

Wallace Edgar

Bosambo of the River



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CHAPTER I

ARACHI THE BORROWER

Many years ago the Monrovia Government sent one Bosambo, a native of the Kroo coast and consequently a thief, to penal servitude for the term of his natural life. Bosambo, who had other views on the matter, was given an axe and a saw in the penal settlement – which was a patch of wild forest in the back country – and told to cut down and trim certain mahogany-trees in company with other unfortunate men similarly circumstanced.

To assure themselves of Bosambo's obedience, the Government of Liberia set over him a number of compatriots, armed with weapons which had rendered good service at Gettysburg, and had been presented to the President of Liberia by President Grant. They were picturesque weapons, but they were somewhat deficient in accuracy, especially when handled by the inexpert soldiers of the Monrovia coast. Bosambo, who put his axe to an ignoble use, no less than the slaying of Captain Peter Cole – who was as black as the ten of clubs, but a gentleman by the Liberian code – left the penal settlement with passionate haste. The Gettysburg relics made fairly good practice up to two hundred yards, but Bosambo was a mile away before the guards, searching the body of their dead commander for the key of the ammunition store, had secured food for their lethal weapons.

The government offered a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars for Bosambo, dead or alive. But, although the reward was claimed and paid to the half-brother of the Secretary of War, it is a fact that Bosambo was never caught.

On the contrary, he made his way to a far land, and became, by virtue of his attainments, chief of the Ochori.

Bosambo was too good a sportsman to leave his persecutors at peace. There can be little doubt that the Kroo insurrection, which cost the Liberian Government eight hundred and twenty-one pounds sixteen shillings to suppress, was due to the instigation and assistance of Bosambo. Of this insurrection, and the part that Bosambo played, it may be necessary to speak again.

The second rebellion was a more serious and expensive affair; and it was at the conclusion of this that the Liberian Government made representations to Britain. Sanders, who conducted an independent inquiry into the question of Bosambo's complicity, reported that there was no evidence whatever that Bosambo was directly or indirectly responsible. And with that the Liberian Government was forced to be content; but they expressed their feelings by offering a reward of two thousand dollars for Bosambo alive or dead – preferably alive. They added, for the benefit of minor government officials and their neighbours, that they would, in the language of the advertisement, reject all substitutes. The news of this price went up and down the coast and very far into the interior, yet strangely enough Arachi of the Isisi did not learn of it until many years afterward.

Arachi was of the Isisi people, and a great borrower. Up and down the river all men knew him for such, so that his name passed into the legendary vocabulary of the people whilst he yet lived; and did the wife of Yoka beg from the wife of O'taki the service of a cooking-pot, be sure that O'taki's wife would agree, but with heavy pleasantries scream after the retiring pot: "O thou shameless Arachi!" whereupon all the village folk who heard the jest would rock with laughter.

Arachi was the son of a chief, but in a country where chieftainship was not hereditary, and where, moreover, many chiefs' sons dwelt without distinction, his parentage was of little advantage. Certainly it did not serve him as, in his heart, he thought he should be served.

He was tall and thin, and his knees were curiously knobbly. He carried his head on one side importantly, and was profoundly contemptuous of his fellows.

Once he came to Sanders.

"Lord," he said, "I am a chief's son, as you know, and I am very wise. Men who look upon me say, 'Behold, this young man is full of craft,' because of my looks. Also I am a great talker."

"There are many in this land who are great talkers, Arachi," said Sanders, unpleasantly; "yet they do not travel for two days down-stream to tell me so."

"Master," said Arachi impressively, "I came to you because I desire advancement. Many of your little chiefs are fools, and, moreover, unworthy. Now I am the son of a chief, and it is my wish to sit down in the place of my father. Also, lord, remember this, that I have dwelt among foreign people, the Angola folk, and speak their tongue."

Sanders sighed wearily.

"Seven times you have asked me, Arachi," he said, "and seven times I have told you you are no chief for me. Now I tell you this – that I am tired of seeing you, and if you come to me again I will throw you to the monkeys.¹ As for your Angola palaver, I tell you this – that if it happen – which may all gods forbid! – that a tribe of Angola folk sit down with me, you shall be chief."

Unabashed, Arachi returned to his village, for he thought in his heart that Sandi was jealous of his great powers. He built a large hut at the end of the village, borrowing his friends' labour; this he furnished with skins and the like, and laid in stores of salt and corn, all of which he had secured from neighbouring villages by judicious promises of payment.

It was like a king's hut, so glorious were the hangings of skin and the stretched bed of hide, and the people of his village said "Ko!" believing that Arachi had dug up those hidden treasures which every chief is popularly supposed to possess in secret places to which his sons may well be privy.

Even those who had helped to supply the magnificence were impressed and comforted.

"I have lent Arachi two bags of salt," said Pidini, the chief of Kolombolo, the fishing village, "and my stomach was full of doubt, though he swore by Death that he would repay me three days after the rains. Now I see that he is indeed very rich, as he told me he was, and if my salt does not return to me I may seize his fine bed."

In another village across the River Ombili, a headman of the Isisi confided to his wife:

"Woman, you have seen the hut of Arachi, now I think you will cease your foolish talk. For you have reproached me bitterly because I lent Arachi my fine bed."

"Lord, I was wrong," said the woman meekly; "but I feared he would not pay you the salt he promised; now I know that I was foolish, for I saw many bags of salt in his hut."

The story of Arachi's state spread up and down the river, and when the borrower demanded the hand of Koran, the daughter of the chief of the Putani ("The Fishers of the River"), she came to him without much palaver, though she was rather young.

A straight and winsome girl well worth the thousand rods and the twenty bags of salt which the munificent Arachi promised, by Death, devils, and a variety of gods, should be delivered to her father when the moon and the river stood in certain relative positions.

Now Arachi did no manner of work whatever, save to walk through the village street at certain hours clad in a robe of monkey tails which he had borrowed from the brother of the king of the Isisi.

He neither fished nor hunted nor dug in the fields.

He talked to Koran his wife, and explained why this was so. He talked to her from sunset until the early hours of the morning, for he was a great talker, and when he was on his favourite subject – which was Arachi – he was very eloquent. He talked to her till the poor child's head rocked from side to side, and from front to back, in her desperate sleepiness.

¹ Colloquial: "Make you look foolish."

He was a great man, beloved and trusted of Sandi. He had immense thoughts and plans – plans that would ensure him a life of ease without the distressing effects of labour. Also, Sanders would make him chief – in good time.

She should be as a queen – she would much rather have been in her bed and asleep.

Though no Christian, Arachi was a believer in miracles. He pinned his faith to the supreme miracle of living without work, and was near to seeing the fulfilment of that wonder.

But the miracle which steadfastly refused to happen was the miracle which would bring him relief at the moment when his numerous creditors were clamouring for the repayment of the many and various articles which they had placed in his care.

It is an axiom that the hour brings its man – most assuredly it brings its creditor.

There was a tumultuous and stormy day when the wrathful benefactors of Arachi gathered in full strength and took from him all that was takable, and this in the face of the village, to Koran's great shame. Arachi, on the contrary, because of his high spirit, was neither ashamed nor distressed, even though many men spoke harshly.

"O thief and rat!" said the exasperated owner of a magnificent stool of ceremony, the base of which Arachi had contrived to burn. "Is it not enough that you should steal the wear of these things? Must you light your fires by my beautiful stool?"

Arachi replied philosophically and without passion: they might take his grand furnishings – which they did; they might revile him in tones and in language the most provocative – this also they did; but they could not take the noble hut which their labours had built, because that was against the law of the tribe; nor could they rob him of his faith in himself, because that was contrary to the laws of nature – Arachi's nature.

"My wife," he said to the weeping girl, "these things happen. Now I think I am the victim of Fate, therefore I propose changing all my gods. Such as I have do not serve me, and, if you remember, I spent many hours in the forest with my *bete*."

Arachi had thought of many possible contingencies – as, for instance:

Sandi might relent, and appoint him to a great chieftainship.

Or he might dig from the river-bed some such treasure as U'fabi, the N'gombi man, did once upon a time.

Arachi, entranced with this latter idea, went one morning before sunrise to a place by the shore and dug. He turned two spadefuls of earth before an infinite weariness fell upon him, and he gave up the search.

"For," he argued, "if treasure is buried in the river-bed, it might as well be there as elsewhere. And if it be not there, where may it be?"

