

Draft 1 (d)

20th April 1962

We've got a dance here tonight. The Women's Club, of which Didy is the secretary, is holding it, and about two hundred people are expected. On the invitation card (admission: 700 fr.) there is written 'Easter Bright Spot', and I am sure it will live up to its name. We have lots of little tables lit by Tilly lamps ranged in the style of a nightclub about the floor; Fiona's room has been converted into a bar; and in the dining room is the piano (!) which will accompany the Cabaret, which consists of: - 'Bless this House', to start the proceedings; 'The Raggle Taggle Gypsy' and 'Green Fields' (Solo by Miss Thérèse Até, Woman Education Officer, and mother of five); and 'On a Hill far away stands a Cross', to bring the evening to a sober conclusion. It will be interesting to see if everything goes to plan.

Your food parcel has just arrived, for which I had to pay 50% duty! However the contents are so rich and wonderful that it is fully worth it. How clever of you to realize about the tea. I am going to put it on the table at Easter as a present for Didy and Pete. The herbs, too, are very useful. The food, actually is very good. Occasionally we go short of butter, and the only meat we have is beef, slaughtered before breakfast on Saturdays, on the other side of the garden hedge, and quartered and sold by the Bamenda Meat Club. No fish. Some of the African chop is delicious; I told you of 'Fou-fou', (a test of whose quality is to throw a lump up in the air, and if it sticks to the ceiling it's good. The other day at the Cowans', the host flicked some up with a spoon, and it returned with a thud onto the lap of his neighbour). 'Agousssi' (crushed melon seeds); peppered chicken; palm oil stew (wonderful - Daddy probably had it - meat stewed in rich copper oil derived from palm kernels, with spices, powdered stink-fish, mangos, coco-nut, orange, grapefruit, pepper, bananas, paw-paws, and rice); groundnut soup; soy (wafer-thin slivers of beef fried in palm oil, and spiced with pepper). We can get most vegetables - masses of avocado; okra, a kind of courgette, very small, with widely celebrated aphrodisiac properties; oranges and grapefruit from the tree (they are in blossom now), and of course fresh coffee.

I feel depressed at the moment as I have just been given a glimpse of the canker that lurks beneath the halcyon covering of our life here. I think I mentioned the scare of terrorists that first arose last October when the decision was taken to link West Cameroon to the East, rather than become a satellite state of Nigeria. We had thought them legendary, or at any rate that they had been suppressed when the government brought home its majority. But rumours of guns, seeing burnt out houses by the roadside, queer intimations of unease as one catches sight of a chain-gang - literally bound in chains - disappearing among the trees, or a shadow passing over the face of an official: these have been confirmed by tales of our friends from the French side - a Dutchman in charge of a large coffee estate and the African principal of a college - in which they talk of raids and campaigns on the outlaws' refuges, smoked out of caves like the wild beasts which, with their squalor, nakedness, and appalling emaciation, they so closely resemble.

Our growing disquiet has been further intensified by an encounter with a young soldier attached to the Division based on the station. I met him yesterday afternoon as I was climbing the hill from Mankon, a young fresh-eyed boy, whose voice took on no colouring of outrage as he recounted the activities of the 'Security Forces' whose offices I can see on the hill from my window. 'It is trying', he said – he spoke good English - 'since a lot of 'terrorists' will assert that they do not understand their English-speaking inquisitors. More often than not they come from the French side. But in order to drag from them the whereabouts of other cells, the names of collaborators, or those who carry them food, it is often necessary to persuade them into speech'. With what unconcern the boy put his fingers in his ears and passed a hand over his groin, marvelling at the efficiency of his superiors – Lt. Meno, who went to Sandhurst, and who came to dinner the other night – or perhaps at the miraculous powers of electricity.

