

RUNNING
THE GAUNTLET
SOME RECOLLECTIONS
OF ADVENTURE

by
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PREFACE

A MAN can relate some of his experiences or adventures without any great trouble, but ask that man to put them on paper and, unless he happens to be a writer, he will pass many miserable hours sucking at his pen instead of writing with it, and end by flinging pen one way and paper the other. Such has been my case, but I have managed to place on paper a few of my experiences as a South African, beginning in the 'sixties, 'seventies, and 'eighties, in the hope that it will, in some small way, keep green the memory of the life we lived at that period.

Many people are fond of quoting "The good old days," but, for my part, I'll be hanged if I can recollect where the good days came in ; "hard old days" would be nearer the mark. Much in the future will be written about those early days, but it can at best be little more than guesswork. We led hard, rough lives, and, with very scanty education, writing was not the fashion. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that so very few of the older generation left any description of the life they lived.

This book tells the story of an individual, but it is also the story of three "peoples"—the English, the Dutch, and the Black Men. In the days of which I

PREFACE

write, the white men in South Africa were far too few to allow of many being out of the limelight. We were all in it, perhaps amid other scenes, in other localities, but fundamentally the same. The same life, the same ups and downs, the same wars, the same class of adventure.

I was born near Durban, Natal, at which place my father landed from Cumberland, England, in the early 'fifties. Trekking inland, he eventually settled for some years at Greytown, Umvoti, County Natal, where I attended the village school, when I could not sneak out of it ; but I am afraid that much of my time was occupied with hunting on the hills in the company of native boys, after birds, rats, rock rabbits, or anything else we could fall upon, and always barefooted.

Wanderlust was in my bones, and when I was twelve years of age I was itching to get away ; when I was fourteen, I was off.

I made my way north to the Transvaal, which at that time was considered to be in the wilds of Africa, and there I became a product of the veld and wide spaces to which I still cling, for I have never lived in a town or near one. I have not yet seen a cinema or circus, but I have seen an aeroplane, high in the air, looking like an eagle sailing along—though no bird ever kicked up such a fiendish row.

When it came to writing these memories, I was fortunate in having preserved rough notes, many of which I kept for more than half a century. I finished writing them in 1930 ; it is now 1937, I am seventy-

PREFACE

five years of age, and soon, very soon, not one of those who took part in the life I have attempted to describe will be living.

Of the life we lived in those days, I am leaving behind me only a sketch. However crude it may be, it is the best I could do, nor under the circumstances can more be expected from me.

I should like to offer my sincere thanks to Mr. John Freeman for his kindness and invaluable help.

G. M.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

with big gaps in them where at one time they boasted windows and doors—in the days of my respectability it was my dining-room—I reviewed the position.

“ Well, so this is this, thirteen thousand pounds gone in one bang ! And the bales of wool in the big shed were worth all of two thousand. Think of all the kicks and cuffs, biffs and buffs, and all for this !

“ Money is like a bone in a dog’s mouth, for before he has time to enjoy it some dog bigger and stronger comes along and snatches it—and this is not the only bone I have had snatched, by a long shot !

“ Now, where is the sense of getting more kicks and cuffs in collecting another bone ? When I am dead I will not own even this rusty old seat.

“ Sitting in ashes may be a joke. If it is, it is a dirty one, and I’m off. No more of this for me ! ”

CHAPTER XVI

A HUNTING TRIP

BOARDING a boat at Delagoa Bay I met two men whom I knew. We will call them Charley and Horace—both wealthy men. Horace was a doctor.

It was my first experience of being on the sea. I stood on deck looking at the receding shore ; a beautiful sight, the bright sun shining on the water and the green forest lining the shore.

Horace came along rubbing his hands. “ Come down to breakfast, man.”

“ I prefer looking at all this,” I replied. “ It is grand ! ”

“ Yes, it is,” he said ; “ still, you will have plenty of time to look at it, but not much time for breakfast.”

I went down with him. It was a good breakfast, and I was enjoying it. Suddenly my chair began to rise and rise, and my stomach went down. I looked up at the ceiling to see how near it was to my skull, when suddenly the chair sank and my stomach jumped up. Letting my knife and fork drop on my plate, I gripped the chair arms with the determination to hold on to the bitter end.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

Up rose the chair again ; up, up, and my stomach fell down. Chancing to glance at a mirror opposite I noticed that my ears were transparent. . . .

Horace sometimes came to my cabin rubbing his hands as usual, and saying, "All you need is a little pluck, man." I could only look at him and groan.

Why do doctors always rub their hands ? It is irritating, especially to one suffering a violent death !

At last the boat anchored in the Bay at Beira, Portuguese East Africa, and again I was standing firmly on African soil, with the sweet smell of the boundless bush veld in my nostrils. Charley and Horace, who wished to see some big game and have some sport, persuaded me to go with them as my object in landing at Beira was elephant and ivory.

Many people think that nothing new can be discovered in Africa, and that adventure is a thing of the past. They are deceived by the map of Africa, which is patched with red, pink, brown, green and other colours. They overlook the fact that the greed of the European Powers extended their patches far beyond their reach. Many years of exploration work remains. To explore and meet adventure, legs are necessary. Step out of the motor car, leave the beaten track, allow the bush veld to take possession of you, and before you know where you are adventure will slap you in the face—and don't growl when it does slap you !

It was a very different bush veld from the one stretching from the foot of the berg near Pilgrim's Rest to Delagoa Bay. I believe that is now the Kruger

A HUNTING TRIP

Park. The bush veld we were in could really be called grass veld. Growing on deep, rich, alluvial soil, it stands thick, fifteen feet in height, and in many spots higher ; a wonderful sight to see from the top of a tall tree. In some parts the grass is on the fringe of dense forest—the home of the elephant. Rhino and buffalo, and the biggest herds of elephant, are to be found there ; the rhino do not herd as other animals do.

We were travelling along a native footpath with a line of twenty-two native carriers. Each of us had a native to carry a spare rifle and whose duty it was to remain with his master. Our aim was to get deeper into the hunting country, for we were only on the fringe of it, being but three days from our starting-point.

Animals, at noon, will often stand under a tree for a couple of hours, and such spots are bare of grass for ten or twenty feet around. Coming to such a spot, we called a halt—the carriers having heavy burdens to carry. After resting awhile, we rose to resume our journey, but the natives remained seated. When asked the reason they simply pointed north-east, and said, "Fire."

Looking in that direction we saw some smoke rising, but it appeared to be some considerable distance away, and we insisted upon their taking up the bundles and marching, which they did without further remark.

Once more we were in the footpath, with the grass on either side a solid wall. What we failed to realize