

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-21
Carnegie Group, III

C/O District Commissioner
Gulu, Acholi District
Uganda
East Africa
10 June 1951

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

After the week end of rest and observation in Kampala the group moved into northeast Uganda for a brief look at one of the primitive tribes, and at some of the government and mission activities in the area lying along the Kenya border. The trip was by plane and by car, Merrill Bennett taking the car and truck north to Soroti, to meet the rest of the party flying back from Moroto, northernmost point of the trip. With the exception of a few hours, spent in duplicating previously-made hospital observations, I believe this period of April 3rd to 6th, to have been very usefully spent.

The plane was a venerable biplane, called a Domini, with two engines, lots of pre-streamline age struts and wires, and a reputation for being pretty fool-proof as a short haul puddle jumper - in an area of poor, short runways. Several of this model are in use here, operated by East African Airways Corp. and used mainly for government official trips. We boarded it early in the morning, April 3rd, at Entebbe airport, after a dawn ride from Kampala on the tarmac strip - a third of all the really good road distance in Uganda - through the banana groves and the green countryside.

Flying north we first passed over the settled, cultivated strip near the lake: cattle, plantains, round thatched rooftops and narrow pencils of smoke from morning fires. Away from Victoria, nearing the indeterminate south shore of marshy, sprawling Lake Kioga, the intense cultivation gave way to grass and bush and cattle. Over the lake itself, shallow and much lighter blue than Victoria, we saw native canoes, tiny fishing villages, and a school of hippo. Once north of the lake we saw fewer cattle, much of the north shore being tsetse infested. This was still the wet part of Uganda, a rich, green, fecund concavity, gathering water for the Nile.

More north of Kioga the bush was less wet, the green slowly giving way to demi-desert, sparsely bushed and dry most of the year. We passed Serere, with its sugar-loaf miniature mountain standing above the flat ground around (like other towns in this area it is located near a watershed, for a year-round guarantee that its people will not be thirsty). Nearby there was much cultivation, the result of the activity of an experimental station for native agriculture there; and this marked the northern boundary of deep green. The bush beyond had herds of game, giraffe and smaller animals, and ostrich, but even during the rainy season it was not at all lush.

Native villages, as we flew north, gradually changed in layout. In the south, where the economy for years had been agricultural and where recent history had been relatively peaceful, huts were often situated alone, and bomas (enclosures or stockades) were ornamental rather than functional. Above Kioga, however, the thin hedges and low fences were replaced by heavy wattle barriers, with huts closely clustered inside their circles. Finally, as we neared Moroto, the barriers became almost fortifications, and there were secondary bomas inside the larger ones - suggesting memories of cattle-raiding, spear-fighting violence still in the minds of the older village age-grades.



There was the feel of heavy heat as the plane came down, the mirage boiling, syrupy and the windsock limp against the staff; and in a moment we were outside the plane, appreciating the locally commonplace but still fantastic sight of nude natives alongside an aircraft.

A man of middle age and military bearing, wearing despite the heat a coat and necktie, was there to greet us and show us around. He was the D.C., Moroto, new to this station but a veteran of the Colonial Service - an administrator who would probably be typed (not deprecatingly) as of the Old School. He had a brief word with the pilot regarding the latter's failure to telegraph the expected time of arrival, and then took us immediately to a village boma on the edge of the airstrip.

We spent perhaps an hour inside the enclosure, getting an impressive first sight and smell of the Karamojo native. The men were generally tall, with eyes, lips and noses showing (to my non-ethnological eyes) a mainly middle-East synthesis - Mongol, Arab, Semite, Caucasian. The only thing natively African seemed to be the very dark skin color. Most of the men wore a metal lip piece placed in a hole through the lower lip - the metal being brass or aluminum or copper; the size and shape being from that of a pencil to as big as a flashlight battery.

Outmatching the lip ornaments were the grotesque male hair dressings, of varied design, made of clay, metal bits like old springs and bolts, and all sorts of feathers and costume jewelry. Most of them clung in a mass to the rear of the head, exaggerating

bulbously the cranial size.



With the D.C. and party along, the natives were very willing camera targets, and our casual questions, through a (clothed) local chief who had joined the group, were accompanied by an almost journalistic clicking of Leica shutters. Our snaps, I think, would bear out that the women, with their rancidly buttered hair, their fiercely perforated ears, with ounces of copper rings through the lobes and pounds slung

round their necks, were as grotesque and ugly as the men athletic and handsome. (A fairly general thing in East Africa, due, quite likely, to the woman's inordinate share of back-bent, weight-lifting labor).



