

MY DARK COMPANIONS

AND

THEIR STRANGE STORIES

BY

HENRY M. STANLEY, D.C.L., Etc.

AUTHOR OF "IN DARKEST AFRICA," "HOW I FOUND LIVINGSTONE,"
ETC., ETC.

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THE LEGEND OF KIBATTI THE LITTLE WHO CONQUERED ALL THE GREAT ANIMALS



I HAVE done my very best to translate this story as closely as possible in order to give the faithful sense of what was said, yet I despair of rendering the little touches and flourishes which Kadu

knew so well how to give with voice, gesture, and mobile face.

“Friends and freemen,” he said, when we were all in listening attitude, “if a son of man knows how to show anger, I need not tell you who are experienced in travel and in the nature of beasts, that the animals of the wilds also know how to show their spite and their passions.” The legend of Kibatti runs upon this.

On a day ages ago the great animals of the

world, consisting of the elephant, the rhinoceros, the buffalo, the lion, the leopard, and hyena, assembled in council in the midst of a forest not far from a village on the frontier of Uganda. The elephant being acknowledged by general consent as the strongest, presided on the occasion.

Waving his trunk, and trumpeting to enjoin silence, he said: "Friends, we are gathered together to-day to consider how we may repay in some measure the injuries daily done to us and our kin by the sons of men. Not far from here is situated a village, whence the vicious two-footed animals issue out to make war upon all of us, who possess double the number of feet they have. Without warning of hostility or publishing of cause, they deliberately leave their conical nests, day by day, with fellest intent against any of us whom they may happen to meet during the shining of the sun. Wherefore we are met upon common grounds to devise how we may retaliate upon them the wanton outrages they daily perpetrate upon our unfortunate kind. Personally, I have many injuries to the elephants of my tribe to remember, and which I am not likely to forget. It was only a week ago that a promising child of my sister fell into a deep pit, and was impaled on a short stake set in the bottom of it; and but a few days before my youngest brother fell head-foremost into a horribly deep excavation that was dug, and which was artfully

concealed by leaves and grass, whereby none but those, like myself, experienced in their guileful arts, could have escaped. Ye have all, I daresay, been similarly persecuted, and have deep injuries to revenge. I wait to hear what ye propose. Brother Rhinoceros, thou art the next to me in bigness and strength, speak."

"Well, brother Elephant and friends, the words we have heard are true. The son of man is, of all creatures that I know, the most wanton in offence against us of the four-footed tribes. Not a day passes but I hear moan and plaint from some sufferer. Not long ago, a cousin, walking quietly through a wood not far from here, caught his foot in a vine that lay across the path, and almost immediately after a hardened and pointed stake was precipitated from above deep into the jointure of the neck with the spine, which killed him instantly, of course. I have, by wonderful good luck, escaped thus far, but it may be my fate to fall to-morrow through some foul practice. Wherefore, I think it were well that we set about doing what we decide to do instanter. I propose that early in the morning, before a glint of sunshine be seen, we set upon the piratical nest and utterly destroy it. I am so loaded with hate of them, that I could dispose of the half of the rascals myself, before they could recover their wits. But if any of ye here has a better plan, I lend my ears to the hearing of it,

my heart to the approval of it, and my strength and fury to the doing of it, without further speech. I have spoken."

"Now, friend Lion," said the Elephant, turning solemnly to him, "it is thy turn, and say freely what thy wit conceives in this matter. Thy courage we all know, and none of us doubt that thy mind is equal to it."

