

REID MAYNE

THE CLIFF
CLIMBERS

Mayne Reid
The Cliff Climbers

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The Cliff Climbers A Sequel to «The Plant Hunters»:*

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Chapter One. The Himalayas

Who has not heard of the Himalayas – those Titanic masses of mountains that interpose themselves between the hot plains of India and the cold table-lands of Thibet – a worthy barrier between the two greatest empires in the world, the Mogul and the Celestial? The veriest tyro in geography can tell you that they are the tallest mountains on the surface of the earth; that their summits – a half-dozen of them at least – surmount the sea-level by more than five miles of perpendicular height; that more than thirty of them rise above twenty thousand feet, and carry upon their tops the eternal snow!

The more skilled geographer, or *geognosist*, could communicate hundreds of other interesting facts in relation to these majestic mountains; vast volumes might be filled with most attractive details of them – their *fauna*, their *sylva*, and their *flora*. But here, my reader, we have only space to speak of a few

of the more salient points, that may enable you to form some idea of the Titanic grandeur of these mighty masses of snow-crowned rock, which, towering aloft, frown or smile, as the case may be, on our grand empire of Ind.

It is the language of writers to call the Himalayas a “chain of mountains.” Spanish geographers would call them a “sierra” (saw) – a phrase which they have applied to the Andes of America. Either term is inappropriate, when speaking of the Himalayas: for the vast tract occupied by these mountains – over 200,000 square miles, or three times the size of Great Britain – in shape bears no resemblance to a chain. Its length is only six or seven times greater than its breadth – the former being about a thousand miles, while the latter in many places extends through two degrees of the earth’s latitude.

Moreover, from the western termination of the Himalayas, in the country of Cabul, to their eastern declension near the banks of the Burrampooter, there is no continuity that would entitle them to the appellation of a “chain of mountains.” Between these two points they are cut transversely – and in many places – by stupendous valleys, that form the channels of great rivers, which, instead of running east and west, as the mountains themselves were supposed to trend, have their courses in the transverse direction – often flowing due north or south.

It is true that, to a traveller approaching the Himalayas from any part of the great plain of India, these mountains present the appearance of a single range, stretching continuously along

the horizon from east to west. This, however, is a mere optical illusion; and, instead of one range, the Himalayas may be regarded as a *congeries* of mountain ridges, covering a superficies of 200,000 square miles, and running in as many different directions as there are points in the compass.

Within the circumference of this vast mountain tract there is great variety of climate, soil, and productions. Among the lower hills – those contiguous to the plains of India – as well as in some of the more profound valleys of the interior – the flora is of a tropical or subtropical character. The palm, the tree fern, and bamboo here flourish in free luxuriance. Higher up appears the vegetation of the temperate zone, represented by forests of gigantic oaks of various species, by sycamores, pines, walnut, and chestnut trees. Still higher are the rhododendrons, the birches, and heaths; succeeded by a region of herbaceous vegetation – by slopes, and even table-plains, covered with rich grasses. Stretching onward and upward to the line of the eternal snow, there are encountered the *Cryptogamia*– the lichens and mosses of Alpine growth – just as they are found within the limits of the polar circle; so that the traveller, who passes from the plains of India towards the high ridges of the Himalayas, or who climbs out of one of the deeper valleys up to some snow-clad summit that surmounts it, may experience within a journey of a few hours' duration every degree of climate, and observe a representative of every species of vegetation known upon the face of the earth!

The Himalayas are not uninhabited. On the contrary, one considerable kingdom (Nepaul), with many petty states and communities (as Bhotan, Sikhim, Gurwhal, Kumaon, and the famed Cashmere), are found within their boundaries – some enjoying a sort of political independence, but most of them living under the protection either of the Anglo-Indian empire, on the one side, or that of China upon the other. The inhabitants of these several states are of mixed races, and very different from the people of Hindostan. Towards the east – in Bhotan and Sikhim – they are chiefly of the Mongolian stock, in customs and manners resembling the people of Thibet, and, like them, practising the religion of the Lamas. In the western Himalayas there is an admixture of Ghoorka mountaineers, Hindoos from the south, Sikhs from Lahore, and Mahometans from the old empire of the Moguls; and here, also, are to be found, in full profession, the three great representative religions of Asia – Mahometan, Buddhist, and Brahmin.

The population, however, is exceedingly small compared with the surface over which it is distributed; and there are many tracts in the Himalayan hills, thousands of square miles in extent, where no human being dwells – where no chimney sends up its smoke. Indeed, there are vast tracts, especially among the high snow-covered summits, that have either never been explored, or only very rarely, by the adventurous hunter. Others there are quite inaccessible; and it is needless to say, that the highest peaks – such as Chumulari, Kinchinjunga, Donkia, Dawalghisi, and

the like – are far beyond the reach of even the most daring climber. Perhaps no one has ever ascended to the height of five miles above the level of the sea; and it is a question whether at that elevation a human being could exist. At such a height it is probable that animal life would become extinct, by reason either of the extreme cold or the rarity of the atmosphere.

Though the Himalaya mountains have been known from the earliest historic times – for they are the *Imaus* and *Emodus* of the ancient writers – it is only within the present century that we in Europe have obtained any definite knowledge of them. The Portuguese and Dutch – the first European colonists of India – have told us very little about them; and even our own Anglo-Indian writers were long silent upon this interesting theme. Exaggerated accounts of the hostility and cruelty of the Himalayan highlanders – more especially the Ghoorkas – prevented private explorations; and with the exception of some half-dozen books, most of them referring to the western section of the Himalayas, and comparatively valueless, from the want of scientific knowledge on the part of their authors, this vast tract has remained almost a *terra incognita* up to the present time.

Of late, however, we have obtained a better acquaintance with this interesting portion of the earth's surface. The botanist, lured thither by its magnificent *flora*, has opened to us a new world of vegetation. Royle and Hooker have ably achieved this task. The zoologist, equally attracted by its varied *fauna*, has made us acquainted with new forms of animal life. Hodgson and

Wallich are the historians in this department. Scarcely less are we indebted to the sportsman and hunter – to Markham, Dunlop, and Wilson the “mountaineer.”

But in addition to these names, that have become famous through the published reports of their explorations, there are others that still remain unrecorded. The *plant-hunter*– the humble but useful commissioner of the enterprising nurseryman – has found his way into the Himalayas; has penetrated their most remote gorges; has climbed their steepest declivities; and wandered along the limit of their eternal snow. In search of new forms of leaf and flower, he has forded the turbid stream, braved the roaring torrent, dared the dangerous avalanche, and crossed the dread crevasse of the glistening glacier; and though no printed book may record his adventurous experience, not the less has he contributed to our knowledge of this great mountain world. His lessons may be read on the parterre, in the flowers of the purple magnolia, the deodar, the rhododendron. They may be found in the greenhouse, in the eccentric blossoms of the orchis, and curious form of the screw-pine – in the garden, in many a valuable root and fruit, destined ere long to become favourites of the dessert-table. It is ours to chronicle the story of an humble expedition of this kind – the adventures of a young plant-hunter, the *employé* of an enterprising “seedsman” well-known in the world’s metropolis.

Chapter Two.

A view from Chumulari

Our scene lies in the very heart of the Himalayas – in that district of them least explored by English travellers, though not the most distant from the Anglo-Indian capital, Calcutta. Almost due north of this city, and in that portion of the Himalayan ranges embraced by the great bend of the Burrampooter, may be found the spot upon which our interest is to be fixed. Literally may it be termed a spot, when compared in superficies with the vast extent of wilderness that surrounds it – a wilderness of bleak, barren ridges, of glistening glaciers, of snow-clad summits, soaring one above another, or piled incongruously together like cumuli in the sky.

In the midst of this chaos of rock, ice, and snow, Chumulari raises his majestic summit, crowned and robed in white, as becomes his sacred character. Around are other forms, his acolytes and attendants, less in stature, but mighty mountains nevertheless, and, like him, wearing the vestment of everlasting purity.

Could you stand upon the top of Chumulari, you would have under your eye, and thousands of feet below your feet, the scene of our narrative – the arena in which its various incidents were enacted. Not so unlike an amphitheatre would that scene appear

– only differing from one, in the small number of the *dramatis persona*, and the entire absence of spectators.

From the top of Chumulari, looking down among the foot hills of this majestic mountain, you might behold a valley of a singular character – so singular as at once to fix your attention. You would note that it is of a regular oval shape; and that instead of being bounded by sloping declivities, it is girt by an almost vertical cliff that appears to be continuous all around it. This cliff of dark granitic rock you might guess with your eye to rise several hundred feet sheer from the bottom of the valley. If it were in the season of summer, you might further observe, that receding from its brow a dark-coloured declivity of the mountain rises still higher, terminating all around in peaks and ridges – which, being above the snow-line are continually covered with the pale white mantle that has fallen upon them from the heavens.

These details would be taken in at the first glance; and then your eye would wander into the valley below, and rest there – fixed by the singularity of the scene, and charmed by its soft loveliness – so strongly contrasting with the rude surroundings on which you had been hitherto gazing.

The form of the valley would suggest the existence of the grand elliptical crater of some extinct volcano. But instead of the black sulphuric *scoria*, that you might expect to see strewed over its base, you behold a verdant landscape of smiling loveliness, park-like plains interposed with groves and copses, here and there a mound of rock-work, as if piled artificially and for

ornament. Around the cliffs appears a belt of forest of darker green; and occupying the centre a limpid lake, on whose silver surface at a certain hour of the day you might see reflected part of the snow-crowned summit on which you are standing – the cone of Chumulari itself.

With a good glass you might distinguish quadrupeds of several *species* straying over the verdant pastures; birds of many kinds upon the wing, and others disporting themselves upon the surface of the lake.

You would be tempted to look for a grand mansion. You would send your glance in every direction, expecting to see chimneys and turrets overtopping the trees; but in this you would be disappointed.

On one side of the valley, near to the base of its bounding cliff, you might see a white vapour ascending from the surface of the earth. It would be an error to believe it smoke. It is not that – only the *rime* rising over a hot-spring bubbling out from the rocks and forming the little rivulet, that, like a silver string, connects it with the lake.

