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# PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

# ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

## AND MONTHLY RECORD OF GEOGRAPHY.

### *Explorations on the Welle-Mobangi River.*

By Captain VANGELE.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, February 25th, 1889.)

**Map,** p. 404.

THE river Welle was discovered in 1870, by Dr. Schweinfurth, on his memorable journey to the Niam Niam country. The Ubangi, or Mobangi, was first seen on the 18th April in 1884, by Captain Hanssens. After the exploration of the river undertaken in 1885–6 by Mr. Grenfell, who succeeded in ascending it about 400 miles, reaching the fourth degree of north latitude, M. Wauters, in the April number of the 'Mouvement Géographique,' 1885, started for the first time the theory of the two rivers being one and the same, a theory he supported by clearly defined facts.

Between the first and last of the above dates various hypotheses regarding these rivers—the Welle-Shari, the Welle-Aruwimi, and the Welle-Tumbiri—were emitted and supported with more or less success by their propounders, and the discussion continued even after the discovery made by Mr. Grenfell and the journeys of Dr. Junker.

For various reasons quite unconnected with geographical science, it was in France that the theory connecting the Welle with the Ubangi was fought against with the greatest pertinacity, so much so, indeed, that the discovery of the English missionary was even denied.

It was at this time that the Government of the Congo Free State, anxious to possess for future negociations positive information supplied by one of its own agents, gave me orders to take up and complete the exploration of the Ubangi.

At Leopoldville, the Administration placed the steamer *Henry Reed* at my disposal. The *Henry Reed* is a flat-bottomed boat with a stern paddle-wheel; a lighter fastened to one of the sides completed my means of transport. Three white men (Lieutenant Lienart, the captain of the steamer, and an engineer) and 40 negroes composed the party



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under my orders. I formed a store at Equatorville, and this position served me during two years as my base of operations.

On the 13th October, 1886, I entered the Ubangi, and on the next day came out within view of, but higher up than, the French post. I saluted the friendly flag, and continued on my way. Towards seven o'clock that evening, whilst we were bivouacking, a sentinel announced the approach of a canoe, we shouted to it to advance, and in a few minutes it reached the shore. In it was the officer commanding the French post, who came to warn me that he had orders to forbid access to the river. Basing myself on the decrees of the Conference of Berlin, which ensure free navigation on the Congo and all its tributaries, I refused to comply, but consented to take note of the protestation he then made, which put an end to this incident. The French post of Nkundja, now evacuated, was not established in an advantageous position, which explains why the Government of the Congo State did not occupy it after the last convention made with France, and which settled definitely the question of boundaries.

I renewed my provisions at Bisongo, and pushed on. We were then in the middle of October, the season when the river is at a high level, rendering it needless to look for the navigable channel amongst the numerous islands which dot its surface. In no part did I find less than six feet of water, and on the other hand no sounding ever gave me more than six fathoms. I was thus enabled to keep continually to the left bank when going up, and to the right one when coming down, so that we were able to decide in the most positive manner that the only tributaries as far as the fourth degree north latitude were the Ngiri on the left bank, and the Ibenga and Lobai on the right.

Though the immense volume of flowing water rendered our navigation much easier, it likewise made it very difficult for us to get the wood fuel necessary for the steamer, part of the wooded shores being under water. Fortunately I was able to buy some from the natives.

I will give here a few figures before going on with my description. Below the French post the Ubangi measures about 2730 yards in breadth; its greatest depth is five fathoms, its lowest one fathom; it flows at the rate of 3¼ feet a second. Under the 4th degree, just below the rapids, we find it still has a breadth of 1300 yards, a depth of four fathoms, and a velocity of four feet a second. Between these two points, though continually varying in breadth, it never exceeds about 4000 yards, including the islands. The general appearance of the river is pretty much the same as that of the Congo near Bolobo—strewn with islands, and having low wooded banks. The colour of the water is a light brown.

As regards habitableness and fertility, the left bank is vastly superior to the right, which, apart from the tribe of Ba-Loi, has no great centre of population. It is even to a great extent swampy. The left

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bank, on the contrary, though having a few low-lying parts between Mon-Bolo and Imesa, which, however, are partially inhabited, is densely populated. From the mouth of the river to the rapids at Zongo we successively come across the tribes of the Mon-Bangi, the Ba-Loi, the Ba-Ati, the Mon-Zemba, and the Mon-Tumbi. The Mon-Bangi inhabit the left bank; their language is the same as, and their tattooings very similar to those of the people of Irebu. They are ivory merchants.

The Ba-Loi form an agglomeration of villages about 60 miles above the mouth of the river, and extending along both banks, but principally confined to the right. Ivory merchants, but especially pirates, they are the terror of the neighbouring tribes. When the river is high they pass in their canoes from the Ubangi into the Congo, through the small channels of the Ngiri, and make raids on the districts of Lulanga, Mokomela, and the Equator, carrying off numerous captives.

In one of their places, called Mando, I came across a young man from the Equator, captured four years before in one of these raids. I purchased his liberty, and restored him later on to his father, who for all thanks reproached me with bringing back his son almost naked!

The sole tattooing of the Ba-Loi consists in five small vertical stripes on the forehead, each composed of little horizontal lines. The territory of the Ba-Loi, of the Mon-Zemba, and Mon-Tumbi shows an uninterrupted succession of villages.

