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THE STAIRS EXPEDITION TO KATANGALAND.*

By JOSEPH A. MOLONEY, L.R.C.P., Medical Officer to the Expedition.

In the spring of 1891 the Katanga Company, an international syndicate with headquarters at Brussels, signed a convention with the Congo State whereby it obtained certain preferential rights over the mines reported to be situated in the countries of Katanga and Urua, together with a third of the public domain, provided a valid occupation of these territories was effected within three years.

The work of the various expeditions of the Katanga Company has been already referred to in some little detail in these pages, and the full narrative of Captain Stairs' Expedition has been published by Dr. Moloney in his book 'With Stairs to Katanga.' The following is Dr. Moloney's address to the Society in a slightly condensed form.

The Katanga Company's expedition under the command of Captain Stairs landed at Bagamoyo on June 27th, 1891. Captain Bodson was second in command, the Marquis de Bonchamps was third, Dr. Moloney medical officer, and Thomas Robinson carpenter. The native caravan numbered three hundred and thirty-six. They marched through Mpwapwa, Tabora, the Ugunda and Ugalla countries, for some time in company with Captain Jacques' Anti-slavery Caravan, and on October 9th encamped at the French mission station, Karema, on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika, where, despite its advantageous position on the lake, no trace of German rule existed. From this point the journey assumed a new character, passing into scarcely-known territory, and must be described in Dr. Moloney's words.

There is a phenomenon connected with the lake which may well claim attention. From one of the Fathers we learnt the curious fact that the fort, which is now $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the water, formerly stood at its edge. The level, it appeared, has sunk owing to the breaking down of the bar at the mouth of the Lukugu, which river drains Tanganyika from its western side. This dam forms periodically from silted sand and vegetation, causing the lake to ascend until the pressure bursts through the accumulation, when a subsidence follows. The rise and fall covers in all probability some fifteen years, and the extreme difference of level must be over 18 feet. Captain Stairs discussed this question with a very intelligent native, some fifty-five years old, who told him twice within his experience had the waters sank and once had they risen. He anticipated that they would begin to mount again in two years' time. We also ascertained that a half-knot current sets along the western shore of Tanganyika towards the mouth of the river from the north and south.

* Abstract of paper read at the Royal Geographical Society, June 5th, 1893. Reference may be made to the map of the Katanga Company's territory, Vol. I., p. 288, and to the map of British Central Africa, p. 192.

The passage of Tanganyika was accomplished in most primitive *dhows*, and the winds proving contrary, much valuable time ran to waste.

On October 31st we started for the third and final stage of our pilgrimage. A steep climb brought us to the village of Manda, situated about 5 miles from Lake Tanganyika, and some 1000 feet above its level. We were thus in the midst of the mountains which border the western side of the lake with Mrumbi as their highest peak. On November 3rd we found ourselves at a height of 5000 feet near the village of Kaomba, situated among the Makololo mountains. There is little doubt that the rocks here are peculiarly rich in minerals, and may become a source of wealth to future generations of Europeans. At Kaomba itself iron exists in considerable quantities and in a very pure condition usually as red hæmatite. Hence the village is famed for its foundries, in which hoes, axes, and spear-heads are fashioned. These edifices are built with high conical tops and contain pits about 18 feet by 6 feet, and shallower at one end than the other. The furnace is made of clay and the blast is produced by some twenty bellows composed of two parallel wooden tubes fitting into one nozzle, which is smeared with clay to resist the fire. These pipes are fitted with sticks which are held in either hand and worked up and down like pistons. The smithies are open sheds with stone anvils and hammers, the last devoid of handles. There the smelted iron is made into implements, or into masses weighing from 2 lbs. to 2½ lbs., which are carried about for sale. These lumps resemble a very fat cigar in shape, and have a small rod projecting from either end. As for the implements, they appear rude enough to the European eye; at the same time they are admirably balanced, and with a Murungu axe a native will cut, or rather dig through a thick tree-trunk with great rapidity.

A half-caste slave-dealer, Makatuba by name, the factotum of a rich Zanzibar merchant, had passed through Murungu some weeks previously, and signs of his progress were to be seen on every side in the shape of burnt and deserted villages. In one week we saw no less than six in absolute ruins. The porters were much alarmed when on November 4th we passed within a few miles of the scoundrel's permanent camp, but fortunately he considered us too strong for attack.