Charmed with the view of this lovely valley, you would desire to visit it. You would descend the long slope of Chumulari, and straggling through the labyrinth of rugged foot hills that surround it, you would reach the brow of the bounding precipice; but there you must come to a halt. No path leads downward; and if you are still determined to set foot on the shores of that smiling lake, you will have to make the descent of the cliffs by means of a rope or

rope-ladder several hundred feet in length.

With comrades to help you, you may accomplish this; but once in the valley, you can only get out of it by remounting your rope-ladder: for you will find no other means of exit.

At one end of the valley you may perceive a gap in the cliffs, and fancy that through this you may make your way out to the side of the mountain. The gap may be easily reached, by going up a gentle acclivity; but having passed through it, you will discover that it only guides you into a gorge, like the valley itself, bounded on both sides by precipitous cliff's. This gorge is half filled by a glacier; on the surface of which you may pass for a certain distance downward. At the end of that descent you will find the glacier cut by a deep crevasse, a hundred feet in depth and a hundred in width. Without bridging the crevasse, you can go no further; and if you did succeed in bridging it, further down you would find others deeper and wider, over which it would be impossible for you to pass.

Return then, and examine the singular valley into which you have made your way. You will find there trees of many kinds, quadrupeds of many kinds, birds of many kinds, and insects of many kinds – you will find every form of animal life, except that of the human being. If you find not man, however, you may discover traces of him. Close to the hot-spring, and forming a sort of “lean-to” against the cliff, you may observe a rude hut built with blocks of stone, and plastered with mud from the bed of the rivulet. Enter it. You will find it empty, cold, untenanted

by living thing. No furniture. Stone couches covered with sedge and grass, upon which men may have slept or lain; and two or three blocks of granite upon which they may have sat. That is all. Some pieces of skin hanging around the walls, and the bones of animals strewed over the ground outside, give a clue to the kind of food upon which the inhabitants of the hut may have subsisted. Hunters they must have been. That will be your natural conjecture.

But how did they get into this valley, and how got they out of it? Of course, like yourself, they descended into it, and then ascended out again, by means of a rope-ladder.

That would be the explanation at which you would arrive; and it would be a satisfactory one, but for a circumstance that just now comes under your observation.

Scanning the *façade* of the cliff, your eye is arrested by a singular appearance. You perceive a serried line, or rather a series of serried lines, running from the base in a vertical direction. On drawing nearer to these curious objects, you discover them to be ladders – the lowest set upon the earth, and reaching to a ledge, upon which the second is rested; this one extending to a second ledge, on which the third ladder finds support; and so on throughout a whole series of six.

At first sight, it would appear to you as if the *ci-devant* denizens of the hut had made their exodus from the valley by means of these ladders; and such would be the natural conviction, but for a circumstance that forbids belief in this mode of exit:

the ladders do not continue to the top of the cliff! A long space, which would require two or three more such ladders to span it, still intervenes between the top of the highest and the brow of the precipice; and this could not have been scaled without additional ladders. Where are they? It is scarcely probable they had been drawn up; and had they fallen back into the valley, they would still be there. There are none upon the ground.

But these conjectures do not require to be continued. A short examination of the cliff suffices to convince you that the design of scaling it by ladders could not have succeeded. The ledge against which rests the top of the highest must have been found too narrow to support another; or rather, the rocks above and projecting over would render it impossible to place a ladder upon this ledge. It is evident that the scheme had been tried and abandoned.

The very character of the attempt proves that they who had made it must have been placed in a desperate situation – imprisoned within that cliff-girt valley, with no means of escaping from it, except such as they themselves might devise.

Moreover, after a complete exploration of the place, you can find no evidence that they ever did escape from their strange prison; and your thoughts can only shape themselves into conjectures, as to who they were that had wandered into this out-of-the-way corner of the world; how they got into, and how out of it; and, finally, whether they ever succeeded in getting out at all. Your conjectures will come to an end, when you have read

the history of the *Cliff-climbers*.

Chapter Three.

The Plant-Hunter and his companions

Karl Linden, a young German student, who had taken part in the revolutionary struggles of 1848, had by the act of banishment sought an asylum in London. Like most refugees, he was without means; but, instead of giving himself up to idle habits, he had sought and obtained employment in one of those magnificent “nurseries” which are to be met with in the suburbs of the world’s metropolis. His botanical knowledge soon attracted the attention of his employer, the proprietor of the nursery – one of those enterprising and spirited men who, instead of contenting themselves with merely cultivating the trees and flowering-plants already introduced into our gardens and greenhouses, expend large sums of money in sending emissaries to all parts of the earth, to discover and bring home other rare and beautiful kinds.

These emissaries – botanical collectors, or “plant-hunters,” as they may be called – in the pursuit of their calling, have explored, and are still engaged in exploring, the wildest and most remote countries of the globe – such as the deep, dark forests upon the Amazon, the Orinoco, and the Oregon in America; the hot equatorial regions of Africa; the tropical jungles of India; the rich woods of the Oriental islands; and, in short, wherever there is a prospect of discovering and obtaining new floral or sylvan

beauties.

The exploration of the Sikhim Himalaya by the accomplished botanist, Hooker – recorded in a book of travels not inferior to that of the great Humboldt – had drawn attention to the rich and varied *flora* of these mountains; and in consequence of this, the enterprising “seedsman” who had given Karl Linden temporary employment in his garden, promoted him to a higher and more agreeable field of labour, by sending him as a “plant-hunter” to the Thibetan Himalayas.

Accompanied by his brother, Caspar, the young botanist proceeded to Calcutta; and, after a short residence there, he set out for the Himalayas – taking a direction almost due north from the city of the Ganges.

He had provided himself with a guide, in the person of a celebrated Hindoo hunter or “shikaree,” called Ossaroo; and this individual was the sole attendant and companion of the two brothers – with the exception of a large dog, of the boar-hound species, which had been brought with them from Europe, and that answered to the name of Fritz.

The young botanist had come to India furnished with a letter of introduction to the manager of the Botanical Garden of Calcutta – an establishment of world-wide renown. There he had been hospitably received on his arrival in the Oriental city; and during his sojourn he had spent much of his time within its boundaries. Moreover, the authorities of the place, interested in his expedition, had given him all the information in their power

as to the route he intended pursuing – though that was not much: for the portion of the Himalayas he was about to explore was at that time a *terra incognita* to Englishmen – even in the city of Calcutta!

It is not necessary here to detail the many adventures that befel our plant-hunter and his party, during the progress of their journey towards the Himalayas, and after they had entered within the grand gorges of these mountains. Suffice it to say, that in pursuit of a beautiful little animal – a “musk-deer” – they had gone up a gully filled by one of those grand glaciers so common in the higher Himalayas; that the pursuit had led them far up the ravine, and afterwards conducted them into a singular crater-like valley – the one already described; that once in this valley, they could find no way out of it, but by the ravine through which they had entered; and that on returning to make their exit, they discovered to their great consternation that a crevasse in the glacier, over which they had passed, had opened during their absence, and to such an extent as to render their exit impossible!

They had endeavoured to span this crevasse; and had spent much time in making a bridge of pine-trees for the purpose. They had succeeded at length in getting across the chasm – but only to find others in the glacier below, which no ingenuity could enable them to get over.

They were compelled to abandon the idea, and return again to the valley; which, though lovely to the eye, had now become hateful to their thoughts: since they knew it to be their *prison*.

During their residence in the place, many adventures befel them with wild animals of various kinds. There chanced to be a small herd of “yâks,” or grunting oxen, in the valley; and these formed for a time the staple article of their food. Caspar, who, though younger than Karl, was the more skilled hunter of the two, had a very narrow escape from the old yâk bull; though he succeeded at length in killing the dangerous animal. Ossaroo was very near being eaten up by a pack of wild dogs – every one of which he afterwards succeeded in killing; and Ossaroo was also in danger of being swallowed up by an enemy of a very different kind – that is by a *quicksand*, into which he had got his legs while engaged in taking fish out of a net!

Karl was not without *his* hair-breadth “scape” – having been chased by a bear along a ledge of the cliff, from which he was compelled to make a most perilous descent. The bear itself took refuge in a cave, where it was afterwards pursued and killed, by all three acting in concert, materially assisted by the dog Fritz. They had incurred great risk in this chase of the bear: for although they had succeeded in destroying the formidable animal they lost themselves in the great labyrinthine cavern, and were only able to find their way out by making a fire with the stocks of their guns, and rendering the bear’s-grease available for candles – which fortunately enabled them to extricate themselves.

During the pursuit of the bear, and their subsequent endeavours to find their way out, our adventurers had been struck by the enormous dimensions of the cavern in which the animal

had taken refuge; and in the hope that some of its great galleries might lead out through the mountain, and offer them a way of escape from the valley, they had made torches, and explored it from end to end. It was all to no purpose; and becoming satisfied that there was no exit by way of the cavern, they had at length desisted from the search.

From this point shall we continue, in more circumstantial detail, the history of their attempts to escape from their mountain prison; which they were now convinced could only be done by *climbing the cliff* that encircled it.

Chapter Four.

Home to the hut

Emerging from the cave after their fruitless exploration, all three – Karl, Caspar, and Ossaroo – sat down upon the rocks in front of the cliff, and for some time remained silent. The looks of all betokened a deep and hopeless despair. The same thought was passing in their minds. A painful thought it was – that they were completely cut off from all communication with the world, and might never again look on human faces, save their own!

Caspar was the first to give expression to this gloomy foreboding.

“Oh, brother!” groaned he, addressing himself to Karl, who sat nearest to him, “oh! it is an awful fate! Here must we live, here must we die, far away from home, far away from the world – alone – alone!”

“No,” replied Karl, deeply moved by the distress of his brother, “no, Caspar, not alone – God is with us. Let Him be our world.”

However Caspar in his conscience might have acknowledged the justice of the admonition, it failed to cheer him. Indeed, he could not help perceiving, that Karl had uttered the speech half doubtingly, and with the design of affording consolation. Moreover, the effort which Karl was making to look hopeful and

cheerful was evidently constrained; and only the more convinced his companions that neither hope nor joy was in his breast.

