Sandi The King Maker

By
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I. — THE PROPHETS OF THE OLD KING

IN the village of P'pie, at the foot of that gaunt and hungry mountain which men called Limpisi, or Limbi, there lived a young man whose parents had died when he was a child, for in those far—off days the Devil Woman of Limbi demanded double sacrifices, and it was the custom to slay, not the child who was born upon her holy day—which was the ninth of the new moon—but his parents.

Therefore he was called by acclamation M'sufu-M'goba—'the-fortunate- boy-who-was-not-his-own-father'. All children who are born of sacrificed parents are notoriously clever, and M'sufu was favoured of ghosts and devils. It is said that when he was walking—young he climbed up to the cave of the Holy Devil Woman herself, passing through the guard of Virgins, who kept the hillside, in a most miraculous way, and that he had tottered into that dreadful cave whence no human had emerged alive, and had found the Old Woman sleeping.

He came forth alive and again reached the village. So it was said—and said secretly between husband and wife, or woman and lover (for these latter trust one another). Aloud or openly not one spoke of such a fearful exploit or even mentioned the Old Woman, save parabolically or by allusion.

But to this visit and the inspiration of The Cave-of-Going-In were ascribed the wonderful powers which came to him later in life.

It is told that, seated at food with one of the families which had adopted him, he suddenly broke an hour's silence.

"K'lama and his goat are dead by the deepstones."

"Silence, little child," said his indignant foster-parent. "Are you not ashamed to talk when I am eating? In this way all devils get into a man's body when his mind is thrown all ways."

Nevertheless, a search-party was sent out, and K'lama and his goat were found dead at the bottom of a rocky bluff; and one old man had seen this happen, the goat being suddenly mad and leaping with K'lama at the leash of it, just as the sun rim tipped the mountain-top. At such an hour had M'sufu spoken!

Then another miracle. One Doboba, a gardener, had flogged M'sufu for stealing bananas from his garden.

"Man," said M'sufu, rubbing his tingling seat, "a tree will fall upon you in two nights, and you will be with the ghosts."

And two nights after this Doboba died in such a way.

The story and the fame of M'sufu spread until his name was spoken even in the intimate places of the Old King's hut. And there came one Kabalaka, Chief of all the Tofolaka, this being the country which is separated from the Ochori by the Ghost Mountains, and Kabalaka was a great man in the king's eyes, being his seni-seni, which means Chief Minister.

"Oh, prophesy for me, M'sufu," he said, and before the whole twittering village—aghast at the advent of this amazing prince and his ten companies of spearmen and his dancing women—M'sufu stood up.

"Lord," he said "the crops of the land will be good and better than good. But the crops of the Fongini shall die, because no rain will come and the earth will crack."

"What else?" said Kabalaka, not displeased, for he hated the Fongini and Lubolama, their chief, and was jealous of his influence with the Old King.

"Lord," said the young seer, sweating greatly, "the son of your wife is sick and near to death, but on the rind of the moon he shall live again."

Kabalaka bent his brows, for he loved the son of his wife, and made a forced march back to Rimi-Rimi to find the child already laid for death, with clay

upon his eyelids.

"Wait until the rind of the moon, for this child will not die," said Kabalaka in a confident tone, but inwardly aching.

So they waited, watching the fluttering breath of the boy, the women-folk going out every morning to pluck green leaves to deck their bodies in the death dance. But on the rind of the moon the child opened his eyes and smiled and asked for milk.

And then a week later, when the people of The True Land, as Rimi-Rimi was called, were labouring to get in their mighty crops, there came to the city Lubolama of the Fongini, begging remission of tribute.

"For my crops have failed, Old King," he said, "and there has been no rain, so that the fields are cut with great cracks."

That night the Old King sent for M'sufu, and the prophet, wearing a beautiful brass chain which the grateful Kabalaka had sent him, arrived in the city at the very hour the king's guard pulled down Hughes at Hughes Lloyd Thomas, Inspector of Territories in the service of the British Government.

Lloyd Thomas, in the days before he entered the Service, had been an evangelist—a fiery Welsh revivalist who had stirred the Rhondda Valley by the silvery eloquence of his tongue. Something of a mystic, fay as all Celts are, he had strangely survived the pitfalls which await earnest men who take service under Government. It was the innate spirituality of the man, the soul in him, and his faith, that made him smile whimsically up into the lowered face of K'salugu M'popo, the Old One, Lord and Paramount Lord of the Great King's territory.

They had staked him out before the Old King's hut, and his head was hot from the king's fire which burnt behind him. His travel-soiled drill was stiff with his blood, great rents and tears in his coat showed his broad white chest and the dark brown V of his shirt opening; but though he lay on the very edge of darkness, his heart was big within him, and he smiled, thanking God in his soul that there was no woman whose face would blanch at the news, or child to wonder or forget, or mother to be stricken.

"Ho, Tomini," said the Old King mockingly, and blinking down at his prisoner through his narrow eye-slits, "you called me to palaver before my people, and I am here."

Lloyd Thomas could turn his head, did he desire, and see a sector of that vast congregation which waited to witness his end—tier upon tier of curious brown faces, open-eyed with interest, children who desired sensational amusement. Truly he knew that all the city of Rimi-Rimi was present.

"I came in peace, K'salugu M'popo," he said, "desiring only to find Fergisi and

his daughter: for evil news has gone out about them, and his own wife came to my king, telling of a killing palaver. Therefore my king has sent me, bringing you many beautiful presents, and knowing that you are strong for him, and will tell me about this God-man."

The presents were stacked in a heap by the side of the Old King's stool—bolts of cloth, shimmering glass necklaces, looking-glasses such as kings love, being in gift frames.

The king withdrew his eyes from the prisoner and bent down to pick up a necklace. He held it in his hand for a moment, and then, without a word, tossed it into the fire. At a word from his master, Kabalaka picked up the remainder and flung them into the blaze.

Lloyd Thomas set his teeth, for he knew the significance of this.

"Lord, since I am to die, let me die quickly." he said quietly.

"Let Jububu and M'tara, who skin men easily, come to me," said the Old King, and two naked men came from behind the fire, their little knives in their hands.

"O king—" it was Lloyd Thomas who mocked now, and there was a fire in his eyes which was wonderful "—O skinner of men and slayer of little girls, one day and another day you shall live, and then shall come one in my place, and he shall smell you out and feed your bodies to the fishes."

"Let the skinning men work slowly," said the Old King, rubbing his scrubby chin, and the two who knelt at Lloyd Thomas's feet whetted their little knives on the palms of their hands.

"He shall come—behold, I see him!" cried the doomed man. "Sandi Ingonda, the tiger, and the cater of kings!"

The king half rose from his chair, his puckered face working.

"O men, let me speak," he said huskily, "for this man has said a wicked thing, Sandi being dead. Yet if he lived, who can cross the mountains of ghosts, where my regiments sit? Or can his iron puc-a-puc force a way through the swift waters of the river?"

"He will come," said the prisoner solemnly, "and he shall stand where I lie, and on that hour you shall die, K'salugu M'popo."

The Old Man blinked and blinked.

"This is evil talk, and this man is a liar, for Sandi is not. Did not the man of the Akasava say that Sandi went out upon the black waters and fell through a hole in the world?"

"Lord king, it was said," agreed Kabalaka.

The king sat back on his stool.

"If Sandi comes, he dies, by death," he swore uneasily, "for I who sent the daughter of the God-man, into the earth and delivered the God-man himself to the Terrible Woman of Limbi, even I have no fear. O M'sufu!"

And there came from amongst the women behind the king a youth wearing a glittering chain.

"O M'sufu, see this man. Now prophesy for me, shall Sandi come to this land, where he has never come before, for is not this land called Allimini*, and was there not held a great palaver because the white Frenchis came, cala cala and how may Sandi, who is neither Frenchi nor Allimini, but Inegi, put foot in this land?"

[*German]

M'sufu realized the splendour of the moment, and strutted forth, his head thrown back, his arms extended.

"Hear me, Great King. Hear M'sufu, who has strange and lovely powers. For I say that Sandi shall not come to this land again—neither to the king's country, nor to the lands of the base people on the lower river. He is as dead."

The Old King was on his feet, his legs trembling.

"Hear him!" he yelled, and snatched his killing spears from the ground beside him. "O Tomini, hear this man—liar—liar—liar!"

And with every word, he struck, though he might have saved himself the trouble, for Lloyd Thomas died at the first blow.

The Old King looked down at his work, and his head was shaking.

"O ko," he said, "this is a bad palaver, for I have killed this man too quickly. Now, M'sufu, your voice has been beautiful to me, and you shall build in the shadow of my hut. For I know now that Sandi will not come. But if a devil is in your heart, and you have spoken lies, you shall lie where he lies, the Cold One, and my skinning men shall know your voice."

THERE is something in the atmosphere of the British Colonial Office which chills the stranger to an awed silence. The solemnity of lofty corridors and pale long windows is oppressive. Noble and sombre doors, set at intervals as regular as the cells of a prison, suggest that each door hides some splendid felon. There are in these corridors at certain hours of the day no manifestations of life, save for the occasional ghostly apparition of a solitary clerk, whose appearance in the vista of desolation is heralded by the deep boom of a closing door, sounding to the nervous visitor like a minute gun saluting the shade of a mourned official.

A tanned, slight man came into one of these corridors on an October

afternoon, and the sound of his halting feet echoed hollowly. He was consulting a letter, and stopped at each doorway to examine the number. Presently he stopped, hesitated, and knocked. A subdued official voice bade him enter.

The room was occupied by two sedate young gentlemen, whose desks had been so disposed that each had an equal opportunity of looking out of the window, and at sight of Sanders one of the youths rose with a heaviness of movement that suggested premature age—this also being part of the atmosphere of the Colonial Office—and walked with a certain majesty across the room.

"Mr. Sanders?" he whispered rather than said. "Oh, yes, Mr. Under- Secretary was expecting to see you." He looked at his watch. "I think he will be disengaged now. Won't you please sit down?"

Sanders was too impatient and too nervous to sit. He had all the open-air man's horror of Government offices, and his visits to the headquarters of his old Department had been few and at long intervals. The young man, who had disappeared into an adjoining room, returned, opened wide the door, and ushered Sanders into a larger room, the principal features of which were a carved marble fireplace and a large desk.

A gentleman at this latter rose, as Sanders came hesitatingly into the room, and welcomed him with a smile. The humanity of that smile, so out of place in this dead and dismal chamber, did something to restore the visitor's vitality.

"Sit down, Mr. Sanders." And this time Sanders did not refuse.

The Secretary was a tall lean man, thin of face and short-sighted, and Sanders, who had met him before, was as near ease as he was likely to be in such surroundings. Mr. Under-Secretary did not seem to be anxious to discuss the object of Sanders's summons. He talked about Twickenham, about the football games which were played in that district, about life in the Home Counties, and presently, when Sanders had begun to wonder why a Colonial Office messenger had been detailed to deliver a letter to him that morning, the Under-Secretary came suddenly to the point.

"I suppose you're out of Africa for good, Mr. Sanders?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Sanders quietly.

"It's a wonderful country," sighed Sir John Tell, "a wonderful country! The opportunities today are greater than they have ever been before—for the right man."

Sanders made no reply.

"You know Tofolaka and the country beyond the Ghost Mountains, of course," said Mr. Under-Secretary, playing with his pen and looking intently at the

blotting-pad.

"Yes, very well," smiled Sanders. "That is, as well as anybody knows that country. It is rather terra incognita."

Sir John nodded.

"You call it, I think—?" he said suggestively.

"We called it the country of the Great King," said Sanders. "It lies, as you know, beyond the Ochori country on one side of the river and the Akasava on the other, and I never went into the country except once, partly because the mountain roads are only passable for three months in the year, and I could never get sufficient, steam or speed into the Zaire—that was my ship, you remember—to pass through Hell Gate."

"Hell Gate?" said Sir John reflectively. Oh, yes, that is the narrow canyon beyond the Ghost Mountains. There is a terrific current, isn't there?"

"Ten knots," said Sanders promptly, "and no slack water. Hell Gate has done more to keep the Great King's country free from inquisitive visitors than any other cause. I should imagine. By—the way, that was German territory, was it not?" he asked, with sudden interest.

"It was and it wasn't," said Sir John carefully. "There were two or three nations which marked the territory on their colonial maps, although none can claim either to have conquered or occupied the country. And that is just why I wanted to see you, Mr. Sanders. At the Peace Conference, when the question of the redistribution of Germany's colonies came up for decision, the Great King's territory gave us more trouble and caused more—er—unpleasantness than any other of her possessions which we took over. You see"—he shifted round and faced Sanders, leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs comfortably—"it was never admitted by any of the great nations that the Great King's country belonged to anybody. It is now virtually under the dominion of the—er—League of Nations." he said.

Sanders smiled.

"That means it's still No Man's Land." he said bluntly.

"In a sense, yes," agreed the Under-Secretary. "As a matter of fact, we have received a mandate from the League to straighten out matters, put the country on a proper footing, and introduce something of civilization into a territory which has hitherto resisted all attempts at penetration, pacific or otherwise."

He stopped, but Sanders made no comment.

"We think," said Sir John carefully, "that in six or seven months a strong, resolute man with a knowledge of the native—a superhuman knowledge, I might add—could settle the five territories now under the Great King, and

establish law and justice in a country which is singularly free from those ethical commodities."

Again he paused, and again Sanders refrained from speaking.

Sir John rose and, walking to the wall, pulled down a roller map.

"Here is a rough survey of the country, Mr. Sanders," he said.

Sanders rose from the chair and went to the other's side.

"Here are the Ghost Mountains, to the west of which are your old friends, the Ochori; to the cast is Tofolaka, and due south on the other side of the big river is Bubujala. Here the river takes a turn—you will see a lake, very imperfectly charted."

"What is that island asked Sanders, pointing.

"That is called the Island of the Golden Birds—rather romantic," said Sir John.

"And that." said Sanders, stabbing the map with his forefinger, "is Rimi- Rimi, where the Old King lives."

"And north is a mountain—Limpisi." said the Under-Secretary. "That would be new country for you, Mr. Sanders; you're not used to mountains and plateaux. It is very healthy, I'm told, and abounding in big game."

"Very probably it is," said Sanders, returning to the table with his superior, "but I really know very little about it, Sir John, and if you have sent for me to give you information, I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you."

The Under-Secretary smiled.

"I have sent for you to give you some information, Mr. Sanders," he said quietly. "I have told you we want a resolute man, a man who has authority over natives, such as you possess, to go out and settle the country."

"I'm sorry—" began Sanders, shaking his head.

"Wait." The Under-Secretary stopped him with a gesture. "The Government is most anxious that this should be done at once, because—" he hesitated "—you may have heard the news, we sent a man to interview the Old King and make inquiries about the poor Fergusons, the missionaries, and—", He shrugged.

"They chopped him?" said Sanders. "Who was it?"

"Lloyd Thomas."

Sanders nodded.

"I knew him, poor chap. But it is a fairly dangerous proceeding to send a man into the Great King's country alone."

"Ye—es," agreed the other, "it was an error on the part of your successor, Mr. Sanders, but one for which, of course, we must take full responsibility. This is

what I want to say. The war in Africa has passed the king's territory untouched. There was neither the need nor the occasion for either side to penetrate in that direction, so that the Old King has neither had the salutary lessen which the passage of troops through his country might have afforded, nor such supervision as Germany was able to exercise. The result is—" his voice was grave "—there is serious trouble threatened to your old territory. From what we have been able to discover, Lloyd Thomas was received in the haughtiest manner, and the gifts he took with him to propitiate the Old Man were burnt at the king's great fire!"

Sanders made a little grimace.

"That's bad. Poor Thomas could not have had the opportunity, or he would have cleared when he saw that happen. It is a tradition, you know, that wars in the Northern Territory start with the burning of gifts—it is so with the Northern Ochori and with the Akasava."

He was silent for a while, then drew a long breath.

"I should like to help the Government, Sir John," he said, "but honestly I am out of Africa for good!"

The Under-Secretary scratched his chin and again avoided Sanders's eye.

"We have sent a beautiful little ship to the river," he said; "it is a great improvement on the Zaire and with three times her power."

Sanders shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Of course, we shouldn't object to your choosing your own officers and advancing them one grade in their ranks—even if they have left the Service," he added significantly. "I understand that your brother-in-law, Captain Hamilton—"

"He's out of it, too," said Sanders quickly, though here he might have hesitated, for Hamilton at that moment was nursing a sore heart. Women are proverbially fickle, and there had been a certain Vera Sackwell, who had married a man better favoured than Hamilton in the matter of riches.

"And Mr. Tibbetts?"

Sanders smiled.

"Mr. Tibbetts is a very rich man now," he said, "and nothing would induce him to leave London—of that I am perfectly sure," he said.

The Under-Secretary shrugged his shoulders and rose.

"I'm sorry, too," he said. "Anyway, think it over for a couple of days, Mr. Sanders, and let me know what you think. You are already Commander of St.

Michael and St. George, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," said Sanders, with a ghost of a smile on his tanned face.

"Six months' work," said Sir John absently, "and the Government would not be unmindful of its obligation to the man who accomplished that work, Mr. Sanders. To a man like you, of course," he said, with a deprecating smile, "a knighthood means nothing. But the ladies rather like it. You're married, are you not, Mr. Sanders? Why, of course you are! Good-bye." He held out his hand, and Sanders shook it. "By the way," said Sir John, "that Ferguson case was a bad one. We have inquiries every week from the poor mother."

Sanders nodded. He had met the wife of the murdered missionary, and he wanted to forget her.

"She has a theory that the girl, her daughter, is still alive in the hut of one of the king's chiefs."

"Perfectly horrible!" said Sanders shortly. "Please God, she's dead! Good- bye, sir. I'm sorry—"

The aged youth from the room outside appeared from nowhere and opened the door, and in a few minutes Sanders was walking along Whitehall, a very preoccupied man.

It so happened that that night there was a little dinner-party at Twickenham. Mr. Tibbetts, late of the City, and now devoting his great mind to intensive agriculture, was present, and with him a pretty girl, whom he addressed with extravagant and solemn deference; and Hamilton was there, sometime captain of Houssas, a little peaky of face, for he had taken the loss of the lady who was now Mrs. Isadore Mentleheim very badly; and, above all, Patricia Sanders, in Sanders's eyes the most radiant being of any.

It is perhaps incorrect to say that Bones was present, because he had not arrived when the dinner started, and his late arrival added something to the restraint for which Sanders was mainly responsible. He had returned silent and thoughtful, and his wife, who had half—guessed the object of his call to the Colonial Office, did not press him for an account of what had transpired, knowing that in good time he would tell, She guessed what the object of that summons had been, did he but know.

"Come on, Bones," growled Hamilton. "Do you know you've kept us waiting for half an hour?"

Bones had burst into the room, straightening his tie as he came, and bowed reverently to the girl who sat at his right, respectfully to Sanders and affectionately to Patricia, before he had taken his scat.

"Dear old officer!" said Bones. "Tomatoes!"

"Tomatoes?" said Hamilton, looking at his soup. "It is consomme."

"When I say tomatoes, dear old thing." said Bones loftily, "I imply the trend and tendency of my jolly old studies. As dear old Hamlet said—"

"Shut up and eat your soup," said Hamilton.

"Give me the jolly old farm," said Bones ecstatically, pausing with his spoon half-way to his mouth, heedless of the drip, drip, drip of consomme julienne which fell upon his immaculate shirt—front. "Give me—"

"Give him a table napkin and a bib," said Hamilton savagely. "Really, Bones, don't you recognize there's something in the air? Haven't you any sensibility?"

"None, dear old thing." said Bones firmly, and turning to his partner. "Lovely old child," he asked, "have you noticed any of that jolly old nonsense about poor old Bones?"

"Have you decided to stick to farming, Bones?" It was Sanders who asked the question.

"Yes, sir," said Bones promptly. "I've got the jolliest old scheme for raising cabbages in hot-water bottles—in the off-season, dear old Ham, you understand," he said, turning to his friend. "It's funny that nobody ever thought about hot-water bottles. You fill them with hot water."

"Why not hot air?" asked the offensive Hamilton.

"It's a pretty good job you've decided to stick to farming," said Sanders, "because what I'm going to tell you won't worry you. I've had an offer to go back to the Territories. Not exactly the Territories," he corrected, "but to the Great King's country, beyond the Ochori."

Bones and Hamilton put down their spoons together.

"Dear me," said Bones mildly.

"Of course I turned it down," said Sanders indifferently.

"Of course," said Bones.

"Naturally." said Hamilton.

"The idea was for us to go out for six months—"

"Us?" said Bones. "Did you say 'us', dear old Commissioner?"

"I said 'us' for it amounted to that," smiled Sanders. "They offered to let me choose any officers I liked, and to give them a rank one grade higher than that at which they retired. That would make Hamilton a major, and you, Bones, a full-blown skipper."

Bones coughed.

"As I say, I turned it down," said Sanders. "I don't want to go back—even for

six or seven months."

"Would it mean anything good for you?" asked Patricia quietly.

Sanders smiled.

"Well, I suppose they'd be grateful, and all that sort of thing, but I told them I was finished with Africa, and I told them, Hamilton, that you were also settled down, as you are, now you're running Bones's business."

"Quite," said Hamilton. "Of course this is rather a slack time of the year, and we are taking up nothing new for another six months."

"Besides," Sanders went on, "I don't see the fun of upsetting one's life even for six months. It isn't as if we were going back to the humdrum old Territories again. Apparently the Old King's up in arms, and there would be all sorts of trouble until we got him tamed."

"Would there be any danger?" The girl on Bones's left looked at him apprehensively.

"Danger, dear old fiancee!" said the excited Bones, "Danger doesn't worry us, dear old thing. Danger is the neth of my brostrils—I mean noth of my bristrils. Danger?" He was preparing to elaborate, but a warning glance from Sanders stopped him. "Danger? No, dear old friend and partner," he said soothingly. "When I said 'danger', I was talking figuratively. Danger! Ha, ha!"

Bones had a laugh which made you wince.

"Absolutely none, charming old child, and soon to be, I hope—ahem! A jolly old lion or two, a few naughty old cannibals, a wicked old king who wants to cut your jolly old head off, and there you are! Nothing startling!"

"Anyway," said Sanders, after a pause, "I told the Secretary that I can't possibly go. So that's that."

"Quite," said Hamilton, and Bones coughed again.

"I shall have quite a lot of work to do, clearing up the mess that Bones has left," Hamilton went on, "and Bones has pretty well decided on his farm. But it is rather an interesting offer."

"Very." said Sanders.

And then distraction came, and the tension broke. A maid came into the room and bent over her mistress.

"Mrs. Ferguson?" she said in surprise. "Isn't that the poor woman who lost her husband and child, dear?"

Sanders groaned. He saw the hand of a cunning Under-Secretary in this visitation.

"Yes—er—I'll see her."

"Show her in here, Mary," said Patricia, and before Sanders could protest the girl was gone.

"Why, what is the matter?" Patricia asked anxiously.

"Oh, nothing—nothing, dear."

The men rose as the visitor entered the room. She was a slight, frail woman in black, and two deep sad eyes fastened upon Sanders, and he quailed before them.

"You know Mr. Hamilton—Mr. Tibbetts—er—miss—" he stammered.

She took the chair he offered her.

"Mr. Sanders, are you going?" she asked.

Sanders flushed.

"I want you to believe—" he began, and his wife watched his confusion in astonishment.

"Mrs. Sanders, will you let your husband go?" said the woman in a low voice. "You have always been kind and sweet to me, and I know how great is the sacrifice I ask."

"My wife will let me go if I wish to," said Sanders and so quiet was the room that his voice sounded loud.

Mrs. Ferguson was silent for a while.

"I saw it," she said. "They came when we were at breakfast—though the Old King had eaten salt with my husband—and Mofobolo, the king's hunter, led them. Henry told me to run to the river, where our little steamboat was. I saw them drag him out covered with blood, and I saw Mofobolo running after my —my darling—into the bush. Oh, my God, Mr. Sanders! He has her, that man! She will be nineteen on the first of the month!"

"Mrs. Ferguson, please!"

Sanders's face was drawn, and in his eyes there was a look of agony.

"She's there—there now!" the woman almost screamed. "Every hour you defer your decision is a crime, a crime!"

The women took her out, and the men sat in silence each with his separate thoughts. They heard the thud of the front door closing, and the grind of a cab's wheels on the gravel of the drive, and then the two women returned.

Patricia, as she passed her husband, dropped her hand upon his shoulder, and he caught and kissed it.

"I am leaving by the next Coast steamer," he said simply. "Who goes with me?"

There was no need to ask. Hamilton was smiling savagely, and as for Bones, he was swaying backwards and forwards in his chair, his eyes half— closed, like a man in a trance, and he was uttering strange sounds. Strange to the two women was that raucous chant of his, though Patricia caught the rhythm of it, for Bones was singing the song of the fighting Isisi, the song that they used to roll forth in deep-chested chorus as the little Zaire came round the bend of the river in sight of its landing—place.

"Sandi, who makes the laws, Sandi, who walks by night, Sandi, the slayer of Oosoombi. And the hanger of N'gombo. Who gives health to the sick, And justice to the poor..."

ACROSS the Ghost Mountains came the shrill rataplan of a lokali, and the signal drummer of the Ochori, who sent the message, put his whole heart and pride in it.

"Sandi, the Butcher Bird, the swift giver of laws...Sandi Is!"

They carried the message to the Old King, and he foamed at the mouth.

"Bring me M'sufu, the prophet," he howled, "also they who skin men! By death, there shall be one magician less in the land this night!"

And they brought M'sufu, and they killed him before the morning.

II. — THE COMING OF SANDI

A LONG broad-beamed boat was pushing her way through the black waters which swirled and eddied against her bow. She was painted a dazzling white, and her two high smoke-stacks were placed one behind the other, giving her an appearance of stolidity which was very satisfactory to the young man who had constituted himself her chief officer. The open lower deck was a few feet over the water-line, and seemed at a distance to be decorated with bright scarlet poppies. Near at hand these resolved themselves into the new red tarbooshes of the native soldiers who crowded the iron deck. Above was another deck, from which opened the doors and latticed windows of a dozen cabins. Two or three deep-seated wicker chairs and a light table were disposed on the clear space under the big awning aft, but this space reserved for the hours of leisure was deserted. Three men in white duck trousers and coatless stood on the little navigating bridge where the shining brass telegraphs stood, and behind them, raised on a grated dais, a native, bare to the waist, held a polished wheel.

The ship was named Zaire II, and the big searchlight on the bridge, the quick-firing guns which were swung out over each side, the tiny ensign which

fluttered at her one mast, all these things stood for the expectation of war.

The ship was running between sheer rock walls, and the passage was growing narrower. Already the water at the Zaire's bow was piled up to the height of three feet above the level of the river, and the hull shivered and strained at every thud of the engine.

"We're only making five knots," said the troubled Sanders, "and we're nowhere near the worst part of the rapids."

He pointed ahead to where the flanking walls of the canyon rose to a greater height.

"Hell Gate properly begins at that bend." he said. "They've a full head of steam below, Bones?"

Bones was mopping his steaming face with a handkerchief coloured violently.

"A swollen head of steam, dear old Excellency." he said solemnly, and added unnecessarily: "Trust old Bones."

Behind the steersman was the broad open door of a cabin. It was plain but pleasantly furnished, but for the bizarre Thing which stood by the side of the white-covered bed.

Hamilton, major of Houssas, lolling with his back to the rail, caught a glimpse of this gaudy ornament and smiled, though he was in no smiling humour, for the country had brought afresh to him all the dreams he had dreamt in olden times, and, since those dreams and memories revolved about a capricious girl who had found her happiness in material things, they brought him little comfort.

"At least Guy Fawkes is enjoying the trip, sir." he said.

"Guy Fawkes?" Sanders was startled from his own thoughts. "Oh, you mean my bete?"

With a glance at the river ahead, he walked to the door of his cabin, Hamilton at his elbow, and looked in.

Held by two iron brackets in the wall was the most uncouth idol that Hamilton had ever seen. Its head, carved in wood, was painted green, save for its scarlet lips, and from the sides of its head sprouted a pair of ears which might be—and were, in fact—used as handles to lift the monstrosity. The body, painted fantastically, was pear—shaped, and the three squat vermilion legs on which it was supported added to its grotesqueness.

"Guy Fawkes ought to create a sensation in the Old King's country, if we—" He stopped.

"If we get there," finished Sanders quietly. "Well, the next few hours will decide that. Yes, he's rather beautiful, isn't he?"

"I don't quite understand, sir," said Hamilton. "It isn't like you to—er—"

"'Descend' is the word you want," smiled Sanders of the River.

"Well, yes. I've never known you to attempt the placation of a chief by mumbo-jumbery. That sort of thing is usually done in story-books; it isn't done on the river."

"We're going to a new country and a new people," said Sanders, "and that is my excuse. And Guy Fawkes will not burn," he added meaningly.

"Not—Oh, I see! You mean the Old King is burning his gifts....Guy Fawkes is made of iron, and will not burn. And you think that if it doesn't burn he'll be impressed?"

"They have never had a steel bete in this country before," said Sanders, and turned back to the bridge.

"Bones, come here." Hamilton beckoned him. "What do you think of Guy?"

Bones shook his head.

"He's a pretty old dear," he said, "but I wish I'd had the painting of him. Have you ever thought, dear old major and comrade, what I could have made of him with a few jolly old art shades?"

"Sanders thinks that when the Old King discovers that he won't burn—"

Hamilton was on the point of unburdening himself of his troubles, but changed his mind, and at that moment Sanders beckoned him.

"We're near to the crux of our situation," he said grimly. "Set twenty of your men at each side of the ship, and give them the poles I took aboard at the Isisi city. The current will probably drive us against one or the other wall of this ravine. Your men are to pole off the ship from the side."

Hamilton disappeared down the iron ladder which led to the lower deck.

The precaution was taken only in time. Ten minutes later the Zaire pounded slowly round the bend of the "gate" and the fierce current caught her. Slowly but surely she drifted over until the crest of the high cliff hung above her mast.

Nearer and nearer to the wall she drifted, her stem swinging the quicker. Then, when it seemed certain that she would smash against the smooth yellow rock, a dozen poles were thrust against the wall, a dozen sweating men grunted and strained, and the stern came out again.

The pressure of the river was now beyond anything Sanders had seen. The bows of the Zaire gathered water as a broom gathers snow. It sloped down almost from the rail above the bow like a big fluid hillside.

"More steam," said Sanders laconically, for the Zaire was practically at a standstill.

The smoke-stacks flamed, bellowing huge clouds of sparks, and slowly the boat moved forward. They pushed into what was by comparison slick water, and gathered their strength for the next bend. Here, so powerful was the force of the current, the river literally canted to one side, being, as Sanders judged, fully three feet higher on one bank than the other. 'Bank' was a courtesy term, for the cliffs fell sheer, and where the river ran to the left, the waters had scooped out a huge hollow, so that in places the river's edge disappeared from view. Though the sun was still high in the western sky, the canyon was in semi-darkness, so high were its walls.

"We'll run the searchlight off the storage batteries," said Sanders. "Be economical, Bones. I can't afford an ounce of steam for the dynamo, and as likely as not we'll be in this infernal hole till nightfall."

He was worried, yet felt the thrill and exhilaration of the fight. No boat had ever passed upstream through Hell Gate, though many had come down with the current. He remembered with a wince the half-mad wife of the dead missionary Ferguson, who had fled through this canon in a crazy little launch. Just then he did not want to think of missionaries—or their golden-haired daughters.

"The next bend is the worst," he said to Hamilton. "If we get through, we shall be at Rimi-Rimi tonight. I have an idea that the river is not watched as is the mountain road, and we ought to fetch up at the king's city without his being any the wiser."

The safety-valves of the Zaire's engines were hissing ominously as he put the nose of the boat to the last bend.

Then came Bones from below, Bones in soiled duck and with patches of black grease on his face.

"Cylinder leakin', sir," he said lugubriously, and Sanders could have wept.

ON the great hog-back crests of the Ghost Mountains at certain seasons of the year the spirits of chiefs come to eat salt with the most powerful ju-jus. Here comes M'shimba—M'shamba, who munches great swathes of forests and swallows whole villages for his satisfaction, and M'giba—M'gibi, who transforms himself into any manner of thing his fancy dictates. He is the one who walks behind you on dark nights, and though you turn ever so quickly, he vanishes. His is the face you remember and then do not remember. So that when you meet a man on the highway and stop suddenly, half raising your hand in salutation, and as suddenly you discover that his is the face of a stranger, spit once to the left and once to the right, for this is M'giba—M'gibi, "He Who Is Not."

Men travel many miles to watch the cold salt spread upon the ranges. It comes in a night, a thin powder through which the black and brown of rock show in

piebald patches, and some there are who have seen the Ugly Ones gather in the dawn hour, and some, a daring few, have climbed to the peaks to steal ghost salt, only to find that, by the magic of the ju-ju, the salt has turned in their hands to water of terrifying coldness.

Through these mountains runs one road which winds upwards to the saddle of the highest ridge. Here in the right season the salt of the spirits drifts thigh—deep, and for just so long as the season lasts—never more than a month—no man ventures to cross the great barrier. Yet in such a time came a tall man who feared neither devils nor snows, for there was a greater fear in his heart which urged him onward, and bare—legged, bare, breasted, naked but for the kilt of monkey-tails about his middle, and having no other protection from the chill winds but his oval wicker shield, he trudged through the drifts.

He carried three short fighting—spears, and hanging from his belt was a broad-bladed sword fitting into a scabbard made from an elephant's car. He crossed the mountains, setting his face to the Great King's country, and the spies of the Great King saw him and beat out the news upon their signal drums.

None molested him, for the Great King's drum had rattled incessantly all one night with this instruction, and he who disobeyed the Old One did not wait for death, neither he nor his family.

He reached the first village on the wrong side of the mountain—for him—as the first flush of dawn lay pinkly on the snows. The village was awake and assembled, every man and woman and even the young children.

"I see you!" he boomed before the little chief. "I am a tired and a hungry man. Let me sleep and eat."

The chief said nothing. He gave the stranger the flesh of a young goat and a mess of mealies and fish, and then took him to a hut.

The stranger slept like a log for five hours, then walked to a little river and swam for a while. The sun dried him, and the chief again fed him. But none spoke to him, for all the village knew that he was the king's meat.

The guest asked for no information and gave none. He waved his farewell, and the chief nodded silently and watched him disappear round a bend of the narrow path into the forest. Then he called a palaver of all his people.

"Who saw a stranger?" he intoned.

"None saw him," the whole village chanted.

"Did he come?"

"He did not come."

"Did he go?"

"He did not come; he did not go; none saw him."

So passed the stranger—a nothing.

Up in Rimi-Rimi, the city of the Great King, the evening came down redly, and the seven hills of the city crawled and swarmed with life, for in the shallow about which the squat hills rise the big fire of the king was burning, and his carved stool stood before the hut of his chief wife. Here in the shadow of his palace the Old One had delivered justice for innumerable years. He was older than memory, and some said that he had begun with the world. Yet it was agreed that he was not so old as the Devil Woman of Limbi, who was immortal.

