

African Clearings

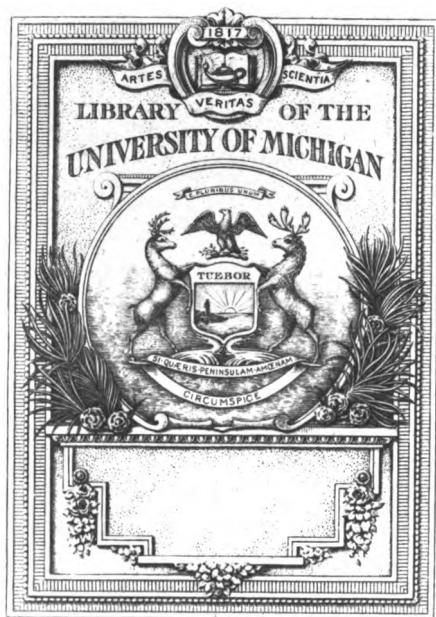
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Jean Kenyon Mackenzie



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BY
JEAN KENYON MACKENZIE

Author of "Black Sheep," etc.



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Dedicated
to the memory of
JANE GROENDYKE FOSTER

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THE material of these essays was gathered during a sojourn of many years in the Southern Cameroon, West Africa. Some of them have already been in print; one in the *Forum*, others in the *International Review of Missions*, and others in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Especially does the author wish to acknowledge her indebtedness to the owners of the Atlantic Monthly Press, who permit her to include "Exile and Postman," one of the essays published by them in the second series of the Atlantic Classics.

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THE UNFORGOTTEN JOURNEYS

AT 4.20 A.M. in the forests of equatorial Africa, the guinea fowl calls. Then my two carriers, each with his load on his back, steal away in the dark. And presently, rudely thrust forth by the alarm clock, I go. We vanish from the lamplit clearing, the white woman sitting in a chair swung over a wheel; in the shafts of this little vehicle, fore and aft, there is a man to pull and a man to push.

Before long I overtake Obama Ze; he is carrying the Chop Box and is romantically designated as the "Cook." His little load of provision is made up of condensed milk, bacon, rice that is about as interesting as usual, a tin of Danish butter of which it has never been claimed

that it is like butter from the ice-box at home. He has bread for five days, if it does not mould. Of the tea he carries, a small — an infinitesimal — haycock might be made, and of the coffee — a most fulsome ode. Obama Ze thinks with an agreeable anticipation of the day when I really *must* have something to eat, and so will eat the tin of beans. He knows from long experience that this will occur early in the journey. And the bread will, of course, diminish daily — until there is no bread. Almost as much may be hoped of the pack of drugs which will make of our nightly camps a kind of dispensary. These calculations cheerfully preoccupy Obama Ze. But Minko, when I pass him, is morose. He carries my cot, and my wardrobe in a tin box, and he is thinking bitterly that Obama Ze is favored in his load, because daily I shall be devouring it. Minko cannot hope for such good

fortune. Moreover, because his load is the lighter, he must carry the lantern; the white woman has made the decree and he cannot hope to part from the lantern until we return to the station. He thinks it would be pleasant were I to call a small boy to walk in my company who would carry the lantern. Only last night, when he and Obama Ze were fitting their loads to their shoulder yokes, Minko painted for my imagination an attractive little boy, whose character would be permanently ennobled by a walk in my company, and who would carry the lantern. "Then your lantern," Minko told me, "would be ever at your hand." But I told him, with the heartless calm of a white person about to start on a journey, that my lantern would indeed be at my hand since himself must be following at my heels. It is my optimism has made Minko morose.

This is the hour when white people carry their helmets in their hands and you may see their hair, that is soft and straight as the hair of a monkey, uncovered to the sky. The white woman carries her helmet in her hand. The hearts of the chairmen are light; they run swiftly, there is a little breeze about the hurry of their going. The stars are paling above that little caravan; the shadow of the forest trail awaits them, and the burdens of the mission station life, with the pressure and the clatter of its industrial and medical and educational and domestic machinery, are left behind. The drum of the station, announcing the hours of the duties of the day, may not enslave them.

There is a Bulu proverb that says: "Don't flatter the day in the morning." But, oh, you flatter the day, and the little caravan, and yourself on the first morning of a journey, if you start in time! You

flatter the starry dark and the pallor that is dawn and the path that begins to show white in the shadows and the carded mists that hang in shreds among the trees of the forest — as you may see when you come to the clearing of a village that lies on the slope of a hill. In all the little villages the roofs release a veil of smoke to the dawn. In one of them, and from the wall of the forest that is back of the huts, you hear the thin and whispered wailing that is the morning voice of sorrow: "*Ma yi ma simsan!* I weep and I remember." And you know that there is a woman abroad on the edge of the forest, grieving for the long-lost and the unforgotten.

In many a village on this first morning of your journey and when the air begins to have the color of day, there will be a drummer at the village drum, drumming to the Christians the call to prayer. And in the first of these you stop at the pala-

ver house, where it is still dark under the thatch. You sit by an ember of last night's fire, planning what you will be saying to the village folk when they come in — which presently they do, stooping one by one at the low entrance, thrusting their right legs over the high sill, bringing their brown bodies and their bright head-dresses into the gloom of that place. Because you are still among neighbors you speak to the circumstance of the village — its known need and its degree of villainy, the known violence of its citizens, its scandals and reforms. How well you know these things! It is terrible! Your audience fidgets and sighs, looking at you without resentment. The Law is terrible in that little hut between the two walls of the forest. And presently from somewhere in your pack of treasures new and old you produce the homely and the immediate things of the love of God for that

one whose name is Trouble — as many a one is named in that village.

You mean, as I suppose all ministers mean, that your service shall be short. But what with the things of God and the things of Friendship, there is a high enchanting ray of sunlight before you leave the village.

The name of that high enchanting ray of sunlight is “the bath of the monkeys.” Your carriers have told you this, and that the monkeys come to the roof of the forest to bathe in the first ray of morning and the last ray of evening light. You believe it. You think when you see the light, so golden, that the monkeys have every inducement — it is their portion. There is no sunlight where you walk in the forest. Upon the floor of that forest, brown ever with a fall of brown leaves and threaded with streams that are brown, or a trickle over stones of a water gray as glass, there

is a little way that men have made. It is the portion of man under that vast roof where there is a place for every creature after its kind. You are among the least of these; you and your little caravan know your place; you are very, very small on the floor of the forest; with an instinct of obedience you walk in the way that is the law. In that place of silence, and of the cry of birds you do not see, and of the gray drift of light among the crowding bodies of trees, and of the never-to-be-forgotten odor of an immemorial mould, you are drowned in a solitude ineffable and thrilling, you are caught in the strong excitement that is the vice of the lovers of the wilderness.

You are perfectly happy until you are hungry.

All your way in the forest is measured by the rivers that are there to be crossed. There is no other measure of distance

known to your carriers. And the sun, your measure of time, does not serve you in that shadow. You cross the rivers in canoes that are sleeping on the farther bank; you shout to a hypothetical ferryman who is asleep or on a journey, and you wonder while you wait, to think that ferrymen must always be living on a farther bank. Whether you approach a river from the path of the setting sun, or from the sun that rises, or from those nameless directions that lie on the right hand and on the left hand of these, always you must sit on your heels and wait for the ferryman to cross the river. Your voice is the only voice above that dreaming water, and when at last the ferryman, as still as dreaming, points his canoe and steals upon you, you desist. You obey the silences about the river. The wall of the forest hangs like a dream above the farther bank. The water slides and slides

under shadows that are always there. Only there wakes in that place of sleep many a little detached weed, a thing of the backwater, where the many of them float like a fleet of little barks with their sails, more green than jade, full of a wind you cannot feel.

You are perfectly happy until you are hungry; this pang is the knell of the golden age. In the palaver house of a village by a river you call for your second breakfast. You sit on one of the many bamboo beds while Obama Ze coaxes a flame from logs that ooze smoke from their charred ends. The sun thrusts a powerful wedge of light through the eastern doors of that brown interior, the bark of all the eastern wall is pricked and slitted with gold; it is near to eight o'clock. The women of the village and the little girls are away in the gardens, but there will be men in the palaver house who will speak to you after

the correct interval, asking news of your town. Little boys getting wind of your visit come in ever so swiftly; they breathe quickly because they have been running up from the river or from their own little affairs behind the wall of the forest. They stand to observe you. Many a one carries a baby astride his hip — these are the little mothers of the village. But whether fishermen or trappers or nursemaids or just rascals and loafers, these little boys are lost in a common bright dream — they dream of fish-hooks! Never was there in any water a fish as bright as the fishes caught on the hooks they dream of, covering the white woman with their perfectly attentive eyes.

I call for water. And the boy who brings it shall have a fish-hook!

Half a dozen little brown bodies flow out of the palaver house door and down the street. An egg appears at my elbow.

It is offered in the most eloquent little hand. If wishing could make it a good egg, it is that. I candle the egg against the sunlight — it is innocent. From a tin Velox box I take the three fish-hooks that are current barter for an egg. A hand of plantains is laid at my feet and on a level with my eyes a boy's dark eyes pray me for fish-hooks. I pay fish-hooks for the plantains. Two little boys come in from the spring with a small brass pail hanging between them. They look, together with their pail, like a capital letter M. They put the pail at my feet. They time exactly the withdrawal of their hands. It is evident that this so sweet spring water, still shivering in its brazen cup and covered with a sprig of fern, is the offering of *two* little boys. Yet it is the worth of but one fish-hook. An ardor of petition presses close to me in the silence of the palaver house. How will the white

woman deal with this union? She gives a fish-hook to each boy. There is a universal sighing breath. And presently other little boys with other of their mothers' cooking pots bring their little beating hearts to be broken. They have sweet spring water under sprigs of green fern, clear as crystal in those brass kettles, but the white woman rejects them.

The tin coffee pot boils on the flame and the egg is there with the coffee; the plantains are roasted in the ashes. One of these is for me. I eat and drink, looking down the clearing and across the river to the sea of the forest. The carriers spread a banana leaf on the ground and dispose there the cassava cake and the peanut butter in its little leaf packet; they squat on their heels and bow their heads and say, "*Akeva Zambe!*" This is to say, "Thank God," and it is a custom of the people of the Tribe of God.

We refresh ourselves in a great calm. There is peace in that dim place, and you would never guess, while you are sitting there, how the violence of the day is growing. But when you set out again, and the sunlight of the clearing floods upon you, the war of the journey is on. You sigh and breast the furies of the light.

In that forest the villages are strung like occasional beads on the thread of a tribal trail. There is a kind of rhythm of sequence — a cluster of villages and a series of gardens, a stretch of true forest, a deserted clearing, the true forest, a series of gardens, and a cluster of villages. In the village clearings the light is a river of light between the walls of the forest. In the garden clearings the trail is shadowed with a growth of cane; the light there is golden and diffuse; the jungle is not strong, but it is close; broken light and broken color beat into your eyes, and

the way is narrow — you weary in a mile of such going. In the true forest you sink into a pool of shadow and of peace. You are a little pebble at the bottom of a well of shadow — a thrilling contralto earth strain is trembling there. You would wish never to leave the true forest. And in the deserted clearings you are stunned by the clamors of the light. I seem to see myself at noon of how many days, adrift on the wide lake of a deserted clearing with the roarings of the sunlight all about me. The grass is high in those clearings, the path is hidden by the grass. That high grass is about your waist. Here and there on the surface of the lake of grass is a little island overgrown with a flowering vine; it is the ruins of the huts that have most resisted ruin. Do not shelter in those huts; just push along with your face hot under your helmet and make for the shelter of the forest wall. You are now on

the crest of the wave of the tropic day. When that wave slides down to evening and the forest shadows fall across the clearing with its lake of grass and its little flowering islands, there will be in that place, where the Bulu lived to the trouble of drums, a dwelling beauty, perfectly solitary, without tremor, and still. Nothing will stir there unless it is a ripple on the shallows of the grass where the passing of a snake "draws death along the dew."

You rest for an hour at noon, lying on the slattings of a bamboo bed in a village. Obama Ze speaks to you like a mother. He says that you must be enduring. "Ah, Matyenda," says Obama Ze, "you must have iron! A traveler must have iron!" How many times Obama Ze has told me that a traveler must be of iron, while he busied himself with the noon meal. This is his way of dealing with the silly salt tears of fatigue.

You are glad that the village is as still — or almost — as Pompeii. The women are not yet returned from their gardens. You have no immediate interest in native customs or folklore; you have no urgings along the line of your profession. You are glad there is no one dead in the village, else there would be a crowd there and a dark shadow and an immanence of violence and words to be said about mortality and immortality. You are glad there is no little new baby in that village, else you must be approving it and speaking to the mother — all powdered with the vermillion powder of the camma tree — of the things of God and her little new baby. You are glad if there are no lepers there to come stealing in with their broken bodies, to hear “three words” of the Word of God. Yes, the more deserted the village, the better you like it at the hour of noon, and you without any iron.

And presently, fortified by an ear of corn and a piece of bread — these roasted in the ashes — and a slab of terribly expensive cheese and an avocado pear and a cup of tea, you are off again.

The day turns about three o'clock. Ever so imperceptibly the day turns; sensed ever so lightly, there forms a little cloud of change; the evening is making. Unless it will rain there is no wind in the forest, only a distillation of coolness, very faint. You believe again in the evening. If this is a day of the dry season, it will not rain, but in the rainy season, that time of the strongest sunlight and the brightest stars, it will surely rain.

How lucky you are to be under cover then! The water rages against the cabin where you have taken shelter and where you are so safe — where the kettle talks on the fire and the fire is red in the gloom. The recession of the rain, its diminuendo

of farewell hushing in the thatch, the washed world emerging gilded from the flood of gray, the path patched with inlays of bright water, and yourself so sleek a vagabond, so sure to sleep the night, and the night so sure to come — how you will be haunted, some day in some city, by this sum of luxury and your lost good fortune!

By four of the afternoon you should be in camp, sitting at ease under the thatch of your choice in the village where you will sleep; and that thatch should be *nkalabande* — which is to say, a cabin without walls. The headman, if he means to give you a chicken at all, has given it by now. In their huts the women who are friendly to the people of the Tribe of God are busy making for their guests packets of peanut butter, or good mushroom soup, or even, in an excess of hospitality, little leaf bundles of stewed fish.

By five o'clock you have renewed yourself with clear water and clean linen. You sit on the east side of a shadow, watching the day fall away from the forest and the light that is the bath of the monkeys. Here presently your supper is brought you and it is a chicken stewed in peanut butter. There are the greens of the cassava plant steaming in a wooden bowl. There is a good little steamed cake of green corn and peanuts, ground together. There is many a little offering of food and all perfectly safe for you to eat — as you must infer when the women who cooked that food, and the man who owns those women, have tasted it in your presence. What more can this village do than to give you shelter, and having cooked good food for you and yours, to taste it in your presence, thus to prove there is no poison in your portion? You make a note of all these offerings. Unless the people of the

village are Christians you will leave a little present for the givers. Many a Bulu woman wears to this day a brass ring, or hangs a safety pin on her necklace of the coarse hair from an elephant's tail, because long ago she befriended a white woman.

While you sup, night fills the vast of the sky. You are small under a starry sky. Your carriers build a little fire beside you in the open, and the embers are a kind of footlights to the show that you are to the people of the village. They gather about you in the dark. Some one drums the news of you on the headman's call drum; those staccato phrases, so like the click of a giant telegraph, speak to the neighboring hamlets. Little groups of brown bodies take the trail; they are lit with torches made of reeds. Your boy lights your lantern and the stage is set.

You speak to them about the things of

God. You read in the Bulu dialect about Him Who is the Word, and that is to say, the Bulu Word. The lost coin rolls under the bamboo bed of that village and the lost sheep strays off into that forest and the prodigal son goes away by the tribal path to the Beach and is lost. And the Son of Man comes down by the trail from the town of Zambe the Creator to seek and to save the things that are lost. And more is discerned there in that hour in that village than the light of the lantern falls on.

I think I can truly say that there never was a day's journey so heavy, nor a caravan so provoking, nor a village so squalid, nor a fatigue so numbing, nor a hunger so ill-satisfied, that any of these things could cheat such an hour by a night fire when there has been talk of the essential things, new and old. How much news have I then heard of the traditions of the Bulu,

of their moral code, of their ultimate decisions about the stars, and the many moons that are ever new, and the outward-bound journeys of the spirit of man.

About the stars — might it not be that these were the glances of an eye? “Because when I wondered at the stars my father told me that the twinkling of a star might be the glance of an eye — ‘the glance of the eye of your man, who is above,’ my father said. And he said that this might be because Zambe, who created us and all that is below, had created also those other things.”

About shadows — there is your shadow in the water. “I saw my shadow in a pool of water. I leaned above it, I looked at that shadow and I wondered. My father said — ‘Yes, that is your shadow.’ And I wondered then about the creation of men. My shadow surprised me.”

About thunder. About dreams. About

magic. About the ways of death. About the new way of death and the going forth without a spear in the hand to meet the unknown dangers. About Ngo Ntoto, who died with a word of greeting. "*Mbolo*," he said, and that is the old way of salutation. "*Yesus, Mbolo*," said Ngo Ntoto, and he died. And he was well-known — everybody knew him. And thus he died. Not a spear in his hand, not a bow nor an arrow.

About the tribe that lives under the earth — there is a persistent rumor of a subterranean tribe. About a great and a nameless man of the far interior, whose character and bounties are ever recounted beside the night fires. About the generations of the clan and the legendary migrations and the crossings of rivers.

You think of these things when presently you undress in the dark under the mosquito net that hangs above your cot

from the roof that is without walls. You note them in your book by the light of the lantern that is relit. You ponder what you have not understood, turning over the bright fragments of the stars and hunting among the shadows — feeling after that man who glances from the sky. Wondering why the Bantu are everywhere awed by their shadows. Wondering whether these dwellers underground are memories, centuries old, of the workers in long-forgotten mines. Writing down ever so carefully in Bulu what you have not understood. Until at last, when the village is as still as sleep, you put out your lantern; you remind yourself that the noise that may wake you will be a dog nosing among your belongings; you look at the night that is everywhere a glaze of moonlight over the roofs of the houses and on the drooping banners of the banana trees; you listen a moment to the

drums that speak for the villages that wake in the forest — a pulsing that is now near and now far, but always articulate, incredibly accurate, and that has come at last to be for you — who have lived so long in the forest — the beat of the heart of silence. And you sleep.

Many hundred nights I have slept on the road, and here is a strange thing — the best of those journeys is forgotten. It is the hours of effort that are remembered and the journeys that were hard.

Why is it sweet to remember fatigues and hungers and the roughest ways? Why must I cherish the memory of that journey in the rainy season when we traveled with three white babies, each in a little cage swung on a pole between two carriers? And that there was in that caravan a donkey from the Canaries — a knave and a fool? And that when we came to a bog where a donkey might bog himself,

he bogged himself? Twice he bogged himself. And that while we were dealing with our donkey there came from the west a white man in a fine coat, with the news that the worst was before us, after which assistance he passed on into a rain that rains forever? Forever it rains on his fine coat and on our donkey's hide and on the brown skin of another truth-teller who met us in the late afternoon with the claim that we had still far to go and many rivers to cross, and to whom I shouted, "You lie!" — thus surprising myself and my carriers. Yes, we had far to go and flooded rivers to cross and into one of these the Chop Box fell. From where I sat on the shoulders of a carrier who was crossing the river on a log that was under water, I thought the Chop Box was the cage with the littlest baby, and I then and there, clinging to the head of Kulu Mejo, died a remembered death. I ask

you, what treasure is there in the memory of this journey that I cherish it so, remembering to this hour that in three days and three nights I drank twenty-four cups of coffee?

One of the best cups of coffee ever made by man was made on that journey at seven of an evening, and offered by Obama Ze, the cook, to a belated, disreputable missionary who had been wet all day by the rain and who drank it with a lip that had but lately passed the lie!

Another superlative cup of coffee is remembered of this journey. We rose at twelve of a moonlit night. The moon was overhead. Everywhere through the breaches in the forest the moonlight fell in a wash of silver and was broken into a glitter on the wet surfaces, on the wet leaves under foot, on the wet leaves of the trees — an abundance of moonlight with-

out measure. Our very hammocks, passing continually from shadow to light, were pale with beauty and enchanted. At four and after, on the edge of a village clearing, we stopped and made coffee. Then the cool of the dawn came stealing about us where we sat by the way, and a sound that was less than a sound suddenly moved us — it was the sound of the sea. We were caught out of the things of the forest and of exile by the sound of the sea in the west.

I wonder. Did we really sleep so well on our old canvas cots, and was drink, indeed, so sweet from our battered camp cups, or do we dream it? Let us try to remember how we hated the rustle of the rats in the thatch and the fatal hole in the roof that was directly over our cot in whatever village we camped and on whatever night it rained. And the night of the day that Ze Ndungo left the lantern in

the forest! And the nights when the warrior ants broke up the camp. And the conclaves of the parrots on that island in the Nlong River where we camped because we thought it would be quiet. Let us remember the cruelties and the monotonous tragedies of four-thirty.

We remember. And while we remember these things, I seem to see myself standing in the middle of a village clearing in the dark of the dawn; I am washing in a tin basin that rocks on the stump of a tree. And I am terribly, terribly happy because it is between four and five o'clock of the morning of a day that will be a trail through the forest, or by the edge of the sea. My carriers are busily tying up my shabby old loads, and I am terribly, terribly happy. I flatter the day in the morning.

