

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Manor Hotel
Mombasa
British East Africa
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
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New York 18, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

By this date I had intended to be in Nairobi, at work on the first stages of my study of the High Commission, or the interterritorial governing body of the East Africa territories of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, and Zanzibar. But this intention was based on an undue faith in the speed and efficiency of the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company and in similar qualities for the dock and customs personnel. The "Durban Castle" docked here on the 8th (which in fact marked the completion of a very fast run from London to Mombasa - 18 days); but my automobile, even at this moment, is still hidden in one of the cargo holds, covered over with cases of whisky or something. After an initial period of fuming and pleading, during which I considerably amused various port and shipping officials, I have accepted reality, relaxed, and languorously embraced the concept of manana, manana, - more prevalent than malaria on Mombasa Island.

To the local representative of Vauxhall Motor Company, whose export department put the car aboard in London with no bill of lading, no notification to me, I have handed over the whole business of getting the car unloaded, serviced, and generally prepared for the trip through Nairobi. In the meantime I have taken a room at this hotel, close enough to the Vauxhall office to enable me to walk over to needle and harass and to receive each time a new set of promises. Mombasa (despite its position some four degrees south of the equator) is fairly comfortable this time of year, and the hotel is airy, cool at night, and built with shutters, verandas, and court-spaces somewhat suggestive of Maugham stories of the tropics. So the delay is having its enjoyable and interesting aspects as well; and the American consul Dean Hinton and several British acquaintances are giving me a fine taste of East Africa hospitality.

Mr. Hinton drove me around the Island and had me to dinner on the 8th; the evening of the 9th was spent at a sort of farewell-and-hello party with some of my shipboard friends who are sailing on round the Cape and some Mombasa residents to whom they introduced me; yesterday afternoon and evening the latter group took several of us swimming at White Sands Beach, a beautiful, palmy stretch inside the reef where the shark

scare is not so great as at other places, and then to the Mombasa Club for a fine dinner. The particular hosts of the evening were a Mr. and Mrs. Ian Gavin who, like many other British couples, have moved from post-war Burma to Kenya. Ian, who is now about fifty, was in charge of some sugar holdings in the Mogaung-Myitkyina area of North Burma before the war. We exchanged some memories about the area, in which I had served in 1944 in Merrill's Marauders. The Mombasa Club is a beautiful place at night, dinner being served on the seaside veranda with palms crowded all around. It gave me a good picture of the more appealing side of the club-member society which I have heard so much discussed at Oxford. At first glance they seem a very friendly, helpful lot, far more serious and moderate than some writers and journalists have suggested.

In this there seems to be some confirmation of my feeling that it will require relatively little effort to understand the attitudes and behavior of the European section of the population; the application of our own standards and norms will not be too far from correct in this area. The real problems of Africa show themselves when one walks or even drives through the native sections of the Island: general poverty, crowding, contrasts in living standards between native and Indian and Indian and European, and the evidences of degradation and moral backsliding in the processes of urbanizing large numbers of migrant laborers fresh from the tribal areas. I am reminded again of Professor Herskovitz telling me that the native, not the European, is the imponderable factor in the African puzzle.

Aside from paying particular attention to the interterritorial customs service and other pertinent agencies which I contacted during the business of landing and getting organized, I have not yet made any specific observations pertaining to my thesis. But Mombasa, as the number one port of Kenya Colony and Protectorate, the principal port serving Uganda and north Tanganyika, and the ocean terminus of rail and highway communications with the Lake Victoria area, deserves a little more than a tourist-look, even at this stage in my observations. The period of delay here - and I am sure that it will not be more than two days more - will be fairly well spent. The only reason for not planning to remain here for a week is that Nairobi is the logical place to start.

Another good feature of this holdup is that I can sketch in some of the happenings since my last newsletter, and give a brief travel account to bring me from the Colonial Services Club, Oxford, to Mombasa. The period to be covered is a long one, happily broken by the conference which you arranged at Oxford, so my narrative will be sketchy indeed.

