



ADVENTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

IN Dr. Holub, Africa has found another enthusiastic and accomplished explorer. Fired in his early boyhood with an ambition to explore the "Dark Continent," through reading Livingstone's travels, he seems to have kept this great object in view during the years of his professional training, and when he felt himself mentally and physically ready for the work, he waited not for a subsidy from Government or Geographical Society, as other explorers have done, but, full of the ardour and faith of

youth, went out alone to realise his dreams. Not that he was rich; on the contrary, it is his constant struggle with pressing poverty that both crippled him and crowned him. When he landed in South Africa and paid the duty on his breech-loader and revolver, he had just half-a-sovereign in his pocket! At Port Elizabeth, however, he obtained a few patients, and might, in time, have had a lucrative practice, but his eyes being turned inland, he adopted the suggestion of a merchant to settle in Fauresmith, in the Orange Free State. He had no sooner reached the town, however, when he saw he was regarded as

an interloper by the medical man already established there, and, accordingly, he went on to the diamond-fields, having borrowed the money necessary for an outfit.

Arrived at his destination, he found that he had barely sufficient money to pay for a night's lodging and a day's food. However, he soon had a patient, whom he cured, and received as his fee an old half-rotten tent-hut and a few pieces of common furniture. This he made his home and his consulting-room. He was not long in working himself into a very fair practice, so that, by denying himself anything but the bare necessities of life, and being his own servant, he was not only able to pay off his debts, but to lay by considerable sums for the undertaking on which he had resolved. Having bought a wagon and a good many of the requisites for travelling, he set out with the three companions he had chosen on his journey of reconnaissance, early in February, 1873. Dr. Holub's object was to accustom himself to the climate, and to learn by actual experience "what amount of provisions and other necessities would be required for a more prolonged expedition into the interior." On this occasion he only penetrated as far as Wonderfontein and returned, having gained much practical experience in travelling, and having secured the following objects of interest:—30 skeletons, about 1,500 dried plants, one chest of skins of mammalia, two chests of birds' skins, more than 200 reptiles, several fish, 3,000 insects, some fossils, and 300 specimens of minerals." The journey had cost over £400, yet Dr. Holub returned so empty in purse to Dutroitspan that he actually had no money until he sold his oxen. He at once resumed his medical practice, and soon found his hands quite full.

In six months he had got together nearly all the £900 which he reckoned his second expedition would cost. Through

the kindness of friends, a mercantile firm was induced to let him have goods on credit, and thus he was enabled to start four weeks earlier than he had contemplated. This was not intended to be *the* expedition to Central Africa, but only a trial trip on a more extensive scale than the former. A liberal friend provided the leader with a team of eight oxen and a Griqua driver; he had also this time a saddle-horse, nine dogs, and a sextant, which, however, could not be made use of for want of a nautical almanac. Two of those who accompanied him on the previous trip, and a Hanoverian, completed the party. Dr. Holub's plan was to travel up the Vaal valley to Hebron, where he would turn off short to Gassibone's town, and then continue the journey to Taung, the residence of the Batlapin King Man-Kuruane, which he had been unable to reach before.

Beyond Hebron, the travellers came upon a region where not a drop of rain had fallen for months, and where, in consequence, the grass was yellow and parched. The oxen had not tasted water for thirty hours, and were proceeding at a snail's pace when Dr. Holub and his companions were dismayed to find the plain on fire.

"We were obliged to take a short rest, and while we were looking about us, we noticed a thick cloud overhanging the plains. Everyone, natives included, settled that it was a huge swarm of locusts. I was occupied with my own matters, and soon forgot all about it. A sudden cry from one of the people in the wagon very shortly afterwards, recalled my attention to what we had seen, and on looking again I beheld a sight that could not fail to fill me with astonishment and alarm. The plain right in front of us, over which we were on the point of passing, was one sheet of flame. The cloud that we had seen, turned out to be a volume of smoke rising above the bushwood, that was all on fire. The

conflagration was, perhaps, five miles from us, but it was exactly across our path, and we might well feel dismayed.

