HUGH MULLENEUX WALMSLEY

THE RUINED CITIES OF ZULULAND

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Walmsley H.

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Содержание

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Preface

No one ever reads prefaces now-a-days; why, therefore, should I write one? may be fairly asked. Simply, I reply, to tell the reader that the tale imperfectly related in these volumes is not a mere work of fiction. It is based on a document sent to me by my brother, to whom I have dedicated this work, and who has for many years been a resident of the frontiers of Zulu Land.

The paper alluded to was transmitted by me, according to my brother's desire, to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of the French, together with a map of Zulu Land, which had been exhibited in the Natal section of the great Paris Exhibition of 1867. Both were graciously accepted and acknowledged by His Imperial Majesty.

The country traversed by the daring men, whose adventures are related in the following pages, is still to be explored. The ruins of the Fort of Sofala, even now, lie buried in the sand, on the beach of the far away Indian Ocean. The Arabs still search there for the smelted lumps of gold, buried or lost by those of whose existence no other trace remains.

The mysterious slabs still exist, encrusted with the dirt and grime of ages, on the mountain land of Gorongoza, and should my tale induce any adventurous spirit to make an attempt to clear away the veil of mystery which yet shrouds the remains of the Ruined Cities of Zulu Land, I can only refer him to Captain Walmsley, from whom the primary information contained herein was first gleaned, before whom the Missionary's depositions were made, and who, for more than fifteen years of his life, has well and honourably filled the difficult and dangerous position of Government Agent, Magistrate, and Resident on the wild frontier of savage Zulu Land.

Bellary Fort

There are few hotter places, and few more unhealthy ones, among our Indian up-country stations than Bellary, in the Madras Presidency, garrisoned in the year 1856 by Her Majesty's 150th Regiment of Infantry. Let the reader imagine the lines of a fort drawn round a bare sugar-loaf hill, on which an Indian sun pours its rays for months. Thoroughly heated by this process of roasting, the arid rock gives out all night the caloric absorbed during the day, and a three years' residence in the Fort of Bellary, such as had been passed by the officers and men of the 150th Regiment, was about equivalent to the same period in a baker's oven. Years passed, and the English Government had at last perceived that it was madness to keep troops within the lines of the old fort when a rich and well-timbered plain lay around it. Barracks had been built outside; and about three-quarters of a mile distant from the main gate of Bellary, white bungalows, with their green verandahs and their well-kept compounds, lay scattered here and there among the trees, while far away, under the moon's rays, on the night when our tale opens, a beautiful one in December, stretched the rich plain, with its piles of rock rising like huge black molehills here and there, giving welcome shelter to the wild-cats, jackals, and hyenas, whose cries might be heard from time to time ringing over the plain. The mess-house of the regiment consisted of the usual large commodious building, with its many outhouses or godowns, the whole surrounded by a low wall, and that again protected by a strong hedge of the prickly pear. A broad verandah ran round the main building, and a flight of steps led up to the house, where some half-dozen of the officers of the corps, dressed in white, with nothing to distinguish them except the forage-cap bearing the number of the regiment, were seated, chatting and smoking. The day had been very hot, but a pleasant breeze was blowing over the plain; the click of the billiard-balls was heard from an adjoining room, whose windows, thrown wide open, cast a stream of light into the compound, and the hum of voices from the messroom told of the dinner only just finished, and of the party of seasoned old soldiers who were even then loth to quit the pleasures of the table and the bottle of Madeira which had crossed the line four times, and for which particular wine the 150th had long been justly famous.

"I am half sorry that my leave has arrived, just as we are expecting the route," said an officer, puffing out a long spiral wreath of smoke as he spoke, and reaching out his hand towards the tumbler of weak brandy pawnee standing on a small table by his side.

"Hear him, the impostor!" laughed a second. "Two years of leave, after nearly nine of foreign service, and he talks of regret."

The first speaker was rather a slight figure, but withal strongly built; thin and wiry, he showed no superfluous flesh. The rather prominent forehead was tanned to a deep brown, save where the line of the forage-cap showed the white skin of the European; the cheeks were sunken, and bore the sallow tinge of sickness, while the aquiline nose, the well-cut mouth, and the rather heavy under jaw, spoke of determination and vigour of character. Nearly six feet in height, he lay languidly back in his chair, the dark masses of hair curling under the forage-cap, and the large black eyes giving a still more marked appearance of illness to his features.

"If I could shake off this feeling of illness, Harris," he replied, "get rid of this terrible Bellary fever, you may depend upon it. I would throw up my leave. One's regiment becomes one's family after nearly twelve years' service, nine of which have been passed in India."

"And you are only captain," replied the other. "A pretty look-out for me, an ensign yet. You had better stop and give me a lift, by making a death vacancy. Do, Hughes, there's a good fellow."

Captain Hughes laughed.

"We shall have the route to-morrow; and if the march to Secunderabad be anything like what ours was from Madras, you won't want for death vacancies."

"Was it such a terrible one?" asked the other, in a serious tone.

"Terrible," replied Major Ashley, who had just left the table, and was lighting his third cigar since dinner, "why, a march up-country in India is always terrible work, as you'll find out before you are many weeks older. There was some dispute about our destination when we were ordered up here three years since," continued the Major, "and so we were detained until the hot weather set in, and cholera caught us up. The road we took may even yet be traced by the mounds of stones which cover our dead."

"It was a fearful time," said Captain Hughes. "When we arrived in sight of the walls of yonder fort, the men were dropping fast, the sentries over the hospital had often to be changed from outside to inside the tent, the surgeon and assistant-surgeon had to be carried to see their sick, so worn were they with fatigue, while round our lines all night long the wailing of the camp followers was to be heard, for they perished by hundreds, the dead being found, when the grey light of morning broke, lying stiff and stark among the tent ropes."

"But you reached the fort at last?" asked the Ensign.

"Yes, we did reach it at last, didn't we, Hughes?" answered Major Ashley. "Do you remember the day an orderly rode into our lines, bearing an order from General Black Jack, as we used to call him, forbidding us to enter the fort; and how, for the sake of doing something, we marched short marches daily round yonder walls, until at last our colonel saw that the men were growing mutinous, and told Black Jack that he would storm the fort if not allowed to enter?"

"I remember it well; and he gave way. The gates were thrown open, and the scourge left us. But it's late; and if we are to have any chance of the tiger, you had better get your rifles, and we will have the sheep picketed. See, they are closing the messroom doors, and putting out the lights."

"So they are," returned a third, yawning; "I shall wish you luck, and turn in."

"I say, Harris, mind you don't make a vacancy in the Light Company yourself," said a captain of Grenadiers, as a group of the late billiard-players went laughing and talking down the steps into the moonlight. "I don't believe you ever saw a tiger, or know anything about a rifle."

"Never fear for me, Hunt; an ensign's not worth a tiger's trouble. If you would consent, now, to be picketed instead of the sheep, Captain—"

"Go to the devil! Good-night, Hughes." And "Good-night—a pleasant journey," rang out cheerily from one after another as they crossed the mess-compound, and took their way to their respective quarters.

"You are an old hand, Hughes," said the Ensign, after a short pause. "Do you remember the Rajah who was a prisoner on the top of Bellary rock?"

"Don't I!" replied the Captain. "I say, Curtis," he continued, addressing a lieutenant of his own company, "you relieved the man who so nearly let the old Rajah loose."

"Ay, poor old fellow; he's dead now, and can't ask his old, well-known question."

"What was it, Curtis? What did he ask, and who was he?"

"Well, wait till I have lit this cigar, and I'll tell you," answered Curtis. "We have an hour yet before the moon gets low, and those black palkywallers are making such a row."

The cigar was lighted, the brandy-and-water carefully mixed and placed on an adjoining table within reach, and comfortably settling himself on his seat, Lieutenant Curtis began his history.

"On the top of yonder sugar-loaf hill, in the centre of Bellary Fort, a prisoner was confined, and the daily duty of the officer of the guard was to visit him. He was an old, worn-out man, whose hair had grown grey a captive, and I can tell you, Harris, it was no joke to have to plod up the steps cut in the face of the rock every morning, to ask the old man the stereotyped question, 'Did he want anything?'

"He had been a sovereign of some petty State, and our people wanted the land, so they took it, and to keep its former owner quiet, confined him to the top of yon granite rock; so daily the subaltern on guard mounted the steps, and asked the usual question, every time receiving the same reply,—

"'Yes, I want my liberty and the land you stole from me, nothing else!'"

"And did he ever get it?" asked Harris.

"He very nearly did," replied Captain Hughes. "But go on with your tale, Curtis."

The officer addressed took a steady pull at the brandy pawnee by his side, puffed out a heavy cloud of smoke, and continued—

"One day the old man received by stealth a considerable sum of money, and with this and the promise of more he succeeded in bribing an officer of a native regiment, then doing duty with us in the fort. The officer went up with his palky several times pretexting illness, and no notice was taken of it; at last, one day the bearers, who had been also well paid, felt by the weight that the prisoner was inside. They took up the palky, which had been standing near the gate, and lazily followed by the sick officer, who inspected the sergeant's guard as he passed, took their way down.

"It was well contrived, but old Sergeant Flack of ours noticed the weight of the empty palky, and as soon as he had turned in his guard, went to his prisoner's quarters to find the bird flown.

"The subaltern and the palanquin with its bearers parted company at the foot of the hill, he taking his way to the main guard, a richer, but dishonoured man; the poor prisoner, his heart beating wildly at the now sure prospect of liberty, was borne along towards the gates of the fort. An armed party of his former subjects waited him; so once outside and mounted he would be safe, and if it had not been for Flack he would have been.

"Just as he neared the gate, the old Sergeant came up breathless, and the loud cry of 'Guard, turn out!' was heard, while the next moment the palanquin was surrounded by the bayonets of our fellows, and the poor grey-headed Rajah found himself half-an-hour later once more seated in the quarters assigned him on the top of the rock."

"Poor fellow! and what became of him?" asked Harris.

"He never again made an attempt to escape, but, native-like, bowed submissively to his fate, and every morning gave the reply I have already repeated to the officer of the guard. It was his only revenge, and until he died this little solace seemed agreeable to him."

"And the officer who connived at the escape?" asked Curtis.

"It could never be proved against him," answered the other. "The old Rajah always sternly denied having had any collusion with him. The bearers had bolted in the confusion; and though he was sent down to Madras and tried by court-martial, he was not convicted, for there was no proof."

"Ay, but he resigned his commission at once, left for England, and from a poor man, rose into one of fair moderate means," remarked Captain Hughes. "But see, the moon is low now, your fellow has picketed the sheep, and if we are to do any good, silence must be the order of the night."

A tiger had lately committed some ravages within the lines of the 150th, and the night before had actually entered the mess-compound of the corps. It was a man-eater, too, and when once these ferocious animals take to preying on the human species, they acquire a love for the food, which never leaves them. Lieutenant Curtis and the Ensign had volunteered to kill it, while Captain Hughes, who was to start for Madras on two years' leave, had gladly joined the party.

Silence now fell on the watchers, the moonlight grew more and more feeble, the red ends of the cigars gleamed under the shadow of the verandah, in one corner of which stood the Captain's palanquin, its bearers thrown down on the chenam floor beside it, sleeping soundly. The stars were shining brightly, and the cries of the hyenas on the plain beyond were answered from time to time by the bleat of the sheep, picketed in the centre of the yard. Hour passed after hour, and the moon had quite disappeared. The youngest of the party, unused to the long watch, had fallen fast asleep, and his head being thrown back in an uneasy position, was snoring loudly.

"Confound that fellow, he is enough to frighten a Bengal tiger; just prod him up, Hughes, will you!" said Curtis, in an undertone.

The Ensign's rifle leaned against one of the pillars of the verandah. Those of the other two lay across their knees, and Hughes, giving two or three pokes with the muzzle of his, between the

sleeping lad's ribs, tried to wake him. Worn out with the heat and watching, the boy muttered some unintelligible words, and, turning, was again fast asleep in a moment.

"And you don't mean to go to England?" continued Curtis, speaking in a guarded tone.

"No, I don't," returned Hughes, in the same low voice. "You and I, Curtis, are the crack shots of the regiment, and my rifle at least shall be heard on the plains and by the rivers of South Africa."

"How I wish I could start with you, old fellow," said Curtis, with a sigh.

"How I wish you could; but it's no use wishing, Curtis. You have had so much leave of late that you can't ask, and if you did, your application would not be forwarded."

"No, I suppose not. Colonel Desmond's a good fellow; but I should not like to ask him. Have you any one you know in South Africa?"

"Yes, I've a relation who has been for many years Government Agent on the Zulu frontier, and he promises me a fit out, and a letter to Panda, the King of the Zulus."

"Won't you have splendid elephant hunting, and, may be, join again with a Kaffir wife."

Hughes laughed. "How that sheep bleats; and hush, Curtis—there's a skurry among the jackals. Do you hear? Hush!"

Hardly had he spoken when the sharp click of the rifle-locks was heard, as their owners brought them to full cock, and almost at the same moment, with a loud growl, a dark, massive form topped the low wall, and with one blow of his powerful fore-arm the man-eater struck down its prey. The tiger turned to fly, carrying with it the dead sheep, but the rope by which it was tied to the stake stopped it. With a low growl of anger the brute glanced round, as though not understanding the reason of the check. The starlight streamed over his painted hide, and the simultaneous reports of the two rifles rang out on the air. Hard hit, the tiger turned, dashed at the wall, clearing it once more, but as he did so received the contents of the two remaining barrels of the rifles, disappearing with a howl of pain and rage.

Harris, worn out by heat he was little accustomed to, had dropped into that dead sleep which invariably overpowers Europeans not broken to an Indian climate. Awoke suddenly by the growl of the tiger, closely followed by the reports of the rifles, it took him some seconds to realise the situation. Even then his faculties seemed confused, for, seizing his rifle, he dashed, without speaking a word, through the gate, in the low compound wall, followed by the loud laughter of his comrades.

"Hallo! stop, you sleepy hunter of tigers!" shouted Curtis, as soon as he could speak for laughter. A fierce growl from the other side of the compound was heard, a long snarl of mingled anger and pain dying away into a deep moan, the report of a rifle ringing loudly on the night air, and all was still.

The two officers looked at each other for a second, then, their emptied pieces in their hands, they also dashed through the gateway, followed at a cautious distance however by the now thoroughly awakened bearers, who had been sleeping beside the palanquin.

The starlight showed the tiger lying dead, and beside it in a half sitting posture, Ensign Harris, with his rifle across his knees.

The wounded brute, after clearing the low wall, had fallen, then dragged itself heavily forward, just passing the gateway, when Harris, at top speed, dashed out, to pitch head foremost over the writhing body in its death struggle. The rifle fell from his hand, and the tiger, though dying, eager for revenge, struck out at the youth's body, as he rolled over and over, carried on by the speed at which he had been running.

"By Jove you've had a narrow escape, my boy. It's not every fellow clears a tiger that way," exclaimed Hughes, as the two stood leaning on their rifles by the carcase of the dead animal.

"I haven't got clear," replied the Ensign, rising to one knee, and wincing with pain as he did so; "but you will find my ball in the tiger's head, and so I have fairly earned the skin."

"Here, you fellows, fetch the palky," cried Curtis. "It is a question of your own skin, not the tiger's. Wounds are never so easily cured under the sun of India as at home."

