

UKEREWE ISLAND

IT IS THE BIGGEST IN VICTORIA NYANZA
AND IS BOSSSED BY AN AMERICAN.

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UKEREWE ISLAND, Lake Victoria—Away out here in the heart of East Africa, 100 miles below the equator, on the biggest island in Victoria Nyanza, I find an American acting as boss. He is the only white man on the island, and he has surrounded him something like 25,000 natives. He came out to Africa expecting to make a fortune in gold mining and ivory, but the mines did not pay and the elephants were scarce, and he settled down out here in the wilds. His business is that of a woodcutter, and he has a concession to furnish fuel for the lake steamers. Ukerewe is densely wooded, and this man has a big gang of blacks cutting down trees and carrying the wood to the shore. His home is a double hut away by itself, a half mile from the nearest village, and not far from the little wooden pier at which our steamer is lying. It is made of cane and thatch, and has only two rooms, with a passageway through the center. There are several other huts at the back which are occupied by his servants. The villages in which his men live are not far away. This man's name is Henry Seifert. He is about 30 years of age and is well dressed and good looking. He is very intelligent, but he seems to like his life out here among the savage people. He tells me he is paid so much for every hundred cubic feet of wood furnished, and that his job is a profitable one. He says that he has had but little trouble with the natives, and as I went about with him over the island I could see that they bowed down to him everywhere.

THE ISLAND OF UKEREWE.

The island of Ukerewe is the largest in Lake Victoria. The lake is spotted with islands. They run all around the shores, and there are several large archipelagos. One of these is the Buvuma islands, which fringe Napoleon gulf, out of which flows the great river Nile. Another is the Sesse group at the north-west, lying south of Entebbe and running south and almost to German East Africa, and a third is this Ukerewe group away down at the southeast in the German territory.

I came here from Mwanza, the chief fortified station of the German government in this part of the world, and our steamer coasted the island for a long distance before we landed. Ukerewe is more tropical than any other part of the lake. The island is fringed with banana plantations and dense forests cover its hills. There are many villages along the shores, and I am told that the population all told is about 25,000. The people are blacks, who go almost naked. They wear nothing but goatskins on bits of bark cloth, which are tied over their shoulders and around the waist. Some have a heart-shaped apron of gaskin in front and behind, and others wear aprons of whole skins which fall to the knees. The men sometimes pull such aprons around behind them when they sit so that they serve as cushion.

Mr. Seifert calls these natives the Wakerewe. As we went about together among them we were everywhere well treated. The people seemed quiet and they allowed me to go into their huts and make photographs. They have pronounced negro features, with thick lips and flat noses. Their hair is woolly here it is left to grow, but in most places a part of the head is shaved close. Some of the men cut off all the wool excepting a lock on the crown, which they tie up in banana fibers so that it stands like a horn, straight up on the head. Others shave the head in spots. Only a few of the people have jewelry. They are too poor to buy the cost-

ly brass and iron wire which are so much worn on the mainland. I saw one woman who had on an ivory bracelet, and a man who wore an anklet composed of a section of ivory tusk hollowed out. Others had bits of bones and glass beads tied to their hair. Nearly all were smeared over with grease, and such as had hair had so covered it with oil that the smell was pronounced.

UKEREWE VILLAGES.

The villages are composed of rude huts made of cane and poles and covered with grass. They have doors at the front so low that one has to stoop to go in. Over some of the doors are iron bells, which are hung there so that if an evil spirit comes in it will bump its head against the bell and warn the owners and perhaps be scared away. The people are superstitious. They believe in devils of all kinds and witch doctors. They have little idols before which they pray and a part of their religion is a worship of snakes. There are many snakes on the island, but the natives will not kill them nor drive them out of their huts; and they are said to consider death by the bite of a snake a sure passport to heaven.

