

SPORT IN ASHANTI

OR

MELINDA THE CABOCEER

*A TALE OF THE GOLD COAST IN THE DAYS OF
KING KOFFEE KALCALLI*

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WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS



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CHAPTER II.

START FOR KINJABO—RIVER SCENERY—AZIZA'S ADVENTURE WITH AN
ALLIGATOR—KING AMOOTAFUO—MELINDA THE ASHANTEE CHIEF—
OFF AGAIN—A NIGHT ATTACK.

WE were roused from our comfortable beds at four o'clock by Sacki bringing a lamp into our bedrooms, and the fragrant smell of coffee induced us to spring out at once and prepare to do justice to the early breakfast which had been set out for us by Mrs. Williams.

Of course it was still dark as pitch, and the land breeze had just commenced to blow. Early as it was two immense canoes had already started for Kinjabo, a large town some thirty miles up the lagoon, where our journey was to commence in reality.

After a substantial meal Fortescue and I went down to the lagoon side, where a busy scene met our eyes. Groups of women and children were gathered round our canoes, jabbering, crying, singing, and swearing, helping, or rather hindering, the loading of the boats. Here a sturdy hunter was seen bidding farewell to his last married wife, a girl not more than fifteen years of age, the adieux being by no means of a demonstrative character. There a creditor had seized upon a debtor, and was endeavouring to extort

"Melinda has told them of the dangers and difficulties of the way. If the white men go with him they must not be afraid, nor when palavers arise say, 'Melinda, why did you not tell us of this before?' The white men may go to Coomassie with Melinda if they insist, but they had better stay at the factories."

"White men do not turn back when they attempt anything, Melinda. We are determined to go to Coomassie and to the mountains beyond. Say, will you accompany us, or must we seek further, or go without a guide? Go we will in spite of difficulty or danger."

"Melinda will go with his white friends; but for their sakes he wishes they would stay. He starts to-morrow when the birds awake. Will the white men be ready to go by that time?"

"We are ready to start as soon as you are able to set out. We have plenty of carriers, and Aziza the great hunter accompanies us."

"Aziza is a great hunter. Melinda has heard of his deeds before this. Many elephants have fallen before his gun, and the hippopotamus and rhinoceros tremble at the sound of his foot-step. The white men are lucky to have Aziza with them."

After settling preliminary matters we left the king, and were conducted to a hut close by, where we prepared to snatch a few hours' slumber ere facing the arduous travelling of the morrow.

Long ere the first streak of dawn had chequered the dark sky Aziza had roused the carriers, who were busy arranging their loads on curious basket-work frames which they bore on their heads. By daylight all were ready, and Melinda having arrived accompanied by his band, we started. Our company formed a long string, extending nearly half a mile along the road. Hammocks had been provided for Fortescue and I, with an efficient staff of hammockmen. The hammocks were of native cloth, striped blue and white, and slung from pegs stuck through the ends of a long bamboo stalk, while an awning of similar material shielded us from the rays of the sun. The hammockmen, with pads of grass on their heads, carried us along in a very jolting manner which

yards, while the doe, killed by Aziza, fell dead ; the one I aimed at only ran a short distance, when it also stumbled to the earth.

"Hurrah!" said I, "venison for dinner to-day."

"What a beautiful creature it is!" said Fortescue, gazing at the dying animal; "one cannot wonder at the Eastern poets dedicating sonnets to the eye of the gazelle, it almost makes me sorry for what I have done when I look at its reproachful tenderness."

Meanwhile Aziza had hurried up three of our men, to whose shoulders the antelopes were quickly transferred, and we again trudged on. By mid-day we arrived at the village of Bevageh, where we prepared to halt for the night. Our followers had already built a huge fire in the square, while our luggage was piled up near them; Melinda had managed to obtain the use of a hut for us, while he and his men were camped close by.

While sitting over our pipes after enjoying a delicious venison supper, Melinda approached and, at our request, sat down by us.

"The white men are good hunters," said he. "I do not fear for them now, since they left their hammocks at early morning and have walked all day."

"We should be very poor hunters if we could not do our share of walking," said I; "when people come out to this country they must be prepared to rough it."

"To-morrow we shall come to the big river, where you will see plenty of animals. You must have your big guns ready, for we may see elephants, rhinoceros, or buffalo, and your shot is only fit to kill birds, and no hunter will shoot them when he can get ivory."

"We shall be prepared for whatever comes in our way, Melinda," said I; "I only hope there will be good sport."

"We shall see sport, for true, before we reach Coomassie," said Melinda with a smile.

