

CHAPTER XII

THE MAMBILA COUNTRY

THE journey from Mbem to Yang was $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours, say six miles. Going up the north side of the valley we rose about 400 feet (B.25.04), which was our highest point. We remained on the hill tops following ridges, till an hour and a quarter out we struck a small stream. This we followed—it was increasing in size all the time—right down to Yang. We crossed it where it was ten yards wide and knee deep, and ten minutes on was the rest-house. The stream is called Manto, and lower down either becomes, or joins, the Makari at a place where it meets, they said, a road going to Ndum.

We were still on the same German road, and I was surprised to find it had been cleared. Between Mbem and Yang we passed through the Nwa country, the chief of which had already sent me a complimentary message to Mbem, inquiring when I was coming.

The rest-house was enclosed in a narrow valley, so there was no view, but it was comfortable and a great improvement on Mbem. I reckoned we were 600 feet below Mbem.

The chief of Mvwe, a very old man named Fenzu, came to see me. I had originally intended going there, but I was now anxious to get back to the main road. Mvwe lies to the left of the road by which I came here, and I believe the journey from Mbem *via* Mvwe could be done in the day quite easily. Its position is due west over a ridge, a distance of about two hours from Yang. There was so little food at Yang that the chief asked Mvwe to assist him for my party.

Most places in the Kaka country are called by different tribes by different names. The confusion is therefore appalling. Yang is a case in point. When I asked the chief here what was the

name of his country, he said Ntong. This was a startler, for when I inquired at Mbem how to get to Ntong, I was told the route was Mbem, Mvwe, Se, and then Ntong, a matter of three days; and, further that I should have to come back the same way before moving on towards the main road. I tackled Money, who had decided to come along as a carrier to earn some money, and he said he never knew this place was called Ntong. The Mbem always called it Yang. Its third name was Yeso, which, they said, was what white men used. Ntong is the whole country, the Chief explained, and the other names are Chief's towns which have become better known. His own town up the valley is called Binzu. Both Hawkesworth and the Frenchman only knew this place under the name of Ntong.

All this was very confusing, for when I spoke first of Ntong being my first destination after Mbem, all the Mbem flatly refused to go to such a place, where there was a different language; but where this other Ntong is, I never found out. The language here differs from Lom and Mbem a little. The numerals are only very slightly different, and it is practically only a slight variation in the pronunciation. The names of the eight days of the week are, however, quite different from the Mbem names. The people here mostly know some Fula.

One would think that a bi-lingual person would appreciate the different pronouns, but it is very difficult to get them accurately in a sentence. To try to get them isolated is a waste of time. I tear my hair over the pronouns, especially as the same difficulty occurs every evening at every stopping-place.

The Chief of Ntong has Acha for his kingly name, but his birth name was Njomu. He was Chief of the country before the Germans came, and was also the Chief when, earlier, the Fulbe raided the country and carried off many men. In one of these raids the present interpreter was carried off as a small child, and only got back many years after. I understood him to say that, as he was attached to the Chief here, so he was attached to the Fula Chief's service.

There were a number of bush-fowl calling in the valley; and the rest-house was full of weevils, which I could not understand. It must have been used to store corn in.

This was the third rainless day I had had.

The orderly arrived with the last of the loads about half an hour after I got in, and he had with him a dozen men whom the Chief of Ntem had sent as the result of his going there. I would not send these back, but returned some of the Mbem instead. As this was the biggest section of my gang, the headman, whose name was Fana, became headman of the whole party.

The next day—Wednesday, the 13th June—I went on to Mbang, a march of three and three-quarter hours. At 5 a.m. the readings were—thermometer, 67°; barometer, 28.04.

Our road ascended the valley easterly, and passed the Chief's village about twenty minutes up. I now learned that this place had always been called Ntong, but that the hill-top beyond had been called Yang by the Germans. They came in from the east, and carried the name down the valley with them. There were fine views when we got up on to the ridges. An hour and twenty minutes out, at a height of about 850 feet above Yang rest-house, one had a good view of the red landslide which marks where you go over the ridge to Mvwe. To the south-east straight below us was the same timbered plain one first sees at Nsob. Rising out of it is a mountain island, bearing 158° to the right-hand end, which is close to Ngom, a town on the low-level road from Nsob-Ntem to Gashaka. Ntem itself bearing about southerly was screened by the hills we were on. Mbang was about E.N.E., but invisible. It was a very fine view over the plain. The Yang people were originally down there, but moved up over the ridge into their present valley.

