MY TIGER.
A GIRL'S STORY OF INDIA.

By ASCOTT R. HOPE, Author of "Stories out of Schooltime," "Stories of Long Ago," etc.

CHAPTER I.

To the hills! One must have lived in India to know the sweetness of these words for dwellers on its sun-baked and fever-stricken plains, where our excited kinmen pant so longingly after a gust of purer air a few thousand feet above the dead level of entidy life.

"Home," with its chill showers, bracing breezes, and occasional sunshine, is first in their hearts; but for want of a better, they welcome the change to the mountain retreats crowded by haughty Europeans at the first fiery breath of spring, though here, even in the "cold weather," reigns a climate that might often put English summers to shame.

I had the good fortune to go straight to such an Ellysium, when as a girl in her teens I came out from England on a visit to my sister and brother-in-law, who held the enviable post of superintendent at a hill station in the Western Ghauts, doctor, magistrate, road-maker, bazaar-manager and general autocrat in one; he even read the service in church three Sundays out of four, the regular chaplain paying us only a monthly visit. I arrived early in the year, before the season opened, while as yet there were hardly half a dozen European families in the place. Unless one strayed into the bazaar with its single broad street of native shops, one might wander through a leafy solitude for hours almost without seeing a soul. The whole ridge was covered with woods, scattered and hidden among which lay the still empty bungalows, white-washed or bare walls of the red lattice stone prevailing in the neighbourhood, with bright tin roofs and broad verandahs, that would be a refuge for the best society of Bombay.

But I, for one, did not miss society in my enthusiastic admiration of this tamed wilderness. In all directions, winding up and down the hill-sides, ran trim red roads through the jungle of dark-leaved trees, overshadowing an undergrowth of scrubby bushes and bleached grass. We were always up at dawn to take a ramble in the fresh morning air, along those woodland walks, or by the crooked coolie-paths on which we met files of gaily-draped native women, patiently trudging up from the valleys with huge bundles of grass on their heads, and now and then a rickety bullock-cart, but there were few other signs of life beyond the crackling gambols of lizards and the pretty striped squirrels so common in India. Through the day, even here, four thousand feet above the sea, the heat was usually so powerful that we were glad to keep indoors. Then, towards evening, we could get that wonderfully soothing point of view that looked down into the deep valleys of the Deccan to the east, or westward over the Konkan, a maze of jagged peaks and cliffs beyond which the crimson glow of sunset revealed the sea forty miles away. Most of the lower ridges and valleys were as yet nakedly sun-burnt, and the turf beneath our bare feet, during which the station became uninhabitable, as much rain falling in a week as on the dampest part of England, the whole year through, all these surfaces would glow with green, the parched stems starting everywhere to life, and the hardy evergreens on the heights vailed in a luxuriant mantle of moss and creepers. Our bleak English November is on the Ghauts the finest month in the year.

There was no favourite goal for our excursions, where, crawling out to the end of a narrow promontory, you looked down, if you dared, upon a sheer drop of some three thousand feet, an awful gulf of black rocks, seaweed with bands of withered grass, almost white in the sun glare, its shadowy hollows and water-worn crevices bristling with ragged trees that from the height appeared like tiny shrubs.

My head was fairly turned the first time by this stupendous view, and I felt glad to draw back after a hasty glimpse of its wonders.

Then as Tom, my brother-in-law, was helping me up the narrow path by which we had descended, I noticed certain deep scratches on the overhanging edge of a tree, and asked him what they meant. He more concealed my nervousness than from any real curiosity.

"A tiger has been sharpening his claws here," he said, as he put his hand through one.

"A tiger!" I exclaimed, with an involun-
tary start, looking round as if I expected to see one spring out of the nearest bush; but Tom only laughed at me.

"Where would you have the poor tigers live, if not in their native jungle?" he said.

"We know of two in these woods, and a panther into the bargain; which is much a more dangerous neighbour!"

