ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

SIX MONTHS AT THE CAPE

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Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
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Letter 1.
"A Life on the Ocean Wave."

South Africa.

Dear Periwinkle,—Since that memorable, not to say miserable, day, when you and I parted at Saint Katherine's Docks,[1] with the rain streaming from our respective noses —rendering tears superfluous, if not impossible—and the noise of preparation for departure damaging the fervour of our "farewell"—since that day, I have ploughed with my "adventurous keel" upwards of six thousand miles of the "main," and now write to you from the wild Karroo of Southern Africa.

The Karroo is not an animal. It is a spot—at present a lovely spot. I am surrounded by—by nature and all her southern abundance. Mimosa trees, prickly pears, and aloes remind me that I am not in England. Ostriches, stalking on the plains, tell that I am in Africa. It is not much above thirty years since the

[1] Near the Tower of London. The South African traffic is now carried on chiefly through the East India Docks, Poplar, from which the Union Castle liners depart. The mail boats proceed from Southampton.

last lion was shot in this region,[2] and the kloofs, or gorges, of the blue mountains that bound the horizon are, at the present hour, full of "Cape-tigers," wild deer of different sorts, baboons, monkeys, and—but hold! I must not forestall. Let me begin at the beginning.

The adventurous keel above referred to was not, as you know, my own private property. I shared it with some two hundred or so of human beings, and a large assortment of the lower animals. Its name was the "Windsor Castle"—one of a magnificent line of ocean steamers belonging to an enterprising British firm.

There is something appallingly disagreeable in leave-taking. I do not refer now to the sentiment, but to the manner of it. Neither do I hint, my dear fellow, at *your* manner of leave-taking. Your abrupt "Well, old boy, *bon voyage*, good-bye, bless you," followed by your prompt retirement from the scene, was perfect in its way, and left nothing to be desired; but leave-takings in general—how different!

Have you never stood on a railway platform to watch the starting of an express?

Of course you have, and you have seen the moist faces of those two young sisters, who had come to "see off" that dear old aunt, who had been more than a mother to them since that day, long ago, when they were left orphans, and who was leaving them for a few months, for the first time for many years; and you have observed how, after kissing and weeping on her for the fiftieth

[2] In 1840. See page 83. The author was writing in 1876.

time, they were forcibly separated by the exasperated guard; and the old lady was firmly, yet gently thrust into her carriage, and the door savagely locked with one hand, while the silver whistle was viciously clapt to the lips with the other, and the last "goo–ood—bye—d–arling!" was drowned by a shriek, and puff and clank, as the train rolled off.

You've seen it all, have you not, over and over again, in every degree and modification? No doubt you have, and as it is with parting humanity at railway stations, so is it at steamboat wharves.

There are differences, however. After you had left, I stood and sympathised with those around me, and observed that there is usually more emotion on a wharf than on a platform—naturally enough, as, in the case of long sea voyages, partings, it may be presumed, are for longer periods, and dangers are supposed to be greater and more numerous than in land journeys,—though this is open to question. The waiting process, too, is prolonged. Even after the warning bell had sent non-voyagers ashore, they had to stand for a considerable time in the rain while we cast off our moorings or went through some of those incomprehensible processes by which a leviathan steamer is moved out of dock.

After having made a first false move, which separated us about three yards from the wharf—inducing the wearied friends on shore to brighten up and smile, and kiss hands, and wave kerchiefs, with that energy of decision which usually marks a really final farewell—our steamer remained in that position

for full half an hour, during which period we gazed from the bulwarks, and our friends gazed from under their dripping umbrellas across the now impassable gulf in mute resignation.

At that moment a great blessing befell us. A boy let his cap drop from the wharf into the water! It was an insignificant matter in itself, but it acted like the little safety-valve which prevents the bursting of a high-pressure engine. Voyagers and friends no longer looked at each other like melancholy imbeciles. A gleam of intense interest suffused every visage, intelligence sparkled in every eye, as we turned and concentrated our attention on that cap! The unexpressed blessing of the whole company, ashore and afloat, descended on the uncovered head of that boy, who, all unconscious of the great end he was fulfilling, made frantic and futile efforts with a long piece of stick to recover his lost property.

But we did at last get under weigh, and then there were some touches of real pathos. I felt no disposition to note the humorous elements around when I saw that overgrown lad of apparently eighteen summers, press to the side and wave his thin hands in adieu to an elderly lady on shore, while tears that he could not, and evidently did not care to restrain, ran down his hollow cheeks. He had no friend on board, and was being sent to the Cape for the benefit of his health. So, too, was another young man—somewhere between twenty and thirty years—whose high colour, brilliant eye, and feeble step told their own tale. But this man was not friendless. His young wife was there, and supported

him with tender solicitude towards a seat. These two were in the after-cabin. Among the steerage passengers the fell disease was represented in the person of a little boy. "Too late" was written on the countenances of at least two of these,—the married man and the little boy.

As to the healthy passengers, what shall I say of them? Need I tell you that every species of humanity was represented?

There were tall men, and short men, as well as men broad and narrow,—mentally, not less than physically. There were ladies pretty, and ladies plain, as well as grave and gay. Fat and funny ones we had, also lean ones and sad. The wise and foolish virgins were represented. So too were smokers and drinkers; and not a few earnest, loving, and lovable, men and women.

