambu pacifically.

Lelo was inexorable. She would not be mollified

and doggedly declined to be moved from her position.

"No! I tell you again, there's only enough for my children, besides what you eat."

Waxing more indignant under the injustice and recalling all she had done for him and the little return she got, she added:

"It's hard enough for me to feed you, without your new woman being thrust upon me! Let her work as I have done, or else you buy food for her."

Lelo was hurt to see how little she had been considered, and was greatly stirred by the deliberate way in which Mavambu went about the business of despoiling her, without even an intimation of his intentions in advance. She meant to stand up for her rights, and she knew that every unprejudiced person in the community would agree with her, even if they feared to express themselves, that Mavambu had absolutely no claim upon her property.

Mavambu was without a shadow of legal support, and had not even a flimsy pretext of custom to cover his naked extortion. He argued however as if every moral consideration were on his side, and as though he deserved credit for his patience in explaining the matter at such length to his obtuse partner.

Bearing patiently with her obtuseness he went on to explain:

"You know that it is too late in the season for Simba to clear and plant another patch?"



"The season is no affair of mine, and what have I to do with Simba?"

Mavambu was beginning to be vexed. Who would not be, confronted by such stubbornness. He lost his smirk, and changed his soft tones for sterner accents, determining to put the matter through with no further waste of time. Said he:

"I have already given Simba a share of these fields. The boundary has been set by me. It is finished!"

"No! You shall not rob me of my support; me with my children to raise. Their portion shall not go to any childless girl!"

Seeing there would be serious trouble, Mavambu became the more quickly enraged, especially since he had no good excuse for his shameful act. Even Mayombe women, strange as it may seem, have some recognized rights. Only by a high-handed act of injustice could he take any part of Lelo's garden. Dropping altogether his argumentative and oily manner and losing control of himself he threatened and cursed her for her obstinacy.

Lelo was not greatly shaken, and answered his insulting menaces with the retort:

"I shall keep my own. I will not consent to be robbed of it."

"I will take what I want then without your consent," he roared, advancing toward her with uplifted matchete in hand, as if he would cut her out

of the way of his plans. He was exasperated beyond measure, and shouted:

"Get out of my sight, or I'll kill you! Me, I want a young wife with sense, not an old meddling fool like you. Go quickly, before I cut you down!"

She looked straight and fearlessly into his palm-wine-streaked and wrath-reddened eyes. Without further word of expostulation she turned and left them, saying simply,

"Good, I go then!"

When Mavambu came to his senses he found that she had taken him at his word. She had left, but had gone a great deal farther than he had intended. Lelo knew almost at once what she would do; her plan was quickly formed while hurrying back to the village.

She gathered from her hut the few poor trifles she owned, and piled them into her basket. Fastening the baby upon her hip with a piece of cloth wound about his chubby body, and then over her shoulder, and with her little girls trotting along by her side, she marched straight away to Yenge *Vula*.

Lelo with the babies entered the gate of the Mission and walked across the mango tree and pineapple-bordered plaza up to the house. She swung the heavy basket from her back to the ground, and then sat down on the floor of the veranda. She hitched the baby around in front to nurse, as if preparing for a long visit. She dumbly waited, as customary with the taciturn

Mayombe women, for Mrs. Missionary to open the conversation.

When Mrs. Missionary appeared, she learned all about Lelo's welfare and the health of the babies before she noticed that something was wrong, and then asked:

"What is the matter?"

"We have come to live with you."

"With me!" exclaimed Mrs. Missionary. "What about Mavambu?"

"He has driven me away!"

"What!" Of course such a statement called for an exclamation of astonishment. Who would not wonder at valuable property being driven away by the owner, even if one could see good reasons why the said property would like to flee on its own initiative.

"He said he would kill me if I didn't go quick."

"What is the trouble about?"

"He gave half of my garden to Simba."

"No, he couldn't do that. He will change his mind," encouraged Mrs. Missionary.

"No, he won't. He hates me too because I love the words of God. Mama, I can't stay with him any longer; I want to live with you."

"But, Lelo, as a Christian I think that you would do more good living among the women in your own town."

"I do like to be with the other women, and don't mind much when they laugh at me. Some of

them don't mean the foolish things they say, and are really thinking much about the words of God. But Mavambu drove me away, and I will never go back to his village. We want to stay here with you."

Lelo, by the comprehensive "we," enlisted the aid of her dear little girl who, clinging close to her side, looked up coyly into the troubled face of Mrs. Missionary. Lelo this time got her own way, and was temporarily installed as a member of the missionary family before the fires of Mavambu's wrath cooled.

It was soon spread broadcast that Lelo had taken refuge with the Teacher of God, and the *Nganga a Nzambi* became the target for much unmerited abuse and many malicious tales. As soon as Mavambu discovered that some of his property had strayed so far away he decided upon getting Lelo back to the village at once and by all means. It was not until after he felt the loss that he began to appreciate her worth. He determined to bring about a reconciliation as soon as possible.

Next day he mustered up courage to face the people over at the *Vula*, and went along to talk the palaver. He knew that now there would be others who would have a word to say, and that he would have to explain matters satisfactorily to the missionaries.

Dressed in his medal-bedecked official garment and assuming his most engaging manner he ap-

peared in front of the Mission House. Not a trace of resentment was visible on his seamy countenance, nor to be heard in the pleasant salutations with which he met the company that quickly gathered. Knowing full well that the *Vula* people would object to any bullying language, or the use of a stick, he wisely tried to confine his speech to persuasive tones, and sweetly endeavored to induce Lelo to compromise. Without mentioning the garden he begged that she return to his aching heart and empty hut.

But it was all labor lost; Lelo would not be any more enticed by his fair speeches at the Mission today, than she was frightened by his matchete out in her garden patch yesterday.

Mavambu at last was obliged to compromise with his own plans, and with a good show of grace he allowed blandly:

"Since you wish so much to remain at the *Missioni* you may stay. But I must have my goods back, of course."

He could reconcile himself much easier to the loss of the woman if he could get back some of the precious stuff he had paid out for her. He meant to make a strong fight for that, as therein largely lay his hopes of gaining a substitute for Lelo.

"What money are you talking about?" she demanded quickly. "Is it that you ever gave me any *zimbongo*?"

"Didn't I pay good cloth for you, after you ran away from your other master?"

Answering Lelo's question with another, he took care to emphasize "other master" in such a way as to show plainly how he regarded the detestable habit she had acquired of running away.

"To whom did you pay the goods you mention?" inquired she, craftily devising a verbal trap for him to fall into.

He blundered into it without hesitation by saying,

"To Kungu's heir of course, as you know very well."

"Oh, in that case then why not apply to Kungu's heir for your *zimbono*? You may search my basket and see whether there is in it a fathom of cloth, or any other article that belongs to you. I have stolen none of your property, and you have given me nothing. To clothe my nakedness you gave me not a cloth; to cover my children, not a rag of a blanket. Nothing, absolutely nothing have I received from you."

Mavambu stood listening to her long tirade abashed and at a loss to know how to adequately refute her charges, his usual weapons being denied him and his stock of gracious words almost exhausted. It was quite true as she had stated that he had given her nothing but had shamefully wasted his goods in making presents to other women. The *Vula* people and Mrs. Missionary who had been

attracted to the spot all knew that Lelo was right. She had their sympathy; she had been badly treated, and they knew Mavambu was greatly in the wrong.

Lelo felt that it was then a good opportunity to say a few things she had on her mind, so she continued:

“You come to me for pay, when you should have brought me an offering in your hands! What reward have I had for all my labor? You have kept me a slave, and I myself earned every bit of cloth we have worn and every bite that my children and myself have eaten in your village. You have deceived, insulted, and cursed me, and now you want me to go back, or you want your cloth! You are right in coming to me, but it ought to be on a different errand; you should be here to recompense me for my work, and to show sorrow for your brutal treatment. As it is now, you will do well if you go and seek your money where you paid it.”

That was the longest speech Lelo had ever made, and she didn't stop then because she had nothing further to say. Mavambu trembled with a rage hard to restrain, and which threatened several times during the course of her lengthy oration to overleap its bounds. Her words acted as a scourge. How gladly then would he have renounced all he had paid for the woman if he could have gotten her once more in his power. If they were only away from those prying, interfering mis-

sionaries for a time he would make her sing a different tune, or kill her in the attempt. He had a premonition she was gone from him for good; that she had effectually slipped through his clutches, and so his wishes appeared useless.

He did not intend to give up the pursuit as long as there was any hope of gaining his point; so he insisted, as one who had an unassailable right but was willing to grant concessions for the sake of peace:

"You may stay here, but only on the condition that you pay me in full for all you have cost me." Then he added as if the alternative was painful for him to contemplate, "Otherwise I will have to take my palaver to the Judge at Boma."

That was no mean threat for any native to hear. Their fear of the "law," whether they were innocent or guilty, was excessive, and their dread of being brought before the White Man altogether unreasonable. Lelo trembled to think of being charged with a crime and of the probable consequences that might follow.

Mavambu was in high favor with the ruling powers, and she was only a woman. He was the Medal Chief of the place, but she was nothing, or next to it, being "only a woman." She well knew that the medal chiefs in those parts were well looked after, therefore what chance would she have before a prejudiced Judge, one whose mind might



possibly be filled with Mavambu's side of the case as presented through a bribed interpreter?

Along with these thoughts, however, came the assurance at last that she too had a powerful Helper, One Who cared for her, and Who could deliver her from Mavambu's wiles and Mavambu's friends in authority. She had almost regained her ease when she finally said,

"You may go with your case where you like as long as you go from me. I will not go back to you; I have my hoe and my strength to use it; I can support myself and the children. We will not enter your hut again."

Mavambu turned away, defeated for the moment and cursing both her and the *Vula* in his heart. Aloud he simply repeated his threat to take the palaver to his *Mundele*, and strode away from the station.

## CHAPTER X.

### COURTING A MAYOMBE GIRL.

**L**ELO was not so much at ease as she looked and it was with a rapidly growing fear that she walked away to her hut. She nervously thrust open the little door, stepped over the high sill, and dropped down in a heap by the fire. The parting word of her former liege lord was a threat well calculated to inspire dread, especially in one who lived in such absolute ignorance of the "Law" and the "Judge."

Just what the particular business of these strange white Judges was, and what they were there to accomplish, was altogether beyond Lelo's comprehension. The stories she had heard of what had happened to various culprits who had been seized and dragged before the foreign *Zuzi* did not tend to reassure her, nor to restore cheerfulness. To be summoned before them was to her mind almost equal to a verdict of guilty and the imposition of a heavy sentence.

Vangu was present with the babies and they were all cuddled on a floor mat together. Lelo had left the children in her care when she went out to meet Mavambu, and Vangu had been only too glad to keep out of his way. She was rather inclined to



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be upset whenever she met him by chance although she had not much to fear while living under the protection of the *baNganga Nzambi*.

