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MARY KINGSLEY

(1862-1900)

Mary Kingsley belongs to that selective group of Englishwomen who had good breeding, poor health, unconventional intellects, and a lust

for the exotic. Like Gertrude Bell, Isabella Bird, and a handful of others, Mary Kingsley came into her own when she cut loose from the constraints of Victorian society and began a life of traveling abroad. Her ultimate thule was West Africa, a place she'd heard about from her explorer-physician father, Charles Kingsley. Her parents died when she was thirty, leaving her free from domestic responsibilities for the first time in her life. She was interested in collecting natural history specimens for the British Museum, and she wanted to continue her father's study of religious fetishes. Fish and fetishes were her purpose she said (and she did return with "one absolutely new fish," which was named after her), but she soon found that everything about Africa captured her imagination.

*She made two journeys to West Africa, in 1893 and again in 1894-95. She published *Travels with great success* in 1897. When the Boer War broke out a few years later, she returned to nurse prisoners of war in Cape Town. But within a few months she caught enteric fever and died at the age of thirty-eight.*

Kingsley traveled alone, with so little money that she bartered for food and often slept under the sky. The fact that she never came down with a tropical illness, or came to grief while whacking her way through the jungle or running the rapids on the Ogowe (as in the following passage), is nothing short of a miracle. But in fact, there never was a more lighthearted and stalwart traveler, and she approached every danger with a peculiar combination of understatement and wonder. Entirely undisciplined and unrefined, her writing sings with a rare wit, clarity, and her disarming force of personality.

Mme Forget received me most kindly and hospitably, she, with her husband and her infant daughter, and M. and Mme Gacon represent the Mission Evangelique and the white race at Talagouga. Mme Forget is a perfectly lovely French girl, with a pale transparent skin and the most perfect great dark eyes, with indescribable charm, grace of manner, and vivacity in conversation. It grieves me to think of her, wasted on this savage wilderness surrounded by its deadly fever air. Oranie Forget, otherwise the baby, although I am not a general admirer of babies of her age—a mere matter of months—is also charming; I am not saying this because she flattered me by taking to me—all babies and children do that—but she has great style, and I have no doubt she will grow up to be a beauty too, but she would have made a dead certainty of it, if she had taken after her mother.

The mission station at Talagouga is hitched on to the rocky hillside, which rises so abruptly from the river that there is hardly room for the narrow footpath which runs along the river frontage of it. And when you are on the Forgets' verandah it seems as if you could easily roll right off it into the dark, deep, hurrying Ogowe. I suggest this to Mme Forget as an awful future for Oranie, but she has thought of it and wired the verandah up. You go up a steep flight of steps into the house, which is raised on poles some fifteen feet above the ground in front, and you walk through it against the hillside, made up mostly of enormous boulders of quartz, for Talagouga mountains are the western termination of the side of the Sierra del Cristal range. When you get through the house you come to more stairs, cut out now in the hillside rock and leading to the kitchen to the right, and to the store buildings; to the left they continue up to the church, which is still higher up the hill-face. That church is the prettiest I have seen in Africa. I do not say I should like to sit in it, because there seems to me no proper precautions taken to exclude snakes, lizards, or insects, and there would be great difficulty in concentrating one's mind on the higher life in the presence of these fearfully prevalent

lower forms.

Across the other side of the ravine and high up, is perched the house which Dr Nassau built, when he first established mission work on the Upper Ogowe. The house is now in ruins; but in front of it, as an illustration of the transitory nature of European life in West Africa, is the grave of Mrs Nassau, among the great white blocks of quartz rock, its plain stone looking the one firm, permanent, human-made-thing about the place.

