

AFRICAN MIRAGE

ROUMANIAN JOURNEY

By Sacheverell Sitwell

An impression by a brilliant modern writer of this little-known country, half European and half Asiatic, with its wealth of interesting landscapes, buildings, customs, costumes and people. Mr. Sitwell has here found a subject well suited to his talent for vivid descriptive writing, and one which will be new to all except a very few of his readers. There is a colour frontispiece and over 130 brilliant "bled-off" photographs, many of them specially taken for the book by A. Costa and Richard Wyndham.


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AFRICAN
MIRAGE

The Record of a Journey



By

HOYNINGEN-HUENE

*Illustrated from
the Author's Photographs*

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PREFACE

I HAVE never written before. These extracts from my diary have no scientific interest. I merely wish to preserve certain visual impressions.

Like most people travelling under unusual conditions, I made notes and kept a diary, the form of which I have tried to follow as closely as possible. Hence the resulting style.

I have purposely omitted all sordidness of realism in my photographs, and have concentrated on the plastic and heroic side of an Africa which is slowly disappearing with the ever-increasing supply of European and Japanese manufactured goods. Some day, when the entire Black Continent is clothed and reduced to comparative banality, these documents may prove of interest, revealing a naturalness of form and movement never found in a world of organised artificiality.

Those who wish to undertake a similar journey, before it is too late, will see for themselves what my incompetent pen and impromptu photography have attempted to convey.

G. H/H.

DAR ESSURUR,
HAMMAMET
1938

*All the photographs were taken with a Rolleiflex camera,
Compur shutter, Tessar lens 1:3, 8 F = 7.5 cm. Carl Zeiss,
Jena, Agfa Isochrome film.*

TO
JEAN and VIOLET HENSON



The Author's Journey

RELUCTANTLY I turn around and start for the river boat across the soft sand dune, the sand sucking at my feet. Egypt lies behind me with its last landmark, the cliffs of Abu Simbel descending into the Nile; huge in the moonlight with the four gigantic figures. The interior of the Temple cut into the hard rock. Chiselled to last for ever, as long as this world will last. The horse of Rameses bounding high over Egypt's enemies, leaping with infinite grace through poetic text. The female figures of Hathor and Nofretere elongated and deeply engraved into the smooth wall amid a papyrus marsh, the sacred boat floating through the great calm space of night into another world, a world of dream and lotus and translucent waters, mingling with the evening mist and the distant stars, and the stars quivering in the deep dark of an invisible stream.

The last great landmark of Egypt's power. A reminder of Pharaonic domination over the savage tribes of Africa. Nubian fishermen crouching on the beach around a fire, the folds of their heavy white draperies catch the warm flicker of the flames. The quiet of night envelops the world. The steamer leaves with a blow of the siren and ploughs its way up stream through the cold darkness. There seems to be no time: time is long and slow and ponderous. No speed, no noise. Serenity, calm, a vague emptiness crowded with nostalgic memories. Everything becomes vast, simple, reduced to its essential form, everlasting.

Farther, farther and farther. The rhythm of the past. The

twentieth century sinks behind the horizon as the Polar Star vanishes from the sky.

The memory of Egypt, absorbing, legendary and disconcerting.

Cairo, noisy, dusty, orientally cosmopolitan, full of souvenir shops with manufactured knick-knacks, and the guides. The guides rule supreme in the hotel quarters and harass you with offers of all kinds. Creeping up behind you, they start with: "Want a guide, sir? This is my card. Official guide, me. This paper from police, see! Ver' good, speak English ver' well, show you all Cairo, mosques, museum, tombs of caliphs and mamelukes, get you car, camel go desert, donkey, visit pyramids, go Giza, Gazira. You want tent for desert? Come here, my brother has shop. I get you cheaper than Cooks. Listen, mister, I get you all what you want, see! Memphis, Saccara. What you do to-night? Where you hotel? Want to see dancing-girl to-night? Real Egyptian dance all naked? I show you boy with girl all naked, all real, boy with boy, girl with girl. How about it? You take me, me good dragoman, you no complain. You pay nothing, pay later, if you not satisfy, you pay nothing. Where you go now?"

In the museum the statue of Kephre of diorite marble. The ultimate perfection in harmony and balance. At the back of the throne the royal falcon gently spreads his wings on either side of the King's head; the movement is like the timid, affectionate caress of a loving creature. Seated on a throne and supported by two lions, the King looks out above the horizon into infinity, and as your eye travels down his torso you feel that this magnificent body, hanging by its shoulders, is suspended in space.





The fleeting revelation of Akhnaton, like a meteor passing through Egyptian history. The jewels of Dashur and the world of glamour, pageantry and fantasy of Tut-ankh-amen's mortuary treasure. Dazzling, spectacular, theatrical accessories for a fleeting performance of incredible luxury. The blinding glitter of electrum and the glow of alabaster shining through the dark ages of slumber and oblivion. The life, humour and universality of the Saccara tombs, which make you see the Egyptian landscape in the terms of horizontal strips. Layers of chalk, stone plateaux, succeeded by rows of palm trees, green fields, and low mud dwellings. Peasants passing along a canal in the flat afterglow of twilight. The colour subdued, low in key, transparently light in values.

Through the windows of the tram going to Giza and past the aggressively modern villas among sugar plantations; the pyramids beyond a network of telegraph wires. No sense of scale from the distance. Mathematics projected upon a landscape of dunes. Behind one, across the hazy valley of the Nile lie the Moquattam hills, from whence the stones were dragged and piled up into geometrical mountains. Below the uncompromising winding demarcation where the desert stops and the fertile fields begin. One is death, the other life, and there is no in between. The Sphinx sprawls in its quarry as in an empty bath-tub.

Once inside the pyramid you crawl, climb and feel crushed by the overwhelming masses of stone. The great hall built on an incline, black, polished blocks of stone fitted with minute precision. At night you may stand at the foot of the pyramid and, looking upwards, you have the impression of a vast semicircle like the horizon of another world with the stars rising and setting beyond it.

Then the train southward. An employee enters my compartment and starts cleaning. The place is one cloud of soot and dust before I can stop him. He then turns to me nonchalantly and demands a baksheesh.

The German pension at Luxor has a Christmas tree brought all the way from Europe, and the loud-speakers thunder recordings of Wagnerian opera over a hushed audience who clap their hands as the flaming pudding parades through the darkened dining-room.

Here the Nile is very wide. The sun sets and turns the stream into liquid gold, pale silver and aquamarine, without a ripple, the pointed sails silhouetted against the luminous glow, boatmen singing melancholy chants, naked, bronzed boys with glistening high-lights, splashing about at the foot of the steep embankment. The moon rises. Dogs bark in the distance. The villages are asleep. The world is given over to the phantoms of the past. Someone follows me as I walk to the site of the Great Temples of Karnak. But soon the steps become discouraged and I am alone in a row of sacred rams like automobiles neatly parked along a beach. The half-demolished pylons cast their deep shadows. The columns in the enormous hypostyle hall are closely packed together. Barbaric in conception. The moon catches these palm-capitalled giants, grazing their sides and revealing a deity submerged in hieroglyphs or a Pharaoh paying homage to the phallic god Min. The shadows grow darker, they conceal people and ghosts. A strange world of spirits rises behind one and plays hide-and-seek with one's imagination. The statue of the lion-headed Sakhmet, the terrifying goddess of war, lit up by a moonbeam through the roof of her sanctuary. Everything

is haunted, every stone seems to guard a living secret. The obelisk of Queen Hatchepsut, around which her jealous husband-nephew, Thothmes III, built a wall for concealment. The wall has crumbled, the obelisk rises glistening into the darkness of the sky.

All around you the grandeur and vastness of great visions. Dreams materialized and then crumbled into the past. Growing out of the sand the pylons are like the desert plateaux, the obelisks like fingers pointing to heaven. The past rushes at you, crashing through the centuries. The pageant seems to go on uninterruptedly. Incredible staging fires your imagination, then dissolves into masonry strewn about, silent, resigned.

The royal cartouche of Rameses II, chiselled in hard granite deep into the sinews of alabaster, of ebony, deep into the back of the hæmatite scarab. The seal, the word, the name engraved for everlasting posterity. Rameses is seen smiting his enemies in a gigantic battle, like a symphony invading and spreading over huge inclined surfaces of stone. His image is repeated along the dark passages of temples, or lies smashed and colossal in the dust. The hours of the night and the hours of the day passing in endless procession deep in the bowels of the desert rocks. An afterworld of material life in a present world of utter desolation. A colourful fashion parade for the gods of death; Queen Nofretere's sumptuous robes in a maze of dark passages.

That was Egypt. And now Nubia.

Here again Rameses rises from the sand like a *leitmotiv*, growing and swelling and invading the mountain-side: bursting forth from the earth, his crown vanishing in the black

night. I dream I am in a tomb being slowly lowered into a fathomless world of shadows.

The steamer stops at Wadi-Halfa before sunrise. Darkness and biting cold. The passengers shivering. After sunrise the passport officials, custom house and train. Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Europeans in shorts and *sola topees*. Khaki uniforms and turbans on black Nubian soldiers. Order, efficiency, calm. The train is white and spotless.

We start across the desert. A stranger enters my compartment, Dr. W., a Swiss, and we discuss the merits of fleeing civilization and the great endless expanse of sand. He is an enthusiastic mountain climber and is going to attempt the ascent of Kenya and Kilimanjaro, accompanied by a little excitable Italian and another Swiss doctor, who travels for pleasure and study. The people on the train are serious-minded, some English travellers rejoining distant outposts in far-away places, others like people out of a Maugham story. The third class is full of natives with timid, bird-like little girls, their hair done in a multitude of stylized plaits. The boys have shaven heads and tufts of hair growing across their skulls like woollen cockscombs. Dark skins, black and white draperies and turbans. Sobriety. Aquiline noses, gentle mouths, large eyes and simple, strong features like primitive sculpture.

By degrees the sky takes on a weird colour through the smoked glass windows. The horizon quivers and detaches itself. Mirage superimposed on mirage, shifting as if the abstract quality of the desert were insufficient. Everything which is not in the immediate vicinity of the tracks dissolves into liquid air.





By tea-time the landscape is completely vacant and flat as a discus—petrified ocean. The contours are sharp. The world is a circular arena with the sun for a spotlight. An arena during an intermission without spectators. The train is a toy filled with serious clowns.

At Abu Hamed the train rejoins the Nile in the darkness. Fine sand filters through the cracks, penetrating one's eyes, nose, ears and mouth. No escape, you breathe sand. The cold persists. Howling wind in the night.

Morning. The train crosses the Blue Nile; confusing flicker of ironwork over a bridge.

Khartoum. Trim British officials, scrupulous tidiness and newness. A brand-new Ford rushes me to the hotel through large avenues of banyan and sycamore trees. The sidewalks are deserted. A few natives on bicycles. Life is lived behind the closed doors of villas and clubs. A large square—the statue of General Gordon riding a bronze camel, by an R.A. The embankment of the Nile is bleak; the waters of the channel. Another academic statue. A snapshot of Kitchener cast in bronze with every detail faithfully reproduced, so that there can be no doubt or misunderstanding. A chemist's resembling an American drug-store. Christmas cards of natives, detective stories, *The Times*, pipes, tobacco, Vat 69 and gin. The houses are low and concealed behind trees. The hotel is like a nursing-home. I expect a regimental nurse to bounce into my room at any moment. Outside, the howling, tearing wind and sandstorm persist. The only thing to do is to go to bed with a hot grog and a book.

Unbelievable how British diehard empire-building, decency and efficiency can cast the atmosphere of dullness upon

the heroism of Gordon, the glamour of the Mahdi and Omdurman, one of the greatest of African markets.

The hotel tries to come to life on New Year's Eve. People in "frightfully jolly costumes" and "I say, what a topping nose," lounging in the hall. The Nubian waiters look like gods of dignity among this innocent and unimaginative attempt at festive exuberance.

I visit the local zoo. A rectangular lawn shaded with palm trees and banyans and surrounded by enclosures with caged animals. But gazelles are grazing and sleeping on the lawn. Cranes, pelicans and shoebills wander about unconcerned by the few visitors who chance upon this strange community. The shoebill gives one the meanest look any one could receive. The baby gazelles on the lawn look as if they had stepped out of a Viennese fabric.

In Omdurman, across the White Nile and at its confluence, there is the ancient dwelling of the Mahdi, and one of his surviving warriors in an incredible costume of coloured patches. He is one of the "sights of the place," and makes you think of some old man out of a limerick.

Among mud huts, the market, an agglomeration of Arabs, fellahin, Nubians, blacks of various tribes, women, gaunt and lean like dried mummies, in blue draperies with stylized Sudanese coiffures, Jews, Syrians, Greeks selling cereals, amulets, leather wear, wicker baskets and matting, low couches and stools made of wooden frames and stretched with rope, salt, hide oil, dried fruit and cotton. The wind blows the draperies from half-clad bodies, revealing daggers worn around powerful biceps; thin bony limbs covered with weird tattoos and scars; occasionally a magnificently strong torso glistens

in the sun, but a cloud of dust envelops the scene, strangely lacking in atmosphere, and our car moves on through a herd of camels.

New Year's Day. Dr. W. and Dr. B. call on me suggesting that I join them across Africa, and asking me to meet them in Kenya Colony. I am thrilled at the idea and accept without a moment's hesitation. Both of them leave for the flying-field after what the French call "*une cordiale poignée de main.*"

The same evening I embark on the southbound river steamer which, after two weeks of voyaging up the Nile, is to deposit me at Juba.

On awakening I discover that there is not merely one boat, but half a dozen boats, rafts, and other vessels, all of them chained together, slowly but steadily paddling up stream, pushing each other along. The main boat with its two decks and roof, its comfortable lounging-chairs, electric fans and sleeping-porches under mosquito netting, is flanked by another similar barge and several rafts.

Ahead are two more boats and rafts with natives, their kitchens and their cattle. The natives are Nubians in bright red blankets edged with green, and wearing white turbans. They live in groups on the floor of the deck like camping Bedouins, eating from a great bowl round which they squat sideways, and almost interlocked like a circular group of performers.

Our boats are detached and pass one by one through the sluices of the Gebel Auliya dam, after which the travelling circus is reassembled in its previous formation, and continues.

Brilliant sun and warmth. Everything around us changes. The Nile is wider, the distant shores green, with masses of

cattle grazing and thousands of wild duck and geese. No palms. No desert. Green, fresh regions with acacia trees. The food on board is excellent. This floating caravan affords perpetual change. I spend hours watching the natives and their graceful movements, listening to the young boy flautist who has heard the Scottish bagpipes in Khartoum and endeavours to imitate them. But soon the shores seem to surrender to the desert.

The night is warm. Venus glows with incredible brilliance. The constellations seem to have changed, as if the sky had been rearranged. The following morning is sunny, the wind dying down. The sky immaculate and cloudless. The shores are again deserted. They repel the waters of the Nile, and the stream's fertility has ceased. Once more two elements confront each other without transition. The yellow stream encased in golden sand.

At noon we reach El Dueim, the capital of the White Nile province. Huts of mud, irregular and hand-made, a mosque and several palm trees lie above the gently sloping shore. The population crowds to the landing-place. We are stuck in the mud, and a row of naked men, up to their shoulders in water, push us off the bank. Many negroes with their families, wearing daggers and amulets tied together with a string of hippopotamus hide.

Most of the natives disembark here amid a confusion of bustling and shouting.

The market begins with the covered soukhs up in the village, under arcades with mud pillars and straw roofs, and continues to an open space with great piles of cereals, barley, wheat and onions, down to the sandy beach where the camels,

knees tied together, are sold. Naked negroes bathing in the Nile, some Bedouins from the desert swathed in yellow draperies and resting their staffs across their shoulders. A couple of crested cranes with bright red and yellow markings promenade, dignified and undisturbed, among the populace.

An hour later we continue up stream under a hot noon sun. We lose our flautist at El Dueim. A Scottish engineer runs the boat, the crew are Sudanese. There are several English officials and engineers, and several women. We expect more passengers at Kosti.

At sunset the Nile seems to widen, long narrow islands with acacias follow the banks. Rare villages in the distance with mud dwellings. Natives with water buffaloes among the papyrus. Rows of flying cranes form immensely elongated quivering serpentines. The landscape is vast and monotonous. There is a mill at Kosti which consists of six blindfolded camels turning in narrow circles round and round the melancholy squeaking receptacles where the cin-cin seeds are ground. The motion of the camels seems perpetual. This ritual-like performance takes place in a shack with the sun rays filtering through the reed-covered top.

Some negroes are loading sacks of wheat on the embankment. Four men lift a sack as the fifth man receives the load on his shoulders. As they heave the load they chant: "Eoo bara barra—ali barra, bara barra ali barra."

The new passengers arrive by train and we depart.

The scene changes in the course of the afternoon, reeds and papyrus separate the mainland from lagoons lined with acacias. The number of birds increases. One large tree is covered with white egrets and cranes, and looks as if it had

burst out in huge blossoms. No villages, no fields; the light softens. You feel that the desert is definitely replaced by grass and bush, broken by occasional clusters of trees that look greyish and feathery. We are traversing the Sudanese savanna. Grass invades the landscape and conceals the banks.

Late at night we halt. The steamer's pump is making an insistent, wailing noise. The negroes start lifting and treading heavily. The sacks seem to float in space above their white loin-cloths, the men's bodies merging with the darkness. Now the barge under my porthole is being unloaded. They jabber and squabble like birds. Each time a case is lifted they chant a plaintive phrase, then one of them will catcall and the whole lot of them break out with spontaneity into a gurgling cackle ending on a high note like a saxophone. Then the chant recommences: "Balla, yalla, balla, aye, aye, aye, aye, yalla, yalla, yalla, aye, aye." Then laughter. The whole thing is a huge joke. The chanting is virile and melodious and has a sexy animal undertone. A rich sound, rich like the deep colour of their fluent limbs.

The greenness of the great expanses of reeds and papyrus seems more intense on the following morning; the trees are taller; the sun more brilliant and without the harsh glare of the desert regions.

We stop at a village of straw huts: here live Sudanese traders, but the inland regions are inhabited by Dinka. Two of these young hunters, from six to seven feet tall, and unbelievably elongated, are standing on the shore. Both wear their cotton cloaks draped and tied over the left shoulder and passing under the right breast. This garment ends above the knees and is open on one side, disclosing an erect and muscular body

*Opposite—Dinka
Following—Shambe Dancers and Audience*









partly powdered with ashes. The first one has his hair completely transformed into a small skull-cap of closely fitting mud balls, painted a dull white like plaster. He wears four bands of flat, oval, turquoise-blue beads round his forehead. Below that and covering his plucked eyebrows, a row of silver discs. Silver rings pierce through the flaps and lobes of the ears, necklaces of white, black and red beads fitting closely. One forearm is entirely covered with gleaming brass spirals, the other with bands of antelope hide. His companion wears a cotton rag rubbed with red brick-dust, as are his cheekbones. Ostrich feathers complete the headdress. They hardly move as they get photographed. They are like living sculpture. Gay, childlike, gentle and dignified. The symbol of the primitive, vainglorious male. The intrepid huntsman with his long spear, agile and wiry. The hero of a legend from times immemorial.

At noon we see the first hippos in the water, coming up for breath. We stop at Renk and visit the village. More Dinka among a crowd of Nubians. One of them is sensationally thin, and wears a rag of deep pomegranate, his hair is a mass of burnt sienna blobs, the colour of the gum-arabic tree. Difficult to photograph, as he tries to escape. The women are draped in indigo blue cotton, and wear bracelets of silver and strings of beads around their heads and necks. They raise their long arms to support an earthenware jar or a petrol tin marked "Shell," balanced on their heads.

The weather is cooler in the early morning. Dried grass, like pale, luminous gold, follows the row of rushes along the shore, frequently interrupted by groups of trees and Shilluk villages. More egrets perched on branches or standing in the

water among the thin reeds. A few scarlet birds with jade green tails flash their colour as they fly by.

My meal companions are an American couple. He is a jovial, grey-haired man with horn-rimmed spectacles like a funny character from a musical comedy. His vocabulary is of the "Oh, boy! Oh, boy!" "Them babies" and "Boloney" order. Incredibly funny to me, but not to the sterner Englishmen at the other tables. She is a retiring but purposeful woman, using "Gee whiz" and "My!" every time she sights something unusual.

At Kaka we all descend and invade the Shilluk village with our cameras. The Shilluks, with long spears, shields of crocodile skin and strange markings, are similar to the Dinkas. Several men wear their hair down to their shoulders in streaks ending in blobs of mud covered with cow excrement and soaked in urine. There are also several hunters whose hair has been cut like a hedge and solidified with mud and manure into a consistent mass resembling felt. These hatlike coiffures remind one of the latest creations of a Parisian *modiste*.

One of the men, with brick-coloured stripes running down his face, looks like a mask. His body is reedlike and is merely hanging from the broad span of his shoulders as he stands lightly on one leg like a crane. His head is like that of an animal. The head of an Egyptian deity. Anubis or Chorus, half man, half beast, an idol descending from generations of paganism. Their slow birdlike movements vary, like the slower and completely relaxed movements of monkeys, each gesture forming an amazing composition. The pure, deerlike expression in their large eyes is animated while they are talking; then all of a sudden the face goes blank, as if some inward

shutter obliterated all brain-functioning. The Shilluk women, apart from their attire and sexual organs, hardly vary from the men in the formation of their bodies and effeminate gestures. The natives are not easy to photograph. The moment one points a camera at them they turn their backs and start gliding away with long, graceful strides. You then produce some small change, which they cautiously take with the tips of their long fingers. Usually a Sudanese will act as interpreter, and they consent to be "shot." A ring of eager passengers forms round the spectacular warrior, and the cameras click.

As we continue up the river we pass more Shilluk villages under tall fan palms. The huts are built of straw and reeds and are cone-shaped, curving domelike and ending in a point. They are surrounded by tall enclosures of dried elephant grass and screened off with matting attached to tree-trunks. Most of the natives are completely naked. Some of the fishermen are throwing fine, circular nets which spread out before reaching the surface. Black figures in canoes scooped out of single tree-trunks. Many little raftlike contraptions made of branches of porous and extremely light pulp called *ambach* tied together in bunches. When not in use they stand them on end and let the water trickle down. These they handle with extreme skill.

At noon we encounter the first crocodiles, basking lazily in the sun, and at our approach these sinister monsters slowly let themselves glide into the concealing waters. We pass Fashoda during the night.

Malakal is surrounded by Dinka villages. The nearest of these to the small European colony are neatly laid out and equipped with sanitary arrangements. The British and Sudanese

authorities live under electric fans in bungalows enclosed by mosquito net porches. There are colourful flowering gardens of tropical vegetation. The spacious court of the hospital is crowded with natives patiently waiting. At the sound of a gong they gather around a kitchen where hunks of raw meat are distributed, and immediately consumed. Strange coiffures, tattoos, stylized scars and jewels mingle with sores, broken limbs, gaping wounds and suppurating eyes. A sinister scene from a black inferno. The prison is surrounded with barbed wire, the prisoners walk about gaily in chains.

We leave some passengers and continue through a starlit night. Along the shores the natives are burning the dry grass, and the flames tear across the vast, flat landscape, throwing up great clouds of luminous, flame-coloured smoke.

In the morning we sight a boat going down another stream. It seems to move above the tall grass like an old-fashioned bathing establishment with a chimney gone adrift. We only see its upper deck.

During dinner my American couple made the table roar with laughter, including the earnest and sociable engineer. This seems to affect the more "silent" table at which Miss Vansittart and a young doctor are trying to convince a future District Commissioner that "civilization" is going to the dogs, the latter fighting valiantly. The American's voice merely thundering a "Baloney" and a "Yes, siree," into the general din which subsides on top deck in the darkness of a windless night, pierced by the reddish glow of a few cigarettes and the distant, greenish darting of fireflies.

Again a day of dazzling sun and hot, dry wind. The wind of summer. Not a cloud since we left Khartoum. The shores

are narrow, with many lagoons. We have passed the last Shilluk villages in an immense plain of grass, which seems as endless as the desert. The sky is pale blue, the dry grass golden, the fresh grass bordering the Nile a brilliant green. The natives, their canoes and huts, the colour of grey mud. The entire light and colour scheme seems to be reduced to its utmost simplicity. And more crocodiles, hippos and birds.

The barges around us are stacked with coal, motor-lorries and sacks of wheat. At sundown the landscape becomes remote and unreal. No trace, no sign of human existence. The supremacy of Nature. Our little oasis of barges ploughs onward. Distance. Space. The beginning and end of the world. An overwhelming feeling of detachment and isolation seems to hold us in its grasp. Everything seems to fall back upon itself, secretly penetrating the remotest depths of the soul, and yet a mood of absolute communion with Nature prevails.

Solitude and peace without the nostalgic presence of loneliness.

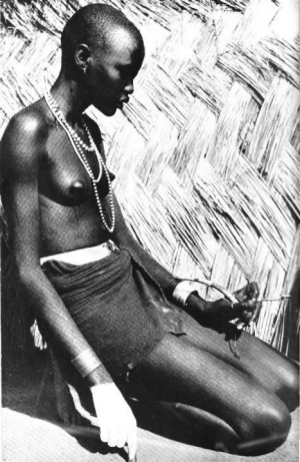
Timelessness.

The sun rises and sets eternally. There is day and night, there are meals at certain hours, the only indication of time, but outside, over the great sweep of the Sudd, there are no seasons, and no hours. To-morrow is yesterday and to-day is thousands of years ago. The rhythm of nature, deliberate and irrevocable, the rhythm of perpetual slow motion. Life, struggle and destruction instantly replaced. One substance superseded by another ever living and constantly renewing itself.

At sunset we reach the point where the Bar-el-Gebel unites with the White Nile. Ahead of us is Lake No. The lake is surrounded by papyrus stretching outwards and covering the world. Long chains of shifting grass lie upon the placid waters like dark clouds, slowly moving in a sunken sky, with pools of every known colour reflected in the luminous waters, which seem to have been transformed into a gelatinous substance. The sun sinks into this slowly shifting transparency and vanishes, leaving its glow upon the surface, as if it had dissolved for ever. We turn southward, and the vision of the phantom lake vanishes in darkness. And now the papyrus seems to crush the stream from either side. In the morning the world is a green cloud, huge feathery bursts billowing and swaying gently with the first breeze.

The horizon is visible from the top deck. The papyrus seems to be an overwhelming element. Halfway up the stems are smothered with invading creepers strewn with mauve flowers, weighing down and ending by spreading themselves upon the opaque grey of the stream. There are frequent masses of elephant grass in this world of papyrus. The wind increases and sweeps over the scene with the gesture of a rising surf. The sea of papyrus responds as wave upon wave of ethereal greenness succeed each other. The wind calms down. A shoebill rises and flies away with a heavy flopping of its wings. The river narrows as if in a deathly struggle to maintain its course through the Sudd. It all seems stagnant and dank in this marsh, overcrowded with vegetation. The shores heave up and down as we pass and a bird will fly up lazily, or a crocodile, disturbed by the lapping surf, will slither head down, dragging its heavy, jagged tail into the concealing liquid





mud. It is like living on a floating sponge. Underneath the surface of this strange world given over to itself, one imagines a life of incredible intensity: billions of creatures devouring each other and multiplying in the rotting undergrowth of slime.