We find ourselves faced with an odd moral problem. It is clear to all of us – to Pete especially, who knows Africa well, that it is only a matter of time before the whole continent founders. Kenya is clearly marked for disaster, for besides anti-colonialism, there are the factors of American arms sunk in Abyssinia, terrible rivalry between the latter and the Somali, the growing assertion of Islam versus the neo-paganism of the smaller tribes, and all sorts of other confusions. Pete foresees South Africa as becoming eventually a White State with a boundary at the latitude of the Zambezi. But before this artificial barrier can be erected, wars will burst on the heads of the people, the Congo will expand like a whirlpool, engulfing all its neighbours, missions will be flattened, schools laid waste. For the fall of the Congo, once the most advanced of all the African states, will, Pete believes, usher in the Dark Ages, which may not arise before five hundred years are spent. This may seem a melodramatic picture, but it is unrealistic to view the development of the country in terms of decades. Tribalism is still passionately fostered, and any incidental trappings of civilization superficially imposed are chaff before the hurricane. For that reason Pete feels that his responsibility in prolonging the example of true justice and incorruptibility until the last possible moment is more important than throwing a beam upon inhumanities which are still but vaguely hinted. Sooner or later evidence will come before him which will mean our immediate return to England. But after the knife has fallen he would like to feel that in the midst of chaos the memory might remain. It is a very strange sensation to have alighted on so lovely a land, and yet to see so clearly presaged its upheaval and future struggles. At the moment the Cameroun Republic is a Fascist State (with the fasces as part of its device). Three weeks ago the UN representative Dr Goyanes's driver was beaten up in the town.

These apocalyptic predictions have not all been fulfilled. At the moment Cameroun is a relatively stable and prosperous state, though its resources are still open to exploitation. A slice of the Africa Oil Boom, its reserves are being developed chiefly by France and China. Extreme deforestation is also a problem, resulting in the erosion of agricultural lands and the clearing of the habitat of the pygmy tribes in the south. For a long time the region has been spared the religious intolerance afflicting its neighbours; but there are signs that the islamic fundamentalism endemic in Nigeria is beginning to penetrate North Cameroun.

May, 1962

A short while ago, to celebrate the success of two youths in passing a stage of their Koranic studies, and to mark the end of a period of fasting, a Jahai was held at Sabka village, about forty miles away overlooking the Ndop plain. We had been told some months ago that in May the Fulani would be holding some sort of festival; and for several days before, we had noticed unusual signs among the Moslem community here: small groups of men sitting stilly in a circle, chanting into their cupped hands or listening to their leader as he recited from the book on his knee – a lovely sight: the dark young faces rapt, the mosaic figure of the Imam, white bearded, eyes closed, nodding back and forth – all set upon the grass, beneath the slender eucalyptus trees, like a random flock of birds.

It was a marvellous morning, clear after the night's rain, bright and wind-blown. We drove up into the hills where waterfalls fell that in the months of drought seemed not to have fallen before; horizons blue, and beyond the plain, the sweeping valleys of waving grass, distant mountains like crystal.

When we got to the village, people were already moving about who directed us up a little path away from the road. We were greeted by a distinguished-looking man with a goatee beard. He ushered us through the narrow gate into the council chamber of the Chief, a sturdily built circular house of mud, beautifully and intricately roofed with bamboo, and thatched almost to the ground on the outside. It was dark and cool within, and we enjoyed the warm milk that was brought to us in little china teapots. Through the open door, in the strong sunlight, we could see beside a blazing fire the flaying of two cows, their quartering and dispersal; small boys sprinting up and bearing carefully away their portion of the beast; women hurrying past holding calabashes filled with milk or bread; a busy air of festivity running through the place. Soon it was announced that everything was ready to begin, and we were led out through the little gate to a small thatched pavilion, from which we could see the whole expanse of the clearing where the ceremony was to take place.