About a mile on was the Kaka-Mambila boundary, marked by the Germans with a heap of stones, and we were now out of the country of the bad people.

We then went down a valley to the north, separated by a narrow wall from the valley that runs steeply down to the plain. The stream in our valley joins the Makari later. We were now in Lip country, and, crossing the stream, went up the steep hillside beyond, rising about 300 feet more than our previous point. In the days of the present Chief of Lip the people largely crossed over the valley to their present site on the western hills opposite. A hill next to the south of the Lip huts has a crest

of scattered large trees which shows a great way off, and from the hill-top I was on the red mark of Mvwe was again visible, bearing 270°.

Mbang rest-camp showed up over a valley ahead bearing 73°, three-quarters of an hour before we reached it. We first passed Leng, partly down the valley to our right, then the site of the old German rest-camp, and, crossing the stream going north, arrived at Mbang rest-house (barometer 25.46).

The rest-house was a new type, being round, with plastered walls, and the grass roof carried up into a high and thick peak. It indicated we had arrived at a new type of building. Raphia fronds were used in its construction. There were a few mosquitoes here, and a new centipede of the slow-moving kind, red, which I had not seen before.

On arrival, I learnt that my carriers from Gashaka had been there yesterday, and had passed on that day to Ngom.

The Chiefs of the three countries, Mbang, Leng and Lip, all sent me presents here. Mbang, among other things, brought a goat, which I had not seen for quite a time. The price of food ran somewhat as follows: goat, two to three shillings; eggs, halfpenny; fowls, threepence, but the boys bought them at a penny each; maize flour, for one day's food, one penny. Banana and plantains exist, but are not the staple food, and are a nominal price. Cassada is almost unknown, but there are a few sweet potatoes.

The Chief, whose name was Kinchina, brought a palaver. One man here had taken a wife from the village of Njzirr; she had stayed with him a fortnight and then gone back to her mother, and the father would not refund the thirty-five shovels—*i.e.*, hoes—paid as headmoney, or its equivalent. I said this was the Chief's affair, but he said that, though the Njzirr people were under him, they would not hear, and there was no sub-chief over them. I told him that the man must on no account go there himself (it would only have meant a fight). The Chief must try what he could do. If the people wanted to fight him, he must report for the information of the District Officer of Gashaka district.

Tala came to me weeping and saying Alimendi had hit him,

but Alimendi denied this. I told Tala to stay away from the kitchen, and work only with Aruna. He said he would like to go back to Kumbo when the rest go, which I agreed to.

I was told to-day that the Germans dealt heavily with the Mbem, and that on one occasion they took twenty men and tied them to trees and shot them, which I imagine they richly deserved. The ex-Chief has the reputation of being a champion looter of cattle. This is the main cattle route and avoids the bad low ground by Ntem, but the Bororo—*i.e.*, the Cow-Fulbe, as opposed to the Town-Fulbe—dare not pass.

Leaving next morning, I reached Ngokh, on the main road, in two and a half hours. There were good views from the hills, and an hour after starting I got an especially fine one (barometer, 24.55)—Binkari Mountains bore 273°, Tumbo hill 252°, and the crested hill near Lip 266°. Finally we met the Ntem to Gashaka road going north, and our road, crossing it, continues to Banyo. Turning south for ten minutes, we came to Ngokh village, with a rest-house, and here I stayed two nights.

Ngokh has three names. The people call it Ngokh, the French call it Mbek, and it is also called Tamia, from the name of its present Chief. This place had also given me a lot of trouble from the variety of its names. My orderly could not pronounce Ngokh at all, and called it Ngom, thus confusing it with Ngom, a day's march on into the plain.

