

# ON VICTORIA NYANZA

Queer Features of Life and Travel on  
The Greatest of the African Lakes.

**How Lake Victoria Outranks Lake Superior—It is the Biggest Fresh-Water Body of the World—Where It Is and What It Is—Now Navigated by Steamers.**

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**O**N LAKE VICTORIA—Get out your straw hats and pith helmets, pack up your white clothing and thin underwear, and fly with me to the heart of the black continent for a trip over the biggest fresh-water lake of the world. We are on the little steamship Sybil far out in Victoria Nyanza, with the mainland nowhere in sight. The blue waters of the lake extend out on all sides of us, as far as our eyes can reach, and there are only islands in view. Some of the islands are high and rocky. Others are bordered with swamps and beds of papyrus, filled with strange birds and with huge black hippopotami, whose bobbing heads may be frequently seen as they swim about near the shore.

## IN KAVIRONDO GULF.

How delightful it is! We are right on the equator, but the air is as cool as Ohio in June or as our great lakes in midsummer, save that the invigorating breeze of those regions is absent. When we took ship at Port Florence the natives were going stark naked, and our boat was loaded by a gang of blacks clad only in breechcloths, and that out of respect to the passengers. The Uganda railway brought us right down to the lake, and naked porters carried our luggage on board. We remember how the blacks sang as they worked, and how beautifully we could see every play of their muscles as they carried the freight to the ship.

We were all afternoon coasting the Gulf of Kavirondo before we entered the lake proper, and our way was in and out of volcanic hills for a distance of 45 miles. The gulf is over 40 miles long, and 14 miles wide, and it is lined with great hills all the way. Some of the peaks rise to 10,000 feet, and are volcanic. This is especially so at the south. At the north the country is lower, and its hills are spotted with straw villages.

The gulf has many islands. It narrows as it goes inland, and it is also narrow at the entrance, where there are islands of curious shape forming a great chain which seems to shut out the lake. Our first night was spent in front of Lusanga Island, which is about six hours from Port Florence, it being unsafe to

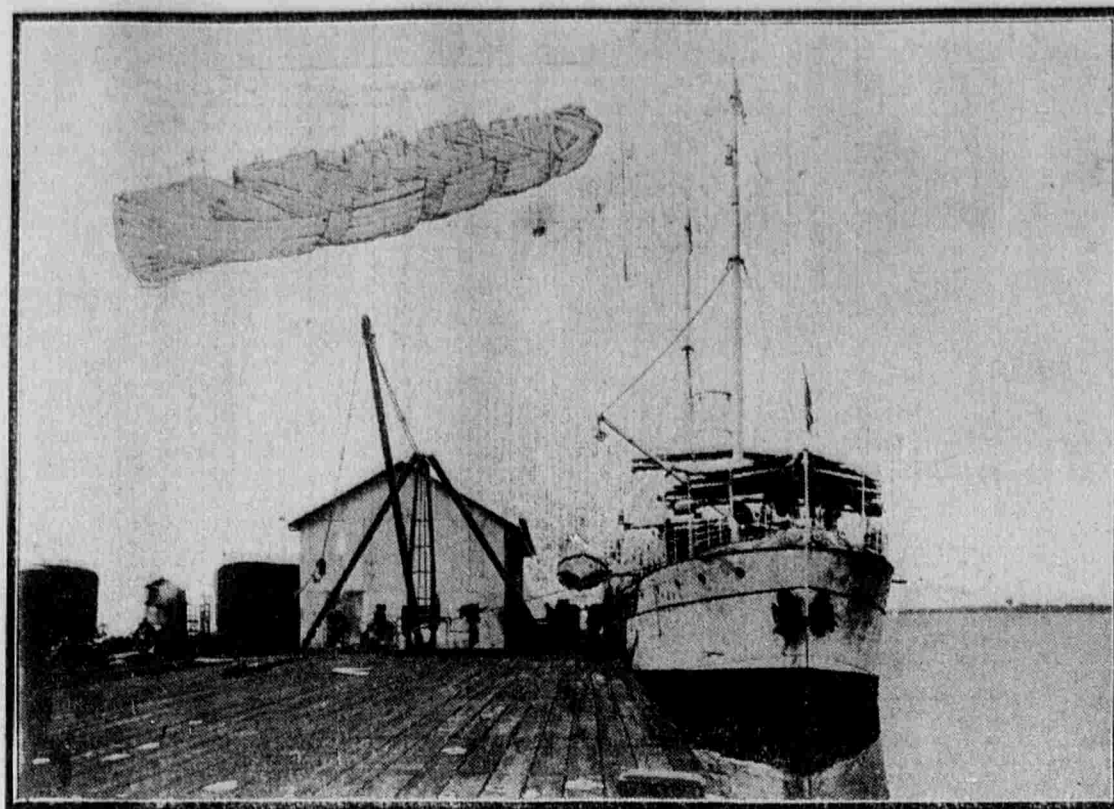
travel in many parts of these little known waters by night.

