MY AFRICAN JOURNEY
1909
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"THE RIVER WAR," "LONDON TO LADYSMITH," "IAN HAMILTON'S MARCH,"
"SAVROLA," "LIFE OF LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL"
WITH SIXTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY
THE AUTHOR AND LIEUTENANT-COLONEL GORDON WILSON, AND THREE MAPS

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PREFACE
In so far as the collection of information is concerned, the advantages of travel may often be over-stated. So much has been written, so many facts are upon record about every country, even the most remote, that a judicious and persevering study of existing materials would no doubt enable a reader to fill himself with knowledge almost to repletion without leaving his chair. But for the formation of opinion, for the stirring and enlivenment of thought, and for the discernment of colour and proportion, the gifts of travel, especially of travel on foot, are priceless. It was with the design and in the hope of securing such prizes, that I undertook last year the pilgrimage of which these pages give account. I cannot tell whether I have succeeded in winning with them; and still less whether, if won, they are transferable. I therefore view these letters with a modest eye. They were written mainly in long hot Uganda afternoons, after the day's march was done. The larger portion has already appeared in the Strand Magazine, and what has been added was necessary to complete the story.

They present a continuous narrative of the lighter side of what was to me a very delightful and inspiring journey; and it is in the hope that they may vivify and fortify the interest of the British people in the wonderful estates they have recently acquired in the northeastern quarter of Africa, that I offer them in a connected form to the indulgence of the public.

WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL

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CHAPTER I
THE UGANDA RAILWAY

The aspect of Mombasa as she rises from the sea and clothes herself with form and colour at the swift approach of the ship is alluring and even delicious. But to appreciate all these charms the traveller should come from the North. He should see the hot stones of Malta, baking and glistening on a steel-blue Mediterranean. He should visit the Island of Cyprus before the autumn rains have revived the soil, when the Messaoria Plain is one broad wilderness of dust, when every tree—be it only a thorn-bush—is an heirloom, and every drop of water is a jewel. He should walk for two hours at midday in the streets of Port Said. He should thread the long red furrow of the Suez Canal, and swelter through the trough of the Red Sea. He should pass a day among the cinders of Aden, and a week among the scorched rocks and stones of Northern Somaliland; and then, after five days of open sea, his eye and mind will be prepared to salute with feelings of grateful delight these shores of vivid and exuberant green. On every side is vegetation, moist, tumultuous, and varied. Great trees, clad in dense foliage, shrouded in creepers, springing from beds of verdure, thrust themselves through the undergrowth; palms laced together by flowering trailers; every kind of tropical plant that lives by rain and sunshine; high waving grass, brilliant patches of
purple bougainvillea, and in the midst, dotted about, scarcely keeping their heads above the fertile flood of Nature, the red-roofed houses of the town and port of Mombasa.

The vessel follows a channel twisting away between high bluffs, and finds a secure anchorage, land-locked, in forty feet of water at a stone's throw from the shore. Here we are arrived at the gate of British East Africa; and more, at the outlet and debouchment of all the trade of all the countries that lap the Victoria and Albert Lakes and the head-waters of the Nile. Along the pier now being built at Kilindini, the harbour of Mombasa Island, must flow, at any rate for many years, the main stream of East and Central African commerce. Whatever may be the produce which civilized government and enterprise will draw from the enormous territories between Southern Abyssinia and Lake Tanganyika, between Lake Rudolf and Ruenzori, as far west as the head-streams of the Congo, as far north as the Lado enclave; whatever may be the needs and demands of the numerous populations comprised within those limits, it is along the unpretentious jetty of Kilindini that the whole traffic must pass.

For Kilindini (or Mombasa, as I may be permitted to call it) is the starting-point of one of the most romantic and most wonderful railways in the world. The two iron
streaks of rail that wind away among the hills and foliage of Mombasa Island do not break their smooth monotony until, after piercing Equatorial forests, stretching across immense prairies, and climbing almost to the level of the European snow-line, they pause—and that only for a time—upon the edges of the Great Lake. And thus is made a sure, swift road along which the white man and all that he brings with him, for good or ill, may penetrate into the heart of Africa as easily and safely as he may travel from London to Vienna.

