GARI-GARI

The Call of
the African Wilderness

By

Hugo Adolf Bernatzik

Translated
from the German
by
VIVIAN OGILVIE

CONSTABLE & CO LIMITED
London

(negro soldiers). The wholesale merchants preyed unscrupulously on the country, forced the natives to hand over their large stocks of ivory, raided more distant parts, burnt down villages, stole women and children. In this way each trader " managed " a tract of land, without competition from other firms in his claim. If one wanted to visit the Sudan at that time one was obliged, as Schweinfurth was, to entrust oneself to the protection of one of these merchants. He would then make out a letter of safe-conduct to the Vakils and the explorer could visit the country in comparative safety. One thing the merchants were particularly careful about, and that was not to alienate the Nilotic negroes. On the contrary, they did all they could to keep on good terms with the powerful and warlike tribes of the Shilluk and Dinka, and even to-day one can see plainly that these negroes have never bowed to a yoke. Such ideal conditions for the merchants lasted up to the 'seventies. Then the fight in Europe against slavery began and Egypt was forced to prohibit these activities by law. But even then things were rosy for the wholesale traders. Governors were bribed and the traffic in slaves and ivory flourished as before. The small dealers, however, who were not in a position to bribe and whose existence was threatened, pestered the Government until at last Egypt decided to take over the administration of these territories. An army under Sir Samuel Baker was equipped, which penetrated to the Upper Nile and founded the Province of Chat el Estiva, in the southernmost Sudan. Through Baker's successors, Gordon Pasha and Emin Pasha, the land became famous. Gradually Egypt occupied Bahr el Ghazal Province as well and compelled the merchants to disband their troops and discharge the *besinger*. In consequence of these measures discontent increased enormously and the *besinger* together with the small traders engineered a rising which Egypt, through Gessi Pasha, put down with great bloodshed. Some sort of peace reigned till the great Mahdist insurrection broke out. Southern Sudan joined the north in going over

to the fanatical dervishes. But these did not know what to do with the country. They contented themselves with occupying Rejaf and Bor, which they turned into slave-trading centres. As a place of banishment the region gained a certain notoriety. Whoever fell into disfavour with the Caliph (the Mahdi's successor) was banished here to live out his days as best he might in the unhealthy climate. Not till the 'nineties did this state of affairs change. Then from the south the Belgians advanced and snatched the greater part of the Bahr el Ghazal Province from the Mahdists; in the west the French attacked; and finally the English, coming from the north and from Uganda, conquered the rest of the country.

Nowadays it does not entice travellers. The climate is bad and feverish and there is very little game. Other reasons attract me. I am eager to preserve in pictures whatever has not yet been lost in this locked-up corner of the world. Already it is necessary to travel hundreds of miles inland to come across archers. The poisoning of arrows is forbidden by the Government, and without poison this weapon, despite its terrible head, is little more than a toy. Costumes and habits are dying out and nearly everywhere the Sheikhs strut about in European clothes, supplied by the Government. Mission stations are also zealously at work destroying the natives' characteristics. For me this land has another special attraction, in that it shelters two animals of which only very few specimens are left in Africa—the white rhinoceros and the giant eland. The former is under protection and the existence of relatively numerous examples of this combative animal leaves at the moment little fear of its dying out from degeneration, as in South Africa. The giant eland is less frequently found than the white rhinoceros and is slowly dying out in spite of all efforts to save it. Is it insight into the inevitable that has led the English to let it loose, although hitherto it has also been protected? In any case it is only granted to every mortal once in his life

to kill a giant eland and the inaccessibility of their abode is a better protection than any hunting laws.

