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# THE RIDGE OF THE WHITE WATERS

("WITWATERSRAND")

OR

IMPRESSIONS OF A VISIT TO JOHANNESBURG  
WITH SOME NOTES OF DURBAN, DELAGOA  
BAY, AND THE LOW COUNTRY

BY

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"BETWEEN SUN AND SAND," "UNCONVENTIONAL REMINISCENCES,"  
"THE WHITE HECATOMB," ETC. ETC.

WITH FORTY-THREE ILLUSTRATIONS IN HALF-TONE

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THE (MODERN) BREAD OF LIFE.

Frontispiece]

## CHAPTER III

The Low Country—Komati Poort—Old hunting grounds—The Crocodile River—Reminiscence of a rhinoceros—The desert and the sown—Waternal Boven—Pretoria—Paul Kruger—Approach to Johannesburg—The dumps—The Rand Club—Street traffic—The Johannesburg shops—The Art Gallery—The Country Club

THE train for the Transvaal starts from Lourenco Marques early in the morning. Whatever else has changed with the changing years the typical Low Country winter weather appears to have remained unaltered. This half-sultry haze, so characteristic of the wide stretch between the foot-hills of the Drakensberg and the sea, the product of the mild, gentle wind streaming over the Indian Ocean from the north-east—how well I remember it! How often have I strained my eyes from the north-western mountain summits, vainly endeavouring to unravel the mysteries it then shrouded!

We pass Ressano Garcia and other sonorously named tin villages and rumble through the

brown ridges of the Lebomba Range, which is very low just here. Thence to Komati Poort, where I mean to spend the night, for I purpose going on by the goods train to-morrow morning. Otherwise I should miss seeing the theatre of some interesting experiences in the year 1875, for the passenger train goes over most of its course through the Crocodile River Valley in the darkness.

Next morning the goods train duly arrives. I am fortunate enough to find attached to it the medical officer's coach; the kindly medico offers me a seat therein, which I gladly accept. The coach, which forms the tail of the train, waggles consumedly—but what of that? To me this journey is of the most vivid interest. Except that it appears to be somewhat arid, the landscape is the same as it was in those dimming years which it is at once a sadness and a pleasure to recall. The timber has not been thinned out; except for the rail-track the hand of man has here left no defacing sign. The only thing I miss is the game; just about here it used to be especially plentiful. But there stand the thickets of gnarled, grey-stemmed deciduous trees, their twigs putting forth the first tender leafage of

spring. There stands a grove of another character. The trees have tall, straight stems, which are heavily groined; the bark is stained a vivid and continuous yellow. This peculiarity is due to the presence of some lichen; probably a *Parmelia*. In the old days we used to think the colour was due to fever, and would carefully avoid either sleeping near such groves or passing under the boughs before the sun had drunk up the dew-fall.

Not very far from here I lost my way in an exceptionally dense haze. I had wounded a buffalo, and followed for hours on its spoor. Suddenly I found that I did not know where I was. I had no water, having left the camp in a hurry when the presence of the herd of buffalo was reported. That night I slept in a tree, with the lions prowling beneath throughout the long night. I had only three cartridges left. My sleep was taken in snatches, for I was pursued by ants from bough to bough.

Away to the right, in the dim distance, I can see Pretorius Kop and the Ship Mountain. Between these was one of my favourite camping-places. To-day they are included in the Sabi Game Reserve, wherein none may trespass

without incurring grievous penalties. The Selati Railway, now being constructed, runs through the Reserve. It is said that the lions, owing to their not being shot down, have become embarrassingly fearless of man in the vicinity of the construction camps.

To the left springs that range of naked, granite hills beyond which the Kaap Valley lies. In the old days I have laid more than one noble koodoo low in the kloofs lying between those rocky ridges. The country then was not so arid; in that broken region several small springs of water were to be found and dense strips of forest ramified between the naked rock-areas, in whose deep clefts many lions laired. But the country lying between this range and Pretorius Kop was quite waterless. I can recall various weary tramps undertaken with one or other of the fountains I had discovered as its objective. Many a night have I lain under the stars among these valleys, and gone to sleep with the roaring of lions echoing round me from ledge to ledge, leaving my Native boys to tend the fire, turn about. Little then did I dream that I should one day spin past these granite masses behind a snorting locomotive.

