

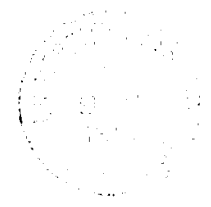
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# BABES IN THE AFRICAN WOOD

BY

THE HON. R. GORELL BARNES

*WITH 69 ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP*



LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.  
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON  
NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA  
1911

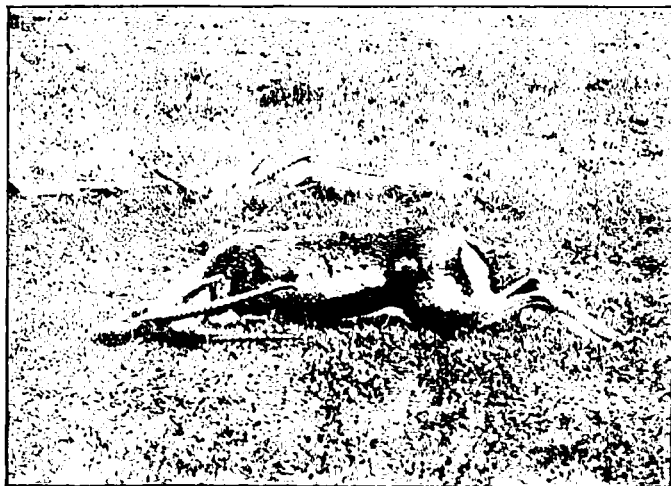
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"A FAIRLY GOOD HORN"

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"ANOTHER TOMMY . . . FELL DEAD TOO"

game than in any other part of the world, and some animals are found nowhere else; but, generally speaking, it is true that, to obtain the finest specimens of the different species, the sportsman would have to go first to one part of Africa and then to another, seeking each in its favourite locality. This, however, is not so with impala: all the best impala heads come from East Africa, and a very beautiful trophy the head makes with its lyre-shaped horns.

We were now following the course of the Guaso Nerok towards its junction with the Guaso Nyiro, and had not proceeded far before a boy ran back from the safari to tell us two rhino were blocking its advance. We cantered up, and saw the two great beasts slumbering on the track about 300 yards ahead; one of them had a fairly good horn, and it was decided that I was to try a shot. It was all so ridiculously easy, that I formed a very erroneous opinion of the dangers of rhino; in like manner I have heard of men going out and finding a lion who let himself be killed like a sheep, and coming back to say there was nothing in lion-shooting. We approached within about 120 yards; the two beasts got on to their feet and peered suspiciously about, and, as there were two and no further cover, I shot at that range at the

one with the larger horn. I happened to shoot straight; his knees seem to give as the dust flew in a little puff from the point of his shoulder, and then he started off, ran 400 yards, stopped, stood, and rolled over dead. The other, though greatly excited by the sound of the shot, made off, and that was really all. Shooting on a plain when one sees the rhino first is a vastly different thing from blundering on to the top of him in bush or long grass, as every one discovers at some time or other.

Later in the afternoon I saw a most amusing scene with another rhino as chief performer. The safari had gone on and made camp, from which men were despatched to the dead beast, while C. and I took divergent courses. He shot a waterbuck and I a Tommy, and, as I was nearing camp, I saw another rhino—they seem to be numerous on this Laikipia plateau. It was some way to my left, and, not wishing to shoot, I made a circuit, but apparently disturbed it, for it made off from me diagonally. About a mile ahead were the tents of camp, and it headed straight for them. Presently some one in camp saw it, and then everybody turned out like a swarming hive, and I could hear the shouts and see arms wildly waving as the men tried to prevent the stupid, puzzled beast from charging straight through.

It veered off in a semicircle, like a skittish horse, evidently trying to make out what was up, but finally departed without doing any damage.