The reason that Vangu kept well out of the Medal Chief's way was because he was courting her and she resented his attentions. In fact it was his assiduous wooing in the first place that induced her to leave her own village and flee for refuge to the Station. When Lelo first came to the Mission Vangu was there to receive her and they shared a house together.

Vangu was nearly sixteen, a healthy active girl just entering womanhood. She was well formed and developed physically, having small shapely hands and feet. Her smiling and regular features, pleasant voice and gentle prepossessing manners, qualities so many young Congo girls are blessed with, won her a host of friends. A number of ardent admirers was naturally attracted to her, and among them came Mavambu to insistently offer what was left of his heart together with a good-sized pile of variously assorted trade goods.

As soon as Mavambu made his appearance at the Mission House Vangu had gone swiftly into the hut which she shared with Lelo, and closed the door. She had not been able to overhear any of the palaver, but as the company stood in full view on the plaza she had interpreted much of what they were saying from their gestures and occasional loud exclamations. She had kept her eye glued to a

crevice between two palm fronds that afforded her, through the wall, a commanding view of the situation. As soon as Lelo got inside, Vangu asked quickly,

“Are you going back?”

The question was uttered at first in a faint and perfunctory manner, and the final syllables died away in her throat when she read the answer in the expression on Lelo’s face.

“He intends to take his palaver to the White Man,” said Lelo, trying vainly to appear indifferent.

Vangu was upset and frankly showed it. She remembered that she was mixed up in a palaver with Mavambu, and now that he had begun to run to his White Man with his *mambus*, maybe he would take her case to him also. Alas, had not her uncle foolishly accepted some of the fine gingham, and had he not greedily swilled some of the palm wine with which Mavambu had come a-wooing; and had not the taking of those valuables forged the first tiny link in the chain of bondage that was intended to bind her for life to her importunate suitor? She hated the chain, and detested the smirking, ogling Mavambu, but she feared him still more.

She trembled now for Lelo as well as for herself. She felt that Lelo would be defeated and that her own downfall would naturally follow.

“What shall we do?” she asked tremulously,

identifying herself with the plan in order to avert, if possible, the threatened disaster.

"I don't know what we shall do *then*, but *now* we can again ask God to help us," replied Lelo earnestly.

So they bowed their heads and prayed. Aloud, and in simple language, Lelo laid their sad case before Him, Who has at heart even the interests of the Congo women and is ever seeking means to help them in their troubles.

After Lelo and the children came to Yenge to live, Vangu soon learned to love her, and grew to lean upon her for help and advice in her own affairs. She was comforted now to think that Lelo would somehow find means of getting out of the maze of difficulties ahead, although she could not then see in what way.

Mavambu had an excellent eye for beauty. He was a connoisseur of female charms, and always on the lookout for new and attractive specimens to add to his collection of women. He fell in love with Vangu at sight, or at least that was the way in which he somewhat vaguely phrased his experience. As a plain matter of fact, any love that Mavambu owned never got beyond his own being; he had none to spare for any other person. He sought only to gratify his personal ambition and to make himself more powerful by the addition of Vangu to the family corral. Since she was beautiful so much the better; that was an additional advantage.

Mavambu had opened negotiations with the maternal relatives of the girl, represented by the head of the house, or *ngwa nkazi*—her mother's eldest brother. He went wisely to the one who could dispose of Vangu and whose decision would be irrevocable.

He had wasted no time trying to ascertain the feelings of Vangu herself but had gone at once to headquarters with his courtship. He knew very well how to court, but the girl, lacking his wisdom and experience, could not be expected to know what to do, or what was best for herself in the case.

The preliminaries were encouraging; the family was not averse to the alliance with a medal chief, and Mavambu began his suit. His attentions to Vangu were a negligible quantity, but he paid valuable cloth and other treasures in the dowry reckoning with her uncle.

After the first friendly drink of palm wine together, a day was settled upon for Mavambu to lay down an instalment of the amount demanded for his new wife. There was no delay and at the appointed time Mavambu and his friends were ready to fulfil their share in the contract. He, like all other intending purchasers, had been obliged to borrow a large portion of the first payment. The people who made the loans considered their *zim-bongo* well invested against the day when they themselves would be making similar ventures, and would have their deposits of cloth with Mavambu



to draw upon. Unless a Mayombe man is a Christian, and a first-class specimen at that, he cannot possibly be happy if he is not in debt. It is in the blood to owe somebody something, and the more the better. It requires the blood of Christ to take the habit away.

Not much had been said to Vangu about the matter because the first intimation of Mavambu's attentions had not been very favorably received by her. She had protested with all her heart at the bare suggestion of such a union.

When Mavambu arrived on his errand of love she was sitting in front of her hut grinding corn. She had a flat, slightly hollowed lower stone on the ground before her, and with both hands she firmly held a round stone, as big as her two fists, which she was using to crush the grain. She was so intent upon her work that Mavambu and his friends were passing her door before she saw them.

One man in the party bore a bundle of what appeared to be cloth, and another carried upon his head a jug which seemed to hold the White Man's *malavu*, as the heavy red wicker cap was still bound with the original cord. The distinguished visitors passed along without halting, but Mavambu, smiling broadly, slackened his pace enough to permit of a very cordial greeting to Vangu. The joyous salutation was plainly meant to show his great esteem, but she, being unaccustomed to marks of royal favor, was rather disturbed by his overtures.

With a perplexed frown she watched the company make their way up the street. Sundry gossiping speeches she had before heard and forgotten began to run through her mind. The crowd, headed by Mavambu, walked with such an air of jollity and exuded such rare good feeling toward the villagers, as could only be induced by the inner application of the contents, freely applied, of such a demijohn as was borne aloft in the procession. When they reached the Chief's house, they all sat down under the low, projecting roof in the shade by the door.

With an air of idle curiosity Vangu turned her head, and indifferently inquired of a woman who had just stopped at the smouldering fire by her side, "What are they going to do with all that cloth?"

The visitor grinned knowingly as she twisted about and lowered her basket to the ground. Stooping to pick up a live coal from the fire, she jammed it into the bowl of her pipe with the tip of a calloused thumb. She puffed vigorously for a moment and slowly emitted a cloud of tobacco smoke before replying; and then said,

"Indeed it is you who ought to know best."

Vangu, failing to see the significance of the answer, asked in troubled accents,

"Me, how should I know?"

"What girl does not know when a nice young man comes along after her, especially when he

brings the goods in his hands? How is it that you are so ignorant?"

She then slung her big firewood basket into place on her back, straightened up, stepped into the beaten path, and walked off toward the forest without looking around. She broke off thus abruptly because it had occurred to her at the moment that she was probably saying more than was wise. So much trouble comes to good women in Mayombe, thought she, for using even but few words at times.

Vangu stared at her receding figure with wide-open, frightened eyes, and then looked fearfully around at the crowd seated before the hut of the Chief. Nobody in that crowd could have been designated as a "nice young man," except in speech subject to a strictly flattering interpretation and not governed by the simple rules of truth. Gazing at blear-eyed Mavambu, she involuntarily shuddered, wondering whether it was he indeed who was the "nice young man" in search of a bride, and if she could possibly be the object of his quest.

She turned her head dazedly toward the woman, her hands gripping the millstone, and called faintly, "Do you mean that somebody wants to marry me?"

The woman kept on her way without turning, or making any sign to show she had heard. Vangu arose quickly to her feet, and ran after her. Laying a restraining hand upon the woman's naked arm, she gasped beseechingly,

"Tell me, was that cloth brought here on my account?"

"Certainly, I heard that Mavambu intends to pay it on your body today."

The abrupt, gruff, but kindly meant reply of the woman left Vangu stark still in her tracks, staring at her disappearing form.

Without turning to note the effect of her information upon the girl, the woman strode along and was soon hidden from sight behind the swaying curtain of dense, tangled vegetation. Pushing up from the ground in every available spot were masses of ferns. Swinging from the huge vines that climbed the trunks, and crossed from tree to tree, binding the forest together with powerful consuming fetters, were other parasitic plants. Some of these grew beautiful flowers that filled in the interstices of the variegated living screen. A few rapid paces, and the sound of her footsteps was lost, and she was hid as effectually behind the barrier as though an hour's march lay between them.

Vangu's heart stood still with shock, but her brain began working feverishly under the pressure of the woman's warning. She glided quickly back to her work and bent over it, to gain time. Her hands raced nervously to and fro across the millstone as she tried to plan some way to avert the threatened disaster. The swiftly flying stone, rhythmically rolling and keeping time with her swaying

body, seemed to crunch out of the cracking corn :  
"Mavambu! Never, never, never!"

She could not help contrasting in her mind for an instant the besotted Medal Chief with a nice young man with whom she was acquainted. He had gawky limbs but he always wore a happy youthful grin when she was near. When he spoke his voice was musical to her. Her heart warmed toward him, and she could have cried out in anger and disgust when she compared him in her mind with Mavambu.

She soon reached a conclusion; her determination was to take a decided and bold course. She resolved to resist, to fight; she would not be led like a lamb to the slaughter but would scream and scratch as she went, if go she must. If she was to be sacrificed she would not go weak and unresisting to Mavambu's hut. She had everything to gain by fighting and fleeing, and all to lose by passively waiting. Then came the cheering welcome thought that she had even a place to which she could go. She could take refuge with Masala.

Masala, the wife of Matundu, had befriended her before, and she was confident she would, if possible, protect her now. Matundu and Masala were Christians, and had erected their little hut just outside the *Vula* compound, beyond the Chapel.

Masala was happily married and she would readily understand why Mavambu was impossible

as a husband, and why almost any other fate would be preferable to a life with him. She would try Masala, and if she failed, then, then—but what was the use of thinking of any alternative until required?

Without a word to anyone, either of explanation or of farewell; without even waiting to pick up any of her little treasures; impelled by an overmastering repugnance and fear, as soon as she made up her mind, she ran off swiftly like a timid antelope into the forest. She lingered neither for a breathing spell nor to bewail her lot with untimely tears, but fled for her life, intent only upon reaching Masala's hut.

In a spasm of fear she remembered as she ran the heart-touching, unspeakably horrible experience of a girl she knew. She also had been refractory. They had suddenly fallen upon her and seized her, and despite her indignant protestations, and anguished pleas for mercy, forced her into a hut and kept her secluded for days a prisoner. No one but the huge brute beast in human form who had a "claim" upon her was allowed to enter the hut during the time of her imprisonment there. The vile treatment to which that poor girl had been subjected was sometimes held up as a warning to the daring and rebellious spirits who were beginning to imbibe strange views concerning the duties of women.

