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AMONG PYGMIES AND GORILLAS

WITH THE SWEDISH ZOOLOGICAL
EXPEDITION TO CENTRAL AFRICA 1921

BY
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GYLDENDAL

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difficult to keep some concerns going. Even the currency regulations, which were passed in 1920 and which once and for all fixed the value of the old rupee at two shillings, momentarily increased the economic confusion.

Cultivation has, however, gone bravely forward. The climate is good and the soil fertile. Almost everything grows there: coffee, sugar, beans, wheat, rice, hemp, cotton, flax, and many other crops. There will soon not be a square inch of uncultivated soil for many miles round Nairobi. The wilds have therefore quite naturally receded further into the country. Where formerly you could ride with the giraffe for company, and where the antelopes grazed by the hundreds, there are now neat plantations with long rows of coffee bushes on parade. Or otherwise there is the busy puffing of a tractor motor, which has supplanted the snorting of the rhinoceros.

Of course, we must rejoice at this progress. From the point of view of political economy it would be positively criminal to leave such a rich country undeveloped, but for anybody who remembers Nairobi as a tiny little outpost of civilization in the midst of an untouched wilderness, all these novelties must nevertheless awaken melancholy reflections and a sigh of regret. For what the country has gained in prosperity it has lost in primitive simplicity and bewitching charm. Nature has had to yield to artifice, progress has pushed primitive life back into the shade, where it has been hidden and forgotten. But such is, of course, the logical law of evolution everywhere in the world.

In order to be able to avail ourselves of the regular boat connection across Victoria Nyanza we hurried on our preparations, so that the expedition was ready to start on January 8th. A white hunter was engaged to keep an eye on the boys, the reserve equipment, etc. It was supposed to be a part of his duties to help generally in the camp and in collecting specimens, as also to act as interpreter. He did not keep his job very long, however—but of that later. In the afternoon all the members of the expedition were stowed away in the compartments of the night express. The boys maintained an animated conversation through the carriage windows with relatives and wives concerning the intricate problems of the forthcoming journey. Whether there was enough rice and salt; whether the white gentlemen could shoot; whether they expected to find big villages where the women would be attractive and cheap. And a thousand other things in which a black is interested.

With a jerk and a creak the engine started, but the wheels only turned round and round without advancing. Renewed jerks, renewed handshakings, renewed admonitions. Enveloped in an enormous cloud of white steam, the engine at last pulled itself together, made a determined effort, and got under way, dragging its long tail behind it.

“Goodbye, good luck, good sport!” they called to us on all sides. And Nairobi gradually disappeared in the golden haze of the setting sun. Our thrust at the heart of Africa had begun in real earnest.

finally led to the film-man's bag. It lay stone dead, shot under the shoulder-blade and through the heart with mathematical precision.

From the camp we sent for bearers, and in the early morning hour a circle of black bodies soon danced round the bag: the arch-enemy. Arms and legs waved about in wild delight. Triumphantly the monotonous song sounded from gurgling throats, "Simba anakufa, simba anakwisha." "The lion is dead, the lion is finished."

Yes, such is the story of my first lion shot from a "boma." It was the result of diligent work, the reward of many nights, vain watching and the disappointments of uncomfortable mornings, for you must not believe that the chase is always successful. Just as certain as that you do not get anything for nothing. It requires a thorough knowledge of the ground, of the daily habits of the animals, of the art of camouflage, of the direction of the wind, the moonlight and a thousand other little details; and you must make your preparations so that everything co-operates to the best advantage—nothing must be omitted. When at last your conscience in this respect is quiet, chance settles the result in the last resort.

To shoot lions from a "boma" is nothing to brag about. The sport is, as a rule, not dangerous, because it very rarely happens that an animal jumps in, and in that case it is always by mistake. No, it is fairer to seek for them in the daytime. The only difficulty is to find them. But if you meet a wounded animal in the high grass you had better be on the lookout, because in that little game only cool blood and a quick eye can possibly

save the hunter. If he shoots too soon it may be fatal. If he waits too long it is perhaps too late. You must wait for the right moment so that the bullet has the greatest probability of reaching a vital spot and stopping the attack. But that is really exciting and puts the nerves to a severe test.

What is really the most dangerous African game is a question one often hears—lions, elephants, buffaloes or rhinoceros? Some say one, others insist with just as much emphasis on another.

