

THE CRYSTAL LAKE

, Dayrell Pole,

My father ~~was~~ ^{was} a born explorer and a famous hunter of big game. He spent years of his life wandering over the less known parts of Africa, and penetrated into many, many places where no white man had previously been seen. Like most men who have lived in close touch with nature, more especially tropical nature, my father was a very silent man; he ~~never~~ made ~~no~~ sound however rapidly he moved, and he never raised his voice. His eyes would glow with deep feeling, twinkle with humour, soften with love, or burn and blaze with anger - they were never veiled with fear. He seldom spoke of his travels, and he never put pen to paper unless ~~he was~~ ^{under} ~~compulsion~~ ^{compulsion} ~~to do so~~. When he did speak of his exploits we realised what we and the world had lost by his silence, for his experiences were soul-stirring, terrifying, beautiful & tragic, and he had the true dramatic gift of simplicity and of few words. From his earliest youth he had wandered ~~for~~, and it was only on his marriage, at two-and-thirty, that he became settled. He and my mother were devoted to one another, and their ^{joined} lives needed nothing beyond what each gave to each. Four years after their marriage, my mother died in giving birth to twin daughters. My father left us in good hands and well provided for, and having set all his affairs in order, he took his

sorrow with him and disappeared - he was swallowed up by Africa and for ten years he never once returned. After this period he came home, and subsequently he ~~would~~ return^{ed} to England every two or three years to spend six months or a year with us. Finally, on his last visit to England, when he was just over sixty and to all appearances hale and well, he died quite suddenly. Among his papers was a sealed packet labelled, "To be opened on my death and if possible published".

It fell to my lot to arrange all my father's papers. On the discovery of the packet, I broke the seals and set to work to decipher the contents. ^{Of unusual and intimate nature} ~~So amazing~~ were they, that I hesitated considerably before deciding to make them public; and it was only because of my dead father's wish, that I finally came to this decision. ~~I now merely reproduce the papers precisely as they were found - comment is superfluous.~~

The period referred to was sometime in the early eighties, about five years after my mother's death. My father states that at this date he had just returned from a protracted journey in the Interior. He was camping at the time about one hundred miles from the Coast, having traversed Africa from West to East almost on the line of the equator. It was his intention to travel Southwards over the waterless Kibo plains, and, if possible, ^(to) reach and climb the great snow mountains, ~~the~~ Kololo.

While waiting to start on this expedition - he had been obliged to send some of his men to the Coast to refit

~~partially~~, and to obtain what was necessary for an unknown climb in severe cold, he was joined by two Englishmen. One of these men, Thomas Scott, was a well-known hunter, and my father had previously met him; the other was an artist called Wilfred Burnet. Thomas Scott was a man of about my father's own age, possibly a little older; a hard, prosaic North countryman, and a splendid shot. Wilfred Burnet was about five-and-twenty years of age, a poet and an artist; slight, pale, and delicate-looking. ~~Now these two men, of such opposite tastes, came to be travelling together and in tropical Africa my father does not explain.~~ ^{my father} He merely stated the fact that he was joined by ^(these two men) them and that after camping together for a few weeks, they finally decided to journey to Mount Kololo in company. Why he consented to such an arrangement, he ~~also~~ does not say. He very much objected to human intrusion while he was exploring or hunting; and ~~that he should have~~ ^{his} accepted ^{ance} ^{of} two companions, ~~in this manner,~~ ^{to him,} one of whom was ~~an~~ absolutely unknown quantity, was a procedure entirely at variance with his habit.

~~I will now,~~ Having briefly indicated the situation, I append the papers ^{precisely} as they were found:

On a slip covering the packet my ^{had written} father writes:-

On the 2nd September 1882, Thomas Scott, Wilfred Burnet and I left Jivu for Mt. Kololo. Our caravan consisted

of our personal servants and gun-bearers, and two hundred porters, of whom twenty carried rifles in addition to their loads. It was entirely without precedent^t that I joined forces with other white men, and I find it impossible to give any adequate reason for my breaking through one of my most rigid rules. Thomas Scott I had known for years, but it was on account of Wilfred Burnet that I felt I must remain in close touch with the two men. He made a very strong appeal to me - almost an appeal for protection. He was exceptionally quiet and reserved, but possessed of a singularly vivid imagination. He saw and felt Africa too acutely, ~~he was snared and held by its beauties and cruelties until all else was wiped from his mind.~~ It was an extraordinary manifestation of possession; and finally Africa held him so firmly in her grip, so swayed his mind and actions, that she drove him to his death.

