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THE CRY OF THE FISH EAGLE

Peter Molloy b.1914

★

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF
A GAME WARDEN AND HIS WIFE
IN THE SOUTHERN SUDAN



Kutsi—a caracal

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sounds of a terrible battle were heard in town. Roaring and bellowing continued for several hours, and in the morning Hermann was there among his wives as usual, while on the bank lay the fearfully mutilated carcass of a rival who had dared challenge the possession of his territory.

Such battles are common among male hippos, almost all of which, particularly the veterans, bear numerous scars as evidence. Fights usually start in the water, and if seriously pursued, finish up on land, where the adversaries rush bellowing at and past each other, ripping upwards at the other's flanks with their lower tusks, set outwards at an angle from the jaw and constantly ground to a knife-edge against the corresponding upper tooth. From the terrible wounds resulting one, or even both, will often bleed to death.

The road to the north of Wau, down the left bank of the Jur, brings you to Gogrial, where the Assistant District Commissioner has a delightfully situated house at the bend of the river, and from there you have a choice of going further north to Wun Rog or else north-westwards to Aweil.

In the former case you have to cross the Lol River at Wun Rog itself, which can now be done by a pontoon ferry, though the method employed before the ferry existed was more picturesque and probably more effective. When you arrived on the bank you sent word to the local chief, who appeared in about half an hour with sixty naked warriors. Amidst much shouting and laughter they attached two long ropes to the front of your lorry, and then divided themselves between the ropes. There followed a mighty chanting and splashing and yelling, whereby, without great individual effort, the lorry was dragged through the two or three feet of water and up the far bank. There, after you had shaken dozens of cold, wet, friendly hands, you were left to take down the carburettor and dry out the plugs.

I visited this area first when I had only been a few months in the Sudan, and while Amtai was engaged in the plug-drying



White Rhino



Black Rhino

elbow of the left arm, where to grasp it with the right hand and how to impart the last-minute flick which would send it sailing out to land gently in a perfect circle.

I was a very dull pupil. No matter how meticulously I followed instructions the net seldom opened more than half, and I caught no fish. When he saw I was tiring, my teacher indicated I should sit down on the bank. Adjusting the net, he waded a few yards upstream and with graceful ease threw a perfect cast.

Holding the end of the cord while allowing the net to settle, he grinned back at me delightedly. He had good reason—the net contained five beautiful *Tilapia*. Setting them on the grass beside me, he waded in again and cast. This time two more *Tilapia* and an *Alestes*. Next time one *Tilapia*, two *Alestes* and a small *Distichodus*. So it went on: moving a few yards upstream each time, he had caught thirty-six fish in ten casts before Amtai appeared with his usual: 'Lorry ready, sir!' We divided the spoils, and it was with genuine regret that I parted from my friend and bumped off down the road.

This natural friendliness, this courtesy and consideration for the feelings of others, characteristic of 'civilized' behaviour (as we ironically call it), distinguishes the Nilotic pastoralists, and particularly the Dinka, from other Southern tribes. Maddening as their sense of superiority can be, exasperating though we find their exclusive cattle-mindedness, these people have developed a way of life they find entirely sufficient and satisfactory: they are in harmony with their environment. To convince them that 'progress' in Government terms is a change for the better, one must first convince oneself. Fortunately I was never asked to do so, since on this score I have profound doubts.

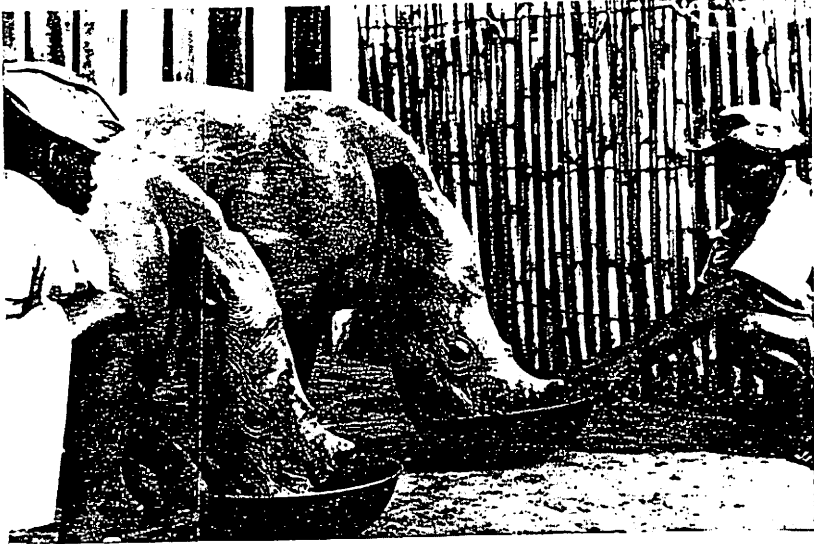
Near Wun Rog, about a hundred miles north of Wau, there is a place called Turelei, which contains the only confirmed pocket of 'black rhino' on the west bank of the Nile (though