The next amusement was that Asmanie, the cook, tried to desert in the night, but was followed and brought back by the Somali. It was just an unreasoning act of pique, for without a paper showing he had been properly paid off he would have been liable to be stopped and arrested at any moment; the regulations about vagrant natives are strict. Asmanie was certainly a vile cook, but on the whole a cheery fellow, though he had these momentary fits of annoyance at being abused. It was on this occasion, I think, that my companion, having let loose on him with his tongue for a very bad dinner served very late, returned saying, "D'you know, that man almost makes me angry." Promptness is more than fine cooking on safari; if the cook is slow, one cannot get started early and one cannot get to bed early, both points of the greatest importance in the success of hunting. However, the next day the tent-boy we had left with J. C. rejoined us, and, discovering that each could do the work of the other, in spite of their protests we changed the two round and did better, for Amisi, the original tent-boy, was shrewd enough to see that the quicker he got us our meals, the

sooner he would be at liberty to resume his interrupted occupation of card-playing.

We saw in this neighbourhood fine water-buck, Grant and Tommy, but none of the rarer species of game. Just now I did a thing which may be common enough, but which struck me as extraordinary, and certainly impressed Abdulla with great respect for his Bwana's shooting powers. Of course one's boys, just like European servants, brag to each other about their individual masters, and I overheard the story with additions in the evening as it started on its round through the camp. I fired with a .405 Winchester at a good Tommy, which was lying down 130 yards away. The bullet struck it on the shoulder, and it just rolled over and died, and another Tommy, which had been lying unseen beside it, staggered to its feet, walked a few yards, and fell dead too. The odd thing was not so much the piercing of the two animals as that both should have been killed almost instantly; but the wound on the second, made by the flattened soft-nose bullet, was a terrible one, tearing away on its outward course the greater part of the shoulder. I have heard since that this double shot is more common with Tommy than with any other animal, owing to their habit of lying down close to

hoped he would come nearer. It had in fact a very tame end; C. sat down, keeping his five soft-nosed bullets in his magazine in case of a charge, and managed after several shots to kill the lion where he was with a hard-nosed bullet. Our Wakamba were kept pretty busy skinning by this one morning's work.

Near this camp was a triangle formed by the hills, in which among the brush and thorns were many buffalo, but hunting them was dangerous and unsatisfactory work; it was exceedingly difficult to pick a head in such stuff, and any one going on to Embu, where there are buffalo in immense numbers, would be wasting time to try long for them here.

There was a rumour of the greater kudu, the most beautiful of all antelopes, on this line of hills, named, I think, Kilima 'Ngombe, but we never saw even the tracks of one. I spent one day climbing the hills in the hope of so splendid a trophy, but had only a story of forcing my way down at last through thorns. They were there in every variety of both size and shape to tear and madden, while great sheaves of daggers stuck up from the ground to make the descent as dangerous as it was toilsome. On arriving back on the plain, tired, hot, and scratched, I began to appreciate the value of Abdulla.

He had had a very stormy morning, and was enough to put any one in a good temper. In the first place he had lost me again and, wandering disconsolate through the scrub, had met C. C. had had a tiring time after buffalo; everything had gone wrong, and to find this dreary idiot disturbing all the game in the part he was hunting, and murmuring plaintively to himself "*Wapi Bwana?*" (Where's my master?) was the last straw. Poor, worthy Abdulla was rudely wakened from his monologue by a forcible inquiry as to his present occupation and a brilliant description of the under-world. On retiring with much tact from this painful scene in the direction in which I was supposed to be, he entered upon further trouble, for which a rhino was responsible. As he meditated upon the lack of appreciation with which his misfortune had been received, he stumbled upon the rhino; the next moment he was half-way up a tree. He seems to have been in some haste, and to have chosen badly, for when I found him, he was still picking thorns out of himself after his frenzied climb.

We had come unexpectedly upon many rhino by this time: twice in one morning I found myself suddenly within twenty yards of one. There can be few meetings much more disconcerting, because no one can tell what the

beast will do ; it doesn't know itself until it has gravely considered the matter within its lymphatic brain, but I was never once charged. I always carried a .405 Winchester in my holster, loaded with five hard-nosed bullets for just such an emergency ; but it is so often when one is trailing a beast, and has one's regular rifle with nothing but soft-nosed bullets in it, that one stumbles on the rhino round the corner.

