

WORLD

The Gentlemen of the Jungle

Jomo Kenyatta

INTRODUCTION Jomo Kenyatta (1893–1978) was a leader in Kenya's struggle against British rule. In 1964, he became the first president of an independent Kenya. Through this fable, Kenyatta describes how the Europeans took control of much of Africa during the Age of Imperialism.

Vocabulary Before you read the selection, find the meaning of these words in a dictionary: turmoil, intricacy, relevant, verdict.

Once upon a time an elephant made a friendship with a man. One day a heavy thunderstorm broke out. The elephant went to his friend . . . and said to him: "My dear good man, will you please let me put my trunk inside your hut to keep it out of this torrential rain?" The man replied: "My dear good elephant, my hut is very small, but there is room for your trunk and myself. . . ." But what followed? As soon as the elephant put his trunk inside the hut, slowly he pushed his head inside, and finally flung the man out in the rain. . . ."

The man . . . started to grumble; the animals . . . heard the noise and came to see what was the matter. . . . In this turmoil the lion came along roaring, and said in a loud voice: "Don't you all know that I am the King of the Jungle! . . . I command my ministers to appoint a Commission of Enquiry to go thoroughly into this matter and report accordingly." . . ."

The elephant, obeying the command of his master, got busy with other ministers to appoint the Commission of Enquiry. . . . On seeing the personnel, the man protested and asked if it was not necessary to include in this

Commission a member from his side. But he was told that it was impossible, since no one from his side was well enough educated to understand the intricacy of jungle law. . . ."

The Commission sat to take the evidence. The Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant was first called. He came along with a superior air, . . . and said: "Gentlemen of the Jungle, . . . I have always regarded it as my duty to protect the interests of my friends. . . . He invited me to save his hut from being blown away by a hurricane. As the hurricane had gained access owing to the unoccupied space in the hut, I considered it necessary, in my friend's own interests, to turn the undeveloped space to a more economic use by sitting in it myself. . . ."

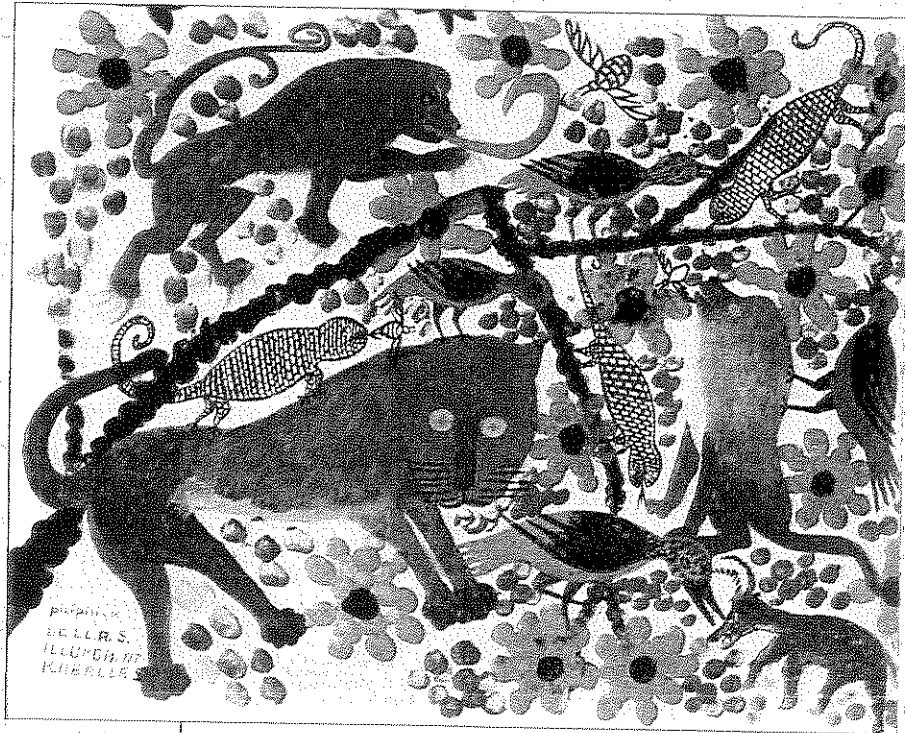
After hearing the Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant's conclusive evidence, the Commission . . . then called the man, who began to give his own account of the dispute. But the Commission cut him short, saying: "My good man, please confine yourself to relevant issues. . . . All we wish you to tell us is whether the undeveloped space in your hut was occupied by anyone else before Mr. Elephant assumed his position?" The man began to say: "No, but—" But at this point the Commission declared that they had heard sufficient evidence from both sides. . . . After enjoying a delicious meal at the expense of the Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant, they reached their verdict. . . . "In our opinion this dispute has arisen through a regrettable misunderstanding due to the backwardness of your ideas. We consider that Mr. Elephant has fulfilled his sacred duty of protecting your interests. As it is clearly for your good that the space should be put to its most economic use, and as you yourself have not reached the stage of expansion which would enable you

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to fill it . . . Mr. Elephant shall continue his occupation of your hut, but we give you permission to look for a site where you can build another hut more suited to your needs. . . .”

The man, having no alternative, and fearing that his refusal might expose him to the teeth and claws of members of the Commission, did as they suggested. But no sooner had he built another hut than Mr. Rhinoceros charged in with his horn lowered and ordered the man to quit. . . . This procedure was repeated until Mr. Buffalo, Mr. Leopard, Mr. Hyena and the rest were all accommodated with new huts. Then the man decided that he must adopt an effective method of protection, since Commissions of Enquiry did not seem to be of any use to him. He sat down and said, “Ng’enda thi ndagaga motegi,” which literally means “there is nothing that treads on the earth that cannot be trapped,” or in other words, you can fool people for a time, but not forever.

Early one morning . . . he went out and built a bigger and better hut a little distance away. No sooner had Mr. Rhinoceros seen it than he came rushing in, only to find Mr. Elephant was already inside, sound asleep. Mr. Leopard next came to the window, Mr. Lion, Mr. Fox and Mr. Buffalo entered the doors, while Mr. Hyena howled for a place in the shade and Mr. Alligator basked on the roof. Presently they all began disputing about their rights of penetration . . . and while they were all embroiled together the man set the hut on fire and burnt it to the ground, jungle lords and all. Then he went home, saying: “Peace is costly, but it’s worth the expense,” and lived happily ever after.



Four artists in Zaire collaborated on this drawing, “À Monsieur le Professeur Van Hove,” done in 1948. Compare the way these painters use birds and animals in their drawing with the writer’s use of animals in this fable.

Source: Jomo Kenyatta, from *Facing Mount Kenya*, selected and edited by Chinua Achebe and C. L. Innes. Reprinted by permission of Martin Sesker and Warburg Limited.

THINKING ABOUT LITERATURE

1. What is the Commission’s explanation for siding with the elephant in the dispute?
2. How does the man solve his problem with the animals?
3. **Synthesizing Information** Explain how the story illustrates the relationship between Africans and Europeans during the Age of Imperialism.