

Balata

*don't capitalize
Balata*

The bleeding and collection of Balata gum in ~~B.C.~~ *British Guiana* started around the middle of the last century and for the first 40/50 years the industry was centered largely in the ~~Canji~~ ^{or} Berbice Rivers with several off-shoots along the entire coastal area. Practically no attempt had been made beyond tidal influence, due to the general ignorance about the various falls and obstructions in each river and also due to the fact that ~~the~~ ^{Government} frowned upon any expedition penetrating beyond a certain line inland. This last was among the unwritten laws for the protection of the ~~Aboriginal~~ ^{original} Indians, and pretty rigorously enforced by M. McTurk, the then Protector. Anyone could, of course, ascend the different rivers so long as you remained in country where no Indians existed, but ~~up~~ up to the beginning of this century Heaven help the man whom McTurk caught walking ~~on~~ ^{on} Indian line or road: entering their villages: trading with them or employing them without permission-- all of which contravened ^a ~~with~~ the Abor. Ind. Regulations.

Most of the Balata grants in those days were small in area - one man shows, as the outfitting of expeditions were and still are pretty costly affairs. Any expedition should work from the start of the first rains until sometime into the following dry season, say from mid April till the end of Sept. ¹ even on the coast: Boats and tacklings, tarpaulins, tools and all supplies of food and medicines for the entire season have to be sent up. It was all pioneer work at first although latterly a few of those interested in the industry had ~~brought~~ ^{brought} out less successful competitors. Yet this ~~century~~ century dawned with no big combine or company. The industry was owned and financed by people of means or ~~merchants~~ merchants in the street largely as a means of increasing their shop sales, Not one of whom ever went a foot to investigate conditions on the grants and few of whom, if any, would have known a ~~Balata~~ Balata from a ~~Banyan~~ Banyan tree.

Balata 2

Balata was ~~said~~ to exist in the far interior but it was known that there were several varieties, most of which had peculiarities that made them either of no commercial interest or as often of no use at all. Thus the current rumor was that all Balata beyond a certain distance ~~xxxxxx~~ from the coast was entirely "bastard" varieties. This bubble was pricked when Gov't in late 1900 forfeited from Johnnie Park a quantity of balata cut by Abor. Indians in the Rupununi River, which was readily sold in town to recognized dealers at top prices.

As described elsewhere Bugle & Co. applied for large areas on Rupununi which were granted. The district was so remote; the difficulties so much greater owing to the large number of almost unknown falls; the cost of organization so much larger ~~thanxxxx~~ that the applicant had to have greatly increased concessions to warrant the great outlay necessary and to insure continuity of work ^{or} over a number of years.

Almost at once Joseph Iodaus Chapman secured concession to the South of Bugle and Co. on the middle Quitaro and ~~Rewa~~^{Rewa} Rivers. Garnett and Co. were granted the ~~KANAKU MOUNTAINS~~ Kanaku Mountains, the upper reaches of the Quitaro and Rewa River and along the Kudywini River to the frontier. The Consolidated Rubber and Balata Estates Ltd. was formed who applied for an enormous area north of Bugle & Co. embracing practically the whole of the middle ~~Essequibo~~^{Essequibo}. Dr. Bovallius took out the ~~the~~ upper reaches of the Potaro some distance above Kaiteuk Fall. Practically all the forests were taken up between the coast and the 2 degree N. Lat.: by far the greater area belonging to the "Consolidated".

Above Potaro Mouth very little was known ~~of~~ of the Essequibo and Rup district and no one, except a couple of small Indian villages, existed in the forests, hence it was necessary to send up all the men necessary for the bleeding purposes and the transport of all supplies and all balata reaped in the area. Since no white men with experience were available the concession ~~areas~~^{river}

Balata 3

had no alternative but employ colored and black men as managers. These were drawn from the ranks of superintendents of balata areas working on the ^uCanji or Berbi^c already by the offer of higher cash emoluments. Bugle & Co. employed a man called Scotland and the Consolidated secured the services of T.K. Merriman for their Rup and Mid. Ess^equebo concessions as managers. Both were excellent men but new to the district -- the enormous distances-- all to be done by paddle in these days-- The local difficulties.

The number of bleeders in the colony were very limited at this time and now began a scramble for men amongst the companies. Operations were being begun practically all over the colony, and there was not anything like enough experienced men to go round. The pioneer instinct was strong in the working classes and there was generally plenty of volunteers --- of a kind: men who had never been in the bush before: who had no knowledge of even the rudiments of the industry but were willing to try", especially as there was a prospect of getting a fair cash advance before leaving town. This meant, as was only natural, that the new industry attracted about as many of the ne'er-do-wells and rascals of the coast as it did bonafide conscientious workmen. As time went on the better men came into their own as with a year's tuition any willing worker can become a really good bleeder, but competition for men was now so keen that for years there was a large proportion of worthless rascals who changed from one company to another each year. In the Rupununi River there were in a few years time well over a thousand bleeders alone employed and hundreds of boat hands, general laborers, steersmen, bowmen, cooks and bottle washers.

Collecting centers had to be cleared and depots built at strategic points such as Potara Mouth: Murawa, Siparuni Mouth, Maipuri Ldg., Inkapata (2) and Apotem (3), all of which called for the employment of large numbers of axemen, sawmen, carpenters and general laborers.

Every boat on the coast had to be commandeered to ~~send~~ send up

Balata 4

supplies and for years boatbuilding yards were working overtime. The falls and rivers were unknown practically, yet these boats had to be manned and ^{ai}captained somehow. Here again hundreds of men volunteered who knew nothing of river work and many of whom could not swim a stroke- a very necessary accomplishment when a boat can be sunk at anytime. Here again the industry attracted many ^{of the}rascals in the river transport trade and it is a peculiarity also how many men, once they leave the last port of authority & police protection throw off their rather skin deep veneer of civilization and revert to something that is worse than the so-called savage of the boma or kraal. For some years the Essequibo from Potare Mouth and Apoteri and from that point up the Rupununi to the Northern foothills of the Kanaku Mountains simply hummed with rascality and violence. Exploitation and destruction was rampant for several years.

Johnnie Park naturally acted as guide to the Bugle bleeders and as such led them to the scene of ^his own bleeding operations, from which they rapidly fanned out in search of more ^{work -} ~~business~~ all through the Rupununi! Indian guides were pressed into service and Bat Creek, Simoni and Cotton Creek (Katoka) were discovered to contain enormous stands of Balata trees which were soon all the scenes of intensive bleeding operations. All these operations were in the hands of black timber cruising foremen who carried up their necessary supplies from Apoteri and were rarely if ever visited or inspected by a responsible manager for years. These men, foremen and bleeders almost to a man, considered the Abor. Indians as fair game for exploitation in every possible way. The Indians had fields, so why should they not draw on them for supplies: the Indians had hammocks, curios, pets, parrots and dozens of interesting articles that would make lovely gifts to friends on the coast, so why not buy them with the understanding that they would be paid for in another year when the purchases came back up to the district. The Indians had lots of women around- mothers, wives, daughters, sweethearts- and had not women since Eden been solely for the pleasure and use of Man so — — ?

Balata 5 *Within two years the Macussi Tribe were reduced to starvation in food and supplies and their women subjected to every stage of debauchery and indignity.*

Although practically no Indians existed between Potaro ~~mouth~~ ^{mouth} Apotaro conditions were just about as bad. Actually these few Indians abandoned their locations and moved to new quarters in ~~XXXX~~ out-of-the-way islands or miles inland from the river bank where it was difficult to find them.

Accidents in the dangerous and unknown falls were frequent. In the height of the transport season they may be said to have been of daily occurrence somewhere on the river. In Gold Fall alone I can remember when over half a dozen wrecked boats could be seen with a radius of less than half a mile - the hulls sticking up among the different rocks and all meaning a huge loss of men and material. I had occasion to render assistance to the crews of two boats which had crashed or sank up in the running down Kialiwak Fall. Seventeen men out of a total of forty-two were drowned: the survivors lost everything they possessed except the clothes on their bodies: the company lost two valuable boats, tarpaulins and tackling and some 15,000 lbs. of Balata.

These accidents for the first two years were due to either carelessness or ignorance of the dangers but they soon took on a very different aspect: in one or two cases a boat passing the scene of a recent wreck had been able to salvage some part of the ^{lost} Balata; the companies gladly paid a bonus of some cents per pound for all recovered. Then some unscrupulous dealers asked why hand it over to the owners for ^{a few} ~~four~~ cents when they, the dealers, would pay 30, 40 or even 50 cents per pound.

By this time there were a number of such dealers operating along the coast who were prepared to buy any quantity of Balata without any questions as to who it really belonged to or where it came from, and definitely encouraging bleeders to pass what balata they had cut across into some other ^{person's} grants to be sold to them later. Stealing of balata became fairly common as it was ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ easy for a man to plead some accident or illness for his producing nothing. He

Balata 6

gained by an advance from his employer and a sale at a price much higher than he was to be paid for as a bleeder. The employer had to pay for all administration supplies and transport and to ~~offer~~ ~~XX~~ often carry heavy deprecations and loss, ~~some~~ ^{more} of which the dealer had to meet so he could cheerily ~~pay~~ ^{pay} ~~XXX~~ 50¢ per lb. for all the stolen balata C.I.F. Georgetown against the employer's price of 20-25 ^{cents} per lb. to the bleeder, *on the grants.*

This new idea had possibilities and soon arrangements and deals for wrecks in ~~XXXXXX~~ Essequibo were fixed up in the rumshops of Lown but there was one snag. All balata from Rup went over the Rockstone-Wismar route and soon suspicion was aroused as there were only 3-4 concessions in the area and where did all these small consignments originate? This difficulty was soon solved. A rascal of a captain invested in an old boat, got a bowman and crew together and started up country to the scene of operations. He ran his balata down to Bartica where it could be sold quietly ~~XX~~ and ~~XX~~ no trace left of the transaction.

Of course competition ^{to} soon set in and more boats joined the "pirates" as they became known. They operated quite openly from Waraputa to almost in sight of Rup. M, offering terms to any boat they met en route for town with a load of balata and there is no doubt the concessionaires lost heavily. It was difficult to find proof. A genuine accident would happen with the loss of everything and several lives, ~~XXX~~ the next day a boat would arrive ~~XXXX~~ at Rockstone badly damaged but no baggage or lives lost. The captain had put all the balata ashore and as soon as repairs were effected he would return to where the balata was stowed away to bring it down.

One of the captains had cached his cargo on a small island and he and the crew were unable to identify the place again. They spent weeks searching unsuccessfully but of course drawing full pay all the time. The concessionaires had to arrange that several boats travelled together in charge of a trustworthy head captain in an effort to defeat the pirates. Then there was a succession of wrecks

Balata 8

Scotland ~~was~~ for a holiday. I passed down the Rup, before the balata was stored on the bank of the river and the occurrence all took place when I was at home, so I knew "nuthin' about nuthin'". When I arrived back in Georgetown I found a special Gov't Commission had been sent up country to investigate into my methods and rascality in my absence. It appeared that the loss of the balata occupied the ~~XXXX~~ clubs and scandalmongers in town and one bright lad had said, "The explanation is simple. Ogilvie (?) and these cunning "bucks" of his could easily remove the stuff just as he liked" The investigator ~~was~~ proved that I had been at sea when the theft was committed and that not one of my Indians had been within 100 miles of the place.

There was of course quite a ~~XX~~ number of river captains who would have no dealings with the pirates, and who ran trip after trip without any loss but there were just about as many who were downright scamps and would have sold their own mothers for half a dollar. Even with the good ones there would be a lapse once in a way and the companies were at their wits end. Special clerks had to accompany ~~the~~ cargos to see if it would remedy things but here again temptation proved too much. There was one head captain in charge of transport for one of the major companies who ran the river for a couple of years without an accident or the loss of any cargo, and naturally he stood in high esteem and received specially high wages and commissions for his work. Eventually even he fell a victim to the wiles of the pirates. He was running a heavily loaded boat - some 80,000 lbs. of balata - from Apoteri to Rockstone and had just cleared Waraputa Fall - the last danger point before reaching Rockstone when he deliberately ran his boat against a rock in fairly shallow water. It was proven later that all the crew were ready, standing by with all their baggage and food in hand and when the boat struck they all ~~XXXX~~ simultaneously stepped over the gunwale as they sprang ashore. This sudden shifting of the men's weight forced the gunwale underwater, the boat

Balata 9

filled ~~XXXXXX~~ instantly with water, the force of the current turned her ^h completely over precipitating her entire cargo on the bottom of the river and inside of an hour the party after embarking their baggage and paddles were on their way downstream for repairs-- the victims of another genuine accident. It was not until a year or two later when some of the crew confessed that the whole thing had been arranged on a ~~h~~ previous trip to town and that the wreck had been staged in full view of the pirates who were quietly waiting on a nearby island and saw the whole thing happen. The crew of 16 men got paid about 20 each, but ^{\$} it was never learned how much the bowman and the captain--the two principals as the former disappeared and the captain died very soon after.

To evade the losses by accident and theft the companies combined and cut a road through from Maipora^f Landing on the Essequibo to the foot of Canister Fall on the Demerara. It ^{was} proposed to lay a set of rails over the distance, roughly 20 miles, over which loaded trucks could be ~~XXXXXX~~ pushed by hand or pulled by mules. Large lock-up barges would operate on the Demerara River. While the construction was going ahead, Indian droghers were recruited who carried a large quantity of balata over the road at so much per lb.- either 1 or 2 cents per lb. per trip. It was found out that the Indian girls excelled at this work and many of them hiked the ~~XXXX~~ trail ~~XXXXX~~ with a load of 300 lbs. balata-- a load so heavy that if they stopped to rest they could not get it on to their backs again. The company then built resting places every three miles with a staging at the correct height against which the droghers backed to get their loads off and on.

scheme

Bugle & Co. were the originators of the ~~XXXXXX~~ and the other companies to come as subscribers at some fixed rate. Meanwhile Bugle got up a number of timber workers whose job was to square greenheart's rails to measure 8" square. He ~~h~~ decided it would be too costly to bring iron rails from town and these wooden rails were to be used for the projected railroad between the two rivers. Squaring was commenced from the Canister Fall end and they soon ~~saw~~ had hundreds of these rails

Balata 10

squared. What between careless workmanship, however, the effects of exposure to the sun and rains and possibly a natural tendency, the rails warped so badly that there was not enough manpower in Georgetown to lay them in a straight line. This project was abandoned and only a few piles- each with several hundred- of squared rails remain to mark the attempt. The line was soon after completely abandoned altogether as the other companies reverted to water transportation which at last was being organized fairly successfully.

