ON SAFARI IN BRITISH EAST AFRICA

With the "Boys" Who Insure the Success of the White Man's Search for Game

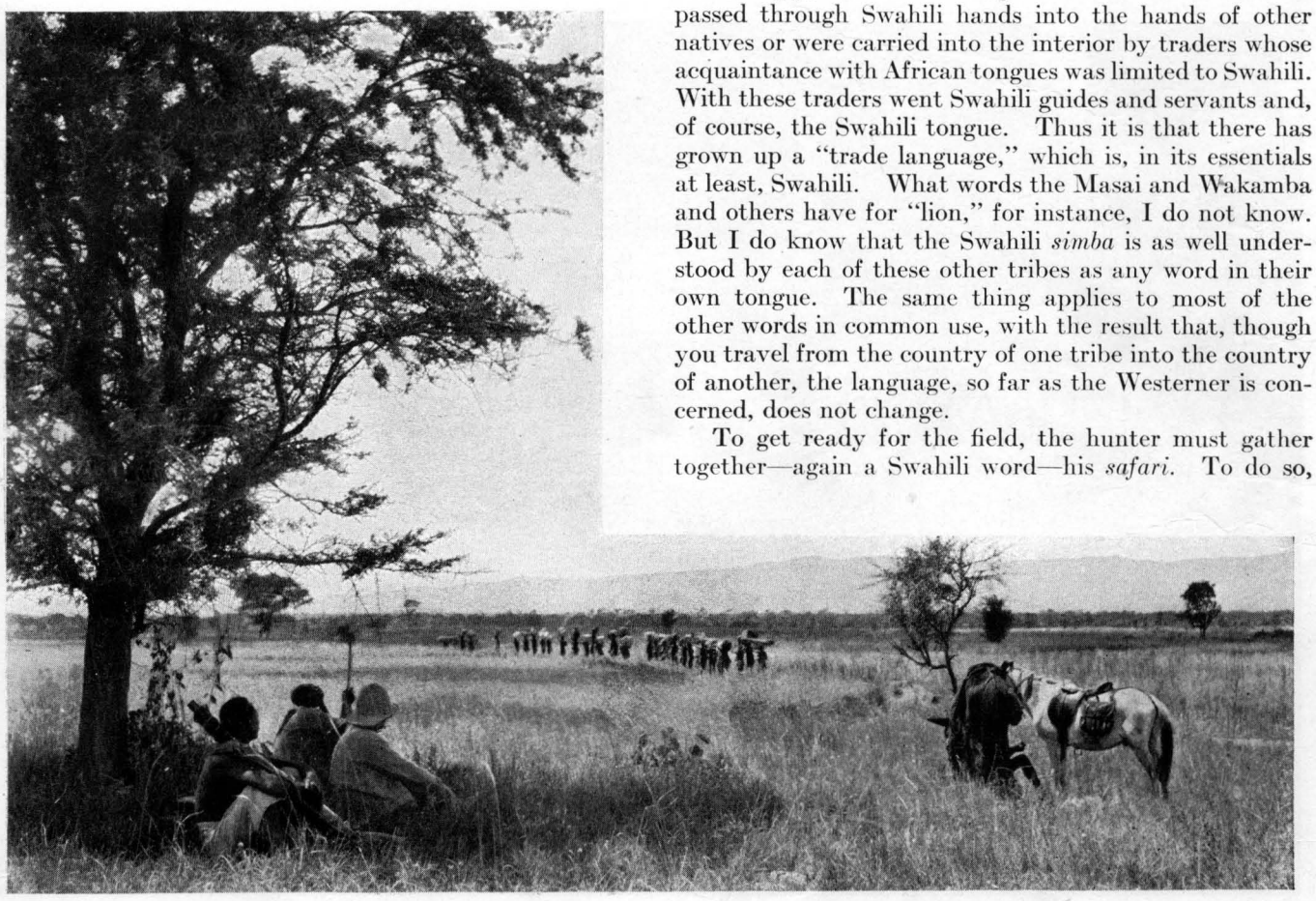
By James L. Clark

TO depict the animals of Africa without including the ever-present natives is much like staging a play without the scenery. Whether you are in Nairobi or on the plains, in the jungles or beside the rivers, there are always natives about. If you happen to be a Westerner in search of African game, you use them to a surprising extent. They are your personal servants and guards, cooks, gun-bearers and guides. Whole companies of them carry your belongings and beat the bush for game. Furthermore, you are forever coming upon some village wherein they live their simple lives, surrounded by their herds of cattle, sheep and goats.

