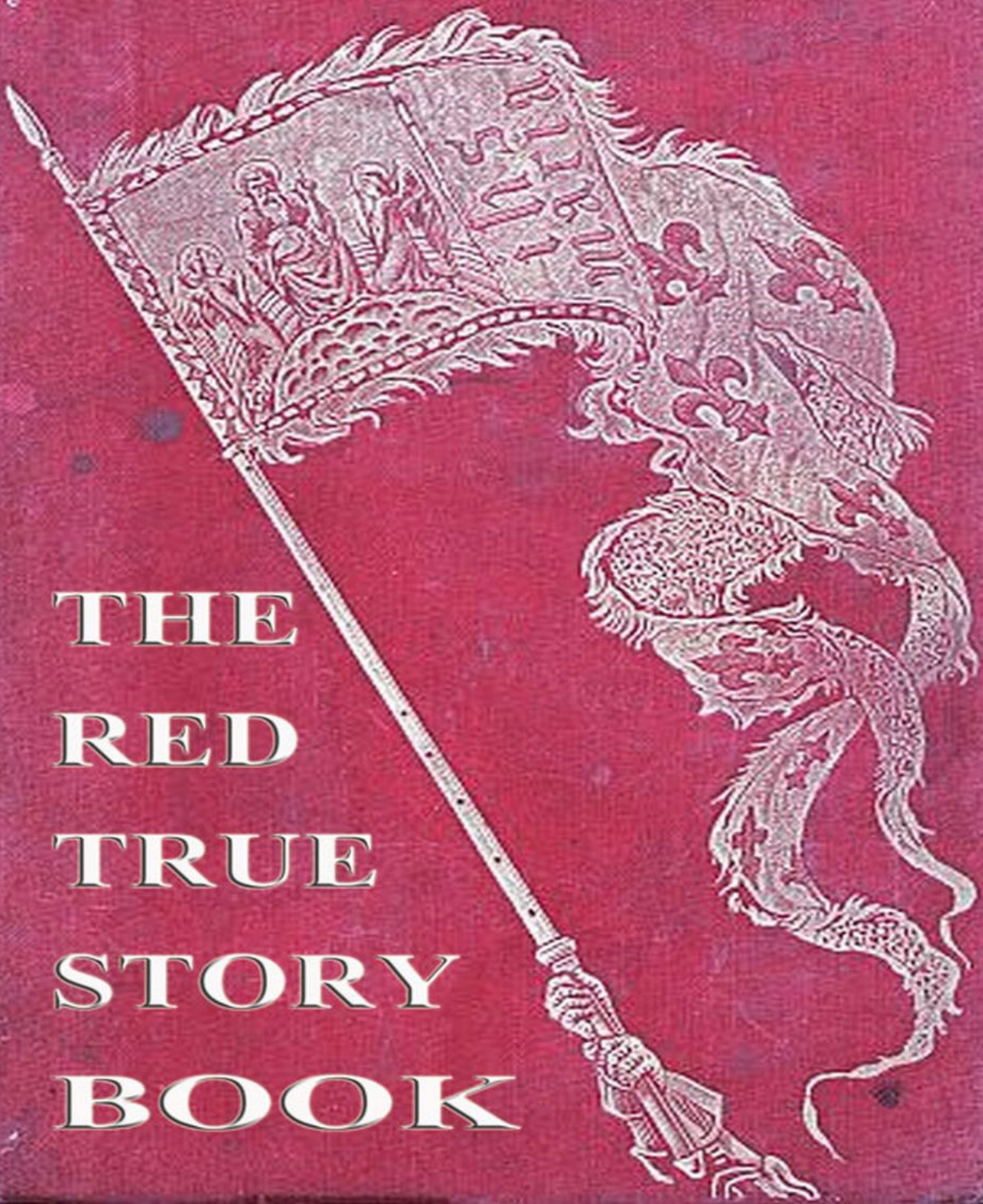
ANDREW LANG



THE RED TRUE STORY BOOK

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Andrew Lang

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ANDREW LANG (1844-1912)

Biographical Sketch from "Portraits And Sketches" by Edmund Gosse

INVITED to note down some of my recollections of Andrew Lang, I find myself suspended between the sudden blow of his death and the slow development of memory, now extending in unbroken friendship over thirty-five years. The magnitude and multitude of Lang's performances, public and private, during that considerable length of time almost paralyse expression; it is difficult to know where to begin or where to stop. Just as his written works are so extremely numerous as to make a pathway through them a formidable task in bibliography, no one book standing out predominant, so his character, intellectual and moral, was full -of so many apparent inconsistencies, so many pitfalls for rash assertion, so many queer caprices of impulse, that in a whole volume of analysis, which would be tedious, one could scarcely do justice to them all. I will venture to put down, almost at haphazard, what I remember that seems to me to have been overlooked, or inexactly stated, by those who wrote, often very sympathetically, at the moment of his death, always premising that I speak rather of a Lang of from 1877 to 1890, when I saw him very frequently, than of a Lang whom younger people met chiefly in Scotland.