It can easily be imagined that the Essequibo and Rupununi Rivers were at this time a hot-bed of petty crime, exploitation and ~~XXX~~ infamy during the wet season of each year. Michael McTurk was Commissioner and Protector of Indians at this time, but he invariably paid his annual visit to the District in Dec. or early Jan. just at the time when every black and colored man, except a few watchmen, were away at the coast celebrating Xmas and the New Year and so could do nothing beyond note the evils of new industry in a country inhabited only by Abor. ~~Q~~ Indians and which so far was an unpoliced, unprotected area. It was evident that some control must be established at once and H.P.C. Melville, a rancher and trader in the Wapichayna country, was made Gov't officer and sub-protector of Indians with fairly wide powers and under him a number of police and forest rangers.

Under this scheme things soon began to improve. Melville tackled the exploitation of the Indians first as being the nearest and most urgent as they were on the point of desperation and ripe for retaliation. The Indian Ordinance was strictly enforced. Anyone, except recognized Abor. Indians, were not to stop at any Indian landing ; to enter a village; to walk on an Indian trail; to do any barter; or to employ any Indians. Fines of \$50. or 3 months in jail was the alternative. Notices were stuck up at all Indian landings and strategic points warning travellers not to land, of which many took little notice at first but very heavy fines were also placed on the company who employed such offenders. Eventually the companies were not allowed to employ or trade with any Indian under any circumstances or conditions at all, otherwise their concessions would be forfeit. These salutary measures soon

Balata 11

had the desired effect in respect to the Indian situation^a: in fact things swung to the opposite extreme and the Macussi were begging for some modification of the Regulations as ~~XX~~ it had broken their one chance of getting any sort of work which was by now their only source of obtaining a little salt and other necessities in life. After a few years the Regulations were relaxed somewhat with benefit to all. The bleeders from the coast were brought to realize that the Indians were human^{after} all and not ~~specifically~~ specially created for the exploitation of any passing rascal. These coastal men had never before met Abor. Indians whose shy retiring manners led to the wrong ideas. The more unscrupulous strangers took every advantage of this disposition, but a few stern examples changed their ~~XX~~ ideas and the District soon became normal.

The "pirate" situation soon was solved. The Regulations regarding Sales of Balata were tightened up at the town end, while Melville did a good bit of patrolling of the affected area by boat. None of the "pirates" were actually caught red-handed although they had one or two very narrow escapes, but several of their boats were overtaken while on the cruise and severely warned of what might happen. These boats pretended they were in the district as prospectors for gold and minerals. Their ~~names~~ names, registrations and certificates were noted and advices sent out to Rockstone, Bartica and elsewhere to be on the lookout for them and to make an inspection of everything when they appeared. They realized the game was up and in a little over a year there was not a single pirate operating in the district.

The various managers; Merriman, Scotland, etc.- were excellent men who had complete control of the labor while actually under their eye, but they had never handled any concern on so large a scale and once they men left the different depots and control, many of lower element flung all traces of decency overboard until they arrived back. The managers tried their best- no doubt- as they held very lucrative posts which it was to their advantage to keep. These managers got a good round salary

Balata 12

plus a commission on all balata ~~XXXXXXXX~~ handed in at their depots. At least two of these men were earning around and over \$5,000 per ~~annum~~^{ann}. This wealth had a demoralizing effect as they soon found it far beneath them to attend to many minor points and the men they selected to carry out such duties often had neither ability nor personality. These managers/superintendents were an open handed lot: Amongst them they staged a "Bleeder's Ball" each year for several seasons in Berbice which was the event of the year. They would employ part of the ~~XXX~~ Militia Band from town and every known bleeder and his woman were invited. Money was simply chucked away but they could always draw on next years^{l)} prospects. They nearly ^{all} were in debt to their employers and these debts kept increasing until the only remedy was for the employer to cut his loss and dismiss ~~XXX~~ his man. The competition ^{to} was very keen for a competent man and they would draw "advances" for every imaginable ~~XXXXXXXX~~ excuse--- sickness, marriage, death in the family, the proposed building of a home, the needs of a large ^{family} at home while he was in the bush^{for} months at a time, or the require^{m n}ments of himself while up country. One little trick^{to} was to ship stuff back to the family from up country and charge same to himself at cost price; the company paying all transport charges from Georgetown to Rup^A and back. I remember one manager who ordered up a boat load of goods which was not even unloaded at Rup. Under the excuse that the boat was carrying returning bleeders and their effects, these goods were sent straight back readdressed to the Manager's family. Then the books were generally in a hopeless muddle and it would take months to straighten them out. It was easy to challenge some item (by the manager) but it would take weeks, months, to send up and get the "chit" which had inadvertently^l been left in Rup. A firm has to get up very early to cope ^{with} the tricks of the trades and wiles of these "Competent" bushmen.

The Actual ~~X~~ bleeder is or was just as bad. Before they started ~~o~~ out they too had to have a "vance" for their families and every ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ imaginary contingency: never much, but a dollar here, fifty cents there and it soon mounts up. The family allowance would be spent in a town spree and fares had to be

purchased to carry them back to Berbice. The bleeder would demand an advance for medicines for personal use in the bush. This he spent in perfume for his donah. An allowance for a Balaclava Helmet and "baby flannel" undervest was used to buy a silk frock for someone. This practice grew so bad that an order for these goods had to be issued on some shop of known ^{repute} ~~report~~ who would not substitute some other article in place of that ordered. These bleeders were on the whole ~~XXXX~~ hard working people once they got to their working places and it ~~XXXXX~~ only led to subsequent discontent to give them too large advances as it reduced by just so much more ^{their} ~~this~~ eventual balance in hand after months of unimaginable hardship and danger. They made good money once they started actual bleeding. A good man could collect two kerosene tins of balata milk in a day which would give 50 lbs. of dried balata. Paid at 20¢ per lb. this represented ~~\$10~~ 15.00 for a day's work. He could not, of course work on wet days but the average bleeder used to demand \$5/per day if for any reason his manager had to put him to other work. Many of them and especially the foremen returned to town after 7 to 10 months in the bush with handsome checks and certainly they deserved every penny they received.

The working people in these parts are extremely generous and open-handed. For a decade or more the gold-digger had set the pace in the display of suddenly acquired wealth, but when the balata industry got really going in Rup, the gold-digger became very small potatoes and few in the hill. Over 1,000 actual bleeders would be at work inside the Rup, and its branches alone, most of whom would reach Georgetown within a few weeks before Christmas. Many of these men seemed to completely lose their heads on reaching civilization. They would ~~have~~ already have notified their families of the date of their proposed arrival and every woman and child of their circle would be on the wharf to meet them. Of course few of the Berbice families could get down nor were they wanted, as their ~~XXXXXXXX~~ presence cramped the style of the menfolk. There were always a score or two of unattached ^{town} ladies dressed and perfumed like the Queen of Sheba to meet the daily river boat as she arrived, and generally a number of musicians with their instruments. X The successful

Balata 14

bleeder dressed in new store clothes with a red howler monkey skin for a hat and a variety of other skins ~~knagging~~ hung round his person strutted up and down the steamer- the image of importance- looking for small boys to carry his baggage - as often as not a hairybank i.e. converted kerosene tin- ashore. Then cussing the unfortunate boy like a trooper and shouting "Howdys" to all ^{and} sundry, he would step on to the wharf to the breathless admiration of the fair sex who were all smiles and wriggles in the hope of catching his eye. It is quite a mystery ~~x~~ how man and woman give out or receive various signals, but soon the bleeder, probably attracted by a dress far in excess of the rainbow for color, would chose his lady. A cab was now required- a ping pong and silent wheels- the hood had to be pushed back and on which ~~the lady~~ he and the lady of his choice took their seats while their feet rested on the cushions where the ordinary man would sit. A couple of musicians (a drum and trumpet) would be installed in the well of the cab and away they'd go, hell for leather, at as good a gallop as the old hatrack horse could be urged to doing. Water St. was the principal route for this display as it was generally busy especially if they were lucky to hit the moment when the shops and stores were closing down.

I suppose the cab and the musicians didn't cost more than a few shillings but his fancy female companion had to be reckoned with although she had to be careful and full of tact. Absolute monarch, for the moment, of all he surveyed, and owner of the ~~xxx~~ Moon, the Sun and at least seven stars, the bleeder was very tempera- mental and ready to transfer his patronage to some other fairy at a single wrong or displeasing action or word. The lucky ones got dolled up in shining satin, umbrella hat and a few ornaments but in any case she managed to reduce somewhat the amount of ready cash on hand. There were few permanent ~~x~~ friendships made under these conditions and even three hundred dollars- a young fortune to such people in ~~these~~ these days- will not last very long in riotous living. Soon after Xmas and definitely the New Year dawned to see the bleeder broke high, wide and handsome financially. Some of the better natured fairies would pawn the ~~3~~ gifts she had received but that

Balata 15

merely prolonged the agony and the ⁿend of the first week in January would find the bleeder back in his employer's office in an attempt "to tickle de Boss for a 'vance" as it was technically called.

Mind you all the bleeders were not like that. Many of them entered town without ostentation, stayed quietly in a hotel or with friends while they contracted their necessary business and left to join their families at the first opportunity. These men had ambition and were out to improve their home and the living conditions of their families but it was the noisy spectacular spend^tthrift that filled the eye and smote the ear with their pingpong and raucous band which remain more persistant^lly in the memory.

As has been indicated, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ the system of 'vanc^ee (advance) can be ~~XXXXXXXX~~ and often is iniquitous and demoralizing but in one case it rose to the spectacular. An Englishman who had had good demonstration of its uses and misuses through a position he held as a town manager-director of a large balata company left the ~~company~~ colony and moved away into Brazil. This country had concentrated on producing what is known as Para Rubber and he found a certain number of untapped balata in the district where he had got a job, but no Brazilian knew how to bleed the trees~~x~~ and cure the latex. Why not go up the Rio Branco, cross into B.C. and down to Georgetown to recruit bleeders? He personally knew scores of the men who had worked under him and whom he felt certain would cheerfully work with him again. As is quite customary this gentleman as a town manager knew far more about the difficulties and solutions of labor in the distant forests than the most proficient manager in the field and he would show the industry a trick or two. He had no difficulty in recruiting all the men he wanted and more as his cash advances were generous but he did have no end of trouble in collecting these men when he wanted to start back up country for Brazil. The departure was delayed on several dates through the normal excuses, but one man, a pit-foreman, refused to budge an inch unless he was allowed to carry his woman with him. How very simple he had been. Here was the solution to all the delay in leaving!!!

His office was almost mobbed for some days by women and he soon recruited well over a hundred. His advances in cash ~~to~~ the women were small but each was given a good sewing machine, a number of which he had bought at reasonable wholesale. Everything went well but on the date when everybody- men and women- had to assemble on the wharf to embark on up the river boat; only a half dozen ~~x~~ men and one solitary woman responded to the roll call. This woman was loud in her complaint and was there only to get "justice". The bailiff had apparently seized the machines for debt. This was too much for the kind employer and he tried to get police and ~~de~~etective help in locating the absconders and the sewing machines. A few machines were located in the pawnshops but the majority had long ago been sent out into the distant country districts and were never located. Finally , in despair the gentleman left town with not more than half a dozen men, out of about 200 advanced. He went back to Brazil via the Potara River and through the Pakaraima Mountains. The party were on the verge of starvation when they reached the first reaches of the Mahn River and the experiment was never repeated. The last of his men refused to go beyond Boa Vista, they made their way back to Georgetown as best they could and not a single pound of balata was ever bled.

Melville was a man of great charm and personality. He was in sympathy with the Indians: spoke their language: and, best of all, held their confidence. When these Indians found he was really serious ~~x~~ in trying to protect them, they quickly came forward with their legitimate grievances. A number were made semi-official detectives and Melville ~~and Melville~~ soon had every black offender brought up on charges with definite ~~proof~~ produced on the ~~sp~~ spot.

In one year the offenses against the Indians were greatly reduced although exploitation was difficult to ~~x~~eradicate in such a large area, as some of the bleeders and even the companies would take a chance. This is to be found a temptation at all times and difficult to cope with.

One of the greatest influences for good at this time was the appointment of a man called Sharples as a policeman in the district. Sharples was born at Betterverwagting and had joined the G/n Constabulary as a young man. He was ^a half and half colored man of negro extraction. He was anything but robust, tall, thin and lanky, although he was very seldom sick or in poor health. He had a weakness somewhere below his knees and his feet never seemed under proper control. This caused a shuffling sort of walk and he was about as clumsy as it was humanly possible to be, yet somehow in a difficult country he could outmarch most of his far more agile and stronger companions. When a "bushy" raid had to be made on the coast, Sharples was invariably selected as he always seemed to stand up better to the trying conditions. He had been promoted to Sergeant several times but he had a failing for "high wines" as a beverage. He would only be sergeant for a short time when he would have a lapse and had to be demoted to private again. Apart from this his conduct was exemplary and his officers spoke very highly of his efficiency, honesty and obedience. During one of his lapses the local Commandant recommended Sharples to Melville as the Rup presented no temptation in ~~the~~ the way of drink. He was nearing retirement also and his officers were most desirous that he should have a clean record for some years as, plus promotion again it meant a much better pension. Sharples became an institution almost in Rupununi until he retired in full pension at the highest point of promotion that was open to him.

Sharples was one of the ~~sharpest~~ sharpest members of the police force: he ~~had~~ had some 20 years behind him in police proceedings; a good knowledge of law; and more important a very comprehensive knowledge of the numerous methods in general use in evading them. Sharples had two fixed principles in life; first, that every man will ~~some~~ ^{if} sometime or other break any law, he thinks he can get away with it and, secondly, that the chief end in every policeman's life was to catch, prosecute and convict as many offenders as possible. When he failed to secure a conviction, Sharples would march around declaring to High Heaven and anyone who cared to listen that the Magistrate was "too soft" and suffering from senile decay. At such a period he was a perfect nuisance,

Balata 18

but it rarely happened fortunately and most of the time he was bubblingly cheerful and happy.

Sharples was provided with a small boat and an Indian crew with whom he toured the whole district practically the whole year, entering every tiny tributary of the Rup and Essequibo and ascending up to or beyond such points as the heavier draught boats of the bleeders could penetrate. The Abor. Indian situation was soon well in hand and the greater part of his work was confined to offenses by the bleeders in the forests, who were contravening the Crown Land Regulations for the preservation of the balata trees for future generations that no tree was to be bled for more than one half round its circumference---penalty of \$50.00 inflicted if infringed. It was a great temptation to the bleeder away in the forests, probably scores of miles from any official, to bleed round the entire circumference as he secured twice the amount of latex for almost the same amount of work and the chances were probably 1,000 to 1 that no inspector or ranger would ever find that tree. These Indian boathands were however probably some of the best bushmen of the world and who would slip unobserved through the forest noting every small detail. They needed no roads to walk along which foiled the bleeder's favorite trick of planting young saplings in their abandoned trails to hide their tracks.