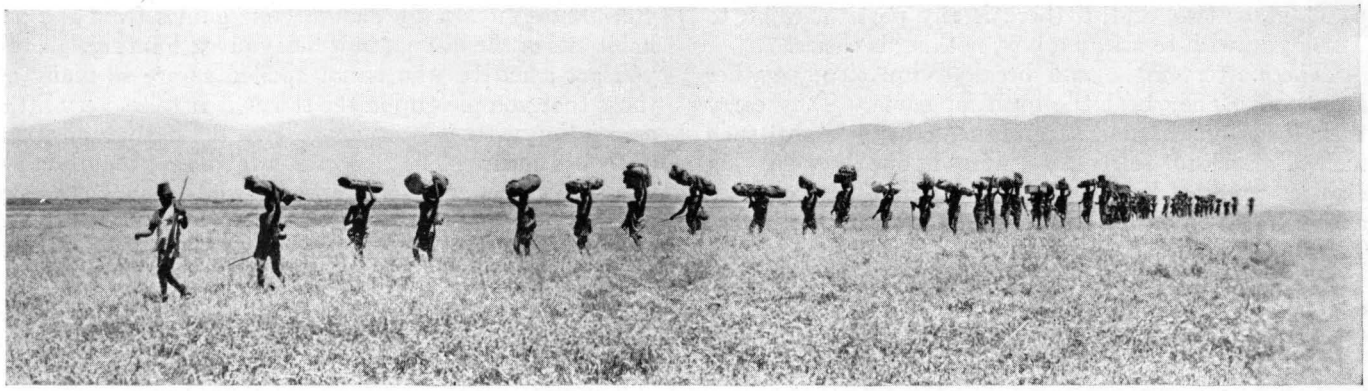
Even within a comparatively small area, in British East Africa, there are, of course, many different tribes. You may be among some tribe or other on the edge of a plateau, such as that above the Rift Valley, and be able to look almost directly down upon a native village of some other tribe where the language is different, where the habits and customs are different, where even the huts are different. When you ask one tribe about another, the reply is invariably that those other people are *shenzis*. Now a shenzi is, in the Swahili tongue, a wild man, and, just as we tend to credit other nations with somewhat less civilization than we ourselves possess, so do these African natives invariably refer to all the other tribes as shenzis—wild people.

Since the languages of the various tribes are as diverse as are the tribes themselves, some method of intertribal communication had, at some time or other, to come into existence. It was the Swahili tongue that ultimately became the one native language understood, more or less, by some members of almost every tribe in "British East." The reason why Swahili thus prevailed is not far to seek. Hundreds of years ago the Arabs settled as traders at Mombasa and in true Arabian fashion set about trading with the natives of the interior. The Swahili tribe inhabits that portion of the coastal plain adjacent to Mombasa, and with it the Arabs first came into contact. Accordingly, the Arabian goods that entered Africa passed through Swahili hands into the hands of other natives or were carried into the interior by traders whose acquaintance with African tongues was limited to Swahili. With these traders went Swahili guides and servants and, of course, the Swahili tongue. Thus it is that there has grown up a "trade language," which is, in its essentials at least, Swahili. What words the Masai and Wakamba and others have for "lion," for instance, I do not know. But I do know that the Swahili *simba* is as well understood by each of these other tribes as any word in their own tongue. The same thing applies to most of the other words in common use, with the result that, though you travel from the country of one tribe into the country of another, the language, so far as the Westerner is concerned, does not change.

To get ready for the field, the hunter must gather together—again a Swahili word—his *safari*. To do so,



Whether a Westerner hunts African game with gun or with camera, he makes use of the natives to a surprising extent. They are his personal servants and guards, cooks, gun-bearers and guides. Whole companies of them, as here in this photograph of James L. Clark's "safari" across the plains, carry his belongings or sometimes beat the bush for game



he goes to his agents and hires a headman and a tent-boy. These two, with the cook, are largely responsible for the success of any venture. After the best available headman has been chosen, he is told how many porters are needed. Thereupon he visits the bazar and announces, in Swahili, to all and sundry that *bwana kubwa*—the big master and mighty hunter—wishes to employ fifty or a hundred or more porters on safari. Perhaps twice as many as are required turn up, and the headman, if he is a good one, chooses the best of these. Many he knows personally. Others he may possibly know by reputation. Others still he knows nothing whatever about. But from the lot, such as it is, the porters are picked. To seal the bargain, the headman pays them a trifling sum of money in advance. Then he gives them a blanket and a water-bottle apiece and tells them to be ready to leave at dawn on the morrow or the day following. But, when dawn comes, very few of them are on hand. They feel a natural human desire to celebrate before departing for weeks or months in the wilds, and, as a rule, they have such a good time as to be temporarily incapacitated.

