TEXT FLY
WITHIN THE
BOOK ONLY

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY
OU_166800
UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 799.26 / M51O Accession No. 39520.

Author Meissner, Hans-Otto

Title One man safari., 1957

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

ONE-MAN SAFARI

by

HANS-OTTO MEISSNER

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT NOBLE

HERBERT JENKINS
LONDON

First published in Great Britain by
Herbert Jenkins Ltd.,
3 Duke of York Street,
London, S.W.1.

1957

WORLD COPYRIGHT BY HANS-OTTO MEISSNER

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		*Page*
One	THE NAMELESS MOUNTAINS	11
Two	PAPER-TRAIL IN BANGUI	32
Three	THE ROAD TO THE HINTERLAND	42
Four	ELEPHANT TRAIL	48
Five	SIBILIT AND BATAVELÉ	58
Six	THE GENTLEMAN WITH BIG FEET	78
Seven	BUFFALO AND LION	103
Eight	SURPRISED IN HIS MUDBATH	116
Nine	BILONGO	133
Ten	THE COVETED BONGO	153
Eleven	BOBO, THE HERMIT OF THE YÉ	173

LIST OF COLOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

Facing page

The men of the Tuareg are ruled by their womenfolk 32

In the middle of the Sahara in the heart of a mountain, I found this lake of clear deep water 48

The author with a forest elephant 64

Drawing the nerves from the tusks of an elephant . 80

The fallen buffalo 96

The shot hippopotamus which was to be the main dish of a ceremonial feast 112

The hippopotamus for the people of Bambi . . 128

I shot this elephant in the vicinity of the River Borni. His tusks weighed 75 lbs. and 70 lbs. 144

ONE-MAN SAFARI

Chapter 1

THE NAMELESS MOUNTAINS

A RANGE of mountains without a name rises in the heart of the Sahara Desert. Their stone is smooth and round and as black as coal. Nothing grows on their sides but a hard yellow grass with edges as sharp as knives. The ground is covered with pebbly shale in varying reddish and black shades. No rain ever falls there. They stand brooding and silent, are not marked on any map and, to the best of my belief, had never before been trodden by a white man.

It was bitterly cold when we struck camp in the very early morning. The sun was still hidden behind the heights but already it was throwing a pale reflection on the sky which was sufficient to light our way. A cool wind blew over the uplands, making us shiver as it penetrated our clothing. It brought with it a sour spicy smell from the spiky grass. We stepped out more smartly to warm ourselves. The silence around us was absolute: not a bird called, not a cricket chirped, not a leaf rustled. Even our soft-soled shoes made no sound on the shale. Walking on the moon must be very like this, I thought.

In front of me marched Ahitagel, one of the last of the Ifora tribe. He had his face veiled, like all the men of the Tuareg, and in his right hand he carried a slender iron spear. From his leather belt hung the takuba, a two-edged sword of medieval shape. His stride was so long and rapid that I found it hard to keep up with him. So did his two slaves and now and then they would break into a trot in

order to keep at a reasonable distance behind us. On their heads they carried our woollen blankets and food and over their shoulders were slung our water-bottles. We carried no tent, for rain was out of the question and we were on our way to the shade of the mountains.

We had been going for about two hours when Ahitagel pointed with outstretched arm to the mountains. Suddenly the topmost peaks burst into light as if a lamp had been switched on. The neighbouring heights caught the glow and in a few minutes the whole range flamed before us in a deep red light. The light ran down the dark cliffs like streams of molten lava till it rolled to our feet and bathed us in its radiance. Immediately the cool breeze dropped, and we felt a new warmth on our cheeks.

Ahitagel turned aside to his morning prayers, though, like all the Tuareg, he was very half-hearted in obeying the precepts of the Koran. Satisfied at last, he nodded to me and set off again. I stripped off my linen jacket and one of the servants ran to take it.

At this latitude the air is so dry and clear that for a long time I thought, wrongly, that we should soon reach the foot of the mountains. Instead they seemed to draw away from us the nearer we approached. It was almost midday, and the January sun of the Sahara was burning down on us mercilessly when we reached the first rocks, rearing up out of the flat desert floor like houses on a square. The sun had warmed them and it was comforting to lay my hands on their smooth surfaces.

Ahitagel did not pause. At the same swift pace he continued to climb the first boulders—standing like silent guardians in front of their mountains—towards a gorge with sides as steep as if Allah himself had split the mountain with a sword-stroke. Not a ray of sunlight penetrated the narrow cleft which, with its black walls, looked as gloomy as the mouth of Hell.

Our pace slackened as we began to scramble over the shale that covered the floor of the gorge, and I suddenly understood the point of Ahitagel's advice that I should wear very light shoes. I had had my doubts about climbing a mountain in such shoes, but now I was grateful for the rope soles which gave a good grip on the smooth rock. It was harder to find sure handholds, for the rock was of the type that affords only occasional ledges by which we could pull ourselves up.

Ahitagel, whose home was in this unreal world, picked his path upwards with unerring certainty. Not once did he look back to find out how I was faring. He left it to the servants, who were climbing behind me, to give me any help I might need, but I needed none: trekking across the Sahara and the Hoggar had accustomed me to the climate, and the hunting of the local chamois at home in Bavaria to stiff climbing. After climbing for some time, the gorge widened into a circular bowl ringed round with naked black rocks. On a patch of sand in this theatre Ahitagel squatted down and invited me to sit beside him. The servants immediately opened their bundles and put out the gear necessary for making tea in Tuareg style.

This preparation is always an elaborate ceremony even though tea is made several times a day on the march. Apart from water, sugar and green tea leaves, Tuareg tea requires several herbs whose nature, source and mixing are a secret of the particular family. Since these people of the desert abstain from alcohol and are too poor to smoke, tea remains their only luxury, and is the only commodity, apart from matches, sugar and some millet, which they take in trade from the outside world. For firing we had brittle grass and a little dried camel dung brought along by one of the Negro servants.

Conversation with Ahitagel was impossible. He could not speak a word of French and I understood not one

syllable of his tongue, Tifinaq. Now and then one of us would smile, which was all that was necessary to maintain a friendly atmosphere between us.

Nothing quenches the thirst like Tuareg tea and five tiny glasses of it, handed to me one after another by Ahitagel, were enough to make me abandon all thought of recourse to the water bottle. Our midday meal of a hunk of goat's cheese and a handful of dates, with plentiful sugar in the tea, was ample nourishment for life in the desert.

In their general geographical perspective the "nameless mountains" belong to the Air Massif, of which the main structure is well known. It has been travelled by several explorers and plotted by French cartographers from the air. But the dark hills in which we were are separated from the massif proper by a broad stretch of desert. On the official map they are marked with the same light yellow colour as is used for the rainless belt of the rest of the Sahara. Remote even from the caravan routes, their forbidding barrenness tempts nobody to make their closer acquaintance as they have nothing of value to offer the modern world. Even if they had, the distance from the nearest traffic route and the murderous heat of a Sahara summer would make exploitation impossible or, at best, uneconomic. Only men who can support life on the barest essentials can maintain existence on these arid slopes.

But this minimum is enough for the last of the Iforas, whose fierce pride is stronger than their desire for better standards of living. These "exiles" have never bowed to the control which has been accepted by their more civilized brethren, the Tuareg of the Hoggar, who in 1916 surrendered to the French after bitter fighting. I had seen something of these people when I had stopped in Tamaurasset a few days earlier in the course of my southwards

drive across the Sahara. Mohammed ag Maslar, the Amenokal (King) of the Hoggar Tuareg, did me the honour of posing for my camera, standing in front of his one-room palace. By custom he must leave his palace at night as it is forbidden for the Prince of Nomads to sleep under the roof of any building. The Amenokal rules over his twenty-five thousand subjects as of yore, governing all their domestic affairs, and apparently finding the tolerant legislation of the French no very great burden on his authority.

The Iforas, on the other hand, refused to accept the domination of any man, however tolerant. They continued to raid caravans and carried on guerilla warfare with such bitter intensity that repeated reprisals have at last reduced their numbers to scarcely a dozen adult males. Yet even this handful of survivors refuses to surrender, though by keeping to their desert wilderness they no longer give further excuse for punitive expeditions against them. Indeed, the numbers of these once heartily-feared people are now so few that a lieutenant and twelve men flying the flag of France at Fort Iferouan two hundred miles away can at last sleep peacefully in their beds each night.

We rested for two hours. While Ahitagel slept, I enjoyed the cool of the shade, happy to have found, in an overcrowded world, a corner free of the litter of picnicking humanity. At last Ahitagel roused himself and gave the signal for a fresh start. The servants quickly replaced our belongings. The going now was steeply uphill through a narrow ravine, in which even my guide had to pause occasionally to recover his breath. At last we reached another plateau, where single stones reared up like molehills out of ground that was otherwise as flat as a table and covered with fine shale, on which walking was as smooth as on a gravel path. Here, as lower down, the sole vegetation was brittle yellow grass which pushed its way through

the stony ground in clumps at wide intervals, presumably because the soil nourishment was too poor to support more than a tuft every three or four square yards. The tiny seed-cases on the dry stems had opened in the midday heat and the air was full of their pollen which pricked the nose and throat.

Here and there deep cracks lay open before our feet. They were too broad to jump, but Ahitagel could always find a point where we could climb down and up the other side. It was because of these crevices that we had left behind the camels on which we had started our expedition. For the Iforas these fissures are at once an obstacle and a protection. No road vehicle or camel troop, not even a mule, can find a way across them. They are also a limiting factor to the distance a man can travel on foot and still maintain his water supply. Any traveller without an Ifora guide to indicate the few places where the ravines can be crossed would find penetration of the mountain impossible.

It was in one of these ravines that I came across the first tracks of the game I was seeking. In the loose sand between two stones was the spoor of a maned sheep (or in scientific language, the *Ammotragus lervia*). Resembling in shape those of the European wild sheep, the tracks were somewhat larger. When I pointed them out to my guide, he merely nodded but was not inclined to linger over them. With a sweeping gesture he pointed forwards to indicate that the real haunt of this rare beast lay farther on. We pushed forward quickly without finding further tracks. Sandy places were few and the sheep's hooves left no mark on stone or shale.

It was nearly dusk when I thought I smelt smoke in the air. I hailed Ahitagel, gesturing a fire with my hands and pointing to my nose. He understood at once and nodded in agreement, pointing ahead with a smile. Through my

field-glasses I scoured the plain as far as the next line of rocks, but could see no trace of a human encampment. Meanwhile, Ahitagel was marching on, so I gave up the attempt and followed him. He was making for one of the dark hills in our line of advance when he disappeared before my eyes, sinking gradually into the ground. I hurried after him and found my way barred by a ravine without any way across it. This was not just a crack in the rock like the rest but a real valley, very deep and fairly wide. Below I could see green grass and bushes and a cluster of date palms. From the middle of the trees a thin column of smoke was rising straight into the air. Hurrying carefully along a narrow ledge after Ahitagel, who was already far down, I was suddenly aware of soft earth beneath my feet and of the air becoming pleasantly humid. Passing through a widely scattered herd of black goats, I came in sight of a camp surrounded by a thorn hedge, where a pack of barking dogs rushed out to meet me. Ahitagel signalled to me to wait and went ahead with the servants to announce my arrival.

Among the Tuareg the matriarchal principle holds good. The "Law of the Mother" is the most ancient form of communal human life. No man may bring a stranger into the camp without the permission of the mother of the tribe. She is the head of the family. Everything belongs to her—the herd, the household and the servants. She determines where the camp will be sited and when it will be struck. She apportions the work. The girls choose their future husbands, not the young men their brides, and the man must be faithful to his wife and obey all her wishes.

It was partly for this reason that, until recently, the Tuareg were the most feared robbers of the Sahara. Continually sent out by their women-folk to plunder, the men roamed and looted as far south as Lake Chad and even into

the Sudan, in order to lay pretty gifts at the feet of their strict spouses at home. They fell upon oases and caravan trains ruthlessly, knowing that they would find a deserted tent at home if they returned empty-handed. Even today, among the Tuareg, the woman counts for everything, the man for nothing.

Some time elapsed before my appearance had been explained and approved by the mistress of the tent. Then Ahitagel returned and signed me to approach.

His household was simple in the extreme. It consisted only of a few branches over which red-tanned hides and goat-hair blankets had been thrown. Enthroned on a pile carpet was Mother Aisha; at a respectful distance from her were her two daughters and the wife of Ahitagel, all unveiled. Around them several children played with puppies, unnoticed.

The mistress of the camp indicated a seat beside her with a warm smile of welcome. Her features were regular but sharp, and her complexion surprisingly light. She wore her hair in long plaits hanging down on each side to her shoulders. From her neck and ears hung a large mass of curiously worked silver ornaments and semi-precious stones, which tinkled when she moved. They indicated that Mother Aisha had been of a higher and richer rank in former days. Indeed, her name belonged to the history of the Sahara, for it was her grandmother who had been the wife of the famous Amenokal, also called Ahitagel, who in 1881 vainly tried to warn the military expedition under Colonel Flatter against advancing farther. The Colonel did advance and was destroyed in a week-long battle, with all his seventy men. Fortunately the first Ahitagel's namesake and great grandson did not treat me in like manner; he was a loyal and constantly helpful guide.

His wife was quite beautiful, especially when her face

was lighted with a smile. She had a strikingly slim boyish figure and narrow well-formed hands.

I spread my gifts out before Mother Aisha: a packet of tea and a box containing about two pounds of sugar candy. To give more, I had been warned, would wound the pride of my hostess.

A copper platter was placed on the ground before the mistress of the camp and a fire was lighted on it. A young female slave brought in the two jugs and other paraphernalia for making tea. A tiny baby pressed to her breast with her left hand continued to suck, undisturbed by his mother's activity.

With the first sip of the tea handed to me by Mother Aisha with ancient ceremonial, I became by custom their guest and directly under their protection. Politeness dictated that I should drink not less than three glasses and, should I drink more, I had to be careful that the number I drank was divisible by three.

My host's family numbered about a dozen, including the children. Whether Ahitagel was the only man or whether there were others elsewhere I could not ascertain because of the difficulty of language. Of household possessions the family owned nothing but the strict necessities—a few soot-blackened pots and several wooden basins, two battered copper jugs, tea glasses and some goatskin water-bottles, the last with the hair still clinging to them. At the back of the tent was a weathered wooden box but I learned nothing about its contents. All the materials used in their clothing had been spun and woven by themselves from goat's hair; the old lady wore black, Ahitagel and his wife, white. The children ran around naked. Carpets and blankets seemed to be made of camel hair. Two or three wooden tubs, hung on a crossbar to protect them from the dogs, held curdled goat's milk and a kind of whey also provided by the goats. Dates, probably gathered from

the palms round the tent, were heaped in a big basket. Their most precious commodity, water, was drawn with a long rope and a leather bucket from a well which, in earlier days when the Iforas were more numerous, had been dug deep into the ground and carefully lined with stones.

Like all the Tuareg, the family had its retinue of slaves, who lived in their own thorn hut, faring neither better nor worse than their owners. The relationship between the two families seemed to be one of mutual respect. Orders were never given in a tone of command. Probably it is inaccurate to describe the Negro half of a Tuareg household as slaves; they are an integral part of the community and have their rights, guarded by ancient custom, as well as their duties. No Tuareg ever sells a slave or breaks up slave families in any way. The aged slaves, though they can no longer work, receive their daily bread, however small and scanty it may be, as a matter of course. Most of them are the descendants of prisoners captured in raids and carried off in earlier days.

In honour of the foreign guest—certainly the first they had ever received—our evening meal consisted not merely of cooked millet and curdled goat's milk; a kid was slaughtered and its flesh, cut into thin strips, was roasted over the open fire. Such a feast was a rarity in the family and even the old lady's eyes lighted up as she tore piece after piece from her strip of meat with her strong teeth. The fact that I brought my knife to supper seemed to cause general surprise.

I passed the night on an old rug, wrapped in my Arab cloak. Near me one of the servants squatted motionless to tend the fires—less to warm me than to keep away the flies which swarmed over the camp in a buzzing cloud. Away from men and beasts there was never a fly to be seen.

It was still night when Ahitagel woke me. Fortified by

tea and cheese provided by his mother, we set out again, this time without servants. On a stalk even one is too many, says the old hunting proverb, so we carried our impedimenta ourselves.

Besides my rifle, a 7·64 Mannlicher with telescopic sight, I had my field glasses and a light rucksack containing food, first-aid kit and camera. Over my shoulder a rubber flask holding just over two gallons of water was slung on a broad strap; on my head I wore my old tropical helmet, once khaki in colour but now just dirty. I had no choice but to load myself with so much water (which weighed a great deal) for a trek of two to three days, even though we drank it in the form of tea only. It was the strict minimum. The uncommonly dry air of the Sahara (the hygrometer fitted in my car showed only five per cent humidity in the South Sahara) dries out the body to an extent scarcely credible in other latitudes. During a trip through the Hoggar, when I carried sufficient water in the car and therefore did not need to be sparing, I drank on an average eighteen pints a day, not for pleasure but from sheer necessity, for there is certainly no pleasure in drinking lukewarm water from a rubber bottle. When I returned home I had to have a stone removed from the kidney. The doctor commented reproachfully: "This comes from not drinking enough."

Ahitagel did not return to the plateau by the way we had descended, but struck off up the ravine due north. By the time the sun was up, the gorge had widened to become a broad valley covered in green. Instead of isolated date palms, whose ancestors had once been planted by the hand of man, there were dry thorny talhas trees. Not unlike acacias, they were covered with tiny yellow woolly flowers which gave off a stupefying scent.

After a time the ground became sandy and soon we saw the tracks of wild sheep. My first delight at this was premature, for the droppings we came across were as dry as

tinder; either this trail was used by the sheep only at other seasons of the year or else they had abandoned it completely.

Wherever the tracks led through a narrow opening between rocks, we saw baulks of timber lying on the path. By signs Ahitagel gave me to understand that they were primitive traps put there by himself or his forebears to snare the maned sheep. He pointed to a funnel-shaped hole in one of the pieces of wood; at its narrow end the hole was just large enough for the animal's hoof to pass through but too small to allow it to be withdrawn. The luckless sheep could do nothing but limp on dragging the log with it and leaving tracks in the loose shale which enabled the sharp-eyed Iforas to follow and dispatch their quarry with a spear. I found it hard to imagine a more horrible method of hunting, especially as it involved an element of chance whether the hunter would even trouble to come for his prey before it perished miserably from hunger and thirst; but as we never saw any signs of a sheep so impeded, I was tempted to hope that the wild sheep had learned the viciousness of these traps and avoided them. Perhaps, indeed, that was why they had abandoned this old haunt.

Ahitagel, however, seemed puzzled that we had not come upon any tracks that promised good hunting. He quickened his already fast pace and led me forward without hesitation. Soon we had left the valley to emerge on a plateau which obviously was strange country to my guide. Several times he climbed eminences to obtain a picture of the lie of the land ahead. Under the sun's steady glow we breasted several crests, completely bare of vegetation, then plunged back into shady valleys where single tufts of grass indicated that there was water below ground.

On the edge of one of these valleys my guide suddenly halted and stood stock-still. On the floor of the depression several dark dots were moving. I raised my glasses with

my heart beating fast and looked. I let them fall again. They were only goats.

It was a great blow to me, but the sight seemed to electrify my guide. From his sign language, I gathered that these were his own animals that had wandered off some time before. Straightway he forgot the purpose of our trip as he concentrated on how to get his beasts back again. We crept into the valley with as little noise as possible and it was not difficult to guess the plan that Ahitagel had in mind. The northern end of the valley was sealed by sheer rock; we had only to drive the herd towards this end, from which there was no outlet.

We accomplished the manœuvre without too much trouble, though Ahitagel's former domestic animals had become as shy as if they'd been wild. We had no rope or leather thongs with which to tether them, so we penned them there by erecting a thorn hedge round them. While one of us prevented the beasts from breaking out into the open valley, the other took his knife and cut the stoutest branches he could find in the talhas thickets and drove them securely into the loose shale across the mouth of the opening. It was a painful job because there was hardly anywhere on the thorn branches where one could get a grip without pricking oneself. With Ahitagel working as if his life depended on it and me doing my share, the afternoon raced past and it was dark by the time we had made sure that the goats could not break through.

Then we made a roaring fire with some dry brush and prepared our first meal of the day. Simple as it was, it looked a banquet to my hungry eyes, especially as I helped it on its way with a tot of kirsch, which had accompanied me all the way from the Black Forest. We had scarcely wiped our mouths clean when my companion rose and delivered a long speech in sign language. It appeared that he must leave me and fetch his people. He needed help

quickly to catch his goats and get them home, for the animals had neither food nor drink in their pen. Meanwhile I was either to wait where I was or else look around for the tracks of wild sheep in the neighbourhood. Before I could protest, my guide had slipped away into the darkness.

I was quite content to let him go. There is no danger in loneliness, especially with a bright fire for comfort. The charm of finding myself completely alone in a world of endless solitude quite outweighed my disappointment at having to postpone the hunt of my quarry. Most of that night I lay awake on my blanket, staring up at the starry sky which covered the nameless mountains with its bell of darkness.

In the first grey of dawn my thoughts returned to the main purpose of my journey here—the hunting of one of the most highly prized hunting trophies on earth. Since the blind instinct of the animal is a better guide than the educated calculations of man, I decided to follow the tracks of Ahitagel's goats where they led down into the valley. When we had first seen them on the previous day the goats had been seeking not food but shade in which to rest after eating. If I could find their pasture, I should probably also find the tracks of the wild sheep, provided, of course, that there were any in the neighbourhood.

I set off at first light and followed the goat tracks without difficulty because, even where they had moved over stone and shale, they had left enough droppings to indicate the direction. After half an hour the country dropped to a basin that was green with fresh grass. Here, among the tufts of grass, my hopes were fulfilled. I found not only many fresh tracks of the wild sheep but also a great many droppings, some of them so moist and shiny that they could only have been left during that same night. None of the

Rue de Rivoli's rarest perfumes could have had such charm for me as the sour smell of those droppings.

Soon I reached a monotonous succession of flat shady valleys and stony ridges, each valley and each ridge looking very like the other. As I approached each crest I slackened pace and advanced cautiously, surveying the next depression through my glasses from any cover I could find. Each time I expected to see the herd moving ahead of me, and each time I rose to my feet disappointed. Unfortunately, I knew little of the habits of my quarry, for I had never met anybody who had hunted it. I had seen these sheep but once—in the ditch around Fort In Salah, where the commandant had some in captivity. Among them had been a magnificent ram, with a splendid beard on chin and chest.

The wild sheep of the Sahara differs in several respects from the wild sheep of Corsica and Sardinia (and successfully introduced into Germany). Whereas the horns of the European ram turn in a more or less upright snail-twist, those of the Sahara ram are more widely set. Though the African animal is bigger and stronger, its horns are lighter and smaller—possibly as a result of a deficiency of lime in its unbalanced diet. The value of its horns as trophies, therefore, lies not in their size but in their rareness and, in the hunter's eyes, the extreme difficulty of finding the beast.

Having no specialist knowledge I could only draw on my general experience of horned wild beasts and assume that *Ammotragus lervia* would also seek a shady place to lie and sleep in during the midday heat. My task was to find his resting place without betraying myself. With so shy an animal this was no small undertaking, especially as the slightest sound would be audible over a wide area in the absolute silence of the mountain. So I pushed on

with scrupulous care, avoiding even stepping on tufts of grass which might rustle under my foot.

Luckily my quarry was less cautious. As I lay at the top of a ridge and examined the low ground ahead, I suddenly heard the patter of small stones falling down the opposite slope. I just had time to swing my glasses and see the silhouette of a ram outlined against the sky as it disappeared over the crest. Excitedly I waited to see whether another animal would follow. When it did not and all remained quiet, I got up and moved as quietly and quickly as I could for the point where the beast—obviously the last of the herd—had crossed the ridge ahead. Rifle in one hand, water-bottle in the other, glasses swinging across my chest, I reached the other side panting and hardly capable of another step. Before setting my foot on the loose shale which covered the slope I halted. If the hooves of an animal used to hills could loosen the treacherous stones how much greater was the risk that my broad human feet would set a whole anvil chorus in motion. To wait was torture, but absolutely necessary if I was not to lose my chance through haste. At last I felt sufficiently recovered to set one foot on the tricky slope. One or two pebbles moved, but they made no noise. I raised the other foot slowly and took another step. No less painful than this snail's pace was the thought that my quarry would be far away over the hills by the time I reached the top. If that happened, I should have to give up the chase, for the increasingly shaly nature of the ground caused my footsteps to leave no impression, and even for the sake of a wild sheep I dared not expose myself to the danger of getting lost.

I was feeling heated now, not only because the sun was blazing down but also because my own impatience and excitement were burning me up. Sweat ran down over

my brow and into my eyes and my feet ached from the constant strain of keeping their muscles under control.

Very slowly I drew near the black boulder crowning the ridge. There was not a breath of wind and the silence was so complete that it seemed to me that my pulse-beat must be audible for miles around. When the jagged edge of the ridge was only a few feet away, I paused again for a few heart-beats of time in order to draw a steady breath. Such moments seem to last an eternity. At last I felt myself calm enough for the last step to the summit. Placing my water-bottle on the ground I raised myself on my left hand, with my rifle in my right, and dragged myself into the shadow of the large boulder whose other side faced into the far valley. Inch by inch I worked myself up over its warm stone, to find when I reached its upper surface that I was looking at nothing but sky. The next ridge must be below me. I dragged myself forward again and took another look.

The next ridge was now in sight, crowned with black boulders like the one on which I was lying. I scanned its crest and then turned my glasses into the valley and examined the rocks. Before my eyes had travelled far, I again heard the rattle of loose stones. Then I saw my quarry.

Standing out boldly against the clear sky, he was poised on the highest point of the ridge on the other side, monarch of his world. His shaggy beard hung deep from neck and chest, his proud head with the backward tilted horns was turned to me. Such a sight is granted to few men. This was the rarest creature of the Sahara, the fabulous maned-sheep in the heart of its native mountains.

He sniffed in my direction, though I was sure I had made no sound and the wind was in my favour. In a split second he might vanish and remain for ever unattainable in his remote world. I prayed that he would stay for the fraction of time needed for my shot to bring him down.

I edged my rifle inch by inch over the smooth rock, my eyes never leaving my target. Some instinct was making him nervous and he stamped backward and forward. Again he sniffed in my direction. Perhaps the risk he was taking in pausing there before descending down the farther side was only the normal duty of the strongest ram in the herd, on whom lay the responsibility of security from the rear. Among chamois, the last beast will stand on a ridge and take a cautious glance backwards before it follows its herd.

At last my rifle was in position, my eye to the telescopic sight. The range was something over 250 yards. I was now reaping the reward of my self-imposed rest; breathing and pulse were steady. The hairline on the sight passed along the ram's flank to the foreleg and up to the shoulder blade; I took aim slightly below the mark in order to allow for the bullet carrying high in the thin air. I cocked the hammer carefully, afraid that the tiny metallic click would alarm my quarry. As I did so the ram started and gathered himself for the leap to safety on the other side of the ridge. Simultaneously, I fired.

As the thunderous explosion shattered the silence, the ram kicked both forelegs high in the air and fell backwards down the slope. I raised myself and passed the back of my hand over my wet brow. I was quivering with excitement. Then with no further need for concealment I breasted the ridge and bent forward to follow his death-fall with my eyes.

I looked down into the valley. In that instant I forgot my kill for there below me, much deeper than I had thought the depression to be, was a glistening mirror. A lake lay at my feet, a sheet of bright blue water hemmed round by reddish rocks. Without a thought for stones or shale I rushed down and threw myself on my knees at its edge, dipping my hands in water as cool and pure as the

mountain stream that foams past my home in the Tyrol. I could see a long way down through its crystal-clear depths, but still could not see the bottom.

Throwing off my clothes, I slipped into its coolness, swimming deep down to enjoy the soft half-light under water after the harsh glare of the day. As I rose again to the surface, I saw the head of the ram above me. In falling, his body had struck a ledge of rock where it was caught, leaving the horned head dangling over the edge. I was glad the old ram's amber eyes were not looking down at me; glad they were turned to the wide sky.

As I swam on my back and gazed at my prize with mingled pride and pity, I felt my body being tickled as if by ghostly fingers. I looked down and found myself surrounded by fish which had swum up out of the depths to investigate the strange creature that had invaded their element. Fish in the heart of the Sahara Desert! About eight or nine inches long, they were different in shape from any I had ever seen, being roughly triangular with the head at the base. The fins were set close to the gills, and from their mouths hung barbels such as catfish have. In moving quickly they used not only the tail but the whole of the body in a sudden vigorous twist. It occurred to me that it might have been a service to science to take home some specimens of these in place of the hide of my wild sheep, but I had no means of catching one. Even had I been able to, without preservatives it would have decomposed long before I could get back to civilization.

The desire to examine my dead ram and hold his horns in my hands impelled me at last from the lake. It was a struggle to drag the heavy beast from the ledge to a shady place, where I severed the head from the body and skinned the carcase.

The way back was heavy going and darkness overtook me on the way, but Ahitagel had returned with his people

meanwhile and had started a blazing fire to guide me on my way. When I was within hailing distance, he and his servants came out to meet me and with loud congratulations freed me of my burden. Tired out more by excitement than by physical effort, I needed some time before I could report my experience. I managed to explain fairly well by means of signs and sketches in the sand the finding of the trail, the pursuit and finally the kill; but not the discovery of the lake and the fish. In vain I hollowed a small trough in the sand, poured in a little water and pointed to the direction from which I had come. The Iforas' faces remained blank and showed no glimmer of comprehension. Then I pointed to the empty skin of the ram, urging them to fetch the carcase. That way they were bound to find the lake. It was of no use. The family had plenty of meat, for they had slaughtered a goat that had been hurt. They could use no more meat for the time being and there was no way of keeping it. Besides, they were anxious to return home with their goats that had strayed.

Possibly the Iforas already knew of the lake but were anxious to keep its position secret to avoid attracting fresh settlers. Yet, if that had been so, it seemed probable that they would have lived on its banks themselves, as there were pasture and kindling near by.

At first light we set out for the Ifora camp. Each of my hosts had his hands full in driving the obstinate goats back home, the animals showing little taste for returning to human bondage. It was three days later when we arrived, tired and thirsty, at the date palm camp, where the children meanwhile had been fending for themselves.

A further week went by before I set out on the return trail. During that time I was able to approach close enough to three more maned sheep which I photographed with the aid of a telescopic lens. I also added a fine dama

gazelle to my bag, though it cost me a long and tiring stalk through endless wastes of burning hot stone. To my regret the beautiful skin of the wild sheep with its fine beard was spoilt by the time I got back to where I had left my car. I finally took home only the horns.

Chapter 2

PAPER-TRAIL IN BANGUI

WHEN my car rolled to a halt under the frangipani blooms in the garden of my friend Manuel Dominguez—the loveliest garden in Bangui in French Africa—it had carried me 7,327 miles from Munich.

Of the various instruments which I had fitted to the car, few had proved their worth. The others might have done very well for a week-end excursion, but were quite unable to cope with a crossing of the Sahara Desert and certainly not the vast stretch of sand relieved only by stones known as the Hoggar.