Here was startling news for me! I had already been cautioned not to go out in the dark without a lantern, for fear of encountering some venomous snake, and always to shake my shoes or my spouge in the morning lest they should be harboring a reptile; but nobody had thought worth while to mention to me that there were tigers in these woods as well as lizards and baboons, and the idea was rather disagreeable. I had never before imagined that people could know of tigers about, and take it so coolly, as a matter of course.

We had breakfast under a tree scored by fresh claw-marks; and all the time Tom kept chaffing me about my fears, so that I knew there could be no real danger. On the road home he explained to me that the tigers were always the most willing to keep out of harm's way as I out of theirs; that the difficulty was to catch the slightest glimpse of them by daylight; that even sportsmen might stalk the jungle for weeks without being seen by one of them; that in any case a respectable tiger, of same mind in a same body, would turn up his nose at the like of me for a breakfast. It was only depraved old tigers, beastly and gone, probably, or joints too stiff for making a livelihood in the regular way, who now and then ventured to come near man. If such a monster were about the white neighbours would soon know of it.

When we got back to the bungalow he showed me the harmless-looking snake which killed far more people in India than the tigers. A wild pig, Tom said, was a more formidable creature to the British sportsman, and in fact he had a trick of charging upon two-legged strangers who chanced to disturb him. The Tuggle, fatal accident in the district, for a long time, had been caused by a panther, at which the horses of a carriage shied and carried it over the precipitous side of the road.

So I knew no more about tigers for a few days, till I had an adventure of my own. I was still that year a child, and generally, whenever I had a trick of charging upon two-legged strangers who chanced to disturb him. The Tuggle, fatal accident in the district, for a long time, had been caused by a panther, at which the horses of a carriage shied and carried it over the precipitous side of the road.

He-
out on my knees, half crying and half laughing at the sorry plight I was in, all tattered and scratched from the fall, though else unhurt.

As soon as I had a little mastered my agitation and put myself in order to hear what this sort of man would serve me, I lost no time in remounting my iron steed and urging it away from the dark thicket, in which, for all I knew, that four-legged foe might still be watching me with hungry eyes. The road ran up-hill now for most of the way, and if fear had not lent me strength, I should have been shaken clean up alive had I been in my mouth at the rusty mark made by harmless creatures darting among the brushwood on either hand. Over and over again I had almost stopped short, taking some darkened patch in the dusky vista ahead for a crouching tiger. But on I went, panting and trembling, through the deepening shadows, thick to my nervous fancy with sights and sounds of terror; and when at length I reached the welcome lights of the bungalow, the first thing I did was to have a good hearty cry before sobbing out the story to my astonished sister Clara.

Clara soothed me as best she could, telling me, for my encouragement, how her own brothers had met with exactly the same misfortune and somehow managed to turn it to good account. But I had more than two sneaking wolves, but how nobody much minded such encounters, which might happen any day, and no harm come of them. Tom, who knew beyond what the matter was, tried to make me laugh by a comic description of the tiger still quaking in the bosom of his family, as he related to them how he had fled through bush and brier from an appalling white monster on wheels, which came near snapping him up as he was walking quietly home from a lecture on vegetation! So I gradually returned to the cheerful side after clucking quite ashamed of myself for this exhibition of cowardice.

When left alone for the night, my fears began to come back upon me, in spite of all I could do to resist them. Clara being badly off for spare room, in the baldness of early infancy, I volunteered to occupy a chappar, a little house of wattles and grass, built on purpose for me at the cost of about fifteen shillings. Now, as I lay trying to get to sleep, I could hear, far below, my voice, now high, now low, from up-pricking ears at every one of the many voices of an Indian night. There was no want of visions, flying and many-footed, to disturb my rest and send my handkerchief roots scampering on the ground, flying foxes rustling in the dry branches above, kites dropping bones on the roof with such skill that the patterings and hummings all round, squeakings and croakings inside and outside, chirping and cracklings from the very furniture, creeping noises and all things invading my bed through a hole in the mosquito curtains, beneath which I tossed and turned, worshipping myself up to a fever in the hot still air. Over the hubbub of restless neighbours, close at hand, from moths to moongoes, I heard, as usual, the long-drawn howl of jackals in the jungle, one lifting up its dismal note with a long howl.