As I indicated to you at the conference, I found the seminar or "symposium" on the subject of colonial administration, held at the University of Bristol, to be very informative and very much worth while. The notes I took while listening to the various

speakers - scholars of colonial affairs and practical administrators alike - will be of much value to me when I get to writing my thesis. The quality of this particular material is much enhanced by its multi-national character; the speakers were members of French, Dutch, Belgian and Portuguese schools of colonial government.

The symposium took me away from Oxford during the latter part of April, but with no effect on my studies since Trinity term did not actually get under way until the end of the month. Shortly after the term began Jordan Severinghaus, another associate of the Institute who has been in South Africa for some two years, arrived in Oxford. He and his wife Sally were able to give me many new ideas about African affairs - ideas which were especially valuable to me because for several months I had been getting only the Oxford and Colonial Office points of view.

The next few weeks I continued to study; spent several days in hospital having my tonsils out (having the amusing experience of being given, through some staff error in the Radcliffe Infirmary, a plate of hot-peppered curry for my first post-surgery meal); applied for and received East African visas; and enjoyably took part in the gathering of Institute people at Weston Manor and Hopcroft's Holt (where, as I recall, you and Sev and I vied with one another to see who could strike his head the most times on the low-hanging sixteenth century beams and casements).

After the gathering I continued my reading and tutorials, leaving out the lectures in the interests of having more time to study specific material for my thesis. I visited London a number of times, getting information from the East Africa Office, making final travel and shipping arrangements, and making the acquaintance of a Mr. Rogers who had replaced Mr. Wallace as the member of the Colonial Office especially concerned with East African affairs. Mr. Rogers, a young, energetic civil servant with considerable experience in the colonies, gave me personal letters to Mr. C. B. A. Darling of the East Africa High Commission in Nairobi, Mr. G. B. Cartland of the Secretariat in Uganda, Mr. E. R. E. Surrige of the Secretariat in Tanganyika, and Sir Vincent Glenday at Zanzibar. These are key figures in administration and government - people who are in number two or three positions in their respective agencies - who know the whole story and yet have time enough to deal patiently with an interested outsider. Mr. Rogers agreed with me that it would be better to make my initial contacts with this sort of official, and for the time being confine relationships with the territorial governors to the proper formal calls.

My last efforts of the term at Oxford were devoted to trying to determine just what the criteria for a good doctorate thesis were. On this I received evasive and cagey answers, and got the idea that powerful lip-service, at least, was being paid to qualities of "originality" but that more than the usual emphasis would be placed upon the standard academic features of

synthesis of previous works, meticulous research, and very careful documentation. I do not intend to allow these considerations to cramp my observations and preliminary writings here in my area. The suggestion you made at the gathering - that I first record my impressions and early conclusions in a less formal, uninhibited manner, and later re-write to fit Oxford requirements - seems to be the best procedure.

My last look at Oxford included attending a program of speeches at Town Hall, with the famous Reverend Michael Scott and Miss Perham speaking on race relations in South Africa. I spent the last few days away from Oxford, visiting and saying goodbye to various friends, among whom was Mr. George Turner, Headmaster of Charterhouse School. I was his guest overnight, and he gave me a look at the way a British public school goes about its business. It was especially interesting to observe the Spartan living conditions of the pupils, the well-ordered discipline with a firm system of rank and chain-of-command among the pupils, and to talk to some of the very intelligent, responsible, and yet lively and well-humored young men. I noticed that no special deference was paid to the Headmaster making his rounds, even in his gown during the compulsory daily chapel service. I do not know whether or not this accounts for the generally very high esteem and affection which all the Charterhouse alumnae I have met have for Mr. Turner.

