

A GUEST OF SULTANS.

Mrs. French-Sheldon Tells of Her Reception in the Dark Continent.

HONORS THICK AND FAST.

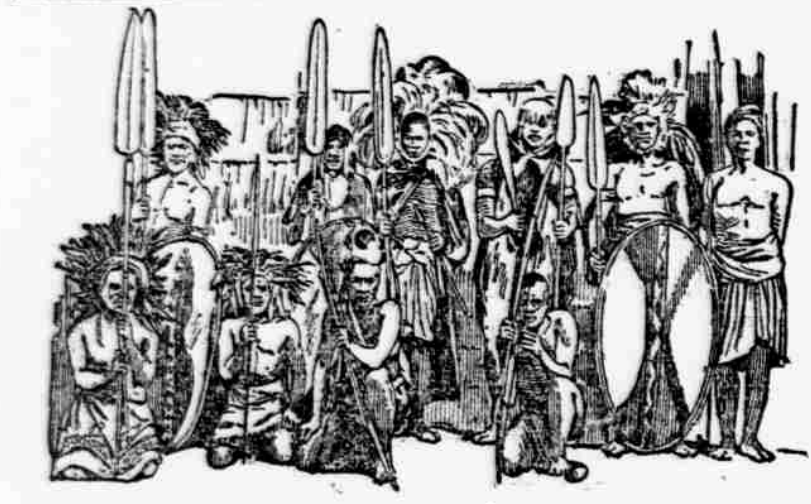
As the Bebe-Bwana She Was Almost Worshiped by the Blacks.

HER ESCAPE FROM A BIG PYTHON.

A Porter Eaten Alive by Hyenas Within Hearing of Her Camp.

WONDERFUL PHOSPHORESCENT LIGHTS.

[CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DISPATCH.] New York, April 22.—The impression which those who meet Mrs. French-Sheldon for the first time receive is one of surprise, and that is particularly true when presentation takes place in her private parlors, where she is able to throw aside restraint and dignity.



FROM ONE OF MRS. SHELDON'S PHOTOGRAPHS.

An expedition and took it into Eastern Africa, as far away from the coast as Chicago is from New York?

She is so slight of figure, so gentle and unassuming in manner, so feminine in her dress and so utterly without affectation that it seems as though the story of her exploits must have been really a fiction, just such a romance as she has herself written when she was known as a writer of novels and as the translator of Flaubert's masterpiece, "Salambo."

Any interview with her which attempted to set forth in consecutive detail the story of her trip would be formal and would lose the piquancy with which she speaks of incidents as they occur to her hap-hazard, so to speak. During a chat with her the first impressions are of the woman. Her personality asserts itself so speedily and her enthusiasm is so impressively demonstrative that those with whom she converses are compelled to think first of her, afterward of her achievement.

How She Impressed the Chiefs. It is very natural therefore that the question the writer put Mrs. Sheldon, after formalities of greeting were over, was: "Mrs. Sheldon, why did you do it?" She smiled for a moment as though amused at the question, seeming to think that the importance of the work, if there was any, was in what she had accomplished and not why it had occurred to her to attempt it.

Photos of Her Black Giants. Littered about the parlor were many photographs, and one representing a dozen masculine specimens of negro physical strength caught my eye as an instant, and Mrs. Sheldon evidently seeing that I was interested took up the photograph and said: "These were some of my porters, and they were very fine specimens of physical manhood than they are. And the devotion of these men after they came to know me and respect my authority was something touching. I had a flattery made, upon which was the motto, 'Noli tangere.' It was absolutely necessary to impress these people with the idea that they must not lay a finger upon me. This was necessary not only for my personal protection but also to inspire them with the idea of superior presence, so to speak, for that would enable me to maintain absolute command over them by reason of both fear and respect.

Narrow Escape From a Python. To illustrate the watchfulness of these men Mrs. Sheldon went to her cabinet and took from it a photograph of four Africans and said: "The watchfulness and marvelous quickness of these men unquestionably prevented me one night from being crushed to death by a python. I was asleep in my palanquin. Not exactly sleeping, but with them as they started upon her expedition.

For more than two hours at a time during the entire expedition. I felt something cold, slimy, ah! horrible." Here Mrs. Sheldon shuddered and closed her eyes as though the recollection of that experience gave her an awful sense of her nearness to a horrible death.

"I realized that in some way a python had got through the guard and got upon my palanquin. I had strength enough to give a signal, the one which summoned my guard to my assistance. In an instant the men were there, and then I heard a horrible sound of cutting and slashing and shouting and chattering, as though they were themselves in terror. In five minutes all was quiet, and I saw that the python had literally cut that python into inch pieces. There is nothing they dread so much, nothing which they shy so completely to destroy.

