

IN A TIGER'S LAIR.

A Terrible Adventure in an Indian Jungle.



WAS stationed in lower Burma for several years succeeding the second Burmese war and had abundant leisure to indulge my taste for hunting, for all kinds of game, from jungle fowl to elephants, abounded. During the dry season of 1872 I was spending a few weeks at the little town of Amherst, on the coast of the gulf of Martaban, at the mouth of the Salween river. A man-eating tiger had taken up his abode in the vicinity of the village, and so bold and fatal had his depredations become that a perfect panic reigned among the superstitious natives, who declared that no mere tiger could be so cunning in escaping all traps and so fiendish in his bloody deeds, and that it was a demon in the form of a tiger that was preying upon them. My friend, Lieut. Harbush, of the Grenadiers, joined me at the end of my first week in the place, and, as he was fully as enthusiastic a sportsman as myself, we were not long in planning a campaign for ridding the village of their terrible enemy. We first sent for the head man of the village and directed him to have proclamation made by means of the town crier that we proposed to kill the man-eater and would pay double wages for a few first-class hunters to assist us. By sunset we had by dint of persuasion, extra wages and the natural desire for vengeance among those who had suffered in their own families from the ravages of the beast got together about a score of men much above the average of Burmese hunters, and armed with everything from a dull hog spear to an antiquated army musket.

The sun was less than an hour above the horizon the next morning when we passed beyond the boundaries of the village and entered the narrow paths which penetrated the dense jungle. We divided our force into groups of two or three individuals, giving orders to spread our lines at first, and gradually converge toward a prominent hill, some miles distant, near which the tiger was supposed to have his lair. If the beast was started the word was to be passed along the line as quickly as possible, and all were to close toward the indicated point with all speed. We had been slowly advancing for over an hour, and the heat was becoming uncomfortable as the sun rose higher, when far away to the left we heard two or three musket shots, followed by loud shouts, which quickly passed from group to group along the scattered line, until we knew that the tiger had been started and brought to bay.

As fast as the nature of the jungle would permit we made our way to the spot, guided by the incessant clamor of our men, which grew louder and louder as the successive groups came in and added their voices to the chorus. We found our men gathered around a patch of dense thorny jungle, which occupied the center of a broad grassy opening in the forest. This dense growth was probably an acre in extent, and so closely were its thorny bamboos leaved and interlaced together by rattan vines, and creepers of every sort, that it really looked as if anything larger than a bird would have difficulty in making its way through the matted mass. Here and there were low tunnel-like paths, formed by the game, and in one of these the enormous tracks of the tiger could be plainly seen, freshly marked in the moist earth. Several of our men



I RECEIVED A CRUSHING BLOW ON THE SHOULDER.

had plainly seen the great cat as he dashed into the cover, and there could be no mistake that we had the right tiger covered, for he bore certain marks which, as well as his unusual size, identified him beyond question. We consulted for a few minutes as to the best method of proceeding, and as Harbush and several natives advised setting fire to the copse, we made a trial of that plan, all hands standing with our weapons ready for instant use, expecting the quarry to be driven from his lair by the flames and smoke. But the foliage was too green, and our fire quickly died away without effecting our purpose, and all the natives but one strongly urged us to abandon the chase for the day, hoping for better luck next time. That one man, a tall, stalwart fellow called Shwayo, was a noted hunter of the region, and, moreover, was smarting under the loss of a near relative who had been dragged to a bloody death by this very tiger, and he proposed a plan which, by its very audacity, at once captivated Harbush and myself.

"His idea was to leave most of the men stationed around the outer edge of the little piece of jungle, while three of us, the lieutenant, Shwayo and I, were to boldly force our way into the

tiger's citadel, and either kill him outright or compel him to break cover, when we might expect a good account of him from the men on guard outside. The older natives vigorously protested that such an undertaking meant certain death to all who entered that dark thicket, but I was not as old then as I am now, and Harbush, being equally as rash, we adopted Shwayo's suggestion.

I chose the path in which the tiger's tracks were to be seen, while the others took those nearest me on either hand. We left our rifles outside, as the paths we had to follow were so low, as well as narrow and tortuous, that most of our progress was made on all fours, and a gun would have been worse than useless. We each carried a heavy six-chambered revolver, and felt no fear of being unable to put the tiger to flight or kill him in case he stood his ground. It was ticklish work, I can tell you. The interlaced foliage overhead was so thick that I crawled along in a deep twilight that was almost total darkness. To add to my trouble the track, or tunnel, that I was following took so many short turns that it was seldom that I could see six feet in advance. All was still as death, and if I was not afraid of being laughed at I should certainly have beaten a retreat, and I have many times wished that I had done so. Suddenly the silence was broken by a hoarse rumbling growl, for all the world like distant thunder. That it was close at hand I knew, but there is an element of ventriloquism about the voice of a tiger, in common with the cries of many other wild beasts, that rendered me unable to decide with any certainty either the distance or direction from whence the sound came. I peered into the twilight on every side, but could see nothing, and in the silence I could distinctly hear the throbbing of my heart. Then instead of a growl the very air vibrated with a savage roar, and I caught the sound of a spring, the bursting of some heavy body through the thick growth close ahead of me, and, horrible to tell, a groan of pain and agony which I knew proceeded from Harbush.

I was frantic with a desire to reach my friend, and rescue him from the tiger's fangs before life should be



THE BURMAN REACHED THE SPOT.

crushed out of him, and I shouted wildly to Shwayo, and struggled madly to force my way through the few feet of distance that separated me from the brave boy in the tiger's clutches. In a moment I recovered my wits, and set to work again on all fours and made all haste to the rescue. I was thus creeping forward, when, just as my head projected around one of the innumerable angles of the path, I received a crushing blow on my shoulder. It was the tiger, and if that blow had hit my head instead of my shoulder, I should not be here telling about it. As it was, my pistol was knocked out of my hand, and I had just time to throw my left arm over my head as some slight protection, when down came that great paw again, and there I was flat on my face, with the fetid breath of the man-eater hot on my neck, as helpless as ever was a mouse under the claws of a cat.

I tried to move myself backward a little, thinking that I might get my right hand on to my pistol, and so free myself; but my captor was far too sharp for that, and nothing but my left arm saved me from instant death, as he struck me again with that cruel paw. This time he did not stop with a blow, but seized my hand in his mouth and with devilish deliberation, as it seemed to me, crushed the flesh and bones from the wrist to the elbow. The agony drew a cry from me in spite of my efforts to suppress it, and that cry probably saved my life, for it guided our brave Shwayo to my rescue. It seemed an age to me then, though it could have been but a few seconds, before the Burman reached the spot. The tiger, being very pleasantly engaged with me, neglected to properly guard his flanks, and the hunter was able to hold his heavy pistol within a foot of the beast's ear and blow the brute's brains out at one shot.

The sound of that shot was the last thing I remembered for some time. When I recovered consciousness I found myself in my bed at the bungalow. My left arm had been amputated at the elbow, and I was doomed to travel through life with the empty sleeve that you see. Harbush, poor fellow, had been terribly torn by the claws and teeth of the tiger, though he had been spared the loss of any limb. When the men entered the copse they found Harbush and me under the dead tiger, and had dragged us out, as they supposed, dead, too, and indeed I doubt if any two rash hunters ever bearded the tiger in his den as recklessly as we did and lived to tell about it. When I recovered they brought me the skin of the tiger. It was unusually large and finely marked, and when I got to England I expect to see it on the library floor, where it has lain for many years as a memento of my first tiger hunt.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

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