As the sun's edge tipped the mountain, his war drums volleyed their summons, and K'salugu M'popo the king showed his gums. Thus he smiled always when the drums rumbled, for was not the skin of one the skin of Oofoobili, his brother who had risen the Territories in rebellion against him, and was not the other the skin of M'guru, the Akasava chief who had carried off the king's daughter?

The crazy grass huts that covered six of the hills—the seventh was bare and sacred to the processes of the king's justice—gave forth their members to the number of fifty thousand, the aged and the young and those who were dying, these latter being carried on litters, for when the Old King's fire burnt and his war-drums rumbled, the searchers of the king's guard slew all that was living within the huts.

They sat in a great half-moon of faces, divided straightly by five paths that radiated from the king's chair like the spokes of a wheel, so that his ministers and servants might have free access to evil-doers, and witnesses a clear way to the throne, and they sat in a solemn unbroken silence,

An hour, two hours he kept them waiting and then, without warning the drums ceased and sixty thousand hands were raised in salute—even the hands of those in the litters on the fringe of the great assembly being held up by their friends and relatives. The Old Man came from his white hut and walked slowly to his chair. There was a grizzle of grey at his chin, and the faintest powder of white on his bony head. About his shrunken form was wrapped a cloak of native silk of a certain colour.

Helpers threw great logs of gumwood on the fire, and it blazed up with a roar.

"Let my wives be numbered," said the Old Man with a cracked voice, and his minister Lubolama, Chief of the Fongini, seni-seni, and commander-in-chief of his armies, walked behind the king's chair and counted the king's wives, for they were not exempt.

"Lord, all your women are here."

The Old King nodded. He sat with his foot on a stool, his elbow on his knee, and his chin resting on the palm of his hand, looking at the fire moodily, and thus he sat for a long time, and none dare break the silence.

"Let her come," he said at last, and Lubolama made a signal.

Through the last of the lanes came four of the king's guard, and in the midst of them a prisoner Presently she knelt before the king's majesty a slip of a woman, obviously a foreigner, for her nose was straight, and her lips were thin, and her skin of a light chestnut colour.

The king stared down at her through the slits of his eyes. "O Woman," he said, with the halting deliberation of an old man, "this night you die."

"Lord, I do not deserve death, for I have done no harm to your people," said the girl. "Also I am not of your race."

The king chuckled and half—turned in his chair.

"He was not of my race, and yet he died." And she lifted her eyes and saw by the king's hut a straight pole where something hung—something that was dried and shrunken by the month's sun, something to which thin rags still hung. She shivered and cast down her eyes.

"He was not of my people, yet he came. By the road over the mountains he came, a little chief showing him the way."

He stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Now, it is not good that I, the Great King, shall be betrayed by little foreign chiefs who show the white man secret paths to my country, and I have waited very long, woman, before I sent my young men into your land to take you and bring you to me. And they waited long also, for they are young and cunning, and presently, when your little chief had gone to the forest, hunting, they came upon you at night and brought you from the land."

The girl licked her dry lips and said nothing, for her abduction was ancient history to her.

"Therefore I set these two great sticks that you and your man might follow together the way the white lord went."

Again she raised her eyes and saw for the first time in the gloom two great poles which flanked the pitiable Something which once had been a loving, laughing, thinking man. She drew a long breath.

"My lord, you have not got him," she said with spirit, "for he is too great for you and too cunning. Your young men would not cross the mountains and meet his army on the plain-by the-forest."

The Old King chuckled again and waved his hand. "He comes!" he said. "He comes!"

The girl twisted her head and stared. Down one of the lanes a tall man was striding toward her unattended, his wicker shield on his arm, the steel tips of his fighting—spears glittering in the light of the fire.

"Lord!" she wailed, and ran to meet him as he reached the clear space before the king, falling at his feet and clasping his knees.

Instantly four giant guards were about him, but, tall as they were, he topped them by inches. He made no resistance, but offered his shield and his spears. Unarmed he came before the king's face, holding the girl by the hand.

"Lord," he said boldly, "what shame is this you put upon me and my master? For behind me are the spears of a million men and guns that say 'ha ha', and men drop dead."

The king's eyes were hardly visible now, so tight were his lids held together. He screwed his neck to look up at the big man's face.

"There is no king in this land but K'salugu M'popo," he said. "Where is M'siti?" he asked, and the guards and ministers who stood about him chanted:

"His hut is broken."

"Where is Goobini, the mighty one?"

"His hut is broken."

"Where is B'lili and all his forest of spears?"

"His hut is broken."

He was wide—eyed now, and there glared within their depths a cold fire.

"This night, little chief, you die," he said, "for you sent a white spy into my land that you might poison me and my people. And, because of you, Sandi is come to the land with his soldiers. And, chief, you shall not see him or tell of the white man Tomini. Therefore by my great cleverness have I brought you here, where Sandi cannot come because of the swift waters. O cunning one, where is your cunning now, for did not I lead you here without a spear behind you when I took your woman?"

The big man nodded his head.

"Lord, that is true." he said simply. "This woman is life to me, and I would rather die at her side this night than live with my people. This also Sandi will know, f or I left him a book saying I was gone into your country. But, lord, because I come in peace and love I brought you these."

He took from his waistband a heavy bag, and, kneeling down, spilt the contents at the king's feet. They were coins of gold and silver, and they made a little heap.

The king looked at the presents with avaricious eyes, for he knew that these

strange round pieces brought many desirable things from an outside world, and that from the Portugisi he could buy square bottles full of hot delight. Only for an instant did he waver, then he made a gesture, and Lubolama, stooping, scooped up the coins and, walking to the edge of the fire, threw them in, and the big man stiffened. The king had burnt his gifts before his eyes, and that meant death.

He turned to the woman at his side and caught her up in his arms, speaking to her in a language which the king did not understand. Then almost instantly they were torn apart and thrown to the ground. The big man made no resistance. The gangways now were blocked by armed men, and behind the king's hut the circle was completed by rank after rank of guards.

Those whose office it was to sacrifice bound wrist and ankle, and, lifting them up, laid them with their feet at the king's feet. Above them stood the sunburnt naked figure of the executioner, his broad knife in his hand.

"Speak well of me to the spirits, to the ghosts, and to the great ones of the mountains," the king repeated the formula monotonously, "also to M'shimba—M'shamba, and speak kindly of me to all ju-jus—strike!"

The executioner measured, touched the throat of the big man tentatively with his knife, as a golfer all but touches the ball he is about to strike, and then raised the keen blade about his head.

And there it remained, for a soul-piercing shriek, a terrible sound which ended in a howl, momentarily paralysed all within its hearing. The king half- started from his carved stool, his mouth agape, and, regardless of the doom which awaits all who take their eyes from the king's face, fifty thousand heads turned in the direction of the sound.

"O Lubolama, what sound was that?" asked the king in a high voice.

"Lord, I do not know," said the trembling man.

It was the captive on the ground, his eyes blazing, who might have supplied the solution, but an interruption came from another quarter.

Clear in the light of the fire a group of men were walking down one of the lanes toward the king's chair, and the armed guard melted out of their way. Two were native soldiers, carrying something which they deposited within a few paces of the dumbfounded king's feet, the other two were indubitably white men, and it was the smaller who spoke.

"O king," he said, "know me."

"Who are you, white man?" The king found his voice with difficulty, for he knew.

"I am he they call Sandi of the River, and I have been sent by my king to be

the overlord of these lands, and I have brought you a rich gift which will bring happiness to you, and shall protect me from evil."

The king's eyes strayed slowly from Sanders's lean face to the thing at his feet. It was a hideous figure straddled on three scarlet legs, and surmounted by a head of peculiar hideousness. The pear—shaped body was painted with flaming designs, and the big wooden head bore the tribe marks of the Tofolaka people, and had ears which the Houssas had used for handles as they straightened the monstrous, pot-bellied thing under the king's gaze. Nor was this all the decoration, for stuck in the hideous wooden head were four small flags which were unfamiliar to the king.

"O Sandi," he said—he was still shaking as much from the effect of the Zaire's syren as from this tremendous visitation—"I—"

Again that shrill shriek arose, sobbing and wailing and echoing against the high bluffs of the plateau on which Rimi-Rimi was situated, and the king shrank back in his stool.

"I hope to Heaven Bones isn't overdoing it," said Hamilton in Sanders's ear, and Sanders shook his head slightly.

"What was that?" whispered K'salugu M'popo, the Old One.

"That was my spirit, king." said Sanders. "Now I have come to talk to you as king to king, and I have brought you a wonderful present, and there are many things I would say to you."

He had seen the captives as he came in, but had not looked down at them.

"First, O great one," he said, "there shall be no sacrifices in this land." And he stooped down swiftly and with his knife cut the grass ropes which bound the two captives.

He did this so quickly and so skilfully that the old man was startled to silence.

"Lord!" whispered the big captive, and Sanders nearly dropped his knife.

"Bosambo, by heavens!" he gasped. "Go quickly, Bosambo," he whispered; "there is death in this city."

By now the king had recovered himself.

"Sandi," he said harshly, "you have come to my city, but who knows when you shall go?"

"I alone know, king," said Sanders softly, "for I go now, and, if you move, my little gun which says 'ha ha' shall spit at your stomach, and you will have many days of agony, and none shall give you ease until you die."

The king did not move. He dropped his eyes only to the level of the black pistol in Sanders's hand. Had the white man whose dried skin now rattled

against the crucifix come so into the king's presence, he might have lived—for a while—but they had pulled him down at the entrance to the city.

"O Sandi," said the king mildly, "I will do you no harm, and you shall have a hut in my city, for I see you are a great one and very cunning. Who but a man of magic could walk through the swift waters? As to this man and woman—"

"They come with me," said Sanders equably.

The king hesitated. "Let it be," he said.

Sanders gave an order and started to back away, and Bosambo, gathering up his wicker shield and spears, which lay where they had been thrown, covered the rear.

"O king," said Sanders, in his deep Bomongo tongue, "see I walk like a crab, and all the time my little gun is looking into your heart, and if you move or speak you will die."

The king said nothing, and the little party moved backwards through the clear alleyway, and nobody stopped them. They had reached the lines of litters before Sanders turned.

"There is no possible chance of getting to the boat," he said. "The old ram will remain friendly so long as he's covered by my gun. As soon as he gets into the hut, we shall have the whole guard after us."

"Can't we make the landing and the boat?"

Sanders shook his head. "That would be impossible now," he said. "Look!"

A line of figures was leaping into the bush. He saw them dimly by the flickering light of the king's fire.

"They are going to head us off, It is the hill of execution, as I expected," he said. "We can hold that for an hour."

"And after?" asked Hamilton dryly.

"All things are with God," said Sanders piously, as he raced through one of the flimsy suburbs to the bare hill where no house stood and where only the bones of innumerable martyrs lay.

"They'll hardly come to the hill tonight," he said breathlessly, as they gained the top; "There are too many ghosts about even for the king's guard."

From where they stood they looked down into the basin, and could see the commotion their escape had produced. Through his night-glasses Sanders saw the old man still sitting in his chair of state, and chuckled.

"I'm afraid Guy Fawkes isn't going to do us much good," said Hamilton. "But the old man seems to be examining our god with three legs."

"Wait," said Sanders.

"Suppose the Old King isn't impressed by the unburnable Guy?" asked Hamilton.

Sanders did not reply. From the basin below rose a hubbub of sound. The people were scattering, and long orderly lines of soldiers were filing before the king.

"I thought it was worth trying," he said, "and it struck me at the time as rather amusing." And he chuckled.

"What is it supposed to be, sir?"

"The ju-ju of the League of Nations," said Sanders, without a smile.

The Old King had risen. They saw that from the hill.

"O people," he was saying, and the sound of his voice came faintly and unintelligibly, "O soldiers, you have seen this night a shame upon my house. Now you shall go and seek out these devils, and tomorrow we will have a great palaver."

He pointed to the three-legged idol, and two of his men lifted it and threw it upon the fire.

Bosambo needed no night-glasses. He stood at Sanders's elbow.

"Lord," he said in a whisper, "they have burnt your present, and that is death."

"So I think," said Sanders, and as he spoke there leapt from the fire a white tongue of blinding light, and there came to their ears a roar louder than any man had heard, and a shock that almost threw them from their feet.

"Good heavens!" gasped Hamilton. "What was that?"

"That was the body of Guy Fawkes—an aeroplane bomb!" said Sanders softly. "Somehow I didn't think it would burn very well."

He stood looking down at the havoc and the fury of flame which sent thousands wailing to the edge of the river.

"Do you know, Hamilton,"—he turned to the other with great seriousness, for the niceties of official matters worried Sanders—"I'm rather troubled about those flags I stuck on Guy Fawkes's head. Is America in the League of Nations?"

III. — THE RESOURCES OF CIVILIZATION

FROM the city of the Great King to the city of Bubujala is a day and a night's journey, but Balaba, sometime the Old King's servant, made the journey in a night, and fell, smothered with dust and half dead with thirst, at the feet of

Fomba, paramount chief of all the Bubujala people. Fomba was sitting in his palaver house amidst his counsellors and headmen when the messenger staggered from the edge of the forest and wearily climbed the hill on which the palaver house was situated.

"O Balaba," said Fomba shakily, "what lies do they tell of me to the Great King?"

He had reason for apprehension, it seemed, and when the breathless messenger did not reply—for in truth he could do nothing but pant—he went on:

"All my people here know that I have lived very humbly in the king's sight. I have sent him my gum and my rubber to the last load, and if any man says that I have spoken against him, I will sew a snake in his mouth."

By this time Balaba had recovered his voice.

"Lord," he said hollowly, "the king is dead!"

"Waa!" gasped Fomba, and sat down heavily.

"The night before the night there came two white men and some soldiers," said Balaba rapidly, "and another white man sat in his great canoe, which makes a noise like a devil, and the two came bearing a ju-ju of great strength, and this they placed before the Old King."

"Did the Old King chop them?" asked Fomba, interested.

"No, lord, he did not chop them, because they had in their hands the little guns that say 'ha ha'."

Fomba of the Bubujala looked at his counsellors, scrutinizing each face.

"The Great King is dead," he said softly. O ko! And these white men killed him, and you chopped them quickly?"

"No, lord, we did not chop them, for the white men had gone away, taking with them two people—the chief of the Ochori and his woman—before the killing order came, for the Old King was afraid of the little guns which the white men carded. But when they had gone off, he sent his fine regiments to cut them away from the river; also he sent his women away, that being his custom when he made a war palaver."

Fomba nodded impatiently as the man stopped to take breath.

"Lord." Balaba went on impressively, "these men brought a powerful ju-ju with a terrible face, and this they gave to the king, saying that it would be good for him, and when they had gone, running swiftly, it was the order of the king that the gift should be burnt."

His voice faltered.

"Lord," he said in a hushed voice, "who knows what great ju-ju these white

men brought? For no sooner had the king put this shame upon them, casting it into the fire, when lightning struck with a terrible noise, and many of the king's guard were thrown down and killed, and all the king's big huts were swept away by a mighty wind, and the houses also on the hills, so that there is nothing in Rimi-Rimi but leaning walls without roofs."

He did not explain that the powerful ju-ju had been an aeroplane bomb which Mr. Administrator Sanders had brought all the way from London, that the terrifying face had been created and painted and its steel legs riveted by an enthusiastic officer at the War Office, because this he did not know. The chief stood in dismayed silence.

"O ko!" he said. "This is bad news, Balaba, for if the white men have come, and they have a ju-ju so powerful—"

"Lord," said the man eagerly, "where he stood, and where the fire was, there is now nothing but a great hole in the ground in which twenty men could lie."

The chief shook his head and thought long, for he was a cunning man, though no great warrior.

"What of Masaga, the king's son—did he die also?"

"Lord, no," said the man. And then, standing first on one bare foot and then upon the other, to evidence his embarrassment, he blurted forth: "Lord, who is king now of all these people? I think it is you, for the king's son is a fool."

Again a silence long and, for the messenger, ominous.

"Go, Balaba, to my hut," Fomba said. "But tell me first—what of the white men, and where are they now?"

Balaba was dusting his hands in proof that his mission was done, a custom of the folk of Bubujala.

"The soldiers sit in two deep ditches near the landing-place, and before them they have made a fence of wire which is filled with sharp and evil pins," he said; "also they have many guns of great size, and the people, who are afraid of them, do not go near them."

Fomba nodded his head.

"Go to my hut, Balaba," he said kindly enough, and the man trotted off.

The chief waited until he was out of bearing, and then turned to his own hunter.

"Go follow Balaba and chop him down," he said. "Let no man hear him speak, for it is good that the city should not know the truth, if he spoke the truth. And if he spoke a lie, then I go to our lord and say that I killed him because of his wickedness."

The hunter slipped silently in the trail of the unconscious messenger, and in full view of the city and of the counsellors upon the hill he struck Balaba down and Balaba went to his death, not knowing how.

All these things Sanders heard later. For the moment he was less engrossed in the tragedy which was occurring in the depths of the forest than in the prospect of tragedy nearer at hand. He sat under the white awning of the Zaire II and sipped a cup of cold coffee, his eyes never leaving the landing- place, where forty Houssas overawed the fifty or sixty thousand people of Rimi-Rimi.

The Great King's own territory, and that of which for hundreds of years his family had been titular kings, was bounded on two of its sides by the river, which here took a wide bend. Rimi-Rimi and the country about was set upon a plateau, the bluffs of which fell steeply to the water and presented no accessible or scalable point, save at the landing—spot opposite which the Zaire was anchored. Here the uncompromising level line of the cliffs sloped into an obtuse V.

Before him squatted one N'kama, and this philosophical prisoner, though there were handcuffs about his wrists, was a small chief whom Sanders had noted, on the night of his arrival, as being of the king's suite.

Sanders brought his eyes back from the two posts which were held by Hamilton and Bones, and stared coldly down at the hunched figure at his feet.

"N'kama," he said, and he spoke in the language of the Upper Bomongo, "for twelve hours you have been on board my fine ship, and though all men say you are a great talker, yet you have told me nothing."

"Lord," said N'kama, shifting a little uneasily under the gaze, "I do not think that you will go alive from this country; but if I speak to you of the great secrets of my people, I shall die most surely, and my skin will hang where the white man's skin was hanging when my lord took it down and put it in a hole in the ground, saying certain Mysteries from a book."

"O ko," said Sanders softly. "Then it seems, N'kama, that you are worse off than I, for I may yet escape; but it is certain that you are a dead man unless you speak to me, and you are as surely a dead man if you do! Now, I think they will kill you more painlessly upon the land than I shall, for I shall hang you up by the heels on two sharp hooks and I will light a little fire under your head."

The involuntary grimace on the prisoner's face told that the threat had been duly appreciated.

N'kama was silent, and when he did speak, it was to recall some of the legendry which was associated with Sanders's name.

"I have heard of you, lord, from Akasava prisoners we have taken, and they

say you are most cruel, and that you have no pity in your stomach. Often I have heard the drums of the Lesser People speaking of Your wickedness. The prisoners said you were dead, but now it seems you are alive, and my heart is full of sorrow."

Sanders did not smile. There were times when he doubted if he would ever smile again, and there was reason for his doubt, could he but foretell the future.

"You shall speak," he said.

"Lord, I cannot speak," said the man, "and I wish to go back to my house, for I have a wife who is very sick. Also I would not be here," he added naively, "but that one of your soldiers hit me on the head and then struck me in the back with his spear."

Sanders knew the value of those intervals of silence which mean so much in native palavers, and resumed his scrutiny of the beach. Two nights before, in the confusion occasioned by the explosion, he and his companions had not only made their way through a panic-stricken people, but in the night he had established a bridge-head which served the double purpose of covering the Old King's city and maintaining the inviolability of his steamer, for the canoes of Rimi-Rimi were beached to the left and right of the gap.

"Sandi," said N'kama, having apparently digested the situation, "what can I tell you that you, so wise and wonderful, and Bosambo, the chief of the Little People, who is more cunning than ghosts, do not know?"

"First you shall tell me about the white man who came here five and five moons ago."

"Lord," said the other frankly, "there is nothing to tell, for he came and was chopped by the Old King's hand, and we had a great feast, and hung his skin upon the trees, as is the custom, for we people are very proud, and do not like the white man who is neither white nor black, and for this reason the Devil Woman of Limbi, who is very holy and a woman of great mystery, even she spoke death for white people in the days of Fergisi."

"Fergisi?" asked Sanders, with a frown.

"He was white also," nodded N'kama, "and a God-man; also his woman, she also was white, and the small woman was white, having hair which was very ugly, being the colour of corn."

Sanders sat up. In the excitement of the past days he had forgotten the murdered missionary and the horror of his daughter's fate.

"How did they die?" he asked softly.

"Lord, I do not know," said the man, "for I was hunting. But the Devil Woman

of Limbi came to the king and spoke for his life, and it was a terrible happening, for the old Devil Woman has never left the mountains for twenty years; but because she hates white people, the king's guard came upon the house of the God-man and slew his small woman. But his own woman ran away in a little puc-a-puc, and it is said that she died in the swift waters."

"And what of Fergisi?" asked Sanders.

"Him they took to Limbi, where the old and holy woman lived, and she put her sword under his chin and cut his throat."

He said this so calmly and in so matter-of-fact a tone, as though he had been discussing some amusing social event, and Sanders, despite his experience, shivered.

"Who is this woman of Limbi?" he asked.

The man looked right and left and lowered his voice.

"Lord, she is older than the gods and the ju-jus, and wiser than the great ones of the mountains. They say she has lived a thousand years, and buried her own mother under Limbi, piling up the rocks upon her until they reached the sky. Lord, she is terrible," he said earnestly, "and all men fear her."

He spat left and right in propitiation.

"Therefore I say, lord, that you will never leave this country, because she sends her tchu to guard our people."

"Tchu!" repeated Sanders, with a puzzled expression, for this was a new word to him.

"Lord, tchu is a ghost who walks so that none see him."

"Where may I see this terrible woman? asked Sanders.

"She will come," was the surprising reply.

"She will come?" repeated Sanders. "O man, I do not understand you."

"Lord, she must come when we make the new king, for she alone knows the mysteries. It is said that she made the Old King, whom your lordship made to vanish, and all men know that he was older than the hills!'

"So she will come, will she?" said Sanders gently, and beckoned the sentry. "Take this man below, Ahmed," he said. "Let none speak to him on your life."

"On my head and my soul," said the Houssa conventionally, and led the passive captive away.

Later in the morning Sanders withdrew his posts from the shore. His force was too small to split, and Fomba might come in considerable strength. When they sat at tiffin on the after-deck of the Zaire, Sanders related his talk with the man.

"Who is this woman, anyway, and where is Limbi?" asked Hamilton.

"I rather suspect it is the native's word for Mount Limpisi, and if that is the case, it must he the mountain we can see, or we saw as we were coming up the river."

Bones, who had come aboard hungry, had in consequence kept silence; but now he rolled his table napkin briskly and smirked, and Hamilton, seeing the smirk, groaned.

"Bones has got a suggestion, sir," he said in despair.

"Dear old Ham is unusually right," said Bones, smacking his lips. "It's one of the grandest little ideas, sir, that's ever penetrated my jolly old noddle. In re Devil Lady, why not chop off her naughty old head?"

Sanders looked up.

"You can't kill a woman in cold blood," he said. "Besides, she might take it into her head to help us along. You never know. One hates to miss any opportunity," he said half to himself. "But I can't reconcile my conscience to what might be a senseless assassination. If she gives trouble, and if she does instigate the people against us, that is another matter."

His smile was unpleasant, and Patricia Sanders would never have recognized the quiet, soft-spoken man who picked caterpillars off his roses with tweezers in this hard-featured arbiter of Fate.

"What we have to expect," he said, "is for the various territories that make up this kingdom to start warring with one another, because I rather think there are about a dozen rival claimants to the throne. There's Lubolama, chief of the Fongini; there is Fomba, chief of the Bubujala; there is the chief of Kasala and friend Kabalaka, who, I suspect, is not without his hopes of succeeding; he was a cousin of the king."

"Who wasn't?" said Bones. "Who wasn't, dear old sir and Excellency? And perhaps this naughty old lady, the girl of the Limbi lost—if you will pardon the jest—perhaps she's his aunt. You never know. Why, I remember a dear old friend of mine—"

"Let us confine ourselves to local barbarians, Bones, if you don't mind," said Hamilton wearily.

"Rude, Ham, rude!" murmured Bones, shaking his head. "Rude, old officer, very rude indeed, deuced rude!"

"Well, there we are," said Sanders, leaning back in his chair with a wry face. "Six months we have to settle this territory, and I rather fancy that we are going to be very fully occupied."

It was two days later that the first of the claimants came upon the scene, and

never was there a claimant less aggressive, more respectful, more frank and considerate in his attitude to all the world than Fomba, chief of the Bubujala. They saw him came in the dawn, twenty-four canoes that came down the river six abreast and keeping perfect line, and the whole crew and company of the Zaire stood to arms, anticipating an attack. But the canoes swept round the bend and made for the shore, and at ten o'clock that morning Fomba presented himself on the ship.

He was a big man, broad of shoulder and inclined to rotundity. His cheeks were round and his eyes and expression intelligent. Unerringly he came straight to Sanders and saluted in the fashion of the territory.

"Lord, I see you," he said.

"I see you, Fomba," said Sanders, who had had tidings of the visitor.

"Lord, I come with peace in my heart," said Fomba, "and I bring you salt."

He turned to a waiting servant who carried a bowl, and scooped up a great heap in his two palms. He offered it to Sanders, who wetted his finger-tips, touched the salt and tasted it, an action which the guest imitated.

"Lord, I have come along journey to see you," said Fomba, "though my heart is heavy because of my cousin and my nearest relation. He has been smitten by your great ju-ju."

Sanders's eyes never left the man's face.

"It is good that you should come, Fomba," he said. "I know that your stomach is sorrowful because the Old King is in hell, but you tell me news when you say you are his nearest relation, for is there not a son?"

"Lord, that son is mad and silly, as every man knows," said Fomba eagerly.

"And is there not a brother, Lubolama, and yet another cousin? I do not dwell in this country, and yet my spies bring me news, and I have heard these things."

"Who knows his father, and are not uncles as many as goats?" quoth Fomba easily. "And who shall say how nearer one person is than another? Yet it seems to me, lord, that I who am here am nearer than they who are far."

"You cannot measure right with a string," said Sanders, giving proverb for proverb. "Now, I tell you this, Fomba, that I am not strong for you, For if I set you up in the king's place, all manner of men will hate you, such as Kabalaka and Lubolama and the many sons of the Old King. Also there is a certain son of the king's second wife who sits with the evil men of the Bad Village."

Fomba looked from Sanders to the shore, and back to Sanders again.

"Lord, why do you come to these lands?" he asked bluntly.

"To bring the law," said Sanders.

Now, in the Bomongo language there is only one word for "law" and "power", and for unbiased "justice" there is no other word than "vengeance". So for "law" Sanders used the word 'lobala', which means "right" as distinct from "wrong".

Fomba was frankly puzzled. "Lord, what is right?" he said. "What you do, or what I do? When two nations are warring, is he not right who has the most spears and the bravest young men?"

Sanders hid a smile. It was queer to bear the paraphrase of Napoleon's dictum that Providence was on the side of the big battalions from the lips of an untutored savage.

"What is right, lord?" repeated Fomba.

Sanders had need to go back to old Rome and quote as best he could the greatest of jurists.

"This is right, Fomba," he said "—to keep faith, to harm none, and to give every man his due."

This Fomba pondered.

"Lord, how can a man keep faith and harm none?" he asked. "For if I keep faith with the king's sons, I harm myself, and if I give Masaga his due, then I rob myself of mine."

Sanders watched the canoe in which Fomba left for the shore with a stony face.

"That man is going to give us trouble, Hamilton," he said, turning to his lieutenant.

"Why not set him up?" asked Hamilton quietly.

Sanders was rubbing his chin—a sure sign of worry.

"The Old King named his son before the great council of the land," he said. "The traditions here are much stronger than in those old territories of ours, Hamilton, or I'd retire his majesty like a shot. But to do that now means to bring the whole of the council against me; for whatever might be the individual ambitions of the chiefs, and although they all separately may desire the throne, yet it is certain that if I put one of them up, I should have the others in arms against me, and probably a rising here in Rimi-Rimi itself. We are facing problems now which we've never met," he said seriously. "The sooner we get Masaga crowned or anointed, the better for all concerned."

"When does the Devil Lady make a dramatic appearance?" asked Hamilton.

"Not before a week," said Sanders. "She, apparently, is the custodian of the

insignia, whatever it may be."

"A week?" said Hamilton. "Anything may happen in a week."

What did happen seemed the most innocent of all possible occurrences. Fomba gave a great feast in honour of his kinsman and sovereign. It was to be a feast of a thousand pots.

"That's a new idea, though the N'gombi people have some similar method," said Hamilton, bringing the news. "Every family brings its own fire and its own cooking-pot, and the philanthropic Fomba provides its contents. And Fomba desires that we should join the royal circle."

"I think not," said Sanders decidedly. "I draw the line at native meals."

"I conveyed that fact to his nibs," said Hamilton. "Really, he is the most adaptable man. He said we may all dine in the white style, and be of the royal circle, though not in it."

"A rum bird," said Sanders thoughtfully. "I'll think it over."

It was decided that Hamilton should go alone to the feast, but at the eleventh hour Sanders changed his plan.

"Bones," he said, "I'm going off with Hamilton. Keep a searchlight on the beach, and let the men stand to arms."

Bones wagged his head disapprovingly, for he had given the feast much more thought than Sanders could have imagined. He had even planned a rescue, and had spent an hour in his store cabin collecting certain articles for use in case of emergency. He could do this without exciting the derision of Hamilton, because he was in charge of the ship's stores.

"You will pardon, dear old Excellency and sir, any suggestion of interference, but diplomacy being my long suit, as dear old Ham jolly well knows—"

"As I jolly well don't know," interrupted Hamilton. "But continue your modest narrative."

"My point is this, clear old thing," said Bones. "The whole of this feast business may be a trap. The naughty old fat one may he working out a stunt —"

"I don't think so, Bones," said Sanders. "I've thought that, too. I can't exactly see what Fomba could do, for the people would be with the king, and for the moment, at any rate, the little fellow's with me."

Bones shrugged his shoulders.

"Dear old Excellency, I have my idea. I've worked it out, and maybe you won't despise poor old Bones when his mind gets working," he said, resigned. "The only point that now interests me is: Do I get my jolly old bath tonight? My

dear old Excellency, if you could see my back—"

"I don't want to see your back," said Sanders hastily. "But there's no reason why you shouldn't have your bath whilst I'm ashore. Abiboo is quite reliable, and will probably keep as good a watch as you."

"And better," said Hamilton, sotto voce.

Bones bowed.

The feast seemed to be the most innocuous function. The rising ground beyond the village was covered with the alfresco diners, and the light of their fires threw a red glow on the low—lying clouds which were rolling down from the mountains. A rude table had been made for the two white men and put against the king's hut, and their own orderlies had spread a make-belief meal. The royal circle, consisting of the king, Fomba, Kabalaka, and two small chiefs, was so close to Sanders's feet that he could have kicked the nearest diner.

Sanders was alert and watchful, and his eyes roamed from side to side.

"This love and harmony is just a little bit too good to be true," he said. "There's a queer little feeling in my spine which is due either to old age or to nerves."

"It isn't old age," said Hamilton in a low voice. "I have that feeling, too. Did you give Bones any warning?"

Sanders nodded.

"I told him, if he heard a shot, to get half the men ashore and to storm the city, regardless of consequences."

"I'm afraid that would be very little use to us." said Hamilton dryly.

"O people!"

It was Fomba who had leapt erect.

"See Masaga, the king!"

The youth who squatted at his side strained his head up to look over the fire, and leered round with his silly smile.

"Behold the son of the Great One!" roared Fomba.

Back came the chorus in a thunderous sound.

"All the people of the world are dogs to the king."

Masaga chuckled and drank from the gourd by his side.

"Let all people know that I love Masaga," cried Fomba, "and that I will stand before him in the face of the white witches who are his enemies!"

He swung round and glared at Sanders.

"Fomba," said Sanders, and his voice was hard, and cut through the babble of sound like a knife, "I think there will be weeping in your hut this night."

"Look, look!" whispered Hamilton hoarsely. "Look at Masaga!"

The young king was getting to his feet like a drunken man. His face was convulsed with pain, and his eyes were staring wildly. He stood for a moment unsteadily, and then, with a shriek, doubled up and fell to the ground. That was the moment which Fomba chose. With a leap he had sprung away from the fire and had doubled between the fires of the feasters, and was lost, if not to sight, at least to range.

Presently they heard his voice. "The king is dead!" they heard him shriek. "The white men slew him with their magic!"

"Into the hut!" said Sanders, and shot down the first warrior who sprang at him. A second fell dead across the threshold.

"This," said Sanders, as he waved the smoke out of the hut, "this is the promised stunt."

Captain Tibbetts was in his bath, and was cheerfully dabbing the little red marks on his body with an ammonia-filled sponge. His face was contorted to the grimace appropriate to the use of strong ammonia.

"Blink, blank!" said Bones, choking at the fumes of the remedy. "Dash these naughty old flies—" And then he heard a shot.

Before he could rise, the door of the bathroom opened cautiously and a man stood in the doorway. He was a stranger, and Bones did not have to consider how he came to the ship, for his skin glistened with water and his loin-cloth was dripping. Nor was his business a mystery, for he held in his hand a short broad knife.

"O white man," he said, "this is the end!"

So far he got, when a large sponge, well soaked in liquid ammonia, struck him in the face. He took one breath and fell into something which was remarkably like a fit. Bones stopped only long enough to pick up the knife, and raced along the narrow alley-way to his cabin. A few seconds later he appeared on the deck, clad only in his pyjama trousers, and he carried under one arm a long black cylinder, and in his hand he gripped what appeared to be three haversacks.

"O Abiboo," he called, "there is a man in my bathroom. Take your long bayonet to him. Hold the ship with half the men, and send the rest ashore after me."

He leapt into the launch, which Sanders had sent back from the shore, and set its engines going. The warriors whom Fomba had put on the beach to resist

any landing from the ship were prepared for all manner of enemies, but they had not counted on ghosts—not a half—naked white ghost, with a black face and two enormous staring eyes that glittered in the light of the fires. They gave way before the racing figure, and Bones flew between the fires, his bare feet burnt with the scattered embers, and drove straight into the crowd that stood before the hut of the chief.

"Come out, white man!" cried Fomba exultantly. "Come out and show us what is right and what is law. I, Fomba of Bubujala, call you!"

And then a body was launched against him. He had a glimpse of a white back as it vanished into the hut.

"The resources of civilization, dear old thing," said Bones hollowly through his mask. "There is one on you, dear old Ham. Trust old Bones in an emergency."

"What have you got? Good heavens!" said Sanders in a hushed voice. "I never thought I should want to use that!"

