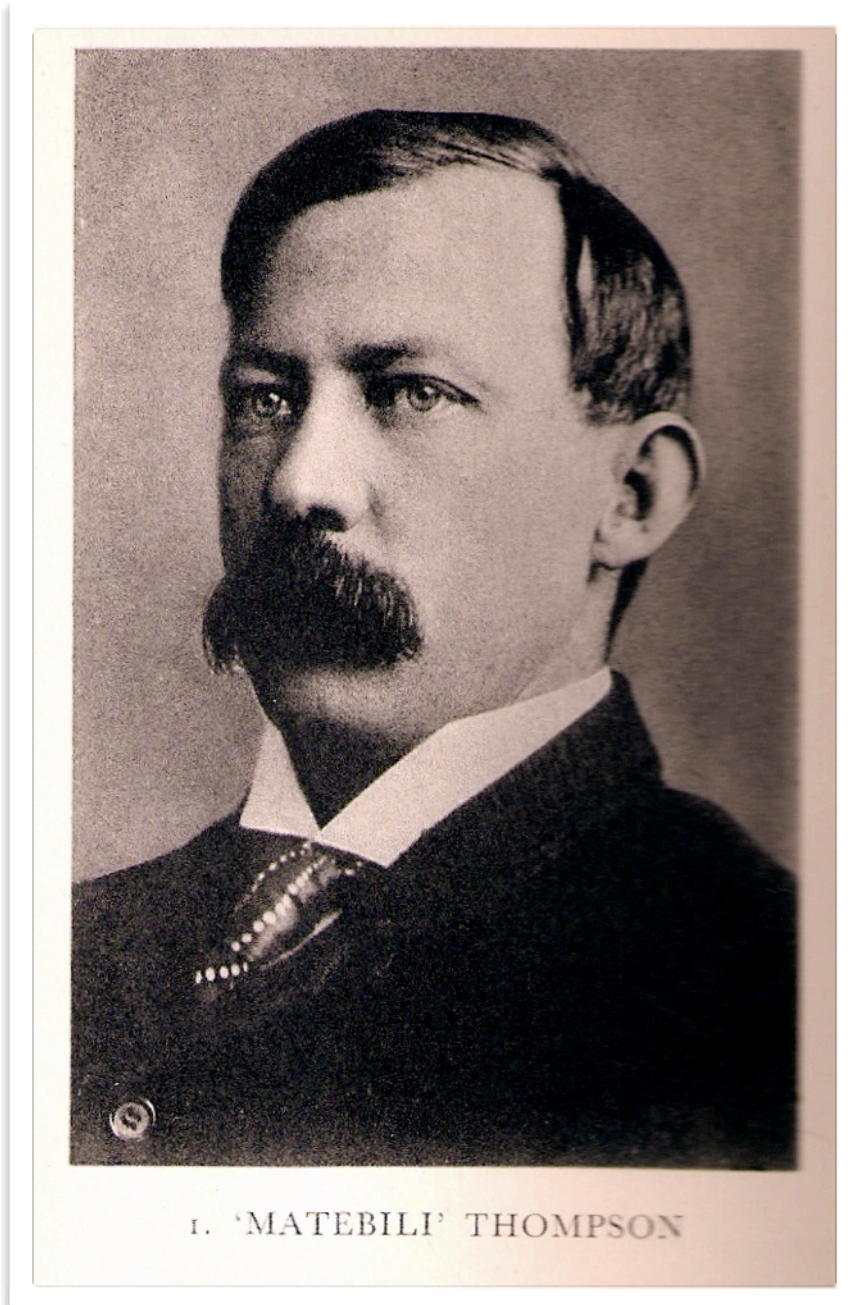


# 'Matebili' Thompson

Africa in the 19th century was a land of mystery and adventure, a frontier far wilder than the "wild west". Francis 'Matebili' Thompson, Gogo's grandfather, had his share in some of the most hair-raising adventures, on and beyond the northern frontiers of the Cape Colony. I have a copy of his autobiography, edited by his daughter (Gogo's mother) Nancy Rouillard, from which I have extracted this account. I've also added a few comments (*in*



*italics*) explaining some of the history surrounding his actions, and filling in some of the less exciting parts of his autobiography.

## 1. A Hunting Expedition in 1850

...

My father was the third son of Francis Thompson, of Cornforth Hill, Richmond, Yorkshire. He sprang from a line of English squires who had lived on their own land for six Centuries. There were members of the family who had served their country as soldiers and sailors, but I must confess that the only remarkable distinction achieved through the years was that of being the best horsemen in their county. The County, possibly, considered this attainment as one of the most desirable. There was a pun on the name, and they were known far and wide as the Riding Thompsons. At the time my father came to South Africa his eldest brother, afterwards Colonel Robert Thompson, was in India, where he served with distinction in the Indian Mutiny; but the other brothers simply carried on their tradition of peaceful and unenterprising citizenship and sought no farther afield. At my grandfather's death the patrimony was divided among the children and my father's portion came to £7000. In those days this was a not inconsiderable sum and with it came the opportunity to satisfy one of his ambitions, which was to go into the wilds and make his name as a hunter of big game. South Africa was the most obvious place for such an enterprise. It was a country of adventure and vast opportunity, and although his intention was to spend only a few years on the project, yet it was undoubtedly more pleasant to go somewhere where he could take his young wife with him. She was just as keen as he was, and in fact I have often wondered whether it was not due more to her influence than to any other that he decided upon this momentous step.

My mother so forceful and unusual a character that I may be pardoned if I dwell upon one whom I had good reason to regard as a wonderful woman. She was a member of the Cumberland family of Backhouse, well-known bankers of their time. They claimed that the blood of Robert the Bruce ran in their veins, but they were nevertheless entirely English. Besides banking, the family had strong leanings towards the Church, and there was a large sprinkling of clergy among my mother's relatives, but she had also a strong Quaker strain. These inherited traits of religion and shrewdness persisted right through her life, and gave her the anchor which kept her firm through many South African days of bitterness and loneliness. Her first marriage was a runaway match to Gretna Green, when she was little more than a schoolgirl. Her parents had opposed the marriage, although the young man had position in the county, but being close to the Border she took the law into her own hands, in the good old-fashioned way, and the families had to accept the inevitable. Her happiness was shortlived, for her husband died within a year, and the widow returned to her own people.



2. FRANCIS AND ANN THOMPSON,  
PARENTS OF 'MATEBILI'  
THOMPSON, SOON AFTER  
THEIR MARRIAGE IN 1850

She had considerable beauty and talent, and had received what was regarded in those days as an advanced education for a woman, but it was her pluck, vitality and gay humour which so perfectly suited my father and led him first to aspire to her hand and then to take her on his great venture into the unknown. In June 1850 they were married and almost immediately set sail for South Africa. They landed at Port Natal, which was then considered the nearest point of departure for the interior. They decided that Pietermaritzburg would be a suitable place for my mother to make her home while my father took his first trip into the wilds. There must have been little to attract her in the few rows of wretched houses that people called Pietermaritzburg in those days, but it was a comparatively safe place, having been settled ten years previously by the Voortrekkers from Cape Colony under Piet Retief and Maritz. The days of Dingaan and the massacre of Weenen were then too recent to permit my father's choosing a place farther up-country, but Pietermaritzburg seemed wild and lonely enough to the rather gay and fashionable young English-woman. It was her own choice, however, and she did not dream of grumbling.

My father came thus early into contact with the best type of British and foreign missionary. On this first trip he met and appreciated Dr. and Mrs. Moffat, and on a later

journey he penetrated as far as the Zambesi, and there met Dr. Moffat's son—in-law, David Livingstone. I think it is very probable that their outlook on the native question, and their interest in the problems even then facing this country of mixed race and colour, influenced my father's opinions. Certainly it was this outlook that he passed on to me, and although I came to know more of natives than he ever knew, and my first ideas were sharply modified, the missionaries and I never wholly parted company.

My father soon discovered that hunting, combined with trading by barter, could be very profitable. He was able to pay expenses, and even on occasion to come out well on the right side. He managed to keep most of the £7000 intact in my mother's hands, and he began to form the idea that they might one day decide to buy land, settle down and make South Africa their home. My mother's first child was born in Maritzburg, and as others arrived it became increasingly necessary to decide upon some settled plan. I have no doubt that my mother began to think that the shooting and exploration had gone on long enough. Be that as it may, an event that entirely changed the family fortunes occurred at this time. During my father's absence it came to her ears, chiefly through my father's elder brother who had come out later to Natal, that there was easy money to be made in a speculation.

Like all speculations it was represented as something perfectly safe, and my mother allowed herself to be persuaded. The idea was that most of her capital should be spent upon the salvage of a wreck in the harbour at Port Natal. This was said to be worth a considerable sum, and her fortune should easily be doubled. The deal was put through, but before the work began a storm sent the wreck and my mother's money into the Indian Ocean, beyond the reach of salvage. It was a pretty bad tale to have to tell the returning traveller, as it changed the whole aspect of his African plans. Something was saved from the debacle, but certainly not enough to provide for a growing family. My father might have returned to England, but that seemed to him a cowardly decision when there was a possibility of making good in South Africa. Trading, of which he had gained some experience, offered a solution; and to his great credit he buckled down to the uncongenial routine of a partnership in a shipping and trading concern at Port Elizabeth. It must have been hard for my mother, thus cut adrift from her own environment.

Home and England had vanished into the limbo of the past. She must have adjusted herself quickly, however, for I can never remember her otherwise than cheerful and happy. On the courage of such women the nation of South Africa has been built. It was when the ship in which my parents were travelling from Port Natal was just outside the harbour at Port Elizabeth, in 1857, that I was born. My birth is accordingly registered at Marylebone England, as one born on the High Seas in an English ship.

Port Elizabeth in those days had already become an important commercial centre. It had been the landing place of the 1820 settlers, and both there and at Grahamstown, ninety miles away, the English culture had taken root. There was a comparatively large and flourishing British community, and by the time that I became conscious of such things I found that my father and mother had already established a niche in the society of the little town and had many friends. I grew up with boys of whom some became famous in the history of South Africa. I can remember being popped over a garden wall one afternoon by a boy who became a justice of the Supreme Court. I was the youngest and most agile of the gang, and it was required that I should steal a fowl from the neighbour's yard and hand it over to my friends. It was needed for a stag picnic the next day, and the fact that the owner of the bird was to be a guest only made the adventure more exciting. Besides the companionship of my boy friends, and the many devious escapades which are part of any healthy boy's existence, I found special pleasure in wandering about and watching the growth of the town. Building and other development was going forward, and I soon became a friend of the artisans. I think I must have been more than usually alert in acquiring general information of all kinds, as I certainly gained a store of practical



knowledge that was to be of the utmost value to me in later years. I always found making friends with people of all classes an easy thing. I inherited a gift of languages from my mother, and thus quite naturally became proficient in Dutch, and in the various native languages that I came across.

Had it not been for my mother's influence I have no doubt that I should have become a very rough small diamond indeed, but she was adamant in morals, manners and the necessity of education. Just because the dangers of contamination in a new country of mixed population were ever present, she and many like her were much stricter than would have been necessary in a more settled community. Her teaching was an adequate creed — —that no matter where we found ourselves, no matter how the circumstances of our lives might vary, no matter with people of what class or colour we had to deal, the aim must be to fear God, honour the Queen, respect ourselves and play straight.

My mother contrived to send my eldest brother to school in England. This was an achievement, but one member of each generation of Thompsons was allowed to send a son to the Blue Coat School in London, and my eldest brother Backhouse accordingly went. It seemed incredible to my mother that her other sons might not be able somehow to receive their education in England, but it was gradually borne in upon her that finances would not allow it. There were good schools even then in South Africa. however, and I was sent to Grey, the school founded at Port Elizabeth by Sir George Grey, which was and is still as good as any in the country. My father and mother taught me to love reading and music, but I was little more than thirteen when another change came over the family fortunes. In 1870 it was decided that my father should move to the newly discovered diamond fields, and we were to live at Klipdrift, now Barkly West, in Griqualand West. I was delighted at the prospect of a change and the possibilities of adventure, but I realized, and my mother knew too, that my education would probably suffer. I promised her that I would do all I could to continue my studies, and I did manage somehow to find time to carry them on in the midst of what became almost immediately an adventurous existence. So successfully did I accomplish this that when I was able, many years later, to enter Oxford, I passed the entrance examination with little effort.

Only a year or so before leaving Port Elizabeth I earned my first contribution to the family exchequer. I had discovered in my talks with builders that copper nails were hard to get in the country, that the supply had run short, and that Europe and the nail makers were very far away. A small boat was the beloved possession of myself and some of my boy friends. One calm day I commandeered the boat and rowed out to one of the wrecks that lay not far from the shore at Port Elizabeth. With a small chisel I prized out the copper-headed nails from the hull, and filled a little bucket. I then made my way back to town and sold them. I think I was aged ten, and I remember that the sum I realized gave me more joy than any money I ever earned afterwards.

When it was decided that my father should move up to the diamond fields I was wild with excitement to join him. The family, at first, was to remain at Port Elizabeth, but when it became certain that they would shortly follow him I was allowed to go ahead of the others. It can hardly be realized nowadays what vast opportunities for adventure, what enormous possibilities, this first diamond rush meant to a youngster such as I was. It was, moreover, the stepping—stone to the great hinterland. I knew of the road my father had first taken, and his tales of the great interior had fired me with enthusiasm to follow the same road and even farther.