Talagouga is grand, but its scenery is undoubtedly grim, and its name, signifying the gateway of misery, seems applicable. It must be a melancholy place to live in, the very air lies heavy and silent. I never saw the trees stirred by a breeze the whole time I was there, even the broad plantain leaves seemed to stand sleeping day out and day in, motionless. The only sign of motion you get is in the Ogowe; if you look at it you see, in spite of its dark quiet face, that it is sweeping past at a terrific pace. One great gray rock sticks up through it just below the mission beach, and from that lies ever a silver streak from the hindrance it gives the current.

Every now and again you will notice a canoe full of wild, naked, or nearly naked savages, silent because they are Fans, and don't sing like Igalwas or M'pongwe when in canoes. They are either paddling very hard and creeping very slowly upwards, against one of the banks, or just keeping her head straight and going rapidly down. Now and again you will hear the laboured beat of the engines of either the *Move* or *Eclairer*, before you see the vessel and hear the warning shriek of their whistles; and you can watch her as she comes up fighting her way to Njole, or see her as she comes down, slipping past like a dream in a few seconds, and that is all.

I spent the succeeding days in buying fish from the natives, who brought it in quantities, mostly of two sorts, and of course wanted enormous prices for it; but I confess I rather enjoy the give-and-take fun of bartering against their extortion, and my trading with them introduced us to each other so that when we met in the course of the long climbing walks I used to take beetle-hunting in the bush behind the mission station, we knew about each other, and did not get much shocked or frightened.

That forest round Talagouga was one of the most difficult bits of country to get about in I ever came across, for it was dense and there were no bush paths. No Fan village wants to walk to another Fan village for social civilities, and all their trade goes up and down the river in canoes. No doubt some miles inland there are bush paths, but I never struck one, so they must be pretty far away. Neither did I come across any villages in the forest, they seem all to be on the river bank round here.

Now and again, on exposed parts of the hillside, one comes across great falls of timber which have been thrown down by tornadoes either flat on to the ground-in which case under and among them are snakes and scorpions, and getting over them is slippery work; or thrown sideways and hanging against their fellows, all covered with gorgeous drapery of climbing, flowering plants-in which case they present to the human atom a wall made up of strong tendrils and climbing grasses, through which the said atom has to cut its way with a matchette and push into the crack so made, getting, the while covered with red driver-ants, and such like, and having sensational meetings with blue-green snakes, dirty green snakes with triangular horned heads, black cobras, and boa constrictors. I never came back to the station without having been frightened half out of my wits, and with one or two of my small terrifiers in cleft sticks to bottle.

When you get into the way, catching a snake in a cleft stick is perfectly simple. Only mind you have the proper kind of stick, split far enough up, and keep your attention on the snake's head, that's his business end, and the tail which is whisking and winding round your wrist does not matter: there was one snake, by the way, of which it was impossible to tell, in the forest, which was his head. The natives swear he has one at each end; so you had better "Lef 'em", even though you know the British Museum would love to have him, for he is very venomous, and one of the few cases of death from snake-bite I have seen, was from this species.

Several times, when further in the forest, I came across a trail of flattened undergrowth, for fifty or sixty yards, with a horrid musky smell that demonstrated it had been the path of a boa constrictor, and nothing more.

It gave me more trouble and terror to get to the top of those Talagouga hillsides than it gave me to go twenty miles in the forests of Old Calabar, and that is saying a good deal, but when you got to the summit there was the glorious view of the rest of the mountains, stretching away, interrupted only by Mount Talagouga to the S.E. by E. and the great, grim, dark forest, under the lowering gray sky common during the dry season on the Equator. No glimpse or hint did one have of the Ogowe up here" so deep down in its ravine does it flow. A person coming to the hill tops close to Talagouga from the N. or N.N.W. and turning back in his track from here might be utterly unconscious that one of the great rivers of the world was flowing, full and strong, within some 800 feet of him. There is a strange sense of secretiveness about all these West African forests; but I never saw it so marked as in these that shroud the Sierra del Crista!. I very rarely met any natives in this part; those that I did were hunters, big, lithe men with all their toilet attention concentrated on their hair. On two occasions I ran some risk from having been stalked in mistake for game by these hunters. I escaped, however, because these men get as close as they can to their prey before firing; and when they found out their mistake they were not such cockney sportsmen as to kill me because I was something queer, and we stood and stared at each other, said a few words in our respective languages, and parted. One thing that struck me very much in these forests was the absence of signs of fetish worship which are so much in evidence in Calabar, where you constantly come across trees worshipped as the residences of spirits, and little huts put up over offerings to bush souls.

