# SETTLERS AND SCOUTS



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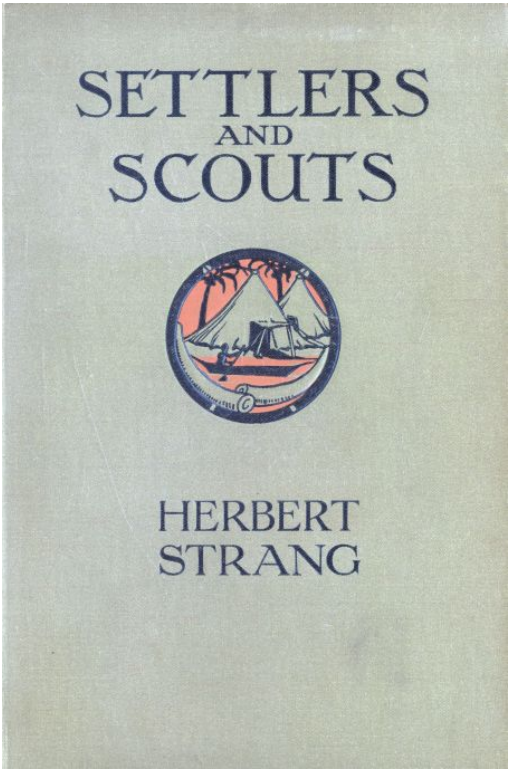


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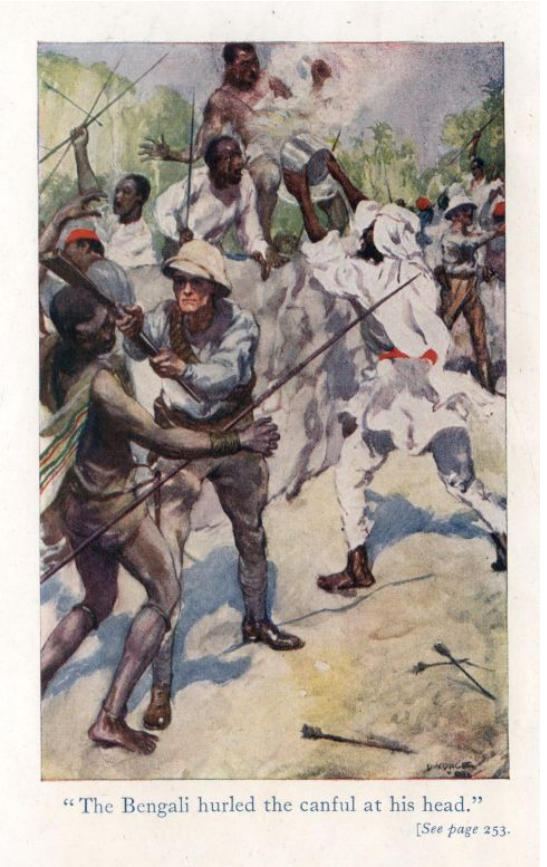
*A TALE OF THE AFRICAN HIGHLANDS*



"The Bengali hurled the canful at his head."
[See page 253.

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BY

HERBERT STRANG

*NEW EDITION*

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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The present story completes a series of three books in which I have endeavoured to give impressions of life in the immense region known as Equatorial Africa. The scene of *Tom Burnaby* was laid in the centre, around the great lakes; *Samba* was concerned with the western or Congo districts; *Settlers and Scouts* is a story of the east, more especially the magnificent highland region which seems destined to become one of the greatest provinces of the British African Empire.

The steady stream of emigration already flowing to British East Africa is bound to swell when it is more generally recognized that in the hill districts of Kenya, Naivasha, and Kisumu there are vast areas of agricultural land constituting an ideal "white man's country." In the following pages I have attempted to show some of the conditions under which the pioneers of emigration must work. The development of communications and the settlement of the remoter regions will soon relegate such alarums and excursions as are here described to the romantic possibilities of the past. But it will be long before the lion, the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus and other more or less formidable neighbours cease to be factors with which the emigrant has to reckon.

For many facts, stranger by far than fiction, concerning the wild inhabitants, human and other, of this most interesting region, I am indebted to Mr. Arkell-Hardwick's *An Ivory Trader in North Kenya* and Colonel Patterson's *Man-Eaters of Tsavo*, among several important works that have appeared during recent years.

It may be added that in the spelling of native names I have sometimes rather consulted the reader's convenience than conformed strictly to rule. The name *Wanderobbo*, for instance, applied to an individual, is a solecism, the prefix *Wa* being a sign of the plural. But it seemed better to err than to afflict the reader with so uncouth a form as *N'derobbo*.

HERBERT STRANG.

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# CHAPTER THE FIRST–The Emigrants

The train was steaming over Mombasa Island, and Mr. David Halliday, ejaculating "Now we're off!" settled himself in his corner and comfortably fell asleep. Age has its weaknesses–or its privileges, according as you look at it. Not that Mr. Halliday was aged, or even old. He was nearly fifty, and might have passed for younger. His son, at any rate, was neither old nor sleepy. He was, in fact, but a few months past his seventeenth year; and being possessed of an average curiosity and a healthy interest in novel scenes, he looked with delight on the groves of lofty cocoa-nut palms, the wide-spreading mangoes and baobabs filled with chattering monkeys, and the long stretches of park-like glades, brilliant with flowers, through which runs the Uganda railway in the first stage of its long course to the shores of Victoria Nyanza.

Mr. Halliday, son of a Scots farmer who had emigrated from Ayrshire thirty

years before, had been for many years agent–or "factor," as he, being a Scotsman, preferred to call himself–on the estates of Lord Sussex, who, as everybody knows, owns half the county from which his title is derived. He had managed to save some money during his stewardship, but having entrusted the greater part of it for investment to a bland London solicitor of his acquaintance, he had the misfortune to learn one day from the newspaper that the lawyer had absconded, leaving defalcations to the tune of some £50,000. A few weeks afterwards another calamity befell Mr. Halliday. His employer, a bachelor, died; the estates passed into the hands of a distant relative; and the new peer, taking alarm at the large sums demanded of him in the shape of death duties, announced his intention of cutting down expenses, and employing a younger man to steward his estates, at a lower salary. Luckily Mr. Halliday had a thousand or two safely invested, apart from what he had lost through the lawyer's rascality; and being disinclined, at his time of life, to seek similar employment, he cast about, during his six months' notice of the termination of his engagement, to find some new outlet for his energies and some secure channel for the use of his little capital.

The problem was complicated by the necessity of starting his son in life. He had intended David for one of the professions, and put him to a good school; but the boy had not shown any particular aptitude for book work, except in the one subject that interested him–natural history. He was never so happy as when he was with dogs and horses; he read with avidity every book about animals on which he could lay hands; and once, when his career was being talked about, he said bluntly that he knew he couldn't stand work at a desk in stuffy London, and implored his father to let him go out to Canada or Australia. Mr. Halliday merely grunted at the time; he was a man of few words; but he thought the matter out very carefully, and his attention having been called to the opening up of East Africa consequent upon the completion of the Uganda railway, he quietly made inquiries, obtained information about the country, its climate, soil, and prospects in regard to stock-raising, and one day startled his son with the news that he was going out in a few months to settle. Having once made up his mind he let no grass grow under his feet. One May day father and son left London in a Peninsular and Oriental Liner, transhipped at Aden into a vessel of the British India Steam Navigation Company, landed at Mombasa, and after spending a fortnight there in preliminary preparations, took tickets for Nairobi, three hundred and thirty miles down the line, whence they proposed to strike up country and select the ground for their settlement.

They travelled by the intermediate class–the third of the four classes into which passengers on the Uganda railway are divided. Mr. Halliday, as he said, had not come out to Africa for the fun of it and having spent considerably over £100 already in travelling expenses, he was not inclined to spend more was ab-

solutely necessary now. By travelling intermediate, unusual though it was, they saved nearly a hundred rupees (the currency of British East Africa) on the first-class fare, and twenty-five on the second, and every rupee they could save would be of importance when they came to stock their ranch. "And I haven't taken return tickets, John," said Mr. Halliday.

Since the boy had been named David after his father, and had no other name, it is necessary to explain how he came to be called John. At school, his name being David, on the principle of association of ideas he was immediately dubbed Jonathan, though he might just as reasonably have been called Saul. Jonathan being too long was cut down to Johnny, and finally to John; and when one of his school-fellows, on a visit in the holidays, addressed him by this simple monosyllable, the name was laughingly accepted by his parents as an excellent means of distinguishing between the two Davids. People who knew him only as John were puzzled when he signed himself "D. Halliday," and one matter-of-fact lady was not quite pleased when he said gravely that, Prince Edward being known in the family circle as David, it was only right that David Halliday should be known as John. "I am glad I am not your godmother," she replied grimly.

John, then, as we, like all his intimates, will call him, smiled affectionately when he saw his father settle himself to slumber, and devoted his own very wide-awake eyes to the scenery. It was a feast for the senses and the imagination. The train, leaving Mombasa island for the mainland, runs through a tract of undulating richly-wooded country, with, here, groves of cocoa-nut palms and papaws; there, orchards of mangoes and cashew apples; anon, vast plantations of maize and millet and other grain crops. There is plenty of time to take in the details of this luxuriant panorama, for the train is climbing, climbing always, and the traveller is not whirled along at the bewildering speed of an English express. Leaning out of the window, and looking back over the route, John catches a last glimpse of the sea at Port Reitz, guarded by the Shimba hills, and realizes that a new chapter in his life is opening, full of romantic possibilities.

"A verree fine country, sir," says a thin staccato voice behind, and turning, he is smiled upon by a swarthy face, with black moustache and beard that have never known a razor, and surmounted by a spotless white turban.

"Magnificent," replies John, eyeing his fellow-passenger curiously.

"But this is not the best," says the man again. "We shall see, in due time, scenes of still more prepossessing appearance, together with myriads of four-footed beasts, et cetera."

"Indeed," says John, a trifle amused.

"Yes, sir. When we come to Tsavo we may behold lions, truly denominated the king of beasts, but no longer monarchs of all they survey, as William Cowper beautifully and poetically says. Man, sir, plays the very dickens with Nature; the

surveyor molests the ancient solitary reign of Mr. Lion; he has to take a back seat."

John was quite unaccustomed to conversation interlarded with quotations from what he had at school irreverently called "rep.," and wondering what manner of man he had to do with he hazarded an indirect question.

"You seem to have read some of our poets," he said.

"Yes, sir, I am familiar with the masterpieces of English literature, edited with notes. My name, sir, is Said Mohammed, failed B.A. of Calcutta University."

"Failed B.A.?" said John, puzzled. He had met B.A.'s of several universities, and even junior masters who called themselves Inter. B.A. Lond. (honours); but a failed B.A. was a new species.

"Yes, sir; the honourable examiners formed a less elevated estimate of my intellectual attainments than was reasonably anticipated, and when the list was published, lo! my name was conspicuous by its absence. But that is a bagatelle. The honorific distinction–what is it but the guinea stamp? It is work, sir, that ennobles. I have accumulated a priceless store of knowledge; I am all there, I assure you."

John thought it only polite to murmur an assent to this, but he felt himself ill equipped to sustain a conversation on the dizzy heights to which Said Mohammed appeared inclined to ascend, and turning once more to the window, he viewed in silence the ever-changing scenery. The luxuriant vegetation of the coastal region had given place to a vast plateau covered with a dense scrub of umbrella-shaped acacias, with patches of dry grass, and here and there a massive baobab rearing its antic form from out the undergrowth. He was interested in the little stations, with their trim flower-beds and home-like appointments, at which the train stopped at intervals of several miles; and gave but perfunctory answers to the Bengali, who kept up, with every appearance of pleasure, a continual flow of talk, informing him that this tree was an aristolochia and that an aloe, and calling his attention at one spot to a herd of sable antelopes which were startled by the train as they drank at a stream, and dashed off into the jungle. "Their scientific name, sir, is *Hippotragus niger*," said Said Mohammed, and Mr. Halliday waking at this point, the Bengali favoured him with a smile, and said, "A verree fine country, sir; good-morning."

They took their lunch at Mackinnon Road station, at the foot of the Taru hills. Refreshed by his sleep and the meal, Mr. Halliday began to take more interest in things in general, and John having introduced Said Mohammed (mentioning impressively that he was a failed B.A. of Calcutta University), a three-cornered conversation was begun, in which the Bengali fluently expounded his views on many subjects.

"Yes, sir," said he, when the question of the treatment of native races

cropped up, "that is a subject to which I have devoted considerable acumen. Is it just, I ask you, is it worthy of this immense and glorious empire on which the sun never sits, that the natives, the primordial owners of the soil, should be laid under such restrictions as are now in force? Are we Indians not subjects of the same gracious and glorious majesty, F.D., et cetera? Have we not shed our blood in defence of the Union Jack? Are we not ready to fight and conquer again and again like your jolly tars and all? And yet my countrymen, to wit, are not allowed in South Africa the full rights of citizens; and in this country, where this verree railway was built by the labour of Indians, it is becoming the rule to refuse them grants of land. Is this sauce for the gander, I ask you, gentlemen?"

"It's a very ticklish subject," said Mr. Halliday, "and I don't profess to understand it. I dare say those zebras yonder–look at them, John, hundreds of 'em–think it great impudence on the part of this engine to run snorting through their grounds. But the engine runs all the same."

At Tsavo the line crossed the river Athi. John looked out eagerly for a glimpse of the lions which were said to infest this region, but to his disappointment saw none. Indeed, as the train passed through mile after mile of uninteresting scrub, he began to feel that his first enthusiasm for the country was premature. But at Kibwezi the line enters another belt of forest, the trees looped together with festooning creepers, and filled with chattering monkeys and barking baboons; the undergrowth brilliant with colour, both of the flowers and of birds and butterflies innumerable. Some miles farther on, at Makindu, the forest yields to rich pasture land, the undulating plain stretching on both sides of the line, broken by streams whose beds are lined with date-palms and firs. All the vegetation was fresh and vivid through recent rains, and Mr. Halliday, viewing the country with a stock-breeder's eye, now for the first time allowed a remark on the scenery to pass his lips. "That's grand!" he said; and when the rumbling of the train set startled herds of antelope and gazelle, red congoni and black wildebeeste, scampering over the plain, he stood up in the carriage and gazed at them with kindling admiration.

The oppressive heat of the morning had now given place to a pleasant coolness, with a crisp exhilarating breeze. When John expressed his surprise at this, within a degree or two of the Equator, Said Mohammed explained that they were now four or five thousand feet above sea-level, among the Highlands of East Africa, where Europeans may live in health and comfort. By the time they reached Nairobi, indeed, the evening air was so chill that both Englishmen were glad to don their overcoats. Said Mohammed deferentially took leave of them on the platform of the station, and disappeared among a crowd of Orientals gathered there; while Mr. Halliday inquired for the coffee-planter to whom he had an introduction, and who had offered him the hospitality of his bungalow so

long as he remained in Nairobi.

# CHAPTER THE SECOND–Said Mohammed, failed B.A.

Nairobi was disappointing. At a distance it looked like a cluster of tin cottages, and though these appeared larger and more substantial on a nearer view, they retained the dreary aspect of makeshift which corrugated iron always gives. Mr. Gillespie, however, the coffee-planter with whom the Hallidays were to stay, was hospitality itself; he and his good wife received their visitors with real Scottish heartiness of welcome. They gave them a capital dinner, and made them feel thoroughly at home.

Mr. Gillespie was much amused when, in answering his question about their journey from Mombasa, John told him of Said Mohammed, failed B.A.

"I'm that myself," he said, with a comical smile–"failed M.A. of Glasgow, though I don't call myself so. Professor Ramsay's Latin Composition fair stuck me, that's a fact. Man, these Indians are a problem. We've some thousands of them here, industrious, quick, and able to live on next to nothing, which we Scotsmen have got out of the way of. I believe in free trade, when it is free; but I don't believe in free competition with people who can beat us hollow, and these Indians will do that if we let 'em. We're bound to put restrictions on them."

"But they're British subjects, sir," John was beginning.

"Aye," interrupted Mr. Gillespie, "and so are the lions and rhinoceros of these parts, and we have to fight 'em. A country can't belong to both wild beasts and men; nor can it belong to black men and white; one or other must go to the wall. Not that the Indians are wild beasts, or even black; on the contrary, they're very decent folk in the main, and that's the worst of it. The only solution I see is to let them develop the Lowlands where we can't live, and to keep the Highlands for ourselves. Man, it's a grand country."

After dinner Mr. Gillespie led his guests to the verandah, and providing them with deck-chairs and cigars, discussed with them their immediate future.

"We've a decent club here; I'll introduce you to-morrow, Halliday. You can get a round of golf; and there are several young lassies who'll play lawn tennis

all day with your son if he wishes."

"Don't speak of it, man," said Mr. Halliday hastily. "We're out on business–strictly on business, and we've no time for playing till we've fixed on our land. Where is this Mount Kenya, anyway? John Gilmour–d'ye know him?–was out hunting a while ago, and he wrote me he'd found the very place for me, somewhere south-east of Mount Kenya; he stuck a post in the ground to mark the spot, and I've the directions written down somewhere."

"Mount Kenya's a bit north-east of us, a hundred miles or so. Fine country, too."

"And how do you get there?"

"Well, the ground's not exactly fit for motor-cars yet, and horses don't thrive. You can get mules, but they're apt to be a trouble, so I guess you'd better tramp it. You'll have to carry food with you, and a load of 'trade' for the natives; we'll have to see about getting carriers for you; you pay 'em about four rupees a month, and feed 'em. Their food don't cost much; you can get a hundredweight of native grain and red beans for three or four rupees, and if you're good shots you can provide yourselves with plenty of meat on the way."

"There's no fear of trouble with the natives, I suppose?"

"Not if you don't go too far north. South of Kenya they're friendly enough as a rule, but there are wild tribes on the east and north. You must have two porters who can shoot; Sniders they're used to; but don't let 'em use them except in case of necessity. Do all the game shooting yourselves, and keep a firm hand on the men; they'll play you all manner of tricks if you don't. They're the queerest people God ever made, that's a fact. They'll desert at any moment and forfeit their pay, for no reason at all that we can understand. I could tell you of men who'll carry a load of ninety pounds or more every day for a month on end, and then all at once decamp, hundreds of miles away from their home, and with no earthly chance of getting there. But you'll find 'em out for yourselves."

The talk lasted far into the night, Mr. Gillespie giving advice and retailing reminiscences of his own early days as a settler, which John drank in eagerly. Next day they set about collecting porters for the journey. The news that a white man was going up country had already spread through the native quarter of the town, and Mr. Gillespie's office was besieged by a great crowd of black men, representing a score of different races, all eager to join the stranger's "safari." The experience of the coffee-planter was very useful at this juncture, and the Hallidays were quietly amused as he dismissed man after man with little ceremony and a curtness of speech which, had they understood it (he spoke in Swahili, the common vehicle of intercourse between European and native), would have amused them still more. A little M'kamba would come forward with a smile. "You're a thief; be off," said Mr. Gillespie, and the man went away, still smiling.

A hulking Swahili appears, a sullen look on his face. "You're always quarrelling; be off," says Mr. Gillespie, and the Swahili retires, to join the crowd of rejected. At length half-a-dozen men were selected, three Swahilis, of whom Coja ben Selim, a big, good-tempered-looking fellow, was to be headman; and three Wakamba. Mr. Gillespie was doubtful whether so small a safari would suffice; but Mr. Halliday was bent on economy; he argued that he could not in any case afford an escort large enough to cope with a serious native attack, and further, that a party of modest dimensions was not so likely to provoke hostility as a large one. Moreover, he intended to pay only a flying visit to the site of his proposed settlement, for the purpose of a preliminary survey. If he was pleased with the country, he intended to mark out the ground and put in an application to the Land Commissioner for a lease of a thousand acres or so. With luck, a month would suffice for this prospecting journey, which incidentally, as Mr. Gillespie informed him, would absolve him from paying registration fees on his porters, such fees only being necessary when they were engaged for two months or more.

It remained to hire a cook for the expedition.

"We don't need a cook," said Mr. Halliday. "I've roughed it often enough; we can do our own cooking."

"Man, you're a tenderfoot," said Mr. Gillespie, laughing. "You must have a cook. Your men would all mutiny if you didn't. I don't mean that he would cook for them; they'll have their own cooking-pots; but they wouldn't obey you for a day if they saw you cooking for yourself. The first maxim for a white man in this country is: 'Never do a black man's work.' Order your men about as much as you please, but *don't do anything*."

"But that's a doctrine of the dark ages. Confound it, man, that's the kind of thing we shook off centuries ago. I'm not a duke."

"That's just exactly what you are here. The natives will regard you as their lord and master, and if you don't act up to the part–why, man, I think the Governor will expel you as an undesirable alien. In short, you must have a cook."

Here Mr. Gillespie's native servant came in to say that an Indian gentleman desired to see him.

"Send him in," said Mr. Gillespie, and there entered, suave and smiling, Said Mohammed, failed B.A. He bowed respectfully–a little too respectfully, thought John–to his acquaintances of the day before; then, addressing himself to Mr. Gillespie, he said–

"Having learnt in the bazaar, sir, that the esteemed gentleman in whose company I had the honour to travel yesterday is engaging a safari, I embrace the opportunity of submitting tender of my services in unremitting attention to the interior economy–soups, joints, sweets, et cetera, or, as one might say, *hoc genus omne*, as it were."

John opened his eyes. Apparently the failed B.A. was offering himself as cook; but John thought he must be mistaken. Mr. Gillespie, however, after a stare at his visitor, said in a severely practical tone–

"You have experience?"

"Yes, sir, I am *experientia docet* with several years' standing, and testimonials galore. Videlicet, the Central Restaurant, sir, in London, continuously chock-a-block on curry day when my dishes, prepared Indian fashion, were the delight of city gents and ladies of prepossessing appearance who feed there regular as clock-work. In soup, joint, entrée I am a don; in sauce I am a wily adept."

"Come up to my bungalow and cook my dinner to-night," said Mr. Gillespie.

"Verree good, sir. The proof of the pudding is in the mastication thereof. Good-morning, sir, and assuring you of my best services at all times."

There was a laugh when Said Mohammed had gone.

"He'll never do," said Mr. Halliday.

"Man, if he's any good at all he'll be a perfect treasure," said Mr. Gillespie. "And you'll have to pay him fifty rupees a month."

"Near £3 a month for cooking?" cried Mr. Halliday. "Can't afford it."

"But, my dear sir, you can't get any sort of a cook here for less than thirty rupees; and our failed B.A., if he's worth his salt, will be worth fifty. He will at least be clean; it's a part of his religion."

"Well, perhaps he's a failure all round. Anyway, we don't want kickshaws, and a cheaper man will do all we need."

But the dinner at Mr. Gillespie's that night turned out excellent–well cooked, well served, and varied though simple dishes.

"Faith, Halliday," said the host, "if you don't engage the man I'll take him myself. That'll bring you up to the scratch if you've any Scotch blood left in you."

Whether it was due to this provocation or not, Mr. Halliday engaged Said Mohammed next day, for a month. Then, having been advised of the inexpediency of delay, which might be taken advantage of by his porters to desert, he decided to set off the same day, as soon as the hottest hours were past. He sent Said Mohammed into the bazaar to buy the necessary amount of food-stuff for the natives; Mr. Gillespie undertook the purchase of small quantities of "trade"–sheeting, coloured cloths, and beads for the most part; Mr. Halliday himself bought a small tent, provisions, blankets, rifles and ammunition, and a few cheap utensils. All these articles were sent up to the bungalow. At three o'clock Said Mohammed and the six porters arrived and set about packing up, under Mr. Gillespie's directions. Within an hour the loads were packed and placed in a line on the ground.

"Now, Halliday," said Mr. Gillespie, "it's up to you. You must give each man his proper load, and don't be jockeyed."

There was a twinkle in his eye which Mr. Halliday detected.

"Are you setting a trap for me?" he asked.

"No, no, man; but as you're to be master, the sooner you feel your feet the better."

Whereupon Mr. Halliday, who was not without courage as well as shrewd common-sense, instantly confided the tent and personal baggage to two of the three Swahilis, and distributed the remaining loads among the three Wakamba by a rough and ready estimate of their muscular capabilities. Then began what John called the "fun." The Swahilis accepted their loads without a murmur; were they not the best fitted to carry the *bwana's* belongings? But one of the Wakamba, a stout little fellow with one eye, uttered a terrible wail when he lifted his bundle to his back, and, letting it down again, began to expostulate in a torrent of gibberish, of which the *bwana*, of course, understood not a word. The others instantly followed his example, and all three began to wrangle and gesticulate and abuse one another with a deafening clamour. It was plain that every man wanted the load of somebody else. Mr. Halliday looked on calmly for a few moments, Mr. Gillespie curiously watching to see what he would do, and placidly smoking a cigar without offering any suggestion. Suddenly Mr. Halliday called to Coja ben Selim, the Swahili, and the only man whose name he knew.

"You're headman; settle it," he said calmly, turning on his heel. "I give you five minutes."

The big Swahili instantly went among the Wakamba, cuffing them right and left. In less than five minutes peace was restored, the Wakamba slung their loads to their backs, passing the long loop of raw hide around their foreheads; the Swahilis set theirs upon their heads; and the cry of "Safari! safari!" indicated that they were ready to be off.

"A capital start, Halliday," said Mr. Gillespie. "Good luck to ye."

Mr. Halliday and John shook hands heartily with their host and hostess, and taking their rifles under their arm, set off after the little caravan, the leader of which had already started a marching song. Said Mohammed, carrying a little bundle of his own, brought up the rear, with Coja ben Selim.

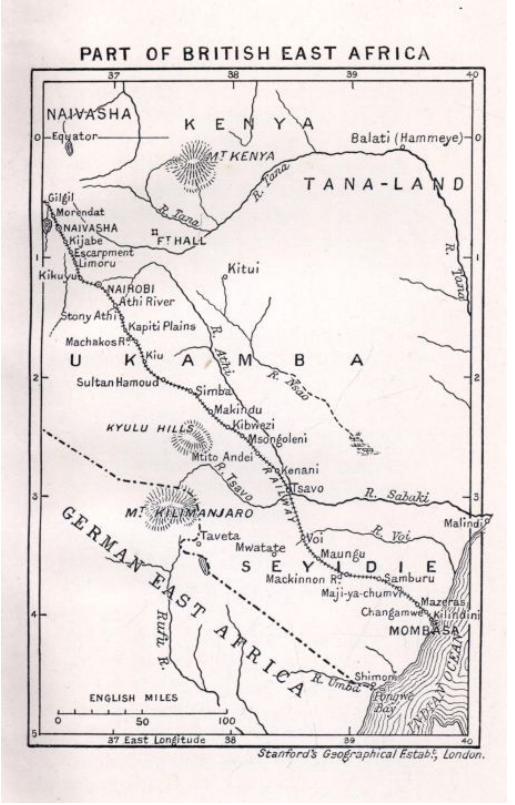
# CHAPTER THE THIRD–In a Game-Pit

John felt all the thrilling excitement of a new experience. There was nothing romantic, it is true, in trudging along at two miles an hour over a decent road, which led at first through the spacious estates of colonists who had already settled in the neighbourhood of the town. But he knew that before long the caravan would enter a wild, unsettled region, swarming with game large and small, holding innumerable possibilities of encounters with strange beasts and men. And though there was nothing novel in the mere exercise of walking, it was both new and amusing to find himself in company with African natives, marching stolidly along under heavy loads, to a monotonous chant kept up by their leader, who repeated the same words endlessly. Curious to know what the man was singing, he asked Coja ben Selim, the only man of them that knew English. The Swahili gave him a wide grin and said it was all nonsense, and when John pressed him for the exact meaning he prevaricated and looked uncomfortable. The song was, in fact, an impromptu one, and the words, literally translated, meant nothing more than "Two more white men; oh, what noses! Oh, what legs!" and if John had known he would only have wondered what amusement the porters could have derived from the constant repetition of such an uninspired and uninspiring refrain. He made up his mind to learn the native tongue as soon as possible.

After they had walked for three or four miles it became suddenly dark, but there was no pause, Mr. Gillespie having advised that they should take advantage of the cool hours, and do a good ten miles before camping for the night. A new moon shed a little light upon the path, which, as the scattered cultivated districts were left behind, entered a region of long grass and belts of forest land. Presently they heard the rushing noise of water, and came to the brink of a deep ravine, whose bottom they could not see for the trees and dense undergrowth with which it was clothed. Coja ben Selim was for crossing the ravine; he said he knew of a fine place for camping a little beyond it; but Mr. Halliday was not inclined to risk a broken leg, and decided to camp in a glade on the nearer bank, and to attempt the crossing by daylight. The loads were set down, the tent was pitched, and a fire lighted; soon the men were cooking their simple supper, chattering cheerfully; and Said Mohammed, opening up the stores, produced some cocoa, tinned milk and biscuits, and in a few minutes provided his employers with a simple meal. Mr. Halliday discussed the advisability of setting a watch during the night, but Coja said that there were no black men in the neighbourhood, and the fires would keep off wild animals; so the two Englishmen wrapped their blankets around them, and slept soundly till the dawn.

Mr. Gillespie had given his guests some instruction in the general conduct of a safari, so that when Mr. Halliday put his head out of the tent and called to the headman to take up the loads, there was a brisk movement among the porters to the pile in which their bundles had been stacked during the night. They laid them

in a row for inspection, first lashing to them their mats and cooking-pots. When this was done, they squatted down to eat a few roasted grains of muhindi (maize), and while the Swahilis struck the tent and tied up the bedding, the two Englishmen having rapidly dressed, Said Mohammed prepared breakfast of tinned meat, biscuits, and tea. Then, to the customary cry of "Safari!" the porters lifted their loads, the utensils were quickly packed, and while the dawn was still grey the little party left the camp and began the descent of the ravine. Looking back as he came to the brink, John saw a hyena slink out of the undergrowth and steal past the smouldering embers of the fires, and birds like kites swoop down with rushing wings, soaring up again with some remnant of food in their talons. He felt now that his new strange life was beginning indeed.




*PART OF BRITISH EAST AFRICA*

The descent was safely made, the river waded, and climbing up the further side, the travellers found themselves entering a region of bush and thorns and tall rank grass, in the midst of which they heard at times a swishing sound as some animal, invisible, darted away from before them. They had left the road leading to Fort Hall, the nearest Government station, and struck off in a direction north by east. The leader picked his way steadily, following the track of an animal, the others close behind him, though after a time some of the porters, weaker or less willing than the rest, began to lag behind. Though it was still early morning, John found it already uncomfortably hot, and, taking off his coat, gave it to Coja. Once or twice he removed his sun-helmet also, but Said Mohammed, at this, came to his side, and said, very respectfully–

"Ten thousand pardons, sir, but a word to the wise: never expose your manly brow to the solar luminary. In a brace of shakes you will have sunstroke."

"But there is no sun; I shan't hurt with this mist over the ground," John protested.

"It is human to err, sir. You cannot see the sun, but he sees you, and lo! in a moment he smites you, and it is no go. The head, sir, is the weaker vessel."

"Put on your hat, John," said Mr. Halliday. "We don't want to run any risks."

By and by the mist cleared, and having reached a ridge bare of trees, the travellers suddenly caught sight of Mount Kenya in the distance, rearing itself from the plain by such gentle slopes that it was hard to believe that its summit was 14,000 feet above sea-level and covered with snow. Its peaks were swathed in cloud; indeed, only once or twice during many months did the travellers catch a glimpse of them. Then the view was magnificent, and for the first time in his life John felt a longing to climb a mountain.

Every day's programme was the same. They started early. After a march of two hours a halt was called, to allow the laggards to come up with the party. Then the march was resumed, and continued until the sun's heat became unendurable, and the men clamoured for a long rest. One day at this time Mr. Halliday, selecting a glade shaded by immense trees, bade the men set down their loads, and take a siesta. The resting-place was not so well chosen as it had appeared to be; a stream ran close by, and the travellers had hardly settled themselves when they were beset by innumerable red ticks, which clung to the white men's clothing and bit their skin savagely, sparing the natives. The Hallidays, finding their attacks intolerable, sprang up and went on, instructing Coja to follow them when the porters were sufficiently rested. They had not gone far when they saw a herd of congoni, an animal of the antelope kind, dashing across the plain, and John fingered his rifle longingly. But Mr. Halliday would not permit him to go in chase of them.

"We shall have plenty of sport by and by," he said, "and we don't want to

heat ourselves or lose touch with the men."

He had scarcely spoken when John caught sight of another safari coming across a ridge in the distance. Mr. Halliday thought it prudent to halt until they were rejoined by the rest of their party, and they threw themselves down under a baobab to wait for them. It was two hours before they came up, and the march had just been resumed when they heard shots, and saw a number of black men rushing towards them at full speed. Mr. Halliday was a little alarmed, thinking that an attack was imminent; but in a few moments Coja told him that the approaching men were plainly porters, for they were unarmed, but they bore no loads, and he suggested that something had frightened them.

In a few minutes the first of the runaways came up, and began to talk excitedly to Coja, who informed Mr. Halliday that the men were indeed porters belonging to a safari returning to Nairobi, and that a rhinoceros had just charged them, whereupon they had flung down their loads and bolted.

"Where is their master?" asked Mr. Halliday.

The man, who had been joined by several of his comrades, pointed back in the direction whence he had come. No white man, however, was in sight, and Mr. Halliday decided to hurry on and see what had become of him, ordering the men to follow, which they were plainly reluctant to do. He came within half-a-mile to the scene of the stampede, the loads of the porters strewing the grass; but there was no sign either of the rhinoceros or of the young white man who, as the scared natives said, was the master of the safari. Coja declared that the *bwana* must have been gored or trampled by the rhinoceros, and suggested that they should hurry on and get out of danger as quickly as possible; but Mr. Halliday would not hear of leaving the spot until he had made an effort to find the unfortunate traveller. He ordered the men to set down their loads and remain with them while he made a search, and asked whether any of them could follow a rhinoceros trail. One and all first denied that they had ever seen a rhinoceros; but Mr. Halliday sternly told Coja that they would have no supper unless they recovered their memory, and then Coja himself reluctantly admitted that if the trail was very clear, and if the white men would go one on each side of him with their guns, he would try to lead them after the animal.

As a matter of fact, the trail was easily found, the ground being soft and the grass heavily trampled. It led them into a dense mass of bush. Mr. Halliday, holding his rifle ready for the least sign of danger, plunged into the jungle with John and Coja, the latter soon declaring that he saw, together with the great hoof-marks of the animal, forming paths on both sides of a ridge of grass, the smaller and fainter tracks made by a white man's boots.

"Him killed dead, sure 'nuff," said Coja solemnly. "No good look no more."

"We'll make sure of it. Go on," said Mr. Halliday, and the three continued

to follow the trail.

"What's that?" cried John suddenly, a few minutes later.

"White man call; him no dead yet," said Coja.

"Hallo!" shouted Mr. Halliday, and a faint "Hallo!" came in answer.

Coja turned a little to the right, in the direction of the sound. Mr. Halliday called again, and again the answer came, louder, but still curiously muffled. Led by the sound, they now left the trail of the rhinoceros, and had proceeded but a few steps farther when Coja suddenly came to a halt, and bursting into laughter, cried, "Him down there!"

"Where?" said Mr. Halliday in amazement, looking about him. And then he saw, in the midst of the grass, a deep hole, and at the bottom, nine or ten feet below the surface, a young white man sitting cross-legged.

"Hallo!" he said, looking up with a smile. "I thought it was my brother, though it wasn't like his shout. Can you help me out? I'm afraid I've sprained my ankle."

"Of course we can," said Mr. Halliday, "but I'd like to know what on earth you are doing there."

"Thanking my stars I'm not skewered," said the other. "Let down your rifle, will you? Perhaps I can manage to scramble out; but don't let me drag you down."

Mr. Halliday lowered his rifle, holding it by the barrel, having first taken the precaution of emptying the breech; and the prisoner took it by the stock, and tried to clamber up the side of the hole. But he winced as his right foot touched the earth, and after a few moments said–

"I'm afraid I can't manage it. My ankle has got a twist. If you'll shout for my men I'll get one of them to make a sling of rope and haul me out."

"We needn't wait for that," said John. "I'll jump down and give you a lift."

"Look out, then. There's a pointed stake in the ground here which I only escaped by a hair's breadth. Jump to the left. It's uncommon good of you."

John leapt down, and making a pick-a-back, got the stranger to mount and then to stand erect on one foot. His head was now just below the level of the pit.

"I'm afraid we're not much for'arder," he said, with a smile.

"Can't you get your elbows on the edge and hoist yourself up?" suggested John.

"Can't reach. You'd better let me down."

"I'll tell you what," said John: "cut a notch in the wall for your foot. Then you can hoist yourself up by the rifle until you are high enough to get your elbows on; then it'll be easy. The earth is pretty soft."

Sitting with his legs over John's shoulders, the stranger soon cut a notch with his knife; and in a few minutes he was hauled to the surface.

"I'm much obliged to you. I might have stayed there till I starved for all my

men would have troubled."

"How did you manage to fall in?" asked Mr. Halliday.

"A rhinoceros charged us as we were crossing the foot of the kopje yonder. He sprang out from behind a small mountain of an ant-hill. My men instantly flung down their loads and bolted–idiots! and as we're rather short of meat I thought I'd try to get within shot of the beast. I was following him up when the earth gave way under me, and I found myself in this old game-pit, and don't know how I managed to escape the skewer sticking up at the bottom, as long as my arm. I say, you haven't happened to see anything of my brother, I suppose?"

"We met nobody but your men," said Mr. Halliday. "Has your brother lost himself?"

"Old Joe lost! Not a bit of it," cried the young man. "He'll turn up all right. He left me a couple of hours ago to shoot something for to-night's pot, and I thought you might have come across him. I'm rather a nuisance, I'm afraid; I can't put my left foot to the ground, and our last donkey died four days ago, so that I can't ride. We've had uncommon bad luck with our donkeys. As a rule they're hardy in this climate, we were told; but every one of the six we started with has died. Really, I am a nuisance, keeping you here."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Halliday. "Coja, shout for some of our men."

"No come, master," said Coja. "Berry much 'fraid."

"If he goes and calls our headman a coward I think it will answer," said the stranger. "Headmen are very jealous of each other."

Coja entered into the spirit of the suggestion, and ran back over the tracks. In a few minutes the sounds of angry altercation came through the bush, and Coja reappeared, in company with a white-clad Somali, each man abusing the other at the top of his voice. Mr. Halliday silenced them sternly, and ordered them to construct a litter, promising a few cents to the man who did the larger share of the work. They set to work at once, weaving strands of creeping plants and stalks of grass with amazing rapidity. In less than twenty minutes a sheet of matting was finished and firmly bound to two rifles, and on this extemporized litter the stranger was carried between the headmen back to the open ground.

On the way he explained that his name was Oliver Browne, "commonly called Poll," and that he came from Cape Colony. With his elder brother he had been shooting and prospecting in North Kenya and Gallaland, and they had thoughts of settling in British East Africa, which seemed to offer better prospects than they could see in South Africa.

"I suppose you're on the same job," he concluded.

"Well, we're going to have a look round," replied Mr. Halliday cautiously. "We're on a flying visit, you see."

"And I'm a nuisance, hindering you like this. Here are my wretched men;

I shall be all right now; and I can't thank you enough. We may meet again, if we decide to come north. Good-bye. And I say, if you meet that brother of mine, please tell him to hurry up, for if another rhinoceros takes a fancy to charge us, and I can't bring him down, I shall be a mangled corpse in no time."

"Hadn't we better stay with you till your brother turns up?" said John.

"Not at all. The plain is pretty open here, and a rhinoceros could not take us unawares. I shall go on slowly, and camp when I come to a suitable place, and my men will rig up a boma in no time. Good-bye again."

The matting had been transferred to two of the Brownes' rifles, and the men of each party having collected and shouldered their loads, they set off in opposite directions, the two headmen hurling abuse at each other as long as they remained in sight. Coja was particularly indignant because his rival had received the reward for completing the greater portion of the litter; but after a little Mr. Halliday consoled him by saying, casually, that his portion had been the more closely knit, so that he should receive a reward also.

"Dat oder fella no good, what I say," remarked Coja.

Half-an-hour after they had parted with Oliver Browne, they met a white man whom at the first glance they knew to be his brother, so striking was the resemblance. He was attended by four porters, each carrying a large portion of some newly-killed animal. Mr. Halliday halted as they came up, saying–

"You're Mr. Joe Browne?"

"That I am, but—-" He paused, looking puzzled.

"You don't know me," said Mr. Halliday, "so you needn't rack your memory. We've just met your brother. He was after a rhinoceros and tumbled into a game-pit."

"Clumsy ass!" cried Mr. Browne, in the manner of an affectionate brother. "No bones broke, I hope?"

Mr. Halliday reassured him on that point, and the two stood for a few minutes exchanging notes. The South African said that he had been much attracted by what he had seen of the country, and if Mr. Halliday became a settler, he would in all probability have him for a neighbour.

"But it won't be yet," he added. "We must settle up our affairs at the Cape first. Three or four months, perhaps; you'll have grown your first crops by then. Don't shoot all the game before I come."

"You have left us some, I hope," said John, eyeing the porters' burdens.

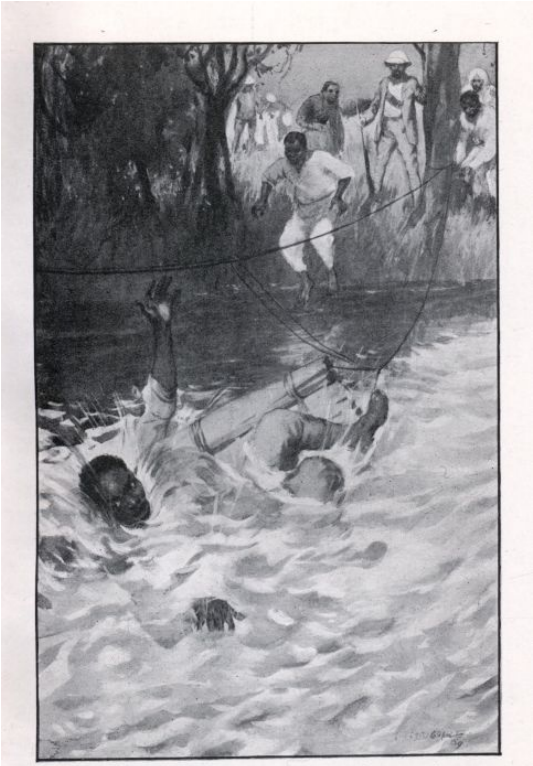
"Oh, that's a couple of water-buck for the pot. You'll find bigger game than that. Hippo meat's uncommonly good, but don't try elephant's foot; it's a fraud. Don't believe any one who tells you to the contrary. Good-bye; pleased to have met you; bar rhinoceros or game-pits we'll meet again."

# CHAPTER THE FOURTH–White Man's Magic

When John found opportunity to put pen to paper, he wrote, as he said, "loads" to a school chum about the incidents of the next few days, every one furnishing a new excitement. Mr. Halliday was so anxious to accomplish the aim of his journey that he pushed on resolutely each day, striking camp at earliest dawn, marching with intervals until ten, resting until three or four, and then going on again until nightfall. The ground was varied, now a stretch of grass land, now a belt of forest; here a rapidly flowing stream rushing between high banks covered with dense vegetation, there a tract of hard volcanic soil so rugged and hot under the sun's rays that walking was painful. It was only during the intervals for rest that John was able to indulge his sporting tastes, and at the same time do service to the commissariat. He caught some fine fish in the rivers, and wished there had been time to follow up the hippopotamus tracks he discovered on the banks. He brought down several water-buck and red congoni with his .303 rifle, and one day was vastly excited to see a black-maned lion with his lioness cross from one patch of reeds to another. The sight of other game in wonderful variety–zebras, leopards, antelopes–became so common that after a time it ceased to be impressive, and opportunities for shooting them came but rarely, the country they frequented being flat and open, and their scent being so keen that it was almost impossible to come within range.

One incident that gave a little excitement was the crossing of the Thika river. The water was so deep and the current so swift that to ford it was impossible, and after vainly searching for a shallow part, Mr. Halliday confessed himself at a loss to know how to proceed. John suggested that they should fell a tree and throw it across the river as a bridge, but this would be a somewhat lengthy operation; and Said Mohammed said it would take less time to construct a raft. This was accordingly done, by lashing together three dead logs found on the bank; but Mr. Halliday asked how it was to be prevented from being swept away by the stream. Coja showed himself to be a man of resource. Taking a rope

between his teeth, he plunged into the river, first looking warily round to make sure that no crocodiles were in the neighbourhood, and swam across, the force of the current giving his course an inclination of sixty degrees. Having reached the other side, he fastened the rope to a tree, and by aid of this line the raft was ferried over, conveying now the loads and now the men. One of the Wakamba slipped off when he was in midstream, and instantly howled that a crocodile was after him; but Coja called him a liar, sprang after him, and catching him by the hair, towed him safely to the farther bank.



"One of the Wakamba slipped off when he was in midstream."

*"One of the Wakamba slipped off when he was in midstream."*

Hitherto the party had met no natives; but Coja now informed his mas-

ter that the people of these parts were very bad, and advised that they should go slowly, so that no stragglers should be left to be set on and robbed–if not maltreated or killed. Mr. Halliday was somewhat troubled at the thought of unfriendly natives between his prospective estate and the outposts of civilization; but consoled himself with the reflection that the area of settlements was rapidly enlarging, and the country in the settled parts being brought thoroughly under control.

The country beyond the Thika river proved to be more difficult than any that had hitherto been traversed. Bare rocky hills, cut by deep and dangerous ravines, alternated with stretches of long coarse grass and dense thorny scrub, impenetrable save by low tunnels made by roaming hippopotami. As they burrowed painfully through these tunnels, they were oppressed by the suffocating heat, their clothes were torn by the thorns, and their skin irritated by the multitudinous insects. It was like wandering through a complex maze, the hippo paths twisting this way and that in apparently aimless fashion, though Coja said they were a clear sign of the neighbourhood of water. After a whole day spent in this fatiguing march the party came abruptly upon a broad river, flowing with swift but almost noiseless current between banks clad with noble palms and every species of tropical vegetation, amid which countless throngs of monkeys desported themselves, and birds of many colours darted this way and that like fragments of a rainbow. Mr. Halliday pitched his camp for the night above the river, and for the first time the porters surrounded it with a boma–a close fence of thorn bushes, which they constructed with wonderful celerity. For the first time, too, a watch was kept, the porters being told off to take turns at sentry-go. It occurred to Mr. Halliday, waking in the middle of the night, to see whether the sentry was alert at his post, and he was not greatly surprised to find him fast asleep. He shook him up and rated him very soundly, his reprimand being, perhaps, the more impressive because delivered in a tongue which the man did not understand. Mr. Halliday slept no more that night, coming to the conclusion that if it was necessary to keep watch, the porters were not to be entrusted with the task.

It was next day that the party first encountered the native inhabitants. They came upon a luxuriant plantation of manioc, and shortly afterwards saw a number of fierce-looking men, armed with spears, lurking in the long grass. Mr. Halliday ordered Coja to go forward and explain that he was a friend, bent on a peaceful errand, and that he would give good prices for any food the people cared to bring him. One of the natives ran back to the village, and soon returned with the chief, who presented a singular appearance in a ragged and stained khaki jacket, and a dilapidated sun-helmet with an ostrich feather stuck in it at a rakish angle. It turned out that this was not his usual attire, but had been hastily donned in honour of the white man.

"He seems a very respectable old guy," said Mr. Halliday to John as the chief came up with a broad smile. With Coja's aid as interpreter, Mr. Halliday repeated what had already been said to the men, and as an earnest of what was to come, presented the chief with a number of coloured beads, feeling somewhat doubtful whether such trifles were worth the acceptance of one who, as his dress showed, had already had some intercourse with Europeans. But the chief showed unmistakable pleasure, and immediately sent two of his young men to bring wild honey and gourds of milk for the wasungu. Presently a number of women came, bearing loads of water-melons and other vegetables, which were very welcome after the dry fare of the past few days, the vendors being thoroughly satisfied with a handful of red beads or a short strip of cloth.

Mr. Halliday had directed the course of his march, under Coja's guidance, according to instructions and a rough map given him by his friend Gilmour. The district recommended to him as an excellent site for his farm lay on high ground to the east of Mount Kenya, and Mr. Gilmour had marked the exact spot by erecting a post, the top of which was carved to the shape of a man's head. When Mr. Halliday expressed a doubt whether the post would still be found after the lapse of several years, his friend reassured him on the point, declaring that the natives would not touch it, and unless it had been thrown down by a sportive rhinoceros, or "collected" as an object of interest by some wandering European sportsman, it would remain precisely as he had left it. Mr. Halliday, judging by his sketch-map that he must have nearly reached his destination, got Coja to ask the natives whether they knew of this post, and was disappointed with their negative answer. There was nothing for it but to continue the march. Accordingly he took leave of the friendly natives, after purchasing considerable quantities of food, and set off.

There was every indication that his goal could not be far distant. The country was open, the soil a rich red loam, covered with rank rough pasturage and wild clover, with occasional clumps of woodland. The air was so cool, except at mid-day, that it was hard to believe they were within a degree or two of the Equator; but by testing the boiling-point of water John discovered that the height was five thousand feet above sea-level, and the temperate climate was explained.

Two days after leaving the native village Mr. Halliday decided to pitch his camp, and taking that for a centre, to explore the surrounding country.

