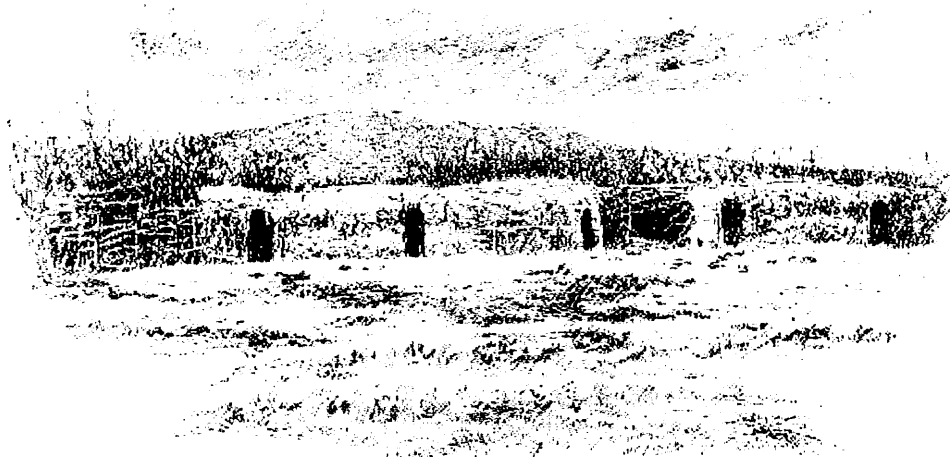


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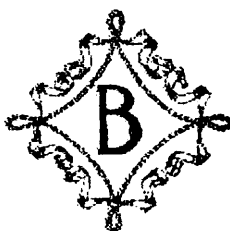
No. 4.



A Masai Kraal. Mount Kenya Longoni in the distance.

HOW I CROSSED MASAI-LAND.

By Joseph Thomson.



BETWEEN the years 1858, when Burton and Speke made their celebrated journey to Lake Tanganyika, and 1882, the rapid development of African exploration had laid bare the chief secrets of the greater part of east central Africa. The country between the Indian Ocean and Lakes Nyassa and Tanganyika had been crossed and re-crossed, and a fair idea acquired of its physical configuration.

There was still, however, one important zone at which various travellers had nibbled, but which no one had made his own. This was the region lying direct-

ly between the coast and Victoria Nyanza, and through which the equator runs. It was already known that it contained snow-clad mountains, and a remarkable tribe of people; but, in add to its attractions, active volcanoes, new lakes, great rivers, etc., were reported till the explorer longed to visit them, and the stay-at-home geographer to have them described and accurately placed on his maps.

There were other than scientific reasons to give an added interest to Masai-land, for such we may now call the zone in question.

When Gordon was Governor-General of the Sudan, he had seen that through Masai-land lay the route of the future for permanent communication between

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mostly grassy savannas, mottled with groves and fringing strips of trees along the streams flowing from the snowy heights. Lying thus open to Masai attacks, there were, of course, no inhabitants; but we had no reason to complain of their absence. Time after time the mountaineers came down from their fastnesses in howling multitudes, dancing wild fandangoes, indicative of the pleasure it would afford them to make us into mince-meat if they could but see their way. Happily, as that was not quite clear to them, and as we felt quite safe, we rather enjoyed their presence, as a savagely romantic adjunct to our march.

In other ways we had no reason to complain of want of incident. On one occasion we stalked an animal in the bush, which, being only partially seen, one thinks is a lion, another a rhinoceros, a third a buffalo. The excitement becomes intense as we near our game, till, on the point of firing, our presence becomes known, and the shaggy head and huge ears of a strayed donkey is seen, while the welkin rings with the commonplace "hee-haw," which completes our discomfiture. Time after time, rhinoceros, which are here plentiful, suddenly awoken from a noontide siesta, charge the caravan, and scatter it to the winds. Trying to stop the headlong progress of one of those brutes, I have a narrow escape of being skied, but escape by a lucky jump aside. Again, a buffalo—old, solitary, and consequently vicious—appears in the midst of our camp, with all the effect of a shell expected to burst. Before one man can escape, he is tossed and badly lacerated, and another is knocked down. A heavily loaded donkey coming in its way is thrown in the air like a cork, ripped open, and a second blow on the head mashes it to jelly. There are a number of narrow escapes before we recover from the first panic, and, finally, with a hundred bullets, despatch the dangerous brute.