A tendency had been gaining on me of late to believe that, after passing middle-life, a man cannot make new and enthusiastic friendships. Never was I more mistaken. It is now my firm conviction that men may and do make friendships of the closest kind up to the end of their career. Of course the new friends do not, and cannot, take the place of the old. It seems to me that they serve a higher purpose, and, by enabling one to realise the difference between the old and the new, draw the cords of ancient friendship tighter. At all events, you may depend upon it, my dear Periwinkle, that no new friend shall ever tumble *you* out of the niche which you occupy in my bosom!

But be this as it may, it is a fact that in my berth—which held four, and was full all the voyage—there was a tall, dark, powerful,

middle-aged man, an Englishman born in Cape Colony,[3] who had been "home" for a trip, and was on his way out again to his African home on the great Karroo. This man raised within me feelings of disgust when I first saw him in the dim light of our berth, because he was big, and I knew that a big man requires more air to fill his lungs than a little one, and there was no superabundant air in our berth—quite the reverse. This man occupied the top berth opposite to mine. Each morning as I awoke my eyes fell on his beard of iron-grey, and I gazed at his placid countenance till he awoke—or I found his placid countenance gazing at me when *I* awoke. From gazing to nodding in recognition is an easy step in ordinary circumstances, but not when one's head is on one's pillow. We therefore passed at once, without the ceremony of nodding, into a quiet "good morning." Although reticent, he gradually added a smile to the "good morning," and I noticed that his smile was a peculiarly pleasant one. Steps that succeed the "first" are generally easy. From disliking this man—not on personal, but purely selfish grounds—I came to like him; then to love him. I have reason to believe that the attachment was mutual. His name—why should I not state it? I don't think he would object—is Hobson.

In the bunk below Hobson lay a young Wesleyan minister. He was a slender young fellow,—modest and thoughtful. If Hobson's bunk had given way, I fear that his modesty and thoughtfulness

[3] Known as the Province of the Cape of Good Hope, (or the Cape Province), since the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

might have been put to a severe test. I looked down upon this young Wesleyan from my materially exalted position, but before the voyage was over I learned to look up to him from a spiritually low position. My impression is that he was a "meek" man. I may be mistaken, but of this am I certain, that he was one of the gentlest, and at the same time one of the most able men in the ship.

But, to return to my berth—which, by the way, I was often loth to do, owing to the confined air below, and the fresh glorious breezes on deck—the man who slept under me was a young banker, a clerk, going out to the Cape to make his fortune, and a fine capable-looking fellow he was, inclined rather to be receptive than communicative. He frequently bumped me with his head in getting up; I, not unfrequently, put a foot upon his nose, or toes, in getting down.

What can I say about the sea that has not been said over and over again in days of old? This, however, is worthy of record, that we passed the famous Bay of Biscay in a dead-calm. We did not "lay" one single "day" on that "Bay of Biscay, O!" The "O!" seems rather awkwardly to imply that I am not stating the exact truth, but I assure you that it is a fact. More than this, we had not a storm all the way to the Cape. It was a pure pleasure excursion—a sort of yacht voyage—from beginning to end; very pleasant at the time, and delightful now to dwell upon; for, besides the satisfaction of making a new friend like Hobson, there were others to whom I was powerfully drawn, both by

natural sympathy and intellectual bias.

There was a Wesleyan minister, also an Englishman, born in South Africa, and of the race of Anak, with whom, and his amiable wife, and pretty children, I fraternised ardently. My soul was also gladdened by intercourse with a clergyman of the Dutch-Reformed Church, well-known in the Cape, and especially in the Transvaal—who, with his pleasant wife and daughter, was on his way back to South Africa after a brief trip to Europe. He was argumentative; so, you know, am I. He was also good-tempered, therefore we got on well.

It would be an endless business to name and describe all the passengers who were personally attractive, and who were more or less worthy of description. There were, among others, a genial and enthusiastic Dutch-African legislator of the Cape; a broad-shouldered but retiring astronomer; also a kindly Cape merchant; and a genial English banker, with their respective wives and families. I had the good fortune to sit in the midst of these at meals, close to Captain Hewat, who is unquestionably, what many of us styled him, a "trump." He is also a Scotchman. There was likewise a diamond-digger, and another man who seemed to hate everybody except himself. There were also several sportsmen; one of whom, a gallant son of Mars, and an author, had traversed the "Great Lone Land" of British America, and had generally, it seemed to me, "done" the world, with the exception of Central Africa, which he was at last going to add to his list. There were also troops of children, who behaved

remarkably well considering the trials they had to undergo; and numerous nurses, some of whom required more attention than all the ladies put together.

You will now, no doubt, expect an account of romantic adventures on the deep, and narrow escapes, and alarms of fire, and men overboard, and thrilling narratives. If so, your expectations are doomed to disappointment. We fished for no sharks, we chased no whales, we fell in with no slavers or pirates. Nevertheless we saw flying fish, and we had concerts and lectures; and such delightful perambulations of the decks, and such charming impromptu duets and glees and solos on retired parts of the deck in moonlight nights, and such earnest discussions, and such genial companionship! Truly that voyage was one of those brilliant episodes which occur only once in a lifetime, and cannot be repeated; one of those green spots in memory, which, methinks, will survive when all other earthly things have passed away.

I will write no more about it, however, at present. Neither will I proceed in what is usually considered the natural manner with my epistles—namely, step by step. Arrivals, cities, travelling, roads, inns, and all such, I will skip, and proceed at one bound to that which at the present moment is to me most interesting, merely remarking that we reached Capetown, (of which more hereafter), in November,—the South African summer—after a voyage of twenty-five days.

I am now sojourning at Ebenezer-Hobson's residence on the

Karroo.

