

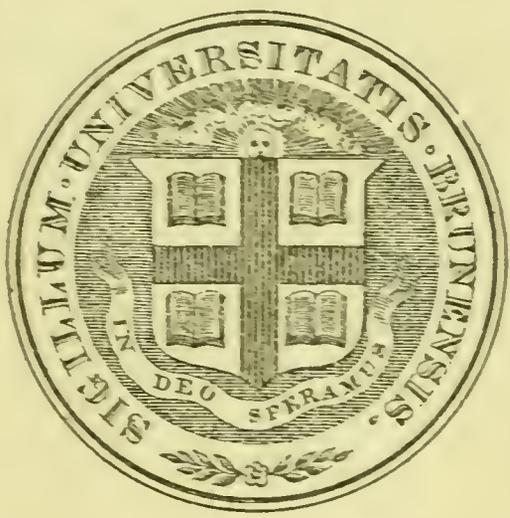
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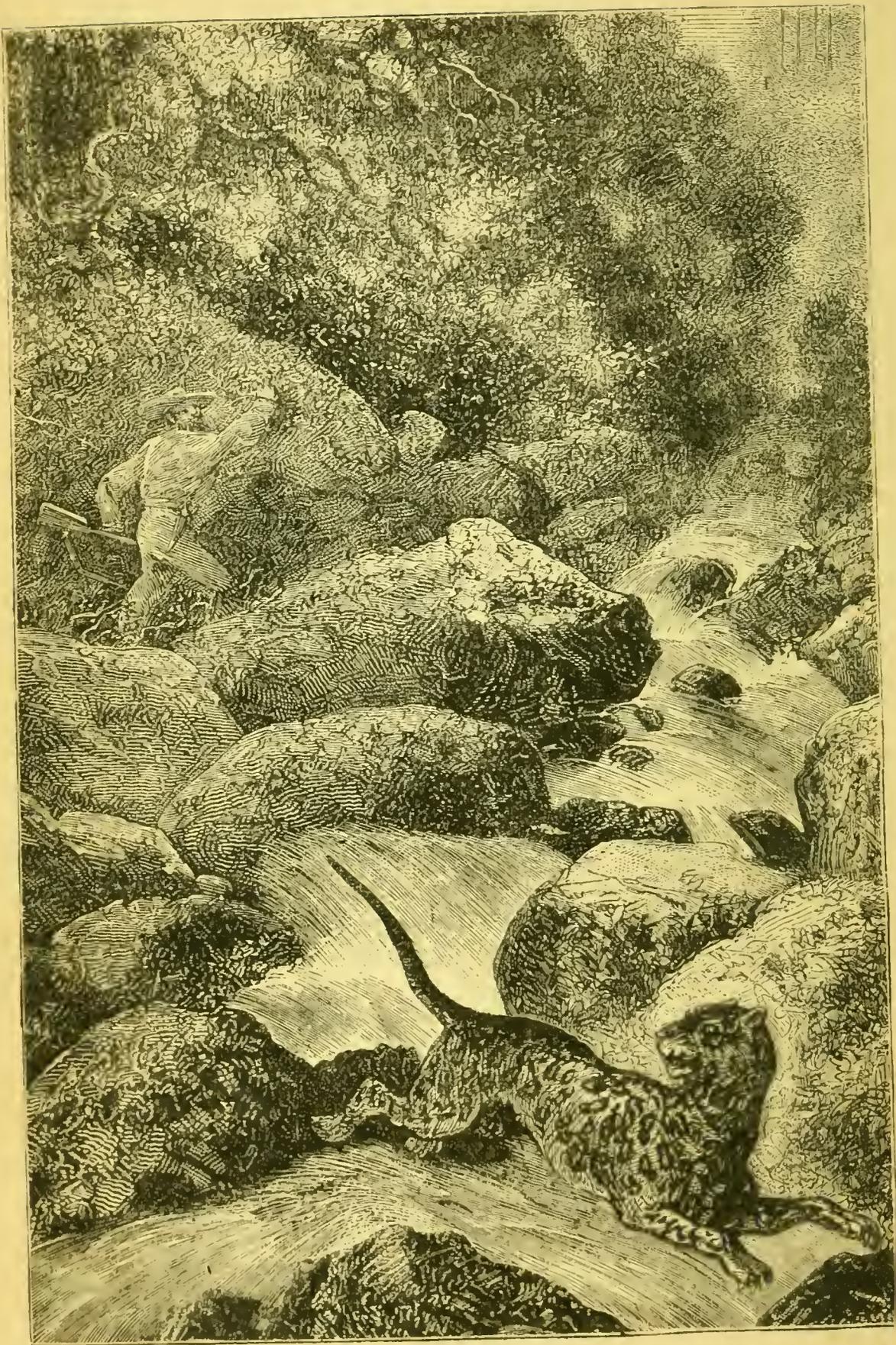
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ADVENTURE WITH A JAGUAR. Page 231.

FRANK REDCLIFFE.

A STORY OF TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE
IN THE FORESTS OF VENEZUELA.

A Book for Boys.

By

ACHILLES DAUNT,

Author of "The Three Trappers,"

&c. &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW.
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FRANK REDCLIFFE.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE AND PROCLIVITIES—LOVE FOR SHOOTING—RUSE TO OBTAIN AMMUNITION—DIFFICULTIES RAISED BY MY FATHER OVERCOME BY A STRATAGEM—SENT TO SCHOOL—FRIENDSHIPS FORMED THERE—COLLEGE LIBRARIES, AND THE COURSE OF READING I FOLLOWED—LEAVE SCHOOL—IDEAS OF PROFESSION ABANDONED—MY LIFE CONTINUES UNCHANGED—LOVE FOR FOXES—COOPER'S "LEATHER-STOCKING TALES" AND THEIR EFFECTS—NEW RIFLE—MY SKILL IN ITS USE—VISIONS OF CANADIAN BACKWOODS—DESIRE TO TRAVEL—LETTER FROM MY UNCLE IN VENEZUELA—RESOLVE TO VISIT VENEZUELA—LETTER FROM GEORGE HARRISON—LEAVE HOME—REGRETS.



FROM my earliest youth I have been an enthusiast in everything connected with sport and travel. Guns were my play-things long before I was sent to school; and well do I remember the keen delight I experienced when the first shot I fired brought down a chaffinch. From that moment I became the determined enemy of every bird or beast I could get within range of. My gun was an old sixteen-gauge single-barrel, considerably taller than myself; and, of course, its length of stock and weight prevented me from placing it to my shoulder in the usual way. I overcame this

difficulty, however, by slipping the butt under my arm, and screwing down my eye till I could look along the barrel; which arrangement placed my face in such dangerous proximity to the hammer that the recoil sometimes caused it to hit me smartly on the cheek. This was a trifling circumstance which weighed little with me; and so day after day I roamed about the woods killing all manner of birds, little dreaming that the time was near at hand when I should be divorced from my amusement.

My father was a literary man, and occupied himself so much with his books and political correspondence that he permitted me to spend my time pretty much as I liked; with the exception of a couple of hours in the day, when a visiting tutor inflicted arithmetic, writing, and geography on me in the school-room. After this gentleman took his departure, away went books and maps, and from its place of concealment I produced my trusty single-barrel. I was particularly proud of my shot-belt, an old-fashioned affair which was slung over the shoulder, and which had somehow found its way into the house. My powder I kept in a bottle, which had the double advantage of keeping it dry, and at the same time of showing what quantity remained. When the store got low, I used to reduce my charges; and at this crisis I ordinarily became very attentive to my lessons, answered well, and got myself surprised studying up my day's task by the tutor on his arrival. He, poor man, predicted

great things of one who so early evinced such an application to his books. Of course, as I intended, my good conduct was duly reported to my father, who was pleased to intimate his approval; and when, a little later, I ventured modestly to prefer my request for a further supply of ammunition, the paternal heart was accessible to the demand.

Things went on thus smoothly for a time, when one day a difficulty cropped up. Some stupid man about the place told my father (who knew nothing of these matters) that I was too young to be trusted alone with either powder or a gun: I might blow myself up, or I might shoot myself. My father became alarmed; but I pleaded so hard, and showed so clearly that I understood the subject thoroughly, that I at length prevailed upon him to allow me to keep the gun. But he was inexorable with regard to the bottle of powder. He would allow me only three charges for each excursion round the domain, which, while he thought it ample for my amusement, he further considered would have the advantage of bringing me back frequently for more. Thus he could keep his eye on my movements.

I blush to relate what follows, but as this is a veracious history, I consider it my duty to lay my iniquity before my readers in all its glaring deformity. I have observed that my father was utterly ignorant of all matters pertaining to guns and shooting. I did not scruple to take advantage of this

ignorance; for when he poured out the powder he intended to allow me, asking all the time, "Is this a charge?" I permitted him to measure to me six for one. In this dishonest manner I overcame the difficulty, and, furnished with eighteen charges instead of three, I ranged the woods again.

Those were happy days. The great outside world had no existence for me. My horizon was bounded by the park walls, within which an ample extent of woodland furnished me with my daily victims. But the end was coming. Without any warning, my father one day addressed me as follows:—

"Sir" (he always called me "Sir"), "it is time for you to go to school. If you don't go now, you will grow up a mere boor. I have made arrangements with the master of a public school to receive you as soon as it is my convenience to send you. Sir, in March *you* must march."

Here was a blow. However, it had to be, and I therefore made no objection—which, indeed, I well knew would in any case be unavailing. I therefore devoted my few remaining weeks of liberty more than ever (if *that* was possible) to the gratification of my ruling passion. I got up early, and shot until breakfast, which meal I bolted hastily; and then again I shot until dinner (I never troubled myself about lunch), which in those days we partook of early in the afternoon.

My tutor's visits spoiled my evenings, but for this

don Cumming became my idol, and his books contended for supremacy in my estimation with those of Mayne Reid. I mention these circumstances to show how my natural tastes were fostered by this kind of reading. With the aid of the library, my years at school passed quickly; and when at length the day fixed for my departure arrived, I could scarcely believe it possible that I was at last to return to the scenes of my early exploits.

Among my friends (I only considered as such those whose ideas coincided with my own) was a capital fellow named Harrison. He was consumed with the same noble ardour as myself. He would rather shoot than eat, and that he was fond of the latter occupation none who knew him will deny.

He kept an Enfield bullet, which he said belonged to his own rifle, in his trousers pocket, and he was an adept in the making and rigging of boats. He therefore was calculated to inspire me with peculiar regard; and accordingly, during our years spent together, we became sworn friends. Our conversations often turned on the splendid hunting-grounds of the New World, and before we finally separated we agreed at some future time to penetrate the forests of the Orinoco together.

Full of this resolve we parted, and did not again meet until the wished-for opportunity of beginning our explorations together presented itself.

My father had some unsettled ideas of giving me a

profession, and with this view he had got me taught mechanical drawing during my school days. But as time went by, the chances of my embracing either the profession of architecture or of engineering waned, and soon the matter was wholly forgotten. In the meantime I found that for me nothing had changed. As in the far-away days of my childhood I spent my time in roaming through our ancestral woods, gun in hand, so now also my days were similarly employed. I knew the haunt of every otter in the river, watched them by moonlight, and earned the applause of my lady friends by bestowing on them the handsome furs for muffs or jacket trimmings. No rabbit could boast that his burrow had escaped my observation, though concealed ever so cunningly beneath the pendent fronds of fern. I became an unseen guest at the family parties of the foxes, and watched the play of the youngsters, who little suspected the dangerous proximity. But they had little to fear from me. Were they not sportsmen too? Besides, their presence in the woods seemed to impart animation to the scene. The dark vista or tangled coppice possessed a double attraction for me when I felt that it was the home of these wild children of nature. And the blood thrilled with pleasure in my veins when I heard their weird barks in the autumn twilight, when the rush of the neighbouring river sounded clear in the frosty air, and the trees waved their branches with a melancholy sighing, as if

they shuddered at the first chill breath of coming winter.

Of course I read Cooper's *Leather-Stocking Tales*. "Pathfinder" became my *beau-idéal* of what I should attain to. I discarded my shot-gun for a time and solely used a rifle. It was a long time before I could find a weapon to suit my fancy. With breech-loaders I would have nothing to do. Pathfinder had not used them, and neither would I. At length I got a forty-eight-gauge muzzle-loader, nicely finished, stocked with black walnut, and with a trap in the butt for greased patches. This I called "Neverfail," and with it I soon learned to shoot with tolerable accuracy. At length I became so expert, that in my conceit I already fancied myself on the same level with my hero. I picked the smallest birds off the tops of tall trees, shot pigeons and rabbits as a matter of course, and at marks could drive the nail at sixty yards, or hit a gun-wad at eighty. I felt that I had the life of everything I could see in my hand. I became disgusted with the smallness of the game; there was nothing able to defend its life; and I sighed for the prairies.

When waiting for pigeons to come in to roost in the woods, I used in fancy to picture myself in the Canadian backwoods; the dim perspective of the trees I peopled with deer and bears, and hard by I figured a moss-covered log-hut, with the cheerful glimmer of the hunter's fire shining in the dusk through the open door.

The flapping of a pigeon's wing overhead would banish for a time these romantic fancies; and at the crack of my rifle the poor victim would flutter to the earth, or fall lifeless with a leaden thump on the ground.

Thus years went on. With increasing age I necessarily altered my views on many things. The unreasonable devotion to a pursuit moderated into a sober, rational liking for it, partly because its exercise brought health. During the term which I may call my *calthood*, circumstances had uniformly frustrated my hopes of undertaking an expedition to the Rocky Mountains. Besides, I hesitated between that region and the gorgeous countries along the Orinoco, to which my attention was drawn by my having an uncle living at Esmeralda, far up that river.

This relative sometimes wrote to my father, and having from his inquiries about me ascertained my proclivities, he invited me to spend some months with him, at the same time enclosing a bill of exchange for £100 to defray my travelling expenses. I need not say how delighted I felt. Here at length was the opportunity for which I had so ardently longed. My father offered no opposition, remarking that it was immaterial whether I wasted my time at home or abroad, and expressing his hope that the experience of the world which the journey would afford might enlarge my ideas and tend to educate me out

of the dependence of character which my life of seclusion had engendered.

Everything now was tinged with a golden light. My preparations occupied my time. Rifles had to be selected, revolvers purchased, ammunition procured. I had also to lay in a large stock of clothing suitable for life in the tropics, and some strong rough suits for forest work.

In this pleasing employment the days passed rapidly. One morning, on coming down to breakfast, I found a foreign-looking letter lying by my plate addressed, "Francis Redcliffe, Esq., Brakehurst, Oakborough." This was for me. On glancing at the signature, I gave a shout that electrified my father.

"Well, you young scamp," said he, "who is your correspondent? I see the postmark is Caracas."

"George Harrison," said I. "Only fancy! it's from George. I'll read you what he says. He dates his letter from Casa de la familia Gonzales, Caracas:—

"MY DEAR FRANK,—You will no doubt be surprised to get a line from me here; but the fact is that the governor sent me out to Caracas to look after a little bit of business of his that threatened to go wrong. The gentleman whom it is my duty to see is at present gone on a long journey up country to a place called Esmeralda, on the Orinoco; and as I learn that he will not be back for several months, I daresay I may follow him, especially as I can reach

Esmeralda before it is considered probable that he will leave it. I write this in the hope that you can manage to come out to join me. You know we always looked forward to the time when we should roam the wilderness together, and here is a splendid chance if you will only avail yourself of it.

““This is a grand country. The climate at present is rather hot, but I am so delighted with everything I see that it would be very unreasonable to complain of a little heat.

““The spiders in the woods here are enormous brutes; only four of them could stand on this letter with their legs outstretched. The natives consider them dangerous, so I am careful to keep out of their way.

““The vegetation here is magnificent. I could “gush” on this subject, but refrain, as I hope you will soon judge for yourself. There is very fine scenery round the town. The two peaks of Silla and of Niguatar seem quite close in the crystal atmosphere; still they are at a greater distance than you would suppose, and are often enveloped in the dense mists that issue from the woods. Anybody trying to reach the summit is then exposed by the treacherous fog to the danger of tumbling over the great precipice which falls sheer to a depth of six thousand feet on the north side of the Silla.

““If you come out, your best way will be by the Harrison line of steamers. As to guns, I think a

Winchester repeater will meet all requirements,—and if you choose to encumber yourself with it, you may bring a twelve-bore breech-loading shot-gun; but you are such a sharp-shooter with the rifle that I think you will not need the scatter-gun.

“I have not had much sport yet, but I had a few days in the woods on the Silla, and picked up some deer. There are any amount of birds along the rivers almost begging to be shot.

“So now, old fellow, I hope you won't disappoint, and will turn up punctually by the next mail. I shall wait till then; and if you do not come, I shall have to start without you, as I cannot delay any longer. Give my best regards to old Squaretoes (who I hope won't prevent you from coming out); and believe me, my dear Frank, ever yours,

“GEORGE HARRISON.”

“Confound the fellow!” exclaimed my father. “Old Squaretoes indeed! Give me his best regards too! a valuable commodity, truly. But the lad is in earnest; you should join him, Frank. It is a singular coincidence that he also should be going to Esmeralda; and on the whole, as you are determined on this wild-goose chase, it is just as well to have a friend to accompany you. My brother will of course receive George as your friend, and I can only hope that everything will go well with you both. But remember that I expect you to keep an accurate account of

everything you see and do ; and don't fail to keep me *au courant* with your movements and adventures,—I shall be anxious to know how you are going on.”

My father was a matter-of-fact kind of man—his manners were the reverse of impulsive ; but I could see he was much troubled at the idea of being so long separated from me, and for a moment I almost regretted the resolution I had formed of leaving him. But it would have been weak to change my mind for a mere amiable sentimentality, so I continued the preparations for my departure, laying in among other things a stock of simple medicines, including a good supply of quinine, which I thought might be useful as a febrifuge.

I will pass over the few days that preceded my departure, for the simple reason that nothing worthy of note occurred. At length the day arrived on which I was to start. From an early hour everybody was astir in the house, and although for several weeks previous my luggage was being got ready, it now seemed as if there still remained much to be got together. The servants ran this way and that ; contradictory orders were issued by the housekeeper ; and articles for which I could have no possible use were packed away among my baggage. I was much amused at the housekeeper's efforts to negotiate the introduction of a warming-pan into a portmanteau which already presented a plethoric appearance. I could hardly induce her to leave the thing behind ;

she was convinced "the young master would be froze to death in them cold tropical places o' nights." A little more hurrying up and down stairs, a little more hurrying to and fro, and all was ready for my departure.

The scene was painful enough. The old servants who had held their places since I was in long clothes really shed tears as the carriage drove away from the door, and many were the fervent wishes uttered for my safe return to the old place. The parting on board the steamer from my father was another pang; and for several hours afterwards, as I leaned over the taffrail and gazed back at the receding shores of England, I almost thought that my long-wished-for expedition had been purchased at too high a price.

These thoughts and regrets, however, were now too late, and I soon succeeded in banishing them by turning my attention to the new objects by which I was surrounded. Behold me then at length on the way to the pathless woods and plains of the New World! I was elated by the newly-born sense of freedom which I felt, and although I had but completed my twentieth year, I already felt A MAN! A declaration at which the reader may smile, as it only rests on the limited experience of the independence enjoyed for a few hours. But perhaps the reader was never placed in a similar situation and under circumstances similar to mine.

CHAPTER II.

DOLPHINS AND FLYING-FISH—MONOTONY OF THE VOYAGE—THE HEAT—SELF-EXAMINATION—"LAND AHEAD!"—ARRIVAL AT LA GUAYRA—ZAMBO PORTERS—MEET GEORGE HARRISON—LEAVE LA GUAYRA—BEAUTY OF THE VEGETATION—LARGE FIG-TREE—BUTTERFLIES AND TREE FERNS—VIEW OF CARACAS—SEÑOR GONZALES—CLIMATIC INFLUENCES—DIFFERENCE IN COLOUR OF THE SKY AT CARACAS AND ON THE COAST—CULTIVATION OF COFFEE AND OTHER PRODUCTIONS—EARTHQUAKES—ASCENT OF THE SILLA—DIFFICULTIES OF THE ROUTE—DENSE THICKETS—GEORGE'S NARROW ESCAPE—REACH THE SUMMIT—MAGNIFICENT PROSPECT—THE DESCENT—ESCAPE FROM THE BITE OF A SNAKE—REACH SEÑOR GONZALES'.



THE preceding chapter will explain the causes which led me to undertake the journey described in the following pages. I have endeavoured to represent the various scenes and incidents as they are painted on my memory; and if the perusal affords the reader the same pleasure which their description yields to me, I shall consider myself well rewarded for the time occupied in writing this narrative.

The voyage out was a singularly uneventful one. We had not even the variety of a gale to enliven the monotony of our circumscribed existence. The slightest incident excited an interest altogether disproportioned to its importance. One day we were all

thrown into violent commotion by a shoal of dolphins which were in pursuit of a cloud of flying-fish towards the vessel. These unfortunate creatures may justly complain of the hardship of their destiny. In the water they are the prey of the dolphins; and when they spring from their natural element in their short curved flight, they become the prey of the numerous species of gulls and frigate-birds that are ever on the watch for them. On the present occasion the flying-fish passed quite close to the ship, and one of them, making a higher flight than its companions, actually fell on the deck, where a passenger speedily secured it for preservation in spirits. The dolphins seemed possessed by a relentless hate of their wretched victims. They plunged through the water with extraordinary velocity, and often sprang altogether across the crests of the waves, presenting the appearance of a marine steeplechase. It was a curious spectacle while it lasted; but both the pursued and the pursuers soon became lost in the distance, and we were again face to face with our monotonous existence.

The only man on board I envied was the first mate. He never seemed tired or bored; his ruddy, jovial face was uniformly expressive of joviality and good-nature as he hurried about in the discharge of his duties.

The heat gradually became oppressive; the tar glistened on the rigging, and actually seemed to

simmer slowly in the joints between the planks. A fierce white heat assailed us on all sides; the breeze which had hitherto accompanied us now died away; and to the distant horizon stretched a sea which appeared rather a sheet of molten metal than the cool expanse of old ocean. The evenings, however, were somewhat more enjoyable. After the sun, like a flaming chariot, had burned his way along the heavens, leaving a path of crimson glory on the surface of the sea, and had then sunk below the watery horizon, the air slowly cooled; and at this time, while a holy calm seemed to have fallen on the bosom of the deep, I used to lean over the side of the vessel, recalling in fancy the past and speculating on the future.

It is in situations such as this that the soul seems to judge itself correctly. All our pettinesses stand forward in their true light; all our failings speak with the trumpet tongue of conscience. It is to be deplored that so few of us lay to heart these lessons—lessons which at one time or another we all of us have had an opportunity of learning, and which we shall certainly be held accountable for neglecting.

It was now the end of the second week since our departure from Liverpool, and each morning eager eyes scanned the southern horizon in search of land. But the same waste of water still extended to the sky line; and with a sense of disappointment we tried to while away the time with the frivolous occupations usual in such circumstances.

On the eighteenth day of our voyage the welcome cry of "Land ahead!" echoed through the ship, and a general rush of passengers took place to feast their eyes on the distant blue slip which extended along the horizon until finally it seemed to mingle with the water. If we were impatient before for the end of our voyage, we were doubly so when the goal of our hopes was actually visible. Next morning every one rose early; and there at last, only a few miles away, lay the land, with the white houses of La Guayra lying in front of a high range of rocks. All was now bustle and activity. Luggage was piled on deck, and every preparation made for leaving our floating prison with the least possible delay.

As soon after the vessel reached her moorings as possible, I got ashore, and was instantly surrounded by a number of Zamboes, who seized on my effects, and who seemed totally regardless of my threats and gesticulations. While yelling, making signs, and endeavouring to prevent these rascals from walking off in as many different directions with my luggage, I felt a heavy slap on the back, with the exclamation in my ear, "Holloa, old fellow! So you've come like a good chap after all."

The next moment I had George Harrison by the hand. He had come down to see the passengers land, and to look for me among them. George, who had some experience of the place, soon restored order among the refractory crew of porters; and

telling me to accompany him to see the luggage passed at the custom-house, he strode off at the rear of some half-dozen Zamboes who staggered under the load of my miscellaneous possessions.

"I am so glad, Frank, you are come," said George, suddenly turning round; "you have no notion what times we shall have up yonder in the woods when we get out of this dirty town."

"I am ready for anything," said I, "from snipe to tigers. Do you see that big square box? That's ammunition. I have ever so many thousand cartridges in that. There's the life of almost half the jaguars of the Orinoco in that box."

"That's the style," replied George; "I have another little box that will keep it company. I think we can start in two days from to-day. I am tired of hanging round here doing nothing except examining the offing for your steamer. I saw you yesterday from the Silla with my glass when you must have been a hundred miles out. That's how I am down here to-day to meet you. I am so glad you're come, old fellow!"

And whistling merrily, as if the temperature were that of a frosty morning in October, instead of 100° in the shade, we proceeded to our boarding-house, after having arranged about the luggage with the officials.

The following day we hired mules both for our own use and for carrying our baggage; and at the head of



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a file of these animals, with their attendants, we left La Guayra and proceeded towards Caracas. We had not advanced far when my attention was riveted by the beauty of the tropical vegetation by which we were surrounded. Slender palms reared their feathery crests along the dusty road and waved murmuring in the air, their trunks and branches hung with flowering lianas which turned and twisted like gigantic serpents in a thousand convolutions round the stems. The interlacings of their cordage had formed receptacles for many-coloured orchids and other beautiful parasites, which almost concealed from view the parent trunk that upheld all this luxuriant drapery. Brilliant parrots flashed through the foliage, or held their noisy altercations hidden from view among the topmost boughs.

At other parts plantations of the cocoa palm had been formed, whose large lanceolate leaves hung pendent or slowly oscillated to an intermittent breeze, displaying, as they swayed aside, the cucumber-like fruit which seems to spring immediately from the stem.

From a green bank that overlooked a bend in the road arose a gigantic fig-tree, its massive trunk buttressed by the enormous roots which rose fully twelve feet above the ground. In any of the recesses between these huge projecting roots a hut large enough to accommodate a whole family might have been formed by the simple process of throwing palm

leaves across overhead. The huge stem of this forest giant presented the appearance of a hanging garden. Orchids and luxuriant ferns contended for a footing with bromeliæ and other brilliant plants; while from the vast arms above which extended far across the road hung festoons of lianas or cipos, which so interlaced both themselves and the branches with their tortuous folds that the eye failed to follow their windings, or to trace to its source any one of their innumerable cords.

This mass of luxuriant vegetation, blazing with brilliant hues, hung over with a tracery of flowers relieved against the green foliage, forming the home of many birds whose plumage was scarcely less brilliant than the flowers themselves, presented to my imagination a striking representation of the force of tropical nature. While I gazed at the vegetable monarch in speechless admiration, George had ridden forward, and now called me impatiently to rejoin him.

“If you stay to admire every tree like that, Frank,” said he, “it will be some time before we reach Esmeralda. I can promise you whole forests of them, and of many others as handsome; so keep a little admiration in reserve.”

As this was my first ride in a tropical country, almost every step presented some new object to my admiration. Butterflies nearly as large as thrushes flitted from flower to flower; tree ferns waved their tremulous crests, suggesting ideas of coolness and

repose; while above them towered immense hymenæas and caraways, their summits hidden above the cathedral vault of overarching foliage through which their stately trunks ascended.

The road* now began, in a zigzag manner, to ascend the elevated ridge of gneiss rocks which lies between the port of La Guayra and the town of Caracas. At one spot, called the Salto, or Leap, a deep fissure extends across the path and is crossed by a draw-bridge, at some distance beyond which, and on the summit, are some old fortifications. After two hours' difficult riding we at length reached a sort of table-land, scattered over which was a profusion of alpine plants. From this plain we beheld, nearly two thousand feet beneath us, the capital city of Caracas, situated in a romantic valley hemmed in by a range of lofty hills. Another hour, and we were installed in the hospitable house of Señor Gonzales, who placed himself, his family, and his whole property, with true Spanish politeness, at my absolute disposal.

The town is placed at the entrance of the valley of Chacas, which has an area of some ten miles in length by about eight in breadth, and is elevated nearly 2,800 feet above the level of the sea. It therefore enjoys a climate of perennial spring, the temperature varying little more than ten degrees, from 68° to 78°, which, during the cooler hours of night, falls to between 60° and 65°. Notwithstanding this mild

* The old road.

temperature, the residents say that they have several seasons every day, as the climate is liable to frequent as well as extremely rapid variations, which seem to affect the inhabitants of tropical countries much more sensibly than sudden changes of temperature affect Europeans. This inconvenience is not peculiar to Caracas: wherever the elevation of any of the temperate regions in the tropics is from two thousand five hundred to five thousand feet above sea-level, the same conditions exist.

I was struck by the difference which I observed between the colour of the sky at Caracas and on the coast. On mentioning this to my host—who, by the way, spoke English remarkably well—he told me that it was a well-ascertained fact, and that the difference in hue was quite 5° as measured by the cyanometer. He further communicated some interesting information with regard to the condition of agriculture in the valley. Coffee is carefully cultivated, and yields abundantly, as does also the sugar-cane, which even reaches perfection at a considerably higher altitude. Besides these, maize, banana, the strawberry, peach, apple, quince, vine, and many other crops, are extensively grown. He added, however, that the sudden alternations of heat and cold produce dangerous affections, which render the health of the cultivators very precarious. But the climatic influences are not the only dangers to which the inhabitants of Caracas are exposed. Fearful earth-

quakes sometimes occur, which in one hour devastate whole districts, overwhelming hundreds of families in the ruin of their houses, and causing widespread desolation and dismay. Such was the memorable convulsion of 1812, which destroyed the entire city of Caracas, and engulfed twenty thousand of the inhabitants of the surrounding provinces. This awful visitation took place on the 26th of March in that year, which day happened to be Holy Thursday. The population were assembled in the churches, engaged in the religious celebrations proper to the day. No previous warning of the impending disaster was afforded by the trembling of the earth, or by those electric reports which sometimes portend a commotion. About four o'clock in the afternoon the first shock was perceived, and the oscillation was so great that it caused the bells in the churches to ring. This was immediately succeeded by so terrible an upheaval, accompanied by a portentous subterranean noise resembling the loudest thunder, that the city was instantly reduced to a heap of ruins. The vaulted roofs of the churches fell on the horrified worshippers below, and crushed several thousands of them to death.

The only building of any note which escaped was the cathedral, situated in the part of the town between the square and the ravine of Caraguata; but its fissured walls, supported by vast buttresses, attest the severity of the shocks it sustained.

The number of persons who met their death during the disaster is generally estimated at between nine thousand and ten thousand ; but this does not include those who died afterwards of the injuries they had received, nor those who were killed by incautiously venturing among the tottering ruins, which often gave way and buried fresh victims beneath them.

Shortly after the fatal convulsion the shocks ceased, and profound stillness succeeded to the uproar. The vast clouds of dust which rose from the shattered walls slowly drifted away before a gentle breeze. The moon had risen, and looked down with cold impassive face on the ruined homes and on the ghastly array of dead that lay thickly scattered among the heaps of fallen masonry. Soon the cries of the survivors were heard, as they searched among the *débris* for their missing kindred, and shrieks of anguish rose to heaven as the mother found the mangled body of her child, or the lover the mutilated corpse of his betrothed. The cries of the wounded added to the horror of the scene as they implored the frenzied passers-by to extricate them from their position, or to terminate immediately their sufferings and their existence together. Medical and surgical aid was unattainable, food was not to be had, and even water could not be procured nearer than the river of La Guayra, the earthquake having broken or displaced the pipes, while the mud had choked the springs. The sufferings, therefore, of the wounded were intense,

unalleviated by any of the helps or appliances so needed in their miserable condition.

The heat of the sun rapidly decomposed the bodies of the dead, which diffused a horrible effluvium. To bury the thousands who had perished was impossible; hence it became necessary to burn the corpses, for which purpose the timbers of the wrecked houses furnished ample fuel. Funeral piles soon blazed all around, and spread far and wide the smoke and smell of burning flesh.

The baleful effects of the earthquake were felt in the far-distant provinces of Maracaybo and Varinas. La Guayra, La Vega, Antimana, Baruta, Mayquetia, and San Felipe were in like manner almost totally destroyed. It is singular that La Victoria, Maracay, and Valencia almost escaped injury, notwithstanding that they are not at a great distance from the capital.

With so terrible an experience before their eyes, the inhabitants of Caracas can hardly be envied their beautiful valley, as they have no guarantee that a similar catastrophe may not again occur at any moment. But doubtless proximity to the danger has so familiarized them with it that they hardly give its possible recurrence a thought. They assert that the earthquakes are kept down by heavy rains, and that consequently during the rainy season they are nearly exempt from those visitations.

The next day George and I set out at a very early

hour for the Silla, the ascent of which I was anxious to make in order to obtain a good view of the surrounding country.

Leaving Caracas at five A.M., we found ourselves two hours later on an elevated rocky ridge connected with the mountain, along the summit of which we advanced with some difficulty. On both sides, at a considerable depth below, were two pretty valleys thickly clothed with vegetation, over which the morning sun shone brightly, dissipating the preceding night's moisture in thin clouds of mist that issued from the trees and slowly melted into the air. The acclivity shortly became so steep that we had to assist our progress by grasping the stems of such plants as offered a hold, by means of which we helped ourselves upward. Presently this aid to our ascent failed us, for we entered on a slope of smooth short grass upon which our feet slipped frequently backwards—a painful addition to the fatigue our exertions occasioned. Above us a girdle of woods clothed the mountain, and promised an easy progression, which stimulated our efforts. The fogs which the morning sun raised from the damp vegetation were streaming from the woods, and hid the summit from our view; but we soon gained the trees and plunged through the twilight of their shelter, getting well wetted with the showers of dew shaken down from every twig and leaf. On emerging from the upper side of the wood we observed that the only practicable way of scaling the peak was to

ascend its western side, to reach which it was necessary to cross a sort of promontory called the Puerta. There was no path, and the difficulties of our route seemed to increase in proportion as we neared the summit. Sometimes slipping backwards for several yards, sometimes stumbling over the rough pebbles concealed in a thick growth of alpine plants, we cheered each other by taking these little *contretemps* with good humour, and soon had the satisfaction of attaining an elevation of six thousand feet, whence we observed in a sheltered ravine several species of trees and shrubs which seemed more proper to the hotter climate of the valley below than to the cooler atmosphere of this elevated region.

We now emerged upon a sloping savanna, the upper edge of which was bounded by woods. The ascent here became considerably less steep, and the ground was covered with a rich carpet of rare and extremely pretty plants, which in their turn gave way to a thicket of rhododendrons, andromedæ, and other analogous shrubs, their twisted branches, shining foliage, and large purple flowers forming a strong contrast with the grace and delicacy of the more tropical productions we had lately witnessed.

We soon approached the western dome, but were separated from it by a deep fissure, or hollow, which divides the two summits, and which has acquired for the mountain the name of Silla, or Saddle. We found great difficulty in forcing our way through this

ravine, so dense was the growth of plants and shrubs, whose branches were so closely interwoven that we were compelled to hew our way with our hunting-knives, which had long heavy blades well suited to this work.

George had become slightly separated from me, having, as he thought, discovered an easier path, and for a few minutes I was alone. Suddenly I was startled by hearing him cry loudly for help, and then he again became silent. Much alarmed, I forced my way with desperate exertions in the direction he had taken. In a few minutes I reached the spot, and found him lying on the rocks, grasping the roots of some shrubs, while his face had the expression of one just escaped from imminent danger.

“Take care, Frank!” he cried; “for your life don’t go another step forward! Just look where you would put your foot if you did.”

Before us was a natural hedge formed by the dense growth of bushes, and which presented an obstacle impervious to the sight. Bending the branches carefully aside, I leaned forward, and instantly drew back with a cry of terror. I stood within a foot of the verge of the great precipice which sank sheer down to a depth of more than six thousand feet. Another step, and I should have been hurled into eternity.

“O George!” I exclaimed, “what a merciful escape you have had! I never would have seen it till I had gone over, if you had not warned me.”

“I was within an ace of falling,” replied he. “See those broken branches leaning outwards. I had actually got upon them, and felt them giving way under me, when I threw myself backwards and seized the roots of this bush. I feel as if my knees would not support me yet if I tried to stand up.”

Sincerely grateful to Providence for deliverance from this danger, we rested for a little under the shadow of the treacherous thicket, and then recommenced our ascent. As we advanced, the vegetation decreased, and we were now scrambling along the top of the rocks within a very few yards of the verge of the precipice. This we discovered to be the only way by which the western peak was accessible. But now our goal was nearly reached, and we pushed forward with redoubled vigour.

At last the rounded granite summit was scaled, and we found ourselves on a small sloping expanse covered with grass, and at the height of nearly nine thousand feet. On all sides the eye ranged over an illimitable expanse of ocean, mountain, and plain. Far in the south rose chains of forest-covered mountains. The courses of rivers were discerned by the frequent flashing of their waters as they wound their serpentine courses across the face of the great landscape. Farms, houses, and orchards covered the foreground, reduced by the distance to the semblance of a coloured map; while to the north, and extending for a hundred miles along the horizon, lay the ocean,

flashing like burnished steel in the sunlight, and the jutting headlands lined with the foam of the breakers.

We now produced our stock of provisions, and with appetites sharpened by our exertions, we lay upon the grass, enjoying the glorious prospect, while we despatched our frugal lunch.

It was now after midday, and with regret we commenced our descent, which we accomplished safely, although I narrowly escaped being bitten by a snake of a peculiarly poisonous species. George coming up at the moment severed the reptile's head from its body with a quick stroke of his knife, and leaving the creature still writhing in its death-struggles, we raced down the mountain, and entered the valley of Caracas just as the moon rose. After a brisk walk we reached our house, where we found Señor Gonzales anxiously looking out for our arrival. A capital supper awaited us in the sala. I need not say that we did ample justice to the good things provided for us, after which, thoroughly fatigued with our day's work, we tucked ourselves behind our mosquito curtains, and were lulled to sleep by the vicious hum of the blood-thirsty little wretches which were disappointed of their expected banquet on our persons.

CHAPTER III.

WE LEAVE CARACAS—PEACHES—RIO DE LA GUAYRA—GRAMINEOUS PLANTS—LAURELS—HUT—CAMP FOR THE NIGHT—THE SOUTHERN SKY—NOCTILUCOUS INSECTS—VAMPIRES—CAPTAIN STEDMAN'S ACCOUNT OF THE VAMPIRE—D'AZARA'S ACCOUNT—APPALLING NOISES AT SUNRISE—HOWLING MONKEYS—DEATH OF A HOWLER—GEORGE'S REGRET—PARTICULARS OF THE HOWLER—MY BIRTHDAY—BIFURCATION OF THE RIO DE LA GUAYRA—WILDNESS OF THE SCENERY—MY SATISFACTION THEREAT—NATIVES AND OXEN AND MULES—VEGETATION—ARBORESCENT FERNS—HELICONIAS—PLUMERIAS AND HIGUERAS—BROWNEAS—IMPRESSIONS—SAN PEDRO—MICA SLATE FORMATION—COUNTRY BECOMES MOUNTAINOUS—REACH A FERTILE DISTRICT—VALLEY OF THE TUY—CULTIVATION OF SUGAR-CANE—VALUABLE TIMBER—CEDRÉLAS AND FIG-TREES—CULTIVATION OF WHEAT—MULTITUDES OF BIRDS—HAWK AND PARROTS—SAN MATHEO, TURMERO, AND MARACAY—GENERAL AIR OF COMFORT OBSERVABLE—ZAMANG TREE.



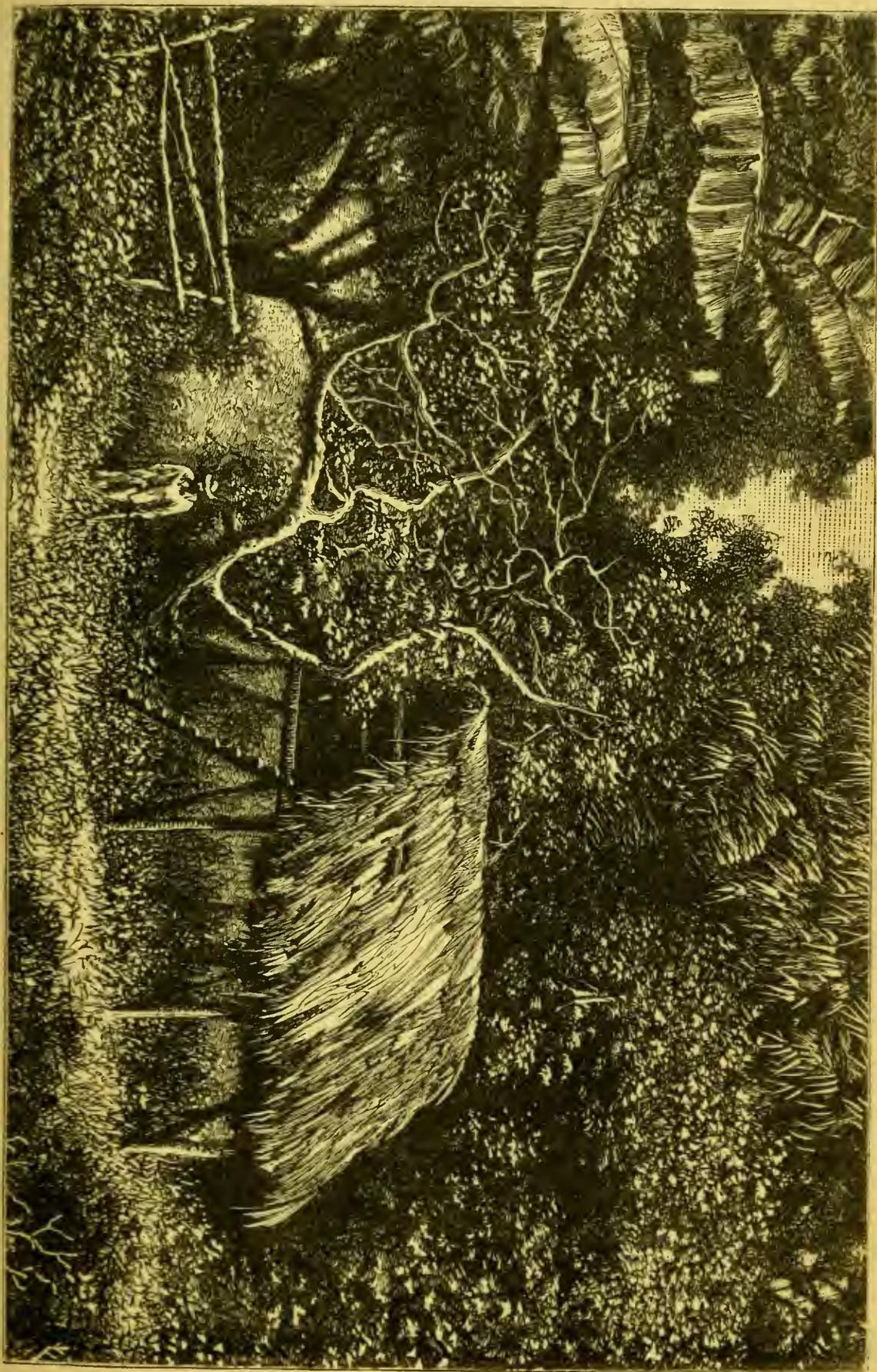
HAVING exhausted the sights of Caracas, on the third day after my arrival there we took our departure and commenced our long journey towards the interior. All unnecessary luggage had been left behind in charge of our kind host, and we now took the field with little else than our ammunition and some changes of clothes, and of course our provisions.

We were attended by two mules, each of which carried the chattels of its owner. George and I rode alongside our charge on fiery little Spanish horses,

our rifles slung at our backs, and our faces shaded from the fierce sun by broad-brimmed sombreros, round which were heavy bands of gold-twist by way of ornament. Our lower limbs were cased in trousers of strong jean, over which we wore heavy horsehide boots which came up above the knee. These were sufficiently strong to protect us from snake-bites—which protection on subsequent occasions we found necessary. We directed our course towards the forest-covered hills that close the valley on the south-west; and as it was late in the day when we started, we contented ourselves with this short journey, which, indeed, we only considered in the light of a start; for Señor Gonzales had placed so many obstacles to our departure, through his hospitable eagerness to retain our company for a few days longer, that we would have been glad to get away, were it only for a mile or two, so that we might be relieved from his kind solicitations, with which we found it impossible to comply.

We rode along the right bank of the Rio Guayra, admiring the verdure that clothed the banks, until we reached the small village of Antimana, which was surrounded with luxuriant plantations of peaches, then in full blossom.

The river of Guayra is extremely sinuous, and winds in a perplexing manner across the route, so that we were obliged to cross it not less than seventeen times. It was in some places bordered with a thick



OUR FIRST CAMP.

hedge of some gramineous plant, which occasionally reached the height of thirty feet. We often passed enormous trees of a species of laurel, hung fantastically with various kinds of creepers. A little farther on we came to a hut supported upon posts, and furnished with a floor raised some seven feet from the ground. To this floor a tree-trunk, notched so as to serve as a ladder, gave access. As the hut seemed to be unoccupied, and as its situation by the road-side rendered it convenient as a camping-place, we unloaded the mules and staked them out to graze on a patch of grass bordered by trees. We then collected some fuel, and speedily constructed a fire, on which we boiled our coffee; and having brought some cold venison and biscuits, we enjoyed a good supper *al fresco*, while watching the sun go down behind a group of palms.

The light slowly died out; the sky assumed a grayish-blue colour, through which sparkled the stars with a brilliancy unknown in Europe. Over the hills in the south-west rose the great constellations of the southern hemisphere, shedding a mild light nearly equal to the moonlight of northern countries. Multitudes of noctilucous insects flitted about the thickets, glancing like meteors in the dark shadows of the trees. Enormous bats darted noiselessly past like evil spirits, hovering above us as if for the purpose of reconnoitring, and then becoming lost to view against the dark background of trees. These crea-

tures seemed to belong to the species known as the *Phyllostoma spectrum*, whose bloodthirsty propensities have been asserted and denied by travellers and writers for upwards of half a century. One of them had returned again and again, perhaps reluctant to leave the neighbourhood of a possible banquet; and by a lucky shot, just as it hovered above us, one of its wings was disabled, and it fell close to the fire. George sprang to seize it, but with a cry of pain he speedily relinquished his prize, which had made its sharp incisors to meet in his hand. A blow on the head killed it, and we examined our specimen by the light of the fire. We observed that the tongue, which seems capable of extension, was terminated by papillæ, arranged in such a manner as to form an organ of suction. Tubercles are uniformly arranged along the lips. By means of these curious organs the bats are enabled to extract great quantities of blood from the veins of their victims, the pain of the operation being alleviated by a gentle fanning which they maintain with their large extended wings. Some naturalists suppose that the first abrasion of the skin is made by the rough tongue of the creature; but others assert that this is not the case, the first puncture being made with the sharp hooked nail with which the claw is furnished. To this slight aperture the apparatus of suction is applied, and the blood soon begins to flow.

The vampire attains a large size. The specimen

which we secured measured quite two feet from tip to tip of its expanded wings. Captain Stedman, who travelled in South America, gives the following account of what fell under his own observation:—

“Knowing by instinct that the person whom they intend to attack is in a sound slumber, they generally alight near the feet, where, while the creature keeps fanning with its enormous wings, which keeps one cool, he bites a piece out of the tip of the great toe—so very small, indeed, that the head of a pin could scarcely be received into the wound, which is consequently not painful; yet through this orifice he continues to suck the blood until he is obliged to disgorge. He then begins again, and continues sucking and disgorging till he is scarcely able to fly; and the sufferer has often been known to sleep from time into eternity. Cattle they generally bite in the ear, but always in places where the blood flows spontaneously. Having applied tobacco ashes as the best remedy, and washed the gore from myself and my hammock, I observed several small heaps of congealed blood all around the place where I had lain upon the ground; on examining which the surgeon judged that I had lost twelve or fourteen ounces during the night.”

The servant of Mr. Darwin, who was travelling in Chili, actually caught a vampire while sucking the traveller's horse one evening in their encampment. The species of which we had secured a sample is

called *Phyllostoma*, from the leaf-like shape of the appendages to their mouths. It is said that these differ from the other bats, inasmuch as they can run with considerable celerity on the ground, an accomplishment not possessed by others of the genus. Of the truth of one part of this statement we had ocular demonstration ; for when our vampire fell at the shot, he succeeded for a little time in baffling our efforts to seize him by running this way and that on the road outside the hut. And when finally seized, the captor was glad to get rid of him, until a stroke with a stick rendered him harmless. D'Azara relates that he himself was bitten on the tips of his fingers while in the cottages in country districts in Paraguay. He describes the wounds as being elliptical, of minute size and very trifling depth. He adds that nobody dreads these animals, or disturbs himself with the anticipation of being bitten by them. How far this is true depends on the nervous temperament of the victim. I should suppose the loss of twelve or fourteen ounces of blood in a single night, as related by Captain Stedman, would be a serious consideration, were it even to occur only once or twice. I must, however, say that when, overcome with the fatigues of the day, we at length sank into a profound sleep, we awoke next morning with whole skins, and had neither of us furnished a midnight banquet to the vampires.

At sunrise the following morning we were dis-



turbed by the most appalling noises. They seemed to proceed from the recesses of the wood at the edge of which we were encamped; and sometimes they diminished or increased in volume, as if the creatures who uttered them were chorussing the leader of an infernal choir. We quickly sprang from our hammocks, and with our rifles in our hands we listened eagerly to the uproar, which was evidently approaching. Presently the rustling of leaves and branches became audible, and on carefully scanning the tree-tops we observed a troop of monkeys travelling overhead with amazing swiftness and agility from tree to tree, swinging themselves from one bough to another by means of their long prehensile tails, which they fastened around a branch, then, launching themselves forward, they laid hold on the limbs of the nearest tree. This feat we now witnessed with considerable interest performed by a whole troop. They soon observed us, and speedily retraced their course; but not before George had fired at and mortally wounded one of their number. We soon regretted this, as the human look of suffering which was observable in the poor creature immediately appealed to our hearts. He felt the wound in his side with his fingers, and seemed distressed with the flow of blood which welled forth and trickled on the grass. He looked beseechingly at us, and then cast his eyes wistfully in the direction taken by his retreating companions, as if with their disappearance

the last link which bound him to his species was severed. Presently he fell over on his side, and extended his limbs convulsively, twitching his tail from side to side. These movements soon ceased, and with a deep-drawn sigh the unfortunate animal breathed his last, inflicting a pang of real regret upon my companion's heart, if I could judge by the troubled expression of his face.

"I'm sorry, Frank," he suddenly exclaimed, "for that poor beast. I feel as if I had committed a murder. But I'll take care for the future not to injure another—unless we are very hard up indeed for meat."

However, although I shared George's regrets for the scene just witnessed, I was glad to have an opportunity of observing closely the strange animal, which I recognized as the brown howler (*Mycetes ursinus*) from the volume of its voice. These sounds are emitted both morning and evening; and the Indians declare that while uttering them one member of the troop takes the part of leader of the choir, the others yelling in chorus at the proper intervals. This is to some extent fictitious; but it is usually observable that one easily distinguished voice dominates the rest, and seems in some sort to influence the hubbub. This individual generally begins, when all the others take up the cry, which, considering the size of the creature, is prodigiously loud. Monkeys ordinarily prefer those forests which grow on dry

plains or uplands; but the *araguatos* or howlers form an exception to this rule, as they appear to prefer those woods which lie in the vicinity of swamps or lakes or rivers. Their diet consists almost wholly of fruits or of the leaves of certain trees, but they are said sometimes to eat insects. The Indians told Humboldt that water partaken of from the drum of the hyoidal bone of this animal is a certain cure for asthma. The reason they allege for this is, that the araguato has lung-power so excessive that some of it is communicated to the water, and that the sanative virtue is thus transferred to the patient.

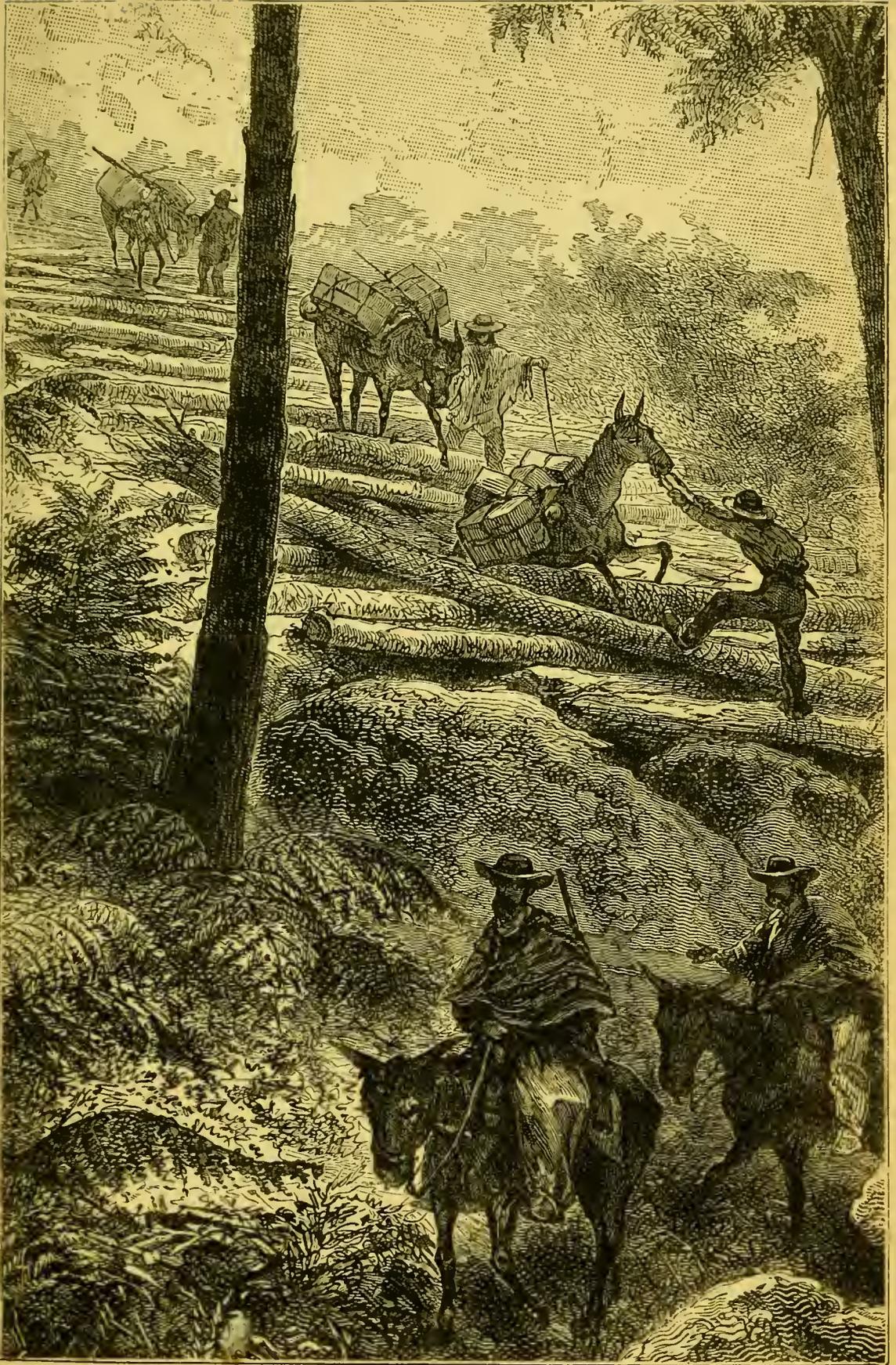
The howling monkeys live in large communities, sometimes in bands numbering from one to two thousand, scattered through a square mile of forest. They have, however, been seen in smaller numbers of from forty to a hundred; and Humboldt states that he once saw a band of forty on a single tree on the banks of the Oparé river. These animals appear to be perfectly harmless; and although of somewhat repulsive aspect and morose temperament, they are a picturesque addition to the tangled wildness of their native haunts.

After we had been wakened by the monkeys, we found sleep impossible. Indeed, we felt rather indebted to our uninvited visitors for having roused us betimes, for in tropical countries there is little of that prolonged twilight which lengthens out the morning.

The working day begins all at once. We therefore addressed ourselves to our breakfast; and having replaced the packs upon our mules, we saddled the horses and continued our journey.

It happened to be my birthday, the 8th of February, and I thought how little, on the last anniversary of the day, I had anticipated that the next would find me travelling towards the wilds of Venezuela through countries which, though cultivated, were still almost in a state of nature when compared with my own. We shortly arrived at the bifurcation of the Rio de la Guayra, where the two small streams of San Pedro and Macaras unite and form by their confluence the river of La Guayra. The slightly civilized aspect which the country had hitherto borne gave place here to a wildness which pleased me greatly. It is to me always a source of pleasure to arrive at the confines of civilization; to look forward into the realms of unsubdued nature, where the thousand annoyances that spring from contact with our fellows are unknown, and where, in this self-sufficient nineteenth century, there may still be found places in the same state as on the morning when first the light of heaven shone on the young world fresh from the hands of its Creator.

That this wildness, however, was more apparent than real was evident from the numbers of natives who met us, driving long troops of oxen, or in charge of mules laden with the produce of the coffee and



MULE-DRIVERS OF THE RIO DE LA GUAYRA. Page 58.

sugar plantations. The vegetation was striking, and I gazed with delight at the arborescent ferns nearly thirty feet in height; the heliconias, plumerias, enormous higueras or fig-trees, rivalling that which had elicited my admiration during my first ride from La Guayra; at the graceful palms with feathery foliage bending forward so as to interrupt the fierce rays of the sun; and the browneas, a perfect pyramid of flowers, like a pile of purple rhododendrons, sixty feet in height. This gorgeous plant produces a world of blossom—often as many as four or five hundred flowers in a single thyrsus.

