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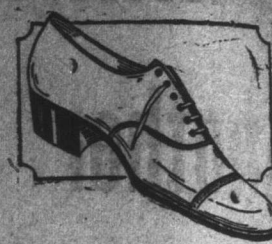
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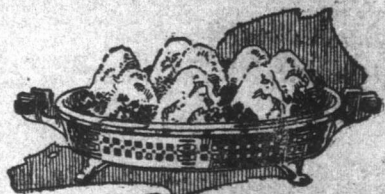
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June 14, 1923, St. John's, Nfld.

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June 12, 1923, St. John's, Nfld.

A Baboon Hunt.

By JAY BROWNE.

The baboon, which is a gregarious animal, except when through old age or other infirmity he is driven from the troop, is found practically throughout South Africa.

Its size and strength protect from natural enemies—save man and the mountain leopard—and in the security of their strongholds baboons thrive and multiply. Their abodes are, for the most part, crannies in the kopjes and kranzes which abound, to which they retreat as night draws nigh, and from which they emerge at early morn in search of such food as their neighbourhood affords. This may be of a varied nature, from the prickly pear and sundry bulbs and roots, the spiders and scorpions under rocks or in stone walls, to the newly sprouted mesquite grown by the native or the white husbandman or his season's crop.

The organization and discipline of the troop are remarkable. The system of scouting and placing of sentinels is worthy of a civilized army; the intelligence which discriminates a possible enemy from an evident innocent is almost uncanny; in the vicinity of habitations of man they quickly note the difference between a gun and a staff, and their dispositions are taken accordingly, though it is only in seasons of scarcity that they are compelled to and do approach the dwellings of the human.

For them to attack man is rare, and then only when they are themselves attacked or intrusion on their domain imperils their safety. When they are brought to bay their bravery and savagery are thrilling and dangerous to their opponents, and dogs of powerful build are not infrequently torn to shreds or mutilated to such an extent that a merciful bullet ends their torment.

It is asserted that when old and toothless and unable to carry out the responsibilities imposed by their troop, they are driven out, and become carnivorous when opportunity comes their way. A stray meerkat, lamb, or an over-venturesome Angora kid which has strayed out of sight and hearing of the native herdsmen, may prove a relief to the cravings of an empty stomach, and only the finding of the pelt, after search following the discovery of the loss on the count of the flock into the kraal at sundown, discloses the fate of the wanderer. Baboons are not believed by the raiser of crops or of the breeder of beasts and birds (ostriches) and no opportunity is lost in taking toll of their clans.

Apart from other diversions, probably to them obligatory rather than recreative, is their aptness in the demolition of the loose stone walls erected, in place of expensive barbed-wire fencing, in districts where the necessary material is ready at hand, with the further advantage of clearing portions of the otherwise rugged veld. It is not improbable that, weary, and perhaps irritable, at the end of a trying day, the owner of a ten to twenty thousand morgen farm (a morgen is approximately two acres) will, on receiving the reports of his herds from outlying stations, be further disgruntled by statements that several yards of his walls have been demolished, or damage of other sort been inflicted, by heedless and unlicensed trespassers that live-stock has strayed beyond his boundary, and loss and penalty may result.

This state of affairs can no longer be tolerated. The disturbers of the territory, the brigands from the kranzes and the kopjes, must be taught a salutary lesson. The herd boys—Kaffirs, Hottentots, half-castes, and

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what not—receive instructions to observe carefully the retreats to which the baboons retire at the close of day, for they do not always choose the same dormitory, and in due course requests are despatched to the various neighbours to meet on an appointed evening at the homestead of the aggrieved one, for the purpose of chastisement or extermination of the common foe.

Some of the sportsmen will arrive from considerable distance, and so that all may be rested and in good fettle for the fray, there is no stinting by the good hostess at the hospitable table, and no shyness in the acceptance of its bounty. Meantime the steeds of the guests are tethered or stalled, as the case may be, and refreshed according to their kind.

The state of crops and live-stock, the health of families, and the merits of the promiscuous firings with which the baboons are to be harassed, having been discussed, the council of war is duly opened. The location of the baboons being assured, a modus operandi is decided upon, after due deliberation by the assembly under the chairmanship of the captain of the hunt. The last-mentioned is elected by an informal vote, and most frequently the honour is conferred upon the host, whose intimate knowledge of the nature of the country to be negotiated especially fits him for the disposition of the forces which he has brought together. Implicit obedience to instructions is of paramount importance both for the success of the expedition and the safety of those engaged in the enterprise. In the present instance the troop of

baboons has been seen to retire for the night to the kranzes at the summit of a lonely kopje attainable by an indirect and somewhat uneasy path extending about three miles from the homestead, and the disciples of retribution having wound white handkerchiefs or other light material round their headgear as a precaution against mishap, having overlooked their arms and ammunition, and saddled their mounts, ride silently out into the night.

The air is calm, still, and warm. There is no sound save the chirp of occasional crickets, the croaking of frogs, and the call of some night-bird. There is no conversation, except what is absolutely necessary, and then only in whispers, as almost noiselessly the party proceeds, more or less in single file, along the Kaffir path through the karroo bushes, whose succulent grazing more than takes the place of the absent grasses.

Having dismounted, and the horses having been passed over to the charge of the 'boys' in attendance, the participants in the hunt, under the direction of the captain, surround the kopje at more or less regular intervals, having due regard to special strength where the physical nature of the ground affords an opportunity for the baboons to break through the cordon. It has to be borne in mind that these operations are carried out under the sole illumination afforded by the twinkling stars, that silence is an essential factor, and that the majority of the guns are unfamiliar with the various obstacles, such as scrub and thorn and boulder, which will be encountered on the climb to near the summit.

