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FOUR YEARS
IN
SOUTHERN **A**FRICA.

BY COWPER ROSE,
ROYAL ENGINEERS.

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FRONTISPIECE.

BIVOUAC IN KAFFERLAND.

LETTER IX.

Sources of Interest.—Elephant Hunting.—Portrait of a Hunter.—Account of a Week's Excursion.—Adventures.—An Ambush.—A Night in the Wilderness.—Costume of the Hunters.—Narrow Escape.—A Rhinoceros.—The Buffalo.—More Sport.—Return to our Bivouac.—Anecdotes of Elephants.—Of the Hunter.—Of Skipper.

You tell me that my descriptions of the scenery and customs of this wild country have an interest for you, who pass life in civilized sameness. Almost every country has some sources of amusement and information peculiar to itself, and this remote frontier, in Africa, is by no means without them; and they are much to my taste, for I seek excitement from situations that most would shun, which you, who know me to be no sportsman, will allow, when I tell you that I have just returned from a week's elephant-shooting. My companion and

myself had appointed to meet the elephant-hunter, who promised us certain sport in the dusky hills through which the great Fish River flows, —a country thickly covered with bush, and given up to the wild animals that infest it.

After wandering half the day amidst its lonely scenery, we heard a distant shot and saw the smoke rise, and shortly afterwards the hunter joined us, a thin, spare, bony man, formed for activity, whose sun-scorched countenance and eye of habitual watchfulness bore that expression so frequently to be traced among poachers. His manner was bold and open, as one who felt that in such situations the petty distinctions of society ceased. His quick grey eye glanced from beneath the broad rim of the boor's hat; his powder-horn hung from a black leathern buckled shoulder-belt, to which his pouch was attached: he was mounted on an active, well-formed, small horse, and followed by nine dogs of every variety of the cur and lurcher, that came limping after him, for they had suffered severely from an attack on a

wild hog, a side of which hung at the hunter's saddle. From him we heard that he had neither seen elephants nor any trace of them; and after searching for some hours, and consulting with his two attendant Hottentots, we took up our bivouac on the banks of the Fish River, gave our horses to the servants, unpacked our provisions, spread our beds of sheepskin, and lighted our fires. We did full justice to a dinner of which the flesh of the wild hog formed a principal portion, and my hungry judgment pronounced it superior to any pork I had ever tasted. There were two fires:—round one sat the hunter, a little boy whom he was training to his dangerous trade, my companion, and myself; round the other, the two Hottentot shooters, and our two attendants. Dinner was at last over, and we reclined on our sheepskins, and listened to the adventures of the hunter, to which I must despair of imparting the interest which he gave to them—for you cannot hear them as I heard them, in a wild soli-

tude, and in the calm beauty of an African night.

D— the shooter was an English settler, and did not conceal that he had been a smuggler among the Kaffers. After the trade was permitted, he followed it at Fort Wiltshire, and lost in the regular traffic what he had gained by the illicit; he not only lost what he possessed, but became involved, and, to recover himself, entered on the wild life of an elephant-hunter. When pursuing his first dangerous trade, his stock of beads, he said, had been frequently seized by the Kaffers, and his life threatened,—for they knew well that the life of the smuggler was not protected—that Gaika had once taken every thing from him, and was about to give him up to the English troops;—“When, you know,” observed the Kaffer calmly, “you will be hanged;” and that he was only saved by the intervention of another chief, Duchany, who prevailed on Gaika to let him escape. He gave

an instance of honourable feeling in this chief, with whom he had trafficked for cattle, which were intercepted by another horde, before he could reach the Colony, and from whom Duchany recovered and restored them.

“I have had many escapes among elephants,” he added, “and among Kaffers, but I never felt as I did on the night in which my companion was killed. We were bringing a venture of cattle into the settlement, when we were surrounded by Kaffers; we fled different ways,—and I wandered on foot, unarmed and alone; night was coming on, when, on suddenly turning a rock, I saw three armed Kaffers within twenty yards of me; they had seized some of the cattle, and the bleeding body of my companion lay by them. I turned, without a hope of escape, and almost felt, in thought, the assegai whizzing into my back. Some time after this escape I was taken, through the fool-hardiness of my companion; for we saw the Cape Corps patrol, and might have secured our safety by the speed of our horses, leaving our

spirit, that had been so high during the day, fell amidst the surrounding gloom, and he still fired and hallooed with the faint hope of having his halloo returned ; and he began to speak of being destroyed by the surrounding elephants. I tried to laugh him out of his fears. We collected dried wood for our night-fire, and agreed to watch and sleep until daybreak. I took the first five hours' watch, and was pleased to hear, from the deep, regular breathing of my young companion, that sleep and fatigue had overcome his terrors.