"If this isn't the place, it ought to be," he said to John. "I never saw a finer country for grazing; it's good for three or four sheep an acre, or I'm a Dutchman, and fruit ought to grow here as well as in Kent."

"It's rather strange, though," said John, "that there's no game to be seen. There ought to be plenty."

"That's true. Perhaps they've been killed off by some disease, though I hope

that's not the explanation. We'll maybe find out by and by."

The camp was pitched near a shallow stream, a boma was erected round it, and next day the travellers set off with Coja and one of the porters, leaving the rest in charge of the second Swahili.

They waded several small streams, and in the afternoon came to a broad river which, on consulting his map, Mr. Halliday felt sure was the one marked as forming the northern boundary of his suggested settlement. But though they searched its banks for some hours, they failed to discover the post, and had to return unsuccessful, reaching camp after nightfall. Next day they set off again in a different direction, so as to strike the river at a point higher up its course. When they came to it, Coja pointed to a native village on high ground some distance on the other side, and suggested that inquiry should be made there. The river could only be crossed by swimming, and there being no sign of crocodiles, they plunged in, finding the water deliciously cold. Their approach was descried from the village, and they were soon met by a group of young warriors armed with bows and arrows, who, standing at a distance, demanded who they were and what was their business. Coja shouted in reply that they had come to make friends with the chief, and had brought some valuable presents for him. One of the men ran back to the village, the others remaining on guard, and forbidding the strangers to advance until the chief arrived.

Some little time elapsed before the chief made his appearance amid a group of elders. At first he stood suspiciously aloof while Coja explained the purpose of the white men's visit, but when Mr. Halliday displayed a strip of coloured cloth, and Coja announced that it was a gift for the chief, the natives drew a little nearer, and said that they were willing to be friends if the strangers would not rob them. Coja's reply to this was that the white men were very good, and would never dream of robbing their friends, adding that the cloth would be handed to the chief if he would come and answer a few questions.

"Give it him at once," said Mr. Halliday, "and say there's more if they'll tell us what we want to know."

The gift of the cloth finally disarmed the chief's suspicions. Looking very much pleased, he came forward with his men, and said that he was ready to give what help he could. Mr. Gillespie had warned Mr. Halliday not to believe too implicitly any statements made by natives, who would always say what they thought would please; so when, in answer to his question about a post with a man's head, the chief said that he certainly knew it, and asked for another piece of cloth, Mr. Halliday shook his head, promising to give more presents if the chief would lead him to the landmark. At this the chief looked much troubled, and his men began to talk eagerly, it being evident from their manner that they were trying to dissuade him from complying with the white man's request. Mr. Halliday

was at a loss to understand their reluctance until Coja, after a long colloquy with the chief, announced that they were afraid to go near the post, which was a terrible devil, for their medicine man had seen its eyes move, and its mouth grin at him. It had come there suddenly one day, no one knew how, but they thought it must have sprung out of the ground, and some of their cattle that grazed around it had soon afterwards died, so that they were sure it was a devil, and they had never since allowed their herds to roam in that direction.

"Where is it?" asked Mr. Halliday.

The chief pointed up the river, and said that if the white man had medicine strong enough to destroy the devil the people would be very grateful. Mr. Halliday thought he might turn this superstition to good account. He explained that he had come from the end of the world to make a home in this country, and the devil had no doubt established himself on the ground in order to show that it was to be a white man's property. But now that he had come, the devil's work of guarding the land was over, and if the chief would promise to be a friendly neighbour, the devil should be at once destroyed, and a good price should be paid for the land, since it was clearly a part of the chief's grazing grounds. The chief gave the promise with alacrity, adding that he would become the blood brother of any man who should rid the country of so terrible a creature. Thereupon Mr. Halliday asked him to lead the way as far as he dared, and he should see for himself that the devil had no power against the white man's magic.

The chief sent a messenger back to the village with this good news, and soon a great throng of people came flocking down, men, women, and children, some blowing rude horns, others beating drums, all in great excitement. The devil was on the bank of the river from which the white men had crossed. Having swum back in company with the chief and half-a-dozen of his men, the travellers marched up the river, the populace flocking along the other bank, being only occasionally visible among the trees.

After walking for about half-a-mile, the chief struck away from the river, and led the way to a saucer-like depression between two ranges of low hills. It was open grass country for the most part, but at the further end of the hollow, about three miles away, there was a thick mass of forest. All at once the chief came to a halt, and, pointing ahead, declared that the devil was there, and he would go no farther. Neither Mr. Halliday nor John could distinguish the post among the long grass, but asking the chief to remain where he stood, they went forward to search for it. After a few steps they missed Coja, and turning to look for him, found that he had halted a hundred yards or so from the chief, being evidently unwilling to face the devil, and at the same time wishing to appear braver than the natives.

Walking some distance apart, so that they should not miss the post, Mr.

Halliday and his son in a minute or two caught sight simultaneously of what they sought. A thick knobby post stood among the grass, its top about a foot above the level of the stalks. The knob had been carved with some skill to the shape of a face with the mouth wide open.

"We may as well do the job with becoming solemnity," said Mr. Halliday. "We'll have a shot or two at it before we go near. Range about a hundred, isn't it?"

"I should think so. Bet you I get most shots in his mouth."

"Considering that our rifles and cartridges are alike, I don't see how you're going to judge. Anyway, you take first shot."

John fired. A flock of birds rose with a great clatter of wings into the air, and the group of natives yelled and flung themselves face downward into the grass, whereupon Coja began to taunt them with cowardice. A shot from Mr. Halliday followed; then each fired again, and Mr. Halliday, turning round, declared that the devil was killed, and walked towards the post. Coja, now thoroughly reassured, ran after him, the natives following at a distance.

"All four shots in the mouth; the honours are easy," said Mr. Halliday. "You're a better shot than I thought you, John. We'd better pull the thing up, hadn't we?"

But they found the post so firmly fixed that they could neither pull it up nor push it over. It was evidently a case for digging. Having no implements with them they were obliged to leave it standing; but Mr. Halliday showed the admiring natives the bullet marks in the mouth, and, slapping the top of the head, assured them that the devil would do no more harm. He then gave the chief another strip of cloth and a handful of beads in reward for his services, and the party returned to the river, where the happy result of the expedition was announced to the main body of the villagers, from whom the proceedings had been hidden by the contour of the ground. The chief wished Mr. Halliday to feast with him, and afterwards witness a war-dance, and when the invitation was declined, he insisted on his white friend accepting a small pied goat.

"The pioneer of our stock, John," said Mr. Halliday. "But the chief must take charge of it until we come up to settle. I don't suppose we shall see it again."

But in this he was mistaken, for when he came some weeks later to enter into occupation of his estate, the goat was brought to him with every mark of respect by a deputation of the villagers.

# CHAPTER THE FIFTH–Juma takes to the Bush

Mr. Halliday spent the next two days in surveying the neighbourhood of Mr. Gilmour's stake. The country was all that his friend had described. The soil was rich; the river, as the natives informed him, never ran dry, though its waters were sometimes very low; and the valley was intersected by several smaller watercourses, which, though now dry, were full streams in the rainy season, so that the estate would never lack irrigation except after long-continued drought. Being well satisfied with the locality, Mr. Halliday got his men to erect a number of boundary posts about a rectangular area of some 1,500 acres, and then set off on the return journey to Nairobi to lodge a claim for a Government grant in the office of the District Commissioner. He paid his preliminary survey fee of seventy-five rupees; then, knowing that it would be months before the official survey was made, he decided to purchase stores, stock, and material for building a bungalow and out-houses, and to engage porters to convey these to the spot, and a certain number of servants to staff the farm. Formal possession of the land would be granted as soon as it was certified to be actually occupied and the balance of the survey fee, some two hundred rupees, was paid; but the lease for ninety-nine years would not be made out until the Commissioner received proof that development had taken place, which practically meant the expenditure of forty times the rent, this being twelve cents an acre. Thus it would be about three years before Mr. Halliday was definitely accepted as a settler and leaseholder, and he impressed upon John that they must both put their backs into the work if they intended to be successful.

It was a month before the second safari was ready to start–a far more important caravan than the first. To begin with, there was a large quantity of stores for the use of the white men, together with seeds, root plants, and a few apple-tree slips, which by all accounts would thrive. Then there was a considerable amount of thin corrugated iron for roofing, some glass, and some ready-made window-frames, which if made on the spot would have involved too great an ex-

penditure of time and labour. There were a few simple agricultural implements which Mr. Halliday had brought from home, guessing, and rightly as it proved, that even allowing for the cost of freight they were cheaper than they could have been bought in Nairobi. These included the "small holdings plough" of Ipswich, which had to be taken to pieces for convenience of transit. Mr. Halliday deplored the lack of roads and of bridges over the streams, which made it impossible to employ vehicles for the carriage of his goods, and prevented him from taking several pieces of machinery he would have liked to have with him. But he purchased a few donkeys, each of which could carry twice as much as a man.

In addition to these articles, a large number of live-stock was included in the caravan. It might be possible, Mr. Halliday was told, to purchase cattle and sheep from the natives in the neighbourhood of his farm, but he was advised to buy a good number of half-bred animals in Nairobi, the native sheep and goats being woolless, and of no value except for their flesh and hides. Later on, when he was fairly settled, he hoped to introduce some English stock to cross with the native. Accordingly he bought 750 sheep at an average price of six shillings a head, a few goats, and a score of cattle, for which he paid £140.

To carry his goods he found it necessary to engage, in addition to the donkeys, forty porters, a few of whom he intended to keep as labourers on the farm or servants in the house, if they proved satisfactory. Of these forty only one, Coja the headman, had been a member of the first expedition, the rest of that party being unwilling to do any more work until they had spent their wages. Twelve of the new company were Swahilis, the remainder Wakamba or Wakikuyu. Four of the Swahilis were askaris, or armed porters. Said Mohammed had done so well on the first journey that he was engaged permanently as cook. John declared that his conversation was well worth his wages, but Mr. Halliday took severely practical views of everything, and said that he didn't pay for conversation. He hired two Indian mistris for three months, at two rupees a day, to build his bungalow and do what other carpenter's work was necessary. And since his farm was to be mainly a stock-farm, he engaged a stalwart Masai and his son, a lad of sixteen or seventeen, to assist in the herding, the Masai being a pastoral race *par excellence*.

Mr. Halliday had not intended to increase his men's burdens on this occasion by "trade" goods, thinking that the friendship he had already sealed with the chief of the neighbouring village would obviate any further dealings with the natives. But he changed his mind on the advice of Mr. Gillespie, who represented that he might come in contact with other tribes not so well disposed, that he might find it necessary to purchase more sheep and cattle, especially if tick fever or some other disease broke out among his stock, and that it would be well to have the means of purchasing ivory, if he found an opportunity, the tribes to

the north of Kenya being reputed great elephant hunters.

All being at last ready, Mr. Halliday set out on his second journey, which took him nearly four times as long as the first, owing partly to a certain turbulence among the Swahili porters, and partly to the difficulty of driving the animals. Apart from their natural tendency to lag and to stray, it was a difficult and sometimes a perilous operation to get them across the many streams; fortunately it was the height of the dry season, and the depth of water insignificant. Several sheep were drowned, some strayed and could not be recovered; one or two died of over-marching. The donkeys also gave a good deal of trouble, having to be unloaded at every stream, lugged across, and then loaded up again. It was a long and tiresome business each night to construct a boma of sufficient circuit to enclose the whole of the safari, and in spite of this thorny fence, and watchfires kept constantly alight, a lion on one occasion broke in at dead of night, snapped up a sheep, and made off with it before the alarm could be given.

Mr. Halliday found the porters even more troublesome than the animals. It turned out that one of the Swahilis was an old rival of Coja ben Selim. He was a big man named Juma, with a stronger strain of Arab blood than the rest, and he constantly disputed Coja's authority, and incited the other men to complain of their loads and their food. Mr. Halliday had to be continually on the watch, and only by dint of great firmness and by keeping Juma on one occasion without food for a day did he succeed in preventing a mutiny. Juma had brought his wife with him, a very stout negress of some Bantu race; or rather, she had attached herself to the expedition when it had marched some ten miles out of Nairobi, and resolutely refused to leave. Her presence proved to be rather an advantage than otherwise, for once when Mr. Halliday had found it necessary to give Juma a stern reprimand, the woman volubly assisted him, demanding of her husband why he was such a fool as to endanger his pay. Juma was evidently in some awe of his spouse, and Coja told John privately that she had a terrible tongue.

At length the safari arrived at the site of the farm, and though Mr. Halliday did not flatter himself that his troubles were over, he felt a great relief that the anxieties of the journey were a thing of the past. The first proceeding was to construct a substantial boma. Then he selected a site for his bungalow, fixing on a pleasant knoll above the river and at a distance of about two hundred yards from it. John pleaded for a position nearer the river, but Mr. Halliday pointed out that the stream was at present shrunk, and would no doubt swell to a much greater width in the rainy season, when exhalations from it might be dangerous to health. He had brought a couple of tents to live in while the bungalow was building; his natives ran up grass huts for themselves; and within twenty-four hours of their arrival, with the tents pitched, the huts erected, the sheep and cattle grazing, and a boma enclosing them all, the place had already begun to

assume the aspect of a settlement.

During the first night the sleep of the camp was disturbed by the distant roaring of lions, and Mr. Halliday took turns with John to watch. They had learnt from Mr. Gillespie that the lion stalks his prey in absolute silence, so that they did not fear an actual visitation while the roars continued; and though the sounds came nearer towards the morning, the dread beasts made no attempt to break in. Examining the ground on the following day, Mr. Halliday found pug marks about half-a-mile from the enclosure, and a little further away the scanty remains of a zebra. The proximity of lions was somewhat perturbing. Sometimes, as Mr. Halliday had learnt, the mere presence of man was enough to drive them away; but if they had once tasted human flesh they showed extraordinary audacity and cunning in obtaining further victims. As a precaution, he caused an inner boma to be erected around the tents and the grass huts of the men, so that if lions should break into the outer enclosure they would find another barrier between them and human prey.

During the daytime the building of the bungalow and the cattle-sheds proceeded apace. There was plenty of wood in the neighbourhood, and the people of the village beyond the river assisted in cutting and transporting the timber in exchange for a small quantity of cloth, beads, or wire. No work could be got out of the porters, except a few of the Wakamba, who began to prepare the ground around the bungalow for cultivation. Mr. Halliday would willingly have seen the backs of the whole company, but Juma declared that they must rest a few days after their long march before returning to Nairobi; and having no means of expelling them Mr. Halliday must needs submit, though he hoped their stay would be short. Apart from other reasons why their presence was undesirable, they consumed a prodigious amount of food, which had to be purchased from the chief; and while the Wakamba were satisfied with grain and fruits, the Swahili demanded meat, which meant that either some of the cattle must be killed, or the Hallidays must go hunting for their unwelcome guests.

One day Wasama, the Masai herdsman, reported that a number of the sheep had strayed. Not willing to lose them, Mr. Halliday and John set off with Wasama and two or three of the Wakamba to find them, taking their rifles in the hope of bringing down some game for the men. They tracked the wanderers through the long grass to the west of the encampment, and found that the trail led them into the woods on the rising ground in that direction. There they lost the trail, and scattered, the Englishmen arranging to fire a shot as a signal to the others if either of them came upon the track of the missing animals.

John was making his way through the wood, bending close to the ground, when he suddenly came upon a small hut standing by itself in a little glade. It consisted of four upright logs, the interspaces filled with brushwood, and covered

with a roof of twisted boughs. He halted, wondering whose dwelling it might be, and then, a movement among the undergrowth at the rear of the hut attracting his attention, he walked slowly towards the spot, holding his rifle in readiness to encounter danger. To his amazement he saw a quaint little figure emerge from the thicket. It was the form of an elderly man, not more than four feet high, dark brown in colour, with strangely bent shins, longish hair streaked with grey, and protruding jaws. He wore nothing but a loose cloak of undressed skin hung from the shoulders, and he carried a small bow. Still more to John's surprise, the little man came forward, and held out his hand with a frank gesture of friendliness, uttering a word or two in a low, quiet voice. John shook his hand, feeling a little confused in his inability to speak to the man; then, thinking that he might be able to assist in the search for the sheep, he fired off his rifle, upon which the man sprang back into his hut with every mark of terror.

The shot soon brought up the rest of the party, and on John explaining why he had fired, Wasama went to the entrance of the hut and shouted into the interior. After a little hesitation the owner came out, and a brief conversation ensued between the two men, at the close of which Wasama, who knew enough English to make himself understood, explained that the man was one of the Wanderobbo tribe and was living quite alone. This fact was rather surprising, for the African natives always live in communities, large or small. But after further speech with the hermit, Wasama said that he had no tribe or village, all his people having been killed a long while ago. He had since lived in this little hut, occupying himself, after the manner of his people, in collecting wild honey and hunting, selling the skins of the animals he killed to the neighbouring villagers.

Mr. Halliday asked whether the man had seen anything of his sheep, and the Wanderobbo at once offered to help in the search in return for a few beads. The party set off again, and, emerging from the wood at its southern extremity, the little man soon discovered the trail, and the wanderers were seen placidly grazing half-a-mile away. The Wanderobbo seemed much more delighted with the few beads given him than the value of the gift appeared to justify, and at parting shook hands warmly with the Englishmen, promising, when Wasama had told him of their settlement, to bring them some honey shortly. Wasama collected the sheep and began to herd them back towards the farm, Mr. Halliday and the others going a little farther in pursuance of his intention of shooting something for the larder. But an hour's search revealing no trace of game, he started to return. He had just overtaken Wasama, about a mile from camp, when he saw Said Mohammed hastening towards him at a run.

"I hope there's nothing wrong," he said, but as the Bengali drew nearer it was plain from his perturbed countenance that he bore bad news.

"Master and esteemed sir," he said, panting as he came up, "I regret to in-

form you that a calamity has transpired."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Halliday, as the cook, who was of substantial physique, paused to recover breath.

"Larceny, sir. Juma, that badmash, awful scoundrel, sir, has lifted, or shall I say pinched, four donkeys, a dozen rifles, and a regular heap of trade goods, and has decamped, bunked, sir, with the Swahilis, who knows where?"

"What was Coja about?" demanded Mr. Halliday, at the same time quickening his pace.

"That, sir, deponent knoweth not. In fact, I have not seen Coja for some time, and suspect that he winked the other eye."

"How long ago was this?"

"I do not know the exact moment, since I was engaged in washing crockery after our matutinal repast, and did not discover the crime until I had made a hole in it; but on a modest computation I should say, not less than five hours ago."

"Soon after we left, John. Which way did the men go?"

"Of that also I am in blissful ignorance, sir."

"We'll soon track them, anyway. John, we must go after them."

They hurried on towards the camp, taking Wasama with them, and leaving the sheep in charge of the Wakamba. When they reached the settlement, it was apparently deserted, except by the Indian carpenters and Juma's negro wife, who, as soon as she saw them, began excitedly to harangue some person out of sight, and then ran behind the bungalow, the walls of which were already up, and dragged forth Coja, whom she brought, a sheepish and crestfallen object, before his master.

Mr. Halliday did not delay either to reprimand or to receive explanations, but ordered Coja and the four Wakamba who had followed him from his hiding-place to sling on their cooking-pots and a little food and prepare to accompany him in chase of the fugitives.

"We don't know how long it will take us," he said to John. "Said Mohammed, you must come with us; we may be a day or two and shall want you to cook. Juma's wife seems a capable body; we'll leave her in charge. Coja, look for their tracks, and go on; we'll follow you."

Within a quarter of an hour of reaching camp the party set off, numbering eight in all. The track was very clear. For three miles it followed the route by which the safari had come several days before; then, to Mr. Halliday's surprise, it made a sudden turn westward.

"I made sure they would strike for the coast," he said. "They won't dare show themselves in any of our settled parts, and I don't understand their going off into the interior. They've had a good start of us, but we travel lighter and ought to catch them if we don't lose the trail."

The party hurried on, not pausing, though the day was now at its hottest. The trail led through open country, and across several streams, some of them of fair size. Here there were signs that the donkeys had given trouble, the soft earth at the brink being so trampled and cut up as to suggest that the animals had had to be pushed and hauled into the water. The trail was for the most part easily followed, for the fugitives had clearly been in too great a hurry to attempt to cover it. Once or twice, when it crossed stony ground, Coja was temporarily at fault, and he then declared he wished they had the Wanderobbo with them, for there were no people like the Wanderobbo for following a trail. Were they not matchless elephant hunters? But a little skirmishing beyond such stony tracts sufficed to pick up the trail again, and pushing on without respite, rest, or food, until sundown, Coja said that the newness of the footprints showed that the quarry was not far ahead. Darkness fell, however, without their having sighted the fugitives, and since they were all thoroughly tired and hungry, Mr. Halliday decided to halt for rest and a meal, and to resume the pursuit in the night if the moon rose, or at dawn.

"I say, father," said John, as they came to a halt, "we mustn't light a fire, or we'll give ourselves away."

"Quite right. We shall have to do without our cocoa to-night, and keep an extra sharp look-out for lions."

The white men had to satisfy themselves with biscuit and water from a brook; the natives ate some of the roasted beans without which they never travel. With the first glimmer of dawn the party were up and on the trail. Two hours' hard marching, at a pace which the natives had never known before, brought them up with the thieves. Coja was the first to catch sight of them, and he held up his hand as a sign to the rest to halt, informing Mr. Halliday in a whisper that the fugitives were only a little distance ahead, in the act of crossing a stream. Half of them had, indeed, already crossed; the remainder were trying to induce the donkeys to face the water.

"Can we catch them?" Mr. Halliday asked.

"Yes, sah, go round about," answered the man.

He led them in a direction at right angles to the path, so as to make a circuit and come upon the runaways from among the thick vegetation at the brink of the river. But Coja's advice turned out to be bad. They had reached the bank and were wheeling to burst upon the Swahilis, when they were suddenly descried by those who had crossed. A shout warned the men struggling with the donkeys; without a moment's hesitation they let go of the animals and took to their heels. When Mr. Halliday came upon the scene nothing was in sight but the donkeys, which on being released had scrambled up the bank out of the river and begun to bray with pleasure at the riddance of their loads.

"We ought to have come straight instead of round about," cried Mr. Halliday, vexed at his failure to punish the men. It was obviously hopeless to pursue them further. The scrub was dense; the Swahilis had good rifles and ammunition; and being relieved of impedimenta, the loads of goods having been left on the farther bank when they fled, they could travel much faster than Mr. Halliday and his party, fatigued after their forced march.

"We must be satisfied with having got back our donkeys and their loads," said Mr. Halliday. "The men are a good riddance; but I grudge those rifles of ours. However, it can't be helped. We must keep a sharp eye on our people, and fire out at once any we can't trust."

The loads abandoned by the runaways were brought across the river without interference, and after they had been strapped on the donkeys' backs the little caravan started to return to the farm.

# CHAPTER THE SIXTH–Raided by Lions

The return march was not so hurried as the pursuit, and it was the afternoon of the fifth day after their departure when the little party arrived at the farm. Mr. Halliday was surprised that none of the Wakamba had come to meet him, thinking that they must have descried him from afar; and still more surprised when, on entering the enclosure, he could not see any of his people. Surely they had not all deserted! Passing through the second boma, however, he heard a howl, and immediately afterwards the natives came rushing pell-mell towards him out of their grass huts, Wasama and Lulu, Juma's wife, leading the way. They crowded about him, all shouting together, and making such a din that Coja himself could not at once distinguish what they were saying. But when Mr. Halliday had sternly called for order, Coja made out that the people were in a terrible state of fright, because a cow had been carried away during the night without a sound.

They declared that the robber must be the devil whom Mr. Halliday had professed to slay.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Halliday. "It must have been a lion."

But no–Wasama declared it could not have been a lion, for he had not heard

a lion's roar, and there was no breach in the outer boma: only a devil could have passed through it without forcing a gap.

When Mr. Halliday set Coja to question the man, however, he learnt that neither he nor any other of the natives had stirred outside the inner enclosure that day, so that they were hardly in a position to know whether the boma had been broken or not. An examination of it soon revealed a gap in the western side, and bits of tawny hide were sticking to the thorns. Mr. Halliday insisted on Wasama following up the tracks which even his inexperienced eye discovered, and within a quarter of a mile he came upon some bones and a few remnants of a carcase, from which a couple of vultures flew away. Wasama, however, persisted in his assertion that the track was not that of a lion, and the others backing him up, Mr. Halliday sent John and Coja to the wood to fetch the Wanderobbo, determined to clear up the point before dark.

The Wanderobbo came bringing a small gourd of wild honey which he offered to Mr. Halliday. The little man threw one glance on the blood-bespattered ground, and then said that the tracks were undoubtedly those of two lions, which would probably return to the spot during the coming night.

"Then we'll stay and wait for them, John," said Mr. Halliday. "We mustn't be molested in this way, and the sooner we teach the beasts a lesson, the better."

But the Wanderobbo, when this was explained to him, earnestly advised the white men not to do anything of the sort. There was no tree at hand, he pointed out, in which the hunters could rest and watch for the lions, and they, having far keener sight than men, would merely stalk them. In the darkness they could not even see to shoot. He said that they had better return to the settlement and watch inside the boma; and since darkness would soon fall, he begged to be taken in for the night, to which Mr. Halliday readily agreed.

Neither of the Englishmen slept that night. They sat at their tent door, with their rifles within reach, listening to the distant roaring, and awaiting with a nervous impatience the onset of the terrible beasts. The roars drew nearer, then ceased. The men clutched their rifles, and stole into the outer enclosure, where the sheep were huddled together in terror. They waited for several hours, peering into the darkness, but neither saw nor heard any more of the marauders, though when they went out with the Wanderobbo in the morning, they traced the spoor of lions within a few yards of the boma.

This experience was repeated for several nights following. To lessen their fatigue, Mr. Halliday and John took turns to watch, but though each night they heard the roars, there was no attempt to break in. Thinking that the fires, which were kept burning all night, were proving effectual in scaring the beasts, both father and son decided one day to go to sleep as usual. But in the middle of the night they were startled by a yell. Springing up, they seized their rifles, and

rushed out of the tent in their pyjamas. There was a great commotion among the animals in the outer enclosure, and dashing through them, Mr. Halliday saw that a gap had been broken in the boma no more than three yards from one of the fires. The man whose turn it was to replenish it with fuel, and whose yell had awakened the white men, said that a lion had sprung through without warning and carried off a sheep. It was useless to attempt to pursue the robber in the dark, and Mr. Halliday could only swallow his vexation and return to his interrupted sleep.

Nothing disturbed the work of the settlement during the daytime. The Indian carpenters were making good progress with the bungalow and the other sheds which Mr. Halliday had decided to erect on the north side, nearest the river. The soil outside the boma was being slowly prepared for crops, and finding after a few days that his Wakamba porters were but indifferent labourers, Mr. Halliday dismissed them, resolving to rely upon the people of the neighbouring villages for such farm labour as he required. He intended to bring only a small area under cultivation at first, for the purpose of growing enough grain and vegetables for his own consumption. Difficulties of transit would prevent him from dealing in farm produce; the work of driving his cattle by and by over a hundred miles to market would no doubt prove arduous enough.

But though the days were thus placid, the nights became a horror. If a watch was kept, the peace of the encampment was undisturbed except by the remote and harmless roars; but as soon as the weary Englishmen determined to enjoy a full night's rest, the thorn fence would be broken at some new spot, and when the sheep and cattle were numbered in the morning it was found that one or more was missing. The natives became scared, and as for Mr. Halliday, he declared it was positively uncanny.

"One would think the beasts have the gift of second sight," he said. "I don't wonder our village friends kept their cattle off these grounds and believed in Gilmour's devil."

The only incident that relieved the tension and afforded a little amusement was the discovery one morning that the lion in his haste had snatched up a bag of rice, which was found at some little distance, the grains scattered about as though the thief had lost his temper when he became aware of the mistake.

It was fortunate indeed for the little community that the lions were apparently not man-eaters. A lion that has once tasted man thenceforth scorns lesser fare, and Coja told his employers harrowing stories of the reign of terror under which the coolies who had been engaged in laying the Uganda railway had lived. Night after night the terrible beasts had crept into the native encampments and stolen forth in dead silence with their hapless prey, ceasing their depredations for months at a time, but returning when the men were lulled to security, and begin-

ning their havoc over again. Mr. Halliday had heard of this from Mr. Gillespie in Nairobi; but the story told now by one who had actually lived in the camps thus visited at night, and punctuated by the roaring of lions at a distance, made a much more powerful and harrowing impression. At any moment the lions might become man-eaters. They had only to stumble upon a native in their nocturnal raids and then the life of no man would be safe.

More than once Mr. Halliday set off in the daytime with John and the Wanderobbo, who was now a frequent visitor to the farm, to track the lions and if possible hunt them down. They found that the spoor led into the dense scrub higher up the river, a region ten or twelve miles in length and nearly as much in breadth. So thick was the scrub that it was impossible to trace the beasts for more than a few yards into its recesses. After what he had heard of the Wanderobbo's skill and prowess as a hunter, Mr. Halliday was surprised to find how reluctant the little man was to accompany them in their expeditions. But he had a wholesome dread of lions. Elephants he was prepared to tackle, and indeed any other creature of the wilds; though even them he would rather snare than stalk; but the lion was a much more cunning and dangerous enemy. He would talk very bravely sometimes, avowing that if he met a lion and stared at him the beast would slink away; but he showed no readiness to enter the probable haunts of the creatures, and admitted that they sometimes took it into their heads to fight instead of running away, and then they were quite as clever hunters as he was. Mr. Halliday somewhat impatiently reminded him that rifles were very deadly weapons; but the Wanderobbo shook his head and said that he had never hunted lions with rifles. He had seen the Arabs do so, and pay for their temerity with their lives. On the whole his advice was to leave the lions alone, and he once confessed very naïvely that if he, bold hunter as he was, saw a lion approaching, he would certainly go the other way.

With such half-hearted assistance it was not surprising that many days passed before the Englishmen so much as caught a glimpse of their tormentors. However, one morning when they had gone out with the Wanderobbo and Coja to track the smaller game for food, they descried two lions stalking slowly across a glade some miles up the river. In spite of the little man's reluctance Mr. Halliday determined to go in chase, and then the Wanderobbo, forgetting his fears when his hunting instincts were aroused, suggested that they should tempt the lions to come within range. He proposed that they should carry a water-buck which John had just brought down, to a spot where the scent of it would be wafted by the wind towards the beasts. This having been done, the party retreated to the rear of the lions and lurked behind some trees to watch them. The lions soon scented the game, and came slowly towards it, moving with a majestic and yet graceful gait that extorted murmurs of admiration from the Englishmen. But when they

had come within two hundred yards, and John was quivering with excitement at the prospect of his first encounter with the king of beasts, one of them became suspicious and halted, lifting his head and sniffing the air, and then uttering a low growl as if to warn his companion. After a minute or two they seemed to decide that they were being led into a trap, and, turning about, stalked slowly away.

"Let's go after them, father," said John, unwilling to let this chance slip.

The four set off stealthily to stalk the beasts, and after an hour's fatiguing march over rough ground, saw them standing together at the edge of a patch of bush just beyond range. Bending low, and taking advantage of every tree and tussock of grass, and a tall ant-hill, for cover, the two Englishmen drew nearer and nearer, and were on the point of lifting their rifles to fire, when the animals disappeared into the bush. There was nothing for it but to begin the stalking again. They cautiously made the circuit of the bush, and presently saw the lions emerge from the further end and continue their promenade. Again the hunters followed them, at one moment flattering themselves that a few yards further would bring them within range, the next chagrined to perceive that the lions had quickened their pace and outdistanced them. At length, when a thin patch of woodland enabled them to hurry their steps and gave hope of overtaking their quarry, the lions broke into a trot and soon disappeared from view.

"Well, if that isn't disgusting!" exclaimed John,

"How long have we been at this game, do you think?" asked his father.

"Two or three hours, perhaps."

"Five hours and a half, my boy, and I rather think we might have been better employed."

John was too much disgusted at the failure of his first lion-hunt to say any more; and when next morning it was found that one of the best cows had been stolen he was still more angry.

"We must put a stop to this, father," he said. "Can't we set a trap?"

"We'll see what our friend Bill says," replied Mr. Halliday. The Wanderobbo's name had proved so unpronounceable that he had been called Bill for short. Bill, however, said that lions were too clever to be caught in traps, which did not seem improbable when he explained what he meant by a trap–a simple pit with a sharpened stick at the bottom, like that in which Oliver Browne had been found, or a spear suspended from the branch of a tree and brought down by the animal treading on a rope. Mr. Halliday set to work to devise a more effective machine.

He got the mistris to cut several stout logs, out of which they constructed a sort of gigantic rat-trap. The door was arranged so that it was held in position by a light pole attached to a length of stout wire, which was connected with a spring hidden under leaves on the floor of the trap. If a lion should enter and

tread on the spring, the wire would be released and the door fall behind him down two grooves of corrugated iron. To entice him to enter, a live goat was placed in a compartment adjoining the trap, so strongly fenced that the bait was in no danger.

This trap was rigged up, with the expenditure of a day's work, at one corner of the outer boma.

"It's rather poor sport to treat the lion like a rat," said John, "but that can't be helped. If we catch one we shan't be able to get a good shot at him in the dark, though."

"Well, we can either keep him there till daylight, or, better still, burn a bit of magnesium wire–I've plenty; that will not only give us a good light, but possibly help to scare other beasts away."

The trap was set. For two nights nothing happened. On the third, just as the two Englishmen were thinking of turning in, they heard the door of the trap fall with a clatter, followed by a low growl of rage. They caught up their rifles and hurried to the spot.

"Now for the wire, father," said John. "You give me a light and I'll pot the beast."

Mr. Halliday struck a match and ignited the wire, but just as John was taking aim it fell to the ground.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I'm as nervous as a cat," said his father, with a rueful laugh. "And I haven't brought a second piece, confound it!"

"Well, we'll take a shot in the dark. We can't both miss."

They fired together. The next moment there was a terrific roar, a crash as of shattered match-wood, and they knew that the infuriated captive had burst through the walls of the trap, stout as they were. They fired another shot in the direction they supposed him to have taken, and then, vexed and disappointed, returned to their tent. They found next day that the lion had been wounded. Bill traced it by the stains of blood upon the ground. But its injuries were plainly not very serious, for the track failed at a patch of reeds a mile up the river, and the Englishmen had to digest their chagrin that the troublesome beast was still at large. Their efforts, however, had not been wholly unsuccessful. The nocturnal visitations ceased, and since no roaring was heard it appeared that the lions had been scared from the neighbourhood.

# CHAPTER THE SEVENTH–John runs the Farm

Within three months of Mr. Halliday's arrival at his farm, which he named Alloway after the village of his father's birth, the place had assumed the orderly appearance of a prosperous settlement. The knoll was crowned by a neat bungalow; two hundred yards below it stood two wooden huts appropriated to Said Mohammed and the mistris; at some distance from this a row of cattle-sheds had been erected; and beyond these stood the grass huts of Wasama and his son and Lulu the negress, these being all who remained of the original party. Pens had been made for the sheep and goats; about twenty acres of land had been prepared for planting when the rains began; and a dairy had been started, being cut out of the side of the knoll on which the bungalow stood, for the sake of coolness and protection from the sun and dust.

The work of the Indians being finished for the present, Mr. Halliday thought of paying them off; but reflecting that more fencing would be needed by and by, as well as lambing-pens and cattle-sheds as the stock increased, he decided to retain the men, even though he could not make full use of them.

It chanced one day that a Swahili came to the farm with a letter from Mr. Gillespie, enclosing one addressed to Mr. Halliday, and bearing the Glasgow postmark and a date nine weeks back. The flap of the envelope bore the name and address of a firm of lawyers unknown to Mr. Halliday, and he opened the letter with some curiosity mixed with apprehension.

"Well now," he exclaimed, as he hastily read it, "this is a pretty fix."

"What is it, father?" asked John.

"You've heard me speak of my uncle Alec–the old curmudgeon who lived by himself and hasn't spoken to any of his family for twenty years. Well, the poor old man is dead, and these people, Wright and MacKellar, tell me that he left no will, and understanding that I am the next of kin, they urge me to come to Glasgow and make good my title. The letter was written nearly three months ago, and seems by the look of the envelope to have had an adventurous career."

"But hadn't your uncle any children?"

"One daughter. She married without his consent: I forget the man's name, and I haven't heard about her for five-and-twenty years."

"What will you do?"

"I'm just thinking. My uncle was a shipowner, and pretty well-to-do: indeed, your poor mother's friends used to advise me to keep in with him, but I couldn't toady to the old bear. I suppose I ought to go back, and yet!—- It's rather upsetting, my boy, just as we are getting settled. He must have died before we left England, and if I had known then, and really inherit his property, we needn't have come out at all, perhaps."

"I'm jolly glad you didn't, then, for I wouldn't have been out of this for anything."

"That's all very well, but there's the property: it would be a pity to lose that: shouldn't like it to go out of the family. At the same time, I'm not inclined to give up the farm; we've made a good start, and I'm uncommonly interested in it. Besides, I may not be the heir after all; my cousin may be alive: and I should look a pretty fool after going to this expense if I cleared out and got nothing–like the dog in the fable. I think I'd better take a trip back to Nairobi and see Gillespie. And I'll tell you what I'll do, John. If I decide to go home, as most likely I shall, I'll find an experienced man in Nairobi and send him up to take charge while I'm away."

"That's rather rotten," said John with a crestfallen look. "I don't want anybody here bossing me, father. Why not leave me in charge?"

"You're over young, John," replied Mr. Halliday dubiously.

"I'm just on eighteen, and I've got a bit used to things. I learnt a lot in that six months at the agricultural college before we started. I'm not exactly a fool, either. Plenty of fellows have gone to the Colonies on their own at my age, and done jolly well too. Look at Ned Cooper; he's got his own ranch in British Columbia, and he's not more than a year older than I am. Besides, look at the expense. You won't get a decent Englishman who'll be any good under £300 a year, I should think, and if this business in Glasgow turns out a frost, you'll be precious sorry you spent the money."

"There's something in that," said Mr. Halliday, stroking his beard. "Well, I'll think of it."

The upshot of his meditations was that he decided to do as John suggested. The lad was unfeignedly delighted; the responsibility did not daunt him; though he said little he felt capable of carrying on the work of the farm, and inwardly resolved to have a good budget to show his father when he returned. Mr. Halliday spent a good many anxious hours in instilling principles of caution and carefulness into his mind: he gave directions about the steps to be taken to bring the

cattle and sheep and dairy produce to market when the proper time came; and then one day he set off with Coja and a couple of villagers as porters, determined to ask Mr. Gillespie to keep an eye on the boy as far as he could.

Before leaving he had a little conversation with Said Mohammed, upon whom he impressed the necessity of paying implicit obedience to his young master, and of helping him in every possible way.

"Verb. sap., sir," said the Bengali. "Mr. John is a chip of the old block, a second edition of you, sir, and I esteem myself most fortunate and in clover to do this trivial round for such a superior person."

Things went on very peacefully and on the whole prosperously at the farm after Mr. Halliday's departure. He sent Coja back from Nairobi with a letter in which he wrote that Mr. Gillespie had advised him to return to England, and had promised to pay John a visit if he found time. The rains began soon after Mr. Halliday had gone, and John was mortified when a few of the sheep died through catching a chill; but apart from this misfortune nothing happened to trouble him. He had no difficulties with the people under his authority. Coja proved to be a handy man; Wasama and his son were excellent herdsmen; and Lulu not only did a fair share of labour in the fields with the villagers, but excelled in laundry work, and looked after John's simple wardrobe with a neatness and care which would have put many a London landlady to the blush. As for Said Mohammed, he was a compendium of utilities. He was cook, khansaman, and table-servant rolled into one. He was careful to explain that in India he would scorn to serve in more than one capacity, but "Tempora mutantur," he quoted impressively, "et nos mutamur in illis."

"Rest, sir, is change of occupation," he said, "and when I have accomplished the culinary part of my functions, I make a lightning change and become a dumb waiter, remembering the beautiful words of the blind epic poet, 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'"

With the beginning of the rains came the season for planting. Mr. Halliday had brought a variety of seeds with him, for though he hoped to make money out of stock-raising rather than agriculture, and reckoned on getting cereals from the neighbouring village for his native and Indian workers, he was not sure that the villagers would always grow enough to supply their needs, and he wished also to grow English vegetables and fruits for his own consumption. John made a start towards the end of November with oats and wheat; next month he sowed cabbages, peas, tomatoes, potatoes and vegetable marrows, and planted a few apple-tree slips. In January he put in cabbages and onions, and finished off with cauliflowers in February. The great dread of the African cultivator is drought, but the rains fell almost continuously for three months, so that there was every prospect of good crops.

The sheep and cattle throve apace. There was no sign of scab or heartwater in the former, but they were troubled for a time by the nostril-fly, a pest that lays its eggs in the nasal passages, causing intense irritation and sometimes a dangerous fever. Two or three of the animals died, but there happening to be a syringe among the things brought from Nairobi, John made a point every night of thoroughly washing out the nostrils of the sheep affected, and had the satisfaction of preventing any more deaths from this cause, though he never succeeded in banishing the pests. He felt not a little gratified at pulling one of the bulls through an attack of pneumonia. After a little trouble in inducing the two Masai and Lulu to be scrupulous in washing their hands, he managed to get the dairy into working order. Each cow yielded about four pounds of milk a day, some of which he turned into butter, which his people consumed in enormous quantities. All the spare milk over and above what was used for food was utilized for making cheese, which was stored in a deep pit until it could be transported to market at Nairobi.

Being dissatisfied with the grass huts which had originally been erected by the natives, he set the mistris to build substantial houses of logs and thatch, and found them both cleaner and healthier. They cost no more than £1 apiece. He also got them to put up a plant-house with wickerwork sides and thatched roof at a cost of £5. Finding that the villagers possessed fowls, he bought a number, and this provided more work for the carpenters. They built a large hen-house of wood with an iron roof, and fenced in a run of about 1000 square feet in area. With the prospect of good crops a barn was necessary, and they erected a wooden building with a floor of about 300 square feet. Having no iron left, he had to roof this with thatch, resolving to buy more galvanized roofing on his first visit to Nairobi.

Before all this work was finished some of the vegetables and cereals he had planted grew to maturity. Said Mohammed gave him turnips for dinner in February; next month he had some fine tomatoes and potatoes, and by the beginning of April the most delicious peas and vegetable marrows he had ever tasted. The grain fields, however, suffered a good deal from the depredations of weaver birds, and after ineffectual attempts to get rid of these with his rifle and by setting up scarecrows, John resorted to a poison supplied by his native neighbours–a decoction of a certain root. This proved effective. The wheat was ready for reaping in April, and he was amused to see the natives cut it with knives, they being quite unable to handle the scythes Mr. Halliday had brought. They threshed it with sticks and winnowed it with hand-sieves. There was a small hand-mill among the farm utensils, and by the end of April John enjoyed the unaccustomed luxury of eating bread baked by Said Mohammed in an earthen oven. Only half an acre had been sown with wheat, and as the yield was 400 lbs. of grain John was thoroughly satisfied. The oats were not ripe until July, and the yield was much

less than that of the wheat; but they made good porridge, and John was able to write to his father that when he returned he could have the national breakfast.

John had heard from Mr. Halliday several times since his departure. The first letter arrived early in December, and caused him mingled amusement and vexation.

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"Here I am, in Glasgow, flourishing as ever. Tennant's stack is behaving even worse than usual, and the atmosphere makes me fair sick after the air of Kenya. I had a horrible passage: we were terribly knocked about in the Bay, and I got a black eye one night through being pitched out of my bunk and coming into collision with the ledge of the one below. There was a teetotal commercial on board (rare bird), who looked at me very suspiciously at breakfast, and asked me at lunch whether I drank pot-still or patent. I asked him which was his line, and he got so red that I was uncharitable enough to conjecture he drinks on the sly.

"But here I am, and I think I've made a fool of myself in coming; for when I called at Wright and MacKellar's they showed me a cable they had just received from the Cape. 'Halliday's daughter inherits; letter this mail.' The death of poor old uncle had of course been announced in the *Herald*, and that goes everywhere, and sure enough when the mail came in there was a letter from some lawyer fellows at Cape Town to say that their client, Mrs. Burtenshaw, née Sylvia Halliday, having seen the announcement of her father's death, had made arrangements to return to Scotland to claim the estate I asked them why the ballachulish they hadn't waited before they sent for me, and Wright said that if he had been aware that I had changed my domicile (law for left the country, I suppose) he would certainly have hesitated before putting me to the inconvenience (and expense, I put in) of making so long a voyage. I asked whether my expenses would come out of the estate, and he said that he was inclined to believe the trustees would not homologate any claim for my outgoings. I'm glad you were not a lawyer, after all. I was for starting back at once, but he wouldn't hear of it: said I must wait to see whether Mrs. Burtenshaw could substantiate her claim; she might be an impostor, and since the estate is valued at over £100,000 it would be a pity to be out of the way if I turned out to be the heir after all. My cousin's name is Sylvia right enough, and I'm convinced the claimant will prove her bona-fides, but I suppose I must kick my heels until she turns up. It's twenty-five years or more since I saw her, and I shouldn't know her from Lulu, so I can't help to identify her. Altogether I'm very unhappy. Tell me how you're getting on. I am wearying until I get back, and on thorns in case anything goes wrong. God bless you!

"P.S.–Don't forget that cabbages and cauliflowers must be transplanted

*about five weeks* after they are sown."

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This was vexing enough, but when the next letter came, saying that Mrs. Burtenshaw was laid up with bronchitis and would be unable to travel for some time, John was thoroughly distressed. He knew how his father would hate hanging on indefinitely, with nothing to do, and no interests to keep him in St. Mungo's city. Mr. Halliday, however, did not remain in Glasgow. He went to his old home in the south of England, instructing Wright and MacKellar to summon him by telegraph when the lady arrived.

As time went on, the stock on the farm was considerably increased by the arrival of healthy lambs and calves. John had expected his father to return before it became necessary to drive the animals to Nairobi for sale, and he became seriously concerned as to how that was to be done. Being the only white man on the farm he could not leave it; yet the animals must be taken to market somehow, for his father was relying on the proceeds of their sale to replenish his small balance at the bank, which he had had to draw upon to meet the expenses of his prolonged stay in England. John himself was running short of "trade" for the payment of his native workers from the village, and of ready money for his immediate dependants, who required hard cash or notes of the East African currency. He did not wish to draw on the bank, as his father had authorized him to do; and he knew that the sums realized by the sale of the stock would enable him to carry on for a considerable time, and also to add to the bank surplus, upon which Mr. Halliday might have to draw at any moment.

There was no one among the hands to whom he could entrust the driving of the cattle. Wasama and his boy, no doubt, could do the actual driving, if they were not plundered on the way; but the presence of a white man would be almost a *sine qua non* to prevent molestation on the journey. Even in the unlikely chance of Wasama getting the beasts safely to Nairobi he could not be expected to sell them to advantage, and Said Mohammed, when John spoke of it to him one day, very frankly acknowledged that the Masai would come off second best in any attempt to barter with the traders of Nairobi, whether Indian or European.

"You have to be up to snuff, sir," said the Bengali, "in dealing with gentlemen of business capacity. Wasama is a very good chap: I have high opinion of his honesty, et cetera; but honesty is no go in markets without the possession of considerable acumen, and Wasama has not had the advantage of gaining that familiarity with the methods of civilization, which, as the proverb says, breeds contempt," an unconsciously double-edged remark which did not amuse John.

Of course he might ask the help of Mr. Gillespie, which would no doubt

be very willingly given; but John was very reluctant to let things out of his own hands, having a full share of Anglo-Saxon independence. The matter, at any rate, was not immediately urgent. Two or three more months must pass before the young animals were weaned and fit to undertake the long journey; and John still hoped that by the time the sale of them became imperative his father would have returned.

It was about six months after Mr. Halliday left that John received the following letter from him–

"The lady has arrived. She's a very decent, respectable widow body. She has brought all her family, two boys and a girl–a pretty creature, the image of her mother when I first knew her. The widow produced her birth certificate and a series of photographs, the first showing her in her father's arms at about a week old, for all the world as if he were a royalty displaying the infant to a crowd of grandees. Wright and MacKellar are satisfied, which is more than I am, coming all this way on such a fool's errand. The widow wanted to repay me the £100 or so I've wasted, but of course I couldn't hear of that. I expect to sail next week. Glad to hear you're getting on well.

"P.S.–I suppose you haven't seen anything of those young Brownes? I'd be a deal happier if I knew you had neighbours."

A week later came a brief note.

"Fate's got a downer on me. I was fool enough to go for a ride in the widow's new 40 h.-p. Panhard. The chauffeur ran us into a dyke; the rest got bruises, but I survive with a broken leg. Tony Weller was right: beware of widders."

Since then no news had come, and John grew anxious, though he reflected that he would have heard if his father was seriously ill.

# CHAPTER THE EIGHTH–Hard Pressed

John spent a good deal of time with Bill the Wanderobbo. He found it at first difficult to communicate with him, for the little man knew no English, nor even Swahili, which John was rapidly picking up, partly from Coja, and partly from a Swahili grammar and Bible which he had brought from Mombasa. He had to employ Wasama as the medium of intercourse with Bill, the two men speaking in the Masai tongue, and Wasama translating either into his imperfect English, or into Swahili, as John became more proficient in it. Coja told him that the Wanderobbo have a language of their own, and he tried to get Bill to teach him that; but the man became reserved and shy whenever the suggestion was made, and Wasama explained that the Wanderobbo never allowed any foreigner to hear them speak in their own tongue. After a time John managed to converse with Bill about simple matters in a kind of sign language, in which the Wanderobbo was very quick. He learnt long afterwards that the mysterious language of the tribe largely consists of signs, to such an extent that the people cannot understand one another in the dark.