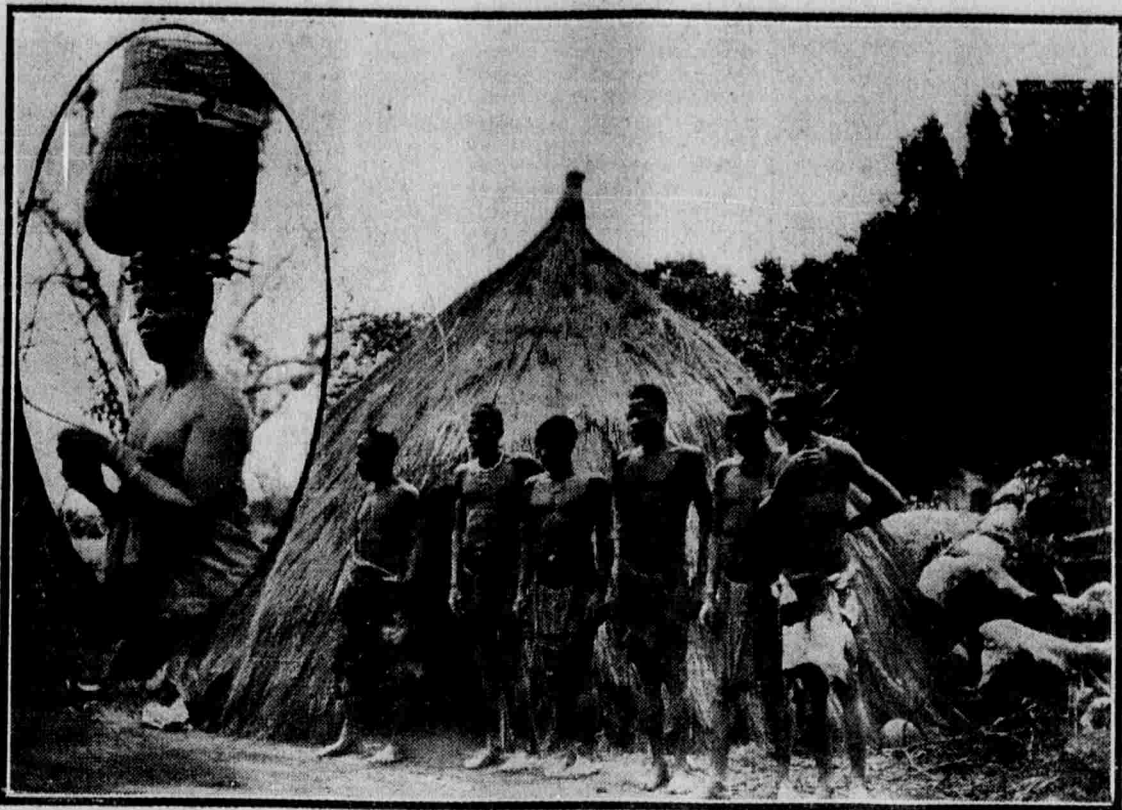
Ukerewe island has dense forests, which are just filled with monkeys. They chattered at us out of the branches as we walked through the woods, scattering away as we pointed our guns at them. There are also many hippopotamuses here. They live all along the shores and go from there back into the country. They are sometimes trapped in pitfalls and then harpooned by the natives. Mr. Seifert tells me that there is a herd of 11 elephants in this part of the island, but that the German government has made it a penalty to shoot them and they are not molested.

THE BUVUMA ISLANDS.

I wish I could show you some of these islands about which I have been traveling for the last few months. Kavirondo gulf is separated from the lake by a fringe of islands, and it was at these we stopped on our way out from Port Florence. In going to Ripon Falls and the source of the Nile we passed through the Buvuma Islands and we spent some time in the Sesse Archipelago as we sailed southward into German East Africa. The largest group of islands in Lake Victoria is the Sesse, which belongs to Great Britain, and next to them are the Buvuma Islands, also British, which lie at the north of the lake, making a series of big stepping stones almost across Napoleon gulf.

