



Giant Prince in Dance of the Lion.

Commander Attilio Gatti, one of the most famous of modern scientific explorers, has written a new book, "South of the Sahara," which is being published in New York. The author tells some strange stories and relates some amazing experiences. Arrangements have been made for publication by "The Age" of a series of articles drawn from Commander Gatti's book, and to-day the series begins with an astonishing story of the Gigantic Race of Princes.

THE WATUSSI are unique, as is their country, and their very appearance is extraordinary. In fact, the whole atmosphere about them, as well as most of their customs and superstitions, and even their gorgeous cattle, seems to have survived a distant and superb period of human history, to have been miraculously lifted and salvaged from the crumbling of the

Pharaoh empire of ancient Egypt.

Located in the centre of the Dark Continent, about equi-distant from Cairo and Cape Town, and half way between the Atlantic and Indian oceans, Rwanda is a small spot difficult to find on the average map. Yet it contains more marvels, contrasts and exaggerations than any other African land.

Though live volcanoes surround this mountainous kingdom, and have covered its borders with patches of black, petrified lava; though craters of other, long-dead volcanoes stud it with innumerable lakes, Rwanda's meagre eighteen thousand square miles are inhabited by three million people, making it, after Egypt, Africa's most populated territory.

The bulk of this population is formed by the Bahutu, negroes of the usual Bantu type, and the only people of Rwanda who are normal in physical characteristics, and ordinary in manner of life. Patient, obstinate, shrewd peasants, the Bahutu have cultivated to perfection every bit of ground not taken up by water, stone or forest. Yet, until quite recently, this contradictory land, which nine years out of ten would give prodigious crops, every tenth year or so was afflicted by terrible droughts, each

## SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

followed by a famine which wiped out hundreds of thousands of the Bahutu.

### Halting Soil Erosion

These calamities, however, one man managed to stop almost single-handedly in less than three years. Governor Voisin, an old friend of mine, brought about this almost magical result simply by persuading the Moami, the King of Rwanda, to issue a couple of innocent-appearing laws. One prescribed that each of his subjects must plant a tree every month as long as he should live; the other, that each hut should be permanently surrounded by a patch of the hardy, prolific manioc, which no drought can kill, and whose root, poisonous when fresh, gives a substantial food when dried and pulverised.

This meant the planting of a billion trees in one generation, the halting of soil erosion due to the deforestation of centuries, the hope for the return of more regular annual rainfall—and meanwhile food at each man's door against the consequences of recurring drought.

Charles Voisin did not have to worry about these orders being carried out. For what the Moami says goes. His word is divine law; and despite the presence of a Belgian Governor he preserves intact, and sometimes still uses, absolute power of life and death over his subjects.

This brings us to the mysterious, spectacular race of 80,000 or so Watussi, all giants and all of princely blood, whose men rule the country under the Moami, the noblest among them, and undoubtedly the noblest sovereign in the entire world, for he is the thirty-ninth consecutive king in his family.

No one has yet been able to explain why the Watussi man is one, two, sometimes three feet taller than the comely woman of his race. While she only rarely reaches five feet ten inches, and never six feet, his average height is above seven feet. Seven feet nine or ten inches is a quite common height; and one occasionally meets a Watussi topping the eight-foot mark. In fact, I know a youth who is generally called "Deo Gratia," from the exclamation that some astounded Catholic missionaries let out when they first saw him. And no wonder, for "Deo Gratia" is all of eight feet nine inches tall, and thinks nothing of it.

Now, back from my tenth African expedition, at the end of my fourteenth year actually spent on African soil, and of my third extensive sojourn in Rwanda, I feel that I

know the Watussi a little better, and that I have learned, at least, some of the simple secrets of their splendid fitness, of their startling average of healthy, active longevity.

