

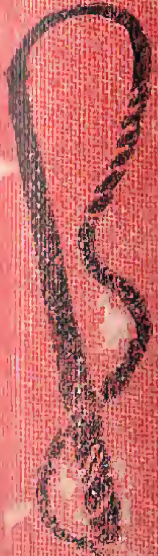
# BOKWALA THE STORY OF A CONGO VICTIM



 A Congo Resident

BOKWALA  
THE  
STORY OF A  
CONGO  
VICTIM

By  
A CONGO  
RESIDENT



By  
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# BOKWALA

THE STORY OF A  
CONGO VICTIM ❦

BY

A CONGO RESIDENT

WITH A PREFACE BY  
H. GRATLAN GUINNESS, M.D.

SECOND IMPRESSION

LONDON  
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY  
4 BOUVERIE ST. & 65 ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, E.C.  
1910



"DOWN IT CAME ON ME, LASH AFTER LASH."

[See page 58.]

## PREFACE

HAVING personally visited the Upper Congo in the days preceding the establishment of the notorious rubber *régime*, and being intimately acquainted with the conditions of native life which then obtained, I have watched with profoundest pity and indignation the development of Congo slavery. Old-time conditions of savage barbarity were awful, but it has been reserved for so-called "Christian Civilisation" to introduce the system of atrocious oppression and hopeless despair under which, during the last fifteen years, millions of helpless natives have perished directly or indirectly, for whose protection Great Britain and the United States of America have special responsibility before God and men.

It is particularly appropriate that in this moment of Congo crisis these pages should render articulate the voice of a Congo victim. Bokwala tells his own story, thanks to the clever and sympathetic interpretation of a gifted and experienced resident on the Congo.



## Preface

And a touching story it is, told with admirable directness and simplicity, truthfulness and restraint.

I heartily commend the book to all who are interested in the greatest humanitarian issue which has appealed to us during the last thirty years, and to those also who as yet know little or nothing of the Congo Iniquity.

H. GRATMAN GUINNESS, M.D.

*Acting-Director of  
The Regions Beyond Missionary Union.*

HARLEY HOUSE, BOW, LONDON, E.

O LORD, how long shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear ! even cry unto Thee out of violence, and Thou wilt not save !

Why dost Thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance ? for spoiling and violence are before me : and there are that raise up strife and contention.

Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth : for the wicked doth compass about the righteous, therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity : wherefore lookest Thou on them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he ?

HABAKKUK i. 2, 3, 4, 13.



## FOREWORD

THIS story of Bokwala, a Congo victim, has been written in the belief that it will help the friends of the Congo native to see something of how Congo affairs appear when looked at from the standpoint of those whom they most nearly concern in their actual working, *i.e.*, the Congo natives themselves.

Bokwala's story is the truth, and nothing but the truth. The whole truth, however, is written only in tears and blood wrung from the unfortunate people who are subjects of such treatment as is described in this book. Even if it were written with pen and ink, it could not be printed or circulated generally. No extreme case has been chosen, the story told has none of the very worst elements of Congo life in it; it is the life which has been lived by hundreds and thousands of Congo natives, and in great measure is being lived by them to-day.

Now in July, 1909, while these words are being written, wrongs are taking place; men and women are being imprisoned for shortage in food



## Foreword

taxes; messengers of white men are threatening, abusing, and striking innocent villagers; and constant demands are being made upon the people who find it impossible to supply such except at great expense to themselves, which they do not hesitate to incur rather than be tied up and go to prison.

Changes there have been in the name and *personnel* of the administration: but no change in the system. We who live here and see what takes place pray that you at home may stand firm and not for one moment think that the battle is won. It is not won yet; and will not be until we see the changes actually worked out by reformers here on the Congo as surely as you see the proposals and promises of them on paper in Europe.

If what is here recorded helps to bring about that happy state of things one day sooner than it would otherwise come, surely readers and writer will unite in praise to Him who alone is able to bring it to pass.

A CONGO RESIDENT.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE BY DR. H. GRATAN GUINNESS . . . . .	5
FOREWORD . . . . .	9
CHAPTER I	
HOW WE ONCE LIVED . . . . .	15
My early days—Life at home—How we fared—Work and play—Our one fear, the cannibals—Iseankóto's warning—We despise it—We are captured by cannibals—The journey—A horrible meal—The cannibal village reached.	
CHAPTER II	
I AM A CANNIBAL'S SLAVE . . . . .	26
In the cannibal village—Before the council—Our fate—Desire to please my master—How I succeeded—Our fears and their justification—A sad company—Siene's murder—The boy who lied—The ordeal by poison—Village strife—The human peace-offering—The haunting dread—Rumours of the white men—A fight—Mak-weke's peril—How he escaped—We plan flight—The start—The chase—A near thing—The river reached—Over, and at home again.	
CHAPTER III	
THE COMING OF BOKAKALA . . . . .	46
At home again—I choose a wife—How I went courting—And was married—My visits to the white men—They	



## Contents

talk of "one Jesus"—The other white man, Bokakala—  
He wants rubber—We are eager to get it—How rubber  
was collected—The rubber market—"We did not know."

PAGE

### CHAPTER IV

#### THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

55

The coming of more white men—A change in our treat-  
ment—Things go from bad to worse—I get tired of  
collecting rubber—And stay at home—The white man's  
anger and threats—I go to a palaver—My rubber is  
short—I am whipped—The white man's new plan—  
Forest guards—Their oppression and greed—We report  
them to the white man—Results—But the worst not  
yet.

### CHAPTER V

#### OPPRESSION, SHAME, AND TORTURE

62

My new slavery—How our villagers fared at home—The  
white man's meat—How it was got—The white men  
of God and their pity—How the women were enslaved—  
Feeding the idle—Endeavours to evade oppression—  
Results—How would you like our conditions?—Forest  
work—Its hardships—The day of reckoning—Back to  
the village and home—An ominous silence—A sad  
discovery—Redeeming our wives—An offending villager  
—A poor victim—A ghastly punishment—The woman's  
death—Another village—The monkey hunters—The old  
man who stayed at home—How he was tortured—No  
redress.

### CHAPTER VI

#### SOME HORRORS OF OUR LOT

74

Our work grows harder—I consult the white man of God  
—A strange contrast—My plea unavailing—My rubber  
short—I am sent to the prison—The captives—Their

12

## Contents

PAGE

work and their punishments—The sick—The new-born  
babe—The dead and their burial—The suspected—How  
they were tortured—The steamer—The rubber chief—  
The prison opened—A procession of spectres—The place  
of the dead—For a time peace—Work for the man of  
God—How we fared—My reward—I wish to go home.

### CHAPTER VII

#### BACK TO SLAVERY

88

My welcome at home—My respite and its end—The  
forest sentry—The little boy—My father's appeal and  
its result—I intervene—The sentry's revenge—A rubber  
slave once more—I appeal to the man of God—Dis-  
appointment—"Nothing but rubber till I die!"—The  
hopeless toil—The coming of the pestilence—The witch-  
doctor's medicine—The desolation—But still the rubber!

### CHAPTER VIII

#### OTHER CHANGES. HOPE DEFERRED

98

A change of labour—We become hunters—A new  
demand—And new difficulties—Failure—The sentry's  
demand—The old man's plea—Murder—We tell the man  
of God—And complain to the rubber man—The white  
chief—The things written in a book—And no remedy  
comes—Hunting again—The English visitor—The white  
woman—Results of making complaints—The sentries'  
threats—The one way of escape—"Better to be with  
the hunters than the hunted"—Another sorrow—The  
sleeping-sickness—"Just a little while, and they die"—  
We cry to the white people.

### CHAPTER IX

#### THE ELDERS OF EUROPE

112

More white men from Europe—Fears and curiosity—  
The white men inquire about us—We tell them of our

13

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# Contents

PAGE

slake—And our oppressors—The knotted strings and their story—"These things are bad"—The white man's promises—Better times—Soon ended—Rubber again—The old toil—The men of the river—The demands on the villages—The chiefs in power—Chiefs and the sentries—The death wail and the white man—"We are very poor."

## CHAPTER X

THINGS WE WANT TO KNOW . . . 121

My story is finished—The past and the present—Why are these things so?—The old days—Now we are white men's slaves—How long will it last?—We are dying—Our only rest is death—How long, how long?

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# BOKWALA

## CHAPTER I

### How We Once Lived

My early days—Life at home—How we fared—Work and play—Our one fear, the cannibals—Iseankóti's warning—We despise it—We are captured by cannibals—The journey—A horrible meal—The cannibal village reached.

**I** HAVE heard that there are many white people in Europe, both men and women, who feel compassion for us black men, and who would, if they knew more about us, take pity on us and save us from our sorrows and trials. So I am going to tell the story of my life, that they may know and help us.

Long, long ago I was born in the village of Ekaka, and having lived so long I have seen many things, and who is better able to tell them than I? We have great controversy with the



## Bokwala

white people about our ages: they say I am about thirty years old, but of course I know better; and I say that I am about three thousand years old—which shows that white men do not know everything.

My name is Bokwala, a slave. I do not know why my father and mother named me so; for I was a freeborn child. But afterwards I became a slave in truth, as I shall tell you, so then it suited me well.

We lived all together very happily in my father's compound. He was the chief of Ekaka, and had great authority; he had but to give an order, and at once the people would hurry to execute it. His own name was Mboyo, but he was always called Isek'okwala, after me, and in the same way my mother was called Yek'okwala. It is one of our customs to call the parents "father" or "mother" of Bokwala, or whatever the name of the child may be.

My mother was my father's favourite wife, but, being a chief, he had several others, and necessarily our compound was a large one.

In the centre of one side of a large open space was the chief's own house, and next to it the open house for talking palavers, feasting, &c. Then there were the houses of the women, one

## How We Once Lived

for each wife, where she lived with her own children, and other houses for slaves. As we boys grew older we built houses for ourselves in our father's compound, and in time it grew to be almost like a small village.

Those were good days, as far as we ourselves were concerned. We were free to do as we liked; if we quarrelled, we fought it out, and the strongest won; if we wanted meat or fish, we went to hunt in the forest, or to fish on the river, and soon had a plentiful supply; and in our gardens there was always as much vegetable food as we needed.

Sometimes the women had quarrels amongst themselves, and then we had no peace for a time. They talked and talked, and scolded each other from morning till night, and almost from night till morning, and there was no sleep for any of us. Not even my father could put an end to these rows: for the time being the women were masters of the situation and of him. You see, the women provide us men with food, and if they are angry with a man they starve him, therefore what can he do? He just waits, and by and by their anger is finished, and a time of peace ensues, and possibly a feast.

I will tell you how we passed our days in the



## Bokwala

time of my childhood. Every one rose with the sun, for our people do not think it good to sleep late, and it did not take long to eat our morning meal of maniocca, and anything which had been kept over from the night before.

Then we began to scatter, some of the women to the large maniocca gardens at some distance in the forest, and others to fish in the river. Sometimes they went fishing for a day only, at other times for as long as a month. The length of time and the kind of fishing depends on the season, whether the water is high or low, and what sort of fish are plentiful. Some of the men and boys would go out to hunt with their nets and spears, others would be busy making nets, canoes, paddles, and cooking utensils, or doing smithy work, making spears, knives, or ornaments for the women. The chief and elders of the village would gather in the large shed and talk palavers, hear and tell news, smoke and chat all day long.

We children would fish, go for picnics in the near forest, bathe in the river, play games, quarrel and fight and make it up again, and return to our play until we felt hungry, when we made our way homewards to seek our mothers.

## How We Once Lived

Towards evening, when the sun was slipping down, the men would come in from the hunt, and the women from the gardens, from wood-cutting in the forest, and water-drawing at the springs, and then the cooking would begin. All round us were women chatting, and little girls running errands and helping them in various ways.

Some of the women would be making *tökö* (native bread) from the steeped maniocca they had just brought from the river, and they were busy with pestle and mortar, pots and calabashes. Others were making *banganju*, a kind of pottage made of maniocca leaves, palm nuts, and red peppers, and yet others preparing *bosaka*, or palm-oil chop.

The animals killed in the hunt were first taken to my father to be divided by him, and soon the portions were given round to the women to be cooked, while we youngsters sat about waiting, talked and feasted on the appetising smells emitted from the various boiling pots.

My mother sat and talked with my father; she did no cooking, as she was the favourite wife, and the others cooked for her. In the fruit season we might add our quota to the feast in the form of rubber and other fruits, or



## Bokwala

even caterpillars or palmerworms, and these were greatly enjoyed by all.

