

*By the same author*  
THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

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# Safari Trail

ILLUSTRATED

THE ADVENTURERS CLUB  

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player, had hunted in Somaliland: so he was no stranger to big game.

Charteris was about forty-five, over 6 feet tall, the typical cavalry officer, a dominant but genial person, beginning to go grey.

He was keen to hunt in Nyasaland—a country new to me. I pressed him to try Kenya or Tanganyika but he stuck to his choice and I got the impression that he preferred a country where there was less likelihood of meeting acquaintances.

We began with a stroke of bad luck. He got all that was needed for the safari from Fortnum and Mason's and the lot was sent out on a cargo boat. Fortunately he took his rifles with him. The cargo ship was wrecked off the African coast and was totally lost.

We spent two happy months in the valley of the Bua river in Nyasaland. He brought a young friend with him, Francis Ricardo, whose father had been colonel of the Blues. I have never met anyone as absolutely imperturbable in face of danger as Edmund Charteris. Nothing disturbed him. Later when I did a safari for a Danish client I was reminded of Charteris. The Dane was like a man of stone, success or failure were the same to him, the more critical the situation the cooler he became. Nothing rattled him. I would, I think, have welcomed some human reaction, a drink out of his water bottle, say, in the course of a long, hard spoor.

"He is more than a man," Manda said once: "Even I, who have hunted the lion since I was a boy, was startled when that leopard leapt at us and tore his clothes as it died: but that *bwana* did not even breathe aloud and wipe his brow. As you do sometimes," he added mischievously, helping himself to snuff.

## Ten

### ALL KINDS

ONE OF the staunchest and bravest Africans I ever met was Gerry Dalton's gunboy. Dalton, one of my oldest friends in Africa and who, to my grief, died a few months ago, was warden of the Marsabit National Park for over sixteen years. Before that he was a well-known hunter.

One day, in the course of his duties, he killed a rhino in heavily bushed country; the rhino's mate attacked him. During the ensuing mix-up he found himself between her forelegs. He was never clear about what happened but the result was a cracked skull.

This disability was added to a permanently crippled left arm, the result of illness in boyhood. He was, despite this, an extremely efficient warden and was wise in the ways of the wilds. Sometimes animals in the reserves may, for no apparent reason, become dangerous and a homicidal elephant is no joke. He will attack other beasts besides mankind. In civilised communities murderers are usually jailed. You can't jail a murderous elephant or lion or leopard. You have to execute them. Gerry had trained or taught his gunboy to stand like a rock while the rifle was rested on his shoulder as the shot was taken. This needed not only natural bravery, which most African gunboys possess to the ultimate degree, but also complete confidence in the marksman. The united effort was a great compliment to Gerry no less than to the boy.

open-hearted, misanthropic or witty. If they were Americans you could be practically certain that they were well mannered and generous. Their clothes, too, marked them out from Europeans and Indians, whose dress conformed to a conventional pattern. Probably because their country is young, historically still in the experimental stage, no one has yet made up his mind about what to wear on safari.

My wife and I met Swantner and Gentry at Nairobi airport. We identified the new clients without difficulty. Swantner was a heavy six-footer, weighing, I guessed, fully 250 pounds and, I reflected, I'll take some of the fat off you before the safari is finished—an ambition I later very successfully accomplished. I introduced myself and my wife and, which was always a good sign, we took an instant liking to him. He introduced Dr. Gentry, a little man with snow white hair, active and interested in everything that was going on. My wife and I guessed him to be seventy and I wondered how he would stand safari life. His face was tanned, hard bitten, he wore a cowboy hat; his khaki trousers were tucked into grey stockings with red tops, and his boots—they looked like baseball boots—were bright blue and laced down to the toes.

Swantner had a short snappy argument with an Indian customs official about some cigarettes he proposed to take ashore (he took them ashore) and we loaded their kit into my hunting truck, a rather austere rigged out vehicle, which, I think surprised them by its simplicity. Their accommodation at the Norfolk Hotel, on the other hand, astonished them by its up-to-dateness. I had reserved a cottage for them in the grounds; and these cottages were, I suppose, as good as the best American motels; they said that they had expected far more primitive conditions in Africa.

We left them and returned at sundown to take them to our house seven miles out of Nairobi. There we staged our usual little reception which in our experience always delighted American visitors.

The safari boys, fourteen of them on this occasion, had

come from Manda's village—they themselves enjoyed the *fiesta*, for it meant an extra meat ration—and played their parts perfectly.

Manda and Hasani were the organisers under us, and they combined affability and dignity in a manner which would not have disgraced a viceroy at a durbar.