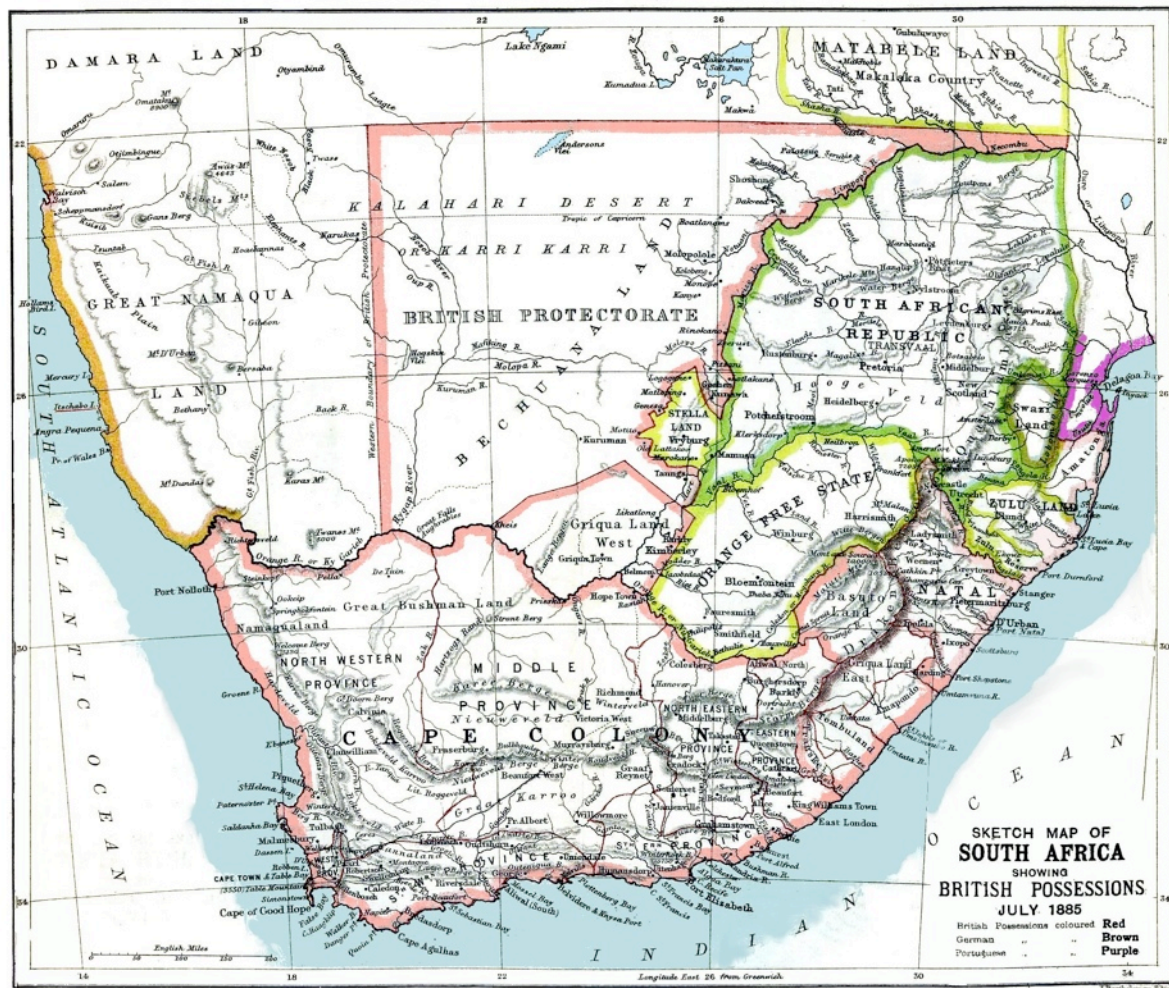
Thus it was that in 1870, in the company of some nine or ten men of various grades of society, I waved farewell to my mother and went over the hill down the long road that led over great mountains and across wide plains to the Vaal River. I was to be allowed thus early to try my luck as a digger. I was gifted, I suppose, with plenty of pluck, certainly marvellous health, and luckily an intuitive knowledge of how to get on with my fellow men, Boer, Briton and native. Above all I had unbounded ambition and enthusiasm. I loved my

fellow men; and to this day, as an old man, I can still say that I love them, and have on the whole encountered far more goodness and honesty than the reverse. If I early learnt that a quick eye and a ready fist were valuable aids to knowing my fellow men, I can only say that in those days physical fitness counted for a great deal, and a straight punch and a cheerful smile took one a long way. I was a powerfully built lad, and a little later I easily took my place amongst the athletes of the community. I held the Champion Belt for sprinters on the Diamond Fields, losing it to Ling, the father of the present famous athlete of Kimberley. Many years afterwards I 'put the weight' for my college at Oxford against Cambridge.

Life on the diggings was hard work for a boy. I hired a native for ten shillings a month and his food, and together we toiled from sunrise to sunset. My food was mealie meal and a little tea and coffee. Meat was rare. The life had its compensations for in each bucket of gravel I hoped that I might come upon a diamond. Most of those round me had some luck, but nothing came my way. At length the day arrived when food and money were almost exhausted and I nearly gave up in despair. Then, to my delight, my trusted native brought me a beautiful stone. This was on a Thursday. I dissembled my excitement and worked until the Saturday, when I went into Klipdrift to sell my treasure. I realized 40 pounds, and with a great sense of importance I laid in a further stock of provisions and returned to my camp with 25 pounds. I put the money carefully into my little box, determined that this should constitute my capital for eventualities. I toiled on for another month, but with no luck of any kind. Then one day, feeling heartsore and despondent, I returned to my tent and found that my box had been broken open and my money stolen. I was only a lad and the blow seemed almost overwhelming. I had nothing left, and food on credit, especially for a lad of my age, was not to be had. I decided to give up this dream of wealth before I got into debt, and try something else.

My father and mother were then settled at Klipdrift and wished me to return home, but again I begged leave to try my fortunes elsewhere and I was lucky to obtain a position in a general mercantile business. I have never regretted the useful knowledge I gained there, but the life hardly suited me and so I was overjoyed when I was able to accompany an old friend of my father on a trip into the interior.

My father by this time was firmly established at Klipdrift and becoming a moderately successful man. His political aspirations kept him interested in the country's problems and it was gradually borne in upon him that there might be a great future for a youth who applied himself to gaining an intimate knowledge of native affairs. He accordingly suggested that I should do this, beginning with native languages and customs. The object was after my own heart, and so diligently did I follow his advice that in a very short time, young as I was, I became something of an authority on native matters. This knowledge was easily acquired on the series of journeys I took into the wilds. I was able by barter to do well financially, and I went farther and farther afield, searching for the knowledge I wanted, and putting through profitable transactions with the tribes I came across.



Scottish Geographical Magazine, 1885.

When still a lad I found myself on the Limpopo or Crocodile River at the foot of the Zoutpansberg. I roamed about in what is now known as Bechuanaland. I shot big game, which I bartered with the natives for ivory and feathers; and once when I was on my homeward journey from the Lydenburg Goldfields in the Northern Transvaal I bartered my ivory and feathers with a trader, taking in exchange two tons of tobacco. This I sold at a great profit on the Kimberley market. This venture was, indeed, the nucleus of the sum which later went to stock my farm.

Early in 1873 my father's political ambitions began to be realized, for in 1872 it had been decided that Griqualand West should be administered by a Legislative Council of eight. Four members were to be appointed by the Governor of Cape Colony, Sir Henry Barkly, acting for the Imperial Government, and the others were to be elected by the people. Right up against the borders of the uncivilized and little explored interior, Griqualand West was country that had belonged from time immemorial to the great Bechuana tribe. A wandering tribe of natives, known as the Griquas, had been settled on this land by the British Government, and had been reinforced by a band of coloured nomads under Adam Kok. It was inevitable that disputes should arise over questions of land, both among the natives themselves and with the Boer settlers, apart from the fact that the borders of this country had never been clearly defined. It was accordingly thought best to remove some of the tribe to another part of the country, on the Natal border, and this was known in turn as Griqualand East. When diamonds were discovered in

Griqualand West, however, it was another story — — — disputes could not be settled by asking the white men to go elsewhere. The border had to be clearly defined, and the country administered in a serious manner. Mr. Richard Southey (afterwards Sir Richard), a veteran of the Kaffir Wars in the Eastern Cape who had done yeoman service in the Cape Government, was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Griqualand West and President of the Council. It was to this Council that my father was elected.

In the intervals of my journeyings my headquarters were with my parents at Klipdrift. I well remember the afternoon I met Cecil Rhodes, in their house. My father came in from a trip to the diggings, and I heard him mention that he had met two rather unusual young men and had asked them to come to supper on the following Sunday, or to visit his house when they felt inclined. These men, mentioned so casually, turned out to be Charles Rudd and his friend Cecil Rhodes. It was thus that two friendships began which meant much to me in later years. I was seven years younger than Rudd, which in youth means a big difference, and yet Rudd was the one man I ever came really to love.

We heard discussed round us questions of not only South African but of world-wide importance. Besides the unusually rapid development, and the changes taking place in this outpost of civilization, with consequent difficulties of administration, Griqualand West was a question mark in South Africa's political scene. It was a strategical point on the chess-board of South African and, indeed, European politics. Lord Carnarvon, bent upon a scheme to federate the South African Colonies and Republics, was urging Sir Henry Barkly to insist upon Mr. Southey's doing nothing to alienate the Dutch, while there were foreign interests, financial and political, eager to step in and exploit any difficulties that might arise round the world's richest deposit of diamonds. Above all, Southey and his Council had a most difficult task in preventing lawlessness among a wild and adventurous element attracted to the fields from every part of the world. Rhodes's genius for politics may have been awakened by the interminable discussion of these matters. It is certain that his great ideals of federation and toleration, and his desire to work with all elements in South Africa, Dutch, British and native, were engendered at this time. He was an idealist of a very practical kind. A favourite phrase of his from those old days is lodged in my memory. After some long and perhaps over — academic discussion at my father's or a neighbour's house, he would declare, 'Don't deal with hypothetical cases — deal with facts.'

## **2. A Fight at Cornforth Hill**





4. HOMESTEAD AT CORNFORTH HILL

With a view to settling Griqualand West the Imperial Government offered, to persons willing to be pioneers, perpetual leases (known in South African law as quitrent leases) of blocks of land. It was under such a lease in 1874 that I was given by the Imperial authorities a farm on the Hartz River, about fifty miles from Barkly West. It was the very first farm acquired and occupied by a European in Griqualand West. I named it Cornforth Hill, after our family's seat in Yorkshire. Thus I became the first pioneer on the northern border of Cape Colony. I set about building my homestead and developing the property. Two years later I bought an adjoining farm from Byron Sampson, a homeopathic doctor, who had acquired it as a grant from the natives. I named it Anthorn, after my mother's old home. This name proved to be a curious example of the long arm of coincidence. Anthorn means one thorn tree, and the Sechuana name of the place was Makalanengwe, meaning one thorn tree, which in turn was a translation of the much older Bushman name Tchwe Thanapi (Tchwe—one, Thanapi—thorn tree). The name came from a huge camel-thorn tree growing near a spring on the property, and regarded by the natives as sacred. It marks the boundary between the Mothibi Batlapin and the Mahuruah people, and was the official place for conferences between tribes, and for executions. This ancient landmark was blown down by a gale in 1912. I preserved its trunk. I remained at Cornforth Hill until the middle of 1878 and in this period of four years I became a prosperous farmer. I was then but a lad, but as I had some three thousand sheep and six hundred head of cattle, with the usual farming implements, I was considered fairly well off, although the cattle and sheep had not the value such things have now.

On the 18th July, 1878, a series of events came to pass, which even at this date I find it hard to recount. War had broken out among the natives in the northern part of Griqualand, now known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate, where years after Major Gould Adams was Resident Commissioner. This was part of a concerted rising of the natives, which began with the Gcaleka War in January 1878 and culminated in the Zulu War and

the capture of Cetewayo in 1879. My father and mother, who were still residing at Barkly West, became extremely anxious concerning me, and my father decided to pay me a visit. He accordingly arrived at my farm on the 14th July. Only a short while before serious and widespread disturbances had taken place at no great distance from me, and several well-known families including the Burnesses and the Walters—men, women and children—had been attacked by the natives and butchered in cold blood. Late one night a neighbouring farmer, Mr. William Hunter, who was farming at Boetsap and running a store, sent down to my homestead to say that he had received warning that he would be attacked, and that I ought to know of the danger and prepare to meet it. My father, myself and my cousin William, a North Countryman who was living with me, at once saddled our horses and rode to the home of our neighbour to render him assistance in his defence. On reaching the place we found that the homestead had already been attacked. The natives had crept close up and fired two or three volleys on its inmates. The eldest Hunter had been shot through the leg, which had to be amputated; a servant had been killed, and Mr. Walters wounded. No fighting occurred while we were there. In the darkness we managed to get back to our homestead. By daylight the natives had cleared out, or so we all thought, in the direction of Kuruman. The Hunters left their farm, taking with them what was possible. They lost nearly all their stock, except a herd of cattle that had been sent two days before to Barkly West.

When we returned home late that night we decided that each in turn should sit up and keep guard. I constructed a small stockade about a hundred yards from my house, and made all possible preparations to prevent a surprise. Our force consisted of my father, my cousin, myself and three Koranna boys. As may be imagined, we were all very anxious, not knowing from hour to hour what was going to happen. During the night I had lain down in the open to snatch a little sleep if possible, leaving one of the Korannas on watch, and it must have been about three o'clock in the morning when he aroused me by whispering, 'Chuga, Morena, baretla sela ba rehola.' (Wake up, master, they are attacking and surrounding us.)

The night air was cold and still; the darkness black as Erebus. I strained my ears and listened attentively, but there could be no mistaking the sound, now every moment becoming more and more distinct. It was the tramp of horses. I judged that the approaching party was within about three hundred yards. We had arranged that whoever happened to be at the stockade should, in case of alarm, fire a shot. After challenging in Sechuana (Putchwa!) and receiving no reply, I fired, meaning if possible to hit somebody. As the report of my rifle died away, all was still as death. But 3 Seconds later, to my profound astonishment, I heard the clarion notes of a British bugle ring out through the darkness. The sense of relief; mingled with bewilderment, which came over me may better be imagined than described. But before I had time to realize what had happened my little fort had been surrounded, and then I discovered to my horror that I had fired on the Redjackets. I was taken prisoner, and notwithstanding explanations, taken down to the homestead in that role.

The party, I presently found, was a detachment of the 2nd battalion of the 24th regiment of the Line under Captain Brunker. This regiment was afterwards wiped out at Isandhlwana. They had been ordered at this time from the centre of Government at Pretoria (for the Transvaal was then under British rule), to be sent to the scene of action in the Langeberg. They had, it turned out, lost their way, and after wandering for some fifty hours had turned up at my farm.

Captain Brunker's suspicions originated in an incident in 1870, when some two hundred miles from my farm there had been a native rebellion on the Orange River, and I am sorry to relate that a European named McCarthy had taken the side of the natives against the Cape Colonial troops. He was a gun mender and gunpowder maker, had been living for a long time among these natives, and had taken unto himself a native wife. He

was discovered in a very amusing manner. After the engagement a number of native prisoners had been taken, among whom were some native women. These women were all standing together, and when the officer commanding turned away for a moment one of the soldiers jokingly slapped a big woman who was standing near. Imagine the surprise of all when the woman, reeling a little to one side, exposed to view McCarthy, who had been concealed under her blankets. He was tried by court martial and shot as a traitor.

When further explanations were given to Captain Brunker I was promptly released. The troopers, as I have said, had lost their way and had been for some fifty-two hours without food. Luckily I was in a position to afford them relief. I had a good stock of hams and bacon of my own curing for use during the summer months, when the weather is too hot to slaughter sheep or cattle unless the meat is to be eaten immediately. We put the three native boys to make fires while my cousin and I made rooster koekies. We threw open the larder, and by nine o'clock next morning everyone was well fed. The troop remained at the farm until five o'clock that evening, when they resumed their march towards the Langeberg. We accompanied them for some distance, and then my father and cousin turned back. I went on with Brunker to guide him through the valley. We had given the troops supplies of food.