Letter 2.
Hunting Springboks on the Karroo

To start for the hunting-field at seven in the morning in a carriage and six, smacks of royalty and sounds luxurious, but in South Africa there are drawbacks connected therewith.

Hobson's farm is, as I have said, on the Karroo—those vast plains which at some seasons resemble a sandy desert, and at others are covered with rich verdure and gorgeous flowers. They are named after the small, succulent, Karroo-bush, which represents the grass of other plains, and is excellent food for cattle, sheep, and ostriches.

These plains embrace a considerable portion of the territory of the Cape. The Karroo is pre-eminently lumpy. Its roads in most places are merely the result of traffic. They, also, are lumpy. Our carriage was a native "cart," by which is meant a plain and powerful machine with springs that are too strong readily to yield. Five of our team were mules, the sixth was a pony.

Our party at starting numbered five, but grew as we progressed. We took with us provisions and fodder for two days. The driving was undertaken by Hobson's nephew, assisted by his eldest son—"Six-foot Johnny." There was a double necessity for two drivers. To hold the reins of five kicking mules and a prancing pony required both hands as well as all the strength of

the cousin, though he was a powerful fellow, and the management of the whip claimed both arms, and all the strength, as well as the undivided attention of his assistant. The whip was a salmon-rod in appearance, without exaggeration. It had a bamboo handle somewhere between twelve and fourteen feet long, with a proportionate lash. The operator sometimes found it convenient to stand when he made a cast with his fishing-rod weapon. He was an adept with it; capable, it seemed to me, of picking a fly off one of the leader's ears.

There was some trouble in keeping our team quiet while rifles, ammunition, provisions, etcetera, were being stowed in the cart.

At last the cousin gave the word. Six-foot Johnny made a cast. The lash grazed the leader's flank with a crack that might have shamed a small revolver. The mules presented first their noses, then their heels to the sky; the cart leaped from the ground, and we were off—bumping, rattling, crashing, swinging, over the wild Karroo, followed by some half-dozen horses led by two mounted Hottentot attendants.

My friend Hobson, greatly to our grief, did not accompany us, owing to inflamed eyes, but I shared the back seat of the cart with his brother Jonathan, a tall strapping man of middle age and modest mien, who seemed to me the perfect type of a colonial hero.

In an hour or so we came to the solitary farm of a Mr Green, who regaled us with a sumptuous breakfast, and lent me a spur. I had the liberal offer of two spurs, but as, in hunting with the rifle,

it is sometimes advisable to sit on one's right heel, and memory during the excitement of the chase is apt to prove faithless, I contented myself with one spur,—feeling pretty confident that if I persuaded the left side of my horse to go, the right side could not well remain behind.

Mr Green joined us. Thereafter we came to the residence of a Mr Priest, who also joined us with his son, and thus we sped on over the flat sandy plains, inhaling the sweet scent of mimosa blossom, glowing in the fervid sunshine, and picking up comrades here and there, until about noon we reached the scene of our intended operations.

This was a vast, almost level plain named the Plaat River Flats. It lay between two rivers, was eight or ten miles wide and upwards of twenty miles in length—a mighty ocean, as it were, of short, compact Karroo, with a boundless horizon like the sea in all directions save one, where a great South African mountain range intercepted the view. Here and there a few clumps of mimosa bushes rose like islets, and lent additional interest to the scene.

We "outspanned", that is, we unyoked, and "off-saddled" here for luncheon, and found shelter from the sun under a mimosa, which was large enough to merit being styled a tree. Its thorns were from four to six inches in length.

The party had now swelled to fourteen—all stout hardy descendants of the English, Scotch, or Dutch settlers, who had originally peopled the land; good rifle shots, and splendid horsemen. One of them was conspicuous by his brawny arms,

which were burnt to a deep brown in consequence of his preferring to hunt and work at all times with shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbows. Another struck me as having the broadest pair of shoulders I ever saw in a man of his size.

"Capital water here," said Green to me, on alighting beside the mimosa-thorn.

"Indeed," said I, thirsting for some, "where is it?"

"Here! come; I'll show you."

He led me to a spot among the bushes where lay a small pond of thin mud the colour of weak tea with milk.

"There you are," said Green.

I looked at him inquiringly.

He looked at me and smiled.

I laughed.

Green grinned, and assured me that it was "first-rate water."

He dipped a cup, as he spoke, and drank it. So did his comrades, with evident satisfaction, though the liquid was so opaque that I could not see the bottom of a tea-cup when it was full.

There could be no further doubt on the point. These reckless and jovial South Africans—European by extraction though they were, and without a drop of black blood in their veins—had actually accommodated themselves to circumstances so far as to consider liquid mud good water! More than that, I found that most of the party deemed it a sufficient beverage, for they were all temperance men, if not total abstainers. Still further, I

followed their example, drank of that yellow pond, and actually enjoyed it. Subsequently I made the discovery that there were small animals in it; after that I preferred it in the form of tea, which was quickly infused by our active Hottentots.

The discovery above referred to was made when Green, (or Brownarms, or Broadshoulders, I forget which), was quaffing a cup of the cold element. Having drained it he spat out the last mouthful, and along with it a lively creature like a small shrimp, with something like a screw-propeller under its tail!

Enjoying our tea under the shade of the mimosa, we rested for an hour, and then, saddling our steeds and slinging on rifles and cartridge-pouches, we mounted, and sallied forth upon the plain.

