

TEN YEARS

ORTH OF THE ORANGE RIVER

A STORY OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND WORK AMONG
THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRIBES

FROM 1859 TO 1869

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EDINBURGH
EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS
1871.

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what I did not see to be right. I had promised to herd his horse with my own, and had done so. Where was my horse when his was taken? Were they not both together, and was not the herd in their neighbourhood at the time? If Hendrik left me, I should be sorry for his own sake, as the distance was very great for one man to travel; and as to the rest leaving me because I would not do what he desired me, I had yet to hear it from their own mouth. But even if I were left alone here, or left with few men, my case was not hopeless; there was plenty of grass and water, and I should take time to consider what to do. In a few minutes Hendrik gave it up; and every one went about his work as usual. Of course no one really thought of going back; but Hendrik imagined he could get me to pay for the horse; and some of the men seemed to think that if he got me frightened it was no matter of theirs: they would countenance his scheme so far as to give him a chance of trying it. When it failed, the thing was no longer heard of. Not even Hendrik was sour-faced a day after.

On Friday the 17th, we reached the fountain called Maila, where we found a small town of Makalaka, under Putse, a tall and very dark man. We had here another illustration of the strength of hereditary prejudices or principles as to the manners and customs of a tribe. The game was here more plentiful than we had before seen it. Vast herds of buffaloes rushed past our waggon as we approached the water. Troops of zebras and gnus were to be seen in several directions. The smaller antelopes abounded; the tracks of the rhinoceros were numerous; while elands and giraffes grazed not more than two miles from our waggons. And yet these Makalaka were starving. Although they were the best agriculturists in Bechuana-land their tribal education did not include the arts of the Bushman. We found the dead body of a man in the forest, but slightly covered with brushwood, and we were told that he had died for want of food.

"What are you eating?" I asked Putse in native style.

"Nothing whatever, sir," he replied; "he has not killed anything lately."

A servant standing by explained that "he" meant that the lion had not brought down anything in their neighbourhood which they might share with him.

Not long after my arrival here, I walked out alone with my gun. The zebras were within sight, and as I had lately killed one, I had a sort of confidence in trying them again. I was not, however, successful on this occasion, and was wending my way to the waggons by one of the numerous beaten game-paths leading to the fountain, engrossed in thought and paying very little attention to objects around me, when something prompted me to look up at the branches of a tree under which the path was leading me. There hung at a considerable height a log of wood about four feet long and some six inches in diameter, with a large assegai at its end pointing towards the ground. A line which was attached to the upper end of this horrid weapon, came down across the path in front of me, and was so secured that any animal going along the path, by disturbing the line would receive the heavily-loaded lance from above. A few more paces and this would have been my fate. I thanked God and passed on. When I came to the fountain I expostulated with Putse, the chief, for not performing a duty which is always observed by chiefs and head men—to inform strangers of all game-pits, poisonous plants, or tsetse-fly in their neighbourhood.

"Who would have thought of your turning up over there! Did you not start in quite another direction? I am sorry; but we are so hungry that I did not wish to take down the trap till to-morrow."

Towards the north-west this plan of killing game is extensively followed; even elephants are killed by this suspended lance, which is sometimes rendered more deadly

in your own country? Did not J— V— and the Boers who were here a few days ago tell me that all this land belonged to the white men, and that they would shortly come and occupy it? Why, then, do you ask for guides in what seems to be your own country?" I replied that the Queen of England had no desire to seize their territory; and that if Englishmen came into their country it would be for two objects—to teach them about God, which was my own purpose, or to hunt and to trade with them for ivory and feathers. I told them that if peace continued, waggons filled with the beautiful things of the white people would visit their country; and that he who was industrious would be able to purchase some of them with ivory, feathers, and skins, and even with the produce of their gardens. This assurance, which has been abundantly verified in succeeding years, gave great satisfaction; and Putse declared the news was good, if only the Matebele would let him "sleep."

Although the Dutch hunters had opened up the water, and we ourselves had also worked at it for hours, we found that unless we prevented the game from drinking in the night, we should not have enough for our oxen. Even while it was still daylight, on Saturday evening, we observed the thirsty zebras gradually approaching, that they might quench their thirst as soon as the sun went down. We lighted a fire at the water, but found that to be of no use. A rhinoceros and a troop of buffaloes dashed right down to the water. One of the latter paid for his temerity with his life. On Sunday evening, as I did not wish the men to lose another night's rest, we not only lighted a fire, but constructed something like the figure of a man in a prominent position. Some prophesied that our effigy would at once be destroyed by an angry buffalo, or a black rhinoceros; but no attention was paid

either to it or to the fire by creatures goaded on by thirst. There was no alternative, therefore, but again to insist upon our exclusive right to the water by the argument of the gun. As soon as their determination to drink led them too near, the men guarding the water fired at them, and caused them to withdraw. Although many more must have been killed, only one zebra was found dead at the fountain, which, with part of the buffalo, I made over to Putse and his people; directing him, at the same time, to take up the blood-tracks of the wounded. We had thus the consolation of thinking that while driven by necessity to fire upon the game in the dark, such as might die of their wounds would be very welcome to the famishing Makalaka. During the night there was quite a procession round the fountain,—a vast gathering of wild creatures in separate troops, galloping, stamping, snorting, and neighing; drawn to the fountain by thirst, and kept from drinking by fear.

