

THE OLD
TRANSPORT ROAD

STANLEY PORTAL HYATT



THE OLD TRANSPORT ROAD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE NORTHWARD
TREK

A Story of the Making
of Rhodesia.

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THE
Grim Grey-Veld



ON THE GRIM GREY-VELD.

THE OLD TRANSPORT ROAD

By
STANLEY PORTAL HYATT

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"Biffel, a Trek Ox"; "The Northward
Trek"; "Black Sheep," etc

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Dedication
To MY MOTHER

TO MY
MOTHER

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	THE FIRST TREK	9
II	ON THE ROAD AT LAST	19
III	THE GOOD DAYS OF BULAWAYO	29
IV	MY FIRST LOAD	43
V	ON THE HIGH VELD	55
VI	FORT VICTORIA	67
VII	AMONGST THE KOPJES	81
VIII	BUYING CATTLE	99
IX	ODD JOURNEYS	121
X	OUR CATTLE	139
XI	THROUGH THE LION COUNTRY	163
XII	PETER—GOAT AND WHITE MAN	189
XIII	ENEMIES OF THE ROAD	213
XIV	SUMMER TREKKING	229
XV	THE TECHNICAL SIDE OF TRANSPORT WORK	261
XVI	CATTLE-DEALING AND CATTLE-STEALING	279
XVII	THE END OF THE ROAD	293

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
On the Grim Grey Veld	<i>Frontispiece</i>
In the Great Days of Transport.	34
When the Trek-ox was All-important	50
When the Great Mud Flats are Dry	62
Just Possible to Cross	68
The Beginning of a Township	74
Outspanned	94
A Mixed Span	112
Six Miles a Day!	176
On the Farm	192
A Heavy Pull	234
Latter Day Transport	294

THE FIRST TREK



CHAPTER I

THE FIRST TREK

THE Great Transport Roads of South Africa were different from any other highways in the world. When, if ever, there arises some one capable of putting the whole Romance of Africa into a book which will live, he must, of necessity, devote nearly half of his pages to the Road and the life of the men of the Road.

True, nowadays, they tell me that the Great Northern Road is abandoned, washed away, well-nigh obliterated in many places; that the Railway has killed all real Transport as we knew it, the strings of twenty, thirty, fifty wagons, even; that only small by-roads remain, mere off-shoots of the Railway, and that the latter-day transport rider reckons a journey of a week's duration a long one.

The Old Road was the forerunner of the Railway; it made the Railway possible; the new roads exist because of the Railway—a totally different matter.

The fascination of the Transport Road was immense, overpowering—at least to those who had any imagination, any love of Nature, any desire for personal freedom, any ideal beyond the mere sordid business of money-getting. It did not lead to places, to Palapye, to Bulawayo, to the Victoria Falls. It led through them, past them. It went on; it was always going on, into the very heart of the

Dark Continent, which was to the Nineteenth century what the Spanish Main had been to the Sixteenth and Seventeenth, what the South Seas had been to the Eighteenth. One year, a district would be a blank on the map, a mere name at best ; the next year, you would find that the Road had reached it, had passed through it, and, in the new edition of the map, there would be scores of names, of mountains, of rivers, of townships even, on that space.

It was the Road, and not the Railway, which brought civilization to Africa. The Railway has merely meant conveniences and luxuries, such as cold storage meat and increased facilities for the making of money, mainly by people who have never been in the country. It would have been impossible to have constructed the Railway without the Road.

There is no Romance about the Line. It is crudely commercial in inception, an eyesore in all its details, authorized by the State, backed up by practically unlimited capital, protected by the armed forces of the State, its completion a certainty from the outset. The men who built it were mere servants, working for a wage ; and, if they failed in their duty or died, there were hundreds more, ready and capable of filling their places. It was a soulless and impersonal thing, right through, resolving itself in the end into so much per cent. for shareholders six thousand miles away, men who would have sold their holdings instantly, could they have found an investment yielding a fraction higher dividend.

The Road was utterly different. It was all Romance, the finest form of Romance, because it had a practical side, resulting in the accomplishment of solid benefit to humanity. Moreover, its making was the work of men

fighting for their own hands, of pioneers in the fullest sense of the term. There was no company, no capital, no armed force behind them, whilst against them were the wild beasts, the natives, the manifold diseases, all the terrors and dangers of the Unknown Land. Yet, in most cases, it was the very fascination of the Unknown, rather than any definite hope of gain, which spurred them on into the wilderness. It must have been so, for the possible profits were infinitesimal, compared with the certain risks.

The Road began when the first Dutchman left the shelter of the forts at Cape Town, and made his way to the back of Table Mountain. It went on slowly at first, very slowly, creeping stage by stage up the mountains, across the horrible desolation of the great plateau, into the dreary veld of Bechuanaland, gradually gathering speed for the final rush, which, in twenty years, carried it as far as it had gone in the last two hundred, right up to that Mecca of all those who had helped in the making of it—the Sources of the Nile.

From the very first day I set foot on it, the Road appealed to me as nothing had ever done before, as nothing has ever done since. It was, to me, what the sea is to other born wanderers ; but I knew the sea already, fairly well, having been round the world in a windjammer, and it seemed as nothing in comparison to that dusty, narrow track which ran from Railhead towards the heart of Africa.

When I was on a sheep station in the back blocks of New South Wales, I had seen other transport roads, with the great wool-laden drays rumbling along them, but, somehow, they had been totally different from the African highway. Wherein lay the difference, I cannot explain ; but it did exist ; it struck you instantly.

Probably, it was only a part of the essential difference in spirit between the two continents, between the land where Romance has seldom risen above the crime of the bush-ranger, and the land where almost every kind of adventure was possible, where you never knew, from one moment to the next, what new peril you might encounter, where you always carried your life in your hands, where the risks were often so great that you quickly ceased to think of them at all, because they had become part of the daily round.

There was a fascination about the very phrase "transport rider." It suggested, perfectly rightly, as I soon discovered, a man who was free to go where he listed, who was controlled by no limited liability company, who worked for his own hand.

I myself was not free, unfortunately—at least, I thought then that it was unfortunate. I had a two years' agreement with a mining company as electrical engineer, and I could not get out of it. Still, I made up my mind that, if the fever of Matabeleland spared me—which was by no means certain, as I had phthisis already weakening me and the death-rate, even amongst normally strong men, was appallingly high north of the Crocodile River—I would go on the Road at the end of my time.

Really, it was an extremely good thing that I had those two years in which to become acclimatized, to learn something of the language, and of the ways of the veld. Moreover, there was the fact that I had not a cent in the world, and that it was necessary to save, or at least to acquire, some capital before transport-riding became possible. Also, of course, I had not the slightest idea of how to handle cattle; but when one is still under one and twenty, future difficulties seldom seem very serious.

In those days, Railhead was at Palapye Siding, a forsaken spot, some eleven miles from Palapye Stad, the capital. The most important point about the Siding was that, like the majority of places in Bechuanaland, it had no water supply. Dirt, dust and discomfort—those are the salient characteristics of most South African settlements, but you found them in an exaggerated degree at Palapye Siding.

Those were the days immediately following the Rinderpest. From eight-five to ninety per cent. of the cattle had been wiped out, and, as a result, transport rates were enormously high—at least, the mining companies called them high, though, personally, I think that, in the circumstances, they were moderate. It was merely a case of supply and demand. The companies were in a desperate hurry to make a show, to be able to assure their shareholders that the machinery was being erected—later on, some of them were by no means so anxious to use that machinery to crush their alleged gold-bearing quartz—and they had to pay for their haste.

After all, twenty-five shillings per hundred pounds weight for a journey of over two hundred miles along an almost inconceivably bad road, with long, dry stretches, and the possibility of lions at every outspan, was not an extravagant price, considering that "Salted" cattle, animals which had recovered from the Rinderpest, were worth at least forty pounds each—over six hundred pounds a span. The wagons were almost negligible factors, hundreds having been abandoned by the roadside; in fact, you could buy wagons which had cost from eighty to a hundred pounds each at the Coast, for two or three sovereigns—or you could just take them and trust to luck not to meet the former owner later on.

After a delay of some ten days, during which we camped in the forwarding agent's yard, and were driven half mad by fleas, flies and thirst, the wagons on which we were to be passengers arrived, and loaded up in leisurely fashion. Really, it was an insult to every decent man on the Road to call those "transport wagons." To begin with, they were owned by natives, Bamangwatu from one of Khama's villages. The gear was bad, even for Kaffir owners; whilst the cattle were unspeakable, the very riff-raff of the scherms, a mixture of aged oxen, young bulls, breeding cows, and heifers. None seemed to be properly trained, and all were deadly thin—I suppose from having gone through the "salting" process, as it certainly was not through work in the yoke.

We saw our kit put on board, and watched the great, eighteen-foot-long vehicles jolt out of the yard. Our first trek on the Road-that-always-went-on had begun.

Ten minutes later, the driver of our wagon halted his cattle, and yelled to a fellow-tribesman, who was sitting on a three-legged stool beside a smoky fire, wheezing out a hymn tune on a concertina. A few shouts were exchanged, the other drivers strolled up and joined in; then, to our intense disgust, the wagons were drawn up just off the road, in a patch of dung-and-offal-littered sand, and the cattle were outspanned.

Our first trek on the Road had come to an end, after we had covered a little over four hundred yards. The concertina-playing savage was, it appeared, a friend of our first driver, and the latter had cheerfully given up half a day's work for the pleasure of spending an evening in his society.

It was a miserable night—at least for us. Neither my brother nor myself had ever slept on the ground in the

open before. It was bitterly cold—there was a sharp frost just before dawn ; the sand was in a horrible state, literally alive with insects ; there was a score or so of other wagons outspanned there, which meant at least half-a-dozen more concertinas were going till after midnight ; whilst every animal belonging to the wagon seemed possessed with a devil of restlessness, especially the donkeys in the spans next to us, who never ceased kicking, biting, and chewing each other's necks from sunset till dawn.

I remember vividly several things about that night, outstanding impressions. One was the feeling that my new blankets—they were extremely good ones—were getting full of that hateful, germ-laden sand ; another was a kind of nervousness, a feeling that the oxen might break loose and trample us, that a lion might put in an appearance, or that the natives might take it into their heads to do to us as the Matabele had been doing a few months previously to the white men up North ; and yet another, the strongest of all, perhaps, was the sense of cold, the feeling that you could not keep warm, that you would never really get warm again.

A week later, I looked back on my fears of that night with amusement ; a month later, I seemed to have forgotten them entirely. It is only now, when I can view my days on the Road as a whole, as a closed chapter of the Past, that the memory of them comes back to me clearly.

I slept for an hour or so, at last, waking up just before dawn, to find the cook-boy, a tattered rag of blanket round his shivering body, offering me a cup of tea. It had no milk and infinitely too much sugar, as is usual in South Africa ; yet it seemed then one of the finest drinks I have ever had.

At sunrise, our native transport-riders began to inspan, at least a couple of hours too late. Then they went across for coffee with the concertina-player, and, after that, the driver of our wagon remembered that he was short of tobacco, and made a tour round the outspan, endeavouring to borrow some. Meanwhile, the unfortunate cattle, hungry, thirsty—they had had no water for over twenty-four hours—weary, even before they had started to plough through the eleven miles of heavy sand ahead of them, stood with heads hanging down, as though the mere weight of the yokes was too much for them, apparently too listless even to try and flick off the loathsome flies which swarmed round them in thousands.

The sun was well above the trees when we finally trekked away from that unwholesome spot. Within the first half mile, every one of our wagons had stuck in the sand, and had had to be hooked out by the other spans; and, raw though we were, we had already discovered that, not only were the cattle leg-weary and hungry, but their lack of training made them practically valueless at the moment.

It was not a pleasant introduction to the Transport Road.

ON THE ROAD AT LAST

CHAPTER II

ON THE ROAD AT LAST

THE first lot of wagons only carried us on as far as Palapye Stad. Then we had to wait about a fortnight before another lot, every whit as bad in every way, turned up to take us on.

The trip up to the Geelong Mine, our destination, was far from being a pleasant one. The cattle were in difficulties all the time; the road was appallingly bad, and the drivers were hopeless. Still, the experience was valuable later on—we learnt how things ought not to be done. Altogether, we were over six weeks doing about two hundred miles, with less than half-loads.

At last, however, we reached the mine, and began our two years of servitude there, a truly miserable time, which seemed to drag by with deadly slowness.

Once during those two years, towards the end of them, I found myself on the Road again, bound for Bulawayo. I had been very ill with a mixture of enteric and malarial fevers—I had already been down with malaria some forty times—and, as there had been too many deaths in the mine already, they sent me away, as a last chance of saving me.

I believe I slept most of the way up—I was a shy, overgrown boy of one and twenty, deadly tired, with a

piece gone out of my left lung, and yellow as a Dago from fever and dysentery—but the change pulled me together. In Bulawayo I bought half-a-dozen donkeys, the first transport animals I ever owned, then started to tramp back across the veld to the mine. My brother, Malcolm, and I had fixed things already. As soon as we had finished our contract, we were going down to Eastern Mashonaland, to shoot, and to buy cattle from the natives.

In any other part of the world it would have been called a crazy enterprise. There was a traders' camp some forty miles east of the mine, but that was the end of all things civilized. Several hundred miles further on, you would find the sea, the intervening space being unknown territory, with a well-deserved reputation for fever.

But, in those days, in Matabeleland and Mashonaland—the word Rhodesia, a term I detest, was barely invented then—men did crazy things in a sane spirit. The Colonials and the Afrikanders kept to the townships, the mining camps, and the canteens, where they could find audiences ready to listen to the tale of their mighty deeds of the Past, and their splendid schemes for the future; but the Home-born Public-school man went out into the veld as we did, just to see what he could find in the immediate Present; though, more often than not, all he found, in the end, was a grave, whilst some one who had risked nothing more than the money of certain trusting shareholders, secured all the profits. But the game was worth it, always. It was a fine game, playing against Death, even though you knew that Death had loaded the dice. I have played it since in other parts of the world, the last time being in the Philippines, during that ghastly Pulajan

Rebellion, when we lost fifty per cent. of our white men in six months, and its fascination never seemed to grow less. It is one of the two or three things really worth doing.

We shook the dust of the mine off our feet thankfully, more than thankfully—how I had hated the place, how I still hate the memory of it!—and trekked out with our six pack donkeys and our four savages.

The story of that trip has nothing to do with the Road, save in so far as the buying of our first span of cattle was concerned. We were out of touch of civilization for over three months; we wandered down almost to the Portuguese border; we shot a good deal of game, and, until Malcolm became depressed in consequence of a touch of fever, we enjoyed ourselves greatly; but the most important fact, so far as the future was concerned, was that we bought sixteen young cattle.

They cost us sixty-four pounds ten shillings in cash, and we were inordinately proud of them. True, most of them were very small, at least, judged by the standard of the ordinary Colonial trek-ox, but they were all clean and well-built, and there was not one of them that did not ultimately develop into a fine beast. Three years later, I could have sold them a dozen times over for four hundred pounds.

Even now, I can remember every one of them. Like all native cattle, who, as calves, spend their first few months in their owner's huts, they were tame, friendly creatures. True, they made an immense fuss when they met a strange herd, bellowing, pawing the ground, tossing great tufts of grass into the air with their horns; but all that meant very little. It was only part of the etiquette of the bullock world, and, in a very few minutes, those

who had been roaring defiance would be rubbing noses. Though we had many hundred cattle through our hands in the course of the next three years, we always held on to the original sixteen. Somehow, they seemed different from the others. Our luck began when we purchased them, and, so far as Africa was concerned, it died with them.

On our return from the Eastern districts, we gave our cattle to a young Boer to train, and tried to settle down to mining work again for a few months, intending to start trading and riding transport after the wet season was over. Malcolm did fairly well—he did not hate galvanized-iron quarters as bitterly as I did, and could be happy on a mine ; but, so far as I was concerned, the experiment ended in utter failure. I had been trained as an engineer, and, at times, I had been sufficiently keen on my profession to pay cash for a technical book ; but the three months on the veld had finally opened my eyes. There were better things than engineering. Practically any one could be as good an engineer as I was—that is not saying much—and most could be better. Anyway, I was quite ready to give up my place on the greasy ladder of engineering fame to any one who wanted it. For over two years, the Road had been calling me, and now I could wait no longer.

I know that normal people, as well as the Good People in books, stick to the profession in which they were brought up, become rich, acquire houses in sedate suburbs, bring normal and sedate children into the world, die decently of zymotic diseases, and, finally, have their wills quoted in the local papers. I can never have been normal—my relations have told me so with rather irritating frequency—for I never wanted to stick to anything,

save the Road, for long, and I never had the least sympathy with people who want to live settled lives. It must be so horribly dull always to do the same thing, always to meet the same people, socially, or in business. I have fought honestly against the so-called curse of Ishmael. Once, I even went to the length of taking a house on a ten years' agreement; but, as I got rid of it at the end of eight months, no great harm was done, except to my banking account for the expenses of moving.

It was one of the best days of my life when I finally quitted the mines and became a Transport Rider. I only did one wiser thing, and that was when I got married.

The young Boer, in whose charge I had left my sixteen cattle, had tried to train them, according to his lights. He had inspanned them amongst his own bullocks, had knocked them about horribly, and had made them very thin. But, though they were both terrified and hungry, they certainly did not know how to pull, as I quickly discovered.

The first thing to do was to buy a wagon. Luckily, I managed to get hold of the very thing I wanted, almost at once. It was useless to think of a full-sized wagon, a huge eighteen-foot-long vehicle, for my little oxen. Even a sixteen-foot mule wagon would have been too heavy, so I bought a light, fourteen-foot donkey wagon, and adapted it for oxen. Wagons had gone up in price since the days of the Rinderpest, and I had to pay twenty-five pounds for the one I bought. Still, as it was in good condition, and had a very decent haft-tent—it is only in pictures of the South African veld, or "veldt" as sub-editors and politicians insist on spelling it, that you see the whole tent wagon—it suited my purpose admirably.

At the Geelong Store, I engaged an alleged driver, a

Zulu by birth, and a piccanin as voorloeper. It took over two hours to inspan the cattle, and then, when we tried to trek off, half of them lay down in the yoke. Taken all round, it was not a very encouraging start, especially as all the Colonials and Afrikanders on the mine came down to the canteen, and, leaning over the rail, jeered at the Home-born man who dared to think he could make a success as a transport-rider. Later on, when I had made a success, a good many of them tried to borrow money from me ; but fortunately, my memory is a good one.

At last, sufficient cattle pulled together to induce the rest to get up and move too, and we jolted off, towards Bulawayo. As the wagon was empty, I had decided to take a new track across the veld, which not only cut off some twenty miles, but also led through some very decent game country.

Once we had started, we managed to keep going fairly well, though it soon became only too obvious that my driver knew absolutely nothing about his work.

He was a useless creature, like most of his tribe. The virtues of the Zulu exist mainly in certain works of fiction ; his vices are only too real. Generally speaking, he is a boastful, dissolute fraud.

I spent my first night as a transport-rider amongst M'Gwala's Kopjes, some ten miles from the Geelong Mine. I had often camped there, whilst out shooting for the week-end ; but never before had I really appreciated the place. And yet, outwardly, nothing had changed.

The sun was just setting. The tiny village, a dozen huts with smoke-grimed roofs at the foot of a huge boulder-strewn kopje, was the same as ever. As usual, at that time of day, the calves in the kraal were bellowing for their

mothers, and the latter were answering from the vlei by the water-hole; in the mealie-lands, the guinea fowl were screeching lustily, as they hurried to roost amongst the trees; half-a-dozen of M'Gwala's men, old acquaintances of mine, were squatting beside the fire, taking snuff solemnly, and endeavouring to find out if I were likely to go shooting in the morning. They knew of a fresh troop of Roan Antelope, and some Koodoo, down by Inyamimi, the big, bald hill at the junction of the Umsingwani and Insiza Rivers, where, a year before, the party of Colonial "sportsmen" had rounded up the troop of Eland, killed seven out of eight of them—and taken the hind quarter of one!

I suppose I had changed; that was the difference. I was my own boss now, working for myself. I could trek or not, just as I liked. There was the whole veld in front of me, and no one to give me orders. The mine, with its dreariness, its monotony, its petty jealousies, its futility—you knew that, however hard you worked, the end of it all would be failure—was now but an evil memory.

Although the wet season had begun, there had been no rain for over a week, and the weather was perfect. After supper, I sat on an upturned bucket and smoked until long after every one else had gone to sleep. A hundred feet up, amongst the granite boulders, almost sheer above me a leopard was growling; once or twice, from the open country outside the kopjes, a lion raised his abominable voice, driving the game down to his silent partner; whilst, in the vlei, a hyæna was, as usual, cursing the whole of living creation.

And still it was peaceful amongst those hills, and I turned in at last, beside the wagon, feeling that, after all,

it was a very good world, that it was a splendid thing to be only twenty-two and your own master.

I remember now, as vividly as though it were yesterday, that, just as I lay down, a gust of wind, eddying in through the poort, bore up the roar of the Geelong stamp mill.

When that mill first started, a man who knew a good deal about the mine and its prospects, remarked in the canteen that every mill gave out a certain rhythm, telling you what the ore was going to yield.

“Eight penny-weights to the ton, and not a penny-weight more, and not a penny-weight more”—that was what he declared the Geelong stamps said.

“And not a penny-weight more, and not a penny-weight more”—those were the last sounds I heard as I went off to sleep on my first night on the Road, as a real transport-rider.

I was more than ever thankful that I had finished with the mines.

THE GOOD DAYS OF BULAWAYO

CHAPTER III

THE GOOD DAYS OF BULAWAYO

FOUR days after leaving the Geelong, I reached the Alice Mine, where Malcolm was then working. I spent a couple of days there, talking over plans for the future. It was the middle of December—the first December of the Boer War—and we decided that, in the following February, we would trek up to Fort Victoria in Mashonaland, find a road down from there to the district in which we had managed to buy our cattle so cheaply, and start regularly as cattle-traders and transport-riders, breaking in the pick of the oxen for our own use, and selling the poor ones to the butchers.

It was a big scheme, considering that we had only been two and a half years in Africa, two of which had been spent in the one mining camp. Moreover, for some unknown reason, transport work was always supposed to be the domain of the Colonial and the Afrikaner, and very few Home-born men ever ventured into it. I believe they were afraid of making a mess of it, although, when they did tackle it, they invariably did better than the African-born.

There were other difficulties, however, beyond our lack of experience. It may sound absurd to the ears of those who have never done any exploring work, but we were by no means certain how long it would take us to

find our cattle-buying district again. No other white man knew it. We had wandered thither from Matabeleland, heading about east-north-east most of the time. As there was no possibility of getting a wagon road through that way, we proposed, now, to go to Fort Victoria, and strike south-east from there. The area of the country to be traversed, in one way or another, was larger than that of Ireland ; there were no maps of any sort to guide us, and we could not hope for much assistance from the savages we met, for one seldom finds a native whose local knowledge extends more than twenty miles from his own kraal.

Still, we were determined to go through with it. There was an irresponsibility and uncertainty about it, which were extremely fascinating. The possible profits were, of course, large, but I do not think that consideration weighed very greatly with us. The chief thing was—at least with me—that we were going to live on the Road, to make a road of our own, to be the actual pioneers of a vast tract of country.

Malcolm decided to stay on at the " Alice " until we could start for Mashonaland—it would have been ridiculous to leave during the wet season, when half the country is a bog—and I was to go on to Bulawayo, to get a light load for the wagon, and, whilst earning money, train the cattle.

Those were the great days of transport, the good days. Bulawayo was still Railhead, and practically the whole country was supplied from there. Scores of wagons left the town every day, loaded with stores of every conceivable kind, from boilers weighing eight thousand pounds to parcels of millinery. The town was flourishing as it had never flourished before, and will certainly never flourish

again. Only whilst it remained Railhead, was its existence justified; but the memory of those splendid days atones in some measure for its utter failure since. At least, it has a past, and none of the other Rhodesian towns, save Fort Victoria, can even boast of that. They have been drab, semi-insolvent, wholly-uninteresting, all through.

There were scores of wagons on the big public outspan on the Tuli Road, close to the Racecourse, when my little wagon, and span of sixteen more or less wild little bulls, arrived there. The turnout created a good deal of interest, more interest than I liked. The cattle in general use were the huge, slow, ungainly, Colonial oxen, beasts for which I afterwards entertained a whole-hearted contempt, and very few transport riders in Bulawayo had ever seen a Mashona ox in the yoke. White men and Kaffirs alike laughed at mine, and, to make it worse, they stuck hopelessly, stuck with an empty wagon, in a ditch but a few inches deep.

The Tuli Road outspan was even more filthy than that one outside Palapye Siding, on which I spent my first night in the open. Hundreds of wagons, thousands of cattle, had stopped there, sometimes for weeks on end. It was the ideal breeding place for flies, and there were half-a-dozen empty tins to every square yard. There were no trees, of course—Bulawayo stands in the barren dreariness of the high veld, the bleak, wind-swept central plateau—but there was plenty of low scrub, just sufficiently high to furnish cover for a sneak-thief. Fire-wood was unobtainable, so, when it was sufficiently dry, you burnt cow-dung, and were half-choked by the acrid smoke.

A mile away was the Location, a collection of hovels,

many of them built of flattened-out paraffin tins, inhabited by Kaffirs from down country—Cape half-breeds, Fingoes, Zulu and a few Basutu, a choice collection of rascality. Most of them claimed to be wagon drivers, but, as a great many could read and write, the principal industry was, naturally, the forging of white men's names to liquor passes, which is practically the only use to which a native ever puts his education.

When there was no forgery to be done, the Location Kaffirs hung round the wagons, and stole anything they could, from a bullock to a pair of boots. Somehow, the Bulawayo police never seemed able to catch them, though one butcher in the town, a product of the Fatherland, was generally known to buy all his beef from the Location thieves. In the end, however, the transport-riders took the matter into their own hands; the Teutonic person was told plainly that, though he might have a host of friends in high places, as in fact he had, that would not save his skin if he were caught red-handed; whilst a round up with sjamboks in the Location itself resulted in two-thirds of its population starting back on the long and weary journey to Cape Colony, where the savage has a vote, and can buy liquor openly and cheaply.

I left the wagon at the outspan, and walked into Bulawayo. Within an hour, I had a load, just what I wanted, about two thousand five hundred pounds' weight of trading stuff for a store in the M'Patane district.

Of course, a full summer load for a properly-trained span of big cattle is eight thousand pounds; but my beasts were very far from being trained, whilst there would have been no second span handy if I stuck. In the circumstances, the load was amply large, almost too large, as I discovered later.

Bulawayo was—and must still be—typical of the results of the system of government-by company. Men of the type who built up our Empire, the real Empire makers, adventurers risking their own lives, and not merely the lives of the employés and the money of shareholders, would never have dreamed of founding a township on that forsaken stretch of veld, in an out-of-the-way corner of the country, with the Kalahari Desert to the West, the dry bush veld to the South, the dreariness of the high veld to the North. A private individual who had thought of placing the principal town of a new colony in such a locality would, rightly, have been considered a lunatic ; but the Chartered Company has, always, to think of the Market at home ; and the price of Rhodesian Shares is regulated, not by practical considerations—few of them are really worth the stamp duty on them—but by sentiment. It was a great thing to found the new settlement, the outward and visible sign of the white man's rule, on the ruins, or just by the ruins, of Lobengula's old kraal. When a new company was floated, the promoters could point to that fact, and add a few thousands more to the purchase money.

The one good point about Bulawayo is that the streets are so wide that you can turn a full span of bullocks in most of them. Beyond this, it has no merits whatsoever. When the ground is dry, the red dust is abominable, choking everything ; whilst a single shower of rain changes that dust into slimy red mud.

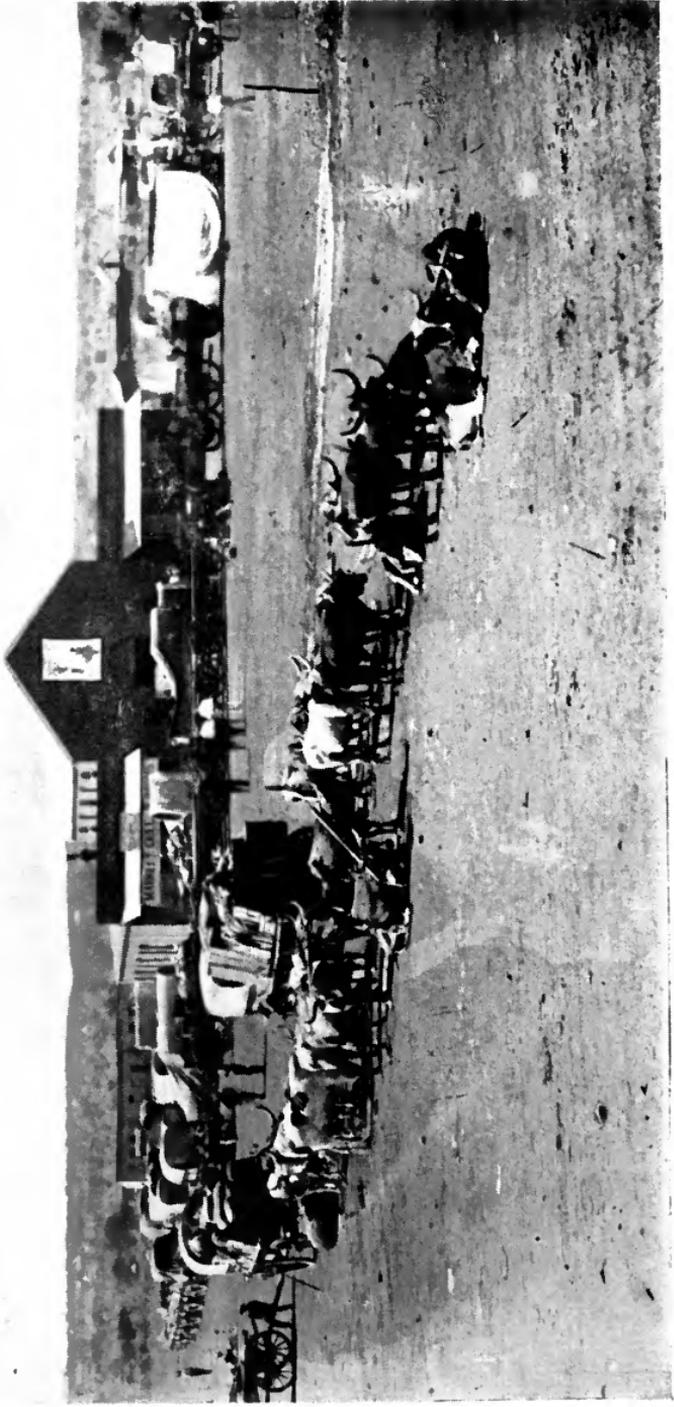
Many of the buildings are quite pretentious—impressive even, to the new-comer who does not happen to know the real financial history of the companies that built them. The Market Square is a fine one, and, up to the second year of the Boer War, the Saturday market was a

thing well worth seeing. Tens of thousands of pounds' worth of stuff would change hands in the morning ; in the busiest hours, the white men could be counted by hundreds ; the harvest of I.O.U.'s in the neighbouring bars would run to hundreds, too ; yet the last time I was there, one Saturday in 1904, though Rhodesia was being boomed more vigorously than ever in the Home Press, there were but three real white men at the Market, in addition to the auctioneers. The rest of the crowd consisted of Greeks, coolies, half-castes, and local savages. The glory of Bulawayo had departed for ever.

But when I knew it first, Bulawayo was a fascinating place. The transport-riders dominated it. They were the masters of the situation. Without them, the country would have come to a standstill. It was curious to go on the Market Square, and see the difference between them and the men of the town, the government servants and the clerks from the mining companies' offices.

Generally speaking, the Bulawayo man could neither ride nor shoot ; he would have lost his way had he gone alone three miles from the township ; yet he invariably wore riding-breeches, puttee leggings and a hunting stock, whilst a stranger, hearing him talking to a barmaid, would have taken him to have been one of the original band of Pioneers. The transport-rider, on the other hand, wore dungaree trousers, a flannel shirt open at the neck, and a disgraceful sombrero. In his favourite bars—there were three or four round the Market Square—he liked to be served by a man, and his conversation ran, not on his own mighty deeds, but on those of his oxen, and on the rotten prices the forwarding agents were offering.

Really, we never made half enough of our chances. We



IN THE GREAT DAYS OF TRANSPORT.

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could have squeezed the mining companies dry ; we ought to have squeezed them, knowing that the majority were rank frauds, and that all we left them would ultimately go into the pockets of the directors and the consulting engineers, that the shareholders would never get one penny back ; and yet we let them down lightly. We were content with a profit of a pound a wagon a day when we might easily have got two, or even three, pounds. Consequently, they began to despise us, to feel certain that they could break us ultimately, and, two years later, with the aid of Cecil Rhodes and his uncleanly Transvaal refugees, they very nearly succeeded.

For the time being, however, all seemed well. A good deal of the capital raised in the days of the Boom was still unspent, even though no more was forthcoming, and most of us believed that, despite the amazing misgovernment, the country would pull round in the end. I know that our optimism has since been proved to have been unfounded, but I still hold that there was some justification for it. It was only reasonable for us to expect that the Imperial Government was going to abrogate that fatal Charter, take the country over, clean out the public services, and give it a chance to go ahead in a healthy, steady manner.

When I got back to the wagon that afternoon, I was met by the news that Joseph, the alleged driver, had gone.

I was not greatly surprised, nor was I greatly troubled. It was out of the question to go on the Road with him again, and I had fully intended to sack him as soon as I could get hold of a successor. Now, his sudden departure saved me from having to pay him the money which he had not earned.

That night, Darkie, the cook-boy, and I tied up the

cattle—the piccanin was almost as inefficient as the last driver had been—and then I sat down on the water-barrel, and wondered when I should get away from Bulawayo, for I certainly could not drive myself, and several men had already told me that drivers who were any good were very hard to get, the military authorities having secured every decent one they could find, as well as a good many who were not worth finding.

There was a great deal of growling about this, and the growls were thoroughly justified. Up till the outbreak of the war, the average wage of a good driver had been three pounds a month with “Cape boy rations”—a pound of Boer meal a day, a pound of tinned meat a week, coffee, sugar, and as much Kaffir meal as he wanted. The military authorities paid five pounds a month, and gave a pound of meat a day, a pound of flour or biscuits, tea, coffee, and sugar. A voorloeper, or leader, had received formerly from ten to fifteen shillings a month, and ordinary Kaffir rations—meal and salt, with beans or monkey-nuts occasionally. The Army gave him thirty shillings a month, and the same rations as the drivers.

Needless to say, there was a rush to the military camps. It was only human nature, and an African savage has no sense of gratitude. Men lost drivers who had worked for them faithfully since childhood, and cursed the British Army officer in consequence. It was not so much the extra pay; it was the extra food which came so heavy. Tinned meat then cost two shillings a pound, and the Army scale of feeding meant an additional food bill of about seven pounds a wagon a month for drivers and voorloeper, say ten pounds a month with the increase in wages. And, even if the transport-rider were prepared to meet this, he could not be sure of obtaining the tinned

meat and Boer meal ; whilst the extra food and extra pay rendered most of the boys insufferably impudent.

Yet the Army officers were not wholly to blame—in fact, they were hardly to blame at all. In Rhodesia, they were practically in the hands of the local authorities—at least they had to look to the latter for advice and information, and they were deliberately led wrong. Too late, they realized that a very large proportion of the Chartered Company's officials were really working for the other side, that everything had been planned to render the British Army unpopular.

It all came out later on, when the plot for the seizure of Rhodesia by the Boers was exposed, a plot which, if any other nation had been concerned, any nation which was not infected with the virus of sloppy sentimentality, would have led to half a dozen executions and the dismissal of half the Civil Servants ; but the harm was done then, and the only punishments awarded were the investing of some of the offenders with the *C.M.G.*

So far as I was concerned, the outlook at that moment was not very bright. I was bound to load within the next forty-eight hours, and I could not even move the wagon until I had a driver. In the morning, I tramped into the town, searched round the Market Square and other places where drivers were likely to be found, but was told everywhere that there was no chance of success. The Army had snapped up every available man.

Naturally, I was not feeling exactly happy when I reached the outspan again ; but I had hardly sat down and told Darkie to get me some coffee, when a little Basutu strolled up, and asked if I were the White man who wanted some one to train his very little cattle, who were now cheeky, and would not pull, because a

schelm called Joseph, a useless Zulu, had been spoiling them.

I wish I had a photograph of him as he appeared then, I wish it for more reasons than one, amongst them being the fact that he was the most efficient servant I ever employed and my most loyal friend.

I never knew what his age was, but, from things he said afterwards, I fancy he must have been about forty, although his queer wizened face, with horse hair plaited into the ends of his moustache, to make it appear long and fierce, might have been that of a man of sixty-five. He was small and slightly built, though tough as watch-spring, absolutely tireless, and perfectly indifferent to danger or hardship. Wet, cold, hunger, thirst, heat—all these seemed to leave him unmoved, the only thing that did affect him being fever, to which, like so many down-country Kaffirs, he was extremely liable.

His costume was always the same—blue dungaree trousers, ragged at the bottoms, a tattered canvas shirt, and a huge sombrero, usually of the Boss of the Plains type, the kind which is now supposed to have some subtle connection with General Baden-Powell, though it was in use, and known as a "B.P.," long before the officer in question had even been heard of in Africa.

His name was Amous, he explained, adding, quite truthfully as it turned out, that he was the best driver in the country. I engaged him at once, at three pounds for a month. He saluted, borrowed some tobacco, then went off to inspect the cattle. An hour or two later he returned, informed me that they were "cattle indeed," then set to work to overhaul the wagon and gear, keeping up a running fire of uncomplimentary remarks concerning the Zulu character.

That evening, the moment he began to tie up the cattle, I saw that he knew his work, and, in some subtle way, the cattle saw it too. There were no wild chases over the veld, as there had been in Joseph's time. The little chaps huddled closely together, too closely really, but they stood whilst he put the reims on their horns, and came out fairly readily when he pulled them towards the trek chain.

Afterwards, he came and talked to me for a couple of hours about the splendid span he was going to have. Cattle were an obsession with him; really, he cared for nothing else, save perhaps tobacco. All his thoughts were of cattle, all his conversation was of matters concerning them. I believe he would rather have worked for no wages at all than not have had cattle in his charge. He preferred young beasts, his ambition being, apparently, to have broken in and trained a better span than any one else. So, from his point of view, the chance he had with us was an ideal one, even though he was going to get three times as much work as he would have had with an ordinary span of old cattle.

Personally, I had begun to feel that our little animals were going to prove complete failures; consequently, Amous' enthusiasm was distinctly refreshing. I turned in, at last, more content with our prospects than I had been for many days past.

An hour later, I happened to wake up, and, hearing voices, looked out of the end of the wagon tent.

Amous was sitting beside the fire, with a very sleepy piccanin, and an equally sleepy cook-boy, in front of him, unwilling listeners to a lecture on the beauties of our "very little oxen indeed."

"Now, Bandom, the black and white one, has eyes

which tell me he will be a front ox—do you hear, little child?—whilst Biffel, the big black one, will _____”

Then I fell asleep again, feeling I was in luck.

MY FIRST LOAD

CHAPTER IV

MY FIRST LOAD

THE following morning, I watched my new driver a little anxiously when he started to inspan. It was raw and damp, and things did not look quite so bright as they had done over-night. But I soon recovered. He knew exactly where he was going to put each beast, and we jolted off the outspan in excellent style. Only one of the oxen, Jackalass, was roaring, and there were never more than three trying to hang back at any one time. What was most important of all was that the front oxen were keeping the chain tight. Given good front oxen in a span, and all things are possible, the others will follow them, though, on an average, not one beast in six will consent to go in front.

Joseph's whip had been tossed aside contemptuously, "Fit only for a Zulu, or a thief from Cape Colony," the little man had grunted.

His own whip was always thirty feet in length, ending in a voorshlag thin as a piece of twine, and he liked his whip stick to be fifteen feet. He never touched his bullocks with the heavy part of the lash, never hit them on the back, never hit them at all, if he could avoid so doing. After a while, the crack of his whip was sufficient, together with his voice, save when the wagon was badly stuck.

We got to the forwarding agents' yard without

trouble of any sort, though it was the first time the cattle had ever been in a town; loaded up with a miscellaneous lot of trading stuff, all comparatively light cases, luckily, and trekked out, down the Filabusi Road, which we had to follow for about fifty miles, before turning off on the track which led to M'Patane.

Already, the difference in the cattle was amazing. Though we had the load on board now, they negotiated several small drifts with ease. Amous was in the Seventh Heaven. They were oxen, indeed. By-and-bye, they would pull a full-sized wagon and full loads, pull through anything. Then, in Mashonaland, we should buy more and more spans, until we were the biggest transport-riders in the country.

Had the Baas not noticed how quickly they fed? How, instead of doing as the great, foolish Colonial oxen did, walking about all the time, cropping a mouthful here, a mouthful there, they found a little patch of good grass and finished it? They were soon full, then they could lie down, and rest, and chew the cud.

He was bubbling over with enthusiasm. I have seldom seen any one so happy as the little man was about his new job, and, as the months went by, his enthusiasm hardened into an article of faith. He held—and I held too, and still hold—that the Mashona cattle, the actual cattle of the country, were far the best for transport work up there. They kept their condition, when bullocks from the South were too thin to trek, much less to pull; they were not nearly so liable to disease as the others; and they actually travelled a good deal faster. True, they could not pull more than seven thousand pounds where the big oxen could manage eight thousand; but, in the twelve months, they usually earned about twenty-five

per cent. more than their rivals—an argument which was good enough for me, even though, by using “niggers’ beasts,” I was offending that dread South African fetish, the Custom of the Country.

There was one thing, however, of which Amous did not approve, and that was the “very little child,” otherwise the piccanin. He might lead the cattle well enough for a lying Zulu like Joseph, he explained, but he would have to alter his ways now there was a real driver, a Basutu. Also, the youngster did not take the oxen out to feed in the right places, but merely went a little way, out of sight behind the nearest rise, and sat down to gorge himself on porridge.

For two days, the wretched piccanin heard a number of home truths concerning himself, and even more speculations concerning the morality of his ancestors; consequently, I was not altogether surprised to be told on the third morning that he was missing.

As a result, Darkie had to act as voorloeper, greatly to his disgust. He had recently grown very lazy, owing to his having begun to smoke Indian Hemp, and any exertion was a weariness to him. How long it would have been before he, too, had bolted, I do not know; not very long probably; but my luck still held good, and, that very evening, we got a new piccanin, an extraordinarily solemn-faced youngster, who strolled up, apparently from nowhere, and was promptly engaged at fifteen shillings a month. I never heard his real name. It was too long for ordinary use, Amous informed me, so he was christened “Scarmanyorka” for short.

Until we left the Filabusi Road, the trip was uneventful. Amous made amazing progress with the cattle. In two days, the hind oxen, Biffel, a great black bull—at least,

he grew into a monster later—and Fransman, his mate, knew their names perfectly. By the end of the fifth day, the rest of the sixteen had learnt theirs.

Naturally, we stuck several times ; and, when a wagon is travelling alone with no second span to hook it out, any stoppage may become a serious matter, through the wheels sinking in the mud, for instance ; but, each time, Amous managed to get on again without any very great delay.

However, on the day we left the main road, our luck seemed to run out. The track, a new one, was quite “unmade”—that is, it was merely a spoor, roughly cleared. That very afternoon we struck a bad drift, a really steep one, long too, and we stuck in it till sundown, despite the expenditure of a marvellous amount of energy on Amous’ part.

At the end of three hours of shouting, the cattle were thorough “rattled,” the front oxen trying all the time to rush backwards, the rest of the span, with the exception of the hind bullocks, jibbing badly. Moreover, the front wheels had worked regular holes for themselves, whilst the hind wheels were still in the river. To add to the delights of the situation, there had been very heavy rains up country, and the river was beginning to rise.

I suggested outspanning for a time, and letting the oxen have a rest and a feed ; but Amous would not hear of it.

“They will be worse than ever then, Baas,” he declared. “Because they will be cold. No, we will change the front oxen, put Jonkman and Sixpence there—they are cattle with wise eyes—then, with our hands, we will run the wagon back a little, to where it is more level, and try again.”

