



THE ANIMALS IN MASAI MARA

Africa

By Lance Morrow

The animals stand motionless in gold-white grasses—zebras and impala, Thomson's gazelles and Cape buffalo and hartebeests and waterbuck and giraffes, and wildebeests by the thousands, all fixed in art naïf, in a smiting equatorial light. They stand in the shadowless clarity of creation.

Now across the immense African landscape, from the distant escarpment, a gray-purple rainstorm blows. It encroaches upon the sunlight, moving through the air like a dark idea. East Africa has a genius for such moments. Wildlife and landscape here have about them a force of melodrama and annunciation. They are the *Book of Genesis* enacted as an afternoon dream.

In Amboseli, under the snow-covered dome of Mount Kilimanjaro, a herd of elephants moves like a dense gray cloud, slow motion, in lumbering solidity: a mirage of floating boulders. Around them dust devils rise spontaneously out of the desert, little tornadoes that swirl up on the thermals and go jittering and rushing among the animals like evil spirits busy in the primal garden.

Later, in the sweet last light of the afternoon, a lion prowls in lion-colored grasses and vanishes into the perfect camouflage—setting off for the hunt, alert, indolent and somehow abstracted, as cats are. A rhinoceros disappears: the eye loses it among gray boulders and thorn trees. The rhino becomes a boulder.

To the human eye, the animals so often seem mirages: now you see them, now you don't. Later, just after dusk, Abyssinian nightjars discover the magic wash of the headlight beams. The birds flit in and out of the barrels of light, like dolphins frisking before a boat's prow. The Land Cruiser jostles, in four-wheel drive, across black volcanic stones toward the camp, the driver steering by the distant light-speck of the cooking fire.

And then the African night, which, more than elsewhere, seems an abnegation of the conscious world. MMBA, "miles and miles of bloody Africa," and it all falls into black magic void.

The world stills, for the longest time. Then, at the edge of sleep, hyenas come to giggle and whoop. Peering from the tent flap, one catches in the shadows their sidelong criminal slouch. Their eyes shine like evil flashlight bulbs, a disembodied horror-movie yellow, phosphorescent, glowing like the children of the damned. In the morning, one finds their droppings: white dung, like a photographic negative. Hyenas not only eat the meat of animals but grind up and digest the bones. The hyenas' dung is white with the calcium of powdered bones.

Africa has its blinding clarities and its shadows. The clarities proclaim something primal, the first days of life. The shadows lie at the other extreme of time: in the premonition of last days, of extinction. Now you see the animals. Soon, perhaps, you won't.

Africa is comprehensive: great birth, great death, the be-



gining and the end. The themes are drawn, like the vivid, abstract hide of the zebra, in patterns of the absolute.

The first question to ask is whether the wildlife of Africa can survive.

The second question is this: If the wild animals of Africa vanish from the face of the earth, what, exactly, will have been lost?

The Africa of the animals is a sort of dream kingdom. Carl Jung traveled to East Africa in 1925 and wrote of a "most intense sentiment of returning to the land of my youth," of a "recognition of the immemorially known." Africa, he said, had "the stillness of the eternal beginning."

Earliest man lived in these landscapes, among such animals, among these splendid trees that have personalities as distinct as those of the animals: the aristocratic flat-topped acacia, the gnarled and magisterial baobab. Possibly scenes from that infancy are lodged in some layer of human memory, in the brilliant but preconscious morning.

An American visitor to Africa decided to ask people about the way that animals come to them in dreams. His five-year-old son in New York City has nightmares about animals he has never seen. He dreams, for instance, of lions. What does an African boy dream about? The visitor collected dreams from Masai and Kikuyu schoolchildren, from schoolteachers, from witch doctors, from Masai warriors and safari guides, from white ranchers and game catchers and naturalists and from himself. It was a way of seeing the animals.

The Masai elder sat in the Lord Delamere Restaurant in the Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi and explained that all animals are left-handed. It is true, said the elder, named Moses. Never get onto a lion's left side. A lion attacks to his left. All animals instinctively lead with the left paw, the left hoof, the left horn. Even cows are left-handed, said Moses.

The Masai are pastoralists who have always lived among the wild animals, lived amicably enough, with some violent exceptions that come with the territory. Moses lives in the remote Loita Hills in southwestern Kenya. On this day he wore his Nairobi clothes: two sweatshirts, one over the other, and dark trousers and sneakers. There were holes in his earlobes where ornaments might fit, but they were austere empty. Handsome, thoughtful, impassive, answering questions like a visiting lecturer, Moses conjured up wild animals. His gaze was sleepy and distant.

On the table Moses demonstrated how the rhinoceros thinks. He used the saltshaker to represent the American visitor. The pepper shaker would be the rhino. The sugar bowl would be the boulder that stood between them. "Be careful," Moses warned. He moved the rhino in an ominous drift to its left. The rhino began to circle the sugar bowl, using the bowl as cover in order to ambush the saltshaker (the visitor) from behind. The visitor became a naked and oblivious wanderer on the white linen plain. He stood frozen and defenseless as the rhino came on.

"Rhino will always go to the left, like this," said Moses softly. He knocked down the saltshaker with a sharp crack of the pepper shaker, like a chess master toppling the king. The visitor went down. White grains of salt spilled out of the holes in the top of his head, and he expired on the flat white linen. The expanse of tablecloth had become for an instant dangerous, in a surreal way. The American had been

run down by a pepper shaker from the Pleistocene in a restaurant named for the paramount white colonial of British East Africa, Lord Delamere (1870-1931).

The visitor did not believe Moses' left-handed-animal theory. Perhaps Moses meant it to be mere entertainment. The American could not be sure, but gave way to it anyhow. He shook his head in appreciation, his mind for the moment numb and hospitable and superstitious. It had ripped across time zones for 23 hours, across the Atlantic Ocean and the breadth of Africa, and had dropped out of the sky into Nairobi. It was dislocated. The visitor's soul vibrated. He thought of a soap bubble's elongation when its iridescent membrane is drawn swiftly through the air by a child. His soul began now to float slow-motion in the strange, bright medium of Africa. He felt suspended, drifting through layers of time.

The Africans run Kenya now. Lord Delamere's dream of an African "white man's country" ended 24 years ago with black independence. From other tables in the Lord Delamere Restaurant came the low music of Swahili, like a dark stream of syllables rushing over rocks. One heard both the deep molten music and the undersong of baby talk that bubbles through Swahili, the lingua franca that came up from the coast with the Arab slavers.