When the food was ready the women brought it in hand-baskets to my father, who first helped himself to his share, and passed some to any visitors who might be with him, then he gave the rest to his wives, and each in turn divided it amongst her own children. The slaves were treated much the same as children when food was served out, they received their share.

We had no plates or spoons then, as some of our people who work for the white men now have, leaves served for plates, and twisted into a scoop did equally well for spoons. The chief possessed his own carved ivory spoon, worked from a solid elephant's tusk, but that was taboo for any but himself. Nowadays we may not work ivory for ourselves, we have to take it to the white men.

As soon as we had all finished eating, and drinking spring water, some of us carefully gathered up all the leaves which we had used, and the peelings and cuttings of the food, and threw them away in the forest, lest some evil-disposed person should get hold of them and by means of them bewitch us. We are all very much afraid of witchcraft, unless we our-

## How We Once Lived

selves practise it; then, of course, it is for others to fear us.

The meal finished and cleared away, and the leavings tied up to the roof to be served again to-morrow morning, we all gathered round the fires and the old men told stories of their prowess in hunting or in war, or retold to us young ones some of the legends and fables of our ancestors of long ago. Sometimes, on rare occasions, my father would sing to us the legend of Lianza, the ancient warrior and hero of our race. This story takes a long time to tell, and at frequent intervals the whole company would join in singing the choruses, with clapping of hands and great excitement.

This lasted far into the night. And sometimes when the moon shone brightly we would sing and dance and play games, which we enjoyed greatly at the time, although they were not good games, and we generally had to suffer for them afterwards. On the following morning many of us were sick, our heads ached, and we were fit for nothing.

We do not play these games so much now as we used to.

There was just one thing we were always afraid of in those days, and that was an attack



## Bokwala

from our enemies who lived on the other side of the river. They were very bad people, so wicked that they even eat men whom they have killed in battle, or slaves whom they have taken prisoners or bought for the purpose. They were at that time much stronger than we were, and when they attacked us we always got the worst of it. So we dreaded them very much, more even than the wild animals of the forest.

On a certain evening we were sitting talking after having finished our evening meal, and we began to make plans for a fishing expedition to the marsh near the river, and finally decided to start on the next day.

We slept that night at home, and were awake betimes in the morning ready for an early start.

There was a very old man in our village named Iseankótó, or the Father of Discernment. He had been a strong man and possessed great fame; but that was in the past, and now we did not pay much heed to his sayings. He called us together as soon as we were awake, and told us of a very vivid dream he had had during the night.

It was this. We went to fish just as we had planned, but while we were there the cannibals

## How We Once Lived

came, attacked and overpowered us, and we were all either killed or taken prisoners. He besought us to lay aside our plans and stay at home that day, as he was certain that the dream was a warning to be disregarded at our peril.

We were self-willed, however, and would not listen to advice, but rather ridiculed the warnings of old Iseankótó.

"It is only a dream," we said; "who cares for dreams?" and snatching a few mouthfuls of food we set off merrily, making fun of the old man as we went. What fools we were! And how we blamed ourselves and each other afterwards!

Down the hill we went towards the river, singing, shouting, and skipping along, heedless of the danger into which we were running. Having reached the bottom of the hill, we made our way along the forest path which skirts the river bank, and ere long came to the place we had decided on visiting.

Very soon we scattered and commenced work, and were just rejoicing to find that the fish were plentiful and we were likely to have a good lot to take home with us at night, when we were suddenly startled by a rustling in the bush close to us.



## Bokwala

Before we had time to realise what had happened, we were surrounded by numbers of fierce cannibal warriors who had been in hiding, waiting for a chance to pounce upon some defenceless party of a weaker tribe.

We tried to fight them, but being almost without arms, we had no chance against these men who had come prepared for battle, and we were completely at their mercy. One or two slaves who went with us were killed, but the women and we boys and girls were tied together with strong creepers and taken prisoners.

Our captors gathered up the corpses of the men they had killed, and compelled some of our number to carry them, and then we were ordered to march off with them. We kept a sharp lookout for any opportunity to escape, but this was impossible as we were too well watched. We were taken across the river and away into the forest, in the depth of which we encamped just before the sun went down.

During all that night we lay awake, weeping for our homes and friends, and more for ourselves, watching our enemies prepare fires, cut up the corpses of our friends, cook, and afterwards eat them; for to those people we are but *nyama* (meat); and all the time we feared even

## How We Once Lived

to speak, lest we also should be deemed fit morsels for their evening meal.

Early the next morning we were on the road again, and at last towards evening we arrived at Bosomo, the village of our captors, footsore and weary, and faint for want of food.

Everything was strange to us. We could not even understand the language which we heard spoken, but we could guess that inquiries were being made as to the success of the expedition, and that we were being examined and scrutinised from head to foot as to our usefulness either as servants or as food.

Some manioca was given to us by the women, and we were put all together in a large open shed, while some warriors acted as sentries lest we should escape. But there was no danger of that just then, we were far too tired, and in spite of our misery were soon fast asleep.



## CHAPTER II

### I am a Cannibal's Slave

In the cannibal village—Before the council—Our fate—  
Desire to please my master—How I succeeded—Our  
fears and their justification—A sad company—Siene's  
murder—The boy who lied—The ordeal by poison  
—Village strife—The human peace-offering—The  
haunting dread—Rumours of the white men—A  
fright—Makweke's peril—How he escaped—We plan  
flight—The start—The chase—A near thing—The  
river reached—Over, and at home again.

**W**HEN we awoke it was to find the sun  
already shining, for after the fight and  
long walk, in addition to the much talking of  
the night before, our new masters were as weary  
as ourselves.

It was not long, however, before the whole  
village was astir and the morning meal eaten.  
We were glad to eat the manioca which had  
been given us the previous night, because now  
that we had rested we felt the pangs of hunger.

### I am a Cannibal's Slave

Needless to say, we watched the people furtively  
to see what they did and what kind of mood  
they were in.

We were surprised and amused to see that  
they washed their hands and faces in the dew  
which was on the plantain leaves, whilst they  
were also very particular about their teeth.  
We, of course, clean our teeth; but if one  
rubs his body occasionally with oil and camwood  
powder surely he has no need of water! It  
only spoils the effect.

When they had finished their ablutions and  
taken their food the chief and elders of the  
town gathered together in council, and after a  
little while we were brought before them.  
There was much talk, which I could not under-  
stand, but as it was evident that they were  
deciding our fate we stood there in fear and  
trembling, not knowing but what some of us  
might be chosen to furnish another feast for  
them. Finally it was decided that we should  
be kept in slavery, and we were divided up  
between the different elders of the town, the  
chief keeping me and three others as his share  
of the spoil. And so my name, Bokwala (slave),  
became true of me and I entered on my life as  
a slave to the cannibals.



## Bokwala

I felt so strange amongst all these people whose language I could not understand, and yet I found that I was expected to enter on my duties at once. Although I had great anger in my heart towards my captors, yet in one way I desired to please them, because by so doing I hoped to make sure of a better time for myself than I should have otherwise. So I set myself to find out what was meant even when I could not understand their words.

When the sun began to slip down a little I noticed that the women commenced to get their fires ready for cooking the evening meal. The wife of my master pointed to me and then to her fire, and was evidently making some request of him which concerned me. He assented and turning to me said, "*Dua na epundu.*"

I knew he was giving me an order, and immediately rose to obey; but what did he want? I went into the house and looked round and soon spied an axe. Of course, the woman wanted firewood, and in order to get that one needed an axe. So probably "*Dua na epundu*" meant "Bring the axe." I picked it up and carried it to my master, who was apparently pleased, for he patted me on the head and said, "*Mwama mbai, mwama mbai*" ("My child").

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

Then, pointing with his lips to the forest, he said, "*Ke a lene desa*" ("Go and cut firewood").

I had expected that order, so was ready to set off at once, repeating over and over the few words I had learned, in turn with my own language, so that I should not forget them:—

"*Dua na epundu, yela listwa;*" "*dua na epundu, yela listwa.*" I said over and over again, until I felt sure of the words. Then, while I was cutting the wood, "*Ke a lene desa, Nco yo tena nkwi;*" "*Ke a lene desa, Nco yo tena nkwi;*" and before long I found that I had enough wood to fill my basket, so I set off for the village, and was again rewarded by a pat on the head and the words, "*Mwama mbai, mwama mbai!*"

While I was in the forest cutting wood the hunters had come back and brought some animals with them, so I found every one busy preparing meat for cooking. I, with the other children, sat down and watched, when suddenly one of the women turned to me and said, "*Dua na mune.*"

I sprang up and rushed into the house, but what I had been sent for I could not think. I sat on the ground and wondered, and again I sent my eyes round the little hut. Ah! that



## Bokwala

is it! oil, of course. They have plenty of meat, and are going to make palm-oil chop. I seized the calabash of oil from under the bed, and ran with it to the woman who had sent me, and was received with a chorus of "*Bia! bia!*" ("Just so"), and for the third time received the old chief's pat on the head, and heard the words, "*Mwama mbai!*"

I began to feel a little less strange, and to listen for other words, for I had already found that the way to please these people was to be bright and do my best. I found that they called *nyama* (meat), *tito*; *bauta* (oil), *mane*; *ngoya* (mother), *ngwaa*, and *fafa* (father), *sango*, and I was just trying to learn these words well so as to remember them afterwards, when the chief called to me, "Bokwala!"

"*Em'one*" ("I am here"), said I, in my own language, for I knew not how else to answer.

"*Dua na yeka dia*," said he, beckoning me to their group, who were gathered round to take their evening meal, which was just being served. I drew near, and received my share of food, and so I learnt some more words, which meant, "Come and eat food."

I began to think that my master did not seem a bad sort of man after all, and that perhaps I

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

might get used to my life there; but then I could not help remembering the fight, and that only two nights before these people had been feasting off my people, and would do so again when they had an opportunity, and I went to sleep that night with my mind made up that if ever I could see the least chance to do so, I would escape, even if it had to be alone.

Many days and nights passed in this way, we slaves having to do all kinds of work and being sent on errands continually, sometimes even being told to mind the little children when the mothers went to their gardens. Of course, we looked upon all this as oppression, and felt great shame, for we boys frequently had to do women's work, and what can be more degrading than that? And I could never forget that I was the son of a chief!

As we learnt more of their language, and began to understand what was said in our presence, we found that there was plenty of reason for fear as to our future, even though we had been kept alive for the present.

When our people were spoken of it was as *tito* (meat), and fighting expeditions were looked upon as hunts. It was quite usual to ratify agreements between chiefs by the killing of a slave



## Bokwala

and feasting on the body, and this was even done sometimes when a chief wanted to pay special honour to a visitor. And when we heard these things being discussed and plans being laid for them, we trembled with fear, and wondered how long we should be all there together.

We had not much time to ourselves, for we were kept continually busy, and we dared not talk together very much, because some of the natives of the village could understand our words, but now and again, out in the forest or at night, we were able to tell each other how we were getting on, and to condole with one another over our misfortunes.

Now my master discovered that I was good at climbing and at catching bats, so when the bat season came on he often sent me into the forest to search for some. One day I went out on such a quest and did not return until evening. I took the bats I had caught to the chief, and afterwards went off to the shed where my companions were sitting.

They all seemed very quiet, and scarcely gave me a welcome, and this was unusual, especially when I brought meat in from the forest. I threw myself down amongst them, and looking round the group I missed Siene, a little

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

girl slave with whom I was on very good terms.

"Where is Siene?" I asked of the others.

"O Bokwala," answered one, "do not ask, we do not want to tell you."

"But I want to know. Is she ill? Or has she escaped?" I inquired, thinking the latter hardly possible for a girl alone.

"Bokwala," said one, beckoning me to follow him, "come."

I followed him to an open space at the end of one of the huts, and pointing to the ground, he said to me, "Look there; that is all that is left of Siene."

I looked and started back. Could it be? Yes, it was only too true—that dark stain on the ground was blood. And little by little I heard the whole terrible story. The chief had visitors, and he determined on a feast in their honour, and as a dainty morsel was indispensable, he decided to kill and serve up the body of my little girl friend. It was on that very spot where we stood that the deed had been committed. And that dark stain was all that was left of my friend!

That night I was drunk with anger, and so were the other boys. There was no one but us



## Bokwala

boys and girls to weep for Siene, but we wept until we wept ourselves to sleep for sorrow; sorrow not only for her, but for ourselves as well; for we knew not how soon we might be treated in the same way.