Sharples used to walk the main road straight into a camp while his boys roamed the forests on either side. The smarter foremen in such camps would offer Sharples every hospitality in his power in the hope of creating a favourable impression and thereby a less rigorous inspection of the area of which he was in charge as well he ^{or} knows every one of his men ^{was} ~~were~~ doing work contrary to the Regulations. Sharples was only too ready to accept the kindness, especially if there was any "high wines" in sight and he would cheerfully consume every little luxury or the last drop of grog without the slightest compunction. His rangers would come in to report and carry Sharples to inspect the wrongful bleeding and that camp was ~~in~~ for it. Sharples had no mercy or sympathy with such offenders and it was music in his ears to hear the Magistrate's "\$50.00 or 3 months in jail". There wasn't a bleeder who

entered the Rup, but had a wholesale respect and very active fear for Sharples. Many hated him most cordially but they behaved accordingly.

Sharples had the making of a great detective if he had had a better education and training. He had the most retentive memory for faces I have ever met as also of facts and figures about wrong-~~doers~~ doers who had come within his orbit. There was an Arawak Indian who came up to the Savannahs to saw wood for ~~(the)~~ Gov't by the old sawpit method. Something about this man stirred a memory in Sharples and he was sure they had crossed paths at sometime. The Indian was apparently ~~perfectly~~ perfectly frank and open and Sharples was stumped. For weeks he haunted the Indian like his shadow without success but at last he made contact; here goes his tale.

Some 12 or 15 years previously (the actual day, date and month being given) Sharples was sent to some remote part of the N.W.D. to execute a Warrant for the arrest of an Abor. Indian called Charles Simpson who had refused to appear on a summons to give evidence in connection with some criminal case being tried in ~~Georgetown~~ Georgetown. The steamer did not stay long enough to allow Sharples to reach the Indian's home and return unless he was very lucky and made considerable haste. He had not gone more than a mile or so when he met an Abor. Indian coming down the road whom he stopped to enquire the way. "Oh! Yes!" He knew Simpson quite well and gave minute instructions as to how to find the house, even to drawing a rough map in the dust of the road and ended by saying if he was not hurrying to catch the steamer he would have acted as guide.

Sharples went on his way rejoicing and found the house without the slightest trouble but there was no one at home and the place was tightly locked up. Enquiries from the nearest neighbors elicited the fact that Simpson had been around that morning and was probably out at his field or away hunting. There was no one in the field, about a mile away in the forest and Sharples spent the day hunting clues. It was not until almost dusk that he located Simpson's immediate family some miles away, who told him that Simpson had left early to join the steamer en route to take up work in some other part of the Colony. According to the description of dress and the baggage he was carrying Sharples easily recognized the obliging Indian he had met on the road.

Balata 20

on the road as Simpson, by now well away to sea and completely beyond his reach, as there was not even a telephone in the District. Sharples had made his mistake in asking the stranger if he knew Simpson to which the Indian truthfully replied he did and all his information and directions were genuine and true, but he tactfully ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ withheld the fact that he himself was Simpson, because he had not been asked.

Incidentally Simpson had changed his ~~xxx~~ name to Johnson in honor of a later employer as not infrequently happens. The Warrant for his arrest was destroyed by some new broom at the Police H.Q. as the Indian was only required as a witness and there was nothing against him except possibly "contempt of court", once the case was tried and ~~xxxi~~ disposed of.

Another man from the coast drifted ~~x~~ in to the Savannahs as a laborer and here again Sharples was definitely certain ~~xxx~~ they had met before in some criminal action or other. The man was a light-skinned negro called 'Lucky' and had spent all his life in the goldfields or working boathand on the Cuyuni and Mazaruni Rivers. He had one easy mark of identification. This was 'half a hand', the result of delayed action on Lucky's part- in leaving a dynamite bomb to kill fish in one of the falls which left him minus ~~xxx~~ his three middle fingers of the right hand. The pair became bosom friends but that led nowhere. Lucky admitted being as big a rascal as ever existed but swore that at no time had he ever got into trouble with the police. Sharples did not think there was a warrant ~~xxx~~ or anything against Lucky but he was positive that he had crossed trails somewhere with the man. The damaged hand conveyed nothing: Sharples had seen that face at sometime and in connection with some criminal activity. The pair of them were quite frank over the matter and Lucky was even ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ anxious to help Sharples clear up his suspicions but it was months before Sharples finally unraveled the mystery.

Sharples in his early days as a constable had been sent up to Bartica on special duty. This little town was at the time suffering from growing pains as the result of a local gold boom in the district and all kinds of gambling had sprung into existence as is general in most out of the way mining ~~XXXXXX~~ centers. There was one den with a

Balata 21

notoriously bad reputation against which a raid was secretly planned by the police. They crept up noiselessly but had to rush across a considerable clearing round the house. This probably caught the attention of the gamblers, but the police were leaping through the doors and windows when someone smashed the kerosene lamp with a club. In that brief second Charles saw Lucky who was fortunate enough to escape arrest in the ensuing melée when most of the gamblers were caught.

The rapid expansion of the industry flung an increasing amount of balata on the market, much more than the demand and prices fell below the cost of production. Many of the smaller concerns either sold out or stopped work and the larger concerns, also losing heavily, only carried on because of the large amount of capital already sunk was so much that some attempt must be made to recover something. New managers, foremen and captains were appointed in place of those who had now gained some experience and they in turn made many mistakes and gave the onlookers much amusement.

Bugle & Co. were fortunate in appointing John Armstrong as their Manager at Apoteri. He was a white man of much personality with good ability in handling and knowledge of local labor. He had had large experience in various mines and timber grants in the Colony and though he knew little of the actual technique of balata production he was able from the start to save considerable expenditure by the coordination of transport through the enormous areas under his control and thus ensure better food supplies at strategic points and better collections of the dried balata. Armstrong raised his company's working in every department to a high point of efficiency and production and to show splendid profit when again demand increased and prices rose.

[Comm-8/12/23] Amongst other new men were Cambridge, Kersting, Hendly ^{and}, Logan and a dozen others, few of whom kept their positions long. They had a habit of managing to overdraw on their actual earnings by a small amount during their first year. There were dozens of excuses for this; lack of postal facilities, failure of certain gangs of bleeders, unforeseen family complications and sickness. They were given a lecture: promised all sorts of reforms but the second year's working without exception found

Balata 22

them in default to a thousand dollars or more. Again lectures, promises but the third year found them dismissed.

Cambridge was a colored man in advancing years with a long experience as a bleeder and foreman on the coast and acted as Senior Foreman under Armstrong for years. He was a fine old man, so gentle that one thought butter wouldn't melt in his mouth but he knew every trick in the trade and he had to be a real smart workman who could put anything over on Cambridge. He was of little use as a manager on his own account although wonderfully efficient in his quiet way as second to a man of Armstrong's force of character.

Kersting was a light colored man probably of Dutch extraction and was in many ways quite a character and held in high esteem by the ^{ea}hands of his firm. He was employed as a ~~pa~~ prospector, or balata cruiser for years. His first year was moderately successful but, highly superstitious before he began his second year's work, he approached certain obeah purveyors and paid a record sum for various charms. These charms were exotic and never to be repeated and carried a promise that wherever Kersting went in the forest nothing but balata would be the predominant tree. The charm worked true for years for the simple reason that Bugle had obtained by far the finest balata bearing area in the Colony. Timber cruising in ^tBai Creek and Simoni, Kersting explored an area that has kept big gangs at work for 40 years and the myth grew about his miraculous powers. Of course here and there he failed. On the evidence of one or two trees showing up on the river bank he would allocate a gang of 30 bleeders to work there. These men would bleed the couple of trees that had been seen and then scour the forests for miles around to find nothing. After some couple of months they would be rescued and put to work ~~on~~ on proven ground, but they would barely make ~~XXXXXX~~ expenses when the season closed down. Once the dry season had really set back Kersting would go to the place and unhampered by flood waters a mile or two from the creek as is common ~~XXXX~~ in the wet season, he would drive a straight line deep into the forests until he made contact with the main reef. A new foreman and gang would be sent to the area to produce almost the record amount of balata for the year. Kersting would show the reason of the previous ~~x~~

Balata 23

year's failure as due solely to a lazy set of workmen who had refused to go out of camp. His employers believed him. The bleeders were told "Where Kersting sets his foot, there only balata grows," and his star hung over his head.

Having exhausted most of Simoni, ~~Bat~~^{Bak} and Katoka^o Creeks, Kersting was much less successful in the Essequibo and ~~Rawa~~^e Rivers where the balata was much more scattered. There were a few ugly failures which even obeah could not remedy and Kersting was having a hard time with the men, as the better workers were furious at being dumped in a camp that only provided a few days work. To shift camps meant the loss of several weeks in making clearings ~~and~~, building camps, dabrees ~~(e)~~ and drying sheds just when they could have been bleeding every day- the best season of the year and they did not relish returning to their families ~~with~~^{not} only with out money but a crop of debt to be worked off in another year.

Kersting knew his star was waning, ~~a~~ obeah or no obeah, and he began to plead ~~with~~ ill-health, but he made one more trip: this time to the Western bank of the Rup. between Eupokarri and the foot of the Kanaku Mountains. The Eastern bank ~~Katoka~~^{R-}, Simomi and ~~Bal~~^E Creeks ~~were~~[—] lousy with balata, it was not possible the reef would stop abruptly at the River. Kersting crossed over the ~~Savannahs~~ from Eupokarri towards the head of the Nappi ~~Creek~~^{KXXK} and walked out along ~~the~~ an old Indian trail that led to a landing below the Mouth of the ~~Napari~~^M Creek. On Kersting's findings ~~and~~ and ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ recommendations over 100 bleeders were sent to exploit the area. The expedition was a complete failure; there were only a few trees along the old Indian road ~~with~~ mostly on high road; the area was subject to deep and long continued flooding even in a mild wet season over almost its length and breadth and the area was very limited in any case. The men were landed but as was a general custom left behind with only one boat in case of emergency. This got sunk ~~up~~ when the river rose—too deep for the men to dive to reach her—the food supplies got swamped and ran out. The men managed to ransack some Indian fields and eventually ~~(the)~~ Gov't were able to remove a number of them just as things got serious.

A short time later when in town, Bugle showed me Kersting's report and asked my opinion on it. The report showed how Kersting had entered the forest from the

Balata 24

Savannah at a well known spot where the distance out to the river is only a couple of hours easy walk along what was then a well known and well defined trail. Soon after ~~the~~ entering the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ high forest the river had begun to rise in flood most unexpectedly and caught Kersting ~~unprepared~~ completely unpre^apared. By morning there was no hope of going back and they had to abandon camp, food and all supplies and climb the surrounding trees to escape death itself. The floods continued till Kersting was right up in the branches of the high forest. Knowing from experience that such floods may take as many weeks to subside as it took hours to rise, he decided to swim for it. Being a splendid bushman he set a course by the sun that would bring ~~him~~ out exactly at a point on the river where he had sent his crew and boat to await his arrival. He had with him only a couple of bleeders and such food as they could carry in their pockets and ~~xx~~ shoulderbags. Night found them struggling on and there was nothing for it but each man must select the comfortably² junction of two branches in which to sleep. They kept on swimming for several days, each night sleeping in the tree tops and were almost at the point of exhaustion and starvation when they made the Rupununi ~~xx~~ exactly at the spot where his boat was waiting according to order and their ordeal was over. He calculated he had swum 20 to 30 miles and that the entire forest was composed solely of balata trees. They had had to take periodic rests and each night had slept only in balata branches.

I gave it as my opinion that balata was found growing with a few possible exceptions only on high ground and clear of swamps and flooding. I also pointed out that the average balata tree had on the average a clean straight pole of over 40 ft. before a branch could be found and that any company who sent men to exploit a forest with such flooding as the report indicated, deserved to incur nothing but disaster, and loss.

Meanwhile, Kersting, poor fellow, was under medical attention and produced a doctor's certificate to the effect that the hardships he had undergone in the forest⁴ had undermined his constitution so badly that his employers were warned that further employment as a balata cruiser would probably prove fatal and he was given a ~~ju~~ warehouse job in town.

At the same time Armstrong was in hot water at Apoteri over the weighing of balata. Every bleeder brings his balata sheets ~~dripping wet~~ into the depot dripping wet from water and in as immature and halfdried form as possible so as to get ~~XXXXXX~~ increased poundage on the weighing scales and also much higher payment as employers were contracted to pay a certain ~~we~~ rate for every pound weighed. Armstrong knew all this and tried to make the ~~XXXXXX~~ men hand in only well cured balata, but try as he ~~XXXX~~ ~~XXXX~~ like the final weights of the ^{Outgoing} balata was far away below the weights of the balata he received from the bleeders. There ^{were} ~~was~~ some unholy rows at Apoteri over ^{these} ~~this~~ weights and only Armstrong's personality and forceful character saved a mutiny and danger to the staff and himself.

Kersting at odd times in the previous years when not actively cruising had often lent a hand in weighing and when some ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ aggrieved bleeders arrived in town with his moan about Armstrong's arbitrary methods and how he had been barefacedly robbed, Kersting was full of sympathy. He would also point out ~~that~~ how when he did the weighing there ^d have never once been a cross word let alone a quarrel such as every bleeder now seemed to have with Armstrong. These bleeders put their stories before Bugle plus a strong request that Kersting be sent to Apoteri in complete charge of the take-over of all balata from the bleeders. Armstrong knew something of Kersting's methods and definitely refused to have him on the depot, using the doctor's certificate as one ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ very valid reason.

Armstrong generally left early in the ~~the~~ season in order to start off the various gangs from Apoteri to the scene of active work on the grants. Meanwhile the doctor found Kersting's general condition much improved and while balata cruising was not to be thought of there was no reason why he could not weigh in the balata without any danger. A couple of months later ^h ~~armstrong~~ was disagreeably surprised to see Kersting arrive at the landing, carrying with him a brand new scale and set of weights, all of which carried the accuracy marks of recent inspection by the authorities, and armed with a letter of ~~app~~ appointment as sole weigher ~~a~~ of all balata received on behalf of his company. Armstrong worried a lot when Kersting got to work as it was only in extreme cases of wet and uncured

balata that he would order it to be ~~is~~ spread out in the shade for further drying. Kersting was most particular about his scale and weights. The food supplies of everybody in the bush is salt fish, pork, or beef and in handling this for every meal most fingers are salty. These meats have to be weighed out in small parcels and every scale gets rusty in some degree but ~~not~~ that of Kersting. No man dared touch his scale or weights and nothing but ~~is~~ balata was weighed. Every day Kersting spent an hour or so cleaning the scale and putting a drop of oil on the fulcrums and joints and rubbing all parts with thick castor oil as a rust preservative. The weights were carefully kept locked away after being ~~used~~ wrapped in cotton wool in a special canister, but each day he burnished these also and set them out in the sun. His whole apparatus shone like a mirror and no fault could be found with ~~it~~ that.

