

AMONG THE WILD ANIMALS OF EAST AFRICA

True Experiences Related by a Young Traveler

IV. A NIGHT IN A NATIVE HUT

MY FRIEND and I had been on a visit to a neighbor's farm near Kitale, Kenya Colony, East Africa. We were on the way back to our own farm in the foothills of Mount Elgon. (See the map on page 136.) The afternoon had been rainy, and therefore the road was not very good. Our motorcycle slid in the red soil of the road from one side to another and I had a hard time to keep myself steady on the back seat. Near Entebass my friend, who was steering, hit a rock with the front wheel of the motorcycle, and turned completely over.

When we got up, our clothing was daubed with the red mud. We tried to start our motorcycle, but the red clay clung to the tires. We found it impossible to continue on our way, because the wheels of our motorcycle

would turn no more, and it was then too late to clean the mud off.

The country around us was filled with lions, elephants, and leopards. We decided, therefore, to try to find night quarters in one of the nearby native huts. There were a few natives who knew us and they were happy to take us into one of their huts over night. This was a great honor for them, as it is very seldom that a foreigner goes into a native hut to sleep.

It was interesting to see how these native huts are built. The natives drive

long poles into the ground for about a foot, while five feet of the pole remains above the ground. These poles are set up in a circle and thin branches are woven in between them until it becomes a round wall of branches. A thick clay mixed with cattle manure is then plastered on this woven wall. This plastering starts from the bottom and goes slowly upward around the wall. After the first layer is dry, fresh plaster is put on. This continues until the wall is five feet high and six inches thick.



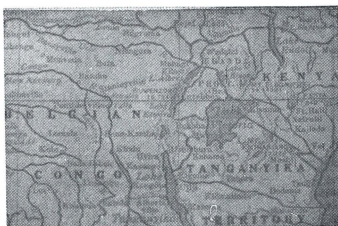
Native Huts of East Africa

This work takes about two days, during which the natives laugh and joke all the time. They like to build new houses. There are some tribes in East Africa who build new houses every two months.

After the walls are completed and

nearly dry, a roof is placed on top. Long poles are bound together at an angle of ninety degrees. This is necessary; otherwise the rain would run into the house. The roofing is ordinary grass which is five to eight feet long. The floor of the hut is the soil on which the hut has been built. It is always very dirty. There is a fireplace on one side, usually in a hole in the ground. The natives are very careful to see that the roof over their heads does not catch fire.

My friend and I were in such a clay-plastered hut as this. We sat with the



Map Showing a Part of East Africa

natives before their fireplace. The heavy smoke from the wood fire made our eyes water.

I took out of my pocket a little flute which I had with me, and played a few of our songs for these East African natives. They seemed to enjoy my music, although I am only a very ordinary performer on the instrument.

After I had finished, one of the natives took a string instrument from his bed and played on it. It was only a poor substitute for a guitar, but the natives seemed to like it. He played a few tunes and then the other natives started to sing. Their songs were long and very monotonous. My friend and I could not understand a word of what they were singing.

Over the fire they were cooking some corn meal, or *posho* as they called it. The *posho* meal was ready when they finished their long song. They took it off the fire and started to eat with their fingers. They ate noisily, and smacked their thick lips together, showing their evident pleasure in the meal. My friend and I did not say anything while they were eating—they were so noisy we could not have been heard.

An old man, who seemed to be the father of the whole family, was dressed

in a cow-hide, which was bound together over his right shoulder. The hide was just as it had come from the cow. It had been dried in the sun before it was used for a garment, and it still had the odor of the animal.

We started a conversation after they had finished their meal. The young men told us that the old man was very rich, as he owned a herd of about sixteen cattle. And he had three wives; the first one had been paid for by his father; he bought the other two himself, and paid six cows for each one. This is the customary way of getting a wife among those natives. A man who has enough cattle to pay for them has several wives; this is a sign of wealth, dignity, and power.

We talked about witch doctors; that was the most interesting subject we could choose. It was astonishing to see how much those natives believe in the power of a witch doctor. When they are sick, they would rather go to a witch doctor than to the government doctor at a hospital. They consult a witch doctor for all sorts of things. If it does not rain just right, or if their cattle become thin, they consult a witch doctor.

Witch doctors also act as judges for the natives. The natives very often have quarrels. Sometimes such a quarrel—a feud—goes on for years. For example, a man may have bought himself a wife for six cows. It might happen that in a few days after the wedding one of these cows would die. This would surely start a quarrel or feud, and the whole family would be busy talking about it. Everybody would believe that this cow had been sick when it was given as payment for the wife, or had been bewitched.

Sometimes these quarrels are brought before the court of an old tribesman, but

they are usually settled with the help of a witch doctor. It depends upon the witch doctor whether the quarrel is settled peacefully or not.

The natives in our hut told us how the old man had lost his eldest son through a witch doctor. A feud had gone on for a long time between the two families. The other family had finally consulted a witch doctor. He had advised his clients to tell the old man to pay them three young healthy cows. This was the common way of settling a feud. The old man had found a dead hen hanging at the door of his hut every morning for a long period. A dead hen meant evil wishes from somebody.

Shortly after this two of the old man's cows had been bitten by snakes and one had died. He now believed in the power of the witch doctor and wanted to pay the three cows. However the son of the old man did not want to let his father pay. He wanted to marry soon, and the three cows were to be the payment for a native girl from another family.

A small bag made of cow hide and containing five feathers was found at his door each morning. The five feathers meant the old man had to pay the three cows within five weeks; otherwise, something very terrible would happen.

After four weeks the son became sick; the old man was very frightened and called the witch doctor. Nobody knows what the witch doctor did, but the son died. The old man then paid the three cows to settle the feud.