"The more sport the better we shall be pleased," said Fortescue; "but why do you keep away from us on the march? we should be glad of your help in securing our game."

"Melinda feels pleased at what his white friends have spoken ;

CHAPTER VI.

GRAND HUNT OF THE YAURURI — BARAKA'S FETICHISM — ELEPHANTS —
MELINDA SHOOTS A LION — PREPARATIONS FOR THE WEDDING — TOILET
OF THE BRIDE—THE CEREMONY.

THE next day was occupied in making preparations for a grand hunt in the forest to the east of Yaurauri. This was a wild, desolate region, with no inhabitants save the wild beasts; elephants abounded, and it was with the express purpose of killing these giants that the present expedition had been organised. The ivory would not only recoup them for all expenses incurred, but would yield a handsome profit when bartered to the traders down the Niger.

Melinda was in high spirits. His father had acquainted him with the favourable reply of Mpengala to his proposal for his daughter, and he hoped to obtain a further supply of ivory from the hunt.

All was bustle throughout the town. Bows were being greased to render them more pliant, or being re-strung, arrows were re-feathered, or dipped in the juice of the deadly lamba-tree; spears were sharpened, knives and daggers seen to, while the favoured few who possessed the fire-guns of the white people

About noon they reached the banks of a small stream, where they halted a short time to partake of breakfast and to escape the heat of the mid-day sun. The hunters gathered together in picturesque groups, threw themselves upon the soft grassy plain, while a dozen fires soon blazed around; tender steaks of antelope, eland, or other animal were quickly sputtering over the embers, and soon after with the keen appetites of true woodsmen they fell to upon the savoury viands.

As the sun began to decline towards the western horizon they again started, and ere nightfall had arrived upon the outskirts of the forest, within whose depths innumerable herds of eland, koodoo, elephant, and other beasts revelled unmolested, save from the periodical hunts of the neighbouring people.

Huts were quickly constructed by cutting down young trees and therewith erecting a square frame; a thatch of palm-leaves was soon thrown over this rude structure, while the smaller branches were wattled in and out to form the sides.

The evening meal was discussed by the flickering light of the fires, and shortly after the hunters, wearied by their long walk, were deep in the sound slumber of the tired. Occasionally some hunter would raise his head and take a look round, or throw another stick on the smouldering fires, or, as the howl of some prowling beast caught his ear, would clutch his gun and sit up with listening ear, ready to do battle with the animal if he should dare to intrude within the privacy of the camp.

In the morning all were astir by the earliest dawn, and the various plans of action discussed. Some were directed to penetrate the forest to the eastward, while the others were to go north-east and south-east respectively. Mpengala, accompanied by Melinda, chose the north-eastern route, while Salamah, with young Quabina, were in charge of the hunters who went south-east; the central body consisted of several veteran hunters, under the command of an aged chief who rejoiced in the *soubriquet* of the "Rhinoceros Horn." As our tale chiefly relates to Melinda, we will accompany him to the fray.

After a march of three hours through a dense forest, they came

CHAPTER VII.

TERRIBLE NEWS—INVASION OF THE BARRARI—BARAKA'S EXORCISM—
THE ATTACK—DEATH OF MPENGALA—CAPTURE OF MELINDA—REPULSE
OF THE BARRARI—AWOONA ALSO A PRISONER—THEY ARE SOLD INTO
SLAVERY—MELINDA IS CREATED A CABOCEE IN ASHANTI—HE HEARS
NEWS OF AWOONA.

BRIGHTLY rose the sun on the morning after the events we have detailed in the preceding chapter, and already had several friends called to congratulate the youthful bridegroom, when a man was observed emerging from the forest on the far side of the plantations which environed the town.

His appearance even at that distance excited surprise. His gait was unsteady as if he were suffering from some injury, while his tattered dress seemed to have received rough usage from the hand of some person in a fearful struggle. As he slowly neared the town he raised his hand, and a feeble cry was heard borne on the morning breeze. As yet he was too distant for his words to be distinguished, but several persons rushed out to learn the news, while the others stood awaiting the announcement of something which, from some unaccountable presentiment or other, they felt was of ill portent.

When the people who had gone to meet the stranger had approached him, they set up a fearful cry, and some hastening to

the people, and endeavoured to inspire them with sufficient courage to make a blow in defence of their hearths and homes.

"The Rabbarori," said he, "cannot be many; otherwise, they could not move from place to place so rapidly. We will boldly face them, and show them that though they may have succeeded in slaying many of our people, when they have fallen upon them in the night, yet when we have an opportunity of making sufficient preparations we can strike as sure and as deep as the bravest warrior among them. Shall we, the Yaurauri, who have lived in peace and plenty for so long, be driven from our homes like the beasts of the forest? No, we will fight in defence of our wives and children, and avenge the deaths of our countrymen who have fallen beneath the treacherous onslaught of the Rabbarori.

