

ran down towards the plain, and so would not go to the Benue basin, but to the Sanaga.

The Chief of Mbem, with a number of followers, met me on the hillside, and some distance off on a small rising ground in the middle of the valley could be seen a collection of huts. This was the rest camp where I eventually stayed very much longer than I intended.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MBEM

THE camp which I occupied for ten days was not very good. My house, long and narrow, was on sloping ground, and leaked when it rained. For the followers there were rough beehive huts. The only advantage was that I had a good all-round view of the valley. Another camp within a few yards was rather worse than mine. These two camps were erected recently when an Assistant District Officer of Bamenda met one from Yola to arrange the boundary between the two provinces, and decide about a division of the Kaka country. The latter brought with him the Chief of Gashaka, a Fula, with the idea of making the Mbem and the other Kaka tribes accept him as their Head Chief. This is in accordance with the policy of the Administration of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria, which is to put all the pagan tribes under the rule of the Fulbe, who, in fact, are their hereditary enemies, and only look upon a pagan as a potential slave. However, I understood later that all the Kaka country was to be under the southern administration, so that British ideas and progress would penetrate, instead of Fula administration and Mohammedanism.

In the Mbem valley are scattered farms, both at the bottom of the valley and up the hills. There is no such thing as a town or village. The hillsides are quite bare, and only in little corners and on the farms are there any trees. A stream flows down the valley to the east, and so connects with the Sanaga River. There are no cattle, sheep, or goats. Cattle, they said, they never had, but there used to be goats until the Fulbe from Banyo took them all away. Fowls are not plentiful, so the people have to live on vegetable food almost entirely. Of game there is none,

there being no shelter. Bird life was small in this valley. I think I saw one small hawk, one black-and-white crow only besides a few green pigeon and rare bushfowl. There were a few of those long-tailed black birds (the size of an English blackbird) that fly in flocks; and there was a bird as large as a pigeon, of mottled brown, with a very long tail and bright yellow beak. In the farms maize and guinea-corn are grown at different seasons, and the maize was just beginning to ripen. When the latter is cut the guinea-corn is planted. The valley seemed free generally from mosquitoes. I did hear one in my house, but it may have been the solitary occupant. In height I reckoned we were 75 feet above the camp at Lom, and 4,620 feet above the sea.

The Mbem people are fairly tall, most of the men seeming to me to average about five feet seven inches. They are fairly well developed, but not of great strength. Their heads are slightly dolichocephalic, with round, sloping foreheads and prominent but small chins.

The head is generally clean-shaven, with a tuft left on top. The older men have thin beards. Their complexion is on the black side, but at least one was a fair copper colour. Their physical strength is below what it ought to be for their build, no doubt owing to their secluded and not very active lives. Some I had as carriers for a few days when I left were only fairly good. One biggish man tried to carry me across a small swamp in the valley, but had to be relieved of his load. The small Chinda, Ndi, from Ndum, then volunteered, and, though not much over five feet, took me over on his shoulders without any difficulty.

In one of my walks I saw a small child blind in both eyes. They said he was crazy and wandered away into the bush for days at a time. This was the only case of any disease I saw.

As to clothing, the men only wear a cloth between their legs hung over a string round their waists, and the Chief was dressed the same. Just a few had a white, sleeveless gown of country-cloth, which they wore on special occasions. The women and children were naked except for tufts of leaves or grass worn when going abroad.

The Chief here was new. His name was Bemba, and he had been installed only a few weeks before by Mr. Hawkesworth, when on tour from Bamenda. The old Chief, named Kako, was still there, and came along the first day with Chief Bemba. He did all the talking, and during my stay attended to all my wants. The new Chief was a feeble nonentity, in striking contrast with that redoubtable ruffian Kako, who always wore a gown, and whose voice could be heard resounding through the valley as from his house he urged on workers in the distant farms on the hillside to greater endeavours. He could carry on comfortably a conversation at a distance of a mile. The new Chief's father had been Chief before him, but the dispossessed Kako seemed somehow to have thrust himself in between. In a tribe such as this a feeble ruler is not wanted, and if they are left to themselves he soon gives way to a more stalwart man.