A glorious sensation of freedom came over me as I felt my horse's springy step,—a sensation which brought powerfully back the memory of those days when I first galloped over the American prairies. Surely there must be a sympathy, a mesmeric influence, between a horse and his rider which sends a thrill through each. Hobson had lent me his own favourite horse, Rob Roy. He was a charming creature; well made, active, willing, and tender in the mouth, but, best of all, he "trippled" splendidly.

Trippling is a favourite gait in South Africa, especially among the Dutch farmers. It is something between pacing and ambling, a motion so easy that one scarce rises at all from the saddle. We trippled off into the vast plain towards the horizon, each horseman diverging a little from his comrades, like a fleet of fishing-boats putting out to sea. Most of the party rode without

coats, for the sky was cloudless, and we looked for a broiling day. Brownarms, I observed, had his sleeves rolled up, as usual, to the shoulder. Six-foot Johnny rode a cream-coloured pony, which, like himself, enjoyed itself intensely, and seemed ready for anything. Each man grasped his rifle by the middle with the right hand, and rested the stock on his thigh.

Being a stranger to the work, I had been supplied with a Hottentot as well as a horse,—to guide me and carry my rifle; but I scorned to ride without my weapon, and did not at first see the necessity of a guide in the circumstances. Ultimately I was only too glad to avail myself of his services!

The South Africans call Hottentots "boys," whatever their age or size may be. My "boy" was named Michael. He was a small wiry man of twenty or thirty,—more or less,—with a dirty brown face, dirty brown garments, and a dirty brown horse. Though a bad one to look at, it was a marvellous horse to go. Michael had a cavernous red mouth, and magnificent white teeth. Likewise he was gifted with a strong sense of the ludicrous, as I have reason to know.

We advanced slowly into the plain at first, and gradually scattered until some of the party began to look like mere specks in the distance. Presently I saw two or three of them break into a gallop, and observed a few moving spots of white on the horizon. I looked anxiously at my boy. He returned the gaze with glittering eyes and said "bok."

"Boks! are they?" said I, applying my spur and making a leap

over an ant-bear hole.

Rob Roy stretched his legs with a will, but a howl from Michael caused me to look round. He was trending off in another direction, and pointing violently towards something. He spoke nothing but Dutch. My acquaintance with that tongue was limited to the single word "Ja."

He was aware of this, and his visage became all eyes and mouth in his frantic effort to assure me it would be wise were I to follow his lead.

I turned at once and galloped alongside of him in faith.

It soon became clear what he aimed at. The horsemen on the far off horizon were driving the springboks towards the stream which bounded one side of the great plain, Mike was making for the bushes that bordered that stream in the hope of reaching them before the boks should observe us.

Oh! it was a glorious burst, that first race over the wild Karroo, on a spirited steed, in the freshness of early morning—

With the silent bushboy alone by my side,

for he *was* silent, though tremendously excited. His brown rags fluttered in the self-made breeze, and his brown pony scrambled over the ground quite as fast as Rob Roy. We reached a clump of underwood in time, and pulled up, panting, beside a bush which was high enough to conceal the horses.

Anxiously we watched here, and carefully did I look to my rifle,—a double-barrelled breech-loading "Soaper-Henry,"—to see that it was loaded and cocked, and frequently did I take

aim at stump and stone to get my hand and eye well "in," and admiringly, with hope in every lineament, did Michael observe me.

"See anything of them, Mike?" I asked.

I might as well have asked a baboon. Mike only grinned, but Mike's grin once seen was not easily forgotten.

Suddenly Mike caught sight of something, and bolted. I followed. At the same moment pop! pop! went rifles in different parts of the plain. We could not see anything distant for the bushes, but presently we came to the edge of an open space, into which several springboks were trotting with a confusedly surprised air.

"Now, Sar,—now's you chance," said Mike, using the only English sentence he possessed, and laying hold of the bridle of my horse.

I was on the ground and down on one knee in such a hurry, that to this day I know not by what process I got off the horse.

Usually, when thus taken by surprise, the springboks stop for a moment or two and gaze at the kneeling hunter. This affords a splendid though brief chance to take good aim, but the springboks were not inquisitive that day. They did not halt. I had to take a running shot, and the ball fell short, to my intense mortification. I had sighted for three hundred yards. Sighting quickly for five hundred, while the frightened animals were scampering wildly away, I put a ball in the dust just between the legs of one.

The leap which that creature gave was magnificent. Much too high to be guessed at with a hope of being believed! The full significance of the animal's name was now apparent. Charging a breech-loader is rapid work, but the flock was nine hundred or a thousand yards off before I could again take aim. In despair I fired and sent a bullet into the midst of them, but without touching one.

I now turned to look at the "boy," who was sitting on his pony with both eyes nearly shut, and a smile so wide that the double row of his teeth were exposed to the very last grinders!

But he became extremely grave and sympathetic as I turned towards him, and made a remark in Dutch which was doubtless equivalent to "better luck next time."

Remounting I rode to the edge of the clump of bushes and found several of my companions, some of whom carried the carcasses of springboks at their cruppers. Hope revived at once, and I set off with them in search of another flock.

"You've failed, I see," remarked my friend Jonathan Hobson in a sympathetic tone.

Ah! what a blessed thing is sympathy!

"Yes," said I; "my shots fell short."

"Don't let that discourage you," returned Jonathan, "you're not used to the Karroo. Distance is very deceptive. Sighting one's rifle is the chief difficulty in these regions, but you'll soon come to it."

