

# COLONEL ROOSEVELT



Edmund Morris



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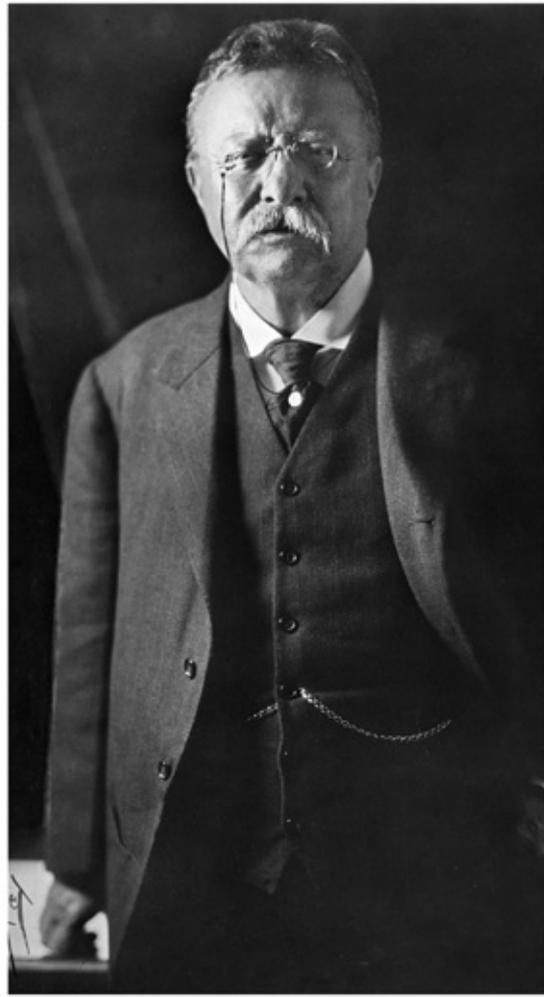
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*The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*

*Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*

*Theodore Rex*

*Beethoven: The Universal Composer*



COLONEL  
ROOSEVELT

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*Edmund Morris*



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*Frontispiece photograph: Theodore Roosevelt by George Moffett, 1914*

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*To*

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*Robert Loomis*

IT HAS BEEN OBSERVED IN ALL AGES, that the advantages of nature or of fortune have contributed very little to the promotion of happiness; and that those whom the splendour of their rank, or the extent of their capacity, have placed upon the summits of human life, have not often given any just occasion to envy in those who look to them from a lower station; whether it be that apparent superiority incites great designs, and great designs are naturally liable to fatal miscarriages; or that the general lot of mankind is misery, and the misfortunes of those, whose eminence drew upon them an universal attention, have been more carefully recorded, because they were more generally observed, and have in reality been only more conspicuous than those of others, not more frequent, or more severe.

—*Samuel Johnson*, THE LIVES OF THE POETS (1781)

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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For compatibility with quotations, and stylistic empathy with the period 1909–1919, most place-names and usages remain unmodernized in this book. Hence, *British East Africa* for what is now Kenya, *Christiania* for Oslo, *Near East* for the Middle East, *Mesopotamia* for Iraq. *Turkey* is synonymous with the Ottoman Empire, and *England* with the United Kingdom.

Racial, personal, and sexual attitudes of the time have not been moderated. Hence, in the African prologue, such words as *savage*, *boy*, and *native* (the last regarded as respectful now but tending toward disparagement then). And in the chapters proper, *crippled*, *Miss* or *Mr*. Married or unmarried, women were hardly ever referred to by surname only. The word *race* when quoted, usually connotes a national rather than ethnic identity. Although some “hyphenated” minorities achieved recognition during World War I, the phrase *African American* did not challenge *Negro* as a universal term. The world was divided into the *Occident* and the *Orient*, and each hemisphere had its *Indians*. God was masculine; countries, ships, and cyclonic disturbances feminine. *United States* and *politics* were still sometimes employed as plural nouns.

A few archaic capitalizations, such as *Government* and *Nation*, have been dropped. Other spellings that have changed only slightly since 1919 are updated without comment: *Czar* becomes *Tsar*, *Servia*, *Serbia*, and *Moslem*, *Muslim*. Punctuation marks are altered for clarity only in transcripts of oral remarks.

## The Roosevelt Africa Expedition, 1909–1910

SITTING ABOVE THE COWCATCHER, on an observation bench rigged for him by British East Africa Railway officials, he feels the thrust of the locomotive pushing him upland from Mombasa, over the edge of the parched Taru plateau. He has the delightful illusion of being transported into the Pleistocene Age.

His own continent recedes to time out of mind. Is it only seven weeks since he was President of the United States? His pocket diary indicates the date is 22 April 1909—not that the calendar matters much in this land of perpetual summer, with equal days and nights. No one will many of its natives be able to read, let alone recognize the name THEODORE ROOSEVELT prominently stenciled on a gun case riding behind him in the freight car. They are more likely to be impressed by what the case contains: a “Royal” grade .500/.450 double-barrel Holland & Holland Nitro Express, the most magnificent rifle ever made. (It contrasts with a portable library of about six dozen pocket-size books, ranging from the Apocrypha to the *Pensées* of Pascal, all bound in pigskin and shelved in a custom-made aluminum valise.)

He gazes through eager pince-nez at the prehistoric landscape opening ahead. Waves of bleached grass billow in all directions. Baobab trees, pale gray and oddly elephantine, writhe amid anthills the color of dried blood. Black men and women, naked as the stick figures of cave paintings, stare expressionlessly as he bears down upon them. He will have to get used to that opaque scrutiny wherever he treks in Africa. It is a look that neither absorbs nor reflects, the stone face of savagery.

