

THE TIGER'S CAVE.*

About three years since, after a short residence in Mexico, I embarked for Guayaquil, in order to visit from thence, the celebrated mountains of Quito. On arriving at Guayaquil, I found there two travellers, who were preparing to take the same route. These were Captain Wharton, an English naval officer; and a young midshipman, named Lincoln. The frigate which Wharton commanded had suffered considerably in her voyage through the South Seas; and as it was now undergoing the necessary repairs, Wharton resolved to devote some of his leisure time to visiting the forests and mountains of Quito. It was quickly agreed that we should make the journey together. I found Wharton a frank and open-hearted man; and his young favourite, Lincoln, a youth of eighteen, had a handsome sun-burnt countenance, with an expression of determined bravery.

We set out on a fine clear morning, attended by my huntsman, Frank, and two Indians, as guides. On beginning to ascend the mountain, the scenery became more enchanting at every step. The mighty Andes, like a vast amphitheatre, covered to their summits with gigantic forests, towered aloft; the snow-capped Chimborazo reared its proud front; the terrific Cotopaxi sent forth volumes of smoke and flame; and innumerable other mountains, branching from the far spreading Cordilleras, faded away in the distance. With an involuntary shudder, I entered the narrow path that leads into the magnificent forest. The monkeys leaped from branch to branch; the parrots chattered incessantly; and the eagles, from amidst the tall cypresses where they had built their nests, sent down a wild cry. The farther we advanced, new objects presented themselves on every side: the stately palms, with their broad sword-like leaves; the singular soap-tree; the splendid mongolia; the tall wax-tree, and the evergreen-oak, reared themselves proudly over the orange groves, with whose fragrance was blended the aromatic perfume of the vanilla.

Towards evening, our guides began to quicken their pace, and we hastened after them. In a short time, they uttered a shout of joy, of which we quickly discovered the cause. By the light of a large fire, which was kindled in an open space of the forest; we descried a little Indian village, consisting of several huts erected on trunks of trees, and to which were appended ladders of reeds. The Indian who was employed in replenishing the fire, answered the cry of our guides in a similar tone; and, after a short conference, we were conducted into one of the huts, where we passed the night.

Early in the morning, we again resumed our way through the deep shade of the forest, and in due time stopped to enjoy a repast under a broad leaved palm. Suddenly, one of the Indians motioned us to be silent, and bending his ear to the ground, appeared to be listening to some sound, which, however, was unheard by us. We paused, and attentively watched his motions. In a few minutes he arose, and beckoned us to follow him into the forest; he stopped often, and laid his ear to the ground, and shortly after we heard a female voice shrieking for help. We hurried on; with difficulty restraining our young midshipman from advancing before the rest of the party; and had proceeded but a short way, when the shriek was repeated close beside us. We stopped on a motion from our guides, who, parting gently the intervening boughs, gave to view a scene which caused us hastily to grasp our arms.

In an open space blazed a large fire round which was seated several men in tattered uniforms: they were armed, and appeared to be holding a consultation regarding a beautiful Indian girl, who was bound with cords to a tree. The Indians prepared their bows and arrows, but we beckoned them to desist, until we gave the signal for attack. On the termination of the conference, one of the men approached the girl, and said, "So you will not conduct us to your village?" "No," answered the young Indian, firmly, but sobbing. "Good child!" he replied, with a scornful laugh, "So you will not be persuaded to lead us to your hut?" "No she again replied. "We shall see how long the bird will sing to this tune," and with these words, the ruffian snatched a brand from the fire, and again approached her. We hastened to get ready our guns; but the impetuosity of Lincoln could not be restrained, and casting his from him, he sprang forward just as the brand had touched the shoulder of the girl and struck the villain lifeless to the earth. At the same instant, the Indian arrows whistled through the air, and wounded two of the others, but not, it appeared dangerously, as they fled with their terrified comrades.