One day Bill darkly hinted that though John was very rich, yet he, the Wanderobbo, was richer. This was surprising, seeing that to all appearance he possessed nothing but his hut and weapons. On being questioned he at first shyly refused to say more, but by and by said that he owned a very large store of ivory.

"Where?" asked John.

"In his old home away in the hills," said Wasama, who was interpreting.

"Then why doesn't he sell it and buy himself a good hut and good arms and make himself comfortable?"

"Because the store is now in the bad man's country, beyond the mountain."

John had by this time learnt something of the native African's genius for invention, and treated the Wanderobbo's assertions as sheer romance; but the old man repeated them again and again, and indeed seemed sometimes to be brooding over his wrongs, so that John began to believe that there was some little foundation for his story. Once Bill said that if the young master cared to go with him a long journey he would show him how to hunt elephants, so that he might get ivory for himself. But it happened that Mr. Halliday had only taken out an ordinary game licence, costing 150 rupees, not caring to pay an additional 600 rupees for the full licence which would entitle him to shoot elephants and rhinoceros and other large game. Bill was totally unable to understand the reason of John's refusal, and John felt that the old man in his secret thoughts set him down as afraid.

But though elephant hunting had to be declined, John was never loth to go in quest of smaller game when the larder required it. He never killed any of his own sheep or cattle for food, but depended on the game that fell to his rifle– waterbuck, grantei, congoni, and other animals which were to be found at first

within short distances of the farm. Bill was his constant companion on these expeditions, and proved very useful, having an instinct for the right localities. Two or three of the villagers were usually hired to carry back the game that was shot.

One day the party had gone some five miles to the northward, and the bearers were cutting up two grantei which John had shot, when a solitary figure appeared in the far distance. It was unusual to see a native travelling alone, but he was approaching so slowly that John did not think it worth while to await his arrival, and when the cutting up was finished, he ordered the men to shoulder their burdens. But taking a look at the stranger before setting off after his men, John felt sure that he was making straight towards him across the broken country; and since he was in the middle of a wide plain, trackless and bare, he wondered whether the stranger had some definite purpose in so directing his course. Letting the bearers go on in advance, he decided to wait with Bill for the man.

As he came more clearly into view, John perceived that he was moving very slowly and with manifest difficulty. When he came up, and John, who had by this time more than a smattering of Swahili, questioned him, the man explained that he was a Baganda, and had been sent to seek help for a safari nearly a day's march to the north-east. The master of the safari was a young msungu (white man), and John was able to make out from what the messenger said that the party was in extreme danger from "bad men." The msungu had sent him out at night on the chance of finding help, but he had not been able to move fast because he was very weak and hungry.

John was in a quandary. On the one hand his inclination prompted him to set off at once to the aid of a fellow white man: on the other hand he had no force at command which could hope to intervene effectually if the "bad men" were in considerable numbers. He was some miles from the farm, and even if he hurried back he could not raise a strong party. Coja was the only man on the farm besides himself who could use a rifle, and John was very doubtful whether he could induce any of the villagers to leave their own ground on a fighting expedition. Still, he felt that something must be done. He asked the Baganda whether he could use a rifle, and on being answered in the affirmative, he first gave the man some food from the little stock he had brought for his own use, and then bade him wait with the Wanderobbo while he returned to the farm.

On arriving he dispatched Wasama with the news to the nearest government station, Fort Hall, forty miles to the south-west. Then he ordered Said Mohammed to make ready a supply of food, and Coja to saddle three donkeys, and within a quarter of an hour he was hurrying back over his tracks, Coja beside him leading the third donkey. Each had his rifle, and Coja carried a third for the

Baganda.

They found the man where he had been left with Bill, looking much the better for his meal. John sent Bill back to the farm, and then, the Baganda having mounted, the party of three set off to the relief of the safari. The route lay first north and then north-west round a steep hill, which John concluded was one of the foothills of Mount Kenya. It was very rough going at times, the messenger having made his way in a direct line, up hill and down dale, and he had to return over the same ground lest he should lose the track and go astray. Fortunately the donkeys were sure-footed, and only a few stumbles on the sides of precipitous descents reminded John subsequently that he had taken risks in his excitement and haste which he would scarcely have faced in cold blood. He felt that he could have travelled faster on foot, and the Baganda was plainly ill at ease on the donkey's back; but not knowing what might be demanded of him, he had thought it wise to ride so as to husband his strength. They saw no signs of habitation: indeed, the whole of the region through which they passed was a wilderness, owing, as was learnt afterwards, to Masai raids in a not remote past.

It was close upon nightfall when, on topping a rise, they came in sight of the spot where, as the Baganda said, his master was beset by the bad men. It appeared to be about three miles off. The actual place could not be seen, owing to intervening patches of woodland, but on proceeding a little farther, the guide pointed out a dark shape on the plain which he said was a camp of bad men, and some distance beyond it John was able to descry the boma within which the white man had entrenched himself.

On the way he had succeeded in getting a few more details from the Baganda, by the interpreting aid of Coja. It appeared that two wasungu had been making a sporting expedition from northern Uganda by way of Lake Rudolf to the Kenya district. The elder msungu had been seized with swamp fever in the neighbourhood of the lake, but had pushed on southward instead of resting, with the result that he became worse and worse and at last died near Mount Sil, eighty miles north of Mount Kenya. The safari had already found the tribes through which it had passed somewhat troublesome, and as after the bwana's death it travelled southward, it came into a region where the people were openly hostile, and hung on its skirts, watching for any opportunity of taking it at a disadvantage. The party had, however, got safely to the Waso Nyiro river, which they had crossed a week ago; but then they had been attacked one night by a tribe of Embe, one of the fiercest and most quarrelsome of East African peoples. Some of the porters were killed, others deserted, and the young msungu himself was wounded. The attack had been beaten off, and the boma round the camp had been strengthened, and when the messenger left they were holding out against a much larger body of natives and in dire straits because their food was running

short.

The safari consisted of forty men, with only ten rifles among them. John tried to ascertain how many the assailants numbered, but the Baganda could only speak vaguely of a very great host. Moving forward cautiously so as not to be seen by the enemy, John soon perceived a second camp on the further side of the boma: it was plain that the savages were subjecting the camp to a strict investment, knowing that, even if they could not break in, want of food would soon compel the beleaguered to surrender. But while it was clearly impossible for the white man's party to make any movement as a body without discovery, it did not appear to John that the blockade was so close as to prevent individuals from entering or leaving the camp under cover of night; indeed, the Baganda had slipped out in the darkness and escaped detection. John therefore asked him whether he was willing to make an attempt to get in during the coming night, and tell his master that help was coming. The man said that he thought he could pass the enemy safely, but he would certainly be shot at from the msungu's camp if his approach was heard, and that was a risk he did not care to run. With some persuasion and the promise of a handsome present John induced the messenger to try his luck, instructing him to make a big fire if he got in safely, or if that was impossible through lack of fuel, to ask his master to fire two shots in rapid succession. John would then endeavour to enter the camp. He did not suppose, of course, that a reinforcement of two would enable the besieged party to turn the tables on the besiegers, but he hoped that his presence would be taken as an earnest of help to come from Fort Hall, and would at least encourage the men to hold out.

The three waited until darkness covered the ground, having meanwhile tethered the animals. Then the Baganda set off on foot just after seven o'clock with a small bundle of food strapped to his back so as not to encumber his movements. The minutes passed slowly; there was no sign from the encampment; and after what seemed hours John ventured to strike a match under cover of the bush and look at his watch. It was only eight. But there had been time enough for the Baganda to have reached the encampment, and John wondered what had happened to him. He did not think he had been captured, for that would have been announced by a shout or a shot. Only a few minutes after he had looked at his watch there was a sudden bright glare in the direction of the encampment: one flash and then darkness. This was followed by a confused murmur of voices, and then by several irregular shots. At the same time two fires were lighted, one on the north and the other on the south of the encampment–a clear sign that the besiegers meant to hold their ground during the night, the fires having been kindled to keep off wild beasts. John guessed that the white man within the boma had adopted the flare as a better signal than the one he had suggested; undoubtedly

the Baganda had reached the camp in safety.

The problem now was to follow him without being detected. The flare had shown John the exact direction in which he should go; but it had also put the besiegers on the alert, though it was unlikely that they had any suspicion at present of the meaning of the light. Luckily no fire had been kindled on the west side of the camp, on which there was no gate, and as the night was pitch dark, John hoped with care to escape the notice of the savages. Leaving the animals tethered, he crept forward with Coja, a little nervous lest he should stumble upon some obstruction or go astray in the darkness. The plain was covered with grass up to his knees, and here and there clumps of mimosa. As the two crept forward the sky in front of them was momentarily lit up by another flare. "He's got his wits about him, whoever he is," thought John. Again he heard shots, but he could not tell whether they were fired within or without the boma. The Baganda had not reported that the besiegers had rifles: one or two of them, he said, had very old guns; but the shots were evidently those of rifles, and John wondered whether the besiegers had been reinforced during the day.

The two men, making slow progress, and guided by the flares which were shown at intervals, drew gradually nearer to the camp. Suddenly a flash showed them a clump of bush between them and the boma, which John guessed to be now about a hundred and fifty yards distant. They lay flat in the grass until the flare had died down, then crept to the edge of the bush, John hoping to find a speedy opportunity of making a dash for the camp. Just as they reached the clump Coja stumbled over his rifle, making a slight rustle among the grass. Instantly there was a low call, apparently from the other side of the bush. A man was on the watch there. "Speak to him," John whispered to Coja, who whispered back that he did not know what tribe the man belonged to, and to speak might be dangerous. John felt that the critical moment was come. He dared not retreat: that would arouse suspicion: nor durst he stay inertly where he was, for the man might come towards them. Yet to attempt to dash past him across the open would be to risk a shot or a spear at such close range that the chance of escape would be small, for though the night was dark, there was enough glimmer from the stars to enable an alert enemy to take aim, besides a reflected glow from the camp fires. He made up his mind instantly to venture on a bold course. Whispering to Coja to follow him closely, he wriggled as quietly as possible through the bush, and came upon a man sitting on his haunches with a rifle or musket across his knees, watching the boma. He half turned his head as he heard the slight rustle of John's approach, but did not rise. Dropping his rifle, John gathered himself together and sprang full upon the man, throwing his left arm round his neck in a strangling embrace. Before the captive could utter more than a gurgle, John's handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth. Then in a swift whisper, while he still held the savage

firmly, John ordered Coja to take the man's weapon and creep towards the boma. Giving him a minute's start, John suddenly flung the man from him, seized his own rifle, and sprinted across the open, overtaking Coja just as he reached the fence. At the same moment a shout was raised from the rear: the sentry had apparently been too much dazed to give the alarm before. Calling in Swahili and English to warn the garrison of their presence, John and Coja stood at the boma, looking vainly for a place to enter. There was an answering shout of "This way!" They ran towards it, and after stumbling for a few seconds, came to a narrow gap. John felt his hand grasped and was lugged into the enclosure: Coja followed him; and they were barely inside when a spattering volley of bullets tore through the thorn defences.

"You did that jolly well," said a pleasant voice, and John was shaking hands with a young man of about his own height. "Come and have a talk in my blockhouse."

# CHAPTER THE NINTH–A Rear-guard Fight

The stranger led the way to the centre of the enclosure.

"Here's my blockhouse," he said. "We've piled up the baggage, you see. I say, you're a trump, you know. Are any more coming up?"

"I sent word to Fort Hall, but that's seventy miles from here, and we can't expect help for two or three days."

"That's bad. We've been on short rations for a week and haven't got a single full meal left. My men are as weak as rats, and I've had a knock myself, as you see"–his right arm was in a sling–"so that if those fellows outside pluck up their courage to make a rush I'm afraid we shall be done for."

"Not a bit of it," said John cheerfully. "How did you get hurt?"

"An arrow made a gash in my forearm. I was in a bit of a funk at first; my men said it was sure to be poisoned. But I'm all right so far: had some antiseptic lotion, and the wound seems to be healing. My man told you how we got into this mess, didn't he? We've had an awful time of it; for six weeks on end had to fight and dodge these ruffians; and my poor father—-"

"Yes, I'm very sorry," said John, as the other stopped.

"What I can't make out," went on the young man presently, "is why these fellows haven't rushed our boma. They were reinforced yesterday by six or eight men with rifles, Swahilis, too, to judge by their dress, and as I've only sixteen men left out of the forty we started with, and only five have rifles (four deserted with rifles yesterday), we couldn't have held out for an hour. There's a couple of hundred of them, I guess, and a dozen or more have got rifles or else smooth-bore muskets, and those at close quarters are just as dangerous as rifles, as we know to our cost."

He did not say, but John learnt afterwards, that it was probably his own fearlessness and activity which had daunted the besiegers. He had had to get assistance in loading his rifle, and could only fire from the left shoulder; but as sure as one of the enemy showed himself within range he became a target, and several had been accounted for during the past few days. Having no doubt been informed by the deserters from his safari, however, that provisions had run short, the besiegers were quite content to play a waiting game.

"What do you think we can do?" asked the stranger.

John said nothing for a few moments: he was thinking hard.

"I wish I could see your face," went on the other. "It's rather odd, this–two fellows who don't know each other talking in the dark. I don't even know your name."

"Halliday," said John, adding with a laugh, as he struck a match; "take a good look while the light lasts."

By the feeble light each saw a clean-shaven face burnt almost the colour of copper by the sun.

"You aren't a bad-looking chap, and my name's Ferrier," said the stranger. "Can we do anything, do you think?"

A listener might have smiled at the quick transition from banter to serious business. During the brief illumination, John had observed, how thin and worn Ferrier looked, and it seemed to help him to make up his mind.

"Well," he said, "it's risky, but I vote we make a bolt for it."

"Now?" asked Ferrier quietly.

"No, but you'll do it, I can see. You don't say, 'How can we?' You see, we can't expect help for two days at the least, and it may be much more. You look worn out as it is, and another day without proper food might do for you. But we can save time by fighting our way southward, though it'll be a pretty risky business, as I said. The best time to clear out will be just about dawn; the fellows outside will be dead tired with watching and won't expect any movement then. With luck we may get a mile or two away before they find out we've gone."

"Why not start in the dark?"

"Safer not, I think. We could easily be rushed in the darkness, and any damage we might do among them wouldn't have half the moral effect it would have in the light, because they couldn't see it. Now give me an idea how the land lies round this place: I only saw it from the side I came in at."

"Well, there's bush pretty well all round, but the ground's clearest on the east side. There's a gap in the bush there which would be the best road."

"We'll make for that, then. But look here, you're dead tired, and you'll want all your strength to-morrow. Get a sleep: I'll see to everything and wake you when the times comes. What are your men, by the way? Swahilis?"

"No, most of them are Bantus of one sort or another. I've got one Swahili; he's headman; and two or three Wakikuyu, strapping fellows who can shoot."

"That's all right, then. Now go to sleep like a good chap, and don't worry."

It was so long since Ferrier had enjoyed a good night's rest that he thankfully availed himself of the presence of a white man capable of taking command. John immediately set about his preparations for the sortie. He ordered the porters to make their loads ready as quickly as possible, discarding everything that was heavy or cumbersome and likely to impede rapidity of movement. Thinking over the position, he decided that the best plan would be to issue from the boma on the east side as if to pass through the gap. This movement, if detected, would probably draw the enemy to both sides of the gap, where they would wait in the bush, thinking they had the safari ambushed. But before reaching the gap he proposed to turn sharp off to the right, seizing a tongue of woodland jutting southward which he had noticed from his post of observation in the wood. Beyond that he could not make any plans, but must trust to the inspiration of the moment and the nature of the ground.

All preparations being made, John told the men to sleep. He would keep watch until the moment for departure came. He walked round the enclosure to make sure that no ammunition or anything else of value had been left, inspected the spot where the boma had been cut to allow the egress of the party, and then sat down on the tent, which it had been decided to leave behind.

Shortly before six o'clock he woke Ferrier, and Coja woke the men, who shouldered their loads, and the whole party moved silently across the enclosure. Some of the men removed the piece of the boma which had been previously loosened, and John led the way out. There was a slight mist over the ground, which favoured the escape. They had covered about two hundred yards in safety when there was a loud shout from both the camps of the enemy, proving that a determined watch had been kept, and that their departure had been discovered. A few shots were fired, and John caught sight of two or three black figures darting among the trees of the wooded tongue towards which he intended to march; but the absence of a general rush seemed to show that his anticipation was being

justified, and that the enemy were swarming from their camps to the two sides of the gap. John threw himself down on a knoll and sent two or three shots into the woodland to check any movement of the enemy to station themselves there, which would be fatal to his plan. The result of his firing was that the men who had been scouting there rushed away to join their comrades in the bush skirting the gap.

Now that the party was fairly out, John asked Ferrier to take the lead, while he brought up the rear with Coja. Ferrier at first demurred to this arrangement, protesting that the greatest danger would lie in the rear, and he didn't see why he should not share in it.

"You shut up," said John, with friendly brusqueness. "We haven't time to argue. We can settle that afterwards. Don't go above a walking pace: if they think we are bunking they will make a rush for us, and we must avoid that at all costs. On you go: wheel to the right when you come opposite the end of the wood."

Ferrier obediently went on with the unarmed porters and his six men who had rifles, including the one captured from the sentry, John and Coja marching behind with the man who acted as messenger, turning every now and then to guard against a rush, and not hurrying their pace though shots were dropping at unpleasantly close quarters. There were loud shouts from the enemy lining both sides of the gap when they saw the safari suddenly sweep round to the right towards the spur of woodland. Several men on the northern side at once broke cover and began to rush across the gap. John saw that the best service he could do was to hold this portion of the enemy's force in check until the woodland was reached, and so reduce their striking strength. The question was, could he and Coja and the one other man with him make things so hot for any of the enemy who tried to cross the gap that they would hesitate until it was too late? Another question which he dared not think about was whether the men with Ferrier would be steady enough to meet the attack from the southern portion of the enemy, which they could hardly escape. Telling Coja and the Baganda to shoot steadily, he took aim from behind a bush at the first man who crossed the gap, and dropped him. Coja aimed at the man immediately behind, but missed. A second shot from John, however, brought him down, and his companions, firing into the midst of a group of half-a-dozen who were following their leaders, gave a shout of delight when they saw two other men fall, and the rest immediately turn tail and scamper at full speed back to cover.

"Come on," cried John.

Leaving the bush from behind which he had fired, he ran towards another which would give still better cover and was at the same time slightly nearer the enemy. The distance was about thirty yards, and several shots were fired at them

as they sprinted across. John felt a bullet slap through his helmet, but no other hit was made, and they reached the second bush safely. It afforded excellent cover against the enemy on the north side of the gap, but would have been useless against any that remained on the south side. These, however, had left their positions in order to deal with the safari making for the woodland, since it was plain to them that they would be at an immense disadvantage in the more open bush if the copse were once gained. Indeed, if they had had the courage and the quickness of perception to seize and hold this spur of woodland, the fate of the safari would almost certainly have been sealed.

John, for the moment left unmolested, had time to look round, and saw with delight that Ferrier and his men had disappeared among the trees. But at the same time he realized that the enemy who had tried ineffectually to head them off from the woodland were now free to attack him, and there was a danger that he might be surrounded. The northern end of the woodland was about a hundred yards from the bush at which he had stationed himself, and there was no time to be lost if he was to get out of harm's way. It was a straight run across the open. From his experience of negroes' shooting he did not fear that a flying shot would hit him except by accident; the only question was whether all three could rush across the open space before they were intercepted by the other section of the enemy.

Since delay was dangerous he ordered the men to follow him at full speed, and made a dash for the woodland. A few shots were fired at them, but luckily the movement had not been seen by the men he had most reason to fear, and by the time they were warned of it by the shouts of their comrades beyond the gap the three runners were safe among the trees. John felt that in the shelter of the wood the party might hold out all day against an enemy who was so reluctant to come to close quarters; but to be beleaguered in the wood would be no better than their situation within the boma, and it was necessary to press on to the south, both with the idea of lessening the distance between the safari and the force of East African rifles or Protectorate Police which he hoped was on the way from Fort Hall, and also of obtaining food. It was not easy to see how the party could cross in safety the open country south of the wood, and John felt the necessity of consulting with Ferrier. Accordingly he hastened on towards him.

Soon he came upon Ferrier's askaris, who informed him that their master, having reached the extremity of the wood, had sent them back to assist him. Ordering them to remain with Coja where they were and keep the enemy in check if they showed any sign of advancing, he hurried on until he reached Ferrier. After explaining how matters stood, he suggested that Ferrier with the porters should hasten with all speed across the open country until they reached the clump of trees in which he had left his donkeys, about two miles away. The enemy would

scarcely suspect that the party would emerge from the wood into the open, and he felt pretty sure that, reinforced by the rifles, he could keep them in play until the safari had reached its goal. The course proposed was favoured by the fact that the safari, by striking off in a south-westerly direction, would soon be out of sight owing to the undulating ground. Ferrier agreed to this plan, and John hurried back to the men.

Nothing had happened during his absence. The enemy on the north side of the gap had not yet plucked up courage to cross, and the rest were apparently still lurking in the bush to the east of the stretch of woodland. John led his men back to the southern end of this, where he halted to watch the progress of the safari, and to assure himself that its escape had not been noticed.

From this position he saw, a quarter of a mile to the right, a mound which would form an excellent defensive position in case he was seriously attacked, and he determined to betake himself thither as soon as the safari was out of sight. After waiting for a few minutes he saw the enemy, who had no doubt become suspicious, at last swarm from the further side of the gap and join their comrades. The combined force, emboldened by numbers, emerged from the bush, and appeared to be intending to make a dash upon the wood. John waited until they had come within two hundred yards, and then gave the word to his men to fire a volley. The effect was instantaneous. Several of the enemy fell; the rest made all speed back under cover. Taking advantage of the repulse, John ordered three of the men to rush to the mound, and as soon as they had reached it, he followed them with the rest. The movement was seen by the enemy, who, knowing now that the safari must have escaped them, and probably suspecting that it had already taken refuge on the other side of the mound, were at last impelled by their rage to make a determined rush to the spot. John and his men were, however, so well ensconced that their fire checked the advance, and the assailants, once more baffled, fled back either into the wood or to their former position in the bush. Twice they repeated the assault: each time they were driven back; and though they came closer each time, and sent a shower of arrows and bullets on to the mound, they were utterly unable to make an impression, the little party of riflemen lying flat on their faces at the top of the reverse slope, so that only their heads were exposed. During the last rush, however, Coja, who was vastly excited at this fight against odds, incautiously raised himself, and received a bullet in the shoulder. John was a good deal concerned: the mere shock of such an injury would have rendered a European helpless; but the African is not so highly strung, and Coja went on all day with admirable fortitude.

John chose the moment when an assault had just been repelled to evacuate the mound, and keeping it between him and the enemy, to strike off to the south-west, intending to make a circuit and rejoin Ferrier at the clump of trees. He had

marched for more than half a mile before the meaning of the movement became plain to the enemy. Seeing the little party now in the open, with no cover of any kind, the men set off with loud cries to intercept them before they reached the clump of trees which was the only shelter for miles. It was a race between the two parties. John was north-west of the clump, the enemy due north, and equidistant from it. Ferrier, who had reached the spot some time before, and was watching eagerly his new friend's manoeuvres, fired an occasional shot at the savages as soon as they came within range, but his single rifle was unable to check the advance. It was fortunate that John had somewhat easier ground than the enemy, sloping gently down to the clump of trees. He ran as he had never run since he won the quarter-mile in his school sports, and the negroes kept pace with him, in the fierce heat of the sun. Ferrier saw that he was gaining on the enemy, and shouted to encourage him. Another two hundred yards and he would be safe. On he came: now he was several yards ahead of his men, then they spurted and came up with him: and in another fifteen seconds the whole party gained the wood, the enemy being no more than a hundred yards away.

Ferrier sent a shot among them which brought them to a halt. Even now they might have overwhelmed the little party, for John and the men were hot and breathless, and their limbs trembled so violently that for some seconds they were unable to hold their rifles steadily. But Ferrier's shot gave them the breathing-space they needed. Then all the rifles spoke together. A gap was made in the halted throng of negroes; there was a moment's hesitation; then with furious yells of rage and disappointment they turned their backs upon the clump of trees, and ran swiftly towards the distant bush.

That was the last that was seen of them. John and the riflemen held the wooded clump while the safari, taking the donkeys, pressed on to the south. Then, when all danger of pursuit seemed at an end, he followed in its track and overtook it within two hours. No pursuers being in sight, he thought it safe to make a long halt for rest and food, both badly needed by the whole party, and especially by Ferrier and his men. Ferrier blessed John's forethought in bringing a quantity of food on the donkeys. It was only sufficient for one meal, and that not a very good one; but a little is a feast to men who are famishing, and there was great contentment among the negroes as they baked little millet cakes at their fires. When the march was resumed, John shot a wart-hog during the afternoon, which he allowed the men to cook and eat there and then. They camped for the rest of the day, building a thorn zariba and keeping a careful watch all night. Early in the morning they went on again, and passing through the friendly village and across the river, they came at midday to the farm. John at once sent Ferrier's headman towards Fort Hall to say that there was no longer any need of help. Then he committed the negroes to the care of Lulu, doctored Coja's wounded

shoulder as well as he could, and asked Said Mohammed to use all his skill in preparing dinner for his guest.

"Your esteemed order shall be punctually attended to," said the Bengali. "The honourable gentleman shall smack his lips and feel jolly well bucked up. I will do him tiptop."

# CHAPTER THE TENTH–Driving Sheep to Market

"I say, Halliday, you're in clover here," said Ferrier, as the two sat smoking in the bungalow after Said Mohammed had made their hearts glad with a capital dinner. "My grandfather made his pile ranching in Manitoba, and you'll do the same here."

John laughed. "We're not paying our way at present," he said, "and I know my father grudged the money for his passage home again so soon. He'll grudge it still more now that his journey has turned out useless, and there are doctors' bills to pay in the bargain."

The two young men had exchanged confidences during the latter part of their march to the farm. Charles Ferrier's father had been called to the Canadian bar, but he had never practised, his fortune being sufficient to keep him and his family in something more than comfort, and to pay for the sporting expeditions which were his real interest in life. Charles, who was twenty years old, had just come down from the McGill university, and his father had brought him to East Africa to "give him a run," as he put it, before he settled down to work.

"And his ambition for me was that I should enter the Canadian legislature," said he, with a wry face. "It's not work much after my mind; I'd prefer ranching like my grandfather. Poor father! D'you think I ought to stick to his notion now that he's gone?"

"I think every man should follow his own bent," said John. "The mischief is we mayn't know till it's too late what our bent is. For instance, I like this life out here, but I don't know I'll succeed at it, and some day I may eat my heart out because I didn't take up law, as my father wished. He's a good sort, and didn't

urge it. Well, khansaman, what is it?" he asked, as Said Mohammed entered.

"Entreating your pardon, sir, Coja has made a discovery and is in an excessive state of amazement, jolly well flabbergasted, as it were. He declares that when you went on donkeys to visit the honourable gent you took three rifles marked with initials D.H., but lo! when he examines the weapons brought back, he finds four. Q.E.D."

"That's rum, certainly," said John. "How did one of our rifles get into the hands of your men, Ferrier? We took three, as Coja says. Your messenger had one."

"I don't know. Wait a bit, though: didn't you bring three rifles into camp? Of course: you took one from the man you half throttled outside our boma. But how could that be marked with your initials?"

"Tell Coja to bring it here, khansaman," said John. "I've a suspicion, Ferrier; we'll soon prove it."

When Coja brought the rifle, John examined it carefully. It was a Snider.

"It's as I thought, Ferrier," he said. "This is one of the rifles run off with by those porters of ours–the sweeps! I don't like the look of it. Looks as though they've started an organized band of freebooters. We shall have to report this at Fort Hall or Nairobi; perhaps you'll do that. I suppose you'll be off to-morrow to get that arm of yours properly attended to."

"That's all right. It's beginning to heal, rather slowly though, and if you can put up with me for a few days I'd like to stay here. Food and rest is what I want more than doctors. Besides, if your deserters have joined that pack of savages they may make a raid on you, and I'll be of some use, even left-handed."

"No, sah," said Coja, "bad man no come all dis way. Juma and dem debbils, oh yes! but not de Embe, oh no! dey never live for come long way."

"Coja's right, Ferrier," said John. "By all accounts no natives will go raiding more than twenty miles from their village, except the Masai, and we haven't to deal with them. Juma and his Swahilis might come if they dared, but they won't venture without support. That'll do, Coja. How's your shoulder, by the way?"

"Jolly fine, sah. Bill him give me stuff to put on, berry good magic."

"There you are, Ferrier," cried John, laughing. "We've got a doctor on the spot. Bill is a Wanderobbo we've made friends with, a little old man who lives by himself and tells fairy-tales about a wonderful store of ivory belonging to him in an enemy's country. He's by way of being a herbalist, too, it appears. We'll have a look at his 'berry good magic' by and by."

The magic turned out to be a decoction of herbs which Bill had smeared on Coja's wound, binding it up with leaves. He begged the new msungu to make a trial of it, and Ferrier after some hesitation consented. His wound healed more rapidly after the application, and Bill was delighted with the present of a few

cents–without doubt the first doctor's fee he had ever earned.

Ferrier remained for the present at the farm, his healthy constitution soon reasserting itself after the strain of his recent experiences. His father's death had left him his own master. He had an only sister living with an aunt at Toronto, and he wrote to her and to the family lawyers, relating what had happened, but saying nothing of his intentions. The letters were entrusted to his porters, whom he dismissed with the exception of three. On reaching Nairobi, the men would take the train to Kisumu, and reach their homes in Uganda by steamer across the Victoria Nyanza.

It was more than a month since John had heard from his father. A few days after Ferrier's arrival he received a note which made him very angry.

"I'm on the mend. Doctor says my leg couldn't have healed better if I were ten years younger. Cousin Sylvia has been very good. Insists on making reparation for the damage (financial and physical) she has done me. 'Twas *her* chauffeur, and *her* motor-car, and so on. Upshot is that as you're getting on so well I'm inclined to accept her invitation of a run through the Continent. Will let you know when I sail. Cousin Sylvia sends her love.

"P.S. Glad to hear you got the lambing over well. Be sure and *don't wean them too soon*."

This apparently innocent note made John furious.

"You see what it is!" he cried, striding up and down the room. "That woman's got hold of him, and she'll marry him, and all our plans will be spoilt by an old–old–I don't know what to call her. Sends her love, indeed!"

Seeing that John was in a passion, Ferrier wisely said nothing, and the storm presently blew over.

The presence of Ferrier at the farm solved John's difficulty about the sheep and calves. He had rather more than 800 lambs altogether, of which 450 rams were for sale, and might be expected to fetch about £90. He had also fifteen calves, which might realize £1 each, and the £105 thus gained would relieve his present anxieties and go far towards defraying the second year's expenses. In addition to these, there was a considerable weight of cheese to be taken to market. He had become so chummy with Ferrier that he did not hesitate to mention to him the difficulty about transporting the animals.

"There's no difficulty at all," said the Canadian at once. "Take them yourself. I'll stay here while you are gone. A rest will do me all the good in the world. You must certainly leave a white man in charge, and I've come in the nick of time."

"It's jolly of you," said John. "I'd accept your offer in a moment if it weren't for those blackguards who stole our rifles. It would be hard lines on you if they

came and attacked you while I was away."

"They won't do it. You told me yourself that you'd sent Bill out to see if he could discover their whereabouts, and he didn't hear anything of them. Besides, if they do come we can defend ourselves. They didn't show any eagerness to come to very close quarters with us, and I don't doubt for a moment that with my men and yours–I suppose the Indians can handle a rifle on occasion?–we could beat them off."

"Very well, then: I'll chance it. I'll take Wasama and three men from the village: his boy can look after the cattle here. I shall have to hire another Masai to help when I get back: there's too much work for two now. You'll find Bill a great help; I wish he would come and live here, but he's an independent old boy and won't leave his little hut in the wood."

"Hadn't you better take him with you? Four men won't be enough for the job. You must carry food and a tent, you know."

"I didn't mean to take a tent. Why not camp in the open?"

"You'd be rather sorry if it happened to rain."

"But the rains aren't due for another month," objected John, looking at his almanac.

"I dare say not, but they may start a bit earlier, and if you think you're going to get all those beasts to Nairobi in a week, or even two, you're mistaken. Remember the streams to cross and the thorn bush to get through. And you'll have to put a boma round the whole lot every night, and that will be a long job with so few men. You'll need twenty at the very least, my boy, so make up your mind for it. Ask Wasama."

John had in fact felt some misgiving lest the party he proposed to take should not be strong enough to guard the animals against wild beasts, or natives who chanced to be hostile or predatory; but he was so anxious to economize that he had stilled his doubts. When Wasama backed up Ferrier's point, he yielded to the inevitable, and engaged fifteen more men in the village. Ferrier insisted on his taking the three Uganda men he had retained out of his safari, because they were not only trained porters, but very fair shots. John wished he had a horse to ride, or at least a mule, not caring about donkey-rides: but Ferrier chaffed him on his singular regard for appearances, and he decided at last to mount the best of the donkeys.

One fine September day the safari set off, numbering twenty in all. Coja was very much depressed at not being able to accompany his master, but his wound was not yet sufficiently healed. The start was watched by the whole community, and as John rode off in the rear of the caravan he felt sure he heard Said Mohammed's high-pitched voice quote, "The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea," and proceed to a recitation of the Elegy.

John had had an inkling of the difficulties of droving, but the reality turned out to be immeasurably worse than the anticipation. The animals, being young, could not be driven hard; their pace at the best was two miles an hour, and often less than one, and as frequent halts were necessary, the longest day's march did not exceed eight miles. The obstacles which had given only amusement or excitement on the journey from Nairobi caused exasperation now. There were many streams to cross, and it was often difficult to induce the sheep to face them. Sometimes they were almost invisible in the long grass, and when they came among thorny bush, the men had to use their knives freely in hacking a path for the beasts, causing hours of delay. For the first week all went fairly well. The bleating of the sheep attracted hyenas, but by dint of great vigilance and activity they were kept off, and only two sheep were seized. In crossing one stream Wasama had a narrow escape from the jaws of a crocodile; but the water in most ran so low after the dry season that it was easy to examine the beds and avoid danger of this kind.

On the eighth night, however, John was awakened by the pattering of rain on his tent. It poured in torrents, and when he got up in the morning he found half-a-dozen sheep stretched lifeless on the sodden earth. It was still raining at the usual time for starting, and the animals could not be induced to move, but turned their backs to the wind and huddled together in a compact mass. The weather cleared about ten o'clock, and then a start was made; but the safari had only been an hour on the road when another downpour checked them. So it continued all day–drenching rain, with brief intervals of sunshine. John persevered, taking advantage of every bright period to move on a little farther; but when the rain finally ceased in the evening he found that during the whole laborious day he had not covered more than about three miles. Some of the sheep had lagged terribly, and it was quite dark when the last of them came into camp, and before they could all be got within the boma a couple of hyenas sprang among them out of the surrounding bush and killed several.

This was only the beginning of trouble. It rained nearly every night, and every night some of the sheep died. The streams were much swollen and flowed so swiftly that it was only with the utmost difficulty that the men prevented the animals from being washed away. One river took two hours to cross, each individual animal having to be passed over from hand to hand. At another the current was so rapid that it seemed hopeless to attempt to cross it at all, until John, with a good deal of risk, managed to swim over slantwise with a rope, which he fastened to a tree on the further bank. With the help of this, every man and beast was got across safely, but with such an expenditure of labour that all were thoroughly exhausted. That night, to add to John's misfortunes, his donkey was killed by a hyena, and he was in a state of miserable depression when he

started to resume his journey.

The one satisfactory feature of the march was that the natives met *en route* had been friendly. The food was exhausted when the safari had been ten days on the road, but they had no difficulty in purchasing muhindi or cassava at the villages. John's rifle provided all necessary meat, and at one stream he shot a crocodile, the flesh of which was highly prized by his men. But the very friendliness of the people became a source of anxiety. They offered their services in helping to drive the animals, and at the end of a day when they had apparently been very useful, John found that six sheep had mysteriously disappeared. He blamed Wasama for not warning him of the thievish propensities of the volunteer drovers, much to the surprise of the Masai, who said he thought everybody knew that a man would take what he could get if he had the chance. After that, John refused all assistance, however generously it was pressed upon him, and kept a sharp eye on the natives who hung about the flanks of the safari. With all his vigilance he lost a dozen more sheep and a fine bull calf by theft, and he began despairingly to wonder whether he would have any animals left by the time he arrived in Nairobi.

But everything comes to an end. One day, nearly four weeks after leaving the farm, he caught sight of the chimney-stack of the Nairobi locomotive works in the distance. Five hours later he trudged wearily into the town, conscious that he presented a deplorable and disreputable appearance. His clothes were torn and dirty; the sole of his right boot had parted from the upper and flapped as he walked, while that of the left boot had gone altogether, and he trod on his sock. He felt thoroughly knocked up, and after he had seen his animals safely penned, he could hardly drag himself to Mr. Gillespie's house. To his surprise nobody in the streets seemed to pay the least attention to his appearance; he supposed that such sights were not uncommon; and Mr. Gillespie did not start back with the look of horror which in his self-consciousness John had expected. The coffee-planter greeted him warmly, but had no sooner taken him to his room than he whipped out a clinical thermometer and stuck it into John's mouth.

"Thought so," he said, when he examined it. "You've a touch of fever, and no wonder. You'll go straight to bed, my boy. We'll have a talk in the morning."

After a hot bath, John was tucked up between the blankets and dosed with quinine by Mrs. Gillespie, and he fell asleep with a happiness and a sense of security to which he seemed to have been a stranger for years.

He was better in the morning, but Mr. Gillespie would not allow him to quit his bed.

"You just leave it to me," he said when John protested that he must see about selling his animals. "I'll go and take a look at them. You won't sell them for a day or two: they'll be all the better for a rest. I've just heard from your father, by the

way. He's a gay old dog, upon my word, gadding about on the Continent. You must have written glowing accounts of the farm, or he'd have been back before this. I dare say there's a letter for you by the same mail: you'll find it when you get back. And how do you like ranching, eh?"

They had a long talk, and Mr. Gillespie said he thought he had done very well for the first year. He laughed when John related the incidents of his march.

"You'll get used to it," he said. "It's rather disheartening at first, but you may think yourself lucky the natives didn't bother you. When I first came out here ten years ago I had a running fight with one of the tribes for a week, and lost practically everything I possessed. Things are safer now."

John told him about the desertion of Juma with the rifles, and the plight from which he had rescued Ferrier.

"That's unpleasant," said Mr. Gillespie. "If you take my advice you'll go back by way of Fort Hall and report to the District Commissioner. He may be disposed to send a company of the Protectorate police to deal with the ruffians. I'm afraid it's not a big enough job for the King's African Rifles. Probably they won't trouble you again, however. Their ammunition will soon be exhausted, and they can't get any more."

John remained in Nairobi for a week. He found that he had lost fifty-two sheep and one calf, besides his donkey; but Mr. Gillespie said that the animals were a healthy lot, and handed over 1500 rupees as the proceeds of the sale. The cheese fetched 100 rupees. John banked the greater part of the money, keeping a little to buy new clothes for himself, a few articles for the farm, and a fresh stock of "trade" for the payment of his native workers. Then, feeling that Ferrier might be growing uneasy at his long absence, he set off one day with his safari on the return journey, feeling pretty well satisfied with the tangible result of his first year's labours.

He went by way of Fort Hall, as Mr. Gillespie had suggested. He found it to be only a fort in the sense in which that word was used to describe the stations of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Far North. A substantial house perched on a hill, with a solid stone wall and a ditch around it, the flag of the Protectorate flying from a staff in the compound, a few huts and houses, a jail, and an Indian bazaar: that was Fort Hall. The Commissioner received him hospitably, and listened attentively to his story.

"Well, Mr. Halliday," he said, "the tribesmen certainly ought to be taught a lesson: in fact, they clearly have been taught a lesson. I don't know that I can do anything. I got your message, of course, but had no men available. You see, we don't care to start police expeditions if we can avoid it. It means great expense, and we want all our funds for peaceful development. Of course if you hadn't already given them a dressing we should have had to do something; but I fancy

you've given them a fright, and they won't bother you again. You're rather far away, and a few years ago you would have had a very hot time there; but there are signs all over the country that the natives are settling down peaceably under our government, and the moral effect of the crushing of the Masai rebellion has been enormous. Let me know at once if you have any further trouble."

The interview left John with the impression that he could expect little assistance from the officials. In this he probably did them an injustice. It is not altogether harmful that the settler should be self-reliant.

# CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH–Rhinoceros and Lions

"I'm jolly glad you're back, old man," said Ferrier, as John marched in one day at the head of his safari. "Began to think you were lost. How did you get on?"

"Splendidly," said John, cheerful after his quick journey home. "That is, pretty well; in fact" (as his memory and his sense of veracity awoke) "I had the rottenest time I ever had in my life. That sounds a bit of a muddle, I know, but I'll tell you all about it presently. How have things been going here?"

"Splendidly: that is, pretty well; and I'm glad you're back in time to prevent me from having the rottenest time I've ever had in my life. It's just short of that at present."

"What! Have those blackguards been bothering you?"

"Worse! Lions!"

"Oh! Is that it? I don't know that they're worse than the natives, though."

"Yes, they are, because it doesn't come to a fair stand-up fight. They're cowardly, skulking brutes, and so disgustingly clever."

John laughed at Ferrier's aggrieved tone and look.

"Well, I'll get a bath and a feed, and then we'll talk it over," he said. "I hope our people have behaved well?"

"Oh yes! Lulu has been a mother to me–at a distance, of course; and Said Mohammed has been a delight three times a day. But go and get your bath; you'll stand here talking for ever."

Half-an-hour later John, having changed into a suit of white drill, was sitting at table with Ferrier in the little dining-room of the bungalow. It struck him as rather bare and cold-looking after Mr. Gillespie's comfortable rooms, and he resolved, if things went well the second year, to buy a few bits of furniture.

"It wants a woman, you know," said Ferrier. "She'd rig up some curtains and make things look cheerful in no time. But you'll never get a woman to live among lions."

"Verree true, sir–excuse the liberty," remarked Said Mohammed, as he handed the fish. "A lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living."

"That's how he goes on," said Ferrier, exploding when the Bengali had gone for the joint. "That's Shakespeare; next time it'll be Milton."

"Did Shakespeare write that rubbish about the wild-fowl?"

"Why, that's the excellent Nick Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream*!"

"Never read it: we only did *Julius Cæsar* and *Henry V*. But tell me what's happened."

"Nothing, for three weeks, except rain. My word, didn't it come down! I'm sorry to say some of the sheep died until we thought of covering them up at night. But a week ago I heard a lion roaring in the night, and in the morning a calf was gone. Last night it was two sheep. The boma's not a bit of good to keep them out. Why don't you put up some wire fencing?"

"It's expensive, but I will by and by."

"The lion got clear away the first time, but last night I was roused by the commotion among the animals, and managed to get a shot as he was slinking off: it was bright moonlight. I'm afraid I missed: my right arm isn't fit for much even yet. I wanted Bill to go and hunt him with me; but he wouldn't. I suppose he won't visit us again now you've come back: Coja said he's sure the lion's an afreet, which is devil, I suppose, and knows when the coast is clear."

"I rather fancy he finds other game scarce in this rainy weather. It's much easier to break into the boma than to hunt game in the open, and I expect now that he's tasted blood again and got back his confidence we shall have some more trouble. We shall have to tackle him."

"If you excuse me, sir," put in Said Mohammed, so respectfully that John could not resent the indiscretion, "I will tell you of the machinations of my prophetic soul my uncle. He has a small property in the Sunderbunds; choice site, excellent amenities, et cetera. There lurks the tiger, tiger burning bright. In my childhood innocence I resided with my avuncular relative, and he being a great shikari I saw some A1 sport. I should esteem it a privilege to be allowed to give you a leg up in hunting the abominable creature. The sahibs in general have derogatory opinion of us Bengalis; but I am a Socialist, gentlemen, in so far

as believing in equality of chances, and I am cocksure that if only I get a look in I shall prove to demonstration that I am full of both grit and beans."

"All right, khansaman, I'll give you a rifle and you shall come with us when we go after the beast. It may be rather exciting."

"A regular beano," said Ferrier, sotto voce. "But I want to hear all about your droving, Halliday."

John gave him a running account of his experiences, which were more amusing in retrospect than in actuality. They spent the rest of the day in going over the farm together. John was very well pleased with the signs of progress he saw everywhere. The sheep and cattle looked healthy; the second crops were in good condition; and the only failures among all the vegetables he had planted were the onions and artichokes, which had produced too much stalk and gave no indication of fruiting.

That night a lion broke in and carried off a ram. John was too late to get a shot at the beast, and next day was too much occupied about the farm to go in search of it. But when Wasama came in with the sheep, somewhat earlier than usual, and reported that he had seen a black-maned lion with his mate on the edge of the bush, John determined to go out after them at once. It was the first time lions had been seen by day, and this sign of growing boldness convinced him that it was high time to attempt reprisals. He was accompanied by Ferrier and Said Mohammed with two of the Baganda, but by the time they reached the bush the lions had disappeared, leaving, however, a trace of their depredations in the freshly-picked bones of the stolen sheep. Roars were again heard at night, and John kept watch with Ferrier in anticipation of another visit; but as had happened before, no lions appeared, and they turned in towards morning very much disgusted.

Next day John sent for Bill and asked him to lead them over the track of the lions. Meat was required for the larder, and he had determined to combine game-shooting with a lion hunt. News of his arrangements was carried to the village by one of the women working on the farm, and just as he was setting off, a dozen men arrived and begged to be allowed to join the party, their motive being probably a desire for excitement mingled with the hope of sharing the spoils. John's policy being to keep on good terms with them, he made no objection, and shortly after ten the party set off, consisting of the two white men with Bill, Said Mohammed (very proud in the possession of a rifle), and the three Baganda, the villagers following at a distance.

Business coming before sport, Bill led the party along the river-bank where he expected to find the tracks of animals which had come down to drink. The proximity of the farm had had the effect of scaring antelopes and gazelles and the timider animals away from the neighbourhood. Already John had had to go

farther afield for game than in the early days of the farm a year before. The Wanderobbo found his way among the dense vegetation by following old hippo paths, which crossed and recrossed in what seemed to the wasungu hopeless confusion. But he came after some miles to a region where there was an abrupt gap in the larger trees: a fairly wide and recent hippo path led through the tall grass on the crest of the river-bank; and the party began to be on the alert for game.

Suddenly Bill halted and took a backward leap which nearly landed him in the arms of John.

"Faro! faro!" he cried excitedly, and on John asking where the rhinoceros was, he pointed a few yards ahead, where, almost hidden by the grass, lay a huge bull animal right across the path, and apparently asleep. The white men had brought only their double-barrelled rifles, which were not the best of weapons for shooting rhinoceros, and John, having no licence for such big game, though Ferrier had, ordered the natives to shout, hoping that this would scare the beast away. When it remained unmoved he went to the river-bank on the right, and breaking off some clods of earth, flung them at the slumberous creature, which completely blocked the way. But this proving ineffectual ("It's like shooting peas at a Dreadnought" said John) there was nothing for it but to try a rifle shot.

Ferrier went forward, cocked his rifle and fired, aiming at the brain; but though he was ordinarily a dead shot, his right arm had not yet fully recovered, and he missed. The rhinoceros was now thoroughly awake; snorting angrily, he sprang to his feet with extraordinary nimbleness for so unwieldy a brute, and after a glance round came charging full at Ferrier. He fired his second barrel, and this time hit; but the shot had no effect except to make the beast more furious, and Ferrier turned and bolted for his life. All the other members of the party except John had turned tail and fled away shrieking at the first moment of the animal's rising. John, licence or no licence, let fly with both barrels in rapid succession; whether he hit or not he could not tell; certainly he failed to check the charging beast, which made with lowered head straight for Ferrier.

All this had happened in a few seconds. Ferrier was running hard, but it was clear that the rhinoceros must soon overtake him, and John knew that one blow from those terrible horns would inflict a fatal gash. His hand shaking with nervous anxiety, he reloaded, but when he lifted the rifle to his shoulder he saw that he could not strike a fatal spot, the animal being directly between him and his friend. He ran after them, hoping for some chance to give him a shot. At this moment Ferrier became aware that the rhinoceros was almost within tossing distance, and leaving the path made a sudden swerve to the right, plunging into the long grass. The animal immediately turned to pursue him, for the first time presenting his flank to John. It was a ticklish moment. John knew that his friend's

life probably depended on his coolness. He steadied himself, took aim at a spot behind the beast's shoulder, and fired. He heard the thud of the bullet, but for a moment feared it had not penetrated the tough hide. The rhinoceros made a half-turn as if to charge his new assailant, and John, glad that he had at least diverted the pursuit from Ferrier, was preparing to fire his second barrel when the great form staggered, recovered itself, made two tottering strides, and then fell over on its side.

