GOOD STORIES OF THE PRESENT DAY.

A Greenhorn's Shot at a Couple of Sleeping South African Lions.

There is this difference between the lion and the tiger in their native haunts: The tiger will always fight; the lion will often run away. When a hunter has wounded a tiger, he can be dead sure that the beast is going to make for him to secure revenge. When he has wounded a lion, he can't be sure that the beast won't sneak off like a whipped dog. I was in Cape Colony, Africa, and out on the edges of the Boer district, twenty years ago, when the lion had become alarmed at the evidences of civilization, but was yet hesitating to withdraw further north. Along the edges of the Kalahari desert, to the west of Cronstadt, Potchefstrom, and Rustenburg, the African lion once grew to his greatest size and flourished at his best. He lived on the fat of the land, the natives let him severely alone, and there was no one to dispute that he was monarch of all he surveyed.

A party of eight of us had gone out from Rustenburg to the West, being well provided with horses, wagons, tents, provisions, and servants, and after a journey of three days we camped on the edge of a stream in a beautiful grove. That night I heard a wild lion roar for the first time, and it was by no means sweet music to my ears. A male lion and his mate discovered our camp about midnight, and for half an hour they seemed determined to get hold of some of our live stock. But for our camp fires and the volleys we fired in the direction of the unwelcome intruders, we should certainly have lost one of the oxen, for the lions advanced within fifty feet of one of the animals before they could be frightened off. It filled us with enthusiasm to find that we had got into the lion country, and we were up and doing at an early hour next morning. A mile to the south of us was a virgin forest—dark, tangled and dangerous. Between that and the desert was a strip of bad land about half a mile wide. There were a few bunches of plants and bushes, many rocks, and the ground was sprinkled with bunch grass. With the telescope we could see animals of the antelope species feeding on this strip; but while I was using the glass they suddenly became alarmed and ran away, going out of sight to the south.

In the forest was the place to look for lions by day, or, at least, it was natural to believe that they would retire to its cover during the hours when the beasts sleep. To the north of us the "bad lands" continued on out of sight, but the forest was more open, being, in fact, a succession of groves. We had two or three natives with us of much experience in lion hunting, and they gave us no encouragement to go out until well toward sunset. One of the men had followed the stream back into the forest for half a mile, and there found a large pool, at which it was evident that many animals came to drink. Nothing worthy of a shot would come there by daylight. Almost every wild beast or animal slakes its thirst at night, and only at night. It does not seem to be a matter of choice with them, but a law of nature. The spoor or trail of the two lions which had paid us a midnight visit, led to the south between the forest and desert, and, as the heavy dew was falling when they went away, the trail could be followed at a gallop. Two of our hunters rode to the north to try and get a shot at some hartbeests seen with the glass, another went up to look around the pool, and the remainder decided not to move at all before afternoon. I decided for a ride to the south, and left camp with a heavy breech-loading carbine across my saddle. It wasn't to be depended on for a long shot, but it would hit to kill, and it carried a ball large enough to kill an elephant.

I soon found the bad lands so bad that I had to let my horse pick his way at a walk. I kept pretty close to the edge of the forest, knowing I stood a better chance of sighting something, and I was a full mile from camp when my horse suddenly halted, sniffed the air in a suspicious manner, and almost jerked my arm from his trembling I knew that he was badly frightened, and I rose in my stirrups to look about for the cause. For a time I could see no living object, but after awhile my eyes lighted on a tawny mass on the sands at the roots of a large bush. I had a bead on it with my rifle in a no sooner brought it to bear than I made out two lions. They were about forty rods away, and while the male lay on his back with his feet in the air, as you have sometimes seen a dog do, the female was stretched out on her side. Both had their heads from me, and were evidently asleep.