When he died, all the newspapers were loud in proclaiming his "versatility." But I am not sure that he was not the very opposite of versatile. I take "versatile" to mean changeable, fickle, constantly ready to alter direction with the weather-cock. The great instance of versatility in literature is Ruskin, who adopted diametrically different views of the same subject at different times of his life, and defended them with equal ardour. To be versatile seems to be unsteady, variable. But Lang was through his long career singularly unaltered; he never changed his point of view; what he liked and admired as a youth he liked and admired as an elderly man. It is true that his interests and knowledge were vividly drawn along a surprisingly large

number of channels, but while there was abundance there does not seem to me to have been versatility. If a huge body of water boils up from a crater, it may pour down a dozen paths, but these will always be the same; unless there is an earthquake, new cascades will not form nor old rivulets run dry. In some authors earthquakes do take place as in Tolstoy, for instance, and in S. T. Coleridge but nothing of this kind was ever manifest in Lang, who was extraordinarily multiform, yet in his varieties strictly consistent from Oxford to the grave. As this is not generally perceived, I will take the liberty of expanding my view of his intellectual development.

To a superficial observer in late life the genius of Andrew Lang had the characteristics which we are in the habit of identifying with precocity. Yet he had not been, as a writer, precocious in his youth. One slender volume of verses represents all that he published in book-form before his thirty-fifth year. No doubt we shall learn in good time what he was doing before he flashed upon the world of journalism in all his panoply of graces, in 1876, at the close of his Merton fellowship. He was then, at all events, the finest finished product of his age, with the bright armour of Oxford burnished on his body to such a brilliance that humdrum eyes could hardly bear the radiance of it. Of the terms behind, of the fifteen years then dividing him from St. Andrews, we know as yet but little; they were years of insatiable acquirement, incessant reading, and talking, and observing gay preparation for a life to be devoted, as no other life in our time has been, to the stimulation of other people's observation and talk and reading. There was no cloistered virtue about the bright and petulant Merton don. He was already flouting and jesting, laughing with Ariosto in the sunshine, performing with a snap of his fingers tasks which might break the back of a pedant, and concealing

under an affectation of carelessness a literary ambition which knew no definite bounds.

In those days, and when he appeared for the first time in London, the poet was paramount in him. Jowett is said to have predicted that he would be greatly famous in this line, but I know not what evidence Jowett had before him. Unless I am much mistaken, it was not until Lang left Balliol that his peculiar bent became obvious. Up to that time he had been a promiscuous browser upon books, much occupied, moreover, in the struggle with ancient Greek, and immersed in Aristotle and Homer. But in the early days of his settlement at Merton he began to concentrate his powers, and I think there were certain influences which were instant and far-reaching. Among them one was pre-eminent. When Andrew Lang came up from St. Andrews he had found Matthew Arnold occupying the ancient chair of poetry at Oxford. He was a listener at some at least of the famous lectures which, in 1865, were collected as "Essays in Criticism"; while one of his latest experiences as a Balliol undergraduate was hearing Matthew Arnold lecture on the study of Celtic literature. His conscience was profoundly stirred by "Culture and Anarchy" (1869); his sense of prose-form largely determined by "Friendship's Garland" (1871). I have no hesitation in saying that the teaching and example of Matthew Arnold prevailed over all other Oxford influences upon the intellectual nature of Lang, while, although I think that his personal acquaintance with Arnold was very slight, yet in his social manner there was, in early days, not a little imitation of Arnold's aloofness and superfine delicacy of address. It was unconscious, of course, and nothing would have enraged Lang more than to have been accused of "imitating Uncle Matt."

The structure which his own individuality now began to build on the basis supplied by the learning of Oxford, and in

particular by the study of the Greeks, and "dressed" by courses of Matthew Arnold, was from the first eclectic. Lang eschewed as completely what was not sympathetic to him as he assimilated what was attractive to him. Those who speak of his "versatility" should recollect what large tracts of the literature of the world, and even of England, existed outside the dimmest apprehension of Andrew Lang. It is, however, more useful to consider what he did apprehend; and there were two English books, published in his Oxford days, which permanently impressed him: one of these was "The Earthly Paradise," the other D. G. Rossetti's " Poems." In after years he tried to divest himself of the traces of these volumes, but he had fed upon their honey-dew and it had permeated his veins.

Not less important an element in the garnishing of a mind already prepared for it by academic and aesthetic studies was the absorption of the romantic part of French literature. Andrew Lang in this, as in everything else, was selective. He dipped into the wonderful lucky-bag of France wherever he saw the glitter of romance. Hence his approach, in the early seventies, was threefold: towards the mediaeval *lais* and *chansons*, towards the sixteenth-century Pleiade, and towards the school of which Victor Hugo was the leader in the nineteenth century. For a long time Ronsard was Lang's poet of intensest predilection; and I think that his definite ambition was to be the Ronsard of modern England, introducing a new poetical dexterity founded on a revival of pure humanism. He had in those days what he lost, or at least dispersed, in the weariness and growing melancholia of later years a splendid belief in poetry as a part of the renown of England, as a heritage to be received in reverence from our fathers, and to be passed on, if possible, in a brighter flame. This honest and beautiful ambition to shine as one of the permanent benefactors to national verse, in the attitude so nobly