Upon my return to the homestead that night we decided that it was unnecessary to keep guard, as we had Redcoats in the vicinity, and it was unlikely that any hostile natives would remain in the neighbourhood. That night and the following day passed without anything unusual happening, nor was guard kept. On the 18th July, however, having heard fresh rumours, we decided that, as the country was in such an unsettled state, and we might have to remove our stock at any time, it would be best to separate the rams from the ewes, so that there should be no cause for delay in moving. I rose at the first streak of dawn and with my natives was going to the kraals when I saw in the distance a native lad named Mangale coming towards the house. I thought this strange, as all natives in the surrounding country had fled northward. When the boy got to the homestead he told us that his father had sent him to warn us that we would be attacked almost immediately. He had overheard a conversation some twenty miles away the night before, and as he and his father had previously worked for me, they showed their gratitude by giving me warning — one of the few instances of the kind I know of. I warned my cousin and also my father, who was just getting out of bed. We ordered the three natives to get their guns ready, and scarcely had we done so when we saw in the distance a body of thirty mounted Kaffirs galloping down on the homestead. These, as it turned out, were merely the advance party. Most of them were mounted on grey horses and wearing European helmets and soldier's coats. They had surprised a detachment of our troops at Klein Boetsap and defeated them, our men making off in the darkness as best they could and leaving the bulk of their ammunition, horses and clothing, to the enemy. This troop, as was generally the case with our men, had not taken precautions against surprise, and had even neglected to post outlying pickets.

The Kaffirs halted about a hundred and fifty yards from the homestead and there awaited the arrival of a hundred more men. The whole force then concealed themselves in a donga, or dry river bed, which ran round the homestead at a distance of a hundred yards. My father and I agreed that I should attempt to parley with them. I put down my gun in the house behind the door, and stepped out in front, although I must admit that I was very nervous. On my calling that I wished to speak to them they immediately replied with a volley of bullets, but fortunately I was not hit. I went back for my rifle and returned their fire. My father, who had taken up a position on the left hand of the house, behind a little portable blacksmith's forge, repeatedly called to me to keep cool and shoot straight, as our only chance was to make a good stand. He was using an elephant gun loaded with slugs, and was the first to draw blood, hitting one of the leading attackers in the abdomen. A

moment later I brought down the second man with a shot through the left shoulder, and then the firing became general.

Owing to the concentrated fire of the natives none of our party was again able to expose himself so the fighting went on, we for dear life and the Kaffirs for murder, loot and revenge on the white man. We were but six, while they were about two hundred. After fighting for about three hours, we discovered that the natives, by gradually creeping up under cover of the kraal had got to within thirty yards of the homestead. Some had loaded their muzzle-loading guns with greased rag, and by this means eventually succeeded in setting fire to the thatched roof of the dwelling. Bad as our position was, we kept up the fight for two hours longer. Then the flames began to appear inside the house, and our situation became desperate. My cousin, who with two of the Korannas had been defending the rear of the house, was now compelled to retreat. We lifted him through a small window into the front portion of the building. I snatched a muzzle-loading musket from one of the boys and for a time succeeded, by firing blank powder, in keeping down the flames as they appeared in the thatch. Every moment the heat was becoming more intense and the smoke thicker. We could hold out no longer; something must be done, and that very soon. Calling to my father I explained how matters stood in my part of the house, and I could see from where I stood that the roof at the back was falling in. There was soon no alternative: we had to run the gauntlet or be burned alive. My father, exposing himself fearlessly, coolly walked from his position carrying a revolver, an elephant gun and a butcher's cleaver. On reaching my part of the building he opened the small window I have mentioned, and was then able to see the extent and progress of the flames, which indeed singed his whiskers as he looked through.

"We must run for it," he said. "Keep about fifty yards apart and everyone for himself."

My father was the first to leap out of the burning house, and I followed. I had got but a short distance when I was struck by a ball fired by the native chief Galishwe at twelve yards range. It hit me near the point of the lowest rib on the left side, breaking the rib and coming out at the back. By this time my father and cousin and two of the Korannas had got well ahead of me, I having been turned completely round like a top by the force of the bullet. Up to this time no one else had been hit, but when crossing the donga about a hundred and fifty yards away my father received a shot in his heel which crippled him, although he was still able to run. In getting over the donga I placed my hand against my wound, which had become painful. In doing so I stumbled, and as I fell my middle finger was driven into the opening. The broken rib from either side closed on the finger, which thus remained fixed in the wound up to the middle joint. I had only one cartridge left in my gun, my pouch having been shot away; but I resolved to fight to the last. I was a good runner and did not at first feel the full effects of my injury. I thus soon began to overtake my father and cousin, but as I approached them thirty mounted men charged down on our left flank and galloped between me and my father.

I saw my cousin captured and my father surrounded, and several shots fired into him at close range. I draw a veil over the tragedy then enacted. It sickens me to recall it, and my grief and rage even at this interval of time awake afresh at the remembrance. It is easy to talk of forgetting and forgiving, but only those who have suffered a cruel wrong can know how hard it is to do either.

Knowing that my father was dead, and realizing my all but helpless condition, I suddenly remembered that there was a well with some five feet of water close by. Quick as thought I ran to this, jumped in and hid myself with only my nose and eyes above water. One of my three Korannas was captured. The other two, after leaving the house, had run down the donga and on seeing me leap into the well called to me to get out, as there might still be a chance of escape if we could creep into the long grass on the opposite side of the donga. They helped me by holding the end of my rifle, which I had dropped into a bush, and by much pulling and struggling, enduring agonies from my wound and imprisoned



hand, I managed to get out. The pain was now terrible, and the loss of blood was weakening me. My finger was still embedded fast in the wound.

I told the boys that it would be a mistake to go into the long grass, and that it would be better to keep down the dry bed of the river. This we fortunately did, for it turned out that some of the natives had taken possession of this same long grass, and had we entered it we should have certainly fallen into their hands. By this time, having completed the mutilation of my father's body and the torturing of my cousin, they had turned their attention to me. We had got about a mile down the donga and had almost reached a thick clump of bushes, when they saw us and gave chase. I continued to run fairly well and still retained my loaded rifle, but at the sight of the coming horde of savages I felt my spirits begin to sink. Turning to the Korannas I said, 'Boys, I'm done for. You had better make away as fast as you can.' While they continued their flight I sank from loss of blood, almost fainting, to the ground. I had, however, the presence of mind before losing my senses to crawl a short distance into the bush off the track, the enemy being, I should judge, about a mile away. I lay hidden in the bush and in a faint for some time, and only regained consciousness as the natives were on the point of reaching the spot where I was concealed. Fortunately for me, at that moment they saw the two Korannas crossing a piece of open ground and resumed the chase, no doubt concluding that I, who was a renowned runner in the country, must have outstripped my companions. On losing sight of the two boys again, four of the natives returned to where I had last been seen, about twenty yards from where I then lay. To my intense relief, while they were taking up the spoor, a loud shout of 'Kebali' (There they go!) caused them to return to the chase. With difficulty I managed to rise and get a little farther into the bush, my wound paining me considerably, for I was quite unable to extricate my finger from between the ends of my broken rib.

Although I had escaped thus far, my danger was not over. I had hardly got another hundred and fifty yards into the bush when I found myself at no great distance from a transport waggon, laden with goods intended for a trader in the north. The natives had seen it too, and with bated breath I watched them, sixty yards away, galloping down to loot it. As soon as they reached it they dismounted, leaving their horses to graze as they liked, native fashion, with the bridles thrown over their heads. Then each of the natives helped himself to whatever article on the waggon struck his fancy. The white men who had been in charge of the waggon, having seen the attack on my homestead, had made off into the bush. The horses grazed in all directions, and some came close to the bush which hid me from view. By breaking off small branches to use as switches, and by throwing sand at the animals, I managed to drive them away some little distance. After the natives had completely looted the waggon, their leader gave the signal to remount. In rounding up the horses two natives passed within ten or twelve feet of me. I held my breath and could hear the beating of my heart. I had determined, if seen, to kill one man at least, but provided I escaped notice, I was content to leave matters as they were. All the natives moved back to the wrecked and burning homestead and looted my sheep, cattle, waggon and horses.

Weak as I was, I managed to scrape out a hole in which I buried my rifle, feeling it too heavy to carry further, and as I was unable to rise I started to crawl. I had crawled about half a mile when the country opened out into a plain, some nine miles in length without a vestige of bush, grass or cover of any kind. I saw a party of natives, who had evidently left the main body to search for cattle, coming directly towards me. Helpless, wounded and unarmed, the thought came over me that this time I must yield to the inevitable and submit to my fate; and then came the desire to live. The country was of that red, sandy soil so well known to travellers in South Africa, and as I looked helplessly about in search of some hiding place what was my joy to discover, only a few yards from me, an antbear hole large enough to admit a full-grown man. These holes are well known to South African hunters. I lost not a moment in concealing myself, feet foremost, and for two hours remained quite

still in the hole without daring to move. At length, fearing that if I remained much longer I should perish from thirst, I struggled forth and, having crept a considerable distance, succeeded in getting on my legs and walking in a bent and crouching attitude.

After struggling on for what seemed an age, but was in reality only a few hours, I came upon a waggon driven by a native boy who had at one time been in my employ. He had been certified as insane and had been for some months under lock and key, but having recovered he was now returning to his home. He consequently was not in any way connected with the local troubles and was quite willing to help me on my way. At six o'clock that evening I arrived at a farm called Spitzkop, some sixteen miles distant from Cornforth Hill.

At Spitzkop I found my neighbour - Robert Spalding, with his wife, a son of sixteen, an aged Scotsman named Donald Martin and seven or eight young children. I leave the reader to imagine my feelings. Although I was in a desperate plight, the knowledge that I was safe for the present and in the company of friends greatly restored my spirits. The house was a substantial one under an iron roof; surrounded by a loopholed stone wall six feet high. The Spaldings were quite unaware of what had happened at my farm, and on seeing me and hearing my news Mrs. Spalding was naturally scared. The lady and old Donald Martin gave me kindly help, and by drawing my broken rib apart succeeded in liberating my finger from the wound where it had been embedded for ten hours. I suffered intense pain during this operation. As the finger was released and extricated it brought with it a long thread of congealed blood, half an inch in diameter and twelve inches long. There was no time to have my wounds even roughly dressed. All promptly set about preparing to defend the house. The party was so small that even I, although quite unable to stand, could not be spared, and it was arranged that my bed should be raised to the level of a loophole at one of the windows, and that I was to command the window with a rifle. The pain of my wound increased every moment.

Hardly had the arrangements been completed when, at a distance of seventeen hundred yards, the same natives who had attacked my homestead were seen approaching. The evening was fast closing in, and only a desultory fire was kept up on both sides during the night. Mrs. Spalding loaded my rifle for me and I fired whenever a flash from one of the natives' guns offered the chance of a hit. So excited and nervous was my state that I was unable to take any food. None of our party had time to think of eating, and a drink of water from time to time was all I had. Thus the long weary night passed, and daylight revealed the situation. The natives were surrounding us, and were now about twelve hundred yards away. Knowing how well the house was fortified, and probably uncertain of the strength of the garrison, for at times we had kept up a pretty smart fire, they were afraid of approaching too near. Throughout the whole of that day, by firing a few shots from time to time, the attacking party was held in check; but it was with an anxiety approaching dread that we contemplated passing another night of siege.

As the sun began to sink, my excitement and pain made me rambling in my speech, and everyone thought me delirious. No doubt I was a little light-headed, but I remember all that went on. About midnight, when I had closed my aching eyes for a moment and fallen into a painful, half-waking state, I distinctly heard the distant sound of a bugle. I roused myself instantly and called to Mrs. Spalding, telling her what I had heard. She immediately went to her husband at the other end of the building and told him what I had said. He replied: 'Don't encourage Thompson; he is becoming delirious. Keep him up and don't let him go away, as it will mean one gun less.' We only had three all told.

Another five minutes elapsed, I listening attentively, and then I knew I was not mistaken for I distinctly heard the 'Advance'. There is nothing like life on a border ranch to sharpen one's sense of hearing. Mrs. Spalding had also heard the bugle call, but probably fearing another snub from her husband said nothing. The natives drew off rapidly, and in a few minutes there appeared a force of five hundred soldiers and we were safe.

For thirty hours I had had no food, only a little water. Now came the reaction. I went off into a swoon; indeed I must, from the time I was wounded, have fainted at least thirty times. When I came to myself, I found that my clothes had been cut off and that I was being examined by two medical men. One of them, Dr. William Murphy, a man I could never sufficiently thank, was well known in Kimberley and was acting on the staff. The second was a military doctor. I saw one look askance at the other and heard him distinctly say, 'Mortification has set in.' Then they withdrew to the adjoining room and held a short consultation, and I asked the orderly left with me (whose name I think was Miller) what the feeling of mortification was replied, 'A sort of dead sensation.' Now for the first time I began to be a little afraid, and began to feel about my wounded side, and my fears were certainly not allayed when I felt the dead and numb feeling described by Miller. The two doctors returned, and it was decided to operate at once. They offered me chloroform, but I refused. I had no experience of its effects, and said that I would prefer to undergo the operation without it. Four men were then called in to lift me and put me on a bed. My hands were put through the top of the bed and tied, and my feet were bound to the bedposts, the four men holding me down. Dr. Murphy then operated by cutting away the piece of the rib and probing my wound. A piece of flannel which had been forced in by the bullet was found, and extracted by pushing it out through the wound at the back. The pain was dreadful, and I shiver even now at the thought of it. As the examination by the medical men showed that part of the intestine had been grazed by the bullet, I was not permitted either to eat or drink. In this condition I lay for eight days, being kept asleep most of the time by morphia injections. At the end of that period I was sufficiently strong to be moved to Barkly West in a cart rigged up as an ambulance, Dr. Murphy accompanying me. There I found my dear mother waiting for me.

While I was recovering from my wound at Spitzkop, there had been a funeral at Barkly West; the funeral of my father's remains. He had been shot through the hips, and a ramrod had been thrust down his throat until its point came out in the middle of the back. He had been scalped and his legs and arms chopped off. Only the mutilated head, and the trunk transfixing by the ramrod, were left. The natives had captured my cousin and, after stripping him naked, had tortured and mutilated him in a peculiarly fiendish manner. They left him for dead, but he almost miraculously survived and was picked up by troops fifteen miles from the scene of the fight. He never completely recovered, however, and died in England five years later.