A camp fire had been lit well away from the house, in a distant part of the garden, wild and suggestive of the bush, and as the clients arrived, beginning with Manda and Hasani, we presented each boy to the masters they would be working for. Manda saw to it that each saluted smartly and gave the formal Kamba greeting—*Iambo, bwana m'kubwa* [How do you do Master]. Drinks, followed by a Kamba *n'goma*—a dance, at which the Kamba tribesmen are expertly artistic. The pleased clients invariably distribute generous *largesse*. I suppose Manda, Hasani and the boys were quite rich by native standards—safari pay is good. Hasani was, I know; he lived in a very pleasant little shack twenty miles out of Nairobi and there my wife and I bade him farewell when I retired.

Manda did very well out of tips and perquisites. For instance, he made a good thing out of lion fat, which was in great demand in the towns, where merchants—Indians chiefly—bought it to sell again: to anoint yourself with the fat of lions is to acquire much of the bravery of that beast!

Swanter created a sensation at the hotel and became a topic of speculation for a long time after he had left us. He had all his teeth out before leaving the States and had two sets of false ones, which hurt him like the devil. He would not wear them. So, the very first time he appeared for a meal he fixed a mincer on the edge of his table and put all his meat through it. The Indian *maitre d'hotel* took a dim view of this method of defeating discomfort but Bob Swantner was an impressive personality not to be deflected from his purpose by any hotel functionary and he continued. He told us that he had done the same thing when staying at Claridge's Hotel in London—and with the same result.

After a comparatively short time on safari—such is the power of habit—he was chewing the toughest buck steaks with ease and the mincer was cast aside. He presented it to my wife at the conclusion of the safari. I took them to one of my camps in the Northern Frontier District, 300 miles from Nairobi, a district twice the area of England and Wales, nearly all desert and scrub and dry ravines; it is a hard country to hunt in but I love it best in the world.

Bob Swantner was an ideal client, a good shot, devoid of nerves and capable of the longest walk without getting exhausted; he began by walking stripped to the waist. When the hot sun began to peel his back he resumed his shirt!

The old doctor was a hero. I took care that he did not overdo his walking but, when he got his chance, he was splendid. He had a short but very difficult stalk after a big lion. He showed intelligence, stamina and all the guts in the world, killing at twenty paces with the first shot. He also successfully faced a charging rhino.

Bob Swantner got what he wanted: and then stopped. He was no killer. On the day that he had an encounter with one of the best rhino I have ever seen he said to me as we were making for camp in the evening:

“It’s Doc’s birthday tomorrow.”

“How old is he?” I enquired.

“Eighty-two.”

“Gosh,” I exclaimed. “Here have I been taking him for long tramps over rough country; only men as fit as fiddles ought to be asked to do that kind of thing. I’d never have allowed it if I’d known he was that age.”

“Don’t worry,” said Bob Swantner: “he loved it and he asked me not to mention his age when we started. He wanted, I guess, to show you first what he can do.”

“All right,” said I, “and what are we going to do to celebrate his birthday?”

“He hasn’t got a buffalo,” said Bob: “I guess he’d be

tickled to death if you could manage to get him one on his birthday.”

“I’ll have a damn good try,” said I. And next morning Manda and I set out with the old man in the hunting truck. I made for some country ten miles distant—the sort of country the old bulls like—thickly bushed, with pools of water in the dry *dongas*, left from the last rains.

Almost at once we struck the spoor of a lone bull; the spoor was as big as a dinner plate. Manda’s help was unnecessary, the tracks were clear; he followed me and Doc followed him, carrying his own rifle, though Manda pressed him to let him do so.

Suddenly I saw the bull seventy-five paces ahead and I sprawled at full length; the other two did the same beside me.

I whispered to Doc to follow my movements exactly. We began our crawl. Every now and then the buffalo, who was feeding stopped, looked round and we froze in our tracks. It took us over an hour to crawl to the bush on the other side of which the buffalo was grazing. Inch by inch we reached an ant hill which hid us from him; he was only fifteen paces away.

I let Doc lie till he had recovered his breath after that long hard stalk. Then I nudged him and he let fly: to the beast’s heart. The bull crashed away into a ravine whilst the old Doc shivered with excitement.

Then, long drawn out, weird, came the death bellow, the sad sound every buffalo makes as he dies. I shook the old man by the hand; Manda, least demonstrative of men, did the same.

Doc Gentry was my oldest client but age had not diminished his courage, his physical fitness nor his accuracy of aim.

“We have had many,” said Manda as we bade farewell to Bob and Doc at Nairobi, “and those two are of the pick.”

something to have done; and something to congratulate oneself on.