All who have lived much in tropical Africa know the danger of a too close inspection of ^{what lies beneath the surface} ~~her horrors~~ (the danger of allowing one's mind to become bound and distorted by her poisonous sway. One must remain master if one is to retain one's reason.

Wilfred Burnet was Scott's ward; he was quite alone in the world and had led a ^{companionless} ~~solitary~~ and lonely childhood. He was delicate physically and had never been to school. When



quite young he showed such a marked talent for painting, that it was decided to give him the best of training in this direction. He studied in Paris and Italy, and finally, having worked too hard, was ordered a year's complete rest. At this point Scott stepped in and suggested a trip to Africa; the doctors approved, and these two strange companions started together. ~~Until they met me,~~ ^{Nothing of any} moment had occurred ^{previous to our encounter)} and Scott was far too unobservant to notice the effect on ^{Burnet} Wilfred of his surroundings. The whole episode, from our first meeting to the climax of Wildred's ^{Burnet's} tragic death, made an indelible impression on me, ~~and did,~~ and ~~does~~ still, so moves me that I find it difficult to ~~spea~~ ~~or~~ write of it. I should not be doing so now, but that on Scott's death, ten years ago, he left me Wilfred's ^{Burnet's} diaries and begged me to publish what related to this particular journey. ~~I found~~ ^{It was} ~~it~~ quite impossible to bring myself to do this during my own lifetime, but I wish the papers to be published after I myself am dead.....

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Extracts from the Diary of Wilfred Burnet.

6th April. Rome.- Since I have been ill there is one thought from which I cannot get away. I am uneasy because

I seem to know that there is something I must do - something which no one else can accomplish, something which is compelling me towards itself. ~~What can it be?~~ That we each, however small and insignificant, have one task in life which we, alone and unaided, must perfect, I have always believed - our span of years lasts only until this task is fulfilled; Once our work is ended our earthly life ends too. What is calling me now? Surely we accomplish our work without knowing it - death alone indicates what the work was

10th April, Rome. My guardian has arrived. The Doctors seemed to think me worse, and he is anxious about me. He is delaying his shooting trip (to Africa) to be with me until I am better. I can see how disappointed he is, and how eager he is to be off to the life that he loves. What a curious life he leads - he has no human interests at all and no friends. He feels the affection for me/a large dog might feel for a mouse, but all I care for and think is a sealed book to him, and one he prefers keeping sealed. He is straight, clean, just, and fearless, but almost inhuman: self-sufficient, but quite incapable of helping others. An open air life, filled with the excitement of hunting and the bodily fatigue the hunting entails, these ^{is the sum of} ~~are~~ his pleasures, ~~his life~~ his all. He is kind but intolerant - refuses to listen to what others want or care for: it does not interest him, so he puts it from him.

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13th April, Rome. It has been decided that I am to go to Africa with my guardian. The doctors think the complete change of life and surroundings will be the best restorative. We are to go to the more healthy parts. My guardian has somewhat changed his plans to make things ^{suitable and} comfortable ~~and suitable~~ for me; but he will be able to shoot ~~so he will~~ ^{and} be happy. I shall ^{also} be happy, ~~too~~, for I feel that this visit to Africa is to solve my difficulties. Since my going has been decided, I am no longer uneasy; I feel convinced ~~that~~ Africa is, in some way, connected with what I have to do — at any rate in part. I feel myself moving, or being moved, in the right direction

1st June. We landed in Africa some days ago. What a dreamland of beauty, what glories of colour! As we slowly entered the wide harbour I felt the gates of some Arabian Night were ~~rolling~~ ^{spread} open. Before us ~~the~~ wonderful turquoise blue of the water, a blue crossed with purple shadows and fading to all shades of green, still, deep, and clear; the sands and rocks fathoms below us, distorted through the transparence of the waters into alarming nearness; the many-coloured, painted-looking fishes darting in all directions; the lazy weeds floating by in red and golden bands, slowly rising and falling on the gentle swell. ~~The~~ Steep banks on either side of us were draped with brilliant green.

