# AFRICA

## FROM SOUTH TO NORTH THROUGH MAROTSELAND

By MAJOR A. ST H. GIBBONS, F.R.G.S., R.C.I.

Author of "Exploration and Hunting in Central Africa."

With numerous Illustrations reproduced from Photographs, and Maps. In two Volumes Vol. I

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD

LONDON AND NEW YORK MDCCCCIV

themselves were all but submerged, the keel three feet behind was scarcely covered. Success seemed within our grasp when we found ourselves held as in a vice — two hidden rocks absolutely precluded farther advance. There was but one course left open to us — to let the launch drop a few yards downstream and haul her into the back wash referred to above. Here, under the lee of a jutting rock, the goods were off-loaded, and we made a fourth attempt, but once more we were to be defeated in our efforts; for after a few exciting moments the current struck her starboard bow, round again she went, dragging the rope from the boys' grasp, and we were again swished downstream at the rate of some ten miles an hour, there to commence again from the very beginning. The water seethed all around us as in a boiling cauldron, but as there were no surface rocks in midstream, we passed down safely. Again we reached the critical point, but this time the rope snapped, and we made another rapid movement to the rear. The sixth attempt was the last, and after a long and desperate pull the *Constance* at last rode peacefully in calm water.

Two or three years earlier these rapids had been the scene of a fatal disaster. A Portuguese officer was making the ascent, when the tow-rope broke, and his boat, turning broadside to the current, capsized, and he with part of his crew perished. I consider that our experience here, added to others of a later date, speaks volumes for the stability of the Hodgetts principle of hull construction. We were three times forced broadside into the current where the water was most disturbed, and though the *Constance* had six inches less freeboard than the boats used by the Portuguese, she did not ship a pint of water, even before she was lightened by the removal of her cargo.

Shortly after midday the following afternoon the launch was reloaded and continued her course up the gorge. While in progress a lioness was sighted taking water at the river. Captain Quicke and myself went ashore and set off in pursuit, each going his own way, so as to increase the prospect of

intercepting her. After a fruitless search we returned. I had caught a glimpse of her head as she glanced over the trunk of a fallen tree lying across a ravine at a distance of two hundred yards, but she got clean away, and nothing further was seen of her.

In the evening we camped immediately clear of the gorge, where the river widens and becomes both shallower and swifter. While out hunting, early the next morning, I encountered a rhinoceros moving slowly down a deep ravine leading to the river, but almost entirely obscured by leafless thorn bush. As I caught sight of the high, blackish shoulder, I fired a soft lead bullet into it, being under the impression that the animal was a wildebeest; but when the ponderous animal dashed up the incline, I realised the mistake I had made in not playing the waiting game. The bullet, which would no doubt have bagged a wildebeest, was placed too high and had not sufficient penetrative power to do much harm to the rhinoceros. I followed him for some distance through a rough undulating country covered with thick thorn bush, but finding no more blood than would be expected from a flesh wound, ultimately gave up the chase as useless, for he had the pace of me, and I felt sure that his wound was not sufficiently severe to weaken him.

The river was now nearly half a mile wide, the high banks being lined with the dark, heavily leaved trees, occurring in so many places on the middle river. Undulations covered with a forest of deciduous trees in their spring foliage sloped away from either bank. The current was so strong and the air so still that three days' very hard work only placed eight miles to our credit, and culminated in an accident which well-nigh proved disastrous in its results.

A gravel bank, over which a very small proportion of the river's volume escaped, stretched almost from bank to bank. Between the right bank and a small gravel island, only some forty yards from it, the main stream rushed by at a pace which offered resistance far too severe to be overcome by the engines of the *Constance*. A jutting precipitous rock on the

mainland denied all foothold for a towing party, since the bank beyond receded at almost a right angle. Thus the only course open to us was to round the head of the gravel island as best we could. In doing so the boys were compelled to tow at an angle of about thirty degrees just at that point where the current was most severe. The strain proved too much for them, and the rope was dragged from their hands. Three times was this performance repeated, and three times we were helplessly carried downstream. On the last occasion we were bumped violently on the stony bottom, and sprang a bad leak through which the boat commenced to fill rapidly. To add to our discomfiture the rope had fouled the propeller, and we bade fair in this helpless plight to go down in deep water. The propeller was freed from this entanglement none too soon, the engines were set in motion, and we ran aground on the island in a sinking condition. Everything was wet through — bales, ration cases, and clothes. We were imprisoned on that small bank of boulders for three days, repairing the damaged hull and drying the goods. Every ration case had to be opened and every tin within it opened, for unfortunately these were not hermetically sealed. Wherever there was a stone with a surface flat enough for the purpose, the ingredients were to be seen spread out in the sun — oatmeal, rice, tapioca, tea; dried, or more properly speaking, wet, fruits were dotted about the inhospitable little island, and in spite of this precaution many were the cups of musty tea which reminded us in the future of this troublesome adventure. By the morning of the fourth day, thanks to Mr. Weller's skill, the little boat was as seaworthy as ever, and was hauled round the head of the island to be loaded up in still water.