Even the headman may not be about, and when, three hours after he should have been there, he finally appears, he will have some extraordinary excuse. He had to purchase something for his wife or had to look after his children, who were suffering from some frightful disease, or was delayed by other equally important business. But, now that he has come, he sets about gathering together his forces. One by one they are brought from the bazar —somewhat blear-eyed, perhaps—and by luncheon-time most of them are present.

The optimistic hunter looks about and decides to lunch, expecting that, by the time he has finished eating, the others will have arrived. But, when he returns—lo, the gathering has melted away. Then three more hours or so are lost. By four in the afternoon, when the men have been rounded up again, the hunter, if inexperienced, will perhaps think he might as well put off his start until the following morning. Not so the experienced man. He will set out at once, even if he can go no more than two miles from town; for he knows that, once these men are in camp, they become more or less responsible—may be found, at least, in the morning when he wants to get under way.

The newcomer to Africa will find that, although he has instructed his headman to hire but a hundred men, there are a hundred and ten or twelve in his party. Inquiry brings out the fact that these porters and servants of his require porters and servants of their own. Each group of six porters is supplied with a tent and a cooking-pot, and each group will probably have—or want—a *toto* of its own. "Toto," by the way, is the Swahili word for youngster—whether human or animal. In the case of a group of these porters it means a boy to carry their tent and cooking-pot, to carry their blankets, to gather firewood for their fire and to prepare their food while they are engaged in their work about camp. He is not paid—either by them or by the head of the safari. He has decided to come for the experience. After a trip or two he may be able to advance in the social scale and become a porter himself. As for food, each group of six is given enough for its needs, and, because the amount is generous, a seventh makes little difference as he dips into the communal pot.

The wise hunter will see to it that his safari is made up of several different tribes. Invariably the members of one tribe stand together, and, if he endeavors to learn who is responsible for some difficulty, the guilty person and his tribal brethren are certain to try to keep the truth hidden. Porters from another tribe, however, are generally ready to turn informer and side with their master; for, as I have said, all tribes are shenzis save the tribe to which the informer himself belongs.

Once under way with such a party, the hunter must, in the beginning, be extremely uncompromising. Then is the time to impress upon his natives the fact that he is boss. The first morning out, his tent-boy is almost sure to oversleep. Despite the fact that orders have been given for a start at daybreak, every single porter lies asleep until later. The cook may serve breakfast an hour after it should have been ready. Everything seems wrong. And then, of all times, is the moment to make an impression. The hunter must, if he values his future peace of mind, turn to in apparent fury. When such an experience has been looked for in advance, when everything has gone exactly as was to be expected, it is sometimes difficult for a man to keep a straight face as he threatens these grown-up children. They are truly childlike. But, like children, they soon learn, so that one wrathful outburst—or two at most—will serve your purpose, provided you have known how to direct your efforts. From then on, if your headman is competent, you are likely to have a good safari, and can enjoy yourself far more than would be possible if you let that first golden opportunity slip.

The natives are paid so little that sometimes you permit yourself to hire a host of personal servants, or "boys," as they are called. There are your *syce*, or pony-boy, your camera-boy, your gun-bearer and his assistant, your tent-boy and so on. Carl and Mrs. Akeley once hired a boy whose sole duty was to care for a pet monkey that they kept with them in camp. Your cook has an