After a ride during which I received impressions that will never be effaced, although I have since feasted almost to satiety on the beauties of tropical nature, we arrived at the village of San Pedro, which seems to have been purposely placed at the intersections of several valleys.

The inhabitants seemed very industrious, for on all sides were orchards of plantains, coffee-trees, and potatoes.

Leaving the little hamlet behind, our road presently began to ascend. We soon perceived a singular formation of the mica slate rock, which bore a fantastic resemblance to a wall terminated by a tower. The surrounding regions seemed scantily inhabited, and were of a mountainous character. Thence we passed into a district much more fertile, and eminently suited to the various forms of agriculture practised

in the country. Habitations became more frequent as we advanced, and we passed through some large villages which might be deemed the centres of the adjacent districts.

This pleasant country is the valley of the Tuy. The inhabitants cultivate the sugar-cane, of which they possess several varieties. The kind in most general esteem is the Otaheitan, which produces a greater abundance of the saccharine juice, and also is much better adapted for fuel.

In the vicinity of San Pedro the most valuable kinds of timber abound in the forests; but the means of transit are so imperfect that many years will probably elapse before this source of industry can be advantageously availed of. Along the skirts of this wood I noticed many beautiful cedrælas, browneas, and enormous fig-trees. These trees are a marked feature in every landscape. Their huge buttressed trunks present a strangely novel appearance to the European, who recognizes in the vegetable giant a representative of a country far from the land of his birth.

At San Pedro we remained for a few days, which we employed in examining the various methods of cultivation practised by the neighbouring farmers. In this district the wheat is luxuriant, and more than sufficient for the needs of the inhabitants. The yield per acre is several times larger than in Europe, and the grain is of fine quality. In every clump of trees

there were multitudes of birds which kept up an incessant chattering; brilliantly plumaged parrots flew in and out of the foliage, or in long files sailed away over the tree-tops to some favourite feeding-ground in the woods. I once saw a flock of these birds pursued by a hawk. Whenever the hawk appeared about to seize his victim, the parrots nearest to him shrieked loudly and flew against him, so that his attention was distracted from the individual he had selected, which then left the party and escaped in a sidelong direction. These tactics were successful while the flock held together; but during the engagement so many fresh birds were dispersed from the party, that those which remained were no longer sufficiently numerous to divert the hawk's aim. He soon closed his talons on a victim, and bearing it off in his clutches, disappeared behind some neighbouring trees. The parrots, as if aware that the rescue of their companion was impossible, calmly pursued their way and were soon lost to view.

On the third day we left San Pedro, and passed in succession the villages of San Matheo, Turmero, and Maracay, where an air of thrift, comfort, and independence was observable in the dwellings of the inhabitants. Before arriving at Maracay, we noticed the celebrated tree known as the zamang of Guayra. This vegetable mountain presents the spectacle of a hemispherical summit six hundred and nineteen feet in circumference, supported on a tall upright shaft

sixty-four feet high, and ten feet in diameter, from which radiate the branches supporting the leafy canopy above. It is a vast natural umbrella: the different diameters of the canopy when measured by Humboldt were respectively two hundred and five and one hundred and ninety-eight feet, so nearly circular is its shape. We observed other specimens of similar trees, but none of such perfect symmetry as this.

I will now pass over some days of travel, which, although interesting to us who were never tired of observing the various forms of vegetable life by which we were surrounded, are still so uniform that their description would but weary the reader.

CHAPTER IV.

LLANOS—SUFFOCATING HEAT—OUR SUFFERINGS—ATTEMPT TO CAMP—WE ARE DRIVEN AWAY BY CLOUDS OF MOSQUITOES—JOURNEY BY MOONLIGHT—OUR HORSES SCENT WATER—ARRIVE AT A CATTLE RANCHE—GARRAPATEROS—WE ARE ENTERTAINED BY NEGROES—HOWLING MONKEYS—CONVEX MOUNDS—VEGETATION—DEER—GEORGE KILLS A DEER—DISLIKE OF MY HORSE TO FIREARMS—BURROWS OF THE PORCUPINE—KINKAJOU—ARRIVE AT CALABOZO—ELECTRICAL EELS—LEVEL PLAINS—ADVENTURE WITH AN ALLIGATOR—RIO URITUCO—CAMP AMONG CORYPHA PALMS—MESA DE PAVONES—REACH THE GUARICO—RECEIVE HOSPITALITY FROM THE MISSIONARY—LOW ALLUVIAL FLATS—REACH SAN FERNANDO—THE APURE.



Yet we had seen nature wreathed in smiles and clothed with her richest drapery. We had now descended the chain of mountains which form in this direction the northern boundary of the llanos, or treeless plains of Venezuela, and found ourselves in a region presenting a complete contrast to that through which we had hitherto journeyed. A level plain lay before us apparently boundless, presenting no object greater than a few inches in height, and burned to a dusty brown by the fervid rays of the sun, which poured down upon it from a cloudless sky. Even the breeze which in other situations cools the throbbing temples here added to our discomfort, as under its influence

the temperature rose perceptibly, and clouds of dust drifted against us, filling our eyes, ears, and mouths with gritty particles. How cool the woods now seemed to our memories, how sweet the refreshing scent of flowers, how pleasing the splash of water over rocks! These recollections served rather to aggravate our sufferings by the force of contrast. A thermometer which George had brought with him registered 120° when placed within a few inches of the parched and dessicated ground. During the entire day we struggled on, our horses no longer moving with elastic step, or tossing their heads as if impatient of control. They rather reeled than walked, frequently shuffling their feet among the loose dusty soil, which rose in clouds about us.

The evening wore on, and still we beheld before us the same endless, monotonous plain, which appeared to rise, saucer-like, all round towards the horizon. We seemed to be at the bottom of some vast basin, the boundaries of which moved forward by enchantment so as always to encircle us within the same limits.

The sun at last sank beneath the far-off verge of the llanos, leaving behind him a sky which seemed to reflect the conflagration of a world. Not a cloud specked the heavens; a lurid vapour hung over the plain, in which some distant palms assumed fantastic shapes, their withered foliage hanging blanched and dusty towards the earth. Towards this melancholy

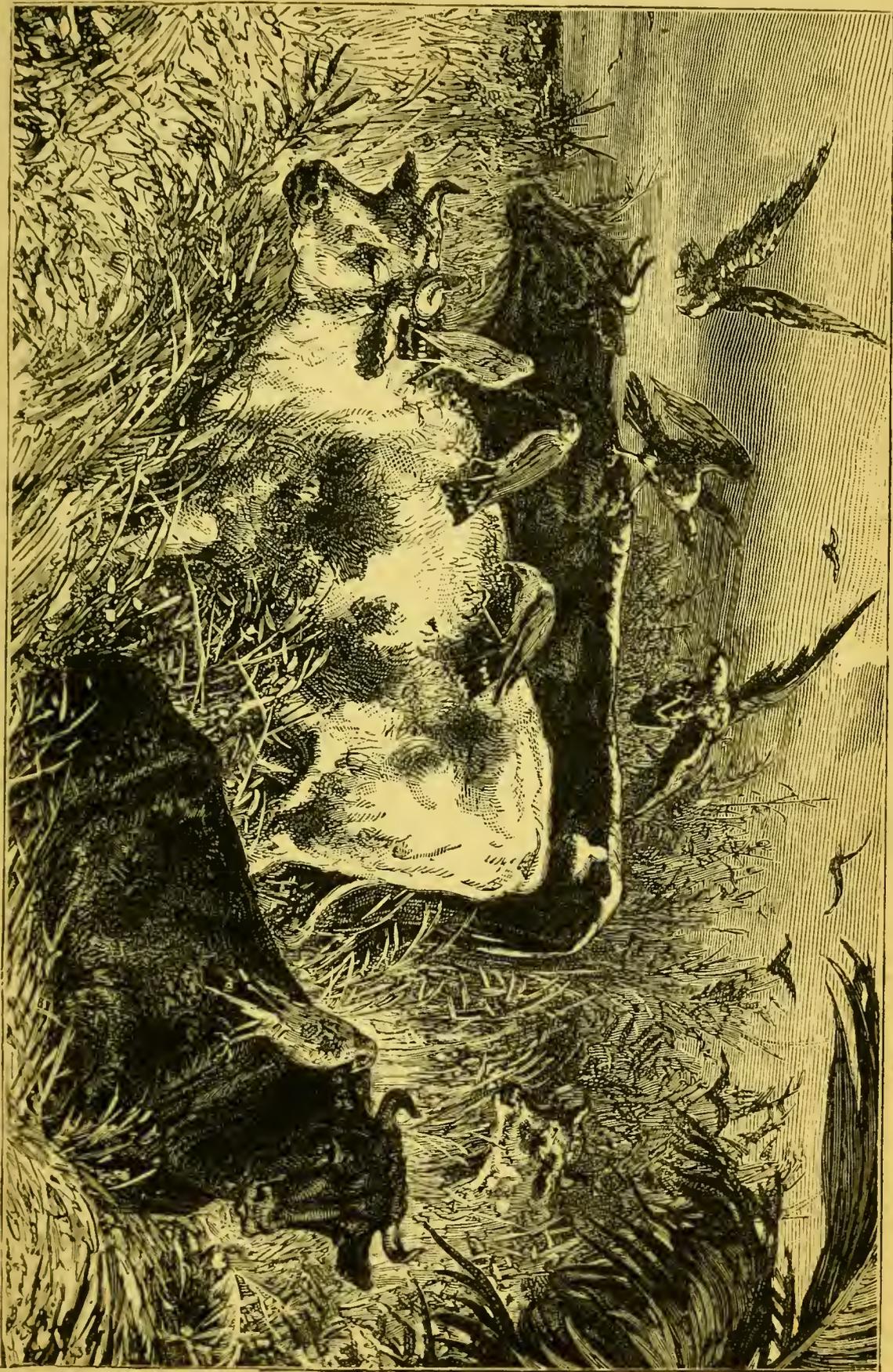
grove we directed our course ; and for the first time in our expedition, we lay down almost supperless to rest. The supply of water we had stored in our flasks was now nearly exhausted, and thirst tormented us. The mules, also, and the horses, suffered much ; but there was no help for it. We tethered the animals among the palms, and tried to snatch a few hours of the repose we sorely needed. But the cup of our misery was not yet full. The mosquitoes assailed us in countless numbers, and effectually banished sleep from our eyes. At length we rose, and having repacked the mules by the light of a brilliant moon, we continued our journey towards the south. All night we wandered onwards, grotesquely nodding as sleep almost overpowered us in our saddles. I was once suddenly recalled to consciousness by a sense of falling, as I found myself leaning forward and encircling my horse's neck with both arms. I will not detail all our sufferings during that night and the ensuing day. Fortunately relief was at hand.

Towards evening, when we looked forward with genuine alarm to another night spent in this waterless desert, our wretched animals suddenly evinced some slight degree of spirit, and stumbled forward with an appearance of vivacity they had not shown during the dreary progress of the previous day. They sniffed a breeze which to us seemed only a slightly modified simoom, and stepped forward with

something like energy. These symptoms excited our hopes, and, patting our horses, we cheered them forward with voice and whip.

Slowly over the horizon appeared a blue line which gradually assumed the appearance of trees, extending for a considerable distance from east to west. Detached groups stood forward, or were scattered at intervals over the plain. We soon reached these, and found, to our surprise, that where we had supposed an uninhabited wilderness, there existed an estate covered with fine pasturage, which seemed to us as if it had fallen from heaven, so grateful to our eyes was the sight of the green grass and the shrubs and trees, among which I observed some malvaceæ and mimosæ.

This estate supported immense herds of cattle, which roamed half wild over the contiguous plain. A large number grazed near a neighbouring encampment, where the herbage afforded a bountiful supply of pasturage. We noticed that these animals were attended by flocks of a kind of falcon which alighted fearlessly on their backs in search of the garrapatas or ticks that infested the skin. These birds are called garrapateros, from preying on the tiny parasites. George looked at me with a self-satisfied expression, indicating that a brilliant thought had suddenly struck him. In answer to my remark on the eager industry with which the birds pursued their food, George said,—



CATTLE AND GARRAPATERO FALCONS.

“In spite of their industry, as you call it, they are certainly thriftless birds. Don't you see that they are always living upon *tick*?”

“Bah!” replied I; “how your thick wits have been sharpened by travel! I suppose you will next observe that the miserable destiny of these wretched insects causes each of them to regard himself as a *tick* douloureux.”

Laughing at these brilliant sallies, we made what haste forward the jaded state of our horses permitted. As night began to fall, we saw lights at some distance, and soon reached a sort of enclosure within which several large fires were blazing. Round these a number of negroes were cooking their supper. Our sudden arrival startled them not a little; but when they found that we were not bandits, they hospitably offered us a share of their meal, which consisted of a coarse kind of bread, and meat roasted over the coals.

We unloaded the poor mules, which could scarcely stand, and suffered them and the horses to go in search of water, which our sable hosts told us was plentiful in the vicinity. As soon as our poor animals were at liberty they trotted off in the proper direction, their instinct having guided them where they could quench their thirst. We presently heard them kicking and plunging in the refreshing element, whinnying in evident delight. They soon satisfied their thirsty cravings, and addressed themselves to

the luxuriant grass which grew round the encampment. Desiring one of the negroes to catch the animals very early the next morning, we lay down, and, overcome with the fatigue of our great march, we had scarcely closed our eyes when we were sound asleep.

When wakened next morning by one of the negroes we felt as if we had only rested for a few minutes. Our sable friend informed us that the mules and horses were standing ready for our immediate departure. We hastily rose, and performed our morning ablutions in the neighbouring pond, which was embosomed in a clump of palms. On our return to the encampment, which was only about a hundred yards distant, we partook of a hasty meal; and, having rewarded our kind entertainers, we continued our journey towards Calabozo, which we were told we might expect to reach early in the afternoon.

Soon the eastern heavens became illuminated with the rays of the rising sun. The advent of the luminary was greeted with a chorus of the howling monkeys all round us. They seemed to exist in great numbers in this locality, for their stentorian notes were caught up and echoed far away by other bands, and again by others, till they sounded faint in the distance.

As the light increased, we could observe that the llanos, which here assumed the appearance of vast meadows, were scattered over with small convex

mounds, ten or twelve feet in height. The vegetation consisted of the *killingia*, *cenchrus*, and *paspalum*, which were here only a few inches high. These plants grew more luxuriantly in the neighbourhood of rivers; and later on I observed them of the height of nearly four feet on the banks of the *Apuré*. Here and there were plants of *turneræ* and some *mimosæ*.

As soon as the sun had climbed over the eastern horizon, we began to experience its power, and dreaded a repetition of the sufferings of the previous day; but we now knew that a few hours would carry us to the town of *Calabozo*, where every accommodation was to be expected.

As we advanced, we saw some groups of *corypha* palms, which promised shelter from the fiery rays. We therefore directed our horses towards them, when George suddenly exclaimed,—

“Frank, get your rifle!—quick! I see some deer among the trees.”

We instantly unslung our rifles, and having inserted cartridges, we cautiously continued to approach the clump of palms. Recommending George to make a detour, so as to take the deer on the opposite side if they should attempt escape in that direction, I advanced slowly, to give my companion time to execute his manœuvre. Apparently this division of forces seemed to perplex the animals, which stood huddled together, now turning to regard George, who galloped

his horse in a semicircle, and now regarding me with considerable uneasiness. After the lapse of a couple of minutes, I began to think I was near enough to risk a shot. The distance was not more than two hundred yards, at which I had often knocked over rabbits at home. But I soon found that there were some difficulties in the way of my making a good shot. My horse seemed to guess what I was about; for as often as I placed my rifle to my shoulder, he became so restless that it was impossible to take aim. I then dismounted, and slipping the bridle over my arm, I again raised the rifle. Just as I did so, my horse tossed back his head, and snorted with uneasiness, pulling the rifle from my shoulder as he moved. There was nothing for it but to hitch the mule and horse together, and this I immediately did.

In the meantime George had taken up his position, and not knowing the cause of my delay, he began the attack on his own account. His first shot flew high, and I plainly heard the whistle of his bullet as it ricocheted from the ground not fifty yards to my left. The deer, alarmed at the shot, sprang forward and raced across the plain within a hundred yards of me, when another shot from George struck the last of the band, and with a high bound in the air the animal pitched forward on his head and turned over dead.

I now saw that my chance was lost; and thoroughly annoyed with the restive conduct of my steed, I re-

mounted and rode towards the dead deer. I was instantly rejoined by George, who was in great spirits at his success.

“Why didn’t you fire, Frank?” he asked. “I waited a minute for you, and couldn’t at all make out what you were about.”

I explained how it had occurred, and George laughed heartily.

“It is funny,” said he; “but I could have sworn that your horse would not stand fire. I guessed it the day you bought him, as I marked his uneasiness when I clicked the lock of my revolver near him. Depend on it, he has had some reason to dislike fire-arms. However, you will not want him now much longer, as we will take boat on the Apuré. But let us get the deer butchered.”

As he spoke we both dismounted, and having secured our animals together by the bridles, we attended to our game. It was a pretty animal, slightly larger than the roe of the English woods; its fawn-coloured hide was dotted over with white spots, something like the young of the Virginian deer.

Having cut its throat to allow the blood to escape, we placed it on one of the mules, and again proceeded on our way to Calabozo. We passed several burrows of the porcupine, an animal about two feet in length, and covered with spines fully eight inches long. None of the occupants were to be seen, and we could not afford to waste time in search of them.

While passing the edge of a wood, our attention was attracted by the movements of a strange creature which we observed stretched along the branch of a huge tree. As we approached I recognized it as the kinkajou (*Cercoleptes caudivolvulus*), a small animal about the size of a rabbit. It is covered with a woolly coat of a grayish colour, sometimes approaching a dusky hue. George raised his rifle, and at the crack the little creature tumbled lifeless from among the branches. My horse made an attempt to bolt at the report; but anticipating some such manoeuvre on his part, I was prepared for it, and gave him such punishment with my heavy Spanish spurs that he soon ceased to be obstreperous, and made up his mind to stand still.

In the interval George, whose horse was singularly well behaved, had dismounted and secured the kinkajou. Swinging it by its long tail, he returned to me, saying,—

“Come, Frank; as you are a naturalist, and know the names of all the brutes in South America, tell me what you call this.”

“It is the kinkajou,” I replied—“an animal that robs the nests of the wild bees by thrusting its long tongue among the honeycombs and abstracting the contents. As you see, its long tail with its slightly callous tip is prehensile, though I don’t think to the same extent as those of the howling monkeys. Still it can steady itself among the branches by its aid.

The little beast is a great enemy of birds, whose nests it rifles of their eggs, which it eats as it holds them between its fore paws; and woe betide the owners if they are so incautious as to venture within its reach. I think that is all I know about it, except that it is very generally distributed over these countries, from the Andes in the west to the Atlantic in the east. It is found also in the West India Islands."

"Well, old fellow," said George, "that's all very fine, but is the brute fit to eat? for if not, I'll just let them alone for the future, as I don't care to shoot any beast that is harmless alive and useless when dead."

"I never heard or read of its being eaten," I answered; "but of course necessity compels people to eat anything, and if we are hard up on our travels we may have to devour worse food than even kinkajou."

At four in the afternoon we arrived at the town of Calabozo, which is the head-quarters of cattle-raising in these districts. The inhabitants own vast herds numbering scores of thousands, which pasture in the surrounding savannas. In the llanos of Caracas, however, we learned that the owners of the great hatos, or cattle farms, possess herds ranging from ten thousand to thirty thousand, and some very rich individuals own many more.

The city or town of Calabozo contains about six thousand inhabitants, and presented a picturesque

appearance as we approached it across the plain. George had a letter of introduction from Señor Gonzales to a relative of his in the town, which procured us a most cordial reception. Our horses and mules were taken at the door by a servant. We followed our host into the house,—he had come out himself to welcome us. After the dusty llanos, the glare of the sun, and the want of comfort we had experienced for the last few days, we fully appreciated the luxurious accommodation of our host's hospitable mansion. Everything which kindness could suggest was done to render our short stay agreeable; and it was with feelings of genuine regret that we parted from our new friend early on the following morning.

It was now the 18th of March, and as we hoped to arrive at Esmeralda by the 25th of May, we found ourselves compelled to push forward with all possible expedition. We left Calabozo at four in the morning, and proceeded southwards. We were informed that a species of electrical eel abounded in the pools near the village of Abaxo, and as we were anxious to observe this strange creature for ourselves, we directed our course towards that village. Our host of the preceding night had furnished us with a guide, and with his assistance we soon reached a pool which contained the gymnoti. At first we could not perceive any of the eels, but on the water being agitated with a pole they emerged from their hiding-places

and swam up and down the small pond, as if to ascertain the cause of the commotion.

Giving my horse to the guide to hold, I waited until one of the eels approached the surface of the water, and with a well-directed shot I put a bullet through its head. With some difficulty we managed to get the creature out with the help of a liana, one end of which was fashioned into a kind of noose. The fish writhed about in its death-struggles.

These gymnoti present a disgusting appearance, being of a livid yellowish colour, and attain a large size, a full-grown specimen being frequently nearly six feet in length, and weighing as much as seventeen pounds. Under the head the general colour becomes slightly mottled or tinged with red. The back is lined with rows of small spots. In the centre of each spot is a small orifice through which the animal discharges a kind of mucus which acts as a lubricant for the skin. On observing our specimen we found that it was furnished with two swimming-bladders, one in front of the other, that in front being the smaller. The larger bladder was nearly detached, being held to the skin by means of a fatty formation which rests along the electrical apparatus. We had no means of testing the strength of the shocks that the eels can administer, but, to judge from the sensations we felt at handling the body of the dead one, it must be very considerable. I have no doubt that it would be highly dangerous to venture into a pool

frequented by gymnoti, as the sense of numbness produced by them would probably cause the victim to sink beneath the water, where he would become an easy prey to its electric inhabitants. In the water, too, the electric influence can be directed by them to some distance, so that they are a very great nuisance to the negroes in charge of cattle farms, as they attack both horses and oxen when driven across rivers. By lying against the bellies of their victims, they discharge such a succession of shocks that, mad with pain, the poor animals plunge, rear, and finally sink into the water, where they are speedily drowned. No wonder that they should be objects of dread as well as of disgust to the inhabitants of the districts where they are found. The streams they frequent are almost destitute of fish, it being supposed that the gymnoti either kill them or drive them away.

Leaving the pond, we again turned our faces towards the Apuré. The day was intensely hot, and we were nearly suffocated by the dust which our animals kicked up. But we bore the annoyance philosophically, comforting ourselves with the reflection that in a few days more we should arrive at the end of our march across the thirsty llanos, and thenceforth that we should float in a comfortable boat through scenes of luxuriant beauty, amusing ourselves with shooting crocodiles and jaguars.

The scattered palms became more scarce as we advanced, and finally disappeared altogether. The

plains were as level as the ocean, and the only living objects which met our view were some large black birds of the *Crotophagi ani*, or *garrapateros*, and stray herds of cattle. At night we reached the Rio Urituco, where George had an adventure with a crocodile which might have terminated fatally.

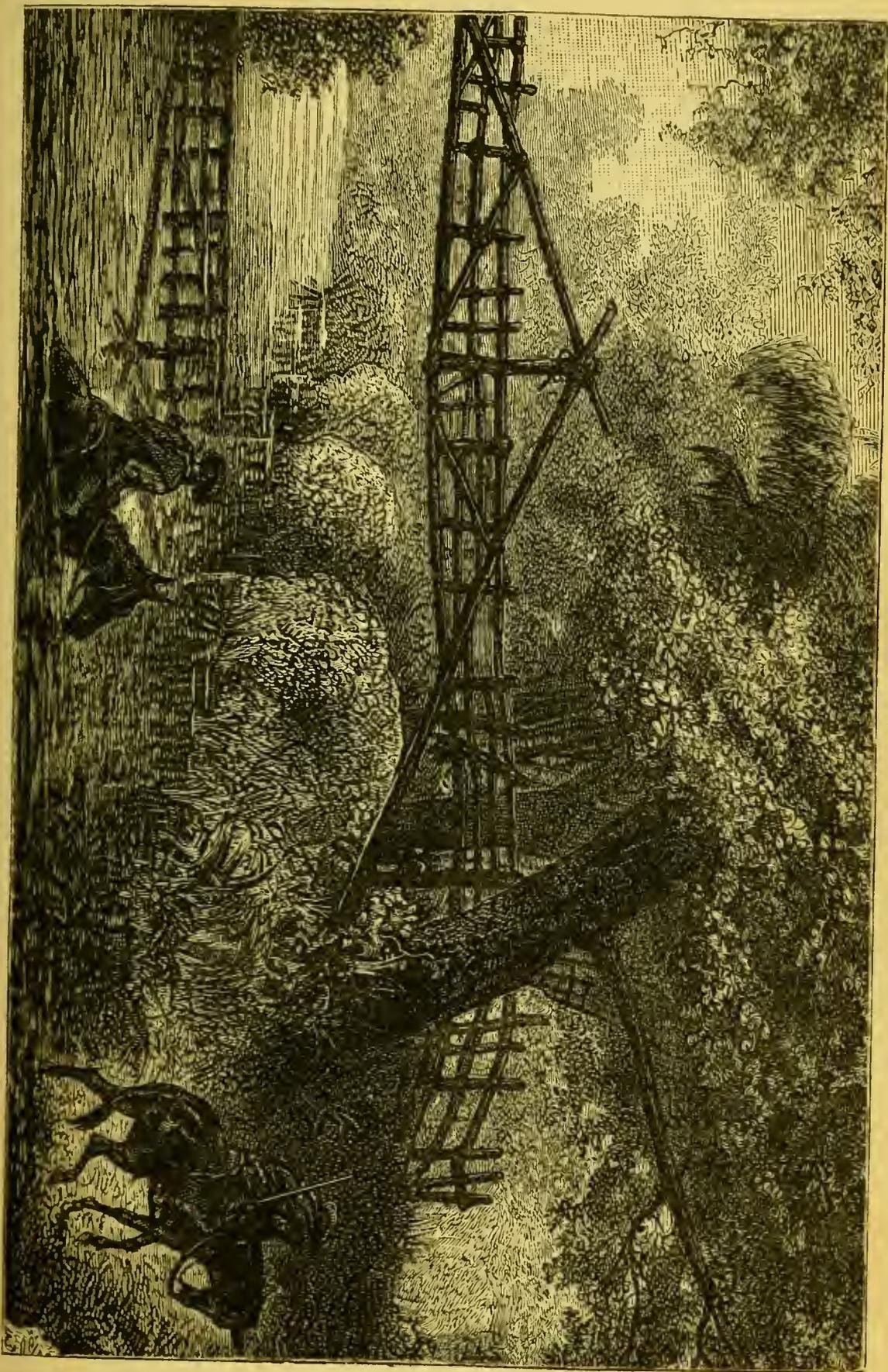
It happened in this wise. We had arrived at the river just as the short twilight was deepening into a gloom which rendered objects indistinct. While searching for a spot where we might safely venture into the stream, George, who had dismounted for the purpose of seeing more clearly, jumped on a large log that lay upon the bank, with the intention of remounting by its aid. His horse, which he led alongside the log, evinced a decided objection to the proximity, violently snorting and backing. With a cry of terror my companion sprang to the ground, just as the end of the supposed log swung round with terrific force, sweeping the legs of the horse from under him, and rolling him over among the bushes. The log was in fact a huge alligator, which had been lying in wait for deer or other game, and which now seemed considerably alarmed, although so far he had certainly the best of the encounter. George's attention was engrossed with his horse, which had fortunately escaped very serious injury, and was now making frantic exertions to break away.

The alligator meanwhile, as if satisfied with its achievement, scuttled into the dark waters of the

Urituco, where we lost sight of it. After some minutes we calmed the excitement of George's steed; and not liking to ford the river at that spot, we rode up-stream for some distance, where, finding an easy passage close to a bamboo foot-bridge, we safely reached the other side. Under the shade of a group of corypha palms we camped for the night, slinging our hammocks between their stems; and hushed by the drowsy rush of the river, we enjoyed a profound sleep. At break of day the howling monkeys roused us; and having cooked our slender breakfast, we journeyed onwards through the Mesa de Pavones, a dreary flat, enlivened to some extent by herds of cattle, attended as usual by the *crotophagi*, which searched the animals for parasites, alighting for this purpose on their backs.

A long and very fatiguing day brought us to a village on the banks of the Guarico, where we spent the night in the house of the missionary, whose hospitable welcome to us, entire strangers, won our lasting gratitude.

In the morning we forded the Guarico, and pursued our way over low alluvial flats, which seemed yet to reek from the soaking of the last inundation. The night was passed in the open air, and although a white fleecy mist covered the plain like a lake, we sustained no ill effects from our exposure. For days I had sighed for the cool green forests of the Apuré. The llanos, with their perpetually receding horizon,



FORDING THE URITUCCO.

their arid dusty soil scorched by a blazing sun, their monotonous landscape, and the insufferable thirst which parched our throats and mouths until our tongues felt shrivelled, impressed me with a sense of desolation which almost made me doubt that beyond them lay a land as beautiful as they were repulsive. It seemed incredible that these sterile, sun-baked plains could exist side by side with murmuring streams, graceful palms, and shady groves.

While thinking thus we perceived lights in the distance, and in half an hour more we arrived at the town of San Fernando. A large river flowed past the town, reflecting the few scattered lights in its broad bosom. It was the Apuré.

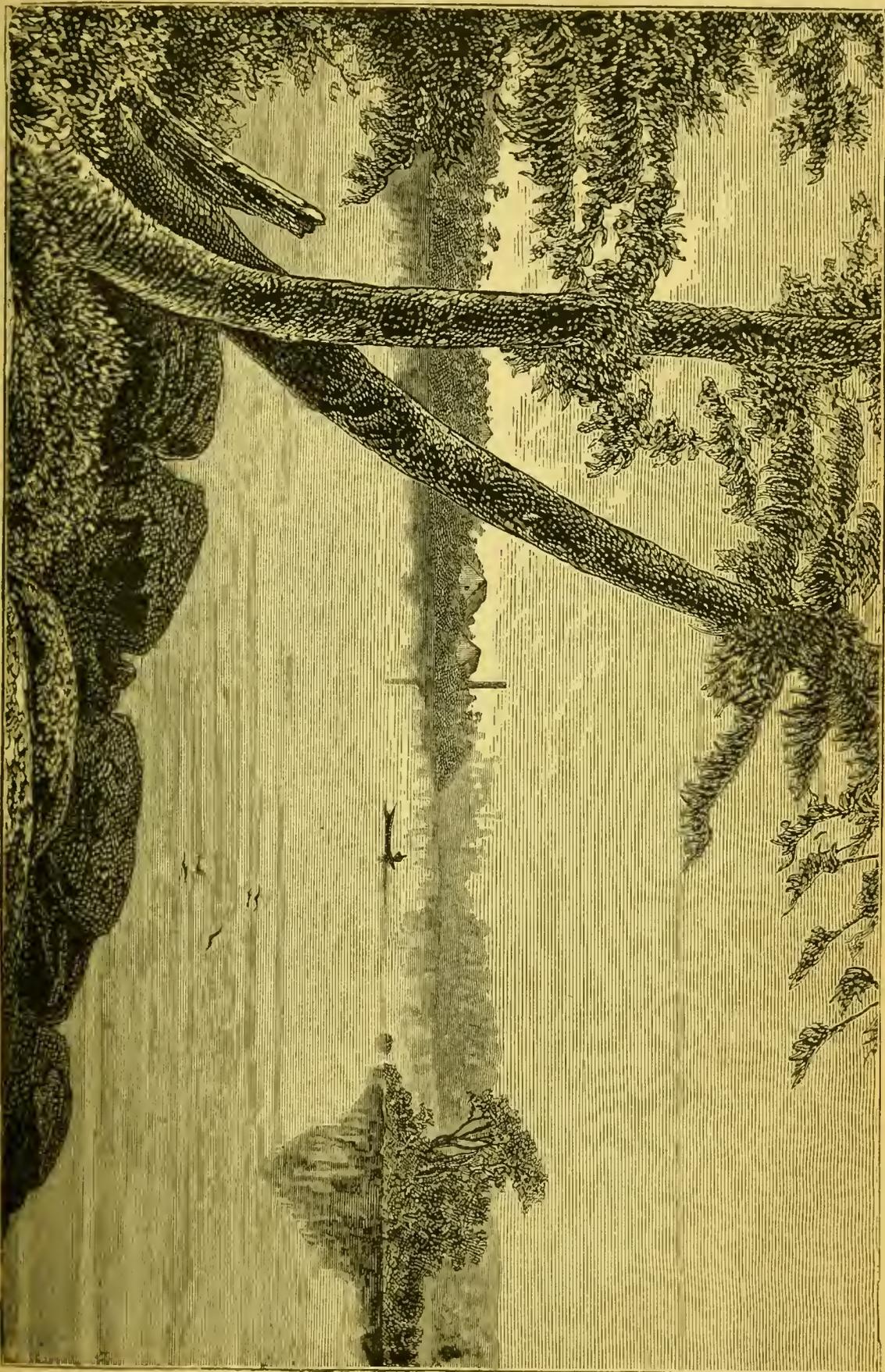
CHAPTER V.

DISPOSE OF OUR HORSES AND MULES — WE BUY A LANCHA, AND ENGAGE INDIANS AS CREW — LEAVE SAN FERNANDO — FORESTS — ARAGUATOS — AQUATIC BIRDS—ALLIGATOR SHOOTING—TURTLES—JAGUAR SHOOTING— PARTICULARS OF THE JAGUAR—LUXURIANT VEGETATION—COATIMUNDI— PALMS—MANATEES—WILDFOWL SHOOTING—BEAUTIFUL FOREST SCENERY —JAGUARS AND TURTLES—GEORGE AND I EACH SHOOT A JAGUAR—THE ANT-EATER—NOTES ON THE ANT-EATER—WE ABANDON THE YOUNG ONE TO ITS FATE.



WE had some difficulty in finding a lodging for the night, but at length we prevailed on the proprietor of what seemed to be the principal house in the town to receive us for a consideration. We now had accomplished the most arduous part of our journey. Henceforth we were to travel in a more luxurious manner, and in fact we dated the really pleasant part of our expedition from our departure from San Fernando.

The next morning we were up early, as we had many things to do. We first had to dispose of our horses and mules. These we sold, at considerably less than their value, to our host, who saw that we could not wait for a better customer. The next proceeding was to buy a boat, or lancha, which we at length succeeded in doing. We obtained an excellent one, fur-



VIEW OF THE APURE BELOW SAN FERNANDO.

nished with mast and sails, for forty pounds. We secured the services of five Indians as our crew. They were only too anxious to engage with us, as their natural home was somewhere near the sources of the Orinoco, from which they had descended the river with one of their missionaries. They therefore gladly availed themselves of the opportunity of returning to their own country.

These preparations exhausted a day. I was anxious to push forward at once, although only a few hours of daylight remained; but George considered it hardly worth while, and proposed that we should postpone our departure until the next morning. To this I reluctantly agreed; and having secured our lancha to the stem of a tree with a stout iron chain, lest our crew should take French leave of us during the night, we returned to our lodgings, and went almost immediately to bed—a luxury which we well knew we could not expect again for several weeks.

At daybreak we arose, and having bidden our host farewell, we took our places in the boat, which had a small cabin constructed of palm leaves laid over a slight framework in the stern. Having seen all our stores safe on board, we shoved off, hoisted sail, and scudded down the river before a pleasant breeze. Both shores were lined with forests, from which the howlings of the araguatos now heralded the rising of the sun. Long files of aquatic birds stood by the margins of the river, intent on fishing for their

morning meal. Among these I observed flamingoes, spoonbills, and upon the beach I noticed flocks of the guacharaca. Directing the men to steer nearer to the bank, George and I got out our rifles, as we perceived several huge alligators lying on the sandy beach, which extended back from the water for some fifty yards on either side. These repulsive monsters seemed to abound in the Apuré. Their scaly backs or long snouts were visible in every direction as they lazily floated with the stream or lay half concealed in the shallows by the shore. One in particular attracted our attention, as he had just crawled out from the river on to the warm sands, where he seemed to be making preparations for a comfortable nap. We soon got within one hundred yards of him, and, fearful lest a nearer approach should disturb him, we ordered the way of the boat to be stopped. George and I both took steady aim, and as the reports echoed on the river the monster gave a convulsive flap of his tail and then lay still. Another, which was only a few yards farther, we now attacked, and selecting the junction of the neck with the skull, we both fired together. We heard the thud of the bullets, and saw the reptile was badly wounded. He made hideously grotesque efforts to reach the water, when, finding the attempt useless, he seemed to abandon himself to his fate.

We now landed, and walked towards the alligators. The reptile we had first fired at was evidently dis-

abled, but not killed. His hard, cruel-looking little eyes were fixed on us with a stony glare, while a stream of blood trickled down his rough side from two wounds behind his shoulder. Seeing us approach nearer, he erected his back in a threatening manner, and commenced a sort of hissing noise like a high-pressure engine letting off steam. He certainly looked a pitiless monster, and I shuddered to think of what my fate would be were those gaping jaws to close upon me in the water.

Unwilling to prolong the sufferings of the hideous creatures, we each disposed of one at close quarters, shooting through the eye, when, with a slap that made the dust rise in a cloud about them, they lay quiet for ever. The firing had disturbed the birds; but, unaccustomed to be persecuted, they had not gone farther than round the next bend in the river, where herons, pauxis, roseate spoonbills, and flamingoes kept up an incessant harsh chattering.

We strolled along, signalling to our boatmen to keep pace with us. These, being out in the stream, necessarily were enabled to see round the bend before we arrived at a point that permitted a view of the next reach. The stream ran fast, and the boat had got slightly in advance of us, when suddenly the Indians ceased pulling, and made eager signs to us to hasten forward, pointing excitedly in that direction.

George and I ran quickly towards the bend in the

river, and just as we rounded it we found ourselves within fifty yards of a large jaguar, which had come down from the forest to quench his thirst, or to breakfast off the turtles which were there very numerous.

As soon as the jaguar observed us he rose to his legs and made two steps forward, then stopped, regarding us attentively. Apparently he did not like our appearance, for he turned his head towards the forest, as if contemplating a retreat in that direction. This was our chance.

“Now, Frank,” said George, “give it to him between the eye and the ear; I’ll put my ball through his shoulder.”

At this instant we both fired. For a moment the smoke prevented us from seeing the result. But before we had time to throw down the levers of our rifles in order to insert fresh cartridges, the fierce brute had, in a couple of springs, reached to within ten yards of us. It there lay crouched, with its head buried between its fore-paws. Lashing its tail from side to side, its green eyes blazed with fury. We felt that no time was to be lost. Quickly raising my rifle, at the report a red spot between its eyes oozed blood; the green fire in its eyes died out, and, with a sort of shiver, the sturdy limbs were stretched, withdrawn, again extended, and all danger was over.

“Hurrah, old fellow!” cried George in ecstasy,

“your first jaguar! Let us see where our shots hit him. I felt sure of him when I fired, and cannot imagine how I missed.”

On examining our prize we discovered that my shot had merely cut open the skin along the top of the head, passing through both ears, while George's had gone rather lower than he had intended, and had only inflicted a very painful and ugly wound. The Indians, who had been excited observers of the contest, now landed, and under their skilful manipulation the handsome skin was removed and placed in the boat. They also brought away the tail, which is considered a delicacy superior to venison; and when we landed to partake of our breakfast, they greedily devoured the savoury morsel, giving it little more than a turn over the fire.

We were pleased to be so well out of our encounter, and I immediately entered particulars of the animal in my note-book, which I here reproduce.

The jaguar (*Felis onca*, Linn.) is the most dangerous animal to be found in the South American forests. The puma is quite as ferocious, but is not nearly so formidable an antagonist as his handsome relative. The jaguar nearly resembles the leopard in appearance, but is of stouter build, and is furnished with a different arrangement of spots. This difference, however, might escape the notice of a superficial observer. Across the shoulder he is ornamented with a few well-defined streaks or dashes of black, reaching from

one shoulder to the other, and passing across the chest. The spots on his side and back are large and not of uniform shape, some approaching a circular form. In the centre of each are one or two smaller spots, and along his backbone is a line of black which reaches to the tail. The limbs are low, and present a very sturdy appearance, suggestive of great muscular power. The head is heavy, as it is in almost all beasts and birds of prey, and of a rather square shape if compared with that of the leopard, while the tail is considerably shorter than that of the latter. The jaguar is very widely distributed over South America. It prefers the neighbourhood of streams, where the turtles and other animals furnish it with abundant food. It is said by the Indians to catch fish, for which purpose it lies in wait in some convenient spot, striking the water occasionally with either its tail or paw. The fish, mistaking the splash for the fall of fruit from the overhanging trees, crowd to the spot, when the jaguar, with a quick stroke of his paw, throws several of them high and dry on the bank, where he makes a meal of them at his leisure. He is a splendid tree-climber; like most of his kind; and, lying along the branch of some forest giant, he quietly waits till the tapir, deer, or peccary passes below, when, with a sudden roar and spring, he strikes down the affrighted animal—or, if the victim be a tapir, it crashes through the forest with its wild rider tearing open the veins of the throat and neck.



FOREST SCENERY ON THE APURE. Page 97.

Unlike most of the Felidæ, the jaguar is a splendid swimmer, and evinces no repugnance to take to the water. He lives indiscriminately on fish, monkeys, capybaras, birds, or turtles. He is also very fond of making a meal off the great ant-eater.

There is one little animal, however, which the jaguar never attacks except when circumstances seem favourable. This is the peccary, a species of wild hog which roams the forests in large bands. This animal is particularly clannish, and readily runs to the assistance of its comrades in distress. It has therefore happened that the jaguar in catching a peccary has caught a Tartar; for when the loud squeals of the captive reach the ears of its comrades, the whole herd rush to the rescue, and fall on the enemy with the utmost fury. The jaguar is often torn to pieces before he has time to effect his escape.

The forest here presented a spectacle of extraordinary richness. Every tree was festooned with graceful creepers, some of which were covered with flowers, and the density of growth was such that hardly any sunlight could penetrate through the heavy foliage overhead. The woods are therefore peculiarly cool, but the air feels damp and heavy. At this place we remarked a long file of monkeys passing across an opening in the forest, upon trailing lianas which midway were supported upon a huge rock thickly covered with parasitic plants. Before leaving the spot we secured a specimen of the

coatimundi (*Nasua fusca*), a brownish animal, whose long pointed snout, narrow head, and long ringed tail presented a singular appearance. The ears are very small and slope backwards. The feet are furnished with long claws, which assist the animal in digging up either worms or insects. He does not, however, confine himself to this diet, and readily eats eggs, birds, snails, or any small quadrupeds. The long narrow jaw is well furnished with teeth, of which this creature has forty. The coati lives principally among trees, and it was while lying along a branch of a huge laurel that it attracted my attention, as I observed its tail waving slowly from side to side.

We now re-embarked and continued our journey down the river, which was here fully three hundred yards broad, and flowed swiftly between tall forests, among which I distinguished the mora and miriti palms, with the hackia and fig-tree. At one part of the river we observed long files of manatees that seemed to be avoided by the alligators, which kept out of their way whenever they approached. This creature attains an immense size, often measuring eighteen to twenty feet in length, and six feet in diameter at the broadest part of the back. It is purely a vegetable feeder, for which diet only its teeth seem suited. It is a harmless animal, and even of a gentle disposition, being, it is stated, easily tamed, when it has evinced a decided affection for its owner.

While gliding down the river with the current, we amused ourselves shooting at the flamingoes at various distances; and although it may sound a little egotistic to say so, we made some excellent shots. At three hundred yards I shot four in succession, and George five, much to the astonishment of our Indian boatmen, who had never before seen the accurate shooting made by modern rifles. The feathers of the flamingoes we preserved, and we saved two of the birds for specimens, as George was an amateur taxidermist, and had a supply of arsenical soap which he had laid in for this purpose.

While coasting along one bank of the Apuré, we passed the mouth of a small river which ran in from the south. This we entered in order to gratify our curiosity. I shall never forget the extraordinary beauty of the scene. The most brilliant sunshine showered its glowing light on tangled masses of the richest vegetation, which climbed and twisted round and over the forest trees. Flowering lianas hung in long streaming lines from the outstretched boughs and dipped their pendulous bouquets in the water of the igarape, which reflected the cloudless blue of the sky. Water-plants of giant size lined the sides of the stream and towered above our heads as we sat in the boat.

Here and there an opening in the vegetable wall on either hand permitted the eye to wander into the forest depths, where bending ferns and plume-like

plants filled the spaces between the tree-trunks, up which bright parasites wound their way, clothing branch and stem with a mantle of vivid green sparkling with brilliant flowers.

Gem-like birds flitted to and fro, flashing back the sunlight from their gaudy plumage, and butterflies like winged blossoms hovered over the rich banquet that nature had spread for them.

As we advanced, the forest became denser and the undergrowth thinner. Landing on a strip of beach—the igapo of the Brazilians, or latest alluvial deposit—I forced my way through the selvage of plants which grew at the entrance of the wood.

What a change from the brightness of the outside scene! The air felt cool and damp. The light of the sun was eclipsed by the impenetrable vault of interwoven branches and creepers above. A dim cathedral light showed me the long perspective of gray trunks rising, apparently rootless, like piles driven into the deep soil, their tops hidden from view; and from these arcades the voice echoed back as from extensive vaults.

From tree to tree, and as far as I could see, were stretched the cobwebs of perhaps a thousand years, hanging gray and motionless in the still air. It was a wild, weird scene; and from afar through the leafy corridors rang the scream of the jaguar, answered by the loud and prolonged whistling of monkeys that were concealed among the branches above.

Filled with an admiration almost akin to awe, I retraced my steps towards the boat. Its bows were turned down-stream, and we soon again breathed the freer air of the Apuré.

As we sailed along, we observed immense numbers of turtles on the sandy beach. Some were crawling along the margin of the water, and others floated on the surface, with their armour-plated backs alone visible. They were of all sizes, from the young one lately hatched to the adult of nearly half a hundredweight.

While watching them we had the opportunity of seeing a drama from nature. The forest touched the verge of the sands, and the front of the tree-line was fringed with a luxuriant growth of tall weeds and flowers which met the curtain of tendrils pendent from above. Here the front of the wood presented a huge wall of apparently solid verdure, in which at frequent intervals were visible the cave-like openings made by the wild beasts on their way to the river. These leafy tunnels looked black, and the eye failed to penetrate them to any great distance, unless a stray ray of sunlight streamed through a storm-torn rent in the roof above.

At the entrance of one of these gloomy passages we observed a huge jaguar extended on the ground, his eyes apparently fixed on the turtles, which seemed to be unaware of his proximity, and were busily engaged scooping out nests in the sand for the purpose of laying their eggs.

Suddenly I noticed that the jaguar was contracting himself for a spring, and with an appearance of great ease the splendid animal launched himself into the air, clearing a space of at least fifteen feet, alighting on the back of a large arrau, and with the shock turning it over on its back. Instantly the fell teeth and claws were at work, and in less time than it takes to tell it the unfortunate turtle's life was ebbing fast away from fearful lacerations in its throat and stomach.

The jaguar had been so engaged with his prey that he failed to observe the boat, which now floated scarcely a hundred yards from the spot where he was devouring his still living victim. At this moment another jaguar appeared on the scene, with several half-grown cubs gambolling at her side. As they approached the spot where their companion was regaling himself on the turtle, they suddenly noticed the boat, and stopped, the old one uttering a low growl. This instantly drew the attention of the other, who ceased his meal and looked round.

"Now, George," said I, "do you take the big fellow, and I'll take his wife. One! two! three!"

At the word "three" our rifles made but one report, and with tremendous roars the jaguars felt themselves hit. With one accord they made for the boat, but a shot from George checked the leading jaguar, disabling him at the water's edge. The other then turned, and bounded across the beach, followed

by the cubs. Just as she plunged into the opening of the game-path my bullet struck her fairly on the nape of the neck. With a smothered roar she reared herself frantically on her hind legs and fell over backwards stone dead. The cubs disappeared in the forest.

“That’s the style,” cried George delightedly. “That *was* a shot.—Quick! to the land, you fellows,” he continued, addressing the Indians. “Look alive there, and let us get out.”

We landed, and soon were engaged in removing the skins, which are very valuable. The male jaguar was a splendid animal, measuring nearly nine feet from the nose to the end of the tail. He was in the prime of life, with sharp well-preserved teeth and long clean claws. He would have been an ugly customer at close quarters, as the muscles stood out like whipcord on his ponderous fore legs; and we felt just as well pleased that the encounter had taken place in the security of the boat.

Laden with the skins and tails, we returned to the boat, into which we also threw the turtle which had been killed and only partially eaten by the jaguar. We hoisted our sail, and again sped merrily down the stream. We saw here and there along the beach small heaps of turtle-shells, which the Indians told us marked the places where jaguars had surprised and devoured the owners.

As evening drew on and the sun declined over the

western forests, the air became cooler. At this time we usually landed, and having suspended our hammocks from the trees at the edge of the woods, or, if these, as sometimes happened, were too dense, from our oars stuck firmly in the sand, we wandered along the banks, observing the many curious birds and animals that frequented them.

One evening, while enjoying ourselves in this manner, we were astonished at seeing a most extraordinary creature advancing in a leisurely manner towards us, either not having yet seen us or not paying the least regard to our presence. This animal was fully seven feet long, including its bushy tail, which it waved like a huge bunch of plumes over its back. The snout was of a remarkable form, very long and tapering to a point, reminding us of the proboscis-like nose of the coati we had shot. The colour of this beast was a grayish brown, changing to black underneath the throat and chest, whence a black band extended towards the shoulders, diminishing gradually until it almost vanished at the tail. On each side of this dark line were bars of a lighter tint than the general gray of the body. I had never seen a specimen of this curious animal before, but from pictures I had no difficulty in recognizing it as the great ant-bear, or more correctly the ant-eater (*Myrmecophaga jubata*).

It soon seemed to apprehend that there was danger in the vicinity, but being a sluggish beast it did not

perceptibly quicken its motions. The tail, which it had hitherto held aloft, it now unfolded, and we perceived for the first time that it carried a young one on its back.

George fell on one knee, and taking a steady aim he dropped the foolish beast dead on the spot. We then approached to examine it more closely. The head was fully fourteen inches in length, narrowing rapidly from the ears forward, sloping into the long snout, which is covered with hair to its point. The feet presented a curious appearance, resembling those of the mole. The claws are long, and adapted for rooting open the tumuli inhabited by the insects on which it subsists.

As walking on the flat of the foot might injure the claws, nature has so formed this animal that it stands on the outer edges of the feet, which are furnished with hard callosities that protect the external edges of the toes. This is the largest member of the family; and although it is not scarce in the regions it frequents, it confines itself generally to the interior of dense thickets, where its presence would be little suspected if its habits did not discover it.

It may appear not a little odd that such a large animal can procure a sufficiency of the minute insects on which it feeds. But it has the power of extending and retracting its tongue with the greatest quickness; and the tongue being covered with a glutinous saliva,

the ants adhere to it in thousands when thrust into their teeming passages. For this purpose the strong claws are put into requisition. With powerful scoops the nest is torn open, and the cells and passages, with their hoards of insects, are laid bare. Among these the tongue is rapidly protruded, and thousands of ants are conveyed into the mouth by each movement of this active member.

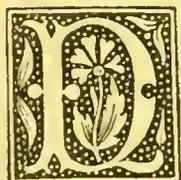
When in a state of repose, the ant-eater tucks his feet under his belly, bringing their extremities close together; and when he is in this position his well-furnished tail is laid over his back to shield it from the too powerful rays of the sun. The long proboscis-like jaw is devoid of teeth, for which this animal has no need. It is amusing to see him cleaning his snout on his fore legs, rubbing it first against one side and then against the other. When dreading an attack from his enemies, which include the formidable jaguar, he seats himself on his haunches like a dog, turning his beak-like snout inquiringly from side to side, his body supported in front by the muscular fore legs.

The young one meantime seemed to imagine that nothing unusual had occurred, for it maintained its position on the body of its parent, eyeing us curiously as we walked round it. The Indians wished to knock it on the head; but we objected to this, and brought it away with us, intending to make it a pet. The difficulty of supplying it with its proper food caused

us to give up this idea, and we reluctantly turned it adrift on the beach, abandoning it to its own devices. Returning to the camp, we rounded a bend in the river, and as the animal receded from view, we could see that it was slowly moving towards the adjacent forest, possibly in search of an ant-hill.

CHAPTER VI.

THUNDERSTORM—DISTURBED BY NOISES IN THE FOREST—ALLIGATORS AND HERONS—SHOOTING ALLIGATORS, VULTURES, CAPYBARAS—THE CUTIA AND PACA—FOREST-COVERED ISLAND OF APURITO—BEAUTY OF THE SCENERY—AN IGARAPE—MOONLIT PROSPECT OVER THE FORESTS—VAMPIRES—A TAPIR HUNT BY MOONLIGHT—COOKING AND CURING TAPIR MEAT—NOTES ON THE TAPIR—INDIAN VORACITY.



URING the night there was a thunderstorm, accompanied by most vivid lightning and heavy rain, from which we were perfectly sheltered by the thick growth of sauso bushes (*Permesia castaneifolia*) which lined the shores.

As day broke, the jaguars roared in the forest, and came near our encampment. Their yells roused the monkeys, who joined in the wild concert, and the various cries, screams, howls, whistles, and calls, varied by the harsh chattering of parrots, curassows, and other birds, effectually banished sleep from our eyes.

All this day we drifted slowly with the current, sometimes near one bank, sometimes near the other, as objects of interest presented themselves on either side. The river here resembled a vast canal margined

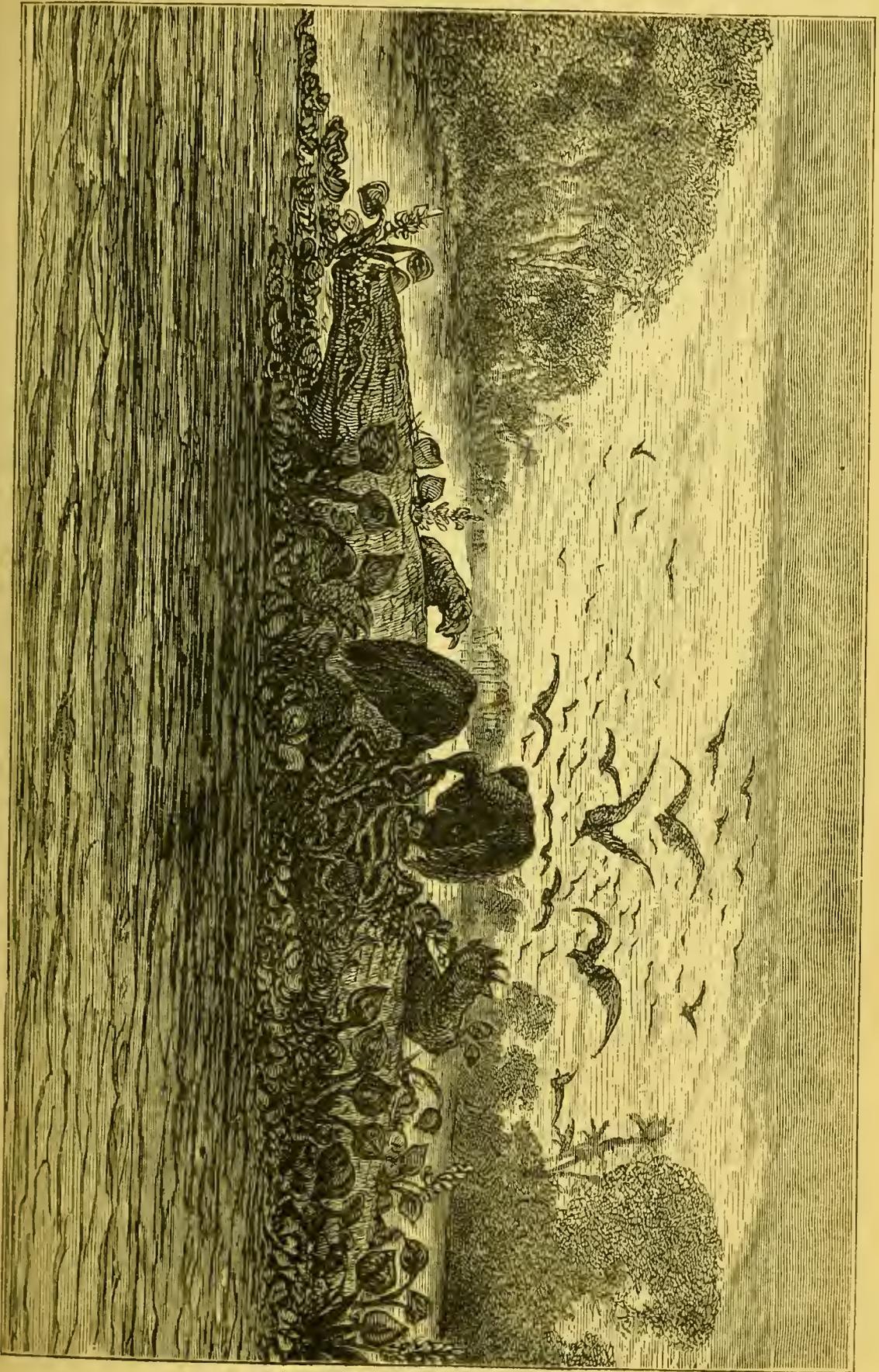
by forests, from which proceeded a confused murmur indicating the teeming abundance of insect life in their cool solitudes. On the margins of the stream were numerous alligators, which, from having their feet dentated along the outer edges like those of Africa, appear to be real crocodiles. They lay motionless, some with their huge gaping jaws opened at right angles. On their backs walked small white birds of the heron kind. These seemed to evince no fear of their formidable companions. The alligators attain an immense size. The largest one we killed measured nearly twenty-three feet in length, and was as stout in the body as a stall-fed ox. We observed him apparently asleep on the surface of the water, and when within twenty yards of him we poured the contents of our rifles into his head. Giving his tail a flap that made the river foam, he plunged head foremost under water, emerging immediately, and raising his huge gaping jaws and shoulders several feet in the air. He again dived, thrusting up his tail and hind legs in a manner at once grotesque and horrible.