## VICTORIA NYANZA.

But before I go farther, let me tell you something about this mighty African lake. Sitting at home, in far-off America, with the snow in the air and all the surroundings of modern civilization about you, it is hard to realize just where and just what it is. The flat maps give one but little idea of the actual conditions. Lake Victoria lies in the heart of east-central Africa. Along the line of the equator, on which we now are, it is 700 miles, or about as far as from New York to Toledo, to the Indian ocean. Going westward along the same line it is over twice as far to the Atlantic. It is only a few miles to the north of us that the Nile flows out on its way down to the Mediterranean sea, and by its windings the distance is almost 4,000 miles. It is over 2,500 miles in a straight line south-east to the Cape of Good Hope and just 534 miles by the ganda railway to Mombasa, where I entered this part of Africa. I am only a few hundred miles from the headwaters of the Congo and from the southern shores of Lake Victoria I could reach Lake Tanganyika by a march of less than 200 miles, and midway on that lake get into a branch of the Congo and float down to the sea.

## BIGGER THAN LAKE SUPERIOR.

I have traveled over most of the great lakes of the world. I know those of our own country well and likewise those of Europe and South America. I have crossed Lake Titicaca, which lies two and one-half miles above the sea on the top of the Andes, and have seen the Dead sea, which is a quarter of a mile below the level of the ocean, on the edge of the Holy Land. Omitting the Caspian sea, Victoria Nyanza is the biggest lake of the world. It is the largest body of fresh water on earth, outranking Lake Superior by about 1,000 square miles. If you could pick it up and spread it over the United States, it would cover the whole of South Carolina, or dropping it into New England it would drown the states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island and Connecticut. It is three-fourths the size of other lakes, Kentucky, Virginia or Ohio and is more than half as large as all of our great lakes combined. It is three times as big as Lake Erie, and if one could



THE "SYBIL" AT WHARF, PORT FLORENCE.

Section Boat in Upper Corner is One Used by Stanley in Navigating Lake Victoria.

out Lake Erie and Lake Huron into one body they would cover about the same surface. This lake is twice as big as Tanganyika, although it is only half as long, and it has three times the area of Lake Chad, which lies away off to the northwest, above the French Congo, on the southern edge of the Sahara. Lake Victoria is almost quadrilateral in shape. Tanganyika is a long, narrow trough between high hills. Nyassa is long and narrow, and so are Lake Rudolf and Albert Nyanza at the north. Victoria Nyanza is more like our own Lake Superior than any of the other great bodies of fresh water. It lies in the highlands, and might be said to be on the roof of the African continent, as Superior is on the eastern roof of the North American continent. Lake Victoria is, however, more than six times as high up in the air as Lake Superior and more than seven times as high as Huron or Michigan. It is about 4,000 feet above the sea, and is within 500 feet of the altitude of the Great Salt Lake.

As to the depth of the lake, its bottom has not been carefully surveyed, but there are places which measure over 600 feet. This is about three times the depth of Lake Erie, but not nearly so deep as Lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan. This lake has a mighty volume of water, and its surface rises 49 or 50 inches during some years. The volume is so great that a dam might be placed at the source of the Nile and water for irrigation for the whole of the world could be obtained from it, which are now undreamed of. As to this matter, however, I will write in the future.

## IN BLACK AFRICA.

Until within the past few years this region was one of the blackest parts of the African continent. Slavery was common everywhere and cannibalism rife. No one knew there was a lake here at all until 1858, when Speke discovered the southern shores; and we had no idea of its extent until our own Henry M. Stanley went around the lake in 1875. As it is now, about the only inhabitants are these queer tribes of African natives, who in certain regions are still wearing with one another. I have described the naked Kavirondo and some of their queer customs. North of Victoria Nyanza are natives who are as far different from them as we Americans are different from the Japanese or Chinese. On the south are other tribes with other strange customs, and the whole lake is surrounded by a dozen or more different peoples, each differing from all the others in appearance and in their various grades of civilization.

