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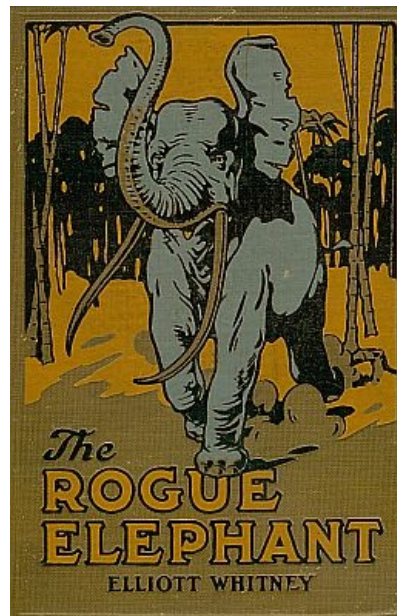
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[4]

It seemed that the great beast was towering over him, reaching for him with that terrible trunk. Then he drew a careful bead on the left fore-shoulder.

**THE ROGUE
ELEPHANT**

BY

ELLIOTT WHITNEY

Illustrated by Fred J. Arting

The Reilly & Britton Co.
Chicago

[5]

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[6]

CONTENTS

[7]

CHAPTER	PAGE
I A CHANCE "OUT"	9
II OFF FOR THE FRONT	21
III QUILQUA THE MYSTERIOUS	33
IV MAKING READY	46
V THE FIRST HUNT	59
VI MOUNT KENIA	71
VII ELEPHANT	83
VIII A RECONNAISSANCE	95
IX INTO THE UNKNOWN	108
X MOWBRAY'S END	120
XI THE DESERT TREK	133
XII A DESERTED LAND	145
XIII A DESPERATE BATTLE	158
XIV THE LAKE OF MYSTERY	170
XV "UNDER THE LEFT GATE-POST"	182
XVI SELIM SHOWS HIS TEETH	194
XVII FRESH SPOOR	206
XVIII LOST!	218
XIX THE ROGUE ELEPHANT	230
XX THE BACK TRAIL	242

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

[8]

- It seemed that the great beast was towering over him, reaching for him with that terrible trunk. Then he drew a careful bead on the left fore-shoulder. [Frontispiece](#)
- Everything else was forgotten in the novel method of riding. [Page 54](#)
- For the man, just as he relapsed into unconsciousness, murmured four words: "Help —me debbil man!" [Page 118](#)
- One slash of the knife, and out trickled a little stream of yellow grains into the brown fist of the explorer. [Page 192](#)
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The Rogue Elephant

[9]

CHAPTER I

A CHANCE "OUT"

"You are so crazy as a loon! Boys? Boys to such a drip dake? Nein!"

Von Hofe excitedly pounded the table until the attendants at the Explorers' Club stared. Then he leaned back determinedly and lighted his meerschaum. The lean, bronzed man who sat opposite pushed away his maps with a smile.

"You misunderstand, von Hofe. I know both these boys personally and vouch for them. You have agreed that this is to be no milk-and-water trip, with hundreds of porters bearing bath tubs and toilet water, but that we shall live off the land as we go. That right?"

The German nodded amid a cloud of smoke.

"You want me to take you into the elephant country and shoot your specimens. I have agreed to do this. I know Africa and I can do it. You are paying the expenses of the trip, but that is immaterial. If we hitch up, von Hofe, it will be on the understanding that I am in command of this expedition; that I choose those I want to go along, and that you are with me to prepare your specimens and nothing else. Now you can take it or leave it—that's final."

[10]

The elderly German paused before replying, the two men searching each other's faces quietly. As most people have it, the famous Dr. Gross von Hofe was a "taxidermist." The average "stuffer," the man who simply covers and replaces the bones of the specimen with excelsior or cotton, is properly named taxidermist, but von Hofe was an artist, known the world over for his wonderful work. In various museums of the world you may see his models, signed like the masterpieces of other artists, of rare and disappearing animals from the distant quarters of the earth, frozen in action, with the setting of the trees, grass, sand or water of their native haunts.

The other, somewhat younger than the famous artist in skin and bone, was an American of German descent—Louis Schoverling. He was one of that little class of world-wanderers, who have barely enough money to carry them about the earth's strange places, hunting and exploring, gradually pushing the frontier of civilization back into the savage quarters of the world, and most happy when self-dependent and forced to rely on gun or hook for a day's meal. [11]

So when Dr. von Hofe was commissioned by two celebrated museums to visit East Africa and secure for each a family group of elephants—tusked bull, calf, and cow—it was natural that he should come to the New York Explorers' Club for a helper and guide. There he had picked on Louis Schoverling—or "the General," as his fellow-explorers had laughingly dubbed him after the failure of a certain South American revolution—to take him to the tuskers. Dr. von Hofe was not a hunter and he knew it. So Schoverling had agreed to go, not for the money in the trip, but for the excitement of it.

"I see," returned the big German at last, "why your comrades call you 'the General.' You are right. You shall take whom you like, and if I say you are crazy as a loon, it makes no difference. You are satisfied?"

"Quite," laughed the American. "When do we start?" [12]

"Three weeks from to-day," returned the other, whose English was perfect save in moments of excitement. "I have a group to finish for the Metropolitan here. Then we go."

"All right. I'll meet you up here three weeks from to-day, with my friends, at twelve sharp."

Such was the interesting prelude to the letter which came to Charlie Collins at Calgary, Canada, five days later. Charlie was one of the boys whom the General had proposed to take with him to Africa. Born in Nova Scotia, he had tramped his way across the continent at the age of seventeen, when his father died. Catching the Peace River fever he had made his way back to Calgary, then up to Peace River Landing, where he went to work to make enough money to turn homesteader. At this juncture Schoverling had met him while on a hunting trip. The General had become keenly interested in the boy, whose ambitions were high. Charlie was accustomed to depending on himself, which caught the explorer's fancy. He had knocked the homesteading notion out of Charlie's head and got him a position at Calgary, where he was now learning the trade of electrician. [13]

So when Charlie walked into the office on that Saturday morning and found a bulky letter from the Explorers' Club, he tore it open in keen anticipation. For five minutes he stood reading in amazement; then he uttered a yell that brought the eyes of the office force down on him, and rushed to the paymaster's desk.

"Give me my time, Mr. Clarke!" he cried, his gray eyes and pleasant, healthy face denoting high excitement. "I've got to quit right off!"

"What's the matter? Fallen heir to a million?" laughed the man behind the window, who was used to his men quitting at a moment's notice.

"Better than that! Jumping sandhills! I'm going to Africa!" almost shouted the boy, as he grabbed his pay envelope and put for the door.

"Hey! Better take your hat!" shouted some one, and Charlie made a quick return for his forgotten headgear, then vanished. When he found himself in his boarding-house room with the door locked, he flung off his coat and settled down to read over once more the wonderful letter. It was written in the customary vein of the explorer—as if he was talking to his reader. [14]

"My dear Charlie:—

"Draw your time and beat it for New York. Meet me at the Explorers' Club at noon of the 22nd. Bring Jack Sawtooth ditto. You don't know him but you will soon. We're going to Africa—sail the night of the 22nd, so hump yourself, old man!

"First for the expedition. Remember asking me once why all explorers couldn't live off the land, as we did up the Mackenzie that winter? I said then that it could be done, and you're going to help prove me right in Africa. We're going to hunt elephant—not where you get them driven up while you sit in a camp-chair, either. We're going after bulls, rogues, the big fellows who live solitary, soured on life in general. We have to get two at least, for museums.

"Never mind an outfit. Don't need your snowshoes, of course. Jack will bring some knee-high moosehide moccasins—no machine-made junk, either. I'm getting the guns. Bring six of those Canadian lynx or fox steel traps. Can't seem to find 'em here, and they'll be useful.

"Have wired and written Sawtooth. He's a quarter-breed—hold on, old scout! Wait till he looks you up; Sunday, I expect. Jack is seventeen, looks like a white—and is white clear through. Next [15]

to you he's the hardiest and gamest ever. Got me skinned a mile on the trail. Educated at the Mission School. You'll like him. He's not sensitive on his blood, but rather proud of it."

Charlie paused and grinned to himself. He did not share the prejudice of a "tenderfoot" against the half-breeds. He knew well enough that as in any race a good, manly Cree or Salteaux was rather above the average white man in point of character.

"Jack has to get down from Mirror Landing, so give him a couple of days' leeway. You have plenty of time, I judge. Better fetch H. B. C. blankets; nights are cold in Africa, and we might strike into the mountains. The trip doesn't promise any more than expenses, but there is always a chance that we can trade or clean up on a bit of ivory. Once we get together we can go over the route and all that. However, the experience is worth while, and it's the best kind of an education. If we pull out ahead of the game you may have a stake to start in some kind of business for yourself."

[16]

"Check enclosed to cover expenses to New York. Don't buy any gold bricks when you strike Broadway! And don't let Jack scalp anyone on board the Overland."

*"Yours in haste,
"Louis Schoverling."*

Charlie slowly folded up the letter and stared out of the window for a moment.

"Jumping sandhills!" he murmured softly, and turned to where "the General" hung framed on his wall. "What a prince of a friend you are to a fellow! I guess I'll give you a bit of a surprise myself, just the same!"

Eight months before, when Schoverling had gone "out," as the saying is up there, he had left Charlie in Calgary. The boy had little knowledge of the ways of the city, but after parting with his new-found friend he had thrown himself into his new life, grimly determined that he would make good. And he had. In the day he had worked at his new trade, in the evening he had plugged away at night-school, making up for lost time. He had doffed his flannel shirt and timber boots for the garb of the city, and as he looked at himself in the glass that morning he grinned again.

[17]

The next day Jack Sawtooth showed up, tired out, fresh from the wilderness. He had received the General's telegram three days before, had not stopped for the letter following, but had said farewell to his father and joined a freight sledge down to Athabasca Landing, to seek out Charlie at Calgary.

"Glad to meet you," exclaimed Charlie when his visitor was dubiously announced by his landlady. The Cree boy was lithe, straight as an arrow, open-browed and keen of eye, with none of the somber gravity of his Indian blood. "I hardly thought you'd get here so quickly."

"I didn't know what was up," smiled Jack. "Say, this is a neat little room! Where did you get the bead-work? Why, you must be an old-timer! Mr. Schoverling has not written me very often, and only mentioned you a few times."

"I've knocked around quite a bit," admitted Charlie, glancing at the Indian bead-work and the pictures of camp and trail that hung on his wall. "Don't you know where we're going?"

The other shook his head.

[18]

"We're going elephant hunting in Africa," laughed Charlie. Jack stared at him.

"Africa? Say, Collins, don't try to give me heart-failure that way! What is it now, honest?"

"You wait," chuckled Charlie, bringing out the explorer's letter and reading over all that related to the trip. Not until Jack had set eyes on it himself would he believe that Charlie was in earnest. Then he sat back and stared again.

"Me—in Africa! Great Scott, am I dreaming or just crazy? Does he mean it?"

Charlie produced the good-sized check in evidence, and Jack's amazement soon gave way to calm acceptance of the situation.

"Then we'll go to Africa, unless I wake up and find myself snowed in somewhere along the trap line. When do we go?"

"Catch the Overland to-night, if you're ready," returned Charlie promptly. Jack gave a single glance at the other's neat clothing and shook his head.

"Not much. I got enough attention coming through town," and he pointed to the jack he had deposited in the corner. "Look here, Chuck," he fell readily into the common abbreviation for Charlie then prevalent, "you fit me out with a rig like yours, in the morning. You know the ropes and I don't. Then I'll pack up those heavy moccasins I brought along and we can take the train to-morrow night. No great rush, is there?"

[19]

"Guess not," grinned Charlie, inwardly delighted at the good sense of his new comrade. "But we'll probably get an outfit in New York. Look here, Jack, I got a new suit of rough tweed last week, and won't need it now. If you don't mind, you could have that as well as not. We're built about the same. Hang on to the hickory shirt, though. We'll probably use 'em. In the meantime I've got enough reg'lar shirts to hold us, and we can dig out on the train to-night if you say."

"Suits me," answered Jack, beaming. "I'm much obliged, old man, for helping me out! Now I'll have to drop dad a note telling him about it, and can write him later from the train. Got any paper handy?"

With much interest Charlie watched the other scribble a hasty note in weird-looking characters. Jack explained that his father could read the Cree writing-language invented by Bishop Grouard, but not English. The more Charlie saw of his new friend, the better he liked him, and the two boys soon fell into a close friendship that was destined to be tested by land and sea, in more ways than either of them imagined. [20]

"Dad will have a fit when he reads that," laughed Jack. "He'd trust me anywhere with Mr. Schoverling, though. They used to know each other when Schoverling was in the Hudsons Bay Company, years ago. Where'll you cash that check?"

"Hotel," returned Charlie. "They know me at the Alberta."

Jack was soon fixed up with "store clothes," the traps and moccasins were packed in two grips, Charlie arranged with his landlady to pack up his stuff and store it for him, and that night the two went "out"—aboard the Limited that would bear them across the continent.

CHAPTER II

 [21]

OFF FOR THE FRONT

The enthusiastic boys reached New York long before the three weeks were up, but the General—as they came to call him, like everyone else—was not in evidence. He had left letters for them at the Explorers' Club, however, and had arranged for them to get a room there until his arrival.

At two minutes to twelve some days later he stepped out of the elevator and entered the library, where Charlie and Jack were waiting in no little dismay. The meeting was a joyful one all around.

"Me?" laughed the General, in answer to their rapid-fire questions. "Oh, I've been in Washington, getting some letters to pave the way for us. But where's von Hofe? He was to meet us at noon."

"Well, is he not here?" came a heavy voice from behind, and von Hofe entered with a broad smile on his bearded face. "You did not say five minutes before the hour, or one minute after the hour, so that I came on the hour—ach! Let go mine hant! I am a man, not a wood or stone image!" [22]

Neither Charlie nor Jack had known, of course, who was behind the expedition, for the General had omitted any mention of von Hofe in his haste. But as it chanced, Charlie had been reading an article that morning which described the wonderful work done by von Hofe, and his contributions to science. So, when Schoverling introduced him, the astonished Charlie let out his accustomed expression, as he shook hands.

"Jumping sandhills! Are you the chap I was reading about this morning—the man who makes photos and sketches of animals before they're shot an' then mounts 'em the same way? Was it you who skinned the skin of a sacred white elephant out o' Siam, an'—"

"Ach, what liars these newspapers are!" But the steel-blue eyes twinkled forth from beneath the bushy yellow-gray brows, and Charlie's heart leaped as he realized that this great man must be going with them.

"You are not such foolish looking boys," decided the German, nodding his head. "Herr Schoverling, they haf the look in the eyes, the look of the dependable-upon men. I apologize. You are not crazy as a loon. Now we haf much to talk over, and we are hungry, I hope?" [23]

"We certainly are," smiled the General, leading the way toward a private dining room which was reserved for them. Jack whispered delightedly in his friend's ear as they followed, "You catch-um that beard?"

Charlie grinned at the Chinook expression and nodded.

"He's a peach, Jack! Say, we're goin' to have the time of our lives, believe me!"

Luncheon was devoted to story-telling. Schoverling related tales of his adventures when he had joined the H. B. C. in Canada as a boy, serving his four years; the doctor jovially gave the story of certain adventures in South Africa, and Jack chipped in with a relation of Indian legend from the far north, relating to the mammoths which were said to be still alive somewhere in the frozen regions. This last, which was backed up by the explorer, interested von Hofe immensely; but at length the meal was done with, the table cleared, and they were alone with their coffee. [24]

Schoverling drew forth a huge map, which he spread out on the table. On it was a route heavily marked in red ink, and he pointed to this as he spoke.

"I got this map from a friend of mine, in Washington at present, who was up there last year

stealing ivory. It's not considered at all bad, boys, among a certain class of hunters, to make a raid into the protected regions and loot all the tusks they can get. Well, this is the latest map of British East Africa, divested of all that is thrown in by chaps who like to fill up blank spaces with names.

"Down here south and east of Lake Rudolph, you see, is the Northern Game Preserve. It is more or less indefinite, extending up to the Abyssinian border. This chap I'm speaking of went dead across it, as you can see. Incidentally, he landed in Abyssinia, which is another story.

"Now, Dr. von Hofe and I have secured permits to get the beasts we are after for scientific purposes. Coming back to the Uganda Railway, here is Nairobi, you see. We'll go just where this friend of mine went—on to Nakuro, then up to the Leikipia hills and through them into the Game Preserve—"

[25]

"To Abyssinia?" cried Charlie, leaning forward "Are we going—"

"We are nod," interrupted von Hofe, his deep voice roaring through his meerschaum smoke. "You will keep very still, if you please!"

Charlie was undecided whether to resent it or not, until he caught a wink from Jack and his quick anger was dissipated instantly.

"No," smiled the General, "we need not fear to return through British territory, for our permits are pretty general. Now let's get back to this map. Here is Mt. Marsabit, straight north of Kenia. Midway between the two we will branch off my friend's route and go over toward the Lorian Swamp. That's unknown country, except to the ivory raiders, and they keep their mouths shut; but that's where the elephants are.

"Does that suit you, Doctor? We could stick closer to civilization, of course, but we wouldn't get the big bulls. Besides, I'd like to do a bit of exploring in there. Some mighty queer yarns have come out of that country lately."

[26]

The big Teuton emitted a dense cloud of smoke before answering.

"You are not to worry about suiting me, my friend. What I want is bulls, such bulls as have never come to this country. Perhaps I will change my mind and go to the North Pole for those mammoth. Ach, what a thing! To bring a mammoth down, skin him, photograph him, mount him for the Smithsonian! What more could a man want?"

"Bosh!" exclaimed the General. "That's all been exploded long ago. Now, we're going to cut out the usual gang of porters and chiefs. I guess we can get along from village to village well enough. Bring those traps and moccasins, boys?"

"They're up in our rooms," answered Jack. "How about clothes?"

"All gone on board ship," smiled Schoverling. Charlie had already noted his appreciative glance at their first meeting, and Jack was now feeling quite at home in his new garments.

They were going from New York straight to Alexandria on a steamer of a Greek line, which would give the boys a brief glimpse of Athens en route. At Alexandria they would pick up an East Coast steamer to Mombasa.

[27]

With this the discussion was closed, but Charlie and Jack put forth an eager question as to their armament, which they had more than once discussed in wild anticipation. The General smiled, comprehending their eagerness.

"The doctor has absolutely refused to touch a gun from start to finish, boys, so that puts it up to us. I had everything we would need. There is a double-barrelled 500-405 Holland for each of us—which of course we won't use on anything but elephants. Two of them are mine, and one was loaned me for the trip. For ordinary use we will carry our 30-30s, and a number twelve shotgun. Those, with a suit case each, make up all our luggage. Any trunks, Doctor?"

"Trunks?" The blond German glared over his beard in surprise. "Would I preserve elephant hide with air? No, but I have eleven cases of chemicals, which you must take."

"Very well—that will make about twenty porters," commented the explorer quietly. "I think we'll have a mighty interesting time if we carry out my original program of living off the country. Anything more to settle?"

[28]

As nothing more seemed to present itself, the meeting was declared adjourned. Von Hofe shook hands with the boys, put away his big pipe, and retired to write some letters. As both Charlie and Jack had seen all of New York that they cared about, Mr. Schoverling spent the afternoon at the club with them, showing and explaining the cases full of savage arms, relics and curios which had been contributed by the explorers and scientists who formed the club. He introduced them to many of its famous members, a few of whom they had already met while waiting for him. It was an informal, cosy place, and during their stay the boys enjoyed themselves immensely.

As the news spread about of the General's proposed trip, a number of men who had been in Africa promptly carried all three off to the library and there ensued a high discussion. Most of them flatly declared that living on the land might be possible, but that moccasins and traps were absurd.

"But why?" laughed the General. "You fellows wear puttees and leather breeches to keep dry, and safe from scratches or snakes. Moccasins are equally as good, especially high ones like ours, and a whole lot more comfortable. You chaps who go in for big game with all the comforts of home don't know what real work is like!"

[29]

This good-natured taunt happened to hit most of those around, and the situation looked stormy until a little, awkward-looking man strolled up and joined in.

"Nonsense!" His irritated voice shrilled high above the rest. "Shut up, you fools! Why, what do you know about East Africa? When I tramped from Fort Rosebury to Kituta in my bare hide I got nothing worse than mosquito bites, and I've had to make moccasins many a time or go barefoot. I'm leaving this afternoon for Africa; how many of you chaps want to go with me? Don't all speak at once, please."

Charlie stared, expecting to see the little, bitter-tongued man mobbed. But to his vast surprise not a word was said, and the dilettante hunters faded away one by one. The little man turned to Schoverling with a bristling laugh of delight.

"See 'em run, General? Going in, I hear."

"Boys, I'd like to have you meet Mr. Mowbray," said the explorer, introducing the two. "You aren't going to British territory, I suppose?"

[30]

"Never you mind, my son," snapped the little man. "Give me back my map. Just got in from Washington an hour ago, and leave in another hour. I'll need that map worse than you will—got wind of something big."

As Schoverling pulled out the folded map and handed it over, Mowbray lowered his voice.

"I'll beat you there by some time, old boy, but I'll be around. Let you in on it, if I can't handle it. Good-looking boys, there. Keep your ears open for a nigger who says 'Me debbil man.' You can trust him. Got to go, General. Mighty glad to have met you, boys—see you later, maybe. Besselama!"

"Jumping sandhills!" ejaculated Charlie. "Who's he? A grand mogul around here? What's that last word mean?"

"Arabic for 'so-long,'" smiled the General.

"What made 'em all shut up when he handed it to them?" inquired Jack curiously.

"That's the chap, of course, who lent me the map, boys." And the General spoke very seriously. "You must never repeat what he said to a soul, or mention his name. In British Africa they have hunted him for years, by regiments; there's a price on his head of some thousands of pounds, and he's slipped into and out of the country whenever he liked. He's defeated the Somali troops and even the white regulars time and again, and no one knows how he gets into the ivory country. He does it for sheer love of the game, for he has a fortune of his own."

[31]

"You mean," asked the puzzled and wondering Charlie, "that he's one of the ivory raiders?"

"He's *the* ivory raider of them all," nodded Schoverling, "and the biggest man in the club here. For all his scornful words, not a man there but would bite off his tongue sooner than repeat that Mowbray was starting for Africa to-day. Why, the British would pay a thousand pounds for those half-dozen words! Now just forget it, boys."

Forget it! It was a long time before Charlie ever forgot the sight of that little man, and the time came when he was to remember him more vividly still, as was Jack also. Neither of them gave any thought to the muttered "Me debbil man." If Schoverling did, he betrayed no inkling of it through his bronzed mask of a face.

[32]

That night they were aboard the steamer. During the days that followed Charlie enjoyed every minute of the time, as did Jack also. But they were both accustomed to hard work, and the luxuries of civilization, where everything was done for them, soon grew monotonous. When they had gone over their beloved guns, oiling every inch, and received instructions for the use of the few simple medicines taken along, there was little to do except to read up on Africa, which labor they threw themselves into gladly.

They saw little of von Hofe on the way over, for he was busy on some chemical experiments; but the day before they reached Gibraltar a strange odor, which permeated the whole ship, drew down on him the wrath of the captain, after which the big Teuton abandoned his beloved mixtures.

The whole voyage to Port Said was uneventful in actual happenings. But at Port Said they went aboard the *Mombasa*, and off Aden they had the pleasure of meeting the gentlemanly Selim ben Amoud, and of first hearing of the Magic Lake and its mysterious Rogue Elephant guardian.

QUILQUA THE MYSTERIOUS

He was a suave, polished, open-shirted Arab, who appeared the morning after they had left Port Said and the Suez far behind, and who smiled at Louis Schoverling with the air of old acquaintance. The American sprang up with extended hand.

"Why, Selim! I had no idea you were aboard!"

"Neither had the authorities at Port Said," rejoined the Arab softly. The explorer raised his eyebrows, and Jack nudged Charlie significantly. A moment later they were being introduced, and von Hofe was explaining the object of their journey.

"It should interest Mr. ben Amoud," smiled the General, "as he is one of the largest Arab dealers in ivory—and other things—on the Coast."

Selim, much to Charlie's surprise, spoke fluent English, enjoyed his cigar as much as did the explorer, and was not as swarthy as their Italian captain. He sat quietly beneath the awning, his wide hat shading his face, and would easily have been taken for a German or Boer, with his flowing beard and European clothes. Most of the Arabs on board wore the burnous and sandals, and Charlie wondered if there were any reason behind this European garb. [34]

The trader heard of their expedition, and gravely complimented von Hofe on his work, of which he spoke with some knowledge, until the doctor beamed genially.

After a pause Selim turned to Schoverling. "Much has happened in the two years since I last saw you. You have not, by any chance, heard of one who calls himself 'Me debbil man'?"

Charlie started, but Jack, his deep black eyes suddenly afire, gripped his arm. Von Hofe stared, and the Arab gazed at Schoverling, whose face never changed.

"Yes," replied the explorer, quietly. "We are all friends of his."

The Arab's gaze darted to one of the deck-hands, lounging on the rail near by. Charlie saw ben Amoud rise, step to the man's side, and hiss something. The man looked startled; then his face changed and he slunk away. Selim, his narrow eyes glittering, returned to his deck-chair and settled himself comfortably. [35]

"Now we can talk, my friends. Mr. Schoverling, have you ever heard of Lake Quilqua?"

The American looked puzzled. "Can't say I remember the name, Selim. Where is it?"

"Ah, many men have asked that question!" and Selim's white teeth shone. Charlie stole a glance at Jack. His dreams of the mysterious East were being rapidly realized! "No one has ever answered it, however. It is one of those odd native yarns that are generally founded on fact, though you white men disbelieve them. Here it is for you:

"Two years ago rumors began to drift to certain of us that somewhere, far down from the Abyssinian border in that desolate land north of the Lorian Swamp, there was a lake. The tale was given me in fuller form by one of my own Arabs who had got lost and found his way out to die, crazed and raving of horrible things, only a few months ago.

