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HUNTING THE LIONS

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R. M. Ballantyne

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Chapter One.

Begins to Unfold the Tale of the Lions by Describing the Lion of the Tale

We trust, good reader, that it will not cause you a feeling of disappointment to be told that the name of our hero is Brown—Tom Brown. It is important at the beginning of any matter that those concerned should clearly understand their position, therefore we have thought fit, even at the risk of throwing a wet blanket over you, to commence this tale on one of the most romantic of subjects by stating—and now repeating that our hero was a member of the large and (supposed to be) unromantic family of “the Browns.”

A word in passing about the romance of the family. Just because the Brown family is large, it has some to be deemed unromantic. Every one knows that two of the six green-grocers in the next street are Browns. The fat sedate butcher round the corner is David Brown, and the milkman is James Brown. The latter is a square-faced practical man, who is looked up to as a species of oracle by all his friends. Half a dozen drapers within

a mile of you are named Brown, and all of them are shrewd men of business, who have feathered their nests well, and stick to business like burrs. You will certainly find that several of the hardest-working clergymen, and one or more of the city missionaries, are named Brown; and as to Doctor Browns, there is no end of them! But why go further? The fact is patent to every unprejudiced person.

Now, instead of admitting that the commonness of the name of Brown proves its owners to be unromantic, we hold that this is a distinct evidence of the deep-seated romance of the family. In the first place, it is probable that their multitudinosity is the result of romance, which, as every one knows, has a tendency to cause men and women to fall in love, and marry early in life. Brown is almost always a good husband and a kind father. Indeed he is a good, steady-going man in all the relations of life, and his name, in our mind at least, is generally associated with troops of happy children who call him "daddy," and regard him in the light of an elephantine playmate. And they do so with good reason, for Brown is manly and thorough-going in whatever he undertakes, whether it be the transaction of business or romping with his children.

But, besides this, the multitudinosity of the Browns cuts in two directions. If there are so many of them green-grocers, butchers, and milkmen—who without sufficient reason are thought to be unromantic—it will be found that they are equally numerous in other walks of life; and wherever they walk they do so coolly,

deliberately, good-humouredly, and very practically. Look at the learned professions, for instance. What a host of Browns are there. The engineers and contractors too, how they swarm in their lists. If you want to erect a suspension bridge over the British Channel, the only man who is likely to undertake the job for you is Adam Brown, C.E., and Abel Brown will gladly provide the materials. As to the army, here their name is legion; they compose an army of themselves; and they are all enthusiasts—but quiet, steady-going, not noisy or boastful enthusiasts. In fact, the romance of Brown consists very much in his willingness to fling himself, heart and soul, into whatever his hand finds to do. The man who led the storming party, and achieved immortal glory by getting himself riddled to death with bullets, was Lieutenant Brown—better known as Ned Brown by his brother officers, who could not mention his name without choking for weeks after his sad but so-called “glorious” fall. The other man who accomplished the darling wish of his heart—to win the Victoria Cross—by attaching a bag of gunpowder to the gate of the fortress and blowing it and himself to atoms so small that no shred of him big enough to hang the Victoria Cross upon was ever found, was Corporal Brown, and there was scarcely a dry eye in the regiment when he went down.

Go abroad among the barbarians of the earth, to China, for instance, and ask who is yonder thick-set, broad-chested man, with the hearty expression of face, and the splendid eastern uniform, and you will be told that he is Too Foo, the commander-

in-chief of the Imperial forces in that department. If, still indulging curiosity, you go and introduce yourself to him, he will shake you heartily by the hand, and, in good English, tell you that his name is Walter Brown, and that he will be charmed to show you something of Oriental life if you will do him the favour to take a slice of puppy dog in his pagoda after the review! If there is a chief of a hill tribe in Hindustan in want of a prime minister who will be able to carry him through a serious crisis, there is a Brown at hand, who speaks not only his own language, but all the dialects and languages of Hindustan, who is quite ready to assume office. It is the same at the diggings, whether of Australia, California, or Oregon; and we are persuaded that the man whose habitation is nearest to the pole at this moment, whether north or south, is a Brown, if he be not a Jones, Robinson, or Smith!