Other things picked up by our cameras were the impressive filth of Karamojo boma life - dirt crust on every skin, and the idea that the nasal waste and eye-excretions adrip on the faces of the children were part of a process of immunization for those who would survive; and the evidences of seasonal dryness - oblong wooden bowls for carefully measuring and rationing water for the cattle. The labyrinth-fort layout of wattle walls, enclosure inside enclosure, was too big to photograph from the ground; and I was sorry there had been no opportunity from the air.



We left the haphazard shade-and-sunlight of the boma and walked back through the unbroken, shimmering heat to the automobiles. (No drop of sweat was on the face of the D.C., above the necktie and coat collar; but I muttered aside to the Assistant, who was less happily coated and collared, that it might be a good idea to telegraph our next official hosts that the group of distinguished American scholars were

making this part of their tour in shorts and shirts). We motored a short distance along the dirt road - very passable now because of an unusual break in the recent spell of rains - and stopped at a cluster of roadside huts which were not enclosed in the traditional boma.



Under the supervision of a local sub-chief, who was one-eyed, heavy voiced, and loud in his way of giving orders in the presence of the white Bwanas, a local meeting and tax-collecting gathering was in session. A clerk was counting silver shillings on a camp table and making out receipts while a queue of nude headmen squatted in the shade of two large trees. Seeing the cameras, the one-eyed chief ran to get his white robe and feather headdress, and a wife to pose with him. He was described by the Assistant D.C. as a rather worthless type; and the general impression he gave was that he was another of emergent natives turning the colonial concept of Indirect Rule to personal advantage; but unlike our ex-handiman Seninde he had the dignity of clinging to native forms and ways.

The headmen sitting round - some squatting, but most using the little spool-shaped wooden stools they carry most of the time - were an extremely interesting sight. Cool, except for a piece of light-weight cloth worn like a shawl, they wore bracelets, thumb-rings, beads, and girdles of copper wire. Except for their lip ornaments, none of their trimmings were so heavy as the ear and neck rings of the women - an appearance that suggested that not only did these men enslave their women with housework and farming chores, but they weighted them down with an unfair share of non-functional dress, and made them as responsible for maintaining an artificial, stylized makeup as are the women of the developed Western societies. (One of the apologies advanced for so much ornamentation is that a society predominantly nomad and cattle-owning must wear its evidences of wealth on the body - other forms of personal property being difficult to transport).



Weapons were present, both spears and knives. The spears were of 'Nilotic' pattern with broad, leaf-shaped blades and long lengths of metal fore and aft, the wood portion of the shaft being relatively short. The knives were belt-worn, sheathed and curved, of Arab design. The cutting edges of the spear blades were muzzled in leather strips, secured by thongs bound round the shaft; and only one spear could be carried by each man. Both of

these measures are rigidly enforced by law: the blades being muzzled to eliminate "accidental" and "unpremeditated" pleas in murder trials, of which there are quite a few here; and the limitation of one spear being an assurance that the native would be armed for defense, not offense. Natives prefer, generally, to carry two spears, bare-bladed.



From the meeting place we drove on, past some cultivated fields, and a site where an irrigation dam of the simplest sort was being scraped and heaped into place by wooden scoops drawn by cattle; on the way it was explained to us that it rains hard when it does rain, here, and that the problem was to make the rain last. We got out of the cars for a while to watch some spading in the fields, and to see the pattern of irrigation ditches, noticing as we did so the presence of huge, latex-bearing milkweed plants - almost trees in size, with seed pods as big as toy balloons and down like miniature parachutes (not commercially exploited).

At the residence of the D.C., a house built roughly, but large and cool, there were drinks and a fine buffet of frankolin, guinea fowl, meats, and salads; and a good deal of conversation with the D.C., the local veterinary officer, the native chief who had been with us all the time, and who ate and appreciated European food though he did not speak English very well, and others.



The nudity of the tribe was mentioned, and we were told that there was small reverence for clothes here; that the missionary influence had not taken hold; local natives who returned from the King's African Rifles at the end of the last war were required to take off their uniforms before being readmitted into the tribe. The D.C. said this was a hygienic measure - the girls were able to tell if a man were diseased. The D.C. seemed to approve of the idea of no clothes, saying that compared to other parts of East Africa the venereal disease rate was very low.

In the afternoon we drove back to the airstrip and took off for Soroti, not so far north in Uganda and more civilized, with clothed natives and a rail head - tip of a spur of the main east-west railway. As we left the party was given three spears, said

to have been used in crimes of violence, being old trial exhibits from the local court collection.