The air was rent with jubilant shouts as the natives emerged from their hiding-places in the grass and ran towards the prostrate beast. They started back in affright when it made a last convulsive effort to rise. John put it out of pain with another shot, and the natives surrounded it and immediately set about cutting it up.

"Thanks, old man," said Ferrier, coming up. "That's the second time."

"I say, what's the penalty for shooting a rhino without a licence?" cried John, to cover his embarrassment.

"The same as if you shot an armed burglar breaking into your house: the thanks of every honest man for ridding the world of a villain."

Said Mohammed, who had watched the incident from a safe distance, wondered that two young men should talk so strangely at a time when they ought to have been overcome with emotion. That is the English way. John had once seen M. Perrichon in the play fling his arms round his preserver's neck and weep with gratitude. "What sickening rot!" he had said. "Come and have an ice."

While the natives were cutting up the rhinoceros, the others marched on. They had no need to shoot more for the larder; there was at least a ton of meat on the huge carcase, which would last for several days. It was now a question of finding the track of lions. John went ahead with Bill, Ferrier walking with Said Mohammed a few yards behind. The Bengali was talking, and his high-pitched voice carried well in the crisp, clear air. John heard him say–

"In my humble opinion, sir, backed by inestimable experience in the Sunderbunds, it was deplorable error of judgment to bunk. My uncle, sir, on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion when I shed the light of my countenance on his tiger-hunt, he put the tiger to dumbfounder and flight–how, sir? By standing firm as a rock, 'without or life or motion,' as the poet Coleridge beautifully says, and staring with unflinching gaze into the opposing optics. Moreover and in addition, he recited with unfaltering lips the words of a charm he had learnt from some old cock of a jogi–you have no word for that in your lovely lingo, sir, but, without disrespect, I might say parson. Tableau! Exit tiger. Triumph of mind over matter. 'He held him with his glittering eye,' et cetera."

"'The man recovered from the bite,

The dog it was that died,'"

quoted Ferrier.

"Oliver Goldsmith, sir," cried the Bengali delightedly, "who wrote like an angel but talked like poor Poll. I esteem it a glorious privilege to hold communion, even in humble capacity of cook and bottle-washer, with gentleman of literary taste and elegant extracts."

The river-bank had descended until the path was almost level with the surface of the water, and passed several patches of reeds which Bill negotiated warily, saying that any one of them might harbour a lion. The white men followed him with growing excitement, and John confessed he felt rather nervous, not knowing but that a lion might at any moment spring up at their feet. He stole a glance at Said Mohammed, and exchanged a smile with Ferrier as he saw that the cook looked decidedly jumpy. Far in the rear came the villagers, eager not to miss the sport, and yet fearful to approach too near.

All at once Bill halted and bent towards the ground. There were the unmistakable pug marks. Following the track with his eyes, but without moving from the spot, after a few moments he stretched out his spear towards a clump of trees about a hundred yards ahead, whispering, "Simba!" Neither John nor Ferrier could at first distinguish the lion, but presently two lionesses sprang out of the undergrowth, and made off with long low bounds across the plain. For a moment the white men watched their graceful movements with admiration, forgetting that these were the pests they had come out to slay. Then they set off in pursuit. But they had not advanced three paces when a huge black-maned lion showed his head among the bushes, snarling angrily. He stared at the strangers for a moment or two, then turned with another growl and trotted after his mates.

"Come along," said John excitedly. "We can't get a fair shot at him yet."

They set off at a run, not troubling about Bill or Said Mohammed, who followed at a discreet distance. They gained on the beast, but after running some three hundred yards found themselves rather short of wind, owing to the fact that they were in rarefied air at least 6000 feet above sea-level.

"We shall spoil our aim if we get puffed," said Ferrier. "Better go slow."

At this moment, however, the lion halted behind a tree, as if to check the pursuit of the lionesses, and stood watching the huntsmen, growling in a very threatening way. He seemed disinclined to budge, so John lay down on the path, and bringing his rifle to his shoulder, covered the huge head.

"Confound it, look how my hand wobbles," he whispered to Ferrier. "I can't fix the sight on him. Be ready to shoot if I miss or just sting him, for he'll fly at us like the wind."

He steadied his arm and pulled the trigger. The fierce head instantly

dropped out of sight, and the air was filled with such appalling roars that John hastily fired the second barrel, in the hope of finishing the beast before he could charge. He had to aim by guess-work, and fired half-a-dozen shots before the roaring ceased.

"Now the others," cried John, shouting to the Wanderobbo to keep his eye on the spot.

He ran forward with Ferrier towards the lionesses, which had halted a quarter of a mile away, and could just be seen above the grass. At the men's approach they cantered off, and though the chase was kept up for nearly a mile, they always got to cover before the pursuers came within effective range, and finally disappeared among a large patch of reeds by the river, whence it was hopeless to attempt to dislodge them.

"Better luck next time," said John, as they retraced their steps. "You shall have first shot, Charley."

Returning towards the spot where the lion had been shot, they found that Bill had deserted his post. He was standing in the middle of the path with Said Mohammed, a good hundred yards away from any bushes or trees. The natives were chattering at a little distance.

"Why didn't you do as I told you?" cried John, vexed at the possibility of having lost his quarry.

"Conscience made a coward of him, I fear, sir," said Said Mohammed.

"Well, go and see if you can find the lion. Get the natives to help. I don't know which tree it was we shot him at," he added to Ferrier, "but I'm not going back without his head."

The party split up and made a systematic search, the natives beating the bush and long grass thoroughly with their spears. At last one of them shouted that he had found the simba, instantly running away from the spot at the top of his speed. There was no growling to be heard, however, so plucking up his courage he returned to the place with his comrades. When John reached them, he found the men grouped a yard or two from the lion's tail, jabbering in much excitement. The beast was stretched on his side, but John was surprised to see by the heaving of his flanks that he was not yet dead. Judging that the chatter of the men would have roused him if he had been able to rise, John went towards his head, but the moment the lion caught sight of him he uttered a terrible roar and to John's amazement sprang to his feet. Stepping hastily backward, John stumbled against Said Mohammed, who, believing like every one else that the beast was helpless, had become bold. The Bengali went down like a ninepin. John recovered his footing with an effort, and raising his rifle, fired at the lion at a range of four yards; but he was too hurried and agitated to take a careful aim, and the shot merely had the effect of throwing the infuriated animal on his

haunches as he prepared to spring.

All this had happened so quickly that Ferrier, who had been beating the bush in the opposite direction from John, had not yet come up. The sudden flight of the villagers apprised him that something was wrong, and as he hurried to the spot he was horrified at the sight that met his gaze. Man and beast seemed only a yard apart. He dared not shoot for fear of hitting John, and seeing that the shot had but momentarily checked the animal, he had given up his friend for lost when, as by a miracle, a sudden diversion occurred. The lion was leaping on John, who fired his second barrel with shaking hand and missed, when Said Mohammed scrambled to his feet and flew down the path, shrieking at the top of his voice. As if supposing that this white-clad yelling creature was his worst enemy, the lion changed the direction of his spring, almost grazing John as he fell, and bounded off after the Bengali, with such enormous leaps that escape seemed impossible. John hastily reloaded and fired, but he was trembling from head to foot; a mist seemed to rise before his eyes; and his shot went very wide of the mark. By the time Ferrier reached his side the chase seemed over; they thought that nothing could save the unlucky Indian. But when almost within the brute's clutches, Said Mohammed with the desperation of terror made a sudden jump to the right towards the river, as if intending to fling himself into it. The lion swerved after him, presenting his flank to the anxious spectators. Quick as thought Ferrier raised his rifle and, just as the beast was midway in his final spring, brought him down with a bullet through the heart.

John heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Good man!" he said. "But what on earth is the fellow up to?"

Next moment both he and Ferrier were shaking their sides with laughter, almost hysterical now that the tension was relaxed. The Bengali, too much overcome with terror to be aware of his safety, was scrambling up a thorn tree with an agility that would have done credit to a slimmer man. Up he went, frantically swinging himself from bough to bough. Half way up he lost his puggaree, snatched from his head by a long spike, and every stage of his ascent was marked by little bits of his white cotton dhoti left clinging to the branches. For some moments John was helpless with laughter, but at last he managed to shout to Said Mohammed to come down, for the beast was dead. The shout only made him climb the faster, nor did he stop until he was perched on the topmost branch, his white robe flapping in tatters about him. Nothing would induce him to budge until the lion's head had been cut off, to be carried back to the farm as a trophy. Then he descended, much more slowly than he had mounted, and with a piteous effort to regain his dignity that was too much for John and Ferrier, who turned their backs so that he should not see their amusement.

These excitements were considered enough for one day, and the party set

"Ferrier raised his rifle, and brought him down with a bullet through the heart."

*"Ferrier raised his rifle, and brought him down with a bullet through the heart."*

off for home, the natives carrying the lion's head and shouting a song of triumph. John said nothing to Said Mohammed until he thought his composure was restored. Then he said–

"I owe you my life, khansaman. It was very plucky of you to draw the lion after you, and I shan't forget it.–Shut up!" he whispered to Ferrier, who emitted a sort of gurgle.

A gratified smile stole across the Bengali's face.

"I am quite bucked, sir," he said. "Your words are sweeter than honey. When your honoured parent returns to this vale of woe, my heart will be in my mouth when I say to him: 'Lo! here is your progeny, whom I, Said Mohammed, failed B.A. of Calcutta University, saved from the jaws of the lion. If I had not been on the spot he would have been absolutely up a gum-tree.'"

Ferrier guffawed.

"Why didn't you do as your uncle did in the Sunderbunds?" he asked presently, unable to resist the temptation of a sly dig at the failed B.A.

"The absence of one ingredient, sir, spoils the sauce. It was rotten nuisance, but I forgot *in toto* the words of the charm."

# CHAPTER THE TWELFTH–The Sack of the Farm

At breakfast on the day after the lion-hunt Ferrier, who was silent and seemed embarrassed, said suddenly–

"I say, old boy, d'you know I've been here nearly two months?"

"What! Getting tired of it?" said John, with a smile.

"Not a bit; only–well, to put it straight, I've been here so long that I ought to pay for my keep."

"Rot!"

"I mean it. It's all very well to be your guest for a week or two, and I'm jolly comfortable, but to hang on like this–no, really, I ought to pay something to help keep the pot boiling."

"Now look here, Charles Ferrier, you're a very good sort, but I'm hanged if I stand that. If there's any talk of pay, I ought to pay you for your services. Five

weeks in charge while I was droving–name your figure. Rounding up strayed cattle; looking after the natives–how much that lot? You do far more in a day than any hired man, as I believe you call 'em in your part of the world."

"Well, I like it, and I've nothing else to do; in fact, I've a great mind to settle about here myself, and I would, like a shot, if it weren't for Hilda. I'm afraid it wouldn't do to bring her among the lions, as your khansaman said. But here I am, learning all about it on the cheap, and with no responsibility."

"Look here, we'll leave it at that. I'm very glad of your company, to say nothing of your help, and as by the look of it that misguided father of mine has been hooked, and the widow must be rolling in money, I don't suppose we shall see him back here. He'll settle down in Park Lane, and die before his time of overfeeding. You stay on as long as you like, and if you're getting experience, I'm getting your services, so we'll cry quits."

So it was left. The two young fellows shared in the management of the farm. They found their time pretty fully occupied, and a portion of a letter which John wrote to his father a week or two later may be quoted as showing how affairs at the farm were progressing.

The rains have stopped, and I've got all the planting done. I'm trying some radish and rhubarb this season; also carrots, which Mr. Gillespie told me are good for the cattle. By the way, that bull we called Moses because he's fierce, is off his feed; I don't know what's wrong with him, and you might send me Barton's book on common ailments. I don't suppose you'll find a copy in Geneva, or wherever you are now, but if you're not too busy to send a card in London, I dare say I'll get it when Moses is dead.

"That'll touch him up, Charley; he'll think Moses would be all right if he were here."

I bought a few fat-tailed sheep from old Sobersides (the chief of the neighbouring village) the other day. He got them, he says, from a party of Rendili who were driven south of the Waso Nyiro by the drought in their own country. I don't suppose it's true, for Coja tells me the Rendili live a big long way beyond the mountain, and we've seen nothing of them.

Sobersides tells us, too, that a gang of Swahilis have established themselves somewhere north of Kenya, and are raiding the surrounding tribes. As they've got guns, I bet they're that sweep Juma and his crew. That's all we've heard of them since we licked them.

Ferrier is still here; says he's in loco parentis, and won't leave me till you return to your duties. I wonder if you tell the widow's children that you're in

loco parentis?

The lions have been quiet lately, since Said Mohammed saved my life; but as the mistris had next to nothing to do and were getting too fat, I have set them to build a stronger boma, of stout poles fastened together with transverse logs. That ought to keep the beasts out; at any rate it will give the place more the look of a respectable stockyard.

I wish you'd ship a few merinos for cross-breeding. Our half-breeds aren't much good for wool. The May lambs were born with long coarse hair, though they grew a poor sort of wool at three months. Wasama doesn't like the woolled sheep; he says they're not like the sheep of his country, and persists in believing that the first woolled beasts were the offspring of lions and hyenas. What ignorance! as old Martha used to say.

Out shooting the other day we saw a herd of zebras, and Ferrier has got a mad idea of catching some of the foals and taming them. We may try it if we come across them again, so don't be surprised if you see us riding to meet you on striped chargers. You, I expect, will be wearing striped trousers, light gloves, and a new silk topper.

The failed B.A. is a perpetual joy. His latest. Ferrier found a hair in his soup the other night. "Accept humble apologies, sir," says Said Mohammed, as he took it away. "In such circs. I can best cheer you up by reminding you of a verse of the little but divine Alexander Pope: 'And beauty draws us with a single hair.'" That may appeal to you, dad.

I hope your leg is all right, and you're enjoying yourself. *I've* got to work for my living.

One day the younger Masai, who had taken a flock of sheep out to graze at the extreme west of the estate, came rushing in breathless and reported with intense excitement that the sheep had been driven off by some men who had pounced suddenly out of the bush. One was a Swahili, the rest negroes. They had carried him along with them for some distance and then let him go.

"How many were they?" asked John.

"Eight," replied the boy. "One had a gun."

"Which way did they go?"

The boy pointed to the west.

"We can tackle eight, Charley. Coja, saddle up the two best donkeys and bring us our rifles. This is something new, Charley. I wonder if it's our friend Juma again?"

"Rum thing, their letting the boy go, don't you think?" said Ferrier. "They must know we'll be after them, especially if the Swahili is Juma; it's not the first time you've chased him."

"He reckons on getting away, or on our not finding the trail, I suppose. We'll take Bill with us."

But when, riding their donkeys hard, they came to the little hut in the wood, they found that the Wanderobbo was not there.

"He's gone for honey, I suppose," said John. "Never mind; we oughtn't to find it difficult to track sheep."

They set off at full speed, and easily picked up the trail at the place where the marauders had rushed from their hiding-place in the bush. They followed it without difficulty so long as it led across grass country, but lost it for a time soon after they entered the bush, because there were evident signs that a herd of animals larger that sheep had recently forced a way. However, they recovered it again after ten minutes' search, and found from that point that it led in almost a straight line–so straight that John was puzzled.

"I can't make out why they haven't tried to blind their trail and lead us astray," he said. "They must be very cocksure, or else they're trying to ambuscade us. We'd better keep a sharp look-out."

They rode more slowly now, yet at a brisk pace, narrowly examining every specially thick bush as they approached it, and avoiding any clump of woodland that might give cover to the marauders.

Suddenly, when they were a good five miles, as John estimated, from the farm, on ascending a gradual slope they saw from its crest the flock of sheep placidly grazing on a little patch of grass about half-a-mile below. There was no sign of the raiders, and the surrounding bush being very thin, they must have been visible had they remained in the immediate vicinity. Cantering down towards the sheep, which scattered as they approached, the riders dismounted, rounded them up, and proceeded to count them.

"They're the Welsh crosses," said John. "Forty-nine–one missing. I can't make this out at all. Look, here's the trail of the men, let's follow it up. We'll tether the donkeys. The sheep won't leave this grass."

The trail led them straight towards a wood a mile further on. At the edge of this they saw clear signs of a sheep having been slaughtered and cut up. Entering the wood cautiously, they followed the trail for some distance, finding that it wound towards the north. Both were itching to punish the raiders, but the trail became more and more difficult to distinguish as the wood grew denser, and at length, hot and tired, and as much mystified as angry, they turned back and came out once more into the open.

"It's something to have got the sheep," said John. "But what was the beggars' game? They couldn't have seen us after them, and they wouldn't drive the whole flock so far for the sake of cutting up one."

"Sheer devilry, perhaps," suggested Ferrier. "They knew we'd overtake 'em

before they had got very far, and I dare say are chuckling at having given us all the trouble for nothing. Rather a poor game, one would think."

"Well, we'd better drive the sheep home. It's a long march, and they'll be pretty well done up by the time we get there."

They remounted, and headed the flock towards the farm. Sheep, as every one knows, and as John had experienced on the road to Nairobi, are very slow travellers.

"By Jove!" said Ferrier, when they had marched for an hour and covered perhaps two miles, "I begin to understand what your droving job was like. I should never have had the patience."

"I'd give anything for a good sheep-dog. I must ask my father to bring one with him–or send one, if he doesn't intend to come himself."

It was on the verge of nightfall when, tired and hungry, they came to the outskirts of the farm. They heard the bleating of the animals that had been already penned, and the flock, weary as they were, moved a little faster to rejoin their kind. Coming to the gate of the boma, John was surprised to find it open, having given strict orders that it should always be closed immediately after the animals were brought in for the night. There was not a man to be seen. Having driven the sheep into their pens, they hurried on towards the farm buildings.

"What a smell of wood smoke!" said Ferrier, sniffing.

"Yes; I hope they haven't set fire to anything. Ah! here's Wasama."

The Masai came running towards them, followed by his son, the Indians, Coja and Lulu, all in great haste.

"The bad men, *bwana*!" cried Coja, and began to pour out a story so rapidly that John, familiar as he now was with Swahili, could make little of it, especially as Lulu and the Masai joined in with great excitement. John silenced them, and asked Said Mohammed to explain what had happened. His story, told in more direct and natural language than John had ever heard from him before, was as follows. About half-an-hour after John had started in pursuit of the raiders Bill had rushed in, dripping wet, and reported that a large party of armed men, having raided the village north of the river, were marching rapidly down with the evident intention of swimming across and making an attack on the farm. The Bengali, according to his own account, wished to close the gate and bar the doors of the bungalow, and defend it to the last; but John afterwards had reason to believe that this was Coja's proposal, and he had found nobody to support him. Only a few minutes after Bill's arrival the strangers were seen rushing into the farmstead. The mistris, the Masai, Lulu, and the few women of the village who had been working in the fields instantly fled and hid themselves, who knows where. Said Mohammed went into his own house, and there awaited the coming of the enemy, resolved to die for the sahib whose salt he had eaten. The men seized

him and dragged him forth, demanding that he should tell them where the rifles and ammunition were kept.

"That made me very ratty, sir," said the Bengali. "What! should I tell tales out of school? But when those fearful bounders threatened to roast me at my own fire I reflected that it could not be your wish, nor the wish of your excellent progenitor, that a failed B.A. of Calcutta University should be roast joint for the sake of a quantity of villainous saltpetre, et cetera, and therefore I owned up. But while the banditti were gloating and slapping their backs I took French leave by the back door, and lo! ensconced behind the barn was Coja, who like me had saved his bacon."

From their hiding-place they watched the proceedings of the enemy. They first of all carried all the rifles out of the bungalow; then from the little outhouse adjoining it they brought all the ammunition and all the "trade." The place had been stripped bare, as the Bengali found when he examined it after the men had gone. The negroes had then shouldered the loot under the direction of three Swahilis who had guns, and when they had marched off, the Swahilis had kindled a fire in the little space between the floor of the bungalow and the ground. Then they had hurried off after the rest. As soon as they had disappeared, Coja and the Bengali emerged from their hiding-places, and extinguished the fire with water from the rain-water tank near the dairy. Very little damage had been done, the incendiaries having been in such haste to overtake the rest of their party that they had not waited to ensure a good blaze.

In the first shock of hearing this bad news both John and Ferrier used such language as might have been expected of them. It was only too clear now that the sheep-stealing had been a mere blind, cunningly devised to decoy them from the farm while the real raid was effected. To John it was a disaster. When he hurried into the outhouses and bungalow and found that rifles, ammunition, and every bundle of "trade" were gone, he felt that ruin stared him in the face. It is not surprising that, tired out after his long day's work, he saw things even blacker than they were. There was still a balance at the bank, Cousin Sylvia having insisted on paying all the expenses of Mr. Halliday's tour; though if John drew upon that there would be little or no reserve in case the second year's working turned out unprofitable. Meanwhile the actual loss was heavy, and the inconvenience perhaps greater, for without the "trade" he could not pay the labourers from the village, and what with the lack of wages and the damage to their employer's prestige, John foresaw a refusal to work any more.

An examination of the bungalow showed that the floor was little more than scorched. Nothing had been taken from it except the rifles, so far as John could see. He kept very little cash, but that was intact. His rupee notes were always stowed for security in the pockets of his belt. It was clear that the raiders had

come for arms and "trade" only, and having got what they wanted had wasted no time in merely looting.

"We can't sit down under this," said John, when he had realized the extent of his loss. "Yet I don't know what on earth we can do. We've two rifles and twenty rounds apiece, against–how many did these ruffians number, khansaman?"

"In mental arithmetic, sir, I am mere greenhorn, rank duffer; but from cursory squint I figure them at five hundred."

"Oh, come now, that won't do. If they had been so many they wouldn't have been in such a hurry, Where's Bill?"

"He has not come within my sphere of influence since he ran in like drowned rat to give us the straight tip, sir."

"Well, get us something to eat. We're famished. By the way, did any one recognize Juma among them?"

"No, sah; no Juma to-day, sah," said Coja. "Him berry much 'fraid to come heah, 'cause of Lulu, sah. Him show him face, ha! ha! she give him what for, sah."

"Go and get your supper."

John spoke irritably. Normally good-tempered, he was now unlike himself.

"And I might have guessed it if I had any gumption," he said to Ferrier. "Juma took advantage of the sheep straying to run off with our rifles before, and it didn't require much ingenuity to invent the ruse."

"Cheer up, old chap. You'll feel better when you've had some grub. It's very sickening, but as you say, I don't see what we can do."

It was now quite dark, and they ate their supper in silence. Even Said Mohammed's excellent cookery could not overcome John's furious disgust at having been tricked. When the Bengali brought in an omelet he said–

"A thousand and one pardons, sir. The wanderer, videlicet Wanderobbo, has returned, and asks for honour of confab."

"Bring him in, and fetch Coja; it takes too long to understand Bill without him."

Bill had come to report that he had followed up the raiders for several miles to the north. They had robbed the villagers of all their foodstuffs, and all the "trade" which they had received as wages for their work on the farm, and then marched directly northward, coming after a few miles to an encampment where they were presently joined by a smaller party from the west. When he came to this part of his story Bill grew much excited. In the leader of the smaller party he recognized one of the safari which years before had attacked his village, killed his people, and plundered their store of ivory–the ivory which by rights belonged to him, and which he would yet recover.

"But that's nonsense," said John. "If these people seized his ivory years ago,

it has all been sold long before this."

When this was interpreted to Bill he was like a man demented, and poured out a torrent of incoherent speech which even Coja was unable to understand. John dismissed them both, thinking that the Wanderobbo must have brooded over some old grievance until it had turned his brain.

"Bill's report has given me a notion," he said to Ferrier presently. "If they looted the village they'll be pretty heavily loaded and will go slowly. They won't march during the night, and if this business happened about five hours ago we ought to be able to overtake them if we start early in the morning."

"But, my dear fellow—-" began Ferrier.

"Oh, I know it's a risk, and we're outnumbered, and we ought to be prudent, and all the other things that people say who sit in easy-chairs and wear goloshes. But it's the only thing to be done, and I'm going to do it."

"But do you think it's right to leave the farm? Wouldn't your father—-"

"Hang–no, I don't mean that; I'm afraid I'm rather a bad-tempered brute to-night, old fellow; but look at it clearly, and you'll agree with me. If we sit down under this they'll try it on again. The farm will never be safe. We might as well cut our sticks at once."

"Why not apply to the Government?"

"Absolutely useless. To begin with, it would take time, and the raiders would be who knows how far away? If they belong to that gang we heard of who've got some sort of a fort up north, they're in a country where precious few white men have ever been, if any. It would be sheer folly to send a police column into the hills after a roving band of this sort. No, it's a settlers' job; it's one of the risks we run, like the lions, and we've got to deal with it."

"Well, but how are you going to set about it?"

"How are *we* going to, you mean."

"A slip of the tongue, old chap. Of course I'm with you, all along the line. How are we going to set about it, then?"

"Don't know yet. That's what we've got to decide before we go to bed to-night. One thing's certain, we must make up our minds quickly, start soon, and hurry like the very dickens, for if there's any truth in this tale of a fort, we must collar our rifles and ammunition before they get to it, or we're done. That's the first thing: to get our rifles back."

"That's a large order. How many did they take?"

"Four and a shot-gun. If they're the same lot we dealt with before they'll have about a dozen now. I know we don't stand the ghost of a chance of recovering them in a fight; that's absurd; but I rather think if we put our heads together we can find some way of diddling them."

"If it's a matter of brains I'm conceited enough to believe we have the odds,

but there's a lot to consider besides. We shall have to take a safari to carry provisions, and a pretty big one if we're going to bluff them. They won't bolt as they did before. Well, where will you get your safari from?"

"The village. What are you smiling at? Snakes, I forgot they've run off with all my "trade." I've nothing to pay porters with. That's bad. Still, the chief has known us some time, and perhaps he'll trust us. I'll see, first thing in the morning."

"Who will you leave in charge of the farm? Not the Bengali?"

"Rather not. He may be a very Nimrod in the Sunderbunds, but he's a funk-stick here. No; Coja's a better man."

"But you'll want him to interpret."

"'M. Afraid I shall. I can rub along pretty well with Swahili by this time, but we may come across a tribe who don't know it, and that would certainly be awkward. Well, Coja must come with us, then."

"What I suggest is that you should send a note to Mr. Gillespie and ask him to send up a respectable European to take charge. He might come himself; he hasn't paid you the visit he promised, and if you tell him what you're after I'm sure he'll do what he can. Besides, if we get bowled over, you know, it would be just as well he should have heard about the business beforehand, for your father's sake. And I'd send a note to the Commissioner at Fort Hall too; he may be inclined to stretch a point."

"I'll do both. A good idea to get Gillespie up here, or some one he can trust. Of course if we're lucky we shall get our rifles and things and be back here long before he could arrive. But then we mayn't. I'll write before we turn in. That's settled."

"Don't you think we ought to have some sort of a plan before we start?"

"Our plan is to go straight after the raiders, and march two miles or more to their one."

"That's all right; but what if they reckon on being pursued and lay a trap for us? You see, they were pursued last time, and they hadn't done nearly so much damage then."

"That's true," said John; "but on the other hand there's such a lot of them this time–we can divide Mohammed's five hundred by five–there's such a lot that they may think we'll not attempt to bring them to book. Still, we ought to be on our guard. The worst of it is that if we have to go carefully we shall have to go slowly, and time's everything in this job. Hand me a cigarette and let's think it over."

"Any good asking Bill?"

"Not a bit. He can do tracking, follow his nose, but that's about all. Besides, he's so cranky just now that he's fit for nothing. I wonder how much truth there

is in this ivory yarn of his? We may get to the bottom of it by and by. But this plan of ours–any ideas, Charley?"

"Not a ghost of one. We *must* follow the track, and that may lead us into an ambush."

"Wait a bit, though. If we could march on a line parallel to it we might go as fast as we liked without much danger."

"How could we do that–far enough away from it not to be spotted, and yet near enough not to lose it?"

"Of course we couldn't all go together; some one must keep on the track, and that must be Bill for one."

"That wouldn't be much good. How could we keep in touch with him? I've got a field-glass, but that will be useless if we have to go through much wood. We can't rig Bill up with wireless!"

"No, but I'll tell you what we can do. You take the safari on the parallel line; I'll go with Bill and take my pocket-mirror with me. It will make a fine heliograph. You know the code, of course?"

"I do, as it happens. I could signal back with my watch-case. But that won't help us if there's a wood or a hill between us."

"Well, we must chance that; and as Bill and I shall be able to go much faster than you with the safari, we can come over to you if necessary; you see what I mean: come and go between the two tracks and yet keep up with you."

"I think that's got it. I suppose it's no use thinking what we'll do when we come up with the raiders?"

"No; all will depend on when we find them, and where. I'm not going to think of that, and as we shall have to be up early to interview the chief and get our things together, I vote we go to bed."

"Don't forget your letters."

"Right. Off you go. Goodness knows when we'll sleep next."

John wrote the two letters he had spoken of, and a third, a brief note to his father explaining what had happened. Then he went to bed thoroughly tired out, and slept like a top.

Next morning one of the most serious of his difficulties was unexpectedly removed. As soon as it was light, the chief came over from the village with some of his people to beg the msungu to follow up the bad men and recover the stores they had stolen. John jumped at the opportunity. He agreed to do so if the chief would allow forty of his strongest young men to act as porters. He pointed out that the villagers had as great a cause of quarrel with the raiders as he had himself, so that the bargain he proposed was reasonable. The chief agreed to it at once. John's recent exploits in slaying the rhinoceros and the lion, his former successes against the raiders, and above all his fairness and punctuality in paying

the villagers for their labour, had won him the respect of his neighbours, and they joined him with full confidence that the expedition would be successful. Preparations were quickly made, a considerable quantity of food was packed up, two runners were sent off with the letters, and by seven o'clock the safari was ready to start.

At the last moment Said Mohammed came up to John.

"With submission, sir," he said, "I offer myself as unit in this expeditionary force. I undertake to be no cipher, but integer, sir, and not a minus quantity. Need I remind you of the saying of some great and glorious general whose name I have forgotten, that an army marches upon its tummy? *Verb. sap.* Grub, sir, is the sinews of war, and astounding military gumption is no go without a cook. Furthermore, was I not honoured to interpose unworthy corpus between raging lion and your honour's nobility? If so, what is a life saved if not also preserved? Permit me, therefore, to be the life-preserver."

"All right. Hurry up! No time to waste," said John, remarking to Ferrier, as the Bengali went off to fetch his bundle: "I suppose he's afraid the place will be attacked again in our absence."

"A bad look-out if it is."

"Well, we shall soon find out whether the whole gang of the raiders are on the march. If they are, I don't think they'll come back, and as nobody else has molested us for more than a year I think we may be pretty easy. Now, khansaman, buck up; we're off."

John had already decided that every member of the party should go on foot. Donkeys might prove a great nuisance if the country was difficult; moreover, mounted men would form conspicuous objects in the plains. Accordingly Ferrier and he had donned stout-soled boots, and set off to tramp after Bill and Coja, who had gone ahead with the chief to select the men for the safari. Said Mohammed brought up the rear.

# CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH– Tracking the Raiders

The two white men had just forded the river when they met the porters marching

to the farm to fetch the loads laid there in readiness for them. It was plain that the chief was in earnest, for the forty young men were the most stalwart in his community. Each carried his bow and arrows, and as John turned and watched them striding lithely along he thought they would prove no mean antagonists in a fight. He went on with Ferrier to the village, had a short conversation with the chief, and then set off with Bill on the trail of the raiders, leaving Coja and Said Mohammed to bring the safari. He wished to go a few miles ahead in order to examine the trail and get some guidance of his course before the others came up.

At the outset the spoor was very easy to follow. The ground in the immediate neighbourhood of the village was soft red soil, on which the print of feet could be clearly seen. But it was impossible at first to distinguish the marks of the raiders from those of the villagers. Presently, however, they came to a stretch of grass-land, the grass cropped short by the villagers' cattle. Here again the trail was so crossed and mingled with the hoof-marks of the animals that had grazed there since daybreak that it was impossible to learn anything from it. But by and by the grass grew longer, and the passage of a numerous body of men through it was plainly indicated. There were two distinct tracks, one a narrow path, the other, a few yards to the left, broader. Both the white men were sufficiently experienced in African travel to know that the former was the track of the bearers among the party, proceeding in single file; the latter that of the Swahilis, who, insolent in their strain of Arab blood, domineer over the native tribes.

"They're going pretty fast," said John, as they marched on; "fast, that is, for men carrying loads."

"How do you know?" asked Ferrier.

"By the look of the spoor. Stop a minute and bend down. Here are the footprints of the niggers, you see, about thirty inches apart. Every man trod in the steps of the man in front, so that the prints are particularly clear. I know they went fast because their feet turned in a lot; look at the marks; you can't carry a load at any pace with your feet splayed. Now look at the other trail. The footsteps are farther apart–three feet, I should think; and one or two of the men had sandals; there's a flatter impression than bare feet make. I rather guess that the Swahilis set the pace and made the natives keep up: they could do that because if there's a lot of them they needn't all carry loads at the same time."

"I say, we could have done without Bill," said Ferrier, with a laugh, as they went on. "Did he teach you that?"

"No. I did some scouting at school. Bill can't make any inferences from what he sees, but he's got sharper eyes than I have, and can often spot the trail when I've lost it, especially on hard ground. The worst of this habit of marching in Indian file is that one can't tell how many the party consists of; at least, I can't; perhaps a more experienced scout could judge from the depth of the impression

of the footprints. Look here; just as I thought. They stopped here to change loads. The Swahilis made a group here; the carriers put their loads on the grass at the side of the path; see how it's pressed down. Here's the mark of one of my ammunition boxes, I'll swear; and the next man had a cargo of maize; here are some of the grains."

"How far do you reckon they went before camping?"

"Well, judging by what Said Mohammed said, they made their attack between one and two–the hottest part of the day, when everybody would be sleepy. Allowing a couple of hours to sack the village and get the loads together, they might start at four and march till seven, so that in about an hour's time we ought to get to their last night's camp. The trail runs fairly straight, so it looks as if they're making direct for their refuge in the hills, and I hope to goodness it's pretty far away: the farther it is the better our chance of coming up with them before they get there. It runs west-nor'-west, you see" (he had taken out his pocket compass), "which leads to the foothills of Kenya. We ought to find ourselves on rocky ground presently, and may lose the trail."

"Hadn't we better wait for our men now?"

"We'll come to the raiders' camp first. Coja won't lose us; and I want to see what sort of camp they made: it may help us."

They hastened on. At one point the track swerved to the east to avoid a steep incline, but returned to its former direction immediately that had been passed. At another it led due west, skirting a swamp, at the edges of which the footprints were still deeper in the soft mud, which was, however, beginning to dry in the sun's rays. Then it crossed a shallow stream, and John wondered at first why the raiders had marched for some little distance up the bank before crossing, since the stream was fordable anywhere. He understood when Bill pointed to a long depression in the soft earth at the brink: a crocodile had lain there, and the men had given it a wide berth, for if it had heard or seen them it would have slipped noiselessly into the water and seized some hapless fellow as they crossed.

At length, after a rapid march of two hours, during which they had covered, as John estimated, about eight miles, they came suddenly to an open glade in the midst of scrub, where there were clear signs of the previous night's encampment. A thorn boma was left partly standing. Within it there were the black marks of fires, and a circular patch of discoloured grass where the loads had been stacked. Here John decided to halt and await the arrival of the safari. The smell of burnt wood was still so strong that he guessed the raiders had not made a very early start, giving him the hope of coming up with them before nightfall if his men would be content with a short rest.

It was an hour and a half before they came up, very hot and tired, Coja having not allowed a halt until they reached the stream, where they had delayed

for a little while to drink and cool their feet. Judging that the raiders were quite out of sight, a belt of forest stretching across the country about a mile ahead, John did not think any harm would come of lighting fires; accordingly the men set about cooking their breakfast, and Said Mohammed made some coffee, which the white men drank out of tin mugs, with condensed milk. John took the opportunity to explain to the men that he wished to set off without delay, promising that with good luck they should recover their stolen goods before next morning. After an hour's rest, therefore, he gave the order to march.

They now adopted the plan he had arranged with Ferrier over night. They had come into country favourable to an ambuscade, and it was advisable to take all precautions. On starting, Ferrier and the safari struck off to the right, leaving John to follow the trail with Bill. The latter kept close to the track so long as it led over open country, where no trap was possible; but as soon as they reached the wood, John heliographed with his pocket mirror to Ferrier, now nearly a mile to the east, to halt until he had scouted among the trees. For some time there was no answering flash to his signals, and he feared the safari was out of touch, but after repeated trials the answer came, and he knew that all was well. John then entered the wood with Bill very cautiously, and found it so thick, and the ground so densely covered with undergrowth, that it was impossible to see the trail. There was nothing for it but to penetrate to the other side, and they did this as rapidly as possible, John thinking it scarcely probable that the raiders would have attempted to lay a trap for them in the wood, where there was no path. John found this the most trying experience he had yet encountered. Here he had to climb over a dead tree-trunk: there to cut his way through a jungle of bamboos, every stroke of his knife shaking a shower of dew from the canopy overhead until his shirt was soaked. He was unable to see a yard in front of him. His progress was all the more difficult because the wood covered a steep slope. It took nearly half-an-hour to get right through, though the distance in a straight line was less than half-a-mile: then they came out upon a sort of rocky plateau, and John got one of his rare glimpses of Mount Kenya, far to the west, its snow-clad peaks, for once clear of mist, gleaming dazzlingly in the sunlight. Leaving Bill to recover the trail, he hastened back to heliograph that the safari might advance, and by the time he had once more penetrated the wood and rejoined the Wanderobbo, Ferrier had come within sight in a hollow a mile and a half to the east. Bill having not yet found the trail on the hard ground, John signalled to Ferrier to halt again; the delay was vexatious, but it was important that the advance should not be continued until he had made quite sure of the direction.

Finding Bill at fault, John cast about for the lost trail in a systematic way. He laid down his rifle to mark the spot where he had emerged from the wood, and sent Bill to the left, himself going to the right, to examine the ground in ever-

widening circles. The difficulty was greatly enhanced by the fact that almost all the raiders were barefooted, so that there was nothing to mark their passage over the hard soil. After searching for half-an-hour in the sweltering heat, and almost despairing, John suddenly observed, about two hundred yards from the spot where he had left his rifle, a tribe of black ants very busily engaged. Looking more closely, he was delighted to see that they were running over and over a grain or maize. Bill came up at his call, and instantly flinging himself upon his face, and peering along the surface of the soil northwards, he declared he saw marks of the scraping of sandals. John hastened in that direction, and within a few yards came upon a small round depression whence a pebble lying near by had evidently been kicked. He had no doubt that the trail was at last recovered, so he sent Bill back for his rifle, and then, finding from his compass that the line between the grain and the hole led in a north-westerly direction, towards a low hill, he ventured to set his course thither, finding, as he progressed, slight traces on the soil that proved his judgment to be correct.

The hill was about two miles away, and by the time he reached it he was so fatigued with trudging over the shelterless plain under the fierce sun that he was glad to throw himself under a thorn-bush at the foot of the slope and rest, first signalling his intention to Ferrier. An hour after, he rose and scouted to the top of the hill, being careful not to expose himself on the skyline, and lying down to take a good look round before proceeding. The plain stretched as far as the eye could reach, slightly undulating, with patches of grass and scrub. There was no sign of the raiders, but a herd of wildebeeste were quietly grazing half-a-mile ahead, from which John concluded that no men had recently passed that way. The march therefore was resumed. Half-an-hour afterwards he caught sight of a party of natives on a hill to the right, and at once signalled to Ferrier to examine them through his field-glass. In a few minutes he saw flashes, and made out from the message that there were no Swahilis among the natives, nor did they carry loads, but appeared to be a hunting party. From Ferrier's report it did not seem that any danger would attend an advance. Accordingly the march was continued, and shortly afterwards the natives caught sight of the safari and bolted into the bush. John wondered whether they would carry news of his approach to the raiders, but soon made up his mind to the contrary, for if what had come to his ears was true, the Swahilis had established a reign of terror in the district, and the neighbouring tribes would rather avoid them. It struck him, however, that it was very necessary to be even more carefully on his guard against premature discovery by the raiders, for these would force any natives they came in contact with to join their safari and fight for them. As it was now drawing towards nightfall, and there seemed no chance of coming up with the raiders, he decided to call a halt, and, striking to the right, joined Ferrier. The men, who had marched without a murmur through

the hottest hours of the day, were very glad to drop their burdens and camp. Tired though they were, they at once set about surrounding the encampment with a boma. While they were doing this, John and Ferrier, accompanied by Bill, scouted for about two miles ahead to make sure that the raiders had not encamped in the vicinity, in which case an accidental noise might betray the safari. Discovering no sign of their presence, they returned to the men. They deliberated whether it was safe to light fires, and decided not to do so, though it meant a cold and dry supper.

Before they went to sleep, Bill, who was not usually communicative, told John more completely, with Coja's aid, the story of which he had hitherto given only scattered hints. He said that they were now drawing near to his own country, which lay only four marches distant beyond the mountain. Between it and their present camp was the country of the bad men. A long time ago he had been one of a considerable tribe, who for many years had enjoyed good hunting. Large herds of elephants had infested their country, and they had slain some with their spears in open hunting, but more by snaring them in pits. The flesh they ate, the tusks they buried for fear of the Masai and the Rendili, who plundered the weaker tribes. They were waiting for the coming of a safari to which they might sell their store of ivory.

The waiting was long, but the safari came at last–a large safari, commanded by brown men, not white men like the *bwana*, nor black like the people of those parts. Coja explained that Bill referred to Arabs. One member of the safari was the very man whom he had seen among the raiders. The Wanderobbo began to bargain with the Arabs, but these, as soon as they learnt where the ivory was buried, had treacherously fallen upon the tribe, and massacred all except a few women whom they spared to make slaves of, for the transport of the treasure. Bill had escaped by shamming dead when the slaughter was going on, and, lurking in the woods, he saw his wife among the slaves whom the Arabs loaded with the ivory. He followed the safari when it marched off with the spoils, and came in its track into the country of the bad men, who secretly gathered around it, and early one morning fell upon it in a fierce assault. From the shelter of a thick tree Bill watched the fighting. The Arabs had fire-sticks, and slew many of the bad men; but after a time they ceased to make the big noises; the fire-sticks had lost their magic. Seeing this, the bad men attacked still more fiercely, and in greater numbers. A whole day the fight lasted, and did not cease until night fell. Creeping up to the Arabs' camp and climbing a tree, Bill saw them bury the ivory by the light of their fires, working hard all night, and before morning came they broke out of their camp and forced a way through the enemy. These, following their custom, waited until daylight before they pursued the Arabs; then they set off, having no fear of them now that the firesticks were silent. Bill was too frightened

to follow them up, but he learnt afterwards that the bad men caught the party up in two days and slew every one, and also the Wanderobbo whom they had enslaved. It was clear, however, that one at least had escaped. Bill remained in the tree until the bad men had gone, and then slipped away and took refuge with a Masai tribe south of his old home. But a time came when disaster overtook the Masai. Disease seized upon their cattle: they roamed about and suffered heavy defeats in war: and at length Bill left them, when almost starving, and built himself the little hut in the wood where John had found him.

Now he was happy. The msungu had been his friend. He had brought him into the very country of the bad men: and when he had punished the people who had robbed him, surely he would go farther, a little farther, and recover the ivory which lay in the earth awaiting its rightful master.

"But did not the bad men take it when they had killed the Arabs?" asked John.

No: they might have sought for it, but they would never find it. They could not tell where it had been concealed, and if they had returned to the camp they would not have discovered it, for the Arabs had strewed ashes from their fires over the spot, to hide the disturbance of the earth. Bill knew where it was; he could lead the msungu straight to the spot; and the msungu who had been his friend would show his friendliness still, and would perhaps buy the treasure when it was laid bare.

"What do you think of it?" John asked Ferrier, as they talked it over together.

"It sounds like a fairy tale. You may be sure that the 'bad men' did find it. They would naturally suppose it had been buried in the camp and search for it there."

"I'm not so sure. They're not a very intelligent lot, to begin with. Imagine a crowd of chawbacons—-"

"What are they?"

"Oh, I suppose you haven't got 'em in Canada–raw country yokels who haven't any ideas beyond beans and bacon. Imagine them in the same case, chasing a party for twenty miles or more and then finding that they hadn't got what they supposed they had. They wouldn't know but what the treasure had been hidden anywhere along the twenty miles run, and they'd adjourn to the nearest 'pub.'"

"You may be right, though I guess no Canadian would give it up so soon. Anyway, we can't help the old fellow, can we?"

"We've got our own job to see through first, and that will be tough enough, I expect. The beggars must have marched at a tremendous pace, and we shall be short of food soon. If we don't catch them to-morrow we shall be in a pretty bad

way, for the country seems practically a wilderness. But we won't croak yet. I'll take first watch while you sleep: I'll wake you at midnight; and we'll make an early start."

The camp was astir while it was still dark, and at dawn was on its way, observing the same precautions as before; indeed, John was even more careful, for being ignorant how far ahead the raiders were, it was necessary to run no risk of approaching them too rapidly. Again the course took a north-westerly direction, but after skirting one of the larger foothills of Mount Kenya, it bore a little more to the west. Bill said that they were now marching almost straight towards his old home. After two hours they came upon the site of the raiders' last camp, and John, finding the ashes of the fires warm, though the sun had not yet broken through the morning mist, concluded that they had been raked over not more than two hours before. This caused him some little uneasiness. Though no attempt had been made hitherto to trap the pursuers, he was still alive to the possibility of such an ambush being laid: it was possible also that the raiders had left a rearguard to advance behind the main body, after they had assured themselves that there was no pursuit. These considerations led him to swerve from the direct track, and proceed through a belt of scrub half-a-mile to the right of it, Ferrier with the safari marching at the same distance still farther to the east, and only at intervals being in sight. He intended to return to the track from time to time, when a favourable opportunity occurred, to make sure that he was still proceeding in the right direction.

It was fortunate that he adopted this precaution, for the first time he struck off to the left to revisit the trail he was astonished to find, distinctly imprinted on the dewy grass, the footsteps of men going in the reverse direction. The sun being now up, he at once signalled to Ferrier to halt, and then carefully examined the new trail. It was quite fresh; the trodden grass had not had time to erect itself; and after a careful scrutiny he came to the conclusion that the marks had been made by four or five men, all wearing sandals. He suspected from this that they were some of the Swahilis of the party, and suspicion became certainty when Bill discovered a tiny strip of white cotton on a spike of a wait-a-bit thorn-bush. The conclusion was irresistible that some of the raiders had doubled on their tracks in order to watch for and perhaps ambush any pursuers.

Feeling that he must find out exactly what had happened, he began with Bill cautiously to follow up the new track, looking warily ahead, and observing with especial care the few large trees that were to be seen here and there in the distance, for any flight of birds would at once indicate the presence of men. As they walked, they found that the trail curved slightly westward, which seemed to show that it would presently join the main track which they had quitted. John moved now more cautiously than ever, for if his supposition was correct, the men

would halt before they actually reached the direct course, at some spot where they could overlook it.

As they proceeded, the ground rose and the scrub became thicker. But suddenly the bushes thinned away and they saw, at the top of a long incline, a clump of trees. And then they stopped short and dropped hurriedly to the ground. Before them, on the knoll, at the foot of a tree, they had caught sight of three white-clad men looking upwards among the branches. They had rifles. Without doubt this was the spot chosen for keeping watch on the trail. Wriggling under cover, at the cost of some scratches, John and the Wanderobbo saw a fourth man perched high up in the tree below which the others stood. Had he not been intently gazing towards the main track, and his companions looking up at him, it would scarcely have been possible for John to escape discovery.

The men were speaking. At the distance John could not distinguish what they said; foreign words are always difficult to pick up when the speakers are at all remote; but from a certain impatient intonation he gathered that the men had been for some time on the watch, and were weary or disappointed at the apparent fruitlessness of it. As he lay there, his heart jumped as he thought how easy it would be to shoot the men. He could take aim at his leisure, and pick off two of them with certainty. Taken by surprise, the others would probably bolt. But it would not be playing the game; he could not bring himself to stalk them as he would stalk a wild animal, though he knew that if they spied him and got first shot they would have no compunction about shooting him. For a moment he thought of dispatching Bill to fetch Ferrier; with his aid, backed by the natives with their bows and arrows, he might capture all four, or, if they showed fight, dispose of them. But he soon gave up the idea. The men might decamp before Ferrier could arrive; they might indeed see the Wanderobbo creeping through the bush, and, the most important consideration of all, a shot would certainly give the alarm to the main body of the raiders, and that would defeat his purpose. If they took to flight he would lose his only chance of recovering his rifles and ammunition, which was his immediate object. If they hastened back at the sound of the firing, he would find himself matched against overwhelming numbers, and the result would be disaster. His only hope of success lay in a sudden unexpected blow at the main body, when his numerical inferiority would be compensated by the paralyzing effect of surprise. How this blow was to be delivered he had at present no notion; it must be left to the guidance of circumstances; but certainly its prospects would be hopelessly jeopardized if the raiders' vigilance was aroused. Patience must be his watchword.

He lay and watched the Swahilis for half-an-hour by his watch. Then, evidently tired of their fruitless errand, they started to rejoin the main body. They came down the slope, passing within a few yards of where John and the Wander-

obbo were concealed; but fortunately they did not retrace their steps along the path by which they had come, but struck off towards the direct course of the main column, which they would probably intersect, as John guessed, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile. If they had returned by the same way the marks of John's boots might possibly have escaped them unless they were accustomed to tracking; but if they had caught sight of them he felt that he would have been in a dangerous predicament. At that moment John wished that he could march barefoot like the natives, but he knew that it was a vain wish.

