PERCY FITZPATRICK

JOCK OF THE BUSHVELD

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

Preface.

Table of Contents

“Sonny, you kin reckon it dead sure, thar’s something wrong ’bout a thing that don’t explain itself.”

That was Old Rocky’s advice, given three-and-twenty years ago—not forgotten yet, but, in this instance, respectfully ignored.

It happened some years ago, and this was the way of it: the Fox of Ballybotherem having served three generations—in his native Tipperary, in Kaffraria, and in the Transvaal—seemed entitled to a rest; and when, in the half-hour before ‘lights out,’ which is the Little People’s particular own, the demand came from certain Autocrats of the Nightgown: “Now, tell us something else!” it occurred to the Puzzled One to tell of Jock’s fight with the table leg. And that is how the trouble began. Those with experience will know what followed; and, for those less fortunate, the modest demand of one, comfortably tucked up tailorwise, and emphasising his points by excited hand-shakes with his toes, will convey the idea: “It must be *all true*! and don’t leave out *anything*!”

To such an audience a story may be told a hundred times, but it must be told, as Kipling says, “Just so!” that is, in the same way; because, even a romance (what a three-year-old once excused as “only a play tell”) must be true—to itself!

Once Jock had taken the field it was not long before the narrator found himself helped or driven over the pauses by quick suggestions from the Gallery; but there were days of fag and worry when thoughts lagged or strayed, and when

slips were made, and then a vigilant and pitiless memory swooped like the striking falcon on its prey. There came a night when the story was of the Old Crocodile, and one in the Gallery—one of more exuberant fancy—seeing the gate open ran into the flower-strewn field of romance and by suggestive questions and eager promptings helped to gather a little posy: “And he caught the Crocodile by the tail, didn’t he?” “And he hung on and fought him, didn’t he?” “And the Old Crocodile flung him high into the air? High!” and, turning to the two juniors, added “quite as high as the house?” And the narrator—accessory by reason of a mechanical nod and an absent-minded “Yes” passed on, thinking it could all be put right next time. But there is no escape from the ‘tangled web’ when the Little People sit in judgment. It was months later when retribution came. The critical point of the story was safely passed when—Oh; the irony and poetic justice of it—it was the innocent tempter himself who laid his hand in solemn protest on the narrator’s shoulder and, looking him reproachfully in the eyes, said “Dad! You have left out the best part of all. Don’t you remember how…”

And the description which followed only emphasises the present writer’s unfitness for the task he has undertaken. In the text of the story and in the illustration by my friend Mr Caldwell (who was himself subjected to the same influence) there is left a loophole for fancy: it is open to any one to believe that Jock is just beginning or just ending his aerial excursion. The Important People are not satisfied; but then the page is not big enough to exhibit Jock at the top of that flight—of fancy!

From the date of that lesson it was apparent that reputations would suffer if the story of Jock were not speedily embodied in some durable and authoritative form, and during a long spell of ill health many of the incidents were retold in the form of letters to the Little People. Other Less Important Persons—grown-ups—read them and sometimes heard them, and so it came about that the story of Jock was to be printed for private circulation, for the Little People and their friends. Then the story was read in manuscript and there came still more ambitious counsels, some urging the human story of the early days, others the wild animal life of South Africa. Conscious of many deficiencies the narrator has left two great fields practically untouched, adhering to the original idea—the story of Jock; and those who come into it, men and animals, come in because of him and the life in which he played so large a part. The attempt to adapt the original letters to the symmetry of a connected story involved, as one might have known, endless trouble and changes, necessitating complete re-writing of most parts; and the responsibility and work became still greater when, after a casual and unforeseen meeting, my friend Mr Caldwell accepted the suggestion to come out to South Africa and spend six months with us in order to study the game in its native bush and to know the conditions of the life and put that experience into the work of illustrating “Jock.”

The writer is well aware that, from the above causes and one other, there are grave inequalities in style and system, and in plane of phrase and thought, in different parts of the book. For this feature the ‘one other’ cause is alone put

forward as a defence. The story belongs to the Little People, and their requirements were defined—“It must be *all true*! Don’t leave out *anything*!” It has been necessary to leave out a great deal; but the other condition has been fully and fairly complied with; for it is a true story from beginning to end. It is not a diary: incidents have been grouped and moved to get over the difficulty of blank days and bad spells, but there is no incident of importance or of credit to Jock which is not absolutely true. The severest trial in this connection was in the last chapter, which is bound to recall perhaps the most famous and most cherished of all dog stories. Much, indeed, would have been sacrificed to avoid that; but it was unthinkable that, for any reason, one should in the last words shatter the spell that holds Jock dear to those for whom his life is chronicled—the spell that lies in ‘a true story.’

