

RECOLLECTIONS OF ADVENTURES

PIONEERING AND DEVELOPMENT
IN SOUTH AFRICA

1850 - 1911

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CHAPTER VIII.

BIG GAME SHOOTING TRIPS, ADVENTURES WITH LIONS, ETC.

In those days the High Veld between the Drakensberg and Heidelberg was *swarming* with game, and in September and October, dense masses of them would trek out of Natal to the Free State; the whole country was full of deep water pools containing fine yellow fish, carp, tench and barbel. These pools were surrounded with tall reeds and rank grass, and lions in great numbers lurked in these covers, for their prey. A Pole named Drodsky, made a business of lion shooting, and always went alone with one Hottentot, following him at a safe distance with a spare gun and ammunition; he was greatly admired by the Boers for his cool courage and is reported to have killed during the years he lived on the Vaal River, some hundreds of lions, and sold the skins and the cubs he sometimes caught.

I have had wagons stampede at night, when oxen saw or smelled lions, and one night when near Cornelius River, I went to see what the dogs were barking at, one brute nearly caught me, but I never suffered real damage through them on the High Veld, partly owing to my knowing the worst places to avoid at night time; besides they had so much game that they were not hungry. These fine water holes and morasses are now nearly all dried up, and one-time rich grass and clover valleys are dry ditches, due to sheep and goats tramping foot-paths from one water hole to another, which in flood time they soon cut into deep "dongas." The

game, although in countless thousands, never cut up the pasturage like sheep do, and many parts of South Africa are becoming barren, as the water instead of being stored as of yore, is run off in these dongas without benefitting the soil.

When not occupied during the winter in going trips to Zoutpansberg and Spelonken, I used to go hunting in the Bush Veld where in those early days, there were large numbers of game, rhinoceros, giraffe, buffalo, kudu, waterbuck, eland, palla, wildebeest, hartebeest, rietbok, quagga, ostrich, besides smaller antelopes such as duiker and steinbok, and birds of all kinds, francolin, partridge, grouse, guinea-fowl, koorhaan, pauw, wild duck, pigeon, geese, teal, lions, hyenas, leopards, lynxes, wild dogs, jackals, etc. There was grand shooting and plenty of excitement, sometimes with natives, sometimes with lions, etc., and I have enjoyed having yarns with the old Boer hunters who lived in tents and wagons all along the Apies, Pienaars, Plaatte, and Eland rivers, grazing their stock during winter on the succulent buffalo grass. They lived a primitive, but perfectly happy life, shooting what game they required and having plenty of food, bread, dried fruits, pumpkins, potatoes, mealies, besides fresh milk, eggs and butter, and the better sort made their camps very snug.

I never pretended to be a lion hunter and had a wholesome respect for their majesties, but occasionally had their acquaintance *forced* upon me, and much as I dislike lion and snake stories, I will relate one or two adventures as they occur to me.

While returning from a winter trip in the Bush Veld with two wagons and a troop of loose cattle ;

after trekking for miles through burnt grass, we arrived late at Sluetelfontein, drew the wagons a distance apart, and made a rough bush "kraal" to keep the loose cattle between the spans of oxen. My horse was tied to the hind wheel of my wagon, my brother and a friend slept in the other wagon, the native drivers and leaders on the ground under their wagon. We had heard no lions and it was very dark. About midnight I woke hearing a gurgling noise, got off, with my shot gun loaded with slugs, (as I had been shooting small buck), and saw an animal close to me which I took for a hyena sitting up in the road, gave him the charge of slugs right in his face, he, a large male lion, gave a tremendous roar, fell, and got up again, and got into a patch of dry grass in a gully, where after some commotion, he was quiet. The cattle were now all on the alert and I ordered the men to stand round them. When quiet was restored, I looked for my horse, he was gone from the wheel, the buffalo "reim" broken, and the gurgling noise was heard again about 30 paces away. I called my driver, Klaas, to make a flambeau of grass on a long stick, and come with my spare gun. We went towards the sound, and two green eyes were looking at us over the side of my dead horse, behind which the lioness was crouching. Klaas lifted the torch, I fired at the eyes, and in a flash the lioness charged me. Klaas bolted with the light, and the other gun, and in diving under the wagon, cut his head open against a bolt. The lioness stopped a few yards from me, so near that I felt the gravel she disturbed rattle against my legs; she then went back again and lay behind the horse. I got Klaas back with a fresh torch, and promised to shoot him if he bolted again. I fired several shots at her, the brute rushing at me and growling, but turning back each time about half way, as fortunately I had not wounded her in the