A quarter of an hour later, we were ready. I took the leading reim in place of the Scarmanyorka, who was pretty well exhausted, whilst Amous stationed himself just in front of the hind oxen. There was not room to crack his great whip, so he doubled his lash and made that whistle. Then he called their names over once, slowly, and after that came a sudden shout of appeal to his new front oxen.

“Jonkman! Sixpence, Sixpence! Ach, mien juckers! Yeck! Yeck!”

And, almost before I had realized what had happened, I was stopping them on the level. They had come out at a run.

The little man sat down on a stump, and proceeded very carefully to fill his pipe. It was a triumph for him, and at first he could not trust himself to speak. A minute later he was reviling the Scarmanyorka for being slow over outspanning.

We gave the cattle a day's rest—the grass was very good along that river bank—and I went out shooting, returning with a reed-buck bull. I was very lucky all that trip, so far as game was concerned, starting off by securing five buck with five consecutive cartridges, a fact which raised me immensely in Amous' estimation. After that, whenever I did happen to miss badly, he ascribed it to the rifle, whilst the Scarmanyorka used to try and comfort me by remarking in his dreary way that “the Spirits of the ancestors of the buck did not wish him to die, therefore it had been no use attempting to shoot him.”

“We shan't stick again, Baas,” Amous remarked when we trekked away from that river. “Now, these very little cattle are trained. Nothing can stop them.”

But that afternoon we did stop, stopped dead, in the middle of a huge grassy vlei. The ground was literally saturated with rain water ; and, within half a minute, we were up to the front axles in black mud.

Then began one of the very worst experiences I ever had as a transport rider. At every attempt to move it, the wagon sank yet deeper, whilst the ground on which the cattle were trampling became a pond of black slime.

Amous did his level best, and the oxen responded splendidly at first, but still they could not move the wagon. Just at sunset, the rain began again, a regular deluge, and of course we had to outspan—if you work cattle in the rain, the yokes give them neck-sores.

We had no firewood in the wagon, and, even if we had had any, we could not have kept a fire alight long enough even to boil the kettle ; so, after tying the cattle up to the trek gear, we made a meal off bully-beef and some very sour bread, and turned in. I had the wagon tent ; consequently, though I was wet through, I was able to change and get fairly comfortable ; but Amous and the two youngsters had to manage as best they could under the wagon. Many times afterwards, when I was travelling without a tent, I slept underneath, in the mud, and contrived to sleep soundly too, without catching a cold ; but before I actually had to try it, I used to worry a good deal about my boys, quite unnecessarily really.

It was still raining in the morning, and there was even less chance of lighting a fire. Not until after mid-day did the weather break at all, and then it took us a couple of hours to dig the wheels clear, the fore-carriage itself being now actually in the mud.

At last we inspanned ; the cattle started off with a splendid swing, pulled the wagon just out of the first

hole and stopped dead. We were stuck worse than ever, after having gone exactly far enough to have our hind wheels in the hole where the front wheels had been.

It rained all that night too, though, by some miracle, Amous had now managed to get a fire going under the fore-carriage, enough to make some coffee.

Twenty-four hours later, we had not moved more than a couple of inches, and the cattle were actually up to their bellies in liquid mud. On the first day, I had given up trying to wear boots—the mud actually dragged them off your feet—and I had not a dry rag left.

Amous was terribly upset, terribly tired too, I fancy. He filled up his tobacco bag from mine in silence, then pushed his old hat backwards, and shook his head.

“The cattle can’t do it, Baas,” he said. “We must unload, make a sledge, drag all the goods over the mud on that, then put a long chain on to the empty wagon, and pull it out that way.”

It was the only plan—I had thought as much already—but there was one difficulty. We could not possibly unload our stuff, perishable trading goods, on to that soaking mud.

For once, the Scarmanyorka made a suggestion. “There is a mining camp behind those kopjes, Chief,” he remarked. “They would have the iron of which white men build huts.”

I imagine he had worked there, for he took me straight to it. It turned out to be the Killarney Mine camp, and the manager at once agreed to lend me some sheets of galvanized iron. After we had got those on the ground, it was merely a question of hard work, lifting the stuff. Luckily, the rain had stopped.

Amous went off early with six cattle in the yoke, and

returned a couple of hours later with his "Sledge," the fork of a fair-sized tree, about nine inches in diameter in the smallest part.

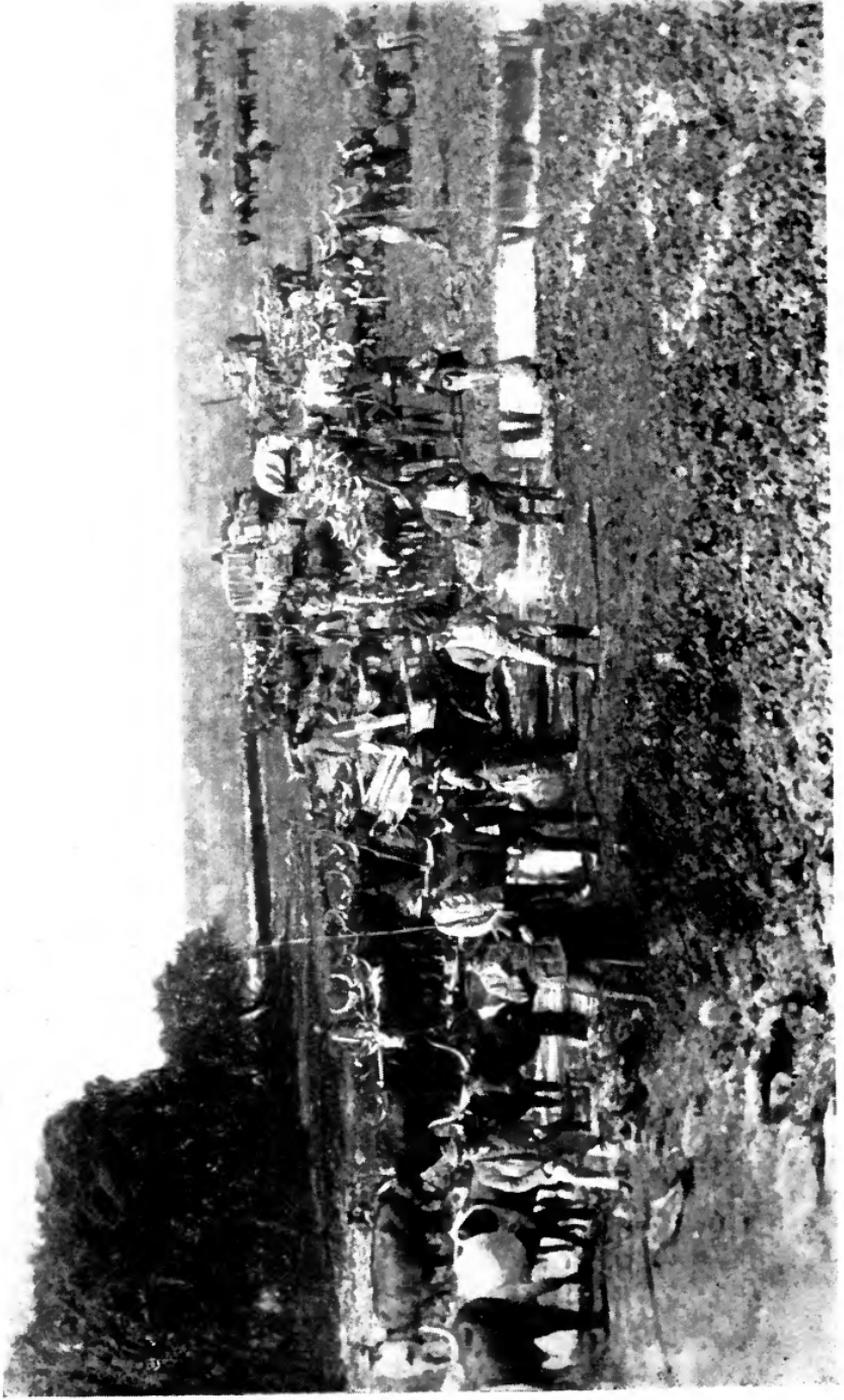
We loaded some eight hundred pounds weight of stuff on this, and found that the cattle could pull it over that abominable mud with the greatest ease. Each load in turn was stacked on, and under, galvanized iron; then, about sixty feet of spare chain was made fast to the end of the düsselboom—the wagon-pole—of the now-empty wagon, and the span hitched on to that. At the first attempt, the wagon came out of its bed of slime, and, before we turned in that night, it was on firm ground, loaded up again.

It had taken us just over five days to do half a mile.

However, it was the last of our real troubles that trip. We never really stuck again during the rest of the journey, and I delivered my first load of transport in good order at the store amongst the M'Patane Kopjes. I forget now what rate per hundred pounds I got, but I know that, though I had only the one little wagon, with what was really only a third of a load, and I had lost those five days in the mud, the journey panned out quite satisfactorily from a financial point of view.

We stayed a day at the store, then started back for Bulawayo, and it was now that I tasted, for the first time, the real delights of transport-riding, the soft side of it—travelling with empty wagons, after you have done your work, and have been paid for it.

There is a wonderful sense of contentment and relief. You know that you are not going to stick anywhere. Except for the rain, you can plan out your treks beforehand, and say to yourself, "I shall camp at such and



WHEN THE TREK-OX WAS ALL-IMPORTANT.

such a place." You are not going to find yourself spending the night in some notorious stretch of lion-country.

Your oxen are getting over their leg-weariness ; your drivers have practically nothing to do ; whilst you, yourself, can sit on the wagon and smoke, or cut off into the bush in search of a buck, and be sure of picking up the spans again at some pre-arranged spot.

The worse the outward trip has been, the more you will enjoy the return in search of fresh loads.

ON THE HIGH VELD

CHAPTER V

ON THE HIGH VELD

IT was the end of February when Malcolm and I left Bulawayo on our trading and cattle-buying expedition. Our load came, in all, to about three thousand five hundred pounds weight, quite enough, as it turned out afterwards. In addition to the wagon, we now had a Scotch cart, drawn by four donkeys, and driven by Daniel, a Matabele youngster, who had been installed as cook-boy in the place of Darkie.

The cart turned out afterwards to be one of the best purchases we had ever made—it was simply invaluable to us down in the low-veld for odd trading, shooting, and fetching stuff from Fort Victoria—but I must admit that there were times on the Gwelo Road, which was, of course, the great north road of Africa, when I was not proud of it. The donkeys were wretched little creatures belonging to Amous, who had been anxious that they should go up country with him. They went along in approved donkey wagon style, heads down, harness slack, whilst Daniel sat on the front of the cart with his head down too, looking just as mournful as did his team.

Only those who have seen the high veld of Rhodesia can realize its unutterable dreariness. Words are quite inadequate to describe it, so, instead of trying to do so,

those who have land to sell there speak of it as the splendid healthy, Central Plateau, and enlarge on its suitability for every sort of pastoral and agricultural purposes.

I had been on the high veld before we started from Bulawayo to Victoria, viâ Gwelo, but I had always managed to get off it in one, or, at the most, two treks. Now, we had hundreds of miles of it before us, and ample time in which to study its manifold beauties.

Vast, rolling plains covered with tall sour grass, barren, wind-swept, devoid of tree or shrub ; in winter yellowish-brown from the drought, or black where the great veld fires had swept over it, dusty, thirsty, bitterly cold at nights, a veritable place of purgatory for the unlucky cattle, who could barely get enough sustenance out of the pasture to keep themselves alive ; green enough in summer, certainly, though the greenness was not that of wholesome land—the grass was too tall, too wiry.

In winter, there was far too little water, and in summer there was too much. True, there were but few rivers capable of holding up the wagons for more than a few days at a time, but there were miles and miles of terrible black mud vleis, heartbreaking mud, inconceivable to any one who has never seen anything of the kind.

Firewood was practically unobtainable. Thousands of herd-boys had searched every clump of scrub within a mile of the road. There was plenty of cow-dung, though, and if you managed to find some that was dry, you could cook after a fashion, though the acrid smoke half choked and blinded you. When the dung was wet, you, yourself, ate cold tinned stuff, and your boys went hungry, unless they had some porridge left from the last cooking.

The road itself, though the main highway of Africa, was still the mere Pioneers' track. Very little had ever

been done to it, save by the transport-riders themselves. There always had been a lack of sympathy—ill-feeling would, perhaps, be the more correct term—on the part of the Government towards the men of the Road, although the latter were absolutely indispensable to the progress of the country. The mining industry was studied in every way, pandered to; its material came in duty-free, its complaints were attended to immediately, but the transport industry had to look out for itself, make its own roads, keep them in repair, protect itself as best it could from its enemies.

There was a sort of Road Department, certainly, and occasionally parties were sent out, but most of their energies were confined to the immediate neighbourhood of the mines; and, when we did know they had been at work on a certain place, word was passed along to avoid it, on the assumption that it would be worse than it had been before.

On the Gwelo Road, you would find places where the track was three-quarters of a mile wide, innumerable spoor through the horrible black mud. When you came to such a spot, the wisest course was to make an entirely new spoor for yourself, if it were possible to do so.

You never knew when you were going to stumble into some one else's "grave," a hole where another wagon had been dug out. As a rule, these "graves" filled up quickly with liquid mud, and I have seen more than one wagon upset in them, toppling over, practically without a moment's warning.

Until we left Bulawayo, Malcolm had never travelled with our own oxen. At first, he was a little inclined to be down-hearted. They looked so very tiny compared with the great bullocks in the other wagons we passed,

and they stuck badly during the second trek, stuck just at nightfall in a huge mud vlei, and it was nearly midnight before Amous got them out.

Malcolm did not like it at all, I remember. He was new to the wet and muddy side of the life on the Road, and, not unnaturally, he began to think that we had let ourselves in for a thundering bad thing, that we should never get through with our single span.

We drew out at last on to a firm stretch of ground, and turned in just as the rain began again, without having got a fire alight. Really, I believe that if I had said the word that night, Malcolm would have agreed to throw up the whole trip, and return to prosaic mine work.

Instead, however, I told him, once more, of our five days in the mud near the Killarney Mine, and of how we finally got out of it. Then, from underneath the wagon, we heard Amous' voice, lecturing Daniel and the Scarmanyorka on the beauties of our cattle, pointing out how no other span in the whole of Africa could have pulled out alone from that mud-hole, partly because they were "cattle indeed," and partly because they had the very best driver in the country. He was still talking when we went to sleep.

It was a dreary trip up to Gwelo, really enough to have disgusted most men with their prospects. We stuck badly about a dozen times in all; and only Amous' splendid driving rendered progress of any sort possible. We had rain on most days, and lived, more or less, in a state of mud.

Then, the mere appearance of that high veld of Rhodesia is enough to reduce most men to the nadir of depression. It was small wonder that, quite apart from its unproductiveness, no natives ever tried to live on it. About every

twenty miles there was a wayside store, two or three mud huts with a galvanized iron mule stable in the rear, but those were practically the only signs of human habitation. In those stores, they provided meals, hashed bully beef, Boer-meal bread, and muddy coffee, for coach passengers, charging five shillings a head; also, they usually had some grain and meal for the boys' food and a little odd Kaffir truck, though the bar trade, whisky at a shilling a tot, was invariably the most paying part of the business.

I have seen a good many dreary habitations in various parts of the world, but, as a whole, I remember none to surpass these stores on the high veld, between Gwelo and Bulawayo. So far as position was concerned, the trader had little choice—the "hotel" had to be combined with the mule stable, otherwise the coaches would not have stopped at it; on the other hand, very little had ever been done to get over the natural disadvantages. The buildings were as bleak and comfortless as possible. The huts had mud walls, thatched roofs, and, in most cases, not even a veranda. The largest building, a square one, would be canteen at one end, store at the other, the two being separated by a rough partition. The bar fittings consisted mainly of whisky cases, the bar itself being made from broken-up boxes. The uneven earthen floor was usually littered with cigarette ends and half-burnt matches. There was an all-pervading smell of stale spirits.

In the store itself, the Kaffir truck was stacked anyhow, often regardless of the attacks of the rats and the white ants. Shoddy trade blankets were heaped together with condemned uniform jackets; the Kaffir hoes were in a heap by the door. The tins of bully, salmon, and milk,

ranged irregularly along the rough shelves, looked as though they had already been in stock far too long ; the sides of bacon were sweating through their muslin coverings ; the meal-bags were leaking on to the floor.

A round hut, innocent of window frames or doors, served as dining-room. The table-cloth, a piece of white limbo, trade calico, remained on from meal to meal, forming a favourite promenade for the flies. The salt was kept in a baking-powder tin, slightly rusted ; the vinegar was still in its original bottle. Table ware was all of enamelled iron, badly chipped, and the food was unspeakable ; still, as one store-keeper remarked to me once—" Who the blazes wants to eat when he gets off the coach after twenty-four hours of jolting and dust ? All he cares about is a drink, or as many drinks as he's time for while they're changing the mules. Very few of them ever touch the food."

I had seen the food provided, and I was not surprised at the reluctance.

Two or three more round huts for the trader and any possible guests, a shelter to serve as kitchen, and a stable completed the camp. Everywhere, were rusted tins and empty bottles. Litter remained just where it was thrown. Nothing was ever cleaned up.

The kitchen arrangements were typical of the whole life of those stores—a big heap of white ashes with some logs smouldering in the middle of it, two bake-pots for the bread, a kettle, a couple of battered saucepans, and a cook-boy in a loin cloth, squatting on the ground, kneading the bread in an old washing-basin, occasionally pausing to empty some snuff into the palm of his hand, and draw it noisily up his nostrils.

What wonder that so few of the wayside stores really

paid, and that such a large proportion of their proprietors ultimately died of drink and malaria combined ?

Generally speaking, the stores in the low-veld were of a much better type. Perhaps the beauty of the kopje scenery had something to do with it, making men hanker after a touch of refinement, which would have seemed almost grotesque on the Great Plateau ; perhaps the fact that conditions were so much better, that timber, grass for thatching, and labour were so much more easily obtained, made the difference. Anyway, down in those districts, you found comfortable huts with verandas, attempts at gardens, even creepers planted up the poles, whilst the bottles and tins were stacked together outside the camp itself. The contrast was a curious one, and I noticed it not once, but scores of times, not only in the case of store-keepers, but of every other class of the population as well. The barren dreariness of the high veld seemed to ruin men more rapidly than any other influence with which I ever came into contact.

Gwelo hardly came up to expectations—it proved to be so very, very small. On the other hand, it is clean and well laid out. Of course, it stands in a mud vlei, but the monotony of the high veld is broken by some tree-covered kopjes at the back, and there are a few trees, real trees in the township itself. Really, from its geographical position, it ought to have been the capital of the country, but both Salisbury and Bulawayo combined to keep it back. That was the one point on which the bigger townships agreed.

From Gwelo, we had to pass through the Selukwe, at that time the principal mining district of the country ; then we dropped down to the bush veld, the final eighty-five-mile stage to Fort Victoria.

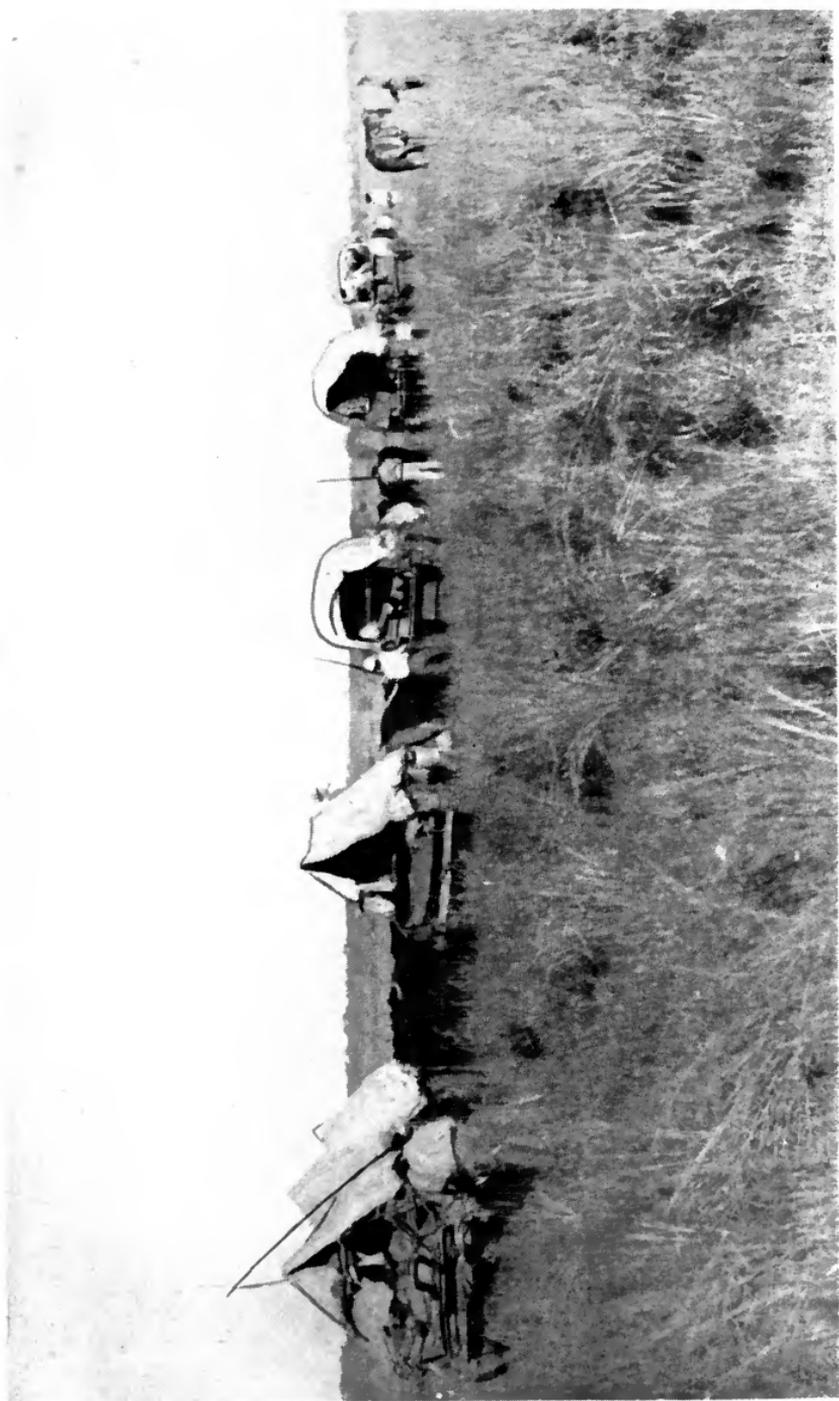
All along, Amous had been dreading the twenty-mile stage from Gwelo to Selukwe.

“There is mud indeed, Baas,” he told me, over and over again—somehow, he always considered me as essentially his own Baas, my brothers being quite secondary persons when I was about, probably because I had engaged him. “Black mud, without a bottom to it. If we stick there, it will be far worse than at the mine—when we made the sledge and didn’t have a fire.”

Other men had told us of that mud. It was sheer lunacy to attempt it in the wet season with one span, they declared. Of course, any transport-rider will always hook out a wagon in difficulties, hook out even the wagon of his most deadly enemy. That is the Law of the Road ; but, when the weather is very bad, you may wait days for the other transport-rider to come along.

We were dreading those Gwelo flats. We had really done fairly well so far, considering the state of the road and the lightness of our cattle, having covered a hundred and ten miles in fourteen days, but now, in all probability, we were going to lower our daily average enormously. And yet, in the end, we went right through to the Sebunga Poort, the entrance to the Selukwe Hills, without sticking once.

It was luck, of course. Two or three hot days without any rain had hardened the surface of that dreaded mud, though twenty-four hours after we had reached the hills the Flats were practically under water again. It was not the only time we had luck there. Two years later, Amyas, my youngest brother, made the record for that wet season with our four wagons, doing the distance, loaded heavily, in three days. The summer had been a truly awful one. Some wagons had taken eight days,



WHEN THE GREAT MUD FLATS ARE DRY.

some a fortnight, while some had never arrived at all, having been abandoned until the rains should be over. In one instance, eighty cattle were put into a single wagon. It came out, certainly, in pieces, leaving its load, a large steam boiler, resting on the mud.

After one or two attempts, the mud became churned up to such a degree, that you could not get the cattle anywhere near it, and somehow, the expedient of a very long chain on to the düsselboom very seldom succeeded.

Still, as I have said, we crossed the Flats without the least trouble, tumbled down the rocky road from Selukwe to the bush veld, and found ourselves once more in Mashonaland.

FORT VICTORIA

B

CHAPTER VI

FORT VICTORIA

I ALWAYS liked the bush veld, especially when I came down to it from the top of the great plateau. The trees were such an immense relief to one's eyes, and it was often a positive joy to escape from the bitter cold of the plains. You get sharp frosts at night during the winter in all parts of the country, except the low veld on the eastern border, but these are as nothing by comparison with the wet mists of the high veld in summer, mists which seem to drive clean through you, and send you to your blankets, your teeth chattering with ague.

Then, too, in the bush country you find native villages, which means you can shoot guinea fowl and buy fresh milk, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and, occasionally, eggs, though, if you are wise, you never pay for the latter until they have been cooked and tried. The Kaffir does not eat them himself, so he sees nothing out of the way in taking them from under a sitting hen, and selling them to you. To him, an egg is an egg, whatever its condition.

Game is far more plentiful amongst the bush, although I believe that, prior to the coming of the Chartered Company, the high plateau was a very much better

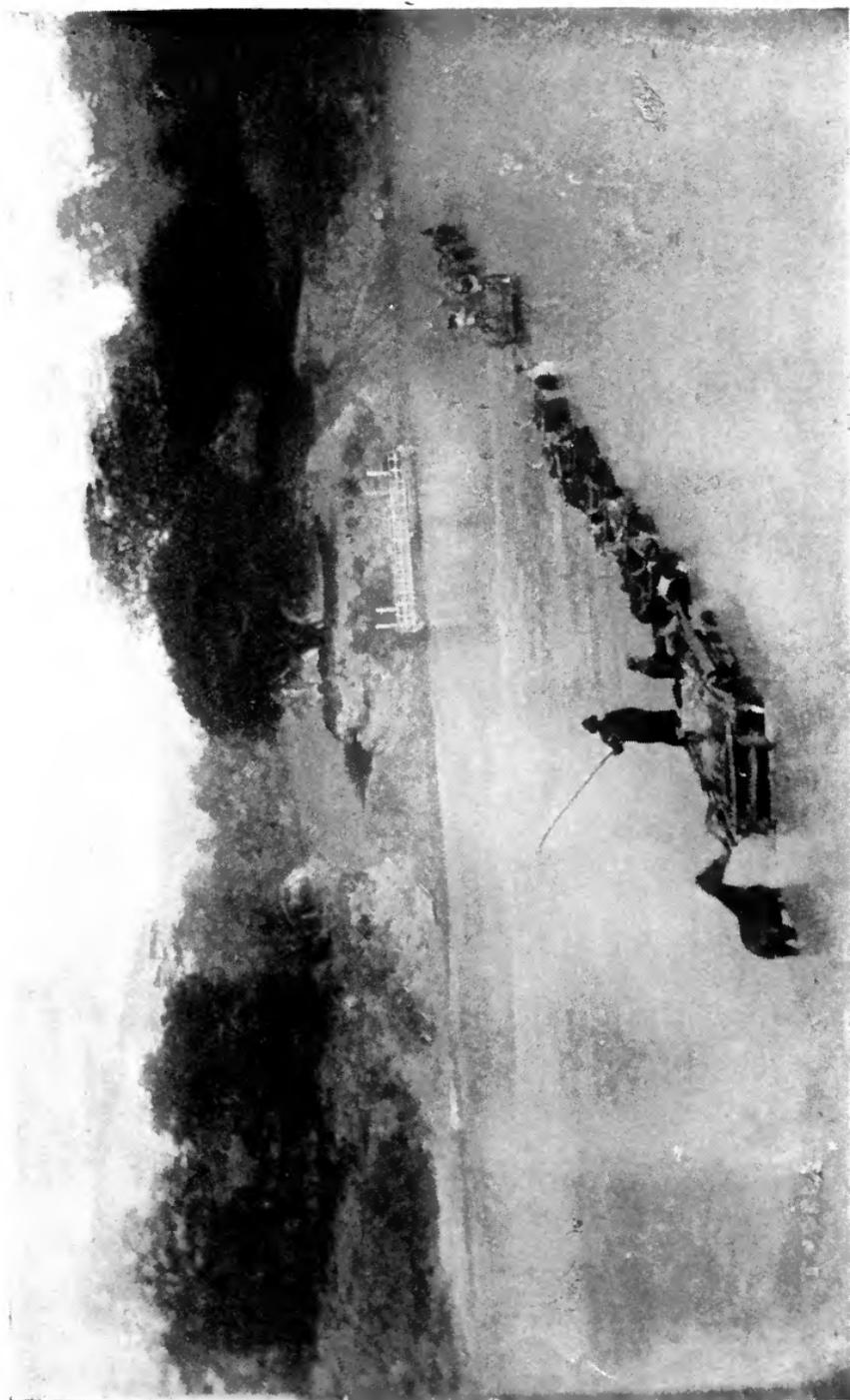
shooting ground than was the case in my day. I never remember shooting a single buck on the Gwelo Road, which means that I never had fresh meat on that road.

Naturally, there are disadvantages connected with the lower country. You find the rivers much bigger ; consequently, the chances of your being held up by a flood are increased enormously. It was no uncommon thing for a transport-rider to spend a month or even six weeks, waiting for the water to go down ; one of the most maddening experiences which can befall a man, especially when, as always seemed to be the case, had he reached the drift an hour earlier, he would have got through easily.

When you find you are held up, you drive a small stick into the bank, just at the edge of the flood, and then you go back to the wagon, intending to smoke or to sleep for a full three hours before you go and see if the level has fallen. But it is morally certain that you will be back every hour at least for the first day or two of your enforced idleness. That stick becomes an obsession to you. You find yourself dreaming of it. Your spirits rise or fall with the water. A drop of an inch, and you give all the wagon boys extra sugar ; a rise of half an inch and you throw boots at the cook-boy, who probably deserved it in any case.

So far as floods were concerned, I was very lucky. The longest time I ever had to wait was a fortnight, though my youngest brother was once over six weeks on the bank of the Tebekwe ; but, as he told me afterwards, it didn't seem so very long. He was too ill with fever to take much notice of anything.

Another bad point about the bush veld is that, the soil being sandy as a rule, the roads wash out very quickly



JUST POSSIBLE TO CROSS

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in the rains. Every rut on a slope becomes a miniature river, and you find great trenches, a foot, sometimes even three feet, deep, scooped out in the track. Naturally, that means you dare not travel in the dark, and day-trekking is abhorrent to every transport-rider who studies his cattle—to every real transport-rider, that is.

The Selukwe-Victoria Road was especially bad for wash-outs, and, when we travelled it for the first time, it was at its very worst.

There are some very nasty drifts on that road. One I remember particularly well. It is where you cross the Tebekwana River, and the pull out is exceedingly steep, and, what is almost as bad, particularly narrow, just a cutting in the river bank. There is no room to swing your span, to give them a start, and it is difficult often to get even the most thoroughly trained span to begin a heavy pull with a dead straight trek-chain. The swing makes an immense difference to them. They feel that something is moving, and they put their whole weight into the yokes at once, all together.

We groaned when we saw that drift, and decided that, in all probability, it was going to be a question of off-loading. At the best of times, it was a two-span place, and, on this occasion, it was washed out badly.

The wagon went through the stream—it was only about axle-deep—and on to the firm ground beyond, then the oxen stuck, hopelessly to all appearance. For an hour, we all shouted and yelled to them, whilst Amous' great whip was cracking like a pistol.

“They can't get out,” we decided. “It's a mere waste of time going on like this. We must off-load part of the stuff and take it up afterwards in the Scotch cart.”

Amous was horribly upset. It was such a slur on his beloved cattle, and on his own driving—at least he thought so, though, in the circumstances, no sane man would have dreamed of blaming either him or the oxen.

“Once more, Baas,” he pleaded. “We’ll try once more. Daniel will lead them this time. Perhaps they are tired of seeing the Scarmanyorka, a dirty little hill-savage without trousers.”

He gave the bullocks several minutes’ rest, patted his beloved hind-ox, Biffel, on the neck, went to the head of the span, and talked to Jonkman and Bandom, the leaders, then returned to his place, a third of the way up the span, and began to call to them, almost quietly. At about the third shout, the wagon moved, the front wheels jolted out of the wash-out into which they had sunk and the span simply walked up the long straight drift with it, as steadily as if they were pulling on the level.

That night, the little man kept the two youngsters up for a good four hours after they ought to have turned in, lecturing them on the true and only way to drive cattle.

A few days later, however, the span did an even greater deed in his estimation—broke the trek chain in a heavy place. For days afterwards, he talked of little else. We met several lots of wagons coming down with grain, and outspanned with them; and on each occasion their drivers had to listen to the whole story, not once, but several times over, rather to their disgust, I fancy. Amous, though invariably respectful where white men were concerned, was a most truculent little devil amongst his own kind, a sort of black Captain Kettle in manner, and insisted on doing most of the talking, and all the boasting, himself.

So far as our cattle were concerned, however, he had good reasons for boasting. He had literally worked wonders with them. Three months before, they had stuck in a tiny donga with an empty wagon ; now, they could snap the heavy trek chain. It was certainly an amazing change, and the credit was due entirely to him.

We came gradually from the bush country on to the high veld again ; and, at last, one evening, we caught sight of what appeared then to be half a dozen buildings with galvanized iron roofs, standing on a stretch of open veld, with some low kopjes a little distance away, and a big range of hills, mountains almost, in the background.

It was the town of Fort Victoria, the Scarmanyorka informed us.

At sunrise next morning, we left the wagon to out-span at the drift, and walked up into the township.

I cannot say that I was greatly impressed at first, much though I liked the place afterwards. We had expected something small, but Victoria was tiny. The Geelong camp had been far more imposing.

The place had been planned out on a splendid scale, so many streets, crossed, at right angles, by so many avenues. Here and there a building had been erected, or, at least, begun, but, as the white population had never exceeded eighty-five, all told, only in the main street, which led from the Drift to the *Thatched House Hotel*, could you trace a regular road. Elsewhere, you took short cuts across the tin and bottle strewn wastes, which were known officially as " building sites."

The Fort, the largest building in the town, consisted of an open space, surrounded by four high walls, with gun platforms at two of the corners, the quarters and stables being along three sides. Really, at first sight,

from a little distance, the Fort was quite imposing, but when you got nearer, you found that the gate was an extremely crazy affair, made of thin deal planks, and badly in need of both paint and new hinges ; in fact, I believe that it was impossible to get it to close.

Built on to the Fort were the Magistrates' office, the Court and the Post Office.

The *Thatched House*, by far the most important place in the town, was just across the road, a most convenient position for the Officials, and for the Police when they had any money, which was not very often.

Lower down the principal road were the stores, three or four in number, hideous galvanized iron sheds.

The remainder of the houses were used for residential purposes. Some were of wattle and dab, some of brick, with galvanized iron roofs. In several cases, the galvanized iron had been taken off again, being wanted elsewhere, and the roofless walls, already crumbling away, did not add to the cheerfulness of the landscape.

The native population lived outside the township, in a filthy collection of hovels called the Location.

I had known Victoria for nearly two years before I discovered that the refuse-littered open space beyond the *Thatched House* was really the Market Square, and that the four unfinished walls, with an entrance closed by means of brushwood and poles, was the Pound.

So far as its site is concerned, Victoria is far better off than Bulawayo, Salisbury, or Gwelo. The hills behind it break the dead monotony of the high-veld, whilst it is well supplied in the matter of water. Old Victoria, the original township founded by the Pioneer Column, is several miles away, all that remains of it now being the graves of the majority of its first citizens. Still,

every Rhodesian township has an extensive graveyard, even though the tale of its inhabitants may not be very large.

The men of Victoria were entirely different from those of the other towns, a superior class altogether. They were, generally speaking, of the right type, the kind of adventurers who built up the British Empire. The Home-born element predominated strongly; the officials and other Afrikanders counted for very little. The good settler, beloved of emigration agents, was not represented, fortunately. No one had the least desire to settle in the country. The aim of most was to make sufficient money to go home again, to settle down in a White Man's land. You could not insult them more than by calling them Colonists; in fact, so strong was the feeling on this point, that, whenever it was possible, married men arranged to have their children born outside the British Colonies, so that they should not be branded as Colonial-born. If a wife could not actually go Home, she was often taken across the border, into Portuguese territory. Personally, I had the very strongest sympathy with this attitude.

There was one subject of conversation in Fort Victoria which overshadowed all others, the Boom, the great wave of prosperity which was going to sweep over the town, and repay every one for the trials and struggles of the past. To the older inhabitants, the Boom was an article of Faith, and, somehow, even new-comers grew to believe in it after a while, which was the more wonderful, because there was less and less business being done in the place all the time.

All arrangements for the future were regulated with an eye to the Boom. Men put off taking a trip Home,

because, immediately after the Boom, as soon as they had sold their mining claims, or the barren stretches of veld which they called farms, they would, of course, be going Home for good. That would be the really splendid part about the Boom—it would enable you to leave the country.

There was something pathetic about it all, the belief in a miracle which would never happen, the holding on to gold claims and land, which would never realize one half of what had already been paid out on them in the shape of fees. Time after time, I have sat on the whisky cases in the corner of the bar, and wondered at the tenacity of the man, who could stay on there year after year, merely in the hope of getting even with Bad Luck in the end. It was not cupidity, far from that. Really, it was a determination not to give in, to fight the thing through. And when you have seen so many of your friends die during the years of waiting, when the Present has practically nothing to give you in the way of enjoyment, and you do not know exactly how you are going to find the means to keep yourself in the Future, it does want some grit and determination to stick to it.

Of course, the town could not live wholly on its hopes for the future. Mining claims merely represented so much in annual expense, whilst the only profit you got out of a farm was the satisfaction of knowing you had an insecure title to so many thousand acres of land. I do not remember ever having seen any sign of cultivation on any one of the farms in the district, though, for that matter, during the seven years I was in Rhodesia, wandering about most of the time, I do not suppose that, altogether, I saw fifty acres in use for agricultural purposes by white men. On the one or two occa-



THE BEGINNING OF A TOWNSHIP (NOW UMTALI).

70 300
ABSTRACT

sions when I did come across a small patch, the locusts had just eaten the crop, or were expected to come and eat it shortly, or else the rains had failed completely. For the farmer who likes to rest during the Autumn, the country is an ideal one. He may sow, but he will not be bothered with getting in any harvest.

There was only one industry left for Fort Victoria—the grain trade; and, fortunately, that was in a fairly flourishing condition. The Kopje country, the native districts to the east and south-east, are as fertile as the high-veld is barren. As a rule, the natives had an immense quantity of surplus grain for sale to traders, in fact they had begun to grow it for sale, working very hard in their fields during the Summer and Autumn, although, officially, they were, and still are, a wickedly lazy people, who, purely in their own interests, in order that they may learn all about the Dignity of Toil, must be forced, by means of heavy taxation, to go and work on the mines.

The traders on the out-stations bought the grain, paying for it entirely with goods—blankets, limbo, hoes, beads, and salt being the principal articles given. It was then ridden into Victoria, the middleman usually sending out the wagons to fetch it; and then forwarded as a rule in other wagons, to the Selukwe mines. Altogether, quite a number of wagons found constant work, save during the worst part of the wet season, and a transport-rider could generally get loads the day he arrived.

The traders' roads were mere tracks, extremely rough in the majority of cases; consequently, the big transport-riders would not risk their heavy wagons on them, especially as the middlemen were not always truthful

concerning the distance to the store and other essential details of that kind. The managers of two of the stores—they were never real Victoria men—were especially fond of this trick, and, through them, the whole community got a bad name, right long the Road.

There were all sorts of queer little wagons and spans working between the outside traders' camps and the township. Some were owned by natives, some by coolies, though, in the majority of cases, they belonged to the poorer class of Afrikanders, of whom there were far too many in the district. Donkeys were used largely—a donkey wagon averages six miles a day on a good road—but a combination of donkeys and oxen in one span was by no means uncommon. I remember, one day, meeting a team consisting of six oxen, six donkeys, a mule, and an old horse.

The wagons often were as strange as their spans. They were always shedding parts of themselves on the road, and being repaired with something unsuitable. If they had tents, these were usually fashioned by the simple expedient of bending several saplings into the shape of a bow, from one buckrail to the other, and covering the framework with old sacks.

They were always sticking, always in trouble with the Native Commissioners, or the police, or other transport-riders, yet, in the course of the twelve months, they managed to ride an amazing amount of grain, and many of the owners might have been able to buy decent outfits, but for the fact that, in the majority of cases, as soon as they had saved a little money, they purchased a stock of whisky, trekked out to their homesteads—all the white men of this type owned farms, with one or two grass huts on them—and proceeded to rest, until

their funds and their credit were both exhausted. Needless to say, men of this class were not exactly popular on the Road.

Such was Victoria, and such the conditions existing there when we first struck the place. There was practically no alteration during the three years I knew the township—a few more graves, a little more financial depression, that was all.

I liked the place, and the majority of its inhabitants, from the very first day, and the memory of them is still one of the best of those I have to treasure.

AMONGST THE KOPJES

CHAPTER VII

AMONGST THE KOPJES

GENERALLY speaking, Victoria shook its head over our plan of going down to our old cattle-buying district to trade. No one knew where that district was. We gave the name of the local headman as "Chivamba" and the Civil Commissioner duly issued us a trading licence, but it would have applied equally well to nine villages out of ten in the low-veld. The vagueness of our destination was urged, in all kindness and good-faith, by several of the oldest inhabitants as a reason for our not going on. No one had ever thought of taking a wagon down the hills to the low-veld before we suggested the mad scheme, and we should not have done so had we not been crazy young Matabelelanders, who, apparently, thought that, because a short-sighted government favoured the Southern Territory, we could come up to Fort Victoria and teach the Mashonalanders their business.

Then, the climate was awful, absolutely unfit for the white man, even in Winter; whilst the local heathen were a dangerous lot, always on the verge of revolt.

We should smash up our wagon; we should die of fever or be knob-kerried; we should lose all our trading stuff, and find that the niggers had not got a single beast

to sell—such was the sum of the prophecies made concerning us in the *Thatched House* that first night. It had needed a good deal of whisky to aid in their production, but then, every job, from prophecy to poker-playing, was a dry one in Victoria.

Next morning we were several miles away on the Eastern Road, before the first man in search of a pick-me-up had managed to get the keys of the bar from the canteen-keeper.

The Eastern Road was a pleasant surprise to us, at least for the first twenty miles. I covered it so often afterwards with the wagons, with the Scotch cart, on foot, that, though it is nine years since I was on it, I can still remember every rise, every drift. Until you got amongst the hills, it was one of the coldest places at night I ever knew. On a Winter's morning, you would wake up to find that your breath had formed a kind of hoar frost on your blankets, whilst your cattle were so stiff, that it was actually a kindness to inspan them and make them move; otherwise, they would have stood about, rough-coated and utterly wretched, until the sun came to their rescue.

Perhaps it was because the cold was so intense, and the days so welcome, but the sunrises I saw on that Road seemed finer than any I have seen elsewhere. You woke up at three o'clock—you had been sleeping on the ground, because you had left the wagon tent behind, to save weight—stirred up the fire, huddled on whatever you had in the way of a jacket, over your sweater, then roused the cook-boy, who crawled out from under the blankets he shared with the piccanin, and, groaning and shivering, began to make the coffee; then he, in turn, awoke the driver.

You were shivering in real earnest long before the kettle had boiled. It had been delightfully warm in the blankets, and you could easily have done with another three hours' sleep, instead of turning out into the frosty air; but the cattle must always come first. There was a long trek, eight weary miles, before you would reach any decent grass, and the oxen needed every hour of daylight you could spare them for feeding and chewing the cud.

The piccanin's hands were so cold that he could scarcely pull the oxen into the yokes. Though he would not have admitted it for worlds, the driver was really in very little better case; whilst the cook-boy lingered by the fire until the last moment, clearing up the cooking things and blankets.