I get into the Ford with my gun and cameras. We have a great deal of trouble stowing these delicate things away in the car. I tie ropes across and hang the bags on them. They swing up and down and so their precious contents are spared any violent knocks. All that makes life in Africa agreeable has to be left behind—tent, table, chairs and many other things. Our provisions consist solely of *abri*, rice and a few tinned foods. I observe with apprehension how the springs of the chassis are weighed down. It looks doubtful whether the car can bear the load of over thirteen hundredweight of reserve petrol, oil, water, mosquito outfit for Machulka and myself, on top of the cooking apparatus. But a breakdown sixty or a hundred miles from Shambe, without food, water and game, would be no joke. The engine is cranked up and our hazardous journey starts. Shambe lies on a peninsula surrounded by swamps. A raised road of dry mud, as hard as stone, leads through the swampy region. It is uneven and we have only gone a couple of hundred yards when a suspicious sound makes us stop. The overloaded wooden body is scraping the tyres at every bump in the road and an iron support has already worn deep grooves in the rubber. We remove the iron, saw off a piece of wooden support and then proceed. The sawing has to be repeated and soon very little is left of the support. Then it goes all right at a pinch. The road is not bad and we advance at the rate of about ten miles an hour. We reach the first rest-house. I ask the guard if there is any game and learn that in the early morning a lion had squatted down in the middle of the road. A little further we come upon giraffes, tiang and an ostrich family. They let the car come quite close and gaze after it in surprise; none of them makes any move to run away. On we go without a stop as we must try to put a hundred miles behind us to-day. What in Europe would be a trifle is here a difficult enterprise. The road provides us with perpetual surprises.

CHAPTER IV

Fishing—Search for a *fulla*—A leopard gets away—Africa's other face—Driving with flames at our heels—Tali—Amadi—In the Lado basin—Modern slavery—Mud instead of water—Tindilti—The Niambara—Amadi again—The Niamusa and their smith—Hunting with a net—An old African—I give the Moru a feast.

We are again on board. It is five o'clock. An hour later the sun goes down and shoals of large fish begin to feed quite close to the boat. I put out the lines and in a very short time catch a quantity of catfish up to fifteen pounds in weight and two fish similar to burbot.

Next morning we are wakened by an ear-splitting din. It sounds as if people were beating large tin plates. Mingled with it is a lively hubbub of voices. I jump out of bed and witness an extraordinary spectacle. Some hundred yards from the sailing-boat lies a rest-house with a corrugated iron roof. An inspector who is passing through with his numerous servants is staying there. The servants are now busy under his direction hunting bats with long sticks and a great hullabaloo. The creatures had taken up their abode under the roof without permission from the Government and are being routed out by the warlike official. Kites hurry up from all sides and snap up the bats in mid-air as they escape from the men's sticks. Among the soldiers, who are obviously afraid of the little things, some superstition or other is at work. In this connection one sometimes meets with the queerest beliefs. The Sudanese, for example, think that the gecko, a harmless lizard in the south, shoots the tip of its tail at people and whoever is struck by it goes blind. They have, therefore, a profound respect for this nice little reptile.

The post steamer has just moored at Shambe. Several passengers have made a trip to Rejaf. They have been bored stiff on board, as the fourteen days' voyage from Khartoum to Rejaf is monotonous and it happened to be night when they passed the one spot where hundreds of elephants were to be seen in the papyrus. At this moment a Dinka comes and offers crocodiles' eggs for sale. They look like ducks' eggs but have thinner shells. The mother crocodile buries many hundreds of them in the sand every year and they are hatched out by the sun. As the eggs taste very much like hens' eggs, they are highly relished and eagerly collected by the negroes. This is something for the tourists' appetite for sensation. They crowd round the man and outbid each other to buy the dainty. The Dinka, a born business man like almost all negroes, knows how to make the most of his advantage and smiling contentedly he sells the eggs at four times their proper price. Next day we travel to rest-house number one, to examine more closely the chances of filming. The Dinka who undertakes to guide us is an intelligent-looking man and, as we soon discover, lives up to his appearance. Machulka follows me with two porters. The guide had described a large open sheet of water at some two hours' distance from the rest-house. We march for three hours in the midday heat and all we see is a channel of water a yard wide. I ask about that large open sheet. "Here it is," he says, "it stretches away for four hours to the Nile. The animals all drink from it." My hopes vanish once again. We examine the khor casually. The grass has been trodden down everywhere by buffaloes, elephants, rhinoceroses and antelopes. An ideal hunting ground. But what is the use of sitting by the water at night with flashlight apparatus when the animals spread out over such a long stretch to drink? By day too it is impossible to film because one cannot advance silently through the high grass with a heavy camera on one's back, and in any case the dense bush spoils every view. Another of those occasions where the hunter is sure of a full