The memory of that girl's sad fate did not tend

to slacken Vangu's pace. Like a wild creature she ran along slimy, green, disused by-ways, through groves of bananas, and across dense patches of jungle. She sprang lightly over obstructions, dived under thorny vines, and fought her way through impeding and tangled ferns and coarse, rank grasses, making unswervingly straight to cover. With scarcely a halt she reached Matundu's hut, passed quickly through the open doorway where Masala was sitting, and threw herself panting in the corner.

It was a bold step for a young girl to take in opposition to her family and prospective owner, but she was desperate. Very timid creatures will often fight as a final resort. Even so the patient, burden-bearing, long-suffering Mayombe woman turns as a last expedient on her brutal male oppressor, and fights hard for the privilege of living unshackled and loving the man of her choice.

By that move Mavambu lost what might have been a valuable addition to his supply of women, but Lelo gained a faithful friend. When some months afterward Lelo reached the *Vula*, she found Vangu ready to receive her with open arms. They were comrades in distress, ostracized by their kind in the villages because of the same man, and so perhaps better able to comfort each other in their troubles and rejoice together that they were temporarily free from his persecutions.

Mavambu's "sheep's eyes" expression was

changed to a wolfish glare whenever he looked upon Vangu after her bold resistance of his courting. So that was why Vangu preferred to huddle away in the hut with the babies, and keep out of the palaver, while Mavambu was talking it over with Mrs. Missionary and Lelo out on the plaza.

Mavambu's palaver against Lelo had by that time assumed public importance, and he felt justified in bringing it to the official attention of the village headmen, Makwala and Paka. They talked it over from every point of view and then returned again to its consideration. It was not as if his wife, and a girl for whom he paid a deposit of cloth had taken refuge at some neighboring village, for then the problem would have been easily answered with a whip and a rope; but they had gone to the *Vula* and mixed up the *baNganga Nzambi* in the palaver, which was quite another and more serious matter.

Force, under the circumstances, said the Elders, was a factor to be left out of the calculation. Lelo with her children, and Vangu could all take root and grow at the *Vula* and never be removed if force had to be employed. Mavambu and his clan had numbers and brute strength enough to go over to the *Vula*, overpower the residents, and carry off the women in question, and whatever else besides that took their fancy. But they were beginning to realize that brute strength stood no show with moral force and the power of the civilized and spiritual world as represented by the Govern-



ment and the missionaries. After all, it would be safer to take the palaver to Boma. True, it was far away, and there was a hard road journey and the discomforts of a stay at Boma, but that was no doubt the only way to get justice. So Mavambu decided to go again to the *Vula* and announce his decision.

He met Lelo face to face coming from morning prayers at the grass-roofed chapel. He tried to give his greeting ingratiatingly,

"*Mavimpi.*"

"Eh! *Mbote kwandi,*" she shrugged out in the usual way of returning such a salutation, and endeavored to pass on.

"I came over to see the *Mundele,*" Mavambu added.

"Mr. Missionary has gone on a preaching tour, and will be away for days."

"Well, since I cannot see him, I may tell you what I have decided to do about your case."

Lelo bruskiy informed him, "I am not interested, that is *diambu diaku*" (literally meaning *business thine*).

"We are going to lay the case before my White Man, the *Zuzi,*" said Mavambu, regardless of her interruption. "My" was emphasized to increase her awe of a man of prestige who owned a *Mundele* more powerful than a missionary.

No comment being forthcoming, he went on to say:

"My White Man is a man of sense to decide, as well as power to carry out his orders. What he tells us to do, that I will abide by."

A dogged silence ensued. Again Mavambu broke it with:

"If my *Mundele* says you can stay here, I will drop the matter, but until the case has been legally settled by him I will contend for my rights and my claims on you and my children."

The conversation had then dropped into a monologue, but Mavambu was unabashed by her taciturnity. So he went on to explain to her,

"It will be necessary for us to go to Boma and appear before the *Zuzi* together with our witnesses at the same time. What do you say?"

"All right, I am willing to have the Judge finish the palaver."

"Well, we will start from my village on the first day of next week. I will inform my friends and prepare food for the journey. You can travel in my caravan," Mavambu thoughtfully offered.

Lelo made no answer, and maintained a discreet silence as to what company she would travel with to Boma. Mavambu walked away congratulating himself upon a happy outcome of what might have been another quarrel.

Over a cheery, tiny blaze in the middle of the floor of their little hut that same night Lelo and Vangu again took up the subject. They shrank from the thought of Lelo putting herself in Ma-

vambu's power by journeying with his caravan, but they could think of no plan by which the difficulty might be obviated if she was to go to Boma at all.

The children were asleep on the short, narrow, mat-covered frame bed which was raised about six inches from the floor on two billets of firewood, while Lelo was seated on the edge. Vangu sprawled upon a coarse papyrus mat drawn close up to the fire. She poked the burning ends of the sticks together, and after the first heavy smoke had rolled up into the roof, seeking crevices through which it might escape into the open, she stared gloomily at the upspringing tongues of light that furnished the only grateful luxury to be found in the mean interior of their humble quarters.

"Yes," said she, in answer to a question that had arisen in her own mind, "I too will go with you."

Lelo, knowing the girl's horror of Mavambu, asked in amazement,

"You! Why?"

"I want to accompany you, and when your palaver is finished, then I will ask *Zuzi* to free me from Mavambu's claim."

"Me, I don't like to think of that hard journey to such a place as Boma myself, but for you how much worse it would be," observed Lelo.

"Maybe we would never be permitted to reach Boma, or perhaps he would ill-treat us when he

got us away from the *Vula*," timidly suggested Vangu.

"I don't suppose he would dare injure us now, but he is a bad man and I fear to put myself in his power. However, we shall talk it over tomorrow with Mrs. Missionary, and see what she says."

They fastened the door with a long palm cane by thrusting it through two loops made of thongs of skin which served as a bolt. The hide was fastened to the door and to the door frame, one loop on each side. Banking the fire by drawing up the scattered ashes and putting in the ends of a couple of hardwood sticks they retired to rest. Rest was welcome, not only to their bodies, but to their minds. They forgot in sleep the man who filled so unpleasantly much of their waking thoughts.

Lelo and Vangu were called up to the *Banga* (mansion) next day before Mr. Missionary had time to rid himself of the marks of travel. Mavambu's plan, of which they had heard, did not appeal to Lelo's friends. They hastened to inform Mr. Missionary of Mavambu's new move as soon as he arrived from his journey. Mr. Missionary planned to have the girls see the *Zuzi* first and to present their side of the case before his eyes were blinded by the glare of Mavambu's medal or his mind filled with irrelevant matters by the enemy.

"You need not go with Mavambu's crowd at all;



RAILWAY STATION AND RESIDENCES OF STATE OFFICIALS, FROM C. AND M. A. MISSION HILL



ON ITINERATING TOUR



you can run away now ahead of their caravan, and get to Boma before them," proposed Mr. Missionary.

"But, *Mfummu*, how can we, since we know not the road there, nor the way to the *Zuzi's* palace at Boma."

"I will attend to that. I will arrange with Tubi and another man to show you the way, and protect you on the road."

Their arrangements were made so quietly that no word of the proposed flight got beyond the station. A great burden was lifted from Lelo's heart, and Vangu rejoiced in the solution to their perplexity mostly because she need not be near Mavambu until she got to Boma.

Mavambu did not propose to leave anything to evil chance, or the doubtful temper of *Zuzi*, but set about his propitiation at once. He knew by sad experience how unreliable white men were in that bilious, fever-stricken place, and how the *mindele* often did the most unexpected things in the crankiest kind of way. He planned to make such a good impression that the verdict would fall his way as a matter of course. He had not been an official for so long a time without discovering the immense value and assistance that were to be derived for any cause by seeing the interpreter first and giving a timely word of explanation.

The night before they were to leave his village on the eventful journey, Mavambu ordered a boy

to make a palm-branch crate in which to carry several scrawny, underfed fowls, as a present for the Congo man who would put their evidence into pidgin-French. He had a sudden and lively recollection of past favors from the same quarter and intended to take the *Dingizi* something to put into the family pot.

Mavambu at the head of his caravan of friends and male servants bearing bundles of food on their heads came to the *Vula* in good season to pick up the rest of the party.

They had lingered in their village for some final preparations for the trip, but it was not late in the morning when they reached the front door of the *Banga*. Astonished and indignant at such "treachery," Mavambu received the startling news that Lelo and Vangu had concluded to go ahead and would meet him upon his arrival at Boma.

Injured Mavambu wasted neither words nor further time. As soon as the story had been verified by several witnesses who declared that the women had started off on the preceding day he marched away at once, followed by his disgusted caravan.

By that time the fleeing flock, headed by Tubi, all traveling light, were fully forty miles away on the road to the famous town of Boma, and still moving fast toward their desired haven—the Boma Mission Station.



## CHAPTER XI.

### JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE.

**T**HE sun was blazing high in the equatorial heavens, having burned away all early morning mists and cloud barriers that obstructed its rays. Its intense heat was baking the stony path under the blistered feet of the comrades in affliction when they halted with their faithful escort Tubi upon a high ridge of the hills overlooking Boma. They had slept but one night on the road, and behind them was nearly the whole of the distance of fifty miles which lay between the city of their dreams in the valley below them and their Yenge home.

In all their days they had never beheld such a wonderful scene. It was reviving to their fagged bodies and tired spirits. In the inspiring features of the view before them they lost sight of the hardships of the jungle path over which they had trudged. It was not that they were so much amazed at the sight of the wide reach of swift-flowing river, dammed in by the long, low, rocky barriers far across on the other shore. It was of course hard for them to comprehend such an immensity of water gathered in any one place on

earth, for they were more moved when contemplating the works of man.

What relieved them of their weariness, as if a heavy garment had been cast aside, and straightened their drooping backs, and kindled their dull eyes, and brought forth wondering exclamations of delight, was the sight of so many great *bangas* all built in one place. Such high houses they were too, higher even than a tall palm tree. With their dazzling, lime-washed felt roofs, or glaring coverings of corrugated iron sheets throwing off the hot rays of the sun, they made a shining and attractive picture.

The tales the boasting caravans of blasé traders, surfeited with metropolitan sights and sounds, had carried back to the women in the bush, of things hitherto deemed incredible, were now proved to be true. Anything could easily be true of such a city as the one that now filled their admiring vision. There must have been at least a hundred *bangas* of the *mindele*, and twice that number of native huts! Indeed with hardly an effort they could now believe all they had ever heard concerning the strange interiors of those great houses, and of the customs of those who inhabited them, satiated as they were with luxurious living.

The two women could offer no gesture of doubt, nor venture any expression of contradiction to all the marvelous statements that their willing guide poured into their bewildered ears. Tubi pointed

out from the wealth of his traveled culture a very curious and huge affair out in the water that was neither a fabulous animal, nor any growth of nature. He informed them that it was one of the floating houses that brought within their capacious depths bales of cloth, demijohns of rum, barrels of powder, innumerable guns; and upon its broad decks, the White Men from the foreign land.