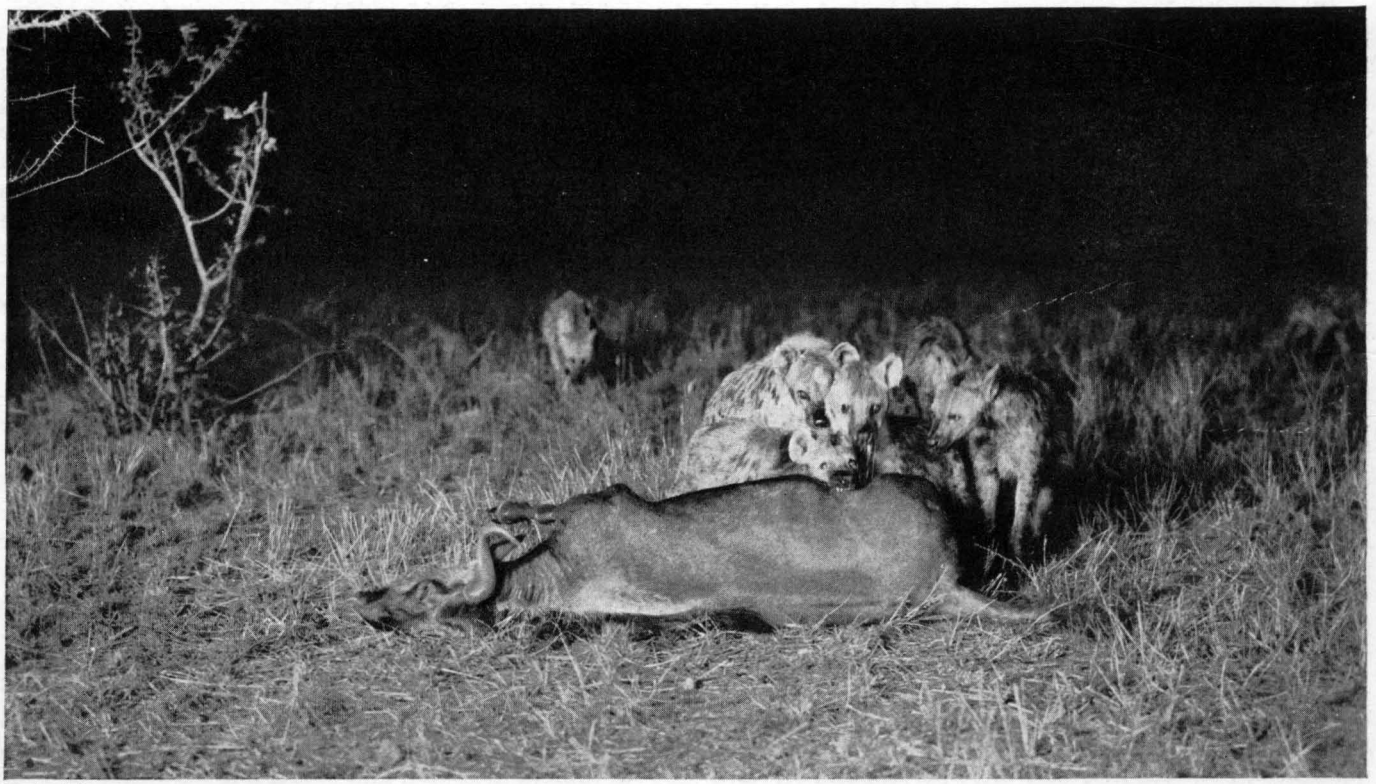
assistant or two, and, if there is any particular job to which you wish to assign a boy, nothing is easier.

The porters make and break camp. They gather fire-wood. They beat the bush for game. They carry their loads on the daily marches. I have known such men to march for thirty-three miles in one day, carrying eighty pounds of load, and then have had them come in ahead of me when all I had had to carry was my gun. They have staffs to aid them as they make their way along with their heavy loads upon their heads, but they do not carry spears or belt-knives—or guns, which are taboo to all natives save the *askaris*.

These men—the askaris—are the soldiers of the party. They stand guard. They are authorized by the government to carry guns, though the cartridges they receive are limited in number and must be strictly accounted for. With a safari of a hundred porters there are usually about eight or ten askaris, who perform more or less the duty of lieutenants. This is work that the Masai—perhaps the most interesting of the tribes I came to know—are willing to do, because they feel it is not beneath their dignity. The Wakamba and many others are quite willing to carry bundles, but not so the Masai. They are warriors at heart, and, although they have subdued only a few of the tribes about them, they occupy a position of great importance in the eyes of all British East African natives. A Masai will condescend to carry his master's gun, it is true, but he does so because a gun fascinates him, and he wants to have it in his hands. Aside from such a task, he is willing to do nothing menial at all. The askari, however, is rated as a person of standing, and so the Masai is willing to be one.

But to me my guides have always been the most interesting of the natives. The reason for this is that you almost invariably choose your guides from the inhabitants of the district in which you are hunting. Thus you get a native who is not spoiled as are so many of those that you pick up in the towns. It takes very little association with Westerners to give the natives all sorts of foolish ideas. They become a bit blasé; they love to wear the ragged, cast-off clothes of white men; they soon pick up the vices of civilization. The simpler natives of the uncivilized districts, however, still retain their natural characteristics. They are handsome in their tribal costumes. They are direct and keen and unspoiled.