Little by little the book has grown until it has come perilously near the condition in which it might be thought to have Pretensions. It has none! It is what it was: a simple record, compiled for the interest and satisfaction of some Little People, and a small tribute of remembrance and affection offered at the shrine of the old life and those who made it—tendered in the hope that some one better equipped with opportunities and leisure may be inspired to do justice to it and to them for the sake of our native land.

Chapter One.

Table of Contents

The Background.

Of the people who live lonely lives, on the veld or elsewhere, few do so of their own free choice. Some there are shut off from all their kind—souls sheathed in some film invisible, through which no thrill of sympathy may pass; some barred by their self-consciousness, heart hungry still, who never learned in childhood to make friends; some have a secret or a grief; some, thoughts too big or bad for comradeship. But most will charge to Fate the thoughtless choice, the chance, or hard necessity, that drew or drove them to the life apart; they know the lesson that was learned of old: “It is not good for man to be alone.”

Go out among them, ever moving on, whose white bones mark the way for others’ feet—who shun the cities, living in the wilds, and move in silence, self-contained. Who knows what they think, or dream, or hope, or suffer? Who can know? For speech among that hard-schooled lot is but a half-remembered art.

"JOCK"

Yet something you may guess, since with the man there often goes—his dog; his silent tribute to The Book. Oh, it's

little they know of life who cannot guess the secret springs of loneliness and love that prompt the keeping of a trifling pet; who do not know what moves a man who daily takes his chance of life and death—man whose “breath is in his nostrils”—to lay his cheek against the muzzle of his comrade dog, and in the trackless miles of wilderness feel he has a friend. Something to hold to; something to protect.

There was old Blake—“mad, quite mad,” as everybody knew—of whom they vaguely said that horses, hounds, coaches, covers, and all that goes with old estates, were his—once. We knew him poor and middle-aged. How old to us! Cheery and unpractical, with two old pointers and a fowling-piece, and a heart as warm as toast. We did not ask each other’s business there; and, judging by the dogs and gun, we put him down as a ‘remittance man.’ But that, it seems, was wrong. They were his all.

He left no letters—a little pile of paper ash; no money and no food! That was his pride. He would not sell or give away his dogs! That was his love. When he could not keep them it seemed time to go! That was his madness. But before he went, remembering a friend in hospital, he borrowed two cartridges and brought him in a brace of birds. That was old mad Blake, who ‘moved on’ and took his dogs with him, because they had always been together, and he could not leave their fate to chance. So we buried him with one on either side, just as he would have liked it!

There was Turner, who shot the crocodile that seized his dog, and reckless of the others, swam in and brought the dog to land.

There was the dog that jumped in when his master slipped from the rock, and, swimming beside him, was snapped down in his stead! And there was the boy who tried a rescue in the dark—when a rustle, yelp and growl told that the lions had his dog—and was never seen again.

So it goes, and so it went, from year to year: a little showing now and then, like the iceberg's tip, from which to guess the bulk below.

There was a Boy who went to seek his fortune. Call him boy or man: the years proved nothing either way! Some will be boyish always; others were never young: a few—most richly dowered few—are man and boy together. He went to seek his fortune, as boys will and should; no pressure on him from about; no promise from beyond. For life was easy there, and all was pleasant, as it may be—in a cage. 'To-day' is sure and happy; and there is no 'to-morrow'—in a cage.

There were friends enough—all kind and true—and in their wisdom they said: "Here it is safe: yonder all is chance, where many indeed are called, but few—so few—are chosen. Many have gone forth; some to return, beaten, hopeless, and despised; some to fall in sight outside; others are lost, we know not where; and ah! so few are free and well. But the fate of numbers is unheeded still; for the few are those who count, and lead; and those who follow do not think 'How few,' but cry 'How strong! How free!' Be wise and do not venture. Here it is safe: there is no fortune there!"

But there was something stronger than the things he knew, around, without, beyond—the thing that strove within him: that grew and grew, and beat and fought for freedom: that bade him go and walk alone and tell his secret on the

mountain slopes to one who would not laugh—a little red retriever; that made him climb and feel his strength, and find an outlet for what drove within. And thus the end was sure; for of all the voices none so strong as this! And only those others reached him that would chime with it; the gentle ones which said: “We too believe,” and one, a stronger, saying: “Fifty years ago I did it. I would do it now again!”