"Oh, it's only a scratch, Curtis," said the brave lad, as the palanquin came up, and his comrades placed him in it.

"I tell you there's no such thing as only a scratch here. If you will go with him to his quarters, Hughes, I'll send Chapman."

The Ensign's bungalow was close by; Chapman, the assistant-surgeon of the regiment, was soon awoke, the wound found to be a severe but not dangerous one, the tiger, having struck forward like a huge cat, with its powerful fore-arm just catching the youngster's leg, scoring deeply into the flesh, and tearing off the light shoe. The wounds were bandaged, and Ensign Harris's name placed on the sick list.

"Good-night, Hughes, and a pleasant journey to you," said Curtis, as the two shook hands at the entrance of the compound.

The air was fresh and cool, the "Southern Cross" was just dipping towards the distant horizon, the long mournful howl of a far-away hyena came across the plain, and on the white dusty road stood the dark-looking palanquin, with its group of dusky bearers, as, wringing his brother officer's hand, Captain Hughes stepped into it, and with a sing-song chaunt the palkywallers shouldered their burden, and moved away on the first stage, which was to lead to the broad plains and well-stocked prairies of that Shikaree's heaven, the hunting-fields of South Africa.

The "Halcyon" Brig

"Sail ho!" shouted the look-out in the foretop of the merchant brig, the "Halcyon," one fine afternoon, some three months after, the events related in the preceding chapter.

The sun was just setting in the western horizon, tinging the trembling waves with a golden hue. The brig was making good weather of it, and she looked a likely craft to do so. Her long, low, black hull supported a pyramid of white canvas, every sail drawing to a nicety, as, with a fresh breeze right over the quarter, she held her course to the northward and westward, bound for the coast of Africa. Three men only were pacing her quarter-deck. The one, a middle-sized, stout built man, his face tanned to the colour of mahogany, was evidently the master of the brig. The second, much younger, was his first mate; while leaning over the bulwarks, lazily looking into the sea, a solitary passenger, who had been taken on board when the brig lay in Madras roads, completed the trio. Forward, on the forecastle, was a group of sailors, thrown here and there under the weather bulwarks, some asleep, some telling tales of former adventures in the land now a hundred miles away on the brig's larboard bow, and which they hoped to sight in the morning.

"Sail ho!" shouted the look-out, and Captain Weber stopped suddenly in his walk, turning to windward, his long grey hair streaming out on the breeze as he did so. His was the seaman's face of the old type. The forehead low and massive; the thick eyebrows overshadowing small piercing eyes; the large good-humoured mouth ever ready to smile, and showing as he did so a range of white teeth; bushy grey whiskers; and a skin tanned to a good standing mahogany colour. His short sturdy frame was clothed in a slop suit of pilot cloth, and a plain cap with a heavy peak completed the picture.

Captain Weber had entered the merchant service as a boy; had been pressed on board a man-of-war; had seen some service, and was now part owner of the brig he commanded. Mr Blount, his first officer, was a man of another school. Taller, and more finely formed, the straight Grecian nose, dark hair, and carefully trimmed whiskers, were adorned by a naval cap having a thin strip of gold lace round it, and the short monkey jacket showed also on the cuffs of the sleeves the same bit of coquetry in the shape of gold lace, it and the waistcoat boasting brass buttons.

"Where away, Smith?—point to her," replied the latter, as he too stopped in his walk, and looked aloft.

This was a phrase lately introduced into the Royal Navy, and copied by the old captain. In a gale, when the look-out's voice could hardly be heard above the roar of the wind, the pointing in the given direction supplanted the voice, and was a useful innovation. The man's hand, on this occasion, was held straight out, pointing to leeward, and there, sure enough, the loftier sails of a full-rigged ship could be seen, standing in the same direction as themselves. The two seamen, shading their eyes from the last gleam of the sun, which was sinking like a ball of red fire into the tumbling waves, gazed at the distant sail, making her out to be a ship lying to, perhaps a whaler.

"It's a queer thing, that a whaler should be lying to so near land, Blount," said Captain Weber, after he had looked long and attentively in the direction of the ship. "Hand me the glass."

At this moment the passenger, waking up from his fit of abstraction, joined the two seamen.

"A ship lying to—and what is there strange in that?" was the question he asked.

"Why, Captain Hughes," replied the mate (Captain Weber being too busy with the glass to reply), "a merchantman generally makes the best of her way from port to port. With her, time is money, while one of Her Majesty's cruisers (God bless her!) would be jogging along under easy sail, not caring either for time or money; but certainly not hove to. No; yonder ship must be a whaler; but it's not often those fellows find their fish in such high latitudes."

"There," said Captain Hughes, for it was indeed he who was the "Halcyon's" solitary passenger. "There—she fills."

"You have a quick eye for a soldier," exclaimed Captain Weber. "Yonder ship has indeed filled as you call it; but allow me to tell you, as a general rule, that square-rigged craft brace-up, while fore-and-aft vessels fill, as they have no yards to brace-up."

"That's logical, at all events," answered the soldier.

"Ay, and it's seamanlike," replied Captain Weber. "Fore-and-aft vessels, when hauling to the wind, get a pull at the sheets, so as to get their sails to set flatter; but you are not absolutely wrong, for, after lying to, both square-rigged and fore-and-aft vessels may be said to fill and make sail. Correctly speaking, yonder whaler has braced up her yards."

"We shall near her rapidly then?" inquired the soldier.

"We are running on two converging lines, which at a given point must meet, and if yonder craft wishes to speak us, she will have it in her power to do so," replied the precise old man. "Here's the steward to announce dinner. The wind seems falling, Mr Blount. Shake out the reefs in our topsails, and join us. Come, Captain Hughes, if your appetite is as sharp as your eyes, you won't be sorry to go below."

The momentary bustle consequent on the making sail followed; the deck was then handed over to the second mate, Mr Lowe (for Captain Weber, contrary to the usual rules of the merchant service, had a first and second mate), and all relapsed into the usual silence; the soughing of the wind through the spars and rigging, and the splash of the waves as they struck against the brig's bows, alone breaking the silence. The stars peeped out, the wind falling with the setting sun, while, as the brig was running free, the motion was slight. Now and then the ship's bell rang out on the still night air, marking the passing hours, and the monotonous tread of the officer in charge as he paced the deck, with occasionally a loud laugh from the men forward, was heard.

Mr Lowe's watch was just ending, and the clear silver tones of the bell had rang out eight times, when the first mate stopped in his walk, looking at the binnacle light, "Have you remarked that red star yonder, Mr Lowe?" asked the old salt at the helm.

"No, Adams; what do you make of it?" replied the officer, turning towards the point indicated.

"Leastways, I don't think it's a star. Shouldn't that whaling chap be down yonder away, sir?"

The second mate took the night-glass, and was in the act of adjusting it, when a bright vivid flame shot up from the sea, and the black hull and spars of a large ship were distinctly seen vomiting forth a volcano of flame; then a low smothered thud came booming over the ocean, and for an instant all was dark and silent. It was but for a few seconds, however, for then a small quivering point of flame danced on the waves; it spread, increasing rapidly in volume; the red light ran up the ropes and rigging of the ship, which was only a few miles to leeward of the "Halcyon." Her sails, one by one, caught fire, while explosion after explosion followed, and by the lurid glare the crew of the doomed craft might be seen moving about in helpless confusion.

"Starboard—starboard, you may, Adams." It was Captain Weber who spoke. "Lay her head straight for the wreck. Take a pull at the weather-sheets and haulyards, my lads. Cheerily, so—steady, Adams—steady. Get the royals on her, Mr Lowe. Watch and idlers, make sail."

It was a splendid but a terrible sight, as the "Halcyon," under her additional sail, plunged through the long seas, straight for the burning ship. Soon the cries of the men on board her could be heard, and the mainmast fell. The flames rose some two hundred feet into the air, the sea being lighted up all round, while slowly surging through the ocean came the dark hull of the "Halcyon," all possible sail set, on her mission of mercy.

Nearer and nearer came the brig.

"See," said Captain Weber, pointing with his hand, "the boats have been blown away, and the poor fellows have no means of leaving the wreck."

"Ay, and she must have powder on board, for the hatchways are blown off, and the solid timbers of her decks forced up."

At this moment a fresh and fiercer burst of flame shot up into the air, and the crew of the burning vessel could be seen jumping into the waves. It was but a choice of deaths, the fierce volcano under foot, or the surging waves around. Captain Weber stamped with impatience; his clipper brig had never seemed to him to move so slowly, and yet every sail drew, and the green water swirled under her counter as she cut her way through the seas.

The ship was a complete wreck, her cargo was on fire, there were not any boats; and a few men, clinging to some spare spars, which had been thrown overboard evidently with the intention of making a raft, were now all that were left to be saved.

Suddenly she gave one heavy lurch, and went down head foremost, leaving what remained of her crew floating on the waste of waters. “See the boats all clear, Mr Lowe; burn a blue light on the forecastle, and have every man at his post ready to hand the royals and heave the brig to.”

Hardly had the words been spoken by Captain Weber when a shriek of anguish rose from the ocean. The cargo of the doomed ship had been composed of naphtha, and now all at once it rose to the surface, spreading over the waves and burning furiously. The sailors on the spars were floating in a sea of fire, and a wail of anguish was given out by the perishing men. It was a fearful sight as the brig rapidly neared the fiery spot on the black ocean, the sharp death-cries ceasing as the fierce flame circled round the unhappy crew. Minutes seemed hours; and discipline was for the moment lost on board, her crew crowding the gangways, and shouting to the perishing men words of encouragement. The oldest sailor there had never before witnessed such a sight as that presented by this red seething sea of flame, with the writhing forms of the crew of the lost ship perishing miserably before their eyes.

“Silence, fore and aft!” shouted Captain Weber. “Heave to, Mr Blount. Stand by to lower away the cutter. Hold on with the blue light, Mr Lowe, until the boat is lowered.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” answered the mate; and then his voice was heard over the creaking of the tackles, the soughing of the breeze, giving the necessary words of command, and before the cutter was ready to be lowered the bows of the “Halcyon” sheered up into the wind, her royals were let fly, her fore and mainsail hung flapping in the brails, and the brig was rising and falling on the waves under her foretopsail, jib, and boom-mainsail.

“Hush,” said the captain, after the cutter had pulled some distance from the brig’s sides, “hush, I thought I heard a hail.”

The men lay on their oars, the blazing light had gone out as suddenly as it had been kindled, and the long swell of the ocean tossed the small boat to and fro under the starlight as though she were a plaything. The blue light was burning on the “Halcyon’s” forecastle, giving her a ghastly and spectrelike appearance, lighting up her spars, sails, and rigging, and casting a strange glare on the sea around.

“Brig ahoy! brig ahoy!” came from out the darkness.

“Hallo! give way, my lads,” and on went the cutter, the stout ash staves bending as the men forced her through the water.

“Brig ahoy!” came the feeble shout, and giving the cutter a yaw to port her bows, grazed a large spar, while the bowman holding on with his boat-hook, the forms of two men were seen lashed to it. They were soon hauled on board, and the cutter again in motion. For fully an hour did Captain Weber row over the spot, but uselessly. There were remains of wreck, of broken, half-charred planks and shattered timbers; but, with the exception of these, and the two men first met with, not a vestige of the stately ship remained.

“Fill and make sail, Mr Blount,” said the captain, as he once more put his foot on the quarter-deck; “send those two poor fellows below, and let my steward see to their comfort. We will hear their tale presently.”

“Had we not better lie to till morning; may there not yet be some other survivor?”

“Not a chance. I have pulled round the whole spot over and over again. We have done all we can do. Lay her head again for Delagoa Bay,” replied Captain Weber, as he went below, and so the yards

were braced round, the courses sheeted home, the royals once more set, and with a fair wind the brig found herself, when morning dawned, seventy miles from the scene of the late disaster. The horizon was clear, not a sail being in sight; the whistling of the wind, the scream of the gulls, which were now wheeling round the brig, showing the proximity to land, those and the whish of the breaking wave being the only noises heard. The decks had been holystoned, the sailors were busy coiling down spare ropes or cleaning the brasswork, which was already as bright as could be, and the regular step of the officer of the watch could be heard as he paced the quarter-deck by those below.

The party in the cabin consisted of Captain Weber, his first officer, his passenger, and the master of the "Argonaut," the ship which had been burned at sea the previous night. Of the whole crew the captain and one seaman only had been saved.

Sad enough he looked as he sat at the well-furnished breakfast-table, his hair singed with fire, and his right arm in a sling.

"We were bound for England, and our cargo consisted of five hundred barrels of naphtha," he said, in reply to a question addressed to him by the first officer of the "Halcyon."

"Why were you lying to when we first sighted you?" asked Captain Weber, "I thought our cargo had shifted a little in the late gale, and I had been overhauling it. That night I was seated with my first mate in the cabin when a furious explosion shook the ship. I was thrown down, and how long I remained insensible I don't know. When I did come to I found myself surrounded with wreck, everything smashed, the bulkheads driven in, and the ship split in her waterway. Hardly had I realised the extent of the misfortune when the cry of fire was heard. In a moment the remainder of the naphtha was in flames, and I had hardly time to get on deck."

"And the boats?" asked Captain Hughes.

"Blown to chips," was the reply. "I ordered the mainmast to be cut away, but the flames were too quick for us, and all we could do was to cut adrift the mainboom. I and Miller managed to reach it. The ship was now burning fore and aft, and presently, as you saw, went down bodily, the whole of the naphtha rising to the surface in a sea of flame. I saw many of my poor fellows swim in this bath of fire. My mate and steward went down beside me. The cook had lashed himself to a piece of wreck, and for a quarter of an hour I heard his cries, then they ceased suddenly. The rest you know."

A bustle on deck, a loud shout, and then a voice repeating the welcome words, "Land ho!" disturbed the breakfast party, who hurried up the hatchway, the poor, spirit-broken master of the "Argonaut" alone remaining below. What to him was land? He had no ship, no crew to care for. The fierce flame and the seething ocean had brought him ruin.

The wind was now well abaft the beam, and even to those on deck the long cloud-like outline of land was soon, visible, as, every sail set that would draw, the brig worked her way on, rising and falling on the long seas, now rolling heavily to leeward as she sank in the green trough, now lifting on the surging wave and heeling over as her loftier canvas felt the full force of the breeze, until she showed her bright clean copper nearly to her keel, only the next moment to dash her wedge-like bows into the foam, sending the glittering particles high into the air, deluging the forecastle with green water, as she drove onward towards land. Above, the bright clear sky of an African day; the gulls and the Mother Carey's chickens wheeling and circling round the masts. Captain Weber, proud of his brig, felt she was doing her best, while by his side walked the captain of the "Argonaut," sad and dispirited, his one hand thrust deeply into his pocket, the other supported by a sling, his burned hair and scorched face looking melancholy even beneath the bright sunshine. To Captain Hughes, the long cloud-like line of the coast was a promised land, where the mighty elephant, the lordly lion, and the fierce rhinoceros waited him; and so the day wore on, and afternoon came.

"Watch and idlers, shorten sail! In royals, start tacks and sheets!" and soon the fore and main-royals were flying loosely in the wind, and the ready seamen busy securing the flapping canvas.

Broad on the port bow the high land of Cape Colato could be seen, as well as a lower bluff stretching away as it were to meet it, but failing in its object, leaving an opening between the two headlands, thus forming the harbour called Delagoa Bay, for which port the "Halcyon" was bound.

