

SOUTH AFRICA

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A SKETCH BOOK OF MEN, MANNERS AND FACTS

WITH AN APPENDIX UPON THE PRESENT SITUATION IN
SOUTH AFRICA AND UPON THE AFFAIRS OF ZULULAND
THE TRANSVAAL AND BECHUANALAND WITH
ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BOER
MISSION TO ENGLAND

BY

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"Not oo word spak he more than was neede"

---Chaucer

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"Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy!"

ordinary colonial sportsman has to be satisfied with the more moderately exciting sport which jackals, hyænas, zebras, wild cats, wolves, and such like afford. Antelopes (bok) and pheasants, and most English game birds, are the usual game, however, which falls to the lot of a colonist. The larger antelopes have left the haunts of the European, and retreated towards the equator with the less graceful, though more formidable animals. In the early days of Natal colonisation, the lion was very often to be seen meandering about the outskirts of settlements, and his roar was by no means infrequently heard by the settlers at night. It is not so many years since they were seen on the Berea (Durban), and they even now, once and again, take it into their heads to start on a marauding expedition, and sneak through outskirting bushes in the interior, into Natal: so that they may be seen there once more any day. The Tongate, a forest not so very far from Durban, used to harbour lions. As to elephants, their tracks may be seen in the Natal forests now. They clear their way before them through the bush, breaking down the young trees and shrubs and trampling them under foot. Traces of their reticulated paths are discernible in the Berea bush. Not more than a quarter of a century has elapsed since this same bush was a perfect network of such paths. The older paths are so well trodden down, that some years must pass over them before they are obliterated. The elephant having once made a thoroughfare for himself, takes care to keep to it, and he walks over it again and again. Elephant's Pass, near Durban, was a famous pass for elephants, whole herds affecting it. At this spot, an old Natalian informed me, that he was shooting birds on the outskirts some five-and-twenty years since, when he suddenly saw his friend of Zoological Gardens' memory making towards him. He let fly at him with a charge of dust shot. A senseless thing to do, no doubt, but the brute seemed not to have relished the insult, for he roared with as much vigour as a child with dust in its eye, and away he went, ploughing up the ground before him. The next morning, my informant saw from his bedroom window, for he resided in the vicinity, a black object in the distance moving along at great speed. He thought it was a Kaffir hut being carried away on the

brawny shoulders of its migratory owner. He discovered, however, in due course, that it was an elephant, and he considered that it must have been the offended magnate of the preceding day's exploit. The screaming of the men, women, and children in the neighbouring kraals informed him as to the personality of the moving figure. When an elephant appears near a Kaffir kraal, every tin vessel is brought into play to create a jarring tintinnabulation, while mothers pinch their children to make them cry. This particular animal took flight, and made for a valley near by, where he was shot and killed, and brought to town in triumph, the achievement causing some little excitement. This I mention, to add that the elephant is a thing of the past, so far as Natal is concerned, though isolated and interesting instances of the capture of these animals in Natal might be multiplied. The rhinoceros is scarcely to be classed amongst Natal animals, but a sea-cow (hippopotamus) was shot at Clare, wallowing in the Umgeni, during my visit to Natal, and I met a man the other day at Tunbridge Wells, who informed me that he had not only shot many sea-cows in Natal, but also enormous boa-constrictors, 30 feet long, and this within the last twenty years. Bushmen paint giraffes on their caves within the boundaries of European South Africa, but I heard of no instance of their presence in British Africa. Several of the smaller feline animals—the tiger-cat, etc., are still fairly plentiful, and they are very destructive, and, like reynard, work sad havoc on the poultry yards. I saw a splendid specimen of this particular animal knocked down for two shillings at the open-air sale, which is held in Durban, weather permitting, every Saturday morning. The black buck, or the koodoo, the eland, the spring buck, or hartebeest, the gemsbuck (the typical unicorn) have, one and all, packed up bag and baggage, and left the dangerous ground of Natal, for the Transvaal and Zambesi. The same practically may be said of the wilde-beest. But this animal is very plentiful near at hand, to which attestation is given by the presence—in most Kaffir huts—of its tail, formed into a kind of artistic broom. Some of the foregoing animals, although they have left Natal, abound in the old colony, the spring-bok notably. This is a difficult animal to shoot. To take a supposition, should you see two hundred grazing, and you