Arachi bore his misfortune with philosophy. He sat in the bare and bleak interior of his hut, and explained to his wife that the men who had robbed him – as he said – hated him, and were jealous of him because of his great powers, and that one day, when he was a great chief, he would borrow an army from his friends the N'gombi, and put fire to their houses.

Yes, indeed, he said "borrow," because it was his nature to think in loans.

His father-in-law came on the day following the deporting, expecting to save something from the wreckage on account of Koran's dowry. But he was very late.

"O son of shame!" he said bitterly. "Is it thus you repay for my priceless daughter? By Death! but you are a wicked man."

"Have no fear, fisherman," said Arachi loftily, "for I am a friend of Sandi, and be sure that he will do that for me which will place me high above common men. Even now I go to make a long palaver with him, and, when I return, you shall hear news of strange happenings."

Arachi was a most convincing man, possessing the powers of all great borrowers, and he convinced his father-in-law – a relation who, from the beginning of time, has always been the least open to conviction.

He left his wife, and she, poor woman, glad to be relieved of the presence of her loquacious husband, probably went to sleep.

At any rate, Arachi came to headquarters at a propitious moment for him. Headquarters at that moment was an armed camp at the junction of the Isisi and Ikeli rivers.

On the top of all his other troubles, Sanders had the problem of a stranger who had arrived unbidden. His orderly came to him and told him that a man desired speech of him.

"What manner of man?" asked Sanders, wearily.

"Master," said the orderly, "I have not seen a man like him before."

Sanders went out to inspect his visitor. The stranger rose and saluted, raising both hands, and the Commissioner looked him over. He was not of any of the tribes he knew, being without the face-cuts laterally descending either cheek, which mark the Bomongo. Neither was he tattooed on the forehead, like the people of the Little River.

"Where do you come from?" asked Sanders, in Swaheli – which is the *lingua franca* of the continent – but the man shook his head.

So Sanders tried him again, this time in Bomongo, thinking, from his face-marks, that he must be a man of the Bokeri people. But he answered in a strange tongue.

"*Quel nom avez vous?*" Sanders asked, and repeated the question in Portuguese. To this latter he responded, saying that he was a small chief of the Congo Angola, and that he had left his land to avoid slavery.

"Take him to the men's camp and feed him," said Sanders, and dismissed him from his mind.

Sanders had little time to bother about stray natives who might wander into his camp. He was engaged in searching for a gentleman who was known as Abdul Hazim, a great rascal, trading guns and powder contrary to the law.

"And," said Sanders to the captain of the Houssas, "if I catch him he'll be sorry."

Abdul Hazim shared this view, so kept out of Sanders's way to such purpose that, after a week's further wanderings, Sanders returned to his headquarters.

Just about then he was dispirited, physically low from the after-effects of fever, and mentally disturbed.

Nothing went right with the Commissioner. There had been a begging letter from head-quarters concerning this same Abdul Hazim. He was in no need of Houssa palavers, yet there must needs come a free fight amongst these valiant soldier-men, and, to crown all, two hours afterwards, the Houssa skipper had gone to bed with a temperature of 104.6.

"Bring the swine here," said Sanders inelegantly, when the sergeant of Houssas reported the fight. And there were marched before him the strange man, who had come to him from the backlands, and a pugnacious soldier named Kano.

"Lord," said the Houssa, "by my god, who is, I submit, greater than most gods, I am not to blame. This Kaffir dog would not speak to me when I spoke; also, he put his hands to my meat, so I struck him."

"Is that all?" asked Sanders.

"That is all, lord."

"And did the stranger do no more than, in his ignorance, touch your meat, and keep silence when you spoke?"

"No more, lord."

Sanders leant back in his seat of justice and scowled horribly at the Houssa.

"If there is one thing more evident to me than another," he said slowly, "it is that a Houssa is a mighty person, a lord, a king. Now I sit here in justice, respecting neither kings, such as you be, nor slaves, such as this silent one. And I judge so, regarding the dignity of none, according to the law of the book. Is that so?"

"That is so, lord."

"And it would seem that it is against the law to raise hand against any man, however much he offends you, the proper course being to make complaint according to the regulations of the service. Is that so?"

"That is so, lord."

"Therefore you have broken the law. Is that truth?"

"That is truth, lord."

"Go back to your lines, admitting this truth to your comrades, and let the Kaffir rest. For on the next occasion, for him that breaks the law, there will be breaking of skin. The palaver is finished."

The Houssa retired.

"And," said Sanders, retailing the matter to the convalescent officer next morning, "I consider that I showed more than ordinary self-restraint in not kicking both of them to the devil."

"You're a great man," said the Houssa officer. "You'll become a colonial-made gentleman one of these days, unless you're jolly careful."

Sanders passed in silence the Houssa's gibe at the Companionship of St. Michael and St. George, and, moreover, C.M.G.'s were not likely to come his way whilst Abdul Hazim was still at large.

He was in an unpleasant frame of mind when Arachi came swiftly in a borrowed canoe, paddled by four men whom he had engaged at an Isisi village, on a promise of payment which it was very unlikely he would ever be able to fulfil.

"Master," said Arachi solemnly, "I come desiring to serve your lordship, for I am too great a man for my village, and, if no chief, behold, I have a chief's thoughts."

"And a chief's hut," said Sanders dryly, "if all they tell me is true."

Arachi winced.

"Lord," he said humbly, "all things are known to you, and your eye goes forth like a chameleon's tongue to see round the corners."

Sanders passed over the unpleasant picture Arachi suggested.

"Arachi," he said, "it happens that you have come at a moment when you can serve me, for there is in my camp a strange man from a far-away land, who knows not this country, yet desires to cross it. Now, since you know the Angola tongue, you shall take him in your canoe to the edge of the Frenchi land, and there you shall put him on his way. And for this I will pay your paddlers. And as for you, I will remember you in the day of your need."

It was not as Arachi could have wished, but it was something. The next day he departed importantly.

Before he left, Sanders gave him a word of advice.

"Go you, Arachi," he said, "by the Little Kusu River."

"Lord," said Arachi, "there is a shorter way by the creek of Still Waters. This goes to the Frenchi land, and is deep enough for our purpose."

"It is a short way and a long way," said Sanders grimly. "For there sits a certain Abdul Hazim who is a great buyer of men, and, because the Angola folk are wonderful gardeners, behold, the Arab is anxious to come by them. Go in peace."

"On my head," said Arachi, and took his leave.

It was rank bad luck that he should meet on his way two of his principal creditors. These, having some grievance in the matter of foodstuffs, advanced, desiring to do him an injury, but, on his earnest entreaties, postponed the performance of their solemn vows.

"It seems," said one of them, "that you are now Sandi's man, for though I do not believe anything you have told me, yet these paddlers do not lie."

"Nor this silent one," said Arachi, pointing to his charge proudly. "And because I alone in all the land can make palaver with him, Sandi has sent me on a mission to certain kings. These will give me presents, and on my return I will pay you what I owe, and much more for love."

They let him pass.

It may be said that Arachi, who lent "to none and believed no man," had no faith whatever in his lord's story. Who the silent Angola was, what was his mission, and why he had been chosen to guard the stranger, Arachi did not guess.

He would have found an easy way to understanding if he had believed all that Sanders had told him, but that was not Arachi's way.

On a night when the canoe was beached on an island, and the paddlers prepared the noble Arachi's food, the borrower questioned his charge.

"How does it happen, foreigner," he asked, "that my friend and neighbour, Sandi, asks me of my kindness to guide you to the French land?"

"Patron," said the Angola man, "I am a stranger, and desire to escape from slavery. Also, there is a small Angola-Balulu tribe, which are of my people and faith, who dwell by the Frenchi tribe."

"What is your faith?" asked Arachi.

"I believe in devils and ju-jus," said the Angola man simply, "especially one called Billimi, who has ten eyes and spits at snakes. Also, I hate the Arabi, that being part of my faith."

This gave Arachi food for thought, and some reason for astonishment that Sandi should have spoken the truth to him.

"What of this Abdul Arabi?" he asked. "Now I think that Sandi lied to me when he said such an one buys men, for, if this be so, why does he not raid the Isisi?"

But the Angola man shook his head.

"These are matters too high for my understanding," he said. "Yet I know that he takes the Angola because they are great gardeners, and cunning in the pruning of trees."

Again Arachi had reason for thinking profoundly.

This Abdul, as he saw, must come to the Upper River for the people of the Lesser Akasava, who were also great gardeners. He would take no Isisi, because they were notoriously lazy, and moreover, died with exasperating readiness when transplanted to a foreign soil.