There was a hissing sound from the cylinder, and he put on his mask. Those outside the door saw a thick yellow cloud of smoke rolling out.

"They have fired the hut," said Fomba. And then one of the men dropped as if he had been shot, then another, and Fomba turned and fled,

The Houssas caught him on the beach as he was making for his canoe.

The next morning Sanders called a palaver of the city, and the one undamaged war-drum of the Old King rolled out its summons. And there, before all the people, Fomba, chief of the Bubujala, came face to face with a slim figure in white who sat upon a camp-stool.

"Fomba," he said, "you ask me what is law, and I tell you that it is my will that no man should harm another. You ask me what right is, and I tell you that it is right that you should die and wrong that you should live; for by your living you brought death to your kinsman, whom you poisoned, and death to those who followed you, and by your dying no man shall take hurt from you."

"Lord, these things are too lofty for me," said Fomba.

"You will see the matter more clearly from the top of that high tree," said Sanders unpleasantly.

And they hanged him from the highest branch of the highest tree on the highest hill in the city of Rimi-Rimi.

IV. — THE HOUSE OF THE CHOSEN

THERE was a man in the forests of Bubujal who called himself M'seru, and he was once a petty chief, being overlord of a community which numbered twenty men, thirty—five goats and as many women. One night, cala cala—which means "long ago", and stands equally for the passage of years or weeks—a woman, his own sister, had come to him from the Great King's city, bearing weals of a flogging and marked on the forehead with three red bars which had a terrible significance.

For so are marked they who are doomed to go up to the cave of the Devil Woman of Limbi, there to be slain and eaten. How the sister of M'seru came to escape from the city and her fate, cannot be told. She had a lover, who afterwards went with bound hands and the sacrificial sword at his waist into the dark opening of the Devil Woman's cave, whence none had ever returned. Perhaps it was he who had rescued her from her husband's vengeance, for she was the second wife of the Old King, who was old even in those far-off days.

M'seru, in the fear of death, hid her, and in time a child was born, upon whose tender arm she pricked and slashed two bracelets, because he was the true son of the Old King, and all such sons were so marked. Then K'salugu M'popo got news of her, and sent his regiments to eat up the village and destroy the woman, her child, and all the woman's relatives.

M'seru heard of the coming of this host, and fled to the forest, taking the child, the woman, and his favourite wife, and for more years than he could count he sat down with the people of the Bad Village at the foot of the high range which separates the Bubujala from the Akasava country. Here he was safe from the king, though he might have been in some jeopardy from the Bad People, who are outlaws and of all tribes, owing their immunity from destruction to the high caves in their rear, which shelter them in emergency, and to the fifty-mile strip of marshland in front of them, across which there is only one causeway.

But the Bad Men received him kindly, and a small chief took the king's wife into his house, and she bore him several sons. M'seru was by this chief protected, and built a little house of straw, and broke ground for his garden, and might have lived and died in peace, but for the news which came pattering across the causeway one misty morning.

He was respected by the Bad Men and their women because he had been a chief under the Great King. And often they brought their disputes to him for judgment, the chief of the Bad Village being a little mad from sleeping sickness. And he judged wisely and fairly.

Kofolaba, his nephew, and the son of the Old One, grew in honour, since the Bad Village had pride in his company. And they taught him their arts, such as stealing and the carrying oil of girls so that they could not cry out, and how, by placing the right thumb so and the left hand thus, a man's neck could be

broken as easily as a rotten stick. And the king's son profited by their teaching, and at the age of seventeen had carried off two girls from Bubujala villages and twice broken the necks of the village watchmen.

Then, when he was nearly thirty, came the news, and M'seru, who had come to usurp the functions of chieftainship, called a palaver of all the people.

"If it is true that the Old King is dead then Kofolaba is king of this land, for he is the son of the Old One by his second wife, and all men know that the first wife had no children, being put away because she burnt the king's fish."

"That is truth," said all the people.

"Now, I have heard strange news," wheezed M'seru, for he was a sick man." The Old King is dead by the magic of Sandi Ingona, who is the white lord of the Akasava and very cruel. And Masaga, the son of K'salugu M'popo, the king is dead by witchcraft, and also the great chief Fomba of these parts. All these men died at Sandi's hand."

"Lord," said one of the near audience, "this Sandi hanged my own brother in the year of the rains because of a woman's palaver. He is very unkind."

"I tell you that there is no king but my nephew Kofolaba." said M'seru, "and there is no man marked for king, though the white men have sent for the Wise Woman of Limbi—" there was a great coughing and swaying of heads at the mention of that terrible name "—to put upon the new king the wonderful magics which give him courage and haughtiness."

"If Kofolaba is king, shall he not go up to the city?" asked one, and there was a murmur of assent,

"So I say," said M'seru, nodding feebly, "for if Kofolaba is accepted by Sandi, we shall be rich, and the Bad Village will rule the land, and that which we desire we shall take, and all will grow fat and comfortable."

Such immoral standards had M'seru adopted through his twenty-five years' association with the men of the Bad Village.

The palaver continued until the dawn, and it was agreed that Kofolaba should take with him twenty spears, and that each, for the sake of appearance, should assume the title and dignity of chieftainship, also the style and magnificence, but as to this there was some difficulty, for the Bad Village was poor.

Nevertheless, it was argued that following a route which led through certain defenceless villages, and by wisely utilizing the candidature of Kofolaba, the necessary equipment might be acquired on the way.

The city of Rimi-Rimi heard news by some mysterious agency, not only of the approaching embassy, but all the circumstances which made the candidature of Kofolaba possible. Of a sudden people who had never heard of the Old King's

wife, who was the sister of M'seru, or, if they had heard, had thought her dead, were in possession of every fact of the woman's flight.

"Some of this they could have learnt by lokali," said the puzzled Hamilton, "but how do they get the gruesome details? One of the little chiefs showed me the spot where the woman crossed the river the night she bolted."

Sanders nodded. "I stopped worrying about the native intelligence system when I heard the story of the Argonne battle from Bosambo the day after it was fought," he said.

The two men were standing in the basin before the king's house, watching a number of men erecting a small but. It was not like other huts, being octagonal in shape, and the grass that the men wove between the skeleton uprights had been dyed purple.

"What is this, sir?" asked Hamilton.

"They call it syaki m'molo," said Sanders, "which, translated roughly, means the House of the Chosen. O Kabalaka!"

A man came out of the king's hut, the towering chief who had stood at the Old King's elbow.

"I see you," said Sanders in greeting.

"I see you, white man," said Kabalaka, the chief.

"O Kabalaka," said Sanders softly, "this morning I sent for you to my fine ship, and I said there should be no 'white men' in the mouths of black men, lest these white men curse them. To me you shall say 'lord,' also your king shall say 'lord,' for I am lord of these parts and over you all, and will rule you with wisdom and give you justice, so that no man shall be oppressed."

"There is no king in these parts," snarled Kabalaka, "but presently shall come one we know; you we do not know—white man."

The words were hardly out of his lips before Sanders's whip fell across his face. Three times he lashed, and the man fell back with a cry, covering his face.

"How do they call me?" asked Sanders, in so low a voice that the final 'k'saso' sounded like a hiss.

"Lord," said the man sullenly.

"That is well."

Sanders had walked two paces away when he turned.

"Who shall make any man king—" he addressed the question to Kabalaka "—and why do you call this hut the House of the Chosen?"

"Lord," said the minister, who was shaking with rage, "into this hut, which

will be filled by great ghosts and devils, will go the Chosen. And whosoever the Old Woman finds there shall be king, for that is the custom since the world began."

"O Kabalaka," said Sanders, "suppose this woman finds a common man—would he be king? Or a chief who had evil plans—would he be king?"

"Lord," replied the minister sullenly, "no man but the Chosen dare go in to the ghosts, because he would die by magic."

"Go on." said Sanders.

"There shall come one to the hut who will put upon him the robe," said the chief, "and fasten about his arm the beautiful bracelets—one who is greater even than white lords, for she has death in her hands, and in her eyes, and she is a drinker of blood, of white—" he hesitated,"—of white lords' blood."

"Fergisi," said Sanders in a voice scarcely above a whisper, his steely eyes fixed on the other.

Kabalaka was taken aback, and his knuckles went to his mouth.

"O ko," he said. "Who spoke that word?"

Sanders did not answer.

"Now, listen. I will tell you this," he said, "and let all your people know that I, who slew the Great King by my magic, and crushed his city into the earth and slew his warriors around him, and him in the midst of his warriors, I, Sandi, say this, and it is not the words of the spider*, but of me. There is no man or woman in this great land who does not lie within my hand, and there is none greater than I, for the people who sent me are as the leaves in the forest, so many. Not all of the same tree are they, but of four great trees and many small trees. What? Shall they all fall down because of the word of an old woman who is mad, who sends her tchu to frighten children?" He saw the minister wince, and knew he had used a forbidden word, that was akin to the unspeakable and unpronounceable "Ewa" of the Lower River. "If she keeps the laws of my masters, she shall be as one with you, and I will protect her; but if she breaks the laws, be sure I will slay her, though she hold M'shimba M'shamba in one hand and death in the other."

[*The story-tellers of the tribes escaped the stigma of lying by prefacing their inventions with the words 'The spider (or the beetle) told me this'.]

"Lord—" began Kabalaka.

"The palaver is finished," said Sanders, and turning on his heel, went back to the beach and to his ship.

"What about the person Kofolaba?" asked Hamilton, when they had got aboard.

"We'll see," replied Sanders, "The people of the city are quiet enough. I don't think the interest in Fomba's execution lasted out the night."

"Native memory—" began Hamilton.

"Is short, I know," said Sanders, "but these people are different from any natives I have met. Did you notice the discipline and evolutions of the guards? Did you observe the silk cloak which the Old King wore? Do you know that the cave in which the Devil Woman of Limbi lives is guarded by twelve virgins who keep an everlasting fire burning, and die if it goes out? Do you guess the significance of the bracelet which is the sign of kingship?"

Bones had strolled to the after-deck of the Zaire, and had been an interested listener.

"Dear old Administrator and Commander-in-Chief," he said excitedly, "I've got it! I see your artful old drift! Find the jolly old bracelet, kill the naughty, naughty lady, put out the fire, and there you are!"

"Where are we?" asked Hamilton. "Really, Bones, you're an ass!"

"I'm the man to do it, dear old Excellency," said Bones. "Give me a couple of trusty middleweights—"

"You're wrong, Bones—for once," said Sanders kindly.

"For once!" murmured the scornful Houssa.

"That isn't my drift at all. And it isn't a new phenomenon, Hamilton." Sanders turned to his second. "We had hints of an older civilization. Do you remember the ghosts of brass in the Akasava?"

"Good heavens!" gasped Hamilton. "Do you mean a Roman civilization?"

Sanders nodded. "The Romans came to the country two thousand years ago," he said; "some came by way of the Big River, some came down through Egypt. There were legionaries in Lower Egypt in the days of the Emperor Decius. I think these were the fellows who came south and west. They were obviously part of the Eastern Army. What is Mount Limpisi, or Limbi, but Mount Olympus?".

"That's Greece, dear old Administrator," said Bones in gentle reproof, "just outside of Athens. Pardon the correction, dear old superior, but geography is my strong point."

"Not so strong," smiled Sanders. "To be exact, it is in Macedonia, through which the Eastern Armies fought. Then we have the bracelet—the old insignia of the Consular office—the purple cloak which the kings have always worn, and even an oracle in the shape of this infernal woman."

"Greek," murmured Bones protestingly, "the oracle of the Adelphi—in Greece."

"Will you shut up?" demanded Hamilton.

"Well, that is all," said Sanders. "Bones is right, except that the Adelphi is in the Strand. But Rome adopted most of the Greek gods and wonders. The Eastern Army practised them. Your vestal virgins and their undying fire are purely Roman. Rimi-Rimi is obviously Roman inspiration, and was sometime called 'Rome,' It is built on seven hills. What do they call the Old King's minister of justice in the native tongue?"

"That's a new one to me, too," said Hamilton. "Seni-seni is a word I've never heard."

"Censor," said Sanders, rising with a laugh, "and the captains of the king's guards are senisuri—'centurions'. It fits beautifully. The king was called Oogoosti, which does not require any very striking mental effort to associate with Augustus."

Hamilton was silent. His tired eyes roved the countryside. By what route did they come, these tattered adventurers of Rome, who had set up their standard in this hot and fearful land, dreaming Heaven knows what dreams of empire?

"The Island of the Golden Birds!" he cried suddenly, and Sanders nodded.

"There, I do not doubt, they planted the eagle of Rome," he said.

It was a depressing picture Sanders had drawn. For hundreds of years these masterful aliens must have toiled, drilling the raw savage into a semblance of Rome's invincible soldiers. There must have been a dynasty of sorts, quarrels, intrigues, jealousies, rebellions and battles, and all the time the wild was working into their blood, and the barbarism of their environment overgrowing them until the tan and olive of Rome became browner and browner and then—black.

Hamilton shivered. "What are you going to do about this Kofolaba person?" he asked.

"I think we'll meet him half-way," said Sanders, and beckoned his orderly.

"Abiboo," he said in Arabic, "go you to Yoka and have steam. Bones"—he turned to Captain Tibbetts—"take a machine-gun detachment and hold Execution Hill. I don't suppose you'll have any trouble. Go round the edge of the town, so that you do not alarm the people."

Half an hour later the Zaire's anchor came up, and she swung round to the south. They who watched from the shore—and the whole headland was lined with people—slapped their chests in joy.

"For now," said one who spoke the thoughts of all, "this wicked man has gone, and there is no king in the land who shall prevent us doing what we desire."

He, for his part, had a matter to settle with a certain maker of clay pots who

had married his sister, and he went back to his hut for his spears.

There were others in the city of Rimi-Rimi who also desired justice. The Zaire was hardly out of sight before the first of the family feuds was being settled on the fighting field before the Old King's palace.

"Ha—ha—ha—ha!"

Bones and his machine—gun detachment were sited on the Hill of Execution, had witnessed the beginning of trouble, and had acted according to orders. The ballets whipped up the dust at the fighters' feet, and the bickering came to a quick end.

"This man Sandi." said one exasperated contestant, wiping the sweat from his forehead, for he had run very fast, "is a man without pity or gentleness. Gondinda was a dead man, and my spear was well at his stomach. O Sa! This is no place for a man to live!"

Sanders heard the rattle of shots and, guessing the cause, smiled faintly. He had one hand on the telegraph, ready to swing the Zaire about—for this new steamer of his boasted two screws—when the firing ceased.

"A little local disturbance, I think," he said quietly, and kept the boat with its nose to the centre of the narrow channel.

Sanders did not rely upon chance information. In the Territories there were many people of the Old King's country, some of whom were in Government service—men who had fled before his wrath, guiding their frail canoes through the leaping waters of Hell Gate—and Sanders had brought with him a dozen of these reliable men, and had sent them north and cast and west under the direction of Ahmet, his chief spy. So it was not by chance that he brought the ship to anchor in the slack waters of the Fongini River, which runs into the Great River sixty miles south-west of Rimi-Rimi.

He had not long to wait, for in two hours there came into view a small flotilla of canoes, paddling closely on to the bank. Sanders lifted his anchor and steamed to meet them.

The party was small, but obviously important. Kofolaba's embassy had looted well and richly, And Kofolaba's head was enveloped in a rusty silk hat which would have wholly extinguished him but for the fact that Nature had endowed him with large, sustaining ears.

They came aboard, this motley party, arrayed in the tawdry magnificence appropriate to the occasion. Sanders's eyes scrutinized Kofolaba with interest. He was a tall man and stout, with sleepy eyes and long, powerful arms.

"O white man, I see you." said Kofolaba.

"I see you," said Sanders. "but I do not hear you when you say 'white man.'

For in this country Kofolaba, all white men are lords, and all black men are the servants of those lords. And when a black Man says 'O white man', to me, my arm goes mad."

"Lord," said Kofolaba, subdued and impressed, "I do not know the customs of the white—of the lords, for I have never seen anybody of your terrible colour before."

"Let us make a palaver," said Sanders, and drew up his chair, the party squatting in a semicircle about him. "I believe you are Kofolaba, and the king's true son. And I have heard that you come that I may give into your two hands the lands of the Old King!"

As to what attitude Kofolaba would take on his meeting the white stranger, there had been innumerable palavers, and a derision had been reached. Kofolaba cleared his throat.

"Lord," he said loudly. "I am the king of this land by right, and take no gift from any man. And these men who are my chiefs know well that I am a proud man, and very fearful in my anger. Also—"

"I also am a proud man." said Sanders grimly, "and no man has seen me in my anger, because he has died before. As for you, Kofolaba, you are a thief and a friend of thieves; for who does not know the Bad Village, where men live who are outside the law? And these chiefs of yours, what are they? They are men of wickedness, who are chiefs of nothing but their own houses and their own women, whom they have stolen. Whose skin do you wear abort your waist, Kofolaba? Ask a dead man in the village of Mumusu."

"O ko," said Kofolaba, aghast, "it seems that you have eyes that walk by themselves."

"I have ears," said Sanders significantly. He looked round at the unprepossessing group, and suddenly he pointed.

"What boy is this?" he said, and indicated a thin, uncomfortable lad, the only other member of the party to wear a European hat.

Kofolaba dragged the embarrassed boy unceremoniously into the foreground.

"Lord," he said, "this is my true and beautiful son."

"True he may be," said Sanders, "and as to that, you know best, but he is not beautiful."

He looked at the boy's arm and saw the tattooed bracelet. Kofolaba, observing this interest, placed upon it a wholly wrong construction.

"This boy is from a woman of the Bubujala, who was a daughter of the chief, and you, who I know are a father and the husband of many wives—" Sanders blushed as he never would have blushed in the old days "—will have in your

stomach a lovely feeling because of my son. Now I tell you I am a proud man, and will not ask for what is my own; but because of my son I will crawl at your lordship's feet for the kingdom which is mine by right."

Sanders turned to Hamilton.

"What do you think of this boy?"

"Black but uncomely." said Hamilton.

"O Kofolaba, and all people, hear me," said Sanders. "for I have had a great thought in my head, and my spirit has spoken into both my ears. How call you this boy, Kofolaba?"

"Buru," said Kofolaba solemnly.

"Hear my judgment," said Sanders. "This boy Buru, being of the royal house, is acceptable, and I will set him up on the stool, and people shall call him king."

There was no trace of parental affection in the look which Kofolaba shot at his son, and he was silent. Then Sanders saw a gleam of hope dawn in the man's eye, and the frown vanished.

"Lord," he said mildly, "that is your lordship's wisdom. So let it be! And Buru shall rule, and I will be his humble servant, and shall be near-by to advise him in all the cunning matters which kings must know."

"He shall he king" said Sanders again slowly and deliberately, "but you, Kofolaba, and your thieves shall go back to the Bad Village and there shall live in peace with all men. And be sure that, if you do not, though the marshes surround you, and M'shimba M'shamba himself sit down in your hut, I will come after you with my soldiers, and I will feed your bodies to the fishes, by death!"

Kofolaba shuddered at the words.

"Lord—" he protested.

"The palaver is finished," said Sanders.

He came back to Rimi-Rimi with a new king, who spent all his time in the engine-room, watching the wheels go round.

It was not until the dawn that the Zaire dropped anchor off the beach of Rimi-Rimi. For the palaver had been a long one, and Sanders had delayed his leaving the place where the meeting had occurred until he had watched the disgruntled deputation well out of sight.

Abiboo called Sanders an hour before the dawn came, and he was dressed and on the deck when the sun flashed up. Hamilton fixed his glasses on the Hill of Sacrifice.

"No signal from the post, sir," he said fretfully. "I hope to Heaven Bones hasn't been getting into trouble."

But Sanders did not speak. He was looking at the beach. "I knew we were popular," he said ironically, "but I had no idea our popularity was so amazingly great."

For the beach was black with people and black for miles with half-naked bodies. The slope leading from the beach to the city was tight-packed, and on the beach alone, where the boats landed, was there any space.

"What the dickens is that?" asked Sanders "It looks like a hayrick."

He pointed to a small yellow object standing at the water's edge. The launch was got ready, and, towing two canoe-loads of Houssas, it chugged its way to the beach.

Then Sanders saw. The thing on the beach was human, though it was pardonable in him to mistake it for a rick. For the arms were encased in sleeves of plaited straw, and a straight, broad dress, dyed and woven in fantastic patterns, reached from the neck to the ground. Over the head was a sort of cage, from which dangled a thick fringe of straw tassels. It carried no weapon. About its waist was girded a broad belt of leather, from which depended something which made Sanders gasp, for it was a sword, not of the native pattern, but a pattern which he had seen in many a museum—the sword of a centurion of Rome!

No other weapon had the figure. As the launch came nearer to the beach, Sanders saw that the figure was bent, and that the two hands which gripped the staff were encased in gloves made from the paws of leopards, the claws painted or polished white.

He stepped daintily off the bow of the launch and walked toward the figure. "O man," he said, "who are you in this strange and terrible dress?"

The attitude of the spectators, who were drawn back a respectable distance, struck him as curious. There was on their faces an expression in which horror and curiosity were mingled, and five out of every six of the men and all the women had their knuckles to their teeth.

"I am no man, O Sandi," said a shrill voice in Bomongo. And then it flashed upon him, and, despite an his experience and coolness, his breath came faster, and something like a thrill passed through him.

"O Wise Woman of Limbi," he said. "You come in time, for I have a king to crown."

She laughed—a wild cackle of laughter.

"Lord, you come too late," she said, "for this day have the people of Rimi-

Rimi chosen their king. And he waits in the House of the Chosen for my magic."

Sanders looked from her to the crowd and back to the crooked figure. He saw a dozen faces eager to give him news.

"O woman," said Sanders, "no man is king of this land save by my wish!'

"Man," croaked the figure, "this was by your wish, for in the House of the Chosen I found two men, one who lived and one who was dead. And he who was dead was Kabalaka, the chief, and he who lived was the white man whose eye is of glass."

"Bones!" gasped Hamilton. "King Bones!"

"PRESENCE of mind, dear old Excellency," said Bones, when they got him on board. "I had a tip that dear old Mrs. Devil-Person was expected, and, knowin' the weakness an' depravity of the indigenous native, I went down to take a look at the jolly old thing. And when I saw Kabalaka sneak into the hut, I knew that he was being simply awfully naughty!'

"He did not tell me the Old Woman was coming so soon." said Sanders. "Well, Bones, what happened?"

Bones beamed around. "I saw the whole thing in a flash, dear old sir. Into the hut I went. There was the wicked old Kabalaka. He was awfully annoyed!"

He did not tell of the fight to the death, Kabalaka's stabbing sword against Bones's jammed pistol, for that was not Bones's way. He boasted only of the things that did not matter,

"So you're the Chosen," said Hamilton and distressed Bones for the rest of the evening by addressing him as "Your Majesty"!

V. — THE DEATH MARK

THERE lived in the city of Rimi-Rimi a carver of wood and a thatcher of straw, who had served the Old King in the days of his greatness and had been well rewarded. He was a man of some age, and he suffered from everlasting headaches, and was wont to be silly. Because the Old King's hand had shadowed him, no man dared put him away, though it is proper, when an old man goes mad, to take him to the forest and, putting out his eyes, leave him to find his quick way to death in solitude. Once his own son and heir to his buried treasures had in his boldness stood before the king and demanded the life of his parent. And the Old King had caused a fire to be built upon the face of this undutiful one, and, after the fire had done its work, had sent him to the forest to wander with sightless eyes until the leopards made an easy kill.

This old carver's name was Somobolaka, or B'laka, and he had visions. On a night when Sanders had come back to the city to meet the Woman of Limbi, there appeared before the old man B'laka his dead master, the king. And very terrible he seemed, for he had only one leg and one arm, and where his head had been was an earthen pot. Yet B'laka knew that it was the Old King, and fell flat on his belly. And the Old King had stopped and whispered—"

"B'laka, you must slay the white man with the knife that is under your fine bed." And with these words, the king had vanished through the roof with the lazy smoke that curled up from B'laka's fire.

In the morning B'laka remembered his dream, and went down to the beach, where the soldiers of the white men were standing, and mingled with them. He carried in his belt a knife which was so sharp that he might have shaved his thin beard with either of its edges.

Sanders came ashore from the Zaire and walked up toward the city, and something said in B'laka's ear—

"This is your meat, B'laka."

He leapt forward with a yell, his knife flashing, and Sanders fired twice from his hip.

"Lord, I do not know why I did this thing." he said faintly; "I think there has been a devil in my stomach for a long time. Now, being on the edge of life, I see all things clearly, and I know that I am an evil man."

"Man," said Sanders gently, "my little pistol has hurt you to death."

"Ai," coughed B'laka, "and now my sons will take my beautiful treasures, which are in a hole beneath the fire in my hut—my rods and the frankis which K'salugu M'popo gave me when he chopped Fergisi, also the magic hair of the little woman, which Fergisi carried in a hole in his dress*. O king!...B'laka, the thatcher, speaks..."

[*Pocket]

He died saying this.

"Go up to this man's hut, Hamilton, and dig up his treasure," said Sanders. "I —I want to know how the Fergusons died—particularly the girl."

A crowd of the city people had run down the slope at the sound of the shooting, and now made an interested but unresentful audience.

Sanders looked at the body of the old man, then raised his eyes to the spectators.

"O people," he said, "who of you saw Fergisi die?"

There was a pause, and then somebody pushed a skinny man through the

crowd. He also was middle-aged, and his eyes were filmed with sleeping sickness.

"Lord, I saw Fergisi die," he said tremulously. "Into the great cave we pushed him with our spears, and the Old Woman slew him in the dark, and sprinkled us with the blood on her sword."

"And the small woman of Fergisi?" asked Sanders steadily.

"She ran into the bush, and Mofolobo, the Old King's hunter, went after her, and he came back laughing and cleaned his spears on the ground."

"She died—quickly?" asked Sanders huskily.

The man shuffled his feet uneasily. "Who knows, lord?" he said. "Mofolobo was gone a long time, but when he came back he cleaned his spears."

Sanders said nothing for a while. "Where is this Mofolobo now?" he asked softly.

A chorus answered him.

"Lord, he is gone to his home...Your little gun frightened him...on the day of Fomba."

Sanders asked no further question, but made his slow way into the city. On the whole, it were better for Mofolobo that he had died when Sanders's little gun had shot into the brown.

His way into the centre of the city led him through a broad street alive with busy householders, who were still searching amongst the debris of the huts for their lost household goods. The houses of Rimi-Rimi, with their frail supports and their shaky roof—trees, had collapsed like so many houses of cards under the repercussion of the explosion which heralded his arrival in the city.

The men turned to look at Sanders as he strode down the street, and there was nothing threatening in their gaze, and there were more smiles than scowls for him. Tomorrow, he thought, one word from the terrible old woman of the mountains, who was camped on the outskirts of the town, and these half-naked figures who poked amongst the ruins, and whose loud laughter shook the silences of the city, would become veritable fiends.

Sanders had left a petty chief named Kusa in charge of the king's hut and, incidentally, the king's household. He was a mild man with some intelligence, and the Administrator found him squatting in the shade of a clump of Isisi palms behind the shattered 'palace'.

"O Kusa," said Sanders, "what of the Old Woman of Limbi?"

The man gave the conventional shiver which that name seemed to produce.

"Lord, she is at the village of M'kiji, a long walk from here, she and her

maidens and all of the king's guard."

"You shall carry my word to her," said Sanders, "and take with you many precious presents, saying this: 'Sandi, who stands in the place of kings to govern this land wisely and with justice, calls a palaver of all the people that he may set up Buru, son of Kofolaba, who was the Old King's true son. And because the Holy One of Limbi is wise in all the mysteries, let her come down in the morrow, when the sun is high, and put upon Buru the cloak and the bracelet, and give into his hands the wonderful magic which kings hold."

Kusa shifted uneasily, a very disturbed and agitated man.

"Lord," pleaded he, "how do I know what the terrible Old One will say or do? Did she not come with all her maidens and her warriors to make a king the day before today, and place upon the beautiful white arm of Tibbetti—"

"Kusa, you talk like a fool." said Sanders calmly. "For when this old woman came, it is true my lord Tibbetti was in the House of the Chosen, but there was no giving of bracelets, and Tibbetti was there because an evil man had defied the ghost of the purple house. And where is he now, this arrogant man? He is in the ground, and the cooking-pots of his wife are smashed, and the roof of his house is broken!'

"Lord," said Kusa, after consideration, "how do I know that this old and holy one will not treat me cruelly if I go?"

Sanders smiled pleasantly. "What she may do to you, Kusa, I do not know; but this I do know, that if you do not go, I will treat you more cruelly—that is certain."

"Lord, I think I will go," said Kusa promptly.

An hour later they brought Buru, the son of Kofolaba, the chief, and landed him on the beach with an escort; and the people who saw him saw that he looked different from all other boys, and were amazed. As well he might look different, for Bones had given him a wonderful bath, using carbolic soap and much elbow-grease.

"Lord, I do not like this," slobbered the boy, "for this devil's milk is burning out my eyeballs and I cannot open my eyes; also it is in my mouth, and tastes evilly."

"Then shut your naughty old mouth," said Bones, and turned a rubber hose on him.

Buru, the boy, had forgotten his terrible experience when he stepped ashore, and the people sniffed the disinfectant and thought it was beautiful. They brought him to Sanders, who had established himself in the king's hut, and the boy, who was in some awe of the Administrator, sat reverently before him, his hands folded.

Sanders looked across his table, but did not smile at the lean youth.

"Buru," he said, "I have brought you here to make you a king, and you shall do the things which are good in my sight. Tell me, Buru, is there anything you desire?"

"Lord," said the boy without hesitation, "I would like my lovely hat."

The "lovely hat" was that which the boy had brought on board the Zaire at their first meeting; it was a battered straw with the soiled ribbon of the Eton Ramblers.

Sanders shook his head. "You will be a king, Buru, and it is not right that you should wear upon your head the ju-ju of a tribe which you can never rule. Tomorrow will come the Old Woman, and there shall be placed upon your head a circle of gold."

"Lord," said the boy, "what of Kofolaba, my father?"

Sanders eyed him keenly. "You wish for your father, my boy?" he asked.

"No, lord," said the boy frankly; "but I do not think he will stay in the Bad Village whilst I sit here in Rimi-Rimi, filling my belly with good food. Therefore, lord," he said, "when I am king, I think it best that I should send my regiments to the edge of Bubujala, and that they should destroy the Bad Village, and put my baba to the broadsword."

Sanders gasped. "You—you nice little fellow!" he said in English.

He spent the rest of the morning pursuing inquiries about one Mofolobo. He discovered that he had gone, not as the crowd had told him on the night of Fomba—by which they marked the night of Fomba's death—but that very morning, to the village of Sakalava, in the Fongini country. It was apparently the Old King's custom to draw his courtiers from all the five territories over which he ruled, and on the arrival of Sanders the courtiers had melted to their several homes.

On going back to his hut, after his tour of investigation, he found Hamilton waiting.

"I dug up B'laka's hut," he said and displayed a collection of articles which were spread upon a piece of native cloth on the floor. "This is the thing you want, I imagine," said Hamilton, handing him a flat pocket—book.

It was empty save for a little paper package, which Sanders opened. Inside was a tiny golden curl of hair, and he fingered it reverently.

"Mofolobo!" he said, and his voice was little more than a whisper.

"He left this morning." said Hamilton.

Sanders nodded. "I've just heard that. Did you discover anything more about

him?"

"Nothing, except—" he hesitated, "—that he has a secret wife—at least, that is the rumour."

"A secret wife?" repeated Sanders slowly.

"This is the story" said Hamilton. "Mofolobo is a Fongini man: and has a very respectable household in the town of Sakalava. Every month, according to local report, he makes a journey into the forest to some unknown destination unattended, which is remarkable, remembering that he is a small chief. He has never been followed, because the forest in question is one of those ghost forests which abound in this country."

There was a long silence.

"Native rumours are usually untrue," said Sanders thoughtfully. "I think the girl is dead."

He put the book away in his pocket, and was a silent, thoughtful man for the rest of the day. That afternoon a message from the camp of the Old Woman arrived. Kusa himself, obviously relieved to find himself alive, brought it.

"Lord, the Holy Woman will graciously come when the sun is at its highest," he said, "and she will put upon Buru's arm the bracelet and give into his hand the magic. But, lord, she demands—" He hesitated.

"Go on," said, Sanders.

"Lord, she demands sacrifice, as is the custom."

"There will be no sacrifice in this land," said Sanders, for he knew that human sacrifice was meant. "Now, go to the Old Woman—"

"Lord, if I go, I'll die," said the trembling Kusa, "for no man has stood twice in the presence of this Great Cow and has seen the daylight of tomorrow."

"Then stay," snarled Sanders, "and be damned to her!"

Later came more disquieting news than the eccentricities of the Old Woman presented. He was sitting at dinner with Hamilton in the hut, and they were eating a melancholy meal by candle light, when the voice of the sentry outside the door challenged somebody, and a voice in Arabic replied.

"That sounds like Ahmet," said Sanders, rising, and the chief of his spies came in. He was dusty and tired, and had evidently come a long way.

"O Ahmet," said Sanders in Arabic.

"Peace upon you and on your house," said the Kano man. "I come quickly with curious news and I shall be glad when the little pigeons find their way to your big ship."

Sanders had brought a corps of pigeons with him, and they were being trained

to find their new home.

"Lord," Ahmet went on, "six hours from here there stands a village of many canoes."

Sanders nodded. "That is true, Ahmet, for I have seen it," he said. "It is a village of fishermen."

"No fishers live there now," said the man grimly, "for one Mofolobo, a great chief in these parts, sits down with many warriors, and their canoes are painted red for war."

"Mofolobo!" repeated Sanders incredulously "But this man is from the Fongini tribe, Ahmet, which is a foreign people and far away."

"Lord, his warriors have come to that village secretly, and also the man Kofolaba, who is the father of Buru, who is to be king in this land."

This was a most surprising joining of forces, and Sanders was impressed.

"This Kofolaba—how many spears did he bring?"

"A hundred and a hundred," said the spy.

This was more astonishing news still, because Kofolaba was a man without a tribe, being of the outlaws who live at the foot of the hills; and, as if interpreting his master's thoughts, Ahmet quoted the Arab saying—

"A king raises armies and a thief raises dust."

Sanders nodded.

"And truly, lord, this man says he is king," said Ahmet. "That," he added shamelessly, "I learnt from a woman to whom I made love whilst her husband was fishing."

When the man had been dismissed Sanders looked at his lieutenant, and Hamilton laughed.

"King-making isn't all it's cracked up to be, sir," he said.

"They'll come by river, of course," said Sanders thoughtfully. "They are canoe-men, these Fongini. Go aboard, Hamilton, and tell Bones what is happening. Let him have the searchlight going all night, and send a patrol down the river in a launch to reconnoitre. You can reduce the guard here to two men. Bones may want all his forces."

"Do you think I'd better stay aboard?"

"You may, if you wish," said Sanders. "Personally, I do not think the attack will come until tomorrow, after the king is set up."