"Salamah, with but few men, advanced into their country to avenge an insult, and shall we be behind the Zoglogbomis in courage?"

"The Rabbarori have come to us, let us give them such a lesson as they may remember as long as they are a nation. Let us show them that we can fight, when called upon to do so for our defence."

These stirring words of the king seemed to infuse courage into the hearts of the Yaurauri, which before seemed to be utterly terror stricken at the approach of the terrible Rabbarori. Mbogela, one of the chiefs, brandishing a highly-polished gun round his head, declared that he for one would never fly before any enemy. "Why should the Yaurauri, who were the bravest hunters on the Niger, quail before the approach of any enemy? Have the Rabbarori greater courage than the lion? Have they greater cunning than the elephant, or more strength than the rhinoceros? Why then should the Yaurauri fear them?"

A loud cheer of applause succeeded Mbogela's speech; and Mpengala at once set about putting the town in a state of defence. Like many other towns among the Houssa tribes, it was surrounded by a high mud wall and a dry ditch. The wall had been allowed to fall into decay in several places during

CHAPTER XV.

A DUEL WITH HIPPOPOTAMI—TERRIBLE ENCOUNTER WITH A PANTHER—
TWO MEN SEIZED—TORTOISES—A DESPERATE RHINOCEROS—A BABOON
HOTEL—RUNNING DOWN ELEPHANTS—A HEAVY GAME BAG—AN UN-
WELCOME BEDFELLOW

WE marched steadily northward for three days, after my adventures in the cave, until we came within the territory of King Akoonga. This monarch enjoyed the rather ambiguous notoriety of possessing eighty-three wives and a hundred and forty-six children.

We crossed the river separating Akoonga's country from that of his more southern neighbour early one morning, having encamped on the banks overnight. While waiting for the baggage to be transported, I took my gun, and, accompanied by Fortescue, strolled along the river's bank, which was unusually clear of trees. After walking for a few hundred yards we heard a great bellowing, and upon coming to a bend, had the good fortune to witness a fight between two hippopotami. Two huge beasts, who appeared to have an inveterate hostility to each other, suddenly rose to the surface of the river and rushed towards each other. Their huge and hideous mouths were open to their widest possible extent, revealing their terrible array of teeth in all their cruel sharpness. Their eyes flamed with rage, and they exerted every atom of their Herculean strength to annihilate each other.

quick as lightning and seized the hunter nearest Melinda, and bore him to the ground, crunching his face in a fearful sickening manner. The poor fellow uttered that fearful cry which had reached us, and in the struggle his gun went off, the ball passing clean through the lower jaw of the panther. This, in all probability, saved the poor fellow's life, for the brute seemed to be paralysed by the shock. At this instant the leopard, which had just attracted the attention of the party, uttered a loud roar and sprang upon them, knocking Fortescue down and tearing the sleeve of his jacket from the shoulder.

Startled for an instant, he scarcely knew whether he was hurt or not; but, quickly recovering, he sent a ball through the heart of the leopard, which was crouching ready for a second spring.

Just at this moment Aziza and I came up, and the reader already knows the conclusion of the tragedy.

All night we sat up bathing and bandaging the wounds of our companions, and for more than a week we continued on the same spot, in order to give rest to the wounded. Thanks to their vigorous constitutions they mended rapidly, although the face of the hunter who had been seized by the panther had several ugly scars on it, which effectually spoilt his beauty for ever.

The next morning a party went out to look for the panther, which they found lying stark in a pool of blood, together with the body of the leopard. Scores of vultures had already assembled on the trees, awaiting the decomposition of the carcasses, for that bird has a very aristocratic taste for high game.

This adventure somewhat cooled our ardour, but when we saw our wounded on the high-road to recovery our sporting taste returned in all its intensity, and we were prepared to fight panthers or any other animals that fell in our way.

At the next village we arrived at we were told that a large rhinoceros had been seen in a valley about five miles to the eastward, where a stream spread out and formed a marshy district such as the animal loves

On reaching the morass we separated into two parties, the one

going to the right and the other to the left, appointing a rendezvous where we agreed to meet on our way home.

Several antelopes of various species appeared bounding through the tall grass, but we were on the look out for other game, and consequently only shot one for the sake of its flesh.

