

TRADE  
HORN



# TRADER HORN

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*Being the Life and Works of*  
ALFRED ALOYSIUS HORN:

*the works written by himself at the age  
of seventy-three and the life, with  
such of his philosophy as is the  
gift of age & experience  
taken down here and  
edited by*

ETHELREDA LEWIS

*With a Foreword by* JOHN GALSWORTHY

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SIMON AND SCHUSTER  
NEW YORK MCMXXVII

To  
A. A. H.

*Forgive me, old friend and fellow craftsman, if our book is in many respects different from what you had expected it would be. Fine and simple as is your own narrative, it yet cannot paint your own portrait in such detail as your conversations. I have, therefore, reproduced these as accurately as lay in my power to do, believing that the Unknown Reader (that shadowy figure beckoning in the background of all our literary work together in the last six months) would wish to see you clearly, not only as the boy-pioneer in West Africa, but as the embodiment of that man, attractive to all humanity, who  
"in his time plays many parts."*

## FOREWORD

BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

THIS is a gorgeous book, more full of sheer stingo than any you are likely to come across in a day's march among the bookshops of wherever you may be. These untutored memories of youth adventuring long ago in a wild place, recorded with an untutored pen in a Johannesburg doss-house, are like the gold ore of that "so-called golden City," as Alfred Aloysius "Horn" would call it, except indeed that the proportion of gold in them is so very much greater. Nothing more racy and full of original wisdom than the conversations at the end of each chapter has come my way for an age. The spelling of this "Old Visiter"—who surely in his time has been a most notable adventurer in the raw world—is best described as lordly, and the mixture of jejune phrasing with sayings incomparably pithy makes for a dish that will rickle the appetite of the most jaded.

Let me serve up a few *hors d'oeuvres*:

"That elephant hunt makes a pretty splash of activity."

"What is poetry but the leavings of superstition."

"The Quakers, Ma'am, I've always held to be above par."

"A few schooner-rigged females—"

"The Americans—a moral people except when it comes to murder and so on."

"Big-game hunters—an equatorial gang of cut-throats, wasting wild life to make what they call a bag."

"Like a lad in a toy-shop—Rhodes."



"But the correctful thing in all literary books is to remember that even the truth may need suppressing if it appears out of tangent with the common man's notion of reality."

Don't we novelists know how true *that* is! Put a bit of life, just as it was, into a novel, and at once people will write to tell one that it's the only impossible incident.

"There's no softness about Nature. When you're driven from the herd, it's for good. I've seen a beaten old Chief weep like a child. No wounds, mind you. But his heart broken. Aye, he knows there's no redress in a state of Nature. No newspaper talk to prop him up again. None of this so-called diplomacy. He sees *Finis* written all over the sunlight—same as an old elephant."

But of *hors d'oeuvres* one so easily eats too much. Suffice it to say, then, that the pudding is stuffed with spice.

Mrs. Ethelreda Lewis, the South African novelist, to whose credit stands the discovery of this gold mine, has explained, in her remarkable introduction, how it came about, and the layout of what is apparently only the first volume of Alfred Aloysius "Horn's" reminiscences. With real inspiration she has adopted the only method which could have displayed the full value and flavour of this "Old Visiter's" personality, philosophy, and prejudices.

I never prophesy, but I would wager that this book will be read by countless readers with gusto as great as I felt myself.

And to those who, in these days of fakes, might be doubtful whether it's not all too good to be true, let me say that in February, 1927, I had the pleasure of meeting the "Old Visiter" and his editress, in Johannesburg; and that he is in very truth the "character" herein disclosed.

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS is a true story of a real man. So real that I have thought it necessary to alter names here and there, including his own surname. The Christian names I have kept, being loth to part with them: the first so redolent of the pre-Norman days from which his spirit seems not yet to have emerged, and the second mounting guard, so to speak, over old half-buried instincts of the Catholic, and ready to see him safely through the door of Heaven when the more barbarous Alfred fails to impress Saint Peter.

In his own words:—"Aloysius? 'Tis a saint's name. It's our custom to give a lad two names. One to make his way through life with and the other to be bugled out when he knocks at Heaven's gate. That'll be the end of my travels. Unless there's room for roamers there too. One can always hope there's some forethought for human nature, be it Heaven or Hell. A feller that's been a prospector, always with his eye somewhere else than what he's standing on, won't be too agreeably placed on those golden floors they speak of."

When Aloysius Horn first swam into my ken I was about to settle down to a morning's work on the stoep. With notebook and pencil, it being then ten o'clock of a bright Tuesday, and peace in the air, I approached the doorstep full of the possibilities of Chapter Fourteen, which, before breakfast, had loomed very clearly.