The commotion in the water caused our boat to rock so much that, combined with the rapidity of his struggles, we could not get a steady aim at him. Still diving and plunging, he gradually worked his way towards the shore, where he shortly stranded in the shallows. Seeing this, we followed, and with a couple of well-directed bullets terminated his sufferings. Here he became the prey of the vultures,

which seemed to collect as if by magic from all points of the compass, scarcely waiting for our departure to commence their revolting repast. How they contrived to penetrate the armoured hide of the reptile with their beaks I know not. Perhaps they mounted guard on the body until decomposition rendered it more tender, as well as more agreeable to their foul appetites.

Alligators seem such a perfect incarnation of pitiless cruelty that I felt no repugnance at witnessing the death-struggles of our victim. As not a year passes but a human life is sacrificed by their ferocity, we both felt it a duty to shoot as many as we could. Although the rainy season had not commenced, there were hundreds of the reptiles in every few miles of the river, and thousands were still lying torpid in the mud of the savannas, waiting to be wakened by the warm deluges of the rainy season.

The capybara or chiguire (*Hydrochærus capybara*) furnishes the alligators with many a meal. This is an amphibious animal, and while in the water easily falls a prey to the reptiles. We witnessed the passage of a drove of these animals across the Apuré that were pursued to the water's edge by a jaguar, which managed to secure one of them; and while swimming across the river, the wretched animals were attacked by several alligators, which each opened its gaping jaws, and with a swirl of the tail that made the water boil for yards around dived with its prey.



VULTURES DEVOURING ALLIGATOR. Page 110.

The survivors, as if accustomed to such treatment, landed, and quietly walked along the banks, finally disappearing up the nearest game-path.

The capybara belongs to the genus *hydrochæridæ*, which literally signifies the species *water-hog*. It is very common along most of the rivers in tropical South America, and is the largest rodent in the world. Its ordinary dimensions are about three feet eight inches in length, but many specimens have been measured from five to six inches longer than this. The teeth in its upper jaw are grooved in front. Its grinding teeth seem formed of several layers or laminæ, from which circumstance the eminent naturalist Cuvier detected its relationship to the elephant.

The capybara is practically devoid of a hairy coat, its pig-like skin being thinly covered with long scanty hairs. It is a herbivorous animal, and subsists entirely on fruits and other vegetable productions. It generally roams about at night, but in the more sequestered parts of the country it also ventures abroad during the day. In the districts where the planters grow rice the capybara is a most mischievous animal, breaking down, trampling, and devouring large portions of the crop.

While thus engaged, or while swimming across the rivers that intersect the forests in all directions, it accompanies its movements with a horrible noise. It is a near relative of two other similar quadrupeds, the paca and the cutia. The latter is the smaller.

Both are much less aquatic in their habits than the capybara, which seems almost as much at home in the water as on shore.

These particulars we learned from our Indian boatmen, who had hunted the capybara as food all their lives. Its flesh has a disagreeable musky smell; but the natives are not fastidious, and esteem the animal very highly.

We were now passing a long narrow island, above which the Apuré forks into two branches which enclose a piece of land nearly seventy miles long. This was thickly covered with forest, which presented a varied outline. The higher trees were stately mora and miriti palms, clad to their crests with flowering lianas. The underwood consisted of arborescent ferns twenty-seven feet high, plumerias and browneas bending forward over the water, and interlaced one with the other in picturesque confusion. The enormous fronds of the tree-ferns, branching downwards towards the river, enclosed behind them water-floored recesses, whose cool shade frequently tempted us from the exposure of the open stream. Upon this island we passed the night. Close by our encampment an igarape led backward from the river under the over-arching foliage.

After supper, as the moon ascended the heavens, I pushed my way through the rank vegetation, and stood on the bank of this watery lane. Below, past its outlet, the Apuré rushed with a drowsy sound.

Across its broad bosom I could see the silvery beach gleaming white in the moonlight, hedged by the towering forests beyond. Looking up the igarape, the view was enchanting. A vault of richest foliage reached from side to side, through innumerable chinks in which the moonlight fell and danced on the wavelets below, revealing the ebony pillars that upheld the verdant roof. A little farther on the woods retired from the banks, leaving scattered palms standing singly here and there, from which depended fantastic drapery waving in the breeze, their roots hidden among a thick growth of sauso plants, and their every branch relieved distinctly against the bright moonlit sky. A spell seemed to brood over the scene; all life seemed hushed, except when the deep silence was broken at intervals by the hoarse scream of a jaguar or the dissonant chatter of some water-fowl. Sometimes the branches rustled overhead, or the bushes near me were agitated; and then again all was still.

Charmed with the exquisite beauty of the moonlit scene, I returned to camp, where I found George busily engaged in preserving the skins of the jaguars.

The reader must not imagine that travel in these lovely lands is all pleasure. While out on this occasion I narrowly escaped being bitten by several snakes, and my admiration was sorely distracted by the bloodthirsty mosquito. This single pest is sufficient in some districts to render life intolerable.

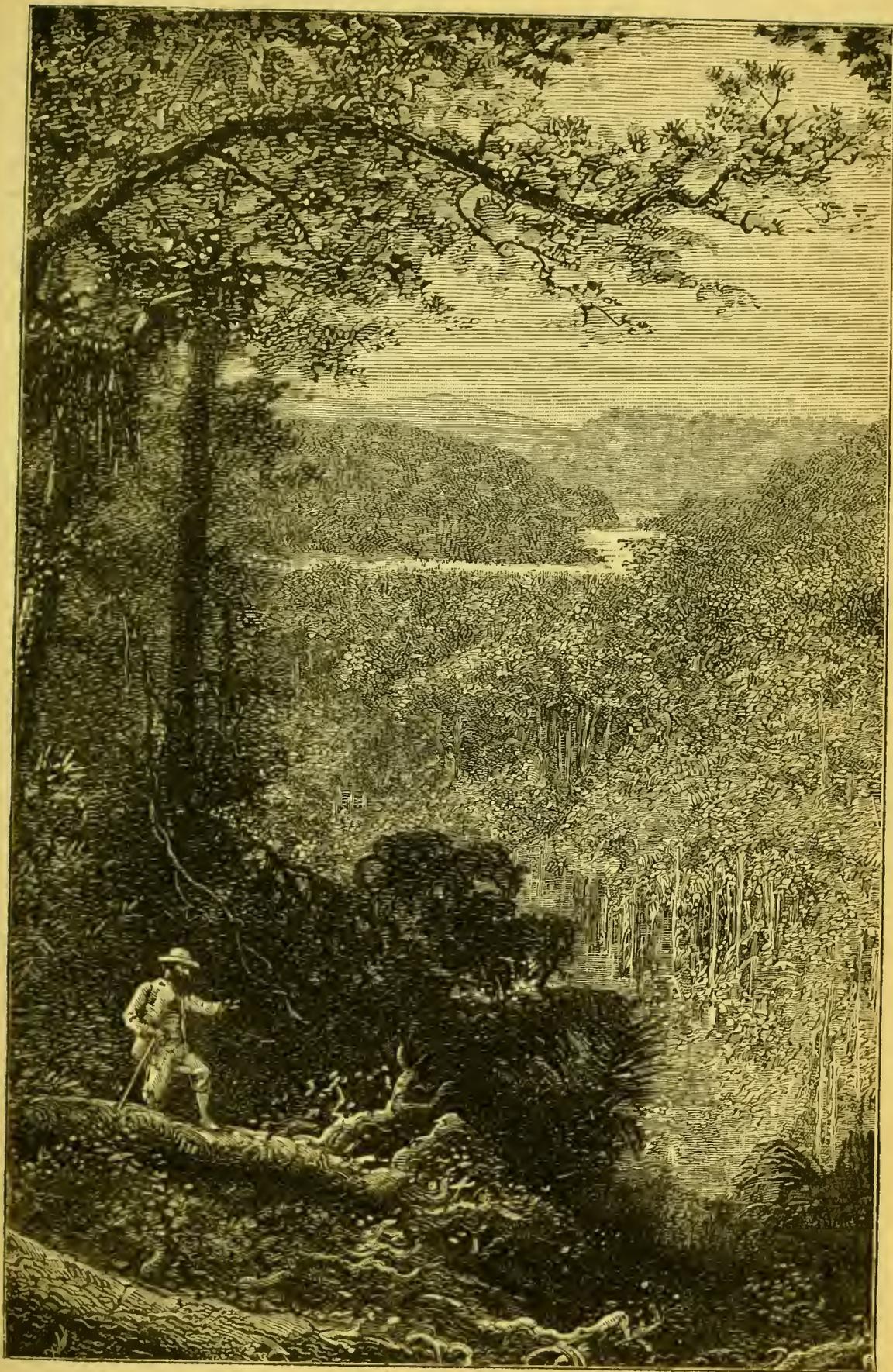
They are most numerous along the rivers that run through low alluvial valleys. "White waters" these rivers are called; while on the "black waters" the mosquitoes do not exist. Few, if any, are to be found along the Rio Negro, although just below it, on the Amazon, they abound.

Not feeling tired or sleepy, I again rambled out, this time going to a high point of rock which towered over the surrounding woods. From this point the eye wandered over the vast forests which lay below like a variegated carpet, stretching away to the distant horizon. A milky light softened the outlines of the woods, and threw an air of mystery over the scene.

A stir or rustle of life rose up from the bosom of the boundless woods—the breathing of the wind among the branches. The trees appeared to rest from the strife of gairish day; for, in these woods more especially, the survival of the fittest is the rule of nature, and tree strives with tree to gain light and air, while a thousand parasitic plants spring from the earth and wrap trunk and branch in their serpentine embrace, often entailing destruction on the tree from which they derive their support and sustenance.

From where I stood I could see the windings of the Apuré through the forests, here a line as dark as jet, and again gleaming like silver in the moonlight.

A partial mist hung above it, here and there drifting slowly in long lines, or hanging stationary



VIEW OF THE APURE THROUGH THE FOREST. Page 116.

between the enclosing forests, according as it felt the varying impulse of the breeze. Whenever this freshened, a solemn murmur rose from the immense field, and filled the air as if the chords of some vast harp had been brushed by a spirit's wing.

How minute a creature is man! and how superfluous his existence seems in these vast forests where all is still in the same condition as on the morning of creation! All these gorgeous plants that load the earth with their luxuriance, all these giant trees that have grown up here without his interference, the world of life which teems throughout this vast domain—all are regulated by nature's laws, and exist for ends that man can hardly understand. He can only wonder and admire, and turn his thoughts towards the great Creator of all the marvels by which he is surrounded.

While reflecting thus, I turned towards the camp, the fires of which I could see reflected on the huge leaves of bananas which shaded our hammocks. On the silvery strand of the Apuré I could see forms moving about. They were the inhabitants of this strange land—the chiguire, the jaguar, the alligator, and the tapir.

It was now late, and throwing myself into my hammock I soon fell into a doze, seeing in the dreamy light the imp-like forms of the vampires flitting to and fro. These gradually faded, and I sank into a profound sleep.

How long I slept I do not know, for I was awakened by the shouting of the Indian boatmen, who were calling to us to rise and get into the boat. Seizing my rifle, which I always kept close to my hand, I jumped from my hammock, and accompanied by George, who had been similarly roused, I got into the lancha, which was instantly pushed off from the shore.

As yet neither of us understood the cause of this sudden commotion, but cries of "Anta! anta!" from the Indians explained it. The moon was declining towards the west, and cast long shadows across the water, gleaming here and there on the surface, in which bright patches I could observe the waves dancing—evidently the result of some disturbance in the water. The boat was paddled swiftly in this direction, and presently we could see the huge head of a tapir cleaving the stream, as he shaped his course towards the igarape which I have already described. He soon gained the mouth of this, and just as he offered a good shot while crossing a brightly lit piece of water, he dived beneath the surface and disappeared.

However, we felt sure that he had turned up the igarape, and we redoubled our exertions to reach the opening of the stream before he could have time to leave it and vanish in the forest. This we succeeded in doing. As we turned up the small stream, which ran directly towards the moonlight that streamed full

on the surface and revealed every sedge and lily, we had the satisfaction of seeing the tapir, who probably already considered himself safe from pursuit, swimming leisurely towards a thick bed of aquatic plants, in which he would be secure from observation.

George and I fired simultaneously. Both shots struck fair and true, the distance being scarcely fifty yards, and with a fearful plunge the animal reared himself from the water, and then fell back, kicking and struggling, now swimming in a circle, and again lying on his side, occasionally uttering a squealing sound.

The boat was quickly alongside, and at such short range as prevented the possibility of a miss, a shot was sent through the skull of the still struggling brute. Before it could sink the Indians seized a leg, and attaching a rope to it they towed the body behind the boat, which was now paddled back to the camp.

The remainder of the night was spent by our swarthy companions in cutting up the game and smoke-drying it, and in cooking sundry choice morsels over the fire. Their excited jabbering and the contests that arose between them as to the partition of the meat prevented us from sleeping. So we lay in our hammocks and watched the dusky crew as they sat or stalked round the fire, their hands and even their faces covered with blood, presenting a hideous and demon-like appearance.

By the light of the moon I made some notes of the chief characteristics of the tapir, which I here transcribe.

The tapir (*Tapirus Americanus*) is quite a large animal, equal in size to an ordinary jackass. It belongs to the order of pachydermata, and its almost hairless skin reminds one of other animals of the same genus, as the elephant, the pig, and the hippopotamus. In colour the animal is of a brown hue; is possessed of a singularly powerful neck, along which runs a stiff mane somewhat like the hogged mane of a pony. The tail is rather short, and is switched from side to side in an excited manner when the animal is preparing to defend itself from the attacks of its enemies.

The tapir is a very shy, retiring creature, frequenting the tangled woods in marshy ground along the banks of rivers or in the neighbourhood of woodland ponds. It rests in some well-hidden retreat during the day; but towards nightfall it rouses itself and ventures abroad in search of its favourite food, which usually consists of fruit, the tender branchlets of trees, or other succulent vegetables. Like its cousins the Suidæ, however, it does not confine itself to a purely vegetable diet, but readily eats the larvæ of insects, slugs, lizards, or other creatures when they come within its immediate reach.

Being a shy animal, its nature is very suspicious, and it is always apprehensive of danger, which an



SMOKE-DRYING A TAPIR. Page 122.

excellent nose and sharp ears detect at a considerable distance. As we saw during our chase, it dives well, and can remain beneath the water for a minute or two at a time without rising to take breath. On these occasions it frequently walks along the bottom of the stream or pool, as also does the hippopotamus.

The tapir is a timid animal and a lover of peace; but if it should be attacked, and without means of escape, it will defend itself bravely, when its formidable teeth warn the aggressor to be cautious in his dealings with it. The flesh when properly cooked is much relished by many persons, resembling somewhat a mixture of tender pork and beef. On the present occasion its appetizing odour while being cooked by our savage friends drew George and me from our hammocks to partake of it. We relished it so highly that we then and there determined never to permit a tapir to escape us if we could only get him within range of our rifles. The tapir is defended against the thorns of his native haunts by a thick tough hide, which in the young is showered over with small white spots.

Having made these observations, and ascertained some of the particulars from the Indians, we prevailed on them to take some rest, and not to gorge themselves to repletion, which they were busily engaged in doing. We had to threaten them that if they did not instantly repair to their hammocks, we would

throw the tapir-meat into the river, to be devoured by the alligators. This threat had the desired effect; and as quiet again reigned over the encampment, we fell asleep for the second time, and were not disturbed until the araguatos serenaded the rising sun.

CHAPTER VII.

RESUME OUR VOYAGE—BIRDS—SLEEPING ALLIGATORS—HERDS OF CHIGUIRES
—TOUCANS—TROGONS—TRUMPET - BIRDS—SEE AN INDIAN VIDETTE—WE
ARE MET BY A PROCESSION HEADED BY A MISSIONARY—TRANSITORY
EXISTENCE OF MISSIONARY STATIONS—LEAVE THE MISSION—GREAT HEAT
—VEGETATION—MONKEYS AND PARROTS OPPRESSED BY THE HEAT—
GLORIOUS EVENING—DENSITY OF THE FOREST—MOONRISE—PROSAIC
HUMAN NATURE—INTERIOR OF THE VIRGIN FOREST—GIGANTIC SERPENT
AND ITS PREY—GREAT NUMBERS OF BIRDS ALONG THE RIVER BANKS—
GUAMO INDIANS—CAMP FOR THE NIGHT ON AN EXTENSIVE BEACH—
THUNDERSTORM—THINGS BRIGHTEN AT SUNRISE—CURIOSITY OF AN ALLI-
GATOR—HIS FATE—IMMENSE NUMBERS OF ALLIGATORS—DIFFICULTIES OF
THE NAVIGATION—VICTORIA REGIA LILY—DESTRUCTIVE BEETLE—BIRDS
ON THE ISLAND OF CARIZALES—VUELTA DEL BASILIO—WEEPER MONKEYS
—HUMBOLDT'S ACCOUNT OF THE WEEPER—INDIANS BEG FOR THE MONKEY.

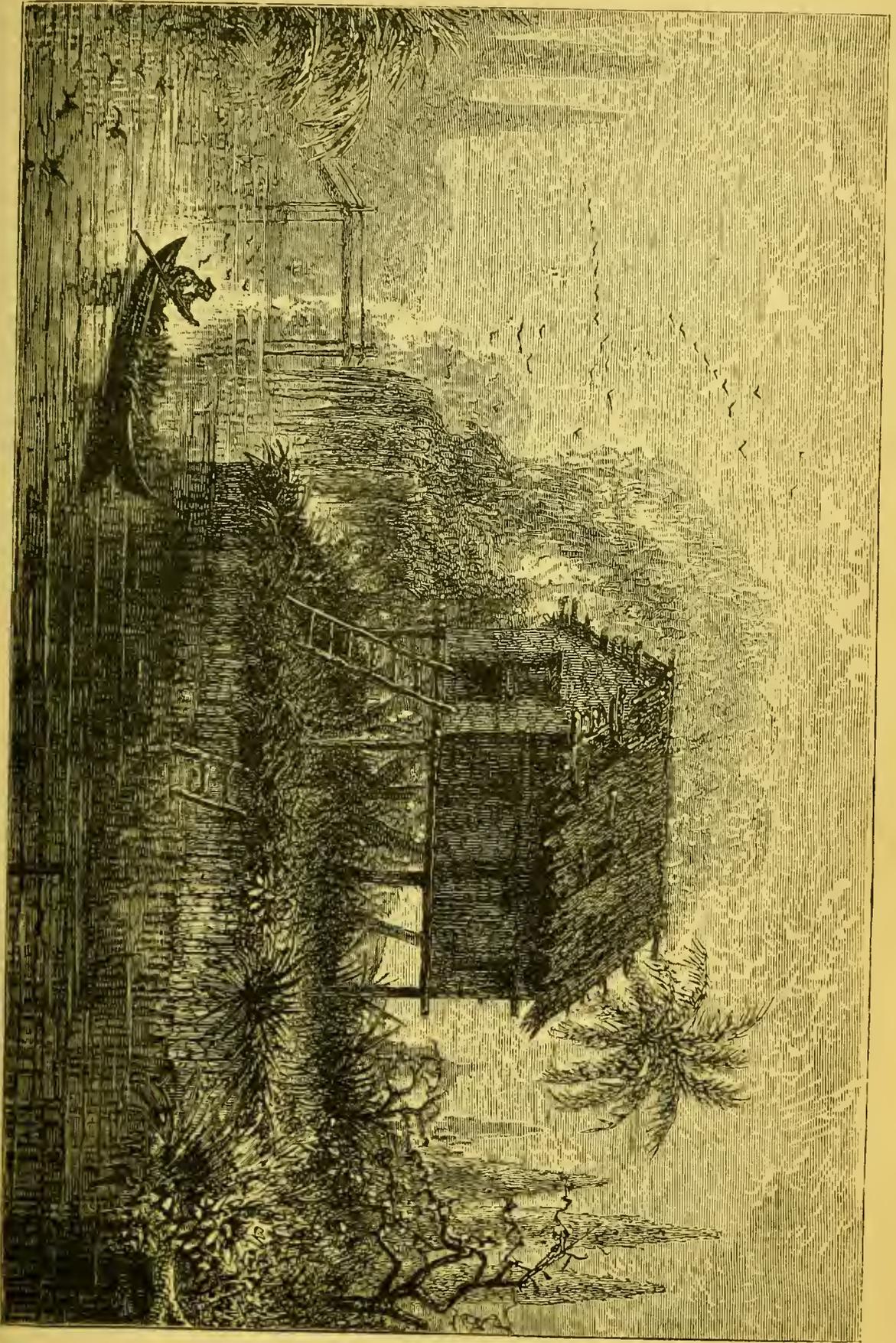


AFTER breakfast, which consisted of beans, coffee, and roasted tapir, we continued our journey, passing many floating logs covered with plotuses or darters, roseate spoonbills, and water-hens. These flew off with discordant cries as the boat approached them. Huge alligators or crocodiles lay upon the sands, and appeared to be asleep, as they took no notice of us, nor of the herds of chiguire which wandered along the front of the forest. Grotesque-looking toucans, which looked top-heavy with the weight of their enormous beaks, and magnificent trogons fluttered in

the branches which overhung the stream, disengaging fruits that fell with splashes into the water. These crumbs from the tables of the well-to-do above furnished the fishes below with their morning meal. Many of these broke water round the spots where the fruits fell, showing that they were on the outlook at this early hour for their daily bread. We also observed flocks of trumpet-birds and hoccas alighting by the margin of the water to drink.

At a little distance in front of us a sand-bar projected into the stream, and although, from our position as we looked at it sideways, it seemed very long, yet we knew that its length was more apparent than real. Within ten yards of its extremity stood a corypha palm. There would have been nothing remarkable in this, were it not that we suddenly saw an Indian slip down the tree, run along the sands, and disappear in the forest. This looked suspicious, and steering the boat to the opposite side of the Apuré, we looked to our rifles, and made up our minds that something unpleasant was about to take place. We were agreeably surprised, however, on rounding the bend in the river, to find a flotilla of small boats putting off to meet us. The sound of rude music saluted our ears, and in the bow of the leading boat we could distinguish a missionary, who doubtless had organized this little tribute of respect or welcome to the strangers.

We cordially shook the worthy man by the hand,



MISSIONARY'S HUT NEAR VUELTA DEL JOVAL.

and stepped into his boat, ours falling into the rear of the procession as it again arranged itself to return to the bank. This we found to be the mission of *Vuelta del Joval*, situated a little below the *Cano de la Tigrera*, where the river became extremely sinuous and sluggish. The surrounding scenery here was, if possible, wilder than any we had seen on the *Apuré*.

We spent a few hours in the hut of the missionary, who told us that these settlements of the Indians have but an ephemeral existence, the inhabitants periodically retiring to the forests, where they pass their time after the fashion of their unconverted brethren, and that they often selected an entirely new locality when they returned from their distant excursions. Thus many old missions marked on the maps no longer exist, and many new ones spring up, where perhaps they remain for a few years, to be again abandoned in favour of some more attractive neighbourhood. The good father's hut was a curious structure. A rough platform, resting on poles six or seven feet high, formed the foundation on which the hut was placed. This raised it above the level of the stream when in flood, at which times the inmate arrived or left in his boat. Close by we observed a foot-bridge which gave access to the opposite side of a stream which here joined the *Orinoco*.

In the afternoon we bade adieu to our kind acquaintance. We were accompanied to the boat

by the entire population, waving palm branches and flowers above their heads, and as we pushed off, a few who were armed with old-fashioned muskets discharged them in our honour.

Waving a farewell to the missionary, we quickly shot before a breeze round one of the bends which are frequent in the river at this spot, and lost sight of the mission of Joval and its inhabitants.

The sun was overpoweringly hot notwithstanding the breeze, which indeed felt like the breath of a furnace. The vegetation on shore drooped heavily, or swayed listlessly in the wind, as if it felt the oppressive influence of the heat. The monkeys, parrots, and other denizens of the woods were silent, being hidden away in some cool recess among the thick foliage, to venture forth again when the fiery sun declined beyond the forests.

This noontide quiet oppressed the spirits; the very water seemed to simmer in the scorching heat. A drowsiness, affecting everything animate and inanimate, seemed to permeate the air, and under its influence we lay in the palm-thatched cabin and dozed off to sleep.

When we awoke we found that our boat still glided along the shores, but the air was cooler, and the animal life of the forests was resuscitated. The sky indeed still blazed with the reflection of the sun; but that luminary had fallen low towards the horizon, and on the water we enjoyed the deep shadow of the

forest, while the tree-tops here and there yet caught the crimson tints and seemed on fire with the reflection. Huge spokes of light reached the zenith from the fiery point in the west where the sun was sinking; a thin drawn cloud or two with edges of burnished gold were stretched along the sky right in the path of light; while all around a crimson flush overspread the heavens, dying away to a whitish blue on the northern and eastern horizons.

It was a glorious evening, even for the tropics, and George and I, full of admiration, gazed long at the burning skies and the changing hues of the forest, till a blue shadow seemed to fall upon the scene, betokening the approaching darkness. Beckoning to the boatmen to beach the boat, we landed and encamped for the night.

As the forest was unusually dense at this spot, owing to the marshy nature of the ground, every tree being enwreathed with a thick covering of creepers, and the undergrowth occupying the space between the trunks, we slung our hammocks from oars which we fixed deeply in the sand.

As the reflection from the west died out along the skies, a faint silvery light stole up from the east, brightening as it grew. Presently the full, round moon rose above the horizon, and showered her pale beams on the dreamy landscape. At the same time a breeze sprang up and cooled the heated air, bearing on its wings the odours of the sleeping woods and the

refreshing splash of the river against some obstacles to its course. But however lovely picturesque nature may be, the prosaic demands of human nature had to be attended to. Our supper of tapir meat soon withdrew our attention from the beauties of the landscape; and having despatched it, our eyes grew heavy, while our heads nodded frequently on our breasts. We therefore retired to our hammocks, which the Indians had cleverly roofed with palm leaves, and in a few minutes we were both sound asleep.

At daybreak, as usual, we bathed in the river, never venturing far from the bank, and the Indians keeping watch to warn us of the approach of any of the alligators which were at all times visible wherever the sandy shores offered them an agreeable resting-place. Having dressed, I left the beach, and forcing my way through the dense undergrowth at the verge of the forest, I soon found myself beneath the cathedral vault of the interior, where the ground was soft and rotten, and where I sank at every step in deep vegetable mould. Underwood there was none, except here and there where some tempest had rent asunder the heavy foliage above, permitting air and light to reach the roots of the trees. A gray light hardly served to show objects in this cloistered solitude clearly enough to distinguish them; so, finding nothing to interest me further, I was about to return, when I perceived the branches agitated at one of

those spots where a sufficiency of light from above fostered a little undergrowth. My curiosity was aroused, and I approached the spot, first placing my rifle at full cock. I was scarcely prepared for the spectacle that presented itself. A gigantic serpent, more than twenty feet in length and almost as thick as my body, enveloped in its horrid convolutions the body of an araguato, which seemed to have been crushed to death. As soon as the hideous reptile discovered my presence, it raised its head to a level with my face and regarded me with a baleful gaze, while from its distended jaws played its tongue with lightning rapidity. Starting back a few paces—for I had come suddenly within a very few feet of the monster—I raised my rifle, and taking a steady aim into its mouth in such a direction that the bullet would pierce its palate and come out through the back of its skull, I pulled the trigger, at the same time running several yards to one side. Lucky for me that I did so, for the huge reptile in its death-struggles landed on the very spot I had occupied almost at the same moment that I sprang aside, and in its furious contortions it levelled the bushes right and left.

It was a horrible object, this huge snake, writhing, knotting, and contorting its bulky length into a hundred tortuous folds, the blood streaming from its head and throat and staining the bushes all around. With a pity akin to disgust I selected an instant

when it lay comparatively still, and with my heavy hunting-knife I dealt it a cut with all my strength, completely severing its head from its body.

All this time the araguatos, from amongst which no doubt the snake had selected its victim, kept up a busy rustling overhead, springing from one tree to another, and shielding themselves as much as possible from observation. They probably were highly excited at the proceedings taking place underneath, and enjoyed the summary justice executed on their arch-enemy.

This serpent was almost the largest I ever saw, being, as I have said, more than twenty feet in length and nearly a foot in diameter. It would have been a splendid object in a museum, but I revolted from the task of removing its skin, which was brilliantly varied with different shades.

I now retraced my steps to the camp, where I gave an account of my morning adventure. The Indians proceeded to the scene of the encounter, and soon returned, dragging behind them the glistening reptile, which presented a sickening appearance, covered with clotted blood and minus its head. After being inspected and commented on, it was consigned to the Apuré, where it speedily vanished from view. While sailing down the river shortly after, we observed several alligators busily occupied with some object in the water, which was probably the body of the snake.

The river now widened slightly, and flowed in a perfectly straight line, flanked as heretofore by the endless forest. The banks were thickly peopled with many species of birds, whose brilliant plumage and incessant croaking and chattering as they caught sight of the boat added life to the scene.

Continuing to descend the river, we shortly came upon an encampment on the right bank of Christianized Indians belonging to the Guamo tribe. A few palm-thatched huts composed the entire settlement, which occupied a comparatively open spot of about a couple of acres in extent, walled in on three sides by the forest, and bounded on the fourth by the Apuré. We did not land, but passed on, although the usually listless and indolent natives issued from their huts and made signs to us to come ashore.

Camping for the night upon a very extensive beach, we were deprived of the cover which the forest would have afforded if we had been able to clear a sufficient space for our hammocks in the dense vegetation. During the night we were exposed to a heavy deluge, which wet us to the skin and rendered us completely miserable. Thunder rolled overhead, vivid lightning flashed, lighting up with its blue flame the surrounding scenery, revealing the long extent of sandy beach, the turbid river, the bending palms weighed down by moisture. All was immediately engulfed in profound darkness, the moon being powerless behind the inky clouds.

Towards morning the weather cleared, and with our teeth chattering with cold, we drew near the wretched fire, which all the skill of the Indians could hardly induce to light. However, there is a remedy for most evils in this world; and when the warm sun ascended the sky, from which every trace of cloud had disappeared, we basked in his rays, our clothes sending up a thick vapour. These we spread on bushes to dry, and put on fresh suits, which, having been wrapped in some waterproof covering, had fortunately escaped the rain.

Feeling comfortable again, our next thoughts were directed to our breakfast, which, after some trouble with our bad fire, was at length got ready. We were within ten yards of the margin of the water, and while we were at breakfast a huge alligator swam towards us, with his forehead and the outline of his scaly back alone visible above the surface. Floating thus, he eyed us stonily, swimming slowly to and fro in front of the spot on which we were seated.

“Look at that disgusting brute,” said George; “he wants some breakfast, I think. He shall have it, but I don’t think he’ll like the flavour.”

So saying, he raised his rifle, and resting his left elbow on his knee, he drew a steady bead on the eye of the monster, which seemed to regard our proceedings with a sluggish curiosity.

At the report flap went the huge tail with a concussion like a pistol shot, and then commenced a

series of struggles at once horrible and disgusting. Finally the reptile subsided, and floated with the current, now and then slowly moving a leg or its tail above the water, as it was gradually carried down the stream out of our view.

“That fellow will not come uninvited to our breakfast again,” I remarked. “It is a pity we cannot clear the river of the brutes.”

“We will do our little best,” said George; “if we kill ten a day, that will clear off more than three hundred before we reach Esmeralda. For my part, I think it is a positive duty to shoot them. They are of no use, and are a source of continual dread and anxiety to travellers on all these rivers.”

As we advanced, the navigation of the river became more difficult, owing to the great number of forest trees which had been uprooted by the action of the water, and which were fixed obliquely here and there, their branchy tops or jagged arms projecting over the surface. At some spots so thickly were these obstacles distributed that it was with the greatest difficulty we could pick our way through them. But we were well repaid for this obstruction by coming on a thick bed of the magnificent *Victoria Regia* lily, which covered the surface of the river for a considerable distance. This gigantic plant presented a superb spectacle, its huge leaves measuring eighteen feet and its flowers three feet in circumference. The enormous flat leaves are furnished with a broad rim

of lighter green above and crimson below. The flowers consist of numerous petals, passing in alternate tints from white to rose and pink.

In some districts, particularly on the affluents of the Amazon, far removed from the influence of the sea air, this gorgeous plant grows in vast beds miles in extent, its numerous blossoms carpeting the surface of the water, and the leaves furnishing rafts over which many species of birds run as securely as on dry land. The flower-stalk measures an inch in diameter, and the calyx is thickly studded with elastic prickles three-fourths of an inch in length. When expanded, the four-leaved calyx measures a foot in diameter, but is almost concealed by the many-petalled corolla. When first unfolded this is white, but when exposed for a day it becomes of a uniform rose colour.

This lily diffuses a fragrant perfume, which in the huge beds that are sometimes to be met with is rather too strong to be agreeable. The rim of the leaf occasionally reaches the height of five inches and a half, the leaf itself attaining a diameter of between six and seven feet, and the blossoms a circumference of nearly four feet.

Sometimes a kind of beetle infests the plant and commits great devastation; but notwithstanding the ravages of the pest, the forest streams present a splendid growth of this great lily, whose blossoms rear their flowered crests above the surface, edging the

watery vistas, the quiet home of many kinds of water-fowl.

Round the island of Carizales great numbers of birds frequented the shores, some wading solemnly in the shallow water near the banks, and others pluming themselves in more retired situations, as if they had abandoned for the moment their almost incessant search for prey.

At the Vuelta del Basilio my attention was attracted by plaintive cries proceeding from the tops of a group of tall trees. On looking up I observed some monkeys of a species which I had not yet seen. Anxious to examine them more closely, I landed, and in the interests of science I shot one which presented a tempting mark, waving to and fro on the extremity of a branch. I was not long in recognizing the animal as belonging to the sub-family of the *Cebinae*, or weepers, from the backward protrusion of the skull, the broad flat muzzle, and long limbs, which I noticed were furnished with hands, on the fingers of which were nails somewhat resembling those of a human being. The tail is well covered with hair, except on the tip, which, from being prehensile, was denuded of its hair by friction against the branches. The activity of their movements is extraordinary. At the report of my rifle the whole troop, numbering probably several hundreds, vanished as if by magic, springing with bird-like ease from tree to tree, all the while giving vent

to their sad cries, which have procured for the creatures the name of weepers. I observed that they restricted themselves to the very summits of the trees, never venturing on the lower branches, from fear, as the Indians assured me, of snakes, which were frequently coiled round the limbs nearer the ground.

The specimen which I procured had its face fringed by long hairs, which grew also on a patch on the top of the head. I once shot a monkey that had two tufts of hair, so arranged as to represent horns, and it is, I believe, from this circumstance called the horned monkey.

The weeper is frugivorous, but does not disdain insects, eggs, or even birds, if by good luck it can lay its claws on one. Humboldt mentions meeting with numbers of this species in his travels. He says: "They were recognizable by their black beards and their gloomy, sullen air, and were walking slowly on the horizontal branches of a genipa. The capuchin monkeys are singularly fond of the Brazil nuts, and the noise made by the seeds when the fruit is shaken as it falls from the tree excites the appetite of these animals in the greatest degree. The spherical pericarp of these nuts is perforated at the summit, but not dehiscent; the upper and swelled part of the columella forms, according to M. Knalsh, a sort of inner cover, but it seldom opens of itself. Many seeds, from the decomposition of the oil contained in the

cotyledons, lose the faculty of germination before the rainy season, during which the ligneous integument of the pericarp opens by the effect of putrefaction. A tale is very current on the banks of the Lower Orinoco that the capuchin and cacafo monkeys place themselves in a circle, and by striking the shell with a stone succeed in opening it, so as to take out the triangular nut. This operation must, however, be impossible on account of the extreme hardness and thickness of the pericarp." *

Leaving the scene of this inquiry, I was about to throw the body of the weeper into the river, after having entered its salient characteristics in my notebook, when the Indians raised a vehement protest against such a waste of excellent food. Disgusted and amused, I surrendered the animal to their custody, when they carefully placed it under some palm leaves at the bottom of the boat, and once more we continued our journey.

* Humboldt's "Travels."

CHAPTER VIII.

WE OBSERVE MONKEYS ASLEEP—THE DOUROCOULI VOCIFERANS—MARMOSET AND PARROT—ENORMOUS TREE—LAND FOR DINNER—NETWORK OF LIANAS—DROWSY INFLUENCES—FALL ASLEEP—SUDDEN ALARM—PECCARIES—WHAT LED TO THE ATTACK—INDIAN GLUTTONY—NOTES ON THE PECCARY—DISAGREEABLE FLAVOUR OF THE FLESH—MAY BE OBTAINED—VAST NUMBERS OF BIRDS AT THE CANO DEL MANITI—HIEROGLYPHICS ON THE ROCKS—SUNSET—DRYING THE PECCARY MEAT—ALLIGATORS AND DOLPHINS—VUELTA DEL PALMITO—HEAR THE SCREAM OF THE COUGAR—IRRITATION CAUSED BY THE MOSQUITOES—LEAVE CAMP BEFORE DAY—SUNRISE—REAWAKENING OF ANIMAL LIFE IN THE FOREST—EXTRAORDINARY TREE—BEAUTIFUL NATURAL FLOWER-BASKET—SUSPICIONS AROUSED—DOGGED BY A COUGAR—UNPLEASANT SITUATION—ATTEMPT TO PRECIPITATE A CRISIS—THE COUGAR INVISIBLE—LOSE MY WAY—A STRATAGEM—DEATH OF THE COUGAR—HEAR DISTANT SIGNALS—ARRIVAL OF GEORGE AND THE INDIANS—NOTES ON THE COUGAR.



THIS region seemed peculiarly rich in the various species of monkeys common to tropical America. An exclamation from George directed my attention to several of a strange kind, which we soon perceived to be asleep. Their faces present an owl-like appearance, which is heightened by the roundness of the head. The eyes are very large, and above each eye is a triangular patch of a white colour. The extremity of the tail is black. Their ears are small and rounded, and are almost invisible in the growth of hair which surrounds them.

From finding them asleep, as well as from the size of the eye, we inferred them to be nocturnal in their habits; but during the rest of our journey we had not again the opportunity of examining these interesting creatures, which made me regret the more not having procured a specimen while it was in my power.

This animal seems to be mentioned by Humboldt as the dourocouli (*D. vociferans*), but of its habits little is known. It belongs to the order of Nyctipithecinae, or night-apes. We also remarked on a tree near the bank of the Apuré a couple of marmoset monkeys (*Jacchus vulgaris*), a kind closely related to those of the Cebinae already described. This pretty little creature, not much larger than a water-rat, would seem, from the conformation of its teeth, to be adapted for an animal diet; and, in fact, that this is the case we had ocular proof, as we noticed one of these creatures cautiously stealing up the trunk of the tree, his eyes fixed on a small parrot which seemed too intent on its own gaudy plumage, and on some seeds which it picked from time to time, to pay much attention to the movements of the monkey, which doubtless it despised too much to regard. But it presently had reason to regret its want of caution; for the marmoset having reached within springing distance, launched himself towards the unwary bird, and cleverly seizing it with one paw, he utilized the other in catching hold of a branch, on which he placed himself at his ease, and

employed himself in tearing asunder his wretched victim, allowing the feathers to float on the wind while he devoured the flesh.

Shortly after this incident, we directed the boat towards an open spot on the bank, in order to take our mid-day meal. Close by, an enormous tree leaned forward from a rising ground almost horizontally over the river, its branches hung with pendent streamers, giving it a peculiarly airy and graceful appearance. The huge trunk furnished a convenient site for beautiful orchids and immense ferns, which bent downwards towards the water, forming a leafy wall that enclosed a secluded cove, into which we shot the boat.

The open space led back from the river towards the gloomy recesses of the forest, dim with a green darkness, against which, in bold relief, stood a palm with a crest resembling the fantastic feather headdress of an Indian chief. On all sides hung lianas and parasitic plants like flowery ropes, connecting the earth with the topmost branches, and forming a fairy-like scene of intricate interlacement, in which the eye loved to lose itself, while the imagination suggested still fairer scenes concealed beyond the verdant drapery.

Above the fragrant forest extended a sky of deepest blue, cloudless and aglow with sunlight. The river flowed past with a sleepy sound, as if enervated by the debilitating heat, while the air was filled with a



subdued hum of insect life, which oppressed me with such drowsiness that, after swallowing our simple dinner, I stretched myself beneath the palm-thatched cabin in the boat and quickly lost all consciousness.

I could not have been long asleep when I was roused by shouts accompanied by shots on the bank. Looking from under my cover, I saw George and the Indians rushing down the bank towards the boat, into which they jumped hastily, at the same moment seizing the oars and pushing off.

There was no need to inquire the cause of this extraordinary commotion, for I perceived at the same moment a crowd of small pig-like animals running quickly towards the river, and apparently in full pursuit of my companions. A noise like the snapping of castanets was made by these animals, together with a shrill grunting, that left me no longer in doubt as to the species they belonged to. They were peccaries, the wild hogs of the South American forests. We were now safe, floating about fifty yards from the shore, and we lay on our oars watching the furious little beasts as they champed their tusks till the foam flew, regarding us with vengeful eyes from the verge of the water. We quickly brought our rifles to bear on the vicious drove, and "pumped" the cartridges into the barrels as fast as we could pull trigger.

So furious a fusilade speedily put the drove to flight, leaving fifteen of their number dead and dying on the bank. The Indians were delighted at the

prospect of a feast, and put back the boat, when the lovely verdure of the sloping shore was speedily stained with the blood of the peccaries, and disfigured with their offal, which was flung carelessly aside.

It seemed that George was lying near the fire, finishing his dinner, when a solitary peccary broke cover within a few yards of the party. One of the Indians, seizing a spear, threw it with such good aim that it transfixed the animal, which speedily rallied its comrades to its aid by its shrill squeals. The remainder of the drove charged the camp without a moment's hesitation, and put George and the Indians to flight, just as I saw them when roused by their cries.

Notwithstanding that our boatmen had already eaten a pretty fair supply of food, they could not resist the temptation of roasting sundry pieces of the fresh meat, and they continued this pleasing occupation long enough to enable me to make some observations on the remarkable animals which had so suddenly obtruded themselves on our attention.

The peccary (*Dicotyles tajacu*) belongs to the subfamily of the *Dicotylinae*, and in a general sense bears a strong resemblance to a small pig, such as may be seen every day in our farm-yards. The chief distinction consists in the musk-smelling gland which is placed over the loins of the creature. This animal has an extensive range, one species being found in the forests of Texas and other Southern States of

North America, and in Mexico; and the only other species known roams through the vast forest region of the Orinoco and the Amazon with their many affluents. The peccary is a very gregarious animal, often travelling in bands containing several hundreds; and as I have already pointed out, it is clannish in its habits, fighting to the death in defence of its brethren or young. Its sharp tusks make it a formidable antagonist independently of its numbers; and it evinces a revengeful spirit, which causes it to spend hours, and even days, it is said, beneath the tree into which it has forced the hunter, whether human or animal, to take refuge. It prefers the marshy forests along low-lying river valleys, where the soft rich soil is easily turned up by it in search of bulbs, worms, or insects. It greedily devours snakes, and is of considerable use in helping to clear the forests of these dreadful pests.

The musky flavour of the peccary prevents its being much esteemed by civilized palates; but this evil may be to some extent remedied by removing the gland that contains the offensive secretion immediately after death, and before it has had time to be diffused through the body. This gland emits a peculiarly disgusting odour whenever the animal becomes excited.

The peccary produces two young at a birth, generally in the hollow of some decayed tree, which it has previously well lined with dry leaves or grass. It has

a hunched appearance when standing at rest, as if it were gathered together from the cold; but it is an exceedingly active animal, and can run with great swiftness, as well as leap to a considerable distance.

Our Indians having at length satiated their gluttonous propensities, we embarked, and again were descending the Apuré. Towards evening we passed the mouth of the Cano del Maniti, where we were amazed at the immense numbers of birds which lined the shores, including flamingoes, herons, roseate spoonbills, and various other water-fowl. These evinced little fear of the boat, probably never having been disturbed by man, though the croaking they made at the sight of us grated harshly on our ears, and added to the wildness of the scenery.

We were informed by our Indians that hieroglyphics were engraved on the rocky walls of some caverns in the neighbourhood. These we visited, but from our ignorance of the ancient traditions of the Indians, and of the meaning of the signs employed by them for the conveyance of their ideas, we failed to make any historical discoveries in our researches.

The sun was now about to plunge below the horizon, so, taking advantage of the remaining daylight, we landed and encamped for the night. The enormous fires made by the Indians for the purpose of thoroughly drying the peccary meat glared on the bosom of the river as soon as the failing twilight was overpowered by the red reflection. In the water we

observed numerous alligators and dolphins, which seemed to be fascinated by the firelight, or, perhaps in the case of the former, attracted by the smell of blood. This camping-place was known as the *Vuelta del Palmito*, and from a grove of these trees near the camp we heard, during the night, the snarling screams of the cougar, which echoed harshly through the woods and curdled the blood in our veins as we lay uneasily in our hammocks. I was not aware then that before a day had elapsed I would have made a much closer acquaintance with the lion of the American continent. It happened thus:—

Being feverishly irritated by the unceasing attacks of the mosquitoes, I rose a little before day and strolled along the river bank, enjoying the early morning air, which, for the latitude, was fresh and inspiring. I presently left the beach and wandered parallel to it, down a kind of pathway formed by two high rows of trees which enclosed me on both sides. This path seemed to have been the course of some periodical stream, or of one which had not long before changed its channel.

Day was streaking the eastern sky with lines of red, ever creeping higher and higher, and throwing an ambitious glow towards the zenith. Stars were dying out, and even the moon looked wan and pale, as if fatigued by keeping the watches of the night. Birds were already astir—macaws held noisy alter-

cations in the impenetrable foliage, planning their day's operations; toucans were looking blear-eyed and stupid, as if day had come altogether too soon, and that it really was too much to expect them to get up at such an unearthly hour; flamingoes were beginning to wander along the creeks and lagoons, or stood motionless on the shores of the Apuré, waiting with stolid patience until some unwary fish ventured within striking distance.

It promised to be a lovely day, and lightheartedly I whistled to the birds overhead, which, in their surprise at such a liberty, shook down showers of dew from the surcharged branches, thus literally throwing cold water on my advances towards making their acquaintance.

The pathway which I was following now branched off in several directions, one leading towards the interior of the forest, and the others either towards the Apuré or straight forward. I was about to take the way which led to the river, when my attention was attracted by seeing an extraordinary tree growing by the track leading towards the forest. The stem of this tree was supported by the roots, from which the earth seemed to have subsided or to have been carefully removed. The trunk appeared to be formed by the welding together of these roots at their upper extremities; below this point they formed a cage-like enclosure, within which grew many pretty plants and ferns, which leaned forward from their prison,

hanging gracefully round the interlacing roots—the whole resembling a novel and very beautiful flower-basket.

I admired this remarkable natural production for some time, and seeing another a little in advance, I continued my walk in order to inspect it, hoping to find some new piece of nature's handiwork prepared for my special edification.

The trees here closed in on the path, which indeed now lost all semblance to one, and merged gradually into the forest.

While thinking of retracing my steps, I happened to look round, and was just in time to see that something had withdrawn itself among the thick growth of underwood and plants about fifty yards behind me. I was much astonished. At first I thought it might be one of the Indians, whom George had sent after me to bring me back to camp for breakfast; but if it were so, why did he conceal himself?

I was determined to unravel the mystery. Cocking my rifle, I walked quickly up to the bushes, and pushing them aside, forced my way towards the centre of the thicket. Nothing was visible, and I was about to lay it to the charge of an araguato which had somehow found its way to the earth, or to an optical illusion, when I heard a purr-like sigh from behind the shelter of some wild cacao-bushes a little to the left. In front of these was an open space where owing to something in the nature of the

ground, the growth of weeds and grass was much thinner than elsewhere. If I had really seen an animal on the spot I now occupied, it must have crossed this open space unperceived while I was looking for it down among the brushwood. Upon this spot, which was soft and greasy, as if it had been the bed of a small pond, its footmarks would be visible, and I accordingly examined it. I at once detected the round cat-like track of a cougar.

I now recollected having heard of the strange habit of dogging travellers possessed by this animal—how it will follow them day after day, putting its paws on their footmarks, and inspiring them with a consciousness of the grim presence which can rarely be detected. Without a doubt I was now the victim of this weird practical joke!

I resolved to precipitate a crisis, be the result what it might, and with this intention I sprang through the bushes, hoping to find myself face to face with my unseen enemy. But I found nothing except the unmistakable impress of its paws in the earth. I thought, indeed, that the long grass at the farther edge of the thicket waved as if some animal were passing stealthily through it, but this ceased almost as soon as I observed it, and again all was still, except the *tssh—tssh—toucan* of these birds overhead, or the howling of the monkeys which heralded the rising of the sun.

Filled with a strange feeling partaking of awe, I

turned to retrace my way to the camp. For a little time I walked boldly forward, until I came to the edge of a deep gloomy stream which ran below high banks, across which from side to side met the dismal foliage of a kind of laurel (*Laurus persea*), throwing inky shadows on the water below. It seemed a place which a sense of its own repulsiveness had banished from the light of day.

I quickly recollected that I had not seen this dark watercourse before. I therefore must have mistaken the path in my hurry. "No matter," thought I, "I will return to where I saw the footprints of the cougar, and be more careful in marking the direction."

I faced round, and my blood ran cold as I clearly saw some long ferns and creepers wave as though they closed behind the passage of an animal through them. I shouted loudly, I scarcely knew why, and ran quickly forward; but, as before, I could see nothing except the tracks of the lurking monster, where he had hidden himself as he watched me with greedy eyes.

I now felt that I was in a very unpleasant position—not so much because I was dogged by the cowardly brute as that I greatly feared myself lost in the forest. If I took a wrong direction, I might never see my companions again, and I shuddered to think of what my fate would be, lost in the interminable woods, and followed, as if by an evil spirit,

by the prowling beast which would probably spring on me in the darkness.

Carefully following my backward tracks, I now noticed that each of them was covered with the round impression of a paw, showing how faithfully I had been stalked by my invisible hunter. But I could not catch sight of the animal itself.

A stratagem now suggested itself to me. I had arrived at the open space where I first noticed its footmarks. I would cross this and conceal myself among the bushes beyond. I could thus see the cougar as it crossed the intervening spot, and I trusted to my rifle to arrange the rest.

I soon reached a suitable place which commanded the desired view. Here I was concealed by the tall bushes which rose above my head; and turning quickly round, I awaited the *dénouement* with breathless interest.

My patience was not long tried: first the tall grass beyond the open waved slightly, then a red paw separated the stalks, and was followed by a long reddish-coloured beast with round cat-like head, which crept forward swiftly and yet stealthily on my tracks.

Drawing my breath tightly, I raised my rifle, and taking a steady aim between the eyes of the sneaking brute, slowly pressed the trigger. I hastily looked under the smoke which hung among the damp dense bushes, expecting to find the cougar charging. But

the bullet had sped truly, and on the thin weeds and grass lay stretched the cruel, treacherous beast, incapable of further mischief.

I now heard distant shots and shouts. These I answered from time to time, and in about half an hour I was surrounded by the Indians, and receiving George's congratulations on the success of my adventure. The cougar was skinned; and hungry and happy I returned to the encampment, where I made a hearty breakfast, and fought my battle over again for the benefit of my companion and the boatmen. The latter corroborated my account of the manner in which the brute had dogged me from place to place, by recounting similar instances which had come within their own knowledge.

The puma or cougar (*Felis concolor*), or, as he is sometimes called, the American lion, is almost of a uniform colour all over, being but faintly marked by a somewhat darker shade of the same colour as the rest of his body, which is of a russet or rufous hue. He, like his congener the jaguar, climbs the tallest trees with such activity that his claws can be heard crackling along the bark as he swiftly flies upwards. His limbs are very muscular, and with a single pat of his paw he can stretch out a peccary, or even a deer, which he springs on from an overhanging branch or bank.

The cougar has a very long tail, which it switches from side to side after the manner of the domestic

cat, and possesses grayish eyes, which have a cold, fierce expression. The skin is not very valuable, the hairs being rather too thinly distributed, and it lacks the beautiful markings which make the furs of other animals of the kind so valuable.

CHAPTER IX.

GEORGE'S ADVENTURE—CARIBE FISHES—DIMINUTION OF THE RIVER—ENTER THE ORINOCO—VAST EXTENT OF WATER—WAVES—HORIZON GIRDLED BY FORESTS—PUNTA CURIQUIMA—MOUNTAINS OF ENCARAMADA—EASY JOURNEY—RIO CABULLARE—MOONLIT FOREST AND BEACH—ALLIGATORS—FEWER BIRDS ON THE ORINOCO THAN ON THE APURE—HIEROGLYPHICS—THE MISSION OF URUANA—HARVEST OF TURTLES' EGGS—THE ARRAU OR TORTOISE—THE TEREKAY—TURTLES' NESTS—THE RIO ARAUCA—PRODIGIOUS NUMBERS OF BIRDS—HERON-SHOOTING—MOUNTAIN OF URUANA—HIEROGLYPHICS—STRONG CURRENT—LAKE OR LAGOON OF CAPANAPARO—ALLIGATORS—CAPYBARAS—A TAPIR-HUNT—A JAGUAR HUNTING ON HIS OWN ACCOUNT—ESCAPE OF THE TAPIR—DEATH OF THE JAGUAR—CONTINUE OUR JOURNEY—TANGLED VEGETATION—PENDULOUS NESTS OF THE ORIOLE—INUNDATED FOREST—BEAUTIFUL SCENES—PORPOISES—CAMP-FIRE—DEMON-LIKE TABLEAU.



GEORGE had had a morning adventure too, which was quite as unpleasant as mine in its way.

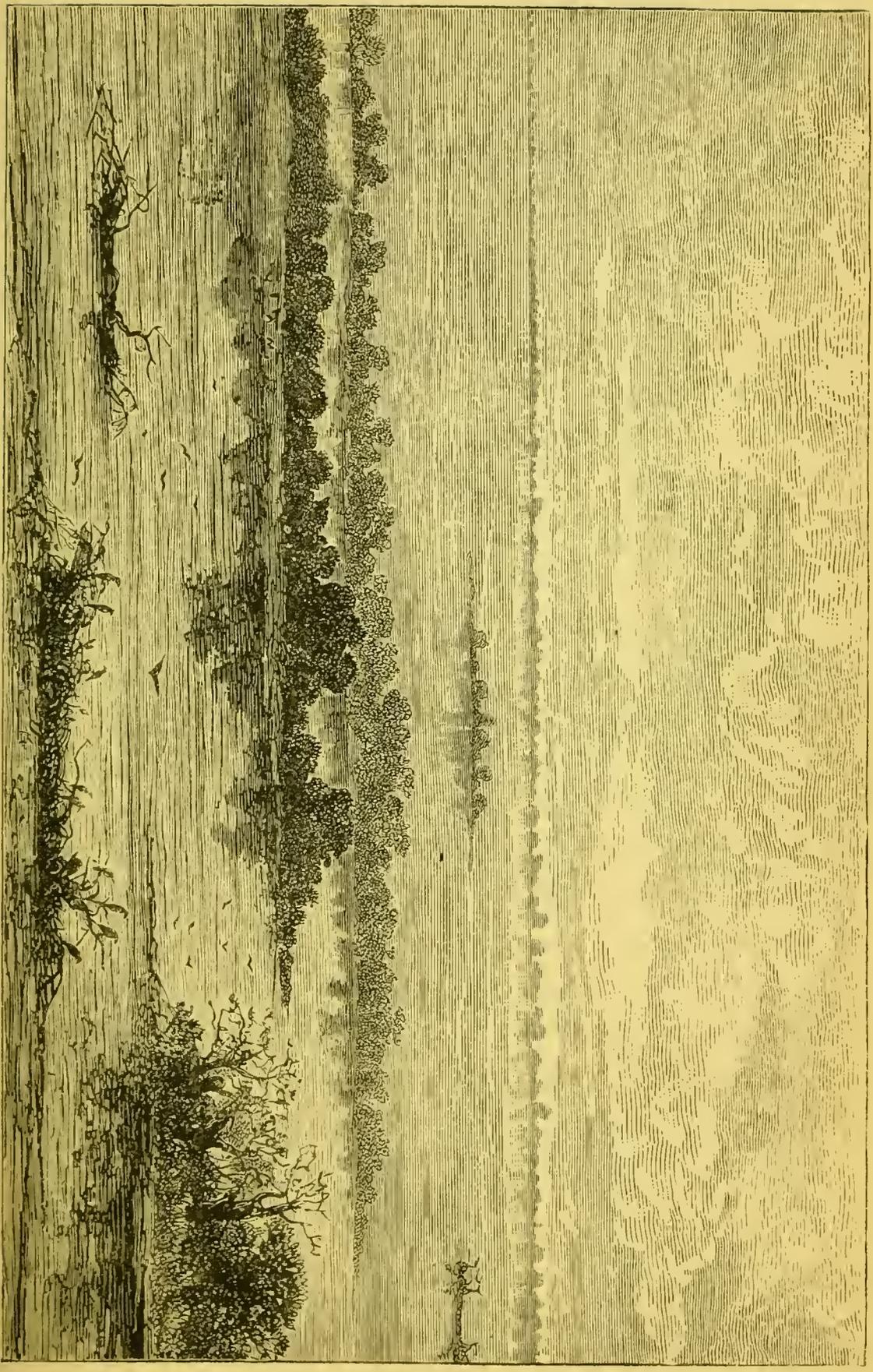
Before breakfast he plunged into the river, having made the Indians beat the water with branches to scare the alligators, and keep watch to warn him of their approach. Scarcely had he swum ten yards from the bank, when he was attacked by numerous small fishes, which tore pieces of flesh from his legs and body with their sharp teeth.