Only the hygrometer and the thermometer were still doing their duty though they had had to cope with conditions which such instruments are seldom required to face. In recording the air humidity the needle of the hygrometer had found its way down to five per cent in the South Sahara, while here in the Congo river belt it had climbed to ninety-six per cent, for the rainy season had just begun. The thermometer had had stranger experiences still, for twice it had reached a point beyond which it could not go—and this at both ends of the scale. In the Tyrol, at the start of my journey, the indicator had stood at minus thirteen degrees Fahrenheit. Further than that it could not go, though the actual frost on that record night had been three degrees colder. The instrument had suffered similarly at the opposite end of the scale one noon on the desert track of In Guezzam, where it had to stop at one hundred and

The men of the Tuareg are ruled by their womenfolk. Ahitagel's mother is on the left and his young wife on the right.

thirty degrees Fahrenheit, the limit of its capacity. What the temperature really was, there was nobody within a circle of three hundred miles to tell me. Now, however, it was raining daily for short periods and when I reached the forest area, it was pleasantly cool, the thermometer registering a modest ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit.

Bangui is on the River Ubangi, one of the mighty tributaries of the Congo, but my goal, the land of the really big elephant, lay nearly a thousand miles farther east. Despite this, the toughest part of my intended elephant hunt—the hunt for hunting permits—lay here in Bangui. This side of big-game hunting in Central Africa is no less strenuous than the later pursuit of the big bulls themselves. Moreover, the paper trail is expensive in money as well as time.

In complying with official permit formalities I covered 150 miles in Bangui, making twenty-seven visits to various civil servants. That I held all the necessary documents in my hand after only five days of effort was due to three lucky circumstances: first, the extremely kindly attitude of all the officials with whom I had to deal; secondly, the kindness of several young ladies in Paris who had helped me to learn their beautiful language when I was a student there; and thirdly, the aid of good friends in Bangui who advised me, stood surety for me and, above all, showed me where the relevant offices were to be found.

In Bangui, which has a population of some 1,800 whites and 90,000 blacks and is seven miles across, it is far from easy to find one's way about. There are no nameplates on the streets and there is no town plan. Native passers-by cannot give information, because they do not know, and one cannot ask the whites because they are always in cars. A stranger without help has little chance of finding, for example, the office of the Department of Rivers and Forests, which is stuck away in the jungle three miles from the

town and, like the other administrative buildings, gives no indication on the outside what work goes on inside.

The big-game hunter in French Africa requires the following papers: an entry visa, a valid certificate of inoculation, a receipt for the deposit of his return fare, a Customs permit for his personal baggage, the declaration of a person of standing guaranteeing the re-export of his hunting weapons, a stamp in his passport stating that he has reported personally at the Sûreté, Customs permits for his guns and for his ammunition, a gun permit, a big-game hunting permit (price just over £40), a permit to use his camera, an exemption certificate to allow him to take out his films uncensored, and a permit to buy ammunition in case he has not brought enough or has not brought the right kind.

To obtain each of these papers it is necessary to fill out forms in multiplicate and on them you are asked to state even the maiden name of your mother. To give the procedure more dignity, most of the forms must bear duty stamps. Naturally these are not obtainable in the various offices where the forms are to be found, but at the Town Hall (ground floor, third door on the right), where many other people are invariably waiting.

The place where you obtain your forms is, of course, never the same as where they must be handed in and that, of course, is different again from the place where you finally receive your permit. Because of the heat, the periods during which Central African offices are open are cut short and holidays are frequent. All men being equal in the sight of the law, whites and blacks wait together in the offices till their turn comes round, exceptions to this rule being made only for people personally known to the operating official, who enter by the back door and speak immediately with him. As in practice every white knows

every other white in Bangui through the club, only white strangers wait outside with their coloured brethren.

Throughout the world the most important thing on any document is the signature of the competent official and so it is in the heart of Africa. The competent official attaches just as great importance to his function as all other competent officials, with the consequence that should the official whose signature is necessary happen to be away—and that can be the case more often than not where the area of administration is enormous—one must await his return.

If one really stuck to the letter of the rules in Bangui, the whole elephant world would succumb to old age before a big-game hunter, in possession of the proper credentials, could get anywhere near it. It is therefore fortunate that the practice is a good deal easier than the theory. It is true that the French are much more active than other nations at inventing bureaucratic rules, but they are not sufficiently bureaucratic to stick to the rules they make. So, however insurmountable the restrictions of the law appear, the problem always settles itself happily. *Tout s'arrange.* It is a considerable additional advantage that many rules contradict each other, whereupon the kindly officials, acting on the motto "The official is your friend and helper," choose the more favourable one. The result is that, just as you have abandoned all hope of being able to go any farther before you are due to return, every problem is magically solved and you are through.

Of course the whole thing begins all over again when you emerge from the jungle. Then it is a question of dragging yourself, your goods and chattels, and your trophies of the chase, through the official net homewards. Every elephant tusk must be weighed and measured, stamped and valued, certified and double-certified. Only when all that is done may you pay the various taxes at the

various places—amounting in all to some forty per cent of the market value of the ivory. Not a horn, hide or even a feather, may leave the territory until it has spent some twenty-four hours in a solution of formalin. After that, the hunting authorities, the veterinary surgeon and the Customs officials must pronounce their verdict on each item. It goes without saying that this does not happen without further form-filling and, of course, charges. As compensation for all your trouble and expense you are finally left in lawful possession of enough paper to fill your brief-case to bursting point.

As far as your own person is concerned, you must appear once more before the official doctor and pay another visit to the police department. This last requirement, at least, is a pleasure, for the gentlemen of the Sûreté have no equals in politeness. They ask no questions, because they already know everything, and they are heartily glad to talk for once with somebody who does not figure in their list of wanted persons.

After each day on the "paper-trail" you finish dead-beat but cheerful. Everything that can be said about the Gordian knot in the labyrinth of officialdom has already been said by the officials themselves.

Of course the task of breaking through the legal forest becomes easier the more often you engage in it. On my third visit I was greeted in every office as an old friend of the family and the papers almost flew into my pocket of their own account.

The money also flies out of your wallet as long as you stay in Bangui. Everything is incredibly dear. If I had not been staying with friends I should soon have become a charge on public charity. Even a modest hotel room costs something like two pounds ten for a restless night, and you cannot have a reasonable meal set on the table under a charge of twenty-five to thirty shillings. A glass

of beer costs over six shillings, coffee over three shillings, and you even have to pay for filtered water. Transport costs to the heart of Africa are so high that the price of every commodity is doubled and even tripled by them. Thus a week in a town in Central Africa punches bigger holes in the tourist's wallet than two months in the bush.

The majority of the white residents of Bangui, like those of other African towns, know nothing of the wide lands in whose heart they live. Whoever is going on leave drives at once to the airport and betakes himself to France. Whoever is forced by business to travel never leaves the main road and never walks more than fifty yards from his car, in which he takes the comforts he needs as well as his servants. When he arrives for an overnight stop at a government rest-house the building is invariably empty, but in the twinkling of an eye it is furnished by his boys from the mass of gear which he has brought along. The modern love of camping has yet to reach the administrative officials of Central Africa.

In Bangui you cannot buy a camp bed or a folding table, a tent or a sleeping bag; but you can buy, at the appropriate price, a crystal table service for twelve persons or a four-poster bed. You will look in vain for a bush shirt or a hunting knife, but your wife could select for herself many a fetching little hat. Any small town of Europe or America offers a better choice to the camper or hunter than Fort Lamy, Brazzaville and Bangui, although these places lie at the heart of open country of fantastic size.

So it is that the intending hunter must bring all his kit with him, down to the last detail. In Bangui even his best friends could not assemble a camping outfit for him by borrowing. The portable furniture which the business men take with them in their lorries is usually made of iron or some other metal, and is much too heavy for week-long

treks on foot through forest and bush. The few white men who still live in the backwoods of Africa—mostly prospectors, scarcely any hunters—get all their equipment from Europe or manufacture what they need on the spot with the help of their native servants.

Only a tiny fraction of the white inhabitants of Central Africa now live outside the big centres of population. Fast, almost daily, air communications with Europe make towns like Bangui, Brazzaville and Fort Lamy suburbs of Paris rather than central points of the African territories which are administered and controlled from them. If you take the evening plane after dinner at Paris-Orly Airport, you can breakfast on Lake Chad and arrive in the Congo by 11 a.m. the next day. But if you want to climb the hill in the jungle that you can see from your hotel veranda, you will need two days, several bearers and careful preparations to do it.

The state, like all the principal commercial firms, guarantees its employees leave at least every two years, with free air passage to Europe. A mother who has three children in the home country can fly to France every six months. Most whites consequently feel, not that they have been transplanted to Central Africa, but that they are merely employed there temporarily. Contact with home is so close and lively that people are no longer conscious of the enormous distance which separates them from it. The post flies back and forth between Paris and Bangui as easily as between Marseilles and Bordeaux, and life moves along more or less the same channels as at home.

In Bangui the schools are excellent and the streets paved. If you do not feel well, you call the doctor or drive yourself to hospital. In the evening you have a choice of cinemas or you can meet in a bar or go out to dinner. At the weekend you can sail on the Ubangi or swim in it, you can hire a horse or even a small sports plane. The young people

flirt over tennis, or dance at the club. For the rest, there is a flourishing social life, with its cliques and jealousies and squabbles. The high costs are not felt so painfully by the inhabitants as by visitors, as the colonial franc is worth double its home-value and salaries are correspondingly high. The radio brings opera from Paris and tells the people of Bangui all the current gossip of the capital.

Life in the bush, however, has none of these conveniences. The bush still belongs to Africa and there is very little contact between it and the town. The bush begins where the tarred road stops. But before you reach it you must pass the airport for Paris . . . so Paris is much nearer.

Very little has changed from earlier days in the existence of the white man living in the bush. Certainly he now possesses a refrigerator which works on petrol, but it only operates efficiently when it is not too hot outside. Though he covers it with wet cloths and stands it in the darkest part of the house, it does not help much when the temperature stands at over 100° F. in the shade, and he is never able to make ice.

Big white ants crawl up and down the whitewashed walls of the bush-dweller's mud house, and mosquitoes hum round the oil lamps in thousands. No carpet can hold out against a thousand gnawing creatures and only constant care can protect wooden furniture from their boring. His servants come from the bush and, though carefully trained, require constant supervision. If the white bush-resident is ill, he must doctor himself, or, if he is very sick, must try to reach the doctor over perhaps two or three hundred miles of wretched roads.

The letter which travels from Paris to Bangui in only sixteen hours may take weeks or even months to arrive in Obo, Melfi or Amtiman. Once the rainy season sets in,

the roads become impassable and transport can no longer get through. If the lamp-oil runs out during this period, the lonely settler must go to bed at sundown. If there is a bad harvest among the local natives, they come to him for assistance, as they do if one of them breaks his leg. If he does not get along with the local people, they may possibly put the chopped whiskers of a leopard in his soup. Then, slowly but very surely, he comes to a painful end.

It was once worth-while financially for a man to spend ten or fifteen years of his life in the bush, far away from white civilization. At the end of that time, when he had had enough of the heat and the natives, there would be a nice little sum—or even a nice big sum—waiting in his account at home. But all that is now past: fortunes are no longer there to be made; the natives will no longer work for a few pieces of cloth and a handful of glass beads; transport costs have shot up to astronomical heights; high tariffs blockade the ports, and the arm of the Treasury reaches behind the farthest jungle tree. It is no longer worth a man's while to cut himself off in the bush when the financial return is no more than he can earn in the towns, while enjoying something of a social life into the bargain.

Air transport has done nothing to open up the wilderness, it jumps over it. The bigger the machines become, the less often do they stop on their flights over the hinterland. Many smaller places which were once air-stops now merely hear the drone of aircraft passing overhead. New railway tracks are not being built any more, and few new overland routes are being planned. The white man is building the towns and abandoning the land because the economy encourages a few big industrial centres and discourages the isolated undertaking. Big business concen-

trates itself on certain fixed points and leaves the outlying plantation to look after itself.

In Bangui there was nobody, apart from two senior officials, who had even a moderate knowledge of conditions in the bush. These two oldish men, left over from the "heroic age," could certainly tell some stories of past feats of hunting, but they had given up jungle safaris years before. Although I made the acquaintance of very many people in that town and asked them to put me into touch with somebody still engaged in big-game hunting, no such person could be found. When I received my big-game permit at the end of March, it was Number 7 for the current year! That in a territory several times larger than the German Republic!

Appearances are deceptive and statistics cannot give an accurate picture of modern developments in Central Africa. Those journalistic experts who paint such breath-taking pictures of modern Africa have mostly merely jumped from point to point in the country; they have seen nothing of the wide open spaces that stretch endlessly between. Nor have the residents—island dwellers with as little idea of what is going on in the jungle around them as castaways lost in the Pacific.

Chapter 3

THE ROAD TO THE HINTERLAND

JUST behind the airport, which is to Bangui what the railway station is to any country town, my road changed its colour. So far it had been grey, but now it became red. The asphalt stopped and in its place was the earth as God made it.

Yet not quite as God made it. Even here steam-rollers had been at work packing down the earth, filling in potholes broken into the surface by the giant tyres of long-distance lorries. All along the road were deserted ant-hills from which the road-menders had taken earth to fill the troughs. The roller had passed and the hole was smoothed over. This had recently been done, which was why my car could cruise along at nearly fifty miles an hour. I maintained this excellent average for the next five hundred miles without trouble. There were no towns to drive through and traffic was limited to no more than a dozen lorries encountered throughout the distance.

Every two or three miles a village would lie alongside the road. These ribbon villages, with their huts, goats, children, hens and black pigs, argue a size of population which does not exist in reality. They look more populous than they are because the huts are strung out along the edge of the road, with long intervals between them. Furthermore, the villages exist only on the road and nowhere else. Immediately behind the huts and their wretched plantations the jungle begins and it runs for a hundred, two hundred, even five hundred miles of wilderness without a human inhabitant.

These wilds were not always so empty as they are today. Only in the course of the last ten or twenty years have the natives left the forests and built their homes along the main roads. It suited the authorities that they should do so because they like to have their flock under their eye, and it also suited the natives. Africa's coloured children are extremely inquisitive and what happens on the traffic road is as amusing to them as is the cinema to other peoples. There lorries thunder past, bringing excitement to an otherwise eventless day; and there also come itinerant natives who have often come from a long way off. They are always ready for a gossip, so that a visit from them is as good as the radio, newspapers and the latest novel all rolled into one.

Such distractions apart, living on the main road also has its practical advantages. The road is the river of life; everything depends on it and is drawn to it. The road takes away what is produced and fetches what is consumed. Along its edge, the native finds, directly or indirectly, the work which brings in the bit of money to buy the little extra comforts of life. Along the road pass the Haussa trader with his shoddy wares, the district nurse to visit the huts, and the witchdoctor with his stock of potions. Of course, the road also brings the tax collector, but his toll of three shillings and sixpence per year is a sound guarantee of security, for the villagers and chieftains no longer fall upon each other as they did in former days. The road also protects them from the attacks of forest beasts—if a lion is too pressing in its attentions, the white policeman appears and shoots it.

So who would stay in the bush away from the attractions of the road? In the depths of the jungle, where the white man rarely shows his face, there are bad men ready to fall on a lonely hut and carry off its occupants; there are elephants and apes to destroy plantations and prevent a

man from harvesting what he has sown; there are leopards and even the dreaded leopard men.

So the old villages in the jungle are abandoned and the former cultivated fields have reverted to the wilderness. This migration in Central Africa has taken place with few people knowing anything about it. Only the animals have known exactly, for they have reaped the reward of the flight of man from the jungle. Helped by the luxuriant climate, the cultivated plants of the deserted villages spread out on all sides—mango, bananas, groundnuts, manioc, potatoes, sugar cane and pineapples, offering titbits which the jungle never offered before. Spared the hand of man, they grow like weeds, encroaching farther and farther into the forests.

Only a man who has penetrated the forests and travelled the jungle on his own flat feet has an idea of what is going on. Yet this does not prevent a host of so-called experts from spreading nonsense about the "extinction" of the larger fauna of Africa. This remote region has two faces: one it shows to the hasty passer-by, the other—a very different face—only to the bush trekker.

As long as I sat in my car rolling on towards Bangassou, I belonged to the first category. On both sides of the road grey and green walls rose up, shutting off any real view of the jungle. Even with the road itself the forest had long since refused to make its peace. It thrust out roots to break the surface from beneath and pushed new shoots through. The very telegraph poles were not safe; it was as though the forest pumped its sap into them and caused them to break out in leafy branches. Here and there a tree giant would throw its rotten trunk, creepers and all, across the path and hold up traffic for days.

But steadily the milestones began to tick off the stages to Fort Sibut, and without their help I might have driven through the place without realizing it. Fort Sibut is distinguished from all the other villages only by a handful of

tin-roofed trading huts and warehouses; somewhere hidden in the foliage lie the house and office of the *chef de la région*—controller of a district bigger than Bavaria.

Yet is his area of administration really so vast? On the map it looks as if it is, but what he actually administers is no more than a ribbon of roadway along which the villages are strung like beads on a string. All else might as well be at the bottom of the sea for all the administration that is involved. It is only the people of the area that matter —their output, control and their welfare. And for this purpose the only territory that counts is the road and the few yards of earth on each side of it.

Fort Sibut proudly calls itself a traffic centre because the road divides here into two branches. To the north it runs via Fort Archambault to Fort Lamy, to finish on the Sahara track beyond which, some 2,000 miles farther on, lies the Mediterranean. To the east the road runs to Bangassou, and from there it continues for 1,000 miles until it reaches the banks of the Nile.

I had once seen from the air the road which I was now travelling, and it had resembled nothing so much as a thread stretched across a gigantic plain arching away to the horizon. It had presented a monotonous picture, just as it did now from road-level. I learned later that two days earlier my friend Dominguez had killed two lions from his car because they barred his path near Milestone 316, but I had no such excitements. On the contrary, I encountered nothing but mile after mile of steady going till I reached Bambari and drove into the well-tended garden of the "Auberge de la Ouaka." This little hotel with its prettily furnished restaurant is the last on the road to the east. Thereafter you must travel some fifteen hundred miles or so to Nairobi or Khartoum in order to reach a hotel with a good restaurant. The "Auberge" is run by

Monsieur and Madame Badiou who entertain their guests so kindly that it is difficult to tear oneself away.

It was less than a year since my last visit and the friendly atmosphere of the hotel enveloped me again at once. While Madame hurried to meet me, her husband, with a wink, placed on the table one of the wines that have made his country famous. The chance to eat and drink really well for the last time for a long time was not my only reason for stopping there. The "Auberge" is the meeting place of many interesting people. Every planter, official, prospector and bush-whacker makes for it when he is in the district of France's eastern jungles in order to enjoy dishes cooked by a white woman. The "Hôtel Ouaka" has therefore become an absolutely first-class information centre for the hunter. You meet the right people there and hear the most reliable news. Nor is the hotel bothered by formalities. Sit at any table and you are immediately drawn into the general talk, asking and being asked questions. At coffee time the guests often stand round the ping-pong table on which maps are spread out and swap experiences. Here, where people are cut off from the mass of their fellows by several hundred miles of empty country, hospitality and readiness to help each other are written in letters of gold. If I had accepted all the invitations I received as a stranger and a German, I should still be in Africa.

But I could not spend the rest of my life as guest of these friendly people. My interest was to find out where the biggest elephant tusks were to be found and where were the biggest antelope horns. Admittedly I already knew something of the country above the M'Bomou, as the best tusks hanging on my walls at home had come from there. But past luck is not always a reliable guide to the future, because conditions in the jungle change from year to year. I wanted to know, also, what the road surface eastwards

was like, which ferries had broken down since I was there last, and what kind of chap the new District Officer was.

The guests at the "Ouaka" took the afternoon off to explain things to me and then devoted the evening to drinking success to my adventure. Crammed with good advice and excellent wine it was long after midnight before I sank into one of the "Auberge de la Ouaka's" most comfortable beds.

Chapter 4

ELEPHANT TRAIL

THE next evening I reached Bangassou, where the Ubangi ceases to be a navigable river and its name changes to the M'Bomou. From this point on, the M'Bomou forms the frontier between French Equatorial Africa and the Belgian Congo, as had the Ubangi throughout its length.

In Bangassou I had to organize my fuel supplies. My car was not specially built for extensive touring; it was an ordinary production model, no longer very new, and intended for normal use in reasonable conditions. It had a diesel engine which has the advantage in Africa that it never boils, even in the hottest part of the Sahara, and the disadvantage that suitable fuel is not always available in remote areas. I had therefore to turn for help to the big transport companies which have branches in most places of any size. This made necessary a personal introduction to the chief of each station, and usually involved me in half an hour's polite chitchat. Nevertheless, I was helped everywhere and on every occasion, though sometimes not without difficulty. In the African hinterland, diesel oil is handled only in forty-five gallon drums—it is chiefly used for stationary engines rather than cars—and several times my good Samaritans had to open a drum of this size to supply me, and then had to leave the greater part of its contents standing about in their yards until they were ready to use it.

In ordering to avoid trespassing unnecessarily on such

A marvel of Nature: in the middle of the Sahara, in the heart of a mountain without a name, I found this lake of clear deep water.

helpfulness, and also because transport stations become rarer beyond Bangui, I had brought with me rather more than twenty gallons of diesel fuel in ten small cans as a reserve. Thus, with the contents of my tank, I had some thirty-five gallons on board.

My destination lay some four hundred miles from Bangassou and as I should also have to provide for the return journey, plus a hundred miles or so of motoring in the hunting area, my reserve fuel stocks were obviously insufficient.

Senhor Pina, a well-to-do Portuguese trader, readily agreed to help me out. He owned a lorry from which the primitive native shops lying along both the roads which meet in Bangassou were kept supplied. Of the possible routes, mine to the east offered him the least profit, yet the good-natured Pina undertook an extra journey out of kindness to me. It was arranged that a ten-gallon drum of diesel fuel should be left for me with each of the three white planters on the road, the distance between each being about a hundred miles.

I already knew these three planters. The best-known of them, a man named Kespars, was the first white man to settle in this territory some forty years ago, and during that time, as a professional ivory hunter, he is said to have shot more elephants there than any living man, his total bag amounting to some 1,200 head. In his early days there was a wide demand for ivory and it fetched a much better price than it does nowadays. But elephant hunting was ended as a profession, not so much by the replacement of ivory by synthetic materials as by the imposition in 1936 of hunting regulations limiting the reduction of elephant herds. Under these regulations every hunter required a permit to shoot elephant and no man might take more than four males in any one year.

So the elephant hunters of former days have become

planters and now measure their skill in the weight rather than the number of tusks they bag. Kespars' finest tusk to date weighed 123 pounds, while de Beaumont's record —de Beaumont has shot some 400 elephants—is a magnificent pair weighing together some 207 pounds.

Immediately beyond Bangassou the road narrowed, becoming less monotonous, though there was still very little to see from it. It consisted of two narrow wheel-tracks between which grass and bushes grew freely. The distance between the tracks corresponded to the width between the wheels of the lorries—which were the only vehicles to use the road—and was altogether too wide for my car. As a result I had to drive with two wheels in one of the tracks and the other two ploughing through the undergrowth in the middle. And what undergrowth it was! A lorry with a high ground-clearance could just clear it, but my low-slung car mowed it down and piled it up in sheaves in front of the radiator. This prevented the water in the radiator from cooling properly and it soon announced its protests on the dashboard thermometer. So, every three or four miles, I had to stop and remove the hay harvest which I had collected.

Old hands, who know the tricks of such roads, have gratings like cow-catchers fixed to the bumpers of their cars so that the undergrowth is thrown clear. Even the big lorries follow this practice, especially towards the end of the rainy season when the growth on untended roads can reach the height of a grown man. I had known of this device but unfortunately I had been unable to find a grating that would fit my car.

The country was now what it was to remain for the rest of my journey—gentle undulations followed by open and level stretches which finally descended into valleys at the bottom of which usually ran a silted stream. These

valleys were overgrown by dark, damp woodland through which the track ran as through a tunnel.

The bridges crossing the streams were primitive, no more than two stout boards laid lengthwise over shaky cross-beams. In constructing these bridges the builders had considered only the requirements of lorries so, with my narrower track-gauge, I had to take damnably good care that my tyres hit the inner edges of the planks exactly. Whenever such a bridge came in sight, I aimed carefully and then accelerated to make sure of getting to the other side before the rickety structure fell to pieces beneath me. As the planks were not nailed to the crossbeams there was a tremendous roaring noise as they bounced up and down under my wheels. However, I always got across.

I met only one other vehicle in three hundred miles of driving. I was passing through a grove of trees when I saw the tunnel of the road ahead darken as a lorry hove into sight. When only a few yards separated us we both stopped and got down. A broad-shouldered white man came to meet me. We met halfway, shook hands and introduced ourselves. He told me he was returning from a tobacco-buying trip on the Sudan border. Then he called to his natives and had a table, two chairs and some wine brought from his lorry. While we took our seats in the middle of the road and swapped the latest news and happenings, the tobacco-merchant's boys hacked a path round his lorry wide enough for my car to pass and expertly spread over the soft earth the branches and saplings which they had cut. In a very short time the by-pass track was ready and, pushed by the native boys and their white boss, my trusty old car wobbled round the heavy lorry until it reached the more or less solid earth of the main road again. We parted with many good wishes and I proceeded without fear of a similar meeting since, the tobacco merchant assured me, there was nobody else "on the road." As

there were in any case only three or four vehicles which could have been on the road, he could be reasonably sure of his facts.

In spite of the small use made of this road, it has played no small role in the history of opening up Africa. It follows the original trail over which, in the second half of the last century, the envoys of Emin Pasha penetrated into the Congo to claim new territories for the Egyptian state.

Looking at the map of Africa it is difficult to believe that at the end of the nineteenth century the influence of Egypt reached thus far. More strictly, it was Turkish influence, since Egypt was at that time still part of the Turkish Empire, native and Arab chieftains acknowledging the Sultan in Constantinople as their overlord. In reality, remote from Turkish authority, they ruled arbitrarily and absolutely. As business partners of the big slave dealers they carried on a trade in their own subjects. Their living merchandise was brought into fortified strong points—the so-called zaribas—and held till the traders arrived to do business. The last zariba was found and burned by the French no more than twenty years ago.

In the garden of the district chief of Rafai, a hundred miles beyond Bangassou, there stands today a little bronze cannon which fifty years ago formed part of the fortifications of a zariba of the local sultan. Originally the cannon must have come from England, for it bears on the barrel the British coat of arms with the fine motto of the Order of the Garter—*Honi soit qui mal y pense.* A very proper slogan for a slave hunter!

Virtually nothing is left of all that gloomy empire of earlier days. The descendants of the chieftains still "rule" today, but they are no more than puppets, no longer obeyed by anybody. They are treated more politely by the French administration than by their own subjects.

The same road was also used by Colonel Marchand when

water. The native driver and his mate had managed to save themselves and both now sat gloomily on the bank, waiting for something to happen. They had already been waiting a week and as they had made not the slightest attempt to send off word of what had happened it could be presumed that they still had a long wait ahead of them.

As soon as the more or less naked ferrymen set eyes on me they began to click their tongues with tremendous enjoyment; they pointed at me with all five fingers and laughingly rubbed their bellies. Their grins revealed their filed cannibal teeth, and for a moment I suffered a passing qualm. Cannibal habits have by no means entirely disappeared in some parts of Africa, and although I had never heard of their having a taste for white men, I had no desire to be the subject of their experiments.

My doubts were quickly dispelled, however, and my distrust shamed when one of the boatmen spoke to me in French. Then I recognized him as one of my bearers of the previous year. The gestures of his friends, he told me, were not meant in any unkindly way. On the contrary, they merely wished me to understand that they remembered me kindly for the eight thousand pounds of elephant meat which I had presented to their village. They hoped I would entertain them again just as splendidly and offered me their services as bearers.

More than willing, I instructed them to look carefully for a "big foot" and cut a stick to show them by its length the diameter which any elephant spoor must reach before I would be prepared to hunt it. They were downcast at the size but promised to do their best. As proof of their good intentions they shoved my car with vociferous energy up the slope at the far side and waved me enthusiastically on my way.

Once across the river I was nearing my first destination. Two more hours I reckoned would bring me to the planta-

tion of my friend Cormon, and I stepped resolutely on the accelerator for greater power in charging and flattening the undergrowth on the road, which grew in such profusion that at times it prevented me from seeing ahead.

But on the roads of Central Africa it is impossible to make predictions about covering so many miles in so many hours. Unforeseen circumstances are constantly arising, as in the present instance when it was entirely thanks to the efficiency of my brakes that I did not crash full tilt into some trees which were lying across the middle of the road. To me at that moment, as a driver in a hurry, the road-block came as a maddening misfortune, but it gladdened me, as a hunter, with a sight such as I had travelled far to see. Elephants had rampaged here, measuring their strength against these uprooted trees. And what elephants they must be! In their course of destruction they had broken a path throught the wood athwart the road, and trampled underfoot every shrub and bush that had stood in their way. On all sides trees had been thrown down and branches ripped off. As a gourmet, the elephant spares himself no trouble to reach fresh delicacies.

Piles of droppings were everywhere and an examination of them showed that they were still moist inside. Clearly it was not long since the marauders had left and, if further proof were needed, even the foliage of the broken trees was still fresh. I closed my eyes and sniffed; I imagined I could smell elephant.

I measured the tracks and found them to be of heartening size. All the same, even though I had been ready to hunt them, I should probably not have done so, because I had even bigger game in mind. The elephants I had set my heart on were the really big tuskers who have left the herds and live solitary lives, or are occasionally attended by one or more young ones. These were the chaps I had come thousands of miles to find and I was not likely to

settle for anything less. Nevertheless the evidence before my eyes was encouraging; at least it proved I had reached the territory of the big elephant as opposed to the smaller forest variety which rarely exceeds eight feet in height.

Very well satisfied, I turned my attention to the obstacle in my path. Without help I could do nothing. It would take days of work with axe and saw to cut a way single-handed through that tangle. Nor did I feel disposed to set out on foot. The villages here were much wider apart than they had been at the outset of the journey and it could well be a darned long way to the next one. There was nothing for it but to wait. Sooner or later another vehicle must arrive from one direction or the other, and it would certainly have men and tools on board. Nobody ever travelled without the tools and manpower to meet such emergencies as this. Or perhaps a native would pass on foot whom I could send with a message to Cormon. Either way it would cost me a little time, but I could afford to wait.

Patience is a virtue I find difficult to practise in Europe, but in Africa it seems to instil itself naturally. So I cheerfully set about the task of cooking my evening meal over a spirit stove. To celebrate the occasion I opened a bottle of red wine.

When the evening rain started, I returned to the car and went to bed. The bed consisted of the chests in which my gear was packed (they were specially made to fit without wasting space and to present a flat surface) and the front seat beside the driver. Over the chests was spread the canvas of my tent, folded into several thicknesses, and a sleeping-bag as underblanket. On top was a second bag to slip into if night became cool. At the head-end was my pillow, for I was never prepared to rely on a good conscience as the sole rest for an easy head.

With no crowd of curious sightseers to worry me, I opened the side curtains and sniffed deeply at the air which the rain had refreshed and cooled. With a good bottle at my left hand and a no less good book in my right, I settled down to enjoy my unexpected stop in the best of spirits.

Chapter 5

SIBILIT AND BATAVELÉ

WAKENED by the sound of voices, the first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was two black faces split by grins from ear to ear. I grinned back delightedly, for they belonged to none other than Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll, my cook and boy.

"We hear our father here," they explained together, "so we run and come quick."

Where and when they had heard that I was stuck here on an elephant trail would have been a superfluous question. In Africa news flies as fast through the jungle as a man can pound a drum.