MINOR MEMORIES

I AM visiting Sorrow of Evening. The walls of her little bark hut are hung with a gray film of nets; for she lives by the sea, and her husband is a fisherman. With a seine of checkered cloth she has been fishing in a backwater, and now she heaps her catch upon a mat of green leaf that she has spread on the clay of her floor. All her fish are little, very little; all are bright. None is longer than an almond. Some are like moonstones and some like opals; some are freckled with gilt, some with vermilion. Some little bold ones are striped like tigers, and burn there on the green of the banana leaf — there they all burn and glimmer and glitter for a moment, and I remember them forever.

It is an early morning, and I am by the sea. The sky is very high, the water is

pale under a multitudinous bright spangle. And at the edge of the incessant ripple I see a pattern of footprints — the little tender markings of the feet of children. There they are in the sand, little prints so delicate, so flawless, going north and south upon little errands so ephemeral, and washed away by a tide of long ago. But still they are remembered — I remember them.

Or it is a dateless night, thick with bright stars and the smothered ember of a moon going down into the sea before my door. Some Senegalese soldiers pass among the trees at the forest's edge; they sound a call on the bugle, very true and sweet — it is the voice of that lovely, lovely night. I walk out, and the night beats upon me in a light fall of starlight, and the damp of the dew and the soft insistence of the waves and the sharp insistence of the thousand thousands in the

grass and the sudden sweetness of the bugle melt my heart that is hard with the monotony of the day's work — and set their record forever in the wax of it.

Or it is four o'clock of an afternoon. The sound of the surf comes from the sea and the sharp rustle of palm trees from the land. Under the immense sky our clearing is suddenly seen to be a space full of significant and noble lighting, which compensates the arrested spirit for the heat and burden of the day. At that hour there is a supernatural signal to the creature in us that is not at home in the world — some secret of liberation is felt at four of the clock on a day long forgotten.

Or it is early morning in a forest village, and we are going to salute the old headman of Nkilezok. The little brown huts of his village crouch under the burden of the sunlight, but in his palaver house there is a permanent dusk. You can

hardly see him in that dusk, as you come in from the day; but he sees your white outline against the door, and he cries out that he has seen a magic! The magic draws near the old man. They speak together. Tapping the clay of his floor with the staff he holds between his knees he says: "I and the earth — we are old!" What has Magic to say to that? You are impressed and he sees it, looking at you with his old eyes that observe you. It is then he tells you that he is God. "Why should I honor God?" he asks you. "I am God. You see all these people about here? I made them." And still he murmurs, looking at you always, "A magic — I have seen a magic!" Afterward you are told of the magic named by him, that it is a bright enchantment and that those who see it must soon die, or one of their household. And always you remember that old god sitting in the dusk of his palaver

house and visited by the ultimate magic.

Of the people of Ebamina I remember only the headman's guard. I am speaking to the people of that village about the things of God; and the guard is there, dressed in ragged khaki and ostentatiously taking notes. He writes and writes — a grotesque figure in his ragged trousers; but there are so many women in Ebamina, who ask so many questions about the things of God, that I cannot ask him — as he hopes that I will do — “Who are you that write so superbly in the backwoods of the forest?” And he goes away.

But that night, when the last guest has gone and the moon is white in the one street of Ebamina, there comes to see me a young buck breeched in bark-cloth, belted with beads, banded with beads below the knee, long knives slung at his side and the inevitable spear in hand.

He and his spear, in the light of my lantern, are very tall. He is wishing, he tells me, that I could help an old woman who has just gone mad. Could I not give her a "Mouth-medicine" to quiet her?

He speaks with the civil gentleness that is the politeness of the forest people; but his aspect, brilliant and wild, is like the brilliant wildness of striped and stealthy creatures. He waits in the glamour of moonlight and the glamour of lantern-light to hear me say that I have no mouth-medicine for his poor mad woman, and then he goes away. With the curious deliberate softness of violent people, he goes away, and his black shadow with him. Suddenly I know that he is my ragged scribe. I remember him forever, because he is beautiful, and because I am surprised.

It is another night and the same lantern. I am going to see my little herd of

schoolgirls, who should now be abed under the long thatch of their dormitory. It is to say good-bye that I am going — I shall be leaving with the dawn, on some forgotten journey. Before I open the door, I hear them say, "The lamp has come!" I suppose that they have seen the light of it through the slits in the bark of their wall. And when I enter, all the little heads, some tousled and some so neatly dressed, come up from the wooden pillows; all the little faces assume a mournful expression, looking as they would wish to look when I must go away.

I put the lantern on the floor, and I make a few of my customary improving remarks. They are well received; my little girls admire me with their brilliant and attentive eyes. Until I say that they have been very good of late, and that, while I have sometimes punished one and sometimes another — when I am inter-

rupted. My little girls think that I am struck with compunction — that I am going away torn with remorse — and they cannot bear it!

“Don’t speak of it!” they cry.

“Not one has a grudge against you!”

“Why would you not punish us? Does not a mother punish her children?”

And all those young faces look at me so sweetly in the light that strikes up from the lantern on the ground — forgiving me so ardently with their faces, that I remember it forever. Forever I remember that sweet and expressive and unanimous absolution.

Too many little girls I remember — bush and beach. Ntet I remember, going before me in our path that lay in the bed of a clear and rocky stream — holding up her little flowered cloth that was so bright in that place of shade — a little Persephone in a kind of forest Hades.

And Soya, too much the child of her white father — she is remembered; and the pallor and bloom of her oval little face, where there is no touch of yellow, but all a tender brown like the brown of faded roses; and the delicate modeling under the coils of her shadowy hair; and her presence, which is as fragrant of youth as the jasmine is sweet; and her smile when she watched us bathe the white baby by the light of a lamp lit long ago. Her pink dress is faded; it does not cover her neck or her little round arms. On one of her wrists there is a silver band, and a copper band on the other; there is a black ribbon hanging from her neck, and above her temple she has thrust a grass ornament as green as jade. And she smiles, when we bathe the white baby, the mysterious smile of women who look at babies. And little wild girls I remember, dancing about the evening fires to their own little drum-

ming and singing, swinging their grass bustles with a rhythmic acquired skill, or playing out under the stars. The memory of them beats softly against my heart, like the wings of the little night-moths that they were.

I remember a day of wrestling. The things of that day are preserved in an amber of sunlight. Summoned by drums, the neighbors are abroad upon the trail. They are going to the wrestling, and I am going. Metingie, by permission, is going to the wrestling. He is our steward, and he is of a cannibal tribe — a Yebekolo. Yet it is confidently asserted of Metingie that he has never eaten man — a fact that has sometimes come to mind when Metingie, with noble gestures, served at table. There he is in the amber of that sunlight, upon the open clearing in the town of Mbita, and there am I. And there I see the men of Mbita's town out

upon the path, with their bow-guns; with their arrows they harry a snake that is coiled too, too bright in the high crest of a palm tree. The snake draws in its golden loop; it was there and now it is not there; somewhere it is in the forest shadow — not to-night will it be eaten from the kettles of the town of Mbita. And that is the snake I am always to remember. Long after, and often, when I am asked if ever in Africa I saw snakes, memory is to select out of an abundant treasure this golden snake of the town of Mbita.

I see before a potter's hut his little new family of clay pots — gray in their nests of green leaves; big and little, they dry in the sun. I meet a group of twenty Bene men, very bold and bad, each with two spears and rejoicing to be off on one of their wicked errands. In the town of Ndib Ela a saucy old woman, sitting under the eaves on the west side of her

hut, accosts me. She demands news of my husband; and when, as ever, I disown him, she asks: "Ye o ne flee?" And thinks that she has used the word so new in the forest: "Are you free?"

Am I free? I wonder. Because I am going to the wrestling, who should be about my proper business, I think that I am "flee," but, oh, if that old woman were to beg me, "Tell me three words of the Word of God!" — then I am not "flee." She does not ask me — still I am "flee." No one asks me; the women are in their gardens or at the wrestling. The challenge of the drums is not abated; the crystal quiet of the morning is in bright fragments all about me; and presently I am the most distinguished person at the wrestling, bar none.

Ango the headman is sitting under the eaves of his house on a chair, and I sit on a chair beside him. No others sit on

chairs; we are isolated by this and by our quality of personal distinction. We are polite, like Theseus and Hippolyta at the play. Resplendent young bucks are called up for our inspection, the pick of the wrestlers of the clan Mvok Amuku; they are breeched with orange, orange and black, crimson, crimson and buff. White socks are painted on their legs, their bodies are oiled. Each has his spear, which will be thrust into the ground when the play begins. On my side of the grand stand, under the eaves, sit the women, their dressed hair painted green or yellow or red. Ango is flanked by men — the non-combatants. The drummers in the shade of a little tree incessantly beat their challenge — Mvok Amuku challenges the clan Esse and the clan Otolu. The empty ring of ground, ploughed for the wrestling, bakes in the morning sun. And there sits quite visibly upon the

inhabitants of this little forest village that *malaise* with which we wait, all dressed up, for the guests to come to our parties.

Will the Otolo come? I gather that, if the Otolo come, the wrestling is made.

They come. Suddenly from the wing to left of stage, where the trail enters the clearing, there debouches a light-foot troop; with incredible swiftness they come to center; they dance beautiful obvious dances of pride and derision. They retire to the shade of a tree, and all those young limbs relax, those young bodies lean on their spears or lie upon the ground. Now another light-foot troop runs out from the right wing; the clan Esse comes to center, they display their quality, and retire to a chosen base. For each group there is a man with an iron bell, a man with a wand, wise men to sit in the shade shouting counsel, and drum-

mers, to fill the clearing with a multiple clamor.

Into the sunlight and that clamor, Ango the headman steps out. He lifts a hand; the drummers pause and the host declaims in the grand manner. There is to be no foul play and no anger.

'Palm leaves like plumes are distributed for tallies. The drummers rage, and from the groups in the shade individual wrestlers run out with conventional challenging gestures. It is the part of the challenger to plead like a lover; he droops altogether to his opponent, but the two or three young men who run in his company "ruffle up the crest of youth"; they spurn the ground in a smooth and equal rhythm. The wrestler does not speak, nor his seconds; but the man with the iron bell gives tongue.

A young man glides to center; he falls upon a knee, his arms crooked like a

drawing of youth on an Egyptian wall; he rises too swiftly, that beautiful image of supplication is too soon dissolved — he has come to grips with his opponent. And there is now another and another team at play in the hot dust of the ring.

There is a constant effort to keep the matches even. The headman's son returns again and again to a heavyweight, who rejects him and who draws him at last under his armpit with an adult impatience — as a sort of scornful measure. But the headman, when he sees it, commends the challenge; and when the lad is thrown, his father calls to him: "Don't make a sullen face — make another kind of face!" For the manner is the thing, almost as much, you would say, as the play.

Both shoulders must touch the ground, to score, and umpires separate those who struggle too long in an equal effort. There

is a pause after an unsuccessful throw — an interlude of conventional gesture, a play of exhaustion and touching posture, which is suddenly cast aside for the return attack. Little boys, who have had their little triumphs under the feet of their elders, are carried off the field, exactly as *premières danseuses* are carried away by their partners — with posed arms and legs. Men when they score are acclaimed; the women of their clan spring to their feet with a rustling of leaf-aprons and bustles; the man who keeps the tally puts a leaf upon the ground, with a little dance. And for all the fair words of Ango, there are quarrels.

Under the eaves in the noise and dust it is too hot.

There is a young man of our party, very fine, whose challenges are evaded. Many times he runs into the ring — so many times that there is a permanent

image of him in the mind. He wears a purple breechcloth; he is very black and has many strands of beads about his middle. It flatters him that he should be feared, and his mien of nonchalance is melted in a burning pride — he is wrapped in a flame of fierce pride. He comes to smile continually, with an intense irrepressible gratification. When I go away in the late afternoon, I leave that arrogant figure still challenging in the haze of the dusty ring, and still the champion of the Mvok Amuku.

Metingie — he of the Yebekolo tribe, he who has never eaten man — goes with me. The Yebekolo, he tells me, are not permitted to wrestle; neither the Government nor their headmen permit it, because they are too quarrelsome. They could not wrestle without bloodshed, Metingie tells me complacently. And he tells me of a young man who was to-day

challenged by his brother-in-law, and refused the challenge. "In that he did well," says the sage Metingie; and then is still. When he is still and I am still, there is only the sound of the drums to be heard; and when these are presently still, how still it is on the trail in that forest! All the innumerable music of the ground is still and waits on the dusk. And the dance-drums that will trouble the night are still—the very swamps through which we pass are still. And in that stillness it is cool. Somewhere beyond our range the sun is going down the path to the sea, the twelve-hour tyranny is at its ebb. Metingie carries my helmet. That young man who has never eaten man is kind to me; he does not murder the heavenly stillness. I am "flee."

In the village of Mbita we meet our twenty men with their forty spears; they are singing and dancing; all their spears

are level. A woman cries out from the center of this group. They are all terribly happy, but not the woman. They tell me how she ran away with a Bulu, and that her Bene husband, going after her to the Bulu bush, was there imprisoned, but has been this very day rescued by the powerful Bene. And the powerful Bene rush away down the road, joyous after an ancient fashion.

Metingie and I drift out of the pool of Mbita's clearing into the stream of the trail. We are again still.

I remember that stillness. Many a time, when I am in the subway, I remember the ineffable stillness of the forest. I wonder to find myself where I am — so savagely circumstanced — so pressed upon by alien bodies — so smitten by noise. Traveling like this, in white man's fashion, you are certainly safe from the snakes and the leopards and the canni-

bal tribes of that other world where you traveled in other fashions. Now that you are shut up so safely in the guts of Manhattan, your friends feel at ease about you — surely the sun shall not smite you by day nor the moon by night.

And yet, perversely, in this perfection of safety, you are intimidated. Suddenly passive after your desperate adventures with traffic, you feel the hidden things of memory rise and flood your heart; you dream. You remember other times of day than the manufactured night of the subway, and other ways of travel. And suddenly, in the indestructible silence that is the core of that incessant clamor, you hear a bugle calling in a forest clearing that is halfway round the world.

THE DRUM IN THE CLEARING

EVERY adult in our forest has a name to be beaten out on the call-drum; by this he is summoned from the forest to the village or from town to town. These nicknames are like proverbs, disclosing the authentic irony of the Bulu mind; and while there is no gender in the Bulu dialect, often the tenor of the comment is a clue.

Abota tells me her drum name or *ndan* is, "You are the limit, the limit, of beauty!"

"My *ndan*," says Esola, "is, 'The little parrot has eaten all the palm nuts,' and that is a way of saying I am small but able."

"And mine," says Zam, "is, 'Don't walk in the towns, your husband is jealous.'" And Miwu's husband when

he beats her *ndan* on his call-drum announces by that medium — “It isn’t only your style; it is that I love you!”

There is no accounting for tastes. I think of this, looking at the last two speakers, who are outraged by the years and past repair. Then I remember they carry these flattering *bindan* from the past and the days of proud youth. And I remember that most cruel *ndan* — “Where is this beauty hidden?” about which I have been told that it is as if you had heard great fame of a woman said to be beautiful, who proves not to be so. “Therefore you say — ‘Where is this beauty hidden?’ You know how it is, Matyenda.”

You do know. And many another ironic *ndan* comes to mind:

“He wants a present, the tears fall.”

“Your friends — perhaps they are right.”

"A beautiful face is not to be borrowed."

"The feet of the favorite are not wet by the dew."

From the shade of my eaves I see our own call-drum, a hollowed log four feet long, the original round of the log trimmed to an oval, the open ends plugged with a softer wood. It is mounted on a sawhorse under a little hood of thatch, overhanging from the brink of our clearing, a world of crowding hills and the climbing tide of the forest. Lost to the eye in that green flood, little villages sleep, and every little village has its tongue. Now and again from the deep of the forest rises the staccato beat of a call-drum — the voice of the village speaking across the uninhabited places, calling the women home from the gardens — "For the guests are many." Warning an absent hunter that "Your

wife has run away!" Or, "Your wife has borne a child." Presently Sakutu, our own drummer, will put his hand in the fissure which cleaves the length of our drum, and will bring out two sticks; striking the drum with these, he will abruptly and terrifically, and in the most expert manner, split into accurate lengths of tumult the quiet day. Then the voice from the thick lip of the drum, which is the man-voice, and the voice from the thinner lip, which is the woman-voice — for there is a least difference between the thickness of the lips of the cleft along the length of the drum — will cry out to the rim of our horizon. Everywhere the villages will give ear to a message from the white man's town, until seventeen miles from here, in the neighborhood of Njabilobe, the last vibration dies.

With his two notes, male and female, and with every interval of time and the

very pulse of rhythm — Sakutu powerfully and delicately beats the drum. The great boomings and crashings rage and rage about him, and fall and fall away from him; the little grace-notes and demi-semi quavers follow, follow after, like little curls of smoke soon lost in air. For five minutes Sakutu leans above the drum, his back sweating and his muscles rippling, while he forces time and space to speak the mind of man. And when he leaves off, and is seen to breathe again, his face is complacent, as it may well be. Then back into the hollow of day flow the inexhaustible silences; they drown the great crying of Sakutu.

But certainly, while it lasted, it was a great voice.

To the trained ear the drum actually syllabizes; the inflection of a phrase, its cadences, are perfectly transmitted, and a Bulu speaking his *ndan* with his tongue

curiously approximates the sound of the drum. And the idiom of the code is as non-committal and evasive as the Bulu are. Sakutu, summoning the women of the neighborhood to bring their produce to our little market, will beat out the old food call — “Since morning I have not eaten,” or, “I hear hunger in my stomach,” or — most cutting and reproachful of phrases — “As I was yesterday, so am I to-day.” Of a Sunday before dawn I shall be happed about, where I lie in my bed, by the strong vibrations of the Sunday morning call, and shall wake and sleep and wake again to the great shoutings of the drum, that proclaims — “The promise we promised yesterday is fulfilled to-day — is fulfilled to-day” — a phrase which is a whole engagement book in itself, and which is ratified by the interested parties, with calculations upon certain notched sticks, or the moving up

of wooden pegs into the last of seven holes. There are six hundred outposts in our mission, and six hundred drummers rise before the dawn of a Sunday morning to smite from drums, new and old, the call.

In the old code all the primal facts of life have their phrases, and all the adventures and the misadventures, their announcements. From a village in a valley when the headman dies, his drum name rises to us in the afternoon, coupled with the old poignant call to mourning, "*Ba, ba, mo toé*" (Cross his hands on his breast). Suddenly out of the forest this phrase, swift as an arrow, is aimed at the heart of man. Under the immediate thrust of it all the life in our clearing is arrested, we stand where we are and listen.

"Ba, ba, mo toé!"

This is what the drum says when you die. Thus, from time immemorial, has

the death of their fellows been announced to these tribes — there is a crying in the wilderness of one, and another, and another, drum. Until all the drums of the neighborhood proclaim your name and your mortality. Yes, even if you are a white man.

The dance-drum, like the call-drum, is a hollowed log. It is upright and is beaten by the palm of the hand. In 1600 B.C., and before that, and ever since, it has saluted the moon. On every moonlight night, in every village, a drummer stands by the upright drum, his hands on the skin of the drumhead, a miracle of precision, his face upturned to the moon in an ecstasy of rhythm, ravished with the clamor of it; while the white night passes and the townspeople dance, and chant, and cry, clapping the perfectly accurate intervals. The white man, waking in his bed to that certain incessance of

the dance-drum, is troubled, and guesses at secret meanings, at obscure and hurrying agitations, at ignoble lassitudes and latent despairs — not more of the senses than of the spirit. It is a particular misery to wake, before the dawn, to the stale and bitter dregs of the dance-drum. But when the call-drum gives tongue at night, to the sudden and violent disasters of our uncertain life, the heart is stricken and halts. I have wakened with the clamor of the night alarm from many drums, falling as thick upon my heart as rain. "Abroad! Abroad! let no man sleep!" And no man slept. The memory of this many-tongued midnight panic has long outlived the memory of the simple explanation which came to us with the morning.

Drums are not all of equal power, nor are their voices more alike than the voices of people are. So I am told by my

friends who could never, say they, fail to locate a drum by its voice. Ekom, the famous craftsman, is dead, but his drums still speak in our valleys, and it was he made for Ngem the great drum that never lied. For so brave was Ngem, and of such an infallible cruelty, that a warning once drummed by him was speedily fulfilled. His exceeding joy, say my friends with the utmost enthusiasm, was the killing of men. A most admirable man. He died, to the long grief of his tribe, and for him too, I suppose, was beaten the call to mourn. But not on his own drum. For who, ask my friends, should beat the drum of so great a man? At the voice of it many would remember and grieve. Or might it not be, say others, that the people, hearing the voice of his drum, would say in their hearts that Ngem had returned?

Into the daylight of our clearing, where

so many miseries are brought and obscure terrors of the heart, this terror has been brought by those who have heard the voice of a dead man's drum. At night they heard it, and rose with the morning to come to Efulan Station. Here was the little huddled group of them before the screen door to tell us:

“For he died, you understand, and we put him in the grave, all that was finished. Yet we heard his *ndan* — not from any village, but from the uninhabited places of the forest where no town is — the beating of a drum that calls him by his name. So we said we will rise and go to Efulan. And now we have come we ask you: what are we to think of this?”

EKUTU

WE are going to visit Atonkum, who is the headman of the Mbite Mbane tribe at Ekutu.

Atonkum is a powerful chief after the old fashion. Of an evening, by the light of his palaver house fire, you may see the entire company of his women, with their dressed heads all turned one way and their bright eyes trained on Atonkum, whose they are and whom they serve. There, too, are his retainers, young and old. Men with musical instruments are there, men with dogs, men with spears; men to buy girls are there, and men to sell them. Carriers are there with loads of rubber that scent the haze of the dim interior; medicine men are there, looking like their neighbors — it is the old patriarchal group of the Bantu. And, if you

were to drive all those lounging bodies from the bamboo couches, and to lift these from the ground, certainly you would find a big old ivory under more than one of them.

