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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Dostoyevsky Smith Willis
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Henry Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Vinci
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Gogol Busch
Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato Scott
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Plato Scott
Andersen Andersen Cervantes Burton Hesse Harte
London Descartes Wells Voltaire Cooke
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Richter Chekhov da Shakespeare Chamberlain Irving
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**Bones Being Further Adventures
in Mr. Commissioner Sanders'
Country**

Edgar Wallace

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Edgar Wallace

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8472-1908-8

www.tredition.com

www.tredition.de

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"BONES"

being

Further Adventures in

Mr. Commissioner Sanders' Country

BY

EDGAR WALLACE

Author of "Sanders of the River," etc.

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON AND MELBOURNE

To

Isabel Thorn

WHO WAS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE

FOR BRINGING SANDERS

INTO BEING

This Book is Dedicated

"BONES"

PROLOGUE

SANDERS—C.M.G.

I

You will never know from the perusal of the Blue Book the true inwardness of the happenings in the Ochori country in the spring of the year of Wish. Nor all the facts associated with the disappearance of the Rt. Hon. Joseph Blowter, Secretary of State for the Colonies.

We know (though this is not in the Blue Books) that Bosambo called together all his petty chiefs and his headmen, from one end of the country to the other, and assembled them squatting expectantly at the foot of the little hillock, where sat Bosambo in his robes of office (unauthorized but no less magnificent), their upturned faces charged with pride and confidence, eloquent of the hold this sometime Liberian convict had upon the wayward and fearful folk of the Ochori.

Now no man may call a palaver of all small chiefs unless he notifies the government of his intention, for the government is jealous of self-appointed [Pg 8] parliaments, for when men meet together in public conference, however innocent may be its first cause, talk invariably drifts to war, just as when they assemble and talk in private it drifts womanward.

And since a million and odd square miles of territory may only be governed by a handful of ragged soldiers so long as there is no concerted action against authority, extemporized and spontaneous palavers are severely discouraged.

But Bosambo was too cheery and optimistic a man to doubt that his action would incur the censorship of his lord, and, moreover, he was so filled with his own high plans and so warm and generous at

heart at the thought of the benefits he might be conferring upon his patron that the illegality of the meeting did not occur to him, or if it occurred was dismissed as too preposterous for consideration.

And so there had come by the forest paths, by canoe, from fishing villages, from far-off agricultural lands near by the great mountains, from timber cuttings in the lower forest, higher chiefs and little chiefs, headmen and lesser headmen, till they made a respectable crowd, too vast for the comfort of the Ochori elders who must needs provide them with food and lodgings.

"Noble chiefs of the Ochori," began Bosambo, and Notiki nudged his neighbour with a sharp elbow, for Notiki was an old man of forty-three, and thin.

"Our lord desires us to give him something," he said.

[Pg 9]

He was a bitter man this Notiki, a relative of former chiefs of the Ochori, and now no more than over-head of four villages.

"Wa!" said his neighbour, with his shining face turned to Bosambo.

Notiki grunted but said no more.

"I have assembled you here," said Bosambo, "because I love to see you, and because it is good that I should meet those who are in authority under me to administer the laws which the King my master has set for your guidance."

Word for word it was a paraphrase of an address which Sanders himself had delivered three months ago. His audience may have forgotten the fact, but Notiki at least recognized the plagiarism and said "Oh, ho!" under his breath and made a scornful noise.

"Now I must go from you," said Bosambo.

There was a little chorus of dismay, but Notiki's voice did not swell the volume.

"The King has called me to the coast, and for the space of two moons I shall be as dead to you, though my fetish will watch you and my spirit will walk these streets every night with big ears to listen to evil talk, and great big eyes to see the hearts of men. Yea,

from this city to the very end of my dominions over to Kalala." His accusing eyes fixed Notiki, and the thin man wriggled uncomfortably.

"This man is a devil," he muttered under his breath, "he hears and sees all things."

