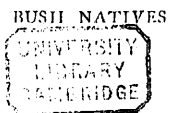




Fr.



THEN I SAW THE CONGO

BY
GRACE FLANDRAU

WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS



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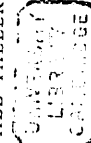
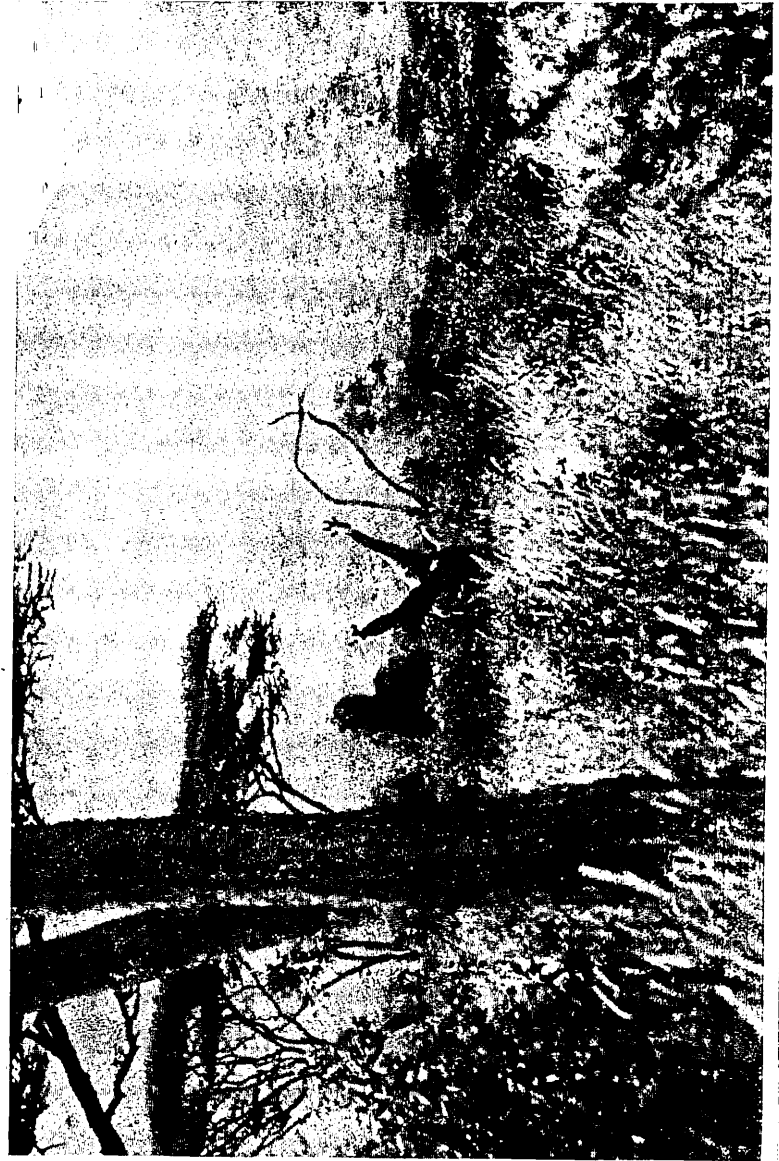
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Farther along we came on a herd of about eighteen giraffes. They were of all sizes—children, pale-gold adolescents, youths and maidens of marriageable age, a couple in the prime of life, and one magnificent old bull of a gorgeous brown-gold so deep it was almost black. After we had stared at one another a long time, the giraffes decided to move on. The young bull took the lead, the others wonderfully ranged themselves in couples for all the world like a wedding procession, and with the patriarch bringing up the rear, went mincing off in a long diagonal across the road and into the woods. A herd of zebra, their well-groomed black and white coats shining like new paint, had been feeding in the background. The going of the giraffes inspired them too to move, and they now drifted quietly off behind the stately procession.

A purple volcano rose in the north, and beyond that bloomed the great white flower of a snow mountain. The road led upward from a vast plain through twisted, rocky ravines. In one of these near the roadside a small tarpaulin was stretched from a low tree to the rock wall, and as we passed, two young men hailed us from the rude camp. They were South Africans, one a professional rhino-hunter, the other a planter. They had driven back from the road a little way into the bush that morning, and their small open truck had been charged by two rhinos and put out of commission. They killed the rhinos and displayed a huge horn, the largest, Schwarz grudgingly admitted, he had ever seen. Rhino horn, it seems, is just hair grown together. It is a dark grey-yellow in colour and is a profitable article of commerce. The hunter was a handsome youngster with an engaging manner and the most beautiful speaking voice I have ever heard, but the fact that he was a professional rhino-hunter roused Schwarz to perfect transports of disdain. Individuals engaged in such a pursuit were, he seemed to believe, no better than rascally vagabonds, and he



contemptuously refused them the lift on one of our trucks they asked for.

