

By the same author

ADVENTURE BEGINS IN KENYA
AFRICA FOR ADVENTURE

AFRICAN ZOO MAN

The Life-Story of Raymond Hook

by

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ILLUSTRATED



LONDON

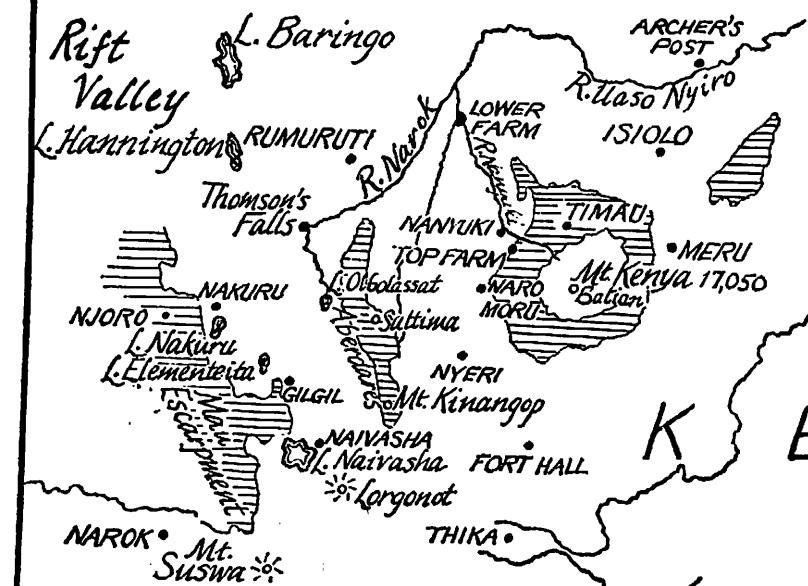
1963
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NORTHERN FRONTIER DISTRICT



Masai

Degeet
Plain

0 20 40 60 80 100 120

R. Tana

KENYA

SOMALIA

Indian
Ocean

MALINDI

VOI



'It was long and low, colonial style . . .' (page 70)



'Mount Kenya's lofty summit floated improbably like an ice-berg in the clouds' (page 99)

the everlasting heat and acacia thorn, men were usually hard put to it to survive from day to day, let alone to muster sufficient courage to fight. There were no 'blighty' wounds to be had in East Africa with welcome cross-channel trips home to a comfortable base hospital. Even a slight wound often meant that death was delayed to find a more hideous consummation. Again there was no leave home for troops serving in the campaign until the end of the apparently endless war. Even for local farmers like Raymond wounds or illness tended to be treated on the spot. So when the Armistice came it was not only the expatriated forces which gave an halloo at the thought of home.

Raymond, of course, wasn't the only Hook to serve in the First Great War. His brother, Hereward, was torpedoed at the age of fifteen, but being a good swimmer was saved. Another brother, Valentine, was killed in Flanders, while Logan, the eldest, was a commander in the Royal Navy and Oliver was a captain first in the Army and then served with the RAF. It was a record to be proud of by any father, and one which was destined to be repeated, though Bryan did not live to see it, after a lapse of twenty years.

Raymond meantime returned to Nanyuki to resume the exciting career of white hunter which the war had interrupted four years earlier. Mostly he went after buffalo and rhino, which were exceedingly plentiful in the forests above the farm. Though alarming tales were told about wounded buffalo, Raymond always maintained that the accounts were exaggerated, or that the hunter concerned had lost his nerve. He had rarely been cornered or surprised by a beast, and even on the rare occasions when this had happened he had never found it possible to feel afraid. A powerful big-game rifle was more than a match for a rhino or an elephant provided that its user had taken the trouble to learn to shoot. Once to prove a theory he had waited for a rhino to charge, and then just before it reached him had stepped nimbly aside. The beast had gone straight on, as he had always supposed it would, and left him

laughing at its disappearing rear. After that he rather enjoyed dealing with charging rhinos as their reactions were predictable and this tended to make them easy targets. When tragedies occurred they were in Raymond's view usually due to inexperience or folly, and the animal was rarely to blame.

CHAPTER VI

White Hunter

RAYMOND had started his career as a white hunter at Njoro and during the 1920s there was a growing demand for experienced men familiar with the country to accompany parties of British or American tourists anxious to shoot big game. Such visitors still come, but nowadays there are literally dozens of professional hunters ready to arrange and lead elaborate safaris at the shortest possible notice. But in the 1920s hunters were much rarer, and clients neither expected nor enjoyed the kind of amenities commonly provided today. It was during these early days that Raymond made his name, and two of the best known white hunters, Percival and Ayre, began to bring their clients to him to hunt rhino in the forests. Rhino in fact always remained with Raymond something of a speciality despite their notorious irritability and block-busting charge. In the forests above his farm were salt-licks favoured by game including rhino, and there Raymond would lead his clients and demonstrate how best to deal with the most dangerous and irritable of all the pachyderms not excluding the elephant. Naturally it was considered *de rigueur* in a white hunter never to lose a client, so whenever anyone became involved in serious difficulties, whether through impetuosity or inexperience, Raymond's rifle was there to cover his escape. In such circumstances the hunter was never known to show fear. He found it quite impossible, he said, to be afraid of a wild animal as he had the use of his intelligence whereas the animal could only rely on its instincts. The result was that many a greenhorn, unfamiliar with Raymond's ways, was destined to tremble with horror-stricken amazement as his companion calmly lectured in the face of a threatening beast.