The Jahai is an ancient form of homage practised over most of the Arab world. It is also an expression of valour, a performance, in which the most dashing displays of equestrian skill seek to rival each other in testifying to the rider's loyalty. We took our stations on a grassy bank oblique to where the Chief would be sitting, and we waited. Nothing much seemed to be happening: the horses making their way casually to the end of the clearing – about two hundred and fifty yards off – where a brilliant assemblage stirred, restive and immaculate. On either side of the muddy track young men and children were congregating, robed in saffron, peacock blue, their heads loosely turbaned or crowned with the little embroidered caps. Away on the right I could see two youths, moving across the fields towards us, bearing a couple of small drums which they playfully started tapping, clumsily as they walked, so that soon they got muddled, and laughing, stopped, hastening their step to where the chief drummer was standing, on the left among the women. Startled by a shadow falling suddenly nearby, I craned my eyes to see a great bird wheeling high above us, which, as though looking for something, diligently, with narrowed eyes, circled smoothly over our head, then – enough done for the present – with gross lifts of its wing, leisurely descended, alighting on a thorn tree, ten yards off, folding its wings, tall and uncouth, raised its eyes that coldly seemed to stare into my own. Associations of

thorns, the primitive barbecue in the compound we had left, foul recollections of a scene of carrion in Cyprus, let me feel no surprise when someone said: “Vultures!” – and indeed there must have been about twenty of them sitting silently on their branches, like an allegory of Fate.

The Chief took his seat in the pavilion, and the drummers began fitfully and nervously, as though for a charge in battle or an execution. The bright melée at the end of the ride shivered into line, appearing through sun-dazzled eyes as it prepared to move forward, quickly flickering into fresh arrangements, like the patterns of a kaleidoscope. Here they come – one catches one's breath – how slowly, a slowly advancing wave, with the Chief's two sons in the van – tossing and bowing, and a further wave behind that, tricked out and gaudy with pagoda-like caparisons, tasselled, bell-hung, fringed with beads: mounted on saddles of richly quilted cloth, the Fulani chevaliers with spears aloft approach the dais of the Chief. They will trample us, they come so close: chuckling of bridles; earthy thud of hooves; intimate moist heat of breathing flanks; dear shaking of mane and sneezing – we would stretch forth our hands if they did not seem so alien: passionate and remote like their riders who, with a wild huzza! now brandish their javelins in obeisance.

They stem off to the right, elate and cheerful, whilst Enugu, one of the Chief's sons, on his Arab white stallion, goes back to lead the second wave forward. They salute as before, pass by, and in a wide crescent join the company of the other horses. It's like a picture of a durbar. This is merely a prologue: when they all have gathered, one by one they canter off, skirting the spectators, to the end of the run where, brusquely collecting themselves, they turn round sharp, and lifting the reins, in pairs, singly, and in trios, hurl themselves forward in a sudden furious stampede, rushing without check to within five yards of the dais, where with an abrupt Hup! – dead in its tracks – each one rears giddily on its hind legs, like the ‘Corsair’, teeters aloft then drops, bounds away, wheeling off to the right. The assault repeats itself over and over, recklessness mounting in an urgent response to the growing excitement of the watchers. The drummers become frenzied, and each time the horsemen return a strange throaty whinneying goes up from the women where they stand and admire.

High up in the open sky, far above the hills, revolve as on a transparent loom the squadron of vultures, fixed and calm, one above the other.

Now they cavort, the stallions, like sea-horses prancing, delicate on their hind legs, tumultuously leaping as they pass and re-pass, sending up showers of mud so that we have to shield our cameras – some glorious, others bare-backed and meanly arrayed; one or two young boys no older than Fiona; a sinister quartet of brothers, one wearing sun-goggles, unsmiling and proud like the rest: from these timeless minutes, in which the pandemonium of horses and drums and shouting is mingled strangely with the glare of sun, soft gusts of wind on our faces, and the indolent circling of the vultures far away, our excitement sinks, attention wanders to other things, and we realize that we have been on our feet for half the morning. We are rather exhausted when, at length, the last rider troops off and we turn aside and go back through the narrow gate for ‘chop’ – freshly slaughtered beef, bone hard and gristly, which must, nevertheless, be somehow digested as there is nowhere to throw it away and the chief is looking at us rather hard.