Moses in his tutorial passed on now to the subject of lions. He told about how he had killed a lion in the Loita Hills not many days before. He and another Masai were herding cattle in the upland pastures. A lion sprang at his friend and clawed him on the shoulder. Moses came running and drew the lion away from the other man. The lion charged Moses, and when the animal was six feet distant, Moses hurled his spear. The spear went into the lion's left eye and crashed through its brain. The animal came to rest at Moses' feet. It was the sixth lion that Moses had killed in his 29 years.

There was trouble with the authorities after that. The rangers came and told Moses he could not kill a lion because it is against the law in Kenya to kill one. "I told them, 'The lion attacked my friend!' They said, 'You should have reported the attack first and asked for a permit to kill the lion.'" In the Lord Delamere Restaurant, Moses threw back his head and laughed, and cried, with an oddly Yiddish intonation, "Ai-yi-yi-yi-yi!"

Moses was asked about a Masai child's dreams. "I do not know what a Masai child has nightmares about," he said. "I will tell you what my bad dreams are about. I have bad dreams about Nairobi, and bright lights and speeding cars and lorries crashing. And all the noise of a thousand radios playing." He made a face and clutched his head: "All of that noise crashing out of the air!" Then, "Ai-yi-yi-yi-yi!" In the Loita Hills, said Moses, "we sing, but we sing without instruments. It makes some sense."

Many of the paved roads in Kenya are crumbling. They look as if a large tar-eating animal had been chewing at them from the shoulders, inward toward the center line. A vehicle therefore speeds demonically down the dead center of a two-lane road, like a rhino charging. The driver waits until the last instant to flick the steering wheel to the



JOSEPH, PARENTS AND MOSES

left (British rules, drive on the left—Did Moses derive the left-handed theory from that?) to swerve around the onrushing bus. The wildest animal on the road is the *matatu*, a jitney designed to carry about eight passengers. Instead, it customarily holds 20 Africans or more, some spilling out the back door, hanging on with one arm. The *matatu* is a hurtling metal beast with people in its belly, an event of nature on the highways. "Aieee! Aieee! *Matatu!*" *Matatu* owners have a witty taste for apocalypse. One of them named his *matatu* the *Enola Gay*. Another proclaims itself the *Stairway to Heaven*. Not reassuring.

Dreaming: Shirley Strum says that there came a time when the baboons spoke to her in English. They came to her in her dreams and asked for her help. For twelve years Strum, an anthropologist from California, had been studying a baboon troop at a ranch called Kekopey, near Gilgil. Then the ranch was turned into an agricultural collective, and the new farmers menaced the baboons and tried to kill them off.

The baboons were Strum's friends. She had given all of them names, and she sat among them every day. They were accustomed to her and accepted her. She came among them like a ghostly premonition of their evolutionary future, a benevolent spirit out of the time warp, another civilization. She came from space. She sat among them holding her clipboard, and made silent notes.

Strum understood the dangers of anthropomorphism, of coming to love the animals too much and to hate the people endangering them. Strum, the least violent of creatures, said that if she had had a gun, she might have shot the farmers who were threatening her baboons. Now, in Shirley Strum's dreams, the baboons asked her for help, and she searched for a ranch that would accept them. The ranchers mostly thought she was insane. Baboons raid crops. Importing baboons to a ranch made as much sense as transplanting cockroaches to a New York City apartment. But at last Strum made an arrangement with the Chololo Ranch on the edge of the Laikipia Plateau north of Nairobi. She had the baboons trapped and sedated and brought to a new home where they would be safe, and she went on silently studying them.

"Watching the baboons is like watching a soap opera," Strum says, "except that the baboons are much nicer people than you see on *Dallas* or *Dynasty*." A visitor walks out with Strum among the baboons at 8 a.m. in Laikipia. They are feeding on the buds of an acacia tree not far from the granite kopje where they sleep. Strum knows all the baboons. "That is C.J. and Ron," she begins. "The female is Zilla. C.J. and Ron have a conflict of emotions." Ron is new to the troop, and so is Ndoftu.

Baboon life, says Strum, is an endless series of negotiations. The drama of their lives revolves not around sex or male intimidation but around alliances, around friendships. Baboons have a Japanese complexity of deferences and dominances. They live, it seems to a newcomer, in a constant state of distracted tension, as if caught in an elastic web of attractions and repulsions, a web constantly in motion, in adjustment of distances. The visitor studies their hands, which are so human, so adept and articulate that they could be trained for neurosur-

gery if good hands were all that a neurosurgeon needed.

Now a magic evening light comes across the Laikipia Plateau, and the baboons straggle in from their day's browsings among the acacia flowers. They sit and socialize on the lower rocks of their high kopje, grooming one another with a sweet absorption, playing with their babies. Like almost everyone and everything in Africa, they seem profoundly tribal. Another troop of baboons arrives, 100 yards away, and each tribe stares at the other with a nervous intensity across the lovely evening light.

It is time to begin the six-hour drive from Nairobi to Moses' *enk'ang* (small village) in the Loita Hills. The Land Cruiser travels for three hours over paved road to the dusty frontier town of Narok, then follows a rutted washboard road across an empty and chokingly dusty plain until it shifts into four-wheel drive and begins the slow climb up into the hills. It is lovely in the hills. They look somewhat like the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico. Part of their beauty is their pristine remoteness. One rarely encounters a white man there.

The visitor came first to the *enk'ang* of Moses' older brother Joseph, who, surrounded by children and dogs and friends, strode out from the *boma*—a tall thorn-and-cedar enclosure, the feudal African fortress against lions and leopards—to meet him. Joseph was smaller and more delicately boned than Moses. He had the fine, intelligent head of a Talmudic scholar, the visitor decided, an Ethiopian head, a fastidious head, given to complex distinctions. Joseph and the visitor set out in the evening light to walk across the hills to Moses' *boma*. Joseph wore a handsome red blanket hung over his shoulder like a toga and, oddly, a suede golf cap that suited him well. He was barefoot, his feet tough and thick as they trod upon rocks and twigs and thorns and dung indifferently.

Joseph was asked if there were any wild animals close by. He did not carry a spear just now, only a thin wand of olive wood. The spear was not necessary at this time of day between *bomas*, Joseph explained. People passed back and forth; the lions would stay away.