"If I smell a dead Hindo-o-o-o-o-o!"

To which his comrades seemed to cock out in chorus:


For the first time this hideous wail kept me awake, magnified by roused imagination into the growl of tigers or leopards prowling round my frail shelter, through the walls of which a kitten could almost have forced its way. And, what was more serious, the horses in the stable began to stamp and neigh, and the dogs to bark, showing that they really had wind of some wild beast not far off.

To increase my alarm, the lamp set to burn beside me also began to smoulder, leaving me a helpless prey to these bugbears of darkness. But for the fear of being laughed at, not to say the chance of setting my foot on a snake or a cockroach in the dark, I would have hurried indoors to seek refuge in the nursery, and there were moments when I had almost shouted out for help. As it was, I vainly telling myself that I had nothing to be afraid of, I buried my head under the pillow to shut out the noises that beset me, till at length, with a long heavy sigh, I was able to my relief when I had come to despair of it; and I dozed off into a nightmare dream, in which our friendly paws at home seemed to be climbing on to the bed, while I was trying to shoot a tiger whenever I tried to stroke her, then, showing horrible teeth and claws, wanted to play with me as a cat does with a mouse.

When I awoke, safe and sound, it was broad, cheerful daylight, and the tumbled state of the bed was the only sign of my troubled night. My early cup of tea stood cold beside my hunting shirt; my watch told me I had lain two or three hours later than usual. Dressing in haste, and laughing at myself for having been so scared into wakefulness, I went over to the bungalow,

VARIEITIES.

OUTLINE OF A REAL LIFE.

(Varieties.

Profitable Penitence.

It is told of a well-known authoress that her kind thoughtfulness for others is a marked trait in her character, and that at one time being spoken to about it, she replied—"

"If I possess such a virtue, it is the result of constant practice. I had a party when I was a little girl, and having no sash, I wore a blue ribbon round my waist. Another little girl came in resplendent with a sash, and was so elated that I at once took occasion to tell her that sashes were all out of fashion. My patois on that piece of feminine nonsense was so hard to have done me good, and I hope it has.""

TO TRYING TO REFORM.

"My dear," said a conscientious old gentleman to his daughter, a young lady of nineteen, "it grieves me to observe your tendency to exaggerate facts; you really ought to stop it.""

"I know I ought," replied the fair penitent, "and I am trying. I have shed barrels and barrels of tears over this weakness."

FIRST-CLASS CONDUCT.

A family of unlimited wealth coming from New York to Liverpool secured the best accommodation the steamer afforded. The gentleman and his wife kept themselves by themselves most of the time, but the children were permitted to run about the deck; but the steamer until they became such intolerable nuisances that the captain was spoken to, and he gave the following answer:

"Maman," said the captain, "first-class fare means first-class conduct."

There was no further protest.

"Can comeliness of form, or shape, or air, With comeliness of words or deeds compare?
No: those at first the unwary heart may gain;
But when, these only can that heart retain."—Gray.

(Synonyms.)

BYRON.

Good without effort—great without a foe.

The Piano Forte.—The piano forte, or forte piano, as it was often written in the eighteenth century, is an instrument of Italian origin. The earliest certain mention of the piano appears in records of the family of Esté in the letters of a musical instrument maker named Palmarino, dated June 27 and December 31, 1709, and addressed to Alfonso II, Duke of Modena.

"Good without effort—great without a foe."
CHAPTER II.