On the Upper Congo the only territories that can be compared to them for density of population are those of the Ba-Yanzi and the Bangala.

Beyond the region inhabited by the Ba-Ati the language changes entirely, and at the same time ivory utensils, mortars, and horns make their appearance. I stopped some time with the Ba-Ati (also called Mopoto), and established a real friendship with the chief, Ekwala. This country, situated under the third degree of north latitude, is composed of high land. The neighbouring districts of the Mon-Zembo and Mon-Tumbi are, on the contrary, low land. This first tribe is as honest as the second is treacherous. As I stated before, the population is very dense. Every morning two or three hundred canoes may be seen cutting their way through the water, carrying to their day's labour in the fields women and children, with a few warriors to protect them. Their fishing deserves special notice. Nowhere, except perhaps at Stanley Falls, have I seen it carried on on such a scale. Their traps are so heavy as to require for their transport two canoes lashed together. The laying down of these traps involves a sort of military ceremony; drums beat, and the different crews accompany each stroke of their paddles with a sharp, short cry. The men are very tall, five feet ten inches being the average height; some of the women are equally so; they have well developed chests and superb biceps. This high stature is universal amongst them, and one cannot help thinking of the ancient Spartan law.



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The Ba-Ati are hardly tattooed at all; a few lines on the forehead. No special head-dress either is adopted, shaved heads being in the majority. It is far from being the same with the Ngombe, a tribe from the interior, with whom the Ba-Ati are closely related. The women of this tribe have a peculiar head-dress, with a long drawn-out chignon, such as the Monbuttu women, of whom Schweinfurth made a drawing The Ngombe ladies fasten to the back of their heads a long veil of some native black stuff, which falls over the shoulders; thus clothed they present a most imposing appearance. Another peculiarity distinguishes these women—they carry their children in a little wicker basket slung round their necks by a sling made of banana fibre.

A characteristic sign of all these people, from Mon Yoka to Zongo, is that they extract the four upper incisors, because "it makes us beautiful," they told me. As a matter of fact, this deprivation of their teeth, far from rendering them repulsive, gives them rather an attractive look. The Ba-Ati women pierce one of their ears, and enlarging the hole till it reaches the size of a five-franc piece, place in it either a round bit of wood or a ring of six or seven coils.

During my subsequent voyage, after passing the rapids, we came upon another tribe, called the Mon-Ba-Ati, tattooed in the same way, and the lobe of the ear pierced just the same as the Ba-Ati. This is what I learnt concerning this analogy: In days gone by both these tribes formed one people in the interior, but being vanquished in some great war, they separated and settled on the banks of this river, which both call Dua. Another similitude proving their common origin is their language, greatly resembling that spoken on the Congo at Upoto.

The Ba-Ati are very fair workers in iron, although their forges are quite rudimentary: a hard bit of rock is their anvil; their hammer of beaten iron is all of one piece and consists of a square-shaped head and a handle. The blacksmith uses the corners of this square head to hollow out the blades of the knives and the iron heads of the spears. The furnace is blown by four bellows formed of antelope skins rendered supple by constant rubbing with oil. They are worked by strongly fastened wooden handles, the rise and fall of which expels the wind into wooden tubes, which convey it into one single baked earthen pipe which reaches the furnace.

Up to close upon the first rapids we are called by the name of Ba-Tandeley, evidently derived from Stanley.

In all this region, or rather from the Ba-Loi to Zongo, I found it impossible to get sight of a single slave. And yet the Ba-Ati make constant raids against the other tribes, but their only object is rapine and the procuring of meat. All that is killed is eaten on the spot; what is captured alive is carried off, and eaten as the occasion arises. I have met with one of these marauding expeditions; it was composed of about fifty canoes divided into vanguard and main body: and the meat I

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mention is, it must be avowed, human flesh, for cannibalism exists on a large scale along the whole river and its tributaries. I have seen houses surrounded by a border of skulls for a distance of at least 28 yards. During the whole of my voyage I was unable to deliver a single one of these wretched creatures reserved for food, and this despite the most liberal offers.

"*It is meat*," they always replied, "and we don't sell it." In fact, it is very characteristic that the names used to designate the man reserved for meat and the goat, whose destiny is the same, are almost similar, the first being *moboli* and the second *mboli*.

Food is very dear amongst the Ba-Ati, and even fowls they will only sell at a very high price. Goats are meat, they said, and asked me for one of my men as the price of one. I must say, notwithstanding, that I consider them as one of the finest native types inhabiting this region, and as a centre for future recruiting; but, like my friend Coquilhat had to do at Bangala, we must first tame these savages.

I have, perhaps, dwelt at rather great length on the subject of these Ba-Ati, but we will now once more proceed. After renewing with them our protestations of friendship, we started off, and four days later reached the fourth parallel of N. lat., where we came upon a group of mountains reaching in some instances a height of from 600 to 800 feet.

Through this rocky mass the Dua has to force a way to reach the Congo. At the entrance of the gorge, the river is compressed into a bed 870 yards wide, and I was stopped by a barrier of rock offering five passages, between which the rushing waters formed a fall and four rapids. I cast anchor in a little creek on the left bank, from which we were obliged to dislodge with our guns the quantities of crocodiles, whose habitual resort it was, and then I proceeded to reconoitre the obstacle. Between the right bank and the first rock, forming together a wall, there is a small fall, which does not exist when the river is low, as I found out afterwards.