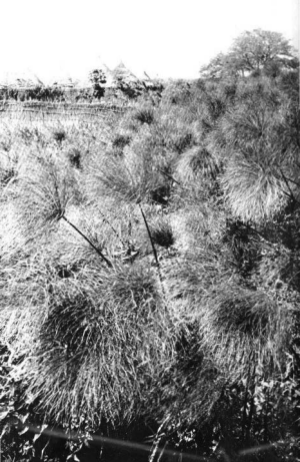
The following day is the same. There is nothing in sight but the invading, billowing ocean of green. The tops seem more feathery, the stems about twenty feet high. Again a shudder runs across the surface, followed by successive waves and ending like breakers: the papyrus bending down to the stream as the wind passes on. Monstrous crocodiles are lying about, half concealed by plants. An occasional clearing reveals the footprints of hippos among a chaos of crushed reeds, torn and trampled on, as if some terrific struggle between invisible prehistoric monsters had taken place.

Again a vacant red sunset in an empty sky which changes the Sudd from green to grey, and then the quickly approaching night turns everything into darkness. Fireflies dart about. On the far horizon long strips of flame and rising smoke, reflecting miles of conflagration. Like a distant battle raging silently. The night is warm and noiseless. We stop at a hut among the papyrus; a halt of several minutes to measure the Nile gauge. A fire is burning under a solitary tree. Two slender girls, completely naked, with their arms crossed, clasping their necks, their pointed breasts protruding, stand warming themselves. An old man is seated in a corner, indifferent to our sudden arrival. Remote lives in a state of permanent lethargy. The natives of these regions are the Nuers, a warlike tribe, the mortal enemies of the Dinka. We are on our way again. Was it vision or reality? We plunge back into the realm of Sudd and continue up stream.

The next day the curtain rises over another drama of papyrus, and then a vast expanse of open water with floating vegetation. We halt at a village called Shambe. Here one of the young doctors leaves us to regain a distant post in the wilderness. There are a few European huts among frangipani trees, beds of canna, mimosa and further tall dom palms, and the huts with thatched roofs housing Dinka and Zande.

It is here that I meet Yom. She is naked but for a low belt of electric blue beads of glass and a short black loin-cloth. In one hand, which is painted white to the wrist, like a glove, she holds an ebony and brass pipe, which she smokes languorously. Every movement of hers is pure harmony and elegance in all its feminine refinement, each attitude exquisite, slow sensuality; every bit of her fabulously plastic body cast iron in motion. Finishing her pipe, she slowly draws herself up from the warm ground and, lifting her arms with fingers bent back, sways gently, then starts stamping and leaping with giggles of delight, raising her tiny, grinning head. She is joined by two companions, and I manage to photograph the three graces. There are young men standing on one foot, the other resting on the knee, birdlike, leaning on a spear and forming two triangles, one within the other. They have no jewels, only the black of ebony to clothe their nudity. Their sexual organs unusually large and uncircumcised. Both men and women pluck their hair, this is obligatory. Some of these blacks are grey, covered with ashes and looking like lepers. Thin, spindly little boys with protruding bellies and skulls like question marks. The straw huts are neat, and the matting and various patterns resemble a succession of large wicker baskets with conical tops. Cattle, dogs and fowl in groups among









the natives, sprawling on the ground. A stray ibis wanders about. The children gather round me as I attempt to photograph a particularly impish urchin who, full of mischief, hides behind the elder boys. One woman, who was observing me, suddenly gives a piercing scream, throws up her arms, goes down on her knees and rolls in the dust, convulsed. Not a fit of epilepsy, but the Dinka way of expressing hilarity. The game of hide-and-seek between model and camera goes on until half a picture is produced. They usually stiffen up for the photograph, like most peasants; the only way of obtaining a seemingly natural pose is to make them take up the attitude you originally saw them in, unless you catch them in motion, which is seldom possible. All this is accompanied by incessant chatter, self-consciousness, childish *espièglerie*, faked hostility and shouts of delight.

I return in the afternoon and go for a walk with a Sudanese official. After half a mile along a path we meet a shepherd carrying several spears, and singing. I hand him a coin and the Sudanese tells him to go on singing. The sun is low, hundreds of birds are rising from the marsh among the tall grass, revealing the horns of grazing cattle. The native starts muttering to himself like an old beggar, then breaks out into a refrain interrupted by nostalgic cries. Not a human cry, the faint cry of an animal in pain. The refrain is plaintive, distant, and seems to contain all the sadness and resignation of the primeval man's solitude. Every now and then he spits in a large curve with a look of detachment. The muttering recommences as he points to the horizon, then an agonizing high-pitched wail in another key, and then, as he departs, the refrain grows distant in the cool of the evening. The meaning of the song

is a farewell to a cow he had sold to a chief. Back in the village, a woman sprawled out flat on her back, fast asleep. Her baby lying on top of her, sucking at her young breast. A circle of boys clapping their hands around two superb youths who are jumping high and hitting their powerful buttocks with their heels. Archaic bodies in action; glistening, sweat-covered thighs like steel springs. Crude ivory bands clasping their arms. The little girls chant: "A doo da Yomda, a doo da Yomda, a doo da Yomda, a doo da Yomda."

The boat glides away after dusk and is once more swallowed up and submerged by the Sudd.

The river is narrower than ever. The choking Sudd seems to defy the current of the Nile. Down below, the chief engineer shows me the engine-room which is open on both sides. Then we crash into the steep masses of papyrus which swish and bend with elasticity. As we brush past, it yields. The huge wisps tower ghostlike in the night, tall and impressive when seen from the water level of the lowest deck. One of our paddles is smashed, the boat heaves a sigh. The machines slow down, the gyrations of the pistons slacken as the flanking barges crash against the reeds, another corner passed. We have cleared the bank. Full steam ahead. Above are the stars in a cloudless and distant sky.

On the following morning again the Sudd. No wind. The Nile is as calm as a lagoon. As the morning advances the papyrus gives way to taller reeds and elephant grass. We pass a few huts with Dinka families waving to us from the shores. Round a bend we see a flock of marabus, and, farther, herons stealthily moving about, vultures, eagles, hawks, duck, egrets





and ibis. A crane, almost submerged by the tall, inter-fused reeds, leaps upward like a ballet dancer, then spreads its large wings and stretches its head forward, its legs taut like a diver's, continuing the elegant curve of its floating arabesque. Then the winds flop, as if in slow motion, as it soars above the billowing surface of grass, and vanishes from sight.

There are hundreds of bright-coloured smaller birds. Then our American companion discovers the first elephants. There is a general rush to the top deck. People passing field-glasses to and fro. A herd of about fifty and a few isolated ones. They look like great boulders—grey in the fresh, green grass, moving almost imperceptibly. As we approach they seem to sense us and most of them start raising their trunks and flopping their huge ears, whilst moving away from the shore, the tall grass hiding their bodies and concealing their rounded backs upon which a stray ibis lands and starts pecking. Farther on we sight another herd. Through the field-glasses I discover several Dinka standing on a termite hill beyond the elephants. They are observing the mass movement of these giants. The Dinka are motionless, like sentinels, with their spears high above their heads. This scene might have been enacted ten thousand years ago.

The crocodiles are more numerous, some speckled green and yellow-brown, others almost black. One of these lies asleep on the bank, his jaws wide open, disclosing rows of deadly teeth. When in the water these monsters resemble logs of wood, and when submerged you can barely distinguish a pair of eyes and nostrils from floating weeds. Dozens of hippos sticking their pink and black heads out of the water, splashing about,

*Opposite—Native of Shambe
Young Dinka*

snorting, shaking their ears, and vanishing as we approach. The opaque, muddy stream conceals a prehistoric life. At sunset we see a hippo emerge from the water, dripping and glistening. It heaves its bulk on the bank and wades through the mud, then, crushing the papyrus, disappears. Sunset is followed by almost instant darkness. The sun rises at six and sets at six, and each day is the same. The same cloudless sky, the same light, the same Sudd. The days are hot and windless, the nights are cool.

When I awake we are in Bor. Tall trees cast their early shadows on a flat place surrounded by native huts, which are larger here than in the previous settlements.

The local Dinka wear wide stomachers of pale coral-coloured beads, the rest of them being naked, their nudity covered with ashes. They wear a long tuft of hair in the middle of their skull. Herds of cattle, interbred with water buffalo, lie about in groups. A canoe with several natives, paddling to the beat of a drum, is crossing the river with a flock of cows following through the swift current, their long horns sticking up above their straining heads. Then another flock is driven into the river close to our boats, but as the stream sweeps them towards the barges they are caught in a cross-current and struggle in a panic. One cow is instantly submerged, its head disappearing under the barge. The natives, in a helpless frenzy, make a dash for the other side of the boats down stream, and as the herd comes floating by, half of the unfortunate beasts are lying on their sides with their heads under water. The surviving cows manage to regain the shore in a state of exhaustion. It is all over within two or three minutes. We leave after this pathetic incident.

*Opposite and following—Dry Season on the Nile Banks
Kenya Landscapes
Meru Family*





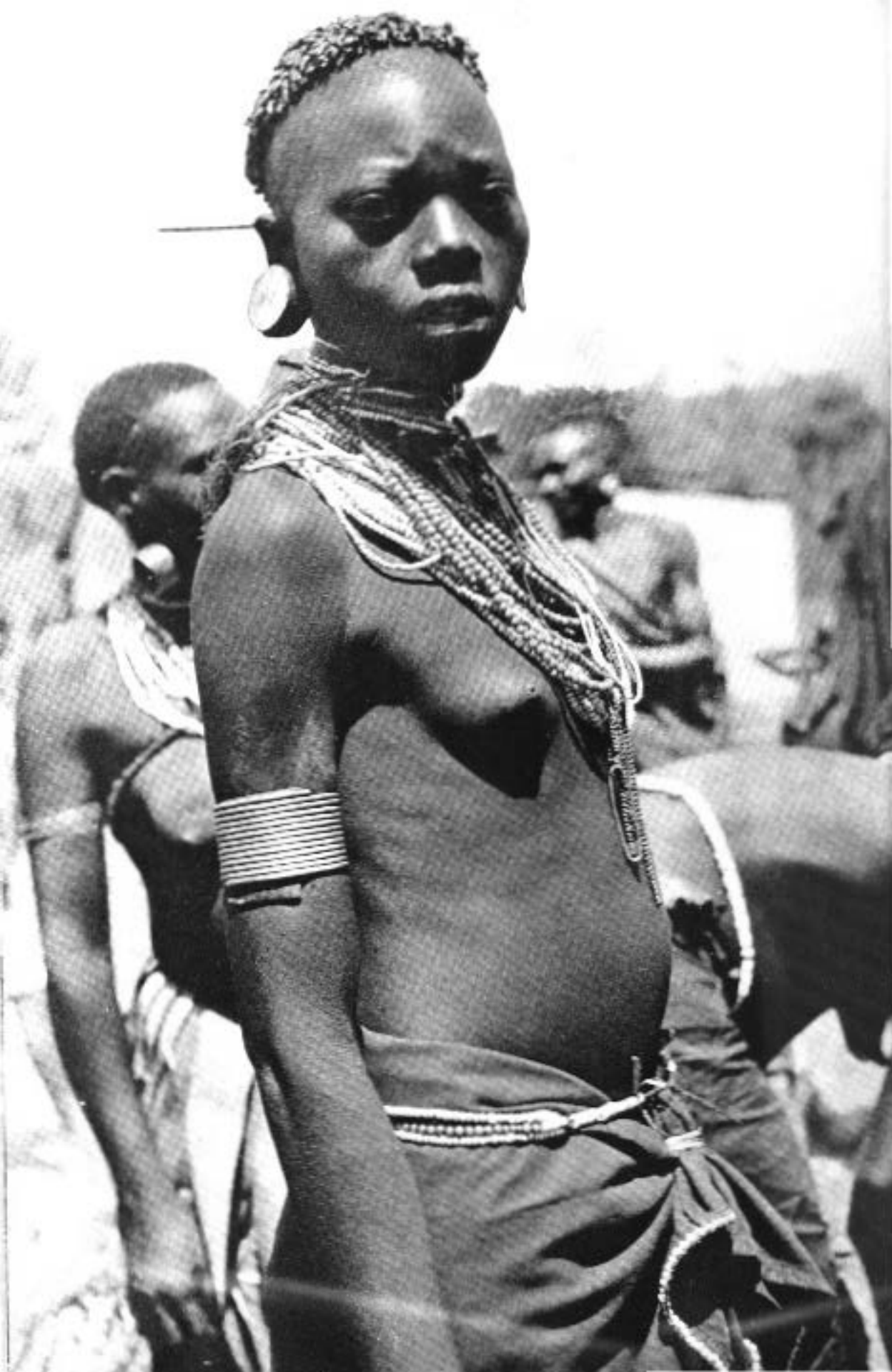












The Sudd gradually gives way to marshy but more solid shores. The world takes on consistency. Tall grass, beyond which rise the first trees and brush. Numerous villages line the banks among dom palms and tall grass. Temporary straw huts, built by the natives who migrate and reach the river during the dry season. They are covered in ashes and crowd the shores, enveloped in a golden light. Great clouds of smoke are rising from the horizon, giving the sky a sinister appearance. As we pass one village the entire tribe comes out to greet us.

Some three hundred young men, accompanied by little girls, start following us, throwing up clouds of dust as they run, their contours silhouetted against the sun. Some of the crew start throwing empty tins and bottles into the water, and several youths fling themselves into the stream to retrieve these "curios." The crowds start shouting and clapping their hands, the din increases, like the growing roar of an ovation. Now their bodies are glistening. The men emerging from the water, aided by their companions among the reeds, look like dark, luminous gods. Louder and louder. The shout of mass enthusiasm. Then they break into song, faster and faster. More splashes, more streamlined bodies shooting through the water like seals. As the boat swerves sideways round a bend, one of the natives barely escapes from being caught by the paddles. The noise augments, the runners increase their pace, some slacken and stay behind, in a whirling cloud of dust. The men running smoothly and with ease, like professional runners. Their bodies the ultimate in perfection. Naked but for a scarlet belt and heavy brass bands round their arms, their broad, straight shoulders turned slightly sideways,

4—A.M.

their tiny round heads with tight stylized hair, their muscular pectorals shining with high lights, their hipless compact loins and their strong wiry legs swinging in elastic tempo. By now they are all aglow with sweat and water in the powdery dust. The noise is low and deep. The deafening cries become mass hysteria, like the thunder of a crowd gone mad. A marathon, an heroic pageant of unsurpassable physical splendour. Faster and faster. The girls firing the men on to greater speed. They are in and out of the water like a flash, swimming with surprising speed, defying space with smooth, animal grace. The crowd, dominated by the same cadence, all in perfect rhythm. No ballet or organized dance could ever attain these spectacular heights. The spontaneous passion of frenzied joy has seized these people, and they are revealed in all the magic of their youth, in every phase of motion on land and in the water. Men and women leaping and bounding with untiring vitality. The turmoil of ecstasy is driving them on in a bacchanalian procession. They cease to be Dinka, they are black demigods. The pure, fresh joy of paganism has descended upon earth and broken out in a whirlwind of primitive enthusiasm. After about a mile the bottles give out; the black athletes, tired of competing, slacken their pace, many of them remaining behind; a few of the more agile following us. We steer round a bend in the stream and the tall reeds obliterate a vision of unforgettable beauty. We are again wrapped in silence. The faint chugging of our engine and the swish of the paddles.

As my excitement subsides I think of the missionaries and manufacturers of cheap clothes, ignorant of the pure flame of simple joy and naturalness in the primitive. The flame which

bursts forth from out of the immensity of African solitude. The gloriously impervious flame which "civilization" is slowly destroying. The monstrous, hideous octopus of modernity, embracing and reducing the world in its remotest corners and choking the human heart. Triumphant with the vulgarity of popular incomprehension. A stream of organized ugliness, flowing like a gutter and dragging the dreariness of artificiality in its wake.

The night is black and hot. There is not a breath of wind. I can hear the elephants trumpeting outside in the grass. Inside, above my head, the incessant whirr of an electric fan. As I lie half-awake I keep thinking of the amazing spectacle of those Dinka in all their unbelievable frenzy. We have left their land and this was their grand finale. The curtain has fallen. A sublime accident, a vision in one's life which remains implanted in one's memory, perhaps unique in the world of to-day. A sight so wonderful, so fresh and vital that one's mind can hardly focus it. It leaves one wondering and bewildered after the wild excitement is over, after the blood has stopped surging and one is left alone with the exquisite memory.

There is a certain feeling that a child senses when reading the legends of antiquity, and which it then loses as the everyday reality of life invades a growing soul and crowds out romanticism. The knowledge that this feeling is still to be found in the world, in the world of savage Africa, is a consolation, a recompense for having lived through all the disillusionments of banality between the first vision of the saga and the actual impact of a dream-world come true.

The next morning we are floating along high banks over

which rises the thick, luxuriant jungle. In the afternoon the river grows wide and shallow, our barges striking mud several times. More elephants, hippo and giant crocodiles. During the late afternoon the heat becomes oppressive. Everything is damp and dripping. We see some waterbuck grazing in the dried grass. On the horizon Mount Lado looms up in a blue haze beyond the thick forests. The sun sets in a flaming streak of purple. We are plunged into darkness and draw up alongside the shore as the river is unnavigable at night. There are mosquitoes by the million. The new moon rises golden and boatlike, then sets behind the high bank with its towering trees leaning towards the water. The scene, which reminds one of a gigantic operatic *décor*, is flooded by a single light from our boat. Beyond the trees there is darkness, and miles of jungle. One's imagination dwells on strange creatures in this world of deep shadows.

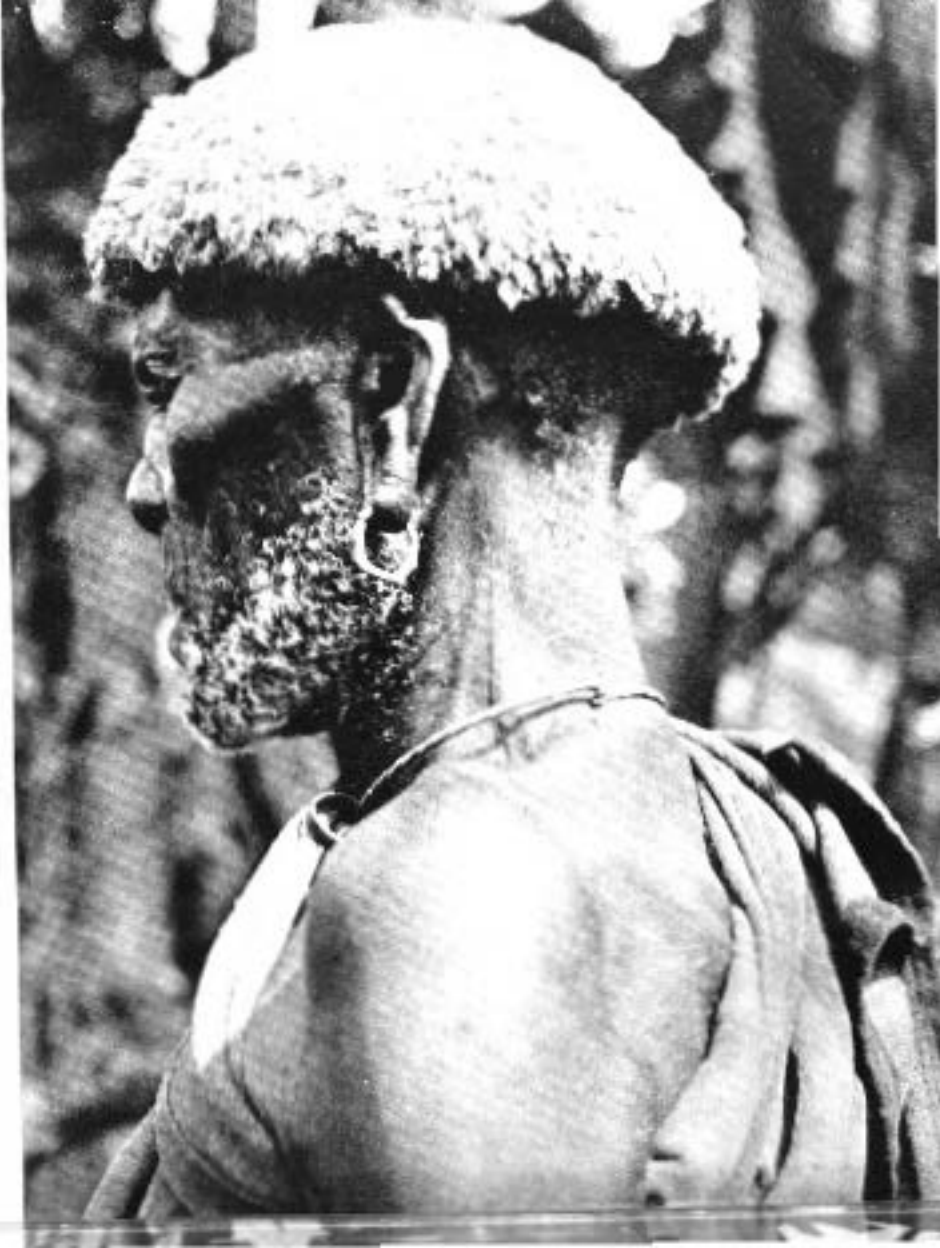
There is not a sound, not even the rustling of a leaf, nor the soft lapping of the Nile.

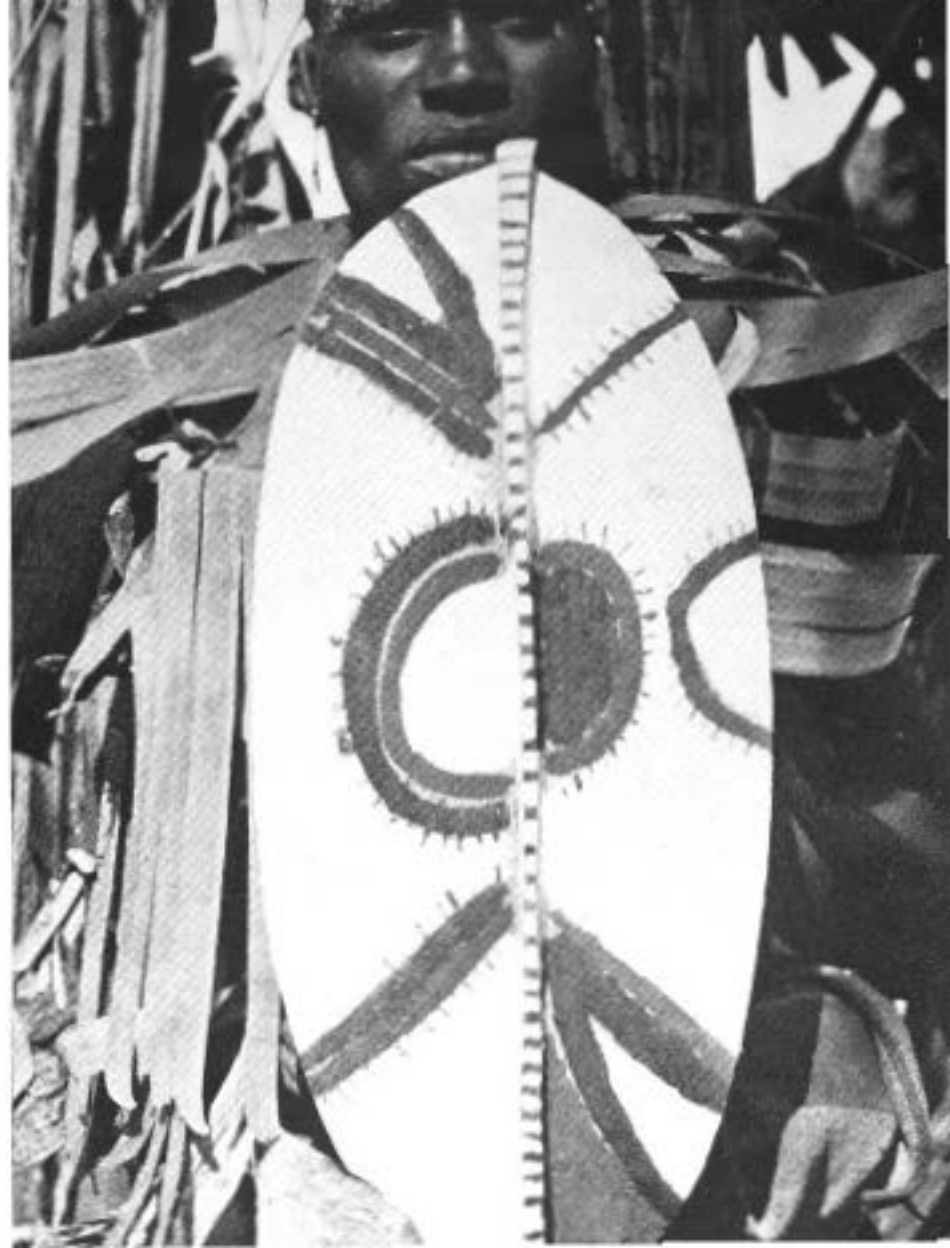
A tall black soldier stands motionless with his rifle, staring into nothing.

The next morning we sight another herd of elephants and, after several bends in the river, a few Bari villages with children splashing about in the water and hundreds of vultures soaring low over the deck.

Then the stone embankment of Juba. I think all of the passengers regret leaving the river boat where life has become a timeless dream amid comfort and pleasant company. A Ford rushes me to the hotel, which is a compromise between an English cottage and a native thatched-roof hut, surrounded by bungalows with mosquito-net porches, and run by an









Austrian from Salzburg. The British officials settle down to their gin and bitters under the hum of electric fans, and make arrangements for the afternoon tennis.

Juba with its Bari negroes, all dressed in shoddy singlets and dirty shirts; its brick porches, with a few stores selling tinned food, boot polish, Flit, guns, soap and cheap cotton; its sewing-machines in the shadow and its interminable avenues of acacia trees, is devoid of any interest. The Bari are tall and strong blacks. The women are mostly naked, save for a piece of brown or blue drapery for a loin-cloth, and carry their babies strapped to their backs, astride, with a wicker lid to protect their bare heads from the scorching sun.

Two cars and a van await the five passengers, including myself, at sunrise. We motor for four hours over miles of low, burned grass and scrawny bush, interrupted by stretches of cotton plantations and native huts, encountering some gazelles as we start climbing a ridge. Farther on we meet several baboons calmly crossing the road.

We stop at a rest-house and I decide to walk the remaining miles. The hills open up, revealing an immense valley, the Nile beyond some cataracts, great ranges of mountains to the west, and southward the fertile plains of Uganda, parklike and extending for miles in a greeny-blue mist.

The sky is luminous with big billowing clouds, the air is dry. A cool breeze relieves one from the burning heat of the midday sun. Down in the valley I am joined by a group of native boys, bareheaded and wearing shorts, two of whom are playing a gay little tune on hollow, boxlike instruments with metal bars, which they flick with their thumbs. I ask them whether they dance. The reply comes in rather bashful,

cooing English: "No dance, great White Chief says no good, dance very bad!"