"Truly, friend Elephant, and ye others, the business we are met to consider is pressing. The sons of men are crafty, and their guile is beyond measure. The four-footed tribes have much cause of grievance against me and mine. However, none can accuse me or my family of having taken undue advantage of those whom we meditate striking. We always give loud warning, as you all know, and afterwards strike; for if we did not do this, few of even the strongest would escape our vengeance. But these pestilent, two-footed beasts—by net, trap, falling stake, pit, or noose—are unceasing in their secret malice, and there is no safety in the plain, bush, or rock-fastness against their wiles. For what I and my kin do there is good motive—that of providing meat for ourselves and young; but it passes my wit to discover what the son of man can want with all he destroys. Even our bones—as, for instance, thy long teeth, O Elephant—they carry away with them, and even mine. I have seen the younglings of mankind dangle the teeth of

my sister round their necks, and my hide appears to be so precious that the king of the village wears it over his dirty black loins. Thy tribe, O Elephant, have not much cause of complaint against me, and thou, Rhinoceros, it would tax thy memory to accuse me of aught against thy family. Brother Leopard will hold me and mine guiltless of harm to him; so also must my cousin Hyena. Friend Buffalo and our family have sometimes a sharp quarrel, but there is no malice in it, I swear. Whereas the son of man, friends, is the common enemy of us all—it is either our flesh, or our fur, or our hide, or our teeth that he is wanting, and his whole thought is bent upon destruction pure and simple. If ye would follow me, I would glory in leading ye even now against the community, and I give ye my word that few would escape my paw and claw. However, as our object is to destroy all, that none may escape, I agree with my friend Rhinoceros that night-time at its blackest is safest. Wherefore believe me that I am so sharp set for revenge, and I feel so hollow, that nothing but the half of all of them will satisfy my thirst for their blood. I have ended my say.”

“Now, friend Leopard, thou hadst better follow thy cousin, and we will feel obliged to thee for the benefit of thy advice,” said the Elephant.

Leopard gave his tail a quick twirl, and licked his chops and spoke:



Walter Buckley

“BROTHER LEOPARD WILL HOLD ME AND MINE GUILTLESS,” ETC.

“All that ye, my friends and cousin, have said, I heartily agree and bear witness to. The spite of the son of man towards us is limitless. It is remarkable, too, for its cold-bloodedness and lack of passion. We have our own quarrels in the woods—as ye all know—and they are sharp and quick while they last, but there is no premeditation or malignity in what we do to one another; but Man, to whom we would rather give a wide berth, if possible, pursues each of us as if his existence depended upon the mere slaying, though I observe that he has abundance of fruit, which ought to satisfy any reasonable being of the ape tribe. Wherefore, as I have many sharp reasons for retaliation on him for his countless offences against me and my kin, I gladly attended this council, and I will go as far as any of ye, and further if I can, to return some of this spite on him and his tribe. I propose that night at its darkest is best for our plan. While the human folk are indulging in dreams of slaughter of us, I vote that we turn their dreams into action against themselves. The elephant, and rhinoceros, and buffalo are strong; let each lead his tribe to attack, overturn, and trample down their nests. We, with our families, will range round and slaughter every one that escapes them. Those are my words.”

“Now, friend Buffalo, what sayest thou?” demanded the Elephant. “Thou art a staunch friend

and stout foe. We cannot but listen with respect to such an one as thyself."

"Ah, friend Elephant, and ye chiefs of tribes, every sentiment of hostility against the vile and spiteful sons of man that ye have expressed finds an echo in my inwards. If wrong has been done to any here, magnify that wrong tenfold in order that ye may understand the intensity of the hate I bear the remorseless destroyers of my kith and kin. Ask me not how I would slay them, my fury is so great that I am unfit to devise. Do ye the devising, and give the method to me. All I can think of now is the pleasure I shall feel when my horns are warmed in the bodies of the base and treacherous creatures who have murdered wife, brother, sister, and child of mine, besides a countless number of my kindred by lance and line, spear and snare, sword and stake, trick and trap. I will lead my herd into the midst of the vicious community with a joy that only my hate can match. That is all I have to say."

"Now, my good friend Hyena. Thou art the only one left whose sentiments are as yet unknown. Speak, and let us hear wisdom from thee in this matter."

