

est in the people on whom they turned, and to read my letters as you read a serial in a magazine. I used to add in my own letters a few threats against our Censor, to be carried out after the end of the war, for him to read. When the end of the war came he may have remembered these threats, or he may on his own have woken up and repented; in any case he sent a runner to the farm with news of the Armistice. I was alone in the house when the runner arrived; I walked out in the woods. It was very silent there, and it was strange to think that it was silent on the fronts of France and Flanders as well,—all the guns had been stilled. In this stillness Europe and Africa seemed near to one another, as if you could have walked by the forest-path on to Vimy Ridge. When I came back to the house I saw a figure standing outside. It was Esa with his bundle. He at once told me that he had come back and that he had brought me a present.

Esa's present was a picture, framed and under glass, of a tree, very carefully penned down in ink, every one of its hundred leaves painted a clear green. Upon each leaf, in diminutive Arabic letters, a word was written in red ink. I take it that the writings came out of the Koran, but Esa was incapable of explaining what they meant, he kept on wiping off the glass with his sleeve and assuring me that it was a very good present. He told me that he had had the picture made, during his year of trial, by the old Moham-medan priest of Nairobi, it must have taken the old man hours and hours to print it down.

Esa now stayed with me till he died.

THE IGUANA

In the Reserve I have sometimes come upon the Iguana, the big lizards, as they were sunning themselves upon a flat

stone in a river-bed. They are not pretty in shape, but nothing can be imagined more beautiful than their colouring. They shine like a heap of precious stones or like a pane cut out of an old church window. When, as you approach, they swish away, there is a flash of azure, green and purple over the stones, the colour seems to be standing behind them in the air, like a comet's luminous tail.

Once I shot an Iguana. I thought that I should be able to make some pretty things from his skin. A strange thing happened then, that I have never afterwards forgotten. As I went up to him, where he was lying dead upon his stone, and actually while I was walking the few steps, he faded and grew pale, all colour died out of him as in one long sigh, and by the time that I touched him he was grey and dull like a lump of concrete. It was the live impetuous blood pulsating within the animal, which had radiated out all that glow and splendour. Now that the flame was put out, and the soul had flown, the Iguana was as dead as a sandbag.

Often since I have, in some sort, shot an Iguana, and I have remembered the one of the Reserve. Up at Meru I saw a young Native girl with a bracelet on, a leather strap two inches wide, and embroidered all over with very small turquoise-coloured beads which varied a little in colour and played in green, light blue and ultramarine. It was an extraordinarily live thing; it seemed to draw breath on her arm, so that I wanted it for myself, and made Farah buy it from her. No sooner had it come upon my own arm than it gave up the ghost. It was nothing now, a small, cheap, purchased article of finery. It had been the play of colours, the duet between the turquoise and the "nègre",—that quick, sweet, brownish black, like peat and black pottery, of the Native's skin,—that had created the life of the bracelet.

In the Zoological Museum of Pietermaritzburg, I have

seen, in a stuffed deep-water fish in a showcase, the same combination of colouring, which there had survived death; it made me wonder what life can well be like, on the bottom of the sea, to send up something so live and airy. I stood in Meru and looked at my pale hand and at the dead bracelet, it was as if an injustice had been done to a noble thing, as if truth had been suppressed. So sad did it seem that I remembered the saying of the hero in a book that I had read as a child: "I have conquered them all, but I am standing amongst graves."

In a foreign country and with foreign species of life one should take measures to find out whether things will be keeping their value when dead. To the settlers of East Africa I give the advice: "For the sake of your own eyes and heart, shoot not the Iguana."

FARAH AND THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Once a friend at home wrote out to me and described a new staging of "The Merchant of Venice." In the evening as I was reading the letter over again, the play became vivid to me, and seemed to fill the house, so much, that I called in Farah to talk with him about it, and explained the plot of the comedy to him.

Farah, like all people of African blood, liked to hear a story told, but only when he was sure that he and I were alone in the house, did he consent to listen to one. It was therefore when the houseboys were back in their own huts, and any passer-by from the farm, looking in through the windows, would have believed him and me to be discussing household matters, that I narrated, and he listened, standing up immovable at the end of the table, his serious eyes on my face.

Farah gave his full attention to the affairs of Antonio, Bassanio and Shylock. Here was a big, complicated business deal, somewhat on the verge of the law, the real thing to the heart of a Somali. He asked me a question or two as to the clause of the pound of flesh: it obviously seemed to him an eccentric, but not impossible agreement; men might go in for that sort of thing. And here the story began to smell of blood,—his interest in it rose. When Portia came upon the stage, he pricked his ears; I imagined that he saw her as a woman of his own tribe, Fathima with all sail set, crafty and insinuating, out to outman man. Coloured people do not take sides in a tale, the interest to them lies in the ingeniousness of the plot itself; and the Somali, who in real life have a strong sense of values, and a gift for moral indignation, give these a rest in their fiction. Still, here Farah's sympathy was with Shylock, who had come down with the cash; he repugned his defeat.

"What?" said he. "Did the Jew give up his claim? He should not have done that. The flesh was due to him, it was little enough for him to get for all that money."

"But what else could he do," I asked, "when he must not take one drop of blood?"

"Memsahib," said Farah, "he could have used a red-hot knife. That brings out no blood."

"But," I said, "he was not allowed to take either more or less than one pound of flesh."

"And who," said Farah, "would have been frightened by that, exactly a Jew? He might have taken little bits at a time, with a small scale at hand to weight it on, till he had got just one pound. Had the Jew no friends to give him advice?"