After an hour I reach the little pier on the Nile with a corrugated iron shed and the name of "Nimule" painted in large letters on a sign. Nimule is a word on the map, but as a place it does not exist, save as a landing for the little river steamer which lies waiting for the passengers to embark. As we leave the sky becomes overcast, again the shores are lined with papyrus. The horizon is bordered by distant mountains.

We halt at "Rhino Camp" at 6 a.m. Again a landing-place with an iron shed and a few Hindu traders who sell cotton stuffs to the local women of the Ginam tribe. The women coming to market from inland are, however, mostly naked, wearing small bunches of leaves, one in front, the other behind, fastened to a single string of beads. The men are strong but ugly blacks with protruding stomachs. Unfortunately the white rhinos are not sighted this morning, and so we leave a few hours later.

The barges carry many natives and a few passengers with children. Large cockroaches crawling over half-torn, last year's copies of *Punch* and dead mosquitoes floating in the wash-basin. The food is of the dishwater and tepid glue variety, but there is a shower on board, which avoids one's sitting in a scrubby bathtub and contemplating the chocolate-coloured water of the Nile.

Again masses of papyrus and floating grass. Brilliant sunshine. During the afternoon the horizon on the left bank is black with smoke. Great flames roar through the bush, scattering multitudes of small animals out of their lairs and into the devouring claws of swooping birds of prey.

The breeze blows a shower of ashes on deck. We watch a huge snake crossing the current with its head well out of the water. After-sunset we disembark at Packwach and board a twin-screw boat, more appropriate for navigating the fjords of Norway than the equatorial lakes of Africa. The night is unbearably hot. The boat is almost empty as she sails across Lake Albert into a hazy nothingness dimly lit by the setting moon. I remember the play *Outward Bound*, the same rather creepy atmosphere.

The morning air is just as stifling, but before sunrise a cool breeze dissipates the cloudy sky and the millions of insects and mosquitoes whirling around the lights like serpentines.

We disembark at Butiaba and, after the customs inspection, motor across the savanna in a clean and comfortable bus. Climbing the counterforts of a high plateau we have a last glimpse of Lake Albert, vanishing in a blur of indigo.

After motoring across more dry and colourless bush we descend into a valley and the scene changes. The air is clear and fresh, the sun bright, the shadows soft and transparent. Native huts lie half-buried among thick clusters of banana trees, coffee, cotton and rubber plantations. We then enter the Budongo forest, the grandeur and beauty of which is overwhelming to the traveller not acquainted with a tropical forest.

Giant trees sprawl over hills and valleys, trees of infinite variety, with creepers running up their stems and falling down over the thick foliage. Thick lianas and roots encircling great trunks and swinging from tree to tree. Moss and plants of orchids cling to the bark. Below are palms and wild bananas mixed with low shrubs, massive and luxuriant,

with large foliage and strange blossoms. Clusters of exotic forms animated by birds of rare colours, large butterflies and weaver nests dangling from branches. Strange fruit, fernlike plants in the deep shadows and not an inch of space uncovered by rampant vegetation. Like a Gustave Doré forest in all its exaggerated romanticism, impregnated with a perfume reassuring the spectator of the reality of this paradisaical landscape. The nearest to what man can imagine the Garden of Eden to look like.

We reach Masindi at noon, and after lunch the American couple depart in a car for the Belgian Congo. The hotel is entirely run by Hindus, comfortable and unpretentious. The landscape through the mosquito-netting looks like a faded eighteenth-century tapestry. A view of gently undulating hills covered with trees, in a thick mist of smoke from burning grass.

Masindi is a parklike settlement, well planned, with discreet bungalows, half-concealed by tropical vegetation, suburban in feeling. Wide expanses of lawn run into golf courses, football grounds and an aerodrome. Lofty trees of great beauty cast their shadows over the red soil. It is England, an England of the tropics. The signposts are in English lettering. For a moment I think I am in Kent, or in a park in Surrey, but there is not an Englishman in sight. The few officials residing here are in their offices or at the country club. I pass a tennis court, the sunburnt, white-flannelled players are Hindus. Several nurses in large picture-dresses with bustles, pushing perambulators leisurely down a lane. They are chocolate-coloured. A young native, in a striped blazer and shorts, passes by on a bicycle and grins at the girls with their Hindu

children. They start giggling and cooing softly with all the coquettishness of Ronald Firbank's heroines.

A native with a caressingly melodious voice asks me what I am about. I explain that I gather the seeds of various plants and flowers and he accompanies me, curious and helpful, but keeping a respectfully polite distance of three paces behind me. This goes on for some time, till we reach a narrow brook leading into a papyrus grove. The scene is charming, a Douanier Rousseau fantasy. We regain the main road and the country is suddenly converted into a raging furnace. The world is burning as only Equatorial Africa can burn. Great clouds of yellow-brown smoke are rising all around us with the crackle and roar of tearing flames. It is inferno let loose; birds scattering in every direction. The land behind the steadily advancing flames is transformed into a landscape of the No Man's Land of a Flanders forest.

My companion points to a native form which lies beyond the barrage of smoke, and, with one leap and a dive, I rush through the first line of fumes, followed by "Sampson." We are in a crater of roaring flames which keep approaching the thatch-roofed hut. The entire family is evacuating the premises. Suddenly a huge tree catches fire, the flames rush up and devour it, turning it into a blazing rocket of sparks. A cloud of smoke from the smouldering grass rolls over us. I feel I am choking. Rushing into the farm's enclosure I start carrying the natives' possessions out into the adjacent tobacco field. Pots and pans, dishes, a rope bedstead, a bicycle, all mixed up helter-skelter. There is a general panic among the family, the men desperately beating the flaming grass with branches, and coughing. The children running about and

enjoying it. Then I come upon the young mother just as I am carrying a bundle of clothes; she turns to me in a cloud of smoke, her eyes streaming with tears from the fumes, a most ingratiating grin on her face and, lifting the skirt of her *robe de style* with its ample bustle, she gives me a deep curtsy worthy of any *prima ballerina*. The men in the meanwhile start chatting with Sampson and would forget the fire had I not insisted on their clearing the ground in front of the hut of the minor flames still hovering about. The fire somehow goes on beyond the farm in its destructive avalanche and the natives, relieved at being out of danger, set about catching their goats and hens which have been set free. My last glimpse of this family is a group of blacks gaily laughing at the incident, between a foreground of creeping yellow fumes and a background of towering flames.

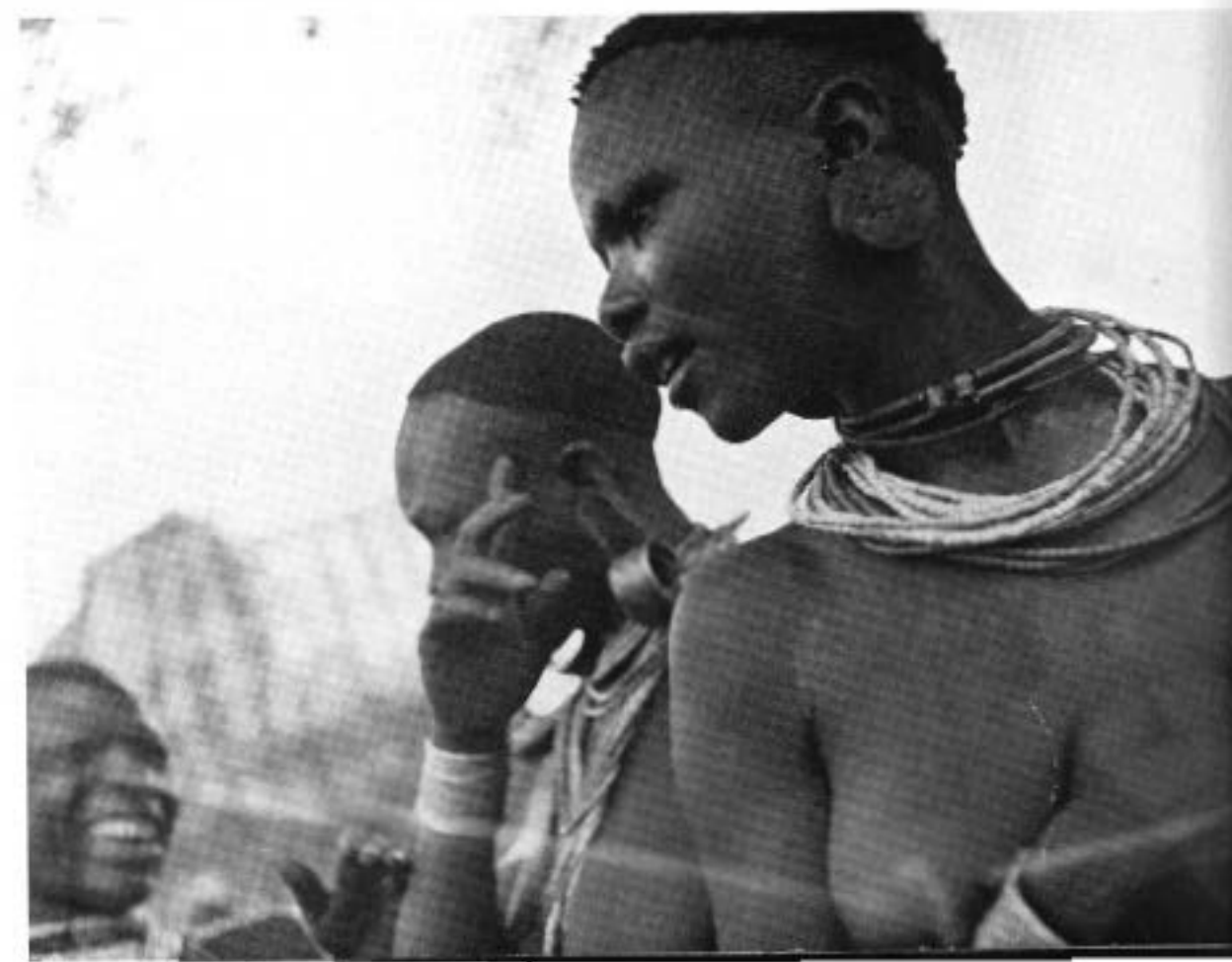
Again a departure at sunrise through burned bush and endless sisal plantations to Masindi Port on the Victoria Nile. After a few hours the little cargo boat enters Lake Kioga under an overcast sky. Lake Kioga reminds me of Lake No, an endless surface of water with floating islands of papyrus, water-lilies and Nile cabbage. Like a flooded area, with many water birds among the reeds.

Most landscapes in Africa take on an air of calamity and contradiction.

I am the only passenger. The four long barges which are being pushed ahead of us are crowded with native labourers sprawling half-naked over each other, like the slain in an heroic battle painting.

Namasagali. A pier with a train which takes one through the savanna with towering euphorbia and termite mounds





and then another impenetrable jungle. As the train climbs a hilly region we are engulfed in banana plantations. The natives in the fields, dressed in gaily printed cottons, wave to us, like the chorus in a musical extravaganza. I leave the train at Jinja. A car takes me through a small town resembling a pioneer settlement in Colorado, and beyond, past some new administrative buildings, to a hotel which is an English country house: herbaceous border, bignonia rambling roses, chintz curtains, muffins and tea.

Lake Victoria and its surrounding hills remind me of the landscape round Plymouth. The hills are grass-covered with opulent trees, the lawns immaculately fresh, the sky crowded with bulging rosy clouds.

I want to go bathing in the lake, but am warned that it is practically suicide, on account of the crocodiles, which I had forgotten. As I walk along the shores, breathing the smell of new-mown hay, I notice the train on the top of a hill across the narrow part of the lake, below which lie the Ripon Falls, with salmon leaping out of the foam among the pointed rocks. Scotland. The great explorers must have felt at home, after hacking their way through virgin forest and swamp, to find a glorified British countryside on the Equator. And thus the placid waters of Africa's greatest lake were named after the Queen of the wonderful century.

The Ripon Falls are like a terrace intersected by several rocks entirely covered by luxuriant vegetation. The calm waters of the lake slowly roll down in a glistening mass of smooth undulation, then quicken, crash into a thundering torrent of foam and spray, and, hemmed in by the steep banks, begin their flow across the African continent, northward. Cormorants

*Opposite—Kikouyou Chief
Kikouyou Women at Market*

by the hundred sit perched on the rocks and brave the waters, catching fish.

Here I come across Mr. and Mrs. Courtauld, who have flown from Khartoum, full of enthusiasm. We read the inscription on a stone nearby indicating the source of the Nile: "J. H. Speke. July 28, 1862."

The power station nearby concealed by trees; its dynamos drowned by the roar of the torrent.

On awakening, the air is moist and heavy.

I feel exhausted. I long to get away from Jinja and the English boarding-house atmosphere.

The train takes me through the fertile country along Lake Victoria, and stops at Tororo. The spotless little station is surrounded by lawns, bordered with roses, frangipani, magnolia and bougainvillæa. Hindus and natives, all colourfully turned out, walking along the neat red earth platform. The Hindu women wear saris of brightly printed design, giving them an air of calm distinction. In the setting sun the colours are even more bewildering for their unusual combinations. The Uganda women in their *robes de style* which would arouse a sensation among Parisian *couturiers*. These ladies, with their hair partly shaven, their unadorned lovely shoulders and gleaming, voluptuous backs, glistening in the setting sun, are moving about dignifiedly, smiling and gossiping in soft melodious voices. The young men in bright polo shirts with smartly cut shorts and gay stockings. A scene of perfect refinement and elegance, like a garden party. All this coming and going among the perfume of blossoms, and several large posters of the snowy Alps marked "Visit Austria."

The night on the train is cold as we pass over the great rift, the equator and the Uganda-Kenya frontier.

The sun rises over a totally different country. A country of vast plains with few trees and distant mountains. Blue sky; dry, invigorating air, billowing clouds. Here the natives along the line seem poor and shoddy. Several men, in cloaks of antelope skin, with perforated earlobes hanging to the neck, are selling fresh pineapple which I consume as the train runs into Nairobi station.

I go to the New Stanley Hotel, the starting-point of all the safari. Nairobi, spick and span, brand-new and very cut-and-dried, is an almost exact replica of Culver City, California. Its churches are like imitation castles and its mosques imitations of Delhi. Everything looks faked and new. Even the trophies in the shop windows.

Up in the lift to my room, a hasty shower, and then my two doctor acquaintances in the bar. We go to a little French restaurant and, over a delicious meal, exchange our impressions of the last weeks. Dr. W., whom I shall call by his first name, Edward, has in the meanwhile climbed the Kilimanjaro, and Mawenzi, and Dr. B., whose name is Fred, has been photographing lions and giraffes on the slopes of the Ngorongoro crater in Tanganyika. We settle down and plan our future itinerary.

My friends leave me the next morning as I am busily organizing my kit. Camp-bed, mosquito-net, quinine, films, visas, permits, and all the rest, including a native servant.

He tells me his name is Maora, as we are speeding along the winding road across the Nairobi plains in my newly acquired Ford box-body car. After about forty miles the land

grows more varied, the road bending around hills and valleys with mountain streams splashing among rocks and thick luxuriant vegetation. A landscape which might come from the brush of Hubert Robert, minus the traditional Roman ruins. Far below lie Kikouyou villages on platforms of red earth, like mushrooms, forming circular patches amidst the green of the slopes. As the sun lowers, I see Kikouyou women returning from the fields. Their heads are close shaven, they wear loosely draped leather loin-cloths. The loads, including bananas, grain, water and, often, a baby, are all tied together on their backs and attached to their foreheads with a wide band of hide, and, in order to maintain their balance, they are obliged to stoop while walking and standing. These thick-set, strong women, slowly treading the red soil, their great breasts hanging and flopping as they stoop forward, their hands supporting the weight round their heads, elbows pointing upwards, covered with red dust, resemble some massive Epstein bronze.

We reach a country of pine trees and gentle green clearings, and arrive at Nyeri as the last rays of sun vanish. Fred greets me at the entrance of the hotel, a charming, rambling country house, gay with flowers and chintz curtains, and lying on the edge of a golf course. Edward, I hear, is still climbing Mount Kenya with the Italian. We chatter after dinner, and Fred tells me of the musical promoting he is interested in. As it happens, on that particular evening, the symphonic orchestra of Lausanne is playing Stravinsky's *Sacré du Printemps*, directed by Ansermet. Our conversation turns to Diaghileff, Nijinsky, Cocteau, Gide, Markevitch, great volcanoes and the whore quarter of Cairo. We finally decide to turn in. I go outside.





A brilliant moon, interrupted by slowly passing clouds, is casting heavy shadows upon the lawn, in the windless, cool night. Silence. Mount Kenya is wrapped in thick invisibility.

Kenya maintains its discreet aloofness for days. Days of pleasant lazing in the sun, or taking long, solitary walks in the surrounding hills and forests, a boy cutting the way ahead of me with his sharp "banga." Occasionally there is a rustling in the impenetrable undergrowth, and some unseen animal darts away. I lie under a tree for an hour, first watching a couple of hornbills and later a monkey high up in the trees, silhouetted against the blue sky. Fred works at his writing through most of the days, but in the evening we chat for long hours, touching every imaginable topic. During these hours I learn to appreciate the erudite mind of this man who has the astonishing memory of a living encyclopædia.

After five days we finally receive word from Edward that he has been delayed in his climb, and we decide to make a tour of Mount Kenya. Starting in the middle of the day, we drive over ravines of red earth with clusters of trees, banana and maize plantations. During these hours of monotonous landscape Fred tells me the thrilling story of Emin Pasha, the conquest of the Sudan and the Fashoda incident. After a while the country becomes flat and grassy with occasional parasol trees which soon disappear, giving place to an endless steppe extending over an incline of gentle mounds and sloping northward as far as the eye can see. Here, the low grass resembles some intricate fabric, a blend of red, violet, gold and green, billowing in the north wind which is massing sinister, low-hanging storm clouds and driving them up the slopes of Kenya, shrouded in mist. A sunlit landscape of great distance

reveals a range of mountains delicately shaded in blues and violets, rising above a golden plain. The Great Tableland beyond which lies Abyssinia. It is here, under the low ceiling of threatening clouds, that we see a flock of zebra. They let us come within a distance of about a hundred feet, then, as we follow them across the steppe, they gallop away. Farther on, more flocks of zebras, like cobs with rotund bellies and spoon-shaped ears. A gay sight, this charge of black and white striped cavalry manœuvring in the open. As the trees become more frequent we see three ostriches scuttling in front of the car. Continuing along the road, we plunge down into a ravine where the clouds have disappeared. The temperature grows warmer, and after several miles we are in a thick virgin forest.

Along the road there are many trunks of dead trees, soaring high like obelisks of ivy and hypomæa. We come upon an extinct crater which we enter through a pass among dead tree trunks sprawling over huge boulders. This crater is like a gigantic arena with mounting trees and creepers crowding its borders and plunging in a mass of all-invading green into a swamp of water-lilies and reeds. Not a soul in sight. One might imagine this circular, stagnant pond, with its ramparts and battlements of vegetation, to be the secret lair of some prehistoric monster. Strange, mysterious atmosphere of suspense as the evening advances and the distant cries of birds subside into silence. After emerging from the forest, we come upon a flat region of tall grass and parasol trees, and here around a bend we stop the car. Along the roadside a huge female buffalo with her calf. Supposedly the most ferocious and dangerous animal of all Africa. A pitch-black mass with

enormous horns curving down on either side of the head. We face each other for a minute, then the animal slowly turns around and moves off, followed by its calf, disappearing in the tall grass.

At dusk we reach Meru, and as the small hotel is full we raise our tent alongside the truck under a gigantic fern overlooking a valley. The night is bitterly cold. I regret not having brought a second blanket, but a cold tub in the open before sunrise restores my circulation. It starts raining and keeps on showering for about an hour. The Courtaulds appear for breakfast and we exchange impressions, after which we part. A road among banana plantations leads us towards a plain where we hope to encounter elephants. However, the grass is too tall to see anything. We come upon some huts built in the trees by the Meru, who are dressed in grass skirts and banana leaves.

After photographing we return in the direction of Meru, and on the way meet a bunch of young men singing and dancing in sensational headdresses of eagle feathers and cloaks of dried banana leaves, and women with flopping naked breasts, jewellery in profusion, and scores of metal rings hanging from their extended ear-lobes and dangling on their shoulders. Their heads are shaved, their entire bodies greased with oil and red mud, their skulls and faces freshly stained with dazzling white marks of charcoal. One of the gaily laughing girls wears a rattle tied to her calf below the knee, resembling a half-open bean with a wooden ball instead of a pea, which produces a hollow noise with each step she takes. Then a large flock of baboons with their babies on their backs cautiously crosses the red path and hides in the deeply

shaded undergrowth of the jungle, through which filter the first rays of morning sunshine. The soil is drying, as the last silver drops are falling in luminous streaks from the distant tree-tops.

After a light lunch we leave Meru and continue our round of Mount Kenya, stopping at several Hindu tradesmen's shanties every twenty or thirty miles, and trying to locate either a native market or a village where we can see some dancing. We reach a place late in the afternoon where a native tells us of a small settlement in the forest where the inhabitants are likely to stage a show on the morrow if we warn them. Fred insists on taking this native with us. We reach a hill of cornfields leading up to a village situated among tightly packed banana trees. There we find a circle of huts and, within an enclosure of dried thorny branches, another little settlement with a few old women busy preparing the day's meal round a fire. Our interpreter explains that we will return the next morning expecting to witness a terpsichorean demonstration, after which we leave to camp alongside the road, with virgin forest mounting on one side and descending deep down a steep ravine on the other. The cries of birds drowned by a thundering waterfall. After fixing our tent against the vertically rising bank we have fried potatoes, corned beef and some fresh pineapple, by which time darkness overtakes us.

A quick plunge into the rushing mountain stream is exhilarating as the first rays of sun break through the towering tree-tops. Daylight finds us speeding towards the village of promise. On approaching we hear singing mixed with laughter among the clustering banana trees. The inner enclosure is filled with old men, squatting around a fire, sullenly smoking

their pipes. Some are wrapped in blankets or wear cloaks of antelope hide, caps of lion mane and wigs of sheepskin. I notice, among this assembly of naked black figures an old leper who has lost most of his extremities and is covered with sores. He looks like a piece of broken African sculpture.

Outside the girls are starting a chant, encouraged by the elder women, and a gradual swaying and shuffling interrupted by shouts of delight and high-pitched long-drawn calls. First tentative, then bolder and more insistent. Some of the younger girls, with shaven heads painted a bright orange and wearing two tiers of dried grass fringe, one tied around their waist, the other falling over their breasts, dash in and out of the banana trees and down the hill, return and join the group of dancers, then break away and run downhill to the road, catcalling in a high tremolo. As we follow them with our cameras we see them running into the forest. Then we hear a loud, virile chant, and round a bend comes a procession of men smothered in banana leaves, running in unison, holding great banners of dried leaves in a cloud of red dust pierced by the sun rays.

The girls meet them with yells of delight as they rush past, followed by a score of women carrying sticks and shields, brilliantly painted, with barbaric *motifs* on a white background. Their faces bear huge white goggle-shaped markings; they tear past us and up the hill, still chanting. We follow into the enclosure, and here this wild procession becomes a whirlpool of shaking grass skirts, swinging shields, grinning faces, stamping feet, arms upraised, writhing backs all rotating, shuffling and running round and round in circles. Every vestige of timidity has disappeared, and by this time we are free

to photograph the frantic medley as well as some of the participants who are "sitting out" for brief spells. The shuffling and jiggling continue. They form chains and run in and out of the enclosure and around each other. The entire countryside is a riot of joy. Apart from the utter abandon and festive spontaneity this spectacle affords, there is a wealth of exotic faces, animated with the ecstasy of mirth and excitement. Eyes rolling, teeth flashing, an incredible variety of fantastic costumes of banana leaves, cloaks, skirts, headdresses, banners, bead and metal jewellery. Having exposed every film we can lay our hands on, and saturated with several hours of this thrilling sight, we depart among a cloud of dust (I having secured two shields for a couple of shillings), and resume our drive through the enchanted forest echoing with the distant sound of the Meru ballet, which most likely will be in full swing for the rest of the day. Another day unforgettable.

The forest along the steep slopes, with its gigantic trees high above and its cascades of vegetation, ferns and creepers, rolling over each other and disappearing in the deep shadows of ravines among an incredible confusion of tangled flora, seems more impressive in its utterly savage abandon. Towering ramparts of green interrupted by tree trunks, spreading, terrace-like parasols and bursts of fresh, immaculate leaves of stemless wild banana, as layer upon layer of foliage succeed each other. A sight of overwhelming grandeur. Amid this profusion of chaotic vegetation we see countless brilliantly coloured birds and butterflies flashing about. Each time we stop the car we hear a veritable chorus of birds calling each other in the faint rustle of trees moving with the warm summer breeze. Our vocabulary of adjectives is completely exhausted,









and so are our eyes by the time we emerge and reach the sloping steppe of billowing grass and rare solitary trees. We pass a Kikouyou market with natives seated in front of their wares of bananas and leafless sugar cane (resembling staffs in the manner of native African sculpture) sprawled haphazardly over a green lawn. The men wearing combs in their hair, like those of ancient Egypt. The women with collars of circular silver rings around their necks, and tiers of blue and white strands of beads falling between their opulent breasts.

Later that afternoon Fred evokes the life story of Stanley and Livingstone with delightful freshness and colour until we finally reach Nyeri, having completed our three days' circuit of Mount Kenya. Three days which are crowded with impressions to last a lifetime.

The Outspan Hotel, with its charming bungalows, lawns and flower-beds, sees us through a shower, badly needed to remove a thick coat of red dust, a table d'hôte dinner among a collection of elderly English spinsters, and a sound sleep under a roof of dried leaves with the quaint whistling chirp of a restless bat which most likely considers this "banda" her personal abode. We spend a restful twenty-four hours, after which we start making preparations for our departure. Fortunately Edward arrives next morning after having successfully climbed both peaks of Kenya, not without great obstacles requiring endurance and tenacity. He is full of the enthusiastic thrill of his accomplished exploit and delighted to be rid of his Italian companion, whom we leave behind us.

We then take the hotel truck for the observation hut in the forest.

We motor for about ten miles to the beginning of the woodlands, and here we are met by a dozen native carriers, who take possession of our kit; and, as Captain Winter, the organizer of "Tree Tops" belonging to the Outspan Hotel, requests us to be silent, we proceed in file formation through a dry and scrubby forest with crushed and broken trees and traces of elephant and rhino all around us. After a while we reach a clearing of low shrubs and dried grass with numerous footprints of animals around a dried-up water hole. There are large elephant turds lying about. A tall ladder is leading to a wild fig tree with a wooden platform bearing a two-roomed hut in its branches reminiscent of the Robinson Restaurant (*grisettes*, *Dumas fils*, and all that), near Paris. Our grips are hoisted up by a pulley to avoid unnecessary noise, the natives disappear in silence, and here we are, isolated in a tree at two o'clock in the afternoon, whispering to each other, reading and writing and waiting. At 5 p.m. we have a very substantial tea—radishes, lettuce, ham sandwiches, rolls and cake. All conversation in a whisper, hardly daring to move. We are like a bunch of kids playing at some secret, forbidden game. A few bush bucks emerge timidly from out of the shadows where we had seen them lying earlier in the afternoon. They move with extreme caution, sniffing about, and raising their heads and ears each time there is a noise. As the sun lowers behind a cloud we hear the first screams of monkeys, and then we see these luxuriously clad colobus swinging their long black and white fur in acrobatic antics from one tree to another. As the sun sets there is a silent suspense which is unbearable. All around us this great forest with its many inhabitants, the light waning and yet no rhino. Strange silence broken by the

insistent cry of a hoopoe. I invariably think of one of the few quotations I know by heart and which describes the mood:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the momeraths outgrabe.