They stared at the tall posts—masts—which were like trees for height, and at the black smoke arising from a tall chimney, which testified to internal fires. Pressed to be exact Tubi could not say how deep the thing was, as he confessed that he had never set foot upon one, but he had heard from more fortunate mortals that they were very deep indeed; and were filled with chambers of various sizes, and compartments for merchandise, and bulky machinery.

At first they could find no words to give vent to what they felt, and could only murmur in expressing their emotions,

“Truly, truly, truly!”

They were too confused to grasp the magnitude of what they beheld, but they feasted their eyes upon it all.

“You cannot see from here,” informed Tubi, “but just over beyond that hillock is a great ship sunk in the river.”

“A ‘dead’ ship; what ‘killed’ it?” inquired Lelo.

“Eh, who knows more than it was blown up

by the explosion of a cargo of gunpowder inside."

"Were all the people killed?"

"No, not all of them. There were two missionaries killed, and their bodies are still inside their 'little house' under the water." The women thought of the strange crocodiles of which they had heard such evil reports, and shuddered.

Tubi, the traveled one, liked his new role of instructor, and went on to give more gruesome history.

"There are some rotting posts on the river bank, just this side of where the ship is half buried, where a trader killed a number of his slaves by throwing them bound into the river. The workmen at the 'factories' (trading houses) tell about it to this day."

"Oh! but what did *Bula Matadi* (meaning literally *Bula*, to break; *Matadi*, rocks—name given H. M. Stanley and succeeding government) do about it?"

"That was before they came, when the slave traders held Boma. You know Boma means slave-pen down here."

Tubi told them of the tales handed down by the Fathers. The women looked out over the river and thought of the time when its banks were covered with grass huts and the slave-pens of the bold foreign adventurers.

They thought of the many woman with blistered, calloused feet that had with aching hearts paused

for an instant upon that spot to take their first look at that fearful, mighty flood that was to bear them away into unending, bitter bondage. As they made the contrast they felt their own lot in life to be better and the coming of the overruling white invader not an unmixed evil.

"In those days," said Tubi, "we could not have come alone so far. We ourselves would have been seized and sold off into bondage *ku mputu*. *Bula Matadi* has stopped slavery along this road."

Lelo thought of the little ones at Yenge Station that she hoped soon to see again and silently agreed to the statement.

They listened for a while longer with great interest to the erudite answers of their guide to the simple and wondering questions which they propounded, and then resumed their march down to the *Vula*.

They were warmly welcomed at the Mission, and Mr. Missionary asked why they had come. Tubi, the spokesman, answered,

"It is a palaver these women have with Mavambu, the Medal Chief, at Yenge. They are going to the Judge tomorrow before Mavambu can tell his 'story of lies.'"

"Where is Mavambu?"

"We don't know. We ran off before him."

"Well, eat and take your rest. In the morning I will send a boy to guide you to the mansion of *Zuzi Palaver*."

That night they rested their weary bones, and safe among friends slept the deep sleep that comes of physical exhaustion. Tubi had been almost forgotten amid the strange sights of the preceding day, but the women remembered him very well again in the chill, waking stiffness of the gray morning on which they were to visit the *banga* of the great white lord.

They were still footsore from their forced march when they presented themselves before the house of the Judge, but the marks of travel had been removed, and the women were both draped in clean calico cloths fastened under their arm-pits above their breasts and falling in folds to their ankles.

Before they could reach the ear of the *Zuzi*, they were obliged to outline their troubles to the policeman who guarded the outer entrance. That haughty functionary was the picture of ebony arrogance and stood there in all the dignity of braided blue blouse, red fez cap, and the pride that goes with a fine uniform and exalted position. After cross-questioning the timid applicants, he passed them along in turn to be interrogated by the *Dingizi*. The interpreter, in due season, ordered them into the august presence of the arbiter of their destinies.

*Zuzi Palaver* is the one above all other white officials who has the seamy side of native character brought to his attention. He saw almost

nothing of the better qualities of the people, which indeed were only intimately revealed to their spiritual teachers. What diverse and strange tales were sometimes poured into his Honor's ears in a single day! Some complaints were too trivial for a lengthy hearing, and others too ancient to travel farther than his office. Some of the applicants bringing serious matters were passed on to other Judges for any additional steps that might be required in their cases.

*Zuzi* often dismissed a complaint that was really funny, and that taxed his outward dignity to the breaking point. Then he might be called upon to listen to a tale of woe calculated to arouse every righteous fiber in indignant protest against such cruelty and injustice. From laughter to tears was often but a short step in that office, but generally the stories that reached him were saturated with gloom. More tales came to *Zuzi's* ears that revealed rank imposition, abuse of authority, intense cruelty, and dastardly crime, than matters of lighter vein.

*Zuzi* absolutely required a keen sense of humor for his own benefit, but only the wisdom of Solomon would have served to untangle some of the knotty problems he had to deal with. That palavers sometimes left his bureau more tangled than when they arrived, was not his fault, but simply because he could do no better with them. The Mayombe man is almost as keen a lawyer as

he is a shrewd trader, and his own cause is always just to him. It is to him simply unthinkable that his adversary has anything to say that has in it a vestige of right.

Mr. Missionary himself sometimes had queer matters brought to him; all of the strange cases did not get into the *Zuzi's* office. One day a man who had been working at the *Vula*, and who was duly impressed with the sympathy that Mr. Missionary showed toward the oppressed, presented himself and demanded vengeance on his enemies. His principal complaint was that the body of his mother had been cremated instead of being given the burial in earth to which it was lawfully entitled. He told Mr. Missionary that she had been denounced by some evilly disposed person as a witch, and that the customary dose of poison had been administered to her. She had neither vomited the *nkasa* mess, nor had she died the same day, proving unquestionably to all reasonable beings that she was innocent of the charge against her. It was not until the next day that she had died, and clearly her death then must have been the result of some other cause than the trial cup. Notwithstanding this indisputable fact some of the villagers had unreasonably dragged away and burned her body instead of allowing it lawful and decent interment.

The injured one demanded, in tones vibrant with deep feeling and with eyes flashing wrath, that



the people of that wretched village be compelled to pay him a rich indemnity for his sufferings, and as a punishment for their crime. Apparently he could still observe the cruel outrage being perpetrated upon his mother's dead and innocent body and it seemingly filled his vision to the exclusion of every other object.

Stirred to indignation against the offenders, and moved with pity toward the young man, Mr. Missionary questioned him to secure further particulars. After he had learned the name of the village, its location, et cetera, he happened to ask, "When did this affair occur?"

The unabashed plaintiff, hopeful of getting redress, stretched forth one arm, and with his fingers stiffened uprightly, gradually lowered his hand until the finger tips were stationary, about three feet above the ground, and said,

"When I was that height."

A swift mental calculation on the part of Mr. Missionary, who generally did his reckoning by years instead of by "so high," revealed that the affair must have happened considerably more than twenty years before, when the aggrieved man was probably about five years old.

It was difficult for the injured one to understand why his hitherto sympathetic hearer immediately lost all apparent interest in his case, and refused to summon any of the guilty villagers who remained above ground to talk about the matter.

Just before Lelo and Vangu were ushered into the room where the white-clothed, white-faced Judge held court, a strange tale had been brought to his ears. In the entry stood a small group that had emerged from his chamber just as Lelo entered. The party was composed of a man, four women, and a little girl. The solitary male spokesman related how waves of sickness, for which they had been unable to account, had swept over their village, carrying away most of the inhabitants, until now they were the small remnant left of all who formerly occupied the stricken and devastated neighborhood.

Something must be done, but it was hard for anyone of the remaining number to do the very obvious thing—accuse another of their number of maliciously causing the calamity. They knew of course that it was witchcraft; what else could account for such a visitation? They knew that there must be illegal complicity between one of their number and the vengeful spirits, but it was hard for anyone to take the initiative and charge another even though it was the only way to save the few remaining lives in the village. Several lives had already fallen before the poison cup, and they were loth to continue that plan any longer.

At last it was suggested, but with whom the hint originated was not made clear, that they mix a large cup of *nkasa*, and that all of the five adults partake of it. It was needless to include the tiny

girl in the test, as she was altogether too young to be mixed up in witchcraft. They prepared the poison and apparently all of the company drank deeply of the mixture, but the *nkasa* revealed that none of them were guilty as no evil effects were perceptible upon anyone.

What next step they would have devised and put in operation in order to remove the affliction resting upon their hamlet will never be known because of the interference of a rank outsider who came along and learned of the circumstances. He, seeking to curry favor, took his information to the nearest Medal Chief who happened to be Mavambu. Mavambu, pursuing his plain duty, sent them alone to the Judge, as there was not enough in it to make it profitable for him to keep the matter quiet.

The little party of accused persons did not go to Boma under arrest, but being willing and anxious for any solution for their troubles, they, strange to say, went without escort. *Zuzi Palaver* after hearing their tale passed up the puzzling case to a colleague for further action, and sent the people back home to await his decision.

When permission was granted, Lelo began to speak and to recount the years of her affliction and bondage. She started at the beginning of her troubles even though it was pretty far back from Mavambu. Where else could a Mayombe woman begin her story? And if the Judge must know all

there was no other place from which to start. Urged frequently to brevity in sharp tones by the exasperated *Dingizi*, she reached the place in her tale where sooner than she expected she fell into Mavambu's clutches.

With forceful gestures, and even dramatically eloquent at times, she disclosed her wretched lot. She told of her antipathy to Mavambu, brought on by his bad treatment and lack of proper support for herself and the children.

With tears flooding her eyes, she related the story of her precious little boy who about two years before had been killed through the treatment of an ignorant fetich priest. Notwithstanding her protests Mavambu had snatched the sick child from her breast and handed him to the witch-doctor. Mavambu alone was to blame for the sufferings and death of the boy. Her children had turned against him, and his own little girl could not bear to look upon him, but fled at his approach as if he were the incarnation of evil.

She described the scene in her field, and how he himself had driven her away with violent threats of bodily harm when he waved his cruel matchete before her face. She begged the *Zuzi* to deliver her, even though Mavambu had apparently repented and wanted her to return to his compound. She prayed that *Zuzi* would permit her to live her own life free from the ownership of Mavambu or any other person.

*Zuzi Palaver* was so accustomed to hearing glib lies that he was quick to turn from them in disgust. Even though they appeared in the guise of the utmost frankness and bore every outer mark of honesty he readily detected and rejected them without ceremony. But he knew that Lelo was sincere, and could not but be impressed with her truthfulness. The simple recital of a few of her varied experiences revealed her indeed as a much-wronged woman.