He continued his journey till he came to the place where he would have turned off had he taken a short cut to the French territory.

Here he left his paddlers and his guest, and made his way up the creek of Still Waters.

Half-a-day's paddling brought him to the camp of Abdul. The slaver's silent runners on the bank had kept pace with him, and when Arachi landed he was seized by men who sprang apparently from nowhere.

"Lead me to your master, O common men," said Arachi, "for I am a chief of the Isisi, and desire a secret palaver."

"If you are Isisi, and by your thinness and your boasting I see that you are," said his captor, "my lord Abdul will make easy work of you."

Abdul Hazim was short and stout, and a lover of happiness. Therefore he kept his camp in that condition of readiness which enabled him to leave quickly at the first sight of a white helmet or a Houssa's tarboosh.

For it would have brought no happiness to Abdul had Sanders come upon him.

Now, seated on a soft-hued carpet of silk before the door of his little tent, he eyed Arachi dubiously, and listened in silence while the man spoke of himself.

"Kaffir," he said, when the borrower had finished, "how do I know that you do not lie, or that you are not one of Sandi's spies? I think I should be very clever if I cut your throat."

Arachi explained at length why Abdul Hazim should not cut his throat.

"If you say this Angola man is near by, why should I not take him without payment?" asked the slaver.

"Because," said Arachi, "this foreigner is not the only man in the country, and because I have great influence with Sandi, and am beloved by all manner of people who trust me. I may bring many other men to your lordship."

Arachi returned to the camp, towing a small canoe with which the slaver had provided him.

He woke the Angola stranger from his sleep.

"Brother," he said, "here is a canoe with food. Now I tell you to paddle one day up this creek of Still Waters and there await my coming, for there are evil men about, and I fear for your safety."

The Angolan, simple man that he was, obeyed. Half a day's journey up the creek Abdul's men were waiting.

Arachi set off for his own village that night, and in his canoe was such a store of cloth, of salt, and of brass rods as would delight any man's heart. Arachi came to his village singing a little song about himself.

In a year he had grown rich, for there were many ways of supplying the needs of an Arab slaver, and Abdul paid promptly.

Arachi worked single-handed, or, if he engaged paddlers, found them in obscure corners of the territories. He brought to Abdul many marketable properties, mostly young N'gombi women, who are fearful and easily cowed, and Sanders, scouring the country for the stout man with the fez, found him not.

* * * * *

"Lord Abdul," said Arachi, who met the slaver secretly one night near the Ikusi River, "Sandi and his soldiers have gone down to the Akasava for a killing palaver. Now I think we will do what you wish."

They were discussing an aspect of an adventure – the grandest adventure which Abdul had ever planned.

"Arachi," said Abdul, "I have made you a rich man. Now, I tell you that I can make you richer than any chief in this land."

"I shall be glad to hear of this," said Arachi. "For though I am rich, yet I have borrowed many things, and, it seems, I have so wonderful a mind that I must live always in to-morrow."

"So I have heard," said the Arab. "For they say of you that if you had the whole world you would borrow the moon."

"That is my mystery," said Arachi modestly. "For this reason I am a very notable man."

Then he sat down to listen in patience to the great plan of Abdul Hazim. And it was a very high plan, for there were two thousand Liberian dollars at the back of it, and, for Arachi, payment in kind.

At the moment of the conference, Sanders was housed in the Ochori city making palaver with Bosambo, the chief.

"Bosambo," said Sanders, "I have given you these upper streams to your care. Yet Abdul Hazim walks through the land without hurt, and I think it is shame to you and to me."

"Master," said Bosambo, "it is a shameful thing. Yet the streams hereabouts are so many, and Abdul is a cunning man, and has spies. Also, my people are afraid to offend him lest he 'chop' them, or sell them into the interior."

Sanders nodded and rose to join the *Zaire*.

"Bosambo," he said, "this government put a price upon this Abdul, even as a certain government put a price upon you."

"What is his price, lord?" asked Bosambo, with an awakening of interest.

"One hundred pounds in silver," said Sanders.

"Lord," said Bosambo, "that is a good price."

Two days afterwards, when Arachi came to Bosambo, this chief was engaged in the purely domestic occupation of nursing his one small son.

"Greeting, Bosambo," said Arachi, "to you and to your beautiful son, who is noble in appearance and very quiet."

"Peace be to you, Arachi. I have nothing to lend you," said Bosambo.

"Lord," said Arachi loftily, "I am now a rich man – richer than chiefs – and I do not borrow."

"Ko, ko!" said Bosambo, with polite incredulity.

"Bosambo," Arachi went on, "I came to you because I love you, and you are not a talking man, but rather a wise and silent one."

"All this I know, Arachi," said Bosambo cautiously. "And again I say to you that I lend no man anything."

The exasperated Arachi raised his patient eyes to heaven.

"Lord Bosambo," he said, in the tone of one hurt, "I came to tell you of that which I have found, and to ask your lordship to help me secure it. For in a certain place I have come across a great stock of ivory, such as the old kings buried against their need."

"Arachi," said Bosambo, of a sudden, "you tell me that you are rich. Now you are a little man and I am a chief, yet I am not rich."

"I have many friends," said Arachi, trembling with pride, "and they give me rods and salt."

"That is nothing," said Bosambo. "Now I understand richness, for I have lived amongst white folk who laugh at rods and throw salt to dogs."

"Lord Bosambo," said the other eagerly, "I am rich also by white men's rule. Behold!"

From his waist pouch he took a handful of silver, and offered it in both hands for the chief's inspection.

Bosambo examined the money respectfully, turning each coin over gingerly.

"That is good riches," he said, and he breathed a little faster than was his wont. "And it is new, being bright. Also the devil marks, which you do not understand, are as they should be."

The gratified Arachi shoved his money back into his pouch. Bosambo sat in meditative silence, his face impassive.

"And you will take me, Arachi, to the place of buried treasure?" he asked slowly. "Ko! you are a generous man, for I do not know why you should share with me, knowing that I once beat you."

Bosambo put the child down gently. These kings' stores were traditional. Many had been found, and it was the dream of every properly constituted man to unearth such.

Yet Bosambo was not impressed, being in his heart sceptical.

"Arachi," he said, "I believe that you are a liar! Yet I would see this store, and, if it be near by, will see with my own eyes."

It was one day's journey, according to Arachi.

"You shall tell me where this place is," said Bosambo.

Arachi hesitated.

"Lord, how do I not know that you will not go and take this store?" he asked.

Bosambo regarded him sternly.

"Am I not an honest man?" he asked. "Do not the people from one end of the world to the other swear by the name of Bosambo?"

"No," said Arachi truthfully.

Yet he told of the place. It was by the River of Shadows, near the Crocodile Pool Where-the-Floods Had-Changed-The-Land.

Bosambo went to his hut to make preparations for the journey.

Behind his house, in a big grass cage, were many little pigeons. He laboriously wrote in his vile Arabic a laconic message, and attached it to the leg of a pigeon.

To make absolutely sure, for Bosambo left nothing to chance, he sent away a canoe secretly that night for a certain destination.

"And this you shall say to Sandi," said the chief to his trusted messenger, "that Arachi is rich with the richness of silver, and that silver has the devil marks of Zanzibar – being the home of all traders, as your lordship knows."

Next day, at dawn, Bosambo and his guide departed. They paddled throughout the day, taking the smaller stream that drained the eastern side of the river, and at night they camped at a place called Bolulu, which means "the changed land."

They rose with the daylight to resume their journey. But it was unnecessary, for, in the darkness before the dawn, Abdul Hazim had surrounded the camp, and, at the persuasive muzzle of a Snider rifle, Bosambo accompanied his captors ten minutes' journey into the wood where Abdul awaited him.

The slaver, sitting before the door of his tent on his silken carpet, greeted his captive in the Ochori dialect. Bosambo replied in Arabic.

"Ho, Bosambo!" said Abdul. "Do you know me?"

"Sheikh," said Bosambo, "I would know you in hell, for you are the man whose head my master desires."

"Bosambo," said Abdul calmly, "your head is more valuable, so they say, for the Liberians will put it upon a pole, and pay me riches for my enterprise."

Bosambo laughed softly. "Let the palaver finish," he said, "I am ready to go."

They brought him to the river again, tied him to a pole, and laid him in the bottom of a canoe, Arachi guarding him.