Less disconcerting, but just as foreign, are the birds that flap and flash around the locomotive’s progress: tiny, iridescent sunbirds, green bee-eaters, yellow weavers and rollers, a black-and-white hornbill rising so late from the track he could catch it in his hands. Much as he loves all feathered things, the zoologist in him is distracted by horizon-filling herds of wildebeest, kongoni, waterbuck, impala, and other antelope. Errant zebras have to be tooted off the rails. Long-tailed monkeys curlicue from tree to tree. A dozen giraffes canter alongside in convoy, their tinkertoy awkwardness transformed into undulant motion.

Polish his lenses as he may, he cannot see the Tsavo reserve, “this great fragment of the long-buried past of our race,” through twentieth-century eyes. The word *race*, with its possessive pronoun, comes easily to him, connoting not color but culture. Even when culture is at its most primitive, as here, something in him thrills at the prospect of soon being where there is no culture at all.



EITHER THESE FLORA and fauna are reluctantly giving way to him, as an armed intruder from the future, or he is, in a sense, regressing into them, finding again the Dark Continent

embraced as a child, in a copy of David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels and Researches South Africa*. Before he could read that book, let alone manage its weight, he had dragged around his father's Manhattan townhouse, begging adults to "tell" him the pictures: elephant spiked with assegais; surging, snap-jawed hippos; a lion mauling a white man.

From then on, the rule of tooth and claw in nature seemed as supreme as his own success at becoming "one of the governing class."

At puberty he had set out to prove that it was possible for the frailest of small boys, nearly dead at three from asthma and nervous diarrhea, to punish bone and muscle till both grew strong. If an overstrained heart fluttered in protest, it must be ignored.

"Doctor," he had said on leaving college, "I'm going to do all the things you tell me not to do. If I've got to live the sort of life you have described, I don't care how short it is." Privately, he allowed for sixty years.

At first, paradoxically, he had had to struggle free of privilege. His eminence, at twenty-two, as the head of one of New York City's "Four Hundred" best families disqualified him for politics, in the opinion of the rough professionals who dominated the state Republican party. Hustling for votes was not the business of a young gentleman with a *magna cum laude* Harvard degree.

So he had fought—if not with tooth and claw, then with whatever weapons, blunt or subtle, cleared his path—north to Albany as assemblyman from the "Silk Stocking" district, west to Dakota Territory as ranchman and deputy sheriff, south to Washington as civil service commissioner, back to New York City as police commissioner, south again to Washington as assistant secretary of the navy. In the process he won wide admiration for political skills so great as to render him unstoppable in his quest for power. If he was not alone in plotting the Spanish-American War, he did more than anyone else in the McKinley administration to bring it about. Then, as colonel of his own volunteer regiment, "Roosevelt's Rough Riders," and *generalissimo* of its faithful press corps, he transformed himself into a military hero. Fresh out of uniform at forty, he became governor of New York, and at forty-two, vice president under the reelected William McKinley. In September 1901, an assassin's bullet made him President of the United States.

Not surprisingly, given his physical and rhetorical combativeness, many Americans greeted his accession to the presidency in 1901 with dread. Those of nonconfrontational temperaments shuddered at his "despotic" reorganization of the army, and demands for a navy big enough to dominate the Western Hemisphere. Their fears seemed realized when he used warships to safeguard the Panamanian Revolution of 1903, securing for the United States the right to build an isthmian canal—and, not incidentally, the ability to move its battle fleet quickly from ocean to ocean. At the same time, they had been amazed at his promptness in granting independence to Cuba in 1902, his willingness to accept less than total victory in exchange for a cease-fire in the Philippines insurrection, and his discreet mediation of the Russo-Japanese peace settlement in 1905—not to mention intervention in the Morocco crisis of 1906, which for a while seemed likely to plunge Europe into war.

His Nobel Peace Prize, the first won by an American, was in recognition of these last two achievements. Had the prize committee been aware of how successfully—and secretly—he had worked to contain the *Weltpolitik* of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the most dangerous autocrat of

the international scene, it might have made its award sooner.

Nevertheless, he has never been quite able to resolve whether action is not preferable to negotiation, and might the superior of right. Even the most scholarly of his books, *The Naval War of 1812* and the four-volume *Winning of the West*, are muscular in their bellicose expansionism. Read in sequence, his biographies of Thomas Hart Benton, Gouverneur Morris, and Oliver Cromwell amount to a serial portrait of himself as a prophet of Manifest Destiny: a cultured revolutionary, an autocrat reconciling inimical forces. For bloodlust—strange combined with tenderness toward the creatures he shoots—few memoirs match his Western trilogy, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, and *The Wilder West Hunter*.

Sexual lust is a subject he deems unfit for print. He is as delicate about the most intimate acts as a Dutch Reformed dominie. That does not stop him from condemning birth control as “race suicide”—using the word *race*, now, in the loose sense of *nationality*. An advanced society must reproduce more and more, to swell its economic power and keep its “fighting edge.” He rejoices in having sired six children and betrays an obvious, if unconscious, desire to castrate men “who think that life ought to consist of a perpetual shrinking from effort, danger and pain.” Such are the intellectual elitists “whose cult is nonvirility,” and other “mollycoddles” unwilling to play a masterful role in making the world. *Masterful* remains one of his favorite adjectives. This British railroad, for example: this “embodiment of the eager, masterful, materialistic civilization of today,” pushing through the Pleistocene!