Living as they do in the immediate vicinity of game, many of these men grow to have an almost uncanny ability to track the animals and to find them. On one occasion I found a Wandorobo whose language was utterly unknown to me. Neither was there a single boy in my safari who could talk to the fellow. Nevertheless I managed, through sign language, to explain to him that I wanted him to take me where there was game. It was interesting to watch his methods. There was only one trouble. As a tracker he approached perfection, and I was never sure that he would not lead me through the heavy undergrowth in which we were hunting until we had come absolutely up to an elephant. He could have done it, I am sure, and to him I was so great a hunter that he no doubt thought he had only to point out the game and leave the rest to me. That he was a real shenzi was certain, and of course the powers of the white hunter, as they had come to his ears, were very, very marvelous indeed. He did not know, poor fellow, that a hunter may have in the gun he carries all the power he needs to kill game without knowing how to shoot so very well. So I had forever to be holding him back, lest he lead me through the bush to a point from which I might have



Martin Johnson

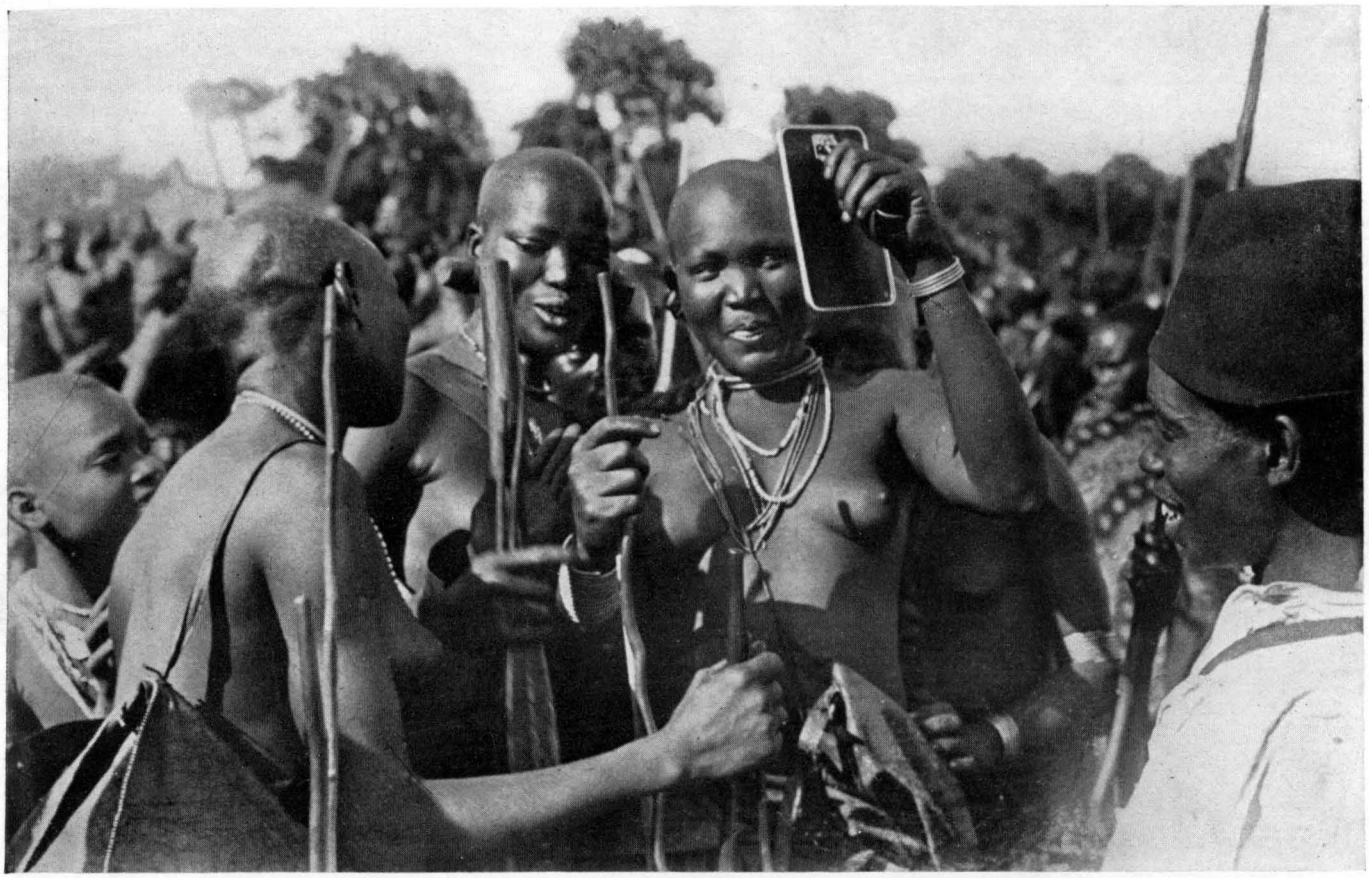
A pack of hyenas can make short work of a wildebeest kill like this, even cracking the bones, chewing them up and swallowing them with great gusto. Mr. Clark was told by the Wakamba that members of that East African tribe not only abandon sick or old people to the mercy of hyenas out on the plains but refuse to kill these beasts for fear of releasing devils