sustained four hundred years ago by Du Bellay and Ronsard, was unquestionably felt by Andrew Lang through his bright intellectual April, and supported him from Oxford times until 1882, when he published " Helen of Troy." The cool reception of that epic by the principal judges of poetry caused him acute disappointment, and from that time forth he became less eager and less serious as a poet, more and more petulantly expending his wonderful technical gift on fugitive subjects. And here again, when one comes to think of it, the whole history repeated itself, since in " Helen of Troy " Lang simply suffered as Ronsard had done in the "Franciade." But the fact that 1882 was his year of crisis, and the tomb of his brightest ambition, must be recognised by every one who closely followed his fortunes at that time. Lang's habit of picking out of literature and of life the plums of romance, and these alone, comes to be, to the dazzled observer of his extraordinarily vivid intellectual career, the principal guiding line. This determination to dwell, to the exclusion of all other sides of any question, on its romantic side is alone enough to rebut the charge of versatility. Lang was in a sense encyclopaedic; but the vast dictionary of his knowledge had blank pages, or pages pasted down, on which he would not, or could not, read what experience had printed. Absurd as it sounds, there was always something maidenly about his mind, and he glossed over ugly matters, sordid and dull conditions, so that they made no impression whatever upon him. He had a trick, which often exasperated his acquaintances, of declaring that he had " never heard " of things that everybody else was very well aware of. He had " never heard the name " of people he disliked, of books that he thought tiresome, of events that bored him; but, more than this, he used the formula for things and persons whom he did not wish to discuss. I remember meeting in the street a famous professor, who advanced with uplifted hands, and greeted me with " What do you think Lang says now? That

he has never heard of Pascal! " This merely signified that Lang, not interested (at all events for the moment) in Pascal nor in the professor, thus closed at once all possibility of discussion.

It must not be forgotten that we have lived to see him, always wonderful indeed, and always passionately devoted to perfection and purity, but worn, tired, harassed by the unceasing struggle, the lifelong slinging of sentences from that inexhaustible ink-pot. In one of the most perfect of his poems, " Natural Theology," Lang speaks of Cagn, the great hunter, who once was kind and good, but who was spoiled by fighting many things. Lang was never " spoiled," but he was injured; the surface of the radiant coin was rubbed by the vast and interminable handling of journalism. He was jaded by the toil of writing many things. Hence it is not possible but that those who knew him intimately in his later youth and early middle-age should prefer to look back at those years when he was the freshest, the most exhilarating figure in living literature, when a star seemed to dance upon the crest of his already silvering hair. Baudelaire exclaimed of Theophile Gautier: " Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" and of Andrew Lang in those brilliant days the same might have been said. As long as he had confidence in beauty he was safe and strong; and much that, with all affection and all respect, we must admit was rasping and disappointing in his attitude to literature in his later years, seems to have been due to a decreasing sense of confidence in the intellectual sources of beauty. It is dangerous, in the end it must be fatal, to sustain the entire structure of life and thought on the illusions of romance. But that was what Lang did he built his house upon the rainbow.

The charm of Andrew Lang's person and company was founded upon a certain lightness, an essential gentleness and elegance which were relieved by a sharp touch; just as a very dainty fruit may be preserved from mawkishness by something delicately acid in the rind of it. His nature was slightly inhuman; it was unwise to count upon its sympathy beyond a point which was very easily reached in social intercourse. If any simple soul showed an inclination, in eighteenth-century phrase, to " repose on the bosom " of Lang, that support was immediately withdrawn, and the confiding one fell among thorns. Lang was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity, invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by the outspread paw with claws awake. This uncertain and freakish humour was the embarrassment of his friends, who, however, were preserved from despair by the fact that no malice was meant, and that the weapons were instantly sheathed again in velvet. Only, the instinct to give a sudden slap, half in play, half in fretful caprice, was incorrigible. No one among Lang's intimate friends but had suffered from this feline impulse, which did not spare even the serenity of Robert Louis Stevenson. But, tiresome as it sometimes was, this irritable humour seldom cost Lang a friend who was worth preserving. Those who really knew him recognised that he was always shy and usually tired.

His own swift spirit never brooded upon an offence, and could not conceive that any one else should mind what he himself minded so little and forgot so soon. Impressions swept over him very rapidly, and injuries passed completely out of his memory. Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success. This, doubtless, is why almost all imaginative

literature which is founded upon the darker parts of life, all squalid and painful tragedy, all stories that " don't end well" all religious experiences, all that is not superficial and romantic, was irksome to him. He tried sometimes to reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; he concentrated his matchless powers on it; but he always disliked it. He could persuade himself to be partly just to Ibsen or Hardy or Dostoieffsky, but what he really enjoyed was Dumas pêre, because that fertile romance-writer rose serene above the phenomena of actual human experience. We have seen more of this type in English literature than the Continental nations have in theirs, but even we have seen no instance of its strength and weakness so eminent as Andrew Lang. He was the fairy in our midst, the wonder-working, incorporeal, and tricksy fay of letters, who paid for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. In some verses which he scribbled to R.L.S. and threw away, twenty years ago, he acknowledged this unearthly character, and, speaking of the depredations of his kin, he said:

Faith, they might steal me, w? ma will,
And, ken'd I ony fairy hill
I#d lay me down there, snod and still,
Their land to win;
For, man, I maistly had my fill
O' this world's din