Time passed on, and we grew more and more accustomed to our surroundings, and as we boys proved useful to our masters, we had a certain amount of liberty, and went to fish and hunt frequently, but always for the benefit of our respective masters—nothing we caught was reckoned as our own property.

And we were not always in favour. If anything was lost or stolen, we were accused of the deed; if we failed to obey or understand, we were beaten or punished in some other way; and if one of us was found to have lied, we had to pay the price, which was sometimes a heavy one.

One boy who told his master a lie was found out, and the master with one slash of his knife cut the boy's ear off, cooked it over the fire, and compelled the slave to eat it. That was a bad master, they were not all like that.

One way of punishing us was by rubbing red peppers into our eyes, and another by cutting little slits in the skin over our shoulders and

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

backs where we could not reach, and rubbing pepper into the sores thus made. They hoped by this means not only to punish us, but to harden us, and make of us brave men who would not flinch at pain.

In the case of accusations of stealing, the most popular way of settling the affair was by the poison ordeal. That was a very frequent occurrence in those days, and still is in parts where the white men do not visit often. It was like this. All the people gathered together, and the chief, witch-doctor, and headmen seated themselves to hear the trial. The persons concerned gave their evidence, and the accused was allowed to make his defence; but if he were a slave, of what use was it? Then the evidence would be summed up, and the decision given that the poison ordeal be administered.

The bark was brought and scraped, then mixed with water, and the draught given to the prisoner. We always took it willingly, for we all believed that it revealed the truth, and therefore were obliged to stand or fall by it. After it was drunk in the presence of the people, all waited eagerly for the result. If the prisoner vomited, and was none the worse of course he had been falsely accused; if, on the other hand,



## Bokwala

he fell and died, there was proof positive of his guilt. What could any one want more decisive than that ?

Occasionally there were fights between different villages near to us, as well as the warlike expeditions to other tribes. When two villages had been fighting for a long time, and neither could win or was willing to give in, it was generally settled by a peace-offering. At such a time we slaves went in fear of our lives, for it was almost certain that a slave would be hanged as a peace-offering, and possibly his corpse would be eaten afterwards.

With all these fears surrounding us, and never feeling sure of our lives for a single day—no matter how kind some of the people might be to us—you will not be surprised to hear that whenever we got together and could talk a little our conversation always turned to the subject of our escape from slavery. But so far as we could see there was no possibility of getting away.

About this time we began to hear rumours of some strange people who had paid a visit to a village not far from my father's place, Ekaka. They were said to be white—men like us but with white skins—and they came in a canoe

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

which went of itself, having no paddlers, but emitting smoke from the roof.

At first we laughed and thought it was just a yarn, simply a made-up story ; but the rumours became frequent, and we heard that some of the people had actually bought some land and settled down on it. We could not understand about them, so we concluded that they must be the children of Lianza, the great warrior hero of our race, who went down river ages ago and never returned. But these things did not trouble me, for what chance had I ever to get back to my father's place, or see these people ?

One day we had a great fright. A neighbouring chief came with his slaves and children and the elders of his village to visit my master. There was the usual salutation and a little gossip, and then he began to tell his business. He had been settling an affair between himself and another chief, and it fell to his share to provide the feast of ratification, and naturally he wished to do it well.

Now he had no suitable slave to kill for the occasion, which was unfortunate, so he had come to his friend to see if he could help him out of this serious difficulty by selling him a slave.



## Bokwala

“No,” said my master, “I cannot help you; I have no one to sell.”

Then there was much talking and pleading. “You have so many slaves in your village, do let us have one, even if only a little one.”

But for some time he held out, and refused to sell, and we who were listening began to hope that we were safe for this time at any rate, until at last we heard the words, “Well, take my wife’s boy: he is small and not of much use to me. Take Makweke.”

Makweke was a little lad whom the chief had given to his wife to look after her two baby girls, of whom they were both very fond. The woman liked Makweke and was kind to him, and not having a boy of her own she treated him better than most of the slaves. So when she heard her husband’s words she whispered to the boy to run and hide, and told him of a safe hiding-place.

Away he went into the bush, and we sat down and waited.

Soon the chief called, “*Makweke, daa pelepele*” (“Come quickly”), but receiving no answer he called again.

Then his wife answered, “Makweke is not here; he was, but has gone.”

## I am a Cannibal’s Slave

“Call him,” said the chief; “I want him here.” The woman answered, “I cannot call him; if you want him you must search for him yourself.”

So, receiving the chief’s permission, the people rushed out and searched for Makweke in the houses and all over the village, then in the gardens at the back, but they found no trace of him. Into the forest they went and hunted in every direction, beating the bushes with sticks, and peering up into the big trees, trying to discover his hiding-place; but it was all in vain. The search failed, and they returned to their own village in great anger at being thwarted in their plans.

But I must tell you of Makweke. He ran off to a little distance, climbed a tree, and let himself down into the hollow trunk—the hiding-place of which he had been told. There he was safe, but he could hear the noise and shoutings of the people who were searching for him getting nearer and nearer, until at last they reached his tree, halted, beat the bushes under it and the lower branches with their sticks, and then—what relief!—passed on.

He told us afterwards that he was so scared he hardly dared breathe, and although he knew



## Bokwala

they could not see him, he trembled with fear as long as they were near.

Late at night, after the visitors had left, his mistress took some food out to him, and told him to remain there until the morning, when probably her husband's anger would be finished. Then he might come back to the village. He did so, and the affair passed without further trouble.

All this decided us that we would not remain in such a place of danger a day longer than we could help. I was older now, and had grown big and strong, and once across the river I knew that a warm welcome would be accorded to me and any who went with me. Our only fear was of recapture before we could reach the river, but we all felt it was worth risking, so from that time we began in dead earnest to look out for an opportunity of running away.

Not so very long after the chief and some of his people went to pay a visit and remained over night. All was quiet in the village, and no one troubled about us boys, so in the dense darkness of a moonless night we gathered together.

Hastily we made our plans, picked up the little food we had saved from our evening meal,

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

grasped our hunting spears and knives, and slipped away into the bush at the back of the village. We went very stealthily—*nyga-nyga*, like a leopard when he is stalking his prey—scared at every sound, starting at the snapping of a twig, the call of a night-bird or the whistle of an insect.

On and on we pressed, not daring to speak to each other, lest we might betray our whereabouts to some unfriendly native, or one who was friendly to our masters, scarcely able to see the path, for the moon had not yet risen, scratching ourselves as we passed thorny bushes, treading on sticks and roots of trees projecting from the ground—and still on—what mattered wounds or weariness if at last we reached the river and liberty?

We made good progress during the first few hours, and were not much afraid of pursuit, as our flight would not be discovered until morning; but by and by some of our party (which consisted of a man and his wife with a little child as well as three of us boys) began to get weary, and it was necessary that we should get away from the main road, lest we should be overtaken. So we turned off into a side road, and at a little distance from it we



## Bokwala

found a large fallen tree which made a good hiding-place. There we lay down and slept for some time, one of us taking turns at watching and listening.

In the morning we were startled by hearing voices not far off, and as we listened we recognised them as belonging to natives of the village we had left. Yes, they had awakened to find us gone; and now a search party was out scouring the forest in every direction for signs of us. We dared not move nor speak, and how anxious we were that the child should not cry! Nearer and nearer came the voices till they sounded almost close at hand, and then they receded gradually, and at last died away in the distance. We were nearly caught, but not quite!

After waiting for some time, we went out to look round, and on the main road we traced the footprints of our pursuers distinctly; they had passed our footpath by, and so we escaped recapture. From now onwards we had to keep to bypaths, sometimes cutting our way through dense forest, spending our nights under fallen trees or on the ground, hungry and weary; but in spite of all our difficulties we reached the river bank at last.

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

We were still far from home, but once on the other bank we would at least be safe from pursuit. Our people have a proverb, "*Nta fendaka ntandu la mposa e'ola*"—that is, "You cannot cross the river by means of a thirst for home." This is certainly a true saying, so we had to seek for a canoe to take us over. One of our party set out along the bank to see if there were any moored there, as people often go out fishing and leave their canoes with no one to look after them. This was our hope, and it was fulfilled.

Not far away was found a canoe with paddles in it, and no sign of the owners. We determined to watch it until sundown, and then, if no one appeared, to take it and set out. For the remainder of that day we rested, and sought for some food to stay our hunger. How we rejoiced to find some edible caterpillars, which were delicious, and made us feel stronger for our night's work! Just as the darkness was coming on, when you cannot tell one man from another, we crept along the bank, stepped into the canoe, grasped the paddles, and silently pushed off into the stream.

We boys were delighted to be on the river again, and we did paddle! But had any people been about we might have lost everything even



## Bokwala

then, for the woman who came with us had been born on that side of the river, and had never been on the water in her life. She sat down in the bottom, clasping her child, and trembling with fear. Every time the canoe gave a lurch she would utter a little half-suppressed scream, and say, "*Na gwa ! Na kwe bona ?*" ("I am dying. What shall I do ?"). We could not help laughing at her, but it did no good, she was really very much afraid. We got safely over, tied the canoe to the bank, and left it for the owners to find as best they might, and plunged once more into the forest.

Now that we were on the safe side of the river we did not need to be so careful about keeping away from the roads; we only hid if we heard voices, not knowing to whom they might belong. Two more nights were passed in the thick forest, and two more days we spent walking on, just managing to keep alive by eating fruit, roots, caterpillars, or anything we could find that was edible. When we were nearing home we again heard voices not far off.

We listened. Yes, I recognised them. They were people from my father's village. Accosting them, we made inquiries about our friends, and were glad to find that all was well.

## I am a Cannibal's Slave

On we pressed with renewed energy, and towards evening we arrived in the village, worn out with anxiety, exhausted from want of food, and ready to drop with weariness; but how glad we were to be there!

And what a welcome we all had! My father and mother received us with great rejoicing—our fellow travellers for my sake—and what a feast was made in our honour! After the feast I told my story, and many were the questions asked and the comments made as the villagers listened.

Thus we arrived back at home, and thus we were welcomed, and on the next day a great dance was held in our honour. And for ourselves, what shall I say? We—we were ready to die of happiness! And yet the day was coming when we would wish that we had stayed where we were, even as slaves of the cannibals.



## The Coming of Bokakala

### CHAPTER III

## The Coming of Bokakala

At home again—I choose a wife—How I went courting—  
And was married—My visits to the white men—  
They talk of “one Jesus”—The other white man,  
Bokakala—He wants rubber—We are eager to get  
it—How rubber was collected—The rubber market  
—“*We did not know.*”

**A**FTER I got back home, it was some little time before we all settled down again to the old ways. As I said, there was much rejoicing, accompanied by feasting and dancing, and then when that was over, I had to visit many friends, while others came to visit me.

We all enjoyed the feasting and soon got strong and well again, some of us quite stout; but it was not long before we got tired of answering so many inquiries, and listening to so many comments; so off we went into the forest to cut bamboos and reeds for thatching,

and trees for building, and set to work to build new houses for ourselves. It was soon settled that the family who had come with us from the cannibal country should remain in our village, so the husband started building a house for them not far from ours.

As time went on I began to think it would be a good thing to get married, and as my father was quite ready to find the riches I should need to pass over to the father of my chosen wife, I did not lose any time in making known my wishes to her.

Her name was Barnatafe, and she was considered very beautiful. Her skin was of a light brown colour, and decorated all over in various patterns of cicatrised cuttings, and when well rubbed with palm oil and camwood powder would shine in the sun. She was usually dressed in a wild-cat skin and fresh plantain leaves frayed out at the edges and suspended from a string of blue beads round the waist. Her hair was dressed in our most beautiful style—called *besingya*—that is, all the hair is divided into very small portions, each of which is rolled in oil sprinkled plentifully with red camwood powder and another kind of sweet-smelling powder made from nuts. Her eyes were black,



## Bokwala

and her teeth were chiseled to very sharp points.

Such was the girl I loved; and now that you know what she looked like, can you wonder that I wanted her?

But of course I had to find out if she were willing to come to me, so I determined to pay a few visits to her home.

On the first occasion I simply passed by and looked at her as she was sitting in her father's house; but I went again, and, drawing near, I said to her, "*Bamatafe, o Peko?*" (salutation, "Are you there?") to which she answered, "I am there; Are you there?" and I said "O!" ("Yes.")

I felt very encouraged after that interview, and the next time stayed and talked with her for a while; then when a few days had passed I carried her a fine fat hen for a present. When she accepted that I knew it was all right for me, she was agreeable.