To Karl's consolatory words his brother made no rejoinder. Ossaroo, however, gave vent to his thoughts by an ambiguous shake of the head, and a brief speech characteristic of that belief in fatalism peculiar to his race.

"Ah, sahibs," said he, addressing himself to both, "if the Great Sahib in the sky will we go out from here, we go – if He no will, we no go – nivvamore."

Ossaroo's speech, however compatible with a true faith, did not contribute much towards cheering the spirits of the party; and for another long interval all remained silent.

Caspar and Ossaroo appeared completely prostrated by the new disappointment. Karl, on the other hand, seemed less disposed to view things despairingly; and as he sate, was evidently engaged in active thought.

After awhile his companions observed this; though neither made any attempt to rouse him from his reverie. They guessed, that, whatever was passing in his mind would soon be communicated to them.

They were right in this conjecture: for in a few minutes Karl terminated the silence by addressing them.

"Come!" said he, speaking in a tone of encouragement, "we are wrong in so soon yielding to despair. Let us not give up, till we are beaten at all points. I have told you what my object was, when I first mounted upon that ledge, and discovered the cave

and its surly occupant, the bear. I thought then, that, if we could find a series of ledges one above another, and sufficiently near each other, we might plant ladders upon them, and so reach the top. You see that there is such a succession of ledges – just before your faces there. Unfortunately there is one of the spaces high up yonder – where the cliff is darkest – that cannot be less than sixty or seventy feet in width. I have ascertained that by comparing it with the height from the ground to the cave – which I had just finished measuring when I met the bear. It would be impossible for us to make a ladder that length – or even to hoist it up there if made – so that all thought of scaling the cliff at this point must be given up.”

“Perhaps,” interposed Caspar, catching at Karl’s idea, “there may be some other part of the precipice where the ledges are nearer to each other? Did you examine it all around?”

“No. I had got no further than this place, when I met Master Bruin; and, as you know, our adventures with him and our exploration of the cave have taken up our time ever since, and, indeed, driven the design of the ladders quite out of my head. Now, however, we may return to it; and our next move will be to go all round, and see whether a better place may not be discovered. To-night it is too late. It already begins to darken; and we must have clear daylight for such a purpose. Let us home to our hut, and have some supper and then go to rest – having first prayed to Him for success. We may rise in better spirits, and continue our examination in the morning.”

To this proposal there was no objection on the part of either Caspar or Ossaroo. On the contrary, the mention of supper – both being very hungry – had caused them to start to their feet with remarkable alacrity; and Karl, taking the lead, they followed him, Fritz in turn following them.

On arriving at their hut, supper was cooked and eaten, with that zest which hunger always gives, even to the coarsest viands; and, having carried out the remaining part of the programme which Karl had suggested – that is, the offering up a prayer for success on the morrow – the trio sought their grass-covered couches with a feeling of renewed hopefulness.

Chapter Five.

A midnight intruder

They had been asleep several hours, when all three were suddenly awakened by the barking of Fritz. During night hours the faithful creature stayed habitually within the hut – where he also had his bed of dry grass. On hearing any unusual noise without, he would rush forth and prowl about for awhile; and, after satisfying himself that there was no enemy in the neighbourhood, would return quietly to his lair.

Fritz was far from being a noisy dog. He had seen too much service, and gathered too much wisdom, to waste his breath in idle barking; and it was only upon grand and important occasions that he condescended to give tongue. Then, however, his bark – or bay, it should rather be termed – was terrific.

On the occasion in question – which happened just about the hour of midnight – the three sleepers were suddenly awakened by his expansive “yowl,” that filled the whole valley, and reverberating from the cliffs, appeared continuous. The dog, after uttering this warning note, had rushed out of the hut – which had no door to it – and it was from some place down near the lake that his barking appeared to proceed.

“What can it be?” was the prompt and *very* natural inquiry of the three individuals, whom Fritz had so abruptly awakened

from their slumbers.

“Something Fritz is frightened at,” said Caspar, who knew the dog’s nature better than either of the others. “He don’t bark that way at any sort of game that he knows he can conquer. It’s some animal that’s a match for him, I warrant. If the old yâk bull were still alive, I should say it was he.”

“There may be tigers in this valley; I never thought of that,” rejoined Karl. “Now that I do think of it,” continued he, drawing upon the reminiscences of his zoological reading, “it is quite probable. People believe the tiger to be exclusively an inhabitant of tropical or subtropical regions. That is an error. On this continent (the speaker was in Asia) the royal Bengal tiger ranges at least as far north as the latitude of London. I know he is found on the Amoor as high as the fiftieth degree.”

“Mercy on us!” broke in Caspar; “it may be a tiger, and we have never thought of having a door to our hut! If it should be one – ”

Here the hypothetical speech of Caspar was abruptly brought to a conclusion, by a singular noise from without – which was heard mingling in chorus with the baying of Fritz.

The noise in question bore some resemblance to the sound of a trumpet, only sharper and more treble in its character. It was in effect more like the squeak of a *penny trumpet* than the real article; and yet, withal, there was something terrifying in the sound.

It must have terrified Fritz: for the moment after it was heard,

the dog came rushing back into the hut, as if pursued by a legion of horned bulls; and, though he kept up his angry baying, he appeared altogether disinclined to venture out again.

Just then, the singular noise was heard outside the door – something between a shriek and a whistle – and this time with a far more terrifying effect: since, whatever produced it – bird, beast, or man – was evidently near, and still approaching nearer.

Of the three individuals within the hut, only one had ever before heard a sound exactly similar to that. Ossaroo was the one. The old shikaree recognised the noise the moment it reached his ears, and knew perfectly well the sort of instrument that must have been producing it; but he was hindered for a time from proclaiming his knowledge, by surprise, as well as a strong feeling of terror at hearing such a sound in such a place.

“By de wheels ob Juggernaut car!” he gasped out. “Can’t be – can’t be; no possible him be here.”

“Who? What?” demanded Karl and Caspar, in a breath.

“See, sahibs! it him – it him!” hurriedly rejoined the Hindoo, in a sort of shrieking whisper. “We all perish – it him – it him – de god – de mighty – de terrible –”

There was no light within the hovel, except a faint glimmer from the moon shining brightly enough outside; but it did not require any light to tell that the shikaree was frightened pretty nearly out of his senses. His companions could discover by his voice that he had suddenly changed position, and was retreating backward to that corner of the hut furthest from the doorway. At

the same time his words reached them in whispers, cautioning them to lie close and keep silent.

Both, without knowing what the danger was, of course obeyed injunctions thus emphatically delivered; and remained sitting up on their couches without uttering a word. Ossaroo, after having delivered his cautioning speeches, kept equally silent.

Once more the strange sound fell upon their ears – this time as if the instrument that produced it had been thrust into the doorway of the hovel. At the same instant the turf outside, hitherto glistening under a bright moonlight, became darkened by the shadow of an enormous creature – as if the queen of night had suddenly disappeared behind the blackest of clouds! Still the light could be seen beyond, and the moon was shining. It was no cloud that had obscured her; but some vast body moving over the earth, and which, having come up to the front of the hovel, was there halting.

Karl and Caspar fancied they could see a gigantic living form, with huge thick limbs, standing outside; but, indeed, both were as much terrified by the apparition as Ossaroo himself, though perhaps for a different reason.

Fritz must have been as much frightened as any of the four; and fear had produced upon him an effect exactly similar to that it had produced upon Ossaroo. It kept him silent. Cowering in a corner, Fritz was now as quiet as if he had been born a voiceless *dingo*.

This speechless trance seemed to have its influence upon the

awe-inspiring shadow outside the door: for, after giving utterance to another specimen of shrill piping, it withdrew with as much silence as if it had been but the shadow it appeared!

Caspar's curiosity had become too strong to be kept any longer under the control of his fears. As soon as the strange intruder was seen moving away from the hut, he stole forward to the entrance, and looked out. Karl was not slow in following him; and Ossaroo also ventured from his hiding-place.

A dark mass – in form like a quadruped, but one of gigantic size – could be seen going off in the direction of the lake. It moved in majestic silence; but it could have been no shadow, for on crossing the stream – near the point where the latter debouched into the lake – the plashing of its feet could be heard as it waded through the water, and eddies could be seen upon the calm surface. A simple shadow would not have made such a commotion as that?

“Sahibs!” said Ossaroo, in a tone of mysterious gravity, “he be one ob two ting. He eider be de god Brahma, or – ”

“Or what?” demanded Caspar.

“An ole rogue.”

Chapter Six.

A talk about elephants

“An old rogue?” said Caspar, repeating the words of the shikaree. “What do you mean by that, Ossy?”

“What you Feringhee, sahib, call *rogue* elephant.”

“Oh! an elephant!” echoed Karl and Caspar – both considerably relieved at this natural explanation of what had appeared so like a supernatural apparition.

“Certainly the thing looked like one,” continued Caspar.

“But how could an elephant enter this valley?”

Ossaroo could not answer this question. He was himself equally puzzled by the appearance of the huge quadruped; and still rather inclined to the belief that it was some of his trinity of Brahminee gods, that had for the nonce assumed the elephantine form. For that reason he made no attempt to explain the presence of such an animal in the valley.

“It is possible for one to have come up here from the lower country,” remarked Karl, reflectively.

“But how could he get into the valley?” again inquired Caspar.

“In the same way as we got in ourselves,” was Karl’s reply; “up the glacier and through the gorge.”

“But the crevasse that hinders us from getting out? You forget that, brother? An elephant could no more cross it than he could

fly; surely not?"

"Surely not," rejoined Karl. "I did not say that he could have crossed the crevasse."

"Oh! you mean that he may have come up here before we did?"

"Exactly so. If it be an elephant we have seen – and what else can it be?" pursued Karl, no longer yielding to a belief in the supernatural character of their nocturnal visitant – "it must of course have got into the valley before us. The wonder is our having seen no signs of such an animal before. You, Caspar, have been about more than any of us. Did you never, in your rambles, observe anything like an elephant's track?"