The Hyena uttered a mocking laugh, and said: "My kind friends and cousins: The night suits me well, for I am in my element then. I may say that I have a large family which is always hungry. It

will be a laughing matter to them indeed to hear of your good purpose. It has been long delayed, this signal measure of just vengeance upon those who have outdone in cold cruelty all that generations of the four-footed tribe of the fiercest kind have done. Bird and beast, from the smallest to the greatest, have fallen victims to man's lust for destruction. True, my kind are often indebted to man for bones and refuse, but what we have eaten has been sorely against his good will ; and we therefore owe him no gratitude. The young of the human community will be juicy morsels for my tribe, when the signal is given for the attack. With all my heart I say let it be to-night. I have said my say."

The Elephant then said: "Friends, chiefs of the most powerful tribes of the forest, let it be to-night, as ye say. Let each go and muster his forces, and let the attack be in the following manner. Half-way betwixt dawn and midnight I will lead my troop from the Uganda side. The Rhinoceros will lead his from the Katonga side. The Buffalo will range his tribe along that side facing Unyoro. Behind my troop the Hyena and his families shall follow to finish those who may be but bruised by our heavy hoofs. Let Leopard place his fellows and kin in rear of the Rhinoceros troop. Lion and his great tribe are needed in rear of Buffalo's forces, for they are apt

in their fury to overlook the crafty bipeds. Our object is to make a complete job of it. The sooner we part now, the fitter each will be for the perfect consummation of his long-deferred revenge."

It was well past midnight when the four-footed forces were gathered around the doomed village, and, at the shrill trumpet-note of the King Elephant, the several chiefs led their respective troops at the charge. The elephants tore on resistlessly, trampling down the doomed cages of the human folk flat and level with the ground. The rhinoceros and his host pushed on with noses low down, and tossed the human nests as we would kick an empty egg-basket; the buffaloes bellowed in unison, and, closing their eyes, threw themselves upon the huts, and gored everything within reach of their horns. Then the fierce carnivora, all excitement at the prospect of the bloody feast, roared, snarled, and laughed as they tore the mangled victims piecemeal. Ah, poor village, and poor people! In a short time the dreaming souls dreamed no more, but were gone past recall into the regions where dreams are unknown—all excepting one clever boy named Kibatti, and his parents, who survived the calamity. These happened to live in a tiny hut close hidden by a grove of bananas on the edge of the forest, and Kibatti about midnight had been disturbed in his sleep by a pressure on his stomach which woke him,

and denied him further sleep. He therefore sat sorrowing over the red embers of his fire, when he heard the hollow tramp of large animals, and pricking his ears, he heard trampling in another direction; whereupon his suspicions that something unusual was about to happen grew on him, so that he woke his parents, and bade them listen to the rumbling sounds that could be heard by such experienced hunters all around them.

“Father, come, delay not! make mother rise at once. This night my sleep has been broken as a warning to me that mischief is brewing. Let us ascend the big tree near by and observe.”

“Child, you are right,” said his father, after listening a moment; “the demons of the wilderness are gathered against the village, for human enemies make no such stir as this. We will ascend the great tree at once.”

Thereupon he drew his wife out.

Kibatti wriggled himself through the burrow under the milk-weed hedge into the banana-grove, and having gained its deep shadows, raced for the great tree, closely followed by his parents. A large vine hung pendant, and up this vine Kibatti climbed, his mother after him, the old man last. Not a moment too soon, for just then the trumpet-note of the King Elephant was heard, and afterwards such a concert of noises that neither Kibatti nor his aged father had ever heard the like before.

In the starlight they saw the huge forms of all kinds of furious animals pass and repass below them; but clinging closely to the shelter of the giant limbs of the tree, they, from their safe perch, witnessed the dreadful ending of their friends and relatives.

When he fully realized the catastrophe and its completeness, Kibatti suggested to his parents that they should ascend to the very highest fork, lest they should be observed in the morning, and on climbing up they found a snug hiding-place far above, hidden all round by the thick, fleshy leaves of the tree. There they remained quiet until morning, when the boy's restless curiosity became so strong that he resolved to gratify it. Grasping close a great limb of the tree, he descended as far as the lower fork and looked down. He saw all the huts smashed, and the bones of his tribe white and gleaming, scattered about. The fences were all levelled, but the elephants, under their leader, were re-setting the poles round about. The lions were pacing watchfully around, the rhinoceroses and buffaloes were herded separately, gazing upon the elephants, the leopards were lying down under the trees in scattered groups, the hyenas were crunching bones, for these last never know when they have eaten enough.