"This lake, it seems, is fed by underground springs—hot springs, that spout up and fall like fountains on the water; its outlet is also by an underground river, so that the lake lies, sweltering in the sun and surrounded by desert and jungle and marsh, where no people live." [36]

Ben Amoud turned to the calmly interested German. "You, Doctor von Hofe, are a scientist. Granted such a body of water, at an average temperature of ninety to a hundred degrees Fahrenheit; would animal life in it and near it be liable to any change in average size?"

The big man stroked his beard reflectively, pulling at his pipe.

"Possibly," he admitted at length. "But only one way. If animal life could exist at such a temperature, it would perhaps be much larger than elsewhere. For instance, a buffalo lives much in the water. In such a place as that, a buffalo's great-grandchildren would be larger, and so on through succeeding generations, each a little larger. Yes, it is possible—but not probable."

"Do you mean," cried Charlie, unable to repress his eagerness, "that there are giant animals there?" [37]

The Arab smiled and waved his hand. "It is but a tale, remember. See, I have heard that in this lake are great serpents of monstrous size. That, as our friend has just said, there are such buffalo there as were never seen, and that evil spirits dwell on an island near the reed-encircled shore. But there is one thing more, that might interest you; indeed, it was my reason for telling you the story.

"Not only the wandering natives, but my own Arab, have raved of a tremendous elephant, a rogue, who dwells near there. He is said to be of great size, very wicked, and cursed by Allah with the desire to fight men. His size is said to be that of a mountain—and in truth I doubt if any man has ever seen him and lived to tell of it. There, my friends, would be a conquest worthy of your skill!"

Von Hofe grunted, but Charlie saw that his blue eyes were never off the face of the Arab. Jack

sat listening with all his ears.

"What's a 'rogue'?" he asked.

"Wait till you see one and you won't need to ask. A rogue is a big bull elephant who's broken away from his herd and lives by himself in the jungle. He's usually a man-fighter, and doesn't think anything of attacking a whole herd of elephants. He's an outlaw, and he's a bad citizen to meet.

[38]

"But I hardly think, Selim," continued the General with a smile, "that we will penetrate to such a place. All we wish is a couple of very large bulls; the others of the groups can be picked up nearer home, but it is essential that we get magnificent tuskers."

"And I have told you where to get the best of all tuskers," rejoined Selim seriously. "There is some foundation for such a tale, believe me. I am not at liberty to tell you more, but perhaps you, Mr. Schoverling, could imagine a friend of yours who would be very likely to try the truth of the yarn."

Charlie's quick eyes roved from face to face. He had not fought with the world for most of his life and emerged unable to read men's faces, young as he was; and he knew enough of Jack by this time to feel confident that the other was losing nothing of what went on.

At the Arab's last words a glance flashed between him and the explorer. Von Hofe was frankly puzzled over these references to an unknown person, but he asked no questions, wisely. It was the explorer who finally spoke.

[39]

"Yes, I can imagine such a man, Selim. But we are in no way connected with him, nor are we acting in conjunction with him. He told me, the day he left New York, that he had something big on hand, and would perhaps meet me later."

The Arab smiled slightly and tossed his cigar over the rail. Charlie had jumped at the conclusion that they spoke of Mowbray, the ivory raider, when Selim had first uttered the catchphrase or password. At Schoverling's reply he knew that he had been right, and watched eagerly for more.

But the conversation shifted to other things, and during the morning there was no more said of the mysterious lake. The two boys got off by themselves and discussed the matter, but arrived nowhere.

"Prob'ly Mowbray is making a try for that Quilqua business," concluded Jack sagely. "It sounds mighty good to me, old boy?"

"Here too," agreed Charlie. "But Selim laid it on too thick, with sea serpents and elephants like mountains. Bet a dollar to a pine chip that he had some axe to grind with the General. You wait and see."

[40]

"Mebbe," conceded Jack doubtfully. "He's a slick-lookin' proposition, Chuck. I saw the lines of a gun in his coat pocket, too. He didn't do much grinding, anyhow. The General didn't fall for his line of talk worth a cent. Well, let's get back; it's almost time for lunch—or what do they call it here? Tiff 'em?"

"Tiffin," chuckled his friend; "same's they do in India. There's a heap of Indians all down the coast, 'cause it's a Mohammedan country an' they don't lose caste by coming over to work."

All of which explanation was largely lost on Jack. Charlie knew a good deal of the East Indians, having witnessed most of the Hindu immigrant riots in western Canada, and he was frankly interested in them as a race.

When they returned to the after awning they found Selim just saying good-bye. He was to leave the ship at Ras al Kyle, a port on the Italian Somaliland coast, and they were nearly due to reach there. So he suavely bowed himself away, in odd contrast to his Boer-like appearance, and the boys immediately deluged the General with questions. Dr. von Hofe rumbled out a laugh.

[41]

"Would you prefer my absence, General? I—"

"Nonsense, Doctor!" broke in Schoverling sharply. "Here is all I know," and he told the big German of meeting Mowbray, and of the latter's words.

"So!" drawled von Hofe. "Then, this Selim ben Amoud is who?"

"I have heard that he is the wealthiest Arab on the east coast," replied the American. "You noticed, I suppose, what he first said?"

Charlie nodded eagerly.

"Privately, I have no doubt that he is a slaver," went on the explorer. "He has a hand in everything, and is always in hot water with the British authorities. He was trying to find out whether or not our expedition had anything to do with that of Mowbray. I have met him before and we know each other slightly."

"Well," asked Jack, "is Mowbray going to the magic lake?"

The explorer laughed. "Who knows? The whole yarn may be a bluff—probably is. Selim would

like the British to think that Mowbray's party is merely exploring, and perhaps he thinks we will spread the news, in which he is mistaken. Or, he may have been honest in the matter; you can never tell what lies behind his words."

[42]

At this Charlie's face fell slightly. He had been intensely interested in the Arab's tale, and the thought that it was a put-up job did not appeal to him in the least.

"But wasn't it true?" he inquired, disappointed. "It sounded pretty good to me!"

"Frankly, Charlie, I don't believe a word of it. You can hear yarns like that wherever you go, and they usually pan out pretty small—just like Jack's story of the mammoth up in the north. You noticed the password, 'Me debbil man'? Well, there isn't a particle of doubt in my mind that Mowbray and Selim are parts of a big underground concern for illicit trading. I don't for a minute think Mowbray would traffic in slaves, but of course he's the biggest ivory raider in the game."

"Then it's a sort of conspiracy?" shot out Jack quickly. "Any chance of our gettin' mixed up in the business?"

"Not a bit of it," asserted the explorer, with a smile at von Hofe. "I'll answer for that, Jack. Selim is satisfied, and we'll probably never hear from him or Mowbray again. Our own trip is perfectly fair and square, the authorities will know everything we do, and we can't afford to soil our fingers with anything crooked. It doesn't pay."

[43]

"That is why," struck in Dr. von Hofe, "I came to you. 'Schoverling,' they told me, 'he is straight.' It is a good reputation to have, my friend."

The boys nodded, understanding. A look of gratification crossed the explorer's face, such gratification as comes to a man when he knows that he has won the esteem of other men.

"We are not looking for hot water and sea serpents," went on the doctor with a broad smile at the boys. "We are looking for elephants, let us remember, please!"

With that, the topic of Lake Quilqua was promptly dropped. At Ras al Kyle, Selim ben Amoud went ashore—this time wearing sandals and burnous—and the *Mombasa* took up her interrupted journey south. But late that night, as the boys swung into their bunks, Jack gave vent to his long-repressed thought.

[44]

"Chuck, I wish to thunder we were goin' to hunt for that lake!"

"Forget it," advised Charlie. "Von Hofe isn't paying expenses for us to chase around after sea serpents. Anyhow, Jack, when you come to think it over it doesn't stand to reason that there's any such place as that. There's a heap of sense in what the General said. I've heard that Injun yarn about the mammoths up north; but you know's well as I do that when it comes down to hard pan there's nothin' to it. Same with this magic lake."

"Guess you're right," sighed Jack regretfully, turning out the light. While the boys were turning in, Dr. Gross von Hofe was replying to a certain question put to him by the General, before they retired.

"Yes, my friend, it could be. Lieutenant Graetz found just such gigantic buffalo at Lake Bangweolo, and was all but killed by them. He has promised that I shall mount one, when he is able to undertake a second expedition to bring home specimens. But elephants and sea serpents—ach, no! Such a yarn is crazy."

[45]

"So crazy as a loon," laughed Schoverling, and said good night.

CHAPTER IV

[46]

MAKING READY

"Mombasa!"

Before them lay the picturesque harbor, filled with Arab dhows from Zanzibar and the Somali ports, tramp steamers, coasters, and a trim French corvette up from Madagascar. Up above the waters rose the old Arab city, now a trim English-ruled town of immense trade, while behind all shimmered the vivid green of trees.

"Dandy sight, isn't it!" and the boys turned to find Schoverling at their side, with the doctor. "That old town used to have a sultan, as Zanzibar has, and a gay pirate life was led along the east coast in the days of Captain Kidd. Portugal captured the place, but the Arabs drove her out again. Now England is making Mombasa into a mighty big trading center, and as the Uganda Railway taps the Cape-to-Cairo, which is about done, things are going to boom."

Charlie and Jack had seen considerable of the cosmopolitan aspect of Port Said, although they had had no time to visit Alexandria, but here was something entirely new to them. As they passed through the streets to the Mombasa Club they were surrounded by English officers in neat uniforms, by Somali and other native troops, by Arabs in fez and burnous, and above all by Indians. Hindus and Mohammedans alike moved through the streets, some wearing the fez,

[47]

others the turban; there were Sikhs and Gurkhas, lordly Brahmins who disdained to touch the Europeans with their garments, and those of the lower castes who were equally particular.

"I was reading the other day," said Charlie, "that the Indians were swarming over here by the shipload, and this certainly looks like it!"

Louis Schoverling brushed aside the would-be native guides, and led the party direct to the Mombasa Club, where they were soon comfortably ensconced. Barely had they arrived when a bronzed, trim Englishman sought out the explorer.

"Mr. Schoverling?" he inquired. "I am Inspector Harrington. The governor heard that you and Doctor von Hofe came in on the *Mombasa*, and he detailed me to look after you. He was anxious to see you in person, as our ambassador at Washington had written him, but he was called up country yesterday."

[48]

"That is very good of you," returned the explorer, introducing his party. "I was assured at Washington that you would have our permits for us."

"They are ready at the Government House," said the inspector. "We are anxious to extend every courtesy to you and Doctor von Hofe, of course. You won't do any trading?"

"Frankly, I don't expect to. We are here to procure specimens and nothing else. But if I could pick up any ivory on my own hook, I suppose it would be all right?"

"With you, yes," smiled Harrington. "Men like you and Selous and Cuninghame can be accepted at the standard of gentlemen. Unfortunately, there are some who cannot. Now, how about porters and so on?"

"We'll take about twenty-five porters," answered the explorer carelessly. At this the Englishman sat up.

"My word! Are you spoofin' me or what? Twenty-five porters! Why, Roosevelt had two hundred, to say nothing of askaris, saises, tent boys, and the rest!"

[49]

Smiling, Schoverling and von Hofe explained their plan of action. Harrington's amazement grew into settled doubt that such a march was possible, for although a remarkably fine young officer, he was decidedly conservative.

"We are all used to doing things for ourselves," concluded the explorer. "The doctor is less used to the trail, but he can wash his own dishes and things right enough, and we'll do the shooting."

"Well, it's your expedition," returned Harrington, "and not mine. But how do you expect to send back the skins with such a small safari?"

"Safari" was the term used for caravan, and was usually applied to the entire expedition, who instead of being on the march, were said to be "on safari."

"There is where I want your help," said Schoverling. "We will camp at the nearest possible point to Mt. Kenia and let the doctor make what sketches he desires. There we will kill the cows and calves and send back their skins. For this purpose we can pick up porters on the spot, but I must have three or four reliable men to bring them back. Also, I want a good cook who can act as a sort of major-domo over the men at each place."

[50]

Harrington pulled out his notebook and jotted down the requirements methodically. Then he rose and shook hands all around.

"As a member of the Club," he told the explorer, "you need no cicerone. You will take the morning train? Well, I will meet you here at eight o'clock with your men. Good-bye!"

For the remainder of the day they rested. Schoverling departed to see that their cases were placed aboard the train safely, while the boys rambled around town with the doctor. The latter had been in Mombasa before, but to-day his head was full of the expedition.

Instead of the great quantity of salt usually taken along to cure hides, he was using a strong chemical powder of his own invention, which could be dissolved in water, and thus be greatly diffused. His fifteen cases comprised not only a sufficient supply of this, but also the medicines which were likely to be necessary.

It had been found that a certain supply of provisions would have to be taken along, but Schoverling was well satisfied when it was found that evening that twenty-five porters would be sufficient for all. Their tents were small sleeping-tents, and two porters could carry the lot with ease.

[51]

That evening they had a long talk with Piet Andrus, a Boer merchant of the city. He very strongly advised them to procure ox-wagons at Nakuro and to proceed north with them.

"I do not know the country up north of the Guasa Nyero," he said, "but I can see no reason why oxen could not be used. It would save porter hire and be more reliable. If you lost them, for any reason, you could always hire porters. I am going up on the same train with you, and if you like, would be glad to pick out seasoned beasts."

After a brief discussion it was decided to take both porters and wagons as far as the first camp,

and then send back the porters with the skins taken there.

In the morning Harrington arrived, followed by a group of men. These, it proved, were all Indians who had been in the British army and in Africa for years. They salaamed at the verandah steps.

[52]

"First your cook and general manager," smiled the inspector. "Gholab Singh!"

A strapping Gurkha stepped out and saluted. Charlie liked his manner at once.

"Gholab Singh," said Schoverling promptly, "are you willing to serve me faithfully and follow wherever I lead?"

"I am, sahib," returned the other in a quiet, confident voice.

"Then you will cook for us, and will be in charge of the safari under my orders. The pay shall be as the inspector sahib has agreed with you. Is it well?"

"It is well, sahib."

Harrington then brought up the gun-bearers—two Gurkhas and a stalwart Sikh. The last, Guru, the General chose for himself as personal attendant. To Charlie was allotted Amir Ali, and to Jack, Akram Das. All three were faithful and highly recommended by the inspector. The four remaining, one an Arab half-caste, two Somali, and one a Gurkha, were to take charge of the safari under Gholab Singh, and to return with the skins as obtained.

[53]

At the railroad station Gholab Singh was given money for the tickets and food en route, and the men vanished into one of the tiny carriages. Special arrangements had been made in honor of Schoverling and the doctor, however, and as the weather was fine they were to travel on a wide seat fastened across the cow-catcher, which held four with comfort. The boys took their places with some misgivings, but found the seat comfortable enough.

Inspector Harrington now waved them farewell, with assurances that all had been arranged for their comfort on the trip, which would take two days. Andrus, they knew, was on board, and had that morning wired ahead to his traders to prepare teams and wagons. In fact, the general courtesy with which they met both surprised and delighted the two boys.

"They seem to do things just to please you," exclaimed Jack happily, as he gave a last wave to Harrington and the train started. "Are they as hospitable and obliging as this all the time, General?"

[54]

"Those we meet are, Jack. But you must remember that we are a special party, and that most of these men, who are big men themselves, consider it an honor to assist the doctor, here. That chap Harrington, for instance, just got in from two years up-country. He had charge of some three hundred square miles of absolutely savage country, and with a dozen Somalis kept order and law enforced. Andrus is another real man, and real men are above smallness."

As the train pulled out everything else was forgotten in the novel method of riding. The boys already knew that on each side of the railroad was a great game reserve, but on the first day's trip they saw nothing save one or two antelope and jackals. Birds were plentiful, however, and the rolling country was constantly presenting a change of scene before them.

The neat railroad stations were always surrounded with curious crowds of natives, some half dressed. As a rule the station agents and officials were Indians in the government service. Both Charlie and Jack kept their pocket cameras busy.

Toward evening they retired into their special carriage and wrote their last letters home, which would be mailed at Nakuro. But with the morning they were in the game country, and took advantage of the first stop to resume their seats in front. Now everything was changed. At one moment they would pass a group of giraffe, running in their ungainly fashion to one side; hartebeests, impalla and other varieties of antelope were everywhere, gazing in fearless fashion at the train. Herds of zebra came into sight, while through the trees scampered monkeys in endless variety.

"They know they're safe, all right," chuckled Charlie, as a herd of beautiful little gazelles stopped a dozen yards away to stare in mild wonder. "Funny how animals get to know where they're protected."

"It's the same in the Yellowstone," said von Hofe. "Within the limits they are almost tame, but across the line—pouf! and they are gone."

The wonderful journey, like no other in the world, was ended at last, however, and they puffed past Lake Nakuro to the village station. Here their trip was ended, their baggage was rolled off,



[55]

Everything else was forgotten in the novel method of riding.

and they were taken in charge by a young subaltern, Lieutenant Smithers, together with the Boer merchant, Piet Andrus. The latter offered them the hospitality of his trading store, which they gratefully accepted.

[56]

"Now to business," said the General that night after dinner. "Lieutenant, what would be your advice as to porters? I'd like to get off in the morning, if possible."

"The usual way," laughed Smithers, "is to take Swahilis, but you seem to be an unusual party. Since you are going to take wagons from here, I would suggest that you load everything into the wagons and trek north to Jan Botha's ranch. There you can pick up a score or two of Masai. They are an offshoot of the old Zulu stock—brave as lions, faithful enough, and able to provide for themselves. This safari business is largely bally rot, to my mind."

"Bully for you!" cried Charlie in delight, while the others laughed heartily.

"According to law," said Smithers, "you'll have to provide tents for the porters. But the Masai would laugh at such things, and this will save you a good deal of carriage. How about horses?"

[57]

"They are in the compound," said Miers, the local agent of Andrus' firm. "I have two good wagons and a dozen 'salted' oxen, specially selected. This gives you six to a wagon, and even if you lose four of the beasts, the other eight will do the work. Better to have too many than too few."

Von Hofe nodded, thoroughly satisfied. By 'salted,' the trader meant that the animals had been through the sickness caused by the bite of the tsetse fly, and were henceforth immune to the worst scourge of Africa. That night there was a gathering of the Boers, English settlers, and officers at the station, all of whom were keenly interested in the novel excursion. It was the general opinion that the expedition would succeed, although the nature of the country beyond the mountains was an open question.

"Well," commented Charlie that night, as he made ready to share his bunk with Jack, "we're off! Looks like we'd have a bully time, eh?"

"It sure does, if we strike a rogue," chuckled Jack. "I'm crazy to get out those guns, Chuck. Funny the doctor doesn't care for shooting."

[58]

"He's got some tough work ahead of him, all right. Did you see those paints an' things he brought along? Right on the job! Well, see you in the morning. Good night."

CHAPTER V

[59]

THE FIRST HUNT

The place was astir with the dawn, and after sunrise, with breakfast over, the party prepared for the start. Gholab Singh took charge of loading the wagons, and the main question was the matter of personal equipment.

Each of the boys carried matches in a water-tight box, compass, and sheath-knife, of course. The elephant guns and ammunition were stored away for future reference, but the 30-30s were to be slung in holsters at their saddles for the present. Each wore a bandolier for cartridges, and their ordinary clothes—flannel shirt and khakis. And, instead of sun helmets, each boy wore his northern hat—a light, stiff brimmed Stetson.

"As our shoes go to pieces," said the General, "we'll replace 'em with moccasins. No use fussing with leggings while we're going to ride. We'll have open veldt country as far as Mount Kenia, anyway. Just get the idea that we're in Canada, going by wagon from Athabasca to Fort McMurray."

[60]

Dr. von Hofe was the only member of the party who from habit insisted on leggings and boots. Their horses were steady, flea-bitten little beasts, not unlike mustangs, and mounts had been provided for the gun-bearers, to the huge delight of all three. Gholab Singh also demanded a horse, which he obtained, as being worthy of his dignity.

It was a military-looking little cavalcade. The Indians had all served in the native cavalry regiments and Gholab maintained strict military discipline. Behind their saddles the boys strapped slickers and H. B. C. blankets—the sight of the latter making Jack just a trifle homesick. Water canteens also were slung at the saddle.

After receiving a letter from Andrus to Jan Botha, Louis Schoverling gave the order to march. Gholab Singh rode to the gate of the compound, reined up, and drew from his neck his silver whistle. One sharp blast, and the two wagons, containing the four who were to bring back the skins, started. A shouted farewell, and the two boys followed the General and von Hofe to the head of the march, the Sikh riding with them and the other gun-bearers on each side of the wagons.

[61]

"Isn't this glorious?" declared Charlie as he rode at Jack's side. "I thought it would be as hot as blazes!"

"Oh, we'll need our blankets at night, I guess,—hello! There's an antelope! What kind is he, General?"

Charlie unslung his glasses hastily to gaze at the quiet figure on a ridge four hundred yards away, but the explorer answered quickly.

"Grant's gazelle, Jack. The most beautiful of all antelopes. He must be an old buck, to judge from his long horns."

"When are we going to hunt a little?" asked Charlie. "I'm itching to get at the guns."

"Not till this afternoon. We can knock over a couple of small antelope then, which will be plenty for all of us. See here, Doctor. These wagons won't make Botha's ranch until sometime tomorrow. How would it suit you to ride on and put up there overnight, then get our Masai all ready to start as soon as the wagons come up?"

"I am very happy," declared von Hofe, who was settled down comfortably in his saddle, his pipe going full blast. "It matters not to me a bit. Perhaps it would be better to spend to-night in solid comfort." [62]

"Very well. Guru!"

"Yes, sahib?" The Sikh drew up and saluted.

"You will bring the other gun-bearers with us for a short hunt. We are going to have an early meal and then push on. Gholab Singh, I leave the safari in your care. You know the way to Jan Botha's?"

"I do, sahib. We will arrive to-morrow morning at ten of the clock."

Charlie winked at Jack, who smiled. The military precision of the stately Gurkha was of no little amusement to them at first, but Gholab promised to be a valuable man in a pinch. The gun-bearers were of little use at present, but would be highly necessary later on, and with their advice Schoverling knew that the two novices in Africa would get along well enough.

Von Hofe having absolutely no interest in hunting, save as regarded his own work, stayed with the wagons. The other six rode out to one side, parallel with the line of march. At a word from Guru, Amir Ali spurred up his horse and departed at a steady gallop to the right. [63]

"He will beat up something," replied the Sikh to their looks of surprise. "Here game is not very thick."

Amir disappeared amid the tall grass and dotted trees, and five minutes later Charlie, with rifle ready, saw a tiny shape bounding through the grass two hundred yards to the right.

"You first, Chuck," exclaimed Jack quietly.

Setting his sights for two hundred yards, Charlie aimed behind the shoulder of the antelope, and fired. The shot went a little high, owing to the jump of the beast, but the boy gave a yell of satisfaction as the antelope went down, its back broken by the shot. As they rode up he mercifully killed it with a shot through the brain, and the two boys looked down on their first Thomson's gazelle, or "tommy."

"Good shot, Charlie," declared the explorer. "Now one for you, Jack, and we'll have enough for this time."

A mile or so farther on Jack got his chance at one of the larger Grant's, and fetched him down with a single shot at three hundred yards, which caused the two Indians to give a cry of delight at his skill. By the time Amir rejoined them the wagons, were "hull down" on the horizon. Guru and Akram Das slung the two gazelles over their saddles, and all six started across the veldt at a brisk canter. [64]

Suddenly Jack's horse, in the lead, stopped dead still, trembling. In vain the boy urged him on, wondering what was the matter. The horse only backed, his ears flat, and then Jack saw that those of the others were doing likewise.

"What's the trouble, General?" exclaimed Charlie. Schoverling unslung his rifle.

"Lion, boys. These are well-trained horses, evidently. See that patch of mimosa just ahead? We are down-wind from that, and they probably smelled a lion. Head around it, and they will be all right."

They arrived opposite the little ridge, topped with a dense growth of long grass, thorn and trees, when an exclamation burst from the Sikh. Out from the thicket broke a long, tawny shape, barely a hundred yards away. It was a magnificent black-maned lion, who stood lashing his sides and watching them as they drew rein. [65]

"There's your chance for a lion," said Schoverling, as the Indians cast a glance at him. Charlie shrugged his shoulders, watching the animal with eager interest.

"What's the use in killing him, General?" he replied. "We don't want his skin particularly, and he's no good for food. How about it, Jack?"

The other's hand fell from his rifle-butt.

"Of course, Chuck. He won't attack us, I suppose?"

"You'd like the excuse, eh?" laughed the explorer. "No, he won't attack us. He's probably got his dinner in that thicket, and heard us coming. It might be of advantage to the sheep ranchers hereabouts to kill him, but certainly not to us."

They rode on, leaving the tawny beast still gazing after them. The Indians were keenly disappointed over not shooting the lion, but neither boy had cared to do so. They had been too well trained to slaughter needlessly; Jack, in particular, had no small share of the Cree feeling that animals are but "little brothers," and more than once thereafter Charlie heard him mutter the Indian's apology for taking life, as he shot. [66]

Upon rejoining the wagons a halt was made, Gholab Singh taking charge of the gazelles. After a good dinner the four white men rode on ahead, following the rude track across the veldt, and the wagons were speedily out of sight.

"This looks a whole lot like the Alberta and Montana country," declared Charlie as they rode along. "With those hills off in the distance, and the dry gullies fringed with trees, a fellow might think he was just pushing across our own range land. Wouldn't this be a swell cow country, Jack?"

"Looks like it," rejoined the Cree. "Look at those ostriches! Isn't that a ranch, up there among those buttes?"

By the aid of their glasses they could see a small ranch-house, a good four miles away, but clear-cut and distinct in the rarefied atmosphere of the plateau. White dots were scattered near by, which Schoverling declared were sheep.