On the 8th we crossed the Lufuko, a river some 30 yards wide and thigh-deep, with a current of 2½ miles an hour. This stream flows into Lake Tanganyika near Mpala. In the valley were trees of hard close-grained timber which would form excellent material for the construction of canoes. Some smaller trees were covered with a round fruit about the size of a plum, whose bitter skin enclosed four triangular kernels of a peculiarly sweet flavour. Here the mountains end, and with them Murungu, for the adjacent district, though assigned to Murungu in the maps, should really be called Kipemba. We crossed a low range of hills near the village of Makawele and arrived at the Ludifwa, a rapid

stream some 18 yards broad, which runs into the Lufunso and so into the Lualaba.

This country is very fine, and suitable alike to pasturage or agriculture. It is covered in parts with tropical forests in which the creepers and ferns reminded Captain Stairs of the Aruwimi uplands traversed by the Emin Relief Expedition. Some of the first marches were through swamps, and the vegetation consisted chiefly of dwarf bamboo, though the more open spaces were covered with herbage and flowers. But we soon entered upon an undulating prairie-land, in which the highlands could pasture any amount of cattle, while the valleys, with their thick beds of vegetable mould, would grow rice and the vegetables produced by the natives, such as manioc, maize, and matamah. Irrigation would be unnecessary, since the plateau is traversed by streams of clear water which, according to the natives, remain unexhausted in the dry season. From its altitude, some 4200 feet above the sea-level, it should be habitable by a European population. The rainy season is said to last five months.

Makatuba had visited this district also, and in consequence, for five days we did not pass a single inhabited village. On the 8th, however, we came across a retired colony which had escaped the scoundrel's raids. The people were a fine and intelligent-looking race, and though the men smeared their heads with a noxious concoction of red clay and grease, the women dressed their heads very becomingly with beads of various colours. They are great hunters, and organise large drives in which the game, which includes elephants, is urged towards some twenty pits dug in a pathway about a quarter of a mile long, let us say, by 20 feet wide.

On the 12th we descended upon the Lufunso, a tributary of the Lualaba. The current runs very fast and the water is waist-deep and 30 yards wide. A rope was thrown across, and the passage was effected without mishap. That night we encamped on the banks of the Lualaba in latitude $8^{\circ} 9' 44''$ S. and longitude $29^{\circ} 6' 45''$ E., and about 15 miles or two short marches north of Lake Moero. Here we remained until the 19th, so as to give our messengers time to reach Msiri with a letter from Captain Stairs. During this interval Captain Stairs succeeded in settling a long standing quarrel between Ngwena, a chief who dwells upon an island in the river, and his powerful neighbour Mpweto, who hails from the north of Lake Moero. After a most protracted *shauri* the dispute, which originated in the theft of a goat, was composed, and next day both potentates accepted the Belgian flag. We were able to ascertain some important facts about the Lualaba, partly by soundings, and partly from information acquired from two intelligent Arabs, Kafindo and Uturutu. The first impression, that of a volume of deep water, proved to be an entire misconception. The river is very wide, its breadth varying from half

a mile to a mile, but, though 30 feet deep in parts, sharp dentated rocks were to be found within a few feet of the surface. In fact, we were told that an experienced native could cross without getting wet above the waist. In no place did the Lualaba appear navigable except for canoes of the shallowest draught. We discovered a low cascade about 5 miles up-stream, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles further on the channel became impeded by numerous wooded islands, beyond which were rapids quite three quarters of a mile wide. The natives told us that only one opening was navigable except in January, and I may mention that the rise during the rainy season is very slight compared with most African rivers. This appears the more remarkable because in Kipemba and Murungu, which drains into the Lualaba, it rains for five months in the year, and so great is the downpour that the natives can only grow one harvest.