The first among us to regain composure was our temporary guide, who pointed out that the wagon-tracks of which he had spoken, were hardly twenty yards ahead; at least, we could reach them. We looked to the right; we looked to the left; on the right the ground was level, but it only led to a chain of hills, the base of which was already licked by the flames; on the left was a hollow which was just beginning to catch fire, and beyond it a little hillock some forty feet high. Our perplexities seemed only to increase, the oxen were too weary to allow us for one moment to think of retreating; they could not hold out for a mile; and yet something must be done; the fire was manifestly advancing in our face. We discussed the possibility of setting fire to the bushwood close in front of us, and thus, as it were, forestalling the flames; but the scheme was not to be thought of; the wagon, which contained some thousands of cartridges, 300lbs. of gunpowder, besides a quantity of spirits, was already so heated by the sun, that we could scarcely lay our hands upon it; a single spark of fire would in an instant involve it in complete destruction, and the risk was too great.

My eye still rested upon the little hill. I saw that the wind was blowing the flames in a direction away from it, and aware that delay would be fatal, and that some action must be taken, I gave my decision that, at all hazards, we must make for it. Everyone agreed that I was right, and, rushing to their posts, did what they could to urge on the bullocks without a moment's loss of time. Mounting my horse, I hurried on in front, but on reaching the hollow that had to be crossed before the place of safety upon the hill could be gained, I almost gave a cry of despair on seeing its character; it was not only overgrown with bushwood and very steep, but was

also strewn in all directions with huge blocks of stone; if only the wagon-wheel should strike against one of these, who could doubt the consequences?

With all his might Boly cracked his whip and shouted vigorously, and succeeded in making the oxen drag the wagon with unexpected speed; they were all flecked with foam as they pulled their oscillating load behind them; every moment it seemed as if it must overbalance. At the bottom of the hollow it was absolutely necessary to take a rest; the beasts must have time to recover from their exertions; they were all more or less torn by the bushes, and my friends, too, were much scratched about the hands and face. The heat was becoming intense. My horse was not naturally a nervous animal, but it trembled till it could hardly stand, and the hardest part of our struggle had yet to come.

A flake of fire fell within fifteen yards of us, and warned us that it was time to be on the move. 'Hulloh am! Hulloh am!' roared the driver, and the bullocks once again strained themselves to their work. Scarcely, however, had they gone ten paces, when the smoke puffed against their eyes, and all bewildered, they swerved into a track where the wagon must inevitably have been overturned; it was a critical moment, but, happily, one of my party, who was walking by my side, saw the danger, and rushing at the heads of the leaders, turned them by a desperate effort into the right direction. The instinct of self-preservation now redoubled everyone's efforts; onwards we pushed, through clouds of smoke, amidst falling ashes, amongst fragments of red-hot bark, till we were within fifty yards of the place of safety. So heated was the atmosphere, that I momentarily expected to see the canvas of the wagon break out into a blaze.

The bullocks once more gasped and tottered beneath their yoke; with painful toil they made their way for another

thirty yards; it was doubtful whether they could accomplish the other twenty.

One more moment of rest, followed by one more frantic paroxysm of exertion, and all was safe! Just in time we reached the hill that overlooked a hollow, beyond which was the expanse of black, burnt grass. I ungirthed my horse, my people all flung themselves exhausted on the ground; their faces were crimson with heat; their limbs were bruised by their frequent falls; their eyes seemed starting from their sockets. Poor Pit, who had scrambled along with the front oxen, had his shirt torn from his back, and his chest was smeared with blood from many a wound, but, fortunately, none that were very deep."

As soon as possible they started off again, and had no difficulty in finding the proper tracks, but the suffering they endured through thirst was so great that they were obliged to moisten their burning lips with vinegar. In the neighbourhood of Tuang, the wagon was mobbed by natives demanding brandy, for, as Dr. Holub has to point out again and again, the blacks have imitated all the vices and but few, if any, of the virtues of the whites. It reflects great credit upon some of the native kings and chiefs, however, that they have prohibited the sale of brandy in their countries, and punish any breach of the law with great severity. No doubt this fact is owing, in a great measure, to the influence of the missionary, of whom Dr. Holub has always a good word to say. At Shoshong, our traveller resolved to return, for his provisions were getting low, and he had not the means of procuring a fresh supply, or of securing the servants necessary if he proceeded further. Besides, he was anxious not to lose his patients at the diamond-fields, without whom his third and great journey would be an impossibility. Accordingly, he worked his way back to Dutoitspan with forty closely packed cases of

curiosities, consisting of ethnological specimens, insects, birds, beasts, fossils, etc.

