

Stanley meets Mutesa
David Rubadiri (Uganda)

Such a time of it they had;
The heat of the day
The chill of the night
And the mosquitoes that followed.
Such was the time and
They, bound for a kingdom.

The thin weary line of carries
With tattered dirty rags to cover their backs;
The battered bulky chests
That kept on falling off their shaven heads.
Their tempers high and hot
The sun fierce and scorching
With it rose their spirits
With its fall their hopes
As each day sweated their bodies dry and
Flies clung in clumps on their sweat scented backs.
Such was the march
And the hot season just breaking.

Each day a weary pony dropped
Left for the vultures on the plains;
Each afternoon a human skeleton collapsed,
But the march trudged on
Its Khaki leader in front
He the spirit that inspired

He the light of hope.

Then came the afternoon of a
hungry march,
A hot and hungry march it was;
The Nile and the Nyanza
Lay like two twins
Azure across the green
countryside.

The march leapt on chanting
Like young gazelles to a
water hole.

Heart beat faster
Loads felt lighter
As the cool water lapped their
sore feet.

No more the dread of hungry
hyenas
But only tales of valour when
At Mutesa's court fires are lit.
No more the burning heat of
the day
But song, laughter and dance.

The village looks on behind banana groves,
Children peer behind reed fences.
Such was the welcome
No singing women to chant a
welcome
Or drums to greet the white
ambassador;

Only a few silent nods from
aged faces
And one rumbling drum roll
To summon Mutesa's court to
parley
For the country was not sure.

The gate of reeds is flung open,
There is silence
But only a moment's silence-
A silence of assessment.
The tall black king steps forward,
He towers over the thin bearded white man,
Then grabbing his lean white hand
Manages to whisper
"Mtu Mweupe Karibu"
White Man you are Welcome.
The gate of polished reed closes
behind them
And the West is let in.

Sources

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