

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-20
Carnegie Group, II

P.O. Kitgum
Acholi District
Uganda
East Africa
4 June 1951

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 18, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

As I said in my last newsletter, I believe that the group was generally pleased with the observations made in Kampala and along the west shore of Lake Victoria into Tanganyika. The first two weeks had included a look at Kampala, the largest urban point in Uganda, at Entebbe, the Capital; and at the administrative headquarters and outlying areas of Bukoba and Biharamulo - examples, respectively, of the richer and poorer types of districts in Tanganyika.

Our next bit of travel took us farther west, through the southern width of Uganda, northward along the edge of the Congo to Fort Portal, east for a week end return to Kampala, north for a look at the primitive strip of Uganda along the Kenya border (via plane), and finally south east into Kenya. Highlights of this portion of the tour, to my mind, were a look at the populous, heavily cultivated areas of Kigezi with its almost oriental breakdown of land holdings; a talk with the agricultural officer in charge of a re-settlement scheme nearby, Mr. Purseglove; the seeing of a leper settlement and a discussion with the managing doctor of the health standards and problems of the natives; a hearing of the views of a Mr. Nicolay who wears a monocle, who is building a cement plant for the Uganda Government, and who can argue very convincingly that a canal-lake-steamer communications hookup would be the salvation of Uganda. We crossed the border into Kenya, at Busea, with I believe as good an impression of Uganda and north-western Tanganyika as could have been sampled under the circumstances of short time and rainy season.

Our last night in Bukoba,¹ with the party invited to the Club for drinks and social games ("dog racing," with dice and small plastic whippets and plenty of gin and brandy) provided an opportunity for observing Saturday nite-life among the few European residents on the very rim of the British Empire. Merrill Bennet, with his true Californian bar-leaning posture, his ready and peppery humor, was accepted here as the most representative among us of the real, genuine Yank. At eleven oclock a picturesque touch was added to the evening by a parade of hippopotami across the club lawn. One of the locals, drunk as a hoot owl, ran out and played a flashlight beam, from a distance of several yards, across the face of a big bull. The hippo treated him with proper disregard, walking on without taking notice, unlike the one which sometime back bit off the buttock of one of the (current) European residents.

1. Actually the 24th of March, not 25th as given in JBG-19.

Westward and northward into Uganda, to Mbarara and Kabale, the road was hard but bumpy; its corrugations crystallized the radiator cradle on my truck and one leaf of a car spring. Professor de Kiewiet went with me to a garage operated by a Sikh family; heard the senior bearded mechanic, who was drunk, first promise the job welded and finished in half an hour, then - as the radiator dismantling proceeded - revise his commitment to an hour, two hours, a day and a half. This we did not accept, but stood over him and the rest of his family - turbaned males from six to sixty - while they welded, sawed, hammered and bent my truck back into passable traveling condition. This was during our halt at Mbarara, which turned out to be for the night.

We stayed in a mud-and-plaster-hut annex to the Mbarara hotel, where the food was good, the lawn grassy, the proprietress expansively friendly, and where Roland Young met in the bar a 'fascist' European resident whose every word was against the native. "They're no good; keep them depressed and uneducated; utilize what force you need to make them work; don't remove the natural biological limitations to population-increase." And so on.

Kabale, our next stop, is one of the show places of Uganda. The administrative headquarters is on a large, grassy hill, in the middle of a land area of good rainfall, with hills, cultivation, and little villages on the slopes which made Merrill and myself recall the countryside of parts of Japan. The White Horse Inn was the nicest hotel yet; better food, better rooms, and a better view than any of the others.

Sir George Duntze, the District Commissioner, when MacLeod and I called at his house in the afternoon, was not there. His wife came round from the garden where she had been planting some flowers and told us he would be out on the adjacent links. We found him playing what looked to me like a very good game of golf with the Medical Officer. He was tall, blond, handsome in an aristocratic, thin-boned way, about forty, with some fifteen years administrative service. He apologized that he would have to go on safari the next day, but told us his assistant Mr. Burgess would show us around the District.

In the early evening Burgess appeared at the hotel to ask what the party wanted to see, and to plan the trip for the next day. Our earliest appointment was with the Agricultural Officer Mr. Purseglove, who is one of the better known authorities on peasant farming in East Africa. The party had been told in Kampala and earlier that he knew more about native agriculture than any other European. In an hour of questions and answers, in his office which had bags of seed samples lying among the reports and letters on desk and shelf, the party heard some rather interesting facts and opinions.

