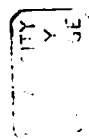




[Frontispiece]

LIONS FEEDING; GIRAFFES COME FEARLESSLY NEAR BECAUSE THE KILLER IS GORGED



HUNTING BEASTS AND MEN

By

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Towards midday on the second day, I had an entirely unexpected thrill, and faced the first big game I ever tackled. We were swimming the horses across a river, slow and deep and about a hundred feet wide, and the leader had got across and was walking his horse through the thick reeds of the bank, when I heard a curse and a splash behind me. The second Dutchman, setting his mount at the muddy bank, had been thrown from the saddle as the animal stumbled and floundered wildly back into deep water before managing to find his feet.

His horse struggled up the bank, his rifle was dropped (he had been holding it above his head), and he himself, snorting like a grampus, stood comically up to his neck in water, wringing out his long hair and feeling with his feet for his rifle under the muddy swirl of river.

Then, without warning, and with a rush like the launch of a battleship, a grunting rhino charged down through the reeds straight at the elf-locked hunter in the stream.

I swung round in my saddle, cuddled rifle to shoulder almost without waiting to sight, and had pulled the trigger and heard the report, my heart hammering, while still struggling wildly to recall all I had heard about how to shoot rhinos.

One should aim at the ear, but my bullet splashed harmlessly off the armoured forehead. I fired again instantly, and simultaneously heard the first Dutchman's rifle crash.

The foaming rush was stopped not three yards from the intended victim; the beast rolled out into deep water and sank.

My horse was trembling violently, and I was in no better state myself. The man in the river scrambled from the water, first fishing up his gun and swearing impassively at it. I never again heard him say so many sentences straight off. Then he stripped, laid his clothes over the

reeds to dry, and sat down nude to take his gun to bits and painstakingly dry and oil every part.

Both men were quite unconcerned that one had almost lost his life. They grunted at my excited questions, though the seated man muttered grudgingly at me: "Second shot quite good. But never miss first time."

I asked about the carcase, but they went silently on with preparations for our midday meal; and, after it, settled down to sleep. I had never known them leave a hide before; and the two rhino horns at least were worth something.

It was evening before the explanation appeared. I was lying lazily watching the sliding river when I saw a huge, mis-shapen object sluggishly break the surface. There was our dead rhino. The sourdoughs had not bothered to explain that the carcase would rise in a few hours.

My bullet had entered a vital spot at the base of the ear, in front. The Dutchman had shot him in the side of the neck.

These two spots are the only really vulnerable ones on a rhino. Over the rest of him, his hide is as impenetrable as the side of a battleship.

I looked at the tons of dead flesh in the water, and prepared to wade in and try to help get him ashore. But one hunter grunted at me, "Wait!" and looked towards the bush behind us.

Then I saw a string of about twenty niggers padding out of the trees. When they saw the carcase in the water, wide grins spread over their faces. They all had knives, and they simply swarmed round that beast.

He was soon on the bank, and with shouting and laughter the blacks hacked him into lumps. Then, again in single file, they set off the way they had come, each man bearing an enormous bit of bleeding meat on his shoulders.

We followed them over a twisty trail until we reached

their village. This was a collection of huts, of mud and thatch, round a central clearing.

A big fire was blazing there, and the women and children hailed the arrival of the meat with deafening shouts and singing. Pretty soon, joints were cooking, and while we waited for our evening meal, we sat down by the headman's hut and talked.

My two companions were slightly more chatty than usual. They grunted a dozen words or more in Matabele to the induna, whose language I knew only a very little. These two Dutchmen had apparently forgotten how to talk properly. They spent their whole lives where a sign or a grunt is sometimes better than speech and, having no need of words, forgot them.

For supper that night, I had a rhinoceros steak. It was fatty and certainly not tender, but I was hungry. The rest of the feast went into the natives, and they capered and shouted over it, ever more slowly as the hours passed. Some specially choice bits were put aside to hang awhile. They would be eaten when the grilling climate had improved their taste and aroma. Most negroes consider crawling meat a great delicacy, but they are too greedy to wait unless there is a glut available.