Old tales and tales of hunting pass the hour under that thatch where there is nothing new. In the daytime lesser headmen, very important and big with palavers, come to visit Atonkum, who is a judge and "cutter of palavers." There is a mighty ostentation of drums like an aura about them; their young drummers stride before them in particolored bark breeches; themselves are carried in rattan chairs that are borne on the shoulders of men; their women run after them — their bustles flying like horses' tails. This rhythmical clamor and agitation of brown bodies creates a core of excitement in the hot waste and middle of the day, as it prevails in the town of Atonkum.

Ekota, no less, is visiting Atonkum, with palavers of a superior sort. All Ekota's palavers — and everything of his — are superior — his mother has told me so. Even his wives, though she does not like them, are superior. Beautiful women. So his mother says. And he is certainly a person of a rumored fame. "If you were an alien," says a Bulu proverb, "we would stab you!" Ekota is headman near Akonalinga and he is a modern. He looks incredibly respectable among the brigandish crew that rages about Atonkum. He was popular with the German Government in our pre-war days, and here is a tale he tells of himself — that is glamorous, as all our tales about ourselves must be:

The French, if we are to believe Ekota, when first they occupied the southern Cameroon, called all the chiefs to a palaver. And they put to them this

riddle: Which do you prefer, the French or the German Government? Then all the chiefs, but our hero, said they had no fathers but the French. The chiefs of the forest, and the chiefs of the French — affirmed they — were just one person. This union was asserted in all the dialects of the neighborhood. Then said Ekota — “I must tell you the truth. I do not know you yet, nor your customs. I knew the Germans and their customs — we were friends. It may be you and I will be friends when we are acquainted.” “Aha!” says the Frenchman — so much wiser than old Lear — “You are our man!” And they gave him great power.

To-day, standing in the dusk of Atonkum’s palaver house, Ekota looks, as much as may be, like a Frenchman; he wears a Frenchman’s pointed beard and a French uniform; his carriage and his gestures have certainly been modeled on the

attitudes of an admired Frenchman. He is engaging, but, oh, he is a tame figure beside his opponent, who leans upon the shaft of a spear, who wears, exactly as his father did, a bark breechcloth, and who makes, in answer to Ekota's French indignations, the old swift gestures with his spear, stepping out into the ring which custom clears for them, with the old conventional rhythm.

Can it be that Ekota is as respectable as he looks?

No one quite knows why Ekota is visiting Atonkum, but every one knows why the white people have come. And if his visit is for reasons of state and attended by clamors and agitations, drums and drummers, we too have our heralds. The drums of every village in that backwoods publish our expected visit, and for days the Christians of that neighborhood stream along the forest trails to the town

of Atonkum. They travel in little caravans, and in each little caravan there is an evangelist. That is he — the young man with the clock! One of those tin clocks of which we take so small account at home, and that are so terribly thrilling a symbol of time in the timeless forest. On how many journeys I have passed such a company with a clock ticking in the hands of an evangelist, as if it were the very beating heart of that little group. But an evangelist, let me tell you, is marked by other signs than the possession of a clock. He who is the pioneer in friendship, going out from his own tribe to serve the alien and the savage — those cannibals and murderers and sorcerers whose tribal signs are other than his own, and whose misdeeds have been lurid in the chronicles of his father from the beginning — he is a marked man. He is distinguished by his aspect, by his dress,

by his authority, and most of all by a look — often very touching on a young face — of a concern more than brotherly — a motherly concern, for the standing and the conduct of the untutored flocks that trail him all the days of his journey, till they come to camp on the eve of the communion service.

For the white people are to hold a communion service. And on that day there will be a vast commotion of people under the roof of the house of God in Ekutu.

On the outskirts of Atonkum's village there is a mission clearing and a little bark hut where the white women will swelter all day. That hot cabin is beaten upon from every side by the babble of the tribe of man; black people hang about it as if they were swarming bees. Every sort of woman goes in and out of that hut — beauty comes in there with banners, and old age with sackcloth, the widow

with her weeds and daubed with clay, the childless woman with her haunted eyes and the mother of children with her baby hanging at her side in a deerskin sling. Stricken women with pitiful diseases press in there, and girls so robust they thrill the air. Here, as everywhere, are the urban and the rustic, to be known by their dress. The white woman threads her way among these many aspects to the heart of her woman, and is often taken aback by what is there. The crowd from Asok look so shabby to her, so dusty with a three days' walk, that she condescends to them in a particular fashion, speaking to them of the most rudimentary of the things of God. Until one of these Makae women, smiling at her from sweet and indulgent eyes, is heard to murmur, "Yes, the Lord God has certainly said so!"

Who is this woman, in her dusty leaves, speaking with such serene and intimate

authority of the sayings of the Lord God? She is no other than Biké, pioneer Christian of her neighborhood, and these other timid ones pressing up against her in that little hot shelter are all her children in the Lord. The moral of this is: Never size up your audience on the basis of clothes.

And yet — how to escape the obsession of clothes! They are the very flags on the peak of the adventure. When communion Sunday dawns — before the dawn — there is a great preoccupation with clothes, and a buzzing about clothes, in the many little huts and beside the camp-fires of that neighborhood. Those many bodies that stream by us to the church have been bathed and anointed with oil. No woman but has got her a new green leaf and has donned her best grass bustle. The wives of headmen and of evangelists wear loin-cloths, or a wider cloth drawn close under their arms. Little girls dragging at their

mothers' hands, wear miniature copies of their mothers' dress — like their mothers they wear green leaf-aprons and little bustles, belts of leopard skin, and superfluous garters of bright beads. Like their mothers, when they are in church they will strive to subdue their bodies to an awe and an observance of God's house, suffering the crowdings of their arms and legs, and fixing the white people, who face them from the platform, with anxious and earnest eyes.

And the white people on the platform are anxious and earnest, too. They have lost all sense of proportion. They have forgotten all they ever knew about the great continent of Africa, and all the statistics of the many Christian denominations at work there. They are overstrained by their visit to the neighborhood of Atonkum, where they have met the familiar and racking misery of being

too few. This harassing knowledge has overstrained them; so that, sitting there under the leaf thatch that is the church, they are like over-wearied mothers of over-many children. The agitations of that gathering, the crowding, the pompous arrivals of headmen, the dogs who have come to church, the selfish people who have come late — these agitations wear upon the white people; their nerves tremble — until a silence falls upon those many people and the worship of God begins.

There is a boy at this service who gives a pair of trousers in the collection basket. You did not know he meant to give the trousers, you could not guess what he meant to do with them. He wears a loin-cloth of beaten bark; he sits folding and unfolding the trousers, that are bright green. You wonder wherever did he get them — they are a miracle. And you dis-

approve of him, believing he is a school-boy, thinking the young should show the old a better example; thinking he is a snob — until the great basket, with its harvest of sacrifice, passes his way — and there are the green trousers in the basket! All sorts of things are there, from the egg to the hen, from balls of crude rubber to silver pieces of money — but the green trousers are surely, in that forest community, the only trousers

Atonkum has a bugler. Taps are sounded any time after midnight and reveille at the most cruel hours. These outrages are the subject of impassioned conversation when the white people meet for breakfast on every morning of their visit but the Monday after communion Sunday. On that morning the white people are off on the trail before the bugler wakes. They journey for an hour under stars and a waning moon. The

country about Ekutu is rather open; it has rained in the night; the white bodies of the trees are bathed in the moonlight and the wet leaves everywhere take a sharper silver. When you look suddenly at the moon, you see the "whole fruit" as the Bulu say — there is the bright quarter and the shadow rimmed with its silver band.

The little villages sleep beside the path sending up their exhalation of smoke. They sleep! The white people slip by them in silence, a delicious, secret silence, not to be broken for worlds. The hand of Ethiopia, all day long stretched out to the missionary, sleeps at the brown side. Until the sun shall rouse the sick who want to be healed, and the ignorant who want to be schooled, and the sorrowful who want to be comforted, and the wicked who want to be good. Then it all begins over again, and who shall be found equal to these things?

OF LUXURIES AND HARDSHIPS

OFTEN you read in books that the missionary lives in luxury, and you are to believe it. He knows it himself — none better than he. When he comes back from a tour of his part of the African forest, and the luxury of his own clearing bursts upon him, he is amazed by it. There it is, like a cup full to the brim with luxury.

Those little mushroom houses of his own planning are shaggy with the thickest of palm-leaf thatch; they stand on ironwood stilts; there is glass in every window of them, and a stove in every kitchen of them, and a batch of white man's bread in every oven. There is a rose before the door and a cabbage in the garden. There is a black boy in the garden — he is the gardener; and another under the house washing out the clothes

— he is the wash-boy; and a boy in the kitchen baking the bread, and one in the middle room playing a crooked game on the table with knives and forks that are twisted.

These are the wonderful servants of the white man. They cry out with joy when they see him returned from his journey — and I ask you, when did your servants do that? It is a luxury. And they rush to tell the white woman — for there is a white woman in that house, and a calendar (which is a thing of the white man entirely), and the white woman has been telling off the days on the calendar against the luxury of her husband's return. And for that day she has planned the most luxurious meal. She hopes there will be fresh meat, but if the huntsman fails her she means to "kill a tin." They will have kippered herring or a tin of sausage for supper, and tinned asparagus.

There they will sit under the clear bright light of a double-burner angle-lamp, — double-burner, mind you, — with their bark walls about them and the forest wall pushed back from their roof and the large expensive stars above their clearing — or the moon in the sky, and the sound of dance-drums rising from the valleys — and the degree of their comfort is excessive. They reread their home letters and the paper that is two months old or the latest novel of three years ago — the sort of thing you would not be found dead doing. Or they look at the butterflies and beetles they have bought for fish-hooks, instead of having caught them themselves.

Nothing could better it — unless it rains. If I could tell you what they feel when it is a night like this and the rain roars on the thatch and from all the eaves there is a fall of water that shines in the lamplight — and the two of them together

there, lapped in luxury — you could not bear to hear of it. Envy would bite you, and you would break the Tenth Commandment. It is just the sort of spectacle that makes anarchists. When it rains, none of their thousands of friends come to see them; they go to bed at nine o'clock; and when, I ask you, had you a chance to do that? You see what I mean.

And if their skies are furnished more elaborately than their station justifies — as they are — why, so are their houses. There is furniture in those houses that is famous for miles about. Black women come from a distance, and creep up the white woman's stair on their hands and knees — a most hazardous adventure — to look at the mirror that is there.

I remember a chest of drawers in such a little cabin, and it was priceless. Money could not buy it. The possession of it was a corruption. I owned it for a year,

and the thought of it obsessed all my journeys — I would rush untimely home from a professional itineration, to verify its presence. It furnished my room when I was at home and my heart when I was abroad. It had three stomachs, each of these larger than the one above it — all bulged. It was painted to simulate mahogany, but it was more vivid than mahogany, as a painted girl is more vivid than a girl. The three drawers of it must have come inland on the back of a carrier and the body of it on another back. It was the only imported article of furniture in the house, and I witness here and now that one luxury may make a summer. I cannot think how I bore to part with it, as I must have done. The drawers of it stuck in that humid air, but this was not a flaw — that chest of drawers was flawless. It was full of roaches.

And the roaches were there for the

people who are sure that we endure the most crushing hardships. They expect so much of the animals and the cannibals and the climate that you hate to disappoint them, and you tell them about the roaches. How big they are, and how silly. How there are so many of them, and that they are forever leaving their little Gladstone bags full of their little foundlings on the steps of your most private doors. That you lace them up in your shoes and pull them out of your pockets and pour them out of your teapots. And once — but no, you think, I won't tell them that. Besides, these people who are enamoured of hardships are not to be put off with a cockroach. Surely, they say, there are days when you live above the level of your cockroaches.

And you are bound to agree that on the days when you have looked higher for your hardships you have found them.

You wonder if you will tell these amateurs that there are days when the major hardships are as many as there are missionaries at the station, and the minor hardships are as many as the things they say and do; that the character of such a day is evident from its dawn. You know what you are in for at breakfast; and if you are very, very wise, you know what the other fellow is in for. If you are as wise as that, you take the quinine yourself as well as prescribe it for your neighbor. Neither dose on such a day is superfluous, or ever entirely adequate.

Refinements of technique do not come amiss on such a day. Do not discuss the postman's schedule — where he should be sleeping the night, or what may be the day and the hour when he will cast his shadow in the clearing. If there are two of you — and the nature of this hardship is based on the gregarious quantity —

these speculations will produce an optimist whose postman is winged, and a pessimist whose postman has been drowned in a river that has risen under a rain that is about to fall. For that same reason, do not discuss the schedules of steamers; avoid discussion of the merits of station clocks, personal watches, and the time of day. Differences of opinion and desperate loyalties to opposing time-pieces in a forest where there is no umpire but the sun, due to set among hills, might breed the hardship of murder. And oh! do not claim inordinate virtues and excessive talents for your house-boy. Let him be as other house-boys are. And don't diagnose this, either.

Best of all, if you have a job twenty miles away from the station, go off in the morning, and take your day of hardship to yourself. Savor it while you may, for it will not last long. In a respectable

mission, where there are no heroes, and there is a bias against the chronicle of adventure, the intoxication of hardship is brief. Presently you will be protesting that it was not like that at all, and that you have had a most wonderful day. You will come limping back to the station where all the clocks are right and all the food is good, and the house-boy and the wash-boy and the cook are all your friends, and your fellow missionary is your brother; and you have had the most wonderful day, or ten days, or month, in the most wonderful country, and the most wonderful profession, in the world. Such is the effect of the hardship — or is it a luxury? — of fatigue.

There is an essential jewel of fatigue so costly that it must be a luxury. It is a pearl for which you pay many another pearl, and it is done up in endless wrappings of efforts and of hours. You are

drawn to it by endless paths in the rainy season — you wander through the débris of the forest, you cross rivers on little bridges that are under water, you struggle through sand by a sea that thunders under an excessive moon. You think not at all of the luxury of fatigue, until suddenly it is night: the stars are out; there is your fire by the way and your pot on the fire. You dry those tears. You drink your coffee. And you feel a rapture. Something from the very bones of you sings under the long pressure of the thorn of fatigue.

I know my metaphors are mixed, and so is the matter of fatigue. It is, indeed, a wine and a thorn and a pearl and an unforgettable rapture. There is no wanderer in the world — soldier, sailor, flyer, missionary, tinker, or other vagabond — but remembers with an extreme and unforgettable nostalgia the rapture of such

an end to such a day of effort. There is none of them but is lost when he smells a blend of bacon and coffee and wood-smoke — and is far away in a camp that was broken long ago. There he sits, in a ragged canvas chair by a little fire on the ground; and there is a black boy beside him, or a yellow boy, or a boy enameled in tattoo, who squats before the fire. That ring of light is the exact center of a shadowy world. He is there at rest, and he is alone. He is altogether lulled by the luxury of the firelight and the silence and the solitude.

Sometimes solitude is a luxury, but not always. Often I have thought of the fishermen of Theocritus, lying against the leafy wall of that wattled cabin by the sea. Because there were two of them, one might tell his dream to the other. And the Two Orphans — each had a sister. Or Dick Whittington — he had his cat.

You think of these things when you are lonely, on a night of the rainy season when the rain is like a wall about the little house where you sleep. Or you are lying at night in a house by the sea, and it is the breathless hour of interval between the land-breeze and the sea-breeze. You hear an empty surf at your door, and you are lonely. Or you have been all day on a journey among strange villages, and you come at night to sleep among strangers. By the light of your lantern in this village where the townsfolk sleep you are reading "Macbeth." "Out, out, brief candle!" says Macbeth; and you alone there by your lantern, which is the only candle in the whole diameter of the darkness of the forest — you are loath to put it out. Or it is the horrible hour of midday on a journey by the sea, and two of your carriers are quarreling. You sit on a log in the lee of the forest. You hear their

grievances, and you administer your languid and impeccable justice; but in the face of these passionate alien furies you feel your isolation and a loneliness. Your carriers regain their customary aspect and are at peace again, but all that day they are strange to your heart — there is everywhere a strangeness. Or you are at home in a village all day, and you have friends in every hut of that village; but in the evening there is a strangeness: there is a shadow of degradation. Dusk falls on that village, and in your heart.

Every missionary in the world knows what I mean, and every girl who is wishing to be a missionary should be told of such hours, and cannot be told. There is no way to be telling her.

All the hardships of which she will have account are tangible, like leopards and cannibals and driver-ants — carnivorous hardships. The leopard that took the

German police dog from beside Mrs. Adams's bed. The cannibal who threw the boy's head under the eaves of the little mission outpost, saying, "There is the white man's portion; let him come and take it!" The driver-ants that do truly drive you from your house — and even on a Saturday night before a communion Sunday, which, in face of the agitations of Saturday and Sunday, is indeed a hardship. These are the favorite hardships. There is a permanent demand for them at home, and in the heart of every young missionary an adequate and fostered fortitude with which to meet them. The last thing such a one looks to see is a reed shaken by the wind. And yet there you are — the woods are full of them — reeds shaken by the wind! And this is the hardship of anticlimax.

There are the leopards and the cannibals and the driver-ants, all truly numer-

ous and truly carnivorous; and for years and years and years you survive them. The cannibals make friends with you. They beg you to visit their villages, where they feed you on chicken stewed in peanuts. There is a leopard's spoor on the trail and the mark of a big paw, but all you ever see of the leopard is the thrilling striped length of a dead one. The snakes that fall from the trees never fall on you. And when the driver-ants swarm over the little cabin where you live, and you rush away with your clothes gathered up as you go, your kitten escapes with you, the hens are let out of the henhouse, the shepherd delivers the sheep and the goats, and it is all quite matter-of-fact and different from the event as imagined.

It is all quite different. The sheep set up a clamor in the night and you are sure they are menaced; it will be a leopard, you think. You rush to the window, and

there is a mist of light among the high grasses about the path to the sheepfold. It is old Ngalli the shepherd, with his torch of reeds. By that little light the white trunks of the trees flash out and the little log hut at the foot of them. The savior has come to the sheepcotes, and that high hysterical crying subsides.

You cannot go to bed, the night is too lovely. You watch the stars, until Ngalli comes back to put them out with his torch, which has burned low, and is a light on his feet, and his loincloth that is the color of earth, and his old brown body, and his withered face that is kind. "It was nothing," he stops to tell you. There is a little new lamb in one of the sheepcotes. And you are to go to bed, leaving him to care for the sheep.

"Sleep well," says old Ngalli. "Am not I the shepherd of the sheep?"

THE ORACLE OF FASHION

IN every mission there is an Oracle of Fashion, and this is the one who is last from home. This office is of brief tenure — and the Oracle's end is obviously of the nature of the tragedy in the Golden Bough, where the slayer himself is slain.

Those who most resort to the Oracle are those who are afraid of looking funny on the steamer going home. As soon as you know when you are going home, you begin to decide whether you are afraid of looking funny on the steamer. And if you are afraid, you begin to want to know certain rudimentary things — where to find a waistline, where on a head is a hat, and how wide is a skirt.

Julia is like that — she wants to know all these things. She is going to make a dress out of the purple blanket, if we can

find buttons to fit some crocheted button-covers we have found. The Oracle, who is dogmatic about where to find a waist-line, has been no more than forty per cent successful about the buttons.

"Ask your husband," says the Oracle. And Julia, asking George, gets two buttons from him — they are of the right size — from his pajamas. The button-covers are five. It is too disappointing. The Oracle tells Julia not to despair; that there are other pajamas in the mission, and that she is to command the next passer-by to inquire of every man he sees in every forest clearing. You never can tell, says the Oracle, *who* has the buttons.

About her shoes the Oracle said to patch them up the back with adhesive tape. And every one said — "Of course." Only Julia did not say this, her expression was agnostic. She said she was afraid she would look funny on the steamer.

But she cannot go barefoot, can she? There you are.

And to comfort her for the shoes, we tell her of the time Mr. Beanland had the barber on the steamer dye his white shoes, and they came out a beautiful black — all but the big white eyelets for the lacings. And about the young trader, who had his coat done over by a black tailor on the Gold Coast, and it was returned to him with a velvet collar, bright green. So that the trader begged us, on every day of our voyage up the coast, to agree that the weather would be so cold at the Canaries that he could transship there with his coat collar turned up. He would die of shame, he said, to be taking a big Cape steamer, with a collar green as grass. Every day we remembered, and told him so, that the weather at the Canaries, when you are homeward-bound, is bitter cold. Warm when you are out-

ward-bound, and cold when you are going home. Once, I told him, I nearly wept with the cold at the Canaries, and this tale comforted him most of all. Not really? he wanted to know; and could never hear enough of my sufferings. But when we called at the Canaries the weather was warm, and we all felt perjured. A southbound steamer was in port, with the weather you get when you are outward-bound — and for this, or for other reasons, it was torrid. So we said, “Go ashore with your coat on your arm — carry it with the collar inside out.” But he said no, he could not do that. His suit was too shabby. We wanted to deny this, but we could not — the more because some passengers from the outward-bound boat had come aboard on a visit — and our eyes were enlightened. We herded in a corner of the deck and observed these bright beings — their com-

plexions and their clothes — with the bitterest envy. So we told him he was lucky to have a coat, and to think of the poor fellow who had sold his overcoat, off the Gold Coast, for a gold ring with the signs of the Zodiac. “Be a sport,” we told him — “Wear your coat with the collar turned up — no matter what you suffer!” So he did; he went ashore in a cockleshell full of fruit, all bathed in sunshine, waving his hat to us and his face laughing out of the collar of his coat.