After hearing that we were journeying to Linyanti, Putse brought to our camp an old Bushman, who had just returned from the district of the Mababe. Putse said it was his custom to tell strangers as much as he knew concerning the country towards which they might be journeying; and for this purpose he had brought the Bushman. "Perhaps what he tells is lies, perhaps it is truth; I shall have discharged my duty when you hear his story." The Bushman now commenced his account, which was to the effect that "the Makololo at Linyanti had killed the head-man of the missionary party and his wife, with a head-man of the Batlaping who accompanied the white men; that several little children had died; that the surviving white man and his wife had left Linyanti, and were now no doubt far on their way southward. Sekeletu, the chief, had poisoned an ox, and then pre-

should be at an end when they could leave him in the hands of the Bushmen. It would seem that the cruelty of the Makololo was not yet complete. Mr. Price afterwards learned that they gave instructions to the Bushmen to lead the waggons into the habitat of the tsetse. Whether the Makololo were guilty of this final act of malice or not, it is certain that the Bushmen led them right into the fly, and then ran away. Now, they had nothing to gain from such treachery, but everything to lose. They lost their pay, and the pleasant life of travelling with a white man's waggon, which a Bushman always enjoys. It is difficult to suppose that this act was not intentional; and it is equally difficult to acquit the Makololo of the chief share in its guilt, inasmuch as Bushmen would be afraid to refuse obedience to their command. Once in the fly, and without guides, Mr. Price despaired of being able to save the forty-four oxen which now constituted his troop. He therefore made straight for the Tamalakan river, which he followed southward to the Zouga. Mr. Helmore's old waggon had broken down, and been left behind on the north of the Mababe; and one of the front wheels of Mr. Price's own waggon broke in the neighbourhood of Lechulatebe's town. With fever still clinging to him, it was with great difficulty Mr. Price made new spokes of such wood as he could find; but although performed in such circumstances, his repairs afterwards sufficed to take the waggon to Kuruman. Lechulatebe had shown great kindness to Mr. Price and the two orphan children of Mr. Helmore. When the waggon broke down, he sent assistance to remove it to the town; and during the month of their stay at the Lake, neither Mr. Price nor the children wanted anything which it was in the power of Lechulatebe to provide. Mr. Price had still a little tea and coffee and sugar left. The chief, who was very partial to these things,

gave in exchange abundance of such food as his town supplied. Every day the tribute in meat (the breast of every animal killed) arrived from some outlying district. It might be the flesh of rhinoceros or buffalo, gnu or zebra, giraffe or eland; but whatever it was, Mr. Price was welcome to a share. The missionary was now a fixture at the Lake; for although the waggon was capable of repair, nothing could save the tsetse-bitten oxen from death. With nothing to purchase a fresh team, or even food for himself and his men, it was welcome news to Mr. Price to hear from the boatmen of Lechulatebe that "a missionary on his way to the Makololo, had touched the Zouga at More oa Maota." Meeting with us on the Zouga after such dark and sorrowful experiences, was, in Mr. Price's own words, "like a resurrection from the dead."

Summing up his personal connection with these calamities, Mr. Price wrote to the Directors of the Society:—"If suffering in mission work is doing anything, then I have done something; if not, then I have done but little. My prayer now is, that God will direct me to some suitable sphere, where I may spend my life in the service of Christ among the heathen." This prayer has been graciously answered. In the active duties of a mission-station, Mr. Price has now spent years of earnest and willing service to Christ. In this work he has companions and fellow-labourers; but in the higher service of suffering, in the dark experiences at the fever-bed and the grave's mouth at inhospitable Linyanti, he is alone among his brethren.

is again beyond the boundary of the Matebele country. I found that great stress was laid by the Batalowta on the fact that I had been at Sekhorne's during the late war; in fact, that I was to be announced to the king as "Sekhorne's missionary." While not caring to hide my connection with the Bamangwato, I endeavoured to impress on their minds that I had been only one year at Sekhorne's; that I had come from England at the same time as the Matebele missionaries, and that I was one with them in entire neutrality in all political matters. I learned afterwards that all my explanations had been given in vain—all that reached Moselekatse's ear being that "Yonie (Mr. J. Moffat) was coming, accompanied by Sekhorne's missionary."

Taking it for granted that Moselekatse would admit us, we did not wait at Mahuku's for an answer, as is sometimes done, but slowly followed in the rear of our messengers. In this way we passed through what is called the Makalaka country, which is the ridge or backbone from which on one side the rivers flow first to the north-west and then northward to the Zambesi, and on the other side flowed to the south-east and joined the Limpopo. This elevated region appeared to be healthy, as well as beautiful and fruitful. Although this was the dry season, we found the country abounding with water. We found here the sugar-bush, and for days were free from the acacia jungles of the lower-lying country which we had left behind us. After leaving Monyama's town we entered the Matebele country proper, and began the descent from the high lands in which we had spent the last few days. We had now an escort in old Monyama himself, who was responsible for letting us pass his village before our messengers had returned with the permission of the chief.