I immediately went and told my father about it, and he arranged with hers about the amount of riches which was to be paid as pledge money on the occasion of our marriage. A spear was passed over as earnest of the other things to come, and that evening I brought home my wife.

Her beauty was greatly admired, and ac-

## The Coming of Bokakala

cording to our custom I had to make a lot of presents to the people who admired her so much. Every one of the young men thought me very fortunate in securing such a beautiful wife. And I soon found that she was clever also, for she could cook well; and at once she set about planting a big garden, which showed that she was industrious.

We settled down to village life then—building houses, making canoes and other things, getting our knives, spears, and ornaments made by the village blacksmith, hunting, fishing, palaver talking, paying and receiving visits, having a good time generally, and feeling so glad to be really free—free from bondage and servitude.

I often paid visits to the white men of whom we had heard so many rumours on the other side of the river, and became quite friendly with them. I could not quite understand them: their words were good certainly, but they said they had come to our land simply to tell us those words, and not to get anything from us.

Naturally that seemed strange to me—our people always want to get and not to give—"but then," thought I, "there is no accounting for people who are such freaks as to have



## Bokwala

white skins ; perhaps it is their way ; and if so, what more ? ” They were always talking about one Jesus, who was very good and kind and loved us, and who they say died and rose again and is now alive. That was too much ! Who ever saw a person rise from death, and if He were alive and really cared for us, why did He himself not come and see us ? So we said, “ When we see Him, we will believe. ” Of course, it is only *nsao* (legend or fable).

We went to see them, and took them an egg or a chicken, or perhaps a little manioca now and then, and listened to their words and heard them sing, and we always came away thinking what wonderful people they were, and how much wisdom they had.

And then there came to our district another white man, and he built a house not far from the compound of these white men of God, and settled down there. At first we thought that he and the other white men were brothers: all had white faces and straight hair like monkeys ; they seemed friendly and helped each other, and we never saw them fight or quarrel as we so often do. But after a while we saw that there was a difference, for the new white man called a palaver, and our chiefs gathered

## The Coming of Bokakala

together from all the villages around the district, and, of course, many of us young men went with them, to hear what it was all about.

It was this : the new white man—we called him Bokakala—had come to live with us because he had heard that in our forest grew the rubber vine in abundance, and he wanted rubber—plenty of it. Not only so, but would pay for it—brass rods, beads, salt ! Now would the chiefs get it for him ? Would they be willing to send their young men into the forest to collect the rubber sap ? And would the young men go ?

Oh, how we laughed ! How we danced ! Who ever heard of placing any value on the rubber plant except for the fruit to eat ? Fancy getting salt—white man’s salt—just for bringing rubber ! Of course we would go and get it. Could we not start at once ?

Then Bokakala got out some baskets to give us to put the rubber in, and there was such a scramble for those baskets—we almost fought as to who should get the first chance of possessing a rubber basket.

The white man seemed pleased, and gave presents to the chiefs ; and we were pleased,



## Bokwala

anxious to get off at once, at the first possible minute, to search for rubber, to obtain for ourselves some of that wonderful salt from Europe. We had already tasted it, and once tasted, there is nothing else that will satisfy the desire for it.

Away into the forest we went—not far, for there was plenty of rubber in those days—and were soon busy making incisions in the vines and catching the drops of sap as they fell in little pots or calabashes ready to bring it home with us in the evening. There was great rivalry amongst us as to who could get the largest quantity. Then when we thought we had sufficient we returned to our homes with it and sought for the plant with which it must be mixed in order for it to coagulate. This grows in great quantities near many of our villages, and we call it *bekakau*. Having mixed the two saps they formed a substance solid enough to make into balls about the size of a rubber fruit. These, packed into the baskets which the white man had given us, were ready for carrying to him.

When we took our well-filled baskets and presented them at his house Bokakala was much pleased, and we wondered that any man

## The Coming of Bokakala

should be so easily satisfied, for we could not understand of what use the rubber could be to him. However, he gave us salt and beads, and if we gained by his foolishness, why should we object?

We continued to take him rubber, and in course of time a special day was set apart (the fifth day of the white man's week) on which rubber was to be brought regularly, and that day soon came to be called by us *mbile étofo* (rubber day), and is so called to the present time.

Week after week the rubber market was held, and Bokakala was good to us—he gave us salt, cloth, and beads in exchange for what we brought; he talked and chatted with us, settled our palavers for us, taught us many things, and even named some of our children after himself and gave them presents.

In those days we had no palaver with Bokakala; it was after he left us that trouble began. Many times since we have regretted that we welcomed Bokakala as we did because of what happened afterwards, but at the beginning he treated us well, and we did not know what would follow. Perhaps he did not know either, but it seems to us that we made our great



## Bokwala

mistake in accepting his first offers. We were tempted and fell into a trap; but we say to ourselves over and over again when we think and speak of those times, "It was all right at first, but WE DID NOT KNOW."

### CHAPTER IV

## The Beginning of Sorrows

The coming of more white men—A change in our treatment—Things go from bad to worse—I get tired of collecting rubber—And stay at home—The white man's anger and threats—I go to a palaver—My rubber is short—I am whipped—The white man's new plan—Forest guards—Their oppression and greed—We report them to the white man—Results—But the worst not yet.

**W**HEN Bokakala had been with us some time, other white men came to our country, and they also wanted rubber. "Why do they want so much rubber?" we asked; for we could not see why they should be continually wanting the same thing. That is not our way; we feel a thirst for a thing for a time, but in a little while it is finished, and we want something else. Later on Bokakala left us to go to his own land to seek for strength in his



## Bokwala

body, and he left us another white man, whom we called "Leopard"; but they were all known afterwards as Bokakala's white men.

When the day of rubber came round week after week, we took in to the white man our little baskets of rubber balls, and received in exchange salt or beads; or if, as sometimes happened, he had none of these articles left, he would give us a book to keep, and pay us in kind when his boxes arrived. So far we had not had any trouble between us and the white man; he and we were satisfied with the barter we carried on.

But changes came—another white man came to help Leopard in his work, and he was different from other white men, he was not good, so we gave him a bad name which meant "Pillage" or "Brigandage," though I do not suppose he ever knew what it meant.

Naturally a change took place in the way we were treated, and gradually things got worse and worse.

Now it is well known that no man goes on for ever at one thing without getting tired, and wanting a rest. And when I had been going to and fro to the forest getting rubber for a long time, I began to wish to sit down in

## The Beginning of Sorrows

town for a little while, especially as by this time Bamatafe had given birth to a little son, of whom I was very proud, as he was our firstborn.

So one week I stayed at home when the young men went to the forest, and when the day of rubber fell I had no rubber, and did not go to the white man's place.

As usual, our names were called out of a book, and when mine was reached some one answered, "He has not come." Then the white man was angry, and said that if Bokwala did not come to the next market he would have a big palaver. My friends came home and told me his words, and the next time I went with them and was told that I must never miss coming—the rubber *must* be brought in regularly without fail, or there would be "chicotte," or perhaps even prison for those who missed coming.

After that I went regularly for a long time, but on one occasion there was a great palaver to be talked in our village, and it was necessary for me to be present at it. At this time we had to collect a certain weight of rubber and present it at the white man's place every fifteenth day. It took almost all our time to go to and from



## Bokwala

the forest and collect the rubber, for it was becoming very scarce.

So when the day came for carrying my basket to the white man I had not the prescribed quantity. I knew that when my turn came to have my rubber weighed the white man would be angry and scold me, but said I, "*Lotango nta wak'ontu*" ("Reproach does not kill a man"), and I did not expect anything worse.

But the order was given, "*Etamana*" ("Lie down").

I could scarcely believe my ears—I, the son of a chief, to be whipped publicly!

It was true. I was placed face down on the ground, my cloth turned back, and the twisted hippo hide whip was brought out by one of the servants of the white man.

Down it came on me, lash after lash, cutting clean into the flesh at every stroke, and causing the blood to flow!

I do not know how many strokes were given me then; how could I count? The pain was bad enough, but the shame was worse. Then I was sent off, the blood drops on the sand showing the path I followed, without payment for the rubber I had brought, and with the order to bring a double quantity next time.

## The Beginning of Sorrows

For my own sake I tried to do so. I bought some from a man in the village who had managed to amass a reserve stock, but I had to pay a ruinous price for it. I soaked some in water to make it heavier, and next time I was allowed to leave without any punishment.

One day the white man told us of a new arrangement he was making for us rubber workers. A number of men were to be set apart as sentries, we called them, but the white man called them guards of the forest. They were to be taken from amongst our own people, and armed with guns, and they would accompany us on our journeys to and from the forest and protect us, and they would also escort us to the white man's place when the day arrived for taking in the collected rubber. This sounded well, and as the rubber grew more and more scarce, and we had to go further into the forest to secure it, surely, we thought, a gun would be a protection, and keep our enemies from interfering with us.

Alas! once more were our hopes dashed to the ground. These men, who were supposed to be our protectors, became in time our worst oppressors. Instead of going with us into the forest, they at once appropriated the best houses



## Bokwala

in the villages for themselves, or if these were not good enough for them, they caused new ones to be erected at our expense. After hurrying us off to the forest alone and unprotected at the earliest possible moment, they established themselves in the village, and lived in such a style as to far outshine any of our chiefs—in fact, taking a delight in insulting and deprecating them and relegating to themselves every vestige of authority which had formerly been vested in the chiefs of our own people.

As soon as ever we young men had gone, they behaved as though everything in the village belonged to them; the few goats we had, our fowls, dogs, food, all our goods and possessions—nothing was safe from their greed, and it was not long before even our wives were not safe if left at home alone.

Things had been gradually getting worse for a long time, and now that the sentries were placed over us were so much worse than ever before that we began to give up hope.

We reported their doings to the white man many times, but we soon found that he and they were as one man, and that if we told we almost invariably lost the palaver before the white man, and then the sentries found means

## The Beginning of Sorrows

of their own to punish us for having spoken against them.

We frequently visited the other white men when we had the time to spare—I mean those who taught about God—and told them our grievances.

They listened and wrote the things we told them in a book, and tried very hard to get things put right for us; but with a bad white man in charge of worse black men who were all armed with guns and given free scope in the villages, it was little they could do.

On several occasions they did win cases for us, and we always knew that things would be worse if they were not in our midst to see and hear what was done, and to take our part against our oppressors.

“Times were bad!” do you say? You are sorry for us?

Yes, white men of Europe, they were bad, even then; but I have not reached the worst part of my story. Then, if you do indeed feel pity, your hearts will weep for us, and you will be filled with grief and with anger.



## Oppression, Shame, and Torture

by the sentries, the white man agreed to them.

At least, we thought he did, as he scarcely ever lost a palaver for them. This kind of treatment, constant rubber collecting, no rest, and sometimes no pay—what can it be called but another kind of slavery?

I want to tell you some of the things which happened during this time of oppression. It is not only we men who go into the forest who suffer; but also those who are left at home in the villages, our old fathers and mothers, our wives and little children.

The white man wanted fresh meat for his table, so he ordered the old men in the villages to hunt antelopes in the forest for him, and bring them in alive. The hunting was easy, but not so the catching of animals alive. That meant great care in dealing with such animals as were inside our enclosures of nets, so as not to allow their escape while endeavouring not to kill them.

Then other kinds, the water antelopes especially, are dangerous, and cannot be caught alive without the captor receiving wounds from their sharp teeth. When once caught, their legs were broken in order to prevent their escape on the

## Oppression, Shame, and Torture

### CHAPTER V

My new slavery—How our villagers fared at home—The white man's meat—How it was got—The white men of God and their pity—How the women were enslaved—Feeding the idle—Endeavours to evade oppression—Results—How would you like our conditions?—Forest work—Its hardships—The day of reckoning—Back to the village and home—An ominous silence—A sad discovery—Redeeming our wives—An offending villager—A poor victim—A ghastly punishment—The woman's death—Another village—The monkey-hunters—The old man who stayed at home—How he was tortured—No redress.

**I** THINK you white people who hear my story will see that by this time my name Bokwala (slave) was being verified for the second time; for though the slavery to the black man was bad and caused me much shame, that which we had to undergo now was, in some ways, worse; and, though most of the very worst things were done



## Bokwala

journey to the white man's compound, and thus our fathers supplied the white man's table with fresh meat.

Some of the villages had to supply one, two, or even four animals weekly, and one white man would not take them with broken legs because he wanted to keep them alive on his own place.

I have been told also that some of the white men of God and their wives remonstrated with the carriers of these broken-legged animals who happened to pass their houses, with regard to the cruelty of breaking the legs. They say they feel pity for the antelopes ! Of course, the men laughed at that, because who pities animals ? They are not men, or we should pity them. White men are strange kind of people !

