

**EXPLORATION  
AND HUNTING IN  
CENTRAL AFRICA**

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BY

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## CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days later, having previously mentioned my intentions of hunting elephant, I ordered the boys to fill the calabashes with water, purposing to sleep some miles from the river that night, and if possible to get among the elephants in the morning.

They sullenly remained seated. I suspect that, although permission had been given to shoot elephants, their instructions were to keep me away from these animals if possible.

"We do not know the country," they protested.

"That matters little; we take water with us; I will go first, you shall follow."

Still showing no inclination to obey, I ordered my three South African boys to get ready and accompany me. To the others I said:

"And as for you, if you do not follow me I will send you all back to the Mokwai, and you shall take a letter to her from me. I shall wait here till other boys are sent who shall take me to Liwanika."

This threat was enough: they followed, and

## UNSUCCESSFUL ELEPHANT HUNT

we camped that evening about six miles from the river.

Very shortly after sunrise the boys were working out the spoor of a large bull elephant, and continued to do so till about an hour before sundown, when they got on to a fresh bull by mistake at a place where the ground had been trampled down in every direction by a herd. Once he was heard trumpeting about a quarter of a mile off, but we never came up with him. Just after sunset I fired at a pallah ram with a Mannlicher. The buck went off apparently unhurt, disappearing over the brow of a hillock in front. One of the boys found his carcase quite by chance as we descended the slope. The small Mannlicher bullet had entered the chest, passed through both heart and liver, and out behind the ribs, yet with this wound the antelope had run quite 200 yards before he fell.

The next few days brought nothing of interest. Enough was shot to provide the boys with meat, and a six hours' chase after a rhinoceros was unsuccessful. On the 14th August we continued the journey and reached the Ngambwe Cataracts. Here the goods were unloaded and carried some 800 yards. The empty canoes were then forced up the rapids to the foot of the cataract and dragged over dry ground to the still water above.

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At midday on the 15th the canoes were passing up the Lusu Rapids. These rapids are most delicately picturesque. I have seen nothing on the Zambezi to equal them in beauty. The river is broken up by innumerable tree-clad islands into narrow, rocky channels through which the water rushes and murmurs in its onward course. Above, the overhanging branches meet, and cast their shade on the watery surface beneath them. Occasional open spaces allow the bright tropical sun to cast his dazzling rays on the dancing torrent. The intensity of light and shade thus created can be imagined. There was a brilliancy about the picture which reminded me more of my childhood's conception of fairyland than of any natural scenery I have ever seen. I was quite sorry when the canoes at last emerged from this watery labyrinth and entered the calm reaches beyond.

That evening camp was pitched at the confluence of the Njoko (monkey) river and Zambezi.

Having shot a pallah and two pookoo rams for the boys that were to be left behind at the main camp, I started up the Njoko with the two small canoes, intending to explore that river for forty or fifty miles before continuing the journey northwards.

On the afternoon of the 17th I started up the Njoko on foot with two boys, sending four

## START UP THE NJOKO RIVER

others in the canoes with the blankets and provisions. The river, though only about twenty feet wide at this time of year, is deep, swift, and very circuitous. Consequently it was quite two hours after sunset by the time the food and blankets were landed. Many of the northern tributaries of the Zambezi, unlike the dry sand rivers of South Africa, flow through wide alluvial valleys, occasionally quite 1000 yards in width. These valleys, though dry in winter, become swampy in the rainy season. The rich soil produces excellent cattle pasture, capable of sustaining vast herds in those districts which are not infested by the tsetse fly. This cruel little pest is particularly numerous on the lower reaches of the Njoko river. The excessive attention they paid to the back of my neck resulted in boil-like lumps, which at one time threatened to give much pain and inconvenience; but zinc ointment and a protecting handkerchief proved a rapid and efficacious remedy.