“If it is as cold as you say,” Julia tells us, “I can wear my muffler.” We have devised a muffler for her. And Mr. Beanland has just donated a large silk handkerchief with the British flag in one corner and in another the legend — *Made in Japan*. We are still thinking what we can make for Julia with this contribution, and whether to display the legend or to suppress it. The “Ladies’

Home Journal" — four months old — has nothing to say to our problems. Except in the matter of ivory beads — ivory beads, we infer, are correct. And that Julia may be correct in this detail, if in no other, Ndong Mbé, from a tusk, is getting her a string of these.

As for George, poor fellow, no one takes his dilemmas to heart; he is to go home as he came out four years ago.

"There is something about shaving," we tell him, "that starts you new every morning."

THE HOST IN THE HUT

LÊT white men and women who have lived in the African forests proclaim that there is a host in the hut. Into how many rude shelters have we been driven by the night or by the storm. There by the fire laid upon the clay floor we have dried ourselves, relaxing in that warmth and light, smelling at last to the very skin of wood-smoke. How often for us has the wooden spoon been dipped into the common kettle, and been tasted by the headman himself, thus to prove past doubting that the food is not poisoned. Until at last by acquaintance we have come to know the many little conventions of hospitality, and have learned to endure without complaint the complimentary sweeping, when the genteel hostess with a little broom of rushes worries the dust of her floor.

Old Minkoe Ntem, who built her house in the middle of the street "because those who pass my house whether by one wall or the other wall must find an open door," she it was who told me that the things of hospitality are old in the Bulu heart. Before ever a Bulu saw a white man or heard the Word of God the Bulu were hospitable. And Melom Ngoe, for my instruction, has written a little treatise in Bulu on these matters, with which he is well fitted to deal. Melom is that sort of reputable man who is called in our forest a "real person."

Melom calls his little book, "Hospitality is of Many Kinds." This is, believe me, a treasure of Bulu wisdom, untinctured by the wisdom of the white man. He writes about two thousand words, covering the *many kinds*, and there is in all his comment an ironic edge hard to conserve in translation. "There is," he

says, "a man who is hospitable because he was born hospitable. There is a man who is hospitable because he desires a gift in return. And a man who is hospitable because he has many possessions.

"And there is a giving," says Melom, "of the mouth." This he discounts — "even if a man laughs merrily there is no help for the hungry in this laughter. Better a generous man with a heavy countenance than a laughing giver with the mouth.

"There is a woman who will cook, not in a big pot, but in a little pot. This is the woman who likes to eat alone. That sort of woman," says Melom, laconically, "has not many friends. And there is a woman who is famous, not for beauty, but for generosity. All the guests of the village eat out of her kettle; all the children of the village, all her husband's other wives, all her husband's unmarried rela-



tives — all these people sit down in her house. We call that woman,” says Melom, “‘the friendly woman.’ And there is a man so mean that when his wife cooks a good cooking, for all he keeps quiet, he will go away and speak to her alone and will say — ‘Why did you cook so much food?’

“If a man is hospitable, then his wife should excel in cooking; thus the two will be famous because they are of an equal strength. The man who is industrious in clearing the forest for the garden, and the woman who is industrious in planting and in cooking — these two will be famous — they are of an equal strength and of an equal wisdom. But you see how it is if one of the two is generous and the other is mean — then they will never truly be friends, for their hearts will have missed one another on the two paths. The guests who go to that village will not like to stay there.

"Guests," says Melom, laconic again, "do not like quarreling. You know how it is," he suggests. And he chronicles, in his little book, that there have been cases where a hospitable woman has run away from her husband because "her fame was dimmed" by his manners. And hospitable men, too, have sold mean wives for a like cause.

It is to be remembered, if these measures seem drastic, that the virtue of hospitality is not academic in a country where except by good-will a stranger may not eat, and where, if you are to see the world at all, your guest of one dry season may be your host of the next dry season. There is a whole section in Melom's book about the guest who comes from afar. "You may meet him again," you are warned, "and in his own place."

"The eating of food," according to Melom, "is of many kinds. If a man gives

you food when you are hungry, whether the food is good or bad, you will like to eat it because of hunger. And if you like a person and he gives you food, though you have already eaten your fill, you will taste it — if only a morsel — lest it appear that you hate him or scorn his food. You eat then because you want him to know that you love him. We Bulu say — ‘First friendship — bring the pig after.’”

About children, I learn that you cannot begin too young. “For this cause we Bulu beg of our children their little possessions. For the custom a man learns midway is a thing hard to grow and to become a whole thing. The person who was born hospitable is the one who finds that custom easy in these days.”

“These days” of which Melom writes are the days of the enlarged hospitality which is the custom of the people of the

Tribe of God, when there are great gatherings, from great distances, of pilgrims who come in by the many little trails of the forest to the mission clearings. Then the Christian women of the neighborhood sleep on the floor, and the bamboo beds of the Christians are invaded by strangers with rustic headdresses — “country people,” old-fashioned in their custom — born of alien tribes. If you are a Christian there will be, on assembly Sunday, babies in your hut who are no kin of yours, and old women who are not your mothers in the flesh nor your mothers-in-law, but just poor old bodies who are your fellows in the Tribe of God.

On the eve of such a festival, in the huts where there is a brown huddle of guests, and without where the dark is sown with a bright spangle of camp-fires, there is everywhere a common gayety and laughter. The water from the spring, the fire-

wood from the forest, the leaf from the tree — none of these symbols of hospitality is measured, and — almost — the things of war and of famine are forgotten. Almost, the Bulu forget the days of the war and after, when the refugees — they who had been carriers for white officers and black soldiers, they who were the war brides of the black soldiers, they who were mothers of babies, they who were too old to keep the march, they who had been wounded — when all these strangers passed in an endless caravan by the huts of the Bulu people. The last stand of the Germans in Cameroon was made in this neighborhood; from here they went over into the neutral territory of Spanish Guinea. Fifteen thousand carriers, caught up from their homes here and there in the forest, went with them. And presently the tide turned, the carriers, released on the Spanish beach with a

silver mark in hand, began to hunt their way home. Back they came who were able, deliberating at crossroads what turn to take in a country that was strange, beggars every one in his own home tongue. There was hunger on the path and hunger in the hut — for the Bulu has no store; we plant no more than a daily bread and eighteen months of war had reduced the gardens. If the Christians were to be hospitable now, it must be at personal cost — not the hospitality of the “man of many possessions.”

They were hospitable. An extraordinary mass hospitality flourished everywhere in the forest. Suddenly everywhere at the door of the hut, there was a Bulu with a morsel of cassava bread and a gourd full of water.

Mr. Dager saw such a one sitting by her door and she was cutting her cassava bread in little pieces. These she gave to

the strangers who passed her way. And to Mr. Dager she said — “I grieve that I must cut my little pieces so small!”

This is how the stranger fared. And the tribal enemy was served in the same fashion. Many a time, sitting in the windswept cabins of the Beach people, I have heard how the Bush people fed them from their kettles when the war was past. Once their guns were turned in — for the Bulu were armed against the Beach tribes during the war — the Christian Bulu sent a message to the famine-stricken Beach tribes. They were to come and be fed from Bulu kettles, they were to rest under Bulu roofs — “Until your gardens bear, and your houses are rebuilt.”

The Beach people are terrible snobs; they wear shoes and collars, and their age-old contempt for Forest people has been reinforced by these achieved distinctions. But the war broke down their

collars, and slit their beautiful trousers, and filled the back yards of their villages with the wrecks of their sewing-machines and their gramophones and their bicycles. They began to take their tatters and their empty bellies inland, and to sit by Bulu fires. They, whose favorite taunt of the Bush people had been — that they eat snake, were glad, indeed, of a portion of snake from the big pot. And to this day, sitting by their own beaches under the shadow of their own cocoanut palms, they remember and celebrate this hospitality. I only hope their children will do the same.

“They say,” says Melom in his treatise — and I imagine this evil reporter to have been the white man — “they say the black people eat greedily when they enter the houses of others. But they do not eat that way. They wait until the master of the house shall give them food. And if he does not give them, they will

go patiently to bed hungry — though they see the food.”

And again he says — “Remember that the stranger has no hearth, and that he has many longings.”

And I seem to see him in my heart — that Stranger without hearth and with the many longings — driven about the world in our day — going patiently to bed at last — hungry and not to wander farther. The people of our neighborhood have buried him. The land could not support all the strangers. But how many humble people have lived to say to the Bulu: “I was a stranger and I drank from your gourd; I ate from your kettle; by your hearth I dried my body wet with rain, and on your slatted bed my wounds were healed.”

“Do not say of the ajap tree in fruit,” writes Melom, “that it bears nothing but leaves.”

EXILE AND POSTMAN

IT used to make me homesick, in our little African clearing, to see the albino woman. She would move about among her brown companions like a flame — and her white body, that flickered in the sun and glimmered in the shade, used to knock at the door of nostalgia. Homesick people always long for a visit, and that albino was so white!

Once, to our neighborhood, where in those days white women did not come, there came a white woman. She did not lodge with us; she lodged with the white officer because she was an officer's wife. We used to wonder if she would call upon us. One of us had a field-glass, and we used to watch her little figure coming and going about the clearing on the Government hill. When one day she was seen

to come down into our valley by the zig-zag trail, we thought we had a Visit. I cannot tell you how anxious we were, in that little bark house, to make a good appearance — or what fresh disposals were made — with our eyes upon that descent — of our properties. I do not wish to make you too sad, but that white woman did not visit us. She went away. She did not know about us, or about exiles — that they are always dreaming of a Visit.

It seems a hard thing, sometimes, when night closes the doors of all the little trails, that the day has passed without a visitor. It is true of exiles that they have the most unreasonable expectations of the sort, based perhaps upon the migrations of swallows, and not relinquished until the hour of dusk. Yes, then the little trails of the forest are perceived by the mind's eye — which like a cat's eyes

sees them better for the dark — to wander away into an infinite distance and a solitude.

Dusk is altogether the most illuminating hour for the exile; he then knows so exactly where he is; he has a perfectly visual sense of his surroundings. He sees where he is, but how came he to be there? The geography of his circumstance is plain, but not the logic. He who has no other companions than himself, suspects this companion in that hour of dusk, to be a fool. It must be a poor fool, he thinks, who has drifted into such a clearing by such a river!

The forest of the Cameroon is as good a place as any to be homesick; but I will not be saying that the members of my profession are chronic sufferers. Missionaries are in the main, gay, and for excellent reasons — some of them pagan reasons, for they are little brothers of An-

tæus; some of them Christian reasons, for they are of the company of successful fishermen. A fisherman with a good catch can defy even the dusk; his string of silver fish is a lantern to his feet.

No, if there were an altar and a service to placate nostalgia, it would not be that fisherman who would most attend that service. The path to that altar would be worn brown by the feet of the trader. I think the trader is lonelier than the missionaries are; he is better versed in solitude. He goes into the forest with a backward look; he comes out of the forest sometimes with a secret and a stricken countenance. More often than the missionaries do, he builds out of his lonely horror and the license of solitude a perverse habitation for his soul. Sometimes — and this is very sad — he is afraid. He lingers and lingers on the margin of that green sea of forest.

“The heart,” say the Bulu, “has gone to hide in the dark.” And this is a Bulu way of saying that the heart is not worn upon the sleeve. Well, upon the sleeve of the white-drill suits that Beach-traders wear, there is, I will agree, no device of hearts. But those lonely inland traders — those who have traveled ten, twenty, thirty days from their kind — what is that they sometimes seem to wear upon the sleeve of their singlets? And who cares where he wears his heart if there is never a white man’s eye to fall upon it! In those little bark huts on the trading posts, where young white men pale with the passing hours, there comes to be a careless fashion in wear, whether of hearts or of collars. In the warm dusk of those little houses, where there is an earthen floor, where there are tin trade-boxes as bright as jockeys’ jackets, where there are trade cloths printed with violent de-

signs, where there is salt fish and cheap scent and tobacco — where all these desirable things may be had for ivory and rubber — there the trader may wear his heart upon his sleeve without shame. None of those brilliant eyes, set in those dark faces, know a white man's heart when they see it. There in his hut is a monotony of brown bodies quick with vehement gestures; there is a tumult of controversy in a tongue he does not know. The sudden glitter of brass ornament is there and the glitter of brass spears. There are fantastic headdresses studded with buttons and shells and beads, and scented with the odor of wood fires. Between those brown bodies and the body of the white man lies the counter. More lies between them than this. There are between them such barriers that the white man is not more lonely when he is alone.

Yet how still it is of an idle day under the thatched leaves of that little house! The sun does its exaggerated violence to the yellow earth of the clearing; the forest hangs its arras over its secret. How far it is, in this place not named on the map, from Manchester! How, when the rain falls, it is other than rainfall on the Clyde! How the pale fruit that hangs high on the ajap tree is not like the apples that ripen in Wishaw!

Do not speak of apples! Nostalgia in her cruel equipment carries a scented phantom apple.

At night there is about that young trader a trouble of drums that never rest. There is the sharp, concerted cry of the dancers. There is the concerted wail for the dead. There is about him all the rhythmic beating of the mysterious life of his neighborhood, tormenting him where he lies under his mosquito net.

For this he will rise and walk about, the ember of his pipe drifting back and forth in the dark, and his gramophone, roused by himself, making its limited obedient effort.

There is this about a gramophone: it is a thing that speaks the home tongue. I have seen him sitting under the eaves of his little hut, by his little table spread with a checkered cloth, his gramophone beside him, trying, with its tale of the old grouse in the gunroom, to divert that lonely meal. Now that I think of it, the gramophone is a kind of hero of my little piece — a kind of David with five tunes to do battle with nostalgia. Back in the tent broods Saul, and this poor patient David plays the endless round of five tunes. Until some day there is a javelin in the wall, and a proud black man goes away with a gramophone into the wilderness.

The night sky does more permanent ministry to the homesick, and of all the bright ministers the moon is the most effectual. It is the great reflector of lights; there it comes, swinging up its old path in the sky, and the fires of home are mirrored on its disk. You who read have spread your hands, in your hour of homesickness, to those phantom fires — and other hands are always spread. Some of us were sitting on our heels about a little flame in a new clearing; all of us were alien in that clearing; one of us was white. And the black women said to the white woman when the moonlight fell upon all those women faces — “The moon looks upon the villages and upon the home village. We black people, when we sit in the towns of strangers and the moon shines, we say, ‘Now by the light of this same moon the people at home dance to the drums!’” However far we walk, we

look upon the moon and we remember our friends at home."

Upon another moonlight night, sitting in a forest camp with young black girls for companions, these sang for me a little set of songs — the songs, they told me, of the moon:

"Ah, moné zip, alu a danéya!
Ah, moné zip!"

This little refrain they sang, clapping their hands ever so lightly, and the meaning of the singing was a warning:

"Ah, little gazelle, the night has deepened!
Ah, little gazelle!"

It was a song of the moon, a song for wanderers. And the moon on that remembered night, dragging its net of broken silver cords in among the trees of the forest, caught everywhere the wandering hearts and drew them back on the little rough trails to the home fires. Every night that is a moonlight night

there is the casting of that silver net upon far rivers and forests deeper than rivers — wherever aliens make a bed of leaves or sleep on a canvas cot.

On such a night, and caught in such a net, I have met the postman. Yes, on just such a night, when the world appeared as it hangs in space, a crystal globe, and when so observed from a little clearing in an African forest, it was seen to be charted for voyagers, and all its little paths ran readily about the globe to that gilt side which is home. On such a night, and upon such a path, I met the postman.

To hang upon a little wicket gate under the moon at the end of a moon-filled clearing in a breach of the forest — to see the black body of the postman suddenly darken the checkered light upon the path from the west — how to speak of this adventure with moderation! How to speak of postmen at all with moderation!

And of those postmen who thread the lonely forests of the world, their loads upon their backs, their rations of salt fish on top of their loads — how to recall their aspects, their monthly or bi-monthly or semi-annual arrivals, the priceless treasures they carry! How to speak of these things to men and women who have never followed the little gazelle into those forests where the night has deepened; who have never felt the divinity in postmen!

Imagine that there is a people in this world who let a postman walk up the path unattended, and who wait until he knocks on the door! Who do not shout to their neighbors when they receive a letter, and who receive one every day! These items alone prove the truth of the Bulu proverb that there are tribes and tribes, and customs and customs.

And I will agree that there are, even on the trails of the wilderness, postmen

and postmen. There are even, though I hate to dwell upon it, postmen whom I do not trust. Not all postmen have wings upon their heels. The ideal postman does, of course, fly. He is like

“The bird let loose in eastern skies
When hastening fondly home.”

He avoids idle wanderers. But they do not all do so. I remember to have been wakened one night in a village by the gossip of two old headmen. They had met before my tent; there in the moonlight they chatted together. All the little life of the village was sleeping; the two old men alone were abroad. They were about the business of the post. It is a pioneer custom in Africa, east and west, that the white man's local letter is franked from town to town. The black man to whom the white man gives his letter carries it to the headman of the next settlement, who carries it in turn to his brother headman

down the trail; and so from hand to hand, by day and by night, with a glance from any passing white man, the letter goes forward. Such a letter — carried as the custom is, in a split rod from which there hung, like a flag, a bit of turkey red — changed hands that night before my tent. And now I write it in a white man's book that the postmen loitered.

To stand and chat there in the moonlight with the exile's letter in your hands — how could you do that, you two old heartless headmen? I watched you from my little green tent. It is remembered of you that you so delayed, while in some lonely hamlet under that same moon a white man sickened for a letter. And when one gave the forked stick to the other, it was then too late. If, indeed, as you would say, you spoke no more than five words of gossip one to the other, those words were five too many. It is remem-

bered of you, and a thousand nights since when I have waited for the mail, if it were a moonlight night, I have told myself with an extreme self-pity and a bitterness, "The carrier is gossiping in some clearing." I have seen in my heart that man with the load of mail upon his back, standing for hours by a friend of his, laughing and asking news one of the other. This conjured vision of two black men holding up the mail is the sad issue of an imagination infected beyond cleansing. You see, I saw them do it.

Some postmen have come in late because their feet were sore. And some, in passing through their home town, have permitted themselves an illness or a marriage. Some have waited, with the mail in their loads, to bury the dead. Such a postman, so given to misadventures and clumsy ill-timed tragedies, was once late to the tune of eleven days. Who

remembers what delayed him or what exquisite reasons he gave? And who of us in that little clearing forgets the long hours of that year of days?

Another postman, of an extreme beauty and an extreme speed, arrived before his time. There was a shouting when he came. All the inhabitants of that little settlement of white men called to each other; the four or five of them filled a room of a bark house — those white faces that were growing daily like the face of the Asra, “bleich und bleicher,” were all lit by the flame of the mail. In all that little commonwealth, with its pioneer trades and its pioneer gardens and its pioneer hospital and school and church—in all that settlement all the busy crude wheels of industry slackened and stood still while the white men opened the load of the mail.

“Now they will be reading the books from home!”

And of Ebenga, that young carrier, it is still remembered that he arrived before he was due. "Ah, Ebenga," you still say to him from time to time, "that was a fine walking you walked that walk so long ago when you slept but three nights with the mail!"

Another postman, never to be forgotten by those exiles whom he served, never came at all. This was a boy, too young, you would think, for his great office. The letters in his little pack were from husbands to wives, and they must travel a hundred miles of forest trail in time of war. Not twenty miles they traveled when the postman, surrounded by black soldiers, was called to deliver. He did not deliver. He could not give the white man's letters to another hand. He said, No, he could not. And for this they killed him. That young body tarried forever upon the trail, witnessing in that inter-

minable delay — as Ebenga had witnessed in his swift coming — to the sacred element in the mail.

Here is the king's touch for the king's evil — the hand of the postman dropping a letter. For this the victims of nostalgia do long service. For this they scribble, in their lonely and various dwellings, their letters. There is a night, in those alien settlements all about the world, that is unlike other nights. It is the night before the mail is closed. The lamp is full of oil that night, and the cup of coffee is at the elbow. On and on, while the stars march, the white man's hand runs upon the page. In villages where there are no street-lamps, the white man's window is a lamp all night of the night before the mail. From steamers that are tied to trees among the rushes, in rivers that you do not know, the officer on watch may look all night through such a window at such

a man writing, writing a long, long letter — the beating heart of man, articulate in all that heartless darkness.

How quick a seed, you would say, the seed in such a letter! How such a letter must bear, some sixty, some an hundred-fold! Yet myself I saw this: I saw the harbor-master of Kabinda, a settlement of white men on the West Coast of Africa, come aboard the monthly steamer to get the mail. He was an old Portuguese, coffee-colored, in his gray linen suit. A long time he had been harbor-master, and many times he had taken the brown bag of mail ashore. This day, when he lifted his bag, he “hefted” it: the lightness of it in his hand made him smile. Some irony that was the fruit of his long experience of exiles and their letters made that old indifferent man curl the lip. I think that in Kabinda that night there went white men hungry to bed. I would not like to

live in Kabinda, where the postman is so old and so wise. These white postmen know too much; they can count more than ten. And other things they know: they know a thing too sad to tell. Better Ebenga, who ran so swiftly with his load, or little Esam, who thought that for a load of letters some would even dare to die.

NGANA

WHEN I pass from the shadow of the forest into the village of my enemy Nso Akuk, I hear him pounding at a bark cloth. To this he has been brought by the war, with the headman of many another little hamlet of latitudes 3 and 4 and longitudes 12 and 13 on the map of Africa. From the dimmest corner of the hut they have rescued the old ivory mallet, worn smooth by the hands of their fathers; they have trimmed a log to their uses and between their mallet and their log they pound out the squares of bark cloth that must replace the trade cloths that were once their pride. Busy at this obsolete craft they remember yesterday, when they passed in patterns bright as the Russian ballet on the trails of the Southern Cameroon.