At last, everything was ready. A hoarse shout to the oxen, a second shout, and a cracking of the whip; then the wagon jolted on to the road again.

There was no moon, but so perfectly clear was the sky that, sitting on the top of the load, you could make out every one of the cattle; could see the piccanin's once-white blanket ahead of the front oxen.

Something hurried away through the long grass—a jackal probably. From the vlei on your left came a curious whistling sound, distinctly eerie.

“A Reed-buck calling for its mate, Baas,” the driver, who had just hitched himself on the front of the wagon and borrowed your tobacco bag, remarked.

Whew! How cold it was. Would the dawn never come? Instead of growing lighter, the darkness appeared to increase. You could hardly make out the cattle now. There was that awkward drift a little way ahead, where you shot the steinbok last trip, a nasty place

to attempt when you couldn't see what you were doing. It seemed hours already since you turned out of those warm blankets, yet you were not half-way to the out-span, at least you thought not. That wretched dawn—and then, looking up again, you saw a faint tinge of grey on the eastern horizon. Ten minutes later, the range of kopjes stood out hard and distinct against the sky, and you could identify every one of the cattle. . . . So the driver had done what he had suggested the evening before—changed the places of Rooiland and Bosman. He had thought that Rooiland would be better on the left-hand side of the chain, whereas Bosman would pull anywhere.

Ah! There was the line of Mimosa trees along the bank of the stream, where the drift you had been dreading was. It wouldn't be so bad now, in the daylight. The oxen and the piccanin would find the water cold though.

You, yourself, were cold enough still with an old brown sweater over your flannel shirt, and an even older Norfolk jacket over the sweater.

If the people who used to know you at Home, people who did not sleep on the ground on a frosty night, and get up at three a.m., men who started for the City at nine, and returned in time to dress for dinner at seven-thirty, and women who went paying calls just after four—if they could see you now! What would they say? That you must have deteriorated, or you would not be so disgracefully shabby? Probably. In fact, you might bet on it safely. Why your chin and cheeks were black. You hadn't shaved yet, or washed away the fine ash from the big veld-fire you passed during the evening trek.

Perhaps they would be right. It was a rotten life

when you had to get so cold, just through studying the comfort of your oxen. A rotten life—why your fingers were too numbed for you to be able to fill your big curved pipe properly. None but a fool——

And then the edge of the kopjes turned suddenly to gold, and, a moment later, there was the red disk of the sun.

By Jove! How splendid the veld looked! It was a fine thing to be your own boss, to have no trains to catch, not to have to wear a stiff collar, a silk hat, and a morning suit. Those poor devils at Home! They vegetated, that was all. Change places with them? Not for—— What was the piccanin saying? That there was a duiker standing just by that clump of bush, a bare hundred yards away. . . . An easy shot . . . plenty of fresh meat now, and to-morrow the wagon would be amongst the mealie lands, which would mean plenty of guinea fowl.

It was going to be another hot day, too hot already for that old Norfolk jacket. . . .

On the third morning after leaving Victoria, we began to think that, after all, the road was not quite so good. It had split up into several smaller tracks, and the one we had to take was the least used of all; in fact, all the grain trading stores to which it led had been abandoned, because no one would take his wagons down it to fetch away the mealies.

I had come prepared for a good deal, but that road staggered me. There were rocks two feet high over which the wheel climbed to drop with a crash on the other side; there were innumerable dry watercourses, steep and narrow, with a twist in the track on the other side, so that the span never got a straight pull; there were

wash-outs in which a big man could have hidden himself easily ; there were huge fallen trees lying across the road, which had to be chopped up and dragged away before you could go on ; there were places where, if you went a couple of yards off the road, there was a drop of a couple of hundred feet, almost sheer ; and finally there was one place where the track actually ran for some thirty yards down the face of a vast mass of rock, smooth, frightfully steep, altogether horrible. The remains of a big red wagon, hopelessly smashed, told us of the fate of the last man who had tried to go down that rock.

There was no chance of improving the road, except at a cost far beyond our means, no chance of finding a better one, for it was obviously the only possible way down the sides of those giant kopjes. There was no room for another track, and, when you have to descend nearly two thousand feet in twenty miles, you must be thankful if you find any sort of a track down which you can take a buck-wagon and sixteen bullocks.

It was one of the roughest pieces of country I had ever been through, even on foot. I believe that, if we had not found the road made for the first part of the way, we should not have tried at all there. We should have spent weeks, perhaps months, attempting to find another way down, and should then have given it up in disgust, to be laughed at by our advisers in Fort Victoria.

Amous had never done any trekking of that kind before ; in fact, he knew very little about the kopje country ; and, up till then, had never even seen a Mashona village ; but he took it all very calmly. We should get through, somehow, he declared. The cattle were very, very good, oxen indeed, and they would pull out of any drift or

mud-hole. Had they not broken the trek-chain on the Selukwe Road ?

That was all very well. At the moment, however, the cattle were not the main cause of anxiety to us. As a last resource, we could always off-load if they stuck ; but if, as was by no means improbable, we smashed up a wheel, we should be in a very awkward fix. Time after time, I thought one of the wheels was bound to go, as we crashed over the boulders, and yet, in the end, we broke nothing, except three düsselbooms, two new ones in a single day once, when we stuck in a very awkward little donga amongst some mealie lands.

The track ended abruptly at an abandoned trading station, three tumble-down huts on a huge flat rock. Still, we were about a third of the way down the hills, and the country ahead looked as though it might be easier than that through which we had just passed. At any rate, we had about five miles of fairly level mealie lands ahead of us before we started the tumbling-down process again.

We asked the local heathen about the old store, and they could tell us nothing, except that the owner had died there and the hyænas had eaten his body. It was a common enough story in those days—perhaps it is common enough still—but, afterwards, we found out that there were one or two uncommon features connected with it.

Some years before, an old Irish solicitor had been infected with the gold fever, had thrown up his practice, and came out to Mashonaland to make his fortune. He soon tired of prospecting, however, and turned his attention to grain-trading. For a while, he was very successful, although he was curiously unsuited to the veld,

both by nature and by training. Before very long, he had several trading stations going, and, having some capital left, he was able to keep clear of the rapacious wholesale companies, which meant that he obtained the market price for his grain ; then, he bought some oxen and a couple of wagons ; and, though he knew not the slightest thing about transport work, and was robbed consistently by his drivers, he made that branch of his business pay too.

A curious old man, white-haired, precise and courteous in his speech, he was one of the most interesting and least-known men in the district. After a while, his brother, attracted by rumours of his success, came out to join him ; then another brother, then two nephews appeared.

The brothers soon dissolved partnership. There was a bitter quarrel, how bitter the story of that abandoned trading station on the kopjes showed. The place belonged to the second brother, who had not been there many months before he went down with an unusually bad dose of fever. Like most traders, he had few stores beyond flour, tea and sugar, the veld or the kraals supplying most of his needs. But you cannot pick up strength on guinea fowl and mealie meal porridge as your standard diet, and, feeling frightfully weak, he sent up to his brother, the big trader, for help. The message was received and ignored. A second message produced as little result ; and all the time the man was sinking. Then, seeing he was dying, and fearing that his spirit might haunt them if they remained, his boys ran away.

From that point onwards there is a blank, until ten days later, when a police trooper, having heard a rumour

came down to investigate. As he reached the doorway of the hut, a hyæna dashed out.

After that, there seemed to be a curse on the whole family. The third brother died, then the two nephews, and, finally, the original trader himself. Several years later, in Untali, I met a girl of the same name—it was a very uncommon one—and I found that she was a niece, the last of the family, she said.

She had only heard vague stories as to the fate of her relatives, and was very anxious to know the truth. Although it was over two years since the last of her uncles had died, she had not managed to get any sort of account of his estate, and, in all probability, she never did. He must have left a good deal of property of one kind or another, but the Chartered Company appointed the manager of one of the trading companies executor, and, with that, the matter might be considered to have ended, so far as the heirs were concerned.

I knew of a good many similar cases, where men died in Rhodesia owning mining claims, land, and oxen, and though I have met relatives of theirs afterwards, or had letters from them, asking me for information, in no single instance did I ever hear of an heir receiving anything, not even the dead man's personal kit and rifle. Being appointed executor was one of the many good things which came to you through keeping on good terms with the Officials.

You knew you would not be prosecuted, whatever you did, for all the law officers and judges were merely servants of the Chartered Company, and the latter could not well be expected to turn on its own friends in the interests of unknown people six thousand miles away. Besides, what did an English mother want with

her dead son's rifle or clothes? They would be far more useful to an Afrikaner on the spot.

From that old store, we decided to strike, as far as possible, south-east. We had cross-examined scores of savages, but had not found a single one who knew the way to Chivamba's, who had ever heard of such a village, although it was quite a large one for that country. We reckoned we had come about forty miles from Fort Victoria, and that Chivamba's would be about another twenty miles further on, a miscalculation which resulted in a good deal of worry and anxiety during the next fortnight.

We were well down amongst the kraals now, which meant that we could get plenty of guinea fowl, as well as milk, eggs, and native grains. The guinea fowl, of course, we shot for ourselves; there was no trouble about securing them; but, at first, the local heathen asked us outrageous prices for the stuff we wanted to buy from them. It is the way of the Mashona always to be insolent until he is taught the danger of that course. They held out for cash at first, and when we offered trading goods, demanded a wholly unreasonable measure.

However, they soon came to their senses. The first few lots not only had to carry their stuff back again, but they also met Amous just outside the camp, and, when he was not actually driving, the little man invariably carried a four-foot-six hippo-hide sjambok. I made a rule of never asking what the noise meant. He had an excellent sense of discipline and the fitness of things, and he saved us an immense amount of trouble. His reputation spread very quickly, or, rather, our reputation with the fear of his sjambok attached to it, and, after a day or so, we had no trouble at all. The Mashona came in

from miles round to sell to the chiefs who were really chiefs, the white men whom you could not swindle.

They were not bad at heart, those savages of the Mabouka Hills ; but there was a mission station on the other side of the range, and it had contaminated the whole neighbourhood. There was hardly a village which had not a mission-trained boy in it, which meant that the authority of the old men was being undermined, and that the young men were becoming thieves, merely through the evil example of the one youngster.

Amous was immensely interested in the Mashona, or, rather, to give them their proper name, the Makalanga—Mashona is only the white man's corruption of a Matabele term of contempt "Amaswena," "the dirty people." He had been used to the comparatively clean kraals down-country, and these villages, rubbish-littered clearings with dilapidated huts scattered about them, filled him with amazement and disgust. In the scherms, the cattle stood almost knee deep in mud, the goats shared the huts with their owners, the dogs were mangy, the fowls undersized, every blanket, every rag of clothing seemed stiff with dirt, was more precious when it was stiff.

"They say they are stronger when they're dirty, Baas," he explained with supreme disgust. "Bah, what a people! Look at the huts there—who but folk who were half baboons would build villages like that?" and he pointed to a kraal right above us, almost at the top of a huge kopje.

Daniel, the Matabele, snorted. "They all lived up kopjes like that, before the white man came and spoilt them. In the days of Lobengula, the king of the Matabele, all these Amagomo (hill-people) were kept in order.

They built their kraals high up, so as to escape from us. Now, they are allowed to be cheeky, and they come down."

Poor Daniel! The Mashona troubled him greatly. He told me, probably with truth, that his father had killed many of them, and his greatest regret was that he would never have the chance to do likewise. Often, when a Mashona had tried to be impudent, he would come to me quivering with rage. "Chief! Chief! Why don't you kill them, instead of merely beating them, and putting them to work. . . . Now, you can see why the Matabele used to kill them. It is the only thing they understand, these baboons from the granite hills."

When we reached the hills, Amous could not speak a word of the Mashona language, but he was a wonderful linguist—he spoke Zulu better than any other native I ever had in my service—and within a month, he had completely mastered the local tongue. A great many Basutu have the same gift. They can learn any dialect in a surprisingly short time, though other tribes never seem to learn Sesutu. It is one more proof of the superiority of the great Southern Tribe. They occupy the same position relatively to the rest of the South and Central African Tribes as the French and ourselves do to the rest of the White nations.

In course of time, I learnt to speak Zulu fairly well, and to understand a good deal of the Mashona and the M'Hlengwi dialects, though I never troubled to study the two last; I could always find an interpreter. The Taal, the horrible jargon of the Cape Dutch, I had no wish to speak or to understand, holding that the dominant white race should insist on its language being the only one recognized.

There is no excuse whatsoever for the official recogni-

tion of the Taal, whilst to teach it in State schools is an outrageous misuse of public funds. South Africa has been even poorer than the other colonies in the matter of literature—and that is saying a great deal, a very great deal—but not one single book has ever been written in the Taal.

Even the two great South African classics, *Prinsloo of Prinsloodorp* and *The Burgher Quixote*, the two books written in the sub-continent which will live, are the work of an Englishman, Douglas Blackburn.

For five miles after passing the old trading station, the making of our new road was a comparatively easy matter, the track leading across old mealie lands. The chief trouble we had, apart from a few ugly little spruits, arose from the ways of the local heathen, who kept on rushing out and demanding compensation for damage to their crops, irrespective of the fact that the crops had already been gathered several weeks. In one way or another, the nuisance continued until we reached Chivamba's, but we soon discovered the best method of dealing with the complainants. We let them follow us until we outspanned, and then we told Amous and Daniel to go and find out what they really wanted.

The answer brought back was invariably the same—that the baboons had made a mistake and were now sorry. As those same baboons were usually back before long, with something to sell, I imagine that there was no ill-feeling, although there might be a little physical soreness.

In dealing with raw savages, tact is the all-important quality. I never liked to punish any of them formally and solemnly. It was much better for Amous, as our deputy, to smooth matters over with his tongue, and his

sjambok ; he was of their own colour, and he understood them perfectly. Only as a last resource, did he bring any one before me.

At the end of the five miles of mealie-lands, we came to the kopjes again, real granite kopjes this time, similar to the Matoppos, though fashioned on a far grander scale. They formed the second stage in the descent. From the edge of them, we could see another plain, about ten miles across, and beyond that, yet another range of hills.

It was a little depressing. We could not recognize a single feature of the country—certainly we had not been there the year before, when we were down buying cattle, which meant that Chivamba's, our destination, must be beyond that third range.

My recollection of the next five days is very slight. I went down with fever, one of the worst doses I have ever had. I remember jolting about in the wagon tent during the day, remember Amous helping me down when the wagon stopped, and making a bed for me in the shade. Malcolm had heard of some Lichtenstein Hartebeeste in the neighbourhood, and was very keen on securing one, but Amous was a splendid nurse, and, moreover, he worshipped me.

I recall that little black face, all wrinkled up, bending over me, trying to get me to take some nourishment, and then I would hear him reviling Daniel for not cooking food that the Baas could eat. Yet, in addition to looking after me, and driving the wagon, he had to tramp on ahead from the outspans, and find the road for the next trek.

In those five days, we got down the second range, a distance of about three miles. Afterwards, when



OUTSPANNED.

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I came back with Amous, he told me how long we had been. At first, I did not believe him—it seemed to me sometimes like twenty-four hours, sometimes like a month—but he pointed out each of our outspans, and I knew he must be right.

TO THE
ASSOCIATION

BUYING CATTLE

CHAPTER VIII

BUYING CATTLE

THE last stage of that journey from the high veld to Chivamba's was much like the other had been, only, if possible, it was a little more dangerous and tiring.

The drop in level was not so great, but the country generally was rougher. There was a series of horrible little dongas, at each of which we had to dig away part of the banks to form a drift, whilst there was one appalling place where, literally, we went straight down the side of a steep kopje.

Old transport-riders, who saw the spoor afterwards, told me that they had never known a wagon even attempt such a feat before, especially a loaded wagon. Still, it was, at the time, the only way down we could find, and we were not going to turn back for anything.

We cleared the track carefully before we started, then at the crest, we unhooked the span, leaving only the hind oxen, Biffel and Appel, to steer the wagon. Amous screwed on the brake until the hind wheels were locked, and called softly to his two bullocks. It seemed almost as if the latter understood how much depended on them. Gently, very gently indeed, they started the wagon moving, then they took their weight off the yokes, and simply guided it, answering immediately to Amous'

voice. It was a wonderful instance of sympathy between man and beast. Never once did Amous have to raise his voice, or give an order twice. A mistake on the part of either of the cattle would have meant a complete smash, yet they made not the slightest error.

It was all over in five minutes. We were at the bottom of the last range ; we had done what every one had declared was impossible ; moreover, when we went to look for a road on ahead, we recognized the country—it was a stretch of veld in which we had camped for a night the year before. Chivamba's] people had induced us to go shooting there, alleging that the game was so plentiful that it had eaten down all the long grass. As a matter of fact, we had seen no game at all, only spoor, most of which were old, but we had heard several lions, and had come across the remains of a waterbuck bull, with the lion's saliva still warm and sticky on the bones.

Still, we were looking for neither game nor lions just then. The essential point was that we knew for certain where Chivamba's kraal was, a bare eight miles away.

The sense of relief was tremendous. Only those who have looked for one of those places which seem to get further away every trek, can understand how we felt.

We had hoped to reach Chivamba's at least ten days earlier, and, latterly, we had begun to fear that we had miscalculated things entirely, that we had headed in the wrong direction. Yet, as a matter of fact, our general course was absolutely right, though in some places we had been forced to go miles off it in order to get round small groups of kopjes. The reason why we had not heard of Chivamba's from any of the natives we questioned was that the belt of lion veld practically cut off the one district

from the next ; no footpath passed through it, and there was little, if any, intercourse between the villages on either side of it.

Two long treks and a short one brought us to our goal. We outspanned in an old mealie-field close beside the little kopje in which we intended to build our store, and then, though it was little after sundown, we turned in. I am sure we had earned our rest.

We had been about eight weeks coming from Bulawayo, and, on the whole, I do not think that was bad. We had only one span, which meant that there was no assistance available if we got stuck, our cattle were young, light, and, at the start, only partially trained ; it was the tail-end of the wet season, and the ground was sodden, the wash-outs at their worst ; we had covered about three hundred and twenty miles, the last sixty of which we had had to find and make for ourselves, through country which every one else had declared to be impossible for wagons ; and we had not had a smash of any sort, save düsselbooms, which do not count, as they can be replaced in a couple of hours.

So far as shooting was concerned, the trip had not been a success ; in fact, during the first stages, we had been very short, even of tinned meat. A new rifle Malcolm had bought—how often I had wished that the money had been spent on food—had not produced one single buck, a record it maintained, until Amyas sold it for one-fifth of its cost to a Colonial.

Still, down in the kopje country, there were guinea-fowl without end, and after all, they are far better for everyday use than buck. You soon tire of the flavour, or lack of flavour, of buck meat. It requires the most careful cooking, and even then as a rule, it barely repays

for the trouble, except in the case of klipspringer, and, occasionally, sable antelope. You eat it of course, because you are in a hungry country, but you would jib at it in a white man's land. On the other hand, wild pig is excellent, whilst hippo foot is splendid ; but these are the luxuries of the veld.

The smaller birds, the partridges and the sand grouse, are very good eating, but we seldom shot them on account of the difficulty of obtaining shot gun cartridges. It was not the cost of the latter—though twenty-five shillings a hundred was fairly high—but the feeling you might not be able to replenish your stock, which made you so careful.

During the Boer War, the regulations as to the sale of cartridges were very strict, at least on paper. You had to obtain a permit whenever you purchased any, and the Home-born man found the magistrates most unwilling to grant him more than ten at a time ; but then, the majority of the magistrates were Afrikaners, and feeling ran high during the war. It was a curious situation—those who had taken the oath of allegiance were only kept loyal by the fear of what those who had never taken any oaths at all might do.

However, it was not the question of permits which worried us, but the difficulty of going to Bulawayo to fetch the cartridges. The gun-smiths knew us, and, though every cartridge in the country was supposed to have been counted by Chartered Officials, and the stocks in hand and sales were supposed to balance with the figures on the permits, we could always get two hundred rounds on the strength of a permit for twenty. The explanation was that an enormous amount of ammunition had been imported into the country with a view to the time when,

after the Boers had taken Ladysmith and Kimberley, Rhodesia was handed over to them, a plot which, fortunately, failed rather ignominiously, in spite of the very strongest backing in high quarters.

The local savages were anxious to start trading the moment the wagon stopped ; but we knew by experience what it meant to open bales and cases before we had any place in which to store them, so, greatly to the disgust of our would-be customers, we set them to work clearing the little kopje of grass and bush, instead of trading with them.

In a week, we had a couple of fairly decent huts built, whilst Amous had had another gang at work making a scherm for the cattle.

The little man was more wonderful than ever now. He undertook the superintendence of everything, and, in a couple of days, his fame had spread through every village for miles round. He had boys cutting timber, boys cutting grass, boys actually building the huts, boys clearing the kopje of everything which might feed a veld fire or afford cover to a schelm. Daniel was trusted with six oxen, and sent out to draw in the poles as they were cut, the Scarmanyorka going with him as voorloeper, whilst two kraal piccanins were made into herd boys.

From dawn to dark, Amous' voice was never still, but, though he talked a great deal about his sjambok, and its terrors, he very seldom used it, realizing that it might offend future customers. We had some twenty or thirty boys working for us at a regular wage, but the number of those who actually worked was much larger. If Amous wanted anything done, and one of the "hill-men" happened to be near, having come in to watch or

to trade, he was merely told to do the job, and he knew better than to refuse.

We began to buy live-stock as soon as we possibly could, cattle, goats, sheep, and fowls, and Amous took charge of everything as it was purchased, taking as much pride in it as though it had been his own. The fowls—we traded about three hundred in the first month—were an abominable nuisance for a time. They insisted on roosting everywhere but in the fowl-house Amous built for them. In the huts, where they drove us nearly crazy and ruined any amount of stuff; in the trees, where the owls carried them off wholesale; under the wagon on the Scotch cart, where the wild-cats fetched them at their leisure—anywhere but in a place of safety.

There was only one possible solution of the difficulty—to put them all to bed every night, until they learnt to go to bed properly, of their own accord. So, at night, after the cattle had been shut up in the scherm, the goats counted and put in their scherm, every available savage was set to work on the fowls.

For a quarter of an hour, the noise used to be indescribable. There were at least a hundred and fifty fowls to be knocked out of the trees round the huts, which meant about five hundred missiles of various kinds being thrown at them, bits of stick, stones, and mealie cobs, and another hundred and fifty to be rounded up from other places. The wretched birds would rush in every direction but the right one, and really each had to be rounded up separately. However, they learned very quickly, doubtless to the grief of the owls and wild-cats, who had been taking between them from three to ten every night.

As soon as all the fowls were in, the door used to be closed, and was not opened again until after dawn. Of

course, the cocks—they formed over a third of the total number—began to crow long before that, and during the last half hour of their imprisonment the volume of the crowing rose almost to a roar, but, after a few days of this, you grew accustomed to it ; any way, it was better than being roused up half-a-dozen times in the night by alarms of lesser schelm carrying off fowls.

In the daytime, however, the latter had it all their own way. They were everywhere, in the store-hut, the mess-hut, the kitchen. Half-a-dozen hens would be seized with a mad desire to lay their eggs in the hut you were using, and nothing, short of shutting them up, would keep them out. They would return again and again, cackling hideously, until you were almost crazy, especially when, as was usually the case, you had fever, or were just recovering from it. Only when a fowl had to be slaughtered, did you get even with your poultry. As a rule, I had about ten killed every week, mainly for soup. The moment I gave the order, the whole of the camp piccanins would turn out with knobsticks, and for a few moments they were gloriously happy. I don't know whether they were really such bad shots with their knobsticks, or whether they deliberately prolonged the chase, but not one stick in twenty hit the right fowl. Meanwhile, the commotion was unspeakable, every bird was screeching its loudest and running its fastest, and every piccanin was yelling. Usually, too, all the customers who happened to be on the kopje joined in the sport, in the hope of receiving the heads and intestines as a reward from their exertions, and, more than once, instead of three fowls killed in conventional manner, after being knocked over with the knobkerries, I have had five assegaied ones brought to me.

As we used to shut up the store entirely during the wet season, we had a new lot of fowls every year, which meant that the whole training process had to be gone through afresh. Sometimes, I used to wonder if they were really worth keeping, but though we could manage without them for the pot, by having more guinea fowl shot, the eggs were an absolute necessity ; and we had to put up with the nuisance for the sake of those. That first season at Chivamba's, we bought altogether a hundred and twenty cattle, and about four hundred sheep and goats. In addition to this, of course, we did a very large and paying cash trade, showing a profit of over a hundred per cent. all through, whilst over the odd things, curios, skins, horns, and tobacco, we cleared about two hundred pounds. Consequently, it was a good season. Had we sold out at the end of it, we should have been about fifteen hundred pounds better off than when we entered Mashonaland seven months previously. But I was fully determined to stick to transport work, and, though Malcolm left me in August or September, I kept to the original plan.

The sheep and goats paid very well, and, with a little more luck, they would have paid enormously. Of course, compared with sheep and goats of other lands, the South African varieties are pitifully small ; but, then, the whole pastoral industry of the sub-continent is carried on on a very small scale. We had a hundred and thirty-three thousand sheep on the New South Wales station where I was before going to Matabeleland ; consequently, I was rather amused, in Cape Colony, to hear that a man with a thousand sheep was considered a big stock-owner. Still, he would brag far more than did the Australian squatter, and perhaps that made their relative importance more nearly equal.

The fat-tailed sheep kills, on the average, about thirty-five pounds clean against the seventy pounds of the Australian sheep ; the African goat cleans anything from fifteen to forty pounds, though the latter figure is exceptional. I should say the average runs about twenty-two pounds. As will be seen, African sheep and goats are not supremely useful animals from the butcher's point of view ; but they were very valuable in Rhodesia, where Nature has not provided at all for the coming of the white man, where, judging by the number of diseases she had in reserve, she objected, and still objects, most strongly to anything imported, whether man, or beast, or vegetable.

When we first started trading at Chivamba's, several of the local headmen paid us a solemn visit, and endeavoured to get us to consent to certain fixed prices for buying and selling. So far as trading goods were concerned, we had agreed at once to their terms. A hoe, a heart-shaped implement weighing two and a half pounds, and costing us about two shillings, was to be five shillings ; limbo, trade calico, was to be a shilling for a " stretch " of a yard and a half ; blankets of certain qualities and patterns were to be five shillings, ten shillings, and a pound ; a two-hundred pound bag of grain was to be a sovereign ; beads were to be a shilling for a certain tin full, and so on ; but, when they began to discuss live-stock, we disagreed. A goat, they said, was to be ten shillings, a sheep a pound, a bullock ten pounds, absolutely irrespective of age or size.

The conference ended rather abruptly. We told them, plainly, that we should never pay cash for sheep or goats, that each animal must be the subject of a separate deal for as much trading stuff as it was worth ; that, though we should always pay for cattle in gold, ten pounds must

be considered the price of a cow, and that only the very largest bull would fetch that amount in our camp.

They said that they were dissatisfied, that the white man was "very dear," and that no one would come in to sell; but, as a matter of fact, they were really well pleased, and, on the following day, several of them sold us sheep and goats for limbo or blankets, the cost to us working out at from three shillings to eight shillings, according to size.

We started with quite a small goat scherm, but it was not many days before we had to build a new one. The cattle were down in the old mealie-field, at the foot of the kopje, but, for safety's sake, we put the goats just outside our own camp. The scherm was made of heavy poles, proof against lions and hyænas, if not against leopards, a big, square enclosure, capable of holding four hundred animals, with a primitive sort of grass roof over it, to protect the stock from the morning dews.

I often wish I could drive home to people how susceptible the goat is to anything in the nature of wet-cold. He suffers most acutely when he cannot get into shelter, and huddle up against others of his own kind. In the majority of cases, it is sheer ignorance which makes people in England who own goats tether their unfortunate victims out in all weathers. It may be customary, I know, but having had a thousand or so goats through my hands, I do not hesitate to say that it is Hell for the goat, that it is so utterly foolish, too, for the goat loses condition, through sheer misery, and goes off milk.

Probably, it is useless to make any sort of appeal for the goat in England. He is supposed to be a kind of comic animal that smells. Yet he suffers, none the less. The woes of unsavoury aliens, Russian revolutionaries, Arme-

nian thieves, Balkan brigands, arouse the deepest sympathy in this country. We are always ready to form a committee, pay a secretary, and raise funds to help them escape from the just penalty of their crimes, and bring them over here to commit fresh crimes ; but an appeal on behalf of the thousands of suffering goats, who cannot appeal for themselves, would be received with jeers. Is not the goat a giddy creature ?

The African native goats do not smell—at least, I never smelt them, and I have had close on four hundred at a time, but twenty yards from my sleeping hut. They are very hardy, except when the scab comes along ; and, if they are usually thin, this is due mainly to the fact that they get too little time for feeding when owned by Kaffirs. In the villages, they seldom go out to pasture before about ten a.m., and they are brought back at sundown, which means that they practically lose their first feed, the meal they should have finished before the sun gets hot. If there is a beer drink on, they very often [do not go out at all, but cry through the day without either food or water.

In Mashona villages when there is a possibility of visits from leopards or hyænas, that is in four villages out of five, the goats sleep in the hut with their owners. The ordinary hut is fourteen feet in diameter, and there is always a fire smouldering in the centre. On an average, five people sleep in it, in addition to at least two dogs and a dozen fowls, consequently the conditions are not altogether wholesome, especially as the little goat pen is never cleaned out. If I were a Mashona goat, I would almost prefer to risk the local leopard outside.

When they are not kept in the huts, the goats are tied to posts, a string being merely put round both the animal's

neck and the post, fairly tightly—very tightly, if the kaffir beer has been strong—and, as often as not, he cannot lie down at all.

There was one village in the same valley as Chivamba's, only about two miles from the store, where the goats used to be tied up in this way. The inhabitants were a particularly lazy crowd, and their stock was invariably thin and scabby. I warned them several times, about the scab and the risk from schelm, but they never took any notice. Then a day came when they remembered—a little too late.

Some one in the village was giving an unusually big beer drink in the fields, and the head-man decided that, though the cattle might go to it, the goats had better remain at home, tied to their posts. It was a very enjoyable day, they told me afterwards. Every soul in the village went. Every dog went, only the goats and the fowls were left behind. At sundown, the people returned home, jodelling cheerfully, to scare the evil spirits off the foot-paths; but the jodelling stopped suddenly when the head of the procession reached the kraal.

Two lions had spent a happy day also in the deserted village; and every single one of the unfortunate sheep and goats had been killed, killed out of sheer devilry, of course, for the lions only ate part of the carcasses of four of them.

Naturally, there was trouble. The head-man came to me for sympathy, and I reviled him for encouraging lions to take up their quarters in the valley. Then he called in the witch doctors, who quickly discovered that they were not lions at all, but men who turned themselves into lions and destroyed goats out of sheer spite. After that, they

threw the bones again, and discovered the names of the two men, who were poisoned shortly afterwards.

We had several cases of witch-lions in the valley, each ending in a murder, and it was partly owing to these that I became prejudiced against witch-doctors. However, after the local practitioner had committed a murder in my own camp, and had done his very best to murder Amyas, I had him shifted out of the way, and I had no more serious trouble. I never knew exactly what happened to him, and I never inquired. The relatives of the murdered man dealt with the case, and the only report they made was that the M'Tagati had gone on a "very long journey." Anyway, he never came back.

The goat world is very different from the world of cattle. There is little etiquette in it. There is no boss of a flock, no fighting for leadership, very few friendships and no lasting animosities, no settled places in the 'scherm at night.

There is always a leader, certainly, to head the procession out to the pasture in the morning and back again at night ; but he is not selected by his size or strength. As a rule, he is a young, thin, restless brute, who appoints himself to the position, and by being invariably on the move, even when he should be chewing the cud, has a bad effect on the rest. Once I knew a young ewe constitute herself leader and keep the post for several weeks.

Fat-tailed sheep are similar to goats in most of their ways, though more lethargic. They are a dreadful nuisance to drive on the roads, as they so quickly become footsore ; on the other hand, whilst the goats have to be carried through the streams, the sheep will cross boldly.

As a rule, the buying of a sheep or goat did not take very long. Your store boy turned him over to make sure

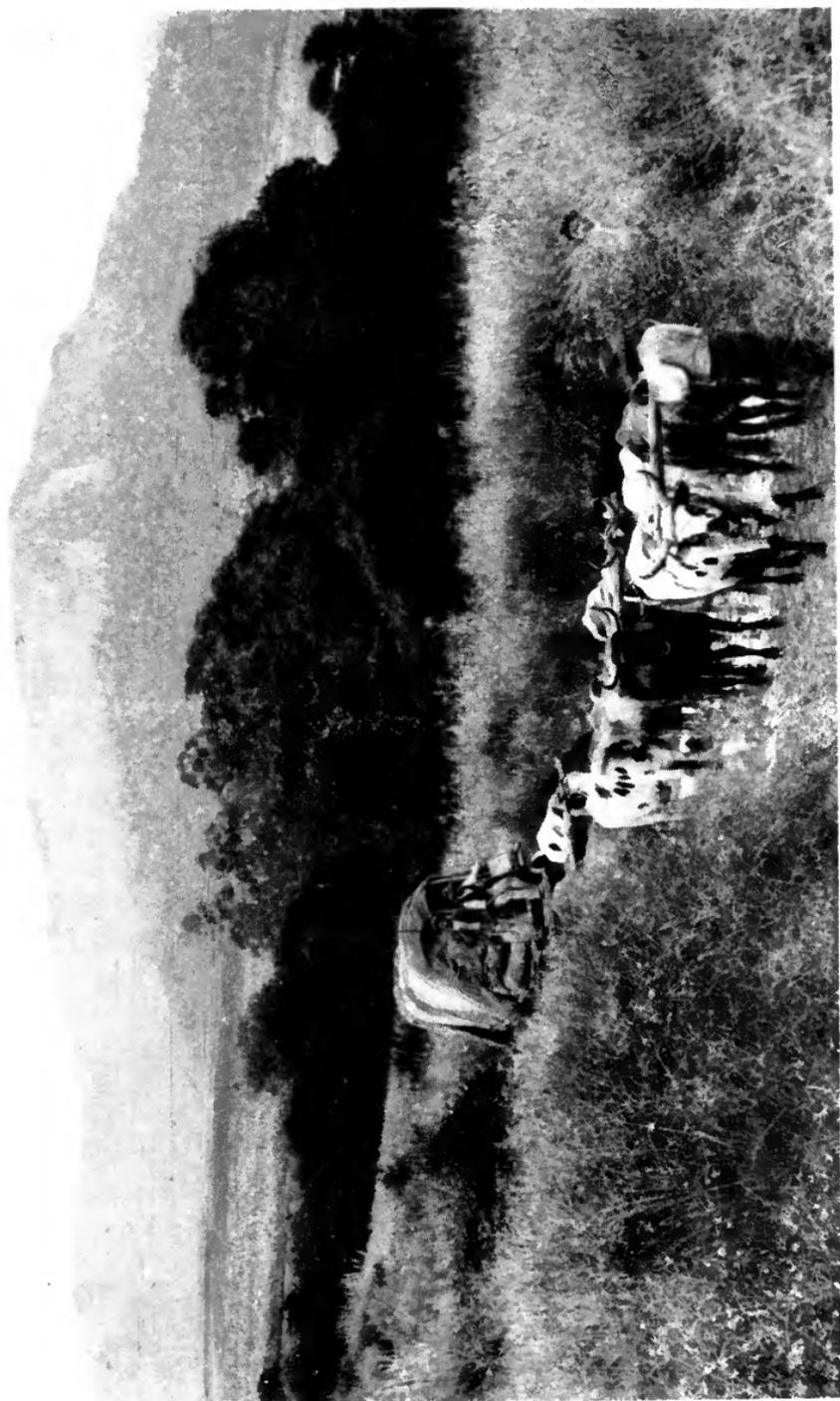
that he had not got the scab ; then you remarked that he was very thin and small, and offered two-thirds of what you were prepared to give. The owner answered that he was an immense beast, and would grow even larger, and asked twice what he expected. After that, you proceeded to come to terms.

But the selling of a bull was a very different affair, one to be undertaken only after the witch doctor had thrown the bones and discovered which day would be auspicious. The deal had to be done on that day, or not at all ; it was most unusual for an owner to agree to continue the discussion on the morrow, if terms had not been arranged overnight.

Then, even, all sorts of formalities had to be observed, conventional lies to be told ; for instance, at the outset, the owner seldom admitted that the beast was his. It belonged to a brother who had gone on a journey, of a month's duration, and had left word that the price was to be something wholly ridiculous.

A great many white men used, not unnaturally perhaps, to lose their tempers over these cattle deals, and then to lose the bargain altogether. They failed to understand that, whilst the buying of a beast was part of the daily routine to them, to the natives the selling of it was probably the most important event of the year. For days afterwards, the price he got, and the manner in which he carried the affair through, would be the main topics of conversation in his village ; consequently, it was only decent, as well as being good policy, to give him plenty of rope, not to try and hurry him.

Cows were the least trouble to buy. We had a standing price of ten pounds for them, and, as that was also the nominal value amongst the natives themselves, there was



A MIXED SPAN.

seldom any real discussion, save as to the "present" which is always given on every deal. As a rule, we gave a hoe and a stretch of limbo on each beast, but this was increased to two hoes if we came to terms quickly.

Bulls were much more difficult to buy. Though the Kaffir himself sets a far greater value on a cow, he invariably asks ten pounds at the start for any bull over a year old; in fact, one particularly cheeky youth once demanded ten pounds for a six-months old calf. "It was strong enough to pull the wagon," he shouted.

I looked round for something heavy—usually, I only threw quite light things—but he saw my purpose, and hurried down the kopje, leaving his calf tied up to a tree. At the foot of the kopje, he ran right into Amous, who already had a score against him. Daniel, who was in pursuit, explained to the Basutu that the Baboon-man had cheeked the chief.

"I told him how foolish he had been, and he is very sorry, now," the little man remarked to me, a few minutes later; then he went over and examined the calf. "It has got wise eyes. It will make a trek-ox indeed, by and by," he declared. "But it is very wrong for hill-men who wear no trousers and beat drums all night to have any cattle at all."

As I had had several impudent youths in recently from the same village as the one who had just fled, I thought it as well to make an example, so I sent out word that no one at all from that place was to come in and trade at the store. The sentence had the desired effect; there was very little disposition to be cheeky after that. As to the bull-calf, I bought him the following day from one of the Chivamba's own brothers for three pounds ten.

In the case of an ordinary bull of about two years old,

the owner would ask ten pounds, and I would offer five. He would sit for a while, waiting for me to speak again, then he would sigh, take a big pinch of snuff, and retire to the rocks under one of the trees, to hold a whispered conversation with the friends who had accompanied him.

A quarter of an hour later, he would come back and squat down again. Then I would raise my offer to six pounds. He would mutter that I was "very dear" and lower his price a pound.

Perhaps it would be a couple of hours later before we got within half-a-sovereign of the price I was prepared to give—seven pounds ten.

His friends—there were generally a couple of them—would come and squat beside him now. Then I would count out the seven sovereigns, arrange them on a hoe, and put the latter down on the ground, in front of the seller. Usually the temptation was too much for him. The moment I added the half-sovereign to the other gold, he would draw the hoe towards him, and the deal was complete.

I have often had the discussion over the price of an animal drag out from sunrise till dusk ; but it very seldom happened that we did not arrive at a satisfactory settlement in the end. In nine cases out of ten, they knew before they came in exactly how much they were going to get for their animal, and they always went away very well pleased with themselves.

Before we had been at Chivamba's long, we had what was practically a monopoly of cattle-buying throughout the whole of a huge district. I had a curious and rather flattering proof of this during our second season.

As might have been expected, our success made other

men anxious to follow our example, and though no one else tried to get a wagon down the hills, several came on foot, with carriers or pack-donkeys. The local natives told me all about them, adding that they had bought practically nothing, as the people refused to sell. Usually, they avoided our valley, but, at last, one of them did turn up at the store. He was quite a decent fellow, and as I had been alone for some weeks, I was glad to put him up for the night.

He had had rotten luck, he told me, had bought practically nothing, certainly not nearly enough to pay his expenses; and he glanced enviously at our big herd of over a hundred. On the following morning, a strange native squat^{ed} down at the door of the hut, and announced that he had a bull for sale. My guest recognized him at once.

"Why, he's the chap I saw yesterday," he exclaimed. "I tried to buy the bull from him then."

"Very well," I answered; "you can have another try, if you like."

He was very grateful for the chance, and did his best, offering as much as ten pounds; but the owner shook his head. No, he wouldn't take the money.

Ten minutes later, he had sold the same animal to me for eight pounds ten. He knew who I was, and my money was good money, it brought you luck, he explained afterwards to Daniel.

After that I constantly came across the same idea. They knew me, and I suppose they did not feel shy with me. I was a great chief, and the others who came down were not chiefs—at least, as far as the people knew. They certainly trusted me, to a degree which was little short of amazing, when one remembers the suspicious

nature of the savage. I was able to do a thing which I never heard of another white man being able to do—buy cattle on credit from the Mashona.

It came about in this way. During the War, there was a great scarcity of gold coin, and the banks in Bulawayo charged even their own customers ten per cent. premium for it, a horrible extortion. All cattle had to be paid for in gold, as the money was wanted primarily for Hut Tax, and, by one of its arbitrary, iniquitous regulations, the Chartered Company would not take paper money or silver from natives, although bank notes were legal tender. Consequently, I needed a good deal of gold, and, not only did I object to the ten per cent. premium, but there was also the expense and risk of having it sent from Bulawayo. It had to come by coach or mule cart to Fort Victoria, entirely at my risk, and I had to send in a runner to fetch it from there.

In the course of a month, I usually took a good deal of gold for cash sales, but I could never be sure of this; then there came a time when I ran clean out, and also had quite a rush of cattle for sale.

The only thing to do was to try and explain matters to the owners of the beasts. I don't suppose for one moment they realized that it was a nuisance to me to send so far for coin, but they evidently came to the conclusion that my excuse was a valid one, for they suggested at once that I should buy the cattle there and then, and pay for them when the money arrived.

At first, I could hardly believe they meant it, but they were entirely in earnest. We used to fix the prices; then I would give them a note—which, of course, they could not read—saying how much I owed them, and they would depart perfectly content, to return usually

in a month's time for payment. I did this dozens of times, and never once did it lead to a dispute of any kind. It was, really, one of the greatest compliments a native could have paid to a white man.

ODD JOURNEYS

CHAPTER IX

ODD JOURNEYS

THE Scotch cart played a very small part during the journey from Bulawayo to Chivamba's ; in fact, at times, it was rather a nuisance, whilst its team of depressed-looking donkeys was hardly a credit to us. However, after we had reached our journey's end, the cart proved most valuable.

The donkeys were not required any more ; they had done their work, so far as we were concerned, and, at the end of the season, they were to go back to Bulawayo ; but one night, one of them—the most lazy and objectionable, luckily—happened to stay out too late, and a lion found him. What we found the next day was a hindquarter. We put strychnine in the remains, and set a trap gun over it, greatly to the amusement of the local heathen, who explained that it was one of their rotten witch-lions again, and that, in all probability, the real culprit was standing there, watching, perhaps even helping us. They may have been right. At any rate, the lion kept clear of both trap and poison.

As a rule, we inspanned six bullocks in the cart, a team capable of pulling it everywhere and over everything. The maximum load was under a thousand pounds, and the cart itself was very light.

I had many a pleasant trip in it. Of course, it was not altogether a comfortable thing to ride in, and, for the greater part of the trek, one walked beside it, but to set against this was the knowledge that it would not stick, and that it was not likely to smash up, even on those awful hills.

About six weeks after we opened the store at Chivamba's, I took the Scotch cart into Victoria to fetch some stuff we needed urgently. The journey which had taken over four weeks when we came down with the loaded wagon, we did now in six and a half days. It was very interesting going over the 'ground again, especially over that part where I had been so ill. It came back to me vaguely, like fragments of a dream.

I had six oxen, with Amous as driver and a Chivamba piccanin as voorloeper, and we never had a moment's trouble, either going or returning. All along the road, the local savages welcomed us cordially, apparently having forgotten entirely their quarrels with us over the alleged damage to their fields. They were very anxious to show us where the Liechtenstein Hartebeeste were running, and to put us on the best places for guinea-fowl. Also, they were very ready to sell meal and sweet potatoes now, and clamoured for all sorts of trading goods, which, of course, we had not got with us.

