

AN ODD TRIBE OF SAVAGES

The Men Go Naked and the Women Have Only a Tassel Tied at the Back of Their Waists—What Young Brides Cost—Old Maids at Reduced Prices—A Look at the Villages Where the Goats Sleep With the People—The Towns of the Dead—A Rich Country Farmed by Natives, Which May Some Day Be One Vast Cotton Plantation—Port Florence the Metropolis of Lake Victoria



"THE KAVIRODO MEN GO NAKED EXCEPT FOR LITTLE APRONS OF DEERSKIN."

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

PORT FLORENCE, March 2.—Unfurl your fans and take out your kerchiefs to hide your blushes. We are about to have a stroll among the Kavirodo, who inhabit the eastern shores of Lake Victoria on the western edge of British East Africa. These people are all more or less naked, and some of the sights we dare not describe. We have our cameras with us, but Postmaster General Meyer will not allow our films to go through the mails, and no newspaper would publish all the pictures we take.

We are in the heart of the continent, so near the equator that a day's march to the north would enable us to straddle it, but so high above the sea that the weather is by no means unpleasant. We are on the wide gulf of Kavirodo and on the eastern edge of the greatest fresh water lake of the world. That island-studded sea in front of us is Victoria Nyanza; and over there at the northwest, less than a week's march on foot and less than two days by the small steamers which ply on the lake, is Napoleon gulf, out of which flows the great river Nile. With the glass you may see the hippopotamuses swimming near the shores of Kavirodo bay, and behind us are plains covered with pastures and spotted with droves of cattle, antelope, and gnu, and also the queerly thatched huts of the stark-naked natives.

The plains have a sparse growth of tropical trees, and looking over them we can catch sight of the hills which steadily rise to the Mau Escarpment, beyond which is the great Rift valley, and still farther east are the level highlands of British East Africa, the whole extending on and on to Mombasa, a distance as great as that between New York and Cleveland to the Indian ocean. It was at that point that I entered the continent, and I have been traveling for days in coming the 584 miles which lie between us and the ocean.

A FUTURE METROPOLIS.
Port Florence is the terminus of the Uganda railroad, and it is destined to be one of the great cities of East Central Africa. When the Cape to Cairo trunk line is completed, there will probably be a branch running from here through Uganda to connect with it, and all the commerce of the vast region about Lake Victoria will flow by steamer to this point and down the Uganda railway to the sea. As it is now, the trade is greatly increasing, and ivory, hides, grain and rubber from German East Africa, the Upper Congo and the lands to the north of the lake are shipped through here to the coast. The cars come right down to a wooden wharf which extends well out into the Kavirodo gulf. On the lake are several small steamers, which have been brought up here in pieces and put together, and they are now bringing in freight from all parts of this big inland sea.

As to Port Florence, itself, it is a little tin town with practically no accommodations for travelers. The only place to stop is a dak bungalow, or rest house, put up by the government, and the only stores are those of a few Hindu traders. The Europeans consist of some soldiers belonging to the king's African Rifles, of the government officials and of some employees of the railroad.

The officials put on great airs. Among the passengers who came in with me yesterday was a judge who will settle the disputes among these half-naked natives. He was met at the cars by some soldiers and a gang of convicts in chains. The latter had come to carry his baggage and other belongings to his tin house on the hill and each was dressed in a heavy iron collar with iron chains extending from it to his wrists and ankles. Nevertheless he was able to aid in lifting the boxes and in pushing them off on trucks, prodded up to his work all the while by the soldiers on guard.

A NAKED NATION.
But let us take our feet in our hands and tramp about through Port Florence. Later on we may march off into the country through which I traveled for about 20 miles on my way here. In Port Florence itself we may now and then see a man with a blanket wrapped around him, and the men frequently wear waist cloths behind or in front. Outside of this they are stark naked, many of them wearing absolutely nothing except plugs in their ears, strings of beads about their waists and rough wire rings on their wrists and ankles. All have skins of a dark chocolate brown. They have rather intelligent features, woolly hair and lips and noses like those of a negro. They belong to the Bantu race, and are among the best formed of the people of Africa. Some one has said that traveling through their country is like walking through piles of living statuary, and I have seen thousands of such statues on my way here.