Joseph talked, when asked, about the Masai diet. Milk, tea. Some maize. Goat or beef on special occasions. Do the Masai ever eat the wild animals? Joseph answered, "Sometimes we eat the gazelle, because the gazelle is close to God."

Joseph's accent had a strange geographical range, with pronunciations in English that sounded as if they had come from either India or Germany. *God* came out sounding like the German *Gott*.

The roundheel quester from America gave a sigh of discovery. "Ah." Long pause.

"Are there other animals that the Masai consider to be close to God?" The visitor had decided, in vague tracery, that the gazelle's grace was associated in the Masai mind with God's grace, a profound though punning link, and that by eating of the flesh of the gazelle, the Masai thought to partake of the grace of God. A pagan chinging of the altar bells, a transubstantiation.

The visitor walked on through the hills, his hands behind him, like an abbot. Then he glanced up at Joseph and saw that the elder was looking at him in consternation.

"Close to God?" asked Joseph.

"You said the gazelle is close



STRUM WITH BABOONS

to God," the other prompted. Something in Joseph detonated minutely, and then he waved it off with a snort.

"Oh, no! I said that we eat gazelle because it is close to goat! The gazelle tastes like goat! We like goat!"

Gott and goat. It was a lesson learned. East Africans see no spiritual significance in the animals, even though each of the Masai clans claims an unsentimental relationship with one animal or another.

Llewelyn Powys, a young English poet, came out to settle in Kenya early in the century. He wrote that Africa was a "country frequented by clawed creatures with striped and gilded pelts, where nettles sting like wasps and even moles are as large as water-rats . . . The sun, naked as when it was born, sucks out one's life blood, and nourishes savagery long since made dormant by the pious lives of one's ancestors. Kill! Kill! Kill! is the mandate of Africa."

A drowsing lioness at midday stirs in the grasses under a flat-topped acacia tree. She yawns, and her mouth is an abrupt vision of medieval horrors, of ripping white spikes. And then the mouth closes and she is a smug, serene Victorian dowager. She complacently surveys her young, who sleep near by, and subsides again into her torpor.

Sometimes it seems that there are no straight lines in Africa or that Africa at any rate resists them. Things curve and undulate: the landscape, the rivers, the gaits of the animals, the design of the *enk'ang*, the trajectory of the spear (although the spear itself is straight). Logic is also curved. At the same time, everything in Africa seems sharp and pointed, given to punctures and ripping. It is a land of teeth and thorns. The whistling-thorn acacia has spikes that can penetrate a six-ply tire.

It is easy to fall in love not only with the shapes and colors of the animals but with their motions, their curving and infinitely varied gaits. The zebra moves with a strong, short-muscled stride. It is a sleek, erotic beast with vigorous bearing. The zebra's self-possession is a likable trait. It is human habit to sort the animals almost immediately into orders of preference. The animals are arranged in people's minds as a popularity contest. Some animals are endearing, and some repulsive. One wants to see the lion first, and then the elephant and after that the leopard, then rhino . . . and so on. One wants to see some animals because they are fierce, and some because they are lovable and soft. It is hard to explain the attractions and preferences. It is possible that human feelings about wild animals reflect the complexities of sexual attractions. Certain animals are admired for their majestic aggressions, and others for softer qualities. The lion is a sleek piece of violence, the waterbuck a sweet piece of grace.

Some of the animals move in deep slow motion, as if traversing another medium, previous to air, and thicker—an Atlantis of time. The elephant goes sleeping that way across the spaces. The medium through which it moves can be seen as time itself, a thicker, slower time than humans inhabit, a prehistoric metabolism. The giraffe goes with undulous slow motion, a long waving that starts with the head and proceeds dreamily, curving down the endless spine. The giraffe is motion as process through time. It is delicate, intelligent and eccentric, and as Karen Blixen said, so much a lady. Each of the animals has its distinct gait. The Grant's gazelle's tail never stops switching, like a

nervous windshield wiper. The hartebeest moves off, when startled, in an undulous hallumph.

For days in Masai Mara, the visitor watched the wildebeests. Ungainly and pewter colored, they are subject to sudden electric jolts of panic, to adrenal bursts of motion that can make them seem half crazed as a tribe. Now they were engaged not so much in migration as in vagrancy, wandering across the plain on strange but idiotically determined vectors. Wildebeests smell monsters on the afternoon breeze, take sudden fear and bolt for Tanzania or Uganda or the Indian Ocean, anywhere to get away.

Sometimes, of course, the monsters are there. The veldt is littered with the corpses that the lion or cheetah has killed and dined on. But sometimes the herding wildebeests seem to be caught in a collective shallow madness. A fantasy of terror shoots through a herd, and all the beasts are gone: hysteria of hooves. The wildebeests thunder by the thousands across rivers and plains, moving like a barbarian invasion. They follow their instinct for the rains, for better grass. And they mow the grass before them. If they know where rain is, the wildebeests are relentless. Otherwise, they march with an undirected rigor, without destination, like cadets on punishment, beating a trail in the parade ground. The wildebeest's bison-like head is too large for its body, its legs too thin and ungainly. It looks like a middle-aged hypochondriac, paltry in the loins and given to terrible anxiety attacks, the sort of creature whose hands (if it had hands) would always be clammy. God's genius for design may have faltered with the wildebeest.

In Masai Mara, vultures wheel dreamily in the air, like a slow-motion tornado of birds. Below the swirling funnel, a cheetah has brought down a baby wildebeest. The cheetah, loner and fleet aristocrat, the upper-class version of the hyena, has opened up the wildebeest and devoured the internal organs. The cheetah's belly is swollen and its mouth is ringed with blood as it breathes heavily from the exertion of gorging. A dozen vultures flap down to take their turn. They wait 20 yards away, then waddle in a little toward the kill to test the cheetah. The cheetah, in a burst, rushes the vultures to drive them off, and then returns to the baby wildebeest. The vultures grump and readjust their feathers and wait their turn, the surly lumpen-carrion class.

The skeleton of an elephant lies out in the grasses near a baobab tree and a scattering of black volcanic stones. The thick-trunked, gnarled baobab gesticulates with its branches, as if trying to summon help. There are no tusks lying among the bones, of course; ivory vanishes quickly in East Africa. The elephant is three weeks dead. Poachers. Not far away, a baby elephant walks alone. That is unusual. Elephants are careful mothers and do not leave their young unattended. The skeleton is the mother, and the baby is an orphan.

