

# KENYA

THE FIRST EXPLORERS

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NIGEL PAVITT

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sleep, heedless of the bitterly cold wind as dusk fell.

Next morning he realized that his problems were far from over. The news of Kivoi's death had spread throughout the land and retribution had been swift. Fifteen traders from Mbere, who happened to be in Kitui at the time, had been murdered in cold blood for the atrocity committed by their fellow-countrymen. The villagers openly accused Krapf of causing their chief's death and his New Testament, notebook and pencil, and telescope were all regarded as connected with witchcraft. He was kept a prisoner for three days while Kivoi's relatives decided what to do with him. 'I heard from some Wakamba that Kivoi's relations intended to kill me, asking why I had gone to the Tana since, as a magician, for which they took me, I ought to have known that the robbers were there. In any case, they said, I ought to have died along with Kivoi.' Since Krapf believed this might well be his fate, he decided to escape. When no one was looking, he hid a little food and a calabash of water in readiness for flight. He awoke in the early hours of 5th September and stealthily removed some of the logs barring the entrance to his hut. Then, covering this hole with the cowhide on which he had been sleeping, to prevent the cold night air from waking his guards, he slipped silently out of the village and made good his escape. He dared not travel by day for he was in a well-populated neighbourhood, but his progress at night was pathetically slow. Tall grass, gullies, rocky outcrops, dense undergrowth and thorns – 'those relentless tyrants of the wilderness' – obstructed his path and ripped his clothes. He even lost his gun which, though useless as a weapon, had served to boost his flagging morale. He advanced barely eight miles in the direction of Yatta in three agonizing nights, having covered a much greater distance in a roundabout way. Sensing the hopelessness of the situation, he gave himself up, fully expecting to be put to death.

Muinde, Kivoi's eldest brother, listened attentively to Krapf's story and showed apparent compassion for the disasters which had befallen him. He

*PART I*

The Reverend Dr Johann Ludwig Krapf  
and The Reverend Johann Rebmann

*Travels and missionary labours  
in East Africa*

1844–53

*The end of the geographical feat is but the  
commencement of missionary operations.*