Need more be said to prove that this great branch of the human family is truly associated with all that is wild, grand, and romantic? We think not; and we hope that the reader is now somewhat reconciled to the fact—which cannot be altered, and which we would not alter if we could—that our hero's name is Tom Brown.

Tom was the son of a settler at the Cape of Good Hope, who, after leading the somewhat rough life of a trader into the interior of Africa, made a fortune, and retired to a suburban villa in Cape Town, there to enjoy the same with his wife and family. Having been born in Cape Town, our hero soon displayed a

disposition to extend his researches into the unknown geography of his native land, and on several occasions lost himself in the bush. Thereafter he ran away from school twice, having been seized with a romantic and irresistible desire to see and shoot a lion! In order to cure his son of this propensity, Mr Brown sent him to England, where he was put to school, became a good scholar, and a proficient in all games and athletic exercises. After that he went to college, intending, thereafter, to return to the Cape, join his father, and go on a trading expedition into the interior, in order that he might learn the business, and carry it on for himself.

Tom Brown's mother and sisters—there were six of the latter—were charming ladies. Everybody said what pleasant people the Browns were—that there was no nonsense about them, and that they were so practical, yet so lively and full of spirit. Mrs Brown, moreover, actually held the belief that people had souls as well as bodies, which required feeding in order to prevent starvation, and ensure healthy growth! On the strength of this belief she fed her children out of that old-fashioned, yet ever new, volume, the Bible, and the consequence was, that the Miss Browns were among the most useful members of the church to which they belonged, a great assistance to the clergymen and missionaries who waited those regions, and a blessing to the poor of the community. But we must dismiss the family without further remark, for our story has little or nothing to do with any member of it except Tom himself.

When he went to school in England, Tom carried his love for the lion along with him. The mere word had a charm for him which he could not account for. In childhood he had dreamed of lion-hunting; in riper years he played at games of his own invention which had for their chief point the slaying or capturing of lions. Zoological gardens and “wild beast shows” had for him attractions which were quite irresistible. As he advanced in years, Richard of the Lion-heart became his chief historical hero; Androcles and the lion stirred up all the enthusiasm of his nature. Indeed it might have been said that the lion-rampant was stamped indelibly on his heart, while the British lion became to him the most attractive myth on record.

When he went to college and studied medicine, his imagination was sobered down a little; but when he had passed his examinations and was capped, and was styled Dr Brown by his friends, and began to make preparations for going back to the Cape, all his former enthusiasm about lions returned with tenfold violence.

Tom’s father intended that he should study medicine, not with a view to practising it professionally, but because he held it to be very desirable that every one travelling in the unhealthy regions of South Africa should possess as much knowledge of medicine as possible.

One morning young Dr Brown received a letter from his father which ran as follows:—

“*My dear Tom,*—A capital opportunity of letting you

see a little of the country in which I hope you will ultimately make your fortune has turned up just now. Two officers of the Cape Rifles have made up their minds to go on a hunting excursion into the interior with a trader named Hicks, and want a third man to join them. I knew you would like to go on such an expedition, remembering your leaning in that direction in days of old, so I have pledged you to them. As they start three months hence, the sooner you come out the better. I enclose a letter of credit to enable you to fit out and start at once. Your mother and sisters are all well, and send love.—*Your affectionate father, J.B.*”

Tom Brown uttered a wild cheer of delight on reading this brief and business-like epistle, and his curious landlady immediately answered to the shout by entering and wishing to know “if he had called and if he wanted hanythink?”

“No, Mrs Pry, I did not call; but I ventured to express my feelings in regard to a piece of good news which I have just received.”

“La, sir!”

“Yes, Mrs Pry, I’m going off immediately to South Africa to hunt lions.”

“You *don’t* mean it, sir!”

“Indeed I do, Mrs Pry; so pray let me have breakfast without delay, and make up my bill to the end of the week; I shall leave you then. Sorry to part, Mrs Pry. I have been very comfortable with you.”

