

THE "MAY PARTY" IN ABERCORN.

Before the outbreak of the 1914 War, which was to swirl across so many of the farms on our northern border, a tradition had already been established among the young, pioneering farmers of Abercorn—and that was the "May Party". Mr. Gordon H. Lobb, a well-known Abercorn farmer of those distant days and who now lives in Broken Hill, has described the last one held before the war stopped them for ever. Even in those days the sense of permanency among the settlers of a young country pervaded their outlook. As Mr. Lobb says of 1914—"There had always been a party in Abercorn every May."

He goes on: " We little thought that the party given by the C. W. Blyths and ourselves on my farm ' Mula ' in the Saisi Valley in May, 1914, was to be the last of its kind. There had always been a party in Abercorn every May. It had always been given by the Provincial Commissioner before. *Tambalika* Marshall and Mrs. Marshall asked everybody in the district on these occasions. It lasted three to five days, and was the great social event of the year. The first one I ever attended was in 1906. We used to have a shoot on the range at 200, 300 and 500 yards against Fort Jameson, each on our own range. It was great fun waiting for the other score to come in by wire to see who had won. I had had a slight go of fever just before May, 1914, and did not go down to the range with the others. On the way down I met an ostrich. I had never met one before, and had been told they could rip you open with their spurs, so I ran like the deuce and, looking over my shoulder, ran into a tree and fell to the ground. The bird stood and looked at me with a peculiar expression on its face, and I stayed down until I was rescued by a boy who knew the bird. I did not know till afterwards that it was a tame one belonging to *Tambalika*. I might have been even more frightened if I had known that ostriches do not inhabit the Northern Province.



The May Party

1890-1891, 1895

Standing (*left to right*): Messrs. Woods, Scott-Brown, Sealey, Miss Brunton, Mrs. Draper, Mrs. Gouldsbury, Mrs. Munro, Mr. Lobb, Mrs. Blyth.

Sitting (*left to right*): Lionel Smith, C. Gouldsbury, Gordon Lobb, Messrs. Morton, Charlie Blyth, Baird, Draper, Deacon.

the Blyths that we might give the party that year for a change, and give the Roma a rest. This was arranged. Of course, everybody wanted to ride, but as we had not enough horses to go round we did the best we could to let as many as we could ride. I let Woods, the Vet., as topweight, ride my best horse, Lumsden, who was full of tricks, and knew all about things. He said he could make the weight and trained on Epsom salts. He did this so well that on the day of the race he had to dash with the horse behind an anthill, at the side of the course, and had to stay there until he felt like coming home. This cost me quite a bit, as I fancied Lumsden a lot. Always wanted to ride him myself as I knew his moods so well. I forget now the different winners of the races. Woods made up for it by winning the golf. I don't remember about the tennis either. We had four to five days of party altogether. People brought their own tents and camped round the house. None of the missionaries accepted our invitation as I suppose horse racing was not in their line. We managed to get some quite good beer over from Kasanga, in German East Africa, from the Indians. Beer was more or less unheard of in those days, but one could get plenty of whisky from Broken Hill at £5 a case (good days those). We played golf and tennis in the afternoons. Racing took place in the mornings. To get the right weights, my wife made weight-cloths which we filled up with cartridges. We had a large spring balance with a very big tray to sit on, all

very professional. We had jackets and caps of our chosen colours. Boots, mostly mine, I lent to the others. Woods borrowed an old pair, but could not get out of them so had to have them cut off and I was glad they were my worst ones. We ended up the last night with a fancy dress dinner. The beer just lasted out. So ended a good party.

" The Germans burnt my place down in the war. All my good furniture, made by Bernard Turner and Freshwater of the London Missionary Society, of local wood which one does not get these days, went up in flames. Thinking that ' Mula ' was our home for our lifetime, I had spent a lot of money on it.

" During this last party the following people were there. They could not all stay there all the time so the Boma people took it in turns to come: C. P. Chesnaye, C. P. Oldfield, Mr. and Mrs. Draper and son Dick, Mr. and Mrs. Gouldsbury and son Guy, also Miss Brunton, Mrs. Gouldsbury's companion, Woods, the Vet., John F. Sealy, Lionel Smith of Mpanga, Gerald Morton of Chereshia, who afterwards joined the Boma, Beard of the African Lakes Companies, John Deacon, a trader, Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Blyth and daughter and son, ' Scot ' Brown, a cinematograph operator to the Lelsea Expedition, and myself, wife and two daughters.

" The day war broke out our boys told us that ' Scot ' Brown and two other white men had been interned at Tabora. This turned out to be true. The natives must have got the news by bush telegraph (drums). ' Scot ' Brown's collection of photographs were taken from him so we never saw the photos of the races taken by him, or of some taken of me driving my tandem in a dog cart that I had bought at Fife Boma from the Government.

" The traditional ' May Party ' was not renewed after the war. Abercorn took a long time to recover."