During our imprisonment on this island of rocks, — for we had no means of reaching the mainland, — the first rain of the coming wet season broke on us in the form of a violent thunder-storm. Before the storm burst the maximum shade temperature reached 105.5 Fahr. Such heat had a drying effect on the moistened provisions and calico, but quite the

reverse on the skins of those who were hammering rivets and doing other manual labour from sunrise to sunset.

We left the scene of our troubles on the first of November. The current was still very strong, and by nightfall we had succeeded in making only six and a half miles, reaching the confluence of the Mosika, a small tributary river, and here we camped. Captain Quicke took his rifle out the next morning, and returned with a palla, thereby replenishing a larder which had been empty for the past five days. Though not in exactly a good game country, we had reached a part of the river sufficiently remote from civilisation to allow of our procuring as much game as was required to keep the cooking-pots well supplied, — that is, when not compelled by untoward circumstances to take up our quarters on desert islands. The numerous buffalo skulls encountered on the veldt showed that the district had been ravaged by the rinderpest epidemic of two years previously. Prior to that cruel visitation this must have been a favourite resort of game, for everything was in favour of its having been so — the country, the sparseness of population, and the comparative abundance of game still surviving that most destructive of all scourges. Waterbuck, palla, zebra, bushbuck, and a few koodoo are still to be found near the river, and, according to native report, the inlying country holds other species, which are not as a rule to be found within a few miles of large rivers, unless driven, by lack of water in the country of their choice, to make midnight or early morning expeditions there for the purpose of slaking their thirst. We should all have liked to make excursions inland, in search of a more varied bag, but if we were to reach the plateau beyond the Victoria Falls before the full force of the wet season was upon us, it was absolutely imperative to press onwards and to content ourselves with what fell in our way.

In addition to the antelopes named we could generally vary our diet with either a guinea-fowl or a goose, the former being particularly plentiful on the Zambezi generally.

We had now reached the outlying districts of the Batonga

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dry a good supply of flesh—for food was scarce in the district—I was paddled down to Afudu, where I purposed remaining two days until the boys came in with the meat. Unfortunately it was four days before they put in an appearance, and those two extra days or even one of them caused me to miss Major Peake's steamer, and relegated me to three months' inactivity amid the mosquito-infested swamps of the Upper Nile.

On the 3d of May, having sent forward a letter of greeting to M. Chaltin, in chief control of Congolese interests in the Lado "enclave," I bade adieu to Captain Langton, who commanded the Afudu district, crossed the river, and hurried north. From Afudu to Rejaf the Nile flows through a steep, rocky valley bound in for more than half the distance by high hills on the east and a mountain range on the west. This stretch of about seventy miles is rendered impossible of navigation under existing conditions, owing to the steady fall of the river over a rocky bed. No one of the rapids thus created accounts for more than a foot or two, and it occurred to me that a couple of locks and dams would do away with this, the only bar to navigation between the south of Lake Albert and the uppermost of the cataracts beyond Khartum. As an engineering feat this work would be mere child's play when compared with the monster barrage I was to see at Assuan a few months later. I arrived at Lado to find that Major Peake's steamer had left Kero—about twenty miles downstream—only the day before. My letter was placed in M. Chaltin's hands only five minutes before the gunboat cast her moorings, and Major Peake, not expecting me for another ten or twelve days, left a note to the effect that he hoped to get another boat up to take me away before very long, and if a despatch boat carrying his mails should meet him north of the Sudd, I might have to wait only a week. However, my proverbial good fortune had deserted me at the eleventh hour, for this latter was not met till the returning steamer was within a short distance of Fashoda, and the steamer which ultimately brought me down was delayed several weeks in the Sudd. In the meantime I occupied my time in mak-