"I go to types and I say Eyes-on-Stick stand before tree," said Mottenkopf. "Many types come quick.... Make away bloody tree."

On the Upper M'Bomou I am called "Eyes-on-Stick" because of the telescope I use when stalking game. "Types" is a straightforward use of the French expression *ce type-là* and here means simply "men." By the same argument a woman is a "typesse." The rather strong term he used to describe the tree, Mottenkopf had learned from the white men who use it constantly in Africa.

For the rest, Mottenkopf had not a single nit in his hair and Stinktjadoll smelt no worse than the average African native normally smells. In fact, they were both remarkably clean people. Their names in the Zandé tongue sounded like Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll though what they really were I had not the least idea. Both had been boys on a plantation where they had learnt a bit of French

and slowly grasped the principal requirements of the white man. Then their white boss had left the bush and gone to Archambault. For lack of a new employer Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll had both married so that they could live on their wives, enjoying a better standard of living than most, as each had bought two wives out of his last pay packet. On my first visit to Obo, the District Officer had recommended them to me, and since then they had awaited from one year to another, because they had adopted me as their "father." This was less of an honour than an obligation on me to keep them in work. I should have lost all face on the Upper M'Bomou if ever I had contemplated hiring anybody else.

Although it is often extremely difficult to get together the necessary manpower for a safari in thinly populated districts, it is simple enough if you have successfully shot elephant or other big game in the same area before, for it is meat, and not the contemptible cash payment, which attracts the native. On my first elephant hunt in this district my host had had to provide me with workers from his plantation workers to get me into the bush at all. But after my first hunt volunteers arrived in shoals—attracted by the stories of my bearers, telling of the mountains of meat they all had swallowed.

Similar hopes had galvanized the "types" now working feverishly round me to clear the road. It takes more than the prospect of money to bring a native thirty miles through the night, and their present industry was designed to show me how strong and willing they were. So I praised their hard work and when they had cleared the road I told the "types" to come to the Cormon plantation where the selection of bearers would be made. My two old servants clambered into the car as supplementary baggage and we covered the last miles at a cracking pace up the broad hill on which the plantation is situated. There I was greeted

with a daintily set breakfast table, for the bush radio had long before announced my coming.

Édouard Cormon rules like a sovereign prince over a territory that has no real boundaries. The village at the foot of the hill was founded by him. Before he came, the neighbourhood was deserted as a result of the early slave raids. With Cormon's coming the natives had come out of their scattered retreats in the forests, and Cormon had gathered them together and settled them at the foot of his hill. There they work for him and live off him. He built the village school, the cottage hospital and the church. He pays the nurses and teachers, and runs the village stores. Seldom have I met a white man who knows how to handle the native with such thorough understanding. His rule is absolute but does not rely on force. His people obey his every word without any underlying threat of punishment. I have no idea how far he bothers with the complications of French social laws, which recently have become applicable to the colonial territories. To judge by the contentment and peace in his village, his private state works admirably on patriarchal principles.

The Cormon estate at Kadjemah is virtually self-sufficient. Almost everything needed is made on the spot. Round the dwelling quarters stretches a garden of mango trees and beyond that lie the market gardens, warehouses and workshops. Beyond these again stretch plantations of coffee, tobacco, cotton, oil palms, with some sugar-cane and groundnuts. It is a mixed economy which protects the planter against a disastrous drop in the price of any one product.

Round the base of the hill on which Cormon himself lives winds the M'Bomou, a good fishing river, forming the frontier between French Equatorial Africa and the Belgian Congo. From the covered veranda of the guest quarters

you can enjoy a simultaneous view of French and Belgian territory.

Neither the French nor the Belgians make much use of their vast regions, principally owing to the lack of population which is complete on the Belgian side. As far as the eye can see there is nothing but forest, and my host, who has lived for a quarter of a century on his hill, has yet to see a native come across from the Congo. The lack of population, and therefore labour, has been the cause of several Europeans leaving the district, among them a Swiss named Wackerni and a Swede named Andersen. Cormon told me that even Kespars had decided to pull out to Bangui. After spending his life in robbing so many elephants of theirs, he was about to leave a richly-decked table to many other elephants by giving up the plantation he founded. In a few years, months even, jungle would grow again over his abandoned fields, but a jungle that is overflowing with new plants edible by man and beast. This had already happened at Wackerni's plantation which had become the feeding ground of so many animals that at times it was difficult to believe the evidence of one's eyes.

"Once the mangos get ripe," Cormon assured me, "we just can't keep the elephants out. They are practically never hunted now, and the blighters come right up to my house every night. It is hardly worth while putting the gardens to rights again."

While we were talking Cormon's boy came up, his bare feet making no sound, and announced the arrival of my trackers. Together we went down to see them, and grinned at each other at what we saw. From their tattered appearance, nobody would have guessed they were two of the best trackers in Africa. The mere rags of what had once been trousers hung from their belts. Presumably they still clung to wearing them only for the sake of the

pockets which were the only whole parts and bulged down their thighs stuffed to overflowing. The elder of the two, Sibilit, also wore some strips of grey material draped over his upper body: many years before they had formed part of a net shirt. Now they no longer served any useful purpose, but were presumably worn from habit. Sibilit's hair had already turned grey and his feet were as flat as flounders. The little toe on each foot stuck out almost at right angles to the rest.

By contrast, Batavelé was an aristocrat, even if his worldly goods amounted to next to nothing. He was tall, slim and well-muscled and he had a fine narrow head. His carriage was proud and his frank eyes looked straight at you. So long as the talk was of general matters, he left it to Sibilit; but when it came to discussing elephants, he spoke with authority. Listening to him, one became certain that he must have sprung from one of the ruling families which had played their part in the unfathomable history of this mighty country.

I had difficulty in making myself understood to them without an interpreter, for neither spoke a word of French nor saw any reason for learning to do so. But for the presence of Mottenkopf or Stinktjadoll as interpreters, our conversation would have been limited to the thirty or forty words of Zandé which I had managed to pick up. They did not amount to much but would doubtless be enough for our simplest needs on the trail.

Sibilit was a hunter by profession, providing meat for Cormon's household and the village as well. But, when it came to elephants, Batavelé's experience was unrivalled. He had been a tracker with Kespars and had lived for the past few years as a "freelance" hunter. He claimed to have been responsible for the tracking of some four hundred elephants in his time, so it is hardly surprising that he

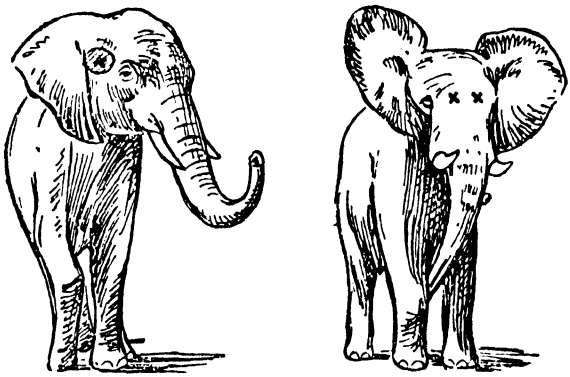
understood something of his trade. That I was able to take him with me was thanks to the goodwill which Kespars bore me. Without a word from Kespars, Batavelé would not have put his services at the disposal of a stranger. Nor, by the same token, would Sibilit have come without being told to do so by Cormon. I was under some burden of gratitude to these two men.

"Batavelé says he has chosen ten bearers," my host said, translating from Zandé. "You can rely on his judgment. When do you want to start?"

I summoned up my best Zandé and told Batavelé myself. "Tomorrow . . . Ape one . . . we go."

"Ape one" meant at the first call of the white-fronted colobus monkey, which is the only monkey to salute the dawn with a rollicking, croaking chorus.

The two trackers nodded approval and hurried off to make the necessary preparations.



When I stepped out into the darkness, the sound of many voices told me my party had already assembled.

"Bring me a light," I called to Mottenkopf. "Let's have a look at these fellows Batavelé has engaged."

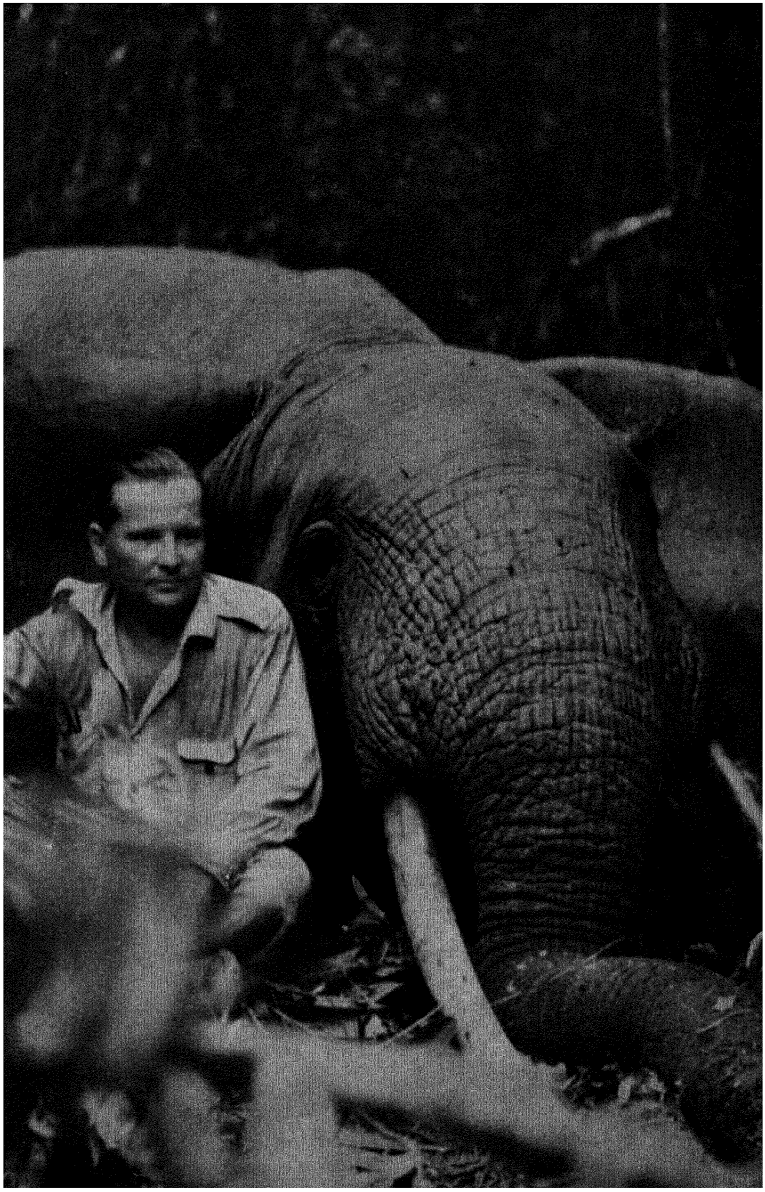
I went round with a lamp and peered at each in turn.

Four of them I recognized from my previous safari, and possibly a fifth, though I could not be sure because Zandé people are puzzlingly alike. All grinned back at me and rubbed their bellies meaningly.

My gear had been packed the night before so all that now remained was to distribute it among the bearers. Most of it was stowed in six metal boxes, which had been specially made for the purpose. Besides having the usual handles, they were also fitted with stout rings so that, where necessary, they could be strung on a pole and carried by two men.

Of the six boxes the most important was what I called my *caisse popotte*—the kitchen box containing paraffin stove, pots and pans, two small oil lamps, tea and coffee canisters, thick china crockery, eating utensils and so on. The second carried enough provisions for ten days. Box No. 3 was attractive because it contained drinks, alcoholic and non-alcoholic. My strong liquor was in concentrated form ready to be "lengthened" with water. I wanted it less for myself than for other travellers I might meet because, when white men meet in the distant corners of Africa, it is customary to take a drink or two and I dislike always being the guest and never the host.

The principal contents of the fourth box were the constituents of my field medicine chest, with a book of instructions on how to use them. Thanks to it, I have never been really ill on any African expedition. In the same box were packed two cameras for use only if the third, which I used every day, went out of action and, most important of all, books. A man needs books in the solitude of the jungle as much as he needs food and water. I have never had so much leisure to read and so much joy in reading as on my travels in the heart of Africa. There are many empty days and hours—days lost in getting together a team of bearers, hours of waiting for the trackers to come back



The author with a forest elephant. It was the only one that fell upright and so allowed a good photograph to be taken. Elephants usually fall on their side when they are shot.

with news—when books take the place of friends with whom you can talk. I prefer good solid books—books that demand some intellectual co-operation with the author from the reader, books that teach as well as amuse. I find that the longer I stay in the jungle, the better educated I am when I emerge.

Box No. 5 carried all those things that come under the heading "Miscellaneous." This box always started by being the lightest and emptiest and finished by being so full that it was hard to get everything in.

Finally, Box 6 carried my "good" wardrobe which was not intended for wear in the bush. It contained clothes for wear when I was staying at a European house and included a white dinner jacket, black trousers, semi-stiff shirt and patent leather shoes which I have never yet used.

"Batavelé, who is big boy No. 1?" I asked.

The tracker pointed out a strongly-built lad from the group, who, apart from a broad hack-knife, was wearing very little more than his own dark skin.

"Give him the *caisse popotte*, Mottenkopf."

The cook put the kitchen box in front of the lad's feet and brought forward the box of provisions.

"Batavelé, who is big boy No. 2?"

The hunter selected the next lad, whose job was to stand next to "No. 1" and carry the provisions as his load.

In this fashion we went on until all ten bearers stood in a row, each with his load at his feet. Without further ado Batavelé then took his place on the right flank. He carried nothing. Next to him came Sibilit who, as second tracker, carried both my guns. I took my place immediately behind him. Then came Stinktjadoll with my rucksack, water-bottle and camera. At the other end of the line, Mottenkopf took his position, carrying nothing but a lamp in either hand. It was his job to look for

anything that got lost and to see to it that nobody was left behind.

And so the great moment had arrived, the finest on any safari: the moment of departure. I walked along the line to give a final glance at the baggage and then gave the order "anduh." The bearers picked up their loads and Batavelé led off. I fell in behind Sibilit, making sure that Stinktjadoll was following me with my rucksack.

For a short time we followed the road before striking across country to reach the River Kerré in the grey dawn. Marching along the steep bank, we came to where hippopotami had a habit of entering and leaving the water. We followed the tracks down to the water's edge and started to wade across the river. The rains had only just begun so that the muddy waters of the river scarcely reached our belts, though the current was strong. As we reached the other bank, the short dawn of the tropical morning came. In a few minutes the sun appeared and at once began to dry the hip-high grass which was as wet with dew as if it had rained throughout the night.

The landscape offered a variety of scene, even though it repeated its pattern over and over again in the same order. On every rising slope the going underfoot was hard and even, the reddish earth supporting only a scanty rough vegetation. But going downhill the soil was looser and was covered with the green of fresh grass and bushes and an occasional tree in leaf. The steeper the slope the thicker the bushes and grass grew and the greater the number of trees. At the bottom of each valley we had to force our way through permanently dripping woodland, a region of perpetual twilight. Everything growing in these mouldering areas struggled upwards towards the light and the whole was draped in a network of lianas.

Out ahead, Batavelé would hack a path through where the curtain was thinnest, wielding his broad knife with

dexterous effect. As we neared the lowest point of each valley the firm ground underfoot would give way to swampland which bordered a stream, dark and uninviting. After we had crossed the muddy water, the ground soon climbed again and for a time we would clamber laboriously over the slippery soil through the tangled scrub until we reached open terrain beyond and finally the red rocky surface of the next rising slope. Then would follow a short but refreshing march over hard dry ground until the whole process started over again. I have no idea how often this landscape pattern repeated itself. The scene changed but was unchanging, so that anybody who got lost there would doubtless have thought that he was going round in circles.

The normal pace of the native is markedly faster than ours, and it costs a white man considerable effort to get used to it; but, once accustomed, he finds that the quick, elastic pace holds off tiredness much longer than his own marching speed. Once the white man's muscles grow accustomed to the native tempo, movement becomes quite automatic. He moves along like a well-oiled motor and comes to believe that he could go on day and night; but he is in trouble if this mechanical stride is suddenly interrupted. The moment he stops, lead pumps into his limbs and he feels as if two giant fists were on his shoulders pushing him into the ground. For this reason, all obstacles that bar the path—be they rivers, thickets or ravines—must be taken as smoothly and uninterruptedly as possible. The forward march must not be allowed to halt, but must "flow" consistently onward. During each day there must be only one rest, but it must be long enough to refresh tired limbs, sufficient to renew the energy as does a night-time's rest.

The common practice is to start out in the first grey of dawn, or in the darkness of night if it is country you know

well, and press on until the midday halt, which may be at 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. according to how hot it is. By this time you will have covered, if the country is reasonably good, anything from twelve to fifteen miles and, occasionally, even twenty. The rest period lasts until about three in the afternoon and the afternoon march goes on until half an hour before sundown. The second spell is therefore of much shorter duration, but you can still often do another six miles or so. Thus, if there is no hunting *en route* to detain you, and there are no particular obstacles of terrain, you can usually cover some twenty to twenty-five miles a day for several days at a time. Of course, you cannot keep this up for many days together, especially when the weather is very hot, and so, after three or four days, the usual thing is to lie up for a complete day of rest.

On this safari, as on every major safari I undertake, I developed blistered feet and suffered agonies throughout most of the first week, but such inconveniences have to be borne with gritted teeth. Nobody who travels Africa on foot is spared these unpleasant moments and, properly tended, the feet soon grow used to the task imposed on them and soon develop the necessary hard skin. There is no substitute for this hard skin, for nobody would get far in Africa wearing regulation marching boots. Such boots, however stout, will not stand up for long to constant soaking in stream and bog and, furthermore, are unsuitable because they engender too much heat. In my opinion the best footwear for hunting in Africa is simple tennis shoes, two or three sizes larger than you normally wear. Inside these I wear one pair of thin and two pairs of thick soft woollen socks. Wearing these, one can move soundlessly and feel underfoot the treacherous twigs that must be avoided at all costs if the stalk is to be successful. Water runs out of them as easily as it runs in and, when the soles are worn thin, the shoes can be replaced by new ones at no

great cost. This, at least, has been my experience, though I know it is dangerous to generalize on any subject as important and controversial as footwear. One of the most experienced of bush travellers, Laboureur, recommends that the hunter should go barefoot!

The popular idea that the hunter in Africa dresses as lightly as possible in shorts, short-sleeved shirt and that strange headgear called a tropical helmet is far from true. Because of the mosquitoes, thorns and sharp grasses, most hunters take care to cover as much of their skin as possible, wearing long trousers and a long-sleeved shirt buttoned at the neck and wrists. Both garments are made of stout material, porous to air and water, but giving some protection against thorns and insects. Both have many large pockets, each with a flap held down by an old-fashioned button and not a new-fangled metal fastening which very quickly rusts and sticks tight.

After little more than a week of safari, trouser bottoms and knees will be worn through and frayed and your boy will busy himself sewing patches on until, at last, there is nothing for it but to throw the trousers away. (They will doubtless be picked up again by some fancier.) Shirts last rather longer, sometimes standing up to two or three weeks' wear.

The best headgear is, simply and plainly, a felt hat. It is soft and pliable and makes no hollow scraping noise when you creep through undergrowth. A tropical helmet rings out like a drum when twigs snap back and strike it. It is scarcely worn at all by Europeans in Africa today except to be photographed in for the folks at home.

Very dark sun-glasses with side-pieces like blinkers are most comforting, but they should be taken off whenever one goes into the twilight of the bush.

It is customary to change one's clothes on arrival in camp in the evening and the boys immediately wash what

one has been wearing during the day. It is an activity that gives them great satisfaction for some strange reason. They like only one thing better—ironing, which they do with the old-fashioned type of iron that can be heated on wood embers. It is also a good thing for the white man's prestige always to have fresh white sheets in his sleeping-bag each night. They are washed and ironed, together with table cloths, each day during the midday pause. At the end of the safari these sheets and cloths have been washed so often and so vigorously that if you give them to your servant he can exchange them for a new wife!

Our present goal was the River Borni, two-and-a-half days' journey away. It was there that, the year before, I had shot my best elephant, a solitary old bull with tusks weighing in all 126 pounds. He, like all such big fellows, had left the herd long before. As a rule these big chaps do not take part in the annual southward migration of the herds during the dry months to the damp forests of the Congo. But now the rains had started and the big herds would be moving back northwards to enjoy the fresh green grass of the open plains. Once the females, young males and calves arrived back at the Borni, the crotchety old gentlemen would stay there no longer, having lost their taste for family life and the noise of their kind. Striking off at a tangent into the bush, they would soon become very hard to find. So we had not much time to reach the river, our plan being to set up camp as quickly as possible and then to quarter the surrounding country.

We sighted the first tracks of a herd moving northward much sooner than we had expected and we were grateful for it. The body of an elephant on the move is like a ship passing through water; it forces its way through the undergrowth and the vegetation closes in behind it. But like a ship it leaves a wake to mark its passing; only a narrow

path, it is true—and anyone unfamiliar with elephants in the wild would scarcely credit that a whole herd could have passed along so narrow a trail—but sufficiently wide to allow us to follow along it in single file.

Shortly before the midday halt on the second day we came upon such a mass of elephant tracks that it was impossible to distinguish the individual herds. The grassy surface was scored with skid-marks as if it had been the scene of a motor-cycle rally. Among the spoor were several very promising large ones which, from the point of view of size alone, would probably have been worthwhile to follow. But to single out the biggest bull from a large herd is a tricky business. Even in reasonably open country, it is difficult to pick the beast with the best tusks, because he is often hidden by his companions, and even if you do sight him, the watchfulness of the rest of the herd will probably prevent you from bringing him into range.

But my real reason for not wasting time on the possibilities which this herd might have to offer was purely the ethical one which says that a sportsman does not shoot an elephant that is still with the herd. As long as a bull lives in the community, it is assumed that he is still taking part in the procreation of his kind. Therefore, to cut short his span of useful life would be both short-sighted and unsportsmanlike. Only when he turns his back on family life to wander alone does he become fair game, his death a loss to no one but himself.

Fortunately, this point of principle goes hand in hand with the hunter's desire to take the best tusks he can get. For it is invariably the solitary beast whose head is adorned with the proudest trophies. As the elephant ages, his tusks go on becoming thicker and longer until their owner dies. If the hunter should see a really good bull among the herd, he should do no more than conclude that probably some-

where in the neighbourhood there are even better bulls living in solitary splendour.

Therefore every argument was against our paying attention to the herds whose tracks we had found, and everything prompted us to press on as fast as possible to the Borni.

We halted that day on the edge of a wood. The bearers laid down their loads with an air of relief and ran down to a brook to drink and wash. My two boys, who had been having an easy time of it, now became paragons of activity. Stinktjadoll, remembering his chores from the previous year, zealously flapped open my chair and set the camp table in front of it. He laid a clean cloth and brought out a jug of filtered water, a glass and a bottle of concentrated fruit juice. While I settled into my chair and stretched out my legs, Mottenkopf started a fire and began to grub about in the *caisse popotte*.

Returning from the stream, the bearers lay down in the shade, ate their manioc and chattered as excitedly as if we had had the most hair-raising adventures along the way. Each of them received his midday cigarette and looked at supreme peace with the world in general and himself in particular.

Preferring my main meal in the evening, I ate neither much nor any great variety at midday, but I enjoyed the luxury of sitting at my white-clothed table and the satisfaction of drinking as much as I wanted. While I was still at table, Stinktjadoll set up my camp bed and arranged the sleeping-bag on it. To one side he set the mosquito net, ready for instant use should it be required.

The next few hours were luxury. While the sun was high, its fiery heat embracing the world, I lay peacefully on my airy bed, sleeping and reading by turns. By the time we started off again, all weariness had gone. In the mean-

time my boys had washed the clothes and packed away the table and chair.

The second half of the day's march, though shorter, was made the more gruelling by heavy rain, which fell regularly each day between four and five o'clock. But with the prospect of a pleasant night's camp ahead of me, the discomfort of a wet shirt did nothing to spoil my enjoyment. However heavy the downpour, my baggage was well protected by canvas tenting and the watertight boxes balanced on the heads of my bearers, and I doubt whether the natives themselves were even conscious of the rain, so quickly did it run off their shining backs.

In this kind of country there is no difficulty in finding a suitable camping site; water, firewood and shelter against the wind were all that we needed and these were to be found everywhere in the regularly recurring valleys. Almost anywhere above the level of the damp, overgrown valley beds would do, so each night we pitched camp on the middle slopes under the first broad-branched trees, with the shoulder of the hill protecting us from the chill of the wind.

We sighted the Borni at eleven o'clock on the third day. It was a pleasant but unimpressive river, its water clear, its bed sandy and its banks shallow. On either side there was an open grass space about thirty yards wide separating the water from the forest. Beneath the first shading trees, I gave orders to clear the brushwood and set up camp. In less than half an hour my tented shelter was ready for use. It was a wall-less creation of canvas stretched over a stout framework of saplings with leafy branches and bent down to the ground on the four sides to provide some protection against rain beating in. The floor was spread with a carpet of large leaves over which was laid a smooth plastic sheet to keep the damp from striking up from below. This sheet was large enough to cover the area of the tent and

for its edges to be raised up twelve inches all round to keep out beetles and other creeping things. As this sheet was cold and cheerless to the eyes and feet I had it covered by a thin and light carpet that transformed the interior appearance of the tent to one of cosy warmth.

My carpet and white tablecloths, to say nothing of my table china and glass, have drawn many a mocking glance from the ascetics of the backwoods. These dyed-in-the-wool tough-nuts scorn anything which is not a sheer necessity of life. It is an outlook with which I cannot agree. My view is that even in the jungle a man should not live in a more primitive fashion than the circumstances demand. And, anyway, all my little luxuries did not amount to more than one porter's load, so the cost of their transport amounted to a little over a shilling a day. My comfort, especially as I had no difficulty in finding bearers, was certainly worth that much. Having taken part in Hitler's ill-starred expedition to Russia and thereafter spent several of the best years of my life behind barbed wire, I attach no value to a voluntary return to the Spartan life. After that sort of experience you lose all desire to spoon your soup out of an old jam tin.

My furniture, apart from the dining table and folding armchair, comprised a small wash-table and a bedside table for my books and personal effects. A green mosquito net surrounded my camp-bed. Two lamps illuminated the tent, one suspended from the roof over the large table and the other at head height close to my bed. Guns, cameras, telescope and ammunition pouches were hung up each from its own peg and the rest of my paraphernalia was disposed as conveniently to hand as possible. When I made more than an overnight stay my boys built an extra storeroom of branches to accommodate the overflow.

In front of the tent a bucket with river water hung from a beam. The bucket contained the filter from which a

thin rubber tube ran down into a water can below. This apparatus produced about two-and-a-half pints of sweet water per night—enough to fill the water can to the brim. As unfiltered water was used for all washing and cooking, this was more than adequate for my needs. Indeed, the filtering was only a precaution and probably not very necessary. As long as you draw your water from flowing streams there is not much chance of infection. The natives cheerfully slake their thirst from murky marshes and bogholes and suffer no ill-effects.

My bathroom, lacking all the conventional privacies, was erected close by. It comprised a floor of fresh leaves over which a bucket was suspended from a gallows. The bottom of the bucket was pierced by small holes which were covered by a metal plate attached to a string. When the string was pulled the water would run through the holes in a very satisfactory shower—provided that Mottenkopf had remembered to fill the bucket.

Many people who do not know the jungle of Africa associate it in their minds with an unending succession of poisonous snakes and other unpleasant crawling creatures. Yet in all my African travels I have seen only three snakes and, as they took flight at once, I cannot say whether or not they were poisonous. Doubtless, plenty of snakes must have seen me, but, if they have, none of them has ever showed any aggressive intentions. In fact, I have never met a white man who has ever been bitten by a snake.

Ants, of which there are several hundred varieties, can be infinitely more unpleasant, although, unless you have the rare bad luck to run up against the so-called flesh-eating kind, their unpleasantness is limited to their "creepy crawliness." Admittedly there is one tiny variety which defends itself vigorously with nasty little bites when you brush it off you, but generally speaking the prey of the ant is not the human but his food. This is especially true

when sweet or meat dishes are on the menu. But, by taking a good look round before establishing camp, it is usually possible to avoid undue interference. Termites become a nuisance only if you stay in one place for some time. Flying insects are abundant and can be maddeningly irritating, but their stings are usually no worse than those of their counterparts in more temperate zones.

The natives build shelters for themselves from leafy branches interwoven so cunningly that hardly a drop of rain penetrates. Each hut has its own fire, the smoke from which hangs heavy on the air—thus providing an excellent deterrent to flies—before slowly filtering through the leaves of the roof. Each man has his own straw mat which serves as a floor covering and bed in one. Lying close to the fire, they require no bed-clothes. The average building time of these huts, with two men per hut, is rather less than twenty minutes.

Each porter was responsible for his own food. Each brought with him a week's supply of manioc, yam and groundnuts in a woven basket. The gourmets had a small bag of maize as well. For the rest, they relied on the results of my hunting though, to make sure they faced the day with a good breakfast inside them, it was my practice to carry a communal supply of maize, flour and millet for everybody.

Our camp on the Borni was some sixty miles from the nearest road and we saw not the slightest sign of black or white habitation. Apart from the main river courses, my map told us nothing of what to expect, it having been plotted by aerial observation only. We were in the heart of one of those "blank spots" of which there are far more in Central Africa than our educational systems would have us think.

An hour after dusk the chatter in the huts gradually died away and soon the only noise in camp was the crackling of

the fires. Lying reading in bed by lamplight, I heard distant trumpeting. The elephants were retailing the day's news—several herds speaking together over wide distances. I closed my book and stared out into the jungle. Most of the calls were short and high-pitched, but now and then they were punctuated by a long deep undertone. A noise beside me made me start. Batavelé was crouching by the bed. He shook my arm.

"Big old gentleman call . . . you hear him?"

Chapter 6

THE GENTLEMAN WITH BIG FEET

It is cool in the jungle just before the morning sky turns to grey. Reluctantly I crept out of my sleeping-bag and stepped into trousers still clammy from the night damp. Drunk with sleep, Mottenkopf made up the fire to get me my first cup of coffee. Batavelé and Sibilit were squatting in front of the tent, hunting fever in their eyes. Near by squatted Mataba, one of the porters who was making his third trip with me. He was the only one of the ten porters stirring because he was the one chosen to accompany us on the day's hunt. All the rest were asleep, and the only movement that came from their huts was when one of them aroused himself sufficiently to throw more wood on his fire.

My rucksack, which Mataba was to carry, contained rations, first-aid kit, cleaning materials for the guns, a little flask of cognac, matches and an oil lamp. Before putting it on his back, Mataba enveloped the rucksack in a groundsheet. Beside him on the ground was a two-gallon can of unfiltered water, which he would carry on his head, and in my pocket was a supply of tablets which make impure water, if not palatable, at least free from infection.

Batavelé's impedimenta were limited to his bush knife, a bag of manioc and his "puh-puh"—a powder box for testing the wind direction. Sibilit's job was to carry my rifles, a double-barrelled elephant gun (400/450 calibre) and a 9·3-mm. German Mauser. He carried them muzzle forward so that I could get at them immediately in case of need.

Complete books have been written on the relative merits of the magazine rifle and the double-barrel gun without any solution being reached. The reason is, of course, that the ideal big-game weapon for all purposes just does not exist. The magazine weapon has the advantage of firing six shots without reloading but has the disadvantage that its complicated mechanism can go wrong, and usually in the most awkward of circumstances. Such mechanical failures are one of the commonest reasons for the hunter becoming the hunted and failing to return. By contrast, the double-barrel weapon is of simple construction, almost never goes wrong and fires a heavier charge, but limits you to two cartridges without reloading.