The ascent having begun, visible contact by the stormers is gradually attained, a halt being signalled around the circle when the point is reached beyond which it is inexpedient to proceed for fear of disturbing the slumbers of their drowsing sentinels. Probably wet through with perspiration, and somewhat exhausted from the arduous climb, through scrubby growth and spiky aloes, by prickly pear and rugged boulder, not without barked hands and bruised shins from collision with unseen obstacles, the rest is welcomed by the hunters, and now the overheated body, in the patient waiting, becomes reduced almost to rigidity by that coldest part of night which precedes the dawn.

But all sense of discomfort is dispelled when the first sign of movement on the part of the ambushed troop is heralded by the discharge of his firearm by the observer, and simultaneously a general fusillade conveys to the bewildered baboons the unpleasant intimations that their fastness is not only invaded but surrounded. A momentary bedlam ensues. The loud barks and hoarse roars of the adults mingle with the cries of the frightened youngsters; but a sudden and almost uncanny silence follows whilst the leaders of the troop, stealthily availing themselves of every scrap of cover, are endeavoring to ascertain the strength and position of the attackers.

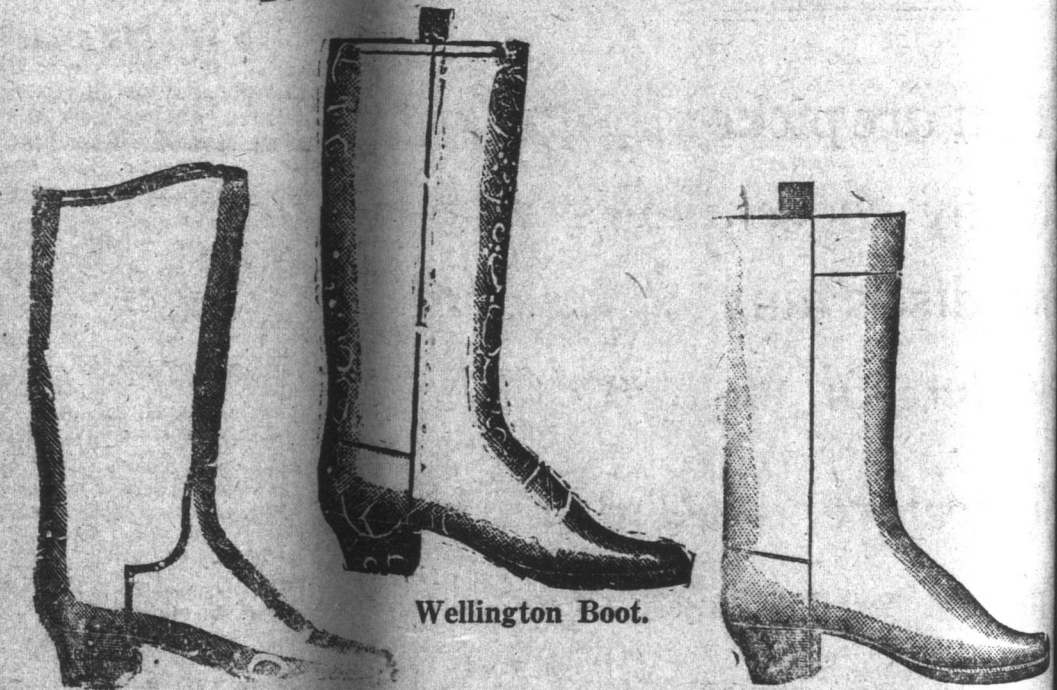
Gradually, very gradually, so as not to break contact, the hunters close in, the depultery firing of rifle or shot-gun indicating the departure to undisturbed hunting-grounds of one or other of the hunted.

Suddenly a new sound breaks upon the ear, and we are now close enough to see both cause and effect. The baboons have decided to break through as a last hope of saving themselves from utter destruction. Mothers clasp their babies to their breasts, older children being carried on the backs of their elders or otherwise hastened along, and with such scolding and not a little dillygo, whose cries are almost human, the band

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makes for the only possible outlet. This is a narrow cleft in a kranz, widening at its base into a small kloof, and towards and down this path to freedom the troop make their way, not recklessly, but taking advantage of every possible shelter, and 'according to plan.'

This probable outlet has not been overlooked by the captain of the hunt, for here he has posted some of his best shots, and strengthened his force in readiness for the eventualities. Here the loss to the baboons is severe. They have little chance against the keen eye, the steady nerve, and the relentless determination of the holder

of the magazine-rifle where their compact formation renders them a conspicuous target.

Meanwhile the main body of the attackers has reached and overtopped the summit, carefully peering between and behind boulder and bush, keenly alert for the discovery of stragglers or those who, with the craftiness of their kind, hope to escape the vigilance of the searchers and obtain safety by doubling back during the diversion to their main body. At length, satisfied that there are no further victims for their lead, the hunters gather, discuss their experiences, collect the tales of the dead for the

obtainment of the Government bounty perhaps capture an orphaned cub for the amusement of other sters at home, and slowly their steps to the foot of the kopje. The sun is now well up, and the day of sweltering heat is upon them. To hasten the horsemen to the die, to spur their way back to the homestead, where, over but coffee and a cold beer, the episode of the night and early morn, and other food for reminiscence on many a later day.—*Canadian Journal.*

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