"They must suffer to some extent from wild animals," he said, "but on the whole the sheep ranges up here are in fine shape. It's a great little old country, boys. If I could make up my mind to settle down I'd like to take up a few thousand acres back near the hills and try irrigation." [67]

"It is too dry," nodded the doctor wisely. "Some day they will irrigate all this. Then the animals will be gone, all gone."

"What of it?" said Jack slyly. "Folks will come just the same to see the masterpieces made by the great von Hofe! The sooner the game goes, the more valuable you will be."

"Ach, no!" Von Hofe shook his head sadly. "It is not nice to see the fine animals be killed off. Look at South Africa—all the game is gone, all the Zulu kingdoms are gone, and instead there is railroads and mines and factories. It is not nice."

"Well, that's the advance of civilization," declared Schoverling. "It was the same in Ohio and Missouri and Montana—everywhere. And yet there are always new fields to conquer."

"As long as the H. B. C. ran things," flashed up Jack, with the true Indian prejudice, "it was all right in Canada. The Company took care of the game first rate. But now everybody takes a whack at trapping—and where's the beaver gone?" [68]

"True enough," sighed the explorer. "But the hunter must give place to the settler, Jack."

A spirited argument ensued, to which Charlie and von Hofe listened amusedly. In the end Jack had to confess that Schoverling was right, however. Towards evening they got into more rolling country, while to the northeast towered up the hills about Mount Kenia, whose snowy summit had been long visible, although nearly a hundred miles away.

Just before sunset they cantered up to Botha's ranch. The hospitable Boer did not need the letter from Piet Andrus to welcome them, and the boys were keenly interested in his family. This consisted of his wife, two stalwart, bearded sons, and their own families—chubby little Dutch people who clambered over everyone, once their shyness had been removed. Von Hofe was soon a prime favorite with them.

After dinner was over, the boys discovered that Botha was related to the famous General of the same name, and had fought through the Boer war with him until his capture. Like many other Boers, Jan had brought his family up into the new country, where his sons had grown up, and where his great ranch was speedily making him wealthy. Dutch and English lived side by side on a perfectly friendly footing, and the old quarrels were forgotten forever. [69]

Jan Botha willingly agreed to ride over early in the morning, and set them right at the Masai village, a dozen miles away, where he was well known. So Charlie and Jack found themselves up before the dawn with the rest of the family, eating breakfast by lamplight, and with the first light of dawn they were on horseback, shivering in the chill morning air.

An hour after sunrise they reached the village, a collection of grass huts beside a river in the hills. Charlie was a little surprised to find that the Masai were stalwart, eager-faced warriors, well dressed in blankets or cotton cloth draped from the shoulder, and bearing spears, bows, and black-and-white shields of hide.

"I wonder if they are really a branch of the Zulus?" asked Jack while Botha was talking with the headman.

"Hardly," said Schoverling. "But no doubt they are distantly connected. Perhaps they are some of the Zulus driven north by the great king Tchaka, a hundred years ago. They are extremely fierce warriors, and highly respected by the other natives. With a score of those fellows for bodyguard, we'll get along finely."

[70]

Bakari proved to be the name of an English-speaking Masai who was put in charge of twenty-five men and hired to accompany the expedition as far as Mount Kenia, or beyond. As the Masai eat nothing but meat, foraging for vegetables would be an easy matter, Charlie concluded.

They reached the Botha farmhouse about nine, the warriors loping easily behind them. An hour later, almost to the minute, the wagons topped a rise and Gholab Singh drew up and saluted. As there was no use in delay, they all bade the hospitable Boers farewell, and pushed on straight for Kenia.

CHAPTER VI

[71]

MOUNT KENIA

Now began the real march—a swift, ceaseless trek over veldt and through the foot-hills, for Schoverling was in haste to reach Mount Kenia, secure the cow and calf skins, and be gone on the real work of the expedition, which lay farther on. Had he been able to foresee just what that work would be, his eagerness would have been increased tenfold.

"Gholab," he said that afternoon, "we are going to push for Kenia as hard as we can. Can we push the oxen day and night?"

"Easily, sahib. Halt for three hours at dawn, at noon, and at nightfall. This will rest the beasts well, and the rest of the time we can march. There will be a good moon for a week yet."

The Masai seemed to make little of a forced march, and so it was agreed upon. The Indians and Masai did not mix, but Bakari and his men yielded ready obedience to the semi-uniformed figure of Gholab Singh. That afternoon the real work of the two boys began.

[72]

"Charlie, you and Jack come over here," called Schoverling, who was sitting with von Hofe in one of the wagons, poring over a map. "We'll have to have meat for these Masai by sundown. I must go over our route with the doctor, so it's up to you. Get busy."

"Aye, aye, General!" and the boys saluted in high delight. They called their two gun-bearers, but Guru the Sikh refused to be left out of the part, so all five cantered off ahead, followed by the eager Masai at a little distance.

Their first taste was not very encouraging. One of the Masai had leaped ahead to a ridge in the veldt, and motioned them that there was game on the other side. Slipping from their horses, the boys stole up gun in hand, to see a herd of at least fifty wildebeest and zebra grazing about three hundred yards off. But before they could get up their guns, the quick-eyed beasts were off like the wind and out of range in an instant.

"Pretty rotten," exclaimed Charlie disgustedly. "Say, they move like a streak!"

[73]

"You bet. Well, there's lots more where they came from."

And there was. Half a mile farther on they came upon a dozen kongoni—another form of antelope—feeding about some bushes. Happening on a drift, or dry water-course, the boys and Guru crawled up this and managed to get a shot. This time Charlie dropped a buck perfectly, but Jack had to place a second bullet in his animal. The Masai took charge of the bodies, tying the hoofs together, placing a long spear between, and two men trotting off with each toward the wagons.

Guru declared that this was not half enough meat for them all, so accompanied by the rest of the Masai, they rode on, just within sight of the caravan. Suddenly an eland dashed out from a clump of bushes barely a hundred yards off, not having heard their approach. Jack fired, missed, fired again, and the eland gave one high spring and rolled heels over head. But as he did so Bakari let out a yell, and they drew rein suddenly at sight of a lion leaping toward them through the long grass, plainly bent on mischief.

"We've roused him up, all right," exclaimed Charlie hastily, as he drew bead. "I'll give him a chance to turn off."

[74]

But the lion, as they discovered later, had been disturbed at his feeding, and came straight for them. The Masai showed no signs of flinching, and the horses trembled but stood still. Anxiously Charlie waited until the great beast had come within two hundred yards, flying over the grass-hummocks in great bounds, then he drew trigger.

The lion went down, but was up again instantly with a roar of pain. Charlie gave him another bullet, but with no better result. At a hundred yards the Masai spread out, spears and arrows ready, but with his third bullet Charlie dropped the huge beast for the last time, the ball piercing the eye to the brain.

"Good shot, old man," cried Jack, as the other wiped the sweat from his face. That had been an anxious moment.

"Had to hit him in the eye," returned Charlie. "Didn't see where else to shoot, after I missed his shoulder."

But he had not missed the shoulder. His first shot had been a mortal one, and his second had struck nearly in the same place; the tremendous vitality and energy of the lion had served to carry him forward until the third bullet pierced his brain. This gave Guru a chance to point out the advisability of shooting for the shoulder, in which case the lion would be crippled and could not charge. [75]

The lion was packed off to be inspected, then photographed, and on the way back Jack knocked over a small Grant's gazelle, which would make the food supply a sufficient one. Charlie received many compliments on his first lion from von Hofe and Schoverling, and regretted that keeping the skin was impossible under the circumstances.

At six that evening they outspanned the oxen, fed and watered them at a waterhole, and rested for three hours, during which all the party slept save Schoverling, who remained on guard. At nine the march was taken up again, and they went on steadily until four in the morning. The night was cold. Overhead on the horizon blazed the Southern Cross, while the moon afforded a good light.

At seven in the morning the oxen were inspanned and they went forward until noon. On this occasion the General accompanied the boys, and they brought in enough game for the rest of the day and night. During their noon halt they met a freighter's wagon-safari trekking west to some of the outlying ranches, but the men were all Boers or natives, and no stop was made. [76]

So during four days and nights they pushed on relentlessly. During the last two days they ran into a driving, cold rain, but finally this was gone and the boys found themselves on the verge of the heavily forested country about Mount Kenia.

At the last stopping place, a shallow drift, or river, in a valley under the western slopes of the great hills, it was decided to make camp here beside the drift, as a sort of headquarters. They had met scattered parties of Kikuyu men, and had passed one or two of the native villages, so after a day's rest a number of the Masai were sent out to bring in some of the natives.

"They can tell us any news of the elephants," declared Schoverling, "and can guide us to the herds. It's ticklish business going without some of them along."

"Why so?" inquired Charlie, "Are they such good hunters?" [77]

"Never mind," laughed the explorer. "You wait and you'll see something."

With this the boys were forced to be content. The lower slopes of the mountains were heavily forested, while the valleys were nothing but jungle. Great trees reached far up above, and between them giant bamboos formed an almost impenetrable mass.

Bakari returned with a dozen Kikuyu hunters, who readily agreed to lead the party to elephants. There was a herd of about fifty, they declared, a day's journey to the east, and as it was morning now, the General determined to start out at once.

"Now, Doctor, just what stuff do you want to take along?"

"My sketching kit," replied the German, all action on the instant. "My small camera I have in my pocket. Beyond this, nothing."

The two Somalis were appointed to take care of the doctor's needs. Half a dozen of the Masai volunteered to serve as porters, for the tents and some supplies had to be carried. It was arranged that the camp should be supplied with fowls, pigs and vegetables from the nearest village, but at the last moment it developed that they would have to do without pigs, the Gurkhas being Mohammedans and refusing to allow pigs in the camp for fear of defilement. [78]

The horses would of course have to be left behind. For an hour the camp was in a buzz of excited preparation. The elephant guns and cordite ammunition were broken out, the blankets, slickers and other necessaries were loaded up on the porters, and the three hunters donned their moccasins for the first time.

"Feels mighty good to get back into moosehide," laughed Charlie, as he laced up the water-tight flaps. "What are the Masai chattering about, Jack?"

"Making a corral—zareba, they call it—out of thorns," answered the other, looking out through the end of the wagon. "For the oxen, I suppose. I heard the General giving them orders about it. Gholab's bossing things lively."

Charlie finished first, and had barely emerged from the wagon-tilt when he saw that something was wrong. The horses were pulling wildly at their pickets, and a number of the porters had dropped their loads. Von Hofe and Schoverling were in the other wagon, making final preparations. But they were not fated to leave the camp for that day at least. [79]

"Hey, Jack! General!" shouted Charlie. "Tumble out lively—something's busted!"

At this moment Guru and Amir Ali ran up excitedly, uncasing the heavy guns and loading them as they ran. Amir reached Charlie first, and thrust the weapon into his hand.

"Rhino, sahib! Rhino coming through the bushes from the river!"

Jack and the explorer leaped to the ground from the wagons as Akram ran up with the third gun. The Masai had clustered at the edge of the camp, but as the explorer took in the situation the warriors broke and fled before a huge dun shape that crashed bushes and trees down before it in blind rage. Charlie gasped at the size of the beast, for he had not yet seen a rhino.

"Female," stated the General quietly. "Going to tear things up, too. Ready, boys?"

By this time the ground was littered with cast-off loads, while the natives fled in all directions. Fortunately, the zareba and oxen were at the other end of the camp, and the courageous Gholab ran down to the horses and loosed them as the rhinoceros charged. [80]

This made the three hunters unable to fire for an instant. Gholab ducked behind a huge tree, and the infuriated brute crashed full into it, knocking off a great flake of the bark and wood. Stunned for an instant, it stood glaring around, and in that instant Schoverling fired.

His bullet took the rhino behind the shoulder, but the beast, rage darting from its deep-set eyes, whirled in the direction of the wagons. It was barely fifty yards from them, and as the explorer fired his second barrel, Charlie pulled trigger also. The tremendous charges halted and shook the big animal, but for an instant only. Then, rocking and stumbling, it came on full tilt for the wagons, the wicked-looking head held low.

One of the Kikuyu porters had started to slip across the open space, and was caught before he could escape. As the terrified man turned, the head of the rhino caught him and tossed him a dozen feet into the air. But that gave Jack and Charlie their chance. As the head went up, they fired together.

Jack's bullet broke the rhino's off-shoulder; that of Charlie tore into her throat. Jack fired again, and at this instant Guru handed back Schoverling's rifle, reloaded; but another bullet was unnecessary. The huge beast stood for a moment quite still, then swayed and plunged down, dead. [81]

"Good!" came the calm voice of von Hofe from behind them. "Now led us see how the man hurd iss."

Only his accent betrayed his excitement as he led the way to the injured porter. The man had been gored in the side by the horn, but had saved himself from mortal injury. The doctor dressed his wound and saw him borne off to the village; meanwhile, the others had gathered about the dead rhino, the natives with wild shouts and chants, the two boys in silent wonder.

"You chaps'll have to give me lessons in shooting," laughed the General. "See here—my first bullet missed her shoulder, and my second likewise. She couldn't have gone far, though; but she could have finished us right enough. That was good shooting, boys."

"Wouldn't have been," admitted Charlie, "if she hadn't lifted her head. Jumping Sandhills! How that fellow did go up!" [82]

"Lucky he wasn't killed," added Jack. "I got her with both bullets, right in the shoulder. Chuck's bullet must have gone clear through to her tail."

It proved that the bullet fired by Charlie through her throat had penetrated to the spine, thus paralyzing her. But as the honors were equal, it did not matter greatly. The Masai took possession of the hide, while the Kikuyu bore off the flesh to their village.

"I guess that ends our trip for to-day," said Schoverling ruefully, as Gholab was directing the re-ordering of the camp. "Everything is badly mussed up; even the men are demoralized. Well, no matter. We can leave the camp in better shape, perhaps."

So, content with their conquest of that day, they gave all their attention to putting the camp in better order. Jack learned how the thorn zareba was built, and Charlie visited the Kikuyu village with his camera. The elephant trip was to take place the next day, and guides came over that night, with a fresh party of natives.

CHAPTER VII

ELEPHANT

The start was made early. First went Schoverling, von Hofe and the boys, with the guides and gun-bearers. Then the Masai marched along, followed by the crowd of natives. So far they had not struck the mountain slopes, and the Kikuyu led them deeper into the great African forest.

The sun was shut out above by the dew-wet foliage,—twisted vines, trees and bushes all matted together. The party traveled by means of old elephant trails, which alone made the jungle passable to man. Hour after hour they walked through the tangle of vegetation, striking into [83]

fresh paths, twisting and turning until the boys felt hopelessly lost.

Great ferns and mosses grew about them. Mighty trees with trunks corrugated and knotted towered overhead, draped with Spanish moss and filled with scampering, chattering monkeys. Into and across tree-ferned ravines, through dashing streams of icy water, past cataract and morass, the party plowed its devious way until long past noon.

[84]

Suddenly one of the guides held up a warning hand and slipped ahead. In a few moments he returned in great excitement.

"Elephant!" he whispered. "Him close! Come!"

No sign of elephant could Charlie or Jack see until they had advanced another hundred feet in the half-gloom. Then the guide pointed out the spoor, deep and heavy in the damp leaves that matted the trail. Here the natives squatted down to wait, and here also the boys made a discovery.

Charlie had stepped ahead, a little to one side of the trail. But as he did so the guides started forward in silent dismay. He paid no attention to them, trying to peer through the dense vegetation; suddenly it seemed that everything gave way beneath him, and the next moment his legs were dangling in vacancy, while he gripped the vines and sticks spread over a great hole dug at one side of the track.

The others broke into quiet laughter at his amazed expression, while the guides pulled him out hurriedly and silently. Then he saw that he had tumbled into an elephant pit—a long, deep trench, narrowing at the bottom.

[85]

"I told you you'd see something," whispered the explorer, as Charlie recovered himself, somewhat disgusted. "Now let's get busy on the trail."

By lighting a match and by watching the tree-tops far overhead they ascertained that the wind was right for an approach, and with guides and gun-bearers they started off on the spoor.

"How many, do you think?" asked Schoverling cautiously. Jack had been studying the signs intently, and answered without hesitation.

"About eight females, three little fellows, and a big chap."

"Just what the guides say," grinned the explorer delightedly. "Pretty good, eh, Doctor? We were lucky in finding them so near camp."

The trail was now marked by freshly broken branches and splintered trees, while in places the bushes were trampled down for yards, where an elephant had stopped to feed. Charlie declared that the animals were not more than half an hour ahead of them, at which the explorer nodded.

Dr. von Hofe had been sketching busily for some time, paying special attention to the spoor and the marks of feeding. He made careful photographs as they advanced, and as Charlie watched him he wondered at the painstaking efforts of the big German to get every smallest detail correctly. Then Schoverling beckoned, and the two boys slipped ahead with him, their moccasined feet as noiseless as the naked soles of the guides.

[86]

"Hear anything?" muttered the explorer when they had gone a hundred yards. Listening, Charlie could hear a faint crashing, and his heart leaped in excitement. Jack nodded also.

They went on, but now the noise grew plainer and seemed to come from one side. As they stood in perplexity, Charlie saw a single elephant track leading off ahead.

"General! One fellow has struck off through there—the others have doubled back, and are on one side of us. We could follow that single track."

A guide was sent back for the others, and now the gun-bearers handed over the heavy guns, retaining the thirty-thirties for emergencies. Slowly they crept forward in silence, while the gruntings, crashings, and rumblings of the great beasts came to them clearly. Cutting through the single track, they soon came upon the whole spoor of the herd again—but this time they knew that Charlie had been right, and that the beasts could not be far ahead.

[87]

So dense was the matted vegetation, however, that nothing could be seen. One of the guides pointed to a tree-trunk with his spear, and a thrill went through the boys at sight of the fresh-rubbed bark. From one side flew up a flock of hornbills, with squawkings and flappings of wings, but the slow movements of the elephants went on.

At this juncture the guides nimbly sidestepped any farther advance by going up trees like monkeys. They indicated that the herd was close at hand, and again the party stole forward, rifles ready for instant action.

"Makes you feel queer," murmured Jack in Charlie's ear, "to hear 'em and not be able to get a crack."

Every sense on the alert, Charlie gripped Schoverling's arm and pointed ahead. A long tendrill of Spanish moss at a bend in the trail was shaking slightly, and without a sound the three stepped off the trail to one side, followed by the Indians. The doctor had remained some distance behind, to sketch a strange flower.

[88]

Something huge and shadowy appeared vaguely, and the hunters drew back farther still amid the tangle. Then there came a tremendous crash, and, at the side of the trail proper a sudden quivering seized the vegetation. At the same moment that the first elephant appeared leisurely, two more crashed from the undergrowth.

Schoverling cast a quick glance of warning and shook his head. The two who had burst through from the side stopped to feed, and after them came two calves. All three were cows, but there were crashings all around, and the Indians were as nervous as the two boys. They stuck to their post nobly, however, the smaller rifles ready. The explorer leaned over and breathed in Jack's ear.

"Give the two cows both barrels. I'll bag the calves."

Jack nodded and passed the word to Charlie. But slight as the breathed whisper had been, the sensitive ear of the elephants caught it and their heads went up. Without hesitation Charlie aimed at the eye of the cow on the right, and all three pulled trigger together. [89]

Fortunately they stood at some distance apart, or the concussion of the three heavy guns would have worked sore damage. Charlie's cow shivered and went down at the first shot; that of Jack trumpeted loud and shrill and tried to whirl, but the second barrel, just back of the shoulder, finished her.

The General had given each calf a single barrel. One plunged to its knees, the other stood shivering. The boys felt the Indians press the lighter guns into their hands, as a great crashing arose ahead. The single cow in the trail proper was just turning, so rapidly had all passed, when Charlie and the General fired together. Both bullets struck her vitally, and she went down.

For an instant the forest was filled with shrill trumpeting and the earth seemed to shake beneath the tread of the frightened beasts. So loud was the clamor that there came not the slightest warning of their danger until the trees directly opposite them swayed and shattered apart, and the enormous head and tusks of a great bull shoved through. [90]

There was no time to run, even had they been able. Jack let drive with both barrels of his 30-30, and the huge beast paused with the shock. In that brief instant the large guns, already reloaded by the agile bearers, were thrust forward. Charlie brought his up and fired just as the bull plunged on. The enormous trunk swept up and then down, hardly a yard in front of them. One step more, and he would be on them.

But even as the boys shrank aside instinctively, Schoverling fired deliberately, right and left. So close was the huge head that Charlie could distinctly see both bullets go home, each taking the bull in an eye fair and square.

It was enough. For a moment there was no movement—a little trickle of blood came from each eye—and then the mighty head dropped, the trunk swept down to the trail, and over went the tusker on his side, the last sweep of his trunk narrowly missing Guru as he leaped away.

"Jumping sandhills! I'm satisfied!"

Charlie sank down weakly on a fallen bamboo, gazing at the tremendous bulk five feet away. Jack, deadly pale, gripped his gun and waited while the crashings and trumpeting died away. The explorer, his deep bronze flushed with red, smiled and mopped his face. [91]

"By George, that was a close thing, boys! I wouldn't go through that again for a million dollars cash." He turned and gripped the hands of the gun-bearers. "Guru, Amir, Akram, you are men! I am proud of you!"

"I guess we all owe you a vote of thanks, General," smiled Jack weakly. Charlie nodded.

"You bet! Jack and I both missed his eye—what dandy shots those were!"

The nervy Indians showed their white teeth at the praise showered on them, and a moment after, von Hofe appeared excitedly, followed by a stream of Masai and Kikuyu. These gave wild yells of excitement and leaped and danced on the fallen carcasses, while the story of that terrible moment was told the doctor. He could barely speak, as he realized what the danger had been.

"Himmel! Ach, er ist—it iss vonderful! Bang-bang, und you haf ein, zwei, drei cows, two calfs, und a bull killed! I shall no more say—ach! Avay—raus!"

And with a roar of anger he rushed at one of the Masai who had triumphantly thrust his long spear into the elephant's hide. The warrior gave one look, then vanished with a long leap, while the disgusted doctor pulled out the spear and flung it after him. [92]

"Afraid they'll spoil your skin, eh?" laughed the explorer. The swift change from the tragic to the ridiculous restored them all to even balance once more, and they went forward to examine the kill. It was indeed a wonderful example of shooting, the whole affair having taken hardly more than two or three minutes, and Charlie found it hard to realize that in such a short space of time they had almost fulfilled the requirements of the whole world-over expedition.

The bull was a large, old fellow, and the General pronounced his tusks as weighing at least a hundred and thirty pounds each. It was a great piece of luck that he should have wandered out of the wilds almost to their side, for full-grown bulls with good tusks are rarely found. The big Teuton pronounced him exactly suitable for one of his groups.

The two cows who had been shot together were both of good size; the third was smaller. The two largest were selected for skinning, together with the calves. For a few moments the doctor sketched and photographed, then handed over the task of skinning to Guru and his two assistants, who were thoroughly qualified.

[93]

"Do you want to stay by them?" asked Schoverling. "If not, we might get back to camp by dark, and they can bring in the sections of skin."

"The Sikh knows all about it," replied von Hofe. "Yes, he will see that they are careful. Let us go back and rest."

As the explorer captured one of the guides and explained his wishes, the boys gazed at the scene before them. Stripped naked, the natives were swarming over the great carcasses, which had to be skinned without a moment's delay. Most of them were already splashed with blood, festoons of meat were dripping from the branches, and the busy hands and knives were making fast progress with the work. It was not a nice scene, and Charlie turned away; but Jack watched it until the explorer called him.

Carrying their own guns now, they found the trip back to camp a weary one. All were tired and hungry, not having eaten since morning, and it was dark when they finally stumbled into camp, to be met with exultant shouts. Runners had already come across the forest paths bearing loads of meat, and after a good wash in one of the mountain streams the four sat down to a delicious meal of broiled elephant's heart and flapjacks, with tea for beverage.

[94]

"Do you chaps realize that we almost accomplished the work of this expedition in about two minutes?" asked the General, smiling. The boys leaned back with a sigh of content.

"I don't care," returned Charlie. "I got all I wanted of elephant hunting, and that's flat, General. My knees are shaking yet."

"It was sheer luck, though," said von Hofe as he filled his pipe and settled back in his folding chair. "We will not find another bull like that for a hundred miles."

"Well, I'm just as glad it's over," announced Jack. "Now we can strike for parts unknown and enjoy life. We haven't struck any real work yet."

"You'll get work enough before you're through," said the explorer grimly. And as it turned out, Jack did.

CHAPTER VIII

[95]

A RECONNAISSANCE

"Well, General, what's doing next?"

It was the morning after the great hunt, and they had just finished a delicious breakfast of roasted calves' feet and bananas. The explorer was puffing at his briar luxuriously, and turned to the doctor.

"Guru says that the skins are on the way now, Doctor. How long will it take you to get them in shape to go back?"

"Ten days," returned the German, whose cases were all piled in readiness before an open space.

"Need us here?"

"No. Get out and keep those boys from bothering me."

"Good!" laughed the explorer, and turned lazily to Charlie. "Feel like starting out this morning? I want to push ahead on horseback and trace out the route for the wagons. I've got it pretty well lined out now, but we've got to make sure about provisions and all that."

[96]

"I'm willing," announced Charlie, and Jack nodded unconcernedly.

So, just as the Masai and Kikuyu, who had worked all night, came in with the skins of the slain elephants, the three rode out together. The Indians were highly disappointed that they were not to go along, but the explorer did not wish to be bothered with them, and they would be useless on this excursion.

Schoverling had provided himself with government maps showing the villages, and the best route across the plateau and through the hills had been traced out for him. On second thought, however, he sent back for Gholab Singh, who knew most of the native dialects from his years of residence in the country, and left the camp in charge of Guru instead.

At noon they struck into the caravan track from the north, and stopped at each village in passing, where Gholab made inquiries. They found that there was no lack of chickens, and wild fowl might be had on every hand for the shooting. As for vegetables, every village had its mealie

patch, yams, bananas, a beet-like plant, and other greens which none of the three recognized, but which Gholab assured them were excellent eating. Besides, there were quantities of fish in the streams. On the whole, Charlie was amazed at the readiness with which food could be had; while to Jack, used to a hard-earned rabbit or trap-line in the snows, the quantity of game was astounding.