As a "plural wife" she was free, but was not aware of it. He would enlighten her, and that was all that was required. He said that if her tale was true nobody had any legal claim upon her; she was of age, and under obligation to no one. There was no need to spend more time over the matter; the case was practically settled. He said that according to the laws of the present "lords of the land," which were printed in books and brought into the country by *Bula Matadi*, her body was allowed to be her very own. He stated that no Congo man could take possession of her against her will; she could go to the one that she wanted, or to no one at all, if that pleased her best.

*Zuzi* gave her permission to return to her own village to live, or to go back to the *Vula*. Her choice would be nobody's business, said he, but her own. She could go where she liked and stay as long as she pleased. She was immediately to inform everybody concerned that she was free, and

that she was to say that he had told her to tell them so.

"Wherever you decide to go, you go there a free woman."

They were simple words and only a plain statement of the law. That the law was practically a dead letter and not recognized in real life, was not the fault of the law, but of its interpreters. To Lelo the decision and instructions of *Zuzi* were the very irrevocable words of life.

"I thank you, *Mfumu*, I thank you," she murmured brokenly.

There were tears in her tones; her throat and tongue were clogged, she could hardly speak. She stood with bowed head, twisting her hands in an embarrassment of unutterable gratitude. It was really too good to be true, but it was true, however unbelievable it seemed.

It must be true because it was written in the book, and the White Man had said that it was so. With her own ears she had heard the strange sounds that the *Mundele* had uttered; which being skilfully explained by the *Dingizi* in her own familiar tongue made the matter quite plain. It was true, she was free and happy!

The dingy room, with its few dusty, shabby pieces of worn furniture, became a veritable earthly palace. This speedy transformation was not in fact but in the mental attitude of Lelo. She had gone into the presence of the Judge in



GROUP OF "ZINKIMBA"—A SECRET SOCIETY FOR BOYS



GROUP OF EVANGELISTS





fear and trembling, and with many misgivings she had made known her sad story. The reply of the *Zuzi* to her plea had effected the change. What a delightful place the room then became to her.

She had been standing during the whole time before a long table covered with black oilcloth and strewn with writing materials. Plainly bound books were arranged upon unpainted deal shelves behind the only chair the room afforded and in which the Judge was seated. The room and contents were all severely simple and intended for practical use, but to Lelo it was as the antechamber of a palace of beauty and delight.

At one end of the long table, standing so as to look from the face of the *Zuzi* to that of the plaintiff without the necessity of turning, was the interpreter. Blocking the doorway, standing at attention, was an armed soldier, dressed in blue blouse with red facings, and the usual fez cap. Through the western window the sun's blazing rays now entered, robbed of much of their force in filtering through a mass of green leaves belonging to the tree shading the veranda. In the room, dancing gaily along in the sun-lighted path, were countless happy, whirling motes. *Zuzi's* gray-faced pet monkey jumped up on the sill and chattered to its master to the squawking accompaniment of a frightened gray parrot perched behind his chair.

It all looked so good to Lelo—such is the power

of a man's word—that she could have danced along with the swift-moving motes, and chattered too with the funny and friendly little monkey. She was joyful because she was free, and wanted to join with all the world in a chorus of praise. She could never forget that room; it was photographed on her mind, and the bright, happy picture would never fade from her vision.

The *Zuzi*, in his white starched linen, seated smilingly at ease upon his leather-covered throne, and who had with such calmness pronounced the momentous, bond-breaking words, was to her the incarnation of justice. Never could she forget, or fail to be thankful for, the few precious moments spent in that place—the spot where her fondest dreams had now been made real. Praise welled from her happy heart to her Master on high, to Him Who had not only freed her soul but had now delivered her body from the degrading shackles of physical slavery to Mavambu. How good it would be to get out into the open and to run and jump and clap hands with Vangu, rejoicing together in victory. On such a day it was good to be alive—and free!

She was recalled rapidly to earth, and the prosaic affairs of an everyday world, by the voice of the interpreter asking her about Vangu. It then suddenly occurred to her that she had nothing to show to substantiate her claim to liberty. She asked humbly of the Judge,

"Sir, write your good words in a book. Give me *nkanda* to show to skeptics who may deny that I am free."

"Your name is now written in my book," he assured her, pointing to his notes; "nobody will venture to molest you."

But Lelo was impressed with the necessity of getting some tangible scrap of evidence. Like all her kind, she attached value out of all proportion to any written document. She made bold to insist,

"*Mfumu*, Mavambu will not believe my word. Please give me a 'book' for my own."

Without further objection his Honor, willing to put her at ease, hastily scribbled a few words in French on a scrap of paper, and handed it to her. It was a very brief note saying that Lelo was no longer a "chattel" to be handed about or disposed of at the will of another, but was a free person.

Her sinking joy revived; she could have cried while she laughed. For twenty years she had moved at the beck and call and trembled at the nod of exacting masters. Now she was her own master by virtue of that precious slip. She seized the paper, and tried to see the writing before the ink was dry, but all that she could make out was a confused blur. Her wet eyes were at fault; the writing was plain enough.

The interpreter asked again about Vangu, sharply this time, not relishing interruptions at such an hour. Time was pressing, the office hours for the

day were about ended, and they had waited nearly the whole day to get a hearing. Vangu told the gist of her tale in a few, broken, low sentences. She bashfully admitted that one of her reasons for fleeing from Mavambu was because she was in love with another. There had been nothing said about marriage; it was early yet, and the matter had not reached that length. There was no doubt about her dread of the ancient suitor who had paid down some cloth for a claim on her body. It would have been cruel to turn her over to the tender mercies of Mavambu.

*Zuzi* took one of the few remaining moments to suggest quizzically,

"Maybe Mavambu would make you a good husband?"

"No, *Mfumu*, no," she hastily interjected, "not Mavambu!"

Observing her unfeigned alarm, he kindly told her:

"No man can force you to marry him, especially one who has another wife."

His refreshing words were as heavy dews upon hard, dry-season soil; she too turned away with lightened heart, grateful to the kind white lord. Together they went from the office back to the *Vula*, where they were to pass the night.

Alas, poor Lelo and Vangu, they were soon to have another lesson. They were to be impressed more deeply than ever with the truth that earthly

joys are fleeting and that the word of man is but a frail staff of comfort. They would have suffered from disturbing dreams that night, had they known of the storm clouds gathering about their heads, and that were to break on the morrow with the arrival of Mavambu.

## CHAPTER XII.

### ZUZI TEMPORIZES.

**B**OILING inwardly with wrath, and sweating under the burden of his official coat, Mavambu, at the head of his indignant followers, marched into Boma early on the following morning. Bedraggled and grimy from the dew-laden grass and the ashes of their campfire they made their way to the hut of a friend to rest and change before going up to the Judge. To their great indignation they learned from a rumor current among some Vungu people who were working at Boma that the palaver which had brought them there had been settled the day before.

The news caused Mavambu to hasten his movements and before the office was open he was on his way to the seat of justice. He did not approach the house of the *Zuzi* at once but stopped to see his friend the interpreter from whom he learned full particulars of the case. Before presenting his friend with the slight tokens of regard he had brought from his village, he informed him that the two women who had been so carelessly freed yesterday were related to him; that one was partly paid for, and that the other was wholly his own property.

To say that the interpreter was chagrined would be to put it mildly. His lack of interest in the case of the preceding day quickly changed. After he had penned the fowls in a place of safety, he thought out a plan to retrieve the lost game. He had cared but little one way or the other during the hearing at *Zuzi's* office, because, as far as he knew, he was unacquainted with any of the people who were mixed up in the affair. Mavambu is such a common name that it is met with as frequently as Makwala, or Mpeso, so he had not sufficient reason to connect "Mavambu" with his generous old friend, the Medal Chief of Yenge.

A woman, and especially one who had brought him no gift in her hand, could not possibly be right in any case wherein open-handed Mavambu was interested. He could only express his deep regret for the miscarriage of justice that had occurred because all the circumstances were not known at the time, and promise that he would do everything in his power now to rectify the error.

He left for his office to put *Zuzi* in touch with the new developments, to tell him of the deceitful women, who with "mouths full of lies" had taken advantage of the kind heart of the good White Man who of course was not expected to fathom such depths of native hypocrisy.

Standing before the *Zuzi*, after being summoned to his presence, Mavambu appeared to every eye a badly used and long-suffering husband. The

white-clad gentleman seated behind the long table could easily observe that he was greatly moved by his wrongs. When permission was granted him to speak, Mavambu so presented his side of the case that the whole matter at once took on a very different aspect. In the first place *Zuzi* had been altogether unaware of the fact that the outraged husband was a Medal Chief, and that he was hastening on his way to Boma to seek justice, even while the woman was telling the *Zuzi* her story.

Lelo had refrained from presenting any irrelevant matters to his attention, particularly such as might have helped the other side. As any other Mayombe woman would have done, she had avoided saying anything that would prejudice her own good cause.

But now Mavambu was here to speak for himself, having no lack of good words to say in defense of his own worthy suit. The medal lay resplendent on the rusty bosom of his black frock coat. The steel chain to which it was usually attached was lacking, but in its place was a bit of ribbon, and a safety pin with which to fasten it in imitation of the way, as he had noted, high officials wore their decorations. The medal, although of common material, threw much light on the case, shining glaringly in protest against the shabby treatment of a tricky woman, and made restless by its owner's rapid breathing induced by his overwrought feelings.



Mavambu smothered his rage, and with an attempt at an ingratiating smile, said by way of introduction,

"*Mfumu*, I am the Medal Chief of Yenge!"

*Zuzi* had already been informed of this fact, so he contented himself with merely saying,

"Yes, well?"

"The woman to whom you gave yesterday 'the book of liberty' is mine!"

*Zuzi* puffed meditatively at his cigarette, and flicked the ashes through the open window with the tip of a manicured nail before questioning slowly,

"So! How is that?"

"Her tale to you, *Mfumu*, was 'lies and lies only'!"

"You abused her, failed to provide for the little ones, and at last drove her away in anger."

When this had been rendered into homely Kikongo from imported French, Mavambu gasped with astonishment. He turned his eyes in speechless denial from the interpreter toward the loyal friends who had been permitted to enter the room with him. His looks appealed to them eloquently and demanded to know whether they in all their lives had ever listened to such a monstrous charge, and if they thought that female duplicity could go any farther on the way to perfection of deceit.

As soon as he had recovered breath from the shock, he hastened to say,

"*Mfumu*, she lied! Not only did I free her

from bondage, but I have always 'carefully kept her'; as these my witnesses will testify."

The said witnesses hurriedly endeavored to express themselves, manifesting great willingness to impart any information in their possession. They were silenced by the orderly interpreter and asked to wait until the Judge called for their evidence.