So the Boy set out to seek his fortune, and did not find it; for there was none in the place where he sought. Those who warned him were—in the little—right: yet was he—in the greater—right too! It was not given to him as yet to know that fortune is not in time or place or things; but, good or bad, in the man’s own self for him alone to find and prove.

Time and place and things had failed him; still was effort right; and, when the first was clear beyond all question, it was instinct and not knowledge bade him still go on, saying: “Not back to the cage. Anything but that!”

When many days had passed, it was again a friend who met him, saying: “Commonsense is not cowardice. You have made a mistake: repair it while you may. I have seen and know: there is nothing here. Come back with me, and all will be made easy.” And answer, in reason, there was none; for the little truth was all too plain, and the greater not yet seen. But that which had swelled to bursting and had fought within for freedom called out: “Failure is the worst of all!” And the blind and struggling instinct rose against all knowledge and all reason. “Not back to the cage! Not that!”

And the heart that had once been young spoke up for Auld Lang Syne: the old eyes softened and dropped: “God

speed you, Boy—Good-bye!” And as the mail-coach rumbled off the Boy put up his head—to try again.

The days passed, and still there was no work to do. For, those who were there already—hardened men and strong, pioneers who had roughed it—were themselves in straitened case, and it was no place for boys.

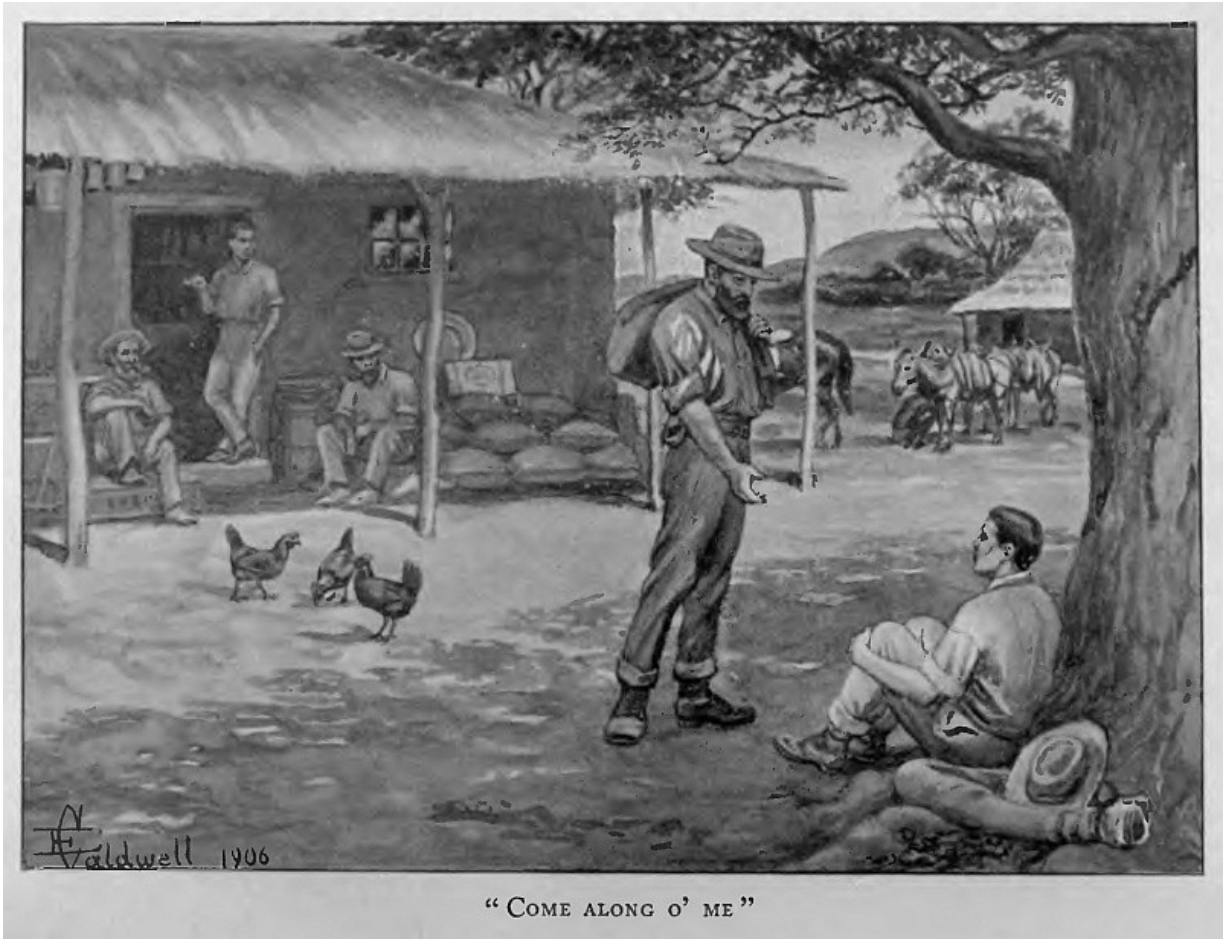
So the Boy moved on again, and with him a man in, equal plight, but, being a man, a guide and comfort to the Boy, and one to lead him on the way. Hungry, they walked all day; yet when the sun went down and light began to fail the place where work and food and sleep should be was still far off. The mountain tracks were rough and all unknown; the rivers many, cold and swift: the country wild; none lived, few ever passed, that way. When night closed in the Boy walked on in front, and the man lagged wearily, grumbling at their luck. In the valley at the mountain foot they came at midnight upon water, black and still, between them and the cabin’s lights beyond; and there the man lay down. Then the Boy, turning in his anger, bade him come on; and, dragging him out upon the further bank, had found—unknowing—some little of the fortune he had come to seek.