There was no moon, but the stars shone in brightness and in beauty on a dark blue sky. I listened, and at times caught wild, remote sounds—the nameless sounds of night. Who that has passed a night in savage solitudes, has not felt how distinct its sounds are from those of day,—has not discovered a voice and a language in the night-wind as it moaned by, different from the rush of any wind on which the sun ever shone,—like spirit-warnings from the past? I listened, and could imagine, in the

distant booming, hollow noises, that hundreds of elephants were crossing the hills ; and again all was still as death : and then would come the wild melancholy howl of the wolf, and its short whoop, the next nearer than the first ; and then, by sending a brighter flame from the fire, all again would be hushed ; and then the stillness was interrupted by the croak of the night-raven, as it sailed down the ravine, catching the scent of the dead elephant ; that ceased, and I heaped more dry wood upon the fire, until it threw up its bright flame gleaming with an indistinct and lurid light on the surrounding bushes. Then came a strange noise, as of some animal that was approaching us ; it came nearer, and roused my little companion, who said it was the hyena with its hideous laugh and chatter—the most wild, unnatural sound that breaks the silence of night in those tremendous solitudes. The morning-star rose over the dark brow of the mountain—the first signs of day followed. We took our guns and lighted sticks from the fire, and left our bivouac, rather anxious to join

our companions, and to break a fast of nearly four-and-twenty hours.

In walking on, I told the young hunter that I was sorry my knocking-up had brought him into a situation of danger, and caused his passing a hungry and uncomfortable night; that I felt greatly obliged to him, and was desirous of making some return.—“Would such a thing be of any use to him?”—“No.”—I named another, that I thought might be acceptable.—“No.”—I, laughing, said, “Every one has some want; you are not, I suppose, exempt; what can I give you?”—“Nothing,” was his reply, in a tone of apathy. On our route, we found, from the recent spoor, that the elephants and buffaloes had been around us, and that we probably owed our safety to our fire.

On reaching our station, I found the hunters absent; and my companion told me that they had gone in a new direction, and that we were to take up a fresh bivouac, and then join in the search for sport. This last part of the arrangement, I must own, I was not

particularly anxious about; for having satisfied my hunger, and bathed, I stretched myself beneath the shadow of the trees, and slept most deliciously. The hunters did not return till the evening; and my companion, a devoted sportsman, I thought appeared pleased that they had seen nothing. Our night-fires were again formed, and our dinner again discussed with admirable appetite. Stretched on the sheepskins, I gave an account of my adventure, and finished it by saying, "While you, I suppose, were greatly amused last night in thinking of our situation?"—"No, I was far from easy," replied D—, "and your meeting with the rhinoceros might have been a very serious one; for it is the most savage beast in the country, and dreads nothing except the elephant." He asked whether it had come towards us grunting, and rooting up the turf with his horn; and on my replying that, as far as I could tell, from the slight glimpse I caught of him, it was not so, and that I only heard his heavy tramp, he said,

“ Then it could not have been seeking you, but had probably been frightened by the elephants crossing the ravine.—There is,” he said, “ an old chief, who is known among the Kaffers for an act of desperate courage, or rather madness:—a hunting party was out, when a rhinoceros started from the bush close to them, so close that the Kaffer sprang upon his back. The monster rushed through the bushes, and ploughed up the ground with his horn, snorted with rage, and did every thing to unseat his wild rider. In galloping on, the bushes tore the carosse from the Kaffer’s back, and the rhinoceros turned upon it, and, while tearing it, the rider leapt from him, and escaped into the thick underwood.” When fired on, even when badly wounded, they rush forward; and flame, which turns other animals, has then no effect on them. The buffalo also charges impetuously forward when fired upon; but is less dangerous, as he keeps his head close to the ground; and if the hunter jumps into a bush, and is raised ever so little above him, he is

safe. The common mode of attacking the buffalo is with dogs, and firing on him when surrounded and engaged with them.

