[Continued from 3rd page.]

A TALE OF THREE LIONS.

[BY H. RIDER HAGGARD.]

"Harry, who as I have said was an eminently practical boy, suggested to Pharaoh that he should go and sit outside the skerm in the moonlight as a sort of bait, assuring him that he would have nothing to fear, as we should certainly kill the lioness before she killed him. Pharaoh however, strangely enough, did not seem to take to this suggestion. Indeed, he walked away, much put out with Harry for having made it.

"It gave me an idea, however.

"'Well!' I said, 'there is that ox. He must die sooner or later, so we may well utilize him.

"Now, about thirty yards to the left of our skerm, if one stood facing down the hill towards the river, was the stump of a tree that had been destroyed by lightning many years before, standing equidistantly between, but a little in front of, two clumps of bush, which were severally some fifteen paces from it.

"Here was the very place to tie the ox; and accordingly a little before sunset the poor animal was led forth by Pharaoh and made fast there, little Knowing, poor brute, for what purpose; and we commenced our long vigil, this time without a fire, for our object was to attract the lioness and not to scare her.

"For hour after hour we waited, keeping ourselves awake by pinching each other—it is, by the way, remarkable what a difference in the force of pinches requisite to the occasion exists in the mind of pincher and pinchee, but no lioness came. The moon waxed and the moon waned, and then at last the moon went down, and darkness swallowed up the world, but no lion came to swallow us up. We waited till dawn, because we did not dare to go to sleep, and then at last we took such rest as we could get.

That morning we went out shooting, not because we wanted to, for we were too depressed and tired, but because we had no more meat. For three hours or more we wandered about in a broiling sun looking for something to kill, but with absolutely no results. For some unknown reason the game had grown very scarce about the spot, though when I was there two years before every sort of large game except rhinoceros and elephant was particularly abundant. The lions, of whom there were many, alone remained, and I fancy that it was the fact of the game they live on having temporarily migrated that made their so daring and ferocious. As a general rule a lion is an amiable animal enough if he is left alone, but a hungry lion is almost as dangerous as a hungry man. One hears a great many different opinions expressed as to whether or no the lion is remarkable for his courage, but the result of my experience is that very much depends upon the state of his stomach. A hungry lion will not stick at a trifle, whereas a full one will flee at a very small rebuke.

"Well, we hunted all about, and nothing could we see, not even a duck or a bush buck; and at last thoroughly tired and out of temper we started on our way back to camp, passing over the brow of a steepish hill to do so. Just as we got over the ridge I from up like a pointer dog, for there about six hundred yards to my left, his beautiful curved horns outlined against the soft blue of the sky, I saw a noble koodoo bull (*Strepsiceros kudu.*) Even at that distance, for as you know my eyes are very keen, I could distinctly see the white stripes upon its side when the light fell upon it, and its large and pointed ears twitch as the flies worried it.

"So far so good; but how were we to get at it? It was ridiculous to risk a shot at that great distance, and yet both the ground and the wind lay very ill for stalking. It seemed to me that the only chance would be to make a detour of at least a mile or more, and come up on the other side of the koodoo. I called Harry to my side, and explained to him what I thought would be our best course, when suddenly, without any delay, the koodoo saved us any further trouble by suddenly starting off down the hill like a leaping rocket. I don't know what had frightened it, certainly we had not. Perhaps a hyena or a leopard—a tiger as we call it there—had suddenly appeared; at any rate, off it went, running slightly towards us, and I never saw a buck go faster. As for Harry, he stood watching the beautiful animal's course. Presently it vanished behind a patch of bush, to emerge a few seconds later about five hundred paces from us, on a stretch of comparatively level ground that was strewn with bowlders. On it went, taking the bowlders in its path in a succession of great bounds that were beautiful to behold. As it did so, I happened to look round at Harry, and perceived to my astonishment that he had got his rifle to his shoulder.

"'You foolish boy!' I ejaculated, 'surely you are not going to—and just at that moment the rifle went off.

"And then I think I saw what was in its way one of the most wonderful things I ever remember in my hunting experience. The koodoo was at the moment in the air, clearing a pile of stones with its fore-legs tucked up underneath it. All in an instant the legs stretched themselves out in a spasmodic fashion, and it lit on them and they doubled up beneath it. Down went the noble buck, down on its head. For a moment it seemed to be standing on its horns, its hind-legs high in the air, and then over it went and lay still.

"'Great Heavens!' I said, 'why, you've hit him! He's dead.

