

Christmas In The Land Of The Mau Mau

Lonely Settlers On Constant Guard

By YORKE HENDERSON

The Equator lies a few miles to the North. But here, at dawn on the Great Rift Escarpment the wind is cold; almost as cold as the wind that blows today through fondly-remembered towns and villages back in the home country.

Kinangop Mountain and the peaks of the Aberdares take shape in the growing light. A thousand feet below on the floor of the broad Rift valley a light beams out from an isolated farmstead.

It is Christmas Day in the morning; still — as it must have been that first Christmas in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago. It is a Christmas card picture, down to the snow gleaming on Mount Kenya.

But for the lonely settlers in their farms and the Kikuyu people in their mud huts, it is the third Christmas under the panga's shadow.



KIKUYU YOUNGSTERS — the children of anti-Mau Mau loyalists—dance their celebration of Sikuku ya Jesus, the Christmas holiday. But in background are armed security guards.

For here, six thousand feet above sea-level, Christmas brings no respite in the deadly game of hide-and-seek being played out in the mountain forests. On one side, soldiers, police and loyal tribesmen; on the other, the fanatical Mau Mau terrorists with the wicked heavy-bladed knives they call pangas.

Today of all days the men and women whose names are in this error-haunted land must be vigilant. The Mau Mau leaders have spurned Christianity for their old tribal gods who live above the clouds in the snows of Mount Kenya. And to their scar-faced leader Dedan Kimathi, the idea of a Christmide massacre would seem a fitting gesture. The propaganda value among the simple Kikuyu would be enormous.

Kimathi and his men nearly always make their attacks when they think people are off their guard; Sundays, meal-times, the crack of dawn.

But though there will be pistols beside the plum-pudding at dinner-time, every Christian in Mau Mau and — regardless of race — will celebrate Christmas.

In the lonelier farms and kraals they will celebrate quietly, listening all the while for the whispered orders, the rustle of bushes, the padding of bare feet in the darkness that mean a Mau Mau ambush.

When the houseboy brings in the traditional dish of turkey from the kitchen he will give a pre-arranged knock on the dining room door. The hum of conversation stops and the master of the house will go, pistol in hand, to unlock the door. Too many terrorist raids have been made via the kitchen.

Then, with doors and windows barricaded, the men and women of the lonelier farms will try to recreate Christmas as they remember it in Britain.

Christmas day comes in the middle of the hot season in Kenya. But, though the temperature may soar into the nineties, dinner will be a Dickensian affair with roast turkey, plum-pudding with hot brandy butter, mince-meat pies, port and nuts.

The plum-puddings used to be imported specially from Britain. Now they come mainly from an Indian firm in Nairobi, yet they will all sport sprigs of holly, the red berries shrivelled and lustreless after the long hot trip through the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

In the more populous centres of Mau Mau land, in heavily-garrisoned townships like Fort Hall and Nyeri, Christmas will be a bit tawdry.

The parties will be gayer and they will last longer. There will be carol-singing at the mission and the young District Officer will sweat behind a cotton-wool beard, playing Santa Claus and trying not to let his revolver bulge through the scarlet robes.

And here, the Christian Kikuyu, well-protected by their own Home Guard armed with bows and arrows, will celebrate Sikuku ya Jesus — the holiday of Jesus — in their own way.

Before dawn they will make a round of the houses in the township carrying banana palm fronds and lanterns and singing carols. "Adeste Fideles" sung in Wakikuyu with a drum background is more impressive than the choir of St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey. It is the more touching when you remember that, like the early Christians, these simple Kikuyu are courting death by professing their faith. For though the Home Guard and the police armoured cars may deter a Mau Mau raid in force, Dedan Kimathi's spirit will be there, marking down the faithful for ghastly vengeance.

Last year, at one Fort Hall mission, the congregation had to strain their ears to make out what the African preacher was saying. A couple of days earlier Mau Mau thugs had kicked out his teeth as a taste of what was in store for him if he preached on Christmas Day.

This year, with Mau Mau hard-pressed, there will be no warning; just a swoop at night, then agonising death at the hands of the terrorist torturers.

For all that, the Kikuyu Christians will celebrate Sikuku ya Jesus. Throughout the day they will hold ngoma's, the traditional dances of their tribe. With the drums throbbing, they will dance

On Christmas Day

smashed the car on the nearest telephone pole. The car turned out to be stolen and there were four half-full bottles of gin in the back. The two occupants were both fighting drunk and are now detained.