Kibatti kept his post all day. By night the poles fenced the village round about as before, and

in the dusk he saw the gathering together of all the creatures in a circle round the King Elephant, to hear his rumbling voice delivering an harangue to the motley allies. When it was ended the lions roared, the rhinoceroses snorted, the buffaloes bellowed, the hyenas laughed, and the shrill trumpeting of the elephants announced that the meeting was over. What occurred after, Kibatti did not stay to learn, but climbed aloft to give the news to his anxious parents.

Said he, "It appears to me, father, that they are going to build the village up again, for they have already fenced it around even better, as I think, than it was before. Those animals have clever leaders, that is certain, but I am not a man-son if Kibatti does not get the better of some of them."

"Oh, you are clever, my child, that is true," said the old man. "Whatever you undertake to do, done it is. I have found out that long ago. If wit will get us out of this place of danger, I have a conviction it will be by yours, and not by mine, or by my old woman's."

"I do not purpose to leave the tree just yet, father," replied Kibatti. "If we keep quiet, we could not find a safer place than here. The tree is so tall that they cannot hear us talk unless they set their ears to listen at the foot of it, and against all that may happen we must provide ourselves."

“Give your confidence to me, boy, and let me judge of your plan,” said the father.

“Well, my idea is this. To-night they will all start off, some to catch the lesser prey, others to graze and feed. The leaders, of course, will remain behind. I propose, after getting three or four winks of sleep, to go down to the gate and discover how things are. If possible, I will try and get my net-ropes. They will be useful for my purpose. We may trap some game, you know.”

“I see, I see, my boy. That is a good idea. Shall I help you?”

“Not to-night, father, except you keep watch until yonder bright star stands overhead.”

The old man agreed to keep watch until the star approached the zenith. A little after midnight Kibatti was waked, and having given his father injunctions to go to sleep, he descended. He proceeded straight to his house, and among the wreckage he found his strong nets and their ropes, and his sharp hunting-knife, besides his father's five spears and his own quiver. These weapons he conveyed directly to the tree, and bore them up to the lower fork. This done, he re-descended the tree and crawled away to a bit of marsh-land not far off, where there was a crane's nest which contained some eggs. He took these in his hand, and went around through the bushes to the Unyoro Road. All this had been done very quickly,

because, being a hunter, he knew the neighbourhood well, and while watching the animals in the village, his mind had been busy forming his plans. Now when he came to the Unyoro Road, he stood straight up and strode rapidly in the direction of the village which had been that of his tribe. Arriving near it he crawled up to the gate and looked in, then traced the fence all around until he came back to the same gate.

Kibatti now stood up and hailed the animals, crying loud,

“Hullo, hullo there! Are ye all asleep? Will ye not let a poor benighted stranger in? The night is cold, and I am hungry.”

King Buffalo, who was on guard, trotted up to the gate, and looking out saw a small boy who was naked, except for a scant robe which depended from his shoulders.

“Who art thou?” demanded the buffalo in his gruffest voice.