I went into the origin of this people. They say they were in days far gone by brothers of the Ndum. They came from their original habitat with them, but had no idea where that was. They said they were brothers of the Ndum, and anything the Ndum Chief said they would do. The last part of the sentence is, of course, merely a stereotyped African expression, meaning no more than "Yours obediently" in a letter. They claim to be a Ndum colony. They brought their wives with them, but later have taken Kaka wives; not recently, however, as they have now enough women of their own. They never send to Ndum for wives. Only the first settlers had Ndum wives. I asked what language the children learnt first. They said the Mbem language (which is the same almost as the Lom), and later they learnt Nsungni, but I did not think that all learn it. They said some of the Kaka tribes spoke a different language from theirs. The various dialects I got appear in the Appendix. The present Chief, his father and grandfather, were all born at Mbem, and Kako knew of six Chiefs before he himself succeeded, and there were many others, he added. So the Mbem put their arrival in the country rather farther back than the Lom—that is, if I understood the latter correctly.

As to some of their customs: their burial customs are much the same as those of the tribes I had passed through. Both men

and women are laid on the left side, with the right hand to their side, and in a niche off the grave. This burying in a niche, I may mention, presupposes that there is soft soil into which the grave can be dug. This is simple in a valley, but on a rugged mountain-top quite impracticable, and the custom of burying in or near the house may have perforce to be avoided. In this connection, I remember the complaint of a village in the Gold Coast, which had been officially assigned a new burial area. It was found to be so full of rocks that they could do nothing with it nor even dig a simple, shallow grave.

Before burial the corpse is tied up to bamboos for one day, and camwood is rubbed on its face and belly, but not on its back. The cause for the back being exempt may have been no other than that it was not easily got at.

The burial of the big Chief of the tribe is different, and only headmen see the ceremony. He is buried squatting down at the bottom of the grave, his hand on each side of his face. He is not in a niche. Sticks are planted all round, and a big flat stone covers him. No house is built over. When his successor is to be buried, the stone is lifted and he is put down in the same place and the stone replaced. Mats are put round him, and a cloth over. Mimbo is poured on the grave. Heads are not cut off to be preserved. A stone is taken to represent the Chief's head, but I am not sure if that applies to ordinary persons. This stone is used to pray to on such occasions as a child (? his child) being sick. This inspires him what to do, and the child gets better. The stone is also taken and knocked on the grave on occasion of a new interment. There never were any human sacrifices, but they say the Mambila used to sell corpses for food. There is a funeral feast for a Chief. If there happens to have been a foreign marriage in the family, which is rare, the relatives from the other tribe are entitled to come to the funeral.

Whilst on burials, I may observe that in some of the tribes whose customs I have noted the Chief is buried the same as ordinary people, and in others differently. This probably indicates that the ruling family was originally not of the same tribe as the one they ruled over, and brought different customs with them to which they have partly adhered.

Lom and Mbem occasionally intermarry. There were actually six Mbem women married in Lom, I was told, and three or four Lom women in this place. A man seldom has as many as three wives. The Chief had only two, and ten children, and the ex-Chief had seven children. Four children are almost the maximum, and two only are common. Immigrants from other countries are unknown. Two men will take each others' sisters in marriage, and there is no headmoney.

The Mbem give special names to twins: two boys, Taku, Bibi; two girls, Wadai, Wafas; one boy, one girl, Bibi, Wadai.

There is an eight-day week, the same as the Bansa have, and on two of those days they do not farm.

As to farming, I have said earlier that maize and corn are the staple foods. Rice and potatoes were given them by the Germans to try. The rice was not a success, and then the war came. The potatoes did well, but are now all finished. There are a few oil-palms in the valley, but they said they did not bear fruit. The ex-Chief said he had planted some himself, but they did not grow. Cotton is grown, and woven in the dry season on a narrow loom, and a model was constructed for me to see. It is staked out both ends on the ground, and the warp is held by strings. Most of their cotton cloth comes from the Jukun country.

I found there was no ceremony at the maize harvest, but a big dance is held at the guinea-corn harvest. The difference might be accounted that it is the custom of many tribes only to have dances in the dry season. Apparently the dances are not in costume, and they have no masks for use on these occasions.

I heard music in the valley quite frequently coming from a flute or some other wind instrument, but I never heard a drum.

This people does not have any face marks, nor do they file their teeth. The men never move without having a couple of spears with them.

The women do the field work after the preliminary clearing has been done. I noticed they all carried big hampers on their backs, with braces over their shoulders. There are four braces in all on the baskets, so if one breaks there is always another. They are much the same pattern as those used in Northern Congo.

A rotation of two years of fallow is allowed here. The granaries are miniature houses, not of clay, standing on three-foot posts. At Kumbo they are like ordinary houses, but stand on stones just off the ground. The houses here are square like those in Kumbo, but smaller and lower in the roof.

As much corn is grown here, one sees blocks of granite everywhere rubbed down into hollows. They do not appear to be removed, but the rubbing stone is merely taken to another rock. The only rubbing stone I saw was small with a section like an isosceles triangle.

