



## ADVENTURES WITH LIONS.

THE lion is found from within one hundred miles or so of the Cape of Good Hope to the shores of the Mediterranean; in short, through nearly the length and breadth of Africa. As regards the more southern portion of that continent, however, it is a very generally received opinion with both colonists and natives that there are two distinct species of this animal—viz., the so-called “black-maned” and the “yellow-maned” lion; the former being described as the longest in the body, and the latter as the larger in regard to general proportions. The dark colour of the mane of the “black-maned lion,” they furthermore say, is not attributable in any way to age—the cause usually assigned by naturalists—but it is of that hue from the first; and this, their view of the matter, is in some degree corroborated by a circumstance that came to my personal knowledge, and for the correctness of which (says Mr. Anderson) I can vouch. Two lions were shot on the same spot, and almost at the same instant of time. Both were full-grown; but one was young, whilst the other was so old that he had merely the stumps of his teeth remaining, and yet the manes of both were similar—that is, blackish.

Besides the so-called black and yellow-maned lion, the Anna Zulu Caffirs, whose opinions are by no means to be despised, distinguish between the grey or white, the red and the grey-necked lion (called by the Boers the blue-necked), which they say is particularly savage; and in addition, both hunters and natives make mention of a maneless lion.

The strength of the lion is enormous; in Algeria—according to Gerard—the

Arabs say it is equal to that of forty men. Hans, my faithful attendant, told me he had known an instance where the beast had broken the back of a large ox whilst it was yet alive. This feat the lion accomplished when planted, so to say, on the poor animal's hind quarters;—for striking his claws deep into the neck of the victim, he, by a violent effort, brought its fore and hind quarters into such close proximity that the spine, as a natural consequence, was at once separated.

He (Hans) told me, moreover that on a certain occasion a lion seized one of his largest oxen by the muzzle, and dragged it away bodily to a distance, when he killed and devoured it at his leisure.

Thunberg's testimony is to the like effect. “The lion,” he says, “is possessed of such immense strength that he will not only attack an ox of the largest size, but will very nimbly throw it over his shoulders, and leap over a fence four feet high with it, although at the same time the ox's legs hang dangling on the ground.”

And Sparman tells us, “that he saw a lion in the Cape Colony take a heifer in his mouth, and though the legs trailed on the ground, he carried it off as a cat would a rat, and leaped a broad dike without the least difficulty.”

But what Montgomery Martin relates as to the enormous strength of the lion is still more extraordinary. After stating “that a young lion has been known to carry a good-sized horse a mile from the spot where he killed it,” he goes on to say: “An instance occurred in the Sneemoberg, where one of these beasts carried off a two-year-old heifer; his ‘spoor’ was followed by the hunters for five hours on horseback, and throughout



the whole distance the carcass was ascertained to have touched the ground only once or twice!"

Notwithstanding the above proofs of the great strength and power of the South African lion, Englishmen who have hunted in India, where, as said, this animal also abounds in certain districts, are inclined to think that in these respects he is inferior to the royal tiger, who has been known to smash a bullock's head by a single blow of his paw! That the strength of the lion should be inferior to that of the tiger can, however, hardly be the case, since their relative size is, I take it, much the same, and the structure of the skeleton (however different the outward form of the animal may be) is so nearly alike as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the one from the other. The notion in question is not unlikely to arise from the tiger being in the habit of *striking* his victim; whilst the action of the lion, when despatching his prey, is more *cat-like-scratching*, as it were.

Speaking of the lion's strength and prowess, it may be proper here to remark that English naturalists, after telling us that in the Cape Colony the lion is hunted with dogs, go on to say:—"The hounds surround him; and, rushing upon him all at once, soon tear him to pieces." It is not, of course, for me to gainsay such high authorities; but I strongly suspect that the reader, after perusing these pages, will agree with me in thinking that even if a score of dogs were simultaneously to attack the king of beasts, not only would a few of them bite the dust, but he himself would come out of the conflict all but, or altogether, unscathed.

The usual pace of a lion is a walk; and though apparently rather slow, yet, from the great length of his body, he is able to get over a good deal of ground in a short time. Indeed, he has been known, in the course of the night, to cross a plain which at that particular

point was, as the crow flies, forty-five miles in width.

Occasionally he trots, when his speed is not inconsiderable.

His gallop—or, rather, succession of bounds—is, for a short distance, very fast: nearly or quite equal to that of a horse. Indeed, unless the steed has somewhat the start when the beast charges, it will be puzzled to escape. Many instances are on record of horsemen who have incautiously approached too near to the lion, prior to firing, who have been pulled down by him before they could get out of harm's way. Happily, however, the beast soon tires of the exertion of galloping, and unless his first rush succeeds, he, for the most part, soon halts and beats a retreat.