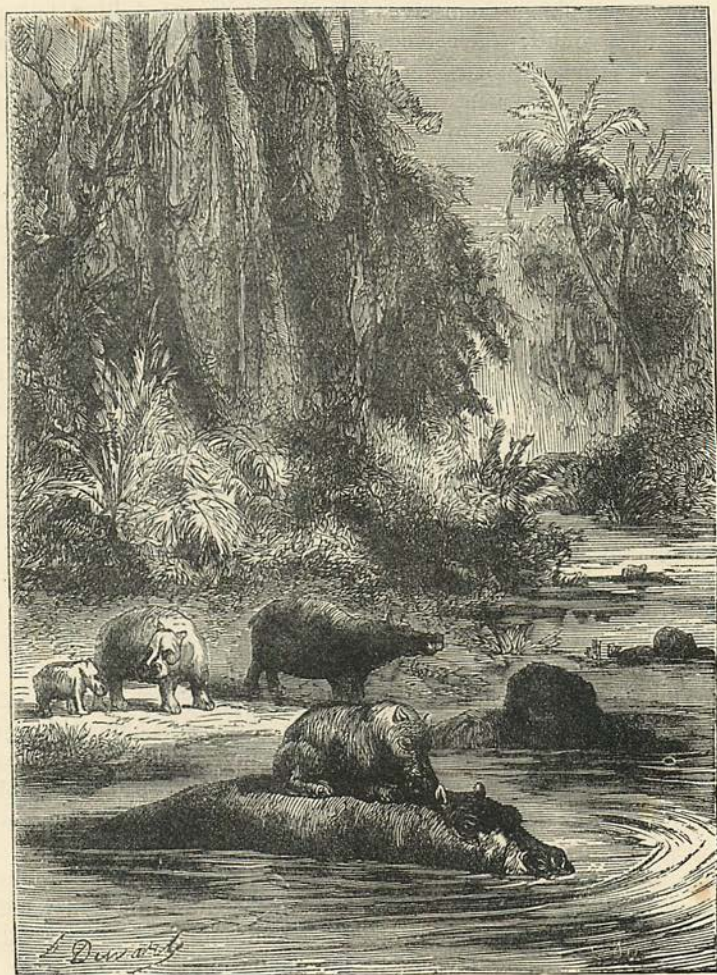
But once again his poverty imposed the yoke upon his neck. Immediately on his arrival, he was called upon to fulfil a bond into which he had entered on behalf of a young man who was to have accompanied him, but absconded instead; and very soon after he was obliged to pay off the £117 which had been advanced to him before starting. He was, therefore, compelled to part with the greater portion of his skins and ostrich-feathers, and to sell his wagon and team for what they would fetch. His medical practice also seemed hard to recover, and although he took the smallest of houses, it was quite a month before he could make any headway. However, fortune smiled upon the doctor in the shape of measles, and he was soon so busy that he had to buy, first a saddle-horse, then a chaise and a couple of ponies. It seems characteristic of the man that from that moment he began his preparations for the third journey.

Having got all ready for the great expedition on which he had set his heart, he left Dutoitspan on the 2nd of March, 1875. From Shoshong he pushed northwards, through Khamé's kingdom, and, after many varied experiences and adventures, stood by the banks of the Zambesi. "Here was the realization of the vision of my youth!" he writes. "Here I was actually gazing on the stream that had mingled itself with my boyish dreams! Never shall I forget the panorama that then broke upon my view, nor the emotion with which I gazed on the valley beneath me." His descriptions of the river, and especially of the celebrated Victoria Falls, are full and most graphic. We quote his description of an African pool:—

"The pond that was closest to our encampment, was thirty feet long and twelve feet wide, its depth about six feet.

It was fed by a tiny thread of water scarcely three inches wide; its outlet in a reedy thicket being somewhat wider. The water was as clear as crystal, so

colour, there of a dark green,—and everywhere assuming the most fantastic forms. In some places it seemed to be in strata, one above another, like semi-



HIPPOTAMI ON THE ZAMBESI.

that every object, even to the bottom, was plainly discernible. Half the pond, or nearly so, was occupied by a network of delicate algæ,—here of a light

transparent clouds in the azure depths; with the part near the outflow, it formed a dark labyrinth of grottoes; whilst on the right it might seem to represent a

ruined castle, so well defined was the foundation from which rose the square watch-tower with its circular turret, the tender weeds turning themselves into a Gothic doorway, through which small fish kept darting to and fro; and on the top of the tower were some projecting growths that kept up the similitude of broken battlements.