Still, morning brought no change; still, was there no work to do. So the man gave up, and sagging back, was lost. And the Boy went on alone.

Rough and straight-spoken, but kindly men and true, were those he came among. What they could they did: what they had they gave. They made him free of board and bed; and, kinder still, now and then made work for him to do, knowing his spirit was as theirs and that his heart cried out:

“Not charity, but work! Give me work!” But that they could not do, for there was no work they could not do themselves.

Thus the days and weeks went by. Willing, but unused to fend for himself—unfit by training for the wild rough life, heart and energy all to waste, the little he did know of no value there—the struggle with the ebbing tide went on; it was the wearing hopeless fight against that which one cannot grapple, and cannot even see. There was no work to be done. A few days here and there; a little passing job; a helping hand disguised; and then the quest again. They were all friendly—but, with the kindly habit of the place: it told the tale of hopelessness too well. They did not even ask his name; it made no difference.



“Come along o’ me”

Then came a day when there was nowhere else to try. Among the lounging diggers at their week-end deals he stood apart—too shy, too proud to tell the truth; too conscious of it to trust his voice; too hungry to smile as if he did not care! And then a man in muddy moleskins, with grave face, brown beard, and soft blue eyes, came over to him, saying straight: “Boy, you come along o’ me!” And he went.

It was work—hard work. But the joy of it! Shovelling in the icy water, in mud and gravel, and among the boulders, from early dawn to dark. What matter? It was work. It was not for hire, but just to help one who had helped him; to ‘earn his grub’ and feel he was a man, doing the work of his friend’s partner, ‘who was away.’

For three full weeks the Boy worked on; grateful for the toil; grateful for the knowledge gained; most grateful that he could by work repay a kindness. And then the truth came out! The kindly fiction fell away as they sat and rested on the day of rest. “The claim could not stand two white men’s grub” had fallen from the man, accounting for his partner’s absence.

It was the simple and unstudied truth and calm unconsciousness of where it struck that gave the thrust its force; and in the clear still air of the Sunday morning the Boy turned hot and cold and dizzy to think of his folly, and of the kindness he had so long imposed upon. It was a little spell before his lips would smile, and eyes and voice were firm enough to lie. Then he said gently: If he could be spared—he had not liked to ask before, but now the floods were over and the river turned perhaps it could be managed—he

would like to go, as there were letters waiting, and he expected news.

Up the winding pathway over rocky ledge and grassy slope, climbing for an hour to the pass, the toil and effort kept the hot thoughts under. At the top the Boy sat down to rest. The green rock-crested mountains stood like resting giants all around: the rivers, silvered by the sun, threaded their ways between: the air was clear, and cool, and still. The world was very beautiful from there.

Far, far below—a brownish speck beside the silver streak—stood the cabin he had left. And, without warning, all came back on him. What he had mastered rose beyond control. The little child that lies hidden in us all reached out—as in the dark—for a hand to hold; and there was none. His arms went up to hide the mocking glory of the day, and, face buried in the grass, he sobbed: “Not worth my food!”