Hamilton returned in an hour with cheerful news. It was the practice at nightfall for the little motor-launch to make a trip up and down the river for

inspection purposes, and when he had arrived on the Zaire, Abiboo, who was in command of the launch, had just returned with news that for twenty miles the river was clear of war-canoes.

"It's a good six hours' paddle from the fishing village," said Sanders, "so we shall have a quiet night."

The king's house consisted of five huts, joined together and communicating by mat-walled passages, and whilst their beds were being made in one of the inner rooms, Sanders strolled out into the city.

The six hills gleamed with the meal-fires of the people, and such men as he met gave him a cheery greeting.. He stopped to watch a funeral procession carrying a body to the beach for burial on one of the little islands.

"What man is this?" he asked one of the mourners.

"Lord, it is B'laka, the mad one, whom you hurt with your little pistol."

"O ko!" said Sanders, and made the native sign to avert bad luck, for it is unfortunate to inquire after your dead enemy, though B'laka was no enemy of his.

From where he stood in the basin he could look between two of the great mounds which were called hills, and see far away, near the edge of a great mahogany forest, little pin-points of light, where the Old Woman of Limbi had her camp. Idling there in the darkness, a man passed him whom he recognized by his gait.

"O Kusa," he said, and the chief turned. "Tell me of the Old Woman," he said, "and what manner of camp she has."

Now, Kusa was not anxious to talk upon a matter which was so taboo as the Wise Woman of Limbi. He had suffered that afternoon from pains in his stomach, due, he did not doubt, to his blasphemy of the morning. More than this his favourite wife had noted a swelling on his neck, at the very spot, he believed, where the eyes of the Old Woman had rested.

"Lord." he said in a hushed voice, "these matters are not spoken of by our people, for this woman is very holy and terrible."

Sanders had the extraordinary faculty of getting inside the native mind and seeing things as they were seen by men who had a most devout faith in ghosts and devils.

"You shall not speak of the Old One," he said, "and you shall take no hurt, Kusa. But tell me of the camp."

"Lord," said Kusa, "they have made her a great hut, and over this yet another great hut; and between the first and the second huts sit her virgins, and all about them is the Old King's guard."

Sanders was silent for so long that the man began to move uneasily.

"May I go?" he said.

"Wait." said Sanders. "What is this talk of sacrifice?"

"It is the custom, lord," said the man simply. "For sometimes the Old Woman grows hungry, owing to her long struggles with ghosts. And then she sends word to the king, and certain maidens are marked for sacrifice."

"How are they marked?" asked Sanders, who had an insatiable appetite for information upon native customs.

"Lord, they are marked with two crosses of a beautiful red upon their foreheads." said the man. "And when they are thus marked, they are the Old Woman's meat, and she will send for them when she desires. And if any man slay them or hurt them, that is a terrible sin against the Old Woman."

"Then they do not die too soon?" said Sanders.

"No, lord." said the man. "They die in the Old Woman's time. Lord, let me go," he whined.

"Go," said Sanders.

"A perfectly ghastly idea," said Hamilton, when Sanders had told him. "Personally, I think you will have to break through your lifelong rule and chop this old lady—"

Sanders had reached the same conclusion.

They sat in the smaller hut until eleven o'clock, as the fires died down, watching the rise and fall of Bones's searchlight.

"Does he expect them to come by aeroplane?" asked the exasperated Hamilton. "Look at that light in the sky. I'll bet any money you like that Bones is handling that plant."

The Zaire was out of sight from where they sat, for the river ran fifty feet below the level on which Rimi—Rimi stands, but the white fan of the searchlight, as it jerked to and fro, now hitting the top of a hill, now illuminating the clouds, supported Hamilton's theory.

Not only the two men, but the majority of the able-bodied people of Rimi—Rimi formed an audience at this demonstration of how not to use a searchlight, and the hills which commanded a view of the steamer were crowded with silent and awe-stricken admirers. And when, as it did sometimes, the light swung round and caught them in its glare, there were shrieks of half-terror and half—laughter, and a frantic bolting to the nearest cover.

And now it blinked spasmodically at the sky, the light coming in long and short intervals. Bones was using the signal shutter which Sanders had had

fitted for long-distance communications. Hamilton spelt out the message—

"O Key, dere ole G.X."

"What the dickens is G.X.?" asked Sanders, who was following the message.

"A slight error on Bones's part," said Hamilton dryly. "I gather he means 'Ex,' which is Bonesesque for 'Excellency.'"

Apparently, after this message, Bones handed over his control of the searchlight to more sober and less enterprising hands, for the rays of the light went down below the edge of the cliff.

Hamilton rose and stretched himself. "I'm going to bed, sir," he said. "I don't think anything will happen tonight."

It was not until all the noises of the city were hushed and the fires had died out, save here and there, where a dull red glow marked the community fires, that Sanders threw away the end of his cheroot and walked to the purple but where the young novitiate king lay.

A soldier on guard at the door challenged him, and he replied.

"No, lord," said the man, "no person has passed in here. The young king is asleep; your lordship can hear him snoring."

"Good night, soldier," said Sanders.

Hamilton was asleep when Sanders reached the hut. He put down the lantern he was carrying and undressed quickly, placing his mosquito boots handy and his revolver under his pillow near the wall. There was a second door leading to a farther room, or, as it really was, to another hut, and he made some attempt to fasten this, though the best he could do was to tie the edge of the door to the door-post with a piece of leather thong. Sanders said his prayers and went to bed.

Sanders always said his prayers. He was one of those simple men who would not have slept if he had omitted the performance of this office. He lay awake for some time thinking, turning over in his mind the almost insoluble problem of this new territory of his. The very placidity of the people, their good humour and tolerance of his presence, was in itself a handicap, he thought. He was conscious of the dark forces which were working round him, and scented the plotting which was in progress in the far-off territories. And then he thought of the Devil Woman of Limbi, and concluded that she was the greatest problem of all. Sanders had known from the first that she was not to be treated as chief or king might be treated—not lightly touched or slighted, either. She must be humoured or she must be killed; there was no half-way measure. So thinking of her, he fell asleep.

He could not have been asleep an hour when he woke with a start and sat up.

His hand slid beneath his pillow and pulled out his revolver. The hut was in darkness, but somebody had touched him. He had a vague feeling that somebody had touched his face. He listened, and heard nothing but the regular breathing of Hamilton; yet there was somebody in the hut. He cursed himself that he had not brought his electric torch, and felt stealthily for the lantern and his matches. His fingers were closing upon the box, when he heard a rustle of feet, and the wind of the hut stirred as somebody passed.

"O man," he called, "if you pass that doorway, you die."

"What is it?" Hamilton was wide awake.

"There's somebody in the hut. Have you got your torch?"

"Here." said Hamilton, and fumbled.

A big circle of light illuminated the opposite wall of the hut. It was empty.

Sanders jumped out of bed and, pulling on his mosquito boots, ran through the narrow passage which separated the room from the bigger hut where he had dined. He caught a glimpse of a figure against the light and raised his revolver, but too late. Then he heard the guttural challenge of the sentry, and ran out into the open as the man brought his rifle up to the shoulder.

The Old King's fire before the hut had been kept burning—Sanders had ordered this for a variety of reasons—and in the light of its flames Sanders saw the stranger and struck down the sentry's rifle. For the intruder had been a woman.

She stood twenty paces from him, slim and erect, unconscious of her danger, or, if conscious, uncaring. She was a girl of seventeen, broad-nosed, thick-lipped, and crop-headed.

"O woman," said Sanders sternly, "come here."

"O man," she mocked, "come here."

Sanders hesitated a moment and then walked slowly towards her, coming, he realized, between the girl and the sentry, and seriously interfering with that worth's line of fire in certain eventualities. He had not taken two steps when the girl turned with a wild laugh and leapt into the darkness. Sanders had a vision of the half-naked body girdled about with a broad belt, and then she vanished.

He stood stock still, wondering what to do, and then, from where the girl had disappeared, he heard a shriek. He flew along in the direction whence the sound had come, and presently came up with somebody who was sobbing on the ground. He stooped. There was enough light to see that the figure was a man.

"Get up," said Sanders, giving him a kick,

"O ko!" sobbed the man. "I am already dead."

Sanders jerked him to his feet. He heard Hamilton call, and the shuffle of his slippers as he came across the ground.

"What is it?" asked Hamilton.

"By his stick and his cloak I should think he's one of the watchmen of the city," said Sanders, and gave the shivering figure a shake. "Speak, man! Why do you cry like a woman?"

"O lord, lord," moaned the man. "I have seen the tchu, the Dead One, and I myself am as good as dead!"

No more could they get out of him, and left him, shivering and quaking, on the ground, rocking to and fro in the desperation of his fear.

"Nothing has been touched," said Sanders, after making a search of his hut.

"Then why the devil did that audacious female come into our boudoir?" asked Hamilton.

"I'll tell you where she came—by this door. The string is cut. I wonder whether anything has happened to Buru?"

Hamilton went out to discover, and returned with the report that Buru was still sleeping to the satisfaction of the sentry.

"The woman came in through one of the back huts." said Sanders. "We must put a sentry there in future, if we stay ashore. What is the time?"

"Half—past four." said Hamilton, consulting his wrist-watch.

"Barr!" shivered Sanders. "I'm going to bed again."

This time sleep came quickly, though there was greater reason for restlessness. He woke with the shriek of the Zaire's syren in his ears and the clamour of howling voices without. It was still dark.

"Lord, they come!" It was the voice of the sentry.

"Who comes?" asked Sanders, slipping on a blanket coat and buckling his belt about him.

Bang!

There followed a whine and a greater crash.

"That's Bones," said Hamilton's voice. "He's got the quick-firer in action. I suppose they're attacking the ship."

They were out of the hut in a few seconds. But now the scene had changed. Fires were burning everywhere. Bang! went the Zaire's gun again, and they saw the shell explode on the slope of a hill to the south of the city.

"Get to the boat," said Sanders quickly. "Mofolobo has not come by canoe. He

has been marching through the forest. Look at them!"

The searchlight of the Zaire made the distant hill as light as day. Sanders saw the deep ranks of the advancing host, their spears glittering in the light. A shell burst amongst them, and for a moment they wavered and then came on.

"Get the king, man!" said Sanders to the sentry; and the boy, half- asleep, was dragged into the chilly morning air, and, with Sanders holding one hand and the sentry the other, they ran for the beach.

Mofolobo had sent a party ahead to cut off that line of retreat. Sanders saw a line of men drawn across the little valley, and fired twice into the thick of them. A minute later he was in the midst of a struggling, yelling mob of men, who jabbed at him with their short spears—not short enough in that crush, as it happened.

He heard Hamilton shoot at close range, then his pistol was knocked out of his hand and he was flung to the ground. They dragged him up and bound his hands behind him with cords that cut like a knife.

"For," said the chief of his captors, "Mofolobo, the hunter, desires the white men alive."

"Where is Buru?" asked Sanders quickly.

"Him we have chopped," was the brief reply, "also your black soldier."

They were making a move, as he guessed, to take him back to the king's hut, when there was a commotion on the outskirts of the crowd, and the warriors gave way before the two men who came.

Kofolaba Sanders recognized in the half-light of dawn. The other man, stout and bestial of face, he guessed was Mofolobo. The Zaire had stopped firing, and its searchlight was dark. Bones at that precise moment was scaling the bluff beyond the Hill of Sacrifice, and with him toiled fifty Houssas, four of whom made slower progress because they carried two machine guns between them.

"O white man," said Kofolaba, "I see you. Now, this is a happy day for me, because I have caught the man who killed the Old King, my father. And presently I shall have your fine ship—I and Mofolobo, my friend."

Sanders said nothing, but looked the man from the Bad Village straight in the eye, and they waited, none speaking a word till the sun came up over the horizon and flooded the slope with quick light.

"Kill now," said Kofolaba.

But the men, who had made a close circle about them were shrinking back, staring with horror from Sanders to his companion.

"Kill!" roared Kofolaba, and plucked out his sword.

And then he, too, saw, and dropped the point of his weapon, his mouth open ludicrously.

"O ko," he said, "it seems these are not for me."

It was at that moment that Bones thought it opportune to strike. The two machine-guns came into action together, and the group about Sanders melted away as they were melting when Kofolaba made his discovery.

The warriors ran along the beach, doubled back into the city—in every direction they ran, and as they ran they carried the word, and the two thousand spearmen who had come with Kofolaba and their own chief went pell-mell back to the forest as though the plague were at their heels.

Bones came up, breathless and panting, and cut the ropes that bound the men.

"Just in time, dear old thing," he said breathlessly.

"What on earth does it all mean?" asked Sanders.

Bones was looking at him curiously.

"Good old Excellency," he said, "have you been working a jolly old stunt?"

"What do you mean?" asked Sanders.

"There are two red crosses painted on your forehead," said Bones.

"It is plain," said Sanders later, "that they were made by the indelicate young lady who came to my room."

"You're marked for sacrifice, eh?" said Hamilton, and laughed.

But Sanders did not laugh. Instead, he sent for one of his men, who was a native of the Old King's country, and whose life Sanders had saved on three separate occasions.

"O Kufusa," said Sanders—and it required an effort to give the instruction —"Go you to the camp of the Old Woman and discover when I die."

VI. — THE WOMAN IN THE HUT

NOT the holy carpet as it lies upon the black tomb of the Prophet; not the vestal virgins in their guarded cells; not any mystic thing or being of any tribe of people; none of these is, or was, more sacred than the tchu. This Sanders learnt on a morning following the visitation of such a divinity. Because she had put upon his forehead—he washed it off, and needed turpentine for the purpose—a mark which told all the world that he had been sealed to sacrifice, Sanders felt no reverence for the virgin, but he had a wholesome respect for her mistress, the Devil Woman of Limbi.

"Bit of a mystery, dear old Excellency."

Bones, constituting himself an impartial investigator, shook his head.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, dear old Ham, but these are the facts."

He ticked them off on a bony forefinger, and he frowned horribly as an outward proof that he was devoting the whole of his brilliant intellect to the matter.

"At eleven, dear old Ham goes to bed, at which—hour, I might remark, poor old Bones was—"

"Fooling with the searchlight—we saw you." interrupted Hamilton.

"Old Bones was alert an' watchin'," said Bones severely, "his jolly old eyes skinned and rovin'. But that's beside the question. At eleven Ham goes to bed. At twelve excellent old Excellency follows, both being perfectly sober."

"Bones!" said the outraged Sanders,

"At four a naughty young lady comes into bedroom without any encouragement, paints two X's on Excellency's noble brow, and hops it."

"Your vulgarity, Bones, is deplorable." said Hamilton. "Well, what's the solution?"

"It's a mystery," said Bones safely.

"I will have no mysteries," said Sanders "and I expect to find no mysteries here that I cannot solve."

Sanders was to discover such a mystery, and soon, but this he could not have known.

"I have been into the question of the tchu," said Hamilton. "and I've got them down fine. Stripped of all the superstitions which surround them, they are the messengers of the Old Woman. The people here insist that the girls must die before they become tchu, and that explains the death-mark on their foreheads. That they are mortal is proved by the fact that one got out of the country some years ago—at any rate, she disappeared. Another took a mundane lover, and what happened to her I cannot tell you in the cold light of morning. But tchu is sacred. The Old King destroyed a regiment of his guards because one of the soldiers slashed a tchu with a stick, seeing her running through the forest and thinking she was a frolicking girl."

"The tchu can wait." said Sanders, getting up from the table where they were breakfasting, "but Mofolobo cannot wait."

Mofolobo of the Fongini was a cunning and clever hunter, for he knew the ways of the forest, and of all beasts, and of some men. He had speared the elephant and the lion, the leopard and the quick little buffalo, to face whom is

death. He had tracked all manner of beasts, wounded and unwounded, reading the story of their strength or fear or savageness from a broken twig here and a bloody leaf there; and where his eyes failed him, his broad nostrils served him well.

He ruled his clan and his village with a rod of iron, and his house with whips. He had fourteen wives, who dug in his fields. Once he had fifteen, the fifteenth being a young girl who had been given him by the king. She was a woman of the Bubujala, accounted beautiful, and a dancer of great merit. A low estimate of her value was twenty goats, such a fortune having been offered for her by a little chief of the Bubujala.

But this fifteenth girl did not take her whippings kindly, and one night, when Mofolobo was sleeping in his great hut, his wife rose from his side, and, slipping a noose about his neck, she pulled with all her strength, having run the loose end through the wooden edge of the bed; and there might have been the end of Mofolobo and all his mysteries, but that the hide turned traitor and broke.

The next morning Mofolobo had the tops of four tall trees cleared of their branches, and between them, clinging to the swaying trunks, his workmen built a platform, and upon this platform was strapped the fifteenth wife, with cords that did not break, and there she remained till she died. The villagers heard her whimpering for six days, and on the seventh the vultures came.

But the platform remained through the months, and husbands who had cause for suspicion would take their wives and point out to them the Place of Waiting.

Mofolobo had hunted men and women, too, for the matter of that. He had kept upon their trail tirelessly, unswervingly, until in the end he had had his kill.

But Mofolobo had never been hunted until the day he flew from Rimi-Rimi. He realized the novelty of the situation by the unusual emotion which flooded and confused him, as he paddled in terrible haste up the river that borders the Fongini country. So hard was the pace that one of the six paddlers collapsed from exhaustion. Mofolobo snatched his paddle, dropped the man over the side of the canoe, and took his place. At each bend and twist of the river Mofolobo would look back expecting to see the white bow of a Government steamer coming round the farther bend, and to hear the whistle and whine of bullets about his head.

He came to a landing at sunset, and threw himself upon the ground. His paddlers had not the strength to leave their canoe, but fell forward in their places, and might have drifted out and down the river, but Mofolobo recovered, gripped the canoe's nose, and aroused his men with his lion whip.

The villagers at the landing-place had seen his arrival, and came forward,

trembling, to serve him. They swept a new hut and cooked food for him and his followers. But Mofolobo had no thought of staying the night. He went on alone, for none of his Men was able to stand, and walked through the dark hours, contemptuous of the shadowy things that prowled in the wood, and turned emerald-green eyes in his direction, and in the morning, when every muscle and nerve within him cried for sleep, he came to his own city, and people who saw him stride down the broad street, which his hut commanded from one end, folded their hands under their arm-pits, but did not speak to him.

Not even the women whose husbands he had taken to war, and who were now scattered in the forest of Rimi-Rimi—not one of these dare ask the fate of her man, for Mofolobo's keen whip whistled left and right as he walked.

He strode into his hut, dropped his whip, and flung himself on his skin bed, and his principal wife came to him.

"Lord, will you eat?" she asked, but he was asleep.

He woke as the shadows were lengthening, and sent for Gini-Gini, his own brother, and the one man he trusted. Gini-Gini came into the big hut expectantly.

"O Mofolobo," he greeted, "I see you. Where are all the soldiers of this city?"

"In hell, I think," said Mofolobo indifferently, "for they are great runners, and it is said that slow men do not reach the devil place."

"What of the white man?" asked Gini—Gini, and Mofolobo shivered.

"He is the meat of the Holy One, and that is what saved him. For on his face were two wonderful marks, such as the Old Woman makes upon her meat. Also—" his voice quavered a moment "—there was tchu in the city before we came."

Now, the tchu, as all men know, are intimates of spirits and ghosts, and are the especial familiars of the Devil Woman of Limbi. There was a special reason why tchu should be dreadful to Mofolobo.

"O ko," said his shocked brother, "that was a bad palaver. But you, Mofolobo, who are so great a one, and who have studied mysteries so that you are as wise as the Old Woman herself, how is she terrible to you?"

And again Mofolobo shivered and did not reply.

His brother sat cross-legged on the bed. He was a loquacious man and a great gossip.

"Tchu I have never seen—" he shuddered conventionally "—but they must be terrible to witness. Some say that men go blind when they see them, and they are certainly very holy ones, being the spirits of the dead whom the Old

Woman has killed. And they say that if you touch them snakes come from your ears, and your blood drips slowly from your fingers, and you are cursed, and will one day shrivel and shrivel until you become a little fish."

The back of Mofolobo was turned to the talker. He had cast off the skin about his middle when he came in to sleep, and he was searching his discarded dress. Presently he found what he wanted, stuffed in a pocket on the inner side of the skin. It was a flat piece of wood bearing certain black designs.

"This I brought from the city of Rimi-Rimi," he said, "being certain devil—marks which the white man has made; and perhaps it will bring me good fortune."

Gini-Gini looked curiously and uncomprehendingly at the signs on the wood.

"These are made with the burnt end of a stick," he said wisely. "I have never seen such magic before. If you keep this thing, Mofolobo, it will make you rich."

"So I think," said Mofolobo, and tucked away the wood into the pocket where he had found it.

He lifted up the skin and seemed in some doubt. Then he cast off the cloth about his waist and put the skin in its place.

"This night I go into the forest, Gini-Gini," he said, "to learn new mysteries."

Gini-Gini moved uncomfortably, yet was in such awe of his brother that he did not give expression to his thoughts. It was while the chief was collecting his spears that Gini-Gini plucked up courage.

"O Mofolobo," he said, "what is this magic in the forest? For it seems you go there very often, and none see your beautiful face for a moon."

"I have a powerful ju—ju," said Mofolobo.

"They say—" began the other, but lacked courage to finish.

"All frogs croak in the same tone," said Mofolobo contemptuously. "They say nothing to me, by death!"

Gini-Gini lowered his voice and came nearer his kinsman.

"O Mofolobo," he said in a low tone, "some men say that in the dark forest, where the devils and the bushmen live, there is a great hut and a woman —"again he hesitated,"—who is not of our colour, Mofolobo."

The other stared at him with a cold, paralysing stare.

"O Gini—Gini," he said softly, "When they say, I do not hear. When you speak I hear well. I love you Gini-Gini, because you are the son of my own mother and father, though my father had a this-way-that-way mind upon the subject, since my mother had a lover, Supusu, and because you are my brother my arm

does not go mad when you speak. But you will not speak again of this matter."

And the brother became a humble subject.

"Lord," he said, "I bury my words."

"That is good," said Mofolobo. "Now we will eat."

It was dark when he started off on his solitary prowl through the forest, and he struck off at they city eastwards of the village which, as all men know, leads to nowhere but the forest of ghosts, and Gini-Gini went with him to the edge of the wood.

Now the people of his village hated their chief and tyrant with hatred of impotent hands and bitter hearts, and they spat secretly after him when they saw him pass, and the women whose husbands had gone beyond view cursed him righteously, though it is true that many of them never desired to see their husbands again.

And when they had cursed him, they came and walked under the dilapidated platform between the four trees, and stepped over the bones that the wind had blown to the ground, and their hatred was fortified.

None hated him worse than Milini, his own favourite wife, who, could he but have read her heart, would have shared the fate of the fifteenth wife. And because he favoured her, he had, in the days of his loving, taught her many curious arts of woodcraft. He had trained her to walk a trail so that not even the leaves beneath her feet would creak or crackle under her, and he had taught her to walk with a certain sideway motion that made her walk more noiseless; and all these things she stored in her memory.

When Mofolobo left his kraal and crossed with his brother to the edge of the great forest, Milini stole silently behind him; and when she saw the two brothers stop to talk at the beginning of the wood, she crouched down behind a tree, and was there when Gini-Gini came back chanting the invocation to ghosts, which men are not ashamed to use on dark nights and in lonely places.

She waited until he was out of sight then arose and went swiftly, but noiselessly, on the track of her husband. He, for his part, made no attempt at quiet. Instinctively, he stepped lightly, but he did not go out of his way to adopt the secret walk he had taught his wife. She heard him muttering and chanting as he went, and once he stopped and threw out his arms towards a dead tree which the lightning had blasted.

"O M'shimba M'shamba," she heard him say, "tell me your magic, for I am very wise, and soon shall be wiser than the Old Woman, the devil. And one day I will sit in her wonderful cave and rule the world."

In spite of herself. Milini shuddered at these dreadful words, for was not Mofolobo setting himself up as a god? She drew in her breath quickly at the

awfulness of his presumption.

"O ghosts who live in this wood," he went on, "and because of your fearful presence no man dare walk, see me, Mofolobo, who has many magical thoughts."

It was true, as he said, that none walked in this wood because of the spirits; nor, was it commonly believed, did any animals live here, or birds or even the little white-whiskered monkeys. Mofolobo did not fear devils nor, for the matter of that did Milini, his wife, though she feared her husband, and everything time he paused in his walk, she dropped her hand on the razor edge hunting-knife which she had been sharpening for two years.

He had not far to go. The reputation which the forest enjoyed, no less than his own reputation, ensured him freedom from the observations of the curious. He struck off at right angles to the path, and she heard the swish of the bushes as he passed through them.

She followed more cautiously, worming her way along the ground under the bushes as he had taught her, and came again within view of him as he was mounting a little hillock. It was a patch in the midst of the forest free from trees.

Moreover, she had a skyline, and could see the edge of a hut set upon the slope of the hill, and it was to this hut that Mofolobo was going.

She approached the hut cautiously and she thought she the rattle of iron. A second later she was sure. She knew that sound and all that it signified. It was a favourite practice of Mofolobo to hold a prisoner with a long steel shackle which allowed him to move a dozen paces and no farther. She saw him stoop and pick up the chain, which was fastened to a stake outside the hut, and gather the loose links in his hand. Then he dropped them with a crash and walked in through the door.

Milini waited for an hour, not daring to cross the clearing, where she would be easily seen. But she learnt many things, and at last, satisfied, she went back along the forest path and came to her hut.

Hers was the best of all the huts. Grass mats hung upon the wall, and there was the skin of a leopard for her feet to rest upon, and a fine bed. Into this bed she turned, and was asleep when Mofolobo came in. At first she was in a flurry of fear, for she thought that Mofolobo had known she had followed him, since it was not usual for him to come back so soon after he had been to the forest to practise his mysteries.

"Lord, lord," she stammered, "do you need me?"

"Woman, get me warm cloth such as women wear," he said, and kicked the fire in the centre of the hut to a blaze.

She saw that he was agitated beyond the ordinary, and hurried to do his bidding, collecting such strips of cloth as she could find.

When she had given these to him and he had put them under his arm, she watched him go out of the village, peering round the edge of her door, and knew that he bad taken the clothes to the woman who was in the forest.

Just as the day dawned somebody else came into her hut, and she sprang up in terror, gathering her cloth about her, for this man's face was the face of a white man, and looking over his shoulder, she saw soldiers carrying guns.

"O woman," said Sanders. "I seek Mofolobo, and they tell me he sleeps in this hut."

"Not in my hut this night, lord," she said, taking courage, for he neither whipped her nor put his fingers in her eyes, as according to tradition white men did. "I think Mofolobo has a better hut than mine."

Sanders did not understand her.

"With what wife shall I find him?" he asked.

"Lord, he is with no wife," said a trembling voice at his elbow, "but is gone to practise this great magic in the forest."

It was Gini-Gini the brother, aroused by the advent of the soldiers and in a sweat to plead the cause of his father's son.

"I have heard of this magic," said Sanders, and his words had an acrid flavour, "and because of this magic have I come in my ship to the shore and on my feet through this forest, for I desired to make a palaver with Mofolobo."

"Lord, he is not here" said Gini-Gini. "But I will tell the beater of the village drum to make a sound for him."

"That you will not do," said Sanders, "for the beater of your village is being beaten by my soldiers, having attempted to send an alarm into this village."

Then he saw something in the woman's face, a light in her eyes, a blazing eagerness, and caught the swift look she threw to Gini—Gini.

"For you, man," said Sanders, turning to the brother, "this palaver is finished. Go to your hut."

"But, lord—"

Sanders raised his stick, and Gini—Gini did not wait, but went out of the hut, his body curved forward as though he feared for that part on which the stick promised to fall.

"Now, woman," said Sanders, "speak quickly and speak truly, for I am hot for Mofolobo."

"Lord, he is truly in the forest," said the woman Milini, his wife, "doing

certain things."

"O ko," said Sanders ironically.

"Lord, it is no magic he makes, Mofolobo, my husband, though it is said he is a great magician. I know he is very cruel."

She led Sanders from the hut and pointed to the platform and the four high trees; and Sanders, who had seen such things before, nodded. Then a horrible thought occurred to him.

"Tell me, woman," he said huskily, "what manner of person is this?"

"Lord, there is none at all save bones," said the woman. "She was Mofolobo's wife."

"A woman of your people?" asked Sanders, scarcely above a whisper. And when Milini nodded, he drew a long breath. He asked her her name, and she told him.

"Now, Milini," he said kindly, "you shall speak to me, and I shall be strong for you against Mofolobo and all manner of people."

"Then I will tell you, lord. Mofolobo is a dog," she said passionately, and told Sanders certain things which cannot be put down here, and Sanders listened with a little grimace of pain.

"Now, I am sorry for you, Milini," he said. "Tell me now of the magic in the forest."

"Lord, there is no magic," she said. "But this man has a hut, and in that hut is a woman, chained by the leg, and to her he goes."

Sanders's face was white and drawn.

"How long has this woman been there?" he said, and his voice sounded strange in his own ears.

"For many moons, I think," said Milini, "for all that time has Mofolobo gone to her, though I did not know of the hut till this night. Lord, I remember," she said suddenly. "It was when he came back from the Old King's city. There had been a great palaver, and Mofolobo and many others chopped a certain god-man—"

Sanders sat down on a stool and covered his face with his hands and groaned, and the woman looked down at him in amazement. Presently he looked up, and his face was the face of an old man.

"Tell me, Milini, is this woman—alive?"

Milini nodded. "Lord, she is alive," she said, "for I heard her scream."

Sanders got up and hitched his belt. He took out his long-barrelled automatic and slipped back the jacket. Then he pulled out two black magazines and

looked at these also, and the woman watched the proceedings with interest.

"You shall lead me to this place, Milini, where your husband is," he said wearily.

"Lord, I hate this man," she said, and her bosom rose and fell with the intensity of her hate.

"Soon he will be too dead for hate." said Sanders. "Come."

She went out and led the way. Sanders and six of his soldiers walked behind, the rest being left in the village; and she led them unerringly, though no path was visible, on the long way she had trodden the night before, and once, when she stopped and looked back, thinking that she walked too fast for the white man, he was at her heels, and said, "Go on!"

They came in course of time to the bushes where Mofolobo had turned off, and Sanders saw how well the place had been chosen, for it seemed that they were still in the midst of the thick forest.

She went through the bushes, Sanders behind her, and along by a little stream, and then unexpectedly they came to open ground. There was the little hillock and the square hut.

"You have done your part," said Sanders. "Now, I tell you, Milini, that this night you shall put dust upon your body and green leaves about your waist, and you shall dance the Dance of the Gone."

"Lord," she said, "I have never danced with such gladness as I shall dance tonight. But why do you hate Mofolobo, whom you do not know, and who has not beaten you, or done any of those things of which I told you?"

Sanders did not explain. He could not tell of the missionary and his daughter, or of Mofolobo, who ran into the bushes and came out wiping his spears, that none of his people should suspect the capture he had made.

"These things are magic, woman," he said, and looked round.

He had not come alone with his soldiers. The headman and certain of the villagers had followed in the wake of the party, and now stood grouped at the opening of the woods. These carried no arms. That insatiable curiosity of the natives had led them, and Sanders had no thought to send them back, for he wanted all men to see the punishment.

He crossed to the foot of the hill and went up quickly, his barefooted soldiers, their rifles at the ready, flanking him left and right. The door of the hut was closed. He saw the end of the chain passing beneath it. It was strange that there should be a door at all, but the maker had constructed a rough screen of plaited straw which hung on hinges of skin.

Mofolobo had neither seen nor heard, and he was talking. Sanders waited an

instant at the door to listen.

"Woman, you shall tell me more," said Mofolobo, "for did I not get you warm cloth because of the cold and the gurgles in your breast. You shall tell me of the magic of your people—"

Sanders lifted his foot and kicked open the door.

"Come out, Mofolobo!" he said in a cracked voice.

He heard a scuffle and the clank of spear handles as they were gathered together. Then Mofolobo leapt out into the open, his shield raised, his spear poised. For a second he glared into Sanders's eyes, and then Sanders shot him dead.

The body sprawled at his feet, but still he stood hesitating to enter the hut. And then, with an effort that made the perspiration pour from his temples, he crossed the threshold and stopped.

There was a woman sitting on a bed. A broad link of the chain was about her ankle, and she did not look up, for she was swaying and shaking with a fit of coughing, and, despite the warm cloth about her shoulders, she was shivering as with an ague.

Sanders stood spellbound, for this girl was black, and obviously negroid. Presently she looked round slowly at the Administrator.

"O man," she said feebly, "I am very sick, and Mofolobo has left me here for a moon, and I am now newly starved."

"Woman, who are you?"

"Lord, he took me," she said listlessly, "to learn all the mysteries of the Old Woman."

She walked slowly toward him. Sanders backed through the door. The group which he had left at the bottom of the hill were now standing about the body of Mofolobo, and they turned as the woman came out. One look they gave her, and then, with a yell, the men and the leader alike fell flat upon their faces. Sanders gripped the newest man and pulled him up.

"Speak, fool!" he said roughly. "Why do you fall at the sight of a girl?"

"Lord," muttered the man—it was Gini-Gini, and he had forgotten the existence of his brother—"this woman is tchu—tchu!"

Sanders looked round in astonishment. He saw the marks on the woman's forehead—the same marks as he had seen on her who had come to him one night and had marked him for death.

"Lord, that is true," said the tchu, "for I was a mystery who carried the word of the Old One, and men feared me—all men save Mofolobo, who seized me on

the night that Fergisi was chopped, that I might tell him the mysteries. For, lord, this Mofolobo desires to sit in the cave of the Old Woman and be a god."

Sanders looked down at the dead man, and drew a long, sobbing sigh. "O Mofolobo," he said, "now by all the rules of these people you deserved your death, and by my rules also do you deserve death, and you came up against me with not Kofolaba, yet I would not kill you now."

"Lord, this man deserved death many times," quavered one of the spectators, "for it is very terrible for any man to look at the tchu, and he has touched her and beaten her, I think, and worse."

Worse it was, according to the girl's account. Sanders found no just cause for revising his hate.

They sent back to the village to get a man to release the girl from the clasp about her ankle, and Sanders had time time to discover many things about Mofolobo.

"This man had certain white magic also," said the woman, and she took gingerly from beneath her bed a flat piece of wood and dropped it on the fire, dusting her hands.

"What magic was that, O woman?" asked Sanders, with a smile.

His relief was greater than he knew.

"It was white magic, lord," said the woman, "being wood with certain devil-marks which white men had made. Mofolobo brought it from the city of the Old King."

"Devil—marks?"

He stooped and picked the shaving of wood from the fire. It was already blackened and scorched, but in some places the writing was discernible, and in one place he was able to see that the letters had been written with a blackened stick.

He carried the wood to the light and read, and, as he read, the room seemed to spin round.

..NDE..

..IANA ..R.USON TER.I.L. DANGER

....AVE YOU .....AN OF LIMBI MIT.

