

A DAY'S HUNT WITH THE MASSARAS.



ABOUT five years ago I was hunting in the Massara *veldt*. Game of every description was more than usually abundant, and I had a staff of the most skilful hunters and trackers to be found in tropical South Africa. These bushmen must not be confused with the pigmies to be found north and on the borders of the Old Colony, who are a most debased, filthy tribe, seldom armed with anything except a bow and poisoned arrows, living in caves, with their hand against every man, and every man's hand against them. No, my Massara bushmen were grand fellows, many of them standing six feet in height, with a magnificent development of chest and limb. True, they were most erratic, changing their residences every few days, for as the game moved its position they followed on its spoor. Much inconvenience did not result from this, for they were ever satisfied with a few bushes and weeds to windward, and a fire at their feet, to feel comfortably housed. A very few of these men had guns obtained from their chief, at Bamanwatto, but these were of the most villanous description, and generally of Portuguese manufacture, quite as likely to be injurious to the shooter as to the object fired at. This being the case, I had little to expect in the way of assistance, provided I was attacked by any dangerous animal, except what they could afford me with their assegais.

Soon after break of day I left my wagons, attended by about two dozen of these swarthy fellows, each full of glee at the anticipation of the coming sport. What a pity it is that they are so redolent; it interferes so much in

making boon companions of them, for jovial companions they can be when the day's work is done, and the deeds of the previous day are being discussed. Time after time I have laughed almost to split my sides, when witnessing the antics they would cut when in a spirit of mimicry they would exhibit to each other how this rhinoceros or that elephant behaved before it was laid low.

A glorious sunrise, the equal to which can only be witnessed on the plateaux in the interior of this continent, greeted us on this occasion; while the air was so cool, yet balmy, that each individual felt equal to any task that might be imposed upon him. It was quite a red-letter day in my diary, for fresh spoor was almost immediately found, and that of the description of animals that I most anxiously sought for—viz., giraffe, for the cows are most excellent eating; but the bulls, pshaw! require the strong stomach of a native to be able to enjoy it.

After an hour's spooring we overtook the quarry; they were quietly grazing on the foliage of some scattered mimosa trees. Dismounting without difficulty, I succeeded in getting within a hundred and fifty yards of the game, when a well-planted No. 8 bullet laid a three-parts-grown cow on the ground. Here our morning's work would have terminated but that some of the hunters viewed a buffalo, and off they darted after it like greyhounds from the slips. Being desirous of seeing the sport, I jumped upon my little mare and followed in the rear, for I was confident that these dare-devils were going to make the hazardous attempt of killing this most dangerous of beasts with their assegais. The bull, which was a very large one, did not appear to be aware that he was

pursued, for with the utmost *sang-froid* he entered a clump of bush, the most dangerous course for his safety that he could have selected, for among the cover his agile pursuers could dodge with comparative safety the precipitous and irresistible charges of this bellicose beast. The wind just suited our purpose, for I rode within fifty yards of the buffalo without being perceived; but when that space separated me, Tom, an athletic scamp ever up to mischief, was only a few feet from the unsuspecting prey. To attain this proximity, he had crawled on hands and knees for some distance. I saw him drop on all fours; from that moment I lost sight of the daring fellow, and of half-a-dozen others in close attendance. Suddenly the bull stopped. The abruptness of the halt told me that the brute apprehended danger, and was prepared for any emergency. However, seeing nothing and scenting nothing, he resumed gathering his morning's repast. But scarcely had he plucked the first mouthful when Tom sprang to his feet, and in an instant had buried his spear deep in the foe's flank. Quick almost as lightning the plucky hunter was charged with a velocity that has to be seen to be believed; but the pursuer in doing so had not seen that other foes were at hand, who each gave him an assegai as he passed.

The poor stricken brute had now no less than six of these fearful weapons fast in his flank and shoulder, but that did not deter him from coursing Tom magnificently round all the adjoining trees. However, our hero soon got an opportunity he had anticipated, for with the dexterity of an ape he sprang into the fork of a mimosa, where he was safe from further danger. But the buffalo was not satisfied; he butted the tree with a force that would have stove in the bulk-head of a steamship; but while thus engaged the other enemies again stole upon him, and plied the gallant animal with more steel. Another of the

Massara was in turn hunted, and again a third, till the excitement and novelty wore off, and pity for the gallant beast took its place. So dismounting, and leaving the pony, I succeeded in stealing within short range of the poor thing which had fought so noble a fight, and dropped it to shot with a two-ounce bullet driven by eight drachms of powder, lodged a few inches behind the corner of the blade-bone.