Screaming with pain and terror, George got ashore as fast as he could swim, and when he landed, pre-

sented a curious spectacle, with the blood streaming from the bites which the savage little creatures had inflicted on various parts of his body. These pests are the Caribe fishes, and are common enough in the Apuré, though this was our sole experience of them.

The waters of the Apuré now seemed to have decreased in volume, our lancha touching the bottom several times on the fords or shallows. Rounding a bend, we suddenly shot from the Apuré on to the broad bosom of the Orinoco. Before us extended a waste of waters almost as far as the eye could see. A fresh breeze blew up the river, and encountering the strong current, raised a chopping sea, from which we were glad to escape by running along close to the shore. We hoisted our sail, and under the influence of the wind we sped merrily up the river, which here was nearly four miles broad, and was fringed by bare and very extensive beaches. The horizon was encircled by forests which closed in the view on all sides, suggesting an idea of sublimity and vastness. Here and there islands densely covered with underwood dotted the bosom of the stream; and floating with the current, or eddying between the islands, we observed several huge tree-trunks torn by the river from their hold in the banks.

We shortly passed a long rocky promontory, called by the natives Punta Curiquima. In the distance, rising beyond the waste of waters which seemed to



VIEW ON THE ORINOCO.

wash their shores, we observed the mountains of Encaramada, which extended from west to east across the horizon.

This day's journey was not a fatiguing one, as we had nothing to do but lie passive, admiring the scenery, while the boat forged ahead before the wind, the waves cresting in foam against the bows and sweeping past the sides with a gurgling sound.

Towards evening we landed above the mouth of the Rio Cabullare and encamped by the verge of the forest, over which, as we lay in our hammocks, the moon rose and lighted up the wild scene with her silver beams. The beach stretched away up and down the river as far as we could see, shining white in the moonlight; numerous dark lines which marked it at intervals—some in motion, others at rest—indicated the presence of alligators, which seemed as plentiful on the Orinoco as on the Apuré. There was a falling off, however, in the vast numbers of birds which had given life to the shores of that river.

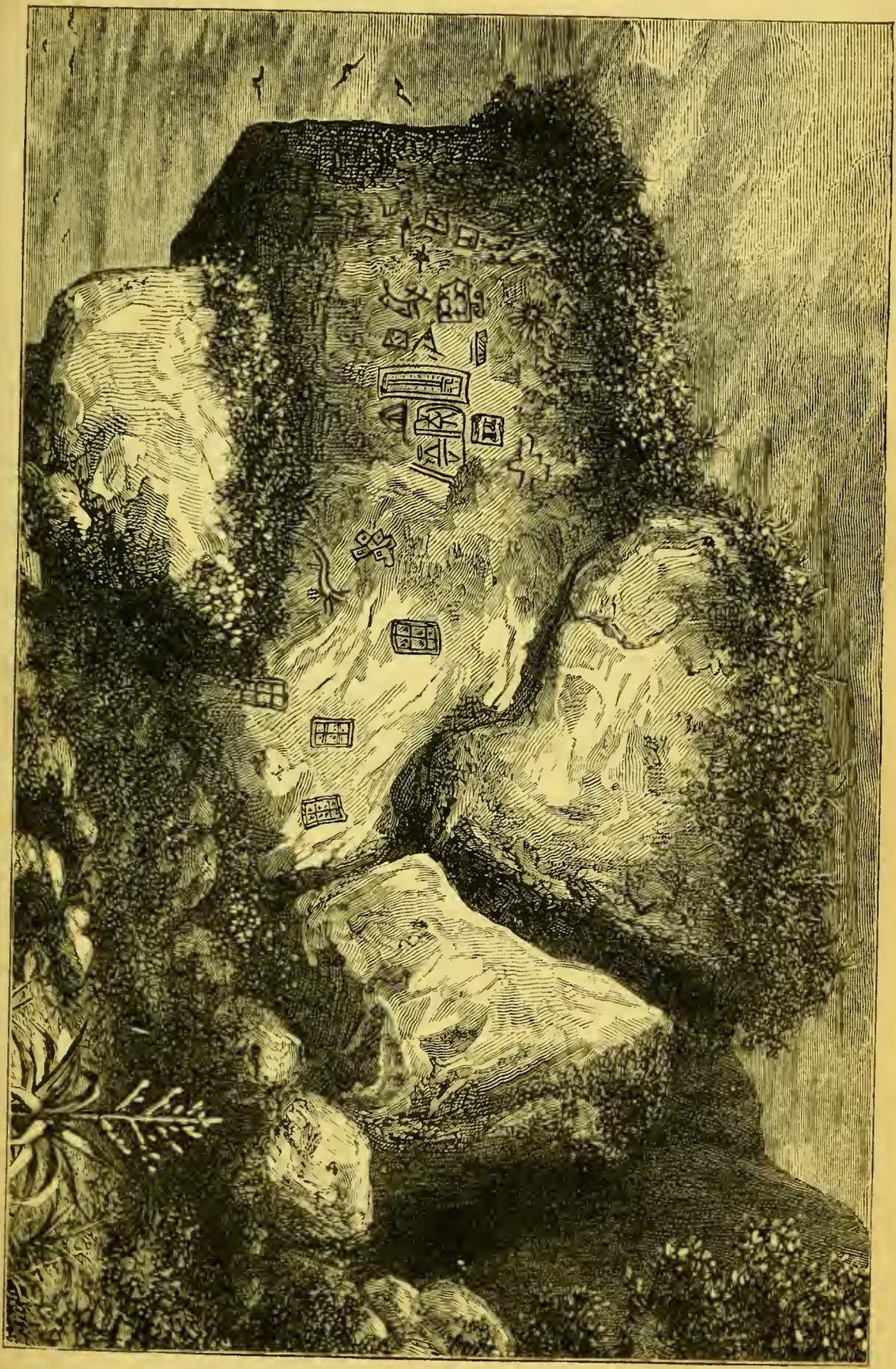
The next morning we sailed along the base of the mountains of Encaramada, and noticed hieroglyphics carved on the rocks at a considerable height above the level of the water. We were much puzzled to account for these marks, as they are now quite inaccessible; and if they were really made by the natives of some long-past age, they must either have reached the spot by the aid of scaffolding, or the river

must in those days have possessed many times its present volume.

Shortly after this we witnessed an interesting scene on our arrival at the mission of Uruana. On the beach were numbers of Indians, accompanied by their missionary, engaged in collecting their annual harvest of turtles' eggs. The sands were filled by the eggs to a depth of several feet, the turtles leaving them to be hatched by the heat of the sun. These strange creatures collect in vast numbers between the mouth of the Apuré and the falls of the Orinoco; and it is at several localities between these points that the Indians meet in order to collect the eggs.

The arrau or tortoise which lays the eggs so highly valued is the large fresh-water species. There is another kind found above the cataracts of the Orinoco; but this is smaller, and its eggs are sought after even more eagerly by the Indians than those of the arrau. The latter is readily distinguished by its webbed feet; flat head, which is deeply channelled between the eyes; and by its shell being composed of five plates in the centre, eight on the sides, and twenty-four marginal plates. This creature is of a muddy gray colour above, changing to orange beneath. Its eggs are about the size of those of a bantam fowl, and are coated exteriorly with a kind of limy crust. The arrau or tortuga, when full grown, will turn the scale at about fifty pounds.

The other kind of tortoise is called the terekay,



HIEROGLYPHICS NEAR ENCARAMADA.

and is of a different colour, being an olive green, with spots of red and yellow on its cranium. Under the chin there is a curious appendage covered with sharp spines.

In February (when the rivers are lowest) these animals issue from the water to deposit their eggs in the sands. In March the proceedings are at their height: at this time thousands of them line the shores, busily engaged in excavating the holes which are to serve as nests. These holes are a yard in diameter and two feet deep. The abundance of the harvest is ascertained by thrusting a pole into the sands, when the depth of the egg deposit becomes at once apparent.

The harvest is ready for gathering in April, at which time the eggs are collected and thrown into a large trough filled with water. In this they are stirred up with sticks until the yolk becomes fit for boiling: from this a very excellent oil is obtained for burning in the lamps in the churches.

After inspecting the egg-fields we again started, and shortly arrived at the mouth of the Rio Arauca, where the shores seemed literally alive with prodigious numbers of birds.

On a huge partially submerged log were several herons, which, at the distance of two hundred yards, offered tempting marks, as they were relieved against the darker coloured water behind. George selected one, and I another; and at the reports both our

victims fell backwards from the log, while the others flew off uttering harsh cries. Steering the boat towards the spot, we picked them both up, and found them to be a kind which we had not seen before.

Continuing our journey, we sailed past the mountain of Uruana, which seems to be built up of separate blocks of granite, the interstices between which often resemble caverns, where we were informed by the Indians that hieroglyphics are carved on the rocks.

The breadth of the Orinoco at this spot, at a distance of six hundred and seventy miles from the sea, was about two and three-quarter miles. Here we were exposed to a strong current, which made the ascent of the stream extremely laborious, notwithstanding that we were helped by the breeze. Whenever the water was sufficiently shallow, two of the Indians poled the boat forward, while the other two worked at the oars.

We landed on the beach between the river and the lake of Capanaparo, where the great numbers of alligators attracted our attention. No doubt these animals found the locality particularly convenient, as they had the lake on one side and the Orinoco on the other, in each of which they could search for their prey.

Leaving the Indians to prepare camp, George and I strolled backwards from the river towards the lake in search of some game. We soon perceived a herd of capybaras, but not relishing these creatures much, we allowed them to escape unmolested.

While breaking our way through the matted growth of reeds which lined the soft shores of the lake we heard a cough-like snort, followed by a heavy splash, as of some animal taking to the water. Quickly getting on the edge of the lake, we were in time to see the bubbles still floating where the beast had plunged in; while the widening circles which expanded in all directions, causing the huge lilies to rock upon the surface, showed that it had been a large animal.

“A tapir, Frank!” whispered George; “keep quiet, and perhaps he’ll show soon!”

We watched the water for some time, keeping a sharp look-out along the banks, and especially by the edges of one or two small reed-covered islands which seemed to float upon the lake about one hundred yards from the shore. But we could detect no traces of the animal’s presence in either direction.

The vice of selfishness is not unknown in the woods any more than it is in civilized life; for, observing a flock of a kind of duck rise from behind a promontory which jutted into the lake at some distance, I desired George to stay where he was, and feeling sure that the alarm of the ducks was occasioned by the sudden appearance of the tapir in their neighbourhood, I started along the banks of the lake, and soon reached a spot which gave me a view of a sort of little bay, in which I at once observed the tapir just as he was about to land.

He had not seen me as yet, and, with beating heart

I knelt on one knee behind some rough sedge, watching the animal as he leisurely walked towards me. When about thirty yards separated us, throwing up my rifle I took a quick aim at his forehead—when, for the first time during the expedition, my rifle missed fire! The wary beast's quick ear caught the unwonted sound of the hammer on the striker, and before I could throw down the lever to put in a fresh cartridge, he had plunged aside from the path, and I could hear him crashing through the reeds towards the impenetrable forest which bordered the reed-beds round the lake shores.

I started in pursuit, and running on the track made by the tapir where the reeds had been forced aside or broken down, I was able to keep on pretty good terms with the game, which I could plainly hear, though I could not see it, a little in advance.

The animal had now all but gained the shelter of the forest. Once in that, he would be lost; so I redoubled my exertions to overtake him. As I increased my pace, crashing through the tall sedges, I suddenly heard a smothered roar, immediately followed by a squealing cry, which I at once recognized as proceeding from the tapir. What could it mean? The explanation soon presented itself.

Running towards me, as if he had forgotten my existence, was the object of my pursuit, bearing between his shoulders a magnificent jaguar, which was savagely tearing the tapir's neck and throat with

both teeth and claws, while the blood poured in streams down the animal's fore quarters. No doubt the tapir had run beneath a branch on which the jaguar had been stretched in wait for just such an opportunity, and in his terror he forgot that following on his tracks was an enemy just as formidable.

I was so astonished at the strange spectacle that I never thought of shooting, until, seeing me standing full in his path, the tapir turned quickly aside through the reeds, and made for the shore of the lake, which was hardly fifty yards distant. I followed, keeping my rifle ready; and not allowing the steed and its rider to leave my sight, I came on the bank just as the tapir plunged into deep water.

Although the jaguar is an expert swimmer, and does not object to take to water on his own account, he cannot compare in this respect with the tapir, which is possessed of the faculty of staying beneath the surface for several minutes at a time. The jaguar, therefore, at once relinquished his hold on his victim, and put round to the shore.

Here his eyes first fell on me; and that the recognition of my presence was anything but agreeable to him was evident from the sudden start, and the green light which I could detect kindling in his eye. However, while he swam was my opportunity. Hardly ten yards intervened between us, when drawing a bead on his head as he swiftly cleft the water, I pulled the trigger, aiming between the eye and the

ear. My aim was true, for without a cry or even a splash, life seemed to become extinct; and slowly settling in the water, I could see the handsome beast gradually sinking until he rested on the bottom, fully twelve feet below me.

George, who had followed very soon, now rejoined me, and listened with astonishment to my account of what had taken place. He could not repress his dissatisfaction at the fatality which seemed to single me out for all the stirring adventures of the journey, while he was destined to achieve nothing more exciting than the destruction of a few alligators or chiguies.

We soon raised the jaguar to the surface with the aid of a liana twisted into a noose at one end: this, after some manœuvring, we managed to secure round one of the beast's legs, and hauling upon our rope, we gently brought him to the bank. We now had had some practice in skinning game, and our busy knives soon stripped the beast of his painted hide, which we carried on our shoulders to the camp.

The astonishment of our Indians was extreme when they saw us return bearing on our shoulders the evidence of a successful encounter with a jaguar. These people very justly stand in considerable awe of the jaguar, and we rose much in their estimation from the apparent nonchalance with which we sallied forth occasionally and returned to camp, killing in the interval one or more of these ferocious and formidable animals.

The curing of the skin occupied us for some time,

and having at length accomplished this as well as our circumstances would permit, we embarked, and hoisting our sail to the afternoon breeze, we shot along by the banks, from which a world of trees, clad with lianas and interlaced with all kinds of brilliant creepers in inextricable confusion, leaned forward over the water, as if about to roll down upon us from the sheer weight of their own luxuriant richness.

Here the river banks formed a succession of sweeping bays, separated one from the other by projecting promontories. Some of these were bare, and covered with alligators and great numbers of birds; others were clad with a dense growth of sauso bushes, out of which rose an occasional palm, airy streamers depending from the branches and waving gracefully to and fro in the wind. At one spot where the bushes leaned forward over the river we observed the pendulous nests of a kind of oriole, which in this safe position were secure from the attacks of monkeys or other predatory creatures. The busy occupants flew about chattering when they noticed us passing close by their nests; but seeing that we did not molest them, they perched on the branches and regarded our progress past their home with somewhat less uneasiness.

With a view to saving the detour made by the river in rounding a great bend, the Indians shot the boat through the forest, which at this point was submerged. And now a beautiful scene was unfolded to

our wondering eyes. Vast corridors floored with water opened before us, separated one from the other by the long rows of colossal trunks upholding the green arches above. Some of these verdant aisles were curtained off by festoons of brilliant drapery, through rents in which the eye could penetrate the vistas of rushing waters, waving fronds, and bright flowers, which perpetually unfolded themselves as we advanced. The tops of browneas and arborescent ferns seemed like islets of flowers resting on the surface of the water; while from tree to tree stretched a cordage of lianas hung with mosses of the most vivid green, the tree-trunks here and there sparkling with a gem-like orchid, or concealed beneath a feathery and tremulous growth of graceful ferns bending downwards and dipping their points in the stream.

Here and there a giant of the forest had yielded to the influence of a hurricane, and lay prone, but not vanquished even in decay. Its myriad foster-children, the lianas, evinced their gratitude to their decrepit parent by supporting him in his declining years; and held by their tough cordage, the venerable monarch lay in their supporting embrace, giving birth to thousands of bright plants on his massive trunk and wide-spreading arms. From these, curtains of pendulous creepers hung downwards and disappeared in the water, attached to the bushes submerged in the depths below.

Wherever an opening had been made in the leafy roof a flood of sunlight streamed down into the interior of the forest, glancing on the waters and paving many a vista with burnished gold, glowing on the flowers and painting the rich crests of the fan-palms or the ferns a more vivid green. Bright-plumaged birds glanced among the foliage, or vanished down the far-reaching perspective of the tree-trunks; and here and there we met bands of porpoises sporting in their novel abode, as if they thoroughly enjoyed the change with which fortune had favoured them. And, pervading all, a solemn music filled the air—the noise of the rushing flood and the whisperings of the breeze along the roof of the forest.

I regretted leaving these wild arcades when the boat at length emerged from their shadows and ploughed its way along the broad expanse of the open river.

As night was approaching, we directed our course towards the first spot suitable for our camp, and landed. Soon a fire shed its ruddy light along the darkening shore, and the appetizing odour of roast duck, with coffee, diffused itself on the evening air.

Had any one lurked in the neighbourhood he would have seen demon-like figures stalking round the fire, casting vast shadows along the level sands, and busily occupied in plucking, cleaning, roasting, and eating ducks, until the pale-faced moon looked sleepily through a white veil of mist upon the scene, and a

chilly breeze off the river sent these bacchanals to the refuge of their hammocks.

Then silence sank upon the camp, and the vampires chased each other without restraint by the expiring light of the fire.

CHAPTER X.

OPRESSED BY A SENSE OF LONELINESS—NOISES OF THE NIGHT—MOONLIGHT EFFECTS—DAYBREAK—NATURE AWAKENS—START FROM CAMP—THE PASSAGE OF THE BARAGUAN—GRANITIC MOUNTAINS—MULTITUDES OF LIZARDS—THE NARROWS—MOUNTAIN CHAIN OF BARAGUAN—CAPYBARAS—ROARING OF JAGUARS—THE NOCTURNAL VISITORS—RIO BARAGUAN—THE RIO CAPANAPARO—MONOTONOUS DAYS—FEROCITY OF INDIVIDUAL ALLIGATORS—NARROW ESCAPE OF AN INDIAN FROM AN ALLIGATOR—BEAUTIFUL FOREST STREAM—SYLVAN RETREAT—THE COUIA OR COYPOU—HUMMING-BIRDS—FLAMINGOES—THE AGOUTI AND ACCOUCHY—SHOOT AN AGOUTI—UPROAR OF PARROTS AND MONKEYS—CAMP FOR THE NIGHT—GEORGE LEAVES CAMP—HIS PROLONGED ABSENCE—HE RETURNS WITH THE SKIN OF A JAGUAR—GEORGE'S STORY—UNUSUAL INCIDENT.



BEFORE morning I awoke, and finding it impossible to sleep again owing to the mosquitoes, I arose and walked along the sands by the edge of the water. The moon was low in the west, and her light was dim, shining through the folds of river fog which hung heavily in the still air. A sense of loneliness oppressed me—a feeling born of being brought face to face with wild nature.

I wandered to some distance from the camp, listening to the noises of the night,—the roar of the jaguar from the neighbouring forest, the onward rush of the majestic river, the hoarse calls of water-

fowl, or the cries of monkeys alarmed by the presence of the forest tyrant.

These were the voices of the night: and for its scenes there were the vast river coming up from the dim distance, flecked with the foam of its haste, and vanishing among the boundless forests; the tangled woods clothed in densest shadow and streaked here and there with the silver moonlight; the sandy beaches edging the forest and the river, shining white in the misty light, and looking more like water than sand.

The moon sank lower behind the woods, just above which she seemed to hover, and then slowly subsided, leaving all in darkness.

But in a little the east began to show signs of the coming day—a gray light rose above the horizon, changing to a roseate flush which soon overspread the whole sky. Nature appeared to stir herself: birds shook themselves, and ventured to chatter with a little hesitation, gradually becoming more assured; waders took their stands by the shallows of the river; the araguatos awoke the echoes; and presently the sun shot over the eastern horizon, and night was conquered.

Returning to the camp, I found the Indians preparing breakfast, and George just starting from his hammock.

We left very early, as we had a difficult day's work before us in the passage of the Baraguan, a rock-

encumbered strait, where the river is contracted in breadth, and rushes swiftly through narrow channels among islands.

High above the river towered the granitic mountain, built of square blocks of stone of enormous size, devoid of vegetation. Here we saw multitudes of lizards basking in the intense heat. These reptiles dwelt among the crevices of the rocks, from which the warmth of the day had attracted them.

At the narrows the river measured about a mile in breadth. Huge rocks protruded from the water, which crested in foam against them, their iron blackness contrasting strangely with the white froth which bubbled and surged around them. At mid-day we landed on an islet to dine, and found that the stream here had a very unpleasant flavour, which was probably due to the decomposition in it of great quantities of vegetable matter.

At length, tired with our long contest with the stream (for we had to lend our assistance to the Indians in forcing the boat against the currents), we camped for the night on the western bank. Across the river we could see the summits of the wild mountain chain of Baraguan, which seemed of great extent. A flock of capybaras ran along the beach, and our rifles speedily dropped two of them, which restored the good humour of our Indians, which had been somewhat clouded by their fatiguing exertions during the day.

Throughout the night the jaguars roared on the east bank of the river, and once or twice we imagined some of these animals were prowling among our hammocks; but we found by the tracks in the morning that our visitors had been a couple of alligators, which probably had been attracted by the fire-light, or perhaps by the smell of the dead capybaras which hung close by.

Opposite the camp a broad river joined the Orinoco, which the Indians told us was the Baraguan. Early next morning we passed the mouth of the Capanaparo, a fine stream which runs in from the westward, bordered by forests, and resembling the Apuré.

For a day or two our time was passed in the monotonous occupation of lying dozing in our little cabin, watching the ceaseless flow of the river, or the boatmen at work, which they accompanied with a kind of drowsy chant.

Occasionally one of us would muster energy enough to put a bullet through a basking alligator, when the grotesque and painful contortions of the hideous reptile would rouse us for a while from our lethargy, and then we would commence a perfect fusilade on these monsters, which abounded along the shores.

Notwithstanding their repulsiveness, it caused me no little remorse to inflict pain on so many of them; but they are so numerous, and in some places so savage, that, as I have said before, we felt it al-

most a duty to kill them. At several of the missions some individual alligators are distinguished by their ferocity and by their preference for human flesh. They have become, like some tigers, regular man-eaters, and no one can venture into or even near the river in their vicinity without being attacked by them.

One day, while poling the boat forward, one of the Indians fell overboard, and being known to be a good swimmer, his companions merely laughed at the accident, and continued their labours as if nothing had happened. Meantime the Indian had come to the surface, and called to us to stop, swimming at the same time after us.

His comrades seemed inclined to give him a little trouble to overtake the boat, when suddenly I noticed an alligator slipping into the water from a sandy point, and making rapidly towards the swimmer, leaving a wake behind like a steamer. Shouting to the Indians to let the boat drift towards the man in the water, George and I seized our rifles; but the reptile swam level with the water, above which not an inch of his body could be seen, though the broken surface indicated his whereabouts.

It was a close race between us and the alligator. If *he* reached the unfortunate man first, the death of the latter would be certain.

Hoping to scare him, we fired at the spot where we could just distinguish the outline of his scaly

back, but with no result. Just as the boat reached the Indian on one side, the reptile shot up on the other. Half-a-dozen arms were reached overboard, and seizing the swimmer he was hauled over the gunwale,—the monster making a bite at him with a noise which sounded like the snapping of a large steel trap!

Disappointed of his prey, he now dived with a swirl of his tail in the water which made the boat rock; and from the agitation on the surface, we tracked his course towards a small islet near the mouth of a creek. We slowly paddled in his wake, keeping our rifles ready, and hoping for an opportunity of avenging ourselves on the bloodthirsty reptile. In this, however, we were destined to be disappointed. The waves on the surface soon ceased, and all indications of his whereabouts vanished. Even the sagacity of our Indians was at fault; and vexed with the escape of the villain, we again entered the Orinoco and paddled onwards.

Coasting along the bank, we shortly arrived opposite the mouth of a small stream, which presented so tempting an asylum from the powerful rays of the sun that we ordered the boat to be rowed into it. Some fan-palms growing near its debouchure on both sides, leaned across it towards each other, and their huge leaves hanging almost to the water looked like a curtain suspended to conceal whatever might lie beyond. Bending under these, we found ourselves

floating beneath a vault of heavy foliage which effectually excluded the rays of the sun, and which met overhead in an umbrageous arch.

The course of this pretty stream was winding, and at each turn some new effect was produced by the varied and luxuriant vegetation. Tree-ferns thirty feet in height hung their feathery fronds above us, while many brilliant flowering plants and creepers entwined themselves among the branches, or hung airily midway above the watery corridor, frequently stretching from side to side of the igarape, and obliging us to hew our way through them with our knives.

Beneath a rock, which was covered with bright flowering parasites, we perceived a small strand backed by a bank which sloped downwards from far away beneath the leafy arcades. Upon this strand we landed, and lying among the flower-enamelled grass on the bank, we dined, delighted with our sylvan retreat.

While resting here we made the acquaintance of a strange creature which we perceived approaching the verge of the stream from the woods some hundred yards above us. As yet it had not observed us, and we watched it with interest. Taking up my rifle I made a lucky shot, killing it instantly. George ran towards it, and presently returned bearing it in his hand. The Indians told us it was known as the couia or coypou (*Myopotamus coypus*), and that it

lives on the banks of rivers or woodland creeks. Its colour was a sooty brown, and the pelage was composed of two different sorts, the outside coat being long and shining, and the inside growth short, soft, and fine grained.

This little creature has been furnished by nature with strong muscular limbs. Along the banks of streams its burrows may be observed, often several together, for it is a gregarious animal; and in these holes the young are brought forth.

The coypou is quite at home in the water, swimming and diving with facility. It is said to eat small fish when it can get them, though naturally adapted for a vegetable diet. When properly cooked, the coypou is fairly eatable; but much depends on taste and circumstances. Its resemblance to an overgrown water-rat would at any rate have proved an obstacle to my enjoying it; but as we had a plentiful supply of other food, I could afford to be squeamish on this occasion.

Having examined the couia, and being anxious to push forward on our journey, I was about to throw the animal into the water, when one of our Indians begged for it. It was therefore placed in the boat; and taking our places, we rowed slowly back along the serpentine igarape, up the mouth of which we found the sunlight streaming, flashing on the river outside, and, within, darting golden shafts far away amid the mysterious entanglement of the woodland solitudes.

Upon a brownea which presented a magnificent spectacle we observed immense numbers of humming-birds darting like brilliantly painted humble-bees from flower to flower. Their glittering plumage and small size caused them to resemble winged gems, as they reflected the sunbeams in their rapid movements.

As we progressed somewhat slowly against the current, we had plenty of leisure to examine whatever objects of interest presented themselves along the shores. Of alligators we had grown heartily tired; there were always five or six in view, and even shooting them had ceased to be sport, their disgusting and horrible contortions in their death-struggles preventing us from taking any pleasure in killing the reptiles. Sometimes, though rarely, we dropped them dead in their tracks, when to all appearance they lay as if asleep,—a convulsive slap alone testifying to their being hit.

Birds presented a more interesting subject of study, and we remarked the habits of the various kinds that frequented the banks, in their intercourse with each other, or in the pursuit of their prey.

The flamingoes presented an extraordinary appearance, with their brilliant plumage and stilt-like legs, long necks, and curiously fashioned beaks, somewhat like the scoop formed by inverting the hand and turning the finger-points inwards towards the body. These huge birds stalked solemnly about the beach, or stood motionless in some sequestered nook waiting

for their prey — glowing against the shady background of matted shrubs and bushes.

At one part of the river we observed a small animal, which at first I took to be a hare; but on reflection I considered this extremely improbable. On a nearer approach I saw that it was the agouti (*Dasyprocta agouti*), which is about the same size as our English hare; and, indeed, there is a further resemblance in the colour, which is brownish, but dashed with a yellow tinge. A nearer inspection will show this to be still further varied by mottlings of black, yellow, and brown on and about the neck.

Like the hare, too, these animals make no burrow, living in “seats” or “forms” in the matted undergrowth of thickets, and offer no defence on being overtaken by their enemies further than by uttering a squealing cry. They hop about the forests, endeavouring to escape observation by sheltering themselves behind bushes, logs, or roots. Their flesh is very palatable, somewhat resembling that of our hares or rabbits.

The accouchy is another creature closely related to the agouti; but the tail of the former is quite two inches in length, of a somewhat cylindrical form, and to this appendage the animal communicates a quivering motion when in any way interested or excited. These creatures are very agile, and make leaps and bounds which would do credit to our hare, to which,

indeed, they may perhaps be considered in the light of distant relatives.

While we were slipping unperceived towards the agouti, it was busily engaged nibbling among some plants near the edge of the forest, so that we had arrived within fifty yards of it before a turn of its head brought us within its full view. It raised itself on its hind legs, as if to reconnoitre us more satisfactorily, in which position it offered so good a shot that, before it attempted to scamper off, a bullet from George's rifle stretched it lifeless on the ground. At the report a sudden uproar of monkeys and parrots or other birds broke from the shelter of the trees, and in the distance we heard the roar of a jaguar, as if he understood that man was a trespasser on his domains, and he resented the intrusion.

As it was now drawing towards evening, and the spot near which we found ourselves presented every feature desirable in a camp, we decided to stay here for the night. The articles, therefore, needed were taken from the boat; our hammocks were suspended between the trees at the verge of the woods, and a huge fire was kindled on the sands, at which the agouti was presently roasting, while the large coffee-kettle bubbled merrily, diffusing the aromatic odour of its contents.

While these preparations were being completed, George took up his rifle and left the camp. I busied myself in the meantime with some fish-lines, which,

as old Isaac has it, I put out at interest. Attending to these—detaching my prizes, and rebaiting the lines—kept me busily occupied, so that it was with surprise I observed the sun sinking behind the forests, and remarked George's continued absence, notwithstanding that he had stated when leaving the camp that he would return almost immediately.

While speculating a little uneasily on what could have occasioned his absence, I detected the individual himself walking in a leisurely way towards the camp, whistling in his nonchalant manner, while, to my amazement, I observed, flung over his shoulder, the freshly flayed hide of a jaguar.

“Pretty skin, isn't it?” said he coolly as he remarked my eyes fixed on it, and as if the killing of a jaguar were an everyday occurrence with him. “Surely, Frank,” he continued, “you don't suppose you are to have them all to yourself! I want one now and then as well as you, old fellow!”

“Tell us about it, George,” said I; “you must have had a fight before that beauty gave up his spotted cloak; and I'm dying to hear about it!”

“All right,” replied he; “but first let's have our supper, and I'll tell you all about it as we get through that!”

Seating ourselves by the fire, and each filling his pannikin from the kettle, and taking a hind leg of the agouti, which was now done to a turn, George commenced his story.

“When I left you,” he began, “I kept along by the river, as no doubt you saw, until I got round that spur of palms yonder. I then kept back a bit from the bank, as I thought I saw a kind of bird I hadn't yet noticed along any of the rivers we've been on, and I wanted to get within shot of it. Well, I kept on, taking advantage of every bush and tree to hide myself, and when I could I went into the forest, when I made such good progress that very shortly I thought I was near enough.

“Stealing quietly towards the edge of the forest, I found that I had overshot my mark, and had got round another bend of the shore, on which, and close to the water, which here ran within thirty yards, I saw a group of alligators. I would have thought nothing of this, only that they were all very busy over something; and pushing very quietly through the bushes to get a better view, my heart gave a jump into my mouth as I found myself standing within five yards of a jaguar, which lay just outside the edge of the trees, and was evidently intent on the proceedings of the alligators.

“I now saw that one of these had somehow secured a capybara; and I further noticed that the jaguar had perceived this fact, and seemed much inclined to join the company at supper. This he really did; for with a snarling growl he leaped forward and seized the body of the capybara, which he attempted to carry off.

“The alligator, however, had no idea of being so summarily deprived of his meal, and kept a firm hold with his grim teeth, at the same time giving vent to a loud hissing sound like a whole flock of geese. Enraged at having his sovereign will and pleasure disputed by the ugly reptile, the jaguar relinquished his hold of the chiguire, and leaping upon the alligator, he used teeth and claws with the utmost energy. But the armour-plated hide of his adversary was proof against these weapons ; and the huge amphibian gave himself a sort of shake, which disengaged the jaguar from his back, and at the same time, curving himself into a half circle, he discharged a blow of his tail against the ribs of his assailant, which threw the latter towards the gaping jaws, each armed with its row of terrible teeth. These quickly closed on the aggressor, who would now have been well content to cry quits.

“But the alligator did not intend to let him off so easily ; for holding him fast by the hind leg, while the jaguar roared with rage and pain, frantically clawing at his enemy’s head and neck, the reptile commenced to drag his victim towards the river, where the strife would have been quickly closed.

“Hitherto I had been an inactive spectator of this novel duel ; but now seeing that the ugly monster would carry off the prize of the tournament if not prevented, I left my place of concealment and advanced towards the combatants.

“Only a few yards now separated them from the river; and well did the jaguar seem to understand that once in that his doom would be sealed, for he redoubled his exertions to escape, and had actually almost extricated his leg from the vice-like jaws of the alligator, which had torn off from the bone muscle, sinew, and flesh.

“But now his eyes met mine as I looked at him along the sight of my rifle. He seemed to recognize escape as hopeless, for he cowered on the scaly back of his destroyer, uttering a kind of despairing roar. At the report of my rifle, fired from within ten yards, he fell limp across the head of the reptile, which seemed thoroughly taken by surprise. A bullet behind the shoulder caused the alligator to alter its intention of taking the water, for it lay writhing on the beach, now twisting this way and again plunging that, while a stream of blood issued from the open jaws, showing that my ball had pierced the lungs. It presently lay still, occasionally opening or shutting its mouth in a spasmodic manner. These movements also soon ceased,—and the jaguar was avenged.

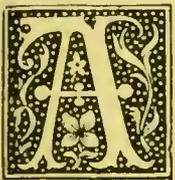
“I got the skin off the latter as soon as I could, for I knew you would be anxious about my being so long away when supper was ready; and besides, I was as hungry as a wolf, and so I made the back track at a run till I got to that point near us.”

Here ended George's interesting story, which I noted down almost word for word as he uttered it.

The comments on this unusual incident,—for it is not often a traveller is fortunate enough to be a spectator of such a fight as this,—occupied us until the dying twilight warned us to retire to our hammocks, from which we continued the conversation, which gradually became more and more unintelligible, till a snore from George reached my drowsy senses, and at the sound I too fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

SCENES AT SUNRISE—MORNING MISTS—INFLUENCE OF MONOTONY—TASTE FOR WILD LIFE WIDELY DIFFUSED—TURTLE SETTLEMENT—JAGUAR SHOT BY GEORGE—NUMBERS OF JAGUARS—TAPIR AND JAGUAR—THE PARARUMA RIVER—ISLANDS IN THE ORINOCO—CURIOUS HILL—RAPIDS—LOVELY SCENERY—ENTANGLED FOREST—BUTTERFLIES—GORGEOUS BEETLES—A FAIRYLAND IN THE POSSESSION OF INSECT AND ANIMAL LIFE—MAN AN INTRUDER—IMPRESSIONS ARISING FROM THE CONTEMPLATION OF NATURE—WE CONTINUE OUR VOYAGE—WONDROUS FOREST SCENES.



AS usual, the next morning's sun found us alert and getting our *impedimenta* stowed away in the boat; while the rekindled fire threw its ruddy gleams around the camp, and at the same time cooked our breakfast of coffee and game, or if the latter was not in camp, warmed up our mess of pork and beans.

Parrots screamed and fluttered among the branches; araguatos howled dismally, as if it were a miserable piece of work to have survived the night; flamingoes flew across the river to fish in the shallows; many birds of bright feathers alighted by the margin of the water to drink; and, in a word, all nature was again awake, and sending aloft its daily tribute of praise and thanksgiving to the great Creator of all things,

who neglects not the meanest of His creatures, but supplies all with a bountiful hand.

Just as the sun tipped the outlines of the tree-tops with his golden pencil, we left the camp, and sailed along the shores, past sleeping alligators, or bands of capybaras, which we disturbed by our presence. We passed the mouths of creeks looking heavily dank beneath their sombre canopy of foliage, wreaths of mist curling in and out in a manner which made me reflect whether I had not better then and there take a good dose of quinine. But the warm rays of the sun soon dispelled the fogs, as well as the sense of chilliness which the damp morning air is apt to create.

It is hard to prevent that feeling of monotony with which the traveller in these regions is oppressed from attaching itself to the narrative of his experiences. The daily routine, which scarcely admits of variety, once described, is known to the reader; and one day's adventures might almost pass for a *fac-simile* of the experiences of a much longer period.

To undertake the description, therefore, of what occurred during our journey from Caracas to Esmeralda is to run the risk of tiring the reader with endless repetitions. But although the journey was occasionally monotonous enough, on the whole both George and I thoroughly enjoyed our wild life; and at the present time I long to roam the boundless llanos on my fiery steed, to traverse the vast forests and revel in their scenery, and to ascend the mighty

rivers in my lancha, to drink in the pleasures of nature—in a word, to become for the time a veritable savage.

At one time or another in their lives almost all men are actuated by this impulse. The wealthy merchant hires his grouse-moor and deer-forest, where he can escape from the trammels of an artificial society. Those who can afford both the time and money escape to the prairies or Rocky Mountains from the restraints of civilization, and to satiate that savage instinct of slaughter which has been handed down to us from the early progenitors of our race. The very greengrocer in the retirement of the arbour in his back garden fancies himself beneath the woodland shade miles from human ken.

It will not, therefore, be a matter of surprise that George and I, who from our earliest days had cherished an ardent attachment to wild life, should feel thoroughly happy when surrounded by the trackless forests of the Orinoco. It was the realization of our boyish dreams. Our lives were, notwithstanding, characterized by a sameness which, although to the actors it was not often oppressive, it is difficult to prevent from creeping into this journal of our adventures.

Hoping the reader will make due allowance for this fact, I will resume my story.

As we advanced up the river, partly by the aid of our oars, and partly before the breeze, we perceived

on the beach at a bend in the right bank evidences of a turtle settlement. Heaps of shells were scattered here and there, showing where the owners had fallen victims to the jaguars; and many of the turtles themselves were either engaged with their nests or were crawling into or out of the river. Steering the boat so as to pass close by the bank in order to view their proceedings more closely, we were presently gliding along within a few yards of the beach.

The forest came down to within fifty yards of the water, which space represented the width of the sandy shore. Our attention was centred on the turtles, so that it was not until one of our Indians directed our notice to it that we perceived the round cat-like head of a fine jaguar staring steadily at us over the top of a low bush by the edge of the wood.

Without a symptom of fear, but from apparently the merest curiosity, the handsome brute watched us attentively as we approached. He had probably come down to secure a turtle for his breakfast. Indeed, these animals usually take up their quarters permanently in the neighbourhood of those localities where the turtles congregate at their breeding season; and in these situations they are fat and sleek, having always a plentiful supply of food at hand. With their powerful fore paws they turn the turtle over on his back, and eat him out of the shell alive.

On the present occasion, we desired the Indians to row quietly forward until we arrived at a spot directly

opposite the bush behind which the jaguar was lurking. During this manœuvre we carefully abstained from looking towards him, hoping that he would retain his position if he thought himself unperceived. In this we were successful. George and I got our rifles ready quietly; and as the former had not been as fortunate as I had been in the chase during our journey, I agreed to give him the first shot, keeping my own in readiness in case it should be required.

Just as the boat got abreast of the jaguar's position, the Indians ceased rowing, and we began slowly to float downwards. The motion was too gradual, however, to disturb an aim; and resting his elbow on his knee to steady himself, George drew a bead on the black curl which showed like a frown between the eyes of the jaguar. Then followed the report, and as instantaneously the head disappeared.

"Well hit, señor!" cried the Indians; "he's dead, he's dead!"

No sign of life being apparent from the bush, we determined to land. We approached the spot cautiously with our rifles at full cock, lest the treacherous brute should be waiting his opportunity for a spring; but George's shot had been fatal. We found the animal stretched lifeless behind the bush, his blood welling from two bullet holes, one midway between his eyes, and the other caused by the exit of the ball at the back of his head.

George was delighted with his good shooting, and declared that he would murder all the jaguars on the Orinoco before he returned to the coast. The skin of this animal measured nine feet six inches in length, and fetched twenty-five dollars at San Carlos not long afterwards.

Jaguars seemed very numerous on this portion of the river, which our Indians attributed to the quantities of turtles, tapirs, peccaries, and other game which frequented the forests on each side of the river. We shortly afterwards had the pleasure of seeing a contest between a tapir and a jaguar, in which the latter failed to secure his victim.

We were encamped at midday just above the mouth of a small stream or creek which joined the Orinoco. The forest here was even thicker than usual, the lianas twining and twisting from tree to tree and branch to branch like the rigging of a ship; huge leaves, the names of which I could not ascertain, hung amongst the intricate cordage, presenting such a mass of entanglement as seemed to bid defiance to any attempt to penetrate it.

Across the creek leaned a huge old trunk covered with orchidiæ, bannisterias, arums, and other parasitic climbers, and forming a bridge upon which monkeys or other arboreal creatures could easily pass from one bank to the other. A game-path led down to the water close to this old tree; and in the mud by the margin we discovered numerous tracks made by

peccaries, deer, and other animals when they had come down to drink at the stream.

While lying by our camp-fire, waiting till our turtle-steaks were cooked, we suddenly heard a rustling in the thick underwood close by, as if some creature were quietly stealing through it. Presently we heard a loud roar; and looking up somewhat alarmed, as we recognized the sound but too well, we were in time to see a magnificent jaguar launching himself on the back of a tapir from the identical tree which I have described as leaning across the creek.

The tapir leaped into the water, but unfortunately here it was too shallow to allow of his diving. He therefore splashed through it, and rushed into the adjoining forest, where he crashed through the thick interlacings of creepers and branches as if they had been cobwebs.

The jaguar meanwhile was using his teeth and claws savagely, and we could observe that the blood flowed in great gouts from the throat of the tapir, against which part the jaguar particularly directed his attack.

Just as the matted vegetation was on the point of hiding the combatants from our view, the tapir, plunging madly forward, fortunately forced his way beneath a thick horizontal branch, which caught the jaguar across the forehead and hurled him violently to the ground. Here he lay for a little as if stunned; while the tapir, emerging from the forest, plunged

into the deep waters of the Orinoco, and swam rapidly towards a small islet about a hundred yards from the shore. Here we lost sight of him as he sought the shelter of a mass of underwood which choked up the spaces between the stems of the taller trees.

Catching up our rifles, we rushed forward to the bank of the creek in order to secure the jaguar; but before we could fire a shot, he had recovered himself, and disappeared in the forest, a sadder if not a wiser animal. We rejoiced at the escape of the tapir; but we ourselves would have been well pleased to kill it, nevertheless, as we relished its well-flavoured, succulent flesh.

The evening of this day found us arrived at the mouth of the Pararuma, which joins the Orinoco from the west. Upon the extensive beach at this place we spent the night, slinging our hammocks from the oars stuck deeply in the sand. There was formerly a mission established here, but from the causes mentioned in a preceding chapter it had been abandoned. Here the Orinoco divides into several huge arms, enclosing between them numerous islands, the extreme breadth from one side to the other being about three and a half miles.

The forests here seemed to surround us more closely than hitherto. Near this spot a curiously shaped mound or hill rises above the trees to the height of two hundred and thirteen feet. The crown of this

eminence is occupied by a tuft of trees, from among which the view over forest, river, and plain is superb.

As we continued up the river it narrowed considerably; and farther on, we came upon rapids, where the water rushed against and over huge boulders, boiling madly beneath precipitous rocks, or racing rapidly down the incline. Above these, a creek poured its waters into the Orinoco beneath a natural archway of dense vegetation.

Tempted by its air of mysterious seclusion, we caused the boat to be rowed into it, and never shall I forget the entrancing and bewildering beauty of this forest interior.

Along by the banks of the igarape vast ferns of elegant shape bent gracefully downwards towards the water, while mimosas and marbled or spotted arums, with fan-palms, filled up every available space.

Among the shaded foliage of the taller trees the tillandsia glowed like flames, and air-plants hanging from the branches waved with the slightest breeze. Orchids of every hue thronged the trunks of the forest giants, entwining their tendrils round and round each stem or branch, clothing the whole with orange, lilac, pink, or crimson flowers. Thousands of lianas interlaced and intertwined their rope-like arms among this wealth of flowers; a network connected tree with tree, branch with branch, blazing with brilliant hues; and from among this profusion of

bright vegetation depended horse-tail-like plants, which imparted a venerable aspect (as do gray beards to old men) to the huge trees which had perhaps supported this teeming verdure for centuries.

At places tree-ferns met across the stream, their feathery fronds making a filigree arch high above us; the airy lightness natural to the graceful Lilliputians of our English woods being faithfully preserved in these glorious giants. Pendulous plants terminating in glowing flowers hung from the branches overhead; and so thick in several places was this waving, trailing luxuriance that we had to cut with our hunting-knives a passage through it for the boat, ruthlessly sacrificing at each stroke some plant or creeper which would have made the reputation of a hot-house at home.

Here and there along the banks rose some forest monarch, whose colossal stem pierced the vegetable arch above, and whose broad summit expanded in the upper air into a wealth of blossoms, which the want of space below denied to more humble brethren. Their rough trunks, nevertheless, gave birth to millions of elegant plants; and from the crevices in the bark, pothoses, cactuses, and orchids leaned forward, as if claiming each their meed of approbation. Huge leaves twisted one into the other; tendrils and cords looped in fantastic knots hung from the branches, or twined in and out of this inextricably confused vegetation, presenting such a spectacle of luxuriant

richness and impenetrability as I had hardly ever before beheld.

Add to all this, numbers of flashing, gaudy birds; huge gaily-painted butterflies; myriads of beetles glancing like jewels in the sunlight; and the beautiful and yet hideous lizards which basked on bark or trunk in the oppressive heat;—throw over all the glowing, dazzling effulgence of a tropical sun intensifying shade and colour, and the reader will have a faint picture of the fairyland in which we found ourselves.

A deep hum of teeming life resounded through these solitudes; billions of insects on the ground, in the air, or upon the leaves, gave each its insignificant note to swell the concert; monkeys and parrots chattered or chased each other among the almost impervious foliage; fishes darted round the spots where fruits or insects fell into the igarape; deer, peccaries, antas, capybaras, or jaguars roamed through the woods, each fulfilling its destiny;—all seemed to have their proper places and their proper duties to perform in the vast sphere. Man alone appeared an intruder on these domains where his puny strength unfits him to force a passage through the wild entanglement of the underwood or to turn to account the teeming richness of the boundless wilderness around.

Having satiated our curiosity, we again entered the Orinoco and continued our voyage. We were

so impressed with the magnificent spectacle which we had just witnessed that we remained silent for some time, each ruminating upon his recollections, and figuring to himself the wondrous scenes which the vast and ever continuous forest enclosed within its bosom.

CHAPTER XII.

ALLIGATORS AND HERONS—INDICATIONS OF FISHING-GROUNDS—ABUNDANCE OF FISH—INNER FOREST—PECCARIES—THEIR DANGEROUS CHARACTER—JAGUAR “TREED” BY PECCARIES—NARROW ESCAPE FROM A SNAKE—AM ATTACKED BY THE PECCARIES—THE JAGUAR TORN TO PIECES—“TREED”—GREAT SLAUGHTER OF THE PECCARIES—ARRIVAL OF GEORGE TO MY ASSISTANCE—FLIGHT OF THE REMNANT OF THE DROVE—ASTONISHMENT OF THE INDIANS—CURING THE PECCARY MEAT.



HEREVER small streams joined the Orinoco, or wherever mud-banks existed, we observed that hundreds of white herons congregated together; and among them, like logs afloat, or resting motionless on shore, were scores of caymans—their ugly muzzles and the serrated outlines of their tails alone serving to distinguish their species. The presence of these creatures in such situations was an indication that fish abounded; and a little trouble on our part usually supplied us with fish enough to last for days, although we never kept more than was necessary for our immediate wants.

At one of these fishing-grounds, while the others got ready the lines and baits, I landed, and plunged into the forest, with the hope of meeting a deer or perhaps a tapir to replenish our larder. Forcing my

way through the tangled growth of bushes on the shore, I soon found myself in the inner forest, where the mast-like trees, with their cordage of lianas, sought the upper air, and cast below a shade in which here and there some plant or flower preferring such situations glowed like a fiery star. The ground was of the richest mould, formed of the decomposed leaves which had fallen and rotted for centuries.

I noticed, as I walked along, looking cautiously all round to catch a glimpse of some game, that the earth was rooted up at frequent intervals, as if a drove of hogs had recently passed that way. And so they had. I recognized the handiwork of peccaries, a species of wild hog which abounds in these forests. They sometimes travel in great droves or gangs, and at such times are exceedingly dangerous, as they rally to each other's assistance in case of attack, when their immense numbers and ferocity put to flight all enemies, not even excepting the jaguar himself, who has been often known to fall a victim to his own temerity. Of this I soon had personal experience.

Being well aware of the dangerous character of the peccaries, I advanced with the greatest caution, taking care that I had none of the drove on either my right or left, who might close in on my rear in case of an alarm from those in front.

Proceeding slowly, I soon became aware of the

proximity of the herd. Shrill grunts and a constant snapping like that of castanets were plainly audible, and apparently emanated from behind a screen formed of lianas and other creepers which hung from the branches of some trees a short distance before me. Now and then I could see the rope-like tendrils violently shaken by animals rushing about within their shelter; but as yet I had been unable to get a view of the scene of the contest which I inferred was being waged by the fierce little pigs with some formidable enemy which they had surrounded.

Not venturing to approach more closely on this side, I made a detour, hoping that at another point I might be able to see the fight, as well as to join in it myself if circumstances seemed to render this prudent. Taking advantage of the shelter afforded by the huge twisted and buttressed trunk of a fig-tree which supported thousands of parasitic plants, I got within thirty yards of the place where the fight was raging.

I could now perceive scores of the infuriated little peccaries plunging madly round the trunk of a tall tree, while others sat around gazing upwards among the branches.

Following the direction of their eyes, I started as I saw a large jaguar stretched along a giant limb, and appearing to regard the indignation meeting taking place below with the sublimest indifference. I could, however, observe that he had not gained his present

safe retreat altogether scathless, as one or two bloody scars along his flanks attested the efficacy of the tusks of his jailers.

At the roots of the tree lay two or three of the peccaries dead or dying. These were, doubtless, the victims whose fate had drawn the vengeance of the whole drove upon their aggressor.

I began to think I had acted imprudently in getting so near the hogs, whose fury was now at its height, and who would instantly attack me if they discovered my presence. Against even half-a-dozen of them my Winchester would have been a safe protection; but a herd of several score was too formidable to attack, and I therefore was about to withdraw as quietly as I had come.

I had turned round for this purpose, when happening to look downwards in order to step cautiously, I was horrified to perceive that I was almost in the act of putting my foot on a rattlesnake which lay coiled in the depression between two roots!

Starting back with a cry, I suddenly became aware of the appalling fact that some thirty or forty of the furious wild hogs had perceived me, and in another instant, with shrill cries and grunts of rage, they were charging down upon me.

Not an instant was to be lost. Disregarding the snake, which had erected itself upon its coil, and was sounding its rattles, while its green eyes blazed maliciously at me, I sprang past it, and hauled my-

self into the tree by the aid of the lianas, which indeed formed an excellent natural ladder.

Scarcely had I placed myself in safety on a large branch some twelve feet from the ground, when the peccaries raced against the tree, snapping their tusks, from which the foam flew in flakes and speckled their fore-quarters. They soon espied the rattlesnake, and instantly the proceedings of the foremost hog presented an interesting spectacle. Erecting his back into an arch, he seemed to dance or sidle round the snake on his tip-toes, grunting shrilly, and holding his head in what I considered a ludicrously forced position.

But reflection soon convinced me that this was sound policy on his part; for as soon as the snake perceived him to be within striking distance, it launched itself towards the hog, who received the bite on his jowl, where the fat neutralized the poison. Thus no veins were pierced, and before the snake could repeat its attack, the peccary leaped into the air, and placing his four pointed hoofs close together, descended upon the coiled reptile, almost cutting it to pieces. Then seizing it, he drew the body through his teeth, stripping muscle and flesh from the bones, and devoured it at his leisure.

I was hoping that this episode would have erased my existence from their recollection, and, remembering the proverb, "Out of sight, out of mind," I had withdrawn myself among the impenetrable shelter of

the many hanging plants which festooned the tree. But in this I was mistaken. No sooner was the snake disposed of than the vengeful brutes again cast longing eyes towards my place of concealment, while some of them ran round the tree as if searching for some mode of ascent.

I was now in a very unpleasant predicament. I had read of hunters being detained many hours, and even days, by these insignificant-looking animals in the tree to which they had been forced for refuge. I doubted my ability to hold out for so long, as already I suffered severely from thirst. However, I tried to hope matters would not reach extremities.

I counted my enemies at the foot of my tree—there were exactly thirty-five; round the jaguar, still keeping guard, were fifty more. I had little doubt that as long as one lived in my vicinity his squeals would attract a reinforcement from the larger band, scarcely forty yards away. I would thus be rather delivering the jaguar from his predicament than delivering myself, and to assist his escape was no part of my policy.

I now produced my ammunition, which I carefully counted. I found that I had thirty cartridges in my pouch, and the magazine of my rifle held fourteen more, while there was one in the barrel. This made forty-five shots. In my revolver, which took the same ammunition as my rifle, and was fortunately loaded, were six more. Thus I had a total of fifty-

one shot, while there were eighty-five peccaries to be disposed of, as well as the jaguar. As the latter might attack me in the tree, while the former could not, I thought it my best plan to begin with him.

From my position he was only partially visible, the view being interrupted by the veil of vegetable drapery which hung from the intervening branches. I could not even tell what part of his body I saw; but guessing that a shot might send him among his fierce enemies below, I took a rest at him off a branch and fired.

I had judged correctly. Scarcely had the echoes answered the report of my rifle, than with a magnificent bound the handsome brute launched himself from the tree, and descending in the very midst of the hogs, he struck savagely to the right and to the left, each blow prostrating an enemy. The numbers of the peccaries, however, prevailed. The jaguar made an effort to reach another tree, but was literally mobbed to death in a few seconds. The long sharp tusks of the pigs ploughed his sides, flanks, and throat, so that in an inconceivably short time the once handsome beast lay a mangled mass of bloody flesh and skin, in which I would never have recognized the graceful and powerful monarch of the forest had I not been a witness of the transformation.

While this fight was going on I began to entertain the hope that my jailers were about to leave me in

order to lend their aid to their comrades ; but seeing the rapid victory the latter gained, they maintained their post, and I now saw with uneasiness, though I had anticipated it, that the division of the drove which had hitherto mounted guard over the jaguar now trotted off to my tree and rejoined their companions. Thus the entire gang of peccaries, elated with their victory, and with their fury augmented by the encounter, grunted, pranced, or sat around, looking up towards me as if requesting me to descend to be torn to pieces.

An intolerable stench was exhaled from the dorsal gland in their backs, which filled the air with a fetid musky odour, almost causing me to trust myself to my legs than remain to be asphyxiated by the disgusting effluvium. I was resolved to give them some reason to remember me ; for I was really angry with the determined hostility displayed by the detestable little brutes, and was, besides, conscious of the humiliating position in which I, a man, was placed by a few apparently insignificant animals. I therefore took up a good position, from which I could shoot with the greatest effect.

As soon as they observed me emerge from my place of concealment, they all seemed to have their interest intensely excited. They raised the bristles on their backs, grunted more loudly, and, if possible, stunk more horribly than before. Seeing two of the brutes in a line, I quickly sighted the nearest and pulled

trigger. I had the satisfaction of perceiving both kicking on the ground, while their companions danced madly round them, even tearing them with their tusks in their blind fury. Selecting similar opportunities as often as I could, I soon had thirty of them stretched lifeless round the tree, and had only expended twenty cartridges.

I had thirty-one shots left, while of the peccaries fifty remained, the jaguar having accounted for five in his death-struggles. The ground round the tree was now soaked with blood, and piles of slain lay scattered here and there. Still the remainder seemed determined to continue the unequal combat—if combat it could be called where the fighting was all on one side.

I had stopped to allow the survivors to concentrate themselves, so as to offer double shots, and thus enable me to use my ammunition to more advantage, when I suddenly heard the crack of a rifle away to the right, and at the same instant a peccary leaped into the air and fell over dead. It was George come to my assistance.

Hurrahing loudly to each other, I, on my part, continued the fusilade with such good effect that in the next minute I had got off twenty shots, and nineteen more of the hogs kicked their last upon the ground. George, too, made splendid shooting from the distance of one hundred yards, each shot killing or crippling a peccary. Seeing such fell destruction falling upon

them, the remainder suddenly took to their heels with terrified grunts, leaving us masters of the field. Only about sixteen finally escaped, the remaining sixty-nine being strewed about the woods in the neighbourhood, some having crawled away from the immediate scene of action.