As to the lion's provender, he does not seem particular. The African antelope is his favourite fare. Once in a time, moreover, the lion kills and eats his brother lion. On only a single occasion, however, has an instance of the kind come to my knowledge. This was when I was on my way to the Lake Ngami. On a certain night we had badly wounded a lion, which retreated growling into the bush, and shortly afterwards a whole troop of lions rushed on their disabled brother, and tore him to pieces.

And once in a time the lion makes a meal of his mate, an instance of which came under my personal notice.

Early one morning a herdsman of ours came running up to us in great fright, and announced "that a lion was devouring a lioness." We thought at first that the man must be mistaken; but on proceeding to the spot found his story to be perfectly true, and that only the skull, the large bones, and the skin of the animal were left. On examining the ground more closely, the fresh remains of a young springbok were discovered. We therefore conjectured that the lion and lioness being very hungry, and the antelope not proving a sufficient meal



for both, they had quarrelled, and that he, after killing his wife, had coolly eaten her also. And certainly, a most substantial breakfast it must have been.

The lion is very destructive to the cattle and sheep of the colonists and natives, especially when several of them are in company, and many instances have come to my knowledge where a troop of these beasts have dashed into the fold and destroyed a number of oxen equal to their own. One night, indeed, when on my way from Damaraland to the Cape, and close to my bivouac, five lions broke into a kraal belonging to a famous hunter, afterwards in my employ, and slaughtered no fewer than five cows.

But great as are the ravages of the lion amongst the domestic animals of Southern Africa, they are trifling in comparison with those the inhabitants of Algeria have to complain of, which are something terrible.

The lion, as is known, becomes occasionally a regular "man-eater," and when such is the case proves a dreadful scourge to the country. Happily, however, not one lion, perhaps, in fifty can properly come under the above denomination.

Various reasons are assigned for lions becoming "man-eaters." Some imagine they first acquire the taste for human flesh (which subsequently they are said to prefer to that of all other) to certain tribes in the interior never burying their dead, but unceremoniously leaving the corpses of their friends exposed in the forest, or on the plain, as the case may be, a prey to wild beasts or the vulture; and I can readily imagine that a lion thus "blooded," so to say, would have little hesitation, when opportunity presented itself, of springing upon and carrying off the traveller or native that came in his way.

But the practice of getting rid of the dead in the way spoken of does not exist in all parts of the interior, where, neverthe-

less, "man-eaters" are to be found. I am, therefore, inclined to believe that the habit of certain lions making a meal of a man, when they can get hold of him, arises rather from incapacity on their part to secure their ordinary prey than from anything else; and I have the greater reason to think this is the case, since young lions are seldom found to indulge in human food. When the beast becomes crippled, whether from wounds or old age, and is no longer able to grapple with the wild animals of his native haunts, it is only reasonable to suppose he will seize the first and most favourable opportunity of satisfying his hunger, and this the exposed situation of the native villages too often affords.

Strangely enough, the lion, it is confidently asserted, would rather dine off a black man than a white, and the cause assigned is somewhat singular. "The beast in question," says Thunberg, "had much rather eat a Hottentot than a Christian—perhaps because the Hottentot, being besmeared with fat, always stinks, and because, as he never eats salt or spices, the juices of his body are not so acrid."

In certain parts of Southern Africa that have been devastated and partially depopulated by bloody intestine wars, lions have become so numerous and daring, and, from feeding on the bodies of the slain, have acquired such a taste for human flesh, that the remaining inhabitants, to escape their clutches, have been necessitated to erect their huts in most extraordinary situations.

On one occasion, I must confess to having felt rather uncomfortable. I had posted myself in a dense mimosa brake, commanding the approach to a certain river at a point much frequented by wild animals and flanked by an immense pitfall. The darkness was deepened by surrounding thick foliage and high river banks. Indeed, so black was the night that I could not discern even the muzzle of my gun. The gloominess of my solitude



was increased by the occasional "Quaqua!" of the night-heron, which made the succeeding hush more dreary, during which even the falling of the leaves and the rustling of insects among dry grass were hailed as a relief to the oppressive silence. To a man in a savage wilderness, and without a companion, silence, especially when combined with utter privation of light, is inexpressibly solemn. It strikes the mind not merely as a negation, but as a threatening presence. It seems ominous. I shall never forget the loneliness and sense of desolation I felt on this occasion. It was past midnight, and still no game appeared.