All the balance of the time I was at Talagouga I spent in trying to find means to get up into the rapids above Njole, for my heart got more and more set on them now that I saw the strange forms of the Talagouga fishes, and the differences between them and the fishes at Lambarene. For some time no one whom I could get hold of regarded it as a feasible scheme, but, at last, M. Gacon thought it might be managed; I said I would give a reward of 100 francs to anyone who would lend me a canoe and a crew, and I would pay the working expenses, food, wages, &c. M. Gacon had a good canoe and could spare me two English-speaking Igalwas, one of whom had been part of the way with MM. Allegret and Teisseres, when they made their journey up to Franceville and then across to Brazzaville and down the Congo two years ago. He also thought we could get six Fans to complete the crew.

I was delighted, packed my small portmanteau with a few things, got some trade goods, wound up my watch, ascertained the date of the day of the month, and borrowed three hairpins from Mme Forget, then down came disappointment. On my return from the bush that evening, Mme Forget said M. Gacon said "it was impossible," the Fans round Talagouga wouldn't go at any price above Njole, because they were certain they would be killed and eaten by the up-river Fans. Internally consigning the entire tribe to regions where they will get a rise in temperature, even in this climate, I went with Mme Forget to M. Gacon, and we talked it over; finally, M. Gacon thought he could let me have two more Igalwas from Hatton and Cookson's beach across the river. Sending across there we found this could be done, so I now felt I was in for it, and screwed my courage to the sticking point-no easy matter after all the information I had got into my mind regarding the rapids of the River Ogowe.

I ESTABLISH MYSELF on my portmanteau comfortably in the canoe, my back is against the trade box, and behind that is the usual mound of

pillows, sleeping mats, and mosquito-bars of the Igalwa crew; the whole surmounted by the French flag flying from an indifferent stick.

M. and Mme Forget provide me with everything I can possibly require, and say, that the blood of half my crew is half alcohol; on the whole it is patent they don't expect to see me again, and I forgive them, because they don't seem cheerful over it; but still it is not reassuring-nothing is about this affair, and it's going to rain. It does, as we go up the

river to Njole, where there is another risk of the affair collapsing, by the French authorities declining to allow me to proceed. On we paddled, M'bo the head man standing in the bows of the canoe in front of me, to steer, then I, then the baggage, then the able-bodied seamen, including the cook also standing and paddling; and at the other extremity of the canoe-it grieves me to speak of it in this unseamanlike way, but in these canoes both ends are alike, and chance alone ordains which is bow and which is stern-stands Pierre, the first officer, also steering; the paddles used are all of the long-handled, leaf-shaped Igalwa type.

Two hours after leaving Njole we are facing our first rapid. Great grayblack masses of smoothed rock rise up out of the whirling water in all directions. These rocks have a peculiar appearance which puzzle me at the time, but in subsequently getting used to it I accepted it quietly and admired. When the sun shines on them they have a *soft* light blue haze round them, like a halo. The effect produced by this, with the forested hillsides and the little beaches of glistening white sand was one of the most perfect things I have ever seen.

We kept along close to the right-hand bank, dodging out of the way of the swiftest current as much as possible. Ever and again we *were* unable to force our way round projecting parts of the bank, so we then got up just as far as we could to the point in question, yelling and shouting at the tops of our voices. M'bo said "Jump for bank, *sar*," and I "up and jumped," followed by half the crew. Such banks! sheets, and walls, and rubbish heaps of rock, mixed up with trees fallen and standing. One appalling corner I shall not forget, *for* I had to jump at a rock wall, and

hang on to it in a manner more befitting an insect than an insect-hunter, and then scramble up it into a close-set *forest*, heavily burdened with boulders of all sizes.