While we returned to camp with one of the youngest and best of the hogs slung on a pole between us, I gave George a full description of the adventure. The Indians were sent to the spot to collect as many of the animals as they chose; and when they returned we were much amused by the expression of astonishment which was visible on their faces. Evidently we ranked in their estimation as Nimrods of the very first order.

Peccaries are eatable if the gland in the back is removed as soon as they are killed, and before the fetid secretion contained in it has had time to diffuse itself through the whole body. Our Indians were aware of this, and shortly our camp resembled a butcher's shop—fitches, hams, and gammons being suspended on all sides of a prodigious fire, which speedily jerked the meat.

CHAPTER XIII.

ARRIVE AT CARICHANA—CURIOUS ROCKS—DIPTERIX ODORATA—EROSIONS—
DEEP RAPIDS—CATARACT AT CARIVEN—MUSIC IN THE ROCKS—IMPEDI-
MENTS TO NAVIGATION—SCARCITY OF INHABITANTS—SCENERY NEAR THE
JUNCTION OF THE META—UNCOMFORTABLE NIGHT—BATS—HEAVY RAINS
—SPIDER-MONKEY—SAN BORJA—DIMINUTION OF THE HEAT—MOSQUITOES
—IMMENSE ALLIGATORS—ISLAND OF GUACHACO—RIO PARUENI—ISLAND
OF PANUMANA—JAGUARS SCARED BY THE CAMP-FIRES—CAPYBARAS AND
JAGUAR—A LONG SHOT—DEATH OF A JAGUAR—EXCELLENCE OF WIN-
CHESTER RIFLE—WE CONTINUE OUR JOURNEY.



EARLY on the succeeding day we arrived at Carichana, a small village, the seat of a mission, situated in a verdant plain backed by a range of hills. A singular formation was visible in this neighbourhood. Scattered over the meadows or savannas were curiously shaped rocks jutting but a few inches above the surrounding vegetation, and giving to the landscape a peculiarly diversified or mottled appearance. Near here grows the well-known *Dipterix odorata*, or tonka bean, which, besides the useful fruit, also furnishes timber of excellent quality.

Where the waters of the river were confined between rocks, the latter showed the marks or erosions of the great inundations. Some of these were nearly one

hundred and thirty feet above the surface of the water, while others of apparently more recent date were only forty-five feet. The river was much encumbered with detached rocks at this point, and as we progressed these obstacles became more frequent and formidable. Notwithstanding the apparent rapids, we found that in some parts, even close to the rocks, the depth of the stream exceeded one hundred feet.

At a place called Cariven, we came upon a cataract where we had the greatest difficulty in forcing our way against the furious currents. Finally, one of the Indians coiled a line round his body, and leaping overboard, he swam to the shore, when he towed the boat to the bank. We were so fatigued with our exertions that we determined to spend the afternoon and night at this spot, which, indeed, presented little attraction as a camping-ground.

During the night, as we lay upon the granite shore, we were astonished by hearing sounds as if of music proceeding from the depths of the rocks! I remembered having read of this phenomenon, which is supposed to be produced by the escape of rarefied air through the cells or pores of the rocks, but I never before had heard it. It produced a strange effect upon me, this symphony of nature in so wild a spot, and at that dark hour, arising from the granite mass on which we lay.

We left the cataract of Cariven at four o'clock the

next morning, and found that for about the distance of three-quarters of a mile the bed of the river was choked with rocks of every size and shape. These so obstructed the navigation that we frequently had considerable difficulty in threading our way—the rushing water breaking into foam against their rugged masses, and threatening to wreck our boat, which was frequently carried against them.

For a space of nearly one hundred and twenty miles we had not perceived any vestiges of inhabitants, except a scattered family or two of Otomac or Jaruro Indians; and we were not sorry, therefore, to find that a Spanish gentleman had established a small settlement near the mouth of the Meta, where we arrived about noon.

At the junction of the Meta, which (with the exception of the Guaviare) is the largest affluent of the Orinoco, the scenery presents a new character. In the east rise fantastic peaks, which assume the appearance of vast castles; the river is fringed by a waste of sands which intervene between the stream and the forests, and reflect the powerful rays of the sun, intensifying the heat, and frequently giving rise to a mirage which floats above their scorched expanse.

The rocks which had for some time interrupted our progress here gave way to smooth reaches of water, on which we floated without the momentary fear of being dashed against a jutting point or block, which fear had recently fully engrossed us. But towards

evening we reached the rapids of Tabaje, where on a rocky beach we passed an uncomfortable night, annoyed by mosquitoes and by countless bats, which I discovered to reside in the fissures which traversed the rocks in all directions. This night was one of the most unpleasant we passed during the entire journey. The rocks prevented us from slinging our hammocks to our oars in the mode we ordinarily practised where there were no trees. We therefore had to lie upon the granite blocks, which were of a tremendous hardness; while to add to our misery, already rendered considerable by mosquitoes and bats, we were exposed to a deluge of rain which lasted until morning, and which, I might almost say, wet us to the bone.

The dreary night at length passed away, and with the advent of the sun matters brightened both literally and metaphorically. The rain ceased, the clouds packed up their heavy folds and departed for other scenes, and by the time the sun was an hour above the horizon we felt new beings. This resuscitation was partaken in by the birds and monkeys, which during the rains seem bedraggled and wretched. They now sported among the foliage with renewed activity, and evinced the pleasure which they experienced at the advent of fine weather.

While breakfast was being got ready, George and I left the camp in order to enjoy the delightful freshness of the morning air in a ramble by the river.

The banks were rocky and broken, rendering walking difficult; but at length we headed the rapids, where we observed that no crocodiles were visible, probably from their being too sluggish to contend with the quick rushing water, and preferring the still reaches both above and below this point.

During this walk we were interested in observing a species of monkey which was new to us. It was seated on a branch within a few yards of the margin of the river, from which indeed it had retreated on perceiving our approach. This creature was about two feet in length, and possessed a prehensile tail, ringed or annulated by bands of a colour different to the rest of its body. While we stood looking at it, the tail was securely hitched round a branch a little higher than that upon which it was seated, while it grasped the latter firmly with its hand-like claws, swaying to and fro in the breeze. I recognized it as the black spider-monkey (*Ateles paniscus*), which is plentifully distributed throughout certain regions in South America, and is reputed to exceed in cleverness all other monkeys peculiar to the New World. It commits great depredations among the sugar plantations or corn-fields, and on this account a fierce war is waged against it by the proprietors of those estates which it lays under contribution. They are stated to be almost omnivorous, eating eggs, fish, molluscs, fruits, or the kernels of nuts, which they are clever enough to extract by breaking the shell with a stone.

The individual which we met on this occasion seemed to be aware that it had nothing to fear from us, as it maintained its position on the branch, eying us curiously as we walked round it at some distance in order to get a better view. From this comparative tameness of disposition we inferred that it is a species easily domesticated; but as we did not wish for a pet just then, we did not molest it. Shortly after, we returned to the camp, where we found our early meal prepared for us by the boatmen, who were themselves regaling upon peccary meat and beans.

After breakfast we again combated the river, and after an exhausting struggle of poling, towing, and rowing, we at length left the rock-strewn channel and rapids behind us, and paddled quietly towards the old mission of San Borja, where we found a few families of Guahiboes, who seemed in no respect different from the other natives we had met with, except that they eschewed the practice of painting their bodies, while several of them had allowed their beards to grow.

Near this mission we felt a grateful diminution of the intense heat, which had so severely tried both our strength and our patience for so long. This mitigation, however, was balanced by the sufferings which we had to endure from the mosquitoes, of which this spot seemed the headquarters. The air was filled with their countless legions, and each of the little wretches appeared to be possessed of an activity and

a bloodthirsty ferocity which left nothing to be imagined in this respect.

In the neighbourhood of San Borja the alligators reach an enormous size—one which George shot just as he was about to take his morning bath in the river measuring twenty-four feet in length, and another which fell to my rifle measuring twenty-five feet. These monstrous reptiles would have little difficulty in stowing away a man in their interior; while their teeth, like ivory harrow-pins, suggested the terrible milling the victim would receive before being transferred to the capacious stomach.

During the night which we passed at San Borja we suffered excruciatingly from the insect plague which infests this place. Sleep was out of the question, and it was with lively feelings of satisfaction that we at length perceived the dawn streaking the eastern sky, announcing that our night of torment was at an end. So anxious were we to make our escape that we did not even wait for breakfast, which we took some time after on the island of Guachaco, a mingled formation of sandstone, granite, and clinker or indurated clay, in which George remarked several traces of an ore which from its rust colour we inferred to be iron.

We worked hard all this day, helping our crew occasionally, and towards evening we had the satisfaction of finding ourselves passing the mouth of the Parueni, a little above which, and on the island of

Panumana, we camped for the night. This island was extremely fertile, and among the profuse vegetation many beautiful shrubs and plants growing out of the crevices of the rocks elicited our admiration. During the night we heard the jaguars roaring in the darkness, having apparently swum to the island; but the large fires which the Indians had kindled with a view to intimidate them kept them at a distance from the camp. Nevertheless, we did not feel assured of security until the dawn, when we rose and commenced our preparations for departure.

While breakfast was being got ready (we usually took the meal before starting, as we found that if we stopped for it later the Indians could be induced to re-embark afterwards only with the greatest difficulty) I went down to the river, which was some fifty yards from the camp, in order to take my morning bath. While standing at the edge of the water, I noticed on the opposite shore, some eight hundred yards away, a jaguar slowly walking along by the river; when suddenly a drove of chiguirees emerged from the forest and advanced towards the water. The instant they became visible the jaguar crouched behind a log which had been stranded on the shore, and with only his eyes above it watched the approach of the capybaras, which seemed to have no suspicion of the danger to which they were exposing themselves.

It was an interesting spectacle, and I almost held my breath as I gazed. When probably within five

yards of the log (at the distance at which I was I could not judge very correctly) the capybaras for the first time evinced some uneasiness; they stopped, and seemed inclined to retreat. But it was too late for one of their number; for with a bound the jaguar cleared the log and alighted on the back of the nearest, which was instantly stretched lifeless on the sands.

The remainder of the drove, numbering probably fifteen or twenty, took to flight, and plunging into the river, they swam with great rapidity in my direction. Seeing this, I imitated the stratagem which I had just seen practised by the jaguar, and hiding behind a rock, I awaited the approach of the luckless animals.

In a few minutes they landed on the beach, and selecting the largest among their number, I made a good shot, tumbling him over stone-dead at about one hundred yards. The others again took to the water, where their usual evil fortune attended them; for as I followed them with my eyes, several huge alligators suddenly appeared in their midst, and two more of the unfortunate animals paid the forfeit of their lives. Indeed these wretched rodents seem created for the express purpose of furnishing jaguars and alligators with a meal whenever they are hungry. It may be the consciousness of this fact that inspires them with the philosophical indifference to their fate which seems to characterize them. They never make

any quick, determined effort at escape, merely running very slowly away—so slowly, in fact, that a man can easily overtake them if he starts on anything like equal terms with them.

The report of my rifle had scared the jaguar from the spot where he had pounced on his victim; but I could see that he had not retreated farther than the edge of the forest, where he was busily engaged with his meal, occasionally glancing in my direction to ascertain if all was right in that quarter.

The distance to where he lay must have been at least nine hundred yards, so that when I raised my rifle to send a bullet towards him it was with no expectation of killing him. My rifle was only sighted for three hundred yards, but I had an extra sight in my cartridge pouch graduated to one thousand yards. This I slipped into the catch arranged for its reception on my rifle, and putting up the nine hundred yards sight, I took a rest off a rock, and after a steady aim pressed the trigger.

Springing aside to get clear of the smoke, I watched for the effect. Fully three seconds passed, and then to my amazement the jaguar sprang from his couchant position and rolled over on the sands, now standing on his hind legs, and again reeling like a drunken man he measured his length on the ground, where he lay tearing up the sand with his claws, and uttering roars which I could hear where I stood. This was certainly an extraordinary shot, and one which I

must attribute entirely to chance. Calling loudly to George, who soon joined me, we launched the boat and pulled across the stream, which seemed fully half a mile in breadth. George was astonished at my wonderful good-fortune in bagging a jaguar with one shot at such a distance; but he did not press the opinion I knew he entertained, that it was the merest luck.

By the time we landed, the jaguar lay perfectly still; and on approaching a little nearer, which we did cautiously, keeping our rifles ready, we perceived that he was dead. My bullet had penetrated the skull between the eye and the ear, passing under the brain, and had made its exit through the opposite ear. This penetration at such a distance reflects great credit on the manufacturers of the Winchester repeater, than which I know no better rifle for such game as is to be met with in the forests or among the mountains of the New World.

The accuracy of this rifle too is marvellous. I have seen a penny postage stamp struck at two hundred yards with it; indeed, at sporting ranges it equals in accuracy the most expensive rifle made. The magazine of fourteen shots gives great confidence to the hunter, as he can, with practice, direct such a hail of bullets on an animal either running from him or charging that its escape is well-nigh hopeless.

George and I now removed the handsome spotted skin of the jaguar, and placed it in the boat

We then examined the capybara, of which very little had been eaten, the jaguar probably having contented himself with drinking the blood. This also we carried to the boat, and put back to the camp, where we were received with acclamations by our dusky companions, more due to the capybaras than to ourselves, we thought. At any rate, slices of the animals soon sputtered on the coals, and the odour was certainly appetizing.

Well pleased with my morning's achievement, I stepped into the lancha; and all being ready for departure, we pushed off, and once more sped up the river before a fresh breeze, which bellied our sail and careened us more than once upon our beam-ends.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOOD FORTUNE IN THE CHASE—A FOREST BROOK—ENCOUNTER WITH A JAGUAR
—AM SAVED BY A FORTUNATE SHOT—ESCAPE WITH TRIFLING INJURIES
—BEGIN TO REGARD JAGUARS WITH MORE RESPECT—LEAVE OUR CAMP
—OBSERVE DISTANT SMOKES—ARRIVE AT THE FIRST CATARACT OF THE
ORINOCO—MOUNTAINS OF PARIME—SCENERY NEAR THE LOWER FALL—
SAVANNAS—FLOWERS—ROCK FORMATION SIMILAR TO THAT AT CARICHANA
—FORESTS OF LAUREL—FLAMINGOES AND HERONS—LUXURIANCE OF THE
VEGETATION NEAR THE CATARACTS—REAL DIFFICULTIES BEGIN—ROCKS
AND ISLANDS—DANGERS OF THE NAVIGATION—CAVERNS—WE ENGINEER
OUR BOAT OVER A FALL—CAMP BY THE RAPIDS.



HAD hitherto no cause to complain of my fortune in the chase. I had, indeed, been much more lucky than my companion, and it seemed as if this good fortune was destined to befriend me during the whole of the expedition.

After leaving the island of Panumana, we made good progress, the breeze assisting us for several hours; and whenever, owing to the sinuosities of the river or to the shelter of islands or promontories, this aid failed us, we supplemented it with our paddles. Thus by our noon halt we had advanced nearly twenty miles from our camp of the preceding night.

The spot which we selected for this halt was on a

grassy bank at the mouth of a thickly-wooded glen, down which a brook splashed and tumbled among scattered boulders, finally joining the Orinoco, into which it flowed placidly, overarched by large trees, from whose interlacing branches depended thousands of streamers and fantastic parasites, which added to the gloom made by the impervious foliage above.

By the margin of this stream I noticed the foot-marks of deer and tapirs; and hoping to get a shot, I left the party seated at their meal and advanced along the bank of the brook, which for some distance flowed in a perfectly straight line, forming a still reach, bordered by many beautiful ferns and aquatic plants, and reflecting in its quiet waters the myriad lianas and interwoven tracery of the overhanging branches. Here and there long cord-like streamers hung almost to the surface, terminating in some brilliant flower; airy festoons were looped from liana to liana; and along the banks giant trunks shot their contorted roots into the water, covered with the most exquisite mosses and orchids wherever they protruded above the level of the stream.

At the farther end of this water-floored, liana-roofed corridor the brook descended from the higher ground and fell over a ledge of rocks, gaily carpeted with lichens and spangled with star-like flowers. Clambering over these with some difficulty, I found myself on an inclined plane, down which the stream flowed with great rapidity, now diverted to one side

by opposing boulders, and again shooting to the opposite bank, broken into numerous miniature rapids, and bordered by steeply sloping rocks covered with a thick growth of mosses and lichens of the most vivid green. At the upper end of the slope the glen seemed to close in, its sides being thickly wooded with flowering trees and bushes, high above which rose the tall column-like trunks of a species of palm much resembling the wax-palm. The graceful crests of these waved in the breeze to which their elevation exposed them.

Down by the bed of the brook the heat was intense, as the trees which shaded the lower portions of the stream here receded from its banks and exposed me fully to the sun. While trying to clamber up a rock some seven feet in height, which was placed at the border of the wooded portion of the glen, and opposed its steep sides to my further progress, my attention was attracted by the clattering of the stones in the bed of the stream. Hastily turning, I was in time to see a splendid jaguar galloping down the brook, his tail stretched out behind him, and his head turned towards me. A moment more, and he would have vanished round a bend of the bank. Taking a snapshot at him, I heard the bullet tell, and saw him spring into the air with a smothered roar, apparently falling in the water just where a projecting boulder intercepted the view.

Throwing down the lever of my rifle to insert a

fresh cartridge, I hastily clambered over the slippery rocks towards the spot where the jaguar had disappeared. But here I could find no trace of him. I searched the banks carefully on both sides of the stream for some time in vain.

At a little distance a rock sloped upwards from the water, its crest waving with luxuriant ferns and other plants. On this rock I detected something red, which a nearer approach showed to be blood. Clearly, then, the jaguar had left the water at this spot, and had either hidden himself in the jungle of fern on the top, or had escaped up the side of the glen to the forest on its summit.

Debating these possibilities, I waded slowly down the bed of the brook, which, encumbered with frequent boulders, and forming pools here and there two or three feet deep, was rather difficult to walk through. I at length neared the rock, which presented unmistakable signs of the jaguar's presence, being still wet with the water which had trickled from his body, as well as being stained with his blood, which seemed to have poured from him in a stream.

Just as I had got within some five or six yards of the rock, and was looking for a place easily scaled, I heard a loud roar; and in the air, springing towards me, was the animal of which I was in pursuit! Firing at random towards him, my foot slipped, and in a moment I found myself on my back in the water—

which luckily was only about eighteen inches deep—and the jaguar above me! Green fire flashed from his eyes as with a sort of exultant roar he seized my left shoulder in his teeth. I gave myself up for lost: my rifle, even if I could use it, was somewhere beneath the water; my pistol had fallen from its holster in my belt. The only weapon I retained was my knife; and this I could not reach, as the animal lay above me, pressing my right hand beneath his body, so that I could not withdraw it, while my left arm he held near the shoulder.

Most fortunately I wore a thick leather jerkin, well padded to withstand the thorns in our forest excursions. This George had frequently ridiculed as being unsuited to the climate; but I had so often found its efficacy in resisting the many thorny plants and bushes through which we had frequently to force our way, that I wore it always in my woodland rambles. On the present occasion it preserved me from the teeth of the jaguar, which nevertheless drove the material into my flesh, inflicting such pain that I screamed. The claws of the monster were buried in my breast, as with a quick jerk he lifted me from the water and leaped lightly with me on to the bank.

All this takes time to describe, but it occurred in a very few moments. The shake which the beast had given me seemed to have banished from me the sensation of terror which at first almost froze the

blood in my veins. I now coolly looked my enemy in the face as he stood over me, waving his tail from side to side, just as a cat may be seen to do with a mouse which she wishes to attempt an escape that she may have the pleasure of again seizing it in her fangs. I remember noticing the intense blue of the sky towards which I looked as I lay on my back, and observing the graceful droop of some tall bending plants which stood close to the spot.

At last I made an effort to collect my wandering thoughts. The jaguar did not seem to contemplate immediate extremities, and this gave me hope. He lay down close beside me, licking his wound, which I could now perceive was not mortal; and occasionally, when it pained him, he would bare his teeth with a savage growl, which augured badly for me. I dared not stir from where I lay. A slight movement which I had made caused my savage captor to spring to his feet and plant one paw on my chest with such force that I thought the bones would yield to the pressure. Blood slowly trickled from the holes which his claws had made in my chest, and I could feel it soaking through my under-flannel. Still I did not feel hurt beyond the smarting sensation of the scratches I had received.

Suddenly I heard distant shouts, with several shots in quick succession. These I knew were signals for my return. I could not venture to answer them lest

I might enrage the jaguar, who I could see was becoming uneasy as he listened to the cries.

I cannot attempt to describe my alternate feelings of hope and despair as I heard the cries repeated; now, as it seemed, as distant as at first, and again as if those who uttered them were advancing in my direction. This variation of sound might be occasioned by the wind, which I saw swaying the crests of the palms on the hill now this way and now that. How fervently I listened, and hoped that each repetition of the call would indicate the approach of George or the Indians!

At length beyond doubt the sounds drew nearer. The jaguar rose and looked in the direction whence they proceeded, and then regarded me with a glance which seemed to imply that whatever happened I was not to escape. I knew that about a quarter of an hour would bring my comrades from the bank of the Orinoco to the spot where I lay, as the distance was trifling and the difficulties of the route were slight. Moreover, the soft ground would betray my footsteps, which the Indians could follow at a fast walk. Once upon the slope above the quiet reach which I have alluded to, they would instantly perceive what had occurred.

Feverishly I listened. The sounds had ceased; the jaguar, apparently satisfied, had again lain down, and the silence was only broken by the rush and splash of the brook, or the cries of the many birds

which darted among the trees around. High aloft I could notice, circling round and round, the filthy zamuro vultures, attracted to the scene by the hope of sharing in the jaguar's banquet.

After a delay which seemed an eternity, I heard an exclamation which caused the jaguar to spring to his feet, growling savagely, and lashing his tail from side to side. In the position which he occupied he looked over me towards the bottom of the glen. While gazing thus, suddenly he sprang into the air, and rolling over me, fell into the brook, where he lay perfectly dead! At the same instant I heard the crack of a rifle, and a loud hurrah, which I recognized as George's voice. I was saved!

I rose to my feet, and, to my surprise, found that I was almost uninjured, except some trifling scratches, and the bruise which I had received when the animal fastened his teeth on my left shoulder. It was a most marvellous escape; and, full of gratitude to a merciful Providence, which had sent my comrade before it was too late to my assistance, I first offered thanks where they were due, and then expressed my obligation to George for his opportune help, without which I would certainly have perished. My rifle and revolver I found at the bottom of the stream; and having skinned the jaguar, we returned to our camp by the Orinoco.

This adventure raised the jaguar considerably in my estimation. I had begun to despise him, from

having been extremely fortunate hitherto in my encounters with those I had met, which a well-directed shot or two had seemed to bag with ease. But after this day I entertained very different feelings; and I now regarded a *rencontre* with a jaguar as a very serious affair indeed.

On our arrival at the river we found everything ready for our departure; so we took our accustomed places in the boat, and left this memorable spot behind. As we advanced we observed distant smokes, which we imagined to arise from a conflagration on the savannas, or from the camp-fires of some tribes of Indians.

Towards evening we arrived at the base of the first cataract of the Orinoco. These falls are occasioned by the river forcing its way through a chain of granitic mountains, which form a portion of the range of Parimé. Between the first and second falls there intervenes a distance of about forty-one miles, the lower cataract being known as that of Atures, while the upper is called the Falls of Maypures.

From the sea the Orinoco is navigable by vessels of some burden to the mouth of the Anaveni, situated near the lower cataract; the length of this section of the river being nearly nine hundred miles, while that portion of it which extends above these rapids is about six hundred miles.

We were charmed with the scenery in the vicinity of the lower fall. Far in the west, beyond Atures,

rose the giant pyramidal mass of the peak of Uniana, rearing its head upwards of three thousand feet above the plain below. Stretching away from its base were savannas clad with the richest verdure, in which grasses of various sorts emulated in their growth tall graceful plants of diversified foliage. Thousands of flowers reared their delicate stems, bending in long undulations before the breeze; and in every hollow or ravine, where the humid soil invited their growth, were tangled brakes of flowering shrubs covered with lianas, arums, and bromeliæ.

Here and there we observed the same rock formation which we had remarked at Carichana—gray tabular masses elevated but a few inches above the plain, and generally covered with a thick coating of mosses and lichens, with an occasional shrub or bunch of succulent plants. The horizon was encircled by mountains, which seemed to be clad to their summits with forests of a dark green foliage, probably laurel, which grows plentifully in these districts. Above the surrounding vegetation tall and elegant palms reared themselves fully to the height of one hundred feet.

In the east the hills assumed the semblance of vast pillars which towered high above the forests; and near the river columnar masses overhung the waters or the beach, and upon their bare summits stood motionless, like sentinels, groups of flamingoes or herons, which gazed down at us as if we were intruders upon their wild domain.

Close to the cataracts, the spray which is disseminated through the atmosphere produces a rich luxuriance of vegetation, than which it is impossible to conceive anything more lovely. Bannisterias, bigonias, arums, orchidiæ, and other exquisite parasites, wrapped the gnarled old tree-trunks in their brilliant folds; mimosas, figs, and laurels clothed the shores; while the graceful, airy bamboo, and hackias, mora, and miriti palms stood near the falls, receiving upon their feathery foliage the grateful moisture which supplied freshness to their verdure.

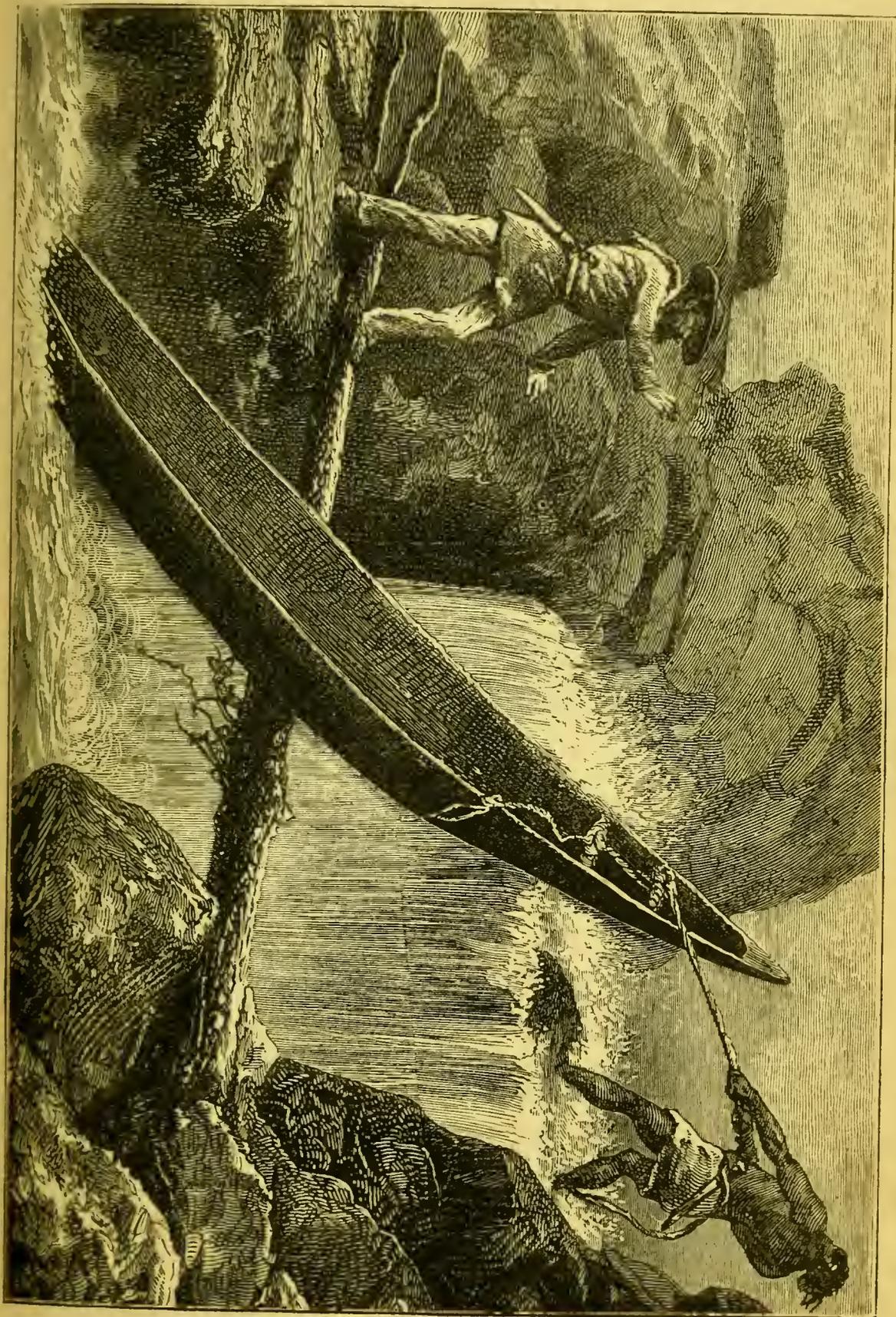
With the falls the real difficulties of the route commenced. For five miles above this spot the Orinoco is strewn with islands of every form, and rocks disposed in bars or ledges, and huge boulders, which break the rushing waters into foam. At parts these bars rise to nearly the surface of the stream, forming dangerous shallows, on which a boat would ground; at other parts the rocks seem scooped out into deep, narrow fissures or channels, down which the water shoots with extraordinary velocity, threatening with destruction against the boulders below whatever object has been drawn within the current. The islands are like emeralds in a setting of foam. From their shores feathery palms wave their tufted crests over the strife of waters, and the roots are buried amid a rich vegetation, among which many gorgeous plants loaded with flowers attracted our admiration.

Among the rapids are numerous caverns, into which

the water plunges with a thundering sound. In one of these, to which we gained access from our boat, we heard the stream rolling at the same time above our heads and beneath our feet!

To combat the difficulties of the rapids, our Indian boatmen had to wade or swim on before, and tow the boat forward by means of a rope. At one spot, to which we turned aside from the greater obstacle offered by the full body of water rushing in a solid fall over a rock, we had to engineer our lancha over a cataract some twelve feet in height. To assist us, we placed a tree trunk across the fall, resting upon a ledge of rock at either side. One of our Indians now scaled the fall, and, standing in the water, pulled the bow-rope until he dragged the boat over the trunk. This formed a sort of balance upon which the boat rested, and preserved it from being rasped against the rocks at the verge of the cataract. By the time the stern left the support afforded by this tree, the bows were afloat above; and having attained this, the Indian easily towed the boat into the deeper water above the fall.

To effect this passage, we had to remove from the lancha all the articles of our freight, as well as the palm-thatched shed which we had constructed to shield ourselves from the rays of the sun. These we had to carry over the rocks on our backs; and having at length accomplished this in safety, we selected a spot at some distance from the rocks (which, as the



SURMOUNTING A DIFFICULTY.

Indians asserted, emitted unwholesome exhalations), where we camped for the night, as it was now about an hour before sundown. We made a large fire, at which, while supper was being got ready, we dried our clothes, which had become saturated with the spray of the cataract.

Fatigued with our exertions, we at length disposed ourselves to sleep, to which the thundering rush of the river assisted us, filling our ears with its monotonous, drowsy sound.

CHAPTER XV.

HARD WORK—HEAVY RAINS—THUNDER-STORM—SKY CLEARS—I OBSERVE VAST NUMBERS OF HUMMING-BIRDS — THE TUFTED-NECK HUMMING-BIRD (TROCHILUS ORNATUS)—LEAVE THE CATARACTS BEHIND — XANCUDOES, TEMPRANEROS—REACH THE RAPIDS OF GARCITA—JAGUARS—THE RAUDAL DE GUAHIBOES—FURIOUS CURRENTS—THE BOAT IN DANGER—WE PREVAIL OVER THE STREAM—THE CATARACTS OF QUITTUNA—BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE RAPIDS—COLUMNAR ROCKS—MAYPURES—GUAHIBOES AND MACOES —REMARKABLE TREE — CUNAVENI MOUNTAINS — SIPAPO MOUNTAINS—SUNSET—ROCK FORMATION NEAR THE VICHADA—CINNAMON-TREE—CAMP NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE ZAMA—WATER-SYSTEMS AND MOSQUITOES—FOREST SCENES — BATS — SAN FERNANDO — SAN BALTASAR — CAPYBARA HUNT.



WHEN daylight again aroused us, we quickly arose, as we well knew that a hard day's work awaited us. However, as there was no help for it, we set to work with light hearts, and towards the afternoon, with the aid of our crew, who alternately waded, swam, pushed, and hauled or poled the boat, we passed the most difficult part of the channel.

The spray, dashed against us from the rocks, wet us through; but we little regarded this inconvenience, as, at any rate, we were saturated with a deluge of rain such as I had seldom seen equalled since leaving San Fernando, and never in Europe. The very

atmosphere seemed transformed into water, which hissed against the rocks, or boiled upon the glassy surface of the unbroken rapids. The sky was of a portentous blackness; and at frequent intervals the crashing of thunder, added to the hoarse roar of the cataracts, made such a chaos of sounds that it was hard to convince the mind, confused by the rushing waters, that the solid earth was not being torn from its foundations and swiftly hurled to destruction.

Drenched and weary, we halted for the night near the upper end of the rapids. In the morning we hoped to complete the ascent by eleven o'clock; and comforting ourselves with this prospect, we exchanged our wet garments for others, and set about preparing our evening meal.

The rain had cleared off, and now the sun, hidden behind the distant forest-clad hills, threw a flood of crimson light along the skies, against which the peak of Uniana stood out in bold relief, painted a deep purple by the shadow.

I had wandered a little way from the camp in order to collect some dried wood, which, indeed, was difficult to find, the late downpour having soaked everything. While searching along the shore near the verge of the forest for driftwood, I was much interested by observing vast numbers of humming-birds flitting among the foliage of a huge old tree which was thickly covered with flowering plants. There

appeared to be several varieties of the minute creatures engaged among the nectaries of this ample flower-bed; but one kind seemed so superior to the others in the beauty of its plumage that I made a special note of its characteristics.

This handsome little creature, according to Lesson, belongs to the genus *Lophornis*, in which he has included several other species which seem immediately connected with each other. It has a handsome crest of reddish chestnut-coloured feathers upon its head, while its neck is decorated with bunches or tufts of narrow feathers, which reach the length of about an inch. These tufts are composed of from ten to twenty plumes, the central one being the longest, and similar in colour to the crest, and are tipped or terminated with a spot of vivid green. The plumage of the throat and breast, as well as the front part of the head, consists of bright emerald-green feathers, so disposed as to resemble scales. This is bordered by a line of a paler shade running from the back of the slit in the bill, round the eyes, and down the side of the throat to the lower part of the breast, where it joins a band of a rufous shade, identical in colour with the crest. Bronze-green forms the predominant shade on the upper parts, varied by reflections which in some lights are steel-blue; and towards the tail is situated a well-defined band of grayish-white; while the tail itself is well-feathered and broad, affording an effectual rudder by which the active

little bird can steer itself, and twist and turn with great rapidity. The centre feathers of the tail are greenish, and the others are a deep chestnut-red with purple reflections. Altogether, this minute bird, scarcely bigger than many insects, and certainly not so large as some, was a beautiful admixture of colours, glowing with a metallic lustre, which glanced as it flitted in and out of the flowers, into which it dived as does the humble-bee into the fox-glove in England.

The heavy rains which had fallen had swelled the volume of the river, which assisted us in the passage of the long series of falls, and obviated the necessity which otherwise would have existed of running the boat on rollers along the banks, or with great difficulty carrying it up steep inclines, or over rocks which might have inflicted serious injury on it.

Gradually the cataracts were left behind, and at length we experienced the great satisfaction of finding ourselves again floating on smooth water, though it still ran with a swift current. The torments inflicted on us in this neighbourhood by xancudoes—a species of gnat with immensely long legs, which fills the lower stratum of the air with their countless myriads—were excessive. We observed that from about daybreak until about five in the afternoon the mosquitoes harass the traveller. These somewhat resemble the common fly, and are of the genus *Simulium*.

Towards nightfall another species of gnat, called *tempraneros*, makes its appearance. These vanish about half-past six or seven; and finally, the nocturnal hours are favoured by the xancudoes, which do not retire until the mosquitoes again mount guard.

After a few hours' paddling, we reached the rapids of Garcita, where, in the face of the impending cliffs, and at the height of nearly two hundred feet, we noticed many small holes, which presented the appearance of having been eroded by the action of the waters in some long past age. This locality was much frequented by jaguars, whose roaring disturbed us during the night; and as a measure of protection we piled fuel on the fire until it flared and glowed, sending up showers of sparks, which were engulfed in the darkness.

The ensuing day, under pressure of the xancudoes, we left our camp at the unusually early hour of three o'clock, and by five in the afternoon we reached the Raudal de Guahiboes, where the stream is traversed by a ridge of rocks, over which the Indians dragged the boat—to effect which the removal of our luggage became necessary.

At this spot the Orinoco is as nearly as possible a mile in breadth; and its waters dashed furiously against the opposing rocks, whirling round their polished sides in fierce eddies, which seized the boat in their furious torsion, and despite the efforts of the Indians, who manfully contested inch by inch,

gradually carried it towards the falls! Seeing the course affairs were taking, George and I dashed to their assistance; and although we were often carried off our feet by the rapid currents, and bruised by violent contact with the rocks, we at length prevailed over the fury of the stream. Slowly and surely we gained ground, and just as night rendered the obstacles of the route indistinct, and thus added to their terrors, we reached a landing-place used by the inhabitants of Maypures, a village situated at some distance from the river.

These cataracts which we had passed with such difficulty are called by the natives of this region Quittuna, and extend along the Orinoco for about three and a half miles. There are several bars or dikes of rock which connect the several rapids, of which the principal are named respectively Purimarimi, Manimi, and the Salto de la Sardina, which last consists of a fall some nine feet in height.

From an elevated position which we reached, and which was situated at a short distance from the village of Maypures, we enjoyed a bird's-eye view of the rapids, which presented a spectacle at once grand and beautiful. Countless rocks broke the broad bosom of the Orinoco into foam of snowy whiteness, from which projected granitic blocks of various shapes, and of an inky blackness. Scattered at intervals amid the strife of waters, islands of the brightest verdure seemed to float peacefully on the

surface; their bosoms clad with graceful palms, leaning their light and fern-like fronds over the swiftly rushing river; bushes glowing with flowers of their own, or covered with those of the various species of lianas, fringed the shores, their branches dripping in the stream, which washed their roots.

The velocity of the current dissipates the spray in a sort of mist which overhangs the scene, in which the sun is "shorn of his beams," and through which the tall columns and bending crests of the palms loom indistinctly. Towards evening a beautiful effect was produced by the slanting beams of the sun striking the vapoury cloud and forming numerous gaily coloured rainbows, which appeared, vanished, and again appeared like magic.

The plain which extends to the west of the elevation from which we viewed the falls formed at some remote period the bed of the Orinoco, which has since changed its channel. These flats are studded with water-eroded rocks rising to a considerable height: some are of columnar shape; others resemble towers, castles, or gigantic mushrooms whose tabular heads project beyond the supporting stem all round.

At Maypures the inhabitants are Guahiboes and Macoes. Formerly they were much more numerous; but disease has thinned their ranks, and at the time of our visit they scarcely numbered sixty. Plantains and cassava are cultivated round the mission; and from the fruits of various species of trees, especially

the palms, they manufacture several kinds of refreshing drinks.

At this place we were struck with the great numbers of macaws of the most diversified colours which flew about the houses, or gathered in flocks in the fields. Vivid purple, blue, and yellow constitute the hues of their plumage; and as they fly in great numbers among the huts of the villagers, they certainly add to the gaiety of the scene.

Being anxious to secure a specimen of these birds, I approached a tree upon which several scores of them were perched. A fortunate shot brought my victim to the earth; but my attention was immediately absorbed by the vegetable giant beneath whose wide-spreading branches I found myself. This tree is of the genus *unona*, and is furnished with straight branches, which rise in the shape of a pyramid,—the column-like trunk upholding a world of foliage, among which I noticed a fruit from which I learned that the Indians make an excellent febrifuge, equal in efficacy to that made from the Peruvian bark.

Having satisfied our curiosity with regard to the objects in this neighbourhood, we again embarked on the morning following our arrival, and soon left the last of the cataracts behind us. I will not describe the difficulties which we had to overcome in the effort, as it would merely be a repetition of what the reader is already familiar with. Here, with the chief

obstacles to our progress left behind us, we found ourselves in quite a new region.

Bounding the horizon, far in the distance rose the summits of the Cunaveni Mountains, a towering peak of which, rising high above the chain, glowed at sunset with the reflected fires of the west. The breeze, which had hitherto aided us on so many occasions, here finally left us; nor did we again experience any wind worth mentioning until we reached the Atabapo. In the east rose the peaks of the Sipapo Mountains, clothed in a dense mantle of forests, which at early morning seemed of varying shades of green. Prodigious shadows were cast westward across the plain, which, as the sun ascended the heavens, grew shorter and shorter, and finally disappeared altogether. Towards evening, vapours exhaled from the surrounding woods, veiled the landscape, and softened the outlines of mountain and forest; and through them the fiery sun descending shed a lurid light, painting hill and plain with his ensanguined beams.

Near the Vichada we remarked the same formation of the rocks into the resemblance of ruined buildings, pillars, or towers. At this spot, too, we observed that the forest, usually luxuriant, became thin; while the soil was poor, and barely concealed the substratum of granite, which, where it was exposed, was covered with lichens and mosses. Here grew the famous *Laurus cinnamomoides*, from which is produced an aromatic species of cinnamon.

At the confluence of the Zama with the Orinoco we spent the night. The Zama possesses blackish or greenish-black waters, and with others forms that water-system to which the term *aguas negras* has been applied. Along the black waters mosquitoes do not exist; at any rate, not in such vast numbers as on the white waters, such as the Cassiquiare or Amazons, where they swarm in clouds along the banks. The dark hue of the *aguas negras* is attributed by the Indians to the decomposition in them of vegetable matter, especially of the roots of the sarsaparilla.

Under the invigorating influence of the out-door life which we led, I could now laugh at fatigue under which at home I would probably have succumbed. Thus, when after each succeeding day of arduous work poling and towing the boat up steep rapids, I rose at the early hour of three or four in the morning, I felt both refreshed with my repose and ready to encounter the fatigues of the journey.

After leaving the Zama, the mountains gradually withdrew from the river on the east. Both banks were, however, still skirted by forests, into whose sombre depths we often cast our eyes in search of game. We passed the mouth of the Mataveni, a fine stream which flows into the Orinoco from the west; and on the beach, just above its confluence, we halted for the night.

The forest here was peculiarly grand. Vast tower-

like trees rose from the deep soil, their roots springing to the height of ten or twelve feet before becoming merged in the immense trunks. Among the recesses between these buttresses several men could easily have found room to stand. Smaller trees, presenting the appearance of having been dwarfed by the shade of their majestic brethren, stood singly here and there, their tall slender stems bending beneath the weight of their branchy tops, which seemed to search for an opening in the vaulted roof of the forest, where they might enjoy a little light and air. High overhead the innumerable cords of the lianas or cipos entwined themselves among the branches, connecting tree with tree by their network; and from this confused mass of tracery hung down long tendrils, which seemed to seek for some support round which to twist themselves. The gray stems of the trees at this spot were less clothed with parasitic plants than I had observed elsewhere, but, nevertheless, plumes of fern had found a resting place in the inequalities of their trunks, and depended gracefully towards the earth.

Wherever the sunlight fell through the branches above upon the ground a flower-bed of extraordinary luxuriance flourished; and bending above the blaze of colours below I observed some magnificent strelitzias, or fan-palms, whose wonderful foliage forms ready-made umbrellas. The far perspective of this forest was wrapped in gloom, which the eye failed to penetrate; while relieved against its sombre shades

some gray trunk caught the eye, wrapped in the serpentine embrace of creepers, or perhaps a stray beam of light from above revealed a bunch of glowing orchids fostered by its daily recurrence. Beneath these vegetable vaults the distant howlings of the araguatos resounded, announcing the approach of darkness; and as the natural gloom of the forest deepened in the thickening twilight, I retraced my steps to the camp, the fires of which I could perceive glancing beyond the verge of the woods.

At this spot the Orinoco flowed between banks which showed the erosions of the inundations at the height of some eight feet above the level of the water. During the night we were annoyed by the vast numbers of bats which flew round us, having their nests in the crevices of the banks or of the rocks. Towards morning we were awakened by a heavy rain, which effectually dispelled sleep, and caused us to leave our hammocks at an unusually early hour. Finding that the rain continued, we embarked, and after ten hours' paddling we arrived at the mission of San Fernando de Atabapo, a village of several hundred inhabitants, situated at the junction of the rivers Atabapo and Guaviare with the Orinoco, of which the Guaviare appeared from its volume to be rather the parent stream than a mere affluent.

It now became necessary for us to decide whether to continue our journey by way of the Orinoco, or to leave that river and reach Esmeralda by the circuitous

route of the Atabapo, Temi, Pimichim, Negro, and Cassiquiare, entering the Orinoco from the latter stream about twenty-five miles below Esmeralda. This route was certainly longer than the more direct one up the river; but as it seemed to offer greater variety, we at length resolved to take it, leaving to chance George's meeting with the gentleman of whom he was in search. Having arrived at this determination, we left the Orinoco, and turned our bows up the Rio Atabapo.

The foliage by which we had lately been surrounded and the atmosphere, here both underwent a change. The forest was composed of trees different in species from those we had left behind. The mosquitoes had also, happily, disappeared: in connection with which fact we observed that the colour of the stream was blackish, and was so clear that we could distinguish the smallest objects on the bottom at the depth of thirty feet. Along the banks was a profusion of elegant plants, above which towered majestic palms, whose image was faithfully mirrored in the crystal waters.

As if to compensate for the marked absence of alligators, we noticed numbers of water-snakes, which wriggled like eels across the river, their heads and part of their necks alone rising above the surface. The araguatos, as well as the capybaras and vultures, had disappeared; but we still saw traces of jaguars, or beheld the animals themselves as they walked along

the beach, or lay stretched on the sands by the edge of the forest.

For some time past we had suffered great inconvenience from the heavy and continuous rains, which fall with great regularity at this season ; and as those who are unacclimatized run considerable risk of catching tertian fever, we judged it prudent to accelerate our journey as much as we conveniently could.

Some miles below the mission of San Baltasar, on the banks of the Atabapo, we were struck by the enormous size of a ceiba tree, which towered above the surrounding forest. This giant measured about fifty-one feet in girth, having a diameter of seventeen feet, and its height, as nearly as we could guess, was about one hundred and thirty feet.

We were much impeded in our progress by the strength of the current, which ran with considerable velocity, sometimes bearing towards us the uprooted trunks of immense trees, which had either been loosened from their hold in the mud, or which had been torn from the banks by the flooded river. These we carefully avoided, and the danger to which we were exposed from this cause was one reason which prevented us from journeying at an earlier hour in the mornings, before we had light sufficient to detect these obstacles and give them a wide berth.

At the mission of San Baltasar we were the guests of the missionary, who entertained us with lively

stories illustrative of the difficulties of his position in the neighbourhood of heathen tribes, whose native barbarity was only slightly modified by their frequent intercourse with the natives of the mission, who, on their part, were not improved by the contact. He spoke in high terms of the beneficial effects produced on some of these wild Christians by the preaching of the gospel. The simplicity of their faith and purity of their lives, he said, contrasted well with the indifference of hundreds professing Christianity, and possessing all the aids to piety to be found in civilized communities.

Leaving San Baltasar behind us, we shortly passed, on the western bank of the river, a large granitic rock, called by the natives "Piedra de la Guahiba," from an old legend connecting it with a Guahibo woman who had been forcibly removed from her forest home in order to be baptized at the mission of San Fernando.

Paddling along shores varied with every species of verdure, now floating past islets which seemed to have become detached from the banks by the floods, and again sailing beneath the overhanging foliage of gigantic fig-trees, bound hand and foot, so to say, with an inextricable cordage of flowering and thorny lianas, from whose ropes, as well as from the branches of the trees themselves, swung the pendulous nests of the crested cassicans, we at length passed the entrance of the Guasucavi, and entered the mouth of

the Rio Temi, which almost connects the Rio Negro with the Atabapo, being only separated by the portage of Pimichim, nine miles in length.

The Temi runs directly from north to south, through a flat country well wooded with various kinds of trees, among which I noticed the pirijao-palms, adorned with large bunches of peach-like fruit, and also the variegated fan-shaped foliage of the *Mauritia aculeata*, which slowly waved to a light wind.

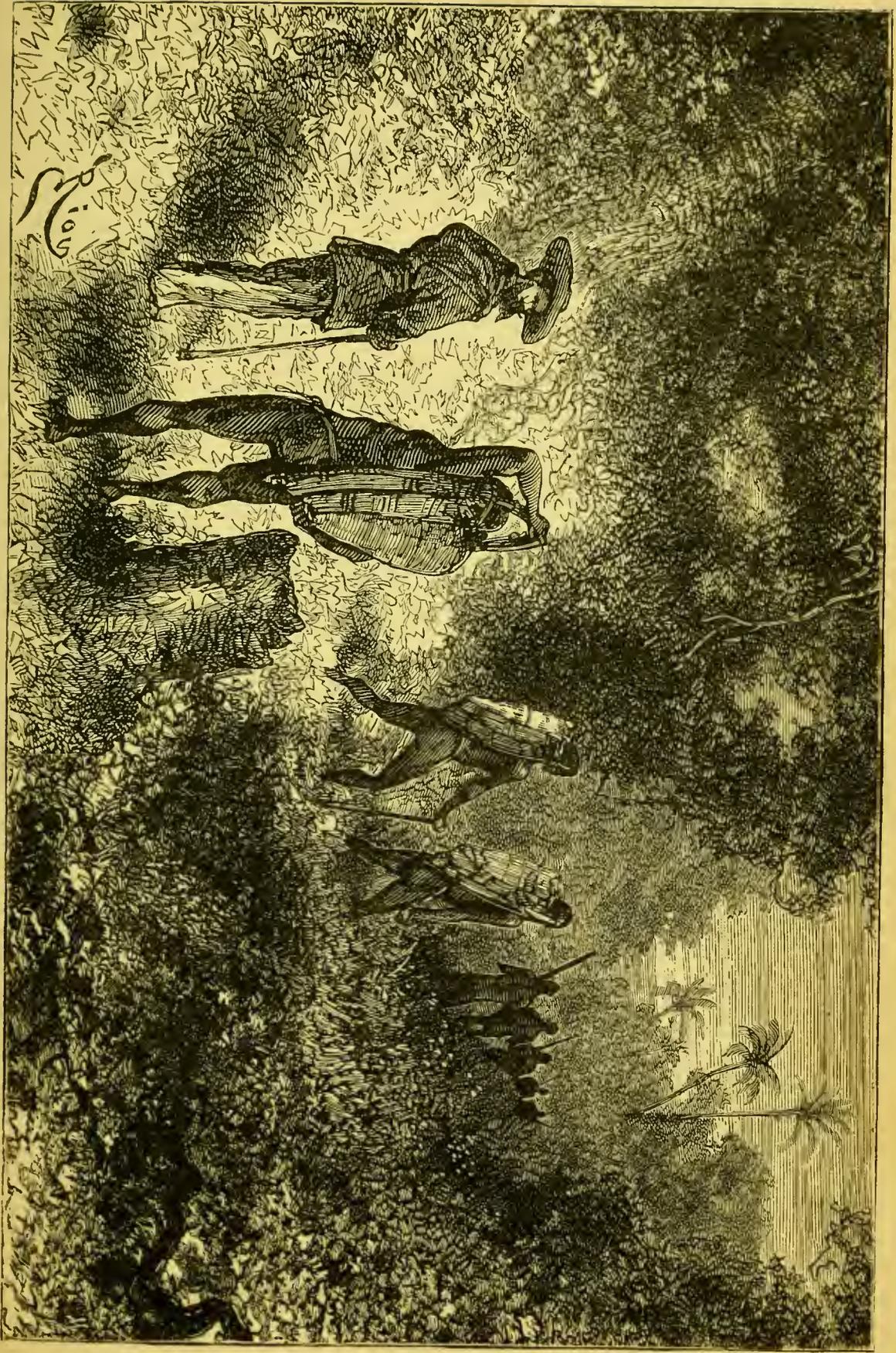
Occasionally the waters, swollen with the frequent rains, overflowed the banks, especially at the bends of the river, and inundated the forests on both sides for a considerable distance. Here we pushed through the thick foliage, often sailing down narrow paths between lofty walls of trees draped with gaudy vegetation. The inundation had taken the serpents and snakes by surprise, for many of them had found precarious sanctuary on the floating logs, or upon branches but little elevated above the rushing flood. As many of these as we passed we conscientiously knocked on the head. Dolphins and bavas, a small species of alligator, sported among the tree trunks, and supplied the places of naiads and mermaids, with which our romantic imaginations would have preferred to people the scene.

The forests all round being flooded to the depth of many feet, we spent an uncomfortable night in our boat, which we secured to a tree. At daybreak we

again started, and after a few hours arrived at the confluence of the Tuamini with the Temi. The former we followed to the south-west; and by noon we found ourselves off the mission of San Antonio de Javita. At this mission we remained for a week, while our Indians, and also others with whom the missionary supplied us, carried our boat and its cargo across the portage of Pimichim, and set it afloat upon the waters of that river. A Portuguese trader, whom the missionary said we might implicitly trust, undertook to superintend the Indians during the portage, having himself articles to transfer, for which purpose he had hired carriers.

Neither George nor I regretted the respite from the fatiguing travel of the past month, and we now looked forward to enjoying some hunting during our short sojourn at San Antonio. Of late we had been much annoyed by the attacks of a species of tick, called chegoes, which buried themselves beneath our skin and there deposited their eggs. From this burrowing habit they are named "aradores," or ploughmen. These pests are scarcely larger than animalculæ, and are consequently extremely difficult of extraction; but the good padre effected a cure by bathing the affected parts in an infusion of the bark of a certain shrub, the name of which I unfortunately neglected to preserve.

Our anticipations of sport were destined to be all but disappointed. Unceasing rain fell during our



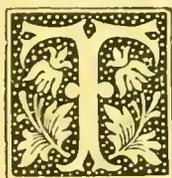
THE PORTAGE OF THE PIMICHIM. Page 260.

visit. One day, however, we witnessed an exciting scene. The river in front of the mission was covered with the canoes of the natives, who were frantically pursuing a herd of capybaras which were swimming in the agitated waters. Already several of the unfortunate rodents lay dead upon the bank, while an Indian, who prosecuted his attack from the shore, sat among them and amused himself with shooting at the heads of those animals which endeavoured to escape from the Indians in the boats.

It was a lively spectacle, but it was soon over; and when at length the canoes were brought to the bank, not less than fifty of the capybaras were found to have fallen victims to the attack.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE START ON A TAPIR HUNT—ARCHIPELAGO OF ISLANDS—DISCOVER THE TAPIR'S TRACKS—THE MISSIONARY'S DOG—THE TAPIR BREAKS COVER AND IS WOUNDED—GEORGE AND THE INDIAN FOLLOW IN PURSUIT—DEATH OF THE TAPIR—DANGER OF CATCHING FEVER DURING THE RAINY SEASON—LEAVE THE MISSION—PATH THROUGH THE FOREST—CURIOUS BRIDGE—BEAUTIFUL SYLVAN SCENE—MARMOSETS—I GIVE JACKO A FALL—REACH THE PIMICHIM—INCESSANT RAINS—EXPOSURE OF OUR BOATMEN—WE OBSERVE INDIANS CONSTRUCTING A CANOE—THE RIO NEGRO—THE WEATHER CLEARS—JOY OF THE ANIMAL CREATION—WILD-FOWL SHOOTING—STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF A DUCK—CIGANAS—REACH THE MISSION OF MAROA—LODGED IN THE CHURCH—DEGRADED CONDITION OF THE NATIVES.



THE next day we devoted to a tapir hunt, which animal the Indians reported as being tolerably numerous a little farther up the river, where a sort of archipelago of islands offered a retreat peculiarly suited to its habits.

Leaving the mission at an early hour, and attended by only one Indian, we arrived shortly after day-break at the first of the islands, which also was the largest, probably covering an area of two or three square miles. This was well wooded with the various species of trees common in the surrounding forests. At one side we observed that the remnants of a

beach existed, the flooded river having covered the remainder; and now the surging waters threatened soon to engulf the island itself, the surface of which was not many feet elevated above the level of the river. Towards this side we directed the boat; and as we coasted along close by the shore we speedily discovered in the wet mud by the edge of the water the fresh footmarks of a tapir. These seemed to lead towards the interior of the island; but the mud was so soft that it had flowed in upon the impressions, rendering their shape rather doubtful.

The missionary had lent us a dog, which he said was an extraordinary animal at tapirs, never losing the scent on land, and having some supernatural instinct vouchsafed him besides by which he could follow them on the water also. This dog we now threw upon the beach, desiring him to "Hie in there!" a command which he hardly waited to hear, for he instantly snuffed the tainted air, and with a yelp of satisfaction he plunged into the wood, where we heard him giving tongue, and gradually working his way towards the opposite side of the island. We, therefore, paddled with might and main in that direction, so as to catch a glimpse of the tapir before he took to the water.

Meantime our four-footed ally was doing his duty faithfully, and fully verifying the high encomiums which our host had bestowed upon him. We could hear him barking from the interior of the grove; and

from the sound I judged that as yet he only ran the scent. All of a sudden, however, his yelps intensified, while they seemed to advance rapidly in our direction. He had evidently started the tapir from his retreat.