SA.RI..... DAY OF LOOKING

Diana Ferguson was alive! The letter must have been written within the past seven days.

"Lord," said the girl, who was looking at him curiously, "is that, too, a mystery?"

"Woman," said Sanders, breathing hard and pocketing the still-warm wood, "it is the greatest of all the mysteries."

VII. — THE WOMAN BOFABA

A CAPTAIN of the Hill was Dobolimi, and taking rank with a chief, for he governed nine thousand of Rimi-Rimi's citizens. But his own hut he did not govern, because of the woman Bofaba, his lovely wife. She had flaunted him in secret, and now she flaunted him openly.

"For the Old One is dead, and the White Man has come, therefore I have no fear," she told her lover, a warrior of the Old King's Guard and a majestic personage, who won women's hearts by his contempt of them.

"Woman," said her lover, "you are fortunate in me, for if Dobolimi speaks spitefully to me, I will smash his head."

So what veil of secrecy she had hung before her perfidy she cast aside, and when her husband, a mild man who loved her strangely, spoke to her in reproof, she threw a pot at him before all the suburb.

"If the Old King lived, you should die," he told her; "but there is a new law here, and I will go today to the palaver of Sandi and speak for myself."

In some circumstances the untutored native employs the identical parabole of his refined white brother, and she replied that, for her part, he could go to the Devil Place.

"O man," she mocked, "who go to this palaver of Sandi? K'luba, the teller of stories, and Bosufumasi, the maker of riddles, so that the people will hand-laugh at Sandi! This I know. Now, what riddle will you ask, Dobolimi?"

"I shall ask of him the riddle of you," said her husband, "and if he gives me no good word, I will come back with my two brothers, who hate you, and you will not be."

Bofaba was frightened until she remembered her majestic admirer, who was a high man.

That day Sanders called to him all captains of districts—Masters of Hills they were termed, because the sections of Rimi-Rimi stood upon hills—and the captains of districts, who were never consulted except when a question of taxation was in dispute, came importantly; for they were not warriors, but stout little chiefs, who had never been consulted within the memory of man. And when they were all together in the great space before the king's hut, the Masters of Hills and their drummers and their keepers of grain and the like, Sanders addressed them.

"Chiefs," he said, "you are wise men, who know the strength and the cunning of all your people, and I wish that you would serve me."

"O ko," said one fat chief, "this white man wishes us to give him something."

Sanders heard the interruption, but diplomatically ignored it.

"From each of the twelve districts of Rimi-Rimi you shall send me the best makers of huts and weavers of straw and thatchers of roof, and you shall each contribute the straw and the wood I desire, for I am going to build a great Palace house in this space and here I and the king I make shall sit down and give laws so that all may live comfortably.

"Lord," said one of the deputation in dismay, "we heard you were not staying with us and our hearts were glad."

"I am staying with you," said Sanders, without a smile, "and if your hearts are not glad, your backs will be sore."

In two hours they had sent to him the best of their artisans, and Sanders, with the top of his walking-stick, drew a plan upon the ground.

"And where I put a leaf, you shall make a door," he directed them, "and where I lay a bamboo stick, you shall make me a fine window."

All the builders and the architects and the weavers of strawy consulted with one another, and one came to Sanders.

"Lord, we cannot do this," he said, "because, if we make a house, you will stay with us. Therefore my friends and my brothers have said: 'We will not make this house, but go back to our homes.'"

"Take this, man," said Sanders, and handed him a long, light bamboo pole. "Now stand here—" he indicated a spot "—and hold the pole straight above your head."

The man did as he was bid.

"And here you shall stand," said Sanders, and tonight I will spread a cloth over the pole and I will speak under it. If you let your hands bend, or do not stand still, my soldiers will beat you until you are sick."

"Lord," said the man, "I think it would he easier to build your house."

"So I think," said Sanders. And here and there ended all labour unrest.

Sanders was in some difficulty. Three times had he endeavoured to find a king for this wayward people, and once or twice a king had discovered himself, with disastrous consequences. The people were quiet, accepted his judgments without question, and even sent from Tofolaka and Bubujala—the most turbulent tribes of the kingdom—requests for a judgment in a matter—it was the inevitable divorce palaver—upon which the local chiefs did not agree.

Now he was to hold his first judgment palaver, an event of some importance. Before the king's hut three chairs had been placed, and already a crowd of litigants and curious spectators were squatting in a half-circle about them. Bones and Hamilton, resplendent in their new uniforms, came ashore for the great talk, and Sanders met them on the beach, for he was particularly anxious to see Bones.

In some respects Sanders had an extraordinary faith in his subordinate. Captain Tibbetts was erratic, his judgments erred at times on the side of wildness, but there could be no question of his native shrewdness, and time and time again Sanders had been pleasantly struck by the amazing sanity of Bones's point of view.

And late on the previous night he had handed to Bores a chip of wood inscribed with certain devil-marks that had come to him in a most surprising manner in the hut of one Mofolobo, recently deceased, having died very quickly for his many crimes.

On that chip of wood had been written a message and that message was from Diana Ferguson, who, four years before, had disappeared and, as it was believed, had died, following the destruction of her father's mission house by the Great King's orders.

"Well, Bones?" he asked anxiously.

Bones shook his head. "It's a jolly old mystery to me, Excellency." he said.

He carried the wood wrapped in a handkerchief, and this he undid carefully. Sanders took the wood. It had been burnt on Mofolobo's fire, and only certain letters were visible.

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..IANA ..R.USON TER.I.L. DANGER

....AVE YOU .....AN OF LIMBI MIT.

SA.RI..... DAY OF LOOKING

"Of course, sir, it's addressed to you," said Bones. "The first word is 'Sanders,' then there's a space where a word or two has been burnt out. This is my construction of it."

Bones took a paper from his pocket and read

"To Sanders. I am Diana Ferguson, and I am in terrible danger. Have you seen or heard of the old woman of Limbi? I am to be admitted to sacrifice on the Day of Looking."

Sanders took the slip from his hand.

"There's something in that." he said, "and I should say that the 'sa.ri' stands for

'sacrifice'. We may get something out of this palaver. Has Kufusa returned?" he asked Hamilton.

"No, sir," replied Hamilton.

"Is that the man you sent to the Old Woman's camp?"

Sanders nodded. "I was not without anxiety to discover the day I am to be executed," he said dryly, for he had the marks of one reserved by the Old Woman for slaughter.

He led the way back to the palaver place, and found the crowd at his feet. There were many there who had genuine grievances for discussion. There were not a few who came to test the genius and tolerance of their new lord, and hardly had the three men seated themselves when one, who was known through the five territories for the excellence of his riddles, stood up.

"Lord," he said, "it is said that you are very wise in your head, and I have come to ask you this. Once in the Old King's garden were nine trees, and on each tree there were nine pineapples. Now, a monkey came to each..."

It was a variant of the ancient herring-and-a-half problem which has puzzled many children.

"O man," said Sanders. "it seems that you think this is a marriage feast, where the asker of riddles puts cunning questions to the foolish. Take this man. Abiboo, and lay him out."

They strapped the puzzler to the ground, and he howled dismally.

"There were so many monkeys", said Sanders, and signalled the sergeant of Houssas, who had turned back his cuffs and was whistling a stout cane. "Nine," said Sanders when the last stroke of the rattan fell. "Tell me, O man, do I speak truth?"

"Lord, you speak truth," said the rueful purveyor of clever sayings. "Now, the last time I asked this riddle I spoke of three monkeys, but I said nine to your lordship, that it should be harder."

"It was harder for you," said Sanders. "And harder yet for him who follows, unless he makes a palaver."

There were four or five other clever ones in the crowd, but they did not ask questions.

Then came a flood of genuine grievances and Sanders listened patiently and judged with extraordinary swiftness—extraordinary, indeed, to the men who were used to day-long palavers, for the Administrator cut short many flights of eloquence and came quickly to the point and to his decision.

Then arose Dobolimi the husband of Bofaba. Sanders saw that he wore half—monkey tails, which were the marks of a type of chieftainship. In this land, he

had discovered, there were two kinds of chiefs. There were the fighting captains and the civic chiefs, who held a position analogous to that of a mayor of a more civilized community. These men commanded no regiments, though they had a force of their own to carry their rulings into effect, and they were mainly concerned in the collection of taxes, in the adjustment of domestic grievances, and with other such useful and uninteresting matters.

"Sandi, I stand—" said Dobolimi, and Sanders jerked his head sideways in acknowledgement. "Master, I do not know the law of the white lords," said Dobolimi, "It seems that I am a very ignorant man. But the Old King's laws I know and I obeyed. Also I have given judgment under his hand. Now he is dead, and you, lord shall give me your law, for my mind is all-ways. This I say truly, that I was the Old King's man."

"It shall not be against you, chief," said Sanders, impressed with the man's honesty, "for there is only one law in all the world, and that is the law of rewarding that which is right and punishing that which is wrong."

"Then you make me happy," said Dobolimi simply, "for I will tell you what is wrong with me, and you shall judge."

And he told the story of an errant and shameless wife, of a woman who held him to mockery, and had even threatened him in heated moments with the vengeance of her majestic lover.

"And this man is tall and strong, lord. Also he is highly favoured, being of the king's own guard, and he is the son of the brother of Kabalaka himself, whom his lordship with the eye of glass slew in the Hut of the Chosen."

"This is a bad palaver, Dobolimi," said Sanders. "It seems your woman is without any niceness, and as for the man who puts your authority to shame, though he be as tall as the mountains and as strong as the swift waters that run through the devil's hands, yet I will break him. Where is this great warrior?"

"Lord, he is there."

Dobolimi pointed to the warrior, who had come to the outskirts of the palaver crowd, either from sheer idle curiosity and to carry stories to the wife of Dobolimi, or to intimidate the chief in his evidence.

"Man, come ye here," said Sanders, and the warrior swaggered forward and stood before the Administrator, very stiff and erect and proud and more majestic than ever, for the pads upon his hair were of red clay, and his great bared torso shone and glistened with fragrant oil.

Sanders rose and held out his hand for the bright spear which the man carried as a sign of his office and his honour, and that spear had been polished so that it shone like silver. Sanders took the spear in his hand and broke it across his knee, which has ever been the sign of degradation of all military castes.

"Go out, man," said Sanders, "and join those who labour to erect my fine hut. And you shall carry water for the workers, and if tomorrow there is oil on your body and clay on your hair, I will whip you till your skin is dry."

And when the man slunk away Sanders sent for Bofaba, that proud wife, and she came defiantly.

"I see you, Bofaba." said Sanders. "You, who are a chief's wife and a favourite wife by my understanding, have done an evil thing. There, fore for the space of one moon you shall be a sweeper in my fine hut like a common woman and all your bracelets and your beautiful ornaments shall be taken away from you, so that you may feel the shame that Dobolimi, your husband, has felt."

The woman said nothing but the eyes that were fixed on Sanders blazed with her hate. For this is true of all peoples in the world who speak and think- -that hate is the child of fear, and that you cannot hate unless you quake. And surely she quaked under the blue eyes of the white man.

The palaver finished, for Sanders believed in these conferences ending on a high note. He was restless and a little irritable. Hamilton, who knew him and loved him, saw the signs, but made no attempt to discover his mind. He walked alone to one of the suburbs, and Hamilton did not follow him, knowing that at such moments Sanders preferred solitude and his own thoughts.

"Do you know what I think?" said Bones, who, too, was watching his chief with a troubled face.

"I don't know, and have never known," said Hamilton, relieved to find a target for his own irritability.

"One of these days, dear old Major," said Bones soberly, "you'll wake up, dear old thing, and find that I've got a head. And you'll be a bit surprised, jolly old sceptic."

"You never spoke a truer word than that, Bones," said Hamilton, "But what was it that you were thinking?"

"I was thinking that this young Diana business is getting on sad old Excellency's nerves. Here's the point I want to make." He tapped Hamilton's chest with his finger. "When the Fergusons were chopped by the naughty Old King—may he roast in hell!" he added in Arabic—"Sanders, from what I've heard, was up in the Ochori."

"Yes," said Hamilton after a moment's pause, "I think he was."

"Isn't it likely," said Bones, "that she heard Sanders was there, wrote the message, and sent it off by some faithful old aborigine before she was captured and killed?"

Hamilton was silent. "You mean that this message is years old?"

Bones nodded. "Why not?" he demanded quietly,

"That is a view, of course, which is quite maintainable," said Hamilton." But Sanders is convinced that the girl is in this country now."

Bones shook his head. In moments such as these, all that was flippant in Bones's nature seemed to evaporate and leave a very calm practical man, though his mannerisms of speech remained.

"Only one man could have told us," he said quietly, "and that was naughty old Mofolobo, and our impetuous Excellency shot him up."

"It is an idea," said Hamilton. "I'll put the idea to Sanders."

"Don't say it's my idea unless it's right," said Bones calmly. "If it turns out that my view is correct, I'll mention the fact, dear old thing."

"I've no doubt you will," said Hamilton.

"Bones is going back to the ship," he explained, when Sanders came up, watching the lanky striding figure swinging towards the beach.

"Do you feel like a six-mile walk before tiffin?" asked Sanders abruptly. He had come back accompanied by a man whom he had requisitioned in the course of his wanderings, and when Hamilton assented: "I'm going out to the place where the Fergusons had their home. I've intended going there ever since I arrived in the city. This man knows the place." He indicated the native walking ahead of them.

"I wondered whether you intended going." said Hamilton. "It occurred to me that there would be likely clues in the place of these unfortunate people. Naturally the folks who chopped them would loot their house and, I suppose, would burn it, but it would be very unusual if they came back to the place after the first day."

It was as Hamilton had said, for in all the native territories are the dead invested with special qualities, so that even the house of a common man is sacred, and is allowed to rot under the rains and the storms until it collapses and is hidden from view by the growing jungle.

The way carried them out to the north of the village, across a bare plain which looked like an elephant's playing-ground, but was, explained Sanders, the old camping-ground of the king's guard; and after an hour's tramp they came to the crest of a gentle ridge, and here they halted. Far away to the north was an unbroken stretch of forest land, above which, in the distance, rose one gaunt, grey hill. Sanders gazed on this long and earnestly.

"That is Mount Limpisi," he said, "the home of that ancient lady who will one day—" He did not finish his sentence, but Hamilton guessed just what fate

was in store for the Devil Woman of Limbi.

It was a sombre, desolate hill; not even distance nor the softening qualities of the heat haze in which it shimmered detracted from its unloveliness. They resumed their walk, following a clearly defined track which meandered through a wood of stunted trees resembling the juniper.

On the way Sanders was unusually communicative.

"I'm a little worried about supplies," he said "—I mean munition supplies. I hoped to get the country settled without anything like a war, but that now seems impossible. We must open up communication with the old territory through the Ochori, and as soon as I've got this infernal king palaver settled I intend setting up posts on the mountain road. There is only one road out, unfortunately."

"I know," said Hamilton, "and it leads through the Tofolaka country," he added significantly.

Sanders said nothing but he shared Hamilton's misgivings. The Tofolaka were the most turbulent of the Old King's tribes, and had been ominously quiescent. But even more ominous was the fact that the Chief of the Tofolaka people had sent no embassy to the city. Moreover, there were stories, which had come through Sanders's spies, of war palavers throughout the country.

"The Tofolaka cannot wait," said Sanders, answering Hamilton's unspoken thought. "The question of securing the path is one we must take in hand haec dum."

The path which they were following was curving now to the river, and they caught glimpses of a broad stream between breaks in the wood. Suddenly the guide stopped and pointed.

"Lord, it was here," he said, and Sanders stared, for there was no sign of house or even a cleating. The elephant grass formed a thick belt to the water's edge, and sturdy little trees made a plantation which seemed to have existed for years.

Sanders walked slowly into the grass and began poking around with his stick. "Yes," he said, "here is the place—" and pointed to a rotting roof-tree.

He followed its direction, and came to a crumbled heap of native bricks overgrown with weeds. Then he took off his coat, and the native drew a long-bladed chopper from the sheath at his waist and handed it to the white man. As for him, he would not touch or help, being, as he explained frankly, fearful of ghosts.

The two men worked for an hour. The sun was hot and the work was heavy. Before they had been at their task very long, both men had stripped off their shirts and were working bare to the waist.

They found a trace of furniture, a battered kettle, a mouldy book, and bits of china plate which had been overlooked by the looters. Sanders knew the ways of the missionaries, and began digging by the side of the heap of bricks where he knew the fireplace had been, and presently he was rewarded.

The find was not a very important one; it was a rusty tin cash-box, the lid of which he wrenched off without effort. Inside were a large number of papers, most of which were undecipherable, and which were evidently correspondence relating to the mission.

At the bottom of the box were three English banknotes for five pounds and three photographs, one of which was evidently a group. Here the moisture had played havoc with the picture. The other he recognized as a portrait of Mrs. Ferguson, and the third, which was practically untouched by the action of the soil, was a full-length cabinet picture of a girl in short frocks.

Sanders looked at the photograph thoughtfully. The child was pretty, and he guessed, by the mop of golden hair, that this was the "little woman with hair like corn" about whom he had heard.

"Pretty child," he said laconically, and handed the photograph to Hamilton.

Hamilton gazed at the picture fascinated. The beauty of this girl budding into womanhood was undeniable, and even an amateur photograph, as it apparently was, could not coarsen her ethereal loveliness. He gave the photograph back to Sanders. They dug a little more, without, however discovering anything that would help toward a solution of the girl's fate, and, slipping the photograph and the papers into his jacket pocket, Sanders re-dressed himself. On the way back Hamilton put forward Bones's theory, and Sanders was obviously impressed. "There is that possibility, of course," he said. "It's perfectly true, as Bones said, that I was in the Ochori at that time, and possibly the missionaries may have known that I was, comparatively speaking, close at hand But it seems to me that the writing is fresh. When I touched one of the letters, the charcoal came off on my fingers."

"It may have been taken into a hut and preserved by a native as a ju-ju," suggested Hamilton.

Sanders did not reply. They were nearing the village before he broke his long silence.

"Hamilton," he said, "we have a pretty stiff task in front of us, and if the Old Woman is as powerful as we think she is, and if the markings which have been put upon my forehead mean anything, I want you to understand that you are to take my place as leader of this expedition."

Hamilton looked at him, startled. "You don't think for one moment sir, that the Devil Woman of Limbi really will kill you?"

Sanders laughed shortly, "I don't know." he said, "but I do not rule out any possibility."

"But you cannot seriously think—"

"I think so seriously," said Sanders, "that I sent Kufusa to discover from the Old Woman and her guards just when this interesting event is likely to occur. And that is why the absence of Kufusa is worrying me a little."

As they came into the place before the king's hut, they saw that something unusual had occurred. There was a party of armed strangers waiting by the door of the hut, and around them, at a respectful distance, was a fringe of awe-stricken townsmen. Sanders pushed his way through the people, and at sight of him the leader of the strangers stiffened. There was no need to ask who he was. The clay-plastered hair, the oily body and the silvery spear in his hand told his calling; the girdle of half-tails and the broad-bladed elephant sword by his side his rank.

"O captain of soldiers," said Sanders, walking towards him, "why do you come to my hut with spears?"

"Man," said the warrior, "I am of the Limbi regiment of the king's guard, and am a captain of a hundred men who sit down at the terrible door of the Old Woman's house."

He was carrying something wrapped up in a square of rough-woven native cloth, Sanders noticed, and whispered two words in English to Hamilton.

"So I see," said Sanders. "Now tell me why you come with your five men and stand so haughtily before me, I who am lord of these lands."

"There is a greater lord, I think," said the man insolently, "and we who serve her say this—that you shall not send your spies into our land, asking evil questions about the Holy One, the Woman of Limbi—and if you do, behold!"

He let one corner of the cloth fall, and there rolled upon the ground at his feet a head. It was the head of Kufusa, the man Sanders had sent to the Old Woman's country.

"Him we found," said the chieftain, unconcernedly, "and burnt him till he spoke, saying that you had sent him. Afterwards we cut off his head."

"This also I see," said Sanders again. "O man, what do they call you in this land?"

"I am a captain of a hundred men," said the big chief proudly, "and I am very terrible in war, having slain all these." He ran his forefinger swiftly down a long line of nicks on his spear, and Sanders made a little grimace.

Until that moment he had not realized the extraordinary power which the Old Woman wielded. That she could send armed men with this insolence to him,

testified to the faith which these warriors had in the potency of her name. For now the captain of a hundred men was preparing to take his departure, having, as he thought, fulfilled the dignified service which carried no evil consequences to himself.

"Put down your spears, men," said Sanders softly, "for these two little guns which are in my hands are spiteful and quick as the lightning from M'shimba M'shamba, as also are those which are in my lord's hands by my side."

"I have heard of these little guns," said the chief, as he dropped his spear, an example which his fellows followed. "Now tell me why you do this terrible thing, for I am the Old Woman's messenger, and none dare stop me in my proud way."

The Houssas of the guard—Sanders had left six at the hut—came out and tied the six men scientifically.

"I also have a proud way." said Sanders. "As to you, friend, your way is the top of a tree where I hanged a great chief, and there you die this day, that all men shall see that the messengers of my pleasure are more sacred than captains of a hundred. And where you hang, man—and listen to this, you soldiers, who will not hang, for you shall go back to the Old Woman with this message—one day upon that same tree I will take the Devil of Limbi, be she man, woman, or ghost, be she the own child of M'shimba, and there she shall hang, by Ewa!"

The Old King's war-drums rolled that afternoon, and before the assembled city of Rimi-Rimi the swaying body of the captain of a hundred was hauled aloft for all men to see. And there it hung till sunset, when they let him down and took him to the middle islands in a canoe and buried him with proper rites.

That afternoon there was a new servant in the hut which Sanders occupied—a sullen woman with scowling brows, who swept listlessly, and seemed nothing now that all her ornaments of legs and arms had been taken from her by her husband. Sanders had placed her there instead of the two women who had hitherto been engaged in his service, partly because there was not sufficient work for two, and they fell to gossiping, to Sanders's annoyance when he took his hour's sleep in the afternoon, and partly because, though he had sentenced Bofaba to this menial office, he did not wish to emphasize her degradation by bringing her into contact with the common women.

At eight o'clock, when the orderly had put their dinner on the table in the hut, Sanders sent for Bofaba.

"Woman," he said, "you go now to the hut of your husband, there to sleep. And when the sun comes up you will return and make all things clean."

She shot one withering glance at him, then dropped her eyes. "Lord, it is better

that I hang like the big warrior," she said, "for now the people of the hill will laugh at me."

"They have laughed long at your husband, my woman," said Sanders.

Though she had been dismissed, she stood still, turning some matter over in her mind. "Lord," she said at last, "if I killed you, would the other lord hang me?"

"Be sure of that," said Sanders. "Also it is likely that I would kill you first and save my strong soldiers their unpleasant duty."

Then she went out and walked slowly to the hill, still turning matters over in her mind, for now she hated Sanders worse than she hated her husband, and she was resolved to kill him.

She sought out her lover, to condole and be condoled, but in his bitterness of spirit he struck her, and she hated Sanders worse.

It was a simple matter to get into the hut, despite all the precautions Sanders had taken after the last midnight visitation, and doubly easy because neither Hamilton nor Sanders was there. Bones had found certain shortages in his stores, and had sent for his superiors, and the conference which followed did not break up until one o'clock in the morning.

At midnight Bofaba, waiting in the dark hut, a long, sharp sword in her hand, somebody come in from the second door of the hut, and walked noiselessly to meet—

And then she saw with her sharp eyes that this was a woman, and drew a long breath and a very natural conclusion—by her code—at one and the same time. But because she did not wish to be betrayed, she asked in a rough voice—

"Who is there?"

And then a hand touched her face lightly, and she felt something wet strike her forehead twice, and heard a flutter of feet. She put up her hand and felt it sticky, and a horrible fear came upon her, and she ran out of the hut shrieking. The sentry at the door saw her go, and, knowing that Sanders had not come back, did no more than curse her for the noise she was making.

Up the hill she flew and into her husband's hut, and he, seeing the sword in her hand, reached for his spear. But in the hut she fell on her knees and turned to him a face that was grey with terror.

"Lord, lord," she cried, "what mark is this upon my head?"

He looked at her and howled his fear.

"Woman," he gasped, "you have been marked for death by the Devil of Limbi!"

She stared at him open-mouthed, then picked up the sword, and, before he could move, she had put the handle on the ground and the point at her heart, and had fallen forward, as many others had done who had been marked by the Devil Woman, and who preferred an instant pain of body to a long agony of waiting.

VIII. — THE KING FROM THE SOUTH

"LORD," said Dobolimi, "the woman my wife was marked for death, and died, I think, because she could not wait for the Day of Looking."

"The Day of Looking?" said Sanders quickly. "When is that?"

"Lord, it is on the ninth day after the new moon."

"How came she to be marked?"

"That I do not know, lord," said the man, "but I have spoken to a woman who was with her in all her wickedness, and therefore knew her heart, and it seems that Bofaba, my wife, went down into your hut to kill you, and the devil-marking came to her in your hut,"

Sanders was thoughtful. He had interviewed the sentry, and had heard the story of a shrieking woman who had rushed out through the doorway.

"In future I think we'll sleep on board the ship," said Sanders. "This infernal king's house is like a rabbit warren."

"What do you think happened?" asked Hamilton, and the Administrator hesitated.

"I think the lady with the marking ink came to—" He stopped.

"But she's already marked you," said Hamilton, with a smile.

"I rather imagine she came to mark you." said Sanders quietly.

"The devil she did!" said Hamilton.

They lunched that day upon the Zaire, having taken off their personal belongings.

"It's a curious thing nobody wants to mark me, dear old Excellency," said Bones.

"Even the Devil Woman jibs at you, Bones," said Hamilton, prodding some pickles.

"In re Devil Lady," said Bones, "I'll tell you a weird discovery I've made. It's a funny thing about me, dear old Excellency," he said, "but I always seem to get hold of some dinky little bit of information that other and so-called superior

brains—not casting any reflection upon your jolly old cranium, Excellency, but facts are facts—manage to miss."

"There are many queer things about this country," said Sanders, "and your perspicacity, Bones, is not the least queer of them."

Bones bowed.

"That wasn't intended as a compliment at all," explained Hamilton, and Bones bowed again.

"Well, what is it, Bones?" asked Sanders.

"Well, this is the queer thing," said Bones impressively. "And, mind you, when I say a thing's queer, it is queer. I'm one of those people with what you might describe as a normal mind."

"I might describe it so." said Hamilton, the temptation being irresistible, "but it is extremely unlikely."

"Go on, Bones," said Sanders, with a smile.

"In this strange an' unpleasant land," said Bones, "there are no witch- doctors."

The two men looked at one another.

"That is queer," said Sanders, "and what's more, it's true. I haven't heard of a witch-doctor palaver or met one of the gentlemen since I've been in the country."

"In every other territory with which I've been acquainted in a career arduous and marked, as it were," Bones rhapsodized, "by adventures ashore and afloat, and characterized—"

"Don't let us have a history of your life Bones, for the Lord's sake!" snapped Hamilton. "you're trying to say that you've never found a country without witch-doctors. Well, you only know one, and that's the old territory."

"It certainly is strange," said Sanders thoughtfully, "and I should imagine that is the secret of the Old Woman's power. She is all the witchdoctors in the country wrapped up in one, and has concentrated in her bands all their authority and power."

There was a man whom he kept a prisoner at large, a petty chief who had served at the Old King's court, and he sent for him from his comfortable quarters below.

"It is true, lord," said the man, "there are no witch-doctors in this land. And once, when a certain man named Gigini set himself up to do magical things, the Old King sent for him because the Woman of Limbi—" he shivered; all natives shivered at the mention of her name "—was very jealous of such doings. And the Old King put a sharp little snake in his mouth and sewed up

his lips."

"Cheery little fellow!" murmured Bones.

"What happens when the Old Woman dies?" asked Sanders.

"Lord," was the surprising and crushing retort, "the Old Woman has never died yet!"

The palaver would have ended there, but this prisoner, being a courtier, must needs ask a question which Sanders had asked himself a hundred times in the past twenty four hours.

"Lord." he said, "how will you find a king?"

"Who knows, man?" said Sanders, being sure himself that he did not know, though he was on the verge of knowing, a thought of his having taken such shape that a derision was near, "I have marked as king the chief of the Tofolaka people, who is by all accounts a warrior and the brother of the Old King's wife. Also M'seru, who is in that relationship; but M'seru is a feeble man and very sick, and, moreover, he has been corrupted by living so long in the Bad Village."

"Lord," said the man, "if you take the chief of the Tofolaka, then I tell you, you will have war. For the Fongini hate the Tofolaka, who have done many cruel things to them, and it is a saying in these parts that the snake and the Tofolaka live in the grass, and the snake dies of shame. Also for years we people of Rimi-Rimi have feared the Tofolaka because it was prophesied that some day a king would come from the south."

"They have set up a new chief of the Bubujala," said Sanders, to whom the legend was new, and the man spat.

"The Bubujala are great thieves," he said, "also they chop and eat men, which we people of Rimi-Rimi have never done. Now, how can you take one of such a shameful race and put as king above us, the proud people of Rimi-Rimi?"

"O man," said Sanders sarcastically, "what cause for pride have you in Rimi-Rimi?"

"Lord, we are proud that we we not as other people," said this heathen Pharisee.

Now, this discussion on the dearth of witchdoctors in the land came at an opportune moment, though this Sanders could not know. For down in Tofolaka a man had come boldly forth as a curer of the dead. Perhaps he had practised his arts secretly during the Old King's lifetime, for there was some report of his having raised a very dead man cala cala (which means long ago), but at the time he ascribed this achievement to the virtues of the Old Woman of Limbi, and it was said that he had whispered her dreadful name in his ear, and that the

deceased had thereupon sneezed and sat up, asking for food.

And when the Old King died, he went before the chief of his village—who was his brother from another woman, but by the same father—and very boldly he asserted, in a long and flowery oration, that all future miracles would be performed without assistance, and that he had no connection with any other business, so to speak.

The Old King was dead, and there was no authority in the land save that which was exercised with such disconcerting violence by three strange white men who had come into the country, Purporting to be the servants of a league, the native name for which being Many-who-speak-as-one, so this man was allowed to practise his arts.

There was a Pope in Rome and a Pope in Avignon, who exercised each his authority and seemed to get along very well, and although it is unlikely that this historical precedent was in the mind of Lobi N'kema, it was certain that for the moment he offered no rivalry to the Old Woman of Limbi, but rather spoke of her as his "sister," and hinted that he had received his inspiration from a source of wisdom which was common to the two. Also he claimed that in the dark hours of the night the Old Woman came to him—having made herself so small that she could be carried on the breast of a bat—and these two would talk together affably, as devil to devil, without pride or conceit.

Then he gave up his wives and returned to a small cave in the neighbourhood of his village—a piece of shameless plagiarism, but impressive. He demanded a guard of women, but this was denied to him for the time being. Nor was he allowed to remain undisturbed in his sanctuary, for when the chief, his brother, died suddenly, or appeared to have done so, lying stiff and motionless with closed eyes, they sent for Lobi the Monkey, and he came. He laid his hand on the heart of his "dead" brother and blew into his nostrils, and his brother woke and was exceedingly well.

There were many sceptics who would have preferred to have seen the experiments tried upon one who was not so closely related to the doctor, and others—these being refused admission by the woman of the brother's house when they came to make sure that he was dead—who spoke contemptuous words; and the leader of the opposition was cursed by Lobi in the most public manner. The next morning he was found in his hut with his throat cut, so that the curse seemed to have had some potency.

Then Lobi came into greater prominence, for the paramount chief of the Tofolaka sent word to all his people, and to his chiefs and headmen and high hunters and masters of land, that they should hold palavers touching the matter of the Old King and his successor, and it was a term of reference that they should decide upon his successor, choosing "the highest and greatest chief of

all the world, one who loved his people and his country, and was skilled in war and hated white men."

This description so accurately fitted the chief of the Tofolaka people that at a thousand palaver fires he was acclaimed as the only possible candidate for the office. To him in his great city came Lobi with strings of teeth about his neck and a necklace of little bones.

"I have heard of you, Lobi," said the chief, "and it seems to me that when I sit in Rimi-Rimi, and the Old Woman makes palaver with me because of your shameful pretensions, I must hand you to the skinners."

Lobi turned grey, but put on a bold face.

"Lord," he said, "last night I spoke to the spirit of the Old Woman, who is my friend. And she came to me under the wing of a bat, and she had made herself so small that she could sit upon my finger." And he held out his finger in proof, and the chief was uneasy. "And, lord," Lobi went on, "I spoke to her, saying: 'Sister-devil—' for we are brother and sister, lord '—Sister—devil, we will put M'ndi in the Old King's place, for he is the brother of the chief of the Tofolaka, who was cruelly slain by the white men and was himself marked for king.'"

"O ko," said M'ndi, fascinated. "That was a great talk. What said the Old One?"

Lobi cleared his throat lest the chief detect his nervousness, and knowing that his life depended upon the way in which M'ndi would take his next invention.

"Lord, she said that M'ndi was no king for her." he stated, breathless in spite of himself, and the chief's brows met.

"Death!" he said. That is a bad talk!"

"So I said, lord," said Lobi. "'Woman,' said I, 'go back to your bat and to your great cave, and do not come here again, for I tell you I, Lobi, great in magic and a raiser of dead men, as your lordship knows, will be M'ndi's friend!'"

The king was open-mouthed. "O Lobi," he said in a hushed voice, "you spoke to the Old Woman thus and you live?"

"I live, lord," said Lobi complacently. "For when the Old Woman threw lightning at me, I put up my shield, which was made for me by three blind ghosts, and the lightning turned to water and fell on the ground, and where it fell is a great hole, as I can show you, chief."

The chief thought a while. "Stay with me, Lobi," he said, "for I see that you are greater than the Old Woman."

Now came Lobi's supreme moment.

"Lord, the Old Woman will die," he said loudly, "but I will never die, for I am

immortal."

There was a silence.

Let curiosity, caprice, sheer lust of hurting stir the chief; let but a flicker of doubt trouble his mind, and Lobi was a dead man. And he stood, his blood like ice, the fear of death upon him, till the chief spoke, and when he spoke Lobi knew, from the quiver in his voice, that he had won.

"You shall sleep in my hut this night, Most Holy One," said the king.

Between M'ndi's city and the city of the Ochori is a distance of two hundred geographical miles. Between the two countries lies the impenetrable barrier of the Ghost Mountains, impenetrable save for the one narrow road which crosses its crest—a road which is no road for twenty miles on either side of the mountain, but a goat track which leads to a narrow, twisting ravine.

In the city of the Ochori dwelt a chief who had settled the problem of witch-doctors to his own satisfaction many years before. Bosambo of the Ochori was a foreigner to his people. He was, in fact, a Liberian Kroo boy who had escaped from a convict establishment in Monrovia, and, after walking hundreds of miles across a desolate and dangerous country, had sat down with the Ochori, the most timid tribe in all Africa, and had created a nation out of this unpromising material. And he had fought the warrior Akasava and the ruthless N'gmbi and the cunning Isisi, and incidentally, from time to time, his own people; for when he filled their stomachs with food and their hearts with courage, they had turned against him, and he had fought great battles with his northern people before he had crushed their aspirations for separate government and had disposed of their leaders.

