



Lake Victoria to Khartoum, with Rifle & Camera

Francis Arthur Dickinson

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Captain Francis Arthur Dickinson (1874-1915) was an officer in the British army and a first rate big game hunter. Due to Dickinson's notoriety as a great big game hunter he was selected by Winston Churchill to escort him on big game hunts while Churchill was Under Secretary of State for the African Colonies.

According to Churchill: "I KNOW by experience that Captain Dickinson in person is an ideal companion and guide through the countries which he describes; and I feel sure that those who are less fortunate than myself will find his book an excellent substitute for his presence. They will realize from his manner of writing his constant cheerfulness, his stores of resource for every difficulty and emergency, and his full knowledge and understanding of every problem which can confront the traveller or the sportsman. Elephants are to him like partridges, and hippopotami like hares; and he has an eye which can identify the rarest of the antelopes by the twinkle of its tail behind a thorn-thicket at a hundred yards. All his advice on the details of big-game shooting is based on long experience interpreted by sound instinct and acute intelligence; and the only drawback to his teaching is that it will not allow his disciples the satisfaction of improving on it.

"Under a literary style which is all his own, Captain Dickinson has a message to convey. It is the interest and spirit of a genuine sportsman, who knows how to find the game, how to kill, and —much rarer quality—how to spare.

He is fortunate in the countries in which his service has lain. These great wild lands offer to the young officer not only opportunities of sport or adventure, but a contact with responsibilities and realities which is a special education in itself. Few return to the prosaic routine of peace-time soldiering in England without new qualities of knowledge and character, to compensate them for the regrets with which they look back, and often, alas, for the health they leave behind them. Reading these pages brings vividly back to me mellow and charming recollections of British East Africa and Uganda, two years ago—the stir in camp before daybreak, breakfast under the stars, the long tramp through the dripping elephant grass while the sun rose higher and higher and the thermometer bounded up in company, the oases of rest in the "bandas" with food and drink assuming totally new values, the cool of the evening, and the long sittings round the camp fire ; and the thrill of the stealthy prowling through reed and thicket in the rhinoceros and elephant country, when at each moment the next step might disclose the hide of some unconscious but formidable enemy.

These paths are rapidly growing less solitary. The steamers multiply, the railways extend. Important footsteps brush back the jungle. The hunter who from some secret spot watches the slow procession of the elephants, or surprises the rhinoceros grazing placidly, is surveying a threatened if not a vanishing civilisation. We approach the period of more game-laws and less game. The achievements which this book records will become increasingly rare as the years pass by, and Captain Dickinson's jaunty chronicle will one day be studied by a generation of sportsmen who will view the "good old times" with envious and ultimately unbelieving eyes."

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