[97]

"I don't think we'll have any trouble living off the land," chuckled the General that night. They had camped beside a mountain stream. In place of tents, their hand axes lopped off a brush shelter in short order. A trout-like fish was plentiful in the stream, and half a dozen of these were soon broiling. These, with fried bananas and tea, made a generous meal.

"Can't see the sense o' fetching them traps," grunted Jack. "Better leave 'em behind when we start. What good are they?"

"I don't know, Jack. Can't tell what we'll strike, though."

"Where does this caravan route go to?" asked Charlie. "This looks as if it was deserted."

"Oh, a caravan of camels and horses comes down about once a year from the lakes up north, toward the Abyssinian border. We only follow it over the plateau with the wagons."

[98]

There was no doubt that the route, which existed on the map only, was practicable for the light wagons. The next day they were among the hills, in high altitudes, and here the game almost vanished for the next two days. The villages of the natives were scattered, but those that they found had more cultivated land near by than the others, which made up for the scarcity of game. The wagons were much under-loaded, and were taken more to bring back what might be found north of the Lorian swamp than for anything else.

"Seems to me," said Charlie on the third day, as he thawed out a gourd full of water that had frozen overnight, "that we could load up the wagons with green stuff when we go through here. That last village we came through was plumb chuck full o' pumpkins."

"Melons, you mean," laughed Jack. "I dug into one. There was some squash, though, in the back fields. How far we going, General?"

Schoverling consulted his pocket-map and compass before replying.

"We ought to be near the station of the commissioner of the district now. If we don't strike it by night we may as well go back. I've found out what we came for."

[99]

About noon, however, they came to a long unpainted frame building with corrugated iron roof, set in the midst of a grove of small trees. At the rear were stables and a great corral of wire netting, in which grazed a herd of ostriches. As they rode up to the door one or two natives came out, and a khaki-clad Englishman with shoulder-straps rushed out to receive them.

"Hello!" laughed Schoverling as he shook hands. "This is the commissioner—Captain Yonge?"

"Yes—and this is the famous Schoverling, I'll wager," smiled the clean-shaven officer. "But where's von Hofe? I got word from down country to watch out for him."

Matters were soon explained, and they joined Yonge at lunch. An hour later a dozen trim King's African Rifles cantered up—Zulus all, under command of Yonge, who maintained order through two hundred miles of savagery.

"Say, the old M. P. ain't in it with this!" said Jack that evening, as he and Charlie wandered out to inspect the ostrich farm. "Hear that yarn he told about nabbing those ju-ju murderers last year, single-handed. No wonder he got a D. S. O. for it!"

[100]

"And they do it all with native troops, too," added Charlie thoughtfully. "You've got to hand it to the British for governing by force of character, right enough. Wonder what the country gets like on the other side of this plateau. Let's find out."

But they found out little. Captain Yonge said that beyond the Guaso Nyero, in the north, the region was practically unexplored. After the great river was left behind there were deserts, strange tribes, great morasses, and the "going" was exceedingly "tough."

"Did you ever hear of a Lake Quilqua?" asked Charlie.

"Often," and the commissioner chuckled. "But, as you Americans say, there's 'nothing in it.' These natives will make up all kinds of yarns, simply to amuse us."

Yonge himself had tried to penetrate the country to the northeast, but had found it impracticable, as he could not get away for very long. Other explorers had sheered off to the easier country to south and northwest, but he agreed that if they wanted a big bull, a rogue, they would stand a better chance of getting one in there than anywhere else.

[101]

"When you stop with the wagons," he said, "I'll give you some water-casks. They may come in handy, as I know from experience."

All remained the next day, highly interested in the court of justice being held over a dispute between two villages. The little plain on which lay the commissioner's station was not cultivated, but it lay in the central part of his district, and was eminently suited for ostrich farming, which was his hobby.

They set out on a leisurely return to the little safari, accompanied for a few miles by the soldierly Zulus. They were well received by the natives, for except in a few spots of Africa, there is to-day nothing but respect for the whites; the dangers of early explorations have largely passed away under the influence of the far-reaching prestige of civilization. The natives are as savage as ever, but they have tasted the retribution of English and German justice, and have little liking for it.

[102]

The four trotted along, Gholab making arrangements with the natives at each village to give them a large supply of fruit and vegetables, but they did no shooting as it was possible to get sheep, goats, or fowl from the natives and fish from the streams and pools. They had timed their ride to get back to the doctor in the evening, and on the morning of their last day's march they came upon a large party of natives setting off into the jungle.

"Want to go along?" smiled the explorer. "Judging from their primitive digging implements, they're going to make an elephant pit."

"You bet!" cried the boys. Slipping from their horses, which were left in charge of Gholab Singh, all three joined the natives, who received them with delight, and all set off along an old elephant track.

"Guess they think we'll bring 'em good luck," grinned Jack. "Got your camera, Chuck?"

Charlie fortunately had brought it, and an hour later he put it into active operation, to the curiosity and childish amusement of the negroes. They had stopped in a little open space full of fresh spoor and elephant signs, and a score of natives were instantly at work clearing off the ground at three points. The boys were amazed at the rapidity with which the work was accomplished with the primitive implements. Chanting a loud, monotonous chorus, the natives threw themselves into the work and speedily had three pits started. These were about four feet wide and twelve long at the top.

[103]

"It's against the law for them to kill elephants," said Schoverling, "but they pay little enough heed to that. There are hundreds of these pits scattered between here and Kenia."

"How do they watch them all?" asked Charlie. "They must have an awful time keeping track of their trap-line!"

"They don't watch them," laughed the explorer. "They wait till they see the vultures and jackals heading somewhere, and trail along. An elephant lives for days after he is trapped, for you'll see that the pits narrow down at the bottom, and his feet are wedged in so that he can't move."

"He must be pretty ripe by the time they get to him," returned Jack disgustedly.

"They don't care for that. These Ndorobo are little better than carrion feeders anyway, and once an elephant is caught a whole village is stocked in meat for a long time."

[104]

As the holes were dug deeper, others of the natives carried off the dirt, scattering it carefully in the depths of the jungle. The boys secured some excellent views of the proceedings, but they were unable to remain for the entire digging. The finished pit would be about ten feet in depth, and at the bottom scarcely a foot wide. Fortunately for white hunters these pits were not staked, as after a week or two the slight covering of sticks, leaves and dirt is overlaid with vines and vegetation that completely conceals it from sight. Indeed, they had passed more than one pit on their way.

A guide was sent back with them when they left the scene of operation. A little after noon as they neared the safari they came upon a village which was in great excitement. The day before, a man had been killed and another badly gored by a bull buffalo, and the wounded man was then in camp under the doctor's care. The villagers appealed to the white men to kill the buffalo, and the latter needed little urging.

[105]

"You want to be careful," said Schoverling as they advanced on foot with some of the men. "A buffalo is about the most dangerous of beasts in these parts. Shoot to cripple him, never mind the head."

The buffalo was located in a patch of reeds and long swamp-grass near a pool only a few miles distant. Further approach was impossible, and they remained on dry ground while the natives tried to beat out the animal. In this they were all too successful. With a crash, the powerful beast swept through the reeds and charged a group of warriors, who scattered to shelter with yells and splashing.

"All right, Charlie," said Schoverling, quietly.

Charlie put a bullet behind the shoulder just in time to save a Kikuyu man. The bull whirled like a flash, and as he did so two more broke cover and charged with a bellow. Jack halted one with a stunning bullet that shattered against its skull. The explorer dropped the other, breaking its shoulder at the first shot.

Then the other came on full tilt, with lowered head. Charlie emptied his magazine at the one he had first wounded, and all four shots took effect, breaking the animal's back and killing him instantly. Jack's bull got within fifty yards of them before the boy fired again, imitating the action of the explorer with the bull elephant. Taking careful aim, he pulled trigger when he was sure of his shot, and the bull crashed down into the swamp-reeds badly wounded and seemingly helpless.

[106]

The natives darted forward with yells of triumph, but with a final effort the brute clambered up and nearly caught them. Jack put a bullet through its eye, however, that finished it, and the hunt was over. The natives went into ecstasies of delight, dancing around and thanking the three hunters exuberantly.

"That is not useless slaughter," said Schoverling as they returned to the horses. "These buffalo are hard on the natives, breaking into their mealie patches and tearing things up badly. They will charge without the least provocation, and the natives can't stand before them. We did a good turn to this village, certainly."

They remounted and rode on, but their halts had delayed them, and it was nearly dark when they finally rode into the safari and were greeted with loud yells by the Masai, while the big German came forward with smiling countenance and bade them welcome home again. [107]

CHAPTER IX

 [108]

INTO THE UNKNOWN

"Well, Doctor," announced Schoverling the next morning, "How near through are you? The sooner we get off the better."

"I will be through to-morrow night," said von Hofe contentedly. "The skins have been pared down to the right thickness, and to-day and to-morrow they will be fixed up and sent off. What does the country look like ahead?"

"It looks like several weeks of rough work," smiled the explorer. "We'll have no trouble in getting on, at least for the present. When we strike down into the plains on the north, however, we may have a harder time. But there are fig-trees in plenty, and on the northern rivers cabbage palms and other wild fruits which ought to supply us. Then we can count on leaving on the third morning?"

Von Hofe nodded, and fell to work. The sections of skins were set out on the ground and by this time were well dried, while their superfluous thickness had been pared off by scores of Kikuyu and Masai knives. Now the doctor mixed gourd after gourd of his preparative, and set the natives to work rubbing it into the under side of the skins. [109]

At one side stood the skulls and a few other bones, boiled clear of all flesh and varnished. These, with the tusks of the bull, the doctor began packing up while the skins were being attended to. Guru and the other Indians did all this work with great care, to the entire satisfaction of the scientist. Then the well-wrapped packages were slung to poles, for greater safety and more ease in carriage, and by evening were ready.

The boys pitched in and gave good assistance in this work, directing the natives in putting on coat after coat of preservative and rubbing it in well. But von Hofe was everywhere, mixing his chemicals, seeing that everything was done exactly as he wished it, and seemingly endowed with superhuman energy.

"He's no slouch when he gets a-going," murmured Charlie that night, as von Hofe was getting his sketches and films into shape for packing. [110]

"He's done more hustling to-day than on all the rest of the trip put together."

"That's no lie," agreed Jack. "I kind of thought the old boy was a bluff, at first. But he's all to the good, Chuck. Shouldn't wonder if he surprised us a heap later on."

The next day everything was packed up that could be got ready. The skins were still staked out to dry thoroughly, but the Indians could attend to them, and Schoverling was impatient to be off. Fifty Kikuyu men were hired to take the stuff back, under the lead of the Arab and the two Somalis, who were intelligent and thoroughly reliable. The spare Gurkha was to accompany them.

So far the oxen had got along in fine shape, and when it came to loading the wagons, Charlie in charge of this duty, found that their equipment was light indeed.

"Look here, Gen'ral," he complained late that afternoon, "the doctor has used up ten cases of his stuff. That leaves only five, with his little brass trunk. Then there's that case of tomatoes we haven't opened yet, another of baked beans, the ammunition and guns, tents and Gholab Singh's little stove, and the traps. The whole business won't make a quarter-load for one wagon." [111]

"So much the better for the oxen," returned the explorer. "We'll load up as we go along, Chuck. Jack, I'll appoint you commissary-major, to bring in the supplies of green stuff and vegetables. You can take Gholab as interpreter. It'll be up to you to load, Charlie. We won't have to do much hunting till after we pass the commissioner's place, except for the Masai."

"I'll give you all the work you can handle," prophesied Jack, to his chum. "You just wait!"

The next morning the safari filed out from the camp, the Masai greeting the inspanning with

huge delight. Bakari and his men promised that they would accompany Schoverling as far as he wished to go, and the boys were struck more than once by the utter fearlessness of these Masai, who had absolutely no dread of advancing into a strange country.

The march, however, was by no means fast. Von Hofe remained to see his skins safely off, promising to catch up to them later. As before, they made forced marches, for the oxen were fresh and the work was light for them now. Now, as Schoverling had foretold, Jack got all the work he wanted. With three three-hour halts a day, Jack and Gholab rode on ahead and got everything ready for each halt—bartered for goats and sheep and chickens, obtained what vegetables and fruit the natives could spare, and when the wagons arrived Charlie pitched in and loaded up. [112]

So tired were the boys that at night they wrapped up in their blankets and dozed as they rode. Once they passed a herd of at least fifty buffalo, which gathered in a clump, horns out, and pawed the ground and bellowed as the wagons passed. Fortunately, no charge was made, and all drew a breath of relief when the danger was over.

They finally drew up to the station with the wagons loaded high. Captain Yonge greeted von Hofe delightedly, and they rested there for a day. A dozen small water-casks were slung beneath the wagons, to be filled later. As they were departing a native runner came up with news that caused the commissioner to saddle in haste.

"There's an outbreak fifty miles to the west," he said, his men appearing from their own building. "We've got to go over and quash things before the riot spreads. Well, good luck to you all! Sorry I can't be with you!" [113]

Both boys were glad enough to hasten on. The high altitude was not good for the oxen, and the cold nights disgusted both of them, for they were hardly prepared to meet cold in this region. Day and night they forced the march along, and were soon rewarded by drawing through valleys and slopes to the plains once more.

As they went forward the vegetation changed. There was no jungle ahead of them—only long rolling slopes dotted with thorn-tree patches and covered with long thick grass. More than once lions trotted away before them, and on one occasion they were forced to kill a lioness that charged full at the wagons.

"It is beautiful country," exclaimed von Hofe enthusiastically, pointing to the mountain peaks that shot up on every side. "Some day it will be grand farms, when the soil is watered. See, it is volcanic."

He picked up a stone, showing them the indications of volcanic origin. Here and there palms towered up, and when they camped beside a river the next evening the vegetation bordered its banks thickly. Of game there was no lack, and that night the three took their gun-bearers and sallied forth. [114]

"We ought to find a deer-run along this river," declared Jack. Schoverling smiled.

"According to the map it's a branch of the Guaso Nyero, and the last big stream we strike. Tomorrow we head off to the northeast, and into the mapless country. See if you can run across any tracks, boys."

Charlie and Jack separated and after twenty minutes' search in the dusk Charlie located an open glade in a great grove of mimosas, where the deep tracks showed that hundreds of animals were in the habit of watering. Von Hofe had followed them and now joined the party, bearing a little rifle which he had carried in sections in his tiny brass trunk.

"I am something going to shoot," he said, paying no attention to their jests. "Is it allowed to smoke?"

"Not much," chuckled Jack. "You just sit tight and wait. What you going to shoot?" [115]

"I want a good oryx head," declared the scientist. "But I will shoot him myself."

That was a wonderful night to the two boys. Hour after hour they waited until the moon came up, and before them filed uncounted hundreds of animals. There were great droves of zebra, giraffes by the score, three or four rhinoceroses who plunged across the stream and vanished, herd after herd of gazelle, antelope, and wildebeest, and a magnificent drove of the cow-like eland.

Lions abounded, but the other animals paid them no attention, nor did the great cats come for game; they would appear, drink, and slink away, two or three even swimming across the stream. Toward midnight a number of oryx were seen, their long, black, sword-like horns mixed with a herd of zebra. So far not a shot had been fired, but without warning von Hofe raised his little sporting rifle and fired twice.

Instantly the game was off, with a great clicking of hoofs and startled snorts. The explorer and the two boys at once picked out their animals and opened fire. To his vast delight, von Hofe's oryx bounded high and fell dead; it was found that both bullets had gone through the heart. [116]

Schoverling put down another oryx and a zebra, whose flesh the Masai delighted in, though it was too tough for the others. Jack and Charlie each dropped an eland, Jack wounding a

hartebeest which got away in the rush. An instant later, only the thunder of hoofs dying away in the distance showed what vast herds had been there.

The next day they headed by compass for the northeast, which would take them into the supposed desert country, but clear of the great Lorian swamp. Here for the first time they began to be tormented by flies—great long insects such as the boys had never seen, and which rendered fly-nets necessary to their tents at night. Had it not been for them, the tents might have remained unused, for the whites needed them little and the Indians slept in the wagons.

Once they came to an outlying village of the Samburu—a nomad people dwelling farther south. Here they found not only cattle, sheep and goats, but herds of camels, which were kept for their milk and hair alone. These villagers knew nothing of what lay beyond, save that it was desert and uninhabitable. [117]

So, with full water-casks, a renewed store of figs, cabbage-palm tops, and other vegetables, the safari pushed into the desert, going forward day and night. Charlie, much to his surprise and disgust, found that the Masai had little need for water, drinking the blood of game instead, "to make their hearts fierce." This, however, was a great saving to their supply.

There were many hyenas scattered over the district, and these the boys shot wherever found, as they are a perfect scourge and good for nothing. The earth was sun-baked, and the explorer declared that no water had fallen here for possibly a year or more, which the boys could well believe. The game gave place to giraffes, ostriches, and a few varieties of the plains antelope, so that each day they had to circle farther from the camp to secure enough.

Day after day they pushed forward, skirting at times the edge of miasmatic swamps, and generally sticking to the desolate plain. They refilled their casks at occasional water-holes, and the oxen used little water on the march. Von Hofe made no comment, until two weeks of this had passed with no sign of approaching villages or elephant country. Then, one night, he gave voice to his thoughts. [118]



For the man, just as he relapsed into unconsciousness, murmured four words: "Help—me debbil man!"

"Are you sure, Schoverling, that there is anything beyond this? It to me seems not much like elephant country."

"I'm taking a chance, Doctor," returned the dust-caked explorer. "This desert is bound to loosen up sometime, and there is surely elephant country ahead. Give us another week; then if we strike nothing I'll head around toward Lake Rudolph and the mountains."

The other nodded, and said no more. Charlie and Jack had also grown weary of the desolate surroundings, but no complaint had come from the Masai. Two days later one of the oxen died, and on the third day another, from unexplained causes. Then, on the fifth morning, a yell of delight went up from all at sight of green trees ahead.

"It's a drift," exclaimed Charlie, examining the slender line of trees as they pushed their horses on.

"What's that under those big mimosas?" called Jack. "Looks like a native hut."

"Right you are, Jack!" cried the explorer. "Come on Guru!" [119]

They advanced at a gallop, leaving the wagons far behind. Half an hour later they came to the drift—a wide, rocky little valley through which trickled a tiny stream of water. No sign of natives appeared, however, until their horses had watered and they clambered over the stones on foot toward the single hut beneath the mimosas. Then, as Jack shouted aloud, a man appeared in the doorway, crawling toward them on hands and

knees.

"The poor devil's all in," exclaimed Schoverling. "Careful, boys! He may have the plague."

"Let me go first," said the German quietly. They could see that the man, who seemed to be an Arab, was frightfully emaciated. His head was bound up, and half-healed thorn-scars covered his body. Von Hofe beckoned them to come on, as he knelt beside the poor wretch, but as the boys came to his side a startled exclamation broke from them.

For the man, just as he relapsed into unconsciousness, murmured four words.

"Help—me debbil man!"

MOWBRAY'S END

"He iss starved," exclaimed von Hofe. "See what iss in the hut. I will care for him."

Charlie, Jack and Schoverling, with a single glance of amazement at the words of the senseless Arab, advanced to the hut while the Indians clustered about von Hofe. The shelter was a crude one, of bushes and grass, built against the trunk of one of the great mimosas.

"There's a man in here!" cried Charlie as they stood in the doorway.

Before them, lying on a bed of leaves, was the figure of a man in European clothes. His head, one arm, and side were bound in blood-stained bandages. On his chest lay his right hand, still gripping a pencil, while on his knees lay an old letter, scribbled over. With a cry of pity, Schoverling knelt at the man's side—but started up again in horror. [121]

"Good heavens!" His voice rang with a note that struck Charlie's heart. "It is Mowbray—dead!"

They pressed forward, and saw that the man was indeed dead. And Mowbray it was—his cheeks fallen in, the bandage half-concealing his face, but the iron chin locked grimly as ever in the last battle.

"Yes," said Jack softly. "He's dead, right enough. Must have passed out not long ago, though. Let's see what that letter says, Chuck."

Charlie leaned over and picked up the paper sheets. The hut was absolutely bare, save for an empty revolver that lay on the earthen floor. With a shudder the boys emerged into the sunlight again, followed by Schoverling. The wagon had not yet come up, and the doctor was standing over the Arab. He turned at their approach.

"No use, mine friends. He iss dead—was ist das? A letter?"

He peered down at the paper in Charlie's hand. Without a word the boy handed it to Schoverling. The wagons were just creeping through the first trees, toward the water, and the Indians rushed off to restrain the oxen from plunging into the stream. [122]

"Come over here into the shade," said the explorer quietly. "Mowbray is lying in there, Doctor, dead, and seemingly pretty badly wounded. Perhaps these two sheets will throw some light on the situation."

They sat down around him beneath one of the big trees, and for a moment there was dead silence as the explorer examined the scrawled writing on the two sheets of paper and tattered envelope. Von Hofe nervously filled his pipe, nearly dropping it in the attempt.

"He seems to have written this after he got to the hut here," began the explorer. "It has no date and runs on in disconnected sentences." He paused, a catch in his voice. After a moment he went on, with no further sign of the emotion that must have possessed him.

"Yesterday the camel died. Conscious but helpless. Arm, leg, ribs and head broken. Five days travel, to south. Zahir hurt, but managed to drag me to river and trees. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh—"

"That's the first of it," said the explorer. At this moment Gholab approached and saluted respectfully, his bearded face immobile. "Well, what is it?" [123]

"Does the sahib wish to outspan here?"

"Yes. Outspan and pitch camp for to-day. And, Gholab, have two graves dug at the top of this little rise."

The Gurkha saluted and wheeled. Charlie caught an excited look from Jack, and then gave his attention to the General once more.

"Zahir has built a hut. Could get away but refuses. No cartridges in revolver. Z. is cutting up camel. Tough but nourishing. Have hopes. If I pull out will reward Z. for life."

"That's the second bunch of sentences, written on the envelope. The next seems to come on the back of the letter, and is addressed doubly."

The explorer swept his eye down the two dirty, torn papers, and then read slowly:

"To Selim ben Amoud or Louis Schoverling. Whoever finds, take to them.

"Fever for two weeks. Camel gone bad, no cartridges. Zahir-ed-din ben Yusuf has caught some mice for me and starved self. No hope left unless L. S. comes. Am weaker, and Z. has fever. [124]

"In watchcase is plan of Selim's. Struck east from Lake Sugota with camels. Had brush with British but shook them off. Into desert five days full speed. Country deserted. Chain of small lakes, woods, hills as indicated on plan. Deserted ruined huts, no natives. Found Lake Quilqua to south of others."

"What!" cried Charlie. "Is that there, General? Is it—"

"You will keep quiet, please!" rumbled von Hofe. Charlie subsided as the General nodded. Jack said nothing, only his flushed cheeks and gleaming eyes showing his eagerness.

"Lake fed by hot springs. Water warm, very reedy. Crossed to island fifty yards from shore. Found stronghold ruined, slave irons and neck-rings, plenty of skeletons. Evidently place was swept by plague, none escaping. Burned slave-barracoon and house. All very old—at least ten years. Slavers' stronghold explains desolated country. Natives all skipped or slaves.

"Z. and I located big ivory cache under left gate-post. Went back to camp for men, found dying Arab. Gigantic buffalo gored him. Rest gone with camels. Big python showed up; all scared out. Found camel in trees and stayed to look around. Stories true. Shot two buffalo—suggested prehistoric type, great horns. Shot python, thirty-nine feet. [125]

"Guns safe. Third day found elephant spoor. Could hardly believe it. Sighted and caught him by deserted native village. Rogue, fine trophy for L. S. Biggest ever saw, must stand fourteen feet or better. Ivory twelve feet. Z. game to tackle him, next day.

"Rogue didn't wait. Tackled us before dawn. One foot came down through tent, missed me by six inches. Rolled out and grabbed gun. Z. knocked senseless. Fired once, but rogue placed trunk around me and threw me twenty feet into bushes. Senseless.

"Woke up to find rogue gone. Z. pulled me out of thorns and tied me up. Badly smashed. Amputated left hand at wrist. Elephant had smashed guns, with all he could find. Z. lost his nerve. Don't wonder. He caught the camel unhurt. I told him to head south to find L. S. or natives, then fainted again.

"Don't remember much of what happened next. Z. says we rode bareback. Held me in his arms all the way. Five days. No water or grub. Camel died with river only hundred yards away, poor brute. That's all." [126]

The explorer paused, trying to make out the last few lines, which seemed almost illegible. Charlie stared, gulping down a sob at the bare recital of that terrible journey. It was hard to realize that only a few weeks ago he had seen and talked with the intrepid little man who lay cold in death on his bed of leaves, and whose last words were being read to them.

"This last is pretty faint," said Schoverling with expressionless voice. "It's the last thing he wrote, and he seems to have failed at the end. Here is what I can make out of it:

"Z. knocked over a vulture two days ago from carcass of camel. Made him take half, and he promised to go for help. Was too weak and came back. I'm pretty near gone. If you get this, L. S., go kill that rogue for me. Ivory worth while in cache. Feel cold to waist—must be going. Great news for British, eh? Thank God I've lived a decent life, according to my lights." [127]

Schoverling's voice died away, and they knew he had reached the end. Without another word the explorer rose to his feet, walked a few paces and stood gazing over the river with his back toward them. Von Hofe, sucking his unlighted pipe, made no secret of the tears that trickled over his dusty blond beard. Charlie and Jack gazed at each other in awed silence, for that last letter was very vivid and very real to them both.

"He ampudaded hiss own hand—ach!" said the big German huskily, at last.

At the words, Schoverling turned and came slowly back to them, his face set and hard. Behind them the Masai were digging the graves under the direction of Akram Das, and the oxen were splashing about in the shallow silver thread of the river.