KAVIRODO MEN.
Take these Kavirodo men who have gathered about me just now as I write. Their figures are ebony, and some of them look as though they might have been cut from black marble by the hand of a sculptor. Look at those three brown-bucks at my left. They are as straight as Michelangelo's famed statue of David, and about as well formed. See how firmly they stand on their black feet. Their heads are thrown back and two have burst out laughter as I turn my camera towards them. They are stark naked, with the exception of those bands of beads

has an apron of deerskin as big as a lady's pocket handkerchief fastened to his waistband behind. The aprons are tanned with the fur on, and are tied to the belts with deerskin straps. As far as decency goes they are of no value at all, and they seem to be used more for ornament than anything else.

Turning now to other men in the party about me, I see that almost all are similarly clad, although a few have skins thrown around their shoulders, and some have more jewelry. One or two wear pieces of toulon cloth and a very few have waist cloths. I have no trouble in getting the men to pose. They have gone without clothes from time immemorial, and think that the use of them is decidedly foolish.

WHERE THE WOMEN WEAR TAILS.
Let us turn our cameras now on the women. They are by no means so fine looking as the men. They are shorter and not so well formed. Still they are all there. The younger girls are clad in bead waist belts, and the older ones have each a tassel of fiber tied to a circle about the waist. This tassel is fastened just at the small of the back, and it hangs down behind. At a short distance it looks like a cow's tail. I am told that it is an indispensable article of dress for every married woman, and that it is improper for a stranger to touch it. Sir Harry Johnston, who governed these people, says that even a husband dares not touch this caudal appendage when worn by his wife, and if, by mistake, it is touched, a goat must be sacrificed or the woman will die from the insult.

Some of the native women here in Port Florence wear leggings of fiber about six inches long, extending down to the front. I can see dozens of them so clad all about me, and for a penny can get any of them to pose for my camera. The young girls have no clothes at all, and this is the custom throughout the country. Indeed, farther back in the interior the fringe aprons are removed, and both sexes are clad chiefly in jewelry of wire of various kinds.

The strangest thing about the nudity of these savages is that they are absolutely unconscious of any wrong in it. Such of them as have met me in the country by cutting up some American sheeting and giving each a piece. The girls looked at the cloths with interest, but evidently did not know what to do with them. Thereupon the white man took a strip and tied it about the waist of one of the party. Upon this the other girls wrapped their pieces about their waists, but a moment later they took them off, saying: "These are foreign customs and we do not want them."

QUEER MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.

During my stay in the Kavirodo country I have gone out among the villages and have seen the natives in their homes and at work. The land is thickly populated and the people are good natured and quiet. One can go anywhere without danger, and there is no trouble in getting photographs of whatever one wants.

I am surprised at the great number of married women. This rule as to married women wearing tails gives one a knowledge of the condition of every woman he meets. If the tail is on one knows the woman is married, and if not that she is single.

The Kavirodo girls marry very early. I am told they are often betrothed at the age of six years; but that in such case the girl stays with her parents for five or six years afterward. All marriages are matters of bargain and sale. The parents sell their girls for a price, and a good wife can be purchased for 40 hoes, 20 goats and a cow. In the early betrothals the suitor pays part of the fixed sum down and the rest in installments until all is paid. If the father refuses to give up the girl when the time comes for marriage, the payments having been made, the suitor organizes a band of his friends and captures her and carries her home. A man usually takes his wife from a different village from that in which he lives, and when he comes with his band to the bride's village her gentlemen friends often resist the invasion and fight the suitor's party with sticks. At such times the girl screams, but I am told she usually allows herself to be captured.

I am told that old maids are not popular and that the average Kavirodo girl is just as anxious to be married as are our maidens at home. Indeed, she is usually very anxious, that if she does not get a bid in the ordinary way she will pick out a man for herself and arrange to have herself offered to him at a reduced rate. I understand there are plenty of plump maidens now on the bazaar counter.

Another queer marriage custom here is as to one's wife's sister. The man who gets the first girl in a family is supposed to have the say as to all the younger ones as they come to marriageable age. Polygamy is common here and a man may thus have several sisters among his wives.

THEY ARE GOOD GIRLS.

One would suppose that these Kavirodo girls might be rather loose in their morals. I am told that they are not so, and that they rank much better in this regard than the maidens of Uganda, the province adjoining, nearly all of whom wear clothing. Virtue stands high here, and infractions of the laws regarding it are severely punished. This is less so now than in the past. Divorces are not common, but a man can divorce his wives if he will. One curious custom is that if a husband and wife have a quarrel, and she leaves the hut and he shuts the door after her, that action alone is considered equivalent to a divorce and the woman goes back to her own people at once.