"As for Harry he said nothing, but merely looked scared, as well he might. A man, let alone a boy, might have fired a thousand such shots without ever touching the object; which, mind you, was springing and bounding over rocks quite five hundred yards away; and here this lad—taking a snap shot and merely allowing for elevation by instinct, for he did not put up his sights—had knocked the bull over as dead as a doornail. Well, I made no further remark, the occasion was too solemn for talking, but merely led the way to where the koodoo lay. There he was, beautiful and quite still, and there, high up, about half-way down his neck, was a neat round hole. The bullet had severed the spinal marrow, passing right through the vertebræ and away on the other side.

"It was already evening when, having cut as much of the best meat as we could carry from the bull, and tied a red handkerchief and some tufts of grass to his spiral horns, which, by the way, must have been nearly five feet in length, in the hope of keeping the jackals and asavogels (vultures) from him, we finally got back to the camp, to find Pharaoh, who was getting rather anxious at our absence, ready to greet us with the pleasing intelligence that another ox was sick. But even this dreadful bit of intelligence could not dash Harry's spirits; the fact of the matter being that, incredible as it may appear, I do verily believe that in his heart of hearts he set down the death of that koodoo to the credit of his own skill. Now though the lad was a tidy shot enough, this of course was ridiculous, and I told him so very plainly.

"By the time that we had finished our supper of koodoo steaks (which would have been better if the koodoo had been a little younger), it was time to get ready for Jim-Jim's murderess again. All the afternoon Pharaoh told us the unfortunate ox had been walking round and round in a circle as cattle in the last stage of rediwater generally do. Now it had come to a standstill, and was swaying to and fro with its head hanging down. So we tied him up to the stump of the tree as on the previous night, knowing that if the lioness did not kill him he would be dead by morning. Indeed I was afraid that he would be of little use as bait, for a lion is a sportsmanlike animal, and unless he is very hungry generally prefers to kill his own dinner, though when once killed he will come back to it again and again.

"Then we repeated our experience of the previous night, sitting there hour after hour, till at last Harry went fast asleep, and even I, though I am accustomed to this sort of thing, could scarcely keep my eyes open. Indeed I was just dropping off, when suddenly Pharaoh gave me a shove.

"'Listen!' he whispered.

"I was all awake in a second, and listening with all my ears. From the clump of bush to the right of the lightning-shattered stump to which the ox was tied came a faint crackling noise. Presently it was repeated. Something was moving there faintly and quietly enough, but still moving perceptibly, for in the intense stillness of the night any sound seemed loud.

"I woke up Harry, who instantly said, 'where is shef where is shef and began to point his rifle about in a fashion that was more dangerous to us and the oxen than to any possible lioness.

"'Hush up!' I whispered savagely; and as I did so, with a low and hideous growl a flash of yellow light sped out of the clump upon the other side. The poor sick brute gave a sort of groan, and staggered round and then began to tremble; I could see it do so clearly in the moonlight, which was now very bright, and I felt a brute for having exposed the unfortunate animal to such terror as he must undoubtedly be undergoing. The lioness for it was she, passed so quickly that we could not even distinguish her movements, much less shoot. Indeed at night it is absolutely useless to attempt to shoot unless the object is very close and standing perfectly still, and then the light is so deceptive and it is so difficult to see she foresight that the best shot will miss more often than he hits.

"'She will be back again presently,' I said; 'look out, but for Heaven's sake don't fire unless I tell you to.'

"Hardly were the words out of my mouth when back she came, and again passed the ox without striking him.

"'What on earth is she doing!' whispered Harry.

"'Playing with it as a cat does a mouse, I suppose. She will kill it presently.'

"As I spoke, the lioness once more flashed out of the bush, and this time sprang right over the doomed ox. It was an exciting sight to see her clear him in the bright moonlight, as though it were a trick that she had been taught.

"'I believe that she has escaped from a circus,' whispered Harry; 'its jolly to see her jump.'

"I said nothing, but I thought to myself that if it was, Master Harry did not quite appreciate the performance, and small blame to him. At any rate, his teeth were chattering a bit.

"Then came a longish pause, and I began to think that she must have gone away, when suddenly she appeared again, and with one mighty bound landed right on to the ox, and struck it a frightful blow with her paw.

"Down it went, and lay on the ground. She put down her wicked-looking head, with a fierce growl of contentment. When she lifted her muzzle again and stood facing us obliquely, I whispered, 'Now's our time, fire when I do.'

"I got on to her as well as I could, but Harry, instead of waiting for me as I told him, fired before I did, and that of course hurried me. When the smoke cleared, however, I was delighted to see that the lioness was rolling about on the ground behind the body of the ox, which covered her in such a fashion, however, that we could not shoot again to make an end of her.