The tsetse is in reality very little bigger than the English house fly, though his wings being longer he appears to be much larger. The fore part of the body is so hard that more than an ordinary pinch is necessary to deprive this insect of life. I have frequently thrown flies away for dead after giving them a vigorous squeeze, only to see them fly away before reaching the ground. The abdominal part of the body, which is marked

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with black and amber striæ, almost invariably has the appearance of being an empty shell, out of which all substance has been squeezed. Once only I found an exception to this rule. This fly, though he had evidently done himself right royally, could not resist the temptation to sample the new dish my bare arm offered him. I caught and examined him. The abdomen was inflated with blood to the size and shape of a pea, and the distended tissues underneath were rendered sufficiently transparent to show the colour of the blood within. The proboscis of the tsetse protrudes in a horizontal direction and does not point downwards, as is the case with other flies. It is about one eighth of an inch long, and penetrates the skin through a thick flannel shirt without an effort. The fly is frequently to be heard giving vent to the high-pitched buzzing note which gives it a name, but when advancing to attack he noiselessly makes straight for his mark without all the preparatory fuss employed by others of his genus. His tread is so light that the sharp prick of the proboscis is generally the first indication of his whereabouts. The tsetse avoids open plains and is only to be found in forest or bush, and even there the limits of his habitat are so clearly defined, and the fly belts so permanently established, as to give rise to much speculation as to the reason why one of two contiguous districts of a similar character should

## THE TSETSE FLY

teem with "fly," while the other is quite free from the pest. Certainly where buffalo is thick the tsetse is numerous—generally, at least—but this rule does not necessarily apply to most game. Districts occur in which game abounds, which, though within measurable reach of fly belts, are perfectly free of their presence. There is much mystery and consequent speculation about the nature and peculiarities of the tsetse. Hard facts are known well enough, but the scientist has not yet arrived on the scene who can explain its *raison d'être* and the paradoxes of its nature. It is commonly supposed in South Africa that the fly lays its ova in the skin of the wild buffalo, but this is not so, as experiments by Mr. Trimen, formerly curator of the Cape Town Museum, have proved; still, where the wild buffalo is to be found in large numbers the tsetse invariably teems, and yet the domestic ox succumbs more readily to the bite than any other animal, except perhaps the horse, whose first cousin the zebra wanders through belts unhurt. So, too, the wild dog and jackal are impervious, but few domestic dogs survive the bite many months. On the other hand, native dogs whose ancestors have been bred in the fly country for many generations do not succumb to the poison. The same rule applies to goats reared under similar conditions; though it would seem it must not be applied to sheep or cattle. Of all domestic animals the

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lowly donkey alone makes a good fight of it. As high a proportion as four donkeys out of five have spent a whole season in the fly country without signs of the poison taking effect ; though donkeys will, it is believed, at times die of fly bites in the second season after being bitten. As a rule animals bitten by flies in the dry season will live till the first rains fall, when they die within a few days. In the same way a horse if bitten will generally die within twenty-four hours of being ridden through a river. The symptoms are a staring coat, swellings under the jaw, loss of appetite, and increasing poverty of condition. After death the blood is found to have lost its liquidity and become gelatinous. Like the "horse sickness" and malarial fever, this curse to travel and transport undoubtedly recedes before the advance of civilization, so that the far future may yet see the extinction of the tsetse.

Oswell reported the existence of the fly some 600 miles south of the Zambezi, when he hunted there fifty years ago. Now waggons can be taken from Bechuanaland to the Zambezi without any danger of the oxen being "stuck." Several flies are necessary to produce a fatal effect, but in passing through a belt in the daytime several are forthcoming. At night the danger is very small, though it is a mistake to imagine that the tsetse keeps such early hours as other flies. I have at times been worried by them an hour



## THE TSETSE FLY

after the sun has gone down, and have known flies to buzz into my tent as late as 9 o'clock on a dark night and make a bold dash for supper at my expense. At that time of night they are easily caught, and almost invariably found their way into spirits of wine.

With all their faults these destructive little creatures have the merit of being clean feeders. The natives, in taking an animal through a fly belt, plaster it with cow-dung, which effectively keeps the fly at a safe distance. I remember seeing it stated that a certain French traveller, whose name I cannot for the moment call to mind, was of opinion that the tsetse procured its venom from putrid carcases of dead animals. I wish such were the case, for then the tsetse would become as harmless as the house fly for want of poison. The African veldt is practically free from decomposing flesh. If an animal dies or is killed and partly devoured by lions, the skulking hyæna and prowling jackal, which are everywhere at night, soon scent out the remaining flesh. The sun has not risen high ere vultures, at first mere black spots, appear from space in the clear blue sky. Down they swoop, one following another, until what the denizens of the night have been unable to consume is being greedily swallowed by some two dozen of these scavengers. Next, myriads of ants swarm over the bared bones, and thus within twenty-four

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hours everything has been cleaned up, and by the next morning the skeleton itself has been broken to pieces by the returning hyæna. No, if the poison is extraneous, as is almost certainly the case, it is more probable that it is derived from a vegetable source.

