

XV Flood.

And then I was back at Shakama in the Sabaki River valley, and had exchanged drought for flood. The Sabaki is a river of constant flow, and, though the rains had failed on the coast, they had been heavy in the interior. The Sabaki had flooded its banks, and in the newly formed swamps near the camp, the frogs made a noise like a giant's kettle boiling over, and Mutusia, one of the Wakamba, crouching between setting sun and rising moon, made a "medicine" for our safe journey. Next day we followed the course of the river, winding through the vivid green of newly replanted crops and the blue and white of little lakes covered with water lilies. Talk in the villages was all of the river. Here a patch of sugar cane was a total loss; there a small valley had been completely drowned. All this was unfortunate, but you must look on the bright side of things. The elders, speaking with authority, said that a river in spate brought down much good soil. Unless some other misfortune befell, the new crops should be excellent. Eternal optimism that keeps the cultivator from despair. There would be a pinch of snuff all round from a stoppered antelope horn, and the talk would go on. I bought some native tobacco for the men, coarse, fierce stuff, woven into a rope and coiled in a flat disc.

Perhaps Mutusia's "medicine" was effective, for the omens for our journey were good. We met many ant safaris, long columns of the black, Driver ants, formidable to any life they encountered on their path, but of good augury. The smaller workers ran thickly in the centre, carrying their young, while a slim line of large jawed workers ran protectively on either side, ~~sending out scouts~~ sending out scouts in search of anything credible that could be attacked in force. Large though we were, we stood humbly aside to let them pass.

We came at last to the boundary of Giriama territory at a village called Kiziki ya Mzungu, the Stick of the European. Beyond this point there were no more names on my map, except for those of two hills, one on either side of the river. The Wasani hunters, who inhabited the area, did not go in for permanent villages, and

such cultivation as they undertook was sketchy. They lived by hunting, and did not have friendly feelings towards the Game Department. Who were these white people that they should say what game ^{you} ~~they~~ might or might not kill? And why, when you had killed an elephant, should they take the ivory from you? The Giriama headman of Kiziki ya Mzungu seemed to act as a kind of liason officer between the Wasani and the rest of the world, and it was to him that I applied to find me a guide. He produced a short stocky fellow, who said that his name, as near as I can get to it, was Kiribi, with the last i as in I. We sat, Kiribi and I, on the bank of the Sabaki, and discussed the matter.

"I do not think," said Kiribi, "That it is a good idea for you to come into my country. There is no water."

We gazed in silence over the swollen river.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "If we kept along the river bank, there might be water."

"True," said Kiribi, "But the bush is too thick. We should have to cut our way with axes and we should only go a little, little way each day. Besides there are many thorns. I do not think the Memsahib would like it."

I did not accept his estimate of the thickness of the bush but it would have been rude to dispute it, and he was right about the thorns. I did, however, suggest that they seemed to get about the country themselves, and had probably cut paths along the river bank.

"There are many wild animals in my country," said Kiribi hopefully. He looked scornfully at the porters, who were having a grand washing day. "These men," he said, "Are village men. They know nothing about wild animals."

"That is why we need a guide," I pointed out, "One who knows all about wild animals."

"With me", Kiribi admitted, "You would be safe, but your men would have to promise to do what I told them. And there is one other thing. We Wasani stick poisoned arrows in the ground for the animals to step on. If you trod on one of them, you would die."

"Do you often step on them yourselves?" I inquired.

"Of course not! When a man sets arrows like that, he

goes round first thing in the morning and takes them up again."

He eyed me sidelong, feeling that he had rather given his case away.

"Once," he said, "I went as guide to some white hunters, who came with many, many guns. Would you pay us as much as they did?"

"Us?" I queried.

"But of course. You do not expect me to go without another guide? Leave it to me. Tomorrow I will return with kiongozi kingine, other guide. I have preparations to make."

