

02 . 00 . 20

~~665-541.C.90.17~~

665-541.C.90.17

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Copyright by Arthur Lee.

From a painting by P. Laszlo

PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT.



NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1946

All rights reserved

1-14, 1-593

other men who cannot learn to shoot with any accuracy at all. In between come the mass of men of ordinary abilities who, if they choose resolutely to practice, can by sheer industry and judgment make themselves fair rifle shots. The men who show this requisite industry and judgment can without special difficulty raise themselves to the second class of respectable rifle shots; and it is to this class that I belong. But to have reached this point of marksmanship with the rifle at a target by no means implies ability to hit game in the field, especially dangerous game. All kinds of other qualities, moral and physical, enter into being a good hunter; and especially a good hunter after dangerous game, just as all kinds of other qualities in addition to skill with the rifle enter into being a good soldier. With dangerous game, after a fair degree of efficiency with the rifle has been attained, the prime requisites are cool judgment and that kind of nerve which consists in avoiding being rattled. Any beginner is apt to have "buck fever," and therefore no beginner should go at dangerous game.

Buck fever means a state of intense nervous excitement which may be entirely divorced from timidity. It may affect a man the first time he has to speak to a large audience just as it affects him the first time he sees a buck or goes into battle. What such a man needs is not courage but nerve control, cool-headedness. This he can get only by actual practice. He must, by custom and repeated exercise of self-mastery, get his nerves thoroughly under control. This is largely a matter of habit, in the sense of repeated effort and repeated exercise of will power. If the man has the right stuff in him, his will grows stronger and stronger with each exercise of it—and if he has not the right stuff in him he had better keep clear of dangerous game hunting, or indeed of any other form of sport or work in which there is bodily peril.

After he has achieved the ability to exercise wariness and judgment and the control over his nerves *which will make him shoot as well at the game as at a target*, he can begin his essays at dangerous game hunting, and he will

then find that it does not demand such abnormal prowess as the outsider is apt to imagine. A man who can hit a soda-water bottle at the distance of a few yards can brain a lion or a bear or an elephant at that distance, and if he cannot brain it when it charges he can at least bring it to a standstill. All he has to do is to shoot as accurately as he would at a soda-water bottle; and to do this requires nerve, at least as much as it does physical address. Having reached this point, the hunter must not imagine that he is warranted in taking desperate chances. There are degrees in proficiency; and what is a warrantable and legitimate risk for a man to take when he has reached a certain grade of efficiency may be a foolish risk for him to take before he has reached that grade. A man who has reached the degree of proficiency indicated above is quite warranted in walking in at a lion at bay, in an open plain, to, say, within a hundred yards. If the lion has not charged, the man ought at that distance to knock him over and prevent his charging; and if the lion is already charging, the man ought at that distance to be able to stop him. But the amount of prowess which warrants a man in relying on his ability to perform this feat does not by any means justify him in thinking that, for instance, he can crawl after a wounded lion into thick cover. I have known men of indifferent prowess to perform this latter feat successfully, but at least as often they have been unsuccessful, and in these cases the result has been unpleasant. The man who habitually follows wounded lions into thick cover must be a hunter of the highest skill, or he can count with certainty on an ultimate mauling.

The first two or three bucks I ever saw gave me buck fever badly, but after I had gained experience with ordinary game I never had buck fever at all with dangerous game. In my case the overcoming of buck fever was the result of conscious effort and a deliberate determination to overcome it. More happily constituted men never have to make this determined effort at all—which may perhaps show that

the average man can profit more from my experiences than he can from those of the exceptional man.

I have shot only five kinds of animals which can fairly be called dangerous game—that is, the lion, elephant, rhinoceros, and buffalo in Africa, and the big grizzly bear a quarter of a century ago in the Rockies. Taking into account not only my own personal experience, but the experiences of many veteran hunters, I regard all the four African animals, but especially the lion, elephant, and buffalo, as much more dangerous than the grizzly. As it happened, however, the only narrow escape I personally ever had was from a grizzly, and in Africa the animal killed closest to me as it was charging was a rhinoceros—all of which goes to show that a man must not generalize too broadly from his own personal experiences. On the whole, I think the lion the most dangerous of all these five animals; that is, I think that, if fairly hunted, there is a larger percentage of hunters killed or mauled for a given number of lions killed than for a given number of any one of the other animals. Yet I personally had no difficulties with lions. I twice killed lions which were at bay and just starting to charge, and I killed a heavy-maned male while it was in full charge. But in each instance I had plenty of leeway, the animal being so far off that even if my bullet had not been fatal I should have had time for a couple more shots. The African buffalo is undoubtedly a dangerous beast, but it happened that the few that I shot did not charge. A bull elephant, a vicious "rogue," which had been killing people in the native villages, did charge before being shot at. My son Kermit and I stopped it at forty yards. Another bull elephant, also unwounded, which charged, nearly got me, as I had just fired both cartridges from my heavy double-barreled rifle in killing the bull I was after—the first wild elephant I had ever seen. The second bull came through the thick brush to my left like a steam plow through a light snowdrift, everything snapping before his rush, and was so near that he could have hit me with his trunk. I slipped past him behind a tree. Peo-

ple have asked me how I felt on this occasion. My answer has always been that I suppose I felt as most men of like experience feel on such occasions. At such a moment a hunter is so very busy that he has no time to get frightened. He wants to get in his cartridges and try another shot.

Rhinoceros are truculent, blustering beasts, much the most stupid of all the dangerous game I know. Generally their attitude is one of mere stupidity and bluff. But on occasions they do charge wickedly, both when wounded and when entirely unprovoked. The first I ever shot I mortally wounded at a few rods' distance, and it charged with the utmost determination, whereat I and my companion both fired, and more by good luck than anything else brought it to the ground just thirteen paces from where we stood. Another rhinoceros may or may not have been meaning to charge me; I have never been certain which. It heard us and came at us through rather thick brush, snorting and tossing its head. I am by no means sure that it had fixedly hostile intentions, and indeed with my present experience I think it likely that if I had not fired it would have flinched at the last moment and either retreated or gone by me. But I am not a rhinoceros mind reader, and its actions were such as to warrant my regarding it as a suspicious character. I stopped it with a couple of bullets, and then followed it up and killed it. The skins of all these animals which I thus killed are in the National Museum at Washington.

But, as I said above, the only narrow escape I met with was not from one of these dangerous African animals, but from a grizzly bear. It was about twenty-four years ago. I had wounded the bear just at sunset, in a wood of lodge-pole pines, and, following him, I wounded him again, as he stood on the other side of a thicket. He then charged through the brush, coming with such speed and with such an irregular gait that, try as I would, I was not able to get the sight of my rifle on the brain-pan, though I hit him very hard with both the remaining barrels of my magazine Winchester. It was in the days of black powder, and the