On she flew, the wind freshening and the green waves seeming to lift the brig forward on her ocean path. "Let fly the top-gallant sheets," and soon the yards slowly settled down. "Take the foresail off her, Mr Blount. Forward there, see the anchor all clear." The cheerful "Ay, ay, sir," came back in reply to the loud tone of command from the quarter-deck; for much as a sailor loves his ship, he is always pleased at the sight of the port for which that ship is bound; and now the small island of Inyak, nestled within the bay, and the houses of the town, with their light verandahs and white walls, were seen plainer and plainer, seeming to rise like a mirage from the sea, as the entrance to the bay was opened. The brig's helm being jammed hard down, the graceful craft flew up into the wind with a broad sheer, and soon she rose and fell on the waves under her main-topsail, jib, and boom-mainsail, her foresail hanging in the brails, and her foretopsail still flying loose. A puff of white smoke from her bows followed, and a small flag run up in the shape of a ball, and only breaking when it reached its position aloft, was the signal for the pilot, which was soon answered: a minute black speck, now mounting on the seas, now disappearing in the deep trough, telling of the signal being seen and complied with.

Glad to reach the land he had so long looked forward to, and yet at the same time sorry to leave companions whose life, perils, and pleasures he had shared for two months, Captain Hughes stood watching the shore-boat as it pulled towards the ship.

"You'll be glad to land, Captain," said a voice by his side, and as he turned, he saw close to him, leaning over the bulwarks, the melancholy-looking master of the burned ship.

"Well, yesterday I would have said 'Yes,' and somehow to-day I must say 'No'," replied Hughes.

"Ay, ay," struck in Captain Weber, as he passed in his quarter-deck walk, taking off his seaman's cap and pushing back the long white hair from his weather-tanned forehead, "you are as much a sailor as you are a soldier. Well, I shall work the old bark up the coast, trading here and there, I have still some months to spare, for mine is a three-year voyage, and if you are for a passage home before we leave, look out for the 'Halcyon.'"

"I'll land here, and work my way to London," said the captain of the "Argonaut."

"No, no, old fellow, we must not part so, I picked you up floating on a loose spar, and I am not going to cut you adrift. Take share and share with me, and our return voyage will be all the merrier."

The old man shook his head, for the loss of his ship and the fearful fate of his crew, who had perished before his eyes by a death so terrible and so totally unforeseen, had shaken his intellects, and from a bold, daring seaman, he had in one night become completely changed.

Captain Weber saw this, and with his usual kindness of heart pitied his less fortunate brother, as, taking his arm, he led him away, the two diving below to seek consolation in the seaman's universal panacea—a glass of grog, leaving Captain Hughes gazing over the sea, and wondering why he was not pleased to land.

The creaking of the oars in the rowlocks was soon heard, as the shore-boat, impelled by the efforts of four powerful men, came sweeping up on the brig's quarter. A rope was hove, and a half-naked Malay catching at the lee shrouds, as the "Halcyon" heeled over, swung himself on board, losing as he did so his high conical hat, which, with a scanty covering round the waist, formed his only clothing.

"Up with the helm, ease off the jib sheets, fill the main-topsail," were the words of command given the moment the Malay pilot touched the deck and walked aft. The brig's head paid off, her sails filled, and, gathering headway, she once more surged through the seas, running slowly into the bay, and ultimately dropping her anchor not more than fifty yards from the town, where she was quickly surrounded by a whole fleet of shore-boats, eager to sell fresh vegetables, bread, or anything else saleable.

The Lioness of Zoutpansburgh

It was a glorious April morning, and the scene was pleasant enough on the banks of the Limpolulo, not far from a small kraal of native huts called Origstadt, where a tributary stream runs into the river. A light subaltern's tent, with its single pole, was pitched under a clump of spreading trees; close to it stood a waggon, with a hooped tilt and strong canvas covering, while fourteen powerful oxen were browsing near. Behind the tent two horses were picketed. Seven men were variously employed, some cutting wood for the fire, which blazed up merrily under a tree, some cooking, and others mending the heavy harness, in readiness for the morrow's march. On a branch near, hung the carcase of a fat eland, from which animal a strongly built Hottentot was employed cutting a large slice with his long sharp knife. In front of the tent, with a couple of Madras cowrie baskets at his feet, busily engaged sponging out a rifle, Captain Hughes was seated. There was not much water in the river, though there had been trouble enough in crossing it the day before with the waggon, on account of the huge boulders of stone rolled down during the rainy season. A rich plain stretched away towards the mountains, which were those of the Drakenburgh range, and the course of the river, as it wound here and there, could be easily marked until it was lost in the thick woods near the hills. Unlike the vast dried up plains of India, this African land was undulating, dotted with clumps of trees and covered with grass, which here and there near the river grew to a great height. A conical hill, called the Silver Mountain, rose about ten miles away, and beyond the Drakenburgh range lay the country ruled by the powerful native chief Mozelkatse. In the trees by the water side the parrots were screaming and chattering, and some beautiful squirrels were playing among the branches or chasing each other in the sunshine.

A deep dead silence reigned around, broken only by the murmur of the water, the occasional scream of the parrots, and the hum of the mosquitoes, which were so numerous on the banks of the Limpolulo as to be nearly unendurable even to the practised Indian. A more peaceful scene could not be imagined, when suddenly the silence was broken, and a long peculiar melancholy cry came floating on the breeze.

Starting up, his rifle in two pieces in his hand, the soldier listened eagerly. The men had evidently heard it too, for their chattering ceased; the tall, powerful Kaffir, who had been cutting up the eland, pausing with the knife between his teeth, a large lump of meat in either hand, and his head bent on one side, in an attitude of deep attention, a perfect bronze statue. An interval of silence intervened, and then once more the same prolonged, tremulous, far distant cry came floating as it were down on the breeze.

"No Zulu cry that, master," said Luji, dropping, as he spoke, the knife from between his teeth, and his frame relaxing from its stiffened position of intense listening. Again the tremulous cry came, sounding so far away that even in that clear air it seemed as though the final notes of the word coooi, long dwelt upon, alone reached the river bank.

"I have it, Luji!" suddenly exclaimed Hughes. "Put that venison down, get your rifle, and follow me." The Kaffir obeyed, dropping the two huge lumps of meat into a cauldron, which, half filled with mealies, was destined to make a stew for the twelve o'clock meal, and then deliberately washing his hands in the water, he went to the waggon, disappeared under the tilt for a moment, and soon stood by his master's side, armed with a heavy rifle.

"What master think the cry?" he asked.

"I think it is the Australian bush cry, which I never heard before, but which I have read of; and if I am right there must be a European, not able to find our camp."

Luji, as has already been said, was a Hottentot, and a true type of his class. He was not brave to rashness, but was a merry, careless fellow, ever ready for anything, and reckless and improvident to a degree seldom equalled. He was no beauty, his woolly hair surmounting a yellow-black face,

ornamented by a mouth large enough to suffice for even his enormous appetite. High cheek-bones, the elongated eyes peculiar to his race set widely apart, a broad powerful chest, and sinewy limbs, complete the portrait.

He was faithful, very idle, and a fair shot. Merry as a child when pleased, but if wronged or annoyed, passionate and revengeful. He spoke the language of the Zulu Kaffirs, had a fair smattering of English, and was a good cook.

Over-readiness with his long knife was a fault in him, and had already given much trouble. The rest of the men were Kaffirs and Bechuanas, one of them named Noti being a good shot, and a well-known hunter; and all were picked men, models of manly beauty cast in bronze.

Restless, active, and unused to control, the whole band were difficult to manage, but far above the average stamp of their class,—waggon, horses, and men having been carefully selected by the Government Agent on the Zulu frontier, one who had enjoyed a long experience in the country.

So long as the way lay across the plain, all was simple enough, and the two followed a sort of rough trampled path made by the antelope. Now dipping into a deep hollow where the grass grew luxuriantly, now topping a gentle rise, and pausing to listen for the direction whence came the guiding cry, they neared the forest-land at the foot of the mountain range of the Drakenburgh. Troops of eland crossed their path from time to time, but their minds being pre-occupied with the thought of some danger abroad, these were not molested. At last, just after having mounted the slope of one of the undulating rises, they entered upon a green plain, where, feeding about a hundred yards away, were a herd of antelope, such as Captain Hughes had not yet met with. They were of a grey colour, while a narrow white line, taking its origin between the shoulders, ran to the base of the tail, following exactly the vertebral column.

From this line seven or eight others of a similar colour ran downwards towards the belly. The horns were beautifully twisted, like corkscrews, and the grey colour of the face was broken by an angular white bar. Shading his eyes with his hand, Hughes gazed at these graceful antelope.

“They are koodoos, master,” whispered Luji.

The herd was led by a noble buck, and showed no fear, approaching the two strange figures with signs of great curiosity. Advancing to within thirty paces, they stood still and gazed. No sportsman could resist the opportunity, and as they turned to fly the report of the rifle was heard, and the buck, which stood at least four feet high, bounded into the air and fell dead, the ball having entered just behind the shoulder. Leaving it where it lay right in their return path, the remainder of the herd having galloped away at a tremendous pace, the rifle was again loaded, and the two pursued their way. They had advanced about six miles across the plain, hearing the cry from time to time, and replying, when suddenly it ceased, just as their onward path seemed barred by a closely set forest of mahunoo trees, with an undergrowth of dwarf acacia and tangled creepers. It seemed impossible to pass, but at length, after long search, the dry bed of a stream was found, up which there seemed a chance of progressing. Slowly and with much difficulty they made their way on; sometimes crawling on hands and knees, dragging their rifles after them, and winning patiently yard by yard; at others fairly stopped by masses of rock, and forced to cut their way through the spiky branches of the mimosa, bound together with the wild vines and creeping cane-like plants. For fully half a mile did the two thus work their way onwards, their clothes torn and their hands bleeding. The cry had come from the thicket, and yet further progress seemed hopeless, and they were fairly exhausted. Pausing to rest, the deep stillness of the African plain seemed oppressive, when suddenly Luji put his black hand on the Captain’s shoulder, wildly signing to him to listen, his great mouth working convulsively. Nothing was to be seen as they crouched in the bed of the stream, and, for Hughes at least, nothing to be heard. A few seconds passed thus, when, from the tree tops, the long, plaintive, trembling cry peculiar to the Australian bushranger came, quivering and undulating through the air. There was no mistake now; it was close to them, whatever it was; and sounded like the cry of some enormous bird in pain. Luji seemed dreadfully agitated, and then for the first time, his hearing sharpened by his position,

the soldier could distinguish sounds the more practised Hottentot had heard before. The noise was that of bones being crunched by powerful teeth. This then was the meaning of the long mournful cry which had come sweeping down to them on the banks of the Limpolulo, and perhaps it was over the remains of a fellow creature some savage animals were holding high carnival. The soldier's blood ran cold as his imagination pictured the scene passing close to him, while Luji's eyes seemed to roll in their sockets as he gesticulated wildly and signed to his master to retreat, hoarsely muttering in his ear, "Lions, master; two, three lions!"

Gently putting aside the brushwood which seemed to bar all onward progress, while he trailed his gun after him, Captain Hughes advanced up the bed of the stream. There was stern resolution in the knit brow and firmly compressed lips. The tangled bushes closed after him, and the great powerful Hottentot turned, to work his way back, leaving his master to face the danger alone. Once the man hesitated, turned again, took two or three paces, as if to follow, and then stopped. At this moment a tremendous roar rang through the thicket. It decided the matter, and Luji never halted until he gained the edge of the mahunoo grove, and, rifle in hand, climbed up a tree, where he sat patiently waiting the *dénouement*.

Foot by foot, yard by yard, the more determined soldier now alone worked his way on, the growlings and snappings growing more and more distinct, until at last he reached the foot of a large "masuku" tree, whose roots ran down the bank into the bed of the stream, the action of running water having bared them. Suddenly a roar which sounded close to him made him crouch down. It was the same which had decided Luji's retreat. He almost fancied the beating of his own heart could be heard, mixed with the snarling and snapping of some wild animals, and the rending of flesh. His breath seemed to come quick, as, grasping the tap-root of the tree with the left hand, slowly and cautiously he raised himself to a level with the bank. It was a splendid sight for an African hunter. An open space in the bush lay before him, and at the further end, where a narrow path seemed to lead into the forest, lay the headless and torn carcase of a horse. An English saddle with its broken girths had fallen from its back, while to the right an enormous lioness, turned from him, was gently moving her tail to and fro like a great cat, as she contemplated her two cubs rending the dead horse.

Slowly and with great care bringing up his rifle, the hunter aimed deliberately behind the shoulder, knowing that there the shot must prove mortal, the lioness not being ten paces away as he pulled the trigger. Hearing some noise, the watchful animal sprang up just as the report rang out, and the ball, striking too low, instead of killing, wounded her. The next moment lioness and man were rolling together at the bottom of the gully, the growl of the wounded animal ringing savagely among the rocks and bushes. Gripping the helpless hunter by the shoulder, the lioness sprang with him up the bank. The trusty rifle lay at the bottom of the nullah, but still the man did not lose his presence of mind. The pistols at his belt might yet serve him. Slipping his hand down, he found they were gone, doubtless dropped also in the nullah, and then only a shout of agony came from his lips as he found himself, helpless and defenceless, a prey to the lioness.

Her eyes seemed to gleam with fury as she looked into his. Oh, the agony of that moment, as, bleeding and impotent, his head pressed against her shaggy neck, he was dragged up the bank, bodily, the sharp fangs meeting in the flesh of the shoulder. Reaching the open, the great brute for an instant relaxed her hold, probably only to secure a firmer grip, and the unfortunate hunter fell to the ground. Placing her huge paw on the prostrate man's breast, she looked upwards and growled savagely. The sharp ring of a heavy rifle seemed to mix with the voice of the lioness, and a stream of warm blood deluged the face and breast of the fallen hunter, as the whole weight of the dying animal fell upon and almost crushed him, while consciousness, for the first time in his life, departed.

"Her head was within a foot of you when I fired," were the first words which greeted his ears as he revived, and saw a stranger standing beside him, endeavouring to drag away the carcass. The cubs had bolted precipitately at the first shot, and presently Luji, who had heard the double report, coming cautiously up, the hunter was freed from the weight of the dead animal, a hole was scooped

in the sandy bed of the nullah, some fresh water procured, and, some hours afterwards, the two who had thus strangely met were comfortably seated outside the little tent on the forks of the Limpolulo, discussing the eland and mealie stew which had been prepared for dinner.

"A curious situation for you, a missionary, to be in," said Hughes, continuing a conversation which the process of dinner-eating had interrupted.

"Curious enough, and not a very pleasant one," returned the new comer. "I was returning from the country of the Matlokotlopo, where I had been to find the chief Mozelkatse, without whose permission I knew it would be useless for me to attempt penetrating further."

This new comer was of German origin, though his name smacked more of Polish or Hungarian ancestry. He was a man evidently past his prime, and his spare muscular frame, his dark hair slightly flecked here and there with grey, his sunken cheeks and high cheek-bones, told of years of care, hardship, and, perhaps, of dangers bravely faced; while the bright, black, restless eyes, the broad, high forehead, the finely chiselled lines of the mouth, and the firm erect carriage, promised intellectual intelligence, combined with a determined spirit, well calculated to cope with the chances of a life such as he was evidently leading.