I wonder whether the rocks or the trees *were* there first? There is evidence both ways, *for* in one place you will see a rock on the top of a tree, the tree creeping out from underneath it, and in another place you will see a tree on the top of a rock, clasping it with a network of roots and getting its nourishment, goodness knows how, for these are by no means tender, digestible sand-stones, but uncommon hard gneiss and quartz which has no idea of breaking up into friable small stuff, and which only takes on a high polish when it is vigorously sanded and canvassed by the Ogowe. While I was engaged in climbing across these promontories, the crew would be busy shouting and hauling the canoe round the point by means of the strong chain provided for such emergencies fixed on to the bow. When this was done, in we got again and paddled away until we met our next affliction.

M'bo had advised that we should spend our first night at the same village that M. Allegret did: but when we reached it, a large village on the north bank, we seemed to have a lot of daylight still in hand, and thought it would be better to stay at one a little higher up, so as to make a shorter day's work *for* tomorrow, when we wanted to reach Kondo Kondo; so we went against the bank just to ask about the situation and character of the up-river villages. The row of low, bark huts was long, and extended its main frontage close to the edge of the river bank. The inhabitants had been watching us as we came, and when they saw we intended calling that afternoon, they charged down to the river-edge hopeful of excitement.

They had a great deal to say, and so had we. To M'bo's questions they gave a dramatic entertainment as answer, after the manner of these brisk, excitable Fans. One chief, however, soon settled down to definite details, prefacing his remarks with the silence-commanding "Azuna' Azuna!" and his companions grunted approbation of his observations. He took a piece of plantain leaf and *tore* it up into five different-sized bits. These he laid

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along the edge of our canoe at different intervals of space, while he told M'bo things, mainly scandalous, about the characters of the villages, these bits of leaf represented, save of course about bit A, which represented his own. The interval between the bits was proportional to the interval between the villages, and the size of the bits was proportional to the size of the village. Village number *four* was the only one he should recommend our going to.

When all was said, I gave our kindly informants some heads of tobacco and many thanks. Then M'bo sang them a

hymn, with the assistance of Pierre, half a line behind him in a different key, but every bit as flat. The Fans seemed impressed, but any crowd would be by the hymn-singing of my crew, unless they were inmates of deaf and dumb asylums. Then we took our farewell, and thanked the village elaborately for its kind invitation to spend the night there on our way home, shoved off and paddled away in great style just to show those Fans what Igalwas could do.

We hadn't gone 200 yards before we met a current coming round the end of a rock reef that was too strong for us to hold our own in, let alone progress. On to the bank I was ordered and went; it was a low slip of rugged confused boulders and fragments of rocks, carelessly arranged, and evidently under water in the wet season. I scrambled along, the men yelled and shouted and hauled the canoe, and the inhabitants of the village, seeing we were becoming amusing again, came, legging it like lamplighters, after us, young and old, male and female, to say nothing of the dogs. Some good souls helped the men haul, while I did my best to amuse the others by diving headlong from a large rock on to which I had elaborately climbed, into a thick clump of willow-leaved shrubs. They applauded my performance vociferously, and then assisted my efforts to extricate myself, and during the rest of my scramble they kept close to me, with keen competition for the front row, in hopes that I would do something like it again. But I refused the *encore*, because, bashful as I am, I could not but feel that my last performance was carried out with all the superb reckless *abandon* of a Sarah Bernhardt, and a display of art of this order should satisfy any African village for a year at least. At last I got across the rocks on to a lovely little beach of white sand, and stood there talking, surrounded by my audience, until the canoe got over its difficulties and arrived almost as scratched as I; and then we again said farewell and paddled away, to the great grief of the natives, for they don't get a circus up above Njole every week, poor dears.