On the mat stood an old man whose footsteps, coming

up the eight steps from the garden, I had not heard. He was simply there.

He held a cluster of wire kitchen goods in his hand, neatly made and shining coppery in the sun: gridirons, toast-forks and the like.

Regarding me with a mild, but, as I now know, an all-seeing eye which dwelt on my possibilities, he began the business of selling to a person not wanting to buy.

The battle was short. I pleaded a kitchen replete with toast-fork and gridiron. I said I was very busy. I maintained that it was my principle never to buy on the stoep, which was my only study.

With an abstracted eye on my notebooks he said mildly that it was a good habit and that he could well understand it. To show that his words were no idle boast he shouldered his bundle of goods and turned to the steps with a cheerful "good morning."

But of course the battle went to him. Flinging victory away, as England nearly always does when it is hers, I raised my voice to stop him.

"I believe I *could* do with a new gridiron."

There was something I could not bear in seeing that ready acquiescence with failure. What a reward, I thought, for a man too courteous to argue. Too English to bargain, bully and browbeat; to wheedle, whine or weep.

I suppose he knew this was coming. As if it had been his cue in a play and he had retired to the wings for a moment, he turned back and off-loaded the wire goods at my feet.

"Why, certainly, Ma'am. It is natural to all to experience a change of mind. Over little things as over great.



And both you and I are no more than children of nature."

That mild voice, rising, as I now know, from a past as infinitely full of repose, of restlessness, of action, of hidden hoards—spectres of bones and wreckage—from the Past as the sea itself: as full, if so I may put it, of the quality of timelessness, that quality which keeps every roamer, from Ulysses to Columbus, and from Columbus to—to Aloysius Horn, awash between year and year as if the shores of Time were forever theirs. Cradled like gulls, safe on the fiercest sea. Leaving all to the current and to the battering winds which are the breath of life to such as they.

Even after taking the gridiron I again nearly let him go. My head was full of Chapter Fourteen. My notebooks and pencil felt full of life, leaping, as they say, like the child unborn.

But it was not for Chapter Fourteen they leapt and smote. I see now that they were trying to attract my attention to greater opportunities.

We had said our mutual thanks and adieux. The old man's steps were again turned to the road when he paused and said: "I could tell you how to make oatcakes if you'd like me to, Ma'am. You'd find it useful for that thing you've bought."

It was at that moment I said to myself: "This man is an artist. Having successfully sold a thing, he is not basely content with the money. It is necessary to him to put a sort of bloom and finish on the transaction which will lift it from commerce into art. From barter to friendliness."

I listened to the only way of making oatcake, told with such zest and love that I said: "You must be Scotch."

"Born thirteen miles out of Glasgow, Ma'am. I should say you were perhaps Scotch yourself? You are fair."

"English," I said, briefly.

"Oh." The old visiter eyed me closely. "In that case—" There was a pause.

"When I say I was born in Scotland, Ma'am, it's not to say I'm a Scotchman myself.\* They're a poor lot, taken all in all. Lancashire's always been good enough for one of the old Fist-and-Spear. My name's Horn. Aloysius Horn of the Fist-and-Spear."

I bowed and told him mine.

He sighed, as if this exchange of decent civilities had set something moving in his brain. His eyes, those far-seeing, expectant eyes of age, gazed through me mildly. Washed free of definite colour, as is the way with the old, they were still large and clear. Contemplative eyes, set in large sockets. Calmly observant, they yet seemed fixed on the invisible.

"Aye. The old Fist-and-Spear. Ma'am, I could tell you—I've seen—"

He came nearer, his outstretched hand all but touching my shoulder, his face gone under some influence of which I had not yet the secret. I know now that it was the rising pressure of a soul making its last effort to express itself

\* In that delightful book *Cambridge Cameos* the Master of Christ's reminds us that Charles Kingsley was born in Scotland, Devonshire or the West Indies according to the audience he was addressing. The same diplomatic instinct will surely, then, be forgiven in an old, friendless man, intent on the serious business of "seizing food" as he puts it, in a town hard as gold. We are further told by Sir Arthur Shipley that in a biography of Mr. Gladstone the reader is assured that the great man "was born more or less in Scotland." So Aloysius Horn, also a Lancashire man from the day of his birth near Preston, lied in distinguished company.

before the walls of age and senility closed in, to leave its shape and texture in a vanishing world.