Without waiting to listen to a laudation of Mavambu, setting him forth as a paragon of husbands, his Honor spoke. He averred that there were two sides to every case, and as now the other side had appeared unexpectedly, Lelo should be recalled, and the affair reopened. He ordered that all the parties concerned should meet at his office in the afternoon of the same day.

Mavambu had scored a victory and he went off elated, proudly boasting of it. For the ultimate outcome he had no fears; his friend the interpreter understood the case so well that he was sure the matter would be explained correctly to the Judge. As none of the company knew any French they would be able only by the final result to estimate how much of the evidence had percolated to the ears of the Judge during the proceedings.

Yenge was represented early in the afternoon by a full force gathered outside *Zuzi Palaver's* office. They waited quietly in the shade of a squat drab soft baobab tree of colossal girth while *Zuzi* enjoyed his after-lunch siesta. A score of people

found roomy benches on the huge, exposed roots, projecting a foot or more out of the ground.

The shade came more from the enormous limbs than from the few small leaves and great fruit pods dangling from the tips of the branches. Multitudes of people having business at court had rested under the shelter of that tree during the long delays that attended nearly every case. It was the usual meeting place for those who had fallen under the dread shadow of the law.

Although there were no indications of rain several of the women proudly held black cotton umbrellas. Few would have been so foolish and improvident as to use them in a storm; some would rather have protected them beneath their clothing. Umbrellas being a plain indication of affluence, and of considerable value in themselves, were not, of course, to be lightly exposed to tropical downpours.

Many of the "citified" men had canes, holding them in the most approved style or twirling them about as they had observed the foreign lords do. The incongruity was not apparent to a washerman, passing on his way to the river, bearing a wash table on his head, with the week's wash fastened to the top in a sheet, and the ivory handle of an ebony cane striking his bare legs. He was simply a votary of fashion, and thus failed to observe the discordant element, so apparent to common people. It was all harmonious to him, because the fashionable class carried canes. That they did not souse

dirty clothes in the river for a living was another matter.

Only the principals were allowed to enter *Zuzi's* room when the closing session of the case of Mavambu versus Lelo was called. At the far end of the table stood the two women and their faithful guide, Tubi. Nearer to the interpreter was Mavambu, who was supported by two staunch adherents guaranteed to know anything about the affair that inclined favorably toward their Chief.

Lelo was questioned in regard to her testimony as it appeared on *Zuzi's* notes because every important truth she had affirmed had been stoutly denied by her master. She held strictly to her original statements, and cross-examination failed to alter any of the essential facts that had made her side of the matter look so favorable on the preceding day. The difficulty now, however, was not in the facts of the case, but in the much more serious matter of Mavambu's great dissatisfaction.

*Zuzi* was indeed in an awkward dilemma; a faithful servant to the State like Mavambu was entitled to some consideration. It would certainly be unwise, to say the least, to send him away with his wrongs rankling under the coat-front on which hung his proud decoration.

*Zuzi* was not long in reaching that conclusion, and yet there was the woman who no doubt was in the right. Circumstances all pointed to a hard time ahead for her if she fell again into the hands

of her lord. What should he do, what could he do? He could not find it in his heart to consign her unreservedly to Mavambu's tender mercies, and he must not let her go altogether free. He would help both parties a little if possible; but his vacillation confused matters, and did no more than upset both plaintiff and defendant.

*Zuzi* asked for the "book" which he had given *Lelo*, but she pretended not to understand the interpreter. She was reluctant to comprehend that it was to be produced; she feared for its safety. She was sharply commanded to give it up quickly. With unwilling fingers she slowly picked at the knotted end of her loin cloth, where the document was enshrined. What joy she had experienced in the possession of the precious scrap, and how often since yesterday she had fingered it with keenest satisfaction.

"Hand it over, it is not needed now. I will settle the palaver in another way," observed *Zuzi*.

Taking it in his own clean hands, smeared and dirty as it was, from the trembling fingers, he slowly tore the scrap into tiny bits, dropping them one by one into the basket by his chair.

Her eyes sadly followed the deliberate movements of the same fingers that had previously so skilfully penned her right to freedom, as they now tore her hopes into shreds. In her disappointment she became bitterly conscious of the folly of trusting in an earthly prince, or of building high

anticipations upon a flimsy piece of common writing paper. Her new-found white friend had failed her, and the precious document was gone forever!

"Drop the old palaver, and go back to your Chief," he advised in a kindly way.

She was silent, her eyes fixed upon the dirt-tracked board floor. The interpretation of the *Dingizi* did not even cause her to look up for she had lost all heart in the affair.

"Forget your troubles for your children's sake."

Lelo dumbly shook her head in rejection, and as some reply seemed to be required said simply,

"*Nana*, Father, I cannot."

"I do not command you to go back to Mavambu, but I see now that it is the best course for you."

She had so little interest, and so few words at command, that she did not trouble to answer in dissent with more than the speaking Mayombe shrug of the shoulders.

With unintentional irony *Zuzi* ordered Mavambu to take better care of his women and children. "Better care" was comparative, intimating some previous attention. It had been a good many years since Lelo had known any care at all—not since she had been dragged away from the only arms that had toiled for her and carried her over the rough places of early childhood. She had never known any loving ministrations since that time from her own kind, but she herself had done a lot

of looking after and providing for others. *Zuzi* was quite unaware of his sarcasm.

"You must give her a new loin cloth occasionally," said he.

The interpreter's loud command filtered through Mavambu's straining ear. In Mavambu's countenance, turned to the *Zuzi*, was observable his most obedient, anxious-to-please expression.

"And buy some *masambu* (stock fish) for the family pot; you must feed and dress them well, if you want to live in peace," instructed *Zuzi*, paternally.

"Yes, yes, *Mfumuu*, 'I hear you indeed'"—which delighted reply meant that Mavambu heard but to obey. He not only agreed to every injunction, but offered to do even more than was laid upon him.

Lelo, sullenly refusing to look his way, rejected Mavambu's compromise, and uttered again her despairing objection to the *Zuzi*,

"*Nana, Tata!*"

She was abruptly silenced by the interpreter who irritably remembered that this obstinate, cheap woman who was making him so much extra work had brought him nothing to refresh himself with when his strenuous day's work was done.

Now if Mavambu had honestly intended to fulfil his fluent promises, and if Lelo's being had consisted of only stomach and back—the one to regale with odorous stock fish, and the other to adorn with gaudy calico—then the matter had been wisely de-

cided. As it was, one quite important item had seemingly been overlooked by *Zuzi* in reckoning her make-up—her heart. She really had one, and it was still untouched and unyielding after all the rich promises of plenty, so glibly presented by *Mavambu* to *Zuzi Palaver*.

Lelo turned sadly from the seat of justice and went out and down the steps, followed by her young friend. She protested in an agony of despair that she would sooner die than return to the death-in-life from which she had escaped.

Vangu had been broadly included in the new verdict; *Zuzi's* advice was addressed to her as well as to Lelo. She dogged Lelo's heels in silent and loving sympathy as they returned native-fashion in single file, with leaden steps, to the shelter of the *Vula*.

Mavambu followed hard after the women, and soon presented himself at the Mission, demanding that they pick up their traps, and accompany him back to Yenge at once. He did not get a chance to speak to either one of the women because they had fled to the protection of the *banga* (house) when they saw him coming up the hill. Mrs. Missionary took the women to her own room, while Mr. Missionary settled the palaver with Mavambu in a few brief sentences. Said Mavambu,

"I have come for my women."

"Did the Judge say that you could have them?"





NATIVE PASTOR



VANGU, LELO AND HER CHILDREN



pleasantly inquired Mr. Missionary, making no move to comply with the demand.

"Yes, he decided the case in my favor. He said they were to return home with me."

"Oh, then in that case I have been misinformed. I was told that the matter was optional with them."

"*Mfummu*, you were misinformed, maybe because most bush people don't understand the dialect used down here."

"The women don't want to go with you, so I will not force them away."

"But, the *Zuzi* said that they must!"

"Then you had better get a 'book' from the *Zuzi* to that effect, and in the meantime until I read the decision in his own handwriting we shall keep them safely here."

Mavambu blustered and wasted more time and words, until Mr. Missionary finally told him to go. He left the station growling out threats of vengeance.

He hastened back to the *Zuzi* with a carefully embellished story of Mr. Missionary's interference, and suggested that a soldier be despatched to snatch the women away from the meddlers, who were always interfering with *Bula Matadi's* business. *Zuzi* temporized again by saying that the women would no doubt return to his arms when they got back up-country, and that he had better permit them to go up alone without his kind escort. As there was really no charge that could have been

rightly laid against either of the women the *Zuzi* did not think it necessary to send a soldier to the *Vula* after them.

The ultimate decision of the Court had left the cases hanging fire, with both sides uncertain and dissatisfied. When Lelo heard that Mavambu still had a claim upon her, and when Mavambu saw that she did not mean to return to his compound without a struggle, then neither side was content. As for Mavambu he could better afford to wait since he had much of the law on his side, both local and imported; and no sane native would lightly disregard his claims. Lelo was his woman, bound by the law of custom; and as for Vangu, who would venture to marry her? As long as his cloth reposed in the strong box of her owners, his option on her body could not be easily set aside.

Time was no more a consideration to Mavambu than to any other Mayombe man, and then there were always changes to be expected. Mr. Missionary might die, or leave the country as others had done before him, and then what could prevent Mavambu from seizing his own and forcing them back into bondage.

Damocles' sword hung swaying above the heads of the two women, and they must henceforth live in dread of the threatened disaster. It was too bad that *Zuzi Palaver* had changed his mind. If he had only permitted her to keep her "book," thought Lelo, that would have obviated every perplexity

that now made the homeward journey so sombre.

There was nothing further to keep them at Boma, so the women planned to leave secretly, and get back as soon as possible to the safety of the *Vula* at Yenge from which they had started so full of hope a few days before. Fear of being overtaken hastened their movements, else the journey would have been made with lagging feet. The little caravan halted for a few minutes on the hillside overlooking Boma. They paused to look out across the swift brown torrent racing seaward, and over the scattered houses which formed the wonderful town of the white foreigners.

Lelo's eyes lingered upon the white house of the *Zuzi* perched high on the hill. What rapturous heights of hope she had mounted there; and to what depths of dull despair she had been cast under that glaring roof. Her heart was now heavy as lead, crushed by the realization of failure, and of the dull truth that she was still only a chattel of Mavambu's.

"God help me!" The words were faintly uttered and her companions did not hear them—but He heard, and answered. He always does. She saw then beyond the Palace of Justice, with its sordid limitations of human wisdom; beyond the squalid confines of Mavambu's village; far into a future brightened by the love of Christ that no earthly cloud could hide. She did not underrate what it would mean to be once more in Mavambu's clutches,

but she understood more clearly that the body he might be able to seize was only a decaying one; that Christ held fast her undying soul.