Science tells that Nature will recoup herself by ways as well defined as those that rule mechanics. The blood flows upward—and the brain’s awhirl; the ebb-tide sets—and there is rest. Whatever impulse sways the guiding hand, we know that often when we need it most there comes relief; gently, unbidden, unobserved.

The Boy slept, and there was peace awhile. Then came faint echoes of the waking thoughts—odd words shot out, of hope and resolution; murmured names of those at home. Once his hand went out and gently touched the turf, reaching for the friend and comrade of the past—one who knew his every mood, had heard his wildest dreams described, had seen him, hot-eyed, breathless, struggling to escape the cage; one to whom the boyish soul was often

bared in foolish confidence; one who could see and hear and feel, yet never tell—a little red retriever left at home; and the boy stirred and sighed, for answer to the soft brown eyes.

No! It is not good for man to be alone. A wisp of drifting cloud came by, a breath of cooler air, and the fickle spirit of the mountain changed the day as with a wand. The Boy woke up shivering, dazed, bewildered: the mountain of his dreams had vanished; and his dog was not there! The cold driving mist had blotted out the world. Stronger and stronger grew the wind, driving the damp cold through and through; for on the bleak plateau of the mountain nothing broke its force.

Pale and shaken, and a little stiff, he looked about; then slowly faced the storm. It had not struck him to turn back.

The gusts blew stronger, and through the mist came rain, in single stinging drops—portents of the greater storm. Slowly, as he bent to breast it, the chilled blood warmed, and when the first thunderclap split overhead, and lost itself in endless roars and rumblings in the kloofs and hills around, there came a warmth about his heart and a light into his eye—mute thanksgiving that here was something he could battle with and be a man again.

On the top of the world the storms work all their fury. Only there come mist and wind and rain, thunder and lightning and hail together—the pitiless terrible hail: there, where the hare hiding in the grass may know it is the highest thing in all God’s world, and nearest to the storm—the one clear mark to draw the lightning—and, knowing, scurries to the sheltered slopes.

But the Boy pressed on—the little path a racing stream to guide him. Then in the one group of ghostly, mist-blurred rocks he stopped to drink; and, as he bent—for all the blackness of the storm—his face leaped out at him, reflected for one instant in the shallow pool; the blue-white flame of lightning, blinding his aching eyes, hissed down; the sickening smell of brimstone spread about; and crashing thunder close above his head left him dazed and breathless.

Heedless of the rain, blinking the blackness from his eyes, he sat still for head to clear, and limbs to feel their life again; and, as he waited, slowly there came upon a colder stiller air that other roar, so far, so dull, so uniform; so weird and terrifying—the voice of the coming hail.

Huddled beneath the shelving rock he watched the storm sweep by with awful battering din that swamped and silenced every other sound—the tearing, smashing hail that seemed to strip the mountain to its very bone.

Oh! the wanton fury of the hail; the wild, destructive charge of hordes of savage cavalry; the stamping, smashing sweep along the narrow strip where all the fury concentrates; the long black trail of death and desolation! The birds and beasts, the things that creep and fly, all know the portents, and all flee before it, or aside. But in the darkness—in the night or mist—the slow, the weak, the helpless, and the mothers with their young—for them is little hope.

The dense packed column swept along, ruthless, raging, and unheeding, overwhelming all... A sudden failing of its strength, a little straggling tail, and then—the silence!

The sun came out; the wind died down; light veils of mist came slowly by—bits of floating gossamer—and melted in the clear, pure air.

The Boy stepped out once more. Miles away the black column of the falling hail sped its appointed course. Under his feet, where all had been so green and beautiful, was battered turf, for the time transformed into a mass of dazzling brilliants, where jagged ice-stones caught the sunlight on their countless facets, and threw it back in one fierce flashing glare, blinding in its brilliance.

On the glittering surface many things stood out.

In the narrow pathway near the spring a snake lay on its back, crushed and broken; beyond it, a tortoise, not yet dead, but bruised and battered through its shell; then a partridge—poor unprotected thing—the wet feathers lying all around, stripped as though a hawk had stricken it, and close behind it all the little brood; and further afield lay something reddish-brown—a buck—the large eyes glazed, an ooze of blood upon its lips and nose. He stooped to touch it, but drew back: the dainty little thing was pulp.

All striving for the sheltering rocks; all caught and stricken by the ruthless storm; and he, going on to face it, while others fled before—he, blindly fighting on—was spared. Was it luck? Or was there something subtle, more? He held to this, that more than chance had swayed the guiding hand of fate—that fortune holds some gifts in store for those who try; and faith resurgent moved him to a mute Te Deum, of which no more reached the conscious brain than: “It is good to be alive! But... better *so* than in the cage.”