My elephant gun was neither the biggest nor the best there is; it had been used a great deal and was only deadly accurate at short range. In my opinion the best bore for elephant hunting is the biggest; a view which some other hunters will question. My argument is based on the fact that only a really heavy bullet will stop a charging elephant with certainty. No matter where he is hit, a big-bore bullet will bring him down long enough to allow the hunter to reload and deliver the *coup-de-grâce* with some degree of composure.

My 9·3-mm. Mauser with its 6 × telescopic sight was intended for more distant shots when I could not approach as close as I would wish. It was quite lethal provided that the bullet found its mark in the temple, which meant that the elephant must offer his flank to view, but it would not penetrate his forehead frontally. Only the elephant gun would do that and then at no greater range than thirty to thirty-five yards.

Preparing to move off, I slung my telescope round my neck, thrust a small tin box containing a syringe for use with serum against snake-bite into one pocket—I have never needed it—and a compass into another. Cart-

ridges, carefully wiped dry, were stuffed into the breast pocket of my bush shirt, ready to hand and secured against rattling about. On my hip was a broad knife.

After a routine examination of the rifles, I nodded to Batavelé and he moved off, followed by the soundless Sibilit. Then came myself, with Mataba bringing up the rear.

There was still enough moonlight by which to make out the strip of sand along the bank of the Borni. As we made our way silently upstream we heard ahead a gentle splash —probably a crocodile taking to the water on our approach. A moment later we caught sight of some hartebeeste on their way to the river to drink. In a flash they had turned and darted back into the forest. A few yards away in the darkness of the undergrowth we could hear wart-hogs rummaging busily. Once we stopped as a branch cracked close by, but it was only a momentary pause because the cracking sound was instantly followed by another. Colobus monkeys, I guessed. When colobus monkeys swing their way through the trees, a branch will sometimes creak as it takes their weight and creak again when the weight is removed. With an elephant a branch cracks only once.

Before long the river broadened into a lake ringed with dense rushes. Noises of puffing and splashing ahead suggested that a family of hippopotami was returning to its haunts from a night of feeding on shore. Skirting the lake we began to cross marshland which made going difficult in the dark. Suddenly Batavelé stopped and raised his hand. We froze, rigid as the trees around us, and a moment later we heard high-pitched trumpetings followed by the hiss of jets of water. The noises repeated themselves and blended. There were elephants ahead, bathing not three hundred yards from us.

Immediately we left the lakeside and ran crouching to

Drawing the nerves from the tusks of an elephant. The natives will not eat these nerves from superstitious fear of contracting toothache. The boys in the picture are (*left to right*) Mottenkopf, Batavelé and Sibilit.

the edge of the forest. Batavelé held up his puh-puh and tapped it with his finger. Only the professional trackers among the natives pay much attention to wind-direction when they are hunting. The others simply refuse to believe that wind-direction is of any particular significance, especially when hunting elephants. They prefer to leave it to chance, and sometimes they are lucky; if they are not, well, there is plenty of time to try again.

The wind blew the dust from Batavelé's box diagonally across the line between us and the herd. A head wind would have been better, but this wind was not too bad. We hugged the edge of the wood, moving slowly and silently. The elephants had only just arrived and would stay some time in the river. They were enjoying themselves enormously, to judge by the noise they were making. Soon we were abreast of them and separated from them by an open space about fifty yards across. By signs Batavelé indicated a small dark clump of bushes which would screen our movements from the herd. Lying on his belly, he tried his powder box again. He grunted with satisfaction as the powder revealed that we had now brought the wind dead ahead.

Just as the first streaks of dawn began to lighten the sky, Batavelé began to crawl and we slid along behind him. The closer we approached, the slower became our progress until soon, propelled only by fingers and toes, we moved no more than an inch or so at a time. How Sibilit managed to keep his place ahead of me while dragging my rifles behind him is still a mystery to me. The cover we were making for, which we had taken to be a clump of bushes, turned out to be an uprooted, rotting tree stump. Batavelé reached it first and peered carefully over it. He gave me no signal, from which I guessed it was still too dark for him to make out the elephants with any certainty. I took my double-barrel from Sibilit, who was quivering

with excitement, and crawled up to Batavelé. Lying close to him I could feel the suppressed tension of his body. I raised my head slowly over the mouldering stump and looked down towards the river. Almost indistinguishable at first, I slowly discerned the grey masses of five elephants, three standing and two lying in the shallow water. There was nothing we could now do but wait.

Swiftly as the pale glow of morning spread over river and bush, it seemed an eternity before the blurred outlines hardened into clear shapes. Then it was that we saw that this was a family taking its bath, and not, alas, the old gentlemen's club I had hoped for. Not twenty yards away a cow was sluicing down her calf, while close by a young bull wallowed happily in the mud of the bank. A bigger bull, his broad hindquarters turned to me, was grunting with pleasure as he got ponderously to his feet, while the fifth beast was climbing the opposite bank with astonishing agility.

It was a wonderful sight, and one accorded to few mortals; but there was nothing here for a hunter with a clear conscience. I heard Batavelé's hiss and turned in the direction toward which he was looking. He pointed upstream, where, behind some bushes growing in the middle of the river, the withers of a sixth elephant were visible.

"Old gentleman," whispered the black. "Him alone."

He was obviously right, for as the rest of the animals finished their toilet and moved off in a bunch the old man in the bushes paid no attention. Only when the family had gone from sight and it was already bright daylight did he get up. But, as luck would have it, when he did so his backside was turned to me and I could not get a sight of his tusks.

He was certainly old. His skin hung in folds and was worn completely smooth at his knees. The unusual length

of his legs and the bony prominence of his hindquarters were further indications of considerable age. As he began to turn towards me I raised my gun and aimed. By the time I could see his flank he had begun to climb the river bank close to us. Then I took my finger off the trigger. The bull was tuskless. Whether he had broken them off at some time, or whether he had never had any, I did not know; but whichever way it was their absence now saved the old fellow's life.

Fifteen yards from us the tuskless beast stood and stared solemnly in front of him—an old man made up to look like an elephant. With his ears tattered and rolled over at the edges, his skin loose, his breast-bone sticking out, he was the epitome of lost strength.

To no other animal of the wild is it granted to reach so peaceful an old age as the elephant. Once he becomes an adult, he has no enemy but man. Unlike beasts of prey, he is not forced to win his food by the power of his muscle and the alertness of his mind. So long as he can stand upright and his organs function, he can get all the food he wants. Only when his knees fail him and he cannot rise from his river bath does he come to a peaceful end.

Death invariably comes in swamp-land or water; rarely in forest or bush. The failing animal wanders into a bog and, lacking the strength to drag itself out, sinks for ever beneath the surface ooze. Or maybe it is the river and the crocodiles which claim it. Either way it disappears without trace. The secret graveyard to which elephants have been said to travel when death is upon them is, of course, a myth—a romantic story recapturing the riches of Aladdin's cave in a vast depository of ivory. But even if there were such a place, it would contain very little ivory. The creatures of the forest, large, small and microscopic, would quickly devour the dead giant, flesh, bones, tusks and all. A kind of squirrel, which by virtue of its reputa-

tion for gnawing ivory has been given the Latin name of *Protoxerus ebivorus*, would presumably quickly dispose of the tusks, if its habits really do justify its name.

Though I found the spectacle of the failing strength of this very old elephant a sad one, my trackers thought it comic in the extreme. Sibilit clasped his hands over his mouth and laughed till his whole body shook, and even Batavelé's customary gravity dissolved in silent mirth.

When their spasm had passed I gave the order to move upstream. If there were any big tuskers in this neighbourhood they would come to the river to bathe. It was too late today to see them, but we could hope to find their tracks. And following a trail is the most exciting hunting there is.

We came across numerous tracks and followed a number of them but without noteworthy success or cause for excitement.

We saw a great many other beasts. Hartebeeste and water-buck were grazing along the edge of the forest. Crowned cranes stood stilt-legged on the river bank and waited for whatever it is that crowned cranes wait for. Sunk in thought, marabous perched on dead tree-stumps, and on every sandbank crocodiles slept in the sun, often with open jaws. Tiny white birds hopped round them picking insects from the wrinkled skin. Every now and then a hippo would surface from the depths of the Borni, snort, suck in air and sink back again. Clouds of guinea-fowl whirred up before us out of the bush, and in the branches of the trees baboons and their cousins, the colobus monkeys, kept up continuous screaming matches.

Towards midday we rested under a clump of trees at a point where a murmuring brook lost itself in the river. The water looked so refreshing that I lay full length in it, but a shout from Batavelé soon brought me out again. I went over to where he was standing, noting as I went that

the hand he was pointing to the ground with was shaking with excitement. And no wonder! Etched deep and clear in the sand of the river-bank were some of the biggest footprints I had ever seen. This beast must almost certainly be a tusker—and what magnificent tusks they must be!—for their weight was forcing his head forward. Examining the spoor, it seemed to me that the toes of the forefeet were more deeply imprinted than the heels of the hindfeet. As is usual with powerful bulls, the prints of the forefeet were almost round and those of the hindfeet narrower ovals. The furrows in the soles were deep and as broad as my little finger—a sure indication of advanced age.

Mataba handed me the tape measure with which to measure the prints and calculate the elephant's height. Measuring the diameter of the forefeet I found that each extended to a fraction under twenty inches. The formula is: diameter of the forefoot $\times 6 =$ the height of the beast; in this case, ten feet. This formula applies principally to Indian elephants but can be used with some reservation as a reasonably accurate guide to the size of their African brethren.

Batavelé, drawing on the experience of years, estimated the probable weight of the tusks to be seventy pounds apiece. The only question now was—could we get them? The tracks had obviously been made that morning—perhaps only six hours earlier—though the grass torn up by the animal's passing was already yellowing.

What happened after the elephant left the water we could only guess at that moment, but from a fairly close knowledge of elephants' habits I thought it ought to be possible to guess reasonably accurately. Probably after his morning bathe, he proceeded at a brisk pace to breakfast. At this time of year this would doubtless be taken where the forest was thin and the young shoots were juicy

green. It would certainly be a protracted meal and would go on until the heat of the sun made him take himself off to the thickest glade he could find, there to slumber away the midday hours in the shade. After this nap he would probably pick tit-bits from the bushes as he ambled along, less for the sake of eating than to idle away the time, until the call for the evening meal came to persuade him to leave the thicket for more open feeding grounds again.

This sounds as if every day were a holiday for an elephant, with nothing to do but sleep and eat from a permanently decked table. But, in fact, all is not as easy as it seems. These mighty creatures have to work hard to get enough to eat. Every day they must consume vast quantities of leaves, branches, fruit and bark, the browsing of which entails hours of hard work. The task is made the more arduous by the fact that they are very choosy eaters who have to uproot trees much of the time to get at the succulent shoots they prefer.

Some small part of the night they spend in sleep, which they take standing, but long before it is light they are awake again, and begin to exchange noisy greetings with others of their kind. Their love-making, also, probably takes place mostly at night and well away from the rest of the herd. In fact, so reticent are they that few humans, if any, have seen the mating of wild elephants.

We had, of course, no way of guessing how far our fellow had gone. As the crow flies he might be no more than a half a mile away but that would not help us because we should have to follow his tracks even though they might lead in a wide arc almost back to where we now were.

Mataba hastily put our things together and we set off in pursuit. An African elephant on the move can make about ten miles an hour, compared with the seven or eight miles per hour of the Indian. If our quarry had been frightened that morning, or had some private destination

to reach, the probability is that we should never come up with him, as he might well do fifty miles in the day. But elephants usually travel at speed only under the prompting of fear; otherwise their need to eat slows them down continuously. There was no reason to suppose that our quarry had travelled far and fast, because he had had no cause to take fright and there was plenty of good grazing to detain him. I thought we might reasonably hope to overtake him.

On leaving the river, we had no difficulty in following his tracks even where, for a time, he had followed the dry path trodden out by others of his race. The characteristic indentations of his toe-nails were quite discernible. It was more difficult on the stony hill-tops. Here Batavelé had to stop many times to detect the spoor, but as the beast was keeping to a more or less constant direction even this did not offer much trouble.

After a couple of hours' steady tracking, newly-stripped trees and a wide area of torn branches indicated that we had reached his breakfast place. Here, also, we found his first droppings. Batavelé poked into them to find out how warm they were. Pointing his dirty hand to the sky, he indicated where the sun had been when they were dropped. I judged it to have been about nine o'clock.

Willy-nilly, we followed the meanderings which the bull had made in his selection of trees, but at one point we crossed a newer trail where he had gone round in a circle and this saved us some valuable time. It led us to the next valley whither our elephant had gone for his nap. Where the bush was at its most impenetrable we found the ground trodden hard and the bushes crushed flat. A healthy pile of droppings indicated not only a good digestion, but a carefree mind. A nervous elephant will pass only light stools, while a frightened or wounded animal may occasionally even get a mild diarrhœa.

After his nap our fellow had wandered aimlessly in the thicket, his tracks crossing and recrossing so that we had some trouble in selecting the one which finally led us out into open country. By now we had little time left, an hour at most. After that it would be dark, so as the elephant had two or three hours' start on us we should need to be lucky if we were to come up with him before darkness.

At this moment he was probably taking his evening meal, but there was no way of telling how far away. In any case caution was necessary, for an elephant's sense of scent is exceeded in keenness and range by no other animal's. With a favouring wind an elephant can scent a human being over half a mile away. To do so he uses only the terminal nine inches of his nine-foot trunk.

We hurried up the opposite slope of the valley and stopped shortly before the top to try the puh-puh. Luck was against us. The wind, light as it was, carried the trace of dust straight out ahead of us along the elephant's trail. For a moment, then, it was impossible to get closer to him. Once he got wind of us, this wily old bull would go into top gear and put thirty to forty miles between us by morning.

Of course we could have tried to circle round him, but this is an unwise proceeding if you do not know approximately where your quarry is. Besides, not knowing where he was, which of us could guess how big a detour we should have to make in order to get to the lee of him?

Nothing remained now but to wait till the wind changed, as may very well happen when the sun sets. There was little hope of catching up with the elephant that day; the wind had given him a winning advantage and the night was his. You cannot hunt an elephant with a lamp in your hand, although my friend André St. Raphael once tried it without a lamp and was more than successful—he finished up by bouncing off the animal's belly. He got

away with a whole skin, but I knew that, if such a thing ever happened to me, my nerves would never be the same again.

Lacking St. Raphael's spirit, we lay down so as to give the wind the least chance of carrying our scent out ahead of us. The puh-puh passed regularly between Batavelé and myself, as neither of us could bear to wait for the other to try it again. Our unbecoming impatience was duly punished. When the sun had gone down, the wind continued to blow towards the elephant. There was nothing to do but spend the night where we were, and we dared not even light a fire for fear of warning our bull. Without a fire there could be no coffee for me and no smoke to help drive off the myriad mosquitoes.

As if that were not enough, it began to rain hard, descending so suddenly that we were soaked to the skin before the one-man tent could be rigged up or a shelter of branches built. I had no dry clothes to change into and no means of drying what I had on, so I spread out the tent and rolled myself in it. The ground-sheet I gave to my companions who, being used to sleeping by a fire, were shivering with cold. In these circumstances, we spent a thoroughly disagreeable night, so that it seemed that the sun had never been so backward in rising.

It was with relief that we set off again as soon as it was light enough to distinguish the tracks. As each hour passed my excitement continued to mount. In spite of the rain overnight we had no difficulty in following our quarry's trail. We came upon where he had eaten his supper and then where he had spent the night. Then he had made a wide arc to return to the Borni for his morning bathe. There was some comfort in the fact that he had not chosen the same place where yesterday we had picked up his spoor.

By midday we had reached his breakfast place, and our

excitement grew more intense. If we kept on now, we stood a good chance of finding him before his midday nap was over and he left the thicket. Towards two o'clock we reached the edge of a jungle of forest where according to all indications our elephant was now sleeping. His spoor was three or four hours old at most. The wind was favourable; our hopes were high. We worked our way into the tangled wood with every precaution, stopping after every ten paces to listen.

You can hear a sleeping elephant quite clearly from a distance. His stomach produces loud rumbling digestive noises and his breath is expelled with loud snorts. These sounds are, however, not involuntary; they are controllable, are said to be signs of contentment, and cease immediately the animal is alerted. If it is very hot, he flaps his ears to produce a thermostatic effect on the circulation of the blood, thereby cooling his body, and the noise of his great ears brushing against the branches around him can be heard from a surprising distance.

It was Mataba who heard the first sound of him and he touched me from behind. I hissed to the two in front and we froze motionless. Our bull had finished his nap and was moving off at a leisurely pace. He had certainly not got wind of us or he would have gone without a sound to betray his passage. An elephant that knows he is being pursued will break through the thickest bush and step over dry timber with never the crack of a twig. His foot, apparently so clumsy, can cover a small branch beneath its pad so completely that any noise from the breaking of the branch is muffled beneath it. With every step that the five-ton animal takes on the ground the feet broaden by a quarter of their size. They are, in fact, muscular rubber cushions, endowed with the most acute sensitiveness, which enable their owner to move as lightly as a cloud in the sky when he wants to. Separating the branches

with his trunk, he insinuates his streamlined body through the bush so that even the sharpest ears can hear nothing of his going at a range of more than a few yards.

Fortunately for us, our elephant was not behaving in the least cautiously. His progress was completely carefree. He allowed branches to crack under his feet, twigs to scrape along his body, and he splashed noisily through puddles. After a time we caught sight of his back through a gap in the bush but not his head or tusks. Batavelé and Sibilit were so tense with excitement that the need to keep quiet was well nigh unbearable to them. Silently we tried the puh-puh again, for in the forest the direction of any wind there may be changes almost every few yards at ground level. The powder fell straight to earth—no wind.

This would have been bad had our quarry been at rest because, when there is no wind, the human scent tends to spread in all directions and may travel as much as a hundred yards in a quarter of an hour. However, our beast was moving steadily on, unaware of danger.

As if moved by a single thought, my companions each picked up a ball of elephant dung and began to smear the damp brown stuff from head to foot over their bodies, even rubbing it vigorously into their hair. Batavelé politely handed me a dungball, but I shook my head. The odour floating off my companions would have to suffice to cover my own scent as well.

We followed the spoor as fast as the undergrowth and our own caution would permit, expecting it would lead us up the opposite slope and down into the next valley. But instead the bull remained stumping about in the watercourse at the bottom of the valley in which we had found him, apparently moving steadily downstream. Batavelé, in an expressive gesture, showed me he was puzzled. At this time of the day one would have expected to find traces of the animal's passage—a branch torn off here and a tree

stripped there—but our bull was not pausing anywhere. It was as though he had some private assignation.

The going became progressively more difficult as we floundered in a bog at the side of the stream. With each step we sank in, sometimes up to our knees. Everywhere dense vegetation dripped water so that we were soon covered in a film of filth. Wet leaves hit me in the face as branches whipped back after Batavelé and Sibilit had brushed them from their path. Lianas put out tentacles and wound themselves maliciously round our legs. It was impossible to move silently in such conditions and still keep pace with our quarry, but we pushed on with pumping hearts and whistling lungs, lost to all sense of time, and with no thought but to keep up with the elephant ahead.

After what seemed an eternity we heard the roar of a waterfall and a moment later felt a breath of wind in our faces. Batavelé thrust aside a drape of closely-woven liana and it was as if the curtains of a stage had opened. In front of us stretched a broad, bowl-shaped theatre in which a dozen scattered tree trunks, smooth and lofty like pillars, supported an arched roof of green. The mud floor was stamped hard and smooth by countless feet and, except for the massive pillar-like trees, was bare of all vegetation. It was an elephants' "ballroom" such as Kipling described, and I wondered how many human eyes had ever rested on such a place. Silently, I blessed my own good fortune and, as I stood looking at the "floor" from above, I found it required no great effort of imagination to visualize a stately elephant ball in progress by the light of the moon.

Setting aside with some reluctance Kipling's romantic explanation of such places, I thought the most likely explanation to be that this amphitheatre was a traditional meeting-place of elephants before migration. Here the herds probably forgathered before moving off to fresh pastures and, from the hard-packed mud and total lack of

vegetation, could well have been doing so from time immemorial.

From where we were standing the ground fell away in a chine of moss-covered stone down which the forest stream cascaded between walls of fern to a basin having no visible outlet. It was a tricky job slithering down its slippery surface, with tufts of fern which pulled away without resistance whenever we grasped them as our only handholds. However, we reached the bottom without incident and stepped on to the "dancing floor." Elephant droppings were everywhere but their stale condition made it clear that there had been no recent gathering of the clans.

I was suddenly aware that my three companions were very quiet and huddled close to me. Silently they hurried in a bunch across the bare earth as if afraid that the forest's invisible spirits would descend on them. Quite clearly Batavelé's sole concern was to put the uncanny "dancing floor" behind him as quickly as possible.

Back in the familiar thickets of the jungle my friends breathed a sigh of relief and Batavelé quickly began to occupy himself in picking up the tracks of our quarry which fortunately had again become discernible. We hurried to make up for lost time.

Suddenly Batavelé pointed to a stone hollowed by the hand of man into a basin, smooth and polished on the inside. Its trough was full of rain water, and in it lay a rounded stone. It was a primitive mill for grinding maize. Looking round I saw we were in the middle of an abandoned village. The jungle had swallowed its huts; its inhabitants had wandered away. Only the stone mill remained to testify to what had once been.

The mill . . . and something else, as Sibilit pointed out.

"Mango," he said, and pointed to a broken branch hanging down from a tree. So that was what had brought our elephant here so purposefully. The mango fruit were

ripening and the beasts of the forest were reaping the harvest that men had sown.

I took my heavy rifle from Sibilit. It was more than possible that our elephant was not the only one of his kind to be attracted by the sweet fruit, and nothing is more dangerous to a hunter than to stumble unawares across a second animal when hunting the first. This is especially true if the second elephant sees you before you see him.

We knew our big bull could not be far away now because we could hear him tearing at the trees, trampling the fallen branches underfoot, and brushing against the foliage as he enjoyed a placid meal. With extreme caution, we followed the noise of his progress. After some minutes we reached a thicket of mango trees, a tangled mass of broken and crippled trees which each year became more maimed by the depredations of the elephants at fruiting time. Even the most cursory examination revealed a host of old and new scars amid strangely twisted timbers. Some of the trees had been uprooted as saplings but had taken root again where they fell. The impression was that of a forest devastated by artillery. Broken branches lay everywhere and saplings had been broken off into stumps. The trampled ground was knee-deep in the wreckage where the elephants had dragged roots and all out of the earth with the powerful leverage of their tusks. The whole place reeked of elephant as we picked our way through a chaos of droppings, rotting fruit and mouldering timber.

Quite suddenly the sounds ahead of us ceased. We paused and listened, with hearts pounding. The thicket was now absolutely still; the elephant had stopped feeding. With drooping spirits I decided that the wind had probably changed and the beast had got a whiff of us. Yet some sixth sense told me he was near by and I felt he was watching us. Suddenly Batavelé touched me warningly.

There followed a snorting and snapping of branches right in front of us and it seemed that the soft earth trembled. The thicket parted and there, a score of yards away, stood our elephant in all his mighty majesty.

He knew we were there because he could smell us; but he had not yet seen us standing against the broken background of scrub. His trunk tested the air like an outstretched hand. His ears were thrust forward to catch the least sound that might come from the source of this alien scent. Two magnificent, gently-curving tusks seemed to glow at me in personal challenge. Suspicious, yet conscious of his own strength, the great beast seemed loath to allow himself to be driven from this rich feeding ground.

Twenty paces separated us, no more. His head was towards us. If I shot now, it would have to be a frontal attack and not the side shot at the temple which I should have preferred. At this short range it was most necessary to drop him where he stood or it could go ill with us. It called for a very accurate shot to a mark about three fingers' breadth above an imaginary line running between the eyes, slightly to the left or right of dead centre. But where on earth was the midpoint between the eyes? I could not see it for the forward-thrusting trunk. If I shot and did not bring him down he would almost certainly charge and try to settle his reckoning with us where we stood.

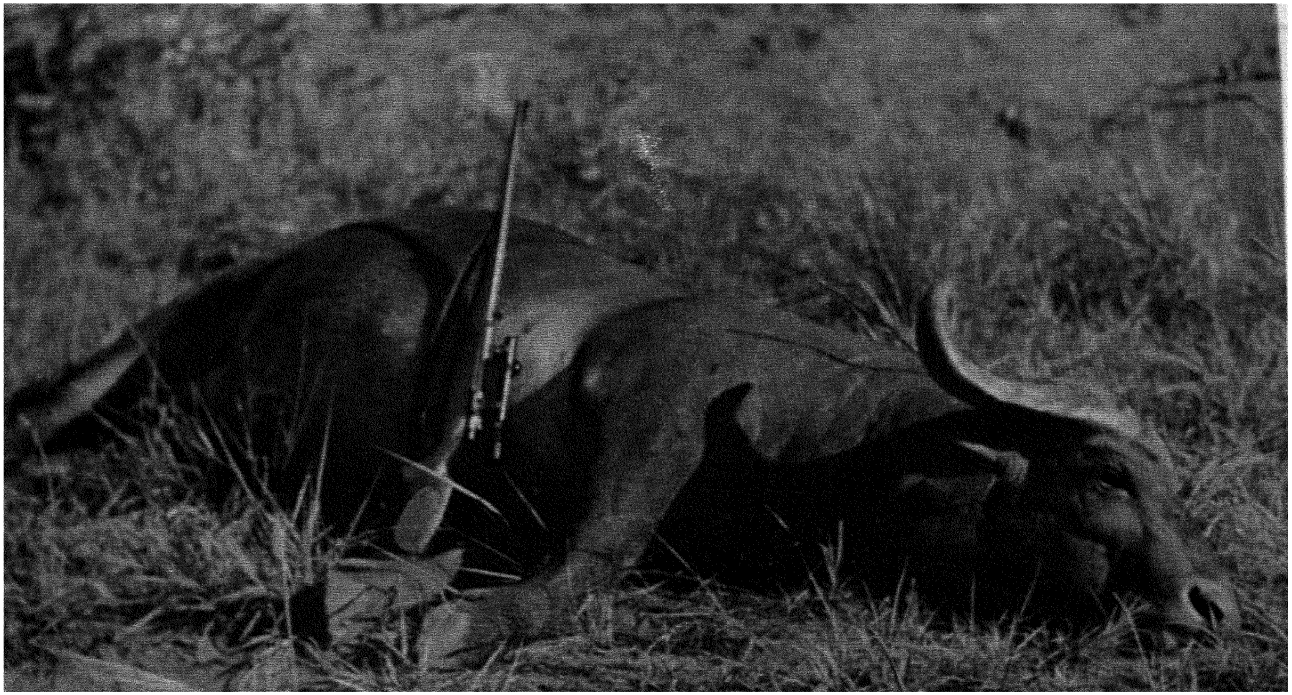
His trunk was now pointing straight at us. He knew where we were now for sure, and I devoutly wished I'd had the sense to smear his dung on myself as my companions had done. The great body swayed and began to move. He was either coming at us or going to move off. In either case I must shoot without further delay. Denied the shot between his eyes, I chose a lower mark and aimed at the larynx, sighting on the Adam's apple under the wrinkled grey skin.

Crack! The bullet spun the bull round sideways, presenting me with the shot I had hoped for. I fired again, aiming just in front of the ear opening. For a moment the colossus stood stock-still. Then he slowly collapsed with a crash, dragging branches, saplings and bushes with him. Beneath my feet, the ground gave a tremor with the impact of his fall.

When the great moment was over, I suddenly felt as if I were clothed in chain mail. Every muscle ached and I had difficulty in keeping my eyes open. We had been going for thirty-four hours almost without rest, for the night had been short, cold and wet. Now, as tension relaxed, exhaustion hit me like a bombshell. But this was no time for resting; there was still much to be done.

It is a common-sense and essential rule of big-game hunting to make sure from a safe distance that any fallen beast is quite dead. Most of the fatal accidents arise because the hunter neglects this precaution and approaches too close too soon. Many an apparently dead animal has risen up and in a last access of strength has taken his killer to the grave with him. Indeed, only recently two of the best-known hunters in French Equatorial Africa met their end in this way—Monsieur Félix, Governor of Birao, was killed by a buffalo, and Pretorius, a son of the famous Boer general, trampled by an elephant.

As I had no such ambitions for myself, I pushed two cartridges into the breech and approached my victim with proper caution. At three yards I put a bullet through his brain. It was unnecessary. There was not a twitch to betray the least spark of life remaining in the colossus. Yet Batavelé still held me back. To make quite sure, he threw a handful of soil on the head, and only when he had ascertained that the eyelids gave no reflex action was he satisfied that the elephant was dead. I then went forward



While I was taking this picture of the fallen buffalo I did not suspect that the rest of the herd had returned and was standing close behind me.

to lay my hand on the grey wrinkled skin in proud token of ownership.

My first thoughts were for the tusks. Where they issued from the head they were as thick as a man's thigh, and with outstretched arms I could not span the distance between tusk tip and the top of the animal's skull. They obviously were of respectable length, especially as one-third of the full length of the tusk is buried in the head. It is this deep and solid anchorage which gives the tusks their enormous power of leverage.

By opening his hands six times, Batavelé estimated to me that the weight of each tusk was around sixty pounds. When they were weighed and measured later, this proved to be an under-estimate. The left tusk, which is often slightly the smaller, weighed seventy-two pounds, the right about seventy-six pounds. Their lengths were respectively seven feet six inches and seven feet eight inches. It was the best elephant I had shot.

Bigger beasts are rare. With the smaller forest elephant twenty pounds is a fair weight for tusks, while thirty pounds is common among elephants of the plains. As has already been stated, Kespars' record was far in excess of mine, his heaviest pair weighing individually 123 pounds and 119 pounds. The record pair for French Africa over the same period was taken by M. Petitjean, Governor of Zemio (seventy-nine and seventy-seven pounds). The heaviest individual tusk taken in the Upper M'Bomou district weighed 112 pounds; unfortunately the second tusk was missing. I was present when this single-tusker was shot by Kurt Adolff, who joined me on safari in the spring of 1955. The world record almost certainly belongs to a pair weighing together 440 pounds. The record single tusk weighed 226½ pounds and was ten feet two and a half inches long; it came from an elephant killed near Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanganyika. M. Hakey at Port Gentil shot

a three-tusked elephant in 1927, the tusks weighing fifty-five, fifty-five and thirty-seven pounds. There have been even four-tusked beasts; one was shot at Fort Sibut. All the tusks were of equal length. At the Dusseldorf Hunting Exhibition in 1955 a complete four-tusked skull was on display in the French pavilion, but the two secondary tusks were much smaller. There is even a report, though there are no details that I know of, of a nine-tusker at Brehm.

Sibilit's first action was to cut off the tail, of which the hair was unusually thick and long. Each hair was the thickness of a steel knitting needle.

As always after killing an elephant, my pleasure and pride were mingled with regret at having robbed so mighty a beast of its life. When the quarry lies dead on the ground, the excitement of the chase through miles of forest and swamp and jungle suddenly gives way to a feeling of regret, remorse perhaps, emotions acquired in the few short centuries of civilization. Certainly I could not share the loud pleasure of Sibilit and Mataba who saw in the dead animal nothing but a mountain of edible flesh—8,000 pounds of it. At such moments a man's thoughts are too conflicting and confusing to stand analysis, too personal to bear discussion. At least mine are, and I prefer to wrestle with them alone.