One day in Meru, the Land Cruiser glides through the lion-colored grasses. It is late afternoon, and lions everywhere are rising from their long day's slumber to think about hunting. The driver, a Masai named Simeon K. Londaga, sees the lion and stops and points. Poking his head like a periscope through the roof of the Cruiser, the visitor follows the line of Simeon's finger and gets lost out there in the grasses. He squints as if dialing the eyes to better focus, as if trying to build the platonic lion out of grass. Still the lion will not come. The beast is hidden in the grass like the



MAN AND BEAST IN THE MARA

number in the dot test for color blindness. Rake your gaze into the grass again, staring deeply into it, and slowly the scene develops like a Polaroid picture, taking color and form. The eyes discover that they are staring straight, deeply, into the eyes of a lion—only the eyes. And the lion is staring straight and deeply back. The eyes in the grass are yellow-black eyes, cat's eyes, emitting rays of measurement and judgment and hunger. "Only you, *mzungu!*" say the eyes. *Mzungu* is Swahili for white man. The visitor feels the chill of a savage attention. At last the Polaroid develops itself fully. The lion turns and lies in full view, spreading the beige grass and lying precisely in the posture of the woman in the grass in Andrew Wyeth's painting *Christina's World*. The grasses in Wyeth's dream and the grasses garnishing the lion have the same color and texture. But whereas Wyeth's Christina was crippled and lay in an unforgettable posture of longing, of groping, the lion, his hind-quarters lazing off on one side, is a masterwork of indolent power. All utterly what he was, all lion.

One night around a fire inside the boma, Moses recounted some of his dreams. In one of them, he runs up a ravine with steep rock walls on three sides, pursued by a rhino. He claws at the rock walls, trying to escape, hanging by his fingertips. He wakes up screaming. In another dream, a lion is dragging Moses through deep grass. Moses desperately clutches at the grass with his fingers, but the grass comes up in clumps, and Moses is dragged on.

One afternoon Moses and his guest came to the Morijo Loita Primary School, a windswept arrangement of tin-roofed buildings on a bare hillside a few miles from Moses' boma. Several dozen schoolchildren were gathered in a classroom of the sort that made one think of the places where Abraham Lincoln went to school on the Indiana frontier. The children sat in rows at long crude benches. They were asked about their encounters with the wild animals, in reality and in dreams. A boy named Seketo told of being chased by a lion once while he was herding cows. But he said normally when a boy meets a wild animal, the solution is simple: the boy runs one way and the animal runs another, and both are happy.

In dreams, the children were paralyzed by fright. A girl named Hyinka dreamed that when she went into the forest for firewood, a Cape buffalo attacked her and she tried to push her down with his horns. She could neither run nor scream. The buffalo pushed her into the water with his nose. Memusi had a dream about a lion's attacking and biting, and she tried to scream but could not. Lekerenga could not scream, either, when bitten in his dreams by a spitting cobra. He woke up crawling on the ground.

The visitor conceived a modest theory about dreams. The difference between the Kenya nightmares and the scary dreams of a five-year-old boy in New York City might be that the beasts of primal fantasy live just outside the Masai huts. The Masai reside, so to speak, in the psychic forest, where the wild things are. The beasts there were not invented by an illustrator. They are the originals. The lion roars in the Masai's sleep, and roars when the Masai awakes as well.

So to some extent, the world inside the skull corresponds to the world outside it, an interesting reconciliation. The inner eye and the outer eye may sometimes see the same image, the same dreamy beast standing under the fever tree. The sleeping and the waking become interchangeable. The actual and the psychic coincide.

The pen where Moses and his family kept their goats at night was covered with a grid of heavy wire. When a visitor wondered about it, Moses explained, "Leopard comes at night to take the goat." Around every Masai *enk'ang* is built a sturdy fence of thorn and cedar to keep the lions out. One day, walking in the forest, Moses shouldered an enormous slab of cedar to add to his *boma*. "The lion makes me do a lot of work," he remarked. Sometimes the barricades do not hold, and the Masai wake to the bawl and crashing of cattle as the lion struggles to carry off his beef.

Reality and dreams dance round to bite each other. One night when Joseph was still a boy, he and his friend dreamed the same dream, about a leopard attacking the calves. "We both woke up at the same time, screaming and fighting the leopard," Joseph said. "We both roared like the leopard, and then the whole *boma* woke up screaming"—shouting about the leopard the boys had seen—but had seen only in their dreams. And in the morning, by the goats' pen, the people found leopard tracks. "You know," said Joseph thoughtfully. "There *are* scary animals. And they eat people. Sometimes people never learn to be brave, and even as old men, they are still afraid."

One afternoon in the Loita Hills, there were three Masai warriors, called *ilmurran*, sitting in the shade beside a dung-walled hut. Their hair was long and greased with fat. They were barefoot and wore only the *shuka*, a bright-patterned piece of cloth, like a tablecloth, draped as a short toga around waist and shoulders. Their spears leaned against the wall of the hut, with their *rungu*—knob-ended clubs that the Masai can throw with a fierce accuracy. One of the warriors, named David, spoke halting English. He was about 20 years old, although the Masai pay little attention to precise ages, since a boy's real life does not start until he is circumcised in mid-adolescence and thereby, with great ceremony, becomes a man.

David translated for the others. David said that, yes, the warriors still obeyed Masai tradition by raiding other tribes for cattle. The Masai believe that in the beginning, God (*Enkai*) bestowed all the world's cattle upon the Masai. Therefore, when Masai warriors go down into Tanzania to raid a Kuria village and steal cows, they are merely taking back what already belongs to them.

How is a cattle raid carried out? "We come at dusk to the Kuria village," David said, "and make a lot of noise. There is a big fight, with spears, with bows and arrows. I have lost friends in raids, and think I have killed six or seven Kuria, although I cannot be sure because we leave quickly. We do not wait to see if they are dead. We take the cows away and drive them all night so we can be across the border in the morning when the army might come to start looking for us."

The government has often tried to domesticate the Masai, to get them to give up the path of the warrior. Some years ago, a colonial district officer named Clarence Buxton decided to try to substitute manly sports for cattle raiding. He conceived the idea of encouraging Masai warriors to play polo while mounted on donkeys. The plan did not go far.



SAMIA KNOCKS DOWN MERZ

The government forbids long hair and warrior business and lion hunting, but it is a huge country, and sometimes the government can manage to be only wistfully authoritarian.

One of the warriors was asked, "Is it easier to kill a man or a lion?"