His wit had something disconcerting in its impishness. Its rapidity and sparkle were dazzling, but it was not quite human; that is to say, it conceded too little to the exigencies of flesh and blood. If we can conceive a seraph being fanny, it would be in the manner of Andrew Lang. Moreover, his wit usually danced over the surface of things, and rarely penetrated them. In verbal parry, in ironic misunderstanding, in breathless agility of topsy-turvy

movement, Lang was like one of Milton's " yellow-skirted fays," sporting with the helpless, moon-bewildered traveller. His wit often had a depressing, a humiliating effect, against which one's mind presently revolted. I recollect an instance which may be thought to be apposite: I was passing through a phase of enthusiasm for Emerson, whom Lang very characteristically detested, and I was so ill-advised as to show him the famous epigram called " Brahma." Lang read it with a snort of derision (it appeared to be new to him), and immediately he improvised this parody:

If the wild bowler thinks he bowls,
Or if the batsman thinks he's bowled,
They know not, poor misguided souls,
They, too, shall perish unconsoled.
I am the batsman and the bat,
I am the bowler and the ball,
The umpire, the pavilion cat,
The roller, pitch and stumps, and all

This would make a pavilion cat laugh, and I felt that Emerson was done for. But when Lang had left me, and I was once more master of my mind, I reflected that the parody was but a parody, wonderful for its neatness and quickness, and for its seizure of what was awkward in the roll of Emerson's diction, but essentially superficial. However, what would wit be if it were profound? I must leave it there, feeling that I have not explained why Lang's extraordinary drollery in conversation so often left on the memory a certain sensation of distress.

But this was not the characteristic of his humour at its best, as it was displayed throughout the happiest period of his work. If, as seems possible, it is as an essayist that he will ultimately take his place in English literature, this element

will continue to delight fresh generations of enchanted readers. I cannot imagine that the preface to his translation of " Theocritus," "Letters to Dead Authors," "In the Wrong Paradise," " Old Friends," and " Essays in Little " will ever lose their charm; but future admirers will have to pick their way to them through a tangle of history and anthropology and mythology, where there may be left no perfume and no sweetness. I am impatient to see this vast mass of writing reduced to the limits of its author's delicate, true, but somewhat evasive and ephemeral. genius. However, as far as the circumstances of his temperament permitted, Andrew Lang has left with us the memory of one of our most surprising contemporaries, a man of letters who laboured without cessation from boyhood to the grave, who pursued his ideal with indomitable activity and perseverance, and who was never betrayed except by the loftiness of his own endeavour. Lang's only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life, and his work will survive exactly where he was most faithful to his innermost illusions.

"IN THE BORGHESE GARDENS PRACTISED THAT ROYAL GAME OF GOLF"

THE RED TRUE STORY BOOK

INTRODUCTION

The Red True Story Book needs no long Introduction. The Editor, in presenting *The Blue True Story Book*, apologised for offering tales so much less thrilling and romantic than the legends of the Fairies, but he added that even real facts

were, sometimes, curious and interesting. Next year he promises something quite as true as History, and quite as entertaining as Fairies!

For this book, Mr. Rider Haggard has kindly prepared a narrative of 'Wilson's Last Fight,' by aid of conversations with Mr. Burnham, the gallant American scout. But Mr. Haggard found, while writing his chapter, that Mr. Burnham had already told the story in an 'Interview' published by the *Westminster Gazette*. The courtesy of the proprietor of that journal, and of Mr. Burnham, has permitted Mr. Haggard to incorporate the already printed narrative with his own matter.

'The Life and Death of Joan the Maid' is by the Editor, who has used M. Quicherat's *Procès* (five volumes, published for the Historical Society of France), with M. Quicherat's other researches. He has also used M. Wallon's Biography, the works of Father Ayroles, S.J., the *Jeanne d'Arc à Domremy* of M. Siméon Luce, the works of M. Sepet, of Michelet, of Henri Martin, and, generally, all printed documents to which he has had access. Of unprinted contemporary matter perhaps none is known to exist, except the Venetian Correspondence, now being prepared for publication by Father Ayroles.

'How the Bass was held for King James' is by the Editor, mainly from Blackadder's *Life*.

'The Crowning of Ines de Castro' is by Mrs. Lang, from Schäfer. 'Orthon,' from Froissart, 'Gustavus Vasa,' 'Monsieur de Bayard's Duel' (Brantôme), are by the same lady; also 'Gaston de Foix,' from Froissart, and 'The White Man,' from Mile. Aïssé's Letters.

Mrs. McCunn has told the story of the Prince's Scottish Campaign, from the contemporary histories of the Rising of 1745, contemporary tracts, *The Lyon in Mourning*, Chambers, Scott, Maxwell of Kirkconnel, and other sources.

The short Sagas are translated from the Icelandic by the Rev. W. C. Green, translator of *Egil Skalagrim's Saga*.

Mr. S. R. Crockett, Author of *The Raiders*, told the tales of 'The Bull of Earlstoun' and 'Grisell Baillie.'

Miss May Kendall and Mrs. Bovill are responsible for the seafarings and shipwrecks; the Australian adventures are by Mrs. Bovill.

Miss Minnie Wright compiled 'The Conquest of Peru,' from Prescott's celebrated History.

Miss Agnes Repplier, that famed essayist of America, wrote the tale of Molly Pitcher.

'The Adventures of General Marbot' are from the translation of his Autobiography by Mr. Butler.

With this information the Editor leaves the book to children, assuring them that the stories are *true*, except perhaps that queer tale of 'Orthon'; and some of the Sagas also may have been a little altered from the real facts before the Icelanders became familiar with writing.

