

THREE CAPITAL BOOKS OF THE WILDERNESS

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

MAJOR Stevenson-Hamilton, the warden of the Transvaal Government Game Reserves, has written an entirely new type of book.¹ It is the first time that full advantage has been taken of his opportunities by any competent observer and writer whose good fortune has put him in charge of one of the great sanctuaries for the wilder forms of life that have been created in both the Eastern and the Western hemispheres of recent years. There have been plenty of good books about African game, some by professional naturalists, some by men whose interests were primarily those of the hunter; and it is a mistake to suppose that there is not room for other good books of this type. But Major Stevenson-Hamilton's book is far more than any ordinary hunting book can be. He deals with African travel; he deals with hunting; but the great value of his book consists in the notes on the life histories of the big game, as well as of the crocodiles, poisonous snakes, and some of the birds and insects, which give its peculiar character to the South African fauna. I know of no other book which contains as much and as valuable information on outdoor African natural history of an interesting kind. There are of course books by great hunters in which more information will be found upon some particular species of big game—lion, or elephant, or buffalo, or rhinoceros. But taking game in the aggregate, and other interesting animals as well, there is no other book I know which equals this. Take the account of the ratel or honey-badger, for instance, the most valiant and I am inclined to think the most interesting beast in Africa. Major Stevenson-Hamilton's work has been such as to enable him to make observations and investigations in a way that the big-game hunter pure and simple cannot possibly do, and in consequence he has added some really extraordinary bits of information to our knowledge

¹ *Animal Life in Africa*. By Major J. Stevenson-Hamilton. William Heinemann, London.

of the ratel. Its partnership with the honey-bird is one of the noteworthy facts of natural history. Both the bird and the mammal have a peculiar and marked individuality in their make-up and habits; the whole life history of each is well worth studying, but their partnership in marauding against the bees is the most extraordinary of all. Normally the ratel feeds on vegetable matter, insects, and the like, yet Major Stevenson-Hamilton gives what seem to be unquestionable incidents of its attacking and killing adult males of the largest and most formidable antelopes. If attacked, it will fight to the death against any odds, and it is no easy work for even a lion or leopard to kill it.

Major Stevenson-Hamilton's position enabled him to note closely all kinds of incidents in the life of the great carnivores, the big cats, the hyenas, and those bush pirates the hunting-dogs. His running notes on natural history are enlivened by accounts of very interesting adventures—one or two of them in connection with lions were of a really extraordinary nature. Like every other competent observer—including the authors of both the other volumes here considered—he dwells on the extreme variability of character among the higher mammals. This is a factor always to be considered in speaking of dangerous game. There is a certain average difference in the danger of hunting lion, buffalo, elephant, and rhinoceros, but this average difference is less than the very wide differences among individuals of the same species. On the whole, lions charge more readily than any other species; yet some can hardly be bullied into making any kind of a fight.

The account of the tame eland makes one regret more than ever that some government does not somewhere undertake the task of taming this splendid animal. The eland is probably by nature much fitter for domestic uses than are cattle. Unfortunately, as with the American bison, it lived in regions where

the natives never reached the stage of themselves taming species of wild animals. Accordingly in Africa, as in America, the tame animals that now flourish were taken over from races who had domesticated them through long ages, so that they had become entirely fitted for their work. At least two, and probably three, wild species of oxen proper were thus tamed, not to speak of the buffalo, the gaur or gayal, and the yak, in Asia, from which region doubtless the cattle-owners spread into Europe and Africa many thousands of years ago, just as within the last few hundred years they have spread into the Americas and Australia. The bison could unquestionably have been domesticated at least as easily as the other species of cattle were domesticated in the long-buried past, and the eland probably much more easily, and certainly very much more easily than the reindeer. In the case of the eland it is not too late now, although the work would probably have to be done by a government rather than by a private individual.

Major Stevenson-Hamilton is not only a keen observer and good writer as well as a good hunter, but he is also admirably fitted to give advice on the whole subject of game reserves and of preserving the wonderful fauna of the wilderness without interfering with the legitimate demands of the settlers in wild places. His book should be in the library of every hunter, of every naturalist, of every man who cares for the life of the wilderness. Moreover, it should be in the hands of every man who is awake to the need of preserving at least a fragment of that extraordinary wild life which vanishes before civilization.