I put my head in at the door of Nso Akuk's hut and there is the big body of him crouched before his log and the strip of bark spread on this. The pallid pulp of it widens under the blow of the mallet. The horrid incessance of those blows is interrupted with the falling of my shadow, Nso Akuk looks up at me in a delicious immediate silence. We pass the word of greeting and I sit down on a bit of firewood under the eaves. Beyond the shade of these the hour of ten is written golden on the clay of Nso Akuk's little clearing; all the bark huts of his village are closed and his women are away harvesting their peanuts. Silence ineffable and healing is everywhere — in the great leaves of the banana trees back of the houses, in the forest back of the banana trees and in the little dark shelter where Nso Akuk observes me with his bright unfriendly eyes. And having found noth-

ing to say to the white woman — or more perhaps to say than is expedient — he strikes a blow at his strip of bark.

In spite of the war between us, business, it seems, is to proceed as usual. I ask news of his wife Ngana.

Aha! This gives pause to the sartorial labors of Nso Akuk. With the portentous deliberate gesture of a violent man he lays his mallet on the ground. He prepares to tell me what he thinks of his wife Ngana. And I prepare to listen. From the quickening of that black face above that powerful body I infer that we are tuning up for what will be more than chamber music. And presently the symphony of Nso Akuk's wrath fills the clearing. I make out, from those trumpeting and drummings and wailings and thin pitiful pipings, the theme of what Nso Akuk thinks of his wife Ngana. And I get this recurrent phrase —

“Do you think you are free? *Ye wo buni na o ne flee?*”

Now this word “free” is a word grafted into the vernacular ever so recently; on the lips of Nso Akuk it has a note of fury and of scorn.

“Many times I tell her,” yells Nso Akuk — and I believe him — “Many times I tell her, ‘The ivory I gave your father when I gave the goods for you was an extraordinary ivory. And you — what kind of extraordinary woman are you? With your dead child! And your runnings after the Word of God! Do you think you are free?’ When she wants to go to hear the Word of God I ask her, ‘What do you think you are? Do you forget the dowry I paid on you? Do you think you are a girl? Are you *flee?*’”

The only woman within hearing of this habitual distressful outburst from Nso Akuk is myself. And I am certainly free.

There is nothing novel in his style to hold my thoughts; they are free and they wander. I think of Ngana. She comes into my head, as the Bene say; I see her at my own door on an afternoon of the last dry season. There she stands with her little air of distinction, her quality — not to be attributed to her dress, which is a bustle and a green leaf-apron — of elegance. Like many another woman of thirty-odd years, Ngana is unhappy. Her face under its mesh of tattoo is sad. The things of her life, says Ngana, are things of nothing; “like food that is eaten” — and she passes her hand over her mouth with the old Bantu gesture of annihilation. I look at her, so sleek and slender in her tattoo and her beads, and I wonder what is the worm at the heart of the apple. Has her husband tired of her? But no, she tells me, this is sorrow for a dead child. Now that her child is in the ground.

Ngana's heart sits in the dark. Never a word to help her but the word of the women of the Tribe of God; and they tell her of the resurrection.

"It is a strange word," says Ngana, "but I believe it; I keep it in my heart. Yet how can I keep it in my heart while I live in my husband's town and am ignorant? Give me leave to stay in the clearing at the foot of your hill where you keep the schoolgirls, until you have taught me the words of God, and the way of the path to the Town of God where my child has gone! My heart," says Ngana, "is a deserted clearing!"

Poor Ngana, does she think she is free? "And is the white woman a stealer of women?" I ask her. "And are you the only woman whose husband hates the things of God? Many a woman finds a way to learn the new things while she cooks the food for a cruel husband in the

kettle of her own house. Take example by such women. But for to-day, sit down with my girls at the foot of the hill until your husband looks for you here, as he will surely do."

And so he did. When I come out from supper, it is moonlight in the mission clearing and there is Nso Akuk under the moon — very tall, very angular in his bark breechcloth — his spear, with its brass tip, like an exclamation point to all his rhetoric. He is hunting for his wife Ngana, that ungrateful woman for whom he gave a mammoth ivory and who has vanished — as I must surely know, since I am a person of the Tribe of God and she is a person of the Tribe of God! — the two of us together members of one tribe! Where is Ngana?

I send a messenger down the hill to call her. Nso Akuk, who has much more to say, cannot think why I have cut him

short like this, with all the riff-raff of the station gathering to hear the rest. Anticlimax is, after all, what he might expect of a white woman. But here is Ngana, very still in the moonlight, her head with its dressed hair drooping above her dispirited body. And Nso Akuk rallies to his part again. He is very eloquent, with his spear he strikes for his altars and his fires and his sires and all the rest of it. His technique is good; the long line of Bene buyers and masters of women is vindicated in him. And the pose of Ngana is correct. The old moon has never looked on a better show of the sort.

“What do you think you are?” roars Nso Akuk. “Do you think you are a girl?” And then he says — “Do you think you are *flee*?”

Flee? Flee? Flee? What is this new winged word that has flown off into the forest and away down the ways of it?

Does she think she is free? What does she think? She does not say what she thinks.

"And whom do you want to love," wails Nso Akuk; "do you want to love God or do you want to love your husband?"

"I want to love God," says Ngana, "and I want to love my husband."

Now, what are you going to do with a woman like that? So little sense! You take her home, putting her before you in the trail and declaiming as you go, until your voice faints away among the trees of the forest. You leave the white woman to her own thoughts, one of which is a sudden wonder if there is a love affair between Ngana and her husband Nso Akuk.

But this was last dry season, and here we are, no forwarder; and when Nso Akuk draws breath midway of his do-

mestic complaint I tell him, "Yes. I believe you have said all these words to Ngana — many times, as you say. And when she dies, and goes away on the old path from your town to Beyond-death, still you will be calling after her — 'Where is the dowry I paid on you? You who run away so lightly — are you a girl? Are you free?'"

Nso Akuk looks at me in a sudden calm — his face is left empty. We look at each other. Under his low roof-tree he rises and from a dark corner he brings out a little broom of rice straw, very dainty. He presents it to me. I am sure he thinks it a proper gift for any woman, black or white. I go away with my little broom and I leave Nso Akuk with his inward look, sitting above his log and its strip of bark. I am-a little way on the trail before I hear again the dull thudding of the ivory mallet his father used before him.

On Sunday, when I sit on the platform under the great thatch that is the House of God at Metet Station, I rake the hundreds of crowding bodies that are brown with violet lights, for the body of Ngana. But she is not there. I do this for many Sundays, she is never there. So I am sure she is not free.

APPRECIATIONS

It is an October day, and that is to say, in our West African forest, it is a day of spring. In the clearings, at three of the afternoon, there fell a golden rain from a sky of veiled blue, and all the fairy threads of that rain were drenched in sunlight. By this sign we know the rainy season draws to a close. The roof of the forest has not leaked under this little golden rain; the trail is dry, until we come to a swamp. There upon the trees is a new foliage like flowers — leaves that pale from a deep wine to a rosy ivory, from an ivory green to a green ivory. And all these colored leaves are still. The trees in the swamp are still, and the water in the swamp is still as death; there is movement neither of leaf on the tree nor of its bright image in the water; and there is

everywhere in that stillness a vibration, delicate and indefinable.

There is a little boy in the swamp, quite invisible in a camouflage of reflected light and color. He sees me; he leaves his quest of frogs, or snails, or whatever minor prey has drawn him, and he sells his afternoon to the white woman. He besets me behind and before. Coming to the village, where his fellows are, he hails them, and they follow on. White people rarely pass this way; admiration still waits upon us, and I am pursued by lyric cries:

“Why, such beauty! My mother! This beauty! I see her hair! I see her laughter! She laughs — how beautiful! I get the fragrance of her beauty!”

A long monotony of approbation has drugged my vanity; it sleeps until I hear my little boy exclaim:

“I have seen many beautiful women,

but you are certainly the woman who excels for beauty!"

He speaks with an absolute conviction that affects me. I think I envy him to have seen so many beautiful women, and to have come, so young and so experienced, upon the very pearl of these.

Other little children attend this beauty-show, and one, though I have seen many beautiful children, does excel. Her little narrow body seems to fly. Running before me in the trail, there is a flutter of little arms and of little grass bustle, and that little creature is hung an instant on the air. She is caught up in an ecstasy of delight and curiosity. Like myself, she is infected by the ardor of our small connoisseur in women. I must be, she thinks, as beautiful as he says I am. And seeing this I am lost in thoughts of discriminations and appreciations.

I think about beauty.

Alone like this on the trail, you savor deliciously your solitude, and your own thoughts, so seldom given place in your heart. You speak then to your carriers about your curiosities, putting away some little honey of observation for your pleasure.

"Of whom," I ask my carriers, "would you say that such a one has beauty?"

"Of yourself! Why not?"

And I say that, having of necessity agreed that I am beautiful, what would they be saying, if not lying, of this matter?

Then they tell me: "Ah, Matyenda, we cannot truly see that you have beauty. But we always say of you that you have style; and this is a true word — we all say it."

Bijang abwi — great style! But style of what sort? Because *bijang* covers the things of ornament — a necklace is bi-

jang; and the things of manner — a studied gesture is bijang. A mannered person is bijang, and a man on a bicycle is bijang. And while a man on a wheel is undoubtedly consumed with pride, there is another word for this flaming emotion. The pride, I suppose, is the inner exaltation, and the bijang is the air of distinction which is the fruit of that spirit. I know bijang when I see it. It is a conscious emphasis in ornament, or carriage, or deportment.

I hear that my bijang is most to be observed when I speak the Word of God. "When you stand to tell us the word of God, then we say: 'Bijang abwi!'"

Well, so they do — many a time I have heard them, under the thatch of the palaver house in strange villages, and under the great thatch of our church in the clearing.

I am left to make what I can of this;

and I conclude that my bijang has to do with carriage and deportment. For while my clothes are, of course — as are the clothes of the missionary the world over — much to be admired, the style in question cannot be of that sort — else why does it so dazzle when I rise to tell the Word of God?

My preoccupation with the mysteries of bijang gives an unfortunate impression. Ze Temba is sorry for me. He speaks to me very gently, saying that not everyone may have beauty. And I agree. I think of the young Edima — there is a beautiful one! All world-weary folk sigh when they see the young Edima; her presence in the herd of commoner bodies smites them with the classic pang. The faces of middle-aged women yearn upon her. Her face is too laughing, her leaf-apron too fresh and green in this old world, her belt of beads too bright about

her body, which is too straight and slim. I ask my carriers of Edima, who is known to them, if she is beautiful. I am assured that she is; she is certainly beautiful, and she has style. You see how unequal a dealing there has been. In my heart I agree that Edima does indeed wear her necklace with a difference.

There is Befege, who claims to be beautiful. "I am so beautiful," says Befege ever so sadly, "that I am besieged!" And I know, when I return from my journey, Befege, stepping with that regal gait of hers that is Beauty on the march, will come to complain to me of her new offers of marriage. Yes, Beauty's gait is certainly to be observed in Befege, who is otherwise a bore.

"What would you say of Befege?" I ask; and that well-known young woman is considered. Ze Ngambe decrees at last that Befege is a "leopard woman";

and all the caravan agree that she is a leopard woman. Not a person of beauty, nor a person of style, but a *xe minga*. And this is to say, a person of grace.

I think of the things of grace. I remember how many a time I have watched our blacksmith in the clearing at Metet, making spear-heads or dog-bells. And how, on a day when he was making a dog-bell, Ngelli the cook was there. Together we watched him. The bell was like a seed pod that is open, but not yet so open as to drop the loose round seed. There is the pod, as big as a big plum, still violet from the flame, and there is the rolling seed, as bright as an ember, shining through the slit. I long to tell our blacksmith how beautiful this is; but Ngelli has warned me that, when the embers are red and the metal is red, it is then taboo for a blacksmith to open his mouth. So I am silent. And I know why our black-

smith has greeted Ngelli and me with two little blows on his anvil: Ngelli has told me that this is the correct greeting when the blacksmith is bound by taboo to hold his tongue.

I do not need Ngelli to tell me our blacksmith is clever: himself, like any other of his craft, will tell me that. There is not a man of the forest tribes who will compete with a blacksmith for that distinction; it is agreed that they are as clever as they claim to be, and there is an understood element of divinity in their skill. Ngelli, the cook, is not in their class at all — they have skill, and Ngelli has wisdom. Ngelli's wisdom is far-famed; it is an attribute entirely at the service of his fellow clansmen, who assemble constantly at the rear of our cabin, where they call upon Ngelli to come out and be a judge and a divider over them. The wisdom of Ngelli is one of our domestic

crosses; his gifts carry him too far from the pot and the fire: here he is, who should be making bread, under the blacksmith's thatch, dispensing wisdom. And of the dog-bell Ngelli murmurs that it is a leopard thing.

Sparks spring out of this leopard thing, that will be so dull in an hour. African dogs are in themselves so unworthy of such inspired efforts; but the bell is for the hunt, and the hunt is the pursuit of freemen. On the day of the hunt nothing is sordid — not even the dogs. The long shafts of the spears, with their heads of brass and of bright iron; the long narrow nets that are coiled about the bodies of the hunters; the men who gather to the meet, dragging their dogs on leashes of three — nothing of all this but has its glamour. When upon our journeys we pass them of an early morning, forgathering at some crossroad with laughter and

with shouting, we workaday folk of the caravan sigh and say: "Besom!" This is a word of envy; it is to say, "The fortunate ones!"

Yes, some are wise and some are skilled and some are fortunate and some are fools. It is a rare caravan, indeed, in which there is no fool. Mbataka is the fool in my caravan on this journey beside the Nlong River. Ze Temba has said so for me, and the comment — taboo so far as I am concerned — was as fitting as an apple of gold. In my heart I had been saying: "When you cross the Nlong River, pay fifteen centimes for Mbataka — that is ferriage for an ass!"

"Okukut!" says Ze Temba, with a malice that is brother to my malice.

This is our revenge upon Mbataka, who has harried our last night's camp with long tales of his life-history, and the history of his financial misadventures,

and the income overdue from the sale of his sister, and the consequent delay in the purchase of a wife. It is a serious ass, about to set out on a beggar's drive. We tell him good-night and good-bye, secretly vowing to pass through his village in the dark before the dawn, when the veil of smoke is ever so faint above the thatch, and before the first door is open.

But there in the dark of the dawn, in the street of that village, is Mbataka. He hails our little creeping caravan in that windy voice of his. He cannot have slept at all. He has lain awake all night, thinking of most exciting personal grievances, of which he has not yet told the white woman. He takes his square of beaten bark-cloth from the ground, where it has lain all night in the dew, and he girds himself. He tells us he means to walk in our company to the town of Mbita, where he plans to negotiate a loan.

And more of this he will tell us; but I walk away. I forget him in the dawn that is like moonlight — a pallor and a shadow: a more radiant pallor and a blacker shadow — and then the day. Now the huts are evident in the little clearings under the shadow of the forest walls. The man with the lantern puts it out. The little trail slips out of the open into that great shadow; the little caravan takes cover there, and is lost. The scent of dawn and of fallen leaves is in that place. It is the ineffable hour.

I hurry ahead of my carriers, and I think I am alone. In the deep forest, where the light will never be too violent and where the people will never be too many, I am released from the pressure of my profession. An enchantment of solitude too sweet to be enduring is broken by the hollow moaning of a horn. It is as if I did not hear it; and then I hear it and

then it follows me. And when I come to a hut in the forest where I mean to breakfast, the horn, its anguish unabated, draws near and broods about the house and moans.

It is Mbataka, I am told. Mbataka himself comes in, and says yes, it is he—none other. And has he any particular meaning with his horn? And he has, yes, he is saying with his horn:

“It is I! I have arrived!”

It is not the custom of the white woman, he is told, to approach the villages with proud announcements.

“But I must do it,” says Mbataka, “because I am just learning it. This horn is new to me; I bought it on the path, and I paid a great price for it!”

We think it strange, and we tell him so, that he, who is so poor as to be abroad on a beggar’s errand, should yet be a buyer of horns.

"But this horn," says Mbataka, "is a necessity — it is to call the people of my village to prayers in the early morning!"

"Why not with a bottle?" we ask him. "You who are a beggar, might you not have begged an old bottle, and breathing into that bottle, have called your brothers to prayers?"

"Truly," says Mbataka, "if I had been as wise before I bought the horn as you have made me, I would now be walking without a horn!"

It is then the inspired Ze Temba tells me ever so lightly that Mbataka is a fool. And I think, there in that little smoky hut, of Malvolio, and am pleased to remember that he was cast in prison for a season.

It is pitiful of Mbataka that he cannot live without appreciation, for he is entirely without art. There is many another with the same hunger, but with

better technique. There is a man on the Ngoé path who cannot live without approval; for this reason and for no other, he celebrates me when we meet — plucking at the strings of a kind of little harp he has, and singing extemporaneous, most vivid praise of the white woman. Never will I be able to resist this, he knows — singing about how wonderful I am, and thinking about how wonderful he is. And hardly has silence fallen between us, when he urges me to say that he is clever. “Am I not clever?”

I tell him that he is clever. I appreciate him audibly and at length. I make him happy for the sake of an old memory, and a regret for a little creature long dead and her skill gone with her into the grave. I remember that I never saw her dance her little dances or heard her sing her little songs, though these were many a time commended to me. I cannot think

how this came to be. I caught her wandering about in the villages — a creature ever so little; the smallest adult ever I saw — with a face the most shadowed, a face in the deepest shadow of the deepest jungle of the human mind. It took a hundred people to convince me she was not an ill-used and starving child. A hundred times they told me how clever she was; that she was everywhere welcome; that headmen begged her to visit them, promising her a present in the hand if she would dance and sing for them. And that her dancing was a thing of skill, her singing a thing to catch the heart. Not a thing of laughter, as I perversely suggested, but a thing of sorrow. “You feel sorrow in your heart, her skill being of that kind. Her songs are orphan songs; and when you have heard them, you put a present in her hand and you beg her to stay in your town; but she wanders.”

Like a headman, I invite her visit. I offer her a roof, and a daily cassava bread, and pity. She brings her little shadowed face under the thatch of the girls' house, where she performs innumerable things of malice. I move her to the hospital — I have a civilized feeling that anyone so wicked must be ill. I cannot think why they would ever be giving her presents. I am tormented by her.

And — if you will believe it — I never ask her to dance or to sing!

And yet on moonlit nights she dances, singing her little orphan songs, to the delight and anguish of the entire assembled black population of our clearing. I hear of these things, that they are things of wonder. Who would laugh, I am asked, at the things of beauty and of sorrow? All are struck to the heart!

Why did I never see her dance? Why was the white woman's heart so cold and

so slow? Why did I never mark that little skill, so much acclaimed, and flowering like a poor little night-blooming cereus under the moon in our own clearing? And was it strange that she who ran away from headmen who approved her, giving her a present in that little hand, should run away from me?

Often I heard of her and her minstrel reputation. Word would come of her from local merrymakings, where she dropped her little tincture of bitterness in the common cup — as desired. And I wished for her return. I had a peculiar wish for her return. Once I met her on the trail; she considered me without words while I wondered what it was that I must say to her. And when I said: "Come back to my town and dance for me!" I was glad, because that was the password.

A quiver of light passed over the shad-

owed pool of that little face, and, "Truly!" she said.

It was a promise, but she never came. Soon after, she died, taking her little skill with her into the grave. Many a time I have thought of her as, often, we think of the dead — wishing that we had dealt with them other than we did; finding other words to speak to them than the words we spoke.

The forest people know a spell to ease this backward longing of the human heart. My carriers have taught it to me on a night of a journey. We are in camp; it is not yet the hour of the true dark; there is a moon that will be the hunter's moon at home; it is new in a blue sky and very low. Above us in the deepening blue the stars are pale and brilliant. We build a little ruddy fire on the floor of the village clearing and there we sit in a great calm under the high and growing night.

The dew falls. We hear the pulsing of a drum far away, and my carriers tell me it is the voice of the drum of a headman who has died the night before.

“They are drumming the call we drum when a man is dead and newly buried, and his people go back to their houses. Then they drum the drumming that says: ‘You have left me in a sorrowful place; you have left me!’” And my men tell me further that the dead are not forgotten in the hearts of the Yebekolo. Long after a man is dead, they say, when his fellows make a great killing of wild pigs or of certain other game and have a great feast, they remember him. Toward morning of the night of that feast they dance the ghost dance. And one of them, who was truly his friend with no feuds between them, then goes to the limit of the village and with his face set to the forest cries out his name, calling him to return.

“Come out of the forest into the street; come out of the forest!”

I listen to my carriers; I learn the incantation, and that it must be spoken by one who was truly a friend. I think of those sad little rendezvous at the edge of the forest. I wonder what the friends would find to say. Would they be indeed as wise and as kind as we think we should be, when we trouble the dark with our incantations?

THE DOOR OF THE DARK

"HE took her up there alone," I am told of Nyangon and her husband — "and the next word she was dead. The black people say he poisoned her, and I should think it very likely."

"She was dead before I got there," says Dr. Lehman of a neighbor — "though I got there as soon as I could. It looked like a case of poison."

"Go to see old Miwu in the forest village of Asok," I am told; "they say she is dying of poison."

But old Miwu when I get there is past speech; she looks at me piteously, tapping her throat that will not articulate. Her sons tell me that the neighbors, not wishing to have a Christian about, put poison in her sugar-cane. At the first swallow she knew she was gone. I listen

to this tale with horror. It is so evident a case of poisoning that I cannot be skeptical, as I incline to be. But the cause — the cause! It is too fantastic. Miwu was no better a Christian than you and I are — and not of a quality to be martyred. I look at that old woman with wonder and anguish; I wish she could tell me, with her blistered mouth, how much there is in her heart of Stephen. I am appalled because I am afraid she is just the most ignorant and darkened old pathetic woman I have always thought her to be, and not the Christian they have killed her for being.