In the early afternoon of the 18th, while skinning a fine specimen of pookoo ram which I had shot that morning, one of the boys pointed out a moving black spot some distance away on the further side of the river. Taking two boys with me I crossed to the opposite bank, and making a detour placed myself to windward of what turned out to be a wildebeest bull. The country was open, but here and there an ant-heap or stunted bush made stalking less difficult. I had crawled to within thirty yards of the wildebeest unnoticed, when I suddenly caught sight of a koodoo bull, with a good pair of horns, grazing about 300 yards beyond, while seventy or eighty yards to the left of him a pallah ram was similarly employed.

This was the first koodoo I had seen during my present trip, so I commenced at once to crawl away from the wildebeest with a view to paying my attentions to the more recent discovery. The wildebeest, however, suddenly suspected that something was wrong. He raised his head and sniffed the air, while I flattened myself as much as possible against the ground and remained still.

## PENETRATION OF MANNLICHER BULLET

Finally he turned his head in the opposite direction, but while taking this opportunity to get away from him unobserved, lest he should disturb the koodoo, he suddenly turned his head and caught me in the act of moving. Three loud, ominous snorts, and my little game was spoilt. The koodoo bull was put on the alert, and with the pallah and wildebeest gazed in my direction. This went on for about five minutes, when suddenly the exposé of my schemes gave a vigorous grunt, threw up his hind legs, lashed his tail and galloped off. His example was followed by the others; so changing my 16-bore for a Mannlicher, as I did not expect a near shot, I ran off, hoping to cut off the koodoo, which now bounded away with two other bulls and four or five cows. In doing so I disturbed a herd of some sixty eland, which I followed and eventually lost in the forest.

On returning to the river valley I once more came across my old enemy the wildebeest. I think he must have been a little deaf, for under covert of a very small and scant piece of scrub I again crawled to within thirty yards of him, bent on avenging myself for the loss of the koodoo head. He was facing me when I pulled the trigger, but immediately swerved and galloped away. The bullet struck some reeds 200 yards beyond almost as I fired, and had the country not been open I should have given myself credit

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for having missed him altogether. As it was the bull fell dead after going about 100 yards; then the boys came up, and I ultimately found that the bullet had entered the chest, passed through the heart, and travelling the whole length of the body had left it just to the right of the root of the tail. It was my custom to file the nickel nose of the Mannlicher bullets until the lead core appeared; this no doubt had enabled the lead core to escape from its nickel coating, for the latter was left behind in a twisted form some nine inches from the exit hole. This incident gives some idea of the penetrative power the new small-bore service rifles possess.

The next day I camped on the rising ground at the edge of the valley, through which the river flowed within a hundred yards, while beyond it many hundred yards of swamp contained large numbers of lechwe and spurwing geese. While waiting for the canoes, which travelled very slowly owing to the rapidity of the current, I waded through the swamps in pursuit of these graceful water-buck, bagging a ram with a nice pair of horns, and wounding a second in the lungs. Before the boys came up with him he had entered a huge entanglement of long river-reeds, and it was not until the following morning that his body was found.

I now decided to proceed for a further twenty miles or so without the canoes. So after des-

## GAME ON THE NJOKO

patching one canoe laden with meat for the boys at the main camp under charge of two local natives, I set off with four boys, leaving the other two to await my return with the second canoe.

On the opposite side of the river from where I camped that evening, mixed herds of wildebeest, zebra, and Lichenstein's hartebeest were to be seen grazing on the rich valley pasture. I wanted a Lichenstein, but had no more clothes with me than those I stood in, and did not think it wise to wet them so late in the evening by swimming the river, so had to content myself by watching their movements, an occupation both interesting and instructive to anyone who can appreciate the impressive simplicity of things natural.