Bosambo, looking up, saw the borrower squatting on guard.

"Arachi," he said, "if you untie my hands, it shall go easy with you."

"If I untie your hands," said Arachi frankly, "I am both a fool and a dead man, and neither of these conditions is desirable."

"To every man," quoth Bosambo, "there is an easy kill somewhere,² and, if he misses this, all kills are difficult."

Four big canoes composed the waterway caravan. Abdul was in the largest with his soldiers, and led the van.

They moved quickly down the tiny stream, which broadened as it neared the river.

Then Abdul's headman suddenly gasped.

"Look!" he whispered.

The slaver turned his head.

Behind them, paddling leisurely, came four canoes, and each was filled with armed men.

"Quickly," said Abdul, and the paddlers stroked furiously, then stopped.

Ahead was the *Zaire*, a trim, white steamer, alive with Houssas.

"It is God's will," said Abdul. "These things are ordained."

He said no more until he stood before Sanders, and the Commissioner was not especially communicative.

"What will you do with me?" asked Abdul.

"I will tell you when I have seen your stores," said Sanders. "If I find rifles such as the foolish Lobolo people buy, I shall hang you according to law."

The Arab looked at the shaking Arachi. The borrower's knees wobbled fearfully.

"I see," said Abdul thoughtfully, "that this man whom I made rich has betrayed me."

If he had hurried or moved jerkily Sanders would have prevented the act; but the Arab searched calmly in the fold of his *bourous* as though seeking a cigarette.

² The native equivalent for "opportunity knocks," etc.

His hand came out, and with it a curved knife.

Then he struck quickly, and Arachi went blubbering to the deck, a dying man.

"Borrower," said the Arab, and he spoke from the centre of six Houssas who were chaining him, so that he was hidden from the sobbing figure on the floor, "I think you have borrowed that which you can at last repay. For it is written in the Sura of the Djinn that from him who takes a life, let his life be taken, that he may make full repayment."

CHAPTER II

THE TAX RESISTERS

Sanders took nothing for granted when he accounted for native peoples. These tribes of his possessed an infinite capacity for unexpectedness – therein lay at once their danger and their charm. For one could neither despair at their sin nor grow too confidently elated at their virtue, knowing that the sun which went down on the naughtiness of the one and the dovelike placidity of the other, might rise on the smouldering sacrificial fires in the streets of the blessed village, and reveal the folk of the incorrigible sitting at the doors of their huts, dust on head, hands outspread in an agony of penitence.

Yet it seemed that the people of Kiko were models of deportment, thrift, and intelligence, and that the gods had given them beautiful natures. Kiko, a district of the Lower Isisi, is separated from all other tribes and people by the Kiko on the one side, the Isisi River on the other, and on the third by clumps of forest land set at irregular intervals in the Great Marsh.

Kiko proper stretches from the marsh to the tongue of land at the confluence of the Kiko and Isisi, in the shape of an irregular triangle.

To the eastward, across the Kiko River, are the unruly N'gombi tribes; to the westward, on the farther bank of the big river, are the Akasava; and the Kiko people enjoy an immunity from sudden attack, which is due in part to its geographical position, and in part to the remorseless activities of Mr. Commissioner Sanders.

Once upon a time a king of the N'gombi called his headmen and chiefs together to a great palaver.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we are children. For our crops have failed because of the floods, and the thieving Ochori have driven the game into their own country. Now, across the river are the Kiko people, and they have reaped an oat harvest; also, there is game in plenty. Must we sit and starve whilst the Kiko swell with food?"

A fair question, though the facts were not exactly stated, for the N'gombi were lazy, and had sown late; also the game was in their forest for the searching, but, as the saying is, "The N'gombi hunts from his bed and seeks only cooked meats."

One night the N'gombi stole across the river and fell upon Kiko city, establishing themselves masters of the country.

There was a great palaver, which was attended by the chief and headman of the Kiko.

"Henceforward," said the N'gombi king – Tigilini was his name – "you are as slaves to my people, and if you are gentle and good and work in the fields you shall have one-half of all you produce, for I am a just man, and very merciful. But if you rebel, I will take you for my sport."

Lest any misunderstanding should exist, he took the first malcontent, who was a petty chief of a border village, and performed his programme.

This man had refused tribute, and was led, with roped hands, before the king, all headmen having been summoned to witness the happening.

The rebel was bound with his hands behind him, and was ordered to kneel. A young sapling was bent over, and one end of a native rope was fixed to its topmost branches, and the other about his neck. The tree was slowly released till the head of the offender was held taut.

"Now!" said the king, and his executioner struck off the head, which was flung fifty yards by the released sapling.

It fell at the feet of Mr. Commissioner Sanders, who, with twenty-five Houssas and a machine gun, had just landed from the *Zaire*.

Sanders was annoyed; he had travelled three days and four nights with little sleep, and he had a touch of fever, which made him irritable.

He walked into the village and interrupted an eloquent address on the obligations of the conquered, which the N'gombi thief thought it opportune to deliver.

He stopped half-way through his speech, and lost a great deal of interest in the proceedings as the crowd divided to allow of Sanders's approach.

"Lord," said Tigilini, that quick and subtle man, "you have come at a proper time, for these people were in rebellion against your lordship, and I have subdued them. Therefore, master, give me rewards as you gave to Bosambo of the Ochori."

Sanders gave nothing save a brief order, and his Houssas formed a half circle about the hut of the king – Tigilini watching the manoeuvre with some apprehension.

"If," he said graciously. "I have done anything which your lordship thinks I should not have done, or taken that which I should not have taken, I will undo and restore."

Sanders, hands on hips, regarded him dispassionately.

"There is a body." He pointed to the stained and huddled thing on the ground. "There, by the path, is a head. Now, you shall put the head to that body and restore life."

"That I cannot do," said the king nervously, "for I am no ju-ju."

Sanders spoke two words in Arabic, and Tigilini was seized.

They carried the king away, and no man ever saw his face again, and it is a legend that Tigilini, the king, is everlastingly chained to the hind leg of M'shimba M'shamba, the green devil of the Akasava. If the truth be told, Tigilini went no nearer to perdition than the convict prison at Sierra Leone, but the legend is not without its value as a deterrent to ambitious chiefs.

Sanders superintended the evacuation of the Kiko, watched the crestfallen N'gombi retire to their own lands, and set up a new king without fuss or ceremony. And the smooth life of the Kiko people ran pleasantly as before.

They tilled the ground and bred goats and caught fish. From the marsh forest, which was their backland, they gathered rubber and copal, and this they carried by canoe to the mouth of the river and sold.

So they came to be rich, and even the common people could afford three wives.

Sanders was very wise in the psychology of native wealth. He knew that people who grew rich in corn were dangerous, because corn is an irresponsible form of property, and had no ramifications to hold in check the warlike spirit of its possessors.

He knew, too, that wealth in goats, in cloth, in brass rods, and in land was a factor for peace, because possessions which cannot be eaten are ever a steadying influence in communal life.

Sanders was a wise man. He was governed by certain hard and fast rules, and though he was well aware that failure in any respect to grapple with a situation would bring him a reprimand, either because he had not acted according to the strict letter of the law, or because he "had not used his discretion" in going outside that same inflexible code, he took responsibility without fear.

It was left to his discretion as to what part of the burden of taxation individual tribes should bear, and on behalf of his government he took his full share of the Kiko surplus, adjusting his demands according to the measure of the tribe's prosperity.

Three years after the enterprising incursion of the N'gombi, he came to the Kiko country on his half-yearly visit.

In the palaver house of the city he listened to complaints, as was his custom.

He sat from dawn till eight o'clock in the morning, and after the tenth complaint he turned to the chief of the Kiko, who sat at his side.

"Chief," he said, with that air of bland innocence which would have made men used to his ways shake in their tracks, "I observe that all men say one thing to me – that they are poor. Now this is not the truth."

"I am in your hands," said the chief diplomatically; "also my people, and they will pay taxation though they starve."

Sanders saw things in a new light.

"It seems," he said, addressing the serried ranks of people who squatted about, "that there is discontent in your stomachs because I ask you for your taxes. We will have a palaver on this."

He sat down, and a grey old headman, a notorious litigant and a league-long speaker, rose up.

"Lord," he said dramatically, "justice!"

"Kwai!" cried the people in chorus.

The murmur, deep-chested and unanimous, made a low, rumbling sound like the roll of a drum.

"Justice!" said the headman. "For you, Sandi, are very cruel and harsh. You take and take and give us nothing, and the people cry out in pain."