About 8 P.M. we came to a corner, a bad one; but we were unable to leap on to the bank and haul round, not being able to see either the details or the exact position of the said bank, and we felt, I think naturally, disinclined to spring in the direction of such bits of country as we had had experience of during the afternoon. We fought our way round that corner, yelling defiance at the water, and dealt with succeeding corners on the *vi et armis* plan, breaking, ever and anon, a pole.

About 9.30 we got into a savage rapid. We fought it inch by inch. The canoe jammed herself on some barely sunken rocks in it. We shoved her off over them. She tilted over and chucked us out. The rocks round being just a wash, we survived and got her straight again, and got into her and drove her unmercifully; she struck again and bucked like a broncho, and we fell in heaps upon each other, but stayed inside that time—the men by the aid of their intelligent feet, I by clinching my hands into the bush rope lacing which ran round the rim of the canoe and the meaning of which I did not understand when I left Talagouga.

We sorted ourselves out hastily and sent her at it again. Smash went a sorely tried pole and a paddle. Round and round we spun in an exultant whirlpool, which, in a light-hearted, maliciously joking way, hurled us tail first out of it into the current. Now the grand point in these canoes of having both ends alike declared itself; for at this juncture all we had to do was to revolve on our own axis and commence life anew with what had been the bow for the stern. Of course we were defeated, we could not go

up any further without the aid of our lost poles and paddles, so we had to go down for shelter somewhere, anywhere, and down at a terrific pace in the white water we went.

M'bo and Pierre, provided with our surviving poles, stood in the bows to fend us off rocks, as we shot towards them; while we midship paddles sat, helping to steer, and when occasion arose, which occasion did with lightning rapidity, to whack the whirlpools with the flat of our paddles, to break their force. Cook crouched in the stern concentrating his mind on steering only. We dashed full tilt towards high rocks, things twenty to fifty feet above water. Midship backed and flapped like fury; M'bo and Pierre received the shock on their poles; sometimes we glanced successfully aside and flew on; sometimes we didn't. The shock being too much for M'bo and Pierre they were driven back on me, who got flattened on to the cargo of bundles which, being now firmly tied in, couldn't spread the confusion further aft; but the

shock of the canoe's nose against the rock did so in style, and the rest of the crew fell forward on to the bundles, me, and themselves. So shaken up together were we several times that night, that it's a wonder to me, considering the hurry, that we sorted ourselves out correctly with our own particular legs and arms. And although we in the middle of the canoe did some very spirited flapping, our whirlpool-breaking was no more successful than M'bo and Pierre's fending off, and many a wild waltz we danced that night with the waters of the River Ogowe.

Unpleasant as going through the rapids was, when circumstances took us into the black current we fared no better. For good all-round inconvenience, give me going full tilt in the dark into the branches of a fallen tree at the pace we were going then-and crash, swish, crackle and there you are, hung up, with a bough pressing against your chest, and your hair being torn out and your clothes ribboned by others, while the wicked river is trying to drag away the canoe from under you. After a good hour and more of these experiences, we went hard on to a large black reef of rocks. So firm was the canoe wedged that we in our rather worn-out state couldn't move her so we wisely decided to "le'f'em" and see what could be done towards getting food and a fire for the remainder of the night.

Our eyes, now trained to the darkness, observed pretty close to us a big lump of land, looming up out of the river. This we subsequently found out was Kembe Island. The rocks and foam on either side stretched away into the darkness, and high above us against the star-lit sky stood out clearly the summits of the mountains of the Sierra del Crista!.