HEN Clara heard what we proposed to do, she was strongly against it, as became a prudent elder sister; but Tom won her over, and my first reluctance had given place to wild eagerness to go through with this adventure, now that I had brought myself to it, so I was allowed to have my way. A good noon-day nap made me feel all the better and braver. After tea, then, with many recommendations of caution from Clara to her husband, we two started off in the buggy, just as coolly as if we were going out to play lawn-tennis, or to drive round the band-stand at Bombay, not that I really felt so cool, but I took pains to look as if I did.

"We must be there in good time," Tom told me. "The tiger won't show till it is almost dark; then, if he suspects anything wrong, we may whistle for him! for, always remember, he is more afraid of us than we of him. A bad conscience, you see!"

"Shall you not be a little bit afraid, Tom, when he comes? I don't mean exactly afraid, but—you know what I mean."

"Nothing to be afraid of! We are as safe on our perch as in the Zoological Gardens. I am no sheddary, mind you. I never met a tiger on foot, face to face—that's something to be proud of! I only undertake this kind of job, because it's my duty to put down all bad characters in the neighbourhood, and just now there's no other Sahib at the station to do the work. This is simply an execution you are going to attend; a real tiger-slayer would turn up his nose at it."

The scene of my encounter with the tiger we had to leave our trap on the road, and, scrambling down a rough hill-side, reached the spot where he had killed the bullock, under the guidance of a highly interested crowd of villagers whom Tom soon sent packing for fear of the noise they made. I didn't like to look at the half-devoured carcass pointed out to me beside a patch of bushes; and I took care to stick close to Tom and his rifle, in case the tiger should make any mistake about the time of day and appear before we were safely ensconced in our machine.

This was erected upon the fork of a tall tree, commanding an open glade in the jungle, at the edge of which lay the "kill" awaiting the return of its butcher. On a platform of sticks and grass, screened by bushes, a charpoy or native bed had been laid out, and a ladder to it was provided for my convenience by which I ascended to my airy post. There I was able to make myself quite comfortable with my back against a branch and a shawl over my feet, high out of reach of the tiger as I was pleased to note.

The servant being sent away, Tom and I remained alone together, like a modern Persius and Andromeda. When he had loaded and laid ready his two heavy rifles, Tom's next proceeding was to light a pipe; but on second thought he let it out in consideration of the tiger's keen nose, at the same time cautioning me once more not to speak above a whisper. It looked, indeed, like serious business, which a man might not smoke and a girl might not talk, but I did not need this warning to be impressed into the most circum- spect behaviour. And since I could not use my tongue, my eyes and ears were all the more open.

We were looking down into a valley, at the bottom of which lay a few naked fields, shut in by slopes covered with rank dry grass and patches of scrubby jungle that straggled out from the thick woods above. In one of these patches fringing a water or shallow ravine, was our watch-post, from which, at the head of the valley, we caught the mud huts of a village scattered through its sheltering grove, but else almost hidden by habituation. It was a still, warm evening, flooded by the rich light of the sun about to sink into a heavy bank of cloud, and there was an oppressive closeness in the air which made even "strike me we are going to have a thunder-storm! I smell rain, anyhow."

"Hope not!" I whispered back, and he answered with a laugh as dogmatic as at my English notions, for one must have lived in dusty sultry India to know how welcome to all is a shower after weeks and months of heat and drought. The new-comer who does not at once get out of the way of remarking as a matter of congratulation and surprise, "Another fine day!"

"I don't think it will come on till we get home, anyhow, so you needn't be so frightened for these fine things of yours," said he, like an ignorant man he was, as if any woman would put on her "fine things" to come out on such an errand!

We watched the sunset with a lurid glow, and saw the thunder cloud of dark cloud drawn higher and higher over the hill on that side, rapidly casting its shadow over the other half, still shut by hazy tints of amethyst and violet. The bush of this peaceful hour faded, broken from time to time by the resounding cry of a jungle fowl, or the deep hoot of a monkey, at which I had much ado not to start; but there was yet light enough to see the length of Tom's eyes as often as I looked uneasily about me, and I mastered myself, determined to show him that a girl need not be the slave of her nerves.