"Five days by camel—that would mean at least a week or ten days with the wagons," said the explorer quietly, looking at von Hofe. The German met the look and nodded.

"Yess. We shall do as he ordered."

"Do you mean that we are going to Lake Quilqua?" exclaimed Jack eagerly.

"We are, Jack. There is no reason why we should not bring back that rogue. He's just the fellow we're after, as—as poor Mowbray said." His voice shook a little. "If we'd only arrived a day or two sooner!" [128]

"It can't be helped, General," returned Charlie softly. "We could not know that he was here, and we might have done no good anyhow. Those last words of his were fine."

"That letter will be framed, some day," said the explorer, "and it'll hang where every man in the Explorer's Club will be proud of it. What a fine fellow that Arab was, too! I'm heartsick to think that we failed to save him."

"It was no use," von Hofe rose to his feet calmly. "It was starvation and wounds. He was a good man, yes. My friends, we will bring that rogue's skin back, and those others. What a triumph of science!"

"That letter said something 'bout there bein' a plan in his watch-case, Gen'ral," spoke up Jack. Schoverling nodded, and turned to the hut. A moment later he came out, a smashed and bent gold watch in his hand. This they managed to pry open with a knife, and the explorer pulled out a tiny, many-folded map of onion-skin paper. The tracings were made in a brown ink, with marks that meant nothing to the boys. [129]

"Arabic," explained Schoverling briefly. "Evidently it was supplied to Mowbray by Selim ben Amoud. From what I can make out, it is a plan of the chain of lakes Mowbray mentions. Here is

one off by itself to the south, named Quilqua. Well, this does us no good. Let's get down to cases."

"One thing is sure," said Charlie as the explorer paused. "That is, that our march will lie just about due north."

"Yes. Now, Mowbray speaks of an island with a slaver's stronghold. That would account for the desolated country—that and the rogue elephant. Probably some Arab settled down there years ago and ran off slaves until he and all his men were swept out in one of the terrible and mysterious plagues that sometimes sweep this country. That would explain the rumors among the natives. Probably Selim heard the story and fancied the place might be worth finding, so went into partnership with Mowbray. The latter evidently found a good store of ivory planted away."

"I guess you've doped it out," said Charlie. "How long will we stay here, General?"

"Two days. That will give the horses and cattle a good rest. The three of us ought to bring in a lot of game, and we'll make some real northwoods pemmican to take us on. First, let's see if the Masai will go with us."

[130]

The explorer called to Bakari and the Masai leader came over grinning. Slowly they explained what lay before them, the terrors of the mysterious lake, and the desert journey, and asked if Bakari and ten of his men would accompany them. The unabashed warrior grinned.

"Me go! Him men go, very fierce. No 'fraid."

Satisfied that he had understood, Schoverling dismissed him, and turned to the boys.

"Pemmican for ten Masai and Bakari, us four, and three gun-bearers. The rest will stay here. We'll take one wagon and six oxen; they can go for two or three days without any water easily enough. We have one thing to do before we go on the hunt, though."

What this duty was all knew well enough. The body of Mowbray was brought out and sewed in the canvas of a spare tent; a small American flag belonging to Schoverling was laid over him, and he was placed in one of the graves. The faithful Zahir-ed-din was laid in the other. As the story was told the Indians, they waited till von Hofe had recited the Lord's Prayer over Mowbray, then Gholab Singh, Mohammedan like the other Gurkhas, delivered a short prayer from the Koran over the Arab, and the graves were filled in.

[131]

Charlie, Jack and the General scoured the plain that afternoon, bringing in three eland and sending the Masai out after two zebra. On their return they found that von Hofe had been at work, for over each grave stood a cross of wood, rudely carved with the name of him beneath. Oddly enough, the Mohammedans made no objection to the cross being placed over the Arab.

"He was a good man," said the big Teuton softly. "It matters not that he believed in Allah, for worse Christians I haf met, yes."

During the next day the game was cut up and smoked by Jack and Charlie, the explorer and Guru bringing in enough fresh meat to keep them for two or three days ahead. That night six of the rested oxen were inspanned to one of the wagons, loaded with water-casks and what was left of their yams and bananas. The spare Gurkha was left with his own rifle, an old Snider, to provide meat for the little camp, and as the moon rose the expedition pushed out across the river to the north—in search of Lake Quilqua and the Rogue Elephant.

[132]

CHAPTER XI

[133]

THE DESERT TREK

The rest, short as it had been, had worked wonders for the cattle. They were as fresh and sleek as ever, and the lightly loaded wagon was a small burden to them. At the last moment Schoverling had flung in the six traps.

"I have a notion," was all he would reply to the questions of the boys.

He and the boys and von Hofe rode first, the Masai tramping along to a swinging chant beside the wagon, and the three gun-bearers bringing up the rear. The oxen did not require any driving, as they followed the leaders unhesitatingly and patiently.

"I guess we've got our work cut out for us," said Charlie as the long, rolling white-dusted plain opened out before them in the moonlight. He and Jack rode together, as usual.

"Seems weird," replied Jack, "to think o' Mowbray coming across here on a camel only to die, an' us going back on the same trail. Wonder how that camel died in five days?"

[134]

"I don't know. He said it was unhurt. Prob'ly the Arab pushed it day and night at full speed. Even a camel would go down under that."

As they advanced, the dust rose in clouds about them, hanging low and choking the Indians behind until they had to come forward. Once or twice the barking call of a zebra sounded from the distance, and toward morning the distant growl of a lion, but no other signs of life came to

them.

The boys had been busy all day, and they were tired enough to doze off in the saddle as they went forward, the white dust covering them all with a thick coating. Hour after hour they plodded on, at intervals wiping out the nostrils of the horses and cattle with a wet cloth by way of refreshment. Von Hofe chatted intermittently with Schoverling, who guided the march by compass, but the boys were too weary for talk.

At five o'clock they halted on the edge of a dry water-course. They had not omitted to fetch along a good supply of fodder for the cattle, which was loaded in the wagon to the very top of the tilt. The horses were given a few swallows of water each, the Masai dined on roast meat about their fires, while the four explorers and the Indians made an excellent repast on cold meat and biscuits with tea. Biscuits were Charlie's specialty, and before the start he had made a good supply, as their flour was running low. [135]

For three hours they rested here, Schoverling and Jack keeping watch in turn. At the next halt von Hofe and Charlie would stand guard, then the three Indians. At eight the cattle were inspanned, and they plodded onward until noon, hot and choked with dust. No complaint came from the Masai, and here the second meal of the day was eaten.

The boys had thought that first march across that almost deserted grass plain was hard, but this gave them an inkling of the meaning of an African trek. They slept with heads on their saddles, the single tent they had brought along shading them somewhat. The Indians and a few Masai slept on the fodder beneath the hood of the wagon, the rest stretched out under the wagon itself.

At three they inspanned and went on again until seven, when another two hours' rest and the evening meal took place. Thus they traveled sixteen hours and rested eight, the men and cattle both getting on more easily at night than in the blazing sun. [136]

That first afternoon nothing much occurred to interest them. Out on the dry desert scoured a few ostriches, at which the boys took distant shots but without result. In the evening they saw two giraffes lumbering across the horizon.

"Wish we had a few yoke of those fellows," said the explorer. "They can go for months without water, and seem to pick up a living from the dead grass."

"I thought camels were the only beasts who could live on air?" said Charlie in surprise. "Do you mean that giraffes absolutely require no water?"

"That is it," answered von Hofe. "It is an unexplained mystery, my friend. The giraffe, he carries no water-tank inside like the camel, yet he sweats and lives. How, is not known."

Charlie and Jack looked after the Masai, but found them dust-grimed and cheerful. The leader, Bakari, had evidently picked out the best men—all stalwart, sinewy warriors who won the respect of the boys in that terrible march by their powers of endurance and unfailing good humor. [137]

"I don't see how they can plug along on foot that way," volunteered Jack on the third day. "By jiminy, two days of it would 'bout put me in hospital! Say, Chuck, ain't these moccasins great? If we had boots now we'd be sorry."

"You bet," nodded Charlie. "They keep the dust out pretty well. The doctor has to empty out a pound o' dust every hour. No wonder his feet are swollen up!"

Indeed, that night von Hofe made application for a pair of the spare moccasins. The dry, irritating dust made no entrance through the thick moosehide, and although the moccasins were undeniably hot, they were much better than hunting-boots. He freely admitted that in no instance had Schoverling's prophecies and ideas fallen down, and thereafter wore his moccasins until the end of the trip.

The dry, brown grass of those plains was almost hidden by the dust, but when their fodder gave out, on the fifth day, the oxen seemed to take it willingly enough. Day after day the march kept up without intermission, and fortunately the six-oxen suffered no loss. They were used to such treks, and the unremitting care of the boys kept them in good shape. [138]

On the seventh day the supply of meat, large as it had been, began to show signs of giving out. The Masai had accepted the smoked meat willingly enough, but neither the explorer nor the boys had counted on their enormous appetites. As it would not do to halt the march, the wagon was left in charge of von Hofe, while the General, the boys, and the three gun-bearers cantered out after whatever game they could find. So far the horses had stood the strain well, being seasoned, wiry little beasts. Schoverling rode between the boys.

"I didn't want to tell the doctor," he volunteered in a low tone, when they were a good half-mile from the wagon, "and don't let on before the Indians; but we're going to be in bad unless we get across pretty soon. There are only two casks of water left. I'm afraid the Masai have been tapping them at night."

"Jumping sandhills!" exclaimed Charlie, staring in dismay. "Why, we have to use at least half a cask a day, only giving the horses and cattle a few swallows, and us too! I s'pose we'll cut out the cattle?" [139]

"Have to," nodded the explorer. "I hate to do it, but we can't return now. I'd like to take a gun-butt to those Masai!"

"You can't blame them," put in Jack. "They've got the hardest end to bear up, Gen'ral. We've only allowed them about a pint a day each, same as us, when they've been hiking steady. It's hard lines on them, take it from me."

"We can't help that, Jack," Schoverling returned. "There's no use punishing them, of course, for they may be valuable later on. But when you're on watch, just take a look under the wagon now and then. If you find anyone at the water-casks, take the cattle-whip to him. That water means life to all of us—and *we come first!*"

The boys fell silent. The danger was brought home to them, as the explorer intended, and they realized the grim law of the white man in savage places—that whatever happened, whoever perished, he must survive. It is not a merciful law; Schoverling was not one of the generous-hearted kind who treat the native as an equal at such times. He was an average, self-preserving Caucasian, who was only merciless when his own life hung in the balance. The boys had been trained in the same school, and fully realized the force of his words. [140]

"The Masai are holding up finely," he went on, "but we'll have to watch them close. At any minute they may get sick of things and try to rush us. That means trouble, which I hope will not come."

Charlie joined him silently in that hope, though from the behavior of the natives he could hardly believe that they would turn on the whites. However, the conversation was soon shifted by the discovery of a herd of giraffes to the north.

"Long range, I s'pose?" queried Jack, getting out his heavy gun. The Indians were armed with the lighter ones.

"Yes," returned the explorer. "We'll never get up on them in this territory. Fire high, when they begin to run, or we'll lose them."

The giraffes saw them plainly enough, but they got to within four hundred yards before the herd began to shift. All drew rein instantly, the trained horses standing stone still, and just as the herd took alarm and broke into their lumbering, awkward-looking gallop, the six rifles rang out. [141]

The lighter weapons of the Indians seemed to have no effect. Charlie saw the bull at which he aimed stagger and go down. Another stopped with a broken shoulder, and Jack's second barrel finished it. Schoverling fired again, but either missed a vital place or his bullet went wide, for a moment later the herd was gone in a cloud of dust.

"Never mind," he cried gayly, reloading as they trotted forward. "Two will be all we can carry in, and will help out wonderfully. They are poor eating for us, but the Masai will be overjoyed."

Reaching the two dead giraffes, all leaped from their horses and set about cutting up the bodies. At last it was finished. Spattered with blood, the boys got the heavy loads on their quivering, blood-sniffing horses after some delay, and set about returning to the wagon.

"Where is it?" exclaimed the explorer. "Surely we can't have lost it?"

But, even with their powerful glasses, no sign could they see of the little safari. In all directions the plain stretched out dry, white, dusty, with no moving speck to break the monotony. The general cased his glasses in disgust. [142]

"I was so interested in giving you my warning that I forgot to take any thought of our direction, and the doctor has my compass. Let's see—we've been riding about northeast."

"Here," cried Jack, pointing to the dusty plain, "there's no wind, so we can follow the tracks. It's a cinch."

"Of course," laughed the explorer, and with Jack and Charlie in the lead all six began retracing their steps. But it was not so easy to follow the trail, after the dust had settled down upon it, and it was an hour later before the white tilt of the wagon was seen, far to the southwest.

"We came more east than north, evidently," said Schoverling. "However, all's well that ends well. Don't gallop, Akram; we must go easy on the horses!"

They were soon up to the wagon and were greeted with a joyful yell by the Masai, who had no scruples about partaking of the raw meat. Knowing their tastes, the explorer had filled two or three gourds with the blood of the slain giraffes, which the natives drank greedily. The boys were disgusted, and sought refuge at the head of the column again. [143]

That night the two remaining casks of water were shifted to the bed of the wagon, the empty casks remaining slung below. With the next evening, however, there came a joyful change in their prospects, for as they proceeded they saw that dark clouds were gathering along the horizon to the north.

"Rain!" cried the boys eagerly. Von Hofe nodded, and the Masai struck up a "rain chant" which seemed to have the desired effect. By midnight the sky was overcast, and when they outspanned the next morning for the early halt gusts of wind and rain were sweeping down upon them that gradually changed to a steady, settled rain.

"This is a great piece of good luck," exclaimed Schoverling, revealing to von Hofe for the first time how their water supply had shrunk. "Get out all the casks, boys, and let them fill. It's a bad thing for the march, however."

"Why so?" queried the doctor, as the two boys began unslinging the casks.

"Because when this soil is wet it's mighty greasy, and makes hard going for the ox-team. However, it's well worth it." [144]

The only trees on the plain were stunted thorn-trees, but from these the Masai got enough dry wood to start a fire, after which others were started. The boys, Schoverling and the doctor huddled together in the wet grass under the tent, blankets around them and saddle-cloths over their feet, and slept comfortably enough despite the drenching rain.

When the camp wakened into action, the rain had passed over and once more the sky was bright and the air hot. But they had obtained three full casks of water, and now had little fear for the future. As the explorer had predicted, the soil was wet and greasy, but aside from getting stuck once in an old drift, they had no great trouble, and after the noon halt the sun had dried up the ground fairly well.

When they halted at sunset that night Charlie pulled out his glasses and then gave a cry of joy. Far ahead, but unmistakable, they could see green slopes and trees. Quilqua the mysterious was in sight.

CHAPTER XII

 [145]

A DESERTED LAND

That night the water was not spared, and the rest of the meat was polished off in reckless fashion. After a three-hour rest, they took up the march again in renewed spirits, the Masai singing and chanting eagerly. But distances were deceptive in that country of clear vision and high altitude. When they camped at dawn after a hard march, they seemed no nearer the trees than before, and the Masai and Indians went to bed hungry, Jack making what little flour they had left into flapjacks.

By the time they camped at noon, however, the boys and Schoverling had brought in an eland, which they had found solitary. This staved off hunger, and without pausing to sleep the hunters set off again while the cattle rested. The country was well timbered farther ahead, and they rode toward this through scattered clumps of thorn-trees. [146]

"There's a lion, right enough," said Jack, as one of the tawny beasts bounded away from a knoll to their right. "That means there's game around."

"We'll strike it in the trees," declared the General. "That seems like a good rolling game country stretching out in front."

Knowing that the doctor would bring on the wagon, they struck straight ahead for five miles. Gradually game became apparent, and after knocking over a couple of gazelles and a fine oryx, they found a waterhole. Akram Das was sent back to guide the wagon to it, and that night there was high feasting in camp.

"I'm mighty glad our cattle pulled through safe," said Schoverling. "We'll need them on the back trail."

"Yes," put in von Hofe, "they will have to draw the elephant skin and the ivory."

"Don't count too far ahead," laughed Jack. "It's not going to be any cinch! But I'd like to meet up with one of those buffalo."

"If poor Mowbray's account is true," said the General, "we'd better have the gun-bearers stick close with the heavy guns. There's no telling what we'll strike here. We'll have to keep pretty good guard, too, for lions will be apt to make a try for the cattle or horses." [147]

Now, with the worst of the march over, they relapsed into regular day-marches again. But that night, sure enough, Charlie heard the low mutterings of a lion, and by the light of the fires could see one of the great beasts slinking past. He gave him two shots from his 30-30, and the aroused camp found only a dead lion to exult over.

The first day's march brought them to a tiny trickle of water in the center of a drift, where they outspanned. There were palms and wild figs in abundance, and with cabbage-palm hearts as a substitute their meat diet was abandoned. Game was increasing, and that night they located another drinking-place half a mile up the drift, where the boys bagged three gerenuk, a kind of gazelle, and two wildebeest.

As they went forward the next day they were all amazed at the remarkable tameness of the herds which passed on every side. A drove of at least a hundred zebra paused within fifty yards of them, gazing curiously, and not until Bakari flourished a spear did they whirl and dash away. At [148]

another time a group of slender-horned impalla bunched together not a hundred yards away, watching fearlessly as the wagon passed.

"That looks mighty queer," declared Charlie. "Seems like they don't get hunted much up here."

"Remember what that letter o' Mowbray's said?" interjected Jack quickly. "How he never met any natives, I mean? Bet a cookie you were right, General, about the slavers."

"What's worrying me," returned Schoverling, "is where that lake can be. There seems to be hills ahead, and to the right, but I can see no sign of a lake."

"I tell you," cried Charlie. "If we strike another drift, it's a good guess that it comes from a lake, isn't it?"

"Yes," rumbled von Hofe, smiling. "That is right, my boy. We will follow the next river to which we come."

Plainly enough, the country was a desert as far as human life was concerned. But the animal life was far too abundant to suit them. That day they passed a rhinoceros, standing to one side and watching them from a distance of fifty yards. With his ears cocked forward he looked like a gigantic pig, but the hunters kept their heavy rifles cocked, for at any moment the beast might take it into his head to charge, and they had had one experience with these huge beasts. [149]

"He's two-horned!" exclaimed Jack, watching intently. It was their first meeting with one of the two-horned variety, and they were relieved when he turned and slowly trotted off, the tick-birds on his back settling down again.

That night Schoverling issued orders that with each halt the Masai should construct a thorn zareba for the oxen, while big fires should be kept blazing all night. Lions were very plainly in abundance, and they could afford to run no risk of losing the cattle, or horses either.

Toward dawn they were aroused by Guru, on guard, to find the horses shivering with fear and the glowing eyes of lions shining from the undergrowth around the camp. A shot seemed to have no effect, until with a well-placed bullet Schoverling killed one of the beasts and the rest disappeared with threatening rumbles.

"That shows what we can expect, in this no-man's country," he said. "We'll have worse than that later on, I'm afraid." [150]

And his words were to prove true, though not exactly as he had intended, before two days more had passed.

Shortly before noon they came upon lower ground, with the high hills rising some ten miles farther on. A stream trickled through beds of reeds and swamp-grass, and it was decided that they should follow the high ground upstream, in the hope of being thus led to their hard-sought goal.

Schoverling and Charlie employed the shotgun in turn, shooting from their horses, and stocking the whole camp with wildfowl. The Masai had spread out in great glee, investigating this strange land like children, when a sudden yell of horror went up from one of them.

Turning as the doctor echoed the shout, those ahead were horrified to see a tremendous python curled about the struggling warrior, at the very edge of the reeds twenty yards away. The huge head of the snake was high—at least six feet above that of the warrior, about whom its coils were tightening slowly. The Masai, with horrible yells, was slashing away without effect, and even as they looked his arms were bound about and fell useless. [151]

"Good heavens!" groaned Schoverling, who had left his rifle in the wagon. The Indians spurred forward with outstretched guns, but in that moment von Hofe proved himself cooler than any. The boys had been afraid to fire, but even as Charlie and Jack threw up their guns the little rifle of the doctor spoke out once and then again.

Struck in the neck by both balls, the python's head drooped and his coils broke away. In a flash the Masai wriggled loose and turned, sword in hand, while his comrades dashed fearlessly to his rescue. For a moment there was a wild turmoil of bodies; one of the warriors was flung a dozen feet away by the slashing tail, then the python fell, cut into a score of pieces.

The exciting combat was begun and over in a moment. Charlie dashed to the side of the men, but it proved that neither of the Masai had been seriously hurt. The first had suffered merely from a vigorous squeeze, the second had the breath knocked out of him, so no attention was paid to the injuries. Measured carefully, the python proved to be thirty feet in length. [152]

"Things look pretty grave," said Schoverling soberly that evening when they were in camp farther up the stream, but well away from the reeds. "Mowbray's forty-foot python was no dream, my friends. We must keep our rifles in the holsters and at our hands night and day in this country."

"The Masai behaved splendidly," exclaimed Charlie admiringly. "Where are you going?" he asked as the General arose.

"Show you in a minute. Guru!"

The explorer had joined the Sikh at the wagon. There was a rattle of chains, and with the steel traps in their hands the two returned to the fire.

"Now, Guru, we are going to set out these traps around the camp. After this you and Akram and Amir Ali will have to do it, so observe us closely."

"Oh, that's what you wanted them for, eh?" cried Jack. Schoverling smiled.

"Not exactly, but they're going to be a whole lot of help. My idea is, Doctor, that if we set these out around the camp they will keep us from being surprised to some extent. They won't stop a lion or buffalo, of course, but they will serve to check them or any other big game." [153]

"It is good," nodded von Hofe gravely. "I think it will be of much use. I will go too."

The boys cut heavy stakes with their hand-axes, and all six of the traps were fastened securely. Then, accompanied by the Indians, they placed the traps in a wide circle on each side of the zareba, the most threatened point of attack. When the stakes were driven, the jaws of the traps were opened and light creepers flung over them.

"By golly, that'll make me sleep a whole lot sounder!" admitted Charlie when they returned. Jack was disposed to turn up his nose at the unbaited traps.

"Any fool jackal would smell 'em," he declared emphatically. "Why, you can see them glint in the moonlight!"

"No matter," smiled the explorer. "We don't want to catch anything in them—they're only there to keep us from being surprised."

That very night the traps proved their value, for while Jack was on guard he was roused by the click of steel, a tremendous snarling growl, and the sound of a furious struggle. The whole camp was up instantly, and by the light of the natives torches they could see a lioness rolling over, tearing furiously at a trap which clenched her two forepaws. [154]

A moment later she tore free, but Jack's elephant-gun crashed out and she lay still. The trap was promptly restaked and reset, while the Masai dragged the body away. And after that, Jack said nothing more on the question of unbaited traps.

They were now in a veritable hunter's paradise. It was unnecessary for Schoverling and the boys to shoot game, for the Masai could spear all that was needed without trouble, two or three of them going up-wind and driving the game past the hiding-place of the rest. The next morning they were off with the dawn, in high hopes of reaching the lake, for the water in the stream seemed warmer than usual, though the explorer laid this to imagination.

The country was open enough for the wagon to proceed without hindrance at a little way from the vegetation of the river. In the course of the morning Charlie descried what looked like grass huts ahead, but as they did not dare leave the wagon it was nearly noon before they came up to the little village. [155]

"Deserted, of course," exclaimed the General when they drew near.

"Old and broken down, too," added Jack. "They're pretty well covered with vines and creepers, and that hut over on the left is a—why, all those mounds are old huts, General!"

Sure enough, at close quarters they saw that scores of little mounds scattered around had once been huts, fallen to pieces under the attacks of animals and the weather. The few that were standing had been somewhat preserved by the shelter of spreading juniper trees overhead, and young bamboos had sprouted around and inside, thus serving to keep them in shape.

"Pretty rotten," said Charlie, poking one with his rifle. The grass and twigs fell at the touch. "They've been deserted for years. But look over there—that used to be a yam patch, and I'll bet a dollar—" [156]

Without finishing he flung himself from the saddle and ran to an overgrown stretch of ground, where his quick eye had detected a few yams growing wild, with a variety of squash. Most of them were trampled or eaten by animals, but they managed to collect a dozen of each, which would give a welcome variety of food.

"General!" called out Jack, fifty yards away.

"Come over here, all of you."

He was standing over something on the ground, at the edge of the forest. When the others arrived, he pointed to an immense buffalo track in the soft ground.

"There's your giant bull," he said triumphantly. "This is no place for us, I guess."

"I should say not!" cried Schoverling. "What a brute that fellow must be! Ever see as big a track, Doctor?"

"Never," and the German wagged his great beard, with a dubious glance around. "Come, let us go on. Ach, what a country is this!"

An hour later they outspanned for the noon halt. By some subtle warning, Schoverling led them [157]

away from the river to a little bare mound crowned by a single spreading mimosa, around which the oxen were grouped. Below on one side, stretched the jungle. On the other, tall grass, reeds and undergrowth led away to the river. And on that little eminence the expedition all but came to grievous wreck.

CHAPTER XIII

[158]

A DESPERATE BATTLE

Fortunately for the entire party, the bandoliers were filled that noon with the heavy cordite bullets, for Schoverling advised all to carry their heavy guns. Guru, Akram Das and Amir Ali carried the 30-30s, while von Hofe broke out a box of shells for the shotgun, as he wished to get a specimen of a peculiar crane he had seen that morning in the river, and refused to let the others shoot it for him.

"Nein," he objected determinedly. "I shoot my own specimens, thanks, for it is good to say, 'Shot and mounted by Gross von Hofe.' I can shoot when I wish."

"I should say you can," laughed Charlie. "You sure nipped that big snake in the right place, Doctor! I never saw any better shooting."

"You let the doctor alone," chuckled Schoverling. "He knows his business better than any of us. Give him an elephant gun, if he wants it!"

[159]

The big Teuton smiled broadly through his blond beard, for the praise was dear to his honest heart. While they sat and rested, Gholab Singh washed the tin dishes, humming one of his native songs. Jack's quick eye caught a movement in the bushes toward the river, and as he jumped up a big boar came running out.