Short has been the life, many the vicissitudes, of the Uganda Railway. The adventurous enterprise of a Liberal Government, it was soon exposed, disowned, to the merciless criticism of its parents. Adopted as a cherished foundling by the Conservative party, it almost perished from mismanagement in their hands. Nearly ten thousand pounds a mile were expended upon its construction; and so eager were all parties to be done with it and its expense that, instead of pursuing its proper and natural route across the plateau to the deep waters of Port Victoria, it fell by the way into the shallow gulf of Kavirondo, lucky to get so far. It is easy to censure, it is impossible not to criticize, the administrative mistakes and miscalculations which tarnished and nearly marred a brilliant conception. But it is still more easy, as one traverses in forty-eight hours countries which ten years ago would have baffled the toilsome marches of many weeks, to underrate the difficulties in which unavoidable ignorance and astonishing conditions plunged the pioneers. The British art of "muddling through" is here seen in one of its finest expositions. Through everything—through the forests, through the ravines, through troops of marauding lions, through famine, through war, through five years of excoriating Parliamentary debate, muddled and marched the railway; and here at last, in some more or less effective fashion, is it arrived at its goal. Other nations project Central African railways as lightly and as easily as they lay down naval programmes; but here is a railway, like the British Fleet, "in being"—not a paper plan or an airy dream, but an iron fact grinding along through the jungle and the plain, waking with its whistles the silences of the Nyanza, and startling the tribes out of their primordial nakedness with "Americani" piece goods made in Lancashire.

Let us, then, without waiting in Mombasa longer than is necessary to wish it well and to admire the fertility and promise of the coastal region, ascend this railway from the sea to the lake. And first, what a road it is! Everything is in apple-pie order. The track is smoothed and weeded and ballasted as if it were the London and North-Western. Every telegraph-post has its number; every mile, every hundred yards, every change of gradient has its mark; not in soft wood, to feed the white ant, but in hard, well-painted iron. Constant labour has steadily improved the grades and curves of the permanent-way, and the train—one of those comfortable, practical Indian trains—rolls along as evenly as upon a European line.

Nor should it be supposed that this high standard of maintenance is not warranted by the present financial position of the line. The Uganda Railway is already doing
what it was never expected within any reasonable period to do. It is paying its way. It is beginning to yield a profit—albeit a small profit—upon its capital charge. Projected solely as a political railway to reach Uganda, and to secure British predominance upon the Upper Nile, it has already achieved a commercial value. Instead of the annual deficits upon working expenses which were regularly anticipated by those most competent to judge, there is already a substantial profit of nearly eighty thousand pounds a year. And this is but the beginning, and an imperfect beginning; for at present the line is only a trunk, without its necessary limbs and feeders, without its deep-water head at Kilindini, without its full tale of steamers on the lake; above all, without its natural and necessary extension to the Albert Nyanza.

3 - On the Cow-catcher.

(Mr. Currie, Mr. Marsh, Col. Wilson, Sir J. Hayes-Sadler, Mr. Churchill.)