There is a fine view from the rest-house over the plain some thousand feet below. There are high mountains to the left, and the Ngom mountain-island to the right, and the plain disappears to the horizon. There is a good deal of patchy forest down there and in folds of the hills. Up at Ngokh it is almost bare grassland. In the early morning there was a heavy cloud-bank over the plain. The view was like an archipelago with the islands peeping out of the sea-like cloud. As I was looking at it, the orderly came out of his hut, wrapped in a brown blanket and shivering, for the thermometer was 58° (barometer, 25.46), and there was a strong north wind blowing. I remarked it was like Victoria, having in my mind the sea with rocks peeping out. He replied it was like Buea. He could only think of the cold. No eye sensation appealed to him. This is one of the fundamental

distinctions that cuts off the African from the European. No sense of beauty is conveyed to him by his bloodshot eye. It also shows from what a different point of view these two varieties of the human race approach the same subject. Mentally and morally, they are radically different.

I took down some of the local language, which differs from any I had got down before. Again I retreated the worse for wear in trying to get such simple sentences as "He comes," "He goes." After a quarter of an hour I still had not got them. The medium was Fula, which is generally spoken, and one would feel that a person who knows two languages must appreciate a pronoun; still, the uneducated native does not seem to recognize their existence, in spite of having, presumably, to render them in the other language he knows. There are now rather complicated consonantal sounds with closed syllables, which were hopeless to my orderly, who comes from the south, with soft slurred sounds. When he comes to repeat a word, it is something quite different. All this is interesting from the phonetic and psychological points of view, but when one wants to write down the maximum number of words, and more especially sentences, in the shortest possible time, and with the least exhaustion, one does not appreciate these bye-products at their full value.

I had time to go into manners and customs at leisure, as these people soon tire of questions, and I like more than one sitting if possible. The burial of men and women is on the left side, with the right arm stretched out. They are not buried in a niche off the grave, an important change from the common practice, but in the grave itself, and the earth is thrown in. The head is cut off first, like the Bambuluwi do, I understood, but then there is a distinction. After some earth has been thrown in, the head is put in by itself, and then the grave is filled up. The body of men and women also is cut open and the heart taken out and examined to see if deceased was a witch. Then it is replaced. The body is washed with water, and afterwards with palm wine, and dusted over with camwood. Burial is in the bush. The burial of the King and big men differs from that of other persons. A hole is dug in the porch of his house, and then a tunnel driven under the house. The corpse sits up with a

back-rest of bamboos. A goat is killed and eaten. There are no human sacrifices, and I was assured never were. A stone is not taken to represent the deceased person's head. Mimbo is poured every week on the grave, the week being here one of ten days instead of eight days as I had found lower down; and when the corn is ripe, some of that is also put on the grave.

I was interested to find a new "week." This longer week I found among all the Mambila tribes, and still farther. Very long ago the original habitat of this people was in the present Banyo country.

The naming of boys and girls is done by the father, but God gives twins their names. Two boys are named Sainya and Tong; two girls, Buti and Fonkwai; one of each sex, Sainya and Fonkwai. The medicine man takes the twins outside the house before the father formally gives them the names.

In marriage a man gives his sister in exchange for another man's sister. If one has no sister, he works in the other's farm in lieu. Provided they are not of the same family, there is no restriction as to marriage. Usually a man has only one, or perhaps two, wives. The Chief himself had three wives. He had had three children, of whom two died and one was left.

There is no food taboo, and women eat the same as men; and there is no restriction on a pregnant woman's food.

The first fruits of a farm are not given to the Chief. A man keeps his own produce.

Dancing takes place in the dry season, and masks are said to be worn. An old man here makes grotesque wooden images, of which he brought me some to see if I would buy any, and I took two at sixpence each. There was nothing special in them except that the forearms are bent upwards. This is what one sees all the natives do in cold altitudes. They cross their hands and hang them on their shoulders for warmth. All the people are practically without clothing, but the Chief wore a cotton gown of country make. He had a goatee beard, and, I think, was the only man so adorned.

He complained to me that the village of Bamga, about a mile north and standing out conspicuously, refused to bring food

for the carriers. When I found it was under him, I told him it was his duty to deal with his own people.

Another complaint was by Timi, Chief of Ata, close to the border. He said natives of the French side came over and harassed him, and he had to leave his village. Last year French soldiers came in. I said I would report it when I met the District Officer. He produced two papers written in Arabic, and I recognized regretfully that British influence was now finished, and in future the culture was to be Fula.*

There was a sufficiency of food here, and I got some butter and also a lot of potatoes. There was tobacco growing on the edge of the village, but it was a kind I had not seen anywhere before. The leaf was inclined to be hairy, and the flower was yellow.