“I ’ope so, sir.”

“Yes, very comfortable; and you may be assured that I shall recommend your lodgings highly wherever I go—not that there is much chance of my recommendation doing you any good, for out in the African bush I sha’n’t see many men who want furnished lodgings in London, and wild beasts are not likely to make inquiries, being already well provided in that way at home. By the way, when you make up your bill, don’t forget to charge me with the tumbler I smashed yesterday in making chemical experiments, and the tea-pot cracked in the same good cause. Accidents will happen, you know, Mrs Pry, and bachelors are bound to pay for ’em.”

“Certainly, sir; and please, sir, what am I to do with the cupboard full of skulls and ’uman bones downstairs?”

“Anything you choose, Mrs Pry,” said Tom, laughing; “I shall trouble my head no more with such things, so you may sell them if you please, or send them as a valuable gift to the British Museum, only don’t bother me about them; and do take yourself off like a good soul, for I must reply to my father’s letter immediately.”

Mrs Pry retired, and Tom Brown sat down to write a letter to “J.B.” in which he briefly thanked him for the letter of credit, and assured him that one of the dearest wishes of his heart was about to be realised, for that still—not less but rather more than when he was a runaway boy—his soul was set upon hunting the lions.

Chapter Two.

Sport Begins in Earnest

Time, which is ever on the wing, working mighty changes in the affairs of man, soon transported our hero from Mrs Pry's dingy little back parlour in London to the luxuriant wilds of Africa.

There, on the evening of a splendid day, he sat down to rest under the grateful shade of an umbrageous tree, in company with Major Garret and Lieutenant Wilkins, both of whom had turned out to be men after Tom Brown's own heart. They were both bronzed strapping warriors, and had entered those regions not only with a view to hunting lions, but also for the purpose of making collections of the plants and insects of the country, the major being a persevering entomologist, while the lieutenant was enthusiastically botanical. To the delight of these gentlemen they found that Tom, although not deeply learned on these subjects, was nevertheless extremely intelligent and appreciative.

The major was very tall, thin; strong, wiry, and black-bearded. The lieutenant was very short, thickset, deep-chested, and powerful. Tom himself was burly, ruddy, broad, and rather above middle size.

"Now this is what I call real felicity," observed the major, pulling out a pipe which he proceeded to fill. Tom Brown

followed his example, and Bob Wilkins, who was not a smoker, and had a somewhat facetious disposition, amused himself by quizzing his comrades and carving a piece of wood with his penknife.

“Does the real felicity, major, result from the tobacco or the surrounding circumstances?” asked Wilkins.

“From both, Bob,” replied the other with a smile, “and you need not spoil my felicity by repeating your well-known set of phrases about the evils of smoking, for I know them all by heart, and I dare say so does Tom.”

“Impossible,” said Wilkins; “I have not yet been two weeks in his company; he cannot, therefore, have heard a tithe of the irresistible arguments which I bring to bear on that pernicious practice, and which I hope some day to throw into shape and give to the public in the form of a bulky volume.”

“Which will end in smoke,” interrupted the major.

“In a literal sense, too,” added Tom Brown, “for it will be sold as waste-paper and be made up into matches.”

“We shall see,” retorted Wilkins, cutting carefully round the right nostril of a baboon’s head which he had carved on the end of a walking-stick; “meanwhile, major, as you are better acquainted than we are with this outlandish country, and have taken on yourself the leadership of the party, will you condescend to give Tom Brown and me some idea of your intended movements—that is, if smoke and felicity will permit you to do so?”

“With pleasure, my dear fellow,” said the major puffing

vigorously for a few moments to get his pipe well alight. "It was my intention to make for Big Buffalo's Village, or kraal as they call it here, and, getting the assistance of some of his sable Majesty's subjects, hunt the country in his neighbourhood, but I heard from Hicks this morning, before we left the camp, that a band of traders, at a kraal not far from us, are about to start for the Zulu country, and it struck me that we might as well join forces and advance together, for I prefer a large party to a small one—there is generally more fun to be got out of it."

