

THE GREAT PLATEAU OF NORTHERN RHODESIA,

Being Some Impressions of the
Tanganyika Plateau

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the night, from sunset, they continue to feed, leaving the open ground once more as the sun begins to rise. It is probable that they water morning and evening, though this, of course, depends upon the time of year; in the rainy season they will frequently make wallows in the swamps, and lie there deep in the mud all day long. They are very fond of thick *musitos*, and feed upon young bracken to a large extent.

Until about four or five months old the calves are not allowed to travel with the herd, although, a week after birth, they may join them with their mothers for an hour or so during the day. It has been said that the old cows hide them in thickets and feed them at stated times, but this is not fully substantiated. A herd with young calves will usually travel very much more slowly than one consisting entirely of adults. Lions are believed to be particularly fond of the young calves, and it is said that they will follow a herd for days together, subsisting in the interval solely upon the droppings of the herd.

A somewhat noticeable instance of the presence of mind of a native face to face with danger of a very real description occurred recently. A white man, having wounded a buffalo, was charged by it in country which admitted of no escape. At the crucial moment his *fundi* sprang to his side and, reversing the spear which he carried, struck the animal with it violently upon the nose. It may be remarked in parenthesis that, had the native inflicted a flesh wound, neither he nor his master would have lived to tell the tale.

With regard to the rhinoceros, but little of interest is known at present. The only species hitherto found in North-Eastern Rhodesia is the black rhinoceros, Burchell's white rhinoceros being unknown. At certain times these beasts herd like elephants; one official has stated that he has seen as many as fifty in a single herd, and that the tracks of twenty together are seen with comparative frequency.¹

It is the habit of the rhinoceros to scatter his dung with

¹ In 1909 a three-horned rhinoceros was shot by Captain Pisiscelli, A.D.C. to H.R.H. the Duchess d'Aosta.

his horn ; the natives say that he is mad, and that he does this in the idiotic belief that the procedure will effectually prevent the hunter from following him.

Ant-bears, though common enough throughout the Plateau, are but rarely met with. The natives call them *nengo*, and are especially fond of their flesh, which is very fat. The animals themselves subsist mainly upon ants, and their method of capturing these is to dig into an ant-heap until the inhabitants, alarmed, commence to scurry to and fro. The ant-bear then inserts its long, thin tongue, and holds it motionless until it is thickly coated with ants, when it is withdrawn and the ants devoured.

As is but natural in a country where lions abound, these animals form the basis of many native superstitions, which it would be wearisome to detail at length. But the superstition anent the *chisanguka*, or were-lion, is interesting, as having its parallel in most of the primitive systems of folklore. It is implicitly believed that certain lions are not merely animals, but human beings, malevolent and endowed with magical powers, who, for their own evil ends, have assumed the dreaded form of the king of beasts. A native will tell you, confidently, that such-and-such a lion is well known to be So-and-so *sanguka'd*—that is to say, transmogrified. And there is a story, widely believed, of a certain so-called were-lion which, being slain by a boar, was thereupon at once declared to be no *chisanguka*. Again, the lion plays an important part in the fortunes of the Mambwe dynasty, it being a universally accepted fact (as previously stated) that the Sokolo, or Mwenemambwe—the reigning chief of the Amambwe—is, at death, transformed into a lion.

Two distinct species of lions are known to the Plateau—the 'white' lion and the 'black-maned' lion. As a pendant to this, one may consider the swamp leopard—if, indeed, this is a distinct species. An official who has had experience of these animals gives it as his opinion that the swamp leopard is not a different species, but that leopards who, on account of the flat, swampy country around some parts of Lake Bangweolo, have taken to frequenting the edges

pletely covered, the marks would be continued on the left forearm. Evidently, however, the exact number of marks varied, since as many as fifteen were sometimes given for a single kill, and it would seem that, after a certain number of elephants had been killed, the expert became entitled to finish tattooing his arm with as many marks as he might think fit.

When a man had killed two or three buffalo, he was admitted to the *uwanga*. A rhinoceros equalled an elephant, but a hippopotamus was evidently regarded as very tame game, and a good many had to be killed to qualify for admission.

The effect of the *uwanga* medicine seems to have been considered as rendering the hunter invisible to his quarry. Lions, probably for superstitious reasons, were not included in the *uwanga*, but a special medicine could be obtained which would 'hold up' an attacking lion until the hunter had time to shoot.

The *mulamba*, or special doctor, whose province it was to make the incision, was paid large prices for his good offices.