## NAVIGATING LAKE VICTORIA.

No European boat had ever been seen on this lake until Stanley came, and he was told that the lake was so large that it would take several years to go around it. Before that the boats were such as no modern man could use. They consist of boards sewed together with fiber of the raffia palm, and can only be kept from sinking by industrious baling. I saw many of them at Port Florence, and they are used more or less all around the lake. The average boat is 25 or more feet long, three feet wide and two feet deep. It is made without nails or any iron whatsoever and is seldom fitted with sails. It is easily capsized in a storm, at which time the boatmen often jump

outside and hold on to the rim of the boat to keep from sinking until the storm is over. Stanley made a big rowboat, which he called the Lady Alice. He started at Speke gulf and by using a sail gradually made his way around, covering many of the points at which I shall call farther on in these journeys. At present there are four little steamers, belonging to the British, on Lake Victoria. One of these is the Sir William McKinnon, which was brought up from the ocean in pieces before the Uganda railway was built and here put together. It is still in commission and is used by the British officials as a sort of a dispatch boat. The next two steamers are the Sybil and Winifred, each of about 600 tons, and the other is the Sir Clement Hill, which has 800 tons and which was launched last year. The Sybil and Winifred are sister ships. They make regular trips around the lake, in connection with the Uganda railway, the voyage from port to port requiring about 10 days. It is upon the Sybil that I am writing this letter.

## A MID-AFRICAN STEAMER.

I wish I could show you this little African steamer. If it could be taken up and transported to one of our American rivers, or dropped down upon Lake Huron or Erie, it would not seem much out of place; for the ship is just about the same as some used on our lakes. The differences lie in the people and the management. This Sybil moves by a screw. It has a smokestack in the center and two masts before and behind with a lifeboat on deck. It has about a dozen cabins with a dark little dining saloon in the rear. The cabins are lighted by electricity and each has an electric fan. Back of the dining saloon is a ledge up under the port holes where the second class passengers sleep. The top deck has a double awning of canvas to protect us from the tropical sun, and at midday we are advised to keep our hats on while sitting under it. The sun's rays are strong in this altitude and one must protect his head even when indoors if the roof is not thick.

As to first-class passengers we have only about half a dozen on the Sybil, and they and the English officers are the only Europeans. For the sailors are half-naked natives, who get wages of about 10 cents a day, and the steward and cooks are Hindoos who are paid a little more. The passengers are two British officials on their way to serve in interior Uganda, a German surgeon who is bound for Mwanza in the Kaiser's territories on the south of the lake, a Kongo trader who has about a cartload of beads and brass wire with him to buy ivory and rubber, and a missionary who is going to Kampala, and who will get off at Entebbe. In addition to these are myself and son, who will leave the boat at Entebbe for Uganda.

We have also on board a half dozen native soldiers and one of these is always guarding the mail. The bags were carried, under guard, on to the boat at Port Florence, and a soldier with a gun in hand stands beside them day and night throughout the voyage.

## A COMING TOURIST CENTER.

The prospect is that Lake Victoria will some day be as well known to the globe-traveler as the great lakes of America. The expense of coming here is too high for the ordinary traveler, but

the man who can pay the bills can live on these boats almost as comfortably as at home. I mean as far as eating and drinking are concerned, and as respects the climate. There is much to be desired in the matter of freedom from cockroaches, rats and other pests. I have never seen so many and such wild animals of the roach kind before. My cabin has some as large as mice and it seems to me that they come out in the daytime and look at one while they sharpen their teeth in order to trouble him the better at night. The roaches run through the dining rooms, and when I put my foot on one, as I do whenever it is possible, it leaves a greasy spot as large as my hand on the floor.

Another infernal insect is the figger. I don't know where I got mine, whether on shore or on ship, but my native boy has extracted the eggs of three of these pests from under my toes during the voyage. The figger is a little insect which bores a hole in one's flesh, choosing the foot, and usually places under the toenails. It lays its eggs there in the form of a little sack about as big as a pearl shirt button, and this sack must be cut out at once. If not and the eggs hatch, they turn into worms which eat about through the flesh and often cause the loss of the toe. The insect is supposed to have originally come from South America. It has already traveled over this half of Africa and it is especially bad about Lake Victoria.