Even before there was a notion of coming to Cameroun all of us had read Gerald Durrell's 'The Bafut Beagles', his delightful account of his often comically thwarted search for animals for his zoo. The Fon of Bafut with his legendary capacity for strong liquor had been raised to iconic status and we were all eager for a chance to meet him.

(Summer ?, 1962)

A lovely day, now ending with the Tilly lamps all lit, and supper waiting next door – groundnut soup, avocado salad, and orange compote – with a hot bath after that.

We started with breakfast on the terrace, the view somewhat obscured by mist, and a hot glare in the sky. Reading books and writing letters. At about 12 o'clock we were picked up by friends, Joe Bealy and his lovely wife from Benin – Aya, and dashed off to Bafut, the windows of the car all open and cool air blowing in our faces – we can release the hermetic seals now (damp newspaper and towels lining the doors), since the small rains have laid the dust, and it no longer comes pouring in through the cracks in the floor.

We arrived, after about half an hour's drive, at the gates of the Fon's palace, a pleasant courtyard of low-roofed buildings in the style of some of the smaller French chateaux or manoirs, with a green sward on either side of the broad walk leading to the principal quarters. We were conducted into the presence of the Fon, who was sitting on a broad throne patterned with a device of antelope heads, a recurring motif of great delicacy; while behind him, lending an air of cosy opulence to the receiving room, was a turgid Victorian tapestry. He was quite a big man, wearing glasses – (he only has one eye) – and he had the most beautiful hands of any man I have seen. He was very hospitable. He showed us his treasures, a row of ceremonial fly-switches, made from the tails of elephant, with the handles carved in the shapes of animals and men, covered with beads, the same we had seen at Bali: an art that seems very popular here and is very highly developed. We saw glittering thrones; calabashes heavily ornamented; pipes; whips – all smothered with these lovely beads, packed into geometric figures, arrows, repeated over the whole surface. The Fon told us that the beads come from Timbuktu. He took us into his museum, where were ranged all the masks and accoutrements of the juju men. Most of them were very large and of considerable weight, and we couldn't imagine how one could keep such objects on ones head and execute the dance at the same time.

[Drawings of three masks]

These are hopeless, and have successfully driven from my mind the true memory of the most imposing mask, carved from solid wood, raw, with a heavy, glandular inflation on either side of the jaw, giving it a squat, frog-like, cottage-loaf appearance – to the superstitious, thoroughly informed with evil.

We saw the great bell which sounds for war, the clutch of spears, which like the fasces, denotes the rank of the chief, shrouded with a hood of the inevitable beadwork. Most strange was to hear, after all but Pete and I had left and bringing to life straightway 'The Golden Bough', the two great figures, crude and brutally carved

– the man slightly smaller than the woman, holding a drinking horn in his hand, and with a bobbly cap on his head; she, with teeth bared, small breasts, clutching a gourd – these two, somewhat apart from the other exhibits, referred to respectively as the ‘Queen and King of the Wood’.

The most imposing feature of the palace is the great juju house, sixty feet high, rising from foundations raised above the earth, reinforced with log-shaped blocks of stone, making the whole structure appear as though founded upon a bastion of rocks. It is very old, and we were not allowed to enter – a great black doorway, its lintel overhung with faded swags of leaves and branches.

We spent the afternoon in the resthouse, drinking whisky with the Fon. This was the house of forty-eight steps, in which Gerald Durrell lived – a beautiful, colonnaded building shaded with deep creeping bougainvillea, and filled with the scent of the orange grove outside. We had a splendid picnic, hunks of chicken, pies, sandwiches; and between us, Jo, the Fon and I finished a bottle of Haigh’s. We also had with us a portable gramophone, and a pile of records, and through the afternoon, in tune with our rising spirits and voices, these belted out New Orleans and Dixie, recalling to the old man the famous Conga party that concludes Durrell’s book.

