

SNOW ON  
THE EQUATOR

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H. W. TILMAN



Mount Kenya: Joseph Glacier and Point Piggott,  
showing col at foot of the west ridge

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TILMAN

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## Contents

	Foreword— <i>Sir Chris Bonington</i>	7
I	Ten Years' Hard	9
II	Buffaloes—and False Teeth	26
III	Kilimanjaro: Kibo and Mawenzi	38
IV	Kenya Mountain	50
V	Business and Pleasure	68
VI	Business and Pleasure	78
VII	Ruwenzori: The Mountains of the Moon	86
VIII	The Approach to Ruwenzori	99
IX	The Ascent of Ruwenzori	108
X	The Gold Rush	122
XI	Amateur Prospectors	129
XII	Kilimanjaro Alone	140
XIII	A New Way Home	148
XIV	Through Uganda	157
XV	Lake Kivu to Stanleyville	166
XVI	North to Bangui	182
XVII	Westwards to the Atlantic	195

## Photographs

Mount Kenya: Joseph Glacier and Point Piggott	2
Dwellings	23
Kilimanjaro: The main crater in 1933	40
Kilimanjaro: Another view of the crater in 1933	40
Kilimanjaro: Leopard's Point	45
Mount Kenya: Pack ponies	53
Mount Kenya: A cave camp in the Mackinder Valley	53
Mount Kenya: Twin peaks of Mount Kenya	56
Mount Kenya: North face of twin peaks of Mount Kenya	61
West face of Mount Kenya, from Point Piggott	63
Mount Kenya: The north face,	66
Ruwenzori: Mount Stanley, photographed from the air	88
The snows of Ruwenzori: An air photograph	96
Ruwenzori: Seventh lake, Nyamgasani Valley	101
Ruwenzori: First glimpse of the snows	104
Ruwenzori: Sunset over the Congo	104
Ruwenzori: On the way up to the Stanley Plateau	111
Ruwenzori: The summit of Alexandra	114
Ruwenzori: Mount Stanley and Mount Baker	117
Signpost on the Nairobi-Kisumu road	154
A war veteran mends the author's shirt	171
Mosquito net and bicycle in front of a hut	171
Canoe race: Canoes going to the starting-point	208
Same canoe race: The fight at the finish	208

## Maps

1	Lake Victoria and surrounding territories	11
2	Mount Kenya	51
3	Ruwenzori	94
4	The route taken across Africa from east to west	211

The pen and ink drawings in the text were tailpieces to some chapters in the first edition, and are by 'Bip' Pares (Ethel Pares, 1904–1977), a prominent and prolific book illustrator, cover designer and poster artist of the 1920s–1950s. She and her second husband Robert Bradby spent their honeymoon in the Himalaya, travelling with H. W. Tilman's 1938 Everest expedition.

Note that Chapters V and VI have the same title—this is not an error.

## Foreword

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*Sir Chris Bonington*

IN JIM PERRIN'S EXCELLENT INTRODUCTION to the collected works of Tilman's mountain writing, he describes the man as 'unsurpassed as a mountaineering author'. I would like to say that Jim hasn't quite gone far enough in his praise, for in looking closely at Tilman and his lifetime exploring the world's mountains, one has to think long and hard to find someone who surpasses his record, not only as an author, but also as a mountaineer. I urge all young adventurers to read a little of Tilman before setting off on their own endeavours, as we did, if only to keep one's self-importance and ego firmly buried in the bottom of the rucksack. His boldness, organisation, and sheer sense of adventure make him one of the greatest mountaineers and explorers Britain has ever known. His list of first ascents around the world, many of which he tackled simply to see what lay beyond the summit, are still not fully appreciated. It is therefore a great pleasure, and not before time, that we see his fifteen wonderfully written books now being republished as new editions.

Climbers of my generation often went to remote mountains, we often tried new routes—we saw ourselves as pioneers, but more often we were shadows, following in the footsteps of Tilman and his friends. I have always found it an inspiration to read his books and share some of his enthusiasm for the unexplored world.