But no Jabberwock; nothing.

We have been in the tree for five hours. We turn in and lie in the darkness. Suddenly there is a succession of violently loud howls from a hyena, which soon becomes fainter and more distant, then a long series of plaintive calls from the monkeys, then a gust of wind shaking the branches we are perched on, then silence.

Later there are more catcalls from monkeys, followed by a cacophony of grunting, belching and snorting. One sound is like the insistent creaking of a half-open door in a draught. The next thing I hear are the birds just before sunrise doing an accompaniment *à la* Mendelssohn to a Walt Disney colour symphony, followed by monkeys coughing loudly. It jars in the silence like the coughing during a pause at a concert.

Then it grows light. Captain Winter apologetically hands me a welcome cup of hot coffee.

He does not seem to understand why the rhinos have failed to turn up. Neither do we. Fred is furious with the two old maids who have spent the previous night at "Tree Tops" and have seen six rhinos. He had tried to join their party but had been refused, and I now hear his pen discharging its scratching venom on the writing-pad.

We still wait. It is 7.30 a.m. A waterbuck slowly saunters among the "wings" of this vast forest stage. The porters appear. We have seen nothing of rhino or elephant and are reimbursed by the hotel for the "organized disappointment," after which we leave in our two trucks across the great plains of grass.

Brilliant, cloudless sky. Mount Kenya, for once, discloses its jagged snow-capped peaks, its great slopes rising slowly from a blue light above the vast African country. We see more ostriches. Impalas grazing and various species of gazelle prancing about among the feathery acacia trees. I am hoping to see a giraffe. This is typical savanna with dark parasols and bleached thistles far apart from one another, parklike and equally distributed over gently sloping, pale steppes. But no giraffe. To the left a marshy valley as we turn south, and beyond the long range of the Aberdare Mountains. At sunset we walk along the shores of Lake Gilgil, with its millions of flamingoes flying low, disturbed by our approach and alighting on the opposite bank to form new masses of pink and white flower-like strips. Waterbuck and wart hog drinking cautiously in the distance and marabus quietly observing a flock of wild turkeys from the top of a tree. We have drinks and dinner with Du Blonnet, a young Swiss who lives at the little hotel at Gilgil, and retire at an early hour.

As we motor past Lake Elmetaita at daybreak, there are great billowing clouds reflected in the smooth opalescent surface over which floats a cloak of delicate rose, the rose of flamingoes by the million. Around the lake a multitude of extinct craters covered with low forest, and a vast landscape





enveloped in the rosy light of dawn. The country which follows is a mountainous ridge of volcanic formation strewn with parasol acacias. Down in the valleys we come upon poor, gaunt-looking natives wearing blankets over their naked bodies and tending their cattle along mountain streams. Then monotonous miles of sisal plantations and finally a low flat stretch where we sight gazelles and ibis. We take all day reaching Kisumu, motoring over a bad piece of road which has turned into chocolate-coloured slime from a recent cloudburst.

We pitch our tent on the shore of Lake Victoria, light a fire, and finish eating as it starts drizzling. A dozen timid antelope observe us from the distance. We hear a piglike grunting from the water. Several cars from Kisumu pass our encampment and draw up alongside a small pier farther down the shore. As I come up to this group of English people, I notice that they are watching half a dozen hippos sticking their heads out of the water. One of the men, a Scotsman, asks me whether I have chosen that particular spot for camping or whether someone has pointed it out to me. I tell him that we have arrived late and have chosen the nearest place on the lake's shore. He is slightly amused and hopes we will not be disturbed by hippos, as that particular spot is the easiest landing-place which they invariably choose for emerging from the lake, the shore being lower and more accessible. Maora is sulking, pointing at the water at our feet and saying: "No good, much mamba." But we are too tired and it is too late anyway to move our tent, as darkness is growing, and so we don't give the hippos another thought.

We are almost asleep when we hear the first snort of a hippo

7—A.M.

blowing air through its nostrils. It seems to be very near. I strain my ears, the water is lapping at the rocks in gentle cadence. I try to peer through the tarpaulin, but there is nothing but darkness, the stars and a few fireflies flitting about. Then we hear another snort. I feel I have to see what is going on outside. Fred follows me. I move in the direction of the water, avoiding the tent poles. I then flash the electric torch. There is a terrific snort, followed by an angry grunting growl, and the dripping of water as the animal heaves itself on to the bank. Fred shouts, "*Foutez le camp,*" we both give a dive for the truck.

I don't remember how I ever managed to avoid the tentropes. Edward, who in the meanwhile has taken refuge in the front of the truck, says he has never seen two people bolt as fast. We certainly are as quick as squirrels reaching that point of safety, from which we keep straining our eyes, trying to pierce the darkness and flashing the torch until we burst out in laughter. After a while we decide that one of us will keep watch, and that we will divide our time in two-hour shifts until it grows light. Maora being too unreliable, and besides being fast asleep in the other truck. The joke is on us. So Fred remains on top with the fireflies and the Southern Cross to contemplate. Lying in the darkness with my head against the tarpaulin, the only thing separating us from any possible demonstration of anger or playfulness on the part of the hippos, I listen to every sound which interrupts the regular lapping of the waves. We distinctly hear the animal munching grass and snorting. There is a mixture of mirth and claustrophobia in our helplessness. How the prudent Scotsman would have laughed had he seen us. At midnight Fred comes down,

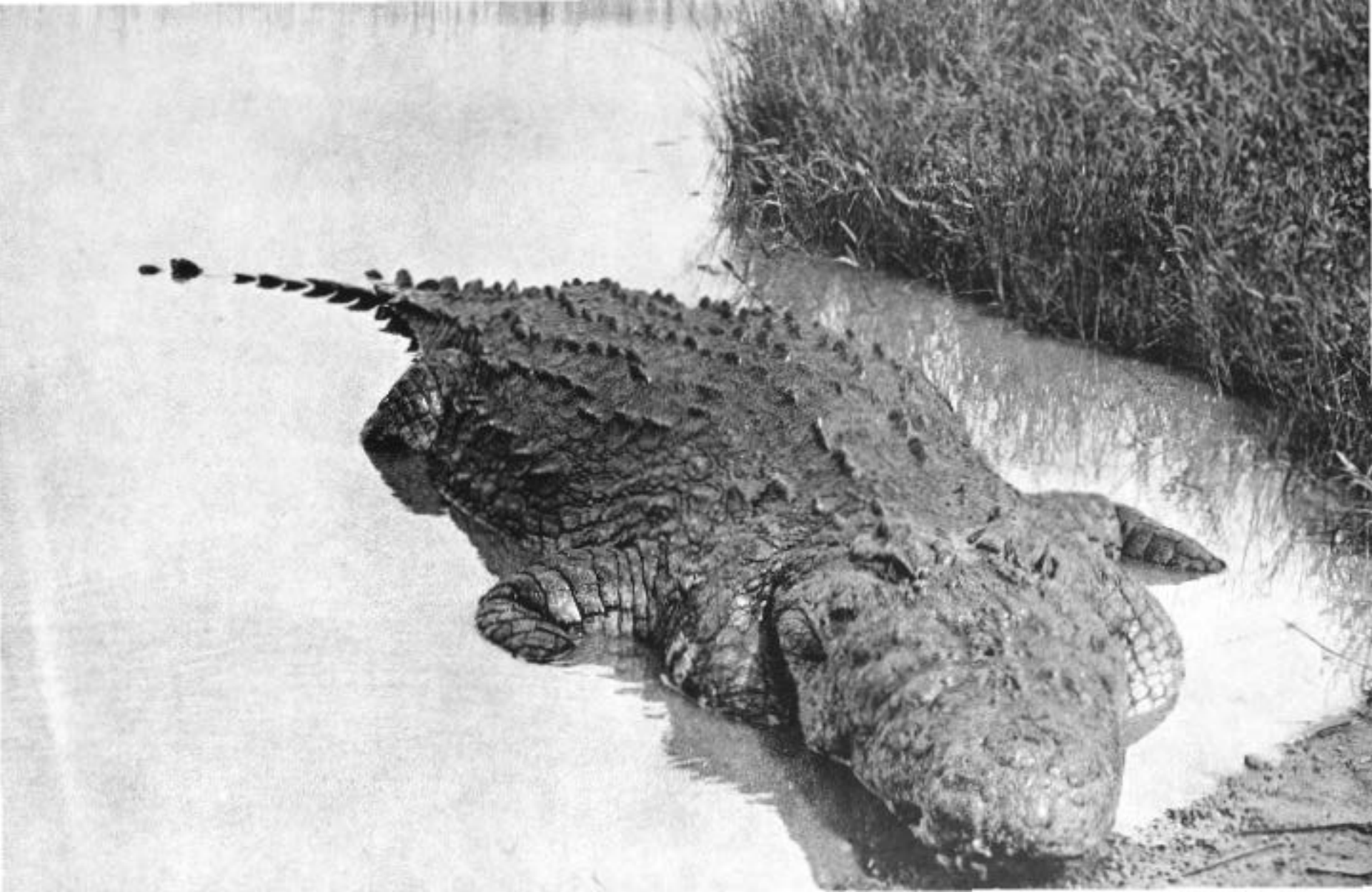
as he has sighted some native fishermen paddling on the lake. By this time we are frantically trying to shoo off the mosquitoes who have invaded the tent with their incessant buzzing, like an aerial attack of miniature planes. When we awaken it is light. We see the footprints of our nocturnal callers on the beach.

Lake Victoria proves to be refreshing in the early breeze, although we cannot venture into deep water on account of the ever-present crocodiles. We have a hasty cup of tea and depart, not making much headway on account of the bad roads, and only able to make any speed whatsoever after crossing the Uganda border at noon.

Here the country changes from dry, scrubby bush to the parklike, intensely green luxuriance characteristic of the eastern province of Uganda. Again the deep red of the road, slightly wet and glistening with a bluish sheen, as we pass through gentle forests of abundant growth. Like the enchantment of the promised land. Fresh, damp, green foliage, birds, butterflies and flowering creepers among palms, ferns and giant trees. We cross the Nile, over a bridge, below the torrent of the Ripon Falls, and reach Kampala in the afternoon. We intend to spend the night and depart next morning, but the other truck, having battery trouble, and it being Saturday, we are obliged to stay over the week-end. I awaken in the middle of the night to the sound of rain and thunder. I have heard of these tropical downpours, but have never realized what the word torrential implied. The waters of heaven come down like a solid mass. No drops or streaks of rain. It is like sitting under a waterfall. The clouds empty themselves for hours with a terrific prattling of wetness.

The sky is overcast next morning, and the red earth redder than ever and converted into slime. Kampala is like a giant *compôte*, and I feel like a fly caught on the surface of a tasteless dessert.

We drive along the hilly coast of Lake Victoria, past the shabby, corrugated iron shanties of the Hindus, and the banal residential quarters of Kampala with its dreary, unimaginative churches built of brick, like stables. Out in the country, we reach a small path thirteen miles away, where we expect to see the famous "Lutembe." Lutembe being a giant crocodile, and living on a small island a mile off the coast. This monster, which is over one hundred years old, was used by the natives in days gone by as an executioner. The suspected individual was tied and left to spend the night on the embankment, close to the water. If undevoured the next morning he would be proclaimed innocent and released. I am told that quite a number of missionaries of the early pioneering era finished their days in Lutembe. The natives call him by beating the water with the lid of a biscuit tin and shouting, "Lutembe! Lutembe! Lutembe!" until the reptile emerges from the shallow waters and waddles his ungainly shape through the slime to rest his jowls on the shore. He then half-closes his eyes and waits. You are requested by the native to provide a shilling, after which a lump of fish is flung at him. Lutembe turns his head, and with a thrust the fish disappears. One second of the jagged pink inside of a huge cavern, lined with sharp, menacing fangs. After this he usually relapses into his faked slumber, or turns his back on the audience, his head in the water and his tail on land. Practical Fred asks Edward to snap him holding on to the tail, for the magic-lantern slides





during his lectures. After slowly slithering around, Lutembe sinks into the muddy waters and makes for his island, gradually becoming a jagged tree-trunk as he regains the open lake.

Besides Lutembe, Kampala has a king in his palace, a few missionaries, a few prostitutes and Barclay's Bank, marble floor, bronze counters, politeness, order, but not a single white man in sight.

The sun is bright the next morning, the earth still gooey; the Uganda women are out in all their glory, but they are carefully holding up their skirts as they dodge the puddles. I again am struck by the grace and charm of the merry maidens of Uganda, with their incredible dresses of billowing cotton with bustle and low-hanging loose sash, presenting a never-ceasing stream of enchanting picture-gowns of unusual and extreme colour combinations.

We have our trucks patched up in a garage full of noisy blacks, and leave the incessant clatter of Kampala, motoring along a dry and smooth road north-west of Lake Victoria. Not stopping for lunch, we literally devour miles and miles of banana plantations interrupted by forests and low damp regions of papyrus. The road is often bordered with strips of water crowded with pale blue water-lilies. Butterflies and birds of every colour, flitting about in the sun's brilliant gaiety. Our radiators are smothered with broken butterfly wings. After about one hundred miles the population changes, and the last crinolines give place to rows of gaunt men walking along the road. These natives are darker and wear draperies of deep brown and black, held together over one shoulder with a silver clasp, and carry their load on their heads. Loads of grain

8—A.M.

or bananas wrapped in sausage-shaped wicker baskets or contained in dark earthenware jars.

The country here is hilly, with low grass and some giant euphorbias. We reach Mbarara. A small Indian hotel, squalid and run down, but not without charm. Billiard table, radio, a Burne-Jones print in one corner and the portrait of the Pope in another; in the middle a lamp surrounded by a swarm of mosquitoes. Outside the incessant ringing echoes of grasshoppers among masses of hibiscus and passion-flowers. A warm summer night. We enjoy a delicious curry while we drown our daily ration of quinine with ginger-beer. Two old missionaries, one a Bavarian, the other a Frenchman, living together happily on the fat of the land, tell us of motor-lorries overturned by elephants in the Lake Albert region, a cheerful prospect for the morrow.

So we go at daybreak, leaving Maora behind us with a grin on his ugly face and his fare to Nairobi. As the light grows we climb a ridge, below which the valleys are streaked with long wisps of mist gradually rising from the wet grass. This keeps on for miles, the borders of the road lined with flowering thistles. These rounded hills, curiously tumbling over each other like the bodies of huge elephants covered with a blanket of green, are undoubtedly the remnants of volcanoes. From the heights of the second ridge we have a breath-taking view, over the descending groups of craters, a placid lake lying tucked away between the lofty hills and the deep valley with three volcanic peaks beyond. Storm clouds are pursuing us, and grow more menacing at every turn of the winding road until they burst, as we are descending a steep decline. We are soaked in cataracts of torrential rain pierced by lightning,





and followed by rolls of thunder which seem to re-echo from the deep valleys below. Everything vanishes from sight, the distant volcanoes, the valley, it all becomes moving, grey wetness. We start skidding and have to slow down considerably. As we descend the last valley and cross over the Belgian border the sun reappears.

The road changes to a country lane. We are bumping along a narrow passage between tall elephant grass, and then into thick jungle. The natives again extremely primitive and poor-looking, salute without the usual gay smile we are used to. Then the first frontier post with a bed of cannas in the middle of a platform, from which rises a tall mast flying the Belgian colours. The officials, extremely polite and friendly, do not bother us with any particular formalities regarding passports and triptique, merely noting our names, the make of our cameras and the fact that we have no firearms.

We have the luck to run across Commandant Hubert, who suggests a trip out to the great game reserve. We lunch at a hotel restaurant, a whitewashed rambling barn with a thatched roof and a cosy dining-room. This place is run by a rather strange and silent man, who must have been extremely good-looking when young. Now an emaciated shadow with a good bone structure beneath his tired face. One of the few colonials who does not insist on telling us his life story or try to justify the fact that he or she is living in Africa instead of Europe.

We fill the cars with petrol and oil and join the commandant who is ahead of us in a truck crammed with natives, goats and supplies. This truck is followed by a luxurious lorry belonging to a bearded Polish photographer. He has

his outfit painted dark blue, with a map of Equatorial Africa, a negress's head, and his itinerary marked out in white. This on either side of the lorry, and the heading in large letters, "Mission Photographique Zagoursky." Zagoursky is an eccentric, courageous and kindly photographer who travels across the entire Belgian Congo alone, developing his negatives and living in his sensational lorry. He immediately produces a number of "stills," which all have that peculiar stereotype quality one finds in postcards sold on racks the world over.

We are again swallowed up by a cloudburst as we sweep across a grassy plain with occasional parasol trees, the road running at the foot of a steep mountainous range, above which the sky is a black mass of ink. The rain subsides after a few miles. The native guide stops our caravan of cars and points. We all get out in turn, and as the grass flanking the road is too tall to see anything we stand on the roofs of our lorries. Several elephants are grazing among the trees at the foot of the mountain ridge. Through our glasses we see them raising their trunks and blowing off the dust from their backs. They hardly move, and we motor on. Then the cloudburst breaks and again we are soaked. The world is wet, the road one slithering mass of liquid slime. Again we have to wait. In half an hour it is all over, the sun is out and everything is black and silver and dripping.

We keep going until, farther down the line, where it is drizzling, we come across a group of the most miserable natives I have seen. They are prisoners, under armed escort. The game warden halts and inquires. Two men in chains tied to each other and a woman whose face is eaten up

with syphilis beyond recognition. Instead of a nose she has a gaping hole in a formless mass which once used to be a face. One of the men is a leper. All of them soaking wet and naked. A sinister sight of utter hopelessness. They are being led to prison for having stolen the remains of the head of a waterbuck. They are carrying the head. It has been chewed up by lions; they have a string around it; a mess of fur, crushed bones and clotted, stale blood.

Then the sun starts setting. We pass some hot springs, the water boiling as it shoots out of the rock, and after a while we reach camp. The sky seems to clear and breaks through the clouds; layer upon layer of clouds, some distant, others still farther, and all transfixed with rays forming luminous contours to the darker, heavier masses. Then the sky as a background, or as a pool or a lake among grottoes changing in tone, forming new worlds, infinite in their dimension, without perspective or measurement.

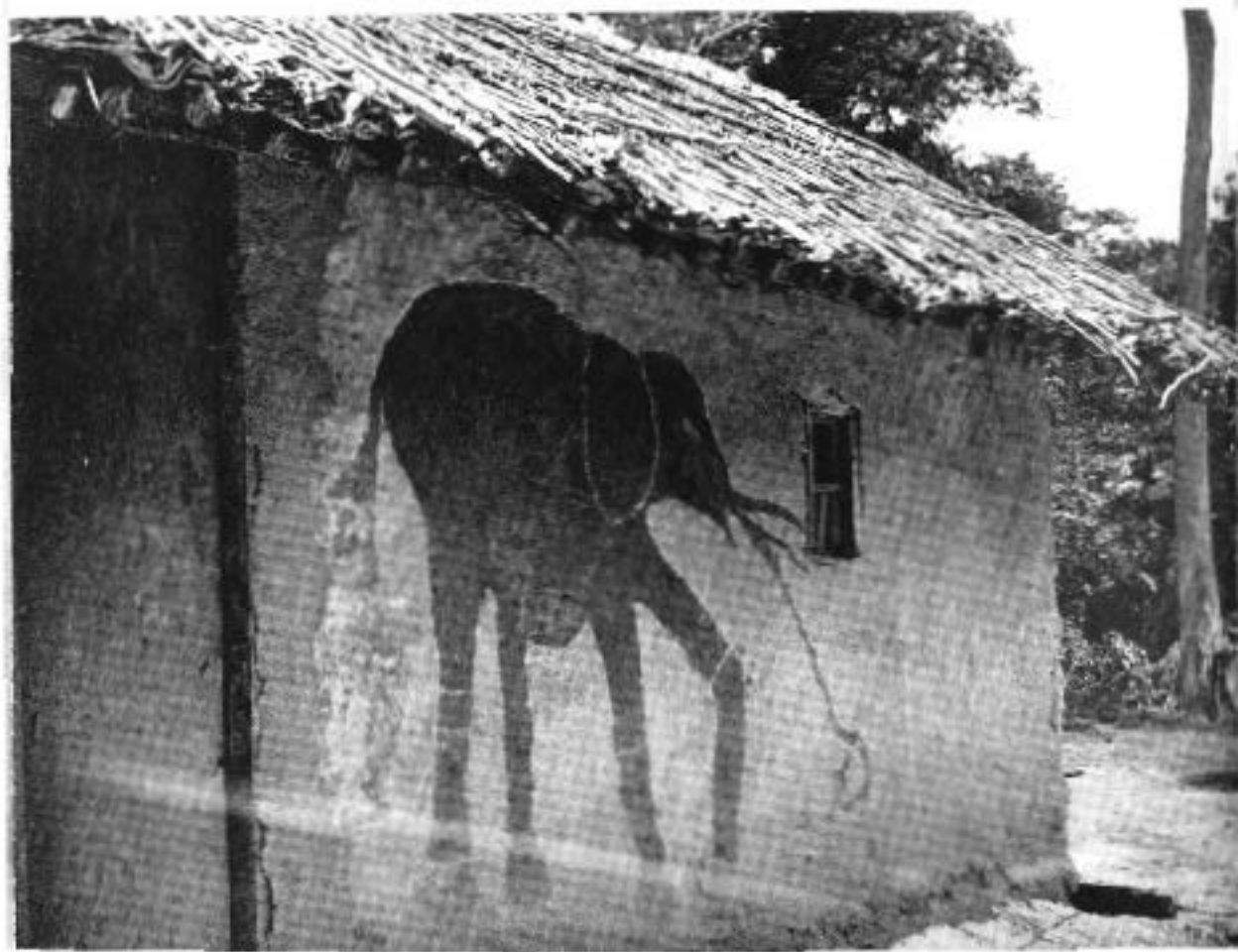
Impressions from one's early childhood return. That first desire to get away. Detach and immaterialize one's self in a world of transparent form, colour and light. A world of luminosity without shadows. A floating semiconscious state of beatitude with no awareness of temperature, sound, or the enslaving gravitation, towards something firm and definite on which you either stand, sit or lie.

It grows dark, and we have to unpack and install our camp beds under a shed. This done, we crowd round a long table with a glaring lantern. Sardines, soup, biscuits and a bottle of Pinard. We chat with the Belgians. One of the men brings his wife and child, returning to the post after dinner. Later the game warden says we might take one of our cars

and go for a ride. We all pile in, including Zagoursky. We follow the road along the savanna south of Lake Edward, a region which extends for hundreds of miles, and which was founded after the world war as a game reserve. No natives are allowed to inhabit this area. The carrying of firearms is prohibited; this rule applies to the game warden as well as to any other person. The land is never burned, and is left to nature. The only mark of man is the camp with its rest huts, and a few roads traversing this vast country. Further tracts of land are never visited by travellers, and only the chief game warden has the right to trespass. The country stretching along the southern and eastern shores of the lake is a virgin plain of grass interspersed with acacias, euphorbia, sparse trees and many low shrubs. A river winds itself through this land in tortuous curves. A land where fauna and flora are left untouched by the hand of man, undisturbed and unspoiled except for a few visitors in their cars.

We motor slowly along the road in complete darkness under a black, starless sky. We see the white, luminous eyes of antelope like phosphorescent circles, their pale, timid bodies shifting nervously as we approach. We pass several flocks. Farther down we see reddish flashes of eyes, but lower than the previous ones. We cautiously drive nearer with our headlights low, then we flash them and turn on our electric torches. There they are in the low grass. Large, pale yellow cats. We get a first glimpse, then pass a bush. Yes, there they are! One sitting up, the others shifting. A lioness devouring an antelope, trying to detach a leg. A male with a huge, dark mane comes up slowly, deliberately, and with one thrust of his paw retrieves the leg; the lioness retreats. We pass another shrub





and turn the car, flooding the scene with our headlights. Then we turn the engine off. The big male is lying in the grass, eating. The lioness is devouring the antelope from the other end, the other lions sit about waiting. We are about fifteen metres away, and for the first time I hear that indescribable, low, thundering growl, which seems to go through you like a current. He turns his head towards us and again his eyes catch the reflection of our headlights; they are two gleaming points like hot irons.

The others keep watching hungrily. The lion is tearing at the raw meat. Then we hear the crunching of bones. It makes my blood run cold. We are all at a high pitch of tension, straining every nerve, and literally absorbing this scene through our eyes. Lightning flashes on the horizon followed by distant rumbling. We are riveted to this incredible spectacle, facing these feasting creatures in the flat dramatic light of the car that pierces through the utter darkness of the night.

It is unbelievable. We wait with bated breath, watching every movement, and as they seem to be nearing the end of their repast, we start the engine and turn the car, moving on. Farther down the road we turn to come back, flashing our torches in every direction, but the lions have moved.

Two glaring eyes up in a tree—a wild cat. On the way back to camp more fleeting, shifting, antelope-like spooks. The countryside seems to be haunted. Haunted and eerie with strange acts of violence going on in the utter darkness. Fierce, hungry eyes penetrating invisibility, crouching, muffled noises, suppressed, stifled, choking. It is uncanny. Death is reigning supreme in these dark hours of anguish.

When I awake, the first thing I hear is an alarm clock, and then comes the distant, thundering roar of a lion, to remind one that dreams have turned into reality. The dim lantern casts a dreary glow over the long table with the remains of last night's dinner. People emerge from the shadows, stretching, scratching, yawning and stumbling over empty tins. Natives, invisible in the night but for their shorts, are coming in from outside with mugs of hot tea. It is soon dawn, and we are off in our lorries across the great plain which seems to be coming to life with the growing light. A life of untamed, natural hide-and-seek, and the daily carnage of beast against beast. The beginning of another day of relentless pursuit. The battle for the survival of the fittest is on. We see nothing for miles. It is light by now. The sun casting long shadows across the dried golden grass. The native scout on the footboard points towards the horizon. We see a hippo moving clumsily in the distance and disappearing among some trees. Then a flock of topi with their slanting backs, and then some small antelope, their tails brushing away the flies, gaily prancing on, then turning sideways and looking back at our cars. As we continue, some timid fowl rushes out from under the wheels and disappears in the billowing grass. The grass moving in the early morning breeze and stretching far among the clusters of shrubs like a layer of transparent mist. Then the native points again and says, "Simba." They are hard to see, we turn the car and start in their direction. We count seven. One male and six lionesses. They keep running away from us and we keep on following. They look round, pause and disperse. Four lions run under a cluster of shrubs and we move our cars one to each end of the bush. We can see their





yellow bodies shifting about through the thin branches. Moving into the inner shadows and out of sight. We get out and stand around. I am very excited and set my camera at 1/100 second, crazy to get a picture. The native throws an old antelope skull into the bush—there is a growl, a sort of cough and snort. Two lions shoot out from the other end, I just catch a glimpse of them as they make for another group of shrubs. I realize I have missed my chance of getting a picture at the very start, by trying to get closer and not having a telephoto lens. We drive on; more antelope, a dik-dik, topi and congoni, then a pair of waterbuck. Further, a new-born congoni trying to join her parent and hardly able to move; the mother returning to its cub and licking it anxiously. A spotted hyena crosses our path, slinking with its low hind legs dragging, looking back as if it had been kicked, and then moving quickly out of sight.