bag while the photographer goes away empty. We turn back thoroughly disgruntled. Suddenly the cry of baboons strikes our ears. I follow them some way into the bush and come to a pool where a quantity of birds are playing, among them Nessyt storks, ducks and geese. Vultures have perched on the trees and are greedily eyeing a certain spot among the bushes. I want to go back to get my gun, for it looks as if some member of the cat family is near and has just killed an animal. Then I observe my two porters fifty yards away. They have seen me and shout, with wild gesticulations, some unintelligible words in their language. I send one of them back for my gun and examine the ground. The head of a baboon that has just been torn to pieces is lying near the tracks of the ill-doer's flight. It was a splendid leopard that had been driven off by my two men. The second Dinka explains to me in broken Arabic that he saw a "lion." It was difficult to drive away and at last disappeared slowly in the grass. Angry, I turn back and learn that the man on the look-out had stupidly sent the two porters forward to chase the leopard away and get the meat of its victim. The leopard has escaped and no amount of cursing will bring it back! In a roaring temper I set out for home but can only hobble along. I had got a few trifling wounds in the feet which, after the hurried march in pursuit of the elands, are now beginning to fester and hurt badly. In addition I am much weakened through a slight attack of dysentery and fever. As the place I was to visit was, according to the guide's account, so near the rest-house I had taken neither food nor water with me. My thirst is by now unbearable in the muggy swamp atmosphere. My tongue lies like an insensible lump in my mouth, my lips are white and swollen. I shall not easily forget this trip. I get back to the rest-house after sunset half dead. Unable to think, I fling myself on the ground. Machulka has not fared much better. But he brings a quart bottle of brandy which he always has with him as a medicine. We are neither of us

petrol is very much reduced and we have long tracts of flooded country with stiff mud before us, but we hope that the lorries will be able to let us have some petrol. My bed is, as usual, set up under the open sky and I am soon sunk in deep sleep. About four in the morning we are wakened by a strange roaring. The sky is completely overcast and a storm is rolling up from all sides. The roaring grows louder and louder, drowns every other sound and swells to a hurricane. Trees are rooted up, branches, grass and lumps of earth fly through the air, and then a furious downpour sets in. The torrential rain abates into a steady drizzle over the whole land which lasts the entire day. The lorries whose arrival was announced do not appear and I see no chance of going further. Machulka says, " Herr Bernatzik, take a wife here and let us plant durra. When the second child is born we can proceed."

We hold a council of war. However we may rack our brains to find a way out, there is nothing for it but to wait for the rain to stop. If wind rises, we can try to go on in a day or two's time. If it rains again meanwhile, then we are simply caught. At last, towards evening, the rain stops. I go out to inspect the scene. At every step one sinks up to the ankle in the soft mud.

We have to spend the second night unfortunately in the rest-house, which is fouled by the droppings of countless birds. The rafters are entirely occupied by birds of all kinds. Their cheerful whistling, chirping and chattering fills the grey morning air. I recognise old friends like house-martins and swifts among them. In the morning the country reminds me of the Albanian swamps in autumn. Thick white ground-mists drift across innumerable ponds and pools that have formed in the soft morass. Instead of the wind we had hoped for a complete calm reigns and it is damp and stifling like a greenhouse. The sun remains hidden behind thick clouds, but slowly the pools dry up and I decide to risk it. At first the going is very bad, but