*Snow on the Equator* introduces us to the young Bill Tilman who, in his own words, was looking for something to do:

*To those who went to the War straight from school and survived it,  
the problem of what to do afterwards was peculiarly difficult.*

*Snow on the Equator*, Tilman's first book, shows the young man, looking for adventure but also searching to understand his own personality. He

had left Britain, left the memories it held of time spent in the trenches during the War, and gone out to find a new life in Africa. He met up with Eric Shipton and together they formed one of the most iconic climbing partnerships in British history. It was in Africa that Tilman succeeded in a series of endeavours, including ascents of Kilimanjaro, a traverse of Mount Kenya and a 3000-mile bike ride home. All are recounted with great humour, and between the lines we discover more of the man who would go on to see so much of the last unexplored corners of the globe.

CB

*May 2015*



## TEN YEARS' HARD

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*Young soldier, what will you be,  
When it's all over?  
I shall get out and across the sea,  
Where land's cheap and a man can thrive.*

—MAX PLOWMAN

TO THOSE WHO WENT TO THE WAR straight from school and survived it, the problem of what to do afterwards was peculiarly difficult. A loss of three or four years upset preconceived plans, and while the War was in progress little thought was devoted to such questions. Not that there was no opportunity for thinking, for there was ample time for that during solitary night watches at observation post or gun line; during periods of what was euphemistically called 'resting' behind the lines; or, where most of us went sooner or later, in hospital. No, the reason was because making plans seemed rather a waste of time. Either the War would go on interminably, in which case one was already arranged for, or, in the other alternative, consolation might be found in the philosophy of Feeble, that 'he who dies this year is quit for the next.'

Coming home, then, from the Rhine in April 1919, with what the polite friend might call an 'open' and the candid a blank mind, it was not altogether surprising that in August of the same year I found myself on a cargo-boat bound for East Africa, or B.E.A. as it was then called. My destination was simply accounted for by the fact that I had drawn a farm, or rather a square mile of land, in a lottery for ex-Service men; and the conveyance, because that seemed to be the quickest way of getting there. And since our destination was believed to be a place where, speaking metaphorically, pearls could be picked up on the beach, it was impossible for one to be on the spot too soon.

When the War had ended there were so many Colonials and others awaiting repatriation, or anxious to begin new jobs abroad,

that passages were at a premium. The shipping offices were besieged, and had waiting-lists miles long. One was told dark stories, which I am sure were libellous, of the necessity of bribing the clerks if one's name was to appear in the first few thousands. To avoid this indefinite delay, seven of this impatient horde, including myself, were impetuous enough to pay thirty-five pounds for the privilege of a passage to Mombasa on the S.S. —.

Five of us were quartered in a steel deckhouse on the poop, flanked on either side by a pen of live sheep, and immediately below was the lascar crew's galley, whence the fumes of cooking never ceased rising. At all seasons of the year the striking thing about the Red Sea, and one that is taken for granted, is the heat, but in August, and in a steel deckhouse with no fans, even Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego might have remarked on it.

British East Africa—Kenya as it now is—occupies a central position on the east coast of Africa astride the equator. It has undergone many changes since starting life as a chartered company, becoming first a Protectorate and then a Colony, and as such assuming the name it now bears. Its neighbours, too, have changed. It marches on the south what was formerly German East Africa and is now British Mandated Territory of Tanganyika, while on the north it is now bounded by Italian territory instead of Abyssinian. West is Uganda, which still stands where it did, and on the east is the sea, one of the few unchanging things left in a changing world.

In the closing years of last century British interests in East Africa, represented mainly by missionaries and the Chartered Company of British East Africa, were centred in Uganda. In 1893 the Imperial Government took over from the company, and the favourable reports of administrators like Lugard and Portal, the pressure of missionary influence at home, and fear of French designs in the Sudan, combined to bring about the construction of the Uganda railway from Mombasa on the coast to Kisumu on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria. An East African Protectorate was declared in 1902, and the healthy, fertile uplands lying beyond the arid coastal belt, which the railway had now reached, began to attract the attention of a few enterprising pioneers. The higher and better parts were uninhabited except for the nomadic Masai, who so dominated the country that the other tribes,



for peace's sake, confined themselves to the forest and bush. Grants of land in the Highlands, as they were called, were made to individuals and companies (a small matter of five hundred square miles to one of the last), and there was some talk of making the Highlands a Jewish National Home—Palestine not being available at that time. By 1914 there were a few hundred settlers, mostly engaged in cattle farming and coffee growing, and Nairobi was already a place of some importance as the capital of the Protectorate.