"Is this, like my own, your first trial of life on the plains of South Africa? If so we have begun well," asked Hughes.

"Oh, I could tell you of many a tale of life among the savages of the Pacific, and of years passed with the hardly more civilised tribes of North-Western India, and my very object here shows that I am not at my maiden essay," replied Wyzinski, laughing. "Shall I tell you the history of the land, and my own views at the same time?"

"Let us light our pipes first, and have some more wood thrown on the fire. Hallo what's all that?" said Hughes, laughing.

What was it, indeed? for on the evening breeze there came sounds of talking and laughter, and soon, over the plain, streamed the missionary's followers, at once swelling the party to fourteen. With them were Luji and the carcasses of the lioness and the koodoo, flung across a horse, and as evening drew on there was high feasting in the camp on the forks of the Limpolulo. Meat was plentiful, and the new comers gorged themselves with it, singing, laughing, and dancing round the camp fires. The lioness was skinned, and its hide stretched out on the branches of a tree; the stars came out, and as they did so the plains around woke into life. The cries of the jackals, the hyenas, and the deer, came on the night air, and once or twice, too, a far away low rumble told of the lion in the distant mountains, seeking, perhaps, his dead mate. The air was warm and pleasant, as, reclining by the fire in front of the tent, Hughes and the missionary talked on far into the night.

"You are among a strange nation," continued the latter. "The first history of the Zulus is that, in the year 1810, they conquered the land, but where the nation came from or how it originated no one knows. It sprang suddenly into notice under their King Chaka, who knew something of military training, and brought his army into a high state of discipline. After he had reigned thirteen years, his brother Dingaan murdered him and then ascended the throne. This wily savage at once opened out the country to the European traders and to us missionaries, and the result was that the English annexed that part of the land now called Natal. In 1829 another brother of the murdered Chaka revolted, avenged his death by killing Dingaan, and under the title of King Panda mounted the throne. He is now a very old man, some say one hundred years of age, and a very enlightened monarch, only he won't let any one penetrate into the interior."

"And why should you wish so strongly to get into the interior?" asked Hughes. "Is your object to found new missions, or are you seeking a crown of martyrdom?"

"Neither one nor the other," replied the missionary, "and I must go back some six hundred and thirty years before the birth of our Saviour, to explain my object to you."

"Go ahead!" said Hughes.

"Well, then, about that period, Pharaoh Necho was king of Egypt, and he collected a large fleet, consisting of one hundred ships, great and small, in the Red Sea, and if he had not done this, you and I would not be talking at this moment on the banks of the Limpolulo."

"I don't exactly see what the Egyptian king has to do with the matter. Listen, Wyzinski, there's the lion again!"

"Well, King Necho's fleet sailed right into the Southern Ocean, until winter came with its cold and storms, against which the frail ships of that day could not contend. They then ran for the nearest harbour, and the crews landing tilled the soil until the fine season came round again. Then, reaping their crops, with a well-filled hold they made sail for other lands, and thus those adventurous seamen roamed about the then unknown ocean, passing Aden, Zanzibar, and Mozambique, and on one occasion wintering in a beautiful inlet hereaway to the northward, called Santa Lucia Bay."

"And were none of the ships lost?" asked Hughes.

"Some on this very coast," replied Wyzinski; "and their crews, unable to return to Egypt, settled in this land, and it is believed by many, by none more firmly than myself, that the present race of Zulus, incontestably the finest in Southern Africa, sprang from the fusion of Pharaoh's seamen with the then cultivators of the soil. Others go further still, and say that this now almost savage land was the ancient Ophir, discovered by Pharaoh's fleet, and from which at a later period the ships of Tarshish drew gold, cedar-wood, and precious stones. Some of our brethren who have dwelt long in the land tell of a geological stratum promising great mineral wealth."

"Then you are in search of gold?" asked Hughes, with a slight curl of the lip, for he could not help, when gazing on the intelligent face of the man before him lighted up by the fitful gleams of the fire, regretting that a missionary should show such a thirst for gold.

"Diamonds, gold, and precious stones are said to exist, as also vast forests of ebony and cedar-trees," continued the missionary, gazing abstractedly into the fire; "but with these revelations came strange tales as to the existence of ruined cities almost swallowed up by giant forest growth; the remains of a mighty but extinct race, said to lie three weeks' journey to the north and west of our settlement at Santa Lucia Bay. It is these ruins I seek."

"And Mozelkatse's pass is necessary to reach them?" asked Hughes.

"Yes! will you join me in the search?" replied the missionary, eagerly, pausing for a while as the other looked moodily into the embers without replying; and then continuing, "I must not deceive you as to the difficulty and even the danger of the search. Efforts have already been made to reach the ruins, and they have ever failed. The jealous care of the native chiefs surrounds them with attributes of sanctity; the terrible tetse-fly haunts the country; and the waggons must be left behind. There are danger and difficulty in the path, but it is one which has never yet been trodden by European foot. Up to the present moment all efforts made to penetrate the country have failed, and the old temples and palaces of a once glorious race, if indeed they do exist, serve as a den for the beasts of prey, or a refuge for the hardly less savage Kaffir."

The missionary's pale face and sunken cheek was lighted up with an enthusiastic glow. The scene was a strange one, the dancing firelight, the blue sky overhead, the far-away ghostlike outline of the mountains, the loud laughter of the Kaffirs, as they gorged themselves with eland and koodoo meat, the white tent gleaming under the starlight, and the strange cries of the wandering inhabitants of the African plain. Then, too, the words, "difficulty and danger." Could he refuse to share them with the man who had that day saved his life?

He struck his hand into the missionary's opened and muscular palm.

"Willingly I will go with you, sharing your danger, your triumph, or your defeat. But what about the pass from Mozelkatse? Did you obtain it?" he asked.

"No. As I told you, I was returning from the country of the Matlokotlopo, where I had been for the purpose. I had left my people at Zoutpansburgh to follow me, and came on alone, intending to camp on the banks of this river. In the grey of the morning I was waylaid by the lioness, and rode

for my life. In the open I held my own easily, but once entangled in the bush, was forced to leave my horse, and had barely time to climb a tree, losing everything save my rifle. The lioness pulled down my horse in a moment, and her cubs soon joined her. My rifle was a single one, while all my powder and ball were left in my holsters. I tried the cry used in the Australian bush, reserving my fire until the last moment. The rest you know."

"But what about Mozelkatse? On your own showing, it is useless to proceed unless you have his protection," asked Hughes.

"He is to be back in seven days, having left his kraal, on a grand hunting expedition, at the foot of yonder mountains, and he sent me a messenger saying he would be glad to meet me," replied the missionary.

"Then there are seven days for me to get rid of the marks of that confounded lioness. Good-night, Wyzinski; it is getting late, and my day has been rather an exciting one."

Mozelkatse

Thanks to a vigorous constitution and to temperate habits, wounds which might have been troublesome under a warm climate soon closed, and though for days the torn shoulder gave a good deal of pain, yet it rapidly healed. Game was plentiful, and the koodoos easily approached, so that Luji and the Kaffir Noti kept the camp provisioned during the week the tent remained pitched on the banks of the Limpolulo until a runner from Mozelkatse arrived, summoning the travellers to meet him at Zoutpansburgh, then a native kraal of some importance, about twenty miles to the northward and westward, on a spur of the Drakenburgh range. The life was a pleasant one. The breakfast round the remains of the camp fire. The loud shouts of the men as they chased and harnessed the lazy oxen. The cracking of the long whip as the lumbering waggon moved off. The mount and the gallop over the plain, with herds of deer flying before the hunters. The dinner under some spreading tree, the house on wheels, oxen and men around it. The tales told round the blaze, as the difficulties of the day were discussed, and those of the morrow canvassed; and then the sound sleep so well earned by fatigue. The evening of the seventh day after the affair with the lioness, the party outspanned at the foot of the mountain range, close to the native kraal Zoutpansburgh, the morrow being fixed by Mozelkatse for the audience.

The morning came, bright, warm, and glorious, as usual, and the little camp was early astir.

The interview was an important one. The name of Mozelkatse was known all through the land, and his power was great. So implicitly did his people believe in him, that they actually asserted that it was he who had made the moon and the sun, and it was utterly useless to attempt to proceed without his authority. Captain Hughes had been furnished by his relative with a letter to this potentate, and both he and the missionary had resolved that unless the reply given was encouraging they would not go on. It was, therefore, not without some anxiety as to the result, that orders were given to all the men to dress themselves out in any little finery they possessed, an English Union Jack was mounted on a lance, and, the one dressed in the time-stained uniform of the gallant 150th Regiment, the other in his priestly robes, took their way, followed by their men, to the enclosure where the king was to receive them, deeming themselves lucky in that the hunting party had led the chief in their direction to this outlying village, and so spared them a long journey to his capital. They saw but few of Mozelkatse's personal guards, most of the motley tribe through which they took their way, preceded by Luji as standard-bearer, being natives belonging to the outlying tribe, and as they gained the enclosure, which was at the same time council chamber and reception hall, the gathering seemed a numerous one, for there were upwards of a hundred braves then present, and the number was rapidly increasing. A covering of skins was fastened round the waist of each, and broad rings of copper were worn round the arms and ankles of the chiefs. A plume of feathers adorned the heads of the principal men, while, hanging behind, somewhat after the fashion of a Hungarian pelisse, each warrior wore a panther or other similar skin. The array of dusky savages looked imposing enough, and all were well armed. The left hand supported a shield of tanned buffalo hide, surmounted with plumes of ostrich feathers. The same hand grasped a long spear, while the right firmly held a short stout stick with a heavy knob. Round the neck was a necklace, from which hung a dagger, while the short beard, grizzly black moustache, and clean cut limbs, made Mozelkatse's braves look formidable as they closed in, forming a circle round the visitors, whose flag waved from the end of an assegai planted in the centre of the circle. The enclosure itself was formed of the branches of the mimosa, strongly and tightly interlaced, and from the height on which it stood, a magnificent view of the plain below, watered by the Limpopo, was obtained. All round were situated the huts of the tribe, looking like beehives, and near each a little walled space, wherein was kept their wealth, in the shape of oxen. No women were permitted to enter the enclosure; and hardly were the new comers arrived when Mozelkatse

stalked into the ring. His hut was the only one opening on the enclosure, and a murmur of applause ran through the ranks of his braves as he made his appearance.

In compliment, perhaps, to the tribe, he wore nearly the same dress. Slowly seating himself on a rudely chiselled stone, Mozelkatse glanced around his warriors proudly, without noticing his visitors. He was a man of large size, apparently in the full vigour of his age, and of great muscular development, the colour of his skin alone detracting from his appearance.

There was an air of thought and command in his face, and, unlike his warriors, his hair was thrown back, his broad forehead being encircled with a fillet of ostrich feathers, terminating in a single plume hanging behind.

Heavy rings of highly-polished copper spanned the thick part of the arms, and lighter ones the wrist. The neck was adorned with a necklace, partly formed of bits of gold strung together, from which depended a dagger, and over the broad, hairy, black breast, floated one magnificent ostrich plume. A tawny lion skin was thrown over the stone on which he sat, while a robe of panther skins hung from his waist.

His right hand held the same kind of short stick carried by the warriors, while the left rested on his naked knee. Only that the forehead was rather low, and the mouth too large, Mozelkatse might have passed muster as a splendid specimen of coloured humanity.

A chief named Masheesh now stepped forward and presented the soldier and the missionary to the king, briefly explaining in his own tongue the object which led the strangers to the country. The missionary next addressed the king, asking his acceptance of the presents, which were laid at his feet by Luji, wrapped in an ox hide, the principal object being a handsome pair of pistols, silver-mounted, which seemed to please Mozelkatse. Bowing his head in token of acceptance, the king waved his hand, and two braves stepping forward took up the hide and its contents, conveying them into the king's hut.

Settling himself in his seat, Mozelkatse looked round the circle, and all at once poured forth a torrent of words, which were those of welcome to the white men who had come to see him, ending with a request that they would settle among and trade with his people. The circle of black warriors applauded, striking their shields with their spears, and as their numbers had greatly increased, there not being less than two hundred and fifty armed men in the enclosure, the applause was noisy enough. As it died away, Wyzinski rose and stood before the chief, his clear silvery voice ringing through the enclosure, "Some years since," said he, "I was travelling with my brethren far away on the banks of the Limpopo. I saw much of the various nations around, and by chance met with intelligent men of the tribe which calls Mozelkatse king."

The savage bent his head in token of acknowledgment of the compliment, glancing round the circle of his braves proudly.

"I began," continued Wyzinski, "to speak their language, and as I did so became aware of strange stories as to a spot far away towards the north, where stone buildings exist. One of these I was told was as large as Mozelkatse's kraal, having an opening about half its height, through which they who desire to see the ruins must pass. My Matlokotlopo brethren told also of strange figures cut in stone, and of curiously carved birds also in stone. These houses must have once been the dwellings of the white man, and the legends our fathers have taught tell us of such white men, who came many thousand years since from the regions of the rising sun, landing on these shores. To reach these ruins, to prove that our fathers spoke the truth, is our object, and in the name of our ancestors we ask thy protection, chief."

Drawing his robes round him, Wyzinski sat down, and for fully a minute there was a dead silence.

"The broken huts exist," at length replied the king, "though none of us have ever seen them, and none know what far-away tribe made them. To reach them my white brethren must pass over the vast plains which lie between the Limpopo and the Zambesi, which the foot of the white man has

never yet trod. The elephant and the lion abound there. The savage moohoohoo breed undisturbed, and not less cruel tribes, to whom Mozelkatse's name carries no terror, inhabit them. Let my white brethren stay to hunt, and to trade with us. A party of my braves shall seek the fallen huts and bring back the images."

The rattling sound of the rude applause was once more heard.

"No, chief," replied Wyzinski; "we are not traders. We have turned from our road to ask your aid. Give it, and we shall succeed. The report will go far and wide that through the protection of a great king our fathers' truth has been manifested, and traders will follow in our footsteps. Speed us on our journey, chief."

Mozelkatse did not reply, and for a few moments there was a deep silence. It was broken in a sudden and startling manner. A little man, almost a dwarf, deformed in person and fearfully ugly, leaped into the circle. Executing a wild dance, which he accompanied with shrill screams, he spun round, the warriors crouching down and applauding, not as heretofore with their spears, but by beating on the hard baked ground with their sticks, sometimes altogether, sometimes in an irregular manner.

Stopping as suddenly as he had begun in his mad dance, the sorcerer, for such he was, threw himself violently on the ground at Mozelkatse's feet, breaking as he did so a necklace of bones which he wore round his neck. For the first time the living circle of dusky braves gave way, and all able to do so crowded round the sorcerer, who with fixed and straining eyes was staring at the masses of bones lying here and there, from the position of which the augury was to be drawn. Luckily for the travellers, the omen was tolerably propitious, the seer pronouncing that though there was danger in the path, the white chiefs should return in safety.

The circle was again formed, and a long discussion ensued, in the course of which several of the more noted chiefs joined in, and the result was a mass of evidence as to the existence of ruins somewhere in the neighbourhood of Manica, a country lying to the northward, well watered by tributaries of the Zambesi, all the evidence being however merely hearsay. Eventually the king's aid and protection were promised, and Mozelkatse retired, two braves as he did so advancing, and taking from their sheaths the long glittering knives, performed a curious dance round the strangers, eventually cutting away the grass upon which they had sat, and burying it in a hole under the stone which had served as a throne. This being a ceremony always performed by the chief who wishes to retain the friendship of his visitors, during their temporary absence, was of good augury. The audience was at an end, the king disappearing inside his hut, and the Union Jack being struck, the new comers, escorted by a band of armed braves, singing a monotonous song, and accompanying themselves with the regular but discordant noise of the spears striking against the shields, marched off to the camp, where an ox previously purchased was slaughtered, cut up, and distributed among the braves, the absent but friendly sorcerer not being forgotten.