"Knock him over," suggested Schoverling lazily. "But we'll have to cut him up and cook him ourselves."

Jack agreed, as the boar trotted across the open space, followed by another. Catching up his 30-30, which lay with the other guns close at hand, he put a shot through the brain of the second animal. Charlie joined him and they ran out to bring in the body, as the Sikh was the only Indian who would touch pig's flesh.

"Say, Jack," exclaimed Charlie as they bent over the boar, "didn't it strike you queer that they'd run out that way? 'Most as if somethin' was after 'em."

"Right," and Jack sprang to his feet. Looking closely, they could see the tops of the twenty-foot reeds along the river-bank shaking heavily and slowly, as if massive bodies were advancing. "Maybe it's a rhino, Chuck. He wouldn't bother us—hello! What's up?"

[160]

A chorus of shrill yells from the Masai above startled them. Glancing up, they saw Schoverling and the gun-bearers catching up their weapons, while the natives were leading the cattle away from the wagon, the inspanning having already begun for the march. They saw Gholab Singh catch up the little rifle belonging to von Hofe.

"Jumpin' sandhills!" began Charlie in wonder. "What on earth—"

"Get up here!" roared the General at them. "Boys! Quick!"

Without pausing to inquire further the boys jumped for the camp. A moment later they stood gazing around in amazement, inquiring what was wrong. For answer the explorer pointed to the river below. The boys whirled, then a single cry burst from their lips and they stood astounded, unable to believe their eyes.

"Ach, himmel! Vot a sight!" broke from the doctor.

There, bending down the tough reeds like grass, a mighty herd of buffalo was coming slowly forward, the first two or three just emerging into the clearing. All together, there must have been sixty or seventy of them—but what buffalo they were!

[161]

Great, shaggy fellows, nearly a third larger than those the boys had seen and shot during the first part of the trip, they seemed like some part of a wild dream. It flashed through Charlie's mind that it must have been such buffalo as this that Mowbray had seen, or rather, that had scattered his Arabs.

Slowly the great mass pushed forward, heads upturned. Plainly they had scented the camp, for they were down-wind, and intended to investigate. Both boys realized that they were in grave danger, as this became apparent.

"Think they'll dare to charge us?" murmured Charlie, a little pale.

"Can't tell," returned the explorer, staring. "Great Scott, what animals! No wonder Mowbray's men lit out for safety! If they come on, we're goners."

That they plainly meant to come on was soon evident. The foremost paused to sniff and paw the body of the slain boar, and to gaze up at the waiting men, then those crowding behind shoved them onward. Two or three went on to one side, but the others began the ascent of the little hill without hesitation.

[162]

"We'll have to stop them," said Schoverling, his face set. Charlie looked around to find Jack at his elbow, gun ready, black eyes glittering, and cheeks flushed darkly. Behind were grouped the Indian gun-bearers, fully recognizing the danger. The Masai, chattering but with arrow on the string, stood near the wagon.

"Bakari!" called the explorer quickly. At the sound of his voice the giant buffalo halted for a moment, and the boys yelled in hope that they would retire. But the hope proved groundless, as they came forward with slow steps again.

"Bakari, put some of your men up into that tree—keep those bulls away from the wagon and oxen at all costs," ordered the General. The Masai nodded, and a moment later five of his men went up nimbly into the big mimosa, and threaded their way out along the branches until they stood over the heads of the boys. The wagon and oxen were twenty feet behind, and the remaining natives grouped before them.

"All right, boys," said Schoverling quietly. "Don't fire at the head, remember, unless you are sure of the eye. We've got to stop them at once."

[163]

Charlie and Jack lifted their guns. The tremendous beasts were a scant fifty yards below, but more were crowding up from the reeds every instant. The four white men spread out at intervals of a few yards, the gun-bearers between. Von Hofe, shotgun in hand, stood on the long wagon-tongue with Gholab Singh.

The three heavy Hammonds rang out with a crash. Charlie's bull went down, as did two more, and a wild bellow of fury went up from the entire herd. Instantly the second barrels streamed forth their deadly cordite, and a mass of kicking, struggling animals lay below them, while from the Masai streamed forth spears and arrows.

"Hope that holds them," said Schoverling, as they reloaded rapidly. The gun-bearers, as good gun-bearers should, had not yet fired but stood waiting till the last extremity.

"By golly!" yelled Jack, bringing up his rifle hurriedly. Instead of being intimidated, the shots and powder-reek seemed to render the herd more furious yet. Loud snortings, swishing tails and pawing hoofs testified to their rage, and the bodies of the slain were trampled into a bloody mass as the herd swept on.

[164]

Down went the foremost again, impeding those behind, and Schoverling nodded to the Indians as he reloaded. The 30-30s spoke out, each of the old soldiers wasting not a shot, but firing the five cartridges in his magazine slowly and methodically. The scene below was terrible, and the wild yells of the Masai rose high over the snorting and bellowing. But great as was the slaughter, the immense herd poured up bodily, until they were but thirty yards down the hill, the bodies of the killed trampled underfoot, those behind pressing the others forward in mad rage.

Now there was no let-up. Charlie loaded and fired as fast as he was able, as did Jack and the rest. Another volley from the Indians helped, and from the wagon von Hofe scattered bird-shot wildly, but Gholab's little rifle-ball picked more than one bull neatly through the eye to the brain.

From above the Masai streamed down their arrows into the backs of the giant brutes, until the wounded ones turned and lashed out at their fellows. Shot after shot poured down into the crowded mass of buffalo, and a moment later Charlie knew that the fight was all but won. Those in the van had gone down, those behind were rearing and trampling, fighting each other in desperate confusion, forgetting what lay ahead.

[165]

Suddenly a yell of terror from behind startled Charlie and he saw Jack whirl with a shout. While they had been fighting the foe in front, a single bull, led perhaps by some instinct, had quietly ascended the hill from the rear and was shaking his head angrily at Bakari and his remaining five men.

As the boys turned, the Masai unhesitatingly poured spears at him, and with a bellow of pain he charged them. They faced him gallantly, but before Jack or Charlie could fire, one went high in air and another was trampled under foot. Gholab leaped from the wagon with his small rifle, and sprang forward; but, taking a desperate chance, Jack had fired at the brute's shoulder. The buffalo turned and made for the little party, and as he did so Gholab Singh shot him through the eye at ten yards.

A yell of delight from Guru drew Charlie back to the front. Here it was evident that the buffalo were retiring, only two solitary bulls charging through the bloody, tangled mass of hoofs and horns. One of these the General dropped, and Amir Ali attended to the other. A moment later the herd drew away, sullenly and fighting among themselves still, to the shelter of the reeds, where the snortings and bellowings gradually died away in the distance.

[166]

With the lifting of the terrific strain, Charlie staggered and caught Schoverling's arm, while Jack sank down beside him with drawn face. Guru and his comrades leaped down the hill to kill the wounded, kicking bulls.

"There, boys, you take it easy," said the explorer, his voice just a trifle shaken. "That was pretty bad for a minute, but we pulled out all right."

"Better see to the Masai," said Charlie faintly.

Schoverling looked up, noting for the first time the slain bull by the wagon. The boys watched him leap to the side of von Hofe, who was kneeling over the injured men.

"I've had about enough of this country," grunted Charlie, rising shakily as his weakness passed. "Feel better?"

[167]

"Some." Jack, also unsteady under the reaction of their great mental and physical strain, got to his feet. "It was a tight squeeze, old chap!"

"You bet. Let's see how bad the men were hurt."

They joined the group. The gored man had an ugly wound in his side. The other had hung to the horns of the buffalo, and beyond a slash in the arm and a few broken ribs, was in no serious danger. The two were placed in the wagon, where the doctor gave them much needed attention.

"I'm going to get away from here," said the explorer. "Bakari, you did nobly! Gholab, Guru, and the rest of you, I can only say that I am proud of you—more proud than ever. Shake hands!"

Smiling broadly, the bearded Indians obeyed, after which the boys shook hands also.

"It was good work, sahib," declared the Sikh gravely. "We are men, all of us. Such a fight will make great telling when we get back!"

Von Hofe received his full share of the praise, for his bird-shot had contributed no little to the rout of the giant buffaloes. He, however, was already busy with his camera, and only the assurance of Schoverling that they could get a skin at another time got him to his horse. Half an hour later they were away from the scene of the battle, to which the kites and vultures were already flocking through the sky.

[168]

"We won't go far," announced the leader. "I don't mind confessing that I'm pretty badly shaken up and want to rest for the remainder of the day. We got out of that scrape almighty well, boys, if you want to know it!"

"Guess we did," returned Charlie with an uneasy glance around. "I won't forget that for many a long day! If the Indians hadn't stood by us—"

He did not need to finish, and the explorer nodded. Two miles farther on, and a mile from the river; they halted beside a little creek. They had learned the value of a big tree, and the oxen were outspanned around a spreading fig-tree of gigantic size. The Masai built a zareba around, and for the rest of the afternoon they stayed quietly recuperating from the terrible exertions of that battle. In the evening great fires were built and the traps set out again.

Nothing disturbed them that night. They slept in their blankets under the shelter of the giant tree, but as they rolled up—von Hofe being on guard for the first three hours—Jack whispered to Charlie.

[169]

"If we struck a herd of them fellows while we were down on low ground—good-bye!"

"You shut up and go to sleep," retorted Charlie. "Every time I close my eyes I think of those tossin' heads. I don't want to dream about them."

"Bet a cookie you will," chuckled Jack. "Remember how their eyes rolled, and the first ones we shot got all trampled out of shape, and—"

Charlie reached over with a mimosa thorn and ended the discussion suddenly. But, nevertheless, his dreams that night were none too pleasant, and he woke more than once, almost feeling a herd of those giant buffaloes grinding him beneath their hoofs.

CHAPTER XIV

[170]

THE LAKE OF MYSTERY

"This stream must be the outlet of the warm lake, all right," said Schoverling the next morning as they sat at breakfast. "There seems to be low hills ahead of us, but I think the wagon can get along."

"Yes," announced the doctor. "The hot lake must be of volcanic origin, a very long time ago. These things one meets with often in Africa. I must shoot one of those big buffalo, please."

"Then you'd better take my heavy gun," offered Charlie. "I've shot all of 'em I care to." The doctor's white teeth flashed, as he nodded.

"If it was anywhere else we could ride ahead and pick out a road," said Jack. "But we wouldn't dare leave the wagon here."

"Not much," laughed Schoverling. "If we'd been gone yesterday we'd have had to settle down here for life. Well, let's inspan." [171]

"Let's see that plan of Mowbray's—the Arabic one," said Charlie. The explorer found it and tossed it over. The two boys pored over the rudely-drawn chart while the oxen were being inspanned.

"This must be the river we're on," and Jack pointed to the line of a stream flowing to the south and west of a small lake. "Why couldn't we—"

"Hey, General!" called Charlie. "Come back here a minute!" The explorer, who was filling his bandolier, came over to their side, and Charlie pointed to the stream. "This river seems to run west out of the lake, and then turn south. Now, she's running north and south right here, isn't she?" The explorer, glancing at his compass, nodded. "Then instead of keeping close to the stream, why couldn't we strike off northeast and head straight for the lake? The river only leads us every which way."

"Good idea," exclaimed the General. "I had forgotten all about that map, to tell the truth. The only question is whether we can depend on it."

"That fellow Selim," put in the interested doctor, "was a man of brains, my friends. He would not send his camels and partner where he did not know. There is too much game beside this river, also. I like it not." [172]

"Very well," said Schoverling. "Then we will simply cut around those hills ahead and march by compass. No lack o' water here, fortunately."

So, much to the relief of the boys, they left the dangerous vicinity of the river and struck across country. Except on the very banks of the stream there was no jungle, but open and well-wooded country that seemed well able to support a population of natives, had there been any to support. An hour after inspanning they came to another and larger village, which had fallen to decay as had the first. Monkeys were everywhere, grinning and chattering among the ruined huts, and in the center of the old village, fastened to a still sturdy post, they came upon a pair of heavy iron hand-cuffs, which were simply a mass of rust.

"There's an indication of the slave-trade," and Schoverling pointed. "Probably a refractory slave was tied up there and whipped. I suppose those Arabs found this a thickly populated, happy country and simply made a clean sweep, men, women and children. Those that weren't killed or carried off north no doubt perished miserably in the wilderness. Poor devils! It's a tremendously good thing for Africa that the British put down the slave-trade." [173]

"If they'd only conserved their resources," declared von Hofe, "they might be running out slaves yet. But it was more than slavers, my friend." He had advanced to the door of a hut and now drew back. "It is not a good place to stay. There are skeletons—perhaps of the plague."

"That's more like it," exclaimed Charlie, as they rode on. "Mowbray said that he had found the Arab place plague-swept, and had burned the whole thing, prob'ly for fear of infection. That would account for the absence of human life a whole lot better than by laying it all on the slavers."

There was another thought running through Charlie's head, however—something of which no one had yet spoken openly. He wondered if Schoverling had paid any attention to Mowbray's narrative of the big cache of ivory "underneath the left gate-post." He had been long enough in Africa to know the tremendous value of tusks, and resolved to talk things over with Jack at the first opportunity. Von Hofe, meanwhile, had been thinking along more practical lines. [174]

"If we had a large party, Schoverling, and plenty of time, we could make money," he announced suddenly, and pointed to the hills on their left. "Those hills must be of old volcanoes. Why should the Arabs have come so far to settle here in a terrible land? Not for slaves or ivory alone. No. In these lakes and rivers there is gold."

"What!" exclaimed the explorer sharply. Then, more slowly, "I shouldn't wonder if you're right, Doctor. I'd like to take a little trip with a washing-pan up through there! If that is so, as it well might be, there'd be some rich pickings for the taking. However, we're here for elephant first and last, and I'm not inclined to linger with this outfit."

This excited the boys hugely, but both realized that on this expedition there would be small opportunity for any gold-hunting, even if the supposition should prove to be true. The sight of that big python and the giant buffalo had been a good indication of what they might expect if they lingered long hereabouts, and the fate of Mowbray's expedition was vivid in their minds still. [175]

The day passed with no exciting feature, as all kept close to the slow advance of the cattle and wagon. The Masai spread out fearlessly enough, and brought in enough game for the party. That terrific battle with the herd of buffalo had made great inroads on their stock of ammunition, and the explorer cautioned them not to waste a shot in useless hunting.

No sign of the expected lake appeared during the afternoon, and in the evening they camped in a little valley between two kopjes, beside a waterhole that welled out and sank again almost immediately into the thirsty earth.

"We'll need those traps here, I guess," declared Charlie when the outspanning was going on.

"Prob'ly every one of these water-holes is pretty well frequented by animals, so we can look out for visitors. Who's on guard to-night?"

"You are," chuckled Jack; "You and your friend Amir Ali. So mind you don't go asleep on duty, Chuck! I'd hate to wake up in the morning and find one of your moccasins left around to remember you by."

[176]

"Never you mind about me," retorted Charlie. "I never woke up the whole camp by letting go an elephant gun at a jackal."

This reminder of an earlier episode in the trip silenced Jack for the time being, but Charlie had no intention of letting himself be caught napping on duty. His watch lasted till midnight, when Amir would relieve him, and as there was no moon the boys got in a plentiful supply of wood for the fire. While the Indians were setting out the traps as usual, von Hofe departed to inspect the injured men, and Charlie seized the opportunity.

"Say, General, what about that ivory cache of Mowbray's? Think we can lug it off with us?"

The explorer remained silent for a moment, the boys watching him eagerly.

"Look here, you chaps," he said at last, "there were two words in that letter I didn't read. Mowbray said 'ivory—and dust!' I was afraid you might get the gold fever, but I guess you're pretty safe. I was talking to von Hofe about it yesterday. Now, you know that we're paid by him to get elephant and nothing else. Still, the old boy is a sport clear through, and underneath his German reserve he's just as eager as any of us. If we strike the island before we strike the elephant, we'll camp on it for safety and clear out the cache."

[177]

"Hurray!" exclaimed Charlie. "Bully for him! Say, we'll—"

"You wait, Chuck," interrupted Jack quickly. "Look here, Gen'ral, it ain't so simple. Those Arabs with the camels got clear away. Selim ben Amoud ain't a man to let Mowbray stick alone down here, not by a jugfull. I'll bet you that we'll find a bunch of Selim's men there with Selim himself. He was no slouch, that guy."

Schoverling's face clouded. "You've struck the nail on the head, Jack. That thought occurred to me also. Well, if he's there then we'll have to keep away and stick to the rogue. But if we get there first—by thunder, I'll load that cache into the wagon and get out with the elephant!"

"Still, in a way it belongs to him—" began Charlie, but the explorer grunted.

"Rot! His expedition lost out. Mowbray directed his letter to me or Selim, and said nothing about splitting up. Whoever gets there first lands the loot, that's flat. If it belonged to anyone, it belonged to the original bunch of slavers. However, we're counting our chickens a long while before the incubator's opened. When we get there it's time enough."

[178]

To this there was no answer. That night, sure enough, Charlie was glad that he had kept the big fires blazing high, for herds crowded about in vain endeavors to get at the water-hole, even pressing up to the thorn zareba, until the boy had to scatter burning brands among the quantities of eland and antelope and zebra, not wishing to shoot them. Two of the steel traps caught, however; one a slinking jackal and the other a fine oryx, both of which Charlie reluctantly shot with the small rifle belonging to the doctor.

In the morning Amir Ali reported that lions had been about, but they had made no disturbance, and the safari took up its advance soon after sun-up. At the noon halt they were still winding through the valley, but in the afternoon this opened out into open country once more. Jack had his glasses out and gave a yell of delight.

"There's the lake! Dead ahead!"

Even without the aid of glasses they could all see the shimmer of water in the sun, three miles ahead. The Masai gave a yell of joy at the news that they had nearly reached the end of their journey, but they could not hope to get up to the lake until evening with the slow-moving oxen. So, leaving the doctor and the Indians to defend the wagon if need were, Schoverling and his two assistants rode slowly onward to have a look at things and pick out a suitable place for the night's camp.

[179]

In half an hour they were standing on a slight rise that sloped down gently to the waters of the lake. These were thickly cloaked with reeds, but there was no sign of the high jets of hot water of Selim's story on the *Mombasa*.

"See that steam up at the other end of the lake?" said Schoverling, looking through his glasses. "That's where the hot springs are, no doubt."

"There's the island," cried Jack excitedly, who had moved a hundred feet away. Joining him, the others were now able to see a low island which had been hidden by intervening trees. It lay barely half a mile beyond them, and seemed almost a part of the shore. Beyond this the trees seemed to get thicker, while across the lake itself the green and brown hills rose to the height of a few hundred feet. In fact, hills seemed to be all around them, save to the south.

[180]

"Shouldn't wonder if this was one of the craters of an old volcano," declared the General.

"The ground has risen slightly, since we left the wagon, and those hills all around would

indicate such a thing, as would the steaming hot springs up at the other end. Well, we can ride forward to the island. Mowbray's camp must be there somewhere."

Keeping a wary eye open for any danger, they rode on until they arrived opposite the island. Here, under a group of spreading mimosas, they saw vague signs of an old camp. All was overgrown with vegetation, but as they rode down to it the indications of a camp were clear.

"There are tattered old tents, all right," exclaimed Charlie in huge excitement. "But animals and the weather have covered things up pretty well."

Arriving on the spot, they leaped from their saddles and kicked away vines.

"Here's a gun-butt," shouted Jack, holding up a moulded fragment of wood. "And here's the rest of it—an elephant gun." [181]

Schoverling took the pieces and fitted them together. The barrels were twisted and bent, the stock splintered. Rubbing the latter clear of mould, something gleamed in the sun and he uttered an exclamation.

"Mowbray's! Got his name on a silver plate. Well, that's worth keeping as a trophy, boys. Now about camp. This was a mighty poor place for him to land, but he wasn't expecting overgrown buffalo and pythons. There's a little rise behind, where we can camp for to-night, but to-morrow we'll try to get across to the island. That will be a whole lot safer from his majesty the rogue."

"Jumping sandhills, I forgot!" cried Charlie suddenly. "Say, General, we've beat the Arabs back, that's a cinch!"

CHAPTER XV

 [182]

"UNDER THE LEFT GATE-POST"

They made a brief examination of the ground for any sign of elephant spoor, but were relieved to find that there was nothing to indicate a recent visitation from the rogue to the scene of his exploits.

"Hold on," cried Charlie as they remounted. "Something's wrong!"

The faint sound of gun-shots drifted to them against the wind, and as the safari was out of sight behind the clusters of trees, all three urged their horses into a gallop, grave anxiety in their hearts. With rifles ready, they galloped on to find the wagon stuck hard and fast in a rocky drift, while at one side lay the huge body of a rhinoceros.

"All is well, sahib," saluted Gholab Singh, beaming. Von Hofe grinned through his beard.

"The rhino wished to inspect us, Schoverling, but the boys soon finished him off. We'll have to work to get out of this, I fear." [183]

Congratulating the four gun-bearers, all placed themselves at the wheels of the wagon, while Schoverling went to the heads of the cattle. After twenty minutes of hard work they got the wagon across the drift and onto better ground.

They told of finding the camp abandoned by Mowbray, and the General showed the fragments of the broken elephant-gun. This was a visible sign that the rogue elephant was indeed to be feared, and the doctor brightened up and rubbed his hands.

"Ach, he must be wonderful! Let us push on, please!"

They camped that night on the little hill that sloped down to the lake, just opposite the island. None knew what danger might lurk in the reeds, and as these seemed to be dry above the level of the water, with the wind off-shore, they sent the Masai ahead to fire them while the others waited with rifles ready.

The reeds blazed up quickly for a width of a hundred feet, beyond which they managed to keep the fire under control, for had it spread to the country behind it would have worked sad havoc with animal life. Gradually the smoke died down without anything having happened. But a moment later there was a rustling of the reeds and grass off to the right, and a cry broke from the Masai as a tremendous python swept toward them. [184]

The heavy guns roared out instantly. With its head blown to pieces, the huge snake lashed around for a few moments and then lay still. When they advanced to measure it the boys could hardly believe their senses. The python was a good forty feet in length, and while the excited Masai danced around, von Hofe took photographs eagerly.

"We'll get over to that island to-morrow." Schoverling peered through his glasses as the sun sank below the hills. "No trees on it, but you can make out the ruins of the place that Mowbray burned. We'll have to make sure the oxen can get across that thirty yards of water, too."

Von Hofe and Gholab Singh were on guard that night, but the dawn came without any

disturbance. The first move was to make sure that the cattle and wagon could get across the strip of water to the island; if not, then all their plans would have to be changed. Fortunately, they had met with no crocodiles in the country.

[185]

Schoverling and the boys, right after breakfast, rode down to the shore. The burned patch of reeds had left the lake clear before them, and as they urged the reluctant horses down into the water, they were gratified to find that it was shallow—at the deepest part there was only three feet of water. Without returning, they shouted to Gholab to lead on, for the bottom was sandy and strewn, with small rocks.

On these one of the oxen went down, but without injury. With the Masai tugging at the wheels to help, the wagon soon rolled up on the shore where the three were waiting, and they turned to look ahead. The island seemed bare of trees, which fact was explained later; only thorn-bushes clustered around them, the ground gently rising.

"There's the stronghold Mowbray talked about," exclaimed Charlie as they urged their horses to the crest of the little rise on the bank. Ahead of them lay the ruins of a burned building, black and desolate. Others could be seen behind, while around the first was a ring of half-burned stakes that had at one time formed a strong palisade of heavy timbers.

"We'd better keep out o' there," said Schoverling. "Here's a good place for the outspanning, just at the bank. Bakari, better get a thorn fence up right away. There's no telling what's liable to happen here, and we can command the shore at all events."

[186]

"Why can't we take a look around inside?" queried Jack, somewhat puzzled. "There's no sign of any animals around."

"Plague," returned the explorer briefly. "First thing we do, we must go back and get in some game. The Masai only got one impalla buck yesterday, and we can't run short on grub."

With no disappointment the boys gazed over the blackened ruins before them. At one time these must have formed a stronghold indeed. Signs of a "corduroy" road for wagons led down to the water; a clear spring bubbled out cold and refreshing from inside the compound and ran on past their camping-place; and the sturdy palisade had resisted even the fire. Charlie looked regretfully at the huge gate-posts, each nearly three feet thick and planted solidly in the ground.

"Well, the sooner we do the shooting the sooner we can dig," he sighed, and turned to the horses. The three gun-bearers had old Snider rifles of their own, which so far had not come into use, and these they left with the doctor and Gholab, carrying the 30-30s as had been their custom during the march.

[187]

It was still an hour before noon, and by midday they had shot two impalla, which with four hartebeest made up all the game they could carry back. No signs of danger were seen on that short excursion, although once a lion broke cover and trotted away ahead of them. The boys could see no sign of elephant with their glasses.

"He's around," laughed Schoverling to their expressions of doubt. "An old rogue will stay hidden away until he makes up his mind to wipe the earth with whomever's around. When we get ready to go after him, you'll have your hands full." Which statement later turned into a very true prophecy.

They rode back to camp to find the zareba done, and von Hofe standing before the charred gate-posts, hands on hips. He turned at their laughter and smiled.

"But yes," he retorted to their jokes as they surrounded him, "I too have the treasure-hunt fever got! Yet is there one question which puzzles me, my friends!"

[188]

"What's that?" laughed Charlie.

"The letter said 'under the left gate post.' Now, when you face the burned buildings here, this one is the left; but when you turn around, it becomes the right!"

"Well, we'll tackle that one first," smiled the explorer. "But we'll have to satisfy Gholab before we do anything else. Impalla steak would taste pretty good right now, to me."

None the less, the boys were too hungry to do much speculating over the treasure, eager though they were. Half an hour later, over their tea, a council was held as to just how to get at the cache. Spades they had none, and the spears and swords of the Masai were not fitted for digging.

