

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:
SAILING ACROSS EUROPE
SEEING RED
THE WAY OF A TRANSGRESSOR
TRANSGRESSOR IN THE TROPICS
BOMBER'S MOON
(with Tom Purvis)
BEHIND GOD'S BACK
THE STORY OF A LAKE
GOING FISHING
THE SONS OF NOAH

LAST CHANCE IN AFRICA

by

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Makueni land was broken, and only then when a highly literate native Chief, Mutinda, who had 500 acres of his own in the reserve, agreed to accept and cultivate a model 45-acre farm, and brought twenty other native families along with him. They were given 40-acre plots to encourage them. At a cost of some £67,000 (which does not include the cost of the fly-belt), some 13,000 acres have been entirely or partially cleared, wells have been bored, and the land for eighty-four families was ready for occupation when I went to Makueni in February 1948. Any white brain in Kenya which accepts *that* as a project which will answer the Machokos situation is not only misleading itself but the people higher up in England who will have the say in making grants from the Colonial Development Fund. It is just no answer at all.

On the other hand, it is as intelligent and hard-working an effort to make the natives farm properly as could probably be found in all East Africa. In fact, when you survey these model farms and meet the men who are in charge of them, you see that the Makueni development is an admirable scheme. *If* only the natives could be made to work it. It is no answer to Machakos, but it is, most definitely, a deeply sincere effort of the Kenya Government to persuade the Wakamba to adopt a more sensible way of life. Persuasion—and then, I am certain, force will have to be used at Makueni. The natives must be *made* to co-operate, for their own salvation.

A sad item that may be given to show the type of land that is being cleared for the Makueni scheme is to say that 999 rhino had to be shot by white hunters before it was considered safe to open up clearings beyond the tsetse-fly belt. The rhino is an ugly beast, this hangover from prehistoric days, and because his short sight and chronic nervousness makes him charge at anything that moves, is probably the unsafest animal in all Africa. Yet it seemed a shame, if the Makueni scheme is not going to be accepted by the Wakambas, to have slaughtered so many of even these unsociable animals. Thinking of that as I sat in the valley of the Keite River, I felt very much as did a white man who had been clearing the tsetse-fly out of a section of Tanganyika in 1939, who told me then: "Goddam it! When I think of some of the men [white] who are going to come in here, I'd rather have the fly!" Our jeep had to stop and be de-flyed several times in the two days that we were

going in and out of the fly sections at Makueni: a black boy squirting D.D.T. or some other insecticide on our wheels and chassis. Some 4,200 acres have been completely cleared, and 9,000 acres had been "discriminately" cleared—that is, de-flyed, but with a certain amount of shade trees left standing. It is a rolling, and now open, country, at about 4,000 feet elevation, lying between wooded, undulating hills. About as pleasant a spot to live in, it struck me, as any man could wish.

Here you have a large-scale scheme which is intended solely for the African's benefit. No white man will, or could, make one penny out of it. In fact—which is a thing to give the Kenya Government full credit for—the fulfilment of that scheme will mean a large drain on the Colony's exchequer. It is the Africans themselves who are responsible for the slowness with which the project is getting under way, and who, unless they change their unco-operative attitude, will be almost entirely responsible for its failure. The two top men in charge of it on the ground at Makueni could not have been better cast. One, the District Commissioner, is a quiet-spoken man of the university don type, the calm, deliberative Colonial Office official who will sit there patiently and let the native have his say, and thus do much to win the confidence of the black man in the integrity of the scheme: he will be *reasoned* into complying with the necessary restrictions of the scheme rather than ordered into them. This is the psychological advance; a gain greater even than clearing the bush. It is the one thing that will make the native work his land properly. This District Commissioner is also extremely happy in such a post, because he is a fanatic ornithologist, expert enough to contribute regularly to the *Ibis* and other British bird periodicals of the more scientific nature. He lives in a big marquee tent, as does his colleague, and his delight that first night was to show me the set of Audubon prints that will eventually glorify the wall of the small house that is being built for him. The other man there—and these two form a remarkably complementary couple—was King's Own Scottish Borderers in this last war, also an officer in the King's African Rifles, holds the unique distinction of having fired both the first and the last shot in the Abyssinian campaign, with a break as Lieutenant Colonel in Burma in between. He is an agricultural

expert and a fanatical research worker into all the problems arising from the environment itself on these model farms for Africans. He is the "driver," the type of fanatic who "gets things done." Both in its conception in the Agricultural Department in Nairobi and in the application on the spot, this scheme lacks nothing in either heart or intelligence or white man's effort. The only thing wanting is the co-operation of the natives.