In due course, Kersting, having finished weighing all the balata, left for town with scale and weights complete. For the first time there had been no quarreling ~~about~~ over the weighing in and the camp had run on ball bearings so to speak. Armstrong however had to stay on and weigh out the balata from the store for transport by boat to town and he dreaded what the deficit would be from evaporation of moisture against Kersting's weights. Such a loss after the balata had been stored in a baking hot wattle wall hut after some months of dry weather amounted to as much as 8 to 10 % and cases were known where the deficiency, probably helped by a little ingenious stealing, was more than 25%. Armstrong's blood pressure rose to the danger point when, after making the last shipment, ~~the~~ the books showed no loss from evaporation and that Armstrong's weights of outgoing balata was 1% more than Kersting had weighed in. The books were checked and rechecked but no mistake ~~was~~ was found. Kersting had established a new and unique record in the balata industry. Armstrong admitted his scales were rusty, yet.....

The following year Kersting went up to weigh in the balata again and Armstrong was horrified to see the condition of the balata being ~~weighed~~ received. Scarcely a single parcel was challenged for excess moisture although it was brought straight from a water-logged boat and flung on the weighing platform with water dripping on all sides. Now and again a bleeder would challenge Kersting's reading of the scale. Kersting's reply would be "not a man of you touches my scale or weights ~~is~~ but any of you ~~can~~ that likes can read out your own weights." This many did; it only meant a quarter of a pound at most over the

Balata 27

amount called by Kersting. Everybody was delighted: never had they had such a good weigher as Kersting and the bleeders were all in high glee and spirits. Only Armstrong remained uncertain and ^sdisatisfied. Repeatedly he saw the scale set until the indicator trembled on neutral. The machine was extra^rordinarily sensitive as when the indicator was in this position a fourpenny piece thrown on the scale would send it bang against the limit bar. Kersting ~~XXXXXXXX~~ left as usual early and Armstrong remained to weigh out ~~the~~ and dispatch. This time he nearly had apoplexy when he found that his weights for the outgoing balata ^{were} ~~was~~ over 5% in excess of what Kersting had weighed in.

The news was soon known to every clerk and manager in the river and was the subject of much discussion as it was felt there was deception somewhere. The bleeders knew also but they put it down to obeah and Kersting's ability in the supernatural which he was carefully working in their favor. They weighed in their own balata and were given full credit when everyone could see a pound or two of water dribble on the ground while the parcel was actually on the scale. Kersting had put a hoodoo on Armstrong and the clerks when weighing out and although the weights were reported in the company's favor, it was pure magic as they had seen what they had seen with their own eyes. ^mArmstrong was far from satisfied.

The third year Kersting arrived back and for some weeks Armstrong watched the scale get its daily burnishing and oiling; then he took action. With Kersting present he tested the scale in every practical way and even took it to pieces: it was perfect. He then demanded to inspect the weights, but this Kersting flatly refused to allow. Armstrong countered this by threatening, as a Justice of the Peace, to order the two resident Rural Constables to ^Arrrest Kersting and keep him manacled till the Gov't officer, due almost daily, should arrive. Kersting knew Armstrong was a man of his word, and grudgingly handed over the keys of the cannister containing the weights. They proved to be ^wimaculate: the Gov't stamps of accuracy clear and untouched. They were polished to a high degree and the bottom, the sides and top shown like a mirror. Armstrong took a cutlass and struck a weight on the edge when a thickened sliver of black enamel peel^d off and the fraud was unmasked. Kersting had carefully polished his weights for weeks with some form of heavy plumbago paste which ~~had~~ formed an enamel.

Balata 28

This must have added some 30/50% to their weight and a corresponding reduction of all balata weighed.

Kersting was given a few hours in which to pack up and clear out and he left minus the tools of his trade for town. He never returned to the district and his company gave him a warehouse job which he held while he lived. He never saw his actions from Armstrong's point of view. He had not robbed his company and he had only got the same results from the bleeder with smiles and high praise, what Armstrong and everyone else ~~got~~ ^a demanded in the face of great rowdyism and vituperation. Armstrong weighed the balata that year with great difficulty. There was almost a riot on several occasions and some gangs actually took ~~their~~ their balata to town at their own expense to have it weighed by Kersting. It ~~was~~ was only a question of time however until ~~one~~ some bleeder would have spotted Kersting's dodge if he had continued at Apoteri, "and the day they find out" as ~~he~~ Armstrong put it, "every man of us on the hilltop will be murdered."

Practically every bleeder ~~was~~ was up to all sorts of tricks to increase the weight of their balata. Many of the sheets of balata when ~~XXXXXX~~ sufficiently dry to barely hold together were folded up and tightly roped with lianos ~~in~~ into a parcel of 100-150 lbs. This prevented evaporation of surplus moisture. In many cases the bleeder ~~was~~ would actually submerge ~~the~~ such parcels in a pool of water against the ~~y~~ time when it was loaded into the boat for transport to the depot. These boats were allowed to fill with water so as to ~~XXXXX~~ cover most of the cargo (balata). On arrival at the depot the top layer of good dry balata was carried up for inspecting, and weighing begun, but ~~as~~ soon the moisture laden stuff had to be brought to the ~~xx~~ scale. A point was soon reached in visible moisture that no manager could accept if he was fair to his employers ~~XXXXX~~ and then began the row in trying to arrive at some percentage deduction on the scale weight to cover subsequent loss by evaporation. The bleeder would howl and curse, carving ~~XXXXX~~ circles in the air with a razor sharp cutlass and carrying on like a ~~maniac~~ madman, all with the view of intimidating the man at the scale and ensuring a minimum of reduction in net weight. It was no picnic being a manager on those days but when tempers rose he could refuse to weigh in such balata and the bleeder was helpless. He could hold out for a week or more but eventually he would have to open his balata and dry it out ~~xxx~~ to some extent at least. A few of the more

stubborn would decide to, themselves, transport the balata to town to be weighed. ~~XXXXXX~~
 Warned by the lawless reputation of the bleeder the company would probably have a policeman in
 view somewhere. The bleeder, of course, would be gentler than Mary's pet lamb and would accept
 weight and criticisms without a ~~XXXXXX~~ murmur. His employers of course made the mistake of
 thinking their manager didn't know his work or how to handle the men, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ views which
 the office ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ conveyed by letter in no uncertain ~~XXXX~~ and pretty sarcastic terms and
 which created a feeling of almost despair to a few men trying their utmost to protect their
 employers' interests in very difficult circumstances.

Another of the bleeders' little pleasantries was his attempts at
 adulteration of his balata. A few pounds of sand when mixed ~~x~~ with latex meant an unearned
 dollar or two but this was too visible to even office eyes and soon was abandoned. The
 favorite method was ^{the} introduction of latex other than true balata. The favorite one was
 that of the "COWtree". These trees by cutting or bleeding to a height of say 10/12 feet in
 the same manner as balata would give 2-5 tins. The laws at that date forbade bleeding more
 than half the circumference of any tree. The method of climbing higher than the ground was
 by ladder and the best men used what was called a "20 cutlass (22") ladder", which allowed
 them to bleed roughly 40 feet up from the ground. The average was 3-4 balata trees to one
 can of latex and was a good forenoon's work (6:30 to 11 a.m.). A cowtree would give him
 roughly about three times ~~x~~ this amount of latex for one short hours' work. Many of the
 bleeders said they could smell a cowtree from quite a distance. I have tried this out, not
 only myself but with a crowd of very observant Abor. Indians without success but I must admit
 the black bleeders had an almost uncanny faculty in locating every cowtree for miles around.
 I do not think cowtree latex ~~is~~ in reason is detrimental to the quality of balata but any
 adulteration was severely frowned upon in those days. The bleeders swore, erroneously, that
 its latex gave "color" to their balata and will always be used as an adulterant as, if
 added in small proportions, it is impossible to detect it by eyesight or ordinary methods.

Adulteration was not confined to cowtree latex and any tree that gave
 milk was bled and used. Some of these turned the balata brittle or turned it to a black
 color- at that time almost unsaleable. The habit grew until practically every bleeder was
 adulterating and much of the dried balata of such inferior quality as scarcely fit for export.

Forfeiture was no remedy: the bleeder would urge it be sent to town for analysis, but as he was in debt to the company it was generally arranged to take ~~it~~ it over at a reduced price that would ~~bring~~ just cover his debt as it was a cinch that that man would go elsewhere to bleed next year.

Meanwhile the Abor. Indians of the Wapichanna Tribe were becoming expert bleeders. It required very ~~xx~~ little cash or barter to ~~XXXXX~~ satisfy their needs each year and ~~xx~~ without the stimulus of want their production per man was low- far below even the poor coastal bleeder, but what they did produce was of super quality. They had to be and were carefully trained and with their inherent ^honesty, obedience and desire to please, never even thought of adulteration. I have known an Indian report his attempt "just to see the result" but he would say "no good" and ~~he~~ never repeat^{ed} the experiment. So super-excellent was the grade of Indian balata that it was placed on the market under a special mark and became the standard of quality in the London Market under "Q.L.O." and generally ~~was~~ sold for a few pence per pound more than any other balata.

This excellence of quality ~~was~~ became known in the colony and eventually a 2" square of "Q.L.O." quality Balata sheet was attached to each contract^s with the various foremen and which had to be signed by every bleeder in their gangs. They agreed to accept top price- about 20~~x~~ per pound- for all balata of similar quality to the attached "Q.L.O." sample and that inferior grades would be paid for at a correspondingly lower rate, which would be arranged between some authorized member of the ~~COMPANIES~~ company's staff ^{and} the respective foremen at the different depots with the manager as Overseman. For the first time the companies had a standard of quality on the spot, and though there was great ^disatisfaction during the first year, the bleeder of ~~the~~ inferior grades found he had no alternative. A few took their cases to court but got no sympathy as any magistrate could easily see the difference between their contract sample and what they had produced. The bleeder had to pay costs and pay his lawyer so a couple of test cases soon made them realize that a mutual and fair adjustment of price at ~~the~~ depot was much better. No unfair advantage was taken of this ~~xxx~~

Balata 31

arrangement: in fact the managers continued to accept balata much below the standard quality and only the worst grades were paid at reduced ~~XXXX~~ prices. The system proved of the greatest ~~xx~~ use however and the men soon became much more amenable to reason. In a couple of years all the previous friction and quarrels had largely stopped and the district became normal in behavior.

During these years of discord and rascality in the balata industry in Rup. no director, shareholder in the different companies or owner ever put foot in the district with one exception. Every concern was run by a manager at the depot, not one of whom had the faintest idea of the difficulties or topography of the district and who were, with the exception of John Armstrong, colored men of exactly the same ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ type as the workers, but with a better education, a knowledge of book-keeping and some experience in handling labor. The exception was one of the Bugle Bros. who simply could not believe that the cringing humble bleeder who called in at the town office "to raise the wind" (get an advance) or lay complaints about the barefaced robbery by and the tyrannical behavior of the up-country manager could possibly be the lawless rowdy rascal the managers reported.

Bugle traveled up to Apoteri by boat in company with Armstrong. It was a slack season on the depot and the men were all quiet and tame as so ~~may~~ many sheep and Bugle was more than confirmed that the management was unduly harsh and ignorant and that the ~~XXXXXXXX~~ black brother would respond to proper treatment as a flower would to sunshine. Bugle decided to tour his grants entirely on his own and end up by a visit to Dada Naw^a to inspect the working conditions and treatment of the Abor. Indians on a verbal invitation given him sometime ~~XXXXXX~~ previous in town. The company launch and a crew of men were put at his disposal and he left. I had no knowledge of their even being on the way but I happened to be at home when I heard the launch and the party arrived in the early afternoon. Relations were very strained between Bugle and his crew. It appeared that once the party had left Apoteri and prepared to make their first camp, the captain, engineer and crew had refused to eat their rations. They had held salt-fish, pork and beef under Bugle's nose and asked

how he would like to live on such food. Bugle, green and tenderhearted, agreed that it was abominable and gave them permission to draw on his own ample supply of tinned food, biscuits, onions and potatoes. An after dinner ¹lot of whiskey was also conceded, by which time it was agreed that their own food was so offensive in smell that it was thrown overboard.

Not one of the crew had ever been with ^a 100 miles off Dada Nawa but of course they knew it was just a couple of points (bends in the river) above Kupokarri, which place they passed with enough food to last the day. Unfortunately the river was falling rapidly in the Kanakus: the engine gave some trouble and it took 3 days to reach their destination. They had been completely out of food and not a drop of whiskey left, for two days. They arrived during a heavy rain, soaked to the skin, hungry as wolves and everybody in a vile temper. I soon got Bugle fixed up in comfort but I definitely refused to give the men what they demanded. In fact, I refused to grant ~~PERMISSION~~ his black permission to sleep on the premises with some Indian families who were in to see me. I told Bugle my annual ¹supplies had not yet arrived from town and that while he was welcome to stay on and take pot-luck, I had not the supplies his men were demanding for the return trip. I gave the crew just enough dried beef and farina^a the usual Savannah diet--to last them on a quick trip back to Apoteri and they left mid-afternoon to get fresh supplies for Bugle himself and return for Bugle who was to stay on as my guest until such time as they got back.

most
Bugle had a ~~most~~ enjoyable stay although he was not in proper training for crosscountry work. He climbed Mount Tarukaban however and made some short trips on horse back. At the end of ~~the~~ a week, the weather, which had been very dry and an exceptionally low river, changed for the good and we had a couple of days downpour of rain. At the end of 10 days or so the launch arrived back on the rising crest of a flood which was overflowing the banks of the Rup. in style. They arrived--~~some~~ engineers, different crew- ~~about~~ about 8 a.m. and in a tearing hurry to start back as the engineer was afraid the flood might take off and he felt safe on the flood which now covered every fall and rock in the river. They were on their way down stream inside

the hour/

This was the first launch in history to enter the upper savannahs and caused great excitement among the Indians who lived within the sound of the noise of the engines. Everybody had rushed to ~~gux~~ vantage points to get a view of so novel a sight of which they had heard accounts from such of their men as had been to town. A couple of miles below Dada Nawa there was a small village (Dowbar Pawa) and everyone had raced to see the launch pass. There was one old lady of 70-ish who had missed the show going up but she would see it in passing down. She and her family swam out to the river bank (the flood was half a mile over the banks now) and she climbed into a high tree for a box seat. Presently the launch appeared round the bend but behaving strangely for any known type of boat. Presently the engines stopped and the Indians realized there was a first class fight on board. The white man was standing ~~up~~ right out on the bow while the niggers ~~wax~~ were slugging each other with bare fists and handy ~~pe~~ pieces of wood and paddles. The launch was spinning round helplessly in the swirling currents and heading straight for the tree up which the Indians had clambered for a good view. Now thoroughly frightened these Indians fled in dismay, every man for himself and of course the old lady was left alone. She was also hustling but making slow speed down the tangle of ~~kix~~ ^l kianos up which she had climbed and when several feet above flood water she slipped and fell. In doing so her foot caught in the bush ropes which held her suspended whilst her whole body from the knee upwards was under water. Fortunately, her son glanced back and saw what had happened. He dashed back to her rescue and eventually got the old lady free much more dead than alive. An excited Indian dashed in to my place for help and medicines as the old lady was ~~XXXXXXXX~~ quite unconscious. The old lady recovered however to tell the tale and her descriptions of her first sight of black men and launches were priceless. What had happened in the launch I never learned. Armstrong never knew of the fight until I told ~~him~~ ^{been}: Bugle refused to discuss the affair and the crew who had promptly ^{been} sacked on reaching Apoteri left the district for good. Bugle left soon afterwards for England and ~~XXXXXXXX~~ he never returned to the Colony again.

