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FABULOUS
CONGO

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weave their magnificent raffia girdles, even their language, are clearly Egyptian in origin, and furthermore this people lives to the East of the Congo Nile watershed.

The Watussi arrived in the Ruanda-Urundi a few centuries ago in quest of slaves from among the inferior tribes who lived in Central Africa. The routes they followed at that date are still traceable because, to identify their route from afar and to inform their fellow slave hunters, they planted avenues of *kapok*, the cotton tree, a tall fast-growing tree which reaches a great age and moreover constantly reproduces itself because a new root invariably sprouts from the old one.

By their immense stature (seldom less than 6 ft. 6 in.), their mobility, their strategy and the tactics they used in rounding up slaves, the Watussi found it easy to impress the wretched local tribes—the timid Bahutu or Bantu stock, and the Batwa pigmoids. However, it has not yet been possible, and perhaps it never will be, to say exactly how many years the Watussi were engaged in competition with the Arabs in the useful pursuit of slave trafficking. It remains a fact that at some undetermined period, perhaps as a result of an internal revolution at home, or simply because they were attracted by the extraordinary beauty of the localities and the fertility of the soil, the Watussi arrived with their cows to take possession of the region and assume their rule over the Bahutu and the Batwa.

In the history of the Watussi the cow has an extraordinary religious and economic importance. These humble beasts with enormous horns seem to have escaped from some Egyptian bas-relief and to be descendants of the famous bull Apis, which was an incarnated god of the ancient Egyptians. If today you ask a Watussi why he adores the cow and holds it sacred you will never succeed in getting a satisfactory reply. The Hamites have not the same veneration as the Hindus for these mild quadrupeds, and even if they never eat their flesh in any circumstances, for they are strict vegetarians, they make no bones about fashioning themselves a pair of sandals from the hide of a cow that has died a natural death, about selling it or using it to make drums, carpets or chairs. In other words the Watussi are completely ignorant of the complicated reasoning which urges the Indian sects to become complete slaves to their own cattle and, incidentally, to those of others; and a brief observation of their way of life succeeds in fully revealing the "mystery": it is easy to see that the cow is the first and only source of life for the Watussi, and it is quite logical therefore that for generations and generations they have learned to hold it particularly dear, without going so far as to make it a kind of god with its own authentic hierarchy of priests.

As we have already mentioned, on arriving in the Ruanda-Urundi the Watussi came in contact with two races—the mild Bahutu, who seemed to have been created expressly for slavery, and the Batwa pigmoids. Now if the former

are a simple people, rather backward in mentality, obliging and resigned, the latter on the contrary are quarrelsome, solitary and—a decisive factor for their own peace—too small and weak to be of much use as slaves. The Hamitic slave hunters tried, it is true, to push on westwards from the Ruanda and occupy the Ruzizi valley, but there they met with one of the most warlike and valorous tribes of the whole Congo, the Bashi, who roundly discomfited them in several engagements. These setbacks were fatal to their expansion in Congo territory, because the forest drums were quick to spread the news that these gigantic warriors were not invincible, and the Wanianga and the Bahavu were even bold enough to take the initiative in battle. But they in turn were halted by the Watussi, and obviously the illiterate and savage chieftains of that time must have been slightly wiser than their semi-civilized brothers of today because hostilities suddenly ceased; and without any treaty being fixed between the Bantu and the Hamites an enormous no-man's land was created. The Bashi and the Bahavu no longer went down into the Ruzizi Valley, that marvellous land of lions, crocodiles, hippopotami and rhinoceroses, and the Watussi abandoned the idea of conquering the crests of the belt between the Congo and Nile basins.

The Bahutu had never seen a cow in their lives and were stupefied when they saw them arrive, and above all when they were milked. They were completely flabbergasted by this marvel. It became a particular question of pride for them to be allowed to take a cow to pasture, and they agreed enthusiastically when the Watussi proposed to give the beasts over into their custody in return for a proportion of the milk and a permanent ration of beans, bananas and potatoes, the only foods the giants eat. A modest quantity of these vegetarian foods without any spices is all the Watussi need to live harmoniously and to watch time flow by while waiting for a death that does not terrify anyone—and thus it happened, and it still happens today, that a Watussi who owns a few cows can live peacefully on the revenue, with the additions furnished by the Bahutu who act as his herds-men.

Naturally this is only possible because the giants are extraordinarily frugal. They live, in fact, on a number of calories which a white doctor would find insufficient; in all probability he would succeed in proving with precise calculations that a human being would be sure to die on such inadequate fare. In the meantime the Watussi thrive, are expert dancers and fantastic leapers, and never know what it is to be tired. So perhaps it would be presumptuous to suggest that they change their diet.