Prior to the War, Nairobi had some notoriety on account of occasional ebullitions of high feeling on the part of the settlers against the too fatherly attitude of the Government. After the War it was notorious for another reason. Lurid stories were told of the guile and rapacity of those who lay in wait in the Nairobi bars to separate the new settler from his capital, so that the innocent and fearful, like myself, hardly dared to have a drink, kept both hands in their pockets, and passed through the town as quickly as possible. So it came about that in October (the voyage having lasted for six weeks) I was viewing from the top of a tree the square mile of land which was to be my home for the next ten years. This unusual method of inspection was adopted because heavy bush, through which there were no paths, for there were no inhabitants, prevented access to it; and from a tree on a neighbouring ridge a much better notion of its features and possibilities could be got than by submerging oneself in a sea of bush and fighting a way across.

I knew nothing about land, and less about farming it, but the climate of this district was said to be good both from a coffee-growing and a health standpoint. I could see for myself that the land was watered by several streams and one large river, while the growth of forest and bush on it clearly indicated that the soil was good. True, it was in the back blocks fifty miles from the railway, a journey of three or four days for ox-wagons, which were then the only means of transport; no Europeans had grown anything there before, and the clearing of the land would be an expensive business; but all that weighed light in the balance against the ardour of the pioneer, the thought of owning land (and such a large chunk), and, to quote Dr Johnson, 'the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice.' When added to this was the knowledge that the financial conditions attached

to the acceptance of it were easy, it will be understood that I was not long in making up my mind.

Another settler who had arrived here in August was in occupation of some land about one and a half miles from where I proposed to make my home. B. was a newcomer to the district and to farming, but not to B.E.A., since he had worked in Nairobi for a short time before the War. He had then served in the Northern Frontier District near the Abyssinian border with the King's African Rifles before being moved to France, so that he knew enough of the language, the conditions, and the natives, to make the month I now spent with him of great value to me. We lived together in a tent, and began a friendship that ended only with his tragic death seven years later.

The land was situated on the south-western slopes of the Mau Forest, between the edge of the forest and a native reserve, at an elevation of 6500 feet. Though within less than a degree of the equator, the shade temperature seldom exceeded eighty degrees and at night dropped to fifty degrees or lower. It was a country of narrow ridges and spurs, of steep valleys, covered with bush, bracken, and scattered forest. There was little or no grass, and near the streams the forest grew thickly. The earth was a deep red loam, remarkable for its uniformity and the absence of stone, sand, or clay, the lack of which was a severe handicap when it came to putting up buildings that were expected to last more than a year or two.

From the station an earth cart-road ran south for twenty-one miles to Kericho, the administrative post for the Lumbwa Reserve, whence it continued for another fifty miles to the Sotik District before fading out into the blue. This road passed within four miles of our land, but in between ran a river, thirty to forty feet wide, too swift and deep to ford except in the 'dry weather' period from November to March.

Obviously the first thing to be done was to bridge this river and make a road of access to the main road, so this was the task that absorbed most of our energies during the month I spent with B. The river was then low, and it behoved us to get the job finished before the rains began in March. Its proximity to the Mau Forest on the one hand, and the fact that the great water mass of Lake Victoria was only forty miles away on the other, made the district a wet one. The average rainfall was over sixty inches a year, and was so well distributed that

January was the only month when a long spell of dry weather could be counted upon.