The second passage, 270 yards broad, gives vent to the great body of the water; it is a rapid, flowing at the rate of 10 miles an hour. The third and fourth passes showed by their whirling waters the existence of hidden rocks; finally the passage between the left bank and a small island formed a rapid of about seven or eight miles an hour. This was the way by which the natives came down the river; to go up they drag their canoes over the rocks along the bank. If we were to get up any further this was clearly the only way open to us. It must be remembered that the river was then at its highest level. (We were at the end of November.) However, just to satisfy my conscience, I made an attempt to get up by the big central rapid, but in vain. Twice more we vainly tried the pass along the left bank, and then I returned to camp.

During these attempts I had noticed that the pressure on the boiler

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was 70 lbs., or $4\frac{2}{3}$ atmospheres. I resolved to make a last attempt with a higher pressure. I selected the hardest wood I could find for the furnace, and every man who was not absolutely indispensable on board was left on shore. The captain and engineman, visibly frightened, raised some objections, the latter nearly refusing to go, on the plea of being married and having children. With M. Leinart's help, and a bottle of champagne I revived their courage, and our fourth and last attempt was made with a pressure of 90 lbs., or nearly six atmospheres.

I started at full steam; the steamer cut through the water, then went slower and slower, till finally we stopped altogether and began to drift on to the rocky bank. I gave orders to put back; then came a critical moment, for the steamer, offering her broadside to the current as she turned, leant over heavily, and the water rushed in so as to make us fear for the fires. However, I finally regained my camp without accident.

The next day I tried once more, with M. Lienart's help, to get the lighter up, but without success. The natives informed us that higher up the river was even worse, but as to its direction, no information worthy of attention could be gained. The language, totally different from that of the Upper Congo, was quite unknown to us, and we had to correspond by signs.

Once more I returned to camp and began preparations for the return journey. I noticed that, whereas at Stanley Falls the population is very dense near the rapids, here only one village was to be found, that of Zongo on the right bank. I will not here raise the question as to whether the obstacles were too great to be overcome, my second voyage having fully answered that question.

Being thus stopped for the present, all I could do was to explore the tributaries of the Ubangi and the Dua below the Zongo rapids. I have already named them: the Lobai and the Ibenga on the right bank, the Ngiri on the left. The waters of the Lobai are rather darker than those of the Ubangi; its banks are wooded and in some places rise to a height of 30 feet. The population is widespread. About forty miles from the mouth of this river, I was once more stopped by a fall.

The waters of the Ibenga are black; its banks are low and in great measure covered with grass or dead trees still standing, a sign of frequent inundations. Navigation was very difficult on account of the great number of floating trees. Sixty miles up I was completely stopped by a barrier of trees. The river separates into numerous small channels. Elephants must be found in abundance, for ivory was to be had everywhere and very easily.

The Ngiri is a most interesting river. Coquilhat had already prepared me for its existence from information he had gathered from the natives during his canoe expedition up the Ibinga, a little channel forming a communication between the Ngiri and the Congo, a little below Bangala.

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In the narrow peninsula between the Congo and the Ubangi, reaching to 1° 20′ N. lat., there is a valley from four to six miles broad, opening out in the Ba-Loi territory, and offering a succession of pools covered with grass and islands, in the midst of which flows this river that the natives calls Loi, and to which I gave the name of Ngiri—a name already known, recalling the hypothetical lake of Stanley's last map, and besides that being the name of an agglomeration of villages a little above the mouth of the river. The Ngiri has but a feeble current, its waters are very dark, and its course is so winding that frequently we described three-fourths of a circle whilst advancing. The Ibenga and the Itimbiri are equally tortuous.

At this time several villages were under water, and at the extreme limit of possible navigation we still had a depth of two fathoms; there the river separated into several little channels issuing from marshy forests.

It was most picturesque work sailing up these pools. Now and again we would lose the river and find ourselves in the middle of one of these grass-covered lakes where, nevertheless, soundings proclaimed a depth of two fathoms. To regain the river we had to sail across these green plains, which was easily managed with our boat, whose spur-like bow cut a channel through which the rear wheel pushed her along. If we had had a screw steamer this would have been impossible. When we wanted to land at some riverside village, once more we glided through the grass, whilst far behind numerous canoes followed in our wake, the natives using long poles to push themselves on, and producing a rather strange effect, as only their heads were visible.

In the way of landscapes nothing is to be seen but forests entirely composed of palm trees, then banana trees, and then villages, some on the banks of the ponds, others on the islands.

For 60 consecutive miles village succeeds to village in an uninterrupted chain. The dwellers on the river banks had, fortunately for us, made large stores of firewood, thanks to which we were enabled to continue our journey. This wood was sold more or less voluntarily. Sometimes we found the village deserted, which rendered our task much easier, as then we had only to leave behind us the price of what we took, which we generally paid in pocket handkerchiefs, which we left in the most visible places, such as the branch of a tree, for instance.

It has happened that, for some reason certainly connected with superstitious feeling, on our return ten days later, these handkerchiefs had not been removed. As a rule, the natives treated us well. At one place only had we a slight engagement. As we drew near, the natives had fled. As night was falling fast we were obliged to stop there. I went alongside and sent a native from the Equator with various presents as messenger of peace. However, he preferred to enter one of the huts and feast on the supper he found already prepared. The

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natives were not far off, and had seen this theft. They flocked round in masses, all armed; the most daring approached within 15 yards of our camp, and two assegais were thrown at the steamer, one of which, a barbed one, penetrated the side with such force that it was not possible to withdraw it. Fortunately my revolver was close at hand, and a few shots made our foes beat a hasty retreat, while our men pursued them and burned the village. I ordered all hands on board again, and, to prevent any surprise, we passed the night at anchor in mid-stream.