there may be another on the Chel River west of Wau). It is a mystery why they should now be confined almost entirely to the east bank, since they are solitary and cantankerous animals, while the 'white rhino' are short-sighted, gregarious and amiable, so that one might have expected these would first be exterminated by native hunting. Until 1947, indeed, it was believed that there were no black rhino on the west bank and no white on the east; but in that year the Danish Scientific Expedition to the Sudan, having received special permission, shot a rhino at Turelei, which (to their and the Game Department's astonishment) turned out to be black.

That such a mistake could be made illustrates the inadequacy of differentiating the species as 'white' and 'black.' Their skin is identical in colour, a dirty grey, which is overlaid with black or red mud or a whitish clay according to the composition of their last wallow. To anyone well accustomed to both species, however, the greater size, longer skull, square lip and low carriage of the head of the white rhino is easily recognizable. Less practised observers cannot test their identification by giving the beast a whiff of their scent and being prepared to dodge smartly if it turns out to be 'black.'

Eastward from Turelei, in the angle of the Bahr el Arab and Lol Rivers, lies Aweng. Surrounded by swamps, this is a small settlement of the Twij Dinka, built on a mound largely composed of the waste products of perhaps several hundred years of cattle-camps. It was here, on my first visit, that I tried merely to sight the Mrs Gray bucks which were later to cause Yvonne and me such strenuous photographic efforts.

I started out by lorry, but in a few miles it became bogged to the axles, so I continued on foot into the ever-deepening swamp. This meant drawing each foot in turn clear of the mud, water and weeds; and I was further handicapped by a weak knee (this was the knee which had had its cap removed just before I came to the Sudan). My Twij escort accompanied my laborious progress politely for half an hour, then suggested they should scout ahead to locate the Mrs Gray. Thankful for



Feeding Paul and Chloë



Feeding in the mixed paddock

Yirol and the others might have fallen to the gun of main-road sportsmen.)

'Let's have the baby leopard out before tea,' Yvonne begged, and in a few minutes Gustav and Nimr were dashing round the lawn and in and out of the bushes. All our leopards have been exercised with the dogs until the fun becomes too one-sided for the dogs. Nimr was only half Gustav's size but let herself be buffeted and bowled over and pulled along by the hind-leg; as a last resort she lay on her back and thrashed the air with all four feet. Young leopards make enchanting pets until about four months old; then they enter a rough stage, which wears off in another six months or so. If properly handled, they then become increasingly gentle until maturity, though nobody in his senses takes risks with a mature leopard.

'I *do* wish we still had Yowani,' said Yvonne for the hundredth time as we strolled back to the house.

Yowani was a baby elephant about two months old who had been hidden in the long grass when his mother was shot on control by a Game Scout—the same Olango who was the hero of our ordeal by thirst at Mongalla. The poor little fellow ran in circles round his dead mother, making pathetic attempts to lift her and chasing Olango away with determined charges and shrill trumpeting. But Olango remained on the spot and as the baby elephant grew tired, he turned away from his mother and adopted Olango. It was a long way to the nearest motor road, so they started off together, Olango leading and Yowani trotting behind. After several hours they reached a village, and here Olango made a milky concoction with cassava flour, which he fed to Yowani from the narrow neck of a gourd. It was not what Yowani was used to, but being thirsty and tired he was glad of it. Then the two of them lay down on the ground and slept side by side.

Next day they resumed their journey, and in the afternoon reached the Chief's house on the main road. The Chief had no intention of letting this potential source of reward escape and insisted on tying Yowani to a tree with ropes. Yowani was

furious, and in struggling rubbed himself raw in several places, for a baby elephant's skin is surprisingly soft and tender. Again he was fed on cassava-flour milk.