C. was charged in very determined fashion on one occasion ; luckily it was in a comparatively open space, and he had plenty of time to be prepared : he struck it four times with .405 hard-nosed bullets—three times between the neck and shoulder, and once on the top of the spine—but for some reason the shots had absolutely no effect, though every one should have been fatal ; perhaps the bullets broke up, for it still came on, and was only stopped not many yards from him by a shot from his heavy gun. But this instance would seem to be exceptional, and the rhino to be maligned ; some writers give the impression that they invariably charge at sight, but perhaps we were unusually fortunate. We must have actually seen thirty or forty, apart from those who had the sense to remain hidden, and this was the only occasion when a deliberate attack was made.

Their danger undoubtedly lies in their vast stupidity ; the elephant has learned the power of modern rifles ; the rhino fondly imagines he is still in the days of the spear, and that his hide is practically impervious. Once when the safari was passing along a forest-trail through very thick undergrowth, a rhino snorted a few yards off and then blundered through the line, but this may have been only a startled escape from the tainted air. It was rather a disaster though, for the men were scattered with fine agility, and seventeen of our phonograph records of native songs were broken.

The Somali made an odd mistake about a rhino one day, when he was with me as my gunboy ; we saw a large, black form behind a bush, and he offered to bet me a hundred rupees it was a great bull buffalo, saying he could see its tail. I looked with my Zeiss glasses, and was almost sure it was a rhino, but the bush obscured it, and it had a strange appearance as of branching horns. We stalked it, but the nature of the ground prevented our seeing it again until we were within 15 yards of it on the other side of the bush ; it was then seen to be indubitably a rhino, and the seeming horns dissolved into startled rhinobirds. We did not want to shoot it, and beat a

silent retreat, leaving the rhino deeply puzzled by the whole affair.

While we were hunting in this triangle of hills Asmanie surpassed himself in intelligence. We were using the Somali as a gunboy after buffalo, his bravery being beyond question and his powers of tracking high, and camp was temporarily without an acting headman. We had pitched it further than was necessary from the triangle, and now desired to move it one hour nearer on to a parallel little stream. We called up Asmanie, made him headman for the day, and explained our desire precisely. We told him ourselves, and the Somali told him; knowing Asmanie, we took every possible means to avoid a mistake, and he said he understood.

Returning from hunting, I ran across C., who had then been looking for camp three hours; together we ranged along the little stream to what we considered the two extreme limits of Asmanie's stupidity, and then, picking up the trail by our old camp, we solemnly followed it as if it had been a wounded animal. Fortunately the ground was of a sandy, bare nature, so that we could do this without much difficulty, and after riding for a further three hours we found camp. It had been moved about fifteen miles away in an entirely wrong direction, to a

stream quite unsuspected; but Asmanie greeted us with such serene unconsciousness of not having done exactly right, that words failed us, and we were left wondering at the intricate convolutions of the native brain.

It is poor enough fun searching for camp mounted and with one's friend; there is nothing whatsoever to be said for it on foot and with a monotonous boy. The very next day I missed camp in these circumstances: both Abdulla and I understood that camp was to be moved six hours up the main stream of the Isiolo, whereas in fact it was moved two up a branch stream. The ground was too bad for riding, being a blend of great stones and soft, clinging volcanic ash, so I pushed on on foot, and at dusk must have been some 15 miles beyond camp. I fired the three shots we had agreed on as a signal—it is as well we have one of some sort—but no answering shots came, and just then a strange delusion set us walking again. Far away on a hill we saw a red gleam we took to be a camp-fire; it was hidden as we walked towards it, and an hour later we saw it was the rising moon, which had just showed between the top of the hill and the bottom of a heavy cloud.

We were badly lost, and Abdulla was no help; he was devoting himself to a single

## CHAPTER VI

## IN THE FORESTS NEAR MERU

Trials of the jungle—The accursed rhino—The definition of an accident—A prophetic utterance—The African elephant at home—A glorious hour—A cannibalistic carnival The great elephant-dance.

THAT elephants were in the neighbourhood there was abundant evidence, but whether my companion's hunting would be attended with success in the short time that it was possible for us to remain near Meru seemed doubtful. Each camping ground had been so hard to leave that we had fallen a long way behind the time we had planned out for ourselves, with the result that a few weeks only remained, and of the three beasts most to be desired, lion alone had been secured. To find a big buffalo head may be the work of weeks, and no one is ever sure of getting his elephant. It seemed, however, that any one who could afford to watch and wait had a fine chance near Meru, for the herd could occasionally be found in the open while changing their feeding ground, and at times they roamed along the fringes of the forest ; but for

the most part they had their abode in its dense heart, and it is probable that there is no more dangerous sport in the world than to hunt the East African elephant in such conditions.