There came to her the reassuring consciousness of the grip of strong arms which were to hold her firmly to the end, the end which was but a new beginning. Arms that would support her—her undying self—after the clay in which she lived was broken and laid away. Nobody could ever seize or barter away her soul; she knew that it was now His, and that He would guard it well.

Looking back she thought of the trying events of the past days, and then ahead she saw Yenge in the shadow of an unknown future. And last of all she lifted her eyes hopefully to the clear sky behind the fleecy, slow-moving clouds, where her future peaceful habitation was assured forever.

Tears hid all other objects, but she could see Him better through them, and her heart swelled with the glad thought of spiritual freedom—away from Boma, beyond Yenge, farther than the uttermost earth; somewhere with Him which would be heaven indeed. How He must have loved her, poor black, ignorant Congo chattel that she was, that He could lay down His own life for her; and how she thanked Him now!

Lelo came down to earth, and said to her young friend:

“Come along, Vangu, let us hurry. It will be

good to see the babies and meet our friends again, won't it?"

They turned their backs upon the river, and dropped into single file on the narrow, stony trail that led away across the grass-covered *nsekés* (plains) toward the forest country of Yenge.

Mavambu was soon left far behind, dawdling in the Boma shops in search of bargains in alleged rum, adulterated gunpowder, and flimsy gingham with which he intended to load his caravan before returning to the Mayombe.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### WELCOME BONDS.

THE homecoming was both sad and glad. If perfect victory was not with them to rejoice their hearts after their trying journey there were at any rate good friends to meet them with a loving welcome. Lelo was better off than Vangu, as she had her little ones to greet her.

Some days later the quiet atmosphere of the *Vula* was disturbed by the booming of overloaded flint-lock guns being discharged in Mavambu's village. The guns were fastened firmly to forked sticks driven into the ground, and a cord was attached to the trigger. The process of reloading being completed, due notice was given to all concerned to get out of the way. The crowd dispersed and put their huts between themselves and the deadly weapons.

The improvised "cannon" were generally fired successfully, but occasionally the gas-pipe barrels burst and then the venturesome fellow who had pulled the string was thankful that a corner of a hut shielded him from the flying debris.

A crowd of people from the surrounding villages and some boys from the *Vula* were drawn to Mavambu's town. After being attracted by the noise



they were in due time entertained with an oration delivered by Mavambu.

Standing somewhat unsteadily in the midst of his attentive auditors, Mavambu made his speech. Those on the outskirts of the crowd had some difficulty in making out what he said, as his throat was considerably clogged by many liberal applications of trade gin. It was a vile concoction he had brought from Boma, the ingredients of which were unknown to the laity. Its purpose seemed to be to deprive users of sense, vigor, and life for the doubtful benefit of trade and the temporary increase of government revenue. Nominally it was cheap; actually it was dear stuff to have in the country at any price.

Mavambu reminded the assembly of the fact that he had just returned from Boma, where he had been to see about a palaver with two of his refractory chattels. He informed them that he had laid the matter before his friend, the *Zuzi*, who was a wise and good man, consequently he had now the pleasure of announcing to them that he had come out of the skirmish with flying colors. The rebels, said he, had been ignominiously defeated, and to him, his friend the *Zuzi* had awarded the victory.

Upon reaching home, he told them, his first thought had been to call his friends and good neighbors, and impart to them the glad news, and it was to celebrate this event that the guns were being fired. His peroration, if not in a clear voice, was delivered

with a broad smile, probably induced by the same concoction that made his legs unsteady. Said he,

“Lelo must come back to me, and this will serve as a lesson to all other women having like rebellious dispositions.”

A few favored friends, after noisily congratulating Mavambu, remained to drink good success to him in all outstanding palavers. From the bursts of merriment and shouts of triumph heard that day they were anticipating future favorable decisions.

Mavambu's victory, after all, was mostly in the bottles brought from Boma; nothing much remained of it but aches and bad stomachs next day. It was without avail since all efforts to compel Lelo to go back to him were fruitless. He sent a messenger to the *Vula*, demanding that she comply at once with the lawful decision of the *Zuzi Palaver* that had been made in his favor. Lelo's reply was that she was quite within the law at the *Vula*, seeing that she had not been commanded to leave, but simply advised to do so. She said that as the advice did not strike her as good she would not take it.

Mavambu fumed for a while, and made many threats before settling down to await a more favorable season for plucking the fruit of his conquest. Confiding his troubles to a sympathetic friend, he one day remarked,

“Now I drop it, but when I get so angry that the skin of my forehead puckers between my eyes,



OUTSTATION PUPILS



DAY SCHOOL AT VUNGU



then I will go again and reveal to *Zuzi* how his words are set at nought by these native Christians and interloping missionaries."

Mavambu did not relinquish his claim, but conditions evidently remained unfavorable to the puckering process, for it failed to take place. Mavambu's countenance retained its normal appearance, and Lelo was left unmolested with Vangu at the *Vula*.

A full year passed before Lelo asked to be baptized and taken into the church. She had been faithful in her testimony and her life so she was gladly received by her pastor.

There was one cloud in Lelo's sky on the day she was baptized. Vangu was not permitted to go down into the water with her. Vangu had asked to be admitted to a place in the ranks of the little company of Christians at Yenge, but had been requested to wait a little while longer, until she had learned better the meaning of baptism and the requirements of the church.

On that same day, much to the joy of all, two other girls were among the little company of accepted candidates. The missionaries understood that the church could never be really strong until there were more women in it, and so every female recruit was doubly welcomed. The women had held out long; they were far more obdurate than the men to the plea of the gospel. In fact the women had worked long and hard to keep the men

and boys from having anything to do with the "*mambu maNzambi*." Thus the changed attitude of some toward the "words of God," so long delayed, was now gladly received.

Not long after Lelo had become a member of the visible church another important event transpired in her life. Lelo "fell in love." Mabilia was a trustworthy Christian man who had worked long and faithfully for Mr. Missionary. He was kind and reliable and upon him devolved much of the outside work on the station premises during the time Mr. Missionary was away on his preaching tours.

Apart from any consideration of sentiment, or of the feelings of the principals, the marriage bond seemed to be the only way of escape whereby Lelo could ever actually be set free, and thereby evade the ever-impending wrathful claims of Mavambu. It is not to be supposed, though, that she considered marriage with that end in view, for Lelo had really fallen in love.

As a single woman Lelo had only one barrier between herself and Mavambu and the carrying out of his desires of vengeance upon her. That obstacle was a living missionary. A dead missionary would have offered no hindrance, and a missionary on furlough would have taken away the obstruction from his path. Lelo's sole dependence under God, and hope of safety from cruel servitude, was a live missionary who was on the spot.

Not so far away there were places where there were no Christians and no missionary, but life in those parts did not have much to offer to the unfortunate women who existed there; they were perishing like overworked beasts of burden, having no helping hand outstretched to them. So Lelo's safety depended a great deal upon the bare fact that at Yenge there was a missionary, unburied and still on duty.

It would be an excellent change for Lelo to have a real husband, one who could give her and the children the loving protection they needed. The only difficulty in carrying out their plans for the union was Mavambu. He could still be seen, lowering like a wrathful cloud over the bright visions of the future, and threatening to dispel them with a storm.

Lelo found a way out, of course; she would not have been true to type if she had not, since she was a woman and in love. She went to visit the surviving head of her clan, and laid before him a plan for his benefit. In all the happenings of the past years, as far as they had affected Lelo, he had been a mildly interested observer; now he was to be actively enlisted in the cause of freedom. It was naturally to be expected that any project for his own material welfare would have his attentive consideration, and Lelo's expectations were not disappointed.

She sorrowed, she said, since it was settled that

she was to be united in matrimony to Mabiala, to think of her fiancé presenting a dowry for her to anyone outside the family circle, as if it were the price of a slave. She was a respectable woman, said she, and one who fortunately still had a head to her family; and as such her dowry should change hands, and ought to be given, but it could only lawfully go into the hands of the head of the clan. Aside from the light way in which she had been treated by the Ancients, in being given as a slave to an Old Chief as the price of a borrowed jug, strong blood ties held her, and she still clung to her family at heart, and would be glad to thus publicly re-enter its ranks. This she set forth in well-chosen words calculated to hold the attention of the head of the family.

Matundu, the head of her clan, was not averse to the proposition to begin with, and the more he thought upon the matter of retrieving for the family an "*ngudi*" (a child-bearing woman) having living children of her own besides a dowry, and a good husband, the more heartily he approved the plan. Lelo had made indeed a strategic move of value by interesting Matundu in a revival of his family rights.

Hearing of these arrangements, which were to be concluded without his voice being heard, or his presence required, Mavambu sent word that he would remove his objection to a legal marriage, and forfeit his claims upon Lelo, if Matundu would



but divide the dowry with him. His messenger was sent back with the reply, that as he was not a member of the family, and had no native rights in their clan, they could not accept his compromise. Matundu added graciously that Mavambu's relations with Lelo had been altogether irregular, and that now upon the eve of her reinstatement into good society it would be hazardous to start with another such misstep as the one proposed.

At this rejoinder Mavambu might well have knit his brows, but even that was not enough to cause them to contract sufficiently to indicate *nganzi* (wrath); so the preparations went on although Lelo was not without some misgivings regarding the next move her deaf lord might make.

The rebellion of Lelo was probably the means of instilling mutinous thoughts into little Simba's heart. If one woman could leave the man that owned her and carry out the matter so successfully, why not another? Life with Mavambu was not the rosy-hued dream of luxury he had depicted, but it was more and more a drudging reality.

She went over to see Lelo one day, and remarked,

"I wish I were like you," and looked very mournful while saying it.

"Like me, in what way?"

"Free from Mavambu. I wish I had somebody to help me."

"You can get help," promptly affirmed Lelo.

"I don't see how."

"The Lord will help you as He helped me!"

"*Nzambi?* But, I thought it was Mrs. Missionary."

"Give your heart to Him. He can help you better than the missionaries."

"Me, I don't like the words of God," answered Simba frankly. "I don't want to be a 'person of the church.'"

"Then I don't see any other help for you."

Simba went away grieved, longing for liberty, but with no faith in the right means, and the only way by which she could secure it.

In due time the arrangements were concluded between the remaining relatives of the contracting parties. The dowry had been paid, Lelo reinstated, and matters amicably agreed upon and settled in the family consultations.

The happy couple set out on their fifty-mile tramp to Boma, the nearest place at which they could be married in accordance with the laws brought in by the new lords of the land. Mabilia and Lelo were accompanied by another couple from the *Vula*, and by the witnesses required for the legal ceremony.

When they arrived at the office of the Civil State, to see the Officer delegated to make the fifteen-day publication before the marriage could be performed, they were met by another black interpreter. He was not the same one that Lelo

had encountered on her first journey to Boma, but he proved himself a member of the same family of imposters.