We built a fearsome structure of four spans of twelve feet, carried on clumsy but solid wooden piers. Single logs were tied together with iron dog-spikes, and the whole pier coiled round with barbed wire in much the same way as the drunken 'Brugglesmith'\* bound himself to his stretcher as he gyrated down the street pulling the bell-wire after him. Barbed wire is more conveniently used for fencing than for lashing bridge piers. Large quantities had been used recently for the long and elaborate fences stretching from Switzerland to the sea, but, the demand for wire for this purpose having fortunately ceased, miles of it could now be bought for an old song, and that, of course, was our sole reason for using it. We found it just as intractable and spiteful to handle here as it had been in France.

The steep river-banks were heavily wooded, so that timber for the bridge was plentiful, but we had to rely entirely upon the natives for expert knowledge about the suitability of different types of tree. Much bitter experience was needed before we acquired this very necessary knowledge ourselves, and, meanwhile, for any building operations of ours, the natives naturally selected trees with an eye to their proximity, or the ease with which they could be felled, rather than for their powers of resistance to water or white ants. So that this first bridge of ours lasted only for a year, and most of our earlier huts and sheds were devoured standing by the all-pervading termite. Until we built a steel and concrete bridge over a similar river bounding the property on the other side, communications were always liable to interruption. The fate of every cart that left, or was due to return, was a source of anxious speculation until we knew whether it was across the bridge or in the river, while during every spell of wet weather and the accompanying spate in the river it was the usual thing to walk down to the bridge of an evening to see if it was still there.

Feeling a slightly less vivid shade of green after my month with B., I returned to Nairobi, and a week later started again for what I now liked to call my estate, taking with me an assortment of carts, ploughs, harrows, tools, household gear, and food. Having hired some oxen

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\* A character in Kipling—*Ed.*

and their drivers at the station, the two light carts (army transport carts ex-German East) were loaded up, the oxen inspanned, and B.'s place reached four days later. The bridge was not quite finished, but it was solid enough for B. to cut the silk ribbon, as it were, and declare the bridge open. The carts crossed in triumph at the run, with the oxen, encouraged by fierce cries and whip-flourishing from the drivers, leaning hard against each other and away from the rushing water.

Word was now passed round by B.'s boys that another white man wanted labour, and soon I had a small gang at work clearing a track through the mile and a half of bush to my future home. I took up my residence in a tent on the highest land of all, and started the gang, which had now increased to fifty, cutting the bush on a long, gently sloping hillside where I proposed turning the first furrow. Other boys began training oxen to make up the necessary teams, and this was a process which forcibly suggested to the inexperienced onlooker a bloodless bull-fight. Unless one was both callous and nimble it was advisable to be busy elsewhere while this was in progress. A good deal of beating and tail-twisting was necessary to produce results, for an ox has a very effective trick of lying down and remaining down when asked to do anything unusual. Before things got to that stage, even before the animal had been captured and yoked, there would be many fierce rushes which put the fear of death into the clothed, booted, and clumsy white man, but only amused the naked and agile Lumbwa.

Meantime, accompanied by one or two boys armed with 'pangas,' or machetes, to clear a way, I began to find out how my land lay, and soon discovered that there were more eligible sites for a house than where the tent was now pitched. A sheltered position, room for a garden, a view, and water near at hand, were the essentials, and there was more than one place where all these could be had. As I grudged spending time or money on a house while the more important work of development remained to be done, the house was to be only a mud and wattle affair, so that no great harm would be done if it turned out to be in the wrong place. Two, in fact, were built in different places before I was satisfied I had found the best, and before I began to build, many years later, something more substantial.

The first had all the stern virtue of simplicity—a single square room without doors or windows. That is to say, there were two apertures, a

larger one for the door and a smaller one for the window, but nothing that needed opening or shutting. A small veranda was cunningly built on in front, where in the daytime I fed, because the living-room was too dark. It was fitted with a chair and table by the simple expedient of driving into the ground four stakes which supported small straight sticks. The floor was of earth, of which one advantage was that you could light a fire on it, or, when I had reached a more advanced stage of civilisation and could spare the tin, a brazier. Close as we were to the equator, the altitude made the nights cool enough for a fire to be welcome all the year round.