At Hectorspruit is to be seen the first indication that the country is becoming productive. On the platform lie a number of boxes filled with tomatoes destined for the all-consuming maw of Johannesburg. Beside the pile stands a tall, bronzed man in shirt sleeves. His farm, he tells me, lies "over there"—pointing to the granite range. He has no family, no neighbours. He grows a little fruit and breeds cattle. Mules will live in the neighbourhood, but not horses. Yes—an occasional lion strays out of the Sabi Game Reserve and takes up its quarters in one or other of the gorges; last year he shot one. Reedbuck and an occasional koodoo are still to be found. His homestead stands near a small fountain; no doubt one of those in whose vicinity I used to camp. On the whole this man's life must be well worth the living. Better, far, his freedom than the cramping existence of those cooped up in the sordid environment of the average South African town.

The line runs almost parallel with the course of the Crocodile River. The water is rarely visible, but its bed is well defined by the more luxuriant growth of timber and the deeper green of the foliage. The ground begins to swell into

undulations on the right, thus cutting off the view of the interminable, lightly-jungled plains lying to north and east. We now approach the steep-sided valley which the river has carved for itself through the first plateau leading to the foot-hills of the Drakensberg.

Usually, when one looks back, the things recalled become magnified. Here, however, I find the reverse to be the case; I had no idea that the country lying between the Lebomba and the inland range was so immense in extent. The much-matured legs of to-day wonder reminiscently at the prowess of those of youth. Is it possible that I used to wander light-heartedly from bound to bound of this great tract, undertaking long campaigns with no more baggage than a water-bottle, a cartridge-belt, and a tobacco-pouch?

At Kaapmuiden the kind doctor and his waggly coach remain, so I have to take up my quarters in a truck. Fortunately, it is one of those designed to convey "perishables." The Hectorspruit tomatoes fill one end; I, a "perishable" of a different kind, the other. The doctor has added to my debt of gratitude by lending me a comfortable cane arm-chair. In

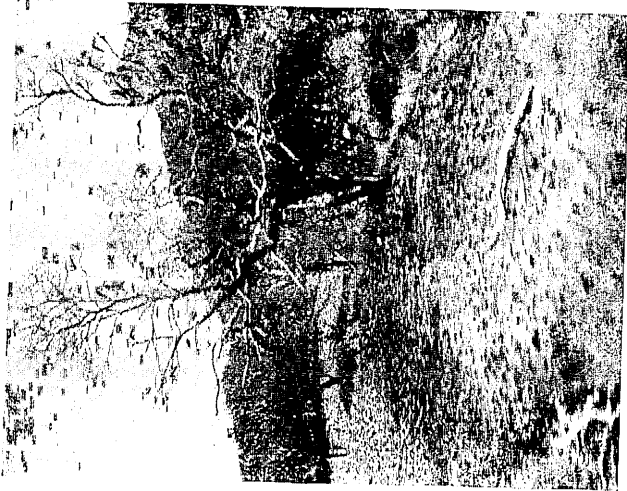
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this I sit, watching the scenes of my old wanderings as they open out in changing panorama on either hand. The mild, mitigated sunshine floods the world, the wind soughs gently down the valley, and I make futile and pathetic efforts to recreate my vanished youth.

At last I am enabled to recognise the spot I have been especially seeking; it lies among those domed hillocks of granite a short distance down the river from the Alkmaar Station. It is the site of my old camp; the place where, in April 1875, I was held up by the flooded river, and where I got fever. I have told the story elsewhere, so will not repeat it. How well I remember those crowded hours—the building of the raft, the gruesome business of swimming through the crocodile-infested reach, the great black rhinoceros which came and sniffed at the little patrol tent in the early morning, and the other huge brute which, much to my embarrassment, I came face to face with when stalking some reedbuck. On that occasion I was creeping round the base of the kopje at the foot of which the Nelspruit Station stands to-day, and suddenly found myself within thirty yards of the creature—"plunged in prehistoric thought."



SCENERY IN THE ELANDS SPRUIT VALLEY.



TYPICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE LOW COUNTRY,  
NEAR HECTORSPRUIT.

It was on the actual spot where the station is built that that armour-plated anachronism stood in its mood of vicious stupidity on that long-past April day. I wonder where the creature's un-gainly bones are lying, and to whose rifle they fell.

On we speed, the mountains on either side growing from pygmies to giants; the river foaming down its deepening gorge, which is strewn with Titanic boulders. We leave the valley of the Crocodile, and enter that of Eland's Spruit. Here is a country which should be magnificently productive. It is a land goodly to the eye and full of rich promise; hot, no doubt, in summer, but probably not unhealthy. Here lie wide, arable plains just beginning to fall under servitude of the plough. Farm-houses and fruit-orchards grow frequent; pineapple plantations and cornfields mark the growing dominance of the husbandman. Around it all, in the mellowing distance, the soft-contoured mountains dream in the golden, cloudless atmosphere.

Yes—the desert has given place to the sown, and my dream of other days has folded its wings and melted into that filmy haze which eternally