Looking them over superciliously, in a way peculiar to some savages in clothes, as if he resented their intrusion upon his leisure, or as if he strongly suspected them of some criminal designs, he demanded abruptly,

"What do you want?"

"We wish to get married," humbly replied Mabilia, turning in his hands a foreign straw hat, borrowed for the occasion.

"Married?" This was uttered with a disdainful sniff. And then, haughtily,

"Have you any witnesses?"

"These four here."

Two of the number were friends of Mabilia who were employed at Boma. They had with difficulty secured permission to leave their work for an hour for the purpose.

"Only four witnesses, and two couples to be married? Not enough; go back, and get four more; then come on the sixth day of next week, with eight witnesses, four for each couple."

"But the food we brought with us from home will not hold out as long as that," politely objected Mabilia.

"*Allez, kwenda,*" scornfully snapped his Excellency the Interpreter. Translated from the French and Kifoti the two words mean, impera-

tively uttered, "to get out, and be quick about it!" If not, the tone intimated, then a bite would follow the threatening bark to hasten their lagging steps.

They knew very well from common report that only four witnesses of their own race were necessary, but what the law of the *mindele* demanded, and what the interpreter required of them, were two widely different matters.

To the ill-concealed displeasure of the *Dingizi*, they came back next morning, bearing a letter from the *Vula*, sealed and addressed to *Monsieur l'Officier d'Etat-Civil*. The letter respectfully protested against needless hardship and expense imposed upon law-abiding people who had already tramped fifty miles to fulfil legal requirements and in making them wait another week before they could even give preliminary notice of their intention to marry. The letter was put into the hands of the officer himself and did not pass through those of the interpreter. The officer called the parties before him after only a short delay.

When he began to write down the names of the principals and witnesses, their approximate ages, and as much information about their ancestry as they possessed, he was interrupted by a young man who entered breathlessly. He had not been summoned by Mabilia, but he seemed to act as if he had been sent for. Said he:

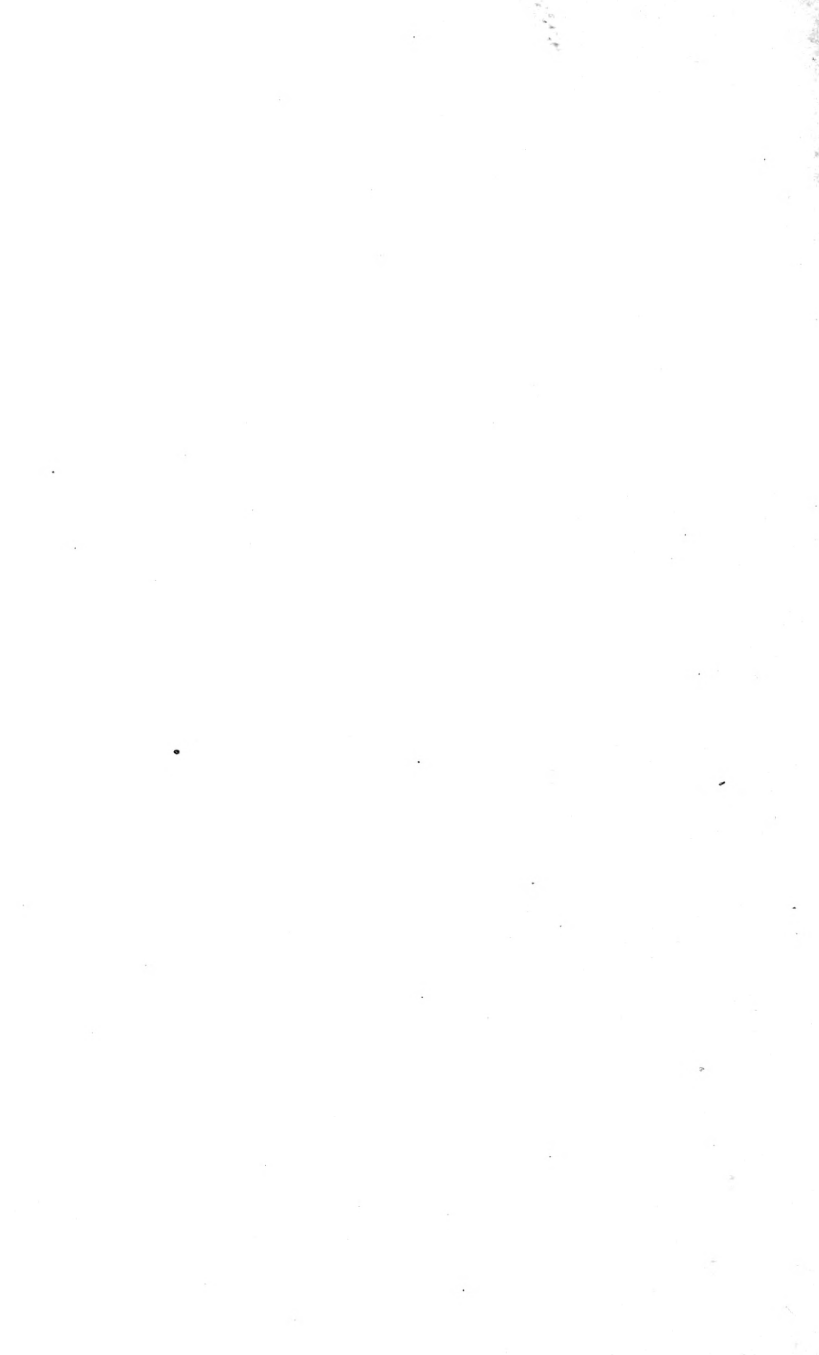
"*Mfumu*, I object! This woman belongs to my brother, Mavambu, the Medal Chief at Yenge."



BRICK PRESS INVENTED BY NATIVE EVANGELIST



CONGREGATION AT DEDICATION OF YEMA CHAPEL



Regarding Lelo sternly, the officer asked, via the ordinary channel,

"You are married?"

"No, I am not married to Mavambu." And then followed an outline of the story, hastily sketched by Lelo, and filled in by interpolations from Mabilia.

"Mfumu, this is all a pack of lies," denied the relative of Mavambu, "she is an evil woman who has contracted the habit of running away. She would rather walk the streets of Boma than live with my brother, her own husband."

"The streets of Boma? I thought you came from up-country," queried the officer suspiciously.

"Mfumu, I know nothing of Boma; we have just come from Yenge!"

The interpreter leered upon her, and said significantly,

"I have seen this evil woman often upon the streets of Boma."

His assurance was so great that the officer was visibly impressed, and turned to Lelo with indecision written on his countenance.

"In all my life," she protested, "I have been but twice in Boma, and I hope that I shall never be obliged to come again."

Then a happy thought caused her to say:

"Ask up at the *Missioni* if my words are not true."

Ah, yes, of course. The officer carefully scru-

tinized the letter that lay on the table before him. Lifting his eyes, he promptly informed the interpreter that he was mistaken, told Mavambu's relative that his claim was outlawed, and then proceeded to post the bans before the interpreter and the other hinderer realized how quickly their little scheme had been demolished. Truly, an *nkanda* (book) works wonders sometimes.

The happy couples and their friendly witnesses were ready and waiting at the door of the Officer of Civil State long before the appointed hour of eight on the auspicious morning two weeks later.

Mabiala's generously proportioned feet were shod in white canvas slippers, his legs clothed in khaki pants, his chest covered with a red singlet, his shoulders bearing a white coat, and above, all was perched a real hat of straw, even though somewhat the worse for wear. In his hand, borrowed for the occasion, was a curved-handled cane of the prevailing Boma mode. These extra touches were in honor of the metropolis, where most of the people wore pants, shoes, hats, and carried canes. Lelo thought he looked well and doubtless he agreed with her in her good opinion.

Lelo was now about thirty-five years old, a solidly built woman of medium height. Her appearance was pleasing, she had a kind smile and a low, gentle voice. Something about her well-shaped head and firmly built chin denoted the sense and



determination she had exhibited at various critical epochs of her checkered life.

Mavambu had spitefully called her an old woman, but she was neither old nor ill-favored. In due time, *Monsieur l'Officier*, utterly unconscious of any flattery, wrote down her age in the marriage certificate as twenty-three. This was his own estimate of course, as no native was ever asked in that office such a trifling question as "How old are you?" Her name appeared in the same place as Malia Lelo. Malia, or Mary, was the name she had added to herself when she was baptized.

As a concession to city style her head was swathed in a gay-colored handkerchief, and in her hand she carefully bore a folded cotton umbrella. This was an ante-nuptial gift from the groom, prudently selected, as it would be very serviceable in future for either member of the conjugal association for use upon state occasions.

During the course of bewildering questions Mabilia understood the officer to ask:

"Do you solemnly promise to protect and provide for this woman through life?" To which he emphatically answered in the affirmative.

Said the officer to Lelo:

"Will you obey this man and follow him wherever he may go?" She said that she would willingly and gladly go with him.

The interpreter here made a slight interpolation, that probably was not in the original French

of Mister the Officer. Said he to Lelo, when informing her as to the duties of her new state:

"When you have a child you must take good care of it. If it should die in infancy, you will be brought here by a soldier, and put into *bloc*."

How changed was Lelo's life now! How different her prospects from the day she had followed Mavambu to his compound, loaded down like a beast of burden! What a difference the missionary with his black-covered Bible in which was the *nsamu wambote* had made in her life! Mavambu was bound by that marriage certificate as well as Mabilia and Lelo. He would be prevented by it from doing any further mischief.

Soon Lelo would stand in the little grass-roofed chapel at Yenge, her little girls by her side, to have the marriage ceremony performed as customary in the presence of the native congregation. How different the prospects for her own little ones as contrasted with the outlook on life she had had when starting off with Bungu's caravan from her mother and home, her life forfeited for a worthless jug.

How similar the beginnings of Lelo's life to that of millions of other chattels in the still dark habitations of cruelty just outside the mission compounds. Alas! for them no deliverer had yet come bearing such light under black covers. She was no more worthy than the multitudes swarming over the land, but she was saved and secure

while they still waited for the human epistles bearing the good tidings. The women were passing fast away without hearing the news; the messengers were so slow, so slow, in coming.

Proudly bearing his marriage certificate in one hand, and swinging his friend's cane with the other, Mabilia marched, erect and smiling, up the broad street shaded by palm trees to the *Vula* followed in single file by the relieved and happy company. A few hours more and the dust of Boma would be shaken from their feet.

"Well, Lelo," asked Mrs. Missionary, smiling at the bride, "is it all over?"

With a sigh of relief she answered contentedly, "Yes, thank the Lord!"

Then after an almost imperceptible pause added, "And the *Mindele mia Nzambi*."













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