In Kigezi District the population pressure is pronounced - some 750 per square mile in the 'habitable' areas. The census shows rather more females than males...and the people, both sexes,

are so comparatively industrious that one is inclined to conclude at once that the higher altitude and more varied diet of the district automatically explodes the idea of a native lethargy of East African peoples... Kigezi originally was sparsely inhabited by cattle-economy tribes; the change to agriculture and heavier population has been historically quick, and one of the invasion-factors which caused the change still exists - in the form of immigration from the Congo, which continues to complicate the demographic problem.

Staple food here is millet, finger millet being very popular because of its ability to continue to bear without replanting. Other foods include sweet potatoes, peanuts, and corn is being introduced. Purseglove is afraid of corn, afraid that the population might follow the line of least resistance and shift to a maize diet which might reduce productivity to the levels of other areas. In the minority of farmland below 5,000 feet bananas do fairly well, but the temperature at Kabale itself, some 40 to 80 degrees Fr. from extreme to extreme, is bad for bananas.

A five year government program for agricultural improvement here has really paid off. Ninety per cent of the farmers are now composting, nearly all are making use of improved seed, and the simple measures of contour hedging - which in time produces terraces - are being actively carried out. Properly aimed propaganda has helped: competitions, prizes and feasts were organized, and a demonstration team of diggers and planters was employed to spread knowledge of simple, locally-applicable methods. The soil conservation portion of the program, including prizes and a feast, cost only 150 pounds for the year 1950.

European industry, outside of the mines, exists in Kigezi only in the form of a processing plant for nicotine tobacco. This is a project suitable to such a remote district since the finished product is so light and compact. Kigezi, like many other East African areas, has its local economy restricted and ^{kept} non-specialized by the absence of rail or good highway communications.

Plows are bad, here. They cost more, and encourage broader cultivation with less productivity per acre. With the rather oriental need for maximum productivity to feed a crowded population, labor conservation is not important. Spades and digging sticks are better.

Land tenure here is fairly simple; all land is Crown land, but to native eyes it is the same as freehold, with much of local custom, like a seven year squatters' rights, being honored. Inheritance, of course, provides problems for litigation as the families grow larger and holdings divide; and the oriental practices of infanticide and abortion have not arisen from this - people here love children and want all they can have...

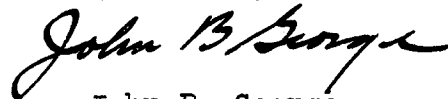
The next two days, after we drove around for a look at what Purseglove had spoken of (encountering on the edge of the cultivated area an old prospector whose eyes brightened at being addressed in Afrikaans by de Kiewiet), we travelled. Our route was northward past Lake George to Fort Portal and then east to Kampala. We saw

the dotted crater lakes of southwest Uganda; looked down on a herd of elephant from the ledge of the Kichwamba hotel, watched waterbuck, buffalo, and hippo as we drove through the reserve; had the revealing experiences of being stalled for an hour at a ferry, until gasoline was siphoned from our own tank to power a paddle-wheel tug, and of being stalled and stuck on the slopes of Ruwenzori in a cloudburst which in those parts is a light shower; arrived at a rest house to find it taken over by another weary traveller; and finally got to Kampala through the rainy-season ruts and past the sight of overturned trucks.

We had a week end of rest, during which appointment dates for the Kenya portion of the trip were set and the necessary telegrams sent to Nairobi. The party members branched out individually to talk with authorities met during the earlier stay in Kampala; and we had dinner one evening at the home of Brigadier Hawes, hydrological advisor to the Uganda Government. Hawes is immediately concerned with the long-range ramifications of the dam project at Jinja. He gave us his views on the problems of dealing with the Egyptian Government in matters regarding the control of the flow of the Victoria Nile, of settling with natives the damages of flooding the shore-land when the level of the Lake is brought up several feet, and of the general problem of economic development in Uganda. He believes that Uganda is naturally a wealthy land, that it needs only more technological know-how, more people, and a more positive method of making the people produce than is admitted by the present administration - to make the area very rich in every way.

The next day, Tuesday March 3rd, the party traveled by car and plane to Moroto and Soroti, in the more remote northeast section of Uganda - and as I think of how to describe this portion of the tour it becomes evident that the space-coverage given in the second paragraph is too great for this one letter. The northeast Uganda trip seems to merit a newsletter by itself, which I will get ready in time for the next mail.²

Sincerely,



John B. George

-
2. The next "mail" will be in about four days. I am traveling in Acholi District, near the Sudan border, on foot. The letterhead address should be all right, though a better emergency address would be care of R. D. Essex, same post office. He could forward a message by runner in about two days. The Makerere address is still the permanent one.