This is a typical case, and shows how strong the power of a witch doctor can be. The British law in Africa forbids the consultation of witch doctors, but their power is still great and the natives believe in them more than in anything else.

We listened to this interesting story, although it took us a long time to understand the natives. While telling it, they had become very excited, and their language was not easy to understand.

It had now become very late, and as my friend and I were both tired, we went to our hut with a native to show us the way. He carried a burning torch.

There were many leopards around, but they do not attack when they see a burning light moving.

There were a few boards in the hut, and we placed them before the entrance. It has sometimes happened that leopards have gone into the huts and have carried goats, dogs, and even children away with them. They have also killed natives, but have disappeared before the other natives

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EAST AFRICAN CHIEFS

One of these chiefs has a tuft of wool on the end of his spear; that means that all three of them and their people are at peace.

MISER'S GOLD

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golden yellow flower. Soon all the meadows in all the land were filled with beautiful golden flowers, the good fairy's golden yellow flowers which everyone could enjoy. And they have bloomed there ever since.

Thus, the good fairy changed the miser's gold into something beautiful which everybody would enjoy.

QUESTIONS

1. What is a legend? (See the dictionary.)
2. What is a miser? (Again see the dictionary.)
3. How did the miser in this story secure his gold pieces?
4. Where did he hide them?
5. What evil person went to the old miser's hut?
6. What did the robber do?
7. What happened to the kettle of gold?
8. What did the fairy see?
9. What did the fairy decide to do?
10. Tell the rest of the story.
11. What do you think of hoarding money and not using it?
12. Do you know any fairy stories? Could you tell one?

NIGHT IN A HUT

(Continued from page 137)

were able to kill them.

We were tired and soon we went to sleep, although our beds were not very comfortable. I do not know how long I had been asleep, when I was suddenly awakened by a loud screaming and yelling outside. We got up at once. We could clearly hear the excited voices of men outside. We did not know what had happened. I took a pistol in my hand and my friend took some of the boards down. We could not see anything outside and the noise had stopped. We called twice and one of the natives answered: "*Tui mbaja sana hapa, bwana.*" (I have killed a leopard.)

This killing of a leopard did not interest us very much, we were so accustomed to it at our farm. Therefore we went to bed again and slept until morning.

The natives were talking noisily when we came out of our hut the next morning. There was a corral near the huts where the cattle and the goats were kept at night. The fence of this corral was about nine feet high and was built from branches of red thorn trees. It was effective for keeping the wild animals out.

During the night a leopard had sneaked through the fence to get one of the goats. He had killed two of them and had begun to eat his prey. The cattle in the corral had become excited. This noise had awakened the natives in their huts, and they knew at once that there was a wild beast around. Two of the men had taken their spears and shields and gone outside quietly.

It was dark outside, but these natives are accustomed to seeing in the darkness. The two men quickly found the leopard. The animal then tried to get out of the corral. He leaped at the two men, and they killed him with their long spears.

A medium sized leopard lay before us. The claws of the beast were long and sharp, and looked very strong. I raised his lips and saw his great fangs which were about three inches long.

The leopard still had the spear in his side. Several wounds showed us that both spearmen had fought him. The natives do not like too many holes in the skin of a leopard. They sell the yellow and brown spotted skin, and they will get more money for it when there are not many holes in it. They usually dry the skin in the

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NIGHT IN A HUT

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sun, and then sell it to one of the farmer's wives.

They offered us the skin, but we thanked them and declined. We could not take the skin with us because we had no means of carrying it on our motorcycle.

We cleaned the mud from our motorcycle, and waited until the hot sun had dried the road. Then we said goodbye and climbed onto our motorcycle which took us to our farm in a short time.

We were glad that we had stayed with the natives during the night, as this had given us the opportunity of seeing their home life and enjoying their hospitality. But one night in a native hut was enough, especially when we had a visit from an East African leopard.

QUESTIONS

1. What can you tell about a leopard? (See the encyclopedia.)
2. Describe the skin of the leopard.
3. Why do the natives not wish to make holes in the leopard's hide?
4. Find Kenya Colony on the map. Mount Elgon.

A GOOD-FOR-NOTHING

(Continued from page 138)

So he added a little petition of his own to his prayer. "Help me, God, to do something worth while, so I won't be a good-for-nothing."

Just as he finished his prayer, he happened to notice the back cover of a recent magazine for young people. "Can you write a good story? Win a prize!" the advertisement read. He scanned the announcement through. "I wonder if I could," he said, half aloud. He thought for a few moments. "Well; I'll try."

He seated himself at his study table. As he did so, he again said the words of his prayer uttered a few moments before. "Help me, God, to do something worth while, so I won't be a good-for-nothing."

Inspiration and strength come to the boy. Soon he was working away on a short story to be sent in answer to the advertisement he had read. Never before had he had such an eager desire to do something worth while. He wrote and wrote. It was a simple story, and the plot unfolded naturally and easily.

"I think this is a pretty good story," Pedro thought when it was almost finished.

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GOUNOD

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dramas, Wagner. (See THE YOUNG CITIZEN for November, 1940.)

At seventy-five, crippled and blinded by a paralytic stroke, Gounod composed a *Requiem*. He heard it played, and when it was finished, he fell over unconscious and died. This was in 1893. At the funeral service hosts of his admirers were present.

Gounod's great operas *Faust*, *Romeo and Juliette*, and many of his sacred compositions will always be heard and loved whenever there is music.

REVIEW

1. What is Gounod called?
2. What is his nationality?
3. What are the dates of his life?
4. What is Gounod's most famous opera?
5. Tell of the success of this opera.
6. What is an opera?
7. Name some selections from *Faust*.
8. Name some other compositions by Gounod.
9. Tell of the disposition of Gounod.
11. Name one contemporary.
12. What was Gounod's last composition?