In one place, between the second and third lines of kopjes, the track led for about five miles across open, or fairly open, grassy flats. We inspanned rather late—I think the cattle had been taken to the wrong pasture—and we were anxious to push on, right to the foot of the second range. As it grew dark, the piccanin had a good deal of trouble in keeping the spoor we had made in coming down with the wagon and cart. Several

times, he got off it altogether—the ground had been hard and the wheels had sunk in very little—and there was some difficulty in picking it up again. At last, Amous grew tired of it.

“ Throw the leading reim on the front oxen’s horns,” he shouted ; “ Bandom will follow the spoor.”

He was quite right. Bandom, a short, sturdy, black and white bullock, one of the best front oxen I ever knew, put his nose close to the ground, and for two hours he followed that spoor perfectly. After a while, it was too dark for us to see it, but Bandom kept it all the time. Really, when one remembered that six months before he had been a wild young bull, who had never even seen a wagon, it was little short of marvellous.

The second range of kopjes was a great place for baboons. They were their, literally, in thousands. On one immense bald hill, very similar to the Rock of Gibraltar in shape, which we named Mount Peter, after our tame goat—it is Mount Peter now, on all the official maps—the Mashonas’ cousins used to sit in rows, and bark incessantly at us as we went by.

I never shot at a baboon, and I have the greatest contempt for those who do so. I know that they are destructive at times, and always utterly useless, but so is a large proportion of the enlightened electors of England, and the killing of a baboon will no more save the crops, than the hanging of a Little Englander will preserve the Empire. To accomplish any good, the whole of the breeds must be exterminated—an impossible proposition, unfortunately.

The casual shooting of baboons is mere coarse cruelty. You very seldom found the Home-born man guilty of it, because, in most cases, he had been to a Public School,

and had learnt what are the things which a fellow can't do ; but the Colonials were very fond of the practice.

A baboon is so easy to shoot when he is above you on a kopje. He does not run away, being just as brave as you are, and he cannot possibly have his revenge on you. It is " safe sport." When you hit him, he screams like a child, and the others crowd round him and try to staunch the wound. It is really most amusing—to those who like that sort of thing. You have the whole difference between the Englishman and the Afrikaner there—the former goes out and shoots the buck he wants for food, taking the risks of the veld, and the latter shoots baboons from the wagon and does not trouble to finish them off.

During my seven years in Rhodesia, nine out of the ten of the buck I saw brought into the camp were shot by Home-born men, though the Colonials were veritable William Tells when it came to potting bottles at fifty yards range, whilst the things they had accomplished in the Past were literally marvellous.

On the way back to Chivamba's, it struck me that, by keeping further to the north, we ought to be able to get a better way through the last range of hills, and, as soon as we reached the store, I sent for the old headman and asked him about it.

He shook his head. Wagons were things of which he knew nothing, he said ; there had been no wagons and no white men in his days ; also, he had never been so far from home in that direction ; then he went on to tell us of what had happened about sixty years before, when the Matabele first appeared in the district. That was Chivamba's way ; he lived such an unreasonable distance back in the Past.

Amous, who was listening, grunted. " The head-baboon

is a fool indeed, Baas. Why waste words on him? These folks never go further than the kraal next to their own. It would be better for me to go to look for that road. Then, when I have found it, we will beat all these people for lying and saying there was no way."

Old Chivamba departed, mumbling rude things about the Basutu race; whilst two or three of his old men, who had been listening, declared that there was nothing but very rugged hills in the direction I pointed out. But that evening, one of Chivamba's nephews, a great lanky creature named Bungu, a name which, somehow, suited him admirably, squatted down outside the hut, and announced that he could show us a road if we would pay him two pounds.

We offered him a pound, to be paid if the road proved satisfactory, and he accepted promptly. Really, he earned the money easily, for it was merely a question of guiding us along a certain main foot-path, which led us, by very easy stages, up into the open country where the Lichtenstein Hartebeeste were, entirely avoiding that abominable place where we slid down the hillside.

I was so grateful for the discovery that I gave Bungu two pounds, rather to the disgust of Amous, who held the theory that Mashonas should work for nothing, and be sjamboked if they did not agree to the idea. The value of that road to us was tremendous. It reduced the dangers of the journey to Victoria by fully one-half, besides cutting off some eight miles of the distance. Really, it was a wonderful pass, almost a freak of Nature. In places it narrowed down to a bare twenty yards; but, throughout its whole length of about five miles, it needed practically no work doing to it, beyond a little clearing.

Yet no one would ever have expected to find a road through that stretch of broken country.

It was just about that time, that two of the store-keepers in Fort Victoria, being anxious to start a rival trading station in our district—an idea they would have jeered at a couple of months previously—sent a Dutchman down to report on the road. There was no spoor on our new track then, and naturally, he struck the old one. He got as far as the place where we went down the kopje, and then he turned back. The report he made in Victoria effectually prevented any one from trying to follow in our tracks. I need hardly say that we kept the news of Bungu's road strictly to ourselves, and left the township to imagine that we were still risking our spans on that awful original spoor.

During the three years we were trading in South-Eastern Mashonaland, we cut a good many hundred miles of road—in South Africa a road is anything along which a wagon has once passed. We ran three trading stations after the first season and were about to start a fourth—we had taken out a licence for it and had cut part of the road—when the crash came and we lost everything.

One of the stations was to the north-east of Chivamba's, almost due east from Victoria. It was Malcolm's idea to start it. He reckoned we could trade an immense amount of grain there, and in that he was right ; but what he did not take into consideration was the appalling nature of the road up which the grain had to be ridden. I, myself, never saw the place at all until it was too late, or I should never have consented to the proposal.

The next store was a little one for cash trade only, down the Lundi River, about sixty miles beyond Chivamba's, on the top of an immense flat-topped kopje called the

M'Bendese. As a rule, we knew this camp as "Thomas," after the village, which was about half a mile away.

The fourth store was to have been at M'Khati, a very large kraal, actually on the Anglo-Portuguese border, in the fork of the Lundi and Sabi Rivers, a wonderfully beautiful spot, more like an immense English park than anything else, but wonderfully unhealthy too. Had the cattle disease not broken out, and paralyzed our business, we should probably have made the M'Khati store pay extremely well. It would have been the only trading station in a country about twice the area of England, inhabited by natives of a very good type, many of whom had been on the Transvaal mines, where they had earned high wages.

As soon as we saw that the experiment at Chivamba's was going to be a success, we sent Home for our youngest brother, Amyas. He had been for some little time on a farm in Canada, but had quickly found that there was little profit in the game, at least for him. He was seventeen years of age when he arrived in Africa, but old for his age, sane, cool, and enormously strong.

In consequence of the War, there was a good deal of uncertainty as to the date of Amyas' arrival; but he wired from somewhere—en route—Salisbury, I think—and a runner brought the message down to Chivamba's. At once, I had the cart inspanned, with six of our best oxen, and went up to fetch him, doing the journey in five and a half days. It was horribly cold on the high veld, colder than I had ever known it before, and I was distinctly short of clothes—the clothes of civilization, that is. I had plenty of warm underclothes, but my flannel shirts, which had the sleeves cut off at the elbows, had long since had all the colour washed out of them, my

dungaree trousers were stained, and frayed at the bottoms, from tramping through wet grass ; and I did not own a jacket, only a rather ragged, brown sweater, and a fawn-coloured Newmarket coat. My hat had been a good one once, but a whole wet season had not improved it.

The night before reaching the township I camped at the Nine Mile Water, on a stretch of burnt veld.

I got up just before three, and, as it was freezing hard, I did not wash, much less shave ; consequently, the black dust remained amongst the stubble on my chin.

When I turned up at the *Thatched House* about eight o'clock, I did not look an entirely prepossessing figure, especially as, in addition to the preventible disadvantages, I was tall, very thin, and a dull yellow from constant fever.

Even now, I remember Amyas' horror. He was always most particular about his dress. He was wearing a collar,] a tie, [and a very well-cut suit. The contrast between us was weird. At first, he could not get over it, but a couple of days later, when he, himself, had experienced what it means to be on the burnt veld on a cold night, he began to understand. He had no wish to shave before starting on an early morning trek.

Amyas grasped the principles of transport work more quickly than any one else I ever knew. Although he was raw to Africa, within six months he was fit to take charge of a big train of wagons, to see to repairs, supervise the training of young cattle, make new roads if necessary, and, most important of all, keep a tight grip on drivers, who, as a class, are about the worst of all natives—save, of course, mission-boys.

Soon after Amyas' arrival at Chivamba's, we decided that Malcolm should take the wagon into Victoria, and

endeavour to buy some more trading stuff. It proved to be a most disastrous trip. We had any amount of trained cattle then—Amous had not been idle with the new beasts—and it was a very fine span of eighteen which Malcolm and Amyas took that time. All the beasts were in good condition, although it was mid-winter, and Amous was certain that he would have no trouble on the road.

Unfortunately, however, instead of going straight in by the track we knew—we had improved it a little each time we covered it with the Scotch cart—Malcolm was persuaded to cut across to a trading station to the north, some fifteen miles out of his way, and load up some grain for Victoria. The rates he was getting were far too low and, even had the road been excellent, it would have been barely worth while. We were in a great hurry for stuff down at Chivamba's, the wet season was not so very far off, and every day was of importance. Moreover, though this was a minor point, I suppose, I had been left practically without white man's food, all I possessed being some flour.

Probably, that trip in with the grain was the worst Amous ever made. The load was too heavy, the road something appalling, a steady grind upwards, with huge rocks, loose sand, and ugly little dongas all the way. The cattle simply could not do it. Time after time, it was necessary to off-load. Malcolm had several of our own savages from Chivamba's district with them, but these all ran away; and he was unable to get any local help. Amous told me afterwards that, had it not been for Amyas' help, he would never have got the wagon through at all.

They must have been about three weeks doing twenty

miles, for they were gone from the store forty days in all, just about three times as long as it would have taken with the Scotch cart.

Judging from what I heard afterwards, they had a bad time ; but I think I had a worse one. The uncertainty told on me so horribly. I had no word from them, no messenger of any sort, and I could not conceive what they could be doing, where they could have got to.

I was frightfully short of everything, and I had just been through a nasty dose of fever, which had left me very weak and low-spirited. I had no tea or coffee, no sugar, nothing of that kind ; but I think that what I longed for most was some candles. As I grew more anxious, so I became sleepless, and to lie awake the whole night, ten hours of it, in the darkness, is too horrible for words. Trade was very slow, as the Mashona were waiting to see what the wagon would bring down, so I had no occupation of any kind, and nothing whatsoever to read. All my own boys had gone with the wagon, and I had only savages who could barely understand me.

Really, it is not surprising that, when, at last, the wagon did appear, I was almost insane. Malcolm said he had not been able to get a messenger to bring me letters and provisions. Had he delayed a day or two longer, he would probably have found I had ceased to want either news or food.

Unfortunately, both Malcolm and Amyas were impressed with the low price at which grain could be bought at the store where they had loaded that grain, and they were also certain that, with a little dynamite and a good gang of boys, the road might be made quite decent. They were very anxious to start grain trading there the following season—the owner had just died and the place

was being abandoned—and, naturally enough, I gave in. They ought to have been able to judge better than I, who had never been there, could do.

We duly started the station next year, buying about a couple of hundred pounds worth of goods especially for it. The experiment ended in utter failure. Certainly, we bought grain at a ridiculously low rate, but the road was impossible, even after we had spent a good deal on it. Instead of riding other people's stuff at high rates, earning a clear profit of a pound a day each, our three wagons were getting knocked to pieces, and our cattle were getting hopelessly out of condition, riding less than half loads of our own wretched grain.

It was not long before Amyas, who was in charge there—Malcolm had left us then—decided to stop buying grain. He got rid of most of the grain he had there, sent the wagons up, in charge of Amous, to ride on proper roads, then came down to Chivamba's, tired out and disgusted, leaving a young Mashona named Jim in charge, to sell out the rest of the trading stuff for cash.

Luck seemed to be against us all through over that venture. Jim had been with us for some time, and we had never had anything against him. So far as we knew, he was an ordinary kraal native, and the vast majority of these are honest; consequently, it came as a great surprise when we learned that he had fled, and that the store was absolutely empty. He had stolen goods that had actually cost us sixty-five pounds.

Then, to our great disgust, we found out how we had been hoodwinked. The innocent Jim was really an educated Kaffir, a Christian, from the mission station at Zimbabwe. We traced him, without much trouble, but, though we tried to get the Native Commissioner to move

in the matter, all we received in the end was one very small bull calf worth, at the outside, four pounds. Today, if his own people have not put an end to him for causing trouble in the village, Jim is probably a fully fledged "Reverend" of some schismatic body.

The furthest east we ever took the wagon was down to our store on the M'Bendese kopje. In itself, the journey was not a difficult one, once the bush had been cleared. Some eight miles beyond Chivamba's, you got out of the kopje country altogether, into the low bush veld, which is very different from the other bush veld on the border of the great central plateau. That is fairly open, cheerful, with white sandy soil as a rule, and a considerable variety of trees; the low bush veld is simply deadly in its monotony. Practically the only tree you find in it is the mopani, and, though the soil is red sand and the leaves a rather bright green, the general impression you get is that everything is a horrible, dull grey.

The kraals are in keeping with the scenery, and the natives, who are mainly the M'Hlengwi, a very low race, suit their surroundings admirably. Most of the villages are very small, ten or a dozen huts, though I know some which have, or used to have, only three. The huts are even more dilapidated than those of the Mashona, and that is saying a very great deal. Apparently, they are never repaired in any way whatsoever, whilst the clearings in which they stand are most certainly never cleaned. The rubbish is just thrown down and left, to rot and fester, or to powder up, according to the season. The water holes are generally a mile or so away, more sometimes—I know a village in the Portuguese Territory which is ten miles from water—and the crops seem invariably to fail. The lions make the keeping of cattle impossible,

and, though the goats are larger and fatter than those of the kopje country, owing to the salt nature of the grass, there are very few of them.

Lions are the curse of existence down in that low bush. Everything is regulated more or less with an eye to them. Even though you may not realize it, the thought of them is always at the back of your mind when you are making any plans. In one village I knew well—it was about eight miles from Chivamba's—the huts were all built with double walls, a space of about two feet between them, the entrance to the inner one being diametrically opposite the outer one. You shut both entrances at night, and then you were fairly safe. I never heard of a lion breaking into a hut of that kind, though I knew of several cases of very old lions, their sense of caution overmastered by their hunger, forcing their way into ordinary huts, and seizing women.

In my time, two of the villages down the Lundi were abandoned altogether, because the schelm made life impossible. From one of them, the lions took sixteen people in six weeks. And in the bush veld, when there is so much clearing to be done before any crops can be raised, it is a very serious matter to start life afresh in a new place. Curiously enough, none of the M'Hlengwi ever seemed to think of fencing their villages. They were too utterly apathetic and depressed to undertake any task which was not absolutely necessary to provide food. Their fatalism was almost akin to that of the Hindu, who takes the evils of life lying down, as things ordained of the gods.

It was always a very anxious time when we took any of our trek-oxen down the Lundi, though, as it turned out, we never lost a single beast there from lions.

I remember well one very curious experience Amyas had some ten miles east of Chivamba's on the M'Bendese track. He had shot a couple of Sable Antelope in the morning, and had had the meat cut up for biltong. When he outspanned at night, he stretched reims underneath the red span's wagon, put the meat on them to dry, then turned in under the other wagon, a few feet away. About midnight, he woke up suddenly. Something was moving, pulling down the biltong; then came a steady noise of chewing. It was undoubtedly a schelm—a hyæna, in all probability.

There was no question of taking aim in the darkness, and, unfortunately, Amyas only had a carbine beside him, not, as was usually the case, a shot gun. He merely picked up the weapon, and, without even putting it to his shoulder, let drive. A fierce growling told him that the visitor was a leopard. For a moment, Amyas was scared—a wounded leopard in the dark is an ugly proposition; then, to his intense relief, the brute bounded away.

In the morning, they found a pool of blood, and a fragment of white bone; but there was no question of following up the blood spoor. The animal had got in amongst the rocks, and only a lunatic would have taken the risk of going after him there.

That little Scotch cart of ours was very handy for shooting purposes. It would carry all the kit and stores for quite a long expedition; with a small bucksail over it, we could easily rig up a shelter in case of rain; whilst we could bring back all our skins, horns, and biltong without having to employ carriers. We almost always inspanned six of the smaller cattle in it. Four would have been ample under ordinary conditions, but the extra pair, and extra length of chain, were invaluable in

some of the steep little dongas. I have spent many a happy evening beside that cart—the cattle near by in a tiny lion-proof scherm of thorn scrub ; the biltong, and, perhaps, several huge quarters of meat as well, hanging up in the trees, out of reach of hyænas and leopards ; the natives—a score or more usually attached themselves to us on those occasions—toasting choice tit-bits in the ashes, whilst waiting for the two great pots of porridge and intestines to boil, our own cook-boy grilling steaks and keeping a watchful eye on the saucepan of guinea-fowl-and-tomato soup ; and we ourselves, stretched out in our blankets, smoking peacefully, with the consciousness that we had not shot so badly. Those were the times when the veld seemed good, when you forgot the mud-holes and the floods, the dysentery and the fever, the drivers who got drunk, and slunk off in the night taking as many of your goods as they could carry with them, and leaving you in the lurch, perhaps a hundred miles from anywhere ; the piccanins who lost the cattle, the cook-boys who spoilt all the food, the wheel which crumpled up at the critical moment, because the blacksmith in Bulawayo had scamped his work, and the düsselboom which smashed on the high veld when there was not a tree suitable for a fresh one within half a day's tramp. You forgot all these, forgot, too, the rain and the frost, and the smoke of the cow-dung fires. You thought only of the marvellously clear, starlit sky above you, the apparent peace of the virgin bush around, the splendid day's sport you had had, and—the good meal you were going to have.

What wonder that sometimes since, when I have been a whole day in London without food, without the means of buying food, that I should have looked back a little regretfully ?

OUR CATTLE

CHAPTER X

OUR CATTLE

WE never kept any record of the number of cattle which actually passed through our hands in the three years we were buying, but I should imagine it ran to nearly four hundred and fifty. To many people, the figure may not seem a large one, yet the net profit on that number was at least three thousand pounds—or would have been, had the African Coast Fever not broken out when it did, and wiped out ninety-seven per cent. of the cattle owned by white men.

With the exception of one cow, which we exchanged for an ox, we kept all our original cattle, those we bought when we went on the shooting trip from the "Geelong," till the end.

At first, I was inclined to think I had made a bad bargain over the cow—I got a big Colonial ox called Witkop for her, a huge framework of a beast—but, in the end, thanks to Amyas' astuteness, we came out very well over it.

A good many Dutchmen of the poorer type inspan and work breeding cows. The practice is as senseless as it is cruel. A breeding cow has comparatively little strength; she loses condition very quickly, and, naturally, by working her, the quality of the calves she throws is

spoil. What we used to call a barren cow—I suppose that, technically, she is a heifer still, even when six years old—is a different matter. She will usually work splendidly, and keep her condition better than an ox, but she is almost certain to become thoroughly vicious in the yoke, and, as often as not, when you have had a great deal of trouble over breaking her in, she will get in calf.

Once only did we train a barren cow. She was a splendid beast, jet black, perfectly shaped—and a perfect she-devil. She was the only one of our trek-cattle of which I was afraid. Out of the yoke, she was quiet enough, but, once she had been inspanned, she began to look for some one to hurt, and, as she had long, sharp horns, she could give you a nasty prod. She pulled in the first pair, the “next-after,” just in front of Biffel, who detested her heartily. Really, I was by no means sorry when Amous announced that she was in calf. I exchanged her promptly for a large black bull and a bull calf.

We seldom kept breeding cows very long. There was a ready market for the ordinary Mashona cow at eighteen pounds, whilst it was always possible to exchange them for a bull larger than themselves. It was the same with heifers; you could invariably get rid of them on most favourable terms, in fact, the cheapest way to secure a big bull was to buy a young heifer.

One particular heifer I shall never forget. She was a fine creature, about two years old, with very wild eyes. It needed half a dozen of her companions from the village scherm as company before she would agree to come to Chivamba's, and when the deal was complete—we gave nine pounds for her—she would not be separated from the others. Consequently, we told the owner to stay overnight, and let her get used to our herd, an instruc-

tion he was ready enough to obey, for there was plenty of meal, and beans and monkey nuts, and occasionally biltong as well, for the boys in our camps.

At sunrise, the strange cattle were cut out—they had spent the night fighting ours—the heifer was sent off with the herd, and the visitors departed. As our own lot filed down towards the vlei, Amous yelled final instructions to the herd-boys to “boss up the black-heifer-which-runs-away,” accompanying the order with some pointed references to his sjambok.

Two hours later, a piccanin hurried in, and after a terrified glance at Amous, squatted down and informed me that the heifer-which-runs-away had departed homewards at a gallop.

“We threw stones and knobsticks, chief” he added tearfully. “But it was no use. The spirits of her ancestors would not agree to her staying. An evil beast indeed, chief. We could not stop her.” Then, once more, he looked at Amous.

As a matter of fact, although the Basutu talked a great deal about the dreadful things he was going to do to the youngsters with his sjambok, he was really extremely kind to them. Even his lectures on cattle and their ways, homilies which were prolonged to unreasonable hours of the night, were meant to benefit his yawning and unwilling hearers. Consequently, on this occasion, the herd-boy had nothing to fear, even when I was not present. At the worst, he would be told, not for the first time probably, that he was the son of a baboon who had lost his tail and had contracted uncleanly habits in consequence.

“Shall I take two of the old cattle and fetch her, Baas?” he asked, then turned to the piccanin. “Ho,

very little child with a dirty body, go and fetch Fransman and Blom. You know them? Fransman is black, with very little grey marks on his back, and wise eyes. He is the friend of Peter, the chief's tame goat. And Blom is the red and white ox, always very fat. See that you bring the right ones, or my sjambok will make you want never to sit down again. Have you not lost the chief's new heifer?"

Whilst the two oxen—they belonged to the original span, and were amongst the most staid animals we had—were being fetched, he picked out half a dozen of the best reims, borrowed the shot gun and some cartridges, and ordered Bungu, the Path-finder, who, as usual, was sitting on the rocks outside the store, to get ready to accompany him.

It was ten o'clock when they had left, and close on sunset when they returned in triumph. Bungu stalked ahead, with two mangy dogs at his heels, two futile little assegais in his hand; then came the piccanin, carrying half a dozen freshly killed guinea fowl; behind him were the cattle, Blom and Fransman, with the runaway heifer between them, lashed horn to horn with Fransman, who appeared to be taking not the slightest notice of her, though, when she jumped about too much, Blom gave her a warning dig in the ribs. Amous brought up the rear.

Without being told, Fransman solemnly walked the captive into the scherm, waited whilst Amous lashed a length of heavy trek chain on to her neck, then, as soon as he was released, went out to see if he could get anything to eat before it was time to be shut up for the night, doing everything with an infinite gravity, as though he knew he had been selected especially for the job, and

was anxious to prove himself worthy of the trust Amous had placed in him.

The moment the scherm was unbarred in the morning, the heifer made a bolt in the direction of her old home ; but, before she had gone the length of the mealie field, the weight of the length of chain had brought her up. She stopped, angry and winded, pawed the ground once or twice, then gave in with surprising meekness, and allowed the piccanins to drive her off to the vlei. She was beaten. A week later, when the chain was taken off her, she made no attempt to escape.

After that, she became merely one of a herd of over a hundred, and we hardly noticed her, until some four months later, when she drew attention to herself, in a rather sensational manner.

We had left Mashonaland for the summer, to escape the wet season there, and, owing to the grass on the main Bulawayo road being so bad, too bad for our young, low-veld cattle, we had taken a little-used road, which had brought us out near the Geelong mine. We had made our midday outspan close to the Umsingwane River, and intended camping at M'Gwala's kraal, where I had spent my first night as a transport-rider ; but when the cattle were brought up for inspanning, we found that they were three short.

It was a bad stretch of veld for lions ; the bush was fairly thick ; and there remained only two hours of daylight. Consequently, every available boy was sent out in search of the missing animals. Half an hour later, to our intense surprise, one of the piccanins returned, staggering under the weight of a newly-born black calf. The latter was very cold, and shivering violently. He had evidently come into the world a few days too soon, and,

at first, we had no hope of saving him. Still, we wrapped him up in blankets, forced some warm milk down his throat, and, before long, he revived. But we were still completely in the dark as to his parentage, not having expected any such addition to the herd. It was sundown before we were certain. Then Amous himself returned with the three missing beasts; they were Blom, a young red bull, and—the heifer-which-ran-away. She was the mother, and she had run away from her own calf! We unwrapped the little fellow, and tried to get her to take charge of it; but though Blom came up and nosed it in his usual friendly way, the mother never even looked at it, but strolled off to rejoin the herd. She never came near it again, and, in a few days, she was to all outward appearance just as she had been before. But, at the very first opportunity, I exchanged her for a bull with one of the Matabele headmen.

As for the calf, every one prophesied he would die at once; in fact, both the natives and the Afrikanders seemed to think there was something almost impious in our trying to keep him alive; moreover, we had practically no fresh milk. But Amyas took him in hand, used condensed milk when he could get nothing better, and, three weeks later, Michael, as he was christened, was strong and healthy as any ordinary calf; in fact, whenever he saw an enamelled basin, he would dash at it, imagining it contained milk.

Of all our cattle, my favourite was Biffel, the left hind-bullock of the black span, the chieftain of the whole herd. Not that I did not love the others, too, but, in some subtle way, Biffel was different. He was the biggest of those we bought during our first trip to the East, and though we bought others almost as big—Appel, Basket,

Scotchman, and Dudmaaker—none of them quite came up to him. All true Mashona cattle—and all really useful trek-cattle for that matter—are short in the legs, and long in the body, but Biffel had both these characteristics in an unusual degree; in fact, many people might have called him ugly on account of them; but he had a beautiful head, short, rather flat horns, and the kindest, wisest of eyes. He was very fond of strolling up in leisurely style to investigate strangers, with his head down, and, on the mining camps, men who did not understand cattle often drew back hastily, but, really, his was only friendly curiosity. If you went up to him, he would stand whilst you scratched his ears, or put your arm round his great neck.

I believe Amous loved Biffel better than anything else on earth. After the little man had been with me a year, I suddenly discovered that he had a wife in Bulawayo. We were outspanned at the Racecourse, and one day a pleasant-looking young Basutu woman came to fetch some things he wanted washed. After she had departed, he remarked casually to me that she was his wife, and that they had been married some years. Naturally, I was surprised. He had never even hinted at such a thing before, and I knew he could have sent her no money whilst he was in Mashonaland, because, at his request, I had kept all his money in my own cash-box.

He shrugged his shoulders when I asked him about it. There had been so many other important things to attend to, he explained, cattle to train, camps to build, reims and whips to make, all our affairs to think of. He was very fond of her, I believe, and she was, like most married native women, quite above suspicion; but she came long after Biffel in his estimation. I often

wondered whether he ever spoke to her as I have heard him speak to Biffel, when something had disturbed the great black bull during the night.

A touch from Amous' hand would always quiet Biffel. There was the most perfect sympathy between them. If Amous went out to the herd to see that they were on the right grass, his favourite would always lumber up to him, sniff at him for a moment, just to make sure that he was all right, then stroll back to his mates.

One little incident I can still remember as vividly as though it had happened yesterday. We reached a certain river just at dark, after a very long trek. There had been tremendous rains higher up country that day—we had seen the black clouds break, and knew what that meant—and unless we got across the drift that night, we might be held up for weeks.

Amous halted his cattle at the top of the drift, and he and Amyas went into the water. It was waist-deep, they reported, and it was evidently rising rapidly. The drift-wood proved that.

There was not a minute to be lost. We went straight in; the cattle pulled splendidly, despite their weariness; and the front oxen were on dry ground on the other side, when the front wheel on Biffel's side struck against a great stone.

It was an ugly position. Even as we groped at that boulder, trying to move it with our hands, we could feel the water was rising. Any moment, it might come down in a wall, and sweep both wagon and span away.

The cattle would not, or could not, pull the wagon over it. They could get no start. Really, there was only one chance—for Biffel to do it alone, for him to force

the düsselboom over, until the wheel had climbed the rock. Everything rested with him.

The span was backed, so as to slacken the trek-chain ; Appel, Biffel's mate, was told to hang back too ; then, very gently, Amous called to the black bull.

It was dark, but we were just able to see what was happening. Slowly, deliberately, Biffel went to work, pushing, always pushing at the yoke, until he seemed to rise high out of the flood, his huge body literally hunched up. Amous, his hand on the animal's back, was talking to him all the time ; yet it appeared to me as though he were asking Biffel to do the impossible. I think the little man himself was of the same opinion, for a new note came into his voice, something very nearly akin to fear.

And then with a rattle which ended in a crash, the wheel was over the rock ; the düsselboom swung back straight again ; the trek-chain grew suddenly taut as the other cattle put their weight on the yokes, and the wagon never stopped until it was at the top of the drift. Biffel had saved us.

Amongst Biffel's peculiarities—and no two bullocks are alike in character—was a very strong aversion to the ordinary herd-boys, the naked piccanins from the villages. He refused absolutely to allow them to inspan him, or to come near him when he was in the yoke. Amous was quick to note this, and used to rage at the youngsters, not at the bull.

“ Ho, dirty-bodied child ! ” he would shout. “ Why do you come near my hind-ox and let him see that you have never washed ? How often have I told you that he will not have savages without trousers near him ? He is wise indeed. Where is that big sjambok of mine ? ”

It may sound absurd—it didn't seem so at the time,

however—but we gave way to Biffel's prejudices to the extent of making the voorloeper of his span wear an old pair of trousers. The experiment succeeded admirably; Biffel ceased to get restless, and "turn the yoke," and would consent to be inspanned without poking the youngster in the ribs.

When the cattle are mustered in line for inspanning, the driver's first task is to put a reim on the horns of each. A well-trained span will stand absolutely still, the reims hanging down, until they are picked out, two by two, and tied to their own yokes. But, after the first season, Biffel never had a reim on his horns. He would come up with the others, take his place at the end of the line for a minute or so, just to see that everything was right, then stroll round the back of the wagon, and wait there until Amous called to him that he was ready. Then he would come up with a kind of slow dignity, and put his head under the yoke which his driver was holding up for him, a performance which used greatly to disgust his mate Appel, who was invariably inspanned first.

When we first started as cattle-owners with the one span, there was no possibility of any of the others disputing Biffel's claim to the leadership of the herd; but, later on, he had a good many stiff fights in support of his dignity. His last year, however, was a peaceful one, no other bull daring to challenge the big chieftain.

The etiquette of the cattle world is intensely interesting. Really, a bullock's whole life, or a very great part of it, is regulated by certain hard and fast rules of conduct. There are the things he must do, and the things he must avoid doing; and there is certain punishment for him if he offends against the laws of the herd.

The government is entirely despotic, the rule of the strongest ; but, at the same time, it is a kindly despotism, exercised for the benefit of all, unselfishly, the despot's main concern being the safety and honour of the herd.

A bull fight—a fight between bulls, I mean—is not the sanguinary affair which home-staying people might expect it to be. In the vast majority of cases, there is no ferocity about it, no desire to injure the opponent. It is merely a trial of strength, a pushing match, head to head, and the only wounds I have ever seen inflicted have been due to glancing blows from the tip of the horn when one of the combatants has stumbled.

Every new-comer has to fight for his place in the herd, for his right to feed with the rest, and to lie down in the scherm at night. Scores of times, I have known that cattle were being brought in for sale by hearing one of our own beasts roar out a defiance. If it was Biffel's deep voice, I was tolerably certain that a big bull, one worthy of the chieftain's personal attention, was coming along the valley.

When two parties of cattle meet, the procedure is always the same. The strangers halt, clustering together, whilst their champion goes forward alone, slowly, stopping every few yards to bellow. Meanwhile, the chief of the local herd has had time to decide on his course of action. If the new-comer appears worthy of the honour, he, himself, takes up the challenge ; but if the other is too small, he sends one of his followers, the second, or third, in command, to punish the stranger's presumption, and forthwith appears to lose all interest in the affair, turning away to go on with his feeding with rather ostentatious contempt.

The preliminaries to a fight are a long business. Any

one seeing for the first time, might reasonably expect that something really gory and horrible was about to happen. The champions advance a few yards, stop, bellow, paw the ground, drive their horns into the soil and toss great clods of earth into the air, advance again, and repeat the process, until they are within a length of each other. A final pawing and snorting, then they come together, not with the rush one might expect, but very, very slowly, gently almost, locking their horns.

After that, the real battle, the test of brute strength, begins. It is a shoving-match, pure and simple—there is no other phrase for it. With heads down, and backs arched almost to humps, they push, and push, and push, until one gives way, slipping, staggering perhaps, to go down on his knees, then to recover himself and retreat ignominiously. The victor gives a final bellow, tosses one more lump of soil into the air, then returns in leisurely fashion to his admiring subjects.

The big bull never takes on an unworthy opponent. There is always a second bull, who is not necessarily the next in point of strength, to uphold the honour of the herd against smaller strangers. For some reason or other, although he was about the tamest and mildest of our cattle, Fransman was always the deputy champion. After their first great fights with Biffel, Basket, Appel and Dudmaaker, seldom, if ever, fought strangers on their first appearance; and, after being defeated by the chief, a bull who has had the honour of meeting the latter does not try and vanquish the deputy. If you know your herd—and I believe all herds are the same—you can tell exactly what your cattle are going to do when a fresh bull comes amongst them.

Quite small cattle are, of course, not expected to fight

at all for a position. They are accepted by the seniors after a preliminary sniffing, though several times I saw Biffel, out of sheer kindness of heart, allow a little fellow to push at his great head for a few minutes.

Cows and heifers, of course, have no fighting to do. They seldom make friends with their own sex, and, as a rule, hasten to put themselves under the immediate protection of one of the larger bulls. Curiously enough, I never remember having seen two males actually fighting for the possession of a female.

In the scherm, each animal has its own place. I could go into our cattle kraal at Chivamba's on the darkest night, and be practically certain of finding any particular animal at the first attempt.

A leader with restless habits, one who is continually on the move when he is feeding, instead of finishing off one patch of grass before he passes on to the next, is an absolute nuisance. In time, he will infect all the other oxen with the same detestable spirit, and you will find them coming home in the evening only partially full. A restless youngster, on the other hand, will quickly be brought to order by a good chieftain.

Appel, who pulled as Biffel's mate during the first season, was very different from his yoke companion. In appearance, he was an extraordinary-looking beast—immensely thick and heavy, practically round in the middle, hornless, dull-red in colour, and possessing one of the most surly faces I have ever seen on any living creature. He was surly, too, at least with men he did not know, as well as with all other cattle. His strength was prodigious, and, even under the worst conditions, he seldom lost any of his fat. I bought him from a native on the Geelong, after I had ridden my first load down to

the store at M'Patane ; and Amous, whose joy over the purchase knew no bounds, immediately set to work to train him.

The task was no easy one. The only animal who was his equal in strength was Biffel, but he was needed in the düsselboom, where he pulled then as mate to Witkop, a Colonial ox ; consequently, he had to be inspanned at first with poor Fransman, who did not appreciate the honour.

Amous put the big red bull in three yokes up from the wagon ; and the first trek was a distinctly lively one. A hornless bull is always more savage than one with horns. He is full of tricks and deviltry. When he fights, and finds he is getting the worst of it, he tries foul tactics, such as jumping to one side and attempting to strike his opponent in the shoulder. Also, he bites, bites very hard and very skilfully.

Appel had all the peculiarities of his kind, and his vices were in proportion to his strength. The lack of horns makes it much more difficult to secure a beast in the yoke, and Appel managed to break loose twice during that first trek. Any one who did not understand trek-oxen might have looked on him as a distinctly bad subject ; but Amous knew better.

"He will make a trek-bullock indeed, Baas," he exclaimed joyfully, after he had secured Appel anew, and put a "turned yoke" right for the twentieth time. "See how he fights ! The bull who is tame, always tame, never works well. By and by, Appel will be fit to pull even with Biffel, the bull of all bulls."

Later on, I realized the truth of his words. Once or twice, I did buy tame bulls which turned out well—Blom and Fransman for instance—but they were all

beasts who had been already trained to pack work by their native owners, and they took to the yoke naturally. On the other hand, the bull with no spirit born in him was no use for work. He would allow you to inspan him, and would walk along in the yoke with perfect amiability, but he would not pull when you wanted him to do so.

As a general rule, the harder an animal fought, the nearer the head of the span he would pull in the end—the faster cattle always go high up the trek-chain—and, if he were absolutely wild for a week or so, you might reckon you were going to have a good front-ox.

Appel was an exception to the latter rule; but that was due to his surly temper. He was slow by nature, an ideal hind-ox, and, once he was trained, he never pulled anywhere but in the düsselboom. On the second day, we put him there with Biffel. A hind-bullock's duty is, of course, to steer the wagon in obedience to the driver's voice, and actually to work only in a heavy place. Normally, the eight middle cattle are supposed to pull the wagon. Appel had yet to learn this, and when he found himself inspanned as mate to Biffel, he suddenly determined to have a real trial of strength of a new kind. Biffel had beaten him fairly easily in an ordinary fight, but the red bull thought he saw a chance of revenge now. Hitherto, in the yoke, he had either fought or hung back; now, he simply put the whole of his mighty strength in his work, which meant that Biffel had to do the same, or be forced clean backwards, almost on to the front wheel.

During the greater part of that trek, the hind bullocks literally pulled the wagon; but, by the time we reached the outspan, Appel had learnt his lesson, learnt that it was no use attempting that sort of trick with Biffel.

In a few days, he was a thoroughly trained hind-ox, obedient instantly to Amous' voice ; but his animosity towards his mate remained, and often in a heavy place, as he hunched himself up against the yoke, I used to see him glance maliciously at the other, challenging him to yet another trial of strength.

Appel had a curious affection for me—curious, because his nature was such a surly one. It began when he developed a huge abscess under the skin of the neck, the result of a yoke sore, on which the flies must have settled. It became so bad that I decided to open it. The operation was not an easy one, as his skin was at least half an inch in thickness, and the only instrument I had was a razor. Still, it was entirely successful, and Appel never seemed to forget the relief I had given him on that occasion. Innumerable men wished to buy him off us—one breeder offered forty pounds for him—but in the end he died in Selukwe with the rest of our oxen.

Our great pride during the latter part of our life on the Road was in our black span. It was the finest team of native cattle in Rhodesia—every one admitted that—and every beast in it was one we had bought and trained ourselves. Moreover, it was the only really black span I ever saw. There was not a speck of white on any of the sixteen cattle, which, with the exception of the big hind and next-hind oxen, were all practically the same size. The wagon and gear were relatively as good as the cattle, and our pride in it was thoroughly legitimate. The team pulled together like one beast, and only in the very worst places did it ever stick. The animals were hard as nails, always in the pink of condition, even when the grass was at its worst, and the big Colonial oxen were mere walking skeletons. Needless to say, Amous was the

driver. His delight in the span was unbounded, his only regret being that Appel, who was red, had to be put to work in another team.

A couple of months before the black span started for Mashonaland for the last time, Amyas refused five hundred and fifty pounds for it without the wagon, probably a record offer for sixteen native cattle.

Our rule was to buy every beast we could get at a reasonable figure—if you pay too much for one bull, you send up the price of the next fifty offered to you, so quickly does the news spread through the kraals—and to break in all that seemed likely to make decent trek-oxen. The showy young bulls, with big dewlaps and small hind quarters, the old oxen that were past work, and the half-trained ones that did not shape well, we sold to the butchers, who were usually not very particular as to what they bought. Several times, we sold complete spans, getting very good prices for them, although it was known that we were keeping all the best workers for our own teams, of which we had four during the last season.

Even now, I can remember three-quarters of the cattle in those spans. The majority of them, of course, had no remarkable characteristics; but there were one or two which stood out strongly.

Jackalass, an extremely sturdy red bull, was the very first beast we ever bought, and made one of our best hind bullocks. Bandom, who could follow a cart spoor across the veld on a dark night, would have been an ideal front ox, but for the fact that he always overworked himself, and we were constantly compelled to let him run loose. Even then, he would round up with the others, and stroll away dejectedly when no reim was put

on his horns. Sixpence, another of the original team, was perfectly reliable. You could put him to work anywhere, on either side of the chain, at either end of the span, and he would adapt himself to the work. Blom, who always wanted to mess round the camp itself, and seemed to consider that he ought to be a kind of pet, was as lazy as he was handsome.

Basket—I could never discover why Amous gave him that name—belonged to the second year. He was a magnificent black bull, with no trace of horns, and the fight between him and Biffel was the greatest we ever had at Chivamba's. It lasted, on and off, for the greater part of the day; but, in the end, the new-comer was fairly beaten, after he had tried the hornless bull's rather foul tactics of sudden charges at the shoulder. He took his defeat philosophically, but, when he was inspanned for the first time next day, he proved himself about the toughest customer Amous ever tackled, ending up by being one of the best workers.

Englishman was one of my failures. He was brought in early one morning. A fine, upstanding red and white bull, far bigger than the average, he came up the little kopje at a run, bellowing with rage. He had smelt the other cattle, who were then away with the wagon, and he was challenging them all. I made up my mind at once that I must buy him, even if I gave an unusually large figure for him. The owner asked a ridiculous price, eighteen pounds, I think. We argued the matter out at intervals all through the day, and, just at dark, I secured him for eleven pounds, the highest price I ever gave for a bull.

When we came to inspan him, however, we found that he shaped badly, from the very start. He did not fight in

the yoke ; he just hung back. With a great deal of trouble, Amous got him to pull fairly well ; and then his hoofs gave out. I had not noticed before—none of us had noticed really—that his feet were unusually small. He went dead lame, lost his condition in an appalling manner, and, though I shod him myself, he was never any good for work. Nor did he pick up again, at least, he never got back to what he had been ; and in the end I was glad to sell him to the butcher for twelve pounds.

Swartland came into our possession in rather an unusual way. We were going shooting with the Scotch cart, and were making our way down a long valley, when, all of a sudden, there was a roar, and a large black bull charged out of the scrub. He had never seen cattle at work before, and he had not the least idea why those six oxen should be walking along in orderly fashion, instead of answering his challenge. He came straight on, not slowing down in the least, dashed right into the span, without doing the least harm ; but as he emerged from under the trek chain, Amous was ready for him, with his whip doubled.

The stranger did not wait to discover what had hit him, but went back to the kraal even faster than he had come. However, he had drawn attention to himself as being an unusually fine beast, so we outspanned at the water hole, and, before we went on, we had bought him.

In a way, Dudmaaker was our most remarkable beast, for he was the one bull in Rhodesia, the one bull in Africa perhaps, who had killed a lion singlehanded. He came from a kraal about ten miles east of Chivamba's. We happened to be shooting in the neighbourhood, and camped at the village. The moment we saw him, we wanted him. He was as big as Biffel, though, like Biffel,

the shortness of his legs made him look smaller than he really was, but, as a matter of fact, he was a veritable giant, compared with the average Mashona bull. His neck was so thick that, later on, when we came to inspan him, it would hardly go between the yoke-skeys.

The cattle scherm belonging to the village was a typical one, built of more or less rotten poles of uneven length, with an enormous boulder forming one of its sides. It would only hold a dozen beasts, who had to stand half way up to their knees in mud. At the time of our visit, however, there were but six cattle in it—the huge black bull, two cows, and three calves.

As usual, we reviled the local savages for the state of their scherm, discovered that, in the morning, they would be glad to sell the bull, provided we would agree to let them have a bull calf in part payment—the spirits of the ancestors of the owner would insist on that—then we turned in, and slept until about two a.m., when we were awakened by a most appalling noise.

It was quite unnecessary for our boys to shout out that a lion had arrived on the scene. The lion himself was telling us that, though the great bull's roar almost drowned the growls of the visitor.

A moment later, almost before we could pluck handfuls of grass out of the nearest thatch to serve as torches, we realized that the lion was in retreat. He paused for a second or two at the edge of the clearing to snarl out a last defiance; but when we heard his voice again, he must have been half a mile away, down by the water hole.