THE ICE CAP OF KILIMANJARO floats like a bubble, the blue of its lower slopes dissolving into the blue of heat haze. Somewhere in that southern swim, parallel with the line of the railway, runs the uneasy border between British and German East Africa. He has no plans to cross it. Having spent much of his presidency perfecting Anglo-American relations, and much of his life visiting and corresponding with well-placed English friends, he is almost an honorary British citizen. “I am the only American in public life whom the Europeans really understand,” he says. “I am a gentleman and follow the code of a gentleman.”

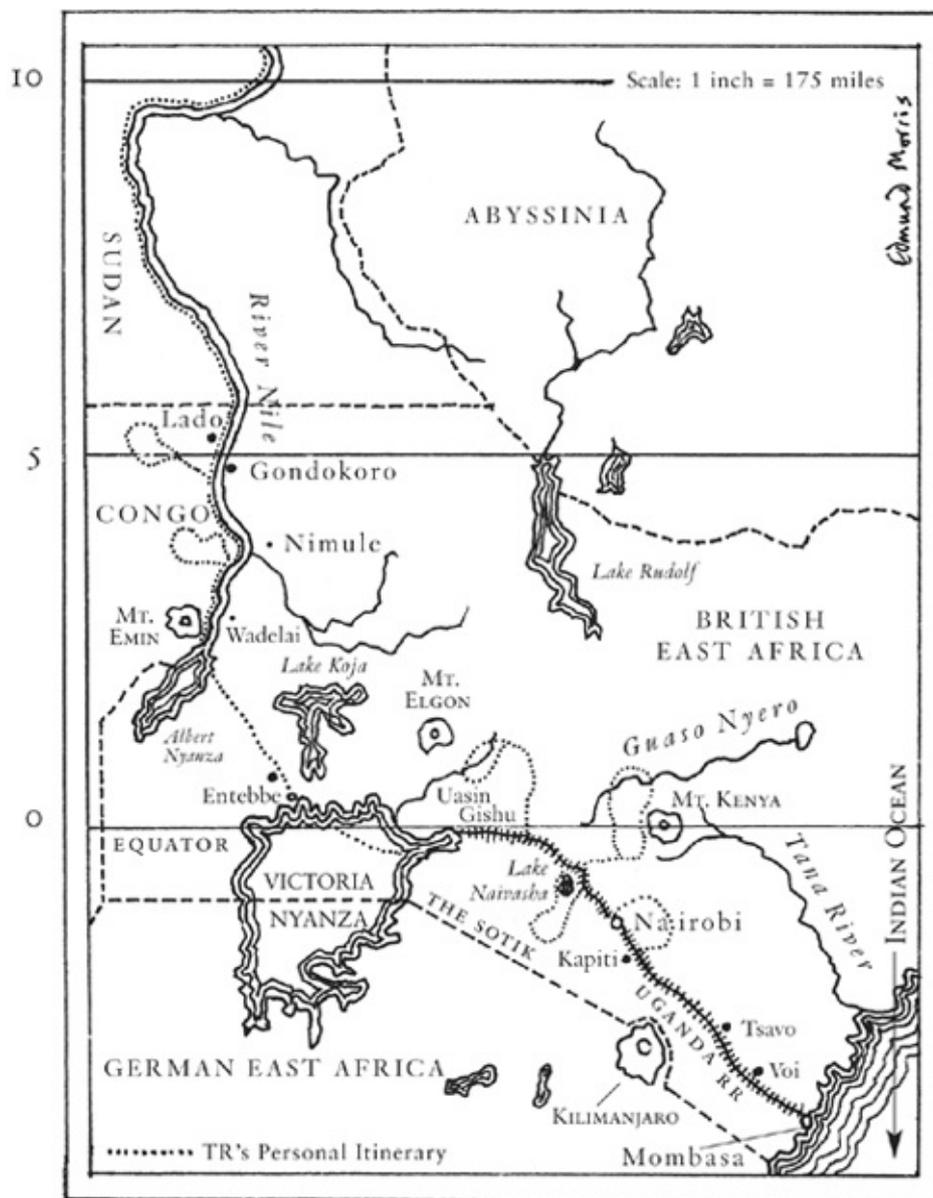
Right now he is the guest of His Majesty’s Colonial Office, as an honored collector of specimens for the National Museum in Washington, D.C. King Edward VII has sent him an official telegram of welcome to the Protectorate. Fifty-six eminent English peers, parliamentarians, naturalists, and men of letters are the donors of his Holland & Holland rifle. Given a high state of alarm in Parliament over Germany’s current arms buildup (the Reichstag has announced the construction of three new dreadnought battleships), it would be undiplomatic of him to quit one empire for another, even if a record rhinoceros beckons.

Packed among his safari gear is the typescript of a speech he has been asked to make at Berlin University next spring. In it, he praises the Wilhelmine Reich for its “lusty youth”—a compliment he feels unable to bestow on France or Britain, in similar addresses written for delivery at the Sorbonne and Oxford. He has taken pains to make all three speeches sound as academic as possible, not wanting to exacerbate the rivalries of Europe’s main powers. Like or not, he will still be listened to as an American foreign policy spokesman.

So much for his fantasy of fading from popular memory in Darkest Africa. His safari has

generated worldwide interest. British East African authorities have extended him special privileges: this train, for instance, comes courtesy of the acting governor. For as long as he roams the Protectorate, he must pay reciprocal respects to every district commissioner who flies a Union Jack over a hut of mud and wattle.

