

# East African Standard

Saturday, July 16, 1960

## *Saturday Essay*

### WAITING FOR THE BIG BANG

IF the world had gone off bang, at teatime on Thursday, as a band of watchers halfway up Mt. Blanc had hoped, never mind feared, this piece of homespun prose need never have been written and, chorusing your hallelujahs around the pearly gates, you might all have been so much the happier.

Alas for the watchers — though not for the waiters jingling their tips after dispensing the Chianti, because seeing the end of the world in is a thirsty occupation — the tiresome old earth obstinately refused to go bang, disappearing into the smoke from whence it is supposed to have come some time ago, and is today grinding around, in tribulation just as it has been doing for a little over a billion, billion years. In every schoolboy's lifetime there has been some report about the end of the world and it, is wonderful to think how a story from the Alps inflamed the imagination of this generation's school children, thousands of miles away in tropical Africa.

As might have been expected, the nuclear age story had a novel twist. Adventure magazines have, come a long way since Noah marched his animals two by two, the elephant and the kangaroo, into the Ark. This time, With atoms to play with, among the marvels of destruction invented by benign scientists, the end was to come in an almighty thermo-nuclear bang. This, at any rate, was how Dr. Elio Bianca interpreted the dreams he dreamed at home in Milan. Dr. Bianca, or Brother Emman to the devotees, led his party of watchers 7,000ft up the mountain; with their waiters following hard by funicular, ministering to the tourists, the newspapermen and the television operators.

They settled into a storm-proof chalet to wait for their appointed apocalypse at 12.45 G.M.T precisely. Out of the funicular stepped a Junoesque blonde in mountain rig, shouldering her gigantic: rucksack, brandishing a quart bottle (nearly empty in one hand and in the other a cornet, Juno took a swig of her Chianti, announced "here comes the last trump" and sounded a couple; of bugle calls. Silence succeeded the echoes that went yodelling down the Swiss valleys. The cameramen were intent on filming the hands of an alarm clock inexorably moving to doom. At 12.45 the alarm went off and it was all over. The world was on with its motley again, the old fraud. "Music, lady", the camera men called to Juno, "hold it, baby". Juno took another swig, the last, and sounded The Last Post in mistake for Reveille.

#### **Bro. Emman failed in algebra**

Everybody began to laugh and also to feel slightly foolish at having been taken so far up the mountain. Bro. Emman read a statement in red ink which said "Our meeting took place in tranquil atmosphere" — like all the publicists from Richard Coeur de Lion to Chiang Kai Shek — and "anybody can make a mistake". When he said that, Bro. Emman meant he still

believed the world will end one of these days but cannot say just when until he gets the sum right. And that is where you can equate Bro. Emman's calculations halfway up an Alp with algebra which paved the way to nuclear fission. He will have to do better than that to solve Bhaskara Acharya's problem, set all those years ago. In his book *Lilavati* and revived this week for readers who follow the correspondence columns, by Mr Channan Singh.

"O beautiful girl with shining eyes!" Bhaskara began after the caressing style of Aesop, but instead of a fable he demanded: "Tell me what is that number which, when multiplied by three, then creased by three-quarters of the product, then divided by, seven, then decreased by one-third of the quotient, the result when multiplied by itself, then decreased by 52, gives after extraction of square root, addition of eight and division by 10, the result — two". Which is a swift enough one to expect any body's beloved with shining eyes to answer.

Nobody having offered the solution, everybody being too busy, writing about politics, and machines being scorned as new-fangled, a mathematical mentor did it by longhand. Only on unknown  $x$  in eight lightning equations, and the eighth was the answer=28. Of course, it could be plus or minus 28, as any fifth-form swot will certify.

If Bro. Emman fails to pass his algebra exam, at the second attempt, you need not worry overmuch, not if you are one of the over-40s. This cracked and perverse world of ours is safe until 1999 according to Old Moore Nostradamus, never mind the provocative capers of Messrs. Eisenhower and Krushchev with their spy planes and rockets. What did Maitre Nostradamus say looking up from his magic pencil and paper one day in the 1550s?

L'an mil neuf cens nonante neuf sept mois,  
Du ciel viendra le grand Roy d'effrayeur.

In the year 1999 and seven months, there will come from Heaven the great King of Terror.