In 1920 Raymond's elder brother Logan retired from the Navy with the rank of Commander and settled at Nanyuki too. There he started a hotel, which was destined to become famous, called Silverbeck after the family home. It stood on the village outskirts and provided comfortable and spacious accommodation as well as marvellous views. Also during 1920 Raymond's father paid Kenya another visit, accompanied by members of his family. His easel was in constant use, and he added to the collection of highly dramatic mountain and animal scenes which he intended to make the basis of full-scale paintings. But this ambition he failed to realize, and as a consequence the paintings have never been exhibited.

In 1921 Raymond took his brother up Mount Kenya as far as the glaciers on what must have been a memorable excursion. Logan, at any rate, fell in love with the mountain and has never returned to Britain from that day to this. Later Raymond provided a like service for his younger sister Sylvia, to whom he had been a childhood hero. At Silverbeck he would take her on his shoulders and leap from the lofty ha-ha to her delighted alarm. 'I was always afraid that he might break his neck,' she recalls with affection. 'But, of course, he never did.' On this occasion and on other safaris across the Kenya veld Sylvia, who had married a government official, was sometimes accompanied by lady-friends unused to the rigours of African safaris or cantering across country on Somali ponies. But they always enjoyed themselves for nothing could have exceeded the hunter's kindness or constant solicitude for their welfare.

In 1927 at Chicago, Jack Dempsey, the former heavyweight champion of the world, put the wily Gene Tunney down for the famous 'long count', and all but regained his crown. But the gigantic crowd which packed the arena on that September evening long ago neither knew nor cared that several thousand miles away in the highlands of East Africa another contest took place that year, which is still far better remembered in the township of Nanyuki than the epic battle on the shores of Lake Michigan.

It happened like this. Raymond was living alone at the time and his only companions were dogs of various breeds and pedigrees, which he had acquired or bred for his own amusement and to assist him on his hunting forays. His favourite was a half-bred greyhound which possessed all the good qualities of a genuine lurcher including high intelligence and courage. One day it was shot by the local butcher for the heinous offence of stealing a piece of meat. The paltry excuse so enraged the hunter that he went for the butcher bald-headed. The latter was something of a boxer, but Raymond wrestled with him and finally knocked him down. His mode of attack recalls that of the great Dempsey himself, though he had probably learned about in-fighting by watching cheetahs. After receiving the thrashing which in Raymond's opinion he so thoroughly deserved, it might have been supposed that the butcher would have apologized or had the grace to remain mum. In effect he did neither of these things. Instead of regret black rancour seethed in his heart and he determined to get even with his rival. Though no match for the giant in a free-for-all he still fancied his chances as a boxer. So he complained that the fight had not been fair, and this gave some local sportsmen a brilliant idea. They offered to provide a new dancing floor for the local club if Raymond and the butcher settled their difference in the ring.

The news that the white hunter and the butcher were going to meet in a boxing match spread round Nanyuki like wildfire, and when the contestants appeared stripped for action there was a large and enthusiastic crowd. But, alas for Raymond, his all-in tactics proved of little avail against a more highly skilled boxer in a contest fought under Queensberry rules. Things began in his favour, but later the butcher landed on the jaw and knocked him down. He waited for the count of nine and then got up, but unfortunately he was no Tunney. After he had taken several further counts the referee came over and whispered in his ear advising him to stay down. The trouble was that Raymond was handicapped by his blind eye and could not see the blows coming. So the contest ended

deafened him was the report of Raymond's rifle, and the leopard fell dead less than two feet from his face.

Such is Martin's description of the incident which left him shaking and unnerved, and thanking his lucky stars for the hunter's presence of mind. Raymond agrees that it is accurate in the main, at least as far as he himself was concerned, but he had already removed Martin to a prudent distance, as it was his business to protect him. He adds the significant rider that the caves were faked. He made an enclosure for lions and leopards which they made look as natural as possible. Still, even though the caves were not genuine the lions and leopards certainly were.

After this adventure their luck seemed out, so in order to recuperate they decided to fly over Mount Kenya. To clear the summit they had to reach a height of close on 20,000 feet, a remarkable feat for a plane which had never been designed to break altitude records. The gleaming vision of snow-fields and glaciers flowing outwards from the central core of brown precipitous cliffs was unforgettable, while lower down the grass covered uplands, cedar forests and bamboo zone reminded them of the many exciting safaris which they had enjoyed on the mountain's slopes.