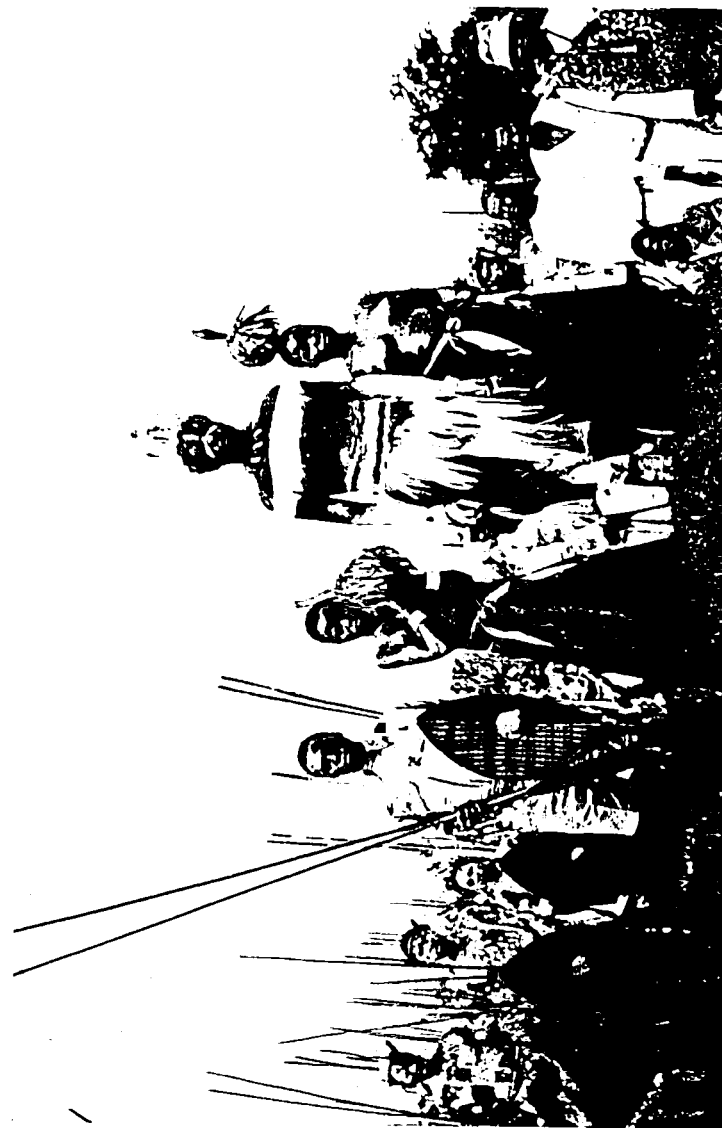
I did try to get a few words out of the less taciturn of my Dutchmen. I asked him what would have happened to our kill if those Kaffirs had not turned up.

"Kaffir boy in bush see rhino shot," he explained. "Fetch men when beast come up. We give them meat and tomorrow they lend us trackers. We go hunting."

"What about ostriches?" I asked. I had come on the trip rather hoping to get some feathers.

"No ostrich here many miles," the man said. And although we got a fine bag of skins on that journey, we never even saw an ostrich.

We set off hunting before dawn next morning. Three Kaffirs came with us, and led us over miles of stunted



A HUGE GATHERING TO MEET A TRADING WAGON

CHAPTER XVII

Arrested by nigger police—Mafuta pays his score—Chased by a rhino—Rhino-foot steak—Praying to a sleep-talker—The end of a hunting-trip—Mafuta goes by train.

AFTER I had seen all I could of the Zimbabwe ruins, I made my way back towards Bulawayo. My brother and a friend, down from West Africa on a shooting-trip, wanted to see something of Portuguese East before they returned. Accordingly, we arranged to meet, and go over the border together. I was granted a special leave for the purpose.

We met at a small dorp about fifteen miles from the frontier. When we had engaged two more cook-boys, and some carriers who would come part of the way with us, we moved off.

Mafuta was in his glory, keeping the bunch in order, and lightening the hours with long tales. It was familiar country to me, though new to my brother. We decided to get on to the border, and make camp for the night, rather than stop for game on the Rhodesian side.

It was a temptation to prolong the journey, because we saw many fresh buffalo and buck spoor. It was a long time since I had been out hunting, and I began to feel the thrill of it run through my veins. I don't like killing, exactly, but when I must do so, for food or self-defence, I rather enjoy the tracking and incidentals of the chase. Usually, when I go on a hunting-trip, I try to get pictures, not a collection of horns and skins to bring home.

We looked out for a spot to make camp, and found a suitable one. Mafuta and his gang soon had the tents up. There was one for stores, and one for my brother, his friend and myself. I prefer to sleep in the air if it is possible, so do not carry a tent when I am on my own.

We had bagged a small impala ewe during the day, and, in the evening, the cook-boys made a savoury stew of the meat. We sat and talked of the chances of sport next day. My brother was excited at the plentiful traces of game we had seen. He was most keen to get a rhino, which he could not do in British territory, because they are protected.

We told yarns about various hunting adventures. My brother had spent a lot of time in the Masai country. Lions there are as common as cats in Golders Green, and he knew nearly all there was to know about hunting them. He said that the natives are marvellously clever at spearing lions. They keep packs of "lion-dogs". These dogs are like bull-terriers, very broad-chested, smooth-haired, and exceedingly strong and hard to bowl over. Three of them will pull down a lion. I had nothing to compare with my brother's stories for thrill, and by the time we turned in, I had decided that I would go up to Kenya Colony and the Masai country as soon as I got the chance.

The chatter in the boys' camp had died down when we finally knocked out the ashes from our pipes. We had had a long day, and all felt dog-tired. I estimated that we were about three miles from the Portuguese border. The extra boys we had taken on were only coming as far as the border; we were to engage fresh ones when we had crossed.