There were, however, one or two drawbacks to an earth floor. Bracken and creepers grew up through it as if they were being 'forced,' and had to be cut down frequently; it became dry and dusty, so that the boy sweeping it with an improvised bracken broom lowered it by several inches a month. (It was not wise to tell him to be less vigorous, or the floor might not have been swept at all.) Moreover, it held a great attraction for the hens, who liked coming in to scratch holes in which they could enjoy a dust bath and lay eggs. Encouraged by these ideal conditions, the jigger flea made its appearance. This is a very small insect which burrows under toe-nails and finger-nails, where it is only discovered by the intense irritation it sets up. It has then to be extracted by digging round it with a needle, an operation which is only complete when the whole insect, with its newly formed egg-sac, has been removed. Houseboys, hens, and dogs are the main sources of flea-infection, but in this district the jigger did not seem to find conditions very congenial. A liberal sprinkling of the earth floor with some disinfectant like Jeyes' (which the boys called 'cheese'), or even water, kept them in check, while with a wood floor they were practically unknown. The jigger, or chegoe, is indigenous to South America, and is supposed to have been brought over to the west coast of Africa in the sand ballast of a ship early in the last century. From there, within a short time, it spread across Africa to the east coast.

Of the plagues and pests usually associated with the tropics we were singularly free; at least, of those which annoy man; but with crops and livestock it was quite another matter. Mosquitoes were rare, while those few we had were not infected with malaria. It was too cold for scorpions. Hornets and snakes were only occasional visitors. I



remember killing a puff adder in the garden, and nearly being killed by a bright green snake sitting in a coffee-bush which I had just started to prune; and many years later, after the petrol age had dawned, I found a puff adder enjoying the lingering warmth on the cylinder head of a car when I opened the bonnet in the morning. But the number seen or killed on the farm annually could be counted on one hand, and, though the natives were mortally afraid of snakes, even dead ones, I never heard of anyone, European or native, being bitten.

The white ant was always with us, but it, fortunately, is not carnivorous, and feeds exclusively on any wood stuck in the ground or in contact with the ground. It never comes to the surface, so that the posts, the rafters, and even the thatch of a house, can be honeycombed with ants without any visible sign of their activities except a few bits of earth, like wormcasts, on the outside of the wood. Certain woods—cedar, for instance—they will not touch, but most posts have to be sunk in concrete. Nor is the wood of a roof or ceiling resting on a brick wall safe, for the ants find a way up to it through the wall between the bricks. The worker termites, which do all the damage, are white, and cannot stand the light of day, hence the earth which they stick on the outside of a post to keep their runs dark.

More ferocious are the black soldier or safari ants, and the red, tree ants, which attack anything living that comes in their way, but an occasional visit from safari ants is not without benefit to a grass hut, to which they give a very thorough spring cleaning. The roof of a grass hut and the mud walls harbour an astonishing variety of insects, of which the least revolting are the spiders and the most obscene a great, fat, white slug. None of these obtrude on one if left alone, and the only indications of their presence are mysterious rustling noises at night, a slight but constant shower of sawdust sent down by the borer beetles, bits of grass dislodged by some restless slug, and occasionally the arrival of some kind of insect in person on the bed or in the soup. But that unpleasantness can be avoided by using a ceiling-cloth or sleeping under a mosquito net, while the safari ants can be relied upon to clear the whole lot out periodically.

If their visit takes place in the daytime, little inconvenience is caused, for one simply vacates the house and waits until they have cleaned up the livestock. The houseboy may make futile attempts to

deflect their line of march with barriers of hot embers, but if the army is in strength this is a useless expedient. A few hours after taking possession they will have devoured every live and dead insect in the hut and passed on their way.

At night it is a different matter. The first indication of trouble is an intensification of the rustling sounds in the roof, but this warning may go unheeded and, presently, if not under a net, one is awakened by a sharp stab in the arm or some more sensitive spot, or by one of the fat slugs, smothered with ants, dropping from the roof on to one's face. You must then 'stand not upon the order of your going,' but make a dive for the door, picking up several hundred ants off the floor *en route*, and, when well clear of the marauding host and its far-flung scouts, tear off your pyjamas and proceed to pull off the numerous ants which have now got their fangs well buried in all the most inaccessible parts of your body. If you have had time to rescue some blankets and a camp-bed, all is well, for on several occasions I have been thus driven out and spent the rest of the night bedded down in a store or tool-shed.