Mr. Campion took off his spectacles and blinked.

"I suggest that there was a connection, do you?" he murmured. "Fred and the gin drinkers met at the cross-roads, in fact. Any signs on the car?"

Pussy shrugged his shoulders. "Our chaps are at work on that now," he said. "The second smash has complicated things a bit, but last time I phoned they were hopeful."

SIFTING THE FACTS

"But my dear fellow!" Sir Leo was puzzled. "If you can get expert evidence of a collision between the car and the postman your worries are over."

"That is, of course, if the medical evidence permits the theory that the unfortunate fellow picked himself up and struggled the three hundred yards towards the constable's house."

Pussy hesitated. "There's the trouble," he admitted. "If that were all we'd be sitting pretty, but it's not, and I'll tell you why."

"In that three hundred yards of Benham road, between the crossing and the spot where old Fred died, there is a stile which leads to a footpath. Down the footpath, the best part of a quarter of a mile over very rough going, there is one small cottage and at that cottage letters were delivered this morning."

"The doctor says Noakes might have staggered the three hundred yards up the road leaning on his stick, but he puts his foot down and says the other journey, over the stile and so on, would have been plain impossible."

"All of which would argue," observed Mr. Campion brightly, "that the postman met a car after he came back from the cottage — between the stile and the policeman's house."

"That's what the Constable thought," Pussy's black eyes were snapping. "As soon as he'd tele-

phoned for help he slipped down to the cottage to see if Noakes had called there.

"When he found he had searched the road. He was mystified though because both he and his missus had been at their window for an hour watching for the mail and they hadn't seen a vehicle of any sort go by either way."

"If a car did hit the postman where he fell it must have turned and gone back afterwards."

Leo frowned at him. "What about the other witnesses? Did they see any second car?"

"No," said Pussy. "As I see it it's a proper mystery, a kind of not very nice miracle, and those two beauties are going to get away with murder on the strength of it. Whatever our fellows find on the car they'll never get past the doctor."

AWKWARD CLIMB

Mr. Campion negotiated the stile and the Chief Constable followed him with some difficulty. It was an awkward climb and the path below was narrow and slippery. It wound out into the mist before them, apparently without end.

The procession slid and scrambled on in silence for what seemed a mile only to encounter a second stile and a plank bridge over a stream followed by a brief area of what appeared to be simple bog. As he struggled out of it Pussy pushed back his dripping hat and gazed at the constable.

"You're not having a game, I suppose?" he inquired briefly.

"No sir, no." He pointed to a hump in the near distance.

"Good Heavens!" Leo regarded its desolation with dismay. "Does anybody really live there?"

"Oh, yes sir. An old widow lady. Mrs. Fyson's the name."

"Alone?" he was aghast. "How old?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. Quite old. Over seventy-five must be."

Leo stopped in his tracks and a silence fell on the company.

Campion broke the spell.

"Definitely no walk for a dying man," he said firmly. "Doctor's evidence completely convincing, don't you think? Now we're here perhaps we should drop in and see the householder."

Leo shivered. "We can't all get in," he objected. "Perhaps the Superintendent..."

"No. You and I will go," Campion was obstinate. "Is that all right with you, Super?"

Pussy waved them on. "If you have to dig for us we shall be just about here," he said cheerfully. "I'm over my ankles now. What a place! Does anybody ever come here except the postman, constable?"

Campion took Leo's arm and led him firmly round to the front of the cottage. Leo hung back. His repugnance was as apparent as the cold.

"I hate this," he muttered. "Go on, knock if you must."

Mr. Campion obeyed. At once the door was opened very wide. A little old woman stood before him.

"Oh dear," she said unexpectedly, and her voice was friendly. "It's lovely to see them all up there again. It's one of the real joys of Christmas, isn't it? Messages from people you love and who love you and all so pretty, too."

"Did you come down bright and early to meet the postman?" The Chief Constable's question was disarmingly innocent, but she looked ashamed and dropped her eyes.

"I wasn't up! Wasn't it dreadful? I was late this morning."

"In fact I was only just picking the letters off the mat there when the policeman called. He helped me gather them, the nice boy. There were such a lot. I lay lazily in bed this morning thinking of them instead of moving."