WILSON'S LAST FIGHT

'They were men whose fathers were men'

TO make it clear how Major Wilson and his companions came to die on the banks of the Shangani on December 4, 1893, it will be necessary, very briefly, to sketch the events which led to the war between the English settlers in Mashonaland in South Africa and the Matabele tribe, an offshoot of the Zulu race.

In October 1889, at the instance of Mr. Cecil Rhodes and others interested, the Chartered Company of British South Africa was incorporated, with the sanction of Her Majesty's Government.

In 1890 Mashonaland was occupied, a vast and fertile territory nominally under the rule of Lobengula, king of the Matabele, which had been ceded by him to the representatives of the Company in return for certain valuable considerations. It is, however, an easier task for savage kings to sign concessions than to ensure that such concessions will be respected by their subjects, especially when those 'Subjects' are warriors by nature, tradition, and practice, as in the present case, and organised into regiments, kept from year to year in perfect efficiency and readiness for attack. Whatever may have been Lobengula's private wishes and opinions, it soon became evident that the gathering of the white men upon their borders, and in a country which they claimed by right of conquest if they did not occupy it, was most distasteful to the more warlike sections of the Matabele.

Mashonaland takes its name from the Mashona tribes who inhabit it, a peaceful and, speaking by comparison, an industrious race, whom, ever since they first settled in the neighbourhood, it had been the custom of the subjects of Lobengula and of his predecessor, Mosilikatze, 'the lion,' to

attack with every cruelty conceivable, raiding their cattle, slaughtering their men, and sweeping their maidens and young children into captivity. Terrified, half exterminated indeed, as they were by these constant and unprovoked onslaughts, the Mashonas welcomed with delight the occupation of their country by white men, and thankfully placed themselves under the protection of the Chartered Company.

The Matabele regiments, however, took a different view of the question, for now their favourite sport was gone: they could no longer practise rapine and murder, at least in this direction, whenever the spirit moved them. Presently the force of habit overcame their fear of the white men and their respect for treaties, and towards the end of 1891 the chief Lomaghondi, who lived under the protection of the Company, was killed by them. Thereon Dr. Jameson, the Administrator of Mashonaland, remonstrated with Lobengula, who expressed regret, saying that the incident had happened by mistake.

This repudiation notwithstanding, an impi, or armed body of savages, again crossed the border in 1892, and raided in the Victoria district. Encouraged by the success of these proceedings, in July 1893 Lobengula sent a picked company to harry in the neighbourhood of Victoria itself, writing to Dr. Jameson that he made no excuse for so doing, claiming as he did the right to raid when, where, and whom he chose. The 'indunas,' or captains, in command of this force were instructed not to kill white men, but to fall particularly upon those tribes who were in their employ. On July 9, 1893, and the following days came the climax, for then the impi began to slaughter every Mashona whom they could find. Many of these unfortunates were butchered in the presence of their masters, who were

bidden to 'stand upon one side as the time of the white men had not yet come.'

Seeing that it was necessary to take action, Dr. Jameson summoned the head indunas of the impi, and ordered them to cross the border within an hour or to suffer the consequences of their disobedience. The majority obeyed, and those who defied him were attacked by Captain Lendy and a small force while in the act of raiding a kraal, some of them being killed and the rest driven away.

From this moment war became inevitable, for the question lay between the breaking of the power of Lobengula and the evacuation of Mashonaland. Into the details of that war it is not proposed to enter; they are outside the scope of this narrative. It is enough to say that it was one of the most brilliant and successful ever carried out by Englishmen. The odds against the little force of a thousand or twelve hundred white men who invaded Matabeleland were almost overwhelming, and when it is remembered that the Imperial troops did not succeed in their contest against Cetywayo, the Zulu king, until nearly as many soldiers were massed in the country as there were able-bodied Zulus left to oppose them, the brilliancy of the achievement of these colonists led by a civilian, Dr. Jameson, can be estimated. The Matabele were beaten in two pitched battles: that of the Shangani on October 25, and that of the Imbembezi on November 1. They fought bravely, even with desperation, but their valour was broken by the skill and the cool courage of the white man. Those terrible engines of war, the Maxim guns and the Hotchkiss shells, contributed largely to our success on these occasions. The Matabele, brave as they were, could not face the incessant fire of the Maxims, and as to the Hotchkiss they developed a curious superstition. Seeing that men fell dead in all directions after the explosion of a

shell, they came to believe that as it burst out of each missile numbers of tiny and invisible imps ran forth carrying death and destruction to the white men's foes, and thus it happened that to their minds moral terrors were added to the physical dangers of warfare. So strong was this belief among them, indeed, that whenever a shell struck they would turn and fire at it in the hope that thus they might destroy the 'live devils' who dwelt within it.

After these battles Lobengula, having first set fire to it, fled from his chief place, Buluwayo, which was occupied by the white men within a month of the commencement of the campaign.

In reply to a letter sent to him by Dr. Jameson, demanding his surrender and guaranteeing his safety, Lobengula wrote that he 'would come in.'