^{their} emerald skirts meeting and becoming one with the blue waters. Delicate palms stood motionless ~~and massed~~ against the sky, every frond of their great leaves outlined in minutest detail. The sky itself has become different in this new world - it stretches in a faint, glowing blue from horizon to horizon, and as it dips to the sea is ~~stained~~ ^{tinged} with pale clear pink. One dread sound fills the air, a sound never absent on the coast of Africa - the dull boom of the breakers as they ~~lunge~~ ^{hurl} themselves in a blinding white semi-circle at the great ~~quiet~~ ^{quiet} ~~wicked~~ coral reef. Far out to sea, when the tide is low, these breakers show the outline of the reef, washing and surging round it, and finally, as the tide rises, covering it with a ~~monoc~~ ^{many} coloured mantle. ~~The water over the reef is never one colour, and it changes from moment to moment like a liquid Kaleidoscope.~~ Whether these tropical seas are coloured from the skies or from the under waters who can say? They seem to lie asleep, and in their sleep they ~~move, and murmur, and change~~ ^{a slowly moving pageant of brilliant colours and curious living movements.} The grasping waves suck and fret at the feet of the black coral rocks, ~~ever~~ and ever pulling and tearing. The rocks, jagged and sinister, stand like silent sentries guarding the lands beyond them, beating back the waters, and with their distorted, upraised fingers, warning all who approach of the dangers that they guard - warning and yet beckoning. ~~The sea draws me towards it as nothing else in nature does, I feel myself melting under it's sway, and here, where it is all so~~

~~wonderful and dazzling, I can hardly bear myself away from it. From moment to moment it varies, a slowly moving pageant of brilliant colours and curious living movements.~~

3rd June. How wantonly extravagant Africa is! Everything is flung about in wasteful profusion, such profusion that half of what grows, is choked and dies before it can reach maturity. Every inch of ground represents a fierce battle for supremacy - not one plant displacing another, but numbers fighting for space, climbing over and smothering one another, only to be trampled on and choked later by some stronger growth. A ~~tortured~~ tangle of living and half-dead rising from and covering death; struggling incessantly, for the relaxation of the struggle means immediate ^{extinction.} ~~death.~~

~~Death~~ How the idea haunts me, and what a picture I shall paint some day! It will be called "Africa" and will be on the following lines. A beautiful but ^{conquering} ~~consumptive~~ female body - naked, mutilated, killed by torture and violence - fear and horror ~~still~~ stamped on the fading face, the ~~dead~~ ~~and~~ broken limbs ~~still~~ rigid with a deathless dread. From this dead body, struggle and push a maze of growing, living things; they surround it, holding it firm in their ~~own~~ ^{clutches.} ~~arms.~~

One great creeping liana is tightly wound round the throat; others bind the body to the ground; giant thorns pierce the white flesh and stain it and the ground with brilliant red. Relentless nature, the murderer, having destroyed the intruder, triumphing in the destruction. As

usual, nature has been too lavish with her implements:
 though the ~~intruder~~^{invader} has been done to death, there is ~~now~~ not
 space for all the ~~tools~~^{slayers} to live, and having accomplished their
 work they are locked in a desperate fight for their own lives.
 They combined to slay the victim, they must now defend themselves.
 Each plant, as if endowed with human feelings, turns and tears at
 what is nearest. Some have fallen dead across the dead body,
 others are dying, twisted and distorted — dead and living, so
 bound together that the living bear a dead burden, and both
 combine to weave a shroud around the naked body.....
 I cannot put it in words, but I can see my picture: it re-
 presents the allegory of Africa - unconquered Africa ~~falling~~^{effacing}
 upon the ~~intruder~~^{invader}. The ~~intruder~~^{invader} will finally win; but how
 many must fall first in the ~~struggle~~^{combat}? I sometimes think ^{that} I
~~see myself bound and dying~~^{am to be involved} in this very struggle. I suppose
 I am an intruder here, but I feel singularly one with this
 relentless, beautiful country.