The most interesting question to us now was whether this rock reef communicated sufficiently with the island for us to get to it. Abandoning conjecture; tying very firmly our canoe up to the rocks, a thing that seemed, considering she was jammed hard and immovable, a little unnecessary-but you can never be sufficiently careful in this matter with any kind of boat-off we started among the rock boulders. I would climb up on to a rock table, fall off it on the other side on to rocks again, with more or less water on them-then get a patch of singing sand under my feet, then with varying suddenness get into more water, deep or shallow, broad or narrow pools among the rocks; out of that over more rocks, &Cl, &c., &c.: my companions, from their noises, evidently were going in for the same kind of thing, but we were quite cheerful, because the probability of reaching the land seemed increasing. Most of us arrived into deep channels of water which here and there cut in between this rock reef and the bank.

M'bo was the first to find the way into certainty; he was, and I hope still is, a perfect wonder at this sort of work. I kept close to M'bo, and when we got to the shore, the rest of the wanderers being collected, we said "chances are there's a village round here"; and started to find it. After a gay time in a rock-encumbered forest, growing in a tangled, matted way

on a Tough hill-side, at an angle of 45 degrees, M'bo sighted the gleam of fires through the tree stems away to the left, and we bore down on it, listening to its drum. Viewed through the bars of the tree stems the scene was very picturesque. The village was just a collection of palm mat-built huts, very low and squalid. In its tiny street, an affair of some sixty feet long and twenty wide, were a succession of small fires. The villagers themselves, however, were the striking features in the picture. They were painted vermilion all over their nearly naked bodies, and were dancing enthusiastically to the good old rump-a-tump-tump-tump tune, played energetically by an old gentleman on a long, high-standing, white-and black painted drum. They said that as they had been dancing when we arrived they had failed to hear us.

M'bo secured a-well, I don't exactly know what to call it-for my use. **It** was, I fancy, the remains of the village clubhouse. **It** had a certain amount of palm-thatch roof and some of its left-hand side left, the rest of the structure was bare old poles with filaments of palm mat hanging from them here and there; and really if it hadn't been for the roof one wouldn't have known whether one was inside or outside it. The floor was trodden earth and in the middle of it a heap of white ash and the usual two bush lights, laid down with their burning ends propped up off the ground with stones, and emitting, as is their wont, a rather mawkish, but not altogether unpleasant smell, and volumes of smoke which finds its way out through the thatch, leaving on the inside of it a rich oily varnish of a bright warm brown colour. They give a very good light, provided someone keeps an eye on them and knocks the ash off the end as it burns gray; the bush

lights' idea of being snuffed. Against one of the open-work sides hung a drum covered with raw hide, and a long hollow bit of tree trunk, which served as a cupboard for a few small articles.

I gathered in all these details as I sat on one of the hard wood benches, waiting for my dinner, which Isaac was preparing outside in the street. The atmosphere of the hut, in spite of its remarkable advantages in the way of ventilation, was oppressive, for the smell of the bush lights, my wet clothes, and the natives who crowded into the hut to look at me, made anything but a pleasant combination. The people were evidently exceedingly poor; clothes they had very little of. The two head men had on old French military coats in rags; but they were quite satisfied with their appearance, and evidently felt through them in touch with European culture, for they lectured to the others on the habits and customs of the white man with great self-confidence and superiority.

The majority of the village had a slight acquaintance already with this interesting animal, being, I found, Adoomas. They had made a settlement on Kembe Island some two years or so ago. Then the Fans came and attacked them, and killed and ate several. The Adoomas left and fled

to the French authority at Njole and remained under its guarding shadow until the French came up and chastised the Fans and burnt their village; and the Adoomas-when things had quieted down again and the Fans had gone off to build themselves a new village for their burnt one-came back to Kembe Island and their plantain patch. They had only done this a few months before my arrival and had not had time to rebuild, hence the dilapidated state of the village. As soon as my dinner arrived they politely cleared out, and I heard the devout M'bo holding a service for them, with hymns, in the street, and this being over they returned to their drum and dance, keeping things up distinctly late, for it was 11.10 P.M., when we first entered the village.