He returned next day followed by a large, docile creature, as tall as Kiribi was short, and as silent as Kiribi was voluble. I never knew his name. He remained, to all of us, Kiongozi Kingine, Ogher Guide. Equipped for the journey, each had, in addition to his brief loin cloth, a second strip of cloth, which served, according to the needs of the moment, as shawl, pocket ~~and~~ rope to tie things up with. At their waists they carried knife, whetstone, roll of snuff and water gourd, and each had his bow and sheaf of arrows. The points of the arrows were dipped in a vegetable poison, and carefully wrapped in slim strips of raw hide to prevent accidents.

There was a ford at Kiziki yz Mzungu and we plunged boldly up to our waists in the crocodile infested river. Kiribi trotted along beside me, doing the honours of his country.

"Look, Memsahib.' Here were two lions, a male and a female. The male stood there. The female lay here. See! She sneezed!"

We passed through one Wasani settlement, the only one I saw. It consisted of a few round huts in an enclosure and a patch of maize beside a little lake. The people were quite distinct in appearance from the elegant Giriama with their rather Nilotic features. The women were leaner, the men more muscular, and the women wore loin cloths instead of the Giriama women's short full skirt. We walked about ten miles in order to accomplish four in the right direction, the path not merely winding with the river, but corkscrewing round every thorn bush. The bush was not particularly thick, but the porters kept on getting their loads

entangled in the thorn bushes, and we were soon covered with scratches. One tree dropped stout, flat based thorns that lay, point upwards, like so many drawing pins. Tall trees with feathery foliage and tattered Hyphaena palms stood along the river bank, and the ground beneath our feet was baked and cracked and pitted with elephant and hippo tracks.

At camp someone lightheartedly kindled a fire round the base of an isolated and completely dead tree, producing an eight foot column of smouldering wood with a tuft of flame at the top. It looked very attractive, but I was afraid of sparks and told them not to do it again. A porter, going to the river to fetch water, nearly trod on an enormous snake, and his yells were so piercing that the whole camp rushed to his rescue, armed with anything they could lay hands on. Other Guide placidly put an arrow into the snake, but the porter had the shakes for an hour afterwards.

Hoping that Maringa would catch us up I had let him select his own porters, and he had chosen the men of his own tribe and the ^w~~ew~~ younger Wakamba. I was left mostly with Kikuyu, who did not seem to me to have the stamina to make good porters. Also Kiribi was a lazy fellow. I have no doubt that he was tireless in the pursuit of game, but pedestrian exercise for its own sake did not appeal to him. As soon as he got bored, he wanted to make camp. When I was with the safari I just said—~~no~~. no, but one day I went off to examine an exposure of rock, and, when I rejoined the porters, found them sitting on the baggage preparatory to unpacking it. Since they had only covered some seven miles, I protested. They looked defiant. Kiribi, they said, had told them that this was the only possible place to camp that day. Beyond ^{the} bush was too thick, there was no water, and too many wild animals. Oh dear!

"We are not camping here," I said with what I hoped was the authentic ring of authority, and walked on.

Njogu, my specimen bag slung over his shoulder, came trotting at my heels, as I had known he would. Ali joined me, as I had known he would. To my surprise Other Guide came too.

Rounding a bend in the path, I was able to see, without looking over my shoulder, that my remaining Mkamba was on his feet with his load on his head, and that Salim, the oldest of the Kikuyu was also on his feet earnestly addressing the others. One by one they began to get up.

That night I sent for Salim and told him that, in Maringa's absence, I was appointing him headman, and next day, with linguistic assistance from Ali, I told the others that we had just the right amount of food to reach our journey's end and get back to Kiziki ya Mzungu. If they only did a half day's march, they would have to do it on half a day's rations, ~~and~~ I had no further trouble.

I told Kiribi that I wanted to climb the larger of the two hills by the river.

"You can't," said Kiribi, "It is very far away and very high. We should not get there and back by nightfall. There is no water, the bush is very thick and there are many animals."

It did look ~~semew-~~ some way off and I was not sure about the food supply, so I said we would leave it till our return journey. We crossed the river again, which took some time, since we had to find a spot ~~whieh~~ where it was fordable for loaded porters. As it was we were up to our armpits, and I was relieved when the last of them was safely over. We camped on the river bank close to the second of my hills.