4th June. What trees! I used to dream of ^{such} trees, ~~like~~
~~these~~, but never thought ~~to~~^{I should} see them growing. I believed them
 to exist only in dreams. Great mangoes in whose cool shade a
 whole village could camp — ~~their dark green leaves polished,~~
~~and glistening in the sun, packed so close together that once~~
~~under~~^{through} their ~~shade~~ a dim half-light ~~reins~~^{reins} and not the fiercest
 sun can pierce; ~~through them~~ emerald bananas, their large
 flat leaves never quite silent, the tiniest ripple of a breeze
 causing them to patter against one another - a falling sound as

of perpetual and gentle rain (the light in a banana plantation is like the light at the bottom of crystal clear water); palms, tall and feathery, swaying softly ~~or out in detail~~ ~~motionless~~ against the blue sky, ~~every frond distinct~~, the pale faint grey of the ⁱⁿgraceful stems crowned with ~~their~~ fernlike masses of leaves, and bunches of heavy yellowing fruit; Oranges and limes, whose subtle yet penetrating scent and golden masses of fruit bring beauty and colour and delight; quaint pineapples, guavas, and custard-apples, all growing and flourishing without care or cultivation; a riot of lavishness and waste, the fruit dropping to the ground and rotting where it lies, swarms of vicious-looking yellow ants and crimson beetles crawling round and over it. Away from the plantations the wild palms are draped with great garlands of orchids of all colours, intersected with bunches of climbing ferns; from the ground spring other ferns, flowers, and creepers, making a beautiful but impenetrable tangle, a tangle through which a path must be cut. No amount of pushing will make a road here, for under the flowers and ferns lie ^{great} ~~small~~ thorns on strong elastic cords, twisting ~~backwards and forwards, and~~ upwards and downwards — a net-work of ~~resistance~~. Lush green of every shade fills the landscape — blotted with colour where the flower masses hang.

9th June.

No dreamer could have dreamt of the flowers. I wandered through a dimly-lighted palm grove; the air was heavy and silent, as if someone ^{unseen presence} stood with finger on lip: Involuntarily I tip-toed forward, my skin pricking, ~~me~~, my throat drying. White light showed beyond the palms, and suddenly I stood on the edge of a meadow, ~~a meadow~~ gorgeous with the blaze of flowers. Standing in close ranks, the green floor hidden, stood row upon row of orchids, lilies, gladioli - but these are senseless names; Before me lay a silent sea of colour - purple, pink, ^{orange} yellow, scarlet, blending in fiery beauty, and sending into the still air waves of delicate yet clinging scents. The beauty, ~~which is ever before my eyes~~, was quite unearthly. A narrow path wound through this Elysian field; my heart beat wildly as I followed it; The dainty blossoms nodded and bent as I touched them, ~~I felt as if faces must be in hiding, and looked vainly for their tiny forms~~, but as my noiseless footsteps passed, ~~they blossoms~~ reassumed their attitude of motionless waiting. A deep wood lay beyond the meadow, and as I neared it a herd of hideous wart-hogs, their manes bristling, their tufted tails erect, rose grunting and snorting from amid the flowers and disappeared in the darkness of the trees.

June 10th. The black people fit in most wonderfully with their surroundings - they never seem to obtrude. I suppose