The great hunter, Sir Samuel Baker, considered elephant shooting in any conditions the most dangerous of all sports, if fairly followed for a length of time ; and here the elephants, in addition to the tangle of their chosen haunts, had been disturbed enough to make them, if not actually vindictive, at least ready to take the aggressive on every slight provocation. They choose mostly those places where the great trees are few and far between, and the forest has degenerated into a wild, thick and thorny jungle ; its only paths are those made by the rhino and the elephant himself, and, except along these, it presents a barrier through which man can pass only with the utmost difficulty, torn and held at every step, whilst the elephant goes straight ahead with as little hindrance as in the open. To be charged by one elephant on such unequal terms, when you can barely crawl and a thorn bush has you by the neck, is not the most enviable of occupations, and the herd may charge in a thundering mass which flattens everything before it. Yet after all that is a case of the pursued turning pursuers ; it has at least a



touch of justice about it, and its possibility must always be present. The elephant hunter has no right to feel aggrieved if it is an elephant which turns the tables upon him, but he may well resent being ended by the sudden onslaught of a rhino. As he makes his way through the tangle, this is a perpetual danger, and not merely a danger, but also an exceeding irritation. A shot may spoil his chances of success for weeks, if not altogether, yet the unjustifiable interference of a rhino may force him to shoot to save his life; and the mere obnoxious proximity of one, thrashing about uneasily in brush that will completely hide it at a few yards' distance, will necessitate a detour which may destroy the carefully thought-out plan of campaign.

In the days that followed C. had more than one illustration of this, and he came to the fixed conclusion that, though in the open a rhino could be treated with some contempt, in the brush it was Hell, and that was the only way of expressing it. Once he and his boys came suddenly on a vicious little rhino glaring at them about fifteen yards away and entirely blocking their advance—a post of vantage which completely upset an elaborate stalk; and on another occasion, as they were on their way home, they were so much disgusted with one

that they whistled and shouted at it, as it blundered across their path. It spun round, and came straight for them, but swerved at a shot, and departed, snorting with rage. C. said it was exactly like the story of a prospector he had met in Western Alaska. The prospector saw a grizzly bear digging for gophers just below him on the mountain side, and in a spirit of fun rolled a stone down at him. The grizzly dropped his gopher, and rushed at his slippant assailant like a thing possessed. "I didn't suppose he'd get mad about a little thing like that," concluded the prospector.

In spite of all these risks, however, a very short space of time was enough to convince my companion that there was nothing for it but to follow the tracks into the jungle, unless he was to return home without an elephant; and on my return to camp the second evening, after a day spent as far as possible from the supposed locality of the herd, I found that the death of an elephant was already an accomplished fact. I was about to offer my hearty congratulations when I was stopped by some forcible and deeply felt maledictions: condolences, it appeared, were required, for half C.'s licence had been used up on an interfering cow. By a provision of the Game Ordinance 1910 any tusks weighing less than 30 lb. a-piece must be

surrendered to the government, a provision framed to protect immature and cow elephants, whose tusks only in very rare instances average so much. The wisdom of some such rule cannot be doubted, but the humorist has naturally seized upon it, and declared that no conscientious sportsman would dream of taking the field without a pair of scales in which to weigh the tusks of any elephant he wished to shoot.

The government, however, is very fair, and makes an exception in the case of animals "killed by accident." The legal definition of "accident" was now occupying C.'s mind; he was quite ready to surrender the tusks, provided he was still at liberty to shoot two bulls, and he betook himself into Meru to argue the point. Is it an accident when a man fires only in the last resort to save his life and the lives of the boys with him? Nothing was further from C.'s intentions when he set out than to kill a cow—he was after bulls, and big tuskers at that, and he certainly did his utmost to avoid the necessity; but the government hold the view that if a man puts himself in the way of elephants, it is not an "accident" if he has to kill a cow; it is a probable, or at any rate a possible, eventuality for which he must be prepared.

