

Some Out of the Way Kings

Quaint Specimens of Royalty in Their Craft and Kindergarten, Who Are Reigning Undisturbed in Obscure Places

By **POULTNEY BIGELOW**



Thus Attired,
His Majesty
Struck an
Attitude.

Drawings by John Sloan.

ONCE that most Christian of heathens, a prince among philosophers, the friend of Emperors and Prime Ministers, a Roman country gentleman, a simple farmer in outward life, a man of the world for all time, the poet Horace, sung a song, which might read: "It's well for Kings and other potentates to rise cautiously, because the higher they soar the sorer it feels when they come down."

And this reminds me of King Ja Ja, from the West Coast of Africa, who never heard of Horace; and indeed Ja Ja himself was but a hazy name to me when I paddled abreast of his palace in the Island of St. Vincent, one of the most beautiful of the British West Indies. Here is perpetual summer—a soft breeze at all times tempering the heat of the sun's rays, grand volcanic mountains clothed with luxuriant tropical vegetation rising from the sea to altitudes almost Alpine. Here grow sugar, cocoa, orange, banana; here life is easy, and man surrounded by everything calculated to make a King forget any throne.

But King Ja Ja was not happy. At home he commanded twenty-five thousand warriors, the finest army in the world, said he—but then that was before the Rough Riders conquered Cuba. At that time the standing army of the United States was exactly the same as that of King Ja Ja; and this induced His Majesty to a comparison of forces in which he demonstrated to his own satisfaction that his African Empire, being equal in fighting forces, must necessarily correspond in other respects.

It was not my place to correct royalty. Ja Ja was a King in Africa. He wore a gauze undershirt and white linen trousers, bare feet and very gorgeous oriental slippers. His Chief Lord High Chamberlain was a bright eyed, woolly headed black boy who showed me to the reception room with as much ceremony as though into the presence of a reigning sovereign of the Old World.

King Ja Ja had turned his army against that of Queen Victoria; and at the end of the war, instead of putting him into a prison with irons on his hands and feet, as we treated Jefferson Davis, the British Queen made him a present of a palace in this West Indian paradise, gave him plenty of pocket money, sent him a wife, and in addition allowed him all the personal liberty compatible with permanent residence in St. Vincent.

He introduced me to his wife—a handsome African damsel dressed in a low neck white stuff which made me think of a lamb chop with a cuff round the handle. He offered me whisky in a pewter mug. When I declined it he was offended, until I told him that my medicine man forbade me such things. This surprised him—he said I was the first white man he had ever met who didn't ask for whisky. Then he offered me some sort of fruit syrup and water, which of course I accepted in order to prove to him that I had no objection to Booker Washington.

Then the King made me treasonable overtures. He expanded upon his power in Africa, upon the value of his alliance; he urged me to bring down an American man of war and carry him away and then found the Empire of Ja Ja. Queen Ja Ja, if I am a judge of features, did not encourage the Empire of Ja Ja scheme. In St. Vincent she was important as a wife; in Ja Ja she might become one of a hundred or so.

Ja Ja was a fine Negro in his way, and maybe I was wrong in not quoting this conversation earlier and thus anticipating by a few years the founding of our great Colonial Empire. However, Ja Ja might have been disappointed, had the Stars and Stripes ever waved over his African capital,—we might have deceived him; he might have become another Aguinaldo. Besides, I discovered that his opinion of the United States navy was tinged by his belief that I had paddled down from New York,

and that my trusty Rob Roy was a species of torpedo boat. This legend served me in good stead, although I heard of it only long afterward.

Opposite the palace of King Ja Ja lay the famous little ketch which E. F. Knight had sailed from England all the way to the Plata River. All lovers of the sea know "The Cruise of the Falcon." King Ja Ja had seen me clambering in and out of the Falcon, and had conceived the notion that I might fit it out once more and carry him away to the United States—the land where his claims to empire would be satisfied. I did not tell him that he would probably find it hard to gain admission into any New York hotel; and paddled away with mixed feelings about Ja Ja.

Kings are quaint things in their combination of craft and kindergarten. This is not merely a Ja Ja generalization; for since my cruise to St. Vincent I have noted the kingly characteristic at many courts, ranging from the Borneo jungle to the pompous palaces of the Thames, the Neva, the Danube, and the Spree. Kings are much alike in one or two distinguishing traits—Mark Twain summed them up in a conversation between Huckle-



King Ja Ja Introduced His Wife.

berry Finn, Tom Sawyer, and Nigger Jim during the raft journey on the Mississippi.