During the last hours in London I got in touch with Mr. Stoneman of the Chicago Daily News and Mr. Russel of the New York Herald Tribune. Conversation with Mr. Stoneman was confined to a few minutes over the telephone as he was just leaving for Paris, but I managed to see and exchange a few ideas with Mr. Russel. Mr. Stoneman plans a trip to East Africa this year, so we may meet in Kampala.

Everything except the aforementioned trouble with Vauxhall Motors and the shipping department of the Union Castle Line went well on the trip. The English Channel and the Indian Ocean acted up a bit at the beginning and end, and the Red Sea and the trip into it (through the desert by ship) via the Suez canal gave me a new definition for the word "heat," but the whole experience is one I would not be without.

Other than the immediate group of civil servants I was traveling with the first class passengers slow to become acquainted with. The ice melted about half way through the Mediterranean; but by that time I had been hailed down to the tourist deck by a young man vaguely associated in my memory with Oxford who turned out to be the son of the Governor of Tanganyika. After it had become a habit for me to gather before dinner at the tourist bar with his party of friends they got around one evening to ask "why the blazes didn't you travel tourist, so you could spend the bloody extra dol-

lars on booze for your friends, meaning us?" I answered with some snide reference to an inept society, so economically backward as to have a seller's market in everything, including transportation, so that a poor foreign traveller had to book passage a year ahead - or else travel first class and be robbed.

There is more truth to this than I thought at the time. The service on the tourist deck of the Durban Castle was considerably better than above, despite the fact that the first class quota was by no means filled. I noticed that the waiters and stewards below had a much more helpful attitude in serving their equals than those above in serving a group of people who were not all above an occasional fit of prima donna temper. British class-consciousness exists on ship as well as on land; the same feelings and attitudes which have caused servants' salaries to go beyond middle class reach have made sea travel a good deal less luxurious than in the good old days.

I got ashore and took a look around at each of the stops, Gibraltar, Port Said, and Aden, with varied and interesting impressions. At Gibraltar the outstanding sociological impression had to do with the overwhelming predominance of Indians in the retail shop business. I had observed and read of their commercial conquests in Africa and Burma, but I found it surprising to see them with such a foothold in such a westerly area, on the continent of Europe itself.

In Port Said I noted carefully the hints of a geographical location near the buffer zone in the cold war. First there was an announcement: no cameras to be taken ashore, no pictures during the stay at Said or the trip through the Suez Canal. While we were moored, waiting for a pontoon catwalk to be linked to our ladder, flights of British aircraft came over: Vampire jets, Mosquito bombers, military transports. Most indicative of all was a conversation I had during the evening with an Arab shopkeeper named Ibrahim. Over a glass of beer in his shop - he had asked Mr. Talbot and Mr. Ainsworth, two Colonial officers, and myself to come there for a drink - he talked of the Soviets and their operations in his city. "They have 75 people here, all with money to hand out. They make promises to the poor, who are fools for their talk because they have no property to lose and see a new way, under communism, to sleep and eat and breed with even less effort than now. In Egypt the Russians have a huge consulate, ten times what they need for business; they hand out money and make trouble. They are strong, with a big land army; but for the long run I think they bluff, mostly bluff..." Ibrahim was past middle age, with an impressive face, and the kind of baldness and the curved profile always shown in classic Japanese drawings. He did nearly all of the talking, so that we were unable to ask the routine questions about his family and the details of his shop, or "General Store". It was one of the larger single-showroom stores of the city.

The significance of what he told us, it seems to me, lies in the extreme interest in world politics evinced. While I do not have time to relate the rest of his conversation, which went into the reasons for his conclusions, it clearly indicated a degree of understanding which would do credit to a professor of politics. Perhaps this is a hint that a large group of the really effective individuals in the critical area of the Suez do have the ability to understand the less-simplified, less-slogvanized ideas of the West - even while communist agents are trying to sell Marxism to the local masses...