it is that they are so much an integral part of tropical Africa - they belong to the landscape and never appear incongruous. Their beautiful copper-coloured skins, their silent and wary tread, their ability to conceal themselves and yet to see (they are ever watching) contrast sharply with ^{the} white man's ^{ways.} The latter seem out of place - out of focus with it all. And yet it is the white man who is, with unostentatious and dogged determination, conquering this wild country and claiming its elusive and malignant spirit. He is very quiet about it all, but in spite of this he is incessantly moving forward, almost imperceptibly, certainly, and apparently with innumerable sets-back. He gives his health or his life without a complaint, he falls on the road, but many anxious workers are waiting to take his place, and he is rewarded if his life has served as a stepping stone in the crossing of the river. Men are caught in the unbreakable web of Africa - it holds them as nothing else can; they sacrifice ~~everything~~, health, ~~wealth~~, friends, family, position, pleasure. They lead a life of hardship and discomfort; they give "their bodies to be burned" - they give all. Should they be compelled to leave Africa for a time they invariably return, even though it be only to die in her arms. What is this strange obsession? What pulls men of all sorts and conditions back to this desolate, tragic, and malign

country? Certainly no thoughts of ~~glory~~, fame, or reward, for these are far from their minds. It is an entire possession of the mind, body and soul, a possession by the spirit of Africa, and it seems to be a spirit which no one can cast out; once it has entered, it remains for ever - it owns the individual. At times I feel as if a spell were being cast

over me: ~~I am curious and anxious, my mind and body are~~

as if I were

being pushed forward towards some goal.

To what ^{am I being urged?} is it? I am

not one of the ~~sturdy~~ ones. I cannot help to conquer Africa, my wretched body would sink unable to be even a temporary foothold for others. Pioneering could never be my metier: I am too weak, and art-and-self absorbed even to start in this mighty race.

20th July: Jivu, — one-hundred-and-twenty miles inland.

We have not only set out on our travels, but we have reached the base of our operations, ~~(I am getting quite military with all this marching)~~. We have come very slowly, and I have been carried in a hammock most of the way. My health has improved wonderfully, probably because my mind is filled with new sights and problems - problems of a much more direct nature than those one is faced with in civilization. ~~Also~~ the simplicity of the life, the healthy conditions, the close contact with the members of our caravan, a cheery, noisy,

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willing and good-tempered crowd of men - children I had almost said, for they are not men in mind, though their bodies are manly enough - the entire and wholesome change from the life of luxury and ~~care~~ ^{ease} to one of Arcadian simplicity ^(have opened up new possibilities). My aptitude for languages has stood me in good stead, and I can already both understand and talk to the men. They are extraordinarily ~~clever~~ and quick at apprehending what one means, even when one expresses oneself incorrectly; interesting creatures, full of superstitions, and of a luxuriant and ingenious imagination, with a marked trend to what is tragic. They are born raconteurs, and their sense of humour is perpetually bubbling over. A laugh will save one in a really dangerous position. Patience, justice, and humour - ~~if one is possessed of these~~ ^{are the} ~~qualities~~ ^{upon which to establish good} ~~one is on the best of~~ terms with the coloured people of Africa.

28th July. We have been delayed here (Jivu) as Scott finds ^{that} two loads of trade goods have been injured on the road, and he must send back to the coast to replace them. He frets at the delay; I like it. Jivu is a beautiful and interesting place - ^{mountain} hills, ranging to five thousand feet in height, spring up close to our camping ground and wander away far into the distance. ~~Here~~ The Bible phrase "everlasting hills" seems to describe perfectly these ranges. They vary enormously in colour, so much ~~so~~ that their shapes seem actually to alter as the colours

change. From a misty, delicate, ~~and~~ opalescent-blue, they flash into a vivid, startling cobalt; their previous, faintly-defined outline, which melted into the sky, becomes so marked and hard that it looks as if it had been painted in on dry paper. Later, the crude cobalt changes to a deep heavy purple, this, as the sun is setting, changing again to a glowing and clear pink - almost pure rose madder. The disappearance of the sun wipes the rose from the hills, and they stand a cold and almost colourless green-grey which sharpens into dead black as the last rays of light fade away. ^{Under} ~~When there is the~~ moon, the hills show like black velvet, ~~silent and mysterious; all nature seems to watch in Africa, and one instinctively does so one's self. What are we all watching for?~~ Thinking of the hills made me forget the river, and as, when ~~we~~ once leave here, it is almost the last water we shall see for about seventy miles, it ought to be remembered. The rivers ~~in these parts~~ lie like bright green ribbons across the ~~lean~~ ^{lean} parched expanse ~~and bosom of Africa~~. For miles the whole country, as far as eye can see, is a waste of burnt-up grass, the only trees being a species of grey thorn, almost always leafless and never ~~growing~~ ^{attaining} to any size. The caravan road winds for hours, a narrow, blinding red track over the pale-yellow, rustling grass, and between the dead-looking thorn bushes — it never ends. A caravan stops, but the road is always there, pushing onwards