"Never. It never occurred to me to look for such a thing. Who would have thought of a great elephant having climbed up here? One would fancy such unwieldy creatures quite incapable of ascending a mountain."

"Ah! there you would be in error: for, singular as it may appear, the elephant is a wonderful climber, and can make his way almost anywhere that a man can go. It is a fact, that in the island of Ceylon the wild elephants are often found upon the top of Adam's Peak – to scale which is trying to the nerves of the stoutest travellers. It would not be surprising to find one here. Rather, I may say, it *is* not: for now I feel certain what we have just seen is an elephant, since it can be nothing else. He may have entered this valley before us – by straying up the glacier as we did, and crossing the chasm by the rock bridge – which I know

he could have done as well as we. Or else," continued Karl, in his endeavour to account for the presence of the huge creature, "he may have come here long ago, even before there was any crevasse. What is there improbable in his having been here many years – perhaps all his life, and that may be a hundred years or more?"

"I thought," said Caspar, "that elephants were only found on the plains, where the vegetation is tropical and luxuriant."

"That is another popular error," replied Karl. "So far from affecting tropical plains, the elephant prefers to dwell high up on the mountains; and whenever he has the opportunity, he climbs thither. He likes a moderately cool atmosphere – where he may be less persecuted by flies and other troublesome insects: since, notwithstanding his great strength and the thickness of his hide, so small a creature as a fly can give him the greatest annoyance. Like the tiger, he is by no means exclusively a tropical animal; but can live, and thrive too, in a cool, elevated region, or in a high latitude of the temperate zone."

Karl again expressed surprise that none of them had before that time observed any traces of this gigantic quadruped, that must have been their neighbour ever since the commencement of their involuntary residence in the valley. Of course this surprise was fully shared by Caspar. Ossaroo participated in it, but only to a very slight degree. The shikaree was still inclined towards indulging in his superstitious belief that the creature they had seen was not of the earth, but some apparition of Brahma or

Vishnu.

Without attempting to combat this absurd fancy, his companions continued to search for an explanation of the strange circumstance of their not having sooner encountered the elephant.

“After all,” suggested Caspar, “there is nothing so strange about it. There are many large tracts of the valley we have not explored; for instance, that wide stretch of black forest that lies at its upper end. Neither of us has ever been through there since the first two days, when we followed the deer all round, and went afterwards to examine the cliff. For myself, I never strayed that way while hunting – because I always found the game in the open grounds near the lake. Now the elephant may have his lair in that piece of forest, and only come out at night. As for tracks, no doubt there are plenty, but I never thought of looking for them. You know, brother, we have been too busy in making our tree-bridge, and afterwards exploring the cavern, to think of much else.”

Karl admitted the truth of these observations; for it was as Caspar had alleged. During the whole time of their residence in the valley, the minds of all three, filled with anxiety about the future, had been keenly bent upon devising some means of escape; and on this account they had given very little attention to anything that did not in some way contribute to that end. Even Caspar, in his hunting excursions, had not gone over one-half of the valley; nor had these excursions been very numerous.

In three or four days he had procured as much *meat* as was necessary. This had been carefully cured by Ossaroo, and formed the staple of their daily food. Only upon rare occasions were the guns afterwards used to procure a little fresh provision – such as a brace of wild duets from the lake, or one of the smaller game animals which could be found almost any morning within gunshot distance of the hut. For these reasons many parts of the valley had been left unvisited; and it was deemed possible enough for even a great elephant to have been all the time dwelling within its boundaries, unseen by any of the party. Indulging in these conjectures, all three remained awake for more than an hour; but as the subject of their speculations appeared to have gone altogether away, they gradually came to the conclusion that he was not going to return at least for that night – and their confidence being thus restored, they once more betook themselves to sleep – resolved in future to keep a sharp lookout for the dangerous neighbour that had so unexpectedly presented himself to their view.

Chapter Seven.

Re-stocking the guns

Next morning all three were astir betimes, and out of the hut by the earliest light of day. Karl and Caspar were anxious to obtain more definite information about the elephant, whose existence Ossaroo was still inclined to doubt. Indeed, with the exception of the three or four shrieking whistles to which the animal had given utterance, so silently and mysteriously had he come and departed, that they might almost have fancied the whole thing a dream.

But such an immense creature could not move about, without leaving some traces of his presence; and as he had crossed the stream, or rather a little embayment of the lake into which the stream emptied itself, no doubt his tracks would be found on the sandy shore.

As soon, therefore, as the day broke, all three started for the spot where the creature had been seen to cross.

On reaching it, they could no longer doubt that an elephant had paid them a visit. Huge footprints – nearly as big as the bottom of a bushel measure – were deeply indented in the soft sand; and looking across the “straits” (for so they were in the habit of calling the narrow mouth of the bay), they could see other similar tracks on the opposite shore, where the animal had waded out.

Ossaroo was no longer doubtful as to the character of the creature that had made those tracks. He had hunted elephants in the jungles of Bengal, and knew all the peculiarities of the grand quadruped. Such footmarks as were now under his eyes could not have been made by a mere visionary animal, but only by a real elephant in the flesh.

“And one of the biggest kind,” asserted the shikaree, now speaking in full confidence, and declaring, at the same time, that he could tell its height to an inch.

“How can you do that?” asked Caspar, in some surprise.

“Me berra easy tell, young sahib,” replied Ossaroo; “only need takee size ob de rogue’s foot. Dis way, sahibs.”

Saying this, the shikaree drew forth from one of his pockets a piece of string; and, choosing one of the tracks which had made the clearest impression, he carefully applied the string around its outer edge. In this way the circumference of the elephant’s foot was obtained.

“Now, sahibs,” said Ossaroo, holding the string between his fingers – that portion of it which had been applied around the footprint – “*twice* the length of dis reachee to the top of he shoulder; that how Ossaroo know he biggee elephant.”

The circumference of the foot thus measured being nearly six feet, it would follow, from the rule laid down by the shikaree, that the elephant in question was nearly twelve feet high; and this Karl knew to be one of the largest. Nor did Karl question the correctness of the deduction: for he had often heard, from

hunters whose word was not to be doubted, that the height of an elephant is exactly twice the circumference of his foot.

Ossaroo, having now yielded up his belief – that the elephant was one of his gods in disguise – declared with full confidence that the animal was a *rogue*. Karl needed no explanation of what was meant by this. He knew that the rogue elephant is an old male, who, for some reason or other – perhaps for bad behaviour – has had the cold shoulder given him by the rest of the herd, and from whose association he has been driven away. Thus *cut* by his former acquaintances, he is compelled to lead a solitary life – the consequence of which is, that he becomes exceedingly spiteful and morose in his disposition, and will not only attack any other animal that may chance to cross his path, but will even seek them out, as if for the mere purpose of indulging in a spirit of revenge! There are many such in the jungles of India, as well as in Africa; and, since man himself is not excepted from this universal hostility, a rogue elephant is regarded as an exceedingly dangerous creature in the neighbourhood where he takes up his abode. There are many instances recorded – and well authenticated too – where human beings have been sacrificed to the fury of these gigantic monsters: and cases are known where a rogue elephant has purposely placed himself in waiting by the side of a frequented path, with the object of destroying the unwary traveller! In the valley of the Dheira Doon an elephant of this class – one, too, that had once been tamed, but had escaped from his servitude – is known to have taken the lives of

nearly twenty unfortunate people before his destruction could be effected.

Well knowing these proclivities on the part of the *rogue*, Ossaroo at once counselled caution in the future movements of all – a counsel which Karl was too prudent to reject; and even the bold, rash Caspar did not think it proper to dissent from.

It was resolved, therefore, before continuing their projected exploration of the cliffs, to set their weapons once more in proper order – against any chance of an encounter with the elephant.

Their guns had to be re-stocked, and a new handle put into the axe – as well as a shaft into the boar-spear of Ossaroo – for all the woodwork of these weapons had been broken up and burnt into ashes in the manufacture of the candles of bear's-grease that had lighted them out of the cave.

The search after the ledges must necessarily be postponed; until they could go upon that errand properly armed and equipped, against any enemy that might oppose their progress.

Having come to this wise determination, they returned to their hut; kindled a fire; cooked breakfast; and having despatched the meal, at once set about selecting pieces of wood for the various purposes for which they were required.

They had no difficulty in procuring just what was wanted: for the valley contained many valuable sorts of timber; and several kinds that had been already cut for other purposes, now well seasoned and ready to hand, were found lying about the hut.

Setting about their work in earnest, and labouring diligently

from morning to night – and even into the night hours – they knew they would not be long in accomplishing a task so trifling as the stocking of a gun, or putting the handle to a boar-spear.

Chapter Eight.

Inspecting the cliffs

Working diligently with their knives two days sufficed to make guns, axe, and spear as good as ever. Ossaroo also made himself a new bow and a full quiver of arrows.

On the third morning, after breakfasting, all three set out with the determination not to leave any portion of the cliff unexamined.

The part which lay between their hut and the cave, Karl had already scrutinised with great care; so they went direct to the point where he had left off, and there commenced their new survey.

It is true they had already examined the cliffs all around; but this was just after they arrived in the valley, and the purpose of that exploration was very different from that of the present one.

Then they were only looking for a place by which they might climb out; and the idea of making ladders had not occurred to them.

Now that this scheme had suggested itself, they entered upon their second survey with the view of ascertaining whether it was practicable or possible. Consequently, they went in search of facts of a different nature – viz., to see if there existed a series of ledges, one above another, that could be spanned by an equal

number of such ladders as they might be able to construct.

That they could make ladders of a prodigious length – allowing sufficient time for the execution of the work – all felt confident. They knew that the Thibet pine-trees – the same sort as they had used in making the bridge for the glacier crevasse – grew in great numbers not far from their hut; and by selecting some of the slenderest trunks of these, they would have the sides of as many ladders as they might want, almost ready made, and each forty or fifty feet in length.

If there should only be discovered a series of ledges, with not more than forty feet space between each two, there would be a fair hope of their being able to escalate the cliff, and escape from a place which, although one of the pleasantest-looking spots in the world, had now become to them loathsome as the interior of a dungeon.