On the evening of Tuesday the 19th August, our attention was directed to the fierce barking of our dogs at

something among the neighbouring trees, and some of the men, having taken their guns, proceeded to the spot. Hearing shots fired, Mr. Moffat and I followed. My wife handed me what we both took for granted was my rifle, and I hastened to the scene of action. As I approached I was met by my two drivers, who were running at full speed. I inquired what was chasing them, but they had no time to tell me. Proceeding a little farther, I saw a black rhinoceros cow with its calf, the latter of which was baited by the dogs. I came up just in time to see one of my dogs tossed into the air by the enraged mother. Sadly shaken, but with no bones broken, "Celt" crept away among the bushes, and did not show face again until the danger was past. The rhinoceros had already received several shots from Mr. Moffat and from the men: I now discharged the contents of both barrels into its body, being perhaps fifty yards from the animal. When I fired the second time the rhinoceros staggered. The calf was now shot, and another bullet or two were placed in the body of the mother, when the men said it was dead, and began to advance towards it. I had just been observing its little eye, and saw there was life in it still, when a sudden movement of its body sent back at the top of their speed those who were advancing. But it was only a spasmodic jerk. The creature was unable to rise again to its feet. It was however too stubborn to roll over in the helplessness of some wounded animals, and died resting on its knees.

"Hallo! who has been firing at a rhinoceros with small shot?" asked some one as soon as we went up to the body. Every one now looked at his gun. To my chagrin I found that I was the hero of the small shot. I had been riding in Mr. Moffat's waggon that afternoon, and in my absence my driver had begged my rifle from my wife. When I afterwards hastily asked it, she mechanically handed

to me my fowling-piece, which was also loaded and capped ! It was amusing now to remember the applause with which the men had greeted my second shot, and the staggering of the rhinoceros ! The noise of the report may have disconcerted the animal, but certainly the hail of small shot did it no harm whatever, only mottling its hide so as to resemble what a rhinoceros with small-pox might be ! As the sun was nearly set, we drew our waggons up to the two carcasses, and there spent the night. Before the waggons were unyoked, the children had climbed on the back of the rhinoceros, and were examining its horns and fierce little eye. The meat from the ribs of the rhinoceros is considered best ; and it is said the flesh of the mohohu or white rhinoceros is very good. I cannot recommend that of the borile or black rhinoceros, although with the appetite of camp life in Africa it was palatable enough.

Two messengers from Moselekatse met us here next morning before we had commenced our day's journey. They had brought the "mouth" of the king to us. Of course Mr. J. Moffat was going home ; the chief was glad to hear of his return. Turning his attention to me, the men began to put a great many questions, to which I returned plain and straightforward answers. "The chief wished to know what I wanted in his country !" I replied that I wished to see the chief himself, and my friends at Inyate. After patiently answering a great many questions—explanations being also given by Mr. Moffat on any point where it was necessary,—to my surprise and disappointment the messenger began, not without some confusion, after our unreserved conversation, to deliver to me the decision of his master. Moselekatse ordered me to return ; Yonie was to come on ; but the chief did not wish to see one of the Bamangwato. I learned, however, that this decision was not final ; one of the men was to return with such explanations as I might have to give. Mr. Moffat and I

There is a second ceremony usually performed in the succeeding year, and which, although of subordinate character and importance, is still necessary to the completion of the training of the young man. After the first year's ceremony the regiment of boys is sent out under the command of their own captain to hunt antelopes. Every one must prove that he has at least killed one before they return. On the completion of the second year's ceremony, the youths are again ordered to the field, now to kill a rhinoceros, a buffalo, or an elephant. Having accomplished this, the Bechuana youths have won for themselves the position of men in the tribe. They live in different parts of the town; and as civilians own allegiance to different head men, but they are nevertheless one compact body for warlike or other purposes. The chief has only to announce to their captain that they must assemble at a certain time, to have his order obeyed. The only way a Bechuana man has of telling you his age is to mention the name of his regiment, and the names of one or two men in it whom you know. The idea of counting years or days was unknown to Bechuanas. Sometimes for practical purposes, if a regiment has been cut up in war, it may be united with another next it in age; but the name is not changed. It is sad to see a whole company of Bechuana old men marching together, nearly every one showing some indication of failing powers. Few of these men have learned to shoot with the gun, a weapon which is eagerly sought after by their buttocks on a stone. This was called "burgessing." "This harsh custom, besides the diversion afforded to the unpolished agents, might be supposed to have the same influence in assisting the local memory of the patients, as that said to exist among the native and more wild Irish, who during the night go the round of the estates to which they still lay claim, as having belonged to their ancestors; and for the purpose of more deeply impressing on the memories of their children the boundaries of the several properties, at certain resting-places give them a sound flogging."—*Jamieson's Scot. Dict.*: "Burgess."