He paused, and Sanders nodded.

"Go on," he said.

"Corn and fish, gum and rubber, we give you," said the spokesman; "and when we ask whither goes this money, you point to the puc-a-puc³ and your soldiers, and behold we are mocked. For your puc-a-puc comes only to take our taxes, and your soldiers to force us to pay."

Again the applauding murmur rolled.

"So we have had a palaver," said the headman, "and this we have said among ourselves: 'Let Sandi remit one-half our taxes; these we will bring in our canoes to the Village-by-the-Big-Water, for we are honest men, and let Sandi keep his soldiers and his puc-a-puc for the folk of the Isisi and the Akasava and the N'gombi, for these are turbulent and wicked people.'"

"Kwai!"

It was evidently a popular movement, and Sanders smiled behind his hand.

"As for us," said the headman, "we are peaceable folk, and live comfortably with all nations, and if any demand of us that we shall pay tribute, behold it will be better to give freely than to pay these taxes."

Sanders listened in silence, then he turned to the chief.

"It shall be as you wish," he said, "and I will remit one half of your taxation – the palaver is finished."

He went on board the *Zaire* that night and lay awake listening to the castanets of the dancing women – the Kiko made merry to celebrate the triumph of their diplomacy.

Sanders left next day for the Isisi, having no doubt in his mind that the news of his concession had preceded him. So it proved, for at Lukalili no sooner had he taken his place in the speech-house than the chief opened the proceedings.

"Lord Sandi," he began, "we are poor men, and our people cry out against taxation. Now, lord, we have thought largely on this matter, and this say the people: 'If your lordship would remit one-half our taxes we should be happy, for this puc-a-puc' –"

Sanders waved him down.

"Chiefs and people," he said, "I am patient, because I love you. But talk to me more about taxation and about puc-a-pucs, and I will find a new chief for me, and you will wish that you had never been born."

After that Sanders had no further trouble.

He came to the Ochori, and found Bosambo, wholly engrossed with his new baby, but ripe for action.

"Bosambo," said the Commissioner, after he had gingerly held the new-comer and bestowed his natal present, "I have a story to tell you."

He told his story, and Bosambo found it vastly entertaining.

Five days later, when Sanders was on his way home, Bosambo with ten picked men for paddlers, came sweeping up the river, and beached at Kiko city.

³ Steamer.

He was greeted effusively; a feast was prepared for him, the chief's best hut was swept clean.

"Lord Bosambo," said the Kiko chief, when the meal was finished, "I shall have a sore heart this night when you are gone."

"I am a kind man," said Bosambo, "so I will not go to-night, for the thought of your sorrow would keep sleep from my eyes."

"Lord," said the chief hastily, "I am not used to sorrow, and, moreover, I shall sleep heavily, and it would be shameful if I kept you from your people, who sigh like hungry men for your return."

"That is true," said Bosambo, "yet I will stay this night, because my heart is full of pleasant thoughts for you."

"If you left to-night," said the embarrassed chief, "I would give you a present of two goats."

"Goats," said Bosambo, "I do not eat, being of a certain religious faith –"

"Salt I will give you also," said the chief.

"I stay to-night," said Bosambo emphatically; "to-morrow I will consider the matter."

The next morning Bosambo went to bathe in the river, and returned to see the chief of the Kiko squatting before the door of his hut, vastly glum.

"Ho, Cetomati!" greeted Bosambo, "I have news which will gladden your heart."

A gleam of hope shone in the chief's eye.

"Does my brother go so soon?" he asked pointedly.

"Chief," said Bosambo acidly, "if that be good news to you, I go. And woe to you and your people, for I am a proud man, and my people are also proud. Likewise, they are notoriously vengeful."

The Kiko king rose in agitation.

"Lord," he said humbly, "my words are twisted, for, behold, all this night I have spent mourning in fear of losing your lordship. Now, tell me your good news that I may rejoice with you."

But Bosambo was frowning terribly, and was not appeased for some time.

"This is my news, O king!" he said. "Whilst I bathed I beheld, far away, certain Ochori canoes, and I think they bring my councillors. If this be so, I may stay with you for a long time – rejoice!"

The Kiko chief groaned.

He groaned more when the canoes arrived bringing reinforcements to Bosambo – ten lusty fighting men, terribly tall and muscular.

He groaned undisguisedly when the morrow brought another ten, and the evening some twenty more.

There are sayings on the river which are uncomplimentary to the appetites of the Ochori.

Thus: "Men eat to live fat, but the Ochori live to eat." And: "One field of corn will feed a village for a year, ten goats for a month, and an Ochori for a day."

Certainly Bosambo's followers were excellent trenchermen. They ate and they ate and they ate; from dawn till star time they alternated between the preparation of meals and their disposal. The simple folk of the Kiko stood in a wondering circle about them and watched in amazement as their good food vanished.

"I see we shall starve when the rains come," said the chief in despair.

He sent an urgent canoe to Sanders, but Sanders was without sympathy.

"Go to your master," he said to the envoy, "telling him that all these things are his palaver. If he does not desire the guests of his house, let him turn them away, for the land is his, and he is chief."

Cold comfort for Cetomati this, for the Ochori sat in the best huts, eating the best foods, finding the best places at the dance-fires.

The king called a secret palaver of his headmen.

"These miserable Ochori thieves ruin us," he said. "Are we men or dogs? Now, I tell you, my people and councillors, that to-morrow I send Bosambo and his robbers away, though I die for it!"

"Kwai!" said the councillors in unison.

"Lord," said one, "in the times of *cala-calat* the Kiko folk were very fierce and bloody; perchance if we rouse the people with our eloquence they are still fierce and bloody."

The king looked dubious.

"I do not think," he said, "that the Kiko people are as fierce and bloody as at one time, for we have had many fat years. What I know, O friend, is that the Ochori are very fierce indeed, and Bosambo has killed many men."

He screwed up his courage through the night, and in the morning put it to the test.

Bosambo, in his most lordly way, had ordered a big hunting, and he and his men were assembling in the village street when the king and his councillors approached.

"Lord," said the king mildly, "I have that within me which I must tell."

"Say on," said Bosambo.

"Now, I love you, Bosambo," said the chief, "and the thought that I must speed you on your way – with presents – is very sad to me."

"More sad to me," said Bosambo ominously.

"Yet lord," said the desperate chief, "I must, for my people are very fierce with me that I keep you so long within our borders. Likewise, there is much sickness, and I fear lest you and your beautiful men also become sick, and die."

"Only one man in all the world, chief," said Bosambo, speaking with deliberation, "has ever put such shame upon me – and, king, that man – where is he?"

The king of the Kiko did not say, because he did not know. He could guess – oh, very well he could guess! – and Bosambo's next words justified his guesswork.

"He is dead," said Bosambo solemnly. "I will not say how he died, lest you think I am a boastful one, or whose hand struck him down, for fear you think vainly – nor as to the manner of his dying, for that would give you sorrow!"

"Bosambo," said the agitated chief of the Kiko, "these are evil words –"

"I say no evil words," said Bosambo, "for I am, as you know, the brother-in-law of Sandi, and it would give him great grief. I say nothing, O little king!"

With a lofty wave of his hand he strode away, and, gathering his men together, he marched them to the beach.

It was in vain that the chief of the Kiko had stored food in enormous quantities and presents in each canoe, that bags of salt were evenly distributed amongst the paddlers.

Bosambo, it is true, did not throw them back upon the shore, but he openly and visibly scorned them. The king, standing first on one foot and then on the other, in his anxiety and embarrassment, strove to give the parting something of a genial character, but Bosambo was silent, forbidding, and immensely gloomy.

"Lord," said the chief, "when shall my heart again be gladdened at the sight of your pretty face?"

"Who knows?" said Bosambo mysteriously. "Who can tell when I come, or my friends! For many men love me – Isisi, N'gombi, Akasava, Bongindi, and the Bush people."

He stepped daintily into his canoe.

"I tell you," he said, wagging a solemn forefinger, "that whatever comes to you, it is no palaver of mine; whoever steals quietly upon you in the night, it will not be Bosambo – I call all men to witness this saying."

And with this he went.

There was a palaver that night, where all men spoke at once, and the Kiko king did not more than bite his nails nervously. It was certain that attack would come.

"Let us meet them boldly," said the one who had beforetime rendered such advice. "For in times of *cala-cala* the Kiko folk were fierce and bloody people."