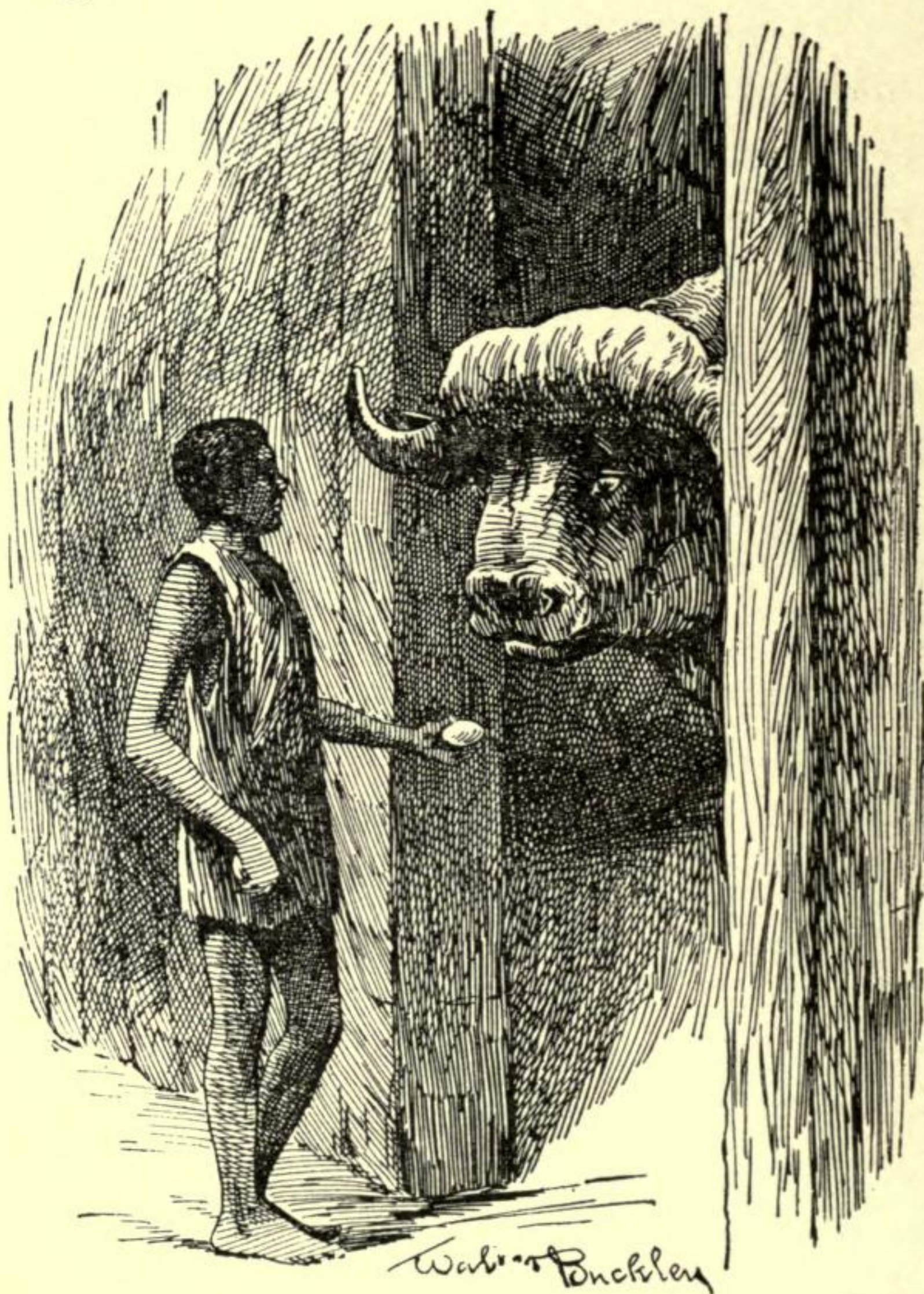
Kibatti answered in the thin voice of a fatherless and starving orphan.

“It is I, Kibatti the Little, from Unyoro.”

“What dost thou want?”

“Only a little fire to roast my eggs, and a place to sleep. I am a forest-boy, and live alone in Unyoro. My parents are both dead, and I have no home. If you will give me work I will stay with you; for then I shall have plenty to eat. If

not, let me sleep here to-night, and in the morning I will go."



"IT IS I, KIBATTI THE LITTLE, FROM UNYORO."

"What work canst thou do?"

"Not much, but I can fetch water and fuel."

"Wait a minute, I will see if our people will let thee in."