We had stopped the boat about fifty yards from the bank, and now, full of excitement, we surveyed the verge of the woods up and down stream, expecting each moment to see the tapir break cover and plunge into the water. In this we were not disappointed. Almost directly in front of us we could hear a loud crashing among the underwood; and immediately after, the hunted animal emerged, with the dog hard at his heels. Shouting loudly, hoping to scare him from plunging into the stream, we both fired together, but so quickly that neither of us made a good shot. The tapir fell, however, but immediately recovered his legs, and, still harassed by the dog, disappeared in the dense underwood. The boat was quickly paddled to the bank, and George and the Indian followed in pursuit, while I kept watch outside, lest the beast might again attempt to escape by diving.

The moments passed slowly as my companion and the Indian forced their way through the tangled vegetation. At length a loud shout announced that the game had been found. Tying the canoe to the branches of a bush on the bank, I landed, and soon reached the spot where lay the tapir, disabled by



DEATH OF THE TAPIR. Page 266.

the shots, but not yet dead. A shot through the head settled him, and our Indian companion proceeded, with every demonstration of satisfaction, to butcher the game.

It was certainly a wild spot, overhung by the interwoven branches of the trees, and rendered still more gloomy by the many tendrils and vine-like creepers which added to the impenetrability of the foliage. As soon as the tapir was cut up into pieces of a size to be conveniently carried to the canoe, we each shouldered our burden; and well pleased with the success which had attended our hunt, we returned in time for breakfast to our host's house. The worthy padre was delighted by the contribution towards his larder of the tapir, which we were only too glad to be able to give him.

This was the only sport we had while staying at this place, as the almost incessant rain prevented us from going out. The rich vegetation, loaded with moisture, wet us to the skin in a few moments, so that we were reluctantly compelled to forego the pleasures of the chase from a fear of being seized with fevers, which even natives of these regions are not proof against during the rainy season. However, the time did not hang heavily on our hands, as we were busily occupied in preparing the specimens of natural history which we had collected during the expedition. These embraced several kinds of birds, some monkeys (*dourocoulis*), and one or two snakes.

Having enjoyed the kind hospitality of the missionary for a week, we were apprised on the seventh day that one of our Indians had returned with the information that the lancha was now safely arrived at the Pimichim, and that our crew awaited our appearance to resume the journey. Our host was loath to part with us so soon, visitors being extremely scarce at these out-of-the-way places. But we at length got away, and took our course through the forest on a nine-mile walk across the portage.

The path, if path it could be called, ran beneath the feathery foliage of palm-trees, varied by fig-trees, laurels, and arborescent ferns, hung over with a gorgeous network of lianas. At one point of the route we passed a small stream which rushed with great velocity along the bottom of a deep glen. Across this was swung a frail chain of lianas, fashioned into a kind of suspension bridge, which spanned the stream at a height of some fifty or sixty feet. At several points this strange bridge, which somewhat resembled a spider's web flung across the ravine, was strengthened by creepers which depended naturally from above. These were intertwined among the cordage of the footway, and certainly helped to steady the whole, although, as we passed cautiously over, the extraordinary structure swayed unpleasantly from side to side.

Near the water I remarked a corneto palm supported upon a pile of its projecting roots, the junction

of which formed the stem. The farther bank was composed of large rocks piled one upon the other, and for the most part concealed behind a verdant curtain of hanging plants. The sides of this glen were thickly wooded with the most luxuriant growth of the various kinds of palms—the corneto, with its strange above-ground roots; the thorny-stemmed pirijao, rising nearly seventy feet above the under-wood, and waving its long spreading fronds in the air; the tough hackia; the graceful mora; the tall miriti, and others. The gigantic higuera, the gloomy laurel (*Laurus persea*), the caoutchouc, and many more, sought the upper air, and wrestled one with the other for a breathing space above that vast and unbroken canopy of foliage which extended overhead from side to side of the ravine, and threw a shade, as of approaching night, upon the brook below.

As I stood upon the bridge, the view both up and down the little stream was very beautiful. Pendent streamers, terminating in tufts of gorgeous colour, somewhat resembling the passion flower, hung from the overarching branches and seemed to seek the water; old trunks, which had probably heard the rush of the brook past their roots for centuries, leaned across it, and upon their gnarled stems and tortuous branches parasites rich in verdure and brilliant in colour seemed to contend for room to grow; mosses of the brightest emerald clothed the roots

which were washed by the waters of the stream, as well as the boulders against which they crested in foam.

A little below the bridge the brook formed a miniature cascade, the spray from which, falling on the rocks and banks around, nourished a variety of splendid plants, the brightness of whose colours almost served to dispel the darkness of the recess in which they grew. Charmed with the beauty of this secluded spot, I followed my companions, who had waited for me with exemplary patience at the farther end of the bridge while I feasted my eyes on the scene. We turned to observe an Indian cross the fragile network. When half over, one of the stays formed of lianas broke, giving a shock to the entire bridge which rather startled our dusky attendant.

On our way from this place to the Pimichim we saw nothing more worthy of record than some monkeys, which seemed, from the fan-like tufts of hair projecting from their ears, to be marmosets (*Jacchus vulgaris*). Their peculiarly shrill and disagreeable voices, indeed, confirmed our suspicions of their identity. One of them, which seemed to resent our presence in its dominions, was particularly vociferous. At length, seeing the creature seated on a frail branch, with no other support in its neighbourhood, I determined to give it a fall. Taking a very careful aim at the exposed part of the branch, my bullet struck it fairly. The bough broke beneath

the weight of Master Jacko, and that astonished animal fell with a heavy thud on the ground at our feet. Before we could seize the queer creature, it nimbly skipped off to the nearest tree, up which it vanished with extraordinary agility, uttering dissonant cries. These, however, presently ceased; and laughing heartily at the adventure, we resumed our walk.

In about an hour we reached the Pimichim, where we found our boat moored to the bank, and our Indians taking refuge from the rain in their hammocks, which they had slung beneath the shelter of the trees.

In the neighbourhood of the mission of Javita the rains are almost without cessation. The missionary, in answer to my inquiry, told me that at the time of our visit it had been raining continuously for six weeks, and that during the preceding rainy season it had rained uninterruptedly for five months! This excess of moisture, while productive of fevers and other dangerous affections to the inhabitants, covers the earth with a rich luxuriance of vegetation not met with in drier regions.

Hitherto we had escaped illness of any kind, which I attributed to our great care to exchange our wet clothes for dry ones whenever we stopped work, and also to the quinine which we took frequently. We had each a suit, too, of waterproof material, which, although it certainly did not fully answer the purpose

of excluding the rain, still preserved us sufficiently well from the never-ceasing deluges. A large india-rubber sheet which George had brought with him to use as a tent we found useful, as when thrown over the roof of our palm-thatched hut on board the boat it completely shielded us from the wet. Here we were comfortable enough, and occupied the time in taking notes on the foliage along the banks, or of the characteristics of such birds or animals as came within the range of our observation.

We pitied our wretched boatmen, who were exposed night and day to the rains; but they did not seem to be very much inconvenienced by this, as the water streamed off their naked backs as from the back of a duck. Here, as well as in Central America, when the European puts on extra clothes to protect himself from the rain, the natives take off whatever clothes they ordinarily wear, which they stow away carefully in some dry place; and defended from the deluge only by their greasy skins, they philosophically await a change of weather.

While passing along by the banks I noticed some Indians engaged in making a large canoe from the trunk of a kind of laurel (*Ocotea cymbarum*), which they hollowed into the required shape by means of fire and their rude axes. The outside was afterwards trimmed into shape, and thus they produced in a single piece a boat large enough to seat thirty or forty persons.

The Pimichim is an extremely sinuous river, twisting and turning throughout its course. To reach a point on its banks only a short distance in a straight line, therefore, occupies a considerable time if the journey be performed by the river.

It seemed as if our acquaintance with the Rio Negro was to be formed under pleasant auspices; for just as we entered it from the Pimichim, after nearly five hours' rowing, experiencing no difficulty in passing the rapid at the junction, owing to the high flood in the river, the weather suddenly cleared, and the evening sun shone out gloriously in a sky from which every trace of cloud seemed to have vanished as if by magic.

The animal creation seemed no less rejoiced at the change than we were. Gaudy macaws and parrots chattered or screamed their satisfaction from the forest on both sides of the river; monkeys emerged from the recesses of the foliage and ogled us slyly as we passed; swallows skimmed along overhead, searching for insects in the higher strata of the air; and birds of a gallinaceous species were visible at intervals by the edge of the forest. Several of these we shot for supper. Some, such as the guacharaca, are excellent, whether boiled or grilled over the coals: roasted on the point of a stick leaning towards a clear fire at an angle of forty-five degrees, and dusted with some pepper and salt, they make a very welcome addition to the hunter's fare.

Water-fowl of different kinds abounded on the river, and at these our rifles were busily engaged.

A duck of a kind I did not know had been winged by one of our bullets, and, unable to fly, it squattered along the water, quacking loudly as it perceived our exertions to overtake it. Our Indians urged the boat forward with powerful strokes of the paddles, and we were on the point of securing our prey when we observed a commotion in the water near the ill-fated bird, which suddenly disappeared! The waves made upon the surface by the unknown robber gradually subsided, and no clue to the mystery presented itself. Whether a huge fish of the pike kind, or whether a cayman or other monster abstracted the duck, certain it is that it vanished by the agency of something unseen by us.

The waters of the Rio Negro, as the word implies, are of a dark colour; and the individuality of the river is preserved for a considerable distance after its junction with the Amazon, its waters being clearly traceable in the whitish current of the latter river. Ciganas were plentiful along the shores, and these handsome birds, which appeared to be a species of pheasant, sputtered over the coals at many a camp on our way down the Negro.

We arrived about sundown at the mission of Maroa, which is situated on the east bank of the river, and contains a small population of semi-civilized Indians. Here we passed the night; and as the missionary's

accommodation was too limited to receive us we were permitted to sleep in the church, which we were grateful for, as it rained heavily during the night. We here replenished our provisions, which had run rather short, by purchasing a pig and several pairs of fowls, as well as some cassava and plantains. The fowls we allowed to run about until required, having first secured their wings together across their backs.

The Indians of these regions seemed a very degraded race, living upon ants and on a paste made of a certain kind of clay, with which they mixed a large species of termites collected in the neighbouring forest.

CHAPTER XVII.

HUNTING EXPEDITION—IMPENETRABLE WOODS—WE LAND—GEORGE'S ESCAPE FROM A SNAKE—I FIND THE IMPRESSION OF A SNAKE'S FANGS ON MY BOOT—GENERAL IMMUNITY OF THE NATIVES FROM SNAKE-BITES—SNAKES NOT SO AGGRESSIVE AS IS USUALLY SUPPOSED—GLOOMY FOREST—ENORMOUS TRUNKS FESTOONED WITH LIANAS—THE GROUND RISES—NEW VEGETABLE FORMS—FOREST SCENE—CROSS THE CREST OF THE HILL—QUIET VALLEY—RICH VEGETATION—DEER—GEORGE AND I EACH SHOOT A DEER—FLIGHT OF VULTURES—WE "DOCTOR" THE OFFAL TO POISON THE VULTURES—DISGUSTING SPECTACLE AFFORDED BY TWO VULTURES—SUCCESS OF MY STRATAGEM—LARGE HERD OF PECCARIES—WE ESCAPE THE NOTICE OF THE HERD—THE JACITARA—URANIAS—JAGUAR—WE LEAVE MAROA—EPICUREAN ALLIGATORS—TANGLED FOREST—REACH DAVIPE—CONDITION OF THE NATIVES IMPROVED BY THE MISSIONARY—PASS THE CASSIQUIARE—SAN CARLOS—WE DISPOSE OF SKINS—ENTER THE CASSIQUIARE—SAN FRANCISCO SOLANO—JAGUARS—OUR PIG SEIZED—FORTUNATE SHOTS.



THE day following our arrival at Maroa broke bright and clear, and we determined to spend it in a hunting expedition in the forest below the mission, where the monk assured us that we should find jaguars, tapirs, and peccaries, as well as a species of deer of a kind different from those we had seen on the llanos. As it was easier to reach our hunting-ground by water than by land, we borrowed a montaria or hunting-canoe from one of the Indians; and having filled our cartridge pouches with a plentiful supply of ammunition, we left the beach and started down-stream,

The trees on both sides were very dense, presenting a solid front of foliage to the river, interwoven with cipos and various kinds of creepers which give such a tangled and impenetrable air to the woods, so that we paddled for a considerable distance before we arrived at a spot which seemed to give access to the interior of the forest. Here we landed, and dived among the gloomy recesses of the trees.

The ground was soft, and was covered with a rank growth of weeds and different kinds of plants, through which we crashed our way. George was a little in advance, when I suddenly heard him cry out, and saw him leap quickly to one side.

“Take care, Frank!” he exclaimed; “there’s a snake there! It struck at my legs as I passed. Lucky I had high boots. Look here!” he continued; “see the mark of the reptile’s fangs on the leather!”

Approaching with caution, I could see the reptile, a rattlesnake, erect on its coil, its fangs playing in and out of its mouth like blue lightning, while it sounded its rattles with a continuous drowsy hum. A well-aimed bullet shattered its skull to atoms.

While examining the hideous writhing carcass, I perceived another coiled up close at hand, and evidently prepared to strike whichever of us ventured near enough. These creatures usually go in pairs; and it is always desirable to look out for number two as soon as number one is despatched. This spot seemed to be a particularly favourite haunt of these

reptiles, as we came upon several more, one of which left the impression of its fangs upon the heel of my boot. Fortunately the leather was thick and strong, so that the poisoned weapon did not penetrate. Had we been barefooted, neither of us, in all probability, would have survived this day.

Notwithstanding the numbers of venomous reptiles in the South American forests, the natives, who usually are quite undefended against the danger, are very rarely bitten. The fact is, that snakes, as well as most of the *feræ naturæ*, are by no means so disposed to mischief as is generally imagined. They are quite content to let man alone, on condition of being let alone themselves. If, however, their haunts are invaded, and, as in our case, the reptiles are almost trodden upon, they naturally suppose the intruder means to attack, and they retaliate accordingly.

There is one villanous snake, however, which is not easily guarded against. This is a small greenish reptile which lurks among the thick lianas and branches of the trees or bushes beneath which the traveller passes, and which he probably brushes against, thus detaching from among the foliage the snake, which so exactly resembles the green shining stems of the lianas that it is a thousand to one if the difference be noticed in time to prevent being bitten. Fortunately this pest is not very often met with.

As we passed deeper into the forest, the denser became the canopy of branches overhead and the

thinner became the underwood. We began to doubt whether any game existed in this gloomy wilderness, in which an oppressive silence seemed to brood. The ground soon began to rise; and here I observed several new species of trees. Immense trunks, some of them twenty feet in diameter, rose like round towers about us, ornamented with bunches of purple orchids and festooned with the never-failing cipos, whose contorted and intricate tendrils, or rather cables, twined round the massive stems, and thence sprang like gigantic serpents outwards to the branches. One giant trunk which I measured attained a diameter of thirty feet, a size frequently reached by the wild fig-tree, whose huge roots swell the proportions of the stem. I remarked a palm, somewhat resembling the pachiuba (*Triarteia exorhisa*), with strangely fantastic roots, which looked like a bundle of stilts supporting the trunk, which was thus elevated some eight or nine feet above the ground. Some kinds of cecropiæ exhibit similar extravagances in the formation of their roots.

On the sides of this rising ground the sunlight found its way through the woods, and under its nourishing influence a profusion of bromeliæ and orchids clothed the trunks of the trees. Some of these had fallen from old age, or had been prostrated by a hurricane; and their venerable corpses were buried beneath a gorgeous envelope of dense, succulent vegetation blazing with gaudy flowers, the branches

of the living trees sending down lines of flowered cordage interlacing with the vegetation below, and forming such a wild luxuriance of rare plants and many hues that I stood long wondering in silent admiration.

Looking down the woods, the emerald tint of the foliage seemed to be communicated to the air, forming a misty greenness which added to the apparent impenetrability of the forest. These various colours were contrasted with the massive gray trunks which were not as yet enfolded in the embrace of parasitic climbers, the pearl-gray or rusty-brown shades of withered fronds of palm or fern, or the peaty blackness of some half-decayed monarch of the woods, in whose mouldering trunk, here and there, a flame-like heliconia nestled.

It was a beautiful forest. On every side some new object was presented to our admiration, although we were by no means tired of the more familiar forms to which we were hardly as yet accustomed. We soon crossed the crest of the hill, up the slope of which we had hitherto been advancing, and descended into a quiet valley on the other side. At the bottom of this was an open space covered with tall flowers of various kinds; and rising among their stalks, a rich grass, three or four feet in height, gave the place an appearance of emerald verdure, which formed a setting for the multitudes of scarlet, blue, and yellow flowers studded thickly over it.

Scarcely had we entered this gigantic flower-bed than several deer sprang from their lairs in the dense grass and dashed across the meadow, their antlered heads alone being visible above the rippling waves of scarlet, blue, and yellow, through which they rather appeared to swim than run. Two quick cracks from the rifles, and with frantic bounds above the grass two deer fell back and disappeared among the tall vegetation, the long stalks of which we could perceive agitated by their dying struggles. Forcing our way towards them, we found two fine bucks stretched on the ground, which was crimsoned by their blood. Drawing our hunting-knives, we cut their throats, in order to allow the blood to run more freely, and we then proceeded to gallowh them.

During this operation a flight of vultures arrived upon the scene, some of which on heavy wing circled round the opening, while others alighted on the bare, blanched top of a tree which had been scathed by lightning, and which stood at the verge of the woods, some hundred yards away. Since my adventure with the jaguar, which had so nearly terminated fatally, I entertained a horror of these unclean birds, several of which, the reader will remember, had collected on that occasion in the hope of picking as much off my bones as the jaguar might have left.

I now was determined to wreak vengeance upon those which had gathered around us, and which

appeared to await our departure with stolid patience. In my cartridge pouch I carried a vial of strychnine, with which I "doctored" the offal of the deer; and having disposed it in the most enticing manner, George and I shouldered such portions of the venison as we had selected, wrapped in the hides, and strode away beneath the shelter of the woods. Here we stopped to observe the effects of my stratagem.

As soon as the vultures conceived us to be fairly off, several of them left their perch and wheeled slowly round the spot where the intestines and remainder of the carcasses had been left. Circling lower and lower, they beat the tops of the tall grass and flowers with their wings, when, as if alarmed at something, they again started into the air, only to repeat their manœuvres. At length, satisfied that the coast was clear, and that all was right, they finally settled to work.

The herbage was so tall that we could not see them as they fed; but occasionally one would start up over the grass, and settle again, probably driven by some more greedy companion from the possession of a choice morsel. Two of the foul birds had commenced to devour a long intestine from opposite ends; and now they presented a disgusting spectacle as they flapped about the spot, joined beak to beak, each endeavouring to make the other disgorge.

In their gyrations and struggles they alighted near the place where we were concealed, and, unwilling

to prolong so loathsome a sight, George and I raised our rifles and shot both of them dead on the spot. The reports scared their companions from their banquet; but the poison was already beginning to work. Several of the vultures dropped before they could reach the forest; while others, perching on the trees around, swayed from side to side, and presently fell to the ground. As far as I could observe, about a dozen of the creatures died in the neighbourhood, including the two we had shot; while of those which passed beyond our sight, probably the larger proportion shared a similar fate.

Satisfied with the effects of the poison, we returned to the canoe, passing on the way a herd of peccaries, whose observation we fortunately escaped, partly by being under their wind, and partly by having hidden ourselves behind the thick enwreathed stem of an enormous fig-tree. In this drove we counted one hundred and fifty members; and this did not include others in the neighbourhood, whose shrill grunts we could hear, though we could not see the animals themselves.

Near the river, George called my attention to a kind of palm which neither of us had seen before, though I remembered having read a description of it. Its slender stem, of scarcely more than the thickness of an ordinary walking stick, attained the length of ninety feet, supporting itself upon the surrounding vegetation. It was, in fact, a kind of creeper, and is

named, as well as I can recollect, the *Jacitara* (*desmonchus*). Leaning outwards from the forest, which grew to the margin of the water, were also huge *uranias* or wild bananas, whose enormous emerald-green leaves rise from a slender stem, and resemble fans.

Our Indians' eyes brightened considerably when they fell upon the venison which George and I deposited in the boat, and we had some difficulty in preventing them from there and then kindling a fire in order to cook it.

Leaving these picturesque shores, we paddled back to the mission, keeping our eyes busy in looking out for game. Shortly before reaching the village, one of our boatmen directed our attention towards a jaguar which lay stretched beneath the shade of a mimosa near the verge of the forest. Between his paws he held a capybara, which from time to time he occupied himself in devouring, glancing towards us occasionally with considerable uneasiness.

We ordered the boat to be gradually steered towards him, so as not to excite too much attention; and getting our rifles ready, George and I waited until we were near enough to fire.

The animal allowed us to approach to within about one hundred and fifty yards; and as he evidently contemplated a retreat behind the leafy jungle at his back, we judged it better to risk shooting at this distance than to run the chance of losing our opportunity

altogether. We both fired almost simultaneously. The jaguar, leaping with a loud roar from the spot on which he had lain, ran down the beach as if with the intention of plunging into the river and attacking us in the boat; but after a few springs, he seemed to alter his intention. He turned, and had just reached the forest when a bullet from George's rifle struck him through the loins and stretched him helpless on the sand. Here he lay roaring savagely, but impotent for mischief.

The boat was now paddled close to the beach, and with a careful aim a ball crashed through the skull of the monster, turning him over dead instantly. We then landed, and found our prize to be an old male, with very worn teeth and claws, and with an inferior skin, which was hardly worth the trouble of removing. The Indians, however, would not leave it behind; and bearing this rather mangy trophy and the tail, we left the blood-covered carcass to the vultures, having first sprinkled it plentifully with strychnine.

Embarking again the next morning before daybreak, we left the mission of Maroa, and passed along the shores where we had hunted the preceding day. Just as the sky brightened in advance of the rising sun, we reached the spot where we had left the carcass of the jaguar. Of this not a vestige remained. Probably it had been dragged into the water by the alligators, which are credited with burying their prey in the mud at the bottom of the lakes or rivers they fre-

quent, until it is sufficiently decomposed to suit their epicurean palates.

The day promised to be fine. A fresh breeze blew along the river, and hoisting our sail we scudded before it, passing close to the tangled forest, which threw its heavy shade upon the water. Towards evening we passed the mouth of the Tomo; and at a short distance beyond, on the opposite bank, we perceived the mission of Davipe. Here we landed, and amid the dull curiosity of the natives, we proceeded to the hut of the missionary, who gave us a most hospitable reception. This worthy padre told us that when he first arrived the natives were in a deplorable condition of poverty, but that he induced them to devote themselves to the cultivation of their gardens, with the result of producing a degree of comfort to which they had before been unaccustomed.

Near Davipe lies the island of Dapa, on which we found some natives subsisting wholly on a glutinous composition of ants and a kind of clay. In one hut were crowded together a family of eleven persons. Most of these were, at the time of our visit, lying suspended in their hammocks, drearily wasting their time away. They regarded us with an apathetic curiosity, which, however, vanished at the sight of the missionary, who had accompanied us thus far, and whom they received with demonstrations of great joy. Here we took leave of our kind entertainer, and continued our journey down the Rio Negro.

During the day we passed the mouth of the Cassiquiare, a vast canal-like river which connects the Orinoco with the Negro. Late in the afternoon we arrived at the station of San Carlos, where we found a military post in charge of Captain Don Rafael de la Vega, whose polished manners and hospitable kindness made our stay at his post one of the pleasantest portions of our journey.

We here observed that the Indians wore amulets and other ornaments made from green pebbles, which we ascertained to be Amazon stones. These articles, however, seem to have been handed down from long past generations, as none of the present natives are expert enough to shape or polish the hard material of which they are composed. They seem to be a kind of jade, resembling compact felspar, and are capable of receiving a high polish. The substance which in Europe is known as Amazon stone is procured in the Uralian Mountains and on the shores of Lake Onega in Russia, and is only a common kind of felspar, but of similar colour to that found in South America.

In going to San Carlos, we had gone rather out of our way, as it is some miles below the junction of the Cassiquiare with the Negro. But we were anxious to get rid of part of the skins which we had accumulated; and this we effected better at that place than we could have done at any other on our route, until we arrived at Angostura, which did not occur until several months afterwards.

Having transacted our business at San Carlos, we again embarked, and despite the eager invitation of our friend the captain to prolong our stay for some time longer, we paddled up the Negro to its junction with the Cassiquiare. On our way we passed the two beautifully wooded islands of Zaruma and Mibita, which seemed bouquets of blossom floating on the broad, placid surface of the river.

After ascending the rapids of Uinumane—which fortunately the swollen state of the river had covered with a sufficient depth of water to enable us to pass safely over the submerged rocks—we entered the Cassiquiare, the mouth of which is situated about ten miles above the fort of San Carlos.

We stopped for the night at the mission of San Francisco Solano, a small village consisting of thirty houses, and inhabited by two tribes of Indians—namely, the Pacimonaes and the Cheruvichahenas. In the neighbourhood of this village the jaguars were so numerous and bold that we had to encircle our encampment at night with a line of fires in order to intimidate them. Frequently during the day the fierce animals themselves were visible, as they stalked along the edge of the woods; and at nightfall their roars were usually to be heard resounding through the forests, and answered on both sides of the river.

On one occasion our Indians on landing carried ashore, for the purpose of knocking it on the head, a live pig which we had purchased as provision. By

some mismanagement the animal was allowed to escape, and it immediately bolted for the forest, with the two Indians who had charge of it hard at its heels. Just as the animal gained the shelter of the woods, we, who had remained in the boat, heard a loud snarling roar, and saw a handsome jaguar spring upon the pig, which, with a blow of his paw on the neck, the fierce beast stretched out lifeless. Our two valiant boatmen instantly turned about and made for the boat at the top of their speed. Fortunately for our larder, the jaguar had a little difficulty in getting the body of the pig comfortably in his jaws, which delay gave us time to take aim and fire. The distance was hardly sixty yards, and it is therefore not surprising that with a brace of balls, one through the heart and another through the skull, the jaguar fell lifeless upon the body of his victim.

This animal must have been lying in wait by the edge of the forest, and made up his mind to attack the Indians, when the ill-fated pig ran into his very jaws. Indeed, I have on several occasions observed that we were followed on both sides of the rivers by jaguars, which were sheltered from our observation by the thick screen of climbing plants hanging along the front of the woods, but whose presence was sufficiently plain from the answering roars, uttered at intervals from both shores, the animals apparently keeping pace with the boat. In regions, however, where they have become acquainted with firearms,

they do not display this ferocity. On the contrary, it is often a difficult matter to get within shot of the skulking brute, which hides in the dense jungle until dusk seems to promise concealment sufficient to render it safe for him to venture abroad.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SCENERY ON THE CASSIQUIARE—DENSE WOODS—FIGHT BETWEEN MANATEE AND JAGUAR—FATAL TERMINATION OF THE CONTEST—MOSQUITOES—ANTHROPOPHAGI—PREACHING UNDER DIFFICULTIES—ARRIVE AT MANDAVACA—OBSTACLES TO COLONIZATION—REACH THE ORINOCO—MOUNTAIN OF DUIDA—ESMERALDA—FERTILE SAVANNA—DIFFICULTY OF ASCERTAINING PARTICULARS OF MY UNCLE—HACIENDA DE WATABA—COFFEE PLANTATION—SEÑOR BARNABE—MEET MY UNCLE—MY AUNT AND COUSINS—MY FATHER'S COURTSHIP AND ITS RESULTS—MANUELITA'S RUSE—MY UNCLE'S MARRIAGE—HE MIGRATES TO ESMERALDA—PROBABLE REASON FOR KEEPING HIS MARRIAGE A SECRET.



THE Cassiquiare is a beautiful stream. It averages about four hundred and fifty yards in breadth; and on both banks it is bordered by luxuriant forests, glowing with every hue, and overhung with a wealth of brilliant creepers, festooned, looped, or hanging in single trailing lines at intervals from the branches. So solid are these enclosing walls of vegetation, that we could discover no openings in them in which to pitch our camp. We, therefore, had the alternative of chopping a space clear from the dense undergrowth or of spending our nights in the boat. The former appeared preferable; and accordingly we had to shorten each day's journey by more than an hour, in

order to have sufficient time to prepare our camping-ground. This density of foliage was a fortunate circumstance, as on several occasions it rained heavily during the night; and notwithstanding, we remained quite dry, the rain failing to penetrate the leafy roof which bent forwards and covered our hammocks.

But every situation presents its own disadvantages; and here we found that the luxuriant woods by which we were surrounded furnished no fuel which would burn, all the branches being too full of sap. We were generally fortunate enough, however, during our voyage up the Cassiquiare, to pick up during the day or to find near our camp some drift-wood sufficient to light the fire and cook our supper and breakfast. On these occasions, we had to take our chance of the jaguars attacking us, as we only preserved a smouldering fire during the night. We were, however, unmolested by them, although once or twice we found their tracks between our camp and the river, showing that they must have approached within a very few yards of us as we lay asleep in our hammocks.

We once were spectators of a contest between a manatee and a jaguar, on the banks of the Orinoco, which I will insert here, although it did not happen until long after we had left the Cassiquiare, and had descended the cataracts of the Orinoco on our way back to Caracas.

We had, as usual, spent the night on the bare and extensive beach which lines the Orinoco on both

shores in many places for miles. Day had dawned, and already the twilight was fast giving way before the increasing light. While breakfasting, we observed a manatee—which had, no doubt, been feeding during the night upon the beds of lilies or of a species of water-grass—crawl out upon an almost submerged bank of sedge; and not having observed us, it seemed to be disposing itself to rest after its nocturnal labours.

This herbivorous amphibian is extremely wary, being possessed of the most acute hearing, and the slightest unusual noise in its vicinity causes it immediately to take to the water, where it plunges out of sight in a moment. We were shielded from its observation by some bushes and flood-wrack which had been deposited on the beach just in front of our encampment, so that we could examine the strange creature, which lay partly exposed among the weeds, without much fear of disturbing it.

In colour the manatee is a greenish brown; the skin, which is an inch and a half in thickness, being covered with a thin coating of hairs three or four inches in length. The head seems disproportionately small when compared with the colossal bulk of the shoulders. The muzzle and mouth somewhat resemble those of the cow, which probably originated its designation of "sea-cow" among the settlers. On each shoulder it has a strong flipper; but these do not seem to be of much assistance to its locomotion, the chief motive power being supplied by its ponderous

tail, with which it can deal terrific blows. Indeed, this is its sole weapon of defence.

The length of the specimen which we were observing was probably sixteen feet, and in girth it could hardly have measured less than twelve or thirteen feet. Manatees frequently reach the weight of two thousand pounds and upwards, and are extremely valuable to the hunter, the skeleton alone being worth £25, while the skin is worth as much more. Live specimens are readily bought for aquaria by naturalists for £125 to £250.

While commenting in whispers, fearful of being overheard by the unwieldy creature, we were suddenly startled by perceiving that it was also a subject of deep interest to another observer—a large jaguar, which lay crouched in the grass and weeds at the edge of the forest. The manatee was about a hundred yards from our camp, and the jaguar was about the same distance, being separated from the former only by the breadth of the beach, which at that particular spot, owing to a projection of the forest, was only some fifty yards broad.

That the manatee was the object of his attention we very soon had proof; for, seeing that there existed no more cover to shield his further advance, he rose from his lair and stealthily ran forward, trailing his body like a cat approaching a bird on the ground. As soon as he had come within eight or ten yards of his prey, he made a huge bound forward, alighting

on the head of the manatee, which he commenced to tear with teeth and claws, fastening himself on the creature's back by means of his hind claws, which he forced into the skin.

At the first intimation of the attack the manatee bellowed loudly, swinging its huge rudder-like tail about, and endeavouring to unseat its rider, which was rending its neck and head and roaring savagely. The sea-cow now directed its whole efforts to reach the water; and the jaguar, well aware that once there his victim would be lost, did all he could to prevent it. The clouds of dust which the combatants raised interfered with our having a clear view of the struggle, but we could see that the manatee was slowly but surely approaching the brink of the river. While plunging about, its unwieldy efforts caused the jaguar suddenly to lose his hold, and slip to one side; when instantly, with a report which we distinctly heard, round against his ribs came the ponderous tail, lifting him off his feet, and throwing him, apparently stunned and helpless, half a dozen yards away on the sands. But it was the last effort of the manatee, which now lay welling forth its life-blood in huge gouts at the very margin of the water, into which it had no longer the strength to enter.

George and I caught up our rifles and ran forward. The jaguar lay in our way, and we examined him first. He was dead! That one terrific blow had broken his back and ribs, and had flung him, like

a thing of neither weight nor strength, several yards along the beach. We next approached the manatee. During the fight the jaguar's teeth and claws had been busy, for they had nearly severed the creature's neck, from the veins of which thick streams of purple blood were pouring and soaking through the sands.

We were much pleased at having been fortunate enough to be witnesses of this wild encounter. Frequently we had heard manatees bellowing during the night, or in the gray of the evening or morning twilight, along the shores of the Orinoco, or up the large streams which joined it. Perhaps they were wrung from the huge cetaceans in their agony, when, unable to regain their more natural element, they were overpowered by the fierce jaguars.

We stripped off the hide of the dead jaguar, and leaving the manatee to be devoured by alligators or vultures (much to the disgust of our Indians), we left the spot.

As the waters of the Cassiquiare are white, we had, of course, suffered from the attacks of the mosquitoes since leaving the Rio Negro. These pests seemed to increase the farther we advanced, and caused us almost incessant annoyance.

Some years ago, many of the Indian tribes along the Cassiquiare and other rivers were cannibals. Even at the present day, far back in the vast forests, live hordes of savages who practise anthropophagy; and not only do they eat the enemies whom they seize in

battle, but they have been known to eat their own children, and even their wives. At the time of Humboldt's visit to these regions, he was informed that an indigenous alcaide or overseer had a few years before eaten one of his wives, whom he had previously fattened by a course of good feeding.

I have read somewhere of the difficulties in which certain missionaries were involved by having brought their wives with them to the scene of their labours. The fair complexions of these ladies had excited the appetites of the heathens to whom their husbands preached the gospel; and while the missionaries spoke of peace and goodwill among all men, they had to do so behind a phalanx of armed servants, whose presence was necessary to defend the *sposas* of the reverend gentlemen from the teeth of the sable converts.

Passing the famous rock of Culimacari, situated $2^{\circ} 0' 42''$ north of the equator, we arrived in due course at the mission of Mandavaca, which consists of a small village of twenty houses and a church. It is strange that in these missions the members of three or four different tribes meet, as upon a neutral ground, and live amicably together. This is due, no doubt, to the civilizing effects of Christianity among them, which has changed their primitive ferocity into a gentleness and mildness of character scarcely credible when we remember what these savages were at no distant date.

Near Mandavaca, rice, beans, cotton, sugar, and indigo have been produced in considerable quantities. Indeed, the soil is so rich that it will yield in profusion any crop which has yet been tried in that region; but the humidity of the climate and the prodigious clouds of insects which infest the air, as well as those which swarm on the ground, present almost insurmountable obstacles to colonization. We remarked that the Indians had to renew frequently the posts of their huts, as the white ants devoured the old ones in an incredibly short time.

We had made such excellent progress on our journey that we now were arrived at the bifurcation of the Orinoco, one arm of which forms the Cassiquiare, while the other, turning round the mountains of Parimé, sweeps in a north-westerly direction as far as San Fernando, whence it flows northward, finally bending towards the east about the seventh degree of north latitude, and pouring into the Atlantic through a vast delta several hundred miles in breadth.

As we emerged upon the broad waters of the Orinoco, which we welcomed as an old friend, we were pleased at observing a group of mountains on its opposite shore, the highest of which is known as the mountain of Duida, and attains an elevation of eight thousand five hundred feet. Its scarp and sterile summit was upheld by several thousand feet of precipitous rocks, the lower slopes of which were covered with dense forests, the whole forming a

magnificent and refreshing spectacle to us who had been oppressed of late with the monotonous uniformity of the scenery along the Cassiquiare. Between the Orinoco and this range of mountains is situated the mission of Esmeralda.

I had anticipated a considerable town, or, at any rate, a village of more or less importance. I was therefore much surprised to find a wretched hamlet of a few houses nestling beneath the south-west side of the mountain of Duida. But if I was disappointed with the size of the village, I was charmed with the beautiful savanna which surrounded it. An expanse of emerald grass stretched away on all sides, diversified with picturesque groups of mauritia palms, and plots of pine-apples or other fruits which the natives were engaged in cultivating. Many rivulets wound their way across this plain, and joined the Orinoco, the vegetation along their banks being richer and taller than elsewhere.

Having landed, George proceeded to make inquiries for the gentleman of whom he was in search, while I endeavoured to ascertain in which direction my uncle's property was situated. At first, much to my surprise, I was quite unable to get the desired information, Señor Redcliffe being quite unknown. At length, however, one of the inhabitants suggested that perhaps I was in search of Señor Barnabe, whom they now recollected to be a foreigner. In this view of the matter I acquiesced, hoping that Señor Barnabe

might afford the information which the Indians were unable to give; and following a native who kindly offered to guide me, we crossed the plain towards the mountain.

Soon we were surrounded by coffee and sugar plantations, which were fenced off from the savanna by a rough paling of logs tied together with lianas and by hedges of the lechers or milk bush. In my imperfect Spanish I tried to inquire the name of the estate through which we were passing. After a little hesitation, the Indian seemed to guess my meaning, for he replied, "Hacienda de Wataba, señor."

It now occurred to me that as this was certainly the name of my uncle's property (so named from a peak which towered up in the north-east), the Señor Barnabe of whom the Indians spoke must be my uncle himself, whose Christian name was Barnabas. I recollected that South Americans seldom trouble themselves with the surnames of individuals, distinguishing persons chiefly by their Christian names. This explained the fact that no one in Esmeralda seemed to know who Señor Redcliffe was, although, I have no doubt, that had I inquired for Señor Barnabe every one would have known to whom I alluded.

While passing along a walk which ran through the coffee plantation, I heard quick steps behind, and turning round I was met by George, who had run to overtake me.

“It’s a fearful bother, Frank,” said he, as he came up, “but Mr. Bartram has left Esmeralda and gone down the river, and is now probably well on his way to Santa Barbara, near the mouth of the Ventuari. I fear I must start after him at once. If we had only been in two days ago we would have caught him before he left.”

“Does he stay there for any time?” I inquired.

“Yes,” said George, “I hear he will be there a fortnight at least.”

“Well, then,” I continued, “never mind, old fellow! Come with me to my uncle’s, and after to-morrow we will both start together after him.”

“But surely, Frank,” said George, with surprise, “you won’t leave your uncle’s family so soon, after having come all this way to see them?”

“Certainly not,” I replied. “What I propose is this. We will overtake Mr. Bartram. You will arrange your father’s affair with him; and having done that, you will accompany me back here, and we’ll have some first-rate hunting back in the Cerro Maravaca. Is it a bargain?”

“All right, old fellow!” answered George heartily, “I’m your man! We’ll wake up the jaguars about here to some purpose. As far as I can hear, there never was a civilized gun fired in all this country.”

While chatting and planning thus we had arrived at a bend in the pathway; and in front of us, at a short distance, we beheld a party of gentlemen, some

on horseback and others on foot, two of whom seemed to be engaged in some very interesting debate. No sooner did they perceive us than one of their number detached himself from his companions and rode slowly towards us. He wore the Spanish sombrero, with the poncho and high boots of the country, and was mounted on a handsome black horse, which arched its neck proudly and champed impatiently at the bit, flecking its forequarters with the foam which flew from its mouth at each toss of its small lean head.

As soon as this dignified-looking individual had arrived within speaking distance of us, he inquired politely the nature of our business, and whether he or his poor estate could be of any service to us.

“I am in search of Mr. Redcliffe,” I replied, “and I understand that this is his property. My name is Frank Redcliffe.”

“Frank! my dear boy!” exclaimed my uncle, for it was he, “I am delighted to see you. Bless me!” he continued, “I ought to have recognized you from your likeness to my brother; but somehow I never expected you to turn up so suddenly.” So saying, the kind old gentleman leaped lightly from his saddle and enfolded me in a very affectionate embrace.

I now introduced George, and explained how it had occurred that he and I had travelled together. As soon as I mentioned Mr. Bartram’s name, he cried, “How unfortunate you did not arrive sooner! Why,

he has been on a visit with me for the last month, and is now going down the river to Santa Barbara."

When I explained to him my intention of accompanying George to Santa Barbara in pursuit of Mr. Bartram he approved of it warmly, and expressed great satisfaction at the prospect of seeing us both back soon, when he hoped George would be able to make a long stay.

We now approached the house, which was a comfortable, square, two-storied building, with vast eaves projecting all round, supported on posts, which were entwined with orchids and climbing plants, like the trees of the forest. Between these posts was a railing overgrown with vines laden with their purple clusters of grapes. The ground-floor was elevated several feet over the earth, and access to the veranda was gained by a broad flight of wooden steps, over the balustrades of which many beautiful plants had been trained. Large French windows looked out upon the gallery, and through their open sashes we could see handsome airy rooms with polished floors and painted walls and ceilings. There was a striking absence of carpets, which only serve to engender vermin and add to the heat.

And now a surprise awaited me. A lady, whose somewhat faded beauty only served to show what it once had been, met us on the veranda.

"Frank, my dear lad, let me present you to your aunt," said my uncle, explaining in Spanish to the

lady—who I for the first time learned was his wife—who I was.

With a motherly kindness she welcomed me to Wataba; and calling some Spanish words through the open door, two young girls, whose lithe figures, dark complexions, flashing eyes, and finely-formed features confessed the mixture of their blood, ran out and were introduced as my cousins. The shy grace, mingled with the affection of their cousinly greeting, enhanced the charm of their appearance, and I thought I had never before seen two such lovely beings.

George, whose matter-of-fact manners seemed framed expressly to shield him from the witcheries of the softer sex, was, in nautical phrase, completely thrown on his beam-ends. His shy and bashful manner acknowledged the effect produced on his sensitive heart by these señoritas, whose pearly teeth, ruby lips, and dark fathomless eyes at each laugh or glance still further added to his confusion. However, he soon rallied; and until the evening meal was announced, he and I, with my two fair cousins, walked up and down the flower-bordered paths near the house, conversing of our adventures on the journey from the coast, or talking of flowers and their language, in which these sirens seemed to be great proficient.

My imperfect knowledge of Spanish caused me to fall into many ludicrous mistakes; and then the

silvery laugh of the señoritas would echo among the bushes, causing my aunt to look towards us from her place on the veranda with an expression of pleased curiosity on her handsome face. George joined in these sallies, which somewhat piqued me, and I half repented the friendly aid I had afforded him when a certain crimson shade in the neighbourhood of his gills confessed the awkwardness he had experienced at his first introduction.

I have said I was surprised at finding a lady presiding in my uncle's establishment. In his letters to my father he had never mentioned his marriage, much less did he mention his possession of two lovely daughters. It was not until afterwards that I discovered the reason of this strange reticence, which at the time surprised me exceedingly.

My father in his young days was British consul at Caracas, and there he met, and at first sight deeply loved, the beautiful Manuelita de Guadarama. But the fair lady preferred my father's brother, who was by no means insensible to her charms. My father marked the growing intimacy between them, and his jealousy was aroused.

One day he had an interview with his brother, in which he told him of his love, and begged him to surrender his pretensions as he valued his brotherly regard. My uncle remonstrated in vain. He urged that the lady looked coldly on my father's advances, and that he felt with inexpressible joy that she

smiled on his own. To what end would he sacrifice his own prospect of happiness? Were he to do so, it would not further my father's cause one step. But these arguments were vainly urged against the dictates of an overmastering passion. My father threatened his vengeance on whosoever dared to cross his path; and trembling with suppressed anger, he left the apartment.

The wit of Donna Manuelita, however, overcame the difficulty. Fortunately her parents' absence facilitated the execution of her scheme. She was seized with a terrible disorder then raging in Caracas, and in three days was reported to be a corpse.

My father was inconsolable in his grief. He neglected his consular duties; offended the officials of the Venezuelan Government by his refusal to accept invitations to the presidential parties; and finally got himself recalled home. In the meantime, my uncle was privately married to the fair Manuelita; and on the evening of the day that all Caracas believed her buried, she and her husband were crossing the llanos towards the Orinoco on their way to Esmeralda, where, at a sufficient distance from the scene of the strange plot, they awaited an amicable settlement of the affair with her parents.

In this they had no difficulty. The delight of her mother knew no bounds at receiving back, as it were from the grave, her only daughter, whom she loved a hundred times better than she loved her husband.

The latter, on ascertaining the position and means of his son-in-law, became reconciled to the match; and the truant couple returned to Caracas, where they lived until the girls—twins—were born. They then removed finally to Esmeralda, where my uncle had created the fine estate which stretched for nearly a couple of miles along the base of the Duida mountain.

Of course, my uncle refrained from mentioning the circumstances of his being married to my father, from some delicacy of feeling, as well probably to avoid any inconvenient questions as to the family of his wife. Thus I had never even suspected the truth, and was proportionately surprised at my introduction to the Señora Manuelita Redcliffe on my arrival.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNACCUSTOMED LUXURIES—GEORGE AND JUANITA—AFTER-BREAKFAST WALK
—CACAO PLANTATION—MY UNCLE'S PRUDENCE—WINEFREDA AND THE
RATTLESNAKE—ALARM OF MY UNCLE AND OF JUANITA—A FAINTING-FIT—
DEATH OF THE SNAKE—THE SUGGESTION OF VANITY—THE RATTLES—
SENTIMENT.



OW shall I describe the sense of luxury to which I abandoned myself as I lay down that night in a real bed, hung round with mosquito curtains, and in a cool chamber, within the shelter of which I cared not whether it rained or not? No need to scan the heavens at bedtime to make a "weather forecast," and if symptoms were unfavourable or suspicious, to go to the extra trouble of roofing over my hammock with the leaves of the fan-palm! After weeks of such experiences, to describe the enthralling, entrancing sensation of sinking into a soft couch, laid with snowy sheets and furnished with the necessary mosquito gauze, is simply impossible. I will not, therefore, court failure by attempting it.

Long I slept, and deeply; and when I awoke at length I could not at first realize my position. My

luxurious couch, the encircling net, the large open window through which the perfume of a thousand flowers streamed on the morning air, the painted ceiling and highly-polished floor—these I could not reconcile with the visions which haunted my sleeping thoughts of camps beneath the dripping forests of the Cassiquiare, of muddy beaches and never-ceasing deluges. It was some time before I could recall what had really occurred, and recollect that I was at last arrived at the end of my long and perilous journey.

A knock at my door aroused me from my half-dreamy state, and presently my uncle entered.

“Why, Frank,” he said, “I thought you would have been up, and down long ago! What a lazy-bones you are, to be sure! Your friend George has been out this hour past with Juanita gathering some flower or other, which he said he had never seen before. Somehow his appearance did not impress me with the idea of his being a botanist; but I suppose I was mistaken. What a fine hearty fellow he seems! Thoroughly English, I should say, but none the worse for that—none the worse for that. You see I have lived so long among foreigners that I have almost forgotten the peculiarities of my own countrymen.”

While my uncle ran on in this style he had stepped out on to the veranda, and I could presently hear him calling cheerily to some one below, who I soon found was his daughter Juanita, who, with George as her escort, was just returning to breakfast. Mean-

time I "sprang from my 'feathery' couch in haste," and splashed through my toilet with the utmost expedition, so that I reached the breakfast-room scarcely later than my friend George, who seemed thoroughly satisfied with himself and with all the world, and who had just sat down by the side of the fair partner of his morning ramble.

"Why, Frank," exclaimed he, "I was looking for you in the garden! I can scarcely believe that it is only now you have got up! You see I have not laid aside the habits of activity which I acquired on the journey; and I assure you I have been at some pains to defend your reputation from grave suspicions!"

"And I have likewise been employed in the same philanthropic task with regard to you," replied I. "I have been assuring my uncle that you are an ardent botanist—to which cause alone he must attribute your early rising this morning!"

A conscious flush suffused the features of the fair Juanita, which assured me that my random shot had reached its mark. George busied himself with his tortillas; and as for my uncle, he smiled grimly. The pause which ensued was broken by the entrance of the other sister.

"We have been inconsistent in our remarks, *cara Niña*," said my uncle to her; "some of us have been scolded for getting up late, and others have been overhauled for getting up early. Now, what shall we say to you?"

“Say nothing at all, papa,” said the pretty brunette, “and then you will offend nobody. In your own England, I think you told me, they have a proverb that ‘least said is soonest mended.’” As she spoke she took a chair, and before I could rise to her assistance she had placed it beside mine. “Come, Cousin Frank,” said she, “you must allow me to be your catechist. Is it true that you are leaving us to-morrow?”

“Dios de mi alma!” exclaimed Juanita. “To-morrow! Whoever heard of such a thing! And Señor George, is he going also?”

This question seemed to be surprised from her, for instantly her face became scarlet, and she attempted to conceal her agitation by helping her father to another cup of coffee. George evidently had not been idle since his arrival.

“We go down the river,” I replied, “as far as Santa Barbara, where my friend George expects to meet his father’s agent, Mr. Bartram, with whom he has some business. As soon as we have arranged that, we mean to return; and I hope I need not add that we shall count the hours until we shall again enjoy the happiness of your society.”

“But you will be days—weeks away! It is very ungallant of you to leave us so abruptly,” said my pretty cousin Winefreda. “A Spanish caballero, now, would be infinitely more considerate. But you islanders are all alike—money first, and manners afterwards!”

“I assure you you do us injustice. In no country, except Venezuela,” said I, smiling, “is gallantry more practised than in England, which we must attribute to the superior charms of our ladies,—who, however, I must admit, lack that fire and dignity of character which distinguish their fair sisters of Spanish blood.”

“Well,” rejoined Winefreda, “I suppose we must not evince more concern at losing you than you do in depriving yourselves of ‘the pleasures of our society,’ as you call it. But where is mamma?” suddenly asked she. “Juanita, you perform the honours of the table so well that really I had overlooked mother’s absence!”

“Your mother is not very well to-day, and keeps her room,” said my uncle, who had been an amused listener to the pert remarks of his favourite daughter. With such conversation we beguiled the breakfast hour; although, indeed, the excellent fare to which George and I had been strangers for so long would have effectually whiled away a much longer time, and that, too, without the company of the interesting cousins.

At length we rose, and plans were formed for the occupations or amusements of the day. George proposed that we should stroll through the coffee plantation and see the method of cultivation practised. To this we agreed; and shortly after we sallied out, my companion escorting Juanita, while I walked a little behind with my uncle and Winefreda.

The portion of the estate under coffee was of inconsiderable extent, the great distance from a market and the difficulties of transport rendering its cultivation unremunerative. The quantity grown, therefore, was little more than sufficient to furnish a supply for the domestic consumption of my uncle's family.

Passing through the coffee-bushes, we soon reached a thicket of the cacao-plant (*Theobroma cacao*), where we found several Mojos Indians attending to the plants. Through this thicket numerous small rivulets were conducted for the purposes of irrigation. At present, however, their services were not needed, as the weather had lately supplied the necessary moisture. The plants seemed to be possessed of wonderful vigour, for wherever the roots were exposed above the surface flowers sprang from the bark and from the stems.

This plantation had escaped the injurious effects of the rainy season remarkably well, as it occupied a very sheltered situation, which protected it from the violence of the north-east winds, which usually blow at intervals in this region from December to March. Irrigation, when injudiciously applied, so far from being beneficial, is rather the reverse; and moisture in the air even requires to be gradually administered, when it may be maintained for a considerable time without ill effects. If the foliage of the cacao-bush or the immature fruit be wet during the dry season, the fruit falls to the ground.

The uncertainty of being favoured with the proper weather at the successive stages of its growth, together with the injuries to the crop resulting from the ravages of many species of insects, worms, birds, or other creatures, render the culture of the cacao a risky matter. In addition to this, the plant does not arrive at maturity until it is eight or ten years old, which is a long time for a settler to look forward to for a return on his industry. It possesses the advantages, however, of requiring much less supervision, or rather labour, than other branches of industry, it having been found that one slave or labourer is sufficient to attend to a thousand plants. Two crops of cacao are gathered on the Upper Orinoco in the twelvemonth—one at about the beginning of July, and the other during December.

“You have no such useful plant as this in England, Frank,” said my cousin, as we stood among the cacao thicket, and conversed on its peculiarities.

“We have many useful trees in England,” I replied, “and some fruit-trees too, of which, I daresay, you would condescend to approve if you only tasted the fruit. I confess, however, that nature has dealt more lavishly with you here in almost everything than she has with us in the cold and sterile north.”

“Would you not like to have a hacienda in Venezuela, Frank,” said my uncle, “and cultivate coffee, cacao, bananas, and sugar? Although I certainly

am proud of my country, I would prefer to live in Venezuela than in England."

"Cousin Frank, papa, prefers the gloomy north," said Winefreda, "where one half of the year must provide both for itself and for the succeeding six months as well, and where the barren earth needs as much care and kind treatment to be induced to yield anything as we bestow on a sickly infant."

"You are too much prejudiced against England—more so than Juanita is, I think," I replied, glancing towards that young lady, who was evidently conversing upon some topic of great interest with her companion. My uncle looked in their direction for a moment, and then said, "By the way, Frank, you have not told me who this friend of yours is; I merely accepted him as a *fait accompli* when he arrived in your company. I should like to know more about him than is to be discovered in a conversation on botany, or from his outward man."

At this moment Winefreda left us to gather a bunch of exquisitely-tinted flowers which grew at a little distance from the path. During her absence I gave my uncle the requisite information with regard to my friend; and that it was of no unfavourable nature may be inferred from the cordial invitation given him by my uncle on the following morning as we departed, "to return soon, and to make Wataba his home until he tired of its inmates."

Amused at the prudence of my relative, whom a

life of isolation had by no means deprived of worldly wisdom, I ran to the assistance of Winefreda, who had got entangled among some thorny lianas which trailed across the pathway from the branches at either side. As I approached I observed her eyes intently fixed on some spot on the ground; her lips were drawn back, leaving her pearly teeth visible; while her whole attitude seemed that of one filled with horror at some spectacle which so paralyzes the senses that retreat is rendered impossible.

Wondering at these extraordinary symptoms I ran forward; and just as I reached her she screamed, and threw herself towards me with the air of one who had burst asunder some spell or incantation by a supreme effort. "A snake! oh save me, Frank! Those dreadful eyes!" Crying thus, and sobbing with a feverish terror, she suddenly fainted in my arms.

Here was a situation! Coiled at the foot of a cacao-bush, scarcely five yards away, was one of the largest rattlesnakes I had ever seen. Its eyes seemed to emit a flame, so earnest was its gaze, and in and out of its open jaws played its tongue, while from its rattles proceeded a drowsy sound, which seemed to have a stupefying effect on the faculties. The more immediate exigency of raising my fair cousin in my arms forbade my attacking the reptile, which I avoided in passing; and bearing my lovely burden, I ran as fast as I could towards one of the acequias or

little canals which distributed the water through the plantation.

By this time my uncle, George, and Juanita surrounded me, filled with horror at what had occurred. In vain I assured them that she had not been bitten, and the agony of both father and sister was painful to behold. Stooping, I sat upon the bank of the acequia with the still unconscious girl in my arms. Water was freely poured over her face and temples, when presently, with a deep sigh and a shudder, she opened her eyes. These at first wandered with a vacant expression from one to the other; but of a sudden her recollection seemed to return, and recognizing in whose arms she lay, a crimson blush overspread her face and neck, and she struggled to be free. Almost with reluctance I surrendered my hold on her frail form, and assisted her to her feet, when she would have immediately fallen if I had not again supported her.

The joy of her father and Juanita now equalled their misery when they believed her dead, and they both seemed to regard me as her deliverer from a dreadful death.

One of the slaves had been despatched to the house for such remedies as had suggested themselves; and now, fearful of the effects of the dreadful news on the nerves of Señora Manuelita, my uncle ran off as fast as he could to assure his wife that Winefreda was in no danger whatever. We slowly followed,

my cousin leaning on my arm, while George and Juanita accompanied us.

When the first alarm had subsided, and my uncle and Juanita were convinced that the reptile had not bitten Winefreda, George had searched for the snake at the spot where I had last seen it, where, finding that it had escaped molestation, it had remained. George quickly despatched it, and with its rattles as a trophy he rejoined us before we reached the house. As we advanced, the effects of the fainting fit, and the terror which had occasioned it, gradually yielded to the exercise and the sense of security, and soon Winefreda was able to dispense with my arm. George and Juanita had fallen behind to admire a distant view of the Cerro de Maravaca.

“What must you have thought of me, Frank,” said Winefreda, “to act so very foolishly, and to give you all such a fright about me? I am so vexed with myself for such weakness. But those eyes! You have no idea of the fascination that reptile exercised upon me. You may smile; but I assure you I felt an irresistible inclination to advance within the reach of its fangs, which, had you not come up when you did, I have no doubt I should have done. I have often heard of the power of fascination possessed by the rattlesnake, but I never believed it until now.”

“I was indeed horrified,” I replied, “when you fainted, for I was not sure but that the reptile might have struck at you. Besides, I had hardly time to

think. To calm your father and Juanita I assured them you had escaped, although I was far from possessing this assurance myself. I cannot tell you what I suffered until I saw you open your eyes."

"I shall always regard you as my deliverer," said Winefreda frankly, "and I shall owe you a debt of gratitude as long as I live. How shocking of me, though, to faint in your arms!"

"Could I have purchased the pleasure of recalling you to consciousness by receiving the bites of a thousand snakes," said I gallantly, "it would have been a pleasure cheaply bought."

Winefreda made no reply. I thought—my vanity suggested—that I heard a sigh. But at this moment George and Juanita overtook us, and we approached the house together. On the veranda we met my aunt, who folded Winefreda in her arms with as much *empressement* as if she had received her back from the tomb. The latter, however, who had now recovered her usual good spirits, laughingly escaped from the embrace of her mother.