We reach a flat part overlooking a vast valley. Through our glasses we see great herds of large antelope, grazing. It is here that we strike the river lying below the steep embankment. The muddy water flows rapidly as it curves around several sharp bends. The banks of mud are lined with glistening hippos. There are clusters of palm trees, opulent and low as they bend towards the water, with creepers tumbling in massed confusion over dead tree-trunks and tall reeds. We get out and start down the ravine, crossing the wet mud until we reach a clearing in the reeds and are able to peer through. We see dozens of hippos' heads out of the water in close proximity, snorting, puffing, belching and spluttering. It is as if all the lavatory noises existing had been amplified by a lot of locomotives. Across the shore lies a giant with her cub. The

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stream seems to be overcrowded with them. As we turn back we see a large hippo slowly shifting behind the shrubs separating us from our car. Then it comes out in the open. The native stops me as I am about to meet it. It has seen some of us and keeps moving away in a semicircle towards the water. Again I have missed a shot. We can't restrain ourselves, and start to run towards another hippo which seems to be inspecting our car on the top of the embankment. It is fairly far away, but I snap it; it has noticed us and makes for the river, where it stands a while before disappearing in the stream. We continue by car over the plain. A flock of baboons rushes across the landscape for shelter.

After a while we sight elephants. We are through the shrubs and over the grass in a wide circle, in order to approach them against the wind. We then leave the cars and creep, crouching, taking cover every now and again behind bushes. Zagoursky cuts a funny figure with his wide plus-fours, his moujik beard and his large Graflex camera, as he dodges dead branches and elephant turds. All of us try to be as silent as possible. As we pass a group of trees we come face to face with a giant. I never knew elephants reached such dimensions. The unexpectedness of this encounter is so sudden that we all reel back, one of us stepping on a dead branch, which snaps with a dry, harsh sound. He has his back turned to us and seems to be moving round on the same place. I take a picture. We then come nearer. My camera clicks again as it starts moving away, and we follow. We are as near as one can possibly be without being heard. Will it turn round and see us, and—what then? We are all very excited. There is a slight breeze from our direction; he spreads his great ears. He must have

smelt us. Then he moves away. It's all over. The other elephants keep moving slowly in the distance, while we return to the car.

It has been grand fun; hard to realize that all this had been crowded into one morning; a morning which seems like an apotheosis of wild animal life.

We depart motoring along the edge of the plain, following the ridge, and soon start climbing northward. The great plain, and beyond it the luminous strip of Lake Edward, disappear in the torpid haze of midday. Going north means going back. I think of the long journey. Of Egypt, Abu Simbel, the Nubian Desert, Omdurman, the dry barren coast of the Nile, where it flows across the savanna, the last Sudanese, the first blacks, the Great Sudd region, which was the first introduction to Equatorial Africa, the slow, ponderous rhythm of the southward-moving Nile steamer, the Great Lakes, the snow on Mount Kenya, the virgin forest, the volcanoes, and finally this vast plain. The turning point. The pulse of Africa, the heart of the dark continent. Its climax ending in the roar of a lion and the crunching of warm bones. I had been waiting for this, I had seen and felt it and lived through it. It was the final, culminating moment.

Now we are up in the mountains, climbing ridges round endless curves of the road, winding in and out. By sunset we are once more swallowed up by the towering forest which spreads darkness over the world. One feels microscopic. The sky is menacing. We run out of gas and have a puncture. The roads not being marked we merely have a vague idea of our whereabouts. Then, plunging down a valley of mist and dampness, we discover a village. This is Lubero. Here the

tradesmen are French-speaking Greeks who sell petrol, hardware and gaily printed cottons, with barbaric designs. These the women of the Belgian Congo wrap around their bodies, often using two different patterns of contrasting colour. The villages in this country are built on the counterforts of extinct volcanoes, a range separated from the great Ruwenzori chain by the Semliki river. In order to avoid being flooded during the six months' rain, the native huts are assembled on steep inclines of beaten red earth, their conic shapes silhouetted against the sky like some exotic set from a Russian ballet.

We continue motoring through mist and darkness. We are exhausted and hope there will be no elephants on the road to hold us up. Fortunately there are none. We drive up a hilltop through a narrow passage of earth with tall elephant grass, and emerge upon a rectangular lawn, surrounded by mud and straw huts. The rain has stopped. A tall and slender young woman of exceptional beauty greets us with a strong Russian accent. Zagoursky's truck has already arrived. The place is fairly crowded with a number of gay visitors from Kenya Colony. The radio is playing Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, in a bungalow full of trophies, spears and shields hung on the bamboo-lined walls; antelope and leopard skins are thrown over low couches. Outside, creepers and ferns grow over thatched porches with shaded lanterns casting their light over this unexpected scene of charm and sophistication.

Dinner is excellent, and so is breakfast, hastily devoured on the morrow. We regret leaving Lubero and our delightful hosts, and we resume the winding road which descends into a





valley where the land gradually flattens out. Then again the forest, always more gigantic, more sinister.

Zagoursky's flamboyant publicity truck overtakes us, in spite of his having half-slid down a ravine and almost turned over while throwing cigarettes to the natives.

Then through the deep shadows of the undergrowth there peer a score of tiny heads. We stop the car. The heads disappear from sight, but we know that we are being watched. We wait. Cautiously, the heads start reappearing. It is animal curiosity. We tempt them with cigarettes and they soon emerge one by one. Out they come with bow and arrow. Pygmies. Timid and ugly little dwarfs, who for centuries have lived concealed in the virgin forest, having been driven to this place of refuge by the stronger races of invading blacks. Fred tells me that the Pygmies are the earliest inhabitants of Equatorial Africa. Zagoursky organizes a bow and arrow shooting competition with a packet of cigarettes for a target and we take pictures. I think they are rather sorry when we leave them, these shy little creatures. More pathetic dwarfs in a village with many tall sunflowers; the largest of flowers for the smallest of men. Some of these men look like black cupids. Farther up the line we pass a dreary but neat colonial settlement called Irumu. Our turning point: from here we shall travel west in the direction of Stanleyville.

Again we are speeding along the vacant road through the gigantic forest. Impenetrable walls soar above us. We are at the bottom of a live canyon of green. Life is concealed from our eyes, within the steep surface of vegetation. The forest rises out of a mass of humus, rotting leaves, putrefaction and climbing

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creepers, choking one another, living and dying. The spreading branches above the giant trunks groaning under the weight of parasites. Everything seems to grow on top of something else, perpetually replacing layers of death by fresh, struggling new-comers working their way to the distant light, generation succeeding generation undisturbed and uninterrupted by Nature. The forest exudes humidity, and you inhale the damp, anæsthetising vapours of this primeval breath. A world which re-echoes the monotonous cry of the hoopoe. The road is straight and endless and smooth. The car falls into an unbroken rhythm of thirty-five miles per hour, the forest rushes past on either side, like something solid. We are in a tunnel with a narrow jagged strip of sky above. One's mind relaxes and one dreams away the time. In one's absentmindedness the forest double-exposes itself as it goes by, the lower shadowy regions faster in dark blur, and the tops falling back slowly in a vast, curving semicircle, falling back behind you into your subconscious memory. No interruptions, no people, no signposts, no villages, just soothing, ever changing, ever repeating green forms of light and shadow. Then a rhythm the car promotes, a melody you invent or one you know and which lulls you like lapping water. Memories appear, and dissolve, giving place to others. Memories, trivial ones, the ones you wonder why you remember, and others which insist, from which there is no escape. But you are as far away from everything as you can be. And then, when your mind is washed and refreshed and semi-dormant, you notice a new plant you have not seen before, or there is a turn in the road or a beautiful bird, and you find yourself awake and are returned to the world and become part of the pattern the

design of which we so often fail to perceive—the pattern of our lives.

At nightfall we halt at a poor and squalid hotel-resthouse run by a buxom Flemish woman who, seated on the porch of the brick shanty, is deeply engrossed in contemplating erotic pictures of "Paris Sex Appeal."

We catch up on yesterday's lost time by starting well before dawn and watching the light grow through the silhouettes of the tree-tops. At dawn we reach a clearing, and wait for the sleepy boatmen to take us across a river. A cable slung over the water from one bank to the other, along which the natives pull a raft, supports a dozen canoes tied together. The shores of these fast-flowing confluent of the Congo are concealed by the forest, which literally thrusts its bursting undergrowth into the muddy waters.

It is while waiting for these rafts that I observe quantities of various butterflies. Large, velvety wings fluttering low over the wet grass.

There is a sign across the river directing the way to an estate and petrol-filling station. In the depth of the forest, overlooking the stream through giant tree-trunks, an American has created a succession of bungalows. Low mud walls with lofty, slanting roofs of dried banana leaves, admirably adapting the native way of building to modern convenience. The breakfast porch, with its large, unstained mahogany jars with ferns, bamboo furniture, native sculpture and matting, would be the delight of any sophisticated decorator. Several enclosures house some fine specimen of okapi, a strange, giraffe-like animal about five feet at the shoulder, with white and black markings on its limbs, the rest of the form a purplish-brown.

The okapi lives in the depth of the primeval forest, and is rarely visible even at close range. There are monkeys cavorting on huge tree-trunks and parrots swinging on the backs of chairs. Unfortunately, the owner is absent, and we continue our way through the forest, after leaving this unforgettable setting of perfect harmony.

At noon we reach Niania. A clearing in the forest with a dreary hotel and garage, run by a Russian refugee and his wife. Courageous and hard-working people, formerly members of one of the wealthiest families of Tsarist Russia, they are now employed by the Belgian communication authorities. The forest continues, keeping up its appearance of gigantic splendour. Every now and again there is a clearing of burning tree-trunks, sending up columns of smoke into the darkening sky. Enormous foliage mixed with damp ferns. Palm trees covered with luxuriant parasites, lianas like cables entwining the soaring trunks, or carelessly thrown from tree to tree like the tangled rigging of a wreck. Impenetrable, stifling, damp, like a hothouse. Overwhelming; continuing for thousands of miles with a few interruptions created by water, fire or man, this primeval forest seems the true nucleus of Africa, with its extremes and relentlessness. Everything seems on a scale beyond human measurements. Days of travelling through this giant vegetation do not seem to reconcile you to the abnormal size of the surroundings. You feel like an insect in a European forest. Grandiose and heroic! Dark forest of dark prehistoric days.

That night we arrive at a deserted village. There isn't a soul save two natives and three hungry cats. It is dark. The natives lead us to a bungalow which had been inhabited by

Europeans. The place looks as if a plague had compelled the population to sudden flight. The surrounding jungle is silent. Lightning flashes on the horizon outlining the strange shapes of giant trees, then darkness and the distant roll of thunder.

We start two hours before sunrise in order to arrive in Stanleyville before the stores close. Here, the forest seems to diminish. We cross over another river and then we pass some villages of extreme poverty with shabby huts in rows along the roadside, their backs up against the great tree-trunks. Some of these huts, however, have crude paintings of wild animals on their walls. The natives, mostly stark naked, lounging about in deck-chairs, doing nothing. There is something odd about these people behaving as if they were on a fashionable beach or in a nudist camp. The deck-chairs certainly seem an anachronism in the poorest part of the African jungle. Damp oppressive air. The air of utter and complete inaction and lethargy. Later on rows of palm trees line the road, palms with ferns and orchid plants smothering their stems. At a turn we see a great mass of water behind whitewashed houses built in the manner of the early Portuguese settlers. We have reached the Congo.

Stanleyville, on the shores of the wide Congo just below a cataract, seems to embody every trait of African apathy. Everything seems run down and worn out. The few Europeans who have the misfortune to reside in this unbearable climate crawl about like half-dead flies. Dampness and oppressive heat reign supreme.

We leave the next day in a torrential downpour, which seems to bring no relief from the stifling oppressiveness. Fred's

car half-slithers down the road into a ditch, fortunately in a village. The natives crowd round us and help by pushing and heaving, and finally succeed in retrieving the car out of the mud. They take it as a huge joke, chanting and laughing. A riot of soaking wet gaiety. We are again motoring through the forest northwards. The trees are less gigantic. The natives and their villages poor and shoddy. We keep crossing more rivers, then the road runs parallel to the wide Aruwimi Stream. In spite of the noise of our motors we hear the first tomtoms rolling their intoxicating, hollow noise across the waters. We run into a tribal gathering. The band consists of two men beating drums and a third hammering a large tom-tom. A circle of natives is lining up for a dance. I leap into their midst and join in the shuffle, which instantly seems to gain in speed, the tomtoms beating faster. Mad, quick rhythm which sends the blood racing through one's veins. The natives close in on me with deafening shouts of delight, their grotesquely made-up faces and feathered hats bobbing up and down in quick tempo. I have my camera ready; before they realize it, I have taken several shots. Then I notice a procession coming along the road. There is a general movement towards the direction from which the newcomers are approaching. The drums beat louder. Four bridesmaids are holding a straw mat over the head of the bride, who wears a large raffia loin-cloth between her thighs. Her legs are painted with white markings, she wears a very large rope around her waist, the top of her naked body being heavily greased and her face plastered with white stars. The procession advances slowly. By this time these Banali blacks consider me as one of their guests and I have no difficulty in taking a close-up of the belle, who has

reached the bridegroom's hut and is going through all the formalities that the wedding ceremony demands. As we drive on, we pass village upon village where the millet beer seems to flow freely and where the tomtom echoes through the forest, compelling the people to dance tirelessly. In one place two men, plumed and wearing skirts of banana leaves, dance wildly, facing one another. The next village has a circle of maidens in bright green grass skirts doing a shuffle. The forest has gone dance crazy. And then, as evening approaches and we reach Buta, a new moon rises through the exotic foliage of the Kombo-Kombo, and the earth is enveloped in a penetrating mist which seems to ooze out of every particle of the red soil and the dripping vegetation.

We visit the mission of Buta the next morning. The Belgian friars have cleverly profited by the claylike substance produced by termites for the manufacture of bricks, of which their building material consists. The result, however, is an ungainly agglomeration of schools and cloisters around a church, no better architecturally than the dull buildings of Kampala. One of the friars shows us some of the young elephants which have been trained for general use in transporting heavy loads and for working in the fields.

Our road continues through the jungle which, every day, is losing its gigantic scale, low palm trees and undergrowth replacing the taller trees. Bamboos in great clusters, the size of a bandstand in a municipal garden, spreading out and transforming the road into a dark cavern as they meet above our heads, obliterating the sky. With the approaching evening, the shadows among the foliage turn into an intense blue. Mist is rising all over the landscape, which gradually

disappears in darkness. We flash our headlights across the fast flowing Uelle River, and soon the drums and the melodious chant of the boatmen come near. The river is wrapped in a moonlit haze, immaterializing its shores. With both our trucks on the wide raft, we move into grey space. It is like floating on mist. The drums start the naked boatmen singing a strong, simple melody. They struggle up stream with their oars and poles, forming a large curve across the relentless stream. The spontaneity of their song seems to give these people new life. It carries them out of a slumber of inaction and transforms them into veritable demons of energy, fighting the current. As we approach the opposite bank, the drums slow down and the rhythm follows, dying into a plaintive nostalgic song with slumber seeming to follow in its wake; and then it all ends in a moment of silence like the end of a sigh, merging into the silence of the surrounding world and momentarily broken by the noise of our engines and the creaking of planks, as our cars roll off the raft and climb the muddy embankment into the night.

A lantern is burning on the porch of a deserted-looking rest-house. This is Bondo. The lantern casts its glaring light over a table at which sits a Dutch tradesman neatly dressed in white and reading Celine's *Mort à Credit*. A native boy is leaning against a pillar. There is a deserted feeling about this place, with no one but a guest and a boy. The boy hardly moves as we approach. He then reluctantly shows us some dimly lit rooms. The Dutchman who is waiting for dinner tells us that he has spent several days in this place, but has neither seen the hotel proprietor nor any one outside of the lackadaisical boy. We, however, manage to settle down





around a table and start our evening meal in the company of the Dutchman, who by now becomes fairly talkative. Then a huge yellow truck drives up. The dining-room door opens and a giant enters. His unusual physical strength and his short cropped beard give him a Herculean appearance. He charges into the room like a bull, and we have to explain, as the Dutchman has explained to us, that this place is worked secretly from behind the scenes through the intermediary of a boy. An elderly woman, dignified, intelligent, matronly, followed by a young man, appears next. They are Sir Charles Markham, his mother and Mr. Patrick Balfour. We spend an enchanting evening exchanging impressions and information regarding the condition of the road and the places worth stopping at on our itinerary. I discover that Balfour and I have many friends in common, and we talk till late into the night. We leave them on the morrow as they are about to resume their southbound route, and after about fifty kilometres we have to retrace our steps, as we have taken the wrong road, and are held up for over an hour, clearing away a large tree which has collapsed across the road, fortunately in the vicinity of a small native settlement.

The natives hack off the branches and help to clear the road. The forest gives way to the savanna. Stretches of tall grass reappear with thorny trees, acacias and thousands of mushroom-shaped termite nests, brick-red in the bright green grass. Again we see some antelope. Hundreds of butterflies swarm about us, and again our radiators are plastered with broken wings of every shade. A tom-tom and a brisk and lively song accompany us across the Mbomou into French territory. The boatmen beating their oars between each stroke, and

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producing a wet, slapping noise to accent their dynamic rhythm. We stop at the customs house. A fat, garlic-smelling Corsican informs us that we have to go through lengthy formalities in order to get our cars across the border, and hints that we would have done better not to be travelling at all. The entire afternoon is spent coaxing a Greek tradesman to witness our signatures. The local district commissioner, a flabby creature with walrus moustache, more like a caricature than a living human being, stamps our passports with grunts of discontent, remarking that cameras are utterly superfluous and cumbersome objects. He then, reluctantly, has a dirty rest-house opened for us, and leaves his office, his porklike bulk squatting upon a stretcher carried by six magnificent native carriers.

We run across a German who has toured Africa, partly on foot and partly on a bicycle, for over a year, starting from Abyssinia and ending by the Cameroons via Rhodesia. He hasn't seen a single lion. We are glad to leave Bangassou, and after working on our trucks all morning, we depart, exchanging our Belgian Congo boy for a tall youth who is going to be our servant as far as Fort Lamy. The sky is overcast. The villages along the road look shoddy and poor. I have never seen a more miserable lot of natives than those living in this God-forsaken region. The women with protruding stomachs, and flabby breasts hanging below their waists. The men with filthy loin-cloths, bulging goitres, leprosy, syphilis, blindness. Some look like living skeletons, all dried up, limping about helplessly. Children with suppurating sores, eaten up with eye and skin diseases, and covered with hovering flies. Even the dogs and fowl are looking starved and emaciated. This

utter dejection is accompanied by the penetrating stench of rancid oil. The curse of God is upon this land. It is here that one of our cars sticks. We are fortunate enough to find an efficient mechanic who is running a coffee plant and palm-oil mill. He and his wife prove most hospitable, and after a delicious dinner we enjoy the night's rest under the porch of their spacious house overlooking the coffee plantation. The morning is oppressive, everything is damp. The fields of coffee are hidden under a thick cover of fog from which rises solitary and birdlike a giant parasol acacia. Through the brick columns of the porch the scene is a Japanese panel come to life.

We finally part from our hosts, their growling underfed cheetah, and a pair of young chimpanzees who walk about arm in arm. Jean, Marie and Babette, when not swinging from the branches of frangipani trees, are turning somersaults on the lawn to the delight of the playful dogs. Their faces old, with tender eyes, their limbs of amazing flexibility in contrast to the compact rigidity of their hard, doll-like backs. We are not long on the road when Fred's lorry backfires, splutters and refuses to go on. We return and abandon our destinies to the hands of the mechanic. After twenty-four hours resting while the treacherous, worn-out truck is being repaired, we rise at dawn and continue through the most miserable and sordid part of Africa. Village upon village lining the road, one place more dejected than the other. The sick-looking natives apathetically lounging in deck-chairs. The forest gives place to frequent open spaces with coffee plantations and masses of hillocks made by the termites. These are covered with white-tipped flowering grass, billowing in

the breeze and looking like frost. The forest becomes more scrubby as we proceed, and we come upon a region of autumnal-looking trees, with the leaves blowing across the bumpy, narrow road. In the afternoon the villages are more frequent. The natives darker, healthier and gayer. Crowds of children emerge from the huts and cheer us as we pass by. The villages seem to be full of youngsters with few old people. Longevity among these primitive blacks is infrequent. The men are short, well-knit and muscular, and as black as ebony, wearing nothing but a skimpy jock-strap. The young women beautifully built, with pointed opulent breasts. The older ones, however, ungainly and almost deformed-looking. As night approaches we pass many camp-fires and tracts of burning grass and bush. We travel for hours through a dense haze of biting smoke till we reach Bambari, thirsty and tired. We stop at a Portuguese tradesman's house, who lives among sacks of salt, petrol tins, rope and groceries under a whitewashed porch, with an iron roof. We make up our camp-beds among these piles of merchandise and turn in, after a surprisingly good dinner.

Again darkness as we fill our cars with petrol and continue over a very rough road. Our lorries heave and sway. The country is burning. One village is undergoing repairs, the men up on the slanting roof thatching, the women with their sharply filed teeth wearing red plugs stuck into the flesh and piercing the side of the nose, a tassel of cord hanging from a string of beads round their loins. The Mbanza tribes.

Crossing a brook, I notice an exotic-looking lizard, its extremities red, pink and yellow, and its body in every shade

of deep blue and purple. The country, however, is conspicuous for its lack of animal life, the natives burning up the grass and hunting with bow and arrow every living creature that escapes from the flames or the vultures. I notice a native among the fumes, fighting a dog over a captured field rat. The heat is growing unbearable. We come upon a large and deserted village surrounded by rocks and gigantic trees, isolated and casting their deep shadows on the hard red soil. The highest thatched straw hut built on a terrace is the rest-house of Mbre. Some of the huts are decorated with barbaric designs. We rest during the hot hours, continuing towards Fort Crampel later in the day.

The native village of Fort Crampel differs from the previous villages. Instead of rows of isolated huts along the road or around a square, the local natives have grouped their huts, surrounding them with six-foot-high straw matting, supported by pow-wow trees, thus forming winding streets of yellow-golden straw, with the conic tops of the thatched roofs peering above. Here we see the first Sudanese blacks interbred with Arabs, and several shepherds swathed in draperies. These Mohammedan blacks seem to have a mature dignity which we have not encountered among the childlike primitives.

The local rest-house stands in a neatly laid out, parklike landscape among tall trees and frangipani. The tom-toms keep on drumming through the hot air of the night. The moon is half-hidden behind distant clouds. Three tom-toms are lying in the middle of a circular place; crowds of natives are strutting in the half light and kicking up dust—black figures, almost invisible, ghostlike, as they keep gyrating in

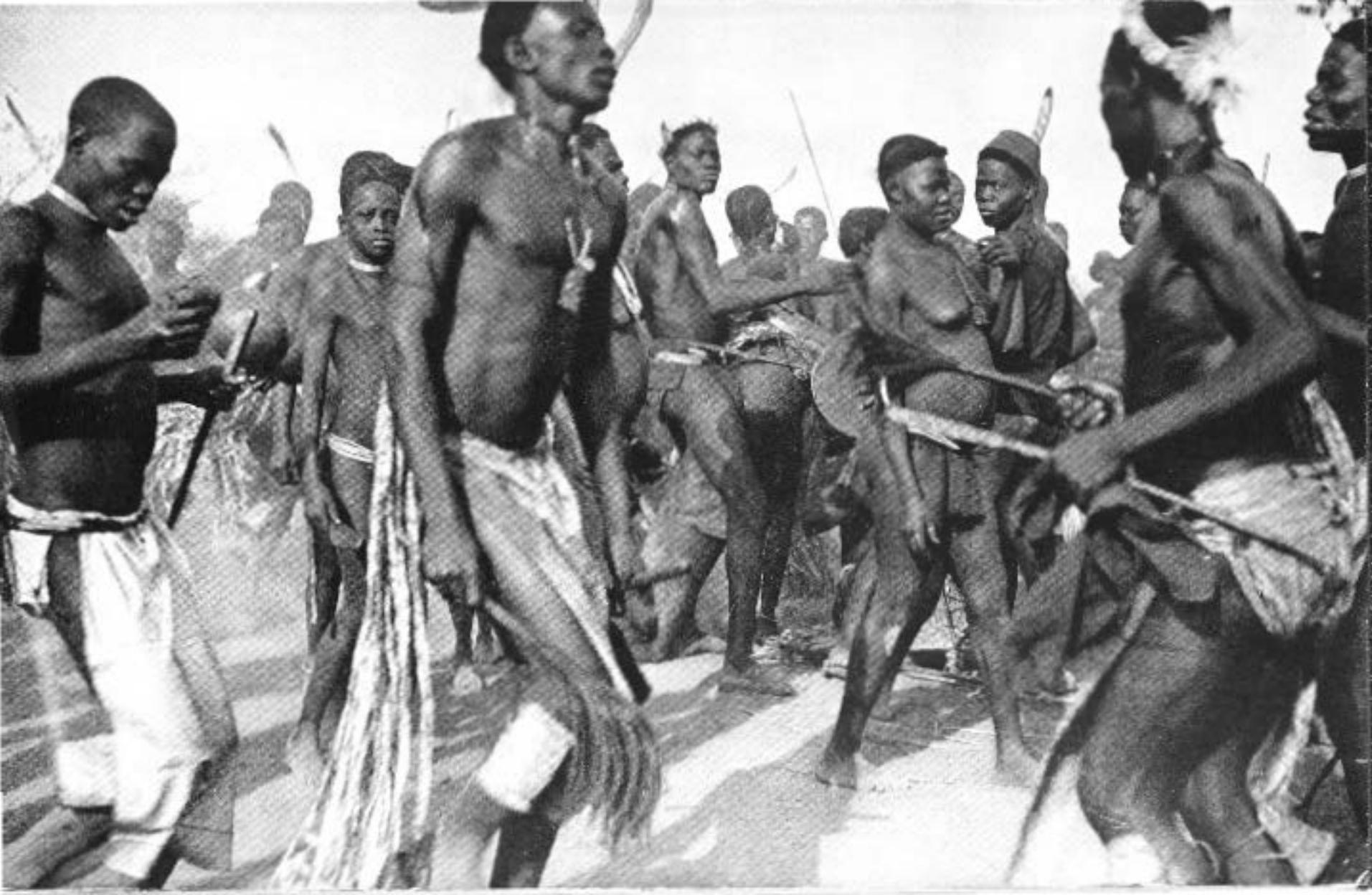
slow rhythm round the centre, brandishing their spears. Men, women, young girls, children, all rotating in circles, here tightly grouped together, there drifting apart and mingling with the onlookers. There is something witchlike in the way the women rattle their tongues in their open mouths. Their filed teeth like tusks. Then a head with a strange headdress peers through the darkness and vanishes, joining the infernal round. In the almost total darkness this rather strange ritual makes me think of Goethe's description of the Walpurgisnacht in *Faust*. Shadows within shadows.