All Somalis have in their countenance something exceedingly dramatic. Farah, with the slightest change of mien and

the German soldiers if we were made prisoners, and he attached great value to it.

How beautiful were the evenings of the Masai Reserve when after sunset we arrived at the river or the water-hole where we were to outspan, travelling in a long file. The plains with the thorn-trees on them were already quite dark, but the air was filled with clarity,—and over our heads, to the West, a single star which was to grow big and radiant in the course of the night was now just visible, like a silver point in the sky of citrine topaz. The air was cold to the lungs, the long grass dripping wet, and the herbs on it gave out their spiced astringent scent. In a little while on all sides the Cicada would begin to sing. The grass was me, and the air, the distant invisible mountains were me, the tired oxen were me. I breathed with the slight night-wind in the thorn-trees.

After three months I was suddenly ordered home. As things began to be systematically organized and regular troops came out from Europe, my expedition, I believe, was found to be somewhat irregular. We went back, passing our old camping-places with heavy hearts.

This Safari lived for a long time in the memory of the farm. Later on I had many other Safaris, but for some reason,—either because we had at the time been in the service of the Government, a sort of Official ourselves, or because of the war-like atmosphere about it,—this particular expedition was dear to the hearts of the people who had been on it. Those who had been with me then came to look upon themselves as a Safari-aristocracy.

Many years afterwards they would come up to the house and talk about the Safari, just to freshen up their memory of it, and to go through one or another of our adventures then.

THE SWAHILI NUMERAL SYSTEM

At the time when I was new in Africa, a shy young Swedish dairy-man was to teach me the numbers in Swahili. As the Swahili word for nine, to Swedish ears, has a dubious ring, he did not like to tell it to me, and when he had counted: "seven, eight," he stopped, looked away, and said: "They have not got nine in Swahili."

"You mean," I said, "that they can only count as far as eight?"

"Oh, no," he said quickly. "They have got ten, eleven, twelve, and so on. But they have not got nine."

"Does that work?" I asked, wondering. "What do they do when they come to nineteen?"

"They have not got nineteen either," he said, blushing, but very firm, "nor ninety, nor nine hundred,"—for these words in Swahili are constructed out of the number nine,— "But apart from that they have got all our numbers."

The idea of this system for a long time gave me much to think of, and for some reason a great pleasure. Here, I thought, was a people who have got originality of mind, and courage to break with the pedantry of the numeral series.

One, two and three are the only three sequential prime numbers, I thought, so may eight and ten be the only sequential even numbers. People might try to prove the existence of the number of nine by arguing that it should be possible to multiply the number of three with itself. But why should it be so? If the number of two has got no square root, the number of three may just as well be without a square number. If you work out the sum of digits of a number until you reduce it to a single figure, it makes no difference to the results if you have got the number of nine,

or any multiple of nine, in it from the beginning, so that here nine may really be said to be non-existent, and that, I thought, spoke for the Swaheli system.

It happened that I had at that time a houseboy, Zacharia, who had lost the fourth finger of his left hand. Perhaps, I thought, that is a common thing with Natives, and is done to facilitate their arithmetic to them, when they are counting upon their fingers.

When I began to develop my ideas to other people, I was stopped, and enlightened. Yet I have still got the feeling that there exists a Native system of numeral characters without the number of nine in it, which to them works well and by which you can find out many things.

I have, in this connection, remembered an old Danish clergyman who declared to me that he did not believe that God had created the Eighteenth Century.

‘I WILL NOT LET THESE GO EXCEPT
THOU BLESS ME’

When in Africa in March the long rains begin after four months of hot, dry weather, the richness of growth and the freshness and fragrance everywhere are overwhelming.

But the farmer holds back his heart and dares not trust to the generosity of nature, he listens, dreading to hear a decrease in the roar of the falling rain. The water that the earth is now drinking in must bring the farm, with all the vegetable, animal and human life on it, through four rainless months to come.

It is a lovely sight when the roads of the farm have all been turned into streams of running water, and the farmer wades through the mud with a singing heart, out to the flowering and dripping coffee-fields. But it happens in the

middle of the rainy season that in the evening the stars show themselves through the thinning clouds; then he stands outside his house and stares up, as if hanging himself on to the sky to milk down more rain. He cries to the sky: "Give me enough and more than enough. My heart is bared to thee now, and I will not let thee go except thou bless me. Drown me if you like, but kill me not with caprices. No *coitus interruptus*, heaven, heaven!"

Sometimes a cool, colourless day in the months after the rainy season calls back the time of the *marka mbaya*, the bad year, the time of the drought. In those days the Kikuyu used to graze their cows round my house, and a boy amongst them who had a flute, from time to time played a short tune on it. When I have heard this tune again, it has recalled in one single moment all our anguish and despair of the past. It has got the salt taste of tears in it. But at the same time I found in the tune, unexpectedly surprisingly, a vigour, a curious sweetness, a song. Had those hard times really had all these in them? There was youth in us then, a wild hope. It was during those long days that we were all of us merged into a unity, so that on another planet we shall recognise one another, and the things cry to each other, the cuckoo clock and my books to the lean-fleshed cows on the lawn and the sorrowful old Kikuyus: "You also were there. You also were part of the Ngong farm." That bad time blessed us and went away.

The friends of the farm came to the house, and went away again. They were not the kind of people who stay for a long time in the same place. They were not the kind of people either who grow old, they died and never came back. But they had sat contented by the fire, and when the house, closing round them, said: "I will not let you go ex-