This was already more than two weeks ago. Since then I’ve been to Godlove’s village, where a dance was given for me. This was such an exciting day that I shall have to put off describing it until my circular letter. Yesterday we went up to Bambue, where Martin Brunt, a very pleasant and intelligent man, looks after an agricultural laboratory. After a splendid meal of dyker, roast and stewed, rowan jelly, beans, potatoes and red wine, fresh pine-apple salad, etc. we all got into a land rover and dashed up to Babenkwe, where there is a leper colony run by the American Baptists.

Didy had been there before and had bought some very fine baskets. It’s a long way from anywhere, in the hills, and apart from the scattered houses belonging to the staff, consists of a small hamlet of tin-roofed mud houses, a hospital (I should not think more than fifty or sixty beds), a school building, and an impressive church that is almost complete. All the cases in the leproserie are infectious – the others come in for periodic treatment from villages far away – and the most long-standing patient had been there for ten years. The weight of time would seem to me to be the most dismaying burden of all, and close on one’s inexpressible pity – lepers are quite indifferent to pity – one feels the deepest anger, that these years could be curtailed by 70% if only a little money were waived from the tycoons of Europe – think of all that’s wasted on commercials – to care for some of these poor people.

There were two kinds of cases: the nodular, which brings disfigurement to the face (I think I’ve got that right), and which didn’t seem so prevalent as the other, whose name I can’t remember, which gives rise to the most fearful contraction of the limbs, and ate away the extremities. Most of these, living for varying periods of years in the colony, visit the hospital every so often for courses of D.P.S., the most widely used drug at the moment, but one which is obsolete already. They rear children in the colony, and as these must be infected through the touch of the mother, treatment starts at birth.

The doctor and his nurses displayed an admirable, attentive coolness in exhibiting his patients, brusquely unwinding the bandages, appearing almost callous with his reproof of those who came too late; until one realized that both minister and ministered understood each other clearly, that there is no time for pity. Miss Renwick had been there for twenty-seven years, a rather hard-faced woman with grey marcelled hair, gaudy fake pearls, and a rather nice dead-pan, caustic way of speech. But it didn't seem at all odd, amongst the execrable furniture, doilies, Mary Crooker Chocolate Cake, coffee, and shelves of Bible books elbowing the script of Ben Hur, when we asked why she chose to come to the Cameroons, that should reply quite simply: 'God sent me here' – conversational and almost surprised.

It was of course through my friendship with Godlove that I had the privilege of getting to know rather more of the life of the Africans than the rest of the family. We spent a lot of time together. He would turn up after lunch when he had finished his duties, crisp in his uniform or in a shirt and slacks – he rarely wore African robes – and we would either head down the escarpment to the town where we might meet up with his pals, or get on our bikes and go out into the countryside. He took a pride in his office as forester, and enjoyed taking me on patrol, explaining the properties and lore of the trees and shrubs. He was well aware of his status, that he was risen up in the world, qualified; and sometimes appeared to look down on the bushman, from whose cast he had emancipated himself.

One of the most beautiful places we have visited here is Baforchu, the home of Godlove. I've been there only twice, but, in a strange way, perhaps due to its being locked amongst hills and difficult to get to, it has made a very strong impression on me. On the first occasion, I went alone with Godlove, and we arrived at dusk after a devious journey. "How many miles to Baforchu?" I wondered as we plunged down valleys, crossed streams, and mounted perilously the narrow twisting earthen roads: on one side, cool plantations of yams and occra, looking like groves of lilies and hollyhocks, hugging the face of the hill; and, on the other, the precipice tumbling down, clothed with spinneys of ancient trees - dark and welcoming – and beyond it, the slopes and valleys of Bali and Bamenda, still visible, though the clouds were low and might at any moment engulf us. It was almost as if we were crossing the Himalayas, the sensation of height and freedom was so strong. Godlove pointed out to me the woods in which he used to go hunting as a child, and the rocks where the baboons have their families.