## WATERSPOUTS OF FLIES.

As to mosquitoes, we have none here on the lake and practically no flies except the common house fly. The shores are infested with the tsetse fly, whose bite causes the sleeping sickness; but this lives only in the swamps and cannot stand the light of the sun. There are plenty of mosquitoes of all kinds on land, and there are swarms of midges in many parts of the lake. I saw such a swarm this morning. It looked like a waterspout rising from the surface. I thought it was one, and was surprised when the captain told me that it was composed of myriads of these midges, which are born in the water and fly up at one time into the air. They sweep over the lake in great numbers, raining down upon the boats as though they were so much black pepper. They come in such quantities that the men sweep them up with brooms and throw them overboard. They even get into the cabins and cover the dining tables. This is so when the ports are covered with netting and when every open space is apparently protected. These flies are perfectly harmless, and they do not live more than a day.

## WHAT ONE EATS ON LAKE VICTORIA.

As to the other matters, as I have said, the accommodations on the boats are good. We have four or five meals a day, and the Hindoos cook well. This morning, for instance, I was awakened by my black boy at 7, who brought me a cup of tea and a cracker. At 8:30 the breakfast bell rang and I went into the saloon for a substantial meal of an orange, some fried herring, bacon and eggs, with marmalade and toast at the end. The coffee served was grown about the lake and was poorly made, but the tea, which I next ordered, was good. At 1 o'clock we had a lunch of pea soup, boiled tongue, roast mutton and chicken

**Cockroaches as Big as Mice and Waterspouts of Flies—The Jigger and His Eggs—The Islands of the Lake—A Look at Shores of Uganda and Mounds of Ants.**

curry with rice, ending up with a dessert of California canned apricots and native fruits. We shall have dinner at 8 o'clock tonight, and our table will be lighted by electricity. The meat will be about the same as the lunch, and we shall probably drink with it a glass or so of ginger ale, while our English friends will wash their throats with whisky and soda or wine or beer, as they order. The cost of such meals is \$1.65 a day, with extra charges for drinks. I have before me the wine list and give a few of the prices. A full peg of whisky and soda costs 8 annas, or about 25 cents, while a half-peg costs 15 cents. Brandy may be had at the same price. The word "peg" for "drinks" is used here on all bills of fare. This is common throughout India, and it arises from an old saying that every drink of intoxicating liquors one takes is a "peg" in his coffin.

If you want a man to take a drink with you ask him to come and have a peg, and there are certain hours of the day which are known as "peg times" or simply "pegs."

## THE ISLANDS OF LAKE VICTORIA.

As I write we are coming near land. During a great part of today we have been out of sight of anything but islands. Victoria Nyanza is 225 miles wide and 275 miles long, and there are places where one can travel for a hundred miles or so and not see land. Here in the north the shores are bordered with beautiful islands, some of which are wooded. Others have grassy hills along the shores, with high lands behind them. Some regions make one think of the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence, and many of the islands would not be out of place if they were off the shores of Ireland or in the English channel. These places have a settled look, and at a distance the country appears just like ours, save that it lacks houses and barns and has thatched villages instead.

## THE SHORES OF UGANDA.

We are now nearing the shores of Uganda. The scenes from the ship are more like those of a settled civilized territory than the heart of the black

continent. The landscape reminds of that along our great lakes. Much of the ground is cleared and there are clumps of dark green woods here and there. In one place there is what seems to be a series of fields where the crops are corn. I bet upon the wheat or corn has just been harvested. These shocks dot the landscape as regularly as though they were many shocks of grain, and as we went on I had a discussion with a fellow traveler as to whether they might be wheat or corn. I bet upon the wheat, and my friend bet upon corn. We asked the question to the captain, who brought out his glass and showed us that the really mounds of yellow clay, the mounds of white ants.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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## THE GAME IN TIN CAN

At a recent dinner the conversation turned to card sharps, and Eben D. Dan of Boston said:

"A one-eyed man was suspected of cheating in a poker game in the city of Tin Can. He played on and on, and the chips were stacked so high on the table before him as to nearly to his eyes from view. Finally he won a huge pot. His one eye gleamed as he looked in three bushels of blue chips, and the sudden silence a tell, lean player rose."