"It is cousin Frank you ought to hug, mamma, and not me," said she; "I did nothing except to get into danger, but it was he who got me out of it."

"And Frank will certainly have no cause to complain of any want of gratitude on my part," said the kind old lady, giving me a motherly kiss. "Perhaps some day or other I may be able to show that I am not forgetful."

“My dear aunt,” said I, “this is really making a mountain out of a mole-hill, as we say in England. I have done nothing to merit all these handsome sayings, I assure you. I did not even kill the snake—George did that.”

“Yes,” said George; “see, here are his rattles. There are fifteen of them. They say that the brute gets a new rattle every year; and if that is true, this snake was fifteen years old.”

“May I beg you to give them to me, Señor George?” said Winefreda.

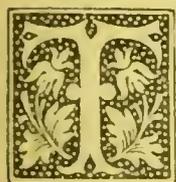
“Certainly, with much pleasure, señorita,” replied George, handing them to her.

“I shall keep them,” said she, “as a souvenir of the occurrence; though,” she continued, sinking her voice, and shooting an arch glance at me, blushing at the same time, “I don’t think I shall need their assistance to recall the comedy to my recollection.”

I was only twenty, and it will therefore not be considered unnatural that this lively and strange mannered girl should have made a greater impression on me than perhaps I was at the time aware of. How far this feeling owed its existence to the incident of the preceding few hours I cannot say. But from this day I began to look upon Winefreda as more than a pretty cousin, and something assured me that I, too, was not an object of indifference to her.

CHAPTER XX.

GEORGE AND I START FOR SANTA BARBARA—FAREWELLS—THE CURARE POISON—ITS RAPID EFFECT—CATLIN'S EXPERIENCES—GUAICA INDIANS—LUMINOUS EXHALATIONS—DEER HUNT—ALLIGATORS ATTRACTED BY VENISON—THE FOREST—OUR NORTHERN FORESTS—VAST FORESTS IN SOUTH AMERICA—THE SELVA—ITS PRODUCTIONS—VISIT TO AN INDIAN HUT—ALLIGATORS AND MANATEE—JAGUAR—HIS ESCAPE—THE INDIANS HELP THEMSELVES TO THE MANATEE FLESH.



TIME rolls on with ceaseless activity. In due course the morning dawned on which we were to take our departure. The Indians who had hitherto accompanied us again offered their services; and from the landing at Esmeralda our boat shot out into the current, while handkerchiefs waved farewells from my fair cousins, and hearty wishes for a quick journey and speedy return came floating on the air from the stentorian lungs of my uncle Barnabas. The last kerchief fluttered, the last glimpse of white dresses was shut out, and again before us lay the broad Orinoco, while on either hand rose the stately forest, whose tangled mysterious solitudes were again to be invaded by our prying eyes and to re-echo to the cracks of our rifles.

We were met by a large canoe full of Indians, who had been on an expedition to gather the liana from the juice of which the celebrated curare poison is manufactured. This liana is called the bejuco, and belongs to the strychnos family. The bark is first removed, and shredded very fine between two stones, when an infusion is prepared by straining water through it in a kind of vessel made by rolling up the leaves of a plantain in the form of a cone, with the apex open. The yellow liquid which percolates through this is the poison. It has to undergo evaporation in an earthen pot, when it solidifies and becomes ready for use on being mixed with a certain proportion of a gummy exudation obtained from the kiracaguera tree.

Being solely a blood poison, the curare may be tasted without danger. Indeed, the Indians often swallow small quantities of it, considering it beneficial in bilious attacks or stomachic affections. So deadly, however, is it when introduced into the blood that animals struck with arrows, the points of which have been smeared with it, fall almost as if struck by lightning.

Catlin, in his American travels, records that on one occasion, being pursued by some peccaries, he desired one of his Indians to try the effects of the blow-pipe or sarbucan upon the vicious little animals, which had been checked in their advance by a deep brook. At Catlin's suggestion one of the Indians

aimed at the leading pig, and struck it with his tiny dart in the jugular vein in the neck. The peccary instantly plunged forward into the brook stone dead! Others, hit in a less vital spot, dropped after staggering about for a minute or two. Upon a rattlesnake it was more rapid in its effect than his own poison!

On a subsequent occasion we procured a supply of this deadly venom from the Indians, and slightly hollowing the point of our Winchester bullets, we filled the cavity with a small pea of the curare paste. This we found very satisfactory in its effects on jaguars and crocodiles.

The Indians whom we encountered bearing home the liana from which they make the curare were of quite a different type from any we had yet seen. They were Guaicas, whose dwarf-like proportions contrasted strongly with the tall stature of our Mojos Indians. In general these savages measure less than five feet in height, an individual above this being the exception. Another variety we also observed, the Guahariboes, who are of about the same size as the Guaicas, but whose skin is several degrees lighter in colour, giving them almost a fair appearance.

As we sailed down the river I noticed flames fitting about the summit of Duida, almost creating the impression that this mountain was a volcano. It is probable that the granitic rock of which it is composed is deeply veined and fissured, and that through these crevices internal gases are exhaled,

which become luminous on coming in contact with the atmosphere. This phenomenon is a sign that the rainy season is drawing to a close.

On the left bank of the river, some miles below Esmeralda, we landed for our midday meal. The forest, owing to some cause for which I cannot ascribe a reason, was here very thin. Tall straight shafts ascended from a sward singularly destitute of that matted and confused vegetation which distinguishes the sylvan scenery of the tropics. The afternoon sun penetrated these woods, and darkly pencilled on the golden sward were sketched the branchless trunks, which rose, without foliage, to the height of nearly eighty feet. These slim shadows stretched away until merged in the opaque shades cast by the tree-tops, the waving of whose branches gave birth to or extinguished a thousand flickering gleams as the sunlight was admitted or excluded through the foliage overhead.

Thinking this looked a likely spot for deer, George and I, leaving the Indians to light a fire and prepare dinner, shouldered our rifles and stalked cautiously among the trees, keeping a keen outlook on all sides in quest of game. We hunted in vain for nearly an hour; not a track could we find, nor any indication that this forest was frequented by deer.

The ground was quite level, but here and there was traversed by deep drain-like streams, which sluggishly flowed in their gloomy beds six or eight feet below

the surface of the earth. While debating the possibility of leaping one of these obstacles, my eye fell on a spot which promised an easy access to the other side. On reaching it we found that it was evidently a passage used by game, as the sides of the bank had been worn down into a path, in which were numerous hoof-marks of peccaries, deer, and other animals. The water, too, was shallow, the bottom being firm and rocky, which no doubt was the reason that it had been selected as a ford.

We here easily reached the opposite bank, the stream being only about ten feet broad. On this side we soon found that game existed. The bare sward gave place to the usual undergrowth of shrubs of various kinds; and as we pushed through these we occasionally heard the light hoof-beats of some active animals bounding off in alarm. The thickness of the cover prevented us from getting a shot for some time; when just as we were thinking of retracing our steps, a noble buck advanced unsuspectingly from the shelter of some bushes, and stood in a small glade about thirty paces distant, nibbling quietly at the tops of the shrubs, now and then tossing his head or shaking his ears to disengage some troublesome fly.

In a moment our rifles were at our shoulders, and at the cracks the beautiful animal gave a tremendous bound and disappeared in the bushes. We sprang forward quickly to the spot, and on the ground, within a few yards of where he had stood when we

fired, we found him quite dead. Both bullets had struck behind the shoulder, and had passed out on the opposite side, piercing the heart in their passage. We removed the skin and such parts of the meat as we thought the best; and each carrying his share, we returned to the boat. Here we found the Indians regaling on capybara, a herd of these animals having been seen crossing the river, and one of them was secured before it could effect its escape.

The venison was hung from the framework of our hut on board the boat, and here we soon found that its scent attracted several alligators, which swam round our neighbourhood until we opened a fusilade upon them from our Winchesters. One of the reptiles sank; while two others, badly wounded, plunged, dived, and reappeared, each time farther and farther away, until we ceased to watch their convulsions.

We shortly afterwards continued our journey, passing the usual sandy beaches backed by forests, or floating past savannas covered with gigantic herbage and strange plants with huge leaves growing in clumps, the names of which I did not know. George reclined against the side of the boat, his eyes fixed on the flitting shores, but with the vacant expression of one whose thoughts are far away.

“Well, old fellow,” said I, after regarding him for a little with some amusement, “what are you thinking about? I’ll stake high I know.”

“Why do you ask then?” he replied good-humouredly. “If you know, you needn’t ask.”

“I think your ‘heart’s in the Highlands,’ but not ‘a-chasing the deer,’” said I. “Come now, admit that you are thinking of the dear one at Wataba—my pretty coz, Donna Juanita. Is it not so?”

“Well, Frank, truth’s the best. I *was* thinking of her. And now, in return for my confidence, confess to me that you think often and fondly of her sister, the dark-haired Winefreda.”

“Why, you know they’re my cousins, and I am very fond of them both, and often think that I never met nicer girls anywhere,” I rejoined.

“You’re a shabby fellow, Frank,” replied George, “to try to pass false coin on me in this way, after my confidence in you.”

“I do confess,” said I, “that at present I think I never saw Winefreda’s equal. What that opinion may blossom into I leave to the future to decide. In the meantime I can truly say I am not hopelessly gone,—like you, for example.” George laughed, and we again relapsed into silence.

The shores past which we glided presented little to interest us. Everywhere our eyes rested on the usual vegetation, which had at length begun to pall: trees inextricably interwoven in the coils of ten thousand creepers ablaze with different hues, in which in some places crimson predominated, in others blue, yellow, or scarlet; the matted, impervious under-

growth fencing in the woods, and almost forbidding the attempt to penetrate their thorny jungles; while high above, the feathery crests of palms of many different kinds, and of various picturesque shapes, bent and waved gracefully to every breeze, as if they acknowledged its grateful coolness with courtly bows.

All this is no doubt very beautiful; but I must confess I prefer the stern simplicity of our northern forests, where the rugged oak bids defiance to the storm, and throws abroad his gray, moss-clad, and gnarled arms, which hardly deign to bend before the tempest; the gloomy pine woods, with their shadows and their silence; the mossy, needle-strewed ground beneath them, refusing to produce underwood for want of light and air denied by the funereal foliage above.

There are few forest scenes to compare with the view down through this perspective of russet stems. A brown mist seems to float between the myriad trunks, caused by the innumerable twiglets which have been killed by the shade, and which remain on the tree for many years, preserved from decay by the turpentine contained in them. Above these is the dense and sombre canopy of foliage, among which nestle the ruddy-hued cones, which at the proper season fall and strew the ground below.

And down through these quiet solitudes dance merry, sparkling brooks, noisily brawling against stones and rocks, or sleeping in brown pools, where,

resting over the golden gravel, speckled trout may be seen on the watch for the ephemeræ which flit above. Bending over these rapids, or over the quiet pools, the osmunda (*regalis*) leans, as if watching its shadow in the water; and leading up the banks, under the shelter of its fronds, will be found the runs of the otter or the water-rat.

As we advance we pass from the shades of the pines, under the shimmering, dancing foliage of the birch; the silver-hued or brown trunks standing upright, or leaning in graceful ease at various angles to the earth, their pendent branchlets streaming in the breeze, or hanging airily downwards. The pearly bark seems to unfurl itself, inviting us to peel it from the tree, or suggests to us to cut our initials on the smooth white stem.

The sturdy beeches also excite our admiration, with their varied shapes,—some graceful, sweeping the ground with their elegant boughs bending beneath the weight of mast; others tossing bare, contorted arms towards the sky, their rugged trunks covered with scaly bark, cracked and broken, as if tempest riven. What can be more glorious than the reflection of a stormy sky, when lurid gleams shoot from between the drifting clouds, thrown upon the autumn-tinted foliage of a beech forest? What gorgeous hues! and what contrasts! Here the deep red, the yellow, the rich brown, there the faded green or maroon, lighted up with the passionate glow of the sky! The

eye traces between the foliage the rigid arms and hoary trunk, which are decked with all this gorgeous drapery: it is the skeleton from which the veil is about to be removed, and which will abide, stern and grim, the hostility of approaching winter.

This scenery is more to my taste than the monotonous uniformity of a tropical forest, where the very richness and density of the heavy vegetation oppress the spirits, and where the system becomes enervated by the relaxing heat. Still these South American forests are among the most beautiful on the earth. There is a tendency in all plants to become arborescent, and the traveller finds himself marvelling at beholding plants and shrubs, which at home he recollects as curiosities in small hot-houses, here rising in the open air to the height of twenty, thirty, or forty feet.

Many of these vast forests have never been explored; and what marvels may not their wild, tangled solitudes contain! The forest of the selva is computed to contain 1,300,000 square miles, about one-third the size of Europe, or nearly forty-one times as large as Ireland! Huge rivers penetrate this sylvan world,—such as the Amazon, the Xingu, the Topajos, the Purus, Teffé, Japura, and many others. Some of these rivers are navigated; but the information we possess with regard to them is confined in most cases to their banks, and few know anything of the vast wildernesses which lie between them.

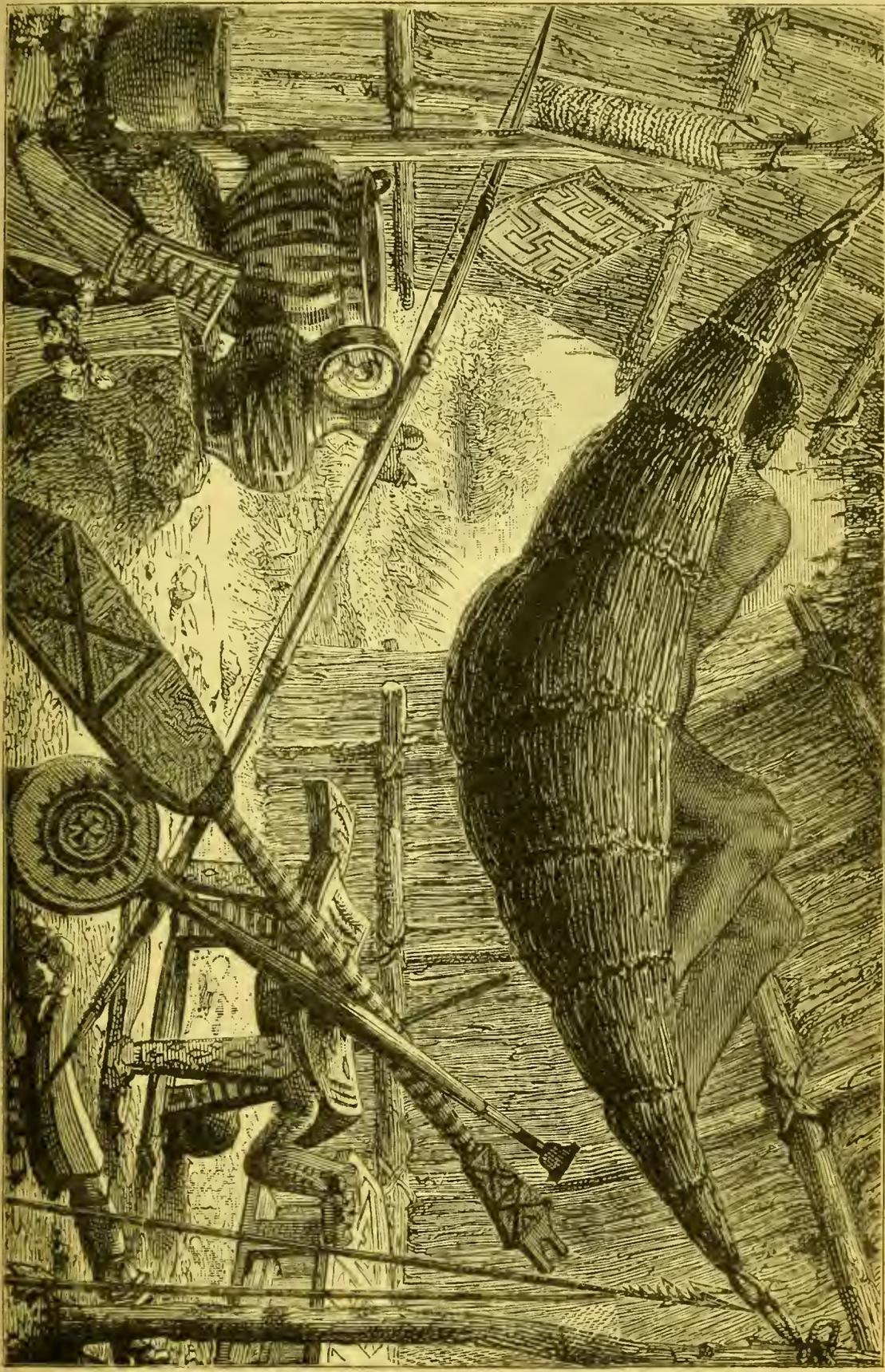
These boundless woods are rich in the most valuable timber. Dyewoods of various kinds abound; caoutchouc or india-rubber trees are plentiful; while iron-wood, mahogany, and many woods, valuable to the cabinetmaker, of exquisite veinings and capable of receiving the highest polish, exist in great profusion. Many medicinal plants, the virtues of some of which have already been made known, cover the ground and lie neglected, as if of no value, for want of hands to gather them. Fruits of delicious flavour and flowers of exquisite perfume have been lavished by a bountiful nature upon this vast region.

Here exists every requisite for a vast and powerful empire, except the population; and of that which does exist here I fear nothing creditable or enterprising can be expected. Whether the Iberian race be incapable of progress, or whether it be enervated by the climate, certain it is that the inhabitants of these regions lack that spirit of enterprise which is as necessary to the prosperity of a nation as of an individual. Of all the countries on the face of the earth, nature has here done most, and man least. The population of Europe might find room, without the least danger of overcrowding, in these untilled solitudes. At present they are in the hands of a few savage tribes and of a few thousands of whites, who are thinly distributed along the lines of the great rivers, in little hamlets almost destitute of trade or importance.

As we sailed down the river we perceived on the right bank a native's hut, constructed of reeds and bamboos, opposite which we stopped. George and I landed and entered. We found the owner calmly reposing in his hammock, while on the floor were scattered in the greatest confusion the various implements of the chase, or the utensils of his domestic economy. We purchased from this savage several fowls, as well as an earthenware jug, shaped somewhat like a claret jug, and which we ascertained to be the manufacture of the native himself. It was neatly moulded, and certainly reflected considerable credit on its maker.

The inhabitants of these forests take life very easily. Eating, fishing, hunting, and sleeping form almost their sole occupations ; and so plentiful are both game and fish that the minimum of trouble is rewarded by the maximum of success in both branches of sport. Leaving our lazy friend, who again surrendered himself to the enjoyment of his hammock, we re-embarked and continued our journey.

Passing round a bend in the river, we suddenly found ourselves in the centre of a number of alligators, which seemed to be aroused from their usual lethargy and were swimming excitedly up and down near the bank, which was covered with dense scrub. As soon as we got opposite the point which seemed to be the centre of attraction, we observed the huge carcass of a manatee, which had no doubt fallen a



INTERIOR OF A NATIVE'S HUT. Page 334

victim to a jaguar. As we advanced, the alligators dived and disappeared; but we observed that many vultures were collected in the neighbourhood, and had not as yet alighted on the carcass. From this we inferred that the jaguar was concealed in the bushes close by, probably having withdrawn out of sight on hearing our voices approaching.

We paddled past, keeping our faces studiously turned another way; and after a little, cautiously stealing a glance round, I saw the round cat-like head of the murderer raised above the grass watching our retreat. We were now about eighty yards distant. Desiring the Indians to stop rowing, George and I took our rifles and faced about. The animal still kept his eyes riveted on our movements, and offered a splendid mark. George's rifle happened to be unloaded, and while he was fumbling in his pouch for a cartridge I took aim and fired.

To my chagrin, instead of, as I fully expected, seeing the jaguar drop lifeless with a bullet through his brain, I saw him leap over the body of the manatee and disappear in the forest. The Indians said I had fired too high, as they had observed a twig fall nearly a foot above the tiger's head. Still I felt certain I had taken a careful aim. I looked at my rifle, and to my intense disgust I perceived that the sight stood at three hundred yards, from which I had forgotten to lower it after firing at a flamingo at that range. This explained the miss.

The Indians now put back the boat, and helped themselves liberally with their machetes, or long wood-knives, to the manatee, severing huge strips of the porky flesh, which they threw into the bottom of the boat, much to our disgust. Having taken as much as they wished, we once more got under way, and glided rapidly down the Orinoco, assisted by a sail hoisted on a pole.

CHAPTER XXI.

JAGUAR TRAP—DISHONESTY OF AN INDIAN—DESERTED ANT-HILL—MEET WITH SUSPICIOUS STRANGERS—WE ARE TAKEN FOR ROBBERS—REFUSE THE STRANGERS' INVITATION TO THEIR CAMP—RE-EMBARK—HAMMOCKS MADE FROM PALM-LEAVES—FLOCKS OF WHITE HERONS—THE RE DE ZAPILOTES—THE PHILODENDRON—THE WONDERFUL FECUNDITY OF NATURE IN TROPICAL COUNTRIES—THE BLACK PANTHER—OUR ESCAPE—DEATH OF THE PANTHER.



ONE day, while halting for dinner by the verge of the forest, I noticed the mouth of a small stream close to our position.

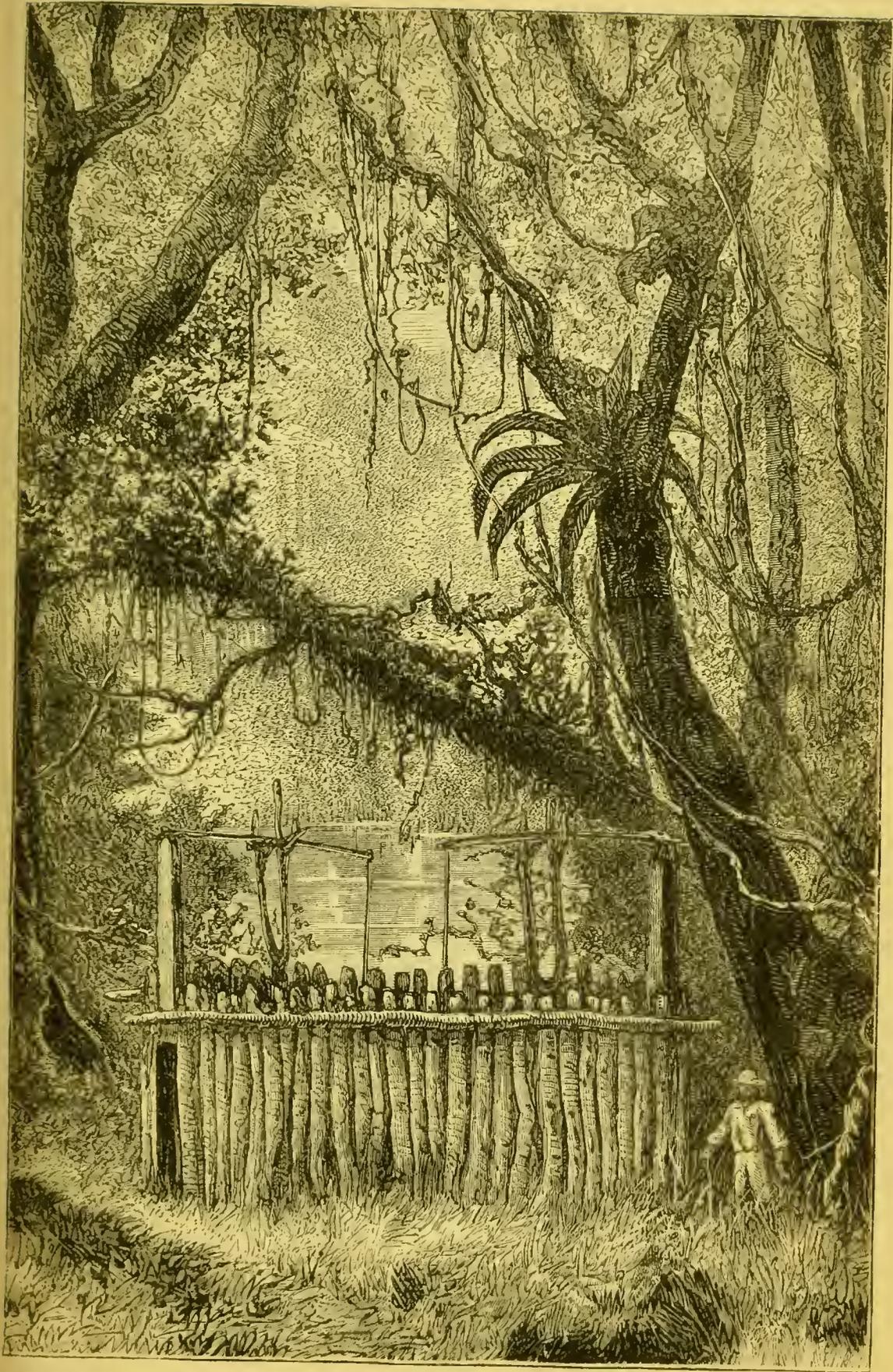
Thinking I might get a shot at something on its banks, I left the camp, and wandered for a short distance by its crystal waters, in which were mirrored the thousands of cipos and parasitic plants which threw their cordage from branch to branch above. I soon came on signs of cutting, indicating human agency; and almost immediately after, my attention was attracted by sounds which seemed to proceed from behind a dense undergrowth of bushes, up through which rose two large trees, hung over with lianas, and decorated with orchidiæ and other plants. Passing round these, I was much astonished to perceive a stockaded enclosure, formed of piles

driven into the earth, and bound together by a transverse bar along their tops.

At first I could not guess the object of this strange enclosure in that wild spot, but on examining it I discovered its purpose. It was a jaguar trap, constructed probably by the Guanami or Punumane Indians who live along these shores. At each end an aperture gave access to the interior of the trap, above which, supported by a pole connected with a trigger, was suspended a large block or slab, which, on the trigger being sprung, descended and imprisoned the intruder. It was cleverly contrived, and, I have no doubt, would serve the purposes for which it was intended. Inside, by way of bait, a small pig was tethered to a stake. The squealing of this unhappy beast it was which had attracted my attention.

This was an extremely pretty spot, and the vegetation which crowded the shores, and seemed to roll outwards on to the water, was, even for the tropics, unusually beautiful. Just at this place the creek widened into a small pond, which was nevertheless too broad for the trees to overarch it completely. Through an opening above the sky was visible, and admitted the golden light upon the water, depicting in it the shadows of the bushes, flowers, and trees around its margin.

Having satisfied my curiosity, I returned to the camp, where I gave an account of what I had seen.



JAGUAR TRAP. Page 339.

An Indian went to visit the spot, and after a little returned, carrying on his back the pig, which the rascal had killed and appropriated. On being remonstrated with, he coolly said that he was more in want of pork than any jaguar in the forest; and that when the proprietor of the trap discovered the loss of his bait, he would attribute it to the didi, or wood-demon, which the superstitions of the natives invest with many strange and horrible qualities. Nothing would induce the thief to restore his ill-gotten game. His companions backed him up, no doubt with the hope of sharing the plunder; so, we immediately left the spot, lest our presence might be discovered, and a connection established in the proprietor's mind between our arrival and the departure of his pig.

Towards evening we noticed, on a sandy flat covered thinly with palms, an extraordinary object. It would have passed for the tempest-shattered ruin of an old tree, were it not for the position it held against a palm, to the trunk of which it seemed to be attached. We landed to examine it, and to our surprise discovered it to be a deserted ant-hill. It was about twenty feet high, and the top had the appearance of having been broken off, so that probably at some former time it was much higher. In front two large cavities had given access to the galleries in the interior, but these were now choked up.

While examining this curious object, we were much astonished at seeing three travellers mounted

on mules coming towards us. In this desert region every one is considered an enemy until he has shown himself to be a friend ; and consequently George and I quietly looked to our rifles, in order to see that all was right, if their services should be required. In answer to our question of who they were, one of them—a swarthy man with a rifle slung at his back—replied, touching his sombrero slightly, “Your servant, sir.”

“Your servant, with all my heart,” I answered. As they drew near, I thought they seemed to be muttering something to each other, when one of them who had fallen a little in the rear turned round, and putting spurs to his mule galloped rapidly off. This was very suspicious, and George and I determined to be on our guard.

Leaning on our rifles, we regarded the new arrivals, who seemed as little at their ease as ourselves. On the pretence that the rifle hurt his back, the man who had first spoken unslung it, and fumbled with the lock in an absent-minded way, making all the time some remarks on the scenery, the weather, or other indifferent subjects, looking frequently along the path by which his companion had departed. To show them how well armed we were, we pumped out the fourteen cartridges which our Winchesters held, and reinserted them. This seemed to bring their uneasiness to a climax.

“You seem to have a perfect arsenal in your rifles,



DESERTED ANT-HILL.

señores," remarked one of the strangers. "They are formidable weapons, beyond a doubt."

"Yes," I answered; "they will dispose of fourteen men in as many seconds, if properly handled. The Winchester rifle is a very valuable protection against either wild beasts or robbers."

While saying this I looked them both sharply in the face. To my surprise, they both smiled. "You are not then ladrones yourselves, señores?" said he with the rifle.

"By no means," I replied. "We are merely English travellers in search of sport and adventure."

"Then, señores," answered the Spaniard, dismounting, "we consider ourselves fortunate in meeting with you. The fact is, we took you for bandits, for which error we now apologize."

George and I laughed heartily. "Why," said the former, "we took you also for robbers; and I was actually debating whether it wouldn't be better to shoot you both at once than, by waiting, to give you any advantage over us. We must apologize, in our turn, for such an extraordinary blunder."

"But where did your companion go?" I inquired. "I noticed that, in consequence of something you said, he galloped back on the path you came by."

"Oh," said the Spaniard, smiling, "he is merely gone back to camp for help. The fact is, there's a large party of us a couple of miles back, and I sent him to bring up two or three more, in order to secure

you and your companion. We are out after some robbers who have been stealing cattle, and who have murdered in cold blood several of our vaqueros."

Affairs having now been apparently satisfactorily explained, we left our new acquaintances, who begged us to remain and accompany them to camp, to share such hospitality as their circumstances permitted. But we were inexorable, and at length got off and embarked. We pushed the boat to the opposite side of the Orinoco, and coasted along by the bank, thinking that it was just as well to keep the broad bosom of the stream between us and the Spaniards, whose story neither George nor I fully believed. We did not meet with them again; so, whether they were what they represented themselves to be, or whether they really were desperadoes banished from civilized society, we never ascertained. As soon as we judged we had put a safe distance between us and these suspicious characters, we encamped for the night.

We noticed near this encampment that the cogollos or crowns of several of the palms, an abundance of which grew about the spot, were cut off, leaving the tall trunk standing erect and branchless like a pole. This had been done by some Indians, who manufacture hammocks from the fibres which they obtain from the leaves.

The cutting off of one of these palm crowns is no easy matter, as the wood is as hard as bone, and the implements of the Indians are rude and inefficient.

The leaves are cut into long strips of the requisite breadth, and are then disfibred by the Indian women. These shreds are twisted into a kind of yarn by placing two or more of them, according to the thickness required, across the thigh and rolling them dexterously under the hand. These filaments are extremely tough and are manufactured into various articles. Hammocks made of them are used in all the Indian settlements.

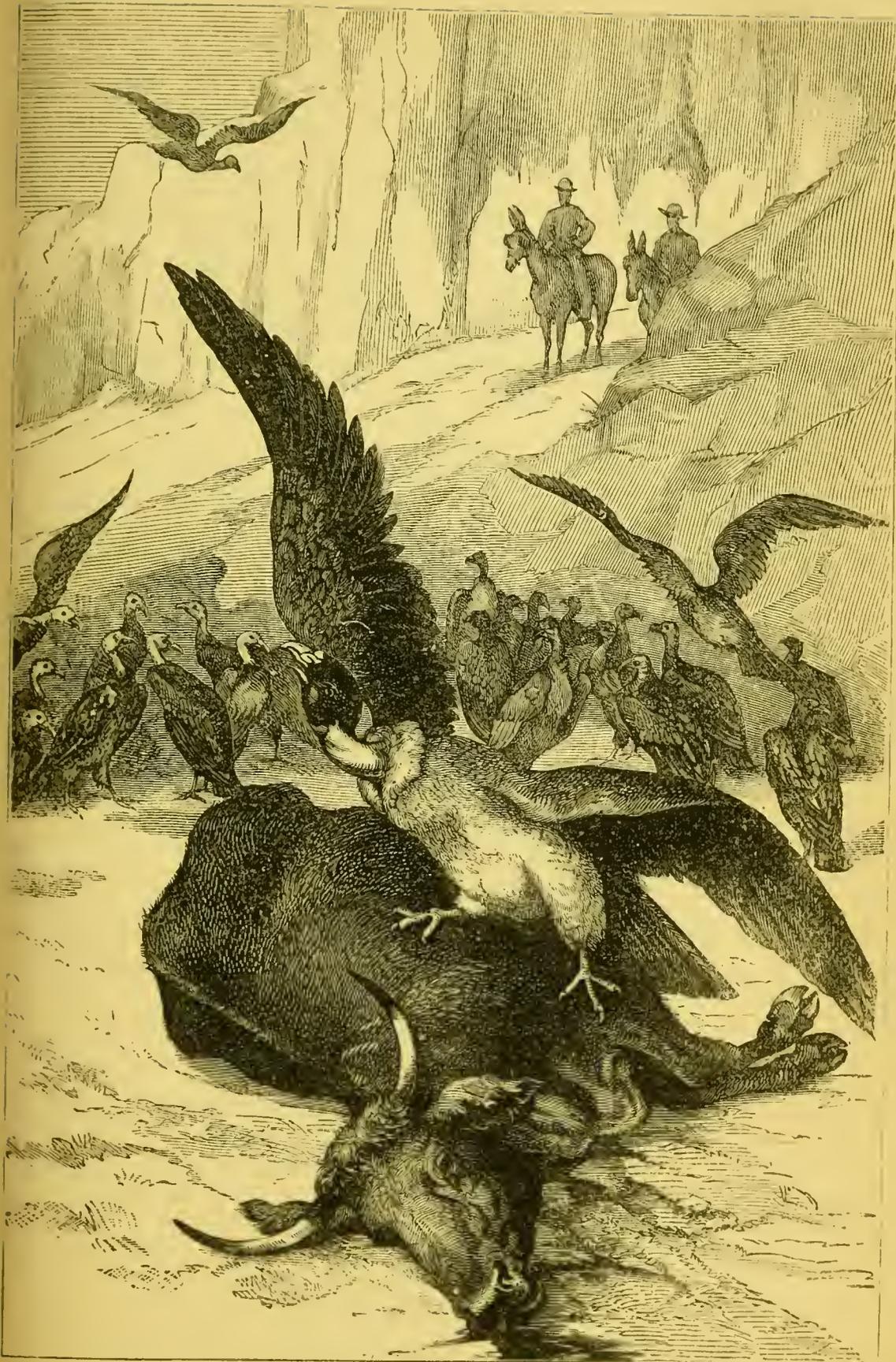
Near our camp we saw large flocks of a snow-white heron, which seemed to have ranged themselves into a line preparatory to taking flight for their roosting-places. The South American pheasant, or cigana, flew down to the verge of the stream, where it flowed close to the forest, to roll in the sand, or perhaps to sip a little water. Several of these we shot, and at the reports the herons took to flight with harsh cries, and heavily winged their way round a curve of the river.

A couple of huge king vultures—the *re de zapi-* lotes—swept from behind the forest, and directed their course across the Orinoco. George made one of the best shots I ever saw at the last of these birds. The distance could not have been less than two hundred yards, and at the crack of the rifle the huge bird turned over in the air and fell into the stream. Here it floated, feebly flapping the water for a moment; and then, lying dead on the surface, it was carried away by the current. When first it fell its

companion swooped after it, and circled round it for an instant, when, hearing the whizz of a bullet close past, which ricocheted along the water, it took its departure with loud screams for the opposite forest. These are very powerful birds, and a few of them will soon pick bare the bones of a bullock which the jaguars (or disease) have left to their disposal.

During our descent from the mountains of Aragua we once came upon a flock of these raptorial, which had congregated to devour the carcass of a bullock lying among the rocks. One huge fellow was perched upon the body, and by the ferocity of his manner kept his companions at a respectful distance, while he prepared to commence his meal. Seeing us, the entire flock rose and flapped off, suggesting the idea of a flock of demons disturbed in the performance of some unholy rite.

On the banks of a small rill, scarcely two yards wide, which trickled from a spring, we observed some handsome plants, which, on a nearer inspection, I recognized as the *Philodendron gloriosum*. George and I gathered a few of the huge cordate leaves, which grew on a long straggling tendril lying along the ground. Other curious plants grew at this spot, among which I noticed the aninga, a plant which belongs to the *Colocasiæ*. On the trees around, too, were many beautiful orchids and lianas, among which the rope-like roots of the large-leaved imbé attracted my attention; and at a little distance, among the



VULTURES DEVOURING CARCASS OF A BULLOCK.

trunks of some palms, a dense undergrowth of the slender myrtaceæ and cacao-bushes covered the ground and formed an impenetrable jungle.

The traveller never ceases to marvel at the extraordinary fecundity of nature in tropical countries. Every yard yields a harvest of plants which in Europe would elicit admiration, but which here pass unnoticed by all, except himself, as being too commonplace to excite either admiration or curiosity. What a field for the botanist and the naturalist here lies ready to be explored! These vast forests teem with animal and vegetable productions which have never been classified; plants abound which possess highly medicinal and other most valuable qualities, and of which a few only are known to the savages who roam through these unvisited solitudes. It is true that one or two well-known men have gleaned a little from this bountiful harvest; but how much yet remains to be done! So much, that, by comparison, nothing seems hitherto to have been achieved.

We had strayed to a little distance from our camp, which was hidden from view by an intervening bend of the river. Hearing the supper-call, we turned and walked rapidly back by the verge of the water, which was here margined by fine sand.

Within a few yards of the Orinoco a large fig-tree or higuera threw outwards towards the stream its vast arms, from which hung the usual cordage of lianas. One of these large branches was less covered

with creepers than the others; and just as we were about to pass beneath it, I happened to glance upwards, and on this bare bough I saw an animal of a kind I had not yet seen, and whose glowing eyes were fixed on mine with a malicious eagerness. It was the black panther, an animal much more feared by the natives than the jaguar, because of its great audacity, and the insatiable thirst for blood which it displays. Evidently the fierce creature was about to spring; so, seeing that no time was to be lost, I called to George to follow me if he valued his life, and quickly ran a few yards before turning round.

The animal still retained its position on the branch, but it squatted so low, and was stretched so flat, with its head buried between its fore-paws, that in the darkening twilight I could not take a satisfactory aim. George, however, fired, and made a good shot, the bullet, as we afterwards ascertained, striking exactly midway between the eyes, and killing the beast on the spot. For an instant we thought he had missed, so quiet seemed the fierce creature; but presently the muscular fore-legs relaxed their hold upon the branch, and losing its balance, the body slipped to one side, and fell with a heavy sound upon the sand.

This was a very fortunate ending to what might have been a very unpleasant encounter, as the black panther is a most formidable antagonist, and, when wounded, becomes thoroughly reckless. We ordered

a couple of Indians who had come up on hearing the firing to remove the skin and to bring it to camp.

After this adventure we attacked our supper with great zest, and debated the possible consequences if George had made a bad shot. The fast-increasing darkness and the swift movements of the agile beast would probably have interfered with my making a successful shot, when most likely one of us, if not both, would have got very badly mauled in the *mêlée*. We made a huge fire to scare away from the camp the mate of the dead panther, if he had one; and swinging ourselves into our hammocks, we speedily became insensible to the objects which surrounded us.

CHAPTER XXII.

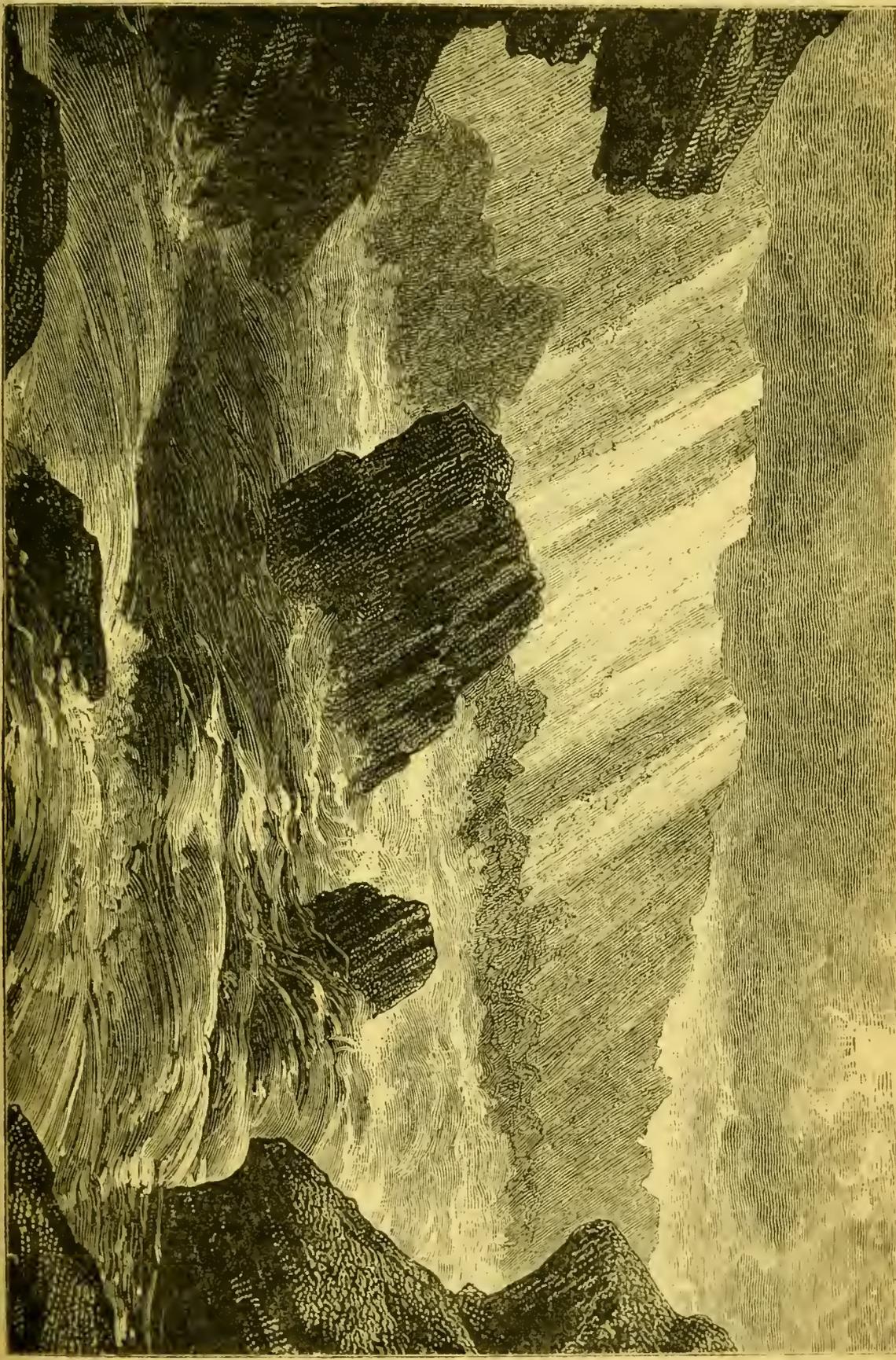
WILD COUNTRY—THE VENTUARI—UNPLEASANT RENCONTRE WITH NATIVES—
WE EFFECT OUR ESCAPE—DISAGREEABLE IMPRESSIONS OCCASIONED—ON
THE QUI VIVE—THE KINKAJOU—WE DISCOVER A BEE-TREE—DIFFICULTY
OF SECURING THE HONEY—BASALTIC CLIFFS—A SERINGUEIRO'S RAFT—
OUR CAMP BY THE JAO—GREAT NUMBERS OF ALLIGATORS—THE SQUIRREL
MONKEY—WE APPROACH SANTA BARBARA—PICTURESQUE HUTS—CAMP BY
THE VENTUARI—IMMENSE NUMBERS OF AQUATIC BIRDS—ALLIGATORS
CLOSE TO CAMP—I SHOOT AN ALLIGATOR FROM MY HAMMOCK—METHODS
OF DESTROYING ALLIGATORS.



THE country along the Orinoco from the Cassiquiare to the Rio Ventuari is extremely wild. For much of the distance it is almost destitute of inhabitants, and the few natives to be met with are less civilized than those upon the lower portions of the river. A range of mountains, of which Duida and the Sierra Maravaca form a part, is visible far to the north, again approaching the river at the Cerros de Sipapo and the Sierra de Baraguan, mentioned in a former chapter.

The Ventuari flows through these mountains, cutting a deep channel through the opposing cliffs, which tower above the foaming rapids at various parts of its course. The shattered rocks lean at every angle to the turbulent stream; and above the boiling flood

RIVER VENTUARI IN FLOOD.



project huge boulders, around which the maddened waters surge, threatening destruction to the canoe of the hardy explorer.

The sources of this river, and the adjacent regions, are scarcely known. Rugged ranges of hills extend for hundreds of miles in all directions, among which lie valleys of exquisite beauty, some forest covered, and others presenting an alternation of savanna and woodland teeming with game. To these regions access is gained by the Ventuari, and its affluents the Manapiari, Paraba, and others. From the Lower Orinoco, the traveller can reach these sierras by ascending the Rio Caura and its tributary the Erevato, which rises among their north-east slopes. These hills are inhabited by tribes of Indians who have had hitherto little or no intercourse with white men. These are the Piraoas, the Guimans, the Maionkongos, Kirishanas, and many others, whose hunting-grounds extend from the head-waters of the Orinoco to 6° north latitude, and from 64° to 68° west longitude. In this extensive section of country hardly a single white settlement exists.

During the night alluded to at the close of the last chapter, we, for the first time in our long expedition, had an encounter with the natives. Our Indians were the first to perceive suspicious symptoms.

One of them had arisen in order to replenish the fire, which had burned low, as it was now near morning. As he raised himself in his hammock, he caught

sight of a dark figure gliding off from the camp into the gloomy shelter of the forest. At first he supposed it might be one of his companions, who had risen for the same purpose as himself, and who was going to the woods for a supply of fuel. But he soon found that his comrades were asleep in their hammocks; and being now thoroughly alarmed, he aroused the camp.

The hour before day is usually selected by the savages of these parts for their hostile attacks, as at that hour their enemies are supposed to be wrapped in their deepest sleep. This was a factor in exciting our suspicions that all was not right; and we therefore left our hammocks and withdrew from the neighbourhood of the fire, lest its light should serve to direct the aim of our treacherous foes, whom we supposed to lurk in the surrounding woods. Sometimes to our straining ears the rustle of the wind among the branches would resemble the prowling footsteps of the savages, or the note of some nocturnal bird would seem to our excited fancies the signal of the enemy for an attack. Waiting in this state of suspense, each moment expecting to see the dark forms of the Indians rushing from the shelter of the forest, or to hear their savage outcries, we passed the remainder of the night.

Dawn had begun to break, and already the departing darkness had retired from the open river, and only lingered in the shadow of the woods. We

hastily unslung our hammocks and threw them into the boat, as well as the other articles of our baggage; and we were about to take our places, when loud yells resounded from the forest, and a crowd of at least a score of naked savages burst from the shelter of the trees, and rushed across the beach towards us, brandishing their spears.

Leaping into the boat, we pushed off, and pulled with might and main for the opposite side of the river. The Indians halted at the water's edge, and discharged a flight of arrows at us, some of which struck the boat, while the others dipped into the water all round us. We shortly, however, got beyond the range of their bows; and seeing that they had no canoe in which to pursue us, we relaxed our exertions, and allowed the boat to float with the current. Our enemies walked along the beach parallel to us, and by signs invited us to land; but, as may be supposed, we took no notice of the invitation. The boatmen wished us to fire on these treacherous people; but as there was no absolute necessity for doing so, we declined to accede to the request.

We were at a loss to account for their forbearance during the night, when naturally they might have expected to attack us at a great disadvantage; but our Indians said they must have seen that we were prepared for them, and that they perhaps hoped to make us believe they had retreated from the neighbourhood. They could then have taken us by sur-

prise while breakfasting. Whether this explanation was or was not the true one we never had an opportunity of learning. Seeing that we were determined to proceed, the savages saluted us with a chorus of ferocious yells, menacing us with their spears, while a few shot off their arrows at a high elevation, several of which fell near us in the water.

Our Indians now took up their oars, and with a long and regular stroke forced the boat rapidly forward. A bend in the river shut out the savages from our view, and we were not again molested by them on our journey to Santa Barbara.

This was the first occasion in our protracted wanderings that we experienced hostility from the natives of Venezuela, who in general seemed a mild, inoffensive people. But soon we were destined to a much more terrible experience of the ferocity of the unchristianized Indians of the sierras in the north-east. But of this later. A few of the arrows which stuck in our boat I preserved as a memento of this occasion; and, as I write, they, in company with some bows acquired subsequently, ornament the walls of my smoking-room.

This incident, harmless as it was in its results, made a disagreeable impression on us; and for many a night afterwards the gloom of the forest seemed, to our suspicions, to swarm with lurking foes, who only waited until we were asleep in our hammocks to rush in and overpower us. Every noise heard in the

woods was pregnant with danger; the cries of water-fowl, the startled flutter of a bird among the branches, the howlings of the araguatos, were, to our fears, signals from the crouching savages who prowled about our camp. These fears, however, gradually wore away, and once again we could abandon ourselves to sleep with our former sense of security.

On the day following this adventure, while descending the river close to the bank, we heard a terrible buzzing, as if a whole hive of bees were avenging their wrongs upon some intruder. Looking upwards to whence the sounds seemed to proceed, we observed a cloud of these insects flying about the entrance to a hole which decay had wrought in the stem of a huge old tree; and close by, seated on a branch which offered a convenient seat, we perceived a kinkajou licking his paws and the sides of his mouth with his long extensile tongue. That he had been robbing the bees of their honey was evident; while the thick coat of grayish or yellowish brown fur with which nature has defended his body rendered him insensible to the attacks of the bees which buzzed viciously about him, trying in vain to find a vulnerable spot.

We now determined to attack the bees on our own account, and for this purpose we landed beneath the tree which contained the nest. On seeing us for the first time, the kinkajou squatted flat along the branch, hoping to escape observation; but a shot from George's rifle brought the robber with a thump

to the ground, where it presently straightened out quite dead.

A careful examination of the tree showed that it was a mere shell, hollowed by the decay of extreme old age; and but for the support it received from the cordage of lianas which attached it in all directions to the neighbouring trees, it would most probably long since have succumbed to the storms which occasionally ravage these forests. An axe was brought from the boat, and after a few sturdy blows, the keen blade crashed through the outer crust, revealing the dark, cave-like interior.

Meantime the bees, perceiving that their arch-enemy had disappeared, had again quieted down to their ordinary employment, and once more came and went with their accustomed regularity. Clearly they did not as yet realize the imminence of a far greater danger than that threatened by the attack of the kinkajou, else doubtlessly they would have interfered with our proceedings.

The small aperture through which they gained access to their hive evidently communicated with the hollow interior which we had laid open with our axe, and would serve the purposes of a chimney if we kindled a fire at the bottom of the tree. A large quantity of dried leaves was heaped in the opening, and on applying a light to this, the pile quickly sprang into a blaze, sending a thick cloud of smoke upwards through the tree, and pouring out at the

small hole above. The bees now crowded out through the aperture, and flew round among the branches, incensed at this new and irresistible enemy.

It was not long until they discovered our presence, and we had to beat a retreat from the neighbourhood, each of us pursued by several scores of the infuriated little insects. George got half a dozen stings in the face and neck, which swelled his features to the proportions of a plum-pudding; and while their effects remained, I very much fear that his appearance would not have made a favourable impression on Donna Juanita. I also was rather badly stung. But we were not to be diverted from our purpose by the hostility of the bees.

The old tree, which was as dry as tinder, was now in a blaze, and vast volumes of smoke rose from it and circled in dense clouds round the neighbourhood, effectually dispersing the buzzing legions. We therefore approached, and sent the Indians up the surrounding trees to cut the ropes of lianas which upheld that which was burning. This they soon effected; and when the venerable patriarch was deprived of the support of its brethren, it speedily yielded to the flames and the sturdy blows of the axemen, and fell with a thundering crash, splitting open for the entire length of its hollowed trunk. The honey was now laid bare, and the quantity was considerable, probably over a hundred pounds, while the quality was excellent.

Well satisfied with the result of our bee-hunt, we collected the blazing logs into a fire, and prepared our mid-day meal, at which we did ample justice to the novel delicacy which we had so unexpectedly procured.

As we sailed down the Orinoco, we passed the mouth of a narrow but very deep stream, which flowed between tall basaltic cliffs of the most extraordinary formation. They resembled sheaves of small pillars collected and bound together into vast block-like masses, distributed along both sides of the stream at regular intervals, their rocky foundations rising above the surface of the water, which expanded into miniature coves between the tower-like cliffs. Streaming down from their summits were long tendrils, depending from a mass of the most luxuriant vegetation which grew above, the brilliant green of the leaves and stalks and the many hues of the flowers forming a striking contrast with the stern gray rocks against which they hung.

A raft, occupied by two persons, floated upon this wild-looking stream. We awaited their approach, and, on inquiry, we found that the travellers were a Portuguese seringueiro and his servant in search of caoutchouc woods. Their boat had been dashed to pieces over the rapids at the upper waters of the stream; and they were now on their way to Santa Barbara in order to procure another. The raft they had constructed themselves from some dried drift

timber which they found along the shores of the river; and although unsuited for ascending a rapid stream, it offered a sufficiently convenient mode of transit on the present occasion.

Leaving the trader, who, indeed, seemed a most uninteresting person, we paddled rapidly down the Orinoco, passing the mouths of the Cunucunumo, Guanami, Puruname, and many others, which flowed from both the north and south. At the debouchure of the largest of these, the Rio Jao, we camped for the night.

The beaches along this portion of the river were bare and very extensive, and upon their baking sands basked immense numbers of alligators. I observed a drove of the brown-haired apida, a kind of pig distinct from the peccary; and several of these we shot before they could effect their escape into the forest.

On the topmost branches of a palm I observed a beautiful little monkey, the tee-tee (*Callithrix sciurus*), or squirrel monkey. This little creature is of a gray colour, and measures about ten inches in length, exclusive of the tail, which attains a length of nearly fourteen inches. The soft expression of its large melancholy eyes gives it an air of intelligence and meekness, which qualities, in fact, characterize it. I noticed that the tail was loosely coiled round a slender branch, as if prehensile; but it seemed rather to use it merely as a stay or support than to trust to

it as a means of locomotion, like the howlers and spider-monkeys, which swing themselves from branch to branch in their progress through the forest by twisting their tails round the branches, while they sling themselves forward to grasp the boughs of the neighbouring trees.

The nose of the tee-tee is black, and the general colour of the face is white; while the skull is larger, and contains a larger brain (proportionately to the size of the animal), than that of any other monkey.

On a subsequent occasion I saw several of these monkeys lying together in a heap, with their arms, legs, and tails so interlaced that it was difficult to detect the owner of any particular member. The food of this monkey consists chiefly of spiders and insects of various kinds, and, according to Humboldt, they occasion the entomologist who keeps them no small annoyance, as they greedily devour any of his specimens which fall in their way, dexterously removing them from their pins without pricking their fingers.

The humid climate of the vast riverine forests is the chosen habitat of this species, and if deported to a drier climate the tee-tee evinces great distress, and sometimes pines away altogether. The feathery crests of the palm-trees seem their favourite sleeping-places, as subsequently I noticed several other individuals of this species apparently disposing themselves to rest for the night, and always on a palm.

A specimen, which I grieve to say I shot in order to examine it with more convenience, was seated at the summit of a pirijao palm, which was one of a group of these trees. Why it had selected this tree I cannot imagine, as its trunk, which rises to the height of seventy feet, is studded with thorns, which must render its ascent a difficult task, even for the agile tee-tee. The leaves of the pirijao are pinnated, and it produces clusters of a purple-coloured fruit two or three inches in diameter. The natives manufacture excellent food from this fruit, which yields a farinaceous substance somewhat resembling in colour the yolk of an egg, and is of a pleasant flavour.

For several days after leaving our camp at the mouth of the Jao, we passed through some exquisite scenery. The broad and brimming river flowed between banks clothed with the varied and magnificent vegetation of the tropics; palms rose high above the mass of tangled and flower-spangled underwood beneath, which was so thick and of such an exuberant growth that it seemed to crest like the waves of the ocean and roll forwards towards the water.

As we advanced, evidences of our approach to Santa Barbara presented themselves. Boats laden with cassava and plantains met or passed us; and occasionally a hut appeared on the banks, showing that man had laid claim to a portion of this luxuriant wilderness. At one spot, where we landed for dinner,

we observed two huts in a most picturesque situation, backed by the tangled forest, and surrounded on the remaining sides by a rich growth of various tall grasses and handsome plants, which gave a peculiarly tropical air to the scene. Beneath the shade afforded by these huts—which indeed hardly deserved the name, as they consisted merely of a thatched roof supported on posts—we took our dinner, and enjoyed afterwards the grateful pipe and a short siesta; then as the afternoon was getting advanced, we reluctantly left this picturesque place, and once more embarked in our lancha.

