



HUGO ADOLF BERNATZIK

THE
DARK CONTINENT
AFRICA

THE LANDSCAPE AND THE PEOPLE

B. WESTERMANN Co., INC., NEW YORK

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THE DARK CONTINENT

Africa is now traversed from north to south and from west to east by modern means of communication. The journey from Cape Town to Cairo is made without having to renounce European comforts. But the traveller learns nothing of that secret life of the natives of the Dark Continent which he may have expected to see. Both the animals and the natives with their genuine culture have retreated from the onrushing wave of civilization to almost inaccessible parts of the country.

Now it might be supposed that owing to the convenient methods of travelling — in which distance plays no rôle — it would be very easy to travel in Africa with a camera. To a certain extent this is right. But one only sees Africa from one particular viewpoint in this way. It makes no difference whether one gets off the train or boat in the east, south or west. Wherever it may be, one comes across a country that bears the unmistakable impress of Europe. But the colonists did not take their culture to the natives because they went to Africa to trade and to hunt for gold. Thus there is no use in looking for beautiful edifices built by Europeans. All one finds are ugly barracks and prosaic-looking houses which rarely strike one as being an artistic improvement on the native buildings made of rare woods or of clay. On the contrary, the native buildings often make a much more artistic impression than do the European ones.

If, however, one wants to penetrate into the Dark Continent, the world of the blacks, and meet the proud unspoilt tribes who live their own lives uninfluenced by European civilization, then this can only be accomplished after overcoming tremendous difficulties and deprivations, and very often the traveller will do so at the risk of his life. It is enough if, out of pure ignorance, one touches or kills one of their totem animals to turn them into deadly enemies.

Once the traveller has entered these remote districts he finds himself in a world of cultural contradictions. There is a cultural gap of thousands of years between the cave dwellers of Northern Rhodesia, who are still in the Stone Age, and the Bagara tribes of Kordofan whose Arabic culture is of the highest order. There are whole tribes living absolutely apart though in close proximity, and whose cultures are of the most varied types and in different stages of development. Each of these various tribal cultures forms a separate

harmonious whole, and are not so strongly contrasted as is the case in India where extreme wisdom as well as barbarism and the most exquisite luxury and extreme misery are found in one and the same country.

In those parts of Africa still left to the natives a pitiless sun scorches the vegetation during the dry season, and the longed-for fruitful rainy season brings numerous diseases in its train. Life is nearly always one long struggle against nature. If the rainy season is late, or rinderpest kills the cattle there are such terrible famines that they become dates by which epochs are reckoned. Hunger and want have set their mark on the natives in most parts of Africa. Their character is hard, secretive and cruel; as cruel as is their struggle for existence. It is only possible to watch their rites and religious ceremonies after having overcome that extreme suspicion which they entertain towards all strangers, and after having understood their mentality. A European may live for months near a tribe without obtaining the least idea of the mental attitude of these blacks.

I always tried to take a photograph of natives when they did not notice it. I succeeded in most cases. In selecting those photographs taken in districts I have not been to myself I have followed the same principle, and have only included pictures which are true to nature and show both the natives and animals as they really are.

The future will show how European life in Africa will finally develop. For this reason I have not dealt with the subject in detail. But the culture of the black peoples, as well as the animals disappear whenever they come in touch with white civilization, in spite of all efforts made towards preservation on the part of considerate governments. The natives are reduced to the position of slaves to the white colonizers, and the animals die off. I have tried to preserve some pictures of a small fraction of this world that is now fast disappearing, and I sincerely thank all those who have kindly placed material at my disposal. Special thanks are due to Professor Bernhard Struck, Dresden, for his generous and highly valuable assistance in preparing the letterpress.

The spelling of names is a difficult question. It often varies according to the nationality of explorers and scholars, and it also tends to vary near the frontiers of the various colonies. I have adopted the official orthography whenever it was possible to do so.

H. A. BERNATZIK



Stone age engraving of
rhinoceros
Rinoceronte
(Età della pietra)

Steinzeitliche Darstellung eines
Nashorns
Dessin de rhinocéros provenant de l'âge de la
pierre



Angreifendes Rhinoceros, Keniakolonie
Rhinocéros attaquant, Colonie du Kénia

Rhinoceros, charging, Kenya Colony
Rinoceronte, Colonia Kenia