Hundreds of people from all parts of Griqualand West attended my father's funeral. Many who did not know him went to show their sympathy in an uncommon visitation of fate. So ended the hunting expedition of 1850. Africa had claimed him as a victim of her evolution from barbarism, affording him no other memorial than a humble share in that task, and the irony of being murdered by those he had befriended. Yet such are among the authentic memorials of Africa, from which alone her story can be truly told.

My mother had been twenty-eight years in Africa when this crushing blow fell upon her. England and Home and the hills of Cumberland were far behind her at the end of a stony road, over an horizon long grown dim in African dust. She turned in her affliction to nursing me. She lived on to a ripe old age and we were fast friends to the very end.

I was in bed for about forty days at Barkly West and when able to dress my wounds I was sent for by the Governor, Sir Owen Lanyon, who asked whether I was willing to join the Imperial Civil Service of Griqualand West. As I had lost all worldly possessions, I accepted the offer but begged permission to be allowed to go through the remaining part of the campaign under Colonel Warren. This request was granted, and I received a commission as a lieutenant in the Intelligence Department on Colonel Warren's staff. At the end of the war, which lasted another two months, I was appointed British Resident and Chief Inspector of Native Reserves in Griqualand West, and carried out the Amnesty of 1878. This was a highly responsible position for one so young. I was a lonely figure, as I

stood there representing Her Majesty's Government on the northern border of Cape Colony, facing the uneasy Transvaal and the wilds of Bechuanaland.

I had special authority to settle all disputes between the native chiefs and to locate them on their reserves. At the end of a native war, after an amnesty had been proclaimed, the natives were invited to return to their reserves, bringing with them their wives and children and such possessions as the war had left them. Each man then received a written document, setting forth how many wives, children, cattle and stock he possessed; and a linen badge. This badge freed him from molestation by the police, and he was placed with his particular clan in whatever part of the reserve the officer deemed advisable. He was then a disarmed native, and the document he held was equivalent to a pardon by the Government. He was given corn land, and became entitled to use the tribe's grazing ground. For all this he paid one pound a year to the Imperial Government as a tax, reduced to ten shillings a year on the annexation of Griqualand West to Cape Colony. At the end of three months, when the natives had decided to return to their reserves, the Government ordered that all the natives of that district should be disarmed, and for this purpose placed at my disposal a force of seventy-five men of the Diamond Fields Horse, under Captain Green. I decided, however, to attempt the task without any display of force, and wrote to the Government requesting that these men might be kept at their different stations. Attended only by Captain Green I visited all the locations and succeeded in inducing the people to conform to the order and immediately surrender their arms. Some twelve hundred or fifteen hundred guns were handed in, each two men being promised a plough in return. This was done at my suggestion, and on the written authority of the Governor, but I regret to say that the ploughs were never supplied. Instead a few shillings were offered for each gun, and this the natives refused. To the best of my knowledge this is the only instance in South Africa of a completely peaceful disarmament of natives.





5. MRS. 'MATEBILI' THOMPSON

### 3. With Rhodes in Bechuanaland

It was at the end of 1881 that fate led my steps to the little town of Malmesbury in Cape Colony. I was once more established in life, and I decided to take a holiday. My married sister Penelope was settled in Malmesbury and I decided to visit her on my way to Capetown. The doctor of the town had recently married the second daughter of Colonel Rees, Imperial Surveyor, who was engaged on work in the fort at Capetown and Simonstown. Destiny willed that one of his daughters should be visiting her recently married sister at the time I arrived in Malmesbury.

A ball for charity was the event of the moment, and most of the preparations for the supper were made in my sister's house. It was from an upper window that I first saw the girl who was to become my wife. She came to take her share of the responsibilities for the dance. I made up my mind that she should be my only partner in the evening, but I was too optimistic. I succeeded in booking one dance after a desperate struggle at the edge of the crowd, but even this she had booked with two partners and I was the unlucky one. It did not take me long to follow her back to Capetown, and on February 16<sup>th</sup> 1882, I married

Georgina Rees. She has been my companion and friend in many adventures, and it proved the luckiest day of my life.

Not four years had elapsed since the attack on the farm, but the natives in our area were completely settled and peaceful. There was thus nothing to fear when I took my wife to live at Cornforth Hill. My work took me far afield and often I had to leave her alone. I have even left her on guard with a gun over some thief or miscreant who had been brought to me to be delivered up to justice. She always treated such occasions as a joke.. To illustrate the changed outlook on the native position, I may mention that it was my general rule simply to put the headman or chief in charge. He would make a demarkation round the homestead and refuse entry to my house without permission. It was a perfectly safe proposition.

One day a curious thing happened. I relate it chiefly because it is a true tale of the man 'Scotty' Smith, round whom so many romantic and rather highly coloured stories were woven. It was sundown and my wife was returning alone from a ride. As she was crossing the very donga in which I had hidden when I was escaping from the natives a few years before, her horse shied. A tall figure rose from the long reeds, which had completely hidden him as he lay resting. My wife was surprised at his polite bearing and good looks, and although she afterwards admitted that she was slightly nervous at meeting a stranger barring her path in such lonely surroundings, she nodded to him and was rewarded with an astonishingly low and courtly bow. Shortly afterwards I returned home and my wife told me of the incident. As darkness fell we were told that a white man had come to ask for a night's lodging. It was a not unusual request in that part of the world and I did not go out to see him, but gave orders that he should be cared for. After the attack in 1878 I had built my new homestead with a large courtyard surrounded by high walls. This courtyard was large enough to hold all my stock, and the walls, provided with holes for rifles, were designed as a defensive work. They are still standing today. It was in one of the rooms built inside this quadrangle that the stranger was lodged. We sent him a good dinner and thought no more of the matter. At dawn the next day I was awakened by a tap at the window of my bedroom. I have often wondered how it was in that rambling house he knew at which window to knock.

'Good-bye, My Thompson. Thank you for your hospitality.'

The tone was cultured and the words unusual for the tramp I had imagined I was entertaining. At sunrise my natives informed me that my whole troop of forty horses had disappeared during the night. Two hours later, however, they were all sent back, and with them a note apologizing for their having been taken in error with others. The note informed me that my guest had not intended to take my horses, because he had eaten my salt and had been well treated, but it was an unpardonable mistake on the part of his servants. I learned afterwards that my visitor was the notorious cattle rustler and horse thief 'Scotty' Smith. I heard of him again in Stellaland.

...

*(I have skipped over his account of years spent helping set up native work compounds for diamond miners in the Kimberley, and helping negotiate with the Boer republics.*

*These were the years of the "scramble for Africa", with different European countries squabbling over who got which part of Africa. Cecil Rhodes wanted a continuous belt of British colonies from "The Cape to Cairo". The missing link was what is now Zimbabwe, and was then the native kingdom of the Matebili, ruled by King Lobengula.*

*As a first step, Rhodes set up a company, comprising him, Charles Rudd and Francis Thompson, to try and negotiate to get mining and prospecting rights to the Matebili kingdom. Rudd, Thompson and their colleague Maguire set out to try and persuade King*



*Lobengula to sign this "Rudd Concession". After a long and dangerous journey they arrived at Lobengula's capital Buluwayo..."*)

## 5 GREETING TO LOBENGULA

On the evening we arrived we went to greet His Majesty. The interview was necessarily short as the law among the Matebili was that no native-man, woman or child-should be out after dark, as only wolves and witches were then supposed to be abroad. So strict was this law that anyone discovered prowling near a village after dark could be killed at sight without question.



We found Lobengula to be just such a figure as I had expected. A man of about twenty stone, tall, stout, well built, looking every inch a king. His palace consisted of a pole stockade with about a dozen huts for the queens who were with him at the time. He had two hundred wives in all. Within the enclosure was a private sanctum constructed of poles known as the 'Buck Kraal', which accommodated at night about five hundred goats. It was in this place that all the plans were concocted for smelling out and killing people, when the sacrifices had to be made for rain. The rain maker was the king.

Lobengula was seated on a block of wood, surrounded on all sides by goats and dogs. We had agreed that we should greet the king as an ordinary gentleman, and that by adhering to this line of conduct we could not go far wrong. We had been told that we should have to approach him by crawling on our hands and knees, and remain in a recumbent position while in his presence. This was the custom, and the whites who had thrown in their lot with the natives were wont to observe it. We decided, however, to walk boldly up to him in the ordinary fashion, and this we did, to the evident surprise of his entourage.

He kept us waiting for some time. Then he enquired who we were, and put many commonplace questions which we answered. We handed him a bag containing a hundred sovereigns by way of a greeting gift. We were then told to return to our camp and sleep nicely, a piece of advice which we lost no time in following.

## 6. THE MATEBILI AND THEIR WAYS

There was no individual ownership of anything in Matebililand. All was the king's. Beast, goat or sheep, land, ivory, gold-dust or game were all the sole property of the king; and with resignation every man went to his execution with the words, 'I am the king's'.

Despotism of the worst kind prevailed. When I was there it was a common thing for Lobengula to order an entire village to be wiped out. It was always his policy, following his father's method, to play off one party against another. For a season the democrats would be the attendants at the court, and through the witch doctors would be used to exterminate a kraal of Royalists. In turn the Royalists would find favour at court, and they would not be slow to advise the king to exterminate some of the other political party. Thus he divided and ruled.

Twenty Indunas were chosen each year to attend the king. In ancient Rome a citizen who became too powerful or fell into disfavour was ordered to open his veins in a warm bath. The Matebili executioners 'opened an Induna's veins' with a tap from a knobkerrie at the back of the head. The victim's wife and children, and all his relatives within reach, were killed and their goods confiscated. They had become Mtagati (witches and wizards) wishing ill against the king. I have passed over the bodies of men and women in their last agony. I have seen a child aged only a few days lying near its murdered mother, like a new-born kitten, dying by inches. One dare say nothing, nor draw the attention or any of the natives to this horror. Nor would one have been allowed to move the dying child towards its mother. Had one done so one would have probably been accused of being a wizard.

When I was in Matebililand I saw many instances of ferocity and the most callous cruelty; a state of affairs, indeed, that common humanity demanded should be brought to an end. The following instances are taken from the diary I wrote at Bulawayo.

Early one afternoon at the Great Place in front of the king's house there were about three hundred natives all drunk on Kaffir beer. I had some trouble to get through the crowd. I got into the king's enclosure, and there I saw the most awful spectacle I have



seen in my life. I saw crawling on his hands and knees a native, about forty years old, with great lumps of flesh hanging from his face; his nose over his mouth, the ears both suspended by a thread of flesh. Just as I got near I saw a man with a pole hit the crawling man in the small of the back, trying to kill the unfortunate brute. This was all in front of the king. The crime the man had committed was that, while under the influence of liquor, he had drunk some of the king's beer. The king ordered his nose, ears and lips, and the skin of his forehead to be cut off.

The next day I heard that this unfortunate wretch was still alive. It was awful to see how the king enjoyed the spectacle. He was a savage in the fullest sense of the word.

Slaves were frequently brought in from the Moshokolombie country. Two girls aged twelve and fourteen were at the king's kraal and I thought (for one dare not say anything), how gentle although downhearted they looked among the other slaves. The poor creatures took it into their heads to make a bolt for it and try to get home. Young warriors, about twenty years old, were sent after them, and they caught them near Imshanyani almost dead from hunger. They were brought back and fed for a day, and then thrashed by the 'dogs'-- twenty boys aged from twelve to eighteen years. The king handed these two girls over to the boys to thrash with big sjamboks. I draw a veil over the rest. They were just alive when I saw them.

A native named Kumalo, whom I knew well, was sentenced to be stoned to death for witchcraft. He had been in the habit of coming to our camp almost every day, as a good many others did. I heard of the sentence, and then saw fifty natives standing in the distance. Not five minutes afterwards I saw Kumalo bolting along the veld with forty boys aged from twelve to seventeen after him, stoning the unfortunate man. They followed him out of sight, and what happened to him may be left to the imagination. There was a hill near by, the scene of all these killings. It would have been madness to interfere, much as one would have liked to save him. This was but one instance. Hundreds of men were killed in this and other ways. The king suffered from gout, and his doctors put it into his head that the only way to be cured was to 'smell out' natives and kill them. The king, unfortunately, had attacks of gout frequently.

At the end of March each year ten thousand men were sent out to destroy and kill all smaller nations on the Zambesi. On these occasions the most awful barbarity was perpetrated. These men, or warriors as they were called, when they reached a town killed all but the children and old women. The old women had to carry all the spoil taken, and when they neared the capital they were tied up to a tree and burned alive. The warriors finished the journey with the little children, who were sold and distributed.

...

Lobengula had many wives. The process of choosing them was very interesting. In a given week before the Saturnalia, the yearly dance of the First Fruits towards the end of January, a number of mothers were warned that the king required wives. Likely candidates, however, had already been provisionally selected by the proper court officials. To qualify for selection they had to be fine specimens of humanity, young upstanding virgins of about eighteen. They were bathed, and then greased and anointed with what Europeans would call 'stinks', but which they regarded as perfumes. They were then brought by their mothers to appear before the king in his private sanctum.

I was once privileged to be present on one of these occasions.

Each of the young maidens, as a rule a dozen or more were chosen at a time, carried a hand-broom, a miniature bed-skin, and a round stone with a hole in it used for grinding corn. These represented the woman's qualifications: with her brush she swept the room, with her millstone she ground sprouted corn for beer, and the white miniature

bed-skin an emblem of chastity, They were not robed in silken gowns. They appeared in nature's garb, singing a little lullaby that sounded to me like 'Three Blind Mice'. Seated at the king's feet were a few of his oldest councillors, men versed in all the requirements. One of these men remarked, 'She is all right in the quarters, her build is good, but oh, what a face!' About a girl fatter than the others, fat being the standard of beauty, he said:

'Ah, there is a nice soft one.'

Three or four were finally selected, and the rest were ordered to withdraw and go home to their mothers. The mothers were anything but satisfied.

Mothers of accepted daughters received a number of cattle, their daughters in the meantime being handed over to the hairdresser. Each girl had her head shaved and a little crown of fibre, the size of a penny, was sewn into a tuft of hair left in the centre of the head. She thus became an 'Nkosisigazi (big lady). Notice was then given to all the young men of her own age in her own district to rally round her, and they formed a new regiment, probably one thousand strong, of which she was the centre. She was allowed to choose the colour of their fighting shield. She received a thousand heifers, grain for seed, pots for beer and slave girls for her court. With her regiment and retinue she was despatched to the border, two hundred miles away, and there she reigned as a little queen while warriors were trained. In this way the boys came to know every feature of this part of the boundary, and in time to come, even as very old men, they would be called in to settle boundary disputes.

In the course of time the cattle increased and the granaries filled. In two or three years the young queen would receive orders to come to the king's court with her regiment. She would be expected to provide food, beer, slaughter bullocks, bring grain and as much herb as is required to feed the court for three days. This included the feeding of the thousand men who lay round the king, outside the Royal Kraal, for his protection. The same procedure was adopted for each queen and thus several regiments might be formed in one year.