Meanwhile, the bull was frantic with rage. It was quite out of the question to go into the scherm and attempt to discover what had happened. None of the cattle had been killed, our boys reported, but when daylight came,

we saw that one of the cows had been badly mauled on the shoulders ; that, with some dried blood on the bull's horn, and a big patch of blood outside the scherm, explained it all.

From the top of the big rock, the lion had dropped on to the cow's back. He must have been very hungry, or he would never have attempted such a thing, but would have kept to his usual noble tactics of terrifying the beasts until they broke out of the scherm. He had got his claws into the cow, but there had been time for him to do no more before the bull had driven a horn clean into his intestines, and tossed him over the fence.

He was an old lion and was very thin—some wandering Kaffirs found the remains of his carcase several days later—but, even then, he must have weighed several hundred pounds. The physical strength required to toss him was enormous, but the courage of his slayer was more extraordinary still, when one remembers the blind terror which the mere scent of a lion usually inspires in cattle.

Naturally, we bought the victor, and when he arrived at Chivamba's, the Mashona came in scores to see the bull who had done what no other bull had ever done before in the annals of the Mashona. We had expected a big fight when he met Biffel—in fact, as Biffel was tired from a couple of months' hard work, I should not have been surprised to see the leadership of the herd wrested from him ; but, instead, the two had a very mild pushing match, a formal affair really, and the new-comer immediately settled down as one of the herd. Nor was he any trouble to train. Within a week of killing the lion, he was working quite cheerfully in the düsselboom of the black span's wagon, greatly to the surprise of his former

owners, who had fully believed him to be possessed of a devil, and had been thankful to get rid of him.

The stipulation made in this case, that they were to receive a smaller beast in part payment, was a very common one. It was due to the fact that many calves are dedicated to the spirit of some deceased headman ; they are sacrificial beasts, to be slaughtered and made the basis of a huge feast at some future date. The latter is fixed by the witch-doctor, who, by throwing the bones, is always able to discover when the ghost of the departed calls for meat. As a rule, ghosts are able to keep their appetites in check until the sacrificial beast is absolutely full grown, usually until he is on the point of dying of old age. In nine cases out of ten, you will find that the big animal which has aroused your envy is dedicated, and, at first, an offer to buy him is met with a blank refusal, but it is generally possible to arrange the matter. With the aid of Kaffir beer, as much as can be made from a two hundred pound sack of grain, the dedication can be transferred to another animal, a two months' old calf even. Consequently, if you are prepared to give a sum in cash, a calf, and a bag of grain, you can often bring off a thoroughly good deal, which is satisfactory both to you and to the former owner, though, possibly, the spirit of the deceased headman does not view it so favourably. Still, that is his affair, not yours.

THROUGH THE LION COUNTRY

CHAPTER XI

THROUGH THE LION COUNTRY

THE end of our first trading season found us in an awkward position. We had a hundred head of cattle—of which some fifty were more or less trained. With a little trouble, we could have made up three spans ; but we only had the one light wagon, and there seemed little or no chance of our being able to buy any more until we reached Bulawayo. The military authorities appeared to have purchased every wagon in the country. Even the old “ Rinderpest Wagons ” from the Palapye-Tuli Road, those which had been abandoned during the great plague, were fetched up and sold. Before the war very few of them would have realized twenty shillings—the sun, the rain, and the white ants had done their work pretty thoroughly—but the British officer was not very wise, and his Afrikander adviser, selected by the Chartered Company, was very slim, and the price became whatever was asked, up to a hundred pounds.

It is curious now to look back on the unutterable ignorance displayed during that Boer War. The wonder is, not that it took us so long and cost us so much to win, but that we ever won at all. It was not only that our officers did not know, but, in nine cases out of ten, they would not learn. In Rhodesia, if an Englishman

tried to tell them anything, they were usually childishly insulting. They went to the Afrikanders for their information. In the majority of cases, I think the officers realized that the average Englishman up there was of better birth and education than themselves, and that he despised them for their inefficiency and conceit, and, therefore, they tried to keep him at a distance by means of studied rudeness.

During that campaign in the North Transvaal, the co-operation of the Home-born civilians would have saved the Empire millions of money, hundreds of lives; but the mere offer of advice usually led to an insulting answer. Perhaps, however, the War Office sent its very worst to Rhodesia. I should like to think it was so. Imagination boggles at the idea of what would happen if it were possible—thank Heaven it is not—for men of that type to enter the Navy.

Sometimes, I think it is a curse to have a good memory. I have never forgiven an insult, or forgotten an injury. Recollections which I should be only too glad to wipe out still remain, vivid, in their natural colours.

In the whole of Rhodesia I do not believe that there was a keener patriot than myself, yet, more than once, when I have seen military transport in difficulties, and, as a man who knew every move in the game, offered to help it out with my own cattle, have been treated almost as a Boer spy. It was a suspicious circumstance that I understood the work, and treated the officer in command as a social equal.

So I have neither love nor respect for the British Army officer. They say that, since the Boer War, and, perhaps even more since the Russo-Japanese War, that there is a new school growing up, a new school which is, in part,

a reversion to the old ideal, when an officer had to be a gentleman as well, that the wealthy tradesman's grandson is no longer in the majority, and that the same class of man who is to be found in the Indian Army, and the Indian Civil Service, is now entering the British Army. I trust it is so. The nation could not survive another scandal like that of the South African War.

A war! In three years, with a quarter of a million men in the field, we had between twenty and thirty thousand killed and wounded, and grew hysterical over the fact. General Nogi "spent" a hundred thousand lives in taking Port Arthur alone, and his country remained calm. It knew it was getting value for blood. But it knew, too, that the Government would not do what we have done in South Africa, meekly hand back the spoils of victory to the vanquished.

The worst of writing reminiscences is that one is apt to get away from the main subject. I started this chapter about buying wagons, or being unable to buy them, and I find I have wandered as far away as Port Arthur.

We were compelled to leave our trading station at Chivamba's in September, and to take our cattle with us. To have remained would have been sheer lunacy. No white man could have lived through a wet season in the low veld. The damp heat would have been appalling; the rivers would all have been in flood, cutting him off from communication with his kind; the country would have been one vast swamp of black mud, alive with mosquitoes; whilst there would have been no trade of any sort doing, for all the natives would have been busy in their fields, sowing the new crops.

An appalling amount of rubbish has been written concerning the African savage, about his laziness, his

inability to recognize the Nobility of Toil, his want of appreciation of the privilege of pounding a drill in a mine shaft for eight hours daily. He has been denounced in the Press and in Parliament, he has been prayed over, in churches, chapels, and synagogues. Legislation has been passed to overcome his failings; special taxes having been devised to prove to him the necessity of earning money; labour agents have raided his kraals, and have carried off the able-bodied men—yet all this strenuous humanitarianism has been wasted. The savage remains a savage, a small cultivator, whose main interests in life are his home, his family, and his crops. He wants to be at home, at least during seed-time and harvest. He may be very black, very crude, and may smell very evilly, but, none the less, he is painfully human, and, knowing him well, I cannot foresee the day when the dividend of a mining company will be more important to him than the filling of that grain bin, in which the food of his wife and children is stored.

There is no trading to be done in the wet season down amongst the granite kopjes of the low veld. As practically every trader who tried to remain on his station throughout the summer died before he had a chance to tell any one about the horrors of his experience, not much is known of the subject of the weather and conditions generally; but we were quite ready to assume that these were disgusting.

We simply cleared everything out of the camp, and left the place to look after itself. Though we fully intended to erect some decent huts when we returned in the autumn, so far we had been content with very crude little hovels, the best of which was not more than fourteen feet across. None of our huts had a proper door—even the

store itself was only closed at night by a reed-screen—which meant that the fowls, and anything else which happened to be on the prowl, walked in and out at will.

Until I lived in that camp, I never knew that it was possible to hate a fowl so greatly, to have such a detestation for an individual bird, such a loathing for chickens in the mass. We used to buy them by the score, almost by the hundred, hardy little birds very little larger than bantams. As a rule, we gave a small measure of white beads for them, but never did we give anything which had cost us more than threepence, a price with which the owners always seemed well content.

The unfortunate birds used to come in hung by their legs from a stick, gasping for air, for water, their necks screwed round in the most pitiful manner. Often, I found that they had been travelling for a couple of days like this, without even a drink. The heathen in his blindness is a pretty cruel brute at times, entirely without sympathy for the animal world.

However, though those fowls might be terribly done when we released them, and all our sympathies might go out to them, they were not long in recovering. Probably, within twenty-four hours we had begun to hate them, as we hated all their comrades. The energy of those Mashona birds was appalling, terrifying. It seemed almost inconceivable that anything created could be so uselessly, so fatuously busy. From dawn till sunset, those fowls never rested. As a rule we had between two or three hundred of them—two were killed for the pot every day, and every night the “schelm,” owls, or wild cats, had two or three more—but out of those two or three hundred one quarter seemed always to be trying to lay eggs in your hut, screaming and screeching at you because

you turned them out, and coming back within twenty seconds to have another attempt.

I shall never forget those first huts, and the ways of those fowls. During that season, I had malaria constantly, and it is more easy to imagine than to describe the sensation of having a broody hen standing on the end of your bed, cackling violently, whilst you, yourself, are huddled up under the blankets, shivering with ague, half-crazy with headache.

When the second trading season came, we had proper huts, with doors and windows ; also we made a point of training our new lot of fowls, building them a house of their own lower down the kopje.

We left nothing in the camp that year. We even took away our enemies the fowls, turning the Scotch cart into a big coop, capable of holding about a hundred and fifty of the birds, who, under Daniel's guidance, quickly learnt to get in and out of it at the outspans. So far as I can remember, we lost none of them on the trip, and in Bulawayo we sold them for half-a-crown a-piece.

In addition to the fowls, we had a number of pairs of bucks' horns, ranging from an eland's down to a reed-buck, and, more important still, about half a ton weight of selected native tobacco, the very first Rhodesian tobacco ever put on the market, the beginning of the now flourishing Rhodesian tobacco industry.

So far as trading goods were concerned, we even actually sold out, so we had no trouble on that score.

No rain had fallen when we left the store, yet, so long as we remained in the kopje country, we found plenty of grass and water ; but the moment we got on to that abominable high veld everything was changed.

Grass ! There seemed not to be a blade of it anywhere.

We should have been glad enough even of the rank, sour stuff which usually clothes that much-vaunted pastoral country; but all this had been burnt off. Black ash, swirling round in a bitterly cold wind—that was all we found for some twenty-five miles. And the surface of the roads! Fine, sharp stones which cut the bullocks' feet to pieces. I had always hated the high veld, but I loathed it then, wondering more and more what made us pour out blood and money in wresting it from the Boer and the Kaffir. A forsaken country, a country utterly unsuitable for white occupation, the Bad Debt of the Empire—such were my feelings then, such were they when I finally left South Africa. Perhaps, if I went back, I might find reason to change my views, but I doubt it. A country which is wholly dreary and depressing can never produce a happy race. The "Dopper" is the logical result of the scenery of the high veld, and it is the Dopper who will become the dominant type in the sub-continent. He suits the country. His narrow-mindedness, his immorality, his personal uncleanness, his bigoted pseudo-piety—all these harmonize perfectly with his surroundings. You could not expect to breed normal white men on the high veld of South Africa.

Our cattle were, of course, all low veld animals. With the exception of the original span, none of them had ever been near those barren, wind-swept uplands. They felt the cold terribly, and felt the lack of grass even more. Huddled together, with rough coats, lowered heads, and sides sunken in, they made a picture of abject misery. We happened to have some bags of mealies on the wagon, and we tried to get them to eat some of these. But it was no use. The only food they would take was that which they cropped for themselves.

Then, too, they grew footsore. They were used to soft ground, and the sharp little stones of that abominable road cut their hoofs to pieces. I happened to have a few ox-shoes, and I shod several of them, but one was too bad to travel at all. We could not wait for him, because there was no grass, and we could not leave him to die ; so we threw him, lashed his legs together, and then, after infinite exertion, actually loaded him up on the wagon, where he remained for twenty-four hours. When we unloaded him and freed him, on the river bank, he was stiff and shaky, but the soreness had gone out of his feet, and, a few months later, he was one of our best working bullocks.

In the case of another beast, however, we were not so fortunate. "Shilling" was the tamest animal we ever had. When he was brought in for sale, a piccanin was riding on his back, and had he not been such a beautiful creature—short-legged, long-bodied, black with a white collar—I should have hesitated about buying him, because the very quiet bull is seldom a good worker. He is apt to walk along passively in the yoke.

But Shilling was an exception. A very few days' training, and he was a most excellent hind-bullock, answering to his name, and understanding his work perfectly. He never seemed to resent having to toil in the span. In short, in many ways he was almost unique, and we soon grew to have a very real affection for him.

He was not particularly fat when we bought him ; but I should never have believed it possible for an animal to get thin so quickly as did Shilling when we reached the high veld. The flesh seemed almost to fall off him. Of course, he was not working ; yet at the end of a trek, he was far more weary than was any of the span. The night

before we reached Fort Victoria, though we seemed to have done everything possible to save him, he died.

The loss of Shilling gave us our final distaste for the high veld. They told us that the whole of the two hundred or so miles between Victoria and Bulawayo was almost as bad as the stretch we had just covered, that the season was a record one for badness of grass. Yet, somehow or other, we had to reach Bulawayo.

To go across the high country with our young low-veld cattle would have been to invite disaster. Half of them would have met the same fate as Shilling, more than half, perhaps. Still, what else could we do? It was at this moment that some one happened to mention an Old Road, a track which nobody had used for years, leading from Victoria to the Belingwe District.

We fairly jumped at the information. Of necessity, that track must run through fertile, well-watered country; and, once we got to Belingwe, there would be no difficulty in getting across to Bulawayo.

There was one drawback—there is a drawback to everything in South Africa—the track led through a rotten lion country. No district north of the Crocodile River had a worse name in that respect, and with a hundred cattle, most of them more or less wild, we seemed likely to be in for a vivid time.

However, there was practically no alternative. Every hour we remained on the high veld we were losing heavily through the cattle getting thinner; so we hurriedly took on some provisions, and trekked away to the south-east. That very evening our course of action seemed to be justified, for we struck a valley in which a shower of rain had fallen a week or so before.

The great, ungainly Colonial oxen would have died

from eating that short, sweet green grass. It would have been too much for them, too sudden a change; but to our native cattle it meant new life. We halted them a couple of days, giving them a chance to pick up, and they made the most of their opportunity. It was delightful to see how they revelled in the place. Although we were hardly over the edge of the plateau, the hills around sheltered us from the bitter winds, whilst there was an ample supply of running water. Then, too, the grass had attracted the game from miles round, and we could have shot ten times as much as we needed. Even the egregious Mr. Roosevelt might have been happy there for a day or two.

In Rhodesia, you can never say definitely that you are not going to find lions, or be found by them, because they are always on the wander, seeking a chance of making themselves detestable. On the other hand, that peaceful little valley was not a likely place for them to visit, as the game was only there temporarily. Consequently, we did not worry about them at the moment; though we did worry very much about their future doings.

If it were absolutely necessary to do so, we could tie up about half our cattle. That is to say that, after an immense amount of trouble, we could get reims on their horns, and make them fast to the wagon or trek gear. But the others were all unbroken. They had never been tied up in their lives, and they would resent the process most savagely. Besides, we had neither enough boys nor enough reims for the purpose. Consequently, our only plan was to camp down early every evening, build as good a scherm as was possible in the time, keep fires going round it all night, and trust to luck.

Our chief fear was, not that the lions would get into the

scherms, but that they would terrify the cattle so greatly that they broke out, and scattered all over the veld.

The day after leaving that valley we struck a farm, one of the very few in Rhodesia on which I ever saw anything being grown. The owner, whom we had left in Victoria, had told us proudly of his vegetables, and given us permission to help ourselves. He himself found it more profitable to act as barman in the hotel during the wet season. When we came to search, the vegetables were reduced down to a large patch of eschalots, which, curiously enough, had thriven exceedingly. We took him at his word, and helped ourselves, gathering a supply which lasted a fortnight. Until you have been four or five years without tasting any vegetables save sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and tomatoes, you cannot understand how keen it is possible to become over a mere onion.

That same morning we had a typical example of the ways of a Kaffir cook-boy. We were having breakfast beside the wagon, and, the tin of condensed milk being finished, the cook-boy was sent to fetch a new one. As he was rather a long time over his job, Amyas got up to investigate. Going quickly round the end of the wagon, he found the savage with the opened tin, and a spoon, which latter he was putting first into the milk and then into his mouth, gobbling down the sticky mess.

He gave a yelp or two as he dropped the tin. Amyas only had on a pair of very light shoes, but I suppose that the hint was sufficient. We never saw that cook-boy again. Probably, a sense of his own unworthiness overcame him, or he may have thought that the atmosphere of a mission station—there was one a few miles away, run by Dutch Reformed preachers, who are by no means Reformed Dutchmen—might suit him better.

I think it was the following day that we came across a Native Commissioner, quite the most efficient Native Commissioner in Mashonaland. Unlike most of his kind, he was not South African born, and, unlike many of his kind, he had never been accused of using his office for his own private profit, of fining natives so many cattle and entering up the fine as having been so many sovereigns.

He had a huge district, and he managed it wonderfully. Other Native Commissioners—most of them were Natal men, suffering from "Natal Fever," chronic tiredness—remained all the year in their camp, surrounded by a crowd of native parasites, female and male, and allowed their black police to do much as they liked, to assess the hut-tax, to level blackmail from the whole countryside; but the methods of this particular N.C. were different. He was always on patrol. So far as possible, he visited every kraal himself, counting the huts, insisting on cleanliness, using his sjambok freely when he found cases of cruelty to animals, bullocks up to their knees in mud and dung, goats left lashed to post throughout the whole day.

His native name was a rare tribute to his ability. It meant one of those little rock-lizards whose heads appear to be on pivots, who can always keep their eyes on you.

The amusing part about our meeting was the conversation we had after dinner. A very keen hunter himself, he objected to any one else shooting in his district. He broke all the game laws without the very slightest compunction—we were at one on that point—but he objected strongly to any one else doing the same. He waxed quite eloquent on the subject. The year before, he told us, two white men had come out of Matabeleland with half a dozen pack donkeys, and, whilst camped on the Lundi

River, one of them had shot a bull hippopotamus, which had been lost in the end, owing to its being swept down by the current. He had gone in pursuit of them, he went on, but they had just managed to escape him.

As I happened to be the white man who had shot that hippo bull, the story had a distinct interest for me. Previously, I had had no idea that Justice had been on my track over the episode.

There was plenty of grass, plenty of water, on that old road ; though, in many places, the track was so greatly over-grown that it was most difficult to follow. Really, no one had used it since the Pioneer days, and, very likely, no one has used it since we went down it, in that year 1900.

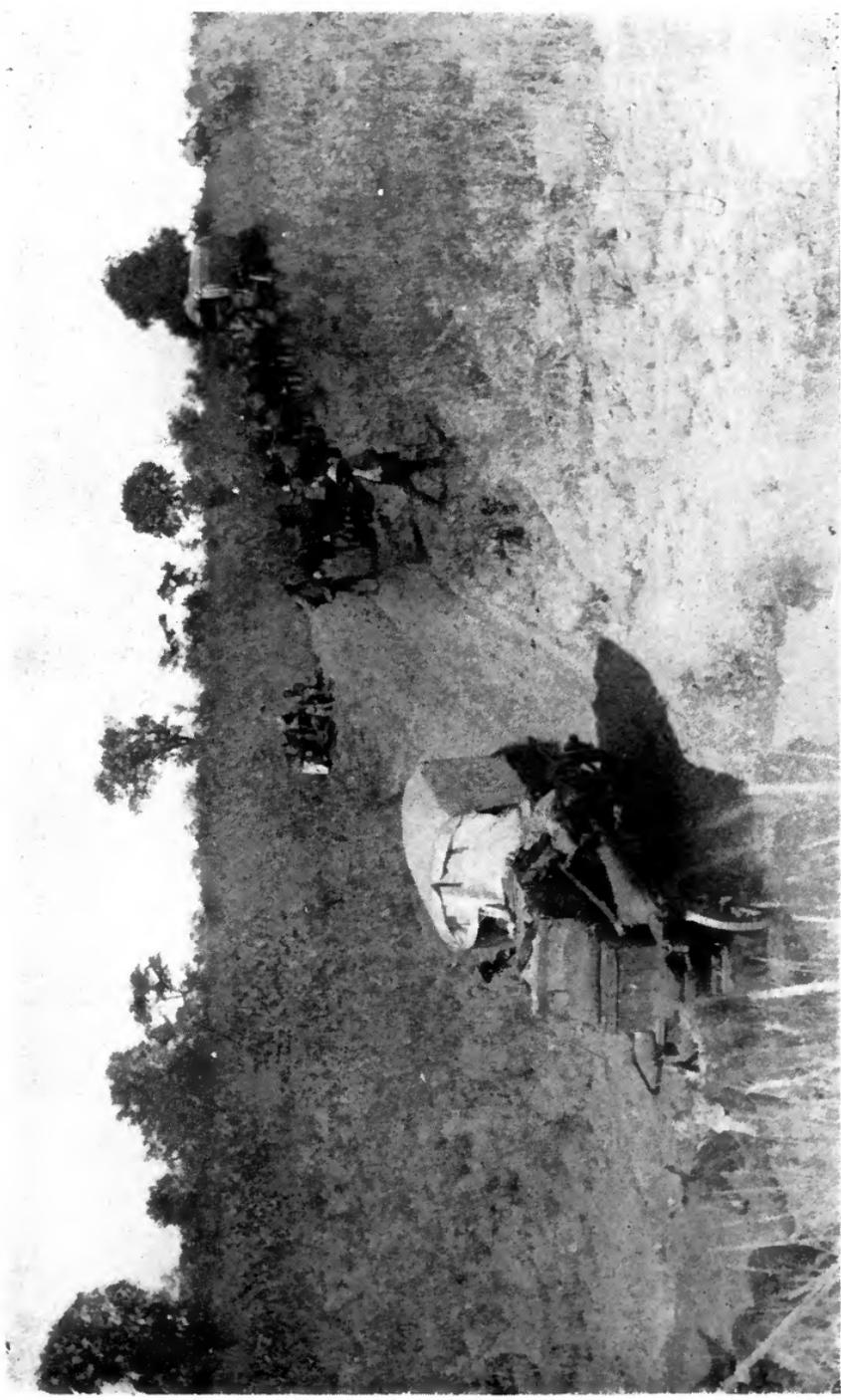
Every night, we made as strong a scherm as possible, though I do not think we ever succeeded in constructing one out of which the cattle could not have broken, had the lions outside really scared them. It takes days to put up such a scherm. It has to be of thorn bush, and thorn may not be readily available ; it has to be high, so that the lion cannot see in, and, therefore, does not think of trying to jump in ; and, to hold a hundred head of oxen, it has to be of considerable circumference. Consequently, it is safe to say that on no occasion during that trip did we have a safe, or anything like a safe, scherm, a fact of which we were only too well aware. Our savages were supposed to take it in turns to keep the watch-fires going, but it was almost impossible to hold them to their work. They would go to sleep, and it always fell to Amyas and myself to do the job.

The cattle were ours. If the lions ate one, we were so many pounds out of pocket ; whereas the Kaffir could not help thinking of the delightful stews to be made out of the fragments which the lion had left. The points of view

were so different. I will not say that our boys wanted the lions to succeed—certainly, Amous was absolutely loyal—but it was absurd to expect them to feel the same interest as ourselves.

Amous, being a Basutu, belonging to the Premier Race of South Africa, was, of course, a clean feeder. He held in detestation the foul things beloved of inferior races. He was quite impartial in his dislikes, recognizing no degrees of inferiority. To him, a Zulu was no better than a Mashona, both being savages. He would only touch things killed in a cleanly way. The ordinary savage, on the other hand, had no scruples. Meat was meat, no matter how, or when, it had been killed. I have come on the remains of a waterbuck bull with the saliva of the lions still hot on it—the killers must have been watching us from the bush—and have seen my boys grill those foul fragments, unwashed, and eat them, there and then. I have seen my carriers fight the sated vultures off the carcass of a sable antelope which had died of mortification from a bullet wound, and have had to turn them and their cooking pots out of camp because of the poisonous smell.

Verily, I believe that nothing is too foul for the average African savage. I have seen him do almost incredible things in the way of eating, have seen him swallow stuff which would have killed a normal man. Not until you learn to understand the native languages can you grasp, in the least degree, his attitude toward foodstuffs: then, you realize that, to him, the only form of food is grain, usually in the shape of porridge. Everything else—meat, beans, vegetables, monkey nuts—is merely flavouring for the porridge, the food. The more flavouring you have, the more food you need. Ordinarily,



SIX MILES A DAY!

NOVA
ANNUAL

without meat, you eat two or three pounds of meal a day ; but if you have five pounds of meat, you will want five pounds of meal to go with it. To the man at Home, the statement may seem incredible, but, time after time, I have seen each of my boys eat some ten pounds of half-cooked flesh and six or seven pounds of meal within the twenty-four hours. Once, when I shot a hippo close to a large kraal, when it was possible to trade meat for meal, I am sure these figures were exceeded. I was ill, and could not trek, and I am certain that, for three solid days, the process of cooking and eating never ceased.

Still, on this occasion, our savages were doomed to disappointment. We travelled very slowly—I think that we were nearly three weeks in the lion country—and every night one or other of us sat up with a shot-gun, watching the fires, and ready to let drive at any prowling schelm. Yet, absurd though it may sound, no schelm put in an appearance. I cannot even recall a hyæna sniffing round, much less a lion. Only on the very last morning, just at dawn, when we were inspanning to trek into the comparative security of Belingwe, did we hear a lion—and he was a full two miles away.

Probably, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a mob of cattle like ours would have been decimated by lions on that old road. They would have been scattered over the veld, and picked up, one by one. Our luck was simply amazing. Moreover, not only had we got them through whole ; but their hoofs had gradually hardened with the trekking, and they had recovered all the condition they had lost on the high veld.

Belingwe was not particularly exciting. Probably, to-day, it calls itself a township ; but, at that time, it consisted mainly of a canteen, with a Native Commis-

sioner's camp, some police huts, and a few odd buildings attached. The canteen was, of course, the important feature. Life in South Africa always revolves round a canteen. Eliminate the whisky, and half the little veld-townships would cease to exist.

Personally, I blame no man for drinking heavily in South Africa. I did so myself, comparatively speaking. I was only a youngster, really—I was about nineteen when I landed there—but I was soon able to hold my own fairly well. On the mines, and in those wretched little townships, the canteen was, of necessity, the centre of social life. The white women were so very few that, save in a few rare instances, they had no effect on the community in general.

Men drank—we all drank—because there was nothing else to do. The weaklings died quickly, of course; and some who were not altogether weak died too. Most of the men of those days are dead—nine-tenths of them are dead, I suppose—which is one of the reasons why, to-day, I am amongst the most lonely of mankind, why because, when I write of those old days, the tears will insist on coming into my eyes.

Since those days, I have known the Love of Woman, and lost the Woman I loved; but Love and Friendship are too very different things, and I have made no new friends. How can you be friends with a man whose grit you have never tested? You may like him, but that is all. You must be quite certain of his personal courage before you can admit him to intimacy.

And so I remain a very lonely man, one of the most lonely men imaginable. Amyas, my brother and comrade of those days, died in Manila; and I never meet any one else who can talk to me of yoke-skeys and strops,

of the guinea-fowl calling in the mealie lands and the reed-buck whistling in the long grass just before dawn, of the hyæna reviling all creation and the Go-away bird warning the game of your approach.

Sometimes, I feel I have been cursed in having been given so good a memory. I cannot forget. I can picture every past scene, remember all the dead men of the past.

Yet I am not despondent. Love has come to me again, come out of infinite sorrow, infinite travail, and, ahead, I can see the possibilities of a great happiness, and perfect peace, of all those things which, hitherto, I have missed in my ill-regulated life ; but the Past remains, the memory of those old days, and when I have finished this book, I would give much for a drink of the Waters of Lethe, so that I could face the Future, untrammelled by regrets.

To forget, to forget ! Scenes, conversations, mere phrases even, burn themselves into your brain, at least, if you are a lonely man. I left Home too young—I was only seventeen when I went to Australia—to know much of conventions, and since I came back at the age of twenty-eight, broken in health and in pocket, to begin life anew, I have troubled little about them.

The sayings of conventional people, of the dwellers in suburbs, the Good Folk who catch trains, never worry me. I have been a storm centre of scandal, and have remained the only person unmoved by the blast. The Little People, the dwellers in villas, the obvious patrons of local dressmakers, may talk until they are blue in the face about me, and I shall not be disturbed. Being essentially self-satisfied—at least, that is my pose—I murmur to myself the Arab proverb, “ The dog barks, the caravan passes on.” But the words and actions of

those who matter, the one or two I love, and the two or three I hate, are different. I forget none of them.

“The one or two I love”—that phrase is wrong. A man only loves one person, The Woman ; though he may like others.

I wonder, is there a special Valhalla for those who died brave deaths, died in the Empire's cause? There should be such a place. Certainly there could be no peace if they found themselves quartered in the same Mansion as the former stockbroker and the retired grocer.

I suppose that a scientific observer, having watched the Home-born men in Rhodesia in those days, weighed them up mentally, tabulated their characteristics, would have come to the conclusion that the majority of them consisted of atavisms. They were not normal products of the nineteenth century ; there was no taint of the Victorian Age on them, no smugness, no false sentiment, no fear. The Elizabethan spirit was the strongest, adventure mainly for adventure's sake, the longing to know what was beyond the horizon ; but, now and then, you got the fifteenth century. You might almost imagine that the ghosts of the old Free Companions had once more taken on bodily form.

There is none of that spirit in South Africa to-day. Most of the men who did the Pioneer work are dead, and the majority of the remainder shook the dust of the country off their feet when the spoils of war were handed back to the Boers. “*Civis Romanus sum*” is ever the motto of the Pioneer. He comes from Home, and he hopes, when he has made his money, to return Home to spend it. The very idea of Colonial self-government is detestable to him. Being a Public School man, he has been taught, and remembers vaguely, that the Roman

Empire fell when the Provincials were allowed to become Roman citizens.

In Belingwe, we had quite a good time, meeting some of our own kind in a canteen where you sat on empty whisky cases, and poisoned yourself with potato spirit, which the Teutonic patriots in Port Elizabeth sent up in the bottles of famous British firms. Then we went on again, the last stage but one on our long journey.

There was a direct road, of a sort, from Belingwe to Bulawayo ; but we were warned against it. There was not a blade of grass to be found along the last forty miles, we were told. Moreover, not only was game scarce, but an absurd police corporal, a new-comer, duty-struck, was trying to obtain convictions against transport-riders for shooting in the close season. You would never be convicted, of course, but there would be the worry of having to appear, whilst the corporal was such a miserable little rat of a Colonial that you could not give him a hiding.

Consequently, we decided to trek on to M'Patane, cross the Umsingwane River near my old mine, the Geelong, and from there take a newly made track up to Bulawayo.

Incidentally, we were going to stop and do some shooting on the Flats.

The Belingwe Flats are a vast expanse of level veld covered with just enough low bush, and a sufficiency of small trees, to render it an ideal hunting country. There was plenty of cover for stalking game, though it was never too thick to see them. We turned off the road—it was really only a trader's track—for about half a mile, to a water hole, and at once set all hands to work to construct a decent scherm. In all probability we should be there several days—we needed biltong and skins for making

reims and whips—and we were not going to take any unnecessary risks from lions. Up till now, our luck had been so marvellous as far as schelm were concerned that it seemed that, according to the law of averages, it must change soon.

By evening we had a fairly lion-proof camp, even though the famous Belingwe “pack,” said to consist of from ten to fourteen lions, did pay us a visit. This was the same pack that Lord Randolph Churchill encountered several years previously. When he first wrote of it, the ex-chancellor was, practically speaking, denounced as a liar ; but men in the district knew to their cost that the story was true enough—many a transport-rider had lost two or three oxen in a single night down there—and though, personally, I never had a glimpse of any of those particular lions, I saw their spoor on several occasions, and I can certainly answer for eight full-grown animals being there.

We soon found that we had made a very lucky selection so far as the game was concerned, in fact we could hardly have camped at a better spot. Just beyond the water hole was the beginning of a stretch of country, about four miles by five, which had been visited by one of those curious local thunderstorms a few weeks previously. The grass was in perfect condition, sweet, fresh, wonderfully green ; and all the game on the Flats seemed to have congregated there. Moreover, no other white men had been down to frighten it.

Eland, sable, roan, all the big buck, in fact, with the exception of the Tsessebi, were to be found, in addition to the ordinary small ones. But the most striking thing was the number of wild pigs ; never before, or since, have I seen so many. You seemed to put up one every

half mile, to see him start off with his long, bush-ended tail sticking straight up in the air.

It did not take us long to get all the meat and skins we needed, then we settled down for several days' well-earned rest whilst the drying process was in progress. Of course, our boys complained. They were gorged with meat; they had far more than they could eat, infinitely more than was good for them; yet they could not see why we did not go on killing. Boer and native are alike in that respect. Though the game is such a valuable asset to the country, given the chance, they will always destroy as much as they can.

Our cattle looked quite an imposing mob when we left that camp. They had all grown considerably—they were quite young beasts in every case—the regular exercise, to which they were now accustomed, seemed to have given them fresh zest for their food, and a better action in walking, whilst the bad coats, due to the filthy condition of the native scherms, had been replaced by glossy hides.

When we reached M'Patane, we met several traders, all of whom seemed to be possessed of the idea that, because we were young and had come from Mashonaland—M'Patane is in Matabeleland—we must of necessity be simple. Anyway, all of them offered us the most absurdly small prices for our best beasts, payment in all cases to be made in "Good-fors."

We declined the offers, knowing the value of our cattle, and having had some "Good-fors" in days gone by; but we did do one deal at a store amongst the kopjes—we bought a mule wagon, a sixteen-foot one, just the thing for our light oxen. It would easily take seven thousand five hundred pounds weight over the worst road—it was

splendidly built, Natal, not Cape Colony, manufacture—and it was emphatically a bargain. I think we gave thirty pounds for it, of course without gear. Eighteen months later, we refused a hundred for it and its gear; and a few months after that, we abandoned it, and its load, on the Selukwe—Victoria Road, because the span had died of African Coast Fever.

It seemed strange to cross the Umsingwane River, and camp beside the Geelong Pumping Station, three miles from the mine. A few hundred yards away, on the top of a small rise, was the River Camp, where I had spent some of the most miserable months of my life. Then, I had been under contract with the Mining Company, worked to the breaking point, generally unable to obtain sufficient food, always putrid with fever, the subject of many petty persecutions and insults from Colonials who had the ear of the manager. Now, I was a free man, absolutely free. The mines were dependent on the transport-riders for their very existence. Moreover, on the mine, still grubbing along in the old way, were those Afrikanders who had scoffed at us when we first talked of going in for cattle, and I knew that the sight of our fine mob would be gall and bitterness to them.

Once, in 1897, I had very nearly died in that River Camp. It was my first dose of Malarial Fever, but, as I also had phthisis, and had recently had pleurisy, it knocked me up considerably.

I was practically alone all the time. There was another white man living in the camp; but he was in charge of a wood-cutting gang, and did not return until the evening, dead tired. We had no house-boys at that period. The company had collared them all. I did manage to get hold of a very tiny piccanin of about five years of age, but he only stayed a day.

For five days I tossed about my bed—if bed it could be called—with a temperature of 103° , and not a soul within call. Probably, the hyænas, who always know when a man is near death, were the nearest living things. Up at the mine, three miles away, were hundreds of natives, and some sixty white men, also a doctor ; but the mine, as an entity, had about as much soul as a hyæna.

To this day, I cannot understand why I did not die. I had no nourishment at all, and my bed consisted of blankets spread on grass, my pillow was a hard water-proof kit-bag. The whole thing is a bad memory, even after all these years ; but—I have smitten hip and thigh those who left me to die in those days, so the account is square.

It was strange to outspan next day at the mine itself, and watch the men dragging wearily to work, to hear that hateful whistle go, and to know that it had nothing to do with yourself, that you were free.

I had left the Geelong with one wagon, and fourteen small, partially-trained oxen ; I came back, only eight months later, with two trained spans of sixteen each, and some seventy loose cattle. Those who had scoffed at us when we started out showed little inclination to meet me now.

A week later, we were in Bulawayo, outspanned on the Racecourse. Our luck had held good all through. We had not lost a single animal since leaving Victoria, and all our beasts were in splendid condition. Moreover, the price of cattle was very high just then, and, when we came to sell our surplus beasts, we did extremely well on them. I reckoned that, taken all round, we made a clear profit of ninety per cent. on our purchases.

We picked out fifty of the best, so as to make three

spans, and had two beasts in reserve, and sold all the rest. It was a highly satisfactory wind-up to a good season. A few more like that, we told ourselves, and we should be rich men.

PETER—GOAT AND WHITE MAN

CHAPTER XII

PETER—GOAT AND WHITE MAN

FOR several years, in fact the whole time we were riding transport, Peter was one of the best-known characters on the Road. Even men who had never seen him before, appeared to have heard of him, and when he strolled up to their wagons at the outspan, and made free with the contents of their boys' cooking-pots, they did not drive him off.

Peter was a goat, a little black Mashona goat, extremely sturdily-built, yet, even when full-grown, not so tall as an Airedale terrier.

His life began in tragedy, continued for over three years in comedy, then ended, as it had begun, tragically. He and his brother were the very first goats born in our camp at Chivamba's. We bought the mother in the morning, and, at sundown, she gave birth to the twins. We had a strong goat kraal, but it was out of the question to put them in there, so the herd boy turned them into the store hut, placing a reed screen in front of the door. Of course, being a Mashona, he did not secure that screen properly, with the result that, about midnight, the mother broke out, to get something to eat, and walked straight into the jaws of a hyæna. She gave just one

cry, but, by the time we could get out with our shot-guns, there was no trace of her left.

The following morning, when, after docking the herd boy's wages, I suggested that he should get some milk and feed the orphans, he seemed quite shocked at the idea. They were unlucky goats, he explained, and it was far better to let them starve to death, in accordance with Mashona custom. From me, he heard a few home truths concerning his ways and those of his people, whilst Amous afterwards supplemented my remarks. I think he managed to drive the lesson into that thick skull, for, as soon as I had entered the store hut, I heard one or two distinct yelps of pain.

At the very first attempt, the goats took the milk out of Amous' improvised feeding bottle, greatly to the astonishment of our local savages, who had never seen such a thing before. That evening, old Chivamba and all his elders, including his witchdoctor, came up to see the wonderful process, took much snuff out of trembling brown palms, and finally departed, shaking their heads sadly. Both Amous and myself were wizards indeed, they declared; whilst, as for the goats, those certainly had evil spirits in them. It would have been quite a fine chance for the witchdoctor to do some poisoning; but, probably, no one was willing to pay him for putting Amous and myself out of the way, and, like so many religious practitioners, he never worked gratuitously.

At first, the goats were known merely as "The Little Black Thing" and "The Little White Thing." It was not until later, when the Little Black Thing had begun to show such an amazing partiality for dancing about on the rocks, that he received the name of "Peter," the Little White Thing becoming "Paul." Afterwards, by a

kind of natural process, when we wanted to speak of them jointly, they were referred to as "The Apostles."

For the first few days, they spent their whole time in the doorway of the store hut, looking out on life with big, wondering eyes. At night, I had them secured in an empty packing case. The hyænas were not going to have them also.

Curiously enough, from the very outset, they took no interest in the other goats, who used to stream past the store hut morning and evening, on their way to and from the big scherm. It was as though those two little fellows were animals apart, a fact which our savages were quick to notice. It confirmed the witchdoctor's words, "They had evil spirits in them."

As soon as the staggering stage was over, Peter began to feel the joy of life, manifesting it by queer little side-way leaps, and prods at his brother's sides. He always took the lead. He it was who first learnt the delight of getting on to a rock, and tumbling off it at once. He was an amazing goat, even at that age, abnormally strong, active, and intelligent.

The moment he saw Amous with a cup in his hand, he ran after him, crying for milk. In forty-eight hours, he learnt to do without the feeding bottle, and to drink direct. Paul was much slower in everything, much less interesting in every respect. I do not think that, had he lived, he would ever have made a pet, but would probably have ended by joining the herd, and falling into their ways.

However, he did not live. A hyæna had killed his mother; a leopard was responsible for his death.

The sequence of events was rather curious. For some extraordinary reason, the cattle in South Africa will not

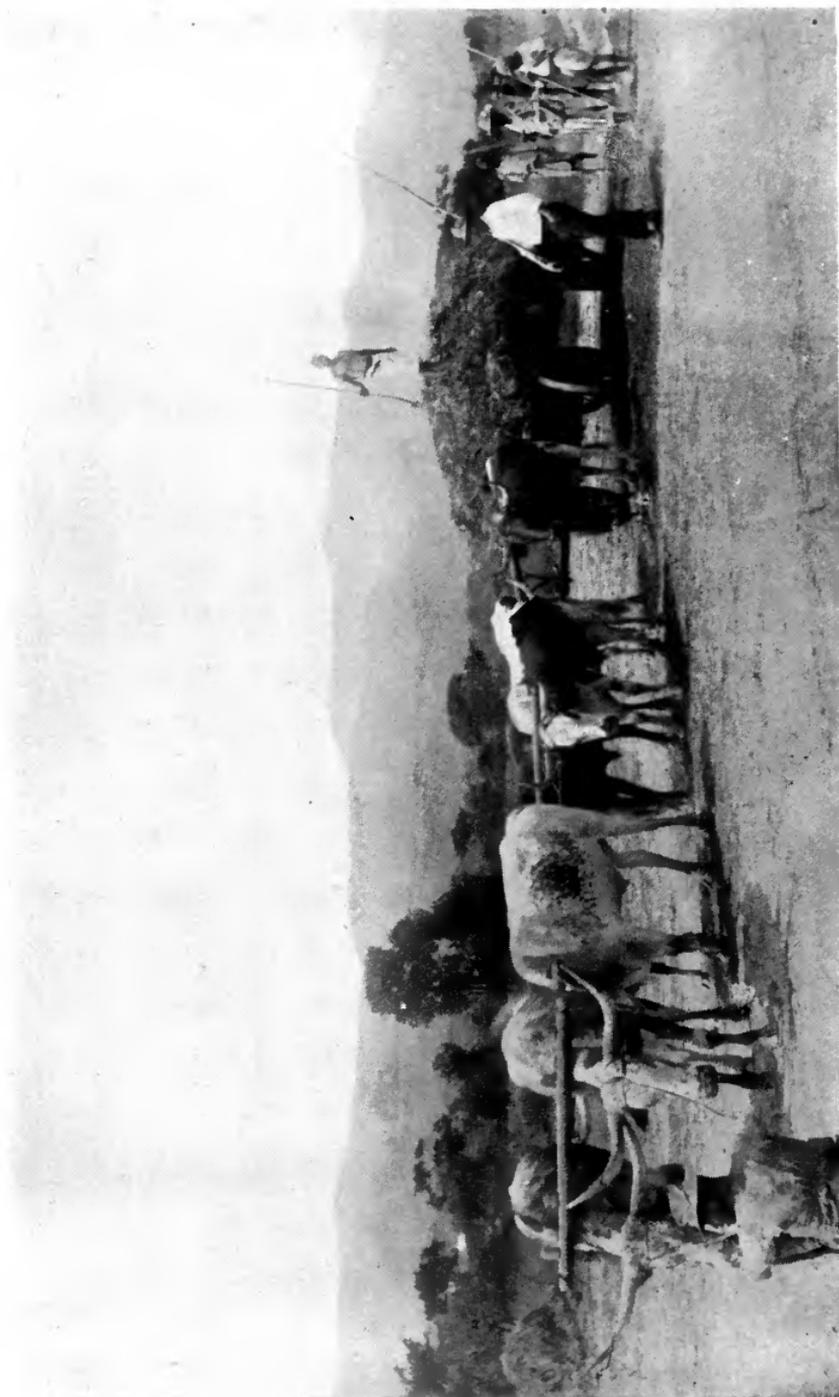
yield milk, unless the calf has first had a suck. Really, the man is far more to blame than the beast. The custom is a native one, but, as usually happens, the Afrikanders have adopted it slavishly, and now regard it as one of their own. They never try to break through it, in any way, and the cattle, with some sense of the foolish habit bred in them, expect to have it observed.