The East African phase of the expedition will end sometime in early December. If personal funds permit, he will then lead a smaller safari through Uganda to the headwaters of the Nile. In the new year, he will cruise down the great river to Egypt, stopping at leisure to hunt northern big game, not reconnecting with civilization until his wife meets him at Khartoum. That should be about eleven months from now. He wants to show her Aswan and Luxor and Karnak, where as a boy he first felt himself regressing in time. (She has somehow always figured in his recall: at twelve, the mere sight of a photograph of little Edith Kermit Carow was enough to stir up in him "homesickness and longings for the past which will come again never, alack never.") From Alexandria, they plan to sail to Italy and revisit the scenes of the honeymoon. After that, his northern speech engagements beckon. He does not expect to return to the United States until the early summer of 1910.



Roosevelt's safari route through British East Africa, 1909–1910. (photo credit p.1)



“JAMBO BWANA KING YA AMERIK!”

The shout comes from more than three hundred porters, gunbearers, horse boys, tent men, and *askari* guards. They stand in two lines outside the little station of Kapiti Plains, five and half thousand feet above sea level. Pitched behind them are sixty-four tents, and the half distributed paraphernalia of the largest safari yet mounted in equatorial Africa. Were it not sponsored by the Smithsonian Museum and financed in large part by Andrew Carnegie, it could almost be a British military foray, with its crates of guns, ammunition, and rock flares, its show of blue blouses and puttees, its sun helmets shading a few authoritative white faces. But four tons of salt, scalpel kits, powdered borax, and enough cotton batting to unspool back to Mombasa betray the safari's field purpose. And instead of the Union Jack, a large Stars and Stripes floats over the field-green headquarters of the “King of America.”

His original plan, conceived while fending off Republican attempts to nominate him for a third term in 1908, was for a private hunting trip in the environs of Mount Kenya. “If I am where they can't get at me, and where I cannot hear what is going on, I cannot be supposed to wish to interfere with the methods of my successor.” But as his preparatory reading extended from J. H. Patterson's *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo* to Lord Cromer's *Modern Egypt*, and as anti-hunting advocates protested his bloody intentions, he let scientific and political considerations reshape a more public-minded itinerary. The Smithsonian Museum is avid for male and female specimens of all the big-game species he can shoot, plus a complete series of smaller East African mammals. He is also expected to collect flora. The Colonial Office wants him to advertise its new railway, and attract settlers along the line to Victoria Nyanza. The British foreign secretary hopes he will cast a sympathetic American eye on Anglo-Egyptian problems in Khartoum and Cairo.

He has, besides, his own image to worry about. Having made almost a religion of conservation in the White House, and laid the groundwork for a world conference on the subject, he can ill afford to be seen again, as he was in youth, as an indiscriminate killer of big game. In fact, he has always hunted for constructive reasons: as a boy, to fill the glass cases of his “Roosevelt Museum of Natural History,” and teach himself the minutest details of anatomy and coloration; in youth, to fight his way out of invalidism, choosing always to make the chase as difficult as possible; and in early middle age, to promulgate, as founder and president of the Boone & Crockett Club, the paradox that hunters are practical conservationists, needing to preserve what they pursue—not only birds and animals and fish but the wilderness too.

Hence this highly professional expedition organizing itself at Kapiti. It does so under the orders of his official guide and manager, R. J. Cuninghame, a bearded, bowlegged Scot and slayer of many elephants. Burned nearly black by wanderings extending from South Africa to the Arctic Circle, Cuninghame affects a Viking look that does not quite conceal the cultured poise of a Cambridge man. Leslie Tarlton, representing a Nairobi safari agency, is assistant manager, a tense little Australian and virtuoso sharpshooter. Three American naturalists represent the scientific side of the expedition. Edgar A. Mearns, a retired army surgeon, began his zoological career by collecting “a most interesting series of skulls” on active duty in the Philippines. He is also a botanist. Edmund Heller is a field taxidermist from Stanford

University, and J. Alden Loring a mammalogist from New York. Seventh and last in the rank of command is the official photographer, Kermit Roosevelt, a willowy nineteen-year-old on leave from Harvard. Kermit is *Bwana Mdogo* (“Little Master”) to the safari porters.

As for *Bwana Mkubwa Sana* (“Very Great Master”), he congratulates himself on putting together a team of the kind of sinewy, well-bred, not overly scrupulous men he has always admired. His son may not qualify. Kermit is handy with a Kodak, and also with a mandolin; he is a reader and lover of languages, sure to profit from exposure to Africa’s tapestry of cultures. But the boy needs, or seems to need, toughening, having a broody, mother-fixated quality that sets him apart from the rest of the family.

How Edith Roosevelt feels about consigning them both to a year in the wilderness is another matter. She accepts that her husband craves danger, perhaps in compensation for his own inclination to bury himself in books. He has proved to be practically indestructible. So has Ted, their grown son. Archie, halfway through Groton, is if possible even flintier. Quentin, the youngest and brightest, is currently a fiend hidden in the cloud of late puberty, yet promises to emerge from it a natural leader and risk taker.

Kermit is made of more fragile material. He, his brothers, and his sisters, Alice and Ethel, worship their father as a sort of sun-god emanating power and love. Edith trusts that in Africa, the aura will be protective.