"Still you heard them come," Leo was very satisfied. "And you knew they were there?"

"Oh yes," she sounded content. "I knew they were there. May I offer you a cup of tea? I'm waiting for my party... just a woman and her dear greedy little boy; they won't be long. In fact when I heard your knock, I thought they were here already."

Mr. Campion, who had risen to inspect the display on the mantelshelf more closely, helped her to move the kettle so that it should not boil too soon.

The cards were splendid. There were nearly 30 of them in all, and the envelopes which had contained them were packed in a neat bundle and tucked behind the clock.

The written messages were all warm and personal, all breathing the outspoken joy of the season: "The very best to you Darling from All at The Limes." "To dear Auntie from Little Phil." "Love and Memories. Edith and Ted."

"There is no wish like the old wish. Warm regards, George." "For dearest Mother." "Cheerio. Lots of love. Just off. Writing. Take care of yourself. Sonny." "For dear little Agnes with love from US ALL."

POINTED QUESTION

Mr. Campion stood before them for a long time but at length he turned away.

Something had happened. It had suddenly become very still in the house. The old lady had lost her smile and there was wariness in her eyes.

"Tell me," Campion spoke very gently. "What do you do? Do you put them all down there on the mat in their envelopes before you go to bed on Christmas Eve?"

While the point of his question and the enormity of it was dawning upon Leo, there was silence. It was breathless and unbearable until old Mrs. Fyson pierced it with a laugh of genuine naughtiness.

"Well," she said devastatingly. "It does make it more fun." She glanced back at Leo whose handsome face was growing steadily more and more scarlet. "Doesn't

it?"

"Then...?" He was having difficulty with his voice. "Then the postman did not call this morning, ma'am?"

She stood looking at him placidly. "The postman never calls here except when he brings something from the Government," she said pleasantly. "Everybody gets letters from the Government nowadays, don't they?"

"But he doesn't call here with personal letters because you see, I'm the last of us." She paused and frowned very faintly. "There's been so many wars," she said, simply.

"But, dear lady..." Leo was completely overcome. There were tears in his eyes.

She patted his arm.

"My dear man," she said, kindly. "Don't be distressed. It's not sad. It's Christmas. We all loved Christmas. They sent me their letters at Christmas and, you see, I've still got it. At Christmas I remember them and they remember me I expect... wherever they are."

Her eyes strayed to a card with a coach on it. "I do sometimes wonder about poor George," she remarked seriously. "He was my husband's elder brother, and he really did have quite a shocking life. But he sent me that remarkable card one year, and I kept it with the others..."

"After all, we ought to be charitable, oughtn't we? At Christmas..."

MYSTERY SOLVED

As the four men plodded back through the fields Pussy was jubilant.

"That's done the trick," he said. "I've cleared up the mystery and made it all plain sailing. We'll get those

two crooks for doing in poor old Noakes.

"A real bit of luck Mr. Campion was here," he added generously, as he squelched on through the mud. "The old girl was just cheering herself up and you fell for it, ah, constable?"

"Oh, don't worry, my boy. There's no harm done. I know how it happened. You didn't want to worry the old thing with the tale of a death on Christmas morning, so you took the sight of the letters as evidence and didn't go into it. As it turned out you were wrong. That's life."

He thrust the young man on ahead of him and came over to Campion.

"What beats me is how you cottoned to it," he confided. "What gave you the idea?"

"I merely read it, I'm afraid."

Mr. Campion sounded apologetic. "All the envelopes were there, sticking out from behind the clock. The top one had a ha'penny stamp on it so I looked at the post mark. It was 1914."

Pussy laughed. "Given to you," he chuckled. "Still, I bet you had a job to believe your eyes."

"Ah," Mr. Campion's voice was thoughtful in the dusk. "That, Super, that was the really difficult bit."

Leo, who had been striding in silence, was the last to climb up on the road. He glanced anxiously towards the village for a moment or so and presently touched Campion on the shoulder.

"Look there."

A woman was hurrying towards them, and at her side, earnest and expectant, trotted a small, plump predatory child. They scurried past, and, as they passed by the stile and the woman lifted the boy to the footpath, the Chief Con-



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Solution
Puzzle page 4

"Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head."

Puzzle page 5