John told Bill to creep through the scrub and follow the men up for a little way, until he was sure that they had finally left the spot. For himself, he had suddenly resolved to climb the tree as the Swahili had done, and discover what outlook could be had from it. He found that the place had been admirably chosen. From a branch thirty feet above the ground the country was visible for miles around. On the west rose the giant mist-clad form of Mount Kenya; eastward the plain extended as far as the eye could reach. South and north he could scan the country through which the raiders had passed, and westward, from the appearance of the vegetation, he inferred that a considerable stream flowed. As he watched, he saw the four Swahilis emerge from the scrub, strike the track, and hasten towards the north. There was no doubt that they had dismissed the idea of being pursued.

When Bill came back, the two set off to rejoin the safari, which they found halted by a shallow stream about two miles away. John told Ferrier what he had discovered.

"I don't think they can be more than five or six miles ahead of us," he said. "We can easily come up with them by the time they camp, or soon after, and I think we ought to strike to-night."

"Have you any idea how?"

"None whatever. All will depend on the lie of the land and the kind of camp they make. I'll send Bill on ahead to make sure they don't alter their direction, and then we'll follow up and get to them by nightfall."

"It's to be hoped they won't get warning. I've seen two or three small parties of natives to-day, and they must have seen us. I suppose they won't give any information."

"I hope not. The chief danger is that the news of our safari will spread, and the raiders learn of it by accident. I don't think the natives will rush purposely to inform them, if they're the kind of tyrants we've heard they are."

"I shall be jolly glad when we come to grips with them. This marching is rather trying, and the men are getting the dumps. They seem to have thought we should overtake the fellows in a winking, and wipe them out with magic. Coja tells me they haven't been so far away from their village before."

"How's our failed B.A.?"

"Decidedly jumpy. He said just now that he feels O.K., excluding organs of ambulation, which are quite below par, owing to filamentous condition and conspicuous absence of beefiness. He has got rather spindly calves, to be sure. By the way, an hour ago we saw two black fellows looking at us through the scrub. We gave chase, but couldn't catch them. I hope they won't bring a horde of the 'bad men' upon us."

"No, indeed. We've got our hands pretty full as it is."

Bill returned by and by with the news that the whole party of raiders had rested in the scrub some distance to the north, but had now resumed their march. John set off at once on a parallel course, and at four o'clock halted again, judging that the raiders would now have chosen the spot for their encampment. Once more he sent Bill forward to reconnoitre, and learnt from him on his return that the raiders had stopped, evidently with no intention of going farther, near a small stream. Knowing that the African native is incapable of estimating distance, John, though he was tired, determined to press on with the Wanderobbo and discover how far off the camp was. It was an hour before he came in sight of it. Some of the men were engaged in erecting a boma; a few were fishing in the stream that flowed within about a hundred yards of the camp; others were cooking a meal. The ground about the camp was for the most part open, but there were patches of scrub here and there, and one or two clumps of woodland. The camp was placed on a hillock, the base of which was washed on one side by the stream. This wound away in a north-easterly direction, and at one point was a tract of tall elephant grass, lining the banks due north of the camp and stretching for about half-a-mile to the west, where it merged in dense scrub.

Being unable to learn as much as he desired from his post of observation south of the camp, John, still accompanied by the Wanderobbo, struck off to the west, crossed the stream, which was only knee-deep but fairly swift, and making a long circuit came down upon it again through the elephant grass, at a point directly opposite the camp, and only about a hundred yards from it. The ground rose gradually from the river to the boma. From his position at the edge of the grass John could not see the gate, but guessed from the coming and going of the men that it was on the south-west side. The boma was constructed of material cut from the surrounding scrub, and was of no great strength, though sufficiently formidable to stop a rush. The fact that the men had kindled fires showed that they were not seriously apprehensive of being followed up, and this sign of security was welcome to John, as favouring his design of surprising them.

It was nearly dark when he rejoined the safari, so fatigued that Ferrier questioned the possibility of his leading an attack that night.

"Oh, I'm all right," said John. "I can rest for an hour or two. Have you got

a pencil? I'll draw a sketch of the camp. Here's the stream: here's the elephant grass: what I propose is that we make our way to that and suddenly spring on them. Even disciplined troops are pretty well scarified by a night attack, and if we can only fairly surprise these beggars we ought at least to be able to get our ammunition, if not our rifles, in the confusion."

"But if they stand we shall be in a bad way."

"That's true. We can't match them in mere fighting strength. Everything depends on the completeness of the surprise, and we shall have to be very strict with our men. The slightest sound will give the alarm, and as they're not used to marching at night they are likely to be scared by anything. That's all I'm afraid of. I don't know whether we hadn't better gag them all."

Ferrier laughed.

"I don't think that would help matters," he said. "You had better explain to them what's at stake, and then take your chance."

"Well, we'll try it to-night. D'you know I begin to get a notion of what their game is. Bill says that one of them belonged to the Arabs who stole his ivory. If that's so, the fellow will know where the ivory is buried, and I fancy this is a pretty scheme to get hold of it. Ten to one it's Juma. That would explain his bagging rifles and ammunition. He wanted to get together a strong party, so that he could keep off the 'bad men' in whose country the ivory is. It will be rather a feather in our cap if we can get back our property and dish his little game too."

"Don't fly too high, old chap. We may thank our stars if we get through at all, and if you take my advice, as soon as we have secured the ammunition if we ever do, you'll make tracks for home and not go treasure-hunting. There's nobody on the farm, remember."

"Well, we'll see. First things first; I'll go and harangue the men."

# CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH– Ferrier Insists

There were long faces among the men when they heard what was expected of them. Night was terrible to them. They were low-spirited, and John had to refrain from stimulating them with a full meal; there would be danger in lighting fires.

But he promised them a feast when the work was done. To march silently, to keep together, to do exactly what they were told: that was the sum of his exhortation. When he left them to consider it, some grumbled, others talked of slinking away. But one reminded them that these wasungu had slain lions and rhinoceros, why should they not slay bad men too? And they kept their promises: if they said there should be a feast, a feast there would certainly be. So they took comfort, and began to talk bravely of the deeds they would do.

Before they set forth, John set Bill to gather some bundles of dry grass and press them tight. Then he asked Said Mohammed to spare him a quantity of the methylated spirit he had brought for cooking. He poured some of this into his pocket-flask from the Bengali's tin can.

"You will remain here, Said Mohammed," he said. "I shall leave five or six men who have most felt the strain of marching."

"Respectfully, sir, that is against the grain. I go where honour calls. Never say die. I gird up my loins and follow into thick of the fray."

"All right. Just as you please. Keep close to us, that's all."

"I will stick closer than a brother, sir."

Some few minutes past ten o'clock, under a sky whose blackness was scarce broken by the stars, John and the Wanderobbo led the way out of the camp, each carrying a bundle of dried grass. Immediately behind them marched Said Mohammed, then Coja and the rest of the men in single file, Ferrier bringing up the rear. They moved silently, and the half-dozen men left behind in the camp, peering out through the boma, neither saw nor heard them when the last man was a dozen yards away.

John did not try to find the track of his former journey. It was too dark to see it. Bill might have discovered it by his wonderfully keen sense of touch, but there was no need. All they had to do was to march due west until they struck the stream; then to hug its bank until they arrived at the elephant grass.

It was slow work, and not without its anxieties for the white men. Every now and then John heard a gulping sound behind, and knew that some one was afraid. Once or twice he halted. The men's hard breathing spoke of terror rather than effort. At such times he passed down the line, speaking quietly to reassure them; then, returning to the head, he bent to the ground and struck a match under his hat, to check the course by his pocket-compass, and went on again. Once there was a rustling sound upon the left hand, and the scared negroes made clicks with their mouths, and some would have run had not John, in a fierce whisper, called to them to stand, and asked whether they feared an antelope.

They came at length to the stream, the gurgle of its waters making a pleasant music in John's ears. Half the journey was done. So that he might not come to the stream near the enemy's camp he had directed his course somewhat south

of his former line; and it was a long march up-stream before they came to the elephant grass. John avoided the brink, for fear of lurking crocodiles. Once he almost stumbled upon a hippopotamus asleep in the sedge, and thought it lucky he was at the head of his men, whom the snort of the beast, as it rose and shambled away into the darkness, might have infected with panic. He heaved a sigh of relief as he came at last to the tall, thick grass standing high above his head. Halting, he passed word down the line to tread even more cautiously and in even deeper silence, trusting that the rustling which could scarcely be avoided would, if heard in the camp, seem to the enemy only the sound of animals moving in the grass. Then he went on again.

Peering out through the screen, he presently saw a dull glow some distance to the right. There lay the camp; within the boma fires were burning. Once more the party halted, and John, moving stealthily, sought Ferrier to consult with him.

"I'm going to set fire to the boma," he said in a whisper. "When you see the flames, fire off all your rifles and lead the men at a rush for the camp. They can shout then like the army of Gideon. We're north-west of it; they'll be startled out of their sleep, and rush for the gate on the south-west; at least I hope so."

"You'd better let me fire the boma, John. You'll lead the men better than I should; they know you best. Besides, it's my turn."

"Rubbish!" said John. "I've been here before."

"But I can't miss the boma if I go straight ahead. I insist on it, old chap; I'm sure it will be best. Hand over your grass and the spirit; I've got matches."

"Your arm's not thoroughly sound yet."

"All the more reason. It doesn't require much muscle to strike a match. Come on; it must be past midnight; there's no time to lose."

John gave him the materials somewhat reluctantly. Ferrier pressed his hand and slid away into the darkness. Time passed very slowly. The men grew fidgety; John heard the strange gulping in their throats, and the little noises they made as they moved worried him, lest they were heard in the camp. True, there were other sounds: the hum of insects, a lion's roar in the distance, the laughing bark of a hyena; but these were momentary, not continuous like the rustling of the grass, which there was no breeze to account for. As minute after minute passed, and there was still no sign, John grew more and more anxious. The boma was less than two hundred yards distant. He durst not strike a light to look at his watch, but surely there had been time to go and come and go again. What was happening?

Ferrier, stealing across the ground with no more sound than a snake might have made, guided always by the faint glow from the fires, had covered, as he guessed, two-thirds of the distance when he thought it prudent to drop upon hands and knees, lest, upright, his form should be descried by some keen-sighted

sentry. He had crawled thus some twenty yards further when suddenly he saw dimly before him a something, like an irregular hedge, no more than four feet high, stretching athwart his path. Was this the boma? Surely it bespoke unusual security in the enemy if they had contented themselves with so low a defence. Their bomas were commonly six feet high or more. He crept on more stealthily until he touched the obstruction: it was a thorny hedge. He tried to peer through it, expecting to see the camp-fires; but he looked into blackness, save for the dull red glow in the sky. Was it possible that the enemy were not so confident after all, but had erected a double barrier? Or was the hedge natural?

He crawled to the left. The hedge had a regular curve. It must have been placed by men. Raising himself gradually to his feet until his eyes were just level with the top, he looked over. Yes; there was the true boma, a dark mass thirty feet away. Through its interstices he saw streaks of dim light from the fires burning within. To set fire to the outer hedge would be useless; within the boma the enemy would be still secure, and the conflagration would but give them light to take aim at their assailants. He must cross the hedge.

But how? By a flying leap? This would expose him to the view of any one on watch, for though the night was dark, it was not so black but that a moving object could be seen. By clambering over? This would be attended by the same risk and by others. He might indeed scramble over at the expense of torn hands and clothing, though there was the danger of being held fast by the tenacious wait-a-bit thorns of which the obstacle was made. But his movements must cause such a crackling and creaking of the interlaced branches as could not fail to alarm any one who chanced to be awake in the camp, no matter at what part of it. Leaping and climbing being equally out of the question, what course remained?

Ferrier was not for nothing the grandson of a man who had roughed it in the backwoods of Canada. If acquired qualities are not inherited, the stock of which he came must have been sturdy and dogged in grain. At any rate, Charles was not the man to be baulked. Dropping on his knees again, he dug his fingers into the soil beneath the hedge. It was gravel, like the ground he had crossed in coming from the river. Very carefully he began to scrape out a hole, intending to persevere until it was large enough for him to squeeze his body through. He soon found that the task was not to be easy. The soil was so light and mobile that, as he scraped, it tended to slip at the sides and fill up the hole he was so laboriously excavating. Further, he felt the hedge, at the point where he was undermining it, subside, with a rustling and creaking which, faint as it was, might easily catch the ear of a wary guard. Fortunately the subsidence was soon checked. The base of the hedge was composed of stout branches which yielded but slightly, and in a few minutes the settling down ceased.

Relieved on this score, Ferrier scraped away at the hole, thinking of John,

who was no doubt wondering at the long delay. He worked until his fingers were sore. At last the hole was large enough for him to wriggle under the hedge. He groped with his hands for any thorns that might be sticking out downwards from the tangle above, and finding several, cut them off with his knife. Then, shoving his bundles of grass before him, he crawled into the hole and began to worm his way through. It was a tight fit, and the difficulty was all the greater because of the need for silence. More than once as his body, pressed close against the lower part of the hedge, put some strain upon it, there was a sharp creak when his passage freed the branch. At last he was through, scratched, hot, and breathless, and with a feeling that the various parts of his clothing were in very unnatural relation to one another. But he was through: that was the main thing; and pausing only to take breath, he ran in a stooping posture across the space between the outer and the inner defences.

All was quiet within the boma. Ferrier maintains to this day that snoring is an infirmity of civilization, for the sleepers emitted no sound. He lost no time in completing his task. First he soaked the bundles of grass thoroughly with methylated spirit, having postponed this until he reached the boma, lest evaporation should diminish the effect. Then he thrust them beneath the boma, choosing a place where it was thick and the light from the fires shone through less freely than elsewhere. Then he struck a match and applied it. Instantly there was a great flame; the dry thornbushes of the boma took fire readily. Ferrier slipped away to be out of the glare, but had gone only a few steps when he heard a soft patter of feet behind him. A moment after, the air was rent with rifle cracks and a din of shouting, from within the boma and from a distance. He turned to meet the man approaching, and saw the form of a big negro silhouetted against the glare. Ferrier was unarmed save for his clasp-knife, and he had not made up his mind what to do when a shot whistled past him: the negro had fired at him while still running. Before the man could draw a knife or turn in his tracks Ferrier threw himself upon him, trying to wrest the rifle from his hand. The two fell together; the rifle dropped to the ground; and black man and white were locked in a desperate wrestle. Ferrier felt the negro's arms about him, straining to crush him or to break his back. Oblivious of the tumult around him–the yells and shots within the boma, the shouts of the assailants, the crackle and roar of the flames–Ferrier strove to free himself from the strangling embrace, conscious that he was no match in muscle for his powerful opponent. He had almost given himself up for lost when the man's grip relaxed, and with a heavy groan he lay still. Ferrier sprang up. By the light of the blazing boma he saw the men of his party at two points of the outer hedge, some leaping over it, some slashing at it with their knives and tearing it down. None of them were firing; after the first discharge of their rifles John had ordered them to rush for the camp. Evidently the big negro

had been struck down by a shot from his own friends.

Ferrier stood for a moment, marvelling at the din. Then he saw that John's men had crossed the outer hedge and were swarming towards the boma. Shouting at the top of his voice lest he should be butchered by his own party, he left the wounded man on the ground and joined them. With John at their head they were sweeping round towards the gate. The firing from within the boma had now ceased; the shouts were those of the assailants alone; and when the excited throng reached the gate, they saw in the ruddy glare the enemy streaming in frantic haste towards the river. Many an arrow was sped after them; a few of the rearmost narrowly escaped capture. Seeing that they were hopelessly routed, John shouted to his men to refrain from pursuit and retire within the boma. Then, telling off a dozen men to stand at the gate and watch against any rally of the enemy, he called to the rest to help him to check the fire. He left the part that was fiercely burning, and ordered the men to tear down a portion on each side of it, so as to make two large gaps across which the flames could not spring. The work was assisted by the absence of wind. The portion around the spot where Ferrier had kindled the fire soon burnt itself out; the remainder was saved. Within ten minutes after the first blaze the enemy were scattered in confusion, and the camp was in John's hands.

# CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH–A Coup de Main

John's first proceeding when the conflagration had been stayed was to look for the property he had been at such pains to recover. The camp-fires gave too little light, so he got Coja to make a couple of torches. Taking one himself and giving the other to Ferrier, he hastened to the centre of the camp, where the baggage was piled. On the way he passed a confused medley of things–sleeping mats, cooking pots, bows and arrows, spears–things left or flung down by the fugitives in their hurried flight. And there, packed in the middle space, out of reach of the fires, were his boxes of ammunition and his rifles.

"We've got the lot, by Jove!" he exclaimed joyfully. "They haven't even opened one of the boxes. What extraordinary luck!"

"Couldn't be better," cried Ferrier heartily. "And you've got more than your own, too; there's a good many bows and arrows and a few spears, besides no end of baskets containing food, I suppose."

"Yes, they belong to the villagers. We'll make them a present of the bows and arrows and spears, and anything else they can find, bar the rifles. There aren't many spears; I suppose the rascals slept with them at their side, and snatched them up when they ran. Hallo! Here are two of the Sniders that Juma ran off with in his first little scheme. That makes three we've recovered."

"And proves that Juma is at the bottom of it."

"I should like to lay that fellow by the heels. But we'd better get something to eat. I'm famishing. Where's our failed B.A.?"

"Here, sir," said a voice at John's elbow. "I obeyed in all points your esteemed injunctions at closest possible proximity, and tender hearty congratulations on the success, not in mortals to command, but more, deserved, which has attended this tour de force."

"Well now, make up the fire and see what you can do to get us a meal. I'll go and talk to the young chief, Charley, and butter him up. He and his men did jolly well. The shouts they let out when I gave the word made amends for their silence during the march, which must have been a trial to them."

Said Mohammed made up the fire and hunted about for the best cooking-pot and the articles of fare he thought would be most pleasing to the white men. The villagers had already set to work to prepare their own food, chattering and laughing in high elation. Within a quarter of an hour Said Mohammed had made a stew of some partly cooked waterbuck he had discovered. He washed out two rough mugs of clay, and pouring the stew into them, handed one to each of the young men.

"A thousand regrets, gentlemen," he said, "that circs. do not admit of more dainty dishes and service to match."

"That's all right," said John. "I could eat anything, and this stew is first-rate."

"Permit me to remark, sir, on national characteristics as displayed by gastronomic ways of going on, utensils, et cetera. The nation, sir, that invented gas-stoves produced Shakespeare, bard of Avon; what achievements in science or literature could be expected from a race that never devilled kidney nor poached egg? Shakespeare himself, sir, was a poacher in giddy youth; though poaching egg and poaching stag are in some respects different, yet each is fine art. The fate of empires lurks in the saucepan; indeed, the mightiest monarch would be negligible quantity without quantum suff. Wherefore—-"

"A little more stew, please," said John, interrupting. "You'd better get your own supper, khansaman; you must be pretty peckish after your exertions."

"I am indeed, sir, an abhorred vacuum, and retire with permission to get

jolly good tuck-in."

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated John when he had gone. "I say, Charley, I was getting very nervous when we didn't see the light for so long. You were pulled up by that hedge, of course; how did you get through?"

"Burrowed like a mole. I've a greater respect for that animal now. I suppose we'll make tracks for home in the morning, by the bye?"

"Well, d'you know, I'd rather like to finish this job now we've started. Juma's still at large: his men are a rabble, of course, but they're not licked, and if he gets them back to this fort of his he may still worry us, to say nothing of harrying the people about him. What do you say? Are you game?"

"What about the farm?"

"Gillespie will have sent somebody up by the time we could get back."

"But don't you think we've done for Juma? To-night's work will damage his prestige, and I shouldn't wonder if the 'bad men,' as Bill calls them, round on him now."

"I don't know. It will take him some time to recover from the blow, of course, but you see he still has some of our rifles and a certain amount of ammunition, I should think, and they'll go a long way in this country of bows and arrows. No: I confess I'd like to follow him up. The chief difficulty is our natives. They've recovered their property, which is what they came for, and I rather doubt whether they'll be willing to go any farther from home. If they won't there's no more to be said."

"In any case we aren't strong enough to storm the fort, if it is a fort."

"I shouldn't propose to do that. My idea is to start at sunrise or before, and get to the fort in advance of Juma. His men are quite demoralized: they'll take some time to rally. They'll probably hide in trees during the night, and they'll have to find one another in the morning, so that if we start early we can easily outstrip them."

"We don't know the way."

"But we've got some prisoners, my boy. No, we haven't though; I called our men off before they caught them. That's awkward."

"I wonder if the fellow who tried to pot me is still alive."

"You didn't tell me of that. When was it?"

Ferrier related the incident that happened outside the boma. John at once accompanied him to the spot, which they reached just in time to see the wounded man limping towards the outer hedge. They ran after him and caught him, taking him back to the camp, where John examined his leg, and did what he could by bathing and bandaging. Meanwhile he questioned the man, and learnt from him that the fort lay a long day's march to the north. It was held by about forty men, of whom several were Swahilis and had rifles. The fort was built on an island in

the river–not the stream flowing past the camp, but a broader river into which that emptied itself a day's march to the south. To find it would be easy. They had only to follow the stream for a short distance, and then strike across country directly to the north. They would soon come upon the river, and the surrounding country being hilly, the easiest way to the fort was to follow its course.

"Now we'll tackle our natives," said John.

He found, as he had expected, that they were at first loath to engage themselves for a further expedition. They had recovered their property: the chief would be expecting them; they wanted to return and celebrate their success by a feast. John pointed out that, though they had done much, they would greatly enhance their glory if they carried back a great quantity of spoil from the enemy. They had been wantonly attacked: why not repay their attackers in their own coin? The fort would certainly contain things worth having. This argument appealed to the men, and when the chief's son reminded them that the wasungu had kept their promise and led them to a bloodless victory, they began to waver. "The wasungu are great hunters of lions," said the young chief; "they are also great hunters of men." John said that any who wished to go home might do so; but none were disposed to pass through the country without the whole body, and ultimately they agreed to follow the msungu wherever he chose to lead them. "You've a most persuasive tongue," said Ferrier to John, as they went away to talk things over. "I'm inclined to think you ought to have gone to the bar after all."

"Bosh! The judges aren't savages. We shall have to arrange a flying column–that's the name for it, isn't it? It's quite clear from what the prisoner said that we must get to the fort well in advance of Juma. If they get back we shan't be able to dislodge them: they won't be caught napping again, you may be sure. As it is, we may find it a hard nut to crack if there are forty men in the fort. We shall have to divide forces, too. We must leave enough men to guard this loot, and I'm afraid we can't both go, old chap: one of us must remain in charge."

"Well, you've done the hardest work so far: you take a rest and let me try my luck."

"But you fired the boma; it's my turn. Tell you what, we'll toss for it. Heads I go, tails you do as you please."

The spin of the coin decided for John.

"Just my luck," said Ferrier. "I always lost the toss when I captained the lacrosse team at McGill's. How many men will you take?"

"I can't do with fewer than twenty. I'll take Bill; Coja and Said Mohammed had better remain with you. By the way, you'll send over to our old camp in the morning and fetch the half-dozen we left there. They'll jump out of their skins if they're left too long. I wonder if our wounded prisoner could manage to come

with me. I might find him useful. In fact, I'll take him–on a litter if he can't walk."

"Well, you'd better get a sleep now, or you won't be fit for much in the morning. The men too. It looks as though they meant to jabber all night."

"I'll stop that. I'll go and pick my men and make 'em go to sleep. Wake me at five, there's a good chap. By Jove! Wouldn't my old dad be in a stew if he knew what was up! We're risking a lot when you come to think of it; but we've been lucky so far, and with rifles and plenty of ammunition I fancy we'll win through. If I'm not back within two or three days you had better make tracks for the farm. Don't forget to wake me at five."

"All right. Pleasant dreams!"

Precisely at five o'clock John was roused, to find ready for him a breakfast of steaming stew and baked millet cakes. Ferrier had also prepared a litter for the prisoner, whose wound forbade him to walk. At half-past five the little company set off, consisting of John and the Wanderobbo, and twenty of the villagers. John had his rifle, a spare one being carried by a man at his side. Only two of the other men had ever handled firearms; these were given rifles, and carried the ammunition in little bundles slung to their backs. John had filled his bandolier and his pockets with cartridges. Ferrier said good-bye to him at the gate of the boma, and started the men left behind in a rousing cheer.

The party marched very rapidly, John at the head with Bill and the litter-bearers, so that the prisoner might keep them in the right way. They followed the course of the stream for about a mile; then forded it, and made across a stretch of grassland, in which, as the morning advanced, they started large numbers of game. Just before noon they reached the river of which the prisoner had spoken, a slow, gurgling current of red water. Here they halted for a meal of beans and millet; then after an hour's rest set forth again. They had gone but a short distance up-stream when, as they ascended a slight acclivity, Bill was seized with intense excitement. Pointing to a flat-topped hill many miles away, he cried that it was there the Arab safari was attacked, and near by the ivory was hidden. A projecting spur to the right was the site of the shambas whence the people had pounced out to the assault. His own old home lay half a day's journey beyond the hill.

John pressed on now even more rapidly. Though he had met with no natives on the way, he could not be sure that some of the fugitives had not outstripped him along another route. For the most part he kept to the river, striking off here and there to avoid wide sweeping curves, as the prisoner indicated. Presently he saw in the distance a bold bluff rising to a hundred feet above the plain, and stretching across the line of march. The fort, said the prisoner, lay a short distance beyond the bluff, which was cut in two by the river. Up the side of the bluff wound a steep pathway, and at the top a look-out was constantly

stationed, except at night, when he was withdrawn into the fort. From this high post the plain could be seen for miles. Knowing how keen is the negro's sight, John called a halt before it was likely that his party had come within the range of vision. The rest of the journey must be performed in the dark. He led the men into the bush at some distance from the river, so that they should not be seen by any one who might pass either to or from the fort. Again he impressed upon them the necessity for silence.

At nightfall, refreshed by the rest, they started once more, confident of being able to approach the bluff unobserved. An hour's march under the pale light of the stars brought them to its foot, and John heard the noise of water rushing swiftly through the gorge. The pathway, said the prisoner, started from a spot very near the river-bank. Even with his directions it proved by no means easy to find in the darkness, and when at last they lit upon it, and John began the ascent, it was scarcely less difficult to keep to the track. Bill fell on his knees and groped along it with his hand, saying when he arose that it had not been made originally by men, but trodden by game descending from the hills to the plain.

Coming at length, after a tortuous and toilsome climb, to the summit, John paused to take breath and to look about him. Below on his left he could now see the foaming river racing through the gorge. Beyond, the ground sloped gradually to the plain. There was no sound save that of the swirling water, no sign of the presence of men. He went on, until he came once more to the brink of the river, and a mile further on saw gleaming in the starlight a broad pool, in the midst of which rose a dark mass. This, said the prisoner, was the island and fort, and at the upper end of the pool the river ran down swiftly, but not so swiftly as below.

Striking off to the right towards a belt of woodland, John led his party until they came opposite the island. It was dark and silent: no one would have supposed that the fort held men. John could see an irregular path leading from the shore to the island. This, said the prisoner, was a line of rocks flung down into the water, and so narrow that only one man could walk along it at a time. There was a gap between the island and the end of the causeway. The prisoner explained that a bridge was thrown over the gap to enable men to enter and leave the fort, the wall of which came to within a few feet of the shore of the island. At night the bridge was drawn up.

John stood to consider his next move. His purpose in bringing the prisoner was to use him as a decoy to draw the garrison from the fort. He was confronted with a difficulty. The man could not walk. He would be useless as a decoy unless he could advance along the causeway so far as to bring him within hearing of his fellows. The bullet was still in the man's leg; John wished he had thought of probing the wound before; it was impossible to do it now. The negro is a hardy animal, stolid under pain. John promised to give the man a handsome present if

he would leave the litter and go with a message to the fort. The man agreed with such alacrity as to suggest an intention of treachery, but John provided against that. He had the prisoner bound to him by a cord about his ankle, and showing him his revolver, he explained what the result would be if he did anything but what he was told to do. He carefully instructed the prisoner in the part he was required to play, repeating his words so that he could not mistake. Then, having placed the remainder of his party under cover of the wood, he set forth with the negro.

There was now a light in the fort, and the glow of a fire. Clearly somebody was awake. The two men walked down to the edge of the pool, and on to the causeway, the guide limping painfully, but uttering no murmur. John walked close behind him, so that he might not be descried from the fort. They had gone about half-way along the causeway when a voice rang out from some point ahead. The prisoner gave an answering shout. John's nerves were at too high a tension to permit of his feeling amusement at the greetings that were exchanged.

"Is it well?"

"It is well."

"Ah!"

"Ah!"

"Um!"

"Um!"

"Have you eaten well?"

"We have eaten well.

"Ma!"

"Ma!"

"Mum!"

"Mum!"

Civilities being thus completed, they got to business. The prisoner recited the story with which he had been prompted, so glibly that a white man might have doubted its veracity. He said that he brought good news. The brave warriors (meaning Juma's party), under their brave leader, had sacked the msungu's farm and the neighbouring village, and made much plunder, so vast a quantity, indeed, that they were exhausted in carrying it. He had been sent in advance to order thirty men to issue forth and help the weary warriors in conveying their spoils up the bluff.

"It is dark," said the sentry.

"It is the leader's command," was the reply. "He will be like a raging lion if you delay."

Another voice was heard within the fort. In a few moments the sentry

cried–

"We come."

"Ah!" said the prisoner.

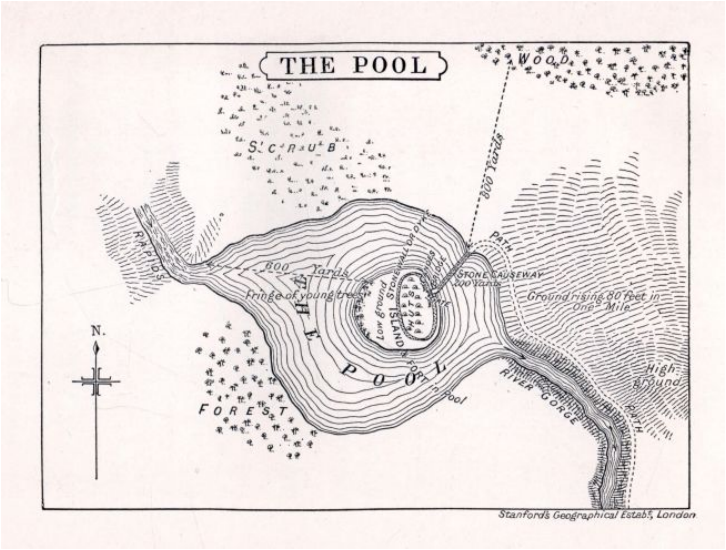
"Ah!" echoed the sentry.

Then, before the garrison could issue from the gate and lay the bridge across the gap, the prisoner cried that he would hasten back and inform Juma that the men were coming. He turned, and followed John along the causeway until they reached the shore. Then the two hurried across the open to rejoin the ambushed party. The prisoner, who had borne up stoically hitherto, collapsed with pain before they reached the wood; and John, alarmed lest his stratagem should be defeated at a moment when success seemed assured, set the man upon his back and ran into shelter. A few minutes afterwards he saw a line of men, headed by a Swahili in a white garment, come across the causeway from the fort, and turn to the right along the path leading to the bluff. John was tingling with excitement. All was going well: would his luck hold? The men's voices faded away in the distance. He gave them ten minutes; then bidding his men follow him closely, he ran down to the shore, and on to the causeway. As he expected, the bridge had been left spanning the gap in readiness for the laden safari. Waiting only to see that the men were close at his heels, John dashed over the last few feet, straight into the fort. A dozen men were squatting in a group about a small fire in the middle of the compound. They looked up as they heard the tread of men, but before they could spring to their feet, before, indeed, their slow minds suspected that anything was amiss, they were bowled over by the rush of twenty sturdy savages with a white man at their head, and lay in shaking terror on the ground, howling for mercy.

John had ordered his men to do no killing. They were surprised, but obeyed. Shouting for silence, he called to the panic-stricken garrison to march out of the fort. They sprang up and fled like a flock of terrified sheep, out of the gate and along the causeway, yelling as they ran. When the last was gone, and none but his own men were left in the place, John caught up the bridge and drew it in. The capture of the stronghold had taken three minutes.

# CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH–Juma is Reinforced

Flushed with his bloodless victory, John ordered his men to make up the fire, and set two to watch at the gate; then, carrying a roughly-formed torch, he proceeded to an examination of the stronghold which was so imposing to the native imagination. It was a poor enough place estimated from a European point of view. It consisted simply of a circular space on a low mound about thirty yards in diameter, enclosed by a rude stone wall rather less than the height of a man. The island itself was an irregular oval. At the eastern end the wall came to within a foot or two of its shore; north and south the interval was little greater, the ground sloping steeply down to the edge of the pool. Westward it fell away less rapidly, though even here the angle was considerable. The island was no more than sixty yards at its greatest length, and from forty to fifty in breadth. The bridge sloped up from the end of the causeway to the gate, which was itself some feet lower than the ground within the fort. Just within it, on each side, a canoe was laid against the wall. Within the enclosure were a number of grass huts, set at intervals of a few yards apart.




*The Pool*

Having surveyed the place as well as he could by the uncertain light of his torch, John searched the huts. He found in the largest of them, which he guessed to be Juma's, two of his rifles, a number of old muskets, a miscellaneous collection of cartridges, most of which would not fit the rifles, shot of all shapes and sizes,

one or two old swords, and a curious assortment of articles, mostly useless, which Juma and his men had no doubt purloined when on safari. Among them were broken boots, a fancy waistcoat in tatters, several condensed milk tins, some pewter spoons, a field-glass case, and an empty whisky bottle. These things, valueless to a European, would be treasure untold to the natives, and John was glad that his promise of loot would not be nullified. There was also a fair quantity of grain food, but no meat.

"I think I'm a bit of a fool," said John to himself, when he had seen all there was to be seen. "What have I come for after all? I've got back our property, to be sure; but what then? I can't demolish the fort before Juma arrives. I can't go back at once, because the men couldn't stand it. It looks as if I shall have to hold the place, for a day at least; and if those beggars come up in any numbers and manage to cross the pool I shall be pretty hard put to it to defend a hundred yards of wall. Ah well! I'm in for it now. The best thing I can do is to get out as soon as possible."

He arranged for a watch to be kept up during the remainder of the night, and then threw himself down on the ground near the fire, not to sleep, for the negro is an untrustworthy sentry, but to turn things over in his mind. He remembered the store of ivory which Bill wished to recover, and would have been willing to help the old man; but when he considered the matter he concluded that it would be sheer lunacy to venture with his handful of men into the country of a tribe that had been strong enough to annihilate a large and well-armed Arab safari. There was no reason to suppose that the "bad men" were any less powerful now than they had been then.

"And suppose I got the ivory," he thought, "how the dickens could I carry it? The men have got quite enough to carry, what with the loot here and the things left with Charley. Judging by the weight of billiard balls a single tusk of ivory would be a pretty heavy load for two or three men, and we might be two or three weeks getting back. Bill will be upset, without a doubt, but I can't help that. A good rest, and then start for home: that's my ticket."

Pondering further, he came to the conclusion that there might after all not be the need for haste that he had at first imagined. Juma's men were thoroughly disheartened, no doubt; the garrison at the fort had been turned adrift; they had lost the greater part of their firearms and ammunition and all their stores of food, and it was probable that for the present they would have enough to do to find subsistence without wasting their energies in attacking either him or Ferrier. His own men had been marching or fighting, with only a few hours' sleep, for two days; a long rest was necessary for them; so he decided, before he fell into a half-doze from which the least sound would have roused him, that he might look forward to spending a day or two in the fort before he need set off to rejoin

Ferrier.

At dawn he was up, and went to the gate to look round. None of the enemy were in sight, except his wounded prisoner, whom he saw hobbling across the causeway. In the excitement of the attack he had clean forgotten the man, who, he remembered with compunction, must have been all night in the wood, hungry, a prey to terror and pain. He let down the bridge and admitted him at once.

"Let me look at your leg," he said.

Removing the bandages, he saw that it was a case for desperate remedies.

"You must let me cut the bullet out," he said.

The man made no objection. John opened his knife and carefully washed the sharpest blade; then ordered two of the men to hold the patient, and began to probe the wound as gently as he could. The bullet was imbedded in the flesh where there was no danger of his severing an artery. He soon found the bullet, and setting his teeth, started the first surgical operation of his life. He had a steady hand: the man lay inert as a log, without wincing or even groaning; and in a few minutes he had extracted the bullet, feeling a vast admiration for the big fellow's fortitude. Having bathed and bound up the leg, he gave the man some food, and saw him in a few minutes fall asleep. John drew a good augury from this little incident. The man had sought him, and not his own master; John took it, perhaps superstitiously, as an indication that he, and not Juma, would, as he put it, "come out on top."

He sent out Bill, with one of the men, to look for the enemy. They returned early in the afternoon, reporting that they had failed to see either the men who had been ejected from the fort, or the larger party under Juma's command. Bill judged from the tracks that the former had scattered, some to the south to meet their friends, others to the east.

In the daylight John confirmed his overnight examination of the fort. He saw now that there were rapids at both ends of the pool, and sighed for leisure to do a little fishing, guessing that such a river would provide good sport. But he had something more serious to think about. After their night's rest the men were less fatigued than he had expected, so he saw no reason to defer the destruction of the fort. His purpose was to rase the wall, and hurl into the pool the stones of which it was built. They were piled loosely one upon another without cement or mortar, and he thought that it would be a light job to remove them; but it turned out to be a much more troublesome business than he had supposed, and when, after two hours' work, he saw how little had been accomplished he felt rather troubled. At the same rate it would take two or three days to complete the work. He had no gunpowder to spare for blowing up the wall; and he wished neither to remain so long absent from Ferrier, nor to be found on the spot when Juma returned, as he assuredly would do.

A little while after Bill had returned from his reconnoitring expedition he suddenly cocked his ear towards the south-east and in a moment declared that he heard the sound of fire-sticks. The men were chattering, and John fancied that the Wanderobbo must be mistaken. He called for silence, and all listened intently, but could hear nothing except the slow gurgle of the water in the pool and the far-away rumbling of the rapids below.

"Do you hear it now?" he asked.

"No," Bill replied; "but I did hear it."

John had by this time so much respect for the Wanderobbo's acuteness of hearing that he felt it unwise to neglect this statement. Bidding the men to sort out all the provisions the fort contained, with the idea of carrying a portion with him when he left, and burning the rest, he left the place with Bill, after giving strict orders that the bridge should be taken up behind him, and not replaced over the gap until his return, unless he should send back a message by Bill. The two crossed the pool and set off at a rapid pace towards the bluff. They were half-way to the summit when Bill declared that he again heard shots. They quickened their pace, and on reaching the top, where a wide expanse of the plain was outstretched before them, they looked carefully all round the southern horizon, keeping under cover. They could see the river winding along between its verdurous banks, and when they lost sight of the shining water they could still trace its course by the fresher green of the vegetation. The plain was covered for the most part with grass, with patches of scrub and clumps of woodland here and there. In the far distance they descried a herd of antelope feeding, but for some time saw no other living creature, beast or man.

All at once both started. In the still air, above the sound of the swirling water beneath them, they heard distinctly six shots. One of them, Bill declared, was that of the msungu's rifle, though John was utterly unable to understand how he could distinguish it from the others. Some seconds afterwards Bill lifted his hand and pointed in a south-easterly direction, saying that he saw smoke among the trees. John looked eagerly in the same direction, but could see nothing. Unluckily he had left his field-glass with Ferrier. Presently he heard more shots, in rapid succession. Clearly there was fighting going on; the natural inference was that Ferrier's party was engaged, and since only he, Coja, and Said Mohammed could use rifles, the number of the shots showed that his opponents must possess firearms. It was equally clear that Ferrier, if it was indeed he, had left the spot where it had been arranged that he should await John's return, and he must be either pursuing or pursued. The conclusion was irresistible that for some unforeseen reason he had found himself compelled to advance towards John.

Anxious on his friend's behalf, John decided instantly that he must set out at once to join hands with him. He sent Bill back to call the men from the fort,

telling him that they must bring the ammunition and rifles for those who could use them. He himself would start towards the firing, pointing out to Bill the general direction in which he would go. He knew that the men, being rapid marchers when not carrying loads, would not be long in overtaking him. The fort must be left unguarded, but there was no help for it; the matter of immediate urgency was to reinforce Ferrier.

While Bill sped back to the fort, John scrambled down the bluff and hurried over the plain. As he proceeded the sounds of firing became ever clearer, and when he had covered about two miles at a swinging pace he could also hear shouts.

He had come almost to a thin belt of forest when he saw figures approaching among the trees. Dropping down behind a bush, he eagerly watched them. At the edge of the forest they came clearly into view, and he saw that they were black men, marching in single file, rapidly, in spite of heavy loads. From behind them came at short intervals the still louder crack of rifles, and the more voluminous shouts of men. In a few moments he recognized them as men of his safari, and rose to meet them. His figure suddenly appearing above the bush startled them, and they instantly dropped their loads with yells, and began to run away. But a shout from him dispelled their fright; they turned, and hastened towards him, leaving their loads, however, where they had thrown them.

When they met him they told him in accents of terror that the msungu was fighting with a great host of bad men. Two or three showed wounds they had received. John ordered them to return to their loads and take them up, and then to look out for the party following him. He hurried forward into the wood, and half-a-mile further on came upon Ferrier with the rest of the safari, slowly retiring before a horde of savages. He had supposed that the "great host" of which the porters had spoken was an exaggeration born of their panic, but he saw that Ferrier and his men were, in fact, holding at bay a crowd of natives, among whom he perceived the white garments of Swahilis. Ferrier had Coja on his right and Said Mohammed on his left, each at a few yards' interval, the remainder of the party, armed only with bows and arrows, being spread out on each side over a considerable space to avoid the risk of being outflanked. They were retiring slowly, taking cover behind trees, picking off any of the enemy who showed themselves. Ferrier himself was a dead shot now that he had recovered the full use of his arm. Several men had fallen to his unerring aim. What execution Coja and Said Mohammed did John never knew; but their shots had been effective in daunting the enemy, who had not dared to come too near, or to make a rush. With a little more courage and generalship the savages, vastly outnumbering the safari, could have swept round them and had them at their mercy; but the young Canadian had hitherto managed to hold off the bolder spirits who pressed him in

front, and the others followed on without as yet attempting a flanking movement.

"Good man!" cried John, as he hastened to Ferrier's side. "My lot are coming up. We had better get out of this wood, or they'll be all round us."

They retired more quickly. It was time, for when they reached the plain, they saw that parties of the enemy, who had at last realized that they were losing opportunities, had crept round to right and left. John instantly sent a shot among the nearer crowd, causing them to scatter. Then, perceiving that another party had slipped by and was hastening in pursuit of the porters, he called some of the bowmen, who were mightily encouraged by his arrival, and set off in chase. Another shot sent this party flying. John saw that the river would form an excellent defence to the left flank of his little force, and running back to Ferrier, he asked him to edge nearer to it.

"If we can only manage to keep them off until our men have had time to climb the bluff, we can make a bolt for it," he said. "Up there among the boulders we can hold our own against any number."

They retired slowly towards the belt of trees fringing the river. By the time they reached it Bill came up with the party from the fort. This reinforcement, together with the more advantageous position of the retiring force, served to check the pursuit. The enemy were not courageous enough to dash past them within range, though their numbers were so great that they could easily have afforded the loss of a few men. The only means they had of slipping past safely and overtaking the safari was either to make a wide detour across the plain, which would have given John's party time to reach the bluff before them, or to cross the river and make their way through the trees on the other bank; but the current here was swift enough to make fording dangerous. So they adopted neither course, but followed sullenly in the track of the party, firing at times, but never diminishing the distance between them.

Every now and then John crept out from cover to watch the progress of the porters. To his impatience they seemed to move extraordinarily slowly, and indeed their speed was much less than when he had first seen them, for they had reached the beginning of the ascent, and were tired with carrying their heavy loads. He could see them toiling up the bluff, not in a close line, but far apart, the rearmost being nearly half-a-mile behind the leader. At length he saw with relief that the last man was within a few yards of the summit.

"Now we'll give them a volley," said he, "and slip away."

All who had rifles accompanied him to the edge of the belt of trees, and at his word fired together at the enemy, who had halted as if undecided what to do. Another volley flashed from the second barrels; then, withdrawing among the trees, the party ran along in the direction of the bluff, reloading as they went. Within a few hundred yards they came without warning upon a band of twenty

or thirty natives with two Swahilis among them. They must have found a means of crossing the river, hastened along the opposite bank, and then recrossed ahead of John's party. There was no time for hesitation.

"All together!" shouted Ferrier.

They poured in a volley, emptying both barrels; then, with John and Ferrier at the head, charged straight at the enemy. The savages, themselves taken aback by this sudden and vigorous onslaught, were too much flurried to discharge their weapons. While they still hesitated, the two white men were upon them, smiting right and left with the stocks of their rifles, their native followers close at their heels, making the air ring with their shouts. The savages immediately in the path of John and Ferrier went over like ninepins; a way was cleft through the group; several fell to the spears of the natives; the rest turned and fled right and left with wild yells, some plunging into the river, the others dashing towards their comrades in the plain.

"Now for a sprint," cried John. "We're not far from the bluff."

They ran as fast as they could through the clinging undergrowth, emerged from cover when the rising ground told them that the end of their march was near at hand, and began to climb the steep ascent. The enemy, whose main body had hurried forward at the sound of firing in the expectation of finding their quarry engaged with the ambush, were driven frantic at the sight of their prey escaping them. Plucking up courage at last, they rushed forward in a yelling swarm, hoping to overcome the little party which had baffled them while it was still on the lower slope of the bluff, the path being so narrow that the climbers must go in single file. In a few brief sentences John ordered the bowmen to climb as quickly as possible, while with the rest he remained at the foot to check the rush. The enemy had come within two hundred yards before John and his companions had time to reload their rifles, which they had been unable to do during their dash through the undergrowth. But they came no nearer. A volley brought down several men in the front line of the mass, if the van of such a wild horde could be called a line. The rest wavered; while they hesitated the terrible bullets were again singing among them. It was enough: they broke and fled in disorder, sped by a flight of arrows from the men who had climbed the bluff and were able to shoot without the risk of injuring their friends below.

"I think that's the end," said John, panting as much with excitement as with his exertions. "Up you go, Coja!"

They hastened up the path, Ferrier and John the last two of the line. When they reached the top, where their men were awaiting them, they halted to look back over the plain.

"My word! you've done jolly well," cried John, as he saw the dusky throng halted below. "I had no idea there were so many of them. What happened,

Charley?"

"Yesterday afternoon, just after I had brought in those fellows we left at our little camp, the beggars made a sudden rush on us, springing up from nowhere, as it appeared. It was the same lot that we stampeded, but largely reinforced, and from what my men said, there's no doubt the newcomers belong to the same tribe I had trouble with when you rescued me. It was lucky we weren't completely taken by surprise. I had a sort of notion they might try on something of the sort. I don't believe they knew at first that you had gone, and their idea was to have their revenge for the slap we gave them. Juma was among them, Coja told me."

"The blackguard!"

"I had got the boma repaired where we burnt it, so that they couldn't get in, but they came all round us, keeping under cover, and thinking, I suppose, that they would starve us out. I felt I was in a bit of a fix. We might hold our own in the camp for three or four days; but I was afraid they'd stay there until you came back, and there was such a crowd of them, as you see, that I didn't see how you could possibly get through them. It struck me that the best thing I could do was to come after you and join forces while there was time; so I left the fires burning and slipped away in the middle of the night, making a detour round their camp, which they had pitched about a quarter of a mile up-stream. We couldn't march very fast with our loads, but the men were very plucky, and it wasn't till this afternoon that the beggars caught us. We had been fighting for about an hour when you came up, and I was jolly glad to see you, I can tell you, for they were beginning to press us very closely, and we couldn't have kept it up much longer. What luck have you had?"

"I've got the fort: I'll tell you all about it when we get there. By Jove! there is a lot of them. What are they up to?"

The enemy, numbering, as nearly as John could estimate, more than four hundred, had given up direct pursuit, evidently recognizing that to scale the bluff under the rifles of its defenders would be a hopeless task. They were marching rapidly to the right. In addition to the fighting men, there was also a large number of men and women carrying loads, no doubt provisions: these had only just come up with the main body.

"Is there any other way up the escarpment?" asked Ferrier, anxiously.

"Not that I know of. It looks as if they're going to make a round to the fort. We had better hurry on."

They turned about and marched rapidly after the men, who were already some distance away.

"I had begun to demolish the fort," said John, "which is a pity if they're going to besiege us. Perhaps they've had enough of it, though."

"Can't we repair it?"

"Unluckily we've pitched the stones of the wall into the pool surrounding it, and I'm afraid we can't fish them up again. It's a good job we hadn't done much. We were in the middle of the work when Bill heard your shots. He spotted your rifle; his hearing is amazingly acute."

"Well, it seems to me that we are in for a nice little campaign. It is to be hoped your friend Gillespie has started for the farm. I don't like to think of it being left."

"Let's see. He must just about have got my letter, I should think. I don't feel very anxious. We had no troubles except from lions and Juma, and the chief will lend a hand if any wandering tribe turns up, which isn't likely. No, Charley; the difficulty's here: and upon my word it looks as if we've got a campaign on our hands, as you say. However, here we are! There's the fort, and we've got to hold it, my boy."