Bugle balata grants were successfully run for about 20 years when they were sold to

~~RE~~

become the Real Daylight Balata Company in 1924(?). The Consolidated Rubber and Balata Co. had a chequered career; sometimes working but more often closed down or working on a very low scale. The Chapman grants to the sough⁵ of Bugle & Co. worked only for one year and were taken over by ~~Mr. W. L. Garnett~~ Garnett and Co. The Garnett concessions have been worked successfully since they were granted. Blacks from the coast were employed on the lower reaches of both the Rup. and Quitaro Rivers but by far the greater part of their concessions were worked solely by Abor. Indians.

Typed in
Museum

Balata

The bleeding & collection of Balata gum in B. G. started around the middle of the last century & for the first 40/50 years the industry was centred largely in the Conje & Berice Rivers with several off-shoots along the entire coastal area. Practically no attempt had been made beyond tidal influence, due to the general ignorance about the various falls & obstructions in each river & also to the fact that Gov. frowned on any expedition penetrating beyond a certain line inland. This last was among the unwritten laws for the protection of the Abor. Indians & pretty rigorously enforced by M. M. Turk, the then Protector. Any one could of course ascend the different rivers so long as you remained in country where no Indians existed, but up to the beginning of this century Heaven help the man whom M. Turk caught walking an Indian line or road; entering their villages; trading with them or employing them without permission. — all of which contravened the Abor. Ind. Regulations.

Most of the Balata grants in those days were small in area — one man shows, as the outfitting of expeditions were & still ^{are} pretty costly affairs. Any expedition should work from the start of the first rains until some time into the following dry season, say from mid-April till the end of Sept. even on the coast. Boats & tacklings, tarpaulins, tools & all supplies of food & medicines for the entire season have to be sent up. It was all pioneer work at first although latterly a few of those interested in the industry had brought out less successful competitors, yet this century downed with no big combine or company. The industry was owned & financed by people of means or merchants in the street largely as a means of increasing their shop sales, not one of whom ever went a foot to investigate conditions on the grants & few of whom, if any, would have known a Balata from a Banyan Tree.

Balata was said to exist in the far interior but it was known there were several varieties, most of which had peculiarities that made them either of no commercial interest or as often of no use at all. Thus the current rumour was that all Balata beyond a certain distance from the coast was entirely "bastard" varieties. This bubble was popped when Govt in late 1900 forfeited from Johnnie Park a quantity of balata cut by Abor. Indians in the Resperumie River, & which was readily sold in town to recognised dealers at top prices.

As described elsewhere Bugle & Co ^{applied} for large areas in

Proposals which were granted. The district was so remote, the difficulties so much greater owing to the large number of almost unknown falls, & the cost of organisation so much larger, that the applicant had to have greatly increased concessions to warrant the great outlay necessary & to ensure continuity of work over a number of years.

Almost at once Joseph Ludlow Chapman secured concessions to the South of Bugle & Co. on the middle Quitaro & Rewa Rivers. Garnett & Co were granted the Kanaku Mountains, the upper reaches of the Quitaro & Rewa River & along the Kudjwini River to the frontier. The Consolidated Rubbis & Balata Estates L^{td} was formed who applied for an enormous area North of Bugle & Co embracing practically the whole of the middle Essequibo. W. Bovallius took out the upper reaches of the Potaro some distance above Waitent's Fall. Practically all the forests were taken up between the coast & the 2° N. Lat.; by far the greater area belonging to the "Consolidated".

Above Potaro Mouth very little was known of the Essequibo & Rupun District and no one, except a couple of small Indian villages, existed in the forest, hence it was necessary to send up all the men necessary for bleeding purposes & the transport of all supplies, & all balata tapped in the area. Since no white men with experience were available the concessionaires had no alternative but employ coloured & black men as managers. These were drawn from the ranks of superintendents of balata areas working on the Couija or Berbice already by the offer of higher cash emoluments. Bugle & Co employed a man called Scotland & the Consolidated secured the services of T. K. Merriman for their Rupun & mid-Essequibo concessions as managers. Both were excellent men but new to the district, the enormous distances -- all to be done by paddle in those days -- & the local difficulties.

The number of bleeders in the colony were very limited at this time & now began a scramble for men amongst the companies. Operations were being begun practically all over the colony, & there wasn't anything like enough experienced men to go round. The pioneer instinct was strong in the working classes & there was generally plenty of volunteers -- of a kind: men, who had never been in the bush before: who had no knowledge of even the rudiments of the industry but were willing "to try", especially as there was a prospect of getting a fair cash advance before leaving town. This meant, as was only natural, that the new industry attracted about as many of the ne'er-do-wells & rascals of the coast as it did bona-fide conscientious

workmen. As time went on, the better men came into their own as with a year's tuition any willing worker can become a really good bleeder. but competition for men was so keen that for years there was a large proportion of worthless rascals who changed from one company to another each year. In the Rupununi River there were in a few years time well over a thousand bleeders alone employed, & hundreds of boat hands, general labourers, steersmen, bowmen, coasts & bottle washers.

Collecting centres had to be cleared & depots built at strategic points such as Potaro mouth; Inurawa, Siparuni mouth, Traipuri hdq. Inkafati (2) & Apoteri (3), all of which called for the ^{employment} considerable of large numbers of axemen, sawmen, carpenters & general labourers.

Every boat on the coast had to be commandeered to send up supplies & for years boat building yards were working overtime. The falls & rivers were unknown practically, yet these boats had to be manned & captained somehow. Here again hundreds of men volunteered who know nothing of river work & many of whom could not swim a stroke - a very necessary accomplishment when a boat can be sunk at any time. Here again the industry attracted many of the rascals in the river transport trade, & it is a peculiarity also how many men, once they leave the last post of authority & police protection ^{through} off their ^{thin} rather skin deep veneer of civilization & revert to something that is worse than the so-called savage of the boma or Ktaab. For some years the Essequibo from Potaro mouth & Apoteri, & from that point up the Rupununi to the Northern foothills of the Kanuku Mountains simply hummed with rascality & violence. Exploitation & destruction was rampant for several years.

Johnnie Park naturally acted as guide to the Bangle bleeders & as such led them to the scene of his own bleeding operations, from which they rapidly fanned out in search of more work, all through the Rupununi. Indian guides were forced into service & Bat Creek, Simoni & Cotton Creek (Katoka) were discovered to contain enormous stands of Balata Trees, which were soon all the scene of intensive bleeding operations. All these operations were in the hands of black timber cruising foremen who carried up their necessary supplies from Apoteri & were very rarely if ever visited or inspected by a responsible manager for years. These men, foremen & bleeders almost to a man, considered theabor. Indians as fair game for exploitation in every possible way. The Indians had fields so

why should they ^E ~~no~~ ^{draw} on them for supplies: the Indians had hammocks
curios, pets, parrots & dozens of interesting articles that would make lovely
gifts to friends on the coast: so why not buy them on the understanding that they
would be paid for in another year when the purchasers came back up to the district:
The Indians had lots of women around - mothers, wives, daughters, sweethearts - & had
not women since Eden been solely for the pleasure & use of Man, so _____?

Within two years the Macussi Tribe were reduced to starvation in food & supplies
& their women subjected to every stage of debauchery & indignity

Although practically no Indians existed between Potaro Ra⁶, Apolone
conditions were just about as bad. Actually these few Indians abandoned their
locations & moved to new quarters in out-of-the-way islands or miles inland
inland from the river bank where it was difficult to find them.

Accidents in the dangerous & unknown falls were frequent. In the
height of the transport season they may be said to have been of daily
occurrence somewhere on the river. In Gold Fall alone I can remember
when over half a dozen wrecked boats could be seen with a radius of less
than half a mile - the hulls sticking up among the different rocks, & all meaning
or huge loss of men & material. I had occasion to render assistance to the crews
of two boats which had crashed or sunk up in running down Kialiwan Fall.
Seventeen men out of a total of forty two were drowned: the survivors lost
everything they possessed except the clothes on their bodies: the company lost
two valuable boats, tarpaulins & tackle & some 15,000 lbs of balata.

These accidents for the first two years were due to either carelessness
or ignorance of the dangers but they soon took on a very different aspect:
In one or two cases a boat passing the scene of a recent wreck had been
able to salvage some part of the lost balata, & the companies gladly paid
a bonus of some cents per pound for all recovered. Then some unscrupulous
dealers asked why hand it over to the owners for a few cents when they, the
dealers, would pay 30, 40 or even 50 cents per pound.

By this time there were a number of such dealers operating along the
coast who were prepared to buy any quantity of balata without any question as to
who it really belonged to or where it came from & definitely encouraging bladders
to pass what balata they had cut across into some other's person's grants to be
sold to them later. Stealing of balata became fairly common as it was easy
for a man to plead some accident or illness for his producing nothing. He gained
by an advance from his employer & a sale at a price much higher than he was

2

to be paid for as a bleeder. The employer had to pay for all administration, supplies & transport & to often carry heavy depreciation & loss, none of which the dealer had to meet so he could cheerily pay 50[¢] per lb for all stolen balata ^{grants.} C. I. F. Georgetown against the employers price of 20-25[¢] per lb to the bleeders. ^{on the}

This new idea had possibilities & soon arrangement & deals for wrecks in Essequibo were being fixed up in the rumshops of town. But there was one snag. All balata from Pups went over the Rockstone - Wismar route & soon suspicion was aroused as there were only 3-4 concessionaires in the area & where did these small consignments originate? This difficulty was soon solved. A rascal of a captain invested in an old boat, got a bowman & crew together & started up country to the scene of operations. He ran his balata down to Bartica where it could be sold quietly & no trace left of the transaction ^{the "pirates"}.

Of course competition soon set in & more boats joined ^{the first} as they became known. They operated quite openly from Waraputa to almost in sight of Pups. M^c offering terms to any boat they met en route for town with a load of balata & there is no doubt the concessionaires lost heavily. It was difficult to find proof. A genuine accident would happen with the loss of everything & several lives. The next day a boat would arrive at Rockstone badly damaged, but no baggage or lives lost. The captain had put all the balata ashore & as soon as repairs were effected he would return to where the balata was stowed away to bring it down.

One of the captains had cached his cargo on a small island & he & the crew were unable to indentify the place again. They spent weeks searching unsuccessfully, but of course drawing full pay all the time. The concessionaires had to arrange that several boats travelled together in charge of a trust worthy ^{head} captain in an effort to defeat the pirates. Then there was a succession of wrecks took place in Stanvini Fall in the space of two days. The head captains were beyond suspicion but the wrecks all happened at the same place that was not especially dangerous. In any case something like 33,000 lbs of balata, the property of three different companies, ^{was} were landed & safely stored, just below the Fall. A palm leaf roof was erected as a protection from the weather & two trust worthy men with ample supplies were left to guard the balata while the others took the damaged boats on to Rockstone for repairs. On their return the balata was found to be 14,000 lbs short of its original weight. The men on guard swore that they had never left the place for a single hour; they had actually lived & slept on top of the

balata for better security & not a single boat had passed either up or down while they were there. The case was a glaring incident & was at once placed in the hands of the police who checked up everything most carefully. No flaw was found in the weights: no loss had been sustained in the accident which took place in shallow water (waist deep) & no evidence could be found that pointed to unfaithfulness amongst the men. The balata simply had disappeared, but it made God sit up & take notice.

On another occasion the unexpected closing down of the rainy season caught a number of bleeding gangs with their balata undelivered from Simoni & Katoka Creeks & the Namaku foothills. They struggled on down the dry bed of the Ruf. as unless the balata was weighed they got no wages for the season. They decided to land & store the balata in a lonely spot on the river & a messenger despatched to inform the company. The manager at once despatched his chief clerk with a portable scale to weigh up. Somewhere between 50,000 & 60,000 lbs were carefully weighed & then stored on the banks under cover of tarpaulins with a couple of men left as guards. The Xmas rains raised the Ruf in flood & boats were sent up from Apote to bring in the balata which when reweighed showed a loss of 26,000 lbs. I had closed down work that season & decided to go to Scotland for a holiday. I passed down the Ruf. before the Balata was stored on the bank of the river & the occurrence took place when I was at home, so I knew "nothing about nothing." When I arrived back in Georgetown I found a special Govt Com^{rs} had been sent up country to investigate into my methods & rascality during my absence. It appeared the loss of the balata occupied the clubs & scandal mongers in town & one bright lad had said. "The explanation is simple. Ogilvie & these cunning bracks of his could easily remove the stuff just as he liked." The investigation proved I had been at sea when the theft was committed & that not one of my Indians had been within 100 miles of the place.

There was of course quite a number of river captains who would have no dealings with the 'pirates'. & who ran trip after trip without any loss but there were just about as many who were downright scampers & would have sold their own matters for half a dollar. Even with the good ones there would be a lapse once in a way & the companies were at their wits end. Special clerks had to accompany cargoes to see if it would remedy things but here again temptation proved too much. There was one head captain in charge of the transport for one of the major companies who ran the

river for a couple of years without accident or the loss of any cargo, & naturally he stood in high esteem & received specially high wages & commissions for his work. Eventually even he fell a victim to the wiles of the pirates. He was running a heavily loaded boat - some 8,000 lbs balata - from Apotari to Rockstone & had just cleared Waraputa Falls - the last danger point before reaching Rockstone - when he deliberately ran his boat against a rock in fairly shallow water. It was proven later that all the crew were ready standing by with all their baggage & food in hand & when the boat struck they all simultaneously stepped one the gunwale as they sprang ashore. This sudden shifting of the men's weight forced the gunwale under water, the boat filled instantly with water & the force of the current turned her completely over precipitating her entire cargo on the bottom of the river. They at once salvaged the boat & inside an hour the party, after embarking their baggage & paddles were on their way downstream for repairs - the victims of another genuine accident. It was not until a year or two later when some of the crew confessed that the whole thing had been arranged on a previous trip to town & that the wreck had been staged in full view of the pirates who were quietly waiting on a nearby island & saw the whole thing happen. The crew of 16 men got paid about \$20 each, but it was never learned how much the bowman & captain - the two principals - as the former disappeared & the captain died very soon after.