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

*PART II*

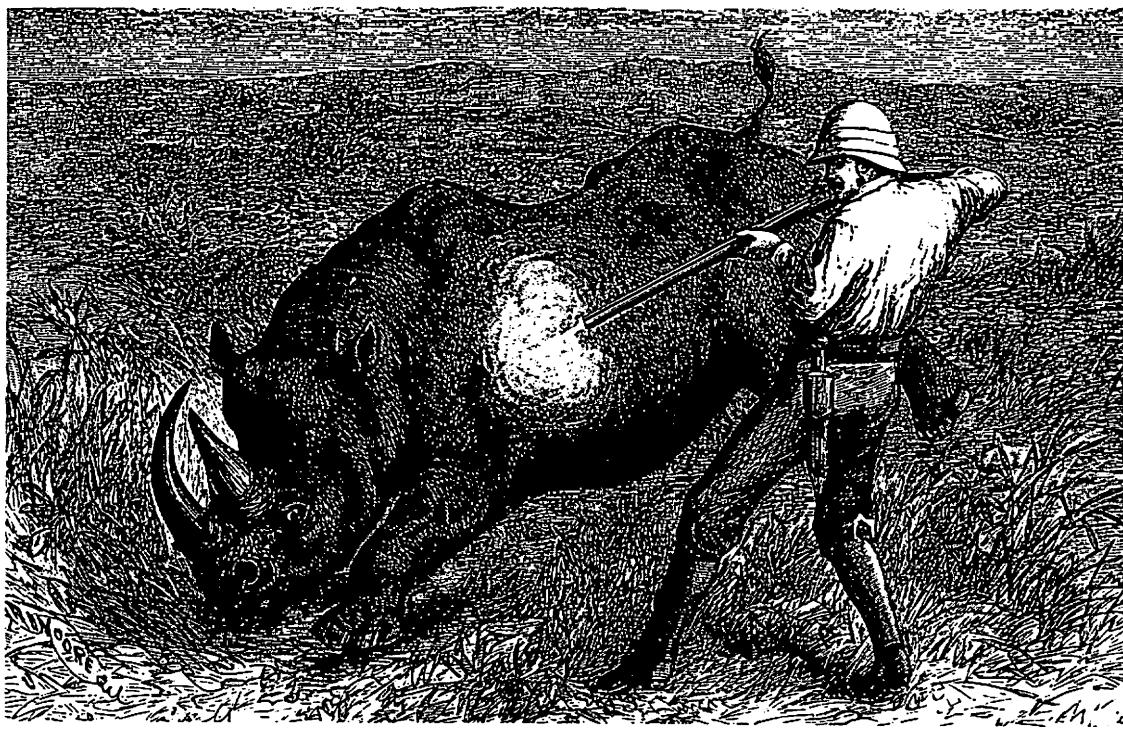
Joseph Thomson

*A journey through Maasailand  
to Lake Victoria*

1883-4

*He who goes gently, goes safely;  
He who goes safely, goes far.*

THOMSON'S MOTTO



in their shoes – had they worn any! But his *bombastes furioso* manner had no noticeable effect. It took another nine days of soul-destroying boredom, relieved now and then by hunting, for the new moon to be sighted signalling the end of Ramadan. Thomson was as enthusiastic as the devout Moslems but for entirely dissimilar reasons; to him, the faint silvery bow, still bathed in the rays of the setting sun, ushered in a new era of hope and an end to the long delays which had sapped his vitality. 'To mark the occasion I had to give a present to each of my men, and then, arrayed in a new tweed suit, I took up my post near my tent and held a levee, considerably diminishing my small stock of comforts in trying to sustain my dignity as the most important man in the caravan.'

On 11th August 1883, the caravans made a fresh start for the countryside which the travellers from Europe had despaired of ever penetrating. On reaching the forest edge beyond the headwaters of the Kimangelia River, another halt was called while the traders indulged in a bizarre mumbo-jumbo to propitiate their gods. At length everyone was ready and set off in dense fog with the intrepid explorer in command of the vanguard. Good progress was made, to Thomson's obvious satisfaction, through Loitokitok and the rolling plains beyond. The Maasai were conspicuous by their absence but rhinos were everywhere, snorting, charging and putting the fear of God into the heavily laden porters. At times the men began to waver, the less brave spirits taking to their heels, while the *komas* or sacred magic staves and flags which led every trading caravan were unfurled and brandished to exorcise the demon and put it to flight. Like a red rag to a bull, these great cumbersome creatures of an antediluvian age often charged, heads down and tails twisted into a piglike curl, towards the bearers of the trusted charms. Only rarely did Thomson have to turn them with his gun. He had come to fancy himself in