We had four cows in milk at the time of the Apostles' birth. That meant four calves in the calf scherm, and about seven or eight pints of milk a day—even the best Rhodesian veld does not seem to lend itself to the production of milk. Then, one night, the local leopard and a friend managed to visit the calf scherm. They took away the smallest of the calves, and ate him; but they destroyed the other three as well, killing them out of sheer wantonness.

The grief of the bereaved mothers was terrible, pitiable. For days they cried, unceasingly; and their milk dried up. Within a week, I had not a drain of fresh milk in the camp, and could buy none outside.

Peter, now a sturdy little black imp, faced the situation bravely. For one day, he fasted; then he began to eat porridge, green-stuff, anything which took his fancy, and to thrive on it. But Paul was very different. He cried without intermission for milk, refused any other food, save the laces out of my boots, and the dry scabs off Mashonas' legs. I do not know what he died of, whether it was hunger, indigestion, or septic poisoning; but he only lasted some five days after the milk supply gave out.

Peter missed him for a few hours, and bleated becomingly, but that evening, just as the sun set, he suddenly started off on a wild scamper round the camp, racing his very hardest, pausing only to butt at any native he



ON THE FARM.



met, a habit which thenceforward he kept up most religiously. That sunset run was an essential part of his day's work.

It was immediately after Paul's death that he adopted me. I suppose that he must have been lonely: at any rate, he refused any longer to sleep in his packing-case, and took up his quarters in my hut, on my blankets. With one short interval, during the days of Paul the Second, he never slept anywhere else for the rest of his life, at least as long as I was in the country.

If ever a man welcomed an animal's companionship, I welcomed that of Peter at that time. It was whilst my brothers, instead of going straight into Victoria with the wagon, had turned off on a mad expedition, trying to ride a load of grain up a perfectly impossible road. For six weeks I heard no word of them, for six weeks I had no white man's food, no reading matter, no candles, and, worst of all, practically no sleep. I am certain that, but for the friendship of that queer little black goat, I should have gone quite mad.

Every hour I expected a runner, and, as each day closed without one appearing, my anxiety grew. They must be dead, I told myself. It never entered into my head that they would not trouble to send. They had expected to be back in sixteen days, and they were away for forty-one. It was the worst time I had ever had in Africa, and when they did return, looking very sleek and well, and having consumed on the road down the greater part of the stores they had bought in Victoria, the extra-special stuff, the three-and-sixpenny tins, I took Peter in my arms, and went with him behind the big rocks, to curse.

Within a couple of months, Peter was well known locally; by the end of the trading season, he was famous

for many miles round. Once only, and then but for a very little while, did he lapse from the high standard he had set himself, and become something approaching a common, ordinary goat. Even then, it was all the fault of the store-boy.

We had gone away shooting, down to M'Bambo's, the famous lion-village, about eight miles away; and had, of course, left Peter behind. Daniel, the Matabele, remained in charge, and Daniel prided himself on his cleverness. He argued that, if the white men thought so much of one evil little goat, a goat with an undoubted devil in it, they would think far more of two; consequently, when a heathen came in with a scraggy, dirty-white little creature, with a long beard and restless eyes, he bought it for five shillings' worth of trading stuff, and put it to sleep with Peter.

As it happened, we were away nearly a week. The game had left M'Bambo's neighbourhood, and shifted off to the south-east, where the salt grass is to be found.

When we got back to camp, just at nightfall, two scurrying, breathless little creatures cannoned against our legs, stayed just long enough to butt at us, then raced on. It was our introduction to the white goat, who was immediately named "Paul the Second."

I can still remember that night of our return. The goats seemed to regard me as an interloper in my own hut. After the candles had been put out, they spent an hour or two scratching the earthen floor to make sleeping places for themselves, after which they would lie down for a few minutes in a totally different spot. When, at last, they did settle for a while, it was to chew the cud, very noisily and vigorously. I was deadly tired, but it must have been three o'clock in the morning

before I got to sleep. A couple of hours later, I awakened suddenly, thinking the roof had fallen in ; but it was merely Paul doing a step dance on my body, whilst Peter, standing on my pillow, was defying him. A moment afterwards, they were doing a wild scamper round the huts, which ended in both of them landing on top of me again, breathless and exhausted.

To say I was angry is to leave out a good deal. As soon as the early morning jobs had been done, the camp cleared, the cattle and goats sent to pasture, I called Amous, and explained the situation to him. A sleeping-place must be constructed for those goats, without delay.

The Basutu scratched his wool. He loved Peter, but Paul had not taken his fancy.

“ Better kill the little white one, Chief,” he said, eyeing the new-comer with grim disfavour. “ He leads Peter astray, and, at least, he will make soup.”

It was, really, sound advice, but I did not want to deprive Peter of his playmate ; so I rejected it, unfortunately as it turned out.

Amous shrugged his shoulders, and set to work, or, rather, set three or four wondering Mashona to work, cutting sticks, making twine out of bark, fetching grass for thatching. His plan was to make a miniature round hut, complete in every detail, for the two goats.

If anything had been needed to confirm the local savages in their theory of Peter's supernatural character, this filled the want. A hut for a goat to sleep in ! Why the white man himself was admitting that the little black creature had the soul of a human being, probably the soul of a dead white man. It was all uncanny and horrible. They made no attempts to disguise their fears.

Just before sundown, the hut was completed. It was

quite a work of art in its way. Peter strolled up, examined it critically, suddenly pulled a mouthful of grass out of the thatch, and dashed off, followed by his evil genius, Paul.

It was no easy task to get them into the hut—of course it had been named “The Vatican”—even after they had been captured. They fought the piccanins most vigorously, and, not until Amous himself took a hand in the game, could they be induced to enter.

That night, and the two or three succeeding nights, I slept peacefully, though during the day I could only secure immunity from attack by stationing a boy at the door of the hut in which I was. Peter was getting worse and worse, every day. He seemed quite to have lost his old affection for me, and to care for nothing but that depraved little white beast with a beard. I was fast coming round to Amous’ point of view—the proper place for Paul was the stock-pot; when the question was settled for me.

It was about one o’clock in the morning when the commotion arose. I was out within a few seconds, shot-gun in hand. The hyæna’s howl had been unmistakable so had the cry of a goat.

Amous tore a handful of grass out of the nearest thatch and fired it. “Look!” he exclaimed, pointing to the Vatican. “Look what the evil beasts have done! Oh, Peter! My Little Black Thing!”

The Vatican was demolished. The foul brutes—there must have been several of them—had managed to tear away the sides, strongly though it had been built. There was no sign of either of the goats.

I do not know who was the more upset, Amous or myself. All Peter’s recent misdeeds were forgotten, and

we thought of him only as the dear little chum of the past few months.

Amous twisted up a couple of fresh grass torches. "We may find the schelm still in the old mealie field," he said. "Perhaps they have stayed to eat the bodies."

The chance was a very poor one, but, at that moment, I was simply rabid for revenge. I had always loathed hyænas before, but now—— Suddenly, somewhere below us, a goat bleated, vigorously, angrily it seemed.

Amous sprang forward. "Peter!" he exclaimed. A couple of minutes later, he was back, with the little fellow in his arms. After such an experience, most goats would have been half dead with terror, but Peter was snorting with rage. He had a nasty bite on the head, and must have escaped death by a miracle, for a hyæna has the strongest jaws of any animal of his size, but, otherwise, he was unhurt.

He spent the rest of that night on my blankets, very quietly; and never again did he run the risk of being caught by one of his foes. As for Paul the Second, we never found a trace of him, and, for my part, he went unregretted. I am sure he would have been a failure in the stock-pot, and I had the hope that he was giving the hyæna fierce indigestion.

Peter took to wagons from the very outset. Even before he had travelled on one, a wagon was one of his favourite playing places. After a little practice, you could jump on to the düsselboom, balance yourself there, and then make a leap to the buck boards. Once you were on it, on an empty wagon, you had a splendid run up and down, your hoofs making a wholly delightful noise on the planks. Then, too, you could show off perfectly, you could rub your sides up against the buck

beams, in full view of all the Kaffir women, who could not help seeing what a beautiful goat you were ; and when any of the trek oxen came along, and sniffed round the wagon, as was their habit morning and evening, you could meet them on terms of equality, rubbing noses with them, especially with Fransman and Biffel, the two hind bullocks. . . . Yes, a wagon was a fine institution from the point of view of a little black goat with a white man's soul—at least, the Mashona were already beginning to say he possessed that doubtful quality—or is it a commodity?—and they ought to have known.

When we did trek away from Chivamba's at the end of the trading season, Amous took the precaution of tying Peter up in the wagon tent. I never saw the Apostle so indignant before. His hair fairly bristled with wrath—it is amazing how eloquent a goat's hair can be—and he butted at every native who came near him. But, in the end, he squared up the account against Amous, squared it up vicariously, through me. He found a new natural-wool shirt of mine—it had cost fifteen shillings in that unholy country—and, by the time we outspanned, he had eaten the whole of the front of it.

After that, he was allowed to sit anywhere on the wagon he liked, so long as he kept out of the tent.

An Ishmaelite myself, I have had the good fortune to have as chums animals with the brand of Ishmael on them, born travellers. My companion of to-day, my companion of the last six years, Black Prince, the little dog who has never left me, night or day, during that time, who sits on the table beside me as I write, sleeps beside my bed, goes to town with me always, Black Prince is as perfect a traveller as was his predecessor in my affections. Peter, the goat with a white man's soul.

Prince's soul is white too. Sometimes, when he turns those wonderful brown eyes of his on me, I feel that, if only he could tell me how he felt towards me I could put into words what a man should feel towards God.

The Love of Woman is the Great Thing. It dwarfs, overshadows, all else ; but to be loved by animals is no small matter. The man or woman who does not love animals, and is not loved by animals, should be shunned as a moral leper. The animal who will not make friends is doing what the leper's bell did of old ; it is saying to all the world, "Unclean, unclean."

Peter loved the wagon-trekking, loved the wagons themselves. Later on, when we had four wagons on the road, he would travel on each in turn, unless, of course, one of them happened to have an uncomfortable load, one on which he could not find a satisfactory resting place.

Often, he gave us horrible scares. We could not find him anywhere. The drivers would, one and all, declare that he could not be lost, that they were sure he had not strayed ; yet there was not a sign of him. A frenzied search round the outspan, visits to all the other wagons there, would yield no results ; and then, after an hour of anxiety, he would be discovered in the bight of a buck-sail, or tucked down between a couple of sacks, chewing contentedly.

After a while, we got to know his ways, to feel certain that he would not stray far ; but I cannot say that all other transport-riders appreciated those same ways of his. He grew to be insufferably conceited and "bossy,"

If we outspanned with other wagons, he would descend

from his own perch, give our own cook-boy a friendly, or pseudo-friendly, butt in the back of the knee-joint, then investigate our cooking-pots, taking all the lids off in turn, either with his little horns or with his wonderful lips. If there were beans cooking, he would eat some; eat them though they were actually boiling; if the herd-boys had a fresh pot of porridge, he would push them aside, so as to get the best of it; and woe betide them if they dared to interfere.

A frying-pan had a great fascination for him. Time after time, I have seen him make a sudden dash, and take a sizzling rasher actually out of the boiling fat. Is it to be wondered at that the Mashona regarded him as a wholly uncanny beast? A goat which ate the flesh of pigs!

If there was nothing particularly interesting at our wagons, he would go over to any others he could find, walking very slowly, in stately fashion. Dogs, strange dogs, were apt to misunderstand him, and to imagine that he was nervous. They were quickly disillusioned. His horns were never more than five inches in length, but they were straight and sharp. When he was only eight months old, I saw him tackle five dogs at once in a store in the Makukukupene District. They were terriers, and the storekeeper thought quite a lot of them. He was a low-down person from Grahamstown, and I fancy he believed that the curs would tear the Rooinek's goat to pieces; but, within thirty seconds, two had tumbled out of one door and three out of the other. After all, as Amyas remarked, they were Colonial-born, whereas Peter undoubtedly had a white man's soul.

All wagons belonged to Peter—at least, he thought they did. Still, he was wise enough to know that he was not

always a welcome guest, and would often take a good deal of trouble to jump up unobserved. He usually found something to interest him, in which case he left palpable proofs of his visit behind him.

As a rule, the wagon-driver, whose rations include "Boer meal," coarse flour, bakes a large round loaf for himself, cooking it in a "bake-pot," or camp-oven, and then placing it on the wagon to cool. By some kind of uncanny instinct, Peter used to know when there was one of these loaves cooling, and, time after time, I have had to compensate a strange driver, who came to me, quivering with indignation, to show me a mere shell of crust, absolutely the whole of the crumb having been eaten out. Peter, standing by, chewing the cud with the mildest possible look on his face, seemed to understand it all, for, when the driver turned to go, he was certain to get a butt on the shins.

Peter always got on very well with the trek-oxen. They all knew him, whilst with three of them, Biffel, Fransman, and Blom, he had a close friendship. In the evenings, just before we inspanned, he would always get up on the tailboard of one of the wagons, and wait for his friends to give him a chance of scratching their great heads with his little horns. Then, whilst the process of inspanning was in progress, he would take a wild scamper all round the camp, returning just in time to scramble on to the leading wagon.

He was never so happy as when he could actually get on top of the wagon tent itself, a feat which, of course, he could only accomplish when the buck-sail was over the tent, and hanging down as far as the fore-carriage. Then, with a wild dash, he would get up the slippery surface, and do a crazy step-dance on top. I shall never

forget a young Boer, who came to me with solemnly-bulging eyes, and stuttered out—

“ I say, man, there’s a buck on top of your tent.”

I fancy he wanted to make sure that Peter really did exist, that he was not merely the result of the previous night’s Dop. However, I reassured him, and gave him some coffee, most of which Peter, who had now descended from his dancing place, drank for him, the visitor having put the cup on the ground whilst he filled his big pipe. He went away sharing the niggers’ views, that that black goat was not a goat at all, but a kind of familiar spirit of mine.

Peter was a nuisance over the coffee question, especially down at the trading camps. In South Africa, the early morning coffee is an institution, a fetish. You have it everywhere, and it is almost invariably bad—in the hotels it seems to be a point of etiquette for it to contain at least three dead flies—but you get to expect it, or to accept it as inevitable, although you would prefer tea.

Your boy brings it to you, entering at dawn on tip-toe. If he is quite raw, he puts the cup on your pillow, so that, when you awaken, you take that muddy liquid externally, and get up in quite a hurry ; but otherwise, he puts it on the floor beside you. It was then that Peter used to get his chance. Constantly, in our big hut at Chivamba’s, Amyas and I have both reached down sleepily for our cups, to find them empty, and then looked round, to see Peter, the picture of innocence, chewing the cud in the doorway.

When we were on the Road, Peter always insisted on sleeping on my blankets. If I had a tent wagon, I did not object to this so much. He was hot, and heavy, but I knew that he was safe from hyænas and leopards ; when,

however, as was too often the case, I had no wagon tent, and it was a question of sleeping under the wagon, it was very different. Peter would start the night as quite a reasonable little goat, humble, thankful for a corner of the rug to keep him out of the mud ; but, gradually, as the hours wore on, he would work himself into the middle of the blankets, and work you out, until you awoke to find that you were actually lying in the mud, and that he was where you had started, and was chewing contentedly, watching you with great staring eyes.

On extra cold nights on the high veld, he would often lie beside the fire, waiting for it to die down, then, just as the last glow disappeared, would scratch away the embers, and make his bed on the hot ground, remaining there until it grew cool. As a result of this habit, his little hoofs were always more or less charred, and there were always ugly burnt patches on his coat. Still, he never seemed to mind.

I am not exaggerating in the least degree when I say that I believe that, on more than one occasion, Peter saved our lives. Personally, down in the native districts where we bought our cattle, Amyas and I were very popular. Few individual natives had grudges against us, and many had reason for being grateful to us ; but the white race, as a whole, was becoming more and more hated, and, when his passions are aroused, the savage loses all sense of individuality.

The Mashona had good reason for discontent. Labour agents, thinly-disguised slave-raiders, were harrying the kraals, seizing all the able-bodied men, flogging indiscriminately, even flogging women ; whilst the air was full of rumours of increased taxation. We were much further out than any other traders—there was, actually, no one

between us and the sea—and, if we had been murdered, weeks might have elapsed before any white man even heard a rumour of the fact.

Several times we had hints, from boys who were undoubtedly faithful to us, that it would be wiser to leave suddenly, in the night; but that would have meant losing everything, as well as being a confession of fear. So we remained, and, right up to the very last, we never saw anything in the nature of a hostile demonstration, not even at a time when all the kraals were seething with discontent, when all the young men were clamouring for war.

But, afterwards, we found it was Peter who had protected us, Peter the Wholly-Uncanny Beast, the goat with a white man's soul, Peter who had saved us. If a Mashona had killed an ordinary white man, he had only to fear the white men's law, the white men's vengeance; but the Mashona who had killed us, who had killed the Brothers of Peter, would, inevitably, have brought down on himself the vengeance of the entire Spirit World.

For Peter was not mortal. The Mashona had been quick to discover that. His body was merely a shell which concealed a white man's Devil, a most potent and terrible Devil, a Devil which told us of all the wicked things that the local people were plotting, which frustrated all their schemes, and enabled me to punish the guilty.

What wonder then that, when they came in to trade, they brought little offerings on platters, choice pieces of tobacco, boiled sweet potatoes, special tomatoes, to offer to the little Black Devil who guarded the White Man's camp. Out of the tens of thousands of savages in those districts, the hundreds of thousands almost, there was

not one who would have dared to raise a hand against Amyas or myself—because we were under the direct protection of the Spirit World, because we had an actual Devil of our own living with us, a goat who was not a goat at all, an animal who was immune even from the attacks of the worst of Evil Things, the Hyænas.

Poor little Peter! He was vain and “bossy” enough anyway; but he would have been insufferable, had he known of his own supernatural qualities.

He took his honours lightly. Although, by birth, he was merely a native goat, he loathed all natives. No one with a black skin might touch him; often, he resented a piccanin even looking at him; and, with him, to resent was to charge. He was very small, it is true, but he was heavy and abnormally strong; moreover his horns were sharp. I suppose it hurt frightfully when he got you in the back of the knee-joint. At any rate, his victims used to howl.

One of the greatest offences was to stand between him and the fire. No Kaffir ever did that twice. It was not pleasant to be butted forward, suddenly, into the glowing logs. Yet he never tried any trick of that kind on with white men. They were his equals. He, himself, was a white man.

Poor little Peter! I loved you as I have loved few others, loved you as I love my little Black Prince to-day. Not once, from the time when I wrapped you in a blanket, a five-hour-old orphan, till that day when you died with my hand on your head, did you fail to play the game with me.

Up and down the Great Transport Road, every one grew to know Peter, and to love him. Once, they had objected to his visits, but before long they were welcomed.

He was the Luck-bringer, the Mascot ; and, after he had visited your wagons, it was far easier to manage your Kaffirs. Every savage between the Zambesi and the Crocodile—at least every savage along the Transport Road—knew of the Goat who was really a White Man's Devil.

Poor little Peter ! I suppose that, to-day, you and I are more or less on the way to becoming solar myths, you and I and Amyas. Even before I left that forsaken country, they had songs about us, about Isandlwana—Amyas, the Little Hand, the boy who had two fingers missing—about M'Ziki, the Reed Buck, myself, and about the Goat-who-was-not-a-Goat-at-all.

They were not pretty songs—in fact, some of them had more than a tendency towards lewdness ; but when a savage tribe takes you into its collection of legends, mixes you up with its own heroes and villains and devils, it means that you must have made an impression on it.

Often and often, when we were working with Chivamba's camp as our base, I have heard a strange native ask one of our own boys what white men were in the place ; and, always, amongst the list of white men would be the name of Peter.

Of the three, Amyas, Peter and myself, I am the only one left. Amyas died in Manila, died from the bite of a miserable little fly, which had fed previously on the carcase of an anthrax bullock. Yet, physically, he was the strongest man I had ever known, though he had not nearly reached his prime—he was only twenty-two—whilst I have never met his equal for dare-devil courage.

I never remember seeing Peter tired. When I was travelling on foot, he would follow me just like a dog. One day, he did over thirty miles, and when we camped

down in the evening was still energetic enough to drive off three Kaffirs, who had dared to squat down between himself and the fire. His hatred of anything black-skinned was strange ; strange because he was a Mashona goat by birth, yet quite natural if you regarded him, as I regarded him, in the light of a white man.

Except for Amous, no one with any trace of coloured blood in his veins could touch Peter with impunity. He was terribly quick, terribly cunning, in his attacks. A large goat is aggressive on the large scale. He gives you warning by getting up on his hind legs before he butts at you ; but Peter's methods were swift and sudden. In his case, there were no preliminaries, no declaration of war. Simply, his head went down, and he flung himself at his adversary.

He was dainty in all things. He would never eat out of a pot which had been used by a native. Invariably, he wanted, and had, the " first go." Tobacco was one of his favourite articles of diet, yet, though there were usually dozens of rolls, sometimes hundreds of rolls, in the store hut, the only one he would chew was the one which I myself was using. I suppose he assumed it to be the best.

So far as foodstuffs were concerned, his tastes were catholic in the extreme. He would eat bacon readily ; he would eat any sort of green stuff ; and—he would eat medicated cotton wool. I remember once coming back to the wagons at the Bulawayo outspan, and finding him busy with a large new package of cotton wool. I pulled it out of him, literally by the yard ; and, at the end of the process, he was ready to play with me. He liked flannel pyjamas, though he had a veritable passion for Jægar underwear, if it had been washed recently. The

clothes of one of my brothers were always immune from him.

Paper seemed to have irresistible attractions for the little fellow. Time after time, when we were sitting in the shade of the wagon, reading, he would steal up behind, make a sudden dash, and go off triumphant, with a page of the book in his mouth. Amyas always used to declare that he had an excellent discrimination in literature. The three books which accompanied me everywhere were Renan's *Life of Jesus*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, and *Marcus Aurelius*. Peter had many pages out of these ; but when somebody sent me sixpenny reprints of some of George Meredith's books, Peter scorned them. Probably, like myself, he was puzzled, as thoroughly puzzled as Gibbon himself, the greatest master of the English language, would have been, had he been set to read those books.

Peter hated fowls. It was a theologically-minded, and semi-inebriated, police trooper who first drew our attention to the fact, or, at least, to its interesting nature. If a cock crowed near Peter, he charged at it ; and the mounted policeman, who had studied for the Scotch ministry, was deeply impressed. " He lives up to his name," he remarked more than once—in fact, we got rather tired of his saying it, and hid the rest of the whisky.

When I went Home, after the loss of our cattle—Peter grieved terribly over them—I handed him over to the care of the township of Victoria, as a whole ; and the township accepted the trust, readily. They were sportsmen in the clean sense of the word, white men, Home-born Englishmen ; and they welcomed the little chap, recognizing that he had a white man's soul.

Peter had a great time in Victoria. The township

adopted him, or he adopted it—I do not know which is the better way of stating things. Nominally, his headquarters were at the *Thatched House Hotel*; really, he slept anywhere, fed out of any one's cooking-pots. Even though some white men and women—there were a few Colonials in Victoria—behaved churlishly towards him, mainly because he was mine, their boys knew better than to offend the spirit world by being inhospitable to Peter.

In Victoria, he grew fatter, sleeker, more self-opinionated than ever, more like a white man, at least according to the natives' point of view.

Afterwards, men told me with bated breath of his depredations, of flowers and vegetables torn up—and to produce either of these in Rhodesia represents a miracle of skill and patience—of cook-boys assaulted, of meals ruined. They were too well-disposed towards me, or too loyal to Peter, to go into details; but I gathered that he had not been altogether the “angel in the household.” Still, he enjoyed himself and kept himself fit; and those were the main considerations with me.

When I returned to Africa, I found myself quartered at Umtali, and, as soon as I had settled down, I sent for Peter. The Native Commissioner told off two old savages, sturdy, sedate old boys, to bring the Apostle up to me. They were told not to hurry, and they respected their instructions, spending over a month on the road. When they arrived, they told me how well they had looked after Peter, how he had had unlimited porridge, and grain, and tobacco.

I could see, for myself, that he had been well fed; in fact, he had been overfed. He must simply have gorged himself at every stopping-place, every village, being received always as a kind of deity. Probably, he had

far too much strong tobacco—his guardians dwelt eloquently on the amount he had eaten. At any rate, within a few hours of his arrival, he developed a kind of gastric fever, and, at sunset the following day, his brave, faithful little soul went to its own place.

Peter, Goat and White Man, lies under a big thorn tree, beside the disused Transport Road, a few hundred yards from the Railway, that new line which has replaced the Road.

Perhaps the ghosts of the wagons rumble along that Road. I like to think it is so—and Peter sees them, and they outspan near his grave, and he goes over, to rub noses with those ghostly cattle, to eat the crumb out of the loaves made by those phantom drivers, and do step dances on the shadowy buckboards.

Ohe! Ghosts, the Ghosts of the Dead Past, play so large a part in my Present, that they are realities to me; and amongst those ghosts there is none I love better than that of the one friend, who, in African days, never went back on me—Peter, the Goat.

ENEMIES OF THE ROAD

CHAPTER XIII

ENEMIES OF THE ROAD

SOMETIMES when, having nothing more profitable to do, I let my thoughts go back to the Past, to those days on the Transport Road, I find myself wondering what the Road would have been like, had all schelm been eliminated, had the Road been safe, for man and beast.

The Taal, the jargon used by the Cape Dutch, that hideous, abominable satire on a language which we ought to have crushed out of existence after the last war, the Taal is anathema to every decent Home-born man ; but it contains one good, comprehensive word "schelm."

A schelm is any noxious creature. As a rule, the word is used for wild animals, from lions down to owls, but, really, it is equally applicable to Colonial politicians and their kind. After all, these are far more noxious, and do infinitely more harm, than all the recognized beasts of prey.

Perhaps I am a reactionary. I trust I am, because, in the years to come, the reactionaries of to-day will be honoured as having been the Prophets. Nothing will ever convince me that Colonial self-government, especially in the case of South Africa, is justifiable, that to grant it is other than treason.

We have now an Empire greater even than that over

which Trajan ruled, but it is an Empire on the verge of dissolution, merely because we have allowed sentiment, sheer sloppiness, to take the place of common sense.

Up till Trajan's death, Rome's colonies existed for the benefit of Imperial Rome. Rome had conquered them, and, rightly enough, Rome demanded tribute. There was a vast gulf between the Roman citizen and the Provincial. When this gulf was filled in, filled in by the process of casting into it all that had made Rome great, the doom of the Empire was sealed.

To-day, we are doing much the same thing. It may be heresy to say so—I know I am running up against all accepted political creeds—but I do not believe in Colonial self-government. If you can no longer run a territory as it should be run, at a profit, you are richer and safer without it. Our principle—if principle it can be called—of giving everything to the Colonies and asking nothing in return, is simple lunacy.

We opened up those territories in the first case, usually at an immense cost of blood and money; to-day, we guarantee their financial credit, we keep an immense fleet to police the Trade Routes for their benefit; we have an Army always ready to assist them; and in return we get—nothing! Nothing but insolence from loud-tongued politicians, who, in this country, would not even get seats on a Borough Council.

When a few hundred thousands are voted by one of the Colonies towards the Navy, our Press grovels to that Colony. The gift is "princely," "Imperial" according to Fleet Street; whereas, in reality, it is but a very small sum on account of a long overdue debt.

Our attitude towards the Colonies is that of a crazy merchant, who started branches abroad, and allowed

his managers and clerks in those branches to keep, not only the profits, but the gross takings as well.

A Colony which cannot pay tribute, definite sums in cash, or fulfil definite purposes like our two most valuable possessions, Singapore and Hongkong, is not worth having. At the end of the Boer War, South Africa should have been charged with the War Debt. Instead, our rulers gave it self-government, lent it money, and we now pay for military and naval protection for it !

Indeed, as a nation we must be doomed, by reason of our folly. If a province of the Roman Empire had behaved as Cape Colony did during the Boer War, Trajan, great, and wise, and humane though he was, would have made it so that a crow could fly from end to end of it, and find nothing to eat in the land.

I never learnt to speak the Taal. Nay, more, I never allowed it to be spoken in my camps. The very sound of it is loathsome. It is in no sense a language, merely the jargon used by a debased form of white man. There is no literature in the Taal ; in fact, its crudity renders such a thing impossible.

But that word "schelm" I do like. It is wonderfully expressive, completely comprehensive. On the Transport Road, you use it every day, every hour, for the schelm are always with you, an ever-present danger. At first, you are nervous about them, nervous so far as your own personal safety is concerned ; but that stage soon passes. You realize that they greatly prefer your cattle to you. Then you become nervous about your cattle, hardly sleeping, starting up at every alarm ; but, at last, you settle down to a deep, quiet hatred of all night-prowlers, and you get into the way, the only sensible way really, of leaving a very great deal to luck.

It is almost impossible efficiently to protect cattle against schelm on the road. At the end of a long trek, even though you may find plenty of thorn scrub, there is not the time to make an efficient scherm. You may construct something through which the lion will not penetrate, but it takes heavy timber to prevent the terrified cattle from breaking out when they smell the lion.

Down at Chivamba's, we had a really lion-proof scherm, one of the best I have ever seen, capable of holding easily a hundred and fifty cattle ; but it took a dozen boys a fortnight to build it, even with the assistance of two wagons to bring in the poles. I cannot remember the schelm ever trying to force their way in there, though, periodically, a lion, or a couple of lions, would take up their quarters in the valley, and levy a heavy toll on the unprotected animals in the villages.

Whenever I heard of the arrival of a new lion—they always seemed to come up from M'Bambo's neighbourhood—I used to send for the local headmen and order them to put their cattle-kraals in order. In nine cases out of ten, these kraals merely consisted of rotten poles, six or seven feet in height, planted so loosely in the ground that the cattle could push them aside, more or less at will. Certainly, there was no suspicion of their being lion-proof.

Still, all my protests, and threats, and curses were unavailing. The most any of those wretched savages would ever consent to do was to hang charms in the entrances of the scherms. When, next morning, they found a heifer gone, they remarked solemnly that the lion must indeed be a potent wizard. I used to grow very tired of this attitude, and used to tell them so, emphatically. If the lions had not had a chance to get anything to eat in the valley—there was very little game

just then—they would soon have grown weary of the place, whereas, finding all those unprotected cattle, they must have come to look on it as a kind of earthly Paradise. I know that they used to stay much too long to please me, especially as they became very cheeky. On two occasions, they actually made attempts on my wagon-spans whilst these were feeding in the vlei, and, when the wagons trekked off, there was always a chance of the local schelm following them up.

What is the best precaution against attacks from lions when you are on the Road? The usual method is to tie your cattle round the wagon itself, not, as is usually done, to the trek-chain, and to keep large fires going. But, in many cases, sufficient firewood is not obtainable, whilst if a lion is really starving he will often run the risk of making a sudden dash right up to the wagon itself.

Many old hunters declare that white rags, fluttering in the moonlight, scare the lion more than does anything else; but of this I have had no practical experience. I have, however, found a small acetylene lamp wonderfully efficient when travelling with pack-donkeys. On one occasion, the bush round our camp seemed to be alive with schelm, yet none of them dared to face that flashing lamp.

Undoubtedly, an old lion is far more dangerous than one in the prime of life. The latter is able to hunt game for himself, to keep away from mankind, whom he both hates and fears. If he does come across men, he generally clears out as quickly as possible, secure of getting food elsewhere, in places where the rifle has never disturbed the game; but the old lion hangs about the outspans. He has cunning, ferocity, and what he now lacks in strength, he makes up for in patience. Hunger renders

him desperate, and, as a result, he often takes desperate risks. If you chance to learn that there is an old lion in your neighbourhood, probably you will sleep but little until you are sure that he has got tired of watching for a chance at your cattle, and has made his way to a native village, where he will spring out on the women as they go down to the water-holes in the evening.

One question which I often heard debated amongst transport-riders was what weight a lion can actually carry on his back. Many—the majority of the old men, certainly—used to hold that he could take a fair-sized bullock in his jaws, fling it on his back, and actually jump a five-foot-high fence with it. Others asserted that a donkey was the most he could carry.

Personally, I doubt the bullock story ; it seems incredible, even to one who, like myself, knows how appalling is a lion's strength ; but I have seen what appeared to be conclusive evidence of a lion having sprung out of a scherm with a medium-sized donkey.

For some strange reason the lion seldom, if ever, eats his kill on the spot where he caught it. He always seems to take it at least four hundred yards. I saw numerous instances of this, and, in almost every case, the dead animal had unquestionably been carried on the lion's back, for the only spoor on the wet grass was that of the slayer himself, and perhaps a trailing hoof or two. Once, when one of my donkeys was killed, there was nothing but the lion's track between the place where the victim had been dragged down, and partially disembowelled, and the clump of bush, nearly half a mile away, under which the carcass had been eaten. What a wonderful picture a flashlight photograph of such a scene would make !

No animal is more difficult to get with a trap-gun, or

with poison, than is the lion. I, myself, with the aid of really experienced hunting-boys, have set trap-gun after trap-gun over half-devoured carcasses, and have never met with the slightest success. We used to take every precaution against rendering him suspicious, disturbing the grass and bush as little as possible, and rubbing rifle, string, and other gear with green leaves, in order to take away any human scent. But the result was always the same. Sometimes, I used to wonder whether the lions did not remain hidden quite close to their kill, and watch all our proceedings. In one instance, I am certain they were doing so, for the carrion crows, of which there were scores in the neighbouring trees, did not dare to descend, even after we had gone. They could see, or smell, the lions, of which there must have been several, as they had eaten at least three hundred pounds weight of meat during the early hours of the morning.

The vulture is not a schelm, of course ; in fact, he is, at times, a highly valuable scavenger ; but, despite his useful qualities, it is not easy to love or admire him. When one of your favourite cattle has just died, and you are grieving over him, you do not like to look up and see a small black spot away towards the horizon, the first vulture coming for his share of the feast, coming apparently from nowhere, the forerunner of perhaps fifty more of his own hideous kind.

How does the vulture know ? What unholy, ghoulish instinct tells him when the Pale Horse and its dread Rider are about ? He always seems to come from beyond the horizon, therefore it cannot be that he sees the Dead. Does he scent it ? Is it instinct that brings him ? I never yet met any one who could answer those questions, nor did I ever meet any one who could explain why, in

certain districts, when game was plentiful enough, one saw no vultures.

The eagle is different. In his way, he is most distinctly a schelm, just as he is not a scavenger. He kills his own food. I know, by experience, that he will take a young goat, and I have heard of him trying to kill a calf. Then, too, he comes down from the sky, not from beyond the horizon.

Perhaps the very strangest sight I ever witnessed was that of a snake falling, apparently from the clouds, a big black mamba, writhing and squirming as it hurtled downwards, to be smashed to pulp on a rock. Just above it, dropping also, with wings closed, was the eagle, which had descried it from above, carried it up in its talons, and dropped it to kill it. A hundred feet or so above the earth, the bird opened his wings, and circled downwards gently, to pick up its victim again. The eyesight of those eagles is one of the most marvellous things in Creation. I have seen them as the tiniest speck in the sky, many hundreds of feet up, perhaps over a thousand feet up, suddenly begin to drop, and I never once saw one soar upwards again without his prey in his claws.

The lion and the eagle never seem to come into conflict with one another. Their tastes are similar, but one is Chief of the Schelm-on-the-ground, the other of the Schelm-in-the-air; but thousands of vultures fall every year as victims of the lion's wrath. It is the vulture's own fault. He overeats himself so appallingly that, after a while, he cannot fly; then he reaches the state when he cannot even walk. The lion comes back, to make a second meal off his kill, and finds the horrible, evil-smelling, lethargic birds in his way. Naturally enough, he becomes annoyed. I have seen ten or a dozen dead

vultures stretched out beside the remains of a bullock, each flattened out, reduced almost to pulp, by a single blow from that terrible paw.

I suppose the leopard ought to rank after the lion in the transport-rider's catalogue of schelm ; but, really, I believe that, so far as human life is concerned, he is the more dangerous beast. I came across far more cases of transport-riders who had been mauled by those horrible slinking brutes than by lions. Of course, it may be argued that most of the lions made a clean job of it at the first attempt ; but I do not think this was so. The leopard tears the flesh horribly, and his teeth have some ghastly septic quality. Two Transvaal Boers, whom I often met on the Road, had their left arms withered almost to nothing from leopard bites.

The leopard can climb, and the lion cannot—therein lies the great difference between the two kinds of schelm. The lion will never venture into any place into which he cannot see ; the leopard will go anywhere, if he is hungry. The lion will always try and avoid a man, the other brute stands his ground ; moreover, being so extremely short in the legs, he is able to crouch more efficiently.

As a rule, it is the calves which the leopard attacks, presumably because he can carry them away ; but he frequently kills full-grown cattle, out of sheer deviltry, by biting them through the back of the neck. I imagine he severs the spinal cord, for death always appears to have been instantaneous.

The one good point about the leopard is that he has little of the lion's caution. He will eat poisoned meat, or walk up to a trap-gun, almost as readily as will a hyæna ; whilst often, in broad daylight, he will expose

himself to be shot at, lying on a boulder up a kopje side, snarling at you, even snarling at bullets which miss him.

I was never perfectly sure as to the number of distinct varieties of leopard to be found in Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Certainly, there are two, very well defined, recognized as being different by all natives, with different names; but I am inclined to think that there is a third one as well. The one or two skins I had belonging to this 'variety' were very poor ones; but there was a marked difference between them and those of the two ordinary kinds.

The black leopard is, I suppose, only a freak of nature. I saw one once, and my brother saw it, in practically the same place, the following day; but neither of us managed to get a shot at it, greatly to our disgust.

Hyænas are not the least amongst the enemies of the Road, even though they never actually pull down a bullock for themselves. I have been told, often, of their killing donkeys, whilst occasionally they attack a man who is sleeping beside a wagon, snapping at his face as they go past.

Really, I believe that the hyæna is the most loathsome thing that goes on four feet. I can certainly think of no creature more horrible, more verminous, more entirely useless. His sole claim to distinction is that he has a stronger jaw than has any other creature of his size. He can chew up the bones which the lion cannot even crack.

What wonder is it that the natives hold him in such detestation? They do not even look on him as an animal, in the ordinary sense of the word. He is an "M'Tagati," always. He belongs to the Evil Spirits, is an evil spirit himself, the horse of devils.

No native would ever willingly touch a dead hyæna;

and, though he is delighted when a white man traps, or poisons, one, he, himself, would never dare to raise a hand against his enemy.

Hyænas are very easily destroyed. The crudest form of trap-gun will get them, every time ; whilst pieces of poisoned meat strewn round the outspan are snapped up eagerly. Unfortunately, however, when you kill one of the brutes, three of his kind always seem to come to take his place, and, presumably, to eat his remains. One curious habit of his is that of hiding that portion of his food, which he cannot finish at one meal, in the nearest water-hole.

The jackal, poor, harmless little fellow, is no schelm at all, unless it be by reason of his mournful cry ; but his cousin, the wild dog, is a veritable prince of schelms. He hunts in packs, usually of about twenty or a dozen, and woe betide anything he attacks. The strongest bullock would go down in a few moments.

Once, I actually saw a pack of wild dogs at work on a reed-buck. We were trekking through the M'Patane district, sitting on an empty wagon, when we suddenly caught sight of a beautiful reed-buck bull, with about a dozen black animals with white bushy tails in close pursuit. They passed down a vlei about four hundred yards away from us.

It was only a matter of a few moments to jump down and begin to shoot. Just before I pulled my trigger, I saw the buck go down. We fired simultaneously, and one of us bowled over a wild dog. Then we saw another five or six coming up behind. The first lot was all over the buck at once ; but, incredible though it may sound, the second contingent stopped at once—to devour their dead comrade.

From the time we fired first to the time we finally drove them off can barely have been five minutes ; yet all that remained of the reed-buck was a shoulder and the head and neck. I believe a pack of that size could account for a bullock in a quarter of an hour.

Fortunately, the wild dog is about the rarest of all schelm ; otherwise, when game is scarce, they would take a heavy toll of human life. As it is, I have little doubt that some of those cases of " mysterious disappearance " of men who go out on the veld alone and are never seen again, can be traced to these detestable creatures.

Of all the schelm, I think that the snakes levied the heaviest toll on our cattle ; and I am sure they made me more furious than any other evil thing of the veld. You can understand a hungry beast of prey seizing a bullock ; and, though you may long for revenge, you cannot but admit to yourself that he is following his natural instinct. He has that excuse. For the snake, however, who wantonly kills two or three of your best oxen, out of sheer deviltry, there is no shadow of an excuse. How can there be ? The animals have not harmed him in any way, and he certainly does not want either to eat their flesh or suck their blood.

Time after time, a shivering herd boy has come up at dawn and reported, often with a break in his voice, that " A Black Mamba has killed so-and-so."

On two occasions, the two animals sleeping furthest apart were killed during the night, a loss of from thirty-five to fifty pounds.

Why does the snake do it ? In those instances, he must have gone deliberately through the herd.

The Mamba—he is the worst offender—always seems

to strike in the same place, on the hind quarter ; and, curiously enough, the animals never looked as though they had suffered acute pain, and we never once heard them shuffling about, or bellowing. When we came to skin them, however, there would be a large patch, a foot across, of hideous black jelly under the hide.

The first time I lost a beast from snake-bite, I, naturally enough, gave instructions for the body to be dragged away to the bush, where I could poison it for the benefit of the local leopards and hyænas ; but at once there arose a chorus of protests from my boys. They were going to eat it ! They assured me, most solemnly, that it could not hurt them, that they knew what they were about, that they had seen bullocks which had died in the same way too often before ; so, finally, I gave in. It was their concern, not mine, so long as they knew the risks. And I suppose that, after all, they were right. Certainly none of them seemed one scrap the worse for that most horrible meat.

So far as human beings were concerned, I never knew one case of snake-bite on the Road, which is the more strange because three out of four of the people connected with wagons sleep on the ground all the time. Several times, in camps, I saw men have very narrow shaves from puff-adders, those most disgusting of reptiles—I had a very narrow escape myself—but, on the veld, the bullocks seemed to get all the snake's animosity.

Looking back on it now, writing in a land where all the schelm go on two legs and wear clothes, often very good clothes, it seems to me that out there we accepted conditions very calmly. I suppose that, really, it was the environment, something in the atmosphere, the general tradition. After a very little while, you never gave a

thought to your own personal safety so far as the wild beasts were concerned. All you troubled about was the safety of your cattle or your donkeys. It may seem a strange notion to those who have never been on the Road, but it was one held by every transport-rider.

Always your animals first—that was one of the great rules of the Old Road.

SUMMER TREKKING

CHAPTER XIV

SUMMER TREKKING

MOST transport-riders hated the wet season ; in fact many of them, especially the Boers, tried their best to keep off the Road whilst the rains were on. If they had earned enough money, or, rather, saved enough, during the winter months, they would go out to some " farm," usually a collection of two or three mud-huts with a small mealie patch attached, and loaf the time away there. It was literally asking for a bad dose of fever, a request which was generally granted. You cannot lead a very active, hard life for seven months, and then suddenly exchange it for one of complete idleness, and, perhaps, chronic intoxication as well. Moreover, it was during that season that the malaria-carrying mosquito was most active.

Others, who could not afford to take a complete " rest-cure," would look for contracts at the mining camps or in the townships, riding cord-wood, or bricks, or something of that sort.

It was for this reason that you found so few wealthy transport-riders, that, though rates were high, and there had been no bad cattle disease since the Rinderpest, men seemed to become no richer. They had had so many wagons when they started, and they were content with

that number. As for money, it was just something to be spent. To most of the men on the Road, oxen were the only form of wealth they recognized. It was mainly for this reason that, when the crash did come, the ruin was so thorough and complete.

We, ourselves, on the other hand, did all our really heavy transport work during the wet season. Throughout the winter, Amyas and I were fully occupied with the stores and the buying and training of new cattle; and, as we did not want our wagons to go too far away, we usually kept them at work riding grain into Victoria from the various grain-trading stations, Amous being in charge of them.