Another flock of springboks was discovered at this moment

on a distant knoll, towards which we trotted, trippled, and cantered. We quickly scattered,—each man taking his own course. Six-foot Johnny, already burdened with a buck, went off at reckless speed. He soon came near enough to cause the game to look up inquiringly. This made him draw rein, and advance with caution in a sidling and indirect manner. In a few minutes the boks trotted off. We were now within long range, and made a dash at racing-speed to head them. The creatures absolutely played with us at first, and performed some of their astounding leaps, as if for our special amusement. Had they set off at full speed at once we should not have had a chance, for they are fleeter than horses. Their manner of leaping is *à la* indiarubber ball. It is not a bound forwards, but a "stott" straight upwards, —six, eight, or nine feet, without apparent effort, and displaying at each bound a ridge, or fold, of pure white hair on their backs which at other times is concealed.

We now "put on a spurt," and the leading men got near enough —between two and three hundred yards. They dismounted, dropped their bridles, and kneeled to take aim. Brownarms fired and brought one down—so did Broadshoulders. Six-foot Johnny, in his eagerness, let the cream pony stumble, somehow, and went over its head—also over his own, and landed on his knees. The bok he was after stopped to gaze at the catastrophe. Johnny, profiting by his position, took aim and tumbled it over.

Mike was by this time leading me towards an animal. We got within three hundred yards when it began to stretch out. Further

pursuit being useless, I pulled up, leaped off, kneeled, fired, and missed again—the ball, although straight, falling short. With wild haste I scrambled on Rob Roy—who, by the way, stood as still as a stone when left with the bridle thrown over his head and hanging from his nose. The horses were trained to this.

Loading as I ran we soon came to a bok which had been turned by some of the other hunters. Again I raced, pulled up, leaped off, and fired. The pop! pop! was now going on all over the plain, and balls were whistling everywhere. Again my bok refused to stop to look at me—as he ought to have done—and again I missed. Michael's eyes were now quite shut, and his jaws visible to the wisdom teeth—supposing he possessed any.

Growing reckless under disappointment I now dashed away in pursuit of animals that had been scattered by the fusillade, and fired right and left at all ranges between two and ten hundred yards, but without any other effect than that of driving up the dust under two or three of them, and causing many of their astounding leaps. Soon the rest of the party were scattered so far on the plain as to be utterly out of sight and hearing. As far as sensation went, my "Tottie" and I were as lonely in that wilderness as was Mungo Park in days gone by.

All this time the sun was blazing in the sky with unclouded and fervent heat. It had been 110 degrees in the shade at Ebenezer a day or two before, therefore I judged it to have been much the same on this occasion. There was not a breath of wind. Everything was tremulous with heat.

Suddenly I beheld, with the deepest interest, a magnificent lake with beautiful islets scattered over its crystal breast. Often had I read of the *mirage* of African deserts, and much had I thought about it. Now, for the first time, it was before me. Never was deception more perfect. If I had not known that no such lake existed in the region I should have been almost ready to stake my life on the reality of what I saw. No wonder that thirsty travellers in unknown regions should have so often pushed forward in eager pursuit of this beautiful phantom.

"Things are not what they seem," truly! This applies to many terrestrial things, but to none of them more thoroughly than to the *mirage*.

While I was looking at it, the form of the lake altered sufficiently to have dispelled the illusion, if I had been labouring under it. In a few minutes it passed away altogether, but only to reappear elsewhere.

Another curious effect, and rather absurd mistake, resulted from the different densities in the super-heated atmosphere which caused this *mirage*. Fancying that I saw two springboks on the horizon I pointed them out to my boy.

"Ja!" said Mike, nodding his head and riding towards them at a smart canter. As we advanced I observed that the boks began to grow rather larger than life, and that Mike slackened his pace and began to grin. It turned out that the objects were two carts with white canvas hoods, and when we came up to them we found they belonged to a party who had come out to join us, but who, up

to that hour, had been unable to discover us in the vast hunting-field!

After directing them to our camp we proceeded on our way. That is to say Mike did. For myself, I was completely lost, and if left to myself should have been quite unable to return to camp.

While galloping along, revelling in the sunshine—in the love of which I will not yield to cats—we came suddenly on the largest snake I had yet seen. It was, I believe, a cobra, must have been fully six feet long, if not more, and was gliding with an easy sinuous motion over the plain as fast apparently, as a man's ordinary running-pace. I observed that it did not get out of the way of small bushes, but went straight through them without the smallest check to its speed. It suddenly dived into a hole and disappeared. It is said that when snakes take to a hole to escape pursuit, some of them have a habit of causing their heads to stop abruptly at the entrance, and allowing their bodies and tails to flip past like the lash of a whip, so that if the pursuer were to thrust in his hand to grasp the tail he would be met by the fangs! As the bite of most South African snakes means death, if the part be not cut out, or otherwise effectually treated, handling them is carefully avoided. Nevertheless my friend Jonathan—when a younger man, let us hope!—was in the habit of occasionally catching deadly snakes by the tail, swinging them round his head, and dashing out their brains on a stone or tree!

Soon we perceived two of our comrades driving a flock of springboks towards the river. Mike at once diverged towards a

clump of bushes which it seemed probable they would pass. In ten minutes we were down in a hollow, with the horses hid behind a mimosa-thorn. The boks had not seen us, being too much taken up with their pursuers; they came straight towards us.

"Now, sar," whispered Mike once again, while his eyes glared with glee, "*now's* you chance!"

I went down on one knee, carefully sighted the rifle, and looked up. The foremost bok was within good range. I fired and missed! "Desolation!" said I, cramming in another cartridge while the flock diverged to the left.