He was a good servant of Government, and faithful, though constitutionally dishonest in small matters. He had made one incursion into the Great King's country, and by the favour of Sanders he had returned with his life and the woman who was to him more than life. They called her Fitema, and she was of the true faith, having been named "Fatima," and this comely, brown Arab girl was the light of Bosambo's eyes.

She sat at the door of her hut, rocking her second son upon her knee and watching Bosambo, whose eyes were roaming the sky. The chief's hut was so placed, like all chiefs' huts, that it commanded a view of the main street of the Ochori, and from where she sat she could see the women busy at the fires, preparing the evening meal.

"Lord," she said softly, "there is no sign of the little bird?"

Bosambo shook his head and came back to her.

"All things are with God," he said in Coast Arabic, "and is it not written in the Sura of the Djin that that which is looked for is never boasted about?"

"Lord," she said gently, "I do not think that is in the blessed Koran."

"Who knows?" said Bosambo vaguely.

And then the thing he had been looking for for twenty days came. The woman saw it first, pointed, and Bosambo looked up. A bird was wheeling round above the village—a tired bird that planed lower and—lower on outstretched wings. Bosambo pursed his lips and whistled. It was a shrill, unmusical whistle, but at the sound of it the pigeon dropped straight to his outstretched hand.

"O Kuku, little love." he chuckled, as he held the bird tenderly in his great paw, "now I did not think you would be the first to come, because you are so lazy. Bring food and water," he called in Bomongo, and he waited until these were brought, caressing the pigeon that lay in his hand with long, gentle strokes. They placed the seed and the water on the ground and only then did Bosambo slip the two rubber bands from the bird's leg and unroll the thin paper they held in place.

He smoothed the paper and walked out from the shadow of the hut, and slowly spelt out the message, which was in Arabic, and began—

"To the servant of God, Bosambo. Chief of the Ochori and Ranger of the Upper Rivers, on your house peace."

Bosambo read and re-read until he knew the contents of the letter by heart, then he walked by himself, the woman watching him anxiously until the sun went down. Presently he returned to her.

"Mother of my children," he said, dropping his huge hand on her head, "'Sandi has need of me and calls me to a great palaver."

The woman licked her lips. "Do you go alone?" she asked.

"With ten spearmen and no wife." said Bosambo. "And I am glad of this, my jewel, because the Old King's city has bad dreams."

"Go then, lord," she said, after a pause, "and I will hold the Ochori for you, for now all the races are at peace, and even the king of the Akasava has sent us presents, because he loves Sandi."

Ten minutes later Bosambo's lokati was sending its staccato message, calling for the "Sunrise Chiefs," they being the chiefs who, by starting immediately from their several homes, could reach the Ochori city by sunrise. In the morning Bosambo held his palaver, and his words were few.

"I go into the Old King's country by the mountains," he said, "and my woman Fitema sits in my place, and has the life of the highest men in her hand. For behind me, in this palaver, is Sandi."

"Bosambo," said one of the assembly, "why do you send for us to tell this? For

who knows whether you walk in or walk out of this land in these peaceful days, save at the tax times, when we all know that you are here?"

There was a smothered laugh at this, and when headmen laugh at their taxation the process of government is running very smoothly.

"I say this for my people and my village," the little chief continued, "that I am Fitema's man, and my shield is for her. For, Bosambo, your woman is a good one. She has no lovers and does not behave naughtily..."

After this the palaver developed into a complimentary exchange of views. In the night, when Bosambo was well on his way, the lokali of the Ochori city, which was a hollow tree-trunk of extraordinary thinness, beat out a long message, and the villages of the north took it up and sent it along, and even the drummers of Tofolaka repeated the message—though they did not understand it—in case it might be sent by one of the spirits that live in the Ghost Mountains.

The drummer of M'ndi heard, and brought his interpretation to his master, who was sitting at council with seven wise men.

"Lord, there is a long-long call, and it comes from the mountain, and by my cunning I understand it, though the rolls of the Ochori are strange and foreign."

"What does it say?" asked M'ndi.

"Lord, it says: 'I come. Make ready.'"

"That is a sign," said Lobi, who was one of the council. "For this lokali has been beaten by spirits. And I do not doubt that the splendid ghosts of whom I spoke, and who are well known to me, are with you in your enterprise, for all men know that beyond the mountains there is nothing but the end of the world and a few common herds of people."

The chief fingered the hair of his chin in a reflective but not unpleasant frame of mind.

"It has been said in this land, ever since the world began, that some day there would come a great king from the south," he said. He did not use the word 'south,' but an idiom which means 'On the left hand of the setting sun'. "Now, if your words are true, Lobi, then it is true that I am the man, for there is no country nearer the mountains than Tofolaka."

And then a great inspiration came to Lobi.

"Lord," he said, "lest any wicked man should rise and say 'I am the true king, for my village is farther south than the city of M'ndi', we will make a journey into the mountains, and I myself will talk with the ghosts for you."

The chief M'ndi was perturbed. "O ko, I do not love ghosts," he said, with a

distasteful grimace. "How can I look upon them and not go blind? Now, you know these beautiful people. Therefore you shall go up, and I will sit at the foot of the mountain and you shall carry their word to me. Besides," he added, and this was to the point, "I am too fat a man to climb hills."

They set forth in the dawn, the king and his counsellors and two regiments of a thousand spears. On the third day they sat down in a village to consider the pressing problem of supplies, for the country could not support the two thousand spears, as the agitated chiefs for miles around testified; and since M'ndi did not wish to begin by plundering the granaries, he sent back all his soldiers save two score.

It was not until the filth day that they came to the foot-hills of the mountain, for M'ndi had tarried in a village because of a certain dancing girl who had pleased him. The high ridges of the mountain were shrouded under clouds, a certain sign that the spirits were present in great strength and desired privacy. It was not a propitious moment, the witch-doctor explained, to make his call, but the next day, the cloud having disappeared, the camp was shifted to half-way up the mountain-side.

And then M'ndi, reflecting all one night as to whether his interests were wholly safe in the hands of a man who had been comparatively unknown to him a few weeks before, made a decision. Might not this companion and associate of devil, utilize the interview for his own advantage? And was it certain that Lobi would tell him all that happened?

"I will come with you he said," even to the very edge of this devil's land. For in the days of the Old King we went against the Ochori by this road, and none of us took hurt from the ghosts."

"Lord, you are wiser than most." said his companion seer, "and it will be good for you in the days to come. For who shall have gone nearer to the edge of the kingdom than you, M'ndi?"

They left their warriors alone at dawn and climbed the steep track. The going was rough and thing until they came to the S-shaped ravine at the very crescent of the mountain.

"I see no ghosts," said M'ndi.

The two men were alone, for M'ndi's disrespectful attitude towards ghosts was not shared by his counsellors or his soldiers.

"Lord, they are invisible," said Lobi, "yet in my wonderful eyes I see many. Look, lord, there is one—a very old ghost who is walking across the road."

"I see nothing," said M'ndi in truth. "O ko, Lobi! now I know that you have the true magic."

"And there," said the imaginative Lobi, pointing, "is is the ghost of the Old

King himself, and he has put up his hand with great joy at seeing you."

M'ndi saw nothing. He stared expressively along the road, up and down the steep sides of the canyon, and finally at Lobi. That wise man had gained confidence in himself at an amazing rate.

"Now I will speak with them he said, and addressed some one who was quite invisible to the chief.

"O ghost," said Lobi, "I see you."

He paused and listened as though for a reply.

"Lord chief," he said, "this ghost wishes you well."

"I hear nothing," said the puzzled M'ndi.

"That is because you do not understand their magical words," said Lobi. "O ghosts and devils—" he raised his voice and threw out his hands to the mountains, and M'ndi, the chief, began to shiver violently, for his courage was oozing away "—see me, Lobi, your servant and friend, also M'ndi, who loves you."

He bent his head again, listening, and great beads of sweat were rolling down M'ndi's face.

"Lord," said Lobi, "this they say: 'O king from the south, I see you!"

"I see you!"

Lobi leapt round with a squeal of fright, for neither M'ndi nor spirit had spoken. In the centre of the roadway was a tall man, his broad shield on his left shoulder, his right hand twirling a stabbing-spear with such rapidity that it seemed a blurred wheel.

"I see you," said the intruder again.

"Who are you, man, who dare stand in this holy place?" asked Lobi.

"I am he of whom you spoke—Bosambo from the south, and king of all these lands and people."

Deep and loud was Bosambo's voice, and the straight cliff caught his words and sent them back in rolling echoes.

"Sleep!" roared M'ndi, first to recover, and sent his spear flying in Bosambo's direction.

An almost imperceptible tilt of his shield, and the spear flew off at a tangent.

"O man, whoever you are," said Bosambo, "and I think you are a chief, now you shall discover all about ghosts."

And the paralysed Lobi, watching in a frightened terror, did not see Bosambo's hand move, and lo! there was M'ndi the chief sprawling on his back in the

road, and his hands beating feebly.

"What man was this?" asked Bosambo.

"Lord," said the shaking Lobi "he was the chief of the Tofolaka, and by accounts doomed to be king of all this land."

"It was a good day when I met him," said Bosambo, and looked at Lobi curiously. "By certain signs of devil masks and such offal as you have about your neck," he said, "I see you are a great witch-doctor."

"Lord, I am what I am," said Lobi uncomfortably.

"How many did you bring with you—you and this dead king—and where do they wait?"

"They wait at the bottom of the road, and there are four times twenty spears."

He looked about him helplessly, and for the first time he saw, perched on boulders, and sitting on the ground and everywhere save on the road, ten men of the Ochori, and they were heavily armed.

"That is good." said Bosambo, and spoke to his followers, giving them certain instructions. "Now you shall come with me Lobi, the witch-doctor, and you shall do as I say; otherwise I shall break your neck."

They went down the road together, and presently issued from the neck of the ravine.

"Lord, when we turn this corner?" said the man, "we shall see the fine soldiers of M'ndi."

"Then we shall not turn the corner," said Bosambo. "Now, man, you shall do this. Whilst I lie in the grass behind this rock, you shall go no farther than I can reach you with three spears' length, so that I may kill you if you make me look foolish, and you shall call up ten of the men and say to them: 'Lay down your arms and go up to the Holy Place where M'ndi is.' Go."

Lobi did as he was bid, calling out in the middle of the road, and ten men came up, packed their spears and went up to the ravine. Presently from the top of the path sounded a low whistle, and Bosambo said:

"Now, Lobi, you shall say to another ten what you said to the first."

And so, ten by ten, they went up into the ravine leaving their spears and their swords, their wicker shields and fine knives by the side of the road; and each party surrendered without noise, and two of Bosambo's guard took the prisoners back to the Ochori village to the south of the mountain, where Bosambo had left a regiment of a thousand spears in case of accidents. And of this thousand, eighty came back without arms and, collecting the spears and the shields and the swords and the sharp little knives which the soldiers of M'ndi had left by the wayside, they arrayed themselves in two lines under

Bosambo's approving eyes.

"SENT for Bosambo?" said Hamilton incredulously. "Good heavens!"

"Why good heavens?" asked Sanders quietly. "There is in reality very little racial difference between the Ochori and the people of this territory."

"Jolly old Bosambo!" murmured Bones. "Why, dash it all, Excellency, he is the king from the South that these naughty old people have been talking about."

"I thought of that, too." nodded Sanders; but mainly I have sent for Bosambo because we are going to have trouble, anyway, and it had better be about a king I can trust."

"But how is he going to get here?" asked Hamilton. "He can't come by way of the river, and if he comes by the mountain path he has got to cross through the Tofolaka country, and the Tofolaka are ready for war and by all accounts M'ndi, their chief, is a pretty hefty fellow."

"He'll come," said Sanders.

He had hardly spoken the words before three canoes swept into view around the point which is made by the out-jutting base of one of the seven hills. And in the centre, beneath a grass canopy, was a large man, and on his head was an opera hat set at a rakish angle, and in his hat was a large cigar,

"Jolly old Bosambo, I think." said Bones.

IX. — THE PASSING OF MAJOR HAMILTON

IT is said with some truth that all wars begin with a woman, and certain it is that the war which the people of Tofolaka joined to make is traceable to Egeni, who was a woman of fifteen, the daughter of the chief Rimilaka, who might have been the wife of M'ndi, the dead chief of the Tofolaka, but that the high chief and his subordinate fell out over the price of. Her father demanded twenty goats but M'ndi stuck at eight goats. So they went apart, and on the day that Bosambo's spear cut short the life of M'ndi, this woman Erring had been married for seven moons, though not to the man she loved.

It was all to the bad that her husband was a quiet man and in awe of her, because she was the daughter of Rimilaka, who was marked for the chieftainship. On the first day of her coming to her husband's hut she settled any question which might have existed as to the dominant partnership in their new combination by hitting him with an iron pot on the head, so that he bled. And he carried his woes to Rimilaka.

"You are no headman for me if you cannot rule a wife," said Rimilaka.

"What shall I do?" wailed the unfortunate husband.

"Beat her." said Rimilaka.

So the husband went home and took a stick to his wife, encouraged thereto by the whole village, and he beat Egeni.

That night came Bosambo with his eighty soldiers making a forced march across the Tofolaka country to join Mr. Administrator Sanders; and he slept that night in the village, taking a chance, for the main body of M'ndi's army was only eight hours distant. And he took the headman's hut as was his right, and the headman's wife served him with her own hands, for she did not know that this was the man who had killed M'ndi, the news of which killing had conic through within a few hours of his death.

Bosambo was not like the natives of the country; he was blacker and taller, broader of shoulder, longer of neck, and much quicker to smile.

"Lord," she said to Bosambo, "how come you to call yourself king of all this land? For M'ndi, who was chief of these parts—"

"M'ndi I killed," said Bosambo, and had not said the words before he regretted them.

She jumped away from him as though he had been a leper, and in the morning, when Bosambo and his eighty soldiers had gone at a jog-trot into the forest her husband, the little headman, carried the story to Rimilaka, and this time Rimilaka listened, and called the elder men to his palaver house.

He was next in line to the chief of the Tofolaka people, so that he had at hand the means to enforce his will. He sent a regiment into the forest to intercept Bosambo and his party, and they marched away with stately strides, to the admiration of all who saw them. But whilst they were walking with stately strides, Bosambo's men were running without dignity—that easy jog-trot which he had taught the people of the Ochori, and which covers six steady miles an hour. Bosambo had reached the river and had commandeered the necessary canoes to carry him to Rimi-Rimi before his pursuers were within twenty miles of him.

On the aft deck of the Zaire the great man squatted, a large glass of beer before him—the one alcoholic dissipation which Sanders had ever allowed his favourite chief—and told his fears.

"Lord," he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and raising his eyes ecstatically, an expression at singular variance with the news he had to tell, "I think there will be war in the Tofolaka country; for, as I came through. I saw very few young men, and I learnt that most of them were in camp. Also I saw the women building houses."

That was a significant happening, as Sanders knew, for the building of houses is a prerogative jealously preserved to the male of the species.

"What spears do they muster, Bosambo?" asked Sanders.

"Lord, I think three tribes, because a man of the country told me six, and the Tofolaka people are notorious liars and boasters."

Three tribes roughly represented twenty-four thousand spears, which was serious enough for Sanders. In preparation for Bosambo's coming, Sanders had sent to all the tribes and people, to the Tofolaka the Bubujala, to the Fongini and the Kasala—which lies to the due east of the Tofolaka country—telling them to send chiefs for a palaver of state. And all had sent respectable representatives except the Tofolaka. From here had come only a few unimportant headmen of the fishing villages, and their appearance merely denoted a desire to be on the safe side, since, being on the river's shore, their villages were open to attack. Once more was the big space in the centre of the city filled with the people of Rimi-Rimi, the ambassadors from the far-off countries forming an inner circle to the great conclave.

"O people of this land," said Sanders, "see me."

"I see you," came in a deep chorus.

"All the people of Rimi-Rimi and the country about know me because of my name," said Sanders. "For I have given the law in the country beyond the mountains. Also here I have given the law, and men have died because they resisted me. Where is the big chief K'salugu M'popo? He is dead because my lightning killed him. And where is Mofolobo? He also is dead. And Lubolama and others? And now I will tell you that M'ndi of the Tofolaka, he also is dead by the hand of my minister.

"Now I have tried to find from all the people of this land one worthy to sit in the place of the Old Man, and give the law, and I have found none but evil men; so I have sent for Bosambo, paramount Chief of the Ochori and a great warrior, of whom you have heard, and him have I set up to be king over you all."

He saw the scowls, the looks of surprise, and in some cases of consternation, and a voice asked:

"Lord, why do you set a foreigner over us proud people of Rimi-Rimi?"

"That you shall ask the king," said Sanders shortly, for he intended leaving a lot to Bosambo.

He turned to that man, standing now before a new carved chair, and threw over his shoulders the coarse-woven purple which robed the kings of Rimi-Rimi, and strapped about him a Sam Browne belt and a long infantry sword—donated for the occasion by Captain Tibbetts—and then stepped back.

"O Bosambo," he said, "you shall be king of these lands, and shall hold the territory for my several masters, and you shall rule justly and treat all men equally."

Bosambo had seated himself, a truly kingly figure. Now he rose solemnly and raised his huge hand—two fingers were erect—and, speaking in English before the astonished and awe-stricken assembly, none more so than the three white men in his audience, he pronounced the Benediction!

Before the assembly could disperse, he beckoned.

"Bring me that man," he said, and they dragged before him one who had looked scoffingly upon him.

"O man, who are you," he asked, "that you laugh in my face?"

"Lord, I did not laugh," said the trembling man. "Having a terrible pain in my teeth, my face goes thus and thus."

"What kind of man are you, for I see you are no warrior?" said Bosambo.

"Lord, I am a little chief of the Bubujala, also I am a cunning carver in wood."

"That is well," said Bosambo, eyeing him speculatively. "Now, you shall make me twenty drums of the size of this great drum of the Old King, and you shall not cover any of them, for it is my heart's desire that each shall be covered with the skin of an enemy, and that each enemy shall come from a different tribe. The palaver is finished."

"Excellent propaganda," said Sanders, when this was reported to him. No doubt Bosambo had started well.

The Tofolaka could wait now, but there were other matters which could not wait. He felt the imminence of danger from another quarter, and Ahmet, the chief of his intelligence staff, who had been recruiting busily, sent out a cloud of spies, all moving cautiously in one direction, and having as their landmark the grey and tawny mass of Mount Limpisi.

Day followed day, and each was a day of tension and strain. Outwardly there was no sign. The land basked in the hot sunshine; the women worked in the fields; there was more laughter than usual from the crowded little streets of Rimi-Rimi; and reports from the Tofolaka were of a negative character.

And yet all these people of Rimi-Rimi knew that from the Tofolaka country six men had come secretly to the Rimi-Rimi country, six proved slayers, such as had served M'ndi in the early days of his chieftainship when it became necessary to remove important rivals, and these had come, or were coming, with orders to slay the three white men and the new king who sat in the Old Man's place.

For once Sanders's spy system failed him, and he had no knowledge that the

deputation was on its way. The first to discover the existence of this conspiracy was Bosambo the king. One day he was inspecting a quarter of the new city which was called the Village Between the Hills. He had with him a dozen men and he himself was heavily armed. Out of the crowd of idlers and those impelled by curiosity to trail behind, or form a group about him when he stopped, came a lean man, and Bosambo saw that he wore no clothes, only a small cloth about his middle and that his body glistened with oil. He held on his outstretched palm two dried fish, and they were gifts such as men commonly bring in token of their loyalty to their master.

"O king, take these," said the man, and Bosambo reached out his hand and grasped, not the palm extended to him, but the right wrist hanging by the man's side with such cunning carelessness that you might not have suspected the haft of a knife concealed in its hollow, or the long N'gombi knife which was laid against the forearm. Under the crushing pressure of Bosambo's hand the man dropped his knife and sought to escape, for he had oiled himself that no man could hold him. But, oil or no oil, Bosambo held, and he was pushed to the ground and tied.

"Man, who sent you?" asked Bosambo.

"Lord, I was sent by Rimilaka, the chief of the Tofolaka."

"O ko," said Bosambo, "Now, this is a state palaver, and it must go before Sandi."

The case did not go before Sanders, because on the way to the beach the man, by reason of the oil on his wrists, slipped his bonds and ran for the bush; and Bosambo, who could throw a spear with great accuracy up to fifty yards, wriggled off his cloak and sent a light lance whizzing after him.

"Now he will not talk," said Bosambo ruefully, looking down at the still figure, "but I do not think he could have told us much."

He reported the circumstances to Sanders, and went in search of Hamilton, who was making an inspection of the defences to the north of the city, but did not find him.

"I saw the white lord looking through a magic tube," said a worker in the fields. "Then he went into the bush, lord king, and he took the path which leads to the little hill looking toward Limbi."

Bosambo was troubled.

"Man, tell me this," he said. "Did Amatini have soldiers with him?"

"No, lord, but he carried a big gun under one arm, and two little guns were strapped about his belly."

Bosambo stopped only to strengthen his escort, and went on at a trot along the

bush path. He was a stranger in these parts, but with the instinct of a woodman he had taken in the lay of the country, and he went forward without error. Presently he came to the crest of the rise which looked toward Limpisi, but there was no sign of Hamilton, although it was quite clear to Bosambo that Hamilton had passed that way. He had seen the half-burnt cigarette, and twenty paces farther the burnt stalk of a match, and Bosambo halted on the crest and took a rapid survey of the country. If Rimilaka had sent assassins into the land it would not be with the sole purpose of destroying him. The white men would be marked for death, and there was a cold feeling in Bosambo's stomach at the thought that Hamilton might be the first victim. He had reason for his distress, as he discovered.

"Let us go on," he said, and went down the slope into the bush.

And there, a hundred paces from the crest, he found the body of a native in the middle of the path. The man was wounded, being shot through the shoulder, but what was more disconcerting than his injury from Bosambo's point of view was the fact that he also wore nothing but a breech cloth and his body was heavily oiled.

A few feet away from him in the grass lay a replica of the knife which Bosambo had taken from the other assassin. Bosambo turned over the wounded man, but he was unconscious. There was no time to be lost. Bosambo raced along the path and came to a second man, who was sitting with his back to a tree and his jaw hanging, dead. He had been shot, apparently, whilst he was standing with his back to the tree, and had slid down into his present position. One glance Bosambo gave, and then ran on. He had not far to go. In a small clearing he found Hamilton's helmet, blood-stained, and a third wounded man: but this time it was no assassin, but one of the Old King's guard in all the panoply of his office. He was bleeding from the breast, and and had evidently been shot at short range, for his flesh was burnt. The bullet, however, had done little harm, except to leave him unconscious, and his groans betokened rather his fear than his pain.

Bosambo jerked him to his feet and put the needle point of his fighting spear under the man's chin.

"Now speak, you," said Bosambo, "or, by death, you will never speak again! Where is the white lord?"

"Chief," said the warrior, who had evidently not heard of Bosambo's promotion, "the white lord is gone, having been taken and marked."

"Taken and marked, O fool? What do you mean?" asked Bosambo.

"He has been taken for the Old Woman's meat," said the man. "For he came running along here, and we heard his little gun say ha-ha, and certain low men who followed him died; but we were waiting in the bushes, and when he came

up to us, we fell on him and struck him down. Me he killed with his little gun because of my bravery in faring him."

Bosambo, a-quiver with grief, was silent.

"How long since, man?"

"Lord," said the soldier, "the shadow of the trees was on that stone."

Bosambo looked and made a rough calculation. It had happened an hour before; it was madness to continue the pursuit with his small force.

"This is a bad palaver, man," he said. "You will come to Sandi."

"Lord, I cannot walk because of my great hurt." said the warrior.

"You will walk or die." said Bosambo curtly, and the man walked.

Sanders heard the news with a white, drawn face, and paced the deck of the Zaire, his hands clasped behind him, his chin on his breast. Presently he spoke.

"Bosambo, you shall sit on this ship, and you shall be as I am in my place, all men obeying you."

Bones came out from his cabin at that moment, and there was nothing that was humorous in his expression, for a hard light was in his eyes, and his mouth was set as no man had seen the month of Bones before.

"We'll want a dozen men, Bones," said Sanders. "We had better take rifles and a box of Mills bombs."

"They're in the boat, sir," said Bones.

"I'll take a few of your own men for carriers, Bosambo," said Sanders; "I can't trust these other devils. Send them to me. We will go ashore together."

A quarter of an hour after he landed he had begun his march, the party moving off in single file, Sanders leading, Bones walking at his heels.

"I warned Hamilton about making these solitary surveys," said Sanders, and those were the only words he spoke in the twenty-mile march they made before sunset.

Sanders had much to think about, and as he walked he pieced together the fragments of information he had received about his enemy. This only he knew —that in a vast cave, the mouth being very wide, but so low that at its highest entrance a tall man must stoop to go in, lived the old Woman of Limbi, who had no name but Death, and no family but the fierce leopards which roamed in the forest, who were like her, for they loved killing for killing's sake, and were dainty feeders.

No man remembered the establishment of the Old Woman in her wonderful position. Tottering fathers of grandfathers told how, as children, they were told of her by other totterers, but none remembered her coming.

It is said that on the day Ferguson the missionary, was chopped by her orders —for he had preached against her—she spoke to the captain of soldiers Mofolobo, having come down to see with her own eyes the destruction of the missionary's house.

"Mofolobo," she said, "I see you, and I know that you are the son of Dabobo, who was the son of Kafu who was the son of Tifilini, who was the son of K'Nema. And K'Nema I knew, also his mother."

That made her at least a hundred.

No living man had seen her face, for she lived alone in her great and lofty cave, and grew in strength on the blood of her victims. Every so often she called for sacrifice, and they brought to the mouth of the cave a girl or a young man, their hands roped behind them and their feet haltered. And they bound round the waist of The Marked a heavy sword which had never been used in war, and round the neck of the sacrifice was a rope, tied to the end of which was a young kid, this being for the propitiation of certain local ghosts and ju-jus which had their home with the Old Woman. Into the cave the sacrifice was pushed and met the Old Woman...

Then the tottering figure in the straw coat and the fantastic mask would come out with her wet sword and sprinkle the shivering crowd. Only on such days were common people allowed to pass the cordon of the virgins who guarded the hill. Who these virgins were, and how they were recruited, Sanders could never discover. Indeed, it was very difficult to find anybody who would discuss the Old One or her retinue. This much he did find out—that the tchu of the Old Woman had no association with the virgin guard, nor did she pass from the mountain by any known route. Sanders suspected a secret way to the cave, and put the tchu as a victim who had been spared by the Old Woman to attend upon her. The fact that the girl he had seen had been marked for sacrifice supported his likely theory. But Hamilton had not been so marked.

Late in the afternoon he made his camp by the side of a little stream four miles north of the village, which, for the information it supplied, might not have existed. None had seen the white man nor the Old King's guard, and when he spoke of the Old Woman of Limbi, they were dumb. Hamilton had been brought through here, however. There were distinct markings of a booted foot in the dust at the entrance to the village.

Sanders marched again at midnight, taking the forest path. He had requisitioned a man of the village to guide him, and, carrying a lantern, he swung ahead on the heels of the guide. Once a lion crossed their path, and unexpectedly, for this beast is not seen to the west or south of the mountain. It was a male lion, and stood only for a few seconds lashing its tail and roaring in fear—for the lion is a coward—then leapt into the bush, and they heard no

mere of him. They saw a leopard too, but the great cat was scared of the light, and the glimpse of his spotted skin was only momentary.

At daybreak they came to the village of P'pie, which is at the foot of Limpisi, the last three hours of the march having been uphill. They were now in the most northerly portion of the Rimi-Rimi country. They were also in touch with the Old King's guard, and there was a little skirmish in the forest, which Sanders had hoped to avoid. He wanted to meet the Old Woman and talk to her. He knew how impossible was his task with the small force at his disposal and without the support which the Zaire's guns could give him—impossible, that is, if it came to war.

Bones went out to reconnoitre the land before the sun fell, and came back haggard and tired. The land rose abruptly, he reported, to an extensive terrace about five miles wide, above which, as abruptly, rose another terrace, and on this last plateau was the Old Woman's cave.

"There's a hill about twelve miles to the left which would put us as near to the second terrace as it is possible to get." said Bones.

"Can the terraces be forced?" asked Sanders.

Bones shook his head.

"Quite impossible, sir," he said quietly, "I saw a camp of three regiments of the Old King's guard and the terrace walls are precipices three or four hundred feet high. I suppose there's some sort of path, but it's pretty sure to be well guarded."

Sanders nodded.

"I sent out a message to the guard by one of the villagers, asking for a passage through and telling my peaceful intentions. They sent back my messenger—and he was not nice to look at," said Sanders grimly. "We shall have to take the hill. Apparently the ceremony is tomorrow."

Bones jerked his chin.

"We'll have to start at midnight," he said. "It's not a long way, but it's a very stiff climb."

The two men did not speak about their missing comrade. Bones drank a cup of tea and looked away from Sanders, and the same fear was in each heart.

As for Hamilton, the story which the wounded soldier had told was very near the truth. He had been surprised by the hired assassins of the Tofolaka, had shot two, and had run straight into the party which had been sent to kidnap him. And the rest of the story was the story of a long, hot walk, amidst men who did not speak to him, who answered none of his questions, but who did not ill-treat him.

Even as Bones was reconnoitring the first terrace, Hamilton was walking slowly up a steep zigzag path that led to its top. The path gave evidence of having been cut from the solid rock, and Hamilton was glad to throw himself upon the ground when he reached the top, and rest his bruised and weary limbs. Here he met a chief who was sufficiently important to talk, one Okaso.

Throughout his journey Hamilton had noticed one curious fact—that the men who guarded him had shown no enmity to him, had practised none of the minor cruelties which vicious men practise quietly upon those they hate, but had treated him with civility, and new the attitude of the chief was no less courteous.

"O chief," said Hamilton, when he saw the man coming towards where he lay, his bonds having r been removed.

"O Amatini," said the chief "I see you."

And, despite his tragic position Hamilton smiled to hear that title, though he knew how quickly the names of strangers ran from one end of the country to the other.

"This is a bad palaver, Okaso," said Hamilton. "Tell me why the Old Woman desires me."

"Lord, who knows?" said Okaso, squatting down opposite him. "She is too wonderful for me. But I think you were marked."

Hamilton shook his head.

"Then one was marked for you," said the other philosophically. "It matters little, and this is the word of the Old Woman—that you are her meat, and one came to me giving orders to send my soldiers to bring you and the two white lords and Bosambo, the king. For when the sun comes up, Amatini, then that is the Day of Looking, when common people may look upon the Old Woman's face and die."

"Tomorrow's dawn," said Hamilton reflectively, "Well, who knows that this is not good?"

"It had better be good," said Okaso significantly, "for it will be! Lord, every year one goes, and sometimes more, to the cave of death. That is why our crops are good and the land is prosperous. Every year goes a maiden or a man, but only goats in milk have gone in these late days, for the Old Woman does not, perhaps, eat so much blood, being so old."

In the morning, when the stars were still in the sky, they wakened Hamilton from a deep sleep, and he got up and bathed his face in the pool. Then they set out across the narrow plain, and presently came to a higher wall of rock. But here the path up the face of the cliff was more gentle, and he reached the top fresh to meet his doom.

The ledge of the second terrace was not more than a quarter of a mile broad, and he saw the cave, a longitudinal slit in the face of the rock that looked like a black, leering mouth. They tied his hands behind him with especial care, and then came Okaso, who, to Hamilton's surprise, buckled about his waist his revolver belt with the two long-barrelled automatics, and he could see the ten spare magazines bulging in the pocket.

"O Okaso, why do you do this?"

"Lord." said the man, "that is the Old Woman's way. For when a warrior is taken in arms for the Old Woman's pleasure, his spears and his fine sword he wears upon him. And the Old Woman told me this, I lying on my belly at the mouth of the cave for fear of her terrible eyes: 'Let the white man come with his little guns that I may see them.' And thus it is." He looked round. "O Lord," he said, "speak well for me to M'shimba M'shamba, and all holy devils and ghosts that walk upon the mountains, and the terrible brothers of Bimbi, who eat the moon."

He stepped back and slipped a noose about Hamilton's neck, and to the end of the rope was fastened a young goat.

"Now, I do not think, Amatini, that my young men need prick you with their spears."

"That is true talk," said Hamilton gravely, "for I am a soldier."

And he walked with steady steps to the mouth of the cave, peering in and seeing nothing. He stopped only for a second at the very opening, and then, lowering his head, he walked in.

He saw nothing and heard nothing save the bleating of a little kid tugging at the rope about his neck, and then in the gloom he saw a figure in straw, and caught the bright gleam of her sword as she came toward him. He lifted his head erect as the sword rose, and closed his eyes, He heard, but did not feel, the swish of the blade as it fell, cutting through flesh and bone, then darkness came upon him....

On the crest of the hill two men lay watching. They saw Hamilton walk into the cave, and waited, not daring to breathe. Then from the mouth of the cave staggered the ghastly figure in her shapeless straw jacket. She brandished in her hand a sword that glittered like silver in the morning sunlight, and there was on that sword a thick red stain. Through his glasses Sanders saw and groaned. He heard a grunt at his side. Bones was cuddling the stock of his rifle, and the muzzle was as steady as a rock. Before he could fire, Sanders's hand fell upon the weapon and twisted it round.

"Bones," he said gently, "there is still work for you and me. If you shoot, the guard can reach the base of this hill long before we can."

Bones stared stupidly from Sanders to the cave and the shambling figure, sprinkling the prostrate guard with bright red drops, then laid his face on the crook of his arm and cried bitterly.

X. — THE GREY BIRD THAT MOANED

"I THINK this, lord," said Bosambo of the Ochori, and king of the great territories, "that grief is like a great pool such as the rain leaves, or the river when it floods its banks, and it is so deep that it is higher than a man's head, and you say, 'How can so much water run away? I think it must be here for all time.' But, lord, the sun comes up, and by its magic the waters shrink, and great winds blow some away, and the earth, which is full of little mouths, sucks its share; and presently there is dry land where the water was, though it carries the water-mark for a thousand years."

Sanders nodded and chewed at his dead cigar, Bones, lying back in his basket-chair under the awning of the Zaire, did no more than look at Bosambo, then fell to biting his nails.

"Lord, there was a man in the Ochori who had many beautiful gardens filled with wonderful things that you could eat. And because one of these gardens was a little hollow, the rain came down one night and the water was so that a man could take a canoe and row amongst the mealie beds. And this man was so sorrowful, and came so often to watch the pool, that all his other gardens died, for the beasts broke through his bad fences, and the weaver-birds took what they liked, because the gardener was looking at the garden which was not, and throwing his face from the garden that was."

Sanders, his elbow on the rail of the ship, examined the chief.