Once more, a little of the fortune that he had come to seek!

At sunset, passing down the long rough gorge, he came upon one battling with the flood to save his all—the white man struggling with the frightened beasts; the kaffir swept from off his feet; the mad bewildered oxen yielding to the stream and heading downwards towards the falls—and in their utmost need the Boy swam in and helped!

And there the long slow ebb was stayed: the Boy was worth his food.

But how recall the life when those who made it set so little store by all that passed, and took its ventures for their daily lot; when those who knew it had no gift or thought to fix the colours of the fading past: the fire of youth; the hopes; the toil; the bright illusions gone! And now, the Story of a Dog to conjure up a face, a name, a voice, or the grip of a friendly hand! And the half-dreamed sound of the tramping feet is all that is left of the live procession long since passed: the young recruits; the laggards and the faint; the few who saw it through; the older men—grave-eyed, thoughtful, unafraid—who judged the future by the battered past, and who knew none more nor less than man—unconscious equals of the best and least; the grey-hued years; the thinning ranks; the summons answered, as they had lived—alone. The tale untold; and, of all who knew it, none left to picture now the life, none left to play a grateful comrade’s part, and place their record on a country’s scroll—the kindly, constant, nameless Pioneers!

Chapter Two.

Table of Contents

Into the Bushveld.

“Distant hills are always green,” and the best gold further on. That is a law of nature—human nature—which is quite superior to facts; and thus the world moves on.

So from the Lydenburg Goldfields prospectors ‘humping their swags’ or driving their small pack-donkeys spread afield, and transport-riders with their long spans and rumbling waggons followed, cutting a wider track where traders with winding strings of carriers had already ventured on. But the hunters had gone first. There were great hunters whose names are known; and others as great who missed the accident of fame; and after them hunters who traded, and traders who hunted. And so too with prospectors, diggers, transport-riders and all.

Between the goldfields and the nearest port lay the Bushveld, and game enough for all to live on.

Thus, all were hunters of a sort, but the great hunters—the hunters of big game—were apart; we were the smaller fry, there to admire and to imitate.

Trophies, carried back with pride or by force of habit, lay scattered about, neglected and forgotten, round the outspans, the tents of lone prospectors, the cabins of the diggers, and the grass wayside shanties of the traders. How many a ‘record’ head must have gone then, when none had thought of time or means to save them! Horns and skins lay in jumbled heaps in the yards or sheds of the big trading stores. The splendid horns of the Koodoo and Sable, and a

score of others only less beautiful, could be seen nailed up in crude adornment of the roughest walls; nailed up, and then unnoticed and forgotten! And yet not quite! For although to the older hands they were of no further interest, to the new-comer they spoke of something yet to see, and something to be done; and the sight set him dreaming of the time when he too would go a-hunting and bring his trophies home.

Perched on the edge of the Berg, we overlooked the wonder-world of the Bushveld, where the big game roamed in thousands and the “wildest tales were true.” Living on the fringe of a hunter’s paradise, most of us were drawn into it from time to time, for shorter or longer spells, as opportunity and our circumstances allowed; and little by little one got to know the names, appearances, and habits of the many kinds of game below. Long talks in the quiet nights up there under waggons, in grass shelters in the woods, or in the wattle-and-daub shanties of the diggers, where men passed to and fro and swapped lies, as the polite phrase went, were our ‘night’s entertainments,’ when younger hands might learn much that was useful and true, and more that was neither.

It was a school of grown-up schoolboys; no doubt a hard one, but it had its playground side, and it was the habit of the school to ‘drop on to’ any breach of the unwritten laws, to ‘rub in’ with remorseless good humour the mistakes that were made, and to play upon credulity with a shamelessness and nerve quite paralysing to the judgment of the inexperienced. Yet, with it all, there was a kindliness

and quick instinct of ‘fair doos’ which tempered the wind and, in the main, gave no one more than was good for him.

There the new boy had to run the gauntlet, and, if without a watchful instinct or a friendly hint, there was nothing to warn him of it. When Faulkner—dragged to the piano—protested that he remembered nothing but a mere ‘morceau,’ he was not conscious of transgression, but a delighted audience caught up the word, and thenceforth he was known only as ‘Ankore’—Harry the Sailor having explained that ‘more so’ was a recognised variant.