Our midshipman, meanwhile, had unbound the girl, who the instant she was free, knelt before him, and poured out her gratitude in the most impassioned language. We learned that her name was Yanna, and that her parents dwelt in a village in one of the deepest recesses of the forest—that she had left home early in the morning to gather cocoa—and that, having strayed too far, she had suddenly found herself surrounded by the ruffians from whom we had just rescued her, and who had endeavoured, by threats and violence, to force her to guide them to the village. We could not withstand her prayers to accompany her home. There we were quickly surrounded by Indians, whom we found to possess an almost Eu-

* We give this narration upon Danish authority. It is related by A. F. Elmquist, of Copenhagen.—[E.]

ropean fairness of complexion. Yanna immediately ran up to her parents, who were chiefs of the tribe, and spoke to them with animation, using all the while the most expressive gestures. As soon as she had finished her narrative, her parents hastened forward, and kneeling before us, kissed our hands with expressions of the deepest gratitude; and the whole of the tribe knelt along with them, poured forth mingled thanks and blessings. Then on a sudden they started up, and seized us, they bore us in triumph to the hut of the chief, where we were treated with the utmost hospitality. Wharton smiled to me as he remarked, that our young midshipman and Yanna had disappeared together. Shortly after, Yanna returned, holding Lincoln with one hand, and carrying in the other a chaplet of flowers, which she immediately placed on his head. On the following morning we again set out, and as we parted, the beautiful eyes of Yanna were filled with tears.

On leaving the village, we continued to wind round Chimborazo's wide base; but its snowy head no longer shone above us in clear brilliancy, for a dense fog was gradually gathering round it. Our guides looked anxiously towards it, and announced their apprehensions of a violent storm. We soon found that their fears were well-founded. The fog rapidly covered and obscured the whole of the mountain; the atmosphere was suffocating, and yet so humid that the steel-work of our watches was covered with rust, and the watches stopt. The river beside which we were travelling rushed down with still greater impetuosity; and from the clefts of the rocks which lay on the left of our path, were suddenly precipitated small rivulets, that bore the roots of trees, and innumerable serpents, along with them. These rivulets often came down so suddenly and so violently, that we had great difficulty in preserving our footing. The thunder at length began to roll, and resounded through the mountainous passes. Then came the lightning, flash following flash—above, around, beneath—every where a sheet of fire. We sought a temporary shelter in a cleft of the rocks, whilst one of our guides hastened forward to seek a more secure asylum. In a short time, he returned; he had discovered a spacious cavern. We proceeded thither immediately, and with great difficulty, and not a little danger, at last got into it.

The noise and raging of the storm continued with so much violence, that we could not hear the sound of our own voices. I had placed myself near the entrance of the cave, and could observe, through the opening, which was straight and narrow, the singular scene without. The highest cedar-trees were struck down, or bent like reeds; monkeys and parrots lay strewn upon the ground, killed by the falling branches; the water had collected in the path we had just passed, and hurried along it like a mountain-stream. When the storm had somewhat abated, our guides ventured out in order to ascertain if it were possible to continue our journey. The cave in which we had taken refuge was so extremely dark, that, if we moved a few paces from the entrance, we could not see an inch before us; and we were debating as to the propriety of leaving it before the Indians came back, when we suddenly heard a singular groaning or growling in the farther end of the cavern, which instantly fixed all our attention. Wharton and myself listened anxiously; but our daring and inconsiderate young friend, Lincoln, together with my huntsman, crept about upon their hands and knees, and endeavoured to discover, by groping, from whence the sound proceeded. They had not advanced far into the cavern, before we heard them utter an exclamation of surprise; and they returned to us, each carrying in his arms an animal singularly marked, and about the size of a cat, seemingly of great strength and power. Wharton had scarcely glanced at them, when he exclaimed in consternation, we have come in the den of—

He was interrupted by a fearful cry of dismay from our guides, who came rushing precipitately towards us, crying out, "A tiger! a tiger!"—and, at the same time with extraordinary rapidity, they climbed up a cedar-tree, which stood at the entrance of the cave and hid themselves among the branches.