After the initiation the *fundis* returned to the village, where beer was drunk, a white cock killed and partaken of by the *bachibinda*, and the women and children joined in dancing and singing until a late hour.

Well-defined ceremonies undoubtedly attended the cutting-up of an elephant—but they are not practised nowadays in their entirety, and seem to have varied in different districts, so that it is difficult to vouch for the accuracy of the following :—

In some districts a torch of grass was passed around the body of the dead animal, under the legs which were uppermost when the beast was down, and finally the elephant was slapped with it upon the forehead. At this stage the song '*Chonde chalima*' was sung, and continued for some time after the ceremony, while one of the hunters stood upon the carcase and the people danced round about it. The skin was then cut, a beginning being usually made at the neck.

The next undertaking was the cutting-up of the tusks.

at a shilling a time in lieu of hut tax. Unfortunately, these crates became speedily too lively and demonstrative, and were on the point of overpowering the station itself, when the sergeant was drastically ordered to burn and bury what he sorrowfully called 'good stink-fish.'

For making large canoes the Wabisa search for large trees in the Luwumbu country, the wood of the *mupapa*, *mulombwa*, *sanninga*, or *mupundu* trees being suitable. When one of the writers ordered a large canoe to be built, all the villagers engaged for the work camped near Movu, where a large trunk of *mupapa* had been located. Several days were spent in cutting down the tree, whereupon half of the workers returned to fetch food, leaving the skilled boat-makers to shape the bows and the stern. In a week the log was trimmed into a solid boat-shaped block, by which time all the workers had returned, and began to cut out the interior. The outlines were marked in charcoal, and the workers fixed their axe heads flatwise in new handles so that they could be used as adzes to hollow out the core. When the inside was sufficiently hollowed out the boat was turned over, but only skilled workmen were allowed to shape the outside lines. It took nearly six weeks to make this large canoe, which was dragged by ropes and wooden rollers to the nearest waterway. Smaller canoes are hewn out in much the same way, since natives believe that burning out the core would spoil the wood and weaken the shell. There was a large canoe on the lake, about 30 ft. long and 8 ft. broad, which was seaworthy and strong. It was called the *Kapopo*, after the mythical monster which was said to have once inhabited the lake. This monster, according to the story-teller, an old Bisa man named Chiwawa, used to come out of the lake and make periodic descents upon villages by night. Its body was as large as seven oxen, and its neck was long and sinuous like that of a python. From its head projected one horn, from underneath which glared a fierce, lidless eye. When it emerged on land the earth shook, and when it roared the sound was heard all over the lake. This blatant beast would make a sudden descent upon a village,

and, inserting its long neck through the narrow doorways, would peer round and drag out and devour the unfortunate inmates one by one. It had a special *penchant* for chiefs and their offspring. When one remembers the voracious native tales about the famous *chibekwe*, or water rhinoceros, with three horns, which used to devour the hippopotamus on Lake Bangweolo, not to mention the Tanganyika sea-serpent, it is not difficult to account for the origin of such stories as have appeared recently in papers about the *dinosaur*, which (according to those who have relied upon such native myths) is said to live, move, and have its being in the vast swamps south of Lake Bangweolo on the river Lunga!

Last of the major industries which are mainly in the hands of the men, is that of salt-making. In 1902 the Assistant Native Commissioner of Mpika Station gave the following account of the salt-making in his division:—

* The grass is cut in such a manner as to leave a little earth on the root, and this is tied in small bundles to dry. When the grass is quite dry the natives burn the bundles, taking care only to char them; for this purpose they take water into their mouths and blow it on to the hot ashes—in other words, making the grass into charcoal. The cinders are then carefully gathered up and taken into the grass shelters which have been built by the riverside. It is not unusual for several hundred natives to congregate at Kibwa during the salt-making season. The women in the meantime have made a large earthen pot in the shape of an inverted cone, with two orifices called *Nshiko*. This vessel is suspended from a post and filled with the cinders containing the salt. On these cinders is poured a large quantity of water, which percolates through them, and runs out at the small holes in the vessel, which are stopped with grass or straw; the water thus filtered but charged with salt is caught in a wooden trough placed to receive it. This salt water is placed in new pots on the fire, and boiled until the water is evaporated, leaving the salt at the bottom. To evaporate enough water to make 12 lb. of salt, the natives are obliged to boil it for thirty-six hours, or, roughly, three hours for each pound of salt. They generally have from four to six pots on the fire at the same time. When all the water is evaporated they break the pot and place the cake of salt on the fire to dry thoroughly. According to the trouble taken in filtering the salt is white or otherwise.