Eighteen acres on paper looks one thing; 18 acres of field, as you stand on them, look entirely different. I can't see how one family of, say, five natives will ever be able to work 18 acres. And I don't think that Major Frank Joyce, who probably knows as much about farming as any white man in Kenya, could either. That is, to judge from his remarks. Yet here is a strange thing, to show how insatiable is the native's lust for land. As we were leaving Makueni, my driver, Joseph, a Kikuyu, asked me what I thought of the Makueni scheme, and I, thinking that one family could never handle so much land, said: "Well, the Wakamba certainly can't complain that they are not being given enough land in this place!" "Oh!" said he. "Eighteen acres is nowhere near enough land, sir!" So there you are. The white man's conception of such a scheme as Makueni is to set going a type of modern farming which will enable more people to live on any given area of land; the black man's idea, when presented with such a scheme, is to ignore that and merely demand more land. The idea of intensive, *permanent* cultivation is the hardest thing to get him to accept.

The very core of the Makueni scheme is to get the native to give up his old habit of shifting cultivation; to show him that he can live on the same section of land, and, by the proper rotation of crops and resting his land, how he can get a greater and assured return from it. It goes further in showing him how, by centring his farming around his own personal cattle *boma* (5 acres of each of these 18-acre farms), he can manure his own land. Fundamentally, it is to teach him that you can't always be taking something out of the land (the kitty) unless you put something into it. By induction, even with these separately worked 18-acre farms it will also show him how to market his cash crops *as a group*. That, if the Kenya Administration can bring it about, would be real

co-operative farming on, say, something like the Danish model.

A good description of these ideal little farms (if they are ever accepted in any number) was given in the *East African Standard*:

"The holding is divided into four main divisions, pivoting on the central one, the homestead. Here two acres are devoted to the farmer's house, his store and tool shed, his fruit trees, chickens and pigs, and—crux of the whole set-up—the cattle *boma*. The *boma* is the manure 'factory,' which keeps the arable going. The arable, the second of the four divisions, is of 5 acres, divided into fields, and properly terraced. Planting is arranged so that not all of it is in use at once.

"Two fields, each of 1 acre, are planted with long-term crops, such as pigeon-peas, sweet potatoes, and the like. Two more fields, each of 1½ acres, are planted with short-term crops. One of these 1½-acre fields is planted in the short rains and lies fallow in the long rains, while the other, having lain fallow through the short rains, is planted in the long rains.

"The land not in use takes the rains, stores the water and is manured against the next crop to be planted on it.

"There is a grass ley covering 5 acres, divided into paddocks of ½ acre each (by hurdles). Cattle are grazed on this grass during the rains only. A system of controlled grazing—and hence of controlled manuring—is employed, the cattle being grazed for one or two days in each paddock in turn.

"The effect is to keep the grass short and manured, leading to a thick mat of grass, in which most of the rain will be held, run-off being reduced to a minimum. At the end of the rains the cattle are brought back into the *boma* and exist—in theory, at any rate—until the next rains entirely on fodder crops grown on the fourth section of this farm, which is a 5-acre fodder plot. . . .

"At the end of four years the arable land is used for fodder crops . . . etc. At the end of another four years it is all rotated once more. . . ."