"Bosambo," he said. "I think you are wiser than I, for there is a garden which has been given to me for my care. Some day I will go up to the Old Woman of Limbi, and there will be an end. I pray God that this Old One lives until I come. Bosambo, how long have you smoked cigars?"

He glanced suspiciously at the butt between Bosambo's fingers.

"Lord," said Bosambo, "for a very long time."

"I called at the Ochori city on my way up," said Sanders plainly, "and though you were not there, I remember certain things were lost from my cabin, and of these a box of cigars is remembered by me."

"Lord Sandi," said Bosambo indulgently, "these Ochoris are great thieves."

"I think so," said Sanders dryly, and almost smiled.

"This garden is all weeds, I think," said Bones, who had evidently been thinking upon Bosambo's parable.

"Lord," said Bosambo cheerfully, "all things are weeds until you train them to be vegetables. For were not sweet potatoes weeds cala cala?—so a god-man told me when I was young."

"Bosambo's right," said Sanders. He turned to the king. "You, Bosambo, desire this kingship, and you must have had many serious palavers with yourself."

"That I have," said Bosambo, "and this is my mind. The people of Tofolaka will fight, being warriors and an uncomfortable people. The people of Bubujala, they also will fight, sending their soldiers into Tofolaka to join Rimilaka, But, lord, in all countries such as this—"

"There is a key state." said Sanders quickly. He used the English phrase and Bosambo was puzzled. Sanders translated laboriously, and the kroo's face brightened.

"Truth is here," he said. "For in the old territories who rose if the Akasava sat down in peace? and in the days when I have brought my people into a warlike spirit, did the Akasava or the Isisi rise? Lord, they knew I was on the frontier of one, and on the flank of the other, and they sat quiet. What is the key state here? Not the Kasala," said Bosambo, shaking his head, "for they are an indifferent people and given to pleasure, though they have fought when the Tofolaka have crossed their line. Nor the Tofolaka, because they are too haughty with their neighbours. Nor the Bubujala men, because they only make war because they fear war."

"You've left the Rimi-Rimi people and the Fongini."

"Lord, you speak." said Bosambo. "As to the Rimi-Rimi people, they are soft and fear devils too much. I think the Fongini are your men."

Sanders was silent.

"They have a new chief," he said, "I have sent for him, but he has not come."

Yet it was true that Fongini was the key state—a conclusion which as much of its history as he could learn went far to confirm. The Fongini was the one tribe which had defied the Old King and had fought him, with such success that, fearing for his position, he had made a compromise in the matter of taxation and concluded a peace. To that day the Fongini paid only half the tribute exacted from the other tribes. And they had defeated the Tofolaka in one great, bloody battle—somewhere around 1860, so far as Sanders could gather—and they had, too, successfully resisted the nomination of chiefs, which at one period was the Old King's prerogative.

Yet the Fongini were a mild people, so mild and so just in their dealings with men that the killing of Mofolobo, which Sanders had expected would rouse a

storm, passed without comment. The people were hunters and workers of steel, and the land was very fertile, save in the year of the drought. Further, all the people were rich with goats and cattle—strange beasts which were never seen south of the mountain.

They were a deceptive people to outside observers, and once in a generation some or the other of their neighbours would hold a palaver and say, "The Fongini are rich and lazy; let us go in and take what we desire," and would lay the seeds for a great deal of regret and explanation and humiliation.

Rimilaka, elected by acclaim to be chief of the fighting Tofolaka, counted heads at a council of all the nation, and was proud of his strength.

"Yes, as he explained to the inner council, though the Bubujala, our friends and brothers, are with us in six fine regiments, and even the chiefs of Kasala have wished us well, and all the folk of Rimi-Rimi, with the Old King's guard, will fight for us, the Fongini have sent us neither spears nor corn. Now, this is a shame."

There were many who agreed; there were a few, old men and experienced, who shook their heads and said "Chuk!" at the mention of the Fongini.

"Lord, we will go on without the Fongini," said the chief's own headman "for these are bad-tempered people and spiteful; and in the days of my father they made war upon the Tofolaka, and there were many broken huts in the land."

"O ko," said a younger councillor in fine contempt, "the Fongini are cowards, and they say that the men are dying away, so that there are four women to every man, and those men feeble."

"So they said in the days of my father," said the old headman sardonically. "And where were the fine regiments that went out to meet them in battle?"

"You talk like an old man." said the other contemptuously. "Now, we young men, whose blood is hot and who are exceedingly brave, we do not remember the past or know of it; and if Rimilaka will send me into the Fongini, I will speak with the chief in a cunning way so that he shall have fear in his heart, knowing that, if he does not fight and the Tofolaka win, his people shall be enslaved to us, and a man of our people shall sit in the chief's place."

The majority of the council thought this an excellent scheme, and M'jibi took a canoe and travelled to a Fongini fishing village, and thence twelve hours through the forest to the Fongini city, where the new chief had been installed.

It was not a propitious moment for the ambassador. The new chief was also young, being the son of Lubolama, the old chief. There never was so humble and pleasant a man as Bufali when he sought the suffrage of the little chiefs, begging them, by the magic of his father's name, that they make him overlord of the tribe. And when they had elected him, and blooded him with the blood

of a goat and a cockerel and a monkey, that he might be nimble and prolific and wise, they discovered that they had elected a tyrant, a glutton, and an evil-doer, who combined the caprices of Heliogabalus with the blood-lust of a Nero. All this M'jibi heard before he came to the city, and was very glad, for this was his man.

Bufali received him kindly, and found in him a kindred soul.

"You will tell Rimilaka," said Bufali, "that because I love him, and hate the white men who slew my father before the king's fire, I will bring the Fongini and my own fighting regiments, who are the bravest warriors in the world. For I tell you this, M'jibi, that a warrior of the Fongini can live without a heart, and he dies slower than any man in the world."

And to prove this he sent for a soldier of the guard, and had him laid spread-eagled before him, whilst certain of his familiars did terrible things to the soldier. Two hours before sun-up the king grew tired of waiting for the man to die, and took M'jibi to his own sumptuous hut.

He was hardly asleep before three little chiefs and a big chief named M'lapa of the Fongini went into the chief's hut and strangled him under M'jibi's fearful eye.

"And if you cry out, man," said the big chief, "we will kill you, too. But if you keep quiet we, will let you go."

And when the chief was dead, they slipped a noose about M'jibi's head.

"O chief," he whimpered, "you promised to let me live."

"That was a lie," said the big chief calmly, "being said to keep you quiet."

So they strangled M'jibi and they threw their bodies in a shameful place, and elected to the chieftainship a big chief who had strangled his predecessor.

"NOW I think there will be war," said the man. "Therefore let all the spears of the land be called, and the young men do their exercises, such as leaping and dancing and throwing spears, until I return."

"Lord, where do you go?" the council asked him.

"I go to Sandi in the city of Rimi-Rimi," said the chief, "and, by my reckoning, I go to the stronger man."

News travels fast in primitive countries, and Rimilaka learnt of the death of a possible ally and the election of a certain enemy with something like consternation,

"M'lapa hates me, as I well know," he said thoughtfully. "In the old days, when we sat in the king's city, and he was a small chief, and I was strong with the Old Man, being a captain of a hundred that guarded his women, I beat this M'lapa, and now I wish I had killed him."

A fortnight passed, and Sanders felt himself growing old with the tension of waiting. The Tofolaka made no sign, and, so far as he could learn, confined their hostilities to the making of intolerable war-palavers. War was in the air; he felt the electric tingle of it, and knew the grand crisis, which would end in the crushing of the rebel forces and the establishment of law in the country, or in his own annihilation, was near at hand.

Hamilton he could not think about—dared not let his mind rest upon. He almost welcomed the coming struggle for the relief it would give him to that one persistent nightmare—the thought of what Patricia, the dead man's sister, would say.

He blamed himself, which was like Sanders. The thought of Hamilton's fate and his own great loss obsessed him, yet did not make him deviate by one hair's breadth from the plan he had laid down, nor yet come between him and his policy. That was like Sanders, too.

He went ashore one afternoon with Bones to attend the palaver which Bosambo had called for the judgment of certain delinquents. They were walking across what Hamilton had called the 'parade ground', when Sanders said:

"Do you know, Bones, that other matter has gone quite from my head?"

"The warning, dear old Excellency?" said Bones, and there was in that 'dear old Excellency' a tender quality which made Sanders choke.

"No," he said gruffly. "I was thinking of the girl Ferguson. That tragedy seems so remote, so incidental to this life—God forgive me!—that I never even speculate upon it nowadays."

By this time they were pushing their way through the crowd about the seat of justice.

Bosambo was a shrewd man and very wise in the ways of litigants. It was his custom on such occasions to sit with a long stick across his knee, and that stick was made of rhinoceros hide, and was a most painful instrument of punishment. It had already served its purpose and reduced litigation to its lowest limits. It had eliminated, too, the petty complainants and those whose chief reason for presenting their cases was the gift of oratory.

Bosambo gave swift justice, and swiftly were the cases presented. The man who committed an offence in the morning went smarting to bed. A dispute which arose at midday was settled by sunset. Those daily justice courts of Bosambo served yet another purpose. Strangers to the city, headmen and little chiefs of outlying villages, came in to discover what manner of justice was given, and of late these informal commissions of inquiry had come from far as Lower Bubujala.

Men sometimes came for particulars of the new government, and these were informative, for they showed Sanders that something of the old fear and terror associated with the Old King's reign had disappeared. On this particular morning came a new kind of applicant. When the palaver had finished and such questions had been answered as 'How many sides are there to this world?' and the like, a man arose who by his cloak, his girdle of monkey tails, and his sword, was clearly a fighting chief, and as clearly a stranger from northern Rimi-Rimi, as he had a fillet of plaited straw about his head, such as the northern people wear. "Lord," he said, "the people of my village have, heard of the wonders which the white lord has brought, especially of the Birds of Grey that moan and because they live in this village and in the king's house, also on the great ship of Sandi, and are not wild, but come to the hands of men, my people think they are spirits. Now, lord, I desire one such bird, that I may take him to my village and worship him, and presently he shall come to my hand also, and I shall be glad."

He addressed Bosambo, but it was Sanders, sitting on the right hand of the king, who answered. It was a curious request, but it had been made before in the old territories. For these Government pigeons were very mysterious to the native mind. It was said that they were the spirits of dead Houssas, and those who had seen them in their swift flight, carrying messages between Sanders and his subordinates had invested them with other magical qualities.

"I would give you many things chief," said Sanders, "but not these, for they are the little servants of the Many-Thinking-As-One." (Thus he translated the League.)

"Lord," said the man earnestly "I would not ask this for a gift, because that would be shameful, but I have brought as the price a great tooth of ivory."

Sanders looked at him in astonishment, because, whatever fallacious values the native may have, he has no illusions as to the worth of ivory, and this man was offering twenty pounds for a bird that was worth five shillings.

"These things are not to be sold, chief," said Sanders gently. "But presently, when I come back on my fine ship, I will send you a grey one who moans and you shall be satisfied."

The man was certainly not satisfied now, for he grew agitated with the refusal.

"There is nothing in my house that I will not give you," he said. "Now, I have ten goats, which is the price of a good wife, and this I will give you for your little bird."

Sanders laughed at the man's persistence, "O friend," he said "is it not said in this land that a good wife does all things but fly? Now, you had better buy a wife with your goats, for this bird I will not sell."

Later Sanders thought the matter over, and the more he thought, the more puzzled he was.

"They're a queer people, these," he said, and looked aloft to the wooden cote which had been hoisted to the mast of the Zaire. One of the greatly desired pigeons was preening himself on the roof of his home; another was circling in slow, wide sweeps in the blue above, locating his, home in the way of a wise pigeon.

"I shall transfer these to Bosambo," he said. "We may be going off at any moment, and they will find a difficulty in getting back."

News came late in the day that four big canoes were coming from the direction of the Fongini country, and towards evening they appeared, the leading boat making straight for the ship.

Sanders watched the approaching flotilla through his glasses, and saw that it carried one whose importance was advertised by the gay colouring of the awning under which the visitor sat.

"This, I think, is the Fongini—chief," he said with a sigh of relief. "which makes matters a little curious, Bones."

"Who is he, sir?" asked Bones.

"Heaven knows," replied Sanders, "for the chiefs are rising up and falling down quicker than I can count them."

He went to the gangway as the canoe came alongside, and presently one came up who had a white cloth about his shoulders, and the edge of that cloth was dyed purple.

"O chief, I see you." said Sanders. "Now, I am glad you have come, for you were one of the Old King's great council of war."

"Lord," said M'lapa. "your ears are greater than elephants', for you have heard this thing. And it is true that I sat in the Old Man's palaver house on big days. Therefore do I wear a white cloth with this beautiful colour upon it, the same as the Old Man's coat."

Sanders smiled within himself, and led the way to the aft-deck.

"Now, M'lapa, we will talk," he said, "for I see you are a chief, and I think you are chief of the Fongini."

"There is truth," said the chief, sitting down upon the deck at a sign from Sanders, "for he who was chief is dead, and I will tell you no twisted stories, but the truth itself. For he was a wicked man, having this and that and the other vices"—he specified them, and Sanders was not shocked—"so we went into his fine house one night, and we put a thong about his neck, and he said 'Ugh!' and died. Also we killed one who was with him, being the secret man of

Rimilaka, the chief of the Tofolaka, who desired war with you and your tribe."

"That is good news for me," said Sanders. "But hear this, M'lapa—that from this day on there shall be no killing palaver in your country; and if any man do evil, he shall come to me, and if it be great, great evil, he shall die, for there cannot be two killers in one country."

"So I think," said M'lapa readily. "I would wish that these high matters were taken from my hands. Now, Sandi, I am strong for you and all my people, and I have called my spears together to go against the Tofolaka."

Sanders's heart leapt, for the miracle for which he had prayed had happened. The key state had declared on his side, and the future of the country was assured.

"O M'lapa" he said, "this is a great thing you have told me, and I will send for the king, Bosambo."

Bosambo came in haste, and the two giants met—M'lapa was only a few inches shorter than his new lord.

"See this man," said Sanders, "for he is strong for you. Hear him kindly. Now hear me! Because of his loyalty and friendship, he shall be second to you in this land, and shall hold Fongini for you and your people."

Bosambo held out both his hands, and M'lapa laid his upon them.

"What tribute do your people send the king, M'lapa?" asked Bosambo, a very practical man.

"Lord, since the beginning of the world they have sent half the tribute which other lands have sent," said M'lapa, "also five regiments in all great wars. Also, lord, we have the right of fishing upon the shores of the northern Tofolaka, who are lazy people and bad fishermen."

So Bosambo in conventional language confirmed the rights and privileges of the Fongini, and the two men ate salt, and cut each his forearm and rubbed the cuts together so that the blood mingled, and Bosambo gave the chief a wonderful cloak of furs and a looking-glass, both of which were unaccountably missing when the chief came to take his departure.

"These will I find and send on to you, M'lapa," said Bosambo soberly, "also many other beautiful presents which I have in my house."

The night had come, and the half moon was riding in the sky, when the chief took his departure and Bosambo went home to his hut.

"How did you know that fellow sat in the council of the Old King?" asked Bones.

"By the purple edging on his cloak," said Sanders quietly. "Didn't I tell you that all these people are descendants of old Roman adventurers?"

"Then—" began Bones.

"The purple stripe on the white toga was the insignia of a senator. I'm afraid you're not very well up in Roman history, Bones."

"I don't know so much about that, sir," said Bones, with something of his old spirit, but he lacked the provocation which Hamilton offered, and relapsed into silence.

At half-past eleven he went to his cabin and lay down on the bed. In these days he did not undress, though the nights were warm, being content to take off his boots and his coat. He was dozing, when there came a tap at the door, and he swung out of his bed in a second.

"Abiboo knocks, lord," said a low voice, and pulled back the door. "Lord," said the sergeant-major of Houssas, "this I found by the little ladder which comes from the water."

He held up a wet cloth.

"What thing is this?" asked Bones.

"Lord, it is such a thing as the men of this country wear about their waists, and it is wet."

"There's a stranger on board," said Bones, and took up his revolver and a flash-lamp.

"The sentries have heard nothing, and these men I trust," said Abiboo, "being people of my own family."

The upper deck of the Zaire was, save for the space aft, made up of two narrow alleyways and the spacious cabin which the officers occupied. Amidships was poor Hamilton's cabin, and as Bones walked along he gasped, for the door of the cabin was open, and it had been locked. Indeed, it had been locked by Hamilton himself, and when Bones had made an attempt to take an inventory of his comrade's kit, he discovered that none of his keys would fit the door, and an entrance had to be made through the open window. Now the door was wide open.

Bones stepped in and switched on the light. Somebody had been in here. A box had been broken open and its contents had been thrown out on the floor.

"O ko," said Abiboo, "this is robbery. I swear to you, lord, that my men are honest."

Bones was trying to think what was in that box. He had made a list of its contents. He went back and aroused Sanders, and told him what had happened, and Sanders came along in his pyjamas to investigate. Bones joined him later, after going to his cabin to get the list he had made and which he had still.

"Here you are," said Bones. "Black box." And he enumerated its contents,

with the object of checking the articles on the floor with the list in his hand.

"One small brown box, locked," he read. "That's gone."

"What did it contain?" asked Sanders.

"I'm blessed if I know, Excellency," said Bones. "I hadn't a key that would fit the lock."

Sanders was puzzled.

"It's extraordinary." he said. "The door of the cabin seems to have been opened without forcing. It's the first time I have heard of a native burglar. Nothing else is missing?"

Bones made a rapid survey, pulling open drawers and unlocking boxes.

"No, sir," he replied, shaking his head in wonder. "The thief must have gone straight for this box. Probably it was the first he came upon."

Abiboo, who had gone out to question his sentries, returned.

"Lord," he said in a troubled voice, "on the high mast behind your lordship's cabin we found wet marks, and also, it seems, one of your pretty birds of grey, Mimi, who lays beautiful eggs, has gone, for the door of their little house, which we pull up at night because of the hawks, has been broken open."

The two men looked at each other in amazement.

"Did the sentry hear nothing?"

"Lord, he heard only the grey birds talking angrily, but thought it was a night-hawk who had alarmed them."

A diligent search of the ship revealed nothing. Yoka, the engineer, who slept by his engine, had not been disturbed, and, but for the waist-cloth in the gangway and the wet marks on the mast, the visitor had left no clue as to his identity.

"My theory is, dear old Excellency," said Bones, "there's a fellow got on board secretly, climbed the mast—"

"Oh, Bones—" Sanders dropped his hand on Bones's hard shoulder and squeezed it affectionately—"only poor Hamilton could have given an adequate rejoinder to that."

Bones shut up so quickly that Sanders was sorry.

The next morning he sent for the chief who had desired to buy the Grey Bird that Moans, but he had gone overnight, some said, though nobody had seen him pass through the adjoining villages. This fact, however, did not impress Sanders, for the people seemed to have a scientific system of silence where the movements and doings of important people were concerned, and he discovered that from one end of the country to the other it was the practice,

when something disagreeable happened which the chiefs desired to go no farther, to call the villagers together and recite to them—

"Who saw this?" To which they answered "No eyes."

"Who heard this?" "No ears."

"What has happened?" "Nothing."

The weather broke, and there were three days of dismal rain, during which the two men found time hanging heavily on their hands and the tension of the situation growing intolerable. On the fourth day the clouds cleared and the sun came up, dispersing the heavy mist which lay on the river, and that day promised to be as uninteresting as its fellows, but at two in the afternoon a message came to Sanders which set the bugles blowing.

"I want full steam, Bones," said the Administrator. "Six hundred canoes from the Tofolaka coast are within a dozen miles."

Bones saluted.

"Shrapnel, I suppose, sir?" And Sanders nodded.

Portable machine-guns were mounted on the tops of the cabins, ammunition lockers were opened, and an extra supply of small-arm ammunition was served out to the men. Then down the middle of the river steamed the Zaire, her blue ensign flying.

Five miles south of the city the Zaire came in sight of the fleet, and Sanders saw the river speckled red with brightly-coloured canoes.

"Gentlemen," said Bones, his shoulder at the rubber feet of the gun, his eye glinting along the sights, "the toast of the evening is 'Sweethearts and wives!'"

And the first gun crashed forth.

"A thousand yards, O Ahmet!" called Bones to the man at the second gun. "Now fire quickly!"

The two Hotchkiss guns banged and crashed and echoed, the 'ha-ha-ha' of the Maxim piercing the infernal din. Bones handed over his gun to a competent man, and ran along the deck to give his soldiers a final look over.

"O man," he said to one who fingered a Mills bomb gingerly, "If you jiggle that little pin from that little hole, I think you will be in hell."

"Lord captain, I do not understand these little devils." said the soldier, and Bones very wisely relieved him of his very dangerous possession.

The flotilla of canoes was now in disorder; white puffs of smoke lay over them, and every second added a new burst. The river was filled with swimming men and men who could not swim. And then, when the bow of the Zaire seemed likely to draw level with the nearest boat, the canoes began to

paddle frantically to the land.

"The Bubujala shore, thank Heaven!" said Sanders. "Shell the beach, Bones, and cease fire as soon as they're out of sight."

When the firing had ceased. "Take a party ashore and destroy the canoes." said Sanders. "I think that will settle the business for the time being."

The Zaire was moving about when Abiboo, frantic with excitement, flew on to the aft deck and gripped Sanders unceremoniously by the arm.

"O man." said Sanders astonished, "what is this shameful thing?"

"Lord," gasped the Houssa sergeant—major, "Mimi—I have seen the beautiful one!"

"Mimi!" said Sanders in astonishment and then remembered the filched pigeon. He looked up, shading his eyes. Above, there was a tiny blue speck that was sweeping downward in a long spiral plane. Presently it dropped to the board of the dovecote, and Abiboo went up the ladder by the mast, hand over hand. He came back to Sanders, trembling with excitement, and in his hand was a pigeon.

"Lord, it is she." he said exultantly. "Now I know how clever are the grey ones, for when the wicked chief released her, behold! she came back to us who are her fathers."

Sanders took the bird and uttered an exclamation, for about its leg, tied with a thin piece of native skin, was a paper. He unfastened the string with trembling fingers.

"What's this, Excellency?" asked Bones. "From Bosambo?"

Sanders did not reply. He opened the paper and peered down at it. The message was written in pencil and was faint.

"South of Rimi-Rimi seventy miles. Fishing village Tonkini. Joining you there."

There was no signature.

Bones, looking over his chief's shoulder, snatched the paper from his hand unceremoniously and, raising his head, emitted a yell of joy. "Hamilton!" he roared.

"Hamilton!" gasped Sanders, "I don't recognize the hand."

"Hamilton!" shouted Bones, prancing up and down the deck in a wild war dance. "Hamilton!" he said incoherently. "Dear old Ham never could spell! Spelt 'joining' without a 'y', dear old Excellency!"

XI. — THE WAR IN THE TOFOLAKA

THE frontier between the Fongini and the Tofolaka country was delimitated by Nature when she laid the true course of the river which is called by the Tofolaka 'Bubukata', meaning 'the invisible river', and by the Fongini 'the river without water'. It is a form of humour in the Fongini country to promise that on a certain date you will wash yourself in the Mala, as they call it. For little water runs here, save a trickle in the rainy season, though there is evidence that at some time or other this was a fierce, strong stream, for the bed lies thirty feet below the level of the plain through which it runs, and this trench is broader than the length of twenty men.

There is a legend of floods in the Fongini country which is analogous to the legend of the Deluge.

Yet the oldest inhabitant had never seen more water in the Mala than could fill, so to speak, a cooking-pot. The explanation was that its waters were caught higher up the mountain and dammed by the rocks and the sand it brought down, forming a lake which had its overflow in two swift rivers, one that ran into the great river near Hell's Gate, and the other which watered the Kasala country. Once in a hundred years, perhaps, the dam would break under the pressure of a heavy rainfall, and the Mala would exist for a year or two as a veritable river, and so would be until the dam formed again. But no living man had ever seen this wonder, none but the Old Woman.

The Chief of the Fongini came back to his city and saw his fine regiments ready for war. He called the captains of hundreds and the captains of thousands to a palaver which followed the dance of a hundred girls and a great feast.

"We go against the Tofolaka people," said M'lapa. "for that is the word of the true king, who is a man."

There was an obstinate councillor, who was very aged and had the sourness which comes so rarely to old people.

"Is this king a true king, chief?" he asked. "For I have not heard that the Old One came down from the mountain and gave him the magic, as is the custom."

"He is true enough for me," replied M'lapa, "for Sandi Ingonda is with him and is his friend."

"Lord." said the old man loftily, "I know nothing of this Sandi, save stories which the young men bring me, or of this Bosambo; but I know well the customs of fathers and their holy superstitions, and I see no king who is not made according to the law."

"Then you see no chief either," said M'lapa. "And will you stand up at this fire

and say I am not your chief?"

The old one was silent, for he loved life, and there was that look in M'lapa's eye which made him uneasy.

"Lord, you are my chief, and Bosambo is my king," he mumbled, and there was no more opposition.

"I will take the regiments to the Mala," said M'lapa the chief, "and there we will sit down until word comes from Sandi, or until these dogs of Tofolaka grow war-proud."

And in the first light of the morning the long columns marched westward and the Tofolaka heard of their coming from the villagers who lived on the other bank of the Mala, and fled in fear of their lives.

The news brought terror to Rimilaka and his councillors, for in their secret hearts they feared the Fongini.

"This is a bad palaver," said Rimilaka to his daughter Egeni, "and I have a mind to go to Sandi and tell him my sorrow."

"Lord father, you should wait," she said, "for who knows what magic may be brought about? And is not Sandi hated by the Old Woman, who has marked him for death?"

"O ko," mocked her father. "And did not Sandi, who is hated by the Old Woman, put all my beautiful canoes into the river and kill my men by the magic of his big guns, though he is hated by the Old Woman and all devils?"

The remnants of the force he had sent against Rimi-Rimi city were returning, and they did not minimize their perils nor the ferocity of the white man's weapon.

The whole of the Tofolaka people had risen, and spears had come to the gathering—places in greater number than ever before in the history of the country. And the Bubujala folk had sent their fighting regiments, from no love of the Tofolaka, it is true, and rather because they were carrying out the native maxim: 'if your neighbour be armed, take your arms and join him'.

"Leave me, woman." said Rimilaka at last. "I will let my mind speak with the spirits of dead chiefs, and they shall tell me what to do."

And she left him to make up the excuses which he would offer to Sanders at a meeting which he thought could not long be delayed.

As for Sanders, he was not thinking of the Tofolaka, nor even of the imminence of war, if the truth be told. Whilst the soldiers of the Fongini were marching to the River-without-water, and the very night they halted on the first stage of their journey, he gave a great feast to all the people of Rimi-Rimi. Bones, on the upper bridge, alternately fired off signal rockets to the awe of all

beholders, and sent his searchlight in erratic and joyous gyrations to the lowest-lying clouds. Under the deck awning a table was spread amidst festive decorations, for Bones had dug out a Chinese lantern, and the flags of all nations were conspicuously, if inartistically, displayed, Bones being the decorator.

"We will have a bottle on this, Bones," said Sanders, and chuckled.

Bones's eyes brightened.

"I didn't know we had any—" he began.

"A large bottle of ginger ale," said Sanders.

"O ko," said Bones dismally. "Dear old Excellency, I thought you were launching forth. Couldn't we have something strong out of the medical stores?"

"Ginger ale," said Sanders, "and even that will be wildly exhilarating."

Later he raised his glass.

"Here's to Hamilton," he said, "wherever he is, and may he soon return."

"Cheerio," said Bones. "It's a horrible drink, but cheerio!"

"I don't quite understand it all," said Sanders. "Surely the fellow who came to steal the pigeon could have brought the note."

Bones nodded wisely,

"Naturally that's a mystery to you, my jolly old Excellency," he said. "Pardon me!" He put his hand convulsively to his mouth. "Dear old Excellency, ginger ale never did agree with me." he apologized. "I can explain the mystery in two ticks. Ham escaped from the cave and is a prisoner in one of the villages. He kidded the jolly old indigenous native that the pigeons were great ju-jus and that he could perform magic. Now, my theory—pardon me" said Bones, "my theory, dear old Sanders is this—pardon me!"

What Bones's theory was, was not immediately disclosed, for Bosambo came, a large smile bisecting his face and a rich red brocaded gown hanging from his shoulders.

"O Sandi," he said, "this is joyful news and now my heart is glad."

"Sit down, Bosambo. And since there must be no unhappiness this night. I tell you that I will not inquire too closely about a certain fine curtain which hung at the door of my cabin and which vanished when you came to see me a moon ago."

"Lord," said Bosambo calmly, and he hitched the brocaded robe, so that the place where the curtain rings had been sewn should not show, "these folk of Rimi-Rimi are great thieves and yesterday I lost a square of beautiful silk,

coloured variously with red and blue, which my lord Tibbetti gave to me," he added in some confusion, as he caught Bones's accusing eye.

"You're a naughty, naughty old liar," said Bones.

"I be fine fellow," said Bosambo in the same language. "I makeum fine king, same like Matty, Marki, Luki, Johnni."

"O you naughty fellow!" murmured Bones, shaking his head.

Sanders clapped his hands, and to the servant who came, "Bring beer for the king," he said.

"In a glass of great size," said Bosambo humbly, "for my hands are so big and clumsy that the little glasses slip and break. And let the glass be filled, Sandi, so that no bad air should get into it."

"Lord," he said suddenly and more seriously, "there is news from the Old Woman's country."

"What is that, Bosambo?" asked Sanders.

"In the days of the Old One," said Bosambo, "there were three great regiments of soldiers who sat about the king's hut and lived in this city. And when you came and your magic destroyed the Old One, these men went up to the mountain and sat down under the Old Woman's cave, being fearful Of white men, and moreover doing what is right by their custom; for the Old King's guard has always been the guard of the Devil Woman of Limbi."

"All this I know." said Sanders, nodding. "What then?"

Bosambo stopped to swallow half the great glass of beer which was put before him, and to wipe his mouth.

"They move on the city, lord," he said, "and that, I think, is a war palaver, because my spies tell me their faces are streaked with camwood, and their shields have been smoked black."

This was bad news indeed. Sanders had depended in the forthcoming conflict upon the placidity of the Rimi-Rimi people, and had not counted upon any interference by the Old King's guard. They were a considerable body, numbering between four and seven thousand men—it was difficult to get any exact figures, but he judged from what he had observed when he had seen Hamilton enter into the Devil Woman's cave. A thought struck him.

"What of the Devil Woman? Has Hamilton killed her?"

He put the question to Bosambo, and the king shook his head.

"Lord, if that were so, who would not know the news? For these people are all ears and are quick to tell. More than this, they come in the Old Woman's name, as I know."

"She has sent them?" asked Sanders, and Bosambo nodded.

"They are commanded by Okaso, who is a big captain of the guard, and they tell me he is a very cunning man.",

"You could not hold the city?" asked Sanders, after a while.

Bosambo looked at him earnestly. "Lord, if you say to me. 'Hold this Place', I will do so with eighty men, and hold it until I die, knowing your lordship will be very gentle and generous to Fitema, my wife. Eighty men I have and no more; they are my own Ochori warriors. As for the townsmen, they do not fight, for townsmen are made only as meat for the fighting men of the country, and have no other use."

"And this I have done, lord." he added. "I have sent word to Fitema, who is very clever—"

"Sent her word?" said Sanders in astonishment.

"I also brought the grey ones who moan," said Bosambo, "and one of these I have flown." He seemed at a loss as to how he should proceed.

"What was the message you sent?"

"Lord, I told her that we were for a great and terrible war, for then I did not know which way the Fongini would go."

Sanders was silent.

"The Territories are settled," he said, thinking of his old country, "and they will not grow reckless because of a war here. But I think they are glad that the Old King is dead, because he had made secret Plans to come down into the Ochori and upon the Akasava and eat them up. Therefore, Bosambo, my friend, you did well."

Bosambo did not tell him how well he had done, for the letter he had painfully composed, which had been addressed to 'Fitema with the eyes of doves and the soft voice of gentle winds', did not under-estimate the peril. Therefore the war lokali of the Ochori had drummed frantically, and messengers had gone south and west to the Akasava, to the N'gombi, to the Isisi, to all save the bushmen, who had no kindness. And the lower river was aquiver with excitement, canoes coming and going, not singly, but in fleets. Armed men trailed through the forest, singing their songs of battle, and war fires were burning from the upper Ochori to the sea.

The villages were deserted on both banks of the river for a hundred and fifty miles, save for the women and the old men, and in the Ochori country, along the great broad road which Bosambo had built with forced labour, an endless column trailed like a column of soldiers northward and ever northward, and at their head, borne on a litter which was carried by eight men, the thin brown

woman Fitema, her husband's spear of chieftanship in her hand.

Sanders spent an uneasy half-hour thinking of the possible complications which would follow Bosambo's note of alarm if it were acted upon. The Territories just then were without a Commissioner, and only a subordinate officer was in control. Whatever doubt he had upon the matter was shifted to another angle when, in the middle of the night, they woke him with the news.

The Mala river—that river without water which divided the Territories—was in spate. There had been a burst somewhere in the mountains, and between the armies of the Fongini and the Tofolaka was a broad, impassable stream which they could not pass for ten days.

Sanders took the news along to Bones.

"This is bad." said Bones. "Rimilaka will not lose such an opportunity."

"He hasn't," said Sanders grimly. "His war fires are burning, and he's gathering a fleet for the invasion of Rimi-Rimi."

Sanders was sending his sergeant to arouse Bosambo and bring him to the ship, when that alert man anticipated his wishes. They heard his voice hailing them from the water, and presently he was aboard, and Sanders saw that he was dressed for war.

He had not come alone, for with him was a warrior in the paraphernalia of the king's guard.

"Lord, I bring this man to you," said Bosambo. "He came to my hut at midnight, and I have made a long palaver with him."

"Who is he?" asked Sanders.

"This man is Okaso, of the king's guard, and, lord, he desires to serve you."

"So I think," said Sanders sarcastically. "Tell me, Okaso, do you desire to serve me as you served the lord Militini, whom you pushed into the cave of the Old One?"

"Master, if you speak of Amatini," said the man calmly, "that was an order. And how should a soldier do if one say to him 'Do this,' and he think on the right or wrong of it? But now I come to serve you by the Old Woman's orders."

"To serve me by the Old Woman's orders?" repeated Sanders incredulously. "O ko, this is strange, for I wish no favour of the Old Woman. And in what way can you serve me, soldier?"

"Lord, I bring with me many thousand spears, being three regiments, all well commanded and hot for fighting."

This was staggering news.

"How do I know this is not a cunning thing you do, Okaso?" he said. "For when you are mixed with my soldiers, could you not turn and destroy them?"

"Of that I have thought," said Okaso, "and I have brought with me my favourite wife and my three children, who shall sit upon your fine ship and be blood for you if I betray you."

The man was obviously sincere—so sincere that Bones, who saw a trap in everything, was impressed.

"Why does she do this, the Old Woman who hates me and has marked me for death?" asked Sanders.