The young man immediately answered, "Easier to kill a lion."

Why?

"It is hard to fight a man, because he is as clever as you are. He has arrows and a spear. He is as tricky as you are. And besides, a person has friends, and if you kill him, his friends can kill you! It is more complicated."

The young warrior is asked his name and replies, "Lord Delamere." His parents had named him Lord Delamere. The visitor tears a page out of his notebook and walks 30 yards away and places the paper on the ground, weighed down by a stone. His lordship is asked to demonstrate his accuracy with a spear. Lord Delamere shrugs and stands and hurls his spear, impaling the blank page. The visitor asks to borrow the spear so that he might try. Alas, he does not straighten his arm, as in a javelin throw, but starts the motion somewhere behind his right ear, as if throwing a fastball. The spear sails up, too high, and at the apex, points straight skyward, and then collapses in the air, subsiding downward on its butt, ignominiously, like one of the early failed rockets from Cape Canaveral. Lord Delamere would not wish to hunt lion with the American.

That night, while sleeping inside Moses' *boma* in the Loita Hills, the visitor dreamed that he raided cattle on West 57th Street in Manhattan. He loaded four stolen cows into a cattle trailer towed by an old Chrysler Imperial and drove them up across the Connecticut border.

Fifty Somali poachers armed with automatic weapons came nosing around the rhino refuge at Lewa Downs. "But we put out the message that if they came in, a few of them would have to die along with us," says Anna Merz. Under the driver's seat in her car, she carries a spike-headed club. She is not licensed to carry a gun, but she employs guards with old Enfield rifles to patrol her fenced-in 7,500-acre refuge, where approximately 16 rhinos live.

"Poor buggers!" says Merz, talking about her rhinos. Her eyes now flash bright indignation. "It is a sin and a crime that animals should be driven to the brink of extinction, especially by something as idiotic as a dagger handle!" The situation of the rhino is bleak. In 1970 there were 20,000 of them in Kenya. Now there are considerably fewer than 500. It strikes a visitor that Merz's rhinos live like a child kept in a germ-free bubble because of some defect in the immune system. The germs are the poachers. With rhino horns worth about \$65,000 each now, to be sold for use as medicines in the Orient or as dagger handles in North Yemen, Anna Merz has about \$1 million stomping around inside her fences.

Merz, an Englishwoman who has lived in Africa much of her life, began the refuge two years ago. A sign at the front gate reads ALL RIGHTS RESERVED FOR RHINOS. She is now raising an orphaned baby rhino named Samia, almost two years old and up to about 500 lbs. Merz tenderly caresses her and calls her "my darling." Samia, feeling frolicsome, knocks Merz over into the mud. Merz rises, muddy and laughing, and prehistoric Samia knocks her over again. Once again, Merz laughs.

A visitor thought of a passage of bully rhetoric in Theodore Roosevelt's *African Game Trails*, the record of his 1909 safari. The rhino, wrote Roosevelt, "seemed what he was, a monster surviving over from the world's past, from the days when the beasts of the prime ran riot in their strength, before man grew so cunning of brain and hand as to master them."

Hugh Lamprey, of the World Wildlife Fund, flies in to Merz's sanctuary that morning to ask her to accept another baby rhino, which was just orphaned by poachers in the Masai Mara. Lamprey is a mandarin who urbanely calls down apocalypse in a voice that sounds the way the finest, oldest brandy tastes. The visitor privately bestows a title upon him: the Duke of Extinction.

The duke speaks of many things African and animal, and warns at the end of each paragraph that such things should not be written about because publicity is fatal. Now you see the duke. Now you don't. He concludes with a flourish of suave obliteration, "If there was one species you could remove to the benefit of the earth, it would be man." Among the animal lovers, it is not unusual to encounter that misanthropic streak. The animal lovers seem to feel themselves to be just as besieged as the animals are.

Sometimes, when talking to the older Kenya whites, people who had been around in the colonial days and stayed on after independence, the visitor caught the vibration of a nostalgia so radical that it strained all the way back to the Pleistocene. They had no use for people anymore. They seemed to wish to cleanse the earth of the human stain, and restore it to preconscious innocence.

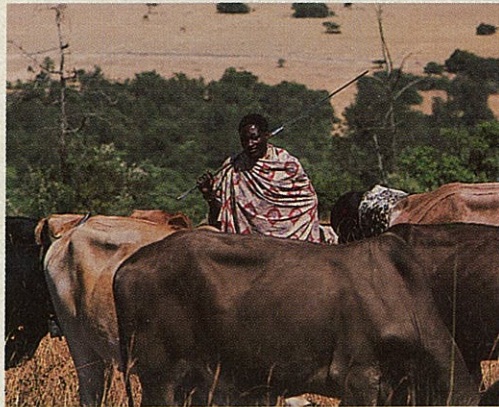
One night Moses announced a goat feast in honor of his visitors.

The goat was slaughtered outside the *boma* just after dusk. The visitor held the flashlight. Young Olentwala did the killing. He threw the goat on its side and seized it by the muzzle with his right hand and placed his knee against the goat's throat and thus strangled it. Joseph said this was the kindest way, but the American doubted it. It was done, anyway, rather tenderly. Joseph and Olentwala chatted easily in Ol' Maa as the goat spasmed and spasmed, and at last expired.

Joseph borrowed the American's Swiss army knife. The moon came up, and Joseph, with an easy precision, relishing the job, began smooth surgery on the goat. He peeled away the hide from the clean inner sack. Halfway through that part of the operation, he and Olentwala leaned down and captured a pool of blood in a pocket of the hide, and drank deeply and loudly, slurping. After a draft, Joseph remembered his manners. He looked up from his drinking and offered the visitor some fresh blood, which was declined.

The sky was now full of brilliant stars. Joseph was happy with his work. He squatted by the rich bag of goat and sliced it with the Swiss knife, working like a surgeon toward the animal's inner pleasures. After five minutes, he came to an item that looked like an enormous cold-remedy capsule. Joseph with great precision peeled away the skin of the capsule, and then took the bright red little salami of it and popped it in his mouth. He made a sound of relish. "Kidney," he explained. He gave the second kidney to Olentwala.

At last the goat was butchered up neatly in the flashlight



MOSES AND CATTLE IN THE HILLS

beam and deposited on its own still wet inner hide. Joseph festively carried the meat into the *boma*. A good fire burned there, and he skewered the thighs and shoulder pieces, hanging them over the flames, and dumped the innards into boiling pots of water. Joseph and Moses took relish in the feast. Among the Masai, the goat was profoundly appreciated. It was a holiday. For the Masai the goat had died well.