BY NOW SHE SHOULD have answered or destroyed most of the fifteen thousand farewell letters that had poured into Sagamore Hill before he left. He has retained just one, hand-delivered the day he sailed, along with a gold expanding ruler—just the thing a man needs on safari. The ruler is engraved THEODORE ROOSEVELT FROM WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT: *Goodbye—Good luck—and a safe return* and the letter, on heavy White House stationery, reads:

My dear Theodore: If I followed my impulse, I should still say “My dear Mr. President.” I cannot overcome the habit. When I am addressed as “Mr. President,” I turn to see whether you are not at my elbow....

I write to you to say “farewell,” and to wish you as great pleasure and as much usefulness as possible in the trip you are about to undertake. I have had my qualms about the result, but in thinking it over they disappear. You will undertake no foolhardy enterprise, I know....

I want you to know that I do nothing in the Executive office without considering what you would do under the same circumstances and without having in a sense a mental talk with you over the pros and cons of the situation. I have not the facility for educating the public as you had through talks with correspondents, and so I fear that a large part of the public will feel as if I had fallen away from your ideals; but you know me better and will understand that I am still working away on the same old plan.



“KERMIT IS MADE OF MORE FRAGILE MATERIAL.”

*Kermit Roosevelt in 1909. (photo credit p.2)*

Taft cannot find it easy to succeed the most confident executive in modern memory. “Mr. President,” in contrast, is happy to sacrifice supreme power—and along with it, a third term virtually guaranteed by the Republican Party and the American electorate. He waves aside token respect. “I am no hanger-on to the shreds of departing greatness.”

That said, there is one title he cherishes, and asks everybody to use from now on: “Colonel Roosevelt.” He feels that it is both valid, reflecting his rank in the Reserve Army of the United States, and merited through bravery in battle. He was, after all, briefly and gloriously commander of a regiment of volunteer cavalymen in '98. If war ever comes again and finds him fit to serve, he intends to reactivate his brevet at once.

He is already “Roosevelt, (Col.) Theodore” in *The New York Times Index*. Reporters do not intend to drop him as a subject, even as he retreats into the wilds of Africa. For more than a quarter of a century they have pursued him, drawn by his “Teddy-bear” caricaturability, perpetual motion, heroic glamour, machine-gun quotes, and ricochet denials. Most attractive of all is his disaster potential—the likelihood that one day he will spend the last cent of his legendary luck, and be destroyed by either violence from outside, or hubris within.

This potential seems especially fraught now that he has elected to test his fifty-year-old body, and faulty vision, in some of the world’s riskiest hunting grounds. Aware of it himself

he has announced that his safari will be closed to all press coverage, save for occasional statistical bulletins that he may issue through cable facilities in Nairobi. Any attempt to follow in his footsteps will be “an outrage and an indecency.” He does not want every missed shot headlined—or, worse still, captured on camera by the increasingly annoying phenomenon of news photographers.

And should he survive, he wishes to tell his own story. A lucrative publishing contract with Charles Scribner’s Sons calls upon him to write an account of his safari, in articles that will appear monthly in *Scribner’s Magazine*. After the safari is complete, the series will be edited for republication in book form. His payment for the articles is to be \$50,000, and the book will earn him a 20 percent royalty. This is the most money he has ever negotiated as a writer. He could have gotten twice as much from *Collier’s Weekly*, but feels that periodical is too slick. A touch *bon marché*, as Edith would say.



HE RIDES OUT to hunt with Kermit, while Cuninghame, Tarlton, and the naturalists continue the preparations. Two local ranchers act as guides. The sortie amounts to a rehearsal for the big safari soon to begin, with gunbearers, grooms, and porters trailing in a precedence as formal as any line he had led as President.

Kapiti’s dry *veldt*, a word he recognizes as a particle of his own Dutch surname, does not compare in fecundity with the well-watered Athi preserve he passed through on the trail. After two years of drought, it is largely depopulated of game. But the Intertropical Convergence Zone seems finally about to drift north across the equator, ahead of them as they ride. When it does, this plain will turn green, and masses of game arrive to graze. At present, ticks alone seem to thrive, attaching themselves like miniature grape clusters to the legs of the ponies. He is grateful for his leather-patch trousers, buttoned tight from knee to boot. A stiff sun helmet, *de rigueur* for all white travelers in the tropics, uncomfortably covers his large head. He yearns for his beloved slouch hat, but defers to the notion that solar rays are lethal in these latitudes.

He strains to adjust his one good eye to the veldt’s visibility, particularly illusive when the sun is overhead, and makes out the delicate prancings of two species of buck. He aims his custom-sighted Springfield .30 at a Grant’s gazelle, but undershoots and misses. Focusing on a small Thomson’s at 225 yards, he breaks its back with a bullet that goes only slightly too high. It is his first African kill, and he looks forward to venison for dinner.

What he really wants to shoot this afternoon, to set the right collecting tone, is “two good specimens, bull and cow, of the wildebeest.” It is the scientist in him, not the hunter, who first responds to a glimpse of brindled gnu moving blue-black and white across the plain, like shadows of the advancing storm clouds. He sees no evidence in that chiaroscuro of the fashionable theory of “protective coloration,” one of his pet biological peeves. How protective is a white throat mane, in angled light? How inconspicuous are zebra, to a lion? He notes, for his book, that Africa’s large game animals “are always walking and standing in conspicuous places, and never seek to hide or take advantage of cover.” Only the small quadrupeds, “like the duiker and steinbuck ... endeavor to escape the sight of their foes by lying absolutely still.”