Batavelé, who remained much less jubilant than his fellows, occupied himself by making me a temporary shelter. A few branches stuck in the ground, with the tent-cloth over them and the rubber sheet inside, made a pleasant, airy home. The rucksack carried by Mataba made a passable pillow and, without eating or touching my water-bottle, I fell asleep at once. I did not even notice when it began to rain.

When I awoke night had come and gone. Around the elephant there was a great activity, much shouting and a sickening stench. The rest of the porters had rejoined us

and the great festival of butchery had started. Batavelé and Sibilit were sending their axes cracking into the bone of the skull to free the tusks, while the remainder of the party had opened up the body and were uproariously dragging out bowels and intestines looking like great pipes. Bespattered with blood from head to foot, they laughed joyously as they milled about in a greenish-brown mess of dirt, blood and entrails. A million flies hung in a dark, humming cloud over the carcase. It was a wild, horrible picture . . . but it was the true Africa.

Hunks of flesh, intestines, guts and the lining of the stomach walls—a special delicacy—hung everywhere from branches and from time to time one of the men would slice off a chunk with his dripping knife and swallow it raw.

"Breakfast ready," announced Stinktjadoll and pointed. As if by magic, my camp had been uprooted and transported overnight, lock, stock and barrel, from the Borni. My tent was already erected, with the filter plant in front and the bathroom behind. Even the kitchen hut was there. On the table was a freshly-ironed table-cloth, with a bunch of bright-coloured flowers stuffed into a tumbler of water. Coffee was bubbling in the pot.

Mottenkopf saw my surprise and grinned widely, wiping his bloody mouth with the back of his hand. They had heard my shots, he explained. We had trekked far, but our devious course had brought us in a wide arc almost back to the river. Fired by the prospect of a giant barbecue he and his companions had not found it difficult to track us down.

As he knew from experience how unpleasant I found the spectacle of a beast being hacked to pieces, he had set up my tent a hundred yards away from the stench and noise, from the flies, and from the vultures that had settled in vast numbers among the trees surrounding the clearing. Though I could still hear the noise from the scene of

activity, the wind carried the smell away from me, and a small patch of scrub cut off my view of the grim scene.

I had not long to wait until the two trackers brought the tusks over to me for inspection. When they were placed upright I could just reach their points with my finger-tips. Round the stumps still adhered the lumps of gristle from which Mottenkopf would later prepare me a very tasty soup.

I fetched my camera and called Batavelé to pull the nerve from the tusk so that I could photograph its yard-long length of bright red jelly, ranging in thickness from that of a man's thigh to a pencil point. Superstitious fear of getting the toothache keeps the natives from eating these nerves; but, even more remarkable, dogs will not eat them either, and even flies refuse to settle on them.

By a feat of strength Mataba succeeded in pulling out the animal's heart for me to photograph. It weighed nearly seventy pounds and was by custom the property of Batavelé and Sibilit. Both were convinced that their considerable personal courage came from the fact that they had eaten many elephant hearts.

That day belonged to my companions and I could do nothing but let them enjoy their feast. It would have been useless to try otherwise. No amount of orders or promises, prayers or threats, would have persuaded them to march. The enormous quantity of meat at their disposal had the same effect on them as might the discovery of a hoard of spirits on the inmates of a home for incurable alcoholics. The mass of red meat sent them plain crazy. They pulled, plucked and snatched at it as long as their strength lasted. They swallowed it raw and, when any one of them paused in his orgy, it was only to vomit. Then back he would go to fill the void left. The more they were sick, the more often they were able to repeat the enjoyable act of eating.

It was afternoon before they were all too full to swallow a mouthful more, and they at once set to work to put green branches on the fire to preserve by smoking the remaining mound of meat that was already beginning to smell.

In the evening, women and children appeared. It has always puzzled me how families invariably contrive to arrive at an elephant killing in time to enjoy the result. Even though you may be a week's march from the nearest village, within twelve or, at the outside, twenty-four hours of the death of an elephant the relatives of the porters and trackers somehow contrive a full muster round the booty—all provided with baskets, gourds, knives and sleeping mats. Their job is to help smoke the eight thousand pounds or so of meat, break it up into manageable loads and carry it away. A dead elephant is not only food for the months to come, but an article of trade. In territory where there is little game men have mostly lost the art of hunting. Meat is therefore a rare and highly-prized delicacy. Thus what a man cannot eat himself, he uses for barter. More than one porter of mine has bought a bride with his share of elephant I had shot.

In Bangui a pound of elephant meat costs a shilling, in Brazzaville three shillings. So today's bag represented a money value of anything from £400 to £1,200. These values, however, are of purely academic interest from the hunter's point of view for, apart from the uncertainties of the keeping qualities of the meat in transit on the heads of hungry natives, the hunter is forbidden by a wise law to traffic in the meat himself. He is free to eat it himself, he can give it away or he can leave it to rot, but he may not sell it.

By the time that darkness fell, an entire village had sprung up around the slaughtered beast. Every family had built its own hut in which to live while the smoking was taking place. No less than sixteen fires blazed in the

bush, each one carefully tended by the women of the family. They worked in shifts throughout the night, turning the meat expertly over the fires.

That night was one of peaceful repletion. Other peoples may sing when they are happy, but not African natives. Instead they gossip and repeat again and again the story of the successful hunt. Thereby the killing of the elephant perpetually acquires new embellishments, until finally every porter comes to believe that he alone is the man who should be thanked for the monster barbecue.

Chapter 7

BUFFALO AND LION

It was late on the following day before our party was ready to move off. Though we could obviously not get far that day, I was anxious to make a start away from the temptations of that delectable mound of meat.

In the smoke of many fires the hunks of elephant flesh had slowly assumed a blackish colour, but appeared to be no less appetizing to my boys. Before we set out they stuffed their bellies with it to bursting-point and then left their womenfolk to tend and safeguard what remained. Each also provided himself with a tasty chunk to chew on the road. Any previous ideas I may have had about porters carrying no more than forty-five pounds weight were shown to be absurd. Forty-five pounds was the regulation load—the possible load was now proved to be more than double. When I pointed this out to Mottenkopf I was assured "Meat weighs nothing." By the same reasoning he told me that you don't eat the smell with the meat!

I had reserved the trunk for myself. Cut into pieces, it would assure the goodwill of any local chiefs we might meet *en route*. I had to engage an extra couple of boys to carry it, and others to carry the tusks on their woolly heads.

After consulting Batavelé and Sibilit I decided to march upstream. On this course, if we did not find any spoor worth following, we should eventually reach the main road. The road to the east from Bangassou, along which I had driven, forks at Obo. One branch continues eastward to

the Sudan, while the other swings first northwards then westwards in a great north-westerly loop to Djemah. By following the river upstream we would eventually strike this road near the village of Bembé Ouadaka and thereby renew some slight contact with the inhabited world.

So we set off northwards, slowly at first until we got into our stride; but we did not march for long. Two hours after we had set off it was dark and we were camped. During the night we heard a lion roar—not a common occurrence on the Upper M'Bomou. The beast was doubtless attracted into following our fragrant trail by the smell of the meat which we were carrying. Some of the natives were apprehensive and huddled closely together over the fires, but their fears were unfounded as the lion gave us a respectfully wide berth.

Next day we struck camp early and I split our column into two parts. Batavelé, Sibilit, Mataba and I went on ahead as the hunting party, and the bearers followed about a mile behind. The chatter and scent of a large body of men will disturb all the game for miles around. Twice that day we came across abandoned villages, recognizable by large clumps of neglected mango trees and palms. These were not in so battered and so sorry a state as the one we had seen before, though they showed all the signs of being regularly visited by elephants. At the foot of a grove of palm trees lay the husks of nuts, as big as plates, which had been sucked dry and spat out by the elephants. Wart-hogs had also been enjoying themselves among the fallen mango fruit, which they particularly enjoy when the fruit are rotten. In one of the villages we found pine-apple plants that had run wild, but in spite of all our searching we could find no single whole fruit. Everywhere the beasts of the jungle had anticipated us.

About half an hour before we stopped for the midday halt we had one of those unforeseen experiences which I

would not wish on any man—even to those "experts" who aver that buffaloes only attack men when they themselves are attacked first. We were crossing a wide plain where the grass came up to our thighs, when Batavelé signalled to us to stop. He pointed to the edge of the forest which followed the line of the river a considerable distance away. I looked but could see nothing but a wide cluster of what seemed to be ant-hills. As Batavelé would not have stopped us for so insignificant a reason, I took out my telescope and looked again. Through the glass I saw that what I had taken to be ant-hills were in fact buffaloes. There might have been anything up to three hundred of them contentedly chewing the cud.

As we did not want to disturb them for fear of scaring any elephant in the neighbourhood, I signed to Batavelé to give them a wide berth and we resumed our march. But after a few minutes Batavelé, whose eyes were sharper than needles, again called on us to halt. One of the buffaloes had broken away from the herd and was slowly approaching us. Why this animal should bother about us when none of the rest was taking the least notice of us was known only to the beast itself. I studied it through the glass but without real interest. It was a young cow with horns that no self-respecting hunter would give the least thought to.

Soon the inquisitive creature had slowly come to within a hundred paces of us, when she suddenly dropped her head and began to paw the ground. Then she charged. There was no way of avoiding her; we were out in the open and clearly visible, and with no cover to run to. I grabbed my Mauser from Sibilit and took aim, determined to shoot only if the cow continued to come on. Sometimes buffaloes will apparently charge only to swerve at the last minute. But not this one. She bore furiously down on us without the slightest provocation.

My three companions threw themselves flat on the ground, while I held my aim on the middle of her brow just where the horns met. To make sure that my shot killed—a wounded buffalo is a doubly dangerous customer —I let her come to within twenty paces before I fired. I squeezed the trigger and down she crashed, kicked once or twice and was dead.

It was the remainder of the herd that was worrying me. If the rest of the brutes decided to imitate the action of the cow, our position would be desperate. Two guns would be powerless against the charge of a determined herd. Our only chance would be to make a dash for the river in which we should probably be safe from the buffaloes, but possibly not from crocodiles. All the same, I should not have hesitated to take my chances with the crocodiles as, during the day at least, they usually steer clear of men. Fortunately, no such desperate measures were necessary. The herd took not the slightest notice of the shot or of the fate of their female relative.

I walked over to the fallen buffalo and gave her another bullet just to make sure. Then I examined her closely, for I thought that maybe some earlier encounter with men had soured her against our kind, but she bore no scars and seemed to be perfectly healthy. The only conclusion one could draw was that, in spite of assertions to the contrary, buffaloes will sometimes attack man without previous provocation.

We left her lying where she was. Her horns were of no interest to me and the column behind us could take as much of the meat as they wanted. As it turned out, they wanted it all. The whole cow turned up that night in camp, cut into pieces; even her horns arrived on Stinkt-jadoll's head. Not to disappoint him, I carried them all the way back to Munich. They hang on the wall at home —an unimpressive reminder of an odd encounter.

As the reports of my two shots would have set every elephant within a radius of three miles on the move, we gave up looking for spoor and speeded up the pace of our march throughout the rest of the morning. After the mid-day halt we came across an elephant trail worn and beaten by so many tracks that the ground was pounded as hard as concrete. I decided to follow the road, determined to see what made elephants tread out a main traffic artery. After a half-hour across open ground we came to a muddy pool, its edges trampled and covered with elephant droppings. Batavelé crouched down, dipped his finger in the muddy water and licked it.

When he nodded I knew what he meant—it was salt. There were alkaline minerals in the earth which are much sought after by elephants, even in the form of mud. All round they had broken up the ground with their tusks to get at the salty earth beneath. (By getting down on his knees an elephant can dig to a depth of nearly five feet.) The entire pool was a result of their work. The absence of fresh spoor made it plain that the pool was only visited at certain fixed seasons. It also suggested that the main herds had not yet reached here on their return migratory march.

We returned to the river, where I was lucky enough to bag a wart-hog. Its flesh is as tasty as hand-fed pork, so I was careful to reserve some of the better cuts for my own table. With the sun going down behind the horizon we picked a place near by to camp and settled down to wait for the main column.

While the team set to work to build the camp, I got Batavelé to fetch me a hunk of elephant meat and to it I tied the guts of the wart-hog I had just shot. I thought it might be an idea to set out some bait in case our lion of the previous night was still following us. We tied the

bloody and odorous bundle to the end of a strong liana and dragged it in a wide circle round the camp. Then we towed it half a mile upstream where we fixed it to a solitary tree. Some bushes conveniently placed near by would offer suitable cover from which to wait and watch.

As soon as the camp was quiet I set out for the hide with Sibilit, and no sooner had we arrived than it began to rain heavily so that we were glad to creep under a length of canvas sheeting which we had brought with us. Though we were well protected, the coming of the rain did not suit me at all; by washing away the scent we had laid, it reduced our chances of attracting the lion to our bait to practically nil. However, we stayed. It does not do to give up too soon when hunting, and the meat was smelling strong enough for me to scent it yards away. Perhaps the lion would find it without having to follow the trail.

After a period of waiting the clouds rolled back and the sky cleared. We had only half a moon for light, but it was quite sufficient for us to make out the tree and the bait. The night was full of life and mystery. I could only identify a fraction of the noises that reached us from the river and the forest. A giggling laugh . . . deep organ tones . . . and sharp high-pitched cries whose origin I could not guess. My few words of Zandé were not enough to ask Sibilit. The crackling of twigs, spitting noises in the grass, rustlings and the soft patter of feet betrayed the life that was going on all round us. In the river a fish jumped high and fell back with a splash. Maybe he, too, was being hunted; or maybe he was just love-making. Somewhere hippopotami snorted; it was the hour when they came on land to graze like cows in a meadow.

Elephants exchanged greetings in the forest, some near at hand, others far away, and I played fancifully with the idea of discovering what the different tones and timings of

their trumpeting signified. I would have loved to know the subject of their gossip.

The air was full of fireflies. Markedly larger than the European variety, they were equipped with glittering emerald-green lamps. In ceaseless motion they whirred through the branches or circled so close to our heads that we could see each other in their light. Then a bat arrived noiselessly among them and swallowed many for its supper.

Farther up the river an animal screamed in an agony of fear, but the cry was quickly stifled; a crocodile must have had his dinner. Close at hand there was a loud rustling in the leaves, then a short squeak and finally silence; a mouse had become somebody's meal. On all sides the forest was filled with violent lamentation as a leopard tried to creep up on some sleeping baboons. Murder and bloodshed were going on all around us, hunger and fear ruled the night. Pursuit and flight kept the animal world on tiptoe. The strong pursued the weak; the weak, the weaker still. Both hunter and hunted had only two instincts—to eat and not to be eaten.

From the sentimental standpoint Nature's methods are often raw and ugly. Nature is constantly destroying the creatures of her own creation and in doing so ensures the survival of none but the fittest to procreate the race. Even death itself represents not destruction, but preservation. Everything that dies preserves life. Nothing is wasted; even natural decay is logical and purposeful.

It is the continuation of the species as a whole, not the individual, that matters. If one species is destined as the food of another, Nature is careful to ensure that it multiplies sufficiently rapidly to maintain continuity and a proper balance. The higher the death rate, the greater the birth rate. The more a species is hunted, the shyer it becomes and the harder it is to catch.

Crouched in my hide, I reflected on these things and

on the sentimentality which in certain quarters brands hunting as cruel and one-sided. It is true that human inventiveness has pressed into man's hands weapons which, when used with skill and experience, put the advantage with the hunter; but it is not an entirely one-sided advantage. Thanks to their incomparably better senses of smell, hearing and sight, many animals are able to elude the sportsman time and again; others rely on speed, cunning and sense of country. The hunter, so much their inferior in equipment of this nature, has to fall back on his superior intelligence, reasoning and the use of his weapons.

When an animal no longer stands a chance, hunting ceases to be and mere slaughter begins. When circumstances load the dice too heavily in his favour, the sportsman readily imposes and accepts restrictions—by law, sporting usage or personal choice—to restore the balance that has been lost. This is particularly true of the hunter in Africa, who is meticulous in his acceptance of the many restrictions and in observing them.

In this reference I am, of course, speaking of conditions today—not the crimes against nature which were committed by the white man in Africa during the early days of the present century. This so-called "free hunting" reached its zenith shortly before the First World War, when in one year some ten thousand elephants were massacred. Even as late as 1928 over six thousand elephants were shot for ivory approaching a million pounds in weight. Then two circumstances combined to put an end to this slaughter—one economic, the other legal.

Quite suddenly, ivory, which had been much sought after for ornament and jewellery, went out of fashion; and at the same time its other commercial uses were met by synthetic substitutes. Its price in the markets of the world fell by half, to drop even lower when high dues on hunting were imposed and the duties on the export of ivory from

Africa and its import into Europe were substantially increased.

The second factor was the agreement of the colonial administration authorities to a common game law, the establishment of reservations (amounting in French Equatorial Africa to one-tenth of the entire territory) and a total ban on the hunting of any species threatened with extinction. Penalties for the infringement of the game laws were severe, repetition of the crime inviting deportation. Thus hunting for profit quickly became a thing of the past.

Since the sale, or even the loan, of firearms to natives is forbidden, the imposition of the game laws had little effect on the local population. Such guns as the natives possess—it is a matter of indifference to them whether or not they have a permit to use them—are mostly muzzle-loaders and flint-locks that wound more animals than they kill, causing untold misery. Even more cruel are the natives' time-old methods of hunting, some of which are still practised. They will dig a pit with sharpened stakes in the bottom to impale their prey, or ring a great circle of jungle with fire. In one fire-hunt in the Obo district no less than forty-seven elephants were roasted alive! Though such practices are banned by law, they still occasionally occur, for who is there to see that the veto is observed? Officialdom rarely learns of native activities in the backwoods, but misses nothing of what the white man does. The native's love of sensation, red meat and gossip is quite sufficient to ensure that the moment one of the larger animals is killed by a white man the news of its demise is circulated far and wide.

Despite this, hunting is a dying art among many of the tribes because, since the white man brought an end to the perpetual inter-tribal wars, the African native has become soft or—as one Governor expressed it to me—lost his manhood. It is as though he put away his courage and endur-

ance with his weapons. In many villages there are no hunters at all; in others perhaps one, or two.

One quite large village stood by helpless while every day big elephants appeared and took the best and ripest bunches of bananas from the village plantation. The villagers did not even attempt to drive the marauders off—even by noise. How are such communities to exist if such attacks multiply? On another occasion I sat with a native family in their hut, waiting for darkness and the elephants that nightly came to raid the manioc fields. I hoped there might be a big tusker among the raiders. Darkness had hardly fallen before the beasts appeared and neither smoke nor the noise we made would turn them from their purpose. After they had taken what they wanted from the fields, the elephants came right up to the clay huts and began to search for the corncobs hanging in the eaves to dry. One of them dipped his trunk into the clay jar in front of our hut and sucked it dry. I could have touched his trunk with my hand. The helplessness of these people who had lost the initiative to defend their possessions was frightening. Their "unmanliness" seemed as contrary to the laws of nature as the constant hunger which these people accept in a land abounding in game.

I started when Sibilit nudged me. With my thoughts far away, I had completely forgotten about him. A distant roaring had announced that our lion had scented the meat. Hunger had been sharpened by the smell of blood.

"Old man," Sibilit whispered in my ear. He was an expert on lions—better than Batavelé whose speciality was elephants.

I laid my rifle in a fork of the shrub in front of me, and found I was peering so hard at the bundle of meat over by the tree that my eyes had started to water. I wiped away the moisture with the back of my hand. For a few minutes there was absolute stillness as all other beasts kept

The shot hippopotamus, which is to be the main dish of a ceremonial feast, has risen to the surface and is being dragged ashore.

silent and apprehensive. Then there was another roar, this time markedly nearer. Then silence again. I could hardly contain my excitement.

Sibilit nudged me again to indicate that he could see the beast, but I could see nothing, even through my glass. My companion took my hand and guided it until my finger pointed to a clump of knee-high grass. I examined the grass carefully through my night glass and thought I saw some movement. As the rest of the grass was motionless, it could not have been the wind that had caused the disturbance. So, if Sibilit was right, the great beast was crouching there, uneasy about venturing into the moonlit open space which offered him no cover. We waited, motionless and with bated breath, staring at the patch of grass. The lion was in no hurry. Something seemed to be worrying him. I wondered whether he had come alone or whether he had others with him. I saw with some anxiety that clouds were drawing in upon the moon. Perhaps the lion was waiting for the shadow which they would throw. But no, he was coming out.

Flat on his belly, his head stretched forward like a cat at a mouse-hole, he slid his dark body into the open and began to slither towards the bait. Then, without warning, he stood up and showed his entire outline clear against the night sky and it was at this moment that a cloud chose to mask the moon and the silhouette faded from view. For almost a minute we could see nothing; but we could hear. We could hear him tearing at the bait, trying to drag it free. Then apparently he gave it up and settled down to a meal on the spot. He grunted as he tore at the flesh, and I imagined I could hear him beating the ground with his tail. He must be very old if he was as hungry as that, I thought, for there is plenty of game on the Borni to satisfy lions. Only a lion that had lost his spring and was too

tired and lazy would so readily accept this random chance of a meal.

The sky brightened again as the cloud sailed on and freed the moon. After the interlude of darkness the light seemed brighter than before, and I saw that the lion was behind the tree to which the bait was attached. Only his head and his hindquarters were visible. He was lying flat on the ground and in the uncertain light it was hard to distinguish his head from the bait, but when he swallowed his head came up.

With my rifle at the ready I waited for the movement. I had retained the telescopic sight in spite of the short distance because in the poor light I could not see the foresight, but I could see the thread in the lens. I took aim and tightened my finger on the trigger. The next time his head came up I would fire.

Crack! In the darkness the flash blinded me, and two or three seconds passed before I could see again. When sight returned the lion had gone. Not a sound to be heard!

It was a foolish situation to which there were two possible solutions. Either I had missed completely in the bad light or I had hit him and he was lying wounded somewhere near. In either event we should have to wait where we were for daylight because a wounded lion is an ugly customer and certainly not the fellow to be hunted down in darkness. There was nothing for it but to sit tight—and silent, too, in case he came looking for us.

Such periods of waiting are always most difficult to bear. One's limbs become stiff and clammy, ants crawl inside one's shirt and flies settle on every inch of exposed skin. Yet I was chary about making any movement to drive them off. If the lion were wounded close by and in an evil temper, he would not be above doing a little stalking on

his own account. Years seemed to roll by before the grey dawn came at last.

Slowly we raised our heads to look around. We did not have to look far. He lay stretched out in the clump of grass from which he had come. Carefully I examined him through my glass. There was not the least movement from breathing; he must have been dead for some time. Sibilit threw a branch at him while I stood with my rifle at the ready. But he was quite dead. We went over to examine him. The bullet had penetrated between eye and ear, yet he had nevertheless achieved the terrific spring to take him back to cover.

He was truly an old fellow. His coat was dull and the scarred hide was quite bare in places. His teeth were rotten and he had no mane worthy of the name. Few lions that live in bush and forest have decent manes. Thorns and undergrowth tear them off bit by bit, leaving a very ragged result. You have to go to the great plains of East Africa for lions with traditionally handsome manes—or to the nearest zoo. Nevertheless, my lion was a big beast with an enormous skull. And in this district any lion was a prize.

I fired two shots into the air in signal to Batavelé that I had got my prey and needed hands to come and fetch it.

Chapter 8

SURPRISED IN HIS MUDBATH

THE tendency in most books on big-game hunting is for the author to concentrate on the highlights and say little or nothing about the blank days and failures. Nevertheless, to report only successes in an unbroken string is to give a totally false picture of everyday realities because more often than not the hunter limps home, tired, empty-handed and sometimes bad-tempered.

Between every story of success in this book, you can safely sandwich at least three or more that ended in failure. For, depend on it, no deities are more moody and changeable than the gods of the chase. Sometimes they will cast their victims from the peak of hope to the depths of despair; sometimes setting up within reach a glittering prize only to snatch it away again. Just occasionally they will toss the most wonderful gift into a man's lap when he is least expecting it and has not gone to the least trouble to deserve it.

I saw an instance of the gods' munificence on my return to Bangui. A missionary, who hunted only to supply his coloured flocks with meat, had shot a world-record eland in the course of a pleasant evening's stroll. Having no interest in trophies, he had left the horns lying about his yard where they were found by chance by a planter who took them to the nearest game authorities. There they were measured and the record was established and confirmed.

I once had rather a similar chance which resulted quite

differently. I managed to get in on one of the few shoots of ibex which are allowed every year in the Val di Paradiso, in Italy. After several days of climbing to the 10,000-feet peaks my guide and I sighted a remarkably fine old buck. Favoured by the wind, I succeeded in getting close enough to make sure of my shot. I spent a few moments enjoying the spectacle of the fine old fellow and then raised my rifle. My bullet struck the rock a couple of inches over the target and the next instant the buck was gone. The fault in my marksmanship lay in my telescopic sight, of which a screw had come a hair's-breadth out of truth. However, I was so impressed by the animal's remarkable horns that I returned the following spring determined to possess them, but by then he was dead. During the winter he had succumbed to old age and his body was found shortly after. I was told that during the one hundred and fifty years that the hunting of ibex has been controlled, there had never been a buck with horns to match this one!

When, however, I stumbled on elephant spoor having the quite unbelievable diameter of nearly 21 inches, it seemed to me that whatever gods of the chase there may be had got together to compensate me for my lost ibex in the Val di Paradiso. Any elephant with a foot of that size must be a mammoth and, with any luck, carrying truly legendary tusks.

But as it turned out both the animal and the gods made a complete fool of me. For two days I followed him at a pace which practically burst my lungs, only to be completely outwitted. Although Batavelé, Sibilit and I tried every trick in the calendar, the monster somehow got wind of us and set out to amuse himself at our expense. On each of the two days, before he settled down for his siesta in thick forest, he made a wide circuit of his hiding place. Then, well concealed by foliage, he watched us trail past

him. We, of course, assumed he was ahead of us and to windward, when in fact by doubling back on his tracks he had placed himself downwind of us in a position to keep a watchful check on every move we made. Then, when he was ready, the giant beast quietly slipped away with as little noise as a ghost, leaving behind him nothing but his spoor to tell us what had happened.

It is almost impossible to come up unseen on an elephant which knows he is being followed and resents it. He will keep doubling on his tracks and using the wind to his advantage, so that the hunter has no chance at all of approaching unobserved. Should he choose to run, he will take himself off at a steady ten miles an hour, covering anything up to fifty miles a day. He does not much enjoy doing this, however. Because of his bulk, he soon gets out of breath and begins to sweat uncomfortably. In the Sudan, where the country is mostly open, the Arabs hunt elephants from horseback, keeping up the chase till the unfortunate creatures can go no farther.

Weight for weight with other animals, the elephant is neither as strong nor as hardy as is generally supposed. In draught power, for instance, his pull is equal to no more than the pull of two strong horses. His bulk is only twenty-five per cent muscle, in contrast to the forty per cent of man and most other animals. Even the tame well-fed elephant can work only six hours a day—and that for only half of his lifetime. His large body is extremely susceptible to heat and therefore undue exertion is unwelcome to him. Although the area of his skin surface may amount to thirty-five square metres, there is only a square centimetre of skin to every twenty cubic centimetres of bulk; this explains why the body temperature varies widely through the body, from twenty-eight degrees centigrade in the hindquarters to twenty-two degrees centigrade in the ear. The great size of the ears, representing

one-sixth of the total body surface, is as much for cooling as hearing. The brain is unexpectedly small, averaging only 0·2 per cent of the animal's total weight as compared to the human brain which amounts to some two per cent of a man's weight.

There are many false ideas current about the age elephants attain. The greatest known age is ninety years, though in captivity they usually live less than half as long —forty-two is the greatest age recorded. Like man, the elephant continues to grow for the first twenty years of its life and the period of sex potency lasts about fifteen or sixteen years. Parturition takes eighteen to twenty-two months and the newborn animal weighs about two hundred and fifty pounds.

The elephant's trunk has also long been the subject of many fallacies. The animal does not drink through the trunk but drinks from it. It draws water into the trunk—when full the average trunk will hold about three gallons —and sprays it into its mouth. Although the trunk is a very useful member, it is not absolutely essential to the animal's well-being because in cases of necessity the elephant can gather his food and manage to drink by use of the mouth alone. Baby elephants have to be taught to use their trunks; at the breast they suck with the mouth.

The olfactory nerves are located high up at the base of the trunk and are probably more delicate than those of any other animal. Through them he finds his food, his kinfolk, and his way by day and by night. He can even smell water under the ground. His sense of touch, due to the very short hairs which grow on the trunk and generally all over the body, is also very acute. On the other hand, his eyesight is bad, so bad that sometimes he may mistake an outcrop of rock against which another elephant has rubbed for another of his kind.

Within the herd, which may be led by either a bull or

a cow, there exists a mutual aid society. At times of danger the young are placed in the middle, wounded animals are protected, and even dead beasts have been known to be dragged several hundred yards away from danger. The British hunter Maurice Coreth tells the story how for an entire day he was unable to approach an elephant he had killed because the others of the herd were holding a wake over it. In the same way, a cow elephant in labour may receive midwifery assistance from other cows.

A wounded elephant will stop a wound with clay and leaves, and will even bathe it in water. All elephants are plagued by ticks and the frequent bathing excursions, when they roll in water, mud or sand, are part of their remedy against these insects.

The African elephant is taller than the Indian and has bigger ears and much bigger tusks. The largest animal on record measured twelve feet tall and weighed 12,100 pounds. From head to tail it measured just over twelve feet and its trunk was eleven feet four inches long. The dried skull alone weighed 277 pounds and the animal's spoor had a diameter of over twenty-one inches. Forest elephants reach only three-quarters the size of the elephants of the plains and their tusks are proportionately smaller. Their ears are less triangular in shape, their hides are thicker and their withers more rounded in the rear. Whether pygmy elephants are a separate breed or simply stunted specimens is a matter on which zoologists have yet to reach agreement.

If it were not for the growth and demands of civilization, elephants might very well live in southern Europe right up to the foot of the Alps. They are certainly not only tropical animals, for they can and do live for considerable periods in temperatures below freezing point. They will remain voluntarily in the highlands of Kilimanjaro under

icing conditions and refuse to be driven down by blizzards. In European zoos elephants are often allowed to come out into the open when there is snow on the ground and they are obviously quite comfortable. Rocks and steep places do not worry them in the least. They are excellent climbers and their sense of balance on narrow ledges and bridges is unhesitatingly sure. When negotiating steep downhill gradients they do so by sliding down on their bottoms. They are good swimmers, though sometimes they prefer to cross a river by walking across its bed with their trunks held high above water as breathing pipes.

Because of his persecution in the plains of the Sudan the elephant gradually disappeared from the open country. Using his brain he saw that such country was dangerous to him and he turned for refuge to the forests of the south and west. Indeed, few other animals profit by experience so readily as the elephant. When it is being hunted, from being primarily a daylight-feeding animal it becomes entirely nocturnal in habit, even refusing to leave the shelter of a thicket if the moon is high. And once shot at, it will leave the neighbourhood and not return, perhaps for as long as a year. If it has been hit, it will never return. In areas where it is hunted, it quickly becomes shy, but where it is left unmolested it soon becomes bold and immune to disturbance from human beings. In the areas where it is fully protected it learns to push impudently into gardens and plantations and will use roads as trails specially created for its own use. In Thailand, where elephants enjoy complete protection for religious reasons, they have changed man's mode of living. On the Kwe-Noi River, for example, the natives have to live on river rafts because the elephants delight in destroying the houses. In the summer of 1953 I was hunting tiger there with some Thai friends. We pitched our camp on a raft, leaving only the jeep and its trailer on land. During the night the

elephants arrived and attacked our transport with gusto. We were able to repair the jeep, but the remains of the trailer are still there to this day.