Bats were another source of disturbed nights. Three or four might find their way into the room at the same time, where they seemed to delight in brushing past one's face as close as possible. The thought of being touched by their clammy wings and mouse-like, flea-ridden bodies was revolting, and I found it impossible to sleep so long as one remained fluttering about. I used to light the lamp and be in bed holding a .22 rifle, to pot them off one by one whenever they settled and hung head downwards from a beam, as sooner or later they did. A quicker and more sporting method was to bag them flying with a tennis racquet.

While on the subject of pests, one of a more serious, widespread, and devastating kind, amounting, in fact, to a plague, should not escape notice. This was the invasion of Kenya and neighbouring East African territories by the desert locust, which began in 1928 and continued for three or four years. The southern deserts of the distant Sudan were their source of origin, but once a swarm is allowed to lay eggs and hatch out it multiplies itself in a way which defies arithmetic. So serious was the destruction of food crops, both native and European, that at one period the export of foodstuffs was forbidden for fear of famine. It was no uncommon thing to see a swarm take a whole day to

pass overhead, veiling the sun as it went, or for a swarm to settle and strip two or three hundred acres of maize or wheat in a very short time. Coffee was about the only green stuff they appeared not to eat, but they did almost as much damage by settling on it and breaking the branches with their weight. There were stories of their eating even the thatch of a roof; one man, it was said, having his roof eaten over his head while he was in his bath. But perhaps such stories were apocryphal.

My second dwelling was a more elaborate affair, built on another site, and finished not a moment too soon, for the old hut collapsed the day I moved into the new one. This house was another wattle and daub structure, but it consisted of two big six-sided huts connected by a veranda, open to the front. It had a fireplace of sun-dried bricks, and a wood floor made from planks cut by the small circular saw which was now in use at B.'s place. (B., who had worked at a saw-mill, got a lot of fun out of slicing up big logs. His main trouble was to prevent boys putting their hands on it to see if it was going round.) From the house I could command a view of the whole planted area of the farm, but, in spite of this encouragement to do so, I did not adopt the practice of 'farming from the veranda,' a common East African failing. Across the valley of the Itare River one looked over the green, broken, but uninteresting country of the Lumbwa Reserve, and beyond to the low wall of the Kisii Hills bounding the western horizon, hills which were washed to a deep indigo after the storms which broke on them had passed away.

The reason for the dullness of the view across the Reserve was, I think, a complete absence of trees; a common feature, sooner or later, of all native Reserves. It is brought about by their system of cultivation and their goats. Each family will clear an acre, or half an acre, of new land every season for their crop of maize or wimbi (a small millet), while the innumerable goats see to it that no seedling trees survive to replace those thus annually destroyed. In the more populated parts of the Reserve it was a source of wonder as to where the natives collected enough sticks for fuel, and for the light fencing which they put round the fields to keep out the ubiquitous goat. As these goats produce neither milk nor hair, and as they are used for food only on the occasion of certain festivals, they are in themselves almost valueless. Their chief function is to figure as a form of currency in such transactions as the

purchase of wives or cattle, in the payment of fines, or in the feeing of the witch-doctor. The destruction of the trees, of course, encourages 'wash,' denudes the soil of humus, and may even affect the rainfall. The evil is obvious, and, though something is being done to repair the damage by encouraging tree-planting, the root of the evil is difficult to remove without considerably altering the native's mode of living.

The most attractive part of the view, at any rate to me, was, in course of time, the neat parallel rows of alternating coffee-bushes and shade-trees stretching away from below the house for half a mile. Most pleasing of all was it when in blossom, with the white flowers set off against the rich dark green of the leaves, or, six months later, when promise had come to fruition, and the bright red cherry-like berries weighed down the branches. It sounds magnificent and it looked magnificent, but in later years it became an increasingly infrequent sight. Hail might knock off all the flower, or even prevent the trees flowering; the flowers when formed acquired an unfortunate habit of not 'setting'; and, if the fruit did appear, it presently acquired a nasty way of turning black and dropping off long before it had reached the cherry-ripe stage. In the six, seven, or even eight months between flower and harvest there was so much that might happen, and so much that did.