"Would it be well to tie ourselves to any one?" asked Tom Brown. "I have always found that a small party is more manageable than a large one however, I do but throw out the suggestion in all humility."

"He shall not necessarily be tied to them," replied the major, re-lighting his pipe, which had a bad habit of going out when he talked; "we may keep company as long as we find it agreeable to do so, and part when we please. But what say you to the change of plan? I think it will bring us into a better hunting country."

"Whatever you think best, major, will please me," said Tom, "for I'm ignorant of everything here and place myself entirely under your directions."

"And I am agreeable," added Bob Wilkins.

"You are neither agreeable nor grammatical," said the major.

"Well, if you insist on it, I'm agreed. But do put your pipe out, Tom, and let us resume our march, for we have a long way to go, and much work to do before reaching the camp to-night."

Thus admonished, Tom Brown made an extinguisher of the end of his forefinger, put his short clay pipe in his waistcoat pocket, and, shouldering his rifle, followed his companions into the forest, on the edge of which they had been resting.

The country through which they passed was extremely beautiful, particularly in the eyes of our hero, for whom the magnificence of tropical vegetation never lost its charms. The three sportsmen had that morning left their baggage, in a wagon drawn by oxen, in charge of Hicks the trader, who had agreed to allow them to accompany him on a trading expedition, and to serve them in the capacity of guide and general servant. They had made a détour through the forest with a party of six natives, under the guidance of a Caffre servant named Mafuta, and were well repaid for the time thus spent, by the immense variety of insects and plants which the naturalists found everywhere. But that which delighted them most was the animal life with which the whole region teemed. They saw immense herds of wolves, deer of various kinds, hyenas, elands, buffalo, and many other wild beasts, besides innumerable flocks of water-fowl of all kinds. But they passed these unmolested, having set their hearts that day on securing higher game. As Wilkins said, "nothing short of a lion, an elephant, a rhinoceros, or hippopotamus" would satisfy them and that they had some chance of securing one or more of these formidable brutes was clear, because their voices had been several times heard, and their footprints had been seen everywhere.

About an hour after resuming their walk, the major went off in hot pursuit of an enormous bee, which he saw humming round a bush. About the same time, Wilkins fell behind to examine one of the numerous plants that were constantly distracting his attention, so that our hero was left for a time to hunt alone with the natives. He was walking a considerable distance in advance of them when he came to a dense thicket which was black as midnight, and so still that the falling of a leaf might have been heard. Tom Brown surveyed the thicket quietly for a few seconds, and observing the marks of some large animal on the ground, he beckoned to the Caffre who carried his spare double-barrelled gun. Up to this date our hero had not shot any of the large denizens of the African wilderness, and now that he was suddenly called upon to face what he believed to be one of them, he acquitted himself in a way that might have been expected of a member of the Brown family! He put off his shoes, cocked his piece, and entered the thicket alone—the natives declining to enter along with him. Coolly and very quietly he advanced into the gloomy twilight of the thicket, and as he went he felt as though all the vivid dreams and fervid imaginings about lions that had ever passed through his mind from earliest infancy were rushing upon him in a concentrated essence! Yet there was no outward indication of the burning thoughts within, save in the sparkle of his dark brown eye, and the flush of his brown cheek. As he wore a brown shooting-coat, he may be said to have been at that time Brown all over!

He had proceeded about fifty yards or so when, just as he turned a winding in the path, he found himself face to face with an old buffalo-bull, fast asleep, and lying down not ten yards off. To drop on one knee and level his piece was the work of an instant, but unfortunately he snapped a dry twig in doing so. The eyes of the huge brute opened instantly, and he had half risen before the loud report of the gun rang through the thicket. Leaping up, Tom Brown took advantage of the smoke to run back a few yards and spring behind a bush, where he waited to observe the result of his shot. It was more tremendous than he had expected. A crash on his right told him that another, and unsuspected, denizen of the thicket had been scared from his lair, while the one he had fired at was on his legs snuffing the air for his enemy. Evidently the wind had been favourable, for immediately he made a dead-set and charged right through the bush behind which our hero was concealed. Tom leaped on one side; the buffalo-bull turned short round and made another dash at him. There was only the remnant of the shattered bush between the two; the buffalo stood for a few seconds eyeing him furiously, the blood streaming down its face from a bullet-hole between the two eyes, and its head garnished with a torn mass of the bush. Again it charged, and again Tom, unable to get a favourable chance for his second barrel, leaped aside and evaded it with difficulty. The bush was now trampled down, and scarcely formed a shadow of a screen between them; nevertheless Tom stood his ground, hoping to get a shot at the bull's side, and never