We may divide the journey into four main stages—the jungles, the plains, the mountains, and the lake, for the lake is an essential part of the railway, and a natural and inexpensive extension to its length. In the early morning, then, we start from Mombasa Station, taking our places upon an ordinary garden seat fastened on to the cow-catcher of the engine, from which position the whole country can be seen. For a quarter of an hour we are still upon Mombasa Island, and then the train, crossing the intervening channel by a long iron bridge, addresses itself in earnest to the continent of Africa. Into these vast regions the line winds perseveringly upon a stiff up-grade, and the land unfolds itself ridge after ridge and valley after valley, till soon, with one farewell glance at the sea and at the fighting-tops of His Majesty's ship Venus rising queerly amid the palms, we are embraced and engulfed completely. All day long the train runs upward and westward, through broken and undulating ground clad and encumbered with super-abundant vegetation. Beautiful birds and butterflies fly from
tree to tree and flower to flower. Deep, ragged gorges, filled by streams in flood, open out far below us through glades of palms and creeper-covered trees. Here and there, at intervals, which will become shorter every year, are plantations of rubber, fibre, and cotton, the beginnings of those inexhaustible supplies which will one day meet the yet unmeasured demand of Europe for those indispensable commodities. Every few miles are little trim stations, with their water-tanks, signals, ticket-offices, and flower-beds complete and all of a pattern, backed by impenetrable bush. In brief one slender thread of scientific civilization, of order, authority, and arrangement, drawn across the primeval chaos of the world.

In the evening a cooler, crisper air is blowing. The humid coast lands, with their glories and their fevers, have been left behind. At an altitude of four thousand feet we begin to laugh at the Equator. The jungle becomes forest, not less luxuriant, but distinctly different in character. The olive replaces the palm. The whole aspect of the land is more friendly, more familiar, and no less fertile. After Makindu Station the forest ceases. The traveller enters upon a region of grass. Immense fields of green pasture, withered and whitened at this season by waiting for the rains, intersected by streams and watercourses densely wooded with dark, fir-looking trees and gorse-looking scrub, and relieved by bold upstanding bluffs and ridges, comprise the new panorama. And here is presented the wonderful and unique spectacle which the Uganda Railway offers to the European. The plains are crowded with wild animals. From the windows of the carriage the whole zoological gardens can be seen disporting itself. Herds of antelope and gazelle, troops of zebras—sometimes four or five hundred together—watch the train pass with placid assurance, or scamper a hundred yards farther away, and turn again. Many are quite close to the line. With field-glasses one can see that it is the same everywhere, and can distinguish long files of black wildebeeste and herds of red kongoni—the hartebeeste of South Africa—and wild ostriches walking sedately in twos and threes, and every kind of small deer and gazelle. The zebras come close enough for their stripes to be admired with the naked eye.

We have arrived at Simba, "The Place of Lions," and there is no reason why the passengers should not see one, or even half-a-dozen, stalking across the plain, respectfully observed by lesser beasts. Indeed, in the early days it was the custom to stop and sally out upon the royal vermin whenever met with, and many the lion that has been carried back to the tender in triumph before the guard, or driver, or any one else could think of timetables or the block system, or the other inconvenient restrictions of a regular service. Farther up the line, in the twilight of the evening, we saw, not a hundred yards away, a dozen giraffes lolling off among scattered trees, and at Nakuru six yellow lions walked in leisurely mood across the rails in broad daylight. Only the rhinoceros is absent, or rarely seen, and after one of his species had measured his strength, unsuccessfully, against an engine, he has confined himself
morosely to the river-beds and to the undisturbed solitudes which, at a distance of two or three miles, everywhere engulf the Uganda Railway.

Our carriage stopped upon a siding at Simba Station for three days, in order that we might more closely examine the local fauna. One of the best ways of shooting game in this part of the world, and certainly the easiest, is to get a trolly and run up and down the line. The animals are so used to the passage of trains and natives along the one great highway that they do not, as a rule, take much notice, unless the train or trolly stops, when their suspicions are at once aroused. The sportsmen should, therefore, slip off without allowing the vehicle or the rest of the party to stop, even for a moment; and in this way he will frequently find himself within two hundred and fifty or three hundred yards of his quarry, when the result will be governed solely by his skill, or want of skill, with the rifle.

