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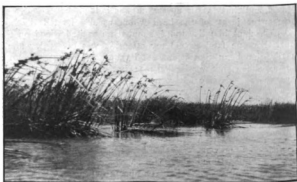
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SCENE ON AN EAST AFRICAN LAKE

## AN ADVENTURE WITH ELEPHANTS

BY SIR EDMUND LECHMERE, BART.

To many people the life of a big-game hunter is one of continual peril and hairbreadth escapes, and his friends live in constant expectation of seeing his sudden and tragic end reported through the medium of the foreign cablegrams. As a matter of fact, however, most of the accidents which occur in big-game hunting are caused either by rashness and inexperience or by the use of unsuitable weapons, more especially the latter.

But to every man whose love of the sport induces him to continue it year after year there comes a day when it is his life or that of the game he is pursuing, and when everything depends on the absolute accuracy of an aim taken in a fraction of the time he would devote to a rabbit or pheasant at home. It is such an experience I am now about to narrate; and after seven years' African shooting, during which I have shot every species of dangerous game in that continent, I can honestly say it is the narrowest escape I have ever had, and I can add with equal honesty that I never want to have a narrower one.

We were camped just on the edge of the Bamboo Forest in British East Africa, about forty-five miles from Lake Naivasha, in January last, whither we had gone in search of elephant,

which, owing to the density of the forest, the cold, and the constant rain experienced at this elevation (over seven thousand feet), are but little disturbed. Our party consisted of my wife, my son, a well-known settler, Mr. William Judd of Kijabé, B.E.A., who had undertaken to guide us to the likeliest places for elephant in this forest, and myself, with a mixed caravan of Kikuyus and Swahilis, whose one and only desire seemed to be to get back to the sunshine and warmth of the plains below. We had had a hot and rather uninteresting march from Naivasha, seeing little game on the way, and experiencing such a plague of flies at each camp owing to the proximity of large herds of Masai cattle that it was quite a relief to get to the cooler altitude, in spite of the storms of thunder,



THE AUTHOR AND A GRAND "RHINO"

lightning, hail, and rain to which we were daily subjected. At our first camp eight of our highly-paid Swahilis refused to go any further, thinking, I suppose, I could not do without them and would turn back. Their places were, however, at once taken by some Kikuyus, who are equally good porters, at about half the money, and subsequently I replaced all my Swahilis with these men, and found them excellent fellows, somewhat scantily attired, but willing, and always ready to go out and report the presence of game, while the Swahilis would not stir from the camp except when marching.

We reached our camp on the edge of the forest on January 21, and the same afternoon the men brought in news of a cow and a bull

elephant which they had seen about four miles off, feeding on the edge of the forest. Accordingly I started at four o'clock, or as soon after as possible, on the following morning, and went to the spot where the elephants had been seen; but, as I expected, they had moved off during the night, and there was nothing for it but to follow the tracks on the chance of their still being in the neighbourhood. The spoor led up and down hills through dense forest alternating with glades covered with long grass, but everywhere reeking with damp and moisture, and though it was not actually raining I was speedily drenched through and through by contact with wet jungle and tall grass. For eight miles we followed this track, and at last came to the bank of a small but rapid river almost hidden by bamboos and foliage. For some time I had suspected that the elephants had got our wind, in which case it was little use going any further, and I made up my mind that if they had crossed the river and gone straight on we might as well give up the chase.

That they had stopped to drink soon became evident, and that they had crossed over was equally plain; but the men utterly failed to find the spoor. There was nothing for it but to cross also, and this I did; and yet, search as we would, we could find no tracks on the other side, so we had to return and search the other bank, and in a few minutes the men again found them. The elephants had waded up stream and returned by another track parallel with the one they had traversed.