There was no hope now of anything but a running shot. I aimed carefully. The smoke cleared off, the flock dashed on, but—one bok lay prone upon the earth. Bang! went my second barrel, and another bok, leaping into the air, fell, rose, fell again, then rose and ran on.

Mike was now jubilant. The whole internal structure of his mouth was disclosed to view in his satisfaction, as he viewed the prostrate animal. I may add that although we did not find the wounded bok that evening, we found him next day.

With our prize strapped behind Mike's saddle we rode in triumph into camp, a little before sunset, and found most of our companions assembled, busy preparing supper and making other arrangements for camping out on the veldt—as they call the plain. Some had been successful, some had failed, but a good many springboks had been killed, and all were hearty as crickets and hungry as hyenas.

To kindle fires, boil tea, roast venison steaks, spread blankets on the ground, and otherwise attend to the duties of the bivouac, was now the order of the hour. The moon rose while we were thus engaged, and mingled her pale light with the ruddy blaze of camp-fires. We spoke little and ate much. Then followed the inevitable pipe and the pleasant chat, but we were all too ready for rest to care about keeping it up long. I was constrained to take the bed of honour in the cart. The others stretched their limbs on the Karroo, and in ten minutes every man was in the land of nod.

Next day we mounted at daybreak and renewed the hunt, but I will say no more about it than that we bagged twenty-six springboks amongst us, and that Six-foot Johnny, having killed the greatest number of animals, returned home "King of the hunt," with a scrap of ostrich feather in his cap.

Letter 3.
Somerset—The British Settlers —Original "Owners"— Native Church-Going

On my way to the Karroo I had to pass through Somerset East, and it so fell out that I fell in with a countryman from Edinburgh, who chanced to be going to Somerset in the same "passenger-cart" with myself. His name must have been a novelty once, though much of its freshness is worn off now—it was Brown.

Our cart had a hood; the roads were very bad, and the behaviour of that hood was stupendous! Its attachment to the cart was, so to speak, partial; therefore it possessed a semi-independent motion which was perplexing. You could not count on its actions. A sudden lurch of the cart to right or left did, of course, carry the hood with it, and, counting on that, you laid your sudden plans to avoid collision; but the elasticity of the hood enabled it to give you a slap on the face before obeying its proper impulse. So, too, it would come down on your head unexpectedly, or, without the slightest provocation, would hit you on the neck behind. I learned with painful certainty in that cart that I had a "small" to my back! It seemed to me that it grew large before the journey was over.

Brown was an intelligent man,—not an unusual state of things with the "Browns." He had two pretty daughters with him, aged eight and twelve respectively. We got on well together, and crossed the Zuurberg range in company on the last day of the year.

It was over passes in this range that the settlers of 1820 went in long trains of Cape wagons, with wives and little ones, and household goods, and civilised implements of husbandry, and weapons of defence, with high hopes and strong courage, and with their "lives in their hands," to subdue the wilderness. It was from these heights that they looked over the beautiful and bush-clad plains of "Albany," which lay before them as the lot of their inheritance.

The breaking up and scattering of the various "parties" was most eloquently and graphically told by the Reverend H.H. Dugmore in a lecture delivered at Grahamstown, on the occasion of the "British Settlers' Jubilee," in May 1870—fifty years after the arrival of the "fathers."[4] I quote one passage, which gives a good idea of the manner in which the land was taken up.

"And now the Sunday's River is crossed, and the terrible old Ado Hill is climbed, and Quaggas Flat is passed, and the Bushman's river heights are scaled. The points of divergence are reached, and the long column breaks into divisions. Baillie's party made their way to the mouth of the Fish River, where,

[4] This deeply interesting lecture was published in Grahamstown as a pamphlet, entitled, *The Reminiscences of an Albany Settler*.

it was said, the 'Head' had been allowed to choose a territory, and where he hoped to realise imaginations of commercial wealth by founding a seaport town. And the Duke of Newcastle's protégés from Nottingham took possession of the beautiful vale of Clumber, naming it in honour of their noble patron. And Wilson's party settled between the plains of Waay-plaats and the Kowie bush, right across the path of the elephants, some of which they tried to shoot with fowling-pieces. And Sefton's party founded the village of Salem, the religious importance of which to the early progress of the settlement, is not to be estimated by its present size and population. These four were the large parties. The smaller ones filled up the intervening spaces between them. Behind the thicket-clad sandhills of the Kowie and Green Fountain, and extending over the low plains beyond Bathurst, were the locations of Cock's, Thornhill's, Ostler's, Smith's, and Richardson's parties. Skirting the wooded Kloofs from Bathurst towards the banks of the Klienemonden, were ranged the parties of James and Hyman. It was the latter who gravely announced to Captain Trapps, the Bathurst magistrate, the discovery of 'precious stones' on his location; and which the angry gentleman, jealous of the reserved rights of Government, found, on further inquiry, were only 'precious big ones!' The rich valley of Lushington afforded a resting-place to Dyason's party. Holder's people called their location New Bristol; which never, however, acquired any resemblance to *Old* Bristol. Passing on towards the front, there were Mouncey's party, Hayhurst's

party, Bradshaw's party, Southey's party, stretching along the edge of the wide plains of the Round Hill, and drinking their Western waters. The post of honour and of danger was the line of the Kap River. This was occupied by the party of Scott below Kafir Drift, and by the Irish party above it. The forlorn hope of the entire settlement was Mahony's party at the clay pits, who had to bear the first brunt of every Kafir depredation in the Lower Albany direction. Names thicken as we proceed from Waay-plaats towards Grahamstown. Passing Greathead's location, we come among the men of Dalgairns at Blauw Krantz. Then those of Liversage about Manly's Flats. John Stanley, 'Head of all Parties,' as he styled himself, belonged to the same neighbourhood. Turvey's party were in Grobblaar's Kloof; William Smith's at Stony Vale, Dr Clarke's at Collingham. Howard's, Morgan's, and Carlisle's, bring us by successive steps to the neighbourhood of Grahamstown.