"A curious interview, Wyzinski and one I am not sorry to have got through," observed Hughes, as the two were seated that evening, near the camp fire.

"At all events, we may look upon the point as gained, and from this day will date our search for the ruined cities of Zulu Land," replied Wyzinski.

The night was dark, and the radius lit up by the blaze was of small extent. Luji and his man had lit their fire under a huge boulder of rock, which had rolled down apparently from the mountain range at whose feet they were encamped. The Matlokotlopo fires could be seen twinkling on the hill-top, and before them lay the plain, watered by the Limpopo, whose sinuous course they had marked, running like a blue thread through the land, from the rude council chamber of the tribe. From the boulder round which the men were squatted came the noise of many tongues, among which that of Luji played a prominent part; away on the plain the jackals and hyenas were to be heard, and the night breeze came rustling the leaves of the tree underneath which the two were talking by the fire.

"How strange," said Hughes, breaking a long silence, "that a land so beautifully situated and so temperate in its climate should be so sparsely populated, and so utterly uncultivated!"

"It won't remain so long," replied the missionary. "Natal is a sugar and coffee producing country, and that of the Zulus must follow. Both possess the inestimable advantage of being perfectly healthy for human beings, the soil is abundantly fertile, and the land is intersected by rivers."

"You are speaking of Natal, but what about this part of the country?"

"Between the Coastland and the Drakenburgh range every variety of tropical and European productions can be cultivated, from the pine apple to the gooseberry, and I have seen wheat, too, unequalled in size and quality, grown near where we now are."

"I thought," replied Hughes, "that wherever the sugar cane prospers the climate is unhealthy?"

"The single exception is that of Natal. The pasture land is eminently adapted for sheep, and nothing but capital is required—capital and labour. As we go more north towards the Zambesi, the nature of the land will alter."

"And Mozelkatse—will he keep his word, think you?"

"He is known for never breaking it," replied the missionary, "he is—." The sentence was not finished, for a black arm and hand seemed to glide out of the darkness, and was laid on the missionary's shoulder.

Starting up, he seized the intruder by the throat, but instantly released him, laughing. It was Masheesh, the Matabele brave, who had presented them that day to Mozelkatse, and as it may be easily imagined that the king, though able to create the sun and moon, was readier with his spear than his pen; the credentials, which were to make his protection of the party known, assumed the tangible form of the chief who thus unceremoniously startled them, and who soon, squatted beside the blaze, proceeded gravely to light his pipe and smoke in silence. The fire grew low, the two Europeans retired into the tent, but Masheesh smoked on quietly and composedly. One by one the Kaffirs and Hottentots lay down, but still the glow of the chief's tobacco could be seen by the fire side. Rising at last, he heaped fresh wood on the embers, and calmly taking his place by the tent door and outside, though he had but to lift it to enter, Masheesh rolled himself in his buffalo hide, and, gorged with meat and tobacco, soon slept as soundly as the rest.

The Matabele Hunt

Masheesh had been deputed by Mozelkatse to accompany them, and there was now nothing to stay their progress northward. The country, too, at the foot of the mountains, was comparatively bare of game, so early the following morning the small party outspanned, and took their way across the plain to strike the banks of the Limpopo.

"How easily the Matabele falls into our ways!" said Wyzinski; as on the morning of the second day after leaving the mountains, the two were riding about half a mile ahead of the waggon, which was coming lumbering along behind them, the shouts of the drivers and the cracking of the long whip reaching their ears.

"It seems strange to see him take the management of our people, and at the same time associate himself with us on a footing of perfect equality," replied Hughes, "he a half-naked and totally uneducated savage."

"Turn it the other way, Hughes; he is a chief in the land, known and respected; we are strangers, with nothing but the white man's prestige placing us at all on the footing of his equal. Masheesh is naturally the leader of our party, and is responsible to his chief for our safety. It is on this I rely."

The Matabele rode well, and he now came dashing along bestriding a small horse which had been given him. He disdained the use of a saddle, and as he came along at full speed, his ostrich feather streaming on the wind, the loose panther skin floating behind, and his long black legs nearly touching the ground, there was something grotesque and yet striking in his appearance. He held his slender assegai in his hand. Dashing up to the two in front, he checked his horse suddenly, bringing it instantly to a standstill, and sending the ground and grit beneath its hoofs flying into the air. Bending down over its shoulder, the savage pointed with the spear head to some marks on the earth, and then looking up into the soldier's face, uttered some words in a low guttural tone, and laughed.

"The track of elephants," said the missionary, who spoke the Zulu tongue, though imperfectly. In a moment Hughes was off his horse, and stooping low as he examined for the first time the footprint of the mighty denizen of the African forests. Masheesh rode on, and in a few moments, a low guttural cry was heard, and the Matabele was seen, halting under a tree, and signing with his spear for the rest to come on. The path had led through a forest, the trees not growing thickly together, but at intervals, and now and then broken by rich undulating plains. Following the direction of the chief's assegai, the two halting by his side under the shade of the mohunno trees, saw stretched before them the winding silver line of the Limpopo, one of the favourite hunting grounds of the Bazizulu.

Herds of antelope, and of hartebeest, were feeding over the vast plain. They could be counted by thousands, and it was indeed a glorious sight for the hunter's eye, that vast undulating plain, whose gentle rises concealed the distance, and were covered with rich pasture, over which were feeding great herds of cattle, who owned no master. About five miles distant the line of the Limpopo bordered by trees, was seen glistening through the foliage as it sparkled in the morning sun. To the right and close to them a large snake was curling along the ground like a big black sinuous branch, making off for the shelter of the wood, while a troop of monkeys over head were grinning and chattering at the intruders, and flights of parrots were screaming among the branches.

A sense of wildness and of vastness creeps over those who look upon these wide plains in their native grandeur and stillness—a feeling of freedom, and of liberty, and at the same time of respect and adoration for the great Creator of all. Deeply feeling this for several minutes, the three gazed in silence, then as the distant shout of the drivers came on the breeze, the nearest troops of antelope stopped feeding, raised their heads, sniffed the air, and moved off—the next taking alarm in the same way—until the whole plain, far as the eye could roam, was covered with droves of antelope, galloping here and there, and crossing each other in wild confusion. It looked like an intricate and mazy dance, the performers in the wild ballet on the plains of South Africa being the antelope.

"His are the cattle on a thousand hills," exclaimed the missionary, breaking silence at last, and reverently uncovering himself.

"Some of them shall be mine before long," replied the matter-of-fact soldier; "if you will get the chief to ride back and stop those fellows shouting."

"I'll do so myself," answered the missionary. "I will halt them here, give you an hour's advance, and then move straight forward for the Limpopo, where we will outspan. We want meat in the camp."

"And shall have it. Come along, Masheesh," cried Hughes, elated beyond measure, and letting the Arab he rode feel the spur, he dashed away followed by the Matabele brandishing his assegai. It looked very easy to procure meat among such countless herds, but an hour of violent exertion proved it was not so. The Arab was untrained, could not be brought to a standstill instantly, and was fidgety, so that it was impossible to aim from the saddle. Shy and timid, the hartebeest moved along in herds seldom exceeding ten in number, ever led by some old and cautious buck.

Of a yellowish orange colour, striped with black under the horns and down the forehead, they had seemed heavy, lumbering animals. The thighs and extremities were tinged with black, and the horns most curiously formed, curving at first backward and outward, but subsequently sweeping inwards, the eyes being like most of the antelope tribe, large and full. Ever on the watch, the hunters quite failed to get near them, and just as after long and cautious labour, they would be almost within shot, away would scamper the herd, in Indian file, and clumsy and ungainly as they were in their movements, all attempts to cut them off utterly failed. Convinced at last of the impossibility, Hughes followed the advice given him by the Matabele, and, dismounting, concealed himself behind a clump of trees, Masheesh, Luji, and others of the hunters who had now found them, making a long sweep to drive the antelope towards him. This at last proved successful.

A herd of hartebeest came cantering along, the leader pausing within ten paces of the clump where he lay hid. The moment sufficed, as a ball crashed through his skull, and he fell heavily, stone dead. The herd instantly turned to fly, but not before another shot had bowled over a second deer.

The buck was a noble animal, measuring seven feet ten inches from the nose to the base of the tail, and carrying a splendid pair of horns, one foot ten inches in height; the second being a female, and consequently much smaller in every respect. The deer were slung across the horses and sent to camp, where they proved a most seasonable supply, and after a rest under the trees the hunters prepared to follow. Before them lay a green rise, hardly to be called a hill, and yet high enough to conceal the country beyond. Masheesh, no longer dressed in his savage finery, but quite nude save a hide girded round his loins, was stalking on some paces in advance, the soldier following and looking with a covetous eye at the troops of deer which he could not approach. Suddenly, Masheesh threw himself flat on his face, as though he had been shot, motioning to the other to do the same. Cautiously and noiselessly the two dragged themselves up the rise, and peeping over its crest, saw spread out before them a rich undulating valley, the grass land broken here and there by groves of mimosa trees, a small river wandering through it on its way to join the Limpopo. The country of the Batonga lay mapped before them, while far to the westward rose the hills of the Drakenburgh range.

Feeding, not five hundred yards from the crest of the rise, was a herd of strange animals. The head and breast had the appearance of buffalo on a small scale, the horns of the males being enormous and very dangerous looking. Twisting spirally downwards when starting from the head, they then curved upwards like a hook. The head and chest were covered with dark shaggy hair, the eyes looking fiercely from under the tangled covering. The shoulders and neck carried a mane like that of a horse, while the remainder of the body and hind quarters were those of a pony, except the tail, which was that of a cow, and the legs, which were those of an antelope.

These strange animals seemed full of fun. Tossing their shaggy, fierce looking heads, one would leave the rest, tear round in a ring at full gallop, and then dash into the centre of the herd, pulling up suddenly.

Captain Hughes seemed lost in contemplation, but Masheesh, laying his hand on his shoulder, signed to him to come away, and both letting themselves slide down the slope, the herd remained quite unconscious of their presence.

The two were silent for some time, but when the savage deemed they were far enough distant to allow of it without giving the alarm, he spoke rapidly enough. Luji coming up at the moment, Hughes learned that the strange animals were gnus, and a whispered conversation followed, it being agreed that under cover of the crest, or green ridge, Hughes and Masheesh should gain the outlet of the valley, while Luji and Noti were to make a long détour, and coming down the wind, drive the herd before them.

The savage carefully posted his companion, and then pointing to a bend in the valley, about forty paces distant, uttered some sentences volubly, and going away buried himself in a neighbouring thicket. All seemed dead silence, and the watcher soon grew weary of it. A quarter dragged itself on into half an hour, and still nothing save the deep silence of the African plain. Suddenly the soldier who had been watching the serried ranks of the ants as they marched along in countless numbers, ever in a straight line, became conscious of a clump of bushes, at the bend of the valley to which Masheesh had pointed, which certainly was not there a quarter of an hour before. The bush had a curious motion, and Captain Hughes concluded there was some wild animal concealed therein—a lion probably, watching the distant herd, and by its presence hindering the gnus coming. His rifle on full cock, firmly grasped in his hands, he eagerly watched the bush. Yes, it certainly moved, slowly but surely.

Raising the deadly rifle, the hunter took a deliberate aim right into its centre. Just as the finger was about to pull the trigger, the thought flashed over him, that if it concealed a lion and the fire were not fatal, the risk would be great. Lowering the weapon, he watched the bush intently, determining to wait till the lion made its spring, or to fire if he could get a glimpse of the animal. An hour had passed, and the temptation returned in full force.

The dead deep silence weighed upon him, the strange motions of the bush made him nervous. Again the rifle was raised, when a loud trampling noise was heard, as with their heads down and their spiral horns glittering in the sun, the troop of gnus came on at top speed. A more ferocious-looking lot could hardly be imagined, as they headed dead down the valley. Still the hunter's attention was divided, and more engrossed with the bush than with the game. The gnus rapidly neared it, urged on by the shouts of Noti, while Luji's voice was plainly to be heard far away in rear. They were close to it; about to pass in safety, when a piercing yell rang from the bush, and a bright spear glancing in the sunshine struck the leading gnu, while Masheesh, casting his leafy covering, sprang to his feet. The report of the soldier's rifle followed, and one of the herd rolled heavily forward, breaking its horns in the impetus of the fall. The animal struck by the spear halted at once, stamping violently with its forefoot, and lowering its head for the charge. The savage stood awaiting it, his knobstick in his left hand, the long glittering dagger in his right, tall, erect, and fearless, the very picture of a dusky brave. With an angry snort the bull rushed on, but the savage stepped lightly aside, and the steel sank deep into the flesh near the spine. Again the gnu turned to charge, for a moment hesitating, as it lowered its shaggy head, but at that instant a ball from the deadly English rifle struck right between the eyes, and it fell heavily close to Masheesh, the blood gushing from its mouth. It was a much larger one than that first killed, when measured proving fully seven feet four inches from the top of the nose to the base of the tail. The horns were one foot ten inches in length, and the animal stood at least four feet in height at the shoulder. The hoof, as Captain Hughes and the delighted Masheesh stood beside the carcass, seemed too large for the legs, and the knee joints were covered with a hard substance like those of a tame ox. In fact the animal seemed to resemble much the half-wild oxen of India, and, before it charged, the wounded gnu pawed with the forefoot, tossing its head exactly as a wild bull would have done. Hughes now learned that the natives regularly hunt the antelope and zebra in the

way Masheesh had done that day, whole herds feeding carelessly up to the supposed bush, but on this occasion the concealed man had run unconsciously a terrible risk.

The sun was sinking towards the west—telling that it was time to strike the river, by whose banks the rest of the party had outspanned; so leaving Luji, Noti, and one of the Kaffirs to cut up and bring in the meat, the two stepped out for the Limpopo. Any fatigue, any privation Masheesh would endure, but even such manual labour as that of cutting up the carcasses of the slain he utterly disdained. It was sunset when the camp was at last reached, and there a messenger from Mozelkatse was found.

"It would appear," said the missionary, who was busy preparing some skins of birds he had shot, "that a strong party of the Matabeles have joined their king."

"Well, all I can say is, a good wash and something to eat are of more importance to me just now than all the kings in the world. You don't know how tired I am, and then nothing to eat besides."

"Look at Masheesh, whom you called an uneducated savage this morning," replied Wyzinski, pointing towards the individual named, who after a drink of water had quietly seated himself, not even noticing the runner of his people, and was smoking, varying the amusement with an occasional pinch of snuff, and waiting calmly until some meat should be cooked by some one, he cared not by whom, provided he had nothing to do with it.

"Well, I suppose you don't want me to smoke and take snuff as proofs of civilisation."

"You have heard of the man, have you not, who thanked God he had at least reached a civilised country on seeing a gibbet? However," continued Wyzinski, "yonder runner brings us an invitation from Mozelkatse, to join a great hunt in which the tribe is taking part on the banks of the Limpopo."