Time had so rapidly passed that I was surprised to observe the altitude of the sun, so, as the heat was becoming very severe, I sent a message to the wagon for my personal servant to bring without delay food for myself and mare. A most charming hollow, that looked like a defunct water-course, being near it, was selected for an *al fresco* camping-place. Shady trees were in abundance, so none were long in making themselves comfortable. It is astonishing to the unsophisticated how soon these savages get their fires lighted and strings of meat broiling on its embers, for although they do not hesitate to eat meat raw, still, if a chance is offered them, I believe they prefer it a little scorched.

In time my food arrived, and with it all the wives and female attachments of my hunters, for although the Massaras' life appears one uninterrupted succession of picnics, still this appeared an exceptional occasion, and all went merrily as a marriage bell.

A bushman's appetite seems to me to be gauged by the amount of food that is obtainable, not by the requirements of the body; thus, it can scarcely be wondered at that, when the entire carcase of a fat buffalo was there to be disposed of in a short time, many felt very indisposed to, in fact incapable of, active exertion.

I nearly reached the end of my cheroot when a cry arose that a rhinoceros was coming that way. Springing to my feet I found that such was the case, so shoving the double-barrel eight-bore into

Tom's hands, I grasped my single four-bore and hurried to intercept the brute's progress, well knowing that if such was not speedily done it would unquestionably enter our place of repose and scatter food and even firing, in slang parlance, "all over the shop."

Till only a hundred yards intervened between me and the unwelcome visitor did I discover that she was accompanied by a baby, about the size of a Newfoundland dog; this made affairs more serious still, for mammas are apt to be more pugnacious when accompanied by their progeny.

Let me say a word about the four-bore; it was too light for shooting large charges, thus kicked fearfully when twelve drachms of powder were behind its bullet; still, if held straight, it sent its leaden messenger direct to the place intended. Now, on this occasion, I have reason to believe that it had obtained its full portion of propelling power; thus, when I aimed at the beast the barrel sprang to the right from some unknown cause, and the bullet hit the old lady on the posterior horn. The result was almost a ludicrous exhibition of activity and indignation; she wheeled about and danced about if not exactly like Jim Crow, the reason was that she did not belong to the same genus. Even the infant rhinoceros stood awed at the vagaries and unprecedented activity of its staid mother. However, immediately afterwards the eight-bore was shoved into my hand by bushman Tom, who, confident I would bring the quarry down at the next shot, heedlessly exposed himself to view, when he was at once charged by the infuriated maternal parent, closely followed by her hopeful bairn. Somehow or other the indignant old lady lost sight of her intended prey, and pursued her way towards our late breakfasting ground. I thought to myself that she would have a drive at the

mare which I left tied to an adjoining tree, so I hurriedly took a long shot, but though the bullet told, I felt convinced it was placed too far back. The fusilade, nevertheless, had had its effect, for all my lazy curs, aroused from their slumbers by the report of my guns, came forth to see what was the matter, and perceiving the baby rhinoceros, immediately made an onslaught upon it. This stopped the vindictive parent, who devoted herself some minutes to charging the dogs, thus affording me time to reload and reappear upon the scene of action. Making a hasty shot, more by good luck than by good guidance, I hit the irate parent a little behind the back of the ear; this sent her sprawling upon her back, from which undignified position she never succeeded in regaining her legs.

After a great deal of trouble and an immense amount of amusement, the youngster was secured, and in a few days became as familiar with cattle, horses, and dogs, as if he had been born and brought up amongst them. I had much desire to bring this amusing and interesting pet home, but it died within a fortnight of its capture from a severe attack of diarrhoea, to which young African elephants are equally subject.

In allusion to that day's hunt, I have not stated that on our way back to the wagons, elands, pallas, and zebra might have been easily shot; in fact, it was, as I have previously said, a regular red-letter day in a sportsman's experiences; but the only thing I pulled a trigger upon was an immense spotted hyæna, which I had the luck to destroy at a distance of eighty or ninety yards; of which act I was not a little proud, for the shot was more than a fair one, and the brute that it had bowled over was one of the most bloodthirsty and cowardly carnivora on the face of the earth."—Gillmore's *Encounters with Wild Beasts*.