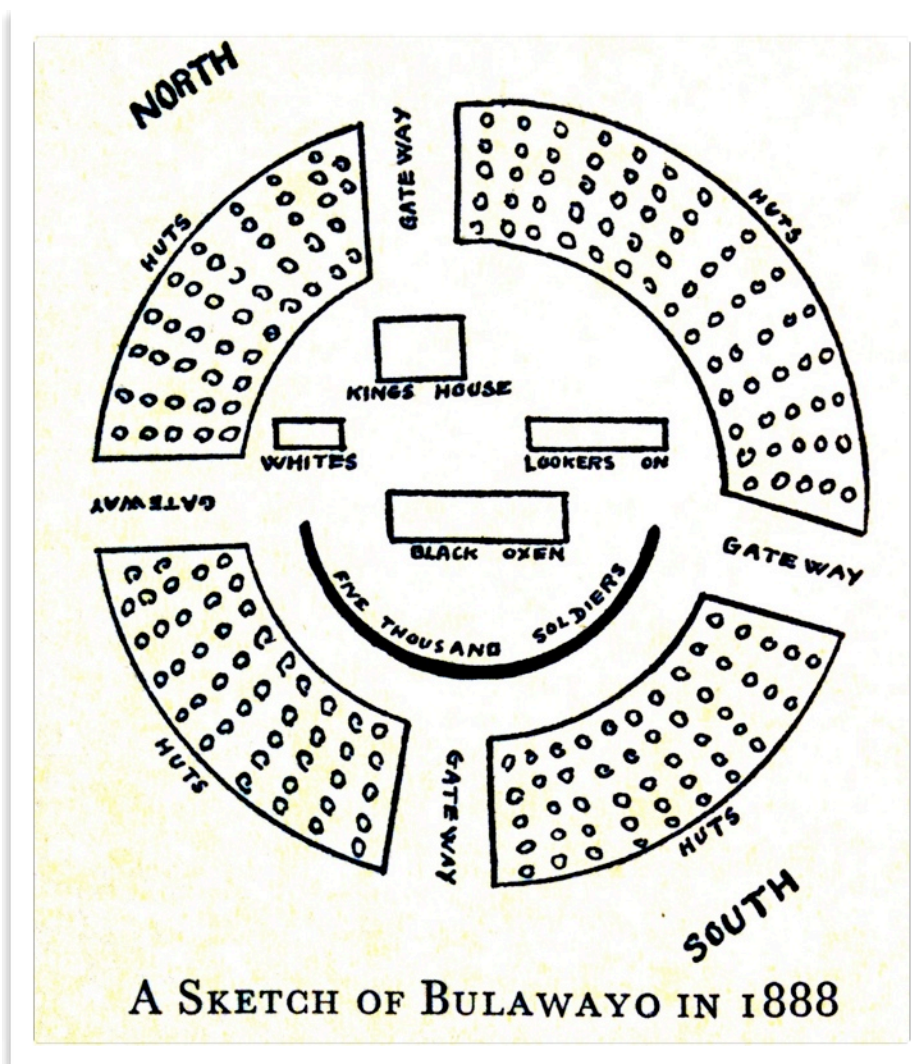
Two or three years added to the stature of the young warriors. They were dressed in their full war dress. Some preceded and some followed the queen on her progress to the court. She had up to this time not occupied the king's couch. If she had improved in her general appearance and manner, and if she found favour in his eyes, he might be in the humour to say she should remain at court for a few days. Outside the enclosure her followers accommodated themselves in improvised huts. Then a new song was written by the song-maker. One of these ran as follows:

*Oh, to think that thou hast found favour with the  
Lion of the North, and art to stay at his court!  
Oh, that thou mayest indeed delight him  
When thou art nestled in the King's arms. And  
Then thou wilt ask a boon of him, that  
Thy regiment may be chosen as one of the many  
To cross the Zambesi, to whet their spears  
In the blood of the enemy; returning with slaves and loot,  
For thus, and thus alone, can we attain manhood  
And the right of marriage—for we too want wives.*

For five days the young queen might remain with the king, and then she was given her congé. God blessed her if she happened to become the mother of a young Lobengula, for her fortune was then assured. Some queens might bring bullocks and beer and corn, but might themselves have developed or improved so little that after the king's inspection they would be told to retire to their distant homes with no 'God bless you'. I felt sorry for

these unfortunate women. The young warriors would rail at them for not having the captivating qualities of the queen preceding them. The king might possibly keep a queen for a month or even longer, but this did not deter him from choosing another if he wished.

Unchastity was rare, and severely punished. A girl who had been unfortunate would be taken to the king, hamstrung, and cast outside the village, losing her name and being allowed only between sundown and dark to creep round on her knees to beg for food. She had always to avoid her own home. A severe penalty could be imposed on any one who addressed her by name as the daughter of her father or mother. She was known as Usefeba (outcast). If the man was discovered he was brained at once, and possibly his father would be severely punished.



A Sketch of BULAWAYO IN 1888

Bulawayo in 1888 was a Matebili town of about ten thousand people. The town itself was built in a circle with a diameter of half a mile, enclosed by a wall or stockade of poles three feet thick. On the inside were ten rows of huts conforming to the circle.

The rough sketch reproduced on the opposite page is one I drew when I was there to illustrate a description of the great dance. On this occasion the women and children, and

the handful of white onlookers were allowed to stand near the king's house. The black half-moon in the sketch represents the warriors, about five thousand. In the middle are shown fifty sacred black oxen.

This great dance inaugurated thirty days of feasting, during which beer and meat were available *ad libitum*. For this period the king abdicated his office, his government being handed over to three eminent 'smellers out', or witch doctors, named Bosongwane, Nonyno, and Thule. It was their business in this inaugural ceremony to anoint the king, and for this they required fifty pots of medicine.

On the first day of the annual feast thus inaugurated, about two thousand men appeared at six o'clock in the morning with long sticks, the tops made to look like the head of Kaffir corn when it is growing. This was called the corn dance. These two thousand men stood and sang a slow solemn hymn imitating at intervals the winter winds, and then you saw their sticks waving like corn. It was really a grand picture, and I could not imagine anything in nature being better imitated.

For the great dance warriors were dressed in ostrich feathers and otter caps. Their sharpened assegais were burnished like silver. They stood round the half-moon ten deep. They began the dance with a war song, to which they beat time with a heavy tramp. They never changed their ground but kept a perfect line. The thud of their feet made the earth ring, and they sang at the top of their voices. Then the queens appeared, some dressed beautifully although barbarically in beads and silk sashes of all colours and shades. The beads on each of them must have weighed about fifty pounds. They carried long wands, and walked from the king's harem in single file according to their rank and the length of time they had been married. After walking round the circle to curtsey to the regiments the queens joined in the song. This ceremony opened the dance and then the common women, all singing, joined the procession. The men kept their places. This went on for two hours, and then the sacred oxen were turned loose. They bolted for the north gateway, running fast as they had been trained to do. Up and after them went the five thousand warriors. The oxen ran the distance into the veld to which they had been trained, and then returned at full gallop to their places, bellowing all the way.

The charge outwards and the return of the oxen lasted about an hour. The women scattered as the oxen returned, and then the warriors came back to their places.

Up to this time the king had not appeared, and silence prevailed while the people awaited him. As he came out on to the verandah of his house a great cheer was raised. The noise was deafening. He came out with his spears and shield and gave three or four leaps like a madman. When he appeared the queens scattered as if running for their lives. He stayed for two minutes. The singing was resumed for half an hour and then the warriors stood at ease.

Soon after the bravest of the brave were called out. They danced and leapt, describing the brave deeds they had done and boasting of the number of enemies they had killed. This pantomime lasted a long time, and according to their declarations each must have killed twenty or thirty of the enemy.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the king appeared again. He made a rush, and as quick as lightning the half-moon closed round him. They moved back, and he led a procession out on to the veld. He took up his assegai and eager eyes watched which way he would throw it, for from that direction war was to be expected. He came out in 1889 on the south-east side of the stockade, a hint of his aim, and in that direction he threw. Two thousand men then knew they would go that way on a raiding expedition.

They came back, took their places, and the king thanked them. Then he went into his house and the gathering dispersed. Most of the warriors had come from various parts of the country and they returned to their camps outside the town.



## 7 Indaba at Bulawayo

When we were in Shoshong Mrs. Hepburn gave me a letter of introduction to Mr. C. D. Helm, senior missionary in Matebililand, who lived twenty miles from Bulawayo. Before leaving the king I informed him that we were going to visit this missionary who, as I suggested to His Majesty, might be questioned about our respectability. Here again my old association with missionaries proved of service, for I need hardly say that when enquiries were made a good account of us was given by Mr. Helm to Lobengula.

Three days having passed, we presented ourselves before the king and I opened our business to him. He listened attentively and showed considerable intelligence. I explained that we were not Boers, and were not seeking for land, but only asked the right to dig the gold of the country. I told him that all eyes were turned to his dominions, which I likened to a dish of milk that was attracting flies. I said that the Boers were evincing signs of pushing their way from the south, alluding at the same time to the death of the Transvaal emissary, Mr. Grobler. I gave him to understand also that the Portuguese were pressing in on the east, or Mashona side, where the vast ocean washed past.

On hearing this the king at once observed: 'You are only a boy. How do you know that there is a sea on the east side? You have never been there?'

He thought that the only way to the east coast was through his country. I replied that I knew by the books of my fathers that the great waters were round there. But in vain did I endeavour to convince him, for he persisted in saying that I must have travelled through his territory if I knew of the Mapunga (rice—eaters, meaning the Portuguese).

Our conversation was carried on in Sechuana, a language only he and a half-dozen Matebili understood. Fortunately the white men at Bulawayo did not understand it. Very little headway was made at the interview, but he was much interested. Among other things I described the Zulu War of 1879, and the engagements in which I had taken part in 1878. Until then white men had been regarded by the Matebili more or less as dogs, but the king took an extraordinary interest in examining the scars of gunshot wounds on my body. I believe he would have preferred to talk of anything rather than discuss giving away the gold concession, a subject he carefully avoided. I as diligently referred to it, with the result that to be rid of us he at last said, 'Well, go and talk to the councillors'.

I asked him when I should be able to do so, and he replied that he would summon them to discuss the matter shortly. With this we were obliged to be content.

Before this interview I had spoken to Lotjie, who occupied among the Matebili a position equivalent to that of Prime Minister, and to Sekombo, the Induna who in 1896 was to meet Rhodes at the Motopos, and put our scheme carefully before them.

I promised them gifts if they assisted us. Rudd and I discussed the feasibility of obtaining a thousand Martini-Henry rifles and ammunition for Lobengula. We felt certain that nothing else would obtain us the concession. We agreed that we should promise these, and in addition a gunboat for the Zambesi. This new temptation was rendered necessary owing to the light estimation in which gold coin was held by natives. Money had no value.

We had £10,000 with us in sovereigns, but the natives referred to them as 'lumps of metal' and 'buttons', and said they were fitted for no better use than to make bullets.

When first I went to Matebililand I could buy an ox for three pounds' weight of beads, costing 1s. 6d. a pound. A sheep could be bought for a yard of calico worth sixpence. A sovereign would not buy an egg, but an empty cartridge case would buy two fowls. A cartridge case was worn as the tribal token in the slit made in the ear. Guns and ammunition, in short, were considered the only things really worth having. This being the case, it will readily be understood how useless it would have been to offer only a monthly payment of so many sovereigns. If we had not obtained guns and ammunition to give as

well, all our efforts would have been in vain. The natives had seen the effects of shooting by hunters, and naturally coveted such efficient treasures. When the time came, of course, we made the most of our ability to supply rifles.

Nobody can conceive the weariness of the ensuing days. It was simply a matter of waiting and watching. The native mind moves slowly, and for reasons of his own Lobengula did not wish to be hurried. He was willing enough to meet us, but did not wish to discuss a concession.

We were reduced to spending every day in our little camp, most of the time playing backgammon or reading. We did not dare to go far afield in case we might be called by Lobengula. Shortly after we arrived the tedium was lifted for a short time by the visit of Sydney Shippard, Administrator of Bechuanaland, who had come to make a full enquiry into the death of Grobler on the border of Khama's territory.

Our anxiety and impatience increased day by day, but at last, at the end of October 1888, a month after we had arrived at the king's kraal, we met one hundred Indunas in an indaba. These Indunas constituted a full council of the Matebili nation. Mr. Helm represented Lobengula, and explained our proposals. The indaba assembled at a spot fifty yards from the king's headquarters and took place on two consecutive days.

I first addressed the meeting and entered fully into the question. The Indunas sat perfectly quiet and listened intently. They heard from me all about the Boers pressing into the country which I likened to a dish of milk; about the Portuguese encroaching; about the thousand Martini-Henry rifles and hundred thousand ball cartridges; about the gun-boat for the Zambesi. They heard all this, but when it came to asking them for the sole right to the gold throughout the whole country, the cry arose from one and all, 'Maai Ba Booa.' This may be translated, 'Mother of Angels, listen, listen.'

By way of explaining the idea of 'sole right' I told them that I was not going to have two bulls in one herd of cows. All discussion with natives on grave matters was in my time carried on more or less in metaphor, a style carrying much weight when skilfully used. On my alluding to bulls on this occasion one Induna observed that I was right, for the bulls would certainly fight instead of looking after the cows. Thereupon another Induna said, 'Yes; I can see he is frightened of other men in the country.'

'He is greedy then,' said a third. At this Samapolane, an Induna who was also to meet Rhodes in the Motopos, rose and said, 'No; we will give you a part of the country.'

This was not what we wanted, but I had created an impression, and my talk about rifles had produced the effect intended. So my reply was to turn to Rudd and say, 'Come, we will go. These people talk only about giving us a place to dig.'

Rudd, speaking for the first time, said, 'All right, let us take a piece'; and then in an aside to me, 'We can gradually ingratiate ourselves with the people.'

Maguire, also opening his mouth for the first time, seized Rudd by the coat tails and said, 'For heaven's sake, Rudd, sit down and don't interfere with Thompson.'

I jumped up and made it appear that we would not discuss matters further. I said, 'Yes, Indunas, your hearts will break when we have gone. And you will remember the three men who offered you moshoshla (Martini rifles) for the gold you despise in this land.'

The farewell 'Good day to you' was half out of my mouth when Lotjie, the Prime Minister, caught me by the little finger. 'Sit down, Tomoson,' he said; 'I thought you were a man when you began to speak. We as old men know about the Portugese to the east, and the ocean running past where the sun rises, but truly I see you are only a child.'