Mr. Horne had been not merely discouraging; he had unfortunately also been prophetic. He had candidly warned us that the present time was most inopportune, since all the elephants were in the densest part of the forest, where there was no chance of picking out the best ivory, and the chances were that the sportsman would be charged by a vicious old cow; and he had added, "Even if she doesn't get you, which is very probable, her ivory won't be much use." The end of it was, C. kept the tusks, and had half his licence accounted used. What had happened was this.

He had struck fresh elephant tracks, and followed them for hours through dense jungle into a matted swamp. Once Elmi, the Somali, whom he had taken with him as well as Mabruki, the Wakamba, sank to his shoulder, and had to be pulled out; but the elephants had just been drinking there, and they pushed on hopefully until they emerged again into the gloom of the thick jungle. Suddenly close to them the undergrowth shook, and they found themselves right among the herd; they moved down a parallel path to get a sight of them, when five or six elephants came with leisurely might through the tangle and crossed the path; then another came to the path, and

14 feet high, and more than once we came to an abrupt halt as we followed single file along the trail at the sound of a rhino moving uneasily close to us; sometimes where the grass was not of a consistent height we could see the black head just showing, as the great stupidity meditated on the intrusion into its domain.

Creeping along a trail in these conditions is a wonderful education; throughout the day the senses are kept intensely on the *qui vive*. A long stem of grass sways ahead and rivets the attention; more often than not its movement is caused only by a little bird which has alighted on it, but it may be swaying to the twitch of a rhino's restless ears. Though the birds in this matter are false alarmists, they are also sure instructors to tell one of the invisible danger. Once we should have stumbled right on to a reposing herd of buffalo, but for Mabruki's eyes. The disturbed fluttering of the little birds told a story to him, though to the less experienced it seemed nothing unusual, and as he had been grouchy all day we were inclined to believe his positive assertion to be merely a ruse to induce us to sit down and wait, but he was perfectly correct, and a herd was concealed in the grass in front of us.

Once we came suddenly on a rhino watching us intently some twenty yards away: little

more than its ears were visible, and our line came to a halt as if turned to stone, and so we all stood, guns ready for an immediate shot, for several minutes. It was getting tedious; the rhino, having no pressing engagement elsewhere, seemed disposed to stand there for hours: we might have tried a slow retreat, but we wanted to pursue the trail we were on, so finally we shouted at it, whereupon it wheeled sharply and disappeared. On another occasion a similar beginning was made, but this rhino was not content with motionless curiosity, and started forward to investigate. His horns showed for an instant and were of very fair length, and as I wanted a second one I fired for the base of his ear. He sank out of sight, and our boys cried "*kufa*" (dead), but we had no leisure to look for him: buffalo had been unexpectedly near, and the shot sent them thundering off, seemingly in every direction, and for a moment the possibility of their appearance engaged our whole attention.

The sound, however, passed without danger, and we looked again for the rhino: to our surprise he was up and making off in a dazed fashion. Fearing I should lose him, my companion put two shots from his .405 in his stern; he turned, and a second shot from my heavy rifle knocked him down again. Through

the grass came his stertorous breathing, and we approached with caution, for we could see nothing till he got on his feet again, when a shot fair on the point of the shoulder ended him, as he seemed about to try a charge. We had been told that, when once a rhino was down, it was all over with him; this incident was in striking disproof, and shows his immense vitality, for no shot was wide of its mark, though the first two had just missed the brain and spine respectively; it shows, too, how different a rhino is in such conditions from on an open plain, for he was never more than thirty or forty yards from us, and could only be seen at intervals in the grass.

One of the most comical interludes in these strenuous days was the scene of egg-buying one day on the road: we were short of meat, and, meeting a boy with a basketful of eggs, set ourselves to bargain for them. Our gun-boys soon assumed control of the *shauri*, and my Abdulla was especially important: he sat himself down with the boy beside him, and went through some extraordinary facial contortions in the rôle of egg-tester. His method was to grasp the egg by the extreme edge of his hand, and then squint at the light through it. Whether he was more successful in testing the eggs which he bought for himself is un-



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"A SHOT . . . ENDED HIM"



"ABDULLA . . . IN THE RÔLE OF EGG-TESTER"