The promised period of two days' grace having gone by, however, and there being no sign of his appearance, a force was despatched from Buluwayo to follow and capture him. This force, which was under the leadership of Major Patrick W. Forbes, consisted of ninety men of the Salisbury Column, with Captains Heany and Spreckley and a mule Maxim gun under Lieutenant Biscoe, R.N.; sixty men of the Victoria Column commanded by Major Wilson, with a horse Maxim under Captain Lendy; sixty men of the Tuli Column, and ninety men of the Bechuanaland Border Police, commanded by Captain Raaf, C.M.G., accompanied by two horse Maxims and a mule seven-pounder, commanded by Captain Tancred.

The column, which started on or about November 14, took with it food for three days only, carried by natives, and a hundred rounds of ammunition per man. After several days' journeying northward the patrol reached the Bubye River,

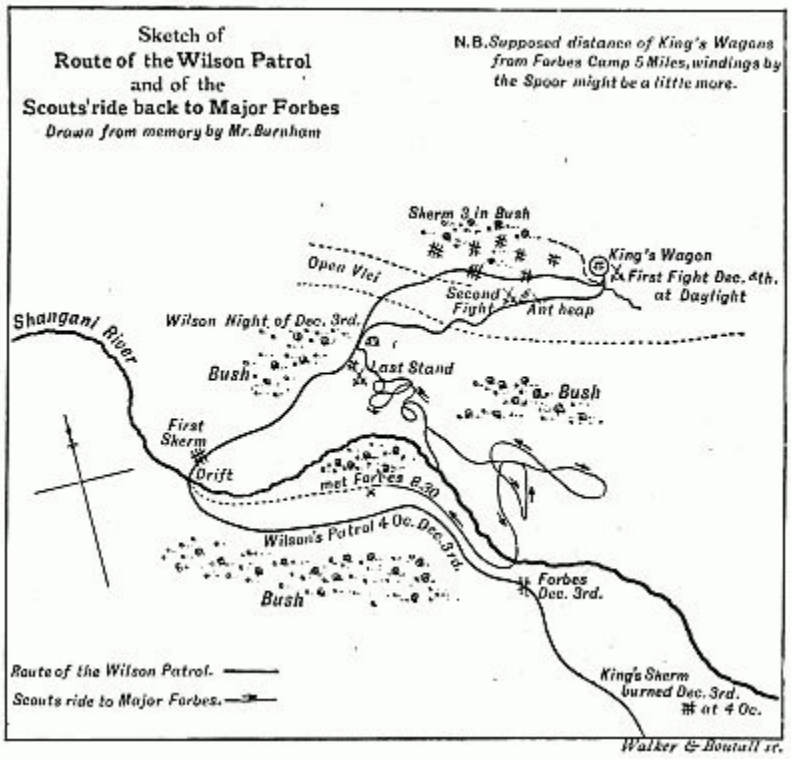
where dissensions arose between Captain Raaf and Major Forbes, the former being of opinion, rightly enough as the issue showed, that the mission was too dangerous to be pursued by a small body of men without supplies of food, and having no reserve of ammunition and no means of carrying the wounded. The upshot was that Major Forbes decided to return, but was prevented from doing so by a letter received from Dr. Jameson, stating that he was sending forward a reinforcement of dismounted men under Captain Napier with food, ammunition, and wagons, also sixteen mounted men under Captain Borrow. The force then proceeded to a deserted Mission Station known as Shiloh. On November 25 the column, three hundred strong and carrying with it three-quarter rations for twelve days, took up the King's wagon spoor about one mile from Shiloh, and followed it through much discomfort, caused by the constant rain and the lack of roads, till, on December S, a point was reached on the Shangani River, N.N.W. of Shiloh and distant from it about eighty miles.

On November 29, however, Major Forbes, finding that he could make small progress with the wagons, sent them away, and proceeded with the best mounted men and two Maxims only, so that the actual force which reached the Shangani on the 3rd consisted of about one hundred and sixty men and a couple of machine guns.

At this time the information in possession of the leaders of the column was to the effect that the King was just in front of them across the river, accompanied only by a few of his followers. Under these circumstances Major Forbes instructed Major Wilson and eighteen men to go forward and reconnoitre along Lobengula's spoor; the understanding seeming to have been that the party was to return by sundown, but that if it did not return it was, if necessary, to be supported by the whole column. With this

patrol went Mr. Burnham, the American scout, one of the three surviving white men who were eye-witnesses of that eventful night's work, which ended so tragically at dawn.

What followed is best told as he narrated it by word of mouth to the compiler of this true story, and to a reporter of the 'Westminster Gazette,' the editor of which paper has courteously given permission for the reproduction of the interview. Indeed, it would be difficult to tell it so well in words other than Mr. Burnham's own.



'In the afternoon of December 8,' says Mr. Burnham, 'I was scouting ahead of the column with Colenbrander, when in a strip of bush we lit on two Matabele boys driving some cattle, one of whom we caught and brought in. He was a plucky boy, and when threatened he just looked us sullenly in the face. He turned out to be a sort of grandson or grand-nephew of Lobengula himself. He said the King's camp was just ahead, and the King himself near, with very

few men, and these sick, and that he wanted to give himself up. He represented that the King had been back to this place that very day to get help because his wagons were stuck in a bog. The column pushed on through the strip of bush, and there, near by, was the King's camp—quite deserted. We searched the huts, and in one lay a Maholi slave-boy, fast asleep. (The Maholis are the slaves of the Matabele.) We pulled him out, and were questioning him, when the other boy, the sulky Matabele, caught his eye, and gave him a ferocious look, shouting across to him to take care what he told.