I slept deeply, and was dreaming of lion-hunts, and of my cousin Tony, who got his leg chewed off by a lion soon after this, when a sudden, painful bang in the ribs woke me rudely from my sleep.

I saw that it was daylight. Both ends of our tent were tied back, and, in each opening, I saw a nigger with a gun. Standing over me was another nigger, jabbing the muzzle of his rifle into my side. My brother and friend were likewise guarded.

I thought, at first, that all the boys had mutinied, got

As a matter of fact, we had a most enjoyable hunting-trip. My brother was used to the more open country of the north and west. The thick bush of Portuguese East Africa was new to him. The whole place simply teemed with game that season. We saw buck, rhinos, buffaloes, lions, hippos and several herds of elephants. I had never seen the place so full of animals, but we afterwards heard that there had been a long drought up north, which had probably driven the beasts down a bit to where water was plentiful.

Lions did not attract my brother. He was so used to the Masai way of going after them with dogs and spears, that it seemed tame to him to track and shoot a lion. However, he had his great wish, and got a rhino.

We had seen fresh spoor about, so were tracking it carefully, my brother, his friend and myself. We went so quietly that it was a slow job. The rhino has wonderful hearing and scent, but his sight is poor. This would be a great help to hunters, only unfortunately the massive old tusker acts as host to numbers of "tick birds". These birds perch on its back, and make a hearty meal of the ticks that live on the tough hide. As a sign of their gratitude, they made a deuce of a din when they see the hunter approach, and fly up and circle above the rhino, putting the wind up every animal for miles. These birds have very keen sight.

We could see the fresh marks on trees and bushes about us, showing where the rhino had torn off pieces for his last meal, and we judged him to be fairly near. My brother spotted him first. He was standing in a small clearing, about eight hundred yards away from us, tearing leaves and twigs off a young tree.

Accordingly, my brother hid himself in the place where we were, and his friend and I circled carefully round the clearing, until we got up-wind of the feeding rhino. Our plan was to make a noise and scare him, when

he would probably bolt past the place where my brother was hidden. Then he would get a broadside shot at him.

We had got all prepared for the scaring scene, when we suddenly heard a shot from the place where my brother was waiting. The rhino we were tracking heard the sound, too, and suddenly tossed up his head, and turned, coming towards us with a thunderous grunt. It was rather like standing in the permanent way, and seeing the Royal Scot hurtling down on top of one.

We both scooted for the nearest tree. Two seconds later, all that could be seen of us was a couple of fine pairs of boots, growing gracefully in a tree, ten feet from the ground. The rhino missed them, though. He passed within a dozen yards of us.

After things were quiet, we went back to see whether my brother had blown his brains out, been playing soldiers, or fired as a signal for us to return forthwith.

I did wonder if he could have had an accident, and was quite relieved to find him, smoking a reflective pipe, and looking almighty pleased with himself, with a huge rhino bull at his feet.

We both gasped, and my companion stopped dead, and said, "You thankless old devil! Where did you bag that? That's not our rhino!"

My brother grinned, and explained that he had been waiting, all tense and expectant, for us to drive our animal down to him, when another beast had come up, winded him, and charged. Apparently, he only saw the rhino when it began to charge. He just had time to scramble aside. Rhinos cannot turn quickly; they are far too unwieldy. He killed the animal with a shot in the side of the neck.

When the boys came up, they fell on the plunder with hoots of joy. Niggers love the fatty parts of rhino meat. They hacked the animal into chunks. The two horns were cut out, and I think my brother still has them.

A specially tender portion of the foot was reserved for our use; the boys made off with the rest.

That night, our cook-boy, assisted by Mafuta, wrapped our piece of meat in a clay pack, and buried it in a hole, over the top of which he raked the hot embers. He sat in front of his pyre for about four hours, smacking his lips, arguing with Mafuta, and talking to himself. "*Nyama yena muhle*. (The meat is good.) 'Nkoos like meat! *Mina asi cooka muhle!*'"

He had a small hooked stick in each hand. On his left he kept a small, clear fire burning. He fed it every few minutes like a temple virgin. As the ash on top of our joint of rhino became cool, he raked it away from the outside of the little heap, with the stick in his right hand. Then, with the left-hand stick, he pulled on more clear, hot wood-ash. He kept this up for the whole time, constantly cursing the other boys because they were in danger of letting his stock of raw fuel become exhausted. At the end of the time, he looked at least as well cooked as the meat.

He served it to us on a round enamel plate. The king's joint-bearer would have had nothing on him then. He positively beamed, although his face was streaked with perspiration and wood-ash.

My brother carved the joint, and we were surprised to find how jolly good it was. It was tender and juicy, and had a marvellous flavour. We told the cook, and he went to bed happy.

The nights were pleasantly cool, and we gave up using the tent, although it had been pitched, and we kept our gear in it. We slept under a tree, our sleeping-blankets pulled well round us, and suffered no more inconvenience from nocturnal insects than we should have done in an open-ended tent.

Just before dawn, I woke, and heard a confused murmur of voices. I wondered at first if I had been