The buffalo moved away and woke up the rhinoceros, the elephant, the lion, the leopard, and hyena, and told them that there was a little forest-boy seeking a night's lodging. At first the general belief was, that he belonged to the tribe which had owned the village, but the buffalo denied that this boy could have known of the country, as he had come boldly up to the gate from the Unyoro road; besides, was it likely that a small boy, knowing what had happened, would ever have come back when those who had destroyed the village were in possession of it? This last remark settled the matter. King Elephant said,

“As thou wilt, Buffalo. Even if the matter were otherwise, a small boy can do no harm. Let him in. We will give him plenty of work.”

King Buffalo opened the gate and allowed Kibatti to enter, and introduced him to his friends, King Elephant and the rest, all of whom smiled as they saw his slender and small form, the only human amongst them. Buffalo took very kindly to his protégé, and showed him around, while Kibatti amused him with his innocent unsophisticated prattle, which convinced the kingly bovine that little Kibatti was indeed a wild-wood waif.

“And where do you all sleep?” asked Kibatti of Buffalo.

“I sleep here, near the gate, King Elephant rests near that big tree. King Lion prefers lying

near that great log there, Brother Rhinoceros throws himself down on the edge of the banana grove, Leopard curls himself near the fence, and Hyena snores stupidly near his pile of bones."

After a little while Buffalo lay down near the gate for a little rest. Kibatti stretched himself near him, but not to sleep. His eyes were quite open, and he soon saw Buffalo's nose rest upon the ground and his head sway from side to side. Kibatti then untied a cord, and stealthily passing it round the four legs of the buffalo, drew the other end round the neck in a slip noose without waking him. He then crawled off towards the elephant, and tied his four legs together, gently tightening the slip noose, and fastening the rope three or four times running round, and brought them all together. To the rhinoceros he did the same. He then went out of the gate and brought his bundle of nets. He took one up, fastened one end to the fence, and drawing it lightly like a curtain over the form of the sleeping lion, just hung it on splinters and projections of the fence. In like manner he secured a net over the leopard, and another over the hyena. All this did clever little Kibatti without waking any of them. He then stole out of the gate a second time, and made his way to the tree where his parents were sleeping.

"Come, father," he said, "the kings of the herds are trapped and netted. Bring down mother to

the lower fork, and come, do you hasten with me with a bundle of spears, two bows, and quivers full of arrows, for we must finish the game before morning."

