

# "OOM PAUL"

## A MIGHTY HUNTER

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WHEN Paul Kruger, the "Oom Paul" of the Boers, was a young man there were no sportsmen in South Africa, but every man was a hunter. At that time the country was as much a game paradise as East Africa is now, and the Boer settlers were obliged to be adept in the use of firearms in order to protect themselves and their families against the attacks and depredations of wild animals, as well as to secure replenishment for their larders.

The huge trekking-parties which were accustomed to go into the wild north every year were not actuated by the sportsmen's motives; they wanted to kill the marauding lion and elephant and to secure a year's supply of meat for "biltong," and hides for harness, shoes and "sjambok."

Biltong was the sun-cured flesh upon which they subsisted, and the sjambok was the dried hide of the rhinoceros and giraffe.

It was as a hunter and not as a sportsman that Paul Kruger gained a reputation among his countrymen—a reputation that was as great as that which he made afterward in the arts of statesmanship, diplomacy and war.

As a frontiersman, with the care of a family and thousands of cattle devolving

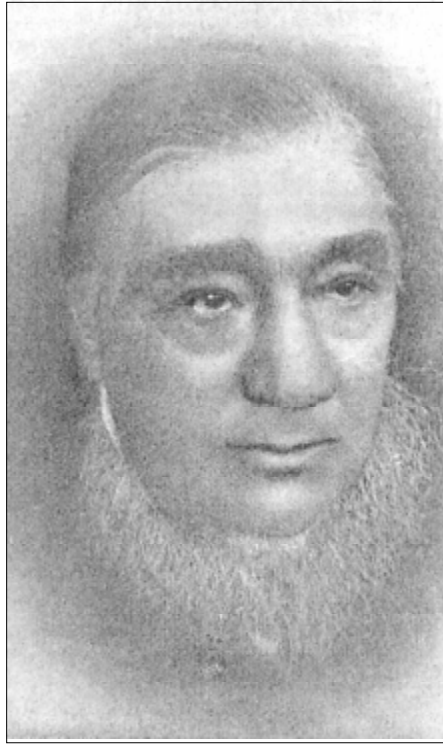
upon him, Kruger had few opportunities and probably no inclination to seek game merely for the sport which it afforded.

When he shouldered his gun it was because lions were harassing his camp or because there was a scarcity of food. Necessity made him a hunter, and his adaptability, his experience and his knowledge of the country and the habits of game caused him to become noted as one of the best in South Africa at a time when such a title had more significance than it has now.

Kruger's game-killing career began when he was one of the "Voor-trekkers" who migrated from Cape Colony into the then unknown interior. In the five succeeding years as this great party of Boers was wandering over the mountains and veldt in search of a permanent home, young

Kruger had many opportunities for shooting game, and early he gained a reputation as a deer-stalker. On this long journey, which finally brought the party to the present Transvaal, Kruger shot no less than fifty lions, according to his own statement to me.

Several instances of his prowess on this trip are well-authenticated and are as widely quoted among his people as the Washington cherry-tree story is among



"Oom Paul,"  
From His Most Recent Portrait.

Americans. When he was fifteen years old, Kruger and one of his sister's were approached by a medium-sized South African panther. With only a knife for a weapon Kruger attacked the animal and slew it after a fierce struggle in which he was severely injured.

After settling in the Transvaal it became necessary to clear the adjacent country of the wild animals that made periodical attacks on the Boers' cattle.

On one of these expeditions Kruger made his famous wager that he could outrun a horse, a feat which he accomplished, the distance being about a quarter of a mile.

Several days later a gun exploded in his hands as he was shooting at a rhinoceros, and his left thumb was horribly lacerated. Before his companions could offer assistance to him Kruger placed his torn thumb on a stone and calmly amputated it with his pocket-knife.

A story which sounds like fiction, but which the aged Boer himself corroborates, relates to his feat of drowning a wild buffalo. Kruger one day encountered a big buffalo which he pursued. His horse had carried him to within a few rods of the animal and he was about to fire upon it when it stumbled in a pool and fell. Before he could prevent the collision, he and his horse were rolling in a heap with the buffalo. Kruger quickly regained his wits, seized the buffalo's horns and held its nose under water until it was dead.

Two famous hunters once asked Kruger to accompany them on an elephant hunt, but when he saw that they had excellent horses and an expensive outfit, he was unwilling to go with such a poor horse and outfit as he possessed. He was finally induced to accompany them however, and, in due course of time, they found an elephant. The beast was so fleet-footed, however, that the two hunters could not overtake it with their horses, notwithstanding Kruger's shouts to "head the beast off." After the pursuit had continued for some time Kruger spurred his sorry-looking pony and soon had the elephant "headed off" and killed. The two hunters had been left far behind, and Kruger looked for more elephants. When the hunters finally found him he had killed four other elephants, and they had not shot even one.