*PART III*

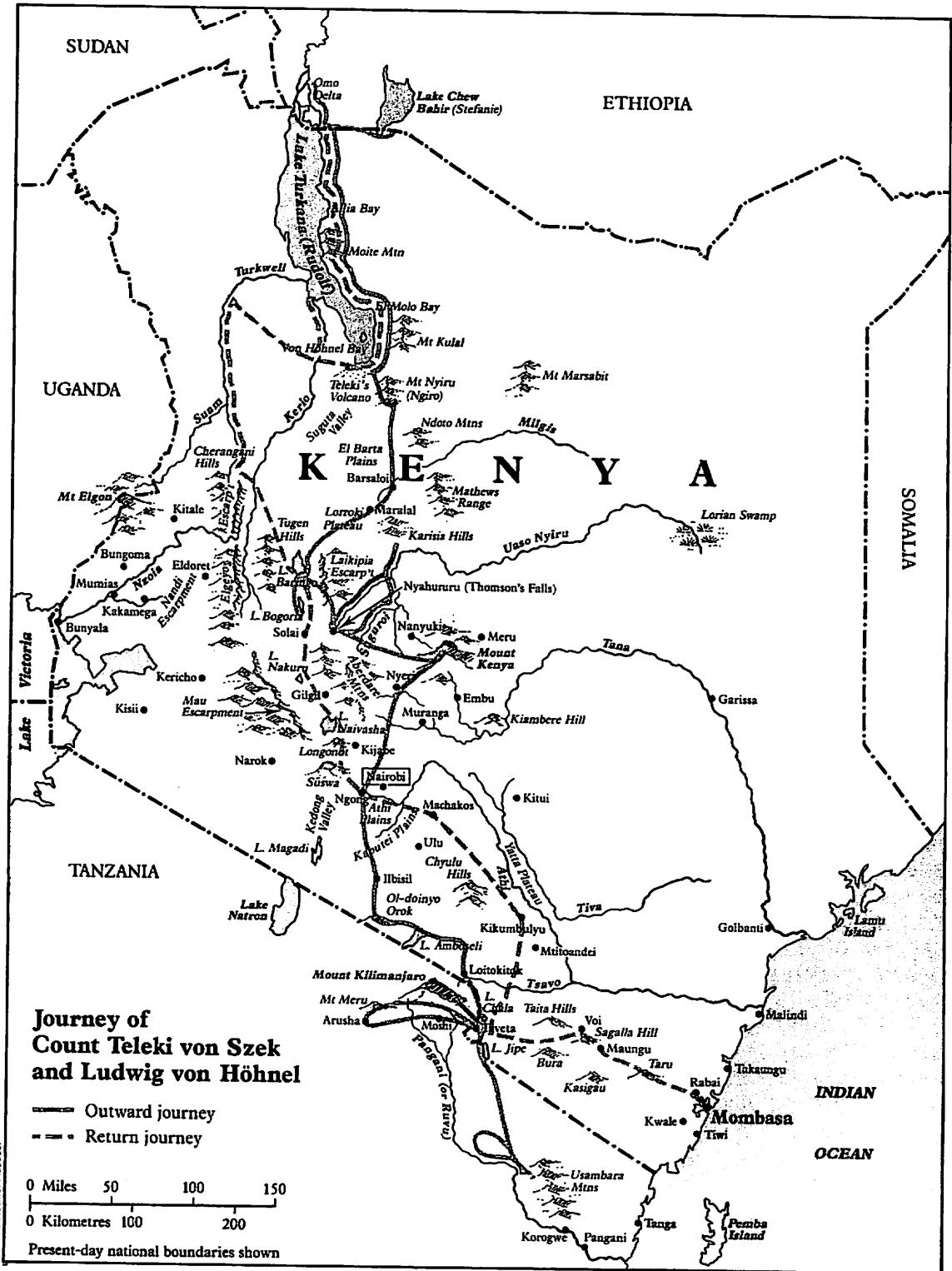
Count Samuel Teleki von Szek  
and Lieutenant Ludwig von Höhnel

*The 'discovery' of Lakes Rudolf  
and Stefanie*

1886–8

*We gazed in speechless delight, spell-bound by the beauty  
of the glittering expanse of a great lake which melted  
on the horizon into the blue of the sky.*