Taken all round, this grain-riding showed a net profit of nearly a hundred pounds a month for three large wagons and a small one, which was quite a welcome addition to our income. They would put in about four months this way, the rest of the time being taken up in riding stuff down to our own stores; whilst we always let the cattle run for a fortnight or three weeks, before closing down for the year, and returning to Bulawayo.

It was an immense advantage being able to fatten up our cattle again so early in the year. When other men's spans were dead thin, hardly able to pull an empty wagon, ours would be in fine condition, owing to the fact that, even at the end of winter, we could always find good grass down in our trading district. In one part, just by the Lundi River, there was regular "salt veld," and two or three days on that proved to have the effect of a strong tonic on our beasts.

Of course, no one can pretend that the Transport Road in summer is the most pleasant of places. Those who have only known the Road under favourable conditions,

with a lightly-laden wagon carrying tents and gear for a shooting trip, for instance, can form no idea of what it is like when the rains are at their worst, how very uncomfortable things can become.

Uncomfortable! Even with half-a-dozen forcible adjectives in front of it, the word would be hopelessly inadequate. An emigrant steamer is uncomfortable, a church pew is uncomfortable; but the Transport Road in summer can be abominable.

It is curious how standards vary according to the life one has lived. I know many people, quite excellent, rate-paying citizens, to whom wet boots are a terror, a cold Sunday dinner a tragedy, who would be unspeakably upset did they happen to miss one meal in the day. There are those, again, who take a pleasure in incurring needless discomfort of a mild kind, such as camping on a damp river-bank, and eating the ptomained contents of tins; and there are those who, like myself, have had to live for so many years amongst crude surroundings that few experiences seem really rough. Yet I believe that, with us, with my kind, despite all we may have gone through, the love for, and the appreciation of, nice things, of good linen, good silver, of a beautiful woman's dress, of well-cooked food and good wines, is far keener than in the case of those who have always been used to comfort, to looking on luxuries as parts of the natural order of existence.

There were times, however, when life on the Road during the wet season tried the toughest, most patient of men. The only harder thing I have ever struck was in the Philippines, during the Pulajan War, when, in addition to the mud and the rain, we had the constant fear of death at the hands of a horrid little brown savage, a wholly-detestable person, whose one object in life was

to cleave you in two with his bolo, his two-foot-long knife ; but then, of course, it is never fair to compare the abnormal conditions of warfare with the natural conditions of everyday life. And, unpleasant though they might be, the conditions on the Road during the wet season were natural enough. You could not change them ; your only course was to make the best of them.

Nothing makes me more angry than to hear men growling against the hardships in a new country. What else do they expect ? Nature never intended those lands for the white man, at any rate not for the ordinary, over-civilized white man. She has set up her barriers, and it needs energy, grit, and endurance to break them down. Moreover, those who do not like facing difficulties can always remain at Home, with a doctor, a sanitary inspector, a curate and a county councillor ever within call, to give them physical or moral comfort.

In many ways, I suppose, I never had the real " Pioneer spirit " in me—at least not in the modern interpretation of the phrase. I was always on the crude side, the unpractical side, far more Elizabethan than Victorian. I wanted to go on, to see what was beyond the horizon ; but I never had the slightest desire to remain in the new land. The Good Colonist, the man who with an axe in his hand, and a high-flown sentiment on his lips—at least, he has it in novels—carving out a new home for himself in the Wilderness, building log-huts, and alternately shooting at, and converting, Lo, the Poor Indian, always seemed to me to be dull and unimaginative. You can so quickly get weary of the woods or the illimitable veld.

Personally, my wish was to copy the entirely sane example of the Elizabethans, to get whatever I could

out of the Land-beyond-the-Horizon, and then to return Home, and enjoy the fruits of my labour in a White Man's country, a course which would have been far pleasanter for me, as well as for Lo, the Poor Indian, or the Mashona, or whoever else was his local representative.

To settle in a tropical or sub-tropical land, to cut yourself off, for ever, from all the pleasant things of life, the little things which count, to be forced to have as your mate some woman who was so soulless that she was content just to grub along, or, out of your own utter selfishness, to break a good woman's heart by keeping her in such entirely alien surroundings, dragging her down with yourself, to bring into the world children, who, knowing nothing of refinement, nothing of our highly-strung civilization, must inevitably grow up—always do grow up—dull, narrow-minded, self-assertive—is this any sort of ideal for a White Man?

Of course, it is treason to-day to write, or speak, against colonization; but when, in a few decades, Europe realizes the gulf which separates its true children from the pseudo-white of America, Australia or Africa, there will be a strong revulsion of feeling.

Nature certainly warned us during the wet season. In Rhodesia, amongst other unpleasant peculiarities of the country, the rains are wholly uncertain. They may begin in September, begin in real earnest, or it may be December before they start. Often, those September rains are a veritable disaster to the cattle-owner. Two or three heavy showers on the burnt veld bring up the new grass, green, full of nutriment. At once, the cattle begin to put on flesh; also they develop a very natural distaste for any old winter grass. But, if those rains are followed, as is often the case, by weeks of scorching

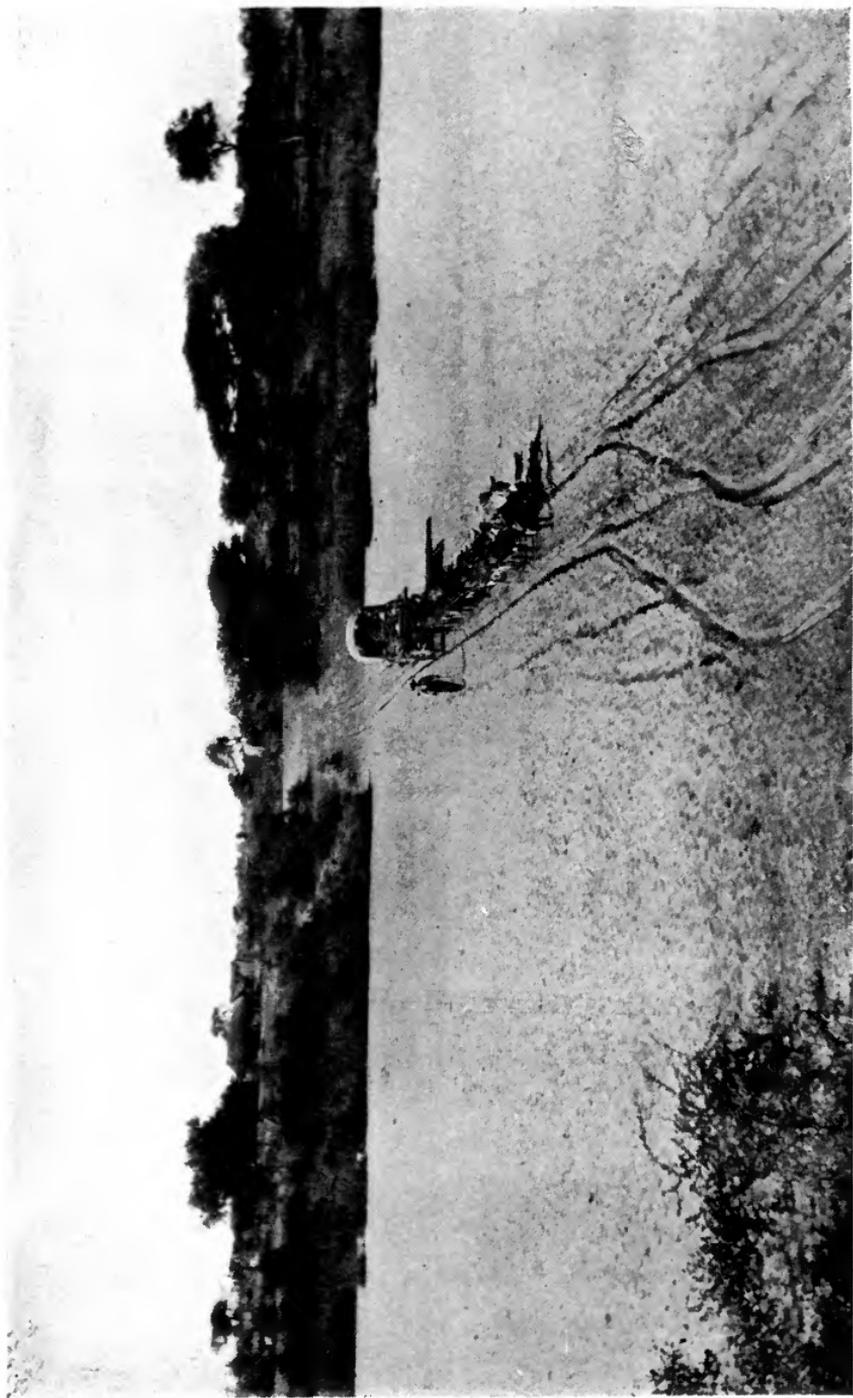
sun, and not a single shower, that young grass quickly withers, and your cattle are in an infinitely worse state than they were before.

During the dry season, the Road—except of course in the rocky parts—becomes hard and smooth. The mud holes dry up rapidly; the wagon wheels and the hoofs of the oxen soon wear down the ruts; when there have been bad wash-outs new spools are made; each succeeding transport-rider does a little towards putting the drifts in order, and by the end of June, trekking is usually comparatively easy. You can travel at night in safety, knowing that you will not stumble into some impossible pitfall.

But with the coming of the rains everything is changed. The vleis become mere bogs of foul-smelling black mud, horrible, essentially African in their detestable nature, apparently bottomless. Where the road is sandy, the rain washes out huge gullies, some of which are four feet deep. The rivers, rising suddenly in flood, sweep away all the careful work expended on the drifts, so that, when the torrent has subsided, you may find it a question of practically remaking the crossing-place.

Of course, the mud is the worst of all. No words could ever describe adequately the mire of Rhodesia during the wet season. It is perhaps for this reason that no official pamphlets, drawn up for the benefit of possible settlers, possible investors in the Chartered Company's land, make any reference to it. The official scribes are, doubtless, conscious of their own limitations, and leave the new-comer to find out for himself. They may be quite certain that he will find out, and, I suppose, manage to salve their consciences with that reflection.

A single day's rain, and what has been, for months



A HEAVY PULL.

past, a level, treeless stretch of plain becomes a hideous morass, extending sometimes, with short breaks, for miles.

It is not a case of a muddy surface, such as you get in England, but of apparently bottomless mud, clinging, foul, evil-smelling in the extreme. With every yard, your wheels sink into it more deeply. I have actually had a hind-wheel, four and a half feet in diameter, out of sight in that mud. It is a matter of daily occurrence to have your fore-carriage resting on the mud.

Naturally, in such circumstances, your cattle are terribly handicapped. How can they pull properly, when even to drag their hoofs clear of that abominable mire requires a great effort. The wonder is, not that the wagons stick so often, but that they ever come out at all. Time after time, I have seen spans practically up to their bellies in mud, still struggling gallantly.

If you are wise, when you get into a really bad mud hole, you take off your boots. They will hamper you tremendously, if you try and keep them on. Every time you drag them out they will be caked more heavily, until they seem to weigh about twenty pounds each; and, in the end, the mud will probably win, your boot-laces will give way, and, standing barefooted, you will have to dig out those wretched boots.

It is all digging in those muddy days, unending digging away of mud from round wheels which sink yet deeper the moment they move. If you can find them, you put branches in the trench in front of your wheels; if there are no bushes or trees, you try to make shift with grass.

Oh, it is a weary job! That mud sticks so hatefully to everything. I have never found any substance more difficult to dig into. But the worst of all is when, having got your wagon quite free, having let your cattle have

a rest and a feed, you inspan again—to stick afresh before you have gone six feet, to stick more hopelessly than ever.

After a while, your cattle lose heart, and refuse to make another effort, standing listlessly, miserable, rough-haired, taking not the slightest notice of the driver's cries or of his terrible, forty-foot-long whip. Who can blame them? They are as tired as you are; they hate the rain as greatly as you do; they can find little real sustenance on those high veld vleis; and they have tried and tried until they are unutterably weary of it all.

Two spans, three spans, four spans! I have actually had sixty cattle on one of my own wagons in the mud of Mashonaland, and they have found it a hard job to get it out; and I have seen close on a hundred fine bullocks on another man's wagon, which came out in pieces. He was so sick of trying that he hooked spans on anywhere, even on to the front wheels; and, when everything gave way, he did not seem in the least disconcerted, heavy though the loss was.

"I swore I would have it out, or smash it," he remarked, as he lighted his pipe.

It was no uncommon thing in one of those big mud holes to have to put a length of trek-chain, perhaps sixty feet, on to the düsselboom, and hook your cattle on to the end of that, because the mud round the wagon itself was so greatly churned up that the oxen had no chance. Naturally, when this was done there was no possibility of steering the wagon; it just followed the general direction in which the span was pulling; and, more than once, just as the front wheels reached hard ground, I have seen the whole thing turn turtle.

A wagon abandoned entirely, at least, abandoned for

several months, until the rains were over, abandoned within a few miles of its destination—the very idea would sound absurd, impossible, to many at Home, who are used to seeing Carter Paterson's vans pass the house twice a day; yet I have seen this happen several times. Once, I remember, in the "Gwelo mud" as we used to call it—the "Gwelo-Selukwe Road" was the official name—a poor wretch of a transport-rider had brought two heavy steam boilers all the way up from Bulawayo, brought them right through the mire, the rivers, and the wash-outs, to within what should have been one short trek of the mine at which he had to deliver them; then he had stuck, hopelessly, utterly. As it happened, there were plenty of spans near at the moment. He had, I think, three, there were four belonging to a Dutchman, and I myself had three; but after one try with seventy-two cattle, twenty-four on the düsselboom, and fourteen on each of the buck-beams, we decided it was no good. We could not dig it out—it sank deeper every time—and more cattle would simply have meant pulling the wagon to pieces. It was exactly the same with the other one.

Of course, with a load of general stuff, it was always possible to do as I had done some years before when I was trekking with a single wagon through the Filabusi District—cut a sledge, unload the stuff on to that, drag it over the mud, and bring the wagon itself out empty. But you cannot unload a boiler weighing nine thousand pounds.

That Gwelo mud was a byword throughout both Matabeleland and Mashonaland—how much nicer those names sound than the horrible term "Rhodesia"—and no one was ever eager to take loads for Selukwe during the wet

season ; consequently, the rates usually ran fairly high. We loaded for these frequently, however, as our oxen, being Mashonas, were exceptionally good in the mud ; and, on several occasions, we managed to make records. Once we did twenty miles of bad mud in four days, though, for weeks past, no one had done it in less than ten, whilst the average had been somewhere about a fortnight.

Three experiences in the mud close to Bulawayo remain fixed in my memory. The first was when we trekked out late one afternoon—the forwarding agent had been unusually intoxicated, and so had delayed us at the yard—and we had only got two or three miles before the leading wagon, the tent wagon in this case, plunged into a mud hole. It was already dusk, and, a few minutes later, it began to rain, a steady, drenching downpour. Of course, you cannot work oxen in the rain—if you attempt to do so, you will quickly have yoke-sores on their necks—consequently, the only thing to do was to outspan. Meanwhile, the right-hand side of the tent wagon had settled down in the mud, until it was a full foot lower than the other side, a fact which did not seem likely to add to my comfort when I turned in. Moreover, there was no sort of possibility of making a fire and cooking anything, even a kettle, and I was drenched to the skin. Yet I can remember vividly—it is one of the best of my memories of those African days—the sense of comfort, almost of luxury, I experienced when I climbed into that wagon tent, let down the flap, and lit a candle. A few minutes later, I was blissfully happy, thinking of those who were still out in the rain, in the mud and the darkness. I had shed my soaking clothes, wrapped myself up in the blankets, mixed a large mugful of Hol-

lands gin, and filled a dry pipe. Moreover, in Bulawayo, I had found a roll of Home papers which I had not yet opened.

The wagon was canted over at an unpleasant angle ; the weather outside was abominable ; the mud was getting worse every minute ; and I had the prospect of a foul day in front of me. Yet, for the moment, I was, probably, the most contented man in the two provinces. It was the contrast with the conditions outside.

The second incident which I remember so vividly occurred near one of the stores on the Gwelo-Bulawayo road. The mud was appalling—in fact, at that point, the track was a full half mile wide—and the night was one of the blackest I had ever known. We had outspanned at dusk—we were travelling south with empty wagons—and had just finished our evening meal, when we heard a great deal of shouting some two hundred yards away, behind the store.

Amous put his head into the tent. “ It’s the coach, Baas,” he said. “ It’s got right off the road, and it’s stuck.”

A few minutes later, a Boer came up with a lantern. He confirmed the Basutu’s words. The coach had blundered into a very bad mud hole, and the mules could not possibly shift it. Within a few minutes, Amous had the black span in the yoke ; and it did not take those perfectly-trained beasts long to hook out the coach, and bring it round to the front of the store.

There were some half-dozen men in the vehicle, and I think I have never seen a more utterly exhausted collection. They had been seven days coming down from Salisbury, travelling, or trying to travel, night and day, practically without any chance of sleep, for you cannot

rest much in a straight-backed coach seat. I think it was nine times that they had been overturned. Their journey was nearly over now. Even with the roads in the condition they were, another two or three hours would see them in Bulawayo ; but one, at least, of them had had enough. He picked up his hand-bag and blankets, staggered across to my wagons, and threw himself down under one of them.

“Take me on when you trek,” he muttered. “I’m absolutely done.”

A few moments later, he was fast asleep. Several times we hooked the mail-coaches out of bad places, but in none of the other instances were the passengers in such a bad way.

The third outstanding memory of summer trekking near Bulawayo is of a certain extremely dark night, when we were coming in from the north. The rain had held us up until nearly midnight, about three miles out, but, as I was anxious to be at the Racecourse outspan on the Tuli Road the following morning, I had inspanned as soon as the deluge ceased. The wagons were quite empty, the cattle in fine condition ; consequently, for once, the mud did not worry us in the very least degree.

There was no reason at all for me to sit up. The drivers were perfectly efficient, and there seemed no possibility of trouble, so, as soon as we were off, I turned in, the tent wagon being, on this occasion, the last of the four.

About an hour later, I awoke, suddenly. The wagons had stopped, and there was a great deal of wrangling and shouting going on. At first, I could make out nothing ; then, gradually, it dawned on me that we were not on the main road at all. The track was quite narrow, and very well-made. Almost before Amous explained,

I realized what had happened. The leader of the first wagon, being, probably, half asleep, had made a mistake, and had led his span up the approach of one of Bulawayo's largest private houses ; and, of course, the other spans had followed !

When I went forward, I could make the house out plainly, only some twenty yards away.

There was one course, and one course alone open to us—to turn the wagons, and get them out again, though to swing round four spans of sixteen cattle each in that nicely-kept plantation probably meant to ruin everything.

I do not know to this day whose house it was, and I was careful not to make inquiries, or to return there in the daylight ; but, judging from the scale on which everything had been done, the owner was probably a mining magnate, and so not deserving of sympathy. The wholly-amazing thing was that no one in the house heard us. You cannot swing your spans without a good deal of noise, and, though the owner may have been on a visit to Berlin or Jerusalem, there must have been some sort of caretakers in the place.

Still, no one appeared, no one questioned us. It is needless to say that I breathed a huge sigh of relief when the last wagon was clear, and we were on the main road once more.

The road which had the worst reputation in every way was that leading from Bulawayo to the Victoria Falls. In winter, it was quite impossible, owing to lack of water, neither man nor beast could get up it ; whilst in summer, when the few wagons did go up, conditions were very nearly as bad. There was too much water then, wholly-appalling stretches of black mud alternating with terrible stretches of rocky track ; there were unlimited lions to

eat your cattle, and any amount of "poison veld" to kill those which the lions spared.

So far as I can remember, the distance was two hundred and twenty miles by road.

I was offered loads for the Falls one Christmastide. Most transport-riders fought shy of such trips, but we had the reputation of being ready to take on most things, and a forwarding agent sought us out in the Market Bar. He offered us fifty-five shillings a hundred pounds weight to carry some twelve thousand pounds up to a missionary station near the Falls, trading goods, of course, blankets, beads and picks.

Over sixpence a pound for two hundred odd miles—it sounded very tempting; but it seemed a little curious that the agent should be so very anxious to close the deal at once; so we hesitated. Within half an hour, we had discovered that the current rate paid by decent folk, ordinary traders and so on, was seventy shillings a hundred pounds, though the missionaries, who got their goods for nothing from subscribers, or with subscribers' money, and paid no licence fees, were trying to get them taken up on the cheap. Perhaps, they would have put one of their black evangelists on to pray specially for us.

Oh, if only the people of England could see the missionary at work, if only they could realize one tenth of the harm he is doing in South Africa alone, if only they could look forward a few years and grasp something of the ghastly horrors of that coming Native War, there would be a fierce revulsion of feeling. At Home, in certain circles, the missionary is a combination of saint and hero; on the spot, amongst those who know him and his ways, he is a public nuisance. Three-quarters of the troubles in China have been caused by those folk,

and at least half the native unrest in Africa can be traced directly to them. They live comfortable, almost luxurious, lives, in good camps, surrounded by native scum—only in missionary camps will you find numbers of native women—they are well-paid from Home, and, consequently, when they enter into competition, as they always do, with the ordinary trader, they have a most unfair advantage, especially as, in very many cases, the trading goods are sent free by the Faithful at Home, to be given to the Heathen in his blindness. But I never yet knew a Kaffir receive any stuff free at a Mission Station.

I think that a good many missionaries, especially the female ones, are sincere when they go out first, every whit as sincere as those foolish folk out of whose bounty their passage money and salaries are paid; but a few years' practical experience produces radical changes. Some become fanatics, refusing to face facts, sweeping aside all practical considerations, gorging themselves on formulæ; others, saddened, weary, true Servants of their Master, recognize the essential hollowness of it all, the rottenness which underlies the organization, the gross commercialism, and yet stay on, trying by the goodness of their own lives to atone in part for the evil wrought by their colleagues; but many, the majority I fear, quickly fall into the ways of their chiefs, and join in the scramble for the shekels.

The Catholics are, of course, exceptions to the general rule. In South Africa at any rate, no man ever yet knew a Catholic Father who was making money for himself, or one who was having anything but a good influence on every person, black or white, with whom he came in contact. I am the more glad to be able to say this as I,

myself, am far removed from belonging to the Catholic Church.

Our greatest terrors on the mud flats were what we used to call "graves," the pits formed by the digging out of other wagons. Sometimes, these were of huge size, quite sufficient to contain the whole fore-carriage. The men who had dug them had left them open—it was worse than useless to try and fill them in again with soft mud—but the recent rain had filled them, and there was nothing to warn you. Even if your cattle managed to avoid them, one of your wheels might plunge in, perhaps resulting in the capsize of the whole wagon. Even when I had plenty of cattle available, I have spent two days getting one wagon out of a "grave."

Now and then, you came across "graves" which were, literally, large enough to contain a wagon, huge pits dug with infinite labour, and having a gradual "pull-out." You know, at once, what these mean—some one with a load all in one piece, a boiler, a mortar-box, an engine casting, has had a capsize, and the only method of reloading was to sink the wagon to the ground level, and roll, or lever, the load back on to it.

A man who took a load of that kind during the wet season, unless at a huge rate, might justly be set down as a fool. I myself have done many foolish things, but I never committed that folly. Once, however, there was a forwarding agent—perhaps I should call him a Forwarding Agent, for he considered himself quite aristocratic—who came to me on the Market Square, with unusual civility in his manner, and the price of many drinks in his pocket.

I allowed him to spend money on refreshment for me in the Market Bar, and, after a while, he came to the

point. He had, it appeared, a heavy casting to forward to a mine about thirty-five miles away, and he wanted me to take it. He told me that there was a specially high rate for it, and that, as I was, like him, a Public School man, he was giving me the chance.

I asked the weight of the casting, and the destination.

"About ten thousand pounds," he answered, then told me the name of the mine, adding "It's a splendid road."

The lies were splendid, or, at least, they were audacious. I knew every inch of the road, having ridden it often, knew that, just at the mine, was one of the very steepest and rockiest drifts in the country; also, I had happened to see that casting on a railway truck, and had noticed the weight marked on it—fifteen thousand pounds.

I declined his offer promptly, so promptly that he went off with an ugly red flush on his clean-shaven face. After that, I forgot all about the matter. We got loads for a short trip, did it in very good time, and returned to our favourite outspan on the Racecourse.

We had hardly sent the cattle off, and settled down to a belated breakfast, when Amous came over and told us that a "very big span indeed" was coming along the road.

It was a big span, twenty-two fine oxen, and on the wagon behind these was that huge casting. Even on the level, every bullock had to be kept up against the yoke, instead of all the work being done by the centre part of the span, the fore and hind oxen being the reserves for heavy places.

The transport-rider, a lean weary-looking Dutchman, outspanned close by us, and we asked him over to our

wagons to have a drink. Already, he was pretty sick about the whole thing. He, also, had been told that the load was "about ten thousand," and not until his wagon was under the crane did he learn that it was half as much again.

Ten thousand pounds represent an abnormally heavy summer load for a wagon, whilst fifteen thousand sounded impossible. Still, I suppose he had been too greatly astonished, or too shy—he was a very simple, back-veld Boer—and he had accepted it. Amazing though it may sound, he knew nothing of the road over which he had to travel. We, knowing it well, told him the truth, at the same time trying not to dishearten him. Still, he went away very sad.

His journey was one long disaster. With ordinary loads, and ordinary luck, he ought to have been back in eight days. Instead of that, he was twenty-eight¹ days. At the Nine Mile Water, one of his front wheels crumpled up, another at the Fifteen Mile.² A hind wheel went a little later on, whilst in the big drift he nearly lost wagon, cattle, and load. When he came back, his cattle were thin and weary, he himself was a wreck from fever and anxiety, and he was actually out of pocket over the job.

The mud was the factor which impressed itself on you most during the wet season, because it caused you the greatest degree of misery and hard work; but the "wash-outs" were almost as bad. You dare not attempt to travel at night during the summer. You never knew into what you were going to stumble. Too often, the road seemed to form a kind of gutter, down which the rain water from the surrounding veld poured in a torrent. A mere two-inch-deep rut would become in a few hours

a three-foot-deep gully. To get a wheel in that was either to capsize or to smash an axle.

Time after time, two or three times a day, perhaps, it would be a question of cutting a new spoor, in order to avoid big wash-outs—a very wearisome occupation.

It was, of course, the drifts which suffered most in this way. I have spent two days in remaking a drift, rendering it crossable, and, just as I was ready to inspan, found that the level of the water was rising so rapidly that I dare not run the risk of trying to cross. There had been a big storm somewhere up country, and the flood was now coming down on us.

So far as being held up by floods was concerned, we were always fairly lucky. Only once or twice was it a case of over a week; yet I knew one man who, in three consecutive seasons, had spells of over six weeks on a river bank. It is a dreadful, wearisome job, that waiting. You can settle down to nothing, for any hour the fall may begin, and the falls are often as rapid as the rises.

You exhaust all your reading matter, and, unless you have been wise enough to foresee the chances of delay, you have soon exhausted your stock of luxuries, white man's food—Rhodesian luxuries, I mean, bully beef, tea, coffee, sugar, and tinned milk.

A weary job! It is the very nadir of weariness. I have spent two solid months, starving in a stockade in the Philippine Islands, a small party of us cut off from everything and everybody, but, even then, we had a kind of sustaining force in the constant expectation of an attack; but, on a riverbank in Mashonaland, your only excitement is to watch your gauge stick at the water's edge.

How do the natives, the drivers and leaders, fare during

the wet season? Very badly, one would say at first sight. They have no wagon tent, and usually no spare clothes. Yet, on the other hand, after a long experience, I believe that they feel the discomforts very little; and I am certain that they prefer the rains to the bitter cold of the winter mornings. Wet is far less terrible to them than frost.

One wet season, when our wagon tent had been smashed up, and we had been unable to buy another one, Amyas and I used always to sleep under one of the wagons, with Peter for company. We had waterproof sheets, but the ground was usually so saturated that these seemed of little avail. You always felt that your blankets were wet, and, as a rule, such was the case; but, on the other hand, you rarely got a chill in consequence; yet, even though there were no bad results, no one could rank damp blankets amongst the pleasant things of life.

As a rule, the only alcoholic liquor we carried on the wagons was "Squareface," Hollands Gin. This was by far the most valuable of spirits. Whisky merely made you bilious, and left you ready for the ministrations of the malaria-bringing mosquito; Hollands washed out the organs, and saved you from the risk of Blackwater Fever. I never knew any other man who took the risks we did, who had fever so constantly, and yet escaped Blackwater. I put our immunity down entirely to our use of Hollands.

Many a night, when Amyas and I have been working, barefooted, drenched to the skin, superintending the digging out of the wagons, worked like that for six or eight hours on end, we have "perished" a bottle of De Kuyper's Hollands—the double-sized bottles, not the ordinary ones—and have not turned a hair over it. As for our drivers, though the Liquor Laws are severe,

rightly severe, we used to break them on those occasions, and serve out Dop by the cupful at a time. Cocoa-folk may say what they like, but human nature was not intended to face such conditions, and cannot face them without stimulants.

The question of food during the wet season often became a very serious one. We were very careful never to run short so far as raw material was concerned, and our boys never had reason to complain on that score—in fact, we always allowed them to help themselves, the drivers to Boer meal, the leaders to Kaffir meal; but uncooked meal is useless when you can get no fire. And on that abominable high veld in summer firing was an ever-present worry.

You have to see that much-vaunted High Plateau in order to realize its barrenness. It is the very Abomination of Desolation. In winter, when it is possible to range round a little, and everything is dry, a piccanin can usually manage to keep up a stock of dry twigs, which, eked out with the dry cowdung at the outspans, suffices for ordinary needs; but in summer the cowdung is merely a semi-liquid breeding ground for flies, whilst the twigs are too wet to burn. To be stuck for a week in a big mud vlei becomes something very nearly akin to a tragedy.

The white man has his tinned meat, and, if he is wise, a stock of biscuits as well; but his boys cannot cook their porridge, and, to them, porridge is the sole form of food. You may share your provisions with them, and still they will be as hungry as before. You have merely given them "flavourings," not "food."

I have had many and many a sleepless night, thinking of my hungry retainers, and yet, now, I find myself

wondering whether they suffered as much, physically, as I did mentally on their behalf. Their feelings, their capacity for suffering, are nothing like so great as our own.

As a rule, I have a fairly good memory—this book is written without the aid of one single note, one single old letter, and it is over ten years since I bade “good-bye” to the Transport Road—but some things seem to run into one another, and you cannot pick them out definitely. An example of this is the Christmas Days I spent on the Road. I think there were three of them—on the others, I was in some township or camp. I think, too, that on each of them we could not trek because of the weather, and I am certain that on one there was such a bitter, driving rain that I never got out of my blankets.

Another time—Amyas was with me then—we had laid in a stock of various Christmas things, the parodies on Christmas cheer which are considered good enough for the Colonies, and, despite the fact that we were on that detestable high-veld, and that it was raining hard, we intended to spend a decent evening in the wagon tent, talking of the things we would do when we shook the dust, or the mud, of South Africa off our feet finally, and returned to a White Man’s land.

The first trouble occurred with the Christmas Pudding. It was in a tin, the very thickest and strongest tin I have ever encountered, and the tin opener broke on it at the first attempt. Then, Amous came to the rescue, with an axe. Certainly he opened that tin of pudding, but, when we had inspected the mess that remained, we suggested that he might like it for himself. The next discovery was that the haunch of steinbok had gone absolutely bad, and that the flies had blown all over our two cold partridges. That reduced us down to bully-

beef. . . . And then the crowning tragedy occurred—Amyas had put a bottle of whisky and one of brandy, all the liquor we had, on the tailboard of the wagon, preparatory to opening them. He was still searching for the corkscrew in the tent-pockets when the back-flap of the tent suddenly blew down. A moment later, the soil of Africa had soaked up both brandy and whisky.

Another Christmas, we were sitting under the wagon—the tent had been smashed up—and the bucksail was hanging down, within an inch of the ground. With us was a pointer bitch belonging to a young Afrikaner. Like all her kind, she was very affectionate, in a foolish sort of way, and would lay her head on Amyas' knee. After a while, he grew tired of this—the heat was pretty bad—and pushed her away gently, pushed her against the bucksail. His hand was still on her head when she gave vent to one terrible yelp, and disappeared, backwards. A leopard had been waiting outside. We never even found a trace of her.

A wet season with a good wagon tent to shelter you is bad enough; but without one it becomes abominable. We had to go through one whole summer tentless. It was a driver called Joseph who was to blame. As a rule, I had Basutu drivers, knowing by experience that they are infinitely superior to all others. If I could not get them, I took Zulu, and, failing those, as a last resource, Cape boys. Nothing good ever came out of Cape Colony, at least in the way of coloured men, and very little that was good ever came from Zululand. Joseph was a Zulu. With him, I made my usual bargain—five pounds a month and rations if he could drive; nothing at all if he proved a failure.

I think he was the worst driver I ever struck. I think

he was even the most inefficient Zulu I ever struck, and that is saying an enormous lot. Amyas and I took it in turns to drive his wagon, trying, at the same time, to teach him the rudiments of his trade, for we could not well afford to do without him, and there was little chance of picking up a substitute. We even went so far as to promise to give him the five pounds a month still, if he could learn to handle his span.

Amous loathed him, loathed him both because he could not drive, and because he came of an inferior race to his own ; but he tried loyally to help us, and, every night, at the outspans, we would hear Amous giving his unlucky colleague long and involved lectures on the technical side of wagon driving.

It was a bad trip, rotten weather, terrible mud. A river held us up for a week ; then we managed to struggle through, and, at our first halting place, met some local savages who told us that the next river, only seven miles ahead, was just crossable, after having been in flood for six weeks. Then they pointed up stream, to a distant range of hills, and remarked that great rains were falling there.

We needed no second warning. Any moment that river ahead, the M'Gesi, might rise again, and we might be held up between the two floods. Amous roused the piccanins promptly, and it was not long before we were once more jolting amongst the wash-outs in the road. A full hour of daylight remained when we reached the top of the M'Gesi Drift. Taking Amous with us, we went down, and waded across. The stream was very narrow, not more than thirty yards, bank to bank, and was running strong ; but we went through without difficulty, and decided, at once, that the cattle could do it. As a

precaution, however, we unhooked one span, the red one, took it through loose, and kept it just at the other side, ready to hook on the moment the team pulling the wagon was well in the stream. It was fortunate we took this precaution, fortunate too that Amyas, who was abnormally powerful, acted as leader for the first wagon. The cattle could barely keep their feet—in fact, one or two of the smaller ones were swimming—and it was with a deep feeling of relief that I saw Amous hook on, and rush the wagon out, right up the Drift, into safety.

The second and third wagons also got over, and there remained only Joseph's span, with the tent wagon. Amyas was on the other bank with Amous, I was at the foot of the Drift, and was just about to return to drive the tent wagon down, when Joseph, filled, I suppose, with a sudden self-confidence, started his oxen. There was quite a nasty bank on the left-hand side of the road, and any decent driver would have kept his cattle well away from it; but this particular idiot remained on the right-hand side of the span; with the inevitable result that the two left-hand wheels mounted the bank, and the whole vehicle turned completely over, absolutely bottom upwards, with the tent crushed to matchwood underneath.

It so happened that on that wagon were all our provisions, or, at any rate, our groceries, for the next six months. When we finally got the thing righted again, the mess in the road was appalling. Tins of curry powder had burst open; bottles of Worcester Sauce, jars of pickles, packages of pepper were all smashed. Perhaps the worst of all was a large bottle of concentrated vinegar, the smell from which was amazingly pungent, and the main contents of which had got on to my blankets. A

bicycle, for which we had paid eighteen pounds, and had never yet used, was reduced to scrap iron. The stock of a shot-gun was cracked.

At the moment, however, I had no eyes for losses in detail; I wanted to get at the cause of the losses in general—Joseph, the pseudo-driver. But Joseph had gone already. I suppose a sense of his own unworthiness seized him, or, perhaps, he divined something of what I was likely to do and to say; at any rate, he went; and, though he probably crawled back during the night for his few rags of blankets and clothing, I never saw him again.

It was daylight before we had the wagon righted and reloaded; and, all those hours, I was in a terror lest the stream should rise and catch me with three wagons on one side, one on the other. As it was, however, luck was with us, and, instead of rising, the flood went down.

Above, I have drawn a picture of the bad side of life on the Transport Road during the wet season, putting in all the discomforts and leaving out all the pleasures. Of course, there were many, many fine days, many treks when Nature seemed perfect, and you revelled in the joy of being alive. It was so splendid to see your cattle fat and well, to have them come back from pasture as full as they could go, to mark how, day by day, they recovered from the semi-starvation of the winter. It was splendid to have the grass green, the leaves green, never to be short of water; so splendid that, at times, you found yourself wondering if, after all, you could really be in South Africa.

I used to curse the mud, to curse the wash-outs, and, as I have shown, I have still a lively remembrance of all the hardships; but none of these altered my love for the

Road ; none of them offered any reason or excuse for giving up the Road ; in fact, in some weird way, I believe they made the Road dearer to me. They kept down the number of those who really knew it in all its moods.

Of course, transport work during the summer was a risky business, financially. With reasonable luck, you did extremely well, for rates were always high, and loads plentiful ; but if a river held you up for a long time you might easily find a month's profits gone ; whilst if you struck exceptionally bad mud, you might tire your oxen so greatly that you had to give them a protracted rest.

Naturally, we never agreed to deliver loads within any specified time. It would have been lunacy to do so ; and both consignee and consignor knew that the transport-rider, for his own sake, would not dawdle.

Once only did we have unpleasantness on this score. We had loaded, in Bulawayo, for Gwelo, three loads for about ten different people, including a large quantity of beer and spirits for the Gwelo Mounted Police. The beer was in barrel, a most unusual thing ; incidentally, too, it made a most awkward load.

It was about nine days before Christmas when we took the stuff aboard. Nothing was said to us about there being any special hurry, although it would have made no difference in any case. We trekked to the outspan, and let the cattle go, intending to go on that night. It was three days later before we moved again. During that time, the rain had never ceased for an instant. It was through a veritable sea of mud that we ploughed our way. Never before had I known the big flats quite so bad. In all, it took us twelve days to do the hundred and ten miles to Gwelo, which was, in the circumstances, very good time, especially as we were very short of boys.

At any rate, we got in ahead of all the other wagons which had loaded up the same day as ourselves.

But one of the consignees, a local hotelkeeper, was not pleased. He drove out to meet us, and found us outspanned a mile or so from the town. Perhaps, he thought we were Boers; at any rate, he misunderstood us, for he began to rage and curse at the delay. Then he found he had struck a cyclone in Amyas. Within a very short space of time, he had realized what a pitiful little creature he himself must be, and was apologizing. Later on, when we delivered his stuff—it was only a couple of small cases—he pressed drinks on us.

Up at the Police Camp, they greeted us with enthusiasm. We had, it appeared, all their Christmas supply of liquor, and, though Christmas was now past, they were none the less glad to have it. They would have a second Christmas, they explained. They did all they could to induce us to stay, and help in the consumption of that beer; but I have been through one lot of Christmas festivities with the Police, and I did not want to repeat the experiment. Sometimes, hospitality can go too far.

I can remember still, as vividly as though it were only yesterday, instead of twelve or fourteen years ago, the sense of relief with which we turned back towards Bulawayo with empty wagons. There was no trouble now, no need to worry about mud holes, no question of digging in the rain. We could make up our minds where we were going to outspan, and be quite certain of reaching that place. As we passed each of the spots where we had stuck on our way up, it seemed almost impossible now that we could have been there so long. Really, I believe that the pleasure of returning with empty wagons, after a rough outward trip, more than repays you for all

the hardships, especially if the trip has been a success from a financial point of view.

Riding transport in summer was a hard life, perhaps the very hardest life a white man could live in South Africa ; and I, for one, used to realize those hardships, and curse them. But, for all that, I loved the life, and I still love the memory of it.

THE TECHNICAL SIDE OF
TRANSPORT WORK

CHAPTER XV

THE TECHNICAL SIDE OF TRANSPORT WORK

THE technical side of transport work was a subject which very few Home-born men ever mastered. Some got a rough idea of how to "boss-up" a convoy, how to keep things going generally, all details being left to the drivers; but they knew nothing of the care needed to maintain wagons and gear in working order month in and month out, of all the little things which have to be attended to every day.

Transport work was, or ought to have been, a profession, almost a science. I cannot say it is a profession, for there will never again be real transport, those hateful railways have taken all the Romance out of Africa. Railways and politicians! Abominably bad State Railways run by wholly dishonest and disloyal politicians—we have these to-day in place of the Transport Road and the grimly-plucky, absolutely honest men of the Road.

We call that Progress and Civilization. We prate of the glories of giving constitutions to Daughter States, of giving votes to our enemies; we treat the braggart Colonial Premier as the man-who-made-the-country, and ignore the fact that the men who really did the work have been allowed to starve to death.

The Colonial politician is an unwholesome product of the second stage in the country's development.

During the first stage, the Pioneer Days, there would have been no place for him, even had he dared to risk his precious skin on the frontier ; but, as soon as the rough work is complete, the heavy toil over, the risks reduced to a minimum, he comes in, like a hyæna, and, too often, manages to persuade the foolish folk at Home that he is really a lion in disguise.

If I had had the opportunity of choosing wagons for transport work in Rhodesia, I should always have selected Natal-made ones, Both in design and in workmanship they are distinctly superior to those from the Cape Colony. The main difference in construction is in the "tongues," the fork into which the "düsselboom," or "pole," fits. A Cape tongue is a crude thing, and the düsselboom is very badly stayed ; but the Natal tongue is excellent. I should say, without any exaggeration, that, for every three düsselbooms you break in a Cape wagon, you only break one in a Natal wagon.

Then, too, in the case of the latter, the "lang-wagon," the wooden bar which connects the fore carriage with the after carriage, is far more easily replaced. To put a new "lang-wagon" in a Cape wagon meant an appalling amount of heavy work ; with a Natal-built vehicle it is comparatively easy. The "bucks," the actual bodies of the wagons, are always more or less similar, with nine-inch by three-inch buck beams of hard wood, "stink wood" usually ; but the Natal brake is far more handy than the Cape brake ; whilst the Natal wagon tent is incomparably superior to its rival. It speaks volumes for the innate conservatism of the Afrikaner, that the Cape people should have gone on for so many years without copying a single one of the improvements introduced by their more intelligent neighbours.

Düsselbooms are a never-ending source of worry and anxiety to the transport-rider. To make one, it is necessary to have a pole some eighteen feet long, and about seven inches in diameter at the thick end. On the middle and low veld it is easy enough to obtain suitable sticks; but on the high veld one often has to tramp for miles, and then only succeed in getting a most inferior article.

And it is on the high veld that most of the düsselbooms get broken. Those mud flats are absolutely fatal to them. I have had five go in four days. Your span swings round suddenly, the front oxen pulling the leader clean off his feet; the trek chain taughtens; but, so deeply are the front wheels embedded that the düsselboom cannot come into line with the chain, then, naturally, it smashes, and you have to waste half a day, a day perhaps, putting in a new one.

Whenever possible, I used to carry some spare sticks on the wagons, but they were rather a nuisance, and the drivers, unused to such precautions, would try their best to get rid of them. As a rule, the only tools used by the transport-rider, or his boys, in getting düsselbooms or "lang-wagons" were an auger and a side-axe; but I had an adze, and, what was more, I was able to use it without injuring myself. As a time-saver, it was invaluable to us. I could shape up a pole in half the time it would have taken Amous to do it with his axe, expert though the little man was; and I always took good care to have the augers in first-rate condition, as well as to have a good supply of spare bolts and nuts. When it came to a matter of repairs, my engineering experience stood me in good stead.

I do not know whether I was unusually lucky, or

unusually scrupulous, but I was one of those who could say, truthfully, that he had never taken a telephone pole for a düsselboom. Those telephone poles—the telephone played the part of the telegraph during those early days in Matabeleland and Mashonaland—were very tempting. They were just the right size, well seasoned, and, in most cases, were very near the road. After all, if you did take one, you only let the wire sag a bit, and, sooner or later, the Mounted Police would come along and replace it. Really, you were doing them a kindness by finding them a job.