Every month, in the official news, there is a list of those who have been convicted and sentenced for deeds of violence — but not all the poisoners or murderers are listed there. Do you think Ze's mother would have witnessed against her son, if she could have come home on congé — like Banquo's ghost? "My son, when he

heard that the killing of a mother is a great charm for fortune, killed me. I am the seed of the great good fortune that is his!" Would she have said that? I wonder, when I see Ze trailing George Schwab on his diurnal round — waiting and hoping to see George alone. And when he and George are alone, Ze tells him that the neighbors have devised an evil report against him, claiming that he has a familiar leopard. There is a leopard in the neighborhood, and the Bene say it preys only upon the enemies of Ze — a report which must never come to the ears of the Govina. Will not the white man — for the sake of old friendship — write five words in the language of the French, telling the Govina that the leopard is not a familiar of Ze? — telling him that Ze has no familiar leopard?

"Rather," says the white man, "I will go and kill the leopard!"

But no — Ze begs the white man to spare the leopard. What would Ze's mother say to that? Be very sure that the forest women when they speak together of the things of violence and the things of magic, do not speak academically. We in the forest are far and far away from the green lights of a police station — yes, and from the exhibits in museums. Many a time in a museum, when I have come upon the instruments of magic lying there — gathering the dust — without honor — still in my heart I have heard the ghost of the authentic sound of them, the light and whispering rustle, the fine and delicate knocking, at the door of the dark.

A Government expedition went in to the Bush to punish the cannibals who threw a boy's head under the eaves of our little clearing in Yebekolo, saying, "There is Beanland's portion; let him come and

get it!" But the pigmy who was entertaining a chief of a superior tribe and, lacking meat, sacrificed one of his wives — who punished that man? I tell you, when this tale came to the ears of the white man, he did not believe it. He shuddered and would not believe it. Just as I do not believe it, though I know it is true.

THE HOST

MBITA GAMBALA's name of friendship is Mimfenda, and I am to call him that. Always, when I visit his women, I drop in to see Mbita; then I try to remember that I am to call him Mimfenda. This little ceremonial of friendship pleases the old man, who is friendly. And because he is friendly, he remembers and I remember one of those embarrassing moments when the things of religion conflicted with the things of friendship.

There was Mbita sitting at a door of his palaver house; and there beside him, on a grass mat, is a recumbent wife; and there, between the two of them, a great pot of boiled plantains still steaming, golden in the pot. I come in out of the middle of the day, so excessive in the clearing that is Mbita's village. I sit

down in the shade of the thatch, and am politely silent for an interval, after which I politely address Mimfenda. I tell him the news of my village. I am impeccable and he is impeccable. And I say I am hungry.

Many a Bene friend of mine has been pleased to hear this admission — looking at me quizzically and taking account of human frailties that reduce the white woman to be eating out of the clay pot, like another. “The wind that shakes one little leaf of the tree troubles all the leaves of the forest.” I beg Mbita for a plantain out of his pot, being truly hungry, and thinking to please him. And suddenly all the elements in that palaver house are violently displaced. Like the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope, they suddenly and violently fall into a new combination. I feel the agitations of that process of displacement all about me, and

am confused. In that confusion I hear the voice of Mbita's wife, and she is begging me to desist — she has risen and is making gestures. Poor old Mbita, whose name of friendship is Mimfenda, is begging the white woman not to eat out of his kettle. He looks quite stricken. And I do assure you that we all shudder — the wind that blows on one blows on all.

Mbita, it seems, was tied by his mother never to eat with a woman. Needless to say, he has never broken this taboo. And needless to say, there has never been a woman to menace him after the fashion that I have so recklessly devised. With alacrity I withdraw. This is a *faux pas* of a most serious sort — the white woman leaping off into the dark and dragging the poor old headman of the village with her. These are the perils, the truly dreadful perils, of indiscriminate contacts. Mbita's wife, long after she is satisfied that we are

safe, continues to breathe quickly, looking at me with a wary and scornful eye. But Mbita himself, whose manners are instinctive, patches up, with his presence of a stricken dignity, the shattered peace of his palaver house. The tide of darkness ebbs away. Only there remains the embarrassment of the negation of hospitality. And while I am explaining to Mbita that there will be a pot on every fire in the hut of every woman of his village, and that I may have a boiled plantain out of every one of these and so grow fat on the hospitality of his village, without breaking any of his personal taboos, there comes an inspiration to Mbita.

There is a carrier walking with his shadow down the clearing of the village. We see the load on his back and the legs of him beneath the load. He walks in the center of the clearing, having no friends

in any of the little huts, and not calling out any salutations by the way.

Mbita suddenly shouts to him. "*Ah mo!*" he cries out, and we see the carrier pause. He waits there in the sunlight, not turning himself about; asking himself, I suppose, Now what are they going to put upon me, and what accusation of stealing or other misdemeanor have they devised against me in this village of Bene strangers! And he stands still at the voice from the palaver house. "*Ah mo! Ah, friend!*" cries Mbita. "Aren't you hungry?"

The carrier is still there. What a silly question — isn't he hungry! And why wouldn't he be hungry? What would he be eating in this country of strangers? And Mbita says to him "Come, eat my food that is here in my palaver house, you who are a guest in my village!"

I see the carrier turn about; there is

front view of him plastered up against the load on his back. He is making good time up the hill now, the two legs of him speeding to the feast. He is a most surprised carrier. And I go away from a placated Mimfenda, who has demonstrated to the dullest of white people that he is a truly hospitable person, once you have made place for his religious convictions.

THE AUTHOR

ELA, I tell myself, is no longer a lad. I suppose, I tell myself, he is a considerable person in his own town. I reiterate these things because I cannot quite believe them, having known Ela since he was "no bigger than an eyelash," when he was an unimportant member of my household. Often since then he has visited me, but this is my first visit to his village, which is on a bypath.

He meets me at the crossroads. He is as highstrung as ever; the same tooth is missing, the same dimple flickers, the same agitations of friendly solicitude beat upon me. He is as ever a gossip, ironic, and overbearing in his manner. And he has at last a little inadequate beard.

Nothing in his town is too good for me, be sure of that. As a matter of fact, it is a shabby town, corrupted by Ela's lack

of order; but such as it is, it is mine. He clamors for small boys, who rush to serve us. The fire-logs are carried smoking from Ela's hut; there is a great worrying of dust in that dim interior. My cot is disposed according to his order, with loud agitations — he remembers exactly how it must be done, and tells me so. He recognizes happily whatever is old of my belongings. If I try to tell him any wish of mine, he is impatient, and will not be instructed because he remembers — he remembers forever and never will forget — exactly my custom and my every wish. He hangs his little perverted mirror low on the wall near where I am to sit — and I am to sit where he has imagined me to be sitting. He wants to cut a hole in the bark of his wall, so that, when I sit there, I may look out at his grass-grown street. I am to eat at his crooked table. And I am halfway through with my supper when

he discovers his cap on the table. "This is a horror!" cries Ela, and flings it into a limbo in a corner.

His townspeople, harried by his anxious hospitality, have cooked my food, and he serves it in fine dishes — some of them borrowed, I know. Ela is terribly impecunious, that is evident. He wants to cook me a chicken, but has none of his own, and his neighbors will not trust him. I know this when little panting runners come from here and there to say:

"He won't!"

"He does not want to!"

"He says no!"

A man calls him from the street, on I don't know what business. And Ela says, "Put your head in the door!"

The man looks in, is stunned by the vision of me — struck dumb.

"Is this a time?" asks Ela. "What will you be saying now?"

“Ah, no!” says the man, all cowed.

The supper served in grand dishes, the meeting by lantern-light in the shabby palaver house — neither of these is the core of my visit to Ela’s town. Ela’s book is that.

He has written a book for me: it is a history of the Bulu people. And he will read it to me, now that every one else — encouraged by himself to do so — has gone to bed. At last we are to get down to business. He tips the lantern and shakes it about to ensure its lasting for hours. I observe these precautions with the greatest interest, and exactly the feeling you have had yourself when your own author settled down for a night.

He begins to read, and I understand at once that I am not to be passive, nothing like that. His subject is subdivided and he drills me in the subdivisions. He says:

“We will remember the things of men

and the things of women, and we will remember them separately. First as to men: the child is born; he has arrived; you see him, but what has he done? Up to this time he has done nothing! Watch his first doing!"

After which introduction he proceeds with the history of the Bulu people. His manner is momentous and severe. Laughter is in my heart like wine. And I am sleepy. The doings of the Bulu people are a kind of rumor, a humming of bees about a river-crossing — the crossing of rivers is the core of their history — until Ela is born. The whole tenor of history is altered at this point, you feel it. The famines are more severe, and the huntings more exciting, and the conduct of headmen more significant. Even the white man appears upon the scene shortly after Ela is born. Everything takes a turn, either for the better or the worse.

And yet, in spite of adventures and misadventures, and Ela fixing you with an eye when an eye can be spared — you wander. Is this history muddled, or are you?

“I must read it myself,” you beg Ela; and to leave it with you.

“You will be unable to read it,” says the Author; “I make it better when I read it. Please let me finish it!”

But no, you must read it yourself — not now, some other time. And Ela must write it more clearly, after you have left the village. Then you will have a writing of it all your own. That will be better.

Ela does not think it will be better, but you tell him good-night. He hates to leave his dusty little cabin and the lantern and the company of the friend for whom he has written the history of the Bulu people. But he picks up his cap from the little heap of his belongings, and

goes out. Soon it will be morning, and well he knows how white people rush away in the morning.

The visit is as good as over.

THE PREACHER

It was so early when we broke camp on this morning that we did not have prayers. And as it is not conceivable that we should journey all day without prayers, we stop where we are on the trail to have them. Only yesterday Se Menge, who carries the forward end of my hammock pole, was seen to wince, as if he had stepped on a thorn; and he said, when I asked him why, that he had just remembered he had forgotten, the night before, to say his prayers. To obviate sudden pangs of the sort, we pray. We are on the steep ascent of Mpikiliki hill, thrust up into the morning; the stars are paling when we close our eyes, they are gone when we open them; and many carriers have joined our little caravan to pray with us. Like ourselves, they have chosen

to mount Mpikiliki in the silver hour; they are returning from a trading expedition to the beach, and they lean a little forward from the weight of the trade goods they carry in their shoulder-yokes. The bulk of their loads, extending above their heads, makes a permanent background for their mutable faces. Some of them are our friends, and one of them is Bwamba.

Bwamba, being an Ngumba, is not so good-looking as the Bulu in whose company he is walking; but he wears trousers, and so is distinguished. He has been, it seems, in jail. And when I regret this — as it is a friend's part to do — Bwamba says that it was quite all right; not a thing to be regretted, rather the contrary. And the way of it was this:

Bwamba carried a load of rubber to the beach. He wore his trousers, and the receipt for his head-tax was in the pocket

of them, where he could put his hand on it if he were subject to inspection. When he came to the beach and had delivered his rubber, he went into the sea, leaving his trousers hidden among the rocks. Along comes a black policeman in his khaki uniform, his club in hand, and he sees Bwamba in the water.

“Hi! you!” he cries; “and where is your tax-receipt?”

Bwamba tells him that he has a pair of trousers and the tax-receipt is in the pocket of them. But the policeman scorns the idea — there is nothing about Bwamba to carry out the pretension of trousers; the policeman, uniform and all, goes out into the sea and arrests the pretender. He will hear nothing of trousers, and together they go to the prison at Kribi.

I make out that solitary confinement is not the policy of the Kribi prison. What-

ever your crime may have been, you will find a brother to it there; and if you are a tax-evader, you are legion. It is a matter of luck — but bad luck, indeed. Thrust into the prison of Kribi, you languish and long to go home. You implore every prisoner whose term has ended to pass by your village, and to summon your friends to redeem you. You hear the alien sound of the sea, and you pine for the forest.

Well, the sun was in the middle when the policeman cast Bwamba into that place of many longings. I suppose he saw some friends of his there, but the most of them were strangers. And he asked them did they want to hear “five words of the Word of God.” They said, certainly yes. So he preached to them for some time, until there was a hand at the door — and there was the policeman with the trousers, and the tax-receipt in the pocket of them. So that was all right.

Bwamba put them on, and was immediately most distinguished. And the prisoners grieved to see him go.

The sun was going down when he came out into the air — and by this you may judge how long a sermon they endure in the prison of Kribi. Bwamba did not loiter in that beach settlement; rather he struck off into the forest. And he thought to himself, he tells me, “Now, that going into the prison was a good going — like the imprisonments of Paul. Ah, Matyenda, for the purpose of telling the Good News I was cast into prison! And when I had done preaching — there was the policeman at the door — like the Angel!”

Having said our prayers, according to custom, and having heard of a miracle, as we cannot hope to do every day, we go our ways. And when we meet a policeman — as we most certainly do in these days of the collection of taxes — we pro-

duce, with the utmost agitation, from the wallet at our belts, or the fold of our loincloths, the little envelopes of banana leaf in which the most of us carry our tax-receipts. Our fingers tremble as we open these, and our eyes beseech the policeman to be patient. "Just wait" — we tell him — "it is here — it is certainly here!"

As for Bwamba, and his angel policeman — let it be as he himself has said.

THE BLACKSMITHS

OFTEN you hear tales about blacksmiths, but here is the whole truth of their beginning, exactly as Malandé gave it me. And it is, he says, a word from the past, and the birth of men — not a saying of this generation, or the last one.

Blacksmiths were made by necessity — smithing was the invention of four desperate men, who had nothing in hand for their marriage dowries. Their mother, having borne the four of them, did not bear any girls to set them up in the world. How were they to marry — having no sisters to give in exchange for wives? And no other property. They saw trouble, says Malandé, and none to help. They took counsel together.

They built a great house, high in the roof and low in the walls. Having fin-

ished it, they gave it a name, for it was not built like a real house. And the name they gave it was *akua* — as we call a smithy to this day.

Then they felled a great tree, an *akom*, and the wood of that tree is soft. They cut the log in four parts and they laid it on the floor of their house four ways like a fence. This done, they went to the place of rocks and began to dig. They chose rocks that were black, both big and little. They piled these in one place. Then they felled an *akuk* tree, and from four logs of this, they hewed out four bellows. These bellows they hung above the fire to dry. After this they took clay and moulded nozzles for their bellows, and this work they did in the dry season, not the season of rain. This done, they built a small house. And with their axes they felled a great *elun* tree, and the wood of that tree is hard. Of this tree they made

charcoal, and put the charcoal in the house they had last built.

Then they dug a great pit in their big house, within the four logs upon the floor. And they brought the bellows from above the fire. They drove wooden pegs into the ground, two for each bellows, that it should be strong and not move. The bellows were pointing to the pit, and the clay nozzles were beyond the two pegs that were driven in the ground. They, too, were pointing to the pit.

Then the four brothers called the children of the village to bring in plantain stalks. They began in the morning, and until evening they brought in plantain stalks and laid them in the bottom of the big pit. This they did because they must put a great clay pot in the bottom of the pit; no one man would be able to move that pot, but twenty men could do it. And they cut many little thorny bushes;

these they put into the great pot. And much oil of the palm nut they put into the pot and other little fragrant things — flowers they put into the pot, and things of magic, besides.

On that day the young men must not see the work, but only the old men and the powerful. These stood in a row and ate much food, all standing. When they made an end of eating, they called the smith; he went down into the pit. And they all raised their voices and blessed the great pot and the things in the pot. They called the master workmen to come near and they came. Those who stood at the edge of the pit blessed all, and said:

“May your work be good!
May your iron be hard!
May your wealth be great!”

When they had made an end of speaking thus, they put the great pot into the

pit. And the smith took the charcoal and the rocks and put them into the pit.

Now that the rocks were in the pit, they were called *not-rocks*, because if they were called rocks after they were put into the pit they would not change into iron. Therefore they were called *not-rocks*.

Then they called the young men, and those who were wise and those who were strong. They called the young men because they were strong, and they called those who were clever because they were wise and would surely mind their work. And the young men came, and those who were wise, to the smithy.

They did not invite visitors, only the men of their own town. "A stranger," they said, "might spoil our work with an evil spell, because of his bad heart."

They sat about the pit in a row, and they were all of one heart and one strength — all alike. They slipped the

bellows between the pegs that were driven into the ground and made them tight. They put fire into the pit where they had put all the other things. Then all alike, they grasped their bellows, and all alike they blew them. When they blew them, the noise of the bellows was heard far away, and people marveled at that noise, not knowing it.

When the fire was hot, the rocks melted and became water. And they took new strength and the rocks changed to iron in great ridges. The iron they first saw was not very good. So they grasped the bellows again with all their strength, and real iron appeared in the bottom of the pit.

Then they rejoiced greatly. And they paid the young men and the other people who had helped them do the work, with pieces of iron; but they gave them only the little pieces of iron, not the big pieces.

All people began now to be wise in

making iron, and they wrought spears and daggers and all the things black people like to buy. The master workmen were called: the clever people, the wise ones, the industrious. So wealth grew in the towns of the black people because of iron and the skill of men.

When Malandé had told me this, I begged him to write his words down, and he did so. He borrowed a lantern from me, and many an evening he sat in the light of it by the table he has made for himself in his little hut. There I have seen him leaning an anxious young face over his caravan of words that followed the path back into the things of the past. All the things of writing are new among our tribes; it is a foreign art. I have still the sheets of paper Malandé brought me at last — so proud that they were clean, and not blotted, and somehow saying what he had meant to say.

“Show this,” he told me, “to your friends who are blacksmiths. Perhaps they will like it.”

Perhaps they will. Or perhaps they will complain of this treatise, set down by Malandé with such an acquired skill and translated by me from the Bulu tongue — that it is not exhaustive. And perhaps it is not. Let them press the matter farther in ways which I leave them to devise. Only let them mind their manners when they meet a blacksmith in a forest village, remembering how long a time he has been called the wise one, the clever. It is to be hoped they will know how to compliment such a one — sitting on his haunches beside his ember, with his bellows in hand and the iron in the fire. Believe me — bigger chiefs than they have done so. And if he is taciturn, that silence is your opportunity; he waits for you to tell him how clever he is — make a little oblation

of praise before this master of an old, old craft, that is a rung in the ladder by which we are climbing out of the pit.

THE NOVICES

It is a Saturday before communion Sunday at Metet Station. There will be two thousand people at that service, and there have been times on Thursday and Friday when the missionaries have felt that the entire two thousand have arrived from their backwoods villages, and have come in mass to call on us.

On this Saturday morning I am sitting in the lean-to back of Metet Church — it is the session room. The elders of the church are here and those of the Metet evangelists whose turn it has come to be — they, and their applicants for baptism. We have sixty outposts from this station and as many evangelists.

The applicants for baptism — a most motley crew — sit along the wall; they brood. They are like patients at a clinic.

Now and again a young mother with a baby in a leather sling at her side is prodded by the baby; she rises and sways about to hush those cries; one of them confides to me that truly since this child was born she has not sat down. "Some babies are like that," she murmurs, but her mind is for once not intent on her little tyrant; like all the other applicants for baptism, she is preoccupied with her own case that will presently come up before the wise ones in the Tribe of God. Will they think her a person to be baptized?

Well I know that among the youths and the men who are there with their backs to the wall are those who ask themselves, "What about Philip and the eunuch? What about that baptism? Who ever said to the eunuch — 'Wait three dry seasons and four dry seasons in your village and do the things of God there

before you ask to be baptized'? Who ever plied him about his debts, and his quarrels, and his reputation in his own town?" The eunuch — riding so grandly in his wagon, and reading so wisely from a book, and baptized so immediately in the first water by the way — has ever been the envy of the convert in our forest.

Gayle Beanland sits apart at a rough table, his head bent over rows of dirty cards; he is for all the world like a man playing Canfield. But no, he is pondering the records of his parish as kept by his evangelists. With an inward look he fingers the grimy little card that is the outline of the religious aspiration and the known history of the woman who stands by the table. She is answering his questions in a voice too low for any ear but his, her eyes are on her dark finger that travels the length of the edge of the table. Back and forth the finger travels, and

the soft woman voice goes back and back to the dark things of the past, and forward and out into the new things of self-possession and self-discipline and good report. I cannot hear her — but, oh, the thousands I have heard!

I sit down near Engola. It is a long time since I have felt terribly interested in Engola, and this is because he has been a long time self-sufficient. And I have the vices of the pioneer. I think, when I see him going about his duties of evangelist with an air so self-contained, and his flock of country folk trailing him so close — like perfectly trusting chickens — I think, or something stirs in my heart that is not a thought but a feeling — “My word, Engola! And yesterday you were a lad in a bit of bark-cloth and you had the itch. And you sat before a chart saying, b — a, ba, to your alphabet!” This has been my feeling for Engola this long time,

but to-day when I sit beside him and watch his methods with his children — who are mine — I agree in my heart that he is a far cry from the lad who sat before his chart saying, b — a, ba, like a lamb. This is a shepherd of sheep.

I pretend that I am writing a letter, and by this act I cease to exist in this room of many confessions and trepidations. I listen to the questions of the emancipated Engola and to the murmur of one and another who come to sit beside him, and to whom he says, "Take your card to Beanland"; or, "Go back to your village and settle your quarrel with your mother-in-law, or your debt to your father-in-law"; or, "Your heart is still in the dark; sit down in your town and learn more of the new things, and come again when the peanuts are ready for harvest."

I like to see how, when he has satisfied

himself of the rote knowledge and the good conduct, he presses out into the region of the spiritual apprehensions of these poor children.

