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MEN AND CREATURES IN UGANDA

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attractive, especially the weaver-birds; some of them build nests among the bougainvilleas in gardens bordering the roadway. The comparative sanctity of birds is shown by the freedom with which they use the haunts of men.

Swallows build in the verandah of the Court of Justice; weaver-birds flit through the branches of the trees in the Club garden, lizards run along the railings, and in the silence of the library it is amusing to watch geckoes dart across the ceiling catching flies. Every part of the island teems with life.

II

THE UGANDA RAILWAY

U.R. These are the initials of one of the most romantic railways in the world. It starts from Mombasa and follows mainly the old caravan route to Kavirondo.

After leaving Mombasa and crossing the bridge over the Makupa creek the line ascends a steep grade giving an excellent view of the island and glimpses of the sea as it runs through groves of coco-nut palms, orange-trees, pomegranates, and banana plantations. Later the railway traverses a desert, covered with scrub and small trees, whose timber is large enough to be used as fuel for the engines.

About 280 miles from Mombasa it enters the Athi Plain, and around Simba station, as the name indicates, lions are plentiful. Rhinoceros and giraffe are occasionally seen in this section of the line. The amount of game on the plain varies with the condition of the grass. When favourable, hundreds of zebra, herds of hartebeest (*kongoni*) and wildebeest (*gnu*) will be seen. Ostriches are often on view stalking one behind the other, as self-conscious as bridesmaids walking up the aisle of a church in the wake at a fashionable wedding. These birds mingle with zebras on the grazing-grounds. Scattered in small herds, often close to the line, Thomson's gazelles will be recognized. These antelopes as well as Grant's gazelles mix with the hartebeest and zebra herds.

In the distance vultures are sometimes seen flying



common to see these cans used as sauce-pans, baking-tins, ovens, and parrot cages; receptacles for *pombé* (beer); boxes for clothes or books, and travelling trunks; one can well packed is a sufficient as well as



Fig. 6. The Simple Life. Nandi woman and baby.

a convenient load for a porter to carry on his head, and a pair are easily adjusted as panniers for donkeys.

The European settlers use the kerosene can as tubs for shrubs and flower pots; the edges of the cans when used

for flowers are cut into triangular patterns, much in the same way as the Masai herdsmen clip the ears of their cattle. When the kerosene can can no longer hold liquid, it is hammered out and the square sheets serve to roof huts.

Travelling along the Uganda Railway from Mombasa to its lake terminus at Kisumu, the tourist will see zebra, hartebeests (gnus), Thomson's gazelles, Grant's gazelles, wart-hogs, and bushbuck. With good luck he may also see elands, giraffe, and the rhinoceros, and, if exceptionally lucky, a lion or so in the early morning, and hyænas in the late afternoon.

Of birds there are, ostriches, bustards, eagles, hawks, vultures, and shrikes sitting on the telegraph wires. He will recognize the glossy starling, drongo, weaver birds, chats, the crowned crane, hornbill, coly, swallow, bee-eater, stork, oxpecker, and the secretary bird.

The Uganda Railway is unique of its kind, for it is probably the only railway in the world where monkeys swing on the telegraph wires; giraffes break them with their long necks in crossing the track, and the rhinoceros tilts at telegraph poles in true quixotic style. As a rule, the laugh is with the animal. On rare occasions a lion promenades a platform and interferes with local traffic.

whilst hunting a buffalo, was attacked and so crushed by the angry brute that the remains could only be recognized as those of a man by the fact that one of the hunter's feet stuck out of the mangled mass.

There are interesting cats in East Africa besides lions, leopards and cheetahs. Whilst in the Rift Valley we



Fig. 57. The Serval Cat.

had opportunities of seeing the serval cat. It is a pretty but untamable animal, very destructive to poultry. A settler hearing a noise in his fowl-house one evening sent a lad to see that the birds were safe, and not disturbed by cats. The boy returned to say that he had made them safe by shutting and fastening the door of the fowl-house. In the morning twenty out of twenty-three birds lay dead and a serval cat sat on the

cross-beam. The boy had shut the animal in with the birds!