The extreme point attained on the Ngiri must be about level with Bangala. There a canoe accosted us with two Bangalas who had entered from the Congo by the channel of the Ibinga, a fact which confirms in an interesting manner the existence of a means of communication other than by the mouth of the river between the Congo and the Ubangi.

According to my instructions, my mission was now at an end, and I came back to Leopoldville to send off my report, leaving the interesting question of the Welle in the same state as Mr. Grenfell.

To resolve it in the direct way in which I had attempted it, I required very different means of carrying out my plans, such as the central Government alone could place at my disposal; I had therefore but to wait. I employed this enforced leisure in exploring the Lopori. In the meantime Stanley's expedition arrived at Leopoldville, and every single boat was placed at his disposal.

Following on a conversation I had with Mr. Stanley at Equatorville, I decided to try and push on to the Welle by going up the Itimbiri as far as the Lubi falls. Here I intended to establish a small base of operations, and from there go due north overland.

Although I still consider that this project is perfectly realisable, it failed on the present occasion owing to the scarcity of population, the bad quality of my provisions and stores, and the precarious character of the means of transport provisionally placed at my disposal. Yet once more had I to retrace my steps without having succeeded in my designs.

On arriving at Upoto an incident occurred which contributed largely to my final success. A Zanzibari called my attention to an enormous canoe on one of the banks. It was one of those canoes that Stanley has described in the account of his fight at the mouth of the Aruwimi, with a raised deck at the bow and stern, and made of tough wood. At Stanley Falls the natives use them for raising their traps in the falls themselves. It was really the canoe in which the Haussas who had left after the fight against the Arabs had come down. The Upoto people had captured men and boat, and I in my turn had no scruples in taking possession of the canoe, which I brought down to Leopoldville, and had thoroughly repaired.

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Wishing to know once for all what really were the resources that the State could dispose of, I determined to go down to Boma. Two months and a half later, in November 1887, I found myself once more on the Mobangi at the Zongo Falls, in the crocodiles' creek, with renewed means of pursuing my way, i. e. a little steam-launch without any cabin, the large canoe we had captured and 220 yards of hemp cable, twenty-four natives enlisted at the Equator, who were to serve me as rowers, and provisions and trade goods in sufficient quantities.

Let me state, *en passant*, that the French had established a post on the left bank in 1° 55′ N. at Buanza-Modzia. I have great pleasure in bearing witness to the perfect tact and urbanity of the commander, M. Ussac.

The little steam-launch *En Avant* was the first ever launched on Stanley Pool, went as far as Stanley Falls, explored Lake Leopold II. and Lake Mantumba with Stanley, the Sankuru under Wolff, and it was aboard her that Captain Hanssens explored the Mongalla and Itimburi rivers, and proved the existence of the Ubangi; and finally, it is owing to this little steamer that the Welle problem was at last solved. I am delighted to have this opportunity of proclaiming the noble services rendered by this little boat, belonging to the Congo State, and built in the Belgian works of Cockerill.

But to come back to Zongo. I noted with pleasure that, though still very strong, the current was much less so than in October 1886. There was a difference of level of about four feet. But still the *En Avant* was not capable of overcoming the obstacle. I determined to reconnoitre with the canoe; if possible to navigate higher up, I would take the steamer's wheels off and drag the hull along the left bank by means of my cable. During my absence my men were to clear a way with their hatchets between Crocodile Bay and the one above the rapids, which figures on the map under the name of En Avant Bay.

Accompanied by M. Lienart, I started off in the canoe, which we hauled up over the rocks, and having once left the rapids behind, we made for Lance Island with our paddles. Here we encountered another rapid, which we once more surmounted, thanks to our cable, and then as far as the eye could reach not an obstacle barred the river, only here and there the point of some crag stuck up out of the water. During four days I pushed vigorously on, which means that I covered a distance of about 16 miles, which brought me to the Bonga rapids. This obstacle was formed by a sunken line of rocks, barring the river from one bank to the other. It was here that six weeks later M. Dolisie, on the French steamer *Asima*, struck, and was forced to retrace his steps. However, I finally discovered by the left bank a passage which the *En Avant* could get through when the water rose, for I found that the highest rocks were five feet below water and the current comparatively weak.

Returning to Zongo, we commenced at once the necessary work to

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get the steamer up. The road between the two bays was ready for the transport of the wheels, paddle-boxes, and provisions. The steamer was taken to pieces, and by the aid of the cable was dragged from one bay into the other. It was really very easy work, only requiring an hour and a quarter. Frantic hurrahs from my men greeted this first success; they were not to be the last they would have an opportunity of giving vent to, and I saw with delight that every one was full of hope.