This is Simba, the handsome Masai "askari" who speared a charging rhinoceros after Mr. Clark had emptied his revolver into its massive old head in vain. While Mr. Clark was leaping about, in his attempts to dodge the wounded and infuriated animal, Simba thrust eighteen inches of his spear into its side. His name, Simba, is the Swahili word for "lion"

been able to touch some big bull elephant with the very muzzle of my gun.

It was extraordinary how perfectly we understood each other, despite the fact that we had not a single word in common. Signs sometimes give your meaning very clearly. You need only try it to see that. To stop, to move ahead or to one side, to go backward—all those ideas can be simply expressed by single motions of a hand. Where has a certain animal gone? One motion tells plainly that he is over a hill; another that he is in a valley. The guide touches his ear and you listen; he points and you look. One sign says that the animal is large; another, that it is small. One suggests danger; another, safety. Nor do you need a great deal of experience before you are able to carry on very well by such methods. And many times, when the bush was thick and dangerous game was near, that Wandorobo called my attention to our quarry by no move whatever, merely holding himself motionless until I, seeing him utterly quiet, looked in the direction in which his spear was pointed.

Such experiences with natives are familiar to almost every one who goes on safari. On more than one occasion, certainly, I have been the whole-hearted admirer of these simple sons of the tropics as they performed their marvels of trekking or proved themselves faithful and brave to the point of facing death for me. Never shall I forget how a handsome Masai askari speared a rhino that charged A. Radclyffe Dugmore and me—a rhino that had refused to turn when I fired buckshot and ball cartridge in its face, and seemed but slightly perturbed when I emptied my revolver into its massive old head. The Masai spearman made an impression on the animal when my weapons had failed; for he thrust eighteen inches of his spear into its side and then pursued it despite the fact that for weapons he had nothing save his swordlike knife



While these Meru girls were having their first experiences with a real looking-glass, Mr. Clark took their photograph. Though the inhabitants of an African village are likely to be anything but natural in their behavior when a hunter on "safari" first comes in contact with them, after a time he may surprise them in some simple act that shows genuine emotion

and his knobbed stick. Having seen him face that wounded and infuriated rhino with such weapons, while I, with a gun that I did not have time to reload, was leaping about spiritedly if ungracefully in my attempts to dodge the animal, I began to realize how much there was to admire in such a warrior.

Simba, as I have said, is Swahili for "lion," and that was the name under which this spearman went. Occasionally parents give it to their children, and some there are who adopt it. What had happened in this case I do not know, but no man could have been more appropriately named.

I have never had a man in any of my safaris killed or mauled by animals, although such things happen now and then. I have had men almost killed in their personal squabbles. It is not unusual to be called suddenly forth from your tent by the shouts and blows of some momentarily fierce fight. Furthermore, you must expect often to sit in solemn state while in the field and to fill the position of judge. Sometimes, too, a Wakamba youngster, sent by his proud parents to pay his respects to the "all-powerful" hunter, comes and stands erect but with bowed head until you place your hand upon his head in a little ceremony that perhaps signifies the conveyance of a blessing of sorts. You are the "great man," and you must play the part.

Of course the very fact that a hunter from Europe or America is such a personage in the eyes of the villagers makes it difficult for him to know them otherwise than superficially. In the field he can learn little enough of the animals, which are his major interest, and usually he learns almost nothing of the natives. When he visits villages, he will find the inhabitants anything but natural. I had been in scores of villages before I ever saw a sign of affection between two natives.

We were on safari, with the usual long string of porters, and arrived one day in a small village where the men were permitted to drop their loads for a rest. While they were thus engaged, one of my boys happened to see his mother, from whom he had been separated for several years. Neither had known where to find the other in all that time, and the meeting was touching. The mother promptly forgot the strange white men who had come from a distant land of which she knew nothing. To her, the world centered in her son. I looked on and was amazed. Never before had I seen tears in a native's eyes as I saw them that day in the eyes of that wrinkled old mother. And when, a half-hour later, we started on, the mother came with us for ten long miles through the rain, and, in order to show her affection for her son, she carried his sixty-pound load upon her head, while he, with her hand upon his arm, chatted joyfully with her throughout the whole way. At last she decided to turn back, but she stood for a long time on a knoll and watched us as we marched—stood there, raising her hand in the air from time to time as her son, carrying his load now, turned and raised his own hand to her in filial salute.