In 1943 the Ruanda-Urundi was in the grip of a terrible famine and the reports of all the commissioners tallied in one incredible detail: the Watussi allowed themselves to die of hunger. They preferred to die rather than to kill

patience, their jaws open against the current. A few unsuspecting fish always end up in their throats and stomachs. Naturally in the lake they never catch any unless it is a case of some suicidal fish which is forced to swim into their gullets when they are taking a bath. But the rivers are not far from Mohasi, the hippopotami do not tire easily and they are capable of doing sixty miles in one day. The Kagera, which flows into Lake Victoria in Uganda territory, is therefore in easy reach—a river which gives its name to the National Park where, alas, the notorious tsetse fly rules.

This and my successive meetings with hippopotami were devoid of any adventure. Like elephants they are peaceful animals unless they are disturbed; once upset they charge at a furious gallop; but you see hardly more of them than rhinoceroses, and encounter more of their noises and shadows than the actual animals themselves.

Rhinoceroses are quite another matter. They hate being watched and will suddenly charge with a furious snort, lowering their horn which is their weapon both of defence and attack. Today it is extremely difficult to find one in the Congo or in the Ruanda-Urundi, because while big game hunting is authorized in the Congo, in the British colonies of Tanganyika and the Uganda it is severely prohibited. Although rhinos cannot read the statutes published by the colonial authorities, they must be warned by a certain instinct of what is going on, because the truth is that they have all gone over into British territory, where to shoot a rhino you have to have a special permit which is not easy to obtain.

However, even in Tanganyika these dangerous beasts are not left in peace because of their precious horns, which hunters sell for more than their weight in gold to Indian merchants who grind them into a fine powder and sell them in India as an aphrodisiac. I am not in a position to say what virtue this powder made from rhinoceros horn possesses, but it seems to me rather a curious story. In any case in these parts there are scores of hunters who have repeatedly violated the British laws and can return neither to Uganda nor Tanganyika for fear of imprisonment, but who have grown incredibly rich by selling rhinoceros horns. One of the most notorious is an Italian who has killed more than a hundred. And it is no easy sport, for the rhino has such a tough hide that he is the least vulnerable of any animal; to stop him when charging it is necessary to plant a bullet of large calibre at the root of his nose or in an eye, and to do this calls for very steady nerves. Before pulling the trigger you have to wait until he is within a few yards, then leap away in time before the mass of charging flesh knocks you over. It is the most difficult and dangerous shot that can be attempted and any hunter who has a rhinoceros to his credit is as proud of it as of a medal for valour.

In the Congo there are two kinds of rhinoceros, the white and the black.

35. To dance "the invincible" one must have killed a leopard and wear its skin.





38. A little play-acting before the hunt to give yourself courage. The leopard is cunning and fierce.

WILD BEASTS, PACHYDERMS AND GAME

The former is the larger, weighing as much as two tons and measuring up to seven feet from the ground to the hump and about fifteen feet in length. Rare protected specimens still wander about the high Uele plains and particularly in the Gambara National Park, which is strictly forbidden to tourists and hunters. Two horns sprout from his muzzle and the foremost can surpass three feet in length. The black rhinoceros, far smaller, lives in its wild state in Katanga either in the plains or in the forests, but it likes the mountain regions and has been met with at 7,500 feet. This second species has also become scarce and to hunt it is considered a great crime.

The hyenas of Lake Edward.

The negroes call them *Mbwa-mwitu* and have a holy terror of them; the white man usually looks upon them as wild dogs or hunting dogs; however their real name is hyena, and whoever kills them is in good favour with men as well as the beasts of the forest. In appearance like wolves, white speckled with chestnut in the Katanga and reddish in the region south of Lake Edward, the hyenas never go about on their own but live in large packs; they are ferocious and cunning as perhaps no other animal in the world, as well as being treacherous and cowardly. The packs cover great distances on their eternal hunt to satisfy their insatiable hunger, and any defenceless animal is attacked and torn to pieces. They bark like dogs, yelp like puppies, and howl like wolves. When in pursuit of a buck or a gazelle they advance silently and swiftly with their tongues lolling out, and once the prey is in their clutches they snarl viciously and fight among each other for the best portions; but if they happen to cross tracks with a lion, which despises them, they keep at a respectful distance, giving vent to little barks which end in long wails as if begging for mercy, and they follow him in the hope of being able to dispute with the jackals the remains of his kill.