[Pg 10]

"And if you ask me why I go," Bosambo went on, "I tell you this: swearing you all to secrecy that this word shall not go beyond your huts" (there were some two thousand people present to share the mystery), "my lord Sandi has great need of me. For who of us is so wise that he can look into the heart and understand the sorrow-call which goes from brother to brother and from blood to blood. I say no more save my lord desires me, and since I am the King of the Ochori, a nation great amongst all nations, must I go down to the coast like a dog or like the headman of a fisher-village?"

He paused dramatically, and there was a faint—a very faint—murmur which he might interpret as an expression of his people's wish that he should travel in a state bordering upon magnificence.

Faint indeed was that murmur, because there was a hint of taxation in the business, a promise of levies to be extracted from an unwilling peasantry; a suggestion of lazy men leaving the comfortable shade of their huts to hurry perspiring in the forest that gum and rubber and similar offerings should be laid at the complacent feet of their overlord.

Bosambo heard the murmur and marked its horrid lack of heartiness and was in no sense put out of countenance.

"As you say," said he approvingly, "it is proper that I should journey to my lord and to the strange people beyond the coast—to the land where even slaves wear trousers—carrying with me most wonderful presents that the name of the Ochori [Pg 11] shall be as thunder upon the waters and even great kings shall speak in pride of you," he paused again.

Now it was a dead silence which greeted his peroration. Notably unenthusiastic was this gathering, twiddling its toes and blandly avoiding his eye. Two moons before he had extracted something

more than his tribute—a tribute which was the prerogative of government.

Yet then, as Notiki said under his breath, or openly, or by innuendo as the sentiment of his company demanded, four and twenty canoes laden with the fruits of taxation had come to the Ochori city, and five only of those partly filled had paddled down to headquarters to carry the Ochori tribute to the overlord of the land.

"I will bring back with me new things," said Bosambo enticingly; "strange devil boxes, large magics which will entrance you, things that no common man has seen, such as I and Sandi alone know in all this land. Go now, I tell thee, to your people in this country, telling them all that I have spoken to you, and when the moon is in a certain quarter they will come in joy bearing presents in both hands, and these ye shall bring to me."

"But, lord!" it was the bold Notiki who stood in protest, "what shall happen to such of us headmen who come without gifts in our hands for your lordship, saying 'Our people are stubborn and will give nothing!'"

"Who knows?" was all the satisfaction he got from Bosambo, with the additional significant [Pg 12] hint, "I shall not blame you, knowing that it is not because of your fault but because your people do not love you, and because they desire another chief over them. The palaver is finished."

Finished it was, so far as Bosambo was concerned. He called a council of his headmen that night in his hut.

Bosambo made his preparations at leisure. There was much to avoid before he took his temporary farewell of the tribe. Not the least to be counted amongst those things to be done was the extraction, to its uttermost possibility, of the levy which he had quite improperly instituted.

And of the things to avoid, none was more urgent or called for greater thought than the necessity for so timing his movements that he did not come upon Sanders or drift within the range of his visible and audible influence.

Here fortune may have been with Bosambo, but it is more likely that he had carefully thought out every detail of his scheme. Sanders at the moment was collecting hut tax along the Kisai river and there was also, as Bosambo well knew, a murder trial of great complexity waiting for his decision at Ikan. A headman was suspected of murdering his chief wife, and the only evidence against him was that of the under wives to whom she displayed much hauteur and arrogance.

The people of the Ochori might be shocked at the exorbitant demands which their lord put upon them, but they were too wise to deny him his wishes. [Pg 13] There had been a time in the history of the Ochori when demands were far heavier, and made with great insolence by a people who bore the reputation of being immensely fearful. It had come to be a by-word of the people when they discussed their lord with greater freedom than he could have wished, the tyranny of Bosambo was better than the tyranny of Akasava.

Amongst the Ochori chiefs, greater and lesser, only one was conspicuous by his failure to carry proper offerings to his lord. When all the gifts were laid on sheets of native cloth in the great space before Bosambo's hut, Notiki's sheet was missing and with good reason as he sent his son to explain.