I now felt certain they had not winded us, but that after drinking they had gone into the forest to feed. A stiff climb up a hillside, slippery with mud, brought us to still thicker jungle, and through this we pushed our way for some two hundred yards. It was very dark and thick, but we could hear the elephants close to us, and, moving as softly as possible, I at length made them out at a distance of about thirty yards, at the end of a track they had themselves forced through the bush. The cow was between me and the bull, so I could do nothing but stand absolutely still, hoping she would get out of the road and give me a shot. To move on or go back would simply mean being charged by the cow, and perhaps losing the bull altogether. We stood thus for some four or five minutes. The cow was directly facing us, though evidently very puzzled as to what we were. Now she would cock her great ears forward like a terrier, now wave her trunk up and down trying to get our wind. At last she either did so or one of the men moved, for she charged straight down on us, screaming like a railway whistle, with the bull behind her. I turned her with a shot low down, and she swerved to the right and went crashing off through the forest. The bull was close on to us, I got him just above where the trunk joins the

head with my left barrel, and he went down on his knees stunned. The 450' cordite had driven the bullet right through the skull, but in consequence of my having aimed a trifle too low had failed to



IN THE ELEPHANT FOREST

penetrate the spongy masses surrounding the brain, as we afterwards found, and he picked himself up just as I had reloaded; but a second shot finished him. This bull had very decent tusks, much better than one I had shot some weeks before near Kijabé, which latter

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had curiously thin and malformed tusks, though on the living animal they looked much larger than they were.

The next day I stayed in camp, sending out men to look for further tracks of elephant, and in the evening they returned with the news that a large herd were feeding some six miles off. It was too



SIR EDMUND LECHMERE, BART., AND CERVAL  
(SINCE PRESENTED TO THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS)

late to go after them that day, so we decided to make an early start next morning. I was particularly anxious to get another good tusker, as my licence only allowed me two, and my last year's licence had expired a few weeks back. Judd also accompanied me, his

knowledge of Kikuyu being of great help in interpreting, my ignorance of this dialect making it very difficult to understand the information given me by the trackers as to the number and size of the game.

We left camp at 6.30, and after a very wet march, for it had poured during the night, we got to the spot where the elephants had been seen the night before. There we waited while the men went a short distance to see if they could locate the beasts, and



KIKUYU MAN AND WOMAN, BRITISH EAST AFRICA

they returned in about an hour saying they were some four miles off in very dense forest. On reaching the top of the hill at the foot of which we had been waiting we left the main track, if indeed it could be honoured by such a designation, and followed the fresh spoor. No one who has not hunted elephants in swampy ground can realise what hard work it is. Imagine a narrow "path" not four feet wide, consisting of a series of huge footprints the size of a

bucket and about a foot deep, half full of liquid mud and water, into which you have to step, the bush and bamboos forming a dense wall on either side, and you have an idea of the sort of ground we had to traverse for some six or seven miles, for the herd were moving slowly forward. This track led us up steep mountain-sides and over fallen bamboos and creepers which were continually catching our feet, the only relief being that it was cool, as the sun had little power to penetrate through the dense mass of foliage which topped the bamboos, growing here to a height of fifty or sixty feet.

After trudging some five miles we came on fresh signs of the elephants, and the track was full of tiny flies like midges, which



A RIGHT AND LEFT AT ELEPHANTS

swarmed in clouds. We kept going up one hill and down another, sometimes through long grass seven feet high, but more often through thick undergrowth, sometimes crawling on hands and knees, but seldom able to walk upright. At last we got among the herd, which consisted of some thirty elephants, so far as we could judge, and here in the dense forest the animal smell became most pungent and unpleasant—something like a dozen cattle-sheds rolled into one. And now we had to look for the bull we hoped to get, for though we could hear the herd all round us we could not see them. Following the sound, we crawled on hands and knees to within a



few yards of one of the elephants, only to find it of the wrong sex. She never saw or heard us, and we crept back to the track, which we again followed in search of another. Two of our Kikuyus were a few yards in front, Judd and I following close behind, with my Swahili gunbearer, who had been with me two years, carrying the second rifle.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, two huge elephants came charging abreast down the track straight on us. The trackers had promptly rushed back and dived into the jungle, only my Swahili gunbearer standing firm. Judd had just had time to snatch my second 450' cordite as we heard the elephants coming, and we both fired almost simultaneously at the left-hand beast, which was