The day after that an Agricultural Officer happened to pass in his lorry. Yowani was hoisted on board and padded with empty cotton sacks, and later that day reached us at Juba. On being unloaded he made a beeline for an adjacent stand-pipe and gurgled with joy as we splashed water over him. He then tried to lie down in the quite inadequate cement bath beneath it.

Yowani was perhaps the most lovable of all our pets because his reactions were so grotesquely 'human.' He soon settled down to a routine of six feeds a day and would trumpet furiously if his bottle was a few minutes late. He demanded constant attention and companionship, and screamed like a spoilt child if thwarted. He used his little stumpy trunk like a human hand to feel through pockets for titbits, also to pick up and stuff into his mouth anything lying about in his run.

His diet was a great anxiety, since an elephant's milk has a peculiar composition almost impossible to approximate artificially. We tried various combinations on a basis of powdered milk before settling on the one he liked best. This he took greedily, and from his droppings it appeared to suit him; yet after a week he started wasting, and we could not devise anything to check it.

Even so he remained active and friendly and interested in everyone, particularly the many children who came to see him. But by the end of five weeks his struggles to remain on his feet had become pitiful, and I decided he could not survive and should not be allowed to suffer. Next morning his pen was empty and on the door a notice:

YOWANI GONE BACK TO MOTHER

In contrast to this sad failure was that of Gussie, a young giraffe, illegally separated from her mother by some native

hunters only twenty-four hours after birth. Not only did she survive a walk of over twenty miles and a lorry ride of fifty before reaching Juba three days later, but she then stepped out of the truck with complete composure, adopted Loroto on sight, and walked groggily but purposefully behind him to her enclosure. Here she scorned animal company, but received all human visitors with obvious pleasure, curiosity and sticky licks of her long purple tongue. She grew all too fast for our facilities, and the time soon came to send her the thousand miles by steamer and train to Khartoum. After a few months there she returned to Juba and went a further two hundred miles by lorry to the Station de la Chasse at Ngangala-na-Bodio in the Belgian Congo. Here she lived for two years and was reaching maturity when she was one night killed in her pen by a leopard.

We were equally successful in raising Paul and Chloë, a pair of young white rhinos caught for us by Mr Carr Hartley, a professional trapper from Kenya—though admittedly Paul at least was fully weaned on arrival. Rhinos, even of the black variety, readily become tame in captivity, and the white can be trained to remain gentle and reliable until maturity. For six months the pair lived in my garage, with an outside enclosure, providing continual interest and amusement. As with all strong and potentially dangerous animals, it is wise to discipline them from youth so as to ensure ease of handling in maturity. Paul and Chloë were therefore taught to line up for their gruel, and would stand together fidgeting and mewing until the word was given; then they would rush forward to their own bowls and drink noisily side by side like a pair of amiable pigs.

After they had spent several months in Khartoum, we hoisted the pair into an aircraft and I accompanied them to Antwerp. They slept peacefully most of the way and quickly settled down in the Zoological Gardens there, where it is hoped they will eventually breed. At the time of writing these are the only white rhinos in captivity outside Africa.

* * *



Yvonne photographing



Blind and amiable

rest-house today, is the grandiloquent inscription 'STIGANDUS ÆDIFICAVIT, 1917.' We were fascinated by Kajo Kaji, with its stone-walled hill-top fort looking out westward over a grassy plain studded with the dark round blobs of mango-trees; and Stigand's bare, rambling house felt most hospitable to us—unlike many other officials, who professed to find it depressing and even haunted.

The people here are the Kuku, one of the small Bari-speaking tribes originally pastoralists and now mixed-farmers, since much of their country has remained free from bush and its accompanying tsetse fly and is being gradually restocked with cattle. They are a cheerful people, no keener on hard work than other Southern tribes, and a sure if initially reluctant source of man-power.

When we had collected our porters from obliging local Chiefs, we set out to cross the northward continuation of the Ilengwa Hills, through a pass leading to the river-side village of Shukoli. Although this stage can be done in three hours it involves a steep climb in either direction which made people like us, used to the plains, doubt our state of fitness.

