

Next, no matter how much I had been talking, some one would ask, "Can he talk?" This question I would answer by some trivial remark, which would be received with a volley of laughter, and repeated over and over again. Then they would begin to ask no trivial questions just to get me to speak, but as this was better fun for them than for me, I would refuse to talk further. Then would follow requests to take off my shoes, or other parts of my clothing, that they might see whether I was really like one of themselves; attempts to induce me to buy ivory or rubber; requests for gifts; offers of marriage; requests to show my trade-goods, compass, notebook, etc.

When I thought their curiosity had been sufficiently sated, I would attempt to tell them why I had come among them, and to give the some idea of the Gospel and their need of it. Here I noted a curious fact, which I have observed before but can never explain. Sometimes the attention and interest were truly inspiring. They would hang on my words, and by their looks and responses show that they were really taking in what I was telling them. Other crowds, apparently not different in any respect, I could hardly hold for five minutes, and it seemed to me that everything I said turned to a caricature in their minds.

These scenes, with numberless variations, are repeated over and over again, as we pass through town after town, till at last we must stop for the night. I get a house, put my goods and carriers inside, and in order to give them a chance to unpack and prepare my supper I stay in the street talking to the people and entertaining them as long as possible. At last I am tired, and tell them I want to be quiet; that they must go home now and let me rest. It is needless to say they do not do it. As soon as I go into the house they crowd around the door. If I shut the door (the only opening in the walls of a Bule House), it is quite dark. Besides, the cooking is being done over an open fire, and with the door shut the smoke is suffocating. But the door may as well be shut as blocked by the heads and shoulders of the curious crowd.

Sometimes I try reasoning with them. I say, "I want to be quiet and rest." "But we want to see you," they reply. Then I say, "Is this a proper way to treat a visitor when he is tired and wants to be let alone?" "No," they all reply. "Then why don't you go away and leave me?" "We want to see you," is the only reply. So I shut the door, preferring the smoke to the crowd. Sometimes I go out into the street and call on the people of the town and inquire whether I am to have a house, or whether I must go on to the next town. By this means I always gain my point, and now I can go in and shut the door. At last I am in my smoky den, and the crowd shut out. But I am not hidden yet. When I light my tallow candle every crack and crevice becomes a peep hole, and I eat my supper knowing that the smoky walls have eyes that are watching every movement and noting every morsel of food I put to my mouth.