"Lord," said this youth, lank and wild, "my father has collected for you many beautiful things, such as gum and rubber and the teeth of elephants. Now he would have brought these and laid them at your lovely feet, but the roads through the forest are very evil, and there have been floods in the northern country and he cannot pass the streams. Also the paths through the forest are thick and tangled and my father fears for his carriers."

Bosambo looked at him, thoughtfully.

"Go back to your father, N'gobi," he said gently, "and tell him that though there come no presents from him to me, I, his master and chief, knowing he loves me, understand all things well."

N'gobi brightened visibly. He had been ready to bolt, understanding something of Bosambo's dexterity with a stick and fearing that the chief [Pg 14] would loose upon him the vengeance his father had called down upon his own hoary head.

"Of the evil roads I know," said Bosambo; "now this you shall say to your father: Bosambo the chief goes away from this city and upon a long journey; for two moons he will be away doing the business of his cousin and friend Sandi. And when my lord Bim-bi has bitten once at the third moon I will come back and I will visit your father. But because the roads are bad," he went on, "and the floods come even in this dry season," he said significantly, "and the forest is so entangled that he cannot bring his presents, sending only the son of his wife to me, he shall make against my coming such a road as shall be in width, the distance between the King's hut and the hut of the King's wife; and he shall clear from this road all there are of trees, and he shall bridge the strong stream and dig pits for the floods. And to this end he shall take every man of his kingdom and set them to labour, and as they work they shall sing a song which goes:

"We are doing Notiki's work,
The work Notiki set us to do,
Rather than send to the lord his King
The presents which
Bosambo demanded.

"The palaver is finished."

This is the history, or the beginning of the history, of the straight road which cuts through the heart of the Ochori country from the edge of the river by the cataracts, even to the mountains of the [Pg 15] great King, a road famous throughout Africa and imperishably associated with Bosambo's name — this by the way.

On the first day following the tax palaver Bosambo went down the river with four canoes, each canoe painted beautifully with camwood and gum, and with twenty-four paddlers.

It was by a fluke that he missed Sanders. As it happened, the Commissioner had come back to the big river to collect the evidence of the murdered woman's brother who was a petty headman of an Isisi fishing village. The *Zaire* came into the river almost as the last of Bosambo's canoes went round the bend out of sight, and since a legend existed on the river, a legend for the inception of which Bosambo himself was mainly responsible, that he was in some way

related to Mr. Commissioner Sanders, no man spoke of Bosambo's passing.

The chief came to headquarters on the third day after his departure from his city. His subsequent movements are somewhat obscure, even to Sanders, who has been at some pains to trace them.

It is known that he drew a hundred and fifty pounds in English gold from Sanders' storekeeper—he had piled up a fairly extensive credit during the years of his office—that he embarked with one headman and his wife on a coasting boat due for Sierra Leone, and that from that city came a long-winded demand in Arabic by a ragged messenger for a further instalment of one hundred pounds. [Pg 16] Sanders heard the news on his return to headquarters and was a little worried.

"I wonder if the devil is going to desert his people?" he said.

Hamilton the Houssa laughed.

"He is more likely to desert his people than to desert a balance of four hundred pounds which now stands to his credit here," he said. "Bosambo has felt the call of civilization. I suppose he ought to have secured your permission to leave his territory?"

"He has given his people work to keep them busy," Sanders said a little gravely. "I have had a passionate protest from Notiki, one of his chiefs in the north. Bosambo has set him to build a road through the forest, and Notiki objects."

The two men were walking across the yellow parade ground past the Houssas hut in the direction of headquarters' bungalow.

"What about your murderer?" asked Hamilton, after a while, as they mounted the broad wooden steps which led to the bungalow stoep.

Sanders shook his head.