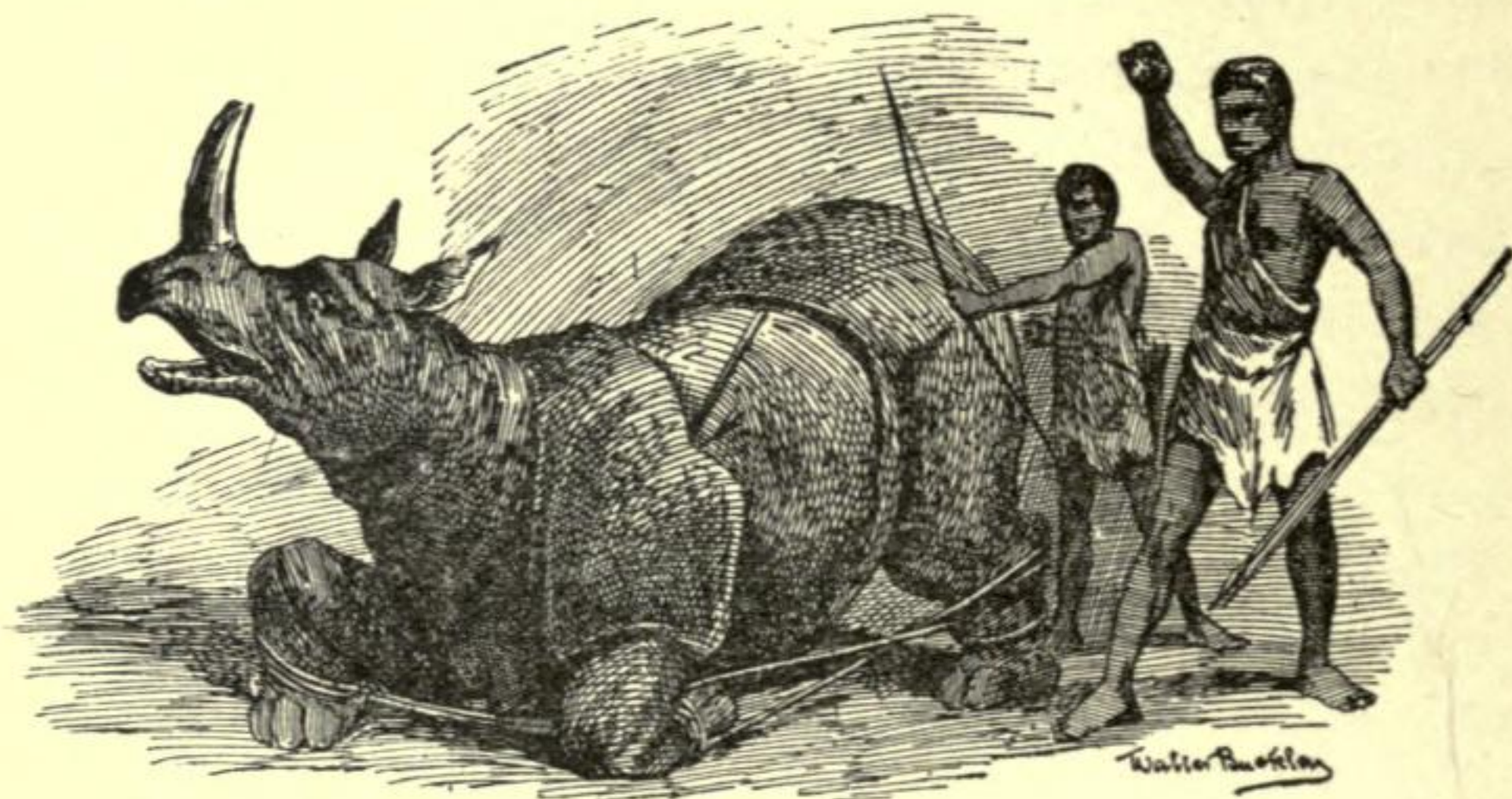
Completely armed with spears and arrows, Kibatti led his father to the gate, and stealthily entered the fenced enclosure, and they stood over the still-sleeping buffalo. Kibatti gave his father a sharp-pointed spear, and gently laying his finger on the vital spot, between neck and head, showed him where to strike. The father lifted his right arm high up, and with one stroke severed the spinal cord. A shiver passed through King Buffalo's body, and he rolled over stone dead.

Then Kibatti and his father approached King Lion, who lay lengthways near the log by the fence, with his side exposed. Kibatti pointed to his own left side behind the shoulder-blade, and father and son drew their bows and drove two arrows into Lion's heart, who sprang up and threw himself like a ball into the net, which closed round him taut, and he presently lay still and lifeless. In the same manner father and son despatched Leopard and Hyena. There then only remained Rhinoceros and Elephant.

They chose to attack the first-named beast, who was still lying down on his side, unconscious of the tragic fate of his confederates.

Kibatti pointed to the enemy's fore-shoulder and

touched his father with his finger two inches below the shoulder-blade. His father understood, and launched his spear straight into the body with such force that the blade was buried. King Rhinoceros, feeling the iron in his vitals, snorted and struggled to stand, but in doing so tightened the cords, and fell back rolling half over. Kibatti drew his bow and buried an arrow close to his



KILLING KING RHINOCEROS.

father's buried spear. Meantime, King Elephant had taken the alarm, and, struggling with his bonds, had capsized himself on the ground.

Kibatti gave vent to a war whoop and cried :

“Never mind, father, let the rhinoceros die. Let us away to the elephant while he is helpless.”

They sprang to the prostrate beast, and they shot their arrows first to every vital point exposed, and then launched their spears with such good

effect that before long the last of the kings of the beasts had ended his life.

Kibatti and his father then flew to where the old woman crouched in the fork of the tree, and taking her with them, they left the ruined village, and sought a home in another district, where, because of the terrible revenge they had taken on the forest lords, they were held by their fellow-creatures all their lives in great esteem.