Where there are no inhabitants food has to be obtained by the rifle, and time after time, though no sportsman, I have to stalk rhinoceros and buffalo, to the imminent danger of my life. But we are called to encounter other dangers

than those from wild beasts and equally wild men. On one occasion, while camped in the midst of a dense jungle, the dried grass is fired by the natives to windward, and the conflagration comes down upon us with terrific speed and an appalling roar. For dear life we have to seize sticks and branches, and go forth to battle with the flames in the midst of an extraordinary scene of excitement and panic. Happily we come out victorious, blackened and scorched, it is true, but with no lives lost, and only some goods destroyed.

These and similar incidents marked our second approach to Masai-land, but being more hopeful of a successful issue to our enterprise, they seemed only to add to our enjoyment of the march. On August 14th we once more came into communication with the Masai, though only with a few graybeards. They brought the pleasant news that all the warriors of the surrounding country were away on various distant expeditions, leaving only the children and married people. This was good news to hear, not so much because the absence of the warriors lessened our dangers, as that we would have less "hango," or "right-of-way tax," to pay—one of the most onerous of the charges which fall upon the trader and explorer who wants to travel peaceably.

Our road thus cleared, we marched on with more confidence. With our entrance into Masai-land we began to leave Kilimanjaro behind us. A weird, flat expanse of barren sand stretched before us, painful to see in its repellent monotony. Hardly a single green tree was to be seen, only a few gaunt skeleton trunks, in harmony with the blasted ribs of rock which here and there rose above the surface. Over all hung a haze, lending a ghastly glamour to the scene, and adding to the strange effects. The mirage also helped to give a further air of unreality to the landscape, projecting bits of it against the sky, making game walk in mid-air, and spreading before us illusory lakes and ponds. Bounding this plain of Njiri—the dried-up bed of an ancient lake—there rose from the quivering gray shen the bounding masses of Kilimanjaro and Meru in the south, Donyo Erok and

not without fear and trepidation. At our elevation of 6,000 feet an icy wind swept across the treeless plains, with an effect not expected so near the equator.

At first this rich and fertile region appeared to be given over wholly to big game. Rhinoceros, buffalo, zebra, wildebeest, antelope, ostrich, etc., were to be seen on all sides in astonishing numbers, in herds, groups, or solitary, according to the habits of the particular species. After a time evidences of other inhabitants could be described, in the shape of dark, circular objects, from which rose curling smoke. These were the kraals of the Masai. As we continued our way we could see that our appearance had aroused a conviction among the inhabitants. Men were running from kraal to kraal, and others were congregating in groups. Soon the bolder or more curious of them began to run toward us, swinging their

By midday we had camped in the neighborhood of the Masai kraals, in a curve of the low-land waters of the Ngare N'Erubi. There we stacked our goods, and while some remained to guard, the rest cut down acacia-trees and built a strong fence. Thus fortified, we were prepared to await the development of events. Unhappily, the promise of our reception was sadly belied by the realization. The warriors gathered in hundreds from all sides, and enormous demands were made on our goods as payment for a right of way through the land. One warrior drew his sword upon me, because I pushed him away when carrying his investigation of my person somewhat beyond bounds. Everyone had to remain in arms. There were continual attempts to steal, horse-play of the most trying description, ugly rushes which seemed as if they would lead to bloodshed and general battle.



Camp of Mr. Thomson's Party at Kikuyu.

great shields at their sides, their enormous spears glancing brightly in the sun. We were speedily face to face with the redoubtable warriors, listening to their strange greetings, touching unicefully their greasy hands. Our fears were for the time allayed by our reception, and we forgot their reputation in our admiration of their magnificent physique.

Worse than all, we heard of a fight which had taken place before with a large caravan that had preceded us, in which some Masai had been killed, and we were made to understand that they would probably take their revenge on us. Next day matters became worse. We heard of a general gathering of the clans and a probable attack