The Buvuma Islands are beautiful. At a distance they might be taken for some of the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence. Some of them are covered with grass, and others are high and well wooded. Buvuma Island, which is the chief of the group, is shaped like an octopus. It has a center about 2,000 feet high, and from this great green tentacles branch out into the sea. It is not unlike the Island of Celebes in shape. This island is fertile, and it has a large population. Its people live in thatched huts each of which ends in a steeply bound around with grass. The shores are covered with banana plantations, and the houses shine like silver out of the green. The Buvuma natives are much like the Basutos, who live on the mainland about the source of the Nile not

Queer People Who Dress in Goatskins and Use Iron Bells To Keep Off the Devil—The Goddess Mukasa of the Sesse Islands and Gugu Her High Priest—Some Queer Customs of the Buvumas—How the Dead are Eaten on Lake Tanganyika—A Look At Dead Man's Island in German East Africa—Queer Burial Customs of the Baganda and the Basukuma—Bodies are Wrapped in Cowskin and Buried in Cattle Yards.



ON UKEREWE ISLAND.

Photographed for the "News" by Frank G. Carpenter.

far away. They dress in bark cloth, and the women often wear only fringes of banana leaves which are tied to a cord about the waist. The men buy their wives with cattle, and every man has as many wives as he can afford. When a man dies his wives become the property of his sons. The only exception is the real mother, who is never given to her own son, but often to an uncle or the father's brother.

The women are little more than the servants of their husbands, as is the case all around this great lake. The men are considered superior beings. A girl may not sit on a chair or a stool, and if there is anything of that kind in the hut it is monopolized by the male members of the family, the girls using the ground.

AMONG THE SESSE ISLANDERS.

The Sesse Islanders are off the shore of Uganda, the largest of them being only three miles from the mainland. They are governed by the king of Uganda, and have a representation in the lukiko, or council of chiefs, at Mengo. The principal chief gets \$1,000 a year

from the British government.

These islands are the largest and best in all Lake Victoria. There are 62 of them, of which 42 are inhabited. In the past they have had a large population, but within two or three years the sleeping sickness has broken out there and thousands have died. There is a large hospital on the island, and this, for the greater part of last year, was under the control of Dr. Koch, the famous German diphtheria specialist, who came out here to study the sleeping sickness. At present the Sesse group has some good-sized settlements. The natives are farmers, and they raise bananas, corn, potatoes and tobacco. Coffee grows wild, and it is said to be good.

The Sesse Islanders are much like the Baganda. Both sexes dress in bark cloth and the women wrap bark blankets around their bodies under their arms, leaving the shoulders and upper breast bare. Only the babies are allowed to go naked. These people are good fishermen, and they have well made canoes. They manufacture them from trees of soft wood, cutting the logs

into boards and then tying the boards together with leather thongs and calking them. Some such boats will hold one hundred men. In olden times, it is said, that certain kings of the Sesse group had as many as 400 canoes.

Speaking of the missionaries, the Sesse Islanders are to a large extent now Christians. In the past their country was a seat of heathenism, and the home of the famed goddess, Mukasa, who ruled all Victoria Nyanza. This goddess had a temple on the island of Buvumba. Her priests were supposed to own the island, and the descendants of one of them named Gugu, is now its proprietor. Gugu has 3,500 acres of land, and is rich in bananas.

The kings of Uganda formerly sent

sacrifices to Mukasa. They contributed flocks of sheep and goats, and that in such numbers that when the royal sacrifices were made the blood ran in streams from the gates of the temple down into the lake. Mukasa, the grandfather of the present king of Uganda, once sent 100 slaves, 100 women, 100 cows and 100 goats at one time to this goddess.

THEY EAT DEAD MEN.