The professional does nothing to destroy the species: he does much to preserve and save. As often happens he has been wrongly selected as the target by ignorant folk who leap to conclusions on insufficient evidence.

## Fourteen

### POACHING

THERE HAS been a great deal of press publicity, reinforced by very vocal protests from writers about wild animals and photographers of them, on the ruthless poaching and slaughter of African fauna.

This is all to the good; the world should know of the pitiless destruction of many species of wild beasts. It is well to preserve a sense of proportion, to try to take an objective view. Poaching is not a thing of yesterday any more than it is confined to Africa.

For as long as I have known Africa, Africans have poached, and years ago Europeans—I have mentioned Daly and Norton at the beginning of this book—were ruthless in pursuit of ivory.

Many years ago I was on safari on the Serengeti plains when I caught fifteen Sukuma tribesmen who had between them over 100 wildebeeste tails. They greatly value these as articles of adornment and the carcasses are left to rot on the plains.

We were not far from Banagi, the headquarters of the game ranger, and I handed over ten of the culprits to him. Since then I have caught other poachers and once I succeeded in getting three white Afrikaans hunters prosecuted for the illegal killing of five elephants near a remote waterhole at night. They shot the elephants from a motor-car using a powerful spotlight. This was just pointless slaughter as the elephants

were all immature with very small tusks. They were fined over £600.

The Wa'Kamba have killed game with nobody's by-your-leave for generations. Manda often told me how as a boy he waited with the hunters by a waterhole at night for elephant, rhino and other game, that they killed with poisoned arrows at a range of a few feet. It is hard to condemn such people who carry on the custom of their ancestors. Times change however and the Kamba tribe have become one of the greatest threats to game in Africa.

The Tsavo National Park is in the midst of the Kamba country and these bold rascals take a terrible toll of animals. It is still sport to them, but the profit motive has become strong and where the lust of money is paramount the sense of scruple weakens.

Snares are employed; cruel wire snares attached to heavy tree trunks, never to standing trees for the power of the elephant or rhino might pull them down. The beast puts its foot into the loop, the noose tightens and it drags the tree until it halts from sheer exhaustion. It is followed up and killed. Often the tough wire cuts into its leg; often death comes from hunger and thirst. The end is the prize of ivory: or, if the victim is a rhino, the horn, which is valued when ground to powder as an aphrodisiac, is hacked off and the body left.

I have seen a ten mile long stretch of these snares, literally hundreds of them in an uneven line across country, many still containing dead or dying victims.

Another trap is the pitfall, cleverly concealed with dry grass; at the bottom of the pit are tough spikes of hardened wood upon which the unfortunate animal is impaled.

Then there is the sharp chunk of iron weighted with a huge stone and suspended over the elephant or rhino path. This is connected with a stout liana rope stretched across the path at ground level. The iron spike falls with terrific force on the shoulders of the animal that breaks the rope in its passage. In most cases the result is fatal.

The fiendish cruelty of the methods used is to me more disturbing than the fact that they are employed in poaching.

I heard of a spot—a district is perhaps a better word—near Voi some years ago where the remains of more than a thousand cruelly slain elephants were discovered.

The ignorant may well ask how it is that such places are not discovered sooner? If such things happen in National Parks what is the Game Department doing? In his anger he does not pause to enquire *how* these activities occur. The answer is, if and when you know, simple.

The Tsavo National Park, to take one, is 12,000 square miles in area and portions of it are still comparatively unknown. It is not the sort of park you can compare to Epping Forest or with Dartmoor, whose area of 140,000 acres would fit into a fractional corner of Tsavo. And, as I shall explain in a moment, the Tsavo Park—among others—is scandalously understaffed.

In the Northern Frontier District of Kenya the Boran, Turkhana, Galla and Somali tribes are inveterate and cruel poachers. One of their favourite methods of destruction was employed at the expense of the unhappy rhino, now diminished to danger point. The rhinoceros has his regular paths which he uses at night. These northern folk built a huge pyramid of stones beside a rhino path and, armed with poisoned arrows or a muzzle loading gun, sat a-top the pyramid and killed the beast. The rhino could not climb the pyramid as the loose stones gave under his feet.

I could give many other illustrations of these murderous methods. Others, who have devoted their full time to the animals' cause, know far more than I do. I have not mentioned countries as badly poached as Kenya; Tanganyika, Uganda, Nyasaland, Rhodesia for instance.