Whatever they might have been once, there was no spirit of adventure abroad then, and many voices united to call the genius who had suggested defiance a fool and worse.

All night long the Kiko stood a nation in arms.

Once the hooting of a bird sent them scampering to their huts with howls of fear; once a wandering buffalo came upon a quaking picket and scattered it. Night after night the fearful Kiko kept guard, sleeping as they could by day.

They saw no enemy; the suspense was worse than the vision of armed warriors. A messenger went to Sanders about the fears and apprehensions of the people, but Sanders was callous.

"If any people attack you, I will come with my soldiers, and for every man of you who dies, I will kill one of your enemies."

"Lord," said the messenger, none other than the king's son, "if we are dead, we care little who lives or dies. Now, I ask you, master, to send your soldiers with me, for our people are tired and timid."

"Be content," said Sanders, "that I have remitted your taxation – the palaver is finished."

The messenger returned to his dismal nation – Sanders at the time was never more than a day's journey from the Kiko – and a sick and weary people sat down in despair to await the realisation of their fears.

They might have waited throughout all eternity, for Bosambo was back in his own city, and had almost forgotten them, and Isisi and the Akasava, regarding them for some reason as Sanders' *urglebes*, would have no more thought of attacking them than they would have considered the possibility of attacking Sanders; and as for the N'gombi, they had had their lesson.

Thus matters stood when the Lulungo people, who live three days beyond the Akasava, came down the river looking for loot and trouble.

The Lulungo people are an unlovable race; "a crabbed, bitter, and a beastly people," Sanders once described them in his wrath.

For two years the Lulungo folk had lain quiet, then, like foraging and hungry dogs, they took the river trail – six canoes daubed with mud and rushes.

They found hospitality of a kind in the fishing villages, for the peaceable souls who lived therein fled at the first news of the visitation.

They came past the Ochori warily keeping to midstream. Time was when the Ochori would have supplied them with all their requirements, but nowadays these men of Bosambo's snapped viciously.

"None the less," said Gomora, titular chief of the Lulungo, to his headmen, "since we be so strong the Ochori will not oppose us – let two canoes paddle to land."

The long boats were detached from the fleet and headed for the beach. A shower of arrows fell short of them, and they turned back.

The Isisi country they passed, the Akasava they gave the widest of berths to, for the Lulungo folk are rather cruel than brave, better assassins than fighting men, more willing to kill coldly than in hot blood. They went lurching down the river, seizing such loot as the unprotected villages gave them.

It was a profitless expedition.

"Now we will go to Kiko," said Gomora; "for these people are very rich, and, moreover, they are fearful. Speak to my people, and say that there shall be no killing, for that devil Sandi hates us, and he will incite the tribes against us, as he did in the days of my father."

They waited till night had fallen, and then, under the shadow of the river bank, they moved silently upon their prey.

"We will frighten them," confided Gomora; "and they will give us what we ask; then we will make them swear by Iwa that they will not speak to Sandi – it will be simple."

The Lulungo knew the Kiko folk too well, and they landed at a convenient place, making their way through the strip of forest without the display of caution which such a manoeuvre would have necessitated had it been employed against a more warlike nation.

* * * * *

Sanders, hurrying down stream, his guns swung out and shotted for action, his armed Houssas sitting in the bow of the steamer, met two canoes, unmistakably Lulungo.

He circled and captured them. In one was Gomora, a little weak from loss of blood, but more bewildered.

"Lord," he said bitterly, "all this world is changed since you have come; once the Ochori were meat for me and my people, being very timorous. Then by certain magic they became fierce fighters. And now, lord, the Kiko folk, who, up and down the river, are known for their gentleness, have become like devils."

Sanders waited, and the chief went on:

"Last night we came to the Kiko, desiring to rest with them, and in the dark of the forest they fell upon us, with great screaming; and, behold! of ten canoes these men are all I have left, for the Kiko were waiting for our coming."

He looked earnestly at Sanders.

"Tell me, lord," he said, "what magic do white men use to make warriors from cowards?"

"That is not for your knowing," said Sanders diplomatically; "yet you should put this amongst the sayings of your people, 'Every rat fights in his hole, and fear is more fierce than hate.'"

He went on to Kiko city, arriving in time to check an expedition, for the Kiko, filled with arrogance at their own powers, were assembling an army to attack the Ochori.

"Often have I told," said the chief, trembling with pride, "that the Kiko were terrible and bloody – now, lord, behold! In the night we slew our oppressors, for the spirit of our fathers returned to us, and our enemies could not check us."

"Excellent!" said Sanders in the vernacular. "Now I see an end to all taxation palaver, for, truly, you do not desire my soldiers nor the puc-a-puc. Yet, lest the Lulungo folk return – for they are as many as the sands of the river – I will send fighting men to help you."

"Lord you are as our father and mother," said the gratified chief.

"Therefore I will prevail upon Bosambo, whose heart is now sore against you, to come with his fighting tribes to sit awhile at your city."

The chief's face worked convulsively: he was as one swallowing a noxious draught.

"Lord," he said, speaking under stress of emotion, "we are a poor people, yet we may pay your lordship full taxes, for in the end I think it would be cheaper than Bosambo and his hungry devils."

"So I think!" said Sanders.

CHAPTER III

THE RISE OF THE EMPEROR

Tobolaka, the king of the Isisi, was appointed for his virtues, being a Christian and a Bachelor of Arts.

For a time he ruled his country wisely and might have died full of honour, but his enthusiasm got the better of him.

For Tobolaka had been taken to America when a boy by an enthusiastic Baptist, had been educated at a college and had lectured in America and England. He wrote passable Latin verse, so I am told; was a fluent exponent of the Free Silver Policy of Mr. Bryan, and wore patent leather shoes with broad silk laces.

In London he attracted the attention of a callow Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, and this Under-Secretary was a nephew of the Prime Minister, cousin of the Minister of War, and son-in-law of the Lord Chancellor, so he had a pull which most Under-Secretaries do not ordinarily possess.

"Mr. Tobolaka," said the Under-Secretary, "what are your plans?"

Mr. Tobolaka was a little restrained.

"I feel, Mr. Cardow," he said, "that my duties lie in my land – no, I do not mean that I have any call to missionary work, but rather to administration. I am, as you know of the Isisi people – we are a pure Bantu stock, as far as legend supports that contention – and I have often thought, remembering that the Isisi are the dominant race, that there are exceptional opportunities for an agglomeration of interests; in fact – "

"A splendid idea – a great idea!" said the enthusiastic Under-Secretary.

Now it happened that this young Mr. Cardow had sought for years for some scheme which he might further to his advantage. He greatly desired, after the fashion of all budding Parliamentarians, to be associated with a movement which would bring kudos and advertisement in its train, and which would earn for him the approval or the condemnation of the Press, according to the shade of particular opinion which the particular newspapers represented.

So in the silence of his room in Whitehall Court, he evolved a grand plan which he submitted to his chief. That great man promised to read it on a given day, and was dismayed when he found himself confronted with forty folios of typewritten matter at the very moment when he was hurrying to catch the 10.35 to the Cotswold Golf Links.

"I will read it in the train," he said.

He crammed the manuscript into his bag and forgot all about it; on his return to town he discovered that by some mischance he had left the great scheme behind.

Nevertheless, being a politician and resourceful, he wrote to his subordinate.

"DEAR CARDOW, – I have read your valuable document with more than ordinary interest. I think it is an excellent idea," – he knew it was an idea because Cardow had told him so – "but I see many difficulties. Mail me another copy. I should like to send it to a friend of mine who would give me an expert opinion."

It was a wily letter, but indiscreet, for on the strength of that letter the Under-Secretary enlisted the sympathies and practical help of his chief's colleagues.

"Here we have a native and an educated native," he said impressively, "who is patriotic, intelligent, resourceful. It is a unique opportunity – a splendid opportunity. Let him go back to his country and get the threads together."

The conversation occurred in the Prime Minister's room, and there were present three Ministers of the Crown, including a Home Secretary, who was frankly bored, because he had a scheme of his own, and would much rather have discussed his Artisans' Tenement (19 –) Bill.

"Isn't there a Commissioner Sanders in that part of the world?" he asked languidly. "I seem to remember some such name. And isn't there likely to be trouble with the minor chiefs if you set up a sort of Central African Emperor?"

"That can be overcome," said the sanguine Cardow. "As for Sanders, I expect him to help. A dynasty established on the Isisi River might end all the troubles we have had there."

