

THE
YOUNG YÄGERS

OR,

A NARRATIVE OF HUNTING ADVENTURES
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.



CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE BOY HUNTERS," "DESERT HOME," "BUSH BOYS," &c.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM HARVEY.

LONDON:
DAVID BOGUE, FLEET STREET.

M. DCCC. LVII.

[*Translation Reserved.*]

249. E. 489.

CHAPTER XXI.

A BATTLE WITH A BORELÉ.

HANS and Arend on this occasion had followed the chase, and were almost "in at the death;" and Klaas and Jan, who from the openness of the ground had had a view of the whole run, shortly after came up, spurring their panting ponies to the very top of their speed.

All six now dismounted to rest both themselves and horses after their sharp gallop, and also to skin the bull. Though Arend was habitually *chef-de-cuisine*, Hendrik and Groot Willem were the butchers. Hans, "the botanist of the expedition," might also be termed its "green-grocer," as his knowledge of botany enabled him to keep the camp-table supplied with many species of esculent roots and vegetables to be found growing wild upon the plains of Southern Africa.

While Hendrik and Groot Willem were flaying

off the skin, Hans and Arend were busy with the head and horns, preparing them for preservation. It was nearly as much on account of these as for his meat that they had hunted the gnoo. They would also be trophies in the halls of the Graaf Reinet; for although the horns of the common gnoo are easily had, those of the brindled species are more precious, for the reason that the latter animal inhabits a more remote part of the country.

Klaas and Jan acted as assistants to the other four—now handing a knife, now holding a limb or flap of skin, and making themselves “generally useful.” All six, therefore, were engaged.

While thus employed, all of them bending and stooping, one way or another, over the dead bull, and none of them keeping a look-out, a queer sound fell upon their ears that caused them to start all together into an erect attitude. The sound they had heard was a loud snort, followed by a blowing noise, somewhat similar to that made by terrified swine, but much fuller and louder. There was, also, the noise of snapping twigs and breaking branches.

These sounds caused all six to start, and some of them to tremble with fear; and the sight that

came under their eyes as they looked up confirmed them in that emotion. In truth, it was a sight that would have inspired with alarm older hearts than theirs.

Breaking through the bushes, and causing the branches to bend and crackle, came a large animal. The tall upright horn upon its snout, its huge heavy body, and strong massive limbs, left them no room to doubt what sort of animal it was. It was a rhinoceros!

There are four species of these in South Africa; but the dark colour of its skin and the double horn proclaimed the one now seen to be the black rhinoceros, or "borelé"—the fiercest and most dangerous of the four.

When the boys first heard it, it was crashing through the bushes close to the edge of the thicket, but they had scarce turned their eyes in that direction before it shot out of the timber, head towards them, and came on at full gallop. Its head was raised high in air, its ears were in motion, and its small but saucy-looking tail was flirted about in a confident manner. Its black eyes gleamed with a malicious expression, and its air was one of anger and menace. The terror inspired

by its look was not lessened by the loud snorting and blowing that issued from its fiery nostrils.

The boys saw at once, and, to their alarm, that it was charging upon *them!* There could be no doubt about the matter. Its whole appearance denoted that it was bent upon attacking them, for it was heading directly for the spot where they stood. They knew, moreover, that there was nothing odd in that,—they knew that the black rhinoceros will charge upon any creature whether man, quadruped, bird, or *bush*, without the slightest provocation!

It is needless to say that the boys were in a dilemma, and were aware of it as well. There were they, all six a-foot upon the plain, with a fierce borelé rushing up to them, and at less than a hundred yards distance!

Fortunately for them the steeds were all well trained, and fortunately the riders had had the precaution to fasten them in such a manner that it required but little time to get them free. But for these two circumstances some one of the six must certainly have been lifted upon the death-dealing horn of the borelé.

As it was the horses had been tied all around

a tree that stood near. Each had his bridle looped to a small branch, so small that it could be wrenched off in a second of time, but large enough to keep a horse steady for a while, unless something should alarm and startle him. This was a precaution the hunters had been taught by their fathers, and the knowledge now stood them in stead.

Of course the moment the borelé "hove" in sight, there was an end to the skinning of the gnoo. There was a chorus of cries expressing terror, a flinging away of knives, a sudden rush to the horses, a seizing of bridles, a snapping off of branches, and a simultaneous leaping into six saddles. All these acts did not take ten seconds of time to accomplish, and the last of them was not accomplished one second too soon; for the riders had just time to turn the heads of their horses to the plain as the borelé came up. In fact, so close to them had he got his hideous snout that several of the horses shied and plunged as they took to flight, nearly dismounting one or two of the riders. To have been unhorsed at that moment would have been a perilous business.

All kept their seats however, and in a moment more were flying over the plain in a close clump, the borelé snorting at their heels.

Now that they were in their saddles, and galloped freely off, some of the yägers were disposed to laugh. Hendrik and Groot Willem were among the number. They knew that the speed of a rhinoceros is no match for that of a horse, and they would soon get out of his way. They were disposed to regard the chase as a bit of fun rather than otherwise. All at once, however, a thought came into their minds that turned their merry mood into a feeling of new and painful apprehension.