for a single instant taking his eye off him. Once more he charged, and again our hero escaped. He did not venture, however, to stand another, but turned and fled, closely followed by the infuriated animal.

A few yards in front the path turned at almost right angles. Tom thought he felt the hot breath of his pursuer on his neck as he doubled actively round the corner. His enemy could neither diverge from nor check his onward career; right through a fearfully tangled thicket he went, and broke into the open beyond, carrying an immense pile of rubbish on his horns. Tom instantly threw himself on his back in the thicket to avoid being seen, and hoped that his native followers would now attract the bull's attention, but not one of them made his appearance, so he started up, and just as the disappointed animal had broken away over the plain, going straight from him, he gave him the second barrel, and hit him high up on the last rib on the off side, in front of the hip. He threw up his tail, made a tremendous bound in the air, dashed through bush-thorns so dense and close that it seemed perfectly marvellous how he managed it, and fell dead within two hundred yards.

Note. If the reader should desire fuller accounts of such battles, we recommend to him *African Hunting*, a very interesting work, by W.C. Baldwin, Esquire, to whom, with Dr Livingstone, Du Chaillu, and others, I am indebted for most of the information contained in this volume,—R.M.B.

The moment it fell the natives descended from the different

trees in which they had taken refuge at the commencement of the fray, and were lavish in their compliments; but Tom, who felt that he had been deserted in the hour of need, did not receive these very graciously, and there is no saying how far he might have proceeded in rebuking his followers (for the Brown family is pugnacious under provocation) had not the major's voice been heard in the distance, shouting, "Hallo! look out! a buffalo! where are you, Tom Brown, Wilkins?"

"Hallo!" he added, bursting suddenly into the open where they were standing, "what's this—a—buffalo? dead! Have 'ee killed him? why, I saw him alive not two minutes—"

His speech was cut short by a loud roar, as the buffalo he had been in chase of, scared by the approach of Wilkins, burst through the underwood and charged down on the whole party. They fled right and left, but as the brute passed, Wilkins, from the other side of the open, fired at it and put a ball in just behind the shoulder-blade. It did not fall, however, and the three hunters ran after it at full speed, Wilkins leading, Tom Brown next, and the major last. The natives kept well out of harm's way on either side; not that they were unusually timid fellows, but they probably felt that where such able hands were at work it was unnecessary for them to interfere!

As the major went racing clumsily along—for he was what may be called an ill-jointed man, nevertheless as bold as a lion and a capital shot—he heard a clatter of hoofs behind him, and, looking over his shoulder, observed another buffalo in full career

behind. He stopped instantly, took quick aim at the animal's breast, and fired, but apparently without effect. There chanced to be a forked tree close at hand, to which the major rushed and scrambled up with amazing rapidity. He was knocked out of it again quite as quickly by the shock of the tremendous charge made by the buffalo, which almost split its skull, and rolled over dead at the tree-root, shot right through the heart.

Meanwhile Tom Brown and the lieutenant had overtaken and killed the other animal, so that they returned to camp well laden with the best part of the meat of three buffaloes.

Here, while resting after the toils of the day, beside the roaring camp-fires, and eating their well-earned supper, Hicks the trader told them that a native had brought news of a desperate attack by lions on a kraal not more than a day's journey from where they lay.

"It's not far out o' the road," said Hicks, who was a white man—of what country no one knew—with a skin so weather-beaten by constant exposure that it was more like leather than flesh; "if you want some sport in that way, I'd advise 'ee to go there to-morrow."