As animals still stubbornly declined to visit the hides, Raymond suggested that they visited a clearing far up the mountain on the forest's edge where the presence of a salt-lick attracted game. Both Raymond and his wife accompanied the safari, which included ponies for riding as well as pack-horses and mules. They followed elephant and buffalo trails, and finally camped in a lovely spot beside a stream. There Osa and Joan Hook caught trout by the score, which provided a tasty supper for the party gathered round the fire in the sharp evening chill. The report by a boy that he had seen a rhino set the safari moving at dawn in the direction of the salt-lick, but by the time they had arrived the rhino had left. A second rhino was then discovered, but Raymond and the Americans took the wise precaution of approaching it up-wind. Osa went forward while Martin started up the camera, but unfortunately the rhino

heard the sound. It immediately charged like an express train straight at Osa, but within yards of reaching her it suddenly swerved. Rhinos are irrational, but the Johnsons had a theory that a rhino would never knock you down if you faced it boldly in the open.

On returning from the mountain Martin and Osa decided to survey the game-plains from the air. Raymond and Joan accompanied them and soon they were crossing the Uasin Nyiro, the muddy stream which marks the boundary of the Northern Frontier District. The animals were thoroughly unnerved by the roar of the plane's engines, and behaved extremely comically when the machine dived low towards them. Today such pranks would doubtless be regarded as highly reprehensible, but the Johnsons were pioneer big-game aviators, and were intent on obtaining effective photographs from the air. For five hours they flew over the barren Kaisoot desert and the rarely visited Matthews range, and were amazed by the vast quantities of game. In addition to buffalo and elephant there were thousands of zebra, kongoni, kudu and commoner buck, as well as ostriches, vultures and eagles in scores. Having surveyed the country they set out on foot to explore it with Raymond. Their main aim was to find enough rhino to test their theory about its charge, and Raymond had claimed to know where rhino could be found. He was as good as his word. In the vicinity of the Uasin Nyiro they found dozens of tracks of rhino, buffalo and elephant, as well as those of giraffe, impala and all the usual gazelles. One day they saw and photographed no less than twelve rhino, but unfortunately Raymond developed a bad leg. Despite this handicap the hunter, as in the case of the leopard, was able to save a nasty situation. One half-grown rhino, which had not yet learned to behave better, charged them so furiously that it had to be deterred. This Raymond accomplished by hitting it with a bullet near the tip of its horn. The impact was so unexpected that the beast rolled over, before regaining its feet and disappearing from view. A rhino's horn, which is composed of thickly matted hair, is extremely sensitive, and a blow from

a bullet will stop it in its tracks. Nevertheless it takes a cool shot to hit a small target like a rhino's horn when the beast is charging straight at you, and once again Raymond demonstrated his remarkable faculty of self-possession in moments of danger.

Next day his leg was worse and he reluctantly returned to Nanyuki. Meantime Martin and Osa were having adventures galore. After narrowly escaping death from a charging elephant, they got involved in an affray with a lion. But these were as nothing when Osa moved a packing-case in her hut and found herself face to face with an African cobra. These snakes are every bit as dangerous as their Indian cousins, and when she rejoined her husband her face was as white as paper. Undaunted, the intrepid pair next set out to watch a party of Lumbwa braves hunting rhinos with spears. The courage of these warriors was only matched by that of the Masai in pursuit of lions, and provided the Johnsons with a remarkable pictorial record. In Raymond's view Martin Johnson was the best photographer of wild-life of his day, and this claim was more than borne out by his films.

When they finally returned to their base camp the Johnsons set to to make a film of the baboon colony which lived in the neighbourhood. The beasts' semi-human antics provided the material for a film which they called *Baboona*, the title which they gave to the city of the apes. It, like *Simba* and *Congorilla* was destined to achieve world fame.

After leaving Nanyuki the Johnsons returned to the Ituri Forest to revisit the Pygmies, whose fascinating customs they had recorded in *Congorilla*. The little people were delighted to see their friends again, and to mark the occasion they took a party of children and adults for a flight in the plane. The poignant reaction of the children's mothers when they finally grounded put paid once and for all to the cruel libel that primitive savages lack parental affection.

When they left Nanyuki, though none of them knew it, Raymond and the Martin Johnsons were parting for the last time. On January 13th, 1937, Martin was killed in a plane crash

in America, and his wife was severely injured. After surviving so many hazardous flights all over the world, it was a harsh trick of fate to destroy them at home.

Raymond, though no sentimentalist, naturally missed their company. He still had of course plenty of friends and visitors, but they were not all of the calibre of the two cheerful Americans with their boundless enthusiasm for wild life and enterprising methods of photography. He had also thoroughly enjoyed advising and protecting the plucky pair whenever their relative inexperience involved them in dangerous situations. Then there were all the fascinating rides in the aeroplanes, and exciting safaris up the mountain or across the Northern Frontier District. But there was something more. The Johnsons were among his very oldest acquaintances as he had first met them in Kenya not long after the First World War, and old acquaintances can never be replaced as they form part of the living past.