The young yägers were riding in pairs. Hendrik and Groot Willem, mounted on their swift horses, had forged some distance ahead of the others. On turning their faces backward they perceived that the two boys, Klaas and Jan, had fallen considerably to the rear, and that the borelé was pushing them closely. He was not twenty yards behind either, for they rode side by side, as if in a racing gallop. Hans and Arend were farther in advance, and these also looking back at the same instant perceived the perilous situation of their younger brothers.

To all four the idea seemed to occur at the same moment, that though a horse can outrun the

rhinoceros, a pony *cannot*, and the thought drew from them a simultaneous expression of alarm. Beyond a doubt Klaas and Jan were in danger. Should the borelé overtake them, their ponies would not save them. The hugé brute would gore these animals to death, or impale them at the first stroke of his stout sharp horn. Beyond a doubt the boys were in danger!

So thought their four brothers as they glanced back; and, as they continued to gaze, they became the more convinced of this fearful truth. They saw that the distance between them and the rhinoceros, instead of widening, was gradually growing less — the borelé was gaining upon them!

It was a moment of painful apprehension with all four; but at this moment Hendrik performed one of the neatest manœuvres that had occurred during the whole expedition. With a wrench upon his bridle he turned suddenly out of his course, and then wheeling round rode backward, calling on Groot Willem to act similarly, but with his head turned to the opposite side.

Groot Willem, as if by instinct, obeyed, and, diverging suddenly from each other, the two wheeled right and left at the same instant. Their horses'

heads were now turned to the rear, and after going a pace or two they halted, and got their guns in readiness.

First Hans and Arend swept past between the two halted hunters,—then passed Klaas and Jan upon the frightened ponies, and then came “borelé.”

Before the last had got fairly on a line, Hendrik and Groot Willem covered his huge body, fired, and then galloping round to his rear commenced reloading.

Both balls took effect, and, though neither brought the brute to the ground, they made a decided alteration in his pace, and in a moment it was perceived that he was running slower, while the blood flowed freely from his wounds. He still, however, kept on after the ponies; and it is hard to say how far he might have followed them, had it not been that Hans and Arend, exactly imitating the manœuvre of Hendrik and Groot Willem, now also wheeled right and left, came back a pace or two, halted and delivered their pieces in the face of the rhinoceros.

Again the bullets took effect, and again did not prove fatal. But the danger, as far as Klaas and Jan were concerned, was over; for the

borelé, instead of pursuing the ponies farther, turned short on his nearer antagonists, and rushed first upon one, then the other, with all the strength and fury that was left in his body.

Several charges were made by him without effect, as the riders, now faced towards him, were able to spring to one side and gallop out of his way.

For nearly a quarter of an hour the battle was kept up, the four loading and firing as fast as they could under the circumstances.

At length the day was decided by a bullet from the big elephant gun of Groot Willem, which, penetrating the skull of the huge borelé, sent him rolling over in the dust.

A loud "hurrah!" proclaimed the victory, and the six yägers now rode up and alighted by the huge body of the borelé, that, prostrate and lifeless, no longer caused them alarm.

An axe was obtained from the wagon, and his long anterior horn—a splendid trophy—was hacked off from his snout, and carried away; while another journey was made for the meat and horns of the blauw-wildebeest, which were packed behind the hunters upon the croups of their horses, and brought safely into camp.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INTERRUPTED BREAKFAST.

NEXT morning the young yägers slept late—because they had nothing particular to do. They did not purpose continuing their journey before the following morning; and on that day they intended to lie up, so that their horses might rest and be fresh for the *road*.

They rose, therefore, a little later than usual, and breakfasted on the tongue of the brindled gnoo, with hot coffee and hard bread; a stock of which they had brought along in their wagons, and which still held out.

It would not have been as great a deprivation to the young yägers to have gone without bread, as it would to you, boy reader. There live many people in South Africa to whom bread is a luxury almost unknown. Many tribes of the

CHAPTER XXIX.

HENDRIK CHASED BY THE KEITLOA.

HENDRIK's feelings at that moment were not to be envied. His reflections were sharply bitter. He felt mortified and humiliated. He wished he had never set eyes upon a blesbok. A sorry figure would he cut on his return to camp. He had laughed heartily at Hans and Arend. They would reciprocate that laugh, and add interest. He had ridiculed the idea of Groot Willem. Groot would not fail to pay back his scorn.

Besides, he had done his horse no good; perhaps had injured the animal. There stood he, with steaming nostrils and heaving flanks, quite used up. They were nearly twelve miles from camp. He would scarce be able to carry his rider back, and Hendrik even began to entertain doubts about his way.

The thought that he might have lost himself was just entering his mind, when his reflections were interrupted by a sound that caused him to start up from that rock, as nimbly as he had ever risen from a seat in his life.

The same sound seemed to produce a very similar effect upon his horse; for the latter, on hearing it, suddenly jerked up his drooping head, pricked his ears, snorted loudly, and, after dancing about a moment or two, shot off down the pass at full gallop!