As to the subsequent course of the river we learnt from Kafindo that for seven long marches it tumbles northward in a succession of rapids varied by two considerable cataracts. This statement can easily be credited, when one remembers that at Ngwena's the stream was 2800 feet above the sea-level, and that at Nyangwe, where Commander Cameron crossed, it is only 2300 feet. The distance between the two places is about 400 miles, so that the drop must be over 13 inches to the mile. The Arabs reported that fifteen marches or some 120 miles to the north-north-west of Ngwena's the river joins Msiri's Lualaba, otherwise known as the Kamalundo, and that the united stream, yet five marches (40 miles) further on meets the Lukugu, flowing from Lake Tanganyika. This information has been confirmed by M. Delcommune's expedition. Having effected the passage of the Lualaba in our steel boats and some canoes supplied by Ngwena, we ascended a spur of the Urua Mountain 570 feet high. The topmost peaks rose some 850 feet above our heads, and were covered with trees. Great quantities of buffalo frequented the lower slopes, and a cow and her calf put the whole expedition to rout by an unexpected charge. On the 22nd and 23rd we marched along the Luvule, which river joins the Lualaba, between Ngwena's and Mpweto's. Thence we diverged into the valleys or oozes of which Livingstone speaks, and on one of them known as the plain of Chewella we had some excellent sport with buffalo and Vardon's antelope. I observe that on some of the Belgian maps the depression is coloured as if it were a lake; but though it becomes, as we had subsequent reason to know, a pestiferous swamp in winter, we walked in November upon smiling meadow-land.

The Luvule was crossed on November 27th at Kifambula's village, and we ascended a mountain range separating the eastern and western water-systems of the two Lualabas. Its altitude is some 4000 feet, and the Valley of Gera to the west has a rich black soil, in which sugar-cane and rice would flourish, as also the plain of Kissinga near the sources of

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the Luvule. We heard, however, that to the south-west there is little water to be found in the dry season. Keeping along the bottom of this trough, so to speak, we passed through scattered forest varied by rivers. The Mpango, Luiki, and Luizi are tributaries of the Luvua, which runs into the Lufira, which is a tributary of the Kamalundo or Western Lualaba. Away to the south-east lies the mighty plateau of Konde Rungo, rising some 2700 feet above the plains of the Luvua and Lufira, and stretching to lat. $11^{\circ} 20' S$.

The Luvua itself we traversed near Kifuntwe's by means of a wooden bridge, and two days afterwards (on December 9th) we struck the stream again at the point of its junction with the Lufira 2952 feet above the sea-level. This last is a river some 40 feet deep, about 45 yards wide, and with a current of 2 miles an hour. It has cut a channel about 30 feet below the surface of the plain, over which it describes the most capricious meanderings. We descended the red clay banks and put together the boats for crossing that day. This was our last passage, as we only marched along the banks of the Lukulwé, which joins the Lufira on its right bank. Like the main stream, it has dug a deep bed in the surrounding plain, and is quite 35 feet deep, and swarming with crocodiles.

As we drew near Msiri's it became evident that famine stared us in the face. Fortunately game abounded so that the porters were not absolutely destitute of food. Still on an occasion they went hungry for eight-and-forty hours, and in addition violent thunderstorms, accompanied by fearful gales of wind, used to put out the fires night after night. And yet the soil seemed fertile enough, while large fields, planted with Indian corn, mhoga, and viazi testified to the natives' industry. The scarcity was due to plundering by Msiri's warriors. Everywhere we were hailed as deliverers, and in no case did Captain Stairs encounter the smallest reluctance to accept the Congo flag. Many of the smaller villages were absolutely deserted, and even the important chief Kifambula had been compelled to shift his homestead.

On December 14th we encamped within a mile of Bunkeia, Msiri's capital. Our journey from Bagamoyo had taken five months and ten days, during which we had made one hundred and twenty marches averaging 9 miles each. This we believed to be a "record" performance in African travel; but the situation with which Captain Stairs had to deal can only be described as desperate. Clearly the empire which the Wanyamwesi adventurer had founded some thirty years before was fast crumbling to pieces. Msiri's authority was practically confined to the valley, some 14 miles square, in which Bunkeia stands, and the approaches to the capital were absolutely denuded of live stock, while the fields remained uncultivated.

Hence Captain Stairs had to make quick work; more especially as we were daily expecting the arrival of the South African Company's