We were climbing all the time, and then, quite suddenly, we reached the brow, and there below, cradled in a steeply enclosed basin, we saw Baforchu, a collection of little houses clinging to its sides, their zinc roofs gleaming in the pale sunlight. Away to the right, in fantastic shapes, arched and crested, the grey-green hills dwindled in the smoky evening air, strange tumuli and bunkers rippling away as far as the vague horizon. We made our way slowly down, and parked the car under the trees in the playground of the village school, a long, low building like a stable, whose plaster walls were painted with designs of russet and ochre, like the palaces of Knossos. Godlove's house was right the other side of the village, and to get there we had to walk some way, skirting the ravines and hollows over which it is scattered. Marvellous and unusual luxuriance: the ground carpeted with what seems like water-

cess – almost Pre-Raphaelite; cold air like rose-water; and rising above our heads gigantic cottonwood-trees vaulting across at a hundred feet or more, hung with festoons of creeper and emblazoned with orchids.

After we had left our things at his house – built of mud bricks and shuttered with wood, warm and dry inside – Godlove led me outside again, and we climbed further up the hillside to the Chief's compound, a walled enclosure set back from a clearing, in the middle of which stood a great tree like an oak. From here he could survey all his lands before him. We went through the doorway into the courtyard, and the first wife, the Queen, came forward. She wore a beautiful necklace of gold, and though poorly dressed otherwise, a coronet of blue beads denoted her rank. We were shown into the reception room, a separate building, and before long the Chief himself appeared through another door and took his seat briskly on his throne. Long silence. Then Godlove gets up from where we are sitting, and assuming an uncharacteristic and ludicrously servile manner approaches the Chief, eyes lowered, shoulders hunched, his two hands cupped together as an intermediary vessel for his unworthy speech. Having finished his devoirs, he backs away like a communicant, abashed and self-conscious: one would almost expect the bow-string to be hovering in the background!

The Chief was not by any means an old man – though it is still very hard for us to tell an African's age: sometimes a harridan looking like seventy will turn out to be only thirty-five. He had rather a weak, round face, with, one would imagine, the same glandular trouble as the Bourbons, for his eyes had an unhealthy stare about them, and there didn't seem to be much brow. But he had a good voice, and his practical, unceremonial behaviour contrasted well with all the pantomime that was going on around him. He was dressed in the traditional robes: dark blue, embroidered with orange, red and yellow; and he had on his head the usual woollen tam o'shanter, flat on the back.

Godlove introduced me and bottles were produced, but this didn't make the atmosphere any more cordial. In the ensuing silences I had time to examine the room. The only light came from the open door round which a lot of children had gathered. There was a great fire in the centre, banked round a broad stone pillar supporting the roof, and cast about in its ashes blocks of wood and fossilized-looking antlers that served, we heard later, as seats of shame for those who came to be tried before the Chief. A juju hung on the central pier, sprigs of dead leaves wrapped round a dry nugget of wax. In between each pause we would spring to our feet in turn and deliver fulsome speeches at each other, elaborate and over-extravagant. Dale Carnegie ('How to win friends and influence people') never quite got round to explaining just *how* one replies to the 'God sent you to us' kind of gambit; and later on, at the dance, when I was exhibited like a slave-girl to the whole village, I rather wished he had. But as there were no other Europeans present, fortunately, I was able to receive their welcome on its own terms, and far from being embarrassed I was actually very moved. By that time I was quite high: every variety of drink had been offered to me, not severally, but in intriguing combinations. I was on the point of relishing a splendid glass of 'White Horse', when an unseen hand stretched forth a bottle of Grenadine and spilt into it an equal portion of the glutinous scarlet liquid.

After chop at Godlove's house we made our way by lantern light once more through the lofty spinneys. Wet leaves brushed against our faces in the dark, and the whole earth breathed an unimaginable freshness, impregnated by the soft rain that fell from the tracery above. Our festive voices echoed down the ravines; cascades of trumpet-flowers greenly glimmered, like Venetian chandeliers, fitfully illumined by the swinging lamps as we passed.

