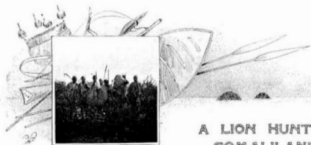


OUTING.

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A LION HUNT IN SOMALILAND.

BY MARION WRIGHT.

IT was our custom when on the march to break camp a little before sunrise, and after breakfasting, so soon as the caravan got under way, C—and I each took two shikaris (or hunters) and a syce (or pony boy) and hunted on either side of the caravan, keeping some six or seven miles apart, in order not to conflict with each other's interests.

At the mid-day halt, though sometimes, when on the track of game, not until evening, we met to talk over the events of the day. On the particular day I now have in mind to describe, my part of the outfit had been on the march for several hours without sight of game, when we saw a "wart hog."

We stalked him for a short distance, and he suddenly disappeared.

On coming up to the spot where last we had seen him, we found ourselves

on the edge of a ravine; and there, not twenty yards below us, grunting softly to himself and rummaging about, was our porker. Seeing that he had no tusks I did not shoot, and subsequent events made me very thankful that I had not, for it was through his instrumentality that larger game was secured, and I owed him a debt of gratitude.

The ravine to which he had led us was one of those singularly beautiful spots which one sometimes finds amid the monotonous stretches of the surrounding country, places where Nature seems to have stored those treasures which she denied elsewhere. The summits of the miniature cliffs which formed the sides of the ravine were on such a level with the outside plain that from a short distance away one would scarcely suspect its presence. At the base of the cliffs lay the dry bed of a tempora-



Painted for Ostron by Jim L. Weston.

"SCATTERING THEM RIGHT AND LEFT." (p. 444.)

rily inactive river, and growing round the smoothly worn boulders which lay in the bed, and clustering on the sides of the cliffs in rich profusion, were fresh green grass and various kinds of dense foliage.

Appreciating how much my pony would enjoy thrusting his nose into that spicy fodder, as for the past few weeks he had not enjoyed anything like a square meal, I decided to stop for a short time.

We had been lying twenty minutes or so on the cool sod, enjoying the shelter from a blazing sun and watching the pony, when one of the shikaris, who had strolled up the ravine, returned with the news that he had found the fresh track of a lion, which had passed, he thought, only a few hours before. We all then hastened to have a look, and, the other shikari confirming his opinion, we prepared to follow it up.

The heaviest rifle we had with us was a "500 Winchester repeater," which at that time I did not judge to be a good rifle for lions, though I have since found by experience that it is large enough for anything under an elephant or rhinoceros. So, deciding to have the heavier rifle, if possible a 577 express, the syce was sent back on the pony to the caravan for it, and we made a start.

My two shikaris went on in front of me, going on the average at a fast walk, which, when the trail became plainer, increased to a dog-trot. The pugs led us through the ravine for a short distance and out over a rough, stony country, where the men often lost them and had to cast about for several minutes before finding them again.

We had been going on in this way for a couple of hours or more when we came to a thick grove of bushes, several hundred yards in extent. The trail led in at the densest part of these, so to save time we circled the outskirts to see if our quarry had come out the other side. Our investigations did not last long, for we could find no trail leading out of the first clump to which we had tracked him, so we felt pretty sure that he was there. It was now only a question of rousing "His Majesty" out of a presumably comfortable nap, and trusting to luck that he would show himself in the open. The bushes were too thick to favor the chances of getting a shot by waking him up, and unless we

jumped him within a few yards of us should be unable to see him. So, stationing my two men on one side of the bush with orders to try and beat him out to me, I went to the other side and waited for him.

They hurled sticks and stones, together with opprobrious epithets chosen from the Somalian vocabulary as being especially calculated to move lions to resentment. His appearance, manners, his ancestors, all received a criticism which, to say the least, was impolite; but all to no purpose, for he gave no indication of his presence.

After many fruitless attempts to move him, we concluded that we had made a mistake, and that he must have gone on. Suddenly, just as were preparing to recast for the trail, there was a great commotion in the bushes, accompanied by a sonorous deep-toned growl, and we could hear the lion breaking his way out on the side opposite us.

We rushed, as quickly as possible round the bush, only to see the tracks which he had made a few seconds before, but caught no sight of the beast himself.

With renewed energies we ran on, the pugs being more easy to follow, as he was going very fast. He had taken a course through the open spaces which divided the line of bushes, and we hurried on in the hope of catching sight of him when he should reach the open ground beyond. This was not to be, however, for when we came to the last clump of trees the pugs stopped short, and on making a detour round it we found none leading out. So here he was again.

The grove in which he was now concealed was of such dimensions that there was only one course of proceeding which seemed feasible, and that was to burn him out. It was slow work, the burning of the bush, which, though dry and very inflammable, owing to the lack of wind burned almost vertically.

When the fire had been under way some time we were joined by my syce, bringing with him the express rifle and two camelmen to help in the tracking. With the usual careful attention to orders of the Somali, which is not always consistent with his thinking powers, he had brought no cartridges for the rifle, so I must needs go on with the Winchester alone.