A remarkable story of Kruger's ability as a hunter is current among the Boers, and it is so characteristic of all his earlier exploits that its truth is undoubted. One evening, after a long day's chase, Kruger was pursued by an infuriated buffalo, which gained momentarily on his tired-out pony. Kruger plied his whip and spurs desperately, but the beast rapidly diminished the distance between them, and there seemed no way out of the impending danger. When the buffalo was within a few yards of his horse's flanks, Kruger turned in his saddle, aimed deliberately with his rifle and shot it in a vital spot in the forehead, killing it instantly.

In speaking to me of Mr. Kruger last May, Mr. F. W. Reitz, the Transvaal's Secretary of State, who has known the old Boer long and intimately, stated that he believed his chief was possessed of the power, of "second-sight," or something akin to it. "Not many, years ago," said Mr. Reitz, who is too practical a man to believe in hearsay, "Mr. Kruger was accustomed to tell his friends where to go for game, and to tell them what kind and how many animals they would find at the spot which he indicated. In scores of instances his friends found the exact number of bucks at the very place to which he had sent them.

"The old President was consequently besought by increasing numbers of Boers on hunting bent. Once, however, he told a man, that if he would journey to a certain locality he would find eight deer. The man went thither, but found only seven deer. When Mr. Kruger learned that he had made a mistake he was sorely grieved, and that night he prayed to the Lord that the strange power might be taken away from him, lest he should unwittingly deceive others."

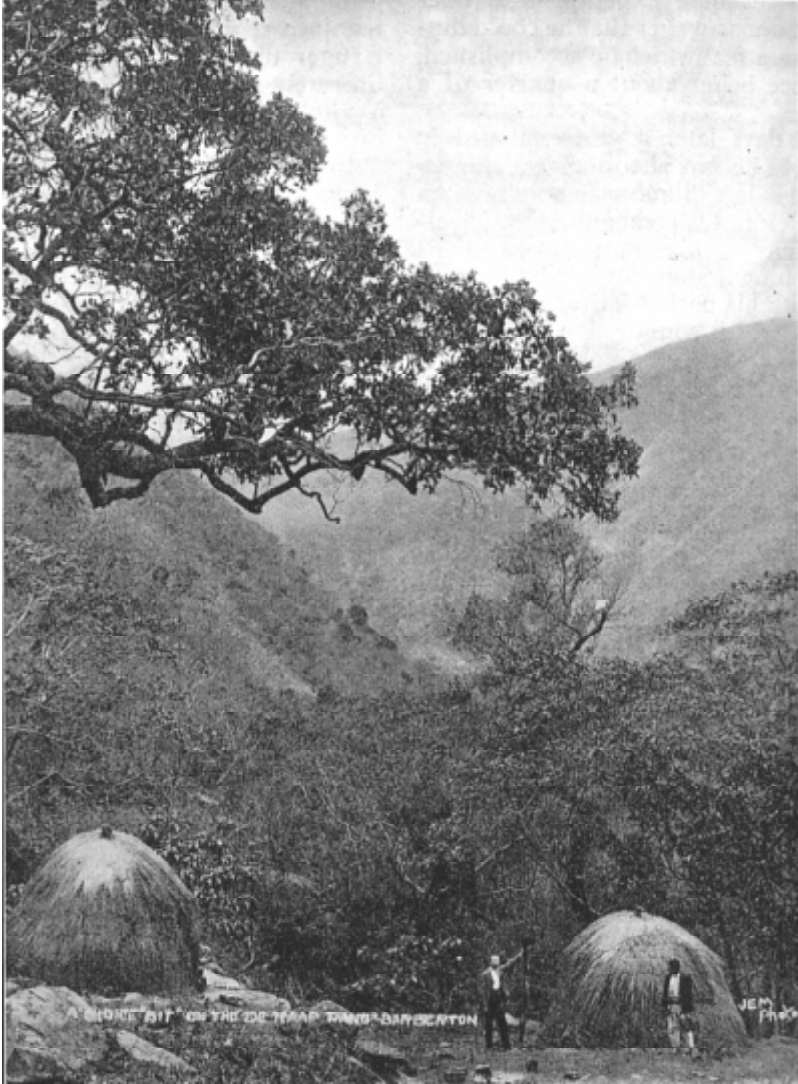
Kruger took a leading part in many hunting expeditions to the Zambesi district until he was about sixty-five years old; then the foreigners came flocking into his country so rapidly that he was unable to spare the time from his executive duties. Thereafter he had the British lion to deal with, and it is more than probable that his early experiences with the South African variety stood him in good stead.

That the grim old warrior must, by the fortunes of war, end his days, according

to the present outlook, far away from his old hunting grounds, is a sad finale of a great career, but even his enemies will acknowledge that the old "Lion of Rustenberg" always observed the rules of the sport.

The progress of mere material prosperity and the development of the natural resources of the Continent may be sensibly accelerated in the near future,

but fellow-sportsmen the world over will be the first to deplore the tide of senseless destruction which is almost certain to follow the incursion of the Philistines into the regions over which "Oom Paul" hunted so successfully. It is much to be feared that he was the last of the mighty hunters of the Transvaal, and upon him, it may be said, the mantle of Gordon-Cumming appropriately fell.



A Famous Hunting Ground in the Transvaal.