"Want some sport in that way!" echoed Wilkins in an excited tone; "why, what do you suppose we came here for? *Of course* we'll go there at once; that is, if my comrades have no objection."

"With all my heart," said the major with a smile as he carefully filled his beloved pipe.

Tom Brown said nothing; but he smoked his pipe quietly, and

nodded his head gently, and felt a slight but decided swelling of the heart, as he murmured inwardly to himself, “Yes, I’ll have a slap at the lions to-morrow.”

Chapter Three.

In which Great Deeds are Done, and Tom Brown has a Narrow Escape

But Tom was wrong. Either the report had been false, or the lions had a special intimation that certain destruction approached them; for our hunters waited two nights at the native kraal without seeing one, although the black king thereof stoutly affirmed that they had attacked the cattle enclosures nearly every night for a week past, and committed great havoc.

One piece of good fortune, however, attended them, which was that they unexpectedly met with the large party which the major had expressed his wish to join. It consisted of about thirty men, four of whom were sportsmen, and the rest natives, with about twenty women and children, twelve horses, seventy oxen, five wagons, and a few dogs; all under the leadership of a trader named Hardy.

Numerous though the oxen were, there were not too many of them, as the reader may easily believe when we tell him that the wagons were very large, clumsy, and heavily laden,—one of them, besides other things, carrying a small boat—and that it occasionally required the powers of twenty oxen to drag one wagon up some of the bad hills they encountered on the journey to the Zulu country.

The four sportsmen, who were named respectively Pearson, Ogilvie, Anson, and Brand, were overjoyed at the addition to the party of Tom Brown and his companions, the more so that Tom was a doctor, for the constitutions of two of them, Ogilvie and Anson, had proved to be scarcely capable of withstanding the evil effects of the climate. Tom prescribed for them so successfully that they soon regained their strength; a result which he believed, however, was fully as much due to the cheering effects of the addition to their social circle as to medicine.

Having rested at the kraal a few days, partly to recruit the travellers, and partly to give the lions an opportunity of returning and being shot, the whole band set forth on their journey to the Umveloose river, having previously rendered the king of the kraal and his subjects happy by a liberal present of beads, brass wire, blue calico, and blankets.

At the kraal they had procured a large quantity of provisions for the journey—amobella meal for porridge, mealies, rice, beans, potatoes, and water-melons; and, while there, they had enjoyed the luxury of as much milk as they could drink; so that all the party were in pretty good condition and excellent spirits when they left. But this did not last very long, for the weather suddenly changed, and rain fell in immense quantities. The long rank grass of those regions became so saturated that it was impossible to keep one's-self dry; and, to add to their discomforts, mosquitoes increased in numbers to such an extent that some of the European travellers could scarcely obtain a wink of sleep.

“Oh dear!” groaned poor Wilkins, one night as he lay between the major and Tom Brown on the wet grass under the shelter of a bullock-wagon covered with a wet blanket; “how I wish that the first mosquito had never been born!”

“If the world could get on without rain,” growled the major, “my felicity would be complete. There is a particular stream which courses down the underside of the right shaft of the wagon, and meets with some obstruction just at the point which causes it to pour continuously down my neck. I’ve shifted my position twice, but it appears to follow me, and I have had sensations for the last quarter of an hour which induce me to believe that a rivulet is bridged by the small of my back. Ha! have you killed him this time?”

The latter remark was addressed to Tom Brown, who had for some time past been vigorously engaged slapping his own face in the vain hope of slaying his tormentors—vain, not only because they were too quick to be caught in that way, but also, because, if slain by hundreds at every blow, there would still have remained thousands more to come on!

“No,” replied Tom, with a touch of bitterness in his tone; “he’s not dead yet.”

“He?” exclaimed Wilkins; “do you mean to say that you are troubled by only *one* of the vile creatures?”

“Oh no!” said Tom; “there are millions of ’em humming viciously round my head at this moment, but one of them is so big and assiduous that I have come to recognise his voice—there!

d'you hear it?"