Africans do not only kill the big game. They go for the small and the comparatively harmless. *Nyama*—meat. The African cannot have too much meat. He hungers after it. He is voracious. He cannot be satisfied. I know. I have had to

supply Africans. So the antelopes are recklessly slain that the tribesmen may eat; and the tribesman's appetite is insatiable. And big animals provide *nyama*, the elephant, the buffalo, even tough old *faru*, the rhino; the giraffe, the zebra, the eland.

I refrain from producing a catalogue, a menu. We must not forget that our paternal care of the Africans has increased the numbers of most of the tribes. We have not allowed Nature or original sin or whatever you like to call it, to take its course. Wars, raids, killings have ceased. Energy has been directed to wild beast murder. And besides gratifying the appetite, many creatures bring money, a commodity which the average African of my youth was inclined to despise. Buffalo hides make shields, giraffe sinews provide top class bow strings, many antelope horns are carved into snuff boxes, even the tusks of the brave wart hog are valuable to the *m'ganga*—medicine man.

Such things have always been but now that the element of profit has entered in, poaching has become a vast commercial racket.

The government has been largely to blame. I hope that the wise and benevolent rule of the Jomo Kenyatta's *et al* will see a great improvement. Government has been to blame because the Game Department has been starved of money and of personnel. There are nowhere near enough rangers, white or black, to check the poachers; and money which should have been spent on safeguarding game has been frittered away on what is called—not humorously of course—general revenue, which is wasted on unnecessary building of new offices, or for salaries, or new officials most of whom are, to put it mildly, neither over competent nor very necessary. Fifteen years ago, to my personal knowledge, the amount paid for game licences alone came to well over £20,000. Half paid the salaries of the existing game staff, the other half disappeared into the maw of general revenue. These figures have greatly increased since then.

And the government itself—misled, like so many of us, by scientists whose preconceptions are fortified by ill-digested and sometimes imagined fact—has done more than its share of wanton killing.

Take the wholesale destruction of game in 1948 or thereabouts.

Tsetse fly had been a scourge in Africa for generations. Some research entomologists, after considerable labour, reported that African game were the principal carriers of tsetse fly. The African governments, Kenya, Tanganyika, etc., like every other government and many individuals throughout the world, accepted the pronouncements of scientists as being infallible—in fact I suspect that neither the entomologists nor the responsible officials knew as much about big game and small game as Manda.

Orders were given to destroy all wild life in certain districts, in particular in Tanganyika. All kinds of killers were recruited, including a number who knew as much about hunting as a small boy with a pop gun. Thousands of animals were killed, nearly as many wounded. The country was full of dead and dying beasts. Some months later it was woefully acknowledged—and the memory of it quickly obliterated—that the scientific pundits were thoroughly mistaken; the game it was somewhat belatedly discovered, were not the principal carriers. Any professional hunter could have told the “discoverers” (a) that tsetse fly does not live on the plains, (b) that more than half of Africa is climatically unsuited to the life or the breeding of the fly, (c) that tsetse fly cannot live at an altitude of 5,000 feet and over, (d) that where the game was murdered in the ill-considered effort to eliminate the fly there are in fact no tsetse flies, and (e) that the fly is in no way dependent on game. This gigantic official gaffe is forgotten in the limbo of government gaffes, from whence there is no resurrection.

In face of this wholesale reasonless slaughter the professional hunter can surely ask to be excluded from the criminal ranks.

In fact, the presence of a professional hunter with a safari in a district deters every poacher within reach of him. Whilst the hunting safari is in the district there is no poaching. This has been established over and over again and a moment's thought will show that it must be so.

The visiting client's bag is limited by strict regulations which the professional hunter in charge sees he obeys to the letter; regulations designed to *control* game. Shooting is on licence, and the licence costs money. A full licence, as it is called, costs £50; and the licensee finds that it is not full. He must pay an extra £10 to shoot one lion, if the district can stand it; an extra £10 for a leopard; £100 for an elephant. Two only of the antelope species may be shot, in many cases only one. Rhinoceros are today classed as royal game—they are entirely protected. Also no female of *any* species may be killed. And the white hunter, like the game warden, insists that the licence holder obeys the regulations.

There is, in fact, no better way to control and to encourage the spread of game. It is the African poacher and the government between them who reduce the numbers and I do not bracket the Game Department with the government.

I do not propose to plunge into the troubled waters of politics. All I will say is that I hope the new African governments will be less indifferent to the needs of the wild animals than their predecessors were. Perhaps they will realise that wild life is their best asset. Visitors do not come to Africa merely to inspect the scenery; they come to see the wild animals in their natural surroundings.

Instead of securing a job in an office for a supporter, a minister would in the long run benefit by appointing more game rangers.