"Lord, she hates the Tofolaka worse, I think," said Okaso, "because they set up a witch who spoke devilish words about Her Holiness."

So the Old Woman was alive. But Hamilton was alive, too, and half the malignity in Sanders's heart against this terrible power vanished with the knowledge of his friend's welfare.

"I will trust you, Okaso," he said. "Yet you shall bring your woman and your three children on board, and be sure I will have no softness in my heart, for them if you betray me. Tomorrow morning you shall take your canoes and fasten them, the nose of one to the end of another, in a long line, and I will fasten the first by a rope to my ship, and you shall go down the river with magical speed and without labour."

"Are you going to the Tofolaka?" said Bones in English, and Sanders nodded.

"Yes." he said quietly. "I am going to the village of Tonkini, where Hamilton expects to meet me. It couldn't have been chosen better for my purpose. From that landing I can throw a force into the heart of Tofolaka, which will bring the main body of Rimilaka's forces back. Incidentally, it will give the Fongini people time to bridge the river. Although I am not a soldier," he said. "I believe that to carry the war into your enemy's country is a favourite plan of all the great strategists."

"You're right," said the enthusiastic Bones. "Dear old Excellency, you're absolutely right! That IS my idea!"

"As for you, Bosambo." said Sanders, "you will come with me on the Zaire, and I think there'll be enough fighting for all of us."

Before daybreak the Zaire steamed down, strewn, and behind her trailed more canoes in one line than any of the people of Rimi-Rimi had ever seen; and in each canoe sat twelve delighted men of the King's guard who found their canoes moving without any effort on their part, and that was pleasing, because soldiers do not like work.

They came to the village of Tonkini at noon, having travelled considerably

over a hundred miles in seven hours, and they landed without opposition. Okaso, who was a skilled captain, threw out a screen of skirmishers without finding his enemy in force, though one village showed fight and was taken and burnt.

The country hereabouts was open.

They were in the foot-hills of the Ghost Mountain, and within twenty miles of the path which led to the Ochori country. To secure this path was Sanders's first consideration, and he sent forward a third of his force to establish themselves in the country to the other side of the road; but Rimilaka had heard news in the night, and, what was more important, had a large force within striking distance of the mountain; and scarcely had the Old King's guard reached their post when Rimilaka struck with five thousand spears and threw the invaders back half-way to their base.

Bosambo saw the danger and went forward at the head of two regiments, striking at a point where he guessed the right of Rimilaka's spears would rest. The manoeuvre was only partially successful, because the greater portion of Rimilaka's force was now in movement; and though Bosambo reached the enemy's flank and turned it he had to retire, leaving a considerable portion of his force upon the ground.

"Lord, I think it is not well," he said. He had come back to Sanders, bleeding from a wound in his shoulder and very tired. This tiredness he explained simply,

"I carried back Okaso who is hurt with a spear in the chest, and will die if it is the will of God. But I think this fight is worth all, because the men led me king as they went into battle. So also did Okaso, else," he added naively. "I would have left him to be chopped."

Okaso's injuries were not as serious as Bosambo thought, but quite bad enough, as Sanders saw when he dressed the wound.

"You shall go on board my ship, Okaso," he said, "and I think you will live."

"It is a terribly strange thing you do, lord," said the fighting captain, "saving those who are hurt to death."

"That is the way of the new king," said Sanders, "and the law he brings."

He had his mind occupied for the next hour. Rimilaka was attacking in full strength, and once broke through the locked line and would have brought about disaster but for an opportune machine-gun post which Bones had sited.

It was late in the afternoon when Rimilaka delivered his third and most serious blow, and Sanders guessed that every warrior the Tofolaka could muster was attacking. The defensive line gave in waves, and it seemed that the end was at hand. Then Bosambo led his eighty warriors into a crucial gap, and for a

moment defeat was averted.

Sanders sent for Bones, and, handing over his machine-gun to his sergeant, Captain Tibbetts reported.

"If we bolt before this crowd, we're probably finished in this country," said Sanders; "and if we don't bolt, we're certainly finished. Have the launch ready, and a full head of steam in the Zaire."

The belt of land his force was holding was scarcely a mile wide, and behind the warriors was no retreat but the river and their canoes. Rimilaka saw the fight from a hill near by.

"Now," he said exultantly, "my day has come, and I shall be king of this land."

He called a grey-haired chief to him.

"Go now and tell my captains to make an end," he said, "for I see that Sandi's soldiers are weak, and if we run quickly our enemies will not reach his boat."

The old man carried his message and then edged his way into the struggling line, where he was killed.

And then, when it seemed that nothing could save Sanders and his party, when the line was wavering and only a pitiful remnant of the king's guard was fighting, and that for its life, Rimilaka turned his head and saw an immense army behind him. They were pouring down the hill through the narrow road which led to the Ochori—Akasava and N'gombi and Ochori—thousands of yellow shields and flashing spear-tops.

"My daughter," he stammered, "how is this?"

He was trembling like a leaf.

"I think these are foreigners," she said huskily.

"You have made me a dead man," said Rimilaka, and stabbed her between the shoulders with his killing spear.

Then he went down to meet the new enemy, and died.

From where he stood Sanders could not see what was happening, only that what appeared to be an inevitably successful enemy was giving way and running in groups, and from far away came the crash of shields and the hoarse shouts of men.

"O Bosambo," he called "what is this?"

"Now, God knows," said Bosambo, "but I think that this is an answer to the prayers which I have addressed to various gods."

He went forward and met none of the enemy and then he raised a great shout, for he had recognized the shields of the company which was coming toward him at a run. He stopped and threw out his arms to them, and the shields

opened and a woman came out—a woman very beautiful in Bosambo's eyes.

When he returned, bleeding and dusty, to Sanders, he carried the woman sitting on his shoulder.

"Lord," he said, "behold Fitema, who is my wife, and who raised the People of the Lower River for our help!"

Sanders put out his hands with a smile and lifted the woman down.

"I see that you are as good a queen for these people, Fitema, as Bosambo is king," he said, "and the soft places of the Ochori are not for you."

"Lord, that is true." she said. "Here I come to stay with my man, and my two fine sons will follow me, O Bosambo, why do you dance?"

Bosambo had stuck his spear head down in the ground and was making little steps about it, performing the dance of the Kroo people, shuffling his feet and slapping his thighs, and as he danced he sang—

"I am the king of this land, and Fitema is my true wife. I am a follower of the Prophet and of other saints and holy ones, etc."

Sanders left him to his joy and to the ecstatic girl, and went on to the ship.

"I think this finishes our work, Bones." said Sanders brusquely. "There has been no sign of Hamilton—that is the only thing which is worrying me now."

"Not a sign," said Bones irritably.

Sanders bit his lip.

"It is queer," he said, "but I suppose we mustn't be particular to an hour or two. He only told us to be here, and he did not specify the hour he would come."

"Of course not," said Bones. His anxiety showed in his voice. "Naturally, dear old Commissioner, we can't expect him to run to timetable." He changed the subject with a question.

"Yes." answered Sanders, "the casualties are rather heavy, but we've settled the Tofolaka, and they will remember this battle for many a day."

"There are still two regiments," said Bones.

"I doubt it." said Sanders, with a smile. "You mean the two regiments which are waiting on the banks of the Mala? According to the rumour I got just before I came aboard—and these rumours are mostly right—the Fongini are already across the river, and I do not think the Tofolaka people will trouble us again."

He turned and dropped his hands on Bones's shoulders and shook him gently.

"Bones. I know a better place than this country, and by this and by that, when I have settled Bosambo firmly, I am going there."

"Yes," said Bones, but with no great heart.

It was no use trying to make conversation; now that the strain of the battle was removed, they found that a heavier burden rested on them. Night came, and still no sign of Hamilton. They kept the search-lights playing on the river throughout the night, and the morning found them tired and irritable. News had come of the Fongini. They had indeed crossed the river, and the two regiments which had opposed them were no more. Sanders sent a message to the Fongini chief telling him to hold his men and was satisfied that his orders would be obeyed. He knew instinctively that his mission was accomplished, and that the solution he had sought had been found.

Bosambo, in a more sober mood, brought a startling estimate of the total losses. Rimilaka's body had been found, also the body of his daughter.

"Lord, had I found her alive," said the gentle Fitema, "she would have died slowly, but my man is very gentle with women, as all men know."

"You weary me with praise," said the smug Bosambo. "Yet you have not told our lord how kind I was to the widow of the Akasava man whom I drowned, or how I brought the little children of Kesemi into the hut of my headman because I slew him."

"I remember that palaver, Bosambo." said Sanders, a little twinkle in his eye. "Your headman came to me and complained of your generosity."

"Lord, he was a dog," said Bosambo. "Look!" he yelled. He pointed up the river. In the very centre was a canoe, and it was paddled by a man in a tattered white shirt.

Sanders raised his glasses and gasped—

"Hamilton!"

Hamilton was paddling furiously. Now and again he looked over his shoulder, but there was nothing in sight, and it seemed that he kept to the centre of the river so that he might see behind him, for hereabouts the great river runs in a succession of curls. With a sweep of his paddle he came alongside, and Sanders gripped him by the hand and hauled him aboard.

"My dear fellow—" he said brokenly, and then could say no more.

It was an exceedingly clean-looking Hamilton, though his face was pale. His clothes were in tatters and his hair was unusually long. For a moment he could not speak, and then he caught Sanders's arm and gently pushed him aside.

"Guns!" he said thickly, and, running to where the Hotchkiss stood, he slipped open the breech and threw in a shell.

There was nothing in sight, and for a moment Sanders thought that Hamilton's brain was affected; but it was only for a moment, for round the bend swept a

single canoe, and behind twenty others in a line.

The first canoe was at least fifty yards ahead of those that followed, and it carried one paddler. Again Sanders fixed his glasses, and nearly dropped them, for he recognized the straw coat and the curious birdcage head-dress.

"The Woman of Limbi!" he cried.

Behind him was a rifle rack and he pulled down a sporting Lee-Metford and slipped in a cartridge from the magazine.

"What are you going to do?"

It was Hamilton, and his voice was strained.

"I'm going to rid this country of its last menace." said Sanders, "and I rather fancy that I shall not miss her."

"Miss whom?" said Hamilton.

"The Old Woman of Limbi," said Sanders, and as he fired Hamilton knocked up his gun.

"Sanders," he said breathlessly "Sanders—she is my wife! if you must shoot, shoot the devils who are following her!"

XII. — WHAT HAPPENED TO HAMILTON

EVERY man gifted with imagination has speculated upon the manner in which he would meet the great moment of his dissolution. It is an idle speculation for nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand, since death at the end has no terrors and excites no fear.

Hamilton of the Houssas had stood before the narrow slit of the Old Woman's cave, and had bent his head and gone in, believing that the end had come. And he had closed his eyes before the flashing blade of the sword. His last vision had been of a monstrous shape that eyed him furtively, as he thought, behind a fringe of grass tassels. Then he had heard the slash and thud of the sword and his knees had given way.

A swoon may last for an hour or the fraction of a second. Before Hamilton's knees had touched the ground, he had instinctively thrown out a foot to save himself, and he was not dead. He felt something shiver against his foot, and looked down. There was sufficient light in the cave to see clearly. The kid which was part of the sacrifice was dead, kicking its last as he looked. And then his eyes slowly travelled in the direction of the cave entrance. He saw the Old Woman, watched her caperings, saw the swing of her bloody sword, and then she came back slowly and stood before him, waiting.

"O woman, end this." said Hamilton in Bomongo, but still she did not speak. He thought she was watching the entrance of the cave and he turned again and saw the backs of the departing soldiers. Then she went behind him, and he felt her cutting at the ropes which bound him In a second he was free, and his hand dropped on the revolver at his belt,

"I'm so sorry to have scared you." said a voice in English, and he stepped back, staring.

The hands with their leopard-skin gloves went and lifted the cage-like structure from her head, and he saw a head such as he had never dreamt of seeing in any land, and never in the wildest delirium of fever had expected to see in the Old King's country. The hair was dull gold, the calm beautiful face was perfect in shape and colouring. And then he recognized her and fell back a pace. "Diana Ferguson!" he breathed, and she nodded slowly, peeling off her leopard-skin gloves.

"Don't speak loudly." she said in a low voice, "Wait, and I will take you to a safe place."

She had stripped off her gloves and unfastened the straw jacket which reached to her feet and put it carefully by one of the walls, and it was so stiff and heavy that it stood of itself. Then she unfastened her hair, which was bunched on the top of her head, and shook it loose, and it fell in a billow of gold over her shoulders.

Hamilton could only stare stupidly at the girl, and had eyes for nothing else. Then she took his hand to guide him, and he followed her over the uneven floor of the cave and along a zigzag passage which was in complete darkness.

He guessed that she was finding her way by touching the wall, for she walked along without hesitation; and after a while he saw a dim light ahead, which proved to be the reflected light from a fire which was burning in the principal chamber of the cave.

It was an immense cavern, the roof of which, he judged, was a hundred feet high. The floor space was a rough oval—he afterwards measured it—of eighty feet at its longest and forty-five feet at its widest. The walls rose almost perpendicularly, and at one side ran a flight of steps roughly hewn, the end of which he could not see in the gloom.

Another thing he noticed was that the smoke rose straight, and the air was sweet and good. In the wall opposite to the "stairway" were two deep alcoves, and in one of these was a native hut deeply thatched, and he wondered whether the Old Woman or the girl had erected this, and just why this additional privacy was necessary.

Diana Ferguson was looking at him curiously, and coloured when his eyes met

hers.

"You are the first white man I have seen for five years," said she, with a little catch in her voice. "The first strange white man, I mean."

"I am dazed," smiled Hamilton, "I suppose I'm not dreaming."

She answered with a smile of peculiar sweetness.

"You don't know what a relief it is to me that you are here," she said. "I did try so hard to catch all three of you, and I marked Mr Sanders—"

"You?"

She shook her head.

"My poor girl did that. They call her tchu. She was a girl who had been marked for death by the king years ago. Do you feel hungry?" she asked. "I have food here."

"I am hungry for information." he laughed, "and I am mystified beyond words. Tell me first, is the Old Woman here?"

She shook her head. "I am the Old Woman," she said simply. And then Hamilton jumped, for a feeble voice called "Diana!"

"Who's that?" he said starting to his feet.

She laid her hand on his and smiled. "My father," she said, and went into the hut.

She was gone for some time, and when she returned there was a worried frown on her face.

"Father is very ill," she said, "He has been ill for some time."

"Your father?" he repeated incredulously. "Surely he was—"

"I'll tell you the whole story," she said, and settled down on a rug by the fire.

She seemed unconscious of the scantiness of her attire, for the thin dress she wore left her shoulders bare, and the skirt was little longer than a kilt.

"We were marked for destruction, you know. Have you seen my mother?"

Hamilton nodded.

"Is she well?" asked the girl quickly, and when he replied in the affirmative, "Thank God!" she said. "I'm so worried that I didn't ask, though of course I knew she escaped, and I prayed that she had not gone mad under the strain. We had a mission, as you know, and we were really doing good work until the Old Woman grew jealous of father's influence and demanded our lives from the king. We had no idea that there was any danger—though one of the servants had given us a half warning—and the first intimation we had that anything was wrong was when Mofolobo, the king's hunter, came into the hut

while we were at breakfast, and, without any warning, struck at my father. Father managed to avoid the blow, and what followed seems like a bad dream. I saw them struggling in the hut, and I saw mother running towards the river. And then Mofolobo came out with such an evil look on his face that my blood turned to ice. I was paralysed for a moment, and then turned and ran, Mofolobo following me. I flew into the woods, and I heard, him coming after me. I was very agile in those days and could climb a tree like a cat. I can still climb." she said, with a half smile, "but I don't think I would dare do the things I did then."

"There were several big, bushy trees with low branches, and, seizing an opportunity when I was out of sight of him, I leapt up, caught the lowest branch, and drew myself up and out of sight, crouching against the trunk and clasping it tightly, praying that the movement of the leaves would not betray me. Fortunately there was a wind blowing that day, and Mofolobo passed me by. I remained still, and presently he came back, looking at the path, and apparently puzzled, for I heard him talking to himself. He could track me to the spot where the branch crosses the path, but after that the trail was broken. I don't know why he did not think of looking into the tree, and once I think he did glance up, but dismissed the possibility of my hiding there as being an unlikely one. I heard him thrashing the bushes with his spear, and once I heard a scream, and my heart came into my mouth; but it seems that Mofolobo must have detected something crouching in the low grass and have speared it, only to find that it was a monkey. It was a monkey's cry I heard."

Hamilton nodded.

"That is why he cleaned his spear." he said.

"Did he? Then you know—" began the girl.

"I know nothing," said Hamilton, "except that he was seen coming out of the wood cleaning his spear."

"When night fell," said the girl, "I went on through the wood, hoping to reach the river and find a canoe in which I could get through Hell's Gate to the Ochori Country, where I knew Mr. Sanders, the Commissioner, was. But I must have lost my bearings in the dark, and wandered on, and nearly walked into a village.

"That would have been fatal, for the Old Woman's word had gone out, and I knew I should be captured. I could not depend upon even the most devout of our converts. For three days and nights I travelled, and one morning at daybreak I found myself on the northern slopes of Mount Limpisi. I had heard of the terrible Old Woman and I knew, of course, that if I fell into her clutches there was small hope for my life.

"That night I managed to make my way to the far side of the mountain, which

country people think is haunted. Beyond the mountain, as you know, is a desert, where wild animals abound and where it would be almost impossible to find food. The north side of the mountain is pitted with holes and caves, but these, I found, were mostly used as lairs by wild animals, and I had a narrow escape from a leopard mother whom I had disturbed.

"Food was the greatest difficulty; of water there was plenty, for the northern hills abound in streams. I had been living on nuts, and I had got a supply of these tied up in the apron I was wearing. To these I added a bunch of bananas which I had stolen from a native garden on the outskirts of one of the villages, and this was sufficient to sustain me whilst I explored the hill. For I knew that, even if I found a likely hiding-place, I should have to go at least once a week into the populated country to get my food, for on the hill there are no trees but junipers and pines.

"I suppose I was a thousand feet up the hill when I discovered what looked to me like a likely cave. I went in carefully, listening and smelling—" she smiled "—but there was no beast smell. And I found myself in what reminded me of a mine gallery—we came from a mining district in Wales. I found the passage, which was perfectly straight, but sloped downwards, and the light from the opening was sufficient to enable me to find my way. But presently this failed, and I stopped. I hadn't the courage to go on in the dark, for I did not know where the passage led to.

"I was on the point of turning back, when I heard a faint sound ahead of me—as though somebody was striking the rock with a stick. I thought that in the darkness I could not be detected, and, though I was dreadfully frightened, I determined to go on a little farther. I walked half a dozen paces down the incline, and then, reaching out my foot, I felt I was stepping into the air, and drew back, half dead with fright. I lay flat on the ground and reached down, and it was very ridiculous, for what I had thought was the edge of a precipice was really a step. Less than a foot down I found firm foothold. This, too, terminated abruptly, and again I investigated, this time with my foot, to find another ledge, and I realized that I was on a man-made stairway. That is it." She pointed up to the wall of the cave. "There are five hundred of those steps," she said, and Hamilton gasped. "Father thinks they must have been made thousands of years ago, and that this was a mine chamber. He has found garnets and little diamonds here, but nothing of any value. But I must tell you what happened," she went on.

"It was very slow progress I made, for I was in fear that there might be a break in the steps, and I had to test every one before I put my weight upon it. After an awful long time—it seemed a whole day—I saw a glimmer of light at the end, which was sufficient, at any rate, to show me the stairs and enable me to move more quickly. Then, as the light grew stronger, I became cautious.

Fortunately I was wearing a pair of rubber-soled shoes that made no sound, but the stairs were so littered with stones that the danger of making some sort of sound was a very grave one.

"After a while I came in sight of this cave, and when I looked down I nearly swooned, for there, seated before a fire, was the most awful woman I have ever seen. I think the Woman of Limbi must have been a hundred years old."

Hamilton nodded.

"She was terribly thin, and I could count every rib from where I stood. She sat before the fire, crooning and talking to herself, swaying backwards and forwards like a demented thing; and I am sure she was mad, and must have been mad for many years. I hardly dared draw breath, but, pressed close to the wall, I peeped down at her. And at that moment I really had a fear that she might be possessed of supernatural powers.

"After a long time she got up from the fire and went out through the passage-way to the entrance to the cave. She had been roasting a chicken, and it was laid on a leaf by the side of the fire, and the smell of the food was maddening, for I was hall starving. I could hear the shuffle of her feet growing fainter, and then I grew bold. I knew I was strong enough to overcome that puny old creature, and the only danger was that she might have some attendants within call. I risked that, and, running down the remainder of the steps, I snatched up the food and ate ravenously. I am afraid I was an awful pig," she added naively, and Hamilton chuckled.

"The Old Woman did not return, and, once my appetite was satisfied, I fell into a panic. I looked round this room and saw, against one of the walls, a heap of swords. You know that every sacrifice that comes to the cave brings his own sword?"

Hamilton nodded.

"I didn't hesitate. I took up the smallest and drew it. It was awful." She shuddered. "The blade was rusted with blood, but at the time this did not trouble me. I listened, and there was no sound. And then I crept along the dark passage where I led you into the outer cave. By this time my eyes had got accustomed to the gloom, and there was no difficulty in finding my way. I came stealthily into the outer cave, expecting every minute to see the Old Woman's horrible face; but as I turned the corner I heard her squeaking, and, putting my head round, I saw the back of her standing at the entrance to the cave, haranguing the soldiers, who had evidently brought a victim.

"The sacrifice was a girl, younger than I, and the poor thing was howling most dismally. Her hands were strapped behind her, and she carried a sword at her waist, and the little goat was fastened by a rope to her neck, as yours was. I don't know what it was, but at the sight of that wretched victim, something

inside me boiled up. The Old Woman backed into the cave and stood ready to receive the shrinking girl, who came sobbing toward her. Then, as the Old Woman brought up her sword, I struck at her."

Again she shuddered and covered her face.

"It was terrible, but I didn't realize how terrible it was till long after. She dropped like a stone, and I think I must have killed her instantaneously. I grabbed the girl by the hand and pushed her into the passage, and then I realized—for I had heard about the custom of the Old Woman—that the soldiers were waiting to 'feel blood.' I was horror-stricken. If the woman did not go out, I thought they might have come in. There was nothing else to do. I lifted the headdress of the Old Woman of Limbi, and with trembling fingers I undid her straw cloak. I won't ask you to imagine my feelings when I put on that terrible hat of hers and fastened the cloak round me. The straw seemed to clutch my arms. But, as it happened, nothing could have been better, for, by stooping slightly, I could make the dress reach the ground, and the leopard paws which she wore on her hands hid the fact that my hands were white.

"I picked up the sword and, going to the entrance of the cave, I sprinkled the people, and must have been on the verge of collapse, for when I came back I fainted, I got rid of the dress and went in search of the sacrifice. I found her sitting by the fire, shivering. Like all native girls she was stupid, and it took me hours to explain that she was not going to be killed. When I told her that I had killed the Old Woman of Limbi, I thought she would have died with horror."

"She was your tchu!" said Hamilton, with sudden realization.

Diana nodded.

"The Old Woman used to have a familiar, who would scare people who had been brought to her cave with the death mark, and they would act as her messengers until the mad old thing would chop her companion and take another. You don't know how many weeks it took me to convince this girl that she would not share the fate of her predecessors. Afterwards she became most devoted, and was the dearest, kindest thing—" Her voice broke. "She died last week," she said simply.

"Then she came to mark us?" asked Hamilton.

"Yes, I sent her, knowing that she would be immune and would not be molested. She carried a message, which apparently you did not get. She left it on Mr. Sanders's desk, I gathered."

"And Mofolobo found it there when he came in with his soldiers to the city," said Hamilton. "But your father?"

"That came later," said the girl. "Two days after I had taken up my residence in

the cave and had managed to clean the Old Woman's dress so that it was at least wearable. I heard a hubbub at the mouth of the cave, and went there, to find my father. Of course, I was wearing the straw coat and the mask, and he did not recognize me, and it broke my heart even to pretend that I was going to hurt him. This time I had to find blood, and the kid which came as part of the sacrifice was the unfortunate little victim. Ugh!

"Father was quite demented with fever and the treatment he had received, and that made things easier. He told me afterwards that he did not recollect being brought to the cave, and knew nothing until he woke up and found himself here."

Hamilton asked her about Kufusu, the messenger whose head had been sent to Sanders.

"I know nothing of him," she said. "The guard settle matters like that—in the interest of the Old Woman," she said, with a grimace.

She got up quickly and turned towards the hut. There was standing in the doorway a grey-haired man in a ragged shirt and trousers, who looked at Hamilton with a queer little smile. The girl was at his side, and, drawing his arm round her shoulder, she supported him to the fire.

"Major Hamilton?" said the old man, "I met you, I think, when I came through your territory years ago."

"I remember you quite well, sir," said Hamilton.

"You have seen my wife?" said the missionary anxiously, and Hamilton told what news he could of the distracted woman who had come to the Commissioner's house on a memorable night.

"Thank God, she's safe!" said the missionary quietly. "I have tried to get word through, but it has been impossible. I am without writing materials and the only method of communication I have found—and that hasn't proved very effective—has been to write on wood with a burnt stick, How we shall manage now that poor Lazai is dead, I do not know," he said.

"How do you manage about food?" asked Hamilton.

"It comes regularly. One of the guard brings it and leaves it in the entrance of the hut every morning. Of late we have had a great deal of goats' milk. I am afraid this is going to be a trying time for you, Major Hamilton."

"Is there no chance of escaping by the way you came in?" asked Hamilton, and the girl shook her head.

"You may get to the north side of the hill," she said, "but since I came, new villages have sprung up on each side, and it is quite impossible to reach the river without passing through the village, and that is one of the guard's posts."

Hamilton slept that night by the fire, and early the next morning he made a reconnaissance of the stairway, up which, he learnt, the tchu had reached the outer world. From the hill slope he looked across a barren desert to a low range of mountains which might have been fifty miles away, such was the clearness of the desert atmosphere. And then he walked down one side of the hill, and had not gone far before he came within sight of the guard village and the flowing river beyond.

The next day he made a reconnaissance in the other direction, without any greater success, though he might have broken through alone, for he had his two pistols and a reserve of ammunition; but that would mean leaving the girl and her father alone, and he suspected that the old man was nearing his end.

One night, after Hamilton had been in the cave a week, Mr. Ferguson had a bad heart attack, and Hamilton thought it was all over. But the old man rallied surprisingly, though his recovery, Hamilton was certain, could only be temporary. Ferguson himself had no doubt as to this, nor had the girl, for whose quiet courage and cheerfulness Hamilton's admiration was reaching a more tender phase.

"I am afraid," she said one night, her hands gripped together in an agony of sorrow. "If we only had medicine!"

Hamilton groaned.

"I have a medicine-chest in my cabin," he said, "That is the maddening thought."

He thought all one afternoon, sitting on the hillside and watching two leopards at play on the plain below, and then an inspiration came to him, and he went down the steps into the cave.

"Who carries out your orders, Diana?" he asked. He had reached the stage of friendship where the conventional prefix seemed absurd.

"O man," she said, in a pathetic attempt at pleasantry, "all men obey me!"

"But tell me, Diana, suppose you wanted something done? Suppose you wanted Sanders caught?"

"I should send for Okaso," she said. "Why? Do you wish him captured? I am afraid he will be more difficult than you."

"Would Okaso carry out the instructions you gave him?"

"For the moment, yes," she said.

"Now, listen to me," said Hamilton, and instructed her minutely.

Hope showed in the girl's face.

"He may fail," she said. "The natives are rather clumsy when they are dealing

with civilized things. Is this the key of your cabin? Isn't it curious! I haven't seen a key for years."

She held it in her hand for a moment, then went into the outer cave and donned her grass cloak and head-dress. The guard of virgins saw the Old Woman standing in the entrance to the cave, and one ran toward her, flinging herself upon her face.

"Send for Okaso," said the girl, and Okaso came before sundown and prostrated himself.

"O Okaso, captain of my guard," said the girl in shrill Bomongo, "take this devil thing which I give to you, and tell one who is very cunning to go to Rimi-Rimi. First he shall buy one of the grey birds that moan from the white man Saudi; and if Sandi will not sell, though you offer a very precious price, let one be stolen; for my spirit has told me that I must make a sacrifice of a grey bird."

"O Devil Woman," said Okaso, "this shall be."

"Take this also, Okaso, my servant," said Diana, and flung the key down by the side of his face. "On the big white canoe where the white men dwell are three houses of wood. This devil thing which I give you shall he put in a certain hole in the middle door and turned, and then will the door open by magic, and whosoever goes will pass in. And there he shall find a great box, and he shall break it open, and take from there a box which is of the colour of a banana when it is fully ripe. And that and the grey bird you shall bring to me."

"Lady, this shall be," said Okaso. "But my head is full of holes, so, Holy One, say over again all you have told me."

Twice and a third time she repeated her instructions, and Okaso took the key in his hand and was going down the hill, when she called him. An idea came to her on the spur of the moment. She would never have dared this, but for the courage and confidence Hamilton's presence had brought.

"O Okaso, this, too, is my order—that you shall take all your soldiers and go to Rimi-Rimi."

"Lady, is it war?" he asked eagerly. "For this my young men desire."

"It is war, but the white man's war, for he goes against the Tofolaka, which have put shame on me."

He stood petrified with astonishment.

"Lady, must I join the white man and the new king?"

"It is my order," she said, and he turned and walked down the hill.

"You wonderful girl!" said Hamilton. "We can give your father a new lease of

life if we can get my medicine-chest. And if the pigeons come, Diana, our imprisonment is over, for I can get a message through to Sanders."

That night Mr. Ferguson was taken ill again, and when he had recovered he sent Diana away.

"Hamilton," he said in a weak voice, "I do not think I have long to live."

"Don't say that, sir," said Hamilton, with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling, and the old man did not speak for some time.

"Hamilton," he said at last, "I am worried about Diana. I am leaving her here—with you—and Heaven knows when you can get away."

"I hope we shall all get away soon," said Hamilton quietly.

"I have hoped that for five years," said the missionary, with a faint smile. "But if you do not, and you are kept a prisoner here—you and Diana—it does not seem to me possible that you can avoid loving her."

Hamilton's heart gave a leap, and the old man must have read something in his eyes.

"Or she you," he said slowly, "for she is a young and loving girl." He stopped. "Are you married?" he asked, with an effort.

"No, sir," said Hamilton.

"Would you—marry Diana? You understand what I mean, Hamilton? If you escape from here after being for years with my daughter—it would not be well for her."

"I quite understand that, sir, and I shall be happy to marry Diana if—Why, you could marry us," he said suddenly, and Mr. Ferguson nodded.

"I thought that," he said. "That was what I meant."

And there in the cave, by the light of the fire that night, a dying clergyman married them—Hamilton of the Houssas and the Devil Woman of Limbi. That night the girl went into the hut to take her father some food and found him sleeping. She went back again an hour later, and came out white of face and sobbed her grief on Hamilton's shoulder.

They buried Mr.. Ferguson in a cavern—and there were many—in one of the side passages of the outer cave, and he had been dead two days when the servant of Okaso fell at the mouth of the cave with a pigeon in one hand and a medicine-chest in the other.

The medicine-chest was useless now, but the pigeon was good. Hamilton stroked the pretty head of the bird, thinking the while.

"You know this country ever so better than I, Diana," he said. "What chance is there of our escaping, suppose we reached the river?"

She thought a moment.

"If we could get past the big fishing village Tonkini, which is just north of Hell's Gate, we are safe," she said. "But there are always soldiers patrolling those waters in their canoes, and I think they are kept there for the purpose of arresting fugitives. You must have seen the village as you passed."

"We came by in the dark," said Hamilton, with a little smile, "and certainly they would not have stopped us."

He wrote his message and threw the bird, and not until it was on its way did he tell the girl what that message had been.

"We leave here in four days." he said, and she stared at him.

"It is impossible! How can you—"

"I can push my way through the village." said Hamilton, "and this is my plan."

His plan was a simple one. He himself would walk boldly to the village and shoot down opposition. He would take a canoe and begin a leisurely journey. Afterwards the girl must come in her Old Woman's dress and must pursue him, ordering the guards to follow—and guards there were certain to be, for Okaso would leave a considerable detachment for her protection.

"They will keep a respectable distance from you," said Hamilton. "and you can regulate your distance from me, and give us both a much easier time than if we were together. For once they suspected you were white, and had killed the Old Woman of Limbi, every village would send its canoes to intercept you."

Everything fell out he had arranged, except that they left in the evening instead of the morning, and the opposition at the village had been surprisingly slight. They were twenty miles from safety when a puff of wind had taken out Diana's straw mask, and men had seen the golden hair and the white face, although she had replaced the head-dress immediately. But because they believed her gifted with divine power to change herself into whatsoever she wished, their suspicions did not take shape until they had reached the bend of the river which hid them from the Zaire; and then, when Hamilton increased his speed and Diana followed suit, it broke upon their dull minds that they had been tricked, and the long war canoes swept forward at double pace till a shell from the Zaire checked the pursuit with disconcerting suddenness.

Two months later a party of four breakfasted at "Read's Hotel," overlooking the Bay of Funchal, and they were in holiday mood, for the Coast boat, which had made a call at Madeira, was staying for twelve hours. They were grouped about a table set on a piled patio, and the glories of bougainvillea and climbing roses and fragrant heliotrope were about them. Only Bones did not do justice to himself in that festive atmosphere, for he was a very thoughtful young man, and had been for some days,

"Ham," he asked in a hoarse whisper, "are you going to write the story of your experience in the cave and all that sort of stuff, dear old thing?"

"I've told you twenty times, if I've told you once." said the patient Hamilton, "that I am not going to write anything about any adventures whatsoever."

Bones looked round with a furtive air of secrecy, though the conversation was audible to every one at table—

"Do you mind if I write it, dear old thing?"

"I certainly object to your writing anything about me," said Hamilton.

"Impetuous and modest one, I wasn't going to write it about you, my jolly old adventurer. I was going to write it about—do you mind if I describe my own adventures in the cave?"

"But you weren't there," said the indignant Hamilton.

Bones made a tut-tut of annoyance.

"What I mean, dear old thing, is this," he said, "and I really am surprised that your jolly old brain hasn't received the impression before. My suggestion is that I should write of your adventures as my own. How does that strike you?"

"And how will you explain me?" asked Diana Hamilton, and Bones was nonplussed.

"H'm!" he coughed. "That would lead to complications, serious complications, jolly old Devil Lady."

"Why not—" it was Sanders who spoke "—why not write the report for the League of Nations, Bones?"

"That's an idea, sir," said Bones, brightening up.

"And don't forget," said Hamilton, putting sugar in his coffee, "that 'League' is spelt with a 'u'."

"It is wholly unnecessary to tell me that," said Bones. "I know it is spelt with a 'u'. L—E—E—G—U—E—League, dear old thing. And there is only one 'c' in 'Nations.' There are certain things I don't want tellin', Ham."