During our first few years most of our energy and capital were devoted to the growing of flax. This commodity was fetching a very high price at the end of the War, and for the first year or two after it. Our mouths watered when we heard of one lot of Kenya flax which sold for £400 a ton, and calculations of profit based on a price of £200 a ton seemed fair, and were undoubtedly attractive. When estimating profits, it should be a safe rule to halve the probable returns and double the estimated expenses, but we were to find that even then two and two sometimes made three.

Eager to take advantage of the high price, we worked feverishly to clear, stump, plough, and sow as many acres as possible. My first year I got in fifty acres, while in succeeding years the acreage sown to flax, if not always reaped, was near a hundred. The snag about flax-growing is that, though the growing of it is fairly simple, the harvesting is not the end of one's troubles, but only the beginning. The ripe stalks have all to be pulled up by the roots by hand, dried on the field in stooks, and stored in a barn. When the weather is favourable—that is, not too

much sun and not too much rain—it is taken out and spread thinly and evenly, almost stalk by stalk, on grass, to undergo what is called 'dew-retting.' This process takes ten to fourteen days, according to the weather, during which time it has to be turned frequently. If there is too much rain it goes mouldy, while too much sun weakens the fibre. After that it is stoked again, tied in bundles, and once more stored in a barn until it can be scutched. With ten or fifteen acres of ground covered with retted flax, ready to carry, the awaiting of the necessary dry day in the middle of a wet spell was a most wearing business for the poor farmer, when every day longer that it remained out meant a serious deterioration in quality and loss in value.

For the scutching, machinery is needed, and it was nearly three years after I started that the first flax was scutched at B.'s and shipped home to England. During this time we had watched the market for flax drop first to £200 and then to £100, at which figure my first lot was sold. Then the rot set in, and before another year was out we were receiving only £50 a ton, a lower price than we had previously obtained for our tow, a by-product of the scutching process. A few farmers in Kenya were ruined by flax, and most lost money by it; especially those who, like my neighbours B. and his partner, had put money into flax machinery. I was fortunate myself, but unless the machinery had been put up it would not have been any use growing flax.

However, even from the beginning, neither my neighbours nor myself had banked entirely on flax, because there were several factors besides the fickleness of the market and the vagaries of the weather which made it an uneconomic crop for us. The yield was low (about half that which is obtained in Europe), a tropical sun weakened the fibre and made it a poorer quality, and we found that it was impossible to crop the same land more than twice. This meant that, to maintain the acreage, fresh land had to be cleared and broken every year, adding greatly to the cost of production; and, apart from that, it was an immoral proceeding in that it partook more of mining the land than farming it, taking good out of it and putting nothing back—exactly what our friends the natives were doing in their Reserve on the other side of the river.

Coffee was the alternative crop, and, after the first year, twenty or thirty acres were planted annually, so that, when flax was finally

dropped, five years later, there was a substantial acreage of coffee, the oldest of which was just coming into bearing. Entitled now to call myself a planter, which sounds so much more dashing than farmer, I felt that a mud and grass hut was hardly worthy of my new status. The planter's bungalow of the novelist is generally spacious, if not luxurious. Even the assistant manager's bungalow is 'trim,' and, in both, servants in spotless white hover silently at their master's elbow. Only planters who have lost their job through drink or women, and have very nearly 'gone native,' are allowed to live in grass huts, and to have their gin poured out by a boy attired in a blanket.

So I began my third and last house. It was built of burnt bricks made on the spot, roofed with corrugated iron, and possessed the usual amenities—a floor, a ceiling, doors, glass windows, cupboards, and, not least, a fireplace and a brick chimney. When it was completed with living-room, two bedrooms, veranda, and built-in kitchen, so astonished and impressed were the houseboy and the cook that they demanded a rise in wages and a uniform.