"My 'reminiscences' are those of an Albany settler; but I do not forget that there was another party, who, though locally separated from the main body, occupied a position, the importance of which developed itself in the after-history of the settlement. I refer to the Scotch party, who were located on the Baviaans River, among mountains and glens that have been rendered classic by the poetry of their leader and historic by the gallant deeds and endurance of his compatriots in the after-struggles of the frontier. I need make no particular reference, however, to the early circumstances of that body of men, as in

Pringle's *African Sketches* they have a most graphically-written history of their own."

Thus, in 1820, was the land overrun and taken possession of by the "British Settlers." It had once been the land of the Hottentots, but had never at any time rightfully belonged to the Kafirs, who, after wrongfully entering it and rendering themselves by their thievish disposition and deceit an unbearable nuisance, were finally driven out of it in 1819.

The idea of Government in sending the settlers out to occupy these vacated lands was, that a convenient buffer might thus be placed on the frontier of the colony to keep the savages in check. That these settlers and their descendants received many a rude shock, and played their part nobly, has been proved, and is admitted on all hands. That they received less encouragement and help from those who induced them to emigrate than might have been expected, is equally certain.

Brown and I chatted, more or less, of these things as we toiled up the slopes of the Zuurberg, where the original settlers had toiled fifty-five years before us, and in the afternoon came to a pretty good inn, where a small misfortune befell us. While we were indulging in a cup of tea, one of our horses escaped. We had crossed the mountain range by that time, and the truant had a fine range of undulating country to scamper over. That animal gave us some trouble, for, although nearly a dozen men went, after him on horseback, he kept dodging about actively with many flourishes of heels and tail during the whole afternoon.

When one is in no hurry, and the weather is fine, a delay of this kind is rather pleasant than otherwise. While men and boys were engaged in the fruitless chase, I wandered off into the bush in the hope of stumbling on a tortoise or a snake, or some other creature that I had previously been accustomed to see in zoological collections, but the reptiles kept close, and refused to show themselves. I came, however, on a gigantic beehive; at least it resembled one in appearance, though the smoke that issued from a hole in its top suggested humanity. There was also a hole in one side partially covered by a rickety door. Close beside it stood a little black creature which resembled a fat and hairless monkey. It might have been a baboon. The astonished gaze and grin with which it greeted me warranted such an assumption, but when it suddenly turned and bolted through the hole into the beehive, I observed that it had no tail—not even a vestige of such a creation,—and thus discovered that it was a "Tottie," or Hottentot boy. The sublime, the quaint, the miserable, the ridiculous, and the beautiful, were before me in that scene. Let me expound these five "heads" in order.

On my left rose the woody slopes and crags of the Zuurberg, above whose summits the white hills and towers and gorgeous battlements of cloud-land rose into the bright blue sky. Around me were groups of flowering mimosa bushes, with thorns from three to six inches long, interspersed with which were curious aloes, whose weird leafy tops gave them the aspect of shrubs growing upside down with their roots scrambling aimlessly in

the air. In front stood the native hut, the wretchedness of whose outside was only equalled by the filth and poverty-stricken aspect within. Near to this were several native children, as black as coal, as impudent-looking as tom-tits, and as lively as crickets. Beyond all lay the undulating plains studded with flowering shrubs of varied form and hue, and bathed in golden sunshine.

There is something sad, ay, and something mysterious, to me in the thought that such a lovely land had been, until so recently, the home of the savage and the scene of his wicked and ruthless deeds.

On New Year's day I dined in a public restaurant in Somerset, —in a strange land with strangers. But the strangers were not shy. Neither was I. There were about a dozen of us at table, and before dinner was half over we were as sociable as if we had been bosom friends from infancy. We even got to the length of warm discussion, and I heard some sentiments expressed regarding natives and "native policy," with which I could not agree; but, being ignorant on the subject at the time, I stuck to general principles. It seemed to me that some of the speakers must have been born with their brains turned the wrong way. This idea recalls to memory the curious fact that, during my first walk in Somerset, I saw a mounted Hottentot policeman wearing his helmet with the fore part to the back, because its rear peak was longer, and a better sunshade, than the front.

The same tendency to sacrifice appearance to utility is observable among the Malays of Capetown, who treat their sou'-

westers similarly.

My first visit to a native church was on a Sunday,—the hottest Sunday I ever spent. The congregation was entirely black and brown. *It*, also, was hot, so that the church was by no means cool. Whatever depth, or want of depth, there might have been in the Christianity of these people, the garb and the bearing of civilisation were very obvious and very pleasant to behold. Their behaviour was most orderly and modest, though, probably, many of them had gone there to display their finery.