After the first sensation of horror and surprise, which rendered me motionless for a moment, had subsided, I grasped my fire-arms. Wharton had already regained his composure and self-possession; and he called to us to assist him instantly in blocking up the mouth of the cave with an immense stone, which fortunately lay near it. The sense of approaching danger augmented our strength; for we now distinctly heard the growl of the ferocious animal, and we were lost beyond redemption if it reached the entrance before we could get it closed; ere this was done, we could distinctly see the tiger bounding towards the spot, and stooping in order to creep into his den by the narrow opening. At this fearful moment, our exertions were successful, and the great stone kept the wild beast at bay. There was a small open space, however, left between the top of the entrance and the stone, through which we could see the head of the animal, illuminated by its glowing eyes, which it rolled, glaring with fury upon us. Its frightful roaring, too, penetrated to the depths of the cavern, and was answered by the hoarse growling of the cubs, which Lincoln and Frank had now tossed from them. Our ferocious enemy attempted first to remove the stone with his powerful claws, and then to push it with his head from its place: and these efforts, proving abortive, served only to increase his wrath. He uttered a frightful howl,

and his flaming eyes darted light into the darkness of our retreat.

"Now is the time to fire at him!" said Wharton with his usual calmness; "aim at his eyes; the ball will go through his brain, and we shall then have a chance to get rid of him."

Frank seized his double-barrelled gun, and Lincoln his pistols. The former placed the muzzle within a few inches of the tiger, and Lincoln did the same. At Wharton's command, they both drew the triggers at the same moment; but no shot followed. The tiger, who seemed aware that the flash indicated an attack upon him, sprang, growling, from the entrance; but, feeling himself unhurt, immediately turned back again, and stationed himself in his former place. The powder in both pieces was wet; they, therefore, proceeded to draw the useless loading, whilst Wharton and myself hastened to see our powder-flask. It was so extremely dark, that we were obliged to grope about the cave; and at last, coming in contact with the cubs, we heard a rustling noise, as if they were playing with some metal substance, which we soon discovered was the cannister we were looking for. Most unfortunately, however, the animals had pushed off the lid with their claws, and the powder had been strewn over the damp earth, and rendered entirely useless. This discovery excited the greatest consternation.

"All is over now," said Wharton: "we have only to choose whether we shall die of hunger, or open the entrance to the blood-thirsty monster without, and so make a quicker end of the matter."

So saying, he placed himself close behind the stone which for the moment defended us, and looked undauntedly upon the lightning eyes of the tiger. Lincoln raved and swore; and Frank took a piece of strong cord from his pocket, and hastened to the farther end of the cave, I knew not with what design. We soon, however, heard a low stifled growling; and the tiger, who heard it also, became more restless and disturbed than ever. He went backwards and forwards before the entrance of the cave in the most wild and impetuous manner, then stood still, and stretching out his neck in the direction of the forest, broke forth into a deafening howl. Our two Indian guides took advantage to this opportunity to discharge several arrows from the tree. He was struck more than once; but the light weapons bounded back harmless from his thick skin. At length, however, one of them struck him near the eye, and the arrow remained sticking in the wound. He now broke anew into the wildest fury, sprang at the tree and tore it with his claws. But having at length succeeded in getting rid of the arrow, he became more calm, and laid himself down as before in front of the cave.

Frank now returned from the lower end of the den, and a glance showed us what he had been doing. He had strangled the two cubs; and before we were aware of his intention, he threw them through the opening to the tiger. No sooner did the animal perceive them than he gazed earnestly upon them, and began to examine them closely, turning them cautiously from side to side. As soon as he became aware that they were dead, he uttered so piercing a howl of sorrow, that we were obliged to put our hands to our ears. When I censured my huntsman for the rashness and cruelty of the action, I perceived by his blunt and abrupt answers that he also had lost all hope of rescue, and with it all sense of the ties between master and servant.