There is another method, which we tried on the second day in the hopes of finding a waterbuck, and that is, to prowl about among the trees and undergrowth of the river-bed. In a few minutes one may bury oneself in the wildest and savagest kind of forest. The air becomes still and hot. The sun seems in an instant to assert his just prerogative. The heat glitters over the open spaces of dry sand and pools of water. High grass, huge boulders, tangled vegetation, multitudes of thorn-bushes, obstruct the march, and the ground itself is scarped and guttered by the rains into the strangest formations. Around you, breast-high, shoulder-high, overhead, rises the African jungle. There is a brooding silence, broken only by the cry of a bird, or the scolding bark of baboons, and the crunching of one's own feet on the crumbling soil. We enter the haunt of the wild beasts; their tracks, their traces, the remnants of their repasts, are easily and frequently discovered. Here a lion has passed since the morning. There a rhinoceros has certainly been within the hour—perhaps within ten minutes. We creep and scramble through the game paths, anxiously, rifles at full cock, not knowing what each turn or step may reveal. The wind, when it blows at all, blows fitfully, now from this quarter, now from that; so that one can never be certain that it will not betray the intruder in these grim domains to the beast he seeks, or to some other, less welcome, before he sees him. At length, after two hours' scramble and scrape, we emerge breathless, as from another world, half astonished to find ourselves within a quarter of a mile of the railway line, with its trolly, luncheon, soda-water, ice, etc.
But if one would seek the rhinoceros in his open pastures, it is necessary to go farther afield; and accordingly we started the next morning, while the stars were still shining, to tramp over the ridges and hills which shut in the railway, and overlook remoter plains and valleys beyond. The grass grows high from ground honeycombed with holes and heaped with lava boulders, and it was daylight before we had stumbled our way to a spur commanding a wide view. Here we halted to search the country with field-glasses, and to brush off the ticks—detestable insects which infest all the resorts of the game in innumerable swarms, ready to spread any poison among the farmers' cattle. The glass disclosed nothing of consequence. Zebra, wildebeeste, and kongoni were to be seen in troops and herds, scattered near and far over the plains, but never a rhinoceros! So we trudged on, meaning to make a wide circle. For an hour we found nothing, and then, just as we were thinking of turning homewards before the sun should get his full power, three beautiful oryx, great, dark-coloured antelope with very long, corrugated horns, walked over the next brow on their way to water. Forthwith we set off in pursuit, crouching and creeping along the valley, and hoping to intercept them at the stream. Two passed safely over before we could reach our point. The third, seeing us, turned back and disappeared over the hill, where, a quarter of an hour later, he was stalked and wounded.

It is always the wounded beast that leads the hunter into adventures. Till the quarry is hit every one walks delicately, avoids going the windward side of unexplored coverts, skirts a reed-bed cautiously, notices a convenient tree, looks often this way and that. But once the prize is almost within reach, you scramble along after it as fast as your legs will carry you, and never trouble about remoter contingencies, be they what they may. Our oryx led us a mile or more over rocky slopes, always promising and never giving a good chance for a shot, until at last he drew us round the
shoulder of a hill—and there, abruptly, was the rhinoceros. The impression was extraordinary. A wide plain of white, withered grass stretched away to low hills broken with rocks. The rhinoceros stood in the middle of this plain, about five hundred yards away, in jet-black silhouette; not a twentieth-century animal at all, but an odd, grim straggler from the Stone Age. He was grazing placidly, and above him the vast snow dome of Kilimanjaro towered up in the clear air of morning to complete a scene unaltered since the dawn of the world.

The manner of killing a rhinoceros in the open is crudely simple. It is thought well usually to select the neighbourhood of a good tree, where one can be found, as the centre of the encounter. If no tree is available, you walk up as near as possible to him from any side except the windward, and then shoot him in the head or the heart. If you hit a vital spot, as sometimes happens, he falls. If you hit him anywhere else, he charges blindly and furiously in your direction, and you shoot him again, or not, as the case may be.