Making a dark green background were the lower stems of the weeds that rustled above the water, and in the open space between the water-weeds and the margin of the pond, rose the three spiral stalks of a large flowering nymphœa, two of them throwing out their flat glossy leaves, and the third, a beautiful pale blue lily, that lay like a gleaming star upon the surface of a crystal mirror. Besides the algæ that I have described, there were others at the bottom of the pool, with their lobulated and dentated leaves, rivalling ferns in the gracefulness of their form.

At first this miniature plant-world appeared to lie in motionless repose, and it was not until the eye grew quite accustomed to the scene that it detected the gentle current that the streamlet made. Once perceived, the effect was very charming; the reed-stems were seen to vibrate and quiver with the ever-varying degrees of motion; the fictitious towers of algæ were observed to tremble without any disturbance to their general outline; the very grottoes had the appearance of being impelled forward by some secret force to seek admission to some other pool. From the bottom of the water, plants, with bright yellow blossoms and serrated cryptograms, stretched up their heads as if they aspired to share the honours of the water-lily, the acknowledged queen of all, and longed, like her, to rock upon the bosom of the lake, to be greeted by the sunbeams, to be refreshed by the morning dew, and sheltered by the shades of night.

Equally fascinating was the exhibition

of animal life. In the more open spaces, where the range of vision was widest, lay some dark-striped fish not unlike perch, perfectly motionless, except for the slight vibration of the hinder fins; from the dim recesses of the algæ, bearded skate-fish would emerge, generally in pairs, and sometimes side by side, sometimes one behind the other, would roll themselves in sport from side to side; and far away, right across the reeds by the opposite bank, stretched itself, as though lifeless, a yellow-mottled object, that might at first have been mistaken for a snake, but which on further scrutiny turned out to be a water-lizard, biding its time to secure its prey.

Nor were the lower orders of creation less fully represented. Water-beetles and water-spiders abounded; the beetles were species of *dysticus* and *hydrophilus*; the spiders were all activity, some towing themselves up, some with glistening air-bubbles letting themselves descend, and hastening to conceal themselves amidst the intricacies and entanglements of the algæ. The larvæ of the beetles as well as of the dragon-flies were clambering over the filaments of the plants and the stems of the lilies, like rope-dancers, whilst the pupæ of the shore-flies were slowly emerging from their mummy-like cases."

Dr. Holub gives the following account of the hippopotami:—

"After re-embarking we kept close to the shore, with the object of avoiding the hippopotamuses that in the daytime frequent the middle of the stream, only rising from time to time to breathe. Whenever the current made it necessary for us to change to the opposite side of the river, I could see that the boatmen were all on the *qui vive* to get across as rapidly as possible, and I soon afterwards learnt by experience what good reason they had to be cautious. We had occasion to steer outwards so as to clear a papyrus island, when all at once the men began to back water, and

the one nearest to me whispered the word '*kubu*.' He was pointing to a spot hardly 200 yards ahead, and on looking I saw first one hippopotamus's head and then a second raised above the surface of the stream, both puffing out little fountains from the nostrils. They quickly disappeared, and the men paddled on gently till they were tolerably close to the place where the brutes had been seen.

Both Blockly and I cocked our guns, and had not long to wait before the heads of two young hippopotamuses emerged from beneath the water, followed first by the head of a male, and then by that of a female. We fired eight shots, of which there was no doubt that two struck the old male behind the ear. The men all maintained that it was mortally wounded, and probably such was the case; but although we waited about for nearly an hour, we never saw more than the heads of three others again. It was only with reluctance that the men were induced to be stationary so long; except they are in very small boats and properly armed with assegais they are always anxious to give the hippopotamus as wide a berth as they can.

Of all the large mammalia in South Africa, I am disposed to believe that to an unarmed man the hippopotamus is the most dangerous. In its normal state it can never endure the sight of anything to which it is unaccustomed, or which takes it by surprise. Let it come upon a horse, an ox, a porcupine, a log of wood, or even a fluttering garment suddenly crossing its path, and it will fly upon any of them with relentless fury; but let such object be withdrawn betimes from view, and the brute in an instant will forget all about it and go on his way entirely undisturbed. This peculiarity may perhaps be physiologically accounted for by the small weight of the brain as contrasted with the ponderous size of the body. Although in some cases it may happen that an unprotected man may elude the attacks of a lion, a buffalo,

or a leopard, except they have been provoked, he cannot indulge the hope of escaping the violence of a hippopotamus that has once got him within reach of its power. When out of several hippopotamuses in a river, one has been wounded, the rest are far more wary in coming to the surface; and should the wound have been fatal, the carcass does not rise for an hour, but drifts down the stream.