He came closer as he spoke, looking as Columbus might have looked as he begged from door to door with his head full of the spaces of land and sea. The waxen skin and high, wide skull stretched over with parchment and a few gray hairs; the white beard, longish, narrow and pointed; visionary eyes that had seen a world and seen it whole—an imperishable picture.

I stood still as the Wedding Guest; or as when a bird comes nearer than usual—say a heron, as you stand on the banks of a stream.

“Africa, Ma’am. Africa—as Nature meant her to be, the home of the black man and the quiet elephant. Never a sound, Ma’am, in a great landscape at noon—only the swish of elephants in grass. Lying still there in the water, too,—and me the first white man (nay, I was a lad) to pry upon their happiness.

“Bound by the rites of Egbo, Ma’am, to be blood brother of cannibals. Look at my thumb, cut when I was eighteen in a fight with a savage and never grew again. Me? I’ve seen the skulls in the Josh House. Blood brother to the priests, where no white man had ever been until I came . . . But I was only a lad.

“And I knew Nina T——, the cruellest woman in West Africa. . . . So they say. So they say. But her hair was dark auburn. . . .

“Goddess she was, in the Josh House there. . . .

“Why, I was only a lad when I took that other poor lady’s body down the river to try and get safe burial for it at Kangwe. Well of course they’d never seen a white

woman before, up at Samba Falls. Very natural they should need such a unique body for *muti*. What won't any of us do for magic? We call it luck now and that's the only difference. A hundred miles I took her, and no mishap from the arrows.

"A lad of eighteen has a natural reserve of chivalry. Aye, it grows like a flower in him then——"

His voice slowed off, as if he stopped to look at something in his mind more intently. Something that was incredibly far away.

"Why, Ma'am, you may not believe it but I can talk French:—Oui, Monsieur, je baragouine ce jargon-la toujours assez bien pour me tirer d'affaires dans le commerce."

He spoke like a parrot, as if he had been using the same phrase on many doorsteps.

"French, Ma'am. A language for the meagre-hearted. If God ever made a worse colonist than the French He hasn't let me know about it. It takes more than a little straw hat and a cigarette and a thimbleful of absinthe all set out in a neat little office to open out Africa. . . .

"Aye, when a young lad first hears the dawn-cry of the gorilla and covers his ears . . . And when he sees slaves—women—

"Seventeen I must have been. Or was it sixteen—I can't remember clear.

"But I must not keep you from your work, Ma'am. I'll be getting along. Good day to you."

I came to from my swoon and hastily rang the front door bell, which was somewhere near my right ear.

When Ruth appeared, my coloured housekeeper and

friend, I whispered "Tea, p.  
and don't pour it out. This gen  
it out himself. Bread-and-butte.

The old visiter was faltering fo  
the steps, the vision all washed out  
I said to him "Won't you stay and h  
said, "Why, it sure would be very pleas  
down on the steps with a vast sigh of plea

No, of reprieve.

Or was it the sigh of the artist at the  
achievement.

I sat down beside him and said "Mr. Horn  
address, please. And can you make it convenient to co  
here and talk next week?"

The compact was made that, once a week, instead of  
trailing round with wire goods to the doors of vulnerable  
housewives whose husbands were away in town, Aloysius  
Horn should come and talk for an hour or two, earning  
a little more than could be made from a day's sales.

All this six months ago. The result of our talks is in  
this book and in others to come.

Just as he rose to go my eye fell on the shining gridiron  
and a sudden thought struck me. More than a thought,  
a suspicion.

"Mr. Horn," I said, "you have told me how to make  
oatcakes, but no one could make them on an open grid  
like this."

"Why, no, Ma'am, I admit the truth of that. 'Twould  
be against the law of gravitation if you took it literally."  
He spoke soothingly. "But thinking you might be from



ought it would please. I have  
 e amount of knowledgable stuff  
 if you'll give me the loan of a  
 a's portrait for you."

notebook for a moment.

Ma'am. That's a bit of wisdom saved  
 stomach now and again when Botha was  
 omuts was never the rage in South Africa  
 . A feller'd never touch the heart as Botha  
 se me if I keep the pencil a moment longer.  
 you a pipe made from the beak of an albatross.  
 go at one time they were amongst us sailors. No  
 ciful lad'd go ashore without one."

"But I thought you didn't kill the albatross if you  
 wanted luck?"

"Only on the homeward voyage, that is. When I was  
 a lad any sailor would kill one on the voyage out. But  
 not me. I was always one for the preservation of Nature  
 when humanly possible. And believe me, Ma'am, when  
 a lad that's seen nothing bigger than the gulls and herons  
 o' Lancashire first beholds that great white apparition  
 of beauty men call Albatross sailing the southern elements  
 he'll not be the one to drain it of breath. Six feet o'  
 wafting snow—"

He began the descent of the steps.