"Listen," said Jack impatiently. "Mowbray said he located the cache, didn't he? Well, at best, he had only a few hours over here. When he burned down the place the smoke kept him from knowing that his Arabs had lit out. That stands to reason. He didn't have time to dig around; he knew right where that stuff was hid, and he went for it. If he found it, the earth would still be pretty loose where he dug."

[189]

"I've got a better scheme than digging," put in Charlie, his eyes gleaming. "Hitch up the cattle to the posts an' pull 'em out."

"Good!" shouted Schoverling. "We're behind the times on thoughts, Doctor! Gholab, inspan the cattle over by those posts."

Ten minutes later the oxen were standing ready, while the explorer and the boys made the ox-chains fast to one of the heavy posts. Slowly the oxen forged ahead, but to their dismay the post broke off short.

"That's a pretty good sign that the earth is unmoved," declared Schoverling cheerfully. "Now for the other one."

Once more the oxen were inspanned to the other post, and walked off at the yells of the Indians. This time a shout went up from all, for the huge post had been ripped out of the earth bodily, leaving a cavity exposed. Charlie leaped down at once, feeling around.

"More logs down here," he cried. "We'll have to throw out the dirt after all."

Instantly Jack was at his side, with two of the broad-bladed Masai knives. There was but room for one to work, but with Jack above and Charlie below the dirt began to fly at a great rate. The two boys were soon plastered with sandy mud. Then came a shout from Charlie, who was buried to his eyes.

"Catch hold, up there!"

Something rose above the ground, and Schoverling and Jack caught it, while the doctor peered down. No sooner had the explorer caught the long object than he gave a cry.

"Those aren't logs, Chuck! They're tusks—wrapped up for carriage!"

A moment later the hole had been enlarged in the sandy soil enough to let Jack leap down to his chum's aid. One by one the tusks were passed back to the Indians and Masai, who grouped them in a pile with much wondering chatter.

"Reg'lar cave down here," came the muffled voice of Jack. "All ready?"

"All ready," and more tusks came up. A moment later the dirt-smeared, excited face of Charlie appeared, and he clambered out, followed after by the figure of Jack.

"That's all, General. Hurray!"

"All!" echoed Schoverling. "Sure there's nothing else? Here, let me get down there."

For the first time Charlie remembered the gold-dust. But although the explorer poked around in the cave-like hole beneath with one of the Masai knives, he finally had to climb up with the admission that the boys had been right. There was no gold-dust.

For a few moments they stood around the huge pile of tusks, while von Hofe counted them. All were wrapped securely in canvas, mouldy and rotted away with the damp of the ground. Charlie tore at one and it came loose in his fingers.

"Thirty-two," announced the big German excitedly. "They vas all goot, but none fery large, too. Ach, vat a pile of ifory!"

"I'm sorry there was no gold-dust, though," said Schoverling. "Funny Mowbray mentioned it. Prob'ly he took it for granted that it was down there with the tusks. You don't suppose there could be a cache under that other post, do you?"

"One o' these would be plenty to build," returned Jack. "Let's have a look at the ivory, Chuck."

He pulled out his knife and ripped off the covering of the tusk Charlie had been pulling at. The ivory gleamed yellow and discolored in the sunlight, while a gasp of surprise went up from the Masai, as for the first time they realized what these things were. The gun-bearers gazed stolidly.

"What's this?"

Jack had held up the tusk, the point of which towered far above his head. As he lowered the hollow butt to the ground in triumph, Charlie sprang forward and picked up a little bag of skin that had been held inside the hollow end by a wooden plug, rotted away. The explorer leaped forward, whipping out his knife, and grabbed the little bag from Charlie's hand. One slash of the knife, and out trickled a little stream of yellow grains into the brown fist of the explorer.

"Gold!"

For a moment they all stood motionless, gazing at the little bag. Von Hofe's face expressed mild interest; that of Schoverling was aflame with passion; Charlie knew that his own eyes were gleaming and glittering, as were those of Jack. But almost instantly the General laughed and resumed control of himself.

"We're acting like a lot of fools. Here, boys, rip open the rest of those tusks and see if there are more sacks."

They fell to work with their knives, von Hofe joining in the

[190]

[191]

[192]



[193]

work, and a few moments later a little heap of skin bags, each the size of a man's fist, was piled up. Each tusk had held one, and two or three yet retained the wooden plugs, which had to be dug out, so firmly were they fastened.

One slash of the knife, and out trickled a little stream of yellow grains into the brown fist of the explorer.

Charlie stood at the edge of the group, oblivious to all else. Suddenly he felt the hand of his gun-bearer, Amir Ali, laid on his arm, and the Gurkha whispered in his ear.

"Will the sahib come over here?"

Wondering, the boy followed the Gurkha off to one side. The gun-bearer pointed to the mainland, toward the foot of the lake, and Charlie whipped out his glasses instantly.

CHAPTER XVI

[194]

SELIM SHOWS HIS TEETH

No sooner had he obtained a focus than Charlie gave a cry of surprise. There, half a mile away still, were a dozen camels grouped together and covering the ground with huge strides. On their backs he could make out the white figures of men, and something flashed in the sunlight like a rifle-barrel.

Despite his surprise, Charlie saw with a glance that the others had not heeded him, and smiled. Casing his glasses, he walked back to the group and stood beside Schoverling, who was examining some of the gold-dust from the opened bag.

"I have a little surprise-party for you," he said quietly. They looked up at him, but Jack caught something in his voice. "You might be interested in knowing that Selim and his party are about half a mile away and coming up at full speed."

With a rush and a shout the party ran to where they could get a good look at the mainland, Charlie smiling at the sensation his words had created. Gholab, whose keen eyes had first detected the approaching camels, came running from the camp with the rifles in his arms.

[195]

Schoverling, after a long look through his glasses, turned and took one of the 30-30s without a word, buckling on his bandolier hurriedly. Von Hofe turned to him protestingly.

"We are not going to fight, Schoverling?"

"Don't see what else," returned the explorer, grimly, as he motioned to the boys to take their rifles and bandoliers. "Those are Arabs beyond any question. There's only one thing they are here for, and that's the ivory and gold."

With a troubled look, the doctor watched them.

"You don't mean that they'd fight for it, General?" asked Charlie, pausing. "Are you joking or do you mean it?"

"Mean it?" repeated the explorer, his bronzed face hardening. "Why, boys, there's a fortune in that stuff there! Do you think for a minute that those Arabs are going to give it up to us, or that I'm going to hand it over to them? Not much! We've got it and we'll keep it while we have a cartridge left!"

[196]

The Indians grinned, while they loaded their own Sniders, Gholab taking one of the heavy Hammonds. Schoverling took command of the situation, while the boys gazed at each other in dismay, knowing that he would never give in, and not relishing the idea themselves of either fighting or giving up the treasure that lay there in the sun before them.

"Bakari! Come here. Gholab, you see that the cattle are led inside this old stockade, which will keep them under cover from shore at least. Bakari, post your men to north and south in the bushes fronting the mainland. Do you understand? But don't loose an arrow or spear until I tell you. Got that?"

The Masai understood well enough, and his fierce eyes glittered at the thought of battle with the Arabs, whom every native hated with good reason. The oxen were led inside the half-burned stockade and left to themselves.

"Now, Doctor," and Schoverling's voice was very keen and cold, "this isn't your funeral, you know. If we have a row with these fellows you had better keep—"

"You are crazy as a loon, yes!" roared the big Teuton with a smile. "Would we gife up all dis?" and his hand swept toward the tusks. "Never, mine friends! I like not to fight, und maybe we don't fight, but ve vill not gife up,—nein!"

[197]

At this emphatic declaration the explorer smiled grimly. A look showed Charlie and Jack that the camels were almost to their old camp above the lake, opposite.

"If there's any chance to get out of it, General," said Charlie, "I suppose you won't go huntin' for trouble?"

"Not I," returned Schoverling. "There are twelve of them and eight of us, besides the Masai, but we've got the stuff and we've got a strong position here. Well, come on down to the shore and we'll see what's doing."

Five minutes later they stood in the bushes above the water. The Indians Schoverling posted at intervals, the Masai being hidden farther on. Across the way, through the burned opening in the reeds, they could see the camels drawing up on the eminence a hundred yards back from the lake, and through their glasses the boys distinctly made out the figure of Selim ben Amoud, in white burnous. [198]

The Arabs bunched together for a few moments, examining the island through their glasses. The wagon and zareba were in plain sight, but they seemed to be puzzled by the absence of men or cattle. All were armed with rifles, and two or three began picketing out the camels, others taking off the camel-bags and proceeding to make camp. A moment later the tall form of Selim ben Amoud advanced alone to the edge of the water. As he did so, Schoverling rose to his feet and greeted him with a warning shout in Arabic.

"*Naharak said, Selim!*"

Selim paused, evidently in astonishment, stared, and half-raised his rifle. Then he dropped it again, and Charlie could distinctly see his white teeth flashing in the sun.

"*Naharak said, effendi!* So it is my friend Mr. Schoverling, eh? What a delightful surprise to meet you here!"

"I guess it's a surprise all right, Selim," responded the explorer. "But the delight is all on your side. Are you out trading?"

"If you would come across and visit us," returned the Arab evasively, "we would be very, very pleased to receive you." [199]

"Don't doubt it a bit," and Schoverling grinned. "Say, come on over and have tea, Selim. Come alone, though. You can trust me but I don't trust you worth a whoop."

For answer the Arab waved his hand and turned back to his camels. The boys gazed after him in curiosity, and Charlie turned to the explorer.

"Think he'll come, Gen'ral?"

"You bet," laughed the other. "He's dying to know whether we've found that cache, and he'd trust me well enough. But we've got to make ready. Jack, go and sling a tent over that pile of ivory. Gholab!"

"Ready, sahib."

"Make tea for all of us, with Selim thrown in. A slice of that impalla for him, too, as he's apt to be hungry. Guru, you and Akram and Ali keep hidden. When I call for you, come alone."

"Yes, sahib."

"What you goin' to do, General?" asked Charlie as the explorer told him to return to the zareba with von Hofe and make every preparation to receive their visitor. [200]

"I'm goin' to run a big bluff on him," said Schoverling. "Remember, those chaps are watching everything we do. Ah, Selim's taking a camel. Keep well hidden up there, Guru!"

With this parting admonition he departed. As they walked slowly back toward the camp, Charlie saw Schoverling pause amid the bushes, fling out his arm as if talking to some one, and point toward the shore. At one place he called Bakari and two of the warriors, whose appearance and disappearance caused a flutter in the group of Arabs.

Selim, meanwhile, had mounted a camel and was approaching the shore. It was only three in the afternoon, and the stately Arab, clad in pure white from head to foot, gleamed in the sunshine, to the admiration of the boys. He drove his ungainly steed into the water and they splashed across. Schoverling, returning, met them at the shore of the island, and led the camel forward to the camp.

Selim cast quick glances to right and left, but the gate-post hole and the treasure were hid beneath canvas and behind the grazing horses—a touch of Jack's. The camel knelt, and the Arab slipped off, Charlie dividing his attention between the man and the ugly, thick-lipped camel. [201]

They all shook hands with smiling courtesy, as if rifles had not been leveled five minutes before, and squatted on blankets around the folding canvas table. Gholab was just making ready tea and a slice of game for the Arab.

"So," smiled Selim, though his black eyes narrowed, "you found the wonderful lake of Quilqua, after all! Did you have any guides?"

"We had Mowbray for a guide," retorted Schoverling dryly. A look of astonishment went over the dark face as the explorer handed him his own map. Then, in a few words, the General related

how they had found Mowbray and produced the letter in proof. As he finished, Gholab came up with the tea, the plate of impalla for Selim, and one or two biscuits. The Arab glanced at the game hesitatingly.

"All right, Selim," declared the explorer. "There is no salt on it. Take away the biscuits, Gholab."

Charlie and Jack interchanged a meaning glance. The Arab would eat no salt with them, which was not a good sign. But he fell to on the venison with gusto, and for half an hour the talk was merely of the country, the game, and their trip. Selim stated that the Arabs who deserted Mowbray had all perished crossing the desert except one, who had remained to guide him with a rescue party. He congratulated them warmly over their first elephant hunt, and also on their battle with the buffalo. But at last Schoverling became exasperated. [202]

"Look here, Selim," he said firmly, "you and I know each other pretty well, and I don't see any use in beating about the bush. Did you come after Mowbray, and nothing else?"

The Arab's face changed, his lids narrowing and his cruel smile thinning down. He met the gaze of the American squarely.

"Do you know of anything else I might have come after?"

"It might have been ivory and gold-dust, for one thing," with which the explorer relieved the tense situation by proffering a cigar. Von Hofe smiled to himself as Selim took it with no indication that the words had startled him.

"Yes," he admitted, "it might." He lit the cigar calmly. At the same moment Guru came into sight, evidently having received some instructions beforehand that Charlie had missed. He advanced toward the party and saluted. [203]

"Well?" said Schoverling.

"Report, sahib. Two of the Arabs have gone up north by the shore."

"You'd better call over to your men, Selim," chuckled the American. "They're liable to meet a buffalo or python in there." The Arab shrugged his shoulders unconcernedly. "Very well, Guru. Keep the men just as they are. Send out twenty of the Masai to spread along the shore to the north. Your men are arranged?"

"Yes, sahib," said the quick-witted Sikh impassively. "Ten near the ford under Amir, and my ten somewhat to the south."

"You may go." Guru saluted and wheeled. Charlie, watching Selim's clear-cut face during this amazing dialogue, saw it change expression slightly.

"You have quite a force, Schoverling," remarked the Arab calmly. "Then, I suppose that you have found the gold-dust and the ivory?"

"Under that canvas," and the explorer pointed. "The game's up, Selim ben Amoud. We got here first, that's all. If your men had not deserted Mowbray he would have cleaned up the stuff. As it is, we have it." [204]

"Yes, you have it," repeated Selim slowly. "But, my friend, you shall not have it long."

"Oh, we have men enough to defend it," retorted the American carelessly. Charlie drew a quick breath. "You have only a dozen over there, and could not cross the strait under our fire."

"If it comes to that," and Selim's teeth glinted, "you cannot cross under *our* fire, my friend. I learned of the cache and of this lake, and equipped the first expedition. By right, that treasure is mine."

"But I found it," returned the explorer brutally. "And by might it is mine."

For a moment tense silence fell upon the group. The boys watched the slim Arab, whose composure never gave way under the strain, which must have been terrific. He puffed slowly at his cigar, and then smiled.

"Mr. Schoverling, and you, Dr. von Hofe, you will realize that your men cannot subsist on air. They must have food. You may be too strong for us in open fight, but at least we can keep you on the island. I do not give up so easily. You may give me trouble, but in the end you will die—either of starvation or by bullet. By the way, this brush seems to be pretty dry. When my men were here it was green. I think a taste of fire—you catch my meaning!" [205]

Charlie, at least, caught it and stared aghast at the cruel smile of the Arab.

CHAPTER XVII

FRESH SPOOR

"That's a good bluff, Selim," rejoined Schoverling coolly, "but it won't go down with me. You might as well give in."

The other shook his head, still smiling. But at this instant Jack, who had listened with intense interest to the duel of words, struck in and cut the Gordian knot.

"Look here, General, and Mr. ben Amoud," he said, leaning forward earnestly. "There's no sense in getting hot-headed over this. As near's I can see, we've each got a mighty good excuse to scrap, and we can do a whole lot of damage once we start. But this country isn't the place to start a row, not to my notion."

"You hold on, Gen'ral, till I get through. We might shoot things up consid'able, both of us, an' when we got through there wouldn't be enough of us left to get back home with. If you start anything, Selim, we'll raise you the limit; but there's no sense to it. I say, let's each of us divvy up the loot an' dig out for home."

[207]

That Schoverling had not considered any division of the cache was evident, and he considered Jack's speech silently. Selim, however, smiled again.

"My young friend, you are very wise. Mr. Schoverling, perhaps we might agree on that basis. A fight would be costly to each of us, and might leave us unable to get home, as is suggested. I am none too anxious to stay in this land after the tales you tell. I recognize the fact that you have the advantage of having the treasure in your power, and see no reason why we shoud not share it and be gone."

Schoverling hesitated as Selim spoke. He plainly realized the force of the argument, and yet to give up even a share of the ivory and dust went against the grain. Perhaps he doubted the good faith of his friend the enemy, but in any case von Hofe's grunt of approbation decided him.

"It iss goot," said the doctor anxiously. "We haf come for elephant, please."

"All right," and the American's face cleared as he held out his hand to the Arab. "We'll split even, Selim!"

[208]

"Hurray!" shouted Charlie in delight. "Bully for you, General! Good work, Jack!"

"That is entirely agreeable," smiled Selim, as he gripped Schoverling's hand. "Now, my friends, we have been in this country for two days, and I have many affairs to get back to. There is no reason why we should delay here for an hour. It is still two hours to sunset, and our camels could cover much ground before then. So, if you are willing, let us divide the spoils and I will trouble you no more."

"That suits us," exclaimed the explorer, springing to his feet. "Come along and we'll have a look at the stuff."

Casting a glance opposite as they arose, Charlie saw that the Arabs had started a fire and seemed to be eating, while the camels grazed. The party left the zareba and moved over to the stockade. Jack threw the canvas from the two piles, and for a moment the Arab's eyes glittered as he surveyed the great heap of ivory.

"Those tusks," he said, "will be hard for us to carry off. We had thought to sling them on our camels, but after our experience of that desert to the north it would make hard work, I fear."

[209]

"Well," suggested Charlie, "you might swap your share of the ivory for some of our gold-dust. That would make it easier to carry."

"Yes," added the General thoughtfully. "We can carry the tusks easily enough in the wagon. There are sixteen each, Selim, and the same number of bags. Here's one I cut open."

The Arab ran the soft gold-dust through his fingers for a moment.

"There is no use stopping to count or weigh all this, Schoverling. Each tusk must be worth, at an average, some fifteen pounds at the coast. Each of these bags seems to be of a size, and they are probably weighed to the same amount. My share of the ivory is worth, at a guess, some two hundred and forty pounds, or twelve hundred of your dollars. What would you say the dust weighs?"

"That is a little hard to say," returned the American. "I rather think, however, that an estimate of about two hundred and fifty dollars—or fifty pounds a bag—would be just about right. If that suits you, I'm agreeable."

"I think that is nearly correct," smiled Selim, nodding. "It is, I believe, slightly an underestimate, but that matters little. Then, at the rate we figure, I would have twenty-one bags as my share, leaving you all the ivory. That is correct?"

[210]

"Perfectly," returned Schoverling. "It looks to me like a fair split, and if the gold runs over that figure, I won't kick. I'll throw in an odd bag for good luck, Selim; that leaves us an even ten and the ivory. There must be more gold where that came from, just the same. You might come back here with a good force and make a clean-up, old man."

"Perhaps I will," said the other seriously. "Now, will you help me get these bags into my saddle-bags? I have no fancy to remain overnight by this lake."

All pitched in and helped to carry the twenty-two little bags of precious metal over to the camel, which was kneeling and chewing stolidly. Jack stepped too near with his burden, and the vicious head swung about to snap. He leaped back amid the laughter of the rest, who remained at a safe distance.

"Well, I suppose we must part," smiled Selim, holding out his hand as the last of the bags was laced in the leathern flaps. "It would be insincere to say that I am not sorry at finding you here before me, but I am really very glad we did not have to fight. To tell the truth, my men were almost too frightened to remain here, and had it come to fighting, they would have refused point-blank."

[211]

"Well," laughed Schoverling whimsically, "I might as well show under true colors, since you have led the way," and he called in all the men. At sight of their real numbers, Selim gave a shout of laughter.

"Good, brother, good!" he cried as he urged his camel forward from its knees. "We played the game well, you and I." He waved a hand as the camel plunged into the water at the ford. "*Abqa'la kheir!*"

"*Abqa'la kheir,*" shouted the American, and the two boys waved their hats with attempts at the Arabic, which drew a last laughing wave from Selim. Then his camel went up the farther bank.

"That means 'until the next time,'" laughed Schoverling. "Well, I'm glad that we got out of that as we did."

"So am I," declared von Hofe, smiling broadly. "See, they are going."

[212]

So it appeared, for as Selim joined the rest there was an immediate bustle. The camels were unpicketed, the saddles adjusted, and the camp broken. All twelve Arabs were now in camp, and one by one the awkward steeds rose to their feet.

"They're mighty fine beasts," declared Schoverling. "No common camels there, but picked racers, worth a fortune apiece. Selim does things up right, no doubt about that."

"He come pretty near doing us up right," grinned Jack. Then came a flutter of the burnouses, those on the island waved, and the group of camels moved away at an amazing speed, to the southwest.

"Probably going to circle around the hills and strike for the north," commented Charlie.

While daylight remained they did nothing save store the ivory in the wagon and place the gold-dust in the brass trunk belonging to von Hofe.

It was decided to place the traps along the shore of the island near the mainland, and all the men were called upon to make note of where they were placed, as they would be left in position until the camp was abandoned.

The injured Masai were slowly recovering from their hurts, for although their wounds rapidly healed, the broken bones took longer. As they sat around the dinner-table that night the four explorers decided that every day spent in that country added to their danger, and that the search for the rogue elephant should begin the next morning.

[213]

"I'm kind of disappointed," muttered Charlie to Jack, as they rolled up that night with Schoverling on guard. "Aren't you? I thought that stuff would be worth heaps o' coin, but according to the General's figures it doesn't come to more'n five thousand iron men."

"What're you looking for?" retorted Jack wearily. "Four or five million? S'pose we split up on that, it means a thousand each, easy. Why, I never saw a thousand dollars in my life. It looks mighty good to me, Chuck."

"Oh, it looks good," admitted Charlie hastily. "But when you talk about treasure you reckon in big figures. I'm not kicking, though,—not on your life! Good thing you came in when you did with that splitting proposition. How'd you happen to think of it?"

"Who wouldn't?" returned Jack. "Made me tired to hear 'em sit there and argue back and forth, making threats and so on. No sense in it."

[214]

Nothing occurred that night to disturb the camp, although the Masai kept up until late a dance and chant in triumph at having, as they supposed, put the Arabs to flight. But in the morning Schoverling made an announcement that roused everyone.

"About eleven last night," he said at breakfast, "I heard a big crashing north of us, farther toward the head of the lake. Then came snorts, and a single trumpet. Sounded as if the rogue elephant was out on a stroll and had run into a buffalo or something."

"Then I feel very sorry for that buffalo," smiled von Hofe. "We shall all go out this morning, no?"

"You don't have to go, Doctor," said the explorer earnestly. "At best you could only take one of the rifles, for we'll have to carry the big guns."

"Pouf!" grunted the German. "It is my party, and I shall go."

"We might as well go on foot," declared the American. "Now, boys, we can put a little tracking into play. The Masai won't do us any good. As near as I can see, we'll have to catch that fellow when he isn't looking for trouble. And remember, under no circumstances fire at his head."

[215]

"How about the bull you killed back at Kenia?" objected Charlie. "You put a bullet in each eye, an' laid him out cold."

"He was within ten feet of me then, and I had no choice in the matter. No, when we do get a shot just you aim to cripple him—in the shoulder or leg. If he charges, hit his trunk or break his leg. One of those bullets, big as they are, would simply flatten out on his skull and stun him."

Von Hofe, who still wished to kill one of the giant buffalo himself, took a 30-30, and Akram Das had perforce to take his Snider or go weaponless. The three hunters carried their own heavy guns, for they might be needed at an instant's notice, and filled their bandoliers to the limit. Gholab Singh was left in charge of the camp with five Masai, Bakari and the other five accompanying the party as flankers and scouts.

An hour after sunrise they waded across the strip of water between the island and shore, and turned toward the head of the lake, as it was in this direction that the explorer had heard the elephant during the preceding night. There seemed to be no sign of any game around them, for once, at which Jack wondered.

[216]

"Scared out," said the explorer grimly, "if that rogue was around."

Ahead, the country did not appear so densely wooded as they had thought. It ascended toward the hills beyond in gentle, rolling swells, and they had no difficulty in advancing through the knee-deep grass. On every hand were trees in clumps or singly, but no sign of elephant spoor could they see.

"Maybe we'd better strike in a little from the river," suggested Charlie. "Jack and I could have a look, anyhow, an' we might pick up a trail."

"I don't think there's much danger that he'd be here, so go ahead," returned Schoverling to their delight. "Circle around for a couple of hundred yards, but don't get out of sight. If he was here last night, he was probably drinking, and has gone in to feed."

The two boys left the party, followed by Akram and Amir Ali, their gun-bearers. But although they searched the ground well, no sign of a trail did they see. Getting a little farther from the party all the time, they proceeded for nearly a mile, and found the forest verging into a jungle of bamboo.

[217]

"Jack," exclaimed Charlie quietly, stopping, "come over here."

Jack and the Indians joined him, and he pointed to the ground a yard ahead. There, deep in the soft soil, was the fresh spoor of an elephant—and at its size the Indians gave a gasp of wonder. It was the rogue!

CHAPTER XVIII

[218]

LOST!

Charlie looked around. The bamboos were all about them, and without retracing their steps they could not summon the others. Jack gripped his arm.

"Look here, Chuck! Let's cut away from the General an' get after that rogue ourselves!"

"Got to obey orders," and Charlie negatived it with a shake of the head. "That spoor is too fresh to suit me, Jack."

"Well, then," and Jack was quivering with eagerness; "we can start on an' send Akram back—slow. We ain't kids. We can tell pretty well if we get up on him."

Charlie considered this proposition for a moment. He longed to have the triumph of downing the old rogue himself, and yet he knew that Schoverling would countenance no disobedience, no departure from orders. But that fresh spoor, leading off through the trees, tempted him and at last he fell.

[219]

"All right. Akram, you go back and call the General. But don't hurry. Tell him that we'll wait for him at the first sign of any danger."

The Indian grinned, saluted, and loitered away. Without hesitation Charlie turned and led the way along the trail. This followed a newly-broken path through the bamboos, and five minutes later they were swallowed up in the dense thickets.