While the men were getting their food I mounted guard over our little possessions, and when they turned up to make things tidy in my hut, I walked off down to the shore by a path, which we had elaborately avoided when coming to the village, a very vertically inclined, slippery little path, but still the one whereby the natives went up and down to their canoes, which were kept tied up amongst the rocks. The moon was rising, illumining the sky, but not yet sending down her light on the foaming, flying Ogowé in its deep ravine. The scene was divinely lovely; on every side out of the formless gloom rose the peaks of the Sierra del Crista!. Tomanjawki, on the further side of the river surrounded by his companion peaks, looked his grandest, silhouetted hard against the sky. In the higher valleys where the dim light shone faintly, one could see wreaths and clouds of silver-gray mist lying, basking lazily or rolling to and fro. Olangi seemed to stretch right across the river, blocking with his great blunt mass all passage; while away to the N.E. a cone-shaped peak showed conspicuous, which I afterwards knew as Kangwe.

In the darkness round me flitted thousands of fire-flies and out beyond this pool of utter night flew by unceasingly the white foam of the rapids; sound there was none save their thunder. The majesty and beauty of the scene fascinated me, and I stood leaning with my back against a rock pinnacle watching it. Do not imagine it gave rise, in what I am pleased to call my mind, to those complicated, poetical reflections natural beauty

selves with a new stock of poles, and subsidising a native to come with us and help us to fight the rapids.

We left the landing place rocks of Kembe Island about 8, and no sooner had we got afloat, than, in the twinkling of an eye, we were swept, broadside on, right across the river to the north bank, and then engaged in a heavy fight with a severe rapid. After passing this, the river is fairly uninterrupted by rock for a while, and is silent and swift. When you are ascending such a piece the effect is strange; you see the water flying by the side of your canoe, as you vigorously drive your paddle into it with short rapid strokes, and you forthwith fancy you are travelling at the rate of a North-Western express; but you just raise your eyes, my friend, and look at that bank, which is standing very nearly still, and you will realise that you and your canoe are standing very nearly still too; and that all your exertions are only enabling you to creep on at the pace of a crushed snail, and that it's the water that is going the pace. It's a most quaint and

unpleasant disillusionment.

A bad rapid, called by our ally from Kembe Island "Unfanga," being surmounted, we seem to be in a mountain-walled lake, and keeping along the left bank of this, we get on famously for twenty whole restful minutes, which lulls us all into a false sense of security, and my crew sing M'pongwe songs, descriptive of how they go to their homes to see their wives, and families, and friends, giving chaffing descriptions of their friends' characteristics and of their failings, which cause bursts of laughter from those among us who recognise the allusions, and how they go to their boxes, and take out their clothes, and put them on—a long bragging inventory of these things is given by each man as a solo, and then the chorus, taken heartily up by his companions, signifies their admiration and astonishment at his wealth and importance—and then they sing

how, being dissatisfied with that last dollar's worth of goods they got from 'Holty's', they have decided to take their next trade to Hatton and Cookson, or *vice versa*; and then comes the chorus, applauding the wisdom of such a decision, and extolling the excellence of Hatton and Cookson's goods or Holty's.

These M'pongwe and Igalwa boat songs are all very pretty, and have very elaborate tunes in a minor key. I do not believe there are any old words to them; I have tried hard to find out about them, but I believe the tunes, which are of a limited number and quite distinct from each other, are very old. The words are put in by the singer on the spur of the moment, and only restricted in this sense, that there would always be the domestic catalogue—whatever its component details might be—sung to the one fixed tune, the trade information sung to another, and so on. A good singer, in these parts, means the man who can make up the best song—the most impressive, or the most amusing; I have elsewhere mentioned pretty much the same state of things among the Ga's and Krumen and Bubi, and in all cases the tunes are only voice tunes, not for instrumental performance. The instrumental music consists of that marvellously developed series of drum tunes—the attempt to understand which has taken up much of my time, and led me into queer company—and the many tunes played on the 'mrimba and the orchid-root-stringed harp: they are, I believe, entirely distinct from the song tunes.