At Shukoli we turned southward on the left bank of the Nile and in eight miles reached the Kayu River, where it comes tumbling through a gorge in the hills and marks the Reserve's northern limit. Like all flood-torrents, this river can present two very different aspects. On our first trip it took us, and the porters with their loads, a full hour to cross, up to our necks in turgid water, stumbling and slithering over the rounded boulders in the river-bed. The next time we stepped across dry-shod, from boulder to boulder.

There is little game at the northern and narrower end of the Reserve, for the grass is thin and poor except on the strip of plain about half a mile wide bordering the Nile; this is visited nightly by elephant and buffalo, and carries small herds of the Lado kob and a few waterbuck. We stopped at Toli, a delightful camping site, where the Nile debouches from a deep gorge into a series of rapids and channels—a traditional fishing-ground for

both Uganda and Sudan halves of the Madi. Stately borassus palms line both river-banks, the islands carry lush green vegetation, and the water churns down the rapids in a white foam. Above the plain there is a steep hill-side, five hundred feet high, giving on to a grassy plateau seamed with the gorges of flood torrents; and above this, stark and bare, tower the thousand-foot cliffs and two-thousand foot peaks of the Ilengwa Range.

Southward from this point we turned inward to avoid the narrow gorge of the Nile itself and of the *khôr* flowing into it from the Ilengwa. At the foot of the hills here lie the ruins of the old Belgian station of Yamba—a reminder of the days when the Madi occupied all this land bordering the Nile, from which they were moved in the early 1930s as a measure against sleeping-sickness. Cookie is unlikely to forget this particular part of the plateau, for he suffered here an experience extremely damaging to his dignity.

We were straggling along in our usual single file when we noted on our left, about a hundred yards away, an exceptionally large white rhino bull, grazing alone in a little valley. Obviously he was soon going to get the wind of the head of the column, and would probably stampede through the line: we awaited this attentively but without alarm. Yes, the old beast shied abruptly as though hit with a stick, snorted in disgust, and curling his tail in a tight loop, set off at a brisk trot towards the centre of the column. The column parted, moving forward or backing away, leaving a thirty-yard gap for the rhino to pass through.

Cookie, however, suddenly realized that he was in the tail-half while Yvonne and I were in the head-half; he set out across the gap to join us. We all shouted together, and Cookie broke into a shambling trot. The rhino, now about thirty yards away, saw a moving figure and swung off in pursuit, probably mistaking it for a companion rhino; so that we were rapidly being approached by an old man now thoroughly frightened, closely pursued by a thoroughly confused rhino.

What with shouting and laughter, I could not have shot if I had wished, so as Cookie stumbled exhausted into our group, I pitched a rock at the rhino, which shied off and disappeared over the crest of the ridge, while all except Cookie set down their loads and howled with laughter. But he never saw the joke, and rhinos remained a sore subject with him indefinitely.

The head of the Khor Lebubu near Yamba made another delightful camp, having both shady trees and clear running water, a combination seldom found in the Sudan below six thousand feet. Here too you could always find herds of buffalo, hartebeeste and waterbuck. We were very pleased with a rock-pool swimming-bath, until the only other British official who knew it told us he had once found himself sharing it with an extremely large python.

Between the confluences of the Khor Lebubu and Assua River with the Nile, a phenomenon sometimes occurs known as the 'dry-crossing.' Large rocks stand out above the water in the bed of the gorge, holding up tree trunks, floating islands of papyrus and other flotsam, which gradually form a solid mass of vegetation stretching from one bank to the other. Madi fishermen, who use this bridge regularly and gratefully, report that elephants also cross by it. Rhino do not—or we could not be so certain that (except for the one stray pocket mentioned earlier) white rhino exist only on the west bank and black rhino only on the east. The last dry-crossing was swept away in 1947 in an exceptional spate, since when it has not reformed—so I myself have never seen it.

From here, following the old Belgian wagon-track along the foot of the hills, we once witnessed one of those exhibitions which make the elephant so fascinating a study. At about 6.30 on a rather misty morning, at the beginning of the rains, we were startled by the trumpeting of elephant, apparently coming from above us. Looking up, we were astonished to see six elephant about five hundred feet up on the steep bare hill-side. Their ascending tracks showed as red seams in the earth, softened by recent rain and dusted with the green of new grass.

DARFUR PROVINCE KORDOFAN PROVINCE