"That will be worth seeing. And when is it to take place?" asked Hughes, forgetting hunger and fatigue.

"To-morrow."

"Accept it, by all manner of means."

Masheesh was interrupted in the tobacco-smoking process. The runner, who since his arrival in camp, had been gorging himself with meat, was sent back; great steaks and collops of venison cut from the hartebeest were grilling on the clear wood fire, and soon the howling of the hyenas, as they tore the bones of what had been left behind of the two gnus, as not worth bringing away, were the only sounds which disturbed the quiet of the little camp on the banks of the Limpopo.

Early morning saw the whole party afoot.

"Had we not better send Luji back to the tent?" said Hughes, as the morning light becoming clearer, they looked back from the crest of a rise, and saw it shining in the early sunbeams.

"We shall need him as an interpreter, perhaps. I can just manage, and that is all, to be understood," replied Wyzinski; "everything is safe. Noti will keep a look-out."

"See, there are a lot of Matabeles," exclaimed Hughes. "They are quite naked, and have bows and arrows."

"And there are more. Look in what numbers they are turning out! Yonder fellows have flint musquets: where did they get them, Luji?" asked the missionary.

"The Portuguese on the Zambesi—him sell, Master," was the answer.

And now detachment after detachment came on, spreading out across the country, like infantry skirmishers, some carrying only spears, others bows and arrows, and a few, a very few, musquets, but always in line: shouting, yelling, and driving everything before them. Soon the antelope came bounding past, endeavouring to escape, but were driven back again, as the long line of savages, throwing forward the two flanks, enclosed them in a crescent miles in length, and drove them back on the river. Herds of koodoos, eland, and hartebeest came scouring along, attempting to break through in vain, while the painted zebra, the graceful leche, with its long tapering horns, were remorselessly driven back by the yells and shouts of the Matabele.

"I suppose we must find Mozelkatse. Tell Masheesh of our wish, Luji," said the missionary. He alone of the whole party was mounted, being weak from the effects of fever, and as he spoke, they topped the crest of one of the green ridges so common to the undulating plains bordering the Limpopo, and on passing it the whole party were stopped by the presence, right in their path, of a huge rhinoceros.

He was quietly standing under a tree, apparently studying the landscape, and not seeming to think of the distant noise. At the foot of the tree rose one of those curious structures, the nest of the African ant, while a strange little animal, covered with thickly-plated scales of a yellowish tint, the under part of the belly only being undefended, was busy feeding on the ant-hill. In length the ant-eater was not more than three feet, and it was engaged shooting out its tongue into the heap, which tongue, being covered with some glutinous substance, always returned black with ants. The spot was comparatively quiet, for the time at least, and the rhinoceros did not seem in the least alarmed. He was a huge, heavy, massive creature, of a pale brown colour, carrying two horns, one very long and pointed, the second short, strong, but blunt. The longer one rose just above the tip of the nose, and seemed a most dangerous arm. Above the shoulders was a kind of hump. An uglier brute certainly could not have barred the path which ran towards the river; but the moohoohoo would have been perhaps inoffensive had not Masheesh, confiding, doubtless, in the power of the English rifle, crept towards him, throwing his spear. The weapon struck fairly and well, but glanced from the tough hide as though it had been hurled against a brick wall, and being made of the soft native iron, it literally curled up with the force of the blow. Having thrown his spear, which elicited only a wrathful grunt from the animal, Masheesh bolted, just as the huge mass put itself in motion, advancing straight up the path. Luji and the rest disappeared among the reeds and bushes, but Captain Hughes had just time to fire, the ball glancing from the mailed coat like a child's marble.

"Look out!" shouted the missionary; but it was too late, and the next moment the unlucky soldier was lying on the ground, with the enormous bulk of the rhinoceros standing over him.

"Lie still, for God's sake," cried Wyzinski, as he unslung the heavy rifle, seeing that the animal did not strike at the fallen man. He was just in the act of raising it to his shoulder, when, attracted by the horse, the moohoohoo suddenly charged, the long pointed horn literally burying itself in the pony's flank, just behind the rider's leg, the rifle harmlessly exploding as horse and rider rolled over. Not pausing for a second blow, the enraged brute drove on, eventually shambling through the line of natives, who opened their ranks gladly to let him pass.

Rising unwounded, but sorely shaken, Hughes extricated the missionary.

"Are you hurt, Wyzinski?" he asked, anxiously.

"Not a bit," was the reply; "but look at the poor grey."

"He is past saving," answered Hughes; and it was evident it was so, for so frightfully had the sharp horn done its work, that the entrails were hanging out, and the animal fast bleeding to death.

Placing his revolver to the pony's head, the report rang out; a few convulsive movements, and the carcase of the horse lay still.

"Where is Masheesh?" enquired Hughes, as he returned the smoking weapon to his belt. "If it had not been for his nonsense, that pistol-shot would have been saved."

Wyzinski had seated himself on the grass, for the whole thing had passed so quickly, that it was difficult to realise the danger.

Slowly stalking out of the bushes, Masheesh, as though nothing had happened, gravely walked to the foot of the tree, took up the ant-eater which, alarmed at the noise, had rolled itself up like a hedgehog, and brought it to where the missionary was seated.

"What on earth does he want with that hedgehog?" asked Hughes. The Matabele, speaking quickly, and in an excited voice, looked up at the missionary as he did so, pointing to the little animal.

"He says it is a great prize," returned the other, "and consoles him for the loss of his spear. It appears that these ant-eaters are scarce, and the possession of one guarantees its owner against loss or sickness among his cattle."

"The loss of his cattle! He nearly lost our lives for us, confound him," replied Hughes, with some show of humour. "He don't seem to think of that."

"A native never does, it is not in their nature, and life is held very cheap. Look at yonder group moving over the plain in a line with that stunted acacia. The king Mozelkatse must be among them."

"Can you walk, do you think, Wyzinski?"

"Oh, yes. I'm a good deal shaken, but that will wear away. Let us join the king."

The rifles were loaded, and the whole party moved off once more, leaving the carcase of the grey pony lying in a pool of blood where it had fallen, to become a prey to the jackals and hyenas, those scavengers of the African plains.

Mozelkatse, in a state of nudity nearly as complete as that of his subjects, was in high good humour, and welcomed them warmly. The hunt, he told them, promised well, and a vast number of deer of all kinds were hemmed in between the horns of the living crescent. He motioned them to take their places by the side of the trap, or barricade, into which the herds were to be forced. Masheesh temporarily left them to place his prize, the ant-eater, in safety; and as the line of beaters was still far distant, there was ample time to examine the stockade.

The whole was something like a lobster-trap without a top, or like one of the salmon weirs to be found running out into the sea on the Welsh coast. It was made of stout branches driven deeply into the ground, with lighter ones interlaced horizontally between the upright poles. The opening was at least fifty paces in breadth, gradually narrowing, and as the horns of the living crescent drew inwards, it was the only outlet for the frightened game. It led to a deep square pit, which must have taken the tribe long to dig, whose sides were quite smooth and perfectly steep. Once in it, the deer could not get out, and towards this all the game was being driven. The process was a slow one, and it was afternoon before the long line of the Matabele approached. It was a curious sight. The shouts, screams, and yells of the men as they drove before them antelopes of all kinds, and then the excitement of those near the trap, as herd after herd would come down, find the barricade, and, suspecting danger, turn back. At first the different animals kept to themselves, but as the circle narrowed, quaggas, zebras, antelope of various forms would become mixed together, while the Matabele would rush among them, brandishing their long spears, and frantically striking their ox-hide shields, shrieking, howling, and spearing right and left, until the affrighted wretches, surrounded on every side by the yelling savages, took the only outlet left them, and dashing madly down the path between the stockades, leaped wildly into the pit, falling pell mell in. On they came, quaggas, koodoos, springbok, hartebeest, the shouting and spearing becoming wilder. Hundreds turned, and forced their way through the ever narrowing circle of yelling Matabele, the spears sticking in their bloody hides, while fuller and fuller became the pit, until it was heaped with the dead, dying, and maimed. There was the ferocious-looking gnu, the painted hide of the zebra, the graceful-limbed springbok, the long spiral horned leche, all heaped together in one boiling, seething mass of pain and suffering, the Matabele above, with savage cries, spearing those who in their agony tried to climb the sides of the pit, while still the yelling savages continued driving herd after herd, until, like the fire worshippers' trap, in Moore's beautiful poem, the pit was full and would hold no more. There was high feasting in the Matabele camp that night, for the hunt had been most successful, and the slaughter immense; but it was with feelings of pleasure the travellers had a farewell interview with Mozelkatse, and then passing among the dancing, singing savages, took their way across the plain, lighted by a brilliant moon, to their quiet camp by the side of the Limpopo.

A Narrow Escape

Two days after the Matabele hunt the vast plains were once more silent, Mozelkatse, at the head of his gorged hunters, having left Zoutpansburgh for his own kraal, and the party of which the white men were the chiefs, having resumed their march northward. The waggon and horses had not yet been sent back, but the onward march was slow and tedious, and passing through the country of the Batonga, it took five days' toilsome march before the tent was pitched on a bend of the Suave river. The weather had gradually increased in heat, the native kraals were few and small, and what was worse, the natives themselves seemed more and more unsociable, if not actually unfriendly.

The white man appeared known among them, but as the distance from the English frontier daily increased, this knowledge seemed only drawn from that of the Portuguese traders on the Zambesi, a degenerate race, who were looked down upon by the blacks. The plains swarmed with game of every kind, and fruits of different sorts were to be found near the rivers; but as the little party advanced, the forest-land became more frequent and more dense. The tall palmyra and the stately moshanna trees grew luxuriantly. Squirrels of various sorts haunted the groves and thickets, more particularly one species of a pale yellow colour, touched up with black, about eight inches long in the body, and being remarkable for its magnificent tail, also pale yellow, barred with black, and fully as long as the body. This beautiful little animal seemed to look for its food among the stones, and was quite fearless. The pitfalls dug by the natives were so artfully concealed as to be very annoying, and even dangerous. On one occasion a Kaffir fell into one, and was released with some difficulty. One was found close to the banks of the Suave river, and into it a splendid panther had fallen. It must have been days since it had been there, for the sides of the pit were scored with its claws: however, a pistol-shot killed it, and its skin was a most beautiful one. The mosquitos and the soldier ants were another source of trouble; and what with the heat, and the too constant meat diet, sores attacked the whole party, breaking out on all parts of the body.

Night had closed round the little camp on the Suave river; the day had been hot and sultry, and the route had lain over plains covered with wild cotton, and among groves of trees closely resembling the orange, but at that time of the year not bearing fruit. Masheesh, who had been a day's journey to the eastward of north, in order to strike a large native kraal and obtain information, had just rejoined the camp, but his tidings were of a very mixed description. The tent was pitched under the spreading branches of a mashonga tree. A huge fire was lighted; a good supper had closed the fatigues of the day, and the men were fast asleep round the blaze, having gorged themselves with eland meat Captain Hughes was engaged sponging out a rifle, and near him, in the full blaze of the fire, Luji was skinning a small animal shot that day. It was a beautiful little creature of the squirrel tribe, about a foot long, of a bright yellowish red, barred here and there with black. The tail was at least three inches longer than the animal itself, and glossy black at the end. Wyzinski was earnestly studying a piece of broken stone, on which appeared some rude and defaced carvings; while, squatted on the ground, looking up into the missionary's face, quite naked and his head ornamented with the waving ostrich plume, the firelight danced over Hasheesh's black face and quick intelligent eyes.

"The Batonga tell," said he, "of a range of mountains to the northward and eastward, called 'Gorongoza.'"

"It is not the place we seek. Gorongoza is known to the Portuguese."

"The white chief seeks the broken stone huts," replied Masheesh, "and the Batonga tell of graves marked by stones lying on the mountain range of Gorongoza."

"And do not they know of others?" asked the missionary.

"Yes," replied the chief; "far to the eastward. Near the mouth of the river lie ruins, looking over the big water; it is from these that the stone which my father holds in his hand came."

Wyzinski stooped over the fire and carefully examined the fragment. That it had been carved was evident, but it was so broken and defaced that he could make nothing of it. The chief continued—

"These ruins by the big water the Batonga call 'Sofala,' but to the northward and westward lies a large kraal. It is some days' journey from Sofala and Gorongoza. Near Manica lie great forests of strange trees, and among those trees lie broken stone huts. In the mountains are caves, where the leopards and the lions hide. The white chief may leave his life there, but he will not see them. The broken huts are sacred, and if the stranger saw them no rain would fall in the country for three years."

The voices of the speakers as they conversed eagerly together, with the wail of the jackals and hyenas, the barking of the foxes, the snort of the hippopotami on the river bank, broke the silence of the starlight night. The blaze occasionally flared up, and then died away, lighting up all to within a certain radius.

Luji was just finishing his squirrel, and Hughes had put his rifle together and was trying the lock, when a tremendous roar, apparently close to, startled all, and the flickering blaze of the firelight danced for an instant on the dark hide of a lion, as he dashed past, the next moment passing through the midst of the astonished group, bearing with him the carcass of an eland that day shot.

The night was dark, the country unknown; dense thickets existed on the banks of the river,— and so heaping fresh wood on the fire, the whole camp was soon fast asleep, the task of following up the spoor of the lion being deferred till the next morning.

The day's march it was determined should be a short one, for Masheesh, who was down on the river side before daylight, had fallen on the remains of the eland some way off, just where the Suave discharged its meagre waters into another and larger stream, "It would seem," said Hughes, when relating the matter to Wyzinski, "that the lion must have been actuated by a spirit of fun, for he certainly was not hungry. The greater part of the eland lies in the brush near the river side."

"We will move on a few miles, and camp on the mountain slope," replied the missionary. "The lion is sure to return for the remains of the eland. You have but to watch for him; and if you don't, the chances are he follows the camp and pays us another visit."

"More than that," returned the soldier, "the grass is very much trampled near the pool formed by the junction of the two rivers. Many wild animals must frequent it, and perhaps elephants; but first we must replace the stolen meat," he continued, shouldering his rifle and moving off, followed by the others across the plain, for eland were very numerous at the foot of the mountain range. Bounding along in single file, led by some old antelope, they looked very pretty, the herds made up into parties of from six to ten, having many young ones among them.

The colour of the males is a rusty yellow, with a brownish tinge here and there, giving place to reddish tufts of hair running down the face. The head small in proportion to the body, which is heavily and powerfully built. The eyes full, large, and soft, and the horns sloping backwards and twisted spirally. Taught by former experience, the hunter lay concealed behind the rocks. Masheesh, Luji, and Noti making a long circuit, came upon the rear of the eland, who were quietly grazing like tame deer in a park. The old buck, who generally led the herd, would soon take the alarm, and, raising his head, gaze around. Uttering a whistling cry, the rest would gather round him, as they moved away in single file for the hill-side. The alarm would spread, and at one moment there could not have been less than a hundred and fifty eland moving near them across the plain. Still the hunter's rifle was not heard, for the deer had taken a wrong direction. At length, a troop of ten headed straight for the rock where Captain Hughes lay; the loud report of his rifle rang out, still more startling the flying antelope, while a deer, bounding several feet into the air, fell stone dead, shot through the heart. The eland was a female, easily distinguished as such from the very great difference of colour, being of a light pale yellow, with a splendid pair of spirally-twisted horns. Without moving, the hunter waited, hoping that some of the herds, now wildly scouring the plain, would come within shot. Trotting jauntily along, his little feet hardly seeming to touch the ground, a young eland came to the side of the dead mother. It was of a different colour to the female. Of a pale orange tint, the horns were short, and not twisted.

