

A CHRISTMAS IN MID- AFRICA

Nairobi, the capital of British East Africa, is in my eyes a very attractive little town. As it lies almost on the equator, it is never cold; but the tableland stretching between the coast and the vast lakes of Central Africa is so high that the nights are rarely unpleasantly hot, and are often cool enough to make a man sleep soundly under blankets. In the middle of the town, in the business part, the stores and other buildings stand close together; but the town is scattered over a wide stretch of territory, and the dwelling-houses stand, each by itself, bowered in trees and the gardens filled with bright-hued flowers. The bougainvillea vines make great splashes of color. Rickshaws and pony carts go through the streets, past long files of scantily clad burden-bearing natives, men and women, past creaking bullock carts, past white men on horseback, past native policemen, past other natives whose half-European clothes show them to be gun-bearers, or *saisés*; slender Somalis, with clean-cut features, saunter by; the Indians are everywhere, for most of the lesser and some of the bigger merchants, and most of the minor officials, come from Hindustan. Of the natives most are wild heathens; but some of them, and, all the Somalis, and most of the Indians, are Moslems. There are many Goanese who have kept the faith of their remote Portuguese ancestors; and there are Parsees, who, of all the Asiatics, come nearest to being accepted by the whites as being measurably on the same level with themselves—and who would be entirely so accepted if they possessed martial virtue in addition to their other good qualities.

Among the white population there are representatives of almost every European race; but of course the great majority are

English. Among them are many men and women who have seen and done many things of interest; who have carried on the work of the world in many strange places, who have met queer emergencies with cool heads, and have performed difficult and sometimes dangerous tasks with good sense and good humor; and who, in addition, are well read and care for music or art or science, or have some of the other interests which add so much to the joy of living even for men of action. I soon found that there were a number of households which to me seemed at least as attractive as any to be found in the great capitals of civilization.

There were several houses where I was made welcome, both within and without Nairobi. I shall always remember them; and of one of them I now write. The book-shelves were filled with just the books one loves to read—especially in the intervals of a rough hunting trip, when dainty refinement in a book gives the same kind of pleasure that under such circumstances is yielded by many other kinds of daintiness and refinement. The master of the house was a Cambridge man, who promptly gave me a letter to the Provost of King's College, Cambridge, when he found that I held in high esteem the Provost's "Short Stories of an Antiquary." That the mistress of the house has the gift of seeing, and the further gift of portraying what is seen, can be told by whoever reads Janet Allardyce's "African Sketches and Impressions" in the November "Scribner's."

Furthermore, there were two dear little girls, of eight and ten, who, as Christmas drew nigh, made me realize how homesick I was for my own family. They were such nice children! They had such quiet, pretty manners, and such true little hearts. When I called, if their father and mother were delayed, they always came in to entertain me. They might solemnly present me the kitty, so that I should not feel lonely; or else a delightful small parrot, which climbed unconcernedly over me, or walked around the floor and gently nipped the ends of my trousers if it thought I was not showing it proper attention. They told me about many things; especially about the small brother who was at school in England. The Nairobi shops

contain few things for children; and a man trying to do Christmas shopping by himself is a rather helpless creature; but I finally succeeded in getting each of them a trifling gift—an Indian-made bangle, of hairs from an elephant's tail, one with a tiny lion dangling from it, while the other had a tiny elephant.

A week before Christmas we said goodbye, with real regret, to all our Nairobi friends and started for Uganda. We crossed Lake Victoria Nyanza and began our march to Lake Albert Nyanza. Uganda is a beautiful, fertile land, with the true tropical climate; it is not a healthy country for white men, even in those parts which are free from sleeping-sickness.

Day after day we marched along, sometimes through seas of elephant grass twice the height of a man, sometimes through patches of tropical forest, sometimes through marshes or along plains where the natives tended their plantations of yams and bananas. Kermit and I, who were in excellent health, tried to keep the party in fresh meat. On Christmas Day we marched as usual, under the dazzling glare of the equatorial sun; Kermit shot a hartebeest for our Christmas dinner—although we would have preferred something else, as hartebeest venison is not very good. When we halted, the black-bearded elephant hunter who was with us—and no better man was to be found in Africa—came into my tent and handed me a little parcel, saying, "Here's a Christmas present which I was told not to give you until Christmas." It was from my two little friends in Nairobi; and on opening it I found some peppermint candy, and a shoe-bag which they had worked for me—and accompanying the latter a note which ran: "We have made this for you ourselves. It is meant for a shoe-bag; but you can use it for anything you wish." So I had my Christmas party, after all; and I do not think any boy or girl in America appreciated his or her presents more than I did mine, or was more touched and pleased to get them. The peppermint candy was a main feature of dinner that evening; and the shoe-bag journeyed all the way home with me.

By the way, though we only got a hartebeest for our main course on Christ-

mas Day, we fared well during Christmas week. Almost every day we got game—usually reed-buck, bush-buck, and guinea-fowl; and Kermit and I killed a big bull elephant. His heart was good when roasted; and from his trunk we made first-rate soup; while his huge body furnished a feast for the entire *safari*.

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