This night we encamped on the right bank, between the arms of the Ventuari which form the delta through which that river discharges its waters into the Orinoco. Here aquatic birds of all kinds abounded. Flamingoes, herons, spoonbills, ibis (both white and scarlet), ducks of several species, cranes (one kind of which I took to be the jabiru), geese, and many other sorts, croaked, cackled, or screamed round our encampment; and as night fell upon the scene, the whoop of the crane, the roar of the jaguars, and the bellowing of the alligators and lamantins made a chorus which at first almost prevented us from sleeping. At length these sounds seemed confused to my wandering mind, and despite the uproar I slept soundly until morning.

Our hammocks were as usual suspended between the trees at the verge of the forest and parallel to the

river. On looking over the side of mine on the following morning, just as the darkness was giving way to a gray twilight, I was astonished to perceive, within twenty yards of our camp, at the margin of the river, several huge alligators which had lately emerged from the water, as was apparent from their still wet and glistening hides. My rifle was at hand, and raising myself cautiously so as not to alarm them, I put a ball into the nape of the neck of the largest of the party.

At the report my companion and the Indians sprang from their hammocks in alarm, but laughed on ascertaining the cause of the disturbance. The reptile I had fired at apparently had his spine broken by the shot, for he lay helplessly on the sands, flapping his huge tail from side to side, and opening and shutting his jaws in a spasmodic manner. His comrades had scuttled into the river on hearing the crack of my rifle.

These monsters appear higher on their legs when walking than when at rest; and they also at this time make a rustling sound, which is probably occasioned by the friction against each other of their overlapping scales. The Indians proceeded to tease the reptile which I had shot by thrusting a large pole down his gaping throat. This he seized in his jaws as firmly as if it had been held in a vice, and then without an effort crushed it to matchwood. Filled with loathing for the unwieldy brute, I poured the

contents of my Winchester into his brain, and left him dead upon the sands.

I have heard of many ingenious modes of killing the alligator, one of which consists of placing a canister of gunpowder in the stomach of a sheep or other animal which is left as a bait in a suitable place ; and by means of a wire connecting the explosive with a galvanic battery, the charge is fired at the proper time, and the monster is blown to atoms.

When the Turkish sultan's yacht was up the Nile some years ago, some persons on board used to amuse themselves by throwing red-hot bricks wrapped in large leaves to some crocodiles which surrounded the ship. The agonies of the unfortunate reptiles were described as horrible to behold, when the hot bricks had burned through the wrappings and came in contact with their intestines. These crocodiles had been accustomed to haunt the neighbourhood of the vessel, in order to pick up the refuse which was daily thrown overboard from the cook's pantry.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WE ARRIVE AT SANTA BARBARA—GEORGE TRANSACTS HIS BUSINESS—WE RETURN TO ESMERALDA—CAMP ON THE JAO—HUNTING EXPEDITION—I SHOOT AN ALLIGATOR—STRANGE BIRD—GOOD SPORT WITH DEER—LARGE HERD OF PECCARIES—I SHOOT A GREAT MANY OF THEM—GEORGE'S RETURN—HIS ADVENTURES—NARROW ESCAPE FROM A WILD BULL—HEAR JAGUARS ROARING ROUND THE CAMP.



THE remainder of our journey to Santa Barbara presented little to interest us. Indeed we were too anxious to push on to waste much time on the banks of the river in pursuit of the game which there abounded. It would have been an awkward circumstance if by unnecessary delay my companion should again miss his father's agent, whose stay at the mission in all likelihood could not be long protracted. We therefore accelerated our journey as much as possible, and spent no more time on the way than was absolutely needful.

On the second day after shooting the alligator, as detailed at the end of the preceding chapter, we arrived at the mission of Santa Barbara, and there found Mr. Bartram, who had actually made all preparations for his departure, and was about to step

into his boat! The nature of my friend's business with him in no way concerns this history, and I will therefore dismiss that subject, merely observing that the affairs to be treated of were arranged to the mutual satisfaction of the parties concerned. This accomplished, Mr. Bartram took his departure.

We next laid in a stock of provisions, and re-embarked in our lancha (for which we nourished a kind of affection, as it was the same we had purchased at far-distant San Fernando, and which had carried us in safety throughout all our wanderings), and once more paddled towards Esmeralda.

Ascending a river and descending it are two very different things. In the one case you win each yard of the route by your own exertion; and fatigued, and with bones aching after a long day's work, you throw yourself on the ground at the camp-fire almost too tired to eat. In the other, you lie luxuriously in your boat, enjoying the scenery, the chief exertion being to steer; and there is plenty of opportunity for remarking the fauna and flora visible along the banks.

But these considerations were not applicable to us on this expedition, as, whether ascending or descending the various rivers, we lay at our ease, chatting, writing, or smoking—occasionally laying down pipe or pencil to take a crack at some basking alligator, or at the staring visage of a lurking jaguar. Despite the drawbacks of heat, mosquitoes, and, after the

rainy season began, the almost incessant rains, I thoroughly enjoyed our journey from first to last.

My tried and valued comrade is, as I write, residing in Venezuela; and I, much to my regret, am once more back in Britain. I hope soon again to tread the primeval forest, to career across the boundless savannas on my half-wild steed, to shoot the surging rapids in my canoe, and to be lullabied to sleep by the roar of the unwieldy lamantin or of the fierce jaguar.

For several days we worked our way upwards, and had passed the various mouths of the Ventuari, when George and I agreed to spend one day hunting on the banks of the Jao, for which purpose we entered the mouth of that river and camped on its western bank. The evening was a beautiful one. During the day a dark mist, high aloft, gave a gloomy air to the sky, but towards sunset much of this vanished and left the heavens nearly clear.

In the west, almost "shorn of his beams," the sun, like a globe of red-hot iron, hung suspended above the forests, which were bathed in the fiery light. Here and there behind our encampment shafts of the lurid beams shot through openings in the forest, showing the declining luminary sinking behind the horizon. Far in the north-west the summits of the sierras were painted crimson; their lower slopes, as well as the many ravines which furrowed their rugged sides, assuming a purple shade, which

deepened each moment, and gradually stole upwards, treading upon the retiring footsteps of the sunlight.

During our supper, which we took on the beach close to the water's edge, George and I agreed to hunt on different sides of the river on the following day. Thus we would have a better chance of finding game than if we kept together. We opened several boxes of cartridges, and I filled my pouch, which contained one hundred, so that I was well prepared to spread slaughter and devastation among the herds of deer, peccaries, or other game which I hoped to fall in with.

Early on the succeeding morning we rose and left the camp. I waited until George had been ferried across the Jao by our boatmen; and then waving his hand as a farewell, he disappeared behind the rugged declivity which sloped back from the river at this spot. I shouldered my Winchester, and walked slowly up the bank, intending to keep near the river during my expedition. There were many beautiful plants growing close to the verge of the woods, which I occasionally halted to examine. One of these bore a strong resemblance to the *cedron*, with its fronds (which somewhat resembled those of the ash or walnut in shape) bending gracefully outwards, and enclosing in the centre the pretty flowers and seeds.

While admiring this handsome plant I heard a



LARGE AQUATIC PLANT.
(*Anthurium Dechardii*.)

grating noise behind me in the river, and turning quickly I observed a large alligator crawling out upon the bank, having apparently not as yet perceived my presence. I was tired of shooting these brutes, and were it not from a sense of duty which I really felt in destroying them on every possible occasion, I would have allowed the ugly saurian to remain unmolested. Acting, therefore, on this principle, I gave him a ball in the eye, which killed him on the spot.

He was certainly a hideous monster; his grinning teeth were visible at the sides of his capacious mouth, his uninjured eye was open and bright—so brilliant, indeed, that I could hardly believe the reptile dead. My bullet had hit him at the lower edge of the eye nearest me, and had then passed out at the opposite side of the head.

After this adventure I strolled along by the margin of the stream, in which, and near the bank, I saw some splendid specimens of the *Anthurium dechardi*. This aquatic plant attains a large size, and presents a majestic appearance, with its huge lanceolate leaves unfolding from round the seed head, which bears some resemblance to the ear of maize. Some of these were as yet enveloped in the spathe-like folds of the leaf; others were opening the folds of their covering, and, nourished by the light and air, would, no doubt, in a few days rival the proportions of their earlier-developed brethren. The effect of a

mass of these plants, with their large succulent leaves hiding the water which bathes their roots and supplies life and nourishment to their system, is certainly most striking. The surrounding forest was very dense; fan-palms and uranias hedged in the woods, almost excluding from the interior the light and air which they strove to monopolize.

I had now been an hour out from the camp, and as yet I had seen no game, except the long lines of flamingoes and other aquatic birds which peopled each reach of the river, and which flew off with discordant cries as I approached. I heard George's rifle once or twice, but during the day I did not see himself. I learned from him in the evening that he had left the neighbourhood of the river altogether, and had hunted in a small savanna which he had discovered at the back of the woods bordering the shores of the Jao.

Continuing my ramble, I found, on rounding a bend in the river, that the forest retired from its vicinity, the intervening space being covered with huge granite blocks thrown together at every possible angle to each other. Above this, down a steep declivity between abrupt rocky banks, rushed the Jao, broken into foam by the opposing masses of granite, and filling the air with the hoarse thunder of its waters. Scrambling with much difficulty up the rugged slope, I entered on a long narrow glen, enclosed on both sides by barren rocks almost destitute

of vegetation. In this place I shot a most beautiful bird, which I perceived resting on a rock overhanging a waterfall. It seemed to be aquatic, from the conformation of its feet, which were partially webbed; but the plumage was not like that of any bird I had ever before seen on water.

I shortly passed through this glen; and again the river flowed through a level country, bordered occasionally by forests as heretofore. Among these woods I had capital sport with deer. A herd of these animals was lying in the shade of some palms, which grew in detached clumps on the banks of the river, like skirmishers in advance of the main body behind. On perceiving me the deer sprang to their feet, and before taking to flight stood gazing at the unwonted apparition for sufficient time to enable me to take sight at the leader of the band, and as the report of my rifle echoed over the river he sprang four or five feet into the air and fell dead in the midst of his terrified companions, who instantly took to flight. This was a handsome animal, with fine antlers. I cut the throat and removed the entrails, and then with considerable difficulty hung the carcass on the branch of a tree, leaving my handkerchief fluttering near it in order to scare away the vultures. I shortly came upon several others, one or two of which I shot and butchered.

Thinking I had secured enough meat for our needs, I retraced my steps towards the camp. While de-

scending the rocks near the falls I saw at the edge of the woods a drove of peccaries. Some were lying in a kind of wallows which they had rooted in the friable soil; others stood about them, occasionally rooting for some nut or root which their instinct told them lay hidden in the earth. I had here a fair chance of thinning the numbers of these irascible animals. The spot on which I stood was quite unassailable by the peccaries, or indeed by any animal less agile than monkeys or jaguars. I therefore sat quietly on the summit of a high rock which commanded the lower falls, and took a steady aim at the nearest of the troop. Along with the report I heard the dull thud of the bullet, and saw the animal leap from the ground and then fall over, kicking in his expiring struggles.

The herd instantly rallied with loud shrill grunts, and perceiving their dying comrade, fell upon him in their fury, and literally tore him to shreds! Crack went my rifle into the thick of them, and another rolled over. The pigs now caught sight of me upon my point of vantage, and charged towards me. Their rage seemed to know no bounds when they discovered my position to be inaccessible. They plunged round below, making frantic efforts to race up the smooth rock, but always slipping back again before they had got half way. Indeed many of them rolled over and over, and finally fell into the seething caldron at the foot of the falls, where they were dashed against the rocks and drowned.

Meantime I was busily engaged. Finding that they could not reach me, the main body, consisting of forty or fifty, sat down before my position to besiege me into a surrender. This was exactly what I wanted. Without stirring from where I sat, I selected my shots, and taking a rest off my knee, I hardly missed one, the distance being only about twenty-five yards.

The indomitable courage and proverbial ferocity of these little brutes kept them on the spot until some thirty of their number lay stretched lifeless on the ground. Then, and not till then, did the remainder of the band take to flight, uttering sharp snorts and grunts as they tossed and plunged forward, disappearing in the forest.

I waited until they had got well away, and then, slipping down, I proceeded rapidly towards the camp, which I reached several hours before sundown. Here I found that George had not yet returned, so I sent the Indians up the river to bring in the deer and as many of the peccaries as they wished. Having regaled myself on a hearty dinner of fowl and bacon, which we had brought with us from Santa Barbara, I threw myself on the ground by the fire and soon fell asleep.

I must have slept for a considerable time, as, when I was awakened by shots from the opposite bank, I found it was twilight. The shots were George's signal for the boat, which the Indians had taken in

order to bring in the meat, and they had not yet returned. I was about to shout across to my companion that he should exercise the virtue of patience until the arrival of the Indians, when I saw them shoot round a bend of the bank, and presently they brought the boat to camp, laden to the water with the deer and peccaries. Throwing them ashore, they pulled across the river for George; and shortly after that worthy stepped up to the fire, literally hung over with different kinds of birds.

“What sport, George?” I asked. “I have had some grand shooting.”

“Pretty fair,” replied he. “I have shot all these birds—every one good to eat, I think, to judge by the smell; and besides, I shot a wild bull in a savanna I fell in with, and several deer.”

I now communicated the result of my day’s sport to my friend, who was amazed at the numbers of peccaries which had again fallen to my rifle.

“Here’s a tid-bit, old fellow!” exclaimed he, taking a tongue from among a bundle of birds; “that will make you smack your lips!”

“That’s from the wild bull, of course?” I inquired.

“Yes,” replied George; “and a pretty dance he gave me before I got it. However, I’ll tell you all about that as soon as my teeth are busy; I’m just famished!”

Several of the birds were quickly plucked, cleaned, and spitted before the glowing embers; a venison

cutlet or two sputtered over the coals; and as soon as these were cooked we set to work, I none the less well that I had eaten a tolerable dinner a few hours before. When the edge had been taken off George's appetite, he commenced the narrative of his day's adventures.

"After I left the bank," he began, "I went over the rise, and down into a little valley at the other side, where the trees were frightfully thick and every spot was covered with bushes and plants tied together with lianas, so that I had pretty smart work to cut my way through with my hunting-knife. Well, I got out of that place at last; and glad I was of it, as it swarmed with snakes! I killed two rattlers, and a huge mapanare that would have put an end to me with one snap of his teeth.

"The country outside the woods was pretty open—grass, and clumps of trees standing like islands over it, and here and there a big gray rock: altogether it was somewhat like the Mesa de Carichana, on the Orinoco.

"I soon made out a herd of deer feeding on the plain; and made a first-rate stalk from behind one of the big rocks, getting within eighty yards of the animals before they guessed anything was wrong. Crack went my Winchester, and over tumbled the best doe in the lot; for I was shooting for venison, you see. Well, at the report the whole drove made off; but I let drive another cartridge into the brown

of 'em, with the result that a fine buck rolled over in the middle of the herd, which scattered to the right and left as they heard the ball hit and saw him fall.

“Near where I stood I noticed a clump of very high reeds. The spot looked as if it had been a pond which had dried up, and in the deep, damp soil the reeds and tall grasses had grown much higher than the surrounding vegetation. While I was passing this in order to reach the deer which I had first shot, I suddenly heard a crash, and out of the reed-bed, with his head held low, came a bull straight at me!

“The distance was hardly ten yards, and almost before I could raise my rifle the huge brute was on me. I sprang to one side, and as he passed with a deep bellow I fired behind his shoulder, hoping my bullet would pierce his heart. But in my hurry I must have fired too low, for, wheeling round with great activity, he came at me a second time. He was, when he turned, about fifteen yards from me, and as he charged I took a quick aim at the nape of his neck where it joins the skull, hoping to sever the spine. I was again unfortunate, and, seeing that he did not drop, I turned and ran for the reed-bed, which was the only place of refuge within reach. Into this I plunged, with the bull hard at my heels. The noise he made in crashing through the matted stalks prevented him from hearing me; and almost as soon as I

entered the friendly cover I turned quickly to the left and gained the open plain, making the best of my way towards a high boulder at a little distance.

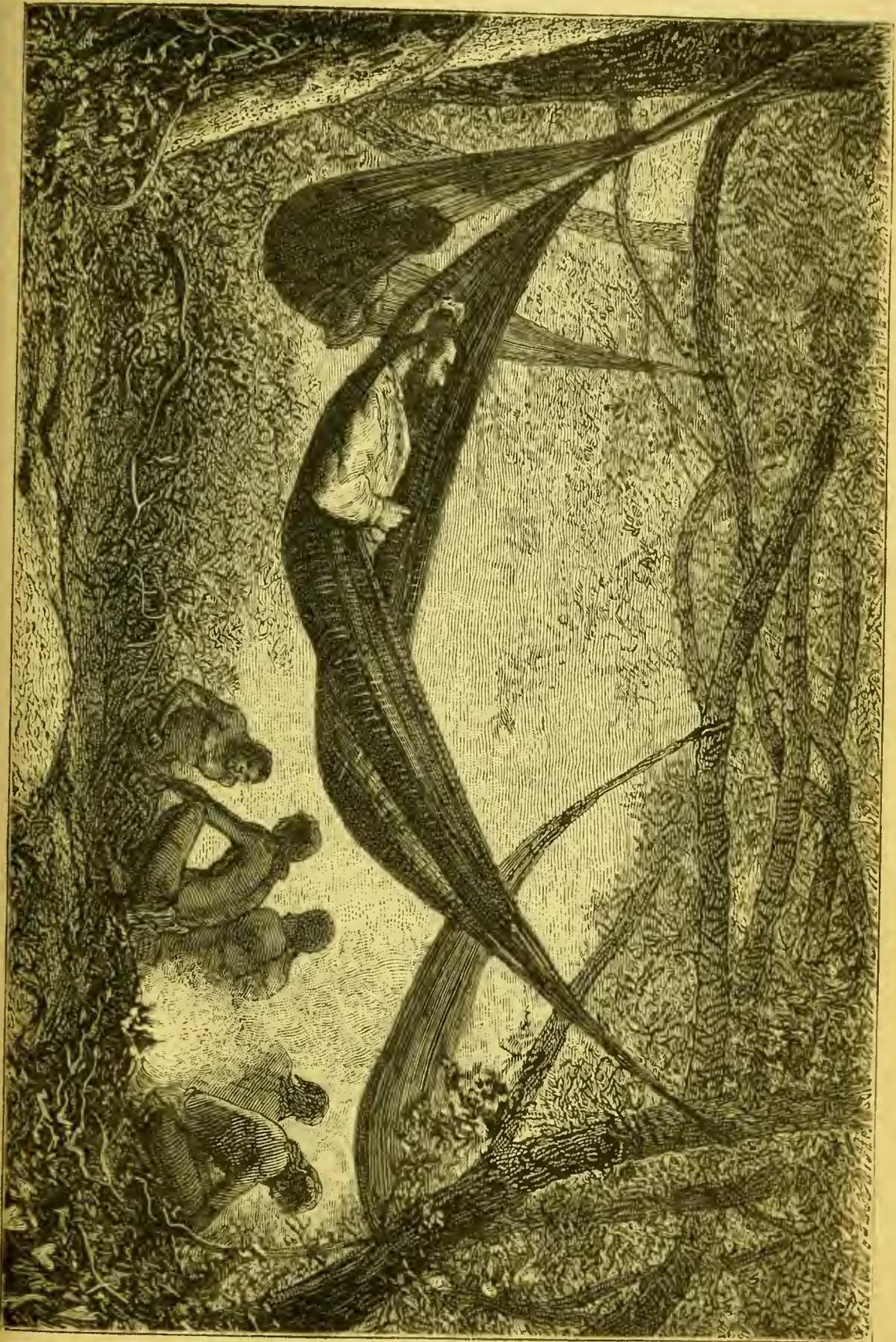
“The bull, meantime, had come to a halt within the reeds, and, I suppose, listening intently, heard my footsteps as I ran across the plain; for he again broke cover, and came thundering after me in quick pursuit.

“But now I had almost gained the rock, which I knew would place me in safety. A few springs more, and I clambered up the rugged boulder, and seated myself, breathless, on the top; while my savage antagonist pawed the ground below, bellowing, and tearing up the earth with his horns. These demonstrations, however, did not now disturb me. I lifted my rifle, and with one well-directed bullet laid him low.

“I then descended from my perch, and having cut out his tongue, I got back to the river as fast as I could. I didn't think there were any of these animals in these parts; but I suppose he must have strayed away from some of the great herds lower down the river.”

Here ended George's story, which interested me much. I would have given a good deal to have had so stirring an adventure myself. After our return to the llanos I had many just as exciting, when I did not think them quite so *couleur de rose* as I had supposed them to be. Our suppers were now de-

spatched; and having made an immense fire to scare the jaguars (which we already heard roaring in the forest) from entering the camp during the night, we betook ourselves to our hammocks; and fatigued with our exertions during the day, we slept deeply until the araguatos raised their devil's matins at sunrise.



CHAPTER XXIV.

NUMBERS OF ALLIGATORS—BLACK PANTHER—PELICANS—A SELFISH PELICAN
—FISHING — DEPRESSING INFLUENCES — MOSQUITOES—OTTERS—GEORGE
SHOOTS AN OTTER—WILD SCENES—NARROW ESCAPE FROM AN ALLIGATOR
—NUMBER OF THESE REPTILES WHICH FELL TO MY RIFLE WHILE IN
VENEZUELA—VALUE OF THEIR HIDES.



OUR hunt upon the Jao was so successful that it deprived us of any excuse for shooting more game for several days.

Indeed we had hardly time for the amusement, as both George and I were anxious to reach Wataba as soon as possible. Our rifles were not idle, however; for alligators were numerous, and an occasional jaguar presented himself to our view. These we shot whenever we had the chance, as the handsome skin would form an acceptable present at Wataba; and as for the alligators, as I have already said, we shot them to satisfy our consciences.

One day, while coasting along by the sandy beach, we saw an immense black panther reclining at the edge of the forest beneath the shade of a zamang. He did not wait to make a close acquaintance with us, but bounded into the forest almost as soon as his eyes rested on us.

Shortly after we saw a group of alligators sleeping in the sun, their huge jaws open at right angles; while a herd of capybaras emerged from the woods, and walked parallel with the river for some distance, finally disappearing among the trees. Multitudes of birds lined the shores: some were busily engaged in fishing, or searching for food in the shallows; while others stood motionless, in an attitude of reflection, balanced on one leg, as if they had abandoned the pursuit of their prey for the present,—these were herons and cranes. Pelicans croaked and flapped in all directions, their insatiable voracity impelling them to wage a ceaseless war on their finny prey.

One of these birds seemed the victim of a huge old fellow, which kept close at hand, and as fast as the other caught a fish, and before it could be transferred to the capacious pouch, the greedy tyrant snapped it, and bolted it with evident relish. This habit is also observable in the pochard, which robs the canvas-back of the roots of the valisneria, which the former is either too lazy or too indifferent a diver to procure for himself. He waits until the canvas-back rises half suffocated with his long immersion in the water, and before the dazed bird can collect his wits, the nimble pochard snaps the coveted roots, and makes his escape with such agility that the poor victim of this barefaced robber well knows it would be idle to pursue him.

I was so disgusted with the manner in which the

selfish old pelican was behaving, that I sent a Winchester bullet through him. His body was secured, and on opening him we found that the gluttonous creature had stowed away no fewer than twenty-seven fish in his interior!

After leaving the Jao, we passed through some extremely wild-looking country. The river was bordered by rocky shores, rising occasionally into bold peaks, which in the distance assumed the proportions of hills of some magnitude. Immense rocks reared their rugged sides high above the bosom of the river; and others, scattered here and there, rose but a few feet above the water, which rippled against the obstruction with a soft and musical murmur. On one of the largest of these we landed to dine; and while the boat was ferrying George from the opposite bank, where he had landed in order to stalk a king vulture which was posted on the apex of a high rock, I amused myself with fishing.

I soon landed several large fish, some of which seemed to be a kind of "ray." These fish are extremely ugly, and often attain the length of three feet, the tail being terminated by a horny sting three inches long. They are of a grayish-brown colour, and are spotted with black; in the centre of each spot is a yellow speck.

Another fish which I caught was nearly four feet in length, and was furnished with two long whip-like feelers projecting from the surface of its nose,

under the eyes. This fish cost me some trouble to land, as it weighed probably forty or fifty pounds. These waters seemed alive with fish of many kinds; but most of those I caught were repulsive looking,—and, certainly, I preferred our venison diet to venturing to test their quality.

After dinner we pushed on as fast as we could, and towards evening landed on a vast sandy shore which intervened between the water and the forest. The vapours which floated above this arid expanse, the wild-looking and dessicated foliage, and one or two truncated hills in the distance, gave the scene quite an African character.

These melancholy shores produced a feeling of depression, which indeed I had experienced on other occasions and under circumstances totally dissimilar. The gloomy forest, tangled and interlaced with lianas and the many other creepers which twist and twine round stem and branch; the air heavy, as it were, for want of ventilation, and filled with the exhalations extracted by the hot-house atmosphere from the rich damp soil and the succulent and exuberant vegetation,—these produced a sensation of melancholy which it is difficult to define. Perhaps it arose from the abstract consciousness that amid these endless wildernesses man is an intruder—that all this riot of vegetation is wasted on the birds and animals which hold it as an inheritance; or perhaps it is due to a vague realization of the question, to what

end is all this in which man seems to have no part?

As we reclined on the dry sand we watched the sun go down beyond the horizon. The river ran full in the track of crimson light, and reflected the fiery hue of the heavens in one long sheet of flame. The sands on both shores were veiled by bluish vapours, which seemed to shift and dance in a fantastic manner, presenting through their distorting medium inverted palms, mountains, and various objects which appeared or vanished in a strange or magical manner. We thought we beheld the Nile flowing through the deserts of Egypt, and expected to see the representation of the pyramids during some of the kaleidoscopic changes of the mirage.

The sun disappeared, seeming to sink beneath the fiery waves of the river in the far west; the birds along the shores, and the araguatos in the forests, croaked or howled their vespers; a cool spirit seemed to breathe over the scene—and it was night. In the tropics there is none of that protracted twilight, that gradual dying of the day, which prepares the inhabitants of northern countries for the approach of night. As soon as the sun falls behind the horizon darkness commences, and in a very few minutes night enshrouds the scene.

On the following morning we started before day had dawned, as we hoped, by two long days' work, to reach Esmeralda the ensuing evening. By noon we

had made such good progress that we halted to rest for an hour in the shade of some trees. All nature seems in these latitudes to take a siesta at mid-day. The birds and monkeys retire into the cooler parts of the forests; the crocodiles bask sleepily on the beaches; the gallatores stand in the shaded nooks and coves, as if satiated with success; the only creature which seems to pursue unchecked its usual avocations is the blood-thirsty mosquito.

It is difficult to assign a sufficient reason for the existence of these wretches, or of snakes. Doubtless, they were created for some wise and adequate purpose, but it transcends our limited intelligence to discover what it is. Perhaps lest man should forget, amid these gardens of nature, that he was made for a higher end than to live without care or trouble; and that as in other countries the bread he eats is procured by the sweat of his brow, so here, where life is sustained without effort, he may also pay that debt of suffering which is the common lot of human nature here below. Who knows? There may be deep metaphysical problems involved in the existence of a xancudo, or of a rattlesnake!

The amount of annoyance which venomous insects cause the traveller in these countries cannot be adequately realized by those who have never experienced what it is to be exposed for days, weeks, and months to the steady, incessant torment inflicted by them.

After our siesta we re-embarked, and finding that a brisk breeze had sprung up, we hoisted our sail and careered merrily up the river, steering now to one side, and now to the other, in search of any novelty in either the vegetation or zoology of these districts. Our boatmen told us that an animal nearly as large as the capybara, but not so high on its legs, frequented the Orinoco in this neighbourhood. We were at a loss to discover what kind of animal this might be, but chance so directed that we should have an opportunity of seeing it this very evening.

We encamped as usual a little before sundown, and while the Indians were tying up the boat, lighting the fire, and making the ordinary preparations for camp, George and I took our rifles and strolled along the beach. About two hundred yards above the spot at which we had landed the bank projected in the form of a promontory into the stream, and was clad to its point with ceibas, erythrinæ, palms, uranias, and the other ordinary trees and plants of the surrounding forests. This shut off from our view whatever lay beyond; and as anything in that direction would, similarly, be unaware of our arrival, George and I cautiously rounded the point, and looked curiously up the river bank.

Here, at the distance of about a hundred yards, we saw two animals at the verge of the water. They seemed, at first, somewhat like gigantic water-rats;

but, on a second glance, we became convinced that they were otters. These were, then, the animals of which our Indians had told us. We were astonished to find on the Upper Orinoco an animal which, hitherto, we had regarded as purely an inhabitant of the temperate and boreal regions.

But we had no time to indulge these reflections, as we perceived indications on the part of the otters of an intention to leave the spot. George, who happened to be in the best position for a shot, raised his rifle, and at the report the larger of the animals fell kicking on the sand. I fired an ineffectual shot at the other, which instantly plunged into the river and disappeared.

The wounded animal was still struggling on the sands, and trying to drag itself towards the water; but we speedily ran up and knocked it on the head. It was a very fine dog otter. The fur was a rich lustrous brown, almost black, and the under pile was wonderfully thick for the tropics. We now returned to camp, bearing our trophy; and the Indians removed the skin, while we looked on, conversing on the habits and peculiarities of this beast. On examining its nostrils, we found that the orifices were furnished with a valve-like apparatus, which enables the animal to close them while diving. The feet were completely webbed; and the long, thick, and heavy tail forms a capital rudder to assist them in making those sudden and quick turns necessary when in pursuit of their

prey. It is probable that it also yields an effective aid to their progress.

This otter weighed about thirty pounds, and measured nearly four feet, including the tail, which was about sixteen inches in length. Our Indians told us that some of the natives of these parts tame the young of the otter, and teach it to catch fish for them. The female usually produces at a birth four or five young ones.

The night was mild, and the stars shone with that peculiar lustre only known in tropical countries. The broad river flowed noiselessly between the tall forests on either bank, its bosom here and there gemmed with the reflection of some brilliant planet. Huge patches of the whitest foam (which collects much more during the night than in the day-time) glided past with ghostly silence; and at the point of the promontory above our camp, bushes of almost human shape leaned forward over the stream, as if they were the sentinels of weird nature, waiting and watching in the discharge of their mysterious duties.

I have often observed the strange shapes assumed by shrubs or other similar objects in the uncertain light of night. At the bends of rivers, or in other situations where they are relieved against the reflection of the sky on the water, they seem to become endowed with a weird personality, and present themselves in the forms of sentinels, wolves, lions, or other

animals, and with an expression, common to all, of intense eagerness of outlook. How the wildness of these scenes becomes accentuated when the distant roar of the jaguar strikes the ear, or the wailing rush of the waters over rocks against which they have chafed and fretted for so many ages comes borne upon the night air!

Watching the dim river, and fitful glitterings of the starlight on its dancing margins, I fell into a doze, from which I was awakened in a manner sufficiently startling to cure me thenceforth of poetic imaginings under similar circumstances. I had been lying on a jaguar skin, within a few yards of the edge of the water, at a little distance from the camp, and I could see the glare of the fire thrown upon the swarthy features of our Indians as they squatted round it, and glowing upon the bending leaves of fan-palms and bananas which hung outwards from the forest.

But although this was impressed in an instant on my eyes, when I was aroused I had something else to do than admire the picturesque effects of light and shade. I first became dimly conscious that I was not alone, but through the thick haze of drowsiness in which my brain was enveloped this fact took some time to penetrate. I next heard a noise of scraping and grating on the sands; but of this I took little notice. "It's the Indians," thought I, and dismissed the subject.

But I suddenly felt something hard and cold pressed against me, and with a scream I sprang to my feet, to find that my visitor was an alligator, which would most probably have seized me in another instant. My sudden change of position, and the loud yell, startled the reptile, for it scuttled into the river before I could seize my rifle to punish it for its boldness. The Indians, to whom I related my adventure, assured me that I had had a very narrow escape, as undoubtedly the intentions of the monster were hostile. They added that scarcely a year elapses at any of the stations along the river that one or more of the natives are not dragged into the water and drowned, or seized while bathing, by these reptiles.

It may be supposed that this incident did not tend to recommend the monsters to my merciful consideration. Thenceforth, I waged a determined war against them. I find, on consulting my game-book, that I shot nine hundred alligators during the two years which I spent in Venezuela; and had I made it a special pursuit, I might have swelled this amount indefinitely. I have read that in some of the sluggish streams and bayous of Florida five hundred alligators might be shot in a single day!

Now that their hides are marketable articles, these hideous saurians will share the fate which has already overtaken the beaver, which has been banished to the most secluded depths of the wilderness. The

leather which is manufactured from the hide of the alligator makes up effectively into trunks and boxes of different kinds; but the boots made from it are reported to wear out soon from the giving way of the leather under the scales. I learn from a letter in the *Field* newspaper, that two men who have devoted themselves to the pursuit of these reptiles in Florida cleared three thousand dollars in one season from the sale of the hides.

CHAPTER XXV.

REACH WATABA—OUR CONSTERNATION—THE HOUSE RUINED—I FIND MY UNCLE'S BODY—GEORGE VOWS REVENGE—JOSE'S ACCOUNT OF THE CATASTROPHE—AN INDIAN RAID—THE MAIONGKONGOS—WE START IN PURSUIT—THE TRAIL THROUGH THE FOREST—FOREST SCENES—CAUTION—DIFFICULTIES OF THE ROUTE—BEAUTIFUL VALLEY—A HUNTER'S PARADISE—THE ENEMY'S CAMP—A SURPRISE—THE ATTACK—FLIGHT OF THE SURVIVORS—RESCUE OF THE SISTERS.



THE next morning we set out in high spirits, as we expected that evening to reach Esmeralda. Little did we suspect what had occurred there in our absence! During the day we kept counting the hours until we should arrive; and as each remembered landmark presented itself, we congratulated ourselves on having performed so much of the journey.

There was a short cut to the house from a point on the Orinoco lower down than Esmeralda, and here we landed, hoping to surprise the family at their evening meal. The boat we sent on to the mission, desiring the Indians to come to Wataba in the morning for payment.

Full of excitement and pleasant anticipations we walked rapidly across the savanna, and soon gained

the sloping ground at the foot of the mountain of Duida, which towered darkly against the northern sky. The short twilight was already deepening into night when we reached the small coffee plantation which lay near the house. From where we stood we thought we ought to have seen lights; but we did not speculate upon their absence, but pushed on.

In a few moments more we stood in front of the house. It was roofless and ruined! The trim veranda was pulled down; the vines, and the beautiful parasitic plants which my cousins had trained to trail over it, lay torn and uprooted; the steps were demolished, and masses of charred timber were scattered over the ground!

We gazed with a species of incredulity at this dreadful spectacle. It was impossible! Alas! the blackened walls and shattered windows were but too evident. Who could have done it? My uncle, aunt, and cousins, where were they? Were they, too, the victims of the authors of this catastrophe?

Filled with consternation, I advanced to take a nearer view of the scene of desolation. In front of the spot once occupied by the steps which led to the veranda I stumbled, in the uncertain light, over some large soft object which lay on the ground. A thrill of horror shot through me; I needed not to look to convince myself that it was a corpse! Bending low to examine the features closely, I started up

with a feeling of dismay. It was the body of my uncle! He had been murdered.

My own despair, overwhelming as it was, did not equal that of my companion. He plunged into the ruined building, calling on the name of the one he loved; but there was no answer, except an echo which seemed to mock us. As he entered through the open doorway into the lower story some large animal sprang out through the window and disappeared in the forest. I shuddered as I thought that it had been feeding on the bodies within, perhaps of the dear ones of whom we were in search.

While trying to gain access to the upper story from the outside—for, within, the stairs had been torn down or burned—I heard footsteps approaching. Cocking my rifle, I called sharply, “Who goes there? Answer, or I fire!”

A voice, which I thought I recognized, replied, “It is I, señor,—José, the aguadore.”

“Ha! José,” I cried; “tell me who has done this? who has murdered Señor Barnabas and wrought all this ruin?”

“Los Indios, señor; carrai! Indios bravos; los Maiongkongos!”

This, then, was an Indian raid; one of those picturesque expeditions which, draped with the poetic imagery of a novelist, delight the modern man-milliner, who complacently reads, with slippers on his feet by a comfortable fire, of atrocities performed by

the noble red man, and who thinks that "all that kind of thing, you know, must be good fun, and rather in his line;" but who quakes when a mouse rustles the curtains, and who probably looks under his bed every night in the year.

José did not wait to be asked the dreadful particulars of the calamity. With a voice which yet appeared to quiver from the terror of the spectacle, he told us how, but the night before, the savages had burst out of the woods behind the house, and rushed towards it, uttering their horrible yells; how my uncle, catching up a rifle, had run out, and was instantly shot dead; how the Indians had then pillaged the house, and had carried off the sisters to a captivity worse than death, after burning and destroying everything they could lay hands on.

George listened sternly to this horrible recital, then raising his hands towards heaven he vowed that he would rescue the sisters or die. In this vow I heartily joined. We inquired the numbers of the savages. There were but few, José said — not more than twenty. They had departed at once, and had gone, he supposed, back to their own country, which was among the sierras to the north-east. This was all the information which he could afford, having, as he frankly admitted, taken to his heels when he saw the savages rushing from the woods but too evidently with hostile intentions. He had been at the mission when our boat had arrived, and learning that we

had gone by another route to the house, he had come thither to give us all the particulars he possessed.

Burning with a fierce impatience to avenge this murderous outrage, we feverishly awaited the morning light to guide us on the track of the savages. It was probable that, having encountered no opposition, and finding that there was no pursuit, the Indians would retreat slowly towards their mountain fastnesses.

Our plan was quickly formed. José offered to guide us to a narrow pass which led from the foothills back through the Sierra Maravaca. Through this pass lay the route of the spoilers: if we could reach it in time, we could there lie in ambush for them, and trust to our rifles to see us through the difficulty.

There was no time to look for volunteers; indeed, the few inhabitants of Esmeralda held the name of the Maionkongos in such awe that it would have been a useless task to endeavour to induce them to assist us. Our sole preparations, therefore, consisted in laying in a small stock of provisions and a good supply of ammunition.

As soon as dawn overspread the sky we started. The trail was plain enough—a narrow cattle-path which led back through the woods from the savanna had been followed by the savages, and on its dusty surface their footsteps were sufficiently distinct. But it was not our intention to follow on their track, but

to push on by paths with which José was well acquainted, and which, he said, would lead us to the narrow pass in which we hoped to meet with the enemy. We, therefore, left the cattle-trail shortly after its entrance into the woods, and striking off to the east, we followed what seemed an abandoned game-path, across which thorny lianas grew at every few yards and obstructed our advance.

The woods were dense: mast-like trees, straight and branchless, rose high on either side; up these climbed the matted and confused cordage of lianas and other creepers, stretching from tree to tree, and depending in ragged festoons where, for want of the support of branches, they had lost their hold upon the smooth stems, and had been torn down by the weight of their own luxuriance.

Above this drapery the monkeys skipped and shook down showers of dew, and an occasional nut or fruit. Toucans fluttered among the topmost boughs, uttering their loud dissonant notes, sometimes eying us curiously with their heads on one side, their immense beaks giving them a grotesque air of clumsy solemnity.

It was the ordinary life of the forest reawakened, which we had a thousand times admired, when a peaceful warfare on the feathered or animal tribes was the sole object of our pursuit. How different now! The beauty of the forest was unnoticed; we passed unheeded the graceful deer which gazed an

instant ere plunging out of sight; gorgeous plants and glowing flowers, which at other times we would have loitered to admire, were rudely pushed aside or trampled under foot. All these things had ceased to interest us. We spoke but little, and in low tones, and pressed rapidly forward—José, who led the way, handing back the bending branches lest their rustle should betray us to lurking ears, as if we were already within range of the savages.

All that day we pushed forward, halting only for a few minutes to snatch a little refreshment at mid-day. We crossed several streams which intersected the forest, and gradually left the low country behind us. Now and then, through openings in the trees, we caught glimpses of the bold summit of the Sierra Maravaca, which towered high above the forest-covered foot-hills and plains. Towards this peak we directed ourselves.

The route became more difficult as we advanced. Steep slopes covered with dense vegetation had to be ascended; rugged ravines holding foaming torrents in their depths had to be crossed, and the bare, cliff-like sides scaled. José never faltered in the direction he was taking; we were making a "bee-line" for the pass; and pointing towards a rugged cleft which seemed to divide a distant mountain in two, he said, "Yonder, señores, is the pass. We shall reach it tomorrow before noon, and I don't think the Indians will have gone through before us."

As evening fell we saw light through the trees ahead, and emerging from their shade we found ourselves on the verge of a stupendous descent, which sloped away from our feet down into a deep valley which was surrounded by mountains, and studded over with groves of palms.

It was a beautiful scene. From the valley, which lay in the blue shadows of the enclosing hills, rose a faint murmur of water falling over rocks; the sky behind the summits of the mountains was of a fiery crimson, and the hills themselves were of a fast deepening purple; the bold outlines of crag and peak were silhouetted against the glowing sky, from which the sun had but just disappeared.

While gazing sadly over the splendid prospect, scarcely heeding that which, but a few days before, would have elicited our warmest admiration, a sudden exclamation from George roused me from the reverie into which I had fallen.

“See, Frank!” he exclaimed, eagerly pointing towards the far end of the valley, “do you see that smoke rising above the trees? Perhaps that’s from the camp-fire of the savages.”

I looked, and was surprised I had not before observed a slender column of smoke rising over the palms, and losing itself in the blue shadow or haze which overspread the landscape. José inclined to the opinion that it was the camp-fire of the enemy. He pointed out that it lay not far from

the entrance to the pass towards which we were hastening.

“Señores,” he said, “we cannot afford to camp to-night. We must reach that cañon before morning, or we shall be too late.”

We therefore at once proceeded to obtain some rest; and fearful of attracting observation by lighting a fire, we were compelled to content ourselves with some hard biscuit and bacon, which we had no coffee to wash down.

After resting for about an hour we began the descent of the valley. The moon, fortunately, favoured us with her light, without which we could scarcely have accomplished this part of our journey in safety. We now could advance with more freedom, as we knew the exact whereabouts of the savages, and once in the flat bottom of the valley we progressed very quickly. We pursued a diagonal direction towards the cañoned mountain at its north-east corner, as it was in this narrow defile that we hoped to ambush our foes.

This valley was a hunter's paradise: troops of deer, scared by our presence, ran across the glades and sought the shelter of the groves; several porcupines, with their long bristling quills, disappeared into their burrows as we approached; and once or twice we heard the peculiar sound emitted by the cougar, like a long-drawn sigh. Small animals scurried across the openings in great numbers, probably

agoutis or picas, which latter might have descended from the neighbouring heights; pacas also seemed to abound in this secluded valley, as we met fully a score in our quick walk.

In the woods occasionally an extraordinary uproar would arise, probably occasioned by some conflict among the monkeys; or perhaps the commotion might have been caused by the seizure of one of their number by a panther, amid the cries, whistles, and howls of the rest of the troop.

We had been walking briskly for more than an hour, and already the mountain towards which we were hastening loomed huge and indistinct above the woods. As far as we could guess, we had so shaped our course that we could pass between the enemy's fire and the entrance of the gorge up which we intended to turn. We were much startled, therefore, when, turning suddenly round the angle of a winding glade, we saw before us, at less than a hundred yards distance, a fire round which were grouped about twenty Indians, some reclining in careless indolence on the ground, while others were engaged in cooking.

But what sent the blood bounding through our veins was the sight of Juanita and Winefreda seated together on a jaguar skin within the circle formed by the savages around. They were not bound nor secured in any way. Indeed this would have been needless cruelty, as creatures so delicate were the safe prisoners of their own feebleness.

At the moment that this unlooked-for and astonishing spectacle burst on our view, we saw that we had not been observed. As a measure of precaution, we stooped behind some thick bushes which formed a kind of natural hedge in front of us, and to which most likely we were indebted for not being discovered at once, as only our heads were visible above them.

We continued to watch the camp with intense interest. Supper was being got ready, and the chief, a well-built man of apparently thirty years of age, taking a tender slice of venison, placed it on a leaf, and with a sort of gallantry presented it to Juanita, who although she accepted the courtesy, did so in such a manner that the savage sprang angrily to his feet and stood regarding her with a sullen scowl. George gnashed his teeth with passion, and I had to caution him not to discover us by any untimely act of vengeance.

Winefreda sat sadly by her sister's side, her hair hanging loosely down, and her head bending forward in an attitude of dejection. But at Juanita's solicitation she ate a little of the venison; and then both the girls retired to a small palm-hut near the fire, where, as the entrance looked in our direction, we could see them throw themselves on their knees and raise their hands and eyes to heaven, praying, without doubt, that they might be delivered from the terrible fate which seemed to threaten them. Little did they dream how soon their prayer was to be granted!

We agreed to attack the camp at once, and from opposite sides, so as to create the impression that a much larger force was engaged. José, who had an old trabuco or blunderbuss, was to stay where he was until George and I had taken up our stations, when he was to creep a little nearer, and as soon as he heard our rifles, to blaze into the thick of the savages near the fire. José's weapon carried an enormous charge of buckshot, and would, we hoped, give a good account of itself.

As silently as snakes in the grass we wound our way, George to the left and I to the right of the camp. Our forest training along the shores of the Orinoco stood us in good stead now, and not a bush rustled nor a twig cracked as we each threaded the thickets towards our allotted stands.

At length I reached a position which I considered suitable; and here, within forty yards of the fire, I lay an unseen spectator of the savage crew, who, in fancied safety, had not even thrown out sentinels round their camp. Some lay stretched on the ground, apparently asleep; others still cooked and ate with insatiable appetite round the fire; while a few, farther off, leaned against the trees, chatting with all the ease of conscious security.

The chief sat apart, but still near the fire. His dark eye occasionally wandered towards the palm-thatched hut, and I could trace in the bright fire-light a smile of fierce triumph upon his swarthy

features as he, no doubt, reflected upon the power he possessed over the two helpless captives. Suddenly he called the party about him and addressed them. His remarks seemed to be received with approbation by the band, who testified a savage joy both by looks and gestures.

At the conclusion of the harangue the chief stepped forward to the entrance of the hut, and made signs to the sisters to come forth. His command they slowly and reluctantly obeyed, the gentle Winefreda clinging to the sterner Juanita, as if for protection. Alas! vain indeed would have been any hope of safety had not Providence sent us on the scene!

Seizing Winefreda by the hand, the chief led her towards the fire. Here he made her sit while he took twenty little pieces of stick of different lengths, and throwing them into a bag, motioned his band forward. One by one they advanced and took from the bag one of these pieces. He who drew the shortest danced and gesticulated with joy, and, springing forward, seized Winefreda rudely by the hand. I saw it all now. They had been casting lots for her, and this savage had won her as his wife!

With a loud scream the terrified girl threw off the grasp which the dusky ruffian had fixed upon her arm and sprang towards the chief, before whom she knelt, beseeching him in accents which reached me in my ambush to spare her this shame. The chief motioned her coldly away; when Juanita stepped forward, and

with flashing eye and trembling lip upbraided the monster with his cruelty and his cowardice.

The savage gazed at first upon the handsome girl, although her every feature expressed hate and loathing, with an appearance of admiration, which, as Juanita proceeded in her impassioned invective, changed to decided anger. Lifting his bow, which he held in his hand, he raised it as if to strike the brave girl, who stood unflinchingly before him; but at that moment the sharp crack of a rifle echoed from the woods, and the savage, springing from the ground, fell forward on his face and rolled over on his back, dead! It was George's rifle which had spoken.

Had a thunderbolt fallen in their midst the savages could not have been filled with greater consternation. For a moment they gazed and pressed forward as if to convince themselves of the occurrence, when, with a report like a cannon, José's trabuco showered its deadly hail among the group. Six or eight fell at the discharge, and the remainder with yells of terror sprang from the spot.

Meantime George and I had not been idle. As fast as we could discharge our rifles we kept up a fusilade, which must have seemed to the terrified savages to proceed from the rifles of a whole company.

One tall Indian alone manifested no intention of immediate flight. It was the same who had drawn Winefreda as the prize in the lottery. This savage,

with a diabolical malice, drew his machete, and rushed towards the girls, who had sunk upon the ground. Brandishing his knife above Winefreda's head, he pointed to the forest, and seized her arm, as if bidding her to accompany him, or to take the alternative of death.

With a scream the girl struggled to be free, when the savage, stooping, caught her in his arms, and would have carried her off, had not Juanita come to her assistance and impeded his motions. Dropping the struggling girl, the vengeful savage raised his knife, and in another instant would have plunged it into Juanita's heart; but at the crack of my rifle the blood spouted from his forehead, and he lay dead at her feet.

Not an Indian now remained in the camp except the dead. Of these there were fifteen, so that five had escaped.

We now advanced from our ambush towards the two girls, who stood looking eagerly towards us.

“Juanita! Winefreda!”

“Ah! Dios!” exclaimed the sisters in a breath; “Cousin Frank! and Señor George!”

“And good, faithful José,” I added, bringing the honest, bashful fellow forward; “without the help given by José we would not be here to-night.”

“How can we ever repay you this service?” said Juanita; “you have rescued us from a fate a hundred times worse than death.”

“ We can never repay it,” said Winefreda ; “ but if our life-long heartfelt gratitude—” She paused a moment and burst into tears. “ My poor father and mamma !” she said presently, “ where did you leave them ? They will be your debtors as long as they live for what you have done for us.”

I was terribly distressed. Evidently neither of them yet knew the worst, and I could not bring myself to disclose the dreadful news. Subduing my feelings as best I could, I urged an immediate departure from a place so dangerous. It was within range of the Maiongkongo country ; and as we were aware that five of the savages had escaped, we feared they might either return or follow on our track with reinforcements from the tribe.

We therefore left the camp, and once more directed our course towards Esmeralda, this time following the more open route pursued by the Indians when returning from their raid.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WE RETURN TO ESMERALDA—DISTRESSING SCENE—ARRIVE AT THE MISSION—
THE FUNERAL—WE LEAVE ESMERALDA—ARRIVE AT SANTA BARBARA—
MARRIAGE OF GEORGE AND JUANITA—THEY FINALLY LEAVE SANTA
BARBARA—LIFE IN CARACAS—I LEAVE SOUTH AMERICA AND RETURN
HOME—NEWS—“A LADY FAIR TO SEE”—ANOTHER JOURNEY LIES BEFORE
ME—THE END.



FOR the first few miles we advanced, as the Spaniards say, with the beard on the shoulder; that is, frequently looking round and listening intently for any symptom of pursuit. But there was none. The few savages who had made their escape were in all probability too much cowed by their defeat to dog our retreat, and were impressed as well with the belief that they had been attacked by a large party. We therefore moderated our pace, which had begun to tell upon the delicate frames of the sisters, unaccustomed at any time to much exercise, much less to such journeys as this. George supported the tottering footsteps of Juanita, while Winefreda leaned upon my arm.

We spoke little on our route. I was oppressed by the recollection of the dreadful disclosure which we should have to make to the sisters, who as yet were

ignorant of the fate of their parents. Probably it was the weight of this reflection which made George silent in the society of Juanita, with whom he used to be so talkative. Wishing to ascertain how much my companion really did know of the occurrences of that dreadful night, I questioned her.

“We were just going to supper,” she said, “when José ran up the veranda steps and called out that the Indians were coming upon us. Juanita and I ran to our own room, while papa seized a rifle and went out to the front of the house. Mamma was in her room. In a moment it seemed as if the fiends of the lower world were let loose, such was the demoniac uproar, the horrible yells, and the fearful aspect of the savages. The man whom Señor George shot—the chief—burst into our room with two or three more, and seized us, although we defended ourselves as well as we could. We were carried out and borne away into the woods while the pillaging went on.

“We soon saw flames issuing from the windows, and knew that our dear home was given over to ruin. I never saw papa or mamma afterwards. Ah! Dios de mi alma! how terrible a scene! I shall never lose the vision of that horrible spectacle,—those fiends in human shape!—their actions and their yells will accompany me to the grave. Oh, Cousin Frank, tell me of my mother! You were at the house afterwards, and must know all. Add to the unpayable debt I owe you,—we owe you,—and tell me this!”

I knew not what to say. In their present fatigued and worn-out state could they bear the truth? True, I had not seen the body of Señora Manuelita, but well I knew that she had shared her husband's fate. I replied,—

“Dear Winefreda, you encourage me to tell what, Heaven knows, I wish had fallen to the lot of any other to say. But truth is best at all times. You and Juanita are now orphans.”

In a moment I repented my rashness in speaking thus plainly. The hand which had leaned upon mine for support sank by her side, and before I could throw my arm round her, she had sunk with a cry to the earth.

Juanita, who had been in advance, ran to my assistance. No water was at hand, but, fortunately, in George's pouch was a small flask of aguardiente. A little of this having been poured between her open lips, the insensible girl shuddered, rallied, and soon life again dawned in her eyes, which had terrified me by their death-like expression.

“Juanita!” she cried, “did you hear? We are now fatherless and motherless!”

The stronger-minded girl looked at her pityingly as if she raved; but suddenly this expression changed, and looking swiftly up, she asked,—

“Tell me, Frank, is this true? It cannot be!”

I sadly shook my head, and expecting an exhibition of feeling similar to Winefreda's, I looked towards

George as if to caution him to assist her. But I was mistaken. Not a cry nor a sound escaped her lips. For a moment the shock seemed to unnerve her; her head sank forward on her breast, and I feared she was about to faint. But the colour which had fled from her cheeks again returned, and bending over her sister she kissed her.

"Dearest!" she said, "I will be your mother."

They both embraced fondly, and seeing there was no further need of our presence, George and I left them alone. When we returned they were both calm and resigned.

"Dear Frank," said Juanita as we approached, "we have given you and Señor George a great deal of trouble, and for our sakes you have ventured boldly into danger. Believe me, we are not ungrateful. There is still one more service which we would beg of you before you leave us. You will find the remains of—of your uncle and aunt," she said firmly, "and have them buried in the cemetery at the mission. Then we shall claim your escort to Santa Barbara, where Winefreda and I will live with our aunt, my mother's sister."

"You may trust us to place our time and service completely at your disposal," I replied; "but as to leaving you, how can you think it possible we should do so in the present state of your affairs? But there is time enough to arrange these matters. At present I think we had better leave this spot. There is not

much danger of pursuit, but still it will be prudent to get out of the forest as soon as possible."

We therefore continued our march. As evening deepened the gloom of the woods we halted to prepare our camp for the night. A hut of palm branches was soon erected for the sisters; this we thatched with the huge waterproof leaves of the fan-palm, and the interior was strewn with some fragrant grasses which grew near the spot. Opposite the entrance to this we constructed an immense fire, at which we speedily were engaged in cooking our supper — a couple of ciganas or pheasants which George had luckily secured during our walk serving for both supper and breakfast to the girls. Wrapped in our ponchos, George and I lay down near the fire; and leaving José to watch the first part of the night, we were soon wrapped in as deep a sleep as if no hostile Indians existed upon the continent.

It is not necessary to follow our steps all the way back to Esmeralda. On the afternoon of the next day we once again emerged from the woods, upon the cattle-trail which led across the savanna towards Wataba. But we did not pass near the house, as we feared to expose the sisters to a sight which could only have reawakened feelings of anguish which had already in some sort become dulled. We gained the mission by a circuitous route leading by the banks of a river which joined the Orinoco near the village; and here we left the girls in charge of the missionary,

who received them with the utmost sympathy and kindness, for he had been a close friend of the family since their arrival at Wataba.

Duty now imposed upon us the melancholy task of burying the remains of my uncle and his wife. The bodies had been enclosed in rude coffins by the direction of the worthy padre at the mission, and lay upon a kind of bier or long bench draped with black in the little church of Esmeralda. The girls were not present. Indeed, we did not tell them when the last touching ceremony was to be performed, from the same motives which had led us to prevent them from again seeing the ruined and blackened walls of their home.

When all was over we urged an immediate departure, and we gladly availed ourselves of the kind offer of the missionary, who placed at our disposal a commodious lancha with a comfortable cabin in the stern. On board this we placed the few effects belonging to my cousins which we could find among the ruins of Wataba; and once more we found ourselves afloat upon the ample bosom of the Orinoco. Four days afterwards we landed at Santa Barbara, and accompanied the sisters to the house of their aunt, who was the wife of an officer who had retired from service and had settled in this out-of-the-way spot.

Here my cousins found a home. But not for long did Juanita remain there as an inmate. The devoted services and attachment of my sterling, honest-hearted

friend George had created an interest for him in her heart. The details of their courtship, although, no doubt, of great importance to the individuals themselves, cannot interest my readers. I will therefore content myself with relating that in six months they were married, and that Santa Barbara was *en fête* on the "auspicious occasion."

The difficulties of locomotion prevented the happy pair from taking a honeymoon trip. Of journeys they had had enough. They therefore settled down quietly in Santa Barbara for a year, and afterwards descended the river to San Fernando, from whence they crossed the llanos by our well-remembered route to Caracas. Here they lived happily; and as long as I remained in Venezuela I need not say that I was "a welcome and an honoured guest" in the house of the fair Juanita and my old friend George.

From Caracas we often made excursions to the woods of the Silla, and to the forests in the mountainous region of Aragua, in pursuit of jaguars, deer, peccaries, and the various other animals there to be found.

But at length my holidays drew to a close. Letters from home announced matters of importance which demanded my personal supervision; and, full of regret at leaving the happy home I had found, I was compelled to return to the cold and sterile north.

I still look forward, however, to making another

journey up the Orinoco. At Santa Barbara resides "a lady fair to see," of whom I think often, perhaps too often. Need I say that her name is Winefreda? She writes sometimes to her sister, and I learn from my friend George (who would not divulge a secret for the world!) that these letters are very full of recollections which are also sweet to me.

Another journey by the glowing forests of the Orinoco therefore lies before me. Shall I also lay the incidents of that expedition before my boy-readers?

THE END.