Here is a girl who is saying the Commandments backwards and forwards. She is thinking hard to remember how many days our Lord lay in the grave — I wander from these mechanical tests to where Mr. Beanland is dismissing a little boy because he is too young. “You are all right,” says Mr. Beanland, “but you are too young — come again after two dry seasons. Don’t cry!” begs Mr. Beanland, who himself is not so young as he was before the beginning of the communion season. And I come back to my young woman, who is telling Engola what she knows about the sacraments. “The service we call the Table of the Lord,” she tells him, “is an *ndem*” — and that is to say, in the Bulu tongue, a sign or symbol.

"If," says Engola, "the flour of the white man's grain and the juice of the white man's fruit — if these things of the white man should fail, what then? Could we then have the service?"

"We could use corn, Engola," says my girl, with an air of the most helpful attention to what has seemed to her a semi-domestic difficulty. "The flour of corn we could use, and the juice of the ngong fruit!"

"But if it were not the season of the ngong — or of other fruits," hastily adds Engola to meet the answer that shines in those eager eyes.

"Then water!" she cries, "good water from the spring — we could use that!" and she is triumphant. It is evident she has her opinion of men and the difficulties they make about matters that are so simple to a woman. And she says in a tone of mild and maternal patience:

“Ah, Engola, it is no more than a symbol of the Lord Jesus, His death, His body, and His blood.”

She goes with her card to Mr. Beanland. This harassed chief is listening with one ear to a man who protests with ardor that he will refrain from beating his wife. No matter what the provocation, once he is baptized, he will not beat her — never again. And the other ear leans to the account of a young buck who enumerates the amount of the dowry paid on the girl he has married, claiming that the payment is complete. “Go out to the black people of the Tribe of God,” says Mr. Beanland; “go before them with witnesses, count it over to them, and they will tell me if the payment is complete.” But the fate of the wife-beater I miss — I am intrigued by an old lady to whom Engola is saying, “The Commandments were made to bind people

together; the thing that severs people is the breaking of the Commandments."

Apropos of what? I look at the old lady to see whether she is a captious old person, that she should have drawn this pearl from Engola — but no, her face is not scarred by that vice. She has the face of kind old age. And she has her little treasure of Christian wisdom. She is quite wise about the talk of the woman who is a person of the Tribe of God and the talk of the other woman — how different they are! If you don't believe it, listen to my old lady. And the journeys of these two women — how they differ! She is explicit about the adulteries and the thefts and the back-talk of the one — the honest dealings, the words of God dropped by the way, and the discretions of the other. Yes, she has the daily walk and conversation of the Christian woman at her tongue's end. This, you would say,

has walked straight out of "Pilgrim's Progress." But when Engola asks her, "When you ask God to turn the heart of a wicked person, do you believe that He is able? And that He will?" Then my old woman is staggered. And with a most amusing effect she says to Engola, "What do *you* say, Engola? Ah, Engola, do *you* think He can and will?"

"This is the day," says Engola, "when I ask the question and you make the answer. It is not as other days, when you ask and I answer."

"Ah, but, Engola," she coaxes, "it is like this — the child asks the elders for wisdom, and you were the first-born because you are a man — to whom shall we women go with our questions if not to man, who was the first-born?"

When I go out into the sunlight it is midday. Hundreds of people are abroad in the bright light that is in the clearing

before the church. They wander like the crowd that is on Fifth Avenue at the noon hour. A boy who has washed his shirt, that he may shine on the great day that is Sunday, has hung it on a stick across his shoulder. He is a marked boy — known as “the boy with the shirt.” An old woman who appeared before Engola this morning, and who answered not a word to any question whatever, but came to an end in tears, has waited for me at the door; she waits to tell me that “truly I am a clever woman, though you cannot know it.” And sweet old Atyam Nlam, mother of Ze, the evangelist, seeks me out to beg for my prayers. “I am going in for examination, and I always fail. All the Christians of my household have done all they can for me. But when I was a girl I could never dance like the other girls — I was too stupid!”

And yet they did, on the very next day,

and in the face of the great and the good
and the wise of the neighborhood of
Metet, baptize the happy Atyam Nlam,
mother of Ze.

THEM BEACH GIRLS

I

SATURDAY is the most romantic time of the week for the little schoolgirls who visit in their towns, and for me because they go. On that afternoon there is a great leisure, and in the silence that is about their vacant quarters the weaver birds yell immoderately. Mosembani, the head workman, tells me the weaver birds love company and that on a Saturday they miss "them Beach girls."

On a Friday night there is a great dressing of heads, Beach fashion, and the floor of my room is covered with earnest seamstresses. They patch and patch their rags. These little Beach girls are the third generation to wear clothing — a distinction hard to maintain since the war has reduced supplies. The white

woman, who is not a Beach woman, has her own ideas about a Beach girl's wardrobe, or the lack of it, but the little girls are not infected by her indifference. They feel from the bottom of their souls that, if they are to be distinguished from the baser Bush people, they must maintain the ancient standards and cover their bodies. Little girls and big girls, they sit on my floor of a Friday evening, bending their heads over their discriminating fingers, manufacturing the patchwork symbols of their immense difference and tribal superiority. I suppose the Macleods and the Macgregors and the Frasers felt this holy solicitude about the patching of their tartans.

When they sew like this, they assume the most serious expressions. And they have cause. Little Ndabwalambi has patched this same little square of tatters on every Friday night of the entire school

term, until I would say that nothing could be more desperate. But she does not despair, she attacks the chaos of her cloth with an entire preoccupation; and when, after an evening of most earnest effort, she puts it on with the bright new patch directly over her stomach, her sense of achievement is complete. She stands up, she adjusts it, she pats it, she looks down the declivity of her little body, cocking her head and observing her patch from every angle, and she sees that it is good. She minces away with a grand-lady air, and she walks abroad on Saturday supported by the most happy illusions.

On a Saturday afternoon the young girls from the Beach villages walk proudly about in groups. They are not like Bush girls — they are more graceless. There is about them a rude kind of peasant health — a strong exuberance — an ema-

nation of a physical nature in hardy and untender flower. To encounter a little flock of them is to receive a powerful impression of the human animal in youth. They pass in their ragged dresses, their bodies showing through the rents brown and sleek with oil, their hair in little twirls under their bandanas. They smell of lavender water. They laugh.

Mosembani, who is the young uncle of half the neighborhood, watches them morosely. He tells me that the chiefs of the Beach tribes in a great palaver, having met to discuss the shortage of males since the war, have revoked the old taboo that forbade the sale of Beach girls to men of interior and inferior tribes.

"Them Beach girls," he tells me, "do too much rascal — make all them noises!"

"Them Beach girls" hear him; they turn to laugh at him; their rags blow in

the trade wind; they prance upon the wet sand, looking back at him and doing them rascal until they disappear behind a point of rock.

II

LITTLE MATIMBWE, when she got the fish-bone in her throat, was as good as gold. She took all the fantastic attitudes suggested in our first-aid book; she coughed to order; she ate for once more than she wanted; and still she wept with the bone, looking at us with piteous eyes. Even, she went to be healed by the doctor at Kribi.

Batanga is a station where we have no doctor — we heal what we can of sores and ulcers and pneumonia, and the man who has been bitten by a shark, and the man whose wife bit his thumb off — well, not quite off — and all the time we sing the praises of the Government doctor at

Kribi. The Beach tribes are so inhibited constitutionally that they can never bring themselves to love the doctor at Kribi until that young man is ready to go on furlough. The stranger who takes his place is suspect for the same length of time — so you see why we feel desperate and try to speed up the conjunction of the Beach tribes and the doctor at Kribi.

Matimbwe, with a fish-bone in her throat, was in no position to offer the familiar objections to the Kribi doctor. And was she not the child of Mrs. Adams, who had saved her life during the war? With an inarticulate meekness she dressed in her Sunday wardrobe, wiping her eyes when convenient, and went off with a trustworthy man for the six miles' walk by the beach. It was just the fish-bone made her look surprised — nothing could surprise Matimbwe, who has lived so long with white people — not even to find

herself on the way to the doctor at Kribi.

Presently a runner arrives, dripping with perspiration, wild-eyed. He has heard that Matimbwe has gone to the doctor at Kribi. He is Matimbwe's uncle — her agitated and despairing uncle — imploring the cold white woman that he be permitted to run swiftly after his own child and rescue her. The cold white woman says no. Does not Matimbwe, by right of salvage, belong to Mrs. Adams? And has not Mr. Adams said that she must go to the Kribi doctor? The uncle, drying himself with his cap, trembles and pleads. And when he is told the usual things about the great power of the doctor at Kribi, he puts on the usual Beach expression. Presently it is agreed that he may at least follow after and be in at the death. He leaps off along the edge of the foam. He is a very black man. The moans of Matimbwe, and the agonized

outcries of her passionate uncle, the one overtaking the other, are to be observed by every fisherman, bather, dawdler, and dweller on the beach. The dark dangers of going to the doctor at Kribi are lurid from mouth to mouth—the news of them are a cloud about the runner.

But that child, who has escaped so many deaths during the war, is not to fall into these. When little Matimbwe, dressed in her Sunday best, and her streaming uncle, and her mother who had been picked up from I know not where by a Beach miracle, present themselves at the Kribi dispensary, the doctor is not there. He has gone, like Alexander, to spread his conquests farther.

What an escape for Matimbwe! And at the stroke of our curfew, under a high half-moon, the united family, in a happy state of relaxation, knock at my door. The uncle, with a medicine known to

the Beach tribes from the birth of men,
has charmed the fish-bone — it has gone
up or down.

But there is no use arguing with white
people.

THE FOREST CHILDREN

I

ALL the little thatched roofs of the mission station are like grains of sediment at the bottom of a cup of moonlight, and from the girls' house there is a wavering of smoke that rises to the top of the cup. If you are very still in the flooding light, you hear the sighing breath of the forest against the cup's rim. What is one little cup of moonlight in such a great darkness?

Inside the girls' house it is very gay. There are five big black pots on five ruddy fires; all the bamboo beds are crowded with young lounging bodies that wait to be fed. There are two little cooks for each pot. There are greens cooking in the pots and bright ears of corn cook-

ing in the greens. Or there is a broth of dried fish. Or there are bundles of peanut butter steaming in the water-tight packets of plantain leaves. Whatever there is will be good to eat with cassava bread, and whatever there is will be offered to me.

Ten girls are dancing in that crowded shelter, and one of them is most distinguished. The nine little dancers withdraw a space: they are the chorus; they take the beads from their necks, and in a little dance of admiration they hang their necklaces on her like garlands. Her face is entirely serious and immobile, only her eyes are bright in that childish mask; she dances continually, tossing her grass bustle with a perfection of rhythmic skill. She will not stop to breathe — her endurance is the core of a universal laughter and shouting.

Presently the girls begin to circle; they

are dancing the *Malinga*. Many times their elders have spoken to me of the Malinga, complaining with zest of this dance brought back after the war by the refugees from Spanish Guinea. The forest people say it is a shameful dance — something learned from the white people and shameful. I watch my little girls circling in the wicked dance of the Malinga and I wonder what is shameful there. They are singing the ballad the forest people have made to the air of the Malinga — in honor of a white man famous for his cruelty, for his whimsies, for the glass he wore in his eye, for his knowledge of their own tongue and customs, for his escape during the war into Spanish Guinea, when great caravans of porters, impressed by the way, followed the German exodus to the south.

“Hé Mendomé!” sing my little girls — and that was our hero’s Bulu name —

"Hé Mendomé!

"Hé Mendomé!

"He has finished killing the Bata people,
He has gone to kill the Island people,
And I must follow Mendomé!

"Hé Mendomé!

"Hé Mendomé!

"Mother mine has followed him
Father mine has followed him
And I must follow Mendomé!"

This is what my little girls make of the Malinga, circling in the firelight and singing the ballad of that enforced journey from which so many of their elders never returned, but were left to die of starvation and the ailments of privation beside the terrible insistence of the sea.

And in the center of all the laughter and shouting there sits Begona's little, little monkey, underfoot and undismayed, with a shred of banana in his little, little

hand. Like a creature eternally old and eternally sad. Like a drop of aloe in a cup of wine.

II

My chair men trot along in the late afternoon; we are going to spend the Sunday in a forest village. And suddenly there is a cloud of little girls about us — they rush before and after us, their little chests heaving with the hurry of the adventure. And one of them is terribly in love with her granny.

“My grandmother,” she pipes, “goes always to the House of God and my grandmother takes me to the House of God! My grandmother is a person of the Tribe of God and my grandmother takes a gift to the House of God! My grandmother takes me, and that was my grandmother who stood by the way to salute you at Minkok! She came out of

her house to salute you, and that was my grandmother!"

On and on that darling little voice tells me about "My grandmother — *mvam jam!*" Was I sleeping when I passed the village of Minkok, that I do not remember to have been so saluted by a celebrity? Or is it that you do not always recognize them when you see them — these paragons. They stand by the door of the hut, so humble, so old and timid, so unimpressive. But, never mind, you are sure to see them in church to-morrow, certainly they will be there.

"I believe you will come to the House of God to-morrow," I tell my breathless little convoy, and it is exactly as if I had said, "*Encore! Bis! Bravo!*" for at once I hear the treble announcement of the little herald —

"My grandmother —"

But my chair men press their speed;

there is a turn in the way and we leave the little girls behind.

III

WHEN I pass through the village of Akok, it is exactly as if I were the Pied Piper — all the children of the village follow me off on the forest trail. And presently it appears that the head of this caravan of youth is a gifted person. She is a singer, one of those improvisers of ditties who are given the center of the stage. She is very little, and she performs under difficulties, for she carries a baby on her back. The baby sits on the head of her bustle and cleaves to her body with arms and legs — it is an indestructible union. The little girl is singing a solo part and her companions are the chorus; they sing for my pleasure, they observe me to see if I am pleased — the baby, whose cheek is pressed against the

little bearer's back, looks up at me side-wise. And this is the song they sing:

"The burden I desire," [sings the little soloist]
"And the burden I will make" —

"Is a child!" [shout the chorus]

"The burden I desire
And the burden I will make —"

"Is a child!"

LISA

AT eight o'clock of this Sabbath morning it is breathless in the village of Mejio. The goats lie in the middle of the street under a bright sunlight. From the huts, that would be closed at this hour of a week day and the women in their gardens, there comes a murmur of voices — the people of Mejio are oiling themselves and combing themselves and borrowing one of the other the kerchiefs and the loin-cloths and the sumptuous raiment with which they will honor the day that Mejio himself, good mild old man, may almost be said to have made. For Mejio is the pioneer Christian headman of this part of the forest; he has ordered his village after the law of God these fifteen years, and he and his people have a questionable sense of being letter-perfect. At eight

o'clock of a Sunday morning the people of this village know exactly what to do.

And presently from the manse behind the palm trees Luanga, the wife of the preacher, sallies forth to call upon the white woman. For I am lying ill in that little cabin which the impeccable Christians of the town of Mejio have built for their occasional missionary guests.

I observe Luanga to be rather grand — grander far than her husband Bekalli, whose ambitions have not developed with his great reputation. That little figure of a servant of God has not altered its fashion since the day, long ago, when he went about our neighborhood with a lantern, calling his fellow Christians — so few in number then — to come that night to the House of God, where with him they must give thanks because he had at last finished payment on a wife — and that was Luanga. Where was Luanga

that night? She was not of the party — she who has never missed a party since. And here she is to-day in the town of Mejio, with the busy air of a minister's wife — calling on the sick, with a cloth about her body and a kerchief on her head. Only the pattern of her tattoo has not changed — it is still dark between her eyes that are wide apart, and upon her upper lip there is as ever the tattooed similitude of a mustache.

I lie on my old camp cot, surrounded by the table and the stool and the lantern and the pails of bright spring water which are the deliberate and ostentatious luxury with which the so-practiced Christians of the town of Mejio are pleased to furnish their visiting *minisi*. I know I need not talk — Luanga will take care of that. Lying there in silence — my silence — I contemplate the truly Ngumba face of Luanga, for she is an Ngumba. And the,

Ngumba, I think to myself, are a plain folk. They incline, like the Scots, to the unco' guid. But they are steady and faithful; their emotions run deep. I think about Luanga, how happy she is to be the wife of Bekalli, who has the virtues of his tribe and not the vices; I remember her tragic youth and her first marriage — before she heard the Word of God. And I ask her when did she first hear of the things of God.

Luanga, it seems, first heard the Word of God from a black woman, and this was before the white man had brought the news to our part of the forest. In those days the Mpongwe people from the beach used to come up from their grand towns in Gaboon to trade with the forest tribes. Two of these traders were partners, and one had a wife. Her name was Lisa. She was a beautiful woman, Luanga says, and I, who know the Mpongwe,

believe her. She wore bright cloths about her body, and a chemise, very white, beneath these. The ivory combs in her hair were cunningly carved and she had other ornaments of the yellow metal. She had many little bowls and dishes with the very image of a kind of flower on them — never was the like seen in the forest before, nor after, until the white man came. Luanga knew all these cloths and combs and dishes by heart because she was the little handmaid of the admired Lisa. “I was then,” says Luanga, “as big as your wrist”; and this is to say that she was between eleven and thirteen. I think I can see the little Luanga of those days, and she wears a green leaf-apron and bustle of dried grasses; there is a belt of leopard skin about her middle and a stain of tattoo between her two bright eyes. She is washing her mistress’s cloths, that are gay as flowers, in a stream.

All the other little damsels hang about, bursting with envy of the uplifted Luanga. She drives them away from her mistress's door. She polishes the steel knives and the flowered bowls. She spreads the table with a clean cloth, as Mpongwe people do. Presently her lady sits down to meat, and Luanga is there. "We first thank our Father for the food he has given us," says Lisa — oh, how long ago! And this is the first word ever heard by Luanga of Zambe the Creator, known ever to the forest tribes — that He takes thought of the needs of men.

Luanga does not remember how long she served that gentle person — a dry season, perhaps, or more. But she remembers a day when Lisa had been crying. Her husband was away on a journey; he had gone on the path of the rising sun to hunt an ivory. And on this day when Lisa had been crying, she told her little

Luanga, speaking the forest tongue in her broken way, that her husband's partner had evilly enticed her — but she had not consented. Christian women, she told Luanga, do not consent. Rather, she had run away into the forest, spending the night there in a great horror and fear. This was one day, and on the next, when the little maidservant came to the door of her mistress, there was the partner; he stood at the door; he forbade Luanga to enter. Lisa had a headache, she was ill, she must not be troubled. And the next day — none having seen her for these many hours — Lisa was dead.

Luanga and I look at one another. And, "What did you do?" I ask.

"We buried her. When her husband returned with the ivory, his partner told him — 'Your wife is dead; we put her in the ground.' This is what the partner said, and the people of the forest said the

same. I alone had another word to say, but I was a child, no bigger than your wrist. I feared to say it. I never said it. Eké! The many days since I have forgotten these things! Only the question you asked has made me remember."

The drum beats the call for church, and Luanga, suddenly reminded to look like the wife of a much-admired minister, bustles away. The people of the town of Mejio, in every kind of Sunday finery — from a new leaf-apron to the most impressive calico toga — flock up the hill to the church. Fellows of the baser sort — passing carriers, their loads on their backs, themselves and their loads smelling of dried fish and camp-fires — follow after. The Mvele people from the valley pass my door. Presently I hear them sing, and I know by the volume of that sound that Mejio himself will be telling me, before the sun sets, that the people in the

House of God to-day were many tens; and that one of his accomplished grandchildren will have counted them accurately, and to the number of five hundred or more. In the silence after the singing I hear the voice of Bekalli; I cannot distinguish his words, but well I know he will be telling them of the things of God and the things of the heart — tapping his throat with his fingers, as he invariably does when he speaks of the heart. And Luanga I know will be sitting among the women with her too, too complacent aspect. And all the many of God's children, in the shadow under the thatch they have built in the clearing, will be fed — I am sure of that.

For myself, I lie thinking of the Mpongwe woman who fought the good fight and most certainly resisted unto death. How far away must have seemed to that poor woman the mission station

down in the Gaboon, and those white friends of hers, the fellowship of the Mpongwe people of God and the little church at Baraka, filled always with the wind from the sea. Where were then her mother and her brethren? Where was the cloud of witnesses? Only one little witness, and she no bigger than your wrist!

And I think, too, of the many white women who have asked me, looking at me with incredulous eyes: "And do you truly think that they are Christians?"

CUPS AND TUMBLERS

It is a night of the full moon and Mr. Ford is taking me to a party. We walk three miles from the mission station to the Government House in Libreville, where we will celebrate, doubtless, the fourteenth of July. Our way is by the Beach. The sea, the moon, the great logs cast up on the sand and bleached by sun and water, the trading posts so white in the moonlight — how far and far away — how silvered by time and distance! Nothing lives in that memory but the shadows of the two missionaries going to the party. There are two black shadows on the Beach; they lie before us all the way and are a mirror of how we are to look at the party. The night is so still that the hair of the smaller shadow is permanently sleek — a matter of deep

concern when, after a long sojourn in the forest, you are stationed on the Beach, and are going to a party. The shadow of the skirt is exactly right — it is wedge-shaped. That shadow, smelling ever so faintly of camphor, is so beautiful a silhouette upon the sand that it is a grief to think how the tides must long ago have washed away the stain of it.

This was the only party I ever attended in Africa, and it is forgotten. It is like one of those operas of which you never hear more than the overture. There were high bleak lights in that house, and the ladies, incredibly, wore gloves. They murmured one to the other how they would be kind to *cette petite de la mission*. As doubtless they were. But their *gentillesse* is forgotten and themselves are lost in the shadows of those bleak rooms — out of which their gloves alone emerge — describing elegant gestures.

