


MY FIRST LIONS.

HUNTING FIERCE GAME IN EASTERN AFRICA.

N February, 1893, I left Bombay for Z—, whence a few days in a coaster landed me at K—. On the 1st of March I left the coast, on my second expedition into the interior. On this occasion I marched in a northeasterly direction toward the great waterless plain in which may possibly be comprised most of the country between the district of the great lakes and the southern border of Abyssinia.

I had an escort of eight men, armed with Snider rifles; seven baggage-camels, two riding-horses, and some donkeys; two tents, one double-roofed; double 10-bore and Martini express-rifles, 8- and 12-bore shot-guns, and means of carrying water to last six days. To this must be added provisions to last six months.

While upon the march, I killed a few large antelope for food, but without halting the caravan, except on one occasion for half an hour in order to chase and give a finishing shot to one which I had badly wounded. The largest antelope I shot was an oryx or gemsbok. I had found some gemsbok in a small gully in a range of hills, and as I felt sure they would bolt straight down the ravine when disturbed, making for the great jungle-covered plain where they generally lived, I hid myself near the mouth, sent one man up the gully along the hillside to drive them, and placed another at the mouth opposite to where I was hidden. The gemsbok did not notice this man at first, and almost galloped upon him before seeing him, and then became so frightened that they went straight up the face of the hill; then, on the man running round the spur to cut them off, one turned back and galloped past me at ninety yards. My first shot struck it in the back and killed it, the animal making a complete revolution as it fell. It was about the size and color of a large donkey, with a donkey's tail, and with horns thirty-two inches in length.

One day, while the caravan was halted, I shot a gazel, and covered it with branches to keep off vultures; but when I returned half an hour later to carry the meat to camp, it had entirely disappeared, bones and all, probably the prey of either leopard, chetah, or hyena. The same night my camp was much disturbed by two leopards wandering round and round outside, growling and making the camels very uneasy, but not daring to jump the zarefa.

We marched as hard as possible for eleven days, and as we penetrated farther and farther into the interior the climate became perceptibly cooler. But still the difference was not great, though the increased dryness of the air made the heat much more bearable than it had been nearer the coast. I was also very fortunate in that several heavy thunder-showers fell opportunely, and we were enabled to fill up our water-barrels; otherwise I doubt whether I should have been able to penetrate as far as I did into the interior without a very much larger number of water-barrels and camels to carry them, entailing an increase in the number of men and in the amount of dates, rice, and clarified butter which I was obliged to carry for them.

As I had come out mainly and almost exclusively for lions, I marched without halting until I heard that there were lions in the vicinity. This intelligence I had from the wandering tribes who pasture their flocks, camels, and sometimes a few horses upon the great stretch of rolling country, half prairie, half jungle, which constitutes this burning and monotonous portion of the great continent of Africa.

While mentioning these people as wandering tribes with whom I had to deal, I might refer to what is probably a matter of speculation and surprise to those who read these lines—namely, if, as I have said, water is so scarce, how do the goats, sheep, cattle, camels, and horses manage to live without it for days and sometimes weeks together, making long journeys only at intervals to the "wells" and back? The answer is: a camel needs water not oftener than once in ten days, while the others find sufficient moisture in the early morning upon the grass and plants on which they feed to carry them over the intervals between their visits to the known supplies of water. When there is no water, horses are sometimes given milk to drink.

It was on the eleventh day that the wandering tribes told me that there were lions here, and so I gave orders to make a permanent camp, where I determined to remain until I got definite news. I knew that it would be more advantageous to remain in one place, for when it became known that a white man had arrived to shoot lions, and men came to bring me news of one, they would be able to find me more quickly and surely than if we were to shift our camp from day to day in hope

of getting nearer to the game. Besides, it was very difficult for men to find our camp at all, and I often marveled at my own men being able to return to camp as they unerringly did.