As I walk back the tom-toms throb in my ears. Fainter and fainter, until the chanting and drumming seem to merge into one sound, like that of a distant machine pounding away through the torpid night.

We wake covered with sweat and dust. The sun rises as we are well on the way. We drive through a small village in the half-burned forest. The men have killed a large python and are dancing to celebrate the occasion. By the time we arrive on the scene the drums are beating furiously. The entire village is whirling around the drums in complete dance madness. By now they are in a trance, most of them heavily greased, some of the men's bodies painted scarlet. They wear long strands of raffia, like trailers, hanging from their elbows and sweeping the ground. They are shaking their shoulders as if a spasmodic current is running all the way down their bodies, with inhuman violence and gusto and all the fervour of savagery. Feathers and spears flying, rattles rattling, drums beating and the early morning sun picking out flashes of highlights over rippling muscles. I set my camera, unnoticed by the dancers, photograph, then we leave.









We are fortunate not to run out of petrol by midday, when we reach a most providential filling-station, as well as a rest-house, surrounded by large mango trees, where we take refuge from the merciless midday sun.

The country which we cover later in the afternoon is a mixture of frequently interrupted forest and high tortuous hills; the hills forming the division between the basins of the Chari and Ubangi. The last remnants of the great forest belt, before descending towards the Sudanese savanna. Here the natives are a sturdy race of strong, muscular men, and slender, graceful young girls. We pass a village in front of which a row of ten youths are solemnly chanting a melodious hymn.

They are naked and have *motifs* in the form of interlinked triangles on their foreheads, caked with mud and dyed with a bright yellow stain. Later we are told that this ritual is most likely a post-circumcision ceremony. A mad-looking woman with sharply filed teeth is rolling her tongue and catcalling like some ghastly witch.

We arrive at a very large village near the Chari River, where the huts are encircled by screens of matting, forming narrow, winding passages of straw. Within the enclosures stand huge straw receptacles filled with peanuts and supported on sun-bleached beams and branches. Fires are burning all round, sending thin columns of smoke into the starlit sky, and silhouetting black shapes huddled around the smouldering logs. A few tentative notes interrupt the stillness of the night and I make my way through the maze of matting to where the sound comes from. Two giants are tuning up on instruments which they wear slung around their bodies. These

xylophone-like contraptions have a row of protruding phallic-shaped pumpkins and are decorated with plumes. Several boys are beating time on elongated drums. The players start. A melodious refrain grows into a tune which rings clearly through the night; the drums join in, deep and soft and rich. There is no beginning nor end to this tune. It repeats itself over and over again, without monotony, ever fresh, as if it had been played for the first time. Eternal, timeless music. The flames cast grotesquely shaped shadows across the straw surfaces; several boys slowly gyrating, outlined against the fire. I notice that all the men are wearing antelope hides covering their buttocks, but leaving their fronts bare, with their sexual organs concealed by being strapped under and hidden between their thighs. I ask the chief's permission to photograph on the morrow and am able to take some pictures of one of the loveliest girls we have encountered.

The night is cold after a day of unbearable heat, and now we are off for Fort Archambault, which we reach before noon. We end in the yard of a garage proprietor, who puts us up in his house, and again fortune smiles down on us in the form of a cold shower; an undreamed-of luxury to see coatings of red, sweaty dust flowing down one's limbs in streams of water and soap. Outside the closed venetian blinds the air is quivering with heat. Far away the noise of chanting and drumming mixed with the flutelike sound of the Arab zokra. A cavalcade of riders passes, black men in burnouses with drawn swords, their small horses laden with lavish harness, gold belts gleaming, draperies flying in the wind, dust whirling, as they tear down the streets. Next

follows a score of runners carrying their chief in a sedan chair. It is the day of the Feast of the Lamb. These natives of Mohammedan religion seem to have changed in attitude. A certain savage dignity replaces the childlike gaiety of the primitive negro.

Fort Archambault consists of a few shoddy official buildings and two stores, financed by a Belgian company and worked by Portuguese. Oddly enough, I don't find a single French article among the merchandise displayed. Belgian and American cigarettes, Swedish matches, American canned fruit, Dutch butter, German beer, Portuguese wine, Japanese cotton, etc. The Chari River runs north of this settlement through a desolation of dunes and low scrubby brush. The vast native village is surrounded by a chocolate-coloured mud wall. Many tribes reside in this enclosure, and even those phenomenal women who after years of piercing and extending their lips carry platters of wood upon which trickles their saliva. The human duckbill platypus.

Along the walls, bathed by the last oblique rays of a setting sun, we see a row of women, their hair done in Sudanese fashion, dressed in garments of silk of every imaginable colour, bright aniline dyes, yellows, magentas, dark blues and blacks, mixed with softer, more transparent hues. They are swaying slowly, without moving their feet, their eyes cast down as if ashamed and embarrassed. A line of men with swords and spears faces them, swaying with a dreamlike elasticity. Tall, swarthy, black men in white and blue burnouses, and wearing pointed Sudanese skull-caps on their tiny bullet-shaped heads. Then the haze turns from rose to mauve, the moon is in an opalescent part of the sky, while the light secretly creeps away.

Two men play on drums, one on the zokra. Loud, penetrating, languorous and sensuous, wailing into the oncoming darkness.

Our host, whose native workers are overhauling our trucks, is a Breton. A tough and energetic adventurer who has knocked about this part of the world for over ten years, making big money and then losing it, but enjoying big-game shooting in the process. His wife, a handsome and charming young woman who has obviously married below her social status, keeps the house immaculate and provides us with several excellent meals. Two mongoose and a baby gazelle are the chief distraction of the living-room. We succeed in selling our trucks to our landlord, who allows us to proceed in them as far as Fort Lamy and also lends us his boy.

Once more we are on a raft. Black, naked women like large, clumsy caryatides, are bearing heavy jugs of earthenware full of water, their breasts and buttocks forming the extremities of a curved silhouette, their bodies straining and almost immobilized by the weight. The boatmen are silent as we cross the still surface from evening into night. The moon is like an orange disc in a sky of ink. We motor on through the bush, snatching a few hours' sleep under a thatched roof, waking up in the dark and resting during the hot hours of midday. In the late afternoon, as the villages grow rarer, we see waterbuck, wart hog and large antelope waiting for us to approach, watching us with curiosity, then leaping into the maze of dried tree-trunks and thorny branches and disappearing out of sight. Scores of guinea-fowl along the track, which seems to grow sandier with every few miles. Again the tender caress of a dry, warm

summer night under the brilliant moon, and again we rise before dawn and the sun finds us with many miles covered before its scorching rays force us to take refuge in the shade. We drive later through miles of low-growing gum-arabic trees, feathery mimosa, bleached thorny shrubs, dom palms and small parasol acacia. For miles the landscape has been stamped by a large herd of elephants, upsetting trees and breaking off branches, as if a devastating cyclone had swept the countryside.

We strike the Chari at its confluence with the Logone. A low sandbank pointing its extremity into the stream with a few straw huts surrounded by drying fishing-nets. I take some pictures of a mother with her baby, her hair plaited and falling down on either side of her skull: an early Gothic Madonna. She suddenly throws her child into the arms of another woman standing nearby and breaks out into a solo dance, her loin-skin swinging with its long tail, her heaving breasts and her sharp fangs, transforming her momentarily into a black bacchante. She gurgles with joy and literally puts every bit of seduction and lasciviousness into this mad impromptu act.

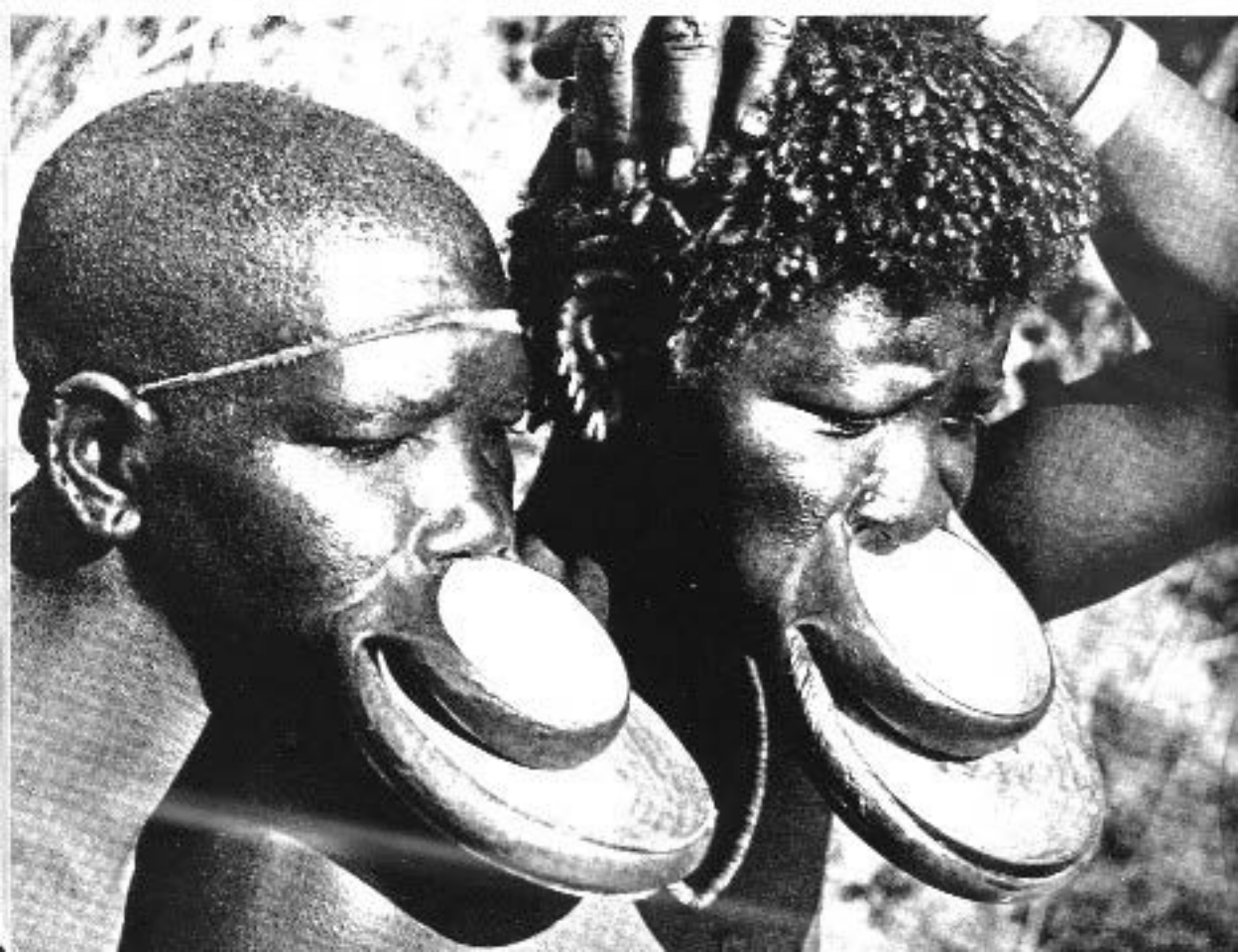
Then a raft with a small motor takes our cars and ourselves across the Chari to the sandy shores and native dwellings of dark grey mud. An aeroplane hums across the sky. Again the joy of a shower in a dirty and squalid hotel run by an extremely fat French couple, who arrange for Edward and myself to reach Zinder by truck in time to catch the trans-Saharan bus.

Fort Lamy. A few administrative buildings and a large, dusty square. Broiling sun. Some tired French sergeants

staggering in the heat; then a gust of hot wind and dust. The dust sifting into everything. Bleached dust and dry heat. The market extends over a large portion of the flat, desolate square. Here is a surging mass of Sudanese women, as numerous as the flies crawling over their bodies. Black women with gentle patient faces framed by the most incredibly complicated coiffures; their hair plaited, twisted, plucked, shaven, and shaped into sculptural forms. Women squatting in rows over pots and pans of salt, spices, goat cheese, milk, pepper, dried fish and meat. Women wandering from group to group in the torrid sun like slowly gliding phantoms. Jewels, large rings and hair ornaments of silver, amulets wrapped in leather. Farther off, the men, in ample, light burnouses with large straw hats, selling camels, cattle, matting and hide. The streets are wide, the grey mud walls slanting inwards, and the men salute as I pass by.

The next day Fred comes as far as the banks of the Chari to see us off. We get into a narrow pirogue, we pass a flock of cattle half in the water, and then cross the stream among numerous crocodiles. On the other bank we get into a 22 h.p. "International" lorry, driven by a Syrian merchant. In the back a load of natives with their bundles. As we bump over the narrow path leading through the northernmost part of the Cameroon, we are back again in darkest Africa. Here the scrubby brush dwindles down to burned grass and bare earth, and monotony reigns supreme during these hours of scorching afternoon sun. Then we drive over a vast plain of muddy earth with dried reeds and poor-looking trees, and many crested cranes and herons. We cross a narrow strip of water which is slowly diminishing during the dry weather season.





The waters of Lake Chad. The villagers are rare and the natives poorer than ever. This region is almost uninhabited on account of sleeping sickness. Then we cross into British Nigeria. The moon rises in a haze, dimming the Southern Cross. We reach the rest-house of Maiduguri. The dirtiest one we have encountered, full of bats; not having our tent, we are obliged to sleep in this foul stinking hole. Jackals howling in the deserted country of sand and thorny shrubs. It is, nevertheless, a great relief to lie on a flat camp-bed after a day of bumping about and sitting upright in that hardest of hard trucks.

With the first rays of the warming sun there is a swarm of large chameleon-like lizards scuttling down from the roof and climbing all over the front of the rest-hut. We make our way to the Syrian's shop and are told that, as it is Sunday, the loading of the lorries will take longer than usual. The morning goes by and finds us still waiting among flies, lizards and vultures. We consume large quantities of ginger-ale in the shade of the little shop, gay with brightly printed cottons. Finally, the lorries arrive, stacked high with goatskins. The stink is terrific, and is going to last during the next twenty hours. The country is a monotonous repetition of burned grass and dried-up trees. Utter desolation. Lifeless, colourless, endless, with the hot afternoon sun beating down on the lumbering lorry.

Later we enter a large village, part mud, part straw and matting. Damagum. A long avenue, wide and dusty. There is an unusual mixture of Moslems and primitive natives. The former in their ample blue cotton gondouras with white caps, the latter in draperies, flounced and bunched by

12—A.M.

*Opposite—Sara Singers
Femmes à Plateaux*

being tied together, producing a silhouette unlike anything we have seen. They wear silver balls riveted to the sides of the noses, blue tattoos and patches of bright colour on their foreheads. This dense mass of mixed people surges around our lorries, eyeing us with extreme curiosity, advancing and retreating with each step we take. One of the older men wears a huge turban and a lavishly brocaded robe and seems to have emerged from a Persian miniature. I point and beckon to several men and women whom I wish to photograph in spite of the waning light. They recoil bashfully—then, being egged on by the crowd, prostrate themselves in the dust, touching the ground with their foreheads. This seems to be the local way of greeting the white man. In a cloud of mauve-gold dust some natives have formed a circle around several dancers. I approach this group, the crowd follows and the circle narrows as I push my way through the packed mass. Several giants, bare to the waist and armed with long whips and spears, are trying to hold the crowd back, lashing their whips blindly at the spectators. I find myself in the presence of a most beautiful youth. He is broad-shouldered and slender with the simple formation of a body found in early Greek sculpture, a faint smile, an expression of ecstatic beatitude on his motionless face. He wears a fringed loin-cloth decorated with multiple white shells, and on his head an elevated semi-circle of ostrich feathers, resembling an ancient helmet. He sways very gently, the upper part of his body motionless, and in perfect poise of relaxation. In one hand he holds a mirror into which he gazes in rapture, oblivious of the battling, surging crowd. His look seems to go beyond his own reflected image, beyond into nothingness. A woman

comes up to the youth and puts some betel in his mouth. Next to him stands a female dancer who seems the living incarnation of all evil and baseness personified. The drums beat steadily, the flautist joins in, but the young deity keeps staring through the looking-glass into infinity, with the same static smile which seems to be part of his features.

This is archaic beauty come to life, living and breathing with a quality of fabulous remoteness. Again, unexpectedly, like a thunderbolt, legend has descended upon this earth. Antiquity has suddenly given up one of its heroes out of the dim shadows of the past. I leave him, undisturbed in his trance, staring at his own image.

As we drive into the village of Posticum, during the fleeting moments of tropical dusk, our driver forgets to turn on the headlights and a little black, monkey-like policeman threatens to stop our lorries from going any farther. I ask to see the chief. Edward and I are led through tortuous streets to a great gate set between two imposing portals. The inner court is lit by a powerful lantern on the ground, which sets the crenellated walls off against the dark sky, projecting gigantic shadows of turbaned men moving noiselessly in their ample white robes. The attendants produce two arm-chairs and then the "King" emerges from under a baldaquin. A priestlike dignitary in deep purple robes, tall and bearded, stands in front of us and bids us be seated. Through an interpreter he expresses his regret for the incident, although he blames the driver for carelessness; he assures us that we may proceed on our journey. After a cordial handshake we leave the mysterious and dramatic palace grounds to continue through the night. The moon rises late, it is getting cold.

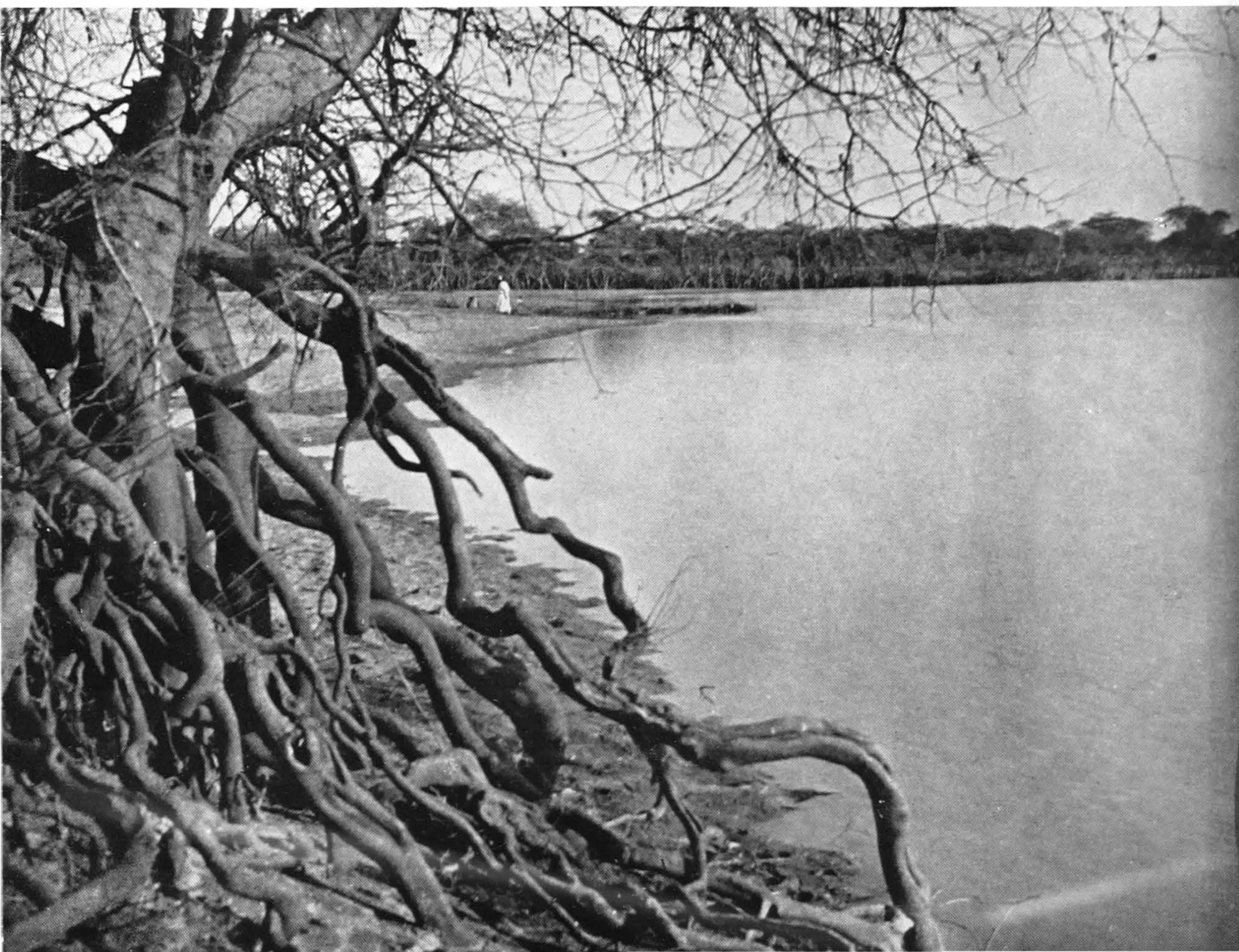
The road is appalling and the continuous stench of the goat-hides nauseating.

We arrive at midnight at a rest house which is immaculate and built like the inside of an Egyptian tomb, with slanting doorways. Three hours later we are again on the road in the biting cold. Dawn reveals a dreary landscape of bush and dried-up trees. Scores of repulsive-looking vultures are consuming excrement along the path. Then, after hours, we cross a large iron bridge and with a sigh of relief collapse in the trim little rest-house of Kano. The sun is high; outside the heat seems to increase with every hour.

Late in the afternoon the Syrian wakes us and tells us that he has arranged for another lorry to take us to Zinder across the border. It is too late in the day to take photographs as we drive through a squat gateway into the crowded city.

Kano has over three hundred thousand inhabitants; it is entirely built of red clay. The winding streets within the great walls of the city are frequently interspersed by clusters of palm trees within walled gardens and plots of grass with water-troughs. The houses are flat-roofed, with crenellated corners and long protruding waterspouts resembling enlarged termite nests. Many of the façades are decorated with bold reliefs of abstract design. These exotic decorations often surround the roughly made horseshoe doors. The inhabitants are Hausa. The minaret of the great mosque, with its sloping walls close to the Emir's palace, is reminiscent of the Egyptian temple pylons. This city is intact, untouched by any European influence. Kano is timeless. Its curious style is insistent, its inhabitants seem to merge with their surroundings and create an atmosphere of complete harmony. We motor to the top





of a tableland dominating the surrounding country. From here we see the vast plain with Kano indistinguishable against the red of the earth and merely indicated by a few palm trees and a veil of blue mist rising from the valley. Outside the walls are the white European buildings of the British authorities and the Syrian merchants. As night falls the various gates of Kano close upon the outside world and no one is allowed to enter until the following morning.

The British Government buildings facing the Emir's palace are good but unimaginative adaptations for modern requirements of the native style of building. The British have also installed an efficient watering system, thus saving the lives of thousands of natives ignorant of hygienic conditions.

We leave at 3 a.m. and follow the atrociously bad road northward, crossing the frontier and entering French territory early. Again the same dreary landscape. After about a hundred and fifty miles we reach a sandy region of hills and great boulders surrounding a mud and straw town. Zinder is a labyrinth of huts and houses with mud enclosures interrupted by parasol acacias. Like the design of a fabric, a design of repeating crenellated walls and straw cones. Numerous vultures perch in the trees or clear the streets of refuse. The market-place consists of two large thatched-roof sheds supported by squat brick pillars. The colour of Zinder is the most delicate and exquisite rose. The rose of the sand and the rose of its walls. At sundown the entire place glows in every shade of pink and mauve under the changing sky, quiet and dreamlike. The white draperies and turbans of the men set off the unveiled part of their faces, arms and feet in patches of black. We encounter some riders, their heads wrapped in

13—A.M.

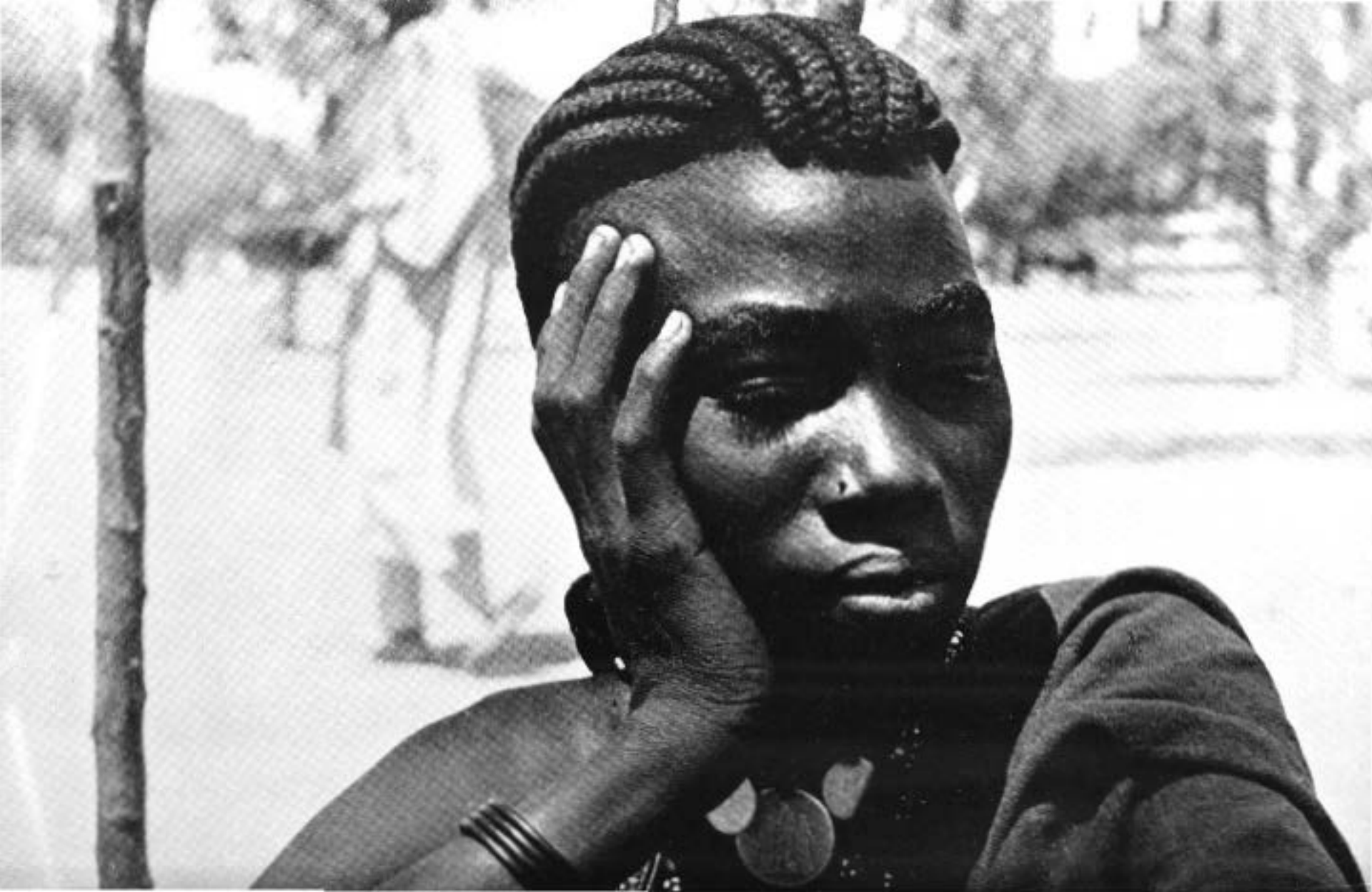
*Opposite—Logone Fishing Village
The Waters of Lake Chad, Cameroon*

dark blue and white, disclosing an enigmatic pair of flashing eyes, their saddles and harness of brightly decorated leather-work.