In the course of the night conversation, I observed that D—— held the Dutch cautious mode of hunting the elephant in high contempt—their firing from a distance, and keeping near their horses. He was himself noted for coolness and courage, and appeared to despise all safe and prudent measures.

The night-fire of the Hottentots was near our own; and I remarked that they were very silent. “They never speak,” said he, “until their hunger is satisfied—no easy thing; and then you will hear one of them holding forth in a monotonous tone, while the others listen, but never interrupt him. After the tale of his adventures is given, another takes it up, and so the night passes; for, wake at any hour, and you will hear a dull, unchanging voice; they never seem to sleep, and yet are ready, at the first dawn of day, to start on new adventures to furnish fresh themes for the night. They

are very superstitious," he added, "and that tale is the best which is the most wonderful; they are now telling a favourite story of the large-legged serpent, with a body as thick as the yellow-wood tree, that lives on the Winterberg.

"That strange old man, Skipper, may be thoroughly depended on in situations of danger, but is easily daunted by superstitious feelings. I remember his firing three times at a large sea-cow; the piece snapped in the pan, and Skipper turned back, and was not to be prevailed on to try again." He said, "It was not to be."

When the elephants do not fall after frequent firing, it is thought to be fate; and Skipper quits the bush, and returns hopeless. The Hottentots generally wear charms about them; and a common one is the wood found in the head of the elephant. "Ay, I have heard of that wood," I said.—"To-morrow, I shall probably be able to show it you," replied the hunter.

Well, to-morrow came, and we took an early breakfast, and prepared for our sport. "I will

not again trust to my own legs," I said, "but to those of my horse."—"He will be of little service to you near the elephants," replied the hunter: "fear deprives horses of all power; and I have seen them lie down under the bush to conceal themselves, crouching like dogs;—however, if you like, you can ride until you come near them."

We crossed the Fish River, and directed our course to its junction with the Kat, through a country strongly resembling that I have already described,—hills and hollows, covered with dusky-green bush, and traversed by elephant paths; while at times we came on the dark, deep, shadowy side of a kloof, or caught a gleam of the river winding its serpent way far below us. As we moved on, the noise of the honey-bird was heard, which a Hottentot quickly answered by a whistle, and followed, still whistling his response to every note; and the bird conducted him to the nest, which, unfortunately, overhung a cliff far out of reach, baffling both bird and follower. I have

several times known the Hottentots pursue these winged messengers, and seldom return empty-handed.

The greater part of the day was spent in fruitless search, and the shadows had shifted before the quick-sighted Hottentots had discovered any recent traces; at length, one of them pointed to a distant, high, rocky hill on the opposite side of the Kat River, and forming a continuation to its steep-wooded bank. We descended from the range of hills we had been skirting, reached the river, crossed it, and commenced the steep ascent: the low ground we had lately been traversing, and the abrupt banks of the stream, had intercepted our view of the elephants; but on mounting the summit of the hill, we saw them plainly. Here, those who were riding dismounted, and tied their horses to bushes, turning their heads from the point of attack, and lighting round them the elephants' dried dung—that, in the event of the animals charging that way, they might be safe—left them, and moved cautiously and silently forward.

As we approached, we counted nine or ten, whose backs rose above the high bush that clothed the side of the steep kloof in which they were feeding. We walked quickly forward, until we got immediately above them. The two Hottentots halted, and took their posts; while the hunter, my companion and myself, pursued our course; the surrounding bush and euphorbia were too thick to see any thing, but we heard them close below us quietly browsing on the boughs of the Spekboom, their favourite food. We heard a shot, —another, and then a tremendous rush, as the elephants passed by us through the bush; the hunter fired without success; and I had not time to bring my gun to my shoulder before they were gone; the whole was a thing of a few seconds. We followed, D— lighting the bush around us; and descending into the hollow, we again heard a shot, and having skirted round the small kloof, returned to the point from which we started.

The effect of the firing was the death of