

THE  
WIDE WORLD  
MAGAZINE

AN ILLUSTRATED  
MONTHLY  
OF  
TRUE NARRATIVE

ADVENTURE  
TRAVEL  
CUSTOMS  
AND  
SPORT

VOL. I.



“TRUTH IS  
STRANGER  
THAN  
FICTION”



*(The following passages are excerpted from the original publications of De Rougemont's tale in The Wide World Magazine).*

Whilst the Malays were at work one of the men saw a mysterious looking black object in the sea, which so attracted his curiosity that he dived overboard to find out what it was. He had barely reached the water, however, when an immense octopus rose into view, and at once made for the terrified man, who instantly saw his danger and with great presence of mind promptly turned and scrambled back into the boat. The terrible creature was after him, however, and to the horror of the onlookers it extended its great flexible tentacles, enveloped the entire boat, man and all, and then dragged the whole down into the clear depths. The diver's horrified comrades rushed to his assistance, and an attempt was made to kill the octopus with a harpoon, but without success.

I also played the part of Neptune in the very extraordinary way I have already indicated. I used to wade out to where the turtles were, and on catching a big six-hundred-pounder, I would calmly sit astride on his back. Away would swim the startled creature, mostly a foot or so below the surface. When he dived deeper, I simply sat far back on the shell, and then he was forced to come up. I steered my queer steeds in a curious way. When I wanted the turtle to turn to the left, I simply thrust my foot into his right eye, and vice versa for the contrary direction. My two big toes placed simultaneously over both his optics caused a halt so abrupt as to almost unseat me. Sometimes I would go fully a mile out to see on these strange steeds.

Just before the battle commenced I had a real inspiration which practically decided the affair without any fighting at all. It occurred to me that if I mounted myself on stilts, some eighteen inches high, and shot an arrow or two from my bow, the enemy would turn tail and bolt. When the first spear was about to be thrown, I dashed to the front with my stilts. Several spears were launched at me, but my shield-bearers turned them on one side. I then shot a half-a-dozen arrows into my enemy's ranks in almost as many seconds. The consternation produced by the flight of "invisible spears" was perfectly indescribable. With a series of appalling yells the enemy turned and fled pell-mell.

**“For myself, however, I believe now, and have believed from the first, that every single incident in the narrative is actual fact.”**

**- William G. Fitzgerald, editor of *The Wide World Magazine***

When readers of London’s *Wide World Magazine* took in the cover story of the publication’s inaugural issue in 1899, they were greeted with the first installation in serialized tale of shipwreck, survival, exploration and adaptation in the wild. Louis De Rougemont’s account – which would spread out over multiple volumes of the magazine and later be published in a 692-page book – might seem somewhat sensational to our modern

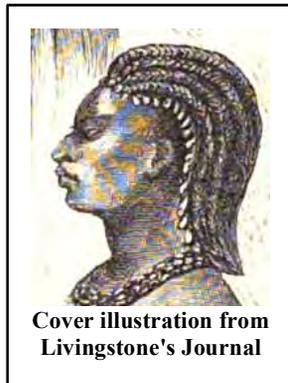
**BRITISH WRECKES REPORTED IN OCTOBER.—The number and tonnage of British vessels respecting whose loss reports were received at the Board of Trade during the month of October, and the number of lives lost, are as follows:—Sailing.—Number, 50; tonnage, 6,151; lives lost, 41. Steam.—Number, 21; tonnage, 22,190; lives lost, 68. Total.—Number, 71; tonnage, 28,341; lives lost, 109. These figures are a record of “reports received” in the month, and not of wrecks which occurred during the month. Many of the reports received in October relate to casualties which occurred in previous months. Casualties not resulting in total loss of vessels, and the lives lost by such casualties, are not included.**

Shipwrecks Report, *Times of London*, 1899

skepticism, digitally enhanced photos, and unsubstantiated rumors, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in many ways a true age of wonder, one where factual accounts of exploration, peril and perseverance in the wild were staples of popular culture. *The Times of London* featured monthly updates on shipwrecks, and the accounts of countless famous explorers filled the pages of periodicals and the shelves of Victorian bookstores.

From 1849 to 1873, famed explorer David Livingstone had explored the African interior, becoming the first European to cross the continent. Livingstone’s explorations were so extensive that at one point he was deemed “lost,” and a second adventurer, Henry Stanley was sent off to find him. The entire episode became a publishing sensation, thanks in no small part to the *New York Herald* and *London Daily Mail*, sponsors of Stanley’s mission. Further books published by both men

sensibilities, but a reader at the turn of the century would have been more than familiar with such accounts of seafaring calamity and uncharted far-off lands. Unlike our internet-drenched age of relentless



throughout the remainder of the century fed the public’s appetite for exploration, adventure, and unabashed colonialism pursued under the “noble” ambitions of science and missionary work. Africa was not the only wild place to be conquered, of course. The 1889 book *Australia Twice Traversed* documented the staggering exploits of explorer Ernest Giles, whose 2500-mile round trip from Port Augusta to Perth became a legendary feat of endurance.

Having an adventure was only half of the equation, however. Telling a good story about it was the other half. One needed to be able to capture the public’s imagination with a vivid, gripping tale about those adventures, complete with descriptions of wild, barren landscapes, ingenious survival tactics, and of course, violent encounters with various native peoples. This was, after all, an era where *Robinson Crusoe* still hung heavy in the cultural consciousness and the recent hit *Moby Dick*



Illustration from Giles’s *Australia Twice Traversed*

had quickly become one of the quintessential imaginings of the wild and terrifying world beyond safely inhabited shores. Stanley’s “search” for Livingstone was reported with breathless blow-by-blow details, while Giles’s

book of his Australian exploits – subtitled “The Romance of Exploration” – was filled with vivid illustrations, intricate descriptions of exotic wildlife, and terrifying near-death experiences.

It was into this excitable, curious, wide-eyed world that Louis De Rougemont’s epic account launched *The Wide World* magazine, whose tales of adventure would keep it in business until 1965. See the reverse side of this insert for excerpts from De Rougemont’s story as it appeared in the magazine, and be sure to check out the lobby display after the show for some important information regarding the tale as it played out in the British presses. – Tyler Smith, Dramaturg