We were now six, myself, two shikaris, syce, and the two camelmen. Heavens! How long it took that bush to burn! I had stationed all the men on the opposite side of the bush to me, and they were making a terrible racket in order to induce the lion to break my way.

The fire was so hot that we had almost lost hope, when, with a succession of angry roars, the lion sprang out of the side towards the men, dashed straight through them, scattering them right and left, and disappeared. Two of the natives saluted him with spears, but he disappeared before I could get a chance for a safe shot. It was annoying, to say the least, to be so close to the brute and have him escape without even the satisfaction of a shot. But it is extraordinary what good judgment a lion exercises when he wishes to escape his pursuers. Lying concealed from view, but always in a position to see all that is going on about him, he notes every move on the part of his enemies, and when their vigilance seems slackest, gives the white hunter a wide berth and springs out towards the natives, evidently preferring to take his chances with men with whose get-up he is familiar. Seldom will a lion submit himself as a fair mark, excepting when he means business, that is, to give and to take.

Well, there was no good crying over spilled milk, and nothing to do but do it all over again. I was dead tired and half famished, having eaten nothing since sunrise, and it was now almost six in the afternoon; but there was still a chance before dark of coming up with our friend, and it was well worth a little extra exertion, so on we went again. I now rode my pony, in order to let my syce help in the tracking and also not to retard the pace of my men, who went much better when I was not with them.

It is a very pretty sight to see the Somalis tracking—they work for all the world like a pack of hounds. Keeping pretty close together, they go along at a slow trot until the trail is lost; then they spread out in different directions; someone who finds it conveys the fact to the others by snapping his fingers; they all close up, and on they go, perfect silence being maintained the whole time. We retraced our way almost in the identical line that

we had come, and in a short time neared the place where we had first jumped the lion.

I now dismounted and left my pony in charge of the syce, as the lion seemed so partial to this particular grove it was quite likely that he would stop some, where on the outskirts. His track, however, led us through some of the densest parts of the undergrowth, and as it was growing late our last remaining chance was to try and sight him somewhere amongst it.

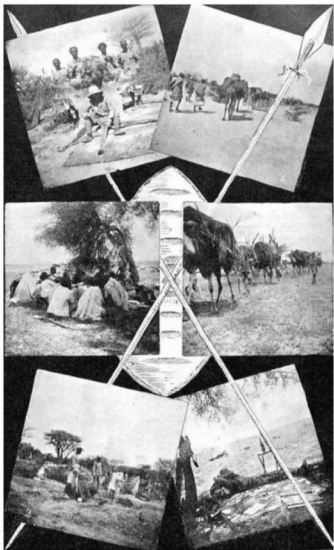
Leaving all the men outside except one shikari, whom I took to do the tracking and also to help see the beast if he was about, we pushed our way through the bushes as best we might, now crawling under them on our hands and knees, now plunging into their depths and getting our hands and faces scratched unmercifully, until at length we lost all signs of the trail and didn't know which way to turn.

Just then I felt a sharp clutch on my arm, and my shikari whispered excitedly, "Me see him," at the same time pointing to a spot some twenty-five yards away.

I followed the direction he was pointing, but for the life of me could see nothing. "Point with the rifle," I told him; and, looking over the sights, saw a pair of eyes as big as saucers peering at us from under the bushes.

As soon as the lion found his presence was known, he showed his dissatisfaction by displaying two rows of shining ivories in a noiseless snarl. My shikari was all this time twitching my sleeve and whispering, "Shoot, shoot; why no shoot?" I told him to shut up, and, walking slowly towards the brute with rifle in readiness to shoot quickly in case he should spring, got within fifteen yards of him. Even then it was difficult to take a satisfactory aim. So dark was it beneath the bush that I could see nothing of the lion except the flickering light of his eyes, and I did not wish to wound our friend at such close quarters. Several times I put my rifle confidently to my shoulder and had to take it down.

A sudden throwing up of his head gave me the desired opportunity, and I fired just between the two great eyes, pumped another cartridge into the barrel, fired again, and then waited for the result. Apparently it was a dead lion, for we



1. Unpegging the lion's skin.
 2. Men at mess.
 3. Striking camp.

4. Our caravan on the march.
 5. Native caravan on the march.
 6. A siesta.

heard no sound, and I on looking into the bush found a beautiful full-grown lion with a neat little bullet-hole just over his right eye. I found on examination that my second shot had not touched him.

The rest of the men joined us almost immediately on hearing the shots. They dragged the lion into the open and began what is called "the lion dance," to the accompaniment of a soft, low chant. It was a very picturesque sight, the dead monarch of the jungle forming the center of the group, and the half-naked men, with the red glow of a setting sun reflected on their glistening skins.



OUR OUTFIT.

I enjoyed it almost as much as themselves.

When they had finished dancing, the work of skinning commenced which they accomplish in an extraordinary short space of time. The skin and head were tied behind the

saddle on the pony. I mounted, and we started for camp, leaving the carcass of the lion to be buried in the stomachs of the hyenas and vultures—the last resting-place of every creature which dies in the open.

The men sang all the way, and as we approached the camp C— came to meet me, followed by nearly all our men, and seemed as well pleased as thyself.



1. THE OXYX.



2. WATERING THE CAMELS.