“Johnny-come-lately’s got to learn” was held to be adequate reason for letting many a beginner buy his experience, while those who had been through it all watched him stumble into the well-known pitfalls. It would no doubt have been a much more comfortable arrangement all round had there been a polite ignoring of each other’s blunders and absurdities. But that is not the way of schools where the spirit of fun plays its useful part; and, after all, the lesson well ‘rubbed in’ is well remembered.

The new assayer, primed by us with tales of Sable Antelope round Macmac Camp, shot old Jim Hill’s only goat, and had to leave the carcase with a note of explanation—Jim being out when he called. What he heard from us when he returned, all prickly with remorse and shame, was a liberal education; but what he remembers best is Jim’s note addressed that evening to our camp:

“Boys! Jim Hill requests your company to dinner to-morrow, Sunday!”

“Mutton!”

As the summer spent itself, and whispers spread around of new strikes further on, a spirit of restlessness—a touch of trek fever—came upon us, and each cast about which way to try his luck. Our camp was the summer headquarters of two transport-riders, and when many months of hard work, timber-cutting on the Berg, contracting for the Companies, pole-slipping in the bush, and other things, gave us at last a ‘rise,’ it seemed the natural thing to put it all into waggons and oxen, and go transport-riding too.

The charm of a life of freedom and complete independence—a life in which a man goes as and where he lists, and carries his home with him—is great indeed; but great too was the fact that hunting would go with it.

How the little things that mark a new departure stamp themselves indelibly on the memory! A flower in the hedgerow where the roads divide will mark the spot in one’s mind for ever; and yet a million more, before and after, and all as beautiful, are passed unseen. In memory, it is all as fresh, bright and glorious as ever: only the years have gone. The start, the trek along the plateau, the crystal streams, the ferns and trees, the cool pure air; and, through and over all, the quite intoxicating sense of freedom! Then came the long slow climb to Spitzkop where the Berg is highest and where our ascent began. For there, with Africa’s contrariness, the highest parts banked up and buttressed by gigantic spurs are most accessible from below, while the lower edges of the plateau are cut off sheer like the walls of some great fortress. There, near Spitzkop, we looked down upon the promised land; there, stood upon the outmost

edge, as a diver on his board, and paused and looked and breathed before we took the plunge.

It is well to pitch one's expectations low, and so stave off disappointments. But counsels of perfection are wasted on the young, and when accident combines with the hopefulness of youth to lay the colours on in all their gorgeousness, what chance has Wisdom?

"See here, young feller!" said Wisdom, "don't go fill yourself up with tomfool notions 'bout lions and tigers waitin' behind every bush. You won't see one in a twelvemonth! Most like you won't see a buck for a week! You don't know what to do, what to wear, how to walk, how to look, or what to look for; and you'll make as much noise as a traction engine. This ain't open country: it's bush; they can see and hear, and you can't. An' as for big game, you won't see any for a long while yet, so don't go fool yourself!"

Excellent! But fortune in a sportive mood ordained that the very first thing we saw as we outspanned at Saunderson's on the very first day in the Bushveld, was the fresh skin of a lion stretched out to dry. What would the counsels of Solomon himself have weighed against that wet skin?

Wisdom scratched its head and stared: "Well, I am completely sugared!"

Of course it was a fluke. No lions had been seen in the locality for several years; but the beginner, filled with all the wildest expectations, took no heed of that. If the wish be father to the thought, then surely fact may well beget conviction. It was so in this case, at any rate, and thus not

all the cold assurances of Wisdom could banish visions of big game as plentiful as partridges.

A party had set out upon a tiger hunt to clear out one of those marauders who used to haunt the kloofs of the Berg and make descents upon the Kaffir herds of goats and sheep; but there was a special interest in this particular tiger, for he had killed one of the white hunters in the last attempt to get at him a few weeks before. Starting from the store, the party of men and boys worked their way towards the kloof, and the possibility of coming across a lion never entered their heads. No notice was taken of smaller game put up from time to time as they moved carelessly along; a rustle on the left of the line was ignored, and Bill Saunderson was as surprised as Bill ever could be to see a lion facing him at something like six or seven yards. The lion, with head laid level and tail flicking ominously, half crouched for its spring. Bill's bullet glanced along the skull, peeling off the skin. "It was a bad shot," he said afterwards, in answer to the beginner's breathless questions. "He wasn't hurt: just sank a little like a pointer when you check him; but before he steadied up again I took for the nose and got him. You see," he added thoughtfully, "a lion's got no forehead: it is all hair."