Sure enough, and to the great joy of all, such a set of shelves was soon after presented to their eyes – having, at least in appearance, all the requirements of which they were in search. The spaces between no two of them appeared to be greater than thirty feet, some were much nearer to each other.

The part of the cliff where these terraces were found was not quite so low, as that where Karl had made his measurement. It did not appear, however, to be more than three hundred and fifty feet – a fearful height, it is true – but nothing when compared with other sections of the same precipice. To reach to its top, more than a dozen ladders would be required – each between twenty

and thirty feet in length. The labour of making these ladders, with such tools as they had, might be looked upon as something stupendous – sufficient, you might suppose, to deter them from the task. But you must endeavour to realise the situation in which they were placed – with no other hope of being delivered from their mountain prison – and with this idea in your mind, you will comprehend why they should have been willing to undertake even a far greater labour. Of course, they did not expect to complete it in a day, neither in a week, nor in a month: for they well knew that it would take several months to make the number of ladders that would be required. And then there would be the additional labour of getting each into its place: as all, after the first one, would have to be carried up the cliff to the ledge for which it should be constructed. Indeed, to raise ladders of thirty feet in the manner contemplated, would seem an impossibility – that is, for such strength or mechanism as they could command.

And so it might have proved, had they intended to make these ladders of the ordinary weight. But they foresaw this difficulty, and hoped to get over it by making them of the very lightest kind – something that would just carry the weight of a man.

Becoming more than half satisfied that at this point the precipice might be scaled in the manner contemplated, they remained upon the ground in order to give it a thorough examination. That done, they intended to make the complete circuit of the valley, and ascertain whether there might not be some other place still easier of ascent.

The point where they had halted was behind the tract of heavily-timbered forest – of which Caspar had spoken, and which up to this time none of them had entered. Between the trees and the cliff they were now contemplating, there was a narrow strip of ground destitute of timber; and covered with a shingle of loose stones which had fallen from the mountain above. Several boulders of large dimensions rested upon the ground, at short distances apart; and there was one of a pillar-shape that stood some twenty-feet high, while it was only about five or six in diameter. It bore a sort of rude resemblance to an obelisk; and one might easily have fancied that the hand of man had accomplished its erection. For all that, it was a mere freak of Nature, and had probably been set up by ancient glacier ice. Up one of its sides there was a series of projections, by which an active man might climb to the top; and Ossaroo *did* climb it, partly out of playfulness, and partly, as he said, to get a better view of the cliff. The shikaree stayed only a few minutes on its top; and his curiosity having been satisfied, he had let himself down again.

Chapter Nine.

A reconnoissance interrupted

Though the three had set out that morning with a wholesome dread of the elephant, and a determination to go about their reconnoissance with caution, their joy at the discovery of the ledges, and the eagerness with which they were scanning them, had for the moment banished from their minds all thoughts of the great quadruped. They were thinking only of ledges and ladders, and talking loudly of how the latter might best be made and placed upon the former.

Just then, and just at the moment Ossaroo descended from the obelisk rock, Fritz, who had been prowling about among the trees, set up a fearful baying – such another as that to which he had given utterance on the night when the elephant had paid its visit to the hut.

There was a certain intonation of terror in the dog's voice – as if whatever called it forth was something that inspired him with fear. The apprehension that it was the elephant occurred to all three at once; and with a simultaneous impulse they faced towards the spot whence the baying of the dog appeared to proceed. Simultaneously, too, they clutched more firmly their respective weapons – Karl his rifle, Caspar his double-barrel, and Ossaroo his bow, with an arrow at the string.

It is superfluous to say, that there was a certain amount of consternation visible in the countenances of all three; which was rather increased than diminished by the sight of Fritz dashing suddenly out of the underwood, and running towards them at full speed, with his tail considerably below the horizontal. Fritz, moreover, was giving utterance to something that very closely resembled a howl. The dog had evidently been attacked by some animal that had put him to flight; and his masters knew that it must be a formidable creature that was causing the variant Fritz to behave in such an ignominious manner.

They were not kept long in doubt as to the character of Fritz's conqueror and pursuer: for close behind his hips, almost touching them, appeared a long, cylindrical, or trumpet-shaped object, of a bluish-grey colour, protruding between two yellowish crescents, like a pair of huge ivory horns. Behind those appeared a pair of large ears, like flaps of sole leather; and in the rear of these last appendages came the round, massive form of an enormous elephant!

Crashing through the underwood, the monstrous creature soon cleared his body from the timber, and rushed straight across the open ground – winding his terrible trumpet as he went. He was following Fritz as straight as he could go, and evidently enraged at the dog.

The latter, on escaping from the tangle of the thicket, made direct for the spot occupied by his masters – thus directing the elephant upon them.

It was no longer a question of protecting Fritz from his formidable pursuer; for the elephant, on seeing three adversaries more worthy of his tusks, seemed to forget all about the puny four-footed creature who had provoked him; and at once directed his attack upon the upright bipeds – as if resolved to punish them for the misbehaviour of their subordinate.

The three, standing close together, saw at a glance that Fritz was no longer the object of the elephant's animosity: for the massive monster was now charging directly down upon them.

There was no time for concerted counsel – neither to take nor to give it. Each had to act upon his own instinct; and following this each acted. Karl sent the bullet from his rifle right between the tusks of the advancing foe; while Caspar fired both barrels of his piece “bang” into the forehead of the monster. Ossaroo's arrow was seen sticking through the elephant's trunk; and the moment after Ossaroo's heels were presented to the enemy.

Karl and Caspar also ran: for it would have been sheer madness to have remained a moment longer in that perilous proximity. Indeed, it is but justice to the shikaree to say, that Karl and Caspar ran first: for they had been the first to deliver their fire; and as soon as they had done so, each scampered as he best could. They ran together; and fortunately for both a large tree was near, with low horizontal limbs, which favoured a rapid ascent towards its top.

There was only a second of time between the commencement of their flight and that of Ossaroo; but short as it was, it decided

the preference of the pursuer, and Ossaroo became the sole object of pursuit.

The shikaree would fain have made for the tree, to which the others were retreating; but the proboscis of the elephant was already so far advanced in that direction, that there was every probability it might get lapped upon him before he could climb beyond reach. For a moment he was in a dilemma, and his customary coolness seemed to have forsaken him.

The elephant was advancing upon him, its little switch of a tail oscillating rapidly in the air, and its trunk stretched horizontally towards him, with Ossaroo's own arrow still sticking in it. It seemed to know that it was he who had sent that skewer through its gristly snout – perhaps giving it far more pain than the leaden missiles that had flattened against its thick skull; and for this reason it had chosen him as the first victim of its vengeance.

In truth, Ossaroo's position was one of extreme peril – so much so that Karl and Caspar – now perceiving themselves comparatively safe from the pursuit – uttered a simultaneous cry: both believing that their faithful guide and follower was on the point of “coming to grief.”

Ossaroo seemed bewildered at the very imminence of the danger. But it was only for a moment – only while he hesitated as to whether he should try to reach the tree. On perceiving that he could not do this with a fair chance of safety, he turned and ran in an opposite direction.

Whither? To the obelisk. Yes, by good fortune, the pillar from

which he had just descended was only ten paces distant; and Ossaroo, in returning towards it, measured the ground with less than five. Flinging away his now useless weapons, he clutched hold of the prominent points of the rock, and “swarmed” up it like a squirrel.

He had good occasion to employ all his powers of agility. A second – half a second more – and he would have been too late: for ere he had reached the summit of the pillar, the digit point of the elephant’s trunk was inserted under the skirt of his tunic; and had the garment been of tougher material; Ossaroo would have been jerked back to the ground more rapidly than he had ascended.

As it was, the cotton fabric – frail from long wear and exposure – gave way with a loud “screed;” and although the shikaree was stripped of his coat-tail, and suffered a rather ignominious exposure, still he had the satisfaction of knowing that to this circumstance he was indebted for the safety of his skin.

Chapter Ten.

Ossaroo on the obelisk

The moment after, Ossaroo stood upon the summit of the obelisk. But even there he was far from being confident of security: for the pursuer had not abandoned the hope of being able to reach him. On the contrary, the infuriated animal, on finding itself balked by the worthlessness of the fabric composing the skirt of the shikaree, spitefully tossed the piece of cloth from its trunk; and, rearing itself on its hind-legs, threw its body into an erect attitude, with its fore-feet resting high up against the rock.

One might have fancied that it was about to climb the obelisk; and this it would certainly have done had the thing been possible. As it was, however, Ossaroo was not out of danger: for as the elephant stood on its hind-legs, with its prehensile proboscis extended to the full length, the tip of the latter was not more than six inches from the soles of his feet.

The shikaree stood upright like a statue on its pedestal – though unlike to a statue in his features, which were anything but unmoved. On the contrary, his countenance exhibited the utmost consternation. And no wonder: for he could plainly perceive that should the elephant succeed in lengthening its carcass only another twelve inches, he himself would be brushed from the

summit like a fly.

In fearful suspense, therefore, did he stand, contemplating the monster which was making every effort to reach him.

These efforts were made with as much sagacity as energy. Not only did the quadruped erect itself to its greatest height – standing, as one might say, upon its toes – but on finding that it was not tall enough, it fell back upon all fours, and then reared up afresh in an endeavour to stretch still higher.

Several times did it repeat the attempt – on each occasion trying a different side of the rock – as if in hopes that a greater elevation of the ground around the base might give it that advantage of twelve inches which it required for seizing its victim.

Fortunately for Ossaroo, the elephant had reached its very highest on first rearing up; and though it kept going round and round the rock, from no side could it do more than just touch with the top of its trunk the edge of the little flat space, upon which the feet of the shikaree were resting.

Ossaroo was beginning to be satisfied with this fact; and probably might have come to believe himself secure in his position, but for a circumstance that was making him uneasy. It was, that, standing upon such a limited surface – a pedestal whose diameter was but little over the length of his own feet – he found it exceedingly difficult to keep his balance. Had he been on the ground, there would have been no difficulty about it; but, perched as he was full twenty-feet aloft, the thing was quite different; and,

with nerves unstrung by the fearful danger that threatened him below, it was just as much as he could do to keep his equilibrium.