Lotjie then went into the king's private enclosure where he and Lobengula remained in close conference for half an hour. When he came out he called 'Tomoson, come in here. The king wishes to speak to you alone}

I stepped inside, and Lotjie asked me to sit down and relate to the king all I had said outside to the Council. This I did, emphasizing what I had said about the sadness of Matebili hearts when we left; and how absurd it was to think we did not mean to do what

was right. 'Who gives a man an assegai', I said, 'if he expects to be attacked by him afterwards?' This was my answer to the fear that in giving the Concession the Matebili would open the door to white aggression, for rifles would then be the best defence they could have. This made an obvious impression on the king, and after pondering it for a few moments he exclaimed, 'Give me the fly-blown paper and I will sign it.'

I then said that according to our customs we three brothers should all be present when the document was signed, as in the event of Rudd, Maguire or myself dying, there would still be one left who would know all about the transaction. He asked, 'Are you brothers?'

I replied, speaking in the usual metaphorical style, 'Yes, there are four of us. The big one (Rhodes) is at home looking after the house, and we three have come to hunt.'

When I uttered these words I did not foresee that I should yet go in fear of my life for calling Maguire my brother.

I strolled out of the king's sanctum, assuming as careless a manner as I could, albeit my heart was beating fast enough from excitement. I said to Rudd and Maguire that they had to follow me at once, as the king wished to sign, and I had asked that it should be done in their presence. Mr. Helm, who had been concerned in watching the interests of the natives, and ensuring that all we did was fair and above board, accompanied us.

We seated ourselves in a semicircle, with the king in the centre. The Concession was placed before him, and he took the pen in his hand to affix his mark, which was his signature. The place on which he was to make his mark was pointed out, and he made it. As he did so Maguire, in a half-drawling, yawning tone of voice, without the ghost of a smile said to me, 'Thompson, this is the epoch of our lives.'

The many people in South Africa and England who knew Maguire will readily imagine the cold-blooded manner in which he uttered the words. It was, in truth, the epoch of his life.

## **8. The Sacred Fountain**

...

The white men, taking advantage of my being single-handed, and of the fact that a large section of the natives, headed by a renegade Xosa named William Mziszi, was secretly opposed to Lobengula and working for his downfall, had urged the natives to call the big meeting. Thousands were summoned. They worked on a popular cry, for they said we had taken the country, and the Matebili would thenceforth have no land on which to live.

There were no means to which these white men did not have recourse. They even addressed a letter to the Queen, purporting to be from Lobengula, denying that he had given any concession and asking the Queen not to believe anything to the contrary. When I found this out I induced two of the white conspirators to sign a written statement to the effect that the letter had been faked, and was not authorized by Lobengula. I sent this statement to the Colonial Office, through Sir Hercules Robinson, and asked to add a certificate of my standing and antecedents. Both arrived in London in the nick of time to prevent the collapse of negotiations for the Charter.

The big meeting was duly held, and I found myself forced to sit and answer such questions as these;

'Have you got a brother named Rhodes who eats a whole country for breakfast?'

'Is it not true that Maguire is a magician who rides wolves at night time?'

I was insulted in every way by the Indunas, and the white men threatened to shoot me. It was no child's play, but after being cross-examined for nearly ten and a half hours I emerged satisfactorily. The natives insisted, however, that I should send for the original of

the Concession. I was glad they did this, for it would give me breathing space. I now realized what a disaster would have ensued had I left Matebililand with Rudd. While all this was going on the Cape Government had been obliged to fill my post as Protector of Natives by appointing Mr. Glen Leary.

I wrote to Rhodes in London giving him a detailed account of what had passed in Bulawayo. I stated that as it would be a matter of life and death to me he must send back the Concession, I explained that nothing would satisfy the Matebili until they had seen it, but warned him that the white men had advised them to insist upon the king's tearing it up. Rhodes by this time was well advanced in his negotiations for the Charter and could not at first send the original. It was in the Colonial Office forming the basis and warrant of the Charter. As soon as it could be released, which was some few months later and after Maguire had left Matebililand, it was sent to me accompanied by a letter from Rhodes. He wrote, in effect, 'I send the Concession, but do not hand it up until the knife is at your throat'

When the Concession once again came into my hands I buried it in a pumpkin gourd, unknown to anyone save my Zulu servant Charlie. I put in with it a little corn, telling Charlie that if I happened to be knocked on the head the growing corn would mark the place where the Concession lay.

The first consignment of rifles arrived in April 1889. It had been escorted as far as Tati by Dr. Jameson and Dr. Rutherford Harris, who were on their way to a shooting and prospecting trip in the Mazoe. So far as I ever knew their visit had nothing to do with the Charter. They came in no official capacity, and their visit was an incident to which nobody alluded. It was of no significance whatever. Rutherford Harris was allowed to attend to one of the king's women who was ill, and he stayed for some weeks at Bulawayo, but Jameson passed on to his prospecting and did not create any particular interest. Indeed, when Jameson and I travelled up to Bulawayo after the Charter was an accomplished fact, I had to introduce him to Lobengula, who either had never seen him before or had completely forgotten him. Such, at all events, was the impression their meeting made on me. I do not believe the story that Jameson attended Lobengula for gout. If he did so, then it must have been at some later date after I had left the country.

Maguire returned from his encounter with Alfred Haggard on the border after the meeting at which the production of the Concession had been demanded. He found the white men busy circulating more newspaper cuttings from Cape Colony. Every statement in these newspapers they interpreted to the natives in a way to suit themselves. As a specimen of what appeared in the newspapers I quote the following, which was inserted under 'Personal Notes' in a Capetown paper: 'Mr. Maguire has seen fit to avoid the Parnell Inquiry, and bolted in order to avoid giving evidence re the Pigott Letters.'

This lent itself to distortion, and full advantage was taken of it. It was not easy to explain the Parnell Inquiry and the Pigott letters to the Matebili, but they understood what bolting meant, and thenceforth everything we did was ascribed to an evil motive. Our short walks every afternoon were represented as excursions in search of gold. This state of affairs gradually became threatening. I was warned by an Induna that we might possibly be knocked on the head when taking an afternoon ramble. I accordingly suggested to Maguire that it was advisable to be guarded and circumspect in all our movements until the people had calmed down, and that we should keep together. We decided also not to wander many yards from the camp. For days together we abstained from going out of camp at all.

The weariness of this wait was most trying. Besides the inaction, there was the strain of being always in grave danger. We had insufficient exercise and unsuitable food. We were often reduced to a diet of badly ground mealies and meat. Through my physical fitness and upbringing I was somewhat better able to stand the strain. I found a certain amount of interest in my study of the Matebili, but Maguire could speak no native

language, the mealies stuck in his throat, and he suffered from acute indigestion. The dilettante member of Parliament, ex-attaché, Fellow of All Souls, was completely out of his element, and he suffered accordingly.

One afternoon Maguire said that he could endure this existence no longer, and added that if he had to be knocked on the head it would be no worse than dying of indigestion. I endeavoured to dissuade him. I also tried to impress upon him that if he got into trouble it would do the concession no good. Nevertheless, contrary to my advice, he boldly sallied forth one afternoon carrying his yellow leather handbag. It contained his toilet accessories, for he was determined to get a 'clean up' or be killed in the attempt. Our camp at this time was at a place called Umganeng, about three miles from the king's drinking fountain, which was sacred. It was used only for medicinal purposes, religious rites and ceremonies. This spring later furnished the water supply of Bulawayo.

When Maguire arrived at the sacred fountain after a tedious tramp he sat down beside it, and after contemplating its cool depths resolved to have a bath. From his bag he brought to light an elegant assortment of tooth-pastes, brushes, powders and a bottle of eau-de-Cologne. He then began leisurely to divest himself of his garments. He had, however, not got very far when he was rudely interrupted by a number of natives who had been told off by Lobengula to watch his movements. Without more ado his bag and one or two articles of his clothing were seized, and he was sternly ordered to retire. This he accordingly did, and in time found himself in camp, a sadder if not a wiser and more careful man. His intrusion into the sacred precincts of the king's drinking place, and evident intention of polluting the water by bathing had given yet another twist to our difficulties.

He informed me that something very unpleasant had happened, and related his experiences. I abstained from the retort, 'I told you so,' and decided that the only thing to do was to put a bold face on the matter. I went down at once to the king and began, in an injured manner, to report the action of his people and their treatment of Maguire. I did not call him my brother. I found myself in the midst of ten Indunas who were being harangued by Tabeni, one of the guardians of the sacred water. In the centre of the group lay the contents of Maguire's dressing bag. Tabeni, losing no point of the story in the telling, related how he and the other custodians had beheld Maguire approach the king's sacred fountain; how the white man began to undress himself; how he washed his teeth with some red stuff; how he then took water from the fountain, gargled it in his throat and spat it forth into the pool, which became blood red; how he repeated the process, but this time the water turned white. Tabeni then described how, unable longer to endure the sight, he and the others descended upon the evildoer and seized the stuff with which the king's water was being poisoned; how one man had taken up the bottle of eau-de-Cologne and smelt it; how a Zulu boy who had travelled with white men said that the odour was one white men loved, which accounted for their horrid smell.

In face of this indictment it was no wonder that I appealed to the King in vain. It was useless my attempting to explain that Maguire had acted in perfect ignorance, that he had not the remotest intention of poisoning the water, and in any event he had no means of doing so. His Majesty would listen to nothing I had to say, and curtly bade me go and talk to the Indunas.

The king's manner made me feel more than usually anxious. The situation was grave, and I had little time to spare for its ludicrous aspect. I followed the Indunas, and near their encampment they formed themselves into a circle to talk the matter out. I joined them, and when assuming my position, which was to crouch down on my haunches, one of them swore at me. 'Sit down lower,' he said. 'Do you wish to be higher than we are?' To deal successfully with natives, especially when they are excited or angry, calls for much tact and forbearance and on this occasion I became as meek as a lamb. The debate to which I had to listen was worse than any I afterwards heard in the Cape Parliament. At



times it was as much as I could do to preserve my gravity, but I did so, for I knew it was no joking matter.

Finally it was agreed that Maguire and I should pay any fine they might think fit to impose, We were glad to get out of the trouble, but unfortunately the Matebili did not state the amount of the fine, or to whom it was to be paid. We were to give, and they would decide when we were to stop giving, and all other particulars. Maguire had obtained bundles of pretty calicoes from Haggard, and with this we paid a portion of the fine. When the first payment was made to the Indunas they coolly informed me that they expected more, and more they came for and received. They were continually getting more, until they had extracted twenty times the value of a reasonable fine. Poor Maguire's hair brushes, tooth brushes, clothes brushes, razors, Cherry tooth-paste and eau-de-Cologne were all confiscated. Life for him was hardly worth living without them.



LOBENGULA IN WAR ATTIRE.

On one occasion he was in grave danger of being killed by Tabeni, for at about this time Lobengula's mother died and the white men alleged that the poisoning of the water was the cause. This did not improve matters, and a day or two later Maguire secretly left for the south; to lay, as he said, the position before Rhodes. When he did so in London Rhodes's reply was characteristic. 'You're the second man of the mission who has come to do that. I know the facts as well as you do. Where is Thompson? Is he, too, coming to lay the position before me?'

'No,' Maguire replied, 'he is staying on. I didn't understand a word of the language, you see, and could do nothing with the whites. They are such liars.'

...

## 9. 'Runnymede'

It was soon after Maguire's departure that his ignorance of native customs placed me again in a most dangerous position. It came about thus. The Matebili were in the habit of making a raid every year into the Mashona country, and at times penetrated so far as to cross the Zambesi into the Mashokolombo and Barotse country, always returning with ivory, cattle and slaves. Some of the slaves were kept by the king, and the remainder distributed among the Indunas, who might sell them as they chose. The king had among his slaves, captured in this year's raid, a little fellow of eight years. As he was a slave he was more or less starved. In common with the rest of the captured people he was in the habit of roaming away from the King's kraal to seek what he could find to satisfy his hunger. A portion of the day he spent in visiting our camp. We called him Jacob, and if we happened to be eating when he appeared Maguire or I, out of sheer pity, would throw him a bone. These acts awakened in him gratitude and affection, and he became very attached to Maguire.

Two or three days after Maguire had left me for the south I was alone with my native servant Charlie when a feeling of impending danger came over me. Charlie would always say in his broken English, as he tucked me up in my blanket at night, 'Oh, master, we never come out of this country alive. The Matebili go kill us, I know.' It was not a cheery remark to one situated as I was, and his pitiful sigh as he uttered it on this particular night was infectious. Maguire had been gone for four days when I was hastily summoned by a breathless messenger from Lobengula to attend immediately. 'Don't you hear that the king calls you?' said the man.

'How should I be able to hear him speak from here?' I replied.

'Come quickly, and don't stay talking there,' he said.

I followed the man, trying to guess why I was called. I felt that I might be going to my doom. As I entered the king's kraal I received an angry scowl from the natives, and to my salute the king vouchsafed no reply. He gave me no sign to approach. I seated myself in the usual fashion, and awaited in silence a signal from Lobengula to come nearer. The situation, I now knew, was serious. It seemed to me the longest hour I had ever passed in my life. Then the stillness was broken by the King's saying, 'Get nearer Thompson.' When I did so he said, 'Is not Maguire your brother?'

I hardly knew how to reply. I decided to hedge and answered, 'He is not my brother in the sense of being my mother's son. He is only my brother in the sense that he comes from the same kraal and is of the same people.'

The great man frowned. After a moment's pause he burst out, 'You are a liar, Thompson. You have two words. Did you not tell me that Maguire and Rudd were your brothers, and that of your three brothers the eldest was at home in charge of the homestead?'

I endeavoured to explain the difference between a brother by blood and one by friendship, but the king would not listen.

'Fruit', said he, 'does not fall far from the tree, and the calves of the same bull are much alike. Know that Rudd has taken the fly-blown paper to the Queen, and has told a lot of lies to her that I have sold you the country. Maguire rides on wolves and has tried to poison my drinking place, and now he has stolen my slave. What have you to say to this?'

'King,' said I, 'I can answer no more than I have done about Rudd's going away, and of Maguire's poisoning the water of your fountain, but I do say this much in regard to the taking away of your slave — that if Maguire has done so, see, here is my neck, you can cut off my head.'

I perceived that my words took effect, and after one or two angry remarks he bade me begone. I was not sorry to get away, for his rage was beyond control. I felt that I had lost all favour with the king, and with the people also.

A week later an impi of fifty, begrimed, hungry and travel-stained, appeared at my camp. As I went to meet them I felt acutely that the constant worry and trouble I had to endure was becoming unbearable. On reaching the opening of my enclosure I saw a man carrying the little slave Jacob, whom he threw down like a log, and then addressed me. He said savagely, 'You liar, Thompson.'

I asked the meaning of this in the most polite manner I could affect, and was told in reply to ask the boy from whence he had come.

