



Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation  
5th Floor, Hunt Library  
Carnegie Mellon University  
4909 Frew Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890  
Telephone: 412-268-2434  
Email: [huntinst@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:huntinst@andrew.cmu.edu)  
Web site: [www.huntbotanical.org](http://www.huntbotanical.org)

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#### *About the Institute*

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

# A REPORTER IN AFRICA

THE BIRDS AND THE BEASTS WERE THERE~I

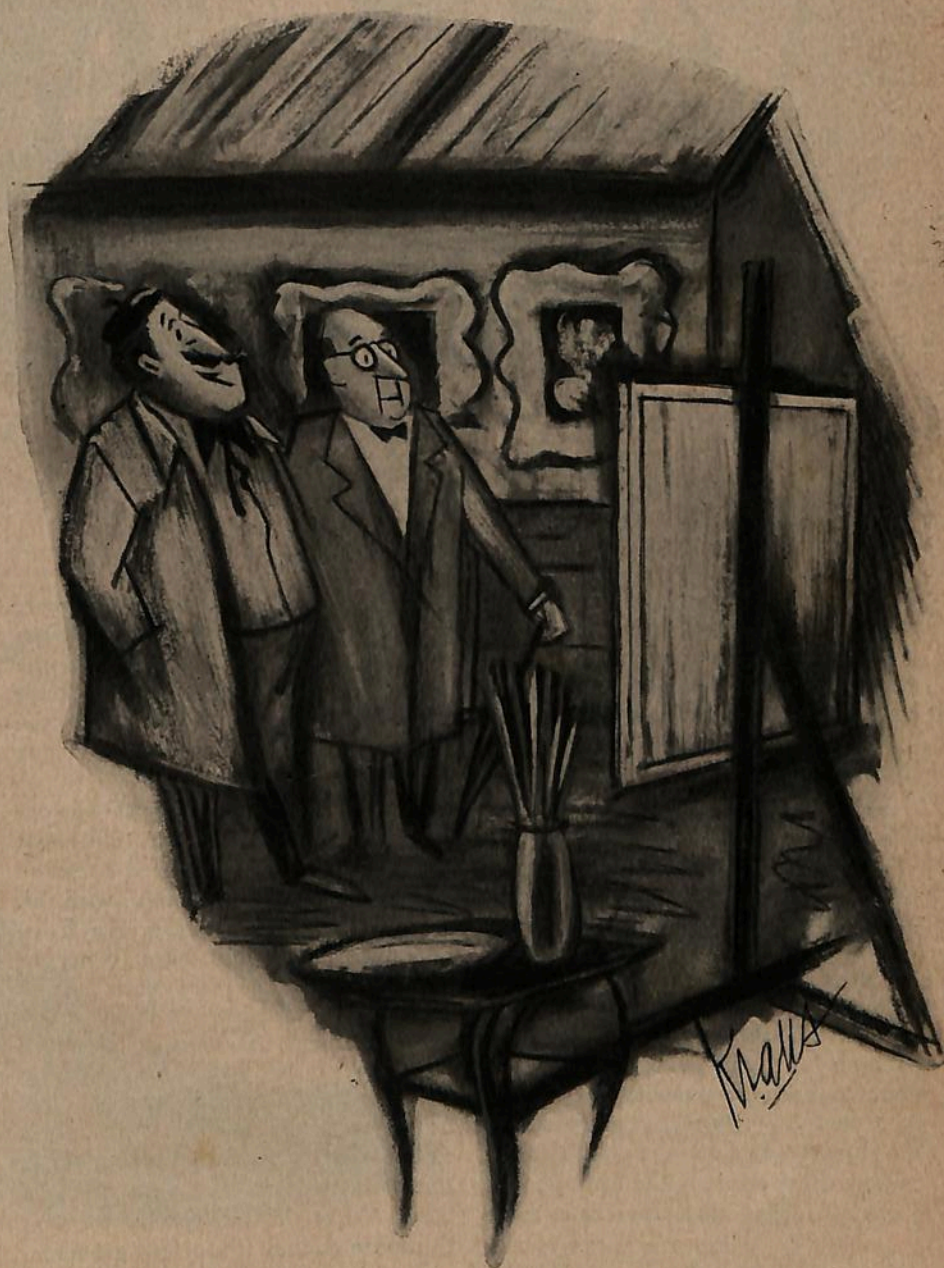
**T**WENTY years or so ago, the British used to run a flying-boat service down through Africa, and although it was a slow and sometimes rather bumpy journey, I can remember no other flight that was quite so pleasant. You took off from Cairo in the early morning, with a fine splash of water spurting past the portholes of the plane, and then by easy stages followed the Nile upstream to its source in Lake Victoria, on the equator. From there the route followed a series of lakes along the Great Rift Valley until eventually you reached Durban, in South Africa. There was no flying after dark, and the pilot put down at some fascinating places for the night: Wadi Halfa, in the middle of the Egyptian desert; Khartoum, at the junction of the Blue and the White Niles, in the Sudan; Kisumu, on Lake Victoria (the lake itself so big that you lost sight of the shore as you flew across it); and Livingstone, just a mile or two above Victoria Falls. Most of the stops were out-of-the-way places that had very little connection with the outside world, so you were plunged repeatedly into the authentic African scene. There were none of the familiar sights—no airport buildings, no advertising billboards, no other traffic of any kind—but just a rush of muddy water as the plane taxied to a stop along the surface of a river or a forest lake, and the boy who came out in a boat to take you ashore was the genuine article. A coal-black African, sometimes naked to the waist, he looked as though he would be far more at home in a thatched hut than in this strange world of flying monsters down from the sky. On the Zambesi River, I recall, they had to run a launch up and down the landing area for a few minutes before the plane came in, to clear the hippopotamuses away. I remember, too, with particular vividness, a little place called Malakal, on the White Nile, where the women of the Dinka tribe were six feet tall and as hipless as young boys. Their hair was thickly matted with grease and piled high in a marvellous coiffure, and they walked gravely along the riverbank, turning their heads away from the great flying boat on the water in the way that primitive people often do when they are confronted with something that they regard as quite miraculous and beyond all comprehension.

These scenes gave the passenger a brief but very potent whiff of Africa.

He felt he was seeing the country as Livingstone and the other early explorers saw it, and although I made the journey only once, it filled me with an intense desire to return someday. Most of all, I wanted to see the wildlife of the continent, and the people in some of the less frequented places from the Congo southward—black Africa below the bulge. It was, I suppose, nothing more than the usual tourist thirst for the jungle in the raw and the Africa of tribal drums, but it was no less compulsive for that. The war, however, did away with any notions of this kind, and afterward, for one reason or another, I kept putting the trip off. Then one day

last January, when my wife and I were in London, we received an invitation from a friend to come and visit him at his home in Johannesburg. Within a fortnight, we set off.

**A**LTHOUGH we knew, of course, that Africa isn't the place it once was, we still had some rather highly charged ideas about its continued primitiveness as we boarded the plane for Johannesburg. Compared to the old flying-boat days, the journey by air turned out to be fairly humdrum, and this we had more or less expected, but we were not prepared for—and consequently were somewhat disillu-



*"I think it's terrific, but then I think all my work is terrific."*