We continued to climb through a wild, desolate scene. Already the sun was setting, and for some reason the thought of lions came into my mind. "This is the kind of place," I said to Schwarz, "where I have always supposed lions lived." And by a pleasant coincidence he was able at that precise moment to say, "It is, and there they are."

There, indeed, they were, six or seven—opinion was divided as to the number—great yellow beasts standing in a most pictorial group by the trail, but scarcely seen before; without any undignified appearance of haste, they disappeared into the bush. Our subsequent limited experience with lions proved that they are never, under any circumstances, capable of being undignified.

As night had come we were obliged to make camp here in a fold of the hills. There was no water at this place, but it was nevertheless an agreeable camp. We ate under the umbrella trees, waited on in irreproachable style by two men-servants, one in an undershirt and fez, the other in a decayed felt hat with a feather in it. The cook had a swollen eye, still bleeding from a blow given him by Schwarz. Schwarz was under the impression that Tanganyika Territory was going to the dogs because the British officials would no longer permit you to beat the niggers. What he called the daily face-punching he indulged in, I do not know. "The English beat them all right in Kenya, which they own," complained the probably prejudiced Schwarz, "but here they're making up to the natives. They want to get their hands on Tanganyika Territory for keeps, and when they apply to the League to make it a colony instead of only a mandate, they want the niggers to back them up. But wait till they get hold of it, and then watch them take it out of these rascals!" But then Schwarz bitterly regretted the bygone time when his own *Kultur* and discipline reigned in Tanganyika.

The cook was accompanied by a diminutive wife swathed



FRIENDS WE ACQUIRED ON THE WEST COAST

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in white robes and a Mahomedan veil. Habitually she knitted in the outdoor kitchen, which consisted of a camp fire and a thorn-bush hung with pots and kettles. But when her husband had been beaten she did not knit; she wrapped her head in her veil and sat all day with hidden face proclaiming sympathy and reproach.

Horns and heads were put out in the sun, skins staked down, drying and smelling vilely. Vultures soared or watched from neighbouring trees, hawks menaced the parrots and terrified monkeys. The trucks had to bring water from a stream a long way off, and during our stay here we were never clean. Each morning our extremely soiled but priceless boys stepped softly into the tents with muddy coffee, and from that moment until bedtime their vigilant attention to our comfort, in so far as it lay in their power to contribute to it, never for an instant failed. And for their pains they had their faces frequently punched by Schwarz.

Schwarz had, in the past, killed his lions and buffalo, and had the distinction of having been scared to death by a herd of charging elephants from which he miraculously escaped. But his hunting had been more or less by the way. As to the best methods of conducting tenderfeet on a sight-seeing tour among the animals, he was quite in the dark. He had never heard of a *boma*, or that gentlemen and even ladies who at home have not shot so much as a wild duck return from Africa with a dozen lions safely potted from behind the thorn hedge, calling themselves big-game hunters. But we wanted to see night life on the veldt; so we explained what a *boma* was and asked him to make us one.

Fever visited us at this camp, and when the time came only two of us were well enough to go to Schwarz's *boma*. It was a long way to the place he had selected. We took our way in pitch darkness through thickets into which, the night before, we had seen the seven lions disappear, flashing out searchlights to keep prowlers away. Schwarz walked ahead, swathed in a plaid shawl and carrying a small pistol! He

GIRAFFES AND OTHER THINGS

owned a Mauser rifle, but had no ammunition, and although we lent him a Mannlicher he preferred, he said, his revolver! As we climbed a steep hill we picked up three pairs of gleaming green eyes above us, which made it extremely unpleasant to continue going up, but nevertheless we went.

The so-called *boma* we found on the top of a windy, desolate hill. It consisted of a few dried thorn twigs thrown about in a circle which any lion or half a lion could walk across without even noticing. Our lights brought the gaudy stripes of the stark, dead zebra, laid out as bait, into brilliant relief against the blackness. Its stomach had already been torn, and the sad wind wafted toward us the smell of entrails and blood.

We sat down on the ground, Schwarz holding his pistol, the native who was with us staring off into the night, one smooth-muscle arm and thigh bare where his one-piece garment had slipped away. All around the circle of the horizon green eyes gleamed, but strangely enough there was not a sound, except occasionally when a dark form scuttled past, brushing the thorns. A soft rain fell for a while, then cleared, and the late moon rose. The wind went whispering back and forth across the veldt; away off a lion roared faintly and there was the remote yelping of hyenas. What these watchful forms were that ringed the kill without approaching we did not know.

"Why don't hyenas come?" we whispered to Schwarz.

"I don't know."

"Are they usually quiet when lions are about?"

"Yes."

"Do lions take a long time to creep up to the kill?"

"Yes. Sometimes when dawn comes they are still crouching in the grass."

"Do they ever charge a *boma*?"

"I don't know."

"Is this *boma* sufficient protection?"

"I don't know."

It was cold and, except for the strangeness of the stealthy,