Bearing all this carefully in mind, we started out to do battle with Behemoth. We had advanced perhaps two hundred yards towards him, when a cry from one of the natives arrested us. We looked sharply to the right. There, not a hundred and fifty paces distant, under the shade of a few small trees, stood two other monsters. In a few more steps we should have tainted their wind and brought them up with a rush; and suppose this had happened, when perhaps we were already compromised with our first friend, and had him wounded and furious on our hands! Luckily warned in time, to creep back to the shoulder of the hill, to skirt its crest, and to emerge a hundred and twenty yards from this new objective was the work of a few minutes. We hurriedly agree to kill one first before touching the other. At such a range it is easy to hit so great a target; but the bull's-eye is small. I fired. The thud of a bullet which strikes with an impact of a ton and a quarter, tearing through hide and muscle and bone with the hideous energy of cordite, came back distinctly. The large rhinoceros started, stumbled, turned directly towards the sound and the blow, and then bore straight down upon us in a peculiar trot, nearly as fast as a horse's gallop, with an activity surprising in so huge a beast, and instinct with unmistakable purpose.
Great is the moral effect of a foe who advances. Everybody fired. Still the ponderous brute came on, as if he were invulnerable; as if he were an engine, or some great steam barge impervious to bullets, insensible to pain or fear. Thirty seconds more, and he will close. An impalpable curtain seems to roll itself up in the mind, revealing a mental picture, strangely lighted, yet very still, where objects have new values, and where a patch of white grass in the foreground, four or five yards away, seems to possess astonishing significance. It is there that the last two shots that yet remain before the resources of civilization are exhausted must be fired. There is time to reflect with some detachment that, after all, we were the aggressors; we it is who have forced the conflict by an unprovoked assault with murderous intent upon a peaceful herbivore; that if there is such a thing as right and wrong between man and beast—and who shall say there is not?—right is plainly on his side; there is time for this before I perceive that, stunned and dazed by the frightful concussions of modern firearms, he has swerved sharp to the right, and is now moving across our front, broadside on, at the same swift trot. More firing, and as I reload some one says he is down, and I fire instead at his smaller companion, already some distance off upon the plain. But one rhinoceros hunt is like another, except in its details, and I will not occupy the reader with the account of this new pursuit and death. Suffice it to say that, in all the elements of neurotic experience, such an encounter seems to me fully equal to half an hour's brisk skirmish at six or seven hundred yards—and with an important addition. In war there is a cause, there is duty, there is the hope of glory, for who can
tell what may not be won before night? But here at the end is only a hide, a horn, and a carcase, over which the vultures have already begun to wheel.

CHAPTER II
AROUND MOUNT KENYA

The town of Nairobi, the capital of the East Africa Protectorate, stands on the base of wooded hills at the three hundred and twenty-seventh mile of the railroad. Originally chosen as a convenient place for assembling the extensive depots and shops necessary to the construction and maintenance of the railway, it enjoys no advantages as a residential site. The ground on which the town is built is low and swampy. The supply of water is indifferent, and the situation generally unhealthy. A mile farther on, however, upon the rising ground a finer position could have been found, and this quarter is already being occupied sparsely by Government buildings, hospitals, and barracks. It is now too late to change, and thus lack of foresight and of a comprehensive view leaves its permanent imprint upon the countenance of a new country.