The thunder had now ceased, and the storm had sunk to a gentle gale; we could hear the songs of birds in the neighbouring forest, and the sun was streaming among the branches. The contrast only made our situation more horrible. The tiger had laid himself down beside his whelps. He was a beautiful animal, of great size and strength, and his limbs being stretched out at their full length, displayed his immense power of muscle. All at once another roar was heard at a distance, and the tiger immediately rose and answered it with a mournful howl. At the same instant our Indians uttered a shriek, which announced that some new danger threatened us. A few moments confirmed our worst fears, for another tiger not quite so large as the former, came rapidly to the spot where we were. "This enemy will prove more cruel than the other," said Wharton; for this is the female, and she knows no pity for those who deprive her of her young."

The howls which the tigress gave, when she had examined the bodies of her cubs, surpassed every conception of the horrible that can be formed; and the tiger mingled his mournful cries with her's. Suddenly her roaring was lowered to a hoarse growling, and we saw her anxiously stretch out her head, extend her nostrils, and look round, as if in search of the murderers of her young. Her eyes quickly fell upon us, and she made a spring forward with the intention of penetrating into our place of safety. Perhaps she might have been enabled by her immense strength to push away the stone, had we not, with all our united power, held it against her. When she found that all her efforts were fruitless, she approached the tiger who lay stretched out beside his cubs, and he rose and joined in her hollow roaring. They stood together for a few moments as if in consultation, and then suddenly went off at a rapid pace, and disappeared from our sight. Their howling died away in the distance, and then entirely ceased. We now began to entertain better hopes of our condition; but Wharton shook his head—"Do not flatter yourselves," said he, "with the belief that these animals will let us escape out of their sight till

they have had their revenge. The hours we have to live are numbered."

Nevertheless, there still appeared a chance of our rescue, for, to our surprise we saw both our Indians standing before the entrance, and heard them call to us to seize the only possibility of flight, for that the tigers had gone round the height possibly to seek another inlet to the cave. In the greatest haste the stone was pushed aside, and we stepped forth from what we had considered a living grave. Wharton was the last who left it; he was unwilling to lose his double-barrelled gun, and stopped to take it up; the rest of us thought only of making our escape. We now heard once more the roaring of the tigers, though at a distance; and following the example of our guides, we precipitately struck into a side path. From the number of roots and branches of trees with which the storm had strewn our way, and the slipperiness of the road, our flight was slow and difficult.

We had proceeded thus for about a quarter of an hour when we found that our way led along the edge of a rocky cliff with innumerable fissures. We had just entered upon it, when suddenly the Indians who were before us, uttered one of their piercing shrieks, and we immediately became aware that the tigers were in pursuit of us. Urged by despair, we rushed towards one of the breaks or gulfs in our way, over which was thrown a bridge of reeds, that sprung up and down at every step, and could be tread with safety by the light foot of the Indians alone. Deep in the hollow below rushed an impetuous stream, and a thousand pointed and jagged rocks threatened destruction on every side. Lincoln, my huntsman, and myself, passed over the chasm in safety; but Wharton was still in the middle of the waving bridge and endeavouring to steady himself, when both the tigers were seen to issue from the adjoining forest; and the moment they descried us they bounded towards us with dreadful roarings.