One is their diet. What they eat, and always with moderation, is mainly milk, cream, butter, several kinds of unfermented cheeses, and honey, bananas and boiled vegetables. Meat has very little part in their meals, because, for some reason it does not seem to agree with Rwanda's climate. We ourselves while there developed a sudden dislike for meat.

Another secret might be that of planned fasting. This they use periodically as a preventive of illness, often as a preparation for strenuous physical exertion, and always as a first treatment when illness comes. Which, even to our "civilised" minds, makes more sense than the gorging in which the Wandande indulge any time they can, expecting a belt made of okapi hide to take care of any consequences.

### Convivial Restraints

A third rule quite generally observed is temperance in drinking. The Watussi's only alcoholic drink is made of honey, milk and bananas. Each of these products is innocent enough. But once they are mixed according to the proper recipe, and fermented the right amount of time, there emerges the most powerful dynamite of a sour-sweet, treacherous liquid I have ever tasted.

Fortunately for the perfect preservation of the Watussi race, their ancient, wise ancestors—perhaps after some personal experimenting with the mixture—must have grown afraid of the consequences that too-convivial customs could bring upon the future of their people. So, even then knowing how easily one drinks more than is prudent when many people are gathered together in a jovial mood, they established one of their strictest taboos—that against drinking or eating in the presence of anyone save the immediate members of one's family.

How faithfully this taboo is still to-day preserved was proved to us when we wished to take some movies of a family around the "table"—the beautifully shaped flower of colored clay which occupied the centre of the floor of every Watussi hut. We had its four semi-circular petals covered with fresh banana leaves. Wooden plates and bottles and pots, all scrupulously clean, and filled with appetising foods and drinks, were disposed on the tender green "table cloth." But when it came to bringing a bottle to the mouth, not even the omnipotent Moami succeeded in persuading anyone to make any more

than a token gesture with a bottle previously emptied of the last drop of liquid and carefully scrubbed and dried.

The fourth rule, and probably the most effective of all, is the one regulating a man's physical activity. From his earliest childhood the Watussi boy spends a good part of his day, practically naked, in the clean, exhilarating mountain air, running, jumping, throwing diminutive arrows and javelins, and learning the elements of the traditional dances of the race, each of which, besides being an accomplishment of great beauty and exquisite grace, represents an entire course of calisthenics.

When he is eight he starts "school," that is, every day he gets a two-hour lesson from the nearest "Maker of Intelligence," which involves a brisk walk of twenty miles or so, to the teacher's house and back. The lessons continue until he is fourteen, all his spare time being taken up by his efforts to reach excellency in dancing and jumping, without which he never could satisfy his highest ambition of being admitted to the corps of the Moami's pages.

After serving between forty and fifty months in the court he is ready to marry the girl he loves. Then, for some years to come, the affairs of State—that is, the chieftainship and the care of the Bahutu families and cultivations on the slopes of the hill confided to his rule by the King, and on the top of which he has built his home—do not occupy too much of his time. So he still participates in the tribal dances and jumping competitions, in which, tall as he may have grown to be, he still must jump at least as high as his own stature, and lightly, gracefully, without the least manifestation of effort.

### Youthful Prowess

What startling results the average youthful Watussi prince can obtain through his daily training and steady, passionate desire for improvement, my companions of the expedition and I were able to see when Moami Rudahigwa ordered a sort of Olympic Games in our honor. For this event from every corner of the realm the best youth of each province flocked toward Nyanza, Rwanda's capital, to display their prowess before their sovereign, his court and his guests.

The moment King Rudahigwa led us from the coolness of his palace to the sunny expanse of the enormous square which faced it, the whole space before us surged to life. And with such a riot of savage rhythms, of violent colors, of barbaric motions

that we felt wrenched away from the present, flung into a past when mankind was boldly entering the first maturity of civilisation. Watussi warriors leaped forward, their small heads covered with lion manes, their wide shoulders and arrogant chest adorned with embroideries of colored beads and old gold. Their unbelievably narrow hips tightly bound by long antelope skins fringed with otter, their snapping ankles and flashing wrists encircled by rows of silvery bells, they flung their soul into the traditional "dance of the lion," and sprang like creatures of flame.