Again, when the white man's compound grew large and he had many people working for him, he needed food with which to provide for their needs. Not only his actual servants but their wives and families, and sometimes others went and sat down, as we say, on the white man's place, for there they had an easy time.

In order to supply all that was needed the women in the villages had to work very large gardens, much larger than would otherwise

## Oppression, Shame, and Torture

have been necessary ; then dig the roots of the maniocca ; peel and steep it in the river for four or five days ; carry it back again to their homes in heavily laden baskets up steep hillsides ; pound, mould into long strips, wrap in leaves, bind with creeper-string, and finally boil the *tökö* or *kwanga*, our native bread. All this meant much work for our women ; firewood must be cut and carried from the forest, special leaves sought and gathered, and creeper cut for string ; and every week the food must be taken to the white man's place punctually.

And for a large bundle of ten pieces one brass rod (5 centimes) is paid to the women !

What seems hardest of all is that much of the food goes to supply families in which are plenty of strong women, who are perfectly well able to cook for themselves and their husbands.

These women live a life of idleness, and very often of vice, on the land of the white man, and frequently treat the village women with disdain and shower contumely upon them. If, as sometimes happens, high words ensue, the village women have no chance whatever, for the others can say a word to their husbands or paramours, who are armed with guns, and it is an easy thing for them to avenge such quarrels on their next



## Bokwala

visit to the village of which the women happen to be natives.

There are generally a few villages in close proximity to the white man's place the natives of which are set apart to supply paddlers, carriers, dried fish for employees' rations, manioca bread, &c., and who are not reckoned amongst the rubber workers. We used to envy the inhabitants of these places, and some of our people tried to leave their own homes and go to reside where the people seemed to us to be better off than we were.

But this was not allowed by the white man; if found out, the offence was punished severely either with the whip or prison, so we gave it up. And even in these favoured villages they had their trials; fowls and eggs were required as well as other little things, and they had to be supplied *somehow*, and it was often *anyhow*.

As long as the supplies came to hand regularly, and no complaints were made by the villagers against the sentries who were sent out to collect the food or call the people, all went well. But it could not possibly be peaceful for long, because our people were treated in ways that no one, not even an animal, would put up with quietly. And although I know you white

## Oppression, Shame, and Torture

people do not like to hear of bad doings, I must tell you of some now, or you cannot understand how we feel about this rubber and other work which we are compelled to do by strangers of whom we know nothing, and to whom we think we owe nothing.

Think how you would feel, if you had been out in the forest for eleven or twelve days and nights, perhaps in the wet season, when the wind blows so that you cannot climb the trees for fear of either the tree or yourself being blown down; and the rain pours in torrents and quickly soaks through the leaf thatch of your temporary hut (just a roof supported on four sticks) and puts out your fire, so that all night long you sit and shiver; you cannot sleep for the mosquitoes; and, strong man as you are, you weep, because the day which is past has passed in vain, you have no rubber!

Then, if a fine morning follows, and you manage to make a fire, (with tinder and flint,) eat a little food you have kept over, and start off again in feverish haste to find a vine before some one else gets it. You find one, make several incisions, place your calabash under the dripping sap, and your hopes begin to rise. Towards evening it rains again, and again you



## Bokwala

can scarcely sleep for the cold; you have nothing to cover yourself with, and the only source of warmth is a few smouldering embers in the centre of the hut.

In the middle of the night you have a feeling that something is near, something moving stealthily in the darkness, and you see two glaring eyes gazing at you—a leopard or civit cat is prowling round your shelter. You throw a burning firebrand at it, and with a growl it dashes off into the bush.

In the morning you tie another knot in your string, by which you count the days, and say, "If only I can get a lot to-day! The time grows short, I shall soon go home."

Day after day passes in this way, and at last the rubber is ready, or even if it is not, the day has dawned; you must start for the white man's place—and home is on the way!

One or two nights are passed on the road, and you draw near to the village.

"What a welcome I shall have! Bamatafe with the baby, Isekokwala, my father, now an old man, and my mother, and a feast of good things as I always find."

As we get near the village, I begin to sing and feel happy, and tell the other men what a good

## Oppression, Shame, and Torture

wife I have, and what a feast she will have ready for me!

But how quiet it all is—and yes, surely I hear a wail! What can it be?

I rush on ahead, and hear the following story.

In the morning some sentries arrived to bring the rubber men to the white man's place. We had not come in from the forest, so they took our wives, quite a number of them—Bamatafe amongst them with her baby at her breast—away to the white man's prison, or hostage house as he calls it, and my relatives are crying over it!

I was mad with rage, but it was too late to do anything that night.

In the morning we took our rubber in to the white man, who received it, refused to pay anything for it, but allowed it to pass *for the redemption of our wives!* Of course, we did not say anything; we were only too glad to get them free at any price; for what could we do without them?

You, white men in Europe, who say you feel pity for us, how would you feel if such a thing happened to you and your wife and little child? We were treated like that not once, but many times.



## Bokwala

In a village not far from my father's the men were all away on one occasion trying to procure what was required of them as their weekly tax. When the day for bringing it in fell due, they did not arrive in good time, and as usual sentries were sent out to inquire into it.

Finding no men in town, and most of the women having fled into the bush in fear at the approach of the sentries, they seized the wife of one of the absent men. She had recently become a mother; perhaps she was not strong enough to run away with her companions. Anyway she was arrested with her babe at her breast, and taken off to the white man's place, where it was decided to give the village a lesson that they would not soon forget.

In the presence of the white man the poor thing was stretched on the ground, and the awful hippo-hide whip was brought into requisition. The man who started the whipping became tired, and passed the whip over to another to continue it, until at last, when the woman was more dead than alive, and in a condition which cannot be described to you, the white man gave the order to cease, and she was—set free, did you say?—  
*No, sent into the prison house!*

An hour or two later her husband arrived and

## Oppression, Shame, and Torture

was told that if he wanted to redeem his wife he must bring the white man twenty fowls. He succeeded in collecting sixteen, which were refused, then he made up the number, and so redeemed his wife and babe. This redemption must have cost him a great deal of money, and he was a poor man.

Three days after her return to her home the wife died.

It seems strange, but the child lived, and is alive to-day, a puny, ill-nourished child, as you may imagine.

O white women, can you listen to such things unmoved? Think, then, how much worse it must be to see them, and live in the midst of them, knowing that the same thing might happen to *you* any day?

In a village situated at some distance from the white man's compound the sentries had established themselves in their usual style of living, in the best houses the village could boast of, and began to supply themselves lavishly from the gardens and poultry-houses of the villagers. They ordered the old men who were past rubber collecting out into the bush to hunt monkeys for them to feast upon.

Day after day the old men went, and brought



## Bokwala

back the animals required, but one morning there was a heavy fall of rain.

One old man refused to go out in the wet, he said that he could not stand the cold, and so remained in his house. His failure to go to the hunt was discovered by the sentries, and he was arrested by two of them, stripped, and held down on the ground in the open street of the village.

Then they—but I must not tell you what they did, white people do not talk of such things.

After that one of the sentries held the left arm of the old man out straight on the ground, while another, with his walking-staff (a square sawn stick), beat him on the wrist until at last his hand fell off. His sister came to his assistance, and he went away with her to his hut to suffer agonies of pain for months.

A long time after the white man of God and his wife were visiting a neighbouring village, teaching the people, and this old man found courage to go and tell them his story, and show them his arm. Then the wound was green, the bones protruding, and he was in a hopeless condition.

But the strange thing was that the arm

## Oppression, Shame, and Torture

appeared to have been cut a little below the elbow. The explanation was that the ends of the bones had become sharp, and were constantly scratching other parts of his body, so he had cut them off from time to time with his own knife. He, with the white man of God, went a long journey to the white man in charge of the rubber work, and showed him the wound.

But nothing was done, as all his people were too much afraid to bear witness to the deeds of the sentries. If they had done so they might have been treated in the same way, or even worse. For there was nothing, not even murder, that the sentries were afraid to do, and nothing too cruel for them to think of and put in practice.

I think I have told you enough to make you see that we rubber men were not the only ones who suffered from the presence of the white men; and now I must tell you more of my own story.



## Some Horrors of Our Lot

If you are tired of hearing about it, what do you think we must be of living in it ?

The rubber vines were getting worked out in our part of the forest, and almost every time we had to go further to get any, but at last we found a way of getting it quicker. It was this : when we found a good vine, instead of making incisions and waiting for the sap to drip from them, we cut the vine down, dividing it into short lengths. These we placed endways in a pot, and left them to drain off all the sap into the pot. In this way we got quite a lot of rubber from the one vine, and we rejoiced accordingly.

For a time this way of working rubber helped us over some of our difficulties ; it gave us a sufficient quantity in a short time, and so we were saved from the anger of the white man. But it was not long before we began to find a dearth of vines ; for those we had cut were useless for future working, and therefore we had to take longer journeys into the forest than ever before.

If we went too far in any direction it brought us in contact with the natives of other villages who were also seeking for rubber, and regarded us as poaching on their preserves. True, there was some rubber on the other side of the river,

## CHAPTER VI

### Some Horrors of Our Lot

Our work grows harder—I consult the white man of God—A strange contrast—My plea unavailing—My rubber short—I am sent to the prison—The captives—Their work and their punishments—The sick—The new-born babe—The dead and their burial—The suspected—How they were tortured—The steamer—The rubber chief—The prison opened—A procession of spectres—The place of the dead—For a time peace—Work for the man of God—How we fared—My reward—I wish to go home.

**I** AM afraid that you white people will get tired of listening to a constant repetition of the same story, but that is just what my life and the lives of my people have consisted of ever since the coming of Bokakala—rubber, chicotte, prison, rubber, prison, chicotte ; and again rubber, nothing but rubber. We see no chance of anything else until we die.



## Bokwala

but there we dared not go, because of the age-long feud between the natives of that part and ourselves—we feared that if we went we should never return.

After much consideration, I thought there was just one chance of getting free; so I went to see the white man of God, taking him a present which I hoped would show him that I really meant what I said, and asked him to take me on to work for him.

He received the fowl I gave him, but not as a gift; he would insist on paying for it its full value, and giving me a few spoonfuls of salt over. (Truly the ways of white men are unaccountable! Some compel one to supply against one's will what they want, and pay nothing or next to nothing for it; and then others refuse to take a thing as a gift, but insist on paying for it! Of course, we like the latter way, but should not think of doing so ourselves.)

Then he explained to me that it was impossible; he could not engage any man who held a "book" for rubber, and as I did hold one and my name was on the rubber workers' list, it was out of the question. I pleaded with him, Bamatafe pleaded for me. We returned again on the following day to try once more, but it was in vain. I

## Some Horrors of Our Lot

had to go back to my rubber work in the forest.

Soon after this a day came when my rubber was short weight. I had failed to find a good vine, and though I soaked the rubber in water to make it heavier, the white man noticed and refused to pass it. As a result, I did not return home that night, but spent it and several more in the white man's prison.

I had heard much about this place from Bamatafe and others, who had frequently been in it, and so was not so surprised as I otherwise might have been. Prison to us who are used to an outdoor life in the forest has always a horrible aspect; but such a prison as that was is beyond description. And yet I must tell you something about it.

The building itself was a long, narrow hut with thatched roof, bamboo walls, and mud floor. That was all; and it was crowded promiscuously with men and women of all ages and conditions. These were fastened together with cords or chains round the neck, in groups of about ten with a fathom of chain or cord between each.

There were old men and women with grey hair and shrivelled skins, looking more like moving skeletons than living people, with



## Bokwala

scarcely enough cloth or leaves for decent covering. Strong, capable women were there who should have been working happily at home for their husbands; women with babies only a few days' or weeks' old at their breasts; women in delicate health; young girls; the wives of husbands who had somehow failed to satisfy the demands made upon them; and young lads who had tried to shirk paddling the heavily laden rubber boats—all these were there, crowded together in that one shed without privacy or sanitary arrangement of any kind from sundown to sunrise, and some of them for weeks together.

The smell was horrible, the hunger and thirst intense, and the publicity in some ways worst of all. I myself was not hungry that first night, and Bamatafe came to and fro with food for me on the following days; but much of it I never ate. Some of my fellow-prisoners were so ravenously hungry, that it was impossible to save any scraps, even if I had wanted to. Many of them, coming from a distance, had no friends to supply their needs.