To evade the losses by accident & theft the companies combined & cut a road through from Maipori Landing on the Torsequero to the foot of Canister Falls on the Demerara. It was proposed to lay a set of rails over the distance, roughly 20 miles over which loaded trucks could be pushed by hand or pulled by mules. Large lock up barges would operate on the Demerara River. While the construction was going ahead, Indian droghers were recruited who carried a large quantity of balata over the road at so much per lb. - either one or two cents per lb per trip. It was found that the Indian girls excelled at this work & many of them hiked the trail with a load of 300 lbs balata - a load so heavy that if they stopped to rest they could not get it on to their backs again. The company then built rest ⁱⁿ places every 3 miles with a staging at the correct height against which the droghers backed to get their loads off & on.

Bugle & Co were the originators of the scheme & the others companies to come as subscribers at some fixed rate. Meanwhile Bugle got up a

number of timber workers whose job was to square greasheart's rails to measure 8" square. He decided it would be too costly to bring iron rails from town & these wooden rails were to be used for the projected railroad between the two rivers. Squaring was commenced from the Canister Fall end & they soon had hundreds of these rails squared. What between careless workmanship however; the effects of exposure to the sun & rains & possibly a natural tendency, the rails warped so badly that there was not enough manpower in Georgetown to lay them in a straight line. This project was abandoned & only a few piles - each with several hundred - of squared rails remain to mark the attempt. The line was soon after completely abandoned altogether as the other companies had reverted to water transport which at last was being organised fairly successfully.

It can easily be imagined that the Essequibo & Rupununi Rivers were at this time a hot-bed of petty crime, exploitation & infamy during the wet season of each year. Michael M^o Turk was Com^r & Protector of Indians at this time, but he invariably paid his annual visit to the Dis^t in Dec^r or early Jan^y, just at the time when every black & coloured man, except a few watchmen, were away at the coast celebrating Xmas & the New Year. & so could do nothing beyond note the evils of news industry in a country inhabited only by Abor. Indians & which so far was an unpoliced, unprotected area. It was evident that some control must be established at once & H. P. C. Melville, a rancher & trader in the Wapichanna country, was made Post Office & sub-protector of Indians with fairly wide powers & under him a number of police & forest rangers

Under this scheme things soon began to improve. Melville tackled the exploitation of the Indians first as being the nearest & most urgent as they were on the point of desperation & ripe for retaliation. The Indⁿ Ordinance was strictly enforced. ^{Any} Everyone, except recognised Abor. Indians, were to stop at any Indⁿ landing; to enter a village; to walk on Indⁿ trail; to do any barter; or to employ any Indian. Fines of \$50 or 3 months in jail was the alternative. Notices were stuck up at all Indⁿ landing & strategic ^{points} warning travellers not to land, of which many took little notice at first but very heavy fines were also placed on the company who employed such offenders. Eventually the companies were not allowed to employ or trade with any Indⁿ under any circumstances or conditions at all, otherwise their concessions would be forfeit. These salutary measures soon had the desired effect in respect

to the Ind^s situation; in fact things swung to the opposite extreme & the Macussi were begging for some modification of the Regulations as it had broken their one chance of getting any sort of work which was by now their only means of obtaining a little salt & other necessities in life. After a few years the Regulations were relaxed somewhat with benefit to all. The bleeders from the coast were brought to realise the Indros were human all & not specially created for the exploitation of any passing rascal. These coastal men had never before met Abos. In ¹⁹⁰⁰ ~~the~~ whose sly retiring manners led to wrong ideas. The more unscrupulous strangers took every advantage of this disposition, but a few stern examples changed their ideas & the Dist soon became normal.

The 'private' situation was soon solved. The Regulations regarding Sales of Balata were tightened up at the town end, while Inelville did a good bit of ~~the~~ patrolling of the affected area by boat. None of the 'pirates' were actually caught red handed although they had one or two very narrow escapes, but several of their boats were overtaken while on the cruise & severely warned of what would ^{might} happen. These boats pretended they were in the district as prospectors for gold & minerals. Their names, registrations & certificates were noted & advices sent out to Rockstone, Bartica & elsewhere to be on the outlook for them & to make an inspection of every thing when they appeared. They realised the game was up & in a little over a year there was not a single private operating in the district.

~~Both~~ The various managers - Merroman, Scotland etc - were excellent men who had complete control of the labour while actually under their eye, but they had never handled any concern on so large a scale & once the men left the different depots & control, many of lower element flung all traces of decency overboard until they arrived back. The managers tried their best no doubt as they held very lucrative posts which it was to their advantage to keep. These managers got a good round salary plus a commission on all balata handed in at their depots. At least two of these men were earning around & over \$5,000 per annum. This wealth had a demoralising effect as they soon found it far beneath them to attend to many minor points & the men they selected to carry out such duties often had neither ability nor personality. These ^{managers} superintendents were an open handed lot. Amongst them they staged a "Bleeder's Ball" each year for several seasons in Berlice which was the event of

the year. They would employ part of the Militia Band from town & every known bleeder & his woman were invited. Money was simply chucked away but they could always draw on next years prospects. They nearly were in debt to their employers & these debts kept increasing until the only remedy was for the employer to cut his loss & dismiss his man. The competition was very keen for competent men & they would draw "advances" for every imaginable excuse. — sickness, marriage, death in the family; the proposed building of a home; the needs of a large family at home while he was in the bush for months at a time; or the requirements of himself while up country. One little trick was to ship stuff back to the family from up country & charge same to himself at cost price: the company paying all transport charges from Georgetown ^{to Prep.} & back. I remember one manager who ordered up a boatload of goods which was not even unloaded at Prep. Under the excuse that the boat was carrying returning bleeders & their effects, these goods were sent straight back: readdressed to the managers family. When the books were generally in a hopeless muddle & it would take months to straighten them out. It was easy to challenge some item (by the manager) ^{but} it would take weeks, months to send up & get the "chit" which had inadvertently been left in Prep. A firm has to get up very early to cope the tricks of the trades & wiles of these "competent bushmen"

The actual bleeder is or was just as bad. Before they started out they too had to have a "vance" for their families & every imaginary contingency: never much, but a dollar here, fifty cents there & it soon mounts up. The family allowance would be spent in a town spree & fares had to be pre-ordered to carry them back to Berbice. The bleeder would demand an advance for medicines for personal use in the bush. This he spent in perfume for his donah. An allowance for a Balaclava Helmet & "Baby flannel" under vest was used to buy a silk frock for some one. This practice grew so bad that an order for these goods had to be issued on some some shop of known repute who would not substitute some other article in place of that ordered. These bleeders were on the whole hard working people once they got to their working places, & it only led to subsequent discontent to give them too large advances as it reduced by just so much more their eventual balance in hand after months of unimaginable hardships & danger. They made good money once they got started actual bleeding. A good man could collect two Kerosene tins of balata milk in a day which would give

50 lb dried balata. Paid at 20¢ per lb. this represented \$10- for a day's work. He could not of course work on wet days, but the average bleeder used to demand \$5. per day if for any reason his manager had to put him to other work. Many of them, & especially the foremen returned to town after seven to ten months in the bush with handsome cheques, & certainly they deserved every penny they received.

The working people in these parts are extremely generous & open handed. For a decade or more the gold-digger had set the pace in the display of suddenly acquired wealth, but when the balata industry got really going in Pamp. the gold-digger became very small potatoes & few in the hill. Over 1,000 actual bleeders would be at work inside the Pamp & its branches alone, most of whom would reach Georgetown within a few weeks before Christmas. Many of these men seemed to completely lose their heads on reaching civilization. They would already have notified their families of the date of their proposed arrival & every woman & child of their circle would be on the wharf to meet them. Of course few of the Berbice families could get down, nor were they wanted, as their presence cramped the style of the menfolk. There were always a score or two of unattached town ladies, dressed & perfumed like the Queen of Sheba, to meet the daily river boat as she arrived, & generally a number of musicians with their instrument. The successful bleeder dressed in new store clothes with a red howler monkey skin for a hat & a variety of other skins hung round his person strutted up & down the steamer - the image of importance - looking for a small boy to carry his baggage - as often as not a dairybank i.e. converted Kerorene tin - ashore. Then crossing the unfortunate boy like a trooper & shouting "How dy's" to all & sundry, he would step on to the wharf to the breathless admiration of the fair sex who were all smiles & wriggles in the hope of catching his eye. It is quite a mystery how man & woman give out or receive various signals, but soon the bleeder, probably attracted by a dress far in excess of the rainbow for colour, would choose his lady. A cab was now required - a ping pong & silent wheels - the hood had to be pushed back, & on which he & the lady of his choice took their seats while their feet rested on the cushions where the ordinary man would sit. A couple of musician (a drum & trumpet) would be installed in the well of the cab & away they'd go, hell for leather, at as good a gallop as the old hatrack horse could be urged to doing. Water St. was the principal

route for this display as it was generally busy especially if they were lucky to hit the moment when the shops & stores were closing down.

I suppose the cab & the musicians didn't cost more than a few shillings but his fancy female companion had to be reckoned with. Although she had to be careful & full of tact. Absolute Monarch, for the moment, of all he surveyed, & owner of the Moon, the Sun, & at least Seven Stars, the bleeder was very temperamental & ready to transfer his patronage to some other fairy at a single wrong, or displeasing action or word. The lucky ones got dolled up in shining satin, umbrella hat, & a few ornaments, but in any case she managed to reduce somewhat the amount of ready cash on hand. There were few permanent friendships made under those conditions & even three hundred dollars - a young fortune to such people in those days - well not last very long in riotous living. Soon after Xmas & definitely the New Year dawned to see the bleeder broke high, wide & handsome financially. Some of the better natured fairies would pawn the gifts she had received but that merely prolonged the agony & the end of the first week in January would find the bleeder back in his employer's office in an attempt to tickle de Boss for a 'vance' as it was technically called.

Mind you all the bleeders were not like that. Many of them entered town without ostentation, stayed quietly in an hotel or with friends while they transacted their necessary business, & left to join their families at the first opportunity. These men had ambition & were out to improve their home & the living conditions of their families but it was the noisy spectacular spend thrift that filled the eye & smote the ear with their snigpony & vacuous band which remain more persistently in the memory.

As has been indicated the system of 'vance' (advance) can be & often is iniquitous & demoralising but in one case it rose to the spectacular. An Englishman who had had good demonstration of its uses & misuses through a position he held as a town manager - director of a large balata company left the colony & moved away into Brazil. This country had concentrated on producing what is known as Para Rubber, & he found a certain number of untapped balata in the district where he had got a job. But no Brazilian knew how to bleed ^{the trees} & cure the latex. Why not go up the Rio Branco, cross into B. G. & down to Georgetown to recruit bleeders? He personally knew scores of the men who had worked under him & whom he felt certain would cheerfully work with him again.

As is quite customary this gentleman as a town manager knew far better more about the difficulties & solutions of labours in the distant forests than the most proficient ^{manager} in the field & he would show the industry a trick or two. He had no difficulty in recruiting all the men he wanted & more as his cash advances were generous, but he did have no end of trouble in collecting these men when he wanted to start back up country for Brazil. The departure was delayed on several dates through the usual excuses, but one man, a pet-foreman, refused to budge an inch unless he was allowed to carry his woman with him. How very simple he had been!! Here was the solution to all the delay in leaving!!! Advance an equal number of engaging women for the men's use.

His office was almost mobbed for some days by women & he soon recruited well over a hundred. His advances in cash to the women were small, but each were given a good Sewing Machine, a number of which he had bought at reasonable wholesale prices. Everything went well but on the date when everybody - men & women - had to assemble on the wharf to embark on the up river boat; only a half dozen men & one ^{solitary} woman responded to the roll-call. This woman was loud in her complaint & was there only to get "justice". The bailiff had apparently seized the machines for debt. This was too much for the kind employer & he tried to get police & detective help in locating the absconders & the sewing machines. A few ^{machines} were located in the pawnshops, but the majority had long ago been sent out into the distance country districts & were never located. Finally in despair the gentleman left town with not more than half a dozen men, out of about 200 advanced. He went back to Brazil via the Potaro River & through the Pakaraima Mountains. The party were on the verge of starvation when they reached the first ranches on the Mapha River, & the experiment was never repeated. The best of his men refused to go beyond Boa Vista; they made their way back to Georgetown as best they could & not a single pound of balata was ever bled.

Melville was a man of great charm & personality. He was in sympathy with the Indians: spoke their language; & best of all, held their confidence. When these Indians found he was really serious in trying to protect them, they quickly came forward with their legitimate grievances. A number were made semi-official detectives & Melville soon had every black offender brought up on charges with definite proof produced on the spot.

In one year the offences against the Indians were greatly reduced although exploitation was difficult to eradicate in such a large area, as some of the bleeders & even the companies would take a chance. This is to be found a temptation at all times & difficult to cope with.

One of the greatest influences for good at this time was the appointment of a man called Sharples as a Policeman in the District. Sharples was born at Belleriverwagting & had joined the G/A Constabulary as a young man. He was a half & half ~~coloured~~ coloured man of negro extraction. He was anything but robust, tall, thin & lanky, although he was very seldom sick or in poor health. He had a weakness somewhere below his knees & his feet never seemed under proper control. This caused a shuffling sort of walk & he was about as clumsy as it was humanly possible to be, yet somehow in difficult country he could outmatch most of his far more agile & stronger companions. When a "bushy" raid had to be made on the coast Sharples was invariably selected as he always seemed to stand up better to the trying conditions. He had been promoted to Sergeant several times but he had a failing for "high wines" or a boozage. He would only be sergeant a short time when he would have a lapse & had to be demoted to private again. Apart from this his conduct was exemplary & his officers spoke very highly of his efficiency, honesty & obedience. During one of his lapses the local Commandant recommended Sharples to Melville as the Rep presented no temptation in the way of drink. He was nearing retirement also & his Officers were most desirous that he should have a Clean Record for some years as, plus promotion again, it meant a much better pension. Sharples became an Institution almost in Papeanania until he retired in full pension at the highest point of promotion that was open to him.

Sharples was one of the smartest members of the Police Force; he had some 20 years behind him in police procedure; a good knowledge of law; & more important a very comprehensive knowledge of the numerous methods in general use in evading them. Sharples had two fixed principles in life: - first, that every man will some time or other break any law if he thinks he can get away with it & secondly, that the chief end in every policeman's life was to catch, prosecute & convict as many offenders as possible. When he failed to secure a conviction, Sharples would moan around declaring to High Heaven & anyone who cared to listen that the Magistrate was "too soft" & suffering from senile decay. At such a period he was a perfect nuisance, but it rarely happened fortunately & most of the time he was bubblingly cheerful & happy.