Young pages of the King's retinue followed, and imitated their elders. Mouths open in ferocious grimaces, shining teeth clenched, big brown eyes sparkling, heads disdainfully thrown back, they, too, challenged imaginary enemies to mortal combats. Contortions of limbs that a leopard might envy; fantastic bounds in complete disregard for the law of gravity; heads spun round and round as if to give momentum to a missile to be thrown at the enemy; feints, attacks, retreats, momentary defeats, sudden recoveries, new, more audacious thrusts—these went on while unceasingly the Bahutu musicians whipped the yelling dancers and the clamoring audience alike into a crescendo of excitement which finally exploded in a high-pitched cry.

"I, for my Moami, am ready to die!" shouted every man and boy in the crowd. And every woman clapped her hands in wordless homage to her King. Then the Moami raised a hand, and every sound died in a sudden silence. Everybody stood motionless and followed Rudahigwa's gaze. There, in a corner of the immense square, we saw slim figures take a few easy steps, effortlessly abandon the ground, and one after the other soar high up over a thin reed, descending in a graceful curve, landing lightly, composedly.

Though many times I had admired Watussi athletes jumping, I could not believe my own eyes.

"But," I said, "they are actually jumping almost as high as their own stature. You weren't joking then the day you told me so?"

"Oh, no," Rudahigwa replied quietly. "As a matter of fact, some of them jump even higher. For this is our greatest national sport. It is the one thing that even the few undisciplined young men take most seriously and earnestly."

And he asked us to go and stand under the reed, which had just been



Giant King Rudahigwa, of Rwanda, who is eight feet three inches in height.

raised. Later I measured the distance myself. It was exactly 8 feet 3 1/4 inches from the ground, and the bit of anthep from which the jumpers took off was 2 1/2 inches high. That next jump, therefore, was an amazing 8 feet 1 inch. Yet, one after another, the handsome athletes soared above our heads. It was all so effortless, so noiseless, that at a certain moment Charlie, believing the competition ended, started forward to express his enthusiasm to the Moami. But a Watussi, just in that second, was in the air above us. With the quickness of lightning I saw him throw his body forward, stretch out his thin legs, and, with a twist of his back, he lengthened the jump by several feet, clearing Charlie's head by just a few inches. Landing lightly, the prince instantly turned to offer apologies. He had spent a lot of time with us, and his quick mind had picked up and stored away many American expressions. So, unconsciously, he ended that feast of barbaric splendor on just the right note.

The richer and more important the Watussi becomes, the more slaves he needs and acquires, to protect himself and his increasing family and herds of cattle from the attacks of

wild animals, particularly from the aggressive black-spotted leopard of the mountains. Here is where the Batwa pygmies come into the picture, the fiercest and most primitive in existence.

These people possess none of the lovable qualities of the Mambuti or Tikky-Tikky pygmies of the equatorial jungle. One almost never gets a glimpse of these little gnomes, who seldom reach more than half of the Watussi's stature. Cruel, filthy, savage, still armed only with stone-pointed and barbed weapons as primitive of prehistoric times, but knowing Nature's deadliest poisons and darkest secrets, these Batwa slaves are invaluable to the Watussi, as much to-day as in the past when they were regularly used, carrying to an inexorable, bloody conclusion every kind of crime, execution, revenge and guerilla warfare that the superior race of giants wished accomplished.

When a leopard is known to be nearby—that is, within thirty or forty miles—the Watussi prince goes hunting, using his Batwa slaves in place of dogs. He goes hunting to keep his legs trained, his eyes alert, his arms sharp, and perhaps also for the thrill of the dangerous chase. But, mainly he goes to make sure that other foe of his precious cattle is promptly eliminated.