It was a trying suspense, as now we waited without a word, hardly venturing to move, while the sun slowly set below the horizon and stole faintly out above our heads, and the lights of the village began to twinkle below. That cloud in the west brought darkness on the air; figures were scarcely to be distinguished in the shadow, when my companion suddenly nudged me as a signal that the tiger was coming. Tom's face lighted up with an arched twitting of birds, and at the same time significant silence fell upon a band of jackals that a moment before had howled close to our lurking-place.

Tom put his finger to his lip, just as if I hadn't promised not to speak, whatever might happen. No doubt he felt my hand tremble, for he gave me the second rifle to hold ready for him in case of need; and it seemed to me he must hear the thumpings of my heart at the dull stealthy footsteps and the cracking among the bushes which the tiger set on edge. He afterwards declared that my hair stood on end; but, as in those days we were cautious, this was a clear calumny. I sat still as a statue, fancying I could hear the tiger's breath. Then through the stillness came an unmistakable sound that almost turned me cold in the skin. Tom's heart had thumped through, for, as it came on, it was followed or overwhelmed by a sudden peal of thunder. This died away and all again was silence.

I suppose I must have asked a question in my smallest voice, for Tom answered me excitedly, and, even at such a time, I was not so much afraid as to wonder how for once he could lose his cool, choking manner.

"I don't know—I think so—I am not sure—do you see anything?"

His words were cut off with another thunder-clap.

He had snatched the second rifle from my hand, but did not fire; and a gleam of lightning showed me his looks bent intently forward as if he had seen what we lay in for, and the new bullock lay, could catch no sight of the tiger.

"Can you see him? Did you see him?"

Tom kept exclaiming. "I think he was, but they always let you know, Hallo! What's the matter now?"

For now, all at once, we were enveloped in utter darkness. In our excitement we had not noticed how the wind freshened suddenly. Now a whirling cloud of dust had swept up, borne before the storm which began to burst in full fury about us. Forgetful of all my brave resolutions, I could not help clutching Tom's arm in dismay, for this Egyptian gloom was a new experience to me.

"It's only dust!" he cried, assuming an usual tone to encourage me. "I don't think it took us two minutes sooner, before I got a shot at him, for I'll eat my head if the brute wasn't badly hit. A dust-storm, with rain at the back of it. What a nuisance! Though I don't think we shall have to stay up here till it's over. You don't happen to have such a thing as a water-bottle about you, I suppose? Well, we are cut in for a ducking, that's all. Put my coat round your shoulders before the rain comes."

But I wouldn't hear of such a thing, indignantly declaring I was no sugar-girl to melt under a shower; and there, side by side, we sat in the stillness darkness, almost choked and blinded by flying dust, through which
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broke the thunder and lightning, nearer at every burst, I made sure. Thunder always upset me, and I found it doubly alarming with such an unfamiliar accompaniment.

"Hold my hand, old girl, if you are afraid of being blown away," said Tom, cheerily.

"There, I told you so!"

The dust-cloud, indeed, was already passing off, and now we felt the first drops of rain patter in our faces; but we sat quietly for some little time before it came on to pour a regular shower-bath.

"Why not get down and stand under the tree," I chattered shiveringly, when I found myself being drenched to the skin.

"No, no! that would never do," answered Tom.

"We have got to stay here till it is all over.""But why, Tom?"

"Young people should do what they are told and ask no questions," said he, quoting a favourite precept of Clara to her chums.

He did not at the time tell me his reason, but afterwards he explained to me why we could not leave our unsheltered refuge. Refugees have a way, it seems, of not crying out when they are hurt, but then should be most carefully avoided. For all we knew the wounded beast might still be close at hand, so we durst not descend in the dark to get within his range, but must bear the lesser evil of remaining exposed to the storm. Tom confessed, then, that he keenly regretted having brought me on such an adventure, never foreseeing it would take this unpleasant turn. One good thing was, as he put it, that he had no time to trouble about his own share of the danger, for thinking what Clara would say if anything happened to me.