For years the Game Department and white hunters have been fighting a losing fight. Perhaps Africans will come to realise the importance of the wild fauna of Africa and do more for them than their English predecessors. Perhaps.

## Fifteen

### A SHORT CHAPTER ON FREAKS

AFRICA HAS its share of monsters that no one has ever seen but that everyone has heard mentioned by someone who had an uncle or grandfather or friend who swore that he had an uncle or grandfather or friend who, if he hadn't seen the beast himself had met the fellow who had seen it or whose uncle . . . Not only Africans of course believe in these impossible freaks; at least we in England place ours where they ought to be accessible—in Loch Ness for instance. In America they fit out expeditions to find them—I have mentioned the abortive search for the brontosaurus in the great forests of the Congo. The brontosaurus at least seems to have existed and if there is a place where a reliquar beast might be found it is certainly in these huge forests.

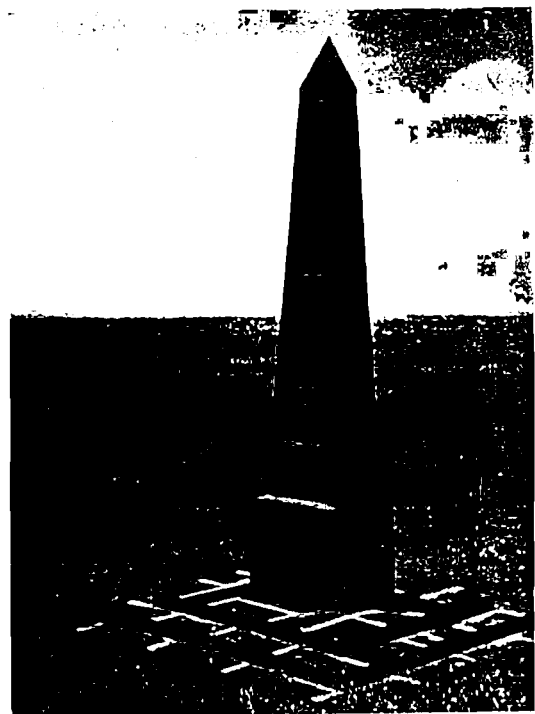
Africa is full of legendary marvels. There is the rival of the Loch Ness monster that dwells on—or rather in—Lake Victoria, that vast extent of water 37,000 square miles in area; there is the spotted lion and the Nandi Bear. The first two share a common characteristic—nobody has ever seen them and everybody has heard of them.

The Nandi Bear is said to be a huge hairy clumsy beast, half large bear and half outsize hyena, armed with great sharp teeth and long sharp claws with which it attacks and slays man and beast. I have never met an African native who told me he had seen this terrible creature though I have met not a few who had heard about it. On the other hand I have

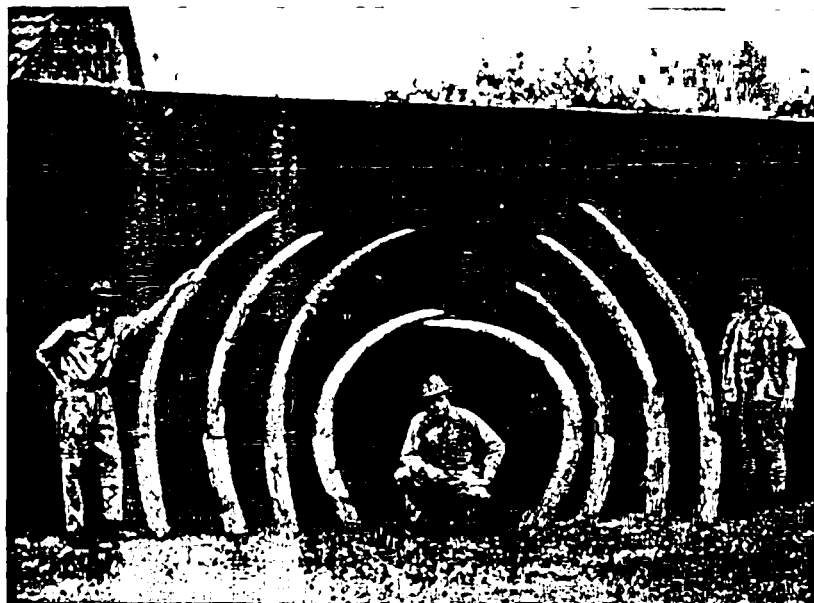




Bill Judd who was killed by an elephant in 1926.



Denys Finch-Hatton's grave on the slopes of the N'Gong Hills.



The heaviest tusk weighs 126 lb.; the lightest 81 lb. Altogether there are 862 lb. of ivory in this photograph.



Betty.