"Right ho! I only hope it won't be another Ladysmith."

"Can't possibly. Our food won't last a week."

"Oh!" said Ferrier.

# CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH– John's Letter

In the comfortable dining-room of Mr. Gillespie's bungalow a merry party was assembled. At the right hand of Mr. Gillespie sat a handsome, well-preserved lady, who was fifty and looked forty-five. At the other end of the table, beside the hostess, was our friend Mr. Halliday, fresh and florid, evidently in the best of health. His neighbour on the right was a slim young girl in black; hers was a tall, well-set-up young man of twenty-five. Opposite these two, in due sequence, were a girl who might have been seventeen, and a youth a year or two older, so much like her that no one could have doubted they were brother and sister.

Laughter rang round the table; everybody seemed at the top of cheerfulness, except the girl in black. Even she smiled at a remark addressed to her by Mr. Halliday. There was a pause in the conversation as they devoted themselves to the sweets, which included a wonderful confection of native pine-apples. Then the lady next to Mr. Gillespie, in slow level tones, and with the clear enunciation

and scarcely perceptible burr of an educated Scotswoman, said–

"He's a dear boy, I'm sure. We could read so well between the lines of his letters that he thought me a very designing woman—-"

"A Delilah, Cousin Sylvia," said Mr. Halliday.

"You'd be the better for having your hair cut, Cousin David. I shouldn't allude to such a personal matter if I didn't hope that Mrs. Gillespie would back me up. *I've* done my best to improve you, and failed; perhaps public opinion will do some good."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Burtenshaw," said Mr. Gillespie. "He'll get a thorough crop before he goes up country, where barbers are unknown."

"But it won't matter then, where there's no one to see him.... It was plain John thought his father would marry me—-"

"The other way about, cousin," Mr. Halliday interposed. "He wouldn't suspect me of all men of fortune hunting."

"Listen to him!" exclaimed Mrs. Burtenshaw, drawing herself up with an affectation of injured dignity. "If any man wanted to marry me it could only be for my money, you see. As I was saying, John quite expects to be presented with a step-mother, and resents it, like all young things. Joe there wouldn't speak to me for a week when I married poor Burtenshaw. It's a nice kind of jealousy, don't you think so, Mrs. Gillespie?"

"Just like a dog's," said Mrs. Gillespie, in a tone that made every one laugh. "When we first came out we had a collie that couldn't see my husband put his arm round me without whining to be petted."

"John will be flabbergasted when he sees us," said the older of the two young men, referred to by his mother as Joe.

"Yes, wasn't it funny that he should come across them in the wilds of Africa, and rescue Poll from a game-pit without either of them knowing they were cousins?" said Helen, his sister. "It's quite a romance."

"Doesn't he know the relationship now?" asked Mrs. Gillespie.

"No," said Mr. Halliday, with a chuckle. "I asked him in one of my letters whether he had seen anything of the Brownes. You see, they talked of settling here, before they came into this fortune."

"That's all over now, of course," said Mr. Gillespie.

"I'm not so sure," said Joe Browne. "The people at home were very nice, and all that, but they're too stiff and starched after what we've been used to; wear high collars and kid gloves. I don't fancy Poll and I could settle down to that sort of thing."

"And I don't want you to," said Mrs. Burtenshaw. "I don't believe in healthy young men loafing about, and I tell my boys they'll have to work for their living just as if I were a poor woman."

"Capital!" said Mr. Gillespie. "And when they see what John has been doing I warrant they'll settle down as neighbours. There'll be quite a little colony of Scotsmen about Alloway soon, for I've no doubt you've Scotch blood in you, Miss Ferrier?"

"Diluted, Mr. Gillespie," said the girl in black. "My grandfather was a Scotsman, but he married a Frenchwoman–Canadian French, of course. Do you really think my brother will settle here?"

"Well, I can't exactly say," was Mr. Gillespie's cautious reply. "It seems very probable from what John says in his letters. Don't you like the prospect?"

"Oh, I shall live with Charley, of course; and if it's really as nice as he says–there isn't any real danger, is there?"

"A lion among the ladies!" cried Mr. Halliday, and they all laughed, Said Mohammed's quotation being common property among them. "I think you'll find it all right, my dear," he added in his fatherly way. "I dare say John and your brother between them have exterminated the lions in our neighbourhood by this time."

"I think Hilda was very plucky to come all this way alone," said Helen. "*I* shouldn't have had the courage."

"But I wasn't really alone," said Hilda Ferrier. "The people on the *Mauretania* were very kind, and I met you on the *Palawan*, you see. I was thinking more of the natives than of lions: of course, you can shoot lions."

"And you can shoot men, my dear," said Mr. Halliday.

"There, now you've frightened her," said Mrs. Burtenshaw, as a startled look crossed the girl's face. "What an absurd man you are, David! You've told us over and over again that the natives are perfectly friendly."

"So we found them, Cousin Sylvia. We had no trouble except with the thieves of our own safari. I grudge them the rifles they stole, that's a fact. I suppose that villain Juma has never dared to show his face in Nairobi again, Gillespie?"

"Not to my knowledge. He wouldn't bring your rifles if he did."

"Why did he steal them, then?" asked Helen.

"To shoot with, of course," said Oliver Browne. "What a question!"

"I thought he might want to sell them, or pawn them, or something."

"We've no pawn-shops in Nairobi," said Mr. Gillespie, laughing, "though I'm sorry to say we've some Indian money-lenders who've got their clutch on some of our poorer settlers. Juma won't try to sell the rifles here at any rate. I suppose he stole them to shoot with, as your brother says, though I confess it's a little odd. He has been a porter for several years past, and it isn't like porters to give up their trade. Perhaps he has taken a fancy for being independent, and has settled down somewhere with others of his kidney. The rifles would be very

useful to him in getting food. He's a scamp, though; for he has unquestionably deserted his wife, who has turned out a capital laundress, John says."

"He hasn't been back to the farm?" asked Mr. Halliday.

"John hasn't said so. I think my notion must be correct, because the man has led an adventurous life, and the only surprising thing is that he should go back to it after years of portering. I believe he once belonged to a party of Arab ivory-dealers–I can't call them hunters, for all they did was to buy, or steal, ivory from the Wanderobbo north of Kenya. They were smashed up a few years ago by a tribe of Embe or Rendili, and Juma was said to be the only one who escaped. He has always been a good porter, except for his temper, and people have put up with that because of his strength and ingenuity.... This is cheese from John's dairy, Mrs. Burtenshaw; I can recommend it."

At this point a black servant entered, carrying a letter on a salver.

"A letter from John himself," said Mr. Gillespie, glancing at the envelope. "Now we shall hear all the news."

He broke the envelope and cast his eye over the contents, the others waiting in silence to hear what he had to say. He looked up in a moment and gave a quick glance at Mr. Halliday. Then, still holding the letter, he smiled and said–

"Shall we go into the other room, Mother, and digest this letter with some coffee?"

"Very well, my dear," said Mrs. Gillespie, rising. No one could have detected from her placid face and natural movements that she was aware that something was wrong. Oliver, who was nearest to the door, held it while the ladies passed out, and stood back for the elder men to follow.

"Go on, my boy," said Mr. Gillespie. "I'll look out some cigars I want you to try; be with you in a moment."

He took Mr. Halliday by the arm as he was passing, shut the door, and putting the letter into his hand, said–

"Read that!"

This is what Mr. Halliday read–

DEAR MR. GILLESPIE,

The farm has been raided while we were away–got away by a trick. I suspect Juma and his gang. They collared all our rifles and ammunition. Ferrier and I are starting at once to follow them up. I want you to send up somebody at once–a white man–to give an eye to things. I dare say we shall be back by the time he gets here, but it'll be just as well to have somebody on the spot in case we're longer than I expect. Sorry to trouble you, but I've got to teach Juma a lesson.

"That's the explanation!" exclaimed Mr. Halliday. "Can I start to-night?"

"No. This may be a serious business–the young madcap! I hope he'll turn back if he doesn't catch them at once—-"

"That wouldn't be John. He'll go on till he has thrashed them."

"Then heaven help him! Man, he may find himself among a whole tribe of blood-thirsty savages. And the worst of it is we may not reach him in time. It's not merely a question of looking after the farm. We'll start as soon as it's light: I'll get a party together."

"The police?"

"No: can't wait for them. I'll go down to the club and get some fellows I can rely on. We'll go on horses and mules. We had better not alarm the women."

"We must tell them something. Better out with it, I think. They'll only think it worse than it is if they see we're keeping something back."

"Couldn't be worse. Well, perhaps you are right; but don't let 'em see we're put about."

"All right. Give me a cigar."

They strolled into the other room smoking, showing no trace of their anxiety. Mrs. Gillespie looked up quickly as her husband entered, but only said–

"Come, your coffee is poured out and getting cold."

"My own growing, ma'am," said Mr. Gillespie to Mrs. Burtenshaw, as he took his cup, "and I hope you like it."

"Mother couldn't say she doesn't, could she?" said Helen archly. "*I* like it very much."

"Helen speaks for us all," said Mrs. Burtenshaw. "Well, what does John say?"

"Any news of the failed B.A.?" asked Joe.

"He doesn't mention him this time. In fact, it's just a note: you can't call it a letter. He has had to leave the farm for a day or two, and wants me to send up a man to look after things in his absence."

"Has Charley gone too?" asked Hilda Ferrier.

"Yes, they've both gone, or it wouldn't be necessary to ask for a man. It's lucky Mr. Halliday is on the spot, so we shan't have to hire anybody."

"Gone shooting, I suppose," said Joe.

"Or after strayed sheep," said Oliver. "They're always a trouble."

"But I don't understand," said Hilda. "You say they have gone: why didn't John get somebody before he went?"

"That shows it's sheep," replied Oliver quickly. "He'd have to start at once

or he wouldn't stand much chance of getting 'em all. That's it, isn't it, Mr. Gillespie?"

"Well, no, not exactly."

"In fact," said Mr. Halliday quietly, "the farm has been robbed, and as there are no policemen in the neighbourhood, John has had to go after the robbers himself."

"Gone shooting: I said so," remarked Joe.

"Don't be absurd, Joe," said Helen.

"I'm going to take Halliday down to the club, if you'll excuse us," said Mr. Gillespie. "He'll start for the farm to-morrow—-"

"So soon!" interrupted Joe quickly. "I thought we should all go together at the end of the week."

"I must go to-morrow," said Mr. Halliday, "and as I shall be off before you're up in the morning I'll say good-bye now. I'll be back in a few days, and then you can all come and view our estate. It's just as well that I am going first, for we shall have to get some rooms ready for you, you know."

He shook hands all round, and left with Mr. Gillespie, who had been speaking in an undertone to his wife. Joe Browne followed them from the room.

"I say, Cousin David," he said, "what's up?"

Hesitating a moment, Mr. Halliday put John's note into his hand. Joe whistled softly.

"I'm coming," he said. "So will Poll. What time do you start?"

"My dear boy, your mother—-"

"Mother's an old trump. I shall tell her the exact state of the case quietly, of course; I won't scare the girls; and she won't turn a hair. We'll ride, I suppose? You can get us mounts, Mr. Gillespie?"

"Yes. We'll start at sunrise. You've got khaki and sun helmets?"

"Of course. We'll be ready, sir, Poll and I."

At six o'clock next morning a party of ten rode out of Nairobi. It consisted of the four men we know, with five friends of Mr. Gillespie and a Somali guide. Six were mounted on horses, the rest on mules. Two members of Mr. Gillespie's household watched them leave. One was his wife, who bid them Godspeed at the door; the other was Hilda Ferrier, who had passed a sleepless night, and looked forth from the window of her room with tired and anxious eyes.

# CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH–

# An Attack in Force

It was within an hour of sunset when John and Ferrier reached the fort. They looked first of all to see whether it was possible to raise the stones which had been cast into the pool, for the purpose of repairing the wall, and found, as John had suspected, that they were too deep below the surface.

"We must make the best of it," said John. "It's lucky we hadn't got more of the wall down. They won't bother us to-night, that's one comfort. They'll think twice before crossing the causeway in the dark."

It proved as he had said. A careful watch was kept all through the night, but nothing happened to disturb them. As soon as there was a glimmer of light John went to the gate with Ferrier to survey the surroundings. Except for the clump of woodland half-a-mile away on the east there was nothing that afforded good cover, and it struck Ferrier that it would be a good plan to seize the wood with the fighting men before the enemy could occupy it. But when he passed over the causeway with John and a dozen of the natives they discovered to their vexation that they were too late. They had advanced but a short distance when they were met by a volley from among the trees, and though none of the party was hit, John considered it prudent to retire into the fort and await developments there.

During the rest of the day the enemy made no serious attack. The smoke from their camp-fires was seen rising above the trees, and now and then a shot was fired if any of the garrison showed themselves at the gate or in the gap of the wall; but the enemy were indifferent marksmen, and the day passed without casualties.

"Things don't look very rosy, do they?" said Ferrier, as he lay on the ground discussing the situation with John. They had found when they came to look into matters that some of the porters during their hurried flight had abandoned their loads. Two boxes of ammunition were missing, and several baskets of provisions. Said Mohammed was in great distress at the loss of the package containing cocoa, condensed milk, and marmalade. This, however, was not so serious as the loss of grain. The total food supply, including the provisions found in the fort, would not last more than three or four days; and John, though he did not say so, thought that Ferrier would have done better to retreat towards the farm than to advance chivalrously to rejoin him. He considered that it would have been possible for himself and his fighting men, unencumbered with baggage of any great weight, to have made a rapid march after demolishing the fort, and joined hands with

Ferrier probably twenty miles nearer home. But fate had ordained otherwise; the situation must be faced as it existed.

"Things certainly do not look rosy," John replied to Ferrier's remark, "but they might be worse–which is a pretty rotten platitude when you come to think of it. It looks as if they mean to keep us boxed up here. We shall have to get out when our food's exhausted, or starve, and I'm inclined to think we had better make a dash for it at once, before the men get weak. These natives who live mostly on grain food soon crock up: they haven't anything like our reserve strength, whatever the vegetarians may say."

"I don't know. My poor father and I passed through a village where the people hadn't had any food for a week, and it was wonderful to see how energetic they were when they saw us coming. They were all skin and bone, dreadful-looking objects; but they weren't anything like so crocked as we should be."

"Well, I suppose it all depends on what you are used to. We'll discuss the pros and cons of vegetarianism when we're out of this and have got a full choice of either food. At present we are likely to become air-eaters before long."

"Aerophags, eh? or chameleons: they're supposed to live on air, aren't they?"

"You seem very chirpy."

"Well, old chap, the fact is I'm so uncommonly glad we're both alive that I am perhaps inclined to be a little—-"

"Light-headed," suggested John.

"If you must be serious, I don't think your notion of an immediate dash is a good one. The men have had a lot of hard marching, and we ought to give them a good rest–a full day, at any rate."

"I dare say that would be wise, but the worst of it is that it will give time for that crowd outside to grow still bigger, and the chances of our getting through them safely will be slighter than ever."

"But remember they've got to eat, as well as we, and the more there are of them the worse their position. The country we came through was practically barren, and when they have used up the food they have with them they'll have to range about for more. That'll be our chance. I vote we sit tight for a while."

"All right. Here's Said with our supper: what is it to-night, khansaman?"

"I suffer pangs, sir, in serving gents with such slops, et cetera, but cupboard is bare, sir, to quote classic of Mother Hubbard; all I can provide for sustenance is cassava bread, beans, and bovril. Incredulity of native mind, sir, is as colossal as credulity. Carved wooden stick is a devil right enough: but when I tell them my little brown bottle contains concentrated essence of stall-fed ox, lo! they grin all over their mug and ask where are its four legs."

"That's rather a good thing, for they won't envy us our supper. We shall

do very well, as long as it lasts."

"Ah, sir, I remember the beautiful words of Dr. Johnson, great lexicographer: 'And every moment makes my little less.' Hunger is the best sauce, sir, but it does not fill the saucepan."

This night, like the last, was undisturbed. On the afternoon of the next day, when John had ceased to look for any offensive movement on the part of the enemy, he saw a great crowd of them issue from the wood, and come yelling across the ground towards the causeway.

"Hallo! They're getting desperate," he said to Ferrier. He immediately brought up all the men who had firearms and placed them at the gap in the wall, bidding them keep under cover and fire when he gave the word. The yelling horde were met by a volley just as they reached the landward end of the causeway; but though several men dropped it did not check the rush, and John concluded from their intense excitement that they had been stimulating their courage with fermented liquor. Some sprang on to the causeway, and began to run across it; others took to the water, which soon swarmed with black heads moving towards the fort. The garrison fired as fast as they could reload, but the men rushing in single file along the causeway did not present a good target, and the swimmers were far too numerous to be dealt with by a dropping fire from the wall. The defenders in their turn were how the mark for a fusillade from the further shore of the pool, where several Swahilis had taken up their position, finding a little shelter in the reeds, and doing their best to cover the attack of the natives. John looked eagerly among them for the big form of Juma, resolving if he saw him to pick him off; the fall of their leader might demoralize or dishearten the rest. But Juma never came in sight; apparently he was directing the movement from a place of safety in the rear.

The men running across the causeway sprang into the water when they came to the gap from which the bridge had been removed, and, swimming under water, sought to scramble on to the narrow shelf of land which ran beneath the wall at this part. At the same time those who had swum round on either side were swarming on hands and knees up the steep bank. The attack began to look more serious than John had anticipated. There were several hundreds of the assailants, and to meet these he had but forty-three, of whom only ten had rifles. The difficulty was increased by the fact that when the enemy succeeded, as some of them did, in effecting a lodgment, it was necessary that his men should show themselves above the wall in order to shoot down upon them, thus becoming exposed to the fire from the Swahilis. Leaving his riflemen at the gap to deal with the men who came over the causeway and to keep down as much as possible the fire from the shore, John ran with Ferrier to whatever part of the wall was at the moment the most seriously threatened. He had already proved the poor

marksmanship of the Swahilis, and, seeing that the enemy must be prevented at all costs from entering the fort, he no longer troubled to seek cover, but ordered the men to mount the wall and make the most of their advantage in being several feet above their attackers. Ferrier and he, fully exposed to the enemy's fire, ran from place to place encouraging the men, grasping their rifles by the barrel so as to use them as clubs if any of the storming party came near the top of the wall.

The extent of rampart to be defended was so great and the enemy so numerous that in spite of all efforts many of them succeeded in scrambling up the mound. Then, having reached the top, they set their feet in crevices between the stones and clambered up with great agility, with spears in their mouths. But no sooner did they show their heads above the wall than John, or Ferrier, or some of the men were upon them, and with clubbed rifles, spears, or fists, hurled them down the slope and into the water. A few managed to mount on the wall before the defenders could reach them, and held their position for a minute or two, thrusting viciously with their spears and wounding several of the garrison. John noticed these, and, hastily loading, called to his men to drop down and then fired, following up the shot with a rush. This group waited for no more, but sprang from the wall, fell headlong on the slope, and rolled into the pool, whither one of their comrades, shot by John's rifle, had already preceded them.

In spite of these checks, the enemy still came on. Those who had been thrown down returned again to the assault, and were constantly reinforced by others. More parties gained a temporary footing on the wall; there was hand-to-hand fighting at several points at once; and John began to fear that his men would lose heart and give way before sheer weight of numbers. Neither he nor Ferrier could be everywhere, and it was noticeable that the enemy held their ground longest where the defenders had not the presence of the white men to give them confidence. The tide was turned at last by Said Mohammed, who had a brilliant inspiration. There was always a fire burning in the middle of the enclosure. It suddenly occurred to him, when he saw his party beginning to be hard pressed, to boil some water, and observing that John and Ferrier were occupied at two different points far apart, he ran towards the wall between them, where a group of the enemy were on the point of springing down into the enclosure. He carried a can full of boiling water. Aiming it at the biggest man of the group, just as he was bending forward to spring, the Bengali hurled the canful at his head. The scalding water fell not only on him, but on the man next him, and there rose two frightful yells which drowned all other sounds of combat. The injured men and their immediate comrades leapt frantically into the pool; their cries caused a weakening of the attack elsewhere; and the two white men, seizing the moment, though unaware at the time to what it was due, laid about them still more lustily with their rifles.

The savages on the side where Said Mohammed had so opportunely intervened were now seen swimming to the shore. Their panic was speedily communicated to their fellows, and in a few moments at least half of the attacking force were in retreat. The defenders being thus free to devote all their attention to the enemy in the other quarter, soon made short work of them, and after twenty minutes of exhausting effort they saw the whole force making shorewards, and scurrying back under cover. John's riflemen fired a few shots at them as they fled, but he put a stop to this, thinking that the punishment they had already received might have taught them a lesson and would break up the siege.

As he turned from the wall to see what casualties the garrison had suffered, Said Mohammed came up to him with his usually solemn face spread abroad with a smile. An empty can was swinging in his hand.

"I did that jolly well, sir: *Hoc solus feci*."

"By and by," said John impatiently, thinking that the Bengali had some trifling act to relate at epic length. Said Mohammed's smile vanished like an April sun behind a cloud. He looked sorrowfully after John's retreating form, then brightened a little as he caught sight of Ferrier.

"Esteemed sir," he said, advancing towards him, "this humble billy was the *Deus ex machina*."

"Eh! What! You aren't hurt, are you?" said Ferrier, hurrying by.

"Only in my soul," muttered Said Mohammed, gloom descending upon him. "'Slow rises worth by poverty depressed.'"

John and Ferrier spent the next half-hour in attending to the wounded. Not a man had been killed; but several were suffering from spear wounds, and still more from rifle shots. The white men were again struck by the uncomplaining patience of the injured men.

"You may call it a lack of sensibility if you like," said Ferrier, "but I guess it's a fine thing from a military point of view."

"One can understand how Wellington's army in the Peninsula, the scum of the earth, as he called them, did what they did. I wish we could do something for these poor chaps. One of them is done for, I'm afraid; I don't feel fit to-day to dig out the bullets from the others. All we can do is to bathe 'em and bandage them up; they've astonishing vitality. Did you read some time ago about a fellow who got a bullet in him in the Franco-Prussian war, and didn't have it removed till thirty years afterwards? Hallo! You've had a knock yourself."

"So have you."

"I didn't know it," said John, looking himself up and down.

"I'm sorry to say it's behind," said Ferrier, with a smile: "just under your shoulder. You'd better take your shirt off and let me see to it."

"After you. You've got a pretty gash in your neck. My face must have

scared 'em, and they didn't recover till I had turned, and then jabbed me in the back."

"If we were only outside, Bill might find some of his herbs and plaster us. However, we're lucky to have got off so well, and I hope we shan't have anything worse to go through before we get back."

Said Mohammed was unwontedly silent when he brought their supper. He handed them their bovril and cassava cakes without a word. John suddenly remembered that he had brushed hastily past the Bengali just as the fight was over.

"By the way, khansaman," he said, "you began to tell me something. Sorry I was too busy to attend to you. What was it?"

"Trifling matter, sir, not worthy of august attention," murmured the man.

"You made some remark about your billy, didn't you?" said Ferrier. "I didn't quite catch it."

"Foreign lingo, sir: in short, Latin, reformed pronunciation."

"Ah! that accounts for it. I was taught by an old Westminster man. You should take pity on my ignorance, khansaman."

"Accepting your invite, sir, I take you back to critical moment when all seemed U P. The hour brings forth the man. There came into my mind the lovely words of Alfred Lord Tennyson, poet laureate–

Fill the can, and fill the cup:
All the windy ways of men
Are but dust that rises up,
And is lightly laid again.

There was the enemy, rising up like dust; here was the can, ready to be filled. Whereupon I filled it in a jiffy, boiled it in the time ordained by nature, and with this right hand hurled it in teeth of the foe. The dust was laid, sir. Q.E.F."

"By Jove!" cried John, "I wondered why they slackened off all of a sudden. You did jolly well, khansaman."

"Shows the usefulness of English literature," said Ferrier gravely. "You never know what inspiration it may give at times of difficulty and danger."

"Verree true, sir; and it makes me feel jolly bucked to know I have such spanking good memory."

# CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH–

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# Trapped

The failure of their determined assault had evidently discouraged the enemy, for during the following day they scarcely showed themselves. John was disappointed, however, to find that it had not caused them to break up their camp. The stock of food in the fort was seriously deplenished; but after the spirit the enemy had displayed he felt that the chances of surviving a running fight with them would be small. The notion of slipping away in the darkness again occurred to him, and as he talked it over with Ferrier it suddenly came into his head to make a preliminary night sortie himself, to see how the land lay on the side of the fort remote from the enemy.

"We can carry one of the canoes to that end, lift it over the wall, and launch it without being seen."

"If there are none of the enemy about," said Ferrier. "You remember we saw a party of them cross the river to-day and march in that direction, foraging, I suppose."

"Yes, but we've never seen or heard a sign of them at night."

"That's true."

"And I say, I've another idea. We want food badly: why shouldn't I go out at night with Bill and a few others and shoot something?"

"Are you quite mad, my dear chap? Your shots would bring them on you in no time."

"Of course I shouldn't attempt to shoot anything until we were miles away from the camp. We could cover five or six miles before it was light, and if we take care not to go to windward they won't hear a single rifle-shot. A volley would be a different thing, I grant you."

"I doubt whether the reeds on that side of the pool are thick enough to hide the canoe, and if they discover it—-"

"There's no need to hide it," John interrupted. "One of the men can paddle it back, and come for us again when we give you a hail. We shall have to return by night, of course."

"Well, you bowl over my objections one after another, so I suppose you must go. Can't I come too?"

"We can't both leave the place."

"Well, why shouldn't I go and you stay?"

"You see, I understand Bill better than you do, and he'll be the one to find the game. I really think, Charley, this time—-"

"Oh, all right!" said Ferrier, interrupting. "This time, and that time, and all the other times!"

"But you fired the boma!"

"Is that to last me for ever?"

"And came to find me, fighting: what about that? Still, if you want to go—-"

"Not a bit of it, old man. It's your idea; you go; I'll run over in my mind all the poetry I know and see if I can get a happy thought like Said Mohammed."

Two hours before dawn the canoe was gently lowered by ropes over the wall at the end of the fort opposite the gate. Here, it will be remembered, the slope of the ground immediately beneath the wall was steep, but the island jutted out, in a fairly level spit, for some distance into the pool. John, the Wanderobbo, and five other men were let down in the same way, four of them to accompany John as carriers of any game he might obtain, the fifth to paddle the canoe back when they had landed. The night was very dark; they moved with scarcely a sound; and having gained the further shore John and his companions struck off across country.

John's intention had been to go directly north, but when Bill told him that the banks of the river would be the most likely quarter in which to find game at sunrise, when the animals came down to drink, he resolved to strike off in a north-westerly direction, from which quarter the wind blew, and gain the river somewhere north of the rapids. They marched very quickly, the plain on this side of the river being open, came to the river-bank in about half-an-hour, and then tramped along up-stream, careful not to approach the water too closely for fear of crocodiles. At dawn they were, John thought, at least five miles from the fort, but he decided to go a mile or two farther before beginning operations, to lessen any risk of shots being heard in the camp.

The river wound this way and that, now between level banks, now bordered by steep bluffs thick with overhanging trees. The current was always swift, and John had been conscious ever since the start that the ground was gradually rising. Bill did not stick closely to the river: indeed, that would have been impossible; he sought the easiest way, which led sometimes through scrub, sometimes over stretches of bare rock which tried John's boots sorely, sometimes through patches of woodland: always, however, coming to the river at last. From one elevated position to which they came John looked back and, now that the morning haze had lifted, saw the river serpentining behind him, and in the far distance the pool gleaming in the sunlight, the island and fort a dark spot in the midst.

At last he considered that he had come far enough to be out of earshot from the enemy's camp, and since the nearest village, the abode of the "bad men," was about a day's march to the north-west, he felt that no danger was to be anticipated from that quarter. Accordingly the party of six descended to the level of the

river, and Bill began his search for game-tracks. The river here flowed through narrow channels between great boulders of a pinkish rock, the brink being lined with reeds. Before long Bill came upon the spoor of a hippopotamus, and since necessity knows no law, John thought himself justified in following it up, in spite of the technical transgression of the terms of his licence. He was not shooting for sport, he reflected, but for food.

They came at length to a rocky pool. Bill halted, and pointing to an overhanging rock on the other side, drew John's attention to a gentle rippling disturbance of the water. In a moment appeared two red nostrils covered with coarse black hair. John lifted his rifle, but Bill signed to him to wait, and after a few seconds the nostrils sank below the surface: the animal had merely risen to breathe. They all sat down on the bank to await his reappearance. Several times during half-an-hour he showed just as much of himself, and no more. This was tantalizing. Would he never emerge? John's patience at length gave out. He thought that if he could cross to the other side he might get a fair shot at the beast, or at least stir him to movement. Looking down-stream, he saw that some little distance away the surface of the river was broken, which indicated shallow water. He hastened to the spot, and stripping to his shirt, waded across waist deep, climbed the bank, and stealthily crept up until he came directly over the place where the hippo had last appeared.

Scarcely had he arrived there when the beast heaved its great back, with a convulsion of the water, above the surface a little farther up the pool. In an instant the rifle was at his shoulder: he fired; the hippo gave a snort, and the water around him was agitated as by an immense churn. Quick as thought John fired the second barrel: and the beast rolled over on its side, with a bullet through the brain.

The four porters shouted with delight, and plunged into the water to drag the carcase to the bank with the cords they had brought with them. The current, however, carried it downwards, and wedged it between two rocks so tightly that, when they had tied the cords to the feet, all their hauling failed for a time to dislodge it. John was determined to secure the prey, which would provide two days' food for his whole party, so he stripped off his sole remaining garment and, first spying for crocodiles, swam to the assistance of the men. After ten minutes' hauling the unwieldy body was freed from the detaining rocks and drawn slowly to the bank.

The men immediately set to work to cut it up with their knives. While they were engaged in this task, John resolved to go a little farther in search of more delicate fare for Ferrier and himself. Rolling on the grass to dry himself, he put on his clothes and set off up-stream with the Wanderobbo, instructing the others to retrace their steps slowly so soon as they had tied up their loads. They had

"The hippo gave a snort, and the water around him was agitated as by an immense churn."

*"The hippo gave a snort, and the water around him was agitated as by an immense churn."*

proceeded but a short distance when Bill discovered the track of congoni which had recently come down to the river to drink. Following it up, they by and by came in sight of a small herd moving leisurely across the plain to the left. Being to windward of them, it would be impossible to stalk them directly. The only chance of getting a shot was to make a long detour and come upon them from the further side. John's sporting instincts were roused. There was no fear of losing the track of his men, so he struck off with Bill at right angles to the river, and after walking rapidly for half-an-hour in a wide curve, Bill never losing sight of the game, they got ahead of them, and took cover in a clump of trees which the animals must pass if they did not change their direction. They came very slowly, and before reaching the trees swerved somewhat to the right. It was now or never. John took aim at the nearest of the herd, which presented its flank to him. His first shot brought it down: the rest, raising their heads and looking round for a moment, galloped off; and Bill hurried forward with John to cut from the dead beast as much as he could carry.

It was by this time more than an hour since they had left the men; and since it would be at least another hour before they could overtake them, John decided to hurry back as soon as Bill had prepared his load. He was sitting at the edge of the clump of trees, clasping his knees, and watching Bill's deft movements a few yards away, when he heard a slight rustling behind him. Thinking it might be a lion or hyena attracted by the scent of the game, he sprang up, grasping his rifle, only to be thrown on to his back by the onset of near a score of yelling savages. He had no opportunity of defending himself. His rifle had been knocked from his hand and was now in the possession of a tall Swahili, who grinned at him with malicious triumph as he lay on the ground, and ordered the savages to turn him over and tie his hands behind his back. Meanwhile some of the party had dashed after the Wanderobbo, who had fled towards the river at the first alarm. The old man was soon caught; John was hoisted to his feet; and in a few minutes he had the mortification of knowing that he was being marched, a prisoner, in a direction the exact opposite of the fort.

The men were in an ecstasy of delight over their capture. They laughed and jabbered among themselves, but John was unable to recognize the dialect. He could not ask Bill who they were, for the crestfallen old man was kept at a distance from him. His hands also had been tied behind his back. John ventured once to speak to the Swahili, but the only answer was a grunt.

They marched on, with intervals for rest, but without food, for the rest of the day. The country became more and more hilly as they proceeded, but the Swahili, who led the way, was evidently familiar with it. Just before sunset they came in sight of a stockaded village, perched up on a hill, and surrounded by wide well-cultivated fields. The Swahili called a halt while they were still some

distance from the stockade, and, leaving his prisoners in the charge of a dozen of the men, went forward with the rest to the gate. There he held a long parley with the villagers, whom John could see thronging the stockade. The Swahili turned several times and pointed towards him, and then the talk began again, with much excited gesturing. John could not guess the meaning of the pantomime; the only thing that was clear was that it had some reference to him. At length, when it was almost dark, the Swahili turned away from the gate and came back to the remainder of his party. Whatever the subject of the discussion had been, the result was evidently satisfactory, for a contented smile overspread the man's swarthy face. He gave a curt order to the men: the prisoners were lifted from the ground where they had been laid, and urged towards the village with ungentle proddings from their captors' spears. They entered the gate and passed through a vast throng of excited people. John was now able to exchange a few words with Bill, who told him miserably that this was the village of the "bad men" who had destroyed the ivory caravan. There was no time for more; the two prisoners were again separated; amid yells from the men and shrieks of laughter from the women John was hustled into a noisome hut, and there left, tired and famished, to chew the cud of bitter reflection, amid the pressing attentions of innumerable pestilent insects.

"Here's a pretty go!" he thought. "I suppose they won't eat me, but what will they do? This Swahili is surely one of Juma's gang, but what is he doing here? If what Bill says is true, there'll be no love lost between Juma and these people. What a precious fool I've been! I wonder if those poor wretches with the hippo meat are collared too? Good heavens! if they get back safe to the fort, I hope Ferrier won't be mad enough to come to the rescue. If he does it's good-bye for us all. Oh! *what* a fool I am!"

To know one's folly is a stage towards wisdom: many men never get so far.

John groaned, and shook his head and body in a vain attempt to get rid of his persistent visitors. He tried to release his arms, but failed. At last, exhausted by fatigue and want of food, and resigned to the stings he could not avoid, he fell into an uneasy sleep.

Next morning, as soon as it was light, he was taken out of the hut, his arms were unbound, and he was given a bunch of bananas, which he ate ravenously, surrounded by a chattering, grinning crowd of villagers, men, women, and children, who watched him curiously, making what he felt to be very personal remarks. He looked around for his companion in misfortune, but could not see him. He made signs that he was thirsty, and a girl brought him a gourd of a sweetish-bitter liquor, which he drained at a draught, and felt so silly that he wondered if he was drunk. Then there was a great shouting, and the men went away. On their departure the women drew nearer, touched his clothes and his bandolier

and ran back giggling, pointed to his fair skin where his shirt was open at the neck, whereat he blushed and they shrieked. One sportive damsel tugged at the leather watch-chain attached to his belt, and screamed when his silver watch came out of its fob. He thought with a kind of fuddled amusement that he might impress them by letting them hear it tick, and when one came and tried to pull his hair, he held the watch to her ear, and she fled away screeching.

What was going on? he wondered. There was a great stirring in the village. A man passed, and John saw that his face was hideously daubed with white, and his head surrounded with the skin of some animal. He carried a spear. Others similarly attired and armed came by. He got up to watch them more closely, and the spectators fell back and made a wide circle about him. Beyond them, in the centre of the village, men were thronging together. It flashed upon him in a moment: they were forming a war-party. The Swahili had come to enlist their aid. What inducements he had held out could only be guessed. Probably he had told them that a white man with great treasure was at their mercy. "Poor old Charley!" thought John: "it'll be a miracle if he isn't overwhelmed." For one mad moment he thought of making a dash to the gate, only to realize that he would never reach it alive. He groaned aloud, and the wretched little urchins around mocked him, booing with vast enjoyment.

Then he saw the Swahili approaching with the chief in all his war-paint. They stood opposite him, talking loud and fast, with many gesticulations. They were growing angry: what were they disputing about? The Swahili pointed in the direction of the fort: the chief shook his head and shouted. Could they be discussing whether to take him with them or leave him behind? With all his heart he hoped they would decide for the former course: he might perhaps escape from them when they approached the fort. But no: presently the Swahili sullenly gave way: John guessed that he felt that numbers were against him. What was his fate to be? Was he to be held as a hostage for the due fulfilment of promises held out? He could not tell. It was clear that he was to be left in the village.

The muster was complete. Amid a tremendous clamour the war-party moved towards the gate. With a sinking of the heart John guessed at their number: there must be three or four hundred. They marched out, the Swahili among them, leaving two of his party evidently to keep a watch on the prisoners–or the prisoner, for where was Bill? They had of course recognized him as a Wanderobbo: had they butchered him at once? No: there he was, at the entrance of a small hut thirty yards away. John took courage at the sight of him. If he was spared, it must be because, being employed by white men, he might have some commercial value. It occurred to John now that Juma, the prime mover in these machinations, would probably stop short of the actual murder of a white man, and might hold him to ransom. But this did not relieve his anxiety about Ferrier.

The young Canadian would certainly not yield without a struggle, and in that struggle he might well lose his life.

The two men left on guard tied his hands again and took him back to his hut. John made them understand by signs that he did not wish to be cooped up in its foetid atmosphere, and they let him sit at the entrance, standing close by with their spears. He saw now that he was at the highest part of the village, overlooking a vast expanse of the lower country. There was the war-party, already a dark blot amid the green. He could see the river winding its way for miles and miles over the plain, until it became little more than a silver streak in the sunlight. Was it his fancy, or did he descry in the far distance the island like a black spot on a silver plate?

Suddenly he remembered that he had in his pocket the little mirror with which he had signalled to Ferrier on the march from the farm. Perhaps he could signal to him now–tell him of his plight, and warn him of the reinforcement of the enemy. The warning would be of little use to him, for he could not materially strengthen his defences; but it would at least show him the folly and the impossibility of attempting a rescue. Neither his guards nor the villagers would understand what he was about. He took the mirror from his pocket. The group of onlookers who had never left him came nearer: what was this piece of solid water that the msungu held?

A woman approached him shyly: he held the mirror up to her; she caught sight of a black smiling face with sharp-filed teeth, and ran away in consternation, screaming that it was a devil. As she stood explaining the marvel to her friends, John threw a flash among them: they covered their eyes, and flew like the wind. Then he turned the glass towards the fort, and began to make tentative flashes. The guards watched him, curiously, stolidly; what was the msungu doing? Again and again he caught the sunbeam, and turned the mirror this way and that. For a long time there was no answer: he feared the signal had not been seen. Still he persevered. The guards had ceased to pay any attention to him. At last he thought he saw a twinkling point of light. Yes: there it was again: Ferrier was flashing back. Then he began to spell out his message–

"Prisoner: large war-party coming towards you. Good luck!"

And presently, with much difficulty, for Ferrier's watchcase was a poor instrument, he read the answer. He could not be sure of it, but it seemed to be–

"Poor old chap! Never say die."

# CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH– Shooting the Rapids

The curiosity of the villagers was lulled after a time, and they went about their usual occupations. The few men left lolled and loafed and played at knuckle-bones: the women went into the fields and returned loaded with vegetables. John found that he was not to be ill-treated; he was given food when the villagers had their meals, and nobody molested him. The guards dozed near by. But when night came it was clear that the men had had orders to watch him strictly. He was bound both hand and foot and taken into the hut, the two men remaining with the evident intention of keeping him company through the night. Before he entered he saw that Bill was not held of so much account. He too was bound, but to all appearance he was left to himself: indeed, the hut assigned to him, half in ruins, was so small that there would scarcely have been room in it for another occupant.

John's discomfort this night sprang less from the insects, to which he had become inured, than from the proximity of his guards. Armed with spears, they did not trouble to keep awake, and he soon had proof that snoring is not, as Ferrier had suggested, an accomplishment only of civilized races. They might have been trumpeters! He lay oppressed in the hot stifling air. Deep silence reigned in the village.

Escape! Why not try? The gate would be unguarded: the negro never keeps watch unless he is on the war-path, and even then very slackly. If he once gained the outside, he would have at least some hours in which to make good his flight. His guards might wake; they might or might not discover that he had gone; if they did miss him, it would be contrary to their instinct and their custom if they pursued him in the dark. There was Bill to be considered: he must not be left behind. But the first thing was to rid himself of his bonds, and that would be no easy matter.

Lying still to think out his plan, he saw a chance. All was hushed, but for the tempestuous snores. It was pitch dark. The guards lay together near the

entrance. With careful movements he rolled and edged and wriggled across the floor until he knew that he was within a few inches of the men. Then, groping with his bound wrists, he sought for a spear. He touched it, grasped it, drew it gently towards him. It resisted: the guard was lying half upon it. He pulled it again: the snoring ceased with a sudden snap, and John thought it was all over. But there was a grunt; the man turned heavily on his side; and the music began again. The spear was now freed. By careful manoeuvring John got the head between his knees, and holding it fast, began to saw the thongs that bound his wrists. The weapon was sharp: the strands parted; he rubbed the skin to relieve the smarting pain, and then, with two sharp cuts, released his ankles.

He stood erect and listened. Only those horn-blasts at his feet. He peered through the entrance. The darkness without was scarcely less than within. Carefully, and with a shiver of apprehension, John stepped over the two stretched forms, in nervous terror lest he should plant a foot on one of them. He gained the entrance, glancing warily to right and left, and stepped into the open, snuffing greedily at the cool air. The village was asleep, calm as the stars twinkling overhead.

The tumble-down hut in which Bill lay was thirty yards nearer to the gate. Four huts intervened. John crept round to the back of them and stole along on tiptoe. He came to the fifth hut, which was separated from the fourth by a passage a yard wide. Groping down this, he reached the entrance, and after another look round, put his head within. All was silent. Perhaps the Wanderobbo tribe did not snore! He called the man's name softly.

"Bwana!" whispered Bill.

In a trice John was beside him. In ten seconds he had cut the ropes. In twenty both were at the back of the hut. Now Bill took the lead. He plunged into a banana plantation behind the line of huts, and made his way swiftly towards the stockade. They came to the gate: it was unguarded. Being merely a sort of strong hurdle of thorn, held in position by a few logs, its removal was easy. They passed out, and lifted the gate back to its former position, though, of course, they were unable to fasten it. They then ran across the stretch of trodden grass outside the village, down the hill towards the river.

Far to the left a lion roared, and John heard his companion utter the strange gulping sound which in the negro indicates fright. A night journey in these wilds was a perilous undertaking. They had one spear between them, a paltry weapon if they should be pounced upon by some beast of prey. There was just enough light from the stars to enable them to choose the opener ground, avoiding bush and trees in which wild beasts might lurk. They moved fast, for John had set his heart on reaching the neighbourhood of the fort before dawn. There were few able-bodied men left in the village, but these would turn out in the morning

as soon as the escape was discovered, and scour the surrounding country. This was reason enough for haste, but there was another. If they did not succeed in entering the fort before daylight, it would probably be impossible until the following night. The attack in all likelihood had not yet been made; the villagers would scarcely attempt it after their long march; John's whole mind was set on standing by Ferrier's side when the assault came.

On they went, running when the ground permitted. Every now and then John had to stop for Bill's sake, the poor old man, weakened by terror and hunger (John discovered afterwards that he had had no food all day), being unequal to the pace. Presently, in descending too rapidly a sharp declivity, John slipped and sprained himself. When he started again every movement was painful. To go at any great speed was now impossible. Still he pushed on, grudging every lost minute of the night.

He could not tell what the time was; it was too dark to see his watch. His pain grew worse at every step, and though he limped along gamely, he had at length to confess himself done, and sank to the ground. His distress of mind was as great as that of his body. Was he doomed to fail? As he crouched miserably in the grass he heard the swirling of the river close at his right hand. He would go to it and bathe his aching legs. Bill expostulated: there were sure to be crocodiles; but John would not be gainsaid. He dragged himself towards the river, and sat down to rest on a small tree-trunk which had apparently been washed ashore. In the faint light he saw others dotted about. An idea flashed upon him. Could they make a raft? Bill had never heard of such a thing: John did not know if there was a word for it. But he made him understand that he was to collect some of the smaller logs, and then to lash them together with strands of the creeping plants which grew in abundance around. It was hard work and slow in the darkness, John himself being unable to move freely; but at length something in the semblance of a raft lay beside him. Rising with difficulty, he helped Bill to carry it the few yards to the water; then, peering around for crocodiles, which they would hardly have seen if any had lain there, they launched the raft and managed to scramble on board, each carrying a branch to steer with. The current was swift; there was no need for paddling; and thus, perched precariously on their crazy craft, they floated down the stream.

At times they heard movements on one bank or the other. Once they heard the horrid snap of a crocodile's jaws. A little farther on the raft bumped against something; there was a swirl of water, and John went hot and cold at the suspicion that they had collided with a hippopotamus. The current bore them past in safety, to his inexpressible relief; one heave of the monster's body would have turned them over.

So they went on, how long John could not tell. The darkness seemed to be

lifting: from the banks came sounds of awakening life: where were they? The river was flowing more swiftly; it was racing; and John suddenly realized with a gasp that he had entered the rapids at the head of the pool. With frantic movements of the paddles they tried to steer into the bank; but the current was too much for them; the lumbering craft was swept along at ever quickening speed; they were helpless. Dropping their paddles–the spear was already gone–they held on for dear life to the lashings. Some of them snapped: one of the outer logs was wrenched away; the raft whirled round, and every moment John expected it to break apart and hurl them into the race. Still he clung on with convulsive grip. Bill was flat on his face with his hands over the edge. On they went, jerked and jarred, until with startling suddenness they were shot over a rock, and found themselves floating on the pool.

The raft was almost in pieces, but it floated more slowly towards the island. John's relief at finding himself and his companion yet alive was dashed by a new anxiety. Dawn was glimmering in the sky. If they were not rescued they would float through the pool to the longer and even more dangerous series of rapids at the further end. They might be seen by the enemy on the bank. He could not swim to the fort; his whole body was stiff and racked with pain; his limbs would fail him. The raft was drifting past the fort; very slowly, for it was no longer in the middle of the current; but being without anything to serve as a paddle, the two could do nothing to check its steady progress towards the lower rapids. There was only one chance. He called to Bill to shout at the top of his voice, and putting two fingers to his lips, he blew a shrill whistle which no white man would fail to recognize. In a moment there came an answering whistle from the fort. Dimly he saw figures at the wall. He shouted: a cheery cry answered him: and in a few moments he saw Ferrier and four men lug a canoe to the gate and put off to the rescue.

But the whistle and the shouts had been heard by the enemy, who were already astir. John could not yet see them, but he heard their yells, and knew that they were swarming towards the pool.

"All right, old man, we've got the start of them," cried Ferrier, as the canoe rapidly approached.

It was a race between the canoe and the current, between the rescuers and the enemy. A shot rang out: a flight of arrows hissed into the water. The raft was drifting within range of the enemy; but in the half-darkness and against the background of wood on the shore the small floating object offered but an indifferent mark. Had the day been even a few minutes older the occupants of the raft would have stood a poor chance against the arrows, to say nothing of the rifles, of the crowd that could now be seen flitting like shadows round the margin of the pool. The greatest source of alarm, however, was not the imperfect shooting of the

enemy, but the rapids to which the raft was drawing ever nearer. Weakened as it was by its passage of the upper rapids, it was inconceivable that it could survive the second and far more formidable strain. The rush of the water could already be heard; the movement of the raft was perceptibly quickening. Would Ferrier arrive in time? And if he did overtake the raft, would he too not run a fearful risk of being drawn into the stream and hurled along in utter helplessness? The shouts from the shore redoubled in volume; arrows flew more and more thickly; and John had almost yielded to despair when the canoe shot up alongside at an amazing pace. Some one grasped the raft; the crew backed water with all their might. Bill plunged into the water and scrambled on board the canoe.

"I can't move; I've ricked myself," cried John. "You must lug me in."

Ferrier leant over, grasped him, and hauled him by main force into the canoe. Then the four sturdy natives dug their paddles into the water. The enemy had reached the brink; some were already on the causeway; but at this moment four rifles flashed from the fort, and a man toppled off the causeway into the pool. The others halted. The canoe sped on; a bullet splashed in its wake; more arrows fell perilously near; but just as the enemy had gained courage to rush over the causeway again, Ferrier steered the canoe away from that side and guided it round to the lower end of the island where landing was easier. The canoe scraped the shore: its occupants sprang to land: and with Ferrier's aid the negroes carried John up to the wall, where willing hands hoisted him over.

"A near shave, old chap," said Ferrier. "You look awfully done up."

"Pretty nearly crocked," said John, with a feeble smile. "Are those beggars attacking?"

"No," replied Ferrier, looking over the wall. "They've gone back. It's not light enough yet."

"Thank goodness! I'm no good at present; I'm—-"

"Don't you worry," interrupted Ferrier, seeing his lips quivering. "Just lie easy for a bit: I'll bring you something to eat."

John closed his eyes and shivered in his drenched clothes. Ferrier got two of the men to carry him to the fire, and in a few moments gave him a mug of soup.

"You'll feel better after that: hippo soup, my boy."

"They got back safely then?"

"Of course they did, an hour after sundown. They hid in the woods yonder until the coast was clear. I gave them a good ragging for leaving you."

"That wasn't fair; we left them."