We were so near the equator that at midday the sun was almost exactly overhead, and at another time of year it would have been so; therefore, without a compass it was difficult toward noon to know the direction in which one was marching. The country is perfectly flat—so absolutely flat indeed, in certain parts, that I was reminded of a billiard-table, or of the ocean in a calm. Moreover, it was entirely covered with thin jungle, everywhere of identically the same character and appearance, one mimosa-tree differing hardly at all from another mimosa-tree in shape or size; and there were no landmarks whatever, such as open plains. So an idea may be formed of the ease with which a person not born and bred among these tribes may lose his way, if left alone in the country.

It was on the eleventh day, then,—and the third day's march into the great waterless plain,—that these African gypsies through my interpreters told me of lions in the neighborhood. Nor could I any longer doubt that I had at last actually reached a district infested with great carnivora, for we soon arrived at a large zareba, or circular inclosure of thorn-fence, within which was a second similar inclosure, divided, as is customary, into partitions for the different herds; and within the inner ring were the remains of a horse, freshly killed, with torn bridle and remains of other portions of quaint trappings of plaited hide and horsehair strewn about near by upon the ground. This, they said, was the work of a lion which, the night before, fearless of the packed flocks, of the human beings, and of the night watch-fires, had leaped both the fences and killed the horse in spite of firebrands and, no doubt, other missiles. This I was bound to believe, for outside in the now hardened mud were the largest lion tracks I had hitherto seen. Here I camped, and for some three days tried to possess myself in patience.

Early on the fourth morning an old man came hurrying in from an adjacent camp about a mile away to tell me that about midnight a lioness or lion, he was not sure which, had sprung over the wall or fence of their zareba, and had killed two sheep under their very noses, one of which it had carried off, in spite of all they could do. On arriving at the camp in the gray light of early day, I was joined by a silent and anxious-looking crowd, most of them carrying two spears and a shield; and step by step, aided by four or five of my own men, we began to follow the track. Here and there the ground was grassy, here and there it was too hard, or too rocky and stony, to show the marks of the great cat-like pads, or the trail of the dragged sheep;

but farther on some one was sure to pick up either the fresh trail or the curious zigzag lines made by the legs of the sheep as they dangled and swept along the dusty earth. And so we slowly crept on and on until the sun had risen full two hours, and at last the trail became indistinct and was lost altogether. And now, by a kind of instinct in the natives, we advanced faster than when there was a trail to follow, till presently I heard a shout, and all the men began to run on, and one with his spear pointed through the trees to a huge yellow ball that was bounding on over the bushes and rocks, and I knew I had seen an uncaged African lion for the first time.

With a heavy rifle to balance on my shoulder, or on the saddle in front, and a horse to steer that would persist in endeavoring to get under the shade of every thin mimosa-bush, I lost sight of the lion for a time, and waited for the trackers to come up, as the ground was soft and sandy again, and showed the trail more favorably. Not many yards away was a thick, close, impenetrable green patch, about half an acre in extent, of bushes probably of the cactus tribe—common enough in some districts, but hereabouts there were not many such pieces of cover. Into this the trackers decided that the lioness—for such it turned out to be—had entered.

There was only one thing to be done. I had a box of matches, carried with this especial end in view. The men were all silent now, and silently I handed them the precious box, nor were any explanations needed. A gentle breeze was blowing, and softly I crept round to leeward of the patch. The horses had been taken out of the way, and the men were in a silent group out of sight upon the windward edge. Fara, my shikaree, stood behind me, and I saw him examining a conveniently adjacent mimosa-tree with interest, in view of a charge from a wounded lioness. Presently there was a whisper in my ear of "*Maro! maro!*" At the same moment there appeared the head of a lioness at an opening four or five yards away; but she hardly appeared to notice me, and instantly withdrew. The fire had barely caught the outer fringe of the cover and was scarcely ablaze. A faint column of smoke rose twenty yards away, and I could just hear the low crackling of the flames. One moment of expectation, and the queen of beasts broke cover in earnest, leaping out, and crossing my front in a kind of lumbering gallop.

I fired, and she fell, but not dead. As she lay she opened her mouth to snarl, and showed her huge white teeth, now and then giving a low, deep, resonant roar, which resembled no other sound in the world, until I approached,—as it seemed there was nothing else in the cover,—and gave her a quieting shot in the neck.