darkness; but hit the dead horse close to her nose more than once. Our white companion was in a "mortal funk" and quite demoralised, so I told him to get inside the wagon and draw the blinds! My brother Edward asked permission to come with me, but I did not like to risk it, so would not let him. Finding it impossible to make a good shot in the dark, I decided to wait for daylight, so built a fire about 30 yards from her, and sent the boys to stand round the cattle while Ted and I watched her. As the dawn was breaking, she gained confidence from being so long unmolested and stood up, intending I think, to lift the horse and take him further off. I fired, and broke her shoulders, and she made a terrible commotion; I had just before firing told the boys to inspan, and get to grass and water on the Elands River. They were just about finished inspanning when the loose cattle stampeded, the two spans with the wagons followed, rushing through the trees, smashing both tents of my handsome new wagons, breaking gear and half killing some oxen, one of my hind oxen being rendered useless—a regular smash up all round. I *could* run in those days, and I did run, to try and stop the stampede, but only succeeded as far as the wagons were concerned, when the oxen got so entangled in the trees, they could go no further. By this time we were far from the dead horse and lions, and were so employed in repairing damages, that we could not go back to skin them, so went to Elands River, where we found the loose cattle. Philip Minnaar's Hottentot going to the stock farm during the day, found the male lion dead in the patch of grass in the hollow, and the lioness with both shoulders broken, lying near the horse. He shot her and so he got two skins. It was an expensive amusement for me! Once coming back from the Spelonken, I was outspanned east of Stryd-

poort, when hundreds of armed Kaffirs passed my wagons, as I thought, on the war path, I hailed some, and they said that Sebedilla, their Chief, had ordered them to encircle game and drive them down to the narrow "poort." I inspanned at once and got into the "poort" just in front of the driving game, and shot seven quaggas for the old chief, for which he was grateful; his whole "Impi" had only killed some small buck, as a black rhinoceros had broken the ring of beaters, and let all the game out. I kept one quagga for my boys, as they preferred that meat to any other game. This old Chief was always friendly to me, and was loyal to the Boers, who had once befriended him; his tribe is Matabele. Years afterwards, in the Volksraad, I used my influence to prevent old Sebedilla's Location being cut into farms, and parcelled out to speculative applicants.

One day while riding a smart little roan pony that was not well trained, I had ridden down a fine giraffe and had just put up my gun to shoot him, when the pony looked up, and, terrified at the tall beast towering over him, swerved under the bough of a tree, which caught me full in the "lower chest," it took me part of the way, and with the recoil, shot me back some yards, the pony going on from under me. I fully understood the meaning of a *real* stomach ache. The boys caught the pony, and I kept him in hard work after that, until he was sensible.

The Elephant's River, after it is joined by the Eland, Moos and the other rivers, is a fine stream. The banks are lined with grand trees, and rich grass, and there are long stretches of water, ideal for boating. It abounds in fish and crocodiles, and when at all in flood is most dangerous to cross at the fords,

which the crocodiles appear to watch, and although natives, when crossing, go in line, the "croc" will rush and take one occasionally. I have shot many of these loathsome reptiles on the sand banks of this beautiful river, but no matter where you hit them, they generally manage to get into the water to die.

Along the banks of the Zambesi the natives make stockades into the water to protect the women while filling their water jars, but the wily "croc" sometimes waylays them in the reeds, and attacks them from the land side. When watering oxen, care must be taken not to let them go near steep banks and deep water, as a crocodile can pull the largest ox in, by seizing him by the nose, and then drowning him. Many dogs get taken by them in the bush veld rivers.

and had a Mr. Bell with him, a tall young fellow, just out from England. Bell went down the reedy banks with a shot gun after snipe and had a little spaniel with him. Suddenly a white rhinoceros rushed out of the reeds after the dog. Bell fired, but the shot would not even tickle him. The dog made for the wagon, ran under it, the half blind rhinoceros followed, ran against the wagon, and got his horn into the "aftertrap" full of pots and kettles, with which he made off, taking it some distance, scattering these utensils about the veld to the astonishment and delight of the native boys. Had it been a black, instead of a silly old white rhinoceros, it would have been a different joke, as the blacks are savage and active.