Taking my place near the pulpit I saw them to advantage. The church was pretty full. I sat down beside a very stout Hottentot girl, whose dress of showy chintz was as much a subject of interest to herself as of indifference to the congregation. There were marvellous contrasts and surprising harmonies displayed in that church, with not a few discords. Childlike good-humour sat on every countenance. When Mr Green ascended the pulpit eager expectancy gleamed in every jet-black eye. When the psalm was given out the preparatory clearing of throats and consequent opening of thick red lips and revelation of splendid rows of teeth all over the church had quite a lighting-up effect on the scene. They sang heartily and well of course,—all black people do so, I think. Just opposite me sat a young man with a countenance so solemn that I felt sure he had made up his mind to "be good," and get the full benefit of the services. His black cheeks seemed to glisten with earnestness; his thick lips pouted with devotional good-will. I do not write in ridicule, but merely

endeavour to convey my full meaning. He wore a superfine black dress coat, a gaudy vest, and buff corduroy trousers so short that they displayed to advantage his enormous bare feet. Beside him was an elderly man with tweed trousers, a white shirt and brown shooting coat, and a face not quite so solemn but very sedate. Some of the men had boots, some had black silk hats, others wideawakes,—which of course they removed on entering. It seemed to me that there was among them every part and variety of costume from morning to evening dress, but no individual could boast of being complete in himself.

As for the women, they were indescribable. Some of them wore little more than a blanket, others were clothed in the height of European fashion,—or something like it,—and all had evidently put on their "Sunday's best." One stout and remarkably healthy young woman appeared in a brilliant skirt, and an indescribable hat with ostrich feathers on her woolly head. She sat herself down close beside me and went to sleep at the beginning of the sermon—not out of irreverence, I am persuaded, but from heat. In this state she continued swaying to and fro to the end of the discourse, occasionally drooping, as though she meant to make a pillow of my shoulder, which she would certainly have done, but for a more modestly clad Hottentot girl at her other side, who, evidently scandalised, kept poking at her continuously with her elbow. In justice to the congregation I am bound to add, that I saw very few sleepers. They were most attentive and earnest, despite the distracting

elements of a humorous kind that obtruded themselves.

Somerset East is a pretty town on the Little Fish River, at the foot of the Boschberg mountains, which rise abruptly from the plain. It boasts of banks, a newspaper, several churches, and the Gill College,—an imposing edifice which was erected by private endowment. In regard to its inhabitants, all I can say is, that the few members I had the pleasure of meeting there during a three days' sojourn were exceedingly hospitable and kind.

Letter 4.
Adventures with Ostriches

Ostrich-farming is no child's play. It involves risk in more ways than one, and sometimes taxes both the courage and strength of the farmer.

In ordinary circumstances the ostrich is a mild, inoffensive creature—indeed the female is always so; but when a male ostrich is what I may style nesting—when, enclosed in a large field or paddock, he guards his wives and his eggs—no lion of the desert, no tiger of the jungle or kloof, is more ferocious or more savagely bent on the death of any or all who dare to intrude on his domain.

The power of the ostrich, too, is quite equal to his strength of will. He stands from seven to nine feet in height, and is very heavy.

His tremendous legs are his only weapons, and his kick is almost, if not quite, equal to that of a horse. Possessing enormous feet, with two toes on each, the horny points of which can cut and rip like cold chisels, he rushes at an adversary and kicks, or hits out, straightforward, like a prize-fighter. No unarmed man on earth could stand long before a furious male ostrich without being killed. But there are one or two weak points about him, which abate somewhat the danger of his attack. In the first place

his power lies only in his mighty legs, the thighs of which—blue-grey and destitute of feathers—are like two shoulders of mutton. With his beak he can do nothing, and his long neck is so weak that if you can only lay hold of it and pull his head to the ground you are comparatively safe, for he cannot kick effectively in that position, and devotes all his energies, when thus caught, to useless attempts to pull his head out of your grasp. But, then, how are you to get hold of that neck—the root of which stands nearly as high as your own head—in the face of two claws that go like battering-rams wrought by lightning? As well might you attempt to lay hold of a prize-fighter's nose while his active fists are darting out at you.

A powerful, active man has been known, when attacked while unarmed, to spring on the bird, grasp a wing with one arm and the body with the other, and hug it, but there is great danger in this method, because in the attempt you are pretty sure to receive at least one kick, and that, if it takes effect, will be quite sufficient to put you out of action. It also requires much power of endurance, for, hugging a creature that is strong enough to dance about and lift you off your legs in its wild efforts to get rid of you, must be hard work. Supposing that you do succeed, however, in holding on until you work your way along to the neck and get the head into custody, then you can without much difficulty choke the bird, but a male ostrich costs about 150 pounds, and one hesitates to choke 150 pounds, even for the sake of one's life, especially when the valuable bird belongs to one's friend.

Another and perhaps the best plan, if you are caught unarmed, is to lie down. An ostrich cannot kick you when you lie flat on the ground, he can only dance on you, and although that process is unpleasant it is not necessarily fatal.

The ostrich is easily killed by a blow on the neck with a stout stick, but this is as objectionable as the choking process, on the ground of cost. In short, the only legitimate method of meeting a savage papa, in his own field, is with a strong forked pole eight or nine feet long, with which you catch the bird at the root of the neck, and thus keeping him at pole's-length, let him kick and hiss away to his heart's content till he is tired, or until assistance comes to you, or until you work him near a wall, when you may jump over and escape, for an ostrich will not jump.

Often have I gone, thus armed, with my friend Hobson to feed the nesting ostriches. The risk of attack, I may mention in passing, is not great when two men go together, because the bird seems undecided which foe to attack, and generally ends by condescending to pick at the mealies, (Indian corn), which are thrown down to him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.