There are all kinds of problems connected with preserving wild creatures, by the way, and one of the most important of them, of a totally unexpected kind, has come to the front during the last decade in connection with the wapiti, the elk, of the Yellowstone Park. The Yellowstone Park was always a favorite summer range of the elk. Under protection they have increased enormously in numbers. They summer within the park; although some of them winter within it, especially near its northern border, the majority tend to go out, especially to the south. All wild birds and animals of course possess a fecundity such that where natural checks are removed they increase in geometrical ratio. This is true of them just as it is true of tame animals; let any kind-hearted lover of animals

remove all checks on the increase of, say, the cats or rabbits on his place, and inside of a year he will find this truth illustrated by practical experiment. Almost any species, if freed from natural enemies, increases so fast as speedily to encroach on the possible limits of its food supply, and then either disease or starvation must come in to offset the fecundity. In European game reserves the shooting tends to keep down any abnormal increase—although even in these game reserves over-preservation often results in stunting the development of the animal or exposing it to disease. In America hitherto the success of the effort to preserve the different kinds of wild creatures has not been great enough to cause us any alarm as to their over-increase, with the single exception of the elk in the Yellowstone Park. But this is a very serious exception. Elk are hardy animals and prolific. It is probable that a herd under favorable conditions in its own habitat will double in numbers about every four years. There are now in the Yellowstone Park probably thirty thousand elk. A very few moments' thought ought to show any one that under these circumstances, if nothing interfered to check the increase, elk would be as plentiful as cattle throughout the whole United States inside of half a century. But their possible range is of course strictly limited, and as there are no foes to kill them down, the necessary death rate is kept up by nature in a far more cruel way—that is, by starvation in winter. The suffering and misery that this means is quite heartrending. Every winter the wapiti herds that go south of the Yellowstone Park lose thousands upon thousands of their numbers by the long-drawn agony of slow starvation. The loss falls especially, of course, on the calves of the year, and the cows in calf—the very animals that under any proper system of hunting suffer least. From time to time well-meaning people propose that the difficulty shall be met by feeding the elk hay in winter or by increasing the size of the winter grounds. Of course there are circumstances under which feeding hay is not only proper but necessary, and it may be that there can properly be made a slight enlargement of the summer range of the elk. But as a permanent way of meeting the difficulty neither enlarging the range nor feeding with hay would be of the slightest use. All that either method could accomplish would be to remove the difficulty for two or three years until the elk had time to

multiply once more to the danger-point. What is needed is recognition of the simple fact that the elk will always multiply beyond their means of subsistence, and that if their numbers are not reduced in some other way they will be reduced by starvation and disease. It would be infinitely better for the elk, infinitely less cruel, if some method could be devised by which hunting them should be permitted right up to the point of killing each year on an average what would amount to the whole annual increase. The herd must be kept stationary, and it should be kept stationary in some way that will work the least possible cruelty to the animals and will be of most use to the people of the country, especially of the States in which the park is situated. Of course the regulation should be so strict and intelligent as to enable all killing to be stopped the moment it was found to be in any way excessive or detrimental. There should be no profit hunting—that is, no sale of the meat or trophies.

Mr. Sheldon is an outdoor naturalist, a faunal naturalist, as well as a great hunter. His present volume¹ is one of a series he is writing dealing with the animals of Alaska and the Northwest, a series which when finished will give us more information on the natural history of the most interesting animals of the Northwest than any or indeed all other volumes contain. Mr. Sheldon and Mr. White—whose book I shall next consider—are big-game hunters of the best type. They are not professionals, but in point of hardihood, of skill in their craft, of ability to fend for themselves, and of readiness to meet every emergency and every risk, it is not too much to say that they are fairly entitled to come in the line of descent straight down from the Boones and Crocketts, the Kit Carsons and Bridgers, of the old days. Each of them by preference hunts entirely alone. Each is as competent to care for himself as any Indian. The book is admirably written by a man who loves the mountains, the great woods, and the stormy seacoasts, and who describes with power and charm what he has seen. He is the direct reverse of a game butcher; he cares nothing for a "big bag." He kills only what must be killed. His book is of practical value to naturalists.

Mr. Sheldon's book is most interesting, as well. Its greatest value consists in the account of his hunting trip after the huge bear of Mon-

tague Island, a bear which Hart Merriam has made into a new species—"species" nowadays having no such significance as in former times, it being a mere term of convenience. His observations of the habits of the big bear have a particular value. It is evident that nowadays these bears are not dangerous game in the sense that various African animals are to be considered dangerous game. The book is illustrated by exceedingly good and well-chosen photographs, and also by certain pictures of Carl Rungius's, which make us realize vividly that even the best photograph in no shape or way replaces or comes anywhere near replacing a really good picture by an artist who is himself a first-class out-of-doors man.

Stewart Edward White's book¹ deals with hunting-grounds as unlike those of northwestern America as can well be imagined. He too has written a notable book, and has given a fresh proof, if one were necessary, that the fact that many first-class books about hunting in a given region already exist in no way means that there is not ample room for another first-class book. It is totally unlike Sheldon's, except in the sense that both men have a great love for wild natural scenery and good power of describing it, that each is an observer as well as a hunter, that both are thoroughly hardy men whose deeds in no way resemble those of the mere holiday hunter. I am not running down the holiday hunter at all, for he may do the best that his opportunities allow: I am only pointing out that he must not compare himself with the man who can push boldly into the unknown and do all his work for himself.