'Where do you come from?' I asked him.

'Well,' he replied, 'I heard the night before the white man (Maguire) left that he was going to leave here and go back to his own country. He had been good to me, and I made up my mind to go with him. I ran off and got a long way ahead of him, to wait until he came



up and go with him to his country. On the following morning he did come up, and he told me to get into his waggon and go with him.'

What could I say in face of this? The impi had found the lad fifty miles away at Maguire's waggon, on the road leading south to the Colony. Fortunately for Maguire himself, he had walked on from the outspan, and so the impi did not find him there. He would, in all probability, have been made to trot back to Bulawayo, carrying Jacob all the way. Knowing that they had me there, they did not bother to bring Maguire's waggon back.

Here was a nice fix! Had I not sworn by all that was holy that the boy was not with my brother? Had I not offered my head as a proof of good faith? I had felt positive that Maguire could never have been so foolish as to allow the king's slave to go with him.

I asked the Induna not to trouble the king on the matter, and said that I would pay for my lie, as they called it. All that I had at my disposal were two spoons and a knife. I had not even a spare blanket. The value of the spoons and knife, however, may be gauged from what I have written about the value of an empty cartridge case. The Induna took the

things and went off, and I flattered myself on being well out of the difficulty. In this I deceived myself, for they had not been gone half an hour when a messenger summoned me instantly to the king.

On my arrival at the royal kraal I sat down and waited, but on this occasion the men of the impi began talking of how they had walked one hundred miles to catch the slave boy who had been taken by Maguire. Their ominous scowls, their angry words and threatening manner, boded ill for me. Although it is customary, to impress a visitor with a sense of the king's dignity, to keep him waiting, Lobengula did not delay the proceedings as long as usual. Calling to me in a sharp tone he said, 'Thompson, where is your neck?'

I remained very quiet.

'You hear me?' asked the king.

'If', said I slowly, 'a child has done wrong, does its father kill it, oh king? Does not a horse stumble though it has four feet? I have but two. I have no answer to make, for you will not believe me, because I said that Maguire did not steal the slave. I am found out in what the impi reports to you, and must conclude that I must bear the consequences. But I can tell you this, oh king, that I did not know the child had gone with Maguire.'

'But, Thompson,' said the king, 'now you are lying again. Why did you try to buy the Induna with these things?'

He solemnly produced the knife and spoons.

'You said they were not to tell the king. Are you the king? Do you wish to undermine my authority?'

'The Induna', I replied, 'had taken much trouble, and it was to reward him that I gave the things, being thankful that the slave was restored. I am afraid to speak now that I am stated to be a liar, and certainly events seem to bear that construction, for the slave was found at Maguire's waggon. I can only crave forgiveness as a son from his father.'

This latter part of my address produced a marked impression in my favour, and after a silence of some moments the king decided, to my intense relief; that for the present he would pardon my offence. But his decision caused great dissatisfaction to the impi. In their opinion my body was not good enough for hungry dogs. As I left the kraal I was greeted by curses long and deep, and they came from all sides. I was called liar, thief, magician; I was told they would have my blood yet.

Lobengula had a strong force of espionage. Whenever I had a conversation with him, sure enough the next day men would try to wheedle from me what the discussion had been about. Good-looking women too, sometimes the queens, tried their hands. By these means the king tested whether I could be trusted. The whites were indefatigable in spreading false reports, and in this case they persuaded the natives that I knew perfectly well that Maguire had taken the slave. They, too, had their smiling native spies. Nothing would have pleased them more than to have had some little proof of my repeating the king's confidential remarks.

My only support and friends at this time were Ben Wilson and Alexander Bogie. I should have been only too glad to have left the country, but apart from the difficulty of getting away there was too much at stake. I had declared without avail that I was innocent of the charges brought against me, and I lived in fear of my life. But nevertheless I felt that I must stay and keep the Concession safe for our partnership. This I was determined to do at all costs. Some time after Maguire arrived in London the dreariness of my existence was cheered by the following letter from Rhodes:

*Westminster Palace Hotel  
London.*

'Dear Thompson

'Stick to it I trust to you alone Upon you depends the whole thing. The Concession I consider your work the Charter mine. Without the latter the former unworkable. Nature



abhors a vacuum. I ask you is there a better chance in the world for you? Besides being one of the richest men in the Colony you will have the kudos. Napoleon was prepared to share the world as long as he got Europe. Work on these lines. Can't you give the whites who are in the country something. If any doubt your power of attorney show them this. Girdlestone will pay all cheques that you draw. I feel you will not fail me.

Stick to the post

'Yours

'C. J. Rhodes.'

I had to content myself with an occasional letter from Rhodes. Continually I was pestered, and called to the Council, about when the original of the Concession would be received. My answer was always the same: 'When my elder brother comes, then we will give it to the Nation.' In June I received another letter from Rhodes, which filled me with the hope that I should soon receive the promised cable.

*Westminster Palace Hotel,  
11th June, 1889.*

'My dear Thompson

'I am so near success that I hope you will carry through your part. I trust implicitly to you and hope you will be willing to remain for the present. As soon as I have finished with — — I will come out and go up I may say I am getting every support but cannot leave until I have everything signed and sealed.

'Meantime it would be a great blow to me to hear you had left as I have not the same confidence in the others.

'Yours

'C. J. Rhodes.,

The story of how the Charter was obtained may be told in a few words. On his arrival in England Rhodes saw the late Baroness Burdett-Coutts, unfolded his plan to her and asked for her help. She advised him to consult the Rev. Dr. Bruce, of Edinburgh, one of the leading spirits in Central African missionary work. Rhodes took her advice, went to Edinburgh, and showed the Concession to Bruce. After reading it, and the certificate by the Rev. C. D. Helm, Dr. Bruce said, 'This is good enough for me. I will help you.'

Rhodes then returned to London, Dr. Bruce accompanying him. Baroness Burdett-Coutts arranged a party, one of the guests being the Prince of Wales. Rhodes was presented to him, and told him about the Concession. The Prince was keenly interested and promised to use his influence with the Queen. Shortly afterwards Rhodes was invited to Balmoral. He accompanied the Prince of Wales there, and laid the Concession and his scheme before Queen Victoria. The Queen intimated that she would consider the matter and discuss it with her Ministers. Rhodes then returned to London and, although a Liberal, got in touch with the Conservatives, who were then in power, and also reminded Parnell of his contribution of £10,000 to the Irish party some time before.

It had been arranged that I should stay at Bulawayo until I received from Rhodes the code word 'Runnymede', which would mean 'Charter signed and sealed; position consummated; matters little what happens your end'. It was about three months after I had received Rhodes's letter that the cable arrived--the word that meant my release, I received also the news, from Rutherford Haris, a somewhat prolific letter writer, that Rhodes was on his way out. Rhodes was still negotiating to buy out all interests in Matebililand and Mashonaland—Barotse concessions, and every other concession, good, bad and indifferent. The word 'Runnymede' was thus for my ears alone. I accordingly felt that as a matter of policy I must remain until Rhodes arrived before I produced the original of the Concession to the king. But Rhodes never came. He was never to meet Lobengula.

Following is an extract from a letter I wrote to my wife:

*12th September, 1889.*

‘. . . I know life is too short to be parted for the time we have been. Rhodes is supposed to be here at the end of this month, if not I must really come away. I cannot possibly stand it. I have strained nerve after nerve to remain, until now I am getting desperate ....

‘I got a letter from Rudd, who adds to my misery by saying I have had a long spell up here and he wonders if I shall be at Bulawayo when this letter reaches me. Don’t be surprised to hear of my leaving this place any day now. Now the Charter has been granted (private) it makes no difference. Rhodes was to have arrived last month and intended coming up at once to Bulawayo ....

‘I must explain what that “private” means about the Charter. I do not want it to be known from me—everybody fancies that it is so. We don’t want it publicly known.’

## **10. A Killing by Night**

A time went on the Matebili became more and more excited. Thousands came from all directions to ask the king if it were true that the white dog Thompson had bought the land. Among the Matebili I was now the most notorious person in the country, and among a section of black and white schemers the most hated. My main difficulty arose from the false interpretation of the Concession by white men at Bulawayo. They told the king to study the word land. It was true that the word occurred in the Concession, but in a very different sense from that imparted to it by these men. In misrepresenting the Concession to the Matebili they relied chiefly on the passage reading: ‘Whereas I have been much molested of late by divers persons seeking and desiring to obtain grants and concessions of Land and Mining rights in my territories’.

A copy of the document was produced at a council of three hundred Indunas, and one of the whites asked me to interpret the word ‘land’. He covered up the other words of the paragraph. I asked the Indunas which of them could tell me whether a beast was male or female when only part of the hide was shown. They answered, ‘None, unless he saw the remaining part of the body.’ ‘I, too,’ I said, ‘cannot interpret that word, for you allow this man to cover up the rest of the sentence.’ I stoutly refused to discuss the word out of its context as the whites would have had me do.

This meeting lasted from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. I was asked by every Induna in turn from whom I had bought the country. My answer was, ‘Matebili, did I not tell you when first I came into this country, about a year ago, that we were not farmers and wanted no land, cattle or grass, but that we wanted the gold in the stone?’

It had been my policy to deal only with the king himself I took up the attitude with him that he alone was the judge of my conduct, and that I did not mind the opinion of others as long as he approved of what I did.

Thus I sat from early morning till late in the afternoon in a broiling sun, most of the time on my haunches, not being allowed to move. I had a terrible headache, from which I was then suffering daily. It was caused by worry, anxiety and wretched food. I had covered my eyes with my soft felt hat, having determined not to answer another question, when I heard a general salute. I took no notice, thinking that from where the Indunas were sitting they had caught sight of the king. Then to my surprise I heard close in front of me:

‘Tomoson, why do you cover your eyes like a son-in-law when his mother-in-law is near?’

Among the Matebili to gaze upon or stand in the path of one’s mother-in-law is a crime. The custom is designed, presumably, to obviate one’s becoming too familiar with her.

I ripped off my hat with apologies. ‘King, I did not know that you were here.’

‘What are they asking you Tomoson?’

‘They ask me from whom I got the land.’

‘What have you told them?’

‘If they say I have the land, let the man stand before me and tell me from whom I got it.’

‘Pogee,’ said the King; meaning, ‘Very sound answer, what more is there to say?’

He was apparently well satisfied as he walked away, and I felt much relieved. His confronting me at this meeting of his Indunas surprised me, and when I thought it over I saw much cause for anxiety. I had had many long conversations with him, and I had no doubt that the Indunas were anxious to know all he had ever said to me. He had seen me under the strain of a long cross-examination, and I assumed he had wondered whether I had misinterpreted him or implicated him. He had seemed uneasy, and so I hoped that my answer to the crucial question had assured him that wild horses would never drag from me anything he had to say. There was really nothing to drag from me, because I knew that he had neither the wish nor the power to give his people’s land away. But his evident desire to vindicate himself in the eyes of his Indunas showed how serious the agitation among the Matebili was becoming, and that the Indunas were prepared to suspect even the king himself. In their eyes he had become far too friendly with me. The serious trouble all this foreshadowed was not long in coming.

The old Prime Minister Lotjie, who was seated beside me, was within a few minutes accused by the Indunas of having advised the king to take the thousand rifles in exchange for gold. The two leading Indunas, who held offices roughly equivalent to the Serjeant at Arms and Black Rod in Parliament, went in to report to the king in his private sanctum. They returned with a declaration that the affairs of the nation rested in their hands, and whatever they did would be right. Two minutes later the decree was passed that Lotjie and his followers were to look on light no more.

I saw the poor old fellow stand erect. He handed his snuff box to a man standing near. He was taken outside the council kraal, and on kneeling down he said, ‘Do as you think fit with me. I am the king’s chattel.’ One blow from the executioner’s stick sufficed; one smart blow on the back of the head.

I turned to the half-dozen white men who sat away to the right, scum as I regarded them, and I said, ‘Who is responsible for this? You, who have told all these villainous lies of what will happen when the Charter is granted.’

My distress may easily be understood when I thus saw my friend and ally put to death. The ostensible reason for his execution was that he had advised the king to accept the rifles and sign the Concession. But in reality he had been made the scapegoat to protect the king from the rising tide of suspicion among the Matebili that their king had traded away their rights in their land.

That night was spent by the Matebili in putting to death the men, women and children of Lotjie’s family. It was the most terrible night in my experience. Charlie crept close to me in the darkness for protection and softly exclaimed as each dull thud of the executioning stick came to our ears, followed by the shrill cry ‘Ay yi yi’. Some three hundred men, women and children were killed—Lotjie’s whole kraal with the probable exception of the sucking child.

Early next morning I decided to drive over to Hope Fountain, the mission station, to discuss the turn of events with Mr. Helm. I had just started when I heard a native following me. He was riding a grey horse. ‘Tomoson,’ he called quietly, ‘the king says the killing of yesterday is not yet over.’ Knowing Lobengula as I did, believing as I had every reason to that he had a certain friendliness towards me, I took this as a well-meant hint; as, indeed, the last service he could do me. As I stopped to consider the message, I saw a crowd of young Matebili in war dress advancing. Their actions left me in no doubt of their intentions. I had decided, in the long thoughts that came to me on Lotjie’s death, what I should do in

such an eventuality. I should make a bolt for it. I could not take Rhodes's permission to hand up the Concession when the knife was at my throat, for the men who were anxious to kill me were even more anxious to destroy that document. There were, indeed, but two ways of preserving the Concession at this stage: to leave it safely buried, and to remove myself from reach of the Matebili.

Up to the time Lotjie was killed I had relied on two things for my safety: first my belief that the king really liked me and wished me no harm; and secondly, that he would be afraid to kill a white man with such powerful friends as mine appeared to be. But when Lotjie was killed I perceived that the king was so hard pressed that he was playing for his own safety. If he could bring himself to sacrifice so trusted a counsellor as Lotjie, he could not be expected to feel unduly anxious about me. Indeed, so far as he was concerned, I could do him no better service than to disappear until the storm blew over. The question was whether it was my duty to remain in Bulawayo did not arise, for when I received the cabled word 'Runnymede' my duty had come to an end. But even had I not thus been released, every dictate of prudence on behalf of Rhodes and Rudd, and all who were now building hopes on the Charter, pointed to my avoiding its being associated with bloodshed or any fatal 'accident'.

Naturally, after I had got safely away, it was in the interest of all concerned, Europeans and Matebili, in Bulawayo and elsewhere, to represent that I had never been in danger. No Matebili wished to step forward and say he had intended to kill me, and nobody associated with the Charter wished to suggest that the Matebili had repented of the Concession. This was all in the nature of things, but in later years a legend emerged from the Jameson romances that I had merely got the funks and run away. I think I can fairly claim that getting the funks has never been a characteristic of mine, but even were this not so my decision to make a bolt for it that morning was a wise and clear-headed one. Had I guessed the sufferings that lay before me I might well have hesitated.