"Hear it!" cried Wilkins; "how can you expect me to hear one of yours when I am engaged with a host of my own? Ah! but I hear *that*," he added, laughing, as another tremendous crack resounded from Tom Brown's cheek; "what a tough skin you must have, to be sure, to stand such treatment?"

"I am lost in admiration of the amiableness of your temper, Tom," remarked the major. "If I were to get such a slap in the face as that, even from myself, I could not help flying in a passion. Hope the enemy is defeated at last?"

"I—I—think so," said Tom, in that meditative tone which assures the listener that the speaker is intensely on the *qui vive*; "yes, I believe I *have*—eh—no—there he—oh!"

Another pistol-shot slap concluded the sentence, and poor Tom's companions in sorrow burst into a fit of laughter.

"Let 'im bite, sir," growled the deep bass voice of Hardy, who lay under a neighbouring wagon; "when he's got his beak well shoved into you, and begins to suck, he can't get away so quick, 'cause of havin' to pull it out again! hit out hard and quick then, an' you're sure of him. But the best way's to let 'em bite, an' go to sleep."

"Good advice; I'll try to take it," said Tom, turning round with a sigh, and burying his face in the blanket. His companions followed his example, and in spite of rain and mosquitoes were soon fast asleep.

This wet weather had a very depressing effect on their spirits,

and made the region so unhealthy that it began ere long to tell on the weaker members of the sporting party; as for the natives, they, being inured to it, were proof against everything. Being all but naked, they did not suffer from wet garments; and as they smeared their bodies over with grease, the rain ran off them as it does off the ducks. However, it did not last long at that time. In a few days the sky cleared, and the spirits of the party revived with their health.

The amount of animal life seen on the journey was amazing. All travellers in Africa have borne testimony to the fact that it teems with animals. The descriptions which, not many years ago, were deemed fabulous, have been repeated to us as sober truth by men of unquestionable veracity. Indeed, no description, however vivid, can convey to those whose personal experience has been limited to the fields of Britain an adequate conception of the teeming millions of living creatures, great and small, four-footed and winged, which swarm in the dense forests and mighty plains of the African wilderness.

Of course the hunters of the party were constantly on the alert, and great was the slaughter done; but great also was the capacity of the natives for devouring animal food, so that very little of the sport could be looked upon in the light of life taken in vain.

Huge and curious, as well as beautiful, were the creatures "bagged."

On one occasion Tom Brown went out with the rest of the party on horseback after some elephants, the tracks of which

had been seen the day before. In the course of the day Tom was separated from his companions, but being of an easy-going disposition, and having been born with a thorough belief in the impossibility of anything very serious happening to him, he was not much alarmed, and continued to follow what he thought were the tracks of elephants, expecting every moment to fall in with, or hear shots from his friends.

During the journey Tom had seen the major, who was an old sportsman, kill several elephants, so that he conceived himself to be quite able for that duty if it should devolve upon him. He was walking his horse quietly along a sort of path that skirted a piece of thicket when he heard a tremendous crashing of trees, and looking up saw a troop of fifty or sixty elephants dashing away through a grove of mapani-trees. Tom at once put spurs to his horse, unslung his large-bore double-barrelled gun, and coming close up to a cow-elephant, sent a ball into her behind the shoulder. She did not drop, so he gave her another shot, when she fell heavily to the ground.

At that moment he heard a shot not far off. Immediately afterwards there was a sound of trampling feet which rapidly increased, and in a few moments the whole band of elephants came rushing back towards him, having been turned by the major with a party of natives. Not having completed the loading of his gun, Tom hastily rode behind a dense bush, and concealed himself as well as he could. The herd turned aside just before reaching the bush, and passed him about a hundred yards off

with a tremendous rush, their trunks and tails in the air, and the major and Wilkins, with a lot of natives and dogs, in full pursuit. Tom was beginning to regret that he had not fired a long shot at them, when he heard a crash behind him, and looking back saw a monstrous bull-elephant making a terrific charge at him. It was a wounded animal, mad with rage and pain, which had caught sight of him in passing. Almost before he was aware of its approach it went crashing through the thicket trumpeting furiously, and tearing down trees, bushes, and everything before it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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