Unlike other tribes, the men, I was told, make the pots, but I did not see any being made. They take them to Ndum to sell, as well as palm wine and fowls. In return they bring back spearheads and other objects of iron, such as knives and hoes.

The men make the mats, and youths may be seen going about with the material, weaving the long strips as they go. These strips are afterwards joined together. I bought one mat, uncoloured, for one shilling and sixpence, which, I was told, equally three marks, was a fair price, but I was inclined afterwards to think it was a minimum.

I have mentioned before the French trade in cattle between Ngaundere and Duala, and which passes part of the way in British territory. They pass through Mbem and Lom, but, I think, have not been doing so long. In any case, the trade is comparatively new. There is a French company which works it, and European agents take sections. During my stay at Mbem, the third convoy of a thousand head passed through, in charge of M. Chollier. He stayed one night, and took his meals with me, so we were able to discuss various things. The price of the animals in Ngaundere is from one hundred and fifty to two hundred francs. He had with him two horses for his own use, and carriers and drivers to the number of eighty in all.

I got some milk, and he killed an animal, so there was a very welcome supply of fresh meat.

Early next morning the animals were on the move across the valley and up the hills beyond, and it was some hours before they were finally out of sight. In the afternoon a Fula herdsman came back to me to say one cow was tired and could not go on.

He had reported to M. Chollier, who had gone on, and he told him to kill the animal and bring along as much meat as the men with him could carry. What he came specially to tell me was that, in his absence, these people in the valley had killed the cow and removed part of the neck and hump, and he asked me to write this down. He had collected from the perpetrators a cotton-spinning stick as evidence, and I learnt that one of the thieves was a son of the ex-Chief. I told him he had better try to get some money for the meat taken, and wrote to M. Chollier he ought to report the matter at Bamenda. I sent and bought some of the meat for my staff for two shillings.

The Mbem people are desperate to get meat. When I gave some to them they rushed off with it and made a fire at once to cook it. They generally manage, by fair or foul means, to get some when a convoy of cattle passes through, but that, of course, is not often.

They are champion looters. There was much shouting in the valley on the second night of my arrival. A Chinda and two others from the Chief at Lom, bearing a present to me from the big man of independent views whom I have already mentioned, and who apparently was passing it formally through the Chief, had been relieved by the Mbem people on the top of the hill of what they were bringing. It was highway robbery. I saw the two Chiefs together the next morning (for I soon saw the new man was a cypher), and asked about my present. About half was produced almost at once, and eventually the rest. I said I would give them till next morning to decide what they proposed to do with the culprits, whom I did not see. The bearers had two fowls for me, and seven small calabashes of palm wine which they had brought to sell to the carriers; but my carriers had left, and, having taken another path, the parties had not met.

Eventually they sold a little of the palm wine to the rest of my followers, and what was over they took back. The next day the Chief said he could not find the culprits, and that they had run away, but promised to deal with them when he got them. There was nothing more to be done then, so when I wrote to Bamenda I reported the matter. The killing of M. Chollier's cow came on later.

When I arrived here, having heard that carriers were on their way from Gashaka to meet me, I reckoned it could not be long before they arrived, so I paid off the Banso carriers. I wanted to keep about eight of them, in case I thought of doing a short trip pending the arrival of the others; but as they objected to separating, I let them all go. They would willingly have come on to Gashaka, but I had no use for them when the others should arrive, and did not want to have two lots drawing pay together. I got the Chief to send someone to the main road to intercept the other carriers before they reached Ntem and bring them here. The man came back in two days, and said there was no news of them.

The Chief then promised to get me men to go with me. He admitted some were not very strong men, but said that when the French were in occupation of this territory, before the frontier was adjusted, they had collected a lot and sent them with loads to Ngaundere. I had arrived on the Sunday, and on the following Saturday thought something ought to be done, and said I would like to see twenty-six men able to carry loads. Nothing happened and I found they were frightened to go by the road I proposed, so at this stage I at once sent off the orderly to Ntem to try and get some news of the missing gang. Two old Fula men passing from Gashaka had told someone they had heard of them as having gone by the Bamum road, but had not themselves seen them. This rather important information the orderly, with indescribable carelessness, never told me. I only heard of it by hearing them talk among themselves.

One finds this everywhere. When they have discussed a subject among themselves, it never seems to dawn on them that a report is necessary, and that anyone else wants to know the result. I found the orderly on many occasions given to leaving out essentials. However, I sent him to Ntem to verify.