"So they said. You may imagine what a funk I was in when they came back without you. I didn't sleep a wink all night."

"Poor old chap! We went after congoni when they were cutting up the

hippo, and were rushed as neatly as possible, and carried off to the village of Bill's 'bad men' in the hills. Our captors were evidently an embassy from Juma to enlist the chief's assistance. Three or four hundred warriors in full fig left yesterday morning: have you seen anything of them?"

"Not yet. We heard a great hullabaloo in Juma's camp last night, and I guessed the lot you signalled about had come in. I was glad you signalled; it was a relief to know you were alive. I wished I could come up and rescue you, and I'd have had a shot at it if you hadn't told me the war-party were coming. Of course that dished it. I couldn't have got through, and I'm afraid our fellows wouldn't have held out long if I'd left them."

"Of course not. It would have been simply mad to try it."

"All the same, it was pretty rotten having to stop here able to do nothing. I chafed a good deal, I can tell you. When I got your message, as the enemy were very quiet I sent Coja and one of my askaris out to see if they could spy out where you were; and what do you think–Said Mohammed insisted on going too."

"Well, I'm hanged!"

"He said it was quite impossible for him to pursue the even tenor of his way while you, his boss and patron, were in parlous circs. and durance vile. I'm beginning to think the Bengali has been libelled; go deep enough and you'll find a man. Anyway, he insisted on going, and I'm sorry to say none of the three has come back."

John groaned from utter weariness and disappointment.

"What a mess I've made of everything!" he said. "If ever we get safely out of this I'll not go rampaging after stolen rifles again. Look what I've brought on everybody!"

"Utter rot! Nobody came against his will, and who could foresee all this? We've had amazing luck really, and as for getting safely out of it–but look here, old man, you mustn't shiver like that. I'm a fat-headed chump. Off with your clothes; they're sopping. We haven't got a change, but you won't shock any one's modesty. I'll rub you dry with some of Said's cloths; your things will dry in no time, and I'll try massage for your sprain. You'll take a good stiff dose of quinine, too; we can't have an invalid on our hands."

John winced as he rose to strip. Ferrier got his clothes off, rubbed him vigorously with cloths ("Shout when I hurt," he said), then rolled him in a blanket and laid him down by the fire, "To sweat it out, you know."

"Just go and look after Bill," said John, feeling comfortably lazy.

"Bill's all right, bless your heart! He's got no clothes to dry, and he's tucking into roast hippo like one o'clock. It's the last of it, by the way. It bucked the men up wonderfully. I wish we had some more."

"How do we stand for food?" asked John anxiously.

"Never you mind about food. You shall have your dinner when the time comes. The best thing you can do is to go to sleep, and when you wake you can tell me how you managed to escape from the 'bad men.' Are they very bad, like the little girl who was horrid? No, you needn't answer; just shut your eyes while I count ten, and you'll sleep like a top."

Two hours later, the man on guard at the gate, one of Ferrier's askaris, reported that a number of men were marching across the plain towards the causeway. Ferrier went to the gate, and saw that the group consisted of two Swahilis and four of their followers. A great throng of black men stood at the edge of the wood, giving no sign of an intention to move.

"A deputation, I presume," thought Ferrier. "Coming to offer us terms!"

The men advanced along the causeway, the Swahilis first. When they had come half-way Ferrier told the askari at his side to order them to stop. They came to a halt immediately.

"Ask 'em if one of them is Juma," said Ferrier.

No: one was Sadi ben Asmani, the other Jumbi ben Abdullah.

"Then you may tell Sadi ben Asmani and Jumbi ben Abdullah that I have nothing to say to them, and they had better be off, sharp."

When this was interpreted the Swahilis glowered. One of them began to speak, but Ferrier signed to him to be silent.

"Tell them I'll listen to the others, but won't hear a word from them."

The causeway being too narrow for two men to pass securely, the file faced about and retreated to the shore. Then they came on again, the negroes this time leading, and the Swahilis remaining at the end of the causeway. The first negro, a finely proportioned fellow whom it was a pleasure to look upon, began to address the white man, using his hands freely.

"What does he say?" asked Ferrier.

The askari did not know his dialect. From the crowd of men who had gathered at the wall one stepped forward saying that he knew it.

"Well, tell me what he says."

"Him say msungu come out: no lib for no more fight. Great big lot o' black men: msungu no can run away."

"You can tell him that the msungu won't come out, and the black men had better run away. They have come to fight us, who never did them any harm. They have come to help a lot of thieves and murderers, who have stolen the goods of the black men round about. This fort is where they lived, and where they kept the goods they stole. The fort now belongs to the msungu. A great many wasungu are now coming from their fort far away to punish them, and when they come they will scatter them as the lion scatters sheep. Tell them we are quite happy; we aren't a bit afraid of them; we have beaten them twice, and we'll beat them

again. They had better take up their cook-pots and go home."

This little speech Ferrier delivered sentence by sentence, wondering how much of it was fairly translated. The deputation clearly gathered the gist of it, for with every sentence they became manifestly more incensed. At the close they shouted and waved their arms, and then the leader, with the air of one playing his trump card, cried out that the msungu's talk was fool's talk, for they held a sheep-faced msungu a prisoner in their village far away, and if their demand was not instantly complied with, the sheep-faced msungu would be killed.

"By Jove!" thought Ferrier, "they didn't recognize old John then. What a tremendous lark! I'll give them a shocker."

To the evident amazement of the natives he laughed heartily. Then, bidding them stand where they were until he came back to them, he returned into the fort.

"I say, John," he said, with a chuckle, shaking the sleeping form; "wake up, old chap. There's a deputation outside summoning us to surrender, and threatening if we don't to slaughter a sheep-faced msungu–sheep-faced, old chap!–whom they've got penned up in their village. Come and show yourself; I bet they'll look sheepish. It was evidently too dark to see you when you came down on your raft. Slip your things on: you don't look the same man in that blanket."

John laughed and slipped on his shirt and breeches, now thoroughly dry. His sun-helmet, which had been fastened on by a strap, was rather pulpy, but Ferrier clapped it on his head, saying that it didn't matter. In a few seconds he had limped to the gate, and stood at Ferrier's side, smiling very amiably.

The natives were struck dumb with astonishment. The Swahilis could not have been more confounded if they had seen a ghost. After gazing for a full minute at the msungu whom they imagined to be in safe custody fifteen miles away, they turned round and marched back in silence, only breaking into excited talk when they reached the shore. The two white men stood watching them until they rejoined the vast throng gathered at the edge of the wood.

"They've got something to digest," said Ferrier, with a laugh. "Now we'll go and get some dinner."

# CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST–A Combined Assault

"Think they'll give it up?" said Ferrier, as they sat over their dinner.

"Not they! Those fellows haven't come all the way from their village for nothing. They wouldn't have come at all but for some strong inducement, for Juma isn't an old friend of theirs, remember."

"Well, there's very little inducement so far as I can see. There's next to no loot bar the rifles and ammunition, and Juma would bag those if he licked us. The others would have a very poor look-in."

"You forget the sort of old curiosity shop collection that the men were so delighted with. The 'bad men' would get those, of course."

"It's very little among so many; you said there were about four hundred of them."

"Yes, but Juma wouldn't be over particular as to what he promised. All he wanted was to get their help. If he were to lick us, he could safely defy the 'bad men,' for with the rifles and practically unlimited ammunition he could do what he liked with 'em. He's sure to attack us, maybe to-day, maybe to-morrow; and the best thing we can do is to strengthen our defences. We shall have all our work cut out to keep 'em off this time: we're three rifles short; I suppose Coja and the others took theirs with them?"

"Yes, unfortunately. But I've already begun to strengthen the defences–started when I got your message."

"Good man! What did you do?"

"First thing, I cut down some of the young trees at the further end of the island. I thought they might give cover to the enemy if they tried an attack in that quarter. Then it occurred to me that if we could raise a sort of bastion to jut over the wall by the gate yonder, we could fire at them without exposing ourselves, and–what do they call it?–enfilade them."

"Capital! I wondered what that rummy erection meant. Didn't like to say so, but it looks like a funeral pyre."

"Well, it's not finished, you know. It took us a good time to cut down the trees and strip off the branches. The enemy didn't see what we were about until we had got a pretty good pile of logs, and then they began shooting at us–with arrows; they didn't want to waste ammunition, I suppose. I had to draw the men off then, and we haven't gone at it again: your arrival has put everything else in the shade."

"We may as well finish that bastion now, at any rate, and put up another on the other side of the gate, if there's wood enough. Sorry I can't help you; I'm too stiff. You'll have to perch me up on one of the bastions when the attack comes, and leave me there."

"Oh, you'll soon be all right. I'll give you a good rubbing by and by with hippo grease; it'll be as good as goose fat, and that's what the old wives use, isn't

it?"

Ferrier set the men to work on the bastions, instructing them how to pile the logs and to interlace the branches they had lopped off, so as to form a kind of parapet, the interstices between the branches making natural loopholes.

They were still engaged on this task, about four o'clock in the afternoon, when Ferrier's attention was attracted by movements among the enemy, who formed a dense black mass, with a few white spots, against the background of trees. He thought that the signs of activity portended an attack, and called to some of the men to occupy the one bastion that was finished. They obeyed quickly, carrying John with them at his own order. But it was soon apparent that the enemy were not contemplating an immediate assault. They suddenly threw themselves on the ground in a large circle, three ranks deep, the Swahilis, eight in number, standing at the centre.

"A council of war: what they call a shauri," said John.

It was soon seen that there was a difference of opinion among the assembly. At first the discussion proceeded in a quiet and orderly manner, the sound of voices reaching the fort very faintly. But presently there were clear signs of excitement. Some of the warriors sprang up, and harangued the Swahilis fiercely, brandishing their spears in the direction of the fort. Their voices were raised; the tumult increased moment by moment; and the sound became a continuous roar, like the noise of surf at a distance.

"The allies are at loggerheads," said Ferrier. "They may raise the siege."

The chief of the "bad men" was in fact demanding to know why the Swahilis had brought him and his men on a fool's errand. Where was the promised spoil? In a fort, defended by a wall, a pool of water, and an army led by wasungu. How had the msungu whom they had left in the village, bound and under guard, come into the fort? Surely by magic; and if the wasungu had such wonderful medicine it was useless to attack them.

To this Juma–for it was he–replied that the spoil was indeed within the fort, but the defences were not so formidable as they appeared. The wall had been partly demolished; the pool could be swum, it contained no crocodiles; and as for the men within, it was clear they must be very weak, for they had taken no food into the fort for many days. Nor could they get any; no doubt an attempt had been made that morning, and found to be impossible because of the current. (Such was his explanation of the incident of the raft.) And as for the msungu who had reappeared so mysteriously, it was no magic, but the carelessness of the guards that accounted for that: the msungu must have escaped, and not being afraid of the dark had marched during the night.

This aspersion on the trustworthiness of the guards roused the chief to fury. Springing up, he demanded the instant fulfilment of the promise made to

him. He worked himself up to an ecstasy of indignation; his men caught fire from him; and when the tumult was at its height they suddenly wheeled round and, following their chief, began to march off towards their village.

"This looks promising, certainly," said John, who had watched the proceedings closely. "If we could only get out we might even enlist those fellows on our side."

But in a few moments a change came over the scene. Six painted warriors came running from the north-west to meet the marching force, which halted, swallowing up the runners into its own mass. A few minutes passed; then the whole body wheeled about and returned to the spot where the Swahilis and their negroes were still grouped in a circle.

"Men from the village come to report our escape," said John.

"But why should that make the chief turn back?" rejoined Ferrier. "It ought to have the opposite effect."

"I take it that the chief is so mad at being done that he has decided not to go until he has caught me again."

"But your escape is no news to him. They've seen you already."

"That's true. Well, I can't account for it; but it's clear that those six fellows have caused a change in the tide, and I wish them at Halifax."

The conference was resumed, and continued until dark. There was no further outburst. Ferrier utilized the time to finish the second bastion: it was impossible to doubt that the enemy was planning an attack. It would not be made in the night, but must be looked for as soon as morning broke. Ferrier's expression was very grave as he helped John to reach his little grass hut in the centre of the fort. He had made an inspection of the stock of provisions during the morning, and knew that it would not last beyond another day.

"I won't worry John to-night," he thought, "but he'll have to know in the morning."

Though convinced that no attack would be made during the dark hours, Ferrier took the precaution of putting four men on sentry-go. He insisted on John's going to bed as soon as he had had his massaging, and sat down by the fire himself, in no cheerful frame of mind. He knew he would get little sleep that night, for the negro, though willing enough, is ever an untrustworthy sentinel. And when he reflected on the horde of savage enemies without, he could not look forward with confidence to the issue of the coming fight. He canvassed the possibility of help coming from Nairobi or Fort Hall, reckoning how long it would take for the messenger to reach Mr. Gillespie, and how long for a rescue party to gain the fort. But he found the very elements of the calculation uncertain; try as he might, he could not recollect clearly how many days had passed since they left the farm. Never before had he understood the savage man's indifference to

time; it was now clear; time is an invention of civilization.

While he was sitting thus brooding over the fire, one of the sentries, an askari of his original safari, came running to him.

"Bwana," he said, "man ober dere."

He pointed towards the western end of the island. Ferrier sprang up, seizing rifle and revolver: surely the enemy had not crossed the river in the darkness and crept round to attack the fort from this side? Hastening to the wall, he mounted upon it and peered into the night. Nothing could be seen. But in a moment he thought he heard a faint sound. He listened intently: yes, he heard it again; it was a kind of whinny–the signal he had arranged with Coja in case he should return after sunset. The men were safe, then; he rejoiced for their own sake, and because it meant the addition of three good rifles to the morrow's defence. Calling up two of the men, he had the canoe lowered and carried down to the water, himself accompanying them, since he could never be sure that unreasoning panic might not seize them. The canoe was launched and paddled quietly to the farther shore of the pool. Two men stepped down to meet it: they were Coja and the askari.

"Where is Said Mohammed?" asked Ferrier.

"Him gone, sah," replied Coja: "dunno where he are."

"You lost him?"

"Long long way ober dere."

"Before it was dark?"

"Long time, sah,"

"Did you look for him?"

"Oh yes, sah, look for him long time, sure nuff."

"Well, get in. You're a couple of muffs, to say the least. What were you doing?"

Coja explained that about midday, as they were fording the river, a number of leeches fastened on their legs. They jumped about to rid themselves of the creatures, and suddenly a huge brown crocodile, waked by the disturbance, slid off a mud bank into the stream, within a foot or two of Said Mohammed. The Bengali heard the flop of the loathsome reptile just in time to spring out of its reach. The others dashed across the river at full speed: Said Mohammed ran back to the bank they had left, scrambled up, and sped away as fast as his legs would carry him into the bush. Coja did not venture to recross the stream at that spot: he sought a ford higher up, but was long in finding one. Both he and the askari waded over and searched along the bank; they did not dare to shout, for fear of bringing an enemy upon them; and failing after a long time to discover any trace of the Bengali, they had thought it best to return to the fort.

"And did you find the place where the *bwana* and Bill are kept?" asked Ferrier.

"No, sah: them's dead, sure miff."

"They're here, and alive," he said. "I was a fool to let the men go," was his unspoken thought.

The men were amazed and delighted that the master had returned. As for Said Mohammed, it was doubtful whether his fate gave them any concern.

The night passed in peace. Ferrier felt very weary in the morning, but John, after a long sleep, rose much refreshed, though he still found moving difficult. About eight o'clock there was a cry from the gate that the enemy were rushing down towards the causeway. The bastions were instantly manned, John taking post in one and Ferrier in the other, dividing the askaris equally between them. Twenty men with spears and bows and arrows were told off to hold the broken portion of the wall on either side of the gate, where the attack was most to be feared. The remainder of the force were stationed at various points, to be ready to run wherever they were called, and to keep watch on the opposite side of the island.

John was surprised to see that the enemy did not take to the water, as they had done on the former occasion, but came in a yelling line along the causeway. They were Juma's newest allies, and being without personal experience of the reception their friends had formerly met with, they came rushing across with a reckless courage. When the first man had reached the middle of the causeway, a volley was fired simultaneously from each of the bastions, and half the line fell into the water, uttering dreadful yells. There was a momentary pause; but the leader had escaped; he bounded forward, followed by the survivors and others who had not come within the line of fire. The shore behind was thick with black warriors, hideous in their war-paint, and shouting furiously. Only Ferrier's rifle was double-barrelled; John's had been taken from him when he was captured; and before the men could reload, several of the enemy had reached the end of the causeway, and, springing into the water at the gap, gained the shelf of land beneath the wall. Ferrier's rifle disposed of one of them; the rest rushed up to the gate and the ruined rampart, and were in a moment fighting hand-to-hand with the men within.

"Keep your fire on the causeway," shouted John, who then called to some of the men in reserve to mount the wall and fling stones on the men trying to clamber up. A second volley from either side crashed into the negroes racing towards the fort. Only two of them got across. Those behind who had not been struck down came to a sudden halt, only to be pushed on by those surging in the rear. The result was that a score of unhurt negroes were hustled into the water. John forbore to fire at these, but as soon as his men had reloaded, sent another volley among those who were still running along. Meanwhile the defenders of the wall had beaten off the assault of the men below, who were at a hopeless

disadvantage. Two or three fell groaning to the ground, transfixed with spears; the rest leapt into the pool, and struck out frantically for the shore. The sight of this retreat, and a fourth volley from their unseen enemy, shattered the confidence of the bravest negroes. There was wild confusion on the causeway. Those upon it could not retreat because of the pressure of their comrades behind. They jumped into the water on both sides. The others, seeing that all was lost, fled back towards the wood. In ten minutes after the first attack they were in full flight.

But at this moment a shout was raised that the enemy were attacking from the other side of the island. Ferrier instantly sprang down from his perch, and calling on his men to follow him, rushed across the enclosure to repel this new assault. John, perforce confined to his post, ordered his company to join the others, while he alone kept watch on the causeway. Being undisturbed, he had leisure to consider what the enemy's plan had been. He could not doubt that they had arranged in their council of war that the Swahilis with their party should cross the river and creep under cover of the trees and scrub to the western shore of the pool. The intention had certainly been that the attack should be made on both sides of the fort simultaneously. If it had been perfectly timed, and begun at a concerted signal, the plight of the garrison might have been very serious. But careful co-operation is impossible to the negro. The men on the eastern side had rushed blindly to the assault, heedless of what the other party was doing. These, led by Juma himself, had made their way unobserved to the place arranged, and swum the pool under cover of the fringe of trees which were still left standing. But only one or two had landed when they heard the din of fighting on the other side. Juma, more intelligent than the negroes, had seen at once the necessity of striking while the garrison was engaged in that quarter. But he was compelled to wait until he had sufficient support, and by the time he had gathered a score of men about him the eastern attack was beaten off, and the defenders were hurrying to meet him.

When Ferrier reached the wall, he saw the Swahilis and their followers coming up the slope in a straggling body. The moment they perceived him, they halted; those who had rifles fired them off, too hurriedly to take effective aim; the others let fly a shower of arrows. Then they all rushed forward, a disorderly shouting mob. Ferrier fired his rifle, but his men had not had time to reload, having hastened from the bastion immediately after the final volley upon the causeway. The enemy had come within about twenty yards of the wall when Ferrier, whipping out his revolver, snapped a shot at Juma and winged him. The big man fell to the ground with a howl of pain; his men halted in consternation. This was not the easy victory they had been promised. Their hesitation was fatal. It had given time to the men on the wall to load their pieces. A general fusillade

spattered bullets among the waverers; it quickened them into action, but instead of continuing their advance they turned tail and bolted down the slope, pursued by a shower of arrows. Juma had risen, and struggled along with the help of two of his kind. They fled with all speed among the trees, and the garrison, yelling with delight, saw them no more that day.

# CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND–A Counter Stroke

John had every reason to be satisfied when he took stock of the results of the action. The enemy had been thoroughly routed, with considerable loss: he had no men killed, and only a few with superficial flesh wounds. But he looked grave enough when, at dinner-time, Ferrier confessed that he had already had to put the men on half rations.

"Our only hope is that the enemy have had enough of it and will clear off," he said. "The 'bad men,' at any rate, won't think much of their job."

"And Juma himself has had a reminder that won't leave him for a few days. But if they *don't* clear off—-"

"We must wait and see. There ought to be plenty of fish in this pool; couldn't we try a little angling?"

"What about hooks?"

"Well, there are some empty condensed milk-tins; we can make some sort of hooks out of them. And as for bait–I say, look there!"

Two vultures were swooping down upon the western end of the island.

"Sickening!" said Ferrier, with a shudder. "I'll go and pot them and get the men to attend to things there. The birds will give us bait, and the men may like to eat them–I couldn't."

Several large hooks were made out of milk-tins. A piece of rope was unravelled to form lines, and several of the men were soon sitting on the causeway, angling with portions of the vultures which Ferrier shot. In the course of an hour or two they caught several fish, large and small; but the total quantity was insignificant in comparison with what was needed to give all a full meal. They were all rather hungry when they settled down for the night, and the white men

devoutly hoped that when morning dawned they would see that the enemy's force had broken up.

In this they were disappointed. Daylight showed them parties of negroes hovering on the outskirts of the wood. That their intention was to resume their old tactics of watching the fort was proved before the day was over. A long line of women was observed coming from the north, bending under heavy loads.

"Grub for them," said Ferrier. "They're short, like us: but they can draw on the village while we starve."

"I wonder if we could intercept a convoy," suggested John.

"Very risky: practically impossible. We couldn't tell when it's coming. We might have to wait a day or two, and miss it after all. Besides, we might be cut off; they're strong enough to keep us out if they get between us and the fort; and the garrison would be so much weakened that they couldn't hold out against a general attack. No: we mustn't think of it."

"Well, it looks as if we must either break out or starve. We may starve in any case. We didn't pass a single cultivated field on the way up, and if we made a dash for home we should have to depend on game and what wild fruits we could pick up. I don't know what on earth we can do, that's a fact."

Next day saw them no nearer a solution of the problem. The enemy were still in force, and the punishment they had received had not sufficed to detach the "bad men," who were easily distinguishable from the other negroes by their characteristic equipment. Juma had in fact persuaded them that the surrender of the white men was only a matter of time: they could not live without food, and while they remained in the fort to obtain food was impossible.

"Look here, Charley," said John that afternoon, "we can't stand this any longer. It's neck or nothing, and I'm for a bold course. That village up yonder is crammed with food-stuff of all kinds. They've just been harvesting. I vote we make a dash for it and seize enough to last us best part of the way home. All the fighting men are away, or nearly all. If we can only get there it'll be easy enough to capture the place and hold it as long as we like: there's a good stockade. But I don't want to hold it. We might stay there a day or two until our men are fed up, and then make tracks. Perhaps we'd have the luck to escape them; it's not likely, I admit. They would be between us and the farm: we should have to be uncommonly clever to dodge them; and as we couldn't move fast, with our men loaded, they're bound to come up with us some time or other. That would mean a fight in the open; perhaps a running fight for miles, with the odds of numbers against us. But I prefer fighting to starving; and it's Hobson's choice."

"It means a night march."

"Yes, but the men won't mind that. We haven't failed in anything so far, and success goes a long way with them."

"Your escape has bucked them more than anything. Bill has told them some wonderful story about your voyage on the raft, and if you talked about taking a trip to the moon I believe they'd think it feasible."

"Things couldn't be better, then. Suppose we start about eight o'clock–the enemy will all be asleep by then–we should have ten hours' grace before sunrise, more than long enough to get to the village, barring accidents."

"That is, if they don't find out that we've gone."

"Of course. I don't see why they should do that. They've never shown any inclination to attack us in the darkness, and if any of them keep a watch on the causeway side, they certainly don't at the other end, or Coja couldn't have got in. That's our way out. We shall have to keep the men quiet, but we've done that before, and when we've explained to them what's at stake they'll be on their mettle. We'll cross the pool in the canoes, and the paddles won't make any sound that they can hear, if we're careful."

"I've an idea. While we're ferrying our things over, and most of the men, why not start the others on a sing-song? That would drown any noise we might make."

"And wake the enemy! They'd wonder what was up. Why should we disturb their rest? Better not make any difference in our usual ways, I think: keep our fires burning, and give 'em no reason to think we're doing anything out of the ordinary."

"You're right. There's a risk that in spite of all our care they'll hear something, but it will take 'em some time to make sure that we've gone, and it's ten to one they won't pursue us in the darkness."

"And when they do find out, in the daylight, they'll probably waste some time in picking up the trail, unless they are good trackers, which we've no evidence of. I fancy we shall get, as I said, a good ten hours' start of them, and I defy 'em to catch us then–again barring accidents."

"D'you think you can stand the march?"

"I'm going to chance it, anyway. Your rubbings have done me a deal of good, and we can't go very fast at night, so I think I'll manage to keep up. If I can't, you must just sling me on to a litter. I'm eleven stone two–or was; I suspect I've lost a few pounds lately; but four men could toddle along with me, and a dozen will have loads in any case. There's the ammunition, and all that flummery I gave to them; they won't want to leave that."

"Suppose we find that some of the war-party have gone back?"

"It's not likely. They're here with the idea of getting loot, and not a man Jack of them will be willing to lose the chance of his share. Anyway, we must risk it. If we have luck we shall get to the village before it's light, and a sudden rush will have the effect it always has on them."

"Well, it sounds rather promising, and, upon my word, I'm itching to be off."

"All in good time, old man. I wish we could all have a good feed before we start, but perhaps the men will march the better with the promise of a meal before them."

The preparation of the men's loads was set about betimes. The absence of large quantities of food was an advantage; the other goods could easily be carried by twelve of the men, and the labour would be lightened by transferring the loads to the others in turn.

There was much excitement among the negroes when John explained his plan to them. The past successes had given them entire confidence in their leaders; and the prospect of actually capturing the village of the notorious "bad men" had a spice of daring about it which lent it a certain charm.

At nightfall the canoes were let down over the wall and carried to the shore. Then the men conveyed the stores to them, moving so silently that only a very alert enemy could have detected the activity. The canoes had to make several journeys across the pool before all the goods and the men were ferried over. There was not a sound from the enemy's encampment. When all were safely landed, John called the men about him, and repeated his instructions to march quietly and above all to beware of straggling; then he set off with Bill to lead the way. Behind him came in order four askaris carrying rifles: then the twelve men with the ammunition and the assortment of oddments found in the fort; then six men bearing in litters three others whose wounds prevented them from marching. After these came the rest of the negroes, among whom the prisoner taken at the camp was enrolled, Ferrier and Coja bringing up the rear to ensure that there was no straggling at the end of the line.

It was a dark night, but the sky was clear and the air cold. To make a direct course was impossible. Bill knew the way in the daytime, but at night he was completely at a loss. John, however, was aware of the general direction, and by keeping within touch of the river, as he could easily do by his sense of hearing, he knew that he could not go very far wrong, though the journey would necessarily be longer than if he had been able to avoid the windings. Fortunately in this hilly country the ground was much less obstructed by tangles of thorn than it was in the less elevated districts to the south, and the safari was not hindered by the annoying necessity of having to cut a way through pathless jungle.

Nevertheless, the march was not devoid of trials and discomforts. The ground was very irregular, and at one point, where the bank of the river rose to a considerable height above the water-level, they found that they had come to a stretch of hard gravel interspersed with large fragments of a whitish rock, making progress very slow and difficult. Looking back, John saw the glow of the

fires left burning in the fort–a little patch of red amid deep black. When they descended to grassy land again he stumbled over an obstruction about three feet high, which Bill told him was an ant-hill. A little further on he heard a strange whistling that seemed to come from a line of trees on his left hand. Hearing the men behind gulping, he halted, and got them to exchange loads, listening meanwhile to the weird and mournful sound, which now increased in volume, now died away in a doleful wail. He asked Bill if he recognized the sound as that of an animal, but he replied that he had never heard it before. After a few moments John observed that the sound rose and fell with the gusts of wind, and concluded that it was caused by the breeze sweeping through the trees. He reassured the men; but it was not till long afterwards he discovered the origin of the sound. The trees were a species of thorn about eight feet high, with leafless branches on which hung a number of hollow seed-pods. In these an insect bores a hole, and the wind, passing through the innumerable tiny apertures, produces the musical notes which so much disturbed the negroes.

After about two hours, John felt much fatigued. The continued exertion had revived the dull aching pain in his back and limbs, and he thought it prudent to rest awhile. The progress had been so good that he could afford to waste an hour: there would still be time to reach the village before the dawn. The whole party lay down on a grassy knoll, speaking only in whispers. Occasionally the cry of some night-bird broke the stillness, and once there came, from far away, the sharp bark of a hyena. At the end of an hour the safari was again on foot. Twice more John found himself compelled to halt, and after the second time Ferrier persuaded him to let four of the men carry him, in a litter which they quickly made by slinging one of the blankets between two rifles. Always taking the river as guide, they pressed on again. At last, when the sounds of re-awakening life in the trees proclaimed that dawn was at hand, they came to the foot of a long grassy acclivity which John felt sure led up to the village. After a consultation with Ferrier, he decided to wait a little until there was light enough to show them the way clearly. The air was misty, but the blackness of night was passing, and at length they were able to see the goal of their long march–the "bad men's" village, lying in perfect stillness on the hill-top.

John led the men among some trees, and waited until he saw the gate opened, and a number of women come out and wend their way into the plantations to the left. When they were out of sight, he ordered the men to leave their loads and follow him closely without a sound. Then, regardless of his pain, he led the way at a steady run up the hill. Ferrier came to his side.

"We do this together, old boy," he said.

On they went. They had almost reached the stockade when a woman in the fields to the left saw them, and uttered a loud shriek. John quickened his pace; the

men, unable to restrain themselves any longer, raised their voices in a tremendous shout. A few seconds later the whole party, the white men still leading, dashed through the gate, and along the single street, causing a wild stampede among the children playing there, and the women who were moving about. The uproar drew several men from their huts, where they were no doubt indulging themselves in a final nap while their womenkind prepared breakfast. Almost all were old men. At the sight of the invading horde they yelled and fled. John hurried on towards the compound where he had seen the war-party assemble. As the scared negroes left the street vacant, he was struck with amazement at the sight that met his eyes. At the entrance of a hut at one side of the central space stood a figure in white. He had risen from bending over a cooking-pot. Next moment Said Mohammed came towards his master, walking leisurely, his face beaming with smiles.

"Good morning, sir," he said blithely. "You have come in nick of time. Banana fritters, new dish to savage with untutored mind, are done to a turn. On point of tickling unappreciative palates, they now serve nobler end, delectating connoisseur who knows what's what. With respect, sir, I'm jolly glad to see you."

Thus the village of the "bad men" was carried without a blow.

John sent Coja back with a few men to bring in the loads and secure the gate. Then he lost no time in hunting through the village, and learnt, as he had hoped, that there were very few men left in it; and these for the most part old and negligible as a fighting force. He had given strict orders to his party not to injure any one wantonly. The women, seeing that there was no burning or slaughtering, recovered from their first fright. They recognized the prisoner in whom they had been so much interested, and their curiosity overcoming every other feeling, they drew slowly nearer to the strangers, uttering little shrieks of excitement. John made them understand that the men were hungry, and they ran with alacrity into their huts, not at all averse from preparing a meal for such inoffensive visitors. Meanwhile Said Mohammed had instantly seized his own cooking-pot and other utensils from the men who carried them, and set to work to cook more banana fritters and other dainties to which the white men had been strangers for many a day. Before long the whole party were seated, enjoying a capital breakfast, the men laughing and chattering like light-hearted children. In the midst of the repast they broke into song, one of them chanting a line of solo, the rest chiming in with a boisterous chorus.

(Solo) Where did the white men go in the night?
(Chorus) They went to the place of the bad men.
(Solo) Why did they go to the place of the bad men?
(Chorus) To get very much food
For themselves and the good men.

The white men must eat,
The black men must eat,
In the place of the bad men is very much food,
O, eat all the food of the bad men.

John smiled rather wistfully as he translated the song to Ferrier.

"Poor devils!" he said. "They don't think of what they may have to go through before they get home. Just like children.... We thought we'd never see you again, khansaman. What became of you?"

"Sir, I will round unvarnished tale deliver. Crossing stream, a thousand horse-leeches take fancy to my nether extremities, and cling like grim death. I make saltatory gyrations to shunt obnoxious hangers-on, when lo! enter crocodile, without introduction, his room better than his company. I was in blue funk, sir, and scooted, with celerity and splash. In agitation of moment I forgot my pals, and when I look round, behold! they are no more. I call: no answer; I call again: silence that can be felt. You could hear a pin drop. In the charming words of the handsome but afflicted Lord Byron–

'What next befell me then and there
I know not well–I never knew:'

but when I came to myself, to quote from same sublime poem–

'I had not strength to stir, nor strive,
But felt that I was still alive,'

for, below, leeches suck my vital fluid; above, black men have me in grip as firm as metropolitan bobby. They propel me, sir, with indignity to reverse of the medal, to this identical spot.

'First came the loss of light, and air,
And then of darkness too:'

in other words, I, Said Mohammed, failed B.A. of Calcutta University, am consigned to ignominious horizontal extension on floor of beastly hovel. I suffer in silence,

'Nor call the gods with vulgar spite
To vindicate my hapless right.'

–Allow me to offer you another fritter, sir."

"Thanks. What next? Fire away!"

"After horrid night, sir, over which I draw veil of decency, I am transported into light of day. Hail, smiling morn! I purchase freedom by generous offer to teach fair sex a thing or two. Casting pearls before swine, sir; pains thrown away. But I earn my salt, and the rest is blank page, clean slate, until I hear the tramp of armed men, and behold, the grand finale!"

"I am glad things have ended so well," said John. "And I must say, khansaman, it was very handsome and plucky of you to undertake a search for me."

The Bengali bowed deprecatingly; then he said–

"But alas! sir, the web of our life is mingled yarn, both good and evil together, as says sweet swan of Avon. There is fly in ointment; gilt is off gingerbread. Coja, very good chap, has left sublunary sphere. 'He will awake no more, oh, never more!' to quote the words of Percy Bysshe Shelley, also failed B.A. We ne'er shall look upon his like again. Who would not weep for—- By gum! This knocks me silly all of a heap! There he is!"

"Yes," said John, laughing, "and you can exchange notes while I take a look round."

# CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD–The Ivory

John reckoned that his escape from the fort would probably have been discovered about the same time as he was entering the village. The enemy would almost certainly suppose that his flight had been southward, towards the farm. Several hours might be wasted in pursuing in that direction; even if they hit upon his trail at once, it would be four or five hours before they could reach him. His course, then, must be to take advantage of this respite to prepare the safari for the struggle that could scarcely be avoided when they came to close quarters.

Issuing from the village with Ferrier, he made his way to the cultivated fields, which, lying on the sheltered slopes of the hill, were more fertile than might have been expected at such a height above sea-level. Much of the har-

vesting had been done: he had already noticed that the shambas were filled to overflowing with muhindi and pumpkins. But the banana-trees were weighed down with huge clusters of ripening fruit, and acres of the soil were covered with beans and sweet potatoes. He could provision the safari for the whole of the homeward journey, and yet make a scarcely sensible inroad upon the resources of the people. He had no scruples in taking as much as he needed, or rather as much as the men could carry; by all the rules of war it would be letting the village off lightly. Accordingly he lost no time in setting the men to get as much of the native produce together as would furnish full loads for the men who were not already burdened. This would inevitably diminish their marching power; but on the other hand they must carry plenty of food with them if they meant to reach home.

While the men were engaged in this task, an idea occurred to Ferrier.

"I say, John, why not go down the river on rafts?" he said. "We should get along much faster, and be less likely to meet Juma, who is sure to know a short cut, and won't stick to the river as we did."

"A jolly good notion! Wait a bit, though. What about the rapids? They nearly did for me, and loaded rafts would stand a worse chance than I did, wouldn't they?"

"That's where I come in, old chap. I've shot the rapids on the St. Lawrence; these rapids aren't a patch on the Roches Fendues. I didn't do it by myself, of course; an old fellow named Baptiste Le Sueur managed the pole; but I saw it all, and I bet I could navigate those little affairs by the fort."

"I'll be hanged if we don't try it, then. We can make a better job of it than Bill and I did. By the way, where is the old fellow? I haven't seen him since we came into the village."

"Nor have I. He won't be far off. Let us set about it at once. Two large rafts, I think: it'll take some time to cut enough timber."

"We needn't wait for that. We'll dismantle some of the huts. The natives can easily build new ones when we are gone, and I'd like to give them a little trouble after all they have given us."

"Capital! Come on then. The sooner we get them done the better."

Returning to the village, they set all the men to work who were not engaged in the fields. In a short time a large number of poles from the huts lay on the ground ready to be lashed together, and a quantity of bast being found, there was no lack of material for the lashings. Those of the men who had been porters and were expert in manipulating ropes were entrusted with this work, the two white men superintending them and making sure that the knots were firm.

The first raft, capable of supporting half the party in addition to half the stores, had just been completed when Bill ran into the village in a state of great

excitement. In such a condition he seemed to lose almost all power of expression, and it was some time before John, even with Coja's assistance, could make out what was the matter with him. Presently, however, he gathered that Bill had gone alone to the spot, a few miles away, where the ivory had been buried by the Arabs when fleeing from the "bad men." It was situated on a wooded knoll washed by the river. Scarcely had he reached the place when his extraordinarily keen sense of hearing apprised him that a number of men were fording the river, though he was not able at first to see them, owing to the trees. Immediately on hearing their approach, he swarmed up a tree–the same in which he had taken shelter years before–and from this coign of vantage he spied a large body of negroes gathered on the further bank. In a little while he saw, moving up the knoll, the party who had previously crossed: they were Swahilis, and their leader was the man whom he had already recognized as a member of the Arab safari. All carried spades or other implements.

And then, helpless in the tree, the old man had had the agony to see the Swahilis dig up the ivory which had lain so long concealed: his ivory, the recovery of which had been his dream for years, a dream for whose realization he had counted on the assistance of the white men. The tusks had been laid only a foot or two below the surface, so that it was no great labour to unearth them. When they were all dug up, the men began to carry them down to the river, each tusk requiring four men. The intention was, Bill supposed, to transport them to the evacuated fort. He seized the opportunity when their backs were turned to slip down from his perch and run to the village: would not the wasungu even now strike a blow for him?

This was a staggering piece of news. The knoll was up-stream; there was not much doubt that downstream the warriors whose village had been captured were marching up in pursuit of the safari. Probably they had already been met by fugitives from the village and informed of what had happened. It struck John that Juma and the chief might have fallen out, and that the Swahili had made a rapid dash northward to possess himself of the treasure while the "bad men" were absent from the neighbourhood. However that might be, there was no question but that both the Swahilis and the villagers were dangerous enemies, and would join forces to crush the little band who had defied and routed them.

"We're in the tightest place we have ever been in yet," said John. "They've got us between them. What on earth are we to do?"

"Slip away, west or east?" suggested Ferrier.

"Hopeless! Loaded as we should be, we couldn't escape them. It's too late to get on to the river now. This one raft won't hold us all. We are done at last!"

They looked at each other in speechless anxiety. The men had ceased work on the second raft; they all knew what had occurred, and gazed at their white

leaders with troubled countenances.

"There's one desperate chance," said Ferrier at length. "Juma is nearest. Deal with him before the others come up."

John stared at him for a moment with brightening eyes. Then he sprang up.

"Right!" he cried. "It's the one chance. But we can't risk it without knowing a little of the ground. I'll go out with Bill and have a look at it, if you'll stay and keep a look-out for the down-stream lot."

The two set off at once. Bill led the way rapidly round the village and further up the hill until they reached the summit. From this point the ground fell away to the plain, and rather less than a mile away John descried the knoll of which Bill had spoken, the peninsula from which it rose jutting out into the river. It was densely covered with vegetation, and on the other side of the stream there was a similar screen. Only a short reach of the river was visible, but here he saw negroes wading waist-deep. They were crossing, however, not to the far side, but from it. Juma had thought it better to bring his porters to the ivory than the reverse. Apparently none of it had yet been transported from bank to bank; but it was all laid in readiness.

Bill gazed at the scene with an expression of mingled grief and rage. Suddenly he stretched forth his hand, pointing towards the trees on the near side of the river. At first John could not see anything but the dense mass of foliage; but presently he discerned two negroes standing motionless at the foot of the knoll. Clearly Juma had posted them as scouts to give warning of any movement from the village. So many years had passed since the defeat of his safari that the likelihood of the people suspecting his search for the treasure was small, especially since they were obviously unaware of its location. But with the remembrance of their hostility in his mind he was evidently uneasy.

John's guess at the course of events was very near the mark. Ever since the defeat of the Arabs, Juma, the sole survivor of their hapless safari, had lived for nothing else than the recovery of the ivory, which would make him a millionaire according to the native standard of wealth. But the store lay in the enemy's country; he had the best of reasons for knowing how formidable they were, and what his fate would be if he was discovered by them when removing the ivory. He had recognized that there was little chance of obtaining possession of it unless he came with sufficient force to repel attack. Its transport would demand a large number of porters, and a still larger number of armed men to protect them. It had therefore been the work of his life to organize such a party. For this he had become a porter himself, to avail himself of opportunities of stealthy pilfering. For this he had established himself in the island fort, hoping to seize an occasion when the villagers were absent on a raid or a hunting expedition to make a dash

up the river and achieve the aim of his ambition.

The unexpected series of events that culminated in the capture of the fort had interposed a check at the very moment when he saw success within his grasp. But his cunning mind conceived the scheme which he had carried out: to form an alliance with the very tribe with whom he had expected to come into conflict. He seized upon the presence of the white men as a rational basis for their alliance, intending, when the white men and their safari had been annihilated, to turn his arms against his allies, and having overthrown them, to secure the prize he had so long coveted.

Again he was baulked by the prolonged resistance of the white men. But it happened that the combined force of natives which he had gathered about him ran short of food. In this circumstance he saw his opportunity. On the morning after John had left the fort, Juma set off with his own contingent before the escape had been discovered, ostensibly to go hunting for game. He took with him almost all the men who had rifles, and a large party to carry the game he promised to shoot. Striking at first to the west, he turned sharply northward, and pushed on with all speed towards the knoll where the hoard of ivory lay concealed. Had he secured it, his whilom enemies, his present allies, would have seen him no more. He would have taken the shortest route to the coast, to dispose of the ivory at one of the ports. His approach was hidden from the people in the village by the hill rising behind it, and being quite unaware that the village was now held by the white men, he felt that he had nothing to fear except chance discovery by some one who might happen to stray up the hill. To provide against this he had posted the two scouts whom John saw at the base of the knoll.

John perceived in a moment that the work of transporting the ivory across the river gave him an opportunity of taking the enemy at a disadvantage. Running back to the top of the hill, careful not to come within sight of the scouts, he reached a point whence he could overlook the village and where he was himself in full view from it. The moment he arrived there he knew that he had been seen, for Ferrier waved his hand above his head. John immediately semaphored with his arms, asking Ferrier to bring out all the men except a few left to guard the village, and to join him on the hill-top. In ten minutes they were with him. Then, descending the western slope of the hill, invisible to the enemy, they worked their way through the belt of trees on the river-bank until they arrived within a furlong of the ford. Juma's porters were staggering down the knoll under their loads–great tusks from six to nine feet long. To advance further without being discovered was impossible: the two scouts were full in the path.

John gathered his party just within the belt of trees, and in a whisper told them what to do. Then, at his word, they dashed after him from cover, yelling at the top of their voices, the askaris firing their rifles as they ran, and reloading.

There was little chance of the shots taking effect, but John reckoned on them to demoralize the enemy. The result surpassed his anticipations. The scouts stood for a moment as if rooted to the ground with amazement; then they flung down their rifles and fled like hares to the spot where Juma was indicating the ford. At the same instant the porters dropped their loads with a yell of fright, and made for the river, into which they cast themselves, careless of its depth, and of the crocodiles that might be lurking expectant of a victim. Juma had his arm in a sling: the other Swahilis raised their rifles, and fired, each one wild ineffectual shot, at the advancing company. Then, utterly confounded by this amazing attack from an enemy whom they supposed to be far away, they rushed in a body to the river, sped by a volley of bullets and arrows. Half wading, half swimming, they gained the further bank, and by the time John and his men came to the ford, they had disappeared with all their men into the undergrowth.

Bill ran from one tusk to another, frantic with joy. But John was too much concerned with the serious work that lay before him to trouble himself for the present with the ivory, however valuable it might be. He saw at once that he must remove all his men from the village to the knoll if the plan of floating down the river was to be successfully initiated. After their fright, Juma and his men might for a time be disregarded; but the war-party of villagers could not now be far away, and the interval before their arrival might be all too short. The knoll not only formed a good defensible position, but it was the most convenient spot for the launching of the rafts, and the timber upon it offered material for the second raft yet to be constructed. Keeping part of his men to hack branches from the trees with their knives, he asked Ferrier to return with the rest to the village and bring over the hill the first raft and all the stores.

"Get the women to help," he said. "Promise that we'll do no more harm to the village if they'll work for us. They'll be glad enough to get rid of us, no doubt. I'd go myself, Charley, only my back is bothering me again, confound it."

Ferrier hurried off. In little more than half-an-hour he reappeared on the shoulder of the hill, followed by a long line of the men of the safari and the women of the village, carrying the loads of provisions, the impedimenta of the camp, and the raft, a cumbersome object which required twenty men to carry it. As they descended the slope, shots were fired at them from the trees bordering the river, but manifestly at so long a range that they were little likely to do any harm. They reached the knoll in safety; the baggage was piled up a short distance from the bank to form a sort of rampart: and then the whole party, including a crowd of women who were impressed to fetch and carry, worked rapidly at the construction of the raft.

"There'll be mighty little protection if they fire at us on the way down," said John gloomily.

"Yes," replied Ferrier, "we haven't got enough baggage to screen us. But look here! Why not make a sort of fence to go all round?"

"The very thing! The men are so used to making bomas that it won't give them any trouble."

While the second raft was being finished, the men who were not engaged upon it were set to weave a light framework of canes, rushes, and slender branches, about three feet high, and strong enough to be impenetrable by spears or arrows. As portions of this were completed, they were lashed to the edges of the first raft. Fore and aft the framework was raised to the height of six feet, and a hole was cut in it through which a pole might be thrust, to ward off rocks or other obstructions as the raft floated downstream, and to steer the unwieldy craft.

At midday a good deal of the work still remained to be done. The sun beat down mercilessly upon the workers, and John, eager as he was to finish, ordered a rest and a meal. The negroes threw themselves on the grass, and appeared to feel no discomfort from the heat; but the white men were glad to seek the shade of the trees crowning the knoll, where Said Mohammed served their dinner.

The order had just been given to resume work when they saw a vast crowd of dusky warriors pouring over the brow of the hill.

"Here they come!" said John, starting up; "and by the look of them, and their yells, we're in for a tight little scrimmage."

Ferrier laughed.

"Not unless they're prepared to attack us over the bodies of their wives," he said. "They can't shoot at us without hitting them."

"Of course not. I hadn't thought of that. But they're so mad that they may be ready to sacrifice their nearest and dearest. We must prevent the women from running away. It's shameful coercion, but we can't help it."

The furious villagers halted within a short distance of the knoll, and one or two let fly arrows at the busy workers behind their rampart of baggage. A wild shriek arose from the terrified women, though none had been hit; and John, running among them, told them sternly that their only safety lay in remaining at their work. To give point to his warning, and at the same time to daunt the warriors, he lifted his rifle and fired towards the dense mob, taking care to aim above their heads. The result was a general stampede. The men had already learnt the power of the wasungu's weapons, and being exposed on the bare hillside they recognized their disadvantage. They retreated up the hill to a position of security, and stood there in impotent wrath, watching their womenkind toiling for the hated enemy.

The work went on without pause until the rafts were finished. The next thing was to launch them. The river swept round the knoll in a half-circle, and

John decided to have the rafts carried to the water on the side remote from the village and out of sight of the warriors, any interference being guarded against by leaving his askaris with loaded rifles at the baggage. When the rafts were launched and moored to prevent their being carried down by the current, the ivory was conveyed to them. One side of each had been left undefended by the framework until the loading was finished. The tusks having been stowed on one raft, half-a-dozen men were set to lash on the framework while the stores and the rest of the baggage were carried to the second raft. It was clear that Bill had by no means exaggerated the value of the ivory. There were twenty-three tusks, varying in weight and size, but scaling in all at least half a ton. John did not know the market value of ivory, but so large a quantity would probably fetch several hundreds of pounds.

By the time the loads were stacked round the rafts, close against the framework, it was drawing towards evening.

"I'm afraid we shall have to wait until morning before we start," said John. "It will be very risky to navigate these clumsy things in the darkness. They lie very heavy in the water, and I shouldn't be surprised if they founder before we've gone far."

"We must chance that," said Ferrier. "I think we had better start at once. There are no rapids in this part of the river; our real trouble will begin when we come above the pool. If we stay here till the morning, we may be set upon before we are well away, whereas by starting now we shall be past the village by the time it is dark, and when they see us fairly off they may chuck up the sponge."

"All right. Is there anything else to be done?"

"We'll rope the rafts together, but we must be ready to cut the hawser if there's any need. I'll go in the first raft, of course. Perhaps Coja had better come with me to try his hand at steering, if you don't mind taking Said Mohammed. Your raft ought to come along in the wake of mine without any difficulty; but have your pole ready to push off if we strike a shoal."

"What's the rate of the current, do you think?"

"Three to four miles an hour, at a guess. Better let the women go now."

