

LIONESS AND CUBS.



XCEPTING in the vast wilds of Central Africa, untrodden by the foot of the white man, the lion, even in the regions to which it is at present restricted, is much more rare than formerly. The ancient Romans procured incredible multitudes

for the arena: Scylla brought 100 males at once into the combat; Pompey gave 600, of which more than half were males; Cæsar, 400; nor was it until the time of the later emperors that any difficulty in procuring them began to be experienced.

There are few travellers in Africa who have not been under the necessity of encountering this formidable beast; and many are the exciting narratives which have been related of the incidents of the chase—of escaping from almost certain death—of triumph over the foe. Dr. Livingstone's account of his adventures with a lion is of thrilling interest. Singular to say, his body was certainly identified, when lately brought to England, by Sir W. Ferguson recognising the crushed bone of the arm that had been caused by the attack of a lion on that celebrated traveller some twenty years previously. Sir W. Ferguson had reset the arm during Livingstone's temporary visit to England shortly after the accident.

As a general rule, the lion is ornamented with a mane of which the female is entirely destitute. What are considered as the true lions belong exclusively to the Old World, where, in former times, they were both widely and abundantly diffused; but with the advancement of man into their haunts, their range has, every year, become more and more circumscribed, until they are now only

to be found in Asia and Africa. They no longer exist in Europe, a part of which, there is no doubt, they once inhabited; nor are they now to be found in Egypt, Palestine, or Syria. Even in India and Persia, and some districts of Arabia, they have become comparatively rare; while the African lion is gradually retiring further and further from the Cape, thus acknowledging his incapability of disputing the ground of his native habitat with the superior intelligence of man.

Mr. Bennett, formerly of the Tower Menagerie, observes that "the true country of the lion is Africa, in the vast and untrodden wilds of which, from the immense deserts of the north to the trackless forests of the south, he reigns supreme and uncontrolled. In the sandy deserts of Arabia, in the wild districts of Persia, and the vast jungles of Hindostan, he still maintains a precarious footing; but from the classic soil of Greece, as well as from the whole of Asia Minor, both of which were once exposed to his ravages, he has been utterly dislodged and extirpated."

The general prey of the African lion consists of the largest quadrupedal herbivora, few of which have the power to combat with it, or to escape from the deadly effects of its terrible spring. The bullocks of the farmer frequently become the victims of its power; so that their owner is generally possessed of a good gun, in the use of which he is usually so well practised as to rarely miss his aim when brought within range of the foe of his herds and flocks.

It appears that, when the lion is roused, it walks off quietly, at first, with a sort of hesitating, uncertain step; and if there be no cover near, and not pursued, it gradually increases its speed to a trot,

till it has reached a secure distance, when it bounds away. Upon such occasions its demeanour is described as of a careless description, as if it did not want to fight, although, if unduly pressed, was quite ready for the combat. When pursued closely, it turns, and couches, generally with its face to its adversary, which is the moment of trial to the nerves of the sportsman. If he be sufficiently cool and skilful in the use of his arm, the rifle ends the fray at once; but if, in the flutter of the unexpected turn of the lion, he miss a vital part, or the ball whizzes past, leaving the animal unscathed, he often charges his foe, and, in his excited fury, takes a terrible vengeance. Even then, however, hunters sometimes save themselves by collecting resolution to make a stand in the face of the beast.

In the "Travels of Lichtenstein," the following thrilling incident is related:—"When passing near the Riet river-gate, and while our oxen were grazing, Von Wyk, colonist, stopped and said, 'It is not more than two years since, in the very place we now stand, I ventured to take one of the most daring shots that ever was hazarded. My wife was sitting within the house, near the door; the children were playing about her, and I was without, near the house, busied in doing something to a wagon, when suddenly, though it was mid-day, an enormous lion appeared, came up and laid himself quietly down in the shade, upon the very threshold of the door. My wife, either frozen with fear, or aware of the danger attending any attempt to flee, remained motionless in her place, while the children took refuge in her lap. The cry they uttered attracted my attention, and I hastened towards the door; but my astonishment may well be conceived when I found the entrance to it barred in such a way. Although the animal had not seen me, unarmed as I was, escape seemed impossible; yet I glided gently, scarcely knowing what I meant to do, to

the side of my house, up to the window of my chamber, where I knew my loaded gun was standing. By a most happy chance, I had set it in the corner, close by the window, so that I could reach it with my hand; for, as you may perceive, the opening is too small to admit of my having got in; and, still more fortunately, the door of the room was open, so that I could see the whole danger of the scene. The lion was beginning to move, perhaps with the intention of making a spring. There was no longer any time to think; I called softly to the mother not to be alarmed; and invoking the name of the Lord, fired my piece! The ball passed directly over the hair of my boy's head, and lodged in the forehead of the lion, immediately over his eyes, which shot forth, as it were, sparks of fire, and stretched him on the ground so that he never stirred more. My relief may be easily imagined."

In reference to the roar of the lion, Gordon Cumming tells us that it is one of the most striking things connected with the king of beasts. It is grand in the extreme. "It consists, occasionally, of a low, deep moaning, repeated five or six times, ending in faintly audible sighs. He will often startle the forest with loud, deep-toned, solemn roars, repeated five or six times in quick succession, each increasing in loudness to the third or fourth, when his voice dies away in five or six low muffled sounds, very much resembling distant thunder.

As a general rule, lions roar during the night, their sighing moans commencing as the shades of evening envelop the forest, and continuing at intervals throughout the night. In distant and secluded regions, however, I have constantly heard them roaring loudly as late as nine or ten o'clock on a bright sunny morning. In hazy and rainy weather, they are to be heard at every hour in the day, but their roar is subdued."

