

one-half times the size of North America, and more than one-fifth of all the land area in the world.

But consider how compact this mass of land appears. Cut off by water from the rest of the world, except for the 80-mile strip of the Suez isthmus in the north-east, Africa presents an almost unbroken coast on all sides. Compare this with the twisting outlines of Europe, with its maze of gulfs and bays, promontories, peninsulas and islands, and you will see the first answer to the African puzzle. Africa's armour is tightly welded; there is little or nothing to "take hold of." If you should set out from the north end of the famous Suez Canal and walk round Africa without leaving the coast line, you would travel only 16,100 miles. If you do the same for Europe, which is less than one-third as large, you will walk three times as far. The saw-tooth shores of tiny Norway alone wriggle on for nearly 12,000 miles.

Naturally, therefore, Africa offered few sheltering harbours, and early seafarers did not come often or linger long on such inhospitable coasts.

Why Africa Remained Dark So Long

Consider next the structure of the land itself. In contrast with other continents, Africa has an exceedingly small area of low ground. Almost everywhere the walls of the great table-lands rise abruptly a short distance from the sea. The coastal strip between is usually barren and filled with brackish mangrove swamps. Early explorers found that the few great streams which succeed in breaking through these coast walls are almost invariably closed by sandbars at their mouths, while their courses higher up are interrupted by rapids and cataracts, which made travel even in small boats next to impossible.

But these obstacles, forbidding as they appear, are only the defences of the outer gates. Turn your back to the Atlas Mountains in the north-west and to the site of ancient Carthage on the bay south-east of Cape Blanc, or leave the ruins of the old Greek settlement of Cyrene on the promontory east of the Gulf of Sidra, and travel southward. Before many miles, the rocky hills

smooth out into rolling sand dunes stretching endlessly toward the horizon. Trees and vegetation disappear. The heat grows intense, pouring down from above, then rising again in shimmering waves from the burning ground. This is the beginning of the Great Sahara, which for ages turned back the tide of civilization approaching from the north.

NOT A WARRIOR BUT A POSTMAN



If you want to send a letter in certain parts of Africa, you don't drop it into a letter-box. You hand it to a young native like this one. He fastens it in the fork of a stick so that he will not forget it and so that the other natives will not interfere with him, for they know if they do they will get themselves into trouble with their British rulers. Then, with a spear in the other hand to defend himself from any wild animals that may attack him, he starts off at a jogging trot which will carry your letter some forty miles a day. For this service he will charge you the equivalent of about ten cents in our money.

This ocean of sand, spread out across the continent for 3,500,000 square miles, greater in size than the whole United States, is without a single river, from the Nile on the east to the Atlantic Ocean on the west. Here and there those who know the way can find an oasis, a rare spot where a little water has forced its way to the surface, giving life to date palms, acacia bushes, and a patch of green herbage. Straggling from one distant oasis to another are ancient caravan routes, along which are scattered the whitened bones of men and beasts, bleached by the sun and the dry sirocco or si-moom winds, or buried in the ever-shifting sand.

The only living things to be seen, aside from a few prowling jackals, are occasional hooded

figures mounted on camels, the "ships of the desert"—for the camel is the only pack animal that can stand the fearful test of the Sahara. The wayfarers may be wild Tuareg tribesmen, the pirates of the sand, cruising swiftly in search of a caravan to plunder; or they may be the swifter *meharistes*, the French desert police, recruited 1,200 strong in the far north and sent to keep order in this tremendous wilderness.

The Real Africa of the Africans

But if we don't lose our way and the water holds out, we shall pass through the desert and the steppes into a greener land beyond where the real Africa of the Africans begins—that central plateau and forest region which stood out to the last against the explorer, the scientist, the missionary, and the soldier. Here is the home of the hundreds of negro tribes, which shade off in the north into Arab and Egyptian, and in the south into Hottentot and Bushman.

It would perhaps be better to enter this region from the west, in the footsteps of the first explorers, for the sinister desert route is not the