This loss of an entire party is unaccountable — except, of course, to a psychoanalyst — because every other of our rare social adventures is intact. I truly believe I remember every white person who ever visited us in the mission — yes, and every one who passed us on the road. I remember every cup of coffee ever I drank under the roof of a white man and the very look of the cup from which I drank it. There was the wineglass that was my coffee-cup while Verna Eick drank from the authentic cup of a most lonely trader in a most lonely clearing beside a most lonely trail. Not to surprise him, we send him a message by a herald: "Two white women will be passing your way in the morning." This gives him warning and a chance to escape or to welcome us. He welcomes us; his cup and his wineglass are burnished; he has spread a red cloth on his little table.

under the eaves; he has put on a white collar, and his boy — who aspires for the moment to be a super-boy — wears a singlet and breathes heavily. Coffee is brought. Verna drinks hers from the cup. I am served with the wineglass, and the trader, for reasons which are not obscure to Verna and me, does without.

We make our little conversation in bad French and bad German and bad English, and I remember, after ten years, the wistful efforts of that hour. I still think them to have been perfectly successful, as I am sure the super-boy did when he drank the dregs of the coffee and had polished his Big Massa's glass.

Again, there was the cup that was a wedding present. How successful was that visit! Some of us have been working among the backwaters of the Gaboon estuary. The engineer of our little launch is a doctor, and yet the engines die on us,

and at midday. All about that little boat there is a silent horror of light; the Bokwé is seen to be a terrible river, inert between its walls of mangrove. It is not a living river; leaves and sticks lie dead on a brown water that turns a green lip to the stroke of an oar. We beat a green way on brown water to a trader's clearing, and there, where you would not think a white man might be, are three white men. They are Frenchmen — very affable. They shelter us from the storms of light under the thatch of a little veranda. They are much diverted by our nationality and by our profession, and by the French of the little one who speaks French. They bring us coffee in glasses and a cup. The cup is offered by the most jovial of the Frenchmen to the most linguistic of the missionaries. It is the last of cups that were a wedding present, she is told. "And I am now, unhappily,"

says the Frenchman, with an air of happy achievement, "a widower!"

Silence on the Bokwé, where we all, with inappropriate expressions, think of these sad things.

And then there was the little bride who mended my sleeve. There am I in the house of one of the Pilz brothers and there is his little new wife beside me. She is on her knees, her head with its bright glitter of young hair is on a level with my eyes. And she is mending a tear in the vagabond's sleeve. It is a fresh tear, believe me; not an hour old. Only that morning by the light of a lantern I had dressed in the best my kit-bag offered. The best-mannered boy in the caravan, wearing the best of borrowed rags, had gone before us to tell the white woman of our passing, and that we should stop to salute her. And now here we are, the two of us together under one roof; and neither of us

fluent in the tongue of the other. We look one at the other, and it is then the little bride sees the tear in my sleeve. She runs for her housewife; she kneels beside me; with a sweet little busyness she plies her needle, furnishing with her unforgettable friendly gesture the silence between us. I cannot look at her, so near me. I feel her kindness like a fragrance. I look about me at the bark cabin that is everywhere redeemed by her presence. And there at the window, when I look that way, is the dark group of my hayseed gang, all agape, hanging about the yard when I told them not to do so, and peering. They fall upon me when I leave the house, and, "Ah, Matyenda," they want to know, "is she indeed your sister? For we saw her go upon her knees to serve you!"

And there was the French officer at Akonalinga, who saw our little caravan

from afar. At his window in the Government post that overlooks the Nlong River bottom he saw us sally forth from the violet wall of the forest, and the bobbings of our helmets across that great meadow of pale and brilliant grass. So we had a wonderful dinner, who had been living for days on less. Duck we had, and vegetables and a salad, and, for all it was war-time, a cup of coffee — the officer drinking his from a tumbler, and making compelling gestures to a paralyzed boy, who had never served our like before. And speaking much of Avignon where he was born, who had come at thirty-five to be the administrator of the green savannahs of the Nlong River, and of the cannibal tribes of that region. I think to-day, as I thought then — there was a good dinner, and a brave man. I seem still to see our pale faces about that little table in those bleak quarters, hung up above the mag-

nificent panorama of the Nlong River bottom, and I wonder to think how white men are flung about the world who were born in the numbered streets of old cities.

Often I wonder about the white men who passed up and down the trails of our forest. Two of them are dead of the sleeping sickness. One of them, so companionable a man and with so persistent a reputation for cruelty to the natives, dead in delirium tremens up the lonely stretches of an inland river. Another, long known to us, dying alone back of Spanish Guinea, poisoned by his cook. Another, dead of an African fever in a little Scotch village. The little young wife of another — she who swung all day in a hammock, reading books — where is she? For her husband, I know, escaping from the Cameroon during the Allied invasion, sat down in a village of Spanish Guinea, where he had a rendezvous with a friend.

And the two of them, sitting there together, drawing breath after their flight, were killed by the natives, who sent their severed ears, with appropriate messages, along the forest ways.

All these and many another died young, but the abominable T—— did not die young. He lived a long, long time with his sentimental memories and his black woman and his half-white children that did not quite seem to him to be his real children. His real children were his girls at home. And he was always going home to his wife and his children — a trio of angels they were — as often he told us sitting at supper in the old house at the mission station. Yes, now and again he would appear among us, to tell us how twenty years ago, when he was going home like any other happy man, his wife, having heard of his black woman, sent word that he need not come. There he

would sit, telling us why he never went home; until he could see for himself — and we must see — what an unhappy man he was. He wore old clothes that I think of still with pain and shame. He drank when he could. And with all this he did not look old. Above his peevish brow his head rose high and was artfully covered with what hair he had. Always he spoke with a correct and careful English. He kept his manners. And over all this survival, and the persistence of his self-pity, and the little sad pack of his memories that he carried about with him forever, there was a delicate exotic growth like a mould — faint innumerable suggestions of the African movement of hands and mouth that marked him. How strange he would have seemed to the trio of angels had they ever summoned him, and how strange they would have seemed, in their differ-

ence from his changeless dream, to that lotus-eater by an African river! I wonder what they felt when they heard he was dead. And I wonder if ever they knew that there was not a kinder nurse to a sick man, or a dying, than poor old abominable T——.

And then there was Claude. It is hard to speak of him freely, because he did not die. He came into the forest very young, as many another has done. He settled in a little trading post a mile or two from the mission station. He did a little business in ivories and palm oil and cocoa. Now and again he came to supper at the mission, where we were all middle-aged, or nearly. We were his only white neighbors — you can think how lively this was for Claude. And presently he was obsessed by a most mocking and mercenary black girl. There came a quick decline, and a day when Claude, whose lack of dignity

had outraged the government authorities, was reprimanded. After which he disappears from that little wayside cabin where he had used to sit all day in his pajamas. He goes farther inland and the black people of our neighborhood cease to laugh at poor Claude. We hear no more of him. We think of him as if he were dead.

Until a day long after. The war has receded from our forests. I am aboard ship off an African port and there is a delay in my journey. There is no one, I think, in that port to befriend me or to speed me on a way that is everywhere interrupted. I am thinking myself friendless, when up the ship's ladder comes a helmet — it is the helmet of a most correct man. He has come aboard to greet me, remembering me, he says, when I may not remember him. He is Claude. I cannot believe it. I am too startled to

cover my amazement, and I cruelly stare at him. It is as if I said to him — *never!* But he insists with patience and politeness, without warmth, that he is Claude, and that I am to believe him to be at my service.

All the days of my sojourn in that backwater of the world he is at my service. Of an afternoon we sit together outside an imitation of an inn on an imitation of a terrace, drinking an imitation of tea. What do we talk about, sitting there in that clearing of the African forest where there is, incredibly, an imitation of an inn? I cannot remember — imitation things I think them to have been, a veneer of commonplace over a strong and deep wonder — his wonder and mine — at a resurrection.

He was inland, I gather, when the war broke out and he was imprisoned. He passed a year in a prisoner's camp, along

with many of his countrymen. I am at liberty to make out of this what I please, but he will do nothing to help me. I may think, if I please — he cannot prevent me — of how there he was — a lonely lad in a suit of ragged pajamas, sitting in the very gutter of the very slum of the world, deserted, ignobly involved in the things of darkness, and suddenly swept into a prisoner's camp with many of his fellows. And here he is, correct and inscrutable, developing for my instruction the policies of the colony, introducing me to the considerable people of the settlement. He is at my service, but he is remote, inscrutable, a resurrected man with a knowledge he may not share.

And I am appalled by his consistent perfection until the day I am to sail, when he has been drinking ever so little too much. Then an unforgotten Claude — remembered from so long ago as a most

vulnerable and fragile personality — is suddenly there. He is saying good-bye. He is making me to be aware of the unspeakable things of loneliness and isolation, of the panic and the doom of youth, in an African forest.

EXILE AND STEAMER

THERE is moonlight and sunlight, there are the stars and the sea. Some days are gray and ribbed with the white trouble of the surf. Some are white days, full of a sparkle of sunlight like a spray above the water. On some days mountains that have been long lost rise out of the sea; at noon they are faint and far away; but with evening they draw in and cast anchor before the little cabin where you live. They are blue. Thus beauty, in her various fashion, smites with her rod the rock of your monotony, and water does indeed gush forth; you drink and are assuaged. But still you look to the sea; you have a glass at hand — it is a ship's glass — and it is not for beauty that you hunt with your glass: it is for excitement. You are hunting for the very heart and

flaming core of excitement, and that is a steamer. Living in lonely places like this, you are a prey to obsessions; you are obsessed by certain sleepless thoughts; they stir in your heart while you sleep, and they speak without ceasing of steamers. It is they that drive you in the morning to your glass, and to be looking all day out to sea, and at night to be searching the dark for a little cluster of stars that are low upon the horizon, like the Pleiades in March; but, oh, they are not the Pleiades — they shine with a difference: they are the lights of a steamer!

How shall I be telling of steamers to the dwellers in great harbor towns, where the loveliest ladies of the sea come and go without applause? Or to inlanders who never see a mast at all, unless it is the superstructure of an oil-well? You whose house is on the Hudson, where a steamer is at anchor before your very door — it is

eight bells; the hour was struck, and did you hear the bell? The signal stands in the engine-room at "Full Steam Ahead," and did you hear that drumming? A week she lay in the river; this morning she is gone, and are you therefore lonely in the world?

In the lost places of the earth a steamer is the great Presence — she furnishes the empty seas. However far out and dim, with her little plume of smoke, she leaves her wake in the heart. There are shores where from every white man's cabin her passing is followed with a sigh; speculation broods upon her all day long. Her ports, her flags, her cargo, her crew, seem a little while to live in the mind after she has gone down the slope of the world. She may be a poor, mean, unkempt cargo-boat, dingy upon a bright sea, but she is the symbol of migration, and a winged flutter in the heart.

As for The Steamer, that is another matter — a matter of Elijah and the ravens. Be sure that Elijah, once he got the ravens' schedule, was not caught napping. He was up and had his glass out before the ravens were overdue. And be sure that there is no steamer so mean, so obscure in her listed sailings, but is The Steamer to prisoners somewhere, behind a barring of cocoanut palms or a grating of ice. Be sure that she will put on airs once she has dropped behind her betters, and will go swelling into little empty harbors where there is only one calendar, and she the only saint written there. Before the anchor falls, white men are off to her between the breaches in the surf. The chain is hardly taut when the little canoes and the surf boats are alongside, and white men are running up the ladder. And suddenly, with the letting go of the anchor, in that great room of

the sea and sky, or in that narrow river-room with its forest wall, there are the agitations of traffic and of commerce. The winches fore and aft thrum and clamor; voices of white men and of black men rise from the water level and from the deck; cargo is slung off and on, dripping with the gilt of palm oil and the dust of rice-bags, or reeking of salt fish.

A day is all too short for what must be done with the barber and the steward and the purser and the chief and the captain of The Steamer. All the white men find a day too short. Night comes too soon; the steamer hangs upon the dark like a bouquet of fireworks, arrested. The last load of cargo has gone over the side; the ship's launch has ceased to sob and sleeps in her berth on deck; the second officer has made his last bitter comments and has gone below to wash himself, and the time has come for the white men to go

ashore. They hang over the railing calling to their little crews that are asleep; they negotiate the difficult descent into their boats — for the trade swell is about the ship now — and they go off into the rain.

There is this about The Steamer — she comes and she goes. You keep your best white ducks for her; you keep all your dates for her; you set your watch by her chronometer and your life by her schedule. Your letters home are full of her worship. But she has such sweet-hearts in every port; the rush and enthusiasm of her advent is matched by the rush and enthusiasm of her exit; she carries her garland of lights away into the darkness, or her feather of smoke into the noon; she grows smaller and dimmer; her drums grow fainter, and once again in a silence and a void you are “ten leagues beyond man’s life,” you “can have no note unless the sun were post.”

You see how, with The Steamer, it is a kiss and a blow. Between the kiss of her coming and the blow of her going is the span of your little day — all the honey of news and of gossip, all the wine of excitement, must be savored now. I think of the many little settlements by the sea waiting to hear of the war from The Steamer, on a day of her days. I think of the first camouflaged steamer staggering up a river on her accustomed schedule, like a fistful of lightning in the hand of Jove. No supernatural visitation could have more astonished her worshipers, all unprepared. I think of her captain shaping her course all through the war, in the dark, unarmed, without convoy — the very idol and providence of the outposts of the earth. And of the captains young and old, whose names you do not know; and some of them, for their service of The Steamer, wear medals, and some

of them lie in the waste of the sea. For all you do not know their names, their names are known; living and dead, they are remembered. Exiles remember and bless them — steamer, and captain, and the engineers in the vitals of the ship, and the little cabin-boys who did their little duties when the steamer was under fire.

In my heart I see her now, and she is under fire. She is unarmed; she zigzags before her smoke-screen, trembling with her speed. You lean on the iron wall of the engine-house, under that bright sky where it is morning, and you watch the great fountains play upon the level of the sea where the shells strike the water. You think of the engineers, who will never come on deck if the ship goes down; and you see on the bridge the legs of the little cabin-boy, whose head, inside the pilot-house door, waits on an order. All the life of the ship, under the cover of the

smoke-screen and the sob of haste and the scream of the exhaust, waits on an order. That young captain biting on his pipe, his megaphone in his hand, is a symbol of man's will to order. He is enshrined there on the bridge above the trouble of the ship — an image of ultimate resistance so intense, on so many solitary seas, that his astral — if ever at all there is an astral — must still patrol the course of the steamer he saved, or of the steamer that was lost.

There is nothing stranger than a map — with its understood relation to a place, and the way they do not resemble. You would never guess, to look at a place on a map, what its aspect really is. Often I go to the map-room in the public library, where I ask for the Southern Cameroon. I look and look at that symbol of the African forest, until my secret knowledge unfolds in my heart, and I see again those

little mountains under their green cloak; I cross those rivers in canoes, or by the old, old bridges of the fallen trees; those many little ravines are blue again and full of the trouble of drums. Then I laugh at the map, with its colors and its names; and it is as if, in a group of strangers, you have met the eyes of your friend. And so it is with the listed sailings of steamers — so many and so broadcast: their names and their published ports trouble your mind as little as the birds that migrate in the autumn. But oh, let them be but due where you are, and they touch you where you live. And of these there is one that drops her anchor in your very heart — you call her *My Steamer*. You name her so, and all your fellow exiles call her yours; your ardor does so subjugate your little world.

For *My Steamer* you wait and wait, and you weary waiting. You cease to

breathe, lest contrary winds blow upon her. But your ardor has spoked the wheel of time; it slackens. The moons wax and wane with a strange and cruel deliberation. Well I remember my first affair with a steamer, and that the seasons dragged, and then the days. Long after, I came upon a calendar with those days crossed off; and when I saw that record of faint hours, I felt again the sickening arrest and backward swing of time.

An affair with a steamer is not always mutual. There she is at Kribi to the north of you, and you with a glass under the eaves since the dawn asking her by wireless — the wireless of the heart — is she yours. And boys running north by the beach to ask the captain, is she yours. And boys running south by the beach to say that she will be down by two o'clock or not at all. And you, packed and ready, on the indigo shade upon the sand at

two o'clock, and still on the sand at three o'clock, but driven back by the tide at four o'clock; and by misgivings at five o'clock driven up a path you know too well, to a thatch which you had thought you need not seek again.

And now boys run up the beach to say, "Steamer live for come"; and she anchors well in. The red of evening grows behind her, her lights blossom on the dark, but no boat comes ashore. You are going to bed, when you are summoned by a lantern — "Boat live for come"; and you race back to the water's edge, all your zests renewed.

But it is a false alarm. There on the sand you find a black man streaming with sea-water; he has swum ashore from the ship in search of the launch, and under the illusion that this is Powell's trading post and that you are Powell. With his wet hand he urges upon you a bill of

lading, incredibly dry. You dismiss him coldly, waving him south, and hoping that you are never to see him again. You do not know how often and often he is to accost you again in memory, his wet body gilded by the light of the lantern and his bill of lading incredibly dry.

In the morning that steamer is gone! And before the shocking emptiness of the sea your friends say, "Oh, do let's sit down!" And they tell sad stories of the defections of steamers: of how Mr. Menkel, in a canoe, with bag and baggage, tried to hold up a steamer with a gesture, like a traffic policeman — and failed; of how the Gaults waited weeks and weeks for a steamer that did not come, because she had blown up in the Congo River, as you may see for yourself between Boma and Matadi; of how many a steamer has passed by on pretext of quarantine; of how, off Quillu, when

the surf is high, the steamer will not so much as call. Until, what with tales of the coldness of steamers and their misadventures, you cannot think how you are to get home at all.

Yes, you wonder that. Many a man has wondered that. Betrayed by some steamer, he has thought of his little cabin, with its million roaches — that he must live there forever; and that he is never to escape the sound of the reiterant surf and its endless pacings. Long after, he will sigh when he thinks of that season, rainy or dry; he will remember dark thoughts that came upon him then, and his sleepless nights. A trader who cut the vein in his wrist with the scissors off his counter told the mission doctor that he knew he was never to go home. He would never live to get home, he said. And he could no longer endure that shanty of his, with its store of cotton

print and salt fish and matches and tobacco. So he cut his wrist. And then he sent, as you see, for the doctor. And the doctor, a long time wise in the things of exile, sent him off in a canoe, with a lantern and a little crew who were to travel with their "Big Massa" until they met the steamer from the south. For it is a great thing, said the doctor, to feel water under the keel.

That is a wonderful feeling. And it is wonderful, when you have lived so long by the light of a lantern, to find a star in your ceiling. For there it is in the ceiling of your cabin — a star. And there, beneath the light of that star, is an apple. Because you look as he had hoped you would look when you see the star shining like this upon the apple, the steward tells you that, yes, he likes to have an apple aboard his steamer. He lets you know at once that he is proud of his steamer,

and ashamed where there is cause. He will speak to you often of these things.

I see myself stretched at ease on the deck of My Steamer, sunk in an excess of languor and of calm. It is a night as bright as silver and as clear as glass. We are moored to a great tree beside a bank of the Congo River; a million little voices speak to me from the sedges on the margin, and the steward speaks to me. He has brought me my coffee, and he tells me of the shame he feels. He is ashamed of his knives and forks, of his linen and the bugs in his beds; he is ashamed of his captain, who is tipsy, and he groans there in the moonlight: "This is no place for you, Miss, no place at all!"

But, oh, what does he, all ashamed there on his execrable boat, know of the ineffable calm that is the atmosphere of My Steamer, where I am as safe from his

knives and forks and the weevils in his oatmeal as a silly silver lamb at the heart of a glass ball! Not the clamor of the winches, or the thunder of the great mahogany logs as they come aboard, or the clangor of iron rails as they go over the side, can break that insulation. Only the rattle of the anchor-chain and the signal to the engine-room can do this; and if we lie off every settlement on the West Coast and go up every stream in the delta of the Niger, for every time the anchor is weighed I will tremble, and will tremble in my heart whenever the ship trembles with that shudder of getting under weigh, which is the initial throe of the ecstasy of going home.

When last I went to Africa, it was in war-time, and I took five steamers. Five steamers I took, and for these five steamers I waited in five several ports, for five æons of time; until at last I said that,

if ever in opening a book I came upon a traveler waiting on a dock, open sea-beach, or river-bank, for a galley, caracul, frigate, clipper, or steamer, I would then close the book. I would never read, I said, of Jason and the Argo, or of Hero and Leander, or even of Europa and the Bull. All adventures taking account of transportation by water would be for me forever anathema. And I would forever forget my voyage of the five steamers. But often and often, in a kind of little flock, the odd assorted lot of them comes back to mind; I see them in my heart and I love them.

There is the Montevideo, and she is a lady. There is the Delphin, so little, so rolling, and so dirty, carrying her cargo of flies from the clean, pale alleys of Cadiz to the sea-based mountains of the Canaries. There is the Cataluna — not so very neutral — with her marred romantic

beauty, and her bright lacquers in her cabins, and her noble deck, where it is always one o'clock of the afternoon, and we are drawing away from the Canaries. The afternoon clouds are gathering on the Pillars of Hercules; gray gulls are flying; a young priest hangs his little golden bird on the port side, under the awning, and at once and forever that little bird casts a tendril of song out to sea. There is the Burutu; and still I see her come into the harbor of Dakar at dusk, her lights fore and aft the color of primroses, and her signals flat in the wind from Timbuctoo. Still I see her pick her way in the dark down the West Coast, or, in the safety of a river, paint the forest walls with her light. In my heart I save her forever from that betrayal in the English Channel, where she was lost, and her crew. And still I remember that last little steamer of all, whose name I have for-

gotten, who had no cabins, but suffered her passengers on her bridge, where they idly slept while she hurried all night under the stars upon the errands of exiles. For them she turned the furrow and cast her anchor in their service wherever there was a lamp at night, or a zinc roof to shine in the sun. She was for them, in those irregular war-times, a kind of miracle — a sweet chariot swinging low and coming for to carry them home. She was Their Steamer.

THE END

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