There were many mouths to feed in camp, and the child eland was three parts grown. Again the sharp crack of the rifle was heard ringing across the plain, and the young antelope fell dead close to the mother, just as a herd of seven came bounding along at top speed within fifteen paces of the ambush. Seizing a spare rifle, the hunter sighted the leader of the troop, and a third sharp report woke up the echoes of the rocks. His foreleg broken, the eland still galloped on, his speed much diminished but yet considerable. Dashing after them came Masheesh, his long straight spear in his hand, his ostrich plume streaming backwards in the wind, his limbs naked save the usual ox hide round the waist. Singling out the wounded buck, the Matabele brave followed it. Its foreleg hanging useless, still the antelope struggled on, bidding fair to get away, but Noti headed it, and the animal came struggling along, in a direction which would lead it to within ten paces of the savage chief. Poising the long bright assegai, Masheesh stood for a moment motionless, while a gleam of light seemed to traverse the air, and the antelope fell heavily forward. The next, Masheesh bent over the struggling deer, the sharp curved knife flashed across the throat, a stream of blood followed, a few convulsive efforts, and all was still. This was a noble buck, measuring nine feet from the horns to the base of the tail, while the length of the horns was fully three, the deer standing nine feet high measured at the shoulder.

Sending the eland meat to camp, the hunters took their way to the river bank, searching for the spoor of the lion. Right opposite the spot where the remains of the deer lay, the river running between, a deep hole was dug, so deep that only the head and neck of a man standing in it would appear above the level ground. Between it and the remains of the deer, the stream formed a kind of pool. To the right ran the chain of mountains, while in front the plain was clear, the water a little lower down, pouring over a ledge of rock, so as to form a miniature cataract. Heavy timber grew right down to the river's edge, the branches of some of the trees dipping into the water. The hole was dug at the foot of a tree, and all round it grew long, rank grass, and tangled brushwood, save where it was cleared away in front.

About nine o'clock that night, Captain Hughes, accompanied by Luji, who carried a spare rifle, took his way down to the river.

"I climb in tree?" asked Luji. "Master hid away in hole?" His English was plain enough, but not very grammatical.

"No, thank you, Luji," replied the soldier, laughing; "remember the lioness of Zoutpansburgh."

"Three lions there," replied the other; "and Luji not know missionary in tree."

"Well, well, just you bundle off to camp, Luji, and go to sleep. If I am not back directly after daybreak, send to look for me."

"Luji come himself," said the man, with the air of a hero. "Good-night, master."

"Good-night, Luji."

The cracking of the brush was heard, then a monotonous chaunt, as the careless fellow took his way back to camp. Both sounds died away in the distance, and the hunter felt himself alone, dependent only on himself, in the middle of the African plain. The moon was in her second quarter, but would not rise before eleven o'clock, and the darkness grew dense. The silence of the day was gradually broken into, the jackals and hyenas began their nightly music, and the watcher, though he could see nothing, became aware that animals of some kind were splashing and drinking in the water close to him. He strained his eyes, but could not make out anything. Soon the jackals scented the carrion, their peculiar wailing cry coming nearer and nearer. Time wore on, the position in the cramped-up hole, without the possibility of seeing anything, was an irksome one, and the hunter, after the fatigues of the day, felt sleep creeping over him.

He heard the jackals quarrelling and snarling over the carrion; he heard the sound of the water as it flowed, falling over the neighbouring ledge, with a continued monotonous noise; he was with the 150th, telling many a tale of African adventure; in a word, he had fallen asleep, when a soft, cold, hairy hand was laid on the back of his neck, and a thrill of horror passed through his frame, as he saw two large eyes looking through the darkness into his. At this moment the lion roared on

the mountain-side, and the jackals heard it, for they left the carrion, giving a long mournful howl as they scurried away, and, taking up a position about half a mile off, filled the air with their plaintive music. Slowly the upper limb of the moon rose above the mountains, when again the cold, hairy touch was felt by the watcher, followed by a twitch at the fur cap he wore, and now by the feeble light he could distinguish an enormous monkey. It did not seem to have the slightest fear, but clutched at the sealskin cap, clashing its long teeth together, and grimacing hideously. Again the lion roared, this time much nearer, as taking up a broken branch, the hunter struck at the troublesome baboon, who, chattering with fear, dashed into the tangled brush. The lion was evidently coming up very cautiously, but presently the snapping sound of breaking branches was heard, as the animal forced its way onwards. Raising his head to see that the rifles were in position, the startled hunter received the soft, warm breeze right in his face, becoming at once aware that the wind had changed, and was bearing the scent straight down on the lion, who was advancing up the wind, perfectly aware of the presence of some enemy, while the brushwood on that side extended for miles, right up to the mouth of the pit. Another roar, this time close to. What would the ambushed man have given had even Luji been within range? The perspiration rolled down his face as he prepared to get out and meet the "lord of the mountain" on the open. It was too late, for a heavy bank of clouds rose, overshadowing the moon, and the hoarse mutterings of distant thunder came on his ear. The cracking of the brushwood, too, sounded close to the mouth of the pit, as making himself as small as possible, the unfortunate hunter crouched down at the bottom of the hole, and, a cocked revolver in his hand, prepared to meet his fate. A thrill of disgust shook him, for, with a shrill cry, the baboon, startled by the lion's approach, leaped into the pit, alighting on the hunter's back, clasping him round the neck. It seemed to him like a horrible nightmare, the long wail of the jackals taking the place of the cry of the fabled Banshee over the living dead. To add to the terror of the situation, the thunder was heard, peal on peal, and the lightning flashed, while the heavy rain-drops spattered on the leaves. He heard, too, the brushwood part, and a deep, hoarse growl told him the lion was looking into the ambush; he fancied he could feel his breath; and then came a shriek of pain from the baboon, as his teeth met in the back of his neck. Lying down at the mouth of the hole, like a huge Newfoundland dog, the lion had reached down with his powerful paw, endeavouring to get at the monkey. In this he had so nearly succeeded, that his long claws had scored the creature's back, and its warm blood was pouring down the hunter's neck. A second time the lion made the attempt, when, with a scream of agony, using the recumbent figure for its spring, the baboon leaped out of the pit. The lion was nearly as active, as, with a fierce growl and a tremendous bound, it also cleared the mouth of the hole. The hunter was saved. Covered with blood, stained with dirt, and sorely frightened, Captain Hughes arose just in time to see the animal, chattering with delight, swing himself from branch to branch of a mowanna tree. The lion having unearthed one, had not suspected the existence of another animal in the same place, and, roaring once more loudly, it took its way towards the carrion, where it began tearing and rending the flesh, the wounded ape, now in safety, moaning bitterly, as the clouds cleared away slowly to the southward, the storm passing along the mountain range. At length the lion rose, and, with a low growl as he passed the tree where the noisy baboon was seated, walked down to the river to drink. He was a very large one, his mane and tail being unusually dark. Slowly and deliberately the magnificent animal walked into the pool. The report of the heavy rifle rang out, the ball striking him right between the eyes, as he stooped his head to drink. With a wild convulsive bound, the lion cleared the stream, falling heavily into the brushwood beyond. Sounds somewhat between a moan of pain and a growl of rage followed, one or two heavy sobs, the breaking of the brushwood, as the huge carcass fell over on its side, and then, save the cry of the jackals and hyenas, the moaning of the ape, and the distant rattle of the thunder, all was still.

The First Elephant

Nearly an hour passed, and the watcher, tired, wet, and worn out, was thinking of the snug fire on the mountain-side, and the tent pitched near it; for certainly he had passed through quite sufficient danger and emotion for one night at least, when several spotted hyenas came down to drink. Some wild boar followed, and it was a strong temptation to the hunter to fire, when a desperate fight took place between two old boars close to him. The storm had quite passed away, cooling the heated air in its passage; the moon and stars were shining brightly, and soon bounding over the plain, with their peculiarly dancing motion, came a herd of springbok. Moving along at a great pace, springing from the ground into the air, and hardly seeming to touch the earth again for the next bound, on came the graceful antelope euchore. Even in the day time the motions of this animal are so quick, that the eye cannot follow its bounds in their details, only realising the pace as a whole, but in the clear, silvery moonlight, they seemed like a troop of fairy elves, to the tired watcher, as they came dancing along over the African plain. Dashing fearlessly into the water, the herd began to drink, with one exception. An old buck, from whose gait the inference might have been drawn that he had been previously wounded, stood sentinel on the bank. There was meat and to spare in the camp, so the hunter only watched the beautiful animals. The sentinel seemed to suspect danger, and was fidgety and impatient. Was it possible he knew of the ambush? Captain Hughes asked himself; and yet from his motions he could not but conclude he did, when all at once a dark object sprang from the bush, and the sentinel springbok was in a moment rolling on the ground, while the rest of the herd were bounding madly over the plain in hurried flight. For a few seconds, there seemed to be one rolling, writhing mass on the bank; then the antelope lay still, and a panther, with its beautiful spotted skin, walked down to the river. Before reaching the water, the animal stopped and began licking and polishing its hide, disarranged in the combat. Again the sharp report of the rifle was heard, and the panther, with a convulsive bound, sprang into the bush, which it could be heard tearing with its powerful jaws and claws in the death agony. Soon all was again still, as scrambling out of the pit, the hunter crossed the river, and advanced cautiously towards the carcass of the springbok, finding it still quivering with muscular excitement, but quite dead. Holding his rifle at full cock, slowly and deliberately he approached the bush. The moonlight streamed over the painted hide of a large panther, lying quite dead.

Leaving the carcass untouched, Captain Hughes managed to drag the deer on one side, covering it in the thick undergrowth, and then once more crossing the river determined never again to leave the brush growing close to the mouth of his hiding-place. That which had been the sentinel springbok's fate had certainly been his, if the panther had come that side of the river.

The report of the rifle had doubtless frightened the deer around, for fully two hours passed without anything coming to the water. The time seemed very long, and the effect of the unusual excitement passing away, the hunter again became drowsy. The position was a cramped one; the first part of the night, before the thunderstorm had cooled the air, had been hot and sultry; the breeze, heavily laden with the scent of the flowers of the mobala trees, again came in hot puffs, bringing with it the cry of the jackal and the hyena, and the other thousand noises of animal life which so distinguish night from day among the wild plains of Southern Africa. Still nearer to the watcher was to be heard the fall of the water over its ledge of rock, the moaning of the wounded ape, and once or twice, and that very distant, the roar of a lion. Spread out in the moonlight lay the plain, stretching away towards the eastern coast, watered by a small river, while to the right rose the chain of mountain land in which the river took its rise, and whose slopes were dotted here and there by what seemed large black patches of forest, principally composed of trees exactly resembling the cedar. From one of these patches there came every now and then the sound of the splintering of wood, just as though a workman were felling timber. This noise was quite inexplicable; and the baboon, too, was annoying,

for not only did it keep up its moaning, but would break off pieces of the branches, and throw them at the hunter, generally with a certain aim. The time wore wearily on, and Captain Hughes had just dozed off, when his attention was suddenly roused by a noise like the bleating of a sheep. No animal of any kind was in sight, and yet there it was, the low, plaintive bleating of a sheep. It seemed to come from the bush, and presently, out of it, came the beautiful painted body of a large snake, some fourteen feet in length, gliding along with a gentle, sinuous motion, and uttering from time to time the strange bleat. Gaining the foot of the tree where the baboon was, it wound itself round the trunk, and crept slowly up it. The moment the monkey caught sight of it dragging its shining length upwards, it evinced a deadly fear. Slowly, but surely, the nogaputsane neared its prey, while the unlucky animal chattering and crying, seemed unable to escape. Moved by its distress, the hunter raised his rifle, but just as he was about to fire the baboon jumped from the tree, and leaping across the stream, seized one of the branches of a young mimosa, swinging himself into it chattering with fright. The large snake paused for a few minutes to look about it, soon slowly descending, and then starting in pursuit, the nogaputsane came to the river, which it did not like, and returned into the bush.

Time wore on; the interest of the night seemed past, and morning could not be far off. Fairly tired out, the soldier began making his arrangements for a return to camp, when he was stopped by seeing, or thinking he saw, a black mass moving among the shadows on the hill-side, where the sound of the splintering wood was heard. The cause of the noise was now made evident, for moving along slowly, the watcher saw for the first time the huge bulk of the African wild elephant. It was advancing towards the river. Suddenly it stopped, and for a few moments the hunter's heart beat quickly, thinking the chance lost, when, trotting along in a lumbering fashion, there came from out of the shade of the cedar and mashunga forests a second, but this time a young elephant. On they came, right for the river, opposite the hiding-place, the young one stopping from time to time, and then coming on at a trot to rejoin its mother. They neared the river, the old elephant evidently carefully examining every yard of ground before putting her huge foot down. They passed under the tree where the baboon was hid, and the spirit of mischief seemed to wake up in the wounded animal, notwithstanding all that had happened to him that night. Breaking off a large bough, jabbering loudly, and making the most diabolical faces, it took aim at the young elephant, the wood hitting it a smart blow on the trunk. The mother stopped dead, uttering a strange trumpeting sound, then circling her trunk round the stem of the young tree, began to shake it violently. The monkey, active as he was, nearly came to the ground, holding on with difficulty, and crying loudly. Then the cracking of the stem was heard, just as the baboon, loosing its hold, dropped on the ground, and with one wild spring clambered into another tree, and swung himself from branch to branch, jabbering and whining with fear.

Casting the sapling from it, the elephant, as if satisfied with the lesson it had given, came down to drink. Coming to the spot where the panther and springbok had struggled, and where the grass and reeds were beaten down, the animal halted, evidently suspecting one of the native traps, and kneeling down on the edge it struck the ground all round with its trunk. It was now within thirty paces, but still the hunter's rifle remained silent. Hoping to meet with an elephant, the heavier rifle was loaded accordingly, the right-hand barrel with the usual ball, but the left carrying one of Devisme's explosive cartridges. Not able to detect anything wrong in the trampled ground, still the cautious creature would not tread on it, but circling round, broke her way through the bush, coming, as she did so, on the carcass of the dead panther. This she examined very carefully, turning it over with her trunk, and it was only when she had fully satisfied herself that it was dead, that she called her little one to her side. Standing in the bed of the stream, the two sucked in vast volumes of water, discharging it into their mouths, and having satisfied their thirst, the old one began spouting the water over the back of its young. Ever ready to fire, the hunter watched them, for a quarter of an hour; but now the increasing coldness of the morning warned him that dawn was at hand. The heavier rifle had not yet been used. Taking a deliberate aim, he fired. For a moment the huge mass stood firm and unmoved; the next, turning, the elephant crashed through the bush towards the forest, the young one remaining standing in

the river, as though wondering what all the noise was about. Covering him with the second barrel, and dreadfully vexed at his failure, Captain Hughes was about to fire, when the larger elephant, missing its young, stopped, and began calling it. Quickly changing his aim, the report of the rifle rang out, the explosive ball striking the elephant behind the shoulder, and taking an upward direction. Moving heavily forward, the enormous bulk of the animal seemed to waver, and sway from side to side. Once it fell on its knees, recovered itself, and then gained the forest, disappearing with her young under the trees, the crash of breaking wood making itself heard once, and then all was still. The cries of the jackals and hyenas gradually ceased, the air became colder and colder as the dawn appeared, the light of the moon paled, and the noise of the falling water, with the occasional croak of a frog along the river bank, were soon the only sounds disturbing the stillness of the African plain, as, covered with the blood of the wounded baboon, soiled with wet and sand, his limbs stiff with cold and watching, as well as worn out with excitement, the weary hunter took his way up the mountain slopes, to where he knew he should find the camp.