into the unknown, luring men further and further into the heart of this mysterious land. Sometimes one has glimpses of distant, strangely-shaped hills, sometimes a great hill rises and breaks away from one's very feet. The country is gently undulating, and curiously monotonous. Marching becomes as mechanical as sleep-walking. With a jerk one pulls up; imperceptibly one has been ascending a gentle rise, and as one tops it, below one lies a twisted emerald band — the river. What comfort to the eyes, what delight, as one moves into the cool shade of great leafy trees, and hears once more the sound of water slipping past. Tall spear-like reeds edge the clear ^{brown} ~~blewn~~ stream; the trees stand in serried ranks, their trunks close together, their branches interlaced and hanging over the water. Rank creepers throw themselves upwards, climbing over stems and branches and making great loops between the trees - strong green ropes splashed with bunches of purple, red, or yellow blossoms. A curious smell, slightly aromatic, slightly acid, strangely penetrating, hangs over African rivers, — a blend of vegetable (almost decaying vegetable, sweet as it decays) and pungent animal. It is perhaps more of an atmosphere than an odour, but it is ever present near the running waters of Africa. As one approaches the water, the harsh

cries of baboons, or the irritable voices of the smaller monkeys disturbed in their drinking or sleeping, break the peaceful quiet; They hurry away, shaking and bending the branches as they spring from tree to tree, chattering angrily as they go. A quivering in the reeds followed by a prolonged but lessening rustle indicates where some beast had stood drowsing till, interrupted by the advent of man, he is aroused and beats a hasty retreat. Birds rise slowly, flapping lazy wings and uttering loud and inharmonious screams ^{as they} and betake themselves to the tree-tops, or to some further reaches of the river where they gently drop on to the water again. Man has upset the equilibrium of nature; ~~he always does~~ his intrusion ~~must~~ ^{invariably} disturbs and alarms, and it is only some time after his departure that nature settles herself again into her previous, calm contentment. She remains watchful and alert until convinced that she is once more uninvaded.

1st August: To-day a great event happened. We met another Englishman. He walked into our camp at about noon, and he has now pitched his own camp quite near to ours. His name is Dayrell Pole, and if I were a man instead of a dreamer, I should, it appears, know his name well. He is an explorer and hunter, and known to all the world. Anyhow, he is my ideal of what a man should look like - ~~he is~~ tall and lithe, ~~and moves~~

~~the~~

^{with} in the most wonderfully noiseless ^{movements.} manner ~~like some graceful~~
~~animal.~~ He is fair-haired and blue-eyed, ~~the head of a~~
~~viking.~~ He looks heroic, as if he had solved life's hardest
problems, and had attained to the calm of what lies beyond.
His eyes are curiously deep-set, and he seldom looks ~~down.~~
When he is in repose he looks straight ahead, or slightly up-
wards. When he talks he looks almost disconcertingly straight
at the man he is talking to. I hope he will stay here, for he
attracts me powerfully; he is not the type of the hunter, and
slayer, but ~~he is so much a man~~ a man at one with nature,
part, the dominant part, of this strange country. He is of
the conquerers of Africa.

5th August: Pole is going to Mt. Kololo; he has sent some
of his men to the coast to refit, so will stay here, or in
the neighbourhood, till they return. He and Scott have known
one another for years - just meeting and touching hands like
this on many of their divers hunting trips. Pole attracts me
more and more, and what gratifies me immensely is that he seems
to seek my society in preference to Scott's. He does not
talk much himself, but he makes me tell him about my life and
work. I feel almost ashamed to recount my puny doings to one
like himself - one who has lived, and has fought the best of
fights. ~~He is extraordinary.~~ He seems to make no demands on