Two mornings later, Moses came to the campfire just after breakfast. He looked grave. He led the visitor to the hut where the Masai kept the baby goats at night, out of reach of leopards. Moses went inside and emerged with a baby goat in his arms. The goat was no more than a week old. It was thin and shaking, and its fur was wet and slick. The animal was clearly almost dead.

"What happened?" the visitor asked.

Moses shook his head, wearing a look of elegant forbearance.

"The driver Davis did it," said Moses.

"Did what?"

"I don't know why. He said the goat had too many flies. He sprayed the goat with insect spray from the can, all over, and now the goat is poisoned and is going to die."

The cook kept a bug bomb near the kitchen hut to drive off flies. Davis seems to have been seized by a purifying impulse.

The flies that attend the Masai are sometimes overpowering. They come with the cattle and are a fact of life, Masai and flies living in symbiosis. Walking among the Masai, one keeps a forearm waving in front of the face like an irregular windshield wiper chasing off the densities of flies.

The Masai are a handsome and arrogant and elegant people, filled with a serene self-satisfaction that amounts to a collective narcissism. Whites in East Africa for generations have been infatuated with the Masai. Yet certain details of their lives, like the flies that sometimes cake their lips and eyelids, can be disgusting. The Masai dwell in the world's most magnificent spaces. Yet to stoop at midday to enter one of their dung-walled huts to share a cup of tea is to be plunged immediately into an impenetrable, claustrophobic gloom, choked with smoke. A laser beam of sunlight fires through the darkness from a window the size of a Kenya five-shilling piece. It takes three minutes for the eyes to adjust and make out the dim outlines of one's friends sitting on short stools, knees near their chins, their eyes fixed dreamily on the coals of the cooking fire, their ruminative conversation interrupted by long silences.

The visitor's driver, Davis, was a Luo from Lake Victoria, a hearty man of middle age with smiling open face and the public manner of a gregarious bishop. Davis considered himself a Roman Catholic priest. Into a notebook that he always carried, he had inscribed the text of the Latin Mass, copied from a missal that he had borrowed somewhere in his travels. Davis sometimes donned a long white alb and, all by himself outside the *boma*, performed services beside his Land Rover, chanting the Latin in a rich bass.

The collision between Catholic faith and morals on the one hand and Masai tradition on the other is spectacular. Perhaps the flies had come to seem to Davis the outward sign of the devil's presence here in the Masai *enk'ang*, home of polygamists and breezy pagan fornicators. But the goat was an ancient symbol of the devil. The theology was confusing. Perhaps Davis merely intended to endow one fly-free little life in the dense air of the *boma*.

Davis was at his prayers next evening at dusk when the witch doctor came to speak to the visitor. The witch doctor, Ole Loompirai, sat in a dark, dung-walled hut and drank beer with the visitor and explained the work that he did. The *laibon*, or witch doctor, spoke in a low, murmurous voice in Maa, sucking frequently on an oversize bottle of Tusker, a faintly smoky Kenya beer brought up in the Land Cruiser from Narok. Moses impassively translated.

As the witch doctor talked about charms and animal sacrifices, Davis' rich, deep Latin poured through the small window of the hut: "*Pater noster qui es in coelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum . . .*" The *laibon* explained the uses of animals in his work. He employed the warthog, for example, to cast a spell to keep the government out of Masai business. Good choice, the visitor thought. The warthog is a strutting little beast, a short-legged peasant with a thin tail that stands straight up like a flagpole when it runs. It backs into its hole and pulls dirt on top of itself and, if cornered there, comes out of the hole like a cannonball. Perfect for ambushing bureaucrats.

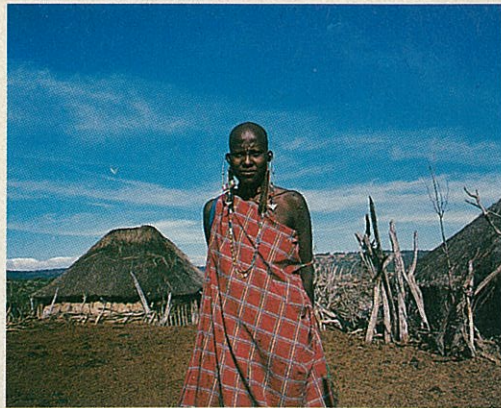
The *laibon* used a Dik-dik, that small lovely antelope, to thwart someone's plans. It works thus: he places charms upon the animal and then releases it in the direction of the person who is the target of the spell. For help with childbirth, he drapes the skin of an eland on the woman—the eland being much like the cow, which possesses magic powers. In order to bring rain, the *laibon* places a dead frog on the ground, belly up, with a charm upon it. Within 24 hours, before the frog decays, the rain will fall.

The *laibon* drained his Tusker and asked for another. From outside, in the failing light: "*Ecce agnus Dei. Ecce qui tollit peccata mundi . . .*" ("Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world.") Of course, it all works, said the *laibon*, irritated that the doubting question was asked. If there are sick cattle, sacrifice a sheep, and take the undigested grass found in its stomach, and stretch the skin over the entrance to the *boma*. The cattle will pass beneath the skin and grass, which will draw the illness out of the cows.

Of all animals, said the *laibon*, cows have the greatest power, the greatest importance. "The cow and the Masai came from the same place in the creation, and they have always been together." The visitor thought of the cattle-raiding warriors, and asked the *laibon* if it is all right to kill a man. The *laibon* thought, drank, blew his nose onto the dirt floor and replied, "It is not so bad to kill a man. If you do it and are successful, it is not so bad, because God allowed the man to die. God agreed, and so it happened."

Asked if he liked the wild animals, the *laibon* answered, "I like the animals, but they do not like human beings. That is the problem. But the eland is a friend. You can eat an eland, and use his skin for many things." Not long ago, the *laibon* dreamed that a spitting cobra bit him. He cried in his sleep and leaped out of his bed, shaking, and awoke.

The *laibon* has been chased by lions many times. The worst attack came one evening when he was walking to another *enk'ang* to see his girlfriend. (The visitor savored the idea of a witch doctor going to pick up his girlfriend for a date.) The lion stalked and menaced him for a long distance, the *laibon*



INSIDE THE BOMA

jabbing with his spear, the lion never quite attacking. Odd.