I never happened actually to want a düsselboom, when one of those poles was the most handy thing available—that was the reason why I never used one of them, why I can look down on other transport-riders from the top of a very pinnacle of virtue. Nor did I ever take the telephone wire itself for the purpose of repairs; in fact, I never actually saw it being taken; though, more than once, I have seen an Afrikaner diligently repairing some broken part with wire of the same gauge as that which ought to have been hanging on the poles and was not.

To smash a düsselboom was a nuisance; to smash a lang-wagon was a filthy nuisance; but to have a wheel crumple up was a disaster, because you could not repair it yourself, and could not go on until you had sent back for a new one, which might easily mean a month's delay, for there were only one or two places where wheels were obtainable, obtainable at wholly outrageous prices.

Personally, although I did things from which other men recoiled in horror, crossed and re-crossed mountain ranges which none of them would even attempt, though nothing was ever too risky to the wagons for me to try, I never smashed either a wheel or an axle. For this,

again, I think my engineering experience helped me. I never went out with a shaky wheel or a bad tyre. I used to look at the naves, not only at the felloes, knowing that the naves were by far the more important. And I knew, too, that a thin tyre was an ever-present danger.

My blacksmith's bill was a very heavy one, from twenty to thirty pounds per wagon per annum, but I always saw that I got good value for the money, and I was always able to laugh at those who had tried to economize. I was constantly passing them on the road, broken down temporarily.

Tyres were, of course, the heaviest item. I can imagine what an English farmer would say to the prices charged ; but there was a variety of small things as well, stays, bolts, angle irons, which served to run up the account. So far as axles went, I believe I am right in saying I always had three-inch ones, and I certainly never had one break ; but for really heavy loads, over nine thousand pounds weight, the three and a half inch axle was necessary.

As a rule, the bullock-wagon, the full-sized wagon, was eighteen feet in length, with three by nine inch buck-beams. I owned several of this type, but, in the end, I came to the conclusion that, for all-round work, economical work, the sixteen foot wagon with the same sized beams was far better. Certainly, it would not take so heavy a load, but it travelled faster, and, in the course of the twelve months, it earned more money than did its larger rival—which was, after all, the great test. The lighter wagon may lose you a little during the dry season ; the men with the nine thousand five hundred pound loads may scoff at your mere eight thousand, but in the summer you will simply run away from them, doing three

journeys to their two, and keeping your bullocks fit all the time. I am absolutely certain that the lighter wagon always paid, up on those rough, unmade roads.

A wagon tent was, of course, an additional weight, and it also rendered loading more difficult ; but it was really a necessity. Of course, everybody used the half-tent, extending rather less than half the length of the wagon. The whole tent, which illustrators of stories are so fond of portraying, is practically extinct. I do not remember ever seeing more than two or three of these, and, in each case, they were the property of some missionary, who could afford to travel in luxury.

It is wonderful how many people can live in an ordinary half-tent. With Englishmen, one is sufficient, two is the limit ; but Afrikanders are different. I had often seen three or four children, and a husband and wife, crawl out of one, and had shuddered at the bare idea of what the interior must be like ; but when I saw a family of twenty-two with one tent as its headquarters I came to the conclusion that I had struck the Nadir of Nastiness. I do not mean that all those twenty-two slept in that tent ; but they all used it, at various times ; and, like all Afrikanders, they had no use for soap.

My dog, Little Prince, is always going in quest of problematical creatures called " Biteys." " Biteys " live—at least, he thinks they live—in dark corners and under bushes ; but, if he could explore an Afrikander's wagon tent, I am sure he would find far more " Biteys " than his little brain ever dreamed of, " Biteys " which bit you, and made you scratch. I could scratch to-day at the mere thought of them.

In the tent was always a mattress formed of strips of raw hide, interlaced. On this, you put your wool mat-

tress—if you had one—and then your blankets. Round the sides, you had wall-pockets, to hold the various necessaries of life, tobacco, cartridges and matches, whilst the rifles and the shot-gun swung overhead. The height was only about four feet, the length seven feet, the width six foot six. As a home, a wagon tent may seem to be somewhat inadequate ; but, for three years, my tent was my only home, and I believe I loved it far more than I have loved any of the infinitely more commodious abodes I have had since.

On the Road, the Great Road, the Road-which-always-went-on, you were a free man, your own master, lord of your own soul, with your own destiny in your hands, so far as the Lord-of-All would allow.

Always you were moving, always you were doing useful work, Man's work, always you were making use of your Manhood, of the God-like part of yourself. Unconsciously, quite unconsciously, by doing your best, by having to do your best, you were bringing yourself into touch with the Divine.

When you toiled in the rain, barefooted, soaked, muddied from head to foot, digging out the wagon, and cursing, perhaps, all the time, toiling always, keeping your niggers at it by your example, your God was there, beside you, because you were doing a White's Man's work, and so spreading the ideal of the White Man, the Creed of the Christ.

When you took the leading reim from the voorloeper, and yourself led the cattle through the flooded river, your God was with you, because the White Man must go first, to show the way.

There was no place for any but a Man on the Transport Road. The weakling, the coward, the miser, the

creature-which-does-not-love-animals, all these found but short shrift. Men and men only, were wanted; men and men only survived.

Egotistical? Aye, perhaps I am egotistical; but —no man living dare say that I have not been through it all.

Sometimes, it is a relief to boast. When you have listened for months to the putrid pettiness of smug suburbanites, male and female, to the men whose greatest adventure has been the losing of a train, to the women whose sole interest in life is the supposed immorality of a woman better looking than themselves, the men and women who have never done anything, save breathe, and, thereby, vitiate, good air, save bring into the world children as inane and useless as themselves, save, by the vileness of their tongues, add to the sorrow of those who can think and feel, those who have a right to live, when you have been through all this, you want to hit, and hit hard, to drive your blows home.

I have no patience left nowadays. I can no longer obey the Pauline precept and "Suffer fools gladly."

Really, I wonder that my stock of patience lasted so long. The fools have ever been the enemies of every one who was dear to me, they are still the enemies to-day. A woman need only have brains and beauty to bring all the ordinary women, the hyæna women of the suburbs, howling hideously after her. Like their prototypes, the hyænas, they are as cowardly as they are ugly, but the offence of their very existence remains.

To lie with a laugh on their lips, their well-rouged lips—that is the way of the suburban woman, hedging against a slander action by saying it was a joke. And when you send the suburban woman to the Colonies, when you

plant her in a Colonial seaport, she becomes even more vile and venomous than the worst of the Colonials, for she has the wider knowledge which they lack.

Some day, I shall dip my pen in vitriol, and try to do justice on those who have hurt the women I have loved. Because, so far, I have held my hand, it does not mean that I have forgiven, that I shall forgive. In these matters, there is no thought, no possibility, of forgiveness. For the sake of the whole community, one must carry on the feud—and punish the offenders. There can be no question of mercy.

The wagon-gear is almost as important as the wagon itself. There is no greater curse than the trek-chain which is constantly breaking in a heavy place. During the Boer War, when one had to make shift with anything, I had two chains of this type. I am sure they must have been of Colonial, or American, manufacture; Cradley Heath never turned out such bad articles. I grew weary of putting in shackles to join up the breaks, yet, so far as weight was concerned, the chains were unusually large.

Besides its habit of breaking, a chain trek-tow had another unpleasant characteristic—when the span got huddled together, entering a drift, the chain was apt to get round the leg of one of the oxen, a round turn, with the result that the moment the span was straightened out, the unfortunate beast's leg was broken. I lost many cattle that way.

With wire trek-tows, this was, of course, impossible. Moreover, the wire was reliable. You got it with the stamp of an English manufacturer on the shackle, and so you knew it was good. You paid a hideous price for it—has any one ever been able to explain why Colonials should

receive gratuitous Naval and Military protection, an Imperial guarantee for their loans, and still be permitted to tax incoming articles of British manufacture?—but, even then, it was worth the money.

So far as yokes were concerned, I always used the Natal yoke, made of stinkwood, with two staples for fixing it to the trek-tow. The two staples allowed you to give an extra leverage to a weaker ox, whereas the one-staple Cape yoke necessitated both oxen being of the same strength, or one of them being constantly pushed backwards. Everything which came from Cape Colony seemed to be rotten.

Yoke-skeys, the fifteen-inch-long pieces of wood which, passed through the yoke, go on each side of the bullocks' necks, were constantly breaking, especially when one had young cattle. At every outspan, you would find, as you ought to find, one or other of your drivers cutting skeys out of a piece of hard wood, using the driver's pet tool, the side-axe. Amous used to make perfect skeys, and he taught me the art, an art which is known to most of the Basutu ; but the Cape boy and the Zulu generally make a very poor show at the work, as, in fact, they do at most other things.

In inspanning a bullock for the first time, one uses one ordinary skey and a "false-skey," a reim passed through the outside skey-slot and under the animal's neck. If he tries to twist round, and "turn the yoke," the false-skey throttles him, whereas an ordinary skey would break immediately.

As a rule, there is ample space between the skeys for a bullock's neck ; but Basket, my big hornless black bull, nearly touched both skeys, whilst Dudmaaker, the slayer of a lion, could only just get in, so huge was his

neck—in fact, I was afraid, at first, of his getting neck sores.

The “strop,” the piece of twisted raw hide which passes from skey to skey, under the bullock’s throat, is of the utmost importance. Good strops mean a huge saving of time in inspanning ; they are slipped on so easily.

We always found that water-buck hide made the best strops. It is enormously strong, and, after having been wet, it does not become hard, as is the case with almost every other skin. The greatest enemies of strops are hyænas. Often and often, when I had thought that everything was safe, I have been awakened in the morning by a driver informing me that the M’Pisi, the hyænas, had eaten half his strops. And strops represented two shillings each—at least, I could always get two shillings for all those I made.

Reims, the thongs which you pass round the bullock’s horns, are an ever-present worry to transport-riders. They seem constantly to be wearing out, or getting lost. I suppose that, in our day, we were the biggest makers of reims, strops, and whips in the two provinces. Certainly, it was a branch of our business which paid us extremely well.

We got plenty of game skins ; in fact, there can have been few men in the country who handled so many. We, ourselves, did a good deal of shooting—no Game Law ever troubled my brothers or myself—but we bought far more skins than we shot. Water-buck, Sable antelope, Lichtenstein Hartebeeste, Roan antelope—we got all these, in addition to smaller buck. As a rule, a skin cost us about two shillings to buy ; and we got from twenty shillings to four pounds for the finished articles we had made out of it. Of course, there was the labour bill,

and the cost of tallow for softening ; but these were very small items ; certainly, they did not amount to ten per cent. of our receipts.

The process of reim-making is a curious one. The skin, after having been thoroughly dried in the sun, is soaked again until quite soft ; then, after the useless parts have been trimmed off, the rest is cut into one continuous strip of green hide, which varies in width, from an inch in the thick portions to three inches in the thin ones. A good deal of skill is needed in this cutting, and a good deal of experience as well. For instance, most buck have the thickest hide on the shoulders, but the water-buck has it thickest on the rump, and, in starting to cut, facts like these must be kept in mind.

After the skin has been cut, it is put over and over a branch of a tree, so as to hang in loops about nine feet long, the bottom of the loops being some four feet from the ground. On these loops, a wagon wheel is slung, so as to form a kind of horizontal flywheel, and a native set to work to wind it round and round. When the hide is as tight as it will go, he releases the wheel, which naturally whirls back at a great speed ; then, when it has slowed down, he catches it, and twists it in the other direction. And so the process goes on, usually for three days, at the end of which time the reims are soft and pliable, ready to be cut into nine-foot lengths, with a noose at the end of each.

My experience was that water-buck skins made by far the best reims, as they were quite as strong as any others, whilst they did not get hard in the wet weather. On the other hand, for the heavy part of whips, the whip proper, sable antelope was undoubtedly the best, better even than giraffe, by which most Boers used to swear.

Bullock-hide reims were nothing like so strong as game-hide ones, and did not command anything like the same price.

Voorshlag, the very thin part of a wagon whip, was a most paying thing to make. By far the best skin for the purpose is that of the water-buck cow, which is amazingly strong and durable. Out of one skin of this kind I have made a clear profit of four pounds—and the skin had cost me a shilling!

All our reims, whips, voorshlag, and strops commanded a ready sale in Bulawayo. We soon got a name for turning out only the very best stuff, and transport-riders who never went down to the game veld were glad enough to buy from us. Although merely by-products, these things made quite an appreciable addition to our profits.

Sjamboks were another paying thing. Hippo were supposed to be "Royal Game," and you could be fined quite a lot of money for shooting one; consequently, when we brought in a bundle of raw sjamboks, it was always understood that they came from across the border, in the Portuguese territory.

I believe that out of one or two really big hippo, we must have cleared from thirty to forty pounds each, allowing for the value of the fat and the ivory as well as the sjamboks, and deducting the heavy cost of transport.

In the case of a hippo skin, you merely cut it into strips—raw, they run from an inch to two inches square, in section—hang them from the branches of a tree, with a big stone on the end of each, and leave them there for a month or two. When you take them down, they are harder than century-old oak, but by soaking them for a few days they become quite soft again, and are then easy to work into shape. The price of a raw sjambok used to

vary from two shillings to fifteen, the latter being for an "after-sjambok," a bullock sjambok, seven feet long.

As I never shot a giraffe, I cannot say from personal experience what the value of its skin would have been ; but the old Boers used to reckon they could make fifty pounds out of a good bull's hide. Personally, I think this was an exaggeration.

Brake blocks are a never-ending source of worry to a wagon driver. They are made of very soft wood, and are lashed on to the brake-bar with the inevitable reim. Of course, on a rough road, they do not last many days, and, at every outspan, you will see one or other of your drivers fashioning new ones.

The brake itself is very primitive ; you screw it on from behind the wagon ; but it is most effective—so long as it does not give way anywhere. If it gives way, there is apt to be a disaster.

I remember once—it was in the Selukwe Hills, on the big hill just past the Tebekwe mine—the brake of our great eighteen-foot wagon suddenly gave out, just as the wagon started to descend the horrible, stony incline.

I was behind, helpless. The driver was behind, the broken screw in his hand ; but Amyas happened to be in front. In a moment, he grasped what had happened, flung the leader of the span aside, seized the leading reim himself, and hauled at the cattle. Almost before the wagon had begun to gather momentum, he had the span on the run, and down that awful hill cattle and wagon thundered—sixteen big oxen, and a wagon with a four ton load, and a small, brown-faced white man ahead of all.

It was the only possible way to avert disaster ; but it needed immense nerve to do it. All I can recall is standing stock still, watching as though hypnotized, and

then, out of the great cloud of dust, hearing Amyas' clear voice, "Wu-uk! Ahnow!" stopping the oxen on the level.

We never grudged spending money on our wagons, which was, perhaps, the reason why we never had a really serious breakdown. We bought the best, always, and so got the best results. At the last, you could not have found four more perfectly equipped wagons in Africa. Every tyre was sound, every spoke tight. The gear was the very best obtainable. In the February, Amyas refused scornfully an offer of a hundred pounds for the black span's wagon.

A few months later, all four wagons had been abandoned on the veld, abandoned beside the bones of their dead cattle.

For aught I know, those wagons, or the rusted remains of their ironwork, are yet on the veld, grim witnesses to official incapacity, and the wreck of men's hopes. Hundreds and hundreds of wagons were abandoned in those days of the Great Disease, and I expect that, in most cases, they rotted where they stood, perfect emblems of Rhodesia, of the Land of High Hopes and Unfulfilled Promises.

CATTLE-DEALING AND CATTLE-
STEALING

CHAPTER XVI

CATTLE-DEALING AND CATTLE-STEALING

THE buying and selling of oxen is a strange business, one at which the amateur is apt to lose heavily.

I suppose we must have had some special instinct for it—certainly, we had no special training—but we never seemed to go wrong. In the first year, our cattle showed us some ninety per cent. clear profit. Probably, in our own minds, we always put too high a price on our animals, and, when it came to a question of bargaining, we were beaten down just to the full market price.

As a general rule, we used to break in all the bulls we bought, see how they shaped in the yoke, and then decide whether we would keep them for ourselves, or sell them. The only exceptions were showy young bulls, with big dewlaps, humps, and small hind quarters ; these we always sold at once to the butcher, without worrying to train them.

Naturally, the number of trek-oxen we wanted for our own use was, after the first season, comparatively small. We took the very pick, and the rest we usually sold in spans, getting a better price that way than by selling them loose.

Men got to know how carefully we trained and selected our beasts, and we never had any difficulty in finding a

market. As for our own spans, they soon became famous. For the Black Span, sixteen absolutely black bullocks, perfectly matched, Amyas refused an offer of five hundred and fifty pounds, an amazing price for native cattle. He was quite right in refusing. At that time, the span was earning forty pounds a month for us, and no one could possibly have foreseen the tragedy of the next few months, the coming of the Redwater, or Coast Fever.

The butchers did not mind what a beast was, bull or ox, cow or heifer, so long as it was in decent condition. The quality of the meat is never a consideration in South Africa, where anything in the way of decent cooking, any of the clean things of life, are utterly despised.

I spent seven years in that miserable sub-continent, wasted seven years, I might almost say; and, during the whole of that time, I never remember having one properly cooked meal, save those that I had prepared myself. And I have stayed at most of the best hotels in Capetown, in Durban, and in Rhodesia.

East Africa is, of course, different. The poison of the Afrikander tradition has never penetrated there, and even in Beira the despised you can fare far better than anywhere in British territory—or I suppose I should say “in Boer territory,” for since that abominable Act of Union, that great betrayal, the British have ceased to count.

In East Africa, there are clean standards, the standards of British India, of a people who, for generations past, have studied how to mitigate the discomforts of life in the Tropics, a people who insist on proper cooking, on punkahs, on servants in clean clothing. In South Africa everything can be traced back to the Boer ideal—

a three-legged stool beside a cow-dung fire, a mug of coffee half-filled with miserable Natal sugar, sour bread, and biltong ; with a naked piccanin squatting a few feet away.

Consequently, South Africa will never pay for quality. To it, meat is merely meat. It will give no more for a young ox than for an old bull. Climatic conditions, environment, are all-powerful ; and its standards are merely those of the Kaffir. Each generation deteriorates a little more, and the influx of new blood seems to do nothing towards stopping the moral dry-rot. Before long, the new-comers have always fallen in with " the Custom of the Country."

As a rule, we did not let many chances go by when it was a question of selling cattle at a decent price, but the greatest chance which ever came to us we refused to take. The story is a curious one.

Amyas and I were both at the big store at Chivamba's, a place where we did not see one strange white man in three months, when, just before sundown, two white men rode up. They were hard-looking cases. One was obviously a Boer, with a dash of colour in him, the other was as obviously a German. Both were thin and ragged, and their horses were in poor condition, whilst the loads which their two or three native carriers had on their heads were very small. Moreover—and this was what worried us—they came from the East, from the country below us, the country which we considered to be our own preserve.

Of course, we asked them to stay. The offer of washing facilities did not appeal to them ; but they ate ravenously of soup, roast fowl, cold guinea-fowl pie, suet pudding, and stewed pears ; and they showed no shyness about helping themselves to whisky. Of course, when they had

finished, and were feeling good, they acted after the manner of their races, and made sarcastic remarks concerning the "luxury" in which we lived, the table cloth, the china plates, the careful cooking, but we were used to Teutonic ways, and so did not worry.

So far, they had told us nothing about themselves, not even their names; but when the table had been cleared, and the second bottle of whisky opened, they began to talk. They had come through, it appeared, from the Portuguese territory—they did not explain how, or why they had been there—and on their way up, some sixty miles from Chivamba's, they had found coal and copper, found them in close proximity to one another, large outcrops of coal, and enormous ancient copper workings. So far as the copper was concerned, I was quite ready to accept the story, as I had already heard rumours of the workings; but the coal was difficult to accept. Still, they produced some bags of coal samples, by no means bad stuff, and they were quite ready to give all details, more than ready, we thought.

Then they sprung their proposition on us. They were, they admitted, absolutely penniless. They had made these discoveries, but could do nothing towards developing them. Would we go into partnership with them? There was our red span and its wagon down in the vlei—worth about three hundred and fifty pounds, in return for that, they would make us over a half share in both the coal and the copper.

On the face of it, it sounded a regular wild-cat proposition. The men were absolute strangers, absolutely broke, whilst the span and wagon were concrete things. I left Amyas to talk to them, to elicit more details, and went out, ostensibly to make some black coffee, really to see if any

of the natives knew anything concerning our visitors. I only had to ask one question. The German, at least, was a famous, or notorious, character, it appeared. He had been Commander-in-Chief of the forces of one of the most dissolute or brutal of native chieftains, a man who, a few years before, had been defeated and deposed by the Portuguese, the one victory won by that nation for many centuries past.

Since then, the German had been running guns into the Mozambique territory. For a long time, he had eluded the authorities, but, recently, quite recently, three Portuguese soldiers had managed to arrest him. His captors must have been too greatly pleased with themselves to be cautious. At any rate, the captive had managed to seize one of their magazine rifles, to shoot all three Dagos dead, and to clear off into British territory. I do not know when, or where, the Boer first came in; but I imagine he must have been a confederate in the gun-running business.

The story decided me—I think it would have decided most men—and I made up my mind at once to keep the red span. Our visitors were a little surly when they were preparing to leave in the morning, and both Amyas and I were careful to have rifles within reach; but after we had given them stores for their journey into Fort Victoria, and told them of the best track to take—no local boy would go with them as guide—they cleared off peaceably.

For a time, we forgot them. Then we heard that they had found a partner, who had put up two or three hundred pounds; then came rumours of a rich syndicate taking over the discoveries; and, after that, the news that they and the partner had been bought out for between twenty

and thirty thousand pounds. Moreover, the news was true.

After that, I ceased to like that red span of cattle.

The wind-up of the whole affair was characteristic of Rhodesia. The German went back to a Happy Fatherland, where the sight of the many police must have worried him greatly.

All the Boer's relatives, scores of horrible, unwashed persons, came up from Capetown and lived on him, creating vast scandals, and rapidly eating away the capital; whilst the partner, I believe, lost his money by speculation, and rather fell away from grace.

The syndicate formed a vastly over-capitalized company, extracted well over a quarter of a million pounds from the British Public, did nothing, except pay salaries to its friends, and finally dropped out altogether. I suppose it was wound up long ago. At any rate, it never attempted to work the mines—the climate was too bad, and they were too remote from anywhere to be commercial propositions—and it is years since I have seen its shares quoted. But I missed a fortune.

During the Boer War there were considerable possibilities of cattle-looting, and one or two men did quite well out of the business. Of course, any loyal Britisher ought to have been allowed to go down across the border, and despoil the enemy; but, unfortunately, the Rhodesian authorities were not all loyal themselves, and every obstacle was put in the way of those who wanted to do loyal service to the Empire, and, incidentally, enrich themselves.

At the outbreak of the War, when there was a chance of a Boer Raid into Matabeleland—half the officials were in the plot—we hurried our cattle out of the Gwanda

District, and hid them in the hills ; then, some months later, when there was an opportunity for reprisals, when it was possible, easy even, to make a raid into the Northern Transvaal and collect some of the enemy's cattle, we were not allowed to do so. I was told personally, by a high official, that if I made any attempt to go down the Tuli Road, except with bona-fide transport, I should be arrested.

That was, I suppose, the beginning of the story that we—Amyas and myself—were kind of latter-day cattle-lifters, imitators of the old Border-thieves, who were not thieves at all, but adventurous gentlemen with patriotic intentions.

Time after time, I have heard ugly hints concerning the way in which we obtained so many cattle. To the ordinary man, who had had no experience at the game, it seemed impossible that natives should sell such a number of oxen to any single trader ; consequently, the yarn of our being cattle-lifters appeared quite a probable one. The fact of our being so essentially British, and holding such decided views on the necessity for hanging Cape rebels, ensured a popularity for any story against us.

We never looted a single bullock—that is the plain truth ; but, at the same time, it is only right to say that there was always the desire to loot, that the opportunity alone was lacking. During the war, I would have seized the cattle of any one of our foes, especially if that foe was a rebel, and have considered that I was doing a patriotic deed thereby. As I have mentioned, we were not allowed to go cattle-collecting in the Northern Transvaal ; but, later on, it seemed as if we were to have a perfectly glorious chance.

Rumour said—and, for once, it did not lie wholly—that a number of Boers from the Northern Transvaal,

“Trek-Boers,” more or less wild men, unwashed men, at any rate, intended to make a dash through Rhodesia, up to German East Africa. They were going to cross the Border at Tuli, and take the old Pioneers’ Road, which Selous and Frank Johnson made in 1890, when they conquered the country for Cecil Rhodes, or, rather, made all the preparations for conquest, did all the hard and dangerous work.

We knew the Pioneers’ Road well, and the natives along that Road knew us. It would all have been so simple, and we had our plans arranged admirably. At the Lundi Drift the wagons must have outspanned—we were going to make sure that the Drift was in bad condition—then, with our band of heathen, it would have been the simplest matter in the world to drive off the cattle whilst they were grazing. We knew every twist and turn amongst those kopjes, and we could have taken our loot to a place where two men could have held off two hundred.

It was a great shame, and a great disappointment. We had gone into every detail, got everything ready and then the wretched Boers never made the trek after all. Luck was clean against us that time.

Most men and women—all men and women save the sexless creatures in hovels and the suburbs—want to lift something or other. To me, cattle-lifting has some touch of the Romantic about it; there is colour and excitement; though I suppose that, when you reduce it down to a question of morality, it is as low as the business of any ordinary City man. The cattle-lifter is really no better than the stockbroker, or even than the tradesman. He merely plunders in a more picturesque way.

I have often wanted to lift a bullock—and I cannot think to-day why I never did so. My ancestors were Robber Barons of the most approved type—I doubt if the people of the South of France approved of them, though—and I certainly have their instincts ; but, somehow or other, though I really belong to the Fifteenth Century, the blight of the Victorian Age seems to have fallen on me, and I have always stopped short. It is as though, instead of being in the open air, I was in an overgrown Crystal Palace, a Crystal Palace which had been treated with Mr H. G. Wells' *Food of the Gods*. Of course, the cattle I wanted to lift were merely those which I could not buy. Natives are apt to be so idiotic over this matter, and, naturally, one gets annoyed. I used to see a beast I wanted very badly, the ideal beast to fill up one of my spans, and, when I offered to buy him, I would be met by the answer that he could not be sold, that he had been dedicated to the spirit of some deceased savage, and must be kept until the time came for him to be sacrificed in due form.

It was all so silly, as silly as a missionary meeting ; and I used to get quite annoyed. Animals are dedicated as calves, by having a pot of Kaffir beer poured over their heads, and then they are supposed to go on living in the kraal until the spirit of the dead man calls for meat, which means until the witchdoctor of the village considers that it is time for a huge orgy. As a rule, the very best animals are set aside in this way, and, constantly, when you go into a village, you will be told that the pick of the herd is not for sale. At first, I used to take this literally, but, after a while, I found the way round it.

If you have a cow calf and a bull calf, no matter how small they may be, you can exchange them for the biggest

sacrificial bull in the country, provided always that you give some grain as a present, grain for the making of beer wherewith to anoint the head of the bull calf.

I did scores and scores of deals of this kind ; in fact, half my best cattle had once been doomed as sacrifices ; and I always managed to make a large profit on the transaction. The whole idea was perfectly characteristic of the Kaffir. He dare not run up against the old superstitions, but he took an absolute joy in cheating the spirits of his ancestors by substituting the bull-calf for the full-grown beast.

So far as the actual stealing of cattle was concerned, Bulawayo was the only really dangerous place. There, at a horrible spot called the "Location," a collection of the most deplorable hovels, many of which were mere frameworks of branches, covered with beaten-out paraffin tins, or old sacks, the choicest collection of rascaldom lived. Most of the inhabitants were Cape boys, half-castes from the Colony, with the vices of both Afrikander and Native. They generally described themselves as "wagon-drivers," but the transport-rider who engaged one was apt to finish the trip a sadder, wiser, and poorer man. In the Colony, they had votes ; they had been taught to read and write ; and, as a result, all their criminal instincts had come out. In Rhodesia, they were regarded merely as natives, and they did not like the change.

But they had their revenge on the community. I should like to know how many cattle disappeared into that Location. Rumour said that there were certain Teutonic persons in the township who could have given a fair estimate, men who could undersell every one else, so far as meat was concerned. At any rate, that Loca-

tion was an unmitigated curse to the men of the Road, and, once you were outspanned near Bulawayo, it was only by unremitting care that you could keep your spans complete.

In Africa, everything depends on getting your cattle to market in good condition. There is no such thing as stall-feeding, and it is usually a terribly slow business for a bullock to put on flesh on the high veld, where all the towns are situated. An English butcher or drover would find it hard to understand the conditions, to see why a coarse, heavy old bull was more valuable than a young ox. You have got to live in South Africa for some time before you come to realize that quality does not count, that the poorest stuff commands the same price as the best, provided it can be described by the same name.

Personally, I found cattle-dealing a very good business ; but I doubt if I should find it so to-day. The Railway has killed transport work, and the cold storage has come up with the trains. At any rate, I am never going to try what it is like under the new conditions. I prefer to stick to my old memories of the Good Days.

THE END OF THE ROAD

CHAPTER XVII

THE END OF THE ROAD

I DID not actually see the Rinderpest, at least not the worst of it. When that terrible plague swept down from the north, I was at Home ; but I was in Bechuanaland in time to see the results of it, the ruin and desolation, the amazing number of abandoned wagons.

Thirty wagons at one outspan, loaded wagons, loaded with stores of all kinds—I have come across this scene more than once. Hundreds of wagons, tens of thousands of pounds worth of stores, machinery, goods of all kinds, abandoned on the road. There was too much to loot. The cattle died within a few hours, died in the water if possible, poisoning the whole countryside, and then the transport-rider, utterly broken, utterly helpless, abandoned all, and, with a boy or two to carry his kit, tramped back to the nearest outspan, to curse his luck, to drink so as to forget that luck, and, perhaps, to die.

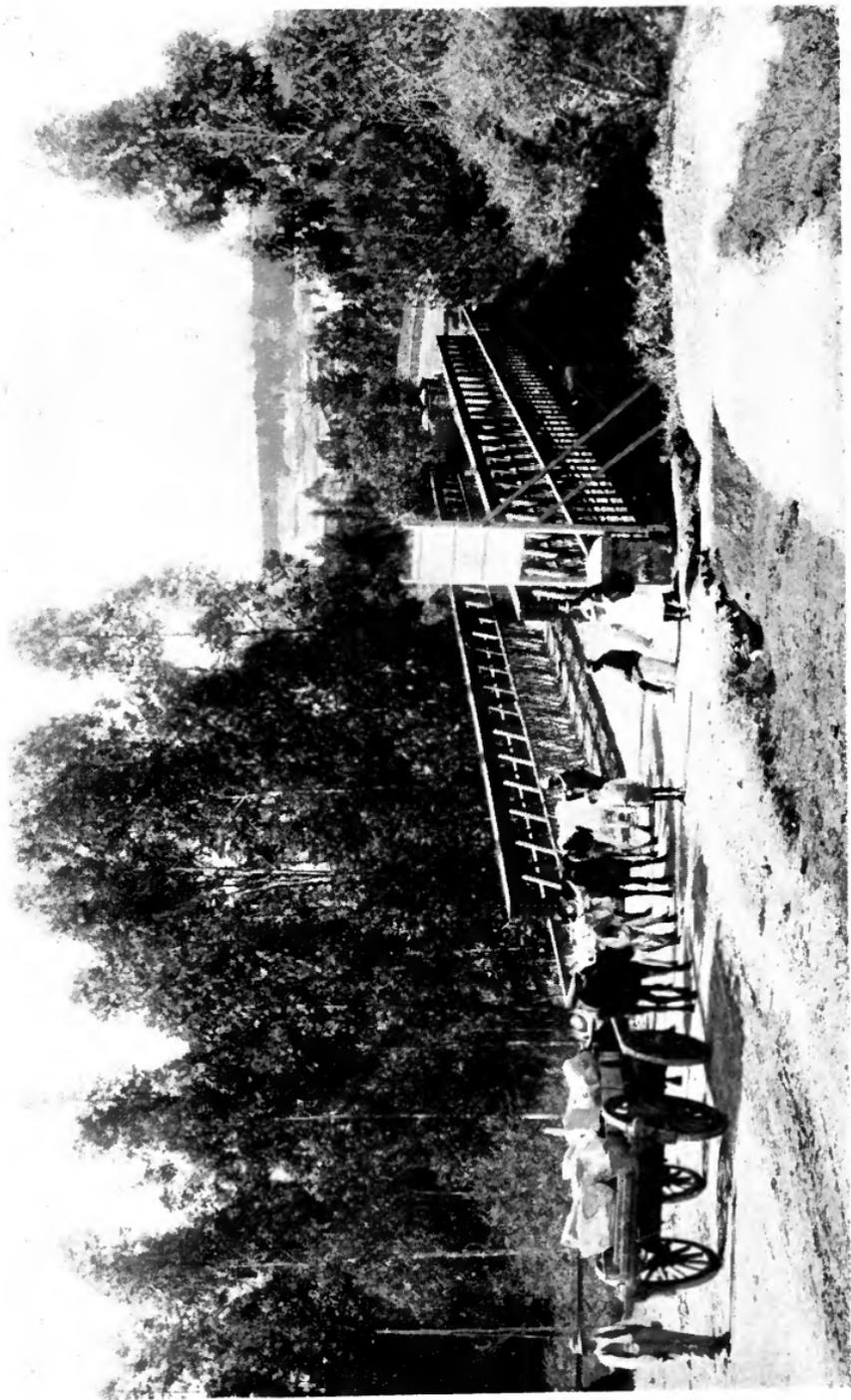
The desolation brought about by the Rinderpest was awful, appalling. The only hope men used to find in it was the thought that such a plague could never occur twice, that Nature had done her very worst. The disease rolled south, seemed to spend its fury, and practically disappeared. Cattle owners began to breathe again. Ninety per cent. of the oxen on the high veld had been wiped out. A whole breed, the Matabele cattle, had prac-

tically ceased to exist ; but the low-veld had not suffered so severely, whilst the abnormally high rates soon tempted up fresh wagons and spans from the Cape Colony and Natal.

Bullock transport was so absolutely necessary to the new country—though the railway was being rushed through, it was merely a main line, with no distributing branches—that the void left by the great disease was soon filled, in part at least, and once more one heard the hoarse shouts of the drivers, and the rumbling of the huge wagons as they jolted over the rocks or down into the drifts.

“ We shall never have anything so bad again,” all the transport-riders used to find comfort in that thought, unconsciously appealing to the law of averages to support their theory. Other diseases we had in plenty—lung-sickness, gall-sickness, spleen-sickness ; but they seemed to be, after all, but minor things.

South Africa generally, Rhodesia especially, is the Country of Diseases. Nothing whatsoever escapes Nature's fierce jealousy. For mankind there is malaria dysentery, and the dreaded blackwater, in addition to ordinary things, such as typhoid produced through the Kaffir's filthy habits. For horses and mules, there is, of course, the dreaded “ horse-sickness,” which, every year, sweeps off almost all the “ unsalted ” animals. In my day “ salted ” horses, horses which had had the disease and had recovered, usually fetched from seventy to ninety pounds. Of course, the vendor gave you a guarantee to refund the money if the beast did die of the sickness ; but it was practically impossible to enforce payment. How could you prove the actual cause of death, when the animal had died miles away, out on the veld, and you had no reliable evidence ?



LATTER DAY TRANSPORT: IDEAL CONDITIONS.

For a long time, we used to look on donkeys as being safe. They had no special plagues, save the lions, who preferred them to every other form of food. Then, suddenly, glanders broke out, and they died by hundreds.

Sheep and goats had all the ordinary complaints, especially scab, in virulent forms; but there were one or two special local ones as well, weird things which no one ever seemed able to diagnose, fatal things, none the less.

Fowls—imported fowls, that is—had a particular complaint of their own, which, breaking out in epidemic form, would sweep away your whole collection of poultry within forty-eight hours. There were also one or two horrible forms of “dog-sickness,” and even a “cat-sickness” for imported cats.

Of the ordinary cattle-diseases, “lung sickness” was undoubtedly the worst. Every one seemed to get it, sooner or later, amongst his spans; though, if he took the thing in time, an inoculated at once, his losses would probably not be great. The process of inoculation was crude enough. You took some of the horrible yellow virus out of a dead beast, soaked some twine in it; then, with a sail needle, drew that twine through one of the lower joints of your animals’ tails. As a rule, there were no evil results, but, in some cases, the whole tail would gradually wither, and then fall off. Tailless oxen were always regarded as being immune against lung sickness.

There was one fact concerning this disease which very few men seemed to realize, namely that it took two distinct forms, “dry” and “wet”; and that the animal which had been inoculated for the one was by no means certain to be immune from the other. Once, in Bulawayo, I mentioned the fact to Dr. Koch, who was then investigating African Coast Fever. He was greatly

interested, and said that, if he ever had the time, he would go into the matter thoroughly ; but his invaluable life was then drawing to its close.

At first, gall-sickness was a very great worry to us, and we lost quite a number of young cattle through it. Really, it is an enlargement of the gall bladder, an exaggerated biliousness, I should imagine. Low veld cattle brought to the high veld for the first time are very liable to it. Probably, the cold has a good deal to do with it. An old Boer told me how to treat it, and from that time onwards we never lost a beast through the complaint. Half a wineglassful of hydrochloric acid in a whisky bottleful of water—the remedy was as simple as it was effective. And it was quite easy to detect an animal in the incipient stages of the illness, for, not only would his coat be rough, but his eyes would appear to have sunk into his head.

Spleen sickness was different. There was no warning, no cure. Suddenly, one of your bullocks lay down and began to bellow. For a quarter of an hour, for twenty minutes perhaps, he continued to bellow, louder and ever louder ; and then, in a moment, he was dead. It was a strange, baffling disease.

Rinderpest was the Act of God. No human power could have stopped it from sweeping down from the north, no one could have checked it, until it got right into civilization. No one was to blame over it. The wild game were, of course, the main agents in its spread, and no one could control their movements. It was a tragedy, an overwhelming disaster ; but, though it left infinite sorrow and suffering behind, it left no bitterness, save in the minds of the most ignorant.

“ There never can be such a terrible plague again,”

we used to tell each other, and we used to believe our own words.

And then, in the last days of the Boer War, the African Coast Fever came.

Rinderpest spared about ten per cent. of the cattle, and those latter, being salted, at once increased enormously in value.

The Coast Fever spared practically none—I, myself, had one beast left out of hundreds.

Rinderpest was mercifully quick. In a few hours, you knew the worst. African Coast Fever was a long-drawn-out agony; and even those which did not die of the disease at once were, you knew, doomed. You could get nothing for them.

As I said above, Rinderpest was the Act of God. The spread of African Coast Fever was due entirely to the criminal folly of man. We heard of it first as being in Umtali—they called it Redwater then. Out of a thousand Australian cows belonging to Cecil Rhodes, all except three had died within a few days.

The news was amazing, appalling. The Chartered Company's government was bombarded with requests, prayers, petitions to take prompt measures, to draw a cordon round Umtali, to destroy any, and every, other beast which had come into contact with those dead cattle, to stamp out the plague at the start.

The only answer was, practically speaking, that the plague did not exist, that it was merely a question of Texas Fever, Redwater, and that nothing would be done. Of course, the reason was obvious—Rhodes had just died, and to admit the existence of a new cattle disease would have sent down Rhodesian shares. The history of South Africa is full of shameful incidents, yet this was

one of the very worst. And none of the men concerned in it was ever punished, except by receiving a knighthood or a C.M.G.

In a few weeks, the disease had got its grip on the country. Every one realized that the cattle were doomed, and prices fell like lead. Naturally, it smashed our business at once. We could no longer sell cattle, and so could no longer buy them from the natives, which meant, too, that the natives could no longer buy trading goods from us. Moreover, all our spans were working up on the high veld, and we were not, of course, allowed to bring them down into the low country.

Nowadays, the whole story seems to me like some evil dream. We had worked so desperately hard, taken such heavy risks, carried our lives in our hands month after month, and now, when we were just on the point of getting our reward, we were to lose everything.

Bitter? I was literally savage then, and, even now, I have not forgotten. I suppose that, in one way and another, we owned some six thousand pounds worth of property when the disease broke out. A few months later, we were only just able to pay our fares out of the miserable country.

I am glad to say that, personally, I saw very few of our cattle die; and I loved them all too well to want to ask Amyas many questions afterwards. I know that the whole of the black span died at Selukwe, and that their wagon was left on the hills; and I know that the red span's wagon was abandoned, fully loaded, near the Tebekwana Drift. I am not sure where the rest came to grief; but, in the end, everything we had was left on the veld, for the natives to loot, or the white ants to destroy.

It would have been impossible to move anything from our stores, and we never even made the attempt. Had we employed carriers to bring in the stuff, no one would have bought it, no one could have bought it, for all were insolvent.

Months afterwards, when all the cattle on the high veld were dead, the Government found itself compelled to admit that mistakes had been made. To a very great extent, it was I who forced their hands. I attacked them so strongly in the columns of one of the great London financial dailies, that they were compelled to do something. What they did was to send Dr. Koch out to investigate. He could not stop the disease, because there were practically no more oxen to die ; but he could tell them the cause of it.

The great German scientist himself told me that he knew all about the matter before he came out, that he had known all about it for the past seven years, and had long ago given the authorities warning. It appeared that, along the sea-coast, all cattle were born with this " African Coast Fever " in their systems. So long as they remained near the sea, the poison never affected them ; but the moment they were moved to the high country they died from it. Cecil Rhodes' Australian cows were landed at Beira, and were allowed to mix with the local cattle. In a few days, every one was infected, the infection being carried by the ordinary tick. When they reached Umtali, the disease came out. They died, quickly enough ; but they left hundreds of thousands of infected ticks behind them.

There is no possibility of excuse for the Chartered officials, and no punishment could have been too heavy for them. They could so easily have prevented the whole

miserable business from happening at all. On the other hand, it is strange to think that, had there been no Rinderpest, there would probably have been no Coast Fever. Prior to the Rinderpest, there was the Tsetse Fly belt, extending all down the East Coast, a stretch of country through which it was quite impossible to take cattle. The Coast Fever could not be carried into the Interior. The Fly was by no means the unmitigated curse which men imagined it to be. But after the Rinderpest, Tsetse Fly almost disappeared. No animal suffered more heavily from the plague than did the buffalo, which was virtually wiped out in many places, and, now, where you found no buffalo, you found no Fly. A very little investigation served to prove that the Fly could not do without the buffalo, that it could only breed in that animal's dung; consequently, the Rinderpest was directly responsible for the destruction of the Fly, and, with the Fly, of the factor which prevented the introduction of Coast Fever into the high country. The whole sequence of events was most curious.

Our cattle died. We lost everything we owned in material wealth; yet the latter was but a small part of it all. We might make fresh fortunes, but there were the things we could not replace, the things which had gone from us for ever—our youth, and our enthusiasms, and our illusions. Those we had buried for ever in that dreary South African veld, as so many thousands of other men have done. Africa takes all, and gives nothing in return—except a grave, and even that the hyænas do not respect.

I was bitter about the Coast Fever; perhaps I am bitter still; and yet—it was a dramatic finish to the Transport Days.

Those, the Transport Days, were over already. The railway was right up to the Victoria Falls, and the branch lines were spreading out on either side. Our task, the task of the Transport Riders, was finished. I know we had done good work, as a class, but there was no place left for us, no outlet, and that overwhelming disaster which swept us all away, which actually killed so many of us, may have been merciful, after all.

The Road, the Great Road, the Road-which-always-went-on, has ceased to be now. I know what it must be like to-day, overgrown, the drifts washed into great ruts, even the heaviest of the ironwork on our abandoned wagons long since rusted away.

In these latter days, I never meet any one to whom I can talk of the Road, any one who knew it. One or two women, women who have never even set foot in Africa, have understood, because they have understood me; but to the average man, the Romance of it all seems absurd, utterly unpractical. Far better, infinitely better, have the train-de-luxe, on which, by ringing an electric bell, you can procure much whisky.

Yet, in a way, I am far richer because of those years on the Road, for, though most other things have gone from me, my memories remain.

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