It is on the day we are to board the trans-Saharan bus that we visit the Sultan's palace. A lofty building, or rather an agglomeration of walls, courts, terraces, inner courts and passages. The tall slanting walls ending in peaks are stained in a deep purple. We pass through the gateway and cross a spacious court with about fifty notables squatting in the shade. They all rise as we go by. Following a narrow passage, and from thence into a hall with strange decorations and vaultings, we emerge into an uncovered alley, and after turning into the last passage reach a small room in which sits Serki Moustapha, Sultan of Zinder. An old man of great corpulence, swathed in an ample white brocaded gondoura, disclosing the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour. On his head he wears a purple hood of velvet, bordered with bright emerald green edging, resembling a doge's cap. He is squatting on a huge cushion of orange satin with his back to a plush carpet, the kind sold by oriental vendors outside the Bohemian cafés of Montparnasse, representing an oasis with houris dancing against a red sky. Through the interpreter-chamberlain I ask the Sultan to sit to me for a photograph. The childish, rather coy old man beams with delight and retires to don his most sumptuous robes, in which he presently reappears. Turbaned and wearing a large burnous of cyclamen satin with heavy *motifs* of silver cord and a silver staff. Incredible colour against the deep purple of the walls and the immaculate sandy floor. The sand in this setting is like the softest and most luxurious of rugs.

Opposite and following—Women of Fort Lamy Market









The Sultan parades before his courtiers like a proud peacock, and is so delighted that he gives Edward and me each a bag of leather craftsmanship, before sending us back in his car.

That afternoon we take one of the "Transtropicaux" buses and start westward in the direction of Tessaua. Besides ourselves and the driver there are a French sergeant, who is an expert in the sinking of wells, three native boys and a placid, bejewelled Hausa negress, the sergeant's girl friend. We have a puncture at dusk, one of the huge tyres is torn to shreds. After a scanty meal in a guest-house we sleep while numerous bats are flapping their wings overhead, and rise at 3 a.m. A cold shower restores me to life and consciousness. We start through the chilly night until an hour later there is a crash, the bus heaves sideways, and almost overturns. We have lost a wheel. The men work for hours. Dawn comes. The stars vanish. It grows light. We are in a landscape of dried grass and dried-up low scrawny trees. One of these suddenly starts trembling in the windless air. Its branches are littered with reddish-brown grasshoppers, who are shaking their wings and rustling like an electric fan. They soon start soaring up and leave in a quivering mass. Edward goes out into a bush to try his luck with the sergeant's army rifle, returning with a rabbit which our hungry appetites will appreciate that night. A toucan stretches his beak skyward and starts singing, then disappears. By the time the sun is up, there is no sign of life save for the buzzing of flies around the empty bus. The roadside is strewn with sacks and packing-cases.

We return to Tessaua and go to sleep. The wire which our chauffeur sends to Zinder has been greatly delayed, as

apparently all wires are in this part of the world. I try to get as much sleep as I can. The guest-house, run by a half-idiot native, is never short of animal life. Flies and mosquitoes give way to bats, huge lizards and large, hairy spiders, moths, and even a hedgehog discreetly makes the tour of the room, following the wall. There is a faint but deliberate crunching of termites working in the beams overhead and sending down a rain of fine sawdust. We are roused at 2 a.m., but as we are about to get into the bus a flat tyre is discovered. Another hour of *que voulez-vous*. We finally arrive at our unlucky spot on the road among the cargo of merchandise and supplies which are reloaded, and we are off at 4.30 a.m. The truck heaves, plunges, rolls, jumps and bumps for eighteen hours over the worst road we have yet encountered. Dawn reveals a landscape identical with that of the last days. Fierce and uncouth, the savanna extends over thousands of miles, separating desert from virgin forest. The dried grass forming a background for innumerable spindly tree-trunks and leafless, thorny branches interlaced in an ethereal web of yellows, browns and greys. A rare shrub of green foliage will now and again interrupt this bleak and colourless mass, and the antelope, seeking refuge among feathery branches, seems to blend into the surrounding paleness.

We stop at a well where a caravan of large camels has assembled. The natives of this region are austere-looking men and women, swathed in navy blue. The men carry long swords. We pass an ancient fort and in the afternoon we come upon a flat, irregular crater covered with broken lava and dried grass. The track becomes wider and sandier. Our lorry is overloaded and we get stuck in the quicksands innumerable





times, having to get out and stuff dried grass under the wheels. The bush gets thinner; what were trees yesterday are tall shrubs to-day. Now and again we cross a strip of rock and sand. The heat is dry. I can hardly believe that I was actually shivering with cold in the small hours of the morning. Again the amazingly rich bird-life of the Sudan; ostriches, eagles of various kinds, hundreds of guinea-fowl, hoopoes, large birds of brilliant blue and black unknown to me, and antelope and wart hog.

As Paris has its *heure bleu*, the French Sudan has its *heure rose*, and once more there is a fleeting moment of breath-taking charm when everything on earth turns into a symphony of delicate rose, the sky remaining a dark background for the approaching night. The stars are brilliantly clear, the Polar Star and the Southern Cross making their appearance simultaneously at opposite angles of the firmament. The Big Bear is completely upside down and so is the waning moon.

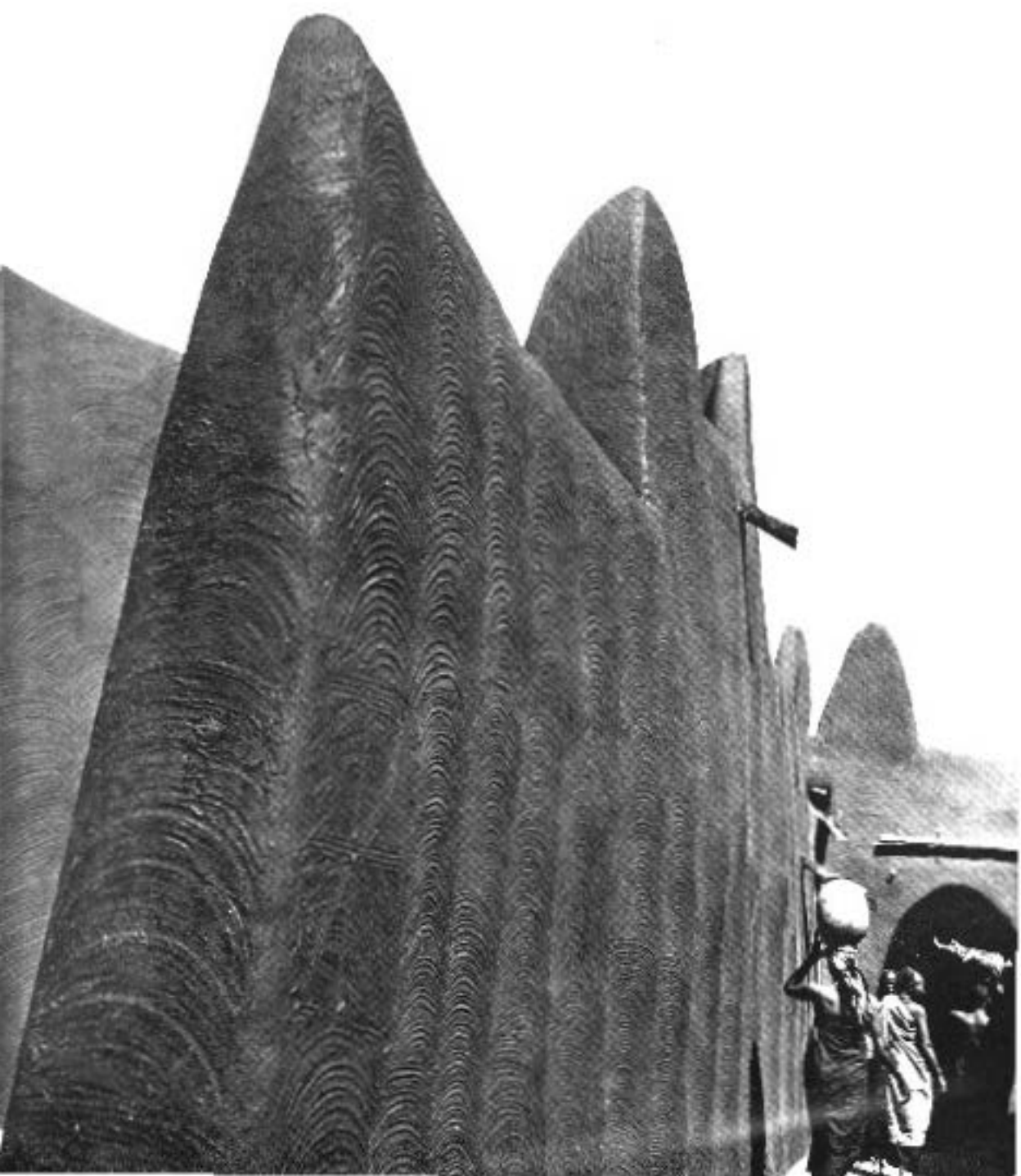
We are late getting into Agadez. The night is pitch black, so black that outside the limit of our headlights there is nothing to reflect a ray of light. It is like travelling through a pitch-black passage. The irregular tracks are difficult to follow. We leave them several times, but manage to return to the only indication marking the direction—a row of little mounds of clay on one side which the sleepy and exhausted driver is endeavouring to locate. In spite of the powerful headlights, we are like a blind man groping in the dark. There is no means of sleeping, as every five minutes we are literally thrown out of our seats. I am in that semiconscious state which must resemble the third degree, when we finally see a dim, flickering

14—A.M.

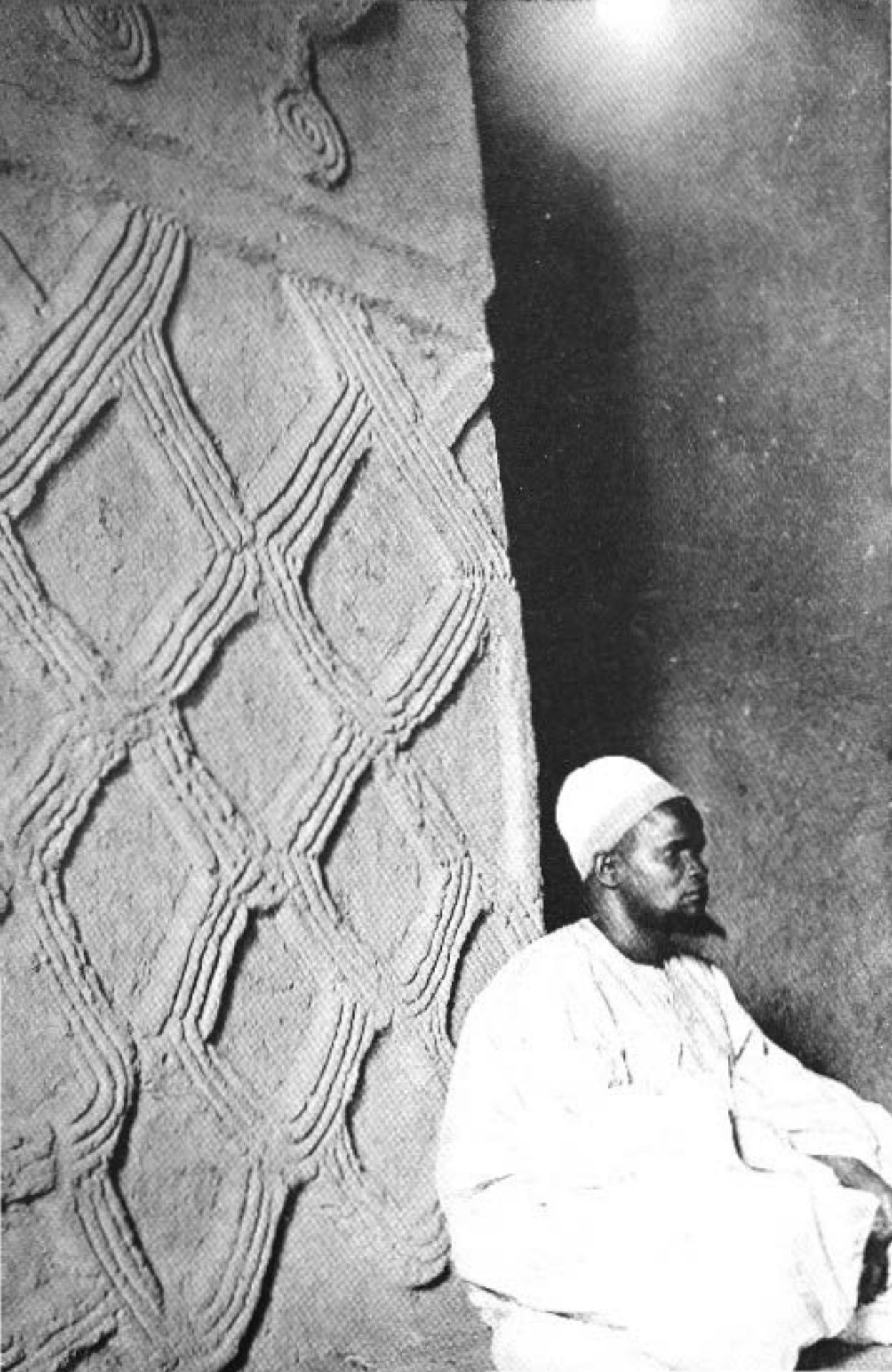
light, then a wall, and then enter a palace transformed into a hotel, and collapse into bed.

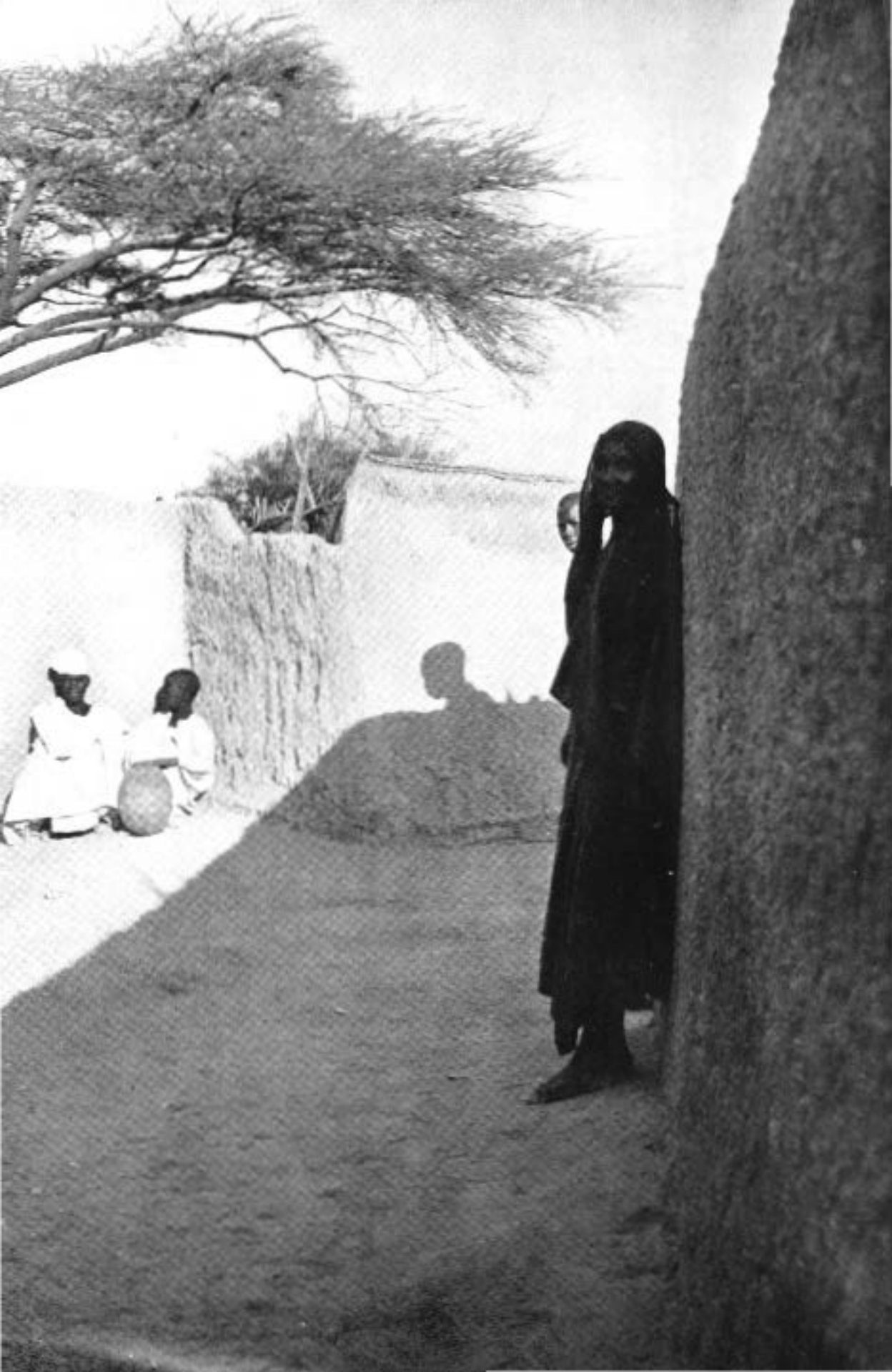
The sun is high as I wake the next day. The crack underneath the door of my room is like a tube of light. Outside, the glare is unbelievable. There is a pale luminous sky and the rest of the world is bleached grey. It is as if the scorching rays will not allow any colour to exist. The vacant places before some clusters of houses are deserted. There seems to be nothing anywhere. The solitary great minaret is like a cactus, its twenty-metre high walls pierced by innumerable beams projecting outward. Vultures hovering about. On looking nearer the formless, colourless masses in the trembling hot air seem to take on the contour of houses. The town is a maze of grey, fantastic architecture. Queer-shaped doors and archways in the form of mushrooms, terraces with bold enclosed brickwork, balustrades, alcoves, winding steps, loggias, patios, niches and almost every architectural element executed in clay and shaped into the most exotic of styles. A dreamland of strange forms, angles, and proportions.

We see the interior of a wealthy Sudanese merchant's house, which might be the vision of an architect gone haywire. One room is vaulted and built around an ornate pillar. The walls with niches and deep relief forming abstract *motifs* delicately coloured in pale shades of blue, rose and yellow on a white-washed background. This interior, in its childlike *naïveté*, reminds me of the sugared bread and candy houses of Hansel and Gretel. His wives and daughters, handsome Hausa women in white and blue gowns laden with amulets and silver jewellery. No set for a fantastic motion picture has ever surpassed this baroque barbarism for sheer extravagance of form.









The sun is boiling; it seems to cook one's brain and literally pins one down to the ground. We creep along the shaded side of a wall and take refuge in a small store run by the native wife of a retired French army official. The children are handsome. Timid little girls with finely cut features, and a small boy who looks like a young Roman emperor. As we enter we are confronted by a Tuareg "goumier" (a sort of military mounted policeman). He is a giant. A giant clad in ample white trousers with a crossed scarlet vest, cartridge belt, amulets, leather braces and a fringed leather money wallet hanging from his neck. His head is bound in deep silvery purple, disclosing a pair of large black eyes, heavily made up with kohl, and sweeping eyelashes. His long, gaunt arms are bare, and below them the open drapery reveals his naked, muscular sides as far down as his waist. His headdress, which is attached with three large silver plaques, discloses strands of long black hair on the top of his head, which is uncovered. His aristocratic aquiline nose is clearly distinguishable in profile. We go outside and soon he appears on an unusually tall, white mehari. Sitting on his lavish saddle, with multicoloured bags of fringed leather, he seems the proudest, most distinguished and dignified young warrior. A magnificent silhouette as he turns his camel's head and, bidding us good-bye, slowly descends into the great, sandy plain.

We climb the winding stairway inside the minaret. Below lies the vast, monochrome city, bare and desolate, and beyond is the desert and a range of mountains on the southeast horizon. The women, moving slowly, project their elongated forms over the hot sand, the right arm raised high, supporting a jug of water which seems to form part of them.

These shadows are like amphoras in motion. There is silence and calm in this remote city with no trace of European influence. One feels as if reincarnated backwards, through centuries, into an archaic kingdom, long ago forgotten. Remote and distant, far, far in time and space. A phantom dream city come true, half-asleep, and yet existing.

As the sun sinks in a cloudless sky, and the haze of golden rose vanishes from earth, the drums start their slow, rumbling sound. Several Tuaregs are dancing in a circle, throwing their spears in the air and waving their draperies as they leap, catcalling in high, shrill voices. A cool breeze dissipates the last remnants of heat as the great constellations form themselves in the black sky.

In the dining-room of the hotel, which is the throne-room of the ancient palace, with its massive pillars supporting a dome, an elderly Belgian painter holds forth about practically everything he has observed, but with infinite charm and originality, gesticulating in his enthusiasm, and almost dancing while he talks.

We are roused at 2 a.m. In the darkness of the cold night we take another truck with a large cargo and drive out into space. We are badly shaken for several hours, and with dawn the country reveals itself—endless flat steppe of bleached golden grass and some rare low shrubs. After a few hours the tracks we are following become sandier, and the shaking and bumping ceases. We pass a water-hole, long and shallow, round which flocks of donkeys and cattle are grouped, and thousands of small partridge, sitting on the dried mud or swarming overhead.

Farther on, as thorny shrubs become rarer, we come across

Opposite—Boulders at Zinder
Following—Tuareg "Goumiers"









the bright shapes of gazelles, prancing across the dazzling plain in the flat morning light. The driver suggests that Edward should shoot one, as it would be a welcome piece of meat for dinner. After wasting several cartridges, we sight one at about a hundred and fifty metres, and the last cartridge brings it down, the bullet forcing the guts out of its side and splashing shrubs with blood. The native boy removes its bowels with a swift cut of his knife and hoists its carcass on top of the lorry. But soon all animal life is to disappear.

We stop for a snack at noon at one of the wells dug by the military authorities. This is the beginning of the Tanezruft, the land of thirst. A flock of camels, donkeys and goats are crowding round the cemented water-hole. Some Tuaregs are splashing the water out of goatskins as they pour them into the muddy pools around which the thirsty herds are fighting for a place amid a deafening din of snorting and bleating. Dust flying in the wind, the women in their dark blue draperies help the men to restore some order among the general confusion. One of the Tuaregs asks us for some cough remedy; he is over six feet tall, his large piercing eyes heavily shaded with kohl are the only part of his face that is visible. His hands are those of a saint from an early Gothic cathedral.

The sun is high, there isn't a shadow. There is nothing to cast a shadow. The flat, hard sand littered with sharp, jagged pebbles, stretches out into infinity. The horizon dissolves into vague, shifting mirages. We feel like loaves of bread in an oven. Every breath of wind, the only moving thing in this world, a blast of hot air. The tracks ahead of us are hardly distinguishable, shifting sand rushing over the surface in powdery streaks.

15—A.M.

On and on. Five hundred kilometres of nothing. The dry heat scorching one's nose, throat and eyes. After hours of grinding across the shifting sand and hard pebbles, we see a low range of hills, then the sun sets in a totally vacant sky, and after turning into an orange disc, vanishes. The world becomes rose, then grey, and then there is nothing but the two circular beams of our headlights picking out the immediate proximity in the dark.

At last a light. It flashes once, twice, someone is waving it. We drive through a gateway into a rectangular court, with small rooms around it. A wind-blown tamarisk and a well within four walls. This is the fort of In-Guezzam. Like a *Beau Geste* fort in the great open space of howling wind and flying sand.

Darkness. The wind has fallen. The night is like the gentle caress of summer. Light reveals low ridges of jagged rocks like streams in the sand. The tracks are almost obliterated from sight. A few scrubby trees, a solitary range of hills on the horizon. The sun rises in a haze, casting long shadows from the frequent stones marking our direction. These stones assume a certain importance in the surrounding emptiness. We are on a flat and immaculately smooth surface of rose. Farther on, some dunes of lighter sand with ranges of rocks like the crests of waves. A salmon-coloured wisp of a cloud in the opalescent air. Delicate, tender colour. Then another group of trees. Two lonely stalks. The rocks assume queer shapes from centuries of erosion. Now the landscape looks like the bottom of an aquarium before the water is poured in. After a few hours we are travelling along a ridge of rocks shaped in vertical columns, like tree-trunks stacked









together. Other groups of horizontally streaked formations, rising from the sand like steps leading to nowhere. Then some sentinels of rock, castles with archways and domes, the sand forming sweeping curves at their feet. Then again sand and pebbles. After a while we approach another ridge on the gentle incline. The sand is smoke-colour, like mist, but higher, a rich ochre against the brown rocks. The sun slowly rises and floods the world. The tracks in the sand, from cars having passed previously, are sharply lined out like the tracks of skiers in the snow. Beautiful, calm landscape of infinitely tender colour. Flat sand with the soothing pattern of ripples designed by the wind. Complete harmony of a few significant forms reduced to their ultimate simplicity.