At the end of the long, hot run through the Red Sea, where an hour's watching over the side would always afford a view of porpoise or shark, we passed through a series of bleak, sand and rock islands and into the Gulf of Aden. We were moored at Aden for an evening, which I spent ashore at the officer's club of an RAF regiment in company with Pat Howard, a captain (Royal Irish Fusiliers) traveling to Durban. Aden to the tourist eye was a smaller, dingier port Said. To the tourist nose it was a little more emphatic in identity: a middle-east or oriental seaport even if you were blindfolded and deaf with a serious sinus infection.

Regarding these three ports I can form three very definite conclusions: First, Prudential Insurance Company had better revise their trade mark symbolism of Gibraltar as the ultimate in permanence and impregnability. In an age of air power, with its one airstrip overlooked at a few hundred yards by Spanish pillboxes, the rock is as strategically permanent as its stored supply of food, water and ammunition; and its property of tactical impregnability would be a factor of small importance to an enemy not immediately concerned with exit from the west Mediterranean. Second, Kipling should have thought twice before stating a Victorian Tommy's heart's desire to be shipped "somewhere east of Suez." Immediately east and southeast of Suez are the Syrian Desert and the Red Sea. I concede that the Victorian Tommy was a swashbuckling chap, but Burmese women and livable climate are both conspicuously absent for some distance beyond Port Said. Third, Poe's inference in The Raven that one might clasp a sainted maiden in Aden is pure hogwash. There is nothing in or about Aden that even smacks of the celestial, the refined, or the virtuous...

The remainder of the trip, through the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, was cool, cloudy, and a little rough in places - the effects of monsoon winds, said the Captain. On July 4th, when we rounded the African Horn, the orchestra played a program of American patriotic songs, "Marching Through Georgia" being the most repeated. There was no Neptune ceremony when we crossed the equator, and the last event worth mentioning was a trip through the ship engine room, which was quite interesting - the only previous motor-ship engines I had seen were on the "Kungsholm" and were of much different design.


I followed an overalled, grease-smearing engineer officer through the machinery-banked, narrow gangways, looking at the two banks of 8 reciprocating diesel units, each one powered on both strokes, each producing over 1,000 hp. Each unit could be disconnected and serviced independently of the others, was freshwater cooled. The starting was by compressed air, and the screws were shafted directly to the crankshafts, so that engines had to be stopped and reversed before the ship could be rear-powered. On thing which I think Sev would have had something to say about was the location of the engines. They were far forward, so that tons and tons of shafting some fifteen inches in diameter had to run through a series of massive radial bearings all the way to the stern; and I noted on a counter dial that they had to rotate some 2,000,000 times to propel the ship from England to Mombasa. One discovery which I had wished I had made during the Red Sea run was the refrigeration plant, where one could stand amid frosted brine-pipe coils at freezing temperature. This was near the engine room, but like all of the service-units on the ship it was powered by separate, smaller diesel units. An ultra-amateur impression I carried back up to the promenade deck was that British conservatism is nowhere so manifest as in their design of ship power plants...

Thus ended my only peacetime ocean trip. The next morning, July 8th, I was aroused by the smell of tropical vegetation coming in through the ventilator, and got up to watch the shore line of palms and mangroves, and the new-looking docks and godowns of Mombasa Island. I said goodbye to my shipmates, hailed a couple of barefooted bantu porters to carry my bags, and moved ashore to encounter the difficulties described at the beginning of this letter.

And I have now learned that the last of these difficulties has been overcome. My car is unloaded, okay except for a lock jimmied during the voyage and a rear view mirror broken in hoisting. Tomorrow I will drive half way to Nairobi, stay overnight at "Mac's Inn" and then drive on to the big town itself.

The ocean trip was wonderful. But after this - perhaps because of an unreasonable impatience instilled during my spell of wartime discomfort in airplanes - my preference will be definitely for air travel. After the first five days on a ship, you get the idea that you have left the 20th Century ashore...

Sincerely yours,


John B. George

Mailed Nairobi 16 July

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