While hunting on the flats below Matala's Mountain, I hired some of his men to carry skins and meat, horns, etc., to the camp for me, the price to be paid was eight head of either quagga, wildebeest (brindled gnu), or hartebeest, for a fortnight's work. I found a troop of wildebeest, killed five, and wounded one badly while running him down in the dust made by the herd; my horse went into a hole and rolled over on to me. The stock of the gun broke, it went off, the bullet passing through the rim of my hat; I was stunned and my shoulder and hand hurt, and when the Kaffirs came up to me I was still dazed and did not know where I was. This was the only time I remember losing my way in the bush veld. The horse's jaw was out of joint and I did not know what to do, but a Boer at the camp knocked it back into the socket with his leather bandolier full of bullets, certainly a primitive, but effectual treatment which would have astonished a "vet."

There is some grand and wild scenery in Matala's and Mapela's countries, and a splendid hunting

came near, then I took the trembling wretch with me. Two days later I met some of his tribe and handed him over to them. He told us that he had wandered from a hunting party shortly before I met him. The gang who were going to drown him had just caught him and brought him to the river. My kaffirs said that he was only a "Bapedi" and very thin and not worth troubling about, and I might have let the Matabeli drown him. The fellow himself seemed rather indifferent about it; he had been well fed at the wagons and preferred to go on with us but I did not want him, so he returned to the bosom of his family.

All my spare working oxen and cattle I sent to fatten in the bush-veld in winter. One year Philip Bronkhorst had them at Rooibokfontein under the Swart Rand near the junction of the Eland and Olifant rivers. On my way to Zoutpansberg I called to get some fresh spans and found my cheery old friend, Willem Hans Prinsloo and his son Adrian, and one or two others there. I asked if there was much game as it looked an ideal bit of country. Old Willem, nick-named "Boschbok" said that there was game, but as an "Englishman could'nt shoot, what did it help." He, however, sent Adrian with me to see that I did not get lost in the hills. We soon saw a blaauw wildebeest (Brindled Gnu), which stood gazing at us about four hundred yards away. I aimed at him, but Adrian said "Don't shoot, he is too far;" as he stood still, I dropped him with a bullet between the eyes. I had then a Pryse and Redman rifle, conical ball, and Adrian was astonished at its accuracy. A little further we came on a herd of pallah and I shot two, with only one shot each. We then left the boys to skin the game and bring the meat into camp. When we arrived, old "Bosch-

bok" said, "Well Adrian, how often did the Englishman miss?" Then old Willem and his friends had a good laugh at my expense, but when sometime later the boys brought in the game and he heard the truth, he seemed quite disappointed, but quite good natured over it. He was a fine old sportsman himself. While we were having supper in Bronkhorst's tent about 9 a.m., we heard a bellowing of cattle and a crashing of the bushes which formed the kraal. Then a general stampede of all the cattle in the big kraal (about 500 of Bronkhorst's and mine together), and the silly creatures bolted in a mass. There was a lull, then we heard another cow bellow, then another stampede, then another bellow, further and further away. At daylight next morning we found one cow dead in the kraal, and eleven of poor Bronkhorst's cows and heifers lying dead at short distances apart, also a large front ox of mine. The lion had eaten the breast of the ox and the udder of the cow and then walked off. Next evening old Willem put up a gun trap with an old smooth-bore loaded with slugs, tying a tempting heifer (one of those the lion had killed), in front of it. About the same time, while at supper, we heard a loud report, a sort of roar and gurgle and then quiet. One fellow, who was a notorious coward, proposed we should go in the dark and see if the lion was dead. We asked him to lead the way but he had several reasons for not doing so. Next morning, we found a big maned lion dead, with one slug hole just over the eye. I gave the head to John Robert Lys, who had it over the door of his office in Pretoria for years. This little episode made our cattle skittish, and Bronkhorst told me on my return that they had stampeded once or twice since. On my return, Philip Minnaar and his wife accompanied me from

Rhenosterpoort, and we stayed a couple of days at Bronkhorst's (who was his brother-in-law). I took a couple of spans of fresh oxen, leaving my tired oxen, and he asked me to lend him a span for a couple of treks to rest his. I lent him a fat red span I bought from Jacobus Rademeyer and these had been in the lion kraal. We had not gone more than two miles, when some guinea fowl startled them; they stampeded with the wagon and frightened poor Mrs. Minnaar dreadfully. The brutes rushed the wagon against stumps of trees until both hind wheels were shaken to pieces and the tent broken. When we got them they were entangled in trees, so we had "to outspan," send the oxen back, get tools and assistance to mend the wagon; poor Philip regretted not having stuck to his tired oxen. Tinkering up his wagon, and with the help of the inevitable raw hide reims, we reached Pretoria safely with our loads of ivory. There was never any monotony on these winter trips through the veld; something was always happening; it was charming, notwithstanding some hardships now and then. I never stayed longer in Pretoria than just to arrange business matters, and prepare again to go either to Natal or Zoutpansberg; the village life soon tired me.