Early in the morning we were turned out in charge of sentries to clean the paths of the compound, carry water, work on houses, cut up and pack rubber, and carry the filled baskets

## Some Horrors of Our Lot

from the store to the river ready for transport by canoe or boat to the place of the great rubber chief down river. If the work done failed to satisfy the sentry, or he had any old scores to pay off to a prisoner who was in his power, the chicotte or the butt-end of the gun was always at hand, and proved an easy means of chastisement for either man or woman, the latter frequently incurring it for nothing worse than a desire for chastity.

Then at sundown we were marched back to the prison house for another night of horrors. It was often impossible to sleep.

On one night in particular we were kept awake hour after hour by the groaning of some of the sick ones, and then towards morning, after a little sleep, we were aroused again by the puny wail of a new-born babe. Was it any wonder that its first cries were weak, and that the little life so recently given seemed on the point of ebbing away? In the morning the sentries agreed that the mother was not fit for work, and reported to the white man accordingly; but three days afterwards the mother was out at work in the hot sun with her baby at her back.

Many prisoners died at the time of which I



## Bokwala

—speak—two, three, five, sometimes ten in a day—there was so much hunger and thirst and sickness. When one died, they tied a string round his foot, and dragged him a little way into the bush, dug a shallow hole, and covered him with earth. There were so many that the place became a great mound, and the burials were so carelessly done that one could often see a foot, hand, or even head left exposed; and the stench became so bad that people were unable to pass by the road which was near the "grave."

And yet, bad as all this was, something happened there which made me glad that I was an ordinary prisoner, and not (what I had thought impossible) something worse. Four big, strong young men were suspected of having stolen some rubber from the white man's store. It may have been a true accusation; that I do not know—no one knows.

The white man was furious, and said that he would make an example of them, which he proceeded to do. Four tall poles were procured and planted in the ground at the back of his own house, and the four men were brought.

Their heads and beards were shaven, they

## Some Horrors of Our Lot

were stripped of their loin cloths, and tied to these poles, not only by the lower parts of their bodies, but by their heads, so that they could not move at all.

This happened in the morning.

The sun climbed up, and stood overhead—they were still there.

The sun slipped down, down, down—they were still there.

No food or water had they tasted all day, so they were parched with thirst. They pled for water, none was given; for a covering for their shame, no notice was taken; and at last, in sheer despair, they entreated that they might be shot—they would rather, far rather, die than endure the shame of remaining any longer in a public place in such a condition.

At night they were released from their agony, only to be sent to prison, and finally exiled up river. The charge was never proved against them. But the white man of God heard about the affair, and talked the palaver with the rubber chief, and eventually they were released and came back to their own villages.

One day we heard a steamer whistle; it was coming to our landing-place. "Oh, joy! perhaps the white man will let us go," we thought.



## Bokwala

He often did send prisoners off to their homes when a steamer whistled, which seemed strange to us in those days, but it mattered not to us why he did it, if only we might get free.

To our disappointment he did not do so on this occasion, and we soon heard that the big chief of rubber had come. We wondered what he would do to us, if things might be worse, although we did not see how that could be.

Afterwards we found that the white men of God had been writing many letters to him about us and the way in which we were treated, and he had come to see for himself. He did so, with the result that he opened the doors of the prison house, and told us to walk out. He commenced to count us, but gave it up: we were so many. He told us we were free, and could go to our homes. We could scarcely believe it, it seemed to be too good to be true; but we immediately set off with hearts full of joy.

You may think what a merry procession we must have been, perhaps even that we were singing and dancing with delight, because we were free! Not so; we must have looked more like a procession of spectres. Some, too weak to walk, were carried on the backs of others not

## Some Horrors of Our Lot

much stronger than themselves; women weak and ill, some soon to become mothers, and others with young babes looking as sickly as themselves; men and women both so famished with hunger that they had tied strips of plantain fibre tightly round their stomachs to try and stay the craving for food!

How eagerly we drank the water and devoured the little food that was given to us by friendly people as we passed, and how the old men and women called out blessings on the head of the chief of rubber and the white man of God who had interceded for us! We noticed that as we passed through their compound the white men and women of God were actually crying with tears for our sorrows, and yet how glad they were to see us free!

Yes, we were free, but many who lived at a distance and were old or sick never reached their homes again. One died at the place of the white man of God, two or three in villages a little further on, and many who entered the forest were never heard of again; they probably died of hunger, and their bodies must have been devoured by wild animals.

I was one of the last to leave the prison, and as I did so the great chief was making



## Bokwala

inquiries about the prison grave of which he had heard. He said to me, "Will you show me the place?"

I answered, "Oh, yes, white man, it is not far. Just over in the bush yonder; but if you come, bring a cloth to hold your nose; for you will not reach the place without it."

He said, "Is it as bad as that? Then I think I will not go." And he did not.

The end of it was that the bad white man who had been so cruel to us was sent away to Europe, and a new one came to us who was much kinder in his treatment of us, and for a time we had peace.

Then came my opportunity; for while there were not so many palavers going on, there was freer intercourse between the rubber white men and the white men of God, and so it became possible for the latter to take a few of us rubber men to work for them.

As I had begged so long for that very chance I was one of the first chosen; and how can I describe the joy with which I said farewell to rubber work, and went with my wife and child to reside near the compound of my new master.

Everything was so different; it was like

## Some Horrors of Our Lot

having a rest, although, of course, I do not mean that we did not have any work. We had plenty, and it had to be well done; but there were regular times, and home and food and a welcome from the wife in the evening when one returned from work tired, instead of cold, wet, hunger, and fear in the forest. I thought I had indeed reached a good place, and should never want to leave it, so I set to work with a will.

By and by I was taught to use the saw, and became one of the staff of pit sawyers who were cutting up wood for house building. We worked from sunrise to sunset, with two hours off for rest mid-day; but sometimes we did piece-work, and then our hours were shorter. We received a monthly wage, and a weekly allowance for rations; and as our wives kept their own gardens, and sometimes went fishing, we were well supplied with food and soon got strong and well.

Each morning before we commenced work there was a service in the chapel which we all had to attend, and later on there was school for the boys and domestic servants of the white people and for our children and any who liked to attend from the villages. Some evenings



## Bokwala

there were preaching services or classes for inquirers, and occasionally the white man showed us pictures with a lamp.

The pictures appeared on a large cloth which was hung from above, and we liked seeing them very much. But we were also somewhat afraid of them, especially when we saw some of our own people who were dead—we thought it must be their spirits! And when we went round to the other side to see their backs, behold, they had none, but only another front, so we thought there must be something strange about them; for we have never seen people with two fronts and no backs!

Every first day of the week we did no work, but went with our wives and other people to hear the teaching. Before this time I knew but very little of it: I knew that it was about one Jesus, but who or what He was, or why they talked so much about Him I could not understand. Now I began to learn that He was the Son of God, and came to earth for us. I heard about His birth, life and death, and how He died for us—instead of us—just as the peace-offering is killed in our country to save the whole village. We kill a slave; but God sent His Son, and Jesus came willingly

## Some Horrors of Our Lot

and gave His life for us. Truly, He must have loved us!

After a time I joined the inquirers' class, for I wanted to learn more about Him, and to belong to His company.

The time passed very quickly, it seemed but a little until my book, which was for twelve moons, was finished. I received my payment—brass rods, cloth, salt, &c.—and felt quite a rich man. Never had I possessed so much before; and I wanted to go to Ekaka and show off my riches. When my master asked what I purposed doing I said that I was tired and would like to go home for a while to rest.

I went, and soon after that my master went to Europe for his rest also.



## Back to Slavery

people as long as his riches last. After that they seem to lose interest in him, and do not care for him any longer.

But at first, as I said, I had a good time. My father was immensely pleased with a present of a red blanket; the father of Bamatafe received a knife and some brass rods, which my father had smelted for him into anklets; the salt was used for feasts and presents, and it was but a few days before we found that we had nothing left of all my wages!

Now, thought I, I would rest. A little fishing, a little hunting, a good deal of lying down in the big palaver house, and very much talking and telling of news—in fact, a good time generally—and then one day came the end of it.

On that day, I cannot forget it, a big bully of a sentry, armed with a gun and chicotte, came into Ekakaka to see about sending the rubber men off to the bush. As he passed my father's place he began to grumble to the old man about many things—he did not provide a sufficient number of rubber workers; he did not give enough honour to the sentries placed in his village; one of the rubber men had died, fallen from the vine he was cutting high up in the top of a tree, and been picked up dead, and my father

## Back to Slavery

### CHAPTER VII

My welcome at home—My respite and its end—The forest sentry—The little boy—My father's appeal and its result—I intervene—The sentry's revenge—A rubber slave once more—I appeal to the man of God—Disappointment—"Nothing but rubber till I die!"—The hopeless toil—The coming of the pestilence—The witch-doctor's medicine—The desolation—But still the rubber!

**I** WAS well received by my people at Ekakaka, and my father, now an old man, was proud to see me return with my riches.

I also had a good welcome from the family of Bamatafe, for had I not brought brass rods, salt, knives, a blanket, and other things for which they craved? When a man is paid off at the end of a year's work he always gets plenty of visitors, and is much praised by all his towns-



## Bokwala

had not brought any one forward to take his place on the white man's list.

This sentry proceeded to seize a little boy of about twelve years of age, a nephew of the deceased man, and ordered him to get rubber. My father ventured to plead for him, representing that he was too young, and not strong enough for the work.

He was answered by curses, insults were heaped upon him, then the bully took his own knife from him and actually cut off his long beard, of which he and all his family were so proud; and finally he struck the old man on the chest with the butt-end of his gun, felling him to the ground.

I had kept quietly in the hut, but this was too much. I sprang up and rushed to my father's aid, and that was my undoing. The sentry took his revenge for my interference by informing the white man that I was sitting down at home doing nothing, and ought I not to be sent out to work rubber?

The white man called me, and gave me a book for rubber. In vain I told him that I was only resting in town for a little while, and intended to return to my work for the white men of God; my name was put on the list, and

## Back to Slavery

once more I was obliged to seek for rubber. The conditions were much the same as before, but we were obliged to go further away than ever to find the rubber vines, as they were getting so scarce.

After some months of this work, which we all hate, I heard the news that my white man had returned to our country.

"Now," thought I, "all will be well. I will go and plead with him, and beg him to redeem me from this slavery, and then I will work for him again."

So when I took my next lot of rubber in to the white man, after receiving my three spoonfuls of salt in return for my basket of rubber balls, I went on to see the other white men.

It was true, the white man for whom I had worked had arrived while we were in the forest, and was just settled down to work again. When he and his wife saw me they gave me a hearty welcome, evidently thinking that I, like so many others, had just called to welcome them back to our land. He knew nothing of what had taken place in his absence.

I told him all my story, everything that had happened to me and mine while he was in



## Bokwala

Europe; and asked him, now that he had returned, to redeem me from my slavery, and let me come back and work for him again.

But new white men had come and new rules had been made since his departure from our land, and again it was not permissible for a man holding a rubber book to take service with any one. All my hopes were dashed to the ground; but still I pleaded with him with all the fluency of which I was capable—he had done it before, and if then, why not now? We can understand white men making rules for black, but how can they interfere with each other? I thought that, if I only kept at it long enough, I should surely win.

But at last I was convinced of the truth of the statement, and I wept. Yes, strong man as I was, I wept; for anger and sorrow were in my heart, and I turned to the white man as I stood there on the grass outside his house.

“White man,” said I, “if this is true, there is no hope for me. It will be nothing but rubber until I die, and rubber is death. Dig a grave here, and bury me now! I may as well be buried in my grave as go on working rubber.” And I meant it.

## Back to Slavery

But back to rubber I had to go, with no hope of ever doing anything else; back into a slavery which would last until death, and from which there is no escape. For if you run away from one district, you only reach another, and another white man as eager for rubber as the one you left. Then he will make you work for him, if he does nothing worse; he may send you back, and then—chicotte, prison, and more rubber!

So I and my people went on day after day, and month after month, with little pay (what we did receive was only a mockery of the word), no comfort, no home life, constant anxiety as to our wives and daughters in the villages, and nothing to look forward to for our sons but that they must follow in our steps, and of necessity become rubber workers as soon as, or even before, they were old enough to have sufficient strength for the work.

White men, do you wonder that the words, “*Botofe bo lē iwā*” (“Rubber is death”) passed into a proverb amongst us, and that we hated the very name of rubber with a deadly hatred? The only ones who were kind to us in those days were the white men of God. They visited our villages frequently to teach us and our



## Bokwala

families, and sometimes on their journeys they would meet with us in the forest, and stop for awhile to talk to us.