A Hausaman passed through with a few cattle for sale, and had several donkeys with him to bring back kola from Bansa.

The day after my arrival, one of the Gashaka carriers came back to ascertain if I were here; and in the afternoon they all arrived, in charge of a messenger from the District Head of Gashaka, a man named Suli, a native of Demsa, and probably of mixed Bata and Fula origin.

There now took place a very radical change in the personnel of my party. Having reached Yola province, Constable Gabriel had to go back. He had been quite useful, and I gave him a watch as a present. Ndi, the Ndum Chinda, also had to return, and Tala went too. As the Gashaka contingent was smaller than I needed, the Ntem headman and two others with him came on, the former still to act as headman, as there was no one else more suitable, and he could speak Fula, which was now the current language. Three Mbem men also came along, including Money, another brother of his and Barua's, named Jatto on account of his ruddy complexion; and I took also two local men, getting others daily in their place.

Before I left Bamenda I arranged for my last mail this way

* Since my return to England I have learned that the Kaka tribes are to be within the sphere of the Southern Nigerian Administration, a decision that has given me the greatest pleasure. The Mambila tribes, however, are to remain under Fula rule.

to leave on the arrival of the Buea mail due there the 7th June. It did not catch me here, and I never got it.

When I was taking down the customs of the people here, with the aid of Money, the Mbem, and Fana, the Ntem headman, they gave me a few notes as to what their own practice was as the various subjects came up. For instance, the Ntem name twins—both boys, Fonfe and Jinko; both girls, Monfe and Yenchu; one of each, Fonfe and Monfe. Among the Ntem a pregnant woman may not eat monkey. If she does she will go blind in one eye. With the Ntem, too, first fruits of a farm are given to the Chief.

Having completed all arrangements, I left this very cold place on the 16th June, Saturday (T. 62°, B. 24.40). It was a singularly uninteresting road for a long time, following a dry route on the watershed of an undulating plateau. This road is new, and was made when the main road of the Germans fell into the French sphere. Being on the watershed, it meanders considerably; but as the valleys are mostly steep, it would have been more difficult otherwise.

In about half an hour we passed Bamga to the right, embedded in vegetation, and a couple of hours out we passed a trench on a col to the left, running north to south up one side and down the other, and said to have been made in a war between Bamga and his brethren. A little farther on I got the only good view on the road from near a mimosa tree, and could see Binkar bearing 269° and Tumbo 247°. A mile on, Wokude or Bokude was visible to the north-east, but it was two and a half hours before I got to the rest-house. We passed along the edge of a valley which was a thousand feet down to our right, with the bottom all carefully cultivated and not an inch of waste space. Wokude itself is in three parts. The first is small and in a patch of forest growth on the hill. Then there is a descent, and No. 2 is on an island, also in forest growth. From there we went right down to the bottom, nearly 1,500 feet from our highest point. The rest camp is on a low knoll, about 150 feet above the valley bottom, and high above it is Wokude No. 3, also embedded in vegetation. This is the chief's town. Between Nos. 2 and 3 is a valley penetrating some way back into the hills, with a

waterfall at the end. No. 2 especially would be an admirable place for defence in native warfare.

The capture of small birds is an industry carried on along this road. I had seen it nowhere before, and did not see it again. A rising valley facing east is selected. Tall bamboos are set up round the upper edge with bunches of leaves on them, evidently to scare the birds and deflect them to the middle of the structure, where a net is spread vertically.

Savannah type trees are few and far between, but most of the valley bottoms had some forest in them, and also raphia.

In more than one place I saw plantations of a worthless leguminous shrub or woody herb. It grows to six feet with two-inch lance-shaped leaflets and six-inch beans. I was told this is planted to fertilize the land for a subsequent corn crop, being cut down and dug in, which is a form of agriculture I had not met before. A small leafed tobacco is also grown.

In several places were terraced hillsides, but with the terraces no longer in use. No doubt safer conditions enable the people to go farther afield to farm.