KAVIRODO VILLAGES.

But let us go out into the country and look at some of the Kavirodo villages. I have visited many and have had no trouble whatever in going into the houses. There are many little settlements scattered over the plains between here and the hills, with footpaths running from village to village. The most of the settlements are small, a dozen huts or so forming a good-sized one. The houses have walls of mud with cone-shaped roofs, thatched with

grass. The doors are so low that one has to crawl into them; and many a house is not more than seven feet high from the mud floor to the top of the cone.

The roof usually extends out beyond the walls of the hut, covering a sort of veranda, a part of which is inclosed and a part open. There are poles outside which support the roof or the veranda.

The huts are usually built around an open space and are joined by fences of rough limbs and roots, so that each collection of huts forms a stockade in which the animals belonging to the village can be kept at night. Sometimes a village may be made of a number of such circles, each collection of huts belonging to one family. One of the huts is for the polygamous husband and one for each of his wives.

But let us go inside one of the houses and see how it looks. We stoop low as we enter. The door is of mud, with a few skins scattered over it. The skins are the sleeping places. Notice that little pen at the back, littered with dirt. That is where the goats sleep. The chickens are put in that little basket over there in the corner and are covered up until morning. There is practically no furniture except a few pots. The cooking is done in clay vessels over that fire in the center of the hut, and the food is served in small baskets, the men eating first and the women taking what is left.

Outside each hut, under the veranda, is the wall of the family, consisting of a great stone, with a hole chipped out of the center. The women grind Indian corn or sorghum seed in such mills, pounding or rubbing the grain with a second stone, just a little smaller than the hole. In the grinding bits of the stone come off and are mixed with the meal, often causing diseases or chronic indigestion.

TOWNS OF THE DEAD.

I understand some of the older Kavirodo villages are nothing but cemeteries, and that there are little towns each but of which contains one or more dead bodies and nothing else. The people are superstitious and want to be buried in the same places in which they have lived. When a chief dies his body is interred in the center of his hut. He is placed in the grave in a sitting posture, just deep enough to allow his head and neck to be above ground. The head is covered with an earthen pot, and this is left there until the ants get in and clean off the skull. After this the skull is buried close to the hut or within it and the skeleton is taken out and reburied on some hilltop or other sacred place.

Ordinary people are buried in their own huts lying on their right sides with legs doubled up under the chin. Such a hut is then left and forms a monument to the dead departed. I understand that where there have been epidemic diseases one may sometimes find a whole village of such huts occupied only by the dead. The buildings are left until they fall to pieces.

KAVIRODO CATTLE.

These Kavirodo are a stock-rearing people. I see their little flocks of sheep and goats everywhere, and frequently pass droves of humped cattle. The animals are fat. They graze everywhere

over the plains, being usually herded. Every drove has a flock of white birds about it. Some of the birds are on the ground, and some are perched on the backs of the cattle eating the insects and vermin they find there. They are the rhinoceros birds, which feed on the flies and other insects which attack those great beasts, and which by their stinging warn them of the approach of danger. The cattle are driven into the villages at night or into small inclosures outside. The women do the milking, but I am told they are not allowed to drink the milk, although they may mix it with flour into a soup.

RICH LANDS FARMED BY NATIVES.

This Kavirodo country is very rich. All over the plains from here to the mountains the trees have been cut off, but the ground is covered with luxuriant grass. Near the villages are little patches of cultivation. The natives raise peanuts, Indian corn and a millet like sorghum. I see them everywhere digging up the black soil. They are naked, and are almost as dark as the dirt they are hoeing.

In the vicinity of Lake Victoria and all along the Uganda railway large tracts of land have been taken up by Europeans, and some of this is being ditched and drained. I understand that it is the intention to turn the whole into one great cotton plantation, and see no reason why that should not be done. This country is right on the equator and the elevation, which is about 4,000 feet above the sea, makes it well fitted for cotton. It is too hot for white men to do steady out-of-door work, but the plantations could be handled by the native labor. The whites who take care of themselves are reasonably healthy.

This is especially so of those who live on the high lands, the lower places being malarious and productive of fever.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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