'The slave-boy agreed with the others that the King had only left this camp the day before; but as it was getting dark, Major Forbes decided to reconnoitre before going on with the column. I learnt of the decision to send forward Major Wilson and fifteen men on the best horses when I got my orders to accompany them, and, along with Bayne, to do their scouting. My horse was exhausted with the work he had done already; I told Major Forbes, and he at once gave me his. It was a young horse, rather skittish, but strong and fairly fresh by comparison.

'Ingram, my fellow-scout, remained with the column, and so got some hours' rest; thanks to which he was able not only to do his part of tracking for the twenty men afterwards sent on to us through the bush at night, but also, when he and I got through after the smash, to do the long and dangerous ride down country to Buluwayo with the despatches—a ride on which he was accompanied by Lynch.

'So we set off along the wagon track, while the main body of the column went into laager.

'Close to the river the track turned and led down stream along the west bank. Two miles down was a drift' (they call a fordable dip a drift in South Africa), 'and here the track crossed the Shangani. We splashed through, and the first thing we scouts knew on the other side was that we were riding into the middle of a lot of Matabele among some scherms, or temporary shelters. There were men, and some women and children. The men were armed. We put a bold face on it, and gave out the usual announcement that we did not want to kill anybody, but must have the King. The natives seemed surprised and undecided; presently, as Major Wilson and the rest of the patrol joined us, one of them volunteered to come along with us and guide us to the King. He was only just ahead, the man said. How many men were with him? we asked. The man put up his little finger—dividing it up, so. Five fingers mean an impi; part of the little finger, like that, should mean fifty to one hundred men. Wilson said to me, "Go on ahead, taking that man beside your saddle; cover him, fire if necessary, but don't you let him slip."

'So we started off again at a trot, for the light was failing, the man running beside my horse, and I keeping a sharp eye on him. The track led through some thick bush. We passed several scherms. Five miles from the river we came to a long narrow vlei , which lay across our path. It was now getting quite dark. Coming out of the bush on the near edge of the vlei, before going down into it, I saw fires lit, and scherms and figures showing dark against the fires right along the opposite edge of the vlei. We skirted the vlei to our left, got round the end of it, and at once rode through a lot of scherms containing hundreds of people. As we went, Captain Napier shouted the message about the King wherever there was a big group of people. We passed scherm after scherm, and still more Matabele, more fires, and on we rode. Instead of the natives having been

scattering from the King, they had been gathering. But it was too late to turn. We were hard upon our prize, and it was understood among the Wilson patrol that they were going to bring the King in if man could do it. The natives were astonished: they thought the whole column was on them: men jumped up, and ran hither and thither, rifle in hand. We went on without stopping, and as we passed more and more men came running after us. Some of them were crowding on the rearmost men, so Wilson told off three fellows to "keep those niggers back." They turned, and kept the people in check. At last, nearly at the other end of the vlei, having passed five sets of scherms, we came upon what seemed to be the King's wagons, standing in a kind of enclosure, with a saddled white horse tethered by it. Just before this, in the crowd and hurry, my man slipped away, and I had to report to Wilson that I had lost him. Of course it would not have done to fire. One shot would have been the match in the powder magazine. We had ridden into the middle of the Matabele nation.

'At this enclosure we halted and sang out again, making a special appeal to the King and those about him. No answer came. All was silence. A few drops of rain fell. Then it lightened, and by the flashes we could just see men getting ready to fire on us, and Napier shouted to Wilson, "Major, they are about to attack." I at the same-time saw them closing in on us rapidly from the right. The next thing to this fifth scherm was some thick bush; the order was given to get into that, and in a moment we were out of sight there. One minute after hearing us shout, the natives with the wagons must have been unable to see a sign of us. Just then it came on to rain heavily; the sky, already cloudy, got black as ink; the night fell so dark that you could not see your hand before you.

'We could not stay the night where we were, for we were so close that they would hear our horses' bits. So it was decided to work down into the vlei, creep along close to the other edge of it to the end we first came round, farthest from the King's camp, and there spend the night. This, like all the other moves, was taken after consultation with the officers, several of whom were experienced Kaffir campaigners. It was rough going; we were unable to see our way, now splashing through the little dongas that ran down into the belly of the vlei, now working round them, through bush and soft bottoms. At the far end, in a clump of thick bush, we dismounted, and Wilson sent off Captain Napier, with a man of his called Robinson, and the Victoria scout, Bayne, to go back along the wagon-track to the column, report how things stood, and bring the column on, with the Maxims, as sharp as possible. Wilson told Captain Napier to tell Forbes if the bush bothered the Maxim carriages to abandon them and put the guns on horses, but to bring the Maxims without fail. We all understood—and we thought the message was this—that if we were caught there at dawn without the Maxims we were done for. On the other hand was the chance of capturing the King and ending the campaign at a stroke.

'The spot we had selected to stop in until the arrival of Forbes was a clump of heavy bush not far from the King's spoor—and yet so far from the Kaffir camps that they could not hear us if we kept quiet. We dismounted, and on counting it was found that three of the men were missing. They were Hofmeyer, Bradburn and Colquhoun. Somewhere in winding through the bush from the King's wagons to our present position these men were lost. Not a difficult thing, for we only spoke in whispers, and, save for the occasional click of a horse's hoof, we could pass within ten feet of each other and not be aware of it.