There was real danger in our present situation. The tree where we were perched, standing out prominently on the hillside as it did, might at any moment be struck by the lightning which glanced and dazzled around us, reflected so brightly on the rifle barrels that again and again I believed I saw it gleaming along them. At every crashing peel it was all I could do to not shriek out in terror. But, mindful of the character I had to keep up, I bit my lips tight not to let any exclamation escape them. Tom should learn that I could at least hold my tongue under trying circumstances, though every flash must have shown him my white face, and the tickety macaroni shock from my involuntary starts. He, for his part, considered as he was on my behalf, all the more made a point of speaking lightly and coolly, which had the desired effect of giving me a little confidence. Thus we did our best to dispense to one another, and each wondered that his companion was not more afraid.

"Fancy if you had taken to fainting, tumbling off into the tiger's jaws, or any thing of that kind!" Tom said, when it was all over. "I can tell you I turned blue down to my boots every time I looked at you, till I saw you weren't the sort of girl to make more fuss than there was any need for.

This is the nearest approach to a compliment I ever heard Tom pay, which, to tell the truth, I little deserved, for what I had to fight against was merely the vague instinctive fear of thunder and lightning that would have come upon me almost as strongly when lying safe in bed. Not being well versed in such matters, I did not know the risk we run of getting burned to a cinder by some flash attuned to our tall tree as a lightning-conductor. But Tom knew.

At length the rain began to stop, and the storm could be heard rolling away over the farther ridges. Tom took to shouting at the pitch of his voice, till some natives appeared with lights, and, all stiff and dripping, we were released from our perilous observatory. Climbing back to the road, we found the buggy gone; the horse had taken fright at the storm and run away with the seats left in charge of him: but it did both of us good to have to walk home in our wet garments. A pretty-looking pair we were that arrived about midnight to relieve Clara's anxiety! Everything I had on had been powdered over by red dust before being soaked through, so that I might seem to have been taking a bath of Gregory's mixture. Of course it was out of the question to search for the tiger that night. But early next morning Tom was back to follow up his traces, and found him not a hundred yards away, dead, among the crushed and torn underwood, having bitten his own leg in the agony of his convulsive struggles—a terrible sight. After all, we might have come down to shelter ourselves from the storm, but the fierce beast had died without a murmur, unless the thunder made it front matters.

So the grateful villagers were freed from their bugbear; and Tom had in their eyes all the glory of a St. George with his dragon safely done for; and I got the skin which had been promised me, and my feet are resting on it at this moment, as I write in quest old England, thinking over the memories of my short visit to India. But I have no desire to earn another such trophy, and my brother-in-law declared he would never again propose to take a girl out tiger-shooting, which indeed is "no sport for ladies." [THE END.]

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QUESTIONS.

111. With whom did "he sceptre" come into the house of Judah? How long did it remain in their hands?

112. Give the names and titles applied to David in the Bible.

113. Name the three heroes who slew lions, and who are mentioned in the Old Testament.

114. By whom, and to whom, was the most ancient letter on record written?

115. Give a definition of a "Parable": by what prophet are parables called "similitudes"?

116. Name two miracles recorded in the 2nd Book of Samuel.

117. How many times was David anointed king? Where did the events take place; and by whom was the ceremony performed?

118. What were the names of the two settled tribes (not nomades) that were descended from Lot? What did we know of their habits; and what recent discovery has thrown light on the history of one of them?

119. Name the three epochs into which the life of David is naturally divided.

120. What city was made the capital of the kingdom over which David reigned; and what prophecy concerning the boundaries of the kingdom was fulfilled in the reign of his son Solomon?