The dance itself was most enjoyable, but like a lot of things in Africa went on for rather too long. The band - which was composed of two guitars, a small drum, square like a book bound in vellum, and an excruciating bottle - was situated in the centre of the floor, and the dancers progressed with Edwardian decorum round about them. It is odd that where one would expect restraint to be abandoned instead one sees, performing the most implicitly sexual dances, couples behaving with the utmost unconcern, aloof from each other, intent on expending as much vigour independantly as possible. For although the 'Highlife' here is a somewhat limited affair, consisting as it does of a perpetual shuffle and swaying, interspersed with more adventurous interludes, it is the most exhausting dance I've ever known. Furthermore, deprived of a support - one girl was volubly outraged when I tried to put my arms about her - it too much smacks of the 'Running on the Spot Exercise - GO!!' sort of thing to be considered as dance at all. But what was terrific was the 'African Jive', an amazing exhibition of whip-lash control over cut-throat agility, conducted *con fuoco* over a slow pulse: india-rubber men, thick and round-bottomed like Epstein's Adam, bounding and dancing, flexed and quivering - enough to make pale the most 'primitive' Ballet Nègre'.

Towards the end of the evening I began to feel rather ill, and it was only when the band had been silenced with a wave of the Chief's hand, and he had embarked on a final valediction - like all great orators he preferred to hold his fire until the end - that I became aware that the grenadine, adulterated beyond endurance by subsequent liquors, had commenced at last to posset and curd, rendering me incapable of murmuring more than the merest conventionalities in reply before rushing with a handkerchief to my mouth past the startled ranks of the Chief's subjects into the fresh air and obscurity outside.

The most popular music in Cameroun was the Highlife, a distinctive and lively dance-music imported from Nigeria. (It had originated in Ghana in the 1920's). Essentially an urban music, you would hear its raucous tones tones belting out from the tinny radios and gramophones in all the bars. Native African music, in which Cameroun is exceptionally rich, could only be encountered in the countryside or in the bush: the kind of thing we had experienced at the Léla. Often quite modest - using only a drum, a pipe and some kind of scraper maybe - it would erupt quite spontaneously, say in a corner in the market, and children would start dancing. I was eager to set up a recording of some of this music, and with the help of the Women's Club we got together a collection of musicians. We put aside an afternoon in a hall at the school: there was quite a crowd, drummers, singers, even an elephant horn. But even after they had become thoroughly primed it didn't really catch fire: they remained self-conscious. It was indoors, there was a mike in front of them, there was no room to dance; they were singing wedding songs and there was no wedding.

Godlove came to supper last night, and although he was a bit shy at first with Pete and Didy we got him to open up eventually. Here are of one or two of the superstitions he recounted to us. Although far from being what might be called a Bushman, both he and Gabriel, a young friend of Little Pete's, utterly believed in what he was saying. No African will whistle in the dark, nor will he look into a mirror after sunset, for fear of calling the devil. The owl is a figure of dread to him, for he believes his enemy will assume such a shape in order to undo him, and Godlove declared that, should he hear the call of the owl while walking in the night, he would suffer a 'change in the blood'. The African also believes that a man may wish thunder on his enemy.

He told us more fully of some of the jujus we had seen here. Each one is connected with a sort of club or cabale: in order to be introduced into one, a man must make certain sacrifices – kill a goat, a couple of hens or so, provide enough mimbo for the club, varying according to the importance of the juju – and then he can be initiated. At the head of each club is the juju man, who is the guardian of the charm on which it is founded. In Bansa there are two of these which are important, the Maboh, who are the messengers of the Fon – and it was these we had seen in the market-place: the fore-runners masked with sacking, like Morris dancers buffeting the cowering populace; followed by the loping juju man (who never speaks), darting from side to side of the road. This band heralds the arrival of the Chief. Far greater – according to Godlove, the most powerful juju in the whole of the Grasslands – is Nkoh. On certain days and feasts, the juju man will don his headdress, which is made of ropes and sacking so that, with the mask, his body is quite dwarfed by its superstructure. Then, having been harnessed securely with two ropes attached to his waist, a cloth or mantle is thrown over him. The effect of this covering is to send him literally out of his wits: his strength becomes unearthly; 'He could knock down this wall', said Godlove, 'with a single blow of his arm'. But for this harnessing he would kill a man and tear him to pieces or else do himself to death. As it is, he will drag those who try to check him, and it is only when he has been brought back to the juju house and has been washed and anointed with certain ointments and rubbed with leaves and herbs, that he will cool down and they will be able to take the shirt from off him.