"Come," they said; "listen to the words of God, the news of salvation."

We came, and they told us the same story of Jesus and salvation from sin; it is a good story, and we liked to hear it. But we would say, "White man, you bring us news of salvation from sin; when will you bring us news of salvation from rubber? If you brought that, then we should have time to listen to and think about your other news."

Then came a time of awful pestilence, so terrible that we do not understand or even mention it, lest we ourselves be smitten like others. When we speak of it we call it the "sickness from above" or the "sickness of heaven"; but the white men, who are not afraid to mention it, call it smallpox.

It raged in all our villages, and spread from hut to hut like a fire. We took our sick ones into the forest, and a few people who had recovered from the disease many years before went to look after them. Crowds of people died, and though some recovered, they were very weak and ill after it.

## Back to Slavery

The white men of God put some medicine into the arms of many of our people. It was cut in with a needle, but we did not understand it, and most of us refused to have it done, as we thought it would hurt. But we noticed that many of those who did take the medicine did not get the sickness, or at least only slightly.

In the midst of it all one of our own witch-doctors arose and announced that a cure had been revealed to him, and as he himself was immune from the disease, he would come and put his medicine on all who were prepared to pay his fee. He made an itineration through all the villages with much singing, dancing, and shaking of rattles, and in each village he took up a stand to administer his medicine to all who would pay.

The sick people were brought out of the bush, the suspected cases from the huts, and the strong ones in the villages came also, and all were anointed with the medicine on payment of a brass rod. Such crowds there were; very few refused, I think only the children of God, and they did it in spite of much opposition. Their relatives tried to persuade them to take it, but when the witch-doctor heard of and asked the reason of their refusal, and was told that it was



## Bokwala

because they were children of God, he said, "Leave them alone; if that is the palaver, it is of no use to persuade them; they will never give in."

But, strange to say, the sickness was worse than ever after this episode, until the people got tired of trying to isolate the cases and just left them in the villages. Crowds of people still died at this time, and many of the corpses were left unburied, until at last we began to think that we should all be finished off by the sickness, which lasted many moons, perhaps sixteen or eighteen.

When at last the sickness did cease, the villages were half empty, whole families had been swept away, and the few who were left were so weak that most of the work in the villages had to be left undone. Then many more died of the hunger and after-effects, because they were unable to work to get food, and had no friends left to help them.

But one thing had to go on without cessation all the time, and that was rubber collecting. It must have varied in quantity, but the supply was never allowed to stop during all that dreadful time.

When our wives and children or mothers and

## Back to Slavery

fathers were sick and we knew not what the end of the sickness would be, we still had to leave them with others, or even alone, and go into the forest on another errand—that of rubber collecting! Many a relative died in those days without our ever knowing of their illness; but we were rubber men. Were we not also slaves, having no choice but to go, even though the rubber sap seemed to us sometimes like drops of our blood?



## CHAPTER VIII

### Other Changes. Hope Deferred

A change of labour—We become hunters—A new demand—And new difficulties—Failure—The sentry's demand—The old men's plea—Murder—We tell the men of God—And complain to the rubber man—The white chief—The things written in a book—And no remedy comes—Hunting again—The English visitor—The white woman—Results of making complaints—The sentries' threats—The one way of escape—"Better to be with the hunters than the hunted"—Another sorrow—The sleeping-sickness—"Just a little while, and they die"—We cry to the white people.

**A**S I was telling you before, many of our people died of the "sickness from above," including a number of the young men who worked rubber. Of necessity the supply of rubber became very small when there were so few to collect it in the forest.

### Other Changes. Hope Deferred

After the sickness was finished, and the white men found that it was really true that so many of our people were dead, and that others were still sick and unfit for work, they called us young men of Ekaka together and told us some very good news. It was this. That they had decided that we should make no more rubber, but be freed entirely from that work on condition that we men would hunt antelopes for the white man's table, and bring smoked meat for his workmen's rations, and that our women would supply *tökö* (manioca cooked ready for eating) at stated intervals.

We agreed with much joy, and all the way home that day we were singing and shouting, so as to let every one know of our good fortune. We went also to tell the white men of God our news; they were glad to hear about it, and gave us much good advice as to keeping up a regular supply of food, and not bringing palavers upon ourselves by failing to do our part. We heartily assented to all they said, for we were ready to do anything if only we might be freed from rubber work.

The hunting was started at once, and we kept up the supply of one or two antelopes weekly, and smoked rations for a long time; but by and



## Bokwala

by a new white man came to us from up-country and he made new rules for us.

An order was given that we must procure four living antelopes every week, and in order to do this all of us who were strong enough to hunt had to be in the forest almost all the time, just sending in the antelopes as we caught them.

It was not so bad in dry weather—then we were used to go on long hunts in the old days of freedom—but now it was all the year round, wet season as well as dry, night and day; for antelopes began to get scarce as the rubber had done, and we had to penetrate a long way into the forest in order to get them. We found to our cost that hunting was not play under such circumstances; but even so, it was better than rubber, and we tried to fulfil the white man's requirements.

But one day—the day for taking an antelope to the white man—we failed to procure one in time for the usual morning visit, when we were in the habit of sending it in.

I suppose the white man became impatient and dispatched a sentry—a native of our country who was known to us all as a fool—armed with a gun and cartridges, to inquire why the animal had not been sent in.

## Other Changes. Hope Deferred

When this sentry, Keboeu, arrived in our village, he found it almost deserted. Only one or two old men and a few women were there; but, my father not being present, his friend, Bomoya, went out to meet the white man's messenger and inquire what he wanted. Bomoya was closely followed by Isekasofa, another old friend and associate of my father's. They exchanged greetings with Keboeu and asked his business.

“Where is the antelope for the white man's soup?” he asked.

They explained that we had failed to catch any on the day previous, and that they were expecting our arrival at any time, and then the animal would be dispatched immediately.

His answer was to raise and load his gun, an action not understood by the old men, who simply stood still waiting. Calling to a woman who was crossing the road to get out of the way, he fired. The shot passed through Bomoya's thigh, disabling him; but old Isekasofa, stooping down to hide behind his friend, received the bullet in his breast, and dropped dead on the spot.

Just as the deed was done, we all rushed into the village with our antelopes, proving the truth



## Bokwala

of what the old men had said. We heard all about the shooting from the woman who had seen it all, and whose husband was a workman of the white men of God. Kebocu himself ran away when he saw us all come into the village.

Basofa, the son of Isekasofa, and another man picked up the corpse, put it on a bier of forest poles, and set off with many others of us to tell our sorrowful story to the white man of God.

We arrived first at the school-house where Mama, the white woman, was teaching the children; when she saw us and our burden she was much grieved, for Isekasofa was a friend of the white people and had visited them only a few days previously. We went on to the dwelling-house, and told our story to the two white men of God, who sympathised with us in our sorrow, and wrote a letter to the white man of rubber about the outrage.

We went on to the rubber compound, and waited there a long time, because the white man had gone to the river. He kept us so long waiting to show him the corpse of Isekasofa (he knew why we were there, for messengers had been sent to tell him) that, sitting there in the heat of the midday sun, we became very angry, and some of our people even set out to attack

## Other Changes. Hope Deferred

the village of which Kebocu, the sentry, was a native.

At last the white man came and listened to our story, but he seemed so strange that we thought—of course we did not know—that he had been drinking the strong palm-wine of Europe which makes people dizzy in their heads. Once a white man gave some to one of our people, and he was quite foolish after it.

We were persuaded not to attack Kebocu's village, as the white man would see that he was punished; and we went back to our own place to weep for and bury our dead, and attend to the wounded man.

It was but a few days after this episode that a great chief called a judge came from down-country to make inquiries about our part, and hear palavers.

This was the first time a white man had come on such an errand, and numbers of our people gathered at the house of the white man of God and told our troubles to the chief. He listened and questioned us, and made inquiries of other people who had seen the things we brought forward, and another white man wrote many, many words in a book. That book, they said, would go down-



## Bokwala

country to another great chief, and then everything would be settled satisfactorily.

As Kebocu had not been punished or even arrested for causing the death of Isekasofa, that affair was also talked about, and Bomoya was carried in from his home that the white man might see for himself the truth of our statements. His wound was in a terrible condition, and was turning green inside. All this was also written in the book.

The book was sent down-country; the white men both went their way; and we never heard any more. Kebocu was never punished, but lived in his own village a free man. Bomoya recovered, because the white men of God made medicine for his wounds, but he was always lame.

It made us very angry when, some time after his partial recovery, he was imprisoned for some weeks—because he was found in his village, and not out in the forest hunting antelopes for the white man's soup! Just as if a lame man would be of any use in a hunt with nets and spears!

We continued our hunting week after week, not only to supply the white man's table, but also to provide rations (either of meat

## Other Changes. Hope Deferred

or fish) for his sentries and workmen, and our women had to provide manioca for the same reason.

It meant much work for us all; not only work, but constant exposure to the cold and damp of the forest. It was worse in the wet season, when many of our people contracted a sickness of the chest which is most painful and often ends in death. In fact, the providing of food was getting to be almost as great a tax upon us as the rubber had been. And we thought, "If the rubber work never ends, the food work will not; they will never give up calling for food!"

We had no comfort at home, for we were rarely there. We had nothing to look forward to in the future but work—either rubber or food—so we gave up hoping; our hearts were broken; we were as people half dead!

Two or three times white people came again to ask about our affairs. One was a very tall Englishman with a wonderful dog such as we had never seen before. He was very kind to us, made many inquiries about our treatment, and gave us presents before he left. We asked him to come back to us again, but he never did. We were told that he was talking about our troubles



## Bokwala

and writing them in a book in England, but that is all we know about him.

Another who came was a white woman. She stayed for a little while at the rubber place, and used to ask us many questions and talked much to us and to the white men. But we could never really understand about her; why should a woman come to see about palavers—how could *she* settle them? She soon went away, and we did not think any more about her.

Others came at intervals—great chiefs from down-river, I suppose they were—to some of whom we told our grievances; but we soon found that the rubber white men did not like us to do so, and sometimes we were punished or even imprisoned after the departure of the white men to whom we had made reports. So you will not be surprised when I tell you that we got to hide our troubles, and did not tell even when an opportunity presented itself.

Many times we have been asked by other white men of God who have come on visits, "Why do you not tell these bad doings of which we hear? Why do you not report to the white chiefs?" It was like this: we were afraid to tell—afraid of the consequences to ourselves afterwards; we had been threatened

## Other Changes. Hope Deferred

with such dreadful things by the sentries if we dared to speak of their doings.

I do not wonder that they did not want their doings talked about, for I have not told you one-tenth of the bad things they did, and the worst of the things cannot be even mentioned. And then, so many promises which had been made to us by white men had been broken, of what use was it to get more promises from them? They would only be broken like the rest, we thought, and so we gave up, and when the white men tried to find out things we even ran away and hid, rather than tell them, and so bring greater trouble on ourselves and our families.

There was just one way out of our slavery, and some of our young men availed themselves of it. It was to become a sentry oneself. Only a few had the opportunity, and those who took it soon became as bad as the other sentries with whom they came in contact. They found that the only way to please the white man was to get plenty of rubber; and in order to do that they were obliged to use the same means as the others and become cruel oppressors of their own people.

When they were remonstrated with they would say, "It is better to be with the hunters



## Bokwala

than with the hunted. We have the chance to join the hunters; what more?" I never had the chance myself; perhaps if I had I might have done the same; for if you compare our lives with the lives of the sentries, I do not think that even a white man can wonder that some of us chose the easy way.

There is one thing of which I have not yet told you; we think it is one of the worst of all our trials. We scarcely know about the beginning of it, but it seems to have been soon after the end of the "sickness of heaven" that this other sickness began to come amongst us. We call it "*nkangi ea ilo*" ("sickness of sleep"), and many refer to it as "this desolation," "*losilo lone*."

Both names describe it. When a person has the disease, he gradually gets more and more languid until at last he sleeps all the time, and the disease destroys him. We have no hope for the future on account of this disease, as well as our other troubles; no one ever recovers, but generally the whole family take it, and die one after the other, until whole villages are almost wiped out.

At first only a few people had it; and though

## Other Changes. Hope Deferred

we did not understand it, we thought that, like other sicknesses, it would be cured. But in a very few years it has spread from house to house and village to village, away into the back towns and far up-river; it seems as if it had no ending!

Numbers of people who are weak and sickly contract it, and many more who are exposed to all weathers rubber seeking, hunting, or fishing, and who come back home with some simple malady, get the sleep sickness as well, and then—just a little while—and they die!