For some time it was thought that hyenas were brave animals, but the observations of hunters and keepers of the game reserves have clearly proved the contrary. It is certainly true that they will face up to any beast, but only in special circumstances, when the latter are in no position to defend themselves. If they meet a wounded lion, for example, they will follow him for days on end without daring to approach so long as he has enough strength to let forth a roar, but when that has almost ebbed away they approach from all sides and surround him in silence, watching him with their burning eyes. At last one dares to attack with snapping jaws, and if the lion's reaction is feeble enough they all leap on him in a flash, snarling in triumph.

Usually, however, the favourite prey of hyenas are the antelope, among whom they wreak great havoc. When they scent a herd of them these wild dogs

story for the rest of his life, always provided he had just that extra little bit of luck which is necessary. When it comes to the shot, not to mention the kill, he will need a cool head, a firm pulse and a good aim, all three things which can be summed up in two words—courage and confidence, in himself and in his weapons.

If the lion is wounded and flees the pursuit must be carried out with extreme caution. You must never go forward in a straight line but always in zig-zags making plenty of detours, because the beast will often return in its own tracks, and you must never lag too far behind. Although it is a good thing not to lose sight of him it is also prudent to keep out of range of an offensive attack. If he lies down to rest it means that he is rapidly losing strength, then you must finish him off and make no mistake about it.

But never try and follow a lion which, although lightly wounded, has succeeded in breaking the ring and taking refuge in the bush, unless the whole party goes with you. By turning back you open a breach in the line and leave the flanks of the other hunters undefended, thus jeopardizing not only your own life but the lives of your companions.

These few moments are full of excitement and beauty. The lions, driven to defend their lives, are wonderfully powerful and brave, and never so much as at this moment when they are going to die do they merit the name King of Beasts. The hunter cannot but marvel at their prodigious strength and splendid courage which enable them to face the unknown, that is so full of mortal danger for him; he has to realize that only human intelligence is capable of overcoming such physical superiority.

Rhinoceroses are expensive.

If the hunting of animals considered to be dangerous—lions, leopards, hyenas, jackals, baboons, snakes, crocodiles and birds of prey—is always allowed except in the National Parks, the hunting of certain species is always forbidden even to hunters who possess a general game licence. Should you wish to have the satisfaction of shooting a rhinoceros or an elephant, a gorilla or an okapi, a special authorization is necessary—which is extremely difficult to obtain and costs a considerable sum of money.

Naturally the tax is in inverse ratio to the extant numbers of the species. The minimum tax to be paid for the killing or capture of these protected animals, apart from hunters possessing a scientific game permit, is as follows:—

White rhinoceros	50,000	Belgian Francs	=	£330
Black rhinoceros	50,000	" "	=	£330
Giraffe	40,000	" "	=	£264

Gorilla	30,000	Belgian Francs	=	£198
Okapi	30,000	" "	=	£198
Elephant	20,000	" "	=	£132
Dwarf elephant	20,000	" "	=	£132
Derby elk	20,000	" "	=	£132
Great Kudu	10,000	" "	=	£66

The hippopotamus is relatively cheap (2,000 Belgian francs = £13) and a night bird like the owl a mere 40 Belgian francs (about four shillings).

These taxes are fixed not so much to control hunters who come to the Congo once or twice in their lives to satisfy a lifelong ambition as to protect the rarer species from speculators and from those who capture animals to deal in them—speculators of the type I have mentioned, who kill rhinoceroses by the dozen to sell their horns to India and agents who are commissioned to replenish zoological gardens and circuses.

In recent years the requirements of zoological gardens have increased enormously ever since they started charging fees for admission. When this admission was free there were few communities which could afford the luxury of acquiring exotic animals, but with the new system of making people pay, zoos became a popular business and there is naturally a continual demand for elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, hippos, etc., so that if there were no protective laws in the Congo the local fauna would be extinct in a few years.

Capturing wild animals is done in several ways with various traps and nets. The trap can be anything from the cage which closes automatically when the animal touches the food placed in the bottom (these are merely large rat-traps) to cleverly placed nooses or masked pits. As to the nets, they vary in size and strength according to the weight of the creature to be caught.

Trapping is a game of patience and cunning which presents no particular excitement except perhaps at the last moment, when you make a tour of the traps and find, for example, a furious lion caught in a cage or a gorilla entangled in a net foaming with rage and reduced to the end of his strength after a desperate struggle which has lasted hours and hours. It is deeply moving to witness the vain struggle which the animals put up to recover their lost liberty. Sometimes traps of the wolf-trap type have been found miles and miles away from the place where they were laid, despite the pegs and weights which secured them to the ground. It is a mystery how certain mild antelopes could have carried weights five or six times greater than their own for such distances.