I believe this is the only occasion on which I have seen Lichenstein's hartebeest mingle with herds of other species. They are essentially exclusive in their dealings with other animals, or perhaps it would be more correct to say the exclusiveness is on the other side. In this case I noticed that whenever a wildebeest found a hartebeest grazing near him he would lower his head and charge. A few bounds, however, and the fleeter antelope was well out of harm's way. On the other hand, zebra and wildebeest frequently associate on the most friendly terms one with the other. Perhaps the marvellous and incongruous masses of game one so often sees illustrated in

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books of travel may have some foundation in fact, but I confess that, although I have frequently seen large herds of game and at times three or four herds of different species within view at the same time, and occasionally to some extent intermingled, I have never yet been fortunate enough to see buffalo, zebra, and some twelve species of antelope, with rhinoceros and a lion or two thrown in, associating together with true farmyard amiability, and extending in every direction as far as the eye can reach.

On the following evening I reached the confluence of the Njoko and Rampungu rivers, in  $16^{\circ} 42'$  S. latitude. The Rampungu, like the river it feeds, flows through an open valley, down which it winds through a bed some fifteen feet wide and four to eight deep. Its water is quite the clearest I have ever seen, objects under six feet of water being perfectly clear and well defined. In the northern angle formed by these rivers there is a native settlement situated on the top of a sandy rise in the angle of the two rivers. I made my camp near one of the villages, and was most hospitably received by the headman, who sent me large quantities of fresh and thick milk—a luxury I always appreciated, but seldom participated in. At noon the next day I commenced my return journey, accompanied by a couple of boys from the village, as I wished to send back a present of meat if fortune brought

## NATIVE HOSPITALITY

anything my way. After travelling about five miles a large herd of lechwe gave me a chance which I would not have attempted to take in ordinary circumstances. They had noticed me, and forthwith moved away across the swamps towards the river. When standing about 400 yards in front, a lucky shot from the Mannlicher wounded one so severely that the boys had no difficulty in finishing it with their assegais, as the wounded animal endeavoured to effect its escape towards the river. I was glad to have the opportunity of sending the greater part of the meat back to the headman of the village I had just left, for when receiving the first milk he sent me I had told him I regretted that I had nothing with me to remunerate him with, and yet he sent more! As a rule, when an African native makes a present he expects one of greater value in return.

Next day I secured a fine reedbuck ram with horns measuring  $15\frac{1}{2}$  inches from base to tip, and later in the evening shot a wildebeest. Taking two boys on with me, I left the rest to cut up and protect the meat till I should send out a sufficient number of boys to carry it to the canoe, which was only about nine miles away. That evening I camped about four miles from home, and immediately after continuing my journey on the following morning sighted a single roan antelope bull, which after a long stalk I failed

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to bag owing to bad shooting. I arrived at my destination at about eight o'clock with a steinbuck ram I had shot on the way.

I had not been in camp more than a short time when three natives, an old man, a young man, and a small boy, turned up in an emaciated condition; the poor creatures were little more than skeletons—victims of the famine. They brought with them a small calabash of honey, for which they begged me to give them meat. I gave them what I could, and went out to shoot a lechwe, hoping to bestow on them as much as they could carry away. Unfortunately I was unsuccessful, and returned empty-handed.

Having a slight touch of fever on me I remained where I was until about three o'clock on the following afternoon, when the return journey was continued by canoe. The current took the boat down at a considerable pace, so that a hippopotamus, which discovered our approach when we were over fifty yards from him, only reached the water's edge as the canoe was almost on a level with him. Then in he plunged immediately in front. In a second he was head and shoulders above water, five yards distant. Vainly I shouted to the boy in the bows to stoop down in order that I might fire, but he was rendered immovable by fright or surprise, or both; and the hippopotamus, after giving



### THE ZAMBEZI AGAIN

ample time for a right and left, disappeared below the water's surface unmolested.

Two days later I reached the main camp on the Zambezi. The boys succeeded in upsetting the canoe while shooting some small rapids, resulting in the loss of one or two trophies only; otherwise nothing out of the ordinary occurred.