"Everybody lied," he said briefly. "I can do no less than send the man to the Village. I could have hung him on clear evidence, but the lady seemed to have been rather unpopular and the murderer quite a person to be commended in the eyes of the public. The devil of it is," he said as he sank into his big chair with a sigh, "that had I hanged him it would not have been necessary [Pg 17] to write three

foolscap sheets of report. I dislike these domestic murderers intensely—give me a ravaging brigand with the hands of all people against him."

"You'll have one if you don't touch wood," said Hamilton seriously.

Hamilton came of Scottish stock—and the Scots are notorious prophets.

II

Now the truth may be told of Bosambo, and all his movements may be explained by this revelation of his benevolence. In the silence of his hut had he planned his schemes. In the dark aisles of the forests, under starless skies when his fellow-huntsmen lay deep in the sleep which the innocent and the barbarian alone enjoy; in drowsy moments when he sat dispensing justice, what time litigants had droned monotonously he had perfected his scheme.

Imagination is the first fruit of civilization and when the reverend fathers of the coast taught Bosambo certain magics, they were also implanting in him the ability to picture possibilities, and shape from his knowledge of human affairs the eventual consequences of his actions. This is imagination somewhat elaborately and clumsily defined.

To one person only had Bosambo unburdened himself of his schemes.

In the privacy of his great hut he had sat with [Pg 18] his wife, a steaming dish of fish between them, for however lax Bosambo might be, his wife was an earnest follower of the Prophet and would tolerate no such abomination as the flesh of the cloven-hoofed goat.

He had told her many things.

"Light of my heart," said he, "our lord Sandi is my father and my mother, a giver of riches, and a plentiful provider of pence. Now it seems to me, that though he is a just man and great, having neither fear of his enemies nor soft words for his friends, yet the lords of his land who live so very far away do him no honour."

"Master," said the woman quietly, "is it no honour that he should be placed as a king over us?"

Bosambo beamed approvingly.

"Thou hast spoken the truth, oh my beloved!" said he, in the extravagance of his admiration. "Yet I know much of the white folk, for I have lived along this coast from Dacca to Mossomedes. Also I have sailed to a far place called Madagascar, which is on the other side of the world, and I know the way of white folk. Even in Benguella there is a governor who is not so great as Sandi, and about his breast are all manner of shining stars that glitter most beautifully in the sun, and he wears ribbons about him and bright coloured sashes and swords." He wagged his finger impressively. "Have I not said that he is not so great as Sandi. When saw you my lord with stars or cross or sash or a sword?"

[Pg 19]

"Also at Decca, where the Frenchi live. At certain places in the Togo, which is Allamandi, [1] I have seen men with this same style of ornaments, for thus it is that the white folk do honour to their kind."

He was silent a long time and his brown-eyed wife looked at him curiously.

"Yet what can you do, my lord?" she asked. "Although you are very powerful, and Sandi loves you, this is certain, that none will listen to *you* and do honour to Sandi at your word – though I do not know the ways of the white people, yet of this I am sure."

Again Bosambo's large mouth stretched from ear to ear, and his two rows of white teeth gleamed pleasantly.

"You are as the voice of wisdom and the very soul of cleverness," he said, "for you speak that which is true. Yet I know ways, for I am very cunning and wise, being a holy man and acquainted with blessed apostles such as Paul and the blessed Peter, who had his ear cut off because a certain dancing woman desired it. Also by magic it was put on again because he could not hear the cocks crow. All this and similar things I have here." He touched his forehead.

Wise woman that she was, she had made no attempt to pry into her husband's business, but spent the days preparing for the journey, she and [Pg 20] the nut-brown sprawling child of immense girth, who was the apple of Bosambo's eye.

So Bosambo had passed down the river as has been described, and four days after he left there disappeared from the Ochori village ten brothers in blood of his, young hunting men who had faced all forms of death for the very love of it, and these vanished from the land and none knew where they went save that they did not follow on their master's trail.