Shortly after I had been outwitted by the wise old bull elephant, I went out alone one morning after buffalo. The wind was just right, and scattered large trees between me and the herd offered both cover and protection in case of a charge. The grazing herd was moving slowly across my path in the direction of the river, and I waited behind the tall roots of an acacia till the leaders came within range. I selected a fine bull and fired at a range of sixty yards. He dropped in his tracks, and the rest of the herd continued to graze, ignoring the death of their companion. When they had all moved slowly on, I approached the fallen animal carefully and gave him another bullet for luck. The horns were as fine and spreading as I could have wished, but I was disappointed to find them riddled with tiny holes. I had never seen the like before; indeed, I had not even known there were insects which would attack the horns of a living animal.

I decided to take a picture of the buffalo where it lay and leaned my rifle against the carcase and stepped back to focus. After I had taken a couple of photographs, I saw Batavelé running to join me. Suddenly he stopped dead and then began to make frantic signals which I did not understand. But when he threw himself on the ground I quickly guessed the nature of the danger, and turned to see that the herd had returned and were gathering in a semicircle around me. With their heads turned towards me, they gazed with the deepest interest and curiosity.

As slowly as my nerves would let me, I backed away from them until I had placed the dead buffalo between them and me. Then I seized my rifle and lay on the

ground using the carcase as cover. For some minutes they stood and stared until, becoming bored, they slowly moved off. Quite obviously the sound of my two shots had had no significance of danger for them, which was probably just as well or I might not have got off so lightly, or perhaps they had thought the bangs to be thunder-claps since storms in the tropics are often accompanied by no more than one or two sharp claps of thunder.

Familiar sounds, however loud, don't alarm animals unless they associate them with danger from past experience. But strange noises will panic them, particularly metallic noises, however faint. The click of the camera shutter, the rattle of a water-bottle, the cocking of a rifle, will send them flying into the distance faster than any tumult of noise to which they are accustomed. On this occasion curiosity was a stronger factor than fear, a not uncommon happening in remote wilderness where man is rarely seen. I have known plenty of other instances of this, and recall particularly an occasion on the River Chari when I was seated at table eating my midday meal when half-a-dozen hartebeeste came so close to examine me that I almost felt I could touch them. It was only when the foolish Mottenkopf came up and threw an empty jam tin at them that they realized that we were not as harmless as we seemed and beat a hasty retreat.

My buffalo kill provided the excuse for a day of rest and feasting. It was impossible to take away the meat without first smoking it and it seemed a crime to leave it to spoil in the bush. My boys spent the day butchering the beast and smoking all the meat they did not eat. While this was going on Batavelé and Sibilit went off in different directions to hunt for spoor.

Sibilit returned without finding anything, but it was after dark before Batavelé came in carrying a stick measure on which he had recorded the size of a spoor he had found.

The tape measure showed a diameter of nearly nineteen inches, so obviously the elephant responsible was well worth taking trouble over. But Batavelé had brought further information. The deep indentations on the soles of the feet were a sure sign of age; and the animal was certainly a tusker because, contrary to usual practice, he had rolled on the ground during his siesta leaving the impression of his tusks scored in the earth.

It was still dark when the hunting party set out next morning. Batavelé led, following his own tracks by the light of an oil lamp. By early dawn we had reached the spot where Batavelé had first come across the spoor and the hunt was on.

It soon became clear we had an animal of leisurely and irregular habits to deal with, who preferred to take his meals continuously as he went along rather than break his journey for a good tuck in. He had browsed untidily all the time, plucking a branch here and uprooting a sapling there, and following an apparently purposeless, serpentine course. In following him we discovered that during most of the previous night he had wandered in an irregular semicircle of several miles circumference. As time went on we came to where he had taken his early-morning bathe a few hours earlier. It was no more than a small sandy stream which, by dint of a great deal of wriggling, he had succeeded in widening to a comfortable bathtub. We did not delay, but pushed on as fast as we could until the trail led us into a patch of forest. An examination of the leaves that the creature had brushed against indicated that he had passed through just after dawn. An elephant usually leaves his bath covered with mud and sand which is gradually wiped off by his passage through trees and bushes. If this occurs before dawn, drops of dew settle over the traces of sand on the leaves and take the form of little balls. But if the animal passes after the dew has fallen, the traces are

left in smears. Such was the case in the present instance, indicating that our quarry had little more than two hours' start of us. With any luck we should come up with him during his siesta.

In the event, the meeting came disconcertingly sooner than that. We were passing through a patch of thicket when we heard an immense splash ahead—from the volume of noise you would have said that a ship had been launched. There followed sounds of snorting, smacking and wallowing. There was no doubt about it . . . our elephant was enjoying another mudbath.

Batavelé consulted his puh-puh and then struck off to the right of our previous course and continued on this line until we were able to approach the sounds of boisterous enjoyment from dead downwind. The elephant was making so much noise in his bath that it seemed unnecessary to advance with customary caution. Particularly thick undergrowth hid us from his view and him from ours, but in any case the range of vision nowhere extended beyond thirty yards. Even with the wind in our faces, the most likely thing to betray us was our scent, because in thickly tangled woodland the wind rarely blows true, but circulates in eddies and cross-currents, according to differences in temperature and humidity. Batavelé kept his powder box constantly in hand and tapped it at frequent intervals.

I was not expecting his signal when it came. He signed to us to halt and dropped on one knee. I took the elephant gun from Sibilit and signed to Mataba to stay where he was. Then I crept forward over the muddy ground till I reached Batavelé. His finger was on his lips enjoining silence and his face alight with excitement.

I crouched down beside him as he bent back the screen of branches with enormous care and found myself looking down into the elephant's mudbath. Hardly a yard in front

of us the ground fell away steeply to form a pool the size of a duck-pond. Beneath the shadow of the giant trees the bath lay in semi-twilight so that I had difficulty at first in making out the elephant at all. Then I spotted his withers and head showing above the surface of the water. They were covered in glutinous grey mud. His ragged ears, rolled at the edges, and the boniness of his spinal ridge confirmed Batavelé's earlier deduction that he was growing old. Then he rolled over and I had a brief glimpse of his tusks—sufficient only to confirm that they were still in place. It was impossible to guess their length and weight as the visible parts were covered in slime and the remainder hidden beneath the water.

It was unthinkable to shoot him where he lay. It would be too great an indignity for the old fellow and, anyway, had I done so the task of carving him up under water would have been wellnigh impossible. I should just have to wait until he had finished his ablutions. But he was by no means in a hurry. He was quite obviously deriving immense satisfaction from the amenities of his dirty pool. Sometimes he rolled so near to us that some of the water he was spraying over himself came over us.

Then, quite suddenly, he was alarmed. He raised himself to his knees and stretched out his trunk, seeking the source of the scent that had reached him. His trunk felt the air like a blind man's hand seeking a familiar object. Then with amazing nimbleness the colossus heaved his bulk out of the mud and water and lumbered hurriedly up the bank. As he gained the top, he paused and gave a bellow of defiance that seemed to make the very forest quiver.

"Baker mémé," hissed Batavelé urging me to shoot, "baker mbala, baker." But still I hesitated. I must be sure his tusks were worth the taking, and as yet I had not had a clear view. I saw them a moment later, just before

he turned his broad rump on me and made off through the forest. I could have had a shot at him as he moved away, aiming at the point where the tail is seated, but forbore to do so. Some hunters assert that a well-placed bullet at the base of the tail of a retreating elephant is fatal; but I had my doubts.

Then the elephant's unlucky star caused him to do a silly thing. Instead of plunging straight ahead to safety, he suddenly swung round across my path, presenting me with a perfect side-shot. Leaping to my feet because intervening branches and leaves were obscuring my aim, I took a step forward and fired.

The next moment I was toppling incontinently backwards and a trailing branch completed my downfall. Uselessly clutching at the air, I went base over apex down the muddy bank and into the filthy pool. In my excitement I had fired while I was off my balance and the recoil of the heavy charge had done the rest. Up to my chest in water, I managed to get a foothold on some roots growing in the bank and began to climb out. But again I slipped and this time I went well and truly under. When I returned to the surface Batavelé was waiting to help me, an immense grin on his black face. True hunter that he was, his first concern when he saw me falling had been for my rifle. He had snatched it up in the nick of time to prevent it joining me in the water. Then, the safety of the weapon assured, he had turned to assist me.

I wiped the mud out of my eyes and received the rifle back from Batavelé. I looked to where the elephant had stood, but could see no sign of him. Batavelé explained by signs that the animal was hit but not dead and immediately set off in pursuit, mad with hunting fever. For the first time since I had known him I had to bellow to make him obey. Reluctantly he returned and stood back while

I went off to complete the job I had started and which I alone must finish.

It was obvious that the elephant had been badly hit; his bowels had erupted when he was thrown backwards by the impact of the bullet. The spoor led in a straight line from the spot, but I could hear no sound of him. Either he was already far away or else he was waiting for me in good cover. Smeared in mud and wet from head to foot, I made my way very gingerly across the sticky ground. Much of the time I could see no more than ten feet ahead of me and I was uncomfortably conscious that attack could come from any side at any moment. I felt as if I were walking through a minefield.

I had covered perhaps two hundred yards when I saw a great grey mass silhouetted behind a clump of bushes not fifteen yards distant. I stood stock-still, the nape of my neck tingling. Then, as I watched, I saw a mighty shudder run through the dark shape and a moment later it subsided with a crash and snapping of branches, flattening the bushes as effectively as if a house had fallen on them. Instinctively I ducked, and when I looked again the elephant was lying where the thick bush had stood. The head, with its mighty tusks, was turned to me, the trunk outstretched towards me.

I raised my rifle, sighted a hand's-breadth from one of the eyes and fired again in final salutation. But he was already dead.

Two days later we marched into the native township of Bembé Ouadaka where they already knew all there was to know about us. Tomtoms had announced our coming and had spread the news of the fortunes of our safari to all settlements up and down the road. One of my porters claimed to be able to read the significance of the drum-beats and from time to time he would pass on to me through Mottenkopf what was being said. Translated

The hippopotamus for the people of Bambi. Everybody is anxious to make sure of his share of the prey.

into the telegraphese of the world's cable companies it would have read: "Last night Eye-On-Stick killed second elephant one-and-half days' march downstream Borni bank. Porters bring much meat with them."

With a favouring wind the tomtom beat will carry anything from three to six miles, which means that, theoretically, a short message could travel a hundred miles in half an hour or so. In practice, of course, it is much slower and as transmission lends itself only to very simple and short messages, anything which does not fit into its limited range must be left unsaid.

On arrival in Bembé Ouadaka we were greeted by the entire village and, most welcome, a lorry from Kadjemah. The good-hearted Cormon, having learned of my progress, had sent the lorry for my more comfortable return. Without more ado we loaded our impedimenta aboard, the boys bundled on top of it and we were off with Obo as our next stop.

My first duty on arrival at Obo was to report my game bag to the District Officer, who examined the tusks, measured and weighed them and entered the results on my hunting permit. All my many documents had to be presented for inspection and my official number punched on each tusk. Even more important from the official point of view was the "game tax" which must be deposited for every pound of ivory taken. In other circumstances all this red tape and paper-work could have been tiresome in the extreme, but the District Officer, Monsieur Perraud, was the soul of charm and, when the requirements of bureaucracy were satisfied, he introduced me to his wife and invited me to dinner.

This young married couple live with their three small children in an isolation which defies the imagination. Madame Perraud has to travel three hundred and fifty miles to Bangassou to do her shopping, and over the most

villainous of roads. Even in Bangassou she has little choice as there are but three shops there, and they have only very limited stocks. The nearest hairdresser's shop and cinema are in Bangui—a journey of eight hundred and fifty miles. Until comparatively recently the Perrauds were fortunate in having a doctor almost on their doorstep —about a hundred miles away across the Sudan frontier where the resident British official was also a doctor of medicine. But Dr. Farrell left the Sudan with the withdrawal of the British administration, so now there is no doctor nearer than three hundred and fifty miles.

The Perrauds' residency in Obo is built of whitewashed clay and palm leaves and consists of three rooms. The service there is excellent. The entire staff, including two male nurses for the children, are convicted murderers. All "life" prisoners are sent to Obo. The conditions are not very strict. The prisoners are shut up only at night; during the day, under moderate supervision, they perform domestic duties or do road-mending. The seven hundred pounds of elephant meat which I had brought with me from my last kill made some small repayment to the men who had built the road which runs through Obo and along which I had driven. The surface of the road was in surprisingly good condition.

I asked Perraud why these life prisoners had not long ago escaped and he replied somewhat cryptically that they would not have got far if they had. He refused to go into details, and I wondered whether he meant that they would become the victims of any cannibal sects which may be in the neighbourhood. More likely he had in mind the Arab slave-dealers who cross the border illegally from the Sudan, and are always ready to buy "black ivory." If the French priest, La Gravière, and the exhaustive reports in the newspaper *Le Monde* are to be believed, in the year 1947 no fewer than 47,000 people were kidnapped in French Equa-

torial Africa and taken to the Yemen and Saudi Arabia to be sold into slavery. According to the estimate of the United Nations Social Council, five per cent of the total population of these territories is made up of recently imported slaves. In this traffic a healthy grown man fetches between £175 and £350, a woman or child half that sum, and a pretty girl double.

I must confess that I have never seen any part of this thriving trade in operation, but I have constantly heard reports of it. Since the British left the Sudan and the Italians were forced to give up Eritrea, no white power remains on the established slave routes to control the traffic. The French, from whose territories the slaves are taken, are largely powerless to intervene because the future slaves are shipped out allegedly as "pilgrims to Mecca" and themselves do not know what is to be their fate. The selected victims are invited by a "charitable foundation" to join the so-called pilgrimage. It is a clumsy trick, but one for which the simpletons readily fall, and is made easier by the fact that it makes no difference whether they are followers of the Prophet or not. The native likes to travel and his hosts do not ask what his religion is. All he has to do is to state at the frontier control that he is a follower of Allah and his Prophet. Colonial powers are unwilling, and properly so, to interfere with the pilgrimages of true believers, and they have learned to tread warily when dealing with Islamic powers who are quick to take offence.

During my return journey to Bangassou I encountered two lorries, fully loaded with black passengers on their way to Mecca. Seated in one of the lorries was a white man!

Mottenkopf had had personal experience of the slave traffic because from all appearances his own son had been sold into slavery. When we had returned from safari in the previous year, he learned that his child had dis-

appeared. The mother, who was expecting an increase in the family, had handed him over to the care of an uncle who lived close to the frontier. The uncle regretted that he no longer had the boy. The unhappy child had got lost. I immediately reported the incident and the District Officer interrogated the whole of the uncle's family several times, both individually and together, but he could not learn anything. One and all stolidly repeated that the boy had got lost, and that was all there was to it. Africa can be truly savage!

My business in Obo completed, we again piled into Cormon's lorry and were bumpily transported back to Kadjemah.

Chapter 9

BILONGO

AFTER a few idle days in the guest house at Kadjemah we set out for the tiny village of Zinga, some seventy-five miles east of Kadjemah on the road to the Sudan. I drove my own car, while the porters and baggage followed in Cormon's lorry. The village of Zinga welcomed us warmly, remembering the meat I had shot the previous year and looking forward optimistically to sharing similar results again.

In Zinga, I installed myself for the night in the local *case de passage*, which is the name given to the rest-houses established by the administration at infrequent intervals along the trunk roads of Central Africa. Of primitive construction—most of them are built of clay and roofed with rushes—they are nevertheless a considerable amenity to the traveller since each has a caretaker to provide water and kindling and undertake the usual domestic chores. They are usually unfurnished, except where there is a *Chef de district* or a *Chef de région* in residence, when an attempt is often made to make them more hospitable. But, since one always travels with all one's household goods, an empty *case* provides no hardship or inconvenience to the traveller.

I was soon at home in the Zinga rest-house, arranging my boxes and other impedimenta just where I had had them the previous year, even to hanging my water-bottle on the very hook which I had fixed for it under the eaves. I felt genuinely touched when the caretaker brought me

two short resined sticks—tomtom sticks which I had bought the year before but had forgotten to take away with me.

The village was peopled only by the old folk. The younger ones had all gone back to Bambi—their village on the M'Bomou which they had long since abandoned—for the fruit harvest. When the white man settled the territory, the ancient road into the Sudan suddenly became the focus of interest to the local inhabitants. They gathered up their belongings and left Bambi for a new settlement athwart the new main artery of traffic—that is to say, where at least one lorry drove through each week. Only when their mango trees on the M'Bomou were in fruit or when fish were migrating in mass upstream did their interest in their old home reawaken. Then all who were young and strong set off for the summer richness of Bambi. On the occasion of my visit they were accompanied by one of the village elders, Futah, doctor, priest and magician all rolled in one.

Next morning we followed the example of the young people of Zinga and marched in two days to the frontier river. As before, the trackers, Mataba and I went on ahead of the porters and managed to get some excellent shooting, bagging two really good waterbuck, a kob and an old hartebeest. But, infinitely more precious, came a gift from the jungle in the shape of a situtunga.

The situtunga, a species of antelope, is much prized among African hunters. Some hunters value its horns more than ivory, not so much because of the rarity of the animal as because of the difficulty of getting a sight of it. It is a creature of the night and extremely shy, living in marshy country and spending more of its time in the water than on land. As a consequence some professional hunters have rarely, if ever, caught even a glimpse of it.

An incredible piece of luck made me a present of this

one. We had found the tracks of a wart-hog and had stopped to listen in case it was rooting around somewhere near. After a few moments we heard a rustling and decided to investigate. We made our way to the clump of scrub from which the sound had come and found that it screened an overgrown pool in the middle of a morass. We could go no farther unless we were prepared to skirt the obstacle and for a wart-hog it was not worth the trouble. We turned back and had only gone a few paces when we heard a splash. Retracing my steps, I could scarcely believe my eyes. Standing in shallow water in the middle of a patch of water-lilies was a real, genuine situtunga.

It was an easy shot and I was over the moon with delight. When I showed the horns later to the game officer of Bangui, he could hardly credit my story because the existence of situtunga on the Upper M'Bomou had never been suspected. Thus this fortuitous encounter a few yards off the trail to Bambi made an interesting addition to the chart of the district's wild life.

Nothing remained of the original village of Bambi but a forest of mango and wild banana. The youth of Zinga had built themselves new shelters of branches which were so flimsy and primitive that it seemed the next puff of wind would blow them away. Our arrival occasioned no surprise, for word of our coming had long since reached them and they had already cleared a space for our camp in the shadow of one of the largest mango trees. Even more hospitably they had cut kindling and drawn water in clay jugs for our use. We could not have been made more welcome.

While my porters busied themselves with pitching camp, I sent for old Futah. I knew that if there were any big elephant in the vicinity this old rogue would know just where they were.

"I know of two," he told me gravely. "Very old gentlemen with tusks too heavy for a strong man to carry. If you want shoot, I make you bilongo."

I raised no objection to his bilongo. All the natives in this area, even those who have been baptized, firmly believe in the magic of a witch-doctor to bring success to a hunt. After a bilongo has been made, all who take part are supremely confident that much meat will result and are inspired to prodigies of labour as a consequence. For my part, I have always found it politic to keep on the right side of witch-doctors. They are cunning old devils who somehow know much more of what is going on around them than any of their fellows. Their enmity can be very tiresome, their friendship well worth having.

"Then make me a bilongo," I agreed. "And if I shoot the old gentleman, you shall have tobacco. Two packets."

The dried-up old fellow shook his head. He wanted his pay in advance, at once, and in meat. Our discussion was not made any the simpler by Mottenkopf's inexpert translation, but after much patient probing I established that some kind of celebration was due to take place and that a great deal of meat was needed for it. The feast was timed for the next day and the animal they wanted was a hippopotamus. There was no alternative. If I would provide the meat for this feast, Futah swore by all the evil spirits of his trade that he would lead me to the finest tusks ever carried by an elephant.

I have never had any desire to kill the harmless hippo, and had not contemplated shooting the one allowed me by my game permit. I was therefore reluctant to acquiesce in Futah's proposition and I spent some time in futile argument with the old devil, but I might have saved my breath. I gave way in the end, trying to persuade myself conveniently but not very convincingly that these people were partners in Africa's natural life and were therefore

entitled to eat a hippo if they wanted to. To be strictly honest, I must confess that I was also influenced by the fact that it would be an interesting hunt.

So, early next morning, Batavelé and Sibilit and I boarded a hollowed-out tree trunk which was propelled by four hefty natives using long poles. These craft are completely unstable and immediately capsize unless prevented from doing so by the skill of the boatmen.

It was hardly a pleasure trip. The dug-out leaked abominably and had nothing in the way of seats. I had to sit slap on the bottom with legs stretched out straight in front of me. I did manage to organize a back-rest from a couple of branches sprung into position against the sides, but nothing could be done to prevent the puddle in which I was permanently sitting from filling up again as soon as it was baled out. These boats often remain out of the water for long periods; as a result the timber cracks in drying and only rarely is any effort made to fill the cracks with resin. But, as I discovered, once you get used to it there is no real discomfort in sitting in a few inches of water; in fact it was rather like floating upriver in a warm bathtub.

Moving slowly upstream, with the French bank on our left and the Belgian bank on our right, I soon saw how narrow is the River M'Bomou at this point. Overhanging branches sometimes touched both sides of the boat. Sometimes our keel—if such a craft could be said to have one—scraped over a rotten tree trunk under water, making an eerie rasping sound. Sandpipers ran along the sandy banks in search of insects, and high up in the branches overhead marabous sat as stiff as pokers. Whenever the banks became steep little cliff-faces, they were punctured by thousands of nesting holes of the little green bee-eater birds which flew in and out like well-drilled troops. Kingfishers flashed down into the water with the speed of

dive-bombers, to reappear many yards away with fish in their beaks. Stately groups of crowned cranes waded stiffly in the shallow water, ignoring the fat crocodiles enjoying their sun-baths a few feet away. But, lazy and sleepy as these loathsome creatures seemed, they were all sharply on the alert. Whenever we got to within fifty yards of them, a shiver would run through the whole group and all would slither to safety in the depths of the M'Bomou.

After we had progressed peacefully upstream for about two hours the M'Bomou, as African rivers frequently do, broadened into a lake. Once in the lake, our boatmen laid down their poles and knocked with sticks against the sides of the boat. The hippo is extremely inquisitive and, if he hears any strange sound, can't resist coming to the surface to see what is happening. Three hundred yards from us the heads of a considerable herd silently rose above the water, showing that they were no less inquisitive than the rest of their tribe.

Every few minutes or so the hippo must come up for air. A few seconds of breathing and then he submerges again. To maintain his considerable bulk he must eat for much of the time that he is not asleep, requiring something like three hundredweight of grass and green food per day. Thus his two prime necessities, food and sleep, are strictly regulated. During the morning daylight hours he spends some of his time feeding. The tropical midday and afternoon are spent in sleep but, as soon as the sun shows signs of going down, he leaves the river again in search of more food, usually returning to the water before the night is over. It is my belief, though it is a theory that many zoologists do not accept, that the hippopotamus sometimes grazes on submerged water-lily roots and other aquatic vegetation on the river-bed to supplement the food which he finds on the river bank. It is reasonable to suppose

that underwater vegetation would be much to his taste, and why else should he remain submerged for intervals of minutes at a time if the attraction is not food?

He often stands to sleep, even under water, and seems to be provided by Nature with an automatic device which brings him up to the surface for air at regular intervals and then lets him sink again when his lungs are full. This action seems to be quite involuntary on the animal's part and seems to go on even while he is asleep. Whether the existence of this "automatic device" has ever been scientifically established I do not know, but certainly my own observations of the animal would seem to confirm the presence of some such necessary organ.

It was just after their breakfast time when we came upon them, and through my telescope I tried to count how many of them there were. It was no easy task because heads kept appearing, disappearing and reappearing, but I came to the conclusion that they numbered about fifteen. As they were gently on the move, the next thing was to find out which way they were heading so that we could work out the best place to position ourselves. After observing them for some time it became clear that they were coming downstream towards us, some fifty yards out from the far bank. I did not like the idea of shooting from the unstable dugout because I wanted to be quite certain of killing outright. My conscience still worried me for having agreed to embark on this trip and would, I knew, be outraged if I succeeded only in wounding my quarry, so I decided I must shoot from the bank in order to get the steadiest shot possible and probably a better view of my target. Very quietly we poled across to the shore and Batavelé and I scrambled up the bank. We found some suitable cover and waited patiently for the herd to approach.

When a hippo takes in air he shows no more of his thick

head than is absolutely necessary, and that is very little. Nature has designed him with nostrils, eyes and ears all on a level high up in the head, so that when his head breaks surface no more than a few inches of skull are revealed. The brain, which must be hit for an immediately fatal shot, is contained in this strip midway between eye and ear. Thus a very small target is offered to the hunter, and he gets very little time for aiming before it disappears from view.

I calculated that the animals were covering about twenty-five to thirty yards along the bed of the lake between each appearance on the surface. It was necessary to establish this point if I was to find a particular animal again. At that distance off, it needed Batavelé's expert eye to pick out the "old man" of the herd; indeed, much of the time I could not even make out the slight protuberance between the ears which distinguishes the bull from the cow. Batavelé soon pointed to an animal which, as he came progressively closer, even I could see was a massive beast. I noted where he submerged each time and calculated when he would next appear. After a time, I found my calculations getting steadily more accurate as the bull gradually came within range.

My first shot slid harmlessly by. In my anxiety to get a perfect sight I waited too long and fired too late. The bullet smacked the water just where the head had been and ricocheted off the surface. There was now nothing for it but to wait and see whether the hippo had recognized the impact of the bullet as an attempt on his life and gone tearing away along the river bed, or whether he had not taken fright and would appear again.

Some minutes went by . . . and up he came. I let him go down again, calculated the point of his next appearance and waited. He surfaced two or three yards from where I had reckoned. I swung my sights on to him, aimed

between eye and ear and fired. Simultaneously with the explosion the hippo heaved half his bulk clear of the water and then sank back into the depths with mouth gaping.

The natives in the boat cheered like men possessed, but I could not share their elation. I passed my rifle to Batavelé and slid down the bank to the water's edge. The boat came round to take us off and, as soon as we were aboard, it noisily set off at top speed for Bambi.

The hippo was left in his grave on the bed of the lake. There he would stay until his gastric juices created sufficient gas to bring his body to the surface. Depending on what the animal had had for breakfast, this would take anything from one to three hours. In a river with a strong current the carcase would have been swept away, but in the still waters of the lake it would surface very near to where it had gone down. As indeed it did when a great gathering of laughing natives went upstream for him later in the day and brought him back to Bambi.

Futah kept his word; he performed a magic dance and prepared a very special hunting charm in payment for the hippo flesh. What the ingredients of the bilongo were I could not guess, nor would he tell me. Perhaps he was afraid of foreign competition. He need not have worried; Zandé magic is too complex an art for me. I once struggled through a book on the subject, lent to me by Dr. Farrell on my first safari. But when I laid it aside I still had not discovered precisely what the Zandé believed, nor which of the spirits of the forest they thought were good and which bad. I gathered they were animists, for whom every form of plant-life and animal-life has its soul, and that each soul is capable of communicating with other souls when circumstances are favourable. I learned that the Zandé believe that their own spirits formerly existed in some other shape, and after their death will again enter some other form of life.

Undoubtedly there is still much that is secret in Africa and in my belief not all the heathen priests are charlatans. For instance, the witch-doctor of Ellé is a much feared man and is grudgingly credited with secret powers even by quite intelligent white people. His village and region lie a bare twelve miles west of Obo, on both sides of the road to Bangassou. Although there are many large elephants in the district, it is claimed that none has ever been killed. No wonder, say the natives, for all the elephants of Ellé are under the protection of the witch-doctor who is himself an elephant though at the moment he is in the guise of a man. Because he protects his own kind from danger he will become an elephant again after his death and lead the biggest herd. However far-fetched this may sound, it is a fact that white men do not hunt elephants in this particular area. Perraud, the District Officer, de Beaumont and Cormon confess they have never hunted there. The sceptical Kespars tried it, but said he would not repeat the experiment.

"I am not particularly superstitious," he told me, "but—hunt the elephant of Ellé? I'd rather not."

I left the natives to their hippo feast and went to bed. I was already asleep when Stinktjadoll wakened me. Futah had news for me. The old man greeted me gravely. "Bilongo has spoken for two elephants," he said, through Stinktjadoll's pidgin French. "Both are old and desire to be shot. To find them you must go farther up the M'Bomou. Their tusks are long and heavy."

As I had already decided to go upstream, Futah's advice coincided with my own plans. I thanked him for his assistance and gave him two packets of tobacco.

Morning saw us moving east in our customary order. The landscape was pleasantly flat and not too overgrown

for easy going. Though the river itself was fringed by forest and scrub, beyond was open plain which made for quick progress.

Nothing of any interest happened until just before we camped for the night, when I shot a buffalo travelling completely alone and carrying a remarkable spread of horns. Of elephants there was no trace, not even of their droppings —that in spite of assurances from Kespars, de Beaumont and Cormon that this was one of the best districts for elephants. It might have been once, I concluded disappointedly, but it certainly did not seem to be now. It happens not infrequently that areas formerly rich in game suddenly go dead, while other areas which once held little interest for the hunter suddenly begin to swarm with life. Nobody has ever explained the cause of this phenomenon, but it seems logical to assume that not only the individual animal but also whole species, at fairly long intervals of time, feel the need for a change of diet and of scene. Such major migrations, which are supposed to take place in eight-to-ten-year cycles, are probably the explanation behind the alarming rumours of whole species "dying out" and "becoming extinct" which you read occasionally in the press. Therefore it seemed to me not entirely impossible that something of the sort had happened to the elephants of this area and that it was now all but empty of them.

To find out if there was any point in going farther I sent Batavelé and Sibilit out alone the next morning, with instructions to return if they found no spoor worth attention by midday. In that case it would be better to return to the road and drive to Bembouti where, in the previous year, I had shot my best bull. It would not have been the first time that I had suddenly changed my plans and tried my luck elsewhere.

The two trackers were very reluctant to go. So blindly

did they believe in the efficacy of the bilongo that they already saw in imagination the two elephants standing asking to be shot and that all we had to do was to press on until we came up with them. Batavelé and Sibilit were so convinced of this that I had to order them to obey and, even though they obeyed, they shook their heads sadly over such lack of understanding of magic spells. The event proved them right. By ten o'clock Sibilit came running back, out of breath with excitement.

"Plenty big mbala . . ." he yelled from afar. "Plenty big tusk . . . baker mémé . . . he sleep and stand."

I jumped up from my camp bed and slipped on my light rubber shoes. Sibilit slung my double-barrelled rifle over his shoulder and began to move off, both of us forgetting my Mauser which was left behind. I grabbed my telescope, threw my rucksack to Mataba and followed Sibilit, who went off at such a cracking pace that I could scarcely keep up with him. After the earlier disappointment enthusiasm and determination were now redoubled and I exerted all my powers to stick to his heels.