"Tomorrow," I said to Kiribi, "I climb this hill, while ~~the~~ the porters rest."

"You cannot," said Kiribi, "It is very, very far away, and very, very high. We would not get back by nightfall. There is no water....."

"Lead on," I said, next morning.

Kiribi clutched his stomach with an anguished expression

"I cannot," he said, "I am very ill."

It seemed to me unlikely that he was suffering from appendicitis, so I gave him a dose of Epsom Salts and took the other guide. Within an hour we were sitting on top of the hill, enjoying a cool breeze. The view was extensive but the ground rises so

so gradually as to appear completely flat. Other Guide pointed out the lair of a rhinoceros on the way up, and that is the nearest I have ever got to a rhinoceros except in a Zoo. We enjoyed ourselves on the top of that little hill, Other Guide, one of the porters, and the inevitable Ali, not going to miss anything.

Back in camp I sought out Kiribi, who was being the life and soul of a group of porters. I inquired tenderly after his symptoms which took him aback, since he had forgotten that he had any symptoms. He recovered quickly, and said that my medicine had been so potent that he was now completely recovered. I pointed sternly to the little hummock we had just climbed.

"Kiribi," I said, "Why are you such an awful liar?"

He beamed as if I had just paid him a great compliment, and then he grew confidential.

"You see, Memsahib," he said, "We Wasani do not like white people coming into our country, so we tell them these tales, and sometimes they go away again. There was a man who came looking for rocks like you. We told him the things I told you, and he went away at once. But you did not go away."

"And, since I did not go away, don't you think you might stop telling me these tales?"

"Perhaps," said Kiribi.

We had only one more camp before us, and it did not seem worth while dragging the porters all the way to my last collecting site, so I told Salim to make camp half way. I left him Other Guide as the most reliable of the two, and took Kiribi and Njogu. I also left that cumbersome and hitherto quite useless gun. I had placed it in the care of a porter who was an ex soldier, ex hospital orderly, but Maringa had annexed him, and Ali was now in charge of it.

Kiribi, Njogu and I set out briskly and ~~walked~~ straight into a pack of wild dogs, fierce creatures that range widely through the countryside. The grass was long, and we could only catch an occasional glimpse of head and shoulders as some dog jumped up to get a view of us, but the movement of the grass showed that they were running round us in a decreasing circle. Kiribi fitted an arrow to his bow, but did not attempt to shoot. Njogu stood with his

mouth open, trustfully waiting for someone to rescue him from this predicament. It appeared to be up to me to do something. Strapped to my belt I had a minute automatic that I had bought in London in a fit of mental aberration. On the occasions when it did not jam it made a surprisingly loud bang. Drawing it with a flourish, I fired into the air, and in no time at all those dogs had dissolved into the landscape, and no one more astonished than I. We went on our way discussing the rival merits of firearms and bows and arrows, and I perceived that I had gone up several pegs in Kiribi's estimation. He was so up-lifted that he shot a buck, and, when we reached our destination, asked permission to go and collect it.

Njogu and I spent a miserable day crawling about on some slabs of rock, so heated by the sun that we could hardly bear to touch them, chiselling out some of the poorest specimens of fossils I have ever collected, fresh water fossils these, for we had left the marine sedimentary deposits behind. The place was well named Boma Mchanga, Rampart of Sand, for a continuous sandstorm filled our eyes with grit. In days long past the sand rampart had been erected as a fortification, but it was now half buried in the sand, and not at all impressive.