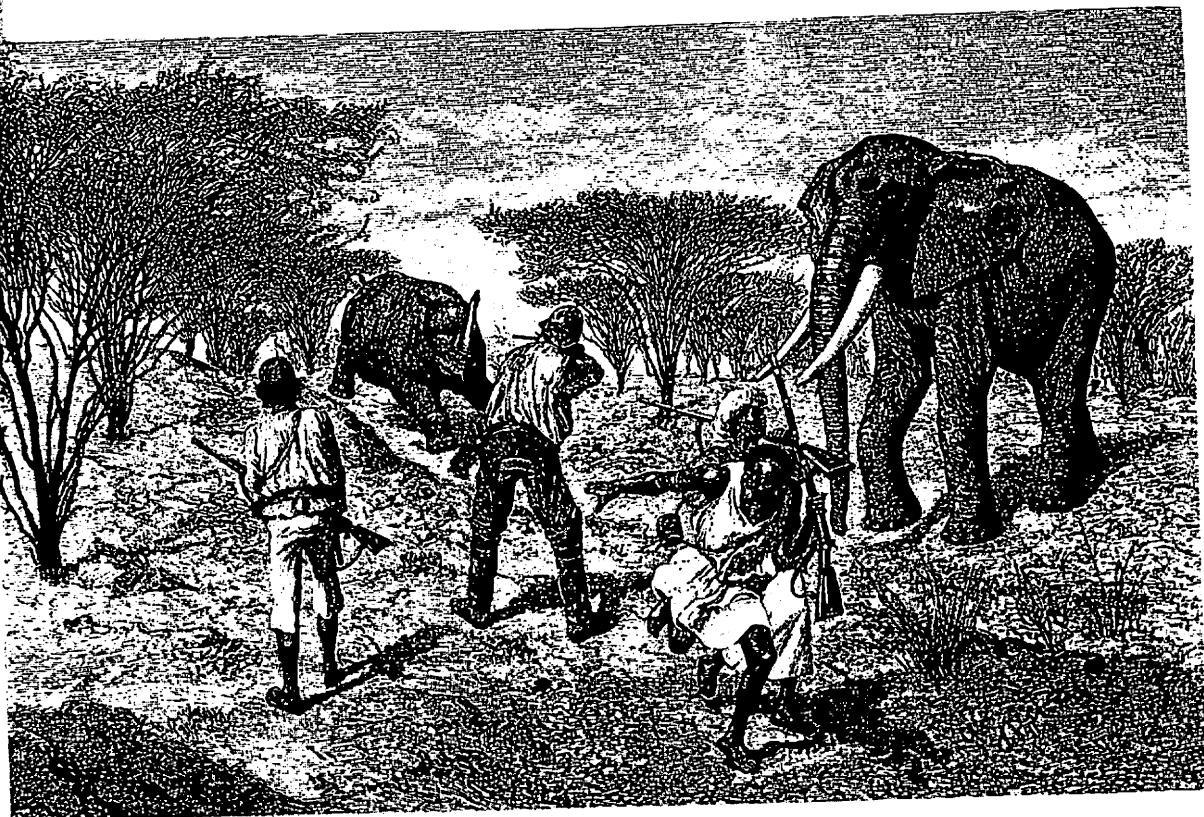
VON HÖHNEL



## **Journey of Count Teleki von Szek and Ludwig von Höhnel**

— Outward journey

— — — Return journey



originating in the dark colour of the foliage ... the bush-grown steppe beyond the mountain was tenanted by numerous rhinoceroses, giraffes, zebras, wild boars [warthogs], gnus, gazelles, ostriches, bustards, guinea-fowls and partridges.' As it was Maasai custom to eat neither the flesh of wild animals nor of domestic fowl, their grazing areas abounded in game. Today, it is no coincidence that East Africa's finest game parks are to be found in Maasailand. Their very existence would be in doubt except for a rare tolerance the Maasai have towards our heritage which man has so ruthlessly destroyed elsewhere. Teleki saw warriors hunting the lion, buffalo and ostrich, but these were speared only occasionally for making head-dresses and shields. Otherwise, the land was an unspoiled paradise – until the first gun-toting hunters appeared on the scene.

Von Höhnel brought down four rhinos, but his first encounter with elephants was not so successful. In the failing evening light, he stalked a small herd to within twenty-three paces and took careful aim at a large bull. As he fired, missing a heart-shot, the barrels of the heavy 8-bore rifle jerked up and the sharp-edged comb of the left hammer split his nostrils wide open and cut the bridge of his nose. This quickly put an end to any thoughts he may have had of following the spoor. On his return to camp, Teleki acted as doctor and hastened to get out all his surgical instruments, carbolic and sublimate liniments and piles of bandages with which, by the light of a hurricane lamp, he treated his blood-stained colleague. Although the wound was not particularly painful, it took a good six weeks to heal.

Mohammedans will not eat unhallowed meat. They insist on a ritual cutting of the throat when the animal is still alive, with its head pointing

Fifty miles beyond El Molo Bay stands Moite Mountain, which falls vertically down towards the lake in a chaotic jumble of coal-black lava boulders. Here there is a stretch of several miles where it is almost impossible to follow the shore. Lembasso persuaded the count to turn inland and avoid the obstacle, though he had no idea of the way or whether water would be found. The scheme contained all the elements of disaster and Teleki made a bad mistake in listening to him without first making a reconnaissance. By cutting the caravan off from its life-line, he very nearly added his expedition to the list of those that had set out into the interior of Africa, never to be seen or heard of again.

It was stifling inland and Teleki's porters, who had grown accustomed to drinking from the lake whenever they were thirsty, were ill-prepared for the gruelling conditions. At the end of their first march they dug in a dry river bed to a depth of six feet and found a little moisture seeping through the sand. This proved cold comfort, though, for much worse was to come the following day.