Both the boys had been used, Jack especially, to following the trail of deer or moose and smaller animals through the woods of the northland, but this was very different. The ground was soft, and the huge bulk of the elephant had sent his feet down at times three or four feet. However, they were able to read the signs of the trail well enough.

"He stopped to feed here," declared Charlie, pointing to a tangle of broken branches at one side. Wherever possible they trod in his tracks, as no sticks or twigs remained to crack beneath their feet; the holes in the swamplier ground they of course avoided.

"Hello, what's this?" cried Jack. A new trail merged into that which they followed, and by a footprint they knew it for that of one of the giant buffaloes. "We've got to see if he's waiting or not."

[220]

The Indian watched them stolidly, gun ready, while they examined the broken bamboos and twigs, as well as the hoof-prints.

"He came in ahead o' the rogue," declared Charlie positively. "Look, here's a deep buffalo-print that's dry. There's one 'bout as deep made by the rogue, but there's water at the bottom. Then these trees over here are dry, but there's still a little sap on the elephant's trail."

"Then they came by last night, sure enough," said Jack. "The buffalo started along feeling pretty good. Stopped to nibble here. The rogue struck into his trail and swished right along careless. Stopped to rub on that tree—there's buffalo hair—whew! Say, that rogue is big!"

"Twelve feet up," said Amir Ali with a delighted display of teeth, as he reached in vain toward the scarred bark.

Somewhat sobered by this, the boys stared at each other until Charlie resumed the march. No sign had come from behind of Schoverling and the rest. Fifty feet farther on the bamboos thinned out, and in a little glade they came upon fresher tracks.

[221]

"Hello!" cried Jack. "Buffalo stopped to feed over here but didn't stay long. Look at the tracks, Chuck. He turned around and stood for a minute, till his hoofs sunk down. Most likely that's where he heard the elephant coming along."

"Well, he didn't wait." Charlie was bending over the spoor as he walked along, reading the sign eagerly. "He pushed right ahead after a minute—say, do you s'pose that was the rumpus the General heard last night? He said it sounded like a buffalo and an elephant!"

Jack shook his head, and now they followed the trail out onto higher ground. The bamboos thinned behind them, and before them were scattered woods, heavy, flat-topped thorn trees, junipers,

and others the boys did not know, while the country was well broken up by little rises. But that was not what caused the boys to leap forward.

In the open space ahead lay a shapeless mass that had once been a buffalo. It was easy to tell what had happened here. The elephant, possibly coming upon the great bull at the edge of the bamboos, had paid no attention to him; possibly had brushed him aside. At all events, the bull had drawn blood, for they saw spots on the edge of the elephant spoor. The huge rogue had plainly turned and pressed his opponent against a big tree, which was scraped and dotted with hair and blood. But this stood a good fifteen feet away from the position of the buffalo, and there were only elephant tracks between!

[222]

"Jumping sandhills!" cried Charlie, realizing the truth. "He must have caught up that buffalo and *flung* him! Then he went over and kneeled all over him."

"Right you are," exclaimed Jack. "Ugh, what a mess! Let's go on."

As they turned, a vulture came winging out of the sky and descended without fear on the carcass. Charlie pointed out that they must be wrong.

"This is another bull, Jack. If the other fellow fought last night, the vultures would be on him by now. Anyhow, that sap was too fresh on the twigs. Bet a dollar the rogue had two scraps last night instead of one."

[223]

That they were right was verified a moment later by Amir Ali, who attracted their attention to a moving object behind some trees six hundred yards away, at the crest of a rise. The boys had their glasses out instantly.

"It's either a rhino or the fellow we're after," declared Jack with a low exclamation. "He's moving off—there he goes on the other side!"

"Come on!" cried Charlie, running forward. Carried away beyond all thought of caution by the excitement, Jack and Amir Ali dashed after him recklessly. It had been impossible to make out the elephant clearly by reason of the trees between, but Charlie had no doubt that he was the one they were after.

That they were plunging into grave danger never occurred to him, nor did he wonder why Schoverling and the rest had not come up. The sun was now high overhead, and the higher ground around them bore no tracks. But neither boy had eye for anything except that clump of trees where the huge animal had stood.

"You keep your eye peeled," cried Jack, at his chum's shoulder. "He's liable to be waitin' there."

[224]

But as the trees opened out ahead they saw that the elephant had not waited. The group of mimosas where he had been was waving slowly in the wind, and for the first time Charlie remembered that most essential part of African hunting. A brief glance, however, showed that

they were across the wind from their prey, and so were safe enough. What lay beyond the mimosas was hidden by the rise, toward which they were rapidly approaching.

Panting, the boys at length drew up to the trees, and the country ahead unfolded. To their keen disappointment, there was no sign of the elephant to be seen. Jack, however quickly pointed to some tall bushes that grew on a slope to their left, more in the direction of the lake.

"There he is! See them bushes wave, Chuck? Better send in a bullet!"

"Cut it!" exclaimed Charlie sharply as Jack brought up his rifle. "Remember what the General said—that we'd have to catch him when he wasn't looking? Got to bust a leg first crack or we're goners. Say, how'll the rest know where we are?"

"They can follow our tracks," cried Jack over his shoulder, as he fell into a lope and headed for the bushes, beyond which rose trees. They were but four hundred yards away, and could plainly be seen waving as some heavy body struggled through them. The thought crossed Charlie's brain as he followed, that even Schoverling would have a hard time tracking; them on that high, rocky ground, but he dismissed it carelessly enough. Amir Ali pounded along after them, grimly determined not to be left behind.

[225]

They were soon near the bushes, but instead of venturing into them, Jack turned aside toward a small hill. Charlie was at his heels, and a moment later the two boys drew up with a simultaneous cry of dismay.

"Rhino!" ejaculated Charlie in disgust. "We're a dandy pair, we are!"

Emerging from the bushes, a hundred yards farther on, was a huge rhinoceros. They were now down-wind, and he neither heard nor saw them, but trotted off lumberingly without so much as a glance in their direction.

"We're a nice bunch of idiots," said Jack angrily, unconsciously including the innocent Amir in the epithet. "We just saw something big and gray moving around, and took it for granted he was an elephant. We should have stuck to the trail, Chuck."

[226]

"Well," returned Charlie, "we're here. Next question is, where are we?"

"Where are we?" repeated Jack, turning in surprise. "Why, we headed east to that first clump of trees, and then north to here. There's the bamboo patch we left, over there."

"Not much," retorted his chum with conviction. "We headed south first, and then east. There's our elephant trail," and he pointed to a second patch of bamboo jungle to their left.

For a moment the two stared at each other. Then Jack broke into a laugh.

"Say, remember that story 'bout the two tenderfeet up north o' Smith's Landing? One said east was one way, the other said it was the other way. They had a scrap and each went east for the camp. An hour later they come face to face in the same place. Well, that's us."

Charlie appealed to Amir Ali, but the Indian shrugged his shoulders and declared that he had not kept the sense of direction, supposing that the sahibs had done so. As neither boy had followed the compass, the instruments were of little use to them.

[227]

"Plain fact of the matter is, we're lost," announced Charlie. "If we fired our guns we'd get the General down on us soon enough, but it'd scare off the rogue."

"Be a heap more likely to bring *him* down on us," grunted Jack. "We've got to find the bunch before the General gets sore, Chuck."

Charlie suggested following their track back, but of course this proved impracticable. There were clumps of mimosa thorn in every direction, each similar to that which they had first headed for. They had left no tracks on the bare, rocky soil, and the grass had closed behind them in the wind.

The tired Amir Ali squatted down to rest, while with their glasses they searched in every direction. They thought of the smoke from the camp-fire, but this was invisible behind the trees. In the distance moved a herd of zebra and another of impalla, but this was the only indication of life that they could find.

"We'll hear the General shooting pretty soon," said Charlie disgustedly. "What's that over in those trees? Looks like an old native village."

[228]

"Let's go over an' see," suggested Jack. "We can camp down there and build a fire. That'll draw the General quicker'n shots would. They might get the rogue's notice."

"Ain't so eager," grinned Charlie. "What's the matter? Nerve failed you?"

"No," confessed the other. "It's all right chasing along when you know the rest of them are right behind. But to get stuck off somewhere all by yourself isn't so soothing. Guess we won't monkey with that rogue till the General comes along."

They started across the slope to where a few of the ruined huts showed the location of a former village. This, when they reached it, proved to be of large extent, a few huts yet standing, others lying in over-grown mounds amid the trees. To their right extended fairly open plain, while

at the left the heavier forest and bamboo patches closed in almost to the village.

Jack set about building a fire to send up a smoke-signal, while Charlie wandered through the desolate village. Suddenly he came upon something that surprised him. Lying in a half-cleared space were the half-burned sticks and the ashes of a fire. Plainly, they had been there for weeks, for vines were growing through, but they could not be as old as the village itself. He called Jack over to look at it.

[229]

"This must be where Mowbray hit off to after the rogue," exclaimed Jack excitedly. "We're plumb on his tracks. I'm goin' to let off a gun, rogue or no rogue. There—that's the bunch now!"

To their ears came the faint report of a heavy gun, borne over the trees, Jack lifted his own Hammond, and sent off both barrels in response.

"That'll get him," he chuckled as he threw out the shells and reloaded. "Now for the fire."

But as he turned away, a startled cry from Amir Ali drew their attention.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

[230]

"Sahibs! Sahibs! The elephant!"

At first the boys looked behind him, taking it for granted that he was running from the danger. But at his gestures they whirled, and there Charlie saw a sight that he never forgot.

Breaking slowly and deliberately from the forest to their left, three hundred yards from where they stood, was an elephant. But no ordinary tusker, this. To the startled imaginations of the two boys it seemed that the tremendous brute towered far above them; in reality, he was over thirteen feet tall, but his immense tusk and huge flapping ears increased his terrific aspect two-fold.

"Jumping sandhills!" breathed Charlie. He heard Jack give a startled gasp at his side.

They were up-wind, and the elephant not only heard but saw them. For a moment he stood, and the boys were so awed by that terrible sight that they forgot to shoot. With his great trunk flung far up, those twelve-foot tusks stretched far up, and the great semi-circular ears lifted up until they almost met above his head, he seemed like some prehistoric monster from thousands of years ago.

[231]

Watching the evil glitter of the little red eyes, Charlie stood as if paralyzed. He realized how the primitive men must have felt when they stood face to face with some huge mammoth, hurling against him their stone-tipped spears and wielding stone axes.

The very thought woke him to himself, bringing back to mind the gun in his hands. Jack stood, awestruck at that fearsome sight, and Charlie yelled at him. As he did so, the rogue elephant curled forward his trunk and trumpeted loud and shrill—a wild scream of rage and defiance that sent the chattering monkeys scurrying in frightened silence.

"Shoot, sahibs!" implored the sweating Amir Ali, not daring to infringe the rules himself.

Once again the elephant trumpeted, and broke forward with a lurch that sent the trees crashing down around him. Jack, trembling with buckfever, flung up his gun and let go both barrels at once. The shock sent him over backward with a groan.

[232]

Charlie waited an instant. He knew that Amir was helping Jack up, but those two cordite bullets had not stopped the great rogue—if, indeed, they had hit him at all. As it proved, both bullets had merely raked along his side. Then he charged—terribly, deadly, asking and receiving no quarter from these puny men who dared to stand before him.

For that instant Charlie felt a wild inclination to turn and run. Then he conquered himself and became cool as he heard the click of Jack's rifle-breech behind him. Up went his Holland, and aiming for the elephant's right fore-leg, he pulled trigger.

Without pausing to see the effect, he followed it instantly with the second ball. During one brief moment it seemed that neither had taken effect, and with feverish energy Charlie pressed home two fresh shells. That awe-inspiring beast was a hundred and fifty yards away, and each second seemed an hour. But, just as Jack stepped forward and fired again, the great beast rocked and went down.

[233]

Both bullets had struck his fore-leg, shattering it. A wild thrill of hope ran through Charlie and he leaped forward. But the rogue had vitality beyond the ordinary, vitality and a tremendous raging strength that carried him to his feet again. For an instant he stood, lurching and rocking on three legs, trumpeting shrilly until the woods re-echoed, and then the horrified Charlie saw him plunge forward, trunk thrown out.

Again Jack fired, and splinters of skin and bone flew from the rogue's head. Charlie realized

full well that his only hope lay in crippling the terrible beast, crippling him so that he could advance no farther. A hundred yards away now, and as he raised the big rifle slowly, mist blurred his sight for a moment. All depended on those two last shots in his rifle.

The mist cleared away. It seemed that the great beast was towering over him, reaching for him with that terrible trunk. But he resisted the temptation to fire at the head, and drew a careful bead on the left fore-shoulder.

Charlie never remembered firing those two shots. The next thing he knew, the rogue was standing before him, then the great head went down with a shrill scream of pain and anger, the mighty form crumpled, and with a crash that shook the very earth beneath them the rogue elephant toppled forward.

[234]

Something long and white flashed past, and from behind came a sudden scream of pain. Whirling, Charlie saw Amir Ali, who had stuck to them bravely, stagger away and sink down. As the elephant dropped, his impetus and the tremendous weight of his gigantic body had snapped off short one of the ends of his tusks, the severed ivory flying forward and striking the Gurkha in the head.

Charlie ran to the man's side, but at a shout from Jack left him and sprang up. The rogue was not dead yet. Fighting to the last, he was trying to rise to his shattered knees, trumpeting till the woods rang again with the horrible screams. Jack was dashing around to his side for a finishing shot, and Charlie watched. Despite himself, he could not help feeling a throb of pity for the great animal, rogue and destroyer though he might be, struggling there so desperately to rise.

And, impossible though it seemed, the elephant actually regained his feet. But even as he did so the shattered fore-legs crumpled up again, and with a low muttering moan of pain he went down. A moment later Jack fired, twice, placing each bullet behind the left shoulder.

[235]

Charlie saw the mighty trunk go up, but no sound issued forth. The red eyes seemed to meet his as with one tremendous effort the rogue lurched up once more, then the huge ears sagged down, the trunk frothed forth bloody foam and fell in the dust, and with a single groan the elephant went over on his side, dead.

Charlie's first thought was for Amir Ali. Reaching the man's side, he pulled the stopper from his canteen and poured water over the Gurkha's head, which was flowing with blood. The wound, however, proved to be slight and the man was but stunned. Charlie gazed down at the foot-long sliver of ivory, and rose. He felt unable to do more, and glanced around for Jack. The other was sitting in the grass, gazing at the dead rogue.

Feeling his knees growing weak with the reaction, Charlie staggered to his side and sank down. For a few moments neither boy spoke. There was something terrible about having killed such an animal, something that oppressed them both with a feeling that it was not yet over, that at any moment he might rise and come at them.

[236]

Charlie tried to speak, but his throat was dry. He had emptied his canteen over Amir, and caught that of Jack. Taking a swallow, he forced the water on Jack, and a moment later the boys rose to their feet.

"I'm kind of sorry," was all Jack could find to say, as he stared down at the brute who had lived so badly and died so well. Charlie shared his feeling, but a moment later a loud gun-shot came to his ears. He remembered the other party, and raising his gun, fired twice in the air.

"Buck up, old man," he said, with a shaky laugh. "The General will be here in a minute, and he'll give us what for. The old boy died game, Jack—but he had it coming to him. Just remember Mowbray."

Jack nodded without speaking. Then, from the forest, not behind but ahead of them, broke a group of yelling Masai headed by Bakari, running on the spoor of the rogue elephant. Behind, trying to hold them back from too close pursuit, ran the figure of Schoverling.

[237]

Both explorer and natives paused together as they grasped the scene before them. Jack and Charlie stood at the side of the dead beast, still pale with the strain of their terrific battle. Behind lay the motionless form of Amir Ali, his beard sticking up in the sunlight, the sliver of ivory by his head, while a few yards away the forgotten fire sent up a thin wreath of smoke into the air.

Schoverling was the first to break that awed silence, as on his trail appeared Guru, von Hofe, and the rest, all at full speed. While they came up and paused in amazement, the explorer advanced and held out his hand.

"I congratulate you," he said huskily. Meeting his eye, the two boys found there only honest admiration, as from man to man, and they shook hands without a word. Then von Hofe joined them, shaking hands with a flood of excited German through which broke no word of English, and the boys laughed.

"We thought you'd be pretty sore, General," admitted Charlie a moment later, "about our going off that way. But, honest, we didn't mean to—except at first."

"I understand, boys," smiled the bronzed explorer. "But never mind that—Akram told me all about it when we began to get anxious. We thought you had gone right on the trail of the elephant, which only led us out here, so we kept on as fast as we could. And this is the great

[238]

Rogue Elephant! How on earth did you boys kill him? Is Amir dead?"

"No, only stunned," said Charlie. Guru and Akram were attending to their injured comrade, who by this time was sitting up, dazed but not badly injured. Before hearing their story, Schoverling despatched Bakari and Guru to bring on the Masai with all speed, while Guru had instructions to inspan and move the camp to this spot, it being possible for the wagon to get around the forest from the south. The Masai who were left, at once fell to work, von Hofe directing them while he listened.

The two boys told the story of the hunt together, freely confessing that at first they had been too much frightened to take good aim. The course of their bullets was followed, von Hofe carefully pocketing the sliver of ivory that had so nearly done for Amir Ali.

"It iss no matter," he said. "I can it fix when I set him up. Ach—vait, vait! My camera!"

[239]

He hastily brushed the five Masai off the carcass and photographed it from every angle, then posed the boys with their rifles, each holding out an ear of the huge beast. The elephant had rolled back until its head lay on the ground, trunk extended, between its fore-legs, and the two boys looked and felt very small indeed as they stood on each side of the massive head.

An hour later the remaining Masai arrived and all fell to work on the skinning. The explorer built up the fire, making a great smoke signal that would guide Guru and Gholab for miles, but it was not until evening that the slow ox-team crawled up to them and was outspanned. In place of a zareba, the traps were set out, but there was to be no rest for the skinners. While great fires were lighted, before which strings of elephant meat were roasted, they worked far into the night getting off the skin of the Rogue.

"How long will we be here, Doctor?" asked the explorer anxiously.

"We have not enough men to pare down the skin inside of a week," said the scientist. "However, the wagon can stand the weight, and we can let the paring go. With two days of drying in the sun and one day to rub in the chemicals, we will go."

[240]

"Three days," nodded Schoverling, and turned to the boys. "Well, boys, I needn't say that I'm sorry not to have had a shot at the brute, for poor Mowbray's sake, but I'll donate a case with his shattered rifle, his letter, watch, and pictures of the Rogue to the Club when we get back. So you both get the credit for him together, eh?"

"I guess so," said Jack. "I didn't do much to knock him over. Chuck did that. But I got in the two shots that finished him."

"Jack stopped him all right," protested Charlie, "with that bullet in the head, when he charged us on three legs. Honest, General, even after he went down the second time, I was scared stiff when I saw him get up! I thought I was dreaming, for I knew that both my bullets had got him in the knee."

"I should think you would have been scared!" laughed the explorer. "I was scared myself, that day the other bull nearly got us up on Mount Kenia. Well, it's all over now. I guess you boys have gained the biggest share of the credit, but you sure deserve it."

[241]

When the boys woke in the morning, the Masai were already hard at work again. At last they got the huge sections of skin off, and the protesting oxen were made to drag off the carcass away from the camp. The hide was thoroughly cleansed, and then staked out to dry in the sun for two days, after which the doctor would attend to it further.

"Doesn't it all seem like a wild old dream to you?" asked Jack that day, as they rode out after an impalla steak. "It's hard to realize that we've done it, Chuck."

"Just the same, we have," laughed Charlie. "Say, when we get back an' show up the pictures we've taken, with the doctor's, won't we raise a howl? I'd like to see that Inspector what's his name?—Inspector Harrington's face when he hears about it! He'll throw a fit!"

"Not him," chuckled Jack ungrammatically but happily. "He'll put out his hand an' say, 'By Jove, allow me to congratulate you! Wonderful!'"

Which, as it turned out, was exactly what he did.

CHAPTER XX

[242]

THE BACK TRAIL

They remained in "Rogue Camp," as Charlie christened it, for three days. The injured Masai warriors were still in no shape to march, although Amir was all right again, but the big wagon had plenty of room. The ivory was loaded solidly and lashed down, with the elephant hide and skull over it, the latter being up in front. On top were placed the tents and other impedimenta, leaving just enough room for the two Masai to lie comfortably beneath the tilt.

"I don't envy him his place," grinned Jack as they loaded him on, the fourth morning. "Bet that

hide won't smell like roses."

"Little he minds that," laughed von Hofe, in huge delight. "He is used to much worse. Schoverling, what are the plans?"

All gathered about the explorer with interest. He drew forth the chart belonging to Selim, which the Arab had omitted to take with him.

"I have our compass-bearings from the other camp, where Mowbray died, to the first water-hole we struck. We can circle around these hills to the southwest, then strike back to the river. To follow our old march back to the water-hole will not be hard. [243]

"There we had better rest a day and stock up. Fortunately, the cattle are in prime shape for the return march. I'll warn Bakari to keep his men away from the water this time, and we ought to get across. Gholab, come over here. Can you follow a compass-bearing through the desert?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Very well, that is all for now. You see," and Schoverling turned to the others, "I figure that by sending Gholab and Guru on ahead with the wagon for three or four days, the other six of us can wait at the waterhole. That will help out the water in the casks wonderfully. With three canteens apiece, we will be able to catch up to them after four days, and our horses will still be in prime condition."

This plan was ultimately followed, and proved excellent. They reached the water-hole by easy stages, the wagon now being heavily laden, and gave the cattle a day's rest here. The doctor was forced to abandon his idea of getting a buffalo, as every pound of weight would tell on the oxen, but he cared little for that now. [244]

They met with no molestation on the return trip beside the river. On one occasion Jack shot another of the forty-foot pythons, which seemed to live in the river, but they saw nothing of the great buffalo herd. On the day they reached the waterhole a rhino charged down on the caravan and narrowly missed goring Bakari, but Schoverling managed to drop him in the nick of time.

The explorer allowed the wagon and the Masai four days' start from the waterhole. A good supply of fodder for the cattle was taken, although this was hardly necessary for any save the horses, and with full water-casks Gholab and Guru plodded off. The others camped, resting the horses and hunting, and on the fifth morning took up the desert trail.

They caught up with the caravan on the eighth day, after narrowly missing it, for a compass-led trip over the desert is no easy matter to keep accurate. The cattle were going along well, the injured Masai were healing well enough to walk part of the day, and all promised favorably for the last stages of the journey. [245]

Being away from fresh game, the Masai were forced to drink water on the desert, much to their disgust. However, Bakari realized the necessity of keeping his men on the allowance given them, and there was no tapping the barrels at night this time. Day after day they plodded along through the dust, and at length Schoverling and the others rode ahead to bring out the other wagon with more water.

So well had the explorer led them that they arrived within half a mile of the camp, to be met with shouts of delight by the men and tears of joy by the lonely Gurkha who had remained in charge. The other oxen were found sleek and well, and Guru, who protested his entire ability, was sent out with the second wagon, loaded with water and fresh fodder, to meet the other.

They came in five days later without accident, the footsore and weary Masai riding delightedly in the extra wagon. After a rest of two days, the load was divided between the two wagons and all set forth for the last trek across the first plain they had crossed. But this was not so bad as that other, and with the aid of an opportune rainstorm that lasted all night, they reached the friendly foothills once more and gained the villages of the Samburo. [246]

From here on to Yonge's Station was play compared to what they had been through. The commissioner met them with great delight, and they outspanned the oxen for a three-days' rest before going on. The Masai were paid and dismissed, each with a handsome gift that sent them away rejoicing.

"Here," said Captain Yonge, holding out an envelope, "is a cable that was forwarded by runner. It came in two days since."

Schoverling reached across the dinner-table and tore it open. He scanned it, then broke into a laugh and read it aloud:

"*Louis Schoverling, care Captain Yonge, Commissioner District, B. S. A.:*

"Best wishes. Bags valued seventy pounds. Got ahead of you there.

"SELIM BEN AMOUD"

They related the story of their trip to Yonge. Schoverling had been in some doubt as to the advisability of saying anything about the gold-dust, but von Hofe overruled him. When they had finished, the captain dissipated their doubts. [247]

"Why, of course, my dear fellow! There will be no objection in the least to your keeping the ivory. You have brought back great news. Poor Mowbray! He was a plucky fellow, and we always regretted orders to go out after him—though he licked us every time. But that news about the new country up north is great! I shouldn't wonder if you got an F. R. G. S. out of it, Schoverling."

Taking it easy, they arrived in due course of time at the end of their trip. Runners had gone on ahead, and for the last two days Piet Andrus with a dozen more rode with them, having gone out to meet the wagons.

At Mombasa they interviewed the governor, relating officially their news of Mowbray and giving a detailed account of the lake country which had been discovered. It was at once arranged that six months later a great safari was to be sent up, with Louis Schoverling in charge, to make a scientific exploration and map out the country about the hot lake.

Letters and cables poured in on them, and the two weeks spent at Mombasa were busy ones. Accounts of their trip were despatched to London, New York and Toronto, and on the day they left a cable came which announced that Schoverling had gained one of his life-long ambitions—Fellowship in the Royal Geographical Society. [248]

"Well, we've sure had a great time," sighed Jack as they steamed out of Mombasa. Von Hofe was accompanying them to New York. "We've pulled pretty near two thousand each out of that ivory and dust, Chuck."

"It certainly does look like big money now," admitted Charlie. "Well, I see where I dig in to learn for a while. Then maybe we can get together for another trip somewheres, eh, General?"

"I hope so," laughed Schoverling. "I thought maybe you would have had enough of it."

"Not much!" cried both boys together. Von Hofe smiled.

"Wait!" he said. "I have a surprise, some day!"

And one day, months later, he took them to a special room in the great Museum of Sciences, where stood the Rogue Elephant as he had stood on that last day of his life; beneath, on the great brass plate at the bottom, were these words: [249]

Elephas Africanus Peeli

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Mounted by Gross von Hofe, F. R. S.

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