The car of a young captain, who I am told is a radio inspector, passes us and becomes a speck, leaving its trail behind in the dustless sand. Another dune is passed with an agglomeration of peaks, like grey coral or a gigantic palace with numerous sharply-pointed towers. The car vanishes for a moment, then reappears, moving away; it is somewhat disconnected with the surrounding space like those little figures that Salvador Dali places into his barren landscapes. We pass a truck stranded in the quicksands. It is like passing a liner in mid-ocean. Our turn to get stuck comes next. We use planks under the tyres, and after several attempts, free ourselves and continue northward over yellow dunes strewn with boulders. As the hour of noon approaches, the sun casts its vertical rays, obliterating all play of light and shadow, and everything turns into a colourless mass in the dazzling light. The rocks strewn about look like flat bits of rubbish. The irregular formations on the horizon as well as the hilly

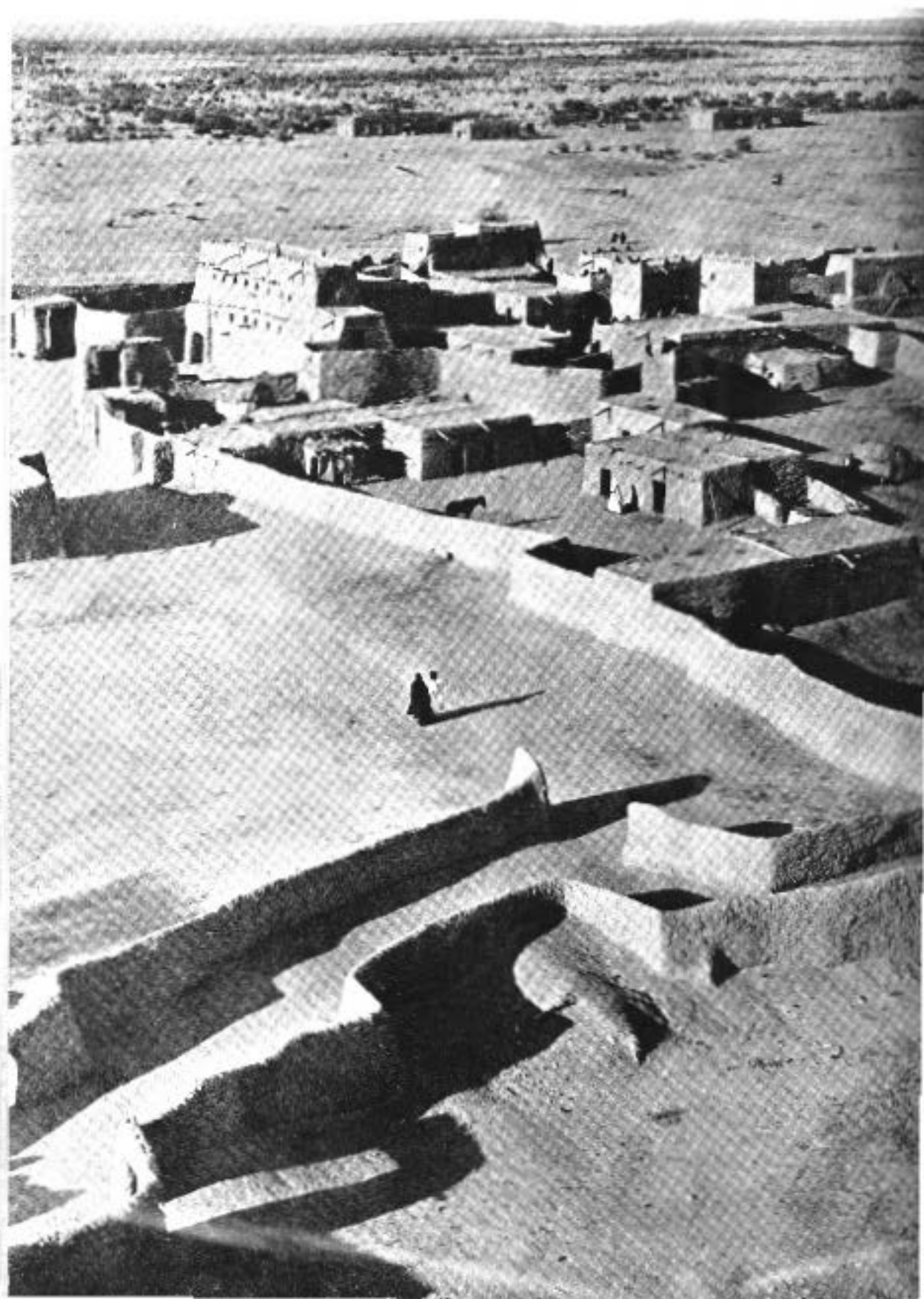
ranges seem to dissolve in a hardly visible haze. And with the trembling noon heat comes the mirage.

The horizon is flooded, things seem to shift through and above the flood, slowly approaching and changing their contour, then diminishing and becoming colourless boulders, half-buried in the sand.

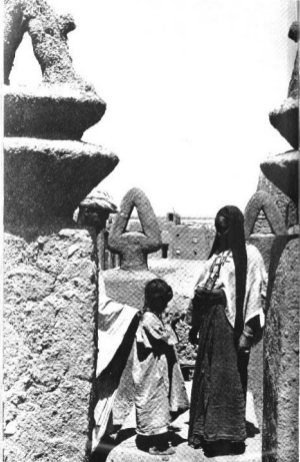
A mountain ahead of us, the only tangible object in the vacant, flat landscape detaches itself and floats reflected in mid-air like a Mediterranean island in the limpid, rippleless waters of an early summer morning. But the waters recede as we approach; the island seems to shrink as its reflection vanishes, and now the waters are beyond the rock, and the rock is part of the solid, boiling sand. Another series of islands emerge from the blue space, and as we advance the "fake" waters recede mile by mile. The ground rises and we cross a flat surface upon which the isolated cliffs seem to rise like islands from a yellow sea. There are various flat surfaces of rock formation: black, blue-grey, pale blue and dark brown, succeeding one another across the sand which is strewn with their debris. The ruins of once-existing mountains. Sand, gravel, stone, rock; not a thistle nor a blade of grass nor a living creature. The triumph of death over Nature.

We stop at noon alongside an abandoned car, which is a landmark in this emptiness, and have a snack in the shadow of our lorry, the shadow being about two feet in width. After an hour we come across the first furtive tufts of grass at intervals. Then a meagre tree under which rests a Tuareg and his family; a little farther in the sun four camels squatting on the ground. There are small piles of stones one on top of another to mark the way, in case of a sandstorm. These little piles of stones

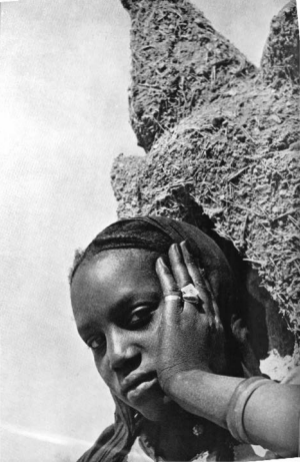












could easily find their way into a modern art gallery in the guise of abstract sculpture, a number underneath each corresponding to an ultra-sophisticated title in the catalogue.

Pebbles and sand continue for hours, the rocky hills, powdered with sand along their sloping crevices, alternating with pointed hills of solid brown rock. Small shrubs of a yellowish-green appear as the hills close in on a valley along which the layers of hot air tremble over the flat surface. We are following a dried-up river bed. The number of solitary trees increases. Thorny shrubs and tamarisk. A gazelle flees over the sharp knifelike rocks. Then the bleached bones of a dead camel, slowly sinking into the sand. Later we enter a chaos of rocks and loose stones. The gleaming, sandy valley flanked by cone-shaped mountains of loose, black rock, like tremendous piles of burned coal. Again the flat desert returns. We are ploughing our way through the debris of collapsed mountains strewn all over the face of the earth, as if the extra stones and pebbles of the world had been swept up in disorderly heaps. We climb a counterfort and plunge down a valley beyond which lies a chain of pitch-black mountains. The track leads up and down and around sharp corners. As far as the eye can see there are black ridges in close succession. The mountains of the Hoggar.

We are now surrounded by chaotic formations of volcanic origin. The lowering sun is casting a reddish light on the surrounding blackness. We cross one more ridge and then a miraculous panorama opens up in front of us. Magic! A vast valley circled by mountains, solitary rocks and detached peaks, tablelands, and needles, and in the middle of this giant arena lies the red and ochre city of Tamanrasset,

16—A.M.

with its intensely bright green fields of fresh wheat, its gardens and clusters of tamarisk trees. The suddenness of this contrast is astonishing.

Tamanrasset is new. Every construction has been designed by a military architect to create a harmonious ensemble without a single false note, except for the utilitarian radio masts. The style of building is a modern adaption of Sudanese dwellings. The spacious avenues are immaculate. A charming hotel, run by an enterprising young Parisian married couple, and then the soft air of the night, which brings almost immediate sleep.

Tamanrasset is a neat, clean and splendidly administered settlement of French army officers. There are few natives, as the Tuaregs are a people of nomadic habits, avoiding the sedentary urban life and spending their existence in desert and mountain, wandering with their herds of cattle and their swift-moving camels. The high crenellated walls, forming large avenues and courts, remind one of some ancient city in Mesopotamia. There is an open-air swimming-pool, an obelisk commemorating Father Foucault, and the spacious villas of army officers. The day's rest is a welcome interlude after the long hours of motoring.

Next evening the surrounding mountains are aglow from the setting sun. As the hour of twilight dwindles over the silent world we visit the Borj of one of the great heroes of recent years. In the days of Father Foucault the Borj stood alone in the empty landscape. Its square of mud ramparts are surrounded by a moat. The murderous bullet which ended the saintly man's life has left a deep hole in the soft wall. Inside, a court with a well dug by the Father, and several vacant

rooms with the sand of the desert for a floor. Above the steep ramparts of this little fortress, the windswept, immaculate sky.

The hotel proprietors give us a Tuareg dinner. Squatting on the carpeted floor, we devour an entire lamb masterfully roasted and spiced on a spit, after having been turned over the coals for hours. This is followed by a couscous of whole wheat, vegetables and melted butter.

We depart at six the next morning. For about forty kilometres we climb and descend over rocks and stones, the main range of the Hoggar Mountains faintly outlined in the flat morning sun. A young Arab travelling with us as far as the next outpost tells me about the Tuaregs and their customs. The young men are of a definitely effeminate nature, although courageous warriors, and they are ruled by their womenfolk, who select their husbands. The matriarchal system is in full vigour, and there are cases when a wealthy Targia may have two husbands at a time.

The mountains grow rounder, of a grey stone, light in values in the morning sun. We cross a sandy plain, then a dried-up river. We stop at Iniker; in the afternoon there are again black ranges of hills and flat valleys, surrounded by steep grey mountains like magnified boulders. Then hills of broken-up stones, and then everything flattens out. Again hours of going up and down counterforts of jagged lava, crumbling on either side of the road. We descend into a valley flanked by mountain ranges with clusters of tamarisk in the dried-up river bed. Three Tuaregs are standing along the roadside holding silver jewellery in their upraised hands. For a moment they look like the wise men of the East presenting their offerings.

The nature of the mountains changes as we follow the

winding gorge of Arak. The towering rocks on either side are of chalk formation, with horizontally running strata and great oblique landslides forming the valley.

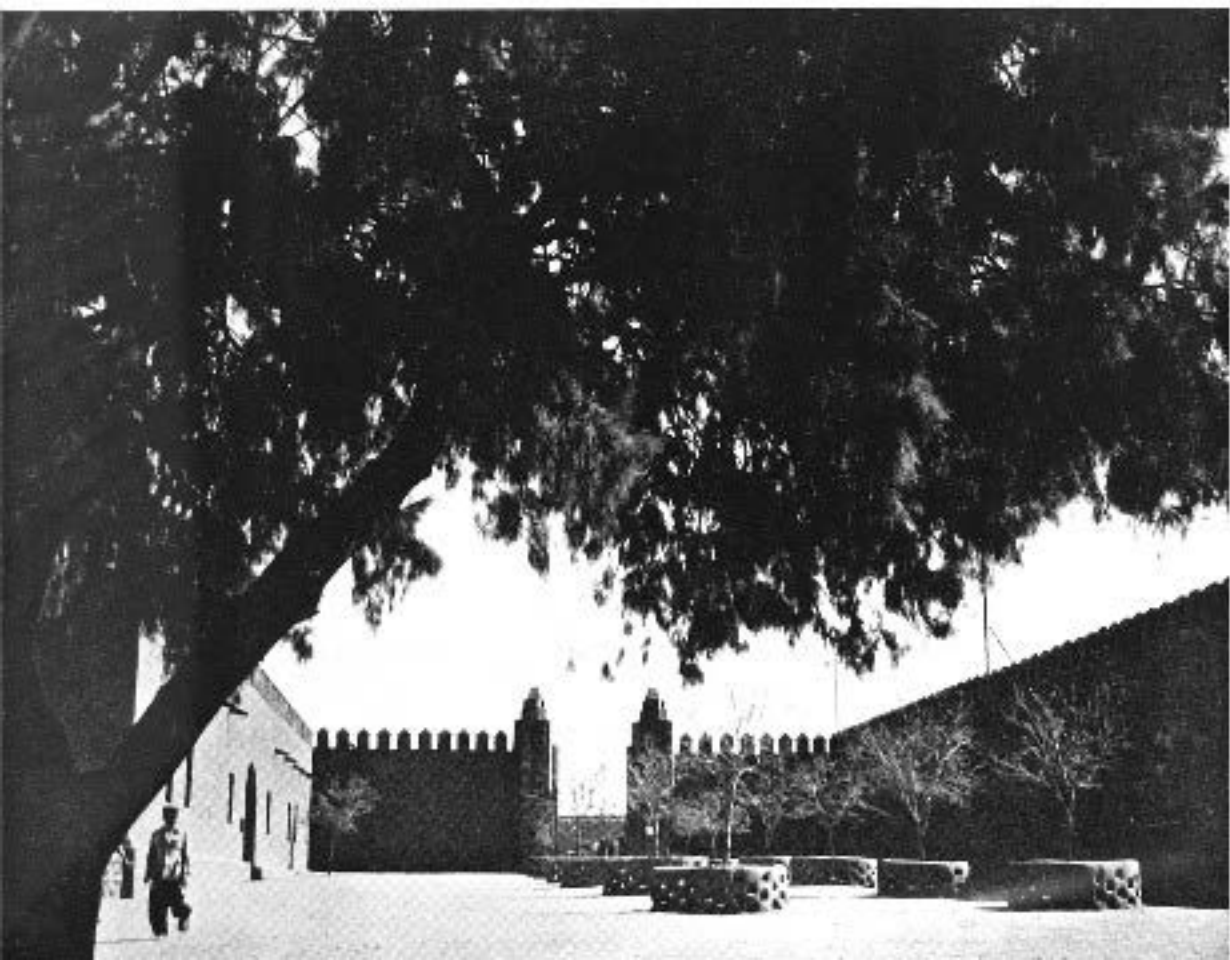
We reach a small inn built like a fort and surrounded by massive rocks. There is a young Swiss aviator who has just arrived in his plane, accompanied by a youth from Hamburg, who is photographing for the German newspapers. The hotel manager, a charming-looking young radio operator, and his wife live completely isolated in this desert of rocks with a few natives for servants. The place is mosquito-ridden and full of poisonous lizards, tarantulas, scorpions and snakes.

As we motor out of this sinister pass on the narrow and come upon a great flat expanse of sharp rocks, we pass the neat-looking red monoplane of the Germans. Then dawn comes and we continue for hours over flat stretches watching the light change from every shade of rose, and then turn yellow and a pale, misty grey. As the sun rises higher, the long distant lines of plateaux flatten out and finally dissolve into mirages in the glaring haze of pale nothingness. We come upon the last black rocks of the Hoggar in horizontal layers, lying at the foot of a steep bank. These stone surfaces are covered with inscriptions depicting sandals and Tuareg writing, most likely a native way for the passer-by to order his sandals. It is cool, and even the glaring sunrays of noon seem to lack heat. We have finally left the Hoggar Mountains behind us and are now in an endless expanse of sand.

The desert seems never-ending. Motoring over this flat, dead surface is surprisingly rough, and we are heaved out of our seats on several occasions. Hour after hour of vacant

*Opposite—(Above) Hoggar Mountains
(Below) Tamanrasset*

*Following—Tanezrust, the Country of Thirst
(Above) El Golea from the Ksar
(Below) Gate and City Walls, In-Salah*

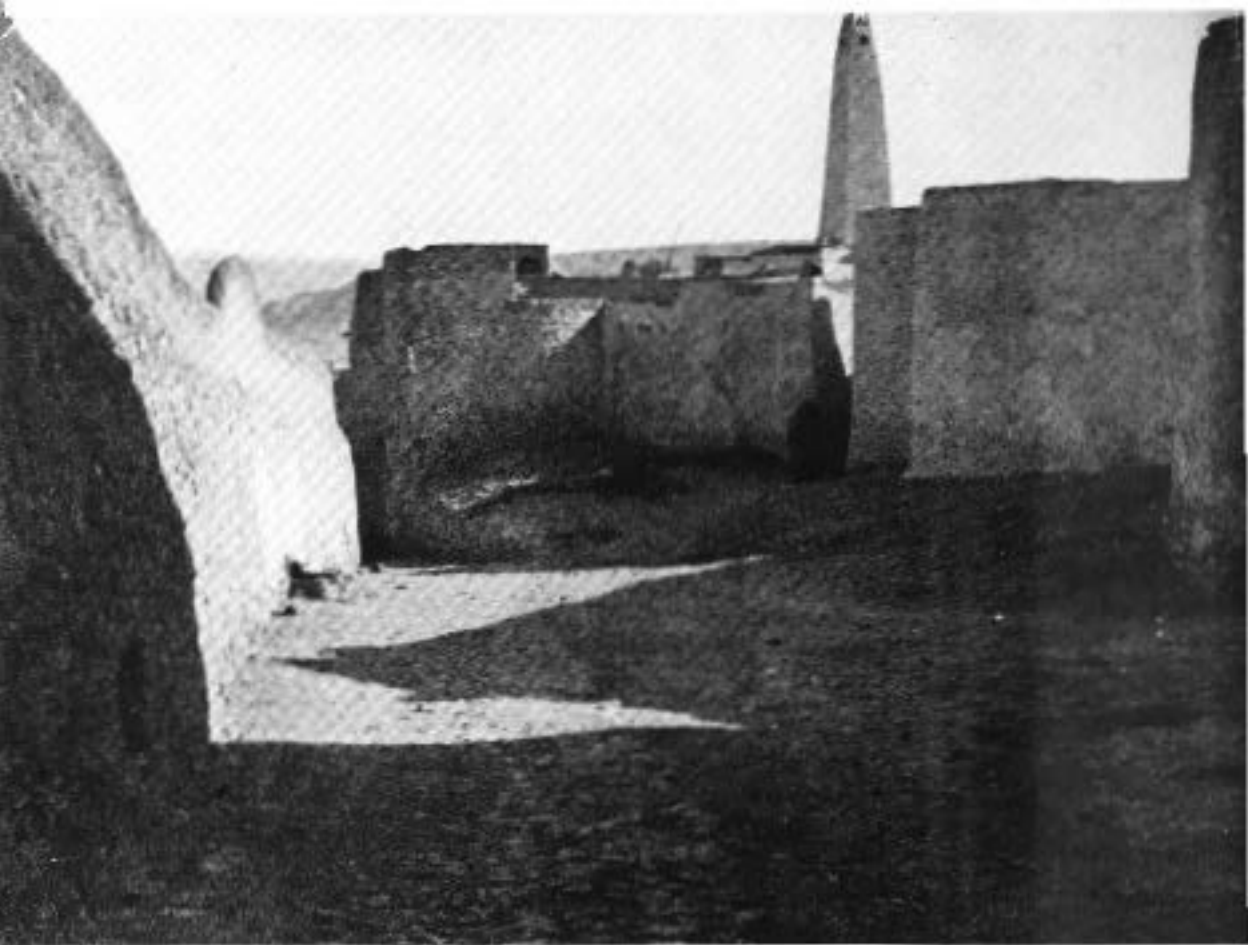












nothingness, of cruel, hard pebbles and sand with no play of light but a hazy blinding glare, seems to weigh down on one depressingly. I try to sleep, but the driving is too rough, and I finally give up all notion of space and time, my mind going completely blank in apparent unison with the surrounding hopeless monotony.

Now and again we pass the dazzling white bones of a camel. A skeleton lies ghostlike in its whiteness, the only object in sight. Like the wreck of a ship at the bottom of the waterless ocean. The thirsty camel collapsed, having served its time. It may have sunk under the burning rays of noon, its body growing cold as life ebbed away into the freezing wind of night. Not even vultures to devour its remains on the morrow. Death guarding death. The winds have dispersed skin and flesh, and the sun has bleached its bones, as it has blackened the surrounding surface of stone. Soon the bones will be blown to dust, the dust of the Sahara.

When we sight In-Salah, we have not encountered a single living being. In-Salah appears on the horizon like a break-water among dunes of yellow sand. Soon we perceive the tops of date palms. We drive along the long line of the city wall, and then through a monumental gate of fine proportions, into a spacious court, lined with arches. A wide avenue sloping downward to the oasis, well designed, pale rose buildings, terraced borders of flowers. The market place, with its monastic patios, colonnades and gates rising from the rose and yellow sand, is in perfect harmony with the few native settlements dispersed among the dunes. Again a triumph of French taste and enterprise in creating harmonious settings in an ocean of sand.

17—A.M

*Opposite—Street in Melika
Ouled Nail Dancer in Gardaia*

The sunset is colourless, and the rose afterglow envelops the dunes of sand rising in static curves and breaking silently and without motion against the city's walls. The light-coloured camels resting in the sand are hardly perceptible. Two women in blue with yellow shawls are seated on the crest of a dune of rose which curves upward like an arabesque, their pale figures outlined against the deep, mauve-brown of the wall, under a sky of aquamarine. Pure, flat colour, without the break of light and shadow. Soft, transparent delicacy mixed with hard, burning colours; then darkness; and here the stars seem nearer in the cool, quiet night.

We leave at 6 p.m. This time in a large, streamlined bus with an immaculate interior of the Pullman type. A tourist in a grey felt hat and a lounge suit joins us. He says good-bye to several Frenchwomen in white burnouses and turbans, like actresses in a desert film. The tourist and the nickel and leather inside of the modern vehicle work like a spell, dissipating the fleeting memory of Equatorial Africa. To-night we shall be in a luxurious transatlantic hotel. I feel quite out of place in my *sola topee* and shorts.

We stick in the dunes and it takes us a good half-hour to extricate ourselves in a landscape of luminous sand with a few large rocks which look like tombs, casting long shadows in the early morning light. The sand flattens out, and by noon we reach a high tableland and start climbing in zigzags. The borders of this plateau are irregular pinnacles of sandstone with windswept tops detached from the main body, their slopes falling into pyramid-shaped landslides. The road winds itself to the top; looking back we see a vast panorama of canyons and mountains, a mixture of tortured

and wind-swept valleys and protuberances. Then comes the flat, hard surface of brown and grey pebbles, the surface of the Tademait, which lasts over two hundred kilometres of continuous monotony. We encounter some road-menders and more bleached skeletons of camels, and every few hours we pass the whitewashed, horizontal markings on the ground for aviators; and then, back into the utter and complete nothingness of dark, colourless, flat emptiness. The road is firm, but we are shaken in an uninterrupted vibrating rhythm. At sunset, we reach the other end of the plateau and pass the small forlorn fort of Miribel.

The bus plunges down the road into the winding valley, and here the scene changes. We cross several strips of tufted grass spread in bands across the stone-littered ground; then again vast stretches of stones, brown, grey and yellow; and then great ridges of luminous pink sand-dunes, like clouds hovering over the horizon. On approaching, we see the large, broad curves, catching the oblique light and casting graded shadows along the deeply scooped out, billowing waves. They seem like the arrested rhythm of giant breakers. Tidal waves turned into a range of sand. The sand is glowing, astonishingly bright and immaterial with the intensity of transparent colour in space, like a liquid substance, its highlights merging with the sky, its shadows forming translucent, abstract forms of infinitely gentle grace, swinging into mid-air, suspended below the sky. One small, salmon-coloured cloud on the horizon catches the sun's last rays, twilight seems to linger. It grows dark as we pass the first palm trees. Then more and more palms. The great oasis of Southern Algeria. Arabs in white burnouses of

heavy wool, low white walls reflecting the glow of our headlights; and then the large entrance gate of the hotel of El Golea. Whitewashed; spotless corridors; the cheerful sight of a crackling fire reflected in the shining tiles of the floor and the supreme delight of a scalding hot shower.

Another harbour in this great ocean of pitiless stone, rock and sand. Each harbour is different, detached from the other by the almost unattainable distance of waterless, dead and forsaken space. The Sahara, like all abstract, vast spaces, is a dream. One vast mirage, the grandeur, the enormity of which fires the imagination in one's memory after the physical impact is over. The desert is something you shrink from while in its presence, but which you remember nostalgically after it is all over. Like a dream or a nightmare which one would like to retrace on awaking.

Towering high above El Golea is the Ksar, a steep rock of sandstone, surmounted by the ruins of an ancient city. A city which was once a maze of winding streets and covered soukhs with houses clinging to the steep cliff like swallows' nests, and merging with the steep vertical ramparts. Below, in a semi-circle, lies the great mass of date palms, with its hundreds of winding, narrow waterways and low mud walls. A few mud settlements, the whitewashed marabu looking like frosted pastry; the gleaming white buildings of El Golea, with its minaret, and beyond more palms, which gradually grow rarer and stop as the distant sand dunes close the vast horizon. To the north, the tortured bare ground rises towards a plateau which forms the other half of this great panorama. Below, in the sleepy, still oasis and behind the brownish walls, lie gardens of palm, nespoli, orange, lemon, apple and apricot





trees. The gentle cool breeze, blowing the petals of peach blossoms over the green grass strewn with blooming flax. The faint rustle of palm leaves and the soothing trickle of water in the fast-running Sagias, create a mood of drowsiness.

The village is comparatively recent, the streets lined with casuarina trees, which cast their trembling shadows along the whitewashed walls. The streets are dull, lifeless and empty. A few white-burnoused Arabs shuffle lazily along the sidewalks, and several persistent boys, try to sell crystalized sandstones for souvenirs. Flies and dust.

As we leave and motor across stone and tufts of grass, we follow an endless row of telegraph poles. They seem like a chain, something that attaches us and returns us to reality. After another plateau we reach a valley with several cities crowding their white and sand-coloured cubes towards a pinnacle of buildings topped by long narrow minarets of irregular shape. Gardaia, the last vestiges of the Sahara. Half deserted Moabite cities, inhabited by the wives and children of travelling tradesmen. A camel market with arcades, winding streets of delicate pastel shades of rose, blue and yellow. The little girls are lavishly dressed in bright shawls and embroidered net. Like Arab versions of little *Infantas*. A street of ill fame with homely-looking Ouled Nails in colourful dresses. A large Jewish quarter of incredible sordidness and misery. Many blind men and women squatting among refuse, and some half-starved cats in a cloud of flies. Dusty, dejected, abandoned cities.

Then we continue. We are one day from the Mediterranean, the telegraph poles are more insistent; the desert is dying and Nature coming back to life with a vengeance. The Nature

18—A.M.

Opposite—El Golea, the Ksar and a Marabu

of Europe, organized and divided. The green freshness of spring in the Atlas, waterfalls, then the flat fields and vineyards, shabby villages.

Algiers. Advertisements, factory chimneys, villas, gardens, more wires, tramlines, crowded streets, noise, motor-cars, cafés, cinemas, the quays, ships, the sea; big blocks of houses and news-stands, municipal gardens and conventional monuments, asphalt, shops, noise, the crowd. Europe.

The African mirage disappears, vanishes, dissolves into a commonplace mass of concentrated vulgarity, excitement, noise and futility. The streets flooded with glaring, hard light, flickering red and purple tubes of neon. Crowded shop-windows and the hurrying traffic, deafening, and tearing at one's nerves. Ugliness seems to invade one's mind quickly, blotting out visions of unforgettable splendour, and chasing them into the secret and remote corners of the heart. Then you submit and accept, and the rest is a memory. The everlasting memory of a world behind one. In space, in time, and in one's imagination.

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