The Ruins at Sofala

Long before the tired hunter woke, a party headed by the missionary had brought in the carcass of the lion, as well as those of the springbok and panther, and strange to say, the baboon had followed them, refusing to be driven away. It was in vain to pelt it with sticks and stones, for dashing away into the bush it would climb a tree, making the most hideous grimaces, chattering and crying, but the moment all was quiet, back it would come again. Worn out with fatigue and watching, the soldier had slept late, and the sun was high in the heavens when he awoke.

Looking about him, roused by the noise, he was just in time to save the baboon's life. Luji had been engaged for some time pelting it with sticks and stones, but the agile brute was too much for him. Masheesh stood in the act of poising his assegai, when Hughes stopped him.

"The monkey saved my life, Wyzinski," said he; "and besides, it would be hard to kill the creature which evidently trusts in us."

"Trusts in you, it would appear," replied the other; for at this moment, as if recognising Hughes, it came towards him, showing the wounds on its back, and holding out its bloody hands.

"Fetch me the arnica and some water, Luji; we will soon put those scratches to rights, though they are caused by the lion's claws."

"The lion's claws!" asked the missionary; "why, what had the monkey and lion in common?"

"I'll tell you when I have had a good wash, and some breakfast," replied the other.

The baboon was soon caught, and his back freely bathed with the arnica water, when the intense smarting, and the grotesque grimaces and loud chattering consequent on it, caused shouts of laughter.

A good wash in the river, a hearty meal of eland meat, with a dessert of the mobala fruit, strongly resembling in flavour the English strawberry, and then the hunter told his tale. The news as to the wounded elephant soon spread through the little camp, and every one, from the missionary downwards, was eager to follow up the spoor.

They soon found it, leading from the trampled river bank up the slope, and entering the wood, they at once came upon the animal itself, lying quite dead on its side; a young tree having been borne down by the heavy weight, had broken short off and lay under it. Standing near was the young elephant, waiting for its dead mother to wake, and on the approach of the party it struck the carcass several times with its trunk, and failing to rouse it, trotted away in a lumbering fashion, its trunk raised in the air, then turned to look. Like the baboon, it showed no fear, barely refusing to be caught. The men were set to work to cut out the tusks, but being unpractised hands, it took them all day to do it. The best parts of the meat were brought into camp, and then the jackals and hyenas assembled in large numbers, holding high carnival, while the tusks, together with the panther and lion skins, remained as a memento of the night. For two days the party halted on this spot, and each night the one or other watched the pool, with varying success, but not seeing any more elephants, and only hearing the lions in the distance.

Still travelling northwards, they pushed on through a fertile country, which gradually became more and more of forest. Elephants were often seen, but it was useless to encumber their march by carrying the tusks, and Wyzinski's sole purpose seemed to be the finding of the supposed ruins. Giraffe, buffalo, antelope of all kinds, quaggas, and zebra, were plentiful, while an occasional lion was seen. The hippopotami and rhinoceros were often met with on the river banks.

The natives, who appeared from time to time, yet bore the stamp of the Zulu race, but were not friendly, though guilty of no overt act of enmity. They were men of good stature, well formed, and clean limbed; their woolly hair often surmounted with plumes of ostrich feathers. They were well armed. Vast forests of what appeared to be magnificent cedars, impeded their way. The natives, both men and women, were nearly naked, the latter particularly showing great fear of the white men, so much so as to leave their huts on the approach of the party, carrying with them their children. In

some of the huts slabs of stone were seen, evidently having been fashioned by hand, and used in the construction of some building, but no information could be gathered. Gold was known, and its value appreciated among these tribes. The men, fully armed, would venture into the camp, bringing with them quills filled with gold, sealed at both ends, and offering them for sale, evidently fancying the white men traders, and asking for calico and beads in return. The young elephant actually followed the party for three days, and on the fourth was found dead close to camp, evidently from its inability to supply itself with the food its mother alone could give. The hippopotami were numerous on the rivers, and unlike those more to the south, they showed little fear of man. Shaped like a huge pig, the head massive, and the eyes placed very high in the forehead, these ponderous animals, whose carcass of a brownish-red looks like a great barrel, have thick hanging lips, and such short stumpy legs, that the belly nearly touches the ground. All day long they might be seen feeding on the sweet grasses; and on the approach of strangers would slide off the bank into the water, gradually subsiding until the whole disappeared, and then rising again slowly for air. On the Quissanga river they were very numerous. Heavy and lumbering looking, none would give these animals credit for the intelligence they really possess, and yet they will only feed on the sweetest grasses, and are nearly as cautious and cunning as the elephant, in avoiding the traps and pitfalls of the natives. They display a strong and peculiar affection for their young, and though quiet and peaceable enough, will fight for them.

"See, Wyzinski," said Hughes one evening, as with their rifles in their hands the two were walking up the banks of the Quissanga river, "look at that unwieldy young hippopotamus feeding alone. I'll give it a start."

"Take care what you are doing," replied the missionary, who was busy watching some birds building near the stream.

"Never fear for me," exclaimed the soldier, bent on the fun of cutting off the lumbering young animal from the water.

Besting his rifle against a tree, Hughes ran to intercept it, which he easily did, for the ugly little brute did not see him until he was quite close to it, and then it seemed to lose its head, waddling away towards the bush, its pursuer shouting and laughing behind. A loud call from the missionary caused Hughes to turn, and he at once saw that the situation of matters was reversed. Right up the bank came a very large female hippopotamus, in pursuit of him. Unarmed, there was nothing for it but to use his legs, and this he did; but the hippopotamus diverged, and so the pursuer pursued must cross the line of its advance, for the bush was too thick to be entered.

It was a question of speed, as the great animal came on, its enormous mouth wide open and menacing. Slow as its motion appeared, the animal would have cut off the man, but just as they neared one another, a ball from Wyzinski's rifle struck it in the open mouth. The hippopotamus stopped as the breathless soldier dashed by, and seized his rifle, when a ball hit it right in the eye, and it fell dead.

This animal measured eleven feet six inches in length, add in girth ten feet five inches. No one of the party ever after this attempted any trifling with the hippopotami.

The baboon had grown very tame, and had taken a great fancy to Luji. The two lived together, and seemed inseparable, and whenever it became tired on the march, it would take its place on his shoulders. It was always in mischief. Seated the same night, after the adventure with the hippopotamus, round the camp fire, near the banks of the Quissanga river, Wyzinski was laughing at the morning's adventure.

"I hadn't a notion you could run so fast, Hughes," he continued.

"Hadn't you," replied the soldier, not half liking the missionary's quiet way of chaffing.

"No, indeed I hadn't," answered the other. "I see now why they gave you the Light Company in the gallant 150th."

Luji's wide mouth was opened to the fullest possible extent.

"Master no like Quissango hippopotamus? Luji no like Zoutpansburgh lion!"

"I'll tell you what, Wyzinski," answered Hughes, "I may live to see you run just as fast yet."

A cry from Masheesh, at this moment, drew attention for the time from the subject. The baboon darted out of the small tent holding something he had stolen. Luji, with a loud shout, dashed after him. Away went the two round and round, the monkey chattering and screaming, but still firmly grasping the object, which proved to be the captain's powder-flask.

"You should try your hand, Hughes," drily remarked the missionary. "Your pace beat that this morning."

Hardly were the words spoken when, with a scream of delight, the baboon vaulted right over the stooping missionary, using his shoulders for the spring, and alighting close to the fire, dropped the flask just into the centre of the blaze, and then bounding off a few paces, stood jabbering and grimacing.

The tent was only a few yards away.

"Run, Wyzinski," shouted the soldier, "all our powder is in the tent." The whole thing was done in a second, and the soldier and missionary scudding down the slope at a tremendous pace the next. Losing his footing, away went Wyzinski, rolling among the stones and bushes, just as the explosion took place.

Luckily, there was little powder in the flask, but the burning embers were blown right and left, and the tent struck by them. The baboon was dreadfully singed, and awfully frightened, and not a beauty before, became literally hideous; but no further harm was done.

"You had better exchange your robes against a subaltern's epaulettes in the Light Company of the 150th Regiment," laughed Hughes.

"I'll think of it," replied the missionary; "but, Hughes, will you give me a certificate?"

"Most certainly. I can't hold a candle to you at running away, Wyzinski," for the soldier thought he had the best of it now.

"Oh, I didn't mean that sort of a certificate. Will you certify there are no monkeys in your Light Company?" remarked the missionary.

"Good-night, Wyzinski," was the only answer vouchsafed; and they both turned in laughing.

Passing Quissanga and Goanha, the little caravan kept steadily on to the northward, making short marches daily, until a period of three weeks had elapsed since they had outspanned from the banks of the Limpopo. Their camp was pitched at the foot of the spur of the Nyamonga mountain range called Gorongoza. It was a pleasant spot, and here they determined to rest a while. Several streams of bright, clear, cold water burst from the mountains, and, after wandering about for some distance, threw themselves into a river, which ran away towards the sea. Forests of the cedar-trees clothed the mountain-sides, and to these Wyzinski pointed triumphantly, asserting that they must now be close to the ruins, "There they are," would he say; "and though there may exist a marked difference between them and the far-famed cedar of Lebanon, though they may have degenerated since the days when Pharaoh Necho's seamen lived under their shade, yet in those cedar groves lie the fallen ruins of the old cities of Zulu land, and there is enough timber to supply the world."

"I wonder what we should do without the custard-apples?" said Hughes, the evening of the day when they arrived at Gorongoza.

"But why call it custard-apple, Hughes?"

"Because it is exactly like the custard-apple of the Madras Presidency, black, rough, and repulsive-looking outside, and a white, delicious custard inside, cool as if iced. It grows plentifully, like blackberries, up-country there."

"Well, I almost prefer the mobala fruit. Under the tropical sun, which, by the way, has tanned you to a mahogany colour, Hughes, it reminds one of the strawberries of England. I shall open a campaign against the wild duck. There seems lots of them."

"Here comes the Matabele chief; what has he got? Eggs, ducks' eggs, as I am a sinner. Won't that be a treat after weeks of venison diet?"

The chief gravely stalked up to the two, and placing his eggs on the ground, squatted down, and looking the missionary full in the face, pointed down the course of the river, merely uttering the word “Sofala,” then changing the direction of his finger, pointed to the north-west, letting fall the dreaded word, “Tetsé.”

The two Europeans looked at each other. A volume could not have better expressed his meaning. Down the stream lay the ruins which had been formerly mentioned. Right in their onward path was the dreaded tetse-fly, sure death to cattle.

“Let us hold a council of war, Wyzinski,” said Hughes, after the two had looked at each other in dead silence. “Here, Luji, come here. We are going to have a palaver.”

“Masheesh, must we send back the waggon?”

The Matabele chief spoke volubly, frequently using the word “Tati,” and then pointing to the river which was running near them, calling it sometimes the Sabe, sometimes the Ouro.

“Do you hear?” asked Wyzinski, eagerly. “The Thati and the Ramaquotan rivers run into the Limpopo, and this river he calls the Ouro, or golden river.”

“Who owns the land, Luji?” asked Hughes.

“Mozelkatse once owned it, master. Now it is the country of Machin, the Batonga, and the Banyai.”

“Can Masheesh procure a canoe? and can we go down the river?” were the next questions.

Both were answered satisfactorily. The Batonga were a friendly people, like the Bechuanas, and feared the Matabele Kaffirs, whose chief, Mozelkatse, had more than once punished them; and after a long talk, it was determined to send back the waggons and horses to the nearest mission, that at Santa Lucia Bay, and go down the river to the sea, before breaking up the camp at Gorongoza.

“It is hard to send back our waggon,” exclaimed Hughes, during a pause in the work of packing.

“We should but have to leave it and all it contains on the way, if we met with the tetse-fly. Its sting is sure death to cattle.”

“And does it harm man?” inquired Hughes.

“Singular to say it does not and I do not believe in its existence so near this coast-line; still it’s no use running the risk.”

“We then resolve to strike the Zambesi, somewhere near Tête or Senna?”

“Yes, passing through the kingdom of this same chief, Machin, who seems to be almost a rival to Mozelkatse.”

It was with feelings of great regret the two saw the waggon with its great tilt, lumbering away an hour or two before sunset, under the charge of the missionary’s men, and bound for the station of Saint Lucia Bay,—it had been their home so long, that the cattle and horses seemed to them as friends. It was hard to part with them. The ground was strewed with packages, which were to be made up in the most commodious form for carrying, and the party was reduced to its original number of seven, with the addition of the Matabele and the two Europeans. A smaller tent had been fashioned by Noti and Luji, out of some spare canvas, easily carried, and it was now pitched by the river side, under the thick shade of a group of trees. Just as the last rays of the sun were gilding the river with gold, making it, indeed, look like the Gold River, Masheesh dropped down it in a canoe, and sunrise saw them on their way to Sofala. The crew of the boat consisted of the missionary, Captain Hughes, Masheesh, and the powerful Kaffir, Noti; Luji being left in charge of the camp at Gorongoza. Floating down the river in a comfortable canoe, between banks whose verdure was most luxuriant, was a pleasant change after the days of toilsome march. The palmyra, the wild date, mohanno, mowanna, and many other tropical trees grew in rich luxuriance, while the thick tangled undergrowth, mixed up with a host of creeping cane-like plants, rendered it impossible to penetrate the forest-land. Long reeds of various kinds hung over the banks, and beautiful water-lilies of gigantic size floated on the water. Wherever a break occurred among the trees, grew grass, or fields of wild maize or wild cotton were to be seen, and now and then the water antelope would dash into the stream and swim across. The

party trusted to their rifles for food, and one of these antelopes coming well within range, Wyzinski fired, wounding the animal severely just as he reached the shore. The canoe dashed on to overtake it, which would easily have been done, for the deer was unable to climb the steep bank, and twice failed in the attempt, falling back into the water, when a huge alligator rose, showing his long shovel-shaped snout above the river. A ball struck the alligator, but without penetrating its mail. The deer struggled wildly for a moment, several other dark log-like forms showed on the bank, and the antelope disappeared, the water bubbling crimson for a moment; the next the canoe moved gently over the reddened river, and all was still.

A second deer swam the stream, and this time it was different.

"Let him go, Wyzinski," whispered Hughes; "the alligators won't touch him while he is swimming."

"Take the shot yourself; see, he nears the bank."

The report of the rifle rang out just as the deer scrambled up it, startling whole flocks of wild duck out of the reeds and rushes. The antelope, with a broken leg, fell, but quickly struggling up again, would have escaped into the bush, when a second ball from Wyzinski's rifle stopped it. The deer proved to be a fine buck, of an ashy grey, with long horns like a goat, of a yellowish brown colour. The horns at first when starting from the head trended directly backwards, and then curved forwards, the tips being very pointed. The legs were remarkably short for a deer, and it could not be very swift on land, for, added to the shortness of limb, the girth round the carcass was very large. The dead buck measured nearly eleven feet in length, and ten in circumference.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.