Where the road leaves Elands River to go over the bush ridges to the Olifant, on the top of "Israel's Nek" is a huge mound of small stones which the Kaffirs say has taken ages to build; each traveller as he passes adds one stone to make his journey safe and prosperous. You see these mounds on many hill passes all over the country. When I first knew this part there were troops of Koodoo, Giraffe, Eland, Rhinoceros, Brindled Gnu, Quagga, Hartebeest, Waterbuck, Rietbuck and vast herds of

Pallah, Rooibok, quantities of Ostriches, Pauw, Knorrhahn, Bustards, Guinea Fowl, Francolin, Red Wing Partridges, Grouse, Spurwing Geese, Widgeon, Teal and Ducks; a game paradise. Now nearly all are gone, and the whole beautiful country destroyed by Kaffir kraals, the trees chopped down, "the place thereof shall know it no more." The Olifant River is a beautiful stream, the banks lined by large trees and long stretches of water fit for boating. I have spent many a happy day hunting on both banks, mostly quite alone, sometimes with a companion, once with my dear brother Alex, keen sportsman and delightful companion.

CHAPTER XX.

BRITISH AND OTHER EUROPEAN PIONEERS AND VISITORS.

After we had been in Pretoria for some time, other Europeans came to reside there, among them John Robert Lys with his cheery anecdotes, his unbounded and genuine hospitality, his ingrained loyalty to the British Empire, and his downright honesty in public affairs. Mauch the explorer used to be much in Robert Lys' house where he came with the dear old hunter and pioneer William Hartley, who was afterwards killed by a rhinoceros, in what is now Rhodesia. He took the traveller Mauch to the Zimbabwe ruins. Thos. Baines (the first to paint the Victoria Falls,) a quaint, unassuming, but sterling man, was one of the first to obtain a concession from Lobengula. He was given more to geographical and scientific research, than mere money making. We enjoyed his visits to Pretoria and "The Willows." Alexander McKorkindale, another real pioneer, who endeavoured to introduce British settlers into the Transvaal, and connect it with the nearest sea port. He obtained from President Pretorius large tracts of land in "New Scotland" district, near Lake Chrissie, eastern Transvaal. The higher portion of this land, named New Scotland, was dotted over with lakes, some so deep that hippopotami lived in them and the district was considered by the Boers too swampy to farm on. Of late years, the lakes have shrunk, some almost dry, and heavy wagons now go over on dry ground—what were formerly swamps and "vleis." The

other part of the concession was on the lower terraces towards Swaziland called Roburnia. McKorkindale undertook to import white settlers to occupy this land, and was to open up a trade route to the Southern portion of Delagoa Bay. He often used to stay at "The Willows," when travelling between New Scotland and Pretoria, and gave me a very unfavourable idea of the thankless task of trying to settle emigrants on the land in South Africa. These Scotch peasants, judging from McKorkindale's statements, who were used to privation and hard work in their own country, were not satisfied with anything while they could claim what they wanted from the Glasgow Company and would do nothing to improve their own position. Eventually, when he died, and the settlement was disbanded, many of these men (when thrown on their own resources) did quite well for themselves. The land has been sold in farms; and thus the company may have repaid their outlay, while the district is filling up; partly occupied by settlers under Lord Milner's scheme after the war, partly by Dutch and English farmers. McKorkindale died of malarial fever contracted on the island of Injak, Delagoa Bay, while waiting for a vessel bringing him freight from England. He was an enthusiastic, courageous pioneer of the best sort, but troubles and anxieties proved too much for him. I remember Anthony Trollope, the novelist, in 1877, being angry with me for saying, I did not think he should write a book on South Africa, until he had studied the life and conditions of the country *outside* Government House, and apart from blue books. Sir George Colley stayed in Pretoria and passed on to Delagoa Bay on foot. Some years afterwards he was commander-in-chief in Natal and was in command at Ingogo, Lang's Nek and Majuba, where he was killed.