mark one from among the crowd. You may be ever so good a shot, and yet miss your prey. Light travels faster than sound, or than the missile itself. The moment you pull the trigger, the beautiful creatures jump aside from the animal you marked, to a distance of a dozen yards, radiating from the centre, the animal marked of course going with the rest, but as you have reckoned upon this jump, and the probable distance of the jump, you may kill, if your object only consent to jump the right way. A haphazard shot into the thick of the herd is next to useless. Unlike India, Africa is minus deer; they are all antelopes, and antelopes alone. The Natalian's usual game is the red buck, a fair-sized animal, and the peat, a pretty little fellow, with a very dark brown belly, white in the centre. It goes about very noiselessly, sniffing on the ground with its nose touching the dead leaves, in search of umcovote berries. By this little rustle, you may, if you are quick of hearing, know that it is approaching towards you.

There are all kinds of shooting parties in the colonies, large and small, ambitious and modest; some planned by men on pleasure bent, others by traders, and men who have an eye to making a living by their guns. There are parties composed of English sportsmen, who spare no expense in securing for themselves all the luxuries and necessaries of life. They fit up beautifully-appointed caravans with everything that shall guarantee comfort and enjoyment, including a plentiful cellar of wine of excellent vintages, air mattresses, musical instruments, and every other adjunct to ease and indulgence, that the mind of man can suggest. These are always the keenest sportsmen, and such men as Gordon Cumming, Lord Mayo, Parker Gilmore, Frank Oates, Major Serpa Pinto, Dr. Emile Holub, may be said to belong to the class. On the other hand, there are caravan parties whose vehicles though far less extravagantly appointed, are, albeit, quite as imposing in appearance. These contain goods and chattels of a nature to commend themselves to the aboriginal fancy—beads, hardware, combs, brushes, gew-gaws, and knick-knacks of all kinds. Brummagen rubbish and Houndsditch tinsel are dear to the savage heart. The trader-hunters barter for skins and feathers, and rely as much upon their cunning in driving hard bargains, as they

depend upon their ocular cunning in shooting game wherewithal to fill their caravans with skins.

Again, there is the colonial cross between these two extremes, men who combine pleasure with business, they shoot mainly for pleasure, and trade with the natives at the same time, and thus make their passion a self-supportive indulgence. Such is Colonel Rennie. There is also the solitary sportsman, who shoots for pleasure alone, but hides himself away unattended by even a Kaffir boy, and is sometimes buried in the bush for years, "lost to sight, to memory dear". There is a large class of this kind of sportsman. Men who either go alone on foot, or attended by a friend or friends, and take boys with them to collect and carry their trophies, while at the expiration of a certain number of years, they reappear, swooping down with a collection of ivory and skins which they offer at the nearest market-place. These worthies generally try to dispose of some of their spoils as they go along. Some hunters start off on foot with nothing but their knapsack and gun, and remain in the bush for an incredibly lengthened period; how they live none can guess, and none know when, or at what place, they will make their reappearance. Such men sometimes disappear altogether. They are either killed, or starve to death, or sink to the level of the native tribes with whom they may be located, and become as one of them. The everyday colonist, however, has nothing to do with adventurous shooting of the foregoing description. He simply shoots as the ordinary English sportsman shoots, to relax the monotony of the routine of a social, professional, or mercantile life. If he be a farmer, he generally can get shooting readily enough on his own grounds, or on those of a neighbouring farmer, or landrost. If he live in a town, he probably knows a farmer or landowner who will give him shooting over field and bush. Such sportsmen need little preparation, or rather, their host provides them with Kaffirs and necessary or useful adjuncts. Much shooting of this kind is done on horseback, the steeds being trained to mark just as a setter marks.

Buck-shooting is after all the grand sport of South Africa proper. The Natalians are keen sportsmen, and many a tale of the exploits of the unsophisticated greenhorn, a Natalian will be only too pleased