Though only a "mild Hindoo," Ossaroo was possessed of a high degree of courage; and, most of his life having been spent as a shikaree, he had become well inured to the risk of losing it. Had he been a coward, or unused to such perils as at that moment surrounded him, he would in all likelihood have succumbed through fear; and toppled helplessly over upon the shoulders of the merciless monster that was threatening to destroy him. With all his bravery, however, it was just as much as he could do to keep his balance. Unfortunately, in climbing up the rock, he had been compelled to abandon his boar-spear: else with that he might have supported himself. His long knife was still in his belt; and this he drew forth – not with the design of using it upon his antagonist, but only the better to balance himself. It is true he would have been fain to take a chop or two at the gristly proboscis of the elephant; but he dared not bend his body into a stooping attitude, lest his centre of gravity might get beyond the supporting base, and thus bring about the result he dreaded.

No other course remained for him, than to preserve his body in an upright attitude; and, conscious of this fact, he braced his nerves to the utmost, and maintained himself erect and rigid as a statue of bronze.

Chapter Eleven.

A wholesale tumble

In this attitude he remained for several minutes – the elephant all the while continuing its efforts to reach him Karl and Caspar, seated upon the branches of the tree, to which they had retreated, were witnesses of the whole scene from beginning to end. The situation of Ossaroo would have been sufficiently ludicrous for Caspar to have laughed at it, but for the danger in which the shikaree was placed. This was so evident, that instead of indulging in anything akin to levity, Caspar looked on with feelings of deep anxiety, Karl being equally apprehensive about the result. Neither could do anything to aid or rescue him, as they were unarmed – both having dropped their pieces when ascending the tree.

I have said that Karl was as uneasy about the result as his brother. He was even more so. It was not that he liked Ossaroo better, or would have more bitterly lamented his fate, had the latter perished by the proboscis of the elephant. No, that was not the reason; but simply that Karl more clearly comprehended the danger in which the shikaree was placed.

After watching the efforts of the elephant for a short time, Caspar had become convinced that the animal could not reach Ossaroo – so long as the latter preserved his balance upon the

summit of the rock. Karl was equally satisfied of this; and both by their shouts kept encouraging the shikaree to stand firm. But Karl soon noted another circumstance, which was as yet unperceived by Caspar, and it was this that was inspiring him with keener apprehension than that felt by his brother. He had noticed that, each time as the elephant erected himself against the obelisk, the rock seemed slightly to shake. Ossaroo was himself well aware of the circumstance – and more troubled at it than any of them – for it rendered it more difficult for him to preserve his equilibrium. Caspar at length also observed the trembling of the rock, but it gave him no particular uneasiness: as, after what had passed, he felt confident that Ossaroo would be able to keep his place. Nor was it the fear of his falling in that way that was distressing the young botanist; but rather a deduction which he drew from the circumstance, not apparent to the less philosophic mind of his brother.

The shaking of the rock had suggested to Karl a dangerous contingency. What was it? The speech addressed by him at that moment to Caspar will explain.

“Oh, brother!” he exclaimed, on perceiving the danger, “if the rock should fall – ”

“No danger of that,” said Caspar, interrupting him; “it stands firm enough. True, I see it shake a little, but only a very little; and that only when the brute springs up against it. No danger, I should think!”

“But I fear there is danger,” rejoined Karl, in a tone of

undiminished anxiety. "Not," added he, "so long as the elephant acts as he is doing; but he may not continue thus. These creatures are wonderfully sagacious; and if he only perceives that the pillar moves under his weight, a new idea may get into his brain, and then it will be all up with Ossaroo."

"Ha! I begin to comprehend you," said Caspar, beginning to share the alarm of his brother. "There is danger in that. What is to be done? If we only had our guns up here, we might open fire on the brute. Whether we succeeded in killing him or not, we might at all events divert his attention from Ossaroo, and perhaps hinder him from thinking of the plan you speak of. We might go down and get our guns. What is to hinder us? – the elephant is too busy to notice us."

"True – an excellent idea of yours, brother Caspar."

"Well, then, to put it in execution. I shall slip down to the ground; you follow to the lowest branch, and I can hand the guns up to you. Keep steady, and don't you fear, Ossy!" added the young hunter in a louder voice, addressing himself to the shikaree. "We'll fetch him away from you directly – we'll tickle him with an ounce or two of lead through that thick hide of his."

So saying, Caspar commenced letting himself rapidly down from branch to branch, Karl following more leisurely.

Caspar had got upon the lowest limb of the tree, and Karl on that immediately above it, when a loud crash, accompanied by a piercing shriek, arrested the progress of both, causing them suddenly to turn their faces towards the obelisk. During the short

time that their eyes had been averted from it, a complete change had taken place in that curious tableau. Instead of a tall column of stone, standing twenty-feet perpendicular, the same column was now seen lying along the earth in a nearly horizontal position, with a huge mass of broken boughs and branches of trees crushed under its top. Near its base, now upturned and standing almost vertically, was the elephant, no longer on its hind feet, nor yet on all fours, but down upon its back, kicking its huge hoofs in the air, and making the most stupendous efforts to recover its legs. Ossaroo was nowhere to be seen!

The contingency dreaded by Karl had come to pass. The elephant, finding it impossible to reach the shikaree with its trunk – and no doubt judging by the “feel” that the rock was not immobile – had at length dropped down on all fours and, placing its broad shoulder against it, backed by the enormous weight of its bulky body, had sent the column crashing among the tops of a chestnut tree growing near – the trunk of which, yielding to the weight, gave way with a crash, and trunk, limbs, and branches were all borne downward to the earth!

The elephant itself, not calculating that it should find the task so easy of performance, had fallen at the same time – its cumbrous body losing balance by the impetus which it had thrown into the effort. In short, of the four objects that formed the tableau – rock and tree, quadruped and man – not one was standing any longer in its place – for it is superfluous to say that Ossaroo had gone down with the obelisk.

But where was Ossaroo? That was the question that occurred to both Karl and Caspar.

“Oh! brother!” groaned Caspar, “I fear he is killed!”

Karl made no reply; but for all that, Caspar’s reflection, delivered in a loud tone, was not left without rejoinder. Directly after the phrase had issued from his lips, an answer was heard proceeding from among the branches of the fallen chestnut tree, in a voice and with words that caused the hearts of the brothers to beat with joy.

“No, young sahibs,” replied the unseen Ossaroo; “me no killee, me no bit damage. If I only can get pass de old rogue, I safe and sound as ibber. Here go for run!”

At the same moment the shikaree was seen shooting out from among the branches under which he had been for the time buried; and, then running with all his might towards the tree upon which the brothers had found refuge.

Long before the elephant could regain its feet, Ossaroo had reached a position of perfect security among the upper branches of the great tree; which Karl and Caspar, no longer thinking of their guns, had also re-ascended.

Chapter Twelve.

A ring performance

As the tree into which they had retreated was a very large one, there was no longer any present fear of danger from the elephant, however furious the latter might be; and they could look down upon it and watch its movements with a feeling of perfect security. The only one of the party that was in dangerous proximity to that dreaded proboscis was Fritz; but Fritz had already been well warned of the wicked designs of the great brute, and was sufficiently swift-footed and sage enough to give the animal a wide berth.

As for the elephant itself, having recovered its feet, it stood for some seconds flapping its huge ears, and apparently in a kind of quandary – as if taken aback by the unexpected accident that had befallen it. Not for long, however, did it continue in this tranquil attitude. The arrow still sticking in its trunk reminded it of its purposes of vengeance. Once more angrily elevating its tail, and sounding its shrill trumpet, it rushed towards the fallen tree, and buried its long proboscis among the branches. One by one it turned them over, as if in search of some object. It was searching for the shikaree.

After a time it desisted from this manoeuvre, and looked around – evidently with a puzzled air, and wondering what had

become of the man. It had not seen him as he rushed towards the great tree: for his retreat had been made while the creature was sprawling upon its back. Just then Fritz chanced to show himself – crouching under the branches upon which his masters had taken refuge, and evidently envying them their secure situation.

The sight of Fritz was enough. It was he who had first challenged the elephant on its approach through the woods, and had conducted it under that terrible battery of bullets and arrows. As soon, therefore, as the latter set eyes upon the dog, its fury not only became rekindled, but apparently redoubled; and, hoisting its tail on high, it charged full tilt upon its original adversary.

Had the assailant been a boar, or even a bull, no doubt Fritz would have stood his ground, or only swerved to one side, the better to elude the onset, and make an attack in turn. But with a quadruped as big as a house – and of which Fritz, not being of Oriental origin, knew so little; and of that little nothing that was good – one, too, evidently provided with most formidable weapons, a tongue several feet long, and tusks in proportion – it is not to be wondered at, nor is it any great blot upon his escutcheon, that Fritz turned tail and fled. So fast fled he, that in less than a score of seconds he was out of sight – not only of his masters in the tree, but of his pursuer, the elephant. The latter only followed him for some half-dozen lengths of its own carcass; and seeing that the pursuit was likely to be a wild-goose chase, declined following Fritz any farther.

They in the tree, as the elephant started after the dog, were in

hopes that the pursuit might carry the dangerous animal to some distance, and thus give them time to get back to the ground, and make their escape from the spot.

In this, however, they were doomed to disappointment; for having desisted from the chase of the dog, the great pachyderm returned to the point from whence it had started; and, after once more tossing the broken branches of the fallen chestnut tree upon the point of its proboscis, it commenced pacing round and round the fallen obelisk, keeping in regular circles, as if it were training itself for some performance in an amphitheatre.

For more than an hour did the brute continue this circular promenade, at intervals stopping to give utterance to its shrieking note; but most of the time moving on in sullen silence. Now and then it directed its eyes, and once or twice its trunk, towards the branches of the prostrate tree as if it had still some suspicion that he who sent that stinging arrow was there concealed. Indeed, it appeared by its movements to be keeping guard over that particular spot, lest its enemy should escape. It had long since extracted the arrow, by placing its great foot upon the shaft, and drawing it forth.