Then what a shouting, and brandishing of spears, and congratulations of the triumphant warrior by the natives, some of them talking me by the arm, and all shouting and talking at the same time in the maddest excitement! There were two hours to wait while I sent back to camp for my photographic camera and some cold provisions, and then followed the photographing and the skinning and the jubilant procession to camp.

On the way we came across some natives who had just killed with poisoned arrows a peculiar kind of long-necked antelope. Some of my men, while I was ahead, took forcible possession of the antelope's head as a trophy. Quite a little battle was threatened, guns being leveled and arrows placed upon the string; but hearing the disturbance, I turned back, and averted the trouble with a coin. Next day, when I visited the spot where the carcass of the lioness lay, I found that every particle had vanished, bones and all.

It was not very far away that, on the same day, we came upon the body of a freshly killed camel. It had been dragged about fifty yards, and in the neck were deep marks of a lion's teeth. So that night I had a screen of thorns made, and instead of returning to camp I slept there, hoping that master lion would return to finish his breakfast, which we had inadvertently interrupted. But nothing came to disturb my night's rest, and in the morning some of my men came to find me, with my horse and some fresh milk, and before noon I was back in camp again.

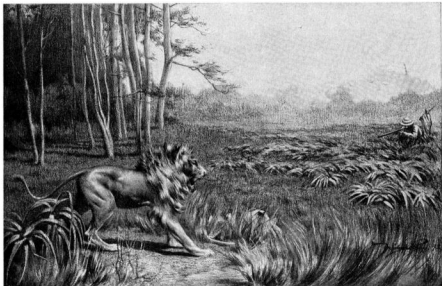
It never rains but it pours, and so I had scarcely been back half an hour when two native horsemen came galloping to the zereba in a cloud of dust, their horses very hot and tired, and themselves very thirsty. I gave them water, and then, through my interpreters, Abdi and Mohammed, they imparted to me their momentous news. They had lost a fine camel, and had been all yesterday searching for it. This morning they saw a large number of those birds of evil omen, the vultures, circling round over a particular spot upon the plain, but not daring to alight. On riding up they found their camel dead, killed by a large lion which was sitting feeding upon the carcass, and which, as the London evening papers say of the House of Commons, they had "left sitting." It was a long way, but if I came quickly I might still find the old fellow there. In less than ten minutes my horse had been brought in and saddled, and, taking some bedding, food, and plenty of water in bottles, we were off in a cloud of dust, which never left us, the two horsemen in front and five of my men running behind carrying my camera and their spears and shields, and three men of the escort who had

asked to be allowed to come. These men bore Snider rifles, and I had been training them to use guns, but they were very poor shots. However, knowing the extreme improbability of our having any serious fighting at this time in this part of Africa, I did not feel much concerned about it. I knew that the mere sight of rifles and cartridge-belts would have the desired effect upon would-be robbers without our having to fire a shot, and that greater danger would result to ourselves than to our enemies from careless handling of firearms. I had therefore taken out the strikers from all the rifles but one, rendering them quite useless until they should be replaced. But now, having no spears with them, none of my escort would ever leave camp without their rifles, disabled as they were. Some days later, after a considerable amount of drill, they became so far efficient that I replaced all the strikers, putting the Sniders once more in working order.

And so for some three hours we swept along across the plain in a cloud of dust, winding in and out among the everlasting mimosa-trees, until at length the guides signified that we were approaching the spot, and pointed to the burning zone ahead, where I could see thousands of vultures circling round at an immense altitude. And now through the trees I caught sight of an orange-colored mass upon the ground, which was the carcass of the camel; and dismounting, I signaled to all the men to remain as they were, and crept on under cover of a bush, hoping that the lion was there and that I might get as near as possible without being seen.

