

‡Salt is candy to pygmies.

SMALLEST AND TALLEST

IN THE darkest corner of Africa live two strange and contrasting races of people, the pygmies and the giants. The pygmies, the smallest people on earth and the most primitive, live in the dense jungles of the Congo. In a land of withering heat, of torrential rains and raging rivers, of cannibals and savage beasts, these tiny people survive by their courage and cunning.

One can't be sure how many of these strange little people there actually are. They slip like shadows through impenetrable forests and never remain long in one place. But it is believed that there are between forty thousand and fifty thousand pygmies. The average pygmy is about four feet tall and weighs about seventy-five pounds. A full-grown pygmy is not much taller and not nearly as heavy as a boy twelve or fourteen years old.

At birth pygmy babies are about the same size as any normal child. For a few years they grow at a normal rate, like any other children. Then nature seems suddenly to check their growth. They

are like children, rather than the ferocious and treacherous savages they often have been reported to be. They are shy, light-hearted, irresponsible and generous. And once you make friends with them, they are loyal and trusting.

Pygmies do not live in villages, as do most native tribes the world over. They are always on the move, drifting through thick forests in search of game. When they find it, they build themselves shelters of leaves placed over sticks, and that is their home for the time being.

The pygmies clothe themselves in garments made from the bark of trees. They live largely on meat. This diet gives them a terrible craving for salt, and the greatest gift an explorer or traveler can offer them is a box of common kitchen salt. They eat it by the handful, as children eat candy. For their food, they snare game in cunningly made nets of vines, or hunt it with bows and arrows and spears. Their arrows are small, the tips dipped in poison obtained from trees. But they depend largely on their skillful nets.

The woodcraft of the pygmies is almost uncanny. Their sense of direction is amazing. Trails mean nothing to them. When they decide to go anywhere, they simply take a direct line, traveling through dense woods as silently as shadows. Rivers alone halt their progress. Pygmies do not know that a person can swim or build a boat or a raft, and the only things on earth which they fear with mortal terror are the crocodiles that infest the rivers. Nevertheless, they do cross the rivers. They build bridges.

At bridge-building, the pygmies are master craftsmen. They spin a web of vines from tree to tree across the river. With apparent ease they swarm up trees 150 feet tall and swing across on a stout rope woven of vines to the other side.

To go from the Land of the Dwarfs to the Land of the Giants, you travel from the steaming jungles across snow-capped volcanic mountains into a world of sleet and snow and biting winds. Although the Congo is right on the equator, these mountains are three miles high and the veritable Kingdom of Old Man Winter. Beyond the sleet and snow belt is a

volcanic region, where you walk over blistering lava, the earth shaking and rumbling and threatening to open under your very feet. But at last you come to the rolling hills and green plains of Belgian Ruanda, the Land of the Giants.

These people, the Watusi, are 7-1/2 feet tall, but they are so well proportioned, so splendidly built, their height does not at all make them appear grotesque. People who have made a study of this tribe believe that they emigrated into Ruanda from Egypt many thousands of years ago. In those days Egypt suffered terrible famines and it is quite possible that these people went forth in search of greener pastures.

They found them in Ruanda. Here, like the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin. All their work is done for them by slaves, descendants of the people who were there before them. It is believed that the giants conquered the original inhabitants, took the land from them, and enslaved the natives. These now till the soil and carry the burdens, while the giants, the overlords, live in ease and comfort.—*Armand Denis, condensed from Radio Digest.*