The kittens of the serval cat are ferocious little brutes; they scratch and bite vehemently. We saw a native in charge of one at Njoro, and the skin of his belly was freely cross-hatched by the claws of the pretty but fierce kitten in his charge. This unchecked scratching seemed to distress him very little.

We were bound to shoot a number of animals in order to supply our camp with meat. Porters when on safari are supplied with flour made from mealies, and they expect meat. When an opportunity offers these men will eat a very large quantity of flesh, and if the porters are kept well supplied with meat they are contented, happy, and not so likely to desert the camp.

Certain precautions are necessary in regard to the religious prejudices of the Mahomedans. The Somali gun-bearers carry a large sheath-knife in their belts for skinning animals when shot. When an antelope, zebra, or buffalo is shot and it is safe to approach, the Somali runs up with the object of cutting the animal's throat before it dies; in such circumstances the Mahomedans will eat the flesh. Should the animal cease to breathe before the throat is cut by a Mahomedan, none will eat the flesh, but he will flay and disembowel the animal for such of the natives, who, not being followers of Mahomet, may choose to use it.

The high grass which abounds in the Rift Valley is the favourite haunt of the rhinoceros. This mammal, like the elephant, is a huge, ungainly representative of a giant fauna which was formerly common on the earth.

have been advanced to account for such local collection of skeletons.

The Swahili traders believe in natural "animal cemeteries." Major Powell-Cotton describes one which he visited near Mount Zunut in the Toposa Country. He was surprised to find the whole country-side glistening with elephants' bones. His guide assured him that it was "the place where elephants come to die." This particular place was well known to the Turkana, who regularly visited it to carry off the tusks.

There are several modes in which mammalian remains may accumulate under alluvial deposits. Gregory, in describing the geology of the Rift Valley, found around water-holes acres of ground white with bones of the rhinoceros, zebra, gazelle, and antelope, jackal, and hyæna, and among them the remains of a lion. All the bones of the skeletons were there fresh and ungnawed. The year before, a drought had cleared both game and people from the district. Such animals as did not migrate crowded around the dwindling pools and fought for the last drop of water. "These accumulations were therefore due to drought and not to deluge."

The manner in which animals congregate in these grassy valleys is remarkable. Sometimes the gazelles are so numerous and so crowded that a valley appears a sandy yellow.

Many of the Uganda game-animals are of large size, and those who have only seen them in a museum, or alive in a menagerie paddock, might imagine them easy to shoot. But all wild animals are watchful, quick to take alarm, and antelopes especially can move from place to place with great rapidity. When feeding on grassy plains they are extremely difficult to approach

nearer than two hundred or two hundred and fifty yards. Surrounded as they are by predacious beasts and hunters, they soon appreciate danger. Every noise around them they appreciate with quickness; even the notes and movement of birds are to them warnings and notes of alarm. We realized this when hunting, for whilst carefully stalking antelopes and slowly creeping through the grass, taking advantage of any slight rise or hillock, a hare would get up and run away, making, every few yards, curious bounds or jumps; or a noisy bird, especially the black-winged plover, would fly and shriek. Then every head in the herd would be raised, and the animals would be off. Schillings, in reference to the harsh cries of black-winged plovers alarming game, calls them "the police of the wilderness in feathered uniforms."

On one occasion, when cautiously creeping into a thicket to get a careful and favourable shot at a herd of zebra, I heard a tremendous cackling and saw around me about fifty guinea-fowl, flapping their wings and screaming with their tails up, like turkeys in a farmyard. It amused me very much, but alarmed the zebras, who were soon out of sight over a ridge.

The oxpecker, or "tick-bird," is useful to the rhinoceros and the buffalo. All mammals are infested with ticks, which crowd on the bare spaces of their bodies. It is not uncommon to see ten or twenty of these birds on a rhinoceros, kudu, or buffalo, busily engaged in picking parasites. On the approach of the hunter they quickly give a note of alarm. The oxpecker is closely allied to the starling, which performs the same useful purpose for cattle and sheep in the British Isles.