The Marutse have a very simple but effectual way of landing their dead bodies; a grass rope, with a stone attached, is thrown across it, and by this means it is easily guided to the shore. The whole riverside population is most enthusiastic in its love of hippopotamus hunting, and it is owing to the skill of the Marutse natives in this pursuit that they have been brought from their homes in the Upper Zambesi and established in villages down here, where they may help to keep the court well supplied not only with fresh and dried fish, but particularly with hippopotamus flesh. The boats that are used as '*mokoro tshi kubu*' (hippopotamus canoes) are of the smallest size, only just large enough for one; they are difficult to manage, but are very swift; the weapons employed are long barbed assegais, of which the shafts are so light that they are not heavier than the ordinary short javelins for military use.

While I was in Sesheke I heard of a sad casualty that had occurred near the town the previous year. A Masupia, on his way down the river, saw a hippopotamus asleep on a sandy bank, and believing that he might make it an easy prey, approached it very gently and thrust his spear right under the shoulder. The barb, however, glinted off its side, inflicting only a trifling wound. In a second, before the man had time to get away, the infuriated brute was up and after him. In vain he rolled himself over to conceal himself in the grass; the beast seemed resolved to trample him to pieces; he held up his right hand as a

protection, and it was crushed by the monstrous fangs; he stretched out his left, and it was amputated by a single bite. He was afterwards found by some fishermen in a most mutilated state, barely able to recount his misfortune before he died. Although I have often tasted hippopotamus meat, I cannot say that I like it. The gelatinous skin, when roasted, is considered a delicacy. In its raw state it makes excellent handles for knives and workmen's tools, as it shrinks as it dries and takes firm hold upon the metal. If a hippopotamus is killed within 50 miles of Sesheke, half of it is always sent to the king, and the breast reserved for the Royal table."

The flesh of the hippopotamus is delicate and succulent; the layer of fat next the skin makes excellent bacon, technically denominated hippopotamus "speck" at the Cape; and from the hide are made most punishing whips, of which a few have occasionally appeared in the shops of London. The ivory of the canines is singularly pure, although brittle, and realises a higher price than the best elephant tusk for particular purposes.

The hippopotami, according to Dr. Smith, feed chiefly on grass, resorting to situations near the banks of rivers which supply that food. "In districts fully inhabited by man," says Dr. Smith, "they generally pass the day in the water, and seek their nourishment during the night; but in localities differently circumstanced they often pass a portion of the day as well as the night upon dry land. In countries in which the night-time constitutes the only safe period for their leaving the water, they are generally to be seen effecting their escape from it immediately before dark, or are to be heard doing so soon after the day has closed, and according to the state of the surrounding country; they then either directly commence feeding, or begin a journey towards localities where food may exist. When previous to nightfall they may have been in pools or rivers,

they are generally at once enabled to commence feeding on reaching the dry land; but when they may have passed the day in the sea, they require commonly to proceed some distance after leaving it, before they find the grass which appears congenial to their palate. It is not every description of grass that hippopotami seem to relish: they often pass over, in search of food, luxuriant green swards which would strongly attract many other animals which feed upon grass. Besides having a peculiar relish for the grasses of certain situations, they appear to have a predilection for districts supporting brushwood; and, owing to the latter peculiarity, they often wander in localities on which little grass exists, when they might get it in the neighbourhood in great abundance, but without the accompaniment of wood."

Dr. Holub gives us a most interesting account of Sepopo, the king of the Marutse-Mabundas. This individual, though adopting European costume, is yet at heart a savage. Of his superstition and cruelty, our traveller heard many stories.

In the train of Sepopo's wives, Dr. Holub attempted to ascend the Zambesi, but an untoward accident to his boat in the rapids compelled him, though most reluctantly, to return. Dispirited and very ill, the march back to Dutroitspan was anything but pleasant. When he reached the diamond-fields once more he was "perfectly insolvent." Without bating one jot of heart or hope, however, the young doctor exhibited his curiosities and live animals, and resumed his medical practice. An unexpected gift of 1,000 florins from the Emperor of Austria, and other sums from various societies and friends, enabled him to seek that rest in Europe he so much needed and deserved. His eyes are still, however, towards Africa, and being young, ardent, and full of faith, the world may yet know more of Dr. Holub as an African explorer.