then the road improves and we can even cross a river again without hesitation. Later it is broken by boggy patches some forty yards wide, in whose stiff mud we are in danger of sticking fast. I try to get through the swamp at the highest speed I can even if it flings a wave of mud over us. My driving is put to a severe test. Still, we advance slowly and the petrol lasts out till we reach rest-house number two. The old policeman is there and tells us that now, after the first rain, plenty of game is about. *Abu Garn*, the white rhinoceros, is to be found at one of the pools, and two days before a large herd of elephants wandered across the road so that a caravan of porters did not dare to go on their way. The roar of lions is to be heard at night quite near and a troop of them actually tore a buffalo to pieces the preceding night. We had heard similar accounts at the first rest-house, and as there are elephant tracks everywhere and we meet natives laden with buffalo meat we can trust these reports. We plan therefore to put up here for some time in order especially to observe *Abu Garn*. Then we propose to visit the friendly inspector at Yirrol again and photograph the Southern Dinka, the finest natives in Africa, among whom the girls are particularly remarkable for a rare symmetry of limb and a splendid figure. I had already decided on my way up to devote several days to these handsome people. But first of all we must go to Shambe to replenish our stocks. We arrive there at last very exhausted.

I am thoroughly tired and knocked up. I pull myself together with difficulty to clean the guns, a job which even in the tropics I always do myself. Then I have to take another rest; it is more than I can do to put the cameras in order for the planned expedition. I have no appetite for supper and a leaden weariness possesses my limbs. At Amadi I had always gone about properly dressed (for reasons of prestige), but on the return journey I had again worn bathing drawers all day. The only conclusion I can draw

is that I have got a slight sunstroke, especially as I feel rather giddy. The plague of gnats is particularly bad to-day, so we light a fire in a tin pan beside the table to enable us to eat our supper. The draught spreads the smoke all over the place. The fire gradually brightens up and its warmth does me good. All the same I nearly collapse with fatigue and retire about seven o'clock. The floor begins to heave under my feet, icy cold sets my teeth chattering audibly, one frosty shiver after another goes through me. I take my temperature and find I have a high fever. I still believe that the exceptional exertions of these last days together with the often inadequate food have conduced to sunstroke. I take some aspirin and try to sleep. Only now does the fever reach its height. There is a roaring in my ears. I am at sea, I hear the great breakers of the North Sea and am hunting seals in a collapsible boat. The waves crash over it and threaten to tear the thin canvas to rags. The boat breaks in two, the frothy crest of a huge wave rises above me. It is going to swallow me up. But what is that dancing there? A large rat-trap! And did anyone ever see one like it? It has a face, it grins mockingly at me and finally slams its doors with a clash. Disaffected Dinka have taken me prisoner, fettered me and tied me to a tree. One of them is slowly driving a long, sharp wooden peg into my skull with a club, blow after blow. His companions sit round me grimacing—devilish faces with queer bulging eyes. Nearer and nearer they come. But they are not Dinka, they are Azande. They are going to roast and eat me and that is why they are hammering on my skull. Mists drift before my eyes, I recover consciousness for a moment and see what these blows mean. Gasmasid is preparing *kahwa* and is pounding the beans in a wooden mortar. Almost at once I sink into another world again. Days that have passed arise before my eyes. People I loved, now long dead, come and go. In their company I enjoy an improbably lovely and happy

time. Aroused again to consciousness I cannot grasp the reality and take enormous trouble to control the wanderings of my mind. At first I seem to succeed, but then lose command of my will again. I start to whirl round, quicker and quicker. Harsh flashes of lightning strike the earth with a loud whizzing sound; red, green and blue fumes coil upwards. I am suffocating. I am going to be quartered. It is a little town in Spain. People in ancient costume press upon me, the sun is scorching and I am parched. My ankles are hurting; they have been twisted. Hangmen approach in blood-red gowns, out of which only their eyes shine, like glowing coals. A church clock is striking. Boom! Boom! Boom! I count the strokes: twelve—thirteen—fourteen. The clock has gone mad too! Oxen are brought to tear me in pieces. But they are Nuer bulls with a hump and enormous horns and decorated with favours. Hands with long claws stretch out after me and all the time the church clock continues its heavy, sullen strokes. A giant's hand encloses my chest and crushes it slowly. I am dying. Then of a sudden I come to. Even now the church clock is not silent and every stroke vibrates through my whole body. It is my heart beating rapidly, loudly, hard, monotonously. My eyes are aching terribly and I feel unspeakably sick. I think sunrise cannot be far off and ask the time. A mere twenty minutes have passed since I last woke.