Mr. White was for part of the time while in Africa a companion of Mr. Cuninghame, a professional elephant hunter, who managed my safari during most of my own trip in Africa, and Cuninghame wrote me that White was the very best game-shot with a rifle he had ever seen in his life. The account of some of his adventures with lion and buffalo is thrilling, and, moreover, it is so written as to give a real and satisfactory idea of just what it was that happened, and, without either understatement or exaggeration, of what might have happened if the powder had not been straight. Moreover, his account of his gun-bearers, of the natives they met, of the vast, strange, barren country through which he traveled, and of the great

¹ *The Wilderness of the North Pacific Coast Islands.* By Charles Sheldon. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

¹ *The Land of Footprints.* By Stewart Edward White. Doubleday, Page & Co., New York.

beasts by which he was continually surrounded, is all most interesting. The chapter on the lion dance of the wild savages who were his porters is as vivid as anything of the kind in any book. And the following chapter, describing the precarious rise from the ranks of a porter with aspirations to become a gun-bearer, is not only very humorously told, but affords a practical illustration of some of the things which Mr. White does that make him a good hunter. Not the least interesting chapters are the two which describe the visit to Mr. McMillan's Juja Farm, where the fortunate visitor can relish, as probably nowhere else on earth, the experience of living in a house with every comfort and luxury, right in the middle of the teeming life of the African wilderness.

In the appendix Mr. White treats of rifles and equipment. In his protest against the needless luxury, in fact the cumbrous luxury, of present-day African hunting he is quite right. At the same time, in the outdoor sense of the word, Mr. White is a very "hard" man, and it would not be well for the average holiday sportsman to try to follow his example in cutting down the paraphernalia of African camping life, any more than in cutting down cartridges. Moreover, he is mistaken in thinking that all the men who use shorts and leggings, leaving their knees bare, do so for the sake of looks. Much the best hunter of my own party speedily adopted them, purely because he liked them; and he has used them since then, hunting sheep in the Mexican desert, and moose and caribou in the great northern forest. Personally, I cannot stand them; but that does not alter the fact that other people genuinely like them better than any other rig. It is rather gratifying to find that White used three rifles of the same kinds that I used—a Springfield, a 405 Winchester, and a double cordite Holland & Holland—and that he found that each of them did just what I found they did; that is, the Springfield was his ordinary weapon—his walking-cane, so to speak; the Winchester was his lion gun and the gun for the big antelope; while the Holland was for the few species of very heavy game. But I emphatically dissent from Mr. White's advice to take out only three cartridges for every head of game which it is expected to shoot. His own record was extraordinary, for he got about one animal for every two cartridges fired. I believe that the great majority of animals he killed

cost him but one cartridge apiece. Moreover, the antelope of the plains were killed at an average of 245 yards, with a maximum of 638 yards. Now I am an ordinary shot, neither better nor worse than the average big-game hunter who has had some experience. But I could not begin to approach these figures. I did not ordinarily shoot at such long ranges, and yet I averaged about three times as many cartridges to a kill as did Mr. White. As a matter of fact, Mr. White at a hundred yards shoots about as well with a pistol as I do with a rifle. Unless the hunter going to Africa is a very unusually good man, I advise him to triple the number of cartridges which Mr. White thinks it necessary for him to take.

Mr. White hunts his lions in the most sportsmanlike style. I agree with him that rounding them up on horseback and following them on foot are the two most sportsmanlike ways. But when he speaks as he does about hunting them with dogs he should remember that it is an exceedingly difficult feat to train a lion pack with real efficiency, and that a pack not so trained is only a doubtful and occasional help. For a century hunters have employed dogs occasionally in chasing lions, and never with any marked success. It was not until Mr. Paul Rainey, an experienced bear hunter, introduced his pack of Mississippi bear hounds into East Africa that this method of hunting became a really startling success. Until Rainey brought his hounds to East Africa few people believed that anything could be done with hounds against lions. Then when Rainey had made his striking success most people jumped to the opposite extreme, and said that it was not a really sporting way in which to hunt lions. As a matter of fact Rainey's was a great feat—not quite as great as the feats of Buffalo Jones and his associates in roping lions, rhinos, and giraffes, but still a great feat. Wherever settlers are found lions must be destroyed, and the very few hunters able to train a pack as Rainey trained his can do more for their destruction than any other man. Of course, where it is desired to preserve lions it is wise not to let such a man as Rainey with such a pack as Rainey's go after them!

These are three capital books, written by three men of the best outdoors type, three men who are hunters, who are naturalists, who are keen observers and excellent writers.