*Crest after crest was scaled, each one in the hope that we would come to a pool, or at least to the dried-up bed of a brook, with some green about it. But one undulation succeeded another, midday came, the sun was at the zenith and poured down its scorching rays upon our heads. It was one o'clock now, and a third of our worn-out men lay stretched exhausted on the ground, here one, there another. Our own cheery 'Haya twende! Let's press on!' no longer had any effect, and many loads without owners lay scattered about. At last at two o'clock we began to descend a gentle slope which led down to the sand-choked, dried-up bed of a stream, where we caught what we took for the gleam of fresh green grass. But when I reached it, it was only to meet with fresh disappointment. Half the men were lying about staring vacantly before them; loads and animals were in the most hopeless confusion; donkeys and sheep wandering aimlessly about, the former either without their saddles or with those saddles under their bellies or round their necks. Not an askari or donkey-boy was to be seen anywhere. All discipline was at an end, and the men were utterly demoralized.*

Teleki had shot two rhinos and pressed on with the vanguard. One of the dead animals lay close to the path but everyone was too worn out to bother with it. They had no way of knowing that their companions had found a trickle of water at the base of a rocky precipice two hours ahead.

*As even the first to get to the pit could not satisfy their thirst, it was a very long time before any water could be obtained to send back to the poor fellows who had fallen by the way. Late in the evening and during the night the stragglers gradually came in and flung themselves like wild vultures upon the water. Each one was eager to be first, so that the dark ravine was soon the scene of a bitter struggle. Not until after a great deal of trouble, and with the help of the Somal mercilessly wielding their whips, were the combatants separated, and something like order restored.*

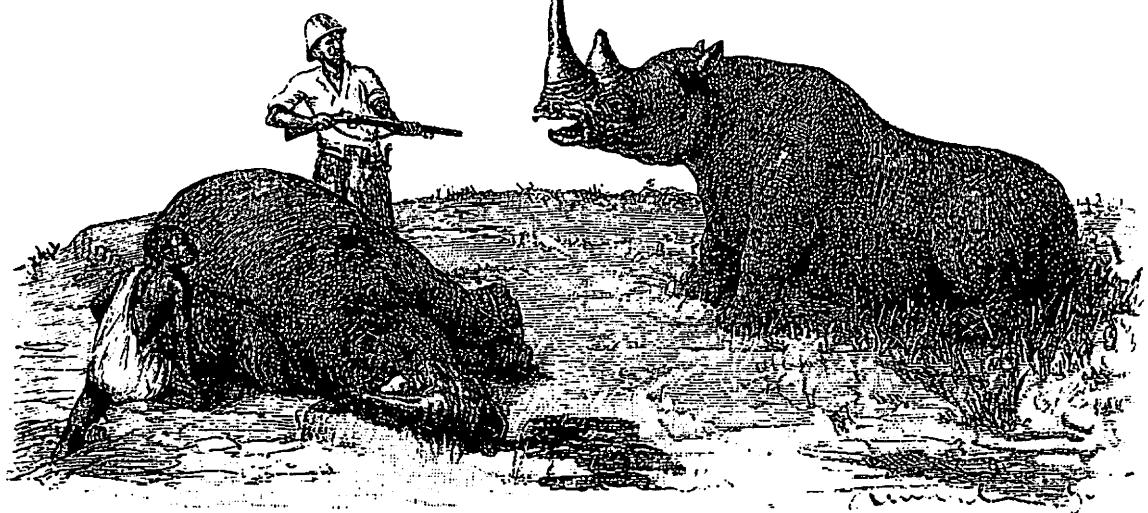
It was a very disorganized and shaken band of men that cut back to the lake a day later. In three and a half hours they arrived at Allia Bay and encountered the northern settlements of the El Molo, which have since disappeared without trace. Between 150 and 200 people were living on two sandbanks rising just above the level of the lake. At first they were diffident of



the strangers whom they supposed were all women because, unlike any other men they had seen, loin-cloths and *khanzus* covered their nakedness.