Tukili, the chief of the powerful eastern island Isisi, or, as it is contemptuously called, the N'gombi-Isisi by the riverain folk, went hunting one day, and ill fortune led him to the border of the Ochori country. Ill fortune was it for one Fimili, a straight maid of fourteen, beautiful by native standard, who was in the forest searching for roots which were notorious as a cure for "boils" which distressed her unamiable father.

Tukili saw the girl and desired her, and that which Tukili desired he took. She offered little opposition to being carried away to the Isisi city when she discovered that her life would be spared, and possibly was no worse off in the harem of Tukili than she would have been in the hut of the poor fisherman for whom her father had designed her. A few years before, such an incident would have passed almost unnoticed.

The Ochori were so used to being robbed of women and of goats, so meek in their acceptance of wrongs that would have set the spears of any other [Pg 21] nation shining, that they would have accepted the degradation and preserved a sense of thankfulness that the robber had limited his raiding to one girl, and that a maid. But with the coming of Bosambo there had arrived a new spirit in the Ochori. They had learnt their strength, incidentally they had learnt their rights. The father of the girl went hot-foot to his over-chief, Notiki, and covered himself with ashes at the door of the chief's hut.

"This is a bad palaver," said Notiki, "and since Bosambo has deserted us and is making our marrows like water that we should build him a road, and there is none in this land whom I may call chief or who may speak with authority, it seems by my age and by

relationship to the kings of this land, I must do that which is desirable."

So he gathered together two thousand men who were working on the road and were very pleased indeed to carry something lighter than rocks and felled trees, and with these spears he marched into the Isisi forest, burning and slaying whenever he came upon a little village which offered no opposition. Thus he took to himself the air and title of conqueror with as little excuse as a flamboyant general ever had.

Had it occurred on the river, this warlike expedition must have attracted the attention of Sanders. The natural roadway of the territory is a waterway. It is only when operations are begun against the internal tribes who inhabit the bush, and whose armies can move under the cloak of the forest [Pg 22] (and none wiser) that Sanders found himself at a disadvantage.

Tukili himself heard nothing of the army that was being led against him until it was within a day's march of his gates. Then he sallied forth with a force skilled in warfare and practised in the hunt. The combat lasted exactly ten minutes and all that was left of Notiki's spears made the best of their way homeward, avoiding, as far as possible, those villages which they had visited en route with such disastrous results to the unfortunate inhabitants.

Now it is impossible that one conqueror shall be sunk to oblivion without his victor claiming for himself the style of his victim. Tukili had defeated his adversary, and Tukili was no exception to the general rule, and from being a fairly well-disposed king, amiable—too amiable as we have shown—and kindly, and just, he became of a sudden a menace to all that part of Sanders' territory which lies between the French land and the river.

It was such a situation as this as only Bosambo might deal with, and Sanders heartily cursed his absent chief and might have cursed him with greater fervour had he had an inkling of the mission to which Bosambo had appointed himself.

III

His Excellency the Administrator of the period had his office at a prosperous city of stone which [Pg 23] we will call Koomboli, though that is not its name.

He was a stout, florid man, patient and knowledgeable. He had been sent to clear up the mess which two incompetent administrators made, who had owed their position rather to the constant appearance of their friends and patrons in the division lobbies than to their acquaintance with the native mind, and it is eloquent of the regard in which His Excellency was held that, although he was a Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George, a Companion of a Victorian Order, a Commander of the Bath, and the son of a noble house, he was known familiarly along the coast to all administrators, commissioners, even to the deputy inspectors, as "Bob."

Bosambo came to the presence with an inward quaking. In a sense he had absconded from his trust, and he did not doubt that Sanders had made all men acquainted with the suddenness and the suspicious character of his disappearance.

And the first words of His Excellency the Administrator confirmed all Bosambo's worst fears.

"O! chief," said Sir Robert with a little twinkle in his eye, "are you so fearful of your people that you run away from them?"

"Mighty master," answered Bosambo, humbly, "I do not know fear, for as your honour may have heard, I am a very brave man, fearing nothing save my lord Sanders' displeasure."