*Wildebeest, duiker, steinbuck*—he is already picking up the Cape Dutch nomenclature the Afrikaans settlers have brought to British East Africa. Their language reminds him of the nursery songs his grandmother used to croon to him, in earliest memory:

*Trippa, troppa, tronjes,  
De varken's in de boonjes.*

Reminiscent, too, is the Paleolithic profile of a wildebeest, as he closes on it in a sudden squall of rain. His first big trophy was an American buffalo, hunted in similar conditions twenty-three years ago. Then, the rain was so dense on his spectacles, he could not be sure what was bison, and what mere beading water. This shape shrinks at four hundred yards to something more slender than massive. Nevertheless, it is a good-sized bull. He wounds it in a run. Kermit, galloping with teenage abandon over rotten ground for more than six miles, administers the *coup de grâce*.

By “veldt law,” credit goes to the man who shot first.



AFTER A WEEK OF hunting around Kapiti, he feels confident enough to stalk lion with dogs. They do not have to sniff far. The hair rises on their backs as they follow catspaw prints down a drainage donga, and his horse boy hisses, “*Simba*.”

He follows the line of the pointing black finger. Just four yards away, something yellow moves in a patch of tall grass. He fires at once with his .405 Winchester. With nothing but color to aim at, he does not know if the movement will materialize into a lion. Kermit fires too. Presently two half-grown cubs emerge, both wounded. They have to be finished off.

Disappointed as the day wanes without result, he allows one of his party to reconnoiter another ravine. More prints show in the sand, much larger this time, and at once he and Kermit are off their horses, alert to crashing, grunting noises in the brush ahead.

Right in front of me, thirty yards off, there appeared, from behind the bushes which had first screened him from my eyes, the tawny, galloping form of a big maneless lion. Crack! the Winchester spoke; and as the soft-nosed bullet ploughed forward through his flank the lion swerved so that I missed him with the second shot; but my third bullet went through the spine and forward into his chest. Down he came ... his hind quarters dragging, his head up, his jaws open and lips drawn up in a prodigious snarl, as he endeavored to turn to face us. His back was broken.... His head sank, and he died.

There is no time to exult over the carcass, because he sees a second lion escaping. He runs it down and fires. The lion rolls over, one foreleg in the air, then takes two more bullets before dying at his feet.

Three days later he kills a much bigger lion, plus another half-grown cub and a lioness. All are destined for the Smithsonian. He hopes that his trophy quota, set by Protectorate authorities, will eventually allow him to shoot a *simba* for himself. It is dark before the lioness is borne back to camp, swinging between two poles. A nearly full moon illumines the porters as they lope into view, intoning a deep, rhythmic song. He tries to notate phonetically: *Zou-zou-boulé ma ja guntai*. They cluster around him as he stands by the fire, then begin to dance. Their chanting rises to a climax. He adds a descant of his own, obscurely derived from Irish folksong: “Whack-fal-lal for Lanning’s Ball.”

The firelight glows on the body of his prey, and on the white and ebony of his jostling celebrants. Around them, the plain lies pale under the moon.



LIKE A PYTHON TOO enormous to shift all its coils at once, the safari begins to move while still based at Kapiti Station. By early May it is in full motion, carrying its own weight, hunting as it goes, sending out flickering forays in search of choice specimens.

As leader, he does his share of collecting and cataloging. *Dendromus nigrifrons*, *Arvicanthus abyssinicus nairobae*, *Myoscalops kapiti heller*, *Thamnomys loringi*, *Pelomys roosevelti*... Later classifications come easily to him; he has been inscribing zoological labels since boyhood. He assists Heller and Loring in writing life histories, enjoying the precision of scientific description. Before politics, this was what he wanted to be: a naturalist in the field. *Coarctata* *bristly hair*, he writes of the meadow mouse named in his honor. *The dorsal coloration is golden yellow overlaid by long hairs with an olive iridescence; the under parts are silky white.*

But his main literary labor, at night in camp after dinner, is to process pocket-diary jottings and fresh memory into serial installments for *Scribner's Magazine*. By 12 May he has completed his first article, "A Railroad Through the Pleistocene." Eight days later he finishes another, describing his wildebeest hunt and visit to a Boer ranch, not failing to quote *Tripp troppa, tronjes*. With a storyteller's instinct for pacing, he reserves his lion kills for installments three, betting that readers who stay with him that long will stay to the end—unless his own end intervenes. "During the last decades in Africa," he reports, "hundreds of white hunters and thousands of native hunters, have been killed or wounded by lions, buffaloes, elephants and rhinos." A unique feature of his book is that it is being written on the march. The possibility of foreclosure adds an agreeable note of suspense to the narrative.



"A PRECEDENCE AS FORMAL AS ANY LINE HE HAD LED AS PRESIDENT."

Roosevelt's safari gets under way, May 1910. (photo credit p.3)

He writes it as he talks—superabundantly, always interestingly, with clarity and total recall. Elegance of style is not his concern. He sometimes repeats himself, relying on h

sharp ear to protect him from cliché, not always with success. He is aware of the page-filling benefits of purple passages, and scatters dying sunsets and brilliant tropic moons with a firm hand.

Beyond these indulgences, the power of his prose comes from its realism. He is an honest writer, incapable of boasting, or even the discreet omissions tolerated by nonfiction editors. If he kills any animal clumsily, wasting bullets, he tells how, in detail. The same truthfulness keeps him from false modesty—the “my poor self” affectation of so many German and English memoirists. Being brave, he admits to acts of bravery; swelling with new experience, he does not hide the breadth of his knowledge. As a result, his indelible pencil gouges the capital letter *I* with a frequency tending to blunt the point.