ing short hunting excursions under not very pleasant conditions — for grass was long and water out — and reading Belgian newspaper misrepresentations and calumnies bearing on the war in South Africa. To Lieutenant Engh, the commandant of Lado, also an officer in the Norwegian army, I am specially indebted for many acts of kindness and hospitality, as also to M. Chaltin and the rest of his officers. In the hunting veldt I was able to add several specimens to my collection, the most interesting being the skin of a white rhinoceros (*Rhin. simus*), hitherto not known to exist in North Africa. This now stands in the Carnegie Museum at Pittsburg, U.S.A. In addition I secured a bull and a cow giraffe, the former standing within two or three inches of twenty feet more or less, though on account of the doubled-up position in which he fell, measurement to an inch was impossible. On one of these short hunting trips two instances occurred which are perhaps worth recording. We had paddled to a spot on the right bank of the Nile where I proposed forming a camp from which to hunt for a few days. On landing we found it necessary, owing to the undesirable nature of the ground in the neighbourhood of the river, to move about a mile inland. While I remained at the selected camping-ground, the boys returned for the remainder of the baggage — principally their own blankets. Fernando was just in time to see a canoe starting away downstream laden with everything on which those in it could lay their hands. They were some distance away when he first realised the situation. He was unarmed, and had no means of intercepting the thieves had it been otherwise; for the heavy iron boat lent me by the Belgians would have been no match in a stern chase with a light dugout canoe.

"We are not 'Tukatuk' [Belgians], we are English," he shouted. Instantly the paddlers pulled up, returned, and relinquished their plunder. Thus here, as in every other part of Africa, — save one, — through which I have passed, whether in British territory or not, he who is armed with the motto *Civis Britannicus sum* carries with him a force of more

practical value than can be derived from the rifles of five hundred askaris. There is no element of cant in this assertion. I speak on the authority of over twenty thousand miles in uncivilised Africa — as travelled by my officers and myself within the space of ten years. Never has any one of us placed a guard over his tent at night, nor had occasion to take a single human life, in spite of the fact that many of the countries traversed had a very bad name. Let the sceptic go through the records of African travel, and if he picks out the three explorers who have travelled farthest, he will find that they were all British subjects, that no one of them ever had a single native askari in his employ, and that each is free from the stain of blood.

I go one step further in the hope of discouraging the "armed party" system in the field of exploration. As the reader will gather from the route lines of the expedition, a considerable proportion of our journeys has fallen in unexplored regions, in many of which the white man had never before been seen. In such countries, travel — so far as the natives were concerned — was strikingly free from difficulty. Opposition never came within my experience, hospitality and respect were the rule. In the few instances in which my life may be said to have been in danger, the hostile attitude of the natives could be directly traced to the tactless conduct of some previous traveller or to the irregularities of the "soldiery" for which he was indirectly responsible.

The other incident to which allusion has been made is of a different nature. Late one afternoon I had sent Sabou to the river. By the time darkness set in he had not returned, so I fired one or two shots in order to give him the direction. Later the angry growls of lions were to be heard within a quarter of a mile of camp, and I feared lest the boy should fall a victim to their appetite. I therefore directed Fernando to fire a couple of rounds out of the 16-bore, as being the noisiest weapon in my possession. The reports echoed and reëchoed in the still night air, the lions ceased their clamour, and all was quiet once more. A quarter of an hour later the missing

boy came into camp. He had lost his way in the thick belt of bush between the river and ourselves, and had wandered aimlessly to and fro until he found himself face to face with three lions. He lost no time in clambering into a small tree, where he sat in safety. Round this the three lions walked in procession for a considerable time. The final two shots fired from camp brought them to a standstill, and after thinking over the situation for a few moments, they walked away in the opposite direction, and were soon lost to view. Sabou, after giving them plenty of time to retreat, descended from his perch and hurried into camp.

On the 31st of June I paid off the Katanga boys, dividing all the surplus trading stuff, except a few yards of calico, between them by way of a present. They took back with them a cheque, on delivery of which at the Chiengi store on Lake Mweru they would receive their calico as arranged. To my sorrow, I made an arrangement with the commandant of Rejaf, by which that officer, being anxious to secure porters to accompany him as far as the Stanley Falls, had undertaken to feed them and look after them thus far, and then pass them along the line of stations to their home. I subsequently heard from Captain Verdick that this arrangement had not been carried out so far as the treatment of the boys was concerned. They were found in a destitute and deplorable condition; the head man and two others had already died on the road, and others were sick. As can be imagined, this culpable neglect of boys who had served me so well filled me with disgust and regret that I had placed their destinies in the hands of one so wanting in that sense of honour which should have prompted him to carry out the compact as between him and myself, quite irrespectively of other considerations.

On the 7th of August, fourteen and a half weeks since I first entered the Lado enclave, the joyful news reached me at Luri, a few miles to the south of Lado, that the Anglo-Egyptian steamer *Kaibar*, under the command of Captain (local major) Saunders of the Worcestershire regiment, had