It happened a year ago in the Chalbi Desert, in the Northern Frontier District. John Hall and his daughter Susan were camping in the open. It was 11 at night when the hyenas came, screaming and laughing, their eyes flashing in the moonlight. There were six or seven hyenas in the pack, and even after Hall opened up on them with his shotgun, they kept coming at him. Hall and his daughter raced for their vehicle, which was open at the sides, and still the hyenas came on, working as a pack, snapping hungrily. Hall plunged the vehicle at them repeatedly and finally chased them off into the desert.

John Hall has been a cattle rancher on the Laikipia Plateau for 23 years. The safari guide, Chrissie Aldrich, brought the visitor up from Nanyuki to Hall's Enasoit Ranch. Hall's neighbors regard him as an eccentric because he gives the wild animals the free run of his ranch. At one time, he and his wife Thelma had a large lovely garden in their front yard, but the elephants systematically demolished it. Hall says cheerfully that he decided to enjoy watching the elephants instead of watching his flowers.

"The elephants are quite considerate, really," says Hall. There is a cabbage tree next to his house. "The elephants pushed down all of the other cabbage trees here, but they left that one standing, because they did not want it to fall on the house." A pride of seven or eight lions lives on his spread. Hall says that the lions do not have a strong appetite for beef, and besides, if they should kill a cow, it is a tax write-off. Twenty years ago, he did have to shoot a lion, one that had killed 46 of his cows. The lion's skin hangs on the living-room wall.

Hall could make more money if he chased the wild animals off his land. "But this is the last of the game," he says, speaking intensely. "So at all costs you must forfeit money to save it. It doesn't look very hopeful for the game, but you mustn't give up. I will fight to the last." That vibration is heard again and again: "Cattle can be replaced anytime, but the game cannot. What right have we to eliminate game? I would eliminate all humans and leave it to the wildlife."

Hall began farming years ago in Nottinghamshire, England. He is a rangy, bearded man who looks like D.H. Lawrence without the haunted introversion. "I always craved wilder conditions," Hall says, matter-of-factly. "I just don't like civilization in any form." The sight of a paved road incenses him.

A wounded Cape buffalo once chased Susan and John Hall into the house. One day a large male baboon pursued Thelma Hall down the veranda and into the house. The baboon came inside after her. She remembers its awful yellow fangs. John Hall came after the baboon with his shotgun, but the gun jammed. Hall jabbed with the gun butt, and the baboon started chewing it up. Finally, Hall whacked the baboon on the head with the gun butt, and it ran under a bed, where Hall finally shot it.

Thelma Hall has begun writing poems about the animals, especially about the elephants. One of the poems ends: "I was always taught/ There are fairies at the bottom of the garden./ At the bottom of our garden/ There are elephants!"

Moses and Olentwala and the American set off from the *boma* one morning to spend the day out in the hills with 140 head of high-humped Boran cattle. Moses carried his long-blad-

ed lion-killing spear. Olentwala, a man in his early 20s who had never been a warrior, carried a less lethal-looking spear, lighter, with less metal on the killing end. They held in their left hands the club-shaped *rungu* and a walking stick of olive wood.

Moses, like all other serious students of African bushcraft, is a reader of droppings, an analyst and commentator on dung. As he and Olentwala whistled the cattle along, he remarked now and then on the evidence that lay in the forest paths and meadows. Here a Dik-dik passed in the early morning. There a waterbuck had paused. Everywhere in East Africa such expertise is encountered.

Moses moves through the forest reading signs. He and Olentwala keep up an easy undulous whistling dialogue with the cattle. Moses explains that the whistles have meaning. The cows know by the Masai's whistle whether to go left or right, whether there is water near, whether they are headed back home.

A sign: Moses kneels and looks at a patch of sandy earth for a moment. He spits a mist upon his palm, *psst-psst-psst*, and then he pats the ground. He shows what sticks to the moisture: some dirt, but also a minute bristling of golden tiny hairs. A shedding. "Lion," says Moses. "Last night."

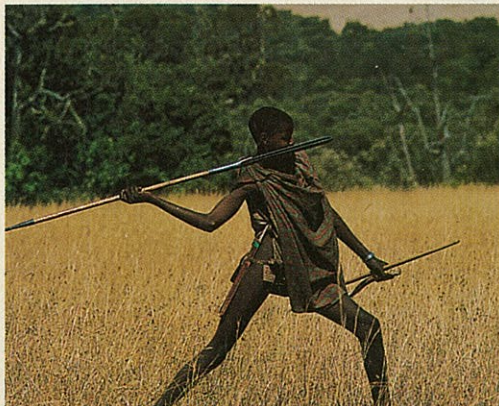
Moses stays downwind of the cattle. He says that the lion, if it is there, will know to keep downwind, and not give the cows its scent. So Moses and his spear will stay between the lions and his cows. Most students of the lion say the lion pays no attention to wind, but one does not argue with a man who has killed six of them.

In an easy loping walk through the meadows, Moses sings a warrior song. There is a falsetto line of rapid narrative in these songs that is interrupted with a chorus of bass organ tones fetched from deep in the chest—low, menacing warrior iterations, animal noises proclaiming war beneath the almost soprano narration. Moses is performing both the falsetto and the deep, sinister chorus. The deep tones of the chorus are like the lowest register of a fierce harmonica. The song is about the Masai clans, about old drought and famine. An old *laibon* says, don't worry, because the warriors will go and raid and get cows from other tribes.

There is a warrior lode that goes along with the song, although Moses does not give it the full treatment now. Chin and chest jut forward at the assertion of organ tone: *Hunnnnnnh! Hunnnnnnnnh!* The Masai know how to look dangerous, and sound dangerous. And the history of East African warfare confirms that they are dangerous. But the visitor wonders why the hands of the men are so oddly soft.

The Boran cattle wear bells that thock and dong and clatter through the forest. The Masai and the cows are so intimately connected that each herdsman knows every cow individually (even, as now, when we are bringing along 140 head) and knows where each will be in the line of march. Moses says the same two white cows always lead the herd, and they do. And the same white cow always comes in last. Moses now and then quite tenderly browses with his hands over one of his animals and pulls off ticks, an act of love. Herding cows is infinitely pleasant for the Masai. It is a matter of walking their money around the grounds. Their cows are dear, animate wealth.