Kings never breathe a natural breath; their breathing is sterilized for them by courtly process. Their atmosphere is made for them by desiccated men and women who try to think what they think that the monarch ought to think; and maybe in normal times monarchs do well to limit themselves to second hand thinking. Long reigns are those untainted by original thought—witness dear old Franz Josef in Austria, the venerable William I., Victoria of blessed memory.

The moment I talked with Ja Ja I knew him for a King,—only a King could have thought his kind of courtly thoughts; only a writer of comic opera could treat seriously the lofty themes discussed that day in our tropical paradise.

This One Was Different.

ON the other hand, King Masupa of Basutoland was different—in degree, but not in kind. He offered me no whisky, because whisky is contraband in Basutoland, and besides he had drunk up the last of the bottle. Masupa succeeded the illustrious Moshesh (a corruption of Moses), and this old Moshesh was a grand old scoundrel who divided his time between raiding Boer cattle and professing Christianity to British missionaries. He organized the Basuto into a nation of black fighters—mainly through raiding upon his neighbors, putting the men to death, sparing the best women, and rearing young boys only in case they proved available recruits for his army. But in time even the missionaries looked askance at Moshesh, and the British Government wearied of his ambiguities.

King Masupa buried his illustrious ancestor with rites half Christian and half African, and then ascended the throne of Taba Basio with a promise henceforth to follow the advice of a British resident commissioner, who at the time of my visit (1896)

was the eminent Godfrey Lagden. Masupa's throne was a sailor's chest, on which he sat with African dignity, telling me that he was thirsting to lead his armies against the Boers and win back the soil of his ancestors.

While thus orating I prepared to photograph him; for he was picturesque in his royal cups. His right hand was extended in dramatic gesticulation, he wore a colored shirt of European make, his legs were bare, and in his left hand he swung a war club. He was every inch a King,—in Africa,—and I wanted him thus on my plate. But up he sprang with a yell and rushed into his royal palace.

Here was not a tithe of the comfort surrounding Ja Ja in St. Vincent; but here were other things dear to royalty,—an abundance of wives and many courtiers. Masupa shouted, and his court convened; they dragged a box from under his bed, and from it pulled out several bits of royal apparel which they submitted for approval. His Majesty finally selected a paper collar, a checked shirt, a spike tail coat with gold lace and buttons which had once been a consular uniform, then from an assortment of old hats he selected a high silk one, and struck an attitude. His courtiers stood about admiringly.

I have thought of this picture at times, when, for instance, a great war lord issues on the parade ground in the flashing uniform of the royal body guard. Masupa was no less serious. He too ruled by divine right; he too commanded the loyalty of a people and the unbounded admiration of many courtiers. What odds if one lives in a Kafir kraal and the other in a Versailles, Hofburg, or Mommoth Schloss. Royalty is not a thing merely of dress; it is of the spirit knowing naught of outward limitations. The old saw that "Dress maketh the man" was fabricated by some untraveled scribe reared in the London fog. To-day we know better—leastwise if it is dress that maketh the mere man, it is want of it which maketh not merely the chorus girl but many a sunny King of my acquaintance.

Masupa treated me with effusive cordiality, and gave me his royal hand at parting—the hand of a sovereign, the man who is to his people in Africa what Booker Washington is to Africans in Massachusetts to-day. He is the great leader of his people, the second Moses—a more than a Moses, for he rules by divine right of succession.

The last words of such a man to me at parting cannot be of trifling import, however oracular or obscure to finite senses. "I have not enough royal insignia!" quoth the King of the Basuto. "I want another insignia!"

I bent my ear to catch his words. "Can I help your Majesty?" quoth I eagerly.

"You may," quoth His Majesty. "What is lacking in your royal insignia?" quoth I. "A red jacket." And I heard no more.

Then Came the Sultan of Brunei.

IN Borneo I had the honor of audience with the mightiest monarch of the Far East. I put it thus, for he thus put it to me. This was none other than the child of the sun and moon, the Sultan of Brunei, whose commands were issued from the largest island of the world and ranged so far in all directions that they included not merely the Philippines to northward and the Java Archipelago to the southward, but covered much of the Chinese mainland on the west, and also whatever of Australia was worth noticing. This kindly old gentleman died but a few months ago, mourned by all of his court; for each member of the court owned a share in the pirate craft of which his Sultan was titular commander.

Brunei is a Venice on stilts: all the houses of this famous Malay capital are cocked up on slim piles arranged so neatly that canoes paddle



I Mistook Him for One of the Domestics.