So the hours go by, day after day of tormenting illness. I have lost all count of time. I am getting to know Africa's other face only too thoroughly. Food tastes musty and squelchy and my gorge rises at it. The clear water of the Nile seems to me worse than that filthy liquid from the Jur's pool.

It can only be one illness, tropical malaria, which however it is quite possible to treat. Every day, in spite of fever and sickness, I swallow a gramme of quinine and with repugnance stuff food into myself. But as the thermometer

shows nearly 104° F. on the fourth day and the fever maintains the same level without fluctuating, I gradually begin to doubt my malaria diagnosis. It might be relapsing fever (*typhus recurrens*). Against that fever quinine is utterly useless and I have no arsenic preparation or salvarsan with me. I ought to try to get to a doctor as promptly as possible. Easier said than done! If we are not held up by a head wind we can make Malakal in three weeks. That would mean that I should just have finished the second attack of fever. The attacks mostly last a week and there is generally a week's interval between them. Whether my sadly reduced physique can stand these fourteen days is another question. In any case the expedition to Yirrol is ruled out. I am much too weak; in fact I can hardly sit upright. So, feeling pretty well beaten, I give the word to break up and move northwards. Good-bye, you elephants, buffaloes, rhinos and lions! And you pretty girls will have to wait for someone else to immortalise your charms!

While I lie in a high fever, the anchor is weighed and silently, almost imperceptibly, the return journey begins. The sun is blazing like a fire, there is absolute calm and the water of the Upper Nile carries us slowly northwards. My condition at first refuses to improve, although I have taken three grammes of quinine on the first two days and now swallow a gramme daily. At length, on the sixth day, the fever abates and I can slip in a three days' rest from quinine. Extremely weak though I am, I am consoled to know that I have only fallen a victim to tropical malaria. Everything is not yet lost.

Eventually we reach the first Nuer on the Zeraf. They are out on a hippopotamus hunt, using a special method of their own. Two men in a dug-out canoe stalk a sleeping hippo and harpoon it. A very tough rope, plaited out of hippo hide, is attached to the harpoon; at the other end is a brake on which a man sits to add his weight to its resistance in the grass. As the fleeing animal drags him through

sedge, one can imagine the state he is in after a successful hunt. As soon as the animal's powers flag, the Nuer deal it its death-blow with their long spears. From the number of teeth offered for sale it is evident that this sort of hunting pays. We ask the Nuer if there is anything they would like and they request a mosquito-net! Unfortunately we cannot give that up, so we invite them to have something to eat. They eye the three plates suspiciously and Tudj has to taste the food before their eyes because they are afraid it might contain onions, which they detest. Even then they are not convinced but offer us a piece of cooked crocodile meat, which we decline with thanks. I cannot work up any enthusiasm for milk in gourds either, knowing as I do that the Nuer wash out their milk vessels with urine. I should dearly have loved to photograph some aspects of these people's life, but I am still too weak to visit the villages which lie far from the river. Shortly afterwards we pass a troop of kob antelopes (*Adenota mariæ*) on a small island. Some of them advance with incredible skill on the floating plants with the help of their long toes. We sail slowly past the beautiful animals, which among the Shilluk are kept for the king. The Shilluk hunt them, it is true, but they only kill the black bucks. The skin is taken to the king, who adorns his numerous wives with it.

The oppressive heat continues although the sun rarely shows itself, and soon the rain begins again. Here too, apparently, the wet season is setting in four weeks too early. As the head wind makes progress difficult, I have the sailing-boat tied to a large swimming island which tows us slowly down-stream, like an extra and highly original barge-horse.

One evening another Nuer settlement comes in sight. Tudj calls out to his kinsfolk " Gari-Gari," the greeting of the desert. Firelight in the palm jungle and the weird shapes of these swamp-dwellers form a scene of elemental nature that compels admiration.

I have had two days free of fever. Time goes by. Life