"It might end other things," said the impatient Home Secretary. "Now about this Tenement Bill. I think we ought to accept Cronk's amendment – er –"

A few weeks later Mr. Tobolaka was summoned to Whitehall Court.

"I think, Mr. Tobolaka," said Cardow complacently, "I have arranged for a trial of our plan. The Government has agreed – after a tough fight with the permanent officials, I admit – to establish you on the Isisi as King and Overlord of the Isisi, Ochori, N'gombi, and Akasava. They will vote you a yearly allowance, and will build a house in Isisi city for you. You will find Mr. Sanders – er – difficult, but you must have a great deal of patience."

"Sir," said Mr. Tobolaka, speaking under stress of profound emotion, "I'm e-eternally obliged. You've been real good to me, and I guess I'll make good."

Between the date of Tobolaka's sailing and his arrival Sanders ordered a palaver of all chiefs, and they came to meet him in the city of the Isisi.

"Chiefs and headmen," said Sanders, "you know that many moons ago the Isisi people rose in an evil moment and made sacrifice contrary to the law. So I came with my soldiers and took away the king to the Village of Irons, where he now sits. Because the Isisi are foolish people, my Government sets up a new king, who is Tobolaka, son of Yoka'n'kema, son of Ichulomo, the son of Tibilino."

"Lord," gasped an Isisi headman, "this Tobolaka I remember. The God-folk took him away to their own land, where he learnt to be white."

"Yet I promise you that he is black," said Sanders drily, "and will be blacker. Also, chiefs of the Ochori, N'gombi, and Akasava, this new king will rule you, being paramount king of these parts, and you shall bring him presents and tribute according to custom."

There was an ominous silence.

Then O'kara, the chief of the Akasava, an old and arrogant man, spoke:

"Lord," he said, "many things have I learnt, such as mysteries and devil magic, yet I have not learnt in my life that the Akasava pay tribute to the Isisi, for, lord, in the year of the Floods, the Akasava fought with the Isisi and made them run; also, in the year of the Elephants, we defeated the Isisi on land and water, and would have sat down in their city if your lordship had not come with guns and soldiers and tempted us to go home."

The Akasava headmen murmured their approval.

"Alas," said the chief of the N'gombi, "we people of the N'gombi are fierce men, and often have we made the Isisi tremble by our mighty shouts. Now I should be ashamed to bring tribute to Tobolaka."

The palaver waited for Bosambo of the Ochori to speak, but he was silent, for he had not grasped the bias of the Commissioner's mind. Other men spoke at length, taking their cue from their chiefs, but the men of the Ochori said nothing.

"For how was I to speak?" said Bosambo, after the palaver. "No man knows how your lordship thinks."

"You have ears," said Sanders, a little irritated.

"They are large," admitted Bosambo, "so large that they hear your beautiful voice, but not so long that they hear your lordship's loving thoughts."

Sanders's thoughts were by no means loving, and they diminished in beauty day by day as the ship which carried Tobolaka to his empire drew nearer.

Sanders did not go down to the beach to meet him; he awaited his coming on the verandah of the residency, and when Tobolaka arrived, clad from head to foot in spotless white, with a helmet

of exact colonial pattern on his head, Sanders swore fluently at all interfering and experimenting Governments.

"Mr. Sanders, I presume?" said Tobolaka in English, and extended his hand.

"Chief," said Sanders in the Isisi tongue, "you know that I am Sandi, so do not talk like a monkey; speak rather in the language of your people, and I will understand you better – also you will understand me."

It so happened that Tobolaka had prepared a dignified little speech, in the course of which he intended congratulating Sanders on the prosperity of the country, assuring him of whole-hearted co-operation, and winding up with an expression of his wishes that harmonious relation should exist between himself and the State.

It was founded on a similar speech delivered by King Peter of Servia on his assuming the crown. But, unfortunately, it was in English, and the nearest Isisi equivalent for congratulation is an idiomatic phrase which literally means, "High-man-look-kindly-on-dog-slave-who-lies-at-feet." And this, thought Tobolaka, would never do at all, for he had come to put the Commissioner in his place.

Sanders condescended to talk English later when Tobolaka was discussing Cabinet Ministers.

"I shall – at the Premier's request – endeavour to establish district councils," he said. "I think it is possible to bring the native to a realisation of his responsibility. As Cicero said – "

"Do not bother about Cicero," said Sanders coldly. "It is not what Cicero said, but what Bosambo will say: there are philosophers on this river who could lose the ancients."

Tobolaka in a canoe sent for him by the Isisi folk, went to his new home. He hinted broadly that a state entrance in the *Zaire* would be more in keeping with the occasion.

"And a ten-gun salute, I suppose!" snarled Sanders in Isisi. "Get to your land, chief, before I lose my patience, for I am in no mood to palaver with you."

Tobolaka stopped long enough at headquarters to write privately to the admirable Mr. Cardow, complaining that he had received "scant courtesy" at the hands of the Commissioner. He had shown "deplorable antagonism." The letter concluded with respectful wishes regarding Mr. Cardow's health, and there was a postscript, significant and ominous to the effect that the writer hoped to cement the good feeling which already existed between Great Britain and the United States of America by means which he did not disclose.

The excellent Mr. Cardow was frankly puzzled by the cryptic postscript, but was too much occupied with a successful vote of censure on the Government which had turned him into the cold shades of Opposition to trouble to reply.

Tobolaka came to his city and was accorded a rapturous welcome by a people who were prepared at any given hour of the day or night to jubilate over anything which meant dances and feasts.

He sat in the palaver house in his white duck suit and his white helmet, with a cavalry sword (this Sanders had not seen) between his knees, his white-gloved hands resting on the hilt.

And he spoke to the people in Isisi, which they understood, and in English, which they did not understand, but thought wonderful. He also recited as much of the "Iliad" as he could remember, and then, triumphant and a little hoarse, he was led to the big hut of chieftainship, and was waited upon by young girls who danced for his amusement.

Sanders heard of these things and more.

He learnt that the Isisi were to be ruled in European fashion. To Tobolaka came Cala, a sycophantic old headman from the village of Toroli, with soft and oily words. Him the king promoted to be Minister of Justice, though he was a notorious thief. Mijilini, the fisher chief, Tobolaka made his Minister of War; he had a Home Secretary, a Minister of Agriculture, and a Fishery Commissioner.

Sanders, steaming up-river, was met by the canoe of Limibolo, the Akasava man, and his canoe was decorated with clothes and spears as for a wedding.

"Lord," said the dignified Limibolo, "I go to my village to hold a palaver, for my lord the king has called me by a certain name which I do not understand, but it has to do with the hanging of evil

men, and, by Iwa! I know two men in my village who owe me salt, and they shall hang at once, by Death!"

"Then will I come and you shall hang also!" said Sanders cheerlessly. "Be sure of that."

It transpired that the light-hearted Limibolo had been created sheriff.

Tobolaka was on the point of raising an army for his dignity, when Sanders came upon the scene.

He arrived without warning, and Tobolaka had no opportunity for receiving him in the state which the king felt was due equally to himself and to the representative of Government.

But he had ample time to come to the beach to greet the Commissioner according to custom. Instead, he remained before his hut and sent his minister in attendance, the ignoble Cala.

"O Cala!" said Sanders as he stepped ashore across the *Zaire's* narrow gangway, "what are you in this land?"

"Lord," said Cala, "I am a great catcher of thieves by order of our lord; also, I check evil in every place."

"O Ko!" said Sanders offensively, "now since you are the biggest thief of all, I think you had best catch yourself before I catch you."

He walked through Isisi city.

The king had been busy. Rough boards had been erected at every street corner.

There was a "Downing Street," a "Fifth Avenue," a "Sacramento Street," a "Piccadilly," and a "Broadway."

"These," explained Cala, "are certain devil marks which my king has put up to warn witches and spirits, and they have much virtue, for, lord, my son, who was troubled with pains in his stomach, as there" – he indicated "Broadway" – "and the pain left him."

"It would," said Sanders.

Tobolaka rose from his throne and offered his hand.

"I am sorry, Mr. Sanders," he began, "you did not give us notice of your coming."

"When I come again, Tobolaka," said Sanders, staring with his passionate grey eyes at the white-clad figure, "you shall come to the beach to meet me, for that is the custom."

"But not the law," smiled the king.

"My custom is the law," said Sanders. He dropped his voice till it was so soft as to be little above a whisper.