Expedition under Mr. Joseph Thomson. At the same time he was hampered by the presence of three English missionaries, Messrs. Crauford, Lane, and Thompson, with whom it would have gone hard in case of hostilities. However, they were soon out of harm's way in the fort built by the Belgian officer, M. Legat, upon the Lifoi some 20 miles away. After two unfruitful palavers with Msiri, Captain Stairs took the law into his own hands and hoisted the Belgian flag upon the hill behind Bunkeia. The king, however, declined to make "blood brotherhood," and escaped by night to a large village called Munema, about 3 miles away. Captain Bodson and the Marquis de Bonchamps were despatched to take him prisoner, whereupon a fracas ensued in which Captain Bodson shot Msiri in self-defence, but was himself killed by one of the king's slaves. The natives fled, and the Zanzibaris promptly began to loot the place, though after some difficulty we restored order and effected a safe retreat. Next day Captain Stairs marched to a large deserted village about 2 miles to the south of Bunkeia and built a fort, without molestation from the inhabitants. Msiri's adopted son, Makanda Vanta, was recognised as his heir, and received as his portion the Bunkeia Valley, while his uncles Lukuku and Chikako were assigned small subchieftainships comprising their respective villages and the appurtenant fields. Then the Wasanga came in, and with them, Captain Stairs being very ill, I made fifteen treaties, and the Belgian authority was acknowledged within a radius of 50 miles from Bunkeia. From one of these chiefs, Mutwila by name, I learnt that a rich vein of gold was to be seen close to his village, about four days march to the south of Bunkeia.

On Christmas Day our porters were given a holiday, and after scouring the country-side, returned with the news that not a mouthful of food was to be obtained within a day's march. Accordingly the camp had to exist for the next three weeks upon leaves and grass, varied by fried locusts and ants. It should be remembered also that the rainy season was fairly upon us and that the rain descended in torrents for five or six hours a day. Hence, fever combined with hunger began to play havoc, and the men died at the rate of two per diem. In all we buried seventy-three, and with desertion the caravan was reduced from three hundred and sixty to two hundred. As for the Europeans, the Marquis de Bonchamps was very ill with fever, and both Captain Stairs and Robinson lay at death's door from hæmaturia and other complications. I alone kept on my legs, and an anxious time it was.

On January 24th, 1892, some Indian corn, which the natives had planted before Msiri drove them forth in the previous November, became ripe enough to be eaten, and therewith our prospects began to improve; also Captain Bia's caravan reached Bunkeia on the 30th.

After consulting with Captain Bia, Captain Stairs decided to hand

over the fort to the Belgians and to return to the coast through English territory. Accordingly we turned our backs upon the familiar *boma* on February 4th, and Lieutenant Franqui took over the station.

We pursued our old route as far as Kifambula's, but under very different circumstances. The rains had entirely altered the face of the country, and what had before been pleasant meadow-land was now a pestiferous and icy cold swamp, through which the porters had to wade while the burning sun beat upon their heads. In consequence the men, who had barely recovered from starvation, fell sick by the score, and some actually died from exposure. After straggling along the road in very disorderly fashion—for all the white men were down with fever—we left our former road on March 5th and made for Lake Moero across the Konde Rungo plateau. We hit the lake on the 15th near a large village owned by Chipula, Mpweto's brother, and crossed the Lualaba a short distance above its egress from Moero. The river, I may mention, runs due west for about 200 yards, then takes a sharp curve to the south-west, and must effect further bends before reaching Ngwena's, where it flows due north. Mr. Alfred Sharpe has described this part of Africa so recently and so well that I feel exempt from commenting upon its aspects, though we were unable to discover that the sheet of water which he terms the old Lake Moero was anything more than a swamp.

The journey from Tanganyika along the Stevenson Road to Nyasa and down the latter lake to the Shiré, and so, with the passage overland necessitated by the Murchison rapids, into the Zambesi, is familiar. On June 3rd we arrived at the Portuguese port of Vicenti, whose importance has departed with the silting up of the Qua-Qua mouth. There poor Captain Stairs was seized with an attack of hæmaturia in its gravest form, and, though we reached Chinde on the seaboard on June 4th, he expired there on the 9th. Throughout the march to the coast he had gradually been regaining strength, and by the time we reached Nyasa he was practically convalescent. Indeed he proposed, on reaching Zanzibar, to go at once to the assistance of Captain Jacques at Albertville or of Captain Lugard in Uganda. But the fever-belt did its work upon his enfeebled frame, and we buried him on the very day that the S.S. *Rouma* arrived to take us home. It was a sad end to an expedition which he had conducted with such a signal combination of courage and caution.

Before the reading of the paper, General STACHEY, who occupied the chair, said: The paper that will be read to you this evening describes the results of the expedition carried through the country at the head of the most southern affluents of the Congo, known as the Lualaba and Luapula, which lie between 7° and 11° N. lat., about 200 or 300 miles to the west of the southern extremity of Tanganyika. This country forms the south-east angle of the territories of the Congo Free State. The expedition was carried out in connection with the operations of the administration of that State. The country had already been