"Good day to you, Ma'am. I must not outstay my  
 welcome. I often suspect I'm getting somewhat childish.  
 What with one thing and another."

He paused half-way down.

"I often think it was a happy fad o' Nature to throw  
 a bright light on boyhood's days as you're getting old.

Aye, she jumbles up the perspective a bit when you're over seventy and seen what I've seen. But it's all for the good of man. When you're in a lodging house at a shilling a day in the Golden City and find your own food, it's good to have your surroundings dimmed a bit or you might feel disposed to give way to complaint, which I should be sorry to do. 'Tis no gentleman's way to give way to anything but philosophy."

We had now reached the gate. He closed it carefully after him, raised his hat which, old and crusted, yet had a certain air of dog about it, and crept uprightly away, eyes on the ground, with the smooth and careful gait of some old men.

I returned to my table and wrote the notes now used here.

For the first two or three weeks this old visiter fluttered round in a circle of subjects like one, as he himself said, somewhat childish. He repeated himself over and over, as the aged will, forgetting what he had told me.

"Egbo, Ma'am? I've been blood brother to the cannibals. No need to say been. I still am. Nothing destroys the bond but death. Cannibals . . . The most moral race on earth. The women chaste and the men faithful. Aye, I've lived amongst 'em like a brother, a young lad clean and safe. Safer than what he'd 'a been in London and other centres given over to civilization. Victoria Street, Westminster and so on. If you doubt what I say, look at this thumb. An inch shorter than the other. Never grew, after the fight I had on the Ogowe River. . . .

"Why, I can speak French, if you'll believe me

Ma'am:—Oui, Monsieur, je baragouine ce jargon-la toujours assez bien pour me tirer d'affaires dans le commerce."

"A poor lot, the French. Dogs in the manger. Snap up a bit o' good land half the size o' Europe and stand yapping over it for their taxes and duties. So taken up with yapping they forget to develop it.

"Did I tell you I'd heard the gorilla first when I was a lad of seventeen? Or was it eighteen . . . He's mad, they say. The natives'll always tell you he's mad. Something shaped in his brain that's similar to the mistakes in the brain of a madman. Nature's always got a hankering after experiments.

"Ma'am, did I mention to you that I've seen a white woman goddess of Isorga? Nina T—— her name. But best not mention that name. I've no wish to betray the tragedies of a noble English family. A handsome girl. Auburn . . . her hair was. Dark auburn. Seventeen I was. Or was it eighteen. . . ."

It was not until the third or fourth visit that the idea came to me how much less wasteful of time it would be for the old man to write his adventures in his own way and for me to devote two hours or so of his weekly visit in making notes, not of his adventures so much as of his outlook on life, and all sorts of experiences which would never come into any written account of his doings on the West Coast: and to use such notes as a sort of chorus between his chapters, somewhat after the manner of Mrs. Markham's History.

The plan worked well. All unconsciously I hit upon the key to unlock an extraordinary memory which the struggle for life, as age advanced, had almost closed up

forever. How nearly lost it was will be gauged by the fact than even at the fourth and fifth meeting he began our talk by reminding me—as if I had never heard of them on the previous occasions—of the four or five things branded on his brain as a youth: Egbo, Nina T——, the wicked French, gorillas, his shortened thumb, he still wove into a vivid monologue, varying the order in which they came into his mind and seeing more and more of the detail of the past as he dwelt upon it.

Sometimes a look came in his eyes as if he had met, in his memory, some old face or scene he had never thought to see again. For instance, it was not till the third visit that he remembered Du Chaillu's musical box and compass. He had begun with Nina T——: "Aye, she gave me the warning that I was to be attacked. She stood on the bank and I was in the old *Pioneer*. Livingstone's boat that had been. At the engine I was standing and my men all in proper formation along the bank in their canoes. She stood there and called me to come ashore. 'It's not safe for you,' she said. Aye, she remembered a little English. A strange look she gave me. Eighteen I was. Perhaps seventeen . . . Did you know I can speak French, Ma'am? Oui, Monsieur . . . 'cré nom de Dieu, puis que je vous dis qu'il n'y a rien à déclarer!

"Aye, but the rite of Egbo's a safer accomplishment than French when you're hunting ivory. French is a language writ in water on the earth's surface. Water and scent. And if the English in pursuit of top-dog happen to have left a little bloody writing here and there, there's no man that is a man but'll agree 'tis a better medium to