On we go singing elaborately, thinking no evil of nature, when a current, a quiet devil of a thing, comes round from behind a point of the bank and catches the nose of our canoe; wringing it well, it sends us scuttling right across the river in spite of our ferocious swoops at the water, upsetting us among a lot of rocks with the water boiling over them; this lot of rocks being however of the table-top kind, and not those precious, close-set pinnacles rising up sheer out of profound depths, between which you are so likely to get your canoe wedged in and split. We, up to our knees in water that nearly tears our legs off, push and shove the canoe free, and re-embarking return singing across the river, to have it out with that current. We do; and at its head find a rapid, and notice on the mountain-side a village clearing, the first sign of human habitation we have seen to-day.

Above this rapid we get a treat of still water, the main current of the Ogowé flying along by the south bank. On our side there are sandbanks with their graceful sloping backs and sudden ends, and there is a very strange and beautiful effect produced by the flakes and balls of foam thrown off the rushing main current into the quiet water. These whirl among the eddies and rush backwards and forwards as though they were still mad with wild haste, until, finding no current to take them down, they drift away into the land-locked bays, where they come to a standstill as if they were bewildered and lost and were trying to remember where they were going to and whence they had come; the foam of which they are composed is yellowish-white, with a spongy sort of solidity about it.

In a little bay we pass we see eight native women, Fans clearly, by their bright brown faces, and their loads of brass bracelets and armlets, intent on breaking up a stockaded fish-trap. We pause and chat, and watch them collecting the fish in baskets, and I acquire some specimens; and then, shouting farewells when we are well away, in the proper civil way, resume our course.

The middle of the Ogowé here is simply forested with high rocks, looking, as they stand with their grim forms above

the foam, like a regiment of strange strong creatures breasting it, with their straight faces up river, and their more flowing curves down, as though they had on black mantles which were swept backwards. Our channel was free until we had to fight round the upper end of our bay into a long rush of strong current with bad whirlpools curving its face; then the river widens out and quiets down and then suddenly contracts-a rocky forested promontory running out from each bank. There is a little village on the north bank's promontory, and, at the end of each, huge monoliths rise from the water, making what looks like a gateway which had once been barred and through which the Ogowe had burst.

For the first time on this trip I felt discouraged; it seemed so impossible that we, with our small canoe and scanty crew, could force our way up through that gateway, when the whole Ogowe was rushing down through it. But we clung to the bank and rocks with hands, poles, and paddle, and did it; really the worst part was not in the gateway but just before it, for here there is a great whirlpool, its centre hollowed some two or three feet below its rim. It is caused, my Kembe islander says, by a great cave opening beneath the water. Above the gate the river broadens out again and we see the arched opening to a large cave in the south bank; the mountain-side is one mass of rock covered with the unbroken forest; and the entrance to this cave is just on the upper wall of the south bank's promontory; so, being sheltered from the current here, we rest and examine it leisurely. The river runs into it, and you can easily pass in at this season, but in the height of the wet season, when the river level would be some twenty feet or more above its present one, I doubt if you could. They told me this place is called Boko Boko, and that the cave is a very long one, extending on a level some way into the hill, and then ascending and coming out near a mass of white rock that showed as a speck high up on the mountain.

If you paddle into it you go "far far," and then "no more water live," and you get out and go up the tunnel, which is sometimes broad, sometimes narrow, sometimes high, sometimes so low that you have to crawl, and so get out at the other end.

One French gentleman has gone through this performance, and I am told found "plenty plenty" bats, and hedgehogs, and snakes. They could not tell me his name, which I much regretted. As we had no store of bush lights we went no further than the portals; indeed, strictly between ourselves, if I had had every bush light in Congo Franc., as I personally should not have relished going further. I am terrified of caves; it sends a creaming down my back to think of them.

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