

THE LATUKA

SOME 80 miles east of the Nile, about midway between Gondokoro and Nimulé, there is a long and narrow valley which stretches north and south. This valley is watered by the river Kos and is the home of the Latuka. The country was visited by Sir S. Baker in 1863.

On the occasion of my visit (1902), the northern part of the country was ruled by a lady named "Tapain"; the southern portion was under a chief called Limoro.

In Africa man is of the mountain or of the plain, and where both exist in a country inhabited by one tribe, it generally leads to the splitting up of the race into two subdivisions; these often in the course of time diverge considerably and tend to show distinct characteristics. The mountaineer, from his geographical position, mode of life, and it may be from the more bracing air he breathes, is stronger and more virile than his fellow of the plain.

When I pitched my camp near the river Kos, and gazed at the high hills on every side, some such thoughts occurred to my mind. I was prepared to find two distinct sections of the Latuka, a hardy race in the hills, a weaker one on the plains. In this I was mistaken, for, with the single exception of Tarangole, Limoro's capital, a huge village of some 400 huts, no other habitation existed on the plains.

This valley of the Latuka, hemmed in on all sides by lofty hills, is most picturesque. At the southern extremity Mount Agoro rises some 10,000 feet; on either side the steep escarpments are terraced with bell-shaped huts enclosed by reed palisades; these reeds are woven into a lattice of various patterns and in the bright sunshine appear almost white.

The country was very dry. In the rainy season the river

Kos is wide and deep and quite impassable; when I saw it, however, but a few inches of water flowed in the centre of its sandy bed.

Here and there along the sides of these hills little streams tumbled down the ravines and leapt from rock to rock, glistening in the sunlight, and so trickled down to the plain, but for the most part the natives on the summits and slopes must have drawn their water supply from natural "dew ponds," as did our own ancestors on the Surrey hills.

The Latuka are a tall race, the tallest I have seen in Africa; they must average, I should think, about 5 feet 8 inches in height. They wear helmets made of human hair and coated outside with brass. Brass wire is the only currency in the country; neither men nor women wear covering of any sort. The language is akin to that of Masai and differs totally from any of the adjacent tribes.

The roofs of the huts are very high and taper to a narrow point; they are mostly thatched with palm leaves; the sides only rise about two feet from the ground, and the interiors are dark and dirty.

I found Limoro at Logguren, a huge pear-shaped mass of granite on which some 30 huts were built. The chief spoke a little Arabic, said he had 107 wives and added to his stock every year. He remembered Sir S. Baker and Emin Pasha; his father Moiya died at Tarangole in 1897.

I asked Limoro why all the people lived on the hills, and he replied that since the Dervishes raided the country, they feared to return to the plains, and, moreover, the different sections were always at war with one another.

Limoro was the chief rainmaker of the tribe and has since been murdered in consequence of a season of drought. Some trading caravans were cut up about two years ago and the country is now closed to Europeans.

Iron is obtained at Mount Kialaming and Mount Iliu; the native shields are very strong and made of buffalo hide. I found the sweet potato and banana in one or two places, but sorghum is the chief food.

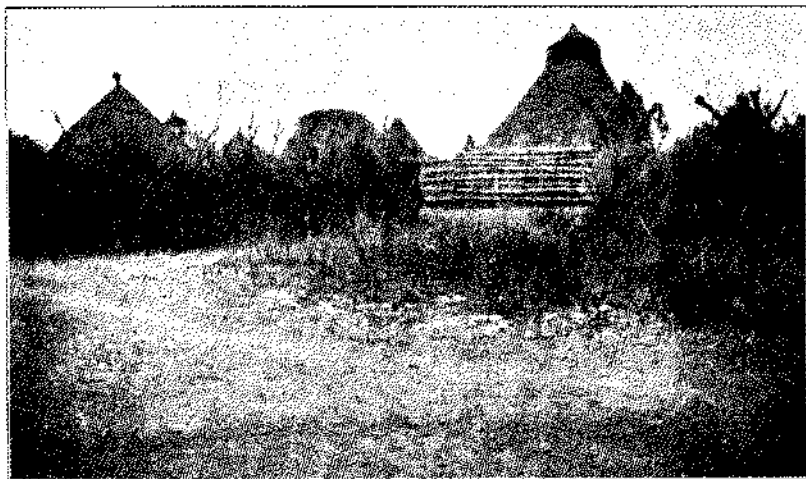
The plains were well stocked with game, which included large herds of roan antelope as well as numerous rhino

and giraffe. Elephant, I was told, were plentiful in the wet season.

On the first day of my arrival in the Latuka valley, I pitched my camp at the foot of a hill called Loboeye. In the afternoon I started off in search of game, attended by my Sudanese orderly and two Swahili carriers. Not far from camp we struck the spoor of two rhino and followed it. The grass was short, but there was much thorn scrub and low dense bush. The rhino tracks led us diagonally across the plain. Once I saw the animals in the distance, but we had almost reached the other side of the plain before I got near them; this time they had evidently got our wind and made off at a great pace. I took a running shot at the nearest, but the bush was so thick that I could see very little and my shot went wide of the mark. I thought it hopeless to follow, and as I was hot and thirsty I made for the shade of a large acacia tree which stood close by.

We were now within a few hundred yards of the hills. Close at hand was some cultivation and several herds of sheep and goats were browsing near. It was a quiet scene; the huts on the hillside were bathed in sunshine, and with the exception of a couple of naked children watching the flocks there was no sign of life; the place seemed very still. Suddenly the silence was broken by the deep note of a war-drum, the sound was taken up and passed along from hill to hill, it stirred the echoes and alarmed the countryside; in a moment men appeared from every hut and clambered down the hills, children and flocks vanished up the winding paths, and in less time than it takes to write the words a large crowd of armed warriors had gathered in our front. The whole place was bristling with spears.

For a few minutes things looked as if they might be unpleasant; then my orderly stepped forward and shouted something in the Bari language. They answered back but evidently did not understand; however, two or three of them advanced and thrust forward a man who spoke a little Arabic; just then the chief arrived, a venerable man carrying a pre-historic blunderbuss. In a few moments matters were explained and we all became the best of friends. It appeared



ENTRANCE TO LATUKA VILLAGE.

the chief's name was Langara and the place was called Kekere. They were at war with the people on the other side of the plain, and as raids were of almost daily occurrence they had mistaken us for enemies. I congratulated the chief on his organization. I never saw men turn out more quickly. After a short palaver I started to return to camp, and the old chief insisted on sending some of his men with me, carrying a sheep as a present.

The echo in this country is most remarkable; the sound is tossed backwards and forwards from hill to hill, echoed and re-echoed till it dies away in the distance.

The first shot I fired on this plain sounded like the rapid fire from a magazine, as it reverberated far down the valley.

At night the sounds were weird. The powerful grunt of the hippo was conspicuous by its absence, but the hyena raised his voice, which was answered in the hills, and the burden of his song was carried on and repeated till it seemed as if some line of ghostly sentries kept vigil till the dawn.

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