Pressing down is necessary, because he writes with two sheets of carbon stuffed into his manuscript pad. One copy of each article is sealed in a blue canvas envelope and dispatched to Nairobi by runner, thence to be sent down the railroad to Mombasa and shipped via two oceans to New York. To insure against loss, a duplicate goes by the next sea mail, and he retains the third copy for himself.

As he falls into the cross-rhythms of riding and shooting, collecting and writing, he becomes in effect a hunter of Africa itself, seeking to capture it whole—alive or dead—and process it into food for mind and body. His pursuit is not for the squeamish. Each new animal fixed to his sights poses a different combination of danger and documentary interest, whether in the number of bullets it absorbs, or the sounds it makes as it dies, or the inches it registers on his tape measure, or the browsing habits he deduces from the contents of its stomach. A buffalo, shot through lungs and heart, bears down with such momentum that it skids to death just thirteen paces away, plowing a long furrow with its horn. A lion, nine feet long and copiously maned, comes on even faster, only to be hit in the chest, “as if the place had been plotted with dividers ... smashing the lungs and the big blood vessels of the heart.” Two swamp buffalo bulls, black and glistening in the early morning light, fall to his biggest rifle and two giant eland, heavy and dewlapped as prize steers, to his smallest. A lioness yields not only herself, but two unborn cubs. Three giraffes topple over in a single morning, followed by a whole family of rhinos, the bull needing nine bullets to finish off, the cow performing “curious death waltz,” and the calf dropping with “a screaming whistle, almost like that of a small steam-engine.” His kills become repetitive. Yet another rhino, then another, and another, and another; two more lions and a lioness, somersaulting left and right in her final agony; more buffalo, more eland, more giraffes.

In a sudden translocation to a world of water, he finds himself in a rowboat with Kermit gliding among purple and pink water lilies. Delicate jacana birds race across the pad, treading so lightly the flowers barely dip. His ornithologist’s eye and ear rejoice at a wealth of other bird life: tiny kingfishers coruscating in the sun like sapphires, white-throated cormorants, spur-winged plover clamoring overhead, little rills threading the papyrus, grebes diving, herons spearing, and baldpate coots resembling the kind he collected as a teenager, except, he notes, for “a pair of horns or papillae at the hinder end of the bare frontal space.”

But he is looking for hippos. The prodigious beasts prove surprisingly fast and difficult to kill in the water. He hits one, this first day on Lake Naivasha, and another the next; but they submerge at once, and decline to float up dead. On the third day, just as he feels an attack of

malaria coming on, he encounters a big bull wading. He fires shakily, breaking its shoulder whereupon it flounders at him with open jaws. He fires again and again, trying to control his tremor, and finally shoots right down its throat. The tusks clash like a sprung bear trap. At point-blank range, the hippo swerves a little, and he drills it through the brain.

Then, curling up on the floor of the boat, he succumbs to his fever.



HE KNOWS THIS IS NOT African malaria, but the Cuban variety that has plagued him since Roosevelt days. Always the sudden convulsions, the cracking headache, then zero at the bone. And always, since he believes illness is weakness (like grief or fear or self-doubt), he fights off until it fells him. Fortunately, attacks never last long. He is well enough after five days to go out looking for more hippos. This time he leaves Kermit behind, and orders two “boys” to row him alone across the lake.

Although he assures himself that he has spilled no more blood, so far, than is necessary to satisfy the Smithsonian and feed his safari, he is aware that his hunter’s luck has been extraordinary. It is the talk of the sundowner set in Nairobi. In just three months, he and Kermit have bagged multiple specimens of most of the major African species. Thanks to his herculean skinning and salting by Heller and Mearns, he can congratulate himself on having shipped, via the railway to Mombasa, “a collection of large animals such as has never been obtained for any other museum in the world on a single trip.”

The trouble with such luck is that it is bound to be perceived by critics of big-game hunting as indiscriminate slaughter. Local “bush telegraph” exaggerates the number of his kills, not to mention his profligacy with bullets. He is sensitive of being caricatured as anything other than the serious leader of a scientific expedition, and begins to regret his press ban. Perhaps he should do more than send the occasional scrawled trophy tally to the little pool of reporters in Nairobi. It is not the kind of “copy” they want.

Whenever he veers near the capital, he can feel their avid interest pulling at him, like a magnetic current. The fact is, he is magnetized himself. Despite his pose of privacy, he remains irredeemably a public figure, obsessed with his own image, half wanting to confide in those he holds at bay. He misses the worshipful cadre of young scribes who took virtuoso dictation from him in Washington. That “Newspaper Cabinet” is now disbanded, and Taft’s self-deprecating envoi (“I have not the facility for educating the public as you had”) suggests that the White House is going to be a poor source of news for the next four years. American editors will have to look farther afield for good material. No story could be more surefire than that of Colonel Roosevelt daily risking death in Africa!

Hence the presence, this day in Naivasha, of F. Warrington Dawson, a young United Press correspondent who has pursued him all the way to Kapiti. Dawson—Southern, French-educated, the author of two successful novels—is obviously eager to serve him. They might discuss how in camp tonight. That hippo “bull” of five days ago turned out, embarrassingly, to be an old cow. The misidentification was excusable, for she was barren, and had developed male characteristics. But it is exactly the sort of thing he does not wish broadcast, as some kind of joke.



IF ONLY TO IMPRESS DAWSON, he wants to get a big bull, and get it cleanly—not an easy task with low profile quarry.