While walking about I suddenly stumbled across a large tortoise, which was cutting along at what must have been race-horse speed to it. As it was a very fine specimen, I took it home, and its shell is now mounted as a flower vase in my house in England.

All at once, without a sound of warning, we heard a fearful uproar to our left; and on turning beheld the rhinoceros rushing furiously at us at the top of its speed, crashing through the thick reeds as if they were mere spectres and ploughing up the ground for several yards with its horn. Its fury seemed awful in its intensity as it charged at everything that came in its way, whether stones, trees, or bushes.

We had not a chance to put in a shot, so took to our heels and ran for very life. Luckily the rhinoceros charges in a direct line, never swerving to the right or left, and when we had put ourselves a few yards out of its course, we turned and watched an opportunity to land our bullets.

The rhinoceros all at once stopped short in his impetuous career and grunted loudly, as if he scented danger. Nor was he very far wrong, for he gave us the chance we had waited for, and, taking aim at the most vulnerable parts, we all three fired.

The huge beast was evidently badly hit, for he fell on his knees, uttering a hideous snort. Then rising again, he rushed madly towards us, while we scampered on one side and allowed him to vent his rage on the bushes near which we had been standing. He tore up the grass by the roots and snorted with fury, charging recklessly here and there as he fancied he descried an enemy. At last I got a chance to draw a bead upon him, and as the smoke cleared off I saw the gigantic pachyderm topple over with a crash that fairly made the earth tremble.

Our shots had reached the ears of Fortescue and his party, who made their appearance just in time to be in at the death.

"Well, old fellow," said he, "you're in luck to-day; for we've potted nothing except a miserable eland."

"Your turn to-morrow, mine to-day. It's only the fortune of hunting. Who knows that you may not shoot an unknown animal to-morrow?"

"No such luck, I'm afraid. By the bye it is lucky for Melinda that he didn't shoot the rhinoceros, as he would have a tough job to skin it."

As the hide of the rhinoceros is invaluable for many purposes, being almost bullet proof, and is so hard that it can only be cut by the very best steel, we remained by the carcass until it was skinned, a job which took up nearly four hours, although as many were employed at it as could get at the body.

So massive was the epidermis that it formed a load for six stout fellows, and even they could not have carried it for any great distance.

The next day, while on the look-out for elephants, I came across a peculiar sight. A very large tree, growing on a small ait in a stream which flowed through the valley where we had shot the rhinoceros, was swarming with baboons.

At a distance it somewhat reminded me of the appearance of a man-of-war with her yards manned. It was ludicrous in the extreme to see them hurrying down to get out of the way, big and little, old and young, some three or four hundred in number. There was no fruit on the tree for them to eat, but the natives say that it is their home and their watch-tower, and that they have lived in the same kind of trees for years. Such instances of the proclivity of a company of baboons for one particular tree are by no means rare.

Notwithstanding I tramped over twenty miles, not a sign of elephant could I see; and I was wearily trudging my way home when, on looking back, I saw a troop of nearly a hundred buffalo quietly grazing towards me. They had evidently no suspicion of

my presence, as they were to the windward of me; so sitting down on the grass, I patiently awaited their approach.

At last, when about sixty yards off, I selected a splendid bull and dropped him at a shot. The others fled over the hills to the right, whither I followed them, more with the idea of exploring the country and looking out for elephant tracks than with the idea of shooting more, for we were fifteen miles at least from camp and we could not carry any great load with us.

I there fell in with the spoor of elephants, and after thoroughly reconnoitring the locality so as to find it in the morning, returned to camp pretty well knocked up. Fortescue had succeeded in bagging a young bull elephant, and obtained a fine pair of scrivellos* from it.

The next day we sallied out on the spoor of the elephants I had discovered the day before, accompanied by all our people and several of the villagers, who could not resist so good a chance of a glorious feed.

We had agreed to pursue this herd and, if possible, to drive them about according to a plan we had learned from the natives, that when winded and knocked up we might easily *pocket* the whole lot.

It may seem rather an exaggerated story for us to try to tire out elephants, but, although possessed of such enormous strength, they are soon wearied by travelling.

About ten o'clock we came up with the troop, which moved off on our approach, while the natives came on shouting and yelling like so many Bedlamites out for a holiday. The elephants made for a small creek, and when they arrived at it commenced cooling their bodies, by filling their trunks with the water and squirting it over their backs. As we gained upon them they again started off, but finally came to a stand about a mile further on.

There they began throwing dirt all over themselves, there being no water in the place; and, while so engaged, Fortescue opened

* The small tusks of young elephants are called scrivellos, and are much sought for by ivory-turners, as they are very hard and take a high polish.