At midmorning the Masai pause. The cows graze, and the herdsman shelter lazily under a grove of olive trees. Moses and Olentwala joke in Ol' Maa. The visitor stretches out and makes



THE USE OF THE SPEAR

notes: "Moses has killed six lions, more than 60 buffalo. A buffalo wounded his brother last year, and he wants to kill lots of buffalo. He points to a buff. skull on the forest floor and says he killed that one there several months ago. Cows grazing all around me now. M. shows me a 'buffalo's house'—a hollowed out space among the olive trees where the buffalo shelter. Moses: 'We like the animals. I am very sad if we don't see them.'"

Then, after we have resumed our herding, the notebook again: "Cows (11:54 a.m.) smell lion and start bawling loudly. They smell fresh lion urine. Moses sees it, pts to spot with spear. Still wet. Lions must be downwind from us now. Cow horns all went up exactly at once when they smelled. Hot noon sun. Moses laughing. Cows still afraid, horns up, smelling. WE CHASE THREE LIONS through forest. One growls. They get away thru bush and olive trees. We chase for 150 yds. and they have slipped away. This is somewhat dangerous business."

What happened was that we saw three lions, and Moses suddenly came alive in the purest spontaneous act. The presence of the lions brought Moses electrically alert. The damndest thing. The lions brought the visitor electrically alert as well, though with less self-confidence.

Moses seemed to become, all at once, everything that he ought to be—which was what the lions were as well: exactly lions. Moses vibrated with a current that contained no thought or premeditation. There was nothing in him of the third eye or the conscience or the sense of sin, but only an animal impulse to kill the lion. Moses went springing after the lion as the lion springs after the wildebeest.

We saw the lions running through the trees. Then they vanished. On general principles, lions are afraid of the Masai. They scurried ignominiously into the forest, not wishing to test Moses. Moses strode back from the olive trees and remarked, "Lucky lions."

Moses and Olentwala practiced throwing the *rungu*. Then they lazed for a time under the trees. Out of the sun, East Africa cools by 10° or 15° F. Altitude and breeze and shade. Moses, showing off, undertook to make fire. He found a piece of cedar, planed the top, and with his Masai *sime* (short sword) bored a starting fire hole. He cut a twirling stick and found the seedpod needed to catch and preserve the fire. Then he and Olentwala set about the rubbing, and soon they had a little smoking seed of flame in Moses' palm.

East Africa is a paradise, but one capable of ominous effects: nature's sweet morning, but also an awful mess, a killing field. The peaceable kingdom is dung covered and bone littered, its graceful life subject to sudden violent extinctions. A high turnover. Life is to be stalked and slain, almost abstractly, and ingested. These days, the death is also to be photographed. The tourist minibuses cluster around a cheetah kill. The late 20th century forlornly suckles on the Pleistocene. The whites popping through the roofs of the vehicles like blossoms from a vase will glare at one another with the hatred of one whose dream has been interrupted.

Among the wild animals, individual life has no claims. What matters is something collective, the species, the tribe, the march of genes: the drive of life, and its dreamlike indifference to the details of individual death. The Great Chain of Eating. Nature at this level is bloody and sloppy, faintly horrifying and very beautiful.

Life and death coexist with a unique ecological compactness. Nothing is wasted. First the lion

dines, and then the hyena, and then the vulture, then the lesser specialists, insects and the like, until the carcass is picked utterly clean, and what is left, bones and horns, subside into the grass. It has been an African custom to take the dead out into the open and leave them unceremoniously for the hyenas.

What is the point of wild animals? If lions and leopards and rhinos and giraffes are merely decorative, or merely a nuisance, then the world will no more mourn them than it mourns the stegosaurus or the millions of buffalo that once wandered across the American plains. Is all animal life sacred?

How would one react to the extinction of, say, the rattlesnake?

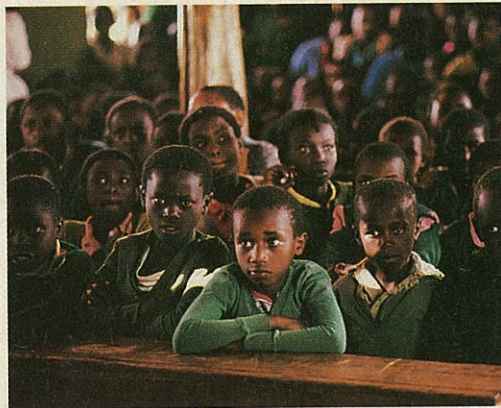
A farmer named Jim Trench was driving around his place near Mount Kenya one day in a rainstorm, showing the visitor the giraffes that share the land with his livestock. He remarked, "Africa would not be Africa without the wild animals."

There are parts of Africa that are less and less Africa every day. Kenya, for example, has the highest rate of population growth in the world (4%). Half of the country's people are under the age of 15. The Malthusian arithmetic ticks away. Progress: fewer infants die, old people live longer than before. The population will double by the year 2000, to 40 million, and then double again early in the 21st century. The human generations tumble out.

Those who live among the wild animals may be excused if they sometimes do not share the American's or the European's mystical enthusiasm for the beasts. Farmers like the Kikuyu, the Embu and the Meru regard the wild animals as dangerous and destructive nuisances. Crop-raiding baboons are esteemed among African farmers about as highly as the coyote is admired among West Texas ranchers. They are considered vermin. Elephants passing through a Kikuyu *shamba* (small farm) one night can wipe out a farmer's profit for a year. The law forbids killing them. If the elephants and giraffes and lions pay for themselves by bringing in the tourists and their dollars, if they prove their worth, then perhaps the governments of Africa will, before it is too late, organize the political will to protect them as a natural resource. But what do wild animals mean?

The wild animals fetch back at least 2 million years. They represent, we imagine, the first order of creation, and they are vividly marked with God's eccentric genius of design: life poured into pure forms, life unmitigated by complexities of consciousness, language, ethics, treachery, revulsion, reason, religion, premeditation or free will. A wild animal does not contradict its own nature, does not thwart itself, as man endlessly does. A wild animal never plays for the other side. The wild animals are a holiday from deliberation. They are sheer life. To behold a bright being that lives without thought is, to the complex, cross-grained human mind, profoundly liberating. And even if they had no effect upon the human mind, still the wild animals are life—other life.

John Donne asked, "Was not the first man, by the desire of knowledge, corrupted even in the whitest integrity of nature?" The animals are a last glimpse of that shadowless life, previous to time and thought. They are a pure connection to the imagination of God. ■



KIKUYU SCHOOLCHILDREN