Of course, this anecdote suggested possible experiences with other wild beasts and serpents, and I asked Mrs. Sheldon if she had any. She said she only saw three or four poisonous reptiles, and was not afraid of them. They had a slight adventure with three lions and they saw some elephants, but as she had not taken an expedition as a mere hunting expedition and did not look for wild beasts they seldom encountered them. In the night time they used to hear the cries of the beasts.

A Porter Devoured by Hyenas. An expression of sadness came to Mrs. Sheldon's face just then, and she said: "I do not like to think about the beasts, for we did have one horrible adventure. One of my most faithful body servants, a splendid fellow, wandered from the camp one night and very foolishly. The first we knew that he was away was when we heard the most appalling shrieks, and then we knew that the poor fellow had fallen a prey to the hyenas or jackals. His shrieks ring in my ears to this day. He gradually grew fainter and fainter, although the other men were hurrying with torches lighted to his

element of the journey. As though that was not enough, during a monsoon on the return Mrs. Sheldon was pitched against the side of the ship, severely wounded in the head, and the scars of that frightful injury are still visible upon her temple, and when she brushes her curly hair aside can be seen extending far back in the scalp.

"By the way," she said, "I am going again. I know exactly where that stone spear which the chief revealed to me as a secret treasure lies hidden, and I am going to get it. I am not going to steal it from him, either. I am going to buy or borrow it, and my impression is that it will prove a most important archeological treasure. I could not be surprised if by its connection could be traced between these people and the early Egyptians."

Wonderful Phosphorescent Lights. "Oh, everything. It was all so fascinating, so strange, so interesting. There was not a moment when my mind was not occupied, not a tedious instant upon the entire journey. But perhaps," and here Mrs. Sheldon seemed to be meditating a moment, "perhaps the phosphorescent mists were the most weird and peculiar of all the sights I saw. I never heard them spoken of as appearing in that country, and I wonder if any explorer has ever seen them there. These mists are of the same effect as that which the glow-worm produces, except that they are immense in area and magnificent in brilliancy. They seem to arise and to contain some quality, either phosphorescent or electrical, so that their appearance upon the plains and in the valleys suggests to some extent that of the aurora. The natives will plunge into them, wave their spears or clubs, and it looks as though these weapons had become incandescent. I must say that I was awe-struck by the sight, and yet it rested me to look at this glowing disturbance of the local atmosphere.

"And then the verdure of East Africa is something wonderful. Perhaps it is that which makes those natives so wonderfully far-sighted. It cannot be that, however, which gives them such remarkable powers of hearing. I have seen men lie upon their bellies and make a peculiar, not loud utterance, which has been heard and responded to by others who seemed to be a mile or two away. I presume that is made possible by some peculiar quality of the atmosphere which carries sound made in a certain way for a long distance."

Without a Shred of Clothing. With the exception of one village which lies right in the track of the caravan and where European vice has been introduced, Mrs. Sheldon found all these people devoid of any clothing. They were all of the same race, and she found that they were without the slightest suggestion of the manners or developments which accompany civilization.

"Why," and Mrs. Sheldon, speaking with great dignity and modesty of manner herself, "in many of these villages the people wore not a shred of clothing, and yet their manner was such, their perfect unconcern so great, that it was impossible to take offense, for they had none among themselves. I made some inquiries and found that the code of morals was perfect, and that the licentiousness which I know it does not exist. To be sure some of them practice polygamy, but the husbands and their wives live according to their code in a perfectly pure state of domestic happiness. One of the most impressive lessons I think I received in that country was that of the purity of morals of these mountain-dwelling people, and I wonder if it is true that those whom I call the naturals are after all the only virtuous people, taking them right through and through, that are to be found."

nearly made a fact of the prophecy of those who said that she would never come out of Africa alive. Four men were carrying her in her palanquin on a bridge made of rough green logs over the Zulus river. They were some 20 feet above the water. The bark made the logs treacherous and slippery, and of a sudden the feet of her porters gave way and she and she were precipitated into the stream. She was rescued just in time to save her life and was not seriously injured except that the shock in her debilitated condition brought on nervous prostration. Her porters were severely bruised, but none of them were drowned.



Didn't Come Back Unscathed. After they reached the coast Mrs. Sheldon was prostrated completely, and for a time was in a state of coma. This was due partly to the shock, partly to her exhaustion and very largely to her loss of sleep, perhaps partly to the reaction from the excitement of the journey.

What the natural features in that part of tropical East Africa pleased you chiefly? I asked.

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Characteristics of the Women. I asked Mrs. Sheldon to describe some of the costumes of the people whom she met. "Well," she said, "I was particularly interested in the women children, and I probably got more of their confidence than any male traveler could ever obtain. These women and children are naturally just as domestic, just as devoted as the best of the Europeans, and I must say just as fond of jewelry. It was interesting to see the mothers put little bells upon the ankles of their babies so as to encourage them to walk. And I was delighted and amused often to witness the harmless vanity with which they decorated themselves with bracelets, anklets, armlets and girlish beads."

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