THE ELEPHANT WHICH ALL BUT CAUSED A MISHAP

coming straight for him. He went down dead, one bullet in the head and another through the heart. Judd had fired both barrels, I had fired one, and there was no time to reload, for the second elephant was almost on the top of me. I was only just able to get the sights on and pull. She was not three strides from me, so it was useless to try to turn her, as I could almost certainly have done had the distance been greater; and I knew that unless I killed her, and killed her dead, I should be a dead man myself inside of three seconds. Aware how rarely the frontal shot will kill an African elephant, I never expected to escape; yet somehow the very feeling of this seemed to take away all fear or excitement, and to concentrate my ideas on the shot. Indeed I

think Judd with his rifle discharged felt a great deal more upset on my account than I did on my own. It has struck me since as very curious. It certainly was not courage, for no man can look sudden death in the face with equanimity; nor was it resignation, for I value my life as much as most people; but I can now understand what Livingstone meant when he said he felt nothing but a curiosity as to what was going to happen next when he was underneath the lion. A scientist may be able to explain the feeling, but I cannot. Anyhow, the elephant was not twelve feet away from me when I fired, aiming above the base of the trunk, and the solid bullet went straight through hide and bone and brain. The huge brute fell with a crash stone dead among the splintered bamboos, and so close that I could touch her outstretched trunk with my rifle from where I stood.

Close behind these two elephants had come two more, but, scared by the firing, had turned off sharp to the right and left of us at a few yards distance, and we could hear them crashing far away into the depths of the forest, the bamboos breaking like the rattle of a Maxim. It was a magnificent sight to see these two mighty beasts lying side by side not five feet apart, and my only regret was that I had been compelled to kill a cow elephant, though of course it was absolutely unavoidable under the circumstances. The cow had fine tusks, the bull poor ones, though both were very large animals. Judd having fired first at the bull, it was his elephant according to the laws of sport, and I left it to him to report the occurrence and send in the ivory.

As regards the cow, I could find no rules as to game shot in self-defence in the Game Regulations, so reported having shot the animal to the Commissioner, adding that, being in doubt on the subject, I should consider it as one of the two elephants allowed me on my licence and refrain from shooting another. Weeks after I received a letter stating my explanation was considered perfectly satisfactory, but that the tusks, being cow ivory, belonged to Government. These, however, I was subsequently allowed to retain. I was not enlightened as to the rule which governed the case until I happened to see the Commissioner on my way to the coast, when it was impossible for me to take advantage of it, for then I was told that, having reported the occurrence, and the Government being satisfied as to its having been unavoidable, I might have shot another bull elephant to make up my number.

Sportsmen going to East Africa must be prepared to pay heavily for everything. Licences are £50 each, and besides this there is a heavy duty on rifles and ammunition. The natives are so pampered by regulations as to food and clothing (each man

engaged as porter having to have a blanket, jersey, and water-bottle supplied him by the sportsman, quite irrespective of whether he is going to shoot in the tropical coast region or further up where the regulation is reasonable) that they are rapidly becoming spoilt. Further, there is a tax charged for every porter engaged, and the railway rates on trophies are of the highest. The shooting is good. Were it not so, very few sportsmen would visit the country in the face of the heavy charges and travelling expenses to and from their shooting grounds. I have always managed my own shooting arrangements and found it best, but this year



PART OF THE AUTHOR'S GUN-ROOM AT RHYDD COURT, WORCESTERSHIRE

I certainly saved a great deal of time and money by engaging the services as guide of Mr. Judd; besides which, his knowledge of the language and acquaintance with the chiefs proved invaluable. A list of the game obtained by me in the country comprises elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, buffalo, Grant's gazelle, Thompson's Impala, Coke's hartebeeste, Neumann's hartebeeste, wilderbeeste, waterbuck, ostrich, zebra, steinbuck, colobus, etc., and this list should satisfy most people. Lions are plentiful, but having shot them in Somaliland I did not go after them, and they require looking for. Eland are somewhat scarce, as are giraffe. For both

of these the Government require an extra £5 each, as also for buffalo, over and above the £50 licence. The sportsman may save himself the trouble of asking for concessions of any sort, whether authorised under special conditions or not, as there will always be an excellent reason for refusing them.

Nairobi is a good centre to start from, but with a guide who knows the country and will undertake to fit out the caravan the trip can be done in half the time and at less cost than a new-comer can do it for himself, and it will be the sportsman's own fault if he does not get most of the animals I have enumerated in a ten to twelve weeks' trip or less. My rifles were two 450' cordites and a Mauser, all by Rigby, and a shot-gun for wildfowl, which swarm on the lakes.