The *En Avant* was once more put together, and the cargo taken over entirely by the canoe to Lance Island, so as to lighten the little steamer, whose wheels, no longer dipping so deeply, acquired a greater velocity. Notwithstanding this precaution, on reaching the island the *En Avant* could not steam up the rapids, and had to be hauled up with the help of a rope thrown from the deck and seized by a black who resolutely jumped into the river. Thanks to this timely aid, we were enabled to reach a sandbank in the calm water beyond. The usual cargoes were apportioned as before, and we pushed on. As I had foreseen, the Bonga rapids were surmounted by keeping to the left bank, the canoe was unfastened, and came up by force of paddles and a little help from overhanging branches. A mile higher up the river was confined to a breadth of 440 yards, but the current was not very strong: it is true that we found a depth of nine fathoms. A little further on the river spread out once more to a width of 2200 yards, but was now sprinkled with islands and rocks, between which the water whirled and rushed. An examination in the canoe showed us a pass the steamer could get through without being taken to pieces, but merely unloaded. We carried the cargo across land to beyond the obstacle.

We were completely ignorant of the language of the natives, who were of but little use as far as information is concerned. When at Belly they seemed to tell us that higher up the people had very long hair. At the time I thought I had misunderstood them, this fact seeming so very extraordinary. We passed through another rapid, and then we came upon such a medley of rocks, rapids, islands, and waterfalls, that it was nearly impossible to make out anything at first. I established my camp a little below them on a sandbank under the right bank, and set off to reconnoitre in the canoe.

Once for all, let me state that no obstacle can stop this sort of embarcation, for it is always possible to tow along the river bank or haul along on land, and thus I had the most perfect confidence in my journey forwards with or without the steamer. This obstacle has a S.W. to N.E. direction, is formed by a group of islands and an isolated island joined to each other and to either bank by a line of rocks which cause various waterfalls and two rapids of the most violent nature. Altogether this is for a steamer the most serious obstacle I have come across. To get over it with the canoe even, seemed at first an impossibility, but a more exhaustive examination of the right bank showed me,

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though the water was bubbling up, a narrow passage of from 8 to 10 feet broad. The current is very powerful, but shows that there is a gap in the rocky wall. Firmly securing the canoe to the bank, I took soundings, which gave me a depth of three feet. The pass is practicable! As the waters were sinking, I hurried on our preparations as before; the steamer was taken to pieces, and, by the help of the cable, hauled across the rocks. It was very hard work, and its successful accomplishment was greeted by three times three.

As we then fondly imagined, no further obstacle could stop us on our onward way. We gave the name of Elephant Island and Falls to this obstruction, as, during my reconnaissance in the canoe, we came across a superb elephant whose habitat was doubtless the group of islands. Assisted by my men I gave chase, killed, and cut him up. One quarter of the flesh was smoke-dried, and lasted the men for a month, the natives carried off the rest. The tusks weighed 42 pounds each.

We continued onwards, and up to Mokuangaz found it extremely difficult work, rocks and islands emerging on every side. I could only proceed in the steamer after having carefully examined the way in the canoe, so that our progress was slow, the journey from Zongo to Mokuangaz taking twenty days, though the distance which separates them is but 20 miles. The appearance of the country between these two points is beautiful in the extreme. On both sides rise gently sloping hills, woods, and pasture lands; fields of maize and bananas pass in endless succession. The villages are not as a rule built on the banks, but on the side of the hill; from afar the rectangular houses look like chalets; with some herds of fine cattle in the pastures, the illusion is complete. Everywhere the natives greeted us with loud cries of friendship, rubbing their arms one against the other; their cry of *nzen, nzen, nze*, reminded me of the Sennenée of the Upper Congo.

As far as and including Belly, the natives have the same type as below Zongo, but they are less tall; their heads are shaved, except at the nape of the neck, and their moustaches are brushed up so that, altogether, they are rather like old soldiers. No tattooing on the face; some few pierce their nostrils and wear a small iron ring. They have but few ornaments, so our trade goods achieve a great success, especially our wire, which is instantly transformed into bracelets. These people treated us very kindly, and sold us plenty of provisions; they are neither noisy nor troublesome nor thieving. The villages by the water's edge are palisaded in front, and in the enormous cotton-trees beside them one can see one, two, and sometimes three posts of observation. These are very clumsily made, and as for aërien villages, they are a complete myth.

Above Belly, i. e. after the third rapid, a new tribe begins, the Ba-Kombe, or Ba-Nyombe. I could not see that they were in any way

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tattooed; on the other hand, the traveller is at once struck by their head-dress. Although of different kinds, they have all a tendency to lean backwards, some ending in chignons, others very similar to those of the Monbuttus, others, again, hanging down in long and slender curling tresses finally united in one. I measured some of these tresses more than six feet long. Some of the women rolled these tresses round their heads like turbans, the end hanging elegantly over one shoulder; ivory pins kept these head-dresses in place, and a ring of red copper passed through the upper lip completes the picture, which is far from being disagreeable. Some of these women are entirely naked, and others wear a few banana leaves, as I likewise observed amongst the Ba-Sokos on the Aruwimi.

Another peculiarity distinguishes the tribe of the Ba-Kombe. They understood the language of one of my men, a native of Upoto, and I was thus able to make myself understood as far as the rapids of Cetema, for during the whole of this distance we always met with Ba-Kombes in the riverside villages, where they served us as interpreters. I conclude from this that the Ba-Kombe must spread far inland.

Many of these natives pierce their upper lips and wear a double stud, one branch of which is turned up at right angles. This ornament is made of a white metal, which analysis has subsequently proved to be tin. I saw this metal as far as Mosso-Niellay. The natives pretend that this metal is extracted in the regions in the interior.