This is probably because different animals behave in very different ways in different situations. You never know beforehand where you have them, or what they will do on a particular occasion. At one time they show fight, at another time they are cowardly. If the bullet sits badly you have every reason to expect the former, but even with a shot that has touched a vital part they may still attack. A lion, for instance, might after a full hit in the heart still use the strength of the last beat of his pulse to leap about ten yards, and after that lie stone dead over the victim he sprang upon; and it has happened to me that a buffalo that I shot from the front, when the bullet went in between the eyes and out at the back of his head behind his horns, nevertheless turned round, made a treacherous circle and attacked from another side exactly as if he had not been hit in the forehead the moment before.

If, however, you try to take the average of the experiences of different hunters, I believe it leans most to the side of the lion. That is to say, I believe that of one hundred big game shot the highest percentage of those that have attacked in order to

kill their assailant has been found amongst lions. After that come the elephant and the buffalo, last of all the rhinoceros. My own experience, however, points decidedly to the buffalo; but that is because I have nearly always had trouble with him, whatever the reason may be. This, however, does not signify much, and will not affect the average figure, for opinions on this subject are, as has already been pointed out, highly individual.

A chapter on the paradise of the animals south of Lake Edward would not be complete unless I touched in a few words on the life of the rivers. For if the steppes are the promised land of the antelopes and lions, Rutshuru can as justly be called the promised land of the hippopotamus.

I have seen these antediluvian monsters all over Africa. In Kenya, in the lakes of the Great Depression, and on the Nile, but nowhere have they been so fearless as here, no stretch of water has in such a very small area concealed so many. I have never come so near to them and never been able to enjoy their clumsy games so undisturbed as in Rutshuru.

And still, how different things looked here a few decades ago!

When Eric von Rosen visited the place in 1912 there were still, he wrote, herds of more than a hundred animals. What must not the river have been like in still remoter times? It must have been like a great ant-heap of *pachydermata*.

But now the stocks in the rivers have decreased. In spite of repeated visits to the best places we could never find more than fifty animals in any one herd. Generally there are only twenty to thirty,



Herons



Hippopotamus



A yawning chasm



sort of tail of grass hanging down behind. Is there anything more ingenious than human vanity?

"June 7th. At last we have reached Irumu. The district commissioner, Mr. Hallez, has kindly put an empty house at our disposal. It is big and airy, but dark. There is a broad verandah on which I lie. I suppose I shall have to remain here some time till my strength returns. Then on to Uele."