The method of construction was original. I put the roof up first on poles, and then, when the walls were built, taking the poles away, I lowered the roof on to the wall-plate. The reason for this was that the bricks of the inside walls were only sun-dried and not burnt, and so the walls had to be protected from rain as they were built, while in the first place the roof had to serve as a covering for the kiln in which the bricks were burnt. The new house, and therefore the brick-kiln, was sited immediately behind the old one; so close that I had to sit up throughout one night to see that the red-hot wall of the kiln did not set fire to the grass roof of the old house in which I was still living.

Had it caught fire, I might have said with some truth that the new house rose phoenix-like from the ashes of the old. Nevertheless, something of the sort did take place, because when all was ready the old house was abolished almost as rapidly as the felling of a chimney, and there the neat, but not too spacious, bungalow of the novelist stood revealed in all its glory.

The house and my faith in its solidity were severely tested shortly after I had moved in. The whole Colony was put into a state of alarm by a severe earth tremor—a mild earthquake, in fact—which at one place opened cracks in the earth and brought down buildings. The effect was

The first dwelling.



The second.



Third, and last.



Dwellings

less violent in our district, but sufficiently frightening. It happened in the early hours of the morning, when I was awakened by a sort of roar, rather like that of an approaching train. At this ominous prelude dogs barked, cocks crowed, cattle lowed, and then the bed began to shake violently. For what seemed like a minute, but what was probably only a few seconds, I lay in bed wondering what would happen next. Then there was a loud crash, and I streaked for the open spaces, while the roar receded in the distance. That was the finish of it, and after a decent interval of time, when confidence was restored, I returned to the house to find an inch crack opened in the upper half of the wall over my bed, and a big rhino horn, whose proper place was on the wall, now on the floor. The fall of that had made the crash which lent wings to my flight.

At the end of one year in my new house, and ten on the farm, I sold out. Many were the changes that had taken place in that time. New settlers had come, old ones had gone. In a small community such as ours, births, marriages, and deaths become almost family affairs. Communications had improved greatly, particularly with the station, the negotiation of which road had interested us perhaps more than anything else. The motor-car and the lorry were now the normal form of transport, and the ox-wagon almost an anachronism. The road had been widened, re-graded, drained, but it was still unmetalled, so that a prolonged wet spell soon gave rise to quagmires from which, if entered, it was impossible to escape. Chains for the wheels were a *sine qua non* on any journey, no matter how fine the weather appeared, while in wet weather shovels, pangas, planks, old sacks, rabbit-netting, or even a block and tackle, were all items of equipment that would be carried by the prudent driver. I remember on one occasion, through neglect of some such precaution, having to put my waterproof under a spinning back wheel for want of anything handy to make it grip. That was the last service it rendered.

For those ten years, except for an annual shooting excursion and one brief visit to England, I had kept my nose to the grindstone. I saw no one else except at weekends, so that, in spite of the efforts of kind neighbours, there was some danger of my becoming as mossy and as difficult to uproot as some of the bigger trees which had taken us days to stump; of developing into the sort of person who in another planting community is called a 'hill-topper'; a man who has lived by himself for



so long that he dreads meeting anyone, and therefore builds his house on the top of some hill, so as to have timely warning of the approach of visitors to escape into the safety of the neighbouring bush.

Another impelling motive for change of scene was that the daily routine of attending to planted coffee was much less congenial to me than the earlier struggle to carve a home out of the forest and to tame the wilderness; to watch the landscape—a waste of bush and jungle, but a familiar one—change daily under one's eyes; to see a new clearing here, a shed there, paths and roads pushing out in all directions, while seeds, which one had oneself planted, grew into trees big enough to make timber.

I already had some land in the Sotik, thirty miles further from the railway, where this absorbing task could be tackled afresh; where with a newly acquired partner there would be no danger of becoming enslaved by the farm. If either wanted a holiday, it could be taken; all that was needed between the two of us was the sort of understanding that John Jorrocks had with his huntsman, James Pigg, to wit, 'that master and man should not both get drunk on the same day.'

