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W. Scully*

Frontispiece.

REMINISCENCES

OF A

SOUTH AFRICAN PIONEER

(1ST SERIES—"WANDERJAHRE")

BY
WILLIAM CHARLES SCULLY

AUTHOR OF
"BY VELDT AND KOPIE," "KAFIR STORIES," "THE RIDGE OF THE WHITE WATERS,"
"BETWEEN SUN AND SAND," ETC., ETC.

WITH 16 ILLUSTRATIONS



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pass. The boys ran forward and collected just beyond the gap. A number of men stood together, about a hundred yards away. It was abundantly clear that trouble was coming.

Several boys collected behind me as I approached the gap. I sent the two Bapedi through first. They went in fear and trembling; I followed immediately after. As the second of my bearers passed through the gap a big boy sprang forward and seized his swag. I at once struck the assailant a smashing blow on the chest with the butt-end of my gun. He fell headlong among his companions. I then, with deliberation, cocked both barrels, walked slowly forward, and told the Bapedi to follow. The boys opened a passage through their ranks and we passed through. Then the men began to shout and jeer, and the boys, stung by this, ran down the hillside after us, brandishing their sticks. One poised his assegai, as though he were about to throw it, but I levelled my gun at him and he swerved. I then turned, and we went on without further molestation. But the war-cry pealed forth, and for a long time we could see people running hither and thither among the kraals.

I believe that on this occasion my Bapedi had a narrow escape, although I do not think any

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harm was intended to me, personally. A few months afterwards a prospector named Coffin was in the same vicinity. His two boys, also Bapedi, were killed in his presence.

I had for some days been suffering from intestinal disturbance and a slight headache, so strongly suspected that I had contracted fever. It took me sixty long and fatiguing hours to get back to the Crocodile River. I arrived there after dusk, and shouted for the raft. Maclean and the Pessimist soon paddled across. The latter was, I am quite convinced, much disappointed at my having turned up. During supper, while I was relating my experiences, the Pessimist interjected the remark that I was a liar. After a more or less drawn battle, Maclean and Niekerk restored peace, so that both supper and narrative were finished without further interruption. But Niekerk, who had been unable to understand the words which gave rise to the disturbance, was confirmed in his ideas as to the essential insanity of the English.

Our little patrol-tent stood about ten yards from the tail of Niekerk's wagon. One morning at daybreak a big black rhinoceros stood grunting and sniffing in the space between. The barrel of Niekerk's rifle protruded slowly from the

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wagon-tilt. When the animal felt the sting of the bullet it swung round and went off at a gallop along the river-bank. Rhino could not have been much hurt, for his spoor was to be seen a few days afterwards fifteen miles away, and it was still the spoor of a running animal. Game was now scarce, so Niekerk decided to shift his quarters.

As we had done no prospecting to speak of, it was decided to explore the Crocodile Valley, in the direction of the mountains, before going home. We accordingly once more crossed the river, and proceeded against the stream along its southern bank, panning as we went. "Colour" was to be found everywhere, but no sign of "pay." On the second morning we had an unpleasant surprise; the Bapedi had bolted during the night. They had taken nothing of our belongings. I was very wrathful; but time brings perspective; to-day I am inclined to think that these boys were justified in clearing out. They had been terribly frightened in Swaziland, and when we again crossed the river they may have thought, naturally enough, that we were going back.

In sadness we sorted our belongings, selecting the indispensable and the more valuable; we

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cached the remainder in a krantz cleft. I wonder if it is still where we hid it? Then, the flood having somewhat subsided, we went westward along the river-bank until we found a fordable spot. Here we crossed and, feeling much chastened, tramped off in the direction of Pilgrim's Rest. As we struggled on we tried to comfort ourselves with a foretaste of the vengeance which we would wreak on Indogozan and his companion when we caught them. However, catch them we never did.

It now became quite clear that I had contracted fever. Headache, dizziness, internal pains, and deadly weakness had me in their grip. Partridges got on my nerves, and became the terror of my life. The country was full of these birds, which were very tame. The whirring scream of a covey, when it flushed around me, almost caused distraction. On such occasions I have often dropped flat in my tracks.

In its early stages, fever is generally more or less intermittent; the subject generally feels either worse or better than he really is. Eventually, however, by hook or by crook, I got back to Mac Mac. Maclean went on to Pilgrim's Rest. I collapsed, and lay in my patrol-tent, alone and untended, for several days. Then Mr. (after-

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wards Sir Drummond) Dunbar and his kind wife took me in, and tended me like truly Good Samaritans. I was as tough as nails. The attack proved to be a comparatively light one, so I managed to pull through.

CHAPTER XI

Weakness after fever—I engage in commerce—Rats—The commandeered cat—My commercial ineptitude—Tom Simpson surprises Wolf—Close of my commercial career—Saulez—His thrashing of the bullies—Gardiner holds up the bank—Nicknames—Conferring a patent of nobility—"Old Nelly"—"A poor man's lead"—"Charley Brown's Gully"—Swindled by my partner—My discovery on the mountain—A lonely time—Waiting for rain—Disappointment and despair—Abandonment of my work—Departure—Once more a tramp.

AFTER rallying from my bout of fever I felt terribly weak. I was kindly looked after for a few weeks by some friends, but it was imperatively necessary that I should, at the earliest possible date, once more begin to earn a livelihood. I was now absolutely penniless. Manual labour was, for the time, quite out of the question. The least physical exertion, more especially if it involved bending down, caused a sickening sense of dizziness and loss of vision. For some little time I resembled one of those dolls whose eyes