But the mounted natives knew what the lion would do better than I, for to my indignation I saw them making a wide circuit and galloping round toward the other side. Then from behind the camel there came a huge gray thing. It was the lion, but too far for a certain shot. As he crouched with extended paws and elevated back, his head near the ground, and glaring at me in defiance, I slowly raised my rifle for a careful shot, for he seemed upon the point of charging. But as I did so he turned and lumbered off, and the shot I despatched to hasten his movements only struck the sand. Then began the chase. My horse was out of sight behind, but I was soon in the saddle and away. Meantime the two mounted natives had taken up the chase, and after running the lion for two miles, he went to bay in a thicket of small mimosa-trees. Brandishing their spears, and keeping at a respectful distance on their active little horses, the men hurled at him what were no doubt the most insulting and scornful epithets. Fara came up, as I was dismounting, just in time to hold my horse.

As I approached the clump of trees, rifle in hand, it was a moment or two before I could



DRAWN BY FREDERICK S. B. PAGE.

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distinguish the lion; when I did so he was crouching full length behind a many-stemmed mimosa, facing me, and evidently in charging mood, as he was swaying his body and working his tail from side to side with great impetuosity. As I walked round outside the clump to get a flanking shot, he kept turning and facing me. So at last I sat down, and fired twice at his head between the stems; and reloading like lightning, I rested the rifle on a bush, and fired once more. Upon receiving this shot, he left his bush and came straight at me as fast as possible, without giving me time to reload the right barrel. When he was about five yards off, I gave him my last barrel in the chest, and jumped aside, and instantly everything was hidden in a cloud of dust. My last shot had broken his charge, and caused him to swerve round. When the dust settled, I saw him under the same bush as before, but badly hit; he was my lion now, and, running up to within easy range, I put two bullets into his shoulder, which finished him. Then came a renewal of the scene of savage exultation which had taken place when I killed the lioness.

The rest of the men having come up, they dragged the lion—it took eight men to move him—into a convenient place for taking his photograph; and then there was the skinning and beheading, which was no inconsiderable task. Finally the head and skin were packed upon my horse, against his objections, and we made for the nearest native encampment, there to pass the night. Our way led past the carcass of the camel, and the whole time while on the way we were met by countless streams of vultures and other large birds, hastening from the dead body of the camel to the dead body of the lion, perhaps in preference, for there was still plenty of meat upon the former. We reached the village just at nightfall, and found it packed with camels, sheep, goats, and natives; but by moving a portion of the inclosure enough room was made for me and my men, and we were supplied with some milk and a sheep,—upon payment,—but there was no water.

Next morning, on reaching camp, I found that the water had almost given out, and there

was no sign of rain; and as I had heard no more news for two days of lion, I was obliged to travel coastward, feeling as though I was being slowly roasted to death.

But I was not to leave the country without a grievous disappointment; for that night a man entered my camp with the intelligence that a lion had just carried a donkey away from his zereba, which was not far off. As my men did not tell me this until nearly day-break, fearing to wake me, we lost some precious time. However, reaching the village at eight, we followed the tracks of two lions until nearly noon, when the ground became hopelessly rocky. The men were now in a long line, and, as chance ordained it, the pair had lain down under a bush just here, and had got away without my seeing them, although some of the men did. The route taken by the lions was almost impassable for horses, and after a prolonged search we returned to camp.

That night I tethered one of my donkeys near the village, and slept with Fara in a small thorn-shelter close by, hoping they might return. About midnight my unfortunate donkey was attacked by some large animal which I thought at the time was one of the lions we were expecting.

I had distinctly heard, just before, heavy breathing close to my head on the outside of the zereba, and the sound of some creature licking its chops. Then the donkey began to growl hoarsely,—as donkeys do when they are afraid,—and then to bray piteously. Then there came a rush, and then—silence. If any life remained in the unfortunate donkey, my first shot, which went clean through its neck, must have extinguished the last spark. Presently the bloodthirsty creatures came back, and in the blackness of the night I could distinguish nothing, but fired two shots at the sound. I knew then that they were not lions, for a lion leaps upon the back of its prey, and I, being low down, could have distinguished his outline against the starry sky. They were nocturnal carnivora, probably hyenas; for when morning broke we found tracks of these voracious brutes—and nothing else.

H. W. Selon-Karr.