Our train traverses the Athi plains, more crowded perhaps with game than any other part of the line, and approaches swiftly the long rows of one-storeyed tin houses which constitute the town. Nairobi is a typical South African township. It might be Pietermaritzburg or Ladysmith of twenty years ago, before blue gum-trees and stone buildings had waxed and multiplied. In its present stage perhaps it resembles Buluwayo most. The population is also South African in its character and proportions. There are five hundred and eighty whites, three thousand one hundred Indians, and ten thousand five hundred and fifty African natives. The shops and stores are, however, much more considerable than these figures would appear to warrant, and are fully capable of supplying the varied needs of settlers and planters over a wide area. Nairobi is also the headquarters of a brigade of the King's African Rifles, the central office and depot of the Uganda Railway, and the seat of the Administration, with its numerous official personnel. The dinner of the Colonists' Association, to which I was invited, afforded the familiar, yet in Central Africa not unimpressive, spectacle of long rows of gentlemen in evening dress; while the ball given by the Governor to celebra
Every white man in Nairobi is a politician; and most of them are leaders of parties. One would scarcely believe it possible, that a centre so new should be able to develop so many divergent and conflicting interests, or that a community so small should be able to give to each such vigorous and even vehement expression. There are already in miniature all the elements of keen political and racial discord, all the materials for hot and acrimonious debate. The white man versus the black; the Indian versus both; the settler as against the planter; the town contrasted with the country; the official class against the unofficial; the coast and the highlands; the railway administration and the Protectorate generally; the King's African Rifles and the East Africa Protectorate Police; all these different points of view, naturally arising, honestly adopted, tenaciously held, and not yet reconciled into any harmonious general conception, confront the visitor in perplexing disarray. Nor will he be wise to choose his part with any hurry. It is better to see something of the country, of its quality and extent, of its promises and forfeits, of its realities and illusions, before endeavouring to form even a provisional opinion.

The snow-clad peak of Mount Kenya, a hundred miles away, can on a clear morning be easily seen from the slopes above Nairobi—a sharp, serrated summit veined with gleaming white. A road—passable, albeit unmetalled, for wagons and even a motor-car—runs thitherward by Fort Hall and across the Tana River. On the way there is much to see. A wild, ragged-looking, but fertile region, swelling into successive undulations and intersected by numerous gorges whose streams are shaded by fine trees, unfolds itself to the eye. Scattered about upon spacious estates of many thousand acres are a score or two of colonists, each gradually making himself a home and a living in his own way. One raises stock; another plants coffee, which grows so exuberantly in this generous soil as to threaten the speedy exhaustion of the plant. Here are ostriches, sheep, and cattle standing placidly together in one drove under the
guardianship of a native child of eleven. There is a complete dairy farm, admirably equipped. One of the streams has been dammed effectively, and turbines are already in position to light Nairobi with electricity. Upon the banks of another there is talk of building an hotel.

7 - Breakdown on the way to Thika Camp.

At one place I found a family of good people from Hightown, Manchester, grappling courageously with an enormous tract of ten thousand acres. Hard by, an old Boer, who has trekked the length of Africa to avoid the British flag, sits smoking stolidly by his grass house, reconciled to British rule at last by a few months' experience of paternal government in a neighbouring Protectorate. He has few cattle and less cash, but he holds decided views as to the whereabouts of lions; there, moreover, stands the heavy tilted wagon of the Great Trek—an ark of refuge when all else fails; and for the rest there is plenty of game, few people, and the family grows from year to year. In short, one sees a sparse, heterogeneous population engaged in varied labours; but everywhere hard work, straitened resources, hopes persisting through many disappointments, stout hospitable hearts, and the beginnings, at any rate, of progress.

A camp has been prepared for me in a very beautiful spot at the juncture of the Chania and Thika rivers. Tents are pitched and grass shelters are erected in a smooth meadow. Southwards, a hundred yards away, a fine waterfall plunges downwards over enormous boulders amid tall, interlacing trees. The muffled roar of another rises from a deep ravine an equal distance to the north; and the Philistine computes, with a frown, four thousand horse-power expending itself upon the picturesque.

Nothing causes the East African colonist more genuine concern than that his guest should not have been provided with a lion. The knowledge preys upon his mind until it becomes a veritable obsession. He feels some deep reproach is laid upon his own hospitality and the reputation of his adopted country. How to find, and, having
found, to kill, a lion is the unvarying theme of conversation; and every place and every journey is judged by a simple standard—"lions or no lions." At the Thika camp, then, several gentlemen, accomplished in this important sport, have come together with ponies, rifles, Somalis, and all the other accessories. Some zebras and kongoni have been killed and left lying in likely-looking places to attract the lions; and at 4 a.m., rain or shine, we are to go and look for them.

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