Kiribi, unreliable fellow, did not return, so Njogu and I made our way back to the camp on our own. We found it easily enough, but it was a startling sight. At a distance the general impression was of a washing day with all the garments ^{that were} hung out to dry made of red flannel. The camp rushed out to meet us, having had a wonderful time during my absence. They had heard my shot, and dropped everything to find out what was going on. Finding no mangled corpses, they had settled down happily to a nice, time consuming investigation as to what had in fact taken place, Other Guide for once ~~getting~~ ^{getting} an opportunity to show off. No sooner had they got under way than they met a herd of elephants. It is true that they were on the other side of the river, but, just to make sure, they had persuaded Ali to fire a shot into the air, with the satisfactory result that the elephants had moved away. Picking a site on the river bank, they had made camp, and into the middle of the new made

camp had strolled an inquisitive young hippopotamus. If I had been there, my instinct would have been to say "Shoo", and see what happened, but the porters panicked, and Ali shot it. It was strips of juicy, young hippo meat that I had seen hanging up to dry.

That hippo was at once a blessing and a curse. A curse because I had no licence to shoot large game, and felt obliged to extract its cumbersome teeth and carry them back to Mombasa to hand over to the Game Department. A blessing because it solved the problem of my dwindling food supplies. There is a lot of eating in a hippopotamus. But a problem of conscience arose, and a deputation called on me. A hippopotamus lived in the water, was it then to be regarded as a fish? On the other hand it looked uncommonly like an outsize pig, and pig was unlawful eating for a Mohammedan. Please, was a hippopotamus a fish or a pig? A hippopotamus is, of course, a good deal nearer to a pig than a fish, but I thought I might reassure them.

I got no sleep that night between the gruntings of the murdered hippo's relations in the river, and the activities of the camp, ~~which ate, dried~~ which ate meat, dried meat, and rendered down fat all night. Only Njogu and I remained vegetarian. Njogu had been tempted by the mutton at Vitengeni, and had eaten too much and given himself awful indigestion, so that he was now confirmed in his vegetarian principles. Next day the porters happily piled pounds and pounds of dried meat onto their loads, and, when ~~we~~^{we} recrossed the river, I was more worried than ever lest one of them should lose his footing, and get swept away.

Fortified by strips of dried meat, made savoury by the salt in which it had been packed, we made excellent time, and I felt I could spare a day to climb the other hill. As we approached ~~it~~ Kiribi developed a precautionary cough, but I got in first.

"The other hill is not too far to climb," I said, "We will carry what water we need for the day. You will remain in camp, and I will take Other Guide." Kiribi's cough vanished.

Other Guide, as usual, came meekly. The bush was not very thick, and we did not see an animal of any kind. The hill proved to be about six miles distant, and was about 500 feet high,

not an alarming day's exercise, but at the foot of the hill Other Guide's courage failed him, and he suggested that we should climb a little molehill to one side instead. We climbed them both. This^e hill, like the first was mainly composed of gneiss, but this one was capped by variegated sandstones and coarse grits.

We continued to make good time, and next day was enlivened by the sight of four lions polishing off the ^{me}remains of a water buck. Down went the loads for an animated discussion as to whether lions can climb trees, which, of course, they can. I regret those lions. I was doing a bit of hustling at the tail end of the safari, and all I saw of them was four tails disappearing into the bush. Unlike the lovely moment when I met a leopard near Kilifi. We were going down a clearing in broad ^{day}light when a leopard ~~leapt~~^{sprang} from the bush into the clearing, stood for a breathless moment looking at us, and ~~then~~^{then} vanished into the bush on the other side of the clearing with the ~~then~~ same exquisite fluidity of movement.

The evenings were the best part of my day. Leaving the tumult of the camp, I would go down to the river bank, and sit watching the sun sink behind the trees, while the river muttered to itself with occasional gurgles as it tripped over its own bed. A fragile little dik-dik, or some other antelope might come down to drink, but mostly my company was crocodiles. They lay like logs on the bank with their jaws agape, falling inelegantly into the river when startled, to be borne swiftly downstream with their heads screwed stiffly over their shoulders. After a bit I began to notice that there always seemed to be a black head bobbing about behind a bush, and I took Salim to task. He looked embarrassed.

"You are tired, Memsahib," he said, "After a long march, and, when people are tired they may fall asleep. If you fell asleep on the river bank, a crocodile might pull you into the river. So I always tell one of the porters to follow you, but not to let himself be seen."

I would rather have been without them, being in no danger of falling asleep, but I could not but accept such solicitude.