Sharples was provided with a small boat & an Indⁿ crew with whom he toured the whole district, practically the whole year, entering every tiny tributary of the Rup & Essequibo, & ascending up to or beyond such points as the heaviest draught boats of the bleeders could penetrate. The Abor. Indian situation was soon well in hand & the greater part of his work was confined to offenses by the bleeders in the forests who were contravening the Crown Land Regulations, which were being strictly enforced. It was part of these Regulations for the preservation of the balata trees for future generations that no tree was to be bled for more than one half round its circumference — penalty of \$50.00 inflicted if infringed. It was a great temptation to the bleeder away in the forests, probably scores of miles from any official, to bleed round the entire circumference as he secured twice the amount of latex for almost the same amount of work, & the chances were probably 1,000 to 1 that no inspector or ranger would ever find that tree. These Indⁿ boatmen were however probably some of the best bushmen of the world & who would slip unobserved through the forest noting every small detail. They needed no roads to walk along which foiled the bleeders ^{for a while} trick of planting young saplings in their abandoned trails to hide their tracks.

Sharples used to walk the main road straight into a camp while his boys roamed the forests on either side. The smarter foremen in such camps would offer Sharples every hospitality in his power in the hope of creating a favourable impression & thereby a less rigorous inspection of the area of which he was in charge as well he knew every one of his men were doing work contrary to the Regulations. Sharples was only too ready to accept this kindness, especially if there was any "high wines" in sight, & he would cheerfully consume every little luxury or the last drop of grog without the slightest compunction. His rangers would come in to report & carry Sharples to inspect the wrongful bleeding & that camp was for it. Sharples had no mercy or sympathy with such offenders & it was music in his ears to hear the Magistrate's "50" or 3 months in jail." There wasn't a bleeder who entered Rup, but had a wholesale respect & very active fear for Sharples. Many hated him most cordially but they behaved accordingly. *Trick*

Sharples had the making of a great detective if he had had a better education & training. He had the most retentive memory for faces I have & ever met as also of facts & figures about wrong doers who had come within his orbit. There was an Arawak Indian who came up to the

Savannahs to saw wood for God: by the old sawpit method. Something about this man stirred a memory in Sharples & he was sure they had crossed paths at some time. The Indian was apparently perfectly frank & open & Sharples was stumped. For weeks he haunted the Indian like his shadow without success, but at last he made contact, here goes his tale

Some 12 or 15 years previously (the actual day, date & month being given) Sharples was sent to some remote part of the N.W.D. to execute a Warrant for the arrest of an Abor-Indian called Charles Simpson who had refused to appear on a Summons to give evidence in connection with some criminal case being tried in Georgetown. The steamer did not stay long enough to allow Sharples to reach the Indian's home & return unless he was very lucky & made considerable haste. He had not gone more than a mile or so when he met an Abor-Ind: coming down the road whom he stopped to enquire the way. "Oh! Yes!!" he knew Simpson quite well & give minute instructions as to how to find the house, even to drawing a rough map in the dust of the road & ended by saying if he was not hurrying to catch the steamer he would have acted as guide.

Sharples went on his way rejoicing & found the house without the slightest trouble but there was no one at home & the place was tightly locked up. Enquiries from the nearest neighbours elicited the fact that Simpson had been around that morning & was probably out at his field or away hunting. There was no one in the field, about a mile away in the forest & Sharples spent the day hunting clues. It was not until almost dusk that he located Simpson's immediate family some miles away, who told him that Simpson had left early to join the steamer en route to take up work in some other part of the Colony. According to the description of dress & the baggage he was carrying, Sharples easily recognised the obliging Ind: he had met on the road as Simpson, by now well away to sea & completely beyond his reach, as there wasn't even a telegraph in the Dist: Sharples made his mistake in asking the stranger if he knew Simpson to which the Ind: truthfully replied he did & all his information & directions were genuine & true, but he tactfully withheld the fact that he himself was Simpson, because he had not been asked. Insert A

Another man from the coast drifted in to the Savannahs as a labourer for God: & here again Sharples was definitely certain they had met before in some criminal action or other. The man was a light-skinned negro called "Lucky" & had spent all his life in the goldfields or working boat hand on the Cuyuni & Mazaruni Rivers. He had one easy mark of identification

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Incidentally Simpson had changed his name to Johnson in honour of a later employer as not infrequently happens. The Warrant for his Arrest was destroyed by some new broom at the Police H. Q. as the Indian was only required as a witness & there was nothing against him except possibly of "contempt of Court," once the case was tried & disposed.

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this was "half a hand", the result of delayed action — on Lucky's part — in hearing a dynamite bomb to kill fish in one of the falls which left him minus his three middle fingers of the right hand. The pair became bosom friends but that led nowhere. Lucky admitted being as big a rascal as ever expected but swore that at no time had he ever got into trouble with the police. Sharples did not think there was a Warrant or anything against Lucky but he was positive that he had crossed trails somewhere with the man. The damaged hand conveyed nothing; Sharples had seen that face at some time & in connection with some criminal activity. The pair of them were quite frank over the matter & Lucky was even anxious to help Sharples to clear up his suspicions but it was months before Sharples finally unravelled the mystery.

Sharples in his early days as a constable had been sent up to Bartica on special duty. This little town was at the time suffering from growing pains as the result of a local gold boom in the district & all kinds of gambling had sprung into existence as is general in most out of the way mining centres. There was one den with a notoriously bad reputation against which a raid was secretly planned by the Police. They crept up noiselessly but had to rush across a considerable clearing round the house. This probably caught the attention of the gamblers, but the Police were leaping through the doors & windows when someone smashed the Kerosene lamp with a club. In that brief second Sharples saw Lucky who was fortunate enough to escape arrest in the ensuing melee, when most of the gamblers were caught.

The rapid expansion of the industry flung an increasing amount of balata on the market; much more the demand & prices fell below the cost of production. Many of the smaller concerns either sold out or stopped work & the larger concerns, also losing heavily, only carried on because of the large amount of capital already sunk was so much that some attempt must be made to recover something. New managers, foremen & captains were appointed in place of those who had now gained some experience & they in turn made many mistakes & gave the outlooker much amusement.

Bugle & Co were fortunate in appointing John Armstrong as their manager at Apoteri. He was a white man of much personality with good ability in handling & knowledge of local labour. He had had large experience in various mines & timber grants in the Colony & though he knew little of the actual technique of balata production

he was able from the very start to save considerable expenditure by the co-ordination of transport through the enormous areas under his control & thus ensure better food supplies at strategic points, & better collection of the dried balata. Armstrong raised his company's working in every department to a high point of efficiency & production, & to show splendid profit when again demand increased & prices rose.

Amongst other new men were Cambridge, Kersting, Healdy Hogan & a dozen others, few of whom kept their positions long. They had a habit of managing to overdraw on their actual earnings by a small amount during their first year. There were dozens of excuses for this: lack of postal facilities: failure of certain gangs of bleeders: unforeseen family complications & sickness. They were given a lecture: promised all sorts of reforms but the second year's working without exception found them in default to a thousand dollars or more. Again lectures, promises but the third year found them dismissed.

Cambridge was a coloured man in advancing years with a long experience as a bleeder & foreman on the coast & acted as Senior Foreman under Armstrong for years. He was a fine old man, so gentle that one thought butter wouldn't melt in his mouth but he knew every trick in the trade, & he had to be a real smart workman who could put anything over Cambridge. He was of little use as a manager on his own account although wonderfully efficient in his quiet way as second to a man of Armstrong's force of character.

Kersting was a light coloured man probably of Dutch extraction. & was, in many ways, quite a character, & held in high esteem by the heads of his firm. He was employed as a prospector, or balata cruiser for years. His first year was moderately successful but, highly superstitious before he began his second year's work, he approached certain obeah purveyors & paid a record sum for various charms. These charms were exotic & never to be repeated, & carried a promise that wherever Kersting went in the forest, nothing but balata would be the predominant tree. The charm worked true for years for the simple reason that Bugle had obtained by far the finest balata bearing area in the Colony. Timber cruising in Bat Creek & Somoni Kersting explored an area that has kept big gangs at work for 40 years, & the myth grew about his miraculous powers. Of course here & there he

failed. On the evidence of one or two trees showing up on the river bank he would allocate a gang of 20 bleeders to work there. These men would bleed the couple of trees that had been seen & then scour the forests for miles around to find nothing. After some couple of months they would be rescued & put to work on proven ground, but they would barely make expenses when the season closed down. Once the dry season had really set back Kersting would go to the place & unhampered by flood waters a mile or two from the creek as is common in the wet season, he would drive a straight line deep into the forests until he made contact with the main reef. A new foreman & gang would be sent to the area to produce almost the record amount of balata for the year. Kersting would show the reason of the previous year's failure as due solely to a lazy set of workmen who had refused to go out of camp. His employers believed him. The bleeders were told "where Kersting sets his foot, there only balata grows." & his Star hung over his head.

Having exhausted most of Simoni, Bat & Katoke Creeks, Kersting was much less successful in the Essequibo & Rewa Rivers where the balata was much more scattered. There were a few ugly failures which even obeah could not remedy & Kersting was having a hard time with the men, as the better workers were furious at being dumped in a camp that only provided a few days work. To shift camp meant the loss of several weeks in making clearings, building camps, dabracs & drying sheds just when they should have been bleeding every day — the best season of the year & they did not relish returning to their families not only without money but a crop of debt to be worked off in another year.

Kersting knew his Star was waning, obeah or no obeah & he began to plead ill-health, but he made one more trip: this time to the Western bank of the Rupun between Eupokarri & the foot of the Kanaku Mountains. The Eastern Bank. — Katoke, Simoni & Bat (K) were lousy with balata & it was not possible the reef would stop abruptly at the River.

Kersting crossed over the Savannas from Eupokarri towards the head of the Rappi Creek & walked out along an old Indian trail that led to a landing below the mouth of the Mapari Creek. On Kersting's findings & recommendations over 100 bleeders were sent to exploit the area. The expedition was a complete failure; there were only a few trees along the old Indian road mostly on high road; the area was subject to

deep & long continued flooding even in a mild wet season over almost its length & breadth. & the area was very limited in any case. The men were landed but as was a general custom left with only one boat in case of emergency. This got sunk up when the river rose - too deep for the men to dive to reach her - the food supplies got swamped & ran out. The men managed to ransack some Indian fields & eventually Govt. were ^{able} obliged to remove a number of them just as things really got serious.

A short time later when in town. Beagle showed me Kersting's report and asked my opinion on it. The report showed how Kersting had entered the forest from the savannah at a well known spot where the distance out to the river is only a couple of hours easy walk along what was then a well known & well defined trail. Soon after entering the high forest the river had begun to rise in flood most unexpectedly & caught Kersting completely unprepared. By morning there was no hope of going back, & they had to abandon camp, food & all supplies & climb the surrounding trees to escape death itself. The floods continued till Kersting was right up in the branches of the high forest. Knowing from experience that such floods may take as many weeks to subside as it took hours to rise, he decided to swim for it. Being a splendid bushman he set a course by the sun that would bring out exactly at a point on the river where he had sent his crew & boat to await his arrival. He had with him only a couple of bleeders & such food as they could carry in their pockets & shoulder bags. Night found them struggling on & there was nothing for it but each man must select the comfortable junction of two branches in which to sleep. They kept on swimming for several days, each night sleeping in the tree tops & were almost on the point of exhaustion & starvation when they made the Papuanian exactly at the spot where his boat was waiting according to order & their ordeal was over. He calculated he had swum twenty to thirty miles & that the entire forest was composed solely of balata trees. They had had to take periodic rests & each night had slept only in balata branches.

I gave it as my opinion that balata was found growing with a few possible exceptions only on high ground & clear of swamps & flooding. I also pointed out that the average balata tree had on the average a clean straight bole of over 40 feet before a branch could be found & that any company who sent men to exploit forest with such flooding as the report indicated, deserved to incur nothing but disaster & loss.

Meanwhile Kersting, poor fellow, was under medical attention & produced a doctor's certificate to the effect that the hardships he had undergone in the forests had undermined his constitution so badly, that his employers were warned that further employment as a balata cruiser would probably prove fatal, & he was given a warehouse job in town.

^{At the same time} ~~Meanwhile~~ Armstrong was in hot water at Apoteri over the weighing of balata. Every bleeder brings his balata sheets into the depot dripping wet from water & in as immature & half-dried form as possible so as to get increased poundage on the weighing scales & also just so much higher payment as employers were contracted to pay at certain rate for every pound weighed. Armstrong knew all this & tried to make the men hand in only well cured balata, but try as he like the final weights of the outgoing balata was far away below the weights he had of balata received from the bleeders. There was some unholy rows at Apoteri over this weights & only Armstrong's personality & forceful character saved a rioting & danger to the staff & himself.

Kersting at odd times in the previous years when not actively cruising had ^{often} lent a hand in weighing & when some aggrieved bleeder arrived in town with his moan about Armstrong's arbitrary methods & how he had been barefacedly robbed. Kersting was full of sympathy. He would also point out how when he did the weighing there have never once been a cross word let alone a quarrel such as every bleeder now seemed to have with Armstrong. These bleeders put their stories before Bygle plus a strong request that Kersting be sent to Apoteri in complete charge of the take-over of all balata from the bleeders. Armstrong knew something of Kersting's methods & definitely refused to have him on the depot, using the doctor's certificate as one very valid reason.

Armstrong generally left early in the season in order to start off the various gangs from Apoteri to the scene of active work on the grounds. Meanwhile the doctor found Kersting general condition much improved and, while balata cruising was not to be thought of, there was no reason why he could not weigh in the balata without any danger. A couple of months Armstrong ^{later} was disagreeably surprised to see Kersting arrive at the landing, carrying with him a brand new scale & set of weights, all of which carried the accuracy marks of recent inspection by the authorities.

and armed with a letter of appointment as sole weigher of all Balata received on behalf of his company. Armstrong worried a lot when Kersting got to work as it was only in extreme cases of wet & uncured balata that he would order it to be spread out in the shade for further drying. Kersting was most particular about his scale & weights. The food supplies of everybody in the bush is salt fish, pork or beef, & in handling this for every meal most fingers are salty. These meats have to be weighed out in small parcels & every scale gets rusty in some degree but not that of Kersting. No man dared touch his scale or weights & nothing but balata was weighed. Every day Kersting spent an hour or so cleaning the scale & putting a drop of oil on the fulcrums & joints, & rubbing all parts with thick castor oil as a rust preventative. The weights were carefully kept locked away after being wrapped in cotton wool in a special canister, but each day he burnished these also & set them out in the sun. His whole apparatus shone like a mirror & no fault could be found with it.