"The tall, lean player took his revolver from his holster, and juggling carelessly, he said:

"Gents, there's cheating 'goin' on here. I ain't the kind of gent to name names nor to make no personal allusion, but if this cheatin' ain't stopped I'll shut his other eye out, an' then he'll be blind."—[Washington Star.]

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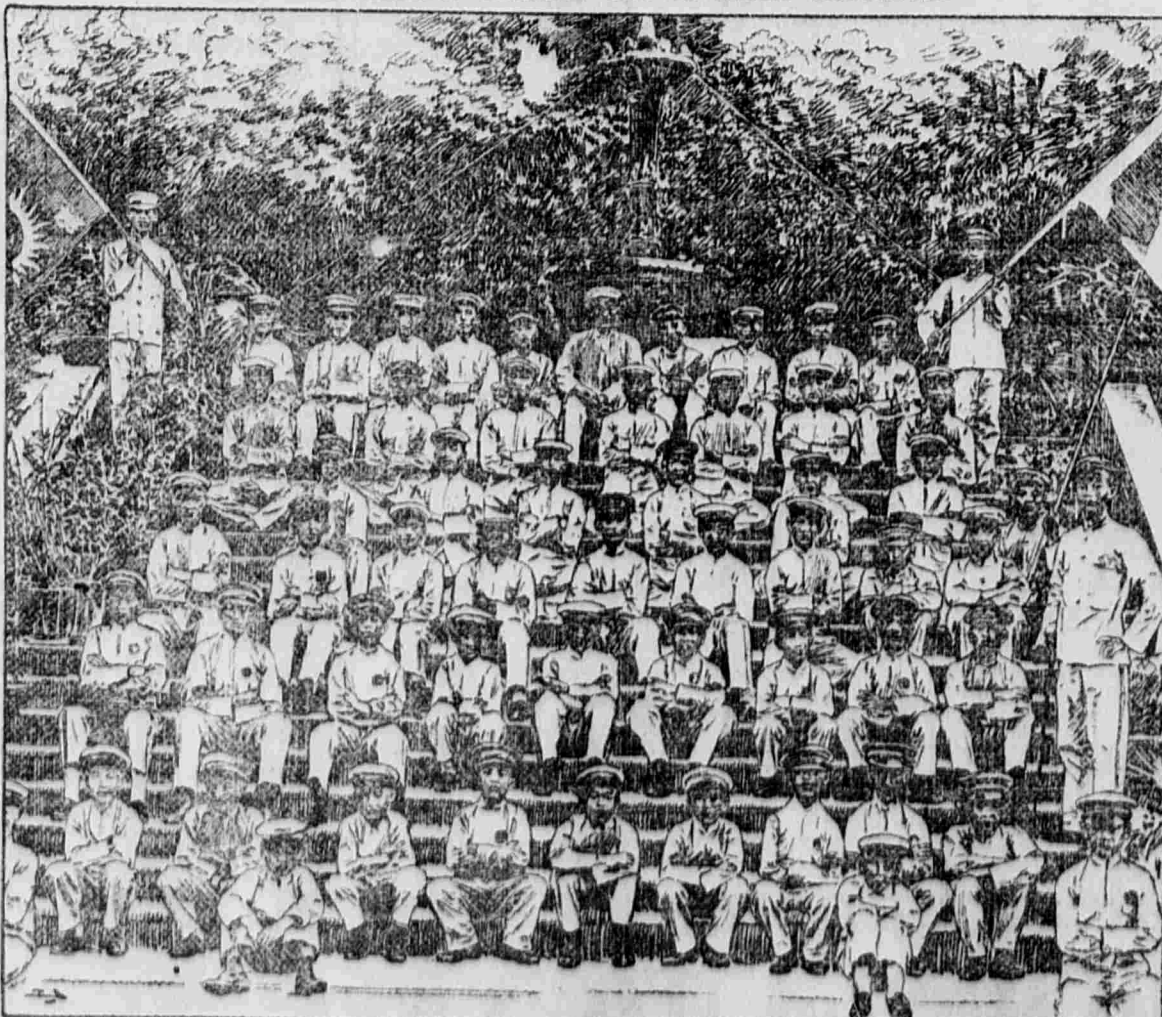
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