The ride to Soroti was bumpy in the afternoon air, and warm at the low altitude, but comfortably short. The D.C. was away, and we were met by his assistant, who shook his head (as we had shaken ours inside the plane) at the bounciest, thumpingest airplane landing I have been in since the war. The pilot blamed the roughness of the field. We were taken to the rest house (in this instance a small hotel, less sheets, blankets and room service), where we found Professor Bennett who had

brought the car and truck up from Kampala, taking a look at the sights along the way. The night was fairly cool; the beds in the rest house were comfortable; and after a certain amount of note-writing after dinner, and a general conversation about man-power mobilization problems in the States, we went to bed - early. All members were outspokenly pleased with the day's observations.

The next day's doings included a visit to the agricultural experiment station at Serere, a short car ride distant. We were shown around models of contours (which had had to be detoured around ant hills and which had been complicated by ill-advised planting of sisal hedges) ploughed by tractor. A model dairy herd was also kept, but the main operation of the station was research in cotton growing. A visit to a cotton ginnery followed, with a look at and an explanation of some seed processing. The seed is selected, dusted with copper oxide to guard against fungus during germination, and given to the natives free of charge. This particular ginnery is privately operated (one of a minority owned by a European), and it processes 30 bales (400 pound) daily.

The day following, April 5th, we again drove out from the rest house to visit a leper settlement, a prison farm, and a Christian Mission Society hospital. During a part of the trip we experienced driving through a rain so heavy that it would stall the windshield wipers - a quarter-inch film of water laying continually on the glass.

From the doctor in charge of the leper settlement, named Wheate, we heard that 3 per cent of the native population of Teso District are infected; that his hospital can treat only one-fiftieth of this number; that the new drugs are proving very effective here. We saw the settlement, a cooperative sort of organization of the natives, with their own "local government" and food arrangements. The patients treat one another, and many of the staff are cured earlier cases. The sights one

would expect are there: the missing noses and toes, the mutilated faces - but the atmosphere, all over the settlement compound, is as cheerful as any native village, with laughing, singing, and dancing in good measure.

The hospital was something we had seen before; but the ride gave us a look at the country, and the experience of crossing a ferry, hand poled floats, with a wait of half an hour and at a cost of seven American cents for car and passengers, was noteworthy. The leper settlement, and the lunch and talk with Dr. Wheate, were the best part of the day.

The day we left Uganda, traveling from Soroti south through Busea into Kenya, was April 6th. The outstanding halt en route was at Tororo, where the showpiece of Progress in Uganda - a concrete-shafted cement plant rising out of the bush - is being erected. The engineer in charge, named Nickolay, had a lot of interesting and pepery things to say about Developement in East Africa. He was another of the more impatient of the participants, feeling that current policy was holding back and slowing down enterprise and effort. Communications were his first interest; he felt they should be improved as quickly as possible, and without regard for 'obstructive' factions, local or in London.

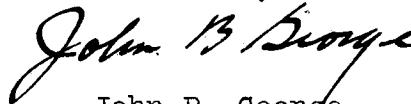


His principal complaint was against the East African Railways and Harbors, which he said had flatly refused to consider any westward extension of their railway until his survey had shown the practicability of a canal, which would open up the country from Kampala, Uganda, west to the Congo. He said that as soon as his survey report had been submitted in Nairobi the Railways had hastily indicated their willingness to build a railway - to link up directly with the Nairobi-Kampala line instead of by canal-barge-lake-steamer to Kisumu rail head.

Nickolay, with his monocle, his bristling mustaches, and his lucid and convincing dialects, was the personification of the more creative form of European impatience here in East Africa. Energetic, desiring to build and to change the face of Uganda in the names of progress and technology, and conscious that if this change is not made through the influence of the Western powers it will be made more ruthlessly by another ideology, he despises everything in colonial policy which says "wait." To me this is one of the most interesting aspects of the current East African scene: the efforts of such men to force Progress, and the regimentation entailed, down the throats of men like the Karamojoan leaning on his cattle-herder staff. I think the Carnegie party got a good look at this struggle, in Uganda.

We had a late lunch at the Border Inn, Busea, and drove on south into Kisumu, spending the night at the hotel there. In the next few days we were to see a country politically much different from Uganda, where the dominant faction would be European, with a more intense demarkation of ethnic and social boundaries. Our next main halt would be at Nairobi, most populous and industrial of East African urban points, lately the first in East Africa to be chartered a City. The coastal area of Kenya, and the central and coastal areas of Tanganyika would be last on the East African list.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John B. George". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

John B. George

Mailed 26 June.

Permanent address still Makerere College, Kampala, Uganda.