"'She's gone for! she's dead!' yelled Pharaoh in exultation; and at that very moment the lioness with a sort of convulsive rush, half rolled, half sprang, into the patch of thick bush to the right. I fired after her as she went, but so far as I could see without result; indeed the probability is that I missed her clean. At any rate she got to the bush in safety, and once there, began to make such a diabolical noise as I never heard before. She would whine and shriek, then burst out into perfect volleys of roaring that shook the whole place.

"'Well, I said, 'we must just let her roar; to go into that bush after her at night would be madness.'

"At that moment, to my astonishment and alarm, there came an answering roar from the direction of the river, and then another from behind the swell of bush. Evidently there were more lions about. The wounded lioness redoubled her efforts, with the object, I suppose, of summoning the others to her assistance. At any rate they came, and quickly too, for within five minutes, peeping through the bushes of our skerm fence, we saw a magnificent lion bounding along towards us, through the tall tamboulin grass that in the moonlight looked for all the world like ripening corn. On he came in great leaps, and a glorious sight it was to see him. When within fifty yards or so, he stood still in an open space and roared, and the lioness roared too, and then there came a third roar, and another great black-maned lion stalked majestically up, and joined number two, and really I began to realize what Jim-Jim must have undergone.

"'Now, Harry,' I whispered, 'whatever you do, don't fire, its too risky. If they let us be, let them be.

'Well, the pair of them marched off to the bush, where the wounded lioness was now roaring double tides, and the whole three of them began to snarl and grumble away together there. Presently, however, the lioness ceased roaring, and the two lions came out again, the black-maned one first—to prospect, I suppose—and walked to where the carcass of the ox lay, and sniffed at it.

"'Oh, what a shot! whispered Harry, who was trembling with excitement.

"'Yes,' I said; 'but don't fire; they might all of them come for us.

"Harry said nothing, but whether it was from the natural wilfulness of youth, or because he was thrown off his balance by excitement, or from sheer recklessness, I am sure I cannot tell you, never having been able to get a satisfactory explanation from him; but at any rate the fact remains, he, without word or warning, entirely disregarding my exhortations, lifted up his Westley Richards, and fired at the black-maned lion, and, what is more, hit it slightly on the flank.

"Next second there was a most awful roar from the injured brute. He glared around him and roared with pain, for he was sadly stung; and then, before I could make up my mind what to do, the great black-maned brute, evidently ignorant of the cause of his pain, sprang right at the throat of his companion, to whom he evidently attributed his misfortune. It was a curious sight to see the evident astonishment of the other lion at this most unprovoked assault. Over he rolled with an angry roar, and on to him sprang the black-maned demon, and commenced to worry him. This finally awoke the yellow-maned lion to a sense of the situation, and I am bound to say he rose to the occasion in a most effective manner. Somehow or other he got to his feet, and, roaring and smarting frightfully, closed with his mighty foe. And then ensued a scene which absolutely baffles description. You know what a shocking thing it is to see two large dogs fighting with abandonment. Well, a whole hundred of dogs could not have looked half so terrible as those two great brutes as they rolled and roared and rent in their rage. It was an awful and a wonderful thing to see the great cats tearing at each other with all the fierce energy of their savage strength, and making the night hideous with their heart-shaking noise. And the fight was a grand one, too. For some minutes it was impossible to say which was getting the best of it, but at last I saw that the black-maned lion, though he was slightly the bigger, was failing. I am inclined to think that the wound in his flank crippled him. Anyway he began to get the worst of it, which served him right as he was the aggressor. Still I could not help feeling sorry for him, for he had fought a gallant fight, when his antagonist finally got him by the throat, and, struggle and strike out as he would, began to shake the life out of him. Over and over they rolled together an awe-inspiring spectacle, but the yellow boy would not loose his hold, and at length poor black-mane grew faint, his breath came in great snores and seemed to rattle in his nostrils, then he opened his huge mouth, gave the ghost of a roar, quivered, and was dead.

"When he was quite sure that the victory wrs his own, the yellow-maned lion loosed his grip and sniffed at his fallen foe. Then he licked the dead lion's eye, and next, with his fore-feet resting on the carcass, sent up his own chant of victory, that went rolling and pealing down the dark ways of the night in all the gathered majesty of sound. And at that point I interfered. Taking a careful sight at the centre of his body, in order to give the largest possible margin for error, I fired, and sent a .570 express bullet right through him, and down he dropped dead upon his mighty foe.