After a chase that left my heart thumping, Sibilit stopped so abruptly that I bumped against him—and not only against him but also against Batavelé who must have risen straight out of the ground in front of us. From the light in his eyes I did not need to be told that he had already seen the elephant.

"Baker mbala . . . he wait," he whispered as if the beast were standing immediately behind us.

I took my rifle from Sibilit's shoulder and was ready.

"Anduh . . . We go."

Batavelé hurried forward. The dry grass which had been knee-high now reached to our shoulders. In order to hide ourselves from sight we walked bent double, though the rustle that the splinter-thin stalks made sounded tumultuous in my ears. We were going too fast

I shot this one in the vicinity of the River Borni. His tusks weighed 75 lbs. and 70 lbs. and were 93 inches and 91 inches long respectively.

for my liking, for I was becoming completely out of breath, and should be at a great disadvantage if I had to shoot suddenly. I was about to call to Batavelé to go more slowly when the ground fell away before us and I had a clear field of vision ahead.

Standing in a broad swampy hollow was a herd of fifteen to twenty elephants. Both sexes and all ages were represented, including sucking babies. Some beasts were enjoying themselves wallowing in the mud, others were rocking their heavy heads, half asleep. There were two or three bulls with excellent tusks.

Batavelé turned, grinned and shook his head. This was just "the rabble," he implied. Our target was something better.

As we started to circle the elephants' hollow, keeping to the cover of the tall grass, a trumpeting came from the herd. An old cow must have got our scent. Immediately all heads turned in our direction and the grey trunks shot out, looking like the gun barrels of a field battery pointing at us. The mothers called the young to them, taking the tiniest of them between their legs, while the bulls roared threats and excitedly spread out their ears.

Batavelé and Sibilit disappeared quickly into the tall grass and I followed them, though I should dearly have liked to look longer on the wonderful picture, particularly as there was no likelihood of their attacking us. Mother elephants are incalculable creatures, but as a rule they only become dangerous when you approach too near to them and their offspring.

We had covered perhaps a couple of hundred yards through the grass when we came to a wide, stony clearing, bounded by trees on the farther side. The ground dipped slightly and was covered with thin grass. In the middle of the clearing a single broad acacia reared up and in its shadow stood two elephants. One was very big, very old

and equipped with massive tusks; the other was a youngster with moderate tusks but very lively in his movements. While the old man took his rest calmly with his trunk swinging and his ears flapping gently to cool him, the other shuffled back and forth and constantly sniffed the air. He was the old fellow's page. Such a relationship between two elephants is common and it combines ideally the experience of age with the alertness of youth. It not only serves as a protection against danger but is also of great practical value in the daily life of both partners. The senior partner, who knows all the best feeding places, the pleasantest pools and shadiest resting places, is the brains of the firm; while the junior partner, who is responsible for excavating the tasty saltlicks and pulling down the most succulent trees, provides the muscles.

Such friendships last until the day when an attractive girl elephant appears on the scene to seduce the allegiance of the page. One can imagine him almost blushing with confusion and entirely forgetting his old friend as he allows himself to be drawn by the young female into a large herd. The abandoned leader follows, vainly calling on the page not to desert him, but he preaches to deaf ears and is eventually driven off by the herd into which the page has married.

It is silly, of course, to attribute human feelings to animals or to measure their emotions by human standards, but I am always saddened and shocked by the sight of a lonely old elephant. So sociable a beast must surely suffer much when he is abandoned by his kind. Indeed, the zoologist Krummbiegel tells of an elephant which attached itself to a herd of domestic cattle belonging to a tribe of Masai and refused to be separated from it. As it behaved itself, caressing the cows with its trunk and spraying them down with water when they were drinking, it was allowed

to stay. Eventually it became so tame with the men tending the herd that sightseers used to come from a distance to see this remarkable guardian.

Batavelé grinned at me. "Mbala . . . he wait."

He made as if to approach the two elephants openly. Had not the bilongo said that this old elephant was tired of life and desired to be shot? But for the bilongo, these two would have taken themselves off at the first sound of alarm uttered by the herd, but I had a job to stop Batavelé and Sibilit from striding boldly into the open.

The powder box showed that what little wind there was was blowing across our line of advance. Although it was very light, it was just about strong enough to carry our scent away and prevent it from spreading out around us like the ripples on the surface of a pond when a stone is thrown in. It seemed to me that, as the bilongo seemed to have robbed my trackers of all their customary caution, it was better that they should remain hidden in the tall grass while I went on alone. With not the best of grace they accepted my injunction to stay where they were and watched impatiently while I began to work my way slowly forward with my rifle slung round my neck. Although the terrain offered practically no cover, I thought I had a fair chance of getting within range of making sure of a kill provided that I did not become detached from my background by betraying myself with a sudden movement. As I have said, the elephant's sense of sight is poor; as long as I did not give myself away by dislodging a stone, and provided that the wind held true, my exposed position was not as hopeless as it might appear.

Very slowly the distance between us narrowed. The page was still shuffling about as though bored by inactivity, but showed no signs of suspicion. His leader remained statuesque, motionless except for the slow fanning movement of his great ears. I wanted to get to within a range

of twenty yards to be certain of putting my bullet just where I wanted it. I continued to inch my way silently over the hard pebbles and the sharp blades of grass that grew between them. When I was almost in position, I stopped and very slowly unslung my rifle from my shoulder. As I did so, the old man suddenly wakened up, stretched his legs and seemed to be talking to his page. Then with one accord, they laid their ears back and began to rumble off towards the forest on the far side of the depression.

As I watched them go, disappointment welled up inside me, shutting out reason. The retreating elephants presented a poor mark and one which I would not normally have taken, but now I raised myself to a kneeling position and brought my sights on to the back of the big fellow's head. Then, taking aim a few inches to the side of the ear opening, I fired. The elephant sat down heavily and the page took to his heels.

I stood up, delighted at having brought him down, and as I did so he turned and saw me for the first time. Struggling to his feet, he swung round and charged towards me across the open coverless ground. Again I brought my rifle to my shoulder and my second bullet took him in the middle of the forehead. He hesitated, stunned, for a few precious seconds. Meanwhile my rifle was empty. With my eyes fixed on the bemused beast, I threw open the breech and heard the empty shells come flying out. My hand flew to the breast pocket of my bush-shirt and brought out two cartridges and rammed them into the breech in a single automatic action. As I did so, the elephant came suddenly to life again. He roared and, slowly at first but with gathering speed, renewed his charge. A moment later I was taking aim at a thundering target that looked as big as a barn door, his ears spread, trunk thrust out straight, roaring with pain and anger. I aimed into the open mouth, squeezed the trigger and the hammer clicked.

That was all. I had forgotten to cock the damned thing! In a flash I cocked it and aimed again.

He was only feet away when I pulled the trigger. The bull fell before the deafening explosion, and rolled over on to his side, but he was indestructible. With unbelievable tenacity he scrambled to his feet and again began to come at me. Although I had put some ten or twelve yards between us in the interval, he closed the gap in a twinkling so that the whole of my horizon again seemed to be full of elephant. Again I fired into the open mouth, panic seizing me as I realized it was the second and last barrel. If he did not stay down now, there would be no second opportunity for reloading. This time he rolled right over, his momentum bringing him so close to me that I instinctively ducked, though little use that would have been if any part of his great body had struck me. I ran for some twenty yards and stopped to reload. My fingers fumbled with the cartridges as I saw him making immense efforts to get to his feet again. Would nothing stop this death-defying beast? With his tusks thrust deep into the ground, he had got to his knees, and stones and earth went spraying out from under his hind-legs as he fought to raise his body. Then I realized that his fore-legs would obey him no more. I advanced to within feet of him and as I did so his trunk came snaking out towards me, trying desperately to take me within its grasp. Keeping well clear, I moved round to his side and fired at a range of four yards into his ear. The bullet snuffed out the last flicker of valiant life within him and, as the breath left his body, five tons of elephant rolled over in tired submission.

As I watched, every ounce of my remaining strength seemed to drain from me. I flopped exhausted to the ground, my legs unable to support me. When I had fired my fourth shot he had been so close that he could have caught me in his trunk. In all my hunting experience,

which included tiger- and bear-hunts, I had never had such a narrow shave. As my first experience of an elephant charge, I had no desire to repeat it. I could only liken it to facing a tank in war. At such peak moments of danger all action is instinctive and directed towards annihilating the foe. Panic and the paralysis of fear come later when one re-lives the episode over and over again in the mind.

The fault, of course, was entirely mine. I should never have allowed myself to be stampeded into taking a shot by the precipitate departure of my quarry. As was proved when we broke open the skull, the first shot had missed the brain and embedded itself in the skull. The skull consists of a mass of porous bone which serves as a cushion to the brain. A shot penetrating the bone but missing the brain does not instantly disable the animal, though, as I had learned, it certainly drives it wild.

The second bullet had thrown the beast backwards by the force of its impact. The third and fourth were fatal but not immediately so. It was only the fifth bullet which found the target which the first should have reached.

One by one my companions reappeared, their faces frightened and serious.

"Bilongo no good," Batavelé said sternly, and I had to agree that this elephant had not given the least indication of being tired of life and waiting peacefully for his executioner's bullet.

My fourth elephant, and the last on my permit, was dispatched two days later. He fell to my rifle with so little trouble or incident that his passing is barely worth recalling. Laden with meat we were marching down a track leading to a native village and were so close to the village that quite a lot of the inhabitants had come out and joined us, anxious to stake an early claim for some of the meat. At least that was the reason I attributed to their welcome until I heard the excited chattering of a

group of youngsters of both sexes. From their exaggerated gestures it soon became obvious that they had brought news of great import. I asked Stinktjadoll about it and he told me they were telling of an elephant bigger than anyone had ever seen before.

I was not greatly impressed by their story. To natives with the possibility of meat in sight, every elephant is the biggest in the world, and only because we had an hour or two of idleness in front of us did I yield to the importunities of these youthful trackers and allow them to lead me to the mammoth beast.

After half an hour of chattering progress across open country my companions suddenly stopped their gossiping and began to advance cautiously and in silence. In due course, they paused a quarter of a mile short of a spur of forest and pointed. They would come no farther. Batavelé shook his head with an amused grin and looked at me as though to say, "Shall we humour them?" Before I could answer there came from the thicket all the typical sounds of an elephant feeding from the upper branches of the trees. Batavelé suddenly looked very sheepish and then moved off quickly towards the sounds with Sibilit and me in close attendance. A hundred yards from the thicket Batavelé stopped and indicated that he could smell the elephant, so he must certainly be upwind of us. A little farther on we heard his belly rumbling and then his ears flapping. But we still could not see him.

We gained the cover of the trees and began to move more cautiously. A few minutes later we were advancing fast over the ground, not caring if we made a slight noise because of the racket the elephant was making. We came to an immense tree closely girt about by bushes and raised our heads to peer through the tangle of vegetation. I could hardly believe my eyes. There was the elephant, not five yards away, his trunk thrust high into the branches

overhead, unconcernedly feeding and sublimely unconscious of his danger.

Pressed close against the trunk of the giant tree I watched him. The villagers had certainly been right. He was a vast fellow with tusks such as I could not hope to improve upon. He never knew what hit him. My bullet went straight to its mark and he dropped like a pole-axed ox.

"Bilongo very good!" Batavelé commented with quiet satisfaction.

Chapter 10

THE COVETED BONGO

A FORTNIGHT later the M'Bomou was behind me and the mighty River Sanga ahead.

I had driven over twelve hundred miles westwards from Kadjemah, back along the road through Bangassou, beyond Bangui, to Salo. Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll accompanied me. As supercargo they were an extra burden on the springs of my long-suffering car, but they added immeasurably to the comfort of the journey. When I pulled up dog-tired each night in front of a *case de passage* my work for the day was done. The two boys would spring energetically into action, setting up my bed and bath, cooking the supper and performing the hundred and one chores which I always find so tiresome. Later they would wash my clothes and even clean the car.

The only drawback was that I had to awaken them in the morning. All African natives find it hard to get out of bed, but, once up, Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll worked like clockwork, bringing me breakfast in bed and setting out my shaving kit. After a couple of days they had learned to stow the baggage in the car—which called for a good deal of contriving and ingenuity—and did it so well that I could afford to forget all about it. Thus I could concentrate all my energies on driving eight or nine hours each day, which is far enough for any man on the roads of Central Africa. It was therefore not surprising that I covered the distance to Salo in double-quick time and arrived in the best of tempers.

Salo is one of the main ports on the River Sanga and the terminus of the monthly steamboat service.. All goods for Nola and Berberati are unloaded at Salo and transported from there by lorry. Indeed, Salo is so important that there is even a white resident stationed there.

I sought out this veteran of Central Africa and handed him my letters of introduction in the hope that he would be able to provide me with a boat and crew for a trip up the Sanga.

"They are very lazy people round here," Monsieur Laboureur explained, guardedly. "They will do virtually nothing voluntarily. But my neighbour Ziliox might put some of his men at your disposal."

Ziliox, owner of a large plantation three miles from Salo, was good enough to do so. By a truly incredible coincidence he not only hailed from my home town, but our families had actually been linked in an earlier generation. He gave me some valuable advice and information and, after only two days of preparation, I went aboard a well-built canoe.

At Salo the river is several hundred yards broad, its waters black as printer's ink and mysterious in the extreme. The country on either bank is practically unexplored territory, only the actual course of the river being known. Savorgnan de Brazza, by birth an Italian who later became a French officer and the founder of Brazzaville, the capital, was the first white man to travel upriver to the source. Recalling the place-names of his childhood, he gave every place in which he stayed for any length of time the name of an Italian town. Thus many a pretty little township in Lombardy has its counterpart in the heart of Africa—Salo, Nola, Berberati, Ouesso and so on.

The Sanga was first mapped by a German captain who, like so many other explorers in this territory, was interested only in the river itself and not in the nature of the country

through which it ran. Indeed, the French Government itself had so little interest in the territory that in 1912, at the Conference of Algeciras, it handed it over to Germany in exchange for a "free hand" in Morocco. Under the name of the New Cameroons the territory was joined to the Cameroon Protectorate with the purpose of linking the German colony with the main artery of goods traffic throughout Central Africa—the River Congo.

The Germans enjoyed possession of the territory for only two years before they lost it in the First World War. By chance, I once met in Munich the last German Commander of Nola. Like the Frenchman, Laboureur, he also had little good to say for the natives of his former province —not surprisingly, since they murdered his predecessor, Captain von Ravensberg, whose grave may still be seen in the cemetery at Nola.

The purpose of my journey was to try to locate the almost legendary *poto-pott* of the Sanga, of which Colonel Bonnotte, the great expert on Central African wild life, had told me much. A *poto-pott* is a natural salt-lick frequented by all manner of animals and here I had hoped to get a shot at one of the shyest of all African fauna, the bongo, which is widely but thinly distributed throughout the African tropical rain belt. In numbers it is not the rarest of animals but because of its extremely elusive habits it is rarely seen and is extremely difficult to shoot. Because of this few hunters can lay claim to a bongo, and as a consequence the possession of its horns among one's trophies is counted the summit of hunting achievement among African sportsmen. The ambition to add this splendid trophy to my own collection had been growing within me for years, and here at last was the chance I had been waiting for.

Remembering the discomfort of my previous expedition in a native canoe, I provided myself this time with a

collapsible chair which kept me both comfortable and dry. At my back was my box of books and in front a small table which just fitted into the two-foot beam of the canoe. At midday we went ashore on a sandbank to allow the six boatmen whom Ziliox had provided to make a meal of some pulpy broth, but apart from this break we pushed on without a pause. The endurance of these boatmen was amazing and they were always cheerful and conscientious. Ziliox certainly knew how to train his men. It was hard to believe that they were of the same stock as the lazy, sullen natives of Salo whom Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll, not being able to make themselves understood by them, so mistrusted that they would never leave my side. One tribe's fear of another tribe is deeply implanted in its bones.

On the third morning we reached Bayanga, where we were met with the coldest reception I had ever received in Africa. Some years earlier a white man had lived there, planting coffee and cane sugar, but he had had to give up his plantation because of the intractability of the natives. Each year when harvest time came round, his workers would go on strike, not for higher wages or better conditions, but, as it seemed, from sheer bloody-mindedness. The more the unfortunate planter pleaded and persuaded, the better the men enjoyed the absurd situation which they created.

When we arrived there, we found their outlook had not improved with the years. When the plantation had been in operation, they had become used to buying such things as tobacco, sugar and salt. These they could now no longer buy and for this they blamed all white men. Again, with the gradual departure of the white planters from the neighbourhood, the roads which had once linked the villages along the river bank had fallen into disrepair and were now largely impassable. For this they also blamed

the white man. In fact, according to them, all evils stemmed from the white man and none from their own procrastination and indolence.

As a consequence of this attitude of the native population, the district round Sanga has advanced very little from what it was fifty years ago. Townships like Berberati, M'Baiki and Carnot have persisted and grown, but most of the smaller centres have long since been given up. In 1912 the Sanga steamer went upriver every fortnight as far as Nola; today it goes but once a month and turns round when it gets to Salo.

I began to think that I, too, should have turned round at Salo after I had endured for a short while the lazy, insolent faces of the populace of Bayanga grinning at me in unending stupidity. They shook their heads sullenly to my inquiry whether any of them would care to act as bearers, and showed no glimmering of understanding when I questioned them about the *poto-pott*. This last did not really surprise me because the Bayangas rarely venture into the forest, preferring to keep close to the river banks and eke out a desperately poor living by catching fish. Nevertheless, I had hoped to find one or two more enterprising than the rest who would agree to accompany me at a price.

It began to look as though my expedition would be stillborn because without a guide and bearers I could not hope to get very far. Ziliox's men had instructions to stay with their boat, so I could not press them into service even had I decided to dispense with the services of a guide.

It was a little gnome of a man under five feet in height who brought me new hope. I saw him standing diffidently at the edge of the forest and regarding me with frank astonishment. He had a yellowish skin, prominent cheekbones and highly intelligent eyes. I guessed he was a Babinga.

In size Babingas come midway between the true pygmies

and the normal African native, but what they lack in inches they make up for in brains. Nobody can explain how this odd race came to be inhabiting this corner of the African interior. Indeed, it might be more accurate to ask how the other races came to be there, since the Babingas, who live in the forest and hunt game, may well be the original inhabitants. The negro-type natives live mostly along the river-banks as is usual with immigrants, and their very real fear of the forest suggests that it is territory which is not only alien to them but also to their ancestors.

The Babingas resemble the disappearing bushmen of South Africa in appearance and, like them, are Mongolian rather than Negroid in countenance. Little is known of their language or their way of life, for they have attracted little investigation. They wander the forest in family units, living mainly nomadic lives in the endless gloom and damp of the trees, and existing on roots, herbage and such game as they can trap. Occasionally a member of the tribe will venture into a Negro settlement to exchange game for salt or, perhaps, a knife.

This one was standing staring at me as if I had been a visitor from Mars, and so I left it to Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll to break the ice with him, which they managed with the gift of a handful of salt. Then I offered him a cigarette which was taken eagerly and with a smile.

Hoping for similar gifts, the natives of Bayanga immediately came up to stare greedily at us, but we chased them off to leave a free field for the little man and, as I correctly guessed, those of his brethren who were hiding in the bush. We laid out salt and cigarettes on large leaves along the edge of the wood and withdrew.

A shout from the first man quickly brought a score or more of his people out into the open. Men, women and children ran forward and clustered chattering round the gifts on the leaves. By evening we had been accepted by

the whole band, and by the following morning they had agreed to act as porters and guides. All this was achieved without a comprehensible word being exchanged by either side and I came to the conclusion that our success in winning their confidence was as much due to our friendliness towards them as to the gifts we made them. After my experience of the inhabitants of Bayanga I thought it likely that these little people were unaccustomed to kindly treatment at the hands of their neighbours.

Having settled the final details with the boatmen for our return journey downstream, our safari got under way. It looked very different from my past safaris, for the Babingas carried my impedimenta on their backs by means of a band round their foreheads instead of balancing the boxes on their heads. They had not as much strength as the native porters, so that in some instances the baggage one man had previously carried without effort had now to be strung on a pole and carried by two. But they moved at as good a pace as their bigger brothers and seemed to consider the whole business irresistibly funny. For the whole of the first hour one and all kept up a continual giggling.

That evening we reached a Babinga village—if you could call such a scratch collection of primitive huts a village. The huts were little taller than big dog-kennels and the damp and mouldering earth was their only floor. A wooden trough and a few tools and implements reminiscent of the Stone Age were all the furnishing the huts contained, if you exclude a surplus of people. When the rain poured down, as it did each day in this rainy region, the Babingas were about as well protected in their huts as if they had been standing under a shower bath. Yet they seemed to be used to this amphibious existence and never seemed to notice whether it was raining or not. Even the babies slept on happily under the torrent, while

the adults' gossip never ceased for a moment. Their fires burned in holes in the ground that were so well covered with leaves that even the rain could not get at them. I wondered that the air could get at them either, yet I never noticed one go out.

The whole forest was dark, damp and unhealthy in the extreme. Never a ray of sunlight fell across our path, and nowhere did we find a dry place to rest. We spent much of our time wading the length of the sandy beds of streams, as most of the country around was barred by impenetrable undergrowth.

The second night we spent uncomfortably encamped in the forest. Near by were some broad footprints once deeply impressed in the ground but now almost washed away. I pointed to them and asked "Babinga?" By way of reply, my companions doubled up with laughing, unable to contain their merriment. Finally, one of them put his neat foot into the print. The foot was far too small to have left such a track. I looked more closely at the prints and in a flash I saw the reason for their merriment. Neither a Babinga nor any other human being had passed this way; the print was made by a cousin common to both —a gorilla.

I could now explain the remarkable cries that we heard occasionally and the dark shadows which I fancied I had seen once or twice in the undergrowth. It had not occurred to me that there might be gorillas in this district, for they are not common animals and there had been no mention of them while we were in either Salo or Berberati.

I learned later from a Dr. Corson that gorillas were comparatively common there. However, they were not for me, as they are strictly protected and, anyway, at the moment my sole interest in life was the bongo.

Late in the third day the forest changed its character. The overgrown vegetation at the base of the trees began

to thin out, even disappearing in places. Thence onwards we marched through a vast cathedral with its roof of treetops resting on a hundred thousand pillars and so closely knit that it admitted not a ray of sunlight. In this perpetual three-quarter darkness no shrub or plant could survive. The blackish earth lay bare, covered only with wet leaves which, decomposing, rapidly became earth themselves. Every growing thing strained upwards towards the light. Every sapling concentrated its all into growing tall, its thin trunk wasting none of its strength in putting out branches or leaves. Everything it had went into hastening its thrust skywards. In the upper world of light, where the sun shone on a limitless expanse of treetops, another life was going on. Plants were growing there which only after birth reached down into the depths to make contact with the richness of the soil. In endless profusion roots hung down, varying in circumference from pencil slimness to the thickness of a man's arm. As they bore no leaves and hung free in the air it was not difficult to pass through them; it was like passing through a living wall of ropes and cables. The roots also provided us with a constant running water supply. You had only to cut one to tap the clear cool water that was trapped inside. My filter plant was as superfluous as my water-bottle.

Very little wild life was to be seen at ground level. All life was in the treetops, where parrots screeched and monkeys screamed; where squirrel-like creatures leaped from branch to branch and snakes moved with silent, deadly purpose. It seemed to me that the real surface of the earth was up above our heads and that we had become like moles moving in the depths of darkness.

Although we were close to the Equator, it was cool in the forest twilight. There was none of the oppressive humidity which we had known in the tangled forests on the M'Bomou. At night I had to use my sleeping-bag to

keep out the cold and during the downpours of rain each day I had to keep moving briskly to keep warm.

My first moment of excitement occurred when we suddenly came upon a road—a firm hard smooth road that even the perpetual rain had been unable to soften. It was ten feet wide and dead straight. It had been trodden out by elephant feet, beaten and beaten again until it had attained perfect smoothness. How many animals had passed over it to make it so and how often, nobody could even guess. I was sure it must lead directly to the *poto-pott*, for what else would elephants be doing in a forest which had nothing in the way of food to offer them? With the treetops too high for any trunk to reach them, the road was of interest to the elephants purely as a clear-cut trail in the midst of uninterrupted forest.

A few hours later we reached the *poto-pott* and I revelled in the warmth of the sunlight which filled this forest clearing. It was a place of sand and water about five hundred yards across and somewhat longer than it was broad, and owed its attraction for the beasts of the forest to the salt content of its soil and water. And, judging from the spoor which ringed it, its attraction must have been great, because there was hardly a square yard that was not marked with the hooves of antelopes or the feet of elephants. Save for a thin strip of grass round its edge all vegetation had been destroyed and no new growth had been given the chance to survive. A stream crossing the clearing had been widened by constant treading to a broad shallow pool and the great attraction of this particular *poto-pott* was that its floor was not mud but grained sand.

There were dozens of elephant paths opening into the *poto-pott* besides the one we had come along, giving eloquent indication of the countless hosts of elephants that must live in the hinterland of the Sanga. It was also a flat contradiction of the ill-informed talk which one hears

from time to time about the nearing extinction of the elephant. Such statements are utterly without foundation. Elephant numbers are not decreasing, but are increasing at a great pace, and this opinion is supported by nearly all competent observers. Dr. Albert Schweitzer of Lambarene, for instance, to name but one, has stated that the number of elephants in his province has doubled since he first arrived in Africa. This is particularly true of the Sanga where the elephant herds are completely undisturbed by man, because the Babingas, having no suitable weapons for use against elephants, confine their hunting to antelopes and small game which can be taken in snares and traps. And because the tusks are small and not worth the cost and rigours of hunting them, the area never has attracted, and probably never will attract, white hunters.

When we arrived the *poto-pott* lay deserted in the bright sunlight. Except for some stilt-legged birds whose name I do not know, there was not a living creature to be seen in the clearing. But this proved nothing; most types of game are accustomed to spend their daylight hours in the shade of bush and forest and it was unlikely that any would venture into the exposed brightness of the *poto-pott* by day.

In order that our scent should not frighten away the regular visitors when night fell, we made camp half an hour's march downwind of the *poto-pott* in a derelict Babinga settlement, where there was a clean stream. Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll quickly created my own shelter and the little men did me the honour of building their own little dog-kennels in a circle round it. Compared with Babinga habitations, the houses that Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll built for themselves were almost palace-like. The little men were for ever astonished that my two boys remained dry in their hut when it rained,

and were almost too overcome by the splendours of my own abode even to cast eyes on them.

When the camp was ready, I went back to the *poto-pott* accompanied by half a dozen of the Babingas and set about building a hide in a tree at about twenty feet from the ground. Though my assistants had never made anything like it before, they soon got the idea of what was required and in a short time they had built an untidy but very adequate hide for me. In this they showed themselves much quicker at grasping the essentials than I did when I tried to make a rope ladder under their tuition; in the end I left it to them to complete. Instead of rope they used a pliable liana which could be looped and knotted like string, and in less than a quarter of an hour a handy knotted line hung from hide to ground. The Babingas swarmed up and down it with the agility of monkeys and invited me to follow.

As it turned out, I lagged sadly behind them when it came to climbing, but I certainly beat them on the descent; I was nearly half-way up the ladder when the liana parted and I came down with an almighty crash. I had forgotten that these dwarfs weighed only half as much as I did, but from the unrestrained glee with which my friends greeted the incident I gathered they had cheerfully foreseen what might occur. They continued to chortle merrily until I sent all but one of them back to camp for the night. Then I ignored the ladder and laboriously climbed the tree while my little companion offered encouragement by nimbly hopping from branch to branch and grinning at me cheerfully. Panting a little, I settled down comfortably inside the hide surrounded by my still and movie cameras, both with fitted telephoto lenses; a powerful flashlamp; telescope; some food and the Mauser.

I sat and waited expectantly for whatever was going to happen, hoping with all my soul for a sight of a bongo,

though aware that I should probably be disappointed. After all, I had only hearsay to go on, and although I had examined the myriad antelope tracks that surrounded the salt-lick, I had not really known what I was looking for because I had never seen the spoor of bongo, nor did I know anyone who had. Indeed, the animal is so little known even to experts that in the zoo at Leopoldville there are several situtunga in the enclosure labelled "Bongo."

Another difficulty to contend with was that I did not know the word for the bongo among the Babingas, and I had trouble in trying to make them understand what I was hunting. I had with much pain and trouble managed to draw a bongo, or as near to it as I could manage. When I had shown them the sketch, they had nodded sagely as if they had understood, but I was far from convinced that they had.

In hoping that the forest animals would come into the open as soon as it was dusk, I was too optimistic. Not a beast of any kind showed itself for as long as a trace of daylight remained, but as soon as it was quite dark there was movement on all sides. It was an intensely dark night, the stars and the first quarter of the new moon were curtained over by heavy cloud and the saucer-shaped pit of the *potopott* might have been a bottomless chasm for all that I could see of it. But below us we began to hear the movement of many feet, some light and delicate, some slow and clumsy. When the elephants arrived there was no mistaking their stamping on the wet ground and the sounds of their play in the pool.

Unable to see anything, but hearing so much, I was several times tempted to switch on my lamp, but I kept hoping the cloud banks would roll away and give us at least the light of the stars to see by. Patience at last paid a dividend. My watch showed a few minutes to midnight

when suddenly the stars appeared, followed shortly after by a sickle moon.

In the pale light a picture appeared such as I had never thought to see. The *poto-pott* was as thronged as a city park on a Sunday afternoon, the meeting place of polite animal society, the focus point of constant comings and goings. In ones and twos, and in larger groups, elephants met, exchanged salutations, or passed each other with what might well have been a friendly word. Sooner or later each one took itself down to the salty pool which was the object of these nightly meetings. At their leisure they enjoyed the health-giving spring, drank its waters, bathed and rolled in them, and finished up with a refreshing douche. Everywhere pleasure and concord reigned among them, not a single angry trumpet did we hear, only a sociable hum and now and then an appreciative snort. Unfortunately, it was too dark to examine individual animals closely. Though I called my night glass to my aid, I could not see the size of their tusks nor in the shifting, milling throng could I form any clear idea of the number of beasts.

They had no idea of my presence. My hide was high up in the branches and the pool itself was well below the surrounding edge of the forest. Presumably my scent was flowing away over the elephants' heads even though some of them came close enough to pass right underneath us. As my eyes became more accustomed to the light I saw that the company below was constantly changing. There was a brisk two-way traffic along the roads leading to and from the forest. The steady flow of elephants continued till just before three o'clock in the morning, when the influx stopped abruptly and only the latecomers remained. Then they too went off and the *poto-pott* was finally deserted.

After a brief interval of silence some antelopes arrived

and it seemed to me that they were shyer and more cautious than those which had visited us earlier that night. They were no more than shadowy forms against a velvet backcloth but even so it was possible to detect their quick uncertain movements as they paused, turned back and then danced forward again. It was quite impossible to say to which species they belonged and my only hope now was that they would continue to play in the vicinity until it was light enough to see, but, as it turned out, they were unprepared to fulfil my wishes. As morning came nearer, they began to drift back to the protection of the forest, but I did manage to catch a glimpse of three animals silhouetted against the mirror of the pool and to my disgust recognized them as waterbuck.

The Babinga nudged me and pointed to the edge of the forest. To make me understand further, he made a grunting noise and stroked his belly hungrily. It was a gesture with which I had heartily to agree, for the flesh of the warthog is the best that Africa has to offer as far as my palate is concerned. For a few moments I considered the position. The night was nearly over and from the general movement of the animals back to the forest it seemed unlikely that any would remain until the light of morning. Almost certainly the shy bongo, if indeed any had visited us during the night, would long since have fled. It seemed a pity not to take the opportunity that now offered to supply my friends with a succulent meat meal. I decided to put an end to the night's vigil by turning pig into pork.