I had had no experience in lion hunting, and I did not know how to act. My horse showed a no small aversion to a bolt, and I dismounted easy of a scrimmage, but he was at my elbow me on such bad ground. When I had finished with the horse I saw that my carbine was in order, pulled my revolver around within handy reach, and walked forward to get a shot at the still sleeping lions. There was nothing brave in this. I was simply a greenhorn, and didn't know better than to take the chances. I knew I was a good shot, and I knew I had nerve, and I felt that I could best the pair no matter what course they took. It was a very sultry morning, and the shade of the bushes was so grateful that the lions had fallen into a deep sleep. And why should they have felt any fears? In all that region the lion was king. His roar sent every other beast to cover, and his growl was a menace to be heeded and respected. I walked up to within thirty feet of the pair, and still they did not hear me or change position. I could not get such a shot as a hunter desires, but I was bent on having one. The male was nearest to me. He was curled up so that he resembled a great ball of hair, and I drew a bead on the centre of the mass, knowing that I must hit him, and that the big bullet would give him a bad hurt.

Now, what followed the shot filled me with astonishment and wonder. Quicker than a flash the lion was on his feet, and a frightful roar from his throat blended with the report of the gun. There was a snarl from the lioness, as she bounded into the air, and then, without seeming to have seen me, or to have ascertained what had happened, the lion ran down the strip of open ground, while his mate broke for the woods. That he was hard hit I could tell by his gait. That she was as rattled as a rabbit was easy to see by the way she dragged her tail as she ran. I had expected a fight, and was disappointed. The male bounded over the broken ground for about eighty rods, and then went to cover in a bush, and after the female rushed into the wood I gave her no further attention. While I realized that a wounded lion was a dangerous foe, the cowardly conduct of this fellow in slinking away as he had done emboldened me, and I started in pursuit. I expected every minute to see him leave the bush and bolt for the forest, but he had different plans. When I was half way to him I turned out of the direct course to cut him off in case he wanted to retreat. I kept on advancing until I was not more than ten rods from the bush. He was so well hidden that I could see nothing of him, even when I searched with the glass. A random shot might have scared him up, and I fired for the centre of the bush.

It wasn't three seconds after I pulled trigger before the lion was coming for me full tilt, his eyes blazing, his teeth showing, and his tail lashing the air like that of a mad bull. In such emergencies one does not stop to think. Nor can one afterward remember just what took place. All I know is that I put a bullet into his head when he was less than forty feet away, and that his momentum brought him almost to my feet. He had ceased kicking in ten seconds, for there was a hole above his eyes into which a baby could have thrust its fist, and he had been grievously wounded by the other shot. He was a great, big fellow, in the full prime of life, and when I came to examine his limbs I was astonished at the tremendous muscular power. I had my foot on him when I heard shouts and shots and a terrible scream from my horse, and I wheeled around to see him galloping down to the edge of the desert with the lioness hanging to the saddle and using her teeth on his neck. His screams were something appalling. Near the spot where he had been tied were two of my friends on horseback. They had witnessed a part of my adventures through the glass, and had saddled up as fast as possible. While they were yet a hundred rods from my horse the lioness had come out of the woods full of dance and revenge, and had made straight for the horse. They fired their guns and waved their hats and shouted, but she would not turn from her course. As she sprang upon him the horse broke away, and it was plain to us that she would kill him before she left him. The two hunters rode up to me, and we opened fire on horse and lioness. The horse did not run straight out upon the desert, but rushed wildly up and down along its edge, and the beast tore great pieces of flesh of his neck as he rushed. One of our bullets hit her, and another brought the horse down just as he was opposite us. He came down all in a heap, fell over on his side with a long-drawn groan, and the lioness placed her paws on his body, and stood there growling at us and showing her teeth in a savage manner. She certainly had more pluck than the lion.

"Look out for her!" cried my comrades in chorus, but the advice was useless. I don't know that the beast saw them at all. She seemed to have eyes only for me, perhaps because I was on foot. I was, indeed, the only one she need fear, for the horses of my companions were so restless that they threatened with every move to unseat their riders, and after two or three minutes bolted in spite of rein and spur and made for camp. I have often wished for a photograph of the lioness as she stood there over the dead horse—head up, lips drawn, eyes flashing, tail switching, and such a warning in her low growling as would try any nerves. I had unmoulded my piece over with a good shot, and I felt not the least fear of this foe. I stood for a minute with half-raised carbine and looked her square in the eyes, expecting every second that she would spring. Seeing that she was waiting for me to do something, she gave a low growl, and then, as I did not move, she turned and walked slowly toward the bush. I felt that I had made a fool of myself, but I was glad I had let the lion alone