Meanwhile Wharton had nearly gained the safe side of the gulph, and we were all clambering up the rocky cliff except Lincoln, who remained at the reedy bridge to assist his friend to step upon firm ground. Wharton, though the ferocious animals were close upon him, never lost his courage or presence of mind. As soon as he had gained the edge of the cliff he knelt down, and with his sword divided the fastenings by which the bridge was attached to the rock. He expected that an effectual barrier would thus be put to the further progress of our pursuers; but he was mistaken, for he had scarcely accomplished his task, when the tigress, without a moment's pause, rushed towards the chasm, and attempted to bound over it. It was a fearful sight to see the mighty animal for a moment in the air above the abyss; but her strength was not equal to the distance—she fell into the gulph, and before she reached the bottom she was torn into a thousand pieces by the jagged points of the rocks. Her fate did not in the least dismay her companion, he followed her with an immense spring, and reached the opposite side, but only with his fore claws; and thus he clung to the edge of the precipice, endeavouring to gain a footing. The Indians again uttered a wild shriek, as if all hope had been lost. But Wharton, who was the nearest the edge of the rock advanced courageously towards the tiger, and struck his sword into the animal's breast. Madened with pain, the furious beast collected all his strength, and fixing one of his hind legs upon the edge of the cliff, he seized Wharton by the thigh. The heroic man still preserved his fortitude; he grasped the stem of a tree with his left hand to steady and support himself, while with his right he wrenched, and violently turned the sword that was in the breast of the tiger. All this was the work of an instant. The Indians, Frank, and myself, hastened to his assistance; but Lincoln, who was already at his side, and seized Wharton's gun, which lay near upon the ground, and struck so powerful a blow with the butt end upon the head of the tiger, that the animal, stunned and overpowered, let go his hold, and fell back into the abyss. The unhappy Lincoln however, had not calculated upon the force of his blow: he staggered forward, reeled upon the edge of the precipice, extended his hand to seize upon any thing to save himself—but in vain. For an instant he hovered over the gulph, and then fell into it, to rise no more.

We gave vent to a shriek of horror—then for a few minutes there was a dead and awful silence. When we were able to revert to our own condition, I found Wharton lying insensible on the brink of the precipice. We examined his wound, and found that he was torn dreadfully. The Indians collected some herbs, the application of which stopped the bleeding, and we then bound up the mangled limb. It was now evening, and we were obliged to resolve upon passing the night under the shelter of some cleft in the rocks. The Indians made a fire to keep the wild beasts from our couch; but no sleep visited my eyes. I sat at Wharton's bed and listened to his deep breathings. It became more and more hard and deep, and his hand grasped violently, as if in convulsive movements. His consciousness had not returned, and in this situation he passed the whole night. In the morning the Indians proposed to bear our wounded friend back to the village we had left the previous day. They plaited some strong branches together, and formed a bridge to re-pass the gulph. It was a mournful procession. On the way Wharton suddenly opened his eyes, but instantly closed them again, and lay as immovable as before. Towards evening we drew near our destination; and our Indian friends, when

they saw our situation, expressed the deepest sympathy; but the whole tribe assembled round us, and uttered piercing cries of grief, when they learnt poor Lincoln's fate.

Yanna burst into tears; and her brothers hastened away, accompanied by some other Indians, in search of the body. I remained with my wounded friend; he still lay insensible to every thing around him. Sleep at length overpowered me. Towards morning a song of lamentation and mourning aroused me—it was from the Indians, who were returning with Lincoln's body. Yanna was weeping beside it. I hastened to meet them, but was glad to turn back again, when my eyes fell upon the torn and lifeless body of our young companion. The Indians had laid him upon the tigers' skins, which they had strewn with green boughs; and they now bore him to the burial-place of their tribe. Yanna sacrificed on his tomb the most beautiful ornament she possessed—her long black hair—an offering upon the grave of who it is possible, had first awakened the feelings of tenderness in her innocent bosom.

On the third day, as I sat at Wharton's bed, he suddenly moved; he raised his head, and opening his eyes, gazed fixedly upon a corner of the room. His countenance changed in a most extraordinary manner; it was deadly pale, and seemed to be turning to marble. I saw that the hand of death was upon him. "All is over," he gasped out, while his looks continued fixed upon the same spot; "there it stands!"—and he fell back and expired.

LETTERS

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