"Tobolaka," he said, "I hanged your father and, I believe, his father. Now I tell you this – that you shall play this king game just so long as it amuses your people, but you play it without soldiers. And if you gather an army for whatever purpose, I shall come and burn your city and send you the way of your ancestors, for there is but one king in this land, and I am his chief minister."

The face of the king twitched and his eyes fell.

"Lord," he said, using the conventional "Iwa" of his people, "I meant no harm. I desired only to do honour to my wife."

"You shall honour her best," said Sanders, "by honouring me."

"Cicero says –" began Tobolaka in English.

"Damn Cicero!" snapped Sanders in the same language.

He stayed the day, and Tobolaka did his best to make reparation for his discourtesy. Towards evening Sanders found himself listening to complaints. Tobolaka had his troubles.

"I called a palaver of all chiefs," he explained, "desiring to inaugurate a system analogous to county councils. Therefore I sent to the Akasava, the N'gombi, and the Ochori, their chiefs. Now, sir," said the injured Tobolaka, relapsing into English, "none of these discourteous fellows –"

"Speak in the language of the land, Tobolaka," said Sanders wearily.

"Lord, no man came," said the king; "nor have they sent tribute. And I desired to bring them to my marriage feast that my wife should be impressed; and, since I am to be married in the Christian style, it would be well that these little chiefs should see with their eyes the practice of God-men."

"Yet I cannot force these chiefs to your palaver, Tobolaka," said Sanders.

"Also, lord," continued the chief, "one of these men is a Mohammedan and an evil talker, and when I sent to him to do homage to me he replied with terrible words, such as I would not say again."

"You must humour your chiefs, king," said Sanders, and gave the discomfited monarch no warmer cheer.

Sanders left next day for headquarters, and in his hurry forgot to inquire further into the forthcoming wedding feast.

"And the sooner he marries the better," he said to the Houssa captain. "Nothing tires me quite so much as a Europeanised-Americanised native. It is as indecent a spectacle as a niggerised white man."

"He'll settle down; there's no stake in a country like a wife," said the Houssa. "I shouldn't wonder if he doesn't forget old man Cicero. Which chief's daughter is to be honoured?"

Sanders shook his head.

"I don't know, and I'm not interested. He might make a good chief – I'm prejudiced against him, I admit. As likely as not he'll chuck his job after a year if they don't 'chop' him – they're uncertain devils, these Akasavas. Civilisation has a big big call for him; he's always getting letters from England and America."

The Houssa captain bit off the end of a cigar.

"I hope he doesn't try Cicero on Bosambo," he said significantly.

The next day brought the mail – an event.

Usually Sanders was down on the beach to meet the surf-boat that carries the post, but on this occasion he was interviewing two spies who had arrived with urgent news.

Therefore he did not see the passenger whom the *Castle Queen* landed till she stood on the stoep before the open door of the residency.

Sanders, glancing up as a shadow fell across the wooden stoep, rose and temporarily dismissed the two men with a gesture.

Then he walked slowly to meet the girl.

She was small and pretty in a way, rather flushed by the exertion of walking from the beach to the house.

Her features were regular, her mouth was small, her chin a little weak. She seemed ill at ease.

"How do you do?" said Sanders, bewildered by the unexpectedness of the vision. He drew a chair for her, and she sank into it with a grateful little smile, which she instantly checked, as though she had set herself an unpleasant task and was not to be conciliated or turned aside by any act of courtesy on his part.

"And exactly what brings you to this unlikely place?" he asked.

"I'm Millie Tavish," she said. "I suppose you've heard about me?"

She spoke with a curious accent. When she told him her name he recognised it as Scottish, on which American was imposed.

"I haven't heard about you," he said. "I presume you are going up-country to a missionary station. I'm sorry – I do not like lady missionaries in the country."

She laughed a shrill, not unmusical laugh.

"Oh, I guess I'm not a missionary," she said complacently. "I'm the queen."

Sanders looked at her anxiously. To women in his country he had conscientious objections; mad women he barred.

"I'm the queen," she repeated, evidently pleased with the sensation she had created. "My! I never thought I should be a queen. My grandfather used to be a gardener of Queen Victoria's before he came to N'York – "

"But – " said the staggered Commissioner.

"It was like this," she rattled on. "When Toby was in Philadelphia at the theological seminary I was a help at Miss Van Houten's – that's the boarding house – an' Toby paid a lot of attention to me. I thought he was joshin' when he told me he was going to be a king, but he's made good all right. And I've written to him every week, and he's sent me the money to come along – "

"Toby?" said Sanders slowly. "Who is Toby?"

"Mr. Tobolaka – King Tobolaka," she said.

A look of horror, which he did not attempt to disguise, swept over the face of the Commissioner.

"You've come out to marry him – a black man?" he gasped.

The girl flushed a deep red.

"That's my business," she said stiffly. "I'm not asking advice from you. Say, I've heard about you – your name's mud along this old coast, but I'm not afraid of you. I've got a permit to go up the Isisi, and I'm goin'."

She was on her feet, her arms akimbo, her eyes blazing with anger, for, womanlike, she felt the man's unspoken antagonism.

"My name may be mud," said Sanders quietly, "and what people say about me doesn't disturb my sleep. What they would say about me if I'd allowed you to go up-country and marry a black man would give me bad nights. Miss Tavish, the mail-boat leaves in an hour for Sierra Leone. There you will find a steamer to take you to England. I will arrange for your passage and see that you are met at Southampton and your passage provided for New York."

"I'll not go," she stormed; "you don't put that kind of bluff on me. I'm an American citizeness and no dud British official is going to boss me – so there!"

Sanders smiled.

He was prepared to precipitate matters now to violate treaties, to create crises, but he was not prepared to permit what he regarded as an outrage. In turn she bullied and pleaded; she even wept, and Sanders's hair stood on end from sheer fright. To make the situation more difficult, a luxurious Isisi canoe with twenty paddlers had arrived to carry her to the city, and the headman in charge had brought a letter from her future lord welcoming her in copper-plate English. This letter Sanders allowed the man to deliver.

In the end, after a hasty arrangement, concluded by letter with the captain of the boat, he escorted Millie Tavish to the beach.

She called down on his head all the unhappiness her vocabulary could verbalise; she threw with charming impartiality the battle of Bannockburn and Bunker's Hill at his stolid British head. She invoked the shades of Washington and William Wallace.

"You shall hear of this," she said as she stepped into the surf-boat. "I'm going to tell the story to every paper."

"Thank you!" said Sanders, his helmet in his hand. "I feel I deserve it."

He watched the boat making a slow progress to the ship and returned to his bungalow.

CHAPTER IV

THE FALL OF THE EMPEROR

"My poor soul!" said the Houssa captain.

He looked down into the long-seated chair where Sanders sprawled limply.

"And is the owdacious female gone?" asked the soldier.

"She's gone," said Sanders.

The Houssa clapped his hands, not in applause, but to summon his orderly.

"Ahmet," he said gravely, speaking in Arabic, "mix for the lord Sandi the juice of lemons with certain cunning ingredients such as you know well; let it be as cool as the hand of Azrael, as sweet as the waters of Nir, and as refreshing as the kisses of houris – go with God."

"I wish you wouldn't fool," said Sanders, irritated.

"This is a crisis of our affairs," said Hamilton the Houssa. "You need a tonic. As for myself, if this had happened to me, I should have been in bed with a temperature. Was she very angry?"

Sanders nodded.

"She called me a British loafer and a Jew in the same breath. She flung in my face every British aristocrat who had ever married an American heiress; she talked like the New York correspondent of an Irish paper for five minutes. She threatened me with the whole diplomatic armoury of America and the entire strength of Scottish opinion; if she could have made up her mind whether she was Scot or just Philadelphia I could have answered her, but when she goaded me into a retort about American institutions she opened her kailyard batteries and silenced me."

The Houssa walked up and down the long bungalow.

"It was impossible, of course," he said seriously. "absolutely impossible. She'll land at Sierra Leone and interview Tullerton – he's the U.S. Consul. I think she'll be surprised when she hears Tullerton's point of view."

Sanders stayed to tiffin, and the discussion of Millie Tavish continued intermittently throughout the meal.

"If I hadn't given Yoka permission to overhaul the engines of the *Zaire*" said Sanders, "I'd start right away for the Isisi and interview Tobolaka. But by this time he'll have her cylinders open. By the way, I've remembered something," he said, suddenly.

He clapped his hands, and Hamilton's orderly came.

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