That was about all he had to say; but, little store as he may have set on it, the tip was never forgotten and proved of much value to at least one of our party years afterwards. To this day the picture of a lion brings up that scene—the crouching beast, faced by a man with a long brown beard, solemn face, and clear unfaltering eyes; the swift yet quiet

action of reloading; and the second shot an inch or so lower, because “a lion’s got no forehead: it’s all hair.”

The shooting of a lion, fair and square, and face to face, was the Blue Riband of the Bush, and no detail would have seemed superfluous; but Bill, whose eye nothing could escape, had, like many great hunters, a laggard tongue. Only now and then a look of grave amusement lighted up his face to show he recognised the hungry enthusiasm and his own inability to satisfy it. The skin with the grazed stripe along the nose, and the broken skull, were handled and looked at many times, and the story was pumped from every Kaffir—all voluble and eager, but none eye-witnesses. Bob, the sociable and more communicative, who had been nearest his brother, was asked a hundred questions, but all he had to say was that the grass was too long for him to see what happened: he reckoned that it was “a pretty near thing after the first shot; but Bill’s all right!”

To me it was an absurd and tiresome affectation to show interest in any other topic, and when, during that evening, conversation strayed to other subjects, it seemed waste of time and priceless opportunity. Bob responded good-naturedly to many crude attempts to head them back to the entrancing theme, but the professional interest in rates, loads, rivers, roads, disease, drought, and ‘fly,’ was strong in the older transport-riders, as it should have been, but, for the time at least, was not, in me. If diplomacy failed, however, luck was not all out; for when all the pet subjects of the road had been thrashed out, and it was about time to turn in, a stray question brought the reward of patience.

“Have you heard if Jim reached Durban all right?”

“Yes! Safely shipped.”

“You got some one to take him right through?”

“No! A Dutchman took him to Lydenburg, and I got Tom Hardy, going back empty, to take him along from there.”

“What about feeding?”

“I sent some goats,” said Bob, smiling for a moment at some passing thought, and then went on: “Tom said he had an old span that wouldn’t mind it. We loaded him up at Parker’s, and I cleared out before he got the cattle up. But they tell me there was a gay jamboree when it came to inspanning; and as soon as they got up to the other waggons and the young bullocks winded Jim, they started off with their tails up—a regular stampede, voorloopers and drivers yelling like mad, all the loose things shaking out of the waggons, and Tom nearly in a fit from running, shouting and swearing.”

Judging by the laughter, there was only one person present who did not understand the joke, and I had to ask—with some misgiving—who was this Jim who needed so much care and feeding, and caused such a scare.

There was another burst of laughter as they guessed my thoughts, and it was Bob who answered me: “Only a lion, lad—not a wild man or a lunatic! Only a young lion! Sold him to the Zoo, and had to deliver him in Durban.”

“Well, you fairly took me in with the name!”

“Oh! Jim? Well that’s his pet name. His real name is Dabulamanzi. Jim, my hunting boy, caught him, so we call him Jim out of compliment,” he added with a grin. “But Jim called him Dabulamanzi, also out of compliment, and I think that was pretty good for a nigger.”

“You see,” said Bob, for the benefit of those who were not up in local history, “Dabulamanzi, the big fighting General in the Zulu War, was Jim’s own chief and leader; and the name means ‘The one who conquers the waters.’”

Then one of the others exclaimed: “Oh! Of course, that’s how you got him, isn’t it: caught him in a river? Tell us what did happen, Bob. What’s the truth of it? It seemed a bit steep as I heard it.”

“Well, it’s really simple enough. We came right on to the lioness waiting for us, and I got her; and then there were shouts from the boys, and I saw a couple of cubs, pretty well grown, making off in the grass. This boy Jim legged it after one of them, a cub about as big as a Newfoundland dog—not so high, but longer. I followed as fast as I could, but he was a big Zulu and went like a buck, yelling like mad all the time. We were in the bend of one of the long pools down near the Komati, and when I got through the reeds the cub was at the water’s edge facing Jim, and Jim was dancing around heading it off with only one light stick. As soon as it saw us coming on, the cub took to the water, and Jim after it. It was as good as a play. Jim swam up behind, and putting his hand on its head ducked it right under: the cub turned as it came up and struck out at him viciously, but he was back out of reach: when it turned again to go Jim ducked it again, and it went on like that six or eight times, till the thing was half drowned and had no more fight in it. Then Jim got hold of it by the tail and swam back to us, still shouting and quite mad with excitement.

“Of course,” added Bob with a wag of his head, “you can say it was only a cub; but it takes a good man to go up