On the second day he returned. He had found the track to Ntem, which took him six hours, very bad. From there he had gone on to Ngom, three and a half hours, but there was no news whatever of the carriers. He ascertained, however, that the party he had heard of were in French territory, and thus were not for me.



Chief of Lom (the small man).



A group of Mbem. Money on left; Barua, third from left.

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He told me he had shot a baboon on the road, and that the natives had buried it with one foot left out of the ground. After a few days it would be dug up and eaten.

The most important thing was that he had brought from the town of Wanke on the way five men who volunteered to come with me. So I told the ex-Chief to try and get me the rest. He said there would be no difficulty in getting sixty if I wanted them. Curiously enough, I had been wanting just half that number all along.

The time had hung a little heavily during my stay here. There was no variety in the walks unless one climbed a mountain-side. I went up the valley and I went down, among the scattered farms, and neither direction contained anything of interest. There was a fair amount of rain, too, and dense fogs would roll up the valley in the early morning. Rain always occurred at those hours most suitable for going out. I used to watch intently the possible paths by which the carriers might come into the valley, which they never did. My staff got a bit tired, too. Ndi, the small Chinda from Ndum, was quite useful for getting me information. He was intelligent, and his English was good. The orderly, of course, did not know the language. There was a good interpreter here, though—a man named Money, who was the local Chinda. He had been to Fernando Po to work, and came back about four years ago.

Nearly all these people were frightened to go outside their own valley. I think it was a case of guilty conscience. Old Kako said he had never been outside except when, as a small boy, he had been captured by the Fulbe and taken to Banyo. He escaped later and came back when he was about sixteen. Since then he had never wandered abroad. Several of these people knew some Fula to talk, including Ndi.

The new Chief shortly after his accession had had a foreign adventure, and complained to me about it on my arrival. He had had a cut on his head, which he showed me, and said several others of his men had been wounded. It was a palaver with Bokop, a neighbouring kingdom. His account was he had been on a visit. The King of the country was not there. He slept there, and early the next morning the wicked Bokop set on them

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and wounded them, so they came back. I told him he ought to have sent first and announced his visit. He said he had, but the messenger had sat down on the road, and he arrived at the same time. I told him he could go and complain at Bamenda, and must on no account go and fight there. He had no doubt fought enough in the past, but now he had grey hairs it was time to stop it.

As a matter of fact, I saw the Chief of Bokop at Bamenda. He had gone there to complain, but had been told it did not concern Bamenda, and he must go to Yola—rather far and an impossible journey, to be precise. He had never been out of his country before, he had only one follower, and was in a state of semi-terror. This follower knew a little English, and I took down some of his language, which is closely allied to that of Mbem and Lom. The Chief's name was Mechuk. He was not a robust type, and only wore a small cloth between his legs.

After I had been at Mbem a week, Money brought a younger brother of his, and said he would like to come on with me. This youth had been away before, and wanted to go and work at Yola, but was frightened to go alone, as well he might be in this country. His name in his own language was Wawa, but as that word means "fool" in Hausa, he gave as another name Barua. I did not particularly want him, but as he was satisfied with ten shillings a month I told him to come. He knew some Fula and a few words of English, and was probably about twenty-three years of age. He was a pleasant-looking young man, and well-behaved, and worked well. The first thing I did was to give him a piece of soap to wash himself and his gown, and I managed to find a few old garments to make him more respectable, but this is always a difficulty, as one hesitates to give away anything that has the least bit of use left in it while one is still far from a store.

I got out of the camp on Tuesday, the 12th June; but not before having to hear a palaver. There arrived early in the morning an old man, named Tadudi, whom I had seen at Lom. He complained that three Mbem men had arrived, and said the white man wanted a girl, and he was to hand one over, which he did. I was rather annoyed at this new act of the Mbem people.

The details were precise to a point. The girl's name was Gechop, and then I asked why he came to me at the last moment, since I had been there ten days, and what day it was that the girl was taken. It then came out it was before I came. After further inquiry it came out it was three years ago. He then said he had seen Hawkesworth about it, and said he had told him to bring it to the next white man who came. Possibly Hawkesworth found it was in French or even in German times. No doubt the matter had rankled, and the old man had had no one to whom to appeal in the past, and lapse of time had not faded the memory of it. It still seemed to him as yesterday. In the absence of an impartial judge to settle such matters, it is not surprising tribes often went to war in the past.

I gave presents to the two Chiefs—the titular one was sick and could not come—and then left. It was a straggling party. There were fourteen Mbem and five Wante men, who filed off first. I went with two loads at eight o'clock, and I left four more for the orderly to follow on with when he could; and if there was any delay, I would send carriers back for them.