There were some very deep game traps along the road, one being quite twenty feet deep. At the entrance to Wokude, also, was a fall leopard trap.

We passed several parties going down to Banso for kola. Close to the exit of Wokude No. 1 was a spot where markets are held every ten days. It was all grass-grown, and there was not much space, as the ground falls away steeply all round.

There was granite and also laterite on the road. On the top of Wokude No. 2, laterite deposit was thick, and one wonders how it got there.

The houses here are circular with red mud walls, and the grass thatch projects far and is enormously thickened at the eaves. On the apex may be a pot, held in position by sticks round it, making a sort of crown. One little hamlet had a pair of stone pillars, three feet high, as an entrance.

The Nigerian Government has deposed the Mambila Chief here, and put in as Chief a Fula nominated by the Fula Chief of Gashaka, who has been made head of all this country. He came down with a crowd of Mambila followers to greet me, and

stayed the night at the camp. He was not well, suffering from diarrhoea, for which I gave him a dose of castor oil, followed next morning before I left with chlorodyne. The Mambila Headman, a funny little person named Gorko, was the business man. I asked him where he got his name, for "Gorko" is "man" in Fulfulde (the Fula language). He said the Fulbe gave it him as a small boy, and he had no other.

I tried some of the language, and, as I had been told at Ngokh, I found some differences from the speech there. Here at first, however, they said the language was identical. I had great difficulties in getting it down, and could not progress beyond the nouns. Suli as yet is of no use whatever as a help in this respect. I gave my two informants threepence each and told them to go.

The Germans are reputed to have killed two thousand of these people before they could do anything with them. They wear their hair cut short into fancy patterns, and are of slim build with shortish heads, and they seem fairly clean. I thought my Mbem friends none too clean, but they are marvels compared with the foul-skinned carriers who have come from Gashaka. The Ntem, I noticed, do not err in over-washing.

On leaving Wokude the next morning, 17th June (T. 64°, B. 25.55), we first crossed the well cultivated valley I have already mentioned. There is a stream ten yards wide in it, flowing north and joining the Makari (also called Okari), I understood. The corn in the valley was in full ear, but not ready yet for cutting. There were some yams growing also. This close cultivation is carried on at the bottom of all the side valleys also, so that when on the other side we began to climb the foot-hills, we still continued to look down on cultivation.

As we rose we could see numerous villages on different hill-tops. We passed near a small village named Wa on the left, which is under Warwar, about two miles to the north; and later Daram showed up a couple of miles to the right.

There was a good deal of erosion going on on the ridges. The soil was largely laterite, which was of great depth, as the precipitous ravines showed. In one place on a col the erosion on each side was so great that the actual path was difficult to walk along, and the bottom had fallen through of a deep buffalo

pit, which was completely undermined. A rock I saw was close grained and bluish, which I did not recollect having seen since the climb up from Bamessi.

After passing a waterfall, about a mile and a half to the right, I picked up a very rough artefact of bluish stone.

When we had been going about four and a half hours we came to a small hamlet or farm belonging to Kabri, and the rest-house showed up about a mile and a half off on a bare hill to the north-east. We had, though, first to descend to the valley bottom, in which was a stream named Mandun, ten yards wide, going to join the stream at Wokude. It was about 500 feet, perhaps, up to the rest-house (B. 24.65).

The chief met me with a party with one drum. He wore a blue garment, but the others wore only the 'tween legs cloth. Later there was a thunderstorm with hail, and the thermometer dropped to 60°, and it became a really cold, wet evening. These people, however, put on no additional covering. They do not like it, all the same. Their only comfort is to huddle round their fires in a hermetically sealed hut.

The hills are very bad on this march. The carriers pulled through well, but I was much the worse for wear when we got in after five hours of it. The country looks barer than the Kaka country because there is now no cultivation on the hills. It is all in the valley bottoms, where the soil is wonderfully rich. That this is recent, however, is shown by the numbers of abandoned terraces on the hillsides.

On account of the storm, and of the chief's village being at a little distance, and also being very tired, I was not able to get down any of the language or customs. Earthenware pots seemed much more plentiful, and to be used instead of calabashes. They are oval with a round bottom, and have longish narrow necks with a small lip, but their make is very rough.