Fritz had stolen back to the edge of the thicket, but kept cowering so close that the elephant could not see him.

The parties perched above were more than annoyed by their imprisonment thus procrastinated, and began to think of how they might set themselves free. They talked of making a rush to possess themselves of their guns; but to Karl this appeared

too perilous to be attempted. It was not twenty yards from the tree to the spot where rested the dismantled monolith; and the elephant, whose eye was in a state of continual activity, could not fail to see them descending from the branches. The massive creature, though it moved about with apparently a gentle griding step, could go almost as fast as a galloping horse; and should it espy them in time, there would be but slight chance of eluding its prehensile trunk.

Moreover, the sight of them – even should they succeed in regaining the tree – would rekindle its rage, and cause it to prolong its stay upon the ground.

There was yet another consideration that influenced them to remain patiently on their perch. They knew that they had provided themselves with only a very limited quantity of ammunition. That article had become scarce with them; and they had prudently determined to economise it. Karl had only two bullets left, with just powder enough to make two charges; while Caspar's horn and pouch were not better filled. They might fire their whole stock of lead into the elephant, and still not succeed in killing a creature that sometimes walks off triumphantly with a score of bullets "under his belt." These shots might only have the effect of incensing it still more, and causing it to stay upon the ground to an indefinite period.

It was a true *rogue*— Ossaroo had long since pronounced it one – and an "old tusker" at that. It was therefore a most dangerous creature; and though they knew they would never be safe in that

valley until it should be destroyed, it was agreed by all that it would be more prudent to leave it undisturbed until some more favourable opportunity occurred for effecting its destruction.

For these various reasons they resolved to remain quiet in the tree, and patiently await the termination of that curious “ring performance,” which the old tusker still continued to keep up.

Chapter Thirteen.

An odd appearance

For the full length of another hour did the trio in the tree have their patience tested. During all that time the “rogue” remained upon the ground, continuing his perambulations around the rock – until he had trodden out a path that resembled the arena of a circus at the close of a night’s performance.

It is not necessary to say that the time hung heavily upon the hands of the spectators – to say nothing of Fritz, who would no doubt have been satisfied with a much shorter programme.

As regards the former, the hour might have been spent less pleasantly than it was; for it so chanced that an *interlude* was introduced, of so interesting a character to all, but more especially to the naturalist Karl, that for a while the proximity of their savage besieger was forgotten, and they scarcely remembered that they were besieged.

Favoured by the accident of their situation, they became spectators of a scene – one of those scenes only to be viewed amid the wild solitudes of Nature.

Not far from the tree on which they had found shelter, stood another of equal dimensions, but of an entirely different species. It was a sycamore, as even Caspar, without any botanical skill, could testify. Its smooth bark, piebald with white and green

spots, its widely-straggling limbs and leaves, left no doubt about its being one. It was the sycamore, identical with its European congener, the *Platanus orientalis*.

It is the habit of this fine tree to become hollow. Not only does the lower part of its trunk exhibit the phenomenon of great cavities, but holes are found high up in its main shaft or in the larger limbs.

The tree in question stood within a few yards of that on which Karl, Caspar, and Ossaroo were perched. It was just before their eyes, whenever they looked in a horizontal direction; and occasionally, when tired with watching the monotonous movements of the elephant, one or other of them *did* look horizontally. The scanty foliage upon the sycamore enabled them to see its trunk and most of its larger limbs, without any obstruction of leaves or branches.

Caspar had not cast his eyes more than twice in the direction of this tree, when he saw there was something peculiar about it. Caspar was a youth of quick sight and equally quick perception. In the main stem of the tree, and about six feet above its first forking, he perceived an object that at once fixed his attention. It looked like a goat's horn, only that it was more like the curving tusk of a rhinoceros or a very young elephant. It was sticking out from the tree, with the curve directed downwards. Altogether, it looked quite different from a branch of the sycamore, or anything belonging to the tree.

Once or twice, while Caspar had his eyes upon it, he thought or

fancied that it moved; but not being sure of this, he said nothing, lest the others might laugh at him. It would not have been the first time that Karl, from his superior knowledge, had indulged in a laugh at his brother's expense.

Caspar's attention being now engrossed by the peculiar appearance he had noted, he continued to scrutinise it; and soon perceived that around the curved excrescence there was a circular disc some eight or ten inches in diameter, and differing in colour from the bark of the sycamore – by being many shades darker. This disc appeared composed of some substance that was not ligneous: for it no more resembled wood than the curved ivory-like object that protruded from its centre. Had Caspar been asked what it did look like, he would have answered that it resembled the agglutinated mud used by swallows in building their nests – so like it, that it might have been the same substance.

Caspar continued to scrutinise these two curious objects – the tusk-like excrescence, and the dark disc from which it protruded; and not until he became fully aware that the former had life in it, did he communicate his discovery to his companions. Of this fact he was convinced by seeing the crescent suddenly disappear – as if drawn within the tree, while in its place a dark round hole was alone visible. Presently the yellowish horn reappeared through the hole, and protruded outside, filling it up as before!

Caspar was too much astonished by this exhibition to remain any longer the sole proprietor of such a mysterious secret, and without more delay he communicated his discovery to Karl, and

indirectly to Ossaroo.

Both at the same time turned their eyes towards the tree, and bent them upon the indicated spot. Karl was as much mystified by the strange appearance as had been Caspar himself.

Not so Ossaroo. The moment he saw the carving ivory and the dark-coloured disc, he pronounced, in a tone of careless indifference, the simple phrase, —

“Hornbill—de bird on him nest.”

Chapter Fourteen.

A curious nest

Just then the curved projection was observed to recede within the tree; and in its place appeared a small dark hole, apparently the entrance to a larger cavity. Karl, as Caspar had done the moment before, saw this with surprise.

“Nest?” repeated Caspar, astonished at the shikaree’s statement. “A bird’s nest? Is that what you mean, Ossy?”

“That just it, sahib. Nest of great biggee bird. Feringhees him call *horneebill*.”

“Well,” rejoined Caspar, not greatly enlightened by Ossaroo’s explanation, “that’s very curious. We have seen something like a horn sticking out of the tree, though it looks more like ivory than horn. It may be the bill of a bird; but as to a bird itself, or the nest of one, where is that, pray?”

Ossaroo intimated that the nest was inside the tree; and that the bird was on the nest just behind its beak, where it ought to be.

“What! the bird is in that hole where we saw the white thing sticking out? Why, it quite filled the hole, and if there’s a bird there, and what we saw be its bill, I have only to say that its bill must be as big as its body – else how can it get out and in through so small an aperture? Certainly I see no hole but the one. Oh! perhaps the bird is a *toucan*. I have heard there are some of

that sort that can go through any place where they can pass their beaks. Is it a toucan, Ossaroo?"

Ossaroo could not tell what a toucan was, never having heard of such a bird. His ornithological knowledge went no further than to the birds of Bengal; and the toucan is found only in America. He stated that the bird in the tree was called by the Feringhees a "hornbill," but it was also known to some as the "rhinoceros bird." Ossaroo added that it was as large as a goose; and that its body was many times thicker than its bill, thick as the latter appeared to be.

"And you say it has its nest inside that hole?" interrogated Caspar, pointing to the little round aperture, which did not appear to be over three inches in diameter.

"Sure of it, young sahib," was Ossaroo's reply.

"Well, certainly there is some living creature in there, since we have seen it move; and if it be a bird as large as a goose, will you explain to me how it got in, and how it means to get out? There must be a larger entrance on the other side of the tree."

"No, sahib," confidently asserted Ossaroo; "that you see before your eye – that the only way to de horneebill nest."

"Hurrah for you, Ossy! So you mean to say that a bird as large as a goose can go in and out by that hole? Why, a sparrow could scarcely squeeze itself through there!"

"Horneebill he no goee in, he no goee out. He stay inside till him little chickees ready for leavee nest."

"Come, Ossy!" said Caspar, in a bantering way; "that story is

too good to be true. You don't expect us to believe all that? What, stay in the nest till the young are ready to leave it! And how then? How will the young ones help their mother out of the scrape? How will they get out themselves: for I suppose they don't leave the nest till they are pretty well grown? Come! good shikaree; let us have no more circumlocution about the matter, but explain all these apparently inexplicable circumstances."

The shikaree, thus appealed to, proceeded to give the explanation demanded.

The hornbill, he said, when about to bring forth its young, selects a hollow in some tree, just large enough conveniently to hold the nest which it builds, and also its own body. As soon as the nest is constructed and the eggs all laid, the female bird takes her seat upon them, and there remains; not only until the eggs are hatched, but for a long time afterwards – in fact, until the young are nearly fledged and able to take care of themselves. In order that she may be protected during the period of her incubation against weasels, polecats, ichneumons, and all such vermin, a design exhibiting either wonderful instinct or sagacity, is carried into execution by the male. As soon as his mate has squatted upon her eggs, he goes to work at the masonic art; and using his great horned mandibles, first as a hod, and afterwards as a trowel, he walls up the entrance to the nest – leaving an aperture just large enough to be filled up by the beak of the female. The material employed by him for this purpose is a kind of agglutinated mud, which he procures from the neighbouring watercourse or

quagmire, and somewhat similar to that used by the common house-swallow for constructing *its* peculiar nest. When dried, this mud becomes exceedingly hard – bidding defiance to the teeth and claws of all would-be intruders, whether bird or quadruped; and with the horny beak of the old hen projected outward, and quite filling up the aperture, even the slippery tree-snake cannot find room enough to squeeze his body through. The female, thus free from all fear of being molested, quietly continues her incubation!

When Ossaroo had got thus far with his explanation, Caspar interrupted him with a query.

“What!” said he, “sit all the time – for weeks, I suppose – without ever coming out – without taking an airing? And how does she get her food?”

As Caspar put this question, and before Ossaroo had time to answer, a noise reached their ears which appeared to proceed from the sky above them. It was a noise well calculated to inspire terror in those who had never before heard it, or did not know what was causing it. It was a sort of fluttering, clattering sound, or rather a series of sounds, resembling the quickly repeated gusts of a violent storm.