In due course Kersting, having finished weighing in all balata, left for town with scale & weight complete. For the first time there had been no quarrelling over the weighing in & the camp had run on ball bearings so to speak. Armstrong however had to stay on & weigh out the balata from the store for transport by boat to town & he dreaded what the deficit would be from evaporation of moisture against Kersting's weights. Such a loss after the balata had been stored in a baking hot & wattle wall hut after some months of dry weather amounted to as much as 8 to 10% & cases were known where the deficiency, probably helped by a little ingenious stealing, was more than 25%. Armstrong's blood pressure rose to danger point when, after making the last shipment, the books showed no loss from evaporation, & that Armstrong's weight of out going balata was 1% more than Kersting had weighed in. The books were checked & rechecked, but no mistake was found. Kersting had established a new & unique record in the balata industry. Armstrong admitted his scales were rusty, yet

The following year Kersting went up to weigh in balata again & Armstrong was horrified to see the condition of the balata being received. Scarcely a single parcel was challenged for excess moisture although it was brought straight from a waterlogged boat & flung on the weighing platform with water dripping on all sides. Now & again a bleeder

would challenge Kersting's reading of the scale. Kersting's reply would be. "Not a man of you touches my scale or weights; but any of you that likes can read out your own weights." This many did: it only meant a quarter of a pound at most over ~~the~~ amount called by Kersting. Every body was delighted: never had they had such a good weigher as Kersting; the bleeders were all in high glee & spirits. Only Armstrong remained uncertain & dissatisfied. Repeatedly he saw the scale set watch the indicator trembled on neutral. The machine was extra-ordinarily sensitive as when the indicator was in this position, a fourpenny piece thrown on the ~~set~~ scale would sent it bang against the limit bar.

Kersting left as usual early & Armstrong remained to weigh out a despatch. This time he nearly had apoplexy when he found that his weights for the outgoing balata was over 5% in excess of what Kersting had weighed in.

The news was soon known to every clerk & manager in the river & was the subject of much discussion, as it was felt there was deception somewhere. The bleeders knew also but they put it down to obeah & Kersting's ability in the supernatural which he was carefully working in their favour. They weighed their own balata & were given full credit when everybody could see a pound or two of water dribble on the ground while the parcel was actually on the scale. Kersting had put a hoodoo on Armstrong & the clerks when weighing out & although the weights were reported in the Company's favour, it was pure magic, as they had seen what they had seen with their own eyes. Armstrong alone was far from satisfied.

The third year Kersting arrived back & for some weeks Armstrong watched the scale get its daily burnishing & oiling, then he took a stone. With Kersting present he tested the scale in every practical way & even took it to pieces: it was perfect. He then demanded to inspect the weights but this Kersting flatly refused to allow. Armstrong countered this by threatening, as a Justice of the Peace, to order the two resident ^{Police} Constables to arrest Kersting & keep him marnaded ^{all} the God's Officer, due ^{almost} daily, should arrive. Kersting knew Armstrong was a man of his word & grudgingly handed over the Keys of the canisters containing the weights. They proved to be immaculate; the God's stamps of accuracy clear & untraced. They were polished to a high degree & the bottom, the sides & top shown like a mirror. Armstrong took a cutlass & struck a weight on the edge when a thickish shiver of black enamel peel off. & the fraud was unmasked.

Kersting had carefully polished his ^{weights} ~~weights~~ for weights with some form of heavy ^{plumbago} paste, which formed an enamel, ^{this} which must have added some 30/50% to their weight, a corresponding reduction of all balata weight.

Kersting was given a few hours in which to pack up & clear out, & he left various the tools of his trade for town. He never returned to the Dist^{ct} & his Coy gave him an warehouse job which he held while he lived. He never saw his actions from Armstrong's point of view. He had not robbed his company & he had only got the same results from the bleeder with smiles & high praise, what Armstrong & everyone else demanded in the face of great roardicism & vituperation. Armstrong weighed the balata that year with great difficulty. There was almost a riot on several occasions & some gangs actually took their balata to town at their own expense so as to have it weighed by Kersting. It was only a question of time however until some bleeder would have spotted Kersting's dodge if he had continued at Apoteri, "and the day they find out" as Armstrong put it "every man of us on the hilltop will be murdered"

Practically every bleeder was up to all sort of tricks to increase the weight of their balata. Many of the sheets of balata when sufficiently dry to barely hold together were folded up & tightly roped with leanos into a parcel of 100 - 150 lb. This prevented evaporation of surplus moisture. In many cases bleeders would actually ^{submerge} ~~place~~ such parcels in a pool of water against the time when it was loaded into the boat for transport to the depot. These boats were allowed to fill with water so as to cover most of the cargo (balata). On arrival at the depot the top layer of good dry balata was carried up for inspecting & weighing before. But soon the moisture laden stuff had to be brought to the scale. A point was soon reached in visible moisture that no manager could accept if he was fair to his employers, & then began the row in trying to arrive at some percentage deduction on the scale weight to cover subsequent loss by evaporation. The bleeder would howl & curse, carving circles in the air with a razor sharp cutlass & carrying on like a madman; all with the view of intimidating the man at the scale & ensuring a minimum of reduction in nett weight. It was no picnic being a manager in those days, but when tempers rose he could refuse to weigh in such balata & the bleeder was helpless. He would hold out for a week or more, but eventually he would have to open his balata & dry it out to some extent at least. A few of the more stubborn would decide to, themselves, transport the balata

7

to town to be weighed. Harmed by the lawless reputation of the bleeder the company would probably have a policeman in view somewhere. The bleeder of course would be gentler than Mary's pet-lamb. & would accept weight & criticisms without a murmur. His employers of course made the mistake of thinking their manager didn't know his work or how to handle the men; ~~the~~ views which the office conveyed by letter in no uncertain, & pretty sarcastic, terms, & which created a feeling of almost despair to a few men trying their utmost to protect their employers interests in very difficult circumstances.

Another of the bleeders little pleasantries was his attempts at adulteration of his balata. A few pounds of sand when mixed with the latex meant an unearned dollar or two, but this was too visible to even office eyes & was soon abandoned. The favourite method was the introduction of latex other than true balata. The favourite one was that of the "Cowtree." These trees by cutting ^{or bleeding} to a height of say 10/12 feet in the same manner as balata would give 2 to 5 lbs. The laws at that date forbade bleeding more than half the circumference of any tree. The method of climbing higher than the ground was by ladder, & the best means used what was called "a 20 cutlass (22") ladder," which allowed them to bleed roughly 40 feet up from the ground. The average was 3-4 balata trees to one can of latex, & was a good forenoon's work (6.30 to 11 AM). A cowtree would give him roughly three times this amount of latex for one short hours work. Many of the bleeders said they could smell a cowtree from quite a distance. I have tried this out, not only myself, but with a crowd of very observant Abor-Inds. without success, but I must admit the black bleeder had an almost uncanny faculty in locating every cowtree for miles around. I do not think cowtree latex in season is detrimental to the quality of balata, but any adulterant was severely frowned on in those days. The bleeders swore, erroneously, that its latex gave "colour" to their balata, & will always be used as an adulterant, as, if added in small proportions, it is impossible to detect it by eyesight or ordinary methods.

Adulteration was not confined to cowtree latex, & any tree that gave milk was bled & used. Some of these turned the balata brittle or turned it to a black colour - at that time almost unsaleable. The habit grew until practically every bleeder was adulterating & much of the

dried balata of such inferior quality as scarcely to be fit for export. Forfeiture was no remedy; the bleeder would urge it be sent to town for analysis, but as he was in debt to the company, it was generally arranged to take it over at a reduced price that would just cover his debt as it was a cinch that that man would go elsewhere to bleed next year.

Meanwhile the Abor. Ind^s of the Wapichanna Tribe were becoming expert bleeders. It required very little cash or barter to satisfy their needs each year & without the stimulus of want their production per man was low - far below even the poor coastal bleeder, but what they did produce was of super-quality. They had to be, & were, carefully trained & with their inherent honesty, obedience, & desire to please, never even thought of adulteration. I have known an Indian report his attempt "just to see the result" but he would say "ho good" & never repeat the experiment. So super-excellent was the grade of Indian balata that it was placed on the market under a special mark & became the standard of quality in the London market under "Q. L. O." & generally was sold for 6 or 7 pence per pound more than any other balata.

This excellence of quality became known in the Colony & eventually a 2" square of "Q. L. O." quality Balata sheet was attached to each contract with the various foremen & which had to be signed by every bleeder in their gangs. They agreed to accept top price - about 20^s per lb - for all balata of similar quality to the attached "Q. L. O." sample & that inferior grades would be paid for at a correspondingly lower rate, which would be arranged between some authorised member of the company's staff & the respective foremen at the different depots, with the Manager or Overseer as ^{time} witness. For the first ^{time} the companies had a standard of quality on the spot & though there was great dissatisfaction during the first year, the bleeder of inferior grades found he had no alternative. A few took their case to court: but got no sympathy as any magistrate could easily see the difference between their contract sample & what they had produced. The bleeder had to pay costs & pay his lawyer, so a couple of test cases soon made them ^{realise} ~~wisely~~ ^{& fair} that a mutual adjustment of price at the depot was much better. No unfair advantage was taken of this arrangement; in fact the managers continued to accept balata much below the standard quality, & only the worst grades were paid for at reduced prices. The system proved of the greatest use however & the men soon became much more amenable

to reason. In a couple of years all the previous friction & quarrels had largely stopped & the district became normal in behaviour.

During these years of discord & rascality in the bakala industry in Ruf. no director, shareholder in the different companies or owner ever put foot in the district with one exception. Every concern was run by a manager at the depot, not one of whom had the faintest idea of the difficulties or topography of the district & who were, with the exception of John Armstrong, coloured men of exactly the same type as the workers, but with a better education, a knowledge of book-keeping & some experience in handling labour. The exception was one of the Bungle Bros. who simply could not believe that the cringing humble bleeders who called in at the town office to raise the wind (get an advance) or lay complaints about the barefaced robbery by & the tyrannical behaviour of the up-country managers could possibly be the lawless roving rascal the managers reported.

Bungle travelled up to Apotari by boat in company with Armstrong. It was a slack season on the depot & the men were all as quiet & tame as so many sheep. & Bungle was more than confirmed that the management was unduly harsh & ignorant & that the blacks' brother would respond to proper treatment as a flower would to the sunshin'. Bungle decided to tout his grants entirely on his own & end up by a visit to Dada know to inspect the working conditions & treatment of the labor. Just on a verbal invitation given him some time previous in town. The company launch & a crew of men were put at his disposal & he left. I had no knowledge of their even being ^{on} the way but I happened to be at home when I heard the launch & the party arrived in the early afternoon. Relations were very strained between Bungle & his crew. It appeared that once the party had left Apotari & prepared to make their first camp, the captain, engineer & crew had refused to eat their rations. They had held salt-fish, pork & beef under Bungle's nose & asked how he would like to live on such food. Bungle, green & tenderhearted, agreed that it was abominable & gave them permission to draw on his own ample supply of tinned food. biscuits, onions & potatoes. An after dinner tot of whiskey was also conceded by which time it was agreed that their own food was so offensive in smell that it was thrown overboard.

Not one of the crew had ever been with a 100 miles of Dada know but of course they knew it just a couple of points (bends in the river) above Kupo-kari, which place they passed with enough food to last the day.

Unfortunately the river was falling rapidly in the Kanakas; the engine gave some trouble & it took 3 days to reach their destination. They had been completely out of food & not a drop of whiskey left for two days. They arrived during a heavy rain, soaked to the skin, hungry as wolves & everybody in a vile temper. I soon got Bugle fixed up in comfort, but I definitely refused to give the men what they demanded; in fact I refused to grant his blacks permission to sleep on the premises with some Indian families who were in to see me. I told Bugle my annual supplies had not yet arrived from town & that while he was welcome to stay on & take pot luck, I had not the supplies his men were demanding for the return trip.

I gave the crew ^{just} enough dried beef & farine - the usual savannah diet - to last them on a quick trip back to Apotari & they left mid-afternoon to get fresh supplies for Bugle himself at Apotari & return for Bugle who was to stay on as my guest until such time as they got back.

Bugle had a most enjoyable stay although he was not in proper training for cross-country work. He climbed Mount Tarukaban however & made some short trips on horse back. At the end of a week, the weather, which had been very dry & an exceptionally low river, changed for the good & we had a couple of days downpours of rain. At the end of 10 days or so the launch arrived back on the rising crest of a flood which was overflowing the banks of the Rupa in style. They arrived - same engineer; different crew - about 8 A.M. & in a tearing hurry to start back as the engineer was afraid the flood might take off & he felt safe on the flood which now covered every fall & rocks in the river. They were on their way down stream inside the hour.

This was the first launch in history to enter the upper savannahs & caused great excitement among the Indians who lived within sound of the noise of the engines. Everybody had rushed to vantage points to get a view of so novel a sight of which they had heard accounts from such of their men as had been to town. A couple of miles below Daba kawa there was a small village (Dowbar Pawa) & everyone had raced to see the launch pass. There was one old lady of 70-ish who had missed the show in going up, but she would see it in passing down. She & her family swam out to the river-bank (the flood was half a mile over the bank's nose) & she climbed into a high tree for a box seat. Presently the launch appeared round the bend but behaving strangely for any known type of boat. Presently the engines stopped & the Indians realised there was a first class fight on board. The white man was standing right out on the bow, while the niggers were slipping each other with bare fists

& handy pieces of wood & paddles. The launch was spinning round helplessly
 in the swirling currents & heading straight for the tree up which the Indians
 had clambered for good views. Now thoroughly frightened those Ind^s fled in
 dismay, every man for himself & of course the old lady was left alone.
 She was also hustling but making slow speed down the tangle of lianas
 up which she had climbed. & when several feet above flood water she slipped
 & fell. In doing so her foot caught in the bush ropes which held her suspended
 whilst her whole body from the knee upwards was under water. Fortunately
 her son glanced back & saw what had happened. He dashed back to her
 rescue & eventually got the old lady free much more dead than alive. An
 excited Ind^s dashed in to my place for help & medicines as the old lady was
 quite unconscious. The old lady recovered however to tell the tale & her descrip-
 tions of her first sight of black men & launches were priceless. What had happened
 in the launch I never learned. Armstrong never knew of the fight till I told
 him. Bugle refused to discuss the affair, & the crew, who had been promptly
 sacked on reaching Apotari left the Dis^t for good. Bugle left soon afterwards
 for England & he never returned to the Colony again.

Bugle balata grants were successfully run for about 20 years
 when they were sold to become the Real Daylight Balata Coy. in 1924 (?)
 The Consolidated Rubber & Balata Co had a chequered career, sometimes
 working but more often closed down or working on a very low scale. The
 Chapman grants to the South of Bugle & Co. worked only for one year, & were
 taken over by Garrett & Co. The Garrett concessions have been worked
 successfully since they were granted. Blacks from the coast were
 employed on the lower reaches of both the Rep. & Quitaro Rivers but ^{by} far the
 greater part of their concessions were worked solely by Abor-Indians.