Hendrik's eyes did not follow him, nor his thoughts neither. Both were too busy with an animal that came from the opposite side, and which had uttered the sound that caused such a sudden alarm. The deep bass snort, and the bellows-like blowing that followed, were no strangers to the ear of the young hunter. He knew that, on looking round, he would behold the black rhinoceros; —and he did so. That fierce creature was coming down the pass!

At first sight Hendrik was not so terribly alarmed. He had hunted the rhinoceros more than once, and did not deem it such dangerous sport. He had always been able to avoid the

charges of the clumsy quadruped, and to escape out of its way when he desired.

But Hendrik for the moment had forgotten that on such occasions he was seated, not on a boulder of rock, but in the saddle, and it was to his horse that he owed his immunity from danger.

Now that his horse had run off, and he found himself a-foot upon the plain, with nothing between him and the rhinoceros but twenty yards of smooth level turf, he became truly alarmed. And no wonder at it—his life was in danger.

His first thought was to run up the rocks, thinking by so doing to get out of the animal's reach. But, on looking towards these, he perceived that they formed a precipice on both sides of the pass, with a wall-like face, that could only have been scaled by a cat! Hendrik could not climb up on either side!

In the pass itself there was no shelter for him. Its bottom was a smooth sward, sloping but slightly. It was but the continuation of the outer plains, that were nearly on the same level. Here and there stood a tree, but they were small ones—mere "brush," and a rhinoceros could have levelled any of them to the ground with his powerful horn.

They offered no hope, either for concealment or retreat.

There appeared no chance of escape in any way. To attempt it by running off would be perfectly useless ; for Hendrik knew that a rhinoceros could overtake the swiftest runner, as every South-African hunter could testify. Hendrik did not think of it. To add to his ill-fortune, he had left his gun strapped to the saddle, and that was now gone off with the horse ; so that his chance of saving himself by the destruction of the rhinoceros was gone also. The only weapon left him was his hunting-knife ; but what was a knife against the hide of a rhinoceros ? It might as well have been a needle.

There was but one hope of safety ; and that was, that the animal might not *see* him. The rhinoceros possesses the sense of sight only in a moderate degree. His eyes are small ; and though sharp enough when an object is directly in front of him, they are so placed in his head, that, on account of his stiff neck and huge form, he can see nothing either behind or even at either side of him.

Hendrik had hopes the fierce brute would pass

without observing him. From his movements it was evident he had not noticed him as yet, else he would already have charged upon him. The black rhinoceros does not wait to be provoked. His own fierce nature furnishes him with sufficient stimulus, and his fury is habitually directed against creatures the most innocent and unoffending.

To get as far out of his way as possible, Hendrik glided silently up to the cliff, and stood close against the rock.

But if the rhinoceros is not a sharp-sighted animal, he is one of the sharpest-scented that lives. With the wind in his favour, he can smell even a "rat" at an almost incredible distance. He is also gifted with a most acute sense of hearing; and the slightest sound, such as the rustling of a leaf or the falling of a footstep, will enable him to guide himself directly to his enemy or his victim. Were the rhinoceros endowed with the power of vision to the same degree as he is with that of smell and hearing, he would be the most dangerous animal in the world. As it is, he is anything but a safe neighbour, and many of the poor natives of the country he inhabits fall victims

to his ungovernable temper and brutal strength. Fortunately his eyes are no bigger than they are.

They were big enough, however, to see Hendrik as he stood, his dark form outlined against the cliff, and sharp enough to distinguish him from the rock. The breeze, indeed, blowing in his spread nostrils, had warned him of the hunter's presence, and that had directed his eyes.

As these rested upon the form of the boy, he stopped short in his track, uttered a snorting noise, vibrated his ears, and flirted his saucy little tail over his huge hips. Then placing himself in a menacing attitude, and giving utterance to an angry blowing, he dashed forward upon Hendrik as if the latter had been his enemy for life!

Hendrik's presence of mind was called for at this moment; and it came to his aid. Had he kept his ground five seconds longer, he would have been crushed against the rock, or impaled upon the strong horn of the rhinoceros. But the moment the latter charged, the boy sprang out from the cliff.

He did not attempt to run—that would not have saved him; and fortunately he knew it. He merely stepped out to the more open ground in the middle

of the pass, and there stood fronting his assailant. The latter having seen the movement, swerved in his course, so as again to head direct for his intended victim; and without stopping, rushed forward as before.

Hendrik stood still, until the sharp black horn almost touched him. Then bounding to one side, he glided past the rhinoceros, and ran in an opposite direction.

He looked back as he ran; and seeing that the fierce brute had turned suddenly on the failure of his charge, and was close at his heels, he again made stand, confronting the animal as before. Again he waited until the rhinoceros was close up, and repeated the manœuvre of springing to one side and running behind. This Hendrik had heard was the only way to escape the rhinoceros in open ground. Had he sprung aside a moment too soon, that is, before the sudden bound enabled him to clear the field of the animal's vision, he would certainly have been followed and overtaken; for, unwieldy as the rhinoceros appears, it is nevertheless far more active than it looks, and the horse can barely get out of the way of its sudden and impetuous rush.