*They lead a kind of amphibious existence, scarcely differing from that of the crocodiles which, with their wild animals, they kill and eat. The two islands are not more than half or one square mile in extent. On the larger are from thirty to fifty, and on the smaller about fifteen brown huts, of the hayrick shape, huddled closely together . . . Their sole possessions are one or two cows, a dozen sheep, and perhaps a couple of dozen dogs. A third uninhabited sandbank nearer the beach serves, with muddy bank, alike as storehouse for fuel, and mooring ground for canoes . . . The men are circumcised in the Mahomedan manner. The hair is dressed in various fashions, either dragged up into a short thin tuft which is thickly smeared with red fat, or combed back flat, and, with the help of some greasy green or violet coloured clay, moulded into quite an artistic-looking chignon. The latter style is peculiar to young men, and is sometimes finished off with two short ostrich feathers . . . Rings are worn in the lobe and sides of the ear, but the lobes are very slightly distended. Other ornaments are bracelets worn on the upper and the lower arm, made of brass or iron wire or of hippopotamus hide. A round knife is also sometimes worn as a bracelet, the edges being protected with a leather case . . . I must add that all the men, but none of the women, carry a little two-legged stool to sit upon, which also serves them as a pillow at night.*

Both settlements had three- or four-man dugout canoes made of doum palm logs which were propelled by crudely fashioned double-ended oars. Tents were pitched half a mile back from the lake in the shade and shelter of *Mswaki* trees, *Salvadora persica*, whose fibrous wood is used as toothbrushes by many country-folk to this day.



Teleki shoots his last rhino of the trip

anxiously speculating whether their wives had remained faithful during their long absences and whether there had been additions or changes to the family circle. Teleki and von Höhnel spent eight weeks on the island recuperating, until they left for Aden towards the end of the year. From there, they made a brief excursion to the walled city of Harar in Abyssinia before returning to Europe after an absence of two years.

They had completed one of the last great African expeditions of travel and adventure, enabling geographers to add significantly to their knowledge of Mount Kenya and the lacustrine chain of the Great Rift Valley. Cartographers were delighted with von Höhnel's most detailed and painstaking observations which almost completed the map of East Africa, while scientists were fascinated by the comprehensive collection of flora and fauna they had brought with them. Among the many items new to science were three chameleons, sixty beetles, fifteen butterflies and moths as well as locusts, spiders, mosses, lichens, flowers and a beautiful lobelia, *Lobelia telekii*, which is found in Kenya's mountain regions above 10,000 feet. Most of Teleki's hunting trophies and the African artefacts he collected were lost during the Second World War.

Teleki travelled to Indonesia in 1893 and later to India but left no account of these hunting trips. Little is known of an unverified report of a second visit he is said to have made to East Africa with the sole intention of becoming the first person to conquer Kilimanjaro; in this, he apparently failed again. He remained a bachelor all his life and spent the rest of his days running his stud farm and family estates. He died in Budapest on 10th March 1916 after a long illness.

Von Höhnel received an unexpected letter in 1892 from William Astor Chanler – a wealthy young New Yorker – inviting him to join another expedition to Africa. Chanler had set his sights on exploring the unknown country lying north of the Tana River, between Lake Rudolf and the Juba River, but most of the porters deserted him, causing the collapse of the expedition. By this time von Höhnel had returned to the coast on a stretcher having been badly gored by a rhinoceros.

Soon after resuming his naval duties, von Höhnel was appointed aide-de-camp to Emperor Franz-Josef. Later he visited Abyssinia at the head of a trade delegation and met Emperor Melenik. Later still, he was promoted rear admiral before retiring from the service in 1909. In the succeeding years

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# PICTURE SOURCES

Line engravings are taken from the following sources: *Discovery by Count Teleki of Lakes Rudolf and Stefanie* by Lieut Ludwig von Höhnel (Longmans, Green & Co, 1894); *Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie et le commerce d'Afrique orientale* by Capt. M. Guillain (Paris, 1856-7, 2 vols); *The Graphic* (22 March 1873; 13, 20 and 27 June and 11 July 1885); *Men and Creatures in Uganda* by Sir John Bland-Sutton (Hutchinson, 1933); *Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar . . .* by Capt. W. F. W. Owen (London, 1833, 2 vols); *Reisen im Ost-Africa in dem Jahren 1859 bis 1865* by Baron Carl Claus von der Decken (Leipzig and Heidelberg, 1869-79, 4 vols); *Through Masai Land* by Joseph Thomson (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1885); *Travels, Researches and Missionary labours during an eighteen years' residence in Eastern Africa* by Rev. Dr Johann L. Krapf (Trübner & Co, 1860).

The endpaper, showing Rebmann's rough sketch map of the Kenya region, is taken from the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (no. 1, vol. 1, May 1849) and is reproduced by kind permission of the Church Missionary Society.

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