Gold Hunting in Africa.

A Personal Experience—With Observations on the Character and Customs of the Dusky Combatants in the Present Revolution, and on the Country in General.

Written for the Deseret News.

The uprising of the Matabele nation, that through the pale we are informed is taking place, is without doubt the initial move for the struggle that was bound to come between the British South Africa company and King Lo Bengula.

This inevitable outbreak the Chartered Co. have long feared, although their reports to the outside world have been such as to lead people to think they were on terms of the closest friendship with the Matabele, and that nothing could arise to rupture these feelings. The fact are, ever since the Chartered Co. discovered that Mashaland was planted out of the gold it was supposed to contain, and that Matabeleland to the westward was a virgin country, rich in both gold and silver, these strained relations have come about and war between the whites and the savages has been been brewing for twenty years past. The British South Africa company's expenses in opening up Mashonaland have been tremendous and the returns nil, for this country is heavy timbered with the old savages of people who dig for the yellow metal age ago, and they are well aware that there is not enough gold in the whole of Mashonaland to repay a single individual for his labor, much less a concern like the Chartered company.

Over in Matabeleland, however, the pick of the gold digger has never entered the ground for the reason that Lo Bengula allowed no white man to prospect in his territory, the punishment for the transgression of this law being death. The British South Africa Co. have tried many ways to get a concession from the Matabele king to work this country, but all efforts in this direction have proved futile. Presents innumerable, both rich and costly, have been made this savage monarch in order to get him to yield permission for the whites to enter, but to all appeals he has remained firm and refused to listen to any petition that had for its object the working of Matabeleland. Now that the company finds it impossible to get anything from him by entreaty or persuasion, they are going to do what has been done over and over again in Africa—make war on the savages, and by their superior strength and mode of fighting force them to yield.

The concession which was obtained from Lo Bengula in 1889 by the Chartered company specified the region from between the Limpopo and Zambesi rivers, having for its eastern boundary Manica land and the east coast Portuguese possessions, and for its western, Matabeleland. This territory was and is known as Mashonaland, and at the time of occupation by the British South Africa company it was widely advertised as a country only waiting for the prospector and gold seeker to make known to the world what wealth it contained. Prospectors all points where Lo was this new gold field, expecting to enrich themselves on their way and every journey through African swamps and forests, suffering untold of hardships and braving dangers innumerable.

Among these misguided gold-seekers were the writer, who was employed with a party of four left Johannesburg (in the Transvaal) in the early part of 1890 to seek our fortunes in Mashonaland. Our equipment for the journey, over 1000 miles, consisted of four oxen, provisions, rifle, mining tools, ammunition, etc.

At Pietersburg, 100 miles to the north of Johannesburg, two of our party had got enough of the novelty of the country and turned back, which left myself and partner (Mr. Clark) to the trail and determined on going into the country to prove the truth of the Chartered Co.'s reports.

From here northwards our troubles began. Water was scarce and we had to travel long distances to obtain it, a distance being sixty miles before striking it. One hundred and ninety miles from Pietersburg we crossed the Limpopo river, the southern boundary of Mashonaland, and were now within the Chartered Co.'s territories. At Fort Tuli, the first settlement, thirty miles north of the Limpopo, we took out our licenses entitling us to prospect all over Mashonaland. For this privilege we paid—one shilling or twenty-five cents each. We were told by reliable information regarding the nature of the kind of country we would have to travel through before reaching the reported fabulous gold from the we people resident here. Most of them were new-comers just from England, and they were family employed building huts of poles and clay with grass roofs, which they termed hotels and stores. They were all sanguine of a short time that could see through Tuli, and were computing their grass hotels and business stocks just as fast as possible in order to be able to give the traveler accommodation on a clay floor at twenty-five ($2.50) a night, or sell him a can of American refined beer at twelve shillings.

There were about 50 company police stationed here on the sand hard overlooking the Shashi river, called a fort. A mining commissioner and police magistrate, with the worldly merchants, comprised the inhabitants of this place.

After a day or two's delay here we again struck out northward through a heavily timbered country, to Fort Victoria. We were now in the country of the Makalaka, a tribe living five in constant fear of the powerful Matabele. They are agriculturists and raise very fine crops as well as sheep, cattle and goats. Their huts or kraals as they are called, are built on high inaccessible rocky hills and a stockade which is constructed on these heights, that their foes, the Matabele, do not take them unawares. As soon as the report of the Dule-Matabele war reached the Makalaka country, the inhabitants with the cattle from one to another in relay to the hillsides and preserve it, while the women and children carry the grain and other provisions. Cattle, sheep and goats are not things one can take along on the rocks to the roof of the top from where, since the last Zulu war, many women and children jumped.

The Matabele make periodical raids on them, taking off all their cattle, goats, etc., and carrying off the women and girls, killing off the men and mutilating the village and finally setting fire to it and laying waste the whole country round about.

Our buying and trading with the tribe was done principally with salt. They have none of this article in their territory and have only a poor substitute for it in the form of a root with a slightly salty taste. They will trade off almost anything they can to get the genuine article. For as much as would fill a wine glass I have obtained in trade articles and vegetable enough to last me for three or four days. Empty cartridge cases are also in great favor with them for ornaments. Of the cartridgs shot we gave away to the natives we found the shell is the most valued of all other tribes we came in contact with, and he shot, bullet and wad were thrown away by them as useless. Dogs, cats, fowls, ducks, goats and donkeys are also in great demand in this country in payment for the trouble of the Chartered Co.'s reports.

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