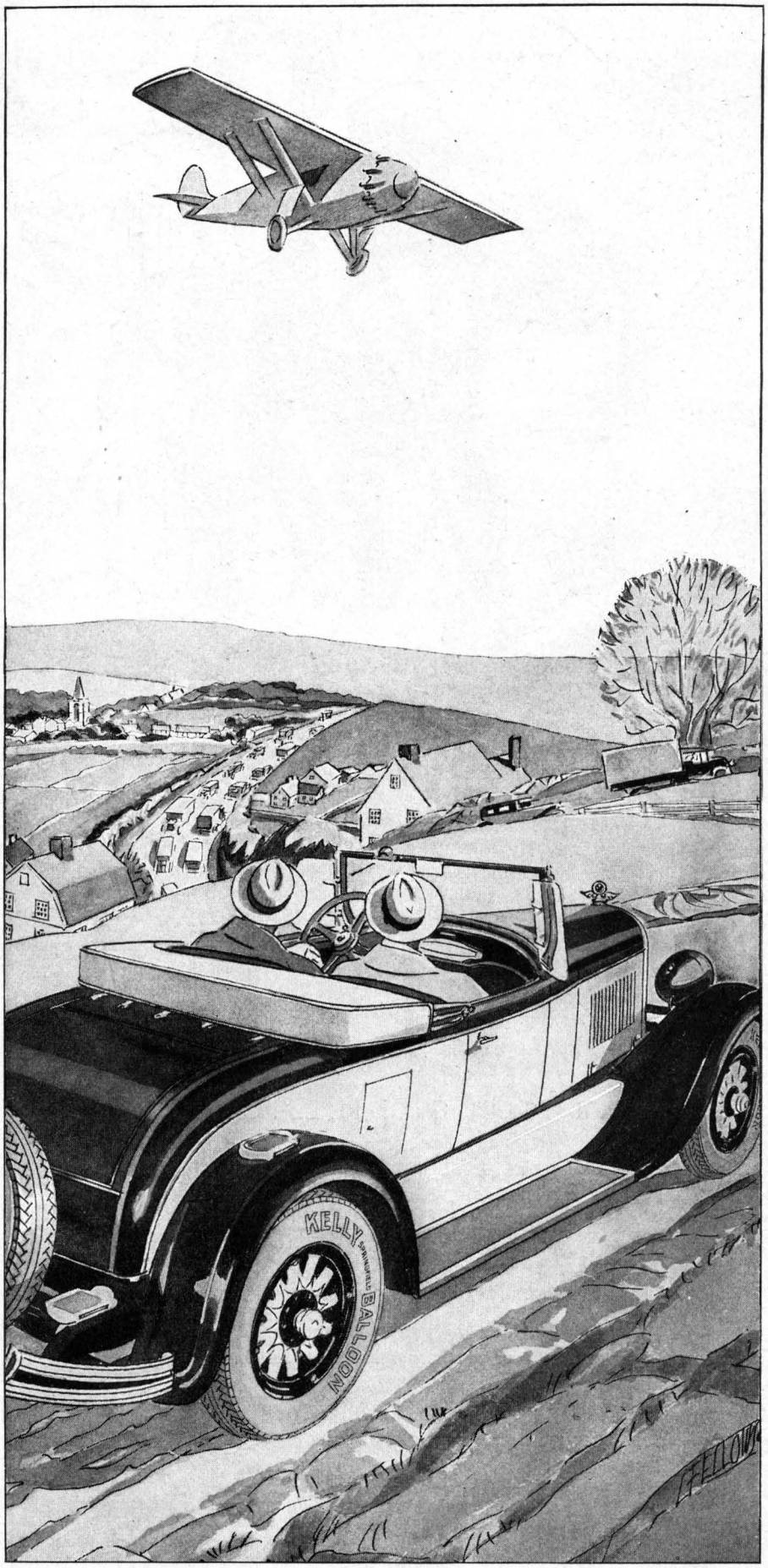
I have heard many men who have spent a few weeks on safari generalize scandalously about the natives. They are worthless. They are dirty and disgusting. They lie. They steal. All of these statements and many others I have heard from travelers in Africa.

Amazing to a Westerner is the nonchalant manner in which these Masai girls wear their elaborate neck-rings. With equal ease they stand for their photograph or bend over, as below, to perform some necessary bit of labor. Like the men of their tribe—one of the most interesting in all British East Africa—they are very handsome and very proud

Naturally African manners are not our manners. On one occasion, after I had killed a big bull elephant, a flock of natives assembled around the carcass, waiting until I should have skinned it and taken charge of the tusks. There were about fifty or sixty family groups, and they sat about on their haunches for all the world like carrion crows, with devouring eyes fixed upon the prospective feast.