John withdrew the askaris who had been keeping guard, and the women, on being told that they might go, fled away up the hill like a flock of sheep. All the men of the safari then took their places on the rafts; these were roped together; the framework was lashed on the unprotected sides; the mooring ropes were released, and the strange overladen craft, sinking so low that the logs were covered with water, took the current and began to float down. Luckily the bales of provisions had been placed above the ammunition boxes and other baggage, which would not suffer from a wetting.

The actual start was hidden from the enemy by the projecting knoll; but

as the rafts swept round the curve their appearance was hailed with loud shouts from the hill-top, where the women had now joined the warriors. The left bank was here too precipitous and too densely wooded to permit the enemy to approach near enough to do any damage; and as the voyagers came into the straight reach that ran by the foot of the hill on which the village was perched, they saw the yelling horde rush over the brow.

"Going to meet us on the level," shouted Ferrier from his place behind the breastwork of the foremost raft. "Keep the men crouching behind the palisade."

# CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH–Ferrier takes the Lead

The river varied in breadth at this part of its course from sixty to eighty yards. The steersmen, Coja in the first, Said Mohammed in the second, kept the rafts in midstream, and they glided on the full current with a steadiness that augured well for the voyage. In less than half-an-hour they were level with the village. Then a shot rang out from the right bank. Clearly Juma had been on the watch. The shot fell short, and the sound of it caused great consternation among the villagers, who had taken up a position a few hundred yards down-stream on a stretch of treeless land on the left bank, raised a few feet above the level of the river. They had evidently been as yet unaware of the proximity of their allies. But their apprehension was immediately changed to wild excitement as they saw Juma, accompanied by his band, appear on a similar eminence on the opposite bank. They shouted with delight, leaping, brandishing spears, little suspecting the trick which the Swahilis had played on them.

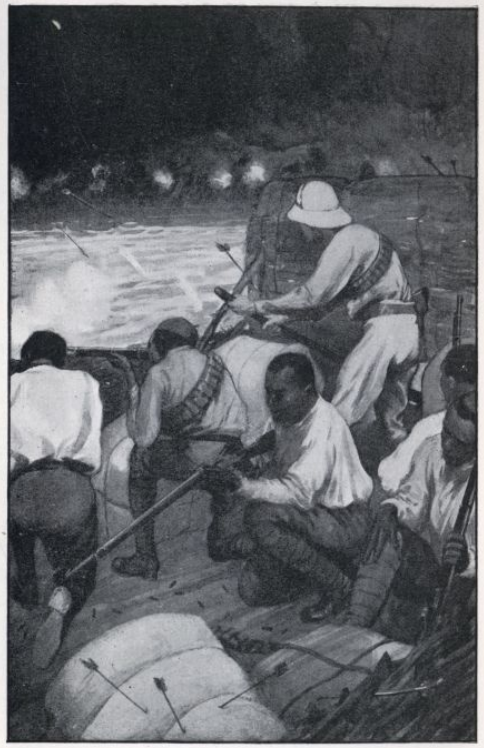
As the rafts approached, they were assailed with showers of arrows from both sides, mingled with rifle shots from the right bank. Ferrier and John ordered their men to lie flat on their faces, for those on the starboard side were exposed to the fire from the right bank, those on the port side to that from the left. The two white men themselves, and their two steersmen, could not find shelter in the same way, being bound to stand erect in order to keep the rafts in midstream. As the missiles flew around him, John felt that this was a vastly unpleasant way of

running the gauntlet. He instinctively pressed his body close to the framework; and whether it was due to the growing darkness, or to the inability of the enemy to hit a moving target, he escaped unhurt. The immediate danger was past when the banks of the river fell away to the level of the stream. Both parties of the enemy still fired, running along in time with the rafts; but their missiles now flew over the top of the breastwork. Ferrier thought it worth risking a volley from his own men. He ordered them to kneel, rest their rifles on the palisade, and take good aim at the Swahilis. Their skill or luck was superior, for when the volley flashed forth, a yell told that one at least of the bullets had got home. Immediately afterwards John ordered his askaris to fire among the negroes on the left bank; but these were somewhat remoter from the river, and he could not learn that any of the shots took effect.

Night had now sunk upon the land. The moon would rise late, and for several hours the voyage must be continued in darkness. John called to Ferrier to ask whether he had not better run into the bank and wait until there was a little light upon the course.

"I can see well enough at present," was the reply. "Besides, those beggars are keeping it up."

His expectation that the pursuit would be abandoned as soon as it became dark was not borne out. It was obvious from the shouts that were heard on either side from time to time that the enemy had screwed their resolution to an uncommon pitch. Their dread of the darkness was no less, but their savage resentment and vindictive desire for revenge was more. John was able to account for their pertinacity when he remembered what lay before him. The rapids! If he, on his light raft, had barely escaped with his life, how much less was the chance that two heavy-laden rafts would survive the battering they must receive! If they were not wrecked and broken up before they reached the pool, they would then become exposed to a terrific attack. He dared not think of what the fate of the safari would be if they were cast into the river and thrown upon the mercy of the enemy. Did they come safe through the first series of rapids and cross the pool, there was the second series beyond, sweeping through the gorge, from the heights of which the enemy could pour down upon them not merely a hail of bullets and arrows, but an avalanche of rocks which could not fail to send the rafts to the bottom. Great as were the perils which had beset him since he quitted the farm, he recognized with a momentary sinking of heart that they were trifles compared with those that were to come. He felt that his confidence would be greater if he could be beside Ferrier on the first raft. Their comradeship during the past few months had brought them very close together. He wished that they could talk things over quietly; whereas now they were separated by forty feet of rope, and anything either had to say must be uttered in a bawl.



"Jim ordered his askaris to fire among the negroes on the left bank."

*"John ordered his askaris to fire among the negroes on the left bank."*

As the darkness thickened the navigation became increasingly difficult. Sometimes, when long stretches of the river were banked by woods, it was pitch dark, and whatever obstacles might have occurred in the course, it would have been impossible to avoid them. Ferrier did his best to keep his raft in midstream, for he knew that crocodiles lurked on the banks; hippos might be sleeping in the shallows; and heavy as the raft was, he had little doubt that a heave of a hippo's huge body, a swish from a crocodile's terrible tail, would cause it to capsize, or at least break a gap in the breastwork.

At one such gloomy patch the raft ran ashore upon a mud-bank projecting into the stream. Before Ferrier could pole it off, the second raft, borne on by the current, collided with it; there was a shock, John's raft spun round, and rocked so violently that the men yelled with fright. The attaching rope, however, pulled it up with a jerk, which had the effect of hauling the first raft off the bank. Their positions were now reversed; Said Mohammed was foremost down-stream, Ferrier last. It was obviously impossible that the voyage could be continued thus. John and Ferrier ran each to the forward end of his own raft.

"Run her ashore again," shouted Ferrier, "and let me swing clear."

John obeyed. He would not have shirked the task of leading, but Ferrier's experience might make all the difference between success and failure, and it was certainly not a time to run any avoidable risks. Some minutes passed before he managed to strike the bank, and then the raft crashed against the projecting stem of a tree with a violence that threw John on to his back. Up in an instant, he clutched a branch just in time to prevent the raft from drifting away, and held on until Ferrier had passed in mid-stream, and the vessels had regained their former order. During this interlude nothing was heard of the enemy. The banks of the river were fortunately too steep and too densely wooded to allow their access.

For a little while all went well. Where the banks were low and free from tall trees the level rays of the rising moon threw a faint light upon the water, enabling Ferrier to use his pole with more confidence. But on entering a narrower reach where the trees came down to the water's edge, the sudden passage from comparative light to absolute darkness prevented him from seeing a rocky ledge jutting out from the right bank. The raft scraped it for a few feet, then stuck fast. The second raft, coming directly in its wake, did not this time sweep by, but bumped the first, and both were now end to end on the rock. The most energetic work with the poles failing to dislodge them, John said–

"Let's have a rest. There's no sign of the enemy, and I'm desperately hungry."

"That's all very well," replied Ferrier, "but the longer we delay the worse off we shall be presently. It gives the enemy time to get ahead of us, and they'll be waiting for us at the pool. I rather fancy they've already outstripped us by

cutting across country; the river winds a good deal."

"All the same, we shan't be any the better off for being famished when we meet them. Besides, I want to talk to you; we haven't settled what we're going to do."

"Very well; we'll have a tuck-in. What's the time? My match-box is empty."

John struck a match. His watch had stopped.

"The spring must have broken when I toppled over," he said. "Isn't yours going?"

"It hasn't been going for a couple of days. We can't tell how far we've come. How is our direction?"

"We're pointing north-west," replied John, after a glance at his compass. "There must be a big curve here. I fancy we must have just about got to the place where Bill and I launched our raft. If so, it will be getting light by the time we reach the pool. What do you think of doing then?"

"That depends on the look of things when we get there. How long are the rapids?"

"About half-a-mile, I should think."

"Any rocks?"

"Upon my word I don't know. I was too anxious about holding on to notice. But judging from the battering we got I should say plenty."

"Then the safest course would be to unload the rafts when we get to the head of the rapids and make a portage–carry the things along the bank until we come to the pool. We can't do that if the enemy are in force. We shall simply have to shoot the rapids and take our chance."

"I'm sorry for us. If my little raft was nearly smashed, what condition will these clumsy things be in when we get through!"

"Well, I can only do my best. Left to themselves they'd be smashed up in no time, but if I can manage to steer clear of the rocks we may get through. It won't be safe to go roped together, though. You had better moor yours while I take down the first; then I'll go ashore and come back for you."

"Rather dangerous, that, if the enemy are about."

"Perhaps. But I'm inclined to think they'll wait for us lower down. In that case I should be back before they could catch me. But really it's not much good settling on anything until we see how the land lies. The most important thing will be to take care we are not caught in the rapids before we know it. If we are, we can only let ourselves go and trust to luck."

After a delay of nearly an hour, during which the whole party made a meal of the fruits they had brought with them, they strove again to pole the rafts off the rock. The task was an impossible one while the vessels were so heavily laden. Accordingly the breastwork was removed from the shoreward side of each, and

a portion of the goods was conveyed to the bank. Thus lightened, the rafts were got off by vigorous poling, and allowed to drift a few yards down-stream until they came once more into the moonlight. Then they were run into the bank and moored while the stores were fetched and the breastwork replaced. This took up a considerable time, and it could no longer be doubted that the enemy, unless they had halted, must arrive at the pool long before the rafts.

As the moon rose higher in the sky the voyage became easier, and it was continued without incident until there were signs that day was breaking. Feeling sure that the rapids could not be far ahead, Ferrier steered into the right bank, followed by John.

"I must take a look round before we go any farther," said Ferrier. "I don't hear anything of the enemy; perhaps they are behind us after all."

He set off alone, making his way cautiously among the trees. It seemed hours before he returned, in almost broad daylight.

"We're in for it," he said as he came up. "We're within six hundred yards of the rapids. I went on round the curve until I got a view of the pool. The fort is manned. Juma must have got well ahead of us and crossed the river somewhere. But I don't think the others have arrived on the scene yet."

"Have they left nobody on the right bank?"

"Nobody at all. They're very poor tacticians. I suppose they rely on our being smashed up in the rapids, and think they'll have us at their mercy. They ought to have held both banks. It gives us a chance. We may have time for a portage, but only to the pool. We can't hope to get past the second rapids on land; but as we shall be hidden from the enemy until we actually come to the pool, there ought to be time to load up again there before they can get round to us."

"What then?"

"We shall have to shoot the second rapids in the rafts just as we are. Can't stop for another portage. From my recollection as we came up past the gorge, they're much longer and swifter than the first, besides being straighter and less rocky. I had a good look at the first as I went down the bank. There's a nasty bit about half-way through: a narrow channel between two irregular lines of sunken rocks. But it's no worse than the Long Saut on the St. Lawrence; not so bad, indeed; and I'm going to run through all right. The only doubt I have is whether we can get to the second rapids before the enemy occupy the bluff above the gorge."

"If we can't—-!"

"We shall have the pleasure of being targets for at least ten minutes for bullets and arrows and stones. But we must just go through with it now; there's no retreat for us. Now we'll unload my raft and send the men along with the

ivory. When we've given them time to get half-way to the pool, I'll go down with the raft."

"Alone?"

"Yes. It won't do for you to come, and leave the men, in case they're attacked; and I don't think any of them would be much help to me. Coja and two or three of the askaris can escort the convoy. We must make 'em understand they are to wait for me when they get to the pool; unless, indeed, I'm there first: the current is pretty swift."

"There's bush enough to hide them, but you're bound to be spotted from the fort as soon as you get to the end of the rapids."

"It will take Juma a long time to get round with his men."

"But they can swim it!"

"They won't! They can't attack us when swimming, and they'll be afraid of getting their heads broken against the raft."

During this conversation the men had already begun the work of unloading the first raft. The breastwork on the right-hand side was removed, and the ivory conveyed tusk by tusk to the bank. Enough was left at the rear to balance Ferrier's weight at the forward end. When all was ready, the men set off with their loads, Coja and two askaris with rifles going ahead.

"Get your raft unloaded while I'm gone, old chap," said Ferrier. "In fact, the men had better start with it straight away; if Juma has the sense to come round at once to meet us it'll be a very near thing to get loaded up again."

"All right. I'll go with them myself and leave a couple of men to guard the raft."

"On second thoughts I think you had better go after the first lot at once. Everything depends on their keeping under cover until I arrive with the raft, and you know how rash they are. Go and keep an eye on them. I'll see to the unloading here and send the men after you."

Accordingly John hurried in the track of the ivory-carriers, whom he overtook by the time they reached the head of the rapids. Leading them carefully through the wood, where they would be invisible to any of the enemy who might be moving along on the other side of the river, he came opposite to the point where the rapids entered the pool. There he ordered them to set down their loads, and sent Bill back to guide the second party over the same course.

Ferrier had resolved not to begin his adventurous voyage until all the men were gathered under John at the head of the pool. The actual passage of the rapids would take but a minute or two, and the time necessary for reloading the first raft would be halved if the whole party were employed in the work. The second convoy having arrived, John left them safely under cover while he retraced his steps for a short distance to a spot where he could witness his friend's

performance. He held his breath and felt his skin creep as the raft came into view, shooting down at a furious rate to what appeared certain destruction. Ferrier had removed the upper part of the framework, and stood with pole in hand, bending low, his whole attention fixed on his task. Now he prodded to the right, now to the left: at one moment the raft swerved, having evidently scraped a rock, and he almost lost his balance; but recovering himself instantly, he dexterously slipped his pole over in the direction to which the raft had been driven, and came again into mid-current. John feared lest he should be carried far into the pool, beyond the spot where the loads were laid; but when the raft came into smooth water, and its momentum was checked, Ferrier flung a rope to the shore, and the craft, uninjured except for some chips at the edges, was hauled in.

"Splendid!" said John. "It would be a stunning sport if—-"

But before he could complete the sentence Ferrier was running hard upstream. There was a shout from the fort; the raft had been discovered; the second raft was still to be brought down. John instantly set the men to load up the first raft. Every movement was visible to the men in the fort. There were loud shouts; a few shots were fired; but the range was too long for inefficient marksmen. To John's consternation and alarm there came an echo to these shouts from upstream. The warriors from the village were evidently within striking distance. Had they discovered Ferrier? Urging the men to hasten with the work of loading, he ran along the bank to see whether the second raft was on the way. Yes; it was sweeping down like the first, and on the opposite bank a crowd of yelling negroes rushed along, dodging the trees, and trying to keep pace. Ferrier paid no attention to them, his whole energy absorbed in his task. John sent a warning shot among the enemy, and they darted out of sight. The raft leapt and dashed and jolted down, and in little more than a minute after it passed John it lay moored beside the other at the shore of the pool.

The men having not yet finished the loading of the first raft, Ferrier had leisure to observe what the enemy were about. The warriors from the village, who had marched along the left bank of the river, were rushing round the northern shore of the pool towards the causeway. It was impossible to see what they would do when they reached it, and, to judge by the uproar in the fort, there was more excitement than cool calculation among Juma's party. But by the time the rafts were loaded, the breastworks replaced, and the ropes attached, the enemy's intention became clear. Before the rafts were loosed from their moorings and poled into the gentle current of the pool, a large number of negroes, with one or two Swahilis, emerged into view from behind the intervening island, and were seen hastening along the path which led from the causeway up the bluff.

"They've got a good start of us," Ferrier called from the leading raft. "We must run the gauntlet."

But now that the critical moment had arrived, John was setting his wits to work. In all the encounters with the enemy hitherto, success had been gained by the exercise of superior intelligence rather than superior force. Was there not a chance of outwitting them even now at the eleventh hour? Could they not be withdrawn from their threatening position above the gorge? An idea suggested itself: to let the rafts drift on until they came opposite the fort, and then to change their direction and pole them across the pool as if with the intention of landing on the western shore of the island and storming the fort. If the ruse succeeded, the enemy would rush back and swarm within the walls again.

John imparted his scheme to Ferrier in a few hurried sentences.

"It's worth trying," said Ferrier, "but can we get back into the current in time?"

"Yes; it begins to flow swifter, as you know, opposite the island. If only the men are drawn back into the fort, we shall have time to come back into the current and make straight for the rapids, and then they may run their hardest but won't overtake us."

"Well, you pole back first, so as not to change our order. They surely won't be such idiots!"

The rafts passed slowly along, hailed with derisive yells from the few men left in the fort, and by a shower of arrows, which flew harmlessly over the breastworks, the men having all lain down as before. Then suddenly they ceased to move; but in a few moments started ponderously in the reverse direction. John and Ferrier had exchanged places with their two steersmen, and while they poled on the bottom in the manner of punters, Coja and Said Mohammed thrust their poles into the water at an angle which would bring the rafts round to the western end of the island. It was exceedingly hard work to force the heavy vessels against the current, slight though that was; but they did move slowly, away from the gorge, and that was enough for the defenders of the fort. Alarmed at the prospect of having to repel an assault from the wasungu, they shouted vociferously to their fellows on the shore to return and help them.

"It's working!" cried John in delight. "I only wish we could see round the island. We shall have to guess when it's time to be off."

But there was little chance of their being left in ignorance of the enemy's movements. The din was tremendous, far and near. Soon the uproar within the fort increased, and men were seen swarming on to the edges of the western wall, some scrambling over and running down the slope to meet the expected attack. The situation of the rafts was too close to be pleasant to their occupants. Arrows flew over and between them, some sticking in the meshes of the breastwork. The men flat on the decks of the rafts were out of harm's way; but the two white men and their assistants were partly exposed to the flying missiles, since they could

not manage the clumsy rafts unless they stood nearly upright. For some minutes they cruised along the shore, as if seeking a convenient landing-place, until they were screened from the enemy by the fringe of trees. At last, having allowed sufficient time for the greater part of the enemy's force to regain the fort, or at least the causeway, John and Ferrier again changed places with Said Mohammed and Coja, and began to pole vigorously in the opposite direction. Being hidden by the trees, the rafts, helped by the current, had gained some speed before the change of direction was perceived. Even then the meaning of it did not at once strike the enemy. Those who had come down to the shore ran back to the fort; those within manned the southern and eastern parts of the wall, anticipating an assault at the spot where it had been partially demolished. But the rafts were increasing their distance from the island; they were also increasing their speed; and as they were now heading straight for the mouth of the gorge Juma at last recognized how he had been duped.

The voyagers were now in full view of the causeway. It was covered with men returning at a run to the fort. But Juma, the moment he saw his mistake, hastened to the gate and shouted to the men to right-about and make for the gorge. The causeway was too long for his words to be heard distinctly at the shore end, and there was a minute's confusion among the negroes before they grasped what was intended–a precious minute to the voyagers, for at the end of it the rafts were swept into the full current. When the men on the causeway, yelling with rage, at last set off to run back to the shore, John saw with a leaping heart that they were too late. A few of the enemy who had not yet reached the causeway when the retirement was countermanded, rushed along the shore and came level with the rafts as these began the descent of the rapids. But they had to run uphill: the speed of the current was at least fifteen miles an hour; before they could gain the summit of the bluff the rafts would be a mile or more downstream.

As John's raft was swept along in the wake of Ferrier's, he wondered whether the rafts, when they reached the end of the rapids, would be in splinters, and the men battered corpses. When he had shot the upper rapids with Bill, the darkness had concealed the full extent of his peril; but now in broad daylight it was brought alarmingly home to him. Ferrier's raft was swinging before him, and John heard his shouts as he instructed Coja how to move his pole for steering. John stuck to his post, almost at his wit's end, but trying desperately to follow in Ferrier's wake, and shouting instructions to Said Mohammed, who steered accordingly.

All at once he saw with terror a large rock almost in midstream, over which the water swirled and dashed with clouds of spray. He felt that nothing could avert disaster. Ferrier was safely past; John, grasping his pole, cried to the Bengali to steer to the right. The rock seemed to approach him with terrible speed; in

a moment the raft would surely be dashed against it and shivered to splinters. But the force of the current, and a timely thrust of the pole–how he made it in time John could never understand–carried the raft clear of the barrier. John's shove was indeed more vigorous than was necessary, for it swung the stern of the raft partly across the current, and caused it to scrape the edge of the rock, with a jar that sent John and the Indian headlong among the men who lay on the deck. There was a howl of dismay, and John sprang up, expecting to find himself whirling to destruction. But to his unspeakable relief he saw that the perilous voyage was over. The raft had shot clear of the gorge, and was floating with almost oily smoothness on the river below the escarpment.

# CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH–The Fight in the Swamp

"By George!" cried John, breathless, as he poled his raft up to Ferrier's, "I don't think I could have faced it if I had known what to expect."

"You did famously," said Ferrier, laughing. "I was afraid you'd come a cropper on that rock. How are your men? Mine are positively sea-sick."

"I didn't give them a thought. They'll be all right now, at any rate. Coja stuck to his job gamely, and so did Said Mohammed. We'll have to do something for them when we get home."

"Do you think we have seen the last of Juma's lot now?"

"Surely they'll have had enough of it by this time?"

"But if your guess is correct, the fellow has missed the aim of his life in losing the ivory. If I were in his place I'd certainly have another try. The current is getting slower and slower; they could easily outstrip us on the bank."

"That might be awkward for us. We don't know anything about the river a few miles down-stream. There may be more rapids. And look: d'you see men coming over the bluff behind us?"

"Yes, swarming like ants. Evidently they mean to chase us, and they'll catch us in an hour at this rate. We had better try punting."

The rate of the current here was probably not more than two or two and a half miles an hour. Vigorous poling increased the speed of the rafts slightly, but they were too heavy to move above a walking pace. A bend in the river hid the pursuers from view. When next seen they were considerably nearer.

"We could get on faster if the men walked," said Ferrier. "Let us land them on the right bank. The enemy appear to be all on the left, and we can take them in again if they come to too close quarters."

The suggestion seemed a good one, and was quickly put in effect. The men, who had had a fright and thorough drenching, were glad enough to stretch their legs on dry land again, and the rafts, relieved of their weight, responded more readily to the sturdy thrusts of the poles. Again the enemy were hidden, but catching sight of them presently through the trees, John cried–

"I say, they are cutting off to their left. The river makes another bend, I suppose, and they're going to post themselves before we arrive."

"I only hope the bank isn't high," said Ferrier. "If it is they can fire down on us, and the mischief is, we can't reply and attend to the rafts as well. Hadn't we better chuck the ivory into the river and take our own things and make a bolt for it?"

"Not I," said John. "I don't like the idea of skedaddling at all, and I'm not going to lose the ivory now. That would bring Juma out on top, and he could crow over us after all."

"There's a good deal of obstinacy in you, John," said Ferrier, smiling. "We shall have to fight, and I shouldn't be surprised if our hottest time is yet to come."

They went steadily down the river, the men keeping pace with them as closely as possible, though the nature of the ground caused them sometimes to leave the bank and march at a considerable distance from it. For nearly two hours, as they guessed, they did not catch a single glimpse of the enemy, and hoped that they had tired of the pursuit. But presently they had reason to suspect that they were not to be allowed to escape so easily. The river spread out into a kind of swamp, apparently almost half-a-mile in breadth. About half that distance ahead it was studded with small wooded islands, and Ferrier, who was still leading, was puzzled as to which of the channels into which the stream was divided was the safest to attempt. The enemy were not in sight, but from somewhere ahead came the sound of chopping wood.

"What are they up to?" said John.

"Can't tell. Making a boma perhaps. Don't you think we had better take the men on board before we get fairly into the swamp? If the enemy are hidden on those islands we had better have them with us."

John hailed the marching men, who came at his call and were soon ensconced on the rafts again. They punted along, looking ahead warily for signs of

the enemy. The current became more and more sluggish, and there was at times scarcely enough water to float the rafts, now again weighted by their passengers. Ferrier scanned the river in search of a practicable channel. In the channels on the left he saw mud-banks rising just above the surface. A wider channel to the right, about twenty yards broad, gave the best promise of a safe passage, and towards this he steered. While still some distance from it, however, he saw some figures emerge from the wooded island on the left, wade hurriedly across, and enter a similar wood on the right bank of the river, both the island and the bank being here slightly above the level of the water. The greater number of the waders were negroes, but among them were the white-clad forms of Swahilis.

"This is nasty," said John. "We can't go back."

"Nor forward either, except at a snail's pace," said Ferrier. "Confound it! We're stuck again. Look out, John: I'm on a mud-bank. Pull up till I'm free."

By dint of energetic poling he managed to get his raft clear. John avoided the obstacle by slightly changing his course.

"All we can do," he said, "is to push on as fast as we can and trust to the breastwork. The worst of it is, the men can't defend themselves without exposing their heads to the enemy's fire."

"Yes they can, if they make loopholes," replied Ferrier. "Set 'em to cut some; we were idiots not to do it before."

The rafts were still about eighty yards from the island. Their course was checked while the men hastily cut loopholes in the breastwork on each side, at which they posted themselves with their weapons; then the white men drove the rafts forward as swiftly as the shallow water permitted. The enemy had again totally disappeared. But just as Ferrier's raft entered the channel between the island and the bank, there was a shout, and a boom of logs was drawn rapidly across, completely blocking the passage. The sound of chopping was explained.

The moment he saw the obstruction, Ferrier strove to increase the speed of the raft, in the hope of breaking through. There was a jolt and a crash, but the boom held, and instantly with ferocious yells the enemy on both sides let fly a shower of arrows mingled with a few rifle-shots at the occupants of the raft. These, kneeling at the breastworks, replied as well as they could through the loopholes; but they suffered two disadvantages: while they were exposed to the missiles of the enemy behind them, and on a higher level, the enemy themselves were concealed among the trees and brushwood. Cries of pain proclaimed that several had been hit, and Ferrier, turning for a moment to seize his rifle, received an arrow in his right shoulder. In an instant he wrenched it out: there was no time to think of wounds.

Meanwhile John had poled his raft somewhat to the left of the other, to try in his turn to break through the boom. Like Ferrier, he failed. The rafts were

now ranged alongside, and John's men became exposed to the deadly hail from the island.

"We must either cut the boom or run for it," he said, gaining what shelter he could from the breastwork.

"Impossible!" returned Ferrier. "We've no axes. Knives are no good. The logs are three deep. Any one who tried to cut the lashings would be killed, to a certainty."

"I'll try and rush the island, then. You keep the others at bay."

"I'll do my best."

John ordered his men to lie down, and rapidly explained to them what he meant to do. Then, with a few vigorous thrusts of his pole, he drove the raft against the bank. As it touched, a bullet passed through his helmet. He dropped his pole, seized a rifle with his left hand and a revolver with his right, and calling to the men, leapt over the breastwork on to the island. The men followed him with a yell, all but Said Mohammed, whom he had ordered to remain and prevent the raft from drifting away.

As they swarmed up the bank, they were met by a shower of missiles. Two or three men fell; an arrow grazed John's cheek; but the suddenness of the attack had taken the enemy by surprise. Those who had rifles had no time to reload before their assailants were among them. Discharging his revolver at the nearest man, John dashed straight forward, smiting left and right with his clubbed rifle, the men hacking with their knives and jabbing with their spears. The enemy had thought rather of obtaining good cover from which to attack than of sustaining a hand-to-hand fight. John's men, emboldened by his example, followed close upon his heels. For a few moments a fierce scrimmage raged among the trees. Then the enemy gave way, turned tail, and, rushing across the narrow island, splashed through the shallow water that separated it from the next. Here they stood and faced about, as if to show fight again; but when they saw John and his little band springing after them they lost heart and fled, racing over the second island and the channel dividing it from the left bank of the river, and never halting until they gained firm ground a hundred yards away.

Meanwhile John had become aware by the uproar behind him that a fierce conflict was in progress there. He could not delay to see whether the enemy he had put to flight would return, but rushed back to the assistance of Ferrier. What he saw filled him with alarm and dismay. The main body of the enemy, several hundreds strong, and led by Juma himself, had swarmed out from the trees and shrubs among which they had been concealed, and after discharging their weapons, were wading through the river to attack Ferrier's raft. The channel was black with them, yelling, brandishing spears and rifles, a few still shooting their arrows as they plunged through the water. Some had run along the boom, and

at the moment when John returned were trying to leap over the breastwork on to the raft. Some had come round on the other side and were attempting to tear down the breastwork. Ferrier was laying about him doughtily with his clubbed rifle; Coja at the further end of the raft was doing the same; and the rest of the men were darting here and there, striking the heads of the negroes in the river, or prodding with their spears at those on the boom.

But the numbers of the enemy were so overwhelming that John feared that nothing could now save the day. Said Mohammed in his agitation had allowed his raft to drift away from the island into the stream, and a rush was immediately made towards it. John sprang on to the boom, and ran with all speed to Ferrier's help, his men close behind. Catching a big negro by the throat, he hurled him off the boom into the water, jumped the breastwork, and came to Ferrier's side just as he staggered and fell with a spear wound in the thigh. The arrival of John's party checked the assault for a moment, but meanwhile the enemy had clambered into his raft, overthrowing Said Mohammed, and the current brought it once more against the boom. The little party was now surrounded. One after another fell. Two men, a Swahili and a negro, had at last broken through the defence and gained a footing on Ferrier's raft. John felled the Swahili with a sledge-hammer blow of his rifle; the negro was killed with a thrust from Bill's knife. But while these first invaders were thus disposed of, others had forced their way on to the raft, and before John could recover himself, a spear was driven through his arm and he was hustled to the deck.

There was a yell of triumph from the enemy. But all at once, above the uproar there came the sharp crackle of rifles, followed by a ringing cheer. Juma, who was at that moment in the act of springing from the boom into the raft, halted for a second, and turned to discover the origin of these new sounds. He saw, on the right bank of the river, not two hundred yards away, a party of mounted white men, riding at a gallop towards him. For an instant he hesitated. While his back was towards the raft, Bill, with an agility amazing in a man of his years, leapt the breastwork, knife in hand, and hurled himself upon the Swahili. Both together, they fell into the river. Juma was undermost. For an instant they disappeared beneath the surface. Bill never relaxed his grip. When they emerged, he plunged his knife up to the haft in the Swahili's throat; then flung his enemy from him. Juma was dead. So he expiated the cruelties and tyrannies of many years, at the hands of a member of the tribe which had suffered most wrong.

While this tragedy was being enacted, the riders came to the brink of the stream, and ten rifles sped their bullets among the swarm of black men. Again the air rang with a British cheer. With screams of pain, yells of consternation and affright, the enemy broke and fled, some towards the island, some scrambling up-stream, those who were in the rafts plunging into the water and swimming

in all directions. And John, rising to his feet, beheld his father and Mr. Gillespie, and eight men whom he did not recognize, and waving his rifle aloft with his uninjured arm, he answered cheer with cheer.

# CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH–Back to the Farm

One morning, about a month after the fight in the swamp, John was sitting at the table in his bungalow, a paper outspread before him, a pencil in his hand, and Said Mohammed standing at his elbow.

"We must have it all first-rate, you know," he said.

"Quite up to dick, sir; you may rely on me."

"Well now, *hors d'oeuvres*–I think we might do without that."

"With respect, sir, *hors d'oeuvres* is *sine qua non*–correct card, sir, foundation of the *comme il faut*."

"All right, then; stick down sardines: we've got a tin. Now *potage*–why the dickens don't you put it in English, khansaman?"

"The English tongue, sir, is great and glorious instrument, but too gross for refinements of culinary art. Soup!–listen to it–soup! disgusting monosyllable, sir, resembling hiccough. Contrast with the delicate vocables of French."

"Well, what shall the *potage* be?"

"Clear, sir, for the ladies, *consommé à la Wanderobbo*."

"What on earth is that?"

"I beg you, sir, not to insist on answer," said the Bengali gravely. "Thick, for masculine gender: Scotch broth, concession to prejudices of great nation."

"That's all right. What's next? *Poissons*! That looks fishy. Take care you don't drop an *s*. What fish can we do?"

"Coja hooked quantity of finny tribe which, with due sauce, may pass for trout."

"Now for *entrées*."

"The partridges you shot yesterday, sir, are in prime condition. I suggest *perdrix à la Swahili*. For *relevé* I propose—-"

"I say, we'll drop that. Let's come to a good honest roast. Shoulder of lamb,

say–but we can't manage mint sauce. There's no vinegar."

"With respect, sir, in intelligent anticipation I provide for that. I put quantity of Bill's honey in ferment, and made acidulous liquid passable imitation of vinegar; pious fraud."

"Plenty of vegetables, of course."

"*Croquettes de pomme de terre, choux-fleurs à la Lulu, topinambours à la crême*."

"Look here, I can't spell that crack-jaw. What, in plain English, are *topinambours*?"

"In vulgar tongue, sir, Jerusalem artichokes; but you will agree that final syllable of artichokes is ominous and forbidding, especially to ladies."

"Well, I've had enough of it. Finish the menu yourself. I've no doubt everything will be all right."

John went out and strolled round the farm. It presented a different appearance: four or five new wooden huts, neatly thatched, erected for the accommodation of the visitors expected, stood near the bungalow. John was at present the only white man on the farm, Mr. Halliday having returned to Nairobi with the rest of the rescue-party to make some purchases, and Ferrier to meet his sister and get attention to his wounded thigh. The evening before, a messenger had come in advance, to announce that the visitors would arrive next day: Mr. Halliday was returning with Mrs. Burtenshaw, her family, and the Ferriers. Said Mohammed was determined "to do credit to the establishment," as he put it; he would show the guests "that the resources of civilization were not dead letter in African wilds."

As the day drew on, John became restless. He had the floor of the bungalow scrubbed twice; set Lulu to scour the pans in the dairy for the third time; and got Coja to cut his hair. He was in some agitation of mind as to what he should wear. He looked out a white shirt, collar, and tie, and a suit of clothes he had not worn since he left England. His unaccustomed fingers struggled with his collar-stud until he was in despair, and when he had knotted his tie he found that he had no clips, and the wretched thing threatened to ride up to his chin.

He was standing at the door of the bungalow, thus arrayed, and feeling ridiculously got up, when he saw Ferrier galloping up on a pony.

"Hallo, old chap!" shouted his friend. "The others are about half-an-hour behind. Thought I would ride ahead and prepare you. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, don't mind what I say, but you look a bit of a guy, you know. Your coat's too tight, and your waistcoat too short: are they the things you wore at school? Your tie's wriggling round to your ear; and your trousers display a good

deal of ankle–d'you know that you've got on odd socks?"

"Hang it all, Charley, what shall I do? I've got nothing else but khaki and drill, and I can't show up in those."

"Don't see why. The women won't expect to find Bond Street fashions here, and if you'll take my tip you'll tumble out of those things as soon as possible, and rig up in your usual toggery."

"You really think they won't mind?"

"Of course not. Hurry up; you'll just have time."

John dashed off with a feeling of unutterable relief. He pitched his tie and collar into a corner, crushed his suit into a drawer, regardless of creases, and in ten minutes reappeared in flannel shirt and clean white drill, feeling at ease.

In less than half-an-hour the party arrived, six in all, Mr. Gillespie having accompanied them. Their safari was still some miles in the rear.

"How d'you do, John?" said the elder lady, as he helped her to dismount. "I am Mrs. Burtenshaw–still!"

John felt himself blushing.

"I know you as Cousin Sylvia, ma'am," he said.

"We'll be great friends, I'm sure. You know Joe and Poll; this is Helen. Hilda, come and be introduced to my long-lost nephew. Regard me as your favourite aunt, my dear boy. Tell me," she whispered, "is that fat smiling gentleman in white your failed B.A.?"

"That's he: cook, khansaman, and major-domo. Said Mohammed, escort the ladies to their rooms."

The Bengali approached, bowing to each in turn.

"Esteemed madam and misses," he said, "deign to direct your footsteps to humble abode, or, as William Cowper beautifully says, your lodge in vast wilderness, with boundless contiguity of shade."

The ladies preserved an admirable composure, and retired to the huts assigned to them.

"Now, John," said Mrs. Burtenshaw, when they reappeared, "you must show us round this wonderful farm of yours. It looks very tidy, I must say. But where are your sheep? I thought you had hundreds, and there aren't fifty in that pen."

"They're out at grass, cousin; you'll see them come in by and by. There really isn't much to see, you know. Cabbages and artichokes–'m; *topinambours* is the name for ladies, says my cook–they're just the same, here and at home. If you'd come a few months later, now, I might have shown you some zebras. I'm going to try and tame some."

"Ah yes! I remember you threatened to meet your father on a striped charger, to match his striped trousers.... Who's that funny-looking little object?"

"That's Bill, scout and huntsman, and a millionaire, as things are reckoned

here. Come and see his ivory."

"You're a very rash and headstrong boy. The idea of going miles and miles after a set of thieves! I wonder you're alive. A pretty settler, indeed!"

"Well, cousin, I dare say I shall settle down now, with father to keep me in order. You see, we couldn't have felt secure if—-"

"Don't tell me! You're just a madcap; if you were my son I should be in constant terror lest you were brought home one day a mangled corpse."

"Look, mother," said Helen, "isn't it a pretty sight?"

The lambs were coming home, a great flock, covering the hollow between two gentle slopes. Their bleatings, heard faintly at first, became a deafening noise as they neared the farm. The observers noticed how they quickened their pace as they approached. Within the pen the ewes moved restlessly about, bleating calls to their young. When the lambs entered through the gate, they leapt forward frisking with delight, darted into the open pen, and sprang this way and that, each seeking its own dam.

"Charming!" said Mrs. Burtenshaw. "What a pity sheep are so silly! Now take us to your dairy."

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Said Mohammed's cookery won general applause.

"I envy you, Halliday," said Mr. Gillespie. "He's worth his fifty rupees a month, isn't he?"

"You don't have a dinner like this every day, I'm sure, John–French menu and all," said Mrs. Burtenshaw. "I should like the recipe for that *consommé à la Wanderobbo*."

"What is *à la Wanderobbo*?" asked Helen.

"I don't know," replied John. "That little old man you saw just now is one of the Wanderobbo tribe."

"Good gracious! I hope he had nothing to do with the soup. He looked–well, not scrupulously clean."

"No, no," said John, laughing. "He had no more to do with the soup than Lulu had with the cauliflowers–unless she cut them. Talking of Bill, Mr. Gillespie, what are we to do about his ivory? It has been his dream for years to recover it, but when we got back he made me a present of it."

"Just like a man," said Mrs. Burtenshaw. "You'll struggle all your life and wear yourselves out for some ridiculous thing, and when you get it don't know what to do with it."

"It's what you do that counts, not what you get," remarked Mr. Halliday: "or as our failed B.A. said when we met him first, it is work that ennobles. But

about the ivory?"

"Well," said Mr. Gillespie judicially, "I'm not sure but it belongs to the Government."

"I don't see that," said Joe Browne. "The Government did nothing for it. Didn't do anything for you, either. I'd stick to it if I were you, John. What will it fetch?"

"Five or six hundred pounds, I should think," said Mr. Gillespie.

"I wish it were mine," said Oliver. "Mother keeps me plaguey short."

"I'd thought of a scheme that would be pretty fair all round," said John. "Bill was the owner, and he gave it to me. He wants to stay on the farm. Well, I propose to build him a new hut and set him up with new weapons: that will make him comfortable for life. Then old Sobersides has been very decent. His men behaved like bricks, and we certainly couldn't have got it without their help. We might give them some bushels of beads and loads of wire and blankets and other things they value. They may seem trumpery to us, but they're untold wealth to the natives."

"And then?" said Mrs. Burtenshaw.

"Well, perhaps Charley and I might share the rest."

"Nonsense!" said Ferrier. "It's yours."

"And we'll share it. We shared everything else. Don't be selfish, Charley."

Everybody laughed, and it was ultimately settled that the ivory should be sent to Nairobi, where Mr. Gillespie promised to get the best possible price for it.

Here Said Mohammed came in with coffee. When he had handed round the cups he lingered.

"Don't wait, khansaman," said John. "We'll manage now. Every one was delighted with your dinner."

"I am repaid a thousandfold, sir. Not to intrude, sir, I have trifling communication to make."

"What is it?"

"Native chief, sir, did me honour to request I would convey thanks of self and co. for immense and colossal benefits conferred."

"Oh, that's all right. He thanked me himself, long ago."

"*Festina lente*, sir. Reflecting on said petition, I deemed the circs. worthy of more formal commemoration than perfunctory acknowledgement. Wherefore and accordingly I scorn delights and live laborious days in inditing few lines pat to the occasion, which with august permission I will now proceed to chuck off chest."

The two girls made suspicious use of their handkerchiefs; Joe Browne kicked Ferrier under the table; and Oliver, choking over his coffee, accused Mr. Halliday of smoking very strong cigars. John and the elder members of the party

preserved their gravity, though it was in a curiously constrained tone that John asked the Bengali to favour the company. With a smile of gratification Said Mohammed unrolled a scroll of paper, and, looking round to make sure that every one was attending, began in his high-pitched voice–

Hear me tell a moving story, chronicled in lofty rhyme,
Redolent of stripling's glory, monument to end of time.
Idol of my veneration, you I celebrate in song;
Ornament of British nation, you I crack up, hot and strong.

To begin at the beginning: When one day, at usual pace,
Our oblate spheroid was spinning through an awful lot of space,
You, an up-to-date Orion, Enfield rifle in your hand,
Did for most obnoxious lion, holy terror in the land.

Next, predaceous gang, Swahilis–Juma, if you please, and Co.,–
Prowling, slippery as eel is, on the rampage to and fro,
Depredated native village, spreading woe and dire alarm,
Then for more important pillage fell like ton of bricks on farm.

Faithful servant, Said Mohammed, feeling anything but bold,
Like a bleating orphan lamb hid, sniffing wolves within the fold;
While despoilers collared rifles, ammunition, shell and shot;
Item, sundry piffling trifles which the poet has forgot.

Minions of a base levanter, villains of the deepest dye,–
You are after them instanter, lightning flashing from your eye;
Swoop upon them in their slumbers, catch them fairly on the hop,
Though inferior in numbers, smite them hip and thigh and crop.

Terrified by dire disaster, they make hurry-scurry flight.
Yoicks! our whipper-in goes faster, helter-skelter day and night,
Till dark citadel is sighted, wall-encircled, likewise moat.
Is prodigious effort blighted? Not at all: we simply gloat.

Roberts' grit and Cæsar's clear eye–honestly, you have them both.
'Fas est ab hoste doceri,' august Roman general quoth:
Taking leaf from book of Juma, you perpended ruse de guerre,
And with dodgy slimness you manoeuvred brigands from their lair.

Penned within restricted compass, you repel the fierce attack,
Calm amid most awful rumpus: things are looking very black.
Lo! in thickest of the slaughter, one sees chance of chipping in,
And with can of boiling water stems the tide and scores a win.

Threat of famine, grisly spectre, makes us look a little blue;
But our commonwealth's protector, launching forth in bark canoe,
Quits the precincts of the island, marches at a spanking pace,
Up-hill, down-hill, swamp and dry land, perfect Nimrod in the chase.

Hippopotamus stupendous to your prowess falls a prey.
Ministers of grace defend us! you are spirited away.
Lo! proverbially fickle, Fortune knocks you from your perch,
Leaves you in a pretty pickle, or, as you may say, the lurch.

Meditating in your prison, through the darkling stilly night,
Ere red Phoebus has arisen you have perpetrated flight:
Swift rejoin the little party by Swahili sore oppressed;
Juma then is in the cart, he gets a bullet in the chest.

Pardon slight inaccuracy, due to exigence of rhyme;
Frenzied poet, going pace, imagines only the sublime.
Be pedestrian and pedantic when you're patronizing prose,
Spur your Pegasus quite frantic when a poem you compose.

To return from this diversion, and to make long story short,
After enemy's dispersion you evacuated fort;
Made a bee-line for the village, situated on a hill,
Scooped the products of their tillage, bloodless coup, resistance nil.

Expediting preparations for strategic move in rear,
'Mid poor females' ululations, most distressing to the ear–
What makes all your pulses throb? oh! what sets all your nerves athrill?
'Tis shikari Wanderobbo, or, to use his alias, Bill.

Pale with rage and indignation (metaphorically pale),
Billy tells of spoliation, thieves his property assail.
Tartar like the bold Cambuscan (Chaucer left his tale half-told),
Juma digs up every tusk and Bill is absolutely sold.

Now behold you on your mettle; now momentous hour has struck,
You in most pugnacious fettle sally forth to try your luck;
Meet marauders by the river, fall on them like bolt from blue,
Crying 'Stand and eke deliver, or I'll run you through and through!'

(Note: that speech, correct in diction, is not quite correct in fact;
'Tis a literary fiction, managed with consummate tact.
So the other classic writers, Livy and Thucydides,
Decorate the lips of fighters with sublime apostrophes.)

Though the words were never uttered, pish! it matters not a jot;
Like March hares the scoundrels scuttered, dropping burdens on the spot;
After years of patient waiting, Bill regains his ownest own,
And with ecstasy gyrating, bellows till he's fairly blown.

You with prescient acumen see that all is not O.K.;
You alas! have very few men, Juma has a vast array;
Yet while danger round you thickens, lo! you neither quail nor quake;
Though you wonder how the dickens you are going to take the cake.

To omit progressive stages, which would take up too much time,
Occupy a dozen pages and exhaust a lot of rhyme–
After navigating torrent where the crocodiles disport,
You were spied by foe abhorrent, lurking watchful in the fort.

How you diddled them just proper, how you did the Johnnies brown,
And how many came a cropper as the rafts were floating down:
This perchance a future Milton, seeking an heroic theme,
May compose splendacious lilt on, in the groves of Academe.

And perchance some future Hallam, with display of prosy pomp,
Will relate in distant Balham scrumptious battle in the swamp;
And describe the villain Juma, in penultimate despair,
Meeting Bill upon the boom and getting his quietus there.

Now the hurly-burly's over, not a cloud bedims the sky;
You are jolly well in clover, and the bloom is on the rye;
'Tempus fugit': I must stow it—end my palpitating lay,
Ever faithful cook and poet, Said Mohammed, failed B.A.

There was a burst of applause as the Bengali concluded.

"Capital!" cried Mr. Halliday.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the girls together, clapping their hands.

"Absolutely unique, by Jove!" added Oliver.

"You're sure of immortality now, John," said Joe.

"I wouldn't wonder if it's good enough for *Punch*," said Mr. Gillespie.

"Such laudation warms the cockles of my heart, ladies and gentlemen," declared Said Mohammed, beaming. "But the poem is not destined to be squandered on *profanum vulgus:* it is strictly for private consumption."

"Have some copies printed, Mr. Mohammed," said Mrs. Burtenshaw. "I'll pay the bill."

"Your esteemed order, madam, shall be punctually attended to. And now, with excuses, I beg to be allowed to retire to my own place–to return to my muttons, as it were: or in other words, to wash the dishes."

And with profound salaams he withdrew.

————

By the last advices from Nairobi I learn that the Hallidays' farm in Kenya is exceedingly prosperous. Mr. Halliday received his lease, and was recently mentioned in a Government report as one of the most enterprising and successful settlers in British East Africa. Mrs. Burtenshaw regards this testimonial as unfair, since Mr. Halliday is only a figurehead, and John does the work; but, as Mr. Gillespie says, nobody cares a pin for what appears in a Government report.

There are two other farms adjoining Alloway, one owned by Charles Ferrier, the other by the two Brownes. It is rumoured that, as lions and other wildfowl have now disappeared from the vicinity, two of the three farms will soon be graced by the presence of ladies; but there seems to be some speculation at teatables in Nairobi as to whether Hilda Ferrier will become Mrs. Joseph Browne or Mrs. David Halliday. Knowing John, I should say that there is no doubt about the matter. Mr. Gillespie advises Helen Browne to change her name to Ferrier at the same time: he is a firm believer in economy. Said Mohammed is anxiously awaiting definite information, for he says that he cannot set to work on his nuptial ode in honour of the occasion until he knows which is which; then he will show us all what's what. My own opinion is that he will be so busy in erecting a wedding-cake of suitable proportions as to have no leisure to build the lofty rhyme. Meanwhile he has learnt Spenser's "Epithalamium" by heart, and is convinced that, with due inspiration, he will knock it into a cocked hat.

THE END

HERBERT STRANG

*Complete List of Stories*

ADVENTURES OF DICK TREVANION, THE
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FIGHTING WITH FRENCH
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FRANK FORESTER

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SETTLERS AND SCOUTS
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THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES
TOM BURNABY
TOM WILLOUGHBY'S SCOUTS
WINNING HIS NAME
WITH DRAKE ON THE SPANISH MAIN
WITH HAIG ON THE SOMME

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