From Mokuangaz the river opens out before us, flowing straight from the north-east, and the outlook is superb. Free from all obstacle, from 900 to 1000 yards wide, the river flows with a depth of 2½ fathoms between banks 6 to 10 feet high, where grassy plains alternate with clusters of trees. We keep on in this north-easterly direction for 30 miles, when the river flows straight from the east, a direction which remains the same on to the end of our voyage, i. e. a distance of 171 miles. We successively came in contact with the different tribes of Ba-Kangi, Mon-Ba-ati, Banzi, Mom-Bongo, and Yakoma on the left bank, and on the right the Bourakas and the Madurus. The natives never vary in their statement that there are no tributaries. As far as the Banzis the river goes under the name of Dua, from there it becomes the Koyu.

Sometimes the banks seem at first sight to be uninhabited, because the villages lie about a hundred yards inland, but the moment one accosts a passing canoe the inhabitants flock down to the water's edge. I never saw such a quantity of provisions everywhere, not only in one particular spot, but during the whole voyage: bananas, maize flour, sorghum, sweet potatoes, yams, beans, sugar-cane, sesame, ripe bananas preserved in honey, palm-wine infused with cola-nuts, tobacco, sheep, goats, splendid fowls, were offered us in abundance.

To sum up, it is the most densely populated and fertile land I have come across in Africa. From Mosso-Niellay the houses are built in a

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shape closely resembling our haystacks. As a rule, the natives shave their heads in the shape of a triangle, the base of which would be the forehead. Amongst the Banzis and Yakomas there is on either edge of this triangle a flat band, formed of little plaits, on which are strung beads, generally white ones, but some are blue and others of red copper of native manufacture. At the back of the head the hair is braided in small curls, also strung with beads. The men wear the short petticoat, the stuff of which is made from the bark of a tree. Some of the women are nude; others wear between the legs a piece of dried banana leaf. One of the ends of this garment is brought flat on to the pit of the stomach, where it is kept by a cord which encircles the waist; the other end floats behind like a little flag. These people neither remove their hair nor practise circumcision, though they know the practice. The Banzis and the Yakomas work very well in ivory; the bracelets seem to have been made on the lathe; the pins, 11 inches long, are well carved and well designed.

On arriving at the Banzis we found the river narrowed by two rocky points jutting out from the sides and forming a rapid that the *En Avant* was powerless to overcome. I made several attempts, rendered useless for want of ropes, and in one of which I lost my anchor, broken off at the shaft—a very serious loss, as it forced me to camp on shore at night. At last I called upon the natives, who very readily sold me ropes, which enabled me to lengthen our cable, and finally haul up the steamer.

The natives took the greatest interest in our proceedings, pointing out the sunken rocks, taking up their fishing tackle which might have interfered with our manœuvres, and even gave us advice—the honest fellows. The medicine men made invocations in our favour, and, without being asked, they all gave us material assistance by helping our men to haul on the cable. The little steamer was thus got through the rapids and brought-to higher up, where it was greeted by the enthusiastic shouts of the whole population, who, dancing and jumping, came to shake hands with all the white men. (This custom, let me state, exists amongst them.) I, of course, made an ample distribution of wire and beads.

The Banzi people robbed us in the most barefaced manner, but I have forgiven them in consideration of the spontaneous and efficacious aid they gave us on this occasion.

We had been warned by the natives that we would still meet with "moumbays," or rocks, higher up, and so in fact we did at Cetema, but the rapids they created were easily passed.

On the 30th December we discovered on the right bank the first tributary we had come across since leaving Zongo. Its mouth must be situated in about 21° 30′ E. longitude; it was blocked up by rocks. The natives were very suspicious; however they told me that the river

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came from or was called Bangasso, the other arm on which we are sailing is called the Koyu. It was impossible to get any further information, as they warned us to go away. With regard to this river there is a remarkable coincidence which I have but lately been aware of. Dr. Junker identifies the river with the Mbomu, and gives the name of Bangasso as that of the chief of a riverside tribe not far from the mouth.

On the 31st December we were still steaming forward. There was not a rock to be seen; but, on the other hand, the sandbanks were numerous, the waters were falling rapidly, and the natives on both sides were thoroughly hostile. They made fun of us when we were stopped by a sandbank, and even threw earth at us; seeing our peaceful attitude they grew bolder and came down on us in canoes, their spears ready poised. A few shots, happily, put an end to these warlike movements. Having lost my anchor, I bivouacked at night on an island, which luckily happened to be uninhabited.

On the 1st January, 1888, we pursued our onward course. I saw in the distance a mountain, which warned us of rocks ahead. It so happened that the sandbanks had driven me to the right bank. I decided to continue on, as long islands—some deserted, some inhabited—separated us from the left bank. A large number of canoes accompanied us, and the natives were most provoking. We shortly came upon a rocky line where the water bubbled and whirled. The natives gave us to understand that we should require wings to get over it. On account of their hostile bearing I was unable to look out for a passage, and determined to retrace my steps, so as to cross over to the left bank and continue up on that side. The right bank was swarming with natives fully armed and greeting us with derisive laughter. All of a sudden a violent shock was felt, followed by a second slighter one; a big leak had been sprung in the steamer's bows. We at once transported our goods into the canoe, which I placed under the command of M. Lienart, giving him orders to run ashore on the right bank about 60 yards distant, so as to discharge his cargo, peacefully, if possible; if not, by force. Five men began to bail out the steamer, but the water came in rapidly; at last we discovered the leak—a hole four feet long by six inches broad; we plugged it with rags and planks. In the meantime I saw M. Lienart "exchanging blood" with the chief. The water gradually diminished in the steamer, whose stern was on a rock; after half an hour's labour we got her off, and I steered for an island about a third of a mile off, where I intended to beach her.