A ghost of a smile played about the corners of Sir Robert's mouth.

[Pg 24]

"That you have earned, my friend," said he. "Now you shall tell me why you came away secretly, also why you desired this palaver with me. And do not lie, Bosambo," he said, "for I am he who hung three chiefs on Gallows Hill above Grand Bassam because they spoke falsely."

This was one of the fictions which was current on the coast, and was implicitly believed in by the native population. The truth will

be recounted at another time, but it is sufficient to say that Bosambo was one of those who did not doubt the authenticity of the legend.

"Now I will speak to you, O my lord," he said earnestly, "and I speak by all oaths, both the oaths of my own people — —"

"Spare me the oaths of the Kroo folk," protested Sir Robert, and raised a warning hand.

"Then by Markie and Lukie will I swear," said Bosambo, fervently; "those fine fellows of whom Your Excellency knows. I have sat long in the country of the Ochori, and I have ruled wisely according to my abilities. And over me at all times was Sandi, who was a father to his people and so beautiful of mind and countenance that when he came to us even the dead folk would rise up to speak to him. This is a miracle," said Bosambo profoundly but cautiously, "which I have heard but which I have not seen. Now this I ask you who see all things, and here is the puzzle which I will set to your honour. If Sandi is so great and so wise, and is so loved by the greater King, how comes it that he stays for [Pg 25] ever in one place, having no beautiful stars about his neck nor wonderful ribbons around his stomach such as the great Frenchman—and the great Allamandi men, and even the Portuguesi men wear who are honoured by their kings?"

It was a staggering question, and Sir Robert Sanleigh sat up and stared at the solemn face of the man before him.

Bosambo, an unromantic figure in trousers, jacket, and shirt—he was collarless—had thrust his hands deeply into unaccustomed pockets, ignorant of the disrespect which such an attitude displayed, and was staring back at the Administrator.

"O! chief," asked the puzzled Sir Robert, "this is a strange palaver you make—who gave you these ideas?"

"Lord, none gave me this idea save my own bright mind," said Bosambo. "Yes, many nights have I laid thinking of these things for I am just and I have faith."

His Excellency kept his unwavering eye upon the other. He had heard of Bosambo, knew him as an original, and at this moment was satisfied in his own mind of the other's sincerity.

A smaller man than he, his predecessor for example, might have dismissed the preposterous question as an impertinence and given the questioner short shrift. But Sir Robert understood his native.

"These are things too high for me, Bosambo," he said. "What dog am I that I should question [Pg 26] the mind of my lords? In their wisdom they give honour and they punish. It is written."

Bosambo nodded.

"Yet, lord," he persisted, "my own cousin who sweeps your lordship's stables told me this morning that on the days of big palavers you also have stars and beautiful things upon your breast, and noble ribbons about your lordship's stomach. Now your honour shall tell me by whose favour these things come about."

Sir Robert chuckled.

"Bosambo," he said solemnly, "they gave these things to me because I am an old man. Now when your lord Sandi becomes old these honours also will he receive."

He saw Bosambo's face fall and went on:

"Also much may happen that will bring Sandi to their lordships' eyes, they who sit above us. Some great deed that he may do, some high service he may offer to his king. All these happenings bring nobility and honour. Now," he went on kindly, "go back to your people, remembering that I shall think of you and of Sandi, and that I shall know that you came because of your love for him, and that on a day which is written I will send a book to my masters speaking well of Sandi, for his sake and for the sake of the people who love him. The palaver is finished."

Bosambo went out of the Presence a dissatisfied man, passed through the hall where a dozen commissioners and petty chiefs were waiting audience, [Pg 27] skirted the great white building and came in time to his own cousin, who swept the stables of His Excellency the Administrator. And here, in the coolness of the stone-walled mews, he learnt much about the Administrator; little tit-bits of information which were unlikely to be published in the official gazette. Also he acquired a considerable amount of data concerning the giving of honours, and after a long examination and cross-