My little companion had never used an electric torch and rather than entrust it to him for the first time now I decided to work it and my rifle at the same time. I was aware that it is not considered sporting to hunt with the help of artificial light, but this was hunting for the pot and not sport within the meaning of the Act. My only purpose was to provide my party with a bit of pork. So

I clamped the torch between my legs so that I could switch it on with a slight pressure of my knees and raised my rifle in readiness.

A moment later I switched on the light and its brilliant beam cut through the night. In the circle of light that illumined the *poto-pott* a number of animals were held momentarily transfixed. Whether the wart-hog which the Babinga had heard was among them I never discovered because my attention was riveted on a small company of startled antelopes which my fascinated eyes told me were bongos. Three, four, five, six, seven bongos. I had never before seen this rarely-encountered creature alive, nor even moving pictures of it, and I sat gazing, entranced. As large as deer, they had white stripes across their dark pelts, both males and females carrying the coveted horns. Three of the bucks were staring mesmerized by my light, the authentic milk-white tips of their horns seeming to glow in challenge.

For a second or maybe more, the shyest antelopes in the world stood motionless in the beam of my torch. Then as if in answer to a signal a quick shudder ran through the whole group, and the next instant they had bounded off and darkness had swallowed them again. But that one glimpse was worth all the trouble of the journey to the Sanga. Seven bongos in one place at one time!

I turned my torch on to the Babinga's face. Clearly he was ashamed of himself. What a rotten bargain he had offered me he seemed to say—a handful of stringy antelope instead of a pack of fat, juicy wart-hogs! In his embarrassment he tried to grin and said something like "Makki . . . makki." I thought at first he was saying "Sorry" or "Anybody can make a mistake," but it was not so. The little fellow put his hands to his head, as if he were wearing horns, and pointed in the direction that the animals had

taken flight. Then several times he repeated, "Makki, makki."

This was progress. I now knew the Babinga word for bongo and should be able to make them understand which game I was really after. I patted my rifle and said, "Makki, makki—puff." Then, feigning the joy of a successful shot, I made as if to present my gnome with a whole sackful of salt. After repeating this piece of theatre several times, perfect understanding prevailed between us!

We descended from the hide and the little man suddenly showed some urgency to get back to camp. He went off at such a pace that I soon gave up all attempts to keep up with him. When I got back to camp he was already there and my boys had set the breakfast table and had steaming hot coffee ready, but my companion of the night gave me no time to enjoy it. His face beaming, he ushered me to another Babinga, pointed at him meaningly, and repeated again and again, "Makki, makki."

As the second Babinga was clearly not a bongo, I was forced to the disappointing conclusion that my earlier deduction as to the meaning of the word "makki" had been wrong. But Stinktjadoll showed himself much quicker in the uptake. "This Babinga man," he said, "he bongo hunter . . . you go with him and find bongo meat."

Of course! There could be no other explanation.

In no more than a few minutes I had gulped down a few mouthfuls of breakfast. Then I slung my rifle again and nodded to the bongo man. "Makki, makki," I said. He nodded back, pointed into the forest and signed to me to follow.

Two hours later we were sitting together on the damp earth of the forest and I was thinking ruefully of my very sketchy breakfast. We were back in the forest colonnade through which we had passed on our outward journey and were well concealed in one of the isolated thickets that

grew in an impenetrable tangle wherever a pool or waterhole occurred. With the certainty of a man who knows his home-ground intimately, my companion had made for this particular island and with some difficulty had burrowed a hole into it big enough to lodge the pair of us. By breaking away some small branches and twigs here and there, we could now look out of our hide with a fair field of vision over a largish pool ringed with the spoor of antelope.

"Makki-makki," the little chap whispered, pointing to the muddy pool, and then sat silent. I slipped off the safety catch and crooked my Mauser in my arm ready for immediate action. I had heard so much about the timidity of the bongo, and how it takes flight at the slightest sound or movement, that I schooled myself to stay as still as a statue. The forest was as silent as we were; there was not a sound or movement in any direction. Soon ants and other insects began to crawl over me. A large black caterpillar calmly inched his way up my left sleeve and began to tickle abominably. I made to squash it but a warning glance from my companion changed my mind. The caterpillar continued to tickle. I soon found that the slightest movement on my part caused the Babinga to hiss at me and lay a finger on his lips. "Makki-makki," he mouthed inaudibly and pointed to the pool with his little finger.

To possess a bongo I was ready to do anything, to suffer any agonies. Stoically I let the caterpillar explore my backbone and presented the freedom of the interior of my nose and ears to the world of creeping creatures. Only when something nasty bit my wrist painfully did I start involuntarily. "Makki-makki," whispered the little man inexorably and held his lips tight shut between thumb and index finger. And so it went on, the watching and waiting, minute after minute, hour after hour. It rained and stopped raining. It rained again. The caterpillar, completing its exploration of my neck, started off upwards into

my hair. Behind my right ear ants or other insects equally maddening were having such a wonderful time and becoming so numerous that I thought they must be keeping open house to all their friends and relatives.

Suddenly the Babinga tensed himself, nudged me and smiled. I nodded and smiled to show I was still game and cheerful about it. He pointed to my rifle and I raised it to show I was ready. He smiled contentedly while I strove desperately to discover what evidence of sight, sound or scent had brought him this satisfaction. As far as I was concerned, the forest was as silent and lifeless, except for its insects, as ever it had been. We waited . . . and waited . . . and waited.

Then I did hear something away in the distance, a sound so small that I would normally have missed it. A moment later I was aware of shadows among the trees. I do not usually get unduly excited when hunting, but now my heart was in my mouth and my temples were throbbing. The shadows remained at a distance, standing in the half-darkness of the trees and seeming to look in our direction. I found myself offering a prayer that if there was any wind in this vast silent forest—and I personally could detect none—it would not betray us now.

Almost before I realized it the bongos were among us. With a bound they reached the pool and stood stock-still, sniffing, looking and listening. They were three buck, one a perfect specimen of full-grown maturity. When their ears twitched, I was certain they had heard me breathing. Suddenly the big fellow's head was raised in suspicion and the white tips of his horns glowed almost luminous against the dark background. Something had awakened his fear, and he moved to turn. But my rifle was already in position and before he could take a step to safety I had fired. He fell without a sound and the rest fled. Before me lay

the prize of my dreams; I could hardly believe my luck as I walked over and laid my hand on his horns.

Later, when I was assured that a finer set of bongo horns had seldom found their way from Africa to Europe, I had a job to keep my pride within bounds. In my more reasonable moments I had to acknowledge that the only part I had played was to aim straight and press the trigger. Otherwise the glory belonged to the Babinga and, if reward depended on work done, the trophy should have gone to decorate his walls. But because he had no walls and, anyway, preferred a bag of salt to an inedible memento, the bongo horns now hang on my wall at home.

I stayed for three days more at the *poto-pott* to enjoy the nightly parade at the pool. Then we marched back to Bayanga and were transported back to Salo by the long boat. We arrived there just in time to drive my car—with Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll sitting triumphantly on top of a mound of baggage—aboard the monthly steamer.

Chapter 11

BOBO, THE HERMIT OF THE YÉ

"CONDEMNED to death by shooting."

The sentence of death was passed by the Ministry for Overseas Territories in Paris, and with its pronouncement the days of Bobo, the hermit of the Yé, were numbered. Two murders, dozens of robberies with violence and countless house-breakings were on his crime sheet. The account was complete; justice must be done and only the supreme penalty would suffice. To me was handed the task of executioner.

At the moment when the verdict was reached round the green-baize table, the criminal was at large in the depths of the jungle, somewhere within the area bordered by the Rivers Wag and Yé, close to the frontier between French colonial territory of Middle Congo and the Gaboon. The condemned criminal weighed some four hundred and forty pounds and his chest measurement extended some seventy inches. Bobo, the gorilla, was excelled by none for the meanness of his temper and the aggressiveness of his nature. Even his own family had disowned him and was closed against him.

Normally gorillas live in families of eight to twelve in number. Their food is principally vegetarian—foliage, roots and young shoots—with a leavening of insects and beetles. Each family has its own territory in the forest which is so jealously guarded that no strange gorilla is permitted even to cast a glance in its direction. It is the responsibility of the strongest male to keep order, deal out

punishment and defend the family against all enemies. Apart from man, who rarely invades his dark forest depths, the only enemy the gorilla has to reckon with is the leopard, which will sometimes stalk the female gorilla and her young through the upper branches of the trees under the cover of night. The head of the family, eschewing the primitive nests of brushwood favoured by the females, makes his bed of leaves at the foot of the dormitory tree. There he keeps watch, sometimes accompanied by other males who have grown too heavy and indolent to enjoy climbing.

Their communal life is usually peaceful, and it is rare that they take to attacking human beings; but every now and then you get the exception and such a one was Bobo who had brought fear and confusion to the neighbourhood of Makouré. Nobody knew why Bobo had been kicked out of his family group. Presumably it was because of his intractable nature, or perhaps he had once been the boss and had had to give way to a stronger animal, but without suffering the usual consequences. Whatever the reason, this truculent anti-social old rogue had gone into exile, where he wreaked his vengeance against his solitary state by threatening to attack all with whom he came into contact.

The gorilla is a gregarious, sociable animal which is usually driven to mischief by loneliness and lack of company of his own kind. Bobo was now suffering all the miseries of solitude and the practical difficulties of having no territory of his own. Wherever he went, other families of gorillas drove him away with screams and curses, blows and bites.

So Bobo wandered from the remote forests of his home to other forests where he had to contend only with timorous, weak-muscled men instead of ill-tempered gorillas. In this way he came to the village of Old Pembé. Old Pembé was no longer inhabited as a village because

its people had migrated to the road along which tree trunks were hauled on their way to the River Likuala. But because New Pembé was still without cultivated fields and plantations, the people continued to tend and harvest the crops which they had left behind them at their old village. When Bobo arrived at Old Pembé the banana crop was just ripening and in the plantation Bobo did full justice to his prodigious appetite. This soon brought clashes between him and the villagers and early on in the exchanges the gorilla grasped the fact that the human beings were more than ready to abandon the bananas to him as soon as he showed himself. In a very short time he had built himself up a reputation for ferocity, though whether in fact the disappearance of the two old women reported by the local chief could be fairly attributed to him is open to some doubt. It is quite common for old people to disappear without trace in the jungle and when they do it is not always through the agency of predatory animals.

As a matter of interest, I am told that the Chief of Police at Fort Archambault has estimated that nearly one-third of all natives in his territory meet with unnatural deaths, and the Medical Officer at Port Gentil has stated that many ageing natives who become a burden on their families are disposed of by poison. Certainly you rarely meet grey-haired folks in many parts of Africa, and it is my belief that many of those who are made away with are eaten by those who survive them. There can be no question but that cannibalism, strongly forbidden though it is, still prevails in Africa, because many secret societies, some of them having intellectual and civilized natives among their members, make the eating of human flesh a condition of membership. Furthermore, it is said on quite reliable authority that these practices are not confined to the backwoods, but are even pursued in the towns up and down

the coast, where it is at any time possible to buy human flesh if you have the right contacts.

However, whether or not Bobo was a murderer, there could be no doubt that he became frighteningly aggressive if he was thwarted and when attempts were made to exclude him from the banana plantation. On one occasion he had grabbed a young man who was bravely aiming a spear at him and enveloped him in a savage hug. Fortunately the terrified outcry raised by the rest of the villagers temporarily unnerved the gorilla. He let go of his victim and rumbled off, leaving the young man badly shaken but alive to tell the tale. Since that day the natives had avoided the plantation and the fields around it, and the victor was left to enjoy the fruits of the harvest that the villagers had planted. As this soon meant empty bellies in New Pembé, the village chief donned a pair of long trousers and marched for three days to Makouré to see the District Commissioner. To him he complained bitterly about the savage marauder who was robbing his people of their livelihood. The Commissioner took an official statement and sent it through the official channels by which it eventually reached Paris and Colonel Bourgoin, who is in charge of all animal life in all the overseas territories of France.

All this paper-work and machinery of bureaucracy was necessitated by the requirements of the International Convention held in London in 1933, by which gorillas throughout the world are protected. At the last conference, held in 1955, the French colonial authorities stated that the extent by which gorillas were multiplying necessitated some limited reduction of their numbers in future. This view was upheld by the Conference, so that, in the measurable future, a big-game hunting permit will allow its holder to shoot one male gorilla. Of course, as in the present instance, a certain measure of hunting of these big

apes had always been made necessary by the damage which they do and the perpetual complaints of the natives who suffer from their depredations. Thus to a minor extent the hunting of gorillas, as the hunting of other dangerous types of big game, becomes on occasions a political and sociological issue.

I had secured the job of executioner because I had promised to take the ape's skeleton back in good order to the Zoological Institute of Munich, the Institute having lost its original specimen during the war. So it came about that one fine day my car, crusted with mud, drew up at the village of New Pembé and I sought out the village elder, a dark-skinned fellow named Kemba. Kemba received me kindly and offered to supply me with men to portage my customary impedimenta to the old village. He told me that, since his brush with the young man with the spear, Bobo had been less openly aggressive, though no less dangerous and destructive. As a result of that incident he was giving more play to his natural slyness and cunning, while conceding nothing in ferocity when he thought he was in a tight corner.

This change of tactics on the part of the big beast was something I had not anticipated. From my previous information it had seemed likely that all I should have to do was to stroll over to Old Pembé and shoot Bobo at my convenience. But now it looked as though I should have to move in and wait on his convenience . . . and keep very much on the alert in the process.

Therefore on the following day I set out for the village plantation with all my worldly goods balanced on the woolly heads of local citizens, and Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll lording it over their coloured brethren. The path leading from New Pembé to Old Pembé was narrow and overgrown and several of Kemba's men had to go on in front to hack a way free for us to pass comfortably. In

spite of this we travelled fast and reached our destination by early afternoon. The drunken huts and overgrown village compound looked sadly bereft, and at our entrance a few domestic hens which had been left behind in the general exodus fluttered squawking into the trees, while goats fled into dwellings which had once been built for human habitation.

Nor were the goats and hens the only creatures to take to their heels. Without a word of explanation, or even of farewell, the porters dumped their loads in the shambles of the village and lit out for home like rabbits diving down a burrow. I watched them go in some astonishment and then shrugged my shoulders in indifference. As long as Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll were around, my creature comforts would be well safeguarded.

Surveying the village we found a hut which was halfway to being habitable. It was a derelict-looking abode, but made most attractive to the eye by being almost completely covered with wild flowers. Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll commandeered it for my use, spreading my rubber groundsheet on its floor, setting up camp-bed, table and chairs, and lighting a fire near by. In a very few minutes my bower of blossom was looking extremely cosy. When the boys had set a meal upon the table, they excused themselves and departed. It was some time before I realized they had really left me alone in this wilderness and my first reaction was one of annoyance, followed by disappointment. But upon reflection, and I had plenty of time to reflect, it seemed unfair to blame them. After all they were little more civilized than Kemba's dark warriors and, like all primitives, highly susceptible to mass hysteria. Doubtless the stories of Bobo's immense ferocity which they must have heard recited in the village on the previous night had had their effect; and the flight of the porters had

provided the last straw. I settled down to a long and lonely night's watch.

I made up the fire to drive away the mosquitoes, and hoped it would also discourage Bobo if he took it into his head to take a look at me. I tried to read, but the jungle of the Middle Congo was just waking up. On every side the undergrowth crackled and rustled as light and heavy footsteps moved through the brush, and from time to time a heavy body would splash in the River Yé on whose bank the village stood. The sounds of the forest went on throughout the night until at last the night sky began to show the first streaks of grey. I brewed myself a strong cup of coffee and a few minutes later day had dawned. Then I picked up my water-bottle, pulled on my hat and set out, my rifle at the ready, to take a look round.

I went first to take another look at the tracks which I had seen in the plantation on the previous evening and succeeded in following them for some distance; but my hope that I might be able to follow the spoor right back to the gorilla's retreat proved unfounded. With the passing of the rainy season the river was markedly lower and narrower than when it was in flood. On both sides of its bed there were strips of hard-baked mud, twenty to thirty yards wide, on which no track would print, and it was here that I lost touch with Bobo. He obviously found it convenient to use the smooth path of dried mud for as long as it lasted, and only the direction in which he was previously travelling suggested that he had made off downstream.

So I, too, went off downstream and continued until I reached the damp earth of a tributary where it joined the main river. There was no sign of the gorilla's prints on the soft ground, so I took a chance and followed the tributary till it petered out. Then I retraced my steps to the main river and carried on until I came to a second

inlet. This was little more than a ditch but I pursued it until it lost itself in a marshy pool swarming with flies. Returning again to the river, I followed it until I came to a third tributary that was so completely overgrown by a tangle of trees and branches overhead that I had to advance up it with head and shoulders bent. But it was reasonably wide—twenty feet or so—so that in case of necessity it afforded a fair field of fire and would give me a moment of grace in which to shoot, provided always that Bobo lived up to the reputation of all apes and gave me fair warning before launching his attack.

Walking up a turgid stream under a thick roof of green may have its attractions, but they did not capture me. Every few yards I had to clamber over a fallen tree or push through a damp curtain of lianas and I was very conscious of being quite alone. Batavelé and Sibilit would have been more than welcome company at that moment.

After some time the river widened and banks of sand appeared on either side of the slowly-moving stream. The damp sand was thickly covered with tracks and among them were Bobo's. I did not know whether I was pleased or sorry. This overgrown watercourse was altogether too spooky for my liking, and my nerves were getting so tense that I half expected the ape to descend on my shoulders at any minute.

The impressions left by his feet were perhaps a trifle longer than those of a grown man, but were almost twice as broad. The toes were powerful and strongly marked, with the big toe splayed to one side. There were also the prints of his hands, for gorillas seldom travel upright, preferring to use their doubled-up fists.

An examination of the prints, some of which were clearly more recent than others, suggested that Bobo used this place regularly, and this impression was amply confirmed when I found a dark tunnel through the grass and under-

growth leading away from the river. In such fertile conditions so small a passage would be quickly overgrown and lost if it were not in frequent use. There was no doubt at all in my mind that this was the place where Bobo was accustomed to come to drink. I got down on all fours and started to crawl into the tunnel, my rifle hanging from its sling round my neck. Every few yards I stopped to listen for sounds coming from behind or ahead. After some fifteen yards of Stygian darkness the tunnel split into two, the two arms being so low that to go farther I should have to crawl on my stomach. At this point my nerve failed me and I backed out as fast as my hands and knees would carry me. Back on the river-bank I found myself sweating from fear and my hands all a-tremble. It's remarkable what a lively imagination can do at times to a normally phlegmatic temperament!

I went back to Old Pembé and arrived there at midday to find Kemba and my boys awaiting me. Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll greeted me sheepishly and then set about preparing my meal. I told Kemba what I had found, adding that I proposed to lie in wait overnight for Bobo and shoot him when he came to drink in the morning. Kemba shook his head. Bobo was wise, he said, and very cunning. He would know that he had been tracked by man and would not return to the same place to drink. Instead, he would lie in wait for me and fall on me when I least expected it.

"Nonsense!" I replied, with more conviction than I really felt. "Bobo's afraid of me and won't come near me unless you drive him to me. And that is what you must do, Kemba, drive him to me. You and the young men of your village must surround his sleeping place and drive him to the river where I shall wait. Then . . . puff! Bobo will be dead."

The chief weighed up my words unhurriedly. Then he said:

"For the sack of salt that is in your car and the lantern which hangs in your hut, my people shall do this thing for you."

I thought he was driving a pretty hard bargain, since the prime purpose of my being there at all was to rid him and his village of a dangerous pest, but I did not bother to argue. Having missed a night's rest I was dog-tired and wanted only to sleep.

"Very well," I agreed, "tomorrow night," and I made for the comfort of my camp-bed.

I awoke just before dark to find myself again alone in the deserted village. Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll, as punctilious as ever, had set out my meal and had left a bright fire burning, but of themselves there was no sign. I ate ravenously and then settled down to read. By ten o'clock my eyes were heavy with sleep and I wondered whether I should be taking a foolish risk by turning in. On balance it seemed most improbable that Bobo would seek me out with the purpose of doing me ill, and so I tossed a few logs on the fire and hoped for the best.

I heard very little of what went on in the forest that night and the sun was well up before I awakened. Lazily I lay where I was, until Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll came hurrying up. They set about preparing my bath and breakfast as though it was quite usual for them to precede these preliminaries of the day with a two hours' trek through the forest.

An hour later, bathed, shaved, fed and rested, I felt ready to face whatever the day might bring. At midday Kemba came marching in at the head of a straggling army of men who had smeared themselves from head to foot with white clay and decorated their heads with feathers and magic herbs. Every man had armed himself several times over

with spears, axes and knives, and three of them carried ancient muzzle-loaders.

From then until evening women kept arriving bringing millet and manioc. They set to work to light fires and soon thirty to forty fires licked and crackled in front of the repossessed huts, their smoke rising straight to the treetops.

The painted warriors polished their spears and recounted deeds of their own heroism which almost certainly never happened, and the night was filled with excitement and tension such as they could not have known since the old days of tribal warfare.

At midnight I sent word to Kemba and torches were lighted. The men picked up their weapons and began to file off to the stream, still discussing their adventurous pasts. I waded ahead of them, for their fear of Bobo had in no way dissipated. The line of flickering torches, lighting up the paint and clay on their bodies, presented a truly bizarre picture.

We halted the men a quarter of a mile from the tunnel and Kemba and I went on alone. When we reached the sandbank I showed him the footprints.

"Bobo has been here tonight," he said with ponderous gravity. "He saw your tracks but was not afraid . . . Bobo is afraid of no man."

I thought the chief was wrong. As far as I could remember there were no new prints since I had been here last, and the idea that the ape's intelligence extended to recognizing man's footprints in the sand struck me as absurd. Equally absurd, I hoped, was the statement that Bobo was afraid of no man.

Kemba returned to the main party and I took up my position in the water, some six paces from the entrance to the tunnel and to one side of it so that Bobo would not see me before I saw him. Standing watchful and silent, I heard Kemba giving last-minute instructions to the men

and later listened to their progress through the brush as they described a wide semicircle of which the two ends joined the river. Kemba believed, and I was disposed to concur, that somewhere within that semicircle the gorilla had his retreat. Spaced at twenty-yard intervals, the men would stand for the rest of the night holding their torches aloft to discourage any attempt at a break-through. Then, if Bobo had not shown himself by full daylight, they were to converge on the river, slowly decreasing the twenty-yard gaps between them.

I reckoned that even a gorilla with the legendary powers of Bobo would lose his nerve and make a break for it before the noise, smoke and flames of one hundred and fifty wild men and their blazing torches. If and when that happened, there was only one direction in which he could go —away from the men and towards the river. Driven by fear, he would almost certainly take the most familiar route and that, I hoped, would bring him to the mouth of the tunnel. It was as simple as that.

All kinds of creatures were moving in and about my stream, and damp disgusting creepy-crawlies kept falling off the overhanging branches on to the back of my neck. I had spent many a night in the jungle waiting for the morning, but this was the first time I had tried it standing in water. I wouldn't particularly recommend it because, apart from its minor discomfort, it makes one feel at a disadvantage, unable to move as quickly and as surely as one would like. This is a feeling that is heightened and enhanced by the knowledge that one's adversary is an agile, cunning and immensely strong creature which may appear from nowhere at any moment with the meanest of intentions.

When, hours later, the sun rose, only the slightest suggestion of the new day filtered down through the overhead

foliage. Not until it was broad daylight would there be more than a cavernous gloom here below.

During my vigil, I had heard, but not seen, many creatures come to the water's edge to drink and I wondered whether Bobo had been among them. Now it was becoming perceptibly lighter each moment and no creature stirred. I was alone in the half-light, waiting for the moment to begin for which the night hours had been only the preparation. Then I heard it, the rhythmical chant of the beaters as they slowly advanced on the river. If my deduction was correct, somewhere between them and me lay Bobo, the gorilla.

I was angry with Kemba. He had started to beat at least fifteen minutes too soon. There was still a slight mist hanging over the water, so that, if Bobo appeared now, I should have difficulty in seeing well enough to take proper aim. Nervously I slipped back the safety catch of my big elephant gun and fixed my eyes on the entrance of the tunnel, which was no more than a darker tone of the generally dark and indistinct background. Except for the noise of the oncoming beaters, all was silence, as though the forest itself were tensed for the drama about to be played.

Suddenly, to my eternal gratitude, the wraith of mist rose upwards like a thin pall of smoke, and with its passing I found I could see much better. The entrance to the tunnel now showed distinct from its background and I glued my eyes to it until they began to water and ache.

Five minutes later there was still no sign of Bobo and by then it was clear that if he did not come in the next couple of minutes he would not come at all. The chant of the beaters was now very close and it did not seem possible that the gorilla would wait until they were right on him before he tried to slip away. Very quietly I moved my stand closer to the bank on the tunnel side so that, if I had

to fire, I should shoot across the mouth of the tunnel and not out towards the line of advancing beaters.

I felt stiff and tired, and had all but given up hope, when there was a soft plop on the bank beside me and there was Bobo, a good fifteen yards from where I had expected him, in the act of rising up on to his hind legs. I swung my rifle round on to him in an automatic movement and as I did so he began to beat with his fists on his black hairy chest in the best boys'-magazine tradition. I held my fire and the next instant he was screaming defiance at me. Then he dropped back on to his powerful fists and showed a mouthful of ugly yellow teeth, while bunched muscles rippled under the skin of his shoulders. As he lowered his head and arched his back, I aimed at his right eye.

With the noise of the explosion, the giant stopped moving, his mouth opened wide and where the eye had been there was only a red hole. I fired again and the body curved forward and crashed into the stream. Water splashed up into my face so that I had to wipe it from my eyes. Bobo was dead.

In the end it had all happened unbelievably quickly—a bare two seconds for the climax of a night's watching. I went over to the sandbank and sat down, waiting for Kemba and the beaters to come up. A few yards away the water played with the untidy hair of the great black carcase. A few moments later all hell broke loose as the beaters leapt into the river and danced shrieking and jeering at their fallen enemy. It was with some trouble that I managed to prevent the painted warriors from tearing the giant to pieces where he lay.

When the first frenzy of excitement had burnt itself out, the natives carried Bobo back to the old village on a litter of branches. There they skinned him and without his shaggy coat he looked so much like a man that I had to turn away. By ancient custom Kemba claimed the heart, ex-

plaining to me: "Now I shall be as strong and brave as Bobo."

"Now you will be as hairy as Bobo," I retorted.

I have always experienced some revulsion when the African native hurls himself greedily on the carcase of a beast, but the present scene surpassed anything I had previously seen. There is a marked difference between men devouring hunks of antelope or elephant and women fighting for the bloody forearm of a gorilla. For my money, it was little better than watching a cannibal feast!

But I had to overcome my nausea and stay, for it was part of my job to ensure that not a single bone was lost. To this end I had insisted on taking an active part in the dissection of the carcase so that the skeleton would suffer the minimum of disruption, and as it would have been well-nigh impossible to keep track of all the small bones of the hands and feet, I had reserved these members to myself. I had also appropriated the head. For the rest I made it known that I was ready to pay in salt for all bones which were brought to me. Even so I had to keep moving from cooking pot to cooking pot with frequent reminders and renewals of the offer because, with maddening disregard of my injunctions, the feasting natives would keep tossing the well-sucked bones into the undergrowth or would crack them between their teeth in order to secure the marrow.

In the following morning, as far as my limited knowledge of anatomy would permit it, I rebuilt the skeleton on the ground and, by means of further bribes, persuaded search parties to hunt for the missing pieces. It seemed to me that the Zoological Institute authorities in Munich would have little thanks to offer me if I turned in only half a skeleton.

Satisfied at last, I packed the whole collection in salt, and coated the skin with becquer-salbe. With nothing further to wait for, I set off for New Pembé where my car waited.

Mottenkopf and Stinktjadoll soon had it loaded up and we got under way to put a few miles between us and the village before darkness. The next day we drove into Makouré and reported to the District Commissioner that the execution had been duly carried out.

"Where are you off to now?" he asked. "Back east for the hunting? Or have you shot all the game on your permit?"

I shook my head. "I'm still entitled to a little more," I said, "but I shall not take it. As a matter of fact I have a sudden yen to see civilization again, though God knows why! Silly, isn't it?"

On the pages which follow are details of other books of interest to Big Game hunters.

MAN AND BEAST IN AFRICA

By François Sommer

With a Foreword by Ernest Hemingway

Profusely illustrated with superb photographs 30/-

"This is surely one of the best books on the subject which has been produced for many years. Not only is it written by one of the great authorities on African game, famed both as a hunter and as a 'reservationist', but the whole history connected with big game is traced.... Quite apart from the value of the work as a reference volume, and as a guide to the wild life in Africa, there is no lack of exciting incidents throughout its pages."—*Shooting Times.*

"Innumerable and often thrilling anecdotes of personal encounters with animals which he has hunted, photographed, and observed with sympathy and understanding."—*The Scotsman.*

"... A wonderful new book about big-game hunting written with real authority ... splendid illustrations. His book is worth getting for their sake alone."—*Ian Fielding, B.B.C.*

HERBERT JENKINS LTD., 3 Duke of York St., London, S.W.1

HUNTER AT HEART

by B. N. Gordon Graham

With a Foreword by H. V. T. Blackburn

Illustrated 15/-

This book will appeal to all in whom the spirit of adventure still lives. It is the outcome of the author's experiences of hunting big and small game in the jungles of India and Ceylon, and affords the would-be hunter the most up-to-date, detailed and practical advice on all that is involved in a jungle expedition – on equipment, food, medical stores and the choice of weapons.

The Field: "Fills a long-felt want, for it is carefully and accurately written and tells the tyro exactly what he needs to know."

Shooting Times: "The author has a unique experience of both big and small game of the jungles of India and Ceylon, and he gives the reader the very fullest and most up-to-date detailed information and practical advice."

HERBERT JENKINS LTD., 3 Duke of York St., London, S.W.1

BIG GAME AND BIG GAME RIFLES

by John Taylor

Fourth impression. 15/-

"There can be little doubt," the author says in his Preface, "that a book dealing with rifles suitable for all types of African hunting is badly needed. Most books on big game hunting devote a short chapter to rifles; but, in the great majority of cases, the writers of these books, having found a battery which proves satisfactory, give up experimenting and just praise and recommend those particular weapons which they are using. Consequently, a great many of these books must be read before a thorough grasp of the subject is possible."

This book, therefore, not only provides for a definite need, but, as a summary of the author's wide experiences as a professional elephant hunter for twenty-five years, and the conclusions to which these experiences have brought him, it is unique both in its scope and in the information it affords.

"I describe," he continues, "various incidents in my own career as a professional hunter, and in the lives of other hunters, in the hope that these incidents will serve to substantiate my arguments. In addition, I have not a little to say concerning the habits of the different species of big game. I consider this most necessary, because if a man knows something of the conditions under which he is liable to encounter an animal, he will be better able to appreciate why certain weapons would be more suitable for him to carry than others."

The Field: "This book contains very interesting and instructive material on African big game shooting and rifles and ammunition for that purpose. Altogether a most useful and informative book for the novice or the expert."

Shooting Times: "His expert advice is worthy of profound consideration."

HERBERT JENKINS LTD., 3 Duke of York St., London, S.W.1