Suddenly, I fancied I heard the purr and breathing of an animal close behind me; but, as no other indications of any living thing ensued, I attributed the sounds to a heated imagination. All at once, however, the dismal stillness was disturbed by the quick steps of a troop of pallahs, descending the stony slope leading direct to my ambush. Stooping as low as possible, in order to catch their outline, I awaited their arrival with my gun on full cock. Nearer and nearer they came, till at last I fancied the leader was on the verge of the pit-fall; but, just at that moment, there was a low, stifled growl, a rush, and then a faint cry as of some dying animal. All was again silent. Though the impenetrable darkness prevented me from seeing anything, I could no longer doubt that I was in the immediate vicinity of a lion.

I freely acknowledge that I felt awed, well knowing that were he to attack me I should be completely at his mercy. My situation was critical in the extreme. Straining eyes and ears to discover the beast's whereabouts, I held my breath in fearful suspense, whilst every nerve was strung to the highest pitch. Presently I heard, to my astonishment, the report of a gun within fifty paces of my hiding-place; then a second and a third shot. This made matters worse; for I now be-

came apprehensive that the men, not aware of my presence, might direct their fire towards me. I therefore sprang to my feet, and vociferated—"Who's there?" "Sir! the lion—the lion!" replied Eyebrecht, the interpreter, for it was no other.

The next instant he stood trembling before me. He had, it appears, been sent by the chief Amral to call me back (he entertaining great apprehensions for my personal safety, several of his people having recently been either killed or cruelly mangled by lions, then unusually numerous in the country, when on the watch in the night-time for game), but had encountered the beast in his path, and fired in order to frighten him away.

Early next morning a number of Hot-tentots came to examine the ground, when, as I had expected, we found the footprints of a lion at the very back of my "screen," and scarcely distant the length of the gun-barrel from where my own person had been, where he had evidently been crouching previously to leaping on the pallah (whose cry I had heard in the night); but which, though wounded, had effected its escape. How far the beast intended mischief is hard to say, but in any case my situation had not been an enviable one.

At a subsequent period I was placed in an even more trying position. Journeying in a very lonely part of the country, and accompanied only by a single native, I arrived one day at a fountain situated in a defile, amongst some craggy rocks. The water issued from different places amongst these cliffs, forming little pools here and there; and though the place was difficult of access, elephants and other large game were in the habit of flocking to the water nightly. As the stony nature of the ground afforded excellent "ambuscades," and being much in the want of provision, I determined to watch the pools in question for a night or two.

The first night was a failure; but in



the second, I succeeded in killing a white rhinoceros. After this, though I watched long and well, nothing appeared, and at last sleep overtook me. How long I slumbered I know not; but all of a sudden I thought, or dreamt, that I was in danger. From much night-watching my hearing and sight had gradually acquired such an acuteness that, even in sleep, I was able to retain a certain consciousness of what was passing around me; and it is probable that I was indebted to this remarkable faculty for the preservation of my life on the present occasion. At first, I could not divest myself of fear; and for awhile my senses were too confused to enable me to form any accurate notion of the imagined danger. Gradually, however, consciousness returned, and I could distinctly hear the breathing of an animal close to my face, accompanied by a purr like that of a cat. Only one animal I knew existed in *these parts* capable of producing the sound; and I at once came to the conclusion that a lion was actually smelling at my person.

If a man had ever cause for dread, I think I certainly had on this occasion. I became seriously alarmed. My first impulse was to get hold of my gun, which was lying ready cocked immediately before me, and the next to raise myself partially from my recumbent position. In doing so, I made as little noise as possible; but slight though it might be, it was sufficient to attract the notice

of the beast, who uttered a gruff kind of growl, too well known to be misunderstood. Following with my eyes the direction of the sound, I endeavoured to discover the lion, but could only make out a large, dark mass looming through the night-mist. Scarcely knowing what I was about, I instinctively levelled my gun at the beast. My finger was on the trigger; for a moment I hesitated; but, by a sudden impulse, pulled it, and the next instant the surrounding rocks rang with the report, followed by roarings from the beast, as if in the agonies of death. Well knowing what a wounded lion is capable of, and how utterly helpless I was, I regretted my rashness. The wounded beast, who at times seemed to be within a few paces of the "screen," and at others at some little distance, was rolling on, and tearing up, the ground, in convulsive agonies. How long this struggle between life and death lasted is hard to say, but to me it appeared an age. Gradually, however, and to my great relief, his roars and moans subsided, and after awhile ceased altogether.

Dawn at length appeared; but it was not until after some time, and then with much caution, that I ventured to ascertain the fate of the lion, whom, to my great satisfaction, I found dead within fifty yards of my place of concealment. The beast was of an average size; but, unfortunately, the hyænas and jackals had played sad havoc with his skin.