It is on the Sesse Islands that the Secret Society of the Bachichi, who have the custom of eating dead human beings, is believed to have its head, and at present all who die there are watched by their relatives for eight days to prevent their being so consumed. A similar custom exists in Uganda, and also along the upper shores of Lake Tanganyika. I met a German trader during my stay at Mwanza who had just returned after a long march from Tanganyika. During this trip he went from Ujiji, at the center of the lake, along the eastern shore to the top and spent some time with the natives. He tells me that the people of the different villages there are closely related, and that when a man dies his family at once sends word to their relatives of the neighboring villages to come and take possession of the body. They do so and then prepare a feast of which the dead body is the chief resistance. The body is cut up and roasted over a fire or boiled with bananas in an earthen pot. No one of the village to which the man belongs is allowed to join in the horrible feast, and the family of the dead are not allowed to be present. Such bodies are taken away in the daytime, soon after death, and the procession carrying them is one of four men who use a sack for the purpose.

These people are called the Manyema, and until recently they have accompanied the burial of their chiefs with human sacrifices, 10 living women being buried in each grave. The legs of the women were broken at the knees and their arms at the elbows, and they were then laid flat in the grave with the dead body of the chief on top of them. After this ten live men whose arms and legs were broken in the same way were placed over the top of the chief, and the grave was then filled up. My authority for this last statement is J. F. Cunningham, a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society of London, who for some years was one of the chief British employees in this part of Africa. My German friend told me that the officials about Lake Tanganyika have been trying to stop the practice of eating the dead, but that the natives are superstitious in regard to it, and that it still goes on.

THE ISLAND OF THE DEAD.

It was shortly after leaving the Sesse Islands that our ship coasted the shores of the Island of the Dead, which lies almost opposite the German military station of Entebbe. It is a little rocky mass, covering but a few acres, which rises out of the lake almost straight upward for several hundred feet. There is a bluff at one end, and in this there are caves which the natives from the mainland use as their burial vaults. They bring the bodies over in canoes and lay them away in the caves to rest.

Further back in the country the Basutos, as these people are called, have public cemeteries in which they bury their chiefs in an odd way. As to the ordinary people, when they die away, they are wrapped in bark cloth and are placed in deep graves, after which a tree is planted over each to mark his resting place. The chiefs are buried

sitting or standing, in holes in the ground. The body is so placed that when the earth has been thrown back the head still remains above the surface, the man being buried up to the neck, as it were. Sometimes an earthenware pot is placed over the head to protect it, but usually there is no covering of any kind. Sentinels are set to watch the grave night and day for a period of two months. A brother of the dead man comes to the grave once every day to see that the watch is properly kept, and that the head does not suffer from the attacks of birds, wild beasts, or even of the domestic animals belonging to the village. At the end of the watching the head is buried and a new chief is elected.

THE GRAVES OF THE BAGANDA.

I saw graves everywhere during my travels in Uganda. The people bury the dead in their gardens, and a common place of burial is at the corner or in front of the hut. Sometimes a house is built for the mourners, outside the family of the deceased. The mourning usually lasts a month and at the end of that time all disperse and go to their homes.

Graves of this kind are usually in the banana bushes and they are often covered with dried grass or banana fibers. The corpse is washed with banana pulp squeezed from the stem of the plant and is wrapped up in bark cloth. The Buvuma Islanders bury their dead in much the same way, and they also erect shelters over them. These are built in the shape of a house, and are usually made of banana leaves. The bodies are removed from time to time when in need of repairs. The graves are often marked by planting trees over them.

The Basukumas, among whom I traveled about the lower part of Lake Victoria, bury their dead in cattle hides. The body is wrapped up in the skin of an animal, just killed, and the grave is dug right in the center of the cowyard. The poor men, who have no cattle, and women and boys are often buried in holes in the ground, and the grave is time the meat of the slaughtered beast is roasted and eaten at the wake; and the funeral, if that of a big man, ends in all grovelling drunk over banana beer, which they suck through straws from their gourd stems.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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