The lake lies almost still. For an hour of stealthy progress, he cannot be sure what are mere strips of mud, wetly gleaming, and what the possible heads of hippos. At last he distinguishes a dozen flat foreheads. He fires at seventy yards, and they all sink without trace. He thinks he may have hit one of them. Still standing, he orders his rowers to advance. He catches the sudden fear, then the boat shudders over some vast upheaval, knocking him off his feet. The water roils as back after huge back rises in rage. Repeatedly, he fires his .30-caliber Springfield at the closest heads (one with a lily-pad eye patch that reminds him, in the midst of panic, of “a discomfited prize-fighter”). The other hippos plunge for cover.

Calm returns to the lake. He waits for it to give up its dead. After an hour, to his surprise and shame, four carcasses surface. One of them is the bull he wanted, but the rest are cow-unnneeded as trophies, undeniable as kills. He persuades himself that they will be a food bonanza for his porters, and for the natives of Naivasha.

Darkness falls as he supervises the laborious business of belaying, mooring, and towing tons of meat. The night grows stormy. Long swells roll through the reeds. He does not get back to camp until three the next morning. Before dawn, he awakes with an attack of acute despair. Alarmed at his haggard look, servants go to fetch Dawson. “*Bwana Mkubwa kill min kiboko!*” Many hippos.

“Warrington,” he says when the reporter appears, “the most awful thing has happened.”

He need not worry. Dawson is so touched to be confided in (“I don’t know what to do. We shall have to let the papers know”) that the story goes out as an attack by, rather than on, the herd of hippos. It is released by a young man who can now style himself secretary to the former President of the United States. In his diary for 23 July, Dawson proudly notes “Wrote letters for the Colonel.”



THE LETTERS, DICTATED with much snapping of teeth, pacing back and forth, and smacks of right fist into left palm, are in response to the first overseas mail the safari has received in nearly two months. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and other politically obsessed correspondents report that President Taft is proving an inept executive, and that Republican insurgents now pose a serious threat to the unity of the Republican Party. But the immediacy of such bulletins fades in proportion to the distance they have come, and the leisurely pace of African “runners.”

There is, in any case, little that a former Party head can do, other than express political concern. Lodge must understand that he has divorced himself from affairs of state. “Remember that I never see newspapers.... I am now eating and drinking nothing but my African expedition.”

He admits to Dawson that he would rather not hear anything about the Taft administration. Insofar as he will discuss his own future, he talks of returning to Oyster Bay for a quiet life of writing books and articles. He says he would like to become “a closer father” to his two youngest sons, whom he feels he may have neglected during his years as President.

However, he does dictate one startling remark that Dawson fails to recognize as news.

occurs in a message of sympathy to Henry White, whom President Taft has dismissed as American ambassador to France: "He said without any qualification that he intended to keep you. It was, of course, not a promise *any more than my statement that I would not run again for President was a promise.*"



HE IS NEARER DEATH, around midday on the nineteenth of August, than he was on Kettle Hill in Cuba, or when he battled for breath as an asthmatic child. An elephant bears down upon him in dense jungle, creepers snapping like packthread in its rush. There are no bullets left in his Holland & Holland rifle: both barrels were needed to dispatch another elephant, only moments before. He dodges behind a tree, ejecting the empty cartridges and jamming in two fresh ones. R. J. Cuninghame fires twice, with the hair-trigger reaction of a professional. The elephant stops in its tracks, wheels, and vanishes, trumpeting shrilly. A copious trail of blood marks its departure.

Hunters' etiquette requires that it be followed. But the contrary duty of a collector is to begin, at once, the task of skinning the specimen already killed, a big bull carrying a hundred and thirty pounds of ivory. Several days' work lies ahead, in humid weather (they are on the lush piedmont of Mount Kenya). He watches fascinated as the safari team—porters, gunbearers, and 'Ndorobo guides alike—throw themselves bodily into the work of flaying and cutting up his quarry.

Soon they were all splashed with blood from head to foot. One of the trackers took off his blanket and squatted stark naked inside the carcase, the better to use his knife. Each laborer rewarded himself by cutting off strips of meat for his private store, and hung them in red festoons from the branches round about. There was no let-up in the work until it was stopped by darkness.

Our tents were pitched in a small open glade a hundred yards from the dead elephant. The night was clear, the stars shone brightly, and in the west the young moon hung just above the line of tall tree-tops. Fires were speedily kindled and the men sat around them, feasting and singing in a strange minor tone until late in the night. The flickering light left them at one moment in black obscurity, and the next brought into bold relief their sinewy crouching figures, their dark faces, gleaming eyes, and flashing teeth.... I toasted slices of elephant's heart on a pronged stick before the fire, and found it delicious; for I was hungry, and the night was cold.



BLOOD, NAKEDNESS, FLESHY festoons, music, moon, and fire, his mouth full of cardiac meat: after four months, he has arrived at the heart of darkness. He is at one with the mightiest of animals, his life juices mingling with his own, at one with all nature, with the primeval past. No longer a mere time traveler in the Pleistocene, he has become a virtual denizen of it. The pages of his safari diary, covered with sketches of every animal he has slain (usually shown in motion, extremities tapering off into blankness), uncannily recall Paleolithic art. Yet a part of him is repelled by much of what he observes: baboons tearing open newborn lambs to get at the milk inside them, a hyena suffocated by the very guts it burrows into, flies walking around the eyes of children. "Life is hard and cruel for all the lower creatures, and for man also. What the sentimentalists call a 'state of nature,' " he writes. "The savage of today shows t

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