Some of the largest and best populated villages are now reduced to a few huts, the majority of which are inhabited by sick folk. Men and women of all ages and little children all alike take the disease, and all alike die.

In the old days, if a person died in one hut, a child was born in another to take his place and name; but now—every day the death wail is heard, every day funerals are taking place—but it is a rare event for a child to be born. You see just one baby here, and another there, and that is all! And therefore we have come to say, "We shall all be finished soon, all get the disease, none recover. If we are to have it, we shall have it: what more?"



## Bokwala

Perhaps you think we should take medicine for this sickness, but we can find none of any use. The white men of God have tried many kinds of medicine : medicine to drink, and also the kind which they put into one's arm with a needle ; but these only did good for a little while, and then the sickness was as bad as ever. Our own people have tried their own medicines, our witch-doctors also have tried to cure it by means of their fetishes ; but all alike are useless. We often ask the white men if their doctors have found the medicine ; but we always get the same answer, "No, not yet." We wonder that the white men with all their wisdom have not found it : if they have not, who can ?

The white men of God are continually teaching us that in view of all this sickness, now is the time for us to settle the palaver between us and God by believing in His Son Jesus, so as to be ready if death comes to us. And then our witch-doctors step in and say, "Is not this closing of the eyes in prayer, which these white men have taught our people, the cause of the sickness of sleep ?"

What can we do ? We go and hear the teaching, and it is good : we agree to it. Then we hear what the witch-doctors say, and for

## Other Changes. Hope Deferred

a while we absent ourselves. And all the time the sickness goes on and increases. O white people, will you not pray to your God for the medicine ? will you not try and send it to us soon, that this desolation may be ended, and some of us be saved alive ?



## The Elders of Europe

curious to see the elders of Europe, and so they went to take a look at them from a distance, and then came back and reported to us who stayed at home. There were, said they, three strange white men, said to be settlers of palavers, two of whom were in truth old, grey-headed men; one other was a medicine-man. These were accompanied by the great rubber chief, as well as the white men who worked the steamer. They had also heard that we were all invited to go to the steamer on the next day and state our grievances.

Then while we were still talking about it, the white men of God sent to advise us not to hide anything, but to come and tell these white men all the palavers we could remember, giving names, and bringing eye-witnesses whenever we could. They also said that these white men had promised that we should be protected, and that no harm should come to us as the result of our making our grievances known.

This reassured us, and we thought that as these white men were not boys but old and white-haired, they were worthy of respect, and their word should be true. Therefore we gathered together, we and our chiefs, and we told them many, many things—things which

## The Elders of Europe

### CHAPTER IX

More white men from Europe—Fears and curiosity—The white men inquire about us—We tell them of our state—And our oppressors—The knotted strings and their story—"These things are bad"—The white men's promises—Better times—Soon ended—Rubber again—The old toil—The men of the river—The demands on the villages—The chiefs in power—Chiefs and the sentries—The death wail and the white man—"We are very poor."

ONE Saturday evening a big steamer came to the white man's beach, and soon after the news spread throughout our villages that a lot of white men from Europe—old men with grey hair—had come to see and judge of our condition for themselves, and to listen to what we had to tell them.

Some of us were afraid to go near them; we had not had a good experience of white men in the past, and we kept away. But others were



## Bokwala

grieved and surprised and made them very angry.

We told them how we had to make rubber when the vines were practically finished in our district; how we had to get animals all the year round and in all weathers, and fish, no matter what the state of the river might be; how our wives could scarcely prepare manioca for our own families because of the constant demands of the white men and his sentries. Then, gaining courage, we went on to tell of the treatment which we received from the sentries in our villages, of their cruelties and oppression, their murders and thefts, their wicked treatment of our wives and daughters, and many other abuses which I cannot tell you of.

Many chiefs came from far distant villages and districts, bringing with them long knotted strings or bundles of twigs, each knot or twig representing a person killed or a woman stolen.

Everything we told was written down, and the white men of God told many things, and these also were written down. This went on for two or three days, until at last the old white chief said, "Have you anything more to tell?"

"Oh, yes," we said, "many things, white

## The Elders of Europe

man; we can go on like this for three more days, if you want to hear all."

Said he, "We have heard sufficient; we know that these things are bad, why should we hear more?"

We were given twenty brass rods each, and told that no one would molest us, and that soon these bad things would be ended, as the palaver would be settled in Europe.

So we went home, and waited. We did not expect much, for we had been told the same thing before, and we had given up hoping long ago.

But after long time of waiting changes did come once more. Bokakala's white men of rubber did not come to us any more, but Bula Matadi (the State) himself came and said that now he would send his own white men to us, and that they were good; and there would be no more bad doings in our villages; as they would recall all the sentries and not send any more out to live with us, and oppress and ill-treat us and our families.

And Bula Matadi really came, and since then we have had better times than before. Having no sentries in our villages, but only our own headmen, makes it much better for us, and far



## Bokwala

safer for our wives and families who are left at home when we are away in the forest.

For a little while there was no rubber work ; we cut posts and bamboos for building, and fire-wood for steamers, and there was always the food tax which pressed hard on men and women alike. It always has been a heavy task to supply that, and is still—just as much food is needed, and we are so few, so very few to keep up the quantity.

However, we congratulated ourselves on not having rubber to work, when lo ! Bula Matadi himself suddenly ordered us to begin working rubber again !

It seems that there is no way of pleasing a white man except by providing him with rubber. I do not mean the white men of God—they are different. But the others, whether they belong to Bokakala or Bula Matadi, whether they live up-country or down, or away on the big river, they are all alike in feeling a hunger for rubber.

So now we are away in the forest for two months, and in our homes for one. The two months are spent in collecting rubber, and making it into long strips to take to the white man. Each man has to make six

## The Elders of Europe

strips for each month, and take them to the white man once in three months—eighteen strips at a time. Then we get a piece of cloth or a shirt or a plate as payment if the rubber is good and the quantity sufficient ; if it is not, then we get very little or no payment, and if the shortage is of frequent occurrence, it may be prison.

We are better off in having a longer time for getting the rubber ; but we have long distances to go in order to reach any vines, and then we have to cut them down and sometimes dig up the roots in order to get sufficient of the sap.

And we have more comfort, because, going for a longer time, we make better shelters, and take our hunting-nets and spears with us, and so succeed in getting some fresh animal food. If several of us are in the same part of the forest, it is easy to set up our nets round a herd of wild pigs or some antelopes. Some go in and beat the bush, others wait outside the nets with poised spears, and it is not long before we have some animal for our evening meal.

The people who live on the river bank, and have to be always providing wood for passing



## Bokwala

steamers, or fish and maniocca for rations for Bula Matadi's soldiers and workmen, and fresh meat for his own table, are really worse off in some ways than we who are now on rubber work, because they must take their portion every seven or fifteen days, and if they fail to do so they are imprisoned.

Then demands are made of some villages to supply fowls and eggs at odd times and in varying quantities. We wonder sometimes what the white men do with so many eggs; they seem to be always wanting them. One of our people who has frequently to supply eggs says that he thinks the white men must be under the impression that we black men lay eggs the same as fowls do, for they are always calling for them, whether or not the fowls are laying!

Now that there are no sentries in our villages the chiefs of the people are expected by the white men to exercise more authority. But during the years of the sentries' rule the chiefs were divested of every bit of authority, and systematically degraded in the sight of their people. So bad did it become that a chief spent a great part of his time in the chain, or in the bush hiding from the sentries.

## The Elders of Europe

Naturally the children and young people lost their respect for the chiefs, and many an old man whose word a few years ago was law has found, to his shame and chagrin, that he is considered as of no importance and his word as valueless.

Sometimes the old men get into trouble for things that are not really their fault.

For instance, a little while ago some one died in a village near the white man's compound, and, as usual, the people commenced wailing. From evening until far into the night the death wail rang out, and the sound disturbed the white man's rest. On the next day the chief was arrested and put in prison for not having stopped the noises—and he remained there for three days and nights. He is absolutely dispossessed of his power, no one thinks of obeying him; and yet he is punished for the inevitable outcome of the rule of the sentries in our villages.

It was much easier to kill the authority of the chiefs than it is to give it back to them. Of course, there is one great chief, who wears a medal, and is in constant intercourse with the white men of Bula Matadi. He has plenty of authority—we think too much—and he uses it largely in getting a great crowd of wives and



## Bokwala

making it difficult for the young men to get any. Being rich, he can pay enormous prices for women, and demand the same. That is one of our grievances at the present time.

It is our custom to pay for our wives to their fathers and guardians, and the present high prices and scarcity of brass rods are making it almost impossible for a young man to get a wife, and this leads to other bad palavers.

We are very poor—poorer than ever, because the prices of food and other things are higher than before, and yet those who provide the food tax do not receive any more for what they supply. Nowadays our women have no heavy brass anklets, gaiters, or neck ornaments; we are often glad to sell the knives, which were our pride in the old days, for rods with which to settle our palavers.

So, although we are better off in some ways since the changes came, we still have our troubles. We are but few and weak, and those who are stronger than we still oppress and tread us down. We are still slaves, and even if our slavery is a little less hard than of old, it is still slavery and still irksome to us and our children.

## CHAPTER X

### Things We Want to Know

My story is finished—The past and the present—Why are these things so?—The old days—Now we are white men's slaves—How long will it last?—We are dying—Our only rest is death—How long, how long?

**W**HITTLE men of Europe, my story is finished. I have told you about the past, and the two kinds of slavery in which we have been bound; I have told you about the present, our constant work, the difficulty in which our chiefs find themselves placed, our inability to marry because of our poverty, our sickness, the desolation which broods over our villages, the lack of children to take the places of those who die. I think I have told you sufficient to show you that we are in need of pity and help.



## Bokwala

I want to ask you, white people of Europe, two questions. The first is, "*Why are these things so?*"

Long ago, our fathers tell us and some of us can remember, there were no white people in our land; we lived alone and happily in our own way. True, there were feuds and fights, quarrels and bloodshed, and a kind of slavery, but the country was ours, the forest was ours in which to hunt, the river was ours in which to fish, the fruits of the forest and the produce of our gardens were ours to appease our hunger. We did not know anything about white men, nor did we wish to.

And then—suddenly they came in their steamers and settled amongst us. And gradually we learnt that these white men, who came to us uninvited, are our masters—we, our families, our forests, the produce of our gardens, the spoil of our hunting and fishing—all belong to them. And we cannot understand why it should be so.

Once more, we have to work for the white man all the time. Now, when the work is lighter than ever, we are in the forest two out of every three months. We must get a certain quantity of rubber, or there is prison for us, and,

## Things We Want to Know

when we come out of prison, more rubber must be made in place of what was short before we can make a start on the next three-monthly portion.

Those of us who are taking food are out on the river fishing from the first to the fifth working day, and we take in the food on the sixth. If we hunt, we must be continually going to the forest, which is not any better. The food-tax men are worse off than the rubber men at present. For all this constant work we receive very little pay, and, if we complain, we are told that all this work is "*wenta*" ("tax"). We knew about "*wenta*" long ago before the white men came, but our "*wenta*" was to pass over a part of what we had in consideration of some benefit received, or the use of some implement, or in order to be freed from some obligation, but we never understood it to mean all that we had or anything which would take all our time. Now, everything else has to be let go in order to get "*wenta*" for Bula Matadi, and I would ask you white men, *Why is it so?*

I have only one more question to ask you. It is this, *For how long will it last?*

We were young men when it commenced, now we are middle-aged, and we seem no nearer



## Bokwala

to the end of it than we were at first. Still there is the demand for rubber, rubber, rubber !

Many of our people have died from exposure to cold and heat, or from lack of comfort ; many others from accidents, such as falling from the rubber vines, and many more from the pestilences of which I have told you.

White men, I tell you the truth : we are dying, soon our villages will be put out as a fire that is quenched.

And still we are working, still we are slaves to the white men.

And we have nothing to look forward to, as far as we can see, except constant work—and death. We have heard that when a man reaches what the white men call forty years of age his tax palaver is finished ; but that time must be in very old age, for no one ever seems to become old enough to leave off work. No, the only rest we can look forward to is death !

The white men of God are still with us, and they still tell us the news of salvation from sin. That is good news.

But again I say that what we want to hear is the news of salvation from rubber. How long

## Things We Want to Know

before we shall hear that news ? How long a time must pass before this "*wata*" business is finished ? How long shall we wait before we get a little rest—apart from death ?

THE END.



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