The moment Ossaroo heard it, he knew what it was; and instead of giving a direct answer to Caspar’s question, he simply said —

“Wait a bit, sahib. Here come old cockee horneebill; he show you how de hen getee her food.”

The words had scarcely passed from the lips of the shikaree, when the cause of that singular noise became known to his companions. The maker of it appeared before them in the form of a great bird, that with a strong flapping of its wings flew past the tree in which they were seated, towards that which contained the nest.

In an instant afterwards, it was seen resting on a spur-like projection of the trunk, just below the aperture; and it needed not Ossaroo to tell them that it was the cock hornbill that had there alighted. The large beak – the tip of it resembling that which they had already seen sticking out of the hole, and which was once more visible and in motion – surmounted by an immense helmet-like protuberance, rising upon the crown, and running several inches along the top of the upper mandible, which might have been taken for a second beak – this singular appendage could belong to no other bird than the *hornbill*.

Chapter Fifteen.

The hornbill

Karl, although he had never seen one of these birds alive, had yet examined stuffed specimens of them in museums, and he had no difficulty in recognising the bird. He was able even to identify the species, for there are many species of hornbill, known under the generic name, *Bucerus*. That before their eyes was the *Bucerus rhinoceros*, or “rhinoceros hornbill,” called also the “topau,” and sometimes the “horned Indian raven,” from a sort of resemblance which it bears both in shape and habits to the well-known bird of this name.

Ossaroo had not exaggerated the size of these birds when he compared it to that of a goose. On the contrary, he had rather moderated the dimensions: for the one in question looked much larger than either goose or gander. It was rather more than three feet in length – reckoning from the tip of its tail to the point of its curving beak, which of itself was nearly a foot long! Its colour was black above, and yellowish-white underneath, the tail feathers being a clear white, with a broad black band crossing them near the middle. Its bill, like that of its mate already observed, was of a yellowish-white, the upper mandible being reddish around the base, while the casque-like protuberance exhibited a mottled surface of white and black.

Ossaroo had to tell them pretty nearly all he knew in relation to this curious bird; for although there are several species of hornbills natives of India, it is by no means a common creature, even at home in its own country.

Karl could have told them much more about its species and habits, and no doubt he would have done so had they been otherwise engaged. But situated as they were, with an angry elephant besieging them in the tree, and now for a while interested in observing the movements of the bird itself, Karl was in no humour to deliver an ornithological lecture. He might have told them that ornithologists have differed much about the classification of the hornbill – some of them placing it among the toucans, while others assert that it belongs to the crow family. Its immense beak – out of all proportion to its body – is not the only point of resemblance it bears to the toucans. Like them, it flings its food into the air, catching and swallowing it as it comes down. Unlike the toucans, however, it cannot climb trees, and is therefore not of the Scansorial order. It is said to be omnivorous in its food; and in this it resembles the crows and ravens: but, indeed, as already stated, there are many species of hornbills, and the habits of the different kinds, by no means uniform or alike, have been confounded by most writers. There are species in Africa, others in India and the Indian islands, and New Guinea is known to have one or two distinct species of its own. All these differ not only in size, colour, shape of their beak, and the protuberance that surmounts it; but also in the kind of

food which they live upon. For instance, the African hornbills, and one or more of the Asiatic species, are carnivorous, and some even carrion-eaters. These are filthy birds, their flesh and feathers smelling rank as those of vultures. On the other hand, there is a species in the Indian islands – the Moluccas more particularly – whose sole food is the nutmeg, which gives to its flesh an exquisite aromatic flavour, causing it to be much relished at the tables of Oriental epicures. The bill of this species after a certain time appears with a number of grooves or furrows in it. As these furrows are observed only on the beaks of the old birds, the Dutch colonists established in the Moluccas believe them to indicate their age, each wrinkle standing for a year. Hence the hornbill has obtained among the colonists the name of *Yerrvogel* (year bird).

Karl, as I have said, was acquainted with all these facts in the natural history of the hornbill; but just then he did not think of making them known to his companions – all three being too much occupied in watching the movements of the male bird. It was evident that he was not one of the vegetable feeders: for on his alighting they could see hanging from his beak a long cylindrical object, which they were able to identify as a portion – the head and part of the body – of a dead snake. It was equally evident that his mate was not accustomed to a vegetable diet: for from the way in which he was manoeuvring, the spectators saw that the mutilated reptile was intended for her. No doubt it was her dinner, for it had now got to that hour of the day.

She was not to be kept waiting any longer. Almost on the instant her provider alighted on the projecting spur, with a toss of his head he jerked the piece of snake up into the air, and then caught it as it came down again – not with the intention to swallow it, but only to get a better grip, in order that he might deliver it the more adroitly into the mandibles of his mate – now protruding through the aperture, and opened to receive it.

In another instant the savoury morsel was transferred from the beak of the male to that of the female; and then the ivory forceps of the latter, with the snake held tightly between them, disappeared within the cavity.

The old cock stayed not a moment longer upon the tree. He had served his mate with her dinner, and perhaps he had yet to bring on the dessert. Whether or not, he rose immediately afterwards into the air, with the same clangorous clapping of his wings; but this time the noise was accompanied by the clattering of his horny mandibles, like a pair of castanets, causing a sound not only singular, but, if heard by strangers, calculated to beget within them a considerable feeling of alarm.

Chapter Sixteen.

A four-footed burglar

After the departure of the bird, that had taught our young adventurers so interesting a chapter of natural history, the elephant once more engrossed their attention. Not that there was anything new in the movements of the latter – for it was acting just as before – but simply because they knew that, so long as it remained upon the ground, they would have to stay in the tree; and they naturally bent their eyes upon it, to see if it was showing any signs of moving off. They could perceive none. Not the slightest appearance to indicate its intention of departing from the spot.

While engaged in regarding the besieger, their eyes were of course removed from the sycamore; nor might they have been again turned towards that tree – at least, not for a good while – but for a sound that reached their ears, and which appeared to proceed from the direction of the hornbill's nest. It was a soft and rather plaintive sound – unlike any that had been made by the rhinoceros bird; nor was it at all like the voice of a bird, of any kind. It was more like the utterance of some four-footed creature; or it might even have been a human voice pronouncing the syllable “wha,” several times repeated.

That it was neither bird nor human being, Ossaroo could tell

the moment he heard the first “wha.” Almost as soon were the others convinced that it was neither: for on turning their eyes to the sycamore, they saw upon the projecting spur that had been so lately occupied by the hornbill, a creature of a very different kind – in short, a quadruped.

Had it been in an American forest, they might have taken the creature for a racoon though a very large one. On closer scrutiny, many points of resemblance, and also of difference, would have become apparent. Like the racoon, it had plantigrade feet, a burly, rounded body, and a very thick hairy tail – ringed also like that of the American animal – but unlike the latter, its muzzle, instead of being long and slender, was short, round, and somewhat cat-like; while its hair, or more properly its fur, formed a thick even coat all over its body, limbs, and tail, and presented a smooth and shining surface. Its general colour was a very dark brown, streaked and mottled with golden yellow; and Caspar remarked, upon the moment of seeing it, that it was one of the handsomest creatures he had ever beheld.

The naturalist Cuvier had made the same remark long before Caspar’s time. So said Karl, on hearing the observation escape from the lips of his brother.

Ossaroo knew that the animal was the “wha,” a name derived from its ordinary call; and that it was sometimes known as the “chetwa,” and also the “panda.”

Karl, on hearing Ossaroo’s name for it, and indeed, on hearing it pronounced by the creature itself, was able to identify the

animal, and to give it still another name – that which has been bestowed upon it by Frederick Cuvier —*ailurus*. This is the generic name, of which, up to the present time, it has been left in undisturbed possession. Since only one species has been discovered, it has the name all to itself; and therefore would not require any specific appellation. But for all that, one has been given to it. On account of its shining coat, it has been called the *ailurus fulgens*.

Though the closet naturalists, in following out their pedantic propensities, have created a genus expressly for this animal, there is nothing either in its appearance or habits to separate it from the badgers, the racoons, the coatimondis, and such other predatory creatures. Like them it preys upon birds and their eggs, as also on the smaller kinds of quadrupeds, and like the racoon, it is a nimble tree-climber.

The situation in which the particular panda, of which we are writing, first appeared to the eyes of Karl and Caspar, proved this capacity, and its actions the moment after testified to its fondness for birds'-eggs. It had not been a minute under the eyes of the spectators, when they saw that it was after the eggs of the hornbill; perhaps, too, it might have had a design of tasting the flesh of their owner.

Resting its thick plantigrade hind feet upon the projection of the tree, it erected itself like a little bear; and with its fore-paws commenced scraping at the barrier wall which the male bird had spent so much time and taken so much pains in building.

It is possible that if it had been left to itself, it might in time have succeeded in forcing an entrance into the nest, and highly probable too – or it would scarcely have entered upon the task. But it was not left to itself. Not that the sitter inside could have done much to hinder it: though it was evident from the way in which her beak was repeatedly projected and drawn back through the hole, and also from her angry hissing, that she knew there was danger without, and that an enemy was assailing her citadel.

Most likely after a time, and by constant scraping, the clay wall would eventually have been pulled down; but before that event came to pass, a loud flapping and fluttering, and cracking and clattering, was heard among the tops of the trees; and in an instant afterwards the broad, shadowy wings of the old male hornbill were swashing about the ears of the four-footed robber, where the long cutlass-like beak, armed at its edges, at once interrupted the intent.

The panda, taken by surprise, quailed at this first onset: for like any other *paterfamilias* who on returning home finds a burglar breaking into his house, the cock bird charged in the full tide of impetuous fury.

The robber, however, evidently used to this sort of thing, soon recovered his self-possession; and instead of retreating from the tree, he only planted himself more firmly upon the projection; and, facing towards his feathery assailant, prepared to show fight.

And fight was instantly shown on both sides – the bird swooping repeatedly at its adversary, striking with its strong

wings and thrusting with its ensiform beak; while the quadruped played back both with teeth and claws – several times plucking a mouthful of feathers from the breast of its winged adversary.

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