During all this time the natives in the canoes had not ceased annoying us. Notwithstanding their protestations of friendship, they inspired me with but small confidence, and, in any case, I had ordered a chest of cartridges to be opened. My fears were but too well founded; I had hardly reached the island when I heard shots from the bank. This is what had taken place.

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The natives had made a pretence of receiving us as friends, the more easily to murder us and steal our goods the moment they thought they had a good opportunity; they fell on M. Lienart and his men with their lances. Two of our men were killed, one falling dead on the spot. M. Lienart at once gave the order to fire; three natives were killed, the others fled. The lieutenant then burnt some of their houses, reloaded the canoe and another he had captured, and rejoined me. The same day I returned to the village, found it deserted, carried off their goats, and completed its destruction by fire.

On the 2nd January, the steamer was dragged ashore, and we had before us four days' work in the midst of a hostile population. If they should attack us in any great number at night, or even in the day, we might have been annihilated. I decided to terrify them so as to gain time: I set fire to the villages on the right bank for a distance of three miles on the 2nd and 3rd of January, and the 4th passed off calmly.

On the 5th January, towards 12 o'clock, the *En Avant* had nearly completed her repairs, there being only a blade missing off one of her wheels. I had made up my mind to float her off and start next day, so as to get round the island on which we were encamped and into the channel on the left bank, and so on further. At about 1 o'clock we saw a fleet of about sixty canoes, each holding on the average twenty warriors, bearing down on us. There could be no doubt about their intentions. At the same instant a look-out placed in a high tree gave warning of the approach of a troop of armed natives, sheltering behind their shields as they advanced on us. These latter had reached the island from the left shore. A regular battle could not be avoided. Part of my men launched the *En Avant*, and I ordered the engine fires to be instantly lighted, and accompanied by M. Lienart and the rest of my men, I advanced on the natives who were on the island, and who bore courageously on, and only withdrew when five or six of them were killed. Hardly had I thus repulsed one attack when a second took place, coming from the upper end of the island. Just at this moment the *En Avant* was afloat, so I ordered M. Lienart to protect her against the probable attack of the canoes, while I myself advanced on the troop coming down the island. Notwithstanding heavy losses, these natives pressed on through the high grass till within 15 yards of the steamer; they were then almost on the muzzles of our guns. At last they retreated. A sandbank stretched out from the island a little higher up than our encampment, and on this spit the canoes disembarked 100 men or so. As in the preceding attacks, these brave fellows bore down on our very guns, and only retreated slowly when 10 of their number had been killed. A fourth attack then followed from the lower end of the island; it was not, however, so determined as the others, and we speedily repulsed it, killing two men, the others taking to their heels. But the battle was not yet ended. All the canoes gathered

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together up river, drums were beaten, and they prepared to dart down on us.

Fortunately by this time there was sufficient steam up to enable us to work down stream (it was then half-past three o'clock), so I retreated, abandoning the battle field. Instead of pursuing us, the canoes went to pick up their dead.

This I consider as one of the hardest fights I have had in Africa. As a rule, the natives fly when they hear the first shots, especially if they see any of their men fall. But in this case it was quite different, the Yakomas came right up to our guns to throw their spears. If any one of their attacks had broken our line we should have been lost, for the boldest of their second line would have been on us at once. The four attacks they made to surround us were, fortunately, made one after the other; had they been made together we never could have repulsed them. A most remarkable fact was that during the whole of this fight, which lasted nearly three hours, the Yakomas never uttered a single cry; their death-like silence and their cold-blooded determination were enough to strike one with terror.

My little troop, composed of 12 Zanzibaris, five Haussas, a Kaffir, and a boy, behaved with a courage beyond all praise. The 20 natives from the Equator station, on the contrary, took refuge from the very first in the big canoe, where most of them gave way to despair, crying "We are lost."

As we started, the natives on the banks shot their arrows after us, whilst others, brandishing spears and shields, yelled insults at us. It was Pandemonium let loose.

We steamed down very slowly, for fear of striking on a sandbank, or, worse still, on a sunken rock; thanks to the chart I had made as we came up, we were able to keep on all night till four o'clock next morning.

I have often asked myself what could have been the cause of the hostility shown us by the natives, especially from the Bagasso (Mbomo) upward. They are passionately fond of beads, and I gave them beads in quantities. We were most conciliatory the whole time until they killed our two men. I can only think of one possible reason: they must have taken us for Soudanese.

I had decided to push on my exploration as far as the falls of the Kissangi, but the hostility of the Yakomas made this an impossibility. The river was low; we should have had to look for a passage between the sandbanks and rocks, and perhaps had some work to do on shore, and that in the midst of tribes who were hunting us down. I had only twenty men on whose courage I could count, and but 600 cartridges. There was nothing for it but to retreat.