"At that, fairly satisfied with our performances, we slept peaceably till dawn, leaving Pharaoh to keep watch in case any more lions should take it into their heads to come our way.

"When the sun was fairly up we arose, and very cautiously proceeded—at least Pharaoh and I did, for I would not allow Harry to come—to see if we could see anything of the wounded lioness. She had ceased roaring immediately on the arrival of the two lions, and had not made a sound since, from which we concluded that she was probably dead. I was armed with my express, while Pharaoh, in whose hands a rifle was indeed a dangerous weapon—to his companions—had an axe. On our way we stopped to look at the two dead lions. They were magnificent animals, both of them, but their pelts were entirely spoiled by the terrible mauling they had given to each other, which was a sad pity.

"In another minute we were following the blood spoor of the wounded lioness into the bush, where she had taken refuge. This, I need hardly say, we did with the utmost caution; indeed, I for one did not at all like the job, and was only consoled by the reflection that it was necessary and that the bush was not thick. Well, we stood there, keeping as far from the trees as possible, and poking and spearing about, but no lioness could we see.

"She must have gone away somewhere to die, Pharaoh,' I said in Zulu.

"'Yes Inkoos' (chief), he answered, 'she has certainly gone away.'

"Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when I heard a most awful roar, and looking round saw the lioness emerge from the very centre of a bush, just behind Pharaoh, in which she had been curled up. Up she went on to her hind-legs, and as she did so I saw that one of her fore-paws was broken near the shoulder, for it hung limply down. Up she went, towering right over Pharaoh's head, as she did so I fling her uninjured paw to strike him down. And then, before I could get my rifle round or do anything to avert the coming catastrophe, the Zulu did a very brave and clever thing. Realising his own imminent danger, he bounded to one side, and then, swinging the heavy axe round his head, brought it right down on to her back, severing the vertebræ and killing her instantaneously. It was wonderful to see her collapse all in a heap like an empty sack.

"'My word, Pharaoh,' I said, 'that was well done, and none too soon.'

"'Yes,' he answered, 'it was a good stroke, Inkoos. Jim-Jim will sleep better now.

"Then, calling Harry to us, we examined the lioness. She was old, if one might judge from her worn teeth, and not very large, but thickly made, and must have possessed extraordinary vitality to have lived so long, shot as she was; for in addition to her broken shoulder, my express bullet had blown a great hole in her that one might have put one's fist into.

"Well, that is the story of the death of poor Jim-Jim and how we avenged it, and it is rather interesting in its way, because of the fight between the two lions, of which I never saw the like in all my experience, and I know something of lions and their ways."

"And how did you get back to Pilgrims' Rest?" I asked hunter Quatermain when he had finished his yarn.

"Ah, we had a nice job with that," he answered. "The second ox died and so did another, and we had to get on as best we could with the three remaining ones harnessed unicorn fashion, while we pushed behind. We did about four miles a day, and it took us nearly a month, during the last week of which we pretty well starved."

"I notice," I said, "that most of your trips ended in disaster of some sort or another, and yet you went on making them, which strikes one as a little queer."

"Yes, I dare say: but then, remember I got my living for many years out of hunting. Besides, half the charm of the thing lay in the dangers and disasters, though they were terrible enough at the time. Another thing is, they were not all disastrous. Some time, if you like, I will tell you a story of one which was very much the reverse, for I made four thousand pounds out of it, and saw one of the most extraordinary sights a hunter ever clapped his eyes on; but it's too late now, and besides, I'm tired talking about myself. Good-night.'

[*Concluded.*]

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" London & Lancashire Insurance Company of Liverpool
Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society of Norwich
AMERICAN.
The Aetna Insurance Company of Hartford
" Hartford " " "
CANADIAN.
The Royal Canadian Assurance Company of Montreal
" Western Assurance Company of Toronto.
" Citizens " " "
MARINE INSURANCE.
Risks taken on Vessels, Cargoes, Freight and Disbursements Sterling Certificates issued, if required, in the following Marine Insurance Companies.—
Boston Marine Insurance Company of Boston.
Manheim Insurance Company of Manheim,
Royal Canadian Insurance Co., of Montreal
British America " " of Toronto
Western " " of Toronto
LIFE INSURANCE.
The Standard Life Assurance Company of Edinburgh.
The Rates of Insurance in this Office are low and the Bonuses large.
Low Rates, Fair Settlements and prompt payment of Losses guaranteed.
Thos. F. Gillespie,
Insurance Agent.
Chatham, July 11th, 1887.

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