One day on the Goma road in company with Roberto Mo and Angelo Ginepro who has settled at Kisenyi, on the northern bank of Lake Kivu, I heard

Elizabethville and Jadotville, and I mentioned the colossal mineral wealth merely in order to give point to this question: how is it possible that appalling roads like this could exist in a zone of such natural wealth? And here is the answer. Because the *Société Générale* which owns the mines also owns the railway (*C.F.K., Chemins de Fer du Katanga*, incorporated with *C.B.K., Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Bas Congo au Katanga*) and has the monopoly of rail transport.

By international agreement the Belgian Congo is open to all imports, so that in theory and in practice it is possible to import an unlimited number of cars, lorries, and buses. But there is a monopoly of road transport, and those who use the roads have to pay what the bosses determine. The tariffs in force are extremely high and the roads unnecessarily bad. As long as the present-day privileges are in force nothing can be done. The interests of the community will always be subjected to those of a small group of shareholders; progress will always be hampered by insurmountable barriers raised by those who see in the technical development of the Katanga a reduction in their own profits.

While our native chauffeur was wrestling with the nuts trying to put on the spare, some sweet little red-pawed squirrels appeared at the roadside. Their noses looked out from among the leaves and their eyes glittered with curiosity, happiness and perhaps a little anxiety. Hanging in the branches the monkeys watched too, ready to disappear at the first alarm.

A few years ago the Katanga region was one of the richest in wild life. It was famous for its black lions, so-called because their reddish-brown skin is shot with black, for its black rhinoceroses and its many elephants. But the encroachments of civilization have driven the animals away, although no one quite knows where to, and today you can wander up and down the Katanga roads without ever coming across a single wild animal.

The sun had already risen and the forest was echoing with the myriad voices of birds and monkeys when we decided to help the poor negro whom we had brought along expressly in case of such a breakdown.

We arrived at Jadotville a little after eight o'clock. I had come with a specific purpose: to visit the uranium mines. As they are strictly closed to all foreigners the general opinion was that I should never succeed. Even in Belgium, whenever I brought the conversation round to uranium I was always confronted by a wall of silence; strangers looked upon me with suspicion and my friends with anxiety. Why on earth did I want to go and see the most secret mines in the world? Wouldn't it be just as good to go and see the copper or gold mines? Most of the Belgian authorities told me it was impossible and a few Italians warned me not only to give up the attempt but even to refrain from asking permission. "They'll think you're a Communist spy," they told me. "Several journalists and writers,

you know, even Belgians, have got themselves into the most terrible difficulties over these uranium mines."

The scandal of the U.M.H.K.

During my stay in the Congo, however, I noticed one thing which before arriving in this fantastic country I had not even suspected. There was an ill-disguised hostility among not only private people but also among the great majority of officials towards the big monopolies. Independent colonials, whether farmers, planters, merchants or small industrialists, all had their grievances. They told me of an endless series of abuses and impositions of which they were the victims, and many a time officials shrugged their shoulders when I voiced certain opinions.

Now in the Katanga the *U.M.H.K., the Union Minière du Haut Katanga*, dominates the life of the whole region. The origin of this all-powerful company is very easy to trace. In the beginning there was not "action", as Nietzsche would have said, but the *Société Générale de Belgique*. It was created by the will of King Leopold II, already sovereign of the Independent Congo State, which he bequeathed to Belgium subject to certain well defined concessions in favour of certain of his friends and financiers who were the first to invest capital in the immense territory. Although the consequences of these concessions could not be foreseen their terms were very precise; for example, all the gold-bearing deposits "known or yet to be exploited" were given to Baron Empain.

I do not propose to tell the whole story, because it would serve no useful purpose. It is merely interesting to recall that when the Congo became a Belgian colony it was laid down by the Brussels Government that a progressive policy of reducing the concessions and privileges should be set in motion in order to ensure a fair distribution of the vast wealth.

It is obvious that such a law, interpreted to the letter and in spirit, meant that the ownership of the colony should be divided among different individuals and among different social strata. This is obviously what the democratic ministers in Brussels intended by the term "progressive reduction of concessions". Apparently they were very naive.

The *Société Générale* gave birth to an Extraordinary Katanga Committee to administer all the lands and mines of the province on behalf of the Independent Congo State and of the *Compagnie du Katanga* (both *Société Générale* concerns, since it must not be forgotten that the Independent Congo State was the private property of King Leopold II). This Extraordinary Committee subsequently announced the formation of Tanganyika Concessions Ltd., with the exclusive right to prospect below ground. At last, in 1906, all these companies agreed to the formation of the *U.M.H.K.*, and this combine has the right, until 1990, to