The most fascinating story we heard concerns trans-migration, and it was clear that Godlove – who is representative – believes that not only could his enemy assume a different shape to harm him, but also that he could become an owl if he wanted to. He has had proof, he says.

In the forest a snake who has gorged himself on a big meal will go to the pool, and coiling himself under the waterfall will lift up his throat, open his jaws wide, and let the water flow into his stomach. (I have seen this myself, one day out walking). After he has done this for a while, his food will start to 'decompose' and he can rest.

A young man went hunting one day with his dog. They came to a clearing and the dog ran on ahead and was not away many minutes before he returned, eager that the young man should follow. They went on and presently came to a pool, and there,

under the waterfall, saw a beautiful green snake, its head erect, drinking unawares and at peace. The young man lifted his spear and threw it, catching the snake on the head.

The same afternoon, a man was walking in the market with his friends. They were just leaving, when he suddenly gave a cry, clutched his hand to his temple, and said: 'Somebody has hit me with a stone'. His friends were puzzled, because they had seen nobody who could have thrown a stone, nor had anything fallen from the trees above. But the man seemed to be suffering, and moaned as they led him back to his home.

In the forest the snake was struck down, but not before the young hunter had flung the last of his six spears. He gathered it up and took it in pride to the Chief of his village. Now the Chief had suspected for some time that there was some witchcraft in the forest. Men had seen a big snake lie in wait by the goat tracks, fold itself into a loop circling the path, and at the moment when its victim passed, draw itself smoothly tight, embracing the wretch in its ugly know. Thus, when it was found that after several days and in spite of its numerous wounds it was still alive and its heart beating, the Chief concluded that this was the enchanted beast that had been such a scourge and decided to put an end to it.

When the man had returned home from the market, he laid down in pain, holding his sides and groaning. He never rose from his bed again. His friends could do nothing for him: there was no mark. He slowly sank, and at the moment when the Chief sliced the heart from the body of the snake and before his people had cut it in two, his life stopped and he died.

But it was later told by one of his friends that before he lost consciousness the man had murmured feebly into his ear: '*I have been a snake*'. Such was the tale Godlove told of his village. This happened ten years ago.

As the summer proceeded I began to plan my next adventure. It became clear that Little Pete would have to return to school in the new academic year, and I would be free to return home to take up some kind of musical career. I thought it would be fun to travel overland: take the pilgrim route from Kano in Northern Nigeria over the continent to Khartoum – I could hitch a lift, or even take one of the mammy-wagons that regularly did the trip. Then I could take a boat up the Nile as far as Alexandria, hop over to Athens where Didy had a little house on the island of Hydra, and then back home. It all looked so simple; and at that time would have been perfectly feasible if unfortunate circumstances had not arisen. I had not yet explored the area in Cameroun near the coast, the rain-forest in the region of the Cross River, and I felt I should at least get a glimpse of the 'heart of darkness' before leaving. Everybody had warned me that it was exceedingly unhealthy – 'white man's grave', they said with a snigger; but I blithely and mistakenly put my trust in the pills I had been subscribed and within a week of my return went down with a serious illness.

I set off for Kano in about two weeks time, and from there will make my way – I don't yet know how – across the desert to Khartoum. If any of you should feel inclined to write, I should send your letters to Poste Restante, Khartoum. It would be

lovely to find a little heap waiting for me which I could peruse as I drift slowly up the Nile.