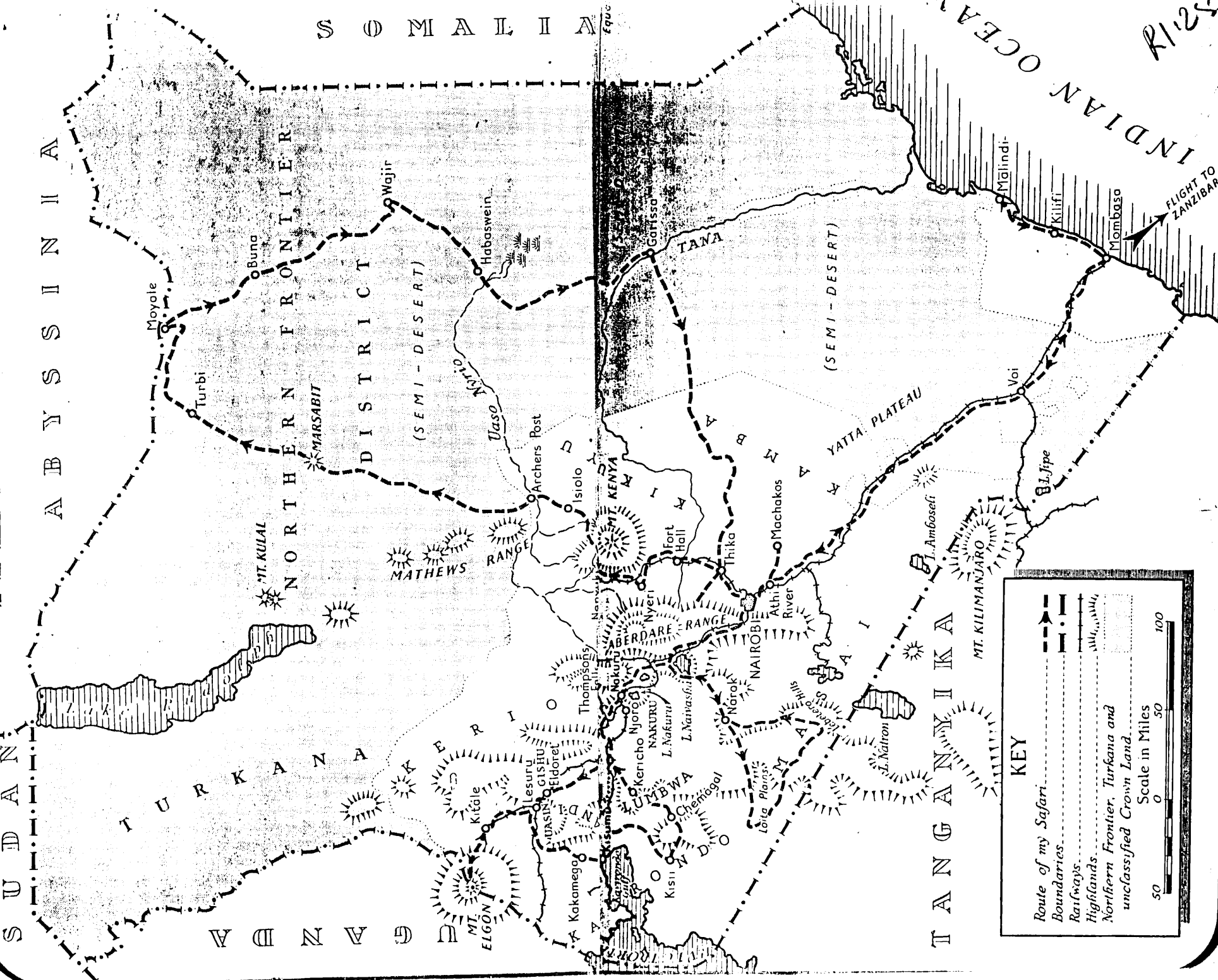
I saw the main experimental farm for the Makueni scheme, where valuable knowledge is being gained of what strains of grass, fodder crops, maize, millets, groundnut, etc., will promise best in the conditions likely to be encountered when the bush has been cleared. But I could not help feeling that the very precision of this rotation and so on was too intricate and delicately balanced, much like a laboratory experiment,

KENYA

S U D A N

A B Y S S I N I A

S O M A L I A



KEY

- Route of my Safari
- Boundaries
- Railways
- Highlands
- Northern Frontier, Turkana and unclassified Crown Land

Scale in Miles
0 50 100

R125