'Wilson came to me and said, "Burnham, can you follow back along the vlei where we've just come?" I doubted it very much as it was black and raining; I had no coat, having been sent after the patrol immediately I came in from firing the King's huts, and although it was December, or midsummer south of the line, the rain chilled my fingers. Wilson said, "Come, I must have those men back." I told him I should need some one to lead my horse so as to feel the tracks made in the ground by our horses. He replied, "I will go with you. I want to see how you American fellows work."

'Wilson was no bad hand at tracking himself, and I was put on my mettle at once. We began, and I was flurried at first, and did not seem to get on to it somehow; but in a few minutes I picked up the spoor and hung to it.

'So we started off together, Wilson and I, in the dark. It was hard work, for one could see nothing; one had to feel for the traces with one's fingers. Creeping along, at last we stood close to the wagons, where the patrol had first retreated into the bush.

'"If we only had the force here now," said Wilson, "we would soon finish."

'But there was still no sign of the three men, so there was nothing for it but to shout. Retreating into the vlei in front of the King's camp, we stood calling and cooeying for them, long and low at first, then louder. Of course there was a great stir along the lines of the native scherms, for they did not know what to make of it. We heard afterwards that the natives were greatly alarmed as the white men seemed to be everywhere at once, and the indunas went about quieting the men, and saying "Do you think the white men

are on you, children? Don't you know a wolf's howl when you hear it?"

'After calling for a bit, we heard an answering call away down the vlei, and the darkness favouring us, the lost men soon came up and we arrived at the clump of bushes where the patrol was stationed. We all lay down in the mud to rest, for we were tired out. It had left off raining, but it was a miserable night, and the hungry horses had been under saddle, some of them twenty hours, and were quite done.

'So we waited for the column.

'During the night we could hear natives moving across into the bush which lay between us and the river. We heard the branches as they pushed through. After a while Wilson asked me if I could go a little way around our position and find out what the Kaffirs were doing. I always think he heard something, but he did not say so. I slipped out and on our right heard the swirl of boughs and the splash of feet. Circling round for a little time I came on more Kaffirs. I got so close to them I could touch them as they passed, but it was impossible to say how many there were, it was so dark. This I reported to Wilson. Raising his head on his hand he asked me a few questions, and made the remark that if the column failed to come up before daylight, "we are in a hard hole," and told me to go out on the King's spoor and watch for Forbes, so that by no possibility should he pass us in the darkness. It was now, I should judge, 1 a.m. on the 4th of December.

'I went, and for a long, long time I heard only the dropping of the rain from the leaves and now and then a dog barking in the scherms, but at last, just as it got grey in the east, I heard a noise, and placing my ear close to the ground,

made it out to be the tramp of horses. I ran back to Wilson and said "The column is here."

'We all led our horses out to the King's spoor. I saw the form of a man tracking. It was Ingram. I gave him a low whistle; he came up, and behind him rode—not the column, not the Maxims, but just twenty men under Captain Borrow. It was a terrible moment—"*If* we were caught there at dawn"—and already it was getting lighter every minute.

'One of us asked "Where is the column?" to which the reply was, "You see all there are of us." We answered, "Then you are only so many more men to die."

'Wilson went aside with Borrow, and there was earnest talk for a few moments. Presently all the officers' horses' heads were together; and Captain Judd said in my hearing, "Well, this is the end." And Kurten said quite quietly, "We shall never get out of this."

'Then Wilson put it to the officers whether we should try and break through the impis which were now forming up between us and the river, or whether we would go for the King and sell our lives in trying to get hold of him. The final decision was for this latter.

'So we set off and walked along the vlei back to the King's wagons. It was quite light now and they saw us from the scherms all the way, but they just looked at us and we at them, and so we went along. We walked because the horses hadn't a canter in them, and there was no hurry anyway.

'At the wagons we halted and shouted out again about not wanting to kill anyone. There was a pause, and then came shouts and a volley. Afterwards it was said that somebody answered, "If you don't want to kill, we do." My horse

jumped away to the right at the volley, and took me almost into the arms of some natives who came running from that side. A big induna blazed at me, missed me, and then fumbled at his belt for another cartridge. It was not a proper bandolier he had on, and I saw him trying to pluck out the cartridge instead of easing it up from below with his finger. As I got my horse steady and threw my rifle down to cover him, he suddenly let the cartridge be and lifted an assegai. Waiting to make sure of my aim, just as his arm was poised I fired and hit him in the chest; he dropped. All happened in a moment. Then we retreated. Seeing two horses down, Wilson shouted to somebody to cut off the saddle pockets which carried extra ammunition. Ingram picked up one of the dismounted men behind him, Captain Fitzgerald the other. The most ammunition anyone had, by the way, was a hundred and ten rounds. There was some very stiff fighting for a few minutes, the natives having the best of the position; indeed they might have wiped us out but for their stupid habit of firing on the run, as they charged. Wilson ordered us to retire down the vlei; some hundred yards further on we came to an ant-heap and took our second position on that, and held it for some time. Wilson jumped on the top of the ant-heap and shouted —"Every man pick his nigger." There was no random firing, I would be covering a man when he dropped to somebody's rifle, and I had to choose another.