I will pass briefly over the difficulties that lay in the way of our downward course. The river had sunk six feet or more, and was a

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totally different one to that which we had steamed up. We were only going half-speed, and often with just enough steam on to steer, and the canoe constantly ahead taking soundings. Notwithstanding these precautions, we ran aground a dozen times, but thanks to the thickness of the hull of the *En Avant*, and the slow rate at which we were going, no serious accident occurred.

On the 13th February I reached Leopoldville once more, and there I learnt the death of Captain Vandevelde. The Governor-General begged me to take over the vacant commandership, and proceed to the Stanley Falls with the Captain's expedition. I executed these orders, and then returned to Europe.

Before I finish, let me show my appreciation of the services rendered me by my companions in my exploration by recalling their names: Lieutenant Lienart and Messrs. Schomberg and Hansen.

The foregoing paper was read in the absence of the author by Colonel Sir FRANCIS DE WINTON, who prefaced the reading by explaining that it contained an account of the journey of an officer of the Belgian Army, who had been employed by the Congo Free State. Captain Vangele's explorations had a special value, as they proved that the Welle and the Ubangi were one and the same river. The author of the paper could not be present to read it, because on the 4th of this month he started on his return to the Congo. The journey of which an account was given in the paper was over a very difficult series of navigations, and was undertaken with a very small force and only one small paddle-wheel steamer and a canoe. After Grenfell's journey in 1885 geographers were met with this problem, whether the great riverine system which Schweinfurth discovered in the Central Soudan was the same as that which Grenfell had traced to 4° N. Captain Vangele's journey had solved the problem, and proved that the Welle and the Mobangi were one and the same river.

After the paper,—

Mr. RAVENSTEIN said that it was a great pleasure to learn that some good work had been done by the employés of the Congo Free State. A great deal had at different times been said about the connection of the Mobangi and the Welle, but Captain Vangele's explorations had settled the question. When Grenfell first reached the great bend of the river he naturally jumped to the conclusion that it was the Welle of Schweinfurth, and the Belgian officer had practically proved that that was so, the distance between the two points visited respectively by Dr. Junker and Captain Vangele being only 60 or 70 miles. Schweinfurth described the region as extremely fertile, and stated that slave-traders from the Soudan met there, and one of the itineraries obtained by Dr. Barth described the same region as a very paradise of slave-dealers. The district was not at present very accessible, but with modern means of locomotion it would soon be easy to get there. Captain Vangele suggested that he was taken for a man-hunter who came from the north, but when a proper understanding was arrived at the natives would no doubt become friendly. If the Congo Free State exhibited a little more liberality in equipping their expeditions better work would be done. Lieutenant Coquilhat, one of the most intelligent of their explorers, who attended the British Association at Manchester, had on his journeys in Central Africa no barometers or thermometers, and could only record, by means of his watch, how many hours of rain there were each day.



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### Latest News of Stanley.

In answer to a question on this subject by Sir George Bowen,

Sir Francis de Winton stated that he would be very happy indeed to give some information as to what the Emin Relief Committee were doing, as well as the latest news of Stanley. They had never kept anything back from the public, but they had always endeavoured to confine themselves to actual facts, and to avoid countenancing any sensational rumours. Many rumours had been circulated about Stanley. He had been assassinated three or four times; but this the Committee did know, that he was at Urenia on the 17th August last, near to the spot where Major Barttelot was murdered. From there he sent a messenger down to Stanley Falls to Tippu Tib to announce his arrival, and to state that he would remain there for ten days, after which he would return to Wadelai. He asked Tippu Tib to accompany him, and said that the road was easy, that plenty of food could be obtained, and that Emin Pasha had large stores of ivory. A second messenger arrived at Stanley Falls with four letters from Stanley, but those had unfortunately been detained by the Belgian officials at Stanley Falls, and were expected to arrive home in about three weeks from the present time. In those letters it was hoped full intelligence would be given of what Mr. Stanley intended doing as regards his return journey. He did not think that the statements in the public press as to Lieutenant Baert's report had a shadow of foundation. Stanley had neither the men nor the money to go to Khartoum, and he (Sir Francis) had written to the Administrator of the Free State at Brussels, asking on what grounds Lieutenant Baert had made such statements, and stating that the Emin Relief Committee could only infer that Lieutenant Baert must have opened the letters that were sent down to Stanley Falls. What was known was that Stanley was going to leave on the 28th August, and that would take him back to Wadelai about November 17th. Then he would decide for himself whether he would come down by Unyoro to Lake Tanganyika or not. A large depôt with provisions and about twenty donkeys had been formed for him near the south shore of Victoria Nyanza, at his own request; but hearing of the troubles in Uganda, he might work his way to the eastward, and come out on the east side of Victoria Nyanza, following the track of Mr. Thomson to Mombasa. Probably he was now on his way down to the east coast, but the letters which it was hoped would be received in a fortnight or three weeks, would settle that point. At the same time, the Congo officials ought to have sent the letters down at the first opportunity, because a month might have been lost in sending relief to Stanley on his return journey.

A vote of thanks to Captain Vangele and Sir Francis De Winton concluded the meeting.

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## *The Congo, and the Ngala and Aruwimi Tributaries.*

By J. R. Werner.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, May 13th, 1889.)

Map, p. 404.

In April 1886, I was engaged by the Congo Free State to go out to Boma on the Lower Congo, and on arriving at that place, was despatched up country to a station called Bangala, which was to be my head-quarters, and where I arrived about the middle of August.

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Wm. Jno. Turner, F.R.G.S. Delt.

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