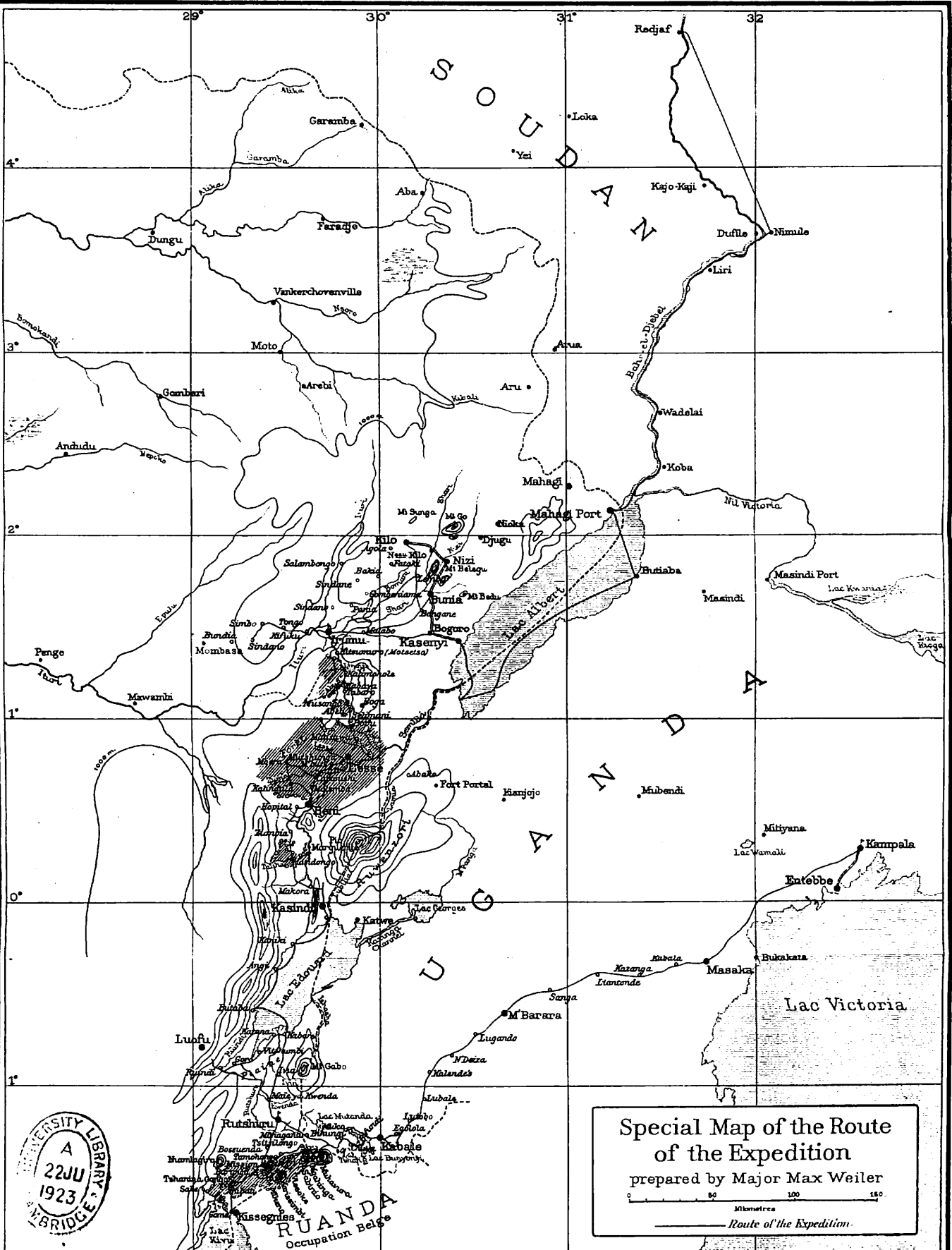
It had originally been my intention to stay two days in Irumu. But it became two months instead. For just as the *spirillum* bacteria let go, malaria seized me and complicated the whole thing. That is how things go when one has bad luck. No other member of the expedition was taken ill. It was only in my thin body that the bacilli lodged and thrived and multiplied. And they did it thoroughly.

I did not see much of the community and its citizens during this long time. That is to say not more than was visible from the verandah. For I was tied down unless I happened to lie in my bed watching the cockroaches eat up the bindings of the few books my library contained. They feasted in their own way, on Fröding and Shakespeare. The worst rainy season had also arrived. Every day showers pattered on the thatched roof and the garden looked like a marsh. The wind howled and the thunder rumbled, mostly at nights. In the end it developed the uncomfortable habit of striking some spot by the corners of the house. Then there was a roar like a cannonade and you jumped up in your bed wondering if the whole structure would fall about your ears, but the

house remained intact and the flashes of lightning sought other victims. Thus one of the doctor's cottage hospitals was wrecked, though no one was hurt.

During all this time the vegetation flourished. Irumu, which was burnt up when we arrived, became transformed after two months' rain into a great sea of green grass with overgrown paths, and the houses peeped out like reddish-yellow islands from the green. Figs and papayas ripened, the pineapples dripped juice, the bananas swelled until they burst. You seemed almost to hear things growing. Even the bird life revived and seemed to multiply. My greatest pleasure was to watch from my verandah the *Vidua paradisea*, flycatchers and humming birds disporting themselves from straw to straw between the showers. Then their wings glistened like multi-coloured metal and the raindrops splashed as they spread their wings. Yes, the birds had a really good time in my green garden.

As time passed it became clear that we must give up the thought of Uele and look for another route to the Nile. It was vexing, because I had promised the State Museum a white rhinoceros and a giant eland which it specially wanted of both the species inhabiting a very limited district in the Northern Congo and Sudan. But we had been delayed from the very start by the coal strike in England and had had no chance of making up for lost time. On the contrary, we were already six weeks late on our arrival at Irumu. And with my fever it soon became hopeless. The rainy season was at its height. The



**Special Map of the Route
of the Expedition**
 prepared by Major Max Weiler
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 Kilometres
Route of the Expedition

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