However, to resume my story, I cut the fastest horse from the traces, jumped on its back, and rode hard to the ford in the Umgusa River, which was the very place to get through to the south. I was soon lost to the hunt in the wildness of the country.

I had no saddle, only the improvised bridle from the trap harness, and in the scurry I lost my hat. After riding for hours in the blazing sun I had to make a hat by tying four knots in my handkerchief, and stuffing it with grass. Towards sundown I found myself in unknown country in the middle of the Kalahari Desert. I had neither food nor water, and might be attacked by lions. I tied my horse, climbed into a tree and there spent the night. The next day I rode until the horse knocked up, and then I walked. Walking and running I covered thirty or a forty miles. My tongue became swollen, and towards evening stuck out of my mouth. My eyes were so bloodshot that I could scarcely see and my breath was short.

At nightfall on the second day I came to a waterhole. I lay down at the edge of the water and bathed my head. My tongue was protruding with thirst and I very painfully drank and drank, the water going into me like water into a hot kettle. As a result I got dysentery next morning. When feeling very weak I met some Makalaka natives cooking a pot of mealies, and from them, in exchange for my pocket-knife, I bought some mealies to eat.

I contrived to struggle on, and then luckily came upon a trader with a mule waggon. He gave me a lift to Shoshong and from there I travelled to Mafeking.

I telegraphed to my wife and to Rhodes. I asked my wife to come up at once to Mafeking with my three children. I had not seen any of them for fifteen months. My reply from Rhodes was an urgent request, a frantic plea, that I should return to Bulawayo. The Governor of Cape Colony, in his capacity as High Commissioner, also telegraphed to me asking me to return.

I was surprised and disappointed at these requests, as I judged that I had done more than my fair share. Nevertheless Rhodes insisted that to unearth the original of the Concession, and ceremoniously hand it to Lobengula, was still essential to the Charter;

and what was more, that this should be done as soon as possible. I had to agree with him that I was the only man to do it, but I did not relish returning to Bulawayo. I thought it would have been much more to the point had Rhodes himself decided to go to Bulawayo. Now that the

Charter was fully secured in all directions it seemed to me that he himself should have appeared with me in Matebililand to institute its administration.

I found Jameson at Mafeking. He had received instructions to go to Bulawayo to represent Rhodes if I refused to return. But as he did not know Lobengula, so far as I was aware, and certainly did not know a native language, and had no experience of treating with natives, I agreed to go back with him, introduce him to Lobengula, and hand to the king the original of the Concession.

Rhodes had written to me from Kimberley dated

28th September, 1889:

'I want you to return because the king recognises you as the Concession and you know perfectly well it will not be ratified unless you are present. As soon as the guns are taken you can come down for your holiday as you stated in your proposals and the relays of mules will save you time in travelling. I have always recognized thoroughly what you have gone through but it seems so hard for your own future that through not seeing it through to the finish which is so near you should lose your credit and reward Please do not view this as a threat but look at it practically if we lose the Concession we have nothing for the Charter. I should have accompanied Jameson but I have to deal with the following:

'( 1) Sir S. Shippard (2) the police question to which I am contributing (3) Home Board of Charter (4) Extension of railway and relations with Sprigg (5) Extension of telegraph Mafeking to Tati for which I am paying (6) Amalgamation with Bechuana Co (7) Negotiations with Paul Kruger to arrange as to his giving up all claim to the north.

'If I were to isolate myself in the interior at this moment the whole of the base would go wrong.

'Yours truly

'C. J. Rhodes.'

In my decision to return I was influenced by the High Commissioner's request as well as by Rhodes's urgent representations, but the decision was so much against my inclination, and so bitterly disappointed my hopes of seeing my family, that I told Rhodes it would be my last journey into Matebililand. In all the circumstances my feelings were natural, but had I been vouchsafed any prevision of what was to happen in Matebililand in Jameson's regime I think my feeling for Lobengula alone would have compelled me to accept Rhodes's offer to take charge there.

On my arrival at Bulawayo I set about making a few grants to the white men who had schemed against me, and in one way or another they received a few thousand pounds. There were concession hunters amongst them who believed that they held prior claims in Matebililand; and they had to be compensated for their hypothetical losses. The explanation of this appears in Rutherford Harris's letter reproduced at the end of this chapter, and Rhodes had also written to me, 'I am arranging with the Colonial Office to withdraw any chance of action against any of the whites, so you can assure them they are safe.'

I then unearthed the Concession and handed it to the king. As he took the paper he turned to the white men and said, 'What have you got to say? There is the paper.'

Their spokesman answered, 'King, this document is all right. We were wrong in all we said about Thompson.'



With a smile the king looked at them, and rubbing his hand across his mouth he said, 'Tomoson has rubbed fat on your mouths. All you white men are liars. Tomoson, you have lied the least.'

He handed the Concession back to me. 'You have been begging me for the last fourteen months to let you go back to your wife and children,' he said.

'When you first came here to Matebililand you likened yourself to hunters. Now let me tell you. When I went killing elephants as a young man I did not, at every stride of my horse, turn and look for my wife and family. I even let my wife suffer in patience, for when I had killed my elephant I waited to let the head decompose so that the tusks would come out easily. When at last I did pull them out, I carried them and I threw them at my Intombi's feet. Then she became an object of envy, feeling that she at any rate had a man and a bull for a husband. Now here, take this fly—blown paper, throw it at your wife's feet, and let her bosoms heave and let her be an object of envy. Now are you sure that your heart is white towards the Matebili?'

'Yes, king,' I said.

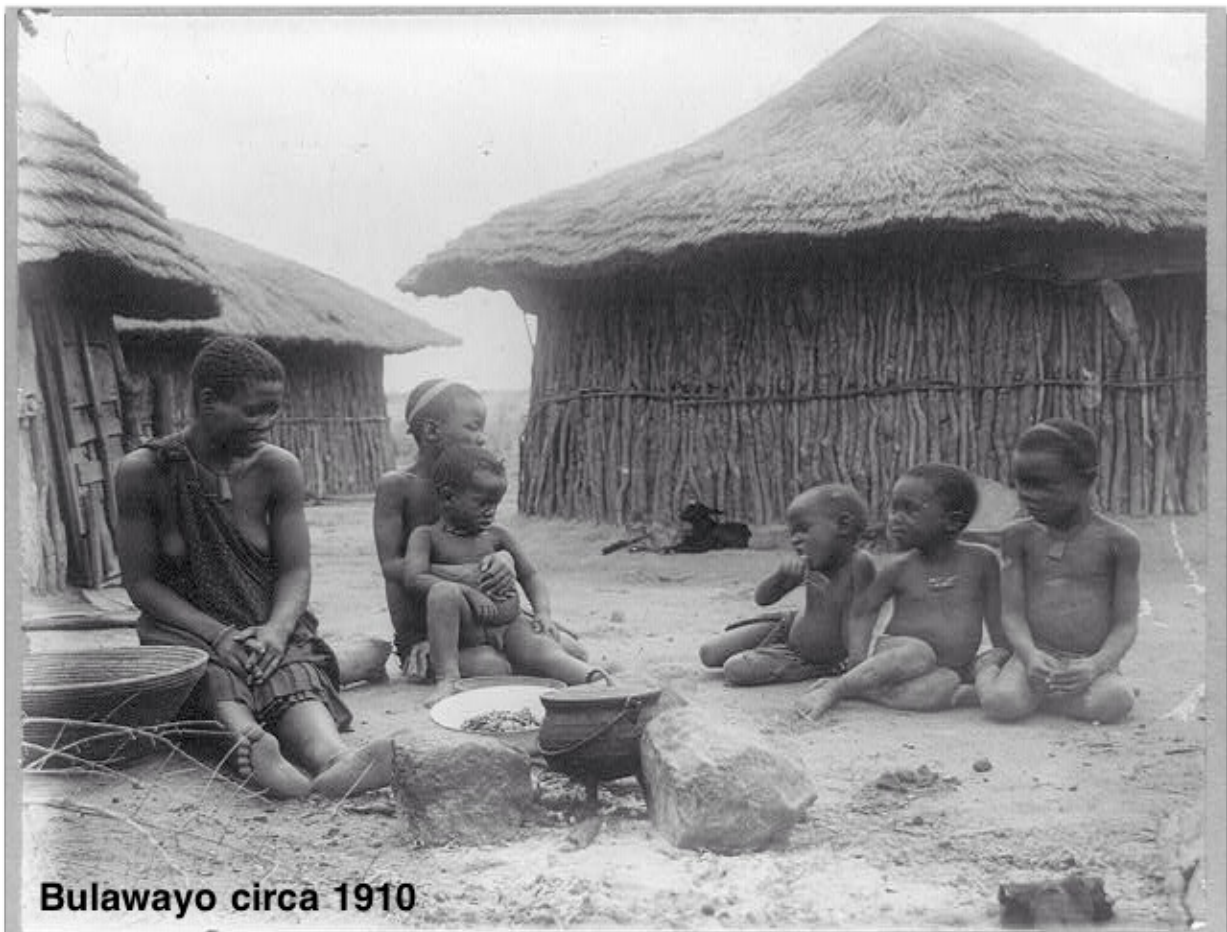
'Show it to me, then.'

I feared that this might mean sitting down to wait for another two months with him, so I sent a message to Rhodes: 'Things are well. Send me a peace offering.'

Rhodes asked the Duke of Fife, a Director of the Chartered Company, to send out two bulls. They arrived when I had returned to Capetown. They were a magnificent pair of Poll Angus, but jet black, the colour conveying to the Matebili almost a declaration of war. I explained that they could not possibly be sent, and they were eventually given to Sir James Sievwright. Albert Grey, afterwards Earl Grey, who was interested in the Chartered Company, then went to Hereford and picked two snow white bulls. These were sent out by steamer, carried to Kimberley by train, where two buck-waggon were fitted up with stalls taking fodder and bran, and so they eventually arrived at Lobengula's kraal as my peace offering.

Before I left the king gave me a lion's pad with the claws thrown back, a symbol that he, the Lion, had left me free without hurt.

I alone handled the Concession throughout all the negotiations and I myself handed it back to Rudd. I can truly say, and all my dealings with natives bear me out, that up to the very last moment of my residence with Lobengula I acted honestly towards him as a friend,



**Bulawayo circa 1910**

and in the conviction that the Concession would bring immediate prosperity to him and his people. Fate willed it otherwise.

Rhodes always assured me that he personally did not want the gold per se, or the land, but rather territorial administrative powers. He wrote to me that he wanted no rights in land, nor did I at any time imagine that we were entitled to them.

*(Rhodes used the "Rudd Concession" to get the British Government to allow him to set up a chartered company for the purpose of exploiting the minerals of Matebililand and any other trading opportunities that might arise in this part of Africa. The British Government gave this company exclusive trading rights in this region.*

*A large party of settlers, supported by heavily armed company police, set out for the region just north of Matebililand, where they established the settlement of Salisbury (Harare). This was not what Lobengula had thought he had agreed to, but as the settlers were not in his territory, peace was maintained for a while. But soon the natives near Salisbury appealed to the company for protection against Lobengula's raids. This was more than Lobengula could stand - if the natives could thumb their noses at him with impunity, his empire would immediately disintegrate.*

*He sent his troops to massacre the rebellious natives, who called on the company police to protect them. With the aid of machine guns, a tiny group of company police massacred the attacking Matebili warriors. The first Matebili War was underway. Despite their vastly superior numbers, this was not a war the Matebili could win, against superior British technology, and in short order Bulawayo had been captured, Lobengula killed, and*

*the Matebili lost their independence and were incorporated into the new British colony of Rhodesia.*

*Arguably this is what Rhodes had intended from the start. Thompson makes it clear in his autobiography that this was not what he had thought he was involved in, and that he deplored this outcome. Though it is hard to believe that he didn't have some idea of where the concession might lead.)*

Only once did I again visit Rhodesia. It was in 1904, as a member of the South African Native Affairs Commission. I was standing on the railway platform at Figtree when I



16. F. R. THOMPSON ON A SHOOTING TRIP IN ZULULAND, IN 1924

was accosted by one of Lobengula's Indunas. 'Ou Tomoson,' he said, 'how have you treated us, after all your promises, which we believed?'

I had no answer.



## 12 'Sunset and Evening Star'

Under the guidance of Rudd I secured my due portion of shares in the Chartered



17. WILLIAM PUNCH

As a child Punch, a Mashona, was bought by F. R. Thompson as a slave. He was a victim of one of Lobengula's raids, his parents being killed in the usual massacre accompanying such expeditions. He was brought up by Thompson as a house servant, remaining with the family all his life, and on occasion travelling with them in Europe. He became warmly attached to his master and survived him only a few years. His last request, which was granted, was that he should be buried at his master's feet

Company. With the help of Rudd's brother on the London Stock Exchange I sold them at the right time. Without the kind help of these two utterly honest men I might easily have lost a great deal in the scramble. As it was I realized a substantial sum.

This fortune opened new vistas to me, including Oxford, and was, I suppose, the fundamental reason why I refused Rhodes's request to remain in Matebililand. It made a sharp contrast to the life in a raw country that my wife would have been exposed to, and consideration for her feelings weighed a great deal. In the light of history the decision I made, now that I look back on it in my old age, seems to have been wrong, and an evil one for the Matebili. But I was young, I had just made a fortune, I had parliamentary ambitions in Cape Colony, I was not conceited enough to assume that I could make any difference to Matebililand, and so ran counter to Rhodes's wishes. On the other hand, I

may have been right. I, and I think Rhodes also had regarded the Concessionn, the Charter, and the opening up of Matebililand in a highly altruistic light that might not have survived events, and the many influences brought to bear. It is idle to criticize now, but situations developed which were contrary to the spirit in which I had regarded the whole thing, and situations I should not have been able to accept.

A short time after my return to the Cape I went I to dinner at Government House. The talk was all of Matebililand and the new Chartered Company, and the Governor begged me to tell my adventures to his guests. When I had finished he said, 'We are not going to call you Thompson any more, but Matebili.' The soubriquet was laughingly taken up, and since then I have been known as Matebili Thompson.

A few months after I left Matebililand I set out for England. First I bought a house, Clay Hall, at Great Clacton in Essex, and then I entered Keble College.

...

*(Thompson entered the Cape Parliament, but was not a great success there. He retired to his estate at Cornforth Hill. One of his sons was killed on the North West frontier of India during the first world war.*

*His autobiography half completed when he died, it was completed from his notes after his death by his daughter Nancy, Gogo's mother.)*

## **References**

Matabele Thompson, an Autobiography, edited by his daughter Nancy Rouillard, Faber and Faber, London, 1936

South African Dictionary of Biography

Many web pages