Finally I had completed my task, and they went to work. With a rush the men leaped upon the skinned carcass. The elephant had been dead two days by now, but they did not seem to mind. They leaped upon it with delight, each man cutting what he could of the meat and throwing it high over the heads of the others to where his own little family group was waiting. The air was filled with flying chunks of meat, and, as each one fell, some little black fellow would dart out after it, would retrieve it and would bring it back to the circle made by his own mother and brothers and sisters. It was amazing how rapidly that carcass disappeared. Men climbed inside the mountain of flesh in their greedy attempts to get what they could, and one man was actually blown off his feet when he stuck his knife into the gas-filled carcass and released the pressure. The next morning, when I passed that way, I found the skeleton picked clean.

Does a native lie? The quick way to answer such a question is merely to say "Yes," but it is not so much that he lies as that he tells you what he believes you want to know. "Are there elephants in the next valley?" "Oh, yes, bwana. Many, many elephants." But ask the same native a little later the same question in a different way. "There are no elephants in the next valley, are there?" "Oh, no, bwana. No elephants at all." The statement I have just made applies to every tribe with which I have been in contact in the East African section and, I believe, to most, if not all, of the Africans south of Abyssinia and the Sahara. The natives of northern Africa certainly are different, and the Somali, who are typical of northern, rather than of eastern, Africa, though they live on the borders of (*Continued on page 408*)



"That's the way to travel, Bob—no crowded roads, no punctures or delays of any kind."

"Yes, I suppose we'll all be traveling that way some day, but in the meantime, a good car with Kelly-Springfield tires all around is about the most comfortable and carefree way I know of."

ON SAFARI IN BRITISH EAST AFRICA

(*Continued from page 367*)

"British East," do not have this particular characteristic.

By and large, the natives of eastern Africa, quite regardless of tribe, are children, mentally, and react very much as children do. They are pleased with trifles and have very little sense of responsibility. I have seen them, during a very long, hard march across a desert where there was not a drop of water to be had, pour out the contents of their canteens in order to lighten their loads. What can you do with creatures like that? They did not seem to realize that the water was essential to them, and later, when their mouths were parched, when the heat of the day had dragged them down, when they were almost fainting with exhaustion, they dropped out and sat beside the trail, where I knew they would die of thirst. I was forced, actually, to use a whip on them, in order to keep them going to where water could be had—miles ahead. Yet later, on that same unfortunate journey, when for two days they had been without food in a country where game was wanting, I was amazed to see them close up their ranks and break into song as we approached a little village where we could get food. It was not that they knew the food would be there. It was only that they seem to have some sort of pride in their appearance, and rarely approach a town save in close marching order—singing. It is one of their ways of showing that they can come in fresh—that they are men—real men.

I wish I understood these people better than I do. I wish I could fathom their strange beliefs. That they are affectionate, I feel certain. Yet, when a member of a Wakamba family is seriously ill or very, very old, do they take care of him? Not so. Instead, they lead him out to the plains at a distance from the village. They supply him with food and fire-wood and build a fire for him. So long as he can keep the fire going, he is safe. But, once he has grown so weak that he cannot keep the blaze up, the hyenas come. Not long thereafter there is likely to be a gruesome feast.

I have asked the Wakamba why they do such things, and have been told quite frankly that, should a person die within a hut, then the hut must be burned, in order to rid it of the devils that have brought about the death, and all the dead person's belongings must be burned. Huts and belongings, simple as they are, are valuable; so the people take the frightful course that custom has brought into being. Nor do they ever kill hyenas, I have been told; for those creatures are, so to speak, the perambulating tombs of their ancestors, and to kill the beasts is merely another way of releasing the devils that already have been guilty of enough trouble. Yet, strange and brutal as this custom is, there is such courage among them that they will sometimes brave death with the utmost unselfishness in order to save a friend or a master.

I should like nothing better than to visit Africa again, in company with some one who thoroughly understands some of these sturdy East African tribes, in order that my superficial observations of them, made when I was almost invariably more interested in something else, might be widened and deepened by careful study. If that is ever possible, it can result I feel convinced, only